

ATHABASCA UNIVERSITY

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE
JOURNEY FROM CHRISTIAN FUNDAMENTALISM TO ATHEISM

BY

TAYLOR E. NOLAND

A THESIS
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE
DEGREE OF MASTER OF COUNSELLING

GRADUATE CENTRE OF APPLIED PSYCHOLOGY

ATHABASCA, ALBERTA
SEPTEMBER 2016

©TAYLOR NOLAND

Approval of Thesis

The undersigned certify that they have read the thesis entitled

**“From Belief to Disbelief: A Phenomenological Study of the Journey from Christian
Fundamentalism to Atheism”**

Submitted by

Taylor Noland

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Counselling

The thesis examination committee certifies that the thesis
and the oral examination is approved

Supervisor:

Dr. Jeff Chang
Athabasca University

Committee member:

Dr. Paul Jerry
Athabasca University

External Examiner:

Dr. Sharon Pham
Providence University College & Theological Seminary

May 4, 2017

Abstract

This thesis describes the rationale and methodology for a qualitative research project on the journey from Christian fundamentalism to atheism. It includes a review of the relevant literature on apostasy from Christian fundamentalism and on the adoption of an atheist identity, as well as a definition of the terms atheism, Christian fundamentalism, and apostasy/deconversion that will be used in this study. Descriptive phenomenology is the approach best suited to the research question and Colaizzi's method as the optimum choice for data analysis because it incorporates participant feedback. Typologies for deconversion and for assuming an atheist identity are presented and discussed. Ethical considerations are also identified and addressed. The research question is: What is the lived experience of those who have moved from Christian fundamentalism to atheism?

Keywords: atheism, Christian fundamentalism, apostasy, deconversion

Table of Contents

Approval of Thesis.....	ii
Abstract	iii
Table of Contents	iv
List of Tables	vii
List of Figures	viii
Chapter I – Introduction.....	1
Rise in Secularism	1
Research Question	2
Author’s Position	3
Chapter II – Literature Review	4
Atheism.....	4
Christian Fundamentalism	6
Apostasy.....	10
Forms of Apostasy	11
Reasons for Apostasy.....	14
The Process of Apostasy.....	18
Psychological Consequences for Christian Fundamentalist Apostates	20
Becoming an Atheist.....	25
Literature Review Summary	29
Chapter III – Methodology	32
Choice of Descriptive Phenomenology	33
Sampling	35
Recruitment of Participants	37
Number of Participants	37
Interviewing	40
Data Analysis.....	41
Step one – transcription of data.	42
Step two – extraction of significant statements.	42
Step three – formulation of meanings.	43
Step four – aggregation into cluster themes and larger themes.	44
Steps five and six – exhaustive description and fundamental structure.....	45
Step seven – verification of findings.....	45
Ethical Considerations	46
Respect for the participants.....	46
Informed consent and data protection.	47
Eliminating bias to accurately reflect participants’ voices	48
Chapter IV – Findings.....	49
Emergent Theme 1	50
Believing in Christian fundamentalism due to being born into it.	50
Believing in Christian fundamentalism due to indoctrination.	51
Believing in Christian fundamentalism due to being in a bubble with a lack of dissenting information.	53
Christian fundamentalism as the main focus in life and central aspect of identity...	54
Seeing nonbelievers as suspicious “outsiders” with whom interaction is limited and seen as likely being problematic.	54

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

Emergent Theme 2.....	56
Questioning/moving away from Christian fundamentalism due to disillusionment with the actions of church leaders and members.	56
Feeling guilt and shame about one's past actions as a Christian fundamentalist.	59
Being embarrassed about one's history of holding Christian fundamentalist beliefs.	61
Leaving Christian fundamentalism and becoming an atheist was an extended process.....	63
Perceptual changes after leaving Christian fundamentalism.	67
Gaining a sense of personal freedom after leaving Christian fundamentalism.....	68
Emergent Theme 3.....	71
Experiencing cognitive dissonance as a direct result of Christian fundamentalist teachings.	72
Influence of critical thinking in breaking down Christian fundamentalist beliefs....	73
Access to new/outside information contributed to leaving Christian fundamentalism.	74
Permanent loss of Christian fundamentalist beliefs due to new knowledge and critical thinking.	76
Emergent Theme 4.....	78
Feelings of inadequacy due to Christian fundamentalist messages.	78
Christian fundamentalist beliefs caused harm in ex-members' lives.....	79
Isolation of believers from "outsiders" can lead believers to adopt extreme lifestyles.	80
Christian fundamentalism/leaving Christian fundamentalism causes ruptures in relationships and breaks up families.	83
Christian fundamentalism can leave individuals naïve and unprepared for the outside world or coping with life events that deviate from the Christian fundamentalist narrative.	84
Emergent Theme 5.....	87
Having a sense of loss after losing one's faith and becoming an atheist.	87
Atheists who are ex-Christian fundamentalists are not the same as other atheists. ..	90
Continuing struggles and the need for specific treatment in the aftermath of the transition from Christian fundamentalism to atheism.....	92
Ex-Christian fundamentalist atheists are not well understood.....	94
Chapter V – Discussion of Findings	97
Essential Structure of Phenomenon	98
Comparison with Previous Studies	102
Typologies.....	102
Reasons for leaving faith.	103
Psychological consequences of deconversion and counselling issues.....	104
Becoming an atheist.	106
Limitations of the Study	107
Ideas for Future Research	108
Impact on Researcher.....	111
Concluding Remarks.....	112
References	114

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

Appendix A: Record of Research Ethics Board Approval	123
Appendix B: Participant Screening Criteria	130
Appendix C: Information Sheet	131
Appendix D: Informed Consent-Researcher.....	132
Appendix E: Informed Consent-Participant.....	137
Appendix F: Data Collection Protocol.....	141
Appendix G: List of Significant Statements	143
Appendix H: List of Formulated Meanings	199
Appendix I: Formulated Meanings Placed into Theme Clusters	270
Appendix J: Emergent Themes	312

List of Tables

Table 1: List of Participants	38
-------------------------------------	----

List of Figures

Figure 1. Path from Christian Fundamentalism to Atheism	101
---	-----

Chapter I – Introduction

Rise in Secularism

Phil Zuckerman (2012) opened his book, *Faith No More*, by saying that “a wind of secularity is currently blowing across North America” and that the “growth of irreligion in the United States in recent years is undeniable” (p. 3). Hunsberger and Altemeyer (2006) introduced their study on atheists in the United States with an equally dramatic assertion, namely, that organized religion is disappearing in the Western world. They further stated that those describing themselves as non-religious are increasing at a faster rate than any religious group, and that this trend is growing with each subsequent generation. In considering the state of organized religion in Europe, they pointed out that, where differences in religious affiliation once sparked fierce fighting between nations, in contemporary life, “few care anymore” (Hunsberger & Altemeyer, 2006, p. 12). The impact on the majority of European countries, these authors indicated, is that the clergy have lost much of their power over the functioning and structure of society as well as over the affairs of people’s personal lives because churches and synagogues are able to draw only a handful of faithful believers. Vargas (2012) echoed these findings on irreligion, stating that, within the last two decades, secularism has been on the rise, even in largely theistic countries such as the United States.

Statistical trends support the conclusions of these researchers. Those who consider themselves to be unaffiliated with any particular religion now number 1.1 billion worldwide, which accounts for about 16% of the total population (Pew Research Center, 2012). In both the United States and Canada, the religiously unaffiliated (the “Nones”) are the fastest growing category on religion surveys (Bibby, 2012; Kosmin & Keysar, 2009; Pew Research Center, 2012). Between 1990 and 2008, the Nones increased from 8.2% to 15.0% in the U.S. (Kosmin

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

& Keysar, 2009); in Canada, the number of persons identifying as Nones in the 2001 Census was 16.5% and, in 2011, it was 23.9% (Statistics Canada, 2001, 2011).

Coinciding with the rise in secularism in North America has been a rise in the number of people who say they do not believe in God or engage in religious or spiritual practices. In 1998, 7.4% of Americans did not believe in God; in 2008, 9.4% reported not believing in God (General Social Surveys – NORC, 2013). Although those claiming no affiliation with any established religion may have at least “some” spiritual beliefs (Pew Research Center, 2012), of the U.S. Nones, 30% are atheists (Baker, 2009). In Canada, of the teenagers reporting themselves as Nones, 30% claimed to be atheists in 1984 and 38% in 2008 (Bibby, 2012). Forty-seven percent of Canadian teenagers and 40% of Canadians said they never attended a religious service (Bibby, 2012). Thirty-five percent of Canadians reported never engaging in personal religious practices or spiritual activities and 18% said religious or spiritual beliefs had no effect on the way they lived their lives (Stats Canada, General Social Survey, 2010).

Research Question

As noted above, a portion of the religiously unaffiliated cohort is atheist, a population about which very little is known because they have long been ignored by sociologists of religion (Hunsberger & Altemeyer 2006; Krueger 2013; LeDrew, 2013). Recent cultural events such as the emergence of New Atheism and best-selling books on atheism by authors such as Dawkins (The God Delusion, 2006) and Hitchens (God Is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything, 2007) have heightened the visibility of the group, but society’s knowledge remains inadequate, superficial and, it could be argued, inaccurate (Hunsberger & Altemeyer, 2006; Krueger, 2013). Quantitative studies have often assigned atheists to broader categories, such as Nones, that also contain deists, agnostics, and those who may have spiritual beliefs but who are outside of

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

organized religion (Krueger, 2013; LeDrew, 2013). As LeDrew (2013, p. 432) stated, “Atheists, however, are a specific group that must be studied in their own right,” and he pointed out that quantitative studies “say little about the lived experience of being atheist”.

This research will examine the lived experience of a particular group of atheists, specifically, those who have journeyed from Christian fundamentalism to an atheist perspective. My intent is to search for the commonalities of their journeys that would indicate it extends beyond the personal reality of each individual into a more general shared experience. The question that will frame my research is, “What is the lived experience of those who have moved from Christian fundamentalism to atheism?” The purpose of the study is to add to the slender but expanding base of knowledge about atheists. A second, but equally important, aim is to provide information to counsellors trying to help persons who are at any stage in this transition.

Author’s Position

To promote transparency as a researcher, I wish to disclose that my interest in this topic is related to my own life story. I was born and raised in a Christian fundamentalist family and later apostatized from this faith perspective. After weighing the evidence for the existence of God or gods, I remain unconvinced by that evidence. I am curious about how my deconversion occurred: I believe it must have been the result of many influences over a long period of time. However, I am not able to completely explain it to myself. It is my hope that through studying the experiences of others who have made the journey from Christian fundamentalism to atheism, I will not only be able to help others understand this phenomenon, but will gain a better understanding of my own situation.

Chapter II – Literature Review

In reviewing the literature on those who apostatize from Christian fundamentalism and become atheists, I will begin by explaining the terms “atheism,” “Christian fundamentalism,” and “apostasy.” Next, I will investigate research on the forms of apostasy, the reasons for apostasy, and the process of apostasy. I will then examine studies on deconverting from Christian fundamentalism and on the steps to becoming an atheist. Finally, I will relate the studies to my research question to show the significance of my proposed inquiry.

Atheism

To capture the full meaning of the designation atheist, one must understand both the definition and the implications of the word. Turning first to the definition, Hunsberger and Altemeyer (2006) summed up their findings on atheist identity in the United States by stating, “they have firmly concluded there is no God, no supernatural being of any kind. Nothing” (p. 11). Zuckerman (2007, 2009), in two articles on atheists, referred to atheists as people who do not believe in God, giving no further qualifiers. Kosmin and Keysar (2009) used a similarly brief definition – those who have no belief in God – in their summary report of the American Religious Identification Survey. Baker and Smith (2009) defined atheists by comparing them to other sub-groups that claim no religious affiliation, such as agnostics. They reported that atheists are the most strongly nonreligious and have very low rates of private religion or spirituality. Atheists are also strongly opposed to religion being used in public spheres of society and they represent a population that is almost unanimously anti-religious. Finally, the authors said that, while agnostics postulate that the existence of God is beyond the ability of people to know one way or the other, atheists assert that they know with certainty that God does not exist.

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

Definitions that present atheism as a perspective in which the individual “believes” there is no god imply that atheism is another religion. Objecting to this perspective, Cliteur (2009) maintained that atheism is more accurately described as a-theism, pointing out that the *a* in a-theism is there to deny what follows it. Hence, an atheist is an individual who denies the tenets of what the theist puts forth. It does not follow that by rejecting the concept of a god or gods, one has invented a religion of one’s own. He stressed that atheists cannot be considered to be religious: They are a-religious. The distinction is important because it counters the portrayal of atheists as operating under a zealous compulsion to repudiate religion. He labelled the argument that the denial of religion itself constituted a religion as nothing more than “a strange rhetorical trick” (p. 2). Cliteur went on to define atheism as a negative position in which the evidence for theism is not deemed robust enough to elicit belief. Davies (2010) likewise asserted that “atheism” and “atheist” were related to “theism” and “theist”, dismissing the popular notion that an atheist is someone who has surmised with confidence that God does not exist.

Adopting the approach of Cliteur (2009) and Davies (2010), I will define an atheist as someone who has looked at, and weighed, the evidence for the existence of God or gods and, finding it unconvincing, does not accept the claims of theism. That is, the person does not believe in the God or gods of theism. This definition is meant to avoid the misconception that an atheist is required to prove the non-existence of God or gods and to promote the conception of atheism as a negative formulation, as a lack of belief.

A complete understanding of the terms “atheism” and “atheist” also requires recognition of the implications these words carry. Zuckerman (2007) commented on the widespread stigma attached to the label of atheist so that, even when people admit they do not believe in God, they avoid referring to themselves as atheists. Hunsberger and Altemeyer (2006) stated that many of

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

the participants in their study felt stigmatized for being atheists. Edgell, Gerteis, and Hartmann (2006), in examining the attitudes of Americans to atheists, found that there was less tolerance for atheists than for other marginalized groups and that atheists did not enjoy the same gains in acceptance that have been building towards other racial and religious minorities since the 1960's. Hence, the label of atheism is not neutral; to reveal oneself as an atheist is to attract a degree of disapproval.

Christian Fundamentalism

Arriving at a standard definition of Christian fundamentalism can be a challenging task. Emerson and Hartman (2006) pointed out the difficulty of attaining accuracy for a term that is used widely and loosely in a variety of situations from media programming to everyday conversation. They observed that the label of fundamentalist is not only applied to Christian religious conservatives, but also to “any group that takes religion seriously or that views religion's role in public life to be greater than the labeler would wish it to be” (p. 128). From a modern secular viewpoint, fundamentalists of any sort are to be feared and resisted because they are perceived to be radical reactionaries, seeking power for their own political agendas, seeking to “throw societies back into the dark ages of oppression, patriarchy, and intolerance” (Emerson & Hartman, 2006, p. 131). Given the pejorative quality of the term “fundamentalism”, how is one to understand Christian fundamentalism?

As with other forms of fundamentalism, Christian fundamentalism is a contextual phenomenon, in that its existence and rise within present day culture is in reaction to the influence of modernity within churches and the social environment (Emerson & Hartman, 2006; Marsden, 2006; McCalla, 2007; Murrell, 2011). Emerson and Hartman (2006) commented that modernity promotes cultural and structural pluralism. They explained that the twin processes of

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

industrialization and urbanization brought many diverse peoples together in close proximity as they migrated to cities to serve burgeoning urban economies or because they had been displaced through colonization. The concentration of people from multiple backgrounds and religions in a setting where work and financial success received the primary focus tended to suppress religious expression in corporate life, making it instead a private concern. The authors declared that religion, initially removed from government and economic affairs, eventually became separated from other public spheres such as education and medicine. Minimizing the impact of religion on society and its institutions, they concluded, was a by-product of modernity.

A second consequence of modernity was an influx of new ideas, some of which further eroded the authority of religion in people's worldviews (McCalla, 2007). McCalla (2007) identified two of the more prominent new conceptual frameworks as being higher biblical criticism and Darwin's theory of evolution. In higher biblical criticism, German theologians and scholars began to separate "the question of the meaning of the Bible from the question of its truth" (McCalla, 2007, p. 547). McCalla (2007) asserted that this approach stemmed from the conviction that the Bible is not a text that is beyond the scope of time and human intervention, but rather a collection written and compiled by specific persons at specific times in specific locations. Examined in this manner, he argued, biblical narratives can be interpreted as myths of distinct ancient peoples appropriate to their culture and region and not accounts of absolute truth. The theory of evolution, with its process of natural selection, also invited an alternate perspective, one in which an intelligent designer was not necessary to explain the natural world. McCalla went on to say that fundamentalism formed as a reaction against modern influence and ideas. Its proponents opposed the teachings of higher criticism and evolution theory on the grounds that they undermined traditional Christian belief. They countered by asserting the

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

inerrancy of the Bible, a doctrine that scripture is divinely inspired in its entirety and is therefore entirely error-free. Biblical accounts of events are factual and historical, not legends or allegories. Fundamentalists held that a literal interpretation of scripture was essential to support its testimony of Jesus Christ. McCalla (2007) further explained that they affirmed that, “Anyone who does not accept the total inerrancy of the Bible does not really believe in the Bible but in some human standard that he or she has substituted for God’s revealed word” (p. 549).

When the Bible is read and interpreted literally (especially the book of Genesis), a discrepancy emerges between this account and society’s increasing level of scientific knowledge regarding the age of the universe, the geological history of the earth, as well as the origin and development of complex life, including humanity (Kitcher, 2011). Creationism, particularly young-Earth creationism, is the Christian fundamentalist position that supports the literal truth of the Bible by asserting that the Earth is much younger than scientists’ interpretation of the geological record and that evolutionary biology is false because it contradicts Genesis (McCalla, 2007). From a Creationist viewpoint, the Bible is the standard of truth against which historical knowledge and scientific findings must be assessed and to which they must conform to be accurate (McCalla, 2007; Stahl, 2010). This position represents a discrepancy with the opinion of the vast majority of scientists and puts Christian fundamentalists in opposition to the larger body of scientific findings (McCalla, 2007). Opposition to evolution and the advocates of evolution is intense: Stahl (2010) asserted that one point on which all fundamentalists agree is that “the kind of science advocated by Dawkins et al. leads to moral degeneracy and disintegration of the social order” (p. 5).

In the United States where support for a fundamentalist world view is strong (Matzke, 2010), there are many who continue to insist they cannot accept evolution because it does not

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

coincide with the first verses of Genesis (Padian, 2009). This anti-evolution stance has resulted in conflicts such as the Dover trial in which school board members were able to convince their colleagues that evolution was hostile to religion and scientifically doubtful (Padian, 2009). Those in favor of creationism attempted to undermine the legitimacy of evolution by inserting the alternative explanation of intelligent design into the curriculum, thus making it appear that a second option of equal merit existed (Padian, 2009). The school board then voted to make it mandatory for science teachers to read a statement questioning the validity of evolutionary theory in the classroom (Berkman, Pacheco & Plutzer, 2008). Although this ruling was ultimately overturned in court, the story demonstrates the widespread popularity and power of Christian fundamentalism that remains prevalent in society today.

The Dover trial illustrates the struggle of fundamentalist Christians against the perceived errors of a science that does not align with a literal reading of the Bible and against the ongoing compromises made by liberals within a pluralistic society that challenge their traditional way of life and values. This struggle has shaped the movement known as Christian fundamentalism from its inception in the late nineteenth century (Murrell, 2011). The term “fundamentalist” was coined after a statement was drafted at the Niagara Conference in 1895 outlining the five essential points of faith. According to Murrell (2007), these five points were:

1. The plenary verbal inspiration of Scripture
2. The deity of Jesus
3. The virgin birth
4. The substitutionary atonement
5. The physical resurrection of Christ (p. xvi)

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

Using these five points, I have chosen, for the purpose of my study, to define a Christian fundamentalist as someone who believes that Jesus Christ is God; that he is the only means to salvation; that he died for the sins of humanity and was resurrected physically from the dead; and that the Bible is to be read literally (meaning evolution is wrong, that humanity originated from Adam and Eve in a garden, that the flood was a global disaster and occurred historically and that heaven/hell are real places).

Apostasy

The word *apostasy* has its roots in the Greek word, *apostasia*, meaning “defection” or revolt (Zuckerman, 2011) or, more literally, to change standing and denotes a walking away (Adam, 2009). Woods (2009) described apostasy as “a departure from known or previously embraced truth” (p. 1). Brinkerhoff and Mackie (1993) characterized apostasy as “a multidimensional process of disengagement” (p. 236) from two primary aspects of religion: religiosity and communality. They said that religiosity refers to the acceptance of a particular set of beliefs. Communality was described as the feeling of belonging that grows around a theological doctrine and which is usually associated with membership in a denominational organization. Streib, Hood, Keller, Csöff, and Silver (2009) preferred “deconversion” over apostasy because, as Brinkerhoff and Mackie (1993) also noted, apostasy is a value-laden term with negative connotations. Streib et al. (2009) defined deconversion as a biographical change resulting from a change in a person’s religious orientation which involves “re-writing one’s religious identity, revising one’s system of beliefs and world views, and re-structuring one’s way of thinking, moral judgment, and dealing with authority” (p. 23). There is movement from a previous position and seeking for a better fit. This definition grew out of Streib et al.’s (2009) study of deconversion from both fundamentalist and mainline religious organizations and, while

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

useful because it alludes to the magnitude of the change that occurs, it also contains elements – such as a change in one’s way of dealing with authority – not found in other definitions. The presence of this element would be a point for me to consider when assessing the lived experience of participants, even though it seems intuitive that it would apply in cases of apostasy from a Christian fundamentalist orientation. For my research, I will use the brief and general definitions found in Zuckerman’s (2011) and Adam’s (2009) work, such as religious defection, religious leave-taking and walking away from one’s faith.

Forms of Apostasy

Zuckerman’s (2011) research led him to conclude that apostasy was not a single phenomenon, but instead took a variety of forms. He conducted individual interviews with 87 participants over a two-year period, using open-ended questions in hour-long sessions. His results indicated three dimensions to apostasy, which he expressed as contrasting pairs.

The first dimension is early vs. late apostasy. Early apostates are those who were indoctrinated into the faith of the people who raised them, attaining a particular religious identity as a function of growing up rather than by deliberate choice, and who later reject that identity as teenagers or young adults. Zuckerman (2011) explained apostasy as part of the maturation and individuation process, where individuation entails rebellion against, or rejection of, the religious aspect of their parents’ identities. Accordingly, early apostates are individuals who dropped their religion as soon as they were no longer under the direct sway of their families. Zuckerman noted that this type of apostasy is common among those who are nonreligious.

Late apostates differ from early apostates in that they were not socialized into a religious orientation as they grew up, and were not motivated to deconvert by a need to find an identity apart from that of their parents. Late apostates developed a religious orientation as an adult by

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

conscious choice and their subsequent leaving was also by conscious choice. Zuckerman (2011) stated that this type of apostasy, which tends to occur much later in life, is “quite rare” (p. 6).

The second dimension is shallow vs. deep apostasy. Shallow apostates are those who move away from their religion but do not become completely secular. They often still think of themselves as spiritual yet do not hold to a particular religion. Zuckerman (2011) gave as an example a person who may no longer believe that Jesus Christ is God or the Messiah, but instead chooses to see him as an historical person who was a special teacher deserving of reverence and respect. He indicated that shallow apostates tend to believe there is some type of supernatural force that fills and sustains the universe without referring to the force as “god”. They may not object to attending a church service on special occasions such as at Easter or on Christmas Eve. They also tend to identify themselves as an “ex” – such as an ex-Catholic or an ex-Protestant – and do not consider themselves to be atheists. In contrast, deep apostates are those who have left religion and become completely secular. According to Zuckerman, they no longer consider themselves to be either religious or spiritual in any way. Being convinced in their unbelief, deep apostates have no interest in participating in religious events of any kind. For the purpose of my proposed research, only deep apostates will be recruited, as mild apostates retain a level of belief that is not consistent with the definition of atheist.

The third dimension is mild vs. transformative apostasy. Mild apostates do not suffer major consequences upon leaving because their attachment to their faith was not especially strong in the first place, and their identity was not bound up with their faith. Zuckerman (2011) found that, because religion was never an integral part of their lives, their transitions tend to be smooth and relatively problem-free. There were few social disruptions in their lives and they suffered few if any psychological difficulties. Transformative apostates have a very different

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

experience. They were at one point deeply religious, making their deconversion process a watershed event that involved a total reorientation psychologically. They may also have lost close personal friends, spouse, membership in a strong community, and been rejected by their family.

Streib et al. (2009) offer a different typology for classifying deconversion experiences derived from an analysis of their core sample of approximately 100 interviews with deconverts from Germany and the United States. The researchers identified four separate groups of deconverts. The first type, labelled “Pursuit of Autonomy”, was people seeking to develop their own identity as they moved away from the religious environment in which they had been raised. This process was typically gradual, occurring over a long period of time, and frequently resulting in a secular exit with a relinquishing of religious belief, practice, and membership. The second type, “Debarred from Paradise”, were deeply emotionally attached to their faith choice before choosing to leave or being forced to leave. These are individuals who had high expectations upon entering their faith communities and, over time, became disappointed. There is an experience of emotional suffering that often requires therapeutic counselling, coupled with a desire to tell others about what has happened to them. The third type, referred to as “Finding a New Frame of Reference”, is searching for a greater intensity in their religious life, as well as more structure and guidance. They are likely candidates for re-conversion at some future point. The fourth category, “Life-long Quests – Late Revisions”, is composed of people who leave one religious community because it failed to meet their hopes and join a new one which is more tolerant of their needs. They may have done this once or multiple times in an ongoing personal quest. Deconverts who fit the profile of Finding a New Frame of Reference or of Life-long

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

Quests – Late Revisions would not be suitable participants for this research project because they continue to hold a theist, rather than an atheist, worldview.

Reasons for Apostasy

The journey of apostasy is most often a gradual and long-term process that is rooted in doubts and involves elements of cognitive dissonance (Adam, 2009; Brinkerhoff & Mackie, 1993; Hunsberger & Altemeyer, 2006; Streib et al., 2009; Zuckerman, 2011). In his study on apostasy from fundamentalism, Adam (2009) remarked that apostates rarely stray casually from their faith; theirs was a purposive movement away without certainty of what lay beyond the borders of their safe community. The doubts that initiate this movement and the factors that underlie it are individual to each apostate, yet research suggests there are common themes.

Wright, Giovanelli, and Dolan (2007) analyzed 50 narratives of former Christians who had provided autobiographic accounts detailing their deconversion. The majority of the writers were between the ages of 20 – 50, were educated, and ranged from middle to upper-class. Most of the writers were from the United States; however, others were from Australia, the United Kingdom, continental Europe, and Canada. Roughly half were born into Christian environments and became Christians in early childhood, and most of the others became Christians as teenagers or young adults in their twenties. Only two became Christians in their thirties. Not all of the apostates moved from Christianity into atheism. Narrative accounts showed that some of the writers remained “spiritual” while others labeled themselves as agnostics, but none joined another religion. Through their analysis, Wright et al. (2007) offered some insight into the motivations for deconversion.

Their first explanation involved a battle between faith versus reason. Some writers made a negative comparison of Christian doctrine with other forms of knowledge. For these

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

individuals, it became impossible to reconcile their religious beliefs with what they knew from history, science, education, and common-sense. For example, the authors found that some of the writers criticized the Bible as being generally “unbelievable, inaccurate, and at times offensive” (Wright et al., 2007, p. 21). Although these individuals had questions and were becoming sceptical, they still very much wanted to believe. In the end, unable to explain away their other forms of knowledge, these individuals felt compelled by their own logic to leave their Christian faith as though they had no other choice.

Another motivation for deconversion was the doctrine of hell and the ubiquitous existence of human suffering. For several writers, the concept of a God who is all good and loving did not fit with the idea that God punishes people eternally. For these individuals, the idea of hell and eternal torture contradicted the existence of a god of love who was worthy of worship and devotion. Some writers found problematic the thought that God would be sending people they loved to eternal torment. The fact of human suffering was also a problem, with writers questioning why it existed at all. It was difficult for them to understand why it was necessary for people to suffer and why God allowed it to happen. Other writers pointed out that God was not merely a passive agent when it came to human suffering but would also take an active role in people’s suffering. The story of Noah and the ark is an example of instances where God would participate in mass level killings. This led some of the writers to question the goodness of God.

Finally, the authors cited interactions with other Christians as playing a part in the apostasy of some individuals. They reported that, when apostates began having doubts about Christianity, they found their peers within the community could only provide unhelpful and pedestrian answers. The same criticism was applied equally to clergy and church leaders. This

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

unwillingness to engage in meaningful dialogue and to assist in the exploration of doubts was construed as anti-intellectual, demeaning, and uncaring. Occasionally, writers mentioned their perceptions or experiences regarding hypocrisy in the behavior of Christians as a cause of their decision to exit. In a minority of cases, writers mentioned non-Christians having had a role, either supplying information or support that facilitated leaving.

Zuckerman's (2011) study also provided information about factors that contribute to an individual becoming an apostate. He found that children are highly influenced by the religious outlook of their parents and that religious socialization powerfully shapes one's original religious identity. If, however, one of the parents in a child's life is either loosely associated or not at all affiliated with religious practice, the likelihood of apostasy increases. Education was another factor: Participants said that, while attending college, they began to examine their assumptions as they started to view the world from different perspectives. In this setting, doubts were triggered which challenged their previously taken-for-granted beliefs and values. Whether at college or elsewhere, contact with other cultures and religions was also a catalyst. Some participants reported being exposed to other religions caused them to question their own. For others, moving to another country and experiencing different worldviews and ways of life caused them to question the superiority of their own. Encountering what is "other" in a meaningful way is also seen in the effect of a positive and close connection to a person who is nonreligious. These types of intimate connections can initiate the deconversion process and guide the direction of an individual's apostasy.

Similar to the finding of Wright et al., (2007), the perceived unresponsiveness of God in the face of turmoil was a contributing factor. The experience of pain and loss caused some participants to question the inherent goodness of God. This confusion was further exacerbated

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

when the participants regarded their prayers as going unanswered. Zuckerman (2011) commented that, while some individuals adhere more closely to their faith in the face of hardship, others become alienated. He also listed politics as a possible element in one's decision to defect. Because highly religious people are more likely to hold conservative views and support conservative policies, more politically active left-leaning liberal persons may feel a sense of isolation when trying to relate to other members of their religion or to what they are hearing in their services. Vargas (2012) found that, in the United States, being opposed to conservative Christian values was significantly associated with contemplating apostasy. For example, he discovered that those who supported same-sex marriage were more likely to both consider walking away from religion and to actually do so. Priorities and values that conflict with one's religious membership can precipitate a feeling of estrangement or non-belonging that can in turn lead to apostasy.

A second arena in which Zuckerman (2011) discovered a clash of priorities and values was in relation to sex. Participants reported that as they became teenagers and young adults, they became interested in having sex. This desire, however, was not in accord with the restrictions of their faith systems, bringing them into conflict with the directives of their religious leaders and/or their God. Some young people caught in this situation decided to engage in sexual activity and to discontinue their attendance at religious services. Regnerus and Uecker (2006) likewise noted the impact of sex on the religious attachment of adolescents. They determined that, while drinking and drug use were not linked with reported decreases in religious affiliation among adolescents, sexual behaviour was. Attempting to cope with the contrast between the constraints placed on sexuality by their religion and their sexual activeness created a level of cognitive dissonance that influenced rates of apostasy in this group. Zuckerman (2011) said that

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

other participants disconnected from religion over resentment of the shame and guilt that their faith associated with sexual desire. The effects of this association continued even after marriage and caused them to reassess religion and its role in their lives. Messages of guilt and shame, he added, were especially potent for gays and lesbians who, at a very early age, were informed that their sexuality was unacceptable, unwanted, and immoral. Faced with this dilemma, these populations often drop their faith system and embrace a secular belief system that accepts and confirms who they are as individuals.

Zuckerman's (2011) list of reasons for apostasy support the earlier work of Hunsberger and Altemeyer (2006) who found that their participants reported becoming atheist because of their socialization in a home that was either nonreligious or where one parent was nonreligious, their inability to accept the Bible, the dissonance created by a literal interpretation of Scripture with evolution or astronomy, their inability to reconcile God with the problem of evil in the world, their observation of hypocrisy among committed Christians, their rejection of church teachings on sex and homosexuality and, occasionally, their exposure to secular writing.

The Process of Apostasy

In addition to being a gradual and long-term process, apostasy tends to occur in defined stages (Brent, 1994; Jacobs, 1987). Brent (1994) and Jacobs (1987) also found that, although apostates pass through these stages at different rates, there are shared elements in their experiences. Brent's (1994) qualitative study was designed to provide a description of the experience of leaving Protestant Fundamentalism. Through the use of snowball sampling, he was able to find participants for in-depth interviews which he taped and transcribed. He found seven sequential stages through which apostates passed, common to all the participants.

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

The first stage was active participation in the Protestant Fundamentalist community. Conformity with behavioral mandates based on a literal interpretation of scripture was expected, as was donation of participants' time and money in support of church projects. Norms were reinforced through frequent church attendance which also limited participants' ability to form relationships outside of the community. The second stage was the initial disillusionment in which participants felt let down by their Protestant Fundamentalist beliefs. Although there were myriad reasons for the initial disillusionment, what was common among participants was that they now had seeds of doubt planted within their faith. The third stage was tolerating the tradition, a time of growth for the doubts that had been sowed, creating internal tension that was suppressed. Nevertheless, questions about how well the Protestant Fundamentalist belief system responded to participants' needs continued to arise, forcing participants to begin assessing the basis of their belief. At this point, participants began moving to the edge of the community. The fourth stage was leaving the tradition in which the increasing tension was brought to a head through a critical incident. The incident gave final proof of the inadequacy of the Protestant Fundamentalist belief system and confirmed the participants' doubts. The fifth stage was the emotion-laden aftermath where participants, feeling abandoned, wrestled with guilt and fear regarding their relationship with God. They were also faced with shouldering the responsibility of making their own choices. The sixth stage was establishing new horizons based on a greater acceptance of themselves and others. Participants began to develop their own worldview and lifestyle as they let go of their previous belief system. The seventh stage was problematic residue. Although ultimately able to move on with their lives, the apostates reported an ongoing struggle with the residual effects of fundamentalism. For example, participants reported experiencing lapses in which they would fall back into a fundamentalist perspective or way of thinking. Some

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

participants also reported ongoing feelings of guilt, while others also reported lingering feelings of anger, sadness, and resentment.

Jacobs' (1987) research was directed to women who left nontraditional religious groups. She collected data from 40 participants who had been members of authoritarian religious movements with a structured hierarchy, rigid discipline of behavior, and devotion to a charismatic leader within a patriarchal religious tradition. She found that deconversion did not derive from a single event in which a participant suddenly lost faith, but was evolutionary in nature. It occurred in a sequence of steps as the participant became disappointed with the social aspects of the movement followed by disillusionment with the leader and eventual disaffiliation from the group.

Psychological Consequences for Christian Fundamentalist Apostates

There is some variation in the findings regarding the psychological consequences of deconversion from Christian fundamentalism. Moyers (1990) reported the potential for long-lasting negative consequences, saying that clients may need help coping with these even years after apostatizing. He cautioned that, even though therapists may not generally consider the role of religion in problems that clients report, failing to consider religious issues can represent a serious oversight when working with clients who at one point were members of fundamentalist organizations. He pointed to Christian fundamentalist teachings that the human condition is damaged and stained with sin, that redemption from this condition can only be found by being “born again”, that there is a real war between God and the devil for every individual’s soul, that secular culture and liberal theology should be opposed, and that the non-fundamentalist world is evil and therefore needs to be distanced. These teachings, Moyers stated, cause Christian fundamentalists to withdraw and form their own tight, isolated communities in which faith

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

provides the principal source of meaning and guidance for living one's life. If faith becomes shaken so that this source is lost, the psychological consequences on the individual can be severe. Without their faith, he said, former fundamentalists may suffer feelings of being overwhelmed and lost. Because Christian fundamentalist groups are so closely knit, leaving the group can cause disturbances with close friends and family who remain faithful to the fold and do not understand the individual's apostasy. This lack of understanding can add to the apostate's isolation, both emotionally and literally. Moyers stated that, from the apostates' perspective, seeing others who have remained in the group and who appear satisfied with their faith may become troubling: Apostates may feel there is something wrong with who they are because they were unable to find fulfillment within the religion that seems to help other people for whom they care.

Individuals seeking counselling after exiting Christian fundamentalism may exhibit common concerns related to their former beliefs and lifestyle (Moyers, 1990; Gericke, 2006). Moyers asserted that, when faced with loss of the high degree of certainty promoted by the Christian fundamentalist perspective, apostates may experience feelings of despair and unhappiness. They may struggle with being able to trust their judgment and decisions, making it hard for them to develop a new sense of direction in life. He said that apostates may be troubled with disturbing thoughts, fears, and self-doubt, giving as an example a client who no longer believed in concepts such as Satan or hell, but who continued to be unsettled by a persistent fear of eternal damnation. In cases where Christian fundamentalist churches emphasize apocalyptic scenarios, apostates from such congregations can suffer from obsessive thoughts about what would happen to them if these dire predictions started to take place. Moyers warned that apostates may also be inclined, through projection, to idealize the therapist much in the same

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

way they used to revere the church and church authority figures. Such idealization may cause clients to react by testing the therapist, a defense mechanism designed to protect against repeating experiences in which apostates have misplaced their trust. The author suggested focusing therapy on helping these clients slowly reclaim the personal authority over their lives that had previously been given away. Other counselling issues Moyers identified were the need for the therapist to adopt a neutral stance and to afford the opportunity for apostates to explore their past involvement with Christian fundamentalism. He said that, if clients feel judged for having held fundamentalist beliefs, they might be driven to defend this belief system out of embarrassment. Apostates might not be inclined to investigate their past participation in fundamentalism if they fear being criticized or misunderstood because they have already been sensitized to these feelings by family and previous friends. In fact, Moyers advised therapists to ascertain if apostates have family members who continue to practice Christian fundamentalism because these clients often require support dealing with feelings of anger, sadness, loss, resentment, and pain resulting from being judged, misunderstood, and/or rejected by their families.

Gericke (2006) also offered insight into the psychological symptoms of a loss of faith in the context of Christian fundamentalist students who were in the course of studying the Old Testament from a Biblical criticism perspective. This loss of faith could be brief or permanent, and left students feeling disoriented as they begin to reassess the faith of their childhood in the light of studies and new understandings that contradicted traditional church dogmatic teaching. The resulting experience was one of a shattering or falling away of their sense of reality. Gericke labelled this experience the “died-again Christian syndrome”, saying that it was the

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

opposite of the “born-again” experience. He provided an exhaustive list of specific psychological symptoms:

Reactive depression, identity confusion, existential anxiety, cognitive dissonance, feelings of sadness, spiritual disorientation, feelings of loneliness, a recurring nostalgia for former certainties, disillusionment, loss of self-confidence and respect, a loss of zest for life and former mental vitality, cynicism, feelings of nihilism and the loss of meaning and purpose, indecisiveness, repression, obsessive compulsive negative self-talk, apathy, anger and frustration, entertaining a death wish and thoughts of suicide, self-loathing, endless reconstruction of the self-image, analysis paralysis, a feeling of fear, horror and revulsion at life and reality, etc. (p. 486).

Gericke advised that these psychological symptoms were often paired with specific physical and behavioural changes, including: “Extreme passiveness or hyperactivity, social isolation, anti-social behaviour, restlessness, changes in appetite and possible eating disorders, chronic fatigue, insomnia or narcolepsy, self-destructive behaviour, impulsive and compulsive activity patterns, inability to commit or trust, etc.” (p. 486).

Gericke (2006) warned that the experience of losing one’s faith can be extremely terrifying and painful. The symptoms can vary among affected individuals in terms of type, frequency, quantity and intensity and can last from hours to decades. The died-again syndrome is all-encompassing because individuals have discovered that reality is something different than what they believed it to be their entire lives. This type and level of disillusionment is extreme and cannot be compared to finding out Santa Claus isn’t real because the died-again syndrome is much more than a sense of a loss of magic. It is the discovery, Gericke declared, that “there

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

never was any magic to begin with” (p. 486). The sense of complete disorientation is comparable to what Lewis (1986) reported in his study of persons who had left and been deprogrammed from restrictive cults. Participants in his study said they felt as though their entire world had caved in or fallen apart, leaving them with the sense that life no longer had any meaning.

Gericke (2006) stated that treatment for Christian fundamentalist apostates lacked a uniform approach and that there were no “quick fix” options. Due to the uniqueness of the students and to the variations in how they experienced the syndrome, treatment needed to be holistic and tailored to each individual. Gericke also stated that, as long as Christian fundamentalism remains as popular as it is within the Christian church and its media as it is today, one could expect the died-again syndrome to be “epidemic” (p. 486) among apostates in the future.

Streib et al.’s (2009) findings differed somewhat from Moyers and Gericke, but these findings were not entirely based on apostates from Christian fundamentalism. The first phase of Streib et al.’s study on deconversion from Christianity dealt with deconverts from new religious fundamentalist organizations; the second phase, however, expanded the research to include deconverts from more mainline religious organizations. The authors reported that, overall, deconverts did not require any special intervention to preserve their well-being. They also said that the overall percentage of those requiring counselling (16%) had likely been inflated because of the high number of fundamentalists and new religious groups in the sample. Of the four types of deconverts the authors identified, two were highly prone to secularizing exits, namely the Pursuit of Autonomy and the Debarred from Paradise. The Debarred from Paradise apostates were characterized by emotional distress at a level that frequently required therapy. For the

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

Pursuit of Autonomy apostates, the need for counselling was mediated by cultural factors: those residing in Germany were apt to experience their deconversion as a crisis, while those living in the United States experienced it as a “quest for personal growth and autonomy” (Streib et al., 2009, p. 82). Hence, according to Streib et al., apostasy did not always signal the occurrence of trauma.

Becoming an Atheist

It appears that, just as the development of apostasy occurs in steps, it may also be possible to identify steps in the development of an atheist identity. However, as Smith (2011) and others (Hunsberger & Altemeyer 2006; Krueger 2013; LeDrew, 2013) have stated, atheists have not been well studied, and there is not complete agreement on what the stages are in assuming an atheist identity or if, in fact, a linear model works. It is also not clear how the processes of deconversion and becoming an atheist correspond and there may well be areas of overlap. Research on becoming an atheist is described below.

Smith (2011) investigated the question of how people raised in a theistic society decide to reject theism and become atheists. He conducted semi-structured in-depth interviews with 40 atheist participants that he located through the use of purposeful and snowball sampling. His research identified four major progressions involved in the adoption of an atheist identity. The first stage is “The Starting Point – The Ubiquity of Religion”, in which the individual is born and raised in a theistic society and accepts the general beliefs and practices into which he or she is socialized. The individual has some concept of God and is engaged in religious activities. Smith found that even those raised in homes where religion is not practiced absorbed concepts of God through the strength of theism in the culture. The second stage is “Questioning Theism” which occurs later in life as participants enter new social settings where their previously unexamined

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

worldviews and religious beliefs are challenged. According to Smith, participants often encountered this situation when they moved away from their families to attend postsecondary education. Participants were exposed to new ideas and ways of thinking as well as new knowledge. Over time, as they continued to interact with others who are questioning religious ideas, and as they continued to pursue higher levels of education, they experienced an increasing amount of skepticism towards the beliefs into which they had been socialized as children. Many participants became critical not only of certain passages in scripture and faith teachings, but also critical of the perceived hypocrisy in the lives of Christians with whom they were acquainted. The issue of morality was key in their movement towards atheism and participants' deepening skepticism caused them to question the assertion that individuals cannot be moral or good without religion. Many of them came to the conclusion that not only was religion unnecessary for morality, secular morality was superior.

Smith's (2011) third stage is "Rejecting Theism", a stage in which participants first clearly rejected their religion and the concept of God and then began to adopt an atheist identity. The movement away from theism was not sufficient in itself to establish an atheist identity; rather, movement from theism opened up this possibility. Once theism had been repudiated, Smith stated, participants were able to explicate their new ways of seeing and being in the world, and they became increasingly committed to understanding the world "through the lens of science and secular thinking" (p. 227). This new commitment to science and secularism entailed a corresponding dismissal of the supernatural. Rejection of one identity made possible the formation of a new one. The fourth and final stage is "Coming Out Atheist". Smith claimed that the meaning and importance of an identity cannot be fully understood until it is explicitly expressed and accepted in a social context. He stated that it was necessary for participants to

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

voluntarily identify themselves to others to appreciate the significance of the label, comparing this phase of coming out with the “coming out process gays experience” (Smith, 2011, p. 229). Although public declaration of a stigmatized identity can initially be difficult, Smith acceded, participants who made this affirmation found it to be empowering and an important step in confirming their new status. They experienced the coming out process as a positive event and felt a freedom in being able to label themselves with a term that was more accurate and true to their new self.

LeDrew (2013) acknowledged the type of movement described by Smith (2011) and said it can be thought of as a “standard trajectory” (p. 435) through which most atheists progress. He argued, however, that this path does not represent a comprehensive picture of those who become atheists. He stated that the standard trajectory expresses the movement away from theism into atheism as a kind of conversion and he offered an alternate view of the process that focuses on discovery. This alternative is based on the results of his inductive thematic analysis of responses to semi-structured questions given by 15 active atheist (active in atheist organizations) participants. The difference is that, whereas conversion involves a change to an established state, discovery is realization of what already exists. He objected to the model of linear progression, saying that not all atheists pass through all the stages of the model, and that the model itself presented a less complex view of the process than what was actually the case. LeDrew differentiated between two major categories of socialization: secular socialization – individuals raised without significant religious influence – and religious socialization – individuals raised with religious influence and who at one time were themselves believers. He mapped out five distinct paths to atheism, noting that these paths need not be linear: Adoption of an atheist identity can involve a back-and-forth movement of questioning, oscillating between

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

theism and atheism. These findings prompted him to assert that formation of an atheist identity is still largely unknown, more complicated than first conceptualized, and in need of further investigation.

Krueger's research (2013) with 16 atheist university students using semi-structured interviews gives support to LeDrew's (2013) arguments that formation of an atheist identity has not yet been completely investigated. Unlike LeDrew, however, she describes a linear path to atheism and states that her findings represent a refinement of Smith's (2011) model. Specifically, her classification inserts a stage between Smith's steps of rejecting theism and coming out atheist that allows for experimentation with a transitional identity between theism and atheism.

Krueger's (2013) five-phase framework begins with detachment, in which individuals who had been socialized according to their parents' faith were not invested emotionally in these teachings and were superficially affiliated with their religion. Participants indicated that they had never been comfortable with their religious persona. The second phase is doubt in which doubts that were vague and unarticulated became known and specified. Participants in this phase were able to point out information, examples, and life events that had been gathered to explain and justify their uncertainty. Krueger mentioned that this phase is "dominated by logic and reason as opposed to emotion" (p. 6). The third phase is dissociation, in which participants rejected the teachings and beliefs of their religion and separated themselves from their former religious identity. Disassociation does not lead directly into atheism, but rather into a period of transition which constitutes the fourth phase. In this phase, the participants attempted to create a new identity, one more in the middle that could act as a bridge between theism and atheism. For example, some participants sought a belief system or a philosophy that was not affiliated with the

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

faults associated with their former religion. By the close of this phase, participants had realized that their transitory identity was insufficient and that, despite any reluctance to claim a stigmatized label; they required an identity better suited to who they were. Ultimately, in the fifth phase, participants adopted a secular worldview, thereby rejecting the concept of faith, religion, religious practice, and belief of any kind. Participants at this stage recognized they did not believe in a God, gods, or a higher power and declared themselves to be atheist.

Literature Review Summary

The literature on atheists is limited because, as a group, they have not been well studied. As a result, relevant research spans several decades: Restricting a search to recent years would yield an insufficient number of studies. Evidence from more recent research indicates that secularism is on the rise as well as the number of people who say they do not believe in God. Not all of these people identify as atheists, in part because of the stigma attached to this label, making it difficult to estimate the true size of the atheist population. Although the exact size of the population is hard to estimate, what is known is that it is increasing because there are an increasing number of people who reject belief in God. A portion of those who assume the label of atheist have emerged from a past history of Christian fundamentalism, and the phenomenon of such a journey has not been dealt with in the literature to date. There are studies on deconverting from Christian fundamentalism and a few on becoming an atheist, but treating the movement from Christian fundamentalism to atheism as a single phenomenon has not occurred. This possibility should be considered because there may be a link between the two: Streib et al. (2009) stated that deconverting fundamentalists are more likely to take a secularizing exit.

Although Christian fundamentalism formed in the late nineteenth century as a reaction to modern influences, it remains a force in contemporary society as illustrated by the Dover trial. It

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

can also remain as a powerful force in people's lives, even well beyond the time they cease to believe, exerting a negative effect on their efforts to become autonomous. The deconversion experience may prove traumatizing and isolating, and therapists might find it beneficial to have an understanding of the centrality of loss-of-faith issues when attempting to help someone reconstitute an identity in the aftermath of apostasy. Moyers (1990) and Gericke (2006) described the significant negative effects of apostasy from fundamentalism, but Streib et al.'s (2009) research did not support the necessity of therapeutic intervention for most apostates. However, it is important to note that fundamentalist as well as mainline Christians were included in Streib et al.'s study and that these researchers hypothesized that the higher-than-expected number of participants needing intervention was the result of the high percentage of fundamentalists in their sample. Moreover, of Streib et al.'s four types of deconverts, only two were appropriate for my study and, of these two, one was characterized as experiencing emotional suffering sufficient to warrant a need for therapy.

When responding to such counselling needs, therapists may be able to help their clients by exploring reasons for leaving fundamentalism. Research suggests that many of these reasons appear connected to a drive for greater autonomy, a wish to be more open to new ideas and to people from different cultural backgrounds, and a determination to resolve cognitive dissonance between knowledge from faith sources and knowledge from science. These motives can be interpreted as a positive desire for personal growth and may serve as an encouraging counterweight to the fear and anxiety associated with a departure from certainty. Pursuit of personal growth may become sidetracked, however, if clients feel driven to defend their previous beliefs out of embarrassment for having held such convictions. They may demonstrate a heightened sensitivity to perceived criticism in the therapeutic relationship due to the censure

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

they have already faced from their families and former community members. They may also require help in coping with the pronounced stigma associated with atheism, especially when weighing the advantages or disadvantages in disclosing an atheist identity.

The typologies for apostates, deconversion from Christian fundamentalism and assumption of an atheist identity reported in the literature are useful in assessing the results of research and may afford a framework for interpreting these results. There is some evidence that deconversion tends to occur in stages over a long period of time and that adoption of an atheist identity may also occur in stages over a period of time. What these stages might be in becoming an atheist has not been definitively settled and, more recently, there is research to suggest that becoming an atheist is a more fluid process than moving through a series of steps. At this point, there is not enough research on atheists to settle the question.

To address the lack of literature treating the movement from Christian fundamentalism to atheism as an integrated whole, the goal of my research project was to produce a rich description of the entire process. My purpose in elucidating this phenomenon was to provide information that will assist counselors who are working with ex-Christian fundamentalist atheists. In presenting the information, I wished to ensure that participants' voices were heard and that they were allowed to speak for themselves.

My research question was: "What is the lived experience of those who have moved from Christian fundamentalism to atheism?" Secondary questions were: "What are the issues associated with counseling ex-Christian fundamentalist atheists who request help in dealing with their transitions?" and "How do the findings from this study align with the results of previous related research?"

Chapter III – Methodology

In this chapter, I will present my choice of research design, giving a brief overview of descriptive phenomenology, including techniques for maintaining objectivity. Next, I chronicle the process used for obtaining participants and collecting data for this study. I then review the procedure for analyzing the data, outlining each of the seven steps in Colaizzi's method. Finally, I consider the ethical issues associated with this type of inquiry.

Choice of Descriptive Phenomenology

My research question asked about the lived experience of persons in relation to the phenomenon of moving from Christian fundamentalism to atheism. My goal was to provide a rich description of this phenomenon that can be generalized to other people in multiple contexts. To meet this objective, a qualitative design was required to accommodate the type of data and data analysis necessary for an adequate exploration of the topic. Of the qualitative approaches considered, descriptive phenomenology appeared to be the best fit. Creswell (2013) insisted that the researcher's task in a phenomenological inquiry is to produce a thorough description of the shared aspects of participants' experience. Balls (2009) agreed that the product of phenomenological research is an accurate portrayal of participants' lived experiences and expressly declared that the aim of this type of research is not to develop theories or models. Descriptive phenomenology has a strong philosophical background that is reflected in the assumptions underlying phenomenological research design and in the design itself.

Descriptive phenomenology is generally attributed to the work of German philosopher Edmond Husserl (1859 – 1938) who was concerned with the subject matter and methods of scientific inquiry into human consciousness (Balls, 2009; Mapp, 2008). Koch (1995) asserted that, in the Husserlian tradition, there is an emphasis on discovering the commonalities or essences of a phenomenon. These essences are universal and generalizable. As Lopez and Willis (2004) explained, within Husserlian philosophy, it is assumed that peoples' experiences as they perceive them are important, have value, and are worthy of scientific study. They added that perceptions are important in understanding human motivation because actions are influenced by what is viewed as real. Husserl believed that, despite its importance, this type of subjective information is not readily available because people typically take their experiences for granted

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

instead of critically reflecting on them. Thus, he claimed that a scientific approach was needed in order to understand and elucidate the vital elements of the lived experiences shared by a group of people (Lopez and Willis, 2004).

According to Lopez and Willis (2004), Husserl presumed that there are essential features of any lived experience that are common and shared by all those who have experienced that phenomenon. The authors went on to say that, in Husserl's view, it is crucial to determine which parts of the lived experience are common to all participants of a study because this is what makes a generalizable description possible. Such descriptions reveal the fundamental character of the phenomenon and surpass the limitations of individual context. Descriptive phenomenology posits reality as an objective construct that can be known outside of history and/or context. Lopez and Willis stated that the assertion that commonalities can be distilled from lived experiences and that these essences are independent of history and context aligns with the perspective of the natural sciences, illustrating Husserl's desire to establish phenomenology as a legitimate and rigorous science.

Koch (1995) said that Husserl believed an objective empirical approach could be realized by assuming the correct attitude and setting aside previous knowledge in order to approach a topic in a neutral and unbiased way. Lopez and Willis (2004) further explained that the key to a phenomenological study of lived experience is the researcher's ability to achieve "transcendental subjectivity", which entails constantly scrutinizing the impact the researcher is exerting on the study and eliminating the influence of biases and preconceptions. The technique for reaching and maintaining transcendental subjectivity is called "bracketing" because the researcher brackets out his or her preconceptions in order to ensure an objective and neutral approach to a topic (Balls, 2009). Hamill and Sinclair (2010) observed that the term "bracketing" originates

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

from mathematics where brackets are used to isolate parts of an equation to facilitate special attention. They noted that, in phenomenology, bracketing is practiced to isolate foreknowledge that could otherwise affect participants' understanding of a phenomenon. Foreknowledge and the assumptions that accompany it can also limit openness to the understandings and meanings brought by participants and thus restrict the researcher's ability to exhaustively study a phenomenon. Moreover, setting aside what is thought to be known helps researchers concentrate on active listening. A number of authors have suggested that bracketing should occur during the entire research process as opposed to being applied only during data collection and analysis (Chan, Fung & Chien, 2013; Hamill & Sinclair, 2010; Lopez & Willis, 2004).

Hamill and Sinclair (2010) offered eight practical suggestions of how bracketing can be achieved, which are: (1) writing down foreknowledge before beginning research and remaining aware of this knowledge throughout the study to ensure personal ideas/values have not superseded the ideas/values of the participants; (2) delaying writing the literature review until after data collection/analysis is completed; (3) keeping a reflective journal; (4) developing an audit trail; (5) utilizing support from supervisors and/or feedback from an advisory committee regarding data interpretation; (6) obtaining feedback from the participants in the study; (7) having a supervisor review planned interview questions to verify they are not leading questions or ones that indicate a foreknowledge of the phenomenon; and (8) ensuring themes within the literature review do not end up in research conclusions without proper evidence.

Sampling

Hancock (1998) observed that the qualitative researcher collects data by means of "direct encounters with individuals" (p. 2), most commonly through observation, one-on-one interviews, and group interviews. In a descriptive phenomenological design, the researcher uses purposive

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

sampling to locate participants who have direct knowledge through having experienced the phenomenon under study (Mapp, 2008; Starks & Trinidad, 2007; Groenewald 2004). Englander (2012) explained that, to select only those who are able to report having experienced the phenomenon directly, the question the researcher has to keep in mind when selecting participants is, “Do you have the experience that I am looking for?” (p. 19). For my study, I asked volunteers if they had, at one point in their lives, believed in the five points of fundamentalism and in the literal interpretation of Genesis. I also asked if, at present, they remained unconvinced of the existence of God or gods. These questions served as the basic screening criteria for participant selection (see Appendix B: Participant Screening Criteria).

Creswell (2013) warned that, depending on the research topic, finding participants who have all experienced the same phenomenon may prove to be a difficult task. Because of this difficulty, purposive sampling can lead to snowball sampling, a method well suited for procuring participants who are members of hidden populations (Atkinson & Flint, 2001; Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981; Frank & Snijders, 1994). Frank and Snijders (1994) defined hidden populations as a “very small subpopulation or a subpopulation of individuals who are unwilling to disclose themselves” (p. 53). Biernacki and Waldorf (1981) suggested that this reluctance to self-disclose might be due to the topic under investigation being a sensitive issue or involving matter that is considered personal and private. To find and gain access to hidden populations, Biernacki and Waldorf (1981) advocated using the help of those with insider knowledge. Atkinson and Flint (2001) suggested that, by using insiders, trust may be developed because the introductions are made by familiar acquaintances as opposed to other more formal methods of recruitment that may seem impersonal and more suspicious.

Snowball sampling was an important aspect of my research design because atheists tend to be a stigmatized subpopulation. According to Zuckerman (2007), people often feel obligated to profess religiosity “simply because such a response is socially desirable or culturally appropriate” (p. 1). He argued that the label of atheist is so stigmatized socially that people will refuse to accept this designation even if they openly admit to not believing in God. The atheists in this study had to be former Christian fundamentalists, making the participant pool a subset of a hidden population, which increased the difficulty of finding individuals without insider assistance. In addition, the subject matter of my study was potentially sensitive and personal.

Recruitment of Participants

My first step in finding volunteers was to contact the Society of Edmonton Atheists (SEA) and ask permission to post a notice on their main page. The SEA board requested a description of the proposed research and, after a period of discussion, authorized a post to their website. I then placed an advertisement on SEA’s Facebook wall. Each person who expressed interest was sent an email containing the checklist of participant criteria and asked to self-assess as to whether or not they met these necessary requirements. Those who met the criteria in turn recommended others whom they believed also met the requirements. Thus, through word-of-mouth, a number of possible participants were quickly identified.

Number of Participants

The number of participants sought in a descriptive phenomenological study is influenced by the data collection method. According to Starks and Trinidad (2007), data is often collected through the use of in-depth interviews. They added that, because each person has the potential to generate hundreds and even thousands of ideas, large data sets can be produced with small sample sizes. Furthermore, given that the goal is to distinguish the common elements of the

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

lived experience, large numbers are not necessary if participants are able to relate their lived experience in a detailed way. The authors added that typical participant numbers for phenomenological studies are between one to ten persons. The target number of participants for my proposed research project was in the six-to-nine range; the actual number was seven. Ultimately, as Klieman (2004) stated, the number I selected depended on meeting data requirements.

Below is a list of the participants followed by pertinent information on each one.

Table 1: List of Participants

Participant #	Pseudonym	Gender*	Age	Race
1	Brandy	Woman	35	Caucasian
2	Sean	Man	58+	Caucasian
3	Cheryl	Woman	48	Caucasian
4	Micah	Man	48	Caucasian
5	Riley	Man	39	Caucasian
6	Chrissy	Woman	38	Caucasian
7	Ryan	Man	43	Caucasian

* All participants self-identified as man or woman

- Brandy was the youngest of the participants. Her family originally belonged to an extremely conservative Christian sect, but later moved to a charismatic fundamentalist denomination. The triggering event that caused her to question her faith was her divorce. She has had major relationship breaches with family members, and specifically requested counseling regarding her transition to atheism.
- Sean was the oldest participant. He was forced to attend church while growing up. In middle age, after having established a marriage and family, he announced that he was gay and the marriage ended amicably. He left his faith when a bishop's letter condemning homosexual acts was read aloud to the congregation.

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

- Cheryl first questioned her faith when her grandfather died but, at that point, was satisfied with the answers she received from a priest. Later, when her father died tragically, these same answers were no longer acceptable. By this time, she had traveled extensively, working as a health care professional, and had witnessed many horrific events. Her husband was an influence in moving to atheism.
- Micah's family was deeply religious until they moved to northern Canada, where he stopped attending Catholic school and the family stopped going to church. After joining the military, he learned how to conduct investigations, acquiring critical thinking skills in the process. His transition to atheism was prolonged and had no specific triggering event. He was the only participant who avowed no guilt or shame associated with past beliefs.
- Chrissy was deeply influenced by the Bible camps she attended each year from childhood through her teenage years. As an adult, she made missionary trips and was shocked by the church's primary focus on proselytizing rather than on relieving the effects of poverty. She also disapproved of the church's position on the role of women. She abandoned her faith when she had intercourse outside of marriage and there did not appear to be any divine consequences.
- Ryan's family was dedicated to its Christian fundamentalist faith, attending church four times a week for hours at a time. For a period of time, as a young adult, Ryan lived a party lifestyle, but then chose to attend a fundamentalist Protestant seminary. While earning undergraduate and graduate degrees, he learned and applied critical thinking skills to the tenets of his theology which proved to be his triggering event for apostasy. Existential angst about mortality continues to be an issue for him.

- Riley was the only participant not born into a Christian fundamentalist family. His older brother became immersed in Christian fundamentalism and invited Riley to Bible school where Riley had an emotional experience leading to his conversion. He became dissatisfied with church leaders while working in ministry to the poor. He began questioning his faith when nonbelievers challenged his dogmatic assumptions and offered alternate explanations.

Interviewing

Because the aim of descriptive phenomenology is to obtain a rich description of a lived experience, face-to-face in-depth interviews are an optimum method for obtaining this data (Guest, Namey, & Mitchell, 2013). Such interviews have an advantage in that they are longer in length and therefore produce more data, nuance, and depth (Englander, 2012). Guest et al., (2013) stated that in-depth interviews respect participants as experts who are able to explain what experiencing a particular phenomenon means. This is the method I chose for data collection.

According to Guest et al., (2013), in-depth interviewing most often starts with a broad question. The researcher may have some follow-up topics; however, the majority of the interview should involve the interviewer following the lead of the participant in order to focus on the elements of an experience the interviewee deems to be most important. Using an unstructured format, my lead questions was, “What was it like for you to leave Christian fundamentalism and become an atheist?” Each interview continued to the point of saturation, as recommended by Mapp (2008). She defined saturation as the point where the narrative begins to repeat itself and no longer produces any new data.

Englander (2012) suggested having a meeting with prospective participants before beginning the research to establish rapport and present participants with the research question.

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

Farber (2006) stated that a preliminary meeting is important because the researcher must explain the purpose of the interviews and data management procedures. I felt that a preparatory session was a good idea, especially because, as Starks and Trinidad (2007) pointed out, snowball sampling generally involves an interview. These sessions gave participants time to think about the lived experience they would be sharing, including any reservations they might have.

The most important factor in successfully conducting these interviews was insider knowledge. Because this is such a personal topic, establishing trust was crucial. I was open with the participants regarding my own history with religion, and it became clear during the interviews that they considered me “one of them.” Much of the information they gave me was heavily steeped in fundamentalist terminology and they did not pause to explain these terms, assuming that I was familiar with them. The fact that I was able to understand their terminology and respond to them using the same terminology helped build rapport and caused more nervous participants to relax. As well, participants would often mention certain Christian bands, or a book, or Christian movies, or concerts, or rallies, or churches, or schools when describing their experience. They would then ask if I understood the reference. Every time I knew the book, had heard the music, had been to the rally, or knew the school, rapport would increase and participants became more open.

(A more complete description of my interview protocol is found in Appendix F.)

