Utah State University
DigitalCommons@USU

All Graduate Theses and Dissertations | Graduate Studies, School of

5-1-2012

This Was the Place: Apostasy from the LDS Church

Traci K. Burnett
Utah State University

Recommended Citation
Burnett, Traci K., "This Was the Place: Apostasy from the LDS Church" (2012). *All Graduate Theses and Dissertations.* Paper 1145.
http://digitalcommons.usu.edu/etd/1145

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate Studies, School of at DigitalCommons@USU. It has been accepted for inclusion in All Graduate Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@USU. For more information, please contact becky.thoms@usu.edu.

THIS *WAS* THE PLACE: APOSTASY FROM THE LDS CHURCH

by

Traci Burnett

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree

of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

in

Sociology

Approved:

Dr. John C. Allen Major Professor	Dr. Peggy Petrzelka Committee Member
Dr. Phillip Barlow Committee Member	Dr. Mark R. McLellan Vice President for Research and Dean of the School of Graduate Studies

UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY
Logan, Utah

2011

Copyright © Traci Kristine Burnett 2011

All Rights Reserved

ABSTRACT

This *Was* the Place: Apostasy from the LDS Church

by

Traci Burnett, Master of Science

Utah State University, 2012

Major Professor: Dr. John Allen
Department: Sociology

This paper looks at both the causes for and the consequences of apostasy from the LDS (Mormon) Church for those residing in the state of Utah. While previous quantitative research has identified many of the demographic characteristics associated with becoming a religious apostate, fewer studies have used qualitative methods to explore the expressed reasons that individuals have when choosing to relinquish their faith. This research offers an in-depth qualitative exploration of the causes for apostasy by examining the results of interviews with 21 heterogeneous respondents identified using a non-randomized snowball sample. The results were analyzed with an inductive grounded theory approach to ascertain the reasoning behind an apostate's decision to leave their religion. This research identified 14 reasons for leaving the LDS Church. All of participants in this research expressed at least one intellectual concern with church history or expressed concerns with human rights issues as reasons for leaving their religion. In addition, this research also identified 17 different positive and negative consequences that impacted the apostates' sense of community. (137 pages)

PUBLIC ABSTRACT

This *Was* the Place: Apostasy from the LDS Church

Traci Burnett

As with every religion, the LDS (Mormon) Church suffers from attrition of membership. This study looks at the experiences of 21 individuals who have left the LDS church, asking about the reasons for leaving the church and about the consequences of making such a decision.

Unlike many other studies concerning religious apostasy, this research takes a strictly qualitative approach to examining the causes and consequences for leaving the LDS Church. Instead of focusing on demographic characteristics such as race, class, or gender as indicators for apostasy, this research asks a small group of individuals in-depth questions to gain a deeper understanding of apostasy on an individual level. This type of data collection and analysis allowed for the identification of previously unknown reasons for apostasy not discussed in prior literature. Additional benefits of this research is it's contribution to the greater body of knowledge concerning apostasy by looking at a topic that has been largely ignored for the last 10 years, and by changing the focus from large scale quantitative data collection and analysis to a more exploratory approach that offers and deeper understanding of apostasy.

Ultimately 14 individual reasons for leaving the LDS church were identified in this research, in addition to 17 diverse consequences for leaving. The individual reasons for apostasy from the LDS church were often intellectual in orientation; some of the reasons included polygamy in church history, concerns over the authenticity of the Book of Abraham, and gay rights, among others. The consequences for leaving the church were both negative and positive, including the loss of a sense of community, negative impacts to family relationships, and an increased sense of happiness. Finally, this study revealed that every participant interviewed has refrained from joining another organized religion, leading to additional questions about apostasy, including the degree to which other apostates remain independent of organized religion.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My committee members deserve special recognition for helping me through the thesis process, which doubtlessly took much, much longer than was necessary. I want to give my major professor, Dr. John Allen, a special thank you for his willingness to remain committed to my project despite his new position as Dean of the College of Humanities and Social Sciences. I know that his schedule was tight to begin with and yet he still was willing to help a master's student succeed. I also want to express my gratitude to my other committee members, Dr. Peggy Petrzelka and Dr. Phillip Barlow, who also gave me such wonderful insight. I couldn't have completed this project without them. Dr. Mike Toney also deserves credit for always having faith in me, even as I transitioned back into academia as undergraduate after a four year hiatus in the military.

I also want to make my husband, Greg, aware of how profoundly grateful I am to have him in my life. Without him pushing me it is likely I never would have had the courage to apply to graduate school, much less finish. He spent countless hours helping me edit term papers, discussing sociological theory, and making me cookies and dinners on the days that I got the craziest, and was my anchor through it all.

I also want to thank my family. My parents and siblings are the best that anyone could have, and I never would have survived school without those Sunday dinners! Finally, I am indebted to everyone in the department for helping me out all those years, particularly Doug, Kevin, "G", Beth, Karin, Joyce, Stephanie, Bryan, Becca, Anita, and Matt. You are all great sources of inspiration to me.

Traci Burnett

CONTENTS

Page

ABSTRACT iii

PUBLIC ABSTRACT iv

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS v

LIST OF TABLES vii

INTRODUCTION 1

Definition of Community 4
The LDS Church as Community 6
Consequences of Apostasy: Community Lost? 11

LITERATURE REVIEW 17

Rubric of Quantitative Research 17
Qualitative Research on Apostasy 23
Research on Consequences of Apostasy 27

METHODS AND PROCEDURES 30

Research Questions 30
Key Concepts 31
Nature of the Sample 32
Data Collection 34
Data Analysis 36

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS 39

Aperçu of the Apostates 40
Antecedents of Apostasy 45
Discussion: Antecedents of Apostasy 70
Aftermath of Apostasy 84
Discussion: Aftermath of Apostasy 107

CONCLUSION 115

REFERENCES 122

APPENDIX 130

LIST OF TABLES

Table Page

1 Respondent Demographics 42

2 Causes of Apostasy 46

3 Consequences of Apostasy 85

INTRODUCTION

There has been much research conducted on both community at large and religion. Some of the research observing community has discussed loss of community due to urbanization and other factors; other research has sought to determine the causes of apostasy from a religion. However, there has been almost no emphasis on the consequences of leaving a religion, especially in relation to impacts on sense of community, and only marginal qualitative exploration of either causes or consequences of leaving a church. In order to help to fill this gap and describe both the causes for, and consequences of apostasy, I interviewed 21 former members of the LDS Church (formally known as The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, also referred to as the Mormon Church). I identified participants with the use of non-random snowball sampling and used interviews to offer in-depth illustrations of the various reasons apostates relied upon when deciding to leave the LDS church and their experiences thereafter.

As such, this research makes significant contributions to the literature by questioning former members of the LDS Church about the specific reasons for deciding to leave their faith, and how that decision affected them, especially in terms of their sense of community. With the use of qualitative methodology and grounded theory I was able to identify several themes describing both the causes for, and consequences of apostasy that were not recognized in previous studies. My findings indicate that many of the underpinnings of an apostate's decision have specific intellectual orientations, and even those who initially left the church for non-intellectual reasons developed intellectual

reasons at a later point. Of the 14 individual reasons for apostatizing that I identified in this research, former members of the LDS Church often cite their discontent with what are perceived as inconsistencies in church history, including polygamy in the early church, the Book of Abraham, and DNA evidences. There are also concerns over what may be called human rights issues. These issues include the historical mistreatment of the black community, and views espoused by members of the church, and the church as an institution, towards women and the gay community. My findings concerning the reasons behind apostasy only somewhat reflect findings elsewhere, mostly in terms of the intellectual reasons for leaving a church. Other reasons for apostasy postulated in previous studies as reasons for apostasy such as divorce or a desire to rebel did not find support here.

The aftereffects of leaving the church encompass a multitude of both positive and negative consequences. Generally speaking, a person who leaves their religion is likely to face negative repercussions for sense of community, which is defined here in terms of geographic delineation, a number of common ties, and a high level of social interaction. The impacts to community also entail repercussions for familial relationships, and a variety of individual effects including conflicting emotions such as a simultaneous sense of anomie and happiness. Surprisingly, apostasy also results in an unexpectedly large number of consequences that are considered fortuitous by the respondents.

These findings supports some previous scholars' research, such Durkheim's supposition that "normlessness" results after leaving a religion; but the findings also open many avenues for further study by identifying new themes of both causes for and consequences of apostasy. Further research should be done to look more closely at the

intellectual reasons that apostates specify as paramount in making their decision, and take into consideration the very real consequences of leaving a religious community.

For clarity, I specifically choose to utilize the term "apostasy" to reference separation from a religious organization because other terms lack the religious connotation that the word apostasy entails. Vernacular such as *disaffiliation* (Bahr and Albrecht 1989), *defection* (Davidman and Greil 2007; Wuthnow and Glock 1973), and *drop out* (Caplovitz and Sherrow 1977; Roozen 1980) could be applied to the discontinuation of membership from a multitude of organizations. On the other hand, the term apostasy is not used to describe disaffiliation from any institutions other than religious churches. Therefore "apostates" can be defined as "persons who have abandoned a religion they once believed in" (Altemeyer and Hunsberger 1997: 21).

The remainder of this introduction clarifies the definition of community, makes the argument that a religion, in this case the LDS Church, can and should be classified as a community—similar to arguments made by scholars elsewhere (Durheim 1951; Kanter 1972; Salamon 2003)—and presents community as an essential aspect of social life. I also propose that leaving ones faith is akin to loss of community by other means such as migration, old age, or as the result of natural disasters. The consequences for apostasy in terms of loss of community are similar to these other phenomena. Once the definition of community and the argument that the LDS Church can be considered a community has been established I review the relevant literature on apostasy, both quantitative and qualitative, and review the limited literature on the consequences of apostasy. I then discuss the specific methods and procedures employed for this research. I follow the introduction, literature review, and methods sections with a discussion of my findings; I

review the themes identified in the interviews, discuss the relation of these findings to previous research, and make suggestions for future study.

Definition of Community

In order to establish what I mean when discussing community, especially as it relates to the LDS Church, I find it necessary to present a concise definition of community. The term *community* is certainly not without debate. Multiple definitions have been formulated and applied over decades of community research, and not all definitions of community apply here. The prescient piece that tackles the semantics of community is Hillery's 1955 review. Hillery notes that of 94 definitions available in the literature, 64 of them agreed that community consists of social interaction, area, and a common tie. Different scholars in declaring their own definitions have suggested that community cannot be restricted to locality (Bender 1978), that community consists of the personal networks of an individual (Wellman and Leighton 1979), that community should be seen as a multi-dimensional variable (Effrat 1974), and even that community can be found in the virtual world online (Wellman 2001), among others.

In addition, there are some scholars who argue that community is not purpose driven, that it does not serve any external purpose (Bender 1978; Warren 1978). However, some scholars contend this thesis. There are examples of organized groups of people throughout the history of the United States that one might not simply call communities, but *intentional* communities, that is, they exist to serve a purpose aside from a desire to belong together. There are three basic types of intentional communities: religious, secular, and environmental (Kanter 1972). These communities are groups of

like-minded individuals who live in a relatively confined geographic space. While the specific methods of living and locations vary by group, the common thread is a desire for autonomy and shared ways of life for the members of the community, often for a specific purpose.

If the definition of community includes the summation as described by Hillery (1955) and the re-conceptualization offered by Effrat (1974)—that community exits on a continuum—it is clear that a variety groups can easily be considered a community. The definition of community as suggested by Hillery seems to be the most appropriate being that the components—social interaction, connection to locality, and a common tie—form the basis from which all others suggested elements of community arise. Indeed, things such as production-distribution-consumption and mutual support (Warren 1978) could not occur without, first and foremost, social interaction, a somewhat defined area within which to interact, and a common tie that binds the relationships together. As such it is also worth noting that not all groups meet Hillery's requirements for community in the same way. Here Effrat's re-conceptualization of a community as existing on a continuum is useful. Each group will fall on a different place on the continuum of "communityness." Some will exhibit higher levels of social interaction, greater common ties, and geographic importance than others. As will be seen, the LDS church as an intentional community ranks very high for all three levels of "communityness," and is one reason that the process of leaving this religion as a result of apostasy is an area of interest which should be examined more closely.

The LDS Church as Community

There is ample evidence to support the notion of a religious group as a community and has been described as such in some literature (Durkheim 1951; Kanter 1972). In some instances individuals actually consider their churches to be their community (Salamon 2003). In fact, the bond to a particular religion can even supersede ties to a local area. Luloff and Krannich note that "Amish ties to Lancaster County (or any other locality for that matter) have always been secondary to their desire to preserve their religious and cultural integrity" (Luloff and Krannich 2002: 164). Other case studies also support the supposition that religion provides "a cohesive fabric for the maintenance of the community values" (Allen and Dillman 1994: 169). Even the sociologist Armand Mauss was quoted in a national newspaper stating that the LDS Church largely serves to "build and maintain a sense of community among the Latter-day Saints in a diverse world" (Stack 2011). However, it is clear based on prior definitions of community that not all religious groups meet all the criteria for a community equally. Each religious group exists at a different point for each of Hillery's conditions for community. While virtually every religious group facilitates some form of participatory events that have a locality based component such as a church building in a neighborhood, not all religious groups will have a clearly delineated geographic area that defines the border for their community. Religious groups also fluctuate in the intensity of social interaction and common ties. As will be demonstrated, the LDS Church in particular ranks extremely high for all three key variables of community, including having an unusually specific geographically central locality, a large number of social ties, and a high degree of social interaction.

Within the LDS Church geography plays an important role. In 1847, then LDS prophet Brigham Young rode into the Salt Lake valley with a small group of pioneers. Upon seeing the valley for the first time, a member of the group recounted:

> While gazing on the scene before us, [Young] was enwrapped in a vision for several minutes. He had seen the valley before in vision, and upon the occasion he saw the future glory of Zion and Israel, as they would be, planted in the valleys of the mountains. When the vision had passed, he said, "It is enough. This is the right place. Drive on." (Poulsen 1977: 247).

Since that time, the words "this is the place" have become something of a Utah state motto. The phrase now adorns a monument at the mouth of Emigration Canyon near Salt Lake City. The church had moved its members to the territory of Utah as part of efforts to establish a city that would be geographically removed from the persecution those members of the LDS Church had faced in other states (Poulsen 1977). Church headquarters are now located in downtown Salt Lake City in the area known as "Temple Square." Local congregations (known as wards) also play a key role in the social organization and workings of the church, and act as a point of reference and identity for church members. LDS wards are geographically delineated; the LDS members living within the bounds of any particular ward attend church at the building assigned to that ward, and their religious interactions are to a great extent only with other members of that congregation. A common practice among LDS members when meeting someone for the first time is to ask them which ward they are "in" (e.g., Green Canyon 11th Ward). Ward church houses are not exclusively places for Sunday worship; they also act as a central hub for various other communal meetings, service projects, dinners, and wedding receptions. As such, although a significant portion of the LDS membership exists outside the bounds of Utah, it is clear that location does play an important role in the LDS

culture, history, and day to day activities. These facts help pave the way for the inclusion of the LDS Church as community in relation to Hillery's emphasis on ties to locality.

The LDS Church also meets the criteria for two other important aspects of community: interaction and common social ties. The social ties found in the LDS Church are demonstrated by the frequency and length of interaction of church members. The LDS Church does not limit contact to a Sunday church session. In addition to the three hours spent in Sunday School, sacrament meeting, and gender specific meetings on the Sabbath, members of the LDS Church are called upon to dedicate many more hours during the week to church relevant functions.

According to LDS.org (the official website of the LDS Church) LDS women are encouraged to attend weekly Relief Society meetings. These meetings may consist of service activities, classes, projects, conferences, and workshops of various kinds. Some of these entail a more doctrinal or spiritual emphasis and others do not. The men also have Priesthood activities, similar in scope to the Relief Society. The men are often called to positions of leadership within the church. These callings may involve becoming a presiding bishop (pastor) of a ward or a teacher for a Sunday School class. Women also serve as teachers, but are generally assigned to teach children and teenagers. The youth also attend weekly meetings, sometimes as segregated male and female groups, and sometimes in joint activities. In high school teens are encouraged to attend religion classes (Seminary) everyday during the school week. Once enrolled in college LDS young adults often register for religion classes at LDS Institutes of Religion that are available on many campuses (LDS.org 2009).

