

ABSTRACT

DISSERTATION: The Atheist Identity in the Higher Education Workplace

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A growing body of literature has examined the lived experiences of atheists in the United States (Fitzgerald, 2003; Garneau, 2012; Pond, 2015). While a subsection of this research focuses on the experiences of atheist college students (Goodman & Mueller, 2009; Mueller, 2012; Small, 2011), this study specifically examined the lived experiences of professional staff members who work in higher education and identify as atheists. The study utilized Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009) and examined the findings through the lenses of stigma management and Christian privilege. The findings indicate that an individual's comfort in his or her identity, the context of the workplace environment, and the influence of campus leadership in the religious environment act in combination to create an experience that is unique to each individual. The implications for practice include the need for atheists to assess the environment prior to accepting employment in higher education, and the importance of including non-religious worldviews into campus diversity programming and human resource workplace diversity training programs.