Data Analysis

The three main approaches to data analysis in descriptive phenomenology are those of van Kaam, Colaizzi, and Giorgi (Mapp, 2008). Van Kaam’s technique tends to be used for studies involving large numbers of participants (Anderson & Eppard, 1998). Giorgi’s and Colaizzi’s systems are very similar, with Colaizzi adding a step for participant approval of

findings. I believe this addition was essential for the integrity of my research project, and therefore I followed Colaizzi's seven-step procedure (as cited in Edward & Welch, 2011; Wojnar & Swanson, 2013).

Step one – transcription of data.

Colaizzi's first step is to transcribe the participant's descriptions of the phenomenon and read and reread the data to acquire a sense of the participant's experience. I transcribed each video-recorded journal word-for-word and then read through them several times, capturing my impressions in a journal. It became evident that, even though I used an unstructured interview format, allowing the interviewees to speak about their experience in whatever way they felt was most comfortable, there was a common pattern in the way the participants organized their responses. In every case except one, they first spent time establishing how deeply they had believed and had been involved with Christian fundamentalism. They went on to describe how they began to have some doubts as to the validity of their beliefs. Finally, they explained how their faith fell away and led to atheism. Six of the seven participants shared their experiences in this linear fashion. One of the participants jumped back and forth from the present to the past; however, all of the participants ended in their current state of unbelief.

Step two – extraction of significant statements.

The second step is to extract significant statements from the narrative that directly relate to the phenomenon and number them. In looking for statements pertaining to movement from Christian fundamentalism to atheism, I first took assertions that pertained to where an individual's faith started, how strong that faith was, and how crucial it was to their identity and understanding of the world. I then chose statements that were related to any deviations from this strong initial faith position. Next, I looked for remarks associated with the person's final

destination as an atheist. Afterwards, I gathered declarations about how the individual compared his/her present life as an atheist to his/her previous life as a fundamentalist Christian. This last category of statements was somewhat unexpected; however, since all of the participants made this comparison, I deemed it important to add it to my data set. Finally, to enhance understanding of participants' juxtaposition of old and new worldviews, I determined it would be helpful to also consider opinions regarding any struggles they were experiencing at present after having completed their journeys. I extracted 486 statements from the transcripts and recorded their page/line numbers as a reference to link the transcripts to the formulated meanings (Appendix G).

Step three – formulation of meanings.

Step three involves formulating meanings for the extracted statements that will illumine their hidden meanings. I carefully examined each extracted statement in order to best determine its meaning, considering both the words and the relation of the comment to the larger context of the participant's journey. There were a few times when participants made significant statements that were very concise. In these cases, I struggled to write a formulated meaning that was anything more than parroting back the original words. I had to take extra time to "sit with" the statement and dwell on the message the interviewee was trying to convey. In reviewing the formulated meanings, one is able to see the shared experiences of these individuals emerge as commonalities in their statements, despite the slightly different wording used by different participants. Each significant statement and accompanying formulated meaning have been placed opposite one another in a separate table (Appendix H).

Step four – aggregation into cluster themes and larger themes.

In the fourth step, the formulated meanings are aggregated into larger (emergent) themes, or clusters of themes, that are common to all of the participants in the study. The first task in this process was to reread the meanings several times to get a feel for this level of the data. Some of the meanings were clearly linked, suggesting a possible theme. However, in seeking additional meanings that might fit the theme, new themes would arise, sometimes overlapping and sometimes competing with the original one. Thus, some of the groupings remained relatively fixed from the beginning while others were more fluid. After establishing the categories, I assigned each meaning to a category, eliminating it from the master list to avoid duplication. If a meaning could not be assigned to any category, it signalled the need to adjust the categories. Eventually, the 486 formulated meanings were classified into 24 theme clusters. The theme clusters have been charted against the formulated meanings in a new table (Appendix I).

The last task in charting the data was to collapse the 24 theme clusters (subthemes) into broader emergent themes. This process closely resembled that of the previous step. I began by rereading and “sitting with” the subthemes, trying to discern the emergent themes that would link various subthemes. Again, as with the meaning statements, some of the clusters had a similar focus and wording, and obviously belonged together. Other clusters were more difficult to classify. I had originally thought there would be four emergent themes; however, as classification proceeded, the need for another category became apparent, resulting in five emergent themes. The five emergent themes have been charted against the subthemes in a separate table (Appendix J).

Steps five and six – exhaustive description and fundamental structure.

The fifth step in Colaizzi's process is to integrate the theme clusters into a thorough/exhaustive description of the phenomenon. This description is in Chapter IV – Findings. The sixth step is to identify the fundamental structure of the lived experience, which is found in the first section of Chapter V – Discussion of Findings.

Step seven – verification of findings.

The last step in Colaizzi's method is to verify the phenomenon's essence with those who experienced it by giving them the opportunity to modify or correct the findings of the study. This step allowed me to test whether or not participants recognized the core of their lived experience in my description of the essence of that experience. Lopez and Willis (2004) pointed out that the Husserlian view is that people are not typically aware of the meaning of their lived experiences and that the point of phenomenological research is to discover this meaning. Once ascertained, however, the phenomenological claim is that the essence is universal and will be common to all those who have had the experience. Thus, I would consider it problematic if my research findings did not resonate with participants in a fundamental way.

In addition, one of my purposes in undertaking this research, and an ethical consideration directly related to it, was the desire to give voice to an under-studied and stigmatized group. Therefore, it was extremely important to me that I faithfully represented the words and captured the meaning of what was shared with me. In light of my personal connection to the phenomenon, I needed to ensure that I had not biased the results by failure to maintain a proper phenomenological attitude. This attitude was accomplished through rigorous bracketing. Lopez and Willis (2004) emphasized that bracketing should be maintained throughout the research process, not only during the phases of data collection and analysis. They suggested several ways

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

in which this could be achieved, one of which was to go back to the participants to obtain validation of results. As I had argued that continual maintenance of bracketing was essential when studying a sensitive phenomenon with which I had personal experience, I saw participant validation as a critical check.

My first step in obtaining feedback was to contact participants and remind them that they had agreed to comment on my findings as the final step in my research. They all assured me of their willingness to cooperate, and I sent them Chapter V: Discussion of Findings from my thesis. Included in the e-mail was my contact information and an invitation to meet with me if they had any questions or concerns about what I had written. I also informed them that the document they were receiving was a single chapter in the thesis, and I offered to mail a bound copy of the full thesis once it had been approved by the review board. All of the participants e-mailed back within a day and responded positively to the description of the phenomenon. No one expressed disagreement or suggested changes, nor did anyone ask for a follow-up meeting. However, they each requested a bound copy of the thesis.

Ethical Considerations

Respect for the participants.

Allmark, Boote, Chambers, Clark, McDonnell, Thompson, and Mary (2009) stated that in-depth interviews tend to attract scrutiny because they are undertaken with the intention of uncovering information/details of an individual's lived experience that would otherwise have remained private and undisclosed. Being aware of the sensitive nature of my topic, my ground rule was that the individual would always take precedence over the study. If a participant requested a break because they were feeling emotionally overwhelmed, that wish was respected. Likewise, in line with a participant's freedom to not answer a question or even to withdraw,

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

participants could discontinue describing their lived experience at any point. I informed participants that if they chose to withdraw from the study, their information would be purged entirely and not be used in my findings. I also informed participants that if they felt the need for psychological help as a result of participating in this research, they would be referred for counselling (which was arranged beforehand).

Informed consent and data protection.

Walker, Holloway, and Wheeler (2005) advised that detailed information be given to participants before they are interviewed, and that the researcher fully discuss the extent of informed consent, including data use and storage. To ensure that candidates received sufficient information in advance to make an informed decision about participating in the study, I drew up an information sheet and a comprehensive consent form (see Appendix C: Information Sheet, Appendix D: Informed Consent-Researcher and Appendix E: Informed Consent-Participant). Both forms explain the purpose of the research; the participant's role; the handling of data; and the participant's right to question, not answer, or withdraw at any time. To ensure the protection of participants' personal data, I maintained their anonymity by assigning each person an alias and referring to each one only by that alias throughout the research process. The true identities of participants were never revealed. Data collected from peoples' personal stories was saved on an encrypted digital storage device (such as a flash drive) at the close of each interview. No unencrypted data was transported from the interview site and all subsequent transcriptions were likewise encrypted. Any transcriptions printed for review were stored in a locked cabinet within a secure location (locked residence).

Eliminating bias to accurately reflect participants' voices

To manage personal bias associated with my background in Christian fundamentalism, I followed, as much as possible, Hamill and Sinclair's (2010) eight recommendations for sustaining bracketing through the entire research period. I say "as much as possible" because I was already in violation of their second recommendation when I undertook a literature review ahead of completing data collection. Apart from this violation, I attempted to carry out the rest of their instructions. Recommendations four (establishing an audit trail) and six (obtaining participant feedback) were achieved through adoption of the Colaizzi method of data analysis (as cited in Edward & Welch, 2011; Wojnar & Swanson, 2013). This method required me to share my findings with participants to validate my results and to incorporate any corrections they suggested.

Chapter IV – Findings

The fifth step in Colaizzi's method (as cited in Edward & Welch, 2011; Wojnar & Swanson, 2013) is to integrate the themes into a thorough, exhaustive description of the phenomenon. The description is also a detailed presentation of findings. As a means of organizing this section, I will discuss each emergent theme together with the subthemes that comprise it. The discussion will be anchored in the participants' own words to ensure their voices are heard directly.

Emergent Theme 1

The first of the five emergent themes is: *A beginning of strong Christian fundamentalist belief complete with a Christian fundamentalist world view.* This emergent theme is comprised of five subthemes which included:

- believing in Christian fundamentalism due to being born into it,
- believing in Christian fundamentalism due to indoctrination,
- believing in Christian fundamentalism due to being in a bubble with a lack of dissenting information,
- seeing nonbelievers as suspicious “outsiders” with whom interaction is limited and seen as likely being problematic, and
- Christian fundamentalism as the main focus in life and central aspect of identity.

Believing in Christian fundamentalism due to being born into it.

For all but one of the participants in this study, Christian fundamentalism was not a choice. Six out of the seven participants were born into homes in which participation in the Christian fundamentalist faith, as well as its rituals, was non-negotiable. As Sean¹ explained, “My mother kind of made us all go. Like there was no not going. You went even if you didn’t want to.” Forced participation was especially evident with one participant whose father was a Pentecostal minister and required his family’s involvement in church services “often more than four times a week.” All six of these participants referred to their religious beginnings as something they were “born into” and not an option they chose.

The seventh participant, Riley, adopted Christian fundamentalism later in life, indicating a clear choice on his part. However, with that stated, it may be of note that he had an elder

¹ All participants’ names have been changed to pseudonyms to preserve confidentiality.

brother who was involved in Christian fundamentalism and who was highly influential in his life. This degree of influence brings into question the freedom of choice that Riley actually exercised, although such a discussion is beyond the scope of this study.

Believing in Christian fundamentalism due to indoctrination.

For those born into Christian fundamentalism, participation, teachings, and study began very early in their childhood, extending back to their earliest memories. Cheryl recalled, “I remember we had a little church in the community I was in, and I remember being in the church and being so tiny you could just barely peer over the pews and, you know, being told, ‘You have to kneel here.’” Micah had similar memories and stated, “I remember probably from the earliest age I can remember, probably around six, um, we would always be going to church...every Sunday.” Micah also got involved and was serving as an altar boy.

Nearly all participants attended some form of religious teaching that happened both during and after church services. This might include Sunday school, which took place for children while their parents were in the adult service, or religious studies, such as “catechism” (Catholic Church), and, for almost all participants, there were teenage youth groups they attended when they were older. In addition, Christian fundamentalist churches often provide, or sponsor, a Christian bible camp, that continues Christian fundamentalist teachings/focus during the summer months when children are not in school. These camps can be highly influential experiences for developing children. Chrissy, who attended Bible camps annually from the age of seven, said that she remembered Bible camps as being “very pivotal in my beliefs.”

Christian fundamentalist teachings in childhood occurred at home as well. For example, Cheryl reflected, “I remember growing up when I was very little, um, right at our home, um, reading books with my mom...like story books, children’s Bible stories.” She further explained

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

that these stories were focused on creation, which included the stories of Adam and Eve and Noah's Ark; however, these were children versions of these stories. At three or four years of age she was also given coloring books with images based on the stories she was being taught. Several of the other participants mentioned having child versions of the Bible from very young ages. These versions of the Bible were described as "kid friendly." For all of the participants born into Christian fundamentalism, these efforts to provide "kid friendly" versions of religious material, required attendance at religious classes, and being sent to Christian fundamentalist Bible camps, were now described as offensive and manipulative.

All of the participants considered their introduction into Christian fundamentalism to be a form of indoctrination. Each one specifically used the word "indoctrination" to explain how they became committed Christian fundamentalists. Brandy, while recalling a time in her childhood in which her family began attending a Pentecostal church, described that as the point in her life "when my second indoctrination started." Their childhood socialization into Christian fundamentalism was described by participants as extremely powerful and influential in their lives, and many remained tied to this ideology long into adulthood. Cheryl offered, "But still...as kids though, I think that's how you get them. I think that's what it is for Catholics, I think that's what it is for Muslims, for Jewish, I think all of those, they get them as kids. And once they get them, they keep them." Reflecting on the long-lasting effects of Christian fundamentalist socialization, Micah asked, "Is raising a child in a religious environment paramount (sic) to child abuse? There is an argument for it and I think everything needs to be taken in context." Several participants raised similar questions about the ethics of early religious training.

Believing in Christian fundamentalism due to being in a bubble with a lack of dissenting information.

For all of those interviewed, indoctrination came paired with induction into a social group that confirmed Christian fundamentalist beliefs and sheltered the individual from all outside or dissenting information. Interviewees often referred to this type of one-sided interaction as being in a “bubble.” They described growing up in homes where families attended Christian fundamentalist churches and spent their free time almost exclusively with other members of their churches. Those families would have children who would all be friends and play together. Such exclusivity creates a situation in which the child is only exposed to one particular set of ideas or beliefs which are then assumed and are never challenged or called into question. Under these conditions, notions that a belief system may, in fact, not literally be true become unthinkable.

Riley related that every time he had a question, people within his social circle would give him answers that were based on Christian fundamentalist ideology, which were then confirmed in the Bible and thus made sense to him. Thinking of his life at this time, he stated, “I was completely in a bubble. I would say, yeah, I had nothing outside of it.” Ryan described being raised in a Christian fundamentalism “bubble”,

I call it the inductive shield. You, you’re under this inductive shield. And when you’re socialized and indoctrinated under the inductive shield, you basically grow up in this, um, ‘Do not question the man of the Lord.’ Right? I mean that’s just part of a foundation of how you grow up. I mean they start that...when you’re three, four years old basically. So if the pastor, mom, dad, tells you the world is 6000 years old, it just, it doesn’t even begin to enter your mind that stuff like that isn’t true.

Christian fundamentalism as the main focus in life and central aspect of identity.

All of those interviewed portrayed themselves as having been extremely devoted to their faith, which was reflected in their use of time and resources. This investment demonstrated how central it was to the participants' sense of identity: Christian fundamentalism became who they were as human beings. When thinking about the centrality of her past beliefs, Chrissy mused,

It's your strength and it's your...right? This is how I get along with people. This is how I dissuade my fears of the future, right? You're worried about what you're going to do after high school. That's a pretty heavy, heady time in your life and that spills out because that's what you use to get you through.

She, as well as other participants, learned to rely on Christian fundamentalist ideology in nearly every aspect of their lives. Their beliefs helped to calm them and to provide them with answers/direction when they experienced anxiety or had questions about the future.

In speaking about how she saw herself and how she related to others from inside her Christian fundamentalist bubble, Brandy proclaimed, "I was a Jesus freak. And I was proud of it. Like, I even had a shirt that said 'Jesus Freak' on there." Although "Jesus Freak" is a pejorative term, she co-opted its implied ridicule as a badge of honor, even advertising her Jesus Freak status to others. This way of relating to others led to a dualistic mentality in which people within the Christian fundamentalist group were "believers" who knew the truth, and others outside the group who were seen as "sinners", needing to be "saved" and brought into the fold.

Seeing nonbelievers as suspicious "outsiders" with whom interaction is limited and seen as likely being problematic.

Outsiders were seen as potentially problematic and interaction with these individuals, while at times unavoidable, was not encouraged; in fact, such interaction was often openly

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

discouraged. For example, Brandy declared, “I had my friends inside my school. But they were just friends at school. I didn’t really do much with them outside of school.” The idea that her friends at school were “just” her school friends confirms that her “true” friends, the ones she spent her time with, were Christian fundamentalist adherents.

Other participants agreed that this restricted association is typical of how Christian fundamentalism socializes members to behave towards people who are outside the in-group. Riley, who was not raised in a fundamentalist home, described being socialized into the Christian fundamentalist bubble as, “I didn’t have the same friends anymore; I kind of walked into a new world with all new friends...” His old life, including those he knew in that old life, was gone/removed and his friends were quickly replaced with new in-group members. While in-group connections are encouraged and out-group relations are discouraged for adults, external friendships for children under the authority of Christian fundamentalist parents/guardians are often strictly forbidden. As Ryan bluntly put it, “You’re not allowed to associate with people from outside that indoctrinated shield.”

Emergent Theme 2

The second emergent theme is titled: *Contributing factors leading to leaving Christian fundamentalism and the changes in perceptions that result from adopting atheism.* This is a large theme that includes the subthemes:

- questioning/moving away from Christian fundamentalism due to disillusionment with the actions of church leaders and members;
- feeling guilt and shame about one's past actions as a Christian fundamentalist;
- being embarrassed about one's history of holding Christian fundamentalist beliefs;
- leaving Christian fundamentalism and becoming an atheist was an extended process;
- perceptual changes after leaving Christian fundamentalism; and
- gaining a sense of personal freedom after leaving Christian fundamentalism.

Questioning/moving away from Christian fundamentalism due to disillusionment with the actions of church leaders and members.

Several participants named the actions of others within Christian fundamentalism, particularly church leaders and church members, as the genesis of doubt and a catalyst for their eventual departure from faith altogether. For these participants, the messages they received from Church leaders, who were seen as authorities on the will and intentions of God, were off-putting. Chrissy mentioned that church authorities would often skew the Bible in ways that would favour their actions as a way to justify their life choices to other Christians. While giving me a look that suggested this was unacceptable, she gave an example of the excuses she had encountered: "I look at pictures of naked women and I watch violent movies, but if I don't act on them, you know, it's fine." She went on to say that such inconsistencies caused confusion for both her and her brother. It appeared to her that leaders in the church were picking and choosing the parts of

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

the Bible that they liked based on passages that would not interfere with their lifestyles. She saw this as a contradiction between Christian fundamentalist doctrine and the way people were actually living. Such contradictions between doctrine and actions caused some participants to question their faith. When recounting the beginning of his uncertainty with Christian fundamentalism, Riley mused, “I think when it started [the doubts] was when I started seeing the hypocrisy of the church itself.”

Other participants were disappointed or felt left out by what they interpreted as the neglectful and uncaring conduct of church leaders. Chrissy reported that, when she went to her church pastor and told him that she was having a hard time and needed someone to talk to, he seemed dismissive and uninterested in taking the time to help her. She said that these rebuffs made her feel like an outsider, like a person who did not fit in and did not really belong. She, in turn, tried to get involved and participate so that she would fit in. She joined the choir, but recalled that her feelings of being an outsider did not subside. Instead, she remembered thinking, “If I wasn’t actually sitting in the choir, I don’t feel like I’d have a spot out in the congregation.” She added, “Of course, looking back, I see it all as ‘doubts started, doubts started.’”

For other participants, the issue was not so much the hypocrisy of individual leaders, but rather the actions that church leaders asked church-goers to take that caused them to question their faith. Sean informed me that, after being appointed treasurer of a local parish, he discovered that the central diocese owed the parish over \$150,000. At the time, the parishioners wanted to erect a new church and, instead of collecting the money owed to the parish, the church leaders decided to “badger all of our parishioners into digging deep” in order to raise another \$150,000 to \$200,000 to construct the new building. Later, after the church was built, the leaders started another fundraising campaign to purchase a new organ for their services. In

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

response to this, Sean exclaimed, “It was just obscene! You know, asking the parishioners to keep paying money when we had all that money somewhere? At any rate, I started to question.”

Sometimes the official stance of the Church and its leaders represented a problem for participants’ continued commitment to their faith. For example, Sean asserted that he did not appreciate the Church’s position “on gay issues, or morality issues, or anything.” In 2005, a bishop whom Sean considered to be a “hatemonger,” issued an anti-homosexual letter that all the priests in the Calgary, Alberta diocese were asked to read aloud to their congregations. The letter enraged him to the point where he got up and walked out of the service. He reported that these types of events and proclamations were offensive to him, and their occurrence began to cause doubt in his mind as to the validity of the church and, therefore, his faith. When the church did not change, but persisted in its position regarding homosexuality, he “stopped going to church entirely.” His continued absence from church services ultimately contributed to his leaving the faith altogether. As he explained, “I’ve been questioning the church’s validity for many, many, many years. This gay thing was simply the catalyst that made me realize that this is so silly. These people can’t be speaking on behalf of God!”

Other participants, too, began to question their faith because of elements of their churches’ teachings that they found to be offensive. They could not avoid these teachings because they were embedded in the Christian fundamentalist culture and reinforced through the actions, attitudes, and beliefs of fellow members of the congregation. For example, Chrissy said that she did not appreciate the Christian fundamentalist beliefs and culture regarding the role and position of women in the church and society. She stated, “One thing that always bothered me were all the Bible verses about ‘Women, be submissive.’” Her experiences with the restricted roles women were allowed to assume in the church increased her contempt of the idea that

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

women should be submissive because of their gender to the point that she now considers the term to be a “dirty word.” Her church’s view of the place of women in society was reinforced by her peers within Christian fundamentalism, engendering feelings of separateness from the collective and prodding her to question her faith.

Brandy also struggled with traditional teachings that were embedded in Christian fundamentalist culture and supported by her peers. She reported that, in her church, the leaders often spoke against homosexuality as a form of immorality and sin. She found it upsetting that she was being induced to shun a group of people. It generated cognitive dissonance for her and drove a wedge between her and other members of her faith, causing her to see herself as separate and different from the collective. No longer a community member, her assessment of the impact of these views is that, “Most Christians I know are not good people. They’re bigots and judgmental.” However, she continues to be affected by the Christian fundamentalist perspective through her contact with family members who remain adherents and uphold church teachings. Brandy went on to say that the gulf of difference that now exists between her and members of her past faith is such that, “I mean I would be uncomfortable, I wouldn’t even want to be around them. I would have nothing in common with them...at this point.” Thus, divergence from Christian fundamentalist doctrine and cultural norms not only drove participants away from their faith communities, but also functions to keep them from returning to the fold.

Feeling guilt and shame about one’s past actions as a Christian fundamentalist.

When apostates realize how different their values and beliefs are from their former ones, they can experience feelings of embarrassment, shame, guilt and regret for having had any past affiliation with Christian fundamentalism. Like an alcoholic on the ninth step of Alcoholics Anonymous’ Twelve Step recovery program in which one goes back to the people who have

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

been wronged through one's substance abuse and apologizes for past actions, several of those interviewed professed a desire to go back and undo, or rewrite, their personal history ("12 Step", 1981). Brandy recollected a time when she took her friend to a church service in which people were "yelling and speaking in weird languages, made-up languages." She said that her friend started to cry, not because she was touched by God as Brandy originally thought, but because she was frightened. In retrospect, Brandy exclaimed, "Yeah, OF COURSE she was crying, I mean we were just preteens and she was AFRAID of what was going on in that church." Confessing remorse over the incident, she said, "Yeah, I've apologized to her since then."

Cheryl expressed regret for demanding that her husband marry her in a church despite the fact that she was fully aware he was a nonbeliever. At the time, she was still a Christian fundamentalist and, knowing she was absolutely right, did not take her partner's feelings into consideration. Now, as an atheist, her demands regarding the wedding are something she would rather go back and change. As she lamented, "Like me insisting that he [my husband] get married in a Catholic church. How dare I! It's absurd! I can't believe I had the audacity to make him do that. It's embarrassing and shameful. I feel horrible over that. Yeah it's embarrassing..."

As a final example, Chrissy shared how her identity as a Christian fundamentalist was very much tied up with maintaining her virginity. Her status as a virgin was something she held onto and made sure others were aware of it. Now, however, since she has become an atheist, she no longer has the same views on sex that she once did. In her interview, she professed shame over her past pontificating and a desire to go back and right the wrongs of her past. She stated,

And it was always this, "I'm better than you are, I'm the capital "V" virgin.

That's embarrassing to me. I'd like to actually go back and apologize to some

people. And they'd probably look at me and go, 'What?' But really, I'd like to have coffee and I'd be so much cooler to talk to now.

Being embarrassed about one's history of holding Christian fundamentalist beliefs.

Many participants expressed not only remorse over past actions while being fundamentalists, but were also embarrassed simply for having held the belief in the first place. Their orientation has shifted so dramatically that it seems incomprehensible to them to have ever held such a faith perspective; in fact, their past beliefs are now a source of chagrin. For example, after watching a documentary that exposed people's religious beliefs, Chrissy said that she reacted by thinking, "Oh my God! That's what I used to say and I'm embarrassed by that. I'm embarrassed that that used to be me."

Laughing in an embarrassed way, Brandy explained how her Christian fundamentalist faith underpinned her past belief that the earth was only 6,000 years old, that Adam and Eve were real people, that the story of Noah's ark was factual and historically accurate, and that rainbows were something created by God to demonstrate his promise that he would never again flood the earth. As she related these beliefs, she covered her face with her hands and said, "It's just, like I still just sometimes shake my head at myself and I cannot believe... it's... it's like I was truly a child. Like... who? Just looking at a rainbow? Like Noah's ark? Like really?"

Cheryl was able to understand the reasons for her belief when she was a child, but the fact that her faith persisted into her adulthood was both distressing and unacceptable.

When I look back now, I think, 'OK, I can see how you got there, but how did you keep believing as you got older? Why were you that weak-minded that you could not? What did you need in your life that you thought you had to believe this?' It's embarrassing to think that I... I think that I'm a pretty intelligent

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

person, but to see this, and to see what I was, I go, ‘You weren’t that bright... if you bought that crap hook, line, and sinker.’

She went on to say, “And you feel like an idiot. That I could be indoctrinated and not see it.”

These sentiments were closely echoed by Sean, who stated, “I suppose it’s not embarrassing if you’re talking to somebody who believes it, but I... I am embarrassed by the fact that I bought into this for so long. I mean, really.”

Micah had a slightly different perspective than the others regarding his previous faith views. He said that he does not feel shame and embarrassment over his past involvement with Christian fundamentalism because he was indoctrinated as a child and did not receive any information to the contrary. This view allowed him to distinguish between the act of believing and the beliefs themselves. “The beliefs are foolish. I am not foolish for believing in them.” His attitude was unique in that he did not blame himself for his past convictions but understood that Christian fundamentalism was externally forced upon him without his consent or understanding. When he received new information, he updated his beliefs which eventually led to his apostasy and his subsequent choice of atheism.

Participants often laughed at themselves and their involvement in Christian fundamentalism when expressing embarrassment over their past beliefs. Brandy, however, stopped laughing about her past affiliation with Christian fundamentalism and made this sobering statement: “I know it’s easy to laugh about it now but it’s crazy how serious it is, though. It’s.. it is laughable, but in a way it’s not because it was a big chunk of my life that was taken up by it.”

Leaving Christian fundamentalism and becoming an atheist was an extended process.

As I often found while conducting this research, the mood of the discussion may have been light and pleasant at times, but the overall topic is serious and involved people's deepest concerns. For all of the participants in this study, Christian fundamentalism was the central focus of a significant portion of their lives. Leaving such an all-encompassing faith system was not done casually and did not happen all at once. Instead, the journey from belief to disbelief occurred slowly and in stages. Statements such as, "My journey was, um, very lengthy," and "But it wasn't, it wasn't like... the lights came on for me. It was gradual. It was very gradual," were common among all of the study participants.

For some participants, life events/hardships were the catalyst for migration into disbelief. Brandy avowed she had been a strong believer until her marriage became abusive. She did not understand how this could be happening to a faithful, obedient believer. "I was doing everything I was supposed to do and my whole world was falling apart. And that's when I thought, 'OK things are not going as planned, I am doing everything I'm supposed to do. I'm a Christian, I believe in God.'"

The confusion generated by her failed marriage caused her to doubt beliefs she had taken for granted as truth throughout her life. She began to ask herself questions such as, "How could God do this?" She stated that admitting she was, in fact, in an abusive relationship was a major step for her, and that when she did, "then it just opened me up to seeing other things." This new openness made her curious, and one day she came across Christopher Hitchens' book, *God Is Not Great* (2007), a book that claims religion is a malignant force that poisons everything. "And I read the back, and I was like, 'Oh my God! I have to get this book!' And I did. And I didn't

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

put it down. And I read it and, ah, it was just the best thing ever.” Afterwards, she no longer accepted the Bible as the inerrant, literal word of God, a major shift away from the dogma in which she had been raised. This shift began to change how she thought about herself and the identity of God. In her first step away from Christian fundamentalism, she mused that, “like, uh, well maybe I’m just spiritual.” By this point, she no longer accepted the deity of Jesus, but she still clung to her belief in God. As a result, she looked into New Age concepts such as “spirits” and “energies” and notions such as, “We are all part of the same wavelength or something.”

Concurrent with the changes she was undergoing in her concepts of spirituality and religion, Brandy was listening to atheist podcasts challenging the truth of the Bible and of Christianity. She listened to “The Atheist Experience,” and “The Thinking Atheist,” in which guests would share their stories of how they fell out of belief and into disbelief. She found these podcasts very moving, “Because I knew that was my story.” The influence of these podcasts, together with her new-found curiosity and exploration of new information and challenging ideas, finally forced her to admit to herself, “I don’t even know if I’m even spiritual anymore!”

In another example, the loss of a parent was the critical factor in the process of apostasy. Cheryl, who had been raised in a Christian fundamentalist environment and had never doubted the validity of her beliefs, first began to question her perceptions of the world after becoming an Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) and leaving home. She commented, “I get to see reality now. People at their worst. I never get to see people at their best in that line of work.” She then entered the military as an EMT. As she traveled to different parts of the world, she remembered thinking, “Wow, there’s a lot out here. Look at all these people here. Well, they don’t believe.” Up until this point in her life, she had been regularly attending Mass, but now, “that has fallen back... but I’m still a believer.”

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

Later, Cheryl married a man she had known from childhood who had also been raised in Christian fundamentalism, but who had since become an apostate and an atheist. Her husband's lack of belief induced her to consider other points of view directly opposed to her own. She looked into the scientific evidence and found that some of the discoveries/advances of science were contradictory to her Christian fundamentalist beliefs. She stated,

Well here's the evidence of evolution right? I mean Darwin. We learn it, I've read it, we were taught in school... however... of course there was Creation Theory too. But something inside of me is saying, 'Hmm...' And it's not going away. It's nagging me. It's just something that I, I, it's annoying me. It's OK. What else is going on here?

The single biggest faith-shattering event of Cheryl's life occurred when her father was tragically killed in a plane crash. This personal catastrophe caused her to diligently examine her view of God and his actual control over the events on the earth. Questions arose in her mind such as, "And why would God plan for him to die like that? And, my dad, he must have been terrified, you know? And why would God do that?" She deemed the answers supplied by her friend, a priest, to be unsatisfactory, answers such as, "Well, it's his time." Her inability to resolve the issues raised by her father's death compelled her to evaluate everything she had previously taken for granted, an investigation which culminated in apostasy and, later, atheism.

In my final example, there was no galvanizing event that propelled Riley into apostasy, but rather a reasoned, step-by-step progression based on intensive scrutiny of facts and philosophical ideas. His exodus from Christian fundamentalism began when he attended a Baptist college and took classes in ethics and philosophy. In his ethics class, the idea was put forward that one could not be a good and moral person without being a believer in Christian

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

fundamentalism. He commented that this opinion disturbed him, and he remembered thinking at the time, “You know what? I was a pretty moral person without God before I became a Christian.” As a result, he began weighing the beliefs he had taken for granted. “And that’s when everything started unravelling; I started reading everything.”

His continuing study included an inquiry into the historicity of Jesus Christ and whether or not he had ever existed. By the end of his investigation, his view of Christ had changed. He said, “I still believe Jesus existed as a historical character. I just don’t believe any of the miracles attributed to him, or even some of the things he even said are attributed to him; ‘I am God,’ stuff like that.” He stated that, after deciding what he believed about Jesus, he moved away from the idea that Jesus is God – he was only a moral teacher – and moved towards the idea of a deistic God. Deism is the belief that God created the universe but remains apart from it, so that it is governed by natural laws that do not include miracles or other supernatural phenomena. Delving into the ramifications of a deistic god, he wondered about the value of believing in such a god. As he put it, “If there even is a deistic god, which we can or cannot disprove whether there is or is not...then what is the point of it? If it just started everything, there’s no point to worship it. It doesn’t care if you worship it.” He said that this line of reasoning brought him to the realization that, “There’s no point to believe in a God anymore. It doesn’t change anything for me even if there is a deistic God.” Rejecting deism, Riley briefly explored Buddhism, a nontheistic religion.

I kept falling back, and back, and back, further and further, trying to find religions that didn’t have gods, that were still religions, to find some kind of purpose for things like Hinduism, which has multiple gods but you don’t have to believe in a god if you don’t want to.

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

Again, these stages – from belief, to questioning belief, to complete lack of belief – took many years in which atheism was the final destination in a series of developments. These progressions inevitably changed the way in which people perceived the world and reality.

Perceptual changes after leaving Christian fundamentalism.

Moving from belief to disbelief effects a dynamic shift in perception. Many participants reported that now, as atheists, past affiliations and convictions seem foreign and unthinkable. As Ryan observed, “I’ll come across a passage, and I’ll be like, ‘Whoa! I used to believe that’s what happened. Like how did I believe, right?’”

Other participants explained how their past beliefs seem obscene and offensive to them now that they are atheists. Brandy talked about how she could no longer accept the concept of hell (eternal torture for finite crimes) as moral, and, by extension, was no longer able to accept the idea of heaven being a good place or a place where one could be happy. She said that we are all supposed to enjoy heaven; however, in order to do so, one must either ignore or be unaffected by the eternal torture of others, some of whom may have been loved ones. She voiced her reaction to the thought of being in heaven while people burn in hell, “Yeah, I’m having fun. I’m doing great. Who cares about them? Like really! It’s disgusting. Who would even want that?” Sean had a similar reaction of disgust when he related the story of Abraham being called by God to sacrifice his own son. Once seen as a story about a man’s unwavering faith and commitment to an all-loving God, Sean’s change in perspective had also changed the meaning of the story for him to one that was outrageous and repugnant. He protested, “I mean, can you imagine, as fulfilling his obligation, because he actually did, uh, he was prepared to kill his own son? How sick is that?”

Gaining a sense of personal freedom after leaving Christian fundamentalism.

Participants affirmed that adoption of an atheist perspective was not only about discarding prior convictions, but it was also about gaining new freedom and accepting the responsibility that accompanied it. Brandy stated that, as a Christian fundamentalist, she had felt stuck in her positions on nearly everything. Her faith had provided answers about the meaning of life, the existence of the universe and humanity's place in it, and what happens to people after they die. Since the Bible was accepted as inerrant, these answers were not up for debate. As an atheist, however, she announced, "I'm not stuck. I don't have to be so...like stubborn, you know? And so set in my ways. I can change my mind. It's just so freeing." She went on to say that she no longer had to have all the answers, but was free to admit she didn't know something. "I can honestly just say now, 'I don't know.' You know? I don't know all the answers. It feels good to admit you don't know. You don't have to prove to anyone. It's not MY job."

Chrissy declared that, since she dropped her belief in a personal God, she is less inclined to be passive. She affirmed that she has assumed responsibility for living her life, which, to her, means she has to make her own decisions and will no longer "be the one who procrastinates the most important things." This choice is a radical change from her previous default position of "pray and wait" when trying to deal with life issues. Another change she noticed was her freedom to care about people without having "some hidden agenda of Bible-thumping them."

All of the participants in this study reported major paradigm shifts in their thinking about death. Cheryl admitted that, while at one time she had faith, now, "I have no beliefs, you know? I don't 'believe' in atheism. There's no such thing. I have no faith. Nothing." This change in perspective led her to conclude, "There's just nothing." Ruminating on the implications of this conclusion in terms of what her death ultimately will mean, she mused, "And, you know, the big

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

questions I had when I was a kid on life and death... when you're dead, you're dead. That's it. That's it. There's nothing." Her conviction about the finality of death led her to view her past beliefs, and religion as a whole, as a coping mechanism to help people deal with their own inevitable destruction. Micah made a similar observation about the role of Bible stories in easing anxiety about death. "Well, it's a stark reality. I mean, all of these fancy stories and everything are designed to give people comfort. And to realize that they are just stories. Nothing more. Somebody made it up."

For other participants, acknowledging the finality of death has meant valuing the time they have left in their lives as finite and precious. This has had an impact on how they lead their lives, especially in their use of time. For example, Chrissy averred that, in the past, she had enjoyed the concept of eternal life because it provided a way for her to make up for all the mistakes she had made, including "the people I didn't spend enough time with before they died..." She has now resolved not to procrastinate in making meaningful gestures. "I'm going to say, 'I love you,' and not worry about the guilt that has." Riley shared that coming to terms with death has made a difference in his family life.

I kind of see things a bit different because religion made things special, but now I think to myself, the fact that I'm not going to live on forever makes things, makes this time more special and you have to make more choices about not doing overtime, about spending time with your family, because there's no guarantee of tomorrow, and there's no guarantee you're going to see anything ever again.

Ryan said that the lack of an afterlife affects the way he interacts with his loved ones. He explained that, as an atheist, he makes an effort to live a much healthier lifestyle because he could die at any moment and, "There's no special hedge of spiritual protection around me or

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

prayer protecting me from that.” He asserted that he lives a more “moral lifestyle as an atheist” than he did as a fundamentalist Christian. As a believer, he admitted that he had taken his loved ones for granted, but as an atheist, he has a different attitude: “I realize there’s only value, or at least, I invest value now in my current relationships, and I don’t want to lose those... because I realize there’s not forgiveness in Magic Land to heal all that, right?”

Participants disclosed that it was only upon abandoning Christian fundamentalism that they became aware of how tightly their faith had controlled their actions, thoughts, and beliefs. After leaving, they reported experiencing previously unknown feelings of freedom in myriad areas of their lives. Brandy observed,

Everything’s given to you. And you really do believe you’re free, though that’s the funny thing. Like you don’t... you think you’re... I always thought I WAS free. Freedom in Christ. Yet you’re not free. You have rules. “Oh no, you can make choices.” Yeah. But if you don’t make the right choices, you go to hell.

Yeah. It’s not free at all. This is free. Now I’m free.

Cheryl also found it a relief to be free of a faith which had become burdensome to her. “I have nothing that I’m dealing with, or having to keep telling myself, [in regards to spiritual belief] there’s, you know? I’m, I’m free. Nonbelief. It was a life’s journey.”

Chrissy mentioned that, as a Christian fundamentalist, she had always carried a load of guilt. She felt guilty about not evangelizing/witnessing enough to others about her faith, guilty about not being a good enough person, and guilty for not being a better Christian. After she apostatized and adopted nonbelief, she found freedom in finally being able to let go of the burden of self-condemnation. She declared, “I feel I’m a better person now. I... the guilt... I didn’t realize until it was gone.” Later, she exclaimed, “That whole guilt... gone!”

Emergent Theme 3

The third emergent theme is titled: *Gaining new/outside knowledge and acquiring critical thinking skills contributed to a permanent transition to atheism.* This emergent theme is composed of the following subthemes:

- experiencing cognitive dissonance as a direct result of Christian fundamentalist teachings;
- influence of critical thinking in breaking down Christian fundamentalist beliefs;
- access to new/outside information contributed to leaving Christian fundamentalism; and
- permanent loss of Christian fundamentalist beliefs due to new knowledge and critical thinking.

These subthemes are difficult to describe separately because they often overlapped or occurred simultaneously in the experiences of participants. For example, when participants began to experience cognitive dissonance in regard to Christian fundamentalist teachings, it became more pronounced as they gained access to new/outside information. Their response to the heightened dissonance was to launch an intensive investigation, during which they often developed critical thinking skills, resulting in an even greater level of dissonance. The spiral of increasing cognitive dissonance, deeper investigation, and continued application of critical thinking distanced participants from their faith more and more with each turn. Though the journey occurred in degrees, the direction was consistently away from Christian fundamentalism.

A universal element in the interviews with participants was their assertion that acquisition of the skill of critical thinking made the move from Christian fundamentalism to atheism a permanent one. They all expressed the idea that, once they had learned how to think critically, it

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

was impossible to unlearn what they had learned. For them, this means they cannot go back: Their critical thinking, as well as their lack of faith, remain permanent fixtures in their lives.

Experiencing cognitive dissonance as a direct result of Christian fundamentalist teachings.

Many of the participants divulged that cognitive dissonance was a part of their daily experience as fundamentalist Christians. Although as believers they were not aware of the term “cognitive dissonance,” those who experienced it reported being aware that something unpleasant and distressful was occurring in their thought lives. Brandy disclosed that, “So it was tumultuous. It was like a mind trick. You have to constantly flip-flop your mind and you never know... like I don’t think I really realized how much stress that puts on a person.” Later, she said, “Cognitive dissonance. Yeah, I learned that like a few years ago and I was, like, ‘That’s it! Yes, that’s what you have to do!’ Your whole life.”

Ryan conceded, “Cognitive dissonance, I believe that is the correct term for it. I experienced it in a very extreme form....” He had been raised within Christian fundamentalism and had never been exposed to alternate interpretations of reality before leaving home at age 17 and becoming a successful professional athlete. According to him, there was much about the lifestyle of a professional athlete that “does not comport itself very well with, with... uh, fundamentalist religious doctrine... to say the least.” This created a dichotomy between what he valued and was doing in his professional life, and what his fundamentalist faith had taught him he should be valuing and doing. “So there was this massive divide, and I didn’t have any, ANY, I didn’t have any way to work through that.” He believed that he had to do as he was taught or else he was bad. In his new circumstances, because he was unclear about how to act as he had been taught, it meant that he must be bad. This self-assessment troubled him greatly: “I didn’t

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

know, didn't know what else to do. It was, yeah, it was weird, a very ah... I felt like I was just compartmentalized and apart and... confused." Over time, his inability to reconcile his new life with his previous frame of reference became intolerable. "I experienced an EXTREME level of cognitive dissonance through, ah, I'd say at least a decade. At least a decade, yeah...to the point where I thought I was having a nervous breakdown at one point."

Influence of critical thinking in breaking down Christian fundamentalist beliefs.

Because cognitive dissonance was such an uncomfortable experience, the participants tried to alleviate the tension by examining the basis of their beliefs and finding ways to resolve their internal conflicts. Cheryl revealed, "But something inside of me is saying, 'Hmm...' and it's not going away. It's nagging me. It's just something that I, I, it's annoying me. It's 'OK, what else is going on here?'" Brandy announced that she began to read books by prominent scientists and by atheists such as Richard Dawkins, began to think critically, and, as a result, she moved from unquestionably upholding the tenets of Christian fundamentalism to no longer being able to support a literal interpretation of the Bible or see it as inerrant. She rationalized that, "Maybe it was just men who were following Christ and wrote a book and were trying to do the best they could, and yeah, they got some things wrong..." She added, in regard to her search for answers that, "It was changing how I looked at God."

For Micah, it was the analysis of Christian fundamentalist doctrine that led to cognitive dissonance rather than dissonance instigating the analysis. Through his work, he learned how to conduct investigations and, in the process, developed strong analytical skills. "So maybe that was part of that initial thing for me where I began that whole critical thinking, and looking at something and weighing the evidence and saying, 'Does this make sense?'" He began to reason that, if there were multiple gods and multiple belief systems, not everyone could be right and no

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

one could be absolutely sure they were always right, nor could one assume that the Bible was the definitive source of truth. Eventually, after not finding any evidence for belief in God, he concluded that he could no longer hold such a belief. His steady progression away from Christian fundamentalism had been a rational process based on weighing the evidence of doctrinal claims. “My belief, and my journey from belief to nonbelief, was a solo journey. It was something where I took the information that I had, and over time, I gathered more information, and I analysed that information, and then I got to a point where I am today.”

Access to new/outside information contributed to leaving Christian fundamentalism.

The manner in which new knowledge, critical thinking, and apostasy from Christian fundamentalism are linked is illustrated in Ryan’s story. Ryan was raised in a strict fundamentalist Christian environment that encapsulated his knowledge and worldview until he left home to pursue a career. When he retired from that career, he earned his first of two degrees in religion and theology at a Baptist college. Ironically, although the classes he took for his degree were designed to strengthen his faith, they instead caused him to begin questioning what he had always assumed to be true. “But probably the biggest mistake that they made there is they started to teach me how to think, not what to think. They started to give me some categories for critical thinking... and I took those with me.”

As he developed the skill of critical thinking, he began to evaluate the tenets of his faith more rigorously, with the consequence that his faith became less valid for him. For example, in evaluating a literal interpretation of the creation narrative, he noted,

When it comes to interpreting natural phenomenon, there are hypotheses that are testable and repeatable and falsifiable, that lead to theories, and there are

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

hypotheses that are bullshit. Like the world is 6000 years old. That's a great hypothesis... until you test it... and then it's not.

By the time he finished his first degree, he said that he still considered himself a Christian, but he was no longer a fundamentalist.

During his Master's studies, Ryan continued to investigate and deconstruct truth claims made by both Christian fundamentalism and other Christian traditions. He was especially interested in anything that appeared to oppose natural law. "I would, if you were going to put it all down to one level, I would call magic... right? Any claim from magic, I want tested." He shared that, one by one, his beliefs began to fall away: Articles of faith that he had once held as sacred were now discarded as improbable. He had gone from a faith-based mentality to one where "something was true and could pass, you know, peer review, or it was a claim, or it was a belief, and that no matter what... ah... knowledge trumped belief. No matter what."

Ryan related that the slow crumbling of his belief structure finally "kind of snowballed," and that, as a consequence, he experienced a paradigm shift.

And to have a paradigm shift, um, requires new knowledge and new understandings and the only way you have a paradigm shift is that the new knowledge and the new understanding reasonably accounts for whatever data it's interpreting. That's it.

This change entailed a complete overhaul of his belief system. "I just spent hours and hours and hours working my way through what I believed." Thus, after years of questioning and study, he finally had to acknowledge, to himself and then to one of his theology professors, "I'm an atheist now. I just... I don't believe I'm going to live forever." The ongoing application of critical thinking and search for new sources of information were key factors in Ryan's apostasy

Permanent loss of Christian fundamentalist beliefs due to new knowledge and critical thinking.

For all participants, the dissolution of their faith after a period of critically examining its teachings in light of new and contradictory information did not feel like a choice. Rather, it felt as though their faith left them and they could do nothing to stop it. As Brandy put it,

I believed, yeah. And I do believe that [becoming an atheist is] not a choice. I used to think it's a choice, right? I have to choose. No. I don't believe that what you believe in is a choice. It just kind of... comes to you.

Not only was the loss of their faith unavoidable, it was permanent. All interviewees reported feeling that it was impossible for them to return to a state of faith. Brandy continued, "If it was a choice, in many ways, it would almost be easier to go back and believe in it. I'd have my family in my life, uh, my friends. I'd have a nice security blanket... but I CAN'T DO IT!"

Sean argued that, after developing the ability to think critically and scrutinizing church doctrine, the change he experienced could not be undone. He summed up his reaction by saying, "You can't unlearn it." He then spoke about how his atheism was permanent, describing what it would take for him to return to a life of faith: "It would take a pretty good orator to convince me that I'm wrong, that's for sure. And that would be impossible." In talking about trying to return to a state of faith, Brandy noted, "I guess I could fake it, but it wouldn't be real."

Riley related that, after he had distanced himself from the influence of an enclosed Christian fundamentalist environment and began to speak about his faith with new friends who were nonbelievers, he was offered alternate ways of looking at some of his religious beliefs. He said that he found himself wondering, "Yeah, why don't I think about it that way? And it was like, that totally makes sense!" Not long after gaining outside perspectives and investigating

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

other Christian traditions, he realized that “certain theologies started falling away piece by piece...” His faith continued to erode as he studied Jesus and the biblical world from an historical point of view. After deliberating on the evidence collected, he became an atheist, stating, “I just, I would love to hold onto the same kind of things that people hold onto but I can’t. It makes no sense to even hold those views. I don’t understand how they hold them.”

Regarding the permanence of his position, he added,

I don’t think I’ll ever get back to it. I’d love to be able to get back to it, um, but it doesn’t make any sense to me so I just... I didn’t reason my way into it, and I reasoned myself out of it, and I don’t think you can be reasoned back into it.

Ryan used the movie *The Matrix* as an analogy for the permanence of his atheist identity. In *The Matrix*, the protagonist, Neo, is offered a choice between two pills. If he takes the blue pill, he stays in the matrix (a comfortable but artificially generated reality) and goes on with his life. The consequence of this choice will be that he will never know the truth about his world. If Neo takes the red pill, he will be granted knowledge about his false environment (the matrix), but he will not be able to plug back into the matrix and forget the truth he has discovered. He must choose between a false but comforting “dream” world, and knowing the truth. Ryan clarified the impact of adopting an atheist viewpoint: “It’s almost like, uh, taking the red pill in *The Matrix*. Like once you do it, once you go down the rabbit hole, there’s just no... you just can’t go back.”

It’s impossible. It’s literally impossible. It’s um... there’s a progression uh, I mean again the technical term is paradigm shift. Right? Once you have a paradigm shift, they only go one way. That’s it; they only go one way. They don’t go backwards, they only go forwards.

Emergent Theme 4

The fourth emergent theme is titled: *Christian fundamentalism as having caused damage in the lives of its adherents*. This emergent is comprised of the following subthemes:

- feelings of inadequacy due to Christian fundamentalist messages;
- isolation of believers from “outsiders” can lead believers to adopt extreme lifestyles,
- Christian fundamentalism/leaving Christian fundamentalism causes ruptures in relationships and breaks up families,
- Christian fundamentalist beliefs caused harm in ex-members’ lives; and
- Christian fundamentalism can leave individuals naïve and unprepared for the outside world or coping with life events that deviate from the Christian fundamentalist narrative.

Feelings of inadequacy due to Christian fundamentalist messages.

The view that previous affiliation with Christian fundamentalism had been damaging and resulted in negative consequences for apostates’ lives was a common sentiment among those interviewed. For example, several participants reported that, as Christian fundamentalists, they often harbored strong feelings of inadequacy that were not alleviated until they abandoned their faith. Brandy sighed, “Oh, and that feeling of always not being good enough. I’ve had that. I’ve struggled. I think, I have to imagine, it’s an experience that all people born into religion must have.” She said that, although people commonly struggle with issues of self-esteem, fundamentalist Christians can have a harder struggle due to negative messages about their worthiness, often received since childhood. According to her, “Society breaks us down and we have to pick ourselves up again. But then I had...like GOD doesn’t think you’re good enough. Like the supreme being who also ‘loves you,’ you know?” She recalled that the teaching about unworthiness was-reinforced in church services and in youth groups. “I always remember

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

feeling like ‘Yeah, I did all of those bad things, I did have negative thoughts, I did have this.’ And so before you know it, for me, I’d be at the altar asking God for his forgiveness... again.”

She emphasized that this message was not specific to her, “And it’s not just me, we all heard it. I mean you must have experienced it, you know? Like you’re never good enough, um, like we’re broken and we always need to be fixed.” She said that outsiders may not understand these feelings of being deficient or their deleterious effects, “I have a friend who was not raised in religion, my best friend, and she’s not experienced that.” She also opined that a relationship in which one is never good enough is unhealthy. “I mean, I didn’t understand it then... and no, that’s not love. That’s like an abusive relationship. Have you ever heard that? Like, if you compare the relationship with God and an abusive relationship, they’re exactly the same thing.”

Chrissy described her anxiety about unworthiness which made her feel fearful and guilty and caused her to continually question herself.

Can I be a good Christian if I don’t witness? I didn’t witness enough, right? Oh God, I didn’t read my Bible enough, I didn’t meet the quota. Right? I didn’t memorize enough scripture verses – am I a good Christian? I don’t believe hard enough, maybe I should be submissive. If I was a better Christian, maybe I should WANT to be submissive.

Christian fundamentalist beliefs caused harm in ex-members’ lives.

Ryan postulated that messages about unworthiness flowed from the Christian fundamentalist doctrine concerning sin, which he summed up as, “You’re born a sinner, you’re a bad person, you have this sin nature in you.” He held that this doctrine is conveyed to all Christian fundamentalists and forms part of the “socialization base” of Christian fundamentalist children. “When you’re young it’s all very, ‘Oooh, Adam and Eve ate the apple and sin came in,

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

and we're all kind of sinners, and God had to recreate the world. But now, 'Sin is bad! You're a sinner!' He said that, when he became a teenager, the message switched to being about sex. It became, "Sex is bad; you're bad if you do these things." He asserted that the doctrine of sinfulness was emphasized throughout a person's life.

And then it kind of, even into adulthood, into, um... You know, the whole point of communion is to re-recognize that – in a lot of denominations every week – you're bad, you're a sinner. This had to happen so that your sin could be covered, atoned – whatever denomination you're in.

As mentioned by other interviewees, Ryan also felt that such messages have had a deleterious effect on him. He characterized the guilt feelings when he acted outside Christian fundamentalist norms as being "almost overpowering," and he described their effect as creating a "weird tension" within him that he struggled with for many years.

I'd go through these horrible peaks and valleys of guilt and shame, and uh, probably the most, uh, unhealthy experience of sexuality that you could probably have, you know, an experience between two consenting adults and just still feeling shame and disgust afterward... uh for myself, not the other person.

He said that, because of his restrictive Christian fundamentalist upbringing, he did not have the knowledge or internal resources to cope with, or work through, these tensions.

Isolation of believers from "outsiders" can lead believers to adopt extreme lifestyles.

Participants highlighted the tendency of Christian fundamentalists to socially isolate themselves from nonbelievers as being negative and, at times, predisposing them to more extreme lifestyles. For example, Cheryl, who had born into Christian fundamentalism and attended Mass weekly, related how she became deeply absorbed in her faith as a teenager after

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

the death of a close family member. She began attending Mass every day, spending the evening at church with the friends she met there. She said that the more she heard the word of God, the more involved she became, attending prayer groups in addition to her Mass attendance and becoming an altar server. She said that, throughout the day, she prayed to God, meditated on God, listened to religious music and tapes, and sang hymns. Outside of church, at home where her parents often quarreled, she preferred to be alone:

Or if I had to be at home, in my room, that was a sanctuary. I had the cross, I had my posters...religious posters. Um, inspirational stuff. All of that, it'd be on my walls as opposed to rock bands and movie posters. I didn't have that. I had the religious everywhere. You know? The rosary. Yeah.

As she became more absorbed with the church and isolated from outside friendships and interests, she thought of leaving home and becoming a nun. She even met with a nun to investigate the possibility, bringing her parents with her. She said her father became angry and was against such an extreme move. "I couldn't understand why he wasn't on board with... but then again... neither of them were aware that, how indoctrinated I was becoming."

Riley talked about his experience of moving into a house with "really extreme" fundamentalists he met at a Christian college.

It was a whole household of people and it was pretty extreme cuz we had some roommates back then that were part of... it was called 'The Awakening.' It happened at, it was called the "airport ministries": people were like falling on the ground. It was like, supposed to be like Acts II kind of a deal where people were being touched, and barking, and rolling, and crying... anyway, my roommate was

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

so devoted to this that he actually left his job and left his car and just got on a Greyhound and went there.

Although he has talked with outsiders about his past with Christian fundamentalism, few have understood his experience. He, however, was able to articulate it simply: “My people say to me, ‘It’s amazing how far you fell in,’ and I think it’s a group-think thing cuz I didn’t have the same friends I had anymore, I kind of walked into a new world with all new friends and they all had these ideas...”

Brandy cited the service that had so upset her friend as an example of behavior that could appear extreme to outsiders, but was accepted in the community of fundamentalist believers.

It’s very intimidating if you don’t know what’s going on. I mean... it’s a freak show. I can’t even believe... I mean... I was introduced to it so gradually that over time...to see people wailing and waving their hands in the air and... being slain... and having women just fall over and being slain in the spirit... was completely normal. A Sunday experience.

Having distanced themselves from fundamentalist culture, participants agreed that some of the practices associated with their former churches might be seen as bizarre by outsiders who would not be able to relate to them. This failure to connect with the larger society reinforced the social isolation of church members. Feeling this separation, some members chose to immerse themselves more deeply in their religion, withdrawing from nonbelievers and engaging in extreme expressions of their faith.

Christian fundamentalism/leaving Christian fundamentalism causes ruptures in relationships and breaks up families.

Participants spoke about the rifts in relationships they had experienced as a result of deepening their involvement with Christian fundamentalism or of leaving it. As mentioned in the previous section, Cheryl greatly upset her father when, as a teenager, she considered leaving her family to become a nun. Sean's mother disowned him briefly after he was baptized in a church that she opposed. Chrissy stated that, because of her current views as an atheist and secular humanist, as well as her choice of friends with different sexual orientations, she and her mother now argue about religion and politics. Fuelling these arguments is the awareness on her mother's part that Chrissy no longer accepts Christian fundamentalism.

Brandy, who came from a large and close-knit Christian fundamentalist family, shared that, after divulging that she was an atheist, her family has stayed away and she does not hear from them anymore. She said that the warm and supportive relationship she used to enjoy with her uncle has been replaced with him sending her "not-so-nice emails about my soul and how I'm raising my daughter. I'm not a very good parent." Even her mother has faded from her life.

So it's sad. Because my mom doesn't come around anymore. Her and I have had a very difficult relationship, as long as I can remember. You know, it's been very difficult for her, but this atheist thing, it's pretty much, it's the biggest wedge there is. Because she can't. She feels like, um, she couldn't be comfortable in my home.

Brandy said her sisters share their mother's feelings, seeing her home as an evil place, unprotected by God, and a spiritual risk. "Like they'd probably look at the pictures on the wall

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

here and think that there is some kind of evil entity in it and it might rub off on them.” She asserted that others in her family have discussed similar concerns about her.

I know that they talk about me. I know that they, you know, it’s in emails.

They’re talking about” [Brandy], who “is now an atheist-slash-Satanist, or has devil influence, same thing to them, has devil influence. They can’t see the fact that I’m actually a good person. Like I mean, it means nothing to them. So that’s why it’s so hurtful, it’s very isolating.

Her suspicions were confirmed when one of her aunts informed her that, if she was an atheist, she would go to hell.

As much as she understood the tenets of her previous faith, Brandy found she was still unprepared to be on the receiving end of such rhetoric from her once-close family. “It’s, it’s just... I know they think that. It shouldn’t surprise me, but to hear it come from their mouth, it was like a stab. It was really shocking.”

Christian fundamentalism can leave individuals naïve and unprepared for the outside world or coping with life events that deviate from the Christian fundamentalist narrative.

Some participants said that their Christian fundamentalist upbringing had left them in a state of naïveté, ill-prepared to deal with reality or to interact with the social majority. They also mentioned their ineptitude in dealing with events that contradicted what the church had led them to expect. Thus, they reported that their naïveté had caused damage in their lives.

Brandy remembered being told that the advances/discoveries of science were a lie. She had been taught that the world was 6000 years old and that dinosaur bones had been put in the ground by Satan to test people’s faith – or that scientists had just made up stories about the bones

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

to deceive others. In addition, she had been told, “Science was not to be trusted, scientists for the most part were here to deceive us; Satan has a hold of their minds.” Having a world view that was not rooted in an evidence-based orientation hindered her from developing critical thinking skills. Consequently, she declared that, by the time she moved out of her home, “I was so naïve. Oh, and my church kept me very naïve. It does!”

Part of her naïveté was her unquestioning acceptance of the path her life would follow according to church teaching.

God had a plan for me, I was a good Christian, I believed he had a man for me to marry, that he was going to bless our marriage, just like I was told. A godly man would come into my life and we would have children, we’d have good little Christian kids and...it did not turn out that way at all.

Looking back, she blamed her poor choice of a marriage partner on her inability to objectively assess the facts of a situation. Because her husband was a Christian man, she ignored the “red flags” that should have informed her decision, such as his alcoholism. She exclaimed, “... had I been a critical thinker! Which I didn’t have a critical bone in my body. I wasn’t taught a thing at all.” She disclosed that the failure of her marriage had been devastating: “To me, the breakdown of the marriage was the worst thing I could possibly go through, what could be worse than that?”

Ryan, who associated his past naïveté with his Christian fundamentalist training, revealed that he grew up believing Moses had turned his staff into a snake, God had rained manna (bread) from heaven to feed the Israelites, and angels had come down to earth and impregnated women, thereby creating a race of evil giants in the world. He indicated his reaction when reading such

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

accounts had been, “Awesome, that seems legit, the Bible says so! Like, who am I to question that? You know? Yeah, it was reading history.”

Another aspect of the fundamentalist theology in which he was raised was the “extreme” dichotomy between good and evil, and the idea that, if bad things happened to a person, it was because Satan was testing the person, whereas if good things happened, it was because God was blessing the person. Coupled with this idea was the doctrine of immediate retribution which he explained meant that, “If you do good things, good things will happen; if you do bad, bad things will happen.” In his opinion, this kind of dualistic thinking had not provided him an adequate framework for making decisions or coping with unexpected events. “I went into the world but I still took all those categories for interpreting natural phenomena that I was socialized into as a child and a teenager, and they remained largely unchallenged for a good deal of my adult life.”

He spent the next 12 years working among people who did not share his Christian fundamentalist orientation and who were leading a lifestyle not well aligned with his belief system. He acknowledged he was unable to reconcile what he had been taught with what he was facing. According to him, “It was just a debacle, the whole 12 years were a debacle.” He admitted that, during this period, he “just kind of bumbled around,” making many mistakes, hurting others, and carrying a lot of regret from those years. Recalling that period of his life, he conceded, “It’s just that I didn’t have, I went into the world, without any good categories, to be a functioning adult in society... is basically what it was.”

Emergent Theme 5

The last of the five themes is: *Ex-Christian fundamentalist atheists are a distinct group with their own needs and issues*. This theme is composed of the following subthemes:

- having a sense of loss after losing one's faith and becoming an atheist,
- continuing struggles and the need for specific treatment in the aftermath of the transition from Christian fundamentalism to atheism,
- individuals who are ex-Christian fundamentalists are not the same as other atheists, and
- ex-Christian fundamentalists are not well understood by others who have not experienced Christian fundamentalism.

Having a sense of loss after losing one's faith and becoming an atheist.

All participants in this study began their journey from Christian fundamentalism to atheism by having doubts, asking questions, and conducting an investigation, which eventually resulted in a loss of faith and adoption of atheism. However, this outcome was not anticipated at the beginning of their exploration. A few of the participants even stated that their faith had been ripped away or taken from them. In Riley's words,

I just didn't understand what I was supposed to do because I had nothing when I grew up, then religion gave me everything, and then I took it away, or it took itself away from ME. It was pulled away from me and then I had nothing again, and I didn't know where to go from that point.

Nearly all of the participants reported a sense of loss associated with their apostasy, a loss that was accentuated by their perceived lack of choice in losing their faith and an inability to

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

return to their previous state of belief. Nevertheless, given the results of their investigations, they described their abandonment of belief as unfortunate but necessary.

The desire to return to faith, expressed by half the participants, occurred for various reasons. For example, Sean talked about the impact of losing loved ones now that his faith is gone.

But when I was in the Church and believing, well I guess seemingly in all this stuff, the concept of seeing my mother was a big plus. Seeing my mother again. But, um, it just...and that's a big loss. Even when I lost my two dogs and the vet sent me a little card with a rainbow bridge, where the dogs cross the rainbow bridge and they're over there, happy and playing and waiting for you and...all of that stuff is gone! Just gone. And it's a real loss! There's no question about it. I mourn for the loss of my faith. But, uh, reason has to prevail.

For him, death now represents a harsh reality and he is uncomfortable with the thought of the finality of death. "Cuz this can't be the end. Oh, how I wish it weren't! Part of me wants to believe that there's a spark of life that survives death. I want to believe that." He acknowledged his nostalgia for the solace provided by faith: "There is a sense of loss. There is...because you know, you think, 'Wouldn't it be wonderful if you just sort of bought into it all?'"

Riley confessed he felt lost and directionless before his conversion, but Christian fundamentalism helped him understand the meaning of his life and how to live.