Clearly the LDS Church ranks high for all three key variables that constitutes the idea of community. As such it stands to reason that there may be real consequences if an individual chooses to disengage from this religious community. Attrition is endemic to any kind of social group, the LDS Church being no exception. After the establishment of a community, and the announcement of Utah's official statehood, the LDS Church experienced a rapid increase in membership levels. In 1830 there were only 280 recorded members of the LDS Church (Albrecht 1998). As of 2009, the church claimed nearly six million members in the United States alone and roughly 13 million members worldwide (LDS.org 2009).[1] However, as with all religious organizations, the LDS Church also experiences loss of membership. While the church *claims* nearly six million members in the United States, according to recent survey data only about three million people in the U.S. self identify as LDS (Kosmin and Keystar 2009). According to this same study approximately 16% of individuals who claimed membership in the LDS Church at one time no longer consider themselves affiliates (Kosmin and Keysar 2009). This trend reflects patterns similar to other religious groups. For example, the groups with the lowest attrition rates are non-denominational Christian groups (2%), those with the highest attrition being Jehovah's Witnesses (32%) (Kosmin, Mayer, and Keysar 2001).[2] These attrition rates, in combination with high levels of communityness, make the LDS Church a prime candidate for examining the ways in which leaving a church affects individuals' sense of community, especially when the community they are leaving ranks so high in terms of common ties and interaction.

---

[1] Here I refer to 2009 data from the LDS Church because the new version of LDS.org no longer offers total membership numbers for the United States.

[2]Here I refer to the 2001 version of the American Religious Identification survey because the 2009 version does not provide the percentages of individuals who "switched out" from any previous religion.

Benefits of Community

Simply understanding the more commonly recognized definition of community, and simply knowing that the LDS church displays these characteristics does not convey the importance of community to individual participants. Communities offer a variety of benefits to members, and those benefits have been examined at great length in academic literature. Since sociologists first began examining human social life, ties to social groups have had a prominent place in discussion. Durkheim (1951) noted the need for community (what he referred to as organic solidarity) when he examined the division of labor. He concluded that without organic solidarity people would be left in a state of anomie, or left without norms to guide behavior.

Of course Durkheim was not alone in his contention that the establishment of, and engagement in community, is beneficial. Community is also seen as existing for the purpose of ensuring the well-being of residents (Wilkinson 1979). Case studies of community (Krannich and Eastman 2002) indicate that membership in a community can be beneficial to individual welfare, particularly when the community facilitates distributive justice, open communication, tolerance, collective action, and communion (Wilkinson 1991). The social support generated by being part of a community is often indispensible to members of that community because social support is a "principal way by which people and households get resources" (Wellman and Wortley 1990: 558).

Other research has emphasized the importance of community in maintaining social order and reducing levels of social disorganization. This research includes focus on the community in relation to the reduction of crime rates (Sampson and Groves 1989),

the effectiveness of community on socialization (Freudenburg 1986) and contextual effects of community on general cohesion (Sampson 1991).

The benefits of community are not limited to physical resources or abstract feelings of well-being or even to social order. Community can be instrumental in assisting individuals with issues as wide ranging as health problems (Hwang et al. 2009), child care issues (Usdansky and Wolf 2008), and even with financial troubles (Lombe and Ssewamala 2007). Networks have been discovered to be important social support systems, that "whom we know, and whom we can depend on influences our success in life, our security and sense of well-being, and even our health" (Fischer 1982: 3). Social support systems, when reduced in size or importance, have negative repercussions on success in life or feelings of well-being (Fischer 1982). All of the aforementioned benefits have led some scholars to believe that communities are so integral to our daily functioning that the importance of community cannot be exaggerated (Fischer 1982).

Consequences of Apostasy: Community Lost?

Even with so many possible benefits stemming from participation in a community, many people experience a loss of community under a plethora of circumstances, and others leave their community voluntarily. Community theory scholars are often concerned with what is referred to as "community lost,"—the idea that communities in general have declined with increases in urbanization and of because of lack of social interaction (Hunter 1975; Kasarda and Janowitz 1974; Putnam 2000). Putnam (2000) argues that there has been a significant decline of individual participation in a variety of civic groups, those groups which have historically helped shaped the social

sphere. Because of this decline Putnam believes that there are negative implications for democratic society and social life. However, there is little agreement about whether the community is actually in decline or if what we understand community to be has simply changed (White and Guest 2003).

While many scholars have looked at the disappearance of community due to factors such as migration and urbanization, and the impacts of such changes to variables such as crime rates, fewer have looked at the impacts of the loss of community on an individual. Knowing the importance of community for the lives of *individuals*, studying the *individual* loss of community is equally important. As such, a more personal version of community lost is worth consideration.

Personal loss of community may come in the form of old age or disease as people are less mobile and less able to make contact with neighbors, or as a result of a natural disaster (Erikson 1976; Hirdes and Scott 1998). Additionally, there is little doubt that migration impacts an individual's community. When a person leaves a particular location they are cut off from previous ties (Choi 2001; Park 1928). Changes in technology have helped to alleviate some of the hurdles in keeping increased contact (Hampton and Wellman 2001), however, technology cannot replace face to face relationships. Since so much of everyday life revolves around a specific locality, instrumental relationships among neighbors remain common and are necessary to provide information and assistance for residents (Chaskin 1997).

So what happens when an *individual* experiences a "community lost" phenomenon? The literature does not often look directly at the individual experiences of a community lost event. Rather, general impacts are usually addressed. Emile Durkheim

(1951) is one of the most prominent scholars to discuss the consequences of lessened community contact. He notes that an individual will experience a sense of anomie when organic ties are lessened in communities. But, anomie, or "normlessness," is not the only possible consequence of "community lost." For example, Durkheim supposed that when an individual feels as though they do not belong to a community they have an increased likelihood of committing suicide, which Durkheim refers to as egoistic suicide in his famous study on the subject.

In other instances, after migration, some individuals suffer from a different kind of community lost and may be relegated to a marginal status because of the color of their skin, their ethnic background, occupation, or language, among other things. Because of the perceived lesser status (and the resulting marginality) of these individuals, migrants are often excluded from privileged spaces (Cullen and Pretes 2000). In other cases, the loss of community due to a natural disaster can lead an individual to have low morale, depression, anxiety, increased disorientation and sense of being disconnected, loss of connection with friends, family, and other ties of communality, and even physical illness (Erikson 1976).

The focus on one's sense of community, and the possible loss of community, after leaving a religion is one shortcoming of previous literature on religious apostasy. As has been noted previously, apostasy not only indicates a "loss of religious belief but rejection of a particular ascriptive community as a basis for self-identification" (Caplovitz and Sherrow 1977: 31). And yet, the academic community has spent little time addressing the consequences of leaving that ascriptive community. I am only aware of one recent study (Wright et al. 2008) that has specifically attempted such an examination. The other

articles and books that make mention of the impacts of apostasy spend little more than a paragraph or a page discussing individual implications of any kind (Altemeyer and Hunsberger 1997; Clapovitz and Sherrow 1977; Hoge 1981; McKnight 2008) or only look at larger societal consequences of individuals leaving religion (Bromley 1988). In other instances the discussion of consequences of apostasy is limited such things as changes in political ideology and levels of happiness (Brinkerhoff and Mackie 1993; Feigelman, Gorman, and Varacalli 1992). However, it is intuitive that religious apostasy would be associated with changes in social relationships of various kinds, and that the repercussions of apostasy from a tightly woven religious community may be intense and long lasting.

Considering the degree to which the LDS Church can be seen as a community, it seems likely for there to be a multitude of very real consequences for those who leave those bounds. Those religious apostates who leave the LDS Church may experience varying degrees of marginality in different aspects of their lives. Social relations may be greatly strained or entirely dissolved by the new “spiritual” distance separating individuals from their previous communities. They may be cut off completely from kinship or friendship ties, they may be discriminated against or suffer from a variety of other negative effects. While some recent literature has touched on the subject of LDS apostasy (and will be more thoroughly reviewed in the following sections) most has been restricted to the psychological effects of apostasy such as depression and loss of self assurance (Buxant and Saroglou 2008; Harty 1996) ignoring a plethora of other potentially negative (and possibly positive) consequences.

With the knowledge of the importance of community, and the idea that a religious institution can be considered a community, it stands to reason that the process of leaving one's church is not a matter of "only casual sociological interest" (Bromley 1988: 11). While the predictors of religious switching[3] (leaving one religion and often, but not always, choosing another) have in the past literature included only "mundane factors such as changing marital status, age, residential or occupational mobility," (Bromely 1988: 11) there is nothing about these "predictors" that clearly explains why people tend to switch religious preferences or leave religion altogether, or how it affects them after they do. Much of the literature on religious switching and apostasy has used quantitative analysis to attempt to explain change in religious preference, and the few qualitative studies that have been produced have either focused on the psychological effects of apostasy, or have had methodological problems significant enough to justify reevaluation. In addition, as noted by other scholars, the bulk of research was conducted over a decade ago and has been largely ignored since then (Wright et al. 2008). Finally, only two qualitative articles have specifically looked at the LDS church, and further exploration of this particular faith is worthwhile.

In this thesis I first review the relevant literature on apostasy looking at quantitative and qualitative studies and specific research on the LDS Church, and look at the limited literature on the consequences of apostasy. Second, I clarify my concepts, state my research questions, and elaborate on the methods used to gather and analyze the

[3] In many instances scholars use the term "religious switching" as virtually interchangeable with apostasy. This is most likely because when one switches out of a religion and into another (or to no religion) the switch still almost always requires the individual to apostatize from the original sect. For example see Putnam and Campbell (2010).

data for this study. Finally, I discuss the findings and results of this research, offer insight and conclusions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The following literature review brings together a large portion of research previously conducted on religious apostasy. First, I integrate the existing quantitative literature that focuses specifically on apostasy into categories to help simplify my discussion. Second, I review previous research that utilized various qualitative styles and offer critiques of their methods, with special focus on the two qualitative studies geared toward the LDS faith. Finally, I briefly review the limited research on the consequences of apostasy and the idea of community lost as one of the possible costs of leaving one's church.

Rubric of Quantitative Research

The bulk of research on apostasy examines an extremely broad range of predictive variables, some of which overlap. This research can be collapsed into five broad categories: 1) demographics, 2) life events, 3) rebellion, 4) intellectualism, and 5) socialization. Individual research projects have addressed different combinations of these factors. Each research article may simultaneously fall into one or more categories based on the variables they included in their study. I will treat each category briefly in turn.

First, demographic variables such as age, sex, and educational attainment are common in many articles addressing apostasy or religious switching (Caplovitz and Sherrow 1977; Merrill, Lyon, and Jensen 2003; Regnerus and Uecker 2006; Roozen 1980; Sandomirsky and Wilson 1990; Smith and Sikkink 2003; Uecker, Regnerus, and Vaaler 2007; Zelan 1968). This research is almost exclusively cross-sectional, and deals with individual levels of analysis. The literature is mostly consistent about a few

variables, many agree that the greatest predictors of apostasy or religious switching are gender (males are more likely to leave) and age (those either in their teens or a twenties are also more likely to apostatize) (e.g., Roozen 1980; Uecker et al. 2007).

One of the most prominent independent demographic variables is educational attainment. The piece by Uecker et al. (2007) is particularly important in this regard considering their choice of methodology. In contrast to most research on apostasy, Uecker et al. utilized longitudinal data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health) which collected in-depth interviews from 20,745 students in 7th to 12th grade. These same students were then interviewed again when they were between the ages of 18 and 25. Both sets of interviews took place between the years of 1994 and 2002. This data provided the researchers with a view of the religious development and change of the individuals that participated, including examining the effect of independent variables on apostasy. The primary variables of focus were: religious affiliation, education, family formation, and behavioral measures, while controlling for certain other characteristics such as age and gender.

While the authors did find support for negative effects of certain behaviors on apostasy, one of their key findings dealt with the effects of education on three types of religious decline, one of which being apostasy. The authors found that those with the highest levels of education were the least likely to have apostatized, while those with far less education were less likely to identify with religion. Students who had no college attendance or only a two year towards a degree were 61 and 54 percent more likely to leave their religion than those with bachelor’s degrees. However, the degree to which education has an impact on apostasy is question that remains unresolved. While Uecker et

al.'s piece supports the findings of other contemporary research (Merrill, Lyon, and Jensen 2003), others suggest that college attendance has a negative effect on religious retention (Caplovitz and Sherrow 1977; Hadaway and Roof 1988; Zelan 1968).

Second, "life events" consists of a number of experiences, some of which could be considered positive, and others which might be considered negative. Life events include occasions such as divorce, marriage, parental divorce, illness, or injury. Generally speaking, negative events are associated with higher levels of apostasy while positive events are associated with lower levels of apostasy (Albrecht and Cornwall 1989; Albrecht, Cornwall, and Cunningham 1988; Hadaway and Marler 1993; McNaughton 2003; Roozen 1980; Sandomirsky and Wilson 1990; Uecker et al. 2007). The effect of parental divorce on the apostasy of children has received a great deal of attention with consensus that parental divorce is positively associated with apostasy (Dudley 1999; Feigelman et al. 1992; Lawton and Bures 2001).

Albrecht and Cornwall's (1989) examination of the effects of life events on religious change (including religious decline, conversion, and apostasy) clearly illustrates this portion of the literature. The authors gathered their sample by using a random sampling process. The authors started by identifying larger "stakes," which consist of several LDS congregations, followed by a random sampling of "wards"—the individual congregations. Finally, the presiding ecclesiastical authority, the bishop, was asked to identify "inactive" members in their ward. The final sample consisted of 1,874 individual respondents, with a balance of inactive and active church attending members. Using regression analysis, the authors concluded that positive life experiences are associated

with increased faith while negative experiences are associated with loss of faith. In both cases the correlations were positive and significant.

Third, “rebellion” consists of factors such as drinking, premarital sex, and general rebellion against parents, but it also includes the desire to stay a member of the childhood religion—the exact opposite of any desire to rebel. In this case, a desire to rebel and engage in behavior deemed inappropriate by many denominations is positively associated with apostasy (Caplovitz and Sherrow 1977; Regnerus and Uecker 2006; Uecker et al. 2007) while a desire to continue in a religion is negatively associated (Dudley 1999).

The key piece of research in this area cited by virtually all scholars of religious apostasy is the study conducted by Caplovitz and Sherrow (1977). In their book examining apostasy among college graduates Caplovitz and Sherrow utilized data from the 1961 National Opinion Research Center (NORC) study which conducted a panel study of 33,782 college students over a three-year period. Caplovitz and Sherrow primarily used un-weighted samples to examine the correlates of apostasy. The authors concluded that people who drop out of a religion do so out of rebellion against their parents. They also note that apostasy is the result of dedication to radical social change, a commitment to intellectualism, and reduction in religiosity. However, the authors note that these factors usually work in concert, and that a simple reduction in religiosity or a commitment to radical social change will be less likely to lead to apostasy if there is not already strain in a parental relationship. These findings have been supported in some instances (Hoge, Johnson, and Luidens 1993) and refuted in others (Hunsberger 1980).

Fourth, “intellectualism” includes the general intellectual orientation of the individual and contestation of doctrinal or theological doubts by the apostate. This

category also includes the discussion of psychological profiles of those who are more likely to apostatize. Those who are oriented towards being more intellectual, have doubts or psychological stress, tend to leave religion more than others (Altemeyer and Hunsberger 1997; Barbour 1994; Brinkerhoff and Mackie 1993; Caplovitz and Sherrow 1977; Hunsberger and Brown 1984; Wuthnow and Glock 1973; Zelan 1968).

Hunsberger and Brown's (1984) influential research in this area included factor structure and multiple regression analyses. A sample of 836 psychology students were asked to complete a 15-page questionnaire asking them about their religious orientation and background. The results of the factor analysis used in the study indicated that "intellectual orientation" explained the highest percentage of variance between apostates and non-apostates (5.8%). Intellectual orientation consisted of the respondents answers to such questions as "to what extent do you consider yourself to be intellectually oriented?" (Hunsberger and Brown 1984: 243). The authors note that their results do not reflect the findings of previous research (Hunsberger 1983) and they speculate on the reasons for the discrepancy between the two studies. The earlier research conducted by Hunsberger in 1983 took place in Canada, while Hunsberger and Brown (1984) used a sample from Australia. Hunsberger and Brown hypothesized that culture may play a role in the apostasy process by making apostasy for intellectual reasons more or less easy. At this point it appears that no other research has followed up to see if their supposition holds true.

