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Church Member Reactions to Religious Disaffiliation

Alexander Daniel Larson

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LOMA LINDA UNIVERSITY
School of Behavioral Health
in conjunction with the
Faculty of Graduate Studies

Church Member Reactions to Religious Disaffiliation

by

Alexander Daniel Larson

A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of
the requirements for the degree
Doctor of Philosophy in Clinical Psychology

June 2017

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Each person whose signature appears below certifies that this thesis in his/her opinion is adequate, in scope and quality, as a thesis for the degree Doctor of Philosophy.

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ABBREVIATIONS

SDA	Seventh-day Adventist
RDAS	Religious Disaffiliate Attribution Scale

ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Church Member Reactions to Religious Disaffiliation by

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Master of Arts, Graduate Program in Psychology
Loma Linda University, June 2017
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Religious disaffiliation is a growing trend in the United States, with estimates of between 15% through 20% of Americans identifying that they have no religion and this rate is growing by roughly 1% each year. Nearly all research concerning religious disaffiliation has focused on the individuals who leave their faith, but little research has empirically explored how church members themselves react to the religious disaffiliation of individuals from their own religious community, as well as what factors potentially contribute to the formation of their attitudes and attributions towards religious disaffiliates. This study utilizes a Seventh-day Adventist sample's reactions to a former Seventh-day Adventist pastor who disaffiliated and identified as an atheist. Before an understanding of the developmental mechanisms of these negative behaviors can take place, it is imperative to be able to identify and study the characteristics of the attitudes and attributions that drive these behaviors and the mechanisms that support them. Religious orientation has been studied extensively as a potential mechanism that shapes religious beliefs and drives religious behavior. The current study created a multi-item scale to identify negative attributions towards religious disaffiliates and explored its relationship to two empirically-established scales regarding religious orientation: Altemeyer and Hunsberger's (2004) religious fundamentalism scale, and Batson and

Schoenrade's (1991b) religious quest scale. This study found a strong, positive association between negative attributions towards religious disaffiliates and religious fundamentalism, and a moderate negative association between negative attributions towards religious disaffiliates and a religious quest orientation. Although there is more work to be done, the current study proposes a scale for further research use and empirical validation.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

In December of 2013, Ryan Bell, previously a pastor of the Hollywood Seventh-day Adventist Church, announced that he was going to “try on atheism” for a year (Bell, 2013, December 31). His decision caught the attention of various national news sources (CNN, 2014; NPR, 2014). During the year of 2014, he immersed himself in atheist culture by reading atheist literature, attending and speaking at atheist conferences, and keeping a blog called *Year Without God* chronicling his experiences. In December of 2014, Ryan Bell announced that he identified as an atheist (Bell, 2014, December 31), which also caught media attention (Los Angeles Times, 2014). Before, during, and after these events, Seventh-day Adventists and other Christians alike made their opinions of him available online. The massive majority of such opinions were not supportive of his religious disaffiliation and negative attributions were made towards his character, including speculations concerning him having rebellious traits, theological ignorance, a lack of religious integrity, and even mental illness (Mackintosh, 2015, January 1; Relevant Magazine, 2015, January; Koonse, 2014, December 23). These claims were scrutinized by atheist individuals and were referenced as proof of the caustic nature of religion as well as used as justification as to why one would want to leave Christianity (Bell, 2015, February 17; Firma, 2014, December 29). Many religious disaffiliates have referenced these kinds of negative judgments from Christians towards them as a normative experience, contributing to distress, feelings of shame, and anger (see reader comments in Mackintosh, 2015, January 1; Relevant Magazine, 2015, January; Koonse, 2014, December 23; Bell, 2015, February 17; Firma, 2014, December 29). Before an

understanding of the developmental mechanisms of these negative behaviors can take place, it is imperative to be able to identify and study the characteristics of the attitudes and attributions that drive these behaviors and the mechanisms that support them. The purpose of this study is to create a measure that can help identify negative attitudes and attributions towards religious disaffiliates.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Ryan Bell's experience of leaving his faith represents a process referred to by scholars as religious disaffiliation, a process of an individual's rejection of both their religious faith and faith community (Brinkerhoff & Burke, 1980). Therefore, the process of religious disaffiliation contains both an individual-level personal belief component and a social-level affiliation component. These two components, labelled as religiosity and communal identification respectively, are highly related, since religious belief often is fostered, shared, and reinforced within the social context of a faith community. However, it is possible to have varying combinations of these two components. Brinkerhoff and Burke (1980) posited that there are four potential categories of religious affiliation. First, there are individuals for whom religiosity and communal identification are high (referred to as "fervent followers"). Second, there are individuals who identify as having strong religious beliefs but do not identify with their religious community (referred to as "outsiders"). Third, there are individuals who have lost either some or all of their religious beliefs but still identify with their religious community (referred to as "ritualists"). Last, there are individuals who have lost both their religious belief as well as their identification with their religious community (referred to as "apostates"). Regardless of an individual's loss of religious belief, in order for church members to express positive or negative feelings towards the individual specifically, they must be aware of that individual's rejection of their shared religious beliefs. Because Ryan Bell's experience of religious disaffiliation is representative of a loss of religious belief and a loss of identification his previous religious community, Ryan Bell's public religious

disaffiliation offers a unique opportunity to examine church member reactions to religious disaffiliation. The Seventh-day Adventist Church, Ryan Bell’s previous religious institution, is an international, evangelical, and protestant religious group. From 2003 through 2013, the Seventh-day Adventist North American Division—which encompasses all churches within the United States, Canada, Alaska, Hawaii, Guam, and Micronesia—has documented 54,461 individual requests for dropping membership, losing an average of roughly 5,000 members each year (adventiststatistics.org). Current studies of Seventh-day Adventist church membership indicate that the rates of religious disaffiliation within Adventism are on the rise (see Figure 1). Ryan Bell’s religious disaffiliation reflects the growing trends of religious disaffiliation in America.

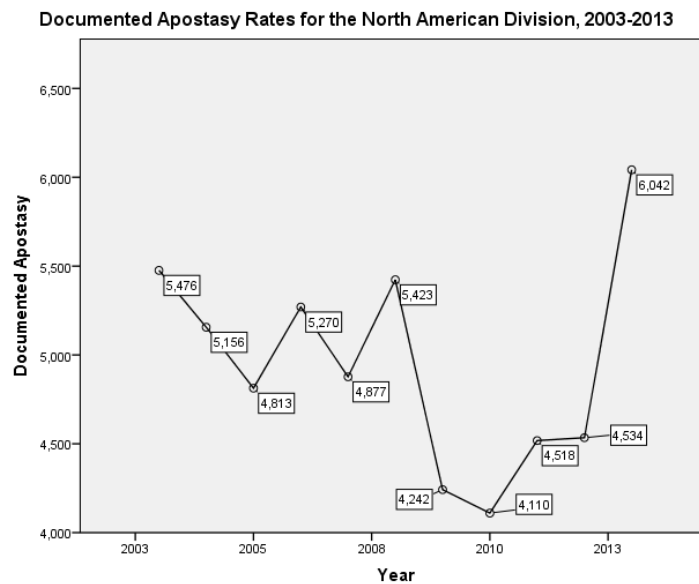


Figure 1. Documented religious disaffiliation rates per year for the North American Division. The North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists is composed of conferences within the United States, Canada, Alaska, Hawaii, Guam, and Micronesia. Religious disaffiliation is defined as individual requests for dropping membership, and are likely underestimates of actual religious disaffiliation. Retrieved from adventiststatistics.org.