At the point of my life where I didn't have answers about direction and stuff like that, or purpose, it was all thrust upon me by Christianity and I really enjoyed that because now I had something. You know before I had nothing. I didn't know what to do with myself, I didn't know what made for a moral person, or a good

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

person, or direction in life, or purpose in life, and these things were thrust upon me and I really enjoyed that.

Christian fundamentalism had become so intertwined with his core identity that leaving was a wrenching experience. All the answers bestowed on him by his faith fell away. He found himself in crisis, becoming nihilistic, and once again asking, “What is my purpose? What is my purpose?” He, too, expressed nostalgia for his previous state of belief. “I just, I would love to hold onto the same kind of things that people hold onto but I can’t.” He further remarked on the permanence of his loss, “I don’t think I’ll ever get back to it. I’d love to be able to get back to it, um, but it doesn’t make any sense to me.”

Ryan reflected on the pain of his loss and his desire, at times, to recover the benefits of belief:

I often wish I could go back because there was a nice, um... even though I lived through a lot of years in cognitive dissonance, there was always that nice warm fuzzy feeling that you were going to live forever, and be forgiven, and get your white robe, and be recreated to be perfect, and everything was going to be good.

Of course, now that his faith is gone, all those comforts are gone with it. Although he did not see a way of returning to the church while preserving intellectual honesty, he also indicated that atheism is not necessarily the end he had desired. He expressed his regret poignantly: “It’s a, it’s a beautiful story! And I, you know, I still have a couple of friends in the academy that I talk to and I just say, “Trust me, if it was true, I would love it to be true. I would LOVE it to be true.”

In addition to the existential issues associated with their loss of faith, some participants also struggled with ruptures in relationships with family and friends. Brandy, who as a believer

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

had been accepted by both her immediate family and her faith community, found herself shunned and excluded when she announced that she no longer believed in God. “I’m not... I’m not part of the clique. I’m the outsider. Not part of the group. And I miss out.” She remembered the camaraderie that she had once enjoyed with family and friends and was sensitive to the distance that now replaced the former intimacy. “But it’s sad though. I do miss them. I can still look back. I mean, when I was a Christian, we had fun. I mean, of course... I was like them so it was fun for me, you know?” For her, the ostracism appears permanent, making it unlikely that she will recover the relationships that had once been close and supportive.

Another type of loss that Sean experienced was the comfort derived from the ceremonies and celebrations of his past faith.

Now I have to tell... I have to confess that I miss certain aspects of the Catholic Church. I miss the smell of incense. I miss the way the church smells. The, the well... all the ritual was very, very interesting for me. The processions. Like, I can remember when the kids were real little, and we went to [a church in Calgary]. And it was Easter, and they have a boys’ choir there. Oh, my God! Talk about your hair standing on end. It was amazing! So beautiful.

Atheists who are ex-Christian fundamentalists are not the same as other atheists.

Participants independently agreed that, because of their Christian fundamentalist background, there were significant differences between them and other atheists. First, they were keenly aware of the reasons they had become atheist, that is, their nonbelief was a thoroughly considered position. Second, each one spoke of the suffering they had endured because of their apostasy, acknowledging they had been marked by the experience in some way. Third, most

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

participants admitted that they continued to grapple with aspects of their loss, often struggling alone because of the difficulty of finding someone who could understand their ordeal.

Due to these differences, ex-Christian fundamentalist atheists may feel resentment when the distinct character of their journey is not acknowledged. A large part of their transformation was a detailed investigation of what they believed and why they had believed that to be true. Those who have not conducted a similar self-examination and are atheist because religion had never been part of their lives are not accepted as comparable. Riley contended,

I have certain opinions on things like...if someone calls themselves an atheist, and they have no reasoning behind why they are what they are other than that's the default position for them like, 'I don't see reasons for there to be a God, so there's no God.' If you haven't thought about the hard questions and had to struggle with the philosophy, then I feel contemptuous about you.

Not all atheists are created equal! Ex-Christian fundamentalist atheists view the "default position" of nonbelief held by atheists who have not wrestled with the "hard questions" as a form of privilege. This privilege consists precisely in the absence of a need to "struggle with the philosophy." As Brandy observed about her atheist husband, "He was one of those lucky people who was raised in a nonreligious home."

Riley later added,

So that kind of bugs me. So when you say someone's secular – I think like yourself – you can say you're secular, and I'd believe, yeah, you're secular. But when someone ELSE says it, like my neighbour, "I don't believe in God," well, WHY don't you believe in God? Because I have reasons for why I don't believe in God.

All the participants in this study had reasoned explanations for their lack of belief. They have studied the arguments in-depth for and against the existence of a transcendent, metaphysical being and do not consider the positions of other atheists who have not explored the issues as being equivalent. “I do feel like I’m more an atheist than you are cuz I can articulate and argue why I don’t believe things. Because I went through both perspectives.”

Continuing struggles and the need for specific treatment in the aftermath of the transition from Christian fundamentalism to atheism.

People who make the journey from Christian fundamentalism to atheism typically endure hardships during their transition and some participants continue to grapple with the aftereffects of their choices. For Brandy, this transformation was unexpected and therefore bewildering, almost more than what she could accept. “I still think sometimes walls are crumbling down. Even though I’m, I’m a, an admitted atheist now, it’s still hard to believe sometimes. I can’t even believe that I’m an atheist.” At the same time that she is struggling to comprehend her new atheist identity, she is finding it difficult to move away from the mentality of the worldview into which she was indoctrinated. “I think I’m still deprogramming, yeah. Yeah, I don’t know, maybe it will never end, I don’t know.”

Riley’s dilemma after abandoning his faith was centred on the need to find new meaning in his life.

I kind of went through these really bad times where I just wanted to... like when I journal, when I have really bad thoughts, I just like wanted to walk out the door and just go. Because it made no sense. It made no sense to be in a relationship; it made no sense to be here; it made no sense for anything. Nothing felt like anything, I just wanted to go.

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

Although he insisted that he never seriously considered suicide, he did go through a long period of time in which he was in extreme emotional distress. “I just didn’t understand what I was supposed to do because I had nothing when I grew up, then religion gave me everything, and then I took it away, or it took itself away from ME.”

Ryan declared that he is still conflicted by the concept of his mortality years after becoming an atheist.

And it’s a... I may feel as much dissonance going from knowing I was going to live forever... to not existing. That might be the a... that might be the most difficult dissonance that I’ve had to experience going from fundamentalist to atheism.

He elaborated on how the loss of the assurance of immortality affected him emotionally and in his thought life:

I mean I grew up just knowing I was going to live forever. I was going to LIVE forever. Yeah, that was, that was a very hard thing for me cognitively... and it actually still is. Um, to think... you know, on Saturday I turn 43. I could die in the next year of a heart attack or I could live to 83 but that’s still only 40 years. That means I’m over 50% through the life cycle.

According to Ryan, the dogma in which he was raised made promises that have made it difficult for him to accept the reality of his current situation. For him, finiteness was not something that only affected him when he first lost his faith. Rather, much like Brandy, who wondered if her ongoing efforts to deprogram herself would ever end, he, too, believed that anxiety about his mortality would be an ongoing issue.

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

I don't know... I don't know if in my lifetime I'll be able to get out of some of the angst of that socialization, or if I'll always carry a small part of that with me. Just because it was the fabric of my understanding of reality. So I still find existential value in life, um, in experiencing moments with my friends and family and investing value there. But I do still carry... I would say like a little weight every day. I don't know if I'm the only one who experiences that, but that would be something I really struggle with.

Ex-Christian fundamentalist atheists are not well understood.

Most participants stated that it was difficult to find help in coping with their deconversion, which was a transformative life experience. The inability to find a person of similar background with whom to communicate can leave the ex-Christian fundamentalist feeling alone. Sean lamented, "And you know, it's very difficult to find somebody to talk to." He stressed that he cannot comprehend or identify with others who have not thought out their beliefs. He recalled asking a friend about her faith, "I said, 'What are your beliefs?' And she said, 'I'm a Christian.' I said, 'And what does that mean to you, really?' 'Well I believe in Jesus Christ.' I said, 'Do you really? Have you ever thought about it?'" He saw being able to speak knowledgeably about one's beliefs as "a different level of communication," and emphasized that most people, whether they are believers or nonbelievers, "Really can't defend it... or have an inclination to even want to."

Participants reported not knowing where to find assistance or resources for working through the intellectual and emotional conflicts associated with their apostasy. Several of them mentioned feeling supported when listening to atheist podcasts hosted by ex-evangelicals

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

because it enabled them to hear from someone with whom they could identify. Brandy recounted the first time she heard one of these podcasts:

His story, or I think the very first one he did, I was just bawling the whole way through. Because I knew that was my story. His story, how he was in church and what he went through, how he left, how his belief system started crumbling apart was so similar to mine. I just started crying.

She commented that she felt reassured of the correctness of her newfound convictions by another podcast in which an ex-evangelical passionately defended atheist logic when responding to fundamentalist Christian callers. “I needed to hear that. I needed that kind of, um, like anger that he has? He kind of gets angry sometimes, but I need to hear it because somebody needs to tell me straight.” She admitted that she is sometimes confused by arguments that spontaneously arise from her previous belief system when trying to reason through an atheist approach. She added that it would be helpful to have someone assist her in exploring these internal conflicts.

I sometimes wish there was a place where there could be role playing. Um, where you could have people talk to you like a Christian and somebody else talks like an atheist and how that conversation goes because my mind gets muddled.

Sometimes... um, I want to know, I want to be more clear.

Riley expressed similar frustration at being unable to locate suitable guidance for sorting out the thoughts and emotions that accompanied his transition to atheism. He confessed that, after losing his faith, he felt alone and was desperately seeking purpose in his life. He determined, “I’m not going to kill myself, and I don’t want to believe in God, so I’m just going to have to live with these problems and just deal with them as I can.” His search for resources to help him make sense of his new situation led him to conclude there was little available.

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

And the biggest thing I found is that... there is nothing out there to help people who walk away from something like this. And that was what drove me crazy.

But I did find a podcast called Living After Faith which helped me IMMENSELY. It made me very emotional because this is a pastor, a Pentecostal pastor of 25 years who walked away and I thought, "There's someone out there who has something similar to me."

After receiving comfort from the podcast, he was encouraged to seek out other material that could aid in resolving his inner turmoil.

I started picking up a lot of books dealing with depression and stuff like that because I started feeling really depressed afterward. But really what happened was that guy's podcast was the saving grace for me at that point cuz he went through the exact same thing it seems like.

Riley confided that hearing the story of another person who had made the same journey left him feeling that he was no longer as alone as he had been before. However, he was still left to work out his issues on his own.

In the next chapter, I reiterate and discuss the findings.

Chapter V – Discussion of Findings

Part six of Colaizzi's method (as cited in Edward & Welch, 2011; Wojnar & Swanson, 2013) entails reducing the exhaustive description of the phenomenon to its essential structure. This task was complicated by the fact that, although there was a common beginning and end point, and the middle portion of the journey covered common territory, the path tended to be convoluted rather than straightforward. In this section, I will discuss the variations in participants' progress along their paths to atheism. I will then compare the findings of my study to previous research findings regarding deconversion and adopting an atheist identity. Finally, I will present the limitations of my research and propose areas for future research that would expand the knowledge base of this topic.

Essential Structure of Phenomenon

All of the participants related their experience with this phenomenon in a linear fashion. They began their stories from a point in time in which they were faithful fundamentalist Christian believers. Next, they started to question aspects of their faith because of the unscripted turns in their lives, or the attitudes and behaviors of other church members and leaders, or the inability of their faith to explain the state of the world. Their qualms initiated a period of investigation in which they attempted to add new and outside information to their fundamentalist worldviews. However, the new information often contradicted these worldviews, creating cognitive dissonance. To resolve the dissonance, further evidence was sought which, in turn, heightened their dissonance and strained their faith. In stages, participants altered their beliefs: possibly the Bible was not inerrant; a literal interpretation of the Bible may not be correct; Jesus may not be God even though there is still a God; I am not Christian but I am still spiritual, etc. The exploration of other ideas, coupled with their growing doubts, eventually induced all seven participants to admit to themselves that they were no longer believers, subsequently adopting an atheist identity.

Because the emergent themes were derived from the participants' stories, one might expect that they could be ordered to align with the stages described above. This premise proved to be only partially true. The first emergent theme, *A beginning of strong Christian fundamentalist belief complete with a Christian fundamentalist worldview*, described the common starting point. They all chose to begin their descriptions by affirming that at one time they had been strong and true believers. Likewise, the fifth emergent theme, *Ex-Christian fundamentalist atheists are a distinct group with their own needs and issues*, aptly captures the end point of each person's journey. It concerns the unique situation and particular needs of those

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

who have passed from Christian fundamentalism to atheism. Most participants concluded the story of their experience by referring to the subjects contained in the subthemes of this category.

The second, third, and fourth emergent themes documented in the findings, although listed sequentially, do not represent a chronological order. There is a degree of overlap among them because participants often moved back and forth across emergent theme boundaries as they encountered various subthemes, rather than experiencing all of the subthemes in one emergent theme before progressing to the next one. The timing of their engagement with subthemes depended on the individual circumstances of their lives. For example, while Brandy began questioning her faith due to the fact that, *Christian fundamentalism can leave individuals naïve and unprepared for the outside world or coping with life events that deviate from the Christian fundamentalist narrative*, Micah began his journey due to *Influence of critical thinking in breaking down Christian fundamentalist beliefs*. These subthemes are very different events belonging to two different emergent themes. Yet, Brandy and Micah encountered these different emergent themes at the same point in their journey, i.e., in the initial phase of doubt.

While some of the subthemes occurred consecutively, such as *Perceptual changes after leaving Christian fundamentalism* following *Questioning/moving away from Christian fundamentalism due to disillusionment with the actions of church leaders and members*, others did not follow this pattern. An individual's path through the subthemes tended to be determined by incidents that stirred up feelings and propelled them toward a new subtheme consistent with the issues raised. Sometimes, participants engaged with multiple subthemes simultaneously as, for example, when they gained insights about their reasons for apostatizing that transpired very close together and compounded their struggles to maintain beliefs. And at least one subtheme,

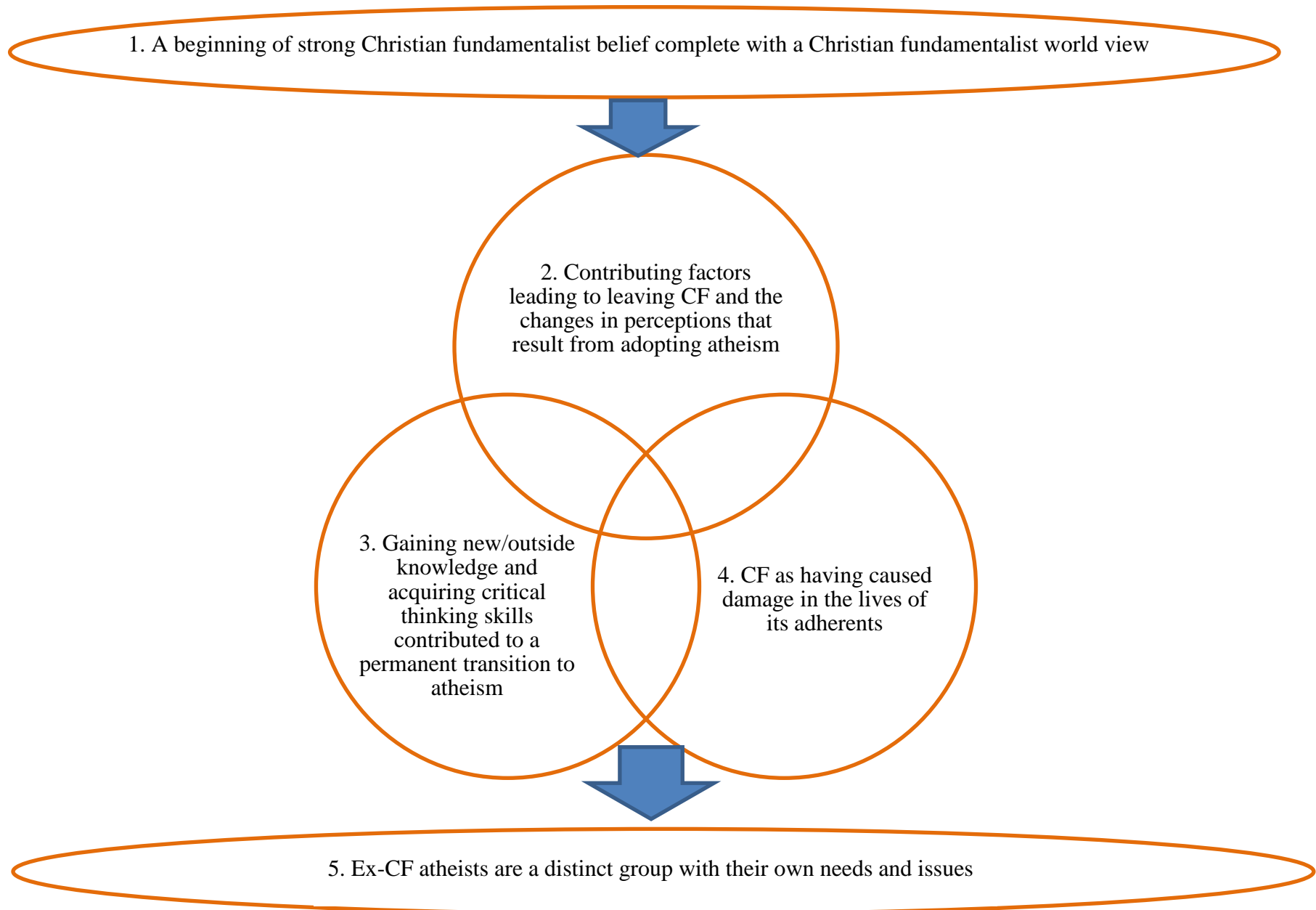
FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

Leaving Christian fundamentalism and becoming an atheist was an extended process, was present throughout the transition from fundamentalism to atheism.

Movement through the subthemes did not necessarily mean that the issues associated with previous subthemes were resolved when the participant progressed to the next one(s). In fact, some issues remained problematic at the end of their journey and beyond. For example, several interviewees admitted that the inner conflicts connected to *Feeling guilt and shame about one's past actions as a Christian fundamentalist*, *Being embarrassed about one's history of holding Christian fundamentalist beliefs*, and *Feelings of inadequacy due to Christian fundamentalist messages*, still caused them to struggle despite having been confessed atheists for years.

Figure 1 below attempts to visually demonstrate the structure of the phenomenon. Participants, when in first contact with the phenomenon, are in a place of strong Christian fundamentalist belief. They then move away from this position and enter the middle section of the diagram in which – in no particular order – they experience various elements of the middle three emergent themes. Finally, they end in a place of total nonbelief.

Figure 1. Path from Christian Fundamentalism to Atheism



Comparison with Previous Studies

Typologies.

Unlike the participants in Zuckerman's (2011) research who were primarily early apostates, all of the participants in this study were late apostates. This is to be expected as all of them were deeply committed to Christian fundamentalism in a personal way rather than as a function of family identity, and they carried their faith into adulthood. They were also all deep apostates because the research design was selective for atheists who did not retain any belief in spiritual or metaphysical dimensions. All but one of the participants fell under Zuckerman's category of "transformative apostasy." Most participants described losing their faith as "momentous", the critical event of their lives. These individuals suffered adverse consequences as a result of their apostasy that continue to affect them on a near-daily basis.

Micah, however, experienced a smoother transition from faith to non-faith. He cannot be characterized as a mild apostate because he had a strong initial attachment to Christian fundamentalism, and yet, over time, he moved away from that position on his own. Perhaps Zuckerman's (2011) typology does not accurately describe apostates of this kind. Instead, Streib et al. (2009) postulated a type of apostasy that may be more appropriate. They proposed "Pursuit of Autonomy" as a way of describing individuals who seek to develop their own identity as they move away from their immediate religious environment. This is a gradual process in which the person slowly moves towards a secular orientation. For Micah, who had an investigative mind, independently developed his critical thinking skills, and gradually moved towards atheism, this might be a better definition. For the other transformative apostates, I believe the Streib et al. category of "Debarred from Paradise" would most closely apply, as these deconverts were deeply attached to their faith, experienced severe emotional distress at losing their faith, and

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

tended to require (or could have benefited from) counselling. Multiple members of this study specifically mentioned the desire, and felt need, to receive counselling as a result of their deconversion experiences.

Reasons for leaving faith.

Wright, Giovanelli, and Dolan (2007) gave three explanations for deconversion: 1) a battle between faith and reason, 2) the doctrine of hell and the ubiquitous existence of human suffering, and 3) interactions with other Christians. These reasons emerged from their data as a whole rather than from each individual participant. In my study, only Sean named all three explanations as factors in his apostasy; the majority cited one or two of these reasons as direct contributors to their deconversion. Overall, then, this study would support the findings of Wright, Giovanelli, and Dolan (2007).

Hunsberger and Altemeyer (2006) listed seven explanations for individual deconversion: 1) socialization in a home that was either nonreligious or where one parent was nonreligious, 2) inability to accept the Bible, 3) dissonance created by a literal interpretation of scripture with evolution or astronomy, 4) inability to reconcile God with the problem of evil in the world, 5) observation of hypocrisy among committed Christians, 6) rejection of church teachings on sex and homosexuality, and 7) exposure to secular writing. Counter to these findings, the participants in my study all claimed that both parents were religious to some degree. This might be due to the fact that Christian fundamentalism promotes a serious level of commitment both in personal and family life. Also, for all those in my study, the Bible (especially earlier on) was readily acknowledged as being accurate and true. The inability to accept the Bible only began after the deconversion process was well underway.

In support of Hunsberger and Altemeyer (2006), there was agreement with points three through seven. Many participants reported dissonance created by their attempts to reconcile the findings of science with a literal interpretation of the Bible, a foundational element of Christian fundamentalism. Sean stressed that all the evil and suffering in the world clearly demonstrated there was no God, and he ended up leaving the Church altogether due to its stance on sex and homosexuality. He felt rejected and openly discriminated against as a result of formal statements and official policy towards people who shared his sexual orientation. Chrissy explained how the hypocrisy of other church members, including church leaders, caused her to begin questioning the validity of what she was being taught. Lastly, all of the participants commented on the influential role secular writings played in their deconversion process. These writings were not a catalyst for apostasy, but once participants were on the path to deconversion, secular material was specifically sought out as a new source of information. Subsequently, this material played a significant role in further propelling them towards complete deconversion and later, atheism.

Psychological consequences of deconversion and counselling issues.

Moyers (1990) discussed the long lasting negative consequences that can develop as a result of deconverting from Christian fundamentalism, several of which were acknowledged by participants of my study. For example, most mentioned the disorientation that accompanied their loss of fundamentalist beliefs and that the ensuing struggles would potentially last for many years. Moyers advised that these struggles and other consequences of apostatizing can be severe enough to leave the deconvert feeling overwhelmed and lost without their faith. In my study, participants tended to experience such feelings in the earlier phases of stepping away from their faith, but over time, they became better equipped to deal with these traumatic emotions. Most participants also remarked that, because they had been a part of such a tight-knit fundamentalist

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

community, abandoning their faith caused ruptures in their relationships with members of their former faith community. This, as noted by Moyers, may not stop with members of the church, but extend to family units as well. In fact, all of the participants in this study reported having relationships end, both in the church and within their families. Only two interviewees indicated having any contact with members of their former church.

In reference to counselling, Moyers (1990) warned that the counsellor needs to remain neutral to allow clients room to probe their past affiliation with Christian fundamentalism and that clients may exhibit caution in sharing their experiences if they feel they may be criticized, judged, or misunderstood. In my research, four participants wanted to receive counselling in order to speak about their experiences/struggles associated with Christian fundamentalism. They expressed the desire to explore questions raised by their past involvement, with one participant suggesting role-playing as a means of attaining deeper insight. Taking a neutral stance with respect to their former beliefs, as Moyers advised, would be important to provide these participants the space required to examine existential issues in a counseling context.

Along with the adoption of a nonjudgmental stance, my experience confirmed that building trust is necessary for establishing an atmosphere in which clients feel free to share. The individuals in my study would not have opened up had they not felt accepted and understood. Not being mischaracterized was an important factor in their decision to participate because any misinformation about what it means to be an ex-Christian fundamentalist could cause harm by adding to the isolation of this already-hidden population. Being a member of this group myself and having insider knowledge enabled me to build the trust necessary for in-depth interviews.

Becoming an atheist.

The journey from belief to nonbelief recounted by participants largely supports the stages of deconversion Smith (2011) developed in his work. All but one of the participants were born and raised in Christian fundamentalist homes and embraced the teachings of their church. Even the one participant who did not become a Christian fundamentalist until adulthood lived in a society immersed in Christian cultural influences. In addition, various members of his immediate family were, or became, fundamentalist Christians. Therefore, the ideas of Christian fundamentalism were not foreign or difficult to understand. Smith's second stage, "Questioning Theism", involves the introduction of new settings, individuals, and ideas that challenge people's unexamined beliefs, launching them into an extended process of questioning their deeply held convictions. Again, all of the participants attested to spending a considerable amount of time in this phase. In the third stage, "Rejecting Theism", people reject theism as both a belief system and an identity, but they do not automatically regard themselves as atheist. I, too, found that the participants, all of whom transitioned into this stage as they moved away from their faith, underwent a delay between ceasing to believe and viewing themselves as atheist. The final stage is "Coming Out Atheist", an empowering and necessary step for the acquisition of an atheist identity. In my findings, although all participants had declared their nonbelief to others and most characterized the experience as empowering, less than half had achieved a fully developed atheist identity. For those who had not succeeded, they related that they were still caught up in an internal struggle that might continue for the rest of their lives.

LeDrew's (2013) objections to Smith's (2011) model of linear progression through set stages of deconversion were also supported by my research. LeDrew postulated five distinct paths to deconversion, stating that these paths need not be linear, and arguing that people can

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

oscillate between theism and atheism. His observations are consistent with my findings that apostates experienced myriad aspects of the journey from Christian fundamentalism to atheism at the same time or in random order. Although they all began in a state of faith and ended in atheism, the order, timing, and path of their journey varied considerably. (This result is presented in Figure 1.0.)

Limitations of the Study

The limitations of this study are found in the study design, participant demographics, research methodology, and participant selection. With respect to design, the focus was specific to Christian fundamentalism and the term “Christian fundamentalism” was precisely and narrowly defined. These restrictions affected the criteria used for screening participants, resulting in the exclusion of some applicants. For example, there were many ex-Mormons who were not accepted because they could not say they used to believe that Jesus was God incarnate and not just a prophet or in some way special to God. Despite the fact that they were able to answer “yes” to every other criterion, their inability to claim this belief caused them to be excluded. Likewise, the perspectives of ex-fundamentalists from other religions are not represented in this research.

In terms of demographics, all of the participants were Caucasian, so I was not able to conclude that the experiences of non-Caucasians would be the same or different than those presented. In the same vein, participants came from a restricted geographic area. With the exception of one person who was originally from eastern Canada, the rest grew up in the Alberta area. They had some level of post-secondary education and had attained a comfortable middle-class lifestyle. Finally, although there was a wide range of ages represented in this study, all participants were over the age of 35. Because there were no teenagers or young adults whose

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

perspectives were included, I am unable to say if a younger member of society would have a different description of the phenomenon.

The research method had inherent limitations. Qualitative methods employ small sample sizes because of the large amount of data generated from each participant. While these approaches render in-depth results, the sample may not be an accurate representation of all members of the group from which the sample was drawn. In this case, the participants may not have been characteristic of the larger population of ex-Christian fundamentalist atheists.

In relation to participant selection, I relied on snowball sampling as a recruitment method. This technique is especially effective when dealing with hidden populations, but it does not produce a random sample and may introduce subtle biases. For example, referrals from other study members tend to produce a more homogeneous group than the population as a whole.

In response to these limitations, the premise of descriptive phenomenology is that there are similar elements in the stories of all individuals who have experienced a particular phenomenon. These similarities transcend group demographics and cultures, making the outcome, i.e., the description of the lived experience, broadly applicable. However, it would only apply to individuals who shared this specific experience. Thus, while I speculate that my findings would be pertinent for ex-members of other fundamentalist faiths who have chosen atheism, I am not able to conclude that with certainty.

Ideas for Future Research

One idea for future research would be to study the long-term effects of leaving fundamentalist Christianity and becoming an atheist, including the permanence of this decision. In this project, every participant made it clear that, once they lost their faith and embraced a worldview based on critical thinking and logic, they were forever changed and could never again

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

return to a state of faith. Long-term follow-up would be required to find out if all of them remain atheist or if some regain their sense of faith. If some do return to believing, it would be worth investigating how and why this might happen. For those who do not recover a sense of faith, it would be important for a counsellor to know if they were able to resolve the myriad issues associated with leaving or if they continue to struggle with these issues years afterwards.

Reviewing the background of the participants for this project, all but one were born into Christian fundamentalism. The person who converted to fundamentalism as an adult shared a similar story about departing to those who were born into the faith. Thus, on the surface, there did not seem to be differences in that person's experience of apostasy despite having entered and exited as an adult. However, it is possible that a more in-depth look at the similarities and differences between the leaving experiences of those born into Christian fundamentalism and those who chose fundamentalism at a later point in life would result in a more nuanced description of the phenomenon.

Another opportunity for research arises from the limited definition of Christian fundamentalism used in this project. That definition ruled out some applicants who very much saw themselves as ex-Christian fundamentalists but who did not agree with one item on the list of criteria for past belief. In particular, ex-Mormons were affected and several who wished to join the project were declined. Therefore, a study comparing the journeys of this group with the journeys of those who were admitted to the project would enrich the results of the original study. Likewise, broadening the definition of fundamentalism to include religions other than Christianity would add to the knowledge base, especially if those from other faiths were able to later return to some form of their original belief system. If that proved to be the case, it would suggest that there is a unique quality to Christian fundamentalist apostasy.

In light of the fact that all those interviewed for this study were over 35 years of age, an avenue of future research would be to examine the experiences of younger apostates. Questions to consider would be the reasons younger people give for undertaking this journey and, if their reasons are similar to their older counterparts, why they reached these same conclusions much earlier in life. For example, one might choose to investigate the impact of the Internet and the “information age” on rates of apostasy among youth as well as the role the Internet plays in the process. In the current project, all of the participants were raised in a “pre-Internet” era. Most grew up in a Christian fundamentalist “bubble” that effectively blocked dissenting or outside information, a situation that would be harder to maintain in today’s information age. One might also ask if younger apostates were as deeply affected by their transition as older apostates since they adhered to Christian fundamentalism beliefs for a shorter period of time. Thus, a comparison between the experiences of pre-internet and internet generations could provide useful insights.

Finally, further research could determine how best to help ex-Christian fundamentalists understand their transition and effectively deal with the issues associated with it. Participants mentioned struggling with the aftereffects of losing their faith for prolonged periods of time and trying in vain to find a counsellor whom they felt could understand their dilemma. One participant said she wanted to sit across from someone who would argue in favor of Christian fundamentalist beliefs while she argued for her new atheist perspective. She hoped this exercise would assist her to clarify her thoughts and beliefs. While such an exchange might or might not be the best approach, the suggestion does point to a desire to resolve confusion and inner conflict.

Impact on Researcher

Pondering my research results, I was intrigued by certain unexpected findings. As previously disclosed, I had hoped to find a degree of closure regarding my own journey from Christian fundamentalism to nonbelief. I realized participants would likely have grappled with core issues in making their transition, but I had assumed these concerns were resolved as they adopted an atheist identity and lived that identity for a period of years. The discovery that four of the seven participants were still struggling with loss-of-faith issues was a surprise, but shed light on my own difficulty in gaining closure.

My next surprise was uncovering divisions in the atheist community. I had proposed that the transition from Christian fundamentalism to atheism was a single phenomenon, but I had presumed that once participants became atheists, they were part of a homogeneous group. To the contrary, I learned that some lifelong atheists referred to themselves as “true” or “pure” atheists because they had never believed in the “nonsense” of religion and did not understand how anyone could have held a religious worldview. Ex-Christian fundamentalist atheists, on the other hand, claimed to be the “real” atheists because they had been believers and had consciously chosen to relinquish their belief. They stressed the struggle they had endured in becoming atheist and their ability to clearly delineate their reasons for choosing atheism. They viewed being raised in a non-religious home as a form of privilege. Again, the recognition that ex-Christian fundamentalist atheists were a subset of atheists with a distinct identity gave me insight into my own situation. Having been a Christian fundamentalist is an aspect of my background that can influence me even though I no longer hold those tenets. It is an experience that can be modified but not erased, and it distinguishes me from those who have not been Christian fundamentalists.

A third unexpected finding was the opportunities for research within the atheist community. The more I delved into the topic, the more I encountered unanswered questions. Atheists have been lumped into other groups for statistical purposes or, if they are separated, they are assumed to constitute a single entity. The revelation for me has been the number of research possibilities that exist beyond the original project I chose.

Concluding Remarks

The purpose of this research was to develop a thorough and rich description for the phenomenon of moving from Christian fundamentalism into atheism. Some literature was available on the topic of deconversion, as well as some studies on becoming an atheist. Studies, however, dealing with the movement from Christian fundamentalism into atheism as an amalgamated phenomenon were very limited. Such research is invaluable in devising an effective counseling approach for atheist clients from a Christian fundamentalist background.

The majority of participants in this study spoke of their inability to find others with whom they could share their stories and feel understood. All but one reported a tremendous sense of loss after becoming atheists and about half directly expressed a desire to attend some form of counselling specifically developed for dealing with the struggles of being an ex-Christian fundamentalist atheist. The request for specialized counselling was based on interviewees' insistence that they are a distinct group of atheists: They are not just people who never believed or who chose not to believe; they are people who used to believe and believed very strongly.

Current statistics indicate secularism (including apostasy) is on the rise within the Western world. This suggests the number of individuals making a similar journey will also be

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

on the rise and further supports the argument that this phenomenon is one that needs to be understood. This study represents a first step in doing so.

References

- Adam, R. J. (2009). Leaving the fold: Apostasy from fundamentalism and the direction of religious development. *Australian Religious Studies Review*, 22, 42-63. doi: 10.1558/arsr.v22i1.42
- Alcoholics Anonymous 12 Step (1981) Retrieved from http://www.aa.org/assets/en_US/smf-121_en.pdf
- Allmark, P., Boote, J., Chambers, E., Clarke, A., McDonnell, A., Thompson, A., & Mary, A. (2009). Ethical issues in the use of in-depth interviews: Literature review and discussion. *Research Ethics Review*, 5, 48-54. doi: 10.1177/174701610900500203
- American Psychological Association. (2009). *Publication manual of the American Psychological Association*. Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association.
- Anderson, J., & Eppard, J. (1998). Van Kaam's method revisited. *Qualitative Health Research*, 8, 399-403. doi: 10.1177/1049732398008008310
- Atheist Demographics (n. d.). In *The Atheist Scholar*. Retrieved on May 23, 2014 from <http://atheistscholar.org/AtheistPsychologies/AtheistDemographics.aspx>
- Atkinson, R., & Flint, J. (2001). *Accessing hidden and hard-to-reach populations: Snowball research strategies*. Social Research Update (Issue 33, Summer 2001). Department of Sociology, University of Surrey, Guildford, England. Retrieved from <http://sru.soc.surrey.ac.uk/SRU33.html>
- Baker, J. O. & Smith, B. (2009). None too simple: Examining issues of religious nonbelief and nonbelonging in the United States. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 48, 719-733. doi: 10.1111/j.1468-5906.2009.01475.x

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

- Balls, P. (2009). Phenomenology in nursing research: Methodology, interviewing and transcribing. *Nursing Times*, 105(32-33), 30-33. Retrieved from <http://www.nursingtimes.net/>
- Berkman, M. B., Pacheco, J. S., & Plutzer, E. (2008). Evolution and Creationism in America's classrooms: A national portrait. *PLOS Biology*, 6, [open-access journal-no page numbers]. Retrieved from <http://www.plosbiology.org/article/info%3Adoi%2F10.1371%2Fjournal.pbio.0060124>
- Bibby, R. (2012). *A new day: The resilience and restructuring of religion in Canada*. [E-Book,PDF Version]. Retrieved from http://www.reginaldbibby.com/images/A_NEW_DAY_Sept_12_2012.pdf
- Biernacki, P., & Waldorf, D. (1981). Snowball sampling: Problems and techniques of chain referral sampling. *Sociological Methods & Research*, 10, 141-163. doi: 10.11877/004912418101000205
- Brent, J. S. (1994). Leaving protestant fundamentalism: A qualitative analysis of a major life transition. *Counseling and Values*, 38, 205-214. doi: 10.1002/j.2161-007X.1994.tb00838.x
- Brinkerhoff, M. B., & Mackie, M. M. (1993). Casting off the bonds of organized religion: A religious-careers approach to the study of apostasy. *Review of Religious Research*, 34(3), 235-258. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/discover/10.2307/3700597?uid=3739392&uid=2129&uid=2&uid=70&uid=3737720&uid=4&sid=21102614658651>

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

Canadian Code of Ethics 3rd ed (2000). Retrieved from

<http://www.cpa.ca/cpaside/userfiles/Documents/Canadian%20Code%20Ethics%20forpsyco.pdf>

Chan, Z.C.Y., Fung, Y-l., Chien, W-t. (2013). Bracketing in Phenomenology: Only undertaken in Data Collection and Analysis Process? *The Qualitative Report*, 18(59), 1-9. Retrieved from [http:// nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR18/chan59.pdf](http://nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR18/chan59.pdf)

Cliteur, P. (2009). The definition of Atheism. *Journal of Religion and Society*, 11,1-23. Retrieved from <http://moses.creighton.edu/jrs/2009/2009-4.pdf>

Creswell, J.W. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry & research design: Choosing among five approaches*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, Inc.

Davies, B. (2010). The new atheism: Its virtues and vices. *New Blackfriars*, 92, 18-34. doi: 10.1111/j.1741-2005.2010.01375.x

Eagle, D. E. (2011). Changing patterns of attendance at religious service in Canada, 1986-2008. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 50, 187-200. doi: 10.1111/j.1468-5906.2010.01559.x

Edgell, P., Gerteis, J., & Hartmann, D. (2006). Atheists as “other”: Moral boundaries and cultural membership in American society. *American Sociological Review*, 71, 211-234. doi: 10.1177/000312240607100203

Edward, K-L., & Welch, T. (2011). The extension of Colaizzi’s method of phenomenological enquiry. *Contemporary Nurse*, 39(2), 163-171. doi: 10.5172/conu.2011.163

Emerson, M. O., & Hartman, D. (2006). The rise of religious fundamentalism. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 32, 127-144. doi: 10.1146/annurev.soc.32.061604.123141

Englander, M. (2012). The interview: Data collection in Descriptive Phenomenological human scientific research. *Journal of Phenomenological Psychology*, 43, 13-35. doi: 10.

1163/15691621X632943

Farber, N. K. (2006). Conducting qualitative research: A practical guide for school counselors.

Professional School Counselling, 9(4), 367-375. Retrieved from <http://school>

counselor.metapress.com/content/03j7315p7m5011m0/

Frank, O., & Snijders, T. (1994). Estimating the size of hidden populations using snowball sampling. *Journal of Official Statistics*, 10(1), 53-67. Retrieved from

<http://www.jos.nu/Articles/abstract.asp?article=10153>

Gericke, J. (2006). The died-again Christian's syndrome: Its etiology as manifested among fundamentalist students of the Old Testament in South Africa. *Deel*, 47(3&4), 477-488.

On line publication, Academia.edu. Retrieved from

http://www.academia.edu/1497070/The_Died-

[Again_Christian_Syndrome_among_fundamentalist_Old_Testament_students_in_South_Africa](http://www.academia.edu/1497070/The_Died-Again_Christian_Syndrome_among_fundamentalist_Old_Testament_students_in_South_Africa)

Guest, G., Namey, E. E., & Mitchell, M. L. (2013). *Collecting qualitative data: A field manual for applied research*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, Inc.

Giorgi, A. (2008). Difficulties encountered in the application of the phenomenological method in the social sciences. *The Indo-Pacific Journal of Phenomenology*, 8(1), 1-9. Retrieved

from <http://www.ipjp.org/>

Giorgi, A. (2012). The descriptive phenomenological psychological method. *Journal of*

Phenomenological Psychology, 43, 3-12. doi: 10.1163/156916212X632934

- Groenewald, T. (2004). A phenomenological research design illustrated. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 3(1). 1-26. Retrieved from http://www.ualberta.ca/~iiqm/backissues/3_1/pdf/groenewald.pdf
- Hamill, C., & Sinclair, H. (2010). Bracketing-practical considerations in Husserlian phenomenological research. *Nurse Researcher*, 17(2), 16-24. Retrieved from <http://nurseresearcher.rcnpublishing.co.uk/>
- Hancock, B. (1998). An introduction to qualitative research. Trent Focus Group for Research and Development in Primary Health Care, 1-27. Retrieved from http://faculty.cbu.ca/pmacintyre/course_pages/MBA603_files/IntroQualitativeResearch.pdf.
- Hunsberger, B.E., & Altemeyer, B. (2006). *Atheists: A groundbreaking study of America's nonbelievers*. Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books.
- Jacobs, J. (1987). Deconversion from religious movements: An analysis of charismatic bonding and spiritual commitment. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 26(3), 293-308. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/discover/10.2307/1386433?uid=3739392&uid=2129&uid=2&uid=70&uid=3737720&uid=4&sid=21102628489151>
- Kitcher, P. (2011). Militant modern atheism. *Society for Applied Philosophy*, 28, 1-13. doi: 10.1111/j.1468-5930.2010.00500.x
- Klieman, S. (2004). Phenomenology: To wonder and search for meanings. *Nurse Researcher*, 11, 7-9. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.7748/nr2004.07.11.4.7.c6211>

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

- Koch, T. (1995). Interpretive approaches in nursing research: the influence of Husserl and Heidegger. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 21(5), 827-836. Retrieved from <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/7601989>
- Kosmin, B. A., & Keysar, A. (2009). *American religious identification survey :ARIS 2008* (Summary Report, March 2009). Retrieved from http://b27.cc.trincoll.edu/weblogs/AmericanReligionSurvey-ARIS/reports/ARIS_Report_2008.pdf
- Krueger, J. (2013). The road to disbelief: A study of the atheist de-conversion process. *UW-L Journal of Undergraduate Research*, XVI,1-9. Retrieved from <http://www.uwlax.edu/urc/JUR-online/PDF/2013/krueger.julie.SOC.pdf>
- LeDrew, S. (2013). Discovering Atheism: Heterogeneity in trajectories to atheist identity and activism. *Sociology of Religion*, 74,431-453. doi: 10.1093/socrel/srt014
- Lewis, J., & Graham, J. (2007). Research participants' views on ethics in social research: Issues for research ethics committees. *Research Ethics Review*, 3, 73-79. doi: 10.1177/174701610700300303
- Lopez, K. A., & Willis, D. G. (2004). Descriptive versus Interpretive Phenomenology: Their contributions to nursing knowledge. *Qualitative Health Research*, 14, 726-734. doi: 10.1177/1049732304263638
- Mapp, T. (2008). Understanding phenomenology: the lived experience. *British Journal of Midwifery*, 16(5), 308-311. Retrieved from <http://www.britishjournalofmidwifery.com/>
- Marsden, G. M. (2006). *Fundamentalism and American culture*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

- Matzke, N. J. (2010). The evolution of creationist movements. *Evolution: Education and Outreach*, 3, 145-162. doi: 10.1007/s12052-010-0233-1
- McCalla, A. (2007). Creationism. *Religious Compass*, 1, 547-560. doi: 10.1111/j.1749-8171.2007.00034.x
- Moyers, J. (1990). Religious issues in psychotherapy of former fundamentalists. *Psychotherapy*, 27, 42-45. doi: 10.1037/0033-3204.27.1.42
- Murrell, A. (2011). *Concise fundamentalism: An introduction to historic Christian beliefs*. Eugene, Oregon: Resource Publications.
- National Opinion Research Center General Social Surveys (1972-2012) Cumulative Codebook (2013)
- Padian, K. (2009). The evolution of creationists in the United States: Where are they now, and where are they going? *Comptes Rendus Biologies*, 323, doi: 10.1016/j.crvi.2008.07.004
- Pew Research Center. (2012). *Pew-Templeton Global Religious Futures Project*. Retrieved on May 12, 2014 from <http://www.pewforum.org/2012/10/09/nones-on-the-rise/>
- Regnerus, M. D., & Uecker, J. E. (2006). Finding faith, losing faith: The prevalence and context of religious transformations during adolescence. *Review of Religious Research*, 47(3), 217-237. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/discover/10.2307/3512355?uid=3739392&uid=2129&uid=2&uid=70&uid=3737720&uid=4&sid=21102674251241>
- Shosha, G.A. (2012). Employment of Colazzi's strategy in descriptive phenomenology: A reflection of a researcher. *European Scientific Journal*, 8(27), 31-43. Retrieved from <http://eujournal.org/index.php/esj/article/view/588>

- Smith, J. M. (2011). Becoming an atheist in America: Constructing identity and meaning from the rejection of theism. *Sociology of Religion*, 73, 215-237. doi: 10.1093/socrel/srq082
- Stahl, W. A. (2010). *One-dimensional rage: The social epistemology of the new atheism and fundamentalism*. Retrieved from <http://booksandjournals.brillonline.com/content/10.1163/ej.9789004185579.i-253.38>
- Starkes, H., & Trinidad, S. B. (2007). Choose your method: A comparison of phenomenology, discourse analysis, and grounded theory. *Qualitative Health Research*, 17, 1372-1380. doi: 10.1177/104973230737031
- Statistics Canada 2010 Census of Canada, *Census on Religious Affiliation Summary Table: Catalogue number 97F0022X2001002* in statistics Canada [database online]. Retrieved from <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/tables-tableaux/sum-som/l01/cst01/demo30a-eng.htm>
- Streib, H., Hood, R. W., Keller, B. Csöff, R-M., Silver, C.F. (2009). *Deconversion: Qualitative and quantitative results from cross-cultural research in Germany and the United States of America*. Retrieved from <http://pub.uni-bielefeld.de/luur/download?func=downloadFile&recordOId=1782990&fileOId=2314082>
- van Kaam, A. (1959). Phenomenal analysis: Exemplified by a study of the experience of “really feeling understood” *Journal of Individual Psychology*, 15(1), 66-72. Retrieved from <http://psycnet.apa.org/psycinfo/1960-04358-001>
- Vargas, N. (2012). Retrospective accounts of religious disaffiliation in the United States: stressors, skepticism, and political factors. *Sociology of Religion*, 73, 200-223. doi: 10.1093/socrel/srr044
- Walker, J., Holloway, I., & Wheeler, S. (2005). Guidelines for ethical review of qualitative research. *Research Ethics Review*, 1, 90-96. doi: 10.1177/1747001610500100304

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

Wojnar, D. M., & Swanson, K. M. (2007). Phenomenology: An exploration. *Journal of Holistic Nursing*, 25, 172-180. doi: 10.1177/0898010106295172

Woods, A. (2009). The last days apostasy of the church. *The Pre-Trib Research Center*.

Retrieved from <http://www.pre-trib.org/>

Wright, B.R.E., Giovaneilli, D., Dolan, E. G., & Edwards, M. E. (2007, October). Explaining deconversion from Christianity: Evidence from on-line narratives. American Sociological Association, Boston. Retrieved from http://citation.allacademic.com/meta/p_mla_apa_research_citation/2/4/2/8/1/pages242813/p242813-1.php

Zuckerman, P. (2007). Atheism: Contemporary numbers and patterns. In Michael Martin , (Ed.), *The Cambridge companion to atheism* (pp. 47-65). doi: 10. 1017/CCOL0521842700.004

Zuckerman, P. (2009). Atheism, secularity, and well-being: How the findings of social science counter negative stereotypes and assumptions. *Sociology Compass*, 3/6,949-971. doi: 10. 1111/j. 1751-9020.2009.00247

Zuckerman, P. (2011). Taking leave of religion. *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 58(14), B10-B12. .Retreived from [http://chronicle.com/section/About the Chronicle](http://chronicle.com/section/About%20the%20Chronicle)

Zuckerman, P. (2012). *Faith no more: Why people reject religion*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Appendix A: Record of Research Ethics Board Approval



March 16, 2017

Mr. Taylor Noland
Faculty of Health Disciplines\Graduate Centre for Applied Psychology
Athabasca University

File No: 21653

Certification of Ethics Approval Date: January 08, 2015

New Renewal Date: March 15, 2018

Dear Taylor Noland,

Your Renewal Form has been received by the AU REB Office.

Athabasca University's Research Ethics Board (REB) has **approved** your request to renew the *certification of ethics approval* for a further year for your project entitled "FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE JOURNEY FROM CHRISTIAN FUNDAMENTALISM TO ATHEISM".

As you progress with the research, all requests for changes or modifications, ethics approval renewals and serious adverse event reports must be reported to the Athabasca University Research Ethics Board via the Research Portal.

To continue your proposed research beyond March 15, 2018, you must apply for renewal by completing and submitting an Ethics Renewal Request form before expiry. Failure to apply for **annual renewal** before the expiry date of the current certification of ethics approval may result in the discontinuation of the ethics approval and formal closure of the REB ethics file. Reactivation of the project will normally require a new Application for Ethical Approval and internal and external funding administrators in the Office of Research Services will be advised that ethical approval has expired and the REB file closed.

When your research is concluded, you must submit a Project Completion (Final) Report to close out REB approval monitoring efforts. Failure to submit the required final report may mean that a future application for ethical approval will not be reviewed by the Research Ethics Board until such time as the outstanding reporting has been submitted.

If you encounter any issue with the Research Portal's online submission process, please contact the system administrator via research_portal@athabascau.ca.

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

If you have any questions about the REB review & approval process, please contact the AUREB Office at (780) 675-6718 or rebsec@athabascau.ca.

Sincerely,

Office of Research Ethics

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF



March 22, 2016

Mr. Taylor Noland
Faculty of Health Disciplines\Graduate Centre for Applied Psychology
Athabasca University

File No: 21653

Certification of Ethics Approval Date: January 08, 2015

New Renewal Date: March 21, 2017

Dear Taylor Noland,

Your Renewal Form has been received by the AU REB Office.

Athabasca University's Research Ethics Board (REB) has **approved** your request to renew the *certification of ethics approval* for a further year for your project entitled "FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE JOURNEY FROM CHRISTIAN FUNDAMENTALISM TO ATHEISM".

As you progress with the research, all requests for changes or modifications, ethics approval renewals and serious adverse event reports must be reported to the Athabasca University Research Ethics Board via the Research Portal.

To continue your proposed research beyond March 21, 2017, you must apply for renewal by completing and submitting an Ethics Renewal Request form before expiry. Failure to apply for **annual renewal** before the expiry date of the current certification of ethics approval may result in the discontinuation of the ethics approval and formal closure of the REB ethics file. Reactivation of the project will normally require a new Application for Ethical Approval and internal and external funding administrators in the Office of Research Services will be advised that ethical approval has expired and the REB file closed.

When your research is concluded, you must submit a Project Completion (Final) Report to close out REB approval monitoring efforts. Failure to submit the required final report may mean that a future application for ethical approval will not be reviewed by the Research Ethics Board until such time as the outstanding reporting has been submitted.

If you encounter any issue with the Research Portal's online submission process, please contact the system administrator via research_portal@athabascau.ca.

If you have any questions about the REB review & approval process, please contact the AUREB Office at (780) 675-6718 or rebsec@athabascau.ca.

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

Sincerely,

Office of Research Ethics

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF



January 13, 2015

File No. 21653

Dear Mr. Taylor Noland,

Your Application for Ethical Review - All Students entitled 'FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE JOURNEY FROM CHRISTIAN FUNDAMENTALISM TO ATHEISM' has been successfully resubmitted. Thank you for completing the minor revisions requested by the review committee.

Best wishes as you complete your research.

Sincerely,

Office of Research Ethics

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF



January 08, 2015

Mr. Taylor Noland
Faculty of Health Disciplines\Graduate Centre for Applied Psychology
Athabasca University

File No: 21653

Expiry Date: January 7, 2016

Dear Mr. Taylor Noland,

The Faculty of Health Disciplines (GCAP) Departmental Ethics Review Committee, acting under authority of the Athabasca University Research Ethics Board to provide an expedited process of review for minimal risk student researcher projects, has reviewed your project, 'FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE JOURNEY FROM CHRISTIAN FUNDAMENTALISM TO ATHEISM'.

Your application has been **Approved on ethical grounds** and this memorandum constitutes a *Certification of Ethics Approval*.

For file purposes, please make the following minor revisions to your application (and resubmit) prior to proceeding with your project:

4.1 Please confirm that the researcher will be the only person who will view the data, given that convention is for one's thesis supervisor(s) to have access to their supervisee's research data.

8.10 Please specify at which point in the research a participant's data cannot be retracted (typically once data analysis has been completed).

Informed consent form (both forms), page 3, it is stated that " Nothing that you tell me will be shared with anybody." This statement seems misleading given that personal information shared by the participant will be publicly shared, albeit anonymously. Revise accordingly.

AUREB approval, dated January 8, 2015, is valid for one year less a day.

As you progress with the research, all requests for changes or modifications, ethics approval renewals and serious adverse event reports must be reported to the Athabasca University Research Ethics Board via the Research Portal.

To continue your proposed research beyond January 7, 2016, you must submit an Ethics Renewal Request form before December 15, 2015.

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

When your research is concluded, you must submit a Project Completion (Final) Report to close out REB approval monitoring efforts.

At any time, you can login to the Research Portal to monitor the workflow status of your application.

If you encounter any issues when working in the Research Portal, please contact the system administrator at research_portal@athabascau.ca.

If you have any questions about the REB review & approval process, please contact the AUREB Office at (780) 675-6718 or rebsec@athabascau.ca.

Sincerely,

Simon Nuttgens

Chair, Faculty of Health Disciplines (GCAP) Departmental Ethics Review Committee

Appendix B: Participant Screening Criteria

Age – Participant is at least 18 years old (adult) _____ Yes _____ No

Fundamentalist Christian Beliefs (former beliefs)

At one point in your life, did you believe in:

1. The absolute verbal inspiration of Scripture _____ Yes _____ No

2. The deity of Jesus _____ Yes _____ No

3. The virgin birth _____ Yes _____ No

4. The substitutionary atonement _____ Yes _____ No

5. The physical resurrection of Christ _____ Yes _____ No

Belief in literal interpretation of Genesis
(creation, flood, devil, heaven/hell) _____ Yes _____ No

Is there anything you would like to add or explain?

Atheist Position (current position)

At present, I have not found convincing evidence
for the existence of a God or gods _____ Yes _____ No

Is there anything you would like to add or explain?

Appendix C: Information Sheet

From Christian Fundamentalism to Atheism

My name is Taylor Noland and I am a student in the Masters of Counselling program at Athabasca University. I am looking for volunteers to take part in a research project on the journey from Christian fundamentalism to atheism. One purpose is to get an accurate description from those who have actually had this experience in order to help counsellors and others understand what it is like. Another purpose is to allow people who have had this experience to be heard and understood by a culture that does not generally acknowledge the perspective of this group.

If you agree to participate, I will first meet with you to go over the details of the study. Then, when you have had time to decide if you want to volunteer, I will meet with you to get your written consent. Next, there will be a formal interview in which I will ask about your experience of leaving Christian fundamentalism and becoming an atheist. Finally, there will be a follow-up contact to give you the chance to read and comment on the study results. The interview will be audio- and video-recorded, but these recordings will be kept strictly confidential and your identity will not be made known. They will be stored securely in a locked cabinet and destroyed after 5 years. This project has been reviewed by the Athabasca University Research Ethics Board and will be monitored by a faculty advisory committee.

To qualify for this project, you must have once been a Christian fundamentalist and are now an atheist. If you do qualify, I would be interested in hearing from you. You may contact me at 780-472-7189 or by e-mail at Elias.Noland@live.ca. If you know someone else who might qualify, please share this information with that person and have them contact me.

You will be volunteering your time if you choose to join the study. As a volunteer, you are free to withdraw at any time. Your participation is always your choice.

Up to now, few studies have been done on the experiences of atheists and your participation could help achieve a better understanding of this group. As well, the study is intended to afford members of this group a chance to tell their own stories in their own words.

Thanks for your time in considering my request



Appendix D: Informed Consent-Researcher

FROM CHRISTIAN FUNDAMENTALISM TO ATHEISM CONSENT FORM
--

This informed consent form is for adults whom I have invited to participate in research on leaving Christian fundamentalism and adopting an atheist identity.

Researcher: Taylor Noland, Masters of Counselling thesis student

Organization: Athabasca University, GCAP Program

Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Jeff Chang

Title of Study: GCAP 697 Thesis 2 research project: From Belief to Disbelief: A Phenomenological Study of the Journey from Christian Fundamentalism to Atheism

This Informed Consent Form has two parts:

- Information Sheet (to share information about the study with you)
- Certificate of Consent (for signatures if you choose to participate)

You will be given a copy of the full Informed Consent Form

Part I: Information Sheet

Introduction

My name is Taylor Noland, a Masters of Counselling student at Athabasca University doing research on the experience of those who have left Christian fundamentalism and become atheist. I am going to give you information and invite you to be part of this research. You do not have to decide today whether or not you will participate in the research. Before you decide, you can talk to anyone you feel comfortable with about the research. If there is anything that you do not understand as we go through the information, please ask me to stop and I will explain. If you have any questions later, you can contact me by phone or by e-mail and I will answer your questions.

Purpose of the research

Atheists have not been studied very much, so counsellors may not have enough information to be able to help members of this group. Some atheists used to belong to Christian fundamentalist churches and their experiences in moving to atheism may be different than others who came from non-fundamentalist backgrounds. The purpose of my research is to investigate and describe the journey from Christian fundamentalism to atheism from the view of those who have actually made the journey. I want to find out if there are common steps that people making this transition would take. I also want to find out what the good parts and the difficult parts were about this transition. This information should be useful to counsellors helping atheists from Christian fundamentalist backgrounds. Finally, this research will give atheists from Christian fundamentalist backgrounds an opportunity to share their experience, an opportunity to speak on their own behalf.

Type of Research Intervention

This research will involve your participation in a few meetings: to explain the purpose of the research and your role in it; to get your written consent to join the study; to have you share your experience of going from Christian fundamentalism to atheism; and to make sure I have accurately described your experience.

Participant Selection

You are being invited to take part in this research because you have said that you are an atheist who used to believe Christian fundamentalist teachings and would be able to contribute much to an understanding of this group of atheists.

- **Check for understanding:** *Do you know why I am asking you to take part in this study? Do you know what the study is about?*

Voluntary Participation

Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary. You may change your mind later and stop participating even if you agreed earlier. You are free to withdraw at any time.

- **Check for understanding:** *Do you know that you do not have to take part in this research study, if you do not wish to? Do you have any questions?*

Procedures

I am asking you to help me learn about the experience of moving from Christian fundamentalism to atheism. If you agree to be part of my research, I will ask you to participate in a few meetings. In our meeting today, I will go over the details of the study and then, when you have had time to decide whether or not you wish to volunteer, I will meet with you again to get your written consent. Next, there will be a formal interview in which you would share your experience of moving from Christian fundamentalism to atheism. During the interview, I may ask you to give more details about what you have said and it will be up to you whether or not you wish to share more on any particular point.

No one else but you and I will be present for the interview unless you want someone else to be there. The entire interview will be audio and video-recorded and later written out, but you will not be identified in my write-up. You will be assigned a name different than your own name when excerpts from the notes are used and no excerpt will be used that could identify you. The information given in the interview is all confidential, and no one else except me will be able to view the video or see the transcription. The recordings and transcripts will be kept in a secure location in a locked cabinet and destroyed after five years. The transcripts will be shredded and the digital video recordings will be deleted.

There may need to be a follow-up interview in which I ask for clarification on some of the things you reported. It may not be apparent to me until later that I did not fully understand what you said or what you meant. It is important for my research that I accurately represent what you say and mean.

The final meeting will involve your reading my write-up of the experience of moving from Christian fundamentalism to atheism to see if it captures what you told me. I will be writing about the common steps that you and others took, so I need to check that the steps I describe are ones that happened for you. You will be able to give me feedback on what I have said.

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

Duration

The research will take place over a period of several months in total. During that time, the interview will possibly take up to two hours; other meetings do not generally take as long.

- **Check for understanding:** *If you decide to take part in the study, do you know how much time the interviews will take? Where will it take place? If you agree to take part, do you know if you can stop participating? Do you know that you may not respond to the questions that you do not wish to respond to? Etc. Do you have any more questions?*

Risks

I am asking you to share some very personal and confidential information, and you may feel uncomfortable talking about some parts of your experience. You do not have to answer any question or share any part of your experience if you don't wish to do so, and that is also fine. You do not have to give any reason for not responding to any question, or for refusing to share any part of your experience.

Benefits

Your participation will help others understand the experience of atheists who have left Christian fundamentalism. This information will be especially helpful for counsellors who are assisting persons with similar worldviews and backgrounds. The study will also give you the opportunity to share your story.

Reimbursements

You will not be provided any incentive to take part in this research.

- **Check for understanding:** *Can you tell me if you have understood correctly the benefits that you will have if you take part in the study? Do you know if the study will pay you to participate?*

Confidentiality

I will not be sharing information about you with anyone else. The information that I collect from this research project will be kept private. Any information about you will have an assigned name on it instead of your name. Only I will know what your assigned name is and I will keep that information locked up in a secure filing cabinet. It will not be shared with or given to anyone else.

- **Check for understanding:** *Did you understand the procedures that we will be using to make sure that any information that I collect about you will remain confidential? Do you have any more questions?*

Sharing the Results

Nothing that you tell me will be shared with anybody, and nothing will be attributed to you by name. The knowledge that I get from this research will be shared with you before it is submitted. Following acceptance of my thesis, I will publish the results so that other interested people may learn from the research. The existence of the research will be listed in an abstract posted online at the Athabasca University Library's Digital Thesis and Study Room, and the final research paper will be publicly available.

Right to Refuse or Withdraw

You do not have to take part in this research if you do not wish to do so. You may stop participating in the interview at any time you want to. I will give you an opportunity to review my write-up, and you can ask to modify my written account if you do not agree with it or if I did not understand you correctly.

Who to Contact

If you have any questions, you can ask them now or later. If you wish to ask questions later, you may contact me by phone at 780-667-6189 or by e-mail at: Elias_Noland@live.ca. This study has been reviewed by the Athabasca University Research Ethics Board. Should you have any comments or concerns regarding your treatment as a participant in this study, please contact the Research Ethics Office by e-mail at rebsec@athabascau.ca or by telephone at (780) 675-6718. If you wish to speak with my supervisor, contact Dr. Chang by e-mail at Jeffc@athabascau.ca.

- ***Check for understanding:*** *Do you know that you do not have to take part in this study if you do not wish to? You can say No if you wish to? Do you know that you can ask me questions later, if you wish to? Do you know that I have given the contact details of the person who can give you more information about the study? Etc.*

You can ask me any more questions about any part of the research study, if you wish to. Do you have any questions?

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

Part II: Certificate of Consent

I have been invited to participate in a study on leaving Christian fundamentalism and adopting an atheist identity. I will be meeting with the researcher to do an interview, and later I will be meeting with the researcher to review the findings of the study.

I have read the foregoing information, or it has been read to me. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about it and any questions I have been asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I consent voluntarily to be a participant in this study

Print Name of Participant _____

Signature of Participant _____

Date _____
Day/month/year

Statement by the researcher/person taking consent

I have accurately read out the information sheet to the potential participant, and to the best of my ability made sure that the participant understands that the following will be done:

1. There will be an initial audio and video-recorded interview in which I will ask the participant to relay his or her experience in deconverting from Christian fundamentalism and later adopting an atheist identity.
2. There may be some follow-up contact for the purpose of clarification of statements made in initial interview.
3. There will be a final meeting in which the results will be discussed with the participant to allow the participant to validate his or her general description of the process of deconversion from Christian fundamentalism following through to adoption of atheism.

I confirm that the participant was given an opportunity to ask questions about the study, and all the questions asked by the participant have been answered correctly and to the best of my ability. I confirm that the individual has not been coerced into giving consent, and the consent has been given freely and voluntarily.

A copy of this Informed Consent Form has been provided to the participant.