Finally, "socialization" is a key variable in predicting apostasy. Socialization consists of variables such as having a good relationship with parents and the level of parental religiosity. Lower levels of socialization resulting either from a poor relationship

with parents, or low levels of parental religiosity are associated with higher levels of apostasy (Hadaway and Marler 1993; Hoge et al. 1993; Hunsberger 1980; Hunsberger and Brown 1984).Some initial research in the socialization area indicated that low levels of religious socialization in childhood were the primary reason for apostasy later in life. Hunsberger (1980) questioned Clapovitz and Sherrow's (1977) supposition that rebellion was sufficient in adequately explaining apostasy. Hunsberger issued questionnaires to 102 students enrolled in the introductory psychology course at Wilfred Laurier University in Waterloo, Ontario. The results of the factor analysis used in this study indicated that the emphasis on religion in childhood was a predictor of apostasy in adulthood.

It is noteworthy that many of the individual variables examined in previous research might fall into one of the categories presented by either Hoge's (1981) or Roozen's (1980) typologies concerning reasons for apostasy. For instance, Hoge (1981) offers six categories with which to label the reasons for apostasy. The typology includes: 1) "family-tension" apostates, who experience discontent with their family members and rebel against them, 2) "weary" apostates, who find church tedious, 3) "lifestyle" apostates, who object to certain moral teachings or whose lifestyle is in conflict with church standards, 4) "spiritual needs" apostates, who do not find their church spiritually fulfilling, 5) "anti-change" apostates, who did not like changes to Mass or other aspects of the church, and 6) "out-converts after marriage" are those who marry outside of their faith and join the denomination of their spouse. However, the categories that Hoge presents are neglected by other research. For example, Hoge's category for "lifestyle" might cover variables such as drinking and premarital sex (those which I categorized as

"rebellion"), but other categories such as Hoge's "spiritual needs" do not appear to be addressed elsewhere in the literature.

Finally, the culmination of all the quantitative research points to one important issue—quantitative variables in and of themselves do not describe the process of apostasy in terms of how and why an individual actually chooses to disengage from a religion, and most research on apostasy (as illustrated) is quantitative. While the quantitative literature is expansive in demonstrating what demographic variables and life events are associated with apostasy, it offers little in the way of describing *why* apostates choose to leave their religion. Thus, the process of apostasy appears to be more dynamic than is illustrated in the quantitative literature. I argue that *qualitative* research can assist in filling this void by taking many of the aforementioned variables into account while pursuing issues of apostasy in more depth, and is the area I turn to next.

Qualitative Research on Apostasy

There has been some research engaged in exploring apostasy with qualitative methods (Altemeyer and Hunsberger 1997; Bahr and Albrecht 1989; Harty 1996; Jacobs 1987; Mauss 1969; McNaughton 2003; Wright et al. 2008). These strategies generally included in-depth interviews with individual apostates from various denominations (Bahr and Albrecht 1989; Harty 1996), case studies of particular churches (McNaughton 2003), as well as content analysis of internet posts from apostates (Wright et al. 2008). However, this research presents its own set of issues. First, some of the research has been geared towards the psychology of disaffiliation (Harty 1996; McNaughton 2003) and does not include sociological variables relating to the process of disaffiliation or the consequences

thereof. Second, much of the research has focused on extreme religious groups, sometimes referred to as New Religious Movements or cults (Jacobs 1987; Richardson, van Der Lans, and Derks 1986; Wright 1988). Third, many of the articles do not distinguish apostasy from one religion from another. The idea that all denominations can be lumped together for study is not universally accepted, and there is evidence that not all religions can be treated equally (Sandomirsky and Wilson 1990; Smith and Sikkink 2003).

The article by Wright et al. (2008) is one such recent article that qualitatively addresses the causes of apostasy. In this case, the study by Wright et al. (currently an unpublished conference paper) looked at a variety of narratives posted online in 2005 by 50 former Christians. Their qualitative grounded theory analysis breaks down the dominant reasons for leaving a Christian denomination into four basic categories: intellectual and theological concerns, God's shortcomings, interactions with Christians, and interactions with non-Christians. Ultimately the most commonly mentioned reasons for leaving a Christian church were intellectual, and this intellectual category was further broken down into three subcategories: faith verses reason (the idea that logic should have greater importance than blind faith), Hell and suffering (the idea that good people should not have to go to Hell simply for not being Christian), and the Bible (the expression of concerns regarding the literalism of Biblical stories).

However, while these qualitative studies do help to further illuminate the causes of apostasy, the methods used by some of the researchers are questionable in terms of their reliability and validity. In Wright et al. (2008) there was no follow up with respondents to clarify terms or to pin point the most important reasons for apostasy. In

other cases, as will be seen in the following section, the two qualitative studies focusing on the LDS religion have particular methodological problems inherent in the research that leads to the exclusion of certain respondents, and therefore reduced external validity (Bahr and Albrecht 1989; Mauss 1969).

Of the qualitative research on apostasy that I was able to identify, there were two articles that specifically discussed the LDS faith. One important article on LDS apostasy sought to examine the reasons for what they called "disaffiliation" from the LDS Church (Bahr and Albrecht 1989). The authors conducted in-depth interviews with 25 former LDS adherents in Utah who were identified with the use of a randomized statewide survey, and the authors used a grounded theory and middle range theory approach to analyze the interviews. The authors of this article postulated that the majority of those who leave the LDS Church do so because they "were never truly 'in' the faith" (Bahr and Albrecht 1989: 193). The authors stated that these individuals were only "marginal members," meaning that the individuals never fully believed in the church to begin with, or were inadequately socialized and educated about the church, thus had a tendency to simply "drift" away (Bahr and Albrecht 1989: 193). That is, these former members left the church almost unconsciously, often because of other life events such as marriage to a non-member spouse (Bahr and Albrecht 1989). The small number of those identified by the authors as "fervent followers" or those most heavily committed and involved with the church left the church for intellectual reasons. While the authors do not elaborate on the specific intellectual rationale given by apostates, they state that former members of the church were "prompted to evaluate thoroughly Mormon history and doctrine in the light

of (1) history and other secular science…and (2) the Bible as interpreted in evangelical or conservative Protestantism" (Bahr and Albrecht 1989: 197).

This contestation that "drift" is a primary reason for individuals to leave the LDS church is subject to criticism because of one particular issue: the social location of the researchers and the effect of that social location on the willingness of former members to participate in the study. While the affiliation of any researcher to a particular university does not necessarily have any impact on the results of a study, in this case it is worth noting that at the time the research was conducted both scholars were employed by Brigham Young University. The reason this affiliation may present a problem is because the school is privately owned by the LDS Church. In the article Bahr and Albrecht noted that of the 59 former LDS members identified in a state-wide survey for possible interviews many declined to participate in the study: "[their] telephone conversations with [the authors] suggested that those most angry or bitter toward Mormonism were most apt to refuse" (Bahr and Albrecht 1989: 186).

Although not clearly stated, this indicates an unknown level of potential sample bias because of the authors' affiliation with LDS Church. This sample bias may have led to issues of external validity, meaning that the results may not show the whole picture if, for example, most people who left the church for doctrinal reasons chose not to speak to the researchers. External validity is "the ability to generalize findings from a specific setting and small group to a range of settings and people" (Neuman 2006). So if the findings that Bahr and Albrecht presented in their research that describe the experiences for this small group of individuals did not reflect the experiences of many or most other former LDS adherents, then external validity is one such concern.

Other researchers exploring the processes and causes of apostasy in the LDS Church face similar issues. Mauss (1969) utilized participant observation methods of LDS Church reactivation programs (programs designed to bring marginal saints back to the fold via friend-shipping and other such methods). The findings of Mauss's research indicate that those who do not have their intellectual, social, or emotional needs met at church are more likely to become non-attenders. However, the reactivation programs that the researcher observed were likely not conducive to exploring reasons for leaving a church per se; rather, this kind of environment would have been more suitable for examining the processes that former drop-outs go through when becoming re-engaged in the church. Not all apostates would have been included in such reactivation efforts, and those who had no interest in reactivation, or were particularly hostile towards the church would not have been included in the study. Therefore, it stands to reason that Mauss' observations faced challenges for the same reasons as Bahr and Albrecht's research: problems with sample selection and external validity.

Research on Consequences of Apostasy

While the vast majority of literature on apostasy is geared almost exclusively towards the causes or predictors of apostasy, there are hints and suggestions at the possible consequences of apostasy including labeling (Bahr and Albrecht 1989) and negative consequences for happiness (Brinkerhoff and Mackie 1993; Feigelman et al. 1992; Hoge 1981; Zelan 1968). Other researchers that address a few of the other possible consequences do little to elaborate, only spending a paragraph, at the most a page, on hinting at those consequences (Alteymeyer and Hunsberger 1997; Hoge 1981; McKnight

2008).The one of the most recent articles to spend any length of time on the consequences of apostasy was Wright et al. (2008). After addressing the possible reasons for leaving a Christian denomination (as mentioned previously), the authors made mention of some consequences for leaving. These consequences included both positive and negative repercussions. Negative consequences included the loss of social ties, implications for family relationships, and regret over the loss of religious social capital. Positive consequences were emotional benefits and a sense of increased personal freedom. However, while the authors addressed the possible causes and consequences of leaving a religious institution, they did not differentiate by either denomination or context. In fact, the authors suggest that "the explanations provided by ex-Christians in our study perhaps apply to deconversion from other religions as well" (Wright et al. 2008: 8). However, as mentioned before, other research has indicated that this is not the case (Sandomirsky and Wilson 1990; Smith and Sikkink 2003). Another limitation of their research is the lack of follow-up with the writers of the narratives. Without a follow-up the authors were unable to clarify certain concepts or to ask which consequence(s) were most prominent in apostates' lives after the fact. Finally, Wright et al.'s exploration of the consequences of apostasy is cursory at best and deserves further examination.

Up to this point the vast majority of the research examining apostasy has had a quantitative bent, and this research seems inadequate at explaining why people make the decision to leave their faith. Even research that has used qualitative methods to explore apostasy—such as Wright et al.—has either tried to paint apostasy from various sects with the same brush, or may have had inadequate access to the multiplicity of apostate stories because of their affiliation with a church owned institution of higher learning. To

try and supplement this previous research I will review how my findings fit in with previous quantitative literature. I also compare and contrast the findings of this study with previous qualitative literature, specifically to Wright et al.'s recent study, and qualitative research that has made observations about apostates from the LDS Church. In the following section I review my methods and procedures for data collection and analysis, and then provide extensive quotes selected from my interviews to illustrate the causes and consequences of leaving the LDS church.

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

Research Questions

In light of previous research, what then, are the reasons for and consequences of apostasy? Since the findings from any one study cannot necessarily be applied to all other religions, or even the same religion in all other contexts (time period and geographic location), clearly defining a religion and a context for study is important. My main research questions are as follows:

1. What are the primary motives for, or causes of, individual apostasy from the LDS Church in the state of Utah?
2. To what degree does apostasy from the church impact the sense of community felt by the individual, if at all?
3. What, if any, are the other consequences of apostasy?

My first question clarifies not only a specific religion for study; it also specifies a particular context. The density of LDS membership is much higher in Utah than in other parts of the country; 58% of Utah's population is LDS (The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life 2009). On top of the overall population of LDS people in Utah is the density of LDS membership in specific Utah counties. For example, the population of Utah county is nearly 90% LDS, and the population of Rich county is nearly 85% LDS (Zick and Smith 2006). Religious density is important because the antecedents and consequences of apostasy from the LDS church in a primarily LDS community are most likely different than apostasy in a community where the LDS population is the minority.

My second and third research questions address the consequences of apostasy which, as noted, have been mostly ignored by scholars. How *does* leaving the church

have an impact on the individual; does that person sense a loss of community? What may be some of the other consequences of leaving the church that may not have been anticipated? Since little research on apostasy has addressed the consequences of leaving one's religion, and the impact on sense of community has been virtually ignored, this is a particularly important aspect of this research.

Key Concepts

As mentioned in the introduction I chose to use the word "apostate" to refer to those who have absconded membership in the LDS Church. This definition of apostasy is inclusive of a wide variety of "apostates." In fact, most research on apostasy does not specifically require that the apostate have severed *formal* ties with their former organization. Many religious institutions do not even have formal processes established for severing ties, but the LDS Church is one exception. According to Book One of the LDS Church Handbook of Instructions (2006) individuals may formally resign from the church only after submitting a request to a local ecclesiastical leader who is then required to forward the request to church headquarters. However, in following the spirit of other research, the only requirement for participants in this study was that the individual no longer self-identify with the prior sect. As such respondents selected for participation simply no longer self-identified with the LDS Church, regardless of formal membership status.

The term "consequences" was also used in its most inclusive form. Consequences of apostasy included all manner of impacts on the individual that could be attributed to their apostasy. Based on the limited previous research on the consequences of leaving

religion, it seemed likely that consequences of apostasy were apt to include such things as labeling and lower levels of life satisfaction and happiness. However, I did not believe that this list was exhaustive of all the possible negative externalities of apostasy. The in-depth interviews with respondents indicated a variety of negative and positive consequences, some of which had been noted in other research, others of which had not. In general, my primary aim was to keep a grounded theory approach to ensure the inclusion of all the different forms of repercussions.

Grounded theory is essentially an inductive form of analysis typically used in qualitative research that often leads to a theory. Grounded theory can take on many different forms (Neuman 2006) and has been described as an "inductive way of generating categories from empirical data" (Goldkuhl and Cronholm 2010: 188). Utilizing this definition of grounded theory I formulated the boundaries and categories for these repercussions as I saw the respondents had set them, while making the attempt to not let my previous knowledge of the literature color the findings in the data. As such, this study can be considered to be primarily exploratory and descriptive, with an express goal of moving theory forward by adding to or eliminating previous theories surrounding apostasy and by generating new categories as found within the data.

Nature of the Sample

For this research I utilized in-depth qualitative interviews to explore the reasons for, and consequences of, apostasy from the LDS Church. To identify individuals for interviewing I utilized non-random snowball sampling and purposive sampling methods using initial contacts to make connections with increasingly greater numbers of contacts

to expand the group of individuals I am able to interview. To create my sample, I made initial contact with various organizations including Ex-Mormon and Post-Mormon websites (both of which are online forums dedicated to the social support of those who have left the LDS Church), a local non-LDS religious congregation, and through key contacts that have had prior involvement with prominent LDS or non-LDS organizations. Some examples of these organizations were contacts through the Mormon Stories Podcast (a series of online interviews run by an LDS scholar that explore different aspects of Mormonism), local chapters of the Post-Mormon community (an extension of the Post-Mormon.org website) and the Ex-Mormon Foundation (another group similar to Post-Mormon). I also made contact with individuals not affiliated with any of these organizations by simply utilizing my own social network of friends and family who were able to introduce me to people who had left the church. The goal was to find and interview as many different individuals from different networks as possible until patterns emerged and there was essentially no repetition of data, thus reaching saturation (Miles and Huberman 1994).

The use of various sources when making contact with former LDS adherents made it possible to reach saturation with regard to the different perspectives and experiences of LDS apostates. I attempted to make sure the sample consisted of an even distribution of men and women, ultimately interviewing 9 women and 12 men. However, the demographics of the sample were limited to the contacts that I was able to make. It is possible that my sample is at least somewhat representative of the characteristics of the entire apostate population which is unlikely to have an even dispersion across all age and

gender categories. Ultimately my sample was a mix of gender and age, with many individuals falling into the 30-39 age category.

All of the respondents were given the chance to voluntarily "opt-in" for the research, and to opt-out at any time. Of the 21 individuals that I identified for interviews all agreed to participate, resulting in a 100% response rate. I informed all participants that they were under no obligation to answer any questions that may have been too intrusive, and they could refrain from answering a question if they felt uncomfortable for any reason. However, I did not encounter any individual who refrained from answering for any reason. Following the initial interviews I contacted almost every individual with additional queries that developed during the course of data analysis and with follow-up questions to help clarify previous statements or to probe certain answers more deeply.

Data Collection

My interviews were conducted with the use of a semi-structured interview schedule so that the interviews would have coherence and consistency with the types of *general* questions I used. A semi-structured interview schedule also gave me the flexibility to ask probing questions to clarify concepts and events with the respondent without being limited to only questions prepared for the interview. For example, one question included in the research was: "can you tell me a little about your previous involvement in the church?" Depending on the answer from the respondent I was able to ask questions about how many years the individual had been a part of the church, what positions were held, if any, and about the degree to which family members had also been involved in such activities. (See the appendix for the complete interview schedule.)

