Church Member Reactions to Religious Disaffiliation: Implications of Religious Orientation

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Presentation Overview

Introduction: Context and Literature Review

Methods: Instruments and Procedure

Results: Statistical analyses and patterns

Discussion: Reintegration and considerations
Introduction

Context: Ryan Bell’s *Year without God*

Christian reactions online
- Rebellious traits
- Lack of religious integrity
- Mental illness

Atheist reactions to Christian reactions
- A normative experience for any public disaffiliate
- Proof of “caustic nature of religion”
Disengaging from religious behaviors
- Belief
- Prayer
- Church attendance
- Studying sacred text

Disengagement from religious community
- Rejecting the communal label
- Extent of network

Bahr & Albrecht (1989)
Brinkerhoff & Burke (1980)
Hunsberger & Altemeyer (2006)
Roozen (1980)
“[Fundamentalism comprises] 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 (2004)
Revised Religious Fundamentalism Scale

- 12 items, 9-point scale
- Sample reliability: $\alpha = .916$
  - Valid: $472/634 = 74.4\%$
  - Excluded*: $162/634 = 25.6\%$
- Descriptives:
  - $M = 4.856$, $SD = 1.282$, min = 2.905, max = 7.125
  - Skewness: −.162, Kurtosis: −.724
Religious Fundamentalism

“Fundamentalist” Profile:

- Moderate racial prejudice, high homosexual prejudice
- Tend to be ethnocentric and insular
- Help those who identify similarly
- Relation to “right-wing authoritarianism” ($r = .68$)
  - Submission to authority
  - Aggression towards disobedience/out-groups
  - Adhering and enforcing traditional values

Allport & Ross (1967)
Altemeyer & Hunsberger (1992)
Altemeyer & Hunsberger (2004)
Laythe, Finkel, Bringle & Kirkpatrick (2002)
Fulton, Maynard & Gorsuch (1999)

Altemeyer & Hunsberger (2005)
Gribbins & Vandenberg (2011)
Altemeyer (1988)
Shaffer & Hastings (2007)
Religious Quest

“[Religious quest comprises] the readiness to face existential questions without reducing their complexity, self-criticism, perception of religious doubt as positive, and openness to change.” – Batson & Schoenrade (1991b)
Religious Quest

- Quest Scale (12 items, 9-point Likert)
  - Sample reliability: $\alpha = .822$
    - Valid: $464/634 = 73.2\%$
    - Excluded: $170/634 = 26.8\%$
  - Descriptives:
    - $M = 5.948$, $SD = 1.070$, min = 3.933, max = 7.209
    - Skewness: $-0.637$, Kurtosis: $0.477$

- Research correlations:
  - Religious fundamentalism: $r = -0.44$
  - Subjective well-being: $r = -0.22$
  - Complex thinking about religious questions: $r = 0.36$

Batson & Schoenrade (1991b)
Religious Quest

“Quester” Profile:

- Tend to reject absolutistic thinking styles
- Open to challenging their own belief system
- Inconsistent church attendance
- Likely to engage in helping behaviors that require personal investment (beyond social desirability factors)
- Less likely to rely on authority when judging moral behavior
- Show willingness for purposeful exposure to opposing belief systems
- Tend to have more religious distress and anxiety

Barrett et al. (2005)
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. (Larson, 2016)
Religious Disaffiliate Attribution Scale

13 items, 7–point Likert

Sample reliability: $\alpha = .901$

- Valid: 498/634 = 78.5%
- Excluded: 136/634 = 21.5%

Descriptives:

- $M = 2.311$, $SD = .957$, min = 1.000, max = 5.69
- Skewness: .962, Kurtosis: .710
Data Collection

- Qualtrics Survey Software

- Advertising:
  - Spectrum Magazine
  - Facebook (snowball)

- Data collection: April 4 – April 24, 2016

- 636 total respondents; 76% completed survey
Purpose of Research

1. Analyze relatedness of constructs
2. Examine the influence of religious orientation on negative reactions towards religious disaffiliates
3. Examine the relatedness of religious orientation on perceived social identity
Results

- Analyze relatedness of constructs
  - Pearson correlation

<table>
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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>RDAS</th>
<th>RRFS</th>
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<tr>
<td>RRFS</td>
<td>.633</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(N = 481)</td>
<td>(N = 474)</td>
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<tr>
<td>RQS</td>
<td>-.539</td>
<td>-.524</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(N = 475)</td>
<td>(N = 474)</td>
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*Note: All correlations were significant at the \(p < .001\) level (2-tailed)*
Results

- Examine the influence of religious orientation on negative reactions towards religious disaffiliates
  - Average RDAS scores
  - Average personal reaction scores
  - Average overall disapproval of religious disaffiliation in general

- Independent samples t-test
Results

Average RDAS Scores

°Fundamentalists\n
Average RDAS Score = 3.249

\( t(312) = 15.997, p < .001; r = .67 \)

"Questers"

Average RDAS Score = 1.764
Results

Personal Negative Reaction

<table>
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<th>&quot;Fundamentalists&quot;</th>
<th>&quot;Questers&quot;</th>
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<tr>
<td>4.29</td>
<td>2.44</td>
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$t(299) = 14.450, p < .001; r = .64$
Results

Average Disapproval to Religious Disaffiliation in General

"Fundamentalists" 3.372

"Questers" 1.641

$t(312) = 12.219, p < .001; r = .56$
Results

- Examine the relatedness of religious orientation on perceived social identity
  - Pearson Correlation

<table>
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<th>Discrepancy with</th>
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<th>RQS</th>
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<tr>
<td>GC</td>
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<td>N = 455</td>
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<td>Discrepancy with “Most Adventists”</td>
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<td>.396</td>
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<td>N = 451</td>
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<td>Discrepancy with Ryan Bell</td>
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<td>-.420</td>
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<td>N = 453</td>
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<td>N = 453</td>
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Note: All correlations were significant at the p < .001 level (2-tailed)
Implications

- How we think about religion contributes to what we think about others—particularly those who have left us.

- How we think about religion is often related to how we understand our relationship to others and our authority figures.

- Religious disaffiliation is an important issue for us to address amongst ourselves...
Have you at some point considered leaving the Seventh-day Adventist church?

- Yes: 65%
- No: 35%
- (No Response): 15%

Note: of those who responded:
- Yes: 65%
- No: 35%
- (No Response): 15%