Print Name of Researcher/person taking the consent _____

Signature of Researcher /person taking the consent _____

Date _____
Day/month/year

Appendix E: Informed Consent-Participant

FROM CHRISTIAN FUNDAMENTALISM TO ATHEISM CONSENT FORM
--

Researcher: Taylor Noland, Masters of Counselling thesis student

Organization: Athabasca University, GCAP Program

Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Jeff Chang

Title of Study: GCAP 697 Thesis 2 research project: From Belief to Disbelief: A Phenomenological Study of the Journey from Christian Fundamentalism to Atheism

This Informed Consent Form has two parts:

- Information Sheet (to share information about the study with you)
- Certificate of Consent (for signatures if you choose to participate)

You will be given a copy of the full Informed Consent Form

Part I: Information Sheet

Introduction

My name is Taylor Noland, a Masters of Counselling student at Athabasca University doing research on the experience of those who have left Christian fundamentalism and become atheist. I am going to give you information and invite you to be part of this research. You do not have to decide today whether or not you will participate in the research. Before you decide, you can talk to anyone you feel comfortable with about the research. If there is anything that you do not understand as we go through the information, please ask me to stop and I will explain. If you have any questions later, you can contact me by phone or by e-mail and I will answer your questions.

Purpose of the research

Atheists have not been studied very much, so counsellors may not have enough information to be able to help members of this group. Some atheists used to belong to Christian fundamentalist churches and their experiences in moving to atheism may be different than others who came from non-fundamentalist backgrounds. The purpose of my research is to investigate and describe the journey from Christian fundamentalism to atheism from the view of those who have actually made the journey. I want to find out if there are common steps that people making this transition would take. I also want to find out what the good parts and the difficult parts were about this transition. This information should be useful to counsellors helping atheists from Christian fundamentalist backgrounds. Finally, this research will give atheists from Christian fundamentalist backgrounds an opportunity to share their experience, an opportunity to speak on their own behalf.

Type of Research Intervention

This research will involve your participation in a few meetings: (1) to explain the purpose of the research and your role in it; (2) to get your written consent to join the study; (3) to have you share your experience of going from Christian fundamentalism to atheism; and (4) to make sure I have accurately described your experience.

Participant Selection

You are being invited to take part in this research because you have said that you are an atheist who used to believe Christian fundamentalist teachings and would be able to contribute much to an understanding of this group of atheists.

Voluntary Participation

Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary. You may change your mind later and stop participating even if you agreed earlier. You are free to withdraw at any time.

Procedures

I am asking you to help me learn about the experience of moving from Christian fundamentalism to atheism. If you agree to be part of my research, I will ask you to participate in a few meetings. In our meeting today, I will go over the details of the study and then, when you have had time to decide whether or not you wish to volunteer, I will meet with you again to get your written consent. Next, there will be a formal interview in which you would share your experience of moving from Christian fundamentalism to atheism. During the interview, I may ask you to give more details about what you have said and it will be up to you whether or not you wish to share more on any particular point.

No one else but you and I will be present for the interview unless you want someone else to be there. The entire interview will be audio and video-recorded and later written out, but you will not be identified in my write-up. You will be assigned a name different than your own name when excerpts from the notes are used and no excerpt will be used that could identify you. The information given in the interview is all confidential, and no one else except me will be able to view the video or see the transcription. The recordings and transcripts will be kept in a secure location in a locked cabinet and destroyed after five years. The transcripts will be shredded and the digital video recordings will be deleted.

There may need to be a follow-up interview in which I ask for clarification on some of the things you reported. It may not be apparent to me until later that I did not fully understand what you said or what you meant. It is important for my research that I accurately represent what you say and mean.

The final meeting will involve your reading my write-up of the experience of moving from Christian fundamentalism to atheism to see if it captures what you told me. I will be writing about the common steps that you and others took, so I need to check that the steps I describe are ones that happened for you. You will be able to give me feedback on what I have said.

Duration

The research will take place over a period of several months in total. During that time, the interview will possibly take up to two hours; other meetings do not generally take as long.

Risks

I am asking you to share some very personal and confidential information, and you may feel uncomfortable talking about some parts of your experience. You do not have to answer any question or share any part of your experience if you do not wish to do so, and that is also fine. You do not have to give any reason for not responding to any question, or for refusing to share any part of your experience.

Benefits

Your participation will help others understand the experience of atheists who have left Christian fundamentalism. This information will be especially helpful for counsellors who are assisting persons with similar worldviews and backgrounds. The study will also give you the opportunity to share your story.

Reimbursements

You will not be provided any incentive to take part in this research.

Confidentiality

I will not be sharing information about you with anyone else. The information that I collect from this research project will be kept private. Any information about you will have an assigned name on it instead of your name. Only I will know what your assigned name is and I will keep that information locked up in a secure filing cabinet. It will not be shared with or given to anyone else.

Sharing the Results

Nothing that you tell me will be shared with anybody, and nothing will be attributed to you by name. The knowledge that I get from this research will be shared with you before it is submitted. Following acceptance of my thesis, I will publish the results so that other interested people may learn from the research. The existence of the research will be listed in an abstract posted online at the Athabasca University Library's Digital Thesis and Study Room, and the final research paper will be publicly available.

Right to Refuse or Withdraw

You do not have to take part in this research if you do not wish to do so. You may stop participating in the interview at any time you want to. I will give you an opportunity to review my write-up, and you can ask to modify my written account if you do not agree with it or if I did not understand you correctly.

Who to Contact

If you have any questions, you can ask them now or later. If you wish to ask questions later, you may contact me by phone at 780-667-6189 or by e-mail at: Elias_Noland@live.ca. This study has been reviewed by the Athabasca University Research Ethics Board. Should you have any comments or concerns regarding your treatment as a participant in this study, please contact the Research Ethics Office by e-mail at rebsec@athabascau.ca or by telephone at (780) 675-6718. If you wish to speak with my supervisor, contact Dr. Chang by e-mail at Jeffc@athabascau.ca.

You can ask me any more questions about any part of the research study, if you wish to. Do you have any questions?

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

Part II: Certificate of Consent

I have been invited to participate in a study on leaving Christian fundamentalism and adopting an atheist identity. I will be meeting with the researcher to do an interview, and later I will be meeting with the researcher to review the findings of the study.

I have read the foregoing information, or it has been read to me. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about it and any questions I have been asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I consent voluntarily to be a participant in this study

Print Name of Participant _____

Signature of Participant _____

Date _____
Day/month/year

Statement by the researcher/person taking consent

I have accurately read out the information sheet to the potential participant, and to the best of my ability made sure that the participant understands that the following will be done:

1. There will be an initial audio and video-recorded interview in which I will ask the participant to relay his or her experience in deconverting from Christian fundamentalism and later adopting an atheist identity.
2. There may be some follow-up contact for the purpose of clarification of statements made in initial interview.
3. There will be a final meeting in which the results will be discussed with the participant to allow the participant to validate his or her general description of the process of deconversion from Christian fundamentalism following through to adoption of atheism.

I confirm that the participant was given an opportunity to ask questions about the study, and all the questions asked by the participant have been answered correctly and to the best of my ability. I confirm that the individual has not been coerced into giving consent, and the consent has been given freely and voluntarily.

A copy of this Informed Consent Form has been provided to the participant.

Print Name of Researcher/person taking the consent _____

Signature of Researcher /person taking the consent _____

Date _____
Day/month/year

Appendix F: Data Collection Protocol

To collect the data for my research project, I met with participants initially to thoroughly explain the purpose of the study, to obtain a signed consent form, and to set a time for the interview. In choosing the location for these meetings and the interviews, I was guided by the recommendations of Balls (2009). She advised choosing an interview location that is quiet and can be counted on to be free of disturbance and interruption. She cautioned that conducting interviews in a personal private office may not be ideal as it may create a power differential that would need to be minimized as much as possible. Her suggestion was to hold interviews in neutral locations that are either familiar to the participant or are places in which the participant feels comfortable and relaxed. Therefore, I accommodated the participants' preferences by meeting with them privately in their homes.

I used an unstructured interview format to conduct in-depth face-to-face interviews, beginning with the question, "What was it like for you to leave Christian fundamentalism and become an atheist?" My intention was to primarily follow a participant's lead after inviting the person to describe their lived experience. Other questions flowed from what was shared and were used to clarify the participant's meaning or to obtain more detail if the participant wished to provide it. I believed that, while having two or three questions as a basic guide might be helpful, a set script could interfere with my attention and create artificial priorities.

Lewis and Graham (2007) pointed out ethical aspects of the interviewer's behavior such as establishing rapport with participants by checking for understanding of the interview process, assuring them that there are no right or wrong answers and that what they share has intrinsic value, and ensuring the questions are relevant to the subject. To establish rapport, I adopted a neutral, nonjudgmental stance, reflecting back to participants what I heard and offering positive

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

reinforcement through gestures such as nodding. The question used to start the interview was directly related to the study and was purposely designed to give interviewees the lead. To ensure their comfort with the topic, I gave them the research question in the initial interview and they had time to prepare by mentally reviewing their experience before the data collection interview.

Each interview continued to the point of saturation, which was generally reached within 60 to 90 minutes. All of the interviews were videorecorded using a laptop computer and an external microphone. The equipment used for the interviews was set up and tested in advance of the actual interviews.

Appendix G: List of Significant Statements

No.	Significant Statement	Transcript #	Page #	Line(s) #
1	I grew up Mennonite. It's hard to know, a lot of it is culture and stuff, but the religion is still Christianity – very fundamental: men have to dress a certain way, women have to dress a certain way, you have strict rules to follow, it's very strict.	1 Brandy	1	1 – 3
2	Yeah, very, very, conservative. Um, no make-up, no – just hair in a braid. I mean, that's my mom's side of the family: very, very conservative.	1	1	7 – 8
3	But um, around four or five, I think, my dad had a job offer and we moved away from that community and that led us down another path. And that's when I went to a Pentecostal church; and that's when my SECOND indoctrination started.	1	1	12 – 14
4	I think when we started the Pentecostal church, I was between seven, or, eight, nine, or ten, or something like that, and that was all “praising the Lord”, “slain in the spirit”, “speaking in tongues.”	1	1	14 – 16
5	Also conservative, I mean, going to dances was looked down upon, drinking alcohol was looked down upon, of course. You know, some modest dress – I mean, not as modest as Mennonites – you know, women can wear pants, but you know, especially when I got older and went to youth group, I heard the message that, you know, “You should dress modestly; we don't want to tempt the men and the boys,” and, you know, there were certain expectations on how to behave.	1	1	16 – 21
6	Um, yeah...um... I mean, at that point in my life, I very much thought that homosexuality was a <u>sin</u> (says that with emphasis). Anyone, I kind of...I'll be honest, I mean, I was a very judgmental person.	1	2	4 – 6
7	I felt sorry for everyone because I thought that they were “un-saved”, and I was enlightened, and they're all going to go to hell, and so they were like – of course, I couldn't admit it, I didn't understand it at the time – but I was looking down on them, and I thought I was better than them.	1	2	6 – 9

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

No.	Significant Statement	Transcript #	Page #	Line(s) #
8	And of course if...I don't actually remember meeting an atheist at that point in my life, but...I definitely would have met "non-religious" people (uses finger quotations)...I mean, they wouldn't, they didn't admit to being a Christian or anything like that; they were probably just not religious...well, they were just atheists in my books...and going straight to hell.	1	2	12 – 18
9	And I had people praying for her and...that poor girl, I think she was fine. She was a nice person, but I found out she smoked, and I thought I needed – it was my job to save her soul.	1	2	20 – 22
10	No. I thought I had a wayward soul on my hands, and I got the youth group involved and the other friends in my youth group and the youth pastor, and we were praying for her and...loving on her! (laughs). We were loving on her (laughs). Oh, the terms!	1	3	5 – 7
11	It's just embarrassing now. Like it's just embarrassing.	1	3	7 – 8
12	Yeah...I took another friend to my church once...and there was so much yelling and hollering because, you know, it's a Pentecostal church. It's very intimidating if you don't know what's going on. I mean...it's a freak show. I can't even believe...I mean...I was introduced to it so gradually that over time...to see people wailing and waving their hands in the air and...being slain... and having women just fall over and being slain in the spirit...was completely normal. A Sunday experience.	1	3	8 – 13
13	She cried. She started crying, and I thought, "Oh my, she's being touched by the Lord; this is what we want." But she told me later she was just scared...and she would never come back. And for good reason! And I thought that for sure either she was touched by the Lord or Satan was trying to deceive her. (Raises her hands and puts them back down) Yeah, OF COURSE she was crying, I mean, we were just preteens and she was AFRAID of what was going on in that church.	1	3	18 – 23
14	It is in your face. It is kind of scary. Like, people are kind of yelling, and speaking in weird languages, made-up languages (rolls eyes). Yeah. Falling over? (laughs). Yeah, I've apologized to her since then.	1	4	2 – 4
15	Yeah, and I know it's not really like...you know, I was...it's not my fault per se, I was just doing what I was taught, and I know that's indoctrination. It's very strong and it gets a hold on you	1	4	7 – 9

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

No.	Significant Statement	Transcript #	Page #	Line(s) #
16	Homosexuality was definitely a sin. Science was not to be trusted; scientists for the most part are here to deceive us – Satan has a hold of their minds. Science is against us. Like science is teaching us evolution and, I mean, that is here, that is placed here...Satan put the thoughts of evolution into the scientists' mind to deceive us.	1	4	12 – 15
17	So yeah...we were here to be deceived, um...by scientists. You know, I actually think that's why I didn't take a lot of interest in science, even biology and those classes in high school chemistry? I wish I would've.	1	4	15 – 17
18	Because now! I am not academic at all...but when I hear anything science-y, even though I don't understand half the time what they're talking about, I love it! You know like Neil deGrasse? What is it? Cosmos? I love that stuff! I need to watch it again because, I mean, it might be basic for other people, but it's new to me. You know?	1	4	17 – 21
19	And I know science is hard enough for non-religious people to understand, but I...like I just thought it was useless. It wasn't...I didn't think it meant anything. If I could go back in time, I'd probably try and find more courses in that, you know?	1	5	1 – 3
20	But...no...dinosaur bones were put in the ground by the devil, or by people, or the scientists are just making those stories up to deceive us.	1	5	4 – 5
21	I believed the earth was between six to ten thousand years old, um, and that Adam and Eve were real people; I believed in Noah's Ark. I used to look at a rainbow and thank God for his promise (pause), you know?	1	5	4 – 6
22	It's just (covers her face with her hands) like I still just sometimes shake my head at myself and I can not believe it's, it's like I was truly a child. Like...who? Just looking at a rainbow? (laughs and shakes her head) like Noah's Ark? Like really?	1	5	7 – 9
23	And I thought it was a beautiful little story you hear and now it's just barbaric. I wouldn't even read that story to my three-year-old child.	1	5	12 – 13
24	Oh, and that feeling of always being not good enough. I've had that. I've struggled. I think, I have to imagine that it's an experience all people born to religion must have.	1	5	14 – 15
25	I have a friend who was not raised in religion – my best friend – and she's not experienced that.	1	5	17 – 18

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

No.	Significant Statement	Transcript #	Page #	Line(s) #
26	I have a friend who was not raised in religion – my best friend – and she’s not experienced that. She didn’t have, I mean, if she did have that experience of insecurity or whatever, it’s just because society breaks us down, and we have to pick ourselves up again. But then I had...like GOD doesn’t think you’re good enough. Like the Supreme Being who also “loves you” (finger quotations) you know?	1	5	17 – 21
27	And I don’t understand it because I have a child now and...I mean I didn’t understand it then...and now I just, no, that’s not love. That’s like an abusive relationship. Have you ever heard that? Like if you compare the relationship with God and an abusive relationship, they’re exactly the same.	1	5 6	21 – 22 1 – 2
28	...you’re not worthy of anything: You should be lucky that there’s a God that even wants you alive.	1	6	6 - 7
29	So it’s a message we got, um, not purposefully by her, I don’t blame her, it’s just, it’s just what religion does. And then we went from that into Christian fundamentalism and we heard the message again. And it’s not just me; we all heard it. I mean you must have experienced it you know? Like you’re never good enough, um, like we’re broken and we always need to be fixed.	1	6	3 – 7
30	So it was tumultuous. It’s like a mind trick: You have to constantly flip flop your mind and you never know...like I don’t think I really realized how much stress that puts on a person.	1	6 7	23 1 – 2
31	“Cognitive dissonance.” Yeah, I learned that like a few years ago, and I was like, “That’s it! Yes that’s what you have to do!” Your whole life!	1	7	4 – 5
32	I’ve already been accused of, “Well, you were never a real Christian anyway.” I was a Christian! I loved God. I spent money at the Christian bookstores, you know? (laughs) The amount of money I spent on that? Christian music. Like I was praising and worshiping God. Oh...I mean, it’s crazy how much I invested.	1	7	6 – 9
33	I believed, yeah. And I do believe that it’s (becoming atheist) not a choice. I used to think it’s a choice, right? I have to choose. No. I don’t believe that what you believe in is a choice. It just kind of...comes to you.	1	7	12 – 14

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

No.	Significant Statement	Transcript #	Page #	Line(s) #
34	If it was a choice, in many ways, it would almost be easier to go back and believe in it. I'd have my family in my life, uh, my friends, I'd have a nice security blanket, but I CAN'T DO IT!	1	7	14 – 16
35	I'd get to believe I'd go to heaven after? I could deal with death in a different way, like in a way death now is...well, it's better, but sometimes it's worse too because it makes my life now more meaningful, but I also know that that's it. I don't have that little comfort anymore.	1	7	16 – 19
36	A lot of altar calls and the emotional music, and the soft praise and worship music, and you know, "Come to the front if you feel this way." And the longer those services go on, you just felt that it's you.	1	7 8	22 – 23 1
37	I always remember feeling like, "Yeah, I did all of those bad things; I did have those negative thoughts; I did have this." And so before you know it, for me, I'd be at the altar asking God for his forgiveness...again (laughs). For all the mistakes I made that week (laughs). Crying my eyes out, not really knowing why I'm crying, but it's so emotional. Everyone's crying. A bunch of teenagers just bawling. It's like a cold reading, that's what it is.	1	8	3 – 8
38	Like I had friends inside my school. But they were just friends at school. I didn't really do much with them outside of school.	1	8	16 – 17
39	I just had two sets of friends: my church friends and my school friends. But my non-church friends knew I was a Christian.	1	8	18 – 19
40	I was a good little church girl. I was the girl who would try to slip in a DC Talk CD (Christian rock band) into the car stereo, hoping that they wouldn't notice it was Christian music, hoping that that might, you know, plant a seed (laughs).	1	8 9	21 – 23 1
41	I was a Jesus freak. And I was proud of it. Like I think I even had a shirt that said, "Jesus Freak" on there.	1	9	1 – 2
42	And my quote on my high school year book, oh God, so embarrassing – I wish I could go back and delete that. I think it's, "Nothing is impossible through Christ." What is that, Romans or something? I forget. Yeah. It's my quote in the high school year book for Grade 12. (Looks ashamed and looks down embarrassed). I look back like, "Oh, why did I do that?" I should have just left it at, "I thank my friends, I thank my teachers," and then just leave the verse out.	1	9	2 – 7

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

No.	Significant Statement	Transcript #	Page #	Line(s) #
43	Everything is a potential. Like um...a witnessing potential. Everything is a chance to tell people about the love of God.	1	9	7 – 9
44	And in Junior High we had to do something about...oh, this is another bad one. I wish that I could go back to that teacher and have her let me redo that essay because it's a grade nine essay we had to write about where we think we will be in five years. And I kid you not, I said that I will be in heaven praising my Lord and saviour (embarrassed laugh/grin). In five years: I literally believed that.	1	9	10 – 14
45	I was a soldier for Christ. And proud of it. And I didn't waiver. I think I was more of the real deal than other people who are still Christians today probably.	1	9	21 – 23
46	I honestly think...well, I AM a better person now than I was then.	1	10	1 – 2
47	Most Christians I know are not good people. They're bigots. And judgmental.	1	10	2 – 3
48	That's one thing I lost. That, that need to judge. I think I thought I was being loving and a loving Christian, but when your job in life is to convert people, how do you not judge people? You have to judge them. You have to believe that they can be converted, so that would take a judgement call. And now it's not up to me to change people. I can just accept people for who they are.	1	10	3 – 7
49	I really believed we had to spread the message and that when everyone knew about Christ, that's when Jesus would come back.	1	10	12 – 14
50	I know it's easy to laugh about it now, but it's crazy how serious it is though. It's, it is laughable, but in a way it's not because it was a big chunk of my life that was taken up by it, and that part...	1	10	16 – 18
51	You know, I look at people who never...um, they don't have to say they're atheist because it doesn't occur to them; it's the other way, it doesn't occur to them that they are one. I guess it didn't occur to them that there is a way to not be one. They just think, "Well, I don't know, I just think what I think! I don't know what you mean by what am I? Am I an atheist or not?" They're just, "I don't know." They've never had to think about it.	1	10	18 – 23

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

No.	Significant Statement	Transcript #	Page #	Line(s) #
52	Yeah, I thought God had a plan for me. I was a good Christian, I believed he had a man for me to marry, that he was going to bless our marriage, just like I was told. A godly man would come into my life and we would have children, and we'd have good little Christian kids and... (pauses)...it did not turn out that way at all.	1	11	3 – 6
53	And you know, eight years later the marriage ended. So. I mean, at the time it was very difficult because I just thought...I still believed in God too, like, how could God do this?	1	11	10 – 12
54	I was doing everything I was supposed to do, and my whole world was falling apart. And that's when I thought, "OK (laughs) things are not going as planned, I am doing everything I'm supposed to do: I'm a Christian, I believe in God, I..."	1	11	12 – 15
55	And, of course, I still had those lingering thoughts, "Well, I'm just not good enough." I must just not be a good enough Christian or something.	1	11	15 – 16
56	And it's not that I just didn't... one day decided I wasn't a Christian.	1	11 12	23 1
57	I remember that somebody asked me online. My cousin, "Well are you an atheist?" and I just, had to...that was my deciding factor! I'm like, "Yes!"	1	12	3 – 5
58	...like a lot of my family members were involved, and I knew (laughs) that I'm outing myself once and for all.	1	12	6 – 7
59	He was one of those lucky people who was raised in a non-religious home.	1	12	14
60	And, you know, I got married at 25 and, <i>had I been a critical thinker</i> (clenches her jaw and knocks the table), which I didn't have a critical bone in my body. I wasn't taught a thing at all.	1	13	13 – 15
61	I was so naïve. Oh, and my church kept me very naïve. It does!	1	14	2
62	...I would go with my aunt and uncle who were very religious, who don't have anything to do with me anymore.	1	15	9 – 10
63	Yeah, it's very sad. My uncle was like a father to me in a lot of ways. And he's just...he's actually sent me some not-so-nice emails about my soul and how I'm raising my daughter. I'm not a very good parent.	1	15	11 – 13

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

No.	Significant Statement	Transcript #	Page #	Line(s) #
64	He's a typical Christian bigot. He hates people and...everything that I'm an activist for, and, you know...he hates homosexuals and he's not afraid of saying it. He talks about it on his Facebook wall and stuff like that, and it's just too bad because I can't see him the same way anyway...	1	15	14 – 17
65	Family has really kept their distance. I really don't hear from anyone anymore.	1	15	17 – 18
66	They don't know what to do with me! Nobody knows what to do with an atheist. People don't know what to do with an atheist. Or I guess I should say Christians don't know what to do with an atheist.	1	15 16	23 1 – 2
67	So it's sad. Because my mom doesn't come around anymore. Her and I have had a very difficult relationship as long as I can remember. You know, it's been very difficult for her, but this atheist thing, it's pretty much, it's the biggest wedge there is. Because she can't. She feels like, um, she couldn't be comfortable in my home.	1	16	2 – 6
68	I think they look at our home as like, evil. My sister would. She doesn't come here anymore. I have two sisters, so the one that's younger than me, yeah. She wouldn't come to my home anymore because I'm pretty sure they look at, you know, evil or demons can attach themselves to things. Like they'd probably look at the pictures on the wall here and think that there is some kind of evil entity in it (laughs) and it might rub off on them.	1	16	6 – 10
69	Now I get to really base people on their character. You know? If you're a nice person, then good enough for me.	1	16	16 – 18
70	And then, I mean, once I could admit that I WAS in an abusive marriage, and it wasn't what I thought it was going to be or anything, then it just opened me up to seeing other things.	1	17	5 – 7
71	...I was in Shoppers Drug Mart. I was poking around and they have a little book section there and this bright yellow book popped out. And it said, "God is not Great"	1	17	8 – 10
72	And I read the back, and I was like, "Oh my God, I have to get this book!" And I did. And I didn't put it down. And I read it and, ah, it was just the best thing ever. I mean, I still don't think I could say that I wasn't a Christian after reading that book. I mean, I certainly wasn't saying that I was an atheist; I just didn't take the Bible as the literal word of God. At least I thought the Bible was maybe misrepresented.	1	17	13 – 18

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

No.	Significant Statement	Transcript #	Page #	Line(s) #
73	No, I couldn't take it as literal. I thought, "Well maybe, you know? Maybe men just wrote the book! You know? Maybe it was just men who were following Christ and wrote a book and were trying to do the best they could, and yeah, they got some things wrong, but it doesn't mean God doesn't exist. It doesn't mean Jesus isn't real. There's still a God." But it was just changing how I looked at God.	1	17 18	20 – 23 1
74	So I still believed in God for a long time. That changed into more of a...eventually I started looking at more of a spiritual...like, ah, well, maybe I'm just spiritual. Like I believe there's a God out there, but it doesn't mean we have to have this close relationship: There's just a God of the universe.	1	18	1 – 4
75	I think I started giving up on Jesus. I don't remember the exact time, but I just gave up on the Jesus notion, too. I thought maybe it was just a story. You know? Maybe it's just a nice story. But there's still a God. So I think that's when I was willing to say I was spiritual.	1	18	6 – 9
76	So that's kind of where the New Age part kind of came in, that spirituality. I did believe in that, too. I really thought that we were all part of some wavelength or something.	1	18	14 – 16
77	Because all along the way I'm listening to podcasts. "The Atheist Experience" was a big one; I was listening to that show. Um, I started listening to Seth Andrews, "The thinking Atheist." His story, or I think the very first one he did, I was just bawling the whole way through. Because I knew that was my story. His story, how he was in church and what he went through, how he left, how his belief system started crumbling apart was so similar to mine. I just started crying. And that's when I realized I don't even know if I'm even spiritual anymore! I don't know what I believe!	1	18 19	18 – 22 1 – 2
78	I needed that kind of, um, like anger that he has? (laughs) He kind of gets angry sometimes, but I need to hear it because (pauses) somebody needs to tell me straight.	1	19	10 – 12

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

No.	Significant Statement	Transcript #	Page #	Line(s) #
79	We also listened to “The God Delusion” (Richard Dawkins) on audio, so him and I – I think that was back in 2012 – and it was making so much sense, I mean, that’s another good one. It just, I was blown away like every five seconds. I went to pause; I couldn’t even take it all in at times. I think I was even crying at times. Like it’s just so powerful. It just, just, the walls were coming down.	1	19	16 – 21
80	I still think sometimes walls are crumbling down. Even though I’m, I’m a, an admitted atheist now, it’s still just hard to believe sometimes. I can’t even believe that I’m an atheist. Like, how did I get from being a Mennonite girl, which was just a freak show in itself, like it’s um...like it’s very culty almost. A lot of people would say it’s a cult. I think evangelical Christians would consider Mennonites to be a cult. I came from that, to evangelical Christianity, to an atheist?! It’s like (laughs), it is a huge leap.	1	19 20	21 – 23 1 – 3
81	And Ryan and I, my husband, had a conversation and we were like, “Well, what are we?” And he’s like, “I think we’re an atheist, I think I’m an atheist.” And I said, “You think you are one? (points at herself) I think I am one too!” And once he said it, I felt safe to say it too.	1	20	6 – 9
82	“So are we OK telling people?” He’s like, “I think so, like if it comes up. We’re not going to go announce it.”	1	20	9 – 11
83	But it felt SO GOOD to say it out loud.	1	20	12
84	Like Matt Dillahunty right? He, he taught me how to critically think! Like he made me THINK. Uh, well, so did Christopher Hitchens in the <i>God is not Great</i> book. So once you start thinking like that you, just can’t go back.	1	20	17 – 19
85	And um, I think it’s so important that they teach this in schools. We’re going to do whatever we can to teach our child.	1	21	1 – 2
86	Because I’ve had friends ask, “Well, what happens if your daughter grows up and wants to go to church?” I’m like, “Well if she grows up and she’s 16 years old one day, and she wants to go to church, we’ll take her.” But um, she will know how to think. So I’m not afraid that she’s going to not, ah, base it on critical thinking.	1	21	2 – 5

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

No.	Significant Statement	Transcript #	Page #	Line(s) #
87	Like deciding on whether she wants to go or what she believes in because we're going to teach her those steps, how to critically think. Yeah. She's not going to get brainwashed into anything. I don't see it happening. I don't think it's possible. It works! Critical thinking works (laughs), so it's just not possible.	1	21	5 – 9
88	Everything else is just so much wishful thinking. It's like you're doing mental gymnastics...all the time. It's just such a relief...to not have to do that anymore. I can honestly just say now, "I don't know." You know? I don't know all the answers. It feels good to admit you don't know. You don't have to prove to anyone. It's not MY job.	1	21	14 – 16
89	I'm not stuck. I don't have to be so...like stubborn, you know? And so set in my ways. I can change my mind. It's just so freeing.	1	21	21 – 22
90	Everything's given to you. And you really do believe you're free though, that's the funny thing. Like you don't, you think you're...I always thought I WAS free. Freedom in Christ. Yet you're not free. You have rules. (mocking) "Oh no, but you can make choices." Yeah. But if you don't make the right choices, you go to hell. (laughs). Yeah. It's not free at all. This is free. (pauses) Now I'm free.	1	22	3 – 7
91	To me, the breakdown of the marriage was the worst thing I could possibly go through. What could be worse than that? So I was like, "Bring it. I don't care what's true, what isn't true. I don't even care, I just want to know stuff...even if it shakes me to the core." And it did. But it was, but it was like, the more I learned, I couldn't stay away. Like it was addicting.	1	22	9 – 13
92	And I always did care about people and that was another cognitive dissonance you know? I was taught to not like homosexuals, and I was supposed to say it's a sin, but inside I'm like, "But how can...like I don't want to hate anyone."	1	23	3 – 5
93	And I have that feeling that I'm less than when I'm around those people. I'm assuming that's what they think of me. I'm not, I'm not part of the clique. I'm the outsider. Not part of the group. And I miss out.	1	23	12 – 14
94	Um, but at the same time, as much as I miss hanging out, they're unbearable to be around...like I cannot tolerate it.	1	23	15 – 16

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

No.	Significant Statement	Transcript #	Page #	Line(s) #
95	And I know if I go there, I'm going to get someone telling me, "How could you? You know you're going to hell, like, come on, you know better, you know, just come to church." Or I'd get something told to me that I'm wrong. I mean, it's already been said to me. My aunt once approached me and said, "You know, if you're an atheist, you're going to hell." And it was actually really hurtful. Like it was a real stab, because I'm thinking, "I'm a good person, how can you even say that to someone? How can you say that to a good person?" It's, It's just...I know they think that. It shouldn't surprise me, but to hear it come from their mouth, it was like a stab. It was really shocking.	1	23	16 – 23
96	They're talking about Elizabeth, who is now an atheist-slash-Satanist or has devil influence – same thing to them – has devil influence. They can't see the fact that I'm actually a good person. Like I mean, it means nothing to them. So that's why it's so hurtful. It's very isolating.	1	24	4 – 7
97	The evangelical Christians would never, like they don't adhere to that doctrine, I don't think, of shunning, right? Like it's not something they do. But in their own ways, they do. They just distance themselves. I don't think they know. Their job is to save my soul, and if I'm not going to hear about it or I don't want to talk to them about it, then they have nothing to talk to me about. You know? What are they going to talk about? And you've been around Christians. I mean they...these kind of people? There is nothing else they talk about but the lord. Like everything comes back to the Lord. I mean, I would be uncomfortable: I wouldn't even want to be around them. I would have nothing in common with them...at this point.	1	24	15 – 23
98	But that is sad, though. I do miss them. I can still look back. I mean, when I was a Christian we had fun. I mean, of course, I was like them so it was fun for me, you know?	1	24 25	23 1 – 2
99	You can't go back (smiles/laughs). It's so weird. Like you can't unlearn.	1	25	4

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

No.	Significant Statement	Transcript #	Page #	Line(s) #
100	I've pictured my life: like what would happen if I? It would never happen (laughs), but if it did for some reason, I was in a different life and I wanted to go back (makes a face), I just couldn't do it. Like I'd be faking it. I could do it, but it would be not-real. It would be completely fake. Ugh...I'd probably have to puke every single day, once a day or something, just to get through it or drink alcohol, I don't know.	1	25	4 – 9
101	I guess I could fake it, but it wouldn't be real.	1	25	10 – 11
102	Yeah, I'm having fun, I'm doing great, who cares about them? Like really! It's disgusting. Who would even want that?	1	26	3 – 4
103	I sometimes wish there was a place where there could be role playing. Um, where you could have people talk to you like a Christian and somebody else talks like an atheist and how that conversation goes because my mind gets muddled. Sometimes. Um, I want to know, I want to be more clear.	1	26	16 – 19
104	And I would like to do that with someone so that someone could clarify that with me because I'm sure, I know I'm wrong, but I still have those um, old beliefs and they come out and...	1	26 27	23 1
105	I think I'm still deprogramming, yeah. Yeah, I don't know; maybe it will never end, I don't know.	1	27	5 – 6
106	I guess we could go to whatever which church we wanted...as long as it wasn't Catholic.	2 Sean	1	7 – 8
107	...I, uh, took instruction in the Catholic religion, and actually really got into it. Even after this girl was no longer an issue. I, um, was pretty active in the church, I never missed Mass.	2	1	13 – 15
108	My mother kind of made us all go. Like there was no not going. You, you went, even if you didn't want to. Which none of us did but...	2	1	18 – 19
109	Yes and uh, after I was baptised in the church, they conditionally baptise you in case it wasn't done right the first time, and I told my mother and oh my, she packed up everything that reminded her that she had a son Ralph	2	1	19 – 21
110	It was perhaps only ten days after she kicked me out that she was phoning wanting to "talk." So it was just a very brief period there.	2	3	1 – 3

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

No.	Significant Statement	Transcript #	Page #	Line(s) #
111	And I was the first treasurer of the St. Bernard's Parish Council in Exshaw. But it turned out it wasn't...I wasn't really the treasurer, the priest was the treasurer. He holds the, uh, he's totally in control of the money. And uh, being a treasurer is just a fund raiser. And I sure, I rebelled against that.	2	3	17 – 20
112	And uh so, I found out, being treasurer, that we had \$154,000, St. Bernard's Parish. We had \$154,000 on "permanent loan" to the central diocese. And here we are trying to badger all of our parishioners into digging deep to raise another \$150,000 to \$200,000 or whatever it was, to build a church, when we simply could have drawn down on that money that was owed to us.	2	4	1 – 4
113	But I was quickly told that it is not really ours. It's being "put to good use" and why they showed it as owing to the parish, uh, the priest said, "it's really not." It wasn't owing. So that was kind of upsetting for me.	2	4	5 – 7
114	And even after we built the church, and then we started a fundraiser for the, the, organ. And uh, you know this is like \$3000 or something like that. And we had the big thermometer at the front of the church showing us, uh, how well we were doing, and it was just obscene! You know, asking the parishioners to keep paying money when we had all that money somewhere? At any rate, I started to question.	2	4	7 – 11
115	There was an old lady in Canmore, who had never been, she was Catholic but she hadn't been to Mass for, oh, 30 years. And she had mental health issues and what not. At any rate, she died. And there were two grandsons who were serving on the altar at that time. And I asked, "Why would you not bury Ms. Blank? You're scandalizing the family. You're going to lose the kids!" And he told me categorically that, "The church, Mr. Blank, is a very exclusive club...and when you leave it, you better be a member in good standing...if you hope to be buried in the church." I said, "But it's pointless! She's already been judged according to...I mean everything at this point is simply window dressing isn't it? It could probably save those kids from leaving the church." And he just restated his position.	2	4	13 – 21

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

No.	Significant Statement	Transcript #	Page #	Line(s) #
116	But after the first business with parish council, and I think it was a two-year term...well I left before that. I told them I couldn't...I told them to find someone else. It was so frustrating, my only function was really fundraising, and to this day I just hate it.	2	5	6 – 8
117	Well I didn't appreciate their position on gay issues or morality issues or anything. I think that they, they were just...over the top. But in 1980 my marriage dissolved. I realised at that time that I was a gay, a gay person.	2	5	13 – 15
118	Well I, uh, didn't really change. But I was hoping, I was hoping that, uh, the church would change. At any rate, I was here in Edmonton. I stopped going to Mass entirely.	2	5	20 – 821
119	There was a <i>Time</i> editorial after Pope – whatever his name was, Ratzinger anyway – and he said that gay people could not hold office in the Catholic Church. From now on, they were going to screen all the applicants for priesthood and eliminate the ones who had homosexual tendencies.	2	6	2 – 5
120	Oh, it was horrible and the guy that wrote the article – I was going to print it off for you because it's worth seeing. He was so outraged, and he said, "This is ridiculous, for one thing about half the priests, the existing priests...are gay. And they're not all child molesters, but a lot of them are certainly gay. And I think they've kind of swept that whole thing under the rug because now their current pope is actually reaching out.	2	6	11 – 15
121	And, uh, Bishop Henry, who I considered to be a hatermonger, issued a letter that all the priests in the Calgary area and maybe even the Edmonton area had to read aloud. And I was so outraged that I got up and left.	2	6	18 – 20
122	But uh, I've been questioning the church's validity for many, many, many years. This guy, this was simply the catalyst that made me realise that this is so silly. These people can't be speaking on behalf of God! I mean look...ugh...terrible.	2	6 7	21 – 23 1
123	Well, some of their pronouncements were just so ridiculous. Like mostly for gay people and everything, but uh, how uh, they're against birth control in AIDS-ravaged Africa. They're against the HPV vaccination for young people. Well they claim it's, uh, promoting promiscuity.	2	8	7 – 9

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

No.	Significant Statement	Transcript #	Page #	Line(s) #
124	Well that's like...like condoms. And they're so afraid that they're going to be seen as endorsing anything. In, in 2015, it is the most absurd position. Because Aids, it really is...well I don't know if it's under control...I guess it's under control. It's certainly on the decline in the Western hemisphere anyway. But in Africa? It's just rampant. And they say abstinence. So really, there...there were so many things that were compounding. It just didn't make any sense.	2	8	10 – 14
125	But in the Old Testament, I mean, have you ever seen anything that's more vicious and cruel?! And you know, they – all of these Evangelicals – are trying to make a case against the gay people based on...uh...something God might have said to Moses, or I don't know where it came from, but there are so many rules or so many laws in the Old Testament that are just, just ignored. But they singled out this particular thing and they're going to make a big case over it.	2	8 9	22 – 23 1 – 3
126	I mean let's, let's face it. I mean who wrote those books anyway? And when? And we're told it's, uh...the word of God! But as relayed through umpteen different people and they finally get it down on paper. Most of these, um, characters in the Bible were, uh, illiterate. I don't know how this...by word of mouth from generation to generation. Finally, they found someone who could put pen to paper.	2	9	6 – 10
127	So yeah, I've been sort of...the last few years going to Mass even, before I quit going, was a strain. It was a real strain. And you have to listen to all this stuff that he's talking about and most of it, it's so boring. At least no priest I ever came into contact with even tried to entertain you.	2	9	17 – 20
128	Well, it's just absurd! The whole concept is. I mean what kind of a God, you know, if he's all-loving, all-knowing, and all-powerful...what's with all these disgusting diseases and what-not going on in the world? I mean what kind...I mean I'm paraphrasing Stephen Fry, but I endorse what he said absolutely. He's talking about an insect whose sole purpose in life is to burrow into eyes of children in Africa. And then it burrows its way out and blinds in the process (shrugs). Is God permitting this or...I just don't get it.	2	10	8 – 13

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

No.	Significant Statement	Transcript #	Page #	Line(s) #
129	Why is there so much misery in the world? If there's an all-loving God, that is utter bullshit. I mean life on earth could be absolutely...well, it's hard to even conceive of how life could be without disease and that sort of thing but it's got to be a notch above the status quo, isn't it?	2	10	13 – 16
130	Well uh, even transubstantiation, you know the Catholic Church is different than others. They actually believe that it's the body and blood of Christ. Now...figure that out! They say, "No, this doesn't represent the body and blood of Christ, this is...de facto. I mean, how dumb is that?"	2	11	1 – 4
131	What kind of God, would ask – what is it, – Abraham, to kill his son? And it just so happened, lucky son, that a ram happened to get caught in the brambles and he killed the ram instead. And God accepted that sacrifice, "sacrifice" (finger quotes), I mean, can you imagine, as fulfilling his obligation because he actually did, uh, he was prepared to kill his own son. How sick is that? Yeah, it is...it is ridiculous.	2	11	4 – 8
132	Now I have to tell...I have to confess that I miss certain aspects of the Catholic Church. I miss the smell of incense. I miss the way church smells. The, the, well...all the ritual was very, very interesting for me. The processions. Like I can remember when the kids were real little, and we went to St. Michaels in Calgary. And it was Easter, and they have a boys' choir there. Oh my God! Talk about your hair standing on end. This was amazing! So beautiful.	2	11	10 – 15
133	There is a sense of loss. There is...because you know, you think, "Oh my goodness, wouldn't it be wonderful if you just sort of bought into it all."	2	12	1 – 2
134	But when I was in the church and believing – well, I guess, seemingly believing in all this stuff – the concept of seeing my mother was a big plus. Seeing my mother again. But, um, it just...and that's a big loss. Even when I lost my two dogs and the vet sent me a little card with a rainbow bridge, where the dogs cross the rainbow bridge and they're over there, happy and playing and waiting for you and...all of that stuff (laughs) is gone! Just gone. And it's a real loss! There's no question about it. I mourn for the loss of my faith. But, uh, reason has to prevail.	2	12 13	22 – 23 1 – 5
135	You can't unlearn it.	2	13	7
136	It would take a pretty good orator to convince me that I'm wrong, that's for sure. And that would be impossible.	2	13	9 – 10

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

No.	Significant Statement	Transcript #	Page #	Line(s) #
137	Even for myself. Dead is dead. That's a pretty harsh reality.	2	13	4 – 5
138	Cuz this can't be the end. Oh, how I wish it weren't! Part of me wants to believe that there's a spark of life that survives death. I want to believe that. And I wish someone could make a case for it, but you know the Hindus, but they got all their elephant-head gods and what not, I mean, really (laughs), how much credibility have they got?	2	13	12 – 16
139	Well it's a stark reality. I mean all of these fancy stories and everything are designed to give people comfort. And to realize that they are just stories. Nothing more. Somebody made it up.	2	13	18 – 20
140	But how comfortable it is to just blindly believe.	2	14	6
141	Well, I suppose it's not embarrassing if you're talking to somebody who believes it, but... I, I, I am embarrassed by the fact that I bought into this for so long. I mean, really (shakes his head).	2	14	16 – 18
142	Have you heard of the creation museum somewhere down south there? Dinosaurs romping with people with children? Jeez. And people buy into this! Give your head a shake.	2	15	7 – 9
143	And you know, it's very difficult to find somebody to talk to.	2	15	16
144	Because my friend, my friend Silvia, I said, "Well, tell me, uh, well, they don't go to church or anything, I said, What are your beliefs?" And she said, "I'm a Christian." I said, "And what does that mean to you, really?" "Well I believe in Jesus Christ." I said, "Do you really? Have you thought about it?"	2	15	17 – 20
145	But it's just a different level of communication. You can't talk to...I mean, she's never explored religion, she just bought it hook, line, and sinker without any questions. So she doesn't have the position. And that's the case of a lot, of a lot of so-called religious people. Really can't defend it. Or have an inclination to even want to.	2	15	20 – 23
146	I think, um, as I think with the majority of people, it begins – it began for me – in childhood.	3 Cheryl	1	2 – 3
147	And then I remember growing up when I was very little, um, right at home, um, reading books with my mom...um, like story books, children's Bible stories.	3	1	6 – 8

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

No.	Significant Statement	Transcript #	Page #	Line(s) #
148	Like Noah's ark, the creation, Adam and Eve – but obviously for like, you know, three- and four-year olds. Coloring books, you know, stuff like that. It was Bible-centered.	3	1	10 – 12
149	I remember we had a little church in the community I was in, and I remember being in the church and being so tiny you could just barely peer over the pews and, you know, being told, "You have to kneel here."	3	1	14 – 16
150	Being in a Catholic school, you know, every day we're taught, there's religion class, and you learn the stories, and as you get older you learn more and more in-depth, but as kids, you know the stories and you don't cross the nuns.	3	1 2	21 1 – 3
151	You know, at a very young age it started and that's just what you knew. And you knew it because they taught it to you and if they taught it to you, it had to be true.	3	2	5 – 6
152	Like to me it was, OK, yup, Adam and Eve were real (nods) because, just like Cookie Monster was real to me too and Santa Clause. They were all real at six or seven. They were all real.	3	2	11 – 13
153	At six, if my mom said this person was real, then of course they were real! I don't know any different. And school, they're teaching it in school. Well, one and one is two, so there has to be Jesus. One and one is two...so...we have to have the Holy Trinity (smiles). It was school, we had religion class, just like we had science, and math, and spelling. It was Catholic school.	3	2	13 – 17
154	Yup. I remember in the mornings the buzzer would ring and we would, um, say the Lord's Prayer first thing in the morning. You know, our Lord who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. And look at that? Verbatim. That's insane. INSANE. And as easily as I can still rattle that off, we would sing O Canada right afterwards. So I mean in a nutshell there it is.	3	2	19 – 23
155	You become indoctrinated. You know no different and because it is part, it's just normal. That was (finger quotes) normal.	3	3	2 – 3
156	When I think what I would call the hardcore indoctrination happened, I was probably thirteen? Thirteen or fourteen. My grandfather passed away.	3	3	15 – 16

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

No.	Significant Statement	Transcript #	Page #	Line(s) #
157	And I really struggled with his passing because it was very sudden. And with that, I had lots of questions, right? Like at that young age and then losing someone significant...	3	3	17 – 18
158	You know, “Oh my God, he’s gone”; you know, “is there heaven? Is he really there?” All of that, right? At a young age and facing that now, and it was like, I don’t know what to do.	3	3	21 – 23
159	So that’s when this bond with this priest began. And of course, he’s telling me he’s in heaven. And of course I’m going to see him again, and come on in. So now it’s, “OK, come on back in, let’s do more. Why don’t you come to Mass tonight?”	3	3 4	23 1 – 2
160	Because it went from attending Mass on Sundays to attending Mass every day. Every day... And I think a lot of me also going and becoming more was an escape. Get out of the house in the evening and go to Mass...I would go there, spend the evening there – you have friends there, they all listen, they all enjoy your company.	3	4	7 – 12
161	And the more you’re there, the more you hear the word of God. And the more you hear the word...come on to this prayer group, come on. I became an altar server. Yes, I’m involved in it, yes. Participating in the sacraments, you go to confession once a week, you...all of it. And all because my grandfather passed and the right priest at the right time happened. The childhood programming allowed all that to happen.	3	4	14 – 18
162	I would pray. I would meditate on him. I had music. In my vehicle, putting in cassette tapes, religious music. Sure. Singing along. All the hymns. Yup.	3	4 5	22 – 23 1
163	Or if I had to be at home, in my room, that was a sanctuary. I had the cross, I had my posters, religious posters. Um, the inspirational stuff. All of that, it’d be on my walls as opposed to rock bands and movie posters. I didn’t have that. I had the religious everywhere. You know? The rosary. Yeah.	3	5	5 – 8
164	I even considered becoming a nun. You know, I’m getting older. I think I was 16 or 17 at that point, and it was, um, I started questioning, “Is this for me?” The way I investigated it...you know? And I met with, um, a nun, but my parents came with me.	3	6	10 – 13
165	I could understand why he wasn’t on board with...but then again...neither of them [her parents] were aware that, how indoctrinated I was becoming.	3	6	16 – 18

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

No.	Significant Statement	Transcript #	Page #	Line(s) #
166	It wasn't anyone at home pushing me: It was all me.	3	6	20
167	So upon finishing school, I went into emergency medicine. So you become an EMT and then a paramedic. So this is where some of the thinking is starting.	3	7	10 – 12
168	I don't know if it's questioning, but I don't have the opportunity to be at Mass every day now....because of work and school.	3	7	13 – 14
169	And I'm beginning to work as an EMT. Which I get to see reality now. People at their worst. I never see people at their best in that line of work.	3	7	16 – 18
170	...I'm still pushing myself; I'm still going to church once a week if I can get there because that's what I do. I have to make it work around my EMT schedule because it's shift work, but I'm still the driving force.	3	7	19 – 21
171	So I joined the military and, uh, you join for three years. So I join it, my faith is still the same, I'm doing my thing. And wherever I get posted, I make sure I find a church, I make sure I go to Mass, I make sure I can find another Catholic group that I can go...you know? I'm still praying, I'm still doing all the same. So it's still self-driven. I don't have anyone telling me I have to do it: I just know I have to do it.	3	8	5 – 9
172	But part of me is saying, "Wow, what's going on in the world out here? Look at all this shit that's happening." Because I'm no longer at home anymore, just dealing with life and death on the road. I'm now traveling the world and seeing other places and still dealing with all the life and death on the road.	3	8	9 – 12
173	So I'm seeking out people who are like-minded because it's comfort, it's the right people, it's praying, all of that. But at this same time, I'm going, "Wow, there's a lot out here! Look at all these people here. Well, they don't believe."	3	8	14 – 17
174	The first Gulf War happens. And you're like, "But they're all Muslims over there. What is this? What's the Muslim faith all about?" And you start seeing all these faiths and it's, "Huh, OK, but I'm a Catholic. The Pope, he's the leader of the church. You know? There's a billion of us...can't be wrong."	3	8 9	20 – 22 1

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

No.	Significant Statement	Transcript #	Page #	Line(s) #
175	One thing leads to another, and we end up getting married. I was adamant with him that we get married in a Catholic church. Because I'm the believer. And he knew that, that I was a believer. Am I attending Mass all the time now? No, I am not. That has fallen back...but I'm still a believer.	3	9	5 – 8
176	I could hear him. He wouldn't talk to me about it, right? It's not like he ever challenged me or anything, but I would hear him talking and I'd go, "Hmm..." but it wasn't enough yet. Because I'm still going, "Nah, can't be right." But I would hear, you know? Yeah, I get the universe is that old, but that doesn't mean that God didn't create it. And something's saying, "Well, evolution and fossils right? And dinosaurs...dinosaurs! Hmmm. Well maybe"	3	9	12 – 17
177	I thought, "Why couldn't it have happened both ways?" You know? Well, here's the evidence of the evolution, right? I mean Darwin. We learn it, I've read it, we were taught in school...however...of course, there was creation theory too. Right? Of course. But something inside of me is saying, "Hmmm..." And it's not going away. It's nagging me. It's just something that I, I, it's annoying me. It's OK, what else is going on here?	3	9	19 – 23
178	My dad was killed in a plane accident. And it was a huge impact on me. Yeah. Um, I think then everything that was chipping away, and all these things started coming forward really fast for me.	3	10	5 – 7
179	The questions: Well, how come him? And, really? I'll see him after? Like my grandfather? And, well...why is there never any proof? And all these things of miracles. Well, no, there are no such things as miracles because of this, this, and this. And why would God plan for him to die like that? And my dad, he must have been terrified. You know? And why would God do that?	3	10	7 – 11
180	And so I asked my friend, the priest, "Why him?" He said, "Well, it's his time." I said, "I don't accept that. How was it his time? Him and those other people? They all happened at THEIR TIME? What does that mean?" But things are starting to change now in my head.	3	10	11 – 13

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

No.	Significant Statement	Transcript #	Page #	Line(s) #
181	As slowly as I got indoctrinated, it was just the same way..."Nope, that's bullshit – next." To the point where I'm here now where I'm, "No, I don't believe in any of that." It wasn't a super-switch but it was a hard switch. Like something really hit hard when my dad died because that's when it came, "What the hell is going on here?"	3	10	16 – 19
182	Chipping away. I think it was like a sculpting, a little bit at a time, where the reality, the life-and-death reality, you know, me stepping in and saving someone, it wasn't me, it was God using me. And is it now? No. It was my bloody skills and know-how that saved that person's life, plain and simple. You know? Ok, that guy died. Was it his "time?" No! He had a super injury on him; there was no surviving it.	3	10 11	21 – 23 1 – 2
183	The chipping away, and then I think there was a big hammer, and then after that, big rocks started falling away. I think, though, it has to be the right moment.	3	11	3 – 4
184	Because I look at when my grandfather died, it was the right moment for somebody to take a young mind. As an older person, the right moment when my father died, there was my husband there, the reality-speaker, plus now the questions coming forward.	3	11	4 – 7
185	Because I think if you take a super-believer as an adult, I think something significant needs to happen. I can't see any true hardcore believer suddenly saying there is no God. Think they'd really resist that.	3	11	7 – 9
186	I guess I equate it to: you see these super-politicians that are against gay marriage until their son is gay.	3	11	10 – 11
187	Yeah, I have belief in nothing. I have belief in me and what I can do. I don't believe there is anything other than what we do as people. No. I have no beliefs. You know? I don't "believe" in atheism, there's no such thing. I have no faith. Nothing.	3	11	20 – 22
188	I think once I actually had, you know, no beliefs, I looked back at where I came from and what I was: I'm embarrassed at how weak minded...I was.	3	12	10 – 11
189	...but when I look back now, I think, "OK, I can see how you got there, but how did you keep believing as you got older? Why were you that weak minded that you could not? What did you need in your life that you thought you had to believe this?" It's embarrassing to think that I...I think that I'm a pretty intelligent person, but to see this, and to see what I was, I go, "You weren't that bright....if you bought that crap hook, line, and sinker."	3	12	17 – 21

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

No.	Significant Statement	Transcript #	Page #	Line(s) #
190	Like me insisting that Daryl, that he get married in a Catholic church. How dare I! ...It's absurd! I can't believe I had the audacity to make him do that. It's embarrassing and shameful. I feel horrible over that. Yeah, it's embarrassing...that I...you know? (shakes her head).	3	13	1 – 7
191	And you feel like an idiot. That I could be indoctrinated and not see it.	3	13	7
192	I think anything that starts with kids is how they get them.	3	13	10
193	But still...as kids though, I think that's how you get them. I think that's what it is for Catholics, I think that's what it is for Muslims, for Jewish, I think all of those, they get them as kids. And once they get them, they keep them.	3	13	12 – 14
194	There's no such thing as faith. There's just nothing. And, you know, the big questions I had when I was a kid on life and death...when your dead you're dead. That's it. That's it. There's nothing.	3	13	19 – 21
195	And I think a lot of why people get trapped in religion has to do with death. I honestly believe that. You know, and I think that's why religion is a big thing. It's a coping thing. Because everything has to deal with betterment when you've died. You are living this faith because when you die, this is what you get for living that faith.	3	13 14	21 – 23 1
196	And being that my life is in medicine, and I've held people, I've seen them die. I know, I've been there. It...they're dead. There's been no angels, there's been no lights coming down, there's been no spontaneous declarations as people die saying, "Jesus!" There's been... <u>nothing</u> . You're dead, you're dead. It's just it. They die.	3	14	2 – 5
197	You're there...and you're not. There's no soul coming out of them, there's no...nothing. So to answer your question: No, I have nothing that I'm dealing with, or having to keep telling myself, there's... you know? I'm, I'm free. Non-belief. It was a life's journey.	3	14	7 – 9
198	So, as most people, I think that my involvement – let's just say in religion – started as a child, essentially, because it's what my parents believed and I suspect it's what they wanted me to believe. Born into it. That's it.	4 Micah	1	3 – 5
199	...and I remember probably from the earliest age I can remember, probably around six, um, we would always be going to church. Every Sunday.	4	1	15 – 17

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

No.	Significant Statement	Transcript #	Page #	Line(s) #
200	I don't even know how, but I became an altar boy. And it was one of those things that, it just seemed like the thing to do.	4	1	19 – 20
201	...well, obviously, I was baptised, and then it was first communion, and then going through and confirmation, and all of those various steps.	4	2	1 – 2
202	When I started being an altar boy, and, and that whole involvement in going to church on Sundays was very much, that was part of life as well as being a part of the Catholic Church – you're involved with all of the religious studies that also go along with that. So you would have, ah, we'd have religious classes but then also had a number of things that we would be in church or school.	4	2	3 – 7
203	And the Noah's ark...I didn't think of it as a story then, right? You think, "Oh, OK, it's truly out there and this is...history," (making air quotes, smiles) "history", right? (laughs) And um, yeah, it was part of life.	4	2	19 – 21
204	I could draw a distinction between Santa Claus being fiction, even though I was told it as a child, um, that that story was just a story, but not this. And I think the reason for that is because when you got to a certain age, everybody knew it was a story, your parents knew it was a story, and finally you got to a point where that story, what became a story, was no longer truth, right? So a story is as true as you want it to be.	4	2 3	21 – 23 1 – 3
205	That was history. Growing up I was led to believe that these are all historical things. That Adam and Eve was history.	4	3	6 – 7
206	During that time, and going to church, and everything else, I didn't have, I never looked, I never analysed it. I never took the time to really think things through; it was just an accepted belief. It was just, that was the way it was, I had no reason to doubt it.	4	3	9 – 12
207	Um, when I think back now, if someone was to say, "it's all about faith" – it wasn't, it wasn't even a faith thing. I think at that age, I wouldn't rationalize it in the sense of faith; I was rationalizing it in the sense of, that's what it is! And that's what it was. And if somebody was to ever ask me, "Why do you believe that?" or if someone was to question me on it, I don't think I would say, "Well, that's my faith." I think I would say, "Because that's...because that's...true."	4	3	12 – 16

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

No.	Significant Statement	Transcript #	Page #	Line(s) #
208	... you know, some people will say, “Is raising a child in a religious environment paramount to child abuse?” – there is an argument for it, and I think everything needs to be taken in context.	4	3	20 – 21
209	So everything that I had involvement with was friends from school, friends from the neighbourhood, and everybody in the neighbourhood all went to the same church and all of the rest of it, so yeah, you’re right, very much a bubble of, “This is the information.” Nobody ever questioned me.	4	4	4 – 7
210	I wouldn’t have been an altar boy if I didn’t believe it.	4	5	3
211	I mean, I think as a child, though, I think as a child I had common sense. But to a degree that a child can comprehend things. And I have to say, I was always someone who questioned. I still am today.	4	5	5 – 7
212	And even as a child, and even in school...I did. If I didn’t like something...well, I always wanted to know why.	4	5	8 – 9
213	And I never truly believed that when they blessed the wine that it became blood. None of that rang true like from a physical true, true sense. Only because this is something that is...I can see it, right? It’s not something fabricated. If they said, “This turns to blood,” then you should be able to show me, you should be able to pour it out...	4	5	18 – 22
214	But if someone said, “This is the story of Jesus, and this is the story of Adam and Eve, and this is the story of the Ark, and you know two animals going in,” all of that? Never, never occurred to me to actually think that through. It was just, that’s what I believed, and it was what I believed because the church told me that, the school told me that, my parents told me that, my friends were all...they all believed that, and nobody ever told me anything different.	4	6	3 – 8
215	And I don’t even think I ever really had discussions with my parents or the church or anything else about, “You know, what is this? Does this, does this really make sense?” Not like the types of questions people would have today.	4	6	12 – 14
216	Again, there was never a need to question it. That’s just the way it was.	4	6	14 – 15
217	If it wasn’t...if I was to think back I would say to myself, “Why wouldn’t it be true? Why would somebody tell me all of this if it wasn’t true?”	4	6	15 – 16

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

No.	Significant Statement	Transcript #	Page #	Line(s) #
218	My transformation, um, I think I'm so at peace with my transformation because I made the decision on my own through thoughtful analysis that got me to where I am today, and nobody tried to convince me otherwise. I have never had at any time in my entire life somebody say to me, "Darrell, your belief is wrong. Your belief in God is wrong. You should think about the fact that there isn't a God out there..." or anything like that. Nobody had ever come to me. So my complete transformation is only because of how I see the world now.	4	6 7	19 – 23 1 – 2
219	My path...you know what? It was gradual, but it wasn't gradual.	4	7	5
220	It came to me on my own...I didn't have outside influences.	4	7	5 – 7
221	...I was a teenager. And by that time I was no longer praying before I went to bed, right? You're getting a little bit older and do I really need to do this?	4	7	11 – 12
222	So because we went to the public school system, now I no longer have religion in my day-to-day life. That's the first thing that happened.	4	8	2 – 3
223	...I was no longer, um, I think we started to go to church initially when we moved up there, but life changed. Now I'm in high school, I'm involved in more activities, I was involved in army cadets and so my weekends now had activities that were happening there, and slowly over those couple of years, I just no longer had the desire to go to church.	4	6	4 – 7
224	And it wasn't that I stopped believing, it's just there was never an ongoing influence in my life anymore. We didn't really talk about religion in the house, we didn't have...we weren't going to church, and I wasn't exposed to it in school, and all of my friends were now part of the public school system rather than the Catholic school system. So for all intents and purposes, we make the move to Yellowknife and religion disappears from my life.	4	8	18 – 22
225	There was no longer...my belief didn't stop, right? My belief...I still maintained belief but my belief is going to start to wane at this point. I didn't have people telling me every day, "Don't forget God is in your life, don't forget...and so on."	4	8 9	23 1 – 2

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

No.	Significant Statement	Transcript #	Page #	Line(s) #
226	And it's funny because now, as I think about it today, and, and I look at my present beliefs, is that if you have children, and you don't expose them to religion, and there is no religion in their life, even if you positively tell them there is no God, if no one is telling them there is one, would they manufacture it themselves in their mind?	4	9	5 – 8
227	...but when it comes to beliefs...anything, any sort of belief whatsoever right? Whether it's belief in God, whether it's a belief in the government is coming to get you, whether it's a belief in...whatever! Belief comes from your environment. You are a product of your environment when it comes to those sorts of things. You know, um...nurture vs. nature.	4	9	13 – 17
228	And so, now I'm in high school and I'm thinking, "OK, I actually believe in evolution because there is physical evidence and it's evidence that I find is compelling."	4	10	11 – 12
229	Is that I believe in science, but I also believed in God. And I actually answered my question. And I said to myself, I said, "Okay, if the Bible says that God created man in his own image, the Bible doesn't say what his image is: It just says his own image. So why didn't he create us as a single-celled ameba because that is what he is? And we...just simply evolved!"	4	10 11	20 – 23 1
230	And surprisingly, my dad told me there's no such thing as spacemen. There's no such thing as flying saucers and all the rest of that, right? And yet it seems almost as farfetched to believe in a flying saucer as it would be to believe in God.	4	11	10 – 13
231	...I would say to myself, "Why is it so hard to believe that there can't be intelligent life elsewhere on another planet?" I don't have any belief of that, right?	4	11	13 – 15
232	And the funny thing is, nobody ever told me this. It's just how I tried to come to some type of rationalization as to how can science and my belief in God still coexist.	4	11 12	23 1 – 2
233	I'm very much like I said before; I question things. I'm very much – I need to know the answer to things.	4	12	5 – 6
234	So now I'm finishing high school, I still believe in God, I, I think? And I say that..."I think," I still believe in God. Um, the first time that I believe I came to call myself agnostic was when I was in the military.	4	12	19 – 21
235	So maybe that was part of that initial thing for me where I began that whole critical thinking and looking at something and weighing the evidence and saying, "Does this make sense?"	4	13	8 – 10