Many of the questions that I chose to include were selected because of a desire to examine the variables mentioned in the literature, to see if a desire to rebel, divorce, or prior marginality seemed to correlate with apostasy (Albrecht and Cornwall 1989; Bahr and Albrecht 1989; Caplovitz and Sherrow 1977). If no mention of these variables had been made by the end of the interview, I followed up with some questions to give the respondent the chance to indicate whether the variables in some way played a role in their apostasy. All interviews were conducted either face-to face or, if the challenges of time and space made this impossible, then the interview was conducted over the telephone. All interviews were conducted between April 2010 and June 2010. To increase the accuracy of my data collection I audio recorded every conversation and took detailed notes.

One of my primary concerns in this research was ensuring confidentiality and in reducing any psychological stress. To reduce any potential harm, I attempted to gauge individual reactions to my questions and attempted to avoid the use of affective language that might bias the data or hurt the respondent in some way (Berg 2009). In addition, to maintain confidentiality, I assigned numbers to the respondents' names and kept one list (or key) with the corresponding information, in addition to all other data, in a locked room. I did not disclose the specific locality in Utah where the respondent is from, nor did I document any specific information that might breech the confidential status of their identity. Any identifying information that the respondents may have provided during the interview session was omitted from transcription, and the recordings of the interviews were destroyed immediately following transcription.

Data Analysis

In following the generally accepted practices of qualitative interviewing, I utilized coding schemes to identify common concepts or ideas in the interviews while maintaining a grounded theory perspective (Berg 2009; Miles and Huberman 1994). This helped me to identify and demarcate specific constructs for motives for apostasy, and the resulting consequences. The approach was generally heuristic, as I iteratively cycled through the data to search for new concepts, relationships, or patterns. This process involved constant review and re-review of the transcripts while looking for common themes or ideas. I read and re-read each interview several times, some more often to make sure I was able to glean all potential themes from the data. As I perused the data, I was actively engaged in "memoing" my thoughts, especially in regards to any finding that was particularly puzzling or interesting (Rubin and Rubin 2005). Using these coding methods I was able to inductively identify multiple themes and categories. After reviewing the data multiple times I feel confident that all possible themes and categories have been identified and that saturation of all possible themes was reached.

I was able to easily and efficiently create "codes" or key words that identify themes and track those codes with the use of the Nvivo program. As I read each transcript I would select certain paragraphs, phrases, and sentences and either assign the segment to a pre-established code, or create a new code based on what seemed to be a general theme. As I saw that more themes overlapped I would group them together (Miles and Huberman 1994). For example, when teasing out the consequences for apostasy I originally identified what appeared to be two separated themes, one being the increased autonomy an apostate had after leaving the church, the other being the increased ability to

grow and develop by having new experiences or by continuing education. I eventually combined these two codes into one because of the high level of thematic overlap between the two ideas.

Ultimately my coding scheme took on the form of tree-like matrices, with root themes and ideas branching off into increasingly specific ideas. For instance, one root theme was negative consequences of apostasy, a sub theme was the impacts to familial relationships and an individual code within that category described the loss of and exclusion from family events. Many of my themes were structured as such, few could be considered "free nodes," or themes independent of all others.

Although a simple random sample of apostates may be ideal for the purposes of generalization, generalization is not the goal of this research. In-depth interviews are one of the best ways to gauge the actual decisions behind apostasy and illustrate the perspectives of the individuals who have left their church. My goal is to deeply describe the causes and consequences of apostasy, akin to the "thick description" used by other researchers (Geertz 1977). The process of thick description involves capturing nuances that may be more difficult to tease out. That is, the data is a "multiplicity of complex conceptual structures, many of them superimposed upon or knotted into one another, which are at once strange, irregular, and inexplicit and which [the researcher] must contrive somehow first to grasp and then to render" (Geertz 1977: 10). Therefore, the goal is not to attempt generalization to any greater population with this research, but to attempt the clarification of the complex structures that surround apostasy. I attempt to do this by extensively using quotes to illustrate my findings.

Finally, my use of in-depth interviews and qualitative analysis lends my research certain strengths; the methods that I have chosen have stronger internal validity than some other methods. One of the best ways to search out explanations for apostasy is via in-depth interviews with individuals. No other person, organization, or variable will be able to explain the thought processes of a person when they make the decision to leave a church. Although other individuals may be able to make comments about perceived behavior or commentary made by an apostate, only the apostate can confirm whether or not a certain statement or action was a precursor to, or the result of, the process of apostasy.

In the following discussion of my findings I make use of my data to illustrate the common themes and categories that were identified during the analysis process. Because the goal of this research is to offer an in-depth, descriptive view of apostasy I use quotes wherever possible to exemplify these conclusions. Also, I retained as much of the original language as possible so that the inherent meaning is not diluted. Those changes that were made are inserted text that I used to help clarify what the interviewee said, and those changes can be identified by the use of brackets. Some sentences and paragraphs were also grouped together if they addressed the same topic at different times and those groupings can be identified by ellipses.

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

In this section the outcomes this research concerning the causes and consequences of apostasy are detailed. First, I review the background, demographics and basic descriptions of the 21 participants. Second, I thoroughly review and offer examples for the various themes identified that illustrated the causes for and consequences of apostasy. For ease of analysis I divided my analysis and discussion portions into two sections, the first focusing on the causes of apostasy, the second on the consequences. In the first portion focusing on the causes of apostasy I briefly outline my discussion of the reasons for apostasy, and then address the various specific themes that were identified by using quotes taken directly from the interviews as examples of each emergent theme. The subsequent discussion of my findings then demonstrates how the reasons identified in this study are both a reflection of, and divergent from, previous research.

The second portion will consist of an outline for, and discussion of the consequences of apostasy from the church. This section will focus on the impacts of individual apostasy on sense of community, including effects to relations with family and friends, and will also note the variety of other implications of apostasy for individual lives. A discussion of how these findings are a reflection of other literature and how many findings were unanticipated will conclude the section on consequences. Finally, a general discussion and conclusion will summarize the findings in this research, review shortcomings and difficulties, and provide potential questions and avenues for further research.

Aperçu of the Apostates

As noted previously, all the participants in this study were born in Utah, with the exception of one woman who moved to the state decades ago as a result of her marriage and conversion into the LDS Church. The respondents resided in variety of locations around the state, ranging from little towns in the far southern regions, to the larger metropolitan areas nearer to the Salt Lake Valley, and as far north as the Idaho border. A total of two individuals were converts to the church as adults; the rest were born into LDS families. All former LDS adherents who participated in this research also left the church while residents of Utah, save for one who lived near the state border and worked in Utah. Unsurprisingly, all respondents were Caucasian, a reflection of Utah's mostly white racial profile (Zick and Smith 2006).

These two characteristics—region and race—however, is where the demographic commonality ends. Twelve of the respondents were male, the remaining nine, female. Ages ranged from an 18-year-old college student to an 84-year-old grandmother. The majority of individuals were in their thirtiess but there was at least one representative for each of the established age categories. Educational attainment was varied. At least two individuals had received high school diplomas and three had received their doctorate or equivalent. The rest were a blend of those with some college attendance (5), bachelor's degrees (6), and master's degrees (5).

I include the various career choices of these individuals to demonstrate the varied nature of the sample and to illustrate that there is no "one kind" of person who leaves a religious group, and those apostates represent a wide range of occupational fields. Among the 21 individuals that spoke with me a few practiced law; others worked in the medical

field; one was a physical therapist; and one a waiter. Two were undergraduate college students (one student worked at a production theater while in school), two were graduate students. One person worked in agriculture, another worked for a university, while yet another worked in the technology sector. One older man was retired from the public school system, and another individual had previously considered herself to be a stay-at-home mother. Also represented in this sample were two individuals who worked for small companies; an unemployed person; and a gym instructor. Finally, one of the apostates was an elected official, and one did not disclose her employment status. For the sake of maintaining individual confidentiality, the more specific vocations for each of the people involved will not be attributed to the individuals to reduce the likelihood that any information shared in this research could lead to their individual identification (i.e.: what *kind* of elected official I spoke with will not be disclosed). I also used pseudonyms in place of actual names to help protect the identity of those who contributed to this research.

As outlined in table one on the following page not all of those who participated in this study formally resigned from the church, many simply do not claim identification as LDS. The column labeled “Family Left” indicates whether the individual left the church alone or with other family members. The “Year Left” column indicates the approximate year that the individual either resigned formally or stopped identifying as LDS. Included in the table are the pseudonyms used for the participants, a very basic description of their vocations, the number in which they were interviewed, their respective ages and a listing of their education level, identified with numerical codes. The final column indicates whether the individual formally resigned from the church or not.

Table 1. Respondent demographics

#	Pseudonym	Gender	Age	School	Vocation	Family Left?	Year Left	Resigned?
1	Jocelyn	F	33	3	College Student	Y	1989	No
2	Christian	M	38	4	Gym Instructor	Y	1986	No
3	Sandra	F	52	2	Undisclosed	N/A	2003	Yes
4	Vaughn	M	61	6	Elected Official	Y	2005	No
5	Doug	M	26	2	Waiter	Y	2003	No
6	Gordon	M	42	4	Physical Therapist	Y	2004	Yes
7	Donk	M	32	5	Graduate Student	N	1999	No
8	Karol	F	84	4	Grandmother	Y	2007	No
9	Jackson	M	57	4	Agriculture	Y	2007	Yes
10	Stewart	M	22	3	College Student	Y	2004	Yes
11	Lydia	F	55	5	Medical Field	Y	2007	Yes
12	Susan	F	18	3	College Student	Y	2008	No
13	Anna	F	32	4	Technology	N	2007	Yes
14	Stacey	F	39	3	Real estate	Y	2009	No
15	Sean	M	39	4	Small Business	Y	2009	No
16	Michael	M	37	6	Law	Y	2007	No
17	Ronald	M	72	5	Retired Educator	Y	1979	No
18	Maxine	F	50	5	University employee	N	1980	No
19	David	M	48	5	Unememployed	Y	2008	Yes
20	Craig	M	29	6	Graduate Student	Y	2004	Yes
21	Sylvia	F	54	3	House Wife	N	2007	Yes

Key: 1= Less than high school, 2= High school diploma, 3= Some college, 4= Bachelor's degree, 5= Masters, 6= Phd, JD

Religious Identification

The majority of the respondents (15) indicated that they had been heavily involved with the church before making the decision to leave. Most expressed that this involvement began in childhood and continued up until the first inclination to reevaluate their religious affiliation emerged. Sylvia, a former stay-at-home mother, described her participation in the church this way:

> I was just raised very LDS and I got married in the temple and served all my years in mostly presidency positions—from the time I was 17 I was Laurel president, Primary President, I was Young Women's President, and Relief Society President and then in the capacity of Home Making Leader, and Relief Society instructor and things like that. I never, ever, doubted the church. I always knew it was true.

David, a 48-year-old man, also held various positions in the church, was active throughout his life, and was a teacher for one of the church's Sunday school classes shortly before resigning:

> I served a mission, I was born and raised in the church, born in the covenant…I served a mission to Taiwan when I was 19 until 21…I came home got married in the temple…I've been Elders Quorum president; I have been Gospel Doctrine teacher; I have been, um, I was teacher in High Priest group when I left the church. So pretty heavily involved. I was actively going to the temple once a month up until about two years before I left; before I resigned.

Virtually all of the 15 respondents who had been identified as having high levels of religiosity prior to leaving the church indicated that they attended church every week and held various positions in the church ranging from involvement in youth groups to being presidents of the adult councils and societies. The majority participated in extracurricular activities during the week and all but two participants who were converts had families, parents, spouses and children who were heavily involved in the church as well. In a few cases family members of the participants held positions of authority in the church so high

ranking and easily identifiable that the participants asked that the exact positions not be revealed in order to maintain confidentiality for both themselves and the family member. Sylvia offered one brief example of this kind of heavy family church involvement when she said:

> I was born in the covenant, five generations of Mormon on my mother's side. As far back as I can remember we were a very religious family. My father was a member of the Mormon Tabernacle Choir, we attended church every week. My brother…he's a temple sealer and another is in the Stake Presidency, and you know, all my brothers served missions. I just grew up in a very, very strong LDS home.

Because of what appears to be relatively high levels of religiosity that the majority of these former adherents maintained throughout their lives, the first notable and surprising discovery in this research was the participants' lack of religious affiliation. Of the 21 participants not one identified with an organized religion at the time of their interview. Two did profess a specific belief in God, more specifically, a Christian God. One respondent, Sandra, shared her experience of becoming a Born Again Christian after leaving the LDS Church:

> Actually, I do not follow a religion. I am a Born Again Christian and the difference between religions and someone who is Born Again is that being a Born Again Christian is all about a personal relationship with God, whereas religions are manmade and are more formal kinds of things. I left Mormonism behind but um, that was the turning point in to my being Born Again Christian. And as I started reading the Bible more and more, because I had all those confusing ideas of who Jesus was, I simply gave up all preconceived ideas of who Jesus was and I said, 'Jesus, I don't know who you are, but please, show me who you really are, I am to follow only you now.'

Even though her conversion was not to any specific organized religion, Sandra was the only person who participated in this study that indicated some level of conversion to another faith. The rest did not indicate similar experiences. Rather, the rest indicated little

to no interest in organized religion of any kind. “Jocelyn,” one of the undergraduate college students described her religious affiliation this way:

> I don’t identify with any religion right now. I pretty much look at it as though if I can go to bed knowing that I haven’t hurt anybody, or done the best that I can do then that is pretty much all I need to worry about. I try not to cause more harm than is already out there. And that’s pretty much what I try to live by.

Some respondents expressed the sentiment that some level of spirituality was of greater consequence in their lives than involvement in organized religion. Others shared the view that organized religion was simply an obstacle to be overcome. David stated, “Religion plays a part in my life from the standpoint of trying to cope with the family that’s still involved in it—that’s it. I don’t; I’m not active in any religion, have no interest in any religion.” This finding reflects a shift in religious affiliation in the United States with an increasing number of people becoming “nones,” (those with no formal religious affiliation) a trend that has been noted by scholars (Kosmin and Keysar 2009; Putnam and Campbell 2010).

While the changes in religious affiliation that occur after leaving ones religion is of note, many other changes took place in the lives of respondents after leaving the LDS church, and there were many reasons that each individual had for leaving. Now that I have established a more complete profile of my respondents, I turn to the specific reasons why these respondents chose to leave a church that so many of them were so heavily involved with.

Antecedents of Apostasy

Unlike the respondent’s religious affiliation, the causes and consequences of leaving the LDS Church were not so clearly defined or limited. In fact, I identified 14

individual reasons for leaving. Of those reasons, I classify seven of them as intellectual reasons for leaving the church and they are split between two broad categories: *historical/scientific* and *human rights* (see table 2). The remaining reasons for leaving I list in order of the highest quantity of responses coded, which interestingly enough also coincided with the general categories that I was able to identify. Following intellectual reasons for leaving the church, the next most commonly mentioned motives are *spiritual experiences* and *doubt*, which fall within the *spiritual concerns* category under the "all other" heading. The remaining codes, which have been mentioned less frequently all fall under the final category: *church practices*. These I have also listed in order of the number of references made within the interviews. They are: *financial practices, hypocrisy, rules, temples*, and *doctrines.*

Table 2. Causes of Apostasy

Intellectual	
Historical / Scientific	Human Rights
Polygamy	Racism
Book of Abraham	Gay Rights
Archeology	Women's Roles
DNA	

All Other	
Spiritual Concerns	Church Practices
Spiritual Experiences	Financial Practices
Doubts	Hypocrisy
	Rules
	Temples
	Doctrines

In the following discussion of the motifs of apostasy I first review the intellectual reasons for leaving the church, covering the themes within two of the most commonly identified categories for leaving the church: *historical/scientific* and *human rights*. I then review the remaining ten inducements for apostasy and connect these themes and categories to the relevant literature.

Intellectual. Before reviewing these reasons, there is one caveat to be made here. Although the expressed logical and empirical reasoning for leaving as given by the interviewees can be considered intellectual justifications for forsaking the LDS Church, these reasons do not necessarily negate the influence of emotional responses and reactions that take part in a decision to leave a religion. What is unclear is the relationship between strict cognitive rationing and emotional reactions to stimuli. In addition, the term "intellectual" can also be difficult to operationalize. What does it mean to have intellectual reasons for deciding anything? Do these reasons need to be supported by academic sources? Does the decision need to be made in an emotional vacuum? Because these questions are difficult to answer it seems sufficient at this point to take the responses in these interviews at face value, to assume that the expressed reasons are in fact the actual reasons respondents had when deciding to leave the church. Ultimately I defined a reason as being intellectual if the respondent indicated that their conclusions could be generally considered a rational decision based on empirical evidence or logic.