Within the past decade, the number of Americans identifying themselves as religiously unaffiliated has grown from 15% in 2007 to slightly less than 20% as of 2012 (Pew Forum, 2012).

This population is composed of those who are not looking for a religion, including agnostics and atheists. These numbers are most likely underestimates of actual religious disaffiliation, considering that some individuals act as “closet atheists” or “religious chameleons,” by attending church services and maintaining the persona of a believer while personally not believing, much like the “ritualist” described above (Brinkerhoff & Burke, 1980; Wollschleger & Beach, 2013). Because of this, it is possible that an individual who has disaffiliated both in religiosity and communal identity—yet still is physically present in their church community—may still experience their peers’ negative attributions and attitudes.

In order to compile an extensive list of demographic factors and traits of religious disaffiliates, most studies have utilized large data sets (Pew Forum, 2012; Bock & Radlet, 1988; Brown, Taylor & Chatters, 2013; Petts, 2009; Puffer et al., 2008; Sherkat & Ellison, 1991; Sherkat & Wilson, 1995), questionnaires (Altemeyer, 2004; Bahr & Albrecht, 1989; Hunsberger, 1980; Zelan, 1968) or in-depth interviews (Hunsberger & Altemeyer, 2006; Roozen, 1980). Individuals within the group of religiously disaffiliated are most likely to be White, male, between 18 and 50 years old, and have at least a college education or higher (Pew Forum, 2012). Religious disaffiliates are also more likely to consider themselves “intellectuals” and enjoy having intellectual discussions more than believers who are demographically similar (Hunsberger, 1983; Zelan, 1968). However, despite this preference for intellectualism, comparisons with believers who are

demographically similar show that religious disaffiliates do not differ in GPA, and the general consensus between experts is that the effects of higher education on religious life are unclear at best (Hunsberger, 1983; Mayrl & Oeur, 2009). Religious disaffiliates reported doubting religious beliefs more often and agreed less with traditional doctrine than believers, and reported less emphasis on religion in childhood (Hunsberger, 1983; Hunsberger & Altemeyer, 2006).

While demographic factors can paint a vivid image of individuals most likely to disaffiliate from religious faith, an overemphasis on demographic correlates can lead researchers and consumers of research to erroneously conclude that differences between groups are due to the demographic factors themselves. However, as Betancourt and Lopez (1993) argue, there are two major problems with this kind of conclusion: first, that to do so is to ignore the mechanisms driving the differences in behavior, and that it relies on an overgeneralization of group members. With regards to this study, an unwanted consequence of the first problem is that such conclusions of group differences lead to interpretations that reinforce stereotypes of both religious disaffiliate and believer groups (e.g., “Religious disaffiliates come from higher education backgrounds, therefore religious disaffiliation is a natural consequence of higher learning.”). The second problem points out that within any categorical groupings of individuals, there are more within-group differences than between-group differences; therefore simply basing comparisons on averages may overlook some important nuances. For example, some intellectual believers may actually have higher education than some religious disaffiliates. However, demographic factors are still important, as they can influence the cultural and psychological mechanisms that explain the differences between groups (Betancourt,

Flynn, Riggs, & Garberoglio, 2010). Studying the psychological mechanisms that contribute to behavior will allow for a formulation of an applicable solution and avoid stereotyping the individuals under study.

The 2013 American Psychological Association's Handbook of Psychology, Religion, and Spirituality echoes this nuanced perspective to research. When attempting to distinguish healthy from unhealthy forms of religious behavior (ones that contribute to the betterment of self and society and vice versa respectively), Zinnbauer (2013) recognizes that simply asking whether religion (or spirituality) is healthy or unhealthy is an improper question. Rather, he recommends that researchers attempt to recognize the various factors that affect the positive and negative outcomes of religion and spirituality, asking the more nuanced question, "For whom is spirituality healthy, in what context, by which outcome, from which point of view, and at what point in time?" (Vol. 2, p. 86). While this complex consideration limits the findings and scope of research, it has the potential to keep researchers honest with their findings by facilitating a thoughtful interpretation of results.

Thankfully, researchers have not stopped at merely gathering demographic information on religious disaffiliates. In-depth, unstructured interviews with individuals who have left religious faith entirely have shown interesting trends. When religious disaffiliates were asked to recall reasons why they had left, they mentioned several reasons. First, they reported leaving the church because they found fundamental religious beliefs disagreeable, impossible, unnecessary, or nonsensical (Bahr & Albrecht, 1989; Albrecht & Bahr, 1983; Hunsberger & Altemeyer 2006; Roozen 1980; Pew Forum, 2012; Bell, 2014, December 31). Next, they often mentioned criticisms of the (Christian)

church, its members, or its leadership, including being treated poorly because of doubting or challenging traditional beliefs (Altemeyer, 2004; Hunsberger, 1980; Hunsberger & Altemeyer, 2006; Roozen, 1980; Pew Forum, 2012; Barna Group, 2011). Still others recalled personal lifestyle factors or major life events that contributed to leaving their church, such as moving to a new location, getting married with a non-believer, having parents who disagreed with religious teachings, or having parents who did not emphasize religion much while they grew up (Hunsberger, 1980; 1983; 1984; Hunsberger & Altemeyer, 2006; Roozen, 1980; Pew Forum, 2012). For others, religious disaffiliation was the natural consequence of a church not meeting their spiritual needs, of becoming too liberal or too conservative, and of feeling that religious truth was relative (Bahr & Albrecht, 1989; Hunsberger & Altemeyer, 2006). There are many reasons for why individuals might drop their religious identity, and among them are social factors that include the members of the church that they no longer attend.