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

No.	Significant Statement	Transcript #	Page #	Line(s) #
236	...I was already in my mind, although I still believed in God, in a sense, this is where I was beginning to question whether I was truly, whether I truly believed or not. And I think that from my critical analysis of things, I then started to say to myself, "Well, maybe I'm agnostic." But I didn't see agnostic as someone who was, who didn't believe in God. I felt that I was agnostic because I believed in God, but there was no evidence to support my belief.	4	14	9 – 14
237	So I think I gave myself a label to say that, you know, if I'm wrong...oops! You know? If there is a God, and I'm saying there isn't, it's only because I don't have enough evidence to, so then if I die and there is truly a God, then I'm safe, right?	4	14	14 – 17
238	But at the same time though, too, I already realized that believing in God or the Christian god is not the only god that's out there.	4	14	19 – 20
239	And I used to joke, I think I even joked with my dad one time. I said, "What if the Krishnas are right?" Like, how the heck do WE know? Right? If there's a thousand gods, and everybody's believing...not everybody can be right	4	14	20 – 23
240	So I have to think about it and say, "Well maybe there is a God, and maybe it's just one God, and maybe we just all see that God in a different light." But then how does that make the Bible the definitive source for that God?	4	15	1 – 3
241	I became more analytical.	4	15	11
242	If I was to put my hand on a Bible and swear and then lie about something or whatever, it didn't mean anything to me. Putting my hand on the Bible is nothing. The book is nothing.	4	15 16	22 – 23 1
243	And I was actually, and I had come to, at some point during this period of time, and like I said it was sort of a slow process, but it wasn't, right? It was... there was belief, then there was a lack of anything to keep me believing, and then there was critical thinking, and then there was a slow period of time where my critical thinking then allowed me to, to come to certain realizations myself.	4	16	1 – 5
244	And I remember going into court one day to testify about something, and I made the decision, "I'm not swearing on the Bible anymore."	4	16	6 – 8

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

No.	Significant Statement	Transcript #	Page #	Line(s) #
245	And so, I get up on the stand, and the, uh, and the judge, or sorry, the bailiff, comes over with the Bible, and I turn to the judge and I say, "I'd like to give a solemn affirmation." And the judge says, "Excuse me?" And I say, "a solemn affirmation." And he just looks at me, and the bailiff did not know, she didn't know what to do.	4	16	8 – 11
246	But you know what? I felt guilty. It's funny that I think about it now because I've never thought about this particular thing up until this point, but I actually felt guilty that other people were looking at me and...you know, it wasn't that I felt guilty that I said that I didn't want to swear on the Bible...	4	16	16 – 19
247	I felt shamed. That is exactly what it was. That other people were looking at me and that they were now judging me because I didn't believe.	4	16	21 – 22
248	Up until this point, nobody – I'd never talked to anybody about my foray into non-belief. I didn't think it was anybody's business. It's... whatever I believe is what I believe.	4	17	1 – 2
249	I don't care what you believe; I don't care what somebody else believes. You know what? You want to be a fundamentalist Christian, you want to do, you want to believe in Islam, you want to be a Buddhist, you want to do whatever: good for you, as long as that makes you a good person. As soon as your beliefs start to hurt other people, then I have a problem with you.	4	17	3 – 7
250	I have always believed, and I believe today, that we are where we are because of the decisions we make.	4	17 18	23 1
251	So that day in court where I decided that, no, I'm going to do that solemn affirmation, it actually...the feeling that I felt, from being judged, it actually made me more resolved in the position, in the feeling that I now had.	4	18	9 – 12

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

No.	Significant Statement	Transcript #	Page #	Line(s) #
252	<p>And he said, “All you have to believe...” and he said, “You have to believe in the Great Architect”, and I go, “What do you mean?” And he goes, “Well, you have to believe in God.” And I was like, “Oh yeah,” but I could justify that. That was the time when I just said, when I suddenly went...because you see, it comes down to, if I was a Mason, it would allow me to further my career.</p> <p>There are positive things for being involved in any fraternal organization, especially a powerful fraternal organization. But you know what? But I have a fair amount of...I have a lot of ethics, and I have a fair amount of, again, a lot of, integrity in myself...and there was no way I could do it because I’d have to say I believe in something I didn’t believe in. And that was it. That was the day.</p>	4	19	4 – 12
253	<p>It really comes down to, did I believe in God? And my answer was, “There’s no evidence to support that there is God, but...that’s it. So would I say there is no God? No. I wouldn’t say there is no God, but until somebody provides me with evidence of it, I will withhold my judgement.” That was my answer.</p>	4	19	18 – 21
254	<p>So at that point I never really, I would never outwardly articulate, there is no God...but I did not believe and I knew it at the time.</p>	4	20	6 – 8
255	<p>I don’t feel shame about believing in it; I don’t feel embarrassment about believing in it.</p>	4	20	22 – 23
256	<p>I feel somewhat foolish that I believed in it, but I’m going to go back to that same thing that I don’t live in regret. That it is what it is. I believed it because, at the time, I had no reason to doubt it.</p>	4	20 21	23 1 – 2
257	<p>When I look at myself today, I go the cons...oh, there it is....the concept of believing in it is foolish; the concept of it is stupid.</p>	4	21	4 – 6
258	<p>If I did wrong, if I wronged somebody through my belief, then I would feel bad. But I never wronged anybody through my belief.</p>	4	21	6 – 8
259	<p>My belief, and my journey from belief to non-belief, was a solo journey. It was something where I took the information that I had, and over time I gathered more information, and I analyzed that information, and then I got to a point where I am today.</p>	4	21	8 – 10
260	<p>And I’m not there anymore, and so now I’ve moved on. So the concept? Stupid and foolish.</p>	4	21	14 – 15

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

No.	Significant Statement	Transcript #	Page #	Line(s) #
261	The beliefs are foolish. I am not foolish for believing in them. And that is why I don't dislike other people who believe. I just don't want to freakin' hear about it every single day.	4	21	19 – 21
262	And I was just at the right point – I think I was like 18 years old – where I just needed to really move in another direction, and he started inviting me out to things.	5 Riley	1	14 – 15
263	I think the first real emotional, spiritual experience I had was he took me to his campus at...it used to be called North American Baptist College.	5	1	15 – 17
264	So, I had a really big emotional experience there. After that, you know, I had the Jesus tape, (finger quotes) with the Sinner's Prayer and the passion of Christ kind of idea...	5	2	2 – 3
265	I watched that video so many times cuz I was really big on the emotion of it, and crying about it, and really laying down everything, like, "I want this, I want to experience it."	5	2	4 – 6
266	And I had some friends that were Pentecostal, so I kind of had some influences on the idea that things had to be emotional, and that you had to have a slaying of the spirit in order to be saved or know that you're saved and stuff like that so... That was the beginning of everything for me	5	2	6 – 9
267	I was actually attending (Baptist church) and very charismatic leader there, and he was giving a sermon one day, and there was an altar call, and I totally went up and gave my life up there.	5	2	11 – 13
268	I did my whole testimony thing a couple of days later and then a baptism a couple of weeks after that, after I did some programming to make certain I believed the same things that they believed.	5	2	13 – 15
269	So she wasn't going to be committed, so I was worried about the unequal yoke things from the Bible and stuff like that. So I actually broke up about that.	5	3	6 – 8
270	I found some Christians in class that were the Alliance guys and the Pentecostal guys. So I moved in with them. It was a whole household of people and it was pretty extreme cuz we had some roommates back then that were part of...it was called The Awakening.	5	3	8 – 11
271	And the household I lived in was really extreme. I had guys that married their significant others because they had got involved with sex with them.	5	3	16 – 18

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

No.	Significant Statement	Transcript #	Page #	Line(s) #
272	And then the guy that owned the house, you know, he wouldn't even masturbate. He hadn't masturbated in like three-plus years. He was waiting for God to give him a perfect sign and, um, a perfect girl. He thought if he just sacrificed that, that that would be his direction for him.	5	3	19 – 22
273	Yeah, a pretty extreme house (laughs...looks down and goes quiet).	5	4	1
274	I was kind of in two worlds. I was in the prisons trying to do ministry to people, and I was also in the soup half of it trying to help the poor and stuff like that.	5	4	10 – 11
275	And in the church itself is where I was doing most of my ministry. I was really focused, and the senior pastor we had was kind of like mentoring me and I was doing some sermons there and stuff like that.	5	4	12 – 14
276	It got really, really hard because there was so much mental illness down there that people were like, "Yeah, I see demons in the mirrors," and part of me was like, "Biblically I can see that," and another part of me was like, "You're crazy," and it caused a lot of conflict within me. So I didn't know what was real and what wasn't real if that makes any sense.	5	4	15 – 19
277	Are you experiencing something or are you crazy? That's always been my thing. Like when my roommate that I had could always speak in tongues, and I could never speak in tongues. It drove me crazy, and he just said he could just...do it.	5	4	21 – 23
278	It's like, well, then are you experiencing it? Is it coming over you? Or are you just babbling?	5	4 5	23 1
279	But for him, he'd get all emotional when it happened, so I'd think, "Well, I'm not going to cry if I'm just lying about it. So he must be experiencing something."	5	5	1 – 3
280	And sometimes when I didn't have my experiences, I thought that was Satan, um, trying to put doubts in my mind about things.	5	5	7 – 9
281	It's weird that way. It's like everything can be confirmation bias.	5	5	9
282	I always used to believe that the biggest or the best lie that Satan ever told was that God doesn't exist. And it was like that was one of those things that would really make me apprehensive.	5	5	10 – 12
283	It came to the point where I'd do weird prayers.	5	5	12 – 13

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

No.	Significant Statement	Transcript #	Page #	Line(s) #
284	I just happened to get on the exact same – she went on a different bus than me, and yet we’re on the same train. I thought, “Oh, this is now a sign from God as he’s alright with this kind of idea, so...” (shrugs).	5	6	2 – 4
285	So it’s a weird world to get into when you think it through too much.	5	6	17 – 18
286	... my first area that I went into that allowed my imagination to take such a hold of me was Dungeons and Dragons. And that’s not some “gateway” kind of thing. It’s just the idea that you can just sink into your imagination what could and couldn’t be. You could imagine things; it makes you think different things. And that a, there was like a very strong connection there for me.	5	6 7	19 – 22 1
287	My people say this to me, “It’s amazing how far you fell in,” and I think it’s a group-think thing cuz I didn’t have the same friends I had anymore. I kind of walked into a new world with all new friends and they all had these ideas, and whenever I had a question, people would give these kind of answers and they kind of made sense to me when I read the Bible and stuff like that.	5	7	8 - 12
288	People could do that for me because I didn’t know anything about the world and I just kind of accepted it. Like almost like group-think. I didn’t, I didn’t really think about anything. In fact, I hadn’t even read a book in my entire life at that point.	5	7	16 – 19
289	That’s actually one of the worst things about not being a Christian anymore because I’m still absorbed into it. Um, but just in a different regard.	5	8	5 – 6
290	And then, when I meet other people who are still Christian, I just...not to beat them up, I just wonder how they can hold onto certain things in light of other information that’s out there. That’s my biggest thing.	5	8	10 – 12
291	I just, I would love to hold onto the same kind of things that people hold onto but I can’t. It makes no sense to even hold those views. I don’t understand how they hold them.	5	8	13 – 15
292	I was completely in a bubble...I would say yeah, I had nothing outside of it.	5	8	20 – 22

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

No.	Significant Statement	Transcript #	Page #	Line(s) #
293	And this was like an epiphany because I had that experience at school where I was crying, and then this guy's telling me this kind of stuff, and it was like all these little hits I was having just made a lot of sense to me. And then that's when I really started taking things seriously.	5	9	8 – 10
294	I think when it started [the doubts] was when I started seeing the hypocrisy of the church itself.	5	9	19
295	So I got a second job, and then they wouldn't let me stay at the church anymore...And then I kind of fell away from there, and when I fell away from there, I got into different circles of friends and that allowed me to start investigating things a little more normally.	5	10	13 – 17
296	I remember one day, one guy said to me...uh...anyway it was one of those things where he reversed the question on me and it was, like, "Yeah, why don't I think of it that way?" Like why is it kept half full and not half empty? Like you could see it either way.	5	10	17 - 19
297	And it was, like, that totally makes sense!	5	10	21
298	..because I have certain opinions on things like...If someone calls themselves an atheist, and they have no reasoning behind that, any information behind why they are what they are, other than that's the default position for them, like, "I don't see a reason for there to be a God, so there's no God." If you haven't thought about the hard questions and had to struggle with the philosophy, then I feel contemptuous about you.	5	11	8 – 12
299	I do feel like I'm more an atheist than you are cuz I can articulate and argue why I don't believe things. Because I went through both perspectives.	5	11	13 – 14
300	So that kind of bugs me. So when you say someone's secular, I think like yourself. You can say you're secular, and I'd believe, yeah, you're secular, (puts his fist forward) pound the hand. But when someone else says it, like my neighbour, "I don't believe in God," well, WHY don't you believe in God? Because I have reasons for why I don't believe in God.	5	11	16 – 19
301	But ah, I really started to pull away around 2005. But I didn't pull away just from, from Christianity per se. I kind of fell backwards through things.	5	12	12 – 14
302	Certain things started to fall away, certain theologies started falling away piece by piece, and then they sort of became less and less of certain things.	5	12	16 – 17

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

No.	Significant Statement	Transcript #	Page #	Line(s) #
303	Where, OK, maybe the Bible isn't inerrant, but it was inerrant at one point, and now I see some of the contradictions so maybe I could see it that way.	5	12	17 – 19
304	At the point of my life where I didn't have answers about direction and stuff like that, or purpose, it was all thrust upon me by Christianity, and I really enjoyed that because now I had something. You know, before I had nothing. I didn't know what to do with myself. I didn't know what made for a moral person, or a good person, or direction in life, or purpose in life, and these things were thrust upon me and I really enjoyed that.	5	13	3 – 7
305	And that was one of the biggest things that hit me the hardest when I started leaving because I kind of fell into some nihilism at the end of it before I kind of pulled myself up.	5	13	7 – 9
306	Even with my transition from Christianity to, like, a lax Christian on things – like a Liberal Christian – I kind of fell into Deism and stuff like that, and Buddhism. I kept falling back, and back, and back, further and further, trying to find religions that didn't have gods, that were still religions, to find some kind of purpose for things, like Hinduism which has multiple gods but you don't have to believe in a god if you don't want to.	5	13	9 – 14
307	I think it was – when it really started – was when I read a couple books about, um, the historical Jesus, and whether or not he existed as a human.	5	13	16 – 17
308	And then I started thinking, “Okay, there was Jesus and maybe, um, these accounts, really, are like a car accident and you have different people giving different views on things. It doesn't disprove anything: It's just peoples' different opinions on things. It didn't make a lot of sense. That's why I kind of got away from the inerrancy at first; but the gold thread still runs through it, stuff like that.	5	13 14	23 1 – 4
309	I still believe Jesus existed as a historical character; I just don't believe any of the miracles that are attributed to him, or even some of the things he even said are attributed to him, “I am God,” stuff like that.	5	14	5 – 7
310	So when it really got down to that stuff, Jesus started falling away when I started studying the historicalness of him.	5	14	10 – 11

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

No.	Significant Statement	Transcript #	Page #	Line(s) #
311	And then really it was understanding the heroes of that time. Like people who were similar – similar stories. Like there's Horus, who has like a really similar story to Jesus, which predates Jesus. And then I read all that kind of stuff, and I read the defence of that is maybe Satan put those prototypes there? (incredulous face) Like that?	5	14	11 – 15
312	Yeah! I was like, "That's getting really far out there." This stuff should, like, make a LITTLE more sense. That's when Jesus kind of fell away from being God to being a symbol of some sort to me. Like, he's still a good moral teacher.	5	14	14 – 16
313	So then it kind of got away from the whole Jesus is God, to a deistic god, that we can worship, that wants to be worshiped, that we can pray to, stuff like that.	5	15	1 – 3
314	I couldn't do anything myself, I had to get all my answers from the external, whether it be from prayer or other godly men.	5	15	11 – 12
315	If there's one thing about me it was: I put my feet in, and then I submerged myself. I put my toe in, and then I just fell in.	5	15	16 – 17
316	Then my ethics class, the questions of whether or not you could be moral and not be a believer came up. And that's when I started investigating the other half as well, where I started saying, "You know what? I was a pretty moral person without God before I became a Christian."	5	16	5 – 8
317	You know, I didn't drink till I was of age; I've never done drugs – this is without the guidance of God in my life – it was just things that I didn't do. You know, I stole when I was little, and I learned my lessons and I didn't steal again and... So my ethics class kind of brought things forward, and then my philosophy class brought a lot of things more forward on questioning things. And that's when everything started unraveling. I started reading everything.	5	16	9 – 14
318	My brother did say this, but...I think that he agrees with me when I say this. It seems that education either enforces or destroys your faith.	5	16	15 – 16
319	I think when I just kept unrolling everything. It came down to the point where I got to a deistic god and then I said, "If there even is a deistic god, which we can or cannot disprove whether there is or is not...then what is the point of it?"	5	17	1 – 3

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

No.	Significant Statement	Transcript #	Page #	Line(s) #
320	If it just started everything, there's no point to worship it, it doesn't care if you worship it. I just said, "Then I see no evidence for it." And as I realized that the absence of evidence is not the evidence of absence, and vice versa, I just thought, "There's no point to believe in a God anymore." It doesn't change anything for me even if there is a deistic god.	5	17	3 – 7
321	Cuz when I got down to the: this is a big farce and I've been led into something that I didn't think I was going to go, that I had to find something to get me out of it because I started wondering, "What is the purpose? What is my purpose?"	5	17	13 – 16
322	Um, not going to kill myself, and I don't want to believe in God, so I'm just going to have to live with these problems and just deal with them as I can.	5	17	21 – 22
323	And that's why I like to find people who are like-minded. And that's kind of hard to find because even my wife, she doesn't investigate anything.	5	18	1 – 3
324	She just stopped believing and...moves forward in life, whereas I kind of went through these really bad times where I just wanted to...like when I journal, when I have really bad thoughts, I just like wanted to walk out the door and just go. Because it made no sense. It made no sense to be in a relationship, it made no sense to be here, it made no sense for anything. Nothing felt like anything, I just wanted to go.	5	18	3 – 7
325	And uh, it was very emotional at those times. I wasn't thinking suicide: I just didn't understand what I was supposed to do because I had nothing when I grew up, then religion gave me everything, and then I took it away, or it took itself away from ME.	5	18	7 – 10
326	<u>And the biggest thing I found is that...there is nothing out there to help people who walk away from something like this. And that was what drove me crazy. But I did find a podcast called <i>Living After Faith</i>, which helped me IMMENSELY.</u>	5	18	11 – 13
327	And from there I tried to find other things that were helpful, like that were similar. I started picking up a lot of books dealing with depression and stuff like that because I started feeling really depressed afterward. But really what happened was that guy's podcast was the saving grace for me at that point cuz he went through the exact same thing, it seems like.	5	18	17 – 21

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

No.	Significant Statement	Transcript #	Page #	Line(s) #
328	I don't think I'll ever get back to it. I'd love to be able to get back to it, um, but it doesn't make any sense to me so I just... I didn't reason my way into it, and I reasoned myself out of it, and I don't think you can be reasoned back into it.	5	19	3 – 5
329	But, you know, I kind of see things a bit different, because religion made things special. But now I think to myself, the fact that I'm not going to live on forever, makes things, makes this time more special and you have to make more choices, about not doing overtime, about spending time with your family because there's no guarantee of tomorrow, and there's no guarantee you're going to see anything ever again.	5	19	8 – 12
330	And during times of study, I studied the efficacy of prayer. So that kind of stuff really swayed me as well towards walking away from prayer. And then I'd do my own things like, you know, the whole sheep-wool on the ground, from the Bible. I'm going to try this one, God. If you're there, it's going to happen or it's not going to happen. And then nothing happens...(shrugs)...you know...(laughs).	5	20	17 – 21
331	Everything makes sense when you keep it in its box. But as soon as you open up the box to get the fingers in from other areas? Then it starts to fall apart again.	5	21	3 – 4
332	I was born into Lutheranism, I'll say that. I come from a family with a non-believing father and a believing mother. She was raised Evangelical Christian, um, my father was the one who steered us towards Lutheran.	6 Cheryl	1	3 – 5
333	She gives God a lot of the credit where I'm like, I came to a place personally where I was like, "God didn't get me through that, I got me through that."	6	3	10 – 12
334	Like thank you God for the food on the table? How about thank the farmer? Who my dad was, right? I saw how all that came to be. Like, well when it doesn't rain, the food doesn't grow. Why are we giving God the credit for that? That's really shitty.	6	3	14 – 16
335	That I will say always bothered me a little bit. I can remember things like that as a child being like, you're thanking God for all the good things? Why do all the bad things happen?	6	3	20 – 22
336	Our neighbours, over a simple thing of, "How often should we have communion," separated. There was a distinct line. And that was really hard for me to go through.	6	4	5 – 7

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

No.	Significant Statement	Transcript #	Page #	Line(s) #
337	...I'm old enough to question, and this is the man teaching me confirmation – good ol' Lutheran, um, (mocking voice) "I look at pictures of naked women and I watch violent movies, but if I don't act on them, you know, that's fine." (Gives a look that suggests this is questionable).	6	4	8 – 11
338	Yeah, a lot of inconsistencies to what people who were supposed to be authorities on the Bible. They're just skewing it to make it so that I'm OK, I'm not doing anything wrong.	6	4	13 – 14
339	...and you're sitting and telling these impressionable teenagers that it's OK to look at naked women?	6	4	16 – 17
340	It's sin of the heart, it's the sin of thinking, and yet you're sitting there saying it's OK and then all this confusion. I remember seeing my brother struggle with that. And I remember thinking that was very odd of him to say that. He could just pick and choose what he liked.	6	4	18 – 21
341	We used to go to church school once a week.	6	5	8
342	I remember I actually had the Children's Bible which skews a lot of the facts to make it kid-friendly. I use it to press flowers now (bursts out laughing), but it's this thick book with some pretty decent pictures that I can remember my mom sitting and reading us bedtime stories.	6	5	12 – 15
343	Going back to, though, my mom's church, one thing that I remember being very pivotal in my beliefs was...seven years old? I started going to Bible camp.	6	5	17 – 19
344	I felt like I was getting fed there.	6	5	20
345	But those summer camps, that was that bridge of more of an emotional experience, less of the ritual, and that was what I always felt really fed my faith.	6	7	1 – 2
346	Like, "Oh, I could go home and I can, I could witness to people!" Well...sort of (laughs). I was, "Am I a good Christian if I don't witness to people?" Yeah, oh God...things to never do to my children.	6	7	4 – 6
347	But that was something that...you were guilted into feeling that you should be talking to people about your faith and that you should be ready to witness at any time.	6	7	8 – 10
348	But I remember one year sitting down in the basement and telling myself that I needed to read the Bible, even the Old Testament which was really, really hard (laughs). When you're a kid and you think you're going to run with it, and again I remember I started singing songs about Jesus...	6	7	6 – 9

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

No.	Significant Statement	Transcript #	Page #	Line(s) #
349	It's your strength and it's your...right? This is how I get along with people, this is how I dissuade my fears of the future, right? You're worried about what you're going to do after high school, that's a pretty heavy, heady time in your life and that spills out because that's what you use to get you through.	6	8	15 – 18
350	And I went to [a Baptist college] for two years for a music diploma. Trying it out to see if I could go to a university for arts, ah, as a music major. And part of me was thinking about being a music pastor in a church because then at that time I was attending [a Baptist church] which was quite a large congregation and they actually paid their music pastor to be on staff. And I thought, "Wow wouldn't that be lovely? Music and getting paid to work in a church?"	6	9	6 – 10
351	One thing that always bothered me were all the Bible verses about, "Women, be submissive," and I was, "Really?"	6	9	20 – 22
352	Don't tell me what to do! "Submissive," that's my dirty word, whoa! Ask me about our wedding vows where I laughed in the guy's face.	6	10	3 – 5
353	Growing up in a culture where we are taught to be equals, I mean, I'm not yet 40 years old, so I'm young enough to know that I'm not expected to wear the apron and wait for my husband to come home and the kids have their hair combed, and wearing ties and suits, and sit down to a fully plated meal.	6	10	5 – 8
354	But then you have this conservative Christian mentality of women should just stay at home. Just stay at home and raise kids.	6	10	9 – 10
355	I slowly started thinking about becoming a – what's it called? – a missionary.	6	10	14 – 15
356	And they're kissing you and they're crying and you're thinking, "Wow, God really sent us here to help these people out."	6	10	21 – 22
357	I got no support from the youth pastor, where I said, "You know, I think God is really calling me to do this."	6	10 11	23 1
358	That was really off-putting of, isn't this what you want people to do? You want them to say, "I'm giving up all my possessions, and I'm going to go wherever God calls me to, to proselytize and save people's souls." And he just left me sitting there with my guts hanging out, essentially. And I thought, "Wow, fuck you right back."	6	11	8 – 11

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

No.	Significant Statement	Transcript #	Page #	Line(s) #
359	<p>They organized a trip to go to Mozambique, and I went with them there, and I asked for something as simple as having it announced in the newsletter at this very large congregation of this Baptist church that I'd been attending for six-seven years, singing in the worship team...</p> <p>But, "No," because it hadn't officially gone through the Mission Committee that this was an official mission they could sanction by the congregation, I couldn't put the announcement in.</p>	6	11 11 12	17 – 20 23 1 – 2
360	That's when I kind of went, "Oh, you know, I'm feeling very much like a small town country girl in a city church all of a sudden." And I was like, "Yeah, I'm good, I'm good for a change."	6	12	2 – 4
361	And here I'm thinking, "Really? Is that the best you can do? I've been coming here for a long time. And not just coming and sitting in the back pews. I'm up at the front and you see me singing...into the microphone. Both services! There's no excuse then! Of course, looking back I see it all as, doubts started, doubts started.	6	12	9 – 12
362	<p>I remember going and shaking the pastor's hand one day as he's standing at the door, and I realize they get a lot, but he's like, "How are you?" And I'm like, "I'm not really good, I'm struggling at work, and I need a change, and I don't know what to do, and I can't say I'm good."</p> <p>And again, just left there at the door of, "I just wanted to shake your hand," but no offer to contact me where I'm like, "Really? I know you go and meet other people for coffee and isn't it your job as a pastor to counsel people through the hard times in their life? Not just the people who came from the little church that you moved to, to this big beautiful building that is paid by not tax dollars." Yeah, I'd been here. I felt like I had paid my dues and got nothing out of it.</p>	6	12	12 – 15 18 – 22
363	Well, it just felt like when I need something there's nothing there. There's nobody to come talk to me and say, "Well, what do you need?"	6	13	1 – 2
364	There was nobody there. Especially when I was at this pinnacle point in my life.	6	13	3 – 4
365	So then you start to question, well, maybe God...I feel like God is telling me I should be doing this, but I'm not getting any support. Is that an answer from you? Oh God, the questioning!	6	13	9 – 11

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

No.	Significant Statement	Transcript #	Page #	Line(s) #
366	Again, feeling really big there, and feeling left out, and I thought, I remember at one time thinking, “If I wasn’t actually sitting in the choir, I don’t feel like I’d have a spot out in the congregation.”	6	13	15 – 17
367	I was the faithful one of, “God will make it all work.” And he [her husband] was still struggling with his ex-wife...	6	14	20 – 21
368	And lack of sex played a really big part in that in that I was “The Virgin”, capital T, capital V.	6	15	4 – 5
369	Well, the contradictions of the Gospels, right? That’s a big one. Or how they each had their own theme. And they touched very briefly on the fact that this theme was prevalent in other ancient religions, but...	6	15	19 – 21
370	There was also the New Testament stuff of, “Well we think that Paul was talking to rash women who were disrupting the services,” right?	6	16	2 – 3
371	“We don’t want to have to tell you that you should be barefoot and pregnant in the kitchen like Paul says, but we’re going to put our own modern spin on it...and, ah, it’s just this bullshit that they spewed out to kind of cover up the fact that this Paul dude was a sexist loner.	6	16	3 – 8
372	And all the mission trips. Just people asking me, “Well, did you get to witness?” Or, “What church did you go with?” Like that mattered.	6	16	10 – 11
373	We were there building houses in Christ’s name and putting a roof over their head and that wasn’t good enough for you!	6	16	11 – 12
374	Coming home from that and going to my mom’s church and talking, and he was always just so pissed off with people who were like, “Well, were you able to preach Jesus there?” Like it had all been for naught if you hadn’t.	6	16	18 – 20
375	They live in a garbage, they get raped or they get abandoned, they get raised by who the hell knows – aunties, uncles – because their mom and dad are high or not around, but you’re worried whether or not they had Noah’s ark told to them in the library or whether they could pray or say grace.	6	16 17	22 – 23 1 – 2
376	I came home still a believer but pissed off.	6	17	9
377	When I went to Mexico, same kind of attitude of, “Why can’t they build their own houses?”	6	17	9 – 10

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

No.	Significant Statement	Transcript #	Page #	Line(s) #
378	...Guatemala, we went to a non-Christian affiliated organization and people questioning that? And I was like, “Are you kidding me? You sit in your padded couch and watch the news and you’re separate from it and your fat fridge full of food and no worms or parasites and electricity when you flick the switch and ah...	6	17	16 – 19
379	I still came back from Guatemala still a believer, I still called myself a Christian. And that bothered THE SHIT out of me. Yeah, those are probably two big main themes that I have now in my contempt for Christianity and Christians.	6	18	1 – 3
380	That there has to be some motive of, “Am I going to get points to go to heaven if I do this? Do I get a tax receipt if I put my money in the plate?”	6	18	5 – 6
381	My mom firmly believes that Jesus will come back in her lifetime. He’ll fix the world, all the crap we’ve been doing to it.	6	18	7 – 8
382	...“God will, God will fix it all.” (Her eyes get real big) Oh, you want to piss me off? Tell me that. Those are all things that really pushed me at the end.	6	18	10 – 12
383	The big, um, nail on the head, or, yeah, hitting the nail on the head, was Joe and I built this house and we still hadn’t had sex and we’re still not engaged.	6	18	12 – 13
384	And I was still holding on to my capital “T”, capital “V”, and Joe would keep questioning me, he was getting quite angry, um, and rightly so...because I wouldn’t allow myself to question it. That was my identity and that was what the Bible said.	6	18	13 – 16
385	And there’s lots of stuff in the Bible that I’ve been picking and choosing: How can I pick and choose that which is so fundamental to, if I really believe, I won’t give in because it’s not the right thing to do.	6	18	16 – 18
386	We fooled around, and frustrating as it was not to go all the way, and knowing that it was a big wedge in our relationship, and I still wouldn’t give it up. I was still holding onto that identity.	6	18	21 – 23
387	Yup, he challenged me one day and I couldn’t give him an answer as to why, outside of what the Bible said, I would wait.	6	19	5 – 6

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

No.	Significant Statement	Transcript #	Page #	Line(s) #
388	Here I'm looking at a man I love, that I want to be intimate with, and won't let myself based on some tiny thread I'm holding onto of "No! God says it's wrong!" Other people aren't being struck down by lightning because they have sex, and I would say this to myself, "Other people did it and they're not bad Christians. I plan on marrying this guy, doesn't that make it okay?"	6	19	6 – 10
389	...I couldn't give him an answer and I had to admit to myself that, no, this thing that I'd been holding onto for SO LONG was something that I had to finally give up.	6	19	14 – 16
390	So I did concede, and we had sex, and there was no lightning from heaven, and I remember thinking, and looking up at the sky and going, "All that for nothing! Is there really anybody out there?" I seriously did that. "Where the fuck are you now?" Of all the things that I had to give up, and I held out FOR YOU God! Big sacrifices! And then really nothing happened.	6	19	16 – 20
391	All this stuff had been building up and that was the big whoosh! Just strap on the skis and straight down the hill. Nobody's there.	6	20	7 – 8
392	All the prayers, and the waiting to see what God would put in my lap and give me for opportunities, because that was really what I was doing, "Pray about it and see what God says. What should I do for another job?"	6	20	10 – 12
393	So for me the end came shortly after, where all the stuff that I learned in school – I think the big one was I watched "Religulous" [A documentary by Bill Maher], and I was, "Oh my God! That's what I used to say and I'm embarrassed by that. I'm embarrassed that that used to be me." That I think was the end.	6	20 21	21 – 23 1 – 2
394	I don't have to be that person anymore saying the cheesy, (mocking little girl voice) "Everybody has a Jesus-sized hole in their heart," right?	6	21	2 – 3
395	I don't know if there's a heaven but I'm going to hope because that means all the shitty things I've done, or the people that I didn't spend enough time with before they died, I can go and I can make up for that. That was gone...and I let go of that.	6	21	6 – 9
396	And then I thought, "It's gone, it's gone. Let's move on." So now I have to worry about what I do now every day. I have to make my own god-damned decisions and not pray and wait.	6	21	19 – 21

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

No.	Significant Statement	Transcript #	Page #	Line(s) #
397	And that means I care for people because I care for people and not because I have some hidden agenda of Bible-thumping them.	6	21 22	22 – 23 1
398	I have homosexual friends. I have arguments with my mom about religion and politics, and I've never come right out to her and said I no longer believe. She knows it.	6	22	1 – 2
399	I'm becoming more and more vocal about posting things on Facebook of "Just Us Heathens," this study that finds that, you know, non-believers do a better job actually of raising happier kids. I'm like, "Yeah," because I was so fearful, and guilty, and questioning, and waiting, and inactive, that I was always encouraged to pray and wait, pray and wait. I won't do that to my kids. I won't be doing that to my kids. So, yeah, from one spectrum to the other.	6	22	2 – 7
400	I mean, I can see how other people would be embarrassed...because you spout this bullshit, and then you look back on that and you go (hiding her face), "Oh my God! Really? Did I say that? Was I this self-righteous, hypocritical..."	6	22	17 – 19
401	And it was always this, "I'm better than you are, I'm the capital "V" virgin. That's embarrassing to me. I'd like to actually go back and apologize to some people. And they'd probably look at me and go, "What?" But really, I'd like to have coffee and I'd be so much cooler to talk to now.	6	22 23	21 – 23 1
402	I feel I'm a better person now. I...the guilt...I didn't realize until it was gone.	6	23	2
403	..."Can I be a good enough Christian if I don't witness? I didn't witness enough, right? Oh God, I didn't read my Bible enough, I didn't meet the quota, right? I didn't memorize enough scripture verses. Am I a good Christian? I don't believe hard enough; maybe I should be submissive. If I was a better Christian, maybe I should WANT to be submissive."	6	23	4 – 8
404	That whole guilt...gone!	6	23	8
405	Yeah, I'm a much better person now. That's gone...and I am still me. I'm very opinionated, I'm very vocal, but I don't hold things over people's heads.	6	23	9 – 10

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

No.	Significant Statement	Transcript #	Page #	Line(s) #
406	...“People try to be the best person they can be,” and I’m like, “No they don’t, no they don’t. It’s all selfish motivation.” And I’m not going to hold that against them. I might be annoyed by it and I might not like it. I might think, “I don’t want to be that person.” I want to learn through other people’s mistakes.	6	23	11 – 14
407	But I’m not going to be the one who procrastinates the most important things. I’m going to say, “I love you,” and not worry about the guilt that has. I mean, I tell my children they’re beautiful, and not that God thinks they’re beautiful, or that God made you beautiful, you ARE beautiful. Yeah, no agenda, no guilt, no piling it on.	6	23	14 – 18
408	My journey was, um, very lengthy. I grew up in a fundamentalist home and went through the indoctrination/ socialization that you go through in childhood and the teen years, specifically when you’re in that inductive shield, where all your friends have to be from the same way of thinking, the same church.	7 Ryan	1	2 – 5
409	You’re not allowed to associate with people from outside that indoctrinated shield.	7	1	5 – 6
410	I left home when I was a teenager to play hockey and I went into the world but I still took all those categories for interpreting natural phenomenon that I was socialized into as a child and a teenager, and they remained largely unchallenged for a good deal of my adult life.	7	1	6 – 9
411	And then, ironically, it wasn’t until I went to a Christian school and started taking science classes in a Christian school that I started to consider...and I went to this Christian school very much with the purpose of vocation...of maybe being a pastor or a writer.	7	1	9 – 11
412	So I went to this Christian school and I was going to really “find my way” (finger quotes) in the Christian world, and I was going to be a voice or a pastor of some sort.	7	1	15 – 17
413	And I started to do history classes, science classes, and I really for the first time in my life...I wasn’t even at this point, I wasn’t really challenged. I just started to notice, um, a different way to interpret reality or evaluate truth claims. And so that would have been my first kind of stumbling steps.	7	1	17 – 20

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

No.	Significant Statement	Transcript #	Page #	Line(s) #
414	Again, what I think would be really important in this discussion is that you see so many stories that happen in secular schools where their faith is attacked. In this entire process for me, I was in, uh, spirituality classes, faith classes. They were trying to reaffirm my faith this entire time, but I kept seeing these other ways in these discussions where like...these people seemed to be asking the same questions but coming to different results. How were they doing this? So that was the first real step for me and then I spent several...well basically seven years in the academy.	7	1 2	21 1 – 6
415	I call it the inductive shield. You, you're under this inductive shield. And when you're socialized and indoctrinated under the inductive shield, you basically grow up in this, um, "Do not question the man of the Lord," right? I mean that's just Part A foundation of how you grow up. I mean, they start that...when you're three, four years old, basically. So if the pastor, Mom, Dad, tells you the world is 6000 years old, it just, it doesn't even begin to enter your mind that stuff like that is not true.	7	3	4 – 9
416	You know, like if there was more than one millimeter of dust on the moon, they were worried about landing because they were going to sink into nine billion years of evolutionary dust, but they landed and it was just a millimeter; therefore, the universe is only 6000 years old. "Oh, that makes sense," I repeated. I just re-vomited that to people.	7	3	11 – 14
417	Well, I think there's really two perception-changing ideas. One would be the age of the universe. I think the age of the universe and that argument is so closely tied to your relationship with your creator, right?	7	3	19 – 21
418	The second one that I would think, in my experience, that would be very close to that is original sin. This idea that you're born a sinner, you're a bad person, you have this sin nature in you.	7	3	21 – 23
419	And then they, especially when you're in your teen years, kind of turn that from when you're a kid, to all of a sudden sex is bad: You're bad if you do these things. I mean, the guilt element that they can tie into that is, um...yeah, it's almost overpowering...	7	3 4	23 1 – 3

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

No.	Significant Statement	Transcript #	Page #	Line(s) #
420	It kind of, they kind of start this socialization base. When you're young, it's all very, "Ooo, Adam and Eve ate the apple and sin came in, and we're all kind of sinners, and God had to recreate the world." But now, "Sin is bad! You're a sinner!"	7	4	6 – 9
421	And then it kind of, even into adulthood, into, um... You know, the whole point of communion is to re-recognize that – in a lot of denominations every week – that you're bad, you're a sinner. This had to happen so that your sin could be covered, atoned – whatever denomination you're in.	7	4	9 – 12
422	So yeah, I think, I think that is a, when you're socialized into that, it's...an incredible part of your identity and how you understand almost everything.	7	4	12 – 14
423	When it comes to interpreting natural phenomena, there are hypotheses that are testable and repeatable and falsifiable, that lead to theories, and there are hypotheses that are bullshit. Like the world is 6000 years old. That's a great hypothesis...until you test it...and then it's not. ... That's where I would go into the indoctrination. There's the socialization as a worldview.	7	4 5	19 – 22 1 – 2
424	It, it is, um...when I was a kid, we had the comic book Bible. And it was, the Old Testament was three of them, and the New Testament was one, right? And um, it was basically a historical book for me. I was reading what God did in history.	7	5	7 – 9
425	So there's Moses with a snake as a staff. Yep, OK, that happened, sweet. Ok, he struck a rock; oh, manna is coming from heaven! Awesome! A million people came out of Egypt, okay, yeah, sure, whatever, that's what happened. Oh, some angel dudes came down and impregnated some ladies and there's giants. Awesome, that seems legit, the Bible says so! (laughs) Like who am I to question that? You know? Yeah, it was reading history.	7	5	9 – 14
426	Some of the stuff in the Bible was not so hard to go away from. So you start with these gradual changes.	7	5	17 – 18
427	It's when you start to, uh, I guess, make hamburgers of the sacred cows, right? (This is where letting go of things becomes more difficult.)	7	5	22 – 23
428	I went to church four times a week until I was 18 years old, and I couldn't have explained 95% of the New Testament to you.	7	6	13 – 14

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

No.	Significant Statement	Transcript #	Page #	Line(s) #
429	My father was a Pentecostal minister. So bare minimum, bare minimum, and we went to church often more than four times a week.	7	6	17 – 18
430	It's still like, there's still that, um, extreme dichotomy between good and evil, um, Satan and God are pretty much equal in power, and if bad things are happening, it's because Satan is testing you, and if good things are happening, it's because God is blessing you.	7	7	7 – 9
431	It was, it was an interesting...it doesn't give you a lot of good categories for understanding reality when you go out into the real world, let's just put it that way.	7	7	9 – 11
432	And being kind of imbued in that kind of charismatic theology, it's what they call "immediate retribution theology." If you do good, good things will happen; if you do bad, bad things will happen.	7	7	13 – 15
433	So here I am, 18, really no good categories for understanding reality, and all of a sudden, girls are throwing themselves at me. And I'm like, "Whee! This is not bad," (laughs) right?	7	7	15 – 17
434	Like I'd be coming home at five every morning and just partying it up, living the life. Then, all of a sudden, I'd have like a...maybe a bad streak or something. And I'd be, "I'm rededicating my life to the Lord, I'm not having sex anymore.	7	7 8	22 – 23 1
435	Like it was just this weird tension that I really carried for, um...and I'd go through these horrible peaks and valleys of guilt and shame and, uh, probably the most, uh, unhealthy experience of sexuality that you could probably have. You know, an experience between two consenting adults and just still feeling shame and disgust afterward, um, for myself, not the other person, right?	7	8	2 – 6
436	Like it was, it was a, certainly a lot of, lot of a tension...lot of...yeah. Not good times, let's put it that way.	7	8	6 – 7
437	Cognitive dissonance, I believe, is the correct term for it. I experienced it in a very extreme form because, um, certainly for a very long time, my, ah...I wouldn't even hold them as my beliefs...but I would say my indoctrination, my socialization, the categories that I had from that, um, what told me what I should value, what I should do, were certainly extremely different from what I did value and from what I did do.	7	8	8 – 12

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

No.	Significant Statement	Transcript #	Page #	Line(s) #
438	So there was this massive divide and I didn't have any, ANY, I didn't have any way to work through that, right? It was kind of, "Do what you're told or you're bad," and I didn't know how to do what I was told and I was...(shakes his head)...bad, right?	7	8	12 – 15
439	So yeah, I experienced an EXTREME level of cognitive dissonance through, ah, I'd say at least a decade. At least a decade, yeah. To the point where I thought I was having a nervous breakdown at one point. Yeah. That lifestyle does not comport itself very well with, with a, uh, fundamentalist, religious doctrine...to say the least.	7	8	16 – 19
440	I didn't know, didn't know what else to do. It was, yeah, it was a very weird, a very ah...I felt like I was just compartmentalized and apart and...uh confused. Like I was two people basically.	7	8 9	23 1 – 2
441	It's just that I didn't have, I went out into the world without any good categories to be a functioning adult in society...is basically what it was.	7	9	8 – 9
442	So basically, I was inside this bubble, and everyone I interacted with was inside this bubble, and I went outside the bubble. But all I had was the socialization and the indoctrination of this bubble. That's all I had.	7	9	9 – 11
443	And so I start going and hanging out with normal people...and I did that for 12 years. And it was just a debacle, the whole 12 years were a debacle.	7	9	11 – 13
444	So that's what I went out into reality with. And I kind of just bumbled around there for a while...	7	9	21 – 22
445	I did four years there, and I got a degree in religion and theology. ...But probably the biggest mistake that they made there is they started to teach me how to think, not what to think. They started to give me some categories for critical thinking...and I took those with me.	7	10 11	22 – 23 1 – 3
446	So I did my undergrad in religion and theology and I would say at the end of four years, if I had to tick off all the boxes, I probably wouldn't hit every single one. I wouldn't have been fundamentalist, but I probably would have still been Christian.	7	11	3 – 6
447	At that point, if I still had to say was Jesus the son of God, I probably would have said yes.	7	11	6 – 7
448	Um, I'm going to live forever in heaven. At that point, I still think my consciousness is going to exist forever in some form.	7	11	10 – 11

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

No.	Significant Statement	Transcript #	Page #	Line(s) #
449	And by the time you get to the last year and a half, I'm just like completely deconstructing snake handlers and anything...and pretty much any truth claim within any Christian tradition, for what I would, if you were going to put it all down to one level, I would call magic...right? Any claim from magic, (laughs) I want tested, right?	7	12	1 – 4
450	Um, it was a very weird kind of, um...that was a very weird transition for me cuz some of the stuff that you, um, experience in private, they're private, right? You just go through that transition, and you're like, "Oh, I used to believe this and now this and oh, that's bullshit, and..." You go through that.	7	12	6 – 9
451	...and some of these people I very much respected as scholars, but it was very weird. They could put on their scholar hat and do some really, really good biblical scholarship, but they could just, like, take that off and then put on their faith hat and go, "Oh yeah, God does miracles today, people grow legs."	7	12	11 – 15
452	...I just felt I...something was true and could pass, you know, peer review, or it was a claim, or it was a belief, and that no matter what...ah...knowledge trumped belief. No matter what.	7	12	18 – 20
453	I guess that would be...I was at a point in my life where, where I believed things. I believed, I believed a lot of things, and I believed them on the authority of others, on the authority of the Bible, on the authority of socialization, and I got to a place where I just started to value knowledge –value the process of testing knowledge.	7	12	20 – 23
454	That we can actually look at these things and test them, and that's the greatest thing about the scientific method is that it might not be the greatest method, I don't know because humankind development hasn't ceased, but it's the best method that we have where we can look at the world around us and go, "How does this work?" That's it. How does this work? How do we test it?	7	13	11 – 15
455	It's almost like, uh, taking the red pill in the Matrix. Like once you do it, once you go down the rabbit hole, there's just no...you just can't go back.	7	13	15 – 17

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

No.	Significant Statement	Transcript #	Page #	Line(s) #
456	I often wish I could go back because there was a nice, um...even though I lived a lot of years in cognitive dissonance, there was always that nice warm fuzzy feeling that you were going to live forever and be forgiven and get your white robe and be recreated to be perfect, and everything was going to be good.	7	13	17 – 20
457	And now I know...(laughing) epistemology would tell me that I might be over-valuing my statement. Uh, that my consciousness will one day resort to the same state as before I was born. And it's a...I may feel as much dissonance going from knowing I was going to live forever to not existing. That might be the a...that might be the most difficult...dissonance that I've had to experience going from fundamentalist to atheism.	7	13 14	20 – 23 1 – 2
458	I mean, I grew up just knowing I was going to live forever. I was going to LIVE forever. And I was going to...it didn't really bother me when my Grandma died when I was 16. ... I was going to see her again and she was going to be young.	7	14	10 – 11
459	Yeah, that was, that was a very hard thing for me cognitively...and it actually still is. Um, to think...you know, on Saturday I turn 43. I could die in the next year of a heart attack or I could live to 83, but that's still only 40 years. That means I'm over 50% through the lifecycle, right?	7	15	7 – 10
460	I don't know...I don't know if in my lifetime I'll be able to get out of some of the angst of that socialization, or if I'll always carry a small part of that with me. Just because it was the fabric of my understanding of reality.	7	15	11 – 13
461	I don't know if I'm the only one who experiences that, but that would be something I really struggle with.	7	15	15 – 16
462	It's a, it's a beautiful story! And I, you know, I still have a couple of friends in the academy that I talk to and I just say, "Trust me, if it was true, I would love it to be true. I would LOVE it to be true."	7	15 16	23 1 – 2
463	It's impossible. [to return to belief] It's literally impossible. It's, um...there's a progression, uh, I mean, again the technical term is paradigm shift, right? Once you have a paradigm shift, they only go one way. That's it; they only go one way. They don't go backwards: They only go forwards.	7	16	10 – 13

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

No.	Significant Statement	Transcript #	Page #	Line(s) #
464	And to have a paradigm shift, um, requires new knowledge and new understanding, and the only way you have a paradigm shift is that new knowledge and that new understanding reasonably accounts for whatever data it's interpreting. That's it.	7	16	13 – 15
465	Once you have that shift forward, there's no way you can go back there. It just, it can't happen. It just can't happen. It's like losing a limb. I don't know how to say it other than paradigm shifts only go one way.	7	16	18 – 21
466	And my experience with people I've talked to, and this is a small anecdotal circle, it's not like my experience and the few people I know accounts for the totality of human experience, - I wouldn't have been that naïve – but certainly none of us know what sort of evidence, outside of Jesus floating down here right now, would be sufficient, what sort of argument, because all the ones I've seen so far, especially, ESPECIALLY, the apologetic ones, are so easily skewered and countered with counter arguments I just (shakes his head), I don't, I don't see any way for a paradigm shift to move other than forward. I just don't see a reverse.	7	16 17	23 1 – 6
467	Other than, seeing that we're using the Matrix analogies, my favorite scene in that movie is when Cypher is with the guy from the matrix, and they're in the restaurant and he's like, "I know this isn't steak, but it tastes like steak. I want to go back. I don't want to remember anything, and I want to be someone famous. Like a movie star, someone important," right? (Laughing) I'm just like, "That's it right there." That is, once you have that paradigm shift, yeah, it would be awesome to sit down with somebody like that and go, "I want to be famous. I want to be rich. I know this isn't steak, but it tastes damn good, just...plug me back in.	7	17	7 – 13
468	No Jesus was probably the last. Jesus was probably the last.	7	17	22
469	...and then as I started going through some liberal theology...a lot of liberal theology will play pretty loose and fast with the Old Testament. They're comfortable with that, right? So things can be allegorical, things can be non-historical...	7	17 18	23 1 – 2
470	But even a lot of liberal theologians, um, even ones that would be condemned for, let's say, their take on Genesis, there was still kind of that line in the sand that Jesus, Jesus HAS to be the son of God.	7	18	5 – 7

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

No.	Significant Statement	Transcript #	Page #	Line(s) #
471	I took a molecular biology class and just really started to change the way I started to think about things.	7	18 19	23 1
472	It kind of snowballed. I just spent hours and hours and hours working my way through what I believed...	7	19	11 – 12
473	I came to a point...and if I ever got a tattoo, which I doubt I will, but if I did...it would be something along the lines...that, “Knowledge is infinitely better than belief.” That was just it.	7	19	15 – 37
474	And I know just from my own writing and putting it down so many times... <u>knowledge trumps belief...every time.</u>	7	19	4 – 5
475	And then by the time it was my last semester in my graduate studies, I was talking to one of my professors, and I felt safe with him because, uh, he was younger and we used to travel together a lot, and I just said, “I’m an atheist now. I just... I don’t believe I’m going to live forever. I just...yeah.” But it wasn’t, it wasn’t like...the lights came on for me. It was very gradual. It was very gradual.	7	21 22	20 – 23 1
476	Now from that statement, the existential angst I experienced was gradual, um, it’s never been crushing – like I’ve never gotten nihilistic.	7	22	1 – 2
477	So I still find existential value in life, um, in experiencing moments with my friends and family and investing value there, but I do still carry...I would say like a little weight any day.	7	22	5 – 7
478	There’s no special hedge of spiritual protection around me or prayer protecting me from that. Like, I’m just as liable to a blood vessel bursting as the next person.	7	22	9 – 11
479	That has led me to lead a healthier lifestyle. I can tell you weirdly I live a much better moral lifestyle as an atheist than I ever did as a Christian. As a Christian, I cheated on my wife multiple times. As an atheist, I realize that there’s only value or, at least, I invest value now in my current relationships, and I don’t want to lose those...because I realize there’s not forgiveness in magic land to heal all that, right?	7	22	11 – 15
480	I do much better as an atheist, then I EVER did as a Christian. And I would say that, um, (pauses) my levels of empathy have significantly rose.	7	22	16 – 18

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

No.	Significant Statement	Transcript #	Page #	Line(s) #
481	Probably the two most significant changes...three, I would say three significant changes: 1) incredible shift in what I value for interpreting natural phenomena – “Knowledge trumps belief”; 2) I live a much better moral and virtual or virtuous lifestyle; 3) I have a capacity for empathy that I did not have 10 years ago. I just didn’t have it. It’s like I grew a new limb.	7	22	18 – 22
482	I used to be, I would say, quite a, um, egocentric person. My two jobs since I’ve been an atheist are a social worker and now working for [workplace not to be named but both jobs involve caring for those who cannot care for themselves.] I wouldn’t have done that as a religious person.	7	23	2 – 4
483	So I get, um, being under that inductive shield and looking to mommy and daddy and other authority figures and just, whatever, being a pitcher that they pour water into and that being how you understand.	7	23	9 – 11
484	...and I’ll come across a passage and I’ll be like (looks taken aback) “Whoa! I used to believe (starts laughing) that’s what happened. Like how did I believe that, right?”	7	23	13 – 15
485	Like groups of people can believe really messed up stuff, and if you’re inside that group and that’s all you know (shrugs), that’s how you’re going to interpret reality.	7	24	5 – 6
486	Have you ever met anyone who said they could go back? ... Yeah. I just...I just don’t even know how it’s done.	7	24	11 – 13

Appendix H: List of Formulated Meanings

No.	Significant Statements	Formulated Meanings
1	I grew up Mennonite. It's hard to know, a lot of it is culture and stuff, but the religion is still Christianity – very fundamental: men have to dress a certain way, women have to dress a certain way, you have strict rules to follow, it's very strict.	I was born into Christian fundamentalism. Christian Fundamentalism formed my understanding and values from the very beginning.
2	Yeah, very, very, conservative. Um, no make-up, no – just hair in a braid. I mean, that's my mom's side of the family: very, very conservative.	The environment I was born into was dominating and had many rules.
3	But um, around four or five, I think, my dad had a job offer and we moved away from that community and that led us down another path. And that's when I went to a Pentecostal church; and that's when my SECOND indoctrination started.	Being born into Christian fundamentalism was a form of childhood indoctrination.
4	I think when we started the Pentecostal church, I was between seven, or, eight, nine, or ten, or something like that, and that was all “praising the Lord”, “slain in the spirit”, “speaking in tongues.”	My childhood was abnormal and strange from a very young age.
5	Also conservative, I mean, going to dances was looked down upon, drinking alcohol was looked down upon, of course. You know, some modest dress – I mean, not as modest as Mennonites – you know, women can wear pants, but you know, especially when I got older and went to youth group, I heard the message that, you know, “You should dress modestly; we don't want to tempt the men and the boys,” and, you know, there were certain expectations on how to behave.	I was brought up in-a-belief system that had many rules that separated me from others and I was given strange messages.
6	Um, yeah...um... I mean, at that point in my life, I very much thought that homosexuality was a <u>sin</u> (says that with emphasis). Anyone, I kind of...I'll be honest, I mean, I was a very judgmental person.	I was programmed with hateful messages that contributed to my becoming a person I am not proud of. Religion caused damage in my life.
7	I felt sorry for everyone because I thought that they were “un-saved”, and I was enlightened, and they're all going to go to hell, and so they were like – of course, I couldn't admit it, I didn't understand it at the time – but I was looking down on them, and I thought I was better than them	Religion contributed to my being a person I'm not proud of.

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

No.	Significant Statements	Formulated Meanings
8	And of course if...I don't actually remember meeting an atheist at that point in my life, but... I definitely would have met "non-religious" people (uses finger quotations)... I mean, they wouldn't, they didn't admit to being a Christian or anything like that; they were probably just not religious...well, they were just atheists in my books...and going straight to hell.	People who didn't believe what I believed were outsiders who would be punished for being outsiders. Religion separates and isolates.
9	And I had people praying for her and... that poor girl, I think she was fine. She was a nice person, but I found out she smoked, and I thought I needed – it was my job to save her soul.	Christian fundamentalism caused me to be condescending to others. I thought it was my duty to "save" people.
10	No. I thought I had a wayward soul on my hands, and I got the youth group involved and the other friends in my youth group and the youth pastor, and we were praying for her and... loving on her! (laughs). We were loving on her (laughs). Oh, the terms!	I was in a condescending group that viewed others as outsiders. Our group was cut off from others around us. We had our own way of thinking; we had our own terminology and way of talking.
11	It's just embarrassing now. Like it's just embarrassing.	I am embarrassed about being associated with Christian fundamentalism. I am embarrassed about how I acted when I was a part of Christian fundamentalism.
12	Yeah...I took another friend to my church once... and there was so much yelling and hollering because, you know, it's a Pentecostal church. It's very intimidating if you don't know what's going on. I mean... it's a freak show. I can't even believe...I mean... I was introduced to it so gradually that over time... to see people wailing and waving their hands in the air and... being slain... and having women just fall over and being slain in the spirit... was completely normal. A Sunday experience.	The way I was raised was so strange that others could not begin to relate to me. What would be considered a "freak show" by others was perfectly normal to me. No common ground.

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

No.	Significant Statements	Formulated Meanings
13	She cried. She started crying, and I thought, “Oh my, she’s being touched by the Lord; this is what we want.” But she told me later she was just scared...and she would never come back. And for good reason! And I thought that for sure either she was touched by the Lord or Satan was trying to deceive her. (Raises her hands and puts them back down) Yeah, OF COURSE she was crying, I mean, we were just preteens and she was AFRAID of what was going on in that church.	I didn’t understand at the time, but now I realize why my friend reacted so strongly. I was unable to share with others who I was. Outsiders didn’t understand who I was or what I was about. Looking back I see things differently.
14	It is in your face. It is kind of scary. Like, people are kind of yelling, and speaking in weird languages, made-up languages (rolls eyes). Yeah. Falling over? (laughs). Yeah, I’ve apologized to her since then.	I understand and even agree with my friend now. I am embarrassed and feel shame about exposing her to my religion. I feel that was wrong and a mistake.
15	Yeah, and I know it’s not really like...you know, I was...it’s not my fault per se, I was just doing what I was taught, and I know that’s indoctrination. It’s very strong and it gets a hold on you	It’s not entirely my fault. I was indoctrinated. But I still feel guilty about it.
16	Homosexuality was definitely a sin. Science was not to be trusted; scientists for the most part are here to deceive us – Satan has a hold of their minds. Science is against us. Like science is teaching us evolution and, I mean, that is here, that is placed here...Satan put the thoughts of evolution into the scientists’ mind to deceive us.	I was programmed with hateful messages and with lies.
17	So yeah...we were here to be deceived, um...by scientists. You know, I actually think that’s why I didn’t take a lot of interest in science, even biology and those classes in high school chemistry? I wish I would’ve.	The lies I was programmed with have had a detrimental impact on my life.
18	Because now! I am not academic at all...but when I hear anything science-y, even though I don’t understand half the time what they’re talking about, I love it! You know like Neil deGrasse? What is it? Cosmos? I love that stuff! I need to watch it again because, I mean, it might be basic for other people, but it’s new to me. You know?	Religion held me back from knowledge (such as science/cosmology) that I enjoy and is important to me now.
19	And I know science is hard enough for non-religious people to understand, but I...like I just thought it was useless. It wasn’t...I didn’t think it meant anything. If I could go back in time, I’d probably try and find more courses in that, you know?	If you weren’t raised like I was, you may not understand how much certain knowledge was devalued. It is damage that I wish I could go back in time and erase.

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

No.	Significant Statements	Formulated Meanings
20	But...no...dinosaur bones were put in the ground by the devil, or by people, or the scientists are just making those stories up to deceive us.	Christian fundamentalism lied to me and made the outside world appear evil and deceptive.
21	I believed the earth was between six to ten thousand years old, um, and that Adam and Eve were real people; I believed in Noah's Ark. I used to look at a rainbow and thank God for his promise (pause), you know?	I was programed with a false understanding of history. I believed in the Bible literally. Outside history was wrong and full of lies.
22	It's just (covers her face with her hands) like I still just sometimes shake my head at myself and I can not believe it's, it's like I was truly a child. Like...who? Just looking at a rainbow? (laughs and shakes her head) like Noah's Ark? Like really?	Now that I've deprogrammed myself, I am shocked by the things I used to believe in. It is very easy to see my past beliefs were obviously false. I'm both shocked and embarrassed that I used to believe in what Christian fundamentalism teaches.
23	And I thought it was a beautiful little story you hear and now it's just barbaric. I wouldn't even read that story to my three-year-old child.	Stories I used to think were nice now seem sick and terrible. I will not be passing these stories down to my children.
24	Oh, and that feeling of always being not good enough. I've had that. I've struggled. I think, I have to imagine that it's an experience all people born to religion must have.	People who are born to religion are given messages that they are not good enough.
25	I have a friend who was not raised in religion – my best friend – and she's not experienced that.	People who were not born into Christian fundamentalism do not struggle with the same things I do now.
26	I have a friend who was not raised in religion – my best friend – and she's not experienced that. She didn't have, I mean, if she did have that experience of insecurity or whatever, it's just because society breaks us down, and we have to pick ourselves up again. But then I had...like GOD doesn't think you're good enough. Like the Supreme Being who also "loves you" (finger quotations) you know?	I have feelings of insecurity and not feeling good enough that go beyond the experiences of others and religion is directly responsible for that.
27	And I don't understand it because I have a child now and...I mean I didn't understand it then...and now I just, no, that's not love. That's like an abusive relationship. Have you ever heard that? Like if you compare the relationship with God and an abusive relationship, they're exactly the same.	How I experienced my relationship with God in Christian fundamentalism was negative enough, and caused enough damage, to be considered abusive.

No.	Significant Statements	Formulated Meanings
28	... you're not worthy of anything: You should be lucky that there's a God that even wants you alive.	Christian fundamentalist messages made me feel terrible about myself.
29	So it's a message we got, um, not purposefully by her, I don't blame her, it's just, it's just what religion does. And then we went from that into Christian fundamentalism and we heard the message again. And it's not just me; we all heard it. I mean you must have experienced it you know? Like you're never good enough, um, like we're broken and we always need to be fixed.	Christian fundamentalism breaks people down by giving them negative messages about themselves and making people feel unworthy.
30	So it was tumultuous. It's like a mind trick: You have to constantly flip flop your mind and you never know... like I don't think I really realized how much stress that puts on a person.	Christian fundamentalism gives people contradictory messages that confuse its followers, causing high levels of stress in individuals.
31	"Cognitive dissonance." Yeah, I learned that like a few years ago, and I was like, "That's it! Yes that's what you have to do!" Your whole life!	Christian fundamentalism creates a stressful state of cognitive dissonance in the minds of its followers.
32	I've already been accused of, "Well, you were never a real Christian anyway." I was a Christian! I loved God. I spent money at the Christian bookstores, you know? (laughs) The amount of money I spent on that? Christian music. Like, I was praising and worshiping God. Oh... I mean, it's crazy how much I invested.	People blame my leaving on me never being a true believer. But I was a true believer. My faith was always on my mind. Christian fundamentalism was my whole life.
33	I believed, yeah. And I do believe that it's (becoming atheist) not a choice. I used to think it's a choice, right? I have to choose. No. I don't believe that what you believe in is a choice. It just kind of...comes to you.	Becoming an atheist is not a choice. Atheism came upon me: There was nothing I could do to stop it.
34	If it was a choice, in many ways, it would almost be easier to go back and believe in it. I'd have my family in my life, uh, my friends, I'd have a nice security blanket, but I CAN'T DO IT!	Although it might be more convenient for me to quit atheism and go back to my faith...I am incapable of doing so. It's beyond my power.
35	I'd get to believe I'd go to heaven after? I could deal with death in a different way, like in a way death now is...well, it's better, but sometimes it's worse too because it makes my life now more meaningful, but I also know that that's it. I don't have that little comfort anymore.	Losing my faith is not easy. Although there are some positives about leaving Christian fundamentalism, there is also permanent loss.

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

No.	Significant Statements	Formulated Meanings
36	A lot of altar calls and the emotional music, and the soft praise and worship music, and you know, "Come to the front if you feel this way." And the longer those services go on, you just felt that it's you.	I think that the Church was manipulating me in order to get me to conform and participate in their ceremonies.
37	I always remember feeling like, "Yeah, I did all of those bad things; I did have those negative thoughts; I did have this." And so before you know it, for me, I'd be at the altar asking God for his forgiveness... again (laughs). For all the mistakes I made that week (laughs). Crying my eyes out, not really knowing why I'm crying, but it's so emotional. Everyone's crying. A bunch of teenagers just bawling. It's like a cold reading, that's what it is.	I would get emotionally swept up in services and would beg God for forgiveness for doing mundane things that was normal for people my age.
38	Like I had friends inside my school. But they were just friends at school. I didn't really do much with them outside of school.	School friends were outsiders. I wasn't very connected to them.
39	I just had two sets of friends: my church friends and my school friends. But my non-church friends knew I was a Christian.	I would be friends with outsiders but I was always a Christian first, friend second.
40	I was a good little church girl. I was the girl who would try to slip in a DC Talk CD (Christian rock band) into the car stereo, hoping that they wouldn't notice it was Christian music, hoping that that might, you know, plant a seed (laughs).	I was always Christian first, friend second. I would take steps to try and secretly convert my outsider friends to my form of belief.
41	I was a Jesus freak. And I was proud of it. Like I think I even had a shirt that said, "Jesus Freak" on there.	I was unapologetically different from the others around me.
42	And my quote on my high school year book, oh God, so embarrassing – I wish I could go back and delete that. I think it's, "Nothing is impossible through Christ." What is that, Romans or something? I forget. Yeah. It's my quote in the high school year book for Grade 12. (Looks ashamed and looks down embarrassed). I look back like, "Oh, why did I do that?" I should have just left it at, "I thank my friends, I thank my teachers," and then just leave the verse out.	There are permanent reminders of my preachy Christian fundamentalist past that cannot be erased. It's out there for everyone to see and it's embarrassing. I wish I could make it all go away.
43	Everything is a potential. Like um...a witnessing potential. Everything is a chance to tell people about the love of God.	God was always on my mind. Sharing God with others was always on my mind. I never wanted a moment to share about Jesus pass me by.