With these difficulties in mind, I categorized the intellectual reasons for leaving the church based on one assumption: the notion that all the items in the intellectual category are in some way shaped by perceived or real empirical evidences that the respondents felt do not reflect authenticity in church history or are not supported by

science. I specify that the empirical evidences may be real or perceived because the nature of LDS Church history and archeological evidences—as with other religions—is a matter of continued debate. Some respondents referred to events in church history that they had read about in books written by historians of various stripes. Others referred to pieces of history that may not be corroborated, or are simply inaccurate. However, it is not the purpose of this thesis to determine the validity of the rationale that individuals relied upon when leaving the LDS Church. I will make no assumptions about the reliability of their empirical claims, nor do I speculate about their historical accuracy. This research only seeks to communicate that the motives for leaving are seen by the respondents as very real and legitimate grounds for relinquishing their religious faith. Being that many reasons for leaving appear to be grounded in these real or perceived empirical contexts I feel comfortable in stating that these interviewees who left the LDS Church did so (at least in part) because of intellectual reasons, as every respondent in this study identified at least one intellectual reason for leaving.

The intellectual reasons identified in this research were broken down into two main categories: *historical/scientific* and *human rights*. The *historical/scientific* category revolves around what was viewed by respondents as ignored or forgotten elements of church history, and contemporary scientific findings that do not seem to support the historical validity of the Book of Mormon, contrary to church claims.

This category contains reasons given by the respondents that either refers to certain elements of church history (such as the feeling that aspects of church history is often ignored by both the lay membership and the hierarchy) and to events in church history that the respondents found to be disconcerting (such as polygamy in the early

church). The scientific component consists of the respondents' indications that various scientific discoveries about Book of Mormon historicity, such as DNA evidence, led them to lose faith in the church.

Many respondents—before listing the specific reasons they left the church—would rattle off a list of books or sources that they had read which contributed to their loss of faith and subsequent apostasy to help legitimize their intellectual reasons for leaving. It is interesting to note the degree to which some focused on reading about different aspects of church history before coming to the conclusion that they could no longer believe, and therefore needed to leave the church. Michael, a father in his thirties related his experience this way:

> I read all of the Quinn books, and I just remember those because they were kind of a slog. I read *No Man Knows My History*, I read *Losing a Lost Tribe*, I read *By His Own Hand*, I read *In Sacred Loneliness*, I read uh—what's his mom's name—Lucy Mack Smith's biography of her son, the unedited version. Um, I read the Spaulding, the main book, espousing the Spauldon/Rigdon theory of the Book of Mormon authorship. I think it is really called *Who Really Wrote the Book of Mormon* or something. It's kind of a cheesy title. I read *God is Not Great*, I read *The God Delusion*, I read a biography of Einstein and a book on String Theory that's called *The Elegant Universe*, I think. I am trying to look on my book shelf and remember…

Susan, a college student, and the youngest in my sample, also relayed her experience of exploring church history:

> I ran into—it was an online forum and there was a thread called FAQ about Mormonism. And my first thought was 'I'm Mormon, I can answer questions, I know this.' And it turned out that I didn't. There was a guy there who was discussing temple marriage, and just faking the interviews and doing it for his wife and all that jazz. And I said something really intelligent like 'you can't do that, the bishop will catch you.' And I am pretty sure he told me to F-off and come back when I grew up. That really frustrated me so I started doing research. I started learning and reading and I sent him a few private messages and he was kind and patient enough to say 'look at this, look at that.' And as I did things kept getting more and more concerning. I read *No Man Knows My History* when I was

> 16. I read, shoot what is it…the *Wives of Joseph Smith*. Don't remember the exact title. But that one, it talks about all his wives. I read *Rough Stone Rolling* a year or so later when it came out. Yeah, long book. I could have spent my time on better things [chuckles].

However, not every person I interviewed approached their scientific reasons for leaving in such an academic way. The reasons for leaving the church were not necessarily the result of an intentional review of historical or academic books and literature. In many cases the information gathered was learned in a haphazard fashion. Some respondents simply cited pieces of information that they had learned via hearsay from other people, bits and pieces gleaned from the internet, or even videos created by evangelical Christians. Regardless of the source of the information, or the intentionality behind gathering this information, many of the reasons for leaving overlapped. In the following section I will address each individual theme by starting with reasons that were identified by the largest number of respondents as either the most important reason or an important secondary reason for leaving.

As noted, every respondent in this study listed at least one historical or scientific reason for leaving the church, more than any other category of reasons. Furthermore, the *historical/scientific* reasons were also referred to most commonly when the respondents were asked to identify the most significant reason for leaving. In the historical/scientific category I found four particular themes that were repeated numerous times throughout all of the interviews that were conducted. These were *polygamy*, *The Book of Abraham*, *archeology*, and *DNA*.

The first and most commonly mentioned item were the polygamous practices in the early church, especially in relation to the church's founder Joseph Smith. Of the 21

interviews that were conducted, 13 individuals mentioned polygamy in the early church as one reason of many for leaving. For many of the respondents, the polygamous wives of Joseph Smith were not a topic of discussion at church. Part of the angst that many felt about the polygamous wives of Joseph Smith was the lack of knowledge they felt they had about this aspect of church history. While it is common knowledge that polygamy was practiced in the early church, many did not feel that they had been given full knowledge about the extent to which it was practiced, especially by their church's founder.

For some acquiring this new information the concern was that the polygamy did not appear to be practiced in the way that the church had characterized. Sylvia described that learning about Joseph Smith's polygamous wives—and learning that some of the polygamous wives were already married to other men at the time of their marriage to Smith—bothered her to the point of leaving the church:

> Well, I'd always been in the [women's society] presidencies and been in the background and read a lot and knew a lot just from my own family studies about the church; but while I was in the Relief Society presidency I started to study the history of the church a little bit more closely as I was doing the instruction. I also began—it was just that time in my life, my kids were grown and older and it was that time in my life where I had the chance to start doing my genealogy. One night as I was working on my genealogy I found that kinda through a back door I was related to Joseph Smith. So I began an intense study of him personally and as I got on the genealogical site—I, you know—had read that he had other wives and I thought that they were after he died, they were posthumously sealed to him and found out that he had been married to women when Emma was still alive. Which was not a problem for me, that was something I would easily accept, I'd never been taught it in church, we never really discussed things like that in church, we didn't—polygamy is a subject they generally avoid. But when I went through his wives, the first one I noticed was Zina Diana Huntington and I thought 'oh I will look at her' and I started to investigate her and I noticed that she had been married to someone else, and I thought 'well, this is a widow, one of the widows that he married.' And then as I looked closer, her husband did not have a death date, and that caused me to start to study the polyandry which Joseph Smith lived and I

> found it to be doctrinally unsubstantiated. Also, when I read in the Doctrine and Covenants 132 and it talked about Joseph Smith marrying virgins, well about anyone marrying virgins and how that was allowed, I realized that a woman who was already married was not a virgin. So then that began my doubts about the church and it was not two weeks after I began that search, I studied all night and all day and I took things from the internet, all from Mormon history, nothing from the Ex-Mormon foundation, or anything from anyone Ex-Mormon, and it took me two weeks from the time that I began to study to realize that there were some serious flaws in the church and that indeed I could not believe it anymore.

For others, their concerns with the polygamous practices revolved around the perception that the church was deliberately "white-washing" the information from church history. Of these individuals there was the feeling that if they hadn't happened upon the information serendipitously they might not ever have known. This led to feelings of betrayal since many felt as though the church was being dishonest by not being upfront about the history, and not discussing it in detail. "Lydia," another woman in her fifties stated that:

> It was like I made a mistake, I joined the church sort of under false pretenses. All of the icky stuff, some of the history had been totally ignored. It wasn't taught, I wasn't really aware that things hadn't been taught such as you know the polygamy, polyandry, all of that. And it continued to not be taught.

For others, the polygamous relations were simply seen as a practice that should never have occurred, or did not have sufficient doctrinal justification. For these individuals, polygamy was described as "as a way that Joseph Smith could get more sex and not be committing adultery" (Donk Interview 2010).

Clearly polygamy in the early church was an important reason for many when making the decision to leave the LDS church. However, this reason was usually not the only motivating factor when deciding to leave. In the *historical/scientific* category under the intellectual heading three additional themes were identified. The three remaining

themes that were most commonly referenced as reasons for leaving were: the *Book of Abraham*, Book of Mormon *archeology*, and *DNA* evidence. While the first reason—polygamy—was a part of the founding of the modern church, these latter three more directly point to issues concerning the authenticity of the Book of Mormon as an ancient and historical record of a native people on the American Continent. Of these three, the Book of Abraham was mentioned most commonly.

The *Book of Abraham* is a part of LDS scripture included in a section of the Book of Mormon known as the Pearl of Great Price and is one of the church's primary texts, and a foundation for doctrinal beliefs. Stewart, in describing his particular issue with the book, offers this explanation of the problems he sees as inherent in the Book of Abraham:

> I guess long story short, Joseph Smith came into possession of several ancient Egyptian papyri while he was with the church in Kirtland, Ohio. A traveling salesman named Michael Chandler came by and sold the LDS Church some papyri and some mummies. And Joseph Smith claimed that these papyri—which proved to be just pretty basic funerary texts from the Book of Breathings—he claimed that these were the writings of Joseph in Egypt and Abraham. Most accurately just Abraham. There was a Book of Joseph that was in the scrolls but the LDS Church hasn't translated that yet. These scrolls were supposedly the writing of Abraham written by his own hand on papyrus. Smith would be able to get away with that in the 1830's because we did not yet have a robust understanding of Egyptology and the Egyptian language. But, we do now and we have since found the very scrolls that Smith used for the Book of Abraham that we thought were once destroyed in the Chicago fire, and we can compare our current egyptological translations of those papyri with his translation and they just don't cohere at all. So that's the problem. Our understanding of those scrolls, our translations, don't mention Abraham once in the papyri. It's not about Abraham's doings in Egypt and his relationship with God. Really the scrolls were just something that were just kept in an Egyptian's tomb to give him blessings for the afterlife. That's it, that's the problem. It is canonized scripture as the writings of Abraham when science has now clearly told us that is not the case.

Again, Stewart was not alone in his sentiment that the translation of the Book of Abraham by Joseph Smith was void of historical validity. Anna, a woman in her thirties

who works in the technology sector, stated "at that point I had also read about the Book of Abraham and how it had been transcribed by current Egyptologists, they don't match. They're not even close. We can see what this is and it doesn't match."

The truth claims and the perceived lack of supporting evidence for such truth claims were also confounding issues for people who grappled with concerns about *archeological* evidence. Ronald stated that the dearth of archeological evidence was what led him to determine that the church was not true:

> I think that there are two basic lenses that people look at as they view the church. One is the more rational/intellectual kinds of things, the history, the doctrine and so on. The other is the social/cultural aspects of the church. And for me initially it was the Book of Mormon. I was a history major, I didn't have a real good background in the pre-Columbian history of Mexico, Central or South America but I had enough that I never could jive the history of those regions with the Book of Mormon…So, I would say the Book of Mormon was the most significant thing. I finally came to the conclusion that whoever wrote the Book of Mormon really was describing what they understood about early American history. They essentially were trying to describe what they knew of the native people that lived in upstate New York. One of the conclusions that I reached was whoever wrote it was relying more upon the lore and mythology of the mountain builder civilization than the civilizations of Mexico and Central and South America.

Later in the interview Ronald related:

> Have you ever heard of Thomas Stewart Ferguson? Thomas Stewart Ferguson back in the 50's and 60's was a wealthy attorney in Southern California, an amateur archeologist and he was absolutely convinced that if we went down and started digging in the dirt in Central Mexico, Central America, we would find proof of the Book of Mormon. So he persuaded David O. McKay to come up with a little bit of money and start doing this, and the thing that they organized was the—it still exists—anyway it was an archeological thing that BYU finally took over. But after 10 years or so of digging in the dirt down there he wrote a book titled *One Fold, One Shepherd*. Thomas Stewart Ferguson decided it was all bologna; that there was no evidence in the dirt, that we would never find any archeological evidence of the Book of Mormon. But, he said 'it's a great organization' and the word he uses 'it's a good fraternity.' So he never left the church, he stayed active in the church, but he no longer believed in the Book of Mormon.

New discoveries about DNA evidence was the final reason that had been mentioned by respondents more than once during the course of interviews, although DNA evidence was mentioned almost more as an afterthought, rather than a particularly significant contribution towards apostasy, such as in this quote from Gordon when he stated:

> One of [the reasons I had for leaving] was DNA, that Native Americans came out of Siberia and Asia 14,000 years ago and that the actual church, the apologist of the church actually came out and agreed with this and had on their website a theory behind that, they called it a "Limited Geography Theory," being that the Lamanites lived amongst the Native Americans, but that's not what I was taught especially with my Primary songs that I learned.

Although DNA evidences were not the most commonly mentioned reason for deciding to leave the church, the DNA issue is simply one additional theme that supports and lends credence to the idea that individuals leave the church for a variety of intellectual reasons, many of which are based on church history and recent scientific findings relating to church history. But again, these intellectual reasons do not stand in isolation and are usually combined with a variety of other rationale including various issues concerning basic human rights.

The next general category that was the most heavily referenced was the *basic human rights* category. Similar to the *historical/scientific* category, the three issues grouped together in this category represent ideas that run along a similar vein. These are: *racism*, *gay rights*, and *women's roles*. These reasons for leaving consisted of discontent with historical and contemporary attitudes and treatment towards blacks, concern over the treatment of homosexuals and the church's involvement in delegitimizing gay marriage, along with disagreement with the church concerning women's roles and status. All but

three interviewees mentioned at least one, often more than one, of these issues as a contributing factor to their apostasy, and concern with racism in the church was a dominant theme.

The second most commonly mentioned issue for apostates behind references to polygamy was perceived levels of *racism* in LDS Church history, evident as recent as the late 1970's. Stewart, an undergraduate student in one Utah university, was one such respondent. In fact, his primary reason for leaving the church was the writings of a church leader:

> I remembered that my family had that [book] in their personal library—I can't remember what Mormon book it was but, in reading this one ex-Mormon book I saw this book a lot and so I was like well, we have it, why don't I check out the book and make sure they aren't taking quotes out of context and stuff? So, I began thumbing through Bruce R. McConkie's *Mormon Doctrine* and came upon a chapter titled the Negro, I think it just says Negros, because it is kind of structured as a dictionary where you look up terms and he'll tell you the doctrines relating to that topic. So I turned to a chapter called Negros and I was, and yeah, what I read horrified me, absolutely horrified me. Bruce R. McConkie as you may well know, he wrote that the Negros are not equal with other races, where the receipt of certain spiritual blessings are concerned. And of course he was alluding to the fact that before 1978 blacks weren't entitled to the Priesthood, they were barred from entering the Priesthood and of course they were barred from almost any church position. I knew that to be the case, that they weren't allowed to have the Priesthood before 1978, I am sure a lot of Mormons did. What I didn't know though was like the doctrines and the teachings that under-girded that policy. That's what upset me. I mean he goes on to talk about how interracial marriages are wrong and that segregation is a divine principle inspired of God and it just really profoundly upset me.

Other respondents also noted an equal discomfort with perceived racism in the church. Doug, also a younger individual, stated:

> I don't want to call it racism in the Mormon Church but—how for years African Americans, Blacks, anybody of a dark color were allowed to be members of the church but the men were not allowed to carry the Priesthood or have places of authority within the church. You had to be white. And that changed in the 70's. If you look into that the reasoning why, the church will explain that the reason they

> did that was that there was still so much racism and negative connotations towards blacks if you will. They felt as if it was not in the church's best interest as far as public relations to have black people in charge or have power in the church, until the racism issue had cooled down, and I find a huge contradiction in that. It seems like a noble thing for the church to do is accept them as people and let them have a position rather than wait for the time to be ok because of how the church would look. A lot of little things like that.

Ronald shared an experience from his mission:

> As a missionary I was always bothered by the—as I said I was on a mission in the 50's—and I was always bothered by the church doctrine regarding blacks. I met some very fine black people and our instructions back at that time if we were out tracting[4] and we met a black family was to tell them that we're ministers calling on people in the neighborhood, and we encourage you to attend the church of your choice this Sunday. So, there was no effort to try and teach them anything, or bring them into the church at that time. That always bothered me. Uh, and that in a way also tied in with the Book of Mormon. I had a hard time believing that the Native Americans were cursed people, had a skin that was colored because of the wickedness of their forbearers. So those kinds of things were difficult for me.