While researchers have focused their attention on studying individuals who disaffiliate from their religious identity, there is little research concerning the church members who are affected by a fellow member relinquishing their identity as one of the group. Religious groups are communities as well, and unanticipated departures are unwelcome for many of the community. Even just a quick survey of the ways in which Christian individuals have reacted to Ryan Bell's public declaration of religious disaffiliation shows the plethora of the negative attitudes of church members towards leaving (see reader comments in Mackintosh, 2015, January 1; Relevant Magazine, 2015, January; Koonse, 2014, December 23; Huffington Post, 2015, January 4). In interviews with individuals who disaffiliated from Christianity and then identified as atheist, some

religious disaffiliates described particularly harsh treatment from believers for having left (Hunsberger & Altemeyer, 2006). Most individuals described estrangement from parents, siblings and relatives, even losing friends or their spouse. Religious disaffiliates also described financial and punitive consequences of making their decision public, particularly within a small town, including losing inheritances, being pulled over by police without provocation, and being shunned by friends (Hunsberger & Altemeyer, 2006, pp. 50-53). Atheists in particular also report perceptions of being discriminated against by their peers and general populations. National studies and surveys suggest that atheist individuals are seen as morally inferior and less trustworthy than their religious counterparts, are the recipients of discriminatory acts such as slander, social pressure, and social rejection (Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 2006; Edgell, Gerteis, & Hartmann, 2006; Hammer et al., 2012). Some research is starting to document the physical and psychological impact of these experiences on atheist individuals, noting the negative effects of such discrimination on self-esteem, life satisfaction, and perceptions on overall physical health (Doane & Elliott, 2014). The psychological consequences of “coming out atheist” are apparent, but researchers have yet to use controlled studies to examine the mechanisms underlying the formation of prejudicial attitudes and behaviors toward religious disaffiliates in particular.

A likely mechanism for forming and maintaining prejudicial religious behavior is religious orientation. Allport and Ross (1967) recognized that religious doctrine alone was not what “made or unmade prejudice,” but rather the role religion took in peoples’ lives, or religious orientation. One such orientation is fundamentalism, which is characterized by the belief that “there is one set of religious teachings that contain the

fundamental, unchangeable truth that must be defended from the forces of evil” (Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 1992, p. 118; Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 2004). Researchers have studied religious fundamentalism as a mechanism contributing to many religiously-based behaviors and attitudes. Individuals who have a fundamentalist orientation to religion are more likely to have statistically moderate racial prejudice and statistically large prejudice and hostility towards homosexual individuals (Laythe, Finkel, Bringle & Kirkpatrick, 2002; Fulton, Maynard & Gorsuch, 1999). They are likely to be ethnocentric and receive nearly all of their information concerning out-groups from their own authorities (Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 2005). They are also more likely to help others that identify similarly and vice versa, especially when there is a need for cognitive closure (Gribbins & Vandenberg, 2011). Right-wing authoritarianism has also been posited to be a mechanism driving negative religious behaviors. Altemeyer and Hunsberger (1992) define it as a mixture of submission to authority, aggression towards disobedience or out-groups, and adhering and enforcing traditional values. The authors noted that right-wing authoritarians tend to act religiously, often carry childhood religious lessons into adulthood, and engage in a wide variety of religious behaviors more often than others (Altemeyer, 1988). When presented with a threat to religious beliefs in a vignette, researchers have found that right-wing authoritarians showed increased support for religious fundamentalist values, identified with their group more compared to before the vignette (Shaffer & Hastings, 2007). Religious authoritarianism is strongly correlated with religious fundamentalism ($r = .68$) (Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 1992). Religious fundamentalism may be a construct that would motivate believers to discourage any religiously exploratory or disaffiliation behaviors.

Another psychological mechanism of interest to researchers has been the religious orientation of quest. Batson and Schoenrade (1991a, 1991b) define religious quest as a “readiness to face existential questions without reducing their complexity, self-criticism and perception of religious doubt as positive, and an openness to change” (Batson & Schoenrade, 1991b, p. 436). Batson and Schoenrade designed the Quest Scale in order to assess for how people think about the role or function religion in their lives (as opposed to assessing agreement with certain religio-cultural beliefs). Individuals who score high on the Quest Scale (termed “questers”) tend to reject absolutistic thinking, are open to challenging their own belief system, and show inconsistent church attendance (Genia, 1996). Questers are more likely to engage in helping behaviors that require personal investment when the behavior is likely to help another person, controlling for social desirability (Batson, Oleson, Weeks, Healy, Reeves, Jennings & Brown, 1989). They are also less likely to rely on authority or religious teaching when judging moral behavior (Sapp & Jones, 1986). They tend to think about religious concepts in complex ways, show a need for internal consistency of their beliefs, show willingness for purposefully exposing themselves to opposing belief systems, and support authenticity in religion (Barrett, Patock-Peckham, Hutchinson, & Nagoshi, 2005; Batson & Schoenrade, 1991a; McFarland & Warren, 1992; Messay, Dixon, & Rye, 2012). However, questers tend to report lower spiritual well-being, more religious distress and anxiety compared to non-questers (Batson & Schoenrade, 1991a; Genia, 1996). The quest orientation may be a construct that would motivate believers to encourage or support any religiously exploratory behaviors or acting on authentic personal convictions.

Social psychologists have long studied ways in which individuals form their attitudes about events. Attribution theory within social psychology focuses on the ways in which people ascribe meaning or purpose to various events, contexts, and people, often focusing specifically on how individuals ascribe causation in everyday events. Spilka, Shaver and Kirkpatrick (1985) proposed that attribution theory is a pragmatic framework for examining the religious attributions individuals make; religious ideas become the cognitive framework for explaining various existential questions as well as causal relationships within reality. Used in this way, attribution theory is a useful framework to understand religious belief and behavior.

Weiner has contributed to the development of attribution theory by proposing a three-dimensional aspect to causal attributions: locus of control, controllability, and stability (Weiner, 1992). Locus of control refers to whether an event was initiated by a particular individual or by some force within the individual's environment. Controllability refers to whether the event occurred as a function of an individual's skills or behaviors or by some force uncontrollable by the individual. Stability refers to whether, over time, the inferred cause and outcome are stable or not. When judging a person's failure, individuals tend to make attributions of an internal locus, controllable cause, and stable cause (Weiner, 1992). Weiner (1993) studied the ways in which the perception of how controllable an outcome is affects an individual's social judgment of a particular event. When individuals perceived another person's failure as controllable and avoidable given that person's lack of effort, they displayed more anger and judgment than when they perceived that person's failure due to a lack of inherent ability.

For the present study, Weiner's attribution theory of causal inference will serve as the theoretical structure for the development of a religious disaffiliate attitude scale, which will predict prejudicial behavior towards religious disaffiliates. Within the context of religious disaffiliation, church members would most likely perceive a "loss of faith" as a failure. In fact, the religious term "apostasy" confers a negative connotation for religious disaffiliation.

The purpose of this study is to create a measure that can help assess negative attitudes and attributions towards religious disaffiliates. Because of the lack of previous research addressing church member reactions toward religious disaffiliation, this study serves as an exploratory study. It was hypothesized that:

1. The items used in the Religious Disaffiliate Attribution Scale will have unidimensional items at the primary or secondary level.
2. Religious orientation will have a strong relationship with negative attitudes towards religious disaffiliates:
 - a. Fundamentalism measure scores, as measured by the Revised Religious Fundamentalism Scale, will be strongly and positively correlated with negative attitudes towards religious disaffiliates, as measured by the Religious Disaffiliate Attitudes Scale.
 - b. Quest measure scores, as measured by the Quest scale, will be strongly and negatively correlated with negative attitudes towards religious disaffiliates.