No.	Significant Statements	Formulated Meanings
44	And in Junior High we had to do something about... oh, this is another bad one. I wish that I could go back to that teacher and have her let me redo that essay because it's a grade nine essay we had to write about where we think we will be in five years. And I kid you not, I said that I will be in heaven praising my Lord and saviour (embarrassed laugh/grin). In five years: I literally believed that.	I am embarrassed about my Christian fundamentalist past and how I witnessed to others. Also, my beliefs were very strange and very different compared to others my age who were outside of Christian fundamentalism.
45	I was a soldier for Christ. And proud of it. And I didn't waiver. I think I was more of the real deal than other people who are still Christians today probably.	I was a real strong believer in Christian fundamentalism. I probably believed it more than people who are still in it today.
46	I honestly think... well, I AM a better person now than I was then.	Being an atheist has helped me become a better person.
47	Most Christians I know are not good people. They're bigots. And judgmental.	Christian fundamentalism does not produce good and loving people.
48	That's one thing I lost. That, that need to judge. I think I thought I was being loving and a loving Christian, but when your job in life is to convert people, how do you not judge people? You have to judge them. You have to believe that they can be converted, so that would take a judgement call. And now it's not up to me to change people. I can just accept people for who they are.	Christian fundamentalism requires being judgmental. Now that I am atheist, I am free to accept people as they are instead of judging people.
49	I really believed we had to spread the message and that when everyone knew about Christ, that's when Jesus would come back.	My Christian fundamentalist beliefs and ideas negatively influenced how I interacted with others.
50	I know it's easy to laugh about it now, but it's crazy how serious it is though. It's, it is laughable, but in a way it's not because it was a big chunk of my life that was taken up by it, and that part...	What I'm discussing is not funny. I lost a large part of my life to Christian fundamentalism.

No.	Significant Statements	Formulated Meanings
51	<p>You know, I look at people who never... um, they don't have to say they're atheist because it doesn't occur to them; it's the other way, it doesn't occur to them that they are one. I guess it didn't occur to them that there is a way to not be one. They just think, "Well, I don't know, I just think what I think! I don't know what you mean by what am I? Am I an atheist or not?" They're just, "I don't know." They've never had to think about it.</p>	<p>There is a difference between people who are atheist because they never had religion, and people who are atheist who come out of religion. We are atheists for different reasons; it is not the same. People raised outside of religion have never had to consider the issues the ex-religious have. This represents a type of privilege.</p>
52	<p>Yeah, I thought God had a plan for me. I was a good Christian, I believed he had a man for me to marry, that he was going to bless our marriage, just like I was told. A godly man would come into my life and we would have children, and we'd have good little Christian kids and... (pauses)... it did not turn out that way at all.</p>	<p>My Christian fundamentalist beliefs kept me very naïve about the world. I was not prepared for how life turned out to be.</p>
53	<p>And you know, eight years later the marriage ended. So. I mean, at the time it was very difficult because I just thought... I still believed in God too, like, how could God do this?</p>	<p>I was very lost and confused when my life didn't turn out the way Christian fundamentalism told me it would.</p>
54	<p>I was doing everything I was supposed to do, and my whole world was falling apart. And that's when I thought, "OK (laughs) things are not going as planned, I am doing everything I'm supposed to do: I'm a Christian, I believe in God, I..."</p>	<p>I followed the tenets of Christian fundamentalism but things were still not going properly. I had no other options. I didn't know what else to do.</p>
55	<p>And, of course, I still had those lingering thoughts, "Well, I'm just not good enough." I must just not be a good enough Christian or something.</p>	<p>Without any answers, I turned to blaming myself for everything.</p>
56	<p>And it's not that I just didn't... one day decided I wasn't a Christian.</p>	<p>After much thinking, one day I realized I no longer believed in Christian fundamentalism.</p>
57	<p>I remember that somebody asked me online. My cousin, "Well are you an atheist?" and I just, had to...that was my deciding factor! I'm like, "Yes!"</p>	<p>There was a break-through moment where I realized, acknowledged, and announced, my atheism.</p>
58	<p>...like a lot of my family members were involved, and I knew (laughs) that I'm outing myself once and for all.</p>	<p>Telling others about atheism is highly personal and is experienced as a "coming out" process.</p>

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

No.	Significant Statements	Formulated Meanings
59	He was one of those lucky people who was raised in a non-religious home.	Being raised without being indoctrinated with a religion is a form of privilege.
60	And, you know, I got married at 25 and, <i>had I been a critical thinker</i> (clenches her jaw and knocks the table), which I didn't have a critical bone in my body. I wasn't taught a thing at all.	Religion left me highly unprepared and ill-equipped for life. I didn't know anything, and I couldn't think for myself.
61	I was so naïve. Oh, and my church kept me very naïve. It does!	Christian fundamentalist teachings produced a simplistic view of the world.
62	...I would go with my aunt and uncle who were very religious, who don't have anything to do with me anymore.	I have been disowned for leaving Christian fundamentalism.
63	Yeah, it's very sad. My uncle was like a father to me in a lot of ways. And he's just... he's actually sent me some not-so-nice emails about my soul and how I'm raising my daughter. I'm not a very good parent.	People who were once close to me have disowned-me for my apostasy.
64	He's a typical Christian bigot. He hates people and... everything that I'm an activist for, and, you know... he hates homosexuals and he's not afraid of saying it. He talks about it on his Facebook wall and stuff like that, and it's just too bad because I can't see him the same way anyway...	Holding Christian fundamentalist beliefs encourages people to be intolerant.
65	Family has really kept their distance. I really don't hear from anyone anymore.	My family has pulled away from me since I left Christian fundamentalism.
66	They don't know what to do with me! Nobody knows what to do with an atheist. People don't know what to do with an atheist. Or I guess I should say Christians don't know what to do with an atheist.	Christian fundamentalists are unable to relate to people who have rejected their beliefs.
67	So it's sad. Because my mom doesn't come around anymore. Her and I have had a very difficult relationship as long as I can remember. You know, it's been very difficult for her, but this atheist thing, it's pretty much, it's the biggest wedge there is. Because she can't. She feels like, um, she couldn't be comfortable in my home.	Becoming a Christian fundamentalist apostate can tear families apart and keep families separated from one another.

No.	Significant Statements	Formulated Meanings
68	I think they look at our home as like, evil. My sister would. She doesn't come here anymore. I have two sisters, so the one that's younger than me, yeah. She wouldn't come to my home anymore because I'm pretty sure they look at, you know, evil or demons can attach themselves to things. Like they'd probably look at the pictures on the wall here and think that there is some kind of evil entity in it (laughs) and it might rub off on them.	After apostatizing from Christian fundamentalism, I am treated as an outsider. I am treated with suspicion and as potentially dangerous.
69	Now I get to really base people on their character. You know? If you're a nice person, then good enough for me.	With the obligation removed to take on certain positions because of my faith, I am free to accept others for who they are.
70	And then, I mean, once I could admit that I WAS in an abusive marriage, and it wasn't what I thought it was going to be or anything, then it just opened me up to seeing other things.	Allowing myself to see my life for what it really was opened my mind to new possibilities.
71	... I was in Shoppers Drug Mart. I was poking around and they have a little book section there and this bright yellow book popped out. And it said, "God is not Great"	For the first time, I became introduced to outside, opposing ideas.
72	And I read the back, and I was like, "Oh my God, I have to get this book!" And I did. And I didn't put it down. And I read it and, ah, it was just the best thing ever. I mean, I still don't think I could say that I wasn't a Christian after reading that book. I mean, I certainly wasn't saying that I was an atheist; I just didn't take the Bible as the literal word of God. At least I thought the Bible was maybe misrepresented.	These new ideas were just what I needed/was looking for. New ideas/concepts changed my understanding and position on my faith.
73	No, I couldn't take it as literal. I thought, "Well maybe, you know? Maybe men just wrote the book! You know? Maybe it was just men who were following Christ and wrote a book and were trying to do the best they could, and yeah, they got some things wrong, but it doesn't mean God doesn't exist. It doesn't mean Jesus isn't real. There's still a God." But it was just changing how I looked at God.	I could no longer hold my fundamentalist views. Everything was changing, but I still held onto the idea of God.
74	So I still believed in God for a long time. That changed into more of a... eventually I started looking at more of a spiritual... like, ah, well, maybe I'm just spiritual. Like, I believe there's a God out there, but it doesn't mean we have to have this close relationship: There's just a God of the universe.	I had let my Christian fundamentalist beliefs go. But it was harder to let go of the concept of God.

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

No.	Significant Statements	Formulated Meanings
75	I think I started giving up on Jesus. I don't remember the exact time, but I just gave up on the Jesus notion, too. I thought maybe it was just a story. You know? Maybe it's just a nice story. But there's still a God. So I think that's when I was willing to say I was spiritual.	The idea of a divine Jesus then fell away next. But I still held onto the idea of God. (Belief in religion slowly fading away in stages)
76	So that's kind of where the New Age part kind of came in, that spirituality. I did believe in that, too. I really thought that we were all part of some wavelength or something.	I didn't immediately move from Christian fundamentalism to atheism. I experimented with non-organized religion on my way to atheism.
77	Because all along the way I'm listening to podcasts. "The Atheist Experience" was a big one; I was listening to that show. Um, I started listening to Seth Andrews, "The thinking Atheist." His story, or I think the very first one he did, I was just bawling the whole way through. Because I knew that was my story. His story, how he was in church and what he went through, how he left, how his belief system started crumbling apart was so similar to mine. I just started crying. And that's when I realized I don't even know if I'm even spiritual anymore! I don't know what I believe!	Hearing the testimonies of others who had been through what I was going through let me know I wasn't alone and was very meaningful. It also produced further breakthroughs that led me further down the path towards atheism.
78	I needed that kind of, um, like anger that he has? (laughs) He kind of gets angry sometimes, but I need to hear it because (pauses) somebody needs to tell me straight.	I need someone to unapologetically go through the issues. Because I'm still trying to figure out what's real.
79	We also listened to "The God Delusion" (Richard Dawkins) on audio, so him and I – I think that was back in 2012 – and it was making so much sense, I mean, that's another good one. It just, I was blown away like every five seconds. I went to pause; I couldn't even take it all in at times. I think I was even crying at times. Like, it's just so powerful. It just, just, the walls were coming down.	Listening to the works of prominent atheists was exciting, made sense, had a strong emotional impact, and assisted in my deprogramming.

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

No.	Significant Statements	Formulated Meanings
80	I still think sometimes walls are crumbling down. Even though I'm, I'm a, an admitted atheist now, it's still just hard to believe sometimes. I can't even believe that I'm an atheist. Like, how did I get from being a Mennonite girl, which was just a freak show in itself, like it's um... like, it's very culty almost. A lot of people would say it's a cult. I think evangelical Christians would consider Mennonites to be a cult. I came from that, to evangelical Christianity, to an atheist?! It's like (laughs), it is a huge leap.	Even though I'm an atheist now, I still have much to learn and work to be done. It's hard for me to understand...I've come so far. It's a complete 180.
81	And Ryan and I, my husband, had a conversation and we were like, "Well, what are we?" And he's like, "I think we're an atheist, I think I'm an atheist." And I said, "You think you are one? (points at herself) I think I am one too!" And once he said it, I felt safe to say it too.	I was scared to say out loud that I was an atheist. However, once my husband said it out loud, I was secure enough to say it too.
82	"So are we OK telling people?" He's like, "I think so, like if it comes up. We're not going to go announce it."	We had to renegotiate how we were going to present ourselves in the outside world.
83	But it felt SO GOOD to say it out loud.	It was a great feeling to be accepted and to be able to live openly.
84	Like Matt Dillahunty right? He, he taught me how to critically think! Like he made me THINK. Uh, well, so did Christopher Hitchens in the <i>God is not Great</i> book. So once you start thinking like that you, just can't go back.	I developed the skill of critical thinking. Critical thinking can't be unlearned. There is no way for me to think the way I used to. Learning critical thinking permanently changed me.
85	And um, I think it's so important that they teach this in schools. We're going to do whatever we can to teach our child.	Critical thinking is invaluable and should be taught generationally...even as a matter of institutional policy.
86	Because I've had friends ask, "Well, what happens if your daughter grows up and wants to go to church?" I'm like, "Well if she grows up and she's 16 years old one day, and she wants to go to church, we'll take her." But um, she will know how to think. So I'm not afraid that she's going to not, ah, base it on critical thinking.	I will teach my daughter critical thinking. It will keep her from getting taken in by things like religion. Even if she goes to church, her critical thinking skills will protect her.

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

No.	Significant Statements	Formulated Meanings
87	Like deciding on whether she wants to go or what she believes in because we're going to teach her those steps, how to critically think. Yeah. She's not going to get brainwashed into anything. I don't see it happening. I don't think it's possible. It works! Critical thinking works (laughs), so it's just not possible.	Critical thinking works and protects people from being manipulated and brainwashed into false beliefs.
88	Everything else is just so much wishful thinking. It's like you're doing mental gymnastics...all the time. It's just such a relief... to not have to do that anymore. I can honestly just say now, "I don't know." You know? I don't know all the answers. It feels good to admit you don't know. You don't have to prove to anyone. It's not MY job.	Leaving religion cured me of my cognitive dissonance which was stressful. I no longer have to make wild claims. I can freely admit when I don't have answers. This is a relief.
89	I'm not stuck. I don't have to be so... like stubborn, you know? And so set in my ways. I can change my mind. It's just so freeing.	I am no longer intellectually confined by Christian fundamentalism. I feel relief; I am free.
90	Everything's given to you. And you really do believe you're free though, that's the funny thing. Like you don't, you think you're...I always thought I WAS free. Freedom in Christ. Yet you're not free. You have rules. (mocking) "Oh no, but you can make choices." Yeah. But if you don't make the right choices, you go to hell. (laughs). Yeah. It's not free at all. This is free. (pauses) Now I'm free.	I thought I was free before, but I didn't understand what freedom was. I was not free to make decisions or choices. After leaving Christian fundamentalism, I have these freedoms.
91	To me, the breakdown of the marriage was the worst thing I could possibly go through. What could be worse than that? So I was like, "Bring it. I don't care what's true, what isn't true. I don't even care, I just want to know stuff... even if it shakes me to the core." And it did. But it was, but it was like, the more I learned, I couldn't stay away. Like it was addicting.	I had hit the bottom but it had not destroyed me. I had nowhere to go but up. I was no longer afraid of anything. I started exploring new areas of knowledge and loved it. I couldn't get enough.
92	And I always did care about people and that was another cognitive dissonance you know? I was taught to not like homosexuals, and I was supposed to say it's a sin, but inside I'm like, "But how can...like I don't want to hate anyone."	Christian fundamentalism forced values upon me that, even as a believer, I knew were against my nature.

No.	Significant Statements	Formulated Meanings
93	And I have that feeling that I'm less than when I'm around those people. I'm assuming that's what they think of me. I'm not, I'm not part of the clique. I'm the outsider. Not part of the group. And I miss out.	When I'm with Christian fundamentalist people, I am ostracized and judged. I am not accepted.
94	Um, but at the same time, as much as I miss hanging out, they're unbearable to be around...like I cannot tolerate it.	I miss my family but find them and their values to be offensive.
95	And I know if I go there, I'm going to get someone telling me, "How could you? You know you're going to hell, like, come on, you know better, you know, just come to church." Or I'd get something told to me that I'm wrong. I mean, it's already been said to me. My aunt once approached me and said, "You know, if you're an atheist, you're going to hell." And it was actually really hurtful. Like it was a real stab, because I'm thinking, "I'm a good person, how can you even say that to someone? How can you say that to a good person?" It's, It's just... I know they think that. It shouldn't surprise me, but to hear it come from their mouth, it was like a stab. It was really shocking.	As an unbelieving outsider, I am judged as an outsider. I am judged like I used to judge others. But it's different when it comes from family. I am judged as though they don't know me.
96	They're talking about Elizabeth, who is now an atheist-slash-Satanist or has devil influence – same thing to them – has devil influence. They can't see the fact that I'm actually a good person. Like, I mean, it means nothing to them. So that's why it's so hurtful. It's very isolating.	Since leaving Christian fundamentalism, I am judged as being a problematic/detrimental influence. It is hurtful that I am no longer seen as a good person.
97	The evangelical Christians would never, like they don't adhere to that doctrine, I don't think, of shunning, right? Like, it's not something they do. But in their own ways, they do. They just distance themselves. I don't think they know. Their job is to save my soul, and if I'm not going to hear about it or I don't want to talk to them about it, then they have nothing to talk to me about. You know? What are they going to talk about? And you've been around Christians. I mean they... these kind of people? There is nothing else they talk about but the lord. Like everything comes back to the Lord. I mean, I would be uncomfortable: I wouldn't even want to be around them. I would have nothing in common with them... at this point.	As much as I am ostracized and find they can no longer relate to me, I am also unable to relate to them. I share no common ground with Christian fundamentalist people.

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

No.	Significant Statements	Formulated Meanings
98	But that is sad, though. I do miss them. I can still look back. I mean, when I was a Christian we had fun. I mean, of course, I was like them so it was fun for me, you know?	There is loss. I have lost people and miss them. There is sadness.
99	You can't go back (smiles/laughs). It's so weird. Like you can't unlearn.	The changes that happened to me through the acquisition of knowledge are permanent. I cannot un-change myself. I cannot forget what I know.
100	I've pictured my life: like what would happen if I? It would never happen (laughs), but if it did for some reason, I was in a different life and I wanted to go back (makes a face), I just couldn't do it. Like, I'd be faking it. I could do it, but it would be not-real. It would be completely fake. Ugh... I'd probably have to puke every single day, once a day or something, just to get through it or drink alcohol, I don't know.	Even if I tried to force myself back, it wouldn't work. The changes that happened to me through the acquisition of knowledge are permanent.
101	I guess I could fake it, but it wouldn't be real.	The best I could do to go back would be to pretend.
102	Yeah, I'm having fun, I'm doing great, who cares about them? Like, really! It's disgusting. Who would even want that?	Previously held beliefs are now repulsive to me.
103	I sometimes wish there was a place where there could be role playing. Um, where you could have people talk to you like a Christian and somebody else talks like an atheist and how that conversation goes because my mind gets muddled. Sometimes. Um, I want to know, I want to be more clear.	People who have experienced this phenomenon require treatment. There should be programs set up to specifically treat this issue. I would participate in this treatment, I am still struggling.
104	And I would like to do that with someone so that someone could clarify that with me because I'm sure, I know I'm wrong, but I still have those um, old beliefs and they come out and...	I am still struggling. I could use some help.
105	I think I'm still deprogramming, yeah. Yeah, I don't know; maybe it will never end, I don't know.	I am trying to self-deprogram. I may struggle with this for the rest of my life.
106	I guess we could go to whatever which church we wanted...as long as it wasn't Catholic.	When I grew up, Church was mandatory. My family had strong opinions regarding Christianity.
107	... I, uh, took instruction in the Catholic religion, and actually really got into it. Even after this girl was no longer an issue. I, um, was pretty active in the church, I never missed Mass.	Christianity became very important to me. My faith became my way of life.

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

No.	Significant Statements	Formulated Meanings
108	My mother kind of made us all go. Like there was no not going. You, you went, even if you didn't want to. Which none of us did but...	Growing up, religion was mandatory.
109	Yes and uh, after I was baptised in the church, they conditionally baptise you in case it wasn't done right the first time, and I told my mother and oh my, she packed up everything that reminded her that she had a son Ralph.	Not following my mother's religious demands caused a breach in the relationship.
110	It was perhaps only ten days after she kicked me out that she was phoning wanting to "talk." So it was just a very brief period there.	Although my mother and I worked things out, CF caused a breach in our relationship.
111	And I was the first treasurer of the [Catholic] Parish Council in [small town]. But it turned out it wasn't...I wasn't really the treasurer, the priest was the treasurer. He holds the, uh, he's totally in control of the money. And uh, being a treasurer is just a fundraiser. And I sure, I rebelled against that.	I was uncomfortable with the structure of power in the church.
112	And uh so, I found out, being treasurer, that we had \$154,000, [Catholic] Parish. We had \$154,000 on "permanent loan" to the central diocese. And here we are trying to badger all of our parishioners into digging deep to raise another \$150,000 to \$200,000 or whatever it was, to build a church, when we simply could have drawn down on that money that was owed to us.	The church was being corrupt in its use of power. It was not treating its congregation properly. The church was taking people's money unnecessarily.
113	But I was quickly told that it is not really ours. It's being "put to good use" and why they showed it as owing to the parish, uh, the priest said, "it's really not." It wasn't owing. So that was kind of upsetting for me.	I was troubled by the church's corruption lack of openness about its finances.
114	And even after we built the church, and then we started a fundraiser for the, the, organ. And uh, you know this is like \$3000 or something like that. And we had the big thermometer at the front of the church showing us, uh, how well we were doing, and it was just obscene! You know, asking the parishioners to keep paying money when we had all that money somewhere? At any rate, I started to question.	I saw more corruption. The church was starting to push people into giving more money. This caused me to start to question my faith.

No.	Significant Statements	Formulated Meanings
115	<p>There was an old lady in [small town], who had never been, she was Catholic but she hadn't been to Mass for, oh, 30 years. And she had mental health issues and what not. At any rate, she died. And there were two grandsons who were serving on the altar at that time. And I asked, "Why would you not bury Ms. [Blank]? You're scandalizing the family, you're going to lose the kids!" And he told me categorically that, "The church, Mr. [Blank], is a very exclusive club...and when you leave it, you better be a member in good standing...if you hope to be buried in the church." I said, "But it's pointless! She's already been judged according to... I mean everything at this point is simply window dressing isn't it? It could probably save those kids from leaving the church." And he just restated his position.</p>	<p>The Church was petty and elitist. The Church did not put people first or treat them in a loving manner. The Church was unfair to people.</p>
116	<p>But after the first business with parish council, and I think it was a two-year term... well I left before that. I told them I couldn't... I told them to find someone else. It was so frustrating, my only function was really fundraising, and to this day I just hate it.</p>	<p>I became unable to hold the position or carry out the duties that I did in the past because I did not morally agree with the role the church was asking me to perform.</p>
117	<p>Well I didn't appreciate their position on gay issues or morality issues or anything. I think that they, they were just... over the top. But in 1980 my marriage dissolved. I realised at that time that I was a gay, a gay person.</p>	<p>The Church took positions that offended me. The Church was unkind towards people of my sexual orientation.</p>
118	<p>Well I, uh, didn't really change. But I was hoping, I was hoping that, uh, the church would change. At any rate, I was here in [Alberta city]. I stopped going to Mass entirely.</p>	<p>The Church wouldn't change its position on sexual orientation so I stopped attending.</p>
119	<p>There was a <i>Time</i> editorial after Pope – whatever his name was, Ratzinger anyway – and he said that gay people could not hold office in the Catholic Church. From now on, they were going to screen all the applicants for priesthood and eliminate the ones who had homosexual tendencies.</p>	<p>The Church was openly discriminating against gay people.</p>

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

No.	Significant Statements	Formulated Meanings
120	Oh, it was horrible and the guy that wrote the article – I was going to print it off for you because it's worth seeing. He was so outraged, and he said, "This is ridiculous, for one thing about half the priests, the existing priests...are gay. And they're not all child molesters, but a lot of them are certainly gay. And I think they've kind of swept that whole thing under the rug because now their current pope is actually reaching out.	The church was hypocritical in its stance on gay men and will not acknowledge its error.
121	And, uh, Bishop Henry, who I considered to be a hatermonger, issued a letter that all the priests in the Calgary area and maybe even the Edmonton area had to read aloud. And I was so outraged that I got up and left.	The Church acted in a hateful manner towards people with my sexual orientation. It made me angry enough to leave the Church.
122	But uh, I've been questioning the church's validity for many, many, many years. This guy, this was simply the catalyst that made me realise that this is so silly. These people can't be speaking on behalf of God! I mean look...ugh...terrible.	I was already questioning things, but the hateful way the Church was treating people really made me see that the Church wasn't real.
123	Well, some of their pronouncements were just so ridiculous. Like mostly for gay people and everything, but uh, how uh, they're against birth control in AIDS-ravaged Africa. They're against the HPV vaccination for young people. Well they claim it's, uh, promoting promiscuity.	The Church's ridiculous stance on social issues was further evidence that it wasn't real.
124	Well that's like... like condoms. And they're so afraid that they're going to be seen as endorsing anything. In, in 2015, it is the most absurd position. Because Aids, it really is... well I don't know if it's under control... I guess it's under control. It's certainly on the decline in the Western hemisphere anyway. But in Africa? It's just rampant. And they say abstinence. So really, there... there were so many things that were compounding. It just didn't make any sense.	The Church's unrealistic stance on social issues was incorrect and was causing harm and damage to people throughout the world.
125	But in the Old Testament, I mean, have you ever seen anything that's more vicious and cruel?! And you know, they – all of these Evangelicals – are trying to make a case against the gay people based on... uh... something God might have said to Moses, or I don't know where it came from, but there are so many rules or so many laws in the Old Testament that are just, just ignored. But they singled out this particular thing and they're going to make a big case over it.	The Old Testament contains rules that seem cruel or out of place today. CF ignores these laws but chooses to make an issue of same-sex relationships.

No.	Significant Statements	Formulated Meanings
126	I mean let's, let's face it. I mean who wrote those books anyway? And when? And we're told it's, uh... the word of God! But as relayed through umpteen different people and they finally get it down on paper. Most of these, um, characters in the Bible were, uh, illiterate. I don't know how this... by word of mouth from generation to generation. Finally they found someone who could put pen to paper.	The Bible is just a book. It is not special. It cannot provide special insight. The Bible is not real.
127	So yeah, I've been sort of... the last few years going to Mass even, before I quit going, was a strain. It was a real strain. And you have to listen to all this stuff that he's talking about and most of it, it's so boring. At least no priest I ever came into contact with even tried to entertain you.	I lost interest in the Church. Near the end I was forcing myself to attend.
128	Well, it's just absurd! The whole concept is. I mean what kind of a God, you know, if he's all-loving, all-knowing, and all-powerful... what's with all these disgusting diseases and what-not going on in the world? I mean what kind... I mean I'm paraphrasing Stephen Fry, but I endorse what he said absolutely. He's talking about an insect whose sole purpose in life is to burrow into eyes of children in Africa. And then it burrows its way out and blinds in the process (shrugs). Is God permitting this or... I just don't get it.	I now see Christian fundamentalism and all of its concepts as absurd. All the suffering I see in the world made me question church teachings and proves God is not present or real.
129	Why is there so much misery in the world? If there's an all-loving God, that is utter bullshit. I mean life on earth could be absolutely... well, it's hard to even conceive of how life could be without disease and that sort of thing but it's got to be a notch above the status quo, isn't it?	All the suffering I saw in the world made me question things and proves God is not present or real.
130	Well uh, even transubstantiation, you know the Catholic Church is different than others. They actually believe that it's the body and blood of Christ. Now... figure that out! They say, "No, this doesn't represent the body and blood of Christ, this is...de facto. I mean, how dumb is that?"	Some core Christian fundamentalist doctrines are nonsensical and can't possibly be true. I find it amazing that I used to believe in those things.

No.	Significant Statements	Formulated Meanings
131	What kind of God, would ask – what is it, – Abraham, to kill his son? And it just so happened, lucky son, that a ram happened to get caught in the brambles and he killed the ram instead. And God accepted that sacrifice, “sacrifice” (finger quotes), I mean, can you imagine, as fulfilling his obligation because he actually did, uh, he was prepared to kill his own son. How sick is that? Yeah, it is...it is ridiculous.	In the Bible God is unethical. His actions are unconscionable and disgusting.
132	Now I have to tell... I have to confess that I miss certain aspects of the Catholic Church. I miss the smell of incense. I miss the way church smells. The, the, well...all the ritual was very, very interesting for me. The processions. Like I can remember when the kids were real little, and we went to [Catholic church] in [city]. And it was Easter, and they have a boys’ choir there. Oh my God! Talk about your hair standing on end. This was amazing! So beautiful.	There is loss. There were aspects of going to Church that I enjoyed and miss.
133	There is a sense of loss. There is... because you know, you think, “Oh my goodness, wouldn’t it be wonderful if you just sort of bought into it all.”	There is a sense of loss. Life would be easier if I could somehow make myself believe again.
134	But when I was in the church and believing – well, I guess, seemingly believing in all this stuff – the concept of seeing my mother was a big plus. Seeing my mother again. But, um, it just... and that’s a big loss. Even when I lost my two dogs and the vet sent me a little card with a rainbow bridge, where the dogs cross the rainbow bridge and they’re over there, happy and playing and waiting for you and... all of that stuff (laughs) is gone! Just gone. And it’s a real loss! There’s no question about it. I mourn for the loss of my faith. But, uh, reason has to prevail.	I have lost the comforts that the church used to provide, such as being able to see loved ones again who have died. Losing a faith that was so important and personal to me is another loss that I actually mourn for. It hurts, but I cannot live in delusion. Reason must prevail; I must face reality.
135	You can’t unlearn it.	I can’t unlearn what I have learned.
136	It would take a pretty good orator to convince me that I’m wrong, that’s for sure. And that would be impossible.	There is no one who could convince me to believe again.
137	Even for myself. Dead is dead. That’s a pretty harsh reality.	I’ve lost the comforts that the church used to provide. Reality can be harsh when those comforts are lost.

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

No.	Significant Statements	Formulated Meanings
138	Cuz this can't be the end. Oh how I wish it weren't! Part of me wants to believe that there's a spark of life that survives death. I want to believe that. And I wish someone could make a case for it, but you know the Hindus, but they got all their elephant-head gods and what not, I mean, really (laughs), how much credibility have they got?	I wish what Christian fundamentalism teaches about the afterlife were true. I want it to be true but it's not. Religions are not correct or real.
139	Well it's a stark reality. I mean all of these fancy stories and everything are designed to give people comfort. And to realize that they are just stories. Nothing more. Somebody made it up.	The church provides comforts, but those comforts are a lie. What the church teaches is untrue. The church isn't real.
140	But how comfortable it is to just blindly believe.	If I could believe and have all those false comforts, things would be easier for me.
141	Well, I suppose it's not embarrassing if you're talking to somebody who believes it, but... I, I, I am embarrassed by the fact that I bought into this for so long. I mean, really (shakes his head).	Sharing what I used to believe in is not embarrassing when talking to others who understand those beliefs, but it's personally shameful to me. I feel gullible.
142	Have you heard of the creation museum somewhere down south there? Dinosaurs romping with people with children? Jeez. And people buy into this! Give your head a shake.	My past beliefs were ridiculous. It's hard to understand how this narrative persists.
143	And you know, it's very difficult to find somebody to talk to.	I am alone in my experience. Few understand what's happened to me.
144	Because my friend, my friend Silvia, I said, "Well, tell me, uh, well, they don't go to church or anything, I said, What are your beliefs?" And she said, "I'm a Christian." I said, "And what does that mean to you, really?" "Well I believe in Jesus Christ." I said, "Do you really? Have you thought about it?"	I cannot connect or identify with others about this issue. Others have not faced the same issues that I have dealt with. I am not understood.
145	But it's just a different level of communication. You can't talk to... I mean, she's never explored religion, she just bought it hook, line, and sinker without any questions. So she doesn't have the position. And that's the case of a lot, of a lot of so-called religious people. Really can't defend it. Or have an inclination to even want to.	Many people can't understand me because their beliefs are not thought out. Their beliefs are accepted unquestioningly. It is lazy. I questioned things. I am not understood.
146	I think, um, as I think with the majority of people, it begins – it began for me – in childhood.	I was a Christian fundamentalist because I was born into it.

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

No.	Significant Statements	Formulated Meanings
147	And then I remember growing up when I was very little, um, right at home, um, reading books with my mom...um, like story books, children's Bible stories.	From the very beginning I was programed with religion at home.
148	Like Noah's ark, the creation, Adam and Eve – but obviously for like, you know, three- and four-year olds. Coloring books, you know, stuff like that. It was Bible-centered.	As a child I was fed children's versions of Christian fundamentalist. It was a central aspect of growing up.
149	I remember we had a little church in the community I was in, and I remember being in the church and being so tiny you could just barely peer over the pews and, you know, being told, "You have to kneel here."	I was involved in religion well before I understood it.
150	Being in a Catholic school, you know, every day we're taught, there's religion class, and you learn the stories, and as you get older you learn more and more in-depth, but as kids, you know the stories and you don't cross the nuns.	Religion was ubiquitous and unchallengeable. It was at home and at school.
151	You know, at a very young age it started and that's just what you knew. And you knew it because they taught it to you and if they taught it to you, it had to be true.	Christian fundamentalism became a way of understanding existence and it was obviously the truth. It couldn't be a lie.
152	Like, to me it was, OK, yup, Adam and Eve were real (nods) because, just like Cookie Monster was real to me too and Santa Clause. They were all real at six or seven. They were all real.	The stories of the Bible were not fiction. They were real characters and real events. But so was other nonsense.
153	At six, if my mom said this person was real, then of course they were real! I don't know any different. And school, they're teaching it in school. Well, one and one is two, so there has to be Jesus. One and one is two... so... we have to have the Holy Trinity (smiles). It was school, we had religion class, just like we had science, and math, and spelling. It was Catholic school.	Every authority in my life confirmed the literal truth of Christian fundamentalism. How could it all be untrue? I accepted it unquestionably.
154	Yup. I remember in the mornings the buzzer would ring and we would, um, say the Lord's Prayer first thing in the morning. You know, our Lord who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. And look at that? Verbatim. That's insane. INSANE. And as easily as I can still rattle that off, we would sing O Canada right afterwards. So I mean in a nutshell there it is.	I was indoctrinated in every aspect of my life. The "truths" I was taught were seen as being equally valid to factual truths, such as being Canadian.
155	You become indoctrinated. You know no different and because it is part, it's just normal. That was (finger quotes) normal.	I was being indoctrinated but, because it was all I knew, I was unable to see it.

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

No.	Significant Statements	Formulated Meanings
156	When I think what I would call the hardcore indoctrination happened, I was probably thirteen? Thirteen or fourteen. My grandfather passed away.	When I was in a vulnerable place, Christian fundamentalism was able to indoctrinate me even further.
157	And I really struggled with his passing because it was very sudden. And with that, I had lots of questions, right? Like at that young age and then losing someone significant...	I needed help to make sense out of something I couldn't understand.
158	You know, "Oh my God, he's gone"; you know, "is there heaven? Is he really there?" All of that, right? At a young age and facing that now, and it was like, I don't know what to do.	When I was questioning what happens when a person dies, my faith provided me with simple and comforting answers that helped me at the time.
159	So that's when this bond with this priest began. And of course, he's telling me he's in heaven. And of course I'm going to see him again, and come on in. So now it's, "OK, come on back in, let's do more. Why don't you come to Mass tonight?"	When I was in this vulnerable and weak place...religion took advantage of my situation.
160	Because it went from attending Mass on Sundays to attending Mass every day. Every day... And I think a lot of me also going and becoming more was an escape. Get out of the house in the evening and go to Mass... I would go there, spend the evening there – you have friends there, they all listen, they all enjoy your company.	I became immersed in Christian fundamentalism. It was providing me with things missing in my life. I came to rely on it.
161	And the more you're there, the more you hear the word of God. And the more you hear the word... come on to this prayer group, come on. I became an altar server. Yes, I'm involved in it, yes. Participating in the sacraments, you go to confession once a week, you... all of it. And all because my grandfather passed and the right priest at the right time happened. The childhood programming allowed all that to happen.	I became so drawn into religion that belief was no longer enough. I began active involvement. But none of this would have happened if I hadn't been primed with indoctrination. None of this would have happened if the Church hadn't capitalized on my vulnerability.
162	I would pray. I would meditate on him. I had music. In my vehicle, putting in cassette tapes, religious music. Sure. Singing along. All the hymns. Yup.	I was completely immersed in Christian fundamentalism. I surrounded myself with it. I carried it with me. It was always in my thoughts.

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

No.	Significant Statements	Formulated Meanings
163	Or if I had to be at home, in my room, that was a sanctuary. I had the cross, I had my posters, religious posters. Um, the inspirational stuff. All of that, it'd be on my walls as opposed to rock bands and movie posters. I didn't have that. I had the religious everywhere. You know? The rosary. Yeah.	Christian fundamentalism was also an escape for me. My obsession with it made me different than most other young people my age.
164	I even considered becoming a nun. You know, I'm getting older. I think I was 16 or 17 at that point, and it was, um, I started questioning, "Is this for me?" The way I investigated it... you know? And I met with, um, a nun, but my parents came with me.	I considered letting go of a normal life and completely dedicating the rest of my life to Christian fundamentalism. My parents didn't understand.
165	I could understand why he wasn't on board with... but then again... neither of them [her parents] were aware that, how indoctrinated I was becoming.	My parents didn't understand my interest in becoming a nun because they did not know how programmed I was becoming.
166	It wasn't anyone at home pushing me: It was all me.	I wasn't being forced. It was my own motivation. Christian fundamentalism is what I wanted.
167	So upon finishing school, I went into emergency medicine. So you become an EMT and then a paramedic. So this is where some of the thinking is starting.	The circumstances of my life changed. I encountered new experiences which started to challenge my thinking.
168	I don't know if it's questioning, but I don't have the opportunity to be at Mass every day now....because of work and school.	My responsibilities no longer permitted me to maintain the same degree of immersion in Christian fundamentalism.
169	And I'm beginning to work as an EMT. Which I get to see reality now. People at their worst. I never see people at their best in that line of work.	I was placed in a position to face the struggles of the world. I began to see the world for what it is. I began to see reality.
170	...I'm still pushing myself; I'm still going to church once a week if I can get there because that's what I do. I have to make it work around my EMT schedule because it's shift work, but I'm still the driving force.	I was still holding onto Christian fundamentalism and holding onto my identity as a Christian.

No.	Significant Statements	Formulated Meanings
171	So I joined the military and, uh, you join for three years. So I join it, my faith is still the same, I'm doing my thing. And wherever I get posted, I make sure I find a church, I make sure I go to Mass, I make sure I can find another Catholic group that I can go... you know? I'm still praying, I'm still doing all the same. So it's still self-driven. I don't have anyone telling me I have to do it: I just know I have to do it.	Even though my work assignments took me around the world, I sought out other believers. There was no one pushing me to do it. I put in all the work. I still wanted this.
172	But part of me is saying, "Wow, what's going on in the world out here? Look at all this shit that's happening." Because I'm no longer at home anymore, just dealing with life and death on the road. I'm now traveling the world and seeing other places and still dealing with all the life and death on the road.	I was less isolated now. I was traveling the globe. Everywhere I went, there was pain and suffering. I began to question my ideas and the state of the world.
173	So I'm seeking out people who are like-minded because it's comfort, it's the right people, it's praying, all of that. But at this same time, I'm going, "Wow, there's a lot out here! Look at all these people here. Well, they don't believe."	I surrounded myself with people who shared my beliefs because it helped me feel better. Yet I could not deny what I saw. And there were many people around the world who didn't believe what I believed.
174	The first Gulf War happens. And you're like, "But they're all Muslims over there. What is this? What's the Muslim faith all about?" And you start seeing all these faiths and it's, "Huh, OK, but I'm a Catholic. The Pope, he's the leader of the church. You know? There's a billion of us...can't be wrong."	I became exposed to different areas of the world and to very different belief systems. I began to question if my faith was the true one. Yet the idea all Catholics could be wrong still seemed absurd.
175	One thing leads to another, and we end up getting married. I was adamant with him that we get married in a Catholic church. Because I'm the believer. And he knew that, that I was a believer. Am I attending Mass all the time now? No, I am not. That has fallen back...but I'm still a believer.	I wasn't really going to Mass regularly anymore but I was still insistent that I was a Christian, and I wanted to act out a Christian life.

No.	Significant Statements	Formulated Meanings
176	I could hear him. He wouldn't talk to me about it, right? It's not like he ever challenged me or anything, but I would hear him talking and I'd go, "Hmm..." but it wasn't enough yet. Because I'm still going, "Nah, can't be right." But I would hear, you know? Yeah, I get the universe is that old, but that doesn't mean that God didn't create it. And something's saying, "Well, evolution and fossils right? And dinosaurs... dinosaurs! Hmmm. Well maybe"	My non-believing husband wouldn't challenge my beliefs and I wouldn't believe his ideas, but, at the same time, I could hear what he was saying and I begin to privately question my beliefs.
177	I thought, "Why couldn't it have happened both ways?" You know? Well, here's the evidence of the evolution, right? I mean Darwin. We learn it, I've read it, we were taught in school... however... of course, there was creation theory too. Right? Of course. But something inside of me is saying, "Hmmm..." And it's not going away. It's nagging me. It's just something that I, I, it's annoying me. It's OK, what else is going on here?	I recognized that there were some flaws in my faith; that some of my beliefs had not been thought out. It was at the point where my questioning could no longer be ignored. I had to do further investigation.
178	My dad was killed in a plane accident. And it was a huge impact on me. Yeah. Um, I think then everything that was chipping away, and all these things started coming forward really fast for me.	My father was killed in a tragic accident. My faith began to crumble.
179	The questions: Well, how come him? And, really? I'll see him after? Like my grandfather? And, well... why is there never any proof? And all these things of miracles. Well, no, there are no such things as miracles because of this, this, and this. And why would God plan for him to die like that? And my dad, he must have been terrified. You know? And why would God do that?	The tragic events of my life and the experiences I'd gained began to demonstrate that the teachings of Christian fundamentalism weren't real.
180	And so I asked my friend, the priest, "Why him?" He said, "Well, it's his time." I said, "I don't accept that. How was it his time? Him and those other people? They all happened at THEIR TIME? What does that mean?" But things are starting to change now in my head.	I went back to the Church for answers, but the answers I received weren't good enough this time.
181	As slowly as I got indoctrinated, it was just the same way..." Nope, that's bullshit – next." To the point where I'm here now where I'm, "No, I don't believe in any of that." It wasn't a super-switch but it was a hard switch. Like, something really hit hard when my dad died because that's when it came, "What the hell is going on here?"	My faith fell away one piece at a time. But once my Dad died, the pieces fell away at a steady and continuous pace. Nothing could stop me from my investigating. I had to know the truth.

No.	Significant Statements	Formulated Meanings
182	Chipping away. I think it was like a sculpting, a little bit at a time, where the reality, the life-and-death reality, you know, me stepping in and saving someone, it wasn't me, it was God using me. And is it now? No. It was my bloody skills and know-how that saved that person's life, plain and simple. You know? Ok, that guy died. Was it his "time?" No! He had a super injury on him; there was no surviving it.	My faith did not come apart all at once. I no longer use God to explain what I do or what happens to others.
183	The chipping away, and then I think there was a big hammer, and then after that, big rocks started falling away. I think, though, it has to be the right moment.	I had been questioning things, but my father's death was the watershed moment in which my faith fell away.
184	Because I look at when my grandfather died, it was the right moment for somebody to take a young mind. As an older person, the right moment when my father died, there was my husband there, the reality-speaker, plus now the questions coming forward.	My grandfather's death provided the right moment for my immersion in Christian fundamentalism and my father's death provided the right moment for escaping Christian fundamentalism.
185	Because I think if you take a super-believer as an adult, I think something significant needs to happen. I can't see any true hardcore believer suddenly saying there is no God. Think they'd really resist that.	A strong Christian fundamentalist believer will not be argued out of their faith, nor will they rationalize their way out of their faith. It will take a strong life event to cause them to question their faith.
186	I guess I equate it to: you see these super-politicians that are against gay marriage until their son is gay.	A strong Christian fundamentalist believer will only change his/her beliefs when forced to by circumstances.
187	Yeah, I have belief in nothing. I have belief in me and what I can do. I don't believe there is anything other than what we do as people. No. I have no beliefs. You know? I don't "believe" in atheism, there's no such thing. I have no faith. Nothing.	As an atheist, I have no faith. I believe in nothing other than what we can do for ourselves.
188	I think once I actually had, you know, no beliefs, I looked back at where I came from and what I was: I'm embarrassed at how weak minded... I was.	I am embarrassed by what I used to believe in. I see it as me being weak-minded.

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

No.	Significant Statements	Formulated Meanings
189	...but when I look back now, I think, “OK, I can see how you got there, but how did you keep believing as you got older? Why were you that weak minded that you could not? What did you need in your life that you thought you had to believe this?” It’s embarrassing to think that I... I think that I’m a pretty intelligent person, but to see this, and to see what I was, I go, “You weren’t that bright.... if you bought that crap hook, line, and sinker.”	I can understand why I had my beliefs when I was a child, but I am humiliated that I continued to hold them as an adult. I think perhaps CF fulfilled something I felt was missing in my life. I feel embarrassed. I feel stupid. I feel gullible.
190	Like me insisting that Daryl, that he get married in a Catholic church. How dare I! ... It’s absurd! I can’t believe I had the audacity to make him do that. It’s embarrassing and shameful. I feel horrible over that. Yeah, it’s embarrassing.... that I... you know? (shakes her head).	As a Christian fundamentalist, I also acted in ways that I am ashamed of and wish I could take back.
191	And you feel like an idiot. That I could be indoctrinated and not see it.	I feel stupid. It also shows the power of indoctrination. I couldn’t see through my beliefs.
192	I think anything that starts with kids is how they get them.	People don’t tend to question what they were taught in childhood to be true.
193	But still... as kids though, I think that’s how you get them. I think that’s what it is for Catholics, I think that’s what it is for Muslims, for Jewish, I think all of those, they get them as kids. And once they get them, they keep them.	Life-long indoctrination is a symptom of programing that occurred in childhood.
194	There’s no such thing as faith. There’s just nothing. And, you know, the big questions I had when I was a kid on life and death... when your dead you’re dead. That’s it. That’s it. There’s nothing.	With my new understanding of reality I think that when you die that’s it; no afterlife.
195	And I think a lot of why people get trapped in religion has to do with death. I honestly believe that. You know, and I think that’s why religion is a big thing. It’s a coping thing. Because everything has to deal with betterment when you’ve died. You are living this faith because when you die, this is what you get for living that faith.	Faith exists as a coping mechanism for humans struggling with existential questions and angst, primarily death anxiety.
196	And being that my life is in medicine, and I’ve held people, I’ve seen them die. I know, I’ve been there. It... they’re dead. There’s been no angels, there’s been no lights coming down, there’s been no spontaneous declarations as people die saying, “Jesus!” There’s been... <u>nothing</u> . You’re dead, you’re dead. It’s just it. They die.	Death is final and the reality of that is harsh.

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

No.	Significant Statements	Formulated Meanings
197	You're there... and you're not. There's no soul coming out of them, there's no... nothing. So to answer your question: No, I have nothing that I'm dealing with, or having to keep telling myself, there's... you know? I'm, I'm free. Non-belief. It was a life's journey.	My ideas of death today are far from where I started. It's been a life-long journey. I am resolute in my position, I have no more questioning. I feel free.
198	So, as most people, I think that my involvement – let's just say in religion – started as a child, essentially, because it's what my parents believed and I suspect it's what they wanted me to believe. Born into it. That's it.	I was born into Christian fundamentalism. My parents believed in Christian fundamentalism and they instilled their beliefs in me from the very beginning.
199	...and I remember probably from the earliest age I can remember, probably around six, um, we would always be going to church. Every Sunday.	I was taken to church regularly from an early age.
200	I don't even know how, but I became an altar boy. And it was one of those things that, it just seemed like the thing to do.	At a young age, I began to get personally involved with Christian fundamentalism.
201	...well, obviously I was baptised, and then it was first communion, and then going through and confirmation, and all of those various steps.	Growing up, I participated in all of the "milestone" rituals of Christian fundamentalism.
202	When I started being an altar boy, and, and that whole involvement in going to church on Sundays was very much, that was part of life as well as being a part of the Catholic Church – you're involved with all of the religious studies that also go along with that. So you would have, ah, we'd have religious classes but then also had a number of things that we would be in church or school.	I was immersed in Christian fundamentalism. Christian fundamentalism was my life at my Christian fundamentalist home, at my school, and on the weekends at church. Christian fundamentalism was my entire life.
203	And the Noah's ark... I didn't think of it as a story then, right? You think, "Oh, OK, it's truly out there and this is... history," (making air quotes, smiles) "history", right? (laughs) And um, yeah, it was part of life.	I was taught the stories of the Bible were not stories. They were literal history.
204	I could draw a distinction between Santa Claus being fiction, even though I was told it as a child, um, that that story was just a story, but not this. And I think the reason for that is because when you got to a certain age, everybody knew it was a story, your parents knew it was a story, and finally you got to a point where that story, what became a story, was no longer truth, right? So a story is as true as you want it to be.	Other ideas and stories (Santa Claus) could be myths and untrue, but not the Bible. The Bible was absolutely true. Everyone confirmed this to be truth.

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

No.	Significant Statements	Formulated Meanings
205	That was history. Growing up I was led to believe that these are all historical things. That Adam and Eve was history.	I believed what everyone was telling me. Christian fundamentalism formed my understanding of reality and history.
206	During that time, and going to church, and everything else, I didn't have, I never looked, I never analysed it. I never took the time to really think things through; it was just an accepted belief. It was just, that was the way it was, I had no reason to doubt it.	The Bible was literal and true. I took it for granted. I did not question my beliefs.
207	Um, when I think back now, if someone was to say, "it's all about faith" – it wasn't, it wasn't even a faith thing. I think at that age, I wouldn't rationalize it in the sense of faith; I was rationalizing it in the sense of, that's what it is! And that's what it was. And if somebody was to ever ask me, "Why do you believe that?" or if someone was to question me on it, I don't think I would say, "Well, that's my faith." I think I would say, "Because that's... because that's... true."	Christian fundamentalism formed the world around me. It was all I knew. I had no reason to question it.
208	... you know, some people will say, "Is raising a child in a religious environment paramount to child abuse?" – there is an argument for it, and I think everything needs to be taken in context.	The idea of raising a child in a religious environment being a form of child abuse may seem outrageous, but I think, depending on the context, there is an argument for it.
209	So everything that I had involvement with was friends from school, friends from the neighbourhood, and everybody in the neighbourhood all went to the same church and all of the rest of it, so yeah, you're right, very much a bubble of, "This is the information." Nobody ever questioned me.	I lived in an isolated environment in which the only information I received confirmed Christian fundamentalism to be true. I never heard a dissenting opinion. My beliefs were never challenged.
210	I wouldn't have been an altar boy if I didn't believe it.	I truly accepted and believed in the tenants of Christian fundamentalism.
211	I mean, I think as a child, though, I think as a child I had common sense. But to a degree that a child can comprehend things. And I have to say, I was always someone who questioned. I still am today.	Even from the beginning, I had an inquisitive mind.
212	And even as a child, and even in school...I did. If I didn't like something... well I always wanted to know why.	I would investigate things that I didn't understand.

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

No.	Significant Statements	Formulated Meanings
213	And I never truly believed that when they blessed the wine that it became blood. None of that rang true like from a physical true, true sense. Only because this is something that is... I can see it, right? It's not something fabricated. If they said, "This turns to blood," then you should be able to show me, you should be able to pour it out...	Even at a young age, I was able to recognize (with common sense/critical thinking) that aspects of Christian fundamentalism weren't true in the literal sense.
214	But if someone said, "This is the story of Jesus, and this is the story of Adam and Eve, and this is the story of the Ark, and you know two animals going in," all of that? Never, never occurred to me to actually think that through. It was just, that's what I believed, and it was what I believed because the church told me that, the school told me that, my parents told me that, my friends were all...they all believed that, and nobody ever told me anything different.	Everybody in my life confirmed that what I had been told was true.
215	And I don't even think I ever really had discussions with my parents or the church or anything else about, "You know, what is this? Does this, does this really make sense?" Not like the types of questions people would have today.	Times are different now in the information age. Ideas/beliefs are easily investigated. In my time, information was not so readily available. Beliefs were passed on and taken for granted.
216	Again, there was never a need to question it. That's just the way it was.	I was never given an opportunity or reason to question anything I'd been told.
217	If it wasn't... if I was to think back I would say to myself, "Why wouldn't it be true? Why would somebody tell me all of this if it wasn't true?"	How could everyone be wrong? What motivation would they have to lie? Couldn't be true, it makes no sense.
218	My transformation, um, I think I'm so at peace with my transformation because I made the decision on my own through thoughtful analysis that got me to where I am today, and nobody tried to convince me otherwise. I have never had at any time in my entire life somebody say to me, "Darrell, your belief is wrong. Your belief in God is wrong. You should think about the fact that there isn't a God out there..." or anything like that. Nobody had ever come to me. So my complete transformation is only because of how I see the world now.	No one tried to convince me my beliefs were wrong. I reasoned my way out of Christian fundamentalism on my own. This makes me comfortable with my transformation. The decision was my own.

No.	Significant Statements	Formulated Meanings
219	My path... you know what? It was gradual, but it wasn't gradual.	My journey did not all happen at once. My journey wasn't sudden, but it was steady.
220	It came to me on my own... I didn't have outside influences.	My decision to apostatize was made without outside influence.
221	...I was a teenager. And by that time I was no longer praying before I went to bed, right? You're getting a little bit older and do I really need to do this?	As I got older, I began to move away from Christian fundamentalism, and began questioning things more.
222	So because we went to the public school system, now I no longer have religion in my day-to-day life. That's the first thing that happened.	Life circumstances moved religion away from being part of my everyday life. This was a factor in my moving away from Christian fundamentalism.
223	... I was no longer, um, I think we started to go to church initially when we moved up there, but life changed. Now I'm in high school, I'm involved in more activities, I was involved in army cadets and so my weekends now had activities that were happening there, and slowly over those couple of years, I just no longer had the desire to go to church.	I became involved in many community activities and had little time for church. I began to lose interest in Christian fundamentalism. My faith was less important.
224	And it wasn't that I stopped believing, it's just there was never an ongoing influence in my life anymore. We didn't really talk about religion in the house, we didn't have... we weren't going to church, and I wasn't exposed to it in school, and all of my friends were now part of the public school system rather than the Catholic school system. So for all intents and purposes, we make the move to Yellowknife and religion disappears from my life.	I wasn't around Christian fundamentalism much anymore and its influence in my life waned, but I still held onto my belief.
225	There was no longer... my belief didn't stop, right? My belief... I still maintained belief but my belief is going to start to wane at this point. I didn't have people telling me every day, "Don't forget God is in your life, don't forget... and so on."	Although I still held onto my beliefs, my faith was slowly beginning to fade away.

No.	Significant Statements	Formulated Meanings
226	And it's funny because now, as I think about it today, and, and I look at my present beliefs, is that if you have children, and you don't expose them to religion, and there is no religion in their life, even if you positively tell them there is no God, if no one is telling them there is one, would they manufacture it themselves in their mind?	We are all born atheists. It is the programming we receive as children that makes us believers. As the influence of religion faded from my life, so did my faith. Without my childhood programming, would I ever have believed? I doubt it.
227	...but when it comes to beliefs...anything, any sort of belief whatsoever right? Whether it's belief in God, whether it's a belief in the government is coming to get you, whether it's a belief in... whatever! Belief comes from your environment. You are a product of your environment when it comes to those sorts of things. You know, um... nurture vs. nature.	We believe what we are taught to believe by our parents and the society around us. We are products of our environments. This is evidence that faith is not real.
228	And so, now I'm in high school and I'm thinking, "OK, I actually believe in evolution because there is physical evidence and it's evidence that I find is compelling."	As I left Christian fundamentalism behind, I started to develop new understanding and ways of seeing reality/ history.
229	Is that I believe in science, but I also believed in God. And I actually answered my question. And I said to myself, I said, "Okay, if the Bible says that God created man in his own image, the Bible doesn't say what his image is: It just says his own image. So why didn't he create us as a single-celled amoeba because that is what he is? And we... just simply evolved!"	I tried to reconcile the contradictory messages between Christian fundamentalism and science.
230	And surprisingly, my dad told me there's no such thing as spacemen. There's no such thing as flying saucers and all the rest of that, right? And yet it seems almost as farfetched to believe in a flying saucer as it would be to believe in God.	I began to see the cognitive dissonance displayed by followers of Christian fundamentalism
231	...I would say to myself, "Why is it so hard to believe that there can't be intelligent life elsewhere on another planet?" I don't have any belief of that, right?	I was able to see that my thinking was different from other Christian fundamentalists.
232	And the funny thing is, nobody ever told me this. It's just how I tried to come to some type of rationalization as to how can science and my belief in God still coexist.	I tried to rationalize how the Bible and science could have contradictory messages and yet still be true and coexist.

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

No.	Significant Statements	Formulated Meanings
233	I'm very much like I said before; I question things. I'm very much – I need to know the answer to things.	I would investigate things that I didn't understand. I had the desire to know the answers to my questions.
234	So now I'm finishing high school, I still believe in God, I, I think? And I say that..."I think," I still believe in God. Um, the first time that I believe I came to call myself agnostic was when I was in the military.	I was no longer a Christian. But I wasn't sure if I believed in God. I moved towards agnosticism.
235	So maybe that was part of that initial thing for me where I began that whole critical thinking and looking at something and weighing the evidence and saying, "Does this make sense?"	My thinking changed. I became a critical thinker. I began to base my beliefs on evidence.
236	... I was already in my mind, although I still believed in God, in a sense, this is where I was beginning to question whether I was truly, whether I truly believed or not. And I think that from my critical analysis of things, I then started to say to myself, "Well, maybe I'm agnostic." But I didn't see agnostic as someone who was, who didn't believe in God. I felt that I was agnostic because I believed in God, but there was no evidence to support my belief.	I wasn't ready to stop believing in God so I became an agnostic, saying God may exist but there is no evidence to support my belief.
237	So I think I gave myself a label to say that, you know, if I'm wrong... oops! You know? If there is a God, and I'm saying there isn't, it's only because I don't have enough evidence to, so then if I die and there is truly a God, then I'm safe, right?	I believed in a God only as insurance to protect me in case I was wrong.
238	But at the same time though, too, I already realized that believing in God or the Christian god is not the only god that's out there.	I became aware that the God of Christian fundamentalism is but one of many gods.
239	And I used to joke, I think I even joked with my dad one time. I said, "What if the Krishnas are right?" Like, how the heck do WE know? Right? If there's a thousand gods, and everybody's believing...not everybody can be right	The many gods in the world contradict one another. One cannot know that their particular god is the one real one. This means the odds are that Christian fundamentalism is not correct.
240	So I have to think about it and say, "Well maybe there is a God, and maybe it's just one God, and maybe we just all see that God in a different light." But then how does that make the Bible the definitive source for that God?	My critical thinking was beginning to demonstrate the unlikelihood that the exclusive claims made by Christian fundamentalism were true.
241	I became more analytical.	I was using critical thinking. I became an analytical person.

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

No.	Significant Statements	Formulated Meanings
242	If I was to put my hand on a Bible and swear and then lie about something or whatever, it didn't mean anything to me. Putting my hand on the Bible is nothing. The book is nothing.	The Bible is no longer a special or sacred book to me. The Bible doesn't mean anything to me anymore. It's just a book, nothing more.
243	And I was actually, and I had come to, at some point during this period of time, and like I said it was sort of a slow process, but it wasn't, right? It was... there was belief, then there was a lack of anything to keep me believing, and then there was critical thinking, and then there was a slow period of time where my critical thinking then allowed me to, to come to certain realizations myself.	I moved from belief to a loss of belief to the acquisition of critical thinking. The acquisition of critical thinking then empowered me to come to new realizations without the assistance of others.
244	And I remember going into court one day to testify about something, and I made the decision, "I'm not swearing on the Bible anymore."	The Bible didn't mean anything to me anymore. It was just a book.
245	And so, I get up on the stand, and the, uh, and the judge, or sorry, the bailiff, comes over with the Bible, and I turn to the judge and I say, "I'd like to give a solemn affirmation." And the judge says, "Excuse me?" And I say, "a solemn affirmation." And he just looks at me, and the bailiff did not know, she didn't know what to do.	My own word/oath meant more to me than the Bible. The Bible isn't special; it's just a book.
246	But you know what? I felt guilty. It's funny that I think about it now because I've never thought about this particular thing up until this point, but I actually felt guilty that other people were looking at me and...you know, it wasn't that I felt guilty that I said that I didn't want to swear on the Bible...	I felt guilty for taking this personal stand (to say my word was more important than the Bible, which is just a book).
247	I felt shamed. That is exactly what it was. That other people were looking at me and that they were now judging me because I didn't believe.	I felt shamed. That is exactly what it was. That other people were looking at me and that they were now judging me because I didn't believe.
248	Up until this point, nobody – I'd never talked to anybody about my foray into non-belief. I didn't think it was anybody's business. It's... whatever I believe is what I believe.	My journey was highly personal and private. I did not share my journey with others.

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

No.	Significant Statements	Formulated Meanings
249	I don't care what you believe; I don't care what somebody else believes. You know what? You want to be a fundamentalist Christian, you want to do, you want to believe in Islam, you want to be a Buddhist, you want to do whatever: good for you, as long as that makes you a good person. As soon as your beliefs start to hurt other people, then I have a problem with you.	I am tolerant of the beliefs of others on the condition that individual beliefs do not cause harm to others.
250	I have always believed, and I believe today, that we are where we are because of the decisions we make.	We are personally responsible for our lives.
251	So that day in court where I decided that, no, I'm going to do that solemn affirmation, it actually...the feeling that I felt, from being judged, it actually made me more resolved in the position, in the feeling that I now had.	When I felt shamed and judged for my non-belief, I became more resolved in my non-belief.
252	And he said, "All you have to believe"... and he said, "You have to believe in the Great Architect", and I go, "What do you mean?" And he goes, "Well, you have to believe in God." And I was like, "Oh yeah," but I could justify that. That was the time when I just said, when I suddenly went... because you see, it comes down to, if I was a Mason, it would allow me to further my career. There are positive things for being involved in any fraternal organization, especially a powerful fraternal organization. But you know what? But I have a fair amount of... I have a lot of ethics, and I have a fair amount of, again, a lot of, integrity in myself... and there was no way I could do it because I'd have to say I believe in something I didn't believe in. And that was it. That was the day.	One day after a conversation, I had a break-through moment in which I finally realized I was an atheist.
253	It really comes down to, did I believe in God? And my answer was, "There's no evidence to support that there is God, but... that's it. So would I say there is no God? No. I wouldn't say there is no God, but until somebody provides me with evidence of it, I will withhold my judgement." That was my answer.	I couldn't definitely affirm there is no God. But I couldn't find any evidence that there is a God. I would tell people I was open to any new information and, until then, I would not judge either way.
254	So at that point I never really, I would never outwardly articulate, there is no God... but I did not believe and I knew it at the time.	I became an atheist but kept it private. I did not share my lack of belief with others.
255	I don't feel shame about believing in it, I don't feel embarrassment about believing in it.	I am not ashamed or embarrassed of my past belief.