Still others listed racism in the church's history as one of several areas that they disliked, almost as a laundry list of reasons for leaving. Sean, a man in his late thirties, itemized several reasons:

> I mentioned a few of them, little pieces of history, the idea that most people in the world who aren't LDS consider the LDS Church to be a cult. Um, their stances on various subjects, homosexuality, the whole African Americans not being able to hold the Priesthood thing. Their stance on equal rights for women in the 70's.

In conjunction with the idea that the black population had been discriminated against in church history is the idea that another minority population—those with homosexual orientations—are facing similar issues of discrimination and mistreatment in the modern church, a theme that was hinted at in the comment made above by Sean.

The issues surrounding homosexuality have been a hot topic in Utah and around

---

[4] Tracting is a term commonly used in LDS vernacular as a verb to describe the missionary experience of going door to door distributing information in pamphlet or flier form with information about the church. The word tracting is likely taken from the term "tract," defined as "a pamphlet of political or religious ideas and beliefs."

the country for the last several decades. Between the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" legislation of the 1990's and the more recent amendments to state constitutions' pronouncing marriage as legal only between one man and one woman, some apostates from the LDS Church have come to see this as a salient reason for abandoning their faith, a theme that I coded *gay rights*. Of the respondents who referred to homosexuality or gay rights as one of their reasons for leaving many specifically referred to California's Proposition 8 (2008) which codified marriage as lawful only between one man and one woman. This was problematic for some respondents because of what they saw as the LDS Church's involvement with the passage of the proposition. In the interviews participants noted the inherent conflict between the church's avowed political neutrality and its encouragement for members to donate time and money to campaigns that helped pass the legislation. Anna was one such respondent:

> Then all of the other things that fell under that with Proposition 8, homosexuality—I think anyone should have the right to be married and be happy. I have a really hard time with that. A friend at one point said 'how do you reconcile your view of that and the church' and I was like 'I don't. They don't reconcile, and I don't know how to make them reconcile.' And then with the church pouring all the money into proposition 8 to get it to pass in California—I thought the church didn't get involved in political issues and now here they are pushing this, and pushing members to donate extra money on top of what they are already giving in tithing and stuff. It just blew my mind.

Another was Sean, who indicated clear frustration with the church's involvement in the matter:

> Actually, it is probably something that I haven't mentioned up until now. The whole proposition 8 disaster was probably, if I had to identify a last straw, that was probably it…You are supposed to sustain the leadership, but the way that whole thing happened, I felt was incredibly wrong…I disagree with their policy in regards to homosexuality and so that one was, that one really ramped up my cognitive dissonance because I could not, I couldn't reconcile the idea that I am supposed to sustain the leadership and the idea that they had done all of this

> horrible stuff in California. So that was kind of the point where I completely disconnected mentally and was just going through the motions.

The issue of homosexuality was not only limited to Prop 8 in California. General treatment of the gay community was also a consideration for many and often seen as a civil rights issue. Vaughn, an elected official in his sixties, noted how close to home this particular issue was for him:

> I think the thing that eventually got me questioning the most was, as I indicated, my son came out to us that he was gay, and not really at that point did I question but as I kind of started to observe as to how he was treated after he came out—observing and hearing people talk in church and in open meetings about their own impressions and feelings I guess, beliefs about gays and really, the church not really coming out with, at that time, an official word as you know, 'this is the way it should be handled or shouldn't be handled'…I think the church's attitude to this point is ignore it and hopefully it will go away. It didn't happen with, uh, back in the 70's when they finally gave the blacks the Priesthood—again based on the tide of public opinion. I think eventually they will probably change their position on this. I think they are way too involved in the states' politics and the legislature that comes out, it carries too much influence on that, which is reflected on the laws that we have and the approach on how we address this issue. You know they couldn't even get these common ground initiatives this past year to even be heard let alone to be voted on.

Gay rights and treatment towards members of the gay community was also reflected in the feelings about *women's roles* and women's rights. The biggest sticking point seemed to be the idea that women should be relegated to the home—cooking, cleaning, and otherwise raising children. Several of the women, and even some men that I spoke to considered the way the church viewed and promoted women as stay at home mothers to be another important reason for leaving the church. In Anna's case it was these types of human rights issues, and specifically the feeling that women were valued less than men, that were the most important reasons behind her decision:

> I think from the time I entered the Young Women's program I was frustrated with some of the things that they did with the Young Women activities, and how the

> boy's activities always seemed so much cooler than what the girls got to do. And that continued to be—you know—the homemaking activities were like crafts and that women were supposed to—their job was to be in the home and men were supposed to work. I had gone to school and I had gotten a degree and a career—I am [in the technology sector], and I really like it. I like to have that independence and feel like I am taking care of myself. And so, that was really hard to hear in church every week that we are supposed to be having families and I should be at home. Even in the family and marriage course there was a blurb about [when] a woman continues to work after she's married…they are bringing home their separate stresses and just basically saying by her working she's contributing to pulling the marriage apart…and it wasn't even talking about [after having] kids. And um, Julie B. Beck a few years back that I just feel was—I had to leave the room, I was frustrated by all the stuff she was saying.[5]

Other women noted that they weren't cut out to be stay at home mothers, or that being a stay at home mother was not necessary to raise children and have a fulfilling family life. "Maxine," a woman in her fifties, who works in the medical field noted that "I was never meant to be a controlled stay at home wife, never. And that's kinda the way it feels to me. Most of my friends who are Mormon you know their husband makes the major decisions. No. That's not who I am. A little bit of a rebel, too much of a rebel." Stacey, a mother in her thirties, shared a similar opinion:

> I had been working since I was 14 and didn't want to give that up and people had a hard time with the fact that we only had two kids. That was a big issue with everybody around me for some reason. The fact that I wanted to keep working and I didn't want to—I think when my kids were really little, before they were in school, but as soon as they were both in school there's no reason for me to stay home and clean six hours a day. So, anyway, that's how I felt about it.

For the men it was the pressures they saw on women to conform to a certain standard, that of the stay at home wife. There was also the perception that women's rights

---

[5] The sentiment towards women's roles is encapsulated in a talk given at the church's General Conference by Julie B. Beck, the former General President of the Relief Society (the women's group) in the LDS Church in 2007. In her talk she states "Mothers who know are nurturers. This is their special assignment and role under the plan of happiness. To nurture means to cultivate, care for, and make grow. Therefore, mothers who know create a climate for spiritual and temporal growth in their homes. Another word for *nurturing* is *homemaking.* Homemaking includes cooking, washing clothes and dishes, and keeping an orderly home (Beck 2007) [Emphasis in original].

had been, and were being denied. In one case specifically, the responded alluded to the failure of the Equal Rights Amendment in the 1970's and the church's position that the ERA should not be passed. Men who mentioned the role of women in the church made comments such as: "I mean, I had issues with the culture, and especially the role of women—and I wanted my girls to see the whole horizon and not just one little narrow set of it" (Michael Interview 2010). And: "Anyway, I think the historical problems that really bothered me were the denial of basic human rights: blacks, women, gays especially and polygamy" (Donk Interview 2010).

The complexity of reasons for leaving one's church stretches beyond basic human rights, history or even science. As noted in previous literature (Bahr and Albrecht 1989) belief in a particular faith is critical to maintaining affiliation, a theme included under the *all other* heading, which I now turn to.

All Other Reasons. The remaining reasons given for leaving the church I placed underneath the *all other* heading, that is, these themes do not fall under the intellectual heading. The all other heading is subdivided into two categories: *doubts*, which members sometimes expressed as contributors to their final decision to leave the church and *church practices*, which covers the various church activities and practices that apostates found to be unconscionable or otherwise undesirable.

The themes which emerged within the *doubts* category were the members noted lack of belief or doubts in the truthfulness of the church, and spiritual experiences. About half (11) of those interviewed noted such lack of belief or doubts. Slightly more frequently (in 13 interviews) were the references to *spiritual experiences* that the member had—or did not have—that contributed to the end of their affiliation. I mention these two

themes together in part because more than half of all mentions of disbelief in an interview were paired with mentions of a spiritual experience. One reason that doubt coincided with spiritual experiences is that lack of belief in the church was sometimes attributed to the absence of a spiritual experience that would have otherwise assured the individual that their belief practices were correct.

Here a "spiritual experience" may be anything ranging from a dream, to the receipt of a spiritual "blessing" that is purportedly the result of proper obeisance to a higher-power. The spiritual experience theme may also be the *lack* of a spiritual experience, the feeling that spiritual witnesses should have been received, but were not, or that some other spiritual blessing should have been manifest, but was not. The types of spiritual experiences that former adherents found to be lacking included a lack of confirmation or witness that "the church is true." Some were financial in nature, such the inability to find a job in a difficult economic atmosphere, regardless of the adherent's engagement in specific church related activities such as paying tithing and attending temple ceremonies. According to Stacey, "nothing ever seemed normal about it, nothing seemed to fit all the wonderful promises that were made, I never had the revelations, any of that stuff." Others also felt as though if they lived their lives according to the dictates of the Church that certain spiritual blessings should have more or less been guaranteed:

> The thing that really started me on my way out would have to be the fact that I had been through some serious financial difficulties for several years I had lost a very high paying job and had never been able to get another one. We lost our home we'd gone through bankruptcy, and during that time I was a more than full-tithe payer, and all of these "blessings" we were supposed to be getting weren't materializing (David Interview 2010).

Other interviewees encountered the other end of the spiritual experience spectrum. Instead of awaiting spiritual blessings or promises to be fulfilled, they had a spiritual experience that actually led them to believe that their prior commitment to the church was incorrect. These experiences were less frequent mentioned than the reported lack of spiritual experiences. Most frequently spiritual experiences took the form of a prayer answered with a feeling that continued affiliation with the church was not necessary. In at least one case dreams had the same implication for discontinued faith: "I've had this bizarre—and this is interesting because I normally do not tell people this kind of shit, just 'cuz I don't want them to think that I am weird or whatever. I have had probably about six or seven dreams that have later come true" (Doug Interview 2010). The dreams were interpreted as a sign that continued affiliation with the church was unnecessary because the respondent was led to believe that dreams signified the church's lack of truthfulness.

Truth claims were also important to those who either indicated a lack of belief or doubts in the church at some point during their lives. This group was also a little over half of the respondents. For most, the doubts, questioning and lack of faith began at a fairly early age: "you know, when I was 8, 9, 10 I was questioning…it wasn't until I was 22 that I was, that I had the courage or realized that it wasn't working for me. That I could leave" (Craig Interview 2010). For others, this lack belief seemed to be from the very beginning. In at least once instance the respondent (Stacey) noted that "I think in order to be an apostate you had to have had belief to begin with. If I hadn't been born into [the church] I wouldn't have touched it."

It is interesting to note that even though some individuals had serious doubts from a young age, most did not give up attempting to receive the spiritual blessings, revelations, or confirmations that would have affirmed their commitment to the church to be correct. Anna was one such individual:

> I tried my whole life to believe it, because that was what everyone around me was telling me was true and right. And even though I never felt like I had that strong witness of Joseph Smith, but everybody says well 'just believe it, if you don't have the witness, just keep believing, keep the faith, keep doing all of the things that you are supposed to be doing.' And eventually it all came together and I think I finally just realized it's not happening for me.

Sean also made it clear that a real effort was made on his part to receive a testimony before the decision was made to completely abandon his faith:

> I never got the ongoing learning that I was supposed to get—every time you go to the temple you are supposed to learn something new. I never got the massive injection of 'oh, the spirit is so strong when we go to the temple.' I never felt that, I just felt confused and conflicted when I went because I never learned anything, in spite of what I felt was a massive effort on my part every time I went. It's really 'OK, this time I am going to figure this out. This time I am really going to go with the spirit of learning and an open mind and all that stuff.' It always just seemed very strange, and very cultic and most of the time I just sat there thinking to myself 'is the Celestial Kingdom a tree house that we have to know the special secret password and handshake to get into it?' That always kind of bothered me.

It is important to note, as is indicated by this research, not all people leave a religious institution because of general disbelief as a child or unformed doubts as an adult. Rather, the reasons that have been mentioned previously—those referring to very specific historical/scientific reasons and human rights concerns seem to have a more important role. Those who stated that they doubted the validity of the church at some point in their life did not state that they left the church simply because of those doubts. Rather, the individual formed specific reasons—many of which were intellectual, as noted previously—before making their decision final.

The remaining themes that I identified in this research all fall under what best could be described as the *church practices* category. For those themes that fall under this category the church was seen as violating individual autonomy with the use of too many *rules*, and the church and its members were viewed as *hypocritical*. Other themes include discontent with practices in the *temple* and issues with church *doctrines*. This category encompasses the many ways that individuals felt as though the church and its members were in violation of a higher standard, and the different ways in which church practices were seen as unsavory or undesirable. This sense of the violation of a higher standard was found in the next theme that will be discussed, *financial practices*, the most frequently mentioned theme in this category. In this instance the church was viewed as an entity unconcerned with the spiritual growth and edification of its lay members, rather, interviewees stated that the prominent goal of the church appeared to be increased capital. This bothered many respondents who felt as though the church, if acting in the name of a higher celestial authority, should be almost exclusively focused on things of a spiritual nature.

For at least one grandmother, Karol, the eldest of all the respondents, church finances and its emphasis on tithe paying regardless of all other practices was the most significant reason for her to discontinue affiliation:

> The last straw, the absolute the last straw [laughs]. And I don't know, still don't know what prompted me to do it. I went in to get my temple recommend, March of 07. I went in and, this bishop was not new but a year or two old—fine, fine, man—I just thought 'oh man what a gift to this ward' and I thought 'this is going to be wonderful. He's just going to be super duper.' I went in there and I don't know why I was prompted to do this because I hadn't been drinking coffee, I had been working in the temple, hadn't had a drink of coffee for a long time, hadn't done any of the things I wasn't suppose to do. I was paying my full tithing. I was doing everything right down the line…So I go in there and we go through all the

> stuff and everything is fine. Finally at the last he said 'Do you have any questions for me?' And I said 'Yeah, I guess I do.' [Laughs]. He said 'What' I said 'Well I drink a lot of coffee.' Which I wasn't doing, I wasn't doing so I am lying. I'm sitting right there lying to the bishop. I said, 'I was raised in a family that came from England. We were a lot of tea drinkers. I like tea and I drink coffee every morning.' It was such a lie. He sat around in his chair for a minute and thought for a minute. He turned back; he said 'Well do you pay a full tithing?' I said 'Yes I do.' He said 'Oh well that shouldn't keep you out of the temple then.' That was my bolt of lightning [laughs]. I thought 'That's my whole answer right there. That's what I've been looking for.' And so I came home and when—[my son] calls every night to make sure I am home safe and in bed and all that stuff—I said 'Hey, guess what I discovered.' [Laughs]. He said 'What?' I said 'If you pay a full tithing you can do anything you want.'

For other respondents, church financial practices were simply another item on the laundry list of reasons they had for leaving. One person summed their feelings towards church practices this way:

> Another thing that bothered and continues to bother me about the operation of the church is the lack of transparency when it comes to financial donations to the organization. Of course the Mormon Church is not the only entity who enjoys the benefit of being tax-exempt, but I want to know how my donations are used. My active son told me that most church members would not be able to really understand the way funds are divvied out. I say, let me be the judge of that. I should have that option (Lydia Interview 2010).

Another respondent, Christian, stated that the church "very much seems like a money making operation."

The feeling that the church could be seen more as a financial institution than as a place for spiritual growth was the last code identified that had over half the respondents list it as one reason for leaving. The remaining four themes that were identified were found in less than half of the interviews. The following is a brief overview of each, the next most commonly mentioned reason being *hypocrisy*.

Some respondents mentioned that in at least some cases church members did not always live the lifestyle that they were "supposed" to. Generally speaking the code

hypocrisy often referenced the feeling that church members would "talk the talk, but not walk the walk." This type of hypocrisy included treatment of others, engagement in behavior contradictory to certain church dogmas (such as disregarding the Word of Wisdom, a health and wellness code), and extended to church members prevarications about these non-sanctioned practices. One example of this came from Maxine:

> You know the whole concept that only the people who are active in the church and go to the temple you know and, and do all these things are gonna make it to heaven, but then I always saw these same people who you know didn't always live their religion either, you just see so much, I don't know, people who aren't true to themselves and I struggle with that. I feel like I know many, many, Mormons who are really not true to themselves and that really was a huge thing that I questioned.