CHAPTER THREE

METHOD

Participants

Participants consisted of 452 Seventh-day Adventist adults (49.3% female) above the age of 18 ($M = 34.5$, $SD = 11.5$). Of those who responded, 75.4% identified as White or Caucasian, 5.8% as Black or African American, 4.9% as Asian, 3.1% as Hispanic or Latino, and 7.5% identified having two or more ethnic backgrounds. The majority of participants held a college education or higher (84.7%). Participants indicated that they were directed from either Facebook (60.8%), Spectrum Magazine (33.4%), a SDA college or university (.7%), ADvocate (0.2%), or an unlisted source (4.4%). Of those who responded, 65.3% of participants indicated that, at some point in their lives, they had considered leaving the Seventh-day Adventist church. In-depth participant demographics can be seen in Table 1 below.

At the time of data analysis, 582 self-identified Seventh-day Adventist adults had provided responses to the survey. Before data analysis, the researcher screened out individuals who had not completed all 20 preliminary RDAS items. Next, the researcher screened out five individuals that indicated that they did not identify as Seventh-day Adventists in an essay response question: one individual identified as Mormon (Latter-day Saints), and four used language that nullified SDA identification (see Appendix E for disqualifying comments). Demographic information of the final sample ($N = 452$) are displayed in Table 1.

Table 1. Respondent demographic information.

Demographic characteristic (<i>N</i> = 452)	Valid Percentage
Gender (missing = 0)	
Female	49.3%
Male	48.2%
Other	0.4%
Prefer not to respond	2.0%
Age (missing = 42)	
	<i>M</i> = 34.1, <i>SD</i> = 11.54
18-29 years old	40.5%
30-39 years old	28.0%
40-49 years old	19.3%
50-59 years old	9.5%
60-69 years old	2.7%
Education (missing = 1)	
High School Diploma/GED	5.8%
Associates Degree	7.5%
Bachelors Degree	33.7%
Professional Degree	5.8%
Masters Degree	28.8%
Doctoral Degree	14.9%
Other/Not Listed	3.5%
Ethnicity (missing = 0)	
White/Caucasian	75.4%
Hispanic/Latino	3.1%
Black/African American	5.8%

Asian	4.9%
Pacific Islander	1.1%
Other/Not Listed	0.9%
Two or more ethnicities (“Mixed”)	7.5%
Prefer not to respond	1.3%
Considered leaving SDA church (missing = 3)	
Yes	65.3%
No	34.7%
Referral Source (missing = 2)	
Facebook	61.1%
Spectrum Magazine	33.6%
Other	5.3%

Note. Percentages displayed account only for proportions within given responses; percentages displayed do not reflect missing data. Frequencies of missing data counts are displayed in table.

Materials

Fundamentalist Religious Orientation

The Revised Religious Fundamentalism Scale (Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 2004) is composed of 12 questions concerning attitudes toward religiously themed statements, with higher scores indicating more fundamentalism. It used a nine-point Likert scale ranging from -4 (very strongly disagree) to +4 (very strongly agree) (see Appendix A for items). A religious fundamentalism score was created by taking the average of the 12 scale items ($\alpha = .92$). In previous literature, this scale had a high positive correlation with a belief in a traditional God ($r = .63$), religious ethnocentrism ($r = .73$), and hostility

toward homosexual individuals ($r = .57$). This scale had a moderate negative correlation with doubts concerning religion ($r = -.44$) (Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 2004).

Quest Religious Orientation

The Quest Scale (Batson & Schoenrade, 1991b) is composed of 12 questions concerning respondent ideas and attitudes about how religion is to function in his or her life. It uses a nine-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 9 (strongly agree) (see Appendix B for items). A quest score was created by taking the average of the 12 scale items ($\alpha = .83$). In previous literature, this scale had a negative correlation with both religious fundamentalism ($r = -.44$) and subjective well-being ($r = -.22$) (Genia, 1996). This scale had a moderate positive correlation with complex critical thinking about religious questions ($r = .36$) (Batson & Schoenrade, 1991a).

Attributions toward Religious Disaffiliates

The Religious Disaffiliate Attribution Scale (RDAS) was a 13-item measure created in this study to assess agreement with common negative attributions toward individuals who disaffiliate from their religion. Religious disaffiliation was defined for respondents as “the public rejection of a religious belief system.” It used a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). A scale score was created by taking the average of the 13 scale items ($\alpha = .91$). Higher scores represent more negative attributions (see Appendix C for established 13-item scale, and Appendix D for original 20-item list).

Previous Disaffiliation Consideration

To assess for a personal experience of disaffiliation consideration, the survey included a single question regarding whether they have considered leaving the Seventh-day Adventist church: “Have you at some point in your life seriously considered leaving the Seventh-day Adventist church?” Respondents indicated “yes, I have” or “no, I have not.”

Disapproval of Seventh-day Adventist Religious Disaffiliation

To assess for respondent disapproval of religious disaffiliation in general, the survey included a single question regarding personal disapproval of religious disaffiliation: “I disapprove of a fellow Seventh-day Adventist disaffiliating from their religion, no matter the circumstances.” This item was rated on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

Procedure

The researcher launched the online survey using Qualtrics survey software on April 4, 2016. The researcher utilized a snowball sampling procedure stemming from both his personal Facebook webpage and Spectrum Magazine, an online Seventh-day Adventist news publication that wrote about Ryan Bell’s experience. Although the researcher contacted other Seventh-day Adventist news publications that wrote about Ryan Bell’s experience (i.e. ADvindicate, Adventist Review), sustained contact and cooperation only occurred with Spectrum Magazine. The researcher recruited participants from his personal Facebook webpage and collaborated with Spectrum Magazine to advertise to its online readers via a small article (Spectrum Magazine, April 11 2016).

The distribution of the survey took place for three weeks (April 4, 2016 to April 24, 2016), and responses were kept in an encrypted online database, an encrypted shared network drive, and an encrypted portable storage drive. All data was treated within APA ethical guidelines and according to an approved Loma Linda University institutional review board protocol. Respondents participated in informed consent before beginning the survey, and they were not compensated for taking the survey (see Appendix F for informed consent). All participants were treated in accordance with APA ethical guidelines. After screening out participants based on incomplete RDAS scale responses and disqualifying essay response statements, the researcher conducted the final analyses.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

The researcher conducted an exploratory factor analysis using SPSS version 21 in order to analyze inter-item relationships and construct a scale measuring religious disaffiliate attitudes. Furr and Bacharach (2014) state that while there are no explicit guidelines for a power analysis for exploratory factor analysis, a general guideline is to aim for having ten participants per item to be analyzed (requiring roughly 200 participants), and the current study utilizes 452 participants.