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

No.	Significant Statements	Formulated Meanings
256	I feel somewhat foolish that I believed in it but I'm going to go back to that same thing that I don't live in regret. That it is what it is. I believed it because at the time I had no reason to doubt it.	I feel foolish for believing in Christian fundamentalism, but I understand why I did.
257	When I look at myself today, I go the cons...oh there it is.... the concept of believing in it is foolish, the concept of it is stupid.	The concept of belief/faith is foolish and stupid.
258	If I did wrong, if I wronged somebody through my belief, then I would feel bad. But I never wronged anybody through my belief.	I would feel bad and guilty about my past beliefs if through my beliefs I had hurt others. This, however, did not happen.
259	My belief, and my journey from belief to non-belief, was a solo journey. It was something where I took the information that I had, and over time I gathered more information, and I analyzed that information, and then I got to a point where I am today.	My belief, and my journey from belief to non-belief, was a solo journey. I reasoned my own way out of Christian fundamentalism and into atheism.
260	And I'm not there anymore, and so now I've moved on. So the concept? Stupid and foolish.	I've moved on from faith. Looking back, the concept of faith is stupid and foolish.
261	The beliefs are foolish. I am not foolish for believing in them. And that is why I don't dislike other people who believe. I just don't want to freakin' hear about it every single day.	The concept of faith is stupid and foolish, but I am not stupid and foolish for at one time having had faith. I understand why I had the Christian fundamentalist beliefs that I had. In the same way, I do not judge others for having their beliefs. I, however, would prefer people kept their beliefs to themselves and did not push them on me.
262	And I was just at the right point – I think I was like 18 years old – where I just needed to really move in another direction, and he started inviting me out to things.	I was not born into Christian fundamentalism. Instead, Christian fundamentalism came into my life just when I was looking for new direction in my life.
263	I think the first real emotional, spiritual experience I had was he took me to his campus at... it used to be called North American Baptist College.	I was taken to a Christian fundamentalist campus at which I had an emotional experience I considered to be spiritual in nature.

No.	Significant Statements	Formulated Meanings
264	So, I had a really big emotional experience there. After that, you know, I had the Jesus tape, (finger quotes) with the Sinner's Prayer and the passion of Christ kind of idea...	I had an impactful emotional experience after which I took Christian fundamentalist materials into my home/life.
265	I watched that video so many times cuz I was really big on the emotion of it, and crying about it, and really laying down everything, like, "I want this, I want to experience it."	I watched a Christian fundamentalist video over and over, trying to re-create the emotional experience I had on campus. I wanted to experience those emotional/spiritual feelings as often as possible.
266	And I had some friends that were Pentecostal, so I kind of had some influences on the idea that things had to be emotional, and that you had to have a slaying of the spirit in order to be saved or know that you're saved and stuff like that so... That was the beginning of everything for me	I brought people into my life who also heavily focused on the emotional aspects of Christian fundamentalism. They were a big influence on me.
267	I was actually attending (Baptist church) and very charismatic leader there, and he was giving a sermon one day, and there was an altar call, and I totally went up and gave my life up there.	After a charismatic leader gave a sermon, I responded to an altar call and became a Christian fundamentalist.
268	I did my whole testimony thing a couple of days later and then a baptism a couple of weeks after that, after I did some programming to make certain I believed the same things that they believed.	I went through the rituals of the Church and, after I was programmed with the "proper" beliefs, I was accepted as a member in a Christian fundamentalist church.
269	So she wasn't going to be committed, so I was worried about the unequal yoke things from the Bible and stuff like that. So I actually broke up about that.	I began cutting people out of my life that I did not consider as committed to Christian fundamentalism as I was.
270	I found some Christians in class that were the Alliance guys and the Pentecostal guys. So I moved in with them. It was a whole household of people and it was pretty extreme cuz we had some roommates back then that were part of... it was called The Awakening.	I moved into a household environment where everyone was like-minded and extreme believers.
271	And the household I lived in was really extreme. I had guys that married their significant others because they had got involved with sex with them.	The people I lived with were extreme Christian fundamentalists. They made significant life decisions based on their beliefs.

No.	Significant Statements	Formulated Meanings
272	And then the guy that owned the house, you know, he wouldn't even masturbate. He hadn't masturbated in like three-plus years. He was waiting for God to give him a perfect sign and, um, a perfect girl. He thought if he just sacrificed that, that that would be his direction for him.	The extreme way we were living was abnormal. Most people did not believe or live the way we did.
273	Yeah, a pretty extreme house (laughs...looks down and goes quiet).	Living in that extreme way was strange.
274	I was kind of in two worlds. I was in the prisons trying to do ministry to people, and I was also in the soup half of it trying to help the poor and stuff like that.	I spent my time in service to Christian fundamentalism. I was placed in two extreme environments: the correctional service and in a soup kitchen serving the homeless.
275	And in the church itself is where I was doing most of my ministry. I was really focused, and the senior pastor we had was kind of like mentoring me and I was doing some sermons there and stuff like that.	I also served in the church where I was being mentored and taught and groomed in the ways of Christian fundamentalism.
276	It got really, really hard because there was so much mental illness down there that people were like, "Yeah, I see demons in the mirrors," and part of me was like, "Biblically I can see that," and another part of me was like, "You're crazy," and it caused a lot of conflict within me. So I didn't know what was real and what wasn't real if that makes any sense.	When dealing with the mentally ill, I experienced cognitive dissonance. I began to question Christian fundamentalism. I began to question my concept of reality. I wasn't sure what was real anymore.
277	Are you experiencing something or are you crazy? That's always been my thing. Like when my roommate that I had could always speak in tongues, and I could never speak in tongues. It drove me crazy, and he just said he could just... do it.	I became skeptical about the experiences of others. I was unsure if people were mentally ill or if they were truly experiencing things. I was never certain of the truth.
278	It's like, well, then are you experiencing it? Is it coming over you? Or are you just babbling?	I was uncertain as to what was spiritual and what was not. I was uncertain of reality.
279	But for him, he'd get all emotional when it happened, so I'd think, "Well, I'm not going to cry if I'm just lying about it. So he must be experiencing something."	I remained unsure even though the strong emotional reactions others had to their claimed spiritual experiences seemed to indicate they were genuine.

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

No.	Significant Statements	Formulated Meanings
280	And sometimes when I didn't have my experiences, I thought that was Satan, um, trying to put doubts in my mind about things.	I tried using Christian fundamentalist principles to explain/justify my questions and doubts.
281	It's weird that way. It's like everything can be confirmation bias.	Christian fundamentalism is filled with logical fallacies.
282	I always used to believe that the biggest or the best lie that Satan ever told was that God doesn't exist. And it was like that was one of those things that would really make me apprehensive.	I experienced anxiety regarding my skepticism of Christian fundamentalism. I was concerned I was being deceived by Satan.
283	It came to the point where I'd do weird prayers.	My anxiety caused me to heavily rely on prayer and to behave strangely.
284	I just happened to get on the exact same – she went on a different bus than me, and yet we're on the same train. I thought, "Oh, this is now a sign from God as he's alright with this kind of idea, so..." (shrugs).	I experienced confirmation bias. I would read into events and see them as personal messages from God. This began to dictate my actions.
285	So it's a weird world to get into when you think it through too much.	Living within Christian fundamentalism is like living in a different world/reality.
286	... my first area that I went into that allowed my imagination to take such a hold of me was Dungeons and Dragons. And that's not some "gateway" kind of thing. It's just the idea that you can just sink into your imagination what could and couldn't be. You could imagine things; it makes you think different things. And that a, there was like a very strong connection there for me.	Christian fundamentalism challenges what you believe could and couldn't be. Christian fundamentalism can change not only what you think, but the way in which you think. It shapes your reality.
287	My people say this to me, "It's amazing how far you fell in," and I think it's a group-think thing cuz I didn't have the same friends I had anymore. I kind of walked into a new world with all new friends and they all had these ideas, and whenever I had a question, people would give these kind of answers and they kind of made sense to me when I read the Bible and stuff like that.	I left my old life and entered a bubble in which everyone believed in Christian fundamentalism and confirmed its authenticity. I no longer received any opposing or outside information.
288	People could do that for me because I didn't know anything about the world and I just kind of accepted it. Like almost like group-think. I didn't, I didn't really think about anything. In fact, I hadn't even read a book in my entire life at that point.	Being naïve is what allowed Christian fundamentalism to draw me in. I didn't know anything about the world. I took everything they taught me for granted.

No.	Significant Statements	Formulated Meanings
289	That's actually one of the worst things about not being a Christian anymore because I'm still absorbed into it. Um, but just in a different regard.	Even though I am no longer a Christian fundamentalist, I am still fascinated by it.
290	And then, when I meet other people who are still Christian, I just...not to beat them up, I just wonder how they can hold onto certain things in light of other information that's out there. That's my biggest thing.	Now that I know what CF is and no longer have those beliefs, I am amazed that others are still within that belief system. Simple investigation disproves many Christian fundamentalist teachings.
291	I just, I would love to hold onto the same kind of things that people hold onto but I can't. It makes no sense to even hold those views. I don't understand how they hold them.	I would receive comfort if I were able to still believe in Christian fundamentalism. However, I am unable to hold those views as I know them to be untrue. I do not understand how others continue to hold onto those beliefs.
292	I was completely in a bubble...I would say yeah, I had nothing outside of it.	There was nothing for me outside the bubble of Christian fundamentalism.
293	And this was like an epiphany because I had that experience at school where I was crying, and then this guy's telling me this kind of stuff, and it was like all these little hits I was having just made a lot of sense to me. And then that's when I really started taking things seriously.	I had a powerful emotional experience and began being influenced by others at a critical point in my life. This drew me in and made me take Christian fundamentalism very seriously.
294	I think when it started [the doubts] was when I started seeing the hypocrisy of the church itself.	The hypocrisy of the Church opened my eyes and caused me to begin questioning my faith.
295	So I got a second job, and then they wouldn't let me stay at the church anymore...And then I kind of fell away from there, and when I fell away from there, I got into different circles of friends and that allowed me to start investigating things a little more normally.	Once I left the Christian fundamentalist bubble, I began thinking in healthier ways.
296	I remember one day, one guy said to me... uh... anyway it was one of those things where he reversed the question on me and it was, like, "Yeah, why don't I think of it that way?" Like why is it kept half full and not half empty? Like you could see it either way.	I gained access to outside ideas/information which challenged me and began to change my thinking.

No.	Significant Statements	Formulated Meanings
297	And it was, like, that totally makes sense!	I began to see merit in the way my thinking was being critiqued.
298	..because I have certain opinions on things like...If someone calls themselves an atheist, and they have no reasoning behind that, any information behind why they are what they are, other than that's the default position for them, like, "I don't see a reason for there to be a God, so there's no God." If you haven't thought about the hard questions and had to struggle with the philosophy, then I feel contemptuous about you.	Others who are atheist without really knowing why they are atheist are not the same as a religious person who has become atheist. I am resentful of being lumped in with those individuals. I find it insulting when those atheists believe we are in the same group; we are not.
299	I do feel like I'm more an atheist than you are cuz I can articulate and argue why I don't believe things. Because I went through both perspectives.	My non-belief is well thought out; their atheism is not. They do not know what it's like. I have lived both sides, but they have not.
300	So that kind of bugs me. So when you say someone's secular, I think like yourself. You can say you're secular, and I'd believe, yeah, you're secular, (puts his fist forward) pound the hand. But when someone else says it, like my neighbour, "I don't believe in God," well, WHY don't you believe in God? Because I have reasons for why I don't believe in God.	People who say they do not believe in God but cannot articulate why they don't believe in God are not like me. I am more atheist than they are. We are not equals.
301	But ah, I really started to pull away around 2005. But I didn't pull away just from, from Christianity per se. I kind of fell backwards through things.	As I moved away from Christian fundamentalism, I did not immediately head towards atheism.
302	Certain things started to fall away, certain theologies started falling away piece by piece, and then they sort of became less and less of certain things.	I moved away from my faith one step at a time. It did not happen all at once. The doctrines of Christian fundamentalism faded away and became less important over time.
303	Where, OK, maybe the Bible isn't inerrant, but it was inerrant at one point, and now I see some of the contradictions so maybe I could see it that way.	I began to see some of the contradictions in the Bible which caused me to doubt its inerrancy.

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

No.	Significant Statements	Formulated Meanings
304	At the point of my life where I didn't have answers about direction and stuff like that, or purpose, it was all thrust upon me by Christianity, and I really enjoyed that because now I had something. You know, before I had nothing. I didn't know what to do with myself. I didn't know what made for a moral person, or a good person, or direction in life, or purpose in life, and these things were thrust upon me and I really enjoyed that.	Christian fundamentalism came into my life just when I was looking for new direction. Being naïve is what allowed Christian fundamentalism to draw me in. I didn't know anything about the world. I took everything they taught me for granted.
305	And that was one of the biggest things that hit me the hardest when I started leaving because I kind of fell into some nihilism at the end of it before I kind of pulled myself up.	There was a lot of loss when I lost my faith in Christian fundamentalism. I became deeply affected and experienced extreme negative emotional consequences. I became nihilistic.
306	Even with my transition from Christianity to, like, a lax Christian on things – like a Liberal Christian – I kind of fell into Deism and stuff like that, and Buddhism. I kept falling back, and back, and back, further and further, trying to find religions that didn't have gods, that were still religions, to find some kind of purpose for things, like Hinduism which has multiple gods but you don't have to believe in a god if you don't want to.	As I moved away from Christian fundamentalism, I continued looking for meaning in other religions and spiritual traditions.
307	I think it was – when it really started – was when I read a couple books about, um, the historical Jesus, and whether or not he existed as a human.	I began my own investigation which really caused me to doubt Christian fundamentalism.
308	And then I started thinking, “Okay, there was Jesus and maybe, um, these accounts, really, are like a car accident and you have different people giving different views on things. It doesn't disprove anything: It's just peoples' different opinions on things. It didn't make a lot of sense. That's why I kind of got away from the inerrancy at first; but the gold thread still runs through it, stuff like that.	My investigation caused the tenets of Christian fundamentalism to gradually fall away. It did not happen all at once.
309	I still believe Jesus existed as a historical character; I just don't believe any of the miracles that are attributed to him, or even some of the things he even said are attributed to him, “I am God,” stuff like that.	I still believed in a God but the divinity of Jesus Christ was falling away. Jesus existed but he was no longer God.
310	So when it really got down to that stuff, Jesus started falling away when I started studying the historicalness of him.	My study of the historical Jesus confirmed for me that he was not God.

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

No.	Significant Statements	Formulated Meanings
311	And then really it was understanding the heroes of that time. Like people who were similar – similar stories. Like there's Horus, who has like a really similar story to Jesus, which predates Jesus. And then I read all that kind of stuff, and I read the defence of that is maybe Satan put those prototypes there? (incredulous face) Like that?	The answers Christian fundamentalism provided to my questions about historical facts were insufficient and illogical. I could not take their defences seriously.
312	Yeah! I was like, "That's getting really far out there." This stuff should, like, make a LITTLE more sense. That's when Jesus kind of fell away from being God to being a symbol of some sort to me. Like, he's still a good moral teacher.	The implausible explanations used by Christian fundamentalism to justify its belief system were further causing my faith to fall away.
313	So then it kind of got away from the whole Jesus is God, to a deistic god, that we can worship, that wants to be worshiped, that we can pray to, stuff like that.	I moved away from Christian fundamentalism and began considering the concepts of deism.
314	I couldn't do anything myself, I had to get all my answers from the external, whether it be from prayer or other godly men.	Within Christian fundamentalism, I had no personal agency. All the power in my life was external. I needed God or those connected to God.
315	If there's one thing about me it was: I put my feet in, and then I submerged myself. I put my toe in, and then I just fell in.	I very quickly became immersed in Christian fundamentalism. It did not happen a step at a time.
316	Then my ethics class, the questions of whether or not you could be moral and not be a believer came up. And that's when I started investigating the other half as well, where I started saying, "You know what? I was a pretty moral person without God before I became a Christian."	Christian fundamentalism's position that only believers could be moral challenged me.
317	You know, I didn't drink till I was of age; I've never done drugs – this is without the guidance of God in my life – it was just things that I didn't do. You know, I stole when I was little, and I learned my lessons and I didn't steal again and... So my ethics class kind of brought things forward, and then my philosophy class brought a lot of things more forward on questioning things. And that's when everything started unraveling. I started reading everything.	Some Christian fundamentalist tenets did not square with my personal experience and caused me to doubt.
318	My brother did say this, but...I think that he agrees with me when I say this. It seems that education either enforces or destroys your faith.	Access to knowledge is a key factor in people's ability to hold belief.

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

No.	Significant Statements	Formulated Meanings
319	I think when I just kept unrolling everything. It came down to the point where I got to a deistic god and then I said, "If there even is a deistic god, which we can or cannot disprove whether there is or is not...then what is the point of it?"	My faith slowly came apart until it no longer had any value. There was nothing left to hold onto.
320	If it just started everything, there's no point to worship it, it doesn't care if you worship it. I just said, "Then I see no evidence for it." And as I realized that the absence of evidence is not the evidence of absence, and vice versa, I just thought, "There's no point to believe in a God anymore." It doesn't change anything for me even if there is a deistic god.	My faith had unraveled to the point where I had nothing left. Having a deistic God was pointless to me. There was no point in believing in God anymore.
321	Cuz when I got down to the: this is a big farce and I've been led into something that I didn't think I was going to go, that I had to find something to get me out of it because I started wondering, "What is the purpose? What is my purpose?"	Losing my faith took me to a dark place that I had to escape from. I started questioning the point to life.
322	Um, not going to kill myself, and I don't want to believe in God, so I'm just going to have to live with these problems and just deal with them as I can.	I had to find my own purpose. There was no one else who could do it for me.
323	And that's why I like to find people who are like-minded. And that's kind of hard to find because even my wife, she doesn't investigate anything.	It's hard to find others who have experienced this phenomenon. There are not many others who understand me. There are few I can talk to about my experiences.
324	She just stopped believing and... moves forward in life, whereas I kind of went through these really bad times where I just wanted to... like when I journal, when I have really bad thoughts, I just like wanted to walk out the door and just go. Because it made no sense. It made no sense to be in a relationship, it made no sense to be here, it made no sense for anything. Nothing felt like anything, I just wanted to go.	Others have not experienced the struggles that I have after losing my faith. I have had negative thoughts. I lost all sense of meaning in life. I felt like giving up on everything in my life and just walking away from it all.
325	And uh, it was very emotional at those times. I wasn't thinking suicide: I just didn't understand what I was supposed to do because I had nothing when I grew up, then religion gave me everything, and then I took it away, or it took itself away from ME.	Losing my faith was emotionally traumatic. Christian fundamentalism had filled a need in my life. I did not leave my faith. I did not have a choice. It felt as though my faith left me and I couldn't stop it from happening.

No.	Significant Statements	Formulated Meanings
326	<p><u>And the biggest thing I found is that...there is nothing out there to help people who walk away from something like this. And that was what drove me crazy.</u> But I did find a podcast called <i>Living After Faith</i>, which helped me IMMENSELY.</p>	<p>People do not understand what it means to experience this phenomenon. I could not find any direct support to help me deal with it. Listening to podcasts where others talked about experiencing this phenomenon is what I used to work through my struggles.</p>
327	<p>And from there I tried to find other things that were helpful, like that were similar. I started picking up a lot of books dealing with depression and stuff like that because I started feeling really depressed afterward. But really what happened was that guy's podcast was the saving grace for me at that point cuz he went through the exact same thing, it seems like.</p>	<p>Without adequate support, I had to find my own ways of dealing with my experiences and the accompanying depression that resulted from contact with this phenomenon.</p>
328	<p>I don't think I'll ever get back to it. I'd love to be able to get back to it, um, but it doesn't make any sense to me so I just... I didn't reason my way into it, and I reasoned myself out of it, and I don't think you can be reasoned back into it.</p>	<p>I'd receive comfort if I could go back to being a Christian fundamentalist. However, my reason and intellect make that impossible. I cannot unlearn what I have learned. My faith is gone and I can't get it back.</p>
329	<p>But, you know, I kind of see things a bit different, because religion made things special. But now I think to myself, the fact that I'm not going to live on forever, makes things, makes this time more special and you have to make more choices, about not doing overtime, about spending time with your family because there's no guarantee of tomorrow, and there's no guarantee you're going to see anything ever again.</p>	<p>Losing my faith has given me new perspectives on reality and the value of my life. It has changed my priorities and influenced my life choices, including how I choose to spend my time.</p>
330	<p>And during times of study, I studied the efficacy of prayer. So that kind of stuff really swayed me as well towards walking away from prayer. And then I'd do my own things like, you know, the whole sheep-wool on the ground, from the Bible. I'm going to try this one, God. If you're there, it's going to happen or it's not going to happen. And then nothing happens... (shrugs)... you know... (laughs).</p>	<p>After subjecting the idea of the efficacy of prayer to empirical testing, I found prayer to be false and untrue.</p>

No.	Significant Statements	Formulated Meanings
331	Everything makes sense when you keep it in its box. But as soon as you open up the box to get the fingers in from other areas? Then it starts to fall apart again.	Christian fundamentalism and the concepts of faith quickly fall apart when placed under investigation. One has to simply accept and believe in order for faith to work.
332	I was born into Lutheranism, I'll say that. I come from a family with a non-believing father and a believing mother. She was raised Evangelical Christian, um, my father was the one who steered us towards Lutheran.	I was born into religion. My family raised me to be religious.
333	She gives God a lot of the credit where I'm like, I came to a place personally where I was like, "God didn't get me through that, I got me through that."	I no longer give outside credit to a God for the things I have personally accomplished.
334	Like thank you God for the food on the table? How about thank the farmer? Who my dad was, right? I saw how all that came to be. Like, well when it doesn't rain, the food doesn't grow. Why are we giving God the credit for that? That's really shitty.	People should not give their thanks to a God for things that have nothing to do with him. People should get the credit for the work they do.
335	That I will say always bothered me a little bit. I can remember things like that as a child being like, you're thanking God for all the good things? Why do all the bad things happen?	People are inconsistent with their praise. If God gets credit for all the good things, is God not also responsible for all the bad things too?
336	Our neighbours, over a simple thing of, "How often should we have communion," separated. There was a distinct line. And that was really hard for me to go through.	People divided and left the church over a trivial thing that shouldn't have mattered. This was painful.
337	... I'm old enough to question, and this is the man teaching me confirmation – good ol' Lutheran, um, (mocking voice) "I look at pictures of naked women and I watch violent movies, but if I don't act on them, you know, that's fine." (Gives a look that suggests this is questionable).	The leaders of the Church were inconsistent and hypocritical.
338	Yeah, a lot of inconsistencies to what people who were supposed to be authorities on the Bible. They're just skewing it to make it so that I'm OK, I'm not doing anything wrong.	The leaders of the Church would twist the Bible in order to justify their preferences and lifestyles.
339	...and you're sitting and telling these impressionable teenagers that it's OK to look at naked women?	The hypocritical teaching of church leaders would confuse and hurt the younger generations.

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

No.	Significant Statements	Formulated Meanings
340	It's sin of the heart, it's the sin of thinking, and yet you're sitting there saying it's OK and then all this confusion. I remember seeing my brother struggle with that. And I remember thinking that was very odd of him to say that. He could just pick and choose what he liked.	Younger generations of believers were being confused as to what was right and wrong because what the leaders taught did not make sense.
341	We used to go to church school once a week.	I was raised with a Christian fundamentalist focus and received consistent Christian fundamentalist teachings.
342	I remember I actually had the Children's Bible which skews a lot of the facts to make it kid-friendly. I use it to press flowers now (bursts out laughing), but it's this thick book with some pretty decent pictures that I can remember my mom sitting and reading us bedtime stories.	As a child I was taught "kid-friendly" versions of Bible stories that left a lot of the brutality out of the messages.
343	Going back to, though, my mom's church, one thing that I remember being very pivotal in my beliefs was... seven years old? I started going to Bible camp.	In addition to church and Christian fundamentalist school, I also attended Bible camp. Bible camp was an important influence on my beliefs.
344	I felt like I was getting fed there.	Bible camp felt spiritually nourishing.
345	But those summer camps, that was that bridge of more of an emotional experience, less of the ritual, and that was what I always felt really fed my faith.	Bible camp moved away from ritual and provided more of an emotional experience of faith that became very important to me.
346	Like, "Oh, I could go home and I can, I could witness to people!" Well... sort of (laughs). I was, "Am I a good Christian if I don't witness to people?" Yeah, oh God... things to never do to my children.	I would feel pressure to witness about my faith to others. If I was too afraid, I would feel guilty and wonder if I was even a good Christian. That was wrong. I will not pass this pressure onto my children.
347	But that was something that... you were guilted into feeling that you should be talking to people about your faith and that you should be ready to witness at any time.	I was made to feel guilty if I wasn't ready to witness to others at any time.

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

No.	Significant Statements	Formulated Meanings
348	But I remember one year sitting down in the basement and telling myself that I needed to read the Bible, even the Old Testament which was really, really hard (laughs). When you're a kid and you think you're going to run with it, and again I remember I started singing songs about Jesus...	I often felt guilty that I wasn't a good enough Christian. I felt I needed to do more. I tried to worship God as best I could.
349	It's your strength and it's your... right? This is how I get along with people, this is how I dissuade my fears of the future, right? You're worried about what you're going to do after high school, that's a pretty heavy, heady time in your life and that spills out because that's what you use to get you through.	Praising God was something I used to interact with others and cope with the major stressors in my life.
350	And I went to [a Baptist college] for two years for a music diploma. Trying it out to see if I could go to a university for arts, ah, as a music major. And part of me was thinking about being a music pastor in a church because then at that time I was attending [a Baptist church] which was quite a large congregation and they actually paid their music pastor to be on staff. And I thought, "Wow wouldn't that be lovely? Music and getting paid to work in a church?"	I seriously considered and was willing to dedicate my entire life to the service of Christian fundamentalism.
351	One thing that always bothered me were all the Bible verses about, "Women, be submissive," and I was, "Really?"	I found the church to be misogynistic towards women.
352	Don't tell me what to do! "Submissive," that's my dirty word, whoa! Ask me about our wedding vows where I laughed in the guy's face.	The church's views on women and the expectations the church has of women are extremely offensive to me.
353	Growing up in a culture where we are taught to be equals, I mean, I'm not yet 40 years old, so I'm young enough to know that I'm not expected to wear the apron and wait for my husband to come home and the kids have their hair combed, and wearing ties and suits, and sit down to a fully plated meal.	The church is outdated in their views of the roles of women in the family and their roles in society. These views are offensive and I will not follow such expectations.
354	But then you have this conservative Christian mentality of women should just stay at home. Just stay at home and raise kids.	The Church's views on women and the expectations the Church has of women were restrictive and patronizing.
355	I slowly started thinking about becoming a – what's it called? – a missionary.	I wanted to commit to getting involved in spreading the word of God while helping the poor.

No.	Significant Statements	Formulated Meanings
356	And they're kissing you and they're crying and you're thinking, "Wow, God really sent us here to help these people out."	Making a difference in the lives of others felt like I was a part of God's purpose.
357	I got no support from the youth pastor, where I said, "You know, I think God is really calling me to do this."	When I reached out to the church, I did not receive the support I needed.
358	That was really off-putting of, isn't this what you want people to do? You want them to say, "I'm giving up all my possessions, and I'm going to go wherever God calls me to, to proselytize and save people's souls." And he just left me sitting there with my guts hanging out, essentially. And I thought, "Wow, fuck you right back."	I opened up and the Church was cold and indifferent to me. I became hurt and angry.
359	<p>They organized a trip to go to Mozambique, and I went with them there, and I asked for something as simple as having it announced in the newsletter at this very large congregation of this Baptist church that I'd been attending for six-seven years, singing in the worship team...</p> <p>But, "No," because it hadn't officially gone through the Mission Committee that this was an official mission they could sanction by the congregation, I couldn't put the announcement in.</p>	I gave a lot of my time and energy into the church. And then it came time to ask the church for a simple favour and, due to a technicality, they refused my request. It was all take and no give.
360	That's when I kind of went, "Oh, you know, I'm feeling very much like a small town country girl in a city church all of a sudden." And I was like, "Yeah, I'm good, I'm good for a change."	The church was large and cold. No one acted as though they knew me. There was no sense of family. I had to leave.
361	And here I'm thinking, "Really? Is that the best you can do? I've been coming here for a long time. And not just coming and sitting in the back pews. I'm up at the front and you see me singing... into the microphone. Both services! There's no excuse then! Of course, looking back I see it all as, doubts started, doubts started.	People suddenly seemed not to know me when I made a simple request even though I had been a prominent volunteer for a long time. I began to have doubts.

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

No.	Significant Statements	Formulated Meanings
362	<p>I remember going and shaking the pastor's hand one day as he's standing at the door, and I realize they get a lot, but he's like, "How are you?" And I'm like, "I'm not really good, I'm struggling at work, and I need a change, and I don't know what to do, and I can't say I'm good."</p> <p>And again, just left there at the door of, "I just wanted to shake your hand," but no offer to contact me where I'm like, "Really? I know you go and meet other people for coffee and isn't it your job as a pastor to counsel people through the hard times in their life? Not just the people who came from the little church that you moved to, to this big beautiful building that is paid by not tax dollars." Yeah, I'd been here. I felt like I had paid my dues and got nothing out of it.</p>	<p>I tried to open up and ask for help from the pastor of the Church, but when I did, I was met with cold indifference. I have given the Church a lot of myself and had gotten nothing out of it.</p>
363	<p>Well, it just felt like when I need something there's nothing there. There's nobody to come talk to me and say, "Well, what do you need?"</p>	<p>I was hurt to find out that the fellowship I thought I had established with other believers did not exist.</p>
364	<p>There was nobody there. Especially when I was at this pinnacle point in my life.</p>	<p>It was a key moment in my life and I needed help. But no help came. No one cared about me.</p>
365	<p>So then you start to question, well, maybe God...I feel like God is telling me I should be doing this, but I'm not getting any support. Is that an answer from you? Oh God, the questioning!</p>	<p>The lack of support from the church led me to start questioning my faith and my connection to God.</p>
366	<p>Again, feeling really big there, and feeling left out, and I thought, I remember at one time thinking, "If I wasn't actually sitting in the choir, I don't feel like I'd have a spot out in the congregation."</p>	<p>I was a small fish in a large pond. It was as though I wasn't there and I felt I did not belong.</p>
367	<p>I was the faithful one of, "God will make it all work." And he [her husband] was still struggling with his ex-wife...</p>	<p>I was following CF and was being passive and trusted that God would work things out for me in my life.</p>
368	<p>And lack of sex played a really big part in that in that I was "The Virgin", capital T, capital V.</p>	<p>Following the principles of Christian fundamentalism meant that I couldn't have sex. Being a virgin was a large part of my identity.</p>

No.	Significant Statements	Formulated Meanings
369	Well, the contradictions of the Gospels, right? That's a big one. Or how they each had their own theme. And they touched very briefly on the fact that this theme was prevalent in other ancient religions, but...	The Gospels of the Bible contradict one another and use themes that are derivative of other more-ancient religions. These things caused me to question Christian fundamentalism.
370	There was also the New Testament stuff of, "Well we think that Paul was talking to rash women who were disrupting the services," right?	There were parts of the New Testament that were derogatory towards women and offended me.
371	"We don't want to have to tell you that you should be barefoot and pregnant in the kitchen like Paul says, but we're going to put our own modern spin on it... and, ah, it's just this bullshit that they spewed out to kind of cover up the fact that this Paul dude was a sexist loner.	The Bible was written by people who wrote hateful things about women. The church tries to make excuses for these messages. This was offensive to me.
372	And all the mission trips. Just people asking me, "Well, did you get to witness?" Or, "What church did you go with?" Like that mattered.	I went on missions to help people in need. The people of the church missed the point and were concerned about things that were unimportant.
373	We were there building houses in Christ's name and putting a roof over their head and that wasn't good enough for you!	Helping others in need wasn't really important to the congregation. They cared more about how many people converted to their way of belief.
374	Coming home from that and going to my mom's church and talking, and he was always just so pissed off with people who were like, "Well, were you able to preach Jesus there?" Like it had all been for naught if you hadn't.	Church members reacted as though we had failed in our mission efforts if we built homes for the poor but did not preach to them. This disappointed and angered me.
375	They live in a garbage, they get raped or they get abandoned, they get raised by who the hell knows – aunties, uncles – because their mom and dad are high or not around, but you're worried whether or not they had Noah's ark told to them in the library or whether they could pray or say grace.	Church members did not care that their expectations of our mission efforts were unrealistic in the appalling circumstances in which we worked. I found this hypocritical.

No.	Significant Statements	Formulated Meanings
376	When I went to Mexico, same kind of attitude of, "Why can't they build their own houses?"	The people of the church demonstrated ignorance of the conditions of extreme poverty and had callous attitudes towards the very poor.
377	I came home still a believer but pissed off.	After these experiences with other Christians I was angry with Christian fundamentalists, but I was not prepared to stop believing in Christian fundamentalism.
378	...Guatemala, we went to a non-Christian affiliated organization and people questioning that? And I was like, "Are you kidding me? You sit in your padded couch and watch the news and you're separate from it and your fat fridge full of food and no worms or parasites and electricity when you flick the switch and ah..."	Church members questioned the value of our help because we worked with a non-Christian aid group. I was shocked at the narrowness of their views.
379	I still came back from Guatemala still a believer, I still called myself a Christian. And that bothered THE SHIT out of me. Yeah, those are probably two big main themes that I have now in my contempt for Christianity and Christians.	I was very disappointed in my fellow believers. Now that I'm a non-believer, the ideas and attitudes demonstrated by Christian fundamentalists are areas of contempt I have for this demographic of people.
380	That there has to be some motive of, "Am I going to get points to go to heaven if I do this? Do I get a tax receipt if I put my money in the plate?"	Christians do not help others out of love or because of their faith. They do good deeds for their own benefit. They don't actually care for others.
381	My mom firmly believes that Jesus will come back in her lifetime. He'll fix the world, all the crap we've been doing to it.	Christian fundamentalists hold bizarre notions that an external power will make things right in the world again. They do nothing to fix the problems of the world themselves. They wait for their saviour to take care of things for them.
382	..."God will, God will fix it all." (Her eyes get real big) Oh, you want to piss me off? Tell me that. Those are all things that really pushed me at the end.	The idea that an external power will just fix everything is an idea that makes me very angry. It is one of the forces that strongly motivated me to leave my faith.

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

No.	Significant Statements	Formulated Meanings
383	The big, um, nail on the head, or, yeah, hitting the nail on the head, was Joe and I built this house and we still hadn't had sex and we're still not engaged.	My faith and the reality of my lifestyle/situation were at odds and were coming to a breaking point.
384	And I was still holding on to my capital "T", capital "V", and Joe would keep questioning me, he was getting quite angry, um, and rightly so... because I wouldn't allow myself to question it. That was my identity and that was what the Bible said.	I was proud of my Christian fundamentalist virgin identity and would not question it regardless of how illogically I was behaving.
385	And there's lots of stuff in the Bible that I've been picking and choosing: How can I pick and choose that which is so fundamental to, if I really believe, I won't give in because it's not the right thing to do.	My Christian fundamentalist virgin identity was inconsistent with the lax positions I had taken on other aspects of my faith.
386	We fooled around, and frustrating as it was not to go all the way, and knowing that it was a big wedge in our relationship, and I still wouldn't give it up. I was still holding onto that identity.	My rigid refusal to examine my Christian fundamentalist beliefs caused tension and frustration in our relationship.
387	Yup, he challenged me one day and I couldn't give him an answer as to why, outside of what the Bible said, I would wait.	Even though my virgin Christian fundamentalist identity was indefensible because of all the compromises I had made, I would not give it up.
388	Here I'm looking at a man I love, that I want to be intimate with, and won't let myself based on some tiny thread I'm holding onto of "No! God says it's wrong!" Other people aren't being struck down by lightning because they have sex, and I would say this to myself, "Other people did it and they're not bad Christians. I plan on marrying this guy, doesn't that make it okay?"	Although I accepted others who had enjoyed sex, I could not give in to sex because my virginity was central to my Christian fundamentalist identity and was enshrined in my self-concept.
389	...I couldn't give him an answer and I had to admit to myself that, no, this thing that I'd been holding onto for SO LONG was something that I had to finally give up.	I gave up my Christian fundamentalist virgin identity because it no longer made sense to me in the context of my circumstances.

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

No.	Significant Statements	Formulated Meanings
390	So I did concede, and we had sex, and there was no lightning from heaven, and I remember thinking, and looking up at the sky and going, “All that for nothing! Is there really anybody out there?” I seriously did that. “Where the fuck are you now?” Of all the things that I had to give up, and I held out FOR YOU God! Big sacrifices! And then really nothing happened.	I was shocked that, when I gave up my virgin identity, absolutely nothing happened. There was no supernatural reaction whatsoever. This made me think that there was no reaction from God because there was no God to do the reacting. If nothing reacted, there must be nothing there.
391	All this stuff had been building up and that was the big whoosh! Just strap on the skis and straight down the hill. Nobody’s there.	Doubts had been building for a long time, but the watershed moment when my faith came crashing down was when I realized nobody’s there.
392	All the prayers, and the waiting to see what God would put in my lap and give me for opportunities, because that was really what I was doing, “Pray about it and see what God says. What should I do for another job?”	I realized I’d been passive and had been living with an external locus of control. I had not been acting as though I was responsible for my own life.
393	So for me the end came shortly after, where all the stuff that I learned in school – I think the big one was I watched “Religulous” [A documentary by Bill Maher], and I was, “Oh my God! That’s what I used to say and I’m embarrassed by that. I’m embarrassed that that used to be me.” That I think was the end.	When my faith came crashing down, I exposed myself to secular materials that exposed my beliefs from an outside perspective. I was shocked and embarrassed by the views I used to hold, by the person of faith I used to be. That was when I knew for certain I was done with that Christian fundamentalist identity.
394	I don’t have to be that person anymore saying the cheesy, (mocking little girl voice) “Everybody has a Jesus-sized hole in their heart,” right?	I am free of that CF identity. I no longer have to think like a Christian fundamentalist or speak like a Christian fundamentalist. I will never be that person again.

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

No.	Significant Statements	Formulated Meanings
395	I don't know if there's a heaven but I'm going to hope because that means all the shitty things I've done, or the people that I didn't spend enough time with before they died, I can go and I can make up for that. That was gone... and I let go of that.	The concept of heaven comforts people and allows them to excuse their actions and their responsibilities because they can make up for it in another life. Although it might be comforting, I had to let go of this false concept.
396	And then I thought, "It's gone, it's gone. Let's move on." So now I have to worry about what I do now every day. I have to make my own god-damned decisions and not pray and wait.	I am now responsible for my own life. No outside force is going to take care of things for me or decide things for me.
397	And that means I care for people because I care for people and not because I have some hidden agenda of Bible-thumping them.	I am now more genuine in my relationships with others. I have no more hidden agendas in my interactions.
398	I have homosexual friends. I have arguments with my mom about religion and politics, and I've never come right out to her and said I no longer believe. She knows it.	My allegiances have changed. Although I have not come out as an atheist to my family, I'm sure they are aware I am no longer a Christian fundamentalist.
399	I'm becoming more and more vocal about posting things on Facebook of "Just Us Heathens," this study that finds that, you know, nonbelievers do a better job actually of raising happier kids. I'm like, "Yeah," because I was so fearful, and guilty, and questioning, and waiting, and inactive, that I was always encouraged to pray and wait, pray and wait. I won't do that to my kids. I won't be doing that to my kids. So, yeah, from one spectrum to the other.	Being raised as a Christian fundamentalist left me feeling fearful and guilty. I was always uncertain and didn't take responsibility for my own life. I won't be passing this mentality onto my children. I won't be raising them with religion. I believe they will be better off without it. I am beginning to be more vocal against raising your children with religion.
400	I mean, I can see how other people would be embarrassed... because you spout this bullshit, and then you look back on that and you go (hiding her face), "Oh my God! Really? Did I say that? Was I this self-righteous, hypocritical..."	My past beliefs are embarrassing and shameful. Christian fundamentalism caused me to say things and act in ways about which I am personally embarrassed and ashamed.

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

No.	Significant Statements	Formulated Meanings
401	And it was always this, “I’m better than you are, I’m the capital “V” virgin. That’s embarrassing to me. I’d like to actually go back and apologize to some people. And they’d probably look at me and go, “What?” But really, I’d like to have coffee and I’d be so much cooler to talk to now.	I wish I could undo certain things I did in my past. I’d like to go back and apologize to people and show them how I have changed.
402	I feel I’m a better person now. I... the guilt... I didn’t realize until it was gone.	Leaving Christian fundamentalism has made me a better person. I had to leave Christian fundamentalism before I could see it for what it was.
403	...“Can I be a good enough Christian if I don’t witness? I didn’t witness enough, right? Oh God, I didn’t read my Bible enough, I didn’t meet the quota, right? I didn’t memorize enough scripture verses. Am I a good Christian? I don’t believe hard enough; maybe I should be submissive. If I was a better Christian, maybe I should WANT to be submissive.”	There were a lot of pressures and emotional baggage I was carrying when I was a Christian fundamentalist. It felt like something was wrong with me. I didn’t feel like a good enough Christian.
404	That whole guilt... gone!	I am now free of the guilt that constantly weighed me down as a Christian fundamentalist.
405	Yeah, I’m a much better person now. That’s gone... and I am still me. I’m very opinionated, I’m very vocal, but I don’t hold things over people’s heads.	After leaving Christian fundamentalism, I have become a better person. I have opinions, and speak those opinions to others, but I don’t exploit people.
406	...“People try to be the best person they can be,” and I’m like, “No they don’t, no they don’t. It’s all selfish motivation.” And I’m not going to hold that against them. I might be annoyed by it and I might not like it. I might think, “I don’t want to be that person.” I want to learn through other people’s mistakes.	I see people for what they are but I do not judge them. I can see others’ actions that I do not like, and I learn not to repeat those behaviors.
407	But I’m not going to be the one who procrastinates the most important things. I’m going to say, “I love you,” and not worry about the guilt that has. I mean, I tell my children they’re beautiful, and not that God thinks they’re beautiful, or that God made you beautiful, you ARE beautiful. Yeah, no agenda, no guilt, no piling it on.	I won’t be the person I was before. I will not procrastinate but will be responsible for, and take control of, my own life. I will not pass the guilt I grew up with to my children. I will teach them to accept themselves for who they are.

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

No.	Significant Statements	Formulated Meanings
408	My journey was, um, very lengthy. I grew up in a fundamentalist home and went through the indoctrination/ socialization that you go through in childhood and the teen years, specifically when you're in that inductive shield, where all your friends have to be from the same way of thinking, the same church.	I was born into Christian fundamentalism. I was both socialized and indoctrinated into Christian fundamentalism from the beginning of my life through my teenage years. I was raised in a bubble in which everyone confirmed the teachings of Christian fundamentalism. I did not receive any outside or contradictory information.
409	You're not allowed to associate with people from outside that indoctrinated shield.	I was taught that one must only associate with members of the group, and that fraternizing with outsiders was not permitted.
410	I left home when I was a teenager to play hockey and I went into the world but I still took all those categories for interpreting natural phenomenon that I was socialized into as a child and a teenager, and they remained largely unchallenged for a good deal of my adult life.	When I left the "indoctrinated shield," I took my Christian fundamentalist worldview with me and it remained largely unchallenged for a good deal of my adult life.
411	And then, ironically, it wasn't until I went to a Christian school and started taking science classes in a Christian school that I started to consider... and I went to this Christian school very much with the purpose of vocation... of maybe being a pastor or a writer.	Later in life, I entered Christian school with the intention of dedicating my life to the service of Christian fundamentalism. Surprisingly, however, it was in Christian school that I began to question my faith.
412	So I went to this Christian school and I was going to really "find my way" (finger quotes) in the Christian world, and I was going to be a voice or a pastor of some sort.	I intended to discover my particular Christian vocation through my studies and university experience.
413	And I started to do history classes, science classes, and I really for the first time in my life... I wasn't even at this point, I wasn't really challenged. I just started to notice, um, a different way to interpret reality or evaluate truth claims. And so that would have been my first kind of stumbling steps.	School introduced me to new knowledge and opened me up to different ways of interpreting reality and evaluating truth claims. This is what began my questioning of my faith.

No.	Significant Statements	Formulated Meanings
414	<p>Again, what I think would be really important in this discussion is that you see so many stories that happen in secular schools where their faith is attacked. In this entire process for me, I was in, uh, spirituality classes, faith classes. They were trying to reaffirm my faith this entire time, but I kept seeing these other ways in these discussions where like... these people seemed to be asking the same questions but coming to different results. How were they doing this? So that was the first real step for me and then I spent several...well basically seven years in the academy.</p>	<p>Although Christian school was meant to reaffirm and strengthen my faith, I was noticing that people who had similar questions to mine were coming up with different answers than my own. I began to question my own assumptions. I began to wonder how one could arrive at the truth.</p>
415	<p>I call it the inductive shield. You, you're under this inductive shield. And when you're socialized and indoctrinated under the inductive shield, you basically grow up in this, um, "Do not question the man of the Lord," right? I mean that's just Part A foundation of how you grow up. I mean, they start that...when you're three, four years old, basically. So if the pastor, Mom, Dad, tells you the world is 6000 years old, it just, it doesn't even begin to enter your mind that stuff like that is not true.</p>	<p>Being born into Christian fundamentalism is to be born into a bubble. In this bubble you are indoctrinated from the beginning not to question the religious authorities or their assertions about reality. When this is done effectively, one does not question the assertions of the religious authorities no matter how outrageous the claim. It does not even occur to the indoctrinated individual that such assertions could be false, inaccurate, or untrue.</p>
416	<p>You know, like if there was more than one millimeter of dust on the moon, they were worried about landing because they were going to sink into nine billion years of evolutionary dust, but they landed and it was just a millimeter; therefore, the universe is only 6000 years old. "Oh, that makes sense," I repeated. I just re-vomited that to people.</p>	<p>I believed the ridiculous claims I was programmed with as a child. I then perpetuated these beliefs by passing them on to others.</p>
417	<p>Well, I think there's really two perception-changing ideas. One would be the age of the universe. I think the age of the universe and that argument is so closely tied to your relationship with your creator, right?</p>	<p>The idea that the age of the universe is 6000 years old is closely tied to the idea of the type of relationship one has with God. This is the first concept that greatly affects your perception of reality.</p>

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

No.	Significant Statements	Formulated Meanings
418	The second one that I would think, in my experience, that would be very close to that is original sin. This idea that you're born a sinner, you're a bad person, you have this sin nature in you.	The second Christian fundamentalist concept that greatly affects a person's perception of reality is the concept of original sin. This concept says that you are born into sin, that you are flawed, and that you have sin inside you from birth.
419	And then they, especially when you're in your teen years, kind of turn that from when you're a kid, to all of a sudden sex is bad: You're bad if you do these things. I mean, the guilt element that they can tie into that is, um...yeah, it's almost overpowering...	In your teen years, you are told your natural biological feelings and urges are sinful and wrong. One can become overwhelmed and crushed by the feelings of guilt with which one is deliberately programmed.
420	It kind of, they kind of start this socialization base. When you're young, it's all very, "Ooo, Adam and Eve ate the apple and sin came in, and we're all kind of sinners, and God had to recreate the world." But now, "Sin is bad! You're a sinner!"	From the beginning with Christian fundamentalism, you are ingrained with the idea that sin is bad. It caused God to remake the Earth, and we have this sin too. Later, in teenage years, this message intensifies to the point where the message forcefully states, "Sin is bad! You're a sinner!"
421	And then it kind of, even into adulthood, into, um... You know, the whole point of communion is to re-recognize that – in a lot of denominations every week – that you're bad, you're a sinner. This had to happen so that your sin could be covered, atoned – whatever denomination you're in.	Even as an adult, Christian fundamentalism holds regular rituals that reinforce the idea that you are a failed sinner and God had to die to make up for your sinfulness. The programming never ends.
422	So yeah, I think, I think that is a, when you're socialized into that, it's... an incredible part of your identity and how you understand almost everything.	This indoctrination/ socialization forms the majority of one's identity and becomes the lens through which one perceives and understands nearly everything in life.

No.	Significant Statements	Formulated Meanings
423	When it comes to interpreting natural phenomena, there are hypotheses that are testable and repeatable and falsifiable, that lead to theories, and there are hypotheses that are bullshit. Like the world is 6000 years old. That's a great hypothesis... until you test it... and then it's not. ... That's where I would go into the indoctrination. There's the socialization as a worldview.	There are truth claims that are credible because they can be tested using established scientific means. There are other truth claims that are demonstrably false, such as those made by Christian fundamentalism. Only through socialization/indoctrination do such claims gain any personal merit.
424	It, it is, um...when I was a kid, we had the comic book Bible. And it was, the Old Testament was three of them, and the New Testament was one, right? And um, it was basically a historical book for me. I was reading what God did in history.	As I child, I was given children's versions of Bible stories in comic book form. I read these stories and believed them to be literally true.
425	So there's Moses with a snake as a staff. Yep, OK, that happened, sweet. Ok, he struck a rock; oh, manna is coming from heaven! Awesome! A million people came out of Egypt, okay, yeah, sure, whatever, that's what happened. Oh, some angel dudes came down and impregnated some ladies and there's giants. Awesome, that seems legit, the Bible says so! (laughs) Like who am I to question that? You know? Yeah, it was reading history.	Bible stories formed my understanding of reality and history. I had no reason to question it.
426	Some of the stuff in the Bible was not so hard to go away from. So you start with these gradual changes.	I made gradual changes in perception that moved me away from Christian fundamentalism. Some of these transitions were small/subtle and happened without much struggle.
427	It's when you start to, uh, I guess, make hamburgers of the sacred cows, right? (This is where letting go of things becomes more difficult.)	Things become more difficult when one tries to move away from concepts that hold more prominent positions within the traditions or ideology of Christian fundamentalism.
428	I went to church four times a week until I was 18 years old, and I couldn't have explained 95% of the New Testament to you.	I grew up in the church and was fully indoctrinated and yet lacked knowledge of the theology behind the messages I was receiving.

No.	Significant Statements	Formulated Meanings
429	My father was a Pentecostal minister. So bare minimum, bare minimum, and we went to church often more than four times a week.	My family was thoroughly immersed in Christian fundamentalism and attended church at least four times a week.
430	It's still like, there's still that, um, extreme dichotomy between good and evil, um, Satan and God are pretty much equal in power, and if bad things are happening, it's because Satan is testing you, and if good things are happening, it's because God is blessing you.	Life was reduced to, and explained by, simplistic dichotomous thinking. If bad things are happening, it's because Satan is testing you, and if good things are happening, it's because god is blessing you.
431	It was, it was an interesting... it doesn't give you a lot of good categories for understanding reality when you go out into the real world, let's just put it that way.	Christian fundamentalist dichotomous thinking does not provide good categories for understanding reality, leaving one ill-prepared when entering the outside world.
432	And being kind of imbued in that kind of charismatic theology, it's what they call "immediate retribution theology." If you do good, good things will happen; if you do bad, bad things will happen.	Simplistic dichotomous thinking was all I had to explain the events of my life.
433	So here I am, 18, really no good categories for understanding reality, and all of a sudden, girls are throwing themselves at me. And I'm like, "Whee! This is not bad," (laughs) right?	The rigid and simplistic world view of Christian fundamentalism did not prepare me to make mature moral choices about the situations I encountered.
434	Like I'd be coming home at five every morning and just partying it up, living the life. Then, all of a sudden, I'd have like a... maybe a bad streak or something. And I'd be, "I'm rededicating my life to the Lord, I'm not having sex anymore.	I experienced cognitive dissonance as I began living two lives. One was of the world and partying, and the other was being dedicated to Christian fundamentalism.
435	Like it was just this weird tension that I really carried for, um...and I'd go through these horrible peaks and valleys of guilt and shame and, uh, probably the most, uh, unhealthy experience of sexuality that you could probably have. You know, an experience between two consenting adults and just still feeling shame and disgust afterward, um, for myself, not the other person, right?	The tension I felt between what I believed (my faith) and how I was living contributed to my unhealthy experience of sexuality.

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

No.	Significant Statements	Formulated Meanings
436	Like it was, it was a, certainly a lot of, lot of a tension... lot of... yeah. Not good times, let's put it that way.	My ongoing level of tension about my double lifestyle was both unpleasant and stressful.
437	Cognitive dissonance, I believe, is the correct term for it. I experienced it in a very extreme form because, um, certainly for a very long time, my, ah... I wouldn't even hold them as my beliefs... but I would say my indoctrination, my socialization, the categories that I had from that, um, what told me what I should value, what I should do, were certainly extremely different from what I did value and from what I did do.	I experienced an extreme form of cognitive dissonance over a long period of time because my personal values and actions were not lining up with what I was taught in Christian fundamentalism.
438	So there was this massive divide and I didn't have any, ANY, I didn't have any way to work through that, right? It was kind of, "Do what you're told or you're bad," and I didn't know how to do what I was told and I was... (shakes his head)... bad, right?	I could not sort out my values because my authoritarian Christian fundamentalist training only offered the choice of obeying or being bad.
439	So yeah, I experienced an EXTREME level of cognitive dissonance through, ah, I'd say at least a decade. At least a decade, yeah. To the point where I thought I was having a nervous breakdown at one point. Yeah. That lifestyle does not comport itself very well with, with a, uh, fundamentalist, religious doctrine...to say the least.	My cognitive dissonance became so extreme, stressful, and prolonged that at one point I thought I was having a nervous breakdown.
440	I didn't know, didn't know what else to do. It was, yeah, it was a very weird, a very ah... I felt like I was just compartmentalized and apart and... uh confused. Like I was two people basically.	I could not sort out my values because my authoritarian Christian fundamentalist training only offered the choice of obeying or being bad.
441	It's just that I didn't have, I went out into the world without any good categories to be a functioning adult in society...is basically what it was.	I was ill-prepared when entering into the outside world. I didn't know how to behave as a functioning adult in society.
442	So basically, I was inside this bubble, and everyone I interacted with was inside this bubble, and I went outside the bubble. But all I had was the socialization and the indoctrination of this bubble. That's all I had.	All the knowledge that I had, had come from my indoctrination. I had no other ways of understanding the world/society.

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

No.	Significant Statements	Formulated Meanings
443	And so I start going and hanging out with normal people...and I did that for 12 years. And it was just a debacle, the whole 12 years were a debacle.	My interactions with others outside the closed society of Christian fundamentalism were disastrous. I messed things up terribly and made a lot of mistakes.
444	So that's what I went out into reality with. And I kind of just bumbled around there for a while...	After leaving the bubble of Christian fundamentalism, I spent time just aimlessly fumbling through life.
445	I did four years there, and I got a degree in religion and theology. ... But probably the biggest mistake that they made there is they started to teach me how to think, not what to think. They started to give me some categories for critical thinking... and I took those with me.	Christian university intended to reaffirm and strengthen my faith; however, one of the skills I picked up in university was critical thinking. Learning how to think critically is ironically what led to my questioning and analyzing my belief system.
446	So I did my undergrad in religion and theology and I would say at the end of four years, if I had to tick off all the boxes, I probably wouldn't hit every single one. I wouldn't have been fundamentalist, but I probably would have still been Christian.	By the end of my undergraduate degree, I was no longer a Christian fundamentalist. I was still, however, a Christian.
447	At that point, if I still had to say was Jesus the son of God, I probably would have said yes.	Although I was no longer a Christian fundamentalist, I still believed Jesus was the son of God.
448	Um, I'm going to live forever in heaven. At that point, I still think my consciousness is going to exist forever in some form.	Although I was no longer a Christian fundamentalist, I still believed in the concept of eternal life.
449	And by the time you get to the last year and a half, I'm just like completely deconstructing snake handlers and anything... and pretty much any truth claim within any Christian tradition, for what I would, if you were going to put it all down to one level, I would call magic...right? Any claim from magic, (laughs) I want tested, right?	I took the skill of critical thinking that I had learned from university and began applying it to all kinds of truth claims found within Christian traditions. I was analyzing and testing the tenets of my faith.

No.	Significant Statements	Formulated Meanings
450	Um, it was a very weird kind of, um... that was a very weird transition for me cuz some of the stuff that you, um, experience in private, they're private, right? You just go through that transition, and you're like, "Oh, I used to believe this and now this and oh, that's bullshit, and..." You go through that.	I made many transitions that I considered to be quite drastic. It was a surreal time in my life. I made many of these transitions independently and privately.
451	...and some of these people I very much respected as scholars, but it was very weird. They could put on their scholar hat and do some really, really good biblical scholarship, but they could just, like, take that off and then put on their faith hat and go, "Oh yeah, God does miracles today, people grow legs."	I was confused by the compartmentalization of others who I respected as scholars and knew to be highly intelligent. They were able to critically analyze Biblical texts and yet, at the same time, turn off their critical thinking and continue to hold onto completely illogical, indefensible beliefs.
452	...I just felt I...something was true and could pass, you know, peer review, or it was a claim, or it was a belief, and that no matter what... ah... knowledge trumped belief. No matter what.	I came to value truth over my faith/beliefs. The validity of claims became more important than the claims themselves.
453	I guess that would be... I was at a point in my life where, where I believed things. I believed, I believed a lot of things, and I believed them on the authority of others, on the authority of the Bible, on the authority of socialization, and I got to a place where I just started to value knowledge—value the process of testing knowledge.	My values in life changed. I no longer invested my time/energy into ideas and beliefs that had been handed down to me on the authority of others. I came to a place where the validity of the claims/beliefs was more important. Beliefs were no longer sacred. If beliefs were true/real, then they could be tested and verified. I valued testing the validity of beliefs more than having the beliefs.
454	That we can actually look at these things and test them, and that's the greatest thing about the scientific method is that it might not be the greatest method, I don't know because humankind development hasn't ceased, but it's the best method that we have where we can look at the world around us and go, "How does this work?" That's it. How does this work? How do we test it?	After the acquisition of critical thinking, I no longer trusted any truth claims that couldn't be supported my empirical evidence and validated by the scientific method.

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

No.	Significant Statements	Formulated Meanings
455	It's almost like, uh, taking the red pill in the Matrix. Like once you do it, once you go down the rabbit hole, there's just no...you just can't go back.	You cannot unlearn what you have learned. Once you gain life-changing knowledge, you cannot forget you know it. The change is permanent.
456	I often wish I could go back because there was a nice, um... even though I lived a lot of years in cognitive dissonance, there was always that nice warm fuzzy feeling that you were going to live forever and be forgiven and get your white robe and be recreated to be perfect, and everything was going to be good.	There is a sense of loss that comes with losing my faith in Christian fundamentalism. Christian fundamentalism provided some assurances that everything was going to be OK, and death is not final. Those comforts and that peace of mind that Christian fundamentalism provided is now gone.
457	And now I know... (laughing) epistemology would tell me that I might be over-valuing my statement. Uh, that my consciousness will one day resort to the same state as before I was born. And it's a... I may feel as much dissonance going from knowing I was going to live forever to not existing. That might be the a... that might be the most difficult... dissonance that I've had to experience going from fundamentalist to atheism.	Journeying from a state of mind where I believed I was going to live forever to a place where I've had to accept my own mortality has been extremely difficult. It has been my biggest area of struggle. I experience it as another form of distressing cognitive dissonance.
458	I mean, I grew up just knowing I was going to live forever. I was going to LIVE forever. And I was going to...it didn't really bother me when my Grandma died when I was 16. ... I was going to see her again and she was going to be young.	I was expecting to live forever but now this comfort is gone. I find this extremely distressing. I will never again see the people I've lost.
459	Yeah, that was, that was a very hard thing for me cognitively... and it actually still is. Um, to think...you know, on Saturday I turn 43. I could die in the next year of a heart attack or I could live to 83, but that's still only 40 years. That means I'm over 50% through the lifecycle, right?	The comfort of immortality is gone. I'm running out of time to live/exist.
460	I don't know... I don't know if in my lifetime I'll be able to get out of some of the angst of that socialization, or if I'll always carry a small part of that with me. Just because it was the fabric of my understanding of reality.	I may always struggle with the distress and angst of cognitive dissonance associated with losing a central concept (immortality) that made up the fabric of my understanding of reality for the vast majority of my life.

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

No.	Significant Statements	Formulated Meanings
461	I don't know if I'm the only one who experiences that, but that would be something I really struggle with.	Even after leaving Christian fundamentalism, I continue to suffer from its influence and may do so for the rest of my life.
462	It's a, it's a beautiful story! And I, you know, I still have a couple of friends in the academy that I talk to and I just say, "Trust me, if it was true, I would love it to be true. I would LOVE it to be true."	There is a sense of loss in having left Christian fundamentalism. In many ways, I wish Christian fundamentalism was real because it provides certain comforts that I wish were true. I've lost those comforts and cannot get them back.
463	It's impossible. [to return to belief] It's literally impossible. It's, um... there's a progression, uh, I mean, again the technical term is paradigm shift, right? Once you have a paradigm shift, they only go one way. That's it; they only go one way. They don't go backwards: They only go forwards.	I undertook a massive paradigm shift in my faith/beliefs and my understanding of reality. Paradigm shifts only go forwards. I cannot return to belief. I cannot go back to where I was. Returning to belief is literally impossible. It is gone forever.
464	And to have a paradigm shift, um, requires new knowledge and new understanding, and the only way you have a paradigm shift is that new knowledge and that new understanding reasonably accounts for whatever data it's interpreting. That's it.	For a paradigm shift to successfully occur, one must access new information that better interprets and explains reality. When this happens, it's permanent.
465	Once you have that shift forward, there's no way you can go back there. It just, it can't happen. It just can't happen. It's like losing a limb. I don't know how to say it other than paradigm shifts only go one way.	Paradigm shifts are permanent and cannot be undone. You cannot unlearn what you have learned. It's like losing a limb – when it's gone it's gone; you cannot go back to having that limb.

No.	Significant Statements	Formulated Meanings
466	<p>And my experience with people I've talked to, and this is a small anecdotal circle, it's not like my experience and the few people I know accounts for the totality of human experience, - I wouldn't have been that naïve – but certainly none of us know what sort of evidence, outside of Jesus floating down here right now, would be sufficient, what sort of argument, because all the ones I've seen so far, especially, ESPECIALLY, the apologetic ones, are so easily skewered and countered with counter arguments I just (shakes his head), I don't, I don't see any way for a paradigm shift to move other than forward. I just don't see a reverse.</p>	<p>Still to this day, I have not come across any argument that could come close to undoing my paradigm shift.</p>
467	<p>Other than, seeing that we're using the Matrix analogies, my favorite scene in that movie is when Cypher is with the guy from the matrix, and they're in the restaurant and he's like, "I know this isn't steak, but it tastes like steak. I want to go back. I don't want to remember anything, and I want to be someone famous. Like a movie star, someone important," right? (Laughing) I'm just like, "That's it right there." That is, once you have that paradigm shift, yeah, it would be awesome to sit down with somebody like that and go, "I want to be famous. I want to be rich. I know this isn't steak, but it tastes damn good, just...plug me back in.</p>	<p>Like in the movie "Matrix," I wish I could plug myself back into Christian fundamentalism even though I know it is not true.</p>
468	<p>No Jesus was probably the last. Jesus was probably the last.</p>	<p>Of all the ideas of my faith that fell away, the idea of a divine Jesus was the last to go.</p>
469	<p>...and then as I started going through some liberal theology...a lot of liberal theology will play pretty loose and fast with the Old Testament. They're comfortable with that, right? So things can be allegorical, things can be non-historical...</p>	<p>At first, I moved away from Christian fundamentalism a piece at a time by becoming more liberal in my theology.</p>
470	<p>But even a lot of liberal theologians, um, even ones that would be condemned for, let's say, their take on Genesis, there was still kind of that line in the sand that Jesus, Jesus HAS to be the son of God.</p>	<p>Even within liberal theology there are certain tenets of Christianity that remain non-negotiable. Even within liberal Christian theology, Jesus HAS to be the son of God.</p>

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

No.	Significant Statements	Formulated Meanings
471	I took a molecular biology class and just really started to change the way I started to think about things.	Higher education introduced me to new ideas and new ways of thinking. This contributed to my questioning my beliefs.
472	It kind of snowballed. I just spent hours and hours and hours working my way through what I believed...	Once the first tenets of my faith began to fall away, it caused other tenets of my faith to fall away. The unraveling of my faith built upon itself: it “snowballed.”
473	I came to a point...and if I ever got a tattoo, which I doubt I will, but if I did...it would be something along the lines... that, “Knowledge is infinitely better than belief.” That was just it.	I now hold different values. I now believe that knowledge is infinitely better than belief. It has become my mantra.
474	And I know just from my own writing and putting it down so many times... <u>knowledge trumps belief... every time.</u>	Knowledge is superior to belief. I believe that very strongly now.
475	And then by the time it was my last semester in my graduate studies, I was talking to one of my professors, and I felt safe with him because, uh, he was younger and we used to travel together a lot, and I just said, “I’m an atheist now. I just... I don’t believe I’m going to live forever. I just...yeah.” But it wasn’t, it wasn’t like... the lights came on for me. It was very gradual. It was very gradual.	My journey from belief to disbelief had no singular moment in which I suddenly deconverted to atheism. It was a gradual journey that took a long time and occurred in stages.
476	Now from that statement, the existential angst I experienced was gradual, um, it’s never been crushing – like I’ve never gotten nihilistic.	Although I’ve had existential angst ever since losing my faith, it has never stopped me from functioning.
477	So I still find existential value in life, um, in experiencing moments with my friends and family and investing value there, but I do still carry...I would say like a little weight any day.	Although I continue to experience anxiety, I have managed to carry my burden. I still find joy in life.
478	There’s no special hedge of spiritual protection around me or prayer protecting me from that. Like, I’m just as liable to a blood vessel bursting as the next person.	Without my faith, I am faced with the reality that I am just as weak and vulnerable as everyone else. I have no guarantee of safety.