The idea of hypocrisy was not limited individual church members. The church as a whole was also found to be guilty of such hypocrisy. Stewart recounted how his feelings towards the church began to change as the result of the church's reactions to the war in Iraq, church involvement in the political campaigns surrounding Proposition 8, and the amendment to the Utah state constitution concerning gay marriage:

> A few things happened that kind of shook [my faith]. The Iraq war in 2003. I hated to see how well received it was in Utah…what kind of did it for me was 2004 during the Presidential campaign…I was upset that [the church] chose to abandon their political neutrality and endorse the Constitutional Amendment banning gay marriage. People always think that Prop 8 was the genesis of the church's anti-gay agenda but it just wasn't…Maybe looking back I was disturbed by it because, again, I was wrestling with my sexuality, but from what I remember I was just more upset that as a liberal Mormon that the church would come out and endorse this when they wouldn't talk about things like the Iraq war. If they were just completely neutral I might understand it, but nobody can tell me with a straight face that the gay marriage issue is a moral issue and that pre-emptive war is not.

The third theme identified that falls under the church practices category was *rules* or the idea of being a part of a "cookie cutter culture." For these individuals it seemed as

though the value of the individual took a back seat to conforming to the societal mores that were established by the church. Those who mentioned this as a point of concern indicated that the rules were simply too rigid or too nitpicky. Some referenced rules that they had to conform to on their mission, while others discussed more general practices and standards required of church members. One example of these concerns was a reference to restrictions on creativity and individuality. Lydia stated, "I think it was just that control issue, the rules were so strict that it seemed to sort of disallow any sort of creativity from the individual member. That there was this need for everybody to conform and be clones of one another is what it seemed like to me." Another example of this is a reference to rules and regulations as dictated by the church:

> The main obstacle in my life with the Mormon religion was the rules and the commandments and ordinances and the pressure that they put on the members to perform up to their standards. So, specifically I remember sitting in Relief Society and as I was listening to a Relief Society person, I remember thinking: 'This is just…I can't do this I cannot live up to these standards' (Sandra Interview 2010).

The fourth contributing theme to the church practices category was the reaction respondents had towards their experiences, or lack of experience, with the LDS temple. For some, their experiences inside of a LDS temple were confusing at best. For others the experience was uncomfortable and the good feelings and learning that had been promised didn't always materialize. For Anna it was the experience was particularly disconcerting:

> The temple was a big deal, I went through two weeks before I was married. I felt like they kind of ask you to sign your life away before you have a chance to read this fine print. It was—I didn't feel any good when I was there, I just felt stressed, uncomfortable, frustrated. All the things we had been taught our whole lives that Mormons didn't do they were doing, all the rituals that we thought 'oh that's what Catholics do Mormons don't do that' and uh, and then here I was in the middle of all of these crazy rituals that just seemed bizarre. I got out into the Celestial room and everyone was like 'how do you feel, how do you feel?' And I was like 'let's just go.' I was like emotionally done at that point and I just went home and I cried

> and I was so upset about it. The whole garment thing was just like, are you kidding me? These are awful. And, um, so yeah, I didn't really go back a lot after that first time. Maybe 10 times, at least. I just thought it was so unfair the way they ask you 'if anyone wants to leave, you can go now' but you don't know what you are getting into. They won't let you research it, they won't give you any information on what's going on. If you go out on the internet and read about it you are an awful terrible person. They make you feel guilty about it so, that was a big one. The whole, not being able to talk about things, questions, have any kind of open discussion on topics, was frustrating.

For others, the temple represented an unknown territory that eluded explanation—sometimes viewed as secretive and exclusive. Maxine stated:

> My family does love me and they try to always include me, but you know when somebody gets married in the temple its always weird my mom will say 'are you gonna come up to the temple?' And I'm like 'mom why would I come up to the temple? I'm just gonna have to sit there and wait 'til they come out.'

The final theme to fall under the church practices category, *doctrines*, was also the hardest to code. So many things mentioned by participants may have been construed as doctrinal issues. Because of the difficultly I faced in delineating the boundaries to this code I restricted the code to two elements. First, if a person *said* they had doctrinal issues, and used some variation of the word doctrine, I included it. Second, I decided that if the person had made mention of specific doctrinal or theological concerns in reference to one of the primary texts in Mormonism—namely the Book of Mormon or the Bible—I would include it. I limited this code in this way because the Church only considers something to be doctrinal if it appears in those core texts (Ash 2003). Notably, none of the respondents cited specific doctrinal issues stemming specifically from either set of scripture.

Because of the limited way I framed the code for doctrines there were fewer quotes included in this theme than might otherwise have been, but seven individuals did make reference of one kind or another to doctrinal concerns. Also, because of my chosen

operationalization, these references to doctrines were fairly vague. Even in cases where follow up questions were asked the respondents still mostly spoke in generalities. My conversation with Jocelyn went as follows:

> *Jocelyn*: I also didn't believe in the doctrine, what they teach. In my eyes it is actually ridiculous that people can actually throw their whole lives and everything into believing that, and going through with it, and actually giving their money to it?
> *Interviewer*: But, what specifically?
> *Jocelyn*: Um, tithing and everything pretty much that they do and I mean I don't know everything that they do, I will admit that, they pay for laundry service at the temple; I think everything is pretty much based on a corporation, if you can buy your way into heaven. I mean the beliefs are also quite controversial to me.
> *Interviewer*: Can you give me any examples?
> *Jocelyn*: Uh, the rituals they do in the temple [pause] um, just that sort of thing. Keeping it all secret, you can't talk about it until you are temple worthy, separating families if you are not in the same belief system. That's I think very dangerous and destructive.

Others made similarly vague doctrinal references, sometimes listing other intellectual reasons for leaving as examples of doctrinal problems, such as the change to church policy concerning blacks. Other times respondents simply stated that they took issue with church doctrines of various stripes without going into much detail. Craig stated "the story just doesn't make sense, like it's just; the doctrines just don't make sense."

Discussion: Antecedents of Apostasy

My findings indicate some overlap with, and support for, findings in other research that was discussed in the literature review of this paper—the goal of this paper being primarily exploratory rather explanatory, with the intent of examining themes and provide clear constructs to move theory forward. Of those five categories of quantitative research only one category (intellectual reasons for apostasy) was significantly supported here, but some of my minor findings were a reflection of some of the past literature. For

instance, Brinkerhoff and Mackie (1993) and Hadaway (1989) found that those who leave their religion are more likely to express liberal views. Some of the reasons mentioned for leaving the LDS Church—specifically the role of women and gay rights—reflect this supposition.

However, findings in four of the five categories of quantitative research (demographics, life events, rebellion, and socialization) are not fully supported in this study. What is most unclear about this research is the degree to which the demographics of apostates sampled in this research are a reflection of the greater apostate population. The group of apostates included in this study are generally more likely to be male and more educated but were also more likely to be in their thirties or older. While these findings are not generalizable to the greater population, it is possible that greater numbers of well educated men in their thirties participated in this study simply because there are more educated men in their thirties who leave the church. If this is the case, this basic demographic description of the apostate population is not all ways supported by previous research. Previous studies have shown that those who leave their religion tend to be in their late teens and twenties, and are typically male but there is debate over whether or not high levels of education is associated with apostasy (Caplovitz and Sherrow 1977; Merrill et al. 2003; Roof 1989; Roof and Landres 1997; Roozen 1980; Sandomirsky and Wilson 1990; Smith and Sikkink 2003; Uecker et al. 2007; Zelan 1968).

The second quantitative category was not supported by this research. While some research has indicated that negative life events are correlated with apostasy and positive events are associated with remaining true to a faith it appears in this research that while these events are correlational, they do not appear to be causational (Albrecht and

Cornwall 1989; Albrecht et al.1988; Hadaway and Marler 1993; McNaughton 2003; Roozen 1980; Sandomirsky and Wilson 1990; Uecker et al. 2007). For example, negative life events experienced by apostates may in fact be the result of, and not the cause for, apostasy. Of those individuals in this research who described negative life events—such as divorce and disownment—all suffered from these consequences *after* leaving the church. These specific findings will be discussed in greater depth in the section concerning the consequences of apostasy.

The portion of the literature that focused on rebellion as an antecedent of apostasy has garnered only minor support here as I only identified three individuals who cited a desire to live an alternative lifestyle as a part of their reasons for leaving. For those whose motives fell in to the rebellion categories the individuals cited the desire to engage in a lifestyle or behavior that was not conducive to their continued affiliation with the church. I made the distinction between those who did not agree with the minutiae of rules as established by the church and these individuals because these respondents indicated a desire to live an alternative lifestyle altogether, not simply have increased autonomy within the general strictures of church. One example was when Doug stated, "I was still very close friends with all of these members that I had grown up with, but I wanted to go do things that they didn't. I wanted to get involved with things they thought were wrong." In short, the LDS lifestyle simply did not suit those who left the church out of rebellion and turned to alternative cultures and social groups. However, this theme only showed minor support in this research; unlike literature elsewhere which surmises that rebellion is important factor (Clapovitz and Sherrow 1977; Regnerus and Uecker 2006; Uecker et al. 2007).

Finally, even though the majority of participants included in this research appeared to have religiously committed parents and family, the apostates still chose to leave their church. This is in contrast to the social learning theory (part of the socialization category) which postulates that individuals with committed parents are more likely to retain their religious affiliation (Hoge et al. 1993; Hunsberger 1980; Hunsberger and Brown 1984).

Other research, such as Hoge's (1981) typology has postulated that marriage to a non-member spouse, and boredom at church played a role in apostasy. I only identified one individual who left the church as the result of a marriage to a non-member spouse and only one who mentioned that boredom was a contributing factor (although trivial—according to respondent) to apostasy. As such this research does not greatly reflect other literature that suggests boredom or marriage is one cause of apostasy (Hoge 1981). On the other hand, I did find that some of my themes (those under the category human rights) might fit well with a one of the categories laid out by Hoge (1981) and Roozen (1980) such as the "lifestyle" or "intra-church discord" apostates who leave their church because of disagreements over moral teachings.

Of the five broad quantitative categories of apostasy research discussed in the literature review of this paper, intellectualism seems to be the most applicable to findings here. Many of the concerns that former members had with the church, and were the stated impetus behind a desire to leave, had much to do with empirical evidence, church history, and human rights. Of course, all of these reasons appear to fit best with other research that indicates that individuals leave religion for intellectual reasons. While intellectualism doesn't appear to be the most commonly studied reason for apostasy, every respondent in

this research had at least one motive for leaving that could be considered intellectual. Additionally, this research contributes some new, never before discussed reasons for leaving a religious institution such as concerns that DNA evidence does not support religious claims. As such, this research supports those studies that indicated apostasy was the result of intellectualism or intellectual doubts, and refutes studies that do not have similar findings (Altemeyer and Hunsberger 1997; Barbour 1994; Brinkerhoff and Mackie 1993; Caplovitz and Sherrow 1977; Hunsberger and Brown 1984; Wright et al. 2008; Wuthnow and Glock 1973; Zelan 1968).

The current discussion of the intellectual reasons for leaving the LDS Church is where the benefits of grounded theory come into play and allows for the expansion to, or elimination of other theory. As such, this research has expanded upon the intellectual theory that addresses apostasy from religion by further exploring the specific intellectual reasons apostates have for leaving a religion. This research indicates that prior studies on apostasy, specifically apostasy from the LDS Church, do not adequately address all the variables that contribute to an individual's decision to apostatize. Utilizing grounded theory in this research has allowed me to elaborate upon the specifics of apostasy and further explore some of the reasons that may also be considered as intellectual reasons for leaving.

As stated, with the use of grounded theory I have been able to expand upon the theory concerning the intellectual reasons for leaving organized religion. The significant difference between the findings here and literature focused on intellectualism as a progenitor for apostasy, is that other literature focused on more general intellectual orientations, commitment to intellectualism, vague references to theological doubts, or

psychological stress (Altemeyer and Hunsberger 1997; Brinkerhoff and Mackie 1993; Caplovitz and Sherrow 1977; Hunsberger and Brown 1984; Wright et al. 2008; Wuthnow and Glock 1973; Zelan 1968). In very few cases did researchers address what the *specific* intellectual issues were for former members. As will be discussed in the remainder of this section, when these specific intellectual issues were addressed in the qualitative literature, the reasons for abandoning religion suggested in those articles do not always reflect the reasons proposed by former LDS adherents here.

As noted in the literature review, Bahr and Albrecht's (1989) research looked at apostasy from the LDS Church in Utah by interviewing former adherents identified by random selection with a statewide survey. Their research showed that the majority of the respondents included in the research were what the authors termed "marginal saints" or those with low levels of prior religiosity. Many of these former members did not indicate any level of real dedication to the faith during the time that they were active participants. These former members also noted that they experienced some level of doubt, something also found in this research and in other studies (Brinkerhoff and Mackie 1993).

Ultimately Bahr and Albrecht concluded that most people who leave the LDS Church do so because of "drift." That is, the authors believe that those who left the church did so unintentionally, and the decision often coincided with marriage to a non-member spouse. However, Bahr and Albrecht do note that "fervent followers" or those with high levels of prior religiosity do leave the church because of intellectual reasons, but these fervent followers were noted by the researchers as being a minority of the sample population.

The parallels between this research and the 1989 study mostly coincide over the discussion of intellectual reasons for leaving a religion given by "fervent followers." Of the few fervent followers in Albrecht's study that left the church for intellectual reasons many cited Biblical interpretation as a significant reason for leaving while none of the participants in this research did the same. In addition, those who left the church in the Bahr and Albrecht study were noted as having relied upon "anti-Mormon literature" whereas the respondents in this study who made mention of their sources often cited specific books that they claimed were written by scholars and historians. In a few cases in this research the respondents noted they had made a special effort not to rely on "anti-Mormon" literature and only reference sanctioned LDS literature and sources.

In the Bahr and Albrecht article—and in other research observing former LDS members— respondents were also likely to join another religion subsequent to leaving the LDS Church, whereas respondents in this study claimed no affiliation to any religion. This indicates another discrepancy between the 1989 study and this recent research. In Bahr and Albrecht's study most respondents indicated low levels of religiosity and religious commitment prior to leaving while the majority of respondents in this research reported high levels of religious attendance, tithe paying, temple attendance, and holding various religious callings, often from a young age. This of course may be one significant explanation for why the reasons for apostasy differ so dramatically between the two studies.

However, these differences beg the question: why do the samples in the two studies diverge so greatly? One answer is that the Bahr and Albrecht study used a simple random sample from the entire state of Utah to identify former members while this

research relied on non-randomized snowball sampling. As a result, this research may have been more likely to identify former members who shared similar stories and histories whereas the 1989 study may have been more representative of the apostate population as a whole. However, there is one reason to believe that Bahr and Albrecht's study is not wholly representative. As stated in the literature review the authors noted in their article that half of the identified sample refused to speak to them. This may be because those former members of the church may not have been comfortable speaking with researchers who were affiliated with a university owned by the church they had left.

In contrast, former members may have felt more comfortable speaking to someone who was part of the "in-group," and what my status was in regards to the LDS church—I also am a former member—was inevitably one question participants had for me. Scholars that utilize qualitative methods have often asserted that in many cases the social location of the researcher may have a direct impact on the willingness of participants to be open about private information. This phenomenon is especially noted in instances where the researcher is engaged in field research and wants to gain access to parochial social groups. A researcher's status as an insider facilitates a "more facile entree, a higher degree of trust, [and] easier access to the nuances of local interaction and meaning" (Emerson 2001: 122). Similarly, the relationship of an interviewer—who is not engaged in field work and only conducting interviews—to the participants is also a point of concern for those who gather interview data (Berg 2009; Neuman 2006; Rubin and Rubin 2005).

Of course research as an insider does have its drawbacks and limitations. The insider/outsider dichotomy is not entirely accepted, and there are those who argue that

every researcher is in fact as much an outsider as they are an insider as the social location of the researcher consists of a variety of traits such as class, gender, and race and there is no universally accepted way of determining which traits should be minimized or maximized. In addition, insider research which may lead to increased trust with some groups will almost always lead to greater levels of distrust with other groups. For instance, a researcher may gain trust with a group of striking workers but then lose the trust of the employers and strikebreakers although both groups may be greatly important to the research. Finally, even if trust is only truly required from one set of individuals there is no guarantee of complete trust from every individual, at every moment, indefinitely (Emerson 2001).

Regardless of these possible limitations, as a former member of the LDS Church, I believe that my status as an insider helped to cross boundaries and create a level of trust with apostates that allowed for deeper examination of both the causes and consequences of apostasy. This exploration might have been more difficult to garner as a researcher with a status as an active member of the church, and the data acquired during the course of this thesis has been valuable in terms of identifying and describing different aspects of apostasy.