In the initial exploratory factor analysis, all items were included. The researcher used a principal axis functioning method of factor extraction, which assumes that variables contain some error. In addition, the researcher used the salient loadings criterion, an updated version of Wrigley's criterion, to determine the number of factors. The salient loadings criterion states that a significant factor has a unique set of items that define only it (Gorsuch, 1983). The researcher began with seven factors and eliminated one factor each cycle that did not have at least three (non-cross-loading) factor loadings higher than $|0.4|$ and an internal reliability greater than 0.6. Ultimately, the exploratory factor analysis yielded a single-factor scale with 13 items (see Table 2 for factor loadings). The researcher then examined the internal reliability of the resulting scale by using coefficient Alpha. The Religious Disaffiliate Attribution Scale had an internal reliability of .91. Respondents tended to score within the lower end of the scale ($M = 2.34$, $SD = 0.98$, skewness = 0.93 ($SD_{skewness} = 0.23$), kurtosis = 0.59), with 92.9% of respondents scoring within the "disagree" range (see figure 2).

Table 2. Factor loadings for religious disaffiliate attribution scale (items = 13, $\alpha = .91$).

First-order factor	Factor loadings
Religious disaffiliation places a person's salvation in jeopardy.	.789
Religious disaffiliation is a temptation that no one should yield to.	.782
Religious disaffiliation is dangerous because it separates a person from God.	.735
Only a person of weak character would disaffiliate from their religion.	.711
God is disappointed when a person disaffiliates from their religion.	.710
No matter the circumstances or doubts, it is never appropriate to reject one's religion.	.671
If a person searched for the answers long enough, they would have no reason to disaffiliate from their religion.	.668
Religious disaffiliation models bad behavior to believers who are weak in their faith.	.621
Religious disaffiliation is a betrayal of one's church community	.621
There are many good reasons to disaffiliate from one's religion. ^R	-.616
Religious disaffiliation is when a person actively rejects God.	.581
A person might want to disaffiliate from their religion in order to search for truth. ^R	-.536
When people disaffiliate from their religion, it is because they want to live an easier life.	.516

Note. All factor loadings at $p < .001$. ^R reverse-coded items.

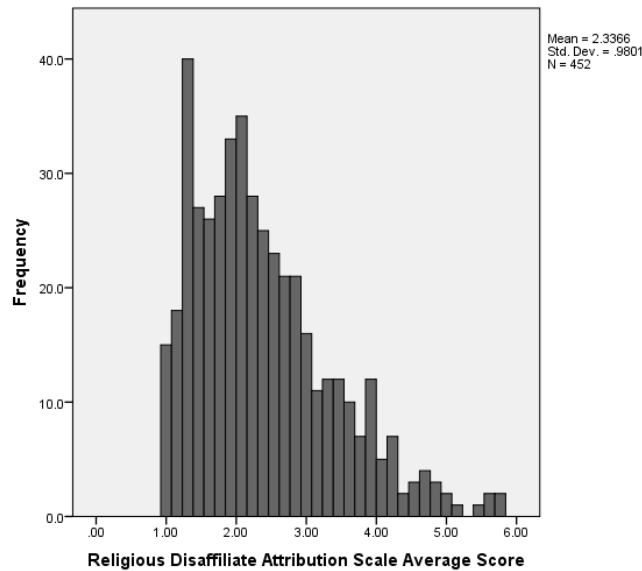


Figure 2. Respondent scores on the Religious Disaffiliate Attribution Scale.

The researcher also examined the construct validity of the scale by assessing whether the measure was related to theoretically-relevant measures like the Revised Religious Fundamentalism Scale (Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 2004) and the Quest Scale (Batson & Schoenrade, 1991b). Results of a Pearson correlation suggested that the RDAS scale was related to each scale strongly and in the hypothesized direction. As expected, the RDAS correlated significantly with Altemeyer and Hunsberger’s (2004) Revised Religious Fundamentalism Scale ($r = .66, p < .001$) and Batson and Schoenrade’s (1991b) religious Quest Scale ($r = -.56, p < .001$). In addition, the RDAS correlated significantly with participants’ reported disapproval of religious disaffiliation ($r = .64, p < .001$), was negatively related with reported experiences of having personally considered leaving the SDA church at least once point in one’s life ($r = -.40, p < .001$), and was unrelated to participants’ reported personal knowledge of Ryan Bell ($p > .05$) (see Table 3).

Based on the content validity of the scale, respondents with high scores may tend to view religious disaffiliation as a spiritually dangerous action, caused by deficits in spiritual character of the disaffiliate—deficits that a “true believer” would not have. An examination of the factor loadings of this scale suggest that the strongest loading items reference negative spiritual consequences of disaffiliation to the disaffiliate. This may imply that negative reactions of church members to disaffiliation are supported mainly by one’s views of the spiritual consequences of rejecting the moral rules and boundaries of the church members’ community and religious beliefs. Based on the preliminary findings of this study, this scale measures negative attributions towards religious disaffiliates in the context of dangerous spiritual consequences (e.g., jeopardizing of salvation, yielding

Table 3. Correlation matrix of variables of interest.

	RDAS	RRFS	QS	DRD	LEAVE
RDAS	2.336 (.980)				
RRFS	.656	4.868 (1.993)			
QS	-.560	-.531	5.926 (1.407)		
DRD	.636	.500	-.430	2.170 (1.437)	
LEAVE	-.401	-.373	.447	-.290	Y = 65.3% / N = 34.7%

Note. All correlations are significant at $p < .001$. Means and standard deviations are displayed in diagonal cells, and the last column contains percentage responses to binary item. RDAS = Religious Disaffiliate Attribution Scale, RRFS = Revised Religious Fundamentalism Scale (Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 2004), QS = Quest Scale (Batson & Schoenrade, 1991b), DRD = Disapproval of Religious Disaffiliation, LEAVE = “Have you at some point in your life seriously considered leaving the Seventh-day Adventist church?”

to temptation, separating self from God, and disappointing God), negative character traits of religious disaffiliates (e.g., disaffiliates have weak character, not searching for answers long enough, not searching for truth, wanting an “easier” life), and perceptions of disaffiliates as not members of religious community (e.g., never appropriate to disaffiliate, actively rejecting God, betrayal of church community). Due to the rendering of a single factor rather than multiple correlated factors, the results suggest that these aspects to religious disaffiliation attributions are related to each other sufficiently enough that they vary together better as one factor than as separate factors.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study suggest that there is a potential relationship between religious orientations and attributions made towards religious disaffiliates. Results support the theoretical relationship between religious fundamentalism and a strong, negative attribution towards religious disaffiliates. Although this is the first study known to the researcher to describe a link between religious fundamentalism and negative attributions towards religious disaffiliates, previous research suggests that such a relationship would likely exist due to two reasons. First, researchers have noted that individuals with high levels of religious fundamentalism tend to receive information about out-group others from their own in-group authority figures (Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 2005). Within religious communities, information is presented with moral scrutiny, adding an extra aspect of meaning. Religious doctrine views the loss of faith as a moral evil (and the presence of faith as a moral good), which can exacerbate any out-group negative attributions. Second, researchers have documented the relationship between religious fundamentalism and negative views on doubting religious truths (Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 2004). By Brinkerhoff and Burke's (1980) definition, religious disaffiliates have engaged in doubting religious truths, which is incompatible with a fundamentalist view that there is a single, clearly-defined religious truth. Therefore, a scale that focuses on individuals who have engaged in religious disaffiliation should have a negative relationship with fundamentalist views.