No.	Significant Statements	Formulated Meanings
479	That has led me to lead a healthier lifestyle. I can tell you weirdly I live a much better moral lifestyle as an atheist than I ever did as a Christian. As a Christian, I cheated on my wife multiple times. As an atheist, I realize that there's only value or, at least, I invest value now in my current relationships, and I don't want to lose those... because I realize there's not forgiveness in magic land to heal all that, right?	As an atheist, I realize there is no edge of spiritual protection and there is no afterlife in which to correct my mistakes. I am solely responsible for my health and relationships. This has caused me to take responsibility for my health and relationships which has affected my lifestyle.
480	I do much better as an atheist, then I EVER did as a Christian. And I would say that, um, (pauses) my levels of empathy have significantly rose.	How I live and who I am as a person have improved since losing my faith. I am more empathetic as an atheist.
481	Probably the two most significant changes...three, I would say three significant changes: 1) incredible shift in what I value for interpreting natural phenomena – “Knowledge trumps belief”; 2) I live a much better moral and virtual or virtuous lifestyle; 3) I have a capacity for empathy that I did not have 10 years ago. I just didn't have it. It's like I grew a new limb.	Journeying from Christian fundamentalism to atheism has come with three significant and permanent changes. 1) An incredible shift in what I value for interpreting natural phenomena. “Knowledge trumps belief.” 2) I am a more virtuous and moral person. 3) A much higher capacity for empathy that did not exist within me as a Christian fundamentalist believer.
482	I used to be, I would say, quite a, um, egocentric person. My two jobs since I've been an atheist are a social worker and now working for [workplace not to be named but both jobs involve caring for those who cannot care for themselves.] I wouldn't have done that as a religious person.	As an atheist, my career involves caring for people who cannot care for themselves. This is not a professional choice I would have chosen or been able to do as a Christian fundamentalist believer.

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

No.	Significant Statements	Formulated Meanings
483	So I get, um, being under that inductive shield and looking to mommy and daddy and other authority figures and just, whatever, being a pitcher that they pour water into and that being how you understand.	Being indoctrinated is something I understand very well. It is being raised inside a bubble in which authority figures tell you what you need to know and what you need to believe. They pour their manifestos into you, so you live out their beliefs.
484	...and I'll come across a passage and I'll be like (looks taken aback) "Whoa! I used to believe (starts laughing) that's what happened. Like how did I believe that, right?"	My journey has taken me so far away from the things I used to believe that it is shocking to look back over the beliefs I used to hold. Those beliefs are now so alien to me that it's hard to believe they were once a part of me.
485	Like groups of people can believe really messed up stuff, and if you're inside that group and that's all you know (shrugs), that's how you're going to interpret reality.	It is easy to believe inaccurate and demonstrably false things if one is inside a bubble that confirms such beliefs to be true. Such beliefs become a person's sense of reality. This is how indoctrination operates.
486	Have you ever met anyone who said they could go back? Yeah. I just... I just don't even know how it's done.	I have no idea how a person returns to faith. And I don't know anyone who can tell me differently.

Appendix I: Formulated Meanings Placed into Theme Clusters

#	Formulated Meanings	Theme Clusters
1	I was born into Christian fundamentalism. Christian fundamentalism formed my understanding and values from the very beginning.	(1) Believing in Christian fundamentalism due to being born into it
4	My childhood was abnormal and strange from a very young age.	
5	I was brought up in a way that had many rules that separated me from others and I was given strange messages.	
106	When I grew up Church was mandatory. My family had strong opinions regarding Christianity.	
108	Growing up, religion was mandatory.	
146	I was a Christian fundamentalist because I was born into it.	
147	From the very beginning I was programmed with religion at home.	
149	I was involved in religion well before I understood it.	
198	I was born into Christian fundamentalism. My parents believed in Christian fundamentalism and they instilled their beliefs in me from the very beginning.	
199	I was taken to church regularly from an early age.	
200	At a young age I began to get personally involved with Christian fundamentalism.	
201	Growing up, I participated in all of the “milestone” rituals of Christian fundamentalism.	
332	I was born into religion. My family raised me to be religious.	
341	I was raised with a Christian fundamentalist focus and received consistent Christian fundamentalist teachings.	

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

#	Formulated Meanings	Theme Clusters
408	I was born into Christian fundamentalism. I was both socialized and indoctrinated into Christian fundamentalism from the beginning of life through my teenage years. I was raised in a bubble in which everyone confirmed the teachings of CF. I did not receive any outside or contradictory information.	(1) Believing in Christian fundamentalism due to being born into it (cont.)
3	Being born into Christian fundamentalism was a form of childhood indoctrination.	(2) Believing in Christian fundamentalism due to indoctrination
16	I was programmed with hateful messages and with lies.	
21	I was programed with a false understanding of history. I believed in the Bible literally. Outside history was wrong and full of lies.	
148	As a child, I was fed children's versions of Christian fundamentalist. It was a central aspect of growing up.	
150	Religion was ubiquitous and unchallengeable. It was at home and at school.	
151	Christian fundamentalism became a way of understanding existence and it was obviously the truth. It couldn't be a lie.	
152	The stories of the Bible were not fiction. They were real characters and real events. But so was other nonsense.	
154	I was indoctrinated in every aspect of my life. The "truths" I was taught were seen as being equally valid to factual truths, such as being Canadian.	
155	I was being indoctrinated, but because it was all I knew, I was unable to see it.	
156	When I was in a vulnerable place, Christian fundamentalism was able to indoctrinate me even further.	
192	People don't tend to question what they were taught in childhood to be true.	
193	Life-long indoctrination is a symptom of programing that occurred in childhood.	

#	Formulated Meanings	Theme Clusters
202	I was immersed in Christian fundamentalism. Christian fundamentalism was my life at my Christian fundamentalist home, at my school, and on the weekends at church. Christian fundamentalism was my entire life.	(2) Believing in Christian Fundamentalism due to indoctrination (cont.)
203	I was taught the stories of the Bible were not stories. They were literal history.	
268	I went through the rituals of the Church and, after I was programmed with the “proper” beliefs, I was accepted as a member in a Christian fundamentalist church.	
342	As a child I was taught “kid-friendly” versions of Bible stories that left a lot of the brutality out of the messages.	
343	In addition to church and Christian fundamentalist school, I also attended Bible camp. Bible camp was an important influence on my beliefs.	
415	Being born into Christian fundamentalism is to be born into a bubble. In this bubble you are indoctrinated from the beginning not to question the religious authorities or their assertions about reality. When this is done effectively, one does not question the assertions of the religious authorities no matter how outrageous the claim. It does not even occur to the indoctrinated individual that such assertions could be false, inaccurate, or untrue.	
417	The idea that the age of the universe is 6000 years old is closely tied to the idea of the type of relationship one has with God. This is the first concept that greatly affects your perception of reality.	
420	From the beginning with Christian fundamentalism, you are ingrained with the idea that sin is bad. It caused God to remake the Earth, and we have this sin too. Later, in teenage years, this message intensifies to the point where the message forcefully states, “Sin is bad! You’re a sinner!”	
422	This indoctrination/socialization forms the majority of one’s identity and becomes the lens through which one perceives and understands nearly everything in life.	

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

#	Formulated Meanings	Theme Clusters
423	There are truth claims that are credible because they can be tested using established scientific means. There are other truth claims that are demonstrably false such as those made by Christian fundamentalism. Only through socialization/indoctrination do such claims gain any personal merit.	(2) Believing in Christian Fundamentalism due to indoctrination (cont.)
424	As I child, I was given children's versions of Bible stories in comic book form. I read these stories and believed them to be literally true.	
425	Bible stories formed my understanding of reality and history. I had no reason to question it.	
428	I grew up in the church and was fully indoctrinated and yet lacked knowledge of the theology behind the messages I was receiving.	
429	My family was thoroughly immersed in Christian fundamentalism and attended church at least four times a week.	
483	Being indoctrinated is something I understand very well. It is being raised inside a bubble in which authority figures tell you what you need to know and what you need to believe. They pour their manifestos into you so you live out their beliefs.	(3) Believing in Christian Fundamentalism due to being in a bubble with a lack of dissenting information
18	Religion held me back from knowledge (such as science/cosmology) that I enjoy and is important to me now.	
19	If you weren't raised like I was, you may not understand how much certain knowledge was devalued. It is damage that I wish I could go back in time and erase.	
71	For the first time, I became introduced to outside, opposing ideas.	
153	Every authority in my life confirmed the literal truth of Christian fundamentalism. How could it all be untrue? I accepted it unquestionably.	
204	Other ideas and stories (Santa Claus) could be myths and untrue, but not the Bible; the Bible was absolutely true. Everyone confirmed this to be truth.	

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

#	Formulated Meanings	Theme Clusters
205	I believed what everyone was telling me. Christian fundamentalism formed my understanding of reality and history.	(3) Believing in Christian Fundamentalism due to being in a bubble with a lack of dissenting information (cont.)
206	The Bible was literal and true. I took it for granted. I did not question my beliefs.	
207	Christian fundamentalism formed the world around me. It was all I knew. I had no reason to question it.	
209	I lived in an isolated environment in which the only information I received confirmed Christian fundamentalism to be true. I never heard a dissenting opinion. My beliefs were never challenged.	
214	Everybody in my life confirmed that what I had been told was true.	
215	Times are different now in the information age. Ideas/beliefs are easily investigated. In my time information was not so readily available. Beliefs were passed on and taken for granted.	
216	I was never given an opportunity or reason to question anything I'd been told.	
217	How could everyone be wrong? What motivation would they have to lie? Couldn't be true, it makes no sense.	
287	I left my old life and entered a bubble in which everyone believed in CF and confirmed its authenticity. I no longer received any opposing or outside information.	
292	There was nothing for me outside the bubble of CF.	
408	I was born into Christian fundamentalism. I was both socialized and indoctrinated into Christian fundamentalism from the beginning of life through my teenage years. I was raised in a bubble in which everyone confirmed the teachings of Christian fundamentalism. I did not receive any outside or contradictory information.	

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

#	Formulated Meanings	Theme Clusters
485	It is easy to believe very inaccurate and demonstrably false things if one is inside a bubble that confirms such beliefs to be true. Such beliefs become a person's sense of reality. This is how indoctrination operates.	(3) Believing in Christian Fundamentalism due to being in a bubble with a lack of dissenting information (cont.)
8	People who didn't believe what I believed were outsiders who would be punished for being outsiders. Religion separates and isolates.	(4) Seeing nonbelievers as suspicious "outsiders" with whom interaction is limited and seen as likely being problematic
10	I was in a condescending group that viewed others as outsiders. Our group was cut off from others around us. We had our own way of thinking; we had our own terminology and way of talking.	
38	School friends were outsiders. I wasn't very connected to them.	
39	I would be friends with outsiders, but I was always a Christian first, friend second.	
40	I was always Christian first, friend second. I would take steps to try and secretly convert my outsider friends to my form of belief.	
41	I was unapologetically different from the others around me.	
68	After apostatizing from Christian fundamentalism, I am treated as an outsider. I am treated with suspicion and as potentially dangerous.	
409	I was taught that one must only associate with members of the group, and that fraternizing with outsiders was not permitted.	
410	When I left the "indoctrinated shield," I took my Christian fundamentalist worldview-with me and it remained largely unchallenged for a good deal of my adult life.	
32	People blame my leaving on me never being a true believer. But I was a true believer. My faith was always on my mind. Christian fundamentalism was my whole life.	(5) Christian fundamentalism as the main focus in life and central aspect of identity

#	Formulated Meanings	Theme Clusters
43	God was always on my mind. Sharing God with others was always on my mind. I never wanted a moment to share about Jesus pass me by.	(5) Christian fundamentalism as the main focus in life and central aspect of identity (cont.)
45	I was a real strong believer in Christian fundamentalism. I probably believed it more than people who are still in it today.	
107	Christianity became very important to me. My faith became my way of life.	
160	I became immersed in Christian fundamentalism. It was providing me with things missing in my life. I came to rely on it.	
161	I became so drawn into religion that belief was no longer enough. I began active involvement. But none of this would have happened if I hadn't been primed with indoctrination. None of this would have happened if the Church hadn't capitalized on my vulnerability.	
162	I was completely immersed in Christian fundamentalism. I surrounded myself with it. I carried it with me. It was always in my thoughts.	
163	Christian fundamentalism was also an escape for me. My obsession with it made me different than most other young people my age.	
165	My parents didn't understand my interest in becoming a nun because they did not know how programmed I was becoming.	
210	I truly accepted and believed in the tenants of Christian fundamentalism.	
265	I watched a Christian fundamentalist video over and over, trying to re-create the emotional experience I had on campus. I wanted to experience those emotional/ spiritual feelings as often as possible.	
266	I brought people into my life who also heavily focused on the emotional	

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

#	Formulated Meanings	Theme Clusters
270	I moved into a household environment where everyone was like-minded and extreme believers.	(5) Christian fundamentalism as the main focus in life and central aspect of identity (cont.)
275	I also served in the church where I was being mentored and taught and groomed in the ways of CF.	
284	I experienced confirmation bias. I would read into events and see them as personal messages from God. This began to dictate my actions.	
286	Christian fundamentalism challenges what you believe could and couldn't be. Christian fundamentalism can change not only what you think, but the way in which you think. It shapes your reality.	
293	I had a powerful emotional experience and began being influenced by others at a critical point in my life. This drew me in and made me take Christian fundamentalism very seriously.	
315	I very quickly became immersed in Christian fundamentalism. It did not happen a step at a time.	
344	Bible camp felt spiritually nourishing.	
345	Bible camp moved away from ritual and provided more of an emotional experience of faith that became very important to me.	
349	Praising God was something I used to interact with others and cope with the major stressors in my life.	
350	I seriously considered and was willing to dedicate my entire life to the service of Christian fundamentalism.	
355	I wanted to commit to getting involved in spreading the word of God while helping the poor.	
356	Making a difference in the lives of others felt like I was a part of God's purpose.	
368	Following the principles of Christian fundamentalism meant that I couldn't have sex. Being a virgin was a large part of my identity.	

#	Formulated Meanings	Theme Clusters
384	I was proud of my Christian fundamentalist virgin identity and would not question it regardless of how illogically I was behaving.	(5) Christian fundamentalism as the main focus in life and central aspect of identity (cont.)
385	My Christian fundamentalist virgin identity was inconsistent with the lax positions I had taken on other aspects of my faith.	
386	My rigid refusal to examine my Christian fundamentalist beliefs caused tension and frustration in our relationship.	
387	Even though my virgin Christian fundamentalist identity was indefensible because of all the compromises I had made, I would not give it up.	
388	Although I accepted others who had enjoyed sex, I could not give in to sex because my virginity was central to my Christian fundamentalist identity and was enshrined in my self-concept.	
412	I intended to discover my particular Christian vocation through my studies and university experience.	
36	I think that the Church was manipulating me in order to get me to conform and participate in their ceremonies.	(6) Questioning/ moving away from Christian fundamentalism due to the actions, attitudes, and beliefs of the Church leaders and its members
47	CF does not produce good and loving people.	
111	I was uncomfortable with the structure of power in the church.	
112	The church was being corrupt in its use of power. It was not treating its congregation properly. The church was taking people's money unnecessarily.	
113	I was troubled by the church's corruption lack of openness about its finances.	
114	I saw more corruption. The church was starting to push people into giving more money. This caused me to start to question my faith.	

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

#	Formulated Meanings	Theme Clusters
115	The Church was petty and elitist. The Church did not put people first or treat them in a loving manner. The Church was unfair to people.	(6) Questioning/ moving away from Christian fundamentalism due to the actions, attitudes, and beliefs of the Church leaders and its members (cont.)
116	I became unable to hold the position or carry out the duties that I did in the past because I did not morally agree with the role the church was asking me to perform.	
117	The Church took positions that offended me. The Church was unkind towards people of my sexual orientation.	
118	The Church wouldn't change its position on sexual orientation so I stopped attending.	
119	The Church was openly discriminating against gay people.	
120	The church was hypocritical in its stance on gay men and will not acknowledge its error.	
121	The Church acted in a hateful manner towards people with my sexual orientation. It made me angry enough to leave the Church.	
122	I was already questioning things, but the hateful way the Church was treating people really made me see that the Church wasn't real.	
123	The Church's ridiculous stance on social issues was further evidence that it wasn't real.	
124	The Church's unrealistic stance on social issues was incorrect and was causing harm and damage to people throughout the world.	
125	The Old Testament contains rules that seem cruel or out of place today. CF ignores these laws but chooses to make an issue of same-sex relationships.	
180	I went back to the Church for answers, but the answers I received weren't good enough this time.	
294	The hypocrisy of the Church opened my eyes and caused me to begin questioning my faith.	

#	Formulated Meanings	Theme Clusters
336	People divided and left the church over a trivial thing that shouldn't have mattered. This was painful.	(6) Questioning/ moving away from Christian fundamentalism due to the actions, attitudes, and beliefs of the Church leaders and its members (cont.)
337	The leaders of the Church were inconsistent and hypocritical.	
338	The leaders of the Church would twist the Bible in order to justify their preferences and lifestyles.	
339	The hypocritical teaching of church leaders would confuse and hurt the younger generations.	
340	Younger generations of believers were being confused as to what was right and wrong because what the leaders taught did not make sense.	
351	I found the church to be misogynistic towards women.	
352	The church's views on women and the expectations the church has of women are extremely offensive to me.	
353	The church is outdated in their views of the roles of women in the family and their roles in society. These views are offensive and I will not follow such expectations.	
354	The Church's views on women, and the expectations the Church has of women, were restrictive and patronizing.	
357	When I reached out to the church, I did not receive the support I needed.	
358	I opened up and the Church was cold and indifferent to me. I became hurt and angry.	
359	I gave a lot of my time and energy into the church. And then it came time to ask the church for a simple favour and, due to a technicality, they refused my request. It was all take and no give.	
361	People suddenly seemed not to know me when I made a simple request even though I had been a prominent volunteer for a long time. I began to have doubts.	

#	Formulated Meanings	Theme Clusters
362	I tried to open up and ask for help from the pastor of the Church, but when I did, I was met with cold indifference. I have given the Church a lot of myself and had gotten nothing out of it.	(6) Questioning/ moving away from Christian fundamentalism due to the actions, attitudes, and beliefs of the Church leaders and its members (cont.)
363	I was hurt to find out that the fellowship I thought I had established with other believers did not exist.	
364	It was a key moment in my life and I needed help. But no help came. No one cared about me.	
365	The lack of support from the church led me to start questioning my faith and my connection to God.	
366	I was a small fish in a large pond. It was as though I wasn't there and I felt I did not belong.	
370	There were parts of the New Testament that were derogatory towards women and offended me.	
371	The Bible was written by people who wrote hateful things about women. The church tries to make excuses for these messages. This was offensive to me.	
372	I went on missions to help people in need. The people of the church missed the point and were concerned about things that were unimportant.	
373	Helping others in need wasn't really important to the congregation. They cared more about how many people converted to their way of belief.	
374	Church members reacted as though we had failed in our mission efforts if we built homes for the poor but did not preach to them. This disappointed and angered me.	
375	Church members did not care that their expectations of our mission efforts were unrealistic in the appalling circumstances in which we worked. I found this hypocritical.	
376	The people of the church demonstrated ignorance of the conditions of extreme poverty and had callous attitudes towards the very poor.	

#	Formulated Meanings	Theme Clusters
377	After these experiences with other Christians I was angry with Christian fundamentalists, but I was not prepared to stop believing in Christian fundamentalism.	(6) Questioning/ moving away from Christian fundamentalism due to the actions, attitudes, and beliefs of the Church leaders and its members (cont.)
378	Church members questioned the value of our help because we worked with a non-Christian aid group. I was shocked at the narrowness of their views.	
381	Christian fundamentalists hold bizarre notions that an external power will make things right in the world again. They do nothing to fix the problems of the world themselves. They wait for their saviour to take care of things for them.	
382	The idea that an external power will just fix everything is an idea that makes me very angry. It is one of the forces that strongly motivated me to leave my faith.	
380	Christians do not help others out of love or because of their faith. They do good deeds for their own benefit. They don't actually care for others.	
11	I am embarrassed about being associated with Christian fundamentalism. I am embarrassed about how I acted when I was a part of Christian fundamentalism.	(7) Being embarrassed about one's history of holding Christian fundamentalist beliefs.
14	I understand and even agree with my friend now. I am embarrassed and feel shame about exposing her to my religion. I feel that was wrong and a mistake.	
22	Now that I've deprogrammed myself, I am shocked by the things I used to believe in. It is very easy to see my past beliefs were obviously false. I'm both shocked and embarrassed that I used to believe in what Christian fundamentalism teaches.	
42	There are permanent reminders of my preachy Christian fundamentalist past that cannot be erased. It's out there for everyone to see and it's embarrassing. I wish I could make it all go away.	
44	I am embarrassed about my Christian fundamentalism past and how I witnessed to others. Also, my beliefs were very strange and very different compared to others my age who were outside of Christian fundamentalism.	

#	Formulated Meanings	Theme Clusters
130	Some core Christian fundamentalist doctrines are nonsensical and can't possibly be true. I find it amazing that I used to believe in those things.	(7) Being embarrassed about one's history of holding Christian fundamentalist beliefs.
141	Sharing what I used to believe in is not embarrassing when talking to others who understand those beliefs, but it's personally shameful to me. I feel gullible.	
142	My past beliefs were ridiculous. It's hard to understand how this narrative persists.	
188	I am embarrassed by what I used to believe in. I see it as me being weak-minded.	
189	I can understand why I had my beliefs when I was a child, but I am humiliated that I continued to hold them as an adult. I think perhaps Christian fundamentalism fulfilled something I felt was missing in my life. I feel embarrassed, I feel stupid, I gullible.	
191	I feel stupid. It also shows the power of indoctrination. I couldn't see through my beliefs.	
256	I feel foolish for believing in Christian fundamentalism but I understand why I did.	
393	When my faith came crashing down, I exposed myself to secular materials that exposed my beliefs from an outside perspective. I was shocked and embarrassed by the views I used to hold, by the person of faith I used to be. That was when I knew for certain I was done with that Christian fundamentalist identity.	
15	It's not entirely my fault. I was indoctrinated. But I still feel guilty about it.	(8) Feeling guilt and shame about one's past actions as a Christian fundamentalist
190	As a Christian fundamentalist, I also acted in ways that I am ashamed of and wish I could take back.	
257	The concept of belief/faith is foolish and stupid.	
260	I've moved on from faith. Looking back the concept of faith is stupid and foolish.	

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

#	Formulated Meanings	Theme Clusters
269	I began cutting people out of my life that I did not consider as committed to Christian fundamentalism as I was.	(8) Feeling guilt and shame about one's past actions as a Christian fundamentalist (cont.)
392	I realized I'd been passive and had been living with an external locus of control. I had not been acting as though I was responsible for my own life.	
400	My past beliefs are embarrassing and shameful. Christian fundamentalism caused me to say things and act in ways about which I am personally embarrassed and ashamed.	
401	I wish I could undo certain things I did in my past. I'd like to go back and apologize to people and show them how I have changed.	
416	I believed the ridiculous claims I was programmed with as a child. I then perpetuated these beliefs by passing them on to others.	
48	Christian fundamentalism requires being judgmental. Now that I am atheist, I am free to accept people as they are instead of judging people.	(9) Leaving Christian fundamentalism and becoming an atheist was an extended process
56	After much thinking, one day I realized I no longer believed in Christian fundamentalism.	
57	There was a break-through moment where I realized, acknowledged, and announced, my atheism.	
58	Telling others about atheism is highly personal and is experienced as a "coming out" process.	
73	I could no longer hold my fundamentalist views. Everything was changing, but I still held onto the idea of God.	
74	I had let my Christian fundamentalist beliefs go. But it was harder to let go of the concept of God.	
75	The idea of a divine Jesus then fell away next. But I still held onto the idea of God.	
76	I didn't immediately move from Christian fundamentalism to atheism. I experimented with non-organized religion on my way to atheism.	

#	Formulated Meanings	Theme Clusters
77	Hearing the testimonies of others who had been through what I was going through let me know I wasn't alone and was very meaningful. It also produced further breakthroughs that led me further down the path towards atheism.	(9) Leaving Christian fundamentalism and becoming an atheist was an extended process (cont.)
81	I was scared to say out loud that I was an atheist. However, once my husband said it out loud, I was secure enough to say it too.	
127	I lost interest in the Church. Near the end I was forcing myself to attend.	
166	I wasn't being forced. It was my own motivation. Christian fundamentalism is what I wanted.	
168	My responsibilities no longer permitted me to maintain the same degree of immersion in Christian fundamentalism.	
170	I was still holding onto Christian fundamentalism and holding onto my identity as a Christian.	
171	Even though my work assignments took me around the world, I sought out other believers. There was no one pushing me to do it. I put in all the work. I still wanted this.	
175	I wasn't really going to Mass regularly anymore but I was still insistent that I was a Christian, and I wanted to act out a Christian life.	
176	My non-believing husband wouldn't challenge my beliefs and I wouldn't believe his ideas, but, at the same time, I could hear what he was saying and I begin to privately question my beliefs.	
177	I recognized that there were some flaws in my faith; that some of my beliefs had not been thought out. It was at the point where my questioning could no longer be ignored. I had to do further investigation.	
178	My father was killed in a tragic accident. My faith began to crumble.	

#	Formulated Meanings	Theme Clusters
179	The tragic events of my life and the experiences I'd gained began to demonstrate that the teachings of Christian fundamentalism weren't real.	(9) Leaving Christian fundamentalism and becoming an atheist was an extended process (cont.)
181	My faith fell away one piece at a time. But once my Dad died, the pieces fell away at a steady and continuous pace. Nothing could stop me from my investigating. I had to know the truth.	
182	My faith did not come apart all at once. I no longer use God to explain what I do or what happens to others.	
183	I had been questioning things, but my father's death was the watershed moment in which my faith fell away.	
184	My grandfather's death provided the right moment for my immersion in Christian fundamentalist and my father's death provided the right moment for escaping Christian fundamentalism.	
219	My journey did not all happen at once. My journey wasn't sudden, but it was steady.	
221	As I got older, I began to move away from Christian fundamentalism, and began questioning things more.	
222	Life circumstances moved religion away from being part of my everyday life. This was a factor in my moving away from Christian fundamentalism.	
223	I became involved in many community activities and had little time for church. I began to lose interest in Christian fundamentalism. My faith was less important.	
224	I wasn't around Christian fundamentalism much anymore and its influence in my life waned, but I still held onto my belief.	
225	Although I still held my beliefs, my belief was slowly beginning to fade away.	
234	I was no longer a Christian. But I wasn't sure if I believed in God. I moved towards agnosticism.	

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

#	Formulated Meanings	Theme Clusters
237	I believed in a God only as insurance to protect me in case I was wrong.	(9) Leaving Christian fundamentalism and becoming an atheist was an extended process (cont.)
244	The Bible didn't mean anything to me anymore. It was just a book.	
245	My own word/oath meant more to me than the Bible. The Bible isn't special; it's just a book.	
248	My journey was highly personal and private. I did not share my journey with others.	
252	One day after a conversation, I had a break-through moment in which I finally realized I was an atheist.	
253	I couldn't definitely affirm there is no God. But I couldn't find any evidence that there is a God. I would tell people I was open to any new information and, until then, I would not judge either way.	
254	I became an atheist but kept it private. I did not share my lack of belief with others.	
259	My belief, and my journey from belief to non-belief, was a solo journey. I reasoned my own way out of CF and into atheism.	
262	I was not born into Christian fundamentalism. Instead, Christian fundamentalism came into my life just when I was looking for new direction in my life.	
263	I was taken to a Christian fundamentalist campus at which I had an emotional experience I considered to be spiritual in nature.	
267	After a charismatic leader gave a sermon, I responded to an altar call and became a Christian fundamentalist.	
301	As I moved away from Christian fundamentalism, I did not immediately head towards atheism.	
302	I moved away from my faith one step at a time. It did not happen all at once. The doctrines of Christian fundamentalism faded away and became less important over time.	

#	Formulated Meanings	Theme Clusters
303	I began to see some of the contradictions in the Bible which caused me to doubt its inerrancy.	(9) Leaving Christian fundamentalism and becoming an atheist was an extended process (cont.)
306	As I moved away from Christian fundamentalism, I continued looking for meaning in other religions and spiritual traditions.	
307	I began my own investigation which really caused me to doubt Christian fundamentalism.	
308	My investigation caused the tenets of Christian fundamentalism to gradually fall away. It did not happen all at once.	
309	I still believed in a God but the divinity of Jesus Christ was falling away. Jesus existed but he was no longer God.	
310	My study of the historical Jesus confirmed for me that he was not God.	
311	The answers Christian fundamentalism provided to my questions about historical facts were insufficient and illogical. I could not take their defences seriously.	
312	The implausible explanations used by Christian fundamentalism to justify its belief system were further causing my faith to fall away.	
313	I moved away from Christian fundamentalism and began considering the concepts of deism.	
317	Some Christian fundamentalism tenets did not square with my personal experience and caused me to doubt.	
319	My faith slowly came apart until it no longer had any value. There was nothing left to hold onto.	
320	My faith had unraveled to the point where I had nothing left. Having a deistic God was pointless to me. There was no point in believing in God anymore.	
369	The Gospels of the Bible contradict one another and use themes that are derivative of other more-ancient religions. These things caused me to question Christian fundamentalism.	

#	Formulated Meanings	Theme Clusters
391	Doubts had been building for a long time, but the watershed moment when my faith came crashing down was when I realized nobody's there.	(9) Leaving Christian fundamentalism and becoming an atheist was an extended process (cont.)
411	Later in life, I entered Christian school with the intention of dedicating my life to the service of Christian fundamentalism. Surprisingly, however, it was in Christian school that I began to question my faith.	
426	I made gradual changes in perception that moved me away from Christian fundamentalism. Some of these transitions were small/subtle and happened without much struggle.	
427	Things become more difficult when one tries to move away from concepts that hold more prominent positions within the traditions/ideology of Christian fundamentalism.	
446	By the end of my undergraduate degree, I was no longer a Christian fundamentalist. I was still, however, a Christian.	
447	Although I was no longer a Christian fundamentalist, I still believed Jesus was the son of God.	
448	Although I was no longer a Christian fundamentalist, I still believed in the concept of eternal life.	
450	I made many transitions that I considered to be quite drastic. It was a surreal time in my life. I made many of these transitions independently and privately.	
451	I was confused by the compartmentalization of others who I respected as scholars and knew to be highly intelligent. They were able to critically analyze Biblical texts and yet, at the same time, turn off their critical thinking and continue to hold onto completely illogical, indefensible beliefs.	
468	Of all the ideas of my faith that fell away, the idea of a divine Jesus was the last to go.	
469	At first, I moved away from Christian fundamentalism a piece at a time by becoming more liberal in my theology.	

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

#	Formulated Meanings	Theme Clusters
470	Even within liberal theology there are certain tenets of Christianity that remain non-negotiable. Even within liberal Christian theology, Jesus HAS to be the son of God.	(9) Leaving Christian fundamentalism and becoming an atheist was an extended process (cont.)
472	Once the first tenets of my faith began to fall away, it caused other tenets of my faith to fall away. The unraveling of my faith built upon itself: it “snowballed.”	
473	I now hold different values. I now believe that knowledge is infinitely better than belief. It has become my mantra.	
474	Knowledge is superior to belief. I believe that very strongly now.	
475	My journey from belief to disbelief had no singular moment in which I suddenly deconverted to atheism. It was a gradual journey that took a long time and occurred in stages.	
478	Without my faith, I am faced with the reality that I am just as weak and vulnerable as everyone else. I have no guarantee of safety.	
479	As an atheist, I realize there is no edge of spiritual protection and there is no afterlife in which to correct my mistakes. I am solely responsible for my health and relationships. This has caused me to take responsibility for my health and relationships which has affected my lifestyle.	
481	Journeying from Christian fundamentalism to atheism has come with three significant and permanent changes. 1) An incredible shift in what I value for interpreting natural phenomena. “Knowledge trumps belief.” 2) I am a more virtuous and moral person. 3) A much higher capacity for empathy that did not exist within me as a Christian fundamentalist believer.	
484	My journey has taken me so far away from the things I used to believe that it is shocking to look back over the beliefs I used to hold. Those beliefs are now so alien to me that it’s hard to believe they were once a part of me.	

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

#	Formulated Meanings	Theme Clusters
69	With the obligation removed to take on certain positions because of my faith, I am free to accept others for who they are.	(10) Gaining a sense of personal freedom after leaving Christian fundamentalism
83	It was a great feeling to be accepted and to be able to live openly.	
89	I am no longer intellectually confined by Christian fundamentalism. I feel relief; I am free.	
90	I thought I was free before, but I didn't understand what freedom was. I was not free to make decisions or choices. After leaving Christian fundamentalism, I have these freedoms.	
197	My ideas of death today are far from where I started. It's been a life-long journey. I am resolute in my position, I have no more questioning. I feel free.	
397	I am now more genuine in my relationships with others. I have no more hidden agendas in my interactions.	
402	Leaving Christian fundamentalism has made me a better person. I had to leave Christian fundamentalism before I could see it for what it was.	
403	There were a lot of pressures and emotional baggage I was carrying when I was a Christian fundamentalist. It felt like something was wrong with me. I didn't feel like a good enough Christian.	
404	I am now free of the guilt that constantly weighed me down as a Christian fundamentalist.	

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

#	Formulated Meanings	Theme Clusters
129	All the suffering I saw in the world made me question things and proves God is not present or real.	(11) Perceptual changes after leaving Christian fundamentalism
131	In the Bible God is unethical. His actions are unconscionable and disgusting.	
138	I wish what Christian fundamentalism teaches about the afterlife were true. I want it to be true but it's not. Religions are not correct or real.	
139	The church provides comforts, but those comforts are a lie. What the church teaches is untrue. The church isn't real.	
185	A strong Christian fundamentalist believer will not be argued out of their faith, nor will they rationalize their way out of their faith. It will take a strong life event to cause them to question their faith.	
186	A strong Christian fundamentalist believer will only change his/her beliefs when forced to by circumstances.	
187	As an atheist, I have no faith. I believe in nothing other than what we can do for ourselves.	
194	With my new understanding of reality I think that when you die that's it; no afterlife.	
195	Faith exists as a coping mechanism for humans struggling with existential questions and angst, primarily death anxiety.	
196	Death is final and the reality of that is harsh.	
220	My decision to apostatize was made without outside influence.	
227	We believe what we are taught to believe by our parents and the society around us. We are products of our environments. This is evidence that faith is not real.	
242	The Bible is no longer a special or sacred book to me. The Bible doesn't mean anything to me anymore. It's just a book, nothing more.	

#	Formulated Meanings	Theme Clusters
249	I am tolerant of the beliefs of others on the condition that individual beliefs do not cause harm to others.	(11) Perceptual changes after leaving Christian fundamentalism (cont.)
250	We are personally responsible for our lives.	
255	I am not ashamed or embarrassed of my past belief.	
258	I would feel bad and guilty about my past beliefs if through my beliefs I had hurt others. This, however, did not happen.	
261	The concept of faith is stupid and foolish, but I am not stupid and foolish for at one time having had faith. I understand why I had the Christian fundamentalist beliefs that I had. In the same way, I do not judge others for having their beliefs. I, however, would prefer people kept their beliefs to themselves and did not push them on me.	
281	Christian fundamentalism is filled with logical fallacies.	
289	Even though I am no longer a Christian fundamentalist, I am still fascinated by it.	
290	Now that I know what Christian fundamentalism is and no longer have those beliefs, I am amazed that others are still within that belief system. Simple investigation disproves many Christian fundamentalist teachings.	
322	I had to find my own purpose. There was no one else who could do it for me.	
329	Losing my faith has given me new perspectives on reality and the value of my life. It has changed my priorities and influenced my life choices, including how I choose to spend my time.	
333	I no longer give outside credit to a God for the things I have personally accomplished.	
334	People should not give their thanks to a God for things that have nothing to do with him. People should get the credit for the work they do.	

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

#	Formulated Meanings	Theme Clusters
335	People are inconsistent with their praise. If God gets credit for all the good things, is God not also responsible for all the bad things too?	(11) Perceptual changes after leaving Christian fundamentalism (cont.)
379	I was very disappointed in my fellow believers. Now that I'm a non-believer, the ideas and attitudes demonstrated by Christian fundamentalists are areas of contempt I have for this demographic of people.	
395	The concept of heaven comforts people and allows them to excuse their actions and their responsibilities because they can make up for it in another life. Although it might be comforting, I had to let go of this false concept.	
396	I am now responsible for my own life. No outside force is going to take care of things for me or decide things for me.	
405	After leaving Christian fundamentalism, I have become a better person. I have opinions, and speak those opinions to others, but I don't exploit people.	
406	I see people for what they are but I do not judge them. I can see others' actions that I do not like, and I learn not to repeat those behaviors.	
480	How I live and who I am as a person have improved since losing my faith. I am more empathetic as an atheist.	
482	As an atheist, my career involves caring for people who cannot care for themselves. This is not a professional choice I would have chosen or been able to do as a Christian fundamentalist believer.	
30	Christian fundamentalism gives people contradictory messages that confuse its followers, causing high levels of stress in individuals.	(12) Experiencing cognitive dissonance as a direct result of Christian fundamentalist teachings
31	Christian fundamentalism creates a stressful state of cognitive dissonance in the minds of its followers.	
88	Leaving religion cured me of my cognitive dissonance which was stressful. I no longer have to make wild claims. I can freely admit when I don't have answers. This is a relief.	

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

#	Formulated Meanings	Theme Clusters
229	I tried to reconcile the contradictory messages between Christian fundamentalism and science.	(12) Experiencing cognitive dissonance as a direct result of Christian fundamentalist teachings (cont.)
230	I began to see the cognitive dissonance displayed by followers of Christian fundamentalism.	
231	I was able to see that my thinking was different from other Christian fundamentalists.	
232	I tried to rationalize how the Bible and science could have contradictory messages and yet still be true and coexist.	
276	When dealing with the mentally ill, I experienced cognitive dissonance. I began to question Christian fundamentalism. I began to question my concept of reality. I wasn't sure what was real anymore.	
277	I became skeptical about the experiences of others. I was unsure if people were mentally ill or if they were truly experiencing things. I was never certain of the truth.	
278	I was uncertain as to what was spiritual and what was not. I was uncertain of reality.	
279	I remained unsure even though the strong emotional reactions others had to their claimed spiritual experiences seemed to indicate they were genuine.	
280	I tried using Christian fundamentalist principles to explain/justify my questions and doubts.	
282	I experienced anxiety regarding my skepticism of Christian fundamentalism. I was concerned I was being deceived by Satan.	
383	My faith and the reality of my lifestyle/situation were at odds and were coming to a breaking point.	
434	I experienced cognitive dissonance as I began living two lives. One was of the world and partying, and the other was being dedicated to Christian fundamentalism.	
435	The tension I felt between what I believed (my faith) and how I was living contributed to my unhealthy experience of sexuality.	

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

#	Formulated Meanings	Theme Clusters
436	My ongoing level of tension about my double lifestyle was both unpleasant and stressful.	(12) Experiencing cognitive dissonance as a direct result of Christian fundamentalist teachings (cont.)
437	I experienced an extreme form of cognitive dissonance over a long period of time because my personal values and actions were not lining up with what I was taught in Christian fundamentalism.	
439	My cognitive dissonance became so extreme, stressful, and prolonged, that at one point I thought I was having a nervous breakdown.	
440	I could not sort out my values because my authoritarian Christian fundamentalist training only offered the choice of obeying or being bad.	
84	I developed the skill of critical thinking. Critical thinking can't be unlearned. There is no way for me to think the way I used to. Learning critical thinking permanently changed me.	(13) Influence of critical thinking in breaking down CF belief
85	Critical thinking is invaluable and should be taught generationally...even as a matter of institutional policy.	
86	I will teach my daughter critical thinking. It will keep her from getting taken in by things like religion. Even if she goes to church, her critical thinking skills will protect her.	
87	Critical thinking works and protects people from being manipulated and brainwashed into false beliefs.	
213	Even at a young age, I was able to recognize (with common sense/critical thinking) that aspects of Christian fundamentalism weren't true in the literal sense.	
218	No one tried to convince me my beliefs were wrong. I reasoned my way out of Christian fundamentalism on my own. This makes me comfortable with my transformation. The decision was my own.	
228	As I left Christian fundamentalism behind, I started to develop new understanding and ways of seeing reality/history.	

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

#	Formulated Meanings	Theme Clusters
235	My thinking changed. I became a critical thinker. I began to base my beliefs on evidence.	(13) Influence of critical thinking in breaking down Christian fundamentalist belief
236	I wasn't ready to stop believing in God so I became an agnostic, saying God may exist but there is no evidence to support my belief.	
239	The many gods in the world contradict one another. One cannot know that their particular god is the one real one. This means the odds are that Christian fundamentalism is not correct.	
240	My critical thinking was beginning to demonstrate the unlikeliness that the exclusive claims made by Christian fundamentalism were true.	
241	I was using critical thinking. I became an analytical person.	
243	I moved from belief to a loss of belief to the acquisition of critical thinking. The acquisition of critical thinking then empowered me to come to new realizations without the assistance of others.	
330	After subjecting the idea of the efficacy of prayer to empirical testing, I found prayer to be false and untrue.	
331	Christian fundamentalism and the concepts of faith quickly fall apart when placed under investigation. One has to simply accept and believe in order for faith to work.	
445	Christian university intended to reaffirm and strengthen my faith; however, one of the skills I picked up in university was critical thinking. Learning how to think critically is ironically what led to my questioning and analyzing my belief system.	
449	I took the skill of critical thinking that I had learned from university and began applying it to all kinds of truth claims found within Christian traditions. I was analyzing and testing the tenets of my faith.	
452	I came to value truth over my faith/beliefs. The validity of claims became more important than the claims themselves.	

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

#	Formulated Meanings	Theme Clusters
453	My values in life changed. I no longer invested my time/energy into ideas and beliefs that had been handed down to me on the authority of others. I came to a place where the validity of the claims/beliefs was more important. Beliefs were no longer sacred. If beliefs were true/real, then they could be tested and verified. I valued testing the validity of beliefs more than having the beliefs.	(13) Influence of critical thinking in breaking down Christian fundamentalist belief (cont.)
454	After the acquisition of critical thinking, I no longer trusted any truth claims that couldn't be supported by empirical evidence and validated by the scientific method.	
70	Allowing myself to see my life for what it really was opened my mind to new possibilities.	(14) Access to new/outside information contributed to leaving Christian fundamentalism
72	These new ideas were just what I needed/was looking for. New ideas/concepts changed my understanding and position on my faith.	
79	Listening to the works of prominent atheists was exciting, made sense, had a strong emotional impact, and assisted in my deprogramming.	
91	I had hit the bottom but it had not destroyed me. I had nowhere to go but up. I was no longer afraid of anything. I started exploring new areas of knowledge and loved it. I couldn't get enough.	
167	The circumstances of my life changed. I encountered new experiences which started to challenge my thinking.	
169	I was placed in a position to face the struggles of the world. I began to see the world for what it is. I began to see reality.	
172	I was less isolated now. I was traveling the globe. Everywhere I went, there was pain and suffering. I began to question my ideas and the state of the world.	
173	I surrounded myself with people who shared my beliefs because it helped me feel better. Yet I could not deny what I saw. And there were many people around the world who didn't believe what I believed.	

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

#	Formulated Meanings	Theme Clusters
174	I became exposed to different areas of the world and to very different belief systems. I began to question if my faith was the true one. Yet the idea all Catholics could be wrong still seemed absurd.	(14) Access to new/outside information contributed to leaving Christian fundamentalism (cont.)
211	Even from the beginning, I had an inquisitive mind.	
212	I would investigate things that I didn't understand.	
233	I would investigate things that I didn't understand. I had the desire to know the answers to my questions.	
238	I became aware that the God of Christian fundamentalism is but one of many gods.	
295	Once I left the Christian fundamentalist bubble, I began thinking in healthier ways.	
296	I gained access to outside ideas/information which challenged me and began to change my thinking.	
297	I began to see merit in the way my thinking was being critiqued.	
316	Christian fundamentalism's position that only believers could be moral challenged me.	
318	Access to knowledge is a key factor in people's ability to hold belief.	
413	School introduced me to new knowledge and opened me up to different ways of interpreting reality and evaluating truth claims. This is what began my questioning of my faith.	
414	Although Christian school was meant to reaffirm and strengthen my faith, I was noticing that people who had similar questions to mine were coming up with different answers than my own. I began to question my own assumptions. I began to wonder how one could arrive at the truth.	
471	Higher education introduced me to new ideas and new ways of thinking. This contributed to my questioning my beliefs.	

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

#	Formulated Meanings	Theme Clusters
33	Becoming an atheist is not a choice. Atheism came upon me: There was nothing I could do to stop it.	(15) Permanent loss of Christian fundamentalist beliefs due to new knowledge and critical thinking
34	Although it might be more convenient for me to quit atheism and go back to my faith...I am incapable of doing so. It's beyond my power.	
99	The changes that happened to me through the acquisition of knowledge are permanent. I cannot un-change myself. I cannot forget what I know.	
100	Even if I tried to force myself back, it wouldn't work. The changes that happened to me through the acquisition of knowledge are permanent.	
101	The best I could do to go back would be to pretend.	
135	I can't unlearn what I have learned.	
136	There is no one who could convince me to believe again.	
140	If I could believe and have all those false comforts, things would be easier for me.	
291	I would receive comfort if I were able to still believe in Christian fundamentalism. However, I am unable to hold those views as I know them to be untrue. I do not understand how others continue to hold onto those beliefs.	
328	I'd receive comfort if I could go back to being a Christian fundamentalist. However, my reason and intellect make that impossible. I cannot unlearn what I have learned. My faith is gone and I can't get it back.	
394	I am free of that Christian fundamentalist identity. I no longer have to think like a Christian fundamentalist or speak like a Christian fundamentalist. I will never be that person again.	
407	I won't be the person I was before. I will not procrastinate but will be responsible for, and take control of, my own life. I will not pass the guilt I grew up with to my children. I will teach them to accept themselves for who they are.	

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

#	Formulated Meanings	Theme Clusters
455	You cannot unlearn what you have learned. Once you gain life-changing knowledge, you cannot forget you know it. The change is permanent.	(15) Permanent loss of Christian fundamentalist beliefs due to new knowledge and critical thinking (cont.)
463	I undertook a massive paradigm shift in my faith/beliefs and my understanding of reality. Paradigm shifts only go forwards. I cannot return to belief. I cannot go back to where I was. Returning to belief is literally impossible. It is gone forever.	
464	For a paradigm shift to successfully occur, one must access new information that better interprets and explains reality. When this happens, it's permanent.	
465	Paradigm shifts are permanent and cannot be undone. You cannot unlearn what you have learned. It's like losing a limb – when it's gone it's gone; you cannot go back to having that limb.	
466	Still to this day, I have not come across any argument that could come close to undoing my paradigm shift.	
467	Like in the movie "Matrix," I wish I could plug myself back into Christian fundamentalism even though I know it is not true.	
486	I have no idea how a person returns to faith. And I don't know anyone who can tell me differently.	
24	People who are born to religion are given messages that they are not good enough.	(16) Feelings of inadequacy due to Christian fundamentalist messages
26	I have feelings of insecurity and not feeling good enough that go beyond the experiences of others and religion is directly responsible for that.	
28	Christian fundamentalist messages made me feel terrible about myself.	
29	Christian fundamentalism breaks people down by giving them negative messages about themselves and making people feel unworthy.	

#	Formulated Meanings	Theme Clusters
346	I would feel pressure to witness about my faith to others. If I was too afraid, I would feel guilty and wonder if I was even a good Christian. That was wrong. I will not pass this pressure onto my children.	(16) Feelings of inadequacy due to Christian fundamentalist messages (cont.)
347	I was made to feel guilty if I wasn't ready to witness to others at any time.	
348	I often felt guilty that I wasn't a good enough Christian. I felt I needed to do more. I tried to worship God as best I could.	
403	There were a lot of pressures and emotional baggage I was carrying when I was a Christian fundamentalist. It felt like something was wrong with me. I didn't feel like a good enough Christian.	
418	The second Christian fundamentalist concept that greatly affects a person's perception of reality is the concept of original sin. This concept says that you are born into sin, that you are flawed, and that you have sin inside you from birth.	
419	In your teen years, you are told your natural biological feelings and urges are sinful and wrong. One can become overwhelmed and crushed by the feelings of guilt with which one is deliberately programmed.	
421	Even as an adult, Christian fundamentalism holds regular rituals that reinforce the idea that you are a failed sinner and God had to die to make up for your sinfulness. The programming never ends.	
2	The environment I was born into was dominating and had many rules.	(17) Isolation of believers from "outsiders" can lead believers to adopt extreme lifestyles
12	The way I was raised was so strange that others could not begin to relate to me. What would be considered a "freak show" by others was perfectly normal to me. No common ground.	
13	I didn't understand at the time, but now I realize why my friend reacted so strongly. I was unable to share with others who I was. Outsiders didn't understand who I was or what I was about. Looking back I see things differently.	

#	Formulated Meanings	Theme Clusters
37	I would get emotionally swept up in services and would beg God for forgiveness for doing mundane things that was normal for people my age.	(17) Isolation of believers from “outsiders” can lead believers to adopt extreme lifestyles (cont.)
164	I considered letting go of a normal life and completely dedicating the rest of my life to Christian fundamentalism. My parents didn’t understand.	
264	I had an impactful emotional experience after which I took Christian fundamentalist materials into my home/life.	
271	The people I lived with were extreme Christian fundamentalists. They made significant life decisions based on their beliefs.	
272	The extreme way we were living was abnormal. Most people did not believe or live the way we did.	
273	Living in that extreme way was strange.	
274	I spent my time in service to Christian fundamentalism. I was placed in two extreme environments: the correctional service and in a soup kitchen serving the homeless.	
283	My anxiety caused me to heavily rely on prayer and to behave strangely.	
285	Living within Christian fundamentalism is like living in a different world/reality.	
62	I have been disowned for leaving Christian fundamentalism.	(18) Christian fundamentalism/ leaving Christian fundamentalism causes ruptures in relationships and breaks up families.
63	People who were once close to me have disowned me for my apostasy.	
65	My family has pulled away from me since I left Christian fundamentalism.	
66	Christian fundamentalists are unable to relate to people who have rejected their beliefs.	
67	Becoming a Christian fundamentalist apostate can tear families apart and keep families separated from one another.	

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

#	Formulated Meanings	Theme Clusters
93	When I'm with Christian fundamentalist people, I am ostracized and judged. I am not accepted.	(18) Christian fundamentalism/ leaving Christian fundamentalism causes ruptures in relationships and breaks up families. (cont.)
95	As an unbelieving outsider, I am judged as an outsider. I am judged like I used to judge others. But it's different when it comes from family. I am judged as though they don't know me.	
96	Since leaving Christian fundamentalism, I am judged as being a problematic/detrimental influence. It is hurtful that I am no longer seen as a good person.	
97	As much as I am ostracized and find they can no longer relate to me, I am also unable to relate to them. I share no common ground with Christian fundamentalist people.	
109	Not following my mother's religious demands caused a breach in the relationship.	
110	Although my mother and I worked things out, Christian fundamentalism caused a breach in our relationship.	
246	I felt guilty for taking this personal stand (to say my word was more important than the Bible, which is just a book).	
247	I felt shamed. That is exactly what it was. That other people were looking at me and that they were now judging me.	
251	When I felt shamed and judged for my non-belief, I became more resolved in my non-belief.	
398	My allegiances have changed. Although I have not come out as an atheist to my family, I'm sure they are aware I am no longer a Christian fundamentalist.	
52	My Christian fundamentalist beliefs kept me very naïve about the world. I was not prepared for how life turned out to be.	(19) Christian fundamentalism can leave individuals naïve and unprepared for the outside world or coping with life events that deviate from the Christian fundamentalist narrative.
53	I was very lost and confused when my life didn't turn out the way Christian fundamentalism told me it would.	
54	I followed the tenets of Christian fundamentalism but things were still not going properly. I had no other options. I didn't know what else to do.	

#	Formulated Meanings	Theme Clusters
55	Without any answers, I turned to blaming myself for everything.	(19) Christian fundamentalism can leave individuals naïve and unprepared for the outside world or coping with life events that deviate from the Christian fundamentalist narrative.
60	Religion left me highly unprepared/ill-equipped for life. I didn't know anything, and I couldn't think for myself.	
61	Christian fundamentalist teachings produced a simplistic view of the world.	
157	I needed to make sense out of something I couldn't understand.	
158	When I was questioning what happens when a person dies, my faith provided me with simple and comforting answers that helped me at the time.	
288	Being naïve is what allowed Christian fundamentalism to draw me in. I didn't know anything about the world. I took everything they taught me for granted.	
304	Christian fundamentalism came into my life just when I was looking for new direction. Being naïve is what allowed Christian fundamentalism to draw me in. I didn't know anything about the world. I took everything they taught me for granted.	
314	Within Christian fundamentalism, I had no personal agency. All the power in my life was external. I needed God or those connected to God.	
367	I was following Christian fundamentalism and was being passive and trusted that God would work things out for me in my life.	
389	I gave up my Christian fundamentalist virgin identity because it no longer made sense to me in the context of my circumstances.	
390	I was shocked that, when I gave up my virgin identity, absolutely nothing happened. There was no supernatural reaction whatsoever. This made me think that there was no reaction from God because there was no God to do the reacting. If nothing reacted, there must be nothing there.	

#	Formulated Meanings	Theme Clusters
430	Life was reduced to, and explained by, simplistic dichotomous thinking. If bad things are happening, it's because Satan is testing you, and if good things are happening, it's because God is blessing you.	(19) Christian fundamentalism can leave individuals naïve and unprepared for the outside world or coping with life events that deviate from the CF narrative (cont.)
431	Christian fundamentalist dichotomous thinking does not provide good categories for understanding reality, leaving one ill-prepared when entering the outside world.	
432	Simplistic dichotomous thinking was all I had to explain the events of my life.	
433	The rigid and simplistic world view of Christian fundamentalism did not prepare me to make mature moral choices about the situations I encountered.	
438	I could not sort out my values because my authoritarian Christian fundamentalist training only offered the choice of obeying or being bad.	
441	I was ill-prepared when entering into the outside world. I didn't know how to behave as a functioning adult in society.	
442	All the knowledge that I had, had come from my indoctrination. I had no other ways of understanding the world/society.	
443	My interactions with others outside the closed society of Christian fundamentalism were disastrous. I messed things up terribly and made a lot of mistakes.	
444	After leaving the bubble of Christian fundamentalism, I spent time just aimlessly fumbling through life.	
6	I was programmed with hateful messages that contributed to my becoming a person I am not proud of. Religion caused damage in my life.	(20) Christian fundamentalists beliefs caused harm in ex-members' lives
7	Religion contributed to my being a person I'm not proud of.	
9	Christian fundamentalism caused me to be condescending to others. I thought it was my duty to "save" people.	

#	Formulated Meanings	Theme Clusters
17	The lies I was programmed with have had a detrimental impact on my life.	(20) Christian fundamentalists beliefs caused harm in ex-members' lives (cont.)
20	Christian fundamentalism lied to me and made the outside world appear evil and deceptive.	
27	How I experienced my relationship with God in Christian fundamentalism was negative enough, and caused enough damage, to be considered abusive.	
49	My Christian fundamentalist beliefs and ideas negatively influenced how I interacted with others.	
50	What I'm discussing is not funny. I lost a large part of my life to Christian fundamentalism.	
92	Christian fundamentalism forced values upon me that, even as a believer, I knew were against my nature.	
208	The idea of raising a child in a religions environment being a form of child abuse may seem outrageous, but I think, depending on the context, there is an argument for it.	
226	We are all born atheists. It is the programming we receive as children that makes us believers. As the influence of religion faded from my life, so did my faith. Without my childhood programing, would I ever have believed? I doubt it.	
399	Being raised as a Christian fundamentalist left me feeling fearful and guilty. I was always uncertain and didn't take responsibility for my own life. I won't be passing this mentality onto my children. I won't be raising them with religion. I believe they will be better off without it. I am beginning to be more vocal against raising your children with religion.	
321	Losing my faith took me to a dark place that I had to escape from. I started questioning the point to life.	
35	Losing my faith is not easy. Although there are some positives about leaving Christian fundamentalism, there is also permanent loss.	(21) Having a sense of loss after losing one's faith and becoming an atheist

#	Formulated Meanings	Theme Clusters
98	There is loss. I have lost people and miss them. There is sadness.	(21) Having a sense of loss after losing one's faith and becoming an atheist (cont.)
132	There is loss. There were aspects of going to Church that I enjoyed and miss.	
133	There is a sense of loss. Life would be easier if I could somehow make myself believe again.	
134	I have lost the comforts that the church used to provide, such as being able to see loved ones again who have died. Losing a faith that was so important and personal to me is another loss that I actually mourn for. It hurts, but I cannot live in delusion. Reason must prevail; I must face reality.	
137	I've lost the comforts that the church used to provide. Reality can be harsh when those comforts are lost.	
305	There was a lot of loss when I lost my faith in Christian fundamentalism. I became deeply affected and experienced extreme negative emotional consequences. I became nihilistic.	
325	Losing my faith was emotionally traumatic. Christian fundamentalism had filled a need in my life. I did not leave my faith. I did not have a choice. It felt as though my faith left me and I couldn't stop it from happening.	
456	There is a sense of loss that comes with losing my faith in Christian fundamentalism. Christian fundamentalism provided some assurances that everything was going to be OK, and death is not final. Those comforts and that peace of mind that Christian fundamentalism provided is now gone.	
462	There is a sense of loss in having left Christian fundamentalism. In many ways, I wish Christian fundamentalism was real because it provides certain comforts that I wish were true. I've lost those comforts and cannot get them back.	

#	Formulated Meanings	Theme Clusters
25	People who were not born into Christian fundamentalism do not struggle with the same things I do now.	(22) Continuing struggles and the need for specific treatment in the aftermath of the transition from Christian fundamentalism to atheism
78	I need someone to unapologetically go through the issues. Because I'm still trying to figure out what's real.	
103	People who have experienced this phenomenon require treatment. There should be programs set up to specifically treat this issue. I would participate in this treatment, I am still struggling.	
104	I am still struggling. I could use some help.	
105	I am trying to self-deprogram. I may struggle with this for the rest of my life.	
324	Others have not experienced the struggles that I have after losing my faith. I have had negative thoughts. I lost all sense of meaning in life. I felt like giving up on everything in my life and just walking away from it all.	
326	People do not understand what it means to experience this phenomenon. I could not find any direct support to help me deal with it. Listening to podcasts where others talked about experiencing this phenomenon is what I used to work through my struggles.	
327	Without adequate support, I had to find my own ways of dealing with my experiences and the accompanying depression that resulted from contact with this phenomenon.	
457	Journeying from a state of mind where I believed I was going to live forever to a place where I've had to accept my own mortality has been extremely difficult. It has been my biggest area of struggle. I experience it as another form of distressing cognitive dissonance.	
458	I was expecting to live forever but now this comfort is gone. I find this extremely distressing. I will never again see the people I've lost.	

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

#	Formulated Meanings	Theme Clusters
459	The comfort of immortality is gone. I'm running out of time to live/exist.	(22) Continuing struggles and the need for specific treatment in the aftermath of the transition from Christian fundamentalism to atheism (cont.)
460	I may always struggle with the distress and angst of cognitive dissonance associated with losing a central concept (immortality) that made up the fabric of my understanding of reality for the vast majority of my life.	
461	Even after leaving Christian fundamentalism, I continue to suffer from its influence and may do so for the rest of my life.	
476	Although I've had existential angst ever since losing my faith, it has never stopped me from functioning.	
477	Although I continue to experience anxiety, I have managed to carry my burden. I still find joy in life.	
51	There is a difference between people who are atheist because they never had religion, and people who are atheist who come out of religion. We are atheists for different reasons; it is not the same. People raised outside of religion have never had to consider the issues the ex-religious have. This represents a type of privilege.	(23) Individuals who are ex-Christian fundamentalists are not the same as other atheists
145	Many people can't understand me because their beliefs are not thought out. Their beliefs are accepted unquestioningly. It is lazy. I questioned things. I am not understood.	
298	Others who are atheist without really knowing why they are atheist are not the same as a religious person who has become atheist. I am resentful of being lumped in with those individuals. I find it insulting when those atheists believe we are in the same group; we are not.	
299	My non-belief is well thought out; their atheism is not. They do not know what it's like. I have lived both sides, but they have not.	
300	People who say they do not believe in God but cannot articulate why they don't believe in God are not like me. I am more atheist than they are. We are not equals.	

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

#	Formulated Meanings	Theme Clusters
59	Being raised without being indoctrinated with a religion is a form of privilege.	(24) Ex-Christian fundamentalists are not well understood by others who have not experienced Christian fundamentalism.
143	I am alone in my experience. Few understand what's happened to me.	
144	I cannot connect or identify with others about this issue. Others have not faced the same issues that I have dealt with. I am not understood.	
323	It's hard to find others who have experienced this phenomenon. There are not many others who understand me. There are few I can talk to about my experiences.	

Appendix J: Emergent Themes

#	Theme Clusters	Emergent Theme
1	Believing in Christian fundamentalism due to being born into it	A beginning of strong Christian fundamentalist belief complete with a Christian fundamentalist world view
2	Believing in Christian fundamentalism due to indoctrination	
3	Believing in Christian fundamentalism due to being in a bubble with a lack of dissenting information	
4	Seeing nonbelievers as suspicious “outsiders” with whom interaction is limited and seen as likely being problematic	
5	Christian fundamentalism as the main focus in life and central aspect of identity	
6	Questioning/moving away from Christian fundamentalism due to disillusionment with the actions of church leaders and members	Contributing factors leading to leaving Christian fundamentalism and the changes in perceptions that result from adopting atheism
7	Being embarrassed about one’s history of holding Christian Fundamentalist beliefs	
8	Feeling guilt and shame about one’s past actions as a Christian fundamentalist	
9	Leaving Christian fundamentalism and becoming an atheist was an extended process	
10	Gaining a sense of personal freedom after leaving Christian fundamentalism	
11	Perceptual changes after leaving Christian fundamentalism	Gaining new/outside knowledge and acquiring critical thinking skills contributed to a permanent transition to atheism
12	Experiencing cognitive dissonance as a direct result of Christian fundamentalist teachings	
13	Influence of critical thinking in breaking down Christian fundamentalist beliefs	
14	Access to new/outside information contributed to leaving Christian fundamentalism	
15	Permanent loss of Christian fundamentalist beliefs due to new knowledge and critical thinking	
16	Feelings of inadequacy due to Christian fundamentalist messages	Christian fundamentalism as having caused damage in the lives of its adherents
17	Isolation of believers from “outsiders” can lead believers to adopt extreme lifestyles	
18	Christian fundamentalism/leaving Christian fundamentalism causes ruptures in relationships and breaks up families	
19	Christian fundamentalism can leave individuals naïve and unprepared for the outside world or coping with life events that deviate from the Christian fundamentalist narrative	
20	Christian fundamentalist beliefs caused harm in ex-members’ lives	

FROM BELIEF TO DISBELIEF

#	Theme Clusters	Emergent Theme
21	Having a sense of loss after losing one's faith and becoming an atheist	Ex-Christian fundamentalist atheists are a distinct group with their own needs and issues
22	Continuing struggles and the need for specific treatment in the aftermath of the transition from CF to atheism	
23	Individuals who are ex-Christian fundamentalists are not the same as other atheists	
24	Ex-Christian fundamentalists are not well understood by others who have not experienced Christian fundamentalism	