There is other qualitative research that specifically examined the reasons for apostasy, although not specifically examining the LDS Church. In at least one study (Wright et al. 2008) the discussion of intellectual reasons for apostasy does support the thesis that many apostates do have several intellectual concerns. However, the concerns raised by Wright et al. are not entirely a reflection of the concerns raised by former members of the LDS faith as found here.

In the article by Wright et al., intellectual concerns offered by former members of various Christian denominations were focused on three major themes: 1) faith verses reason (the idea that education and reason should be more highly valued than faith in the unknowable), 2) hell and suffering (discontent with the proposition that a loving God would eternally damn someone), and 3) the Bible (deemed as a fictitious writing by the former Christians). In interviewing former LDS members for this research it appeared as though few of the reasons discovered by Wright et al. apply per se. To begin with, Wright et al.'s discussion of logic verses reason does not adequately describe the feelings of former LDS people. Many former Christians opined that *general orientations* towards logical discourses and environments were preferable. An example used in the Wright et al. article is a quote taken from a former fundamentalist Christian who noted that, "for most of us, the battle was entirely within ourselves. It was a pitched battle between our faith and our reason, and eventually our reason just refused to be suppressed any longer, no matter what the potential consequences" (Wright et al. 2008: 12). In comparison, I did not identify any quotes comparable to those in the Wright et al. article that would lead me to believe that the individuals were concerned with reason verses faith per se. Former Christians appear to be more oriented to intellectualism in general while former LDS adherents appear to care more about the specifics of church history and ideology than broad attitudes towards reason or logic.

The second intellectual reason offered for apostasy in the Wright article, hell and suffering, was only hinted at by one of the former LDS members in my study. In part this may be due to the peculiarities of LDS doctrine which supposes that even non-LDS people will have the opportunity to redeem themselves in the afterlife, in addition to a

greater doctrinal focus on the “three degrees of glory” (heaven) that can be obtained, than on any possible eternal damnation. The closest any one of the participants in my research came to reflecting these particular sentiments of former Christians was when Maxine had a pivotal moment in her life:

> When I was dating my now husband I met his grandparents. And his grandmother is probably the neatest person I have ever met in my whole life. God fearing, God loving, phenomenal Christian people. And I just had to stop and ask myself, would God really not let these people go to heaven?

This statement is similar to the refrain in the research on former Christians when one person asked “why would God let a good Japanese person (who statistically will probably not be Christian) go to hell?” (Wright et al. 2008: 14). The significant difference here of course is the difference of concerns. Christians feared more for those good people who might go to hell while for at least one former Mormon the distress was in reference to the reduced likelihood of that person going to heaven. However, this comparison must also take into account that the vast majority of former LDS adherents made no mention of heaven or hell as contributors to their decision, and as such this finding cannot be considered a pattern, unlike former Christians of whom “numerous writers expressed” such concerns (Wright et al. 2008: 13).

The final theme identified in Wright et al.’s research was the Bible. In this section apostates cite such concerns as “I find it amazing how people who literally believe in stories about talking donkeys, Noah's ark, and dead people rising can look at me like something's wrong with me for thinking rationally” (Wright et al. 2008: 15). This theme most closely relates to the concerns that LDS apostates had with their own set of scripture. However, instead of discontent with the historicity of the Bible, former LDS

members had concerns with the Book of Mormon as a piece of historical literature, and with the beginnings of church formation. It seems likely that the church's emphasis on the Book of Mormon (the Bible is considered a core text, but only as far as it is "translated correctly") and the church's recent introduction in the 1830's contributes to the LDS apostates focus on these particular aspects of history, as opposed to taking issue with the Bible itself.

The remaining non-intellectual aspects of Wright et al.'s article dealt with three other categories: God's shortcomings, interactions with Christians, and interactions with non-Christians. Some of the results of this research overlapped with these other themes. While former Christians stated that God did not fulfill promises, former LDS members noted how spiritual blessings were not bestowed upon them as promised by the LDS Church as a reward for fulfilling certain specific spiritual obligations (e.g., paying tithing and attending the temple). The second category, what Wright et al. termed "interactions with Christians" was also reflected in this research. Former Christians appeared to leave their faith because of hypocrisy and the lack of effort by other believers in addressing the former Christians' doubts. For LDS apostates, hypocrisy of those in the LDS Church, and the church as an institution, was key. The final theme was interactions with non-Christians, which the authors note had minimal impact on apostasy. I also did not find that interactions with non-LDS people had any particular impact on the desire to leave the church. Only one individual mentioned that time spent with good people that were not LDS made her reconsider her religious belief, but marriage to someone of another faith was the primary reason for her switch.

What seems evident in making a comparison of the specific findings of this research to previous qualitative studies, specifically Bahr and Albrecht (1989) and Wright et al. (2008) is that in many cases there appears to be thematically similar phenomenon occurring, and that it is the specifics of these phenomenon that differ by religious group. Within the intellectual theory for leaving religion some specific attitudes towards empirical religious history, human rights concerns, and frustration with religious hypocrisy appear to be evident. Although the specific issues that former members of the LDS Church had with the empirical history of the church were different in content from those issues addressed in the Wright et al. article and the Bahr and Albrecht article, the undergirding theme—concerns over empirical history—remains intact. What appears evident in this case is that broad intellectual themes appear in a variety of religious contexts, and that it is only the minutiae that appear to be altered. The details vary not only by religion, but also by specific context.

For instance, some ideological stances in the church towards certain human rights issues (both past and present) such as the exclusion of blacks, and treatment towards women and members of the gay community are perceived currently by former members as significant contributions towards their decision to leave. Even if those issues were not identified by the respondent as the most significant initial reason for leaving, these types of issues were either listed as a contributing factor towards the decision or as significant reasons after leaving for not returning to the church. But it is noteworthy that the focus on specific human rights issues has evolved over time. Whereas the Equal Rights Amendment was a particularly important topic several decades ago, gay rights is a more contemporary concern. However, it is likely that this specific concern will likely give

way to other new ideological concerns as national attitudes and legislation towards gay rights evolves.

Ultimately, every single person that was interviewed for this research listed at least one human rights or historical/scientific problem as part of their decision to apostatize. Some listed as many as five, grouping together such issues as archeology, the Book of Abraham, polygamy, racism, and women's roles. Sometimes individual apostates would take a laundry list approach when enumerating their various concerns. It is notable that none of the respondents in this research had only one reason for leaving the church. In fact, instead of narrowing down the reasons to one or two issues that were most significant, and then elaborating on those specific reasons, many former members listed several, even stating in effect that the preponderance of evidence is what led them away. In the words of Sean, bits and pieces of history had been picked up over the course of years:

> Years of this and that and the other thing, just little things that would crop up every once in a while, little bits of information that I would find out and stuff that, I would kind of talk to my wife in passing, but never really discussed heavily and then it would just go away and get put on the shelf. I had some, there were times on my mission when I would talk to people and they would tell me things about my own church that I just didn't believe that would sit in the back and be there and it just kind of built up over the years. In the last couple of years I found myself more and more mentally disconnecting from it just because all these things that I had been finding out kind of stacked up and it got to the point where I found myself sitting in church thinking to myself that I just didn't believe any of this anymore. I had found out things, the connection of the Mason rituals to the temple ceremonies, little bits and pieces of history that just didn't add up with the way they were being taught now.

Clearly, it is these particular issues that strike a chord amongst former adherents, and are one example of how previously studied variables such as age, gender and educational

attainment cannot fully account for the complex decision making process that results in apostasy.

Aftermath of Apostasy

The consequences for leaving the church will be addressed in much the same way as the causes of apostasy. The initial finding in this research is that the consequences of apostasy were even more plentiful than the reasons for apostasy. In this instance 17 negative consequences were identified, many of which were negative, some of which were positive. While many individual themes were identified, themes that had similar basic foundations, or were merely variations of an idea, were grouped together. Within my discussion on the consequences of apostasy I outline how the consequences, both positive and negative, can be broken down into three affected units of community: sense of community in general, implications for the family unit, and experiences that appear to only affect the individual. I further detail the consequences for each of these units and demonstrate the tension between the positive and negative effects of leaving a religious group on individual sense of community. Finally, those ideas that were mentioned only infrequently but that have bearing in this research because of their inclusion in past literature will be addressed in brief towards the end.

My Table 3. Consequences of Apostasy

Negative Consequences		
Community	Family	Individual
Loss of Community	Worse Relations	Anger
Loss of Friends	Affects Family	Judged
Friction with Friends	Family Events	Fear for Job
	Divorce and Disownment	Anomie
		Misunderstood
Positive Consequences		
Community	Family	Individual
New Friends	Better Relations	Autonomy
		Happiness
		Saved Time or Money

Negative Consequences: Community. In the following discussion of the consequences of apostasy I begin with a review of the data that answered one of my primary questions concerning the effects on individual sense of community. This first category, community, contains the themes *loss of community, loss of friends,* and *friction*. The first theme within the community category is *loss of community*, which addresses impacts to an apostate's sense of community in a more general way. This category consists of references to a sense of being cut off from their community, sometimes referred to as "not fitting in." This consequence of leaving the church is not surprising, considering how highly the LDS Church ranks as a community in terms of specific geography, central locality, social ties, and social interaction. If a person of a particular faith living in an area densely populated with members of their religion leaves that religion, they may be cut off from those religious social ties and social interactions. Most of the respondents in this research (18 of the 21 interviewees) experienced this after leaving the church.

This finding is significant because 17 of the participants indicated that members of the LDS Church either "completely" or "moderately" represented their community prior to leaving the church. I established these categories by asking the respondent to what degree they considered their ward, or LDS people that they knew, to comprise their primary community, and to what degree were LDS people the people that they cared about the most, or spent the most time with. For some, LDS people were all that they knew: "[In] my high school, I would dare say 1 out of every 100 or 200 kids was not Mormon. *Everyone* was. I realize that is the norm in Utah, but it was intense, there's no way to make any non-Mormon friends because you don't know anybody" (Susan Interview 2010). Sean said, "We didn't really have any friends outside of our ward or that we had met through people in our ward. We didn't really have any social ties to anybody outside of either family members or people in our ward." David noted, "That was my community. I had no other community."

For others, LDS people weren't the only people that they knew, but the LDS community made up a substantial portion of their personal community. "I still think probably that there were a few that I was pretty close to in the ward. So, I don't remember ever really doing a whole lot with other people outside of the church, but I really didn't do a lot anyway" (Lydia Interview 2010). "We spent a significant amount of time with [members of the ward], and we were friendly with people in the ward and occasionally did things socially with people from the ward, but I grew up in Salt Lake and had…a small number of close friendships [outside of the ward]" (Michael Interview 2010).

Since the LDS community played such a significant role for the majority of the

respondents, leaving the church had a significant impact on their sense of community:

> I do sense in our neighborhood a level of animosity [audio unclear] and I don't know if that's coming from me or from them or from both. People are not quite sure how to interact with us. I feel like we have tried to reach out…even a few years ago—they had assigned a new bishop in our ward, this was after I had resigned—I actually invited the new bishop because I had met him at a gathering. I invited him and a couple of our other neighbors that are all very devout Mormons over for dinner. And it was a real pleasant time. But I still sense a separation now, that people are friendly but sort of its kind of a peripheral friendship, are just sort of there, nice because they're supposed to be nice but there's not a real…there's very little extra effort (Lydia Interview 2010).

Christian described how leaving the church made him feel like an outsider, as someone who did not fit in with the dominant culture, and was therefore cut off from social ties, and from a more dominant sense of community:

> There's definitely a dissatisfaction with living in Utah since such a majority of the people living here are Mormon. By ceasing to identify with that group, it takes away my sense of [this town] feeling like home, because I don't feel like I fit in here. So, it feels somewhat like my home is sort of stolen from me, even though this place is really beautiful, it's a wonderful place; culturally I don't find it that pleasant to live here. I don't find a lot of, I don't find a sense of being with my people or my community.

In some cases this loss of community appeared to be anticipated prior to the decision to leave the church. David noted that even before finally deciding to leave the church he had to be prepared to leave his community behind. He stated "when I decided to leave the church I had to be prepared to leave everything, you know, leave my family, and leave my community." Although this particular person anticipated the loss of community prior to leaving, it is unknown whether all apostates have this expectation prior to leaving their religious faith. Regardless of the ability to intuit the possible consequences of leaving a parochial religious faith, it is evident that in at least some cases

it is not simply the doctrines and theological belief system that is left behind. Rather, entire communities may be left behind as well.

Within the same category for negative consequences to community are impacts to friend relationships. In many of the interviews there were references to the *loss of friends*: "We have had some friends that have not been able to be around us anymore because they are afraid we are going to destroy their testimonies and, you know, we are very careful about who we say stuff to" (Stacey Interview 2010). David had a similar experience: "most of my LDS friends are no longer friends; they almost immediately quit talking to me."

In some instances total revocation of friendship was not experienced, but friendships were not the same. In these instances an increased sense of *friction* was experienced, and was the second most commonly experienced consequence in the community category. This friction often resulted in a loss of closeness and those friendships dwindled. Gordon described how leaving the church had a negative impact on the friendships that remained:

> And it hurt my friends, it's not just my uh, my family but good close friends…when I state that I don't believe the same religion they believe in, that it's not true, you don't get any support. You get defensiveness and you lose, you lose those relationships. And sometimes they just turn into fake superficial things because you just don't have as much to talk about anymore.

Negative Consequences: Family. While impacts to a general sense of community were clearly demonstrated, consequences for other levels of community were evident as well. The second level of community that garnered negative consequences is the family unit. Of all the themes that I identified, impacts to family were the single most referenced consequence in this research, and 20 of the 21 interviewees made mention of some

impact, of one variety or another, on their family lives. These impacts ranged from subtle unease at family events, to full out disownment and divorce. These negative consequences were not only cited by the greatest number of respondents but were also cited the most frequently within each interview. All in all, there were 73 mentions of familial impacts dispersed throughout the numerous pages—more than 200—of interview text. Discussion of the consequences for the family unit after leaving the church follows.

The category that outlines the implications for the family is divided into four sub-codes: *worse relations*, *affects family*, *family events*, and *divorce and disownment*. Each is addressed according to the frequency in which these codes were identified in the interviews. Deteriorated relations (coded *worse relations*) between still active family members and the apostates were the most heavily cited in this category. Many respondents noted varying levels of strain that developed between themselves and their family members; however, the deterioration of the relationships did not necessarily lead to divorce or disownment (a theme discussed later). Rather, snide comments were directed towards the apostate, the favoring of other "better" siblings occurred, there were attempts at re-converting the "lost sheep," and general awkwardness, especially during family events (another theme discussed later in detail). Michael summed up the impacts to his family when he stated "…the bitter fruits of apostasy are that the church can really screw with your primary relationships."[6]

The following statement from Jocelyn is one example of family giving preference to other members:

---

[6] This quote references the title to a chapter in a LDS church instruction manual called *Teachings of the President's of the Church: Joseph Smith.* Chapter 27 in the manual called "Beware the Bitter Fruits of Apostasy."

> I know that there are times when they treat the kids that aren't part of the church differently than they do my brother. For instance, my parents, I think they show a lot more favoritism towards him as well as his relatives because of the Mormon Church.

Sean also shared his experience of facing reconversion attempts by his family:

> It's caused a lot of strain in my family. They haven't stopped talking to us but our relationships with them have gotten a lot more complicated and unfortunately in certain instances a lot more ulterior motive kind of thing is going on. A lot of their communication with us has been colored by attempts to try and get us back to the church.

David was very clear in his dissatisfaction with the changes that occurred in his family after his decision to leave. He made special mention of these consequences towards the end of the interview:

> There is one thing I would like to say here: when I left the church every single familial relationship I had was strained or damaged or separated, including my children with the exception of my one son who had left. I feel that the only way I am going to have a relationship with my children that is healthy and whole again is if I can see them come to an understanding of what the church has done. They don't necessarily have to leave but to understand that I had my reasons, they were valid.

The strain, superficiality, and loss of closeness mentioned by David was a common thread throughout all the interviews. When asked if his decision to leave the church had impacted relations with his family Donk responded:

> Yeah…it has. The only time my dad has ever really been proud of me was when I was on my mission. That's the only time he would actually ever really truly communicate with me. I mean now, yeah, I work for him and we talk all the time but it's all about business and it's not, you know, what's going on…or how are you feeling…or what are you doing, kinda thing…so that was the first and last time in my life that he's ever opened up and gotten more than just the superficial how are ya doing kind of thing.

However, these kinds of strained relationships between the apostate and the remaining family members were not the only significant consequence to familial

relationships. One surprising theme in the interviews was the degree to which the apostates' choice to leave the church had