The findings of this study also suggest that there is a potential relationship between a quest religious orientation and negative attributions made towards religious

disaffiliates. Results support the theoretical relationship between religious quest and a moderate absence of negative attributions towards religious disaffiliates. Previous research suggests that this relationship is likely for two reasons. First, researchers have noted that individuals with high levels of religious quest tend to approach religious questions with complex, critical thinking strategies (Batson & Schoenrade, 1991a). It is likely that those who hold the quest standpoint of “readiness to face existential questions without reducing their complexity, self-criticism and perception of religious doubt as positive, and an openness to change” (Batson & Schoenrade, 1991b, p. 436) would consider the benefits of doubting as well as the possibility that religious disaffiliation might be appropriate for some individuals at some point in their lives. Researchers have documented that individuals with high levels of a quest orientation tend to be open to challenging their own belief system (Genia, 1996), and therefore would likely support other individuals from their community engaging in such behavior. This link is further supported by the results of the current study, which show that Seventh-day Adventist respondents who had personally considered leaving the SDA church at least once in their lives also received lower scores on the Religious Disaffiliate Attribution Scale.

As previously stated, respondents with high scores on the Religious Disaffiliate Attribution Scale may tend to view religious disaffiliation as a spiritually dangerous action, caused by deficits in spiritual character of the disaffiliate—deficits that a “true believer” would not have. However, it is important to remember that this scale-informed respondent profile is a simplified expression of true respondent attitudes and attributions towards religious disaffiliates. The results of this study, as well as considerations of essay responses left by some respondents, indicate that attitude formation for most church

members religious disaffiliation is a complex process, and that the resulting attitudes and attributions are often expressed with nuanced perspectives fueled by personal experiences. The validity of the religious Disaffiliate Attribution Scale should be viewed in the context of a continual process of empirical validation, in which more data is required to understand both the theoretical structure of the attitudes and attributions themselves as well as the development of such attitudes through the context of religious orientation.

There were seven items that were eliminated from the original 20-item scale during the exploratory factor analysis process. These items included the following list: Two of these items focus on external attributions of a religious disaffiliate's behavior that seem to relinquish personal responsibility (e.g., "Religious disaffiliation is a result of a bad church community" and "Religious disaffiliation is often caused by painful life events"). The fact that these items did not load strongly on the single factor scale may indicate that the perception of choice (and therefore responsibility for their actions) is an important component in the process of creating an individual's negative attributions concerning religious disaffiliates. The items "To disaffiliate from your religion is to challenge the truthfulness of the beliefs of each person in your community," and "A person wouldn't disaffiliate from their religion unless they disagreed with the values of that religion" also did not load significantly on a single factor model. The exclusion of these items appears contradictory to theory, particularly because it seems a critical component of creating negative attributions of a scale is to establish the disaffiliate as part of the outgroup (i.e., as a "non-SDA"), or at least defined as not part of the in-group ("not a SDA"). The exclusion of these items may be due to sampling bias, particularly

since a large proportion of the sample tended to disagree with most items (see Figure 2). Other items that regarded the consequences of religious disaffiliation (e.g., “A church community is better off when a religious disaffiliate leaves the church,” and “Once a person disaffiliates from their religion, they are very unlikely to ‘come back’ in the future”). It is important to note that a large proportion of the sample had affirmed that they had at some point in their lives seriously considered leaving the Seventh-day Adventist church (see Table 1), and that a strong correlation was found between a religious quest orientation and this consideration (see Table 3). For respondents who could empathize with other members who doubted their faith, it is unlikely that they would hesitate to regard the action of religious disaffiliation as beneficial for their church community.

Limitations

The current study utilized several sources to create the items for the Religious Disaffiliate Attribution Scale: Seventh-day Adventist and general Christian respondents’ expressed attitudes towards Ryan Bell’s disaffiliation on online forums (see reader comments in Mackintosh, 2015, January 1; Relevant Magazine, 2015, January; Koonse, 2014, December 23; Bell, 2015, February 17; Firma, 2014, December 29), interviews of ex-Christian atheists (Hunsberger & Altemeyer, 2006), and logical themes within the responses. Drafting a scale based on the negative attributions of religious disaffiliates poses both important limitations but also important strengths for external validity. One might argue that reactions towards one individual are likely not representative of the general experience of religious disaffiliates. Therefore, church member reactions towards that individual may not be representative of church member reactions to other religious

disaffiliates or religious disaffiliation as an action in general. Indeed, most research suggests that the normative religious disaffiliation (and loss of faith) process is accomplished by an individual without making it known to the religious community at large (Wollschleger & Beach, 2013). However, the focus of this study concerns public religious disaffiliation, to which church members can form personal reactions and attributions towards the disaffiliate specifically. The researcher posits that the greatest threat to generalizability concerns Ryan Bell's dual status as both a former member of the Seventh-day Adventist church and also a former pastor within that church. It is likely that negative attributions may be qualitatively as well as quantitatively different towards a pastor who disaffiliates than to a general church member. For instance, some themes the researcher noted in essay responses by Seventh-day Adventist respondents to the survey that were unique to a pastoral identity included (1) feeling disappointed and let down by a respected community leader, (2) feeling betrayed or lied to by an authority figure, which their personal faith (informed by the former leader's theology) into question, (3) grief over the loss of a spiritual role model, and (4) the perceived arbitrary nature of a religious leader's exploration into atheism. However, it should be noted that within church communities there are other non-pastoral positions which have leadership positions within the church. For instance, religious teachers (e.g., "Sunday School" teachers or "Sabbath School" teachers) direct the religious focus of children, teens, and adults within that church community, and they are charged with facilitating the appropriate faith development of their students or peers. Church mentors or elders, who unofficially or officially are a part of the church community's infrastructure, can be seen as character role models or spiritual role models for other church members. Still, reactions towards

leaders may be qualitatively and quantitatively different than reactions to church members who do not serve such public social roles within their church community.

The online survey methodology of the current study poses several limitations. In addition, the presence of unqualified responders to the survey may warrant scrutiny as to the representativeness of the attitudes expressed among respondents of this survey. It is possible that individuals who do not currently identify as Seventh-day Adventists responded to this survey and evaded disqualification. As with all survey research, both the results of data analysis and subsequent reintegration with previous literature for this study assumes that the respondents' answers to questions were both truthful (e.g., lack of response bias) and accurate (e.g., respondents can articulate their beliefs in quantitatively-relevant ways). Survey methodology has the burden of attempting to control for influences that could complicate the truthfulness and accuracy of the data as it cannot do so through experimental design.

The statistical methodology of this study also poses several limitations. First, this study only conducted an exploratory factor analysis, and therefore the scale must be tested in different samples to obtain a better sense of reliability and validity. Future studies need to replicate the factor structure proposed by this study using exploratory methods as well as consider confirming the proposed factor structure using confirmatory methods. Second, correlational analyses are susceptible to "third-variable" problems, since they do not address the mechanisms behind the mathematical relationships between variables. In addition, correlational analyses cannot indicate causal relationships or test mechanisms driving the relationships between variables.

Because this study utilized only Seventh-day Adventist respondents, it is unknown as to whether the scale itself and the relationship between the scale and religious orientations is unique to Seventh-day Adventist individuals. In addition, the snowball sampling method and sample size prevents any generalization to Seventh-day Adventist group identity responses, since the researcher cannot ascertain factors that prevented other Seventh-day Adventists from responding to the survey. It is possible that Seventh-day Adventist respondents who were willing to participate in a survey that did not include reimbursement afterwards may be qualitatively different from other Adventists who did not respond to the survey.

Future Directions

The current study provides multiple potential developments for an understanding of church members' negative attributions towards religious disaffiliates. In terms of sampling, further research could be conducted within a Seventh-day Adventist population. It may be possible that geographic-cultural factors impact the way in which attributions towards disaffiliates are made, the way they are expressed towards religious disaffiliates, and even the religious disaffiliation process in general. Future research should conduct sampling from Seventh-day Adventist populations from around the United States and the rest of the world, considering the international distribution of Seventh-day Adventists. In addition, it may be possible that religio-cultural factors impact the above mentioned qualities of negative attributions towards religious disaffiliates. Future research should engage in similar research with various Christian populations (i.e., other Protestant denominations and Catholic populations) as well as non-Christian populations in order to address intra-group differences and inter-group

differences between the way in which attributions towards religious disaffiliates are made, the way they are expressed towards religious disaffiliates, and the strength of negative attributions. Future research may also be extended to studying atheist attitudes towards ex-atheist converts to religion in order to understand differences and similarities between areligious and religious populations in this regard.

Future research should also examine differences between the experiences of religious disaffiliates of different social responsibilities within their previous church communities; it is possible that different church positions and responsibilities indicate different levels of authority within their church communities and therefore warrant differing types and amounts of criticism when they disaffiliate from their faith and their religious community. In addition, future research should consider the social identity of respondents within their religious communities, including the amount of time spent within a particular religious community (e.g., attitudes of new converts versus life-long members' attitudes).

In-depth interviews may be helpful in further exploring the theoretical components of negative attributions and attitudes towards religious disaffiliates. Future research needs to continue the growing trend of studying the experiences of religious disaffiliation from both disaffiliates themselves as well as the communities they leave behind. In addition, future research needs to assess for similarities and potential differences in church member behaviors and expressed attitudes versus the perceptions of disaffiliates. Because of the taboo nature of religious disaffiliation within church communities and the experienced vulnerability of those considering leaving their faith and church communities, it is possible that disaffiliates are psychologically primed to

attend to negative reactions towards disaffiliation from their church community. In addition, it is possible that church community members are not prompted to consider their attitudes and attributions towards religious disaffiliates until confronted with religious disaffiliation in social settings, which may encourage the expression of negative attitudes in order to maintain social identity with the community.

Conclusion

National polls and surveys indicate that religious disaffiliation is on the rise in the United States, particularly affecting Christianity. There is evidence that religious communities do not treat religious disaffiliates well, and growing evidence that which can leave negative psychological and financial consequences, among others. These problems seem particularly relevant to individuals who disaffiliate from their Christian religious faiths and communities in favor of atheism. There is growing research that notes the ways in which atheists experience discrimination and mistreatment as well as perceiving such discrimination from their peers and fellow citizens. As rates of religious disaffiliation rise, religious individuals may continue to treat religious disaffiliates poorly. Therefore, it is important to understand the relationship between proposed psychological mechanisms for behavior (i.e. religious orientation) as well as expressed negative attitudes and attributions). Due to the lack of previous research addressing this topic, the current study proposed a specialized measure to assess for an individual's endorsement of common negative attributions made towards religious disaffiliates, and provided exploratory descriptions of relationships between such attributions and an individual's religious orientation and personal experiences. The results of this study suggested that individuals who have had similar doubts concerning their religious faith and community

tended to express less negative attitudes and attributions towards religious disaffiliates, that a religious orientation of fundamentalism was positively related to negative attitudes and attributions towards religious disaffiliates, and that a religious orientation of quest was negatively related to such attitudes and attributions.

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APPENDIX A

THE REVISED RELIGIOUS FUNDAMENTALISM SCALE

You may find that you sometimes have different reactions to different parts of a statement. For example, you might very strongly disagree ("-4") with one idea in a statement, but slightly agree ("+1") with another idea in the same item. When this happens, please combine your reactions, and write down how you feel on balance (a "-3" in this case).

1. God has given humanity a complete, unfailing guide to happiness and salvation, which must be totally followed.
2. No single book of religious teachings contains all the intrinsic, fundamental truths about life. ^R
3. The basic cause of evil in this world is Satan, who is still constantly and ferociously fighting against God.
4. It is more important to be a good person than to believe in God and the right religion. ^R
5. There is a particular set of religious teachings in this world that are so true, you can't go any "deeper" because they are the basic, bedrock message that God has given humanity.
6. When you get right down to it, there are basically only two kinds of people in the world: the Righteous, who will be rewarded by God; and the rest, who will not.
7. Scriptures may contain general truths, but they should NOT be considered completely, literally true from beginning to end. ^R

8. To lead the best, most meaningful life, one must belong to the one, fundamentally true religion.
9. “Satan” is just the name people give to their own bad impulses. There really is *no such thing* as a diabolical “Prince of Darkness” who tempts us. ^R
10. Whenever science and sacred scripture conflict, *science* is probably right. ^R
11. The fundamentals of God’s religion should never be tampered with, or compromised with others’ beliefs.
12. *All* of the religions in the world have flaws and wrong teachings. There is *no* perfectly true, right religion. ^R

Note: ^R indicates item is reverse-coded. Responses are rated on a nine-point Likert scale (+4 = very strongly agree, 0 = neutral, -4 = very strongly disagree). Directions and items printed directly from Altemeyer and Husberger (2004).

APPENDIX B

THE RELIGIOUS QUEST SCALE

1. I was not very interested in religion until I began to ask questions about the meaning and purpose of my life.
2. I have been driven to ask religious questions out of a growing awareness of the tensions in my world and in my relation to my world.
3. My life experiences have led me to rethink my religious convictions.
4. God wasn't very important for me until I began to ask questions about the meaning of my own life.
5. It might be said that I value my religious doubts and uncertainties.
6. For me, doubting is an important part of what it means to be religious.
7. I find religious doubts upsetting.^R
8. Questions are far more central to my religious experience than are answers.
9. As I grow and change, I expect my religion also to grow and change.
10. I am constantly questioning my religious beliefs.
11. I do not expect my religious convictions to change in the next few years.^R
12. There are many religious issues on which my views are still changing.

Note. ^R indicates item is reverse-coded. Responses are rated on a nine-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 4 = neither agree nor disagree, 9 = strongly agree). Items printed directly from Batson and Schoenrade (1991b).

APPENDIX C

RELIGIOUS DISAFFILIATE ATTRIBUTION SCALE, FINAL VERSION

Please indicate your current agreement or disagreement with the following opinions concerning apostasy. *Religious disaffiliation* is the formal disaffiliation from a religion by a person.

1. Religious disaffiliation is evidence of an active rejection of God.
2. A person might want to disaffiliate from their religion in order to search for truth.
R
3. There are many good reasons to disaffiliate from one's religion. ^R
4. Religious disaffiliation models bad behavior to believers who are weak in their faith.
5. Religious disaffiliation is a betrayal of one's church community.
6. Only a person of weak character would disaffiliate from their religion.
7. When people disaffiliate from their religion, it is because they want to live an easier life.
8. No matter the circumstances or doubts, it is never appropriate to reject one's religion.
9. If a person searched for the answers long enough, they would have no reason to disaffiliate from their religion.
10. Religious disaffiliation is a temptation that no one should yield to.
11. Religious disaffiliation places a person's salvation in jeopardy.
12. God is disappointed when a person disaffiliates from their religion.
13. Religious disaffiliation is dangerous because it separates a person from God.

Note: ^R indicates item is reverse-coded. Responses are rated on seven-point Likert scale

(1 = strongly disagree, 4 = neither agree nor disagree, 7 = strongly agree).

APPENDIX D
RELIGIOUS DISAFFILIATE ATTRIBUTION SCALE, ORIGINAL
VERSION

Please indicate your current agreement or disagreement with the following opinions concerning apostasy. *Religious disaffiliation* is the formal disaffiliation from a religion by a person.

1. *Religious disaffiliation is often caused by painful life events.*
2. *A person is completely responsible for their decision to disaffiliate from their religion.*
3. *Religious disaffiliation is a result of a bad church community.* ^R
4. Religious disaffiliation is evidence of an active rejection of God.
5. A person might want to disaffiliate from their religion in order to search for truth.
R
6. *Once a person disaffiliates from their religion, they are very unlikely to “come back” in the future.*
7. There are many good reasons to disaffiliate from one’s religion. ^R
8. Religious disaffiliation models bad behavior to believers who are weak in their faith.
9. *A church community is better off when a religious disaffiliate leaves the church.*
10. Religious disaffiliation is a betrayal of one’s church community.
11. Only a person of weak character would disaffiliate from their religion.

12. When people disaffiliate from their religion, it is because they want to live an easier life.
13. No matter the circumstances or doubts, it is never appropriate to reject one's religion.
14. *A person wouldn't disaffiliate from their religion unless they disagreed with all the values of that religion.*
15. If a person searched for the answers long enough, they would have no reason to disaffiliate from their religion.
16. Religious disaffiliation is a temptation that no one should yield to.
17. Religious disaffiliation places a person's salvation in jeopardy.
18. God is disappointed when a person disaffiliates from their religion.
19. *To disaffiliate from your religion is to challenge the truthfulness of the beliefs of each person in your community.*
20. Religious disaffiliation is dangerous because it separates a person from God.

Note: ^R indicates item is reverse-coded. Items in italics were not included in the final scale. Responses are rated on seven-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 4 = neither agree nor disagree, 7 = strongly agree).

APPENDIX E
DISQUALIFYING STATEMENTS

The following statements are written responses to an optional essay response prompt:

If you would like, feel free to write down any personal thoughts or reactions about this issue. Please be careful about revealing personal details if you wish to stay anonymous.

1. “I left the Adventist religion the moment I discovered that EGW is a false prophet and everything the SDA church teaches is EGW interpretation of what the Bible says...I left and am now in a solid Sola Scriptura Christian church and never will go back.”
2. “I did this because I'm Mormon and [a friend] liked it on FB.”
3. “I had noted Ryan's experimental departure from the church but had thought very little of it until the church itself made such an enormous issue out of it. I've also done a large amount of research into the basis of SDA fundamental beliefs and found that they are not a real Christian organization due to their inclusion of Satan in the salvation narrative (bearing the sins in the end of time as EGW wrote). SDA, LDS, and Jehovah's Witnesses are all the same thing in my head now even though I grew up an extremely conservative SDA and was very involved in the most conservative movements of the church (Restoration International, Family Camp, etc.). I've also sat down with multiple Rabbis to learn the truth of what Jewish beliefs are instead of getting it secondhand from SDA pastors or EGW books, and so I recognize now that Satan is entirely a creation of early Christian authors and their superstition.”

4. “I think this was a misleading way to get people to answer a survey based on the experience of one man, and in many ways is symptomatic of why many of us could no longer affiliate ourselves with your body.”
5. “I too left the SDA denomination but not because I found I no longer believed in God. Mine was totally based upon circumstances occurring within my local church (the largest SDA congregation within my state) where I served as a deacon, webmaster, photographer, etc. The narrow-mindedness and disparaging and cutting remarks aimed at me were the final straw in the church life of someone who had left the church for 30b+ years and gone through Bible studies and actively sought out being rebaptized - yet I still believe in my Loving God and consider myself to be a God-loving Christian on every level. Am simply no longer a member of a church whose older generation cast aspirations on those who are forward thinking....”

APPENDIX F
INFORMED CONSENT FORM

You are invited to participate in a survey about understanding Seventh-day Adventist attitudes regarding religious disaffiliation from the Seventh-day Adventist church, including the example of former pastor Ryan Bell's religious disaffiliation. In order to participate, you must be 18 years of age or older and currently identify as a Seventh-day Adventist. Pilot studies suggest that participating in this survey will take approximately 25 minutes. This research is being conducted by us from Loma Linda University as part of fulfillment for Master's program requirements. Whether or not you participate is entirely voluntary and will not affect your relationship to Loma Linda University.

Participating in this study involves answering questions about your religious life, beliefs about God, truth, and religion, and your perspective on aspects relating to religious disaffiliation in general and former pastor Ryan Bell's religious disaffiliation. The content of the survey may be uncomfortable for some, particularly those who were or are close with Ryan Bell, and it is possible that you may experience slight fatigue during the survey.

If you participate in this survey, your answers will be anonymous and securely stored in password-protected research database. However, as with all internet communication, it is possible that through intent or accident someone other than the intended recipient could see your response. Please do not disclose any confidential or identifying information about yourself or others. In addition, when we receive the results, no information will link your answers back to you.

Although participation might not benefit you directly, the information gleaned from this study will potentially contribute to a better understanding of the perspectives of Seventh-day Adventists on an action that often causes distress to individuals as well as their church communities. Please see this study as an important way to anonymously provide your perspectives on this issue to your fellow Seventh-day Adventist church members.

You may contact an impartial third party not associated with this study regarding any question or complaint by calling 909-558-4647 or e-mailing patientrelations@llu.edu for information and assistance. If you have any questions, please email Kendall Boyd, the principal investigator of this study, at kboyd@llu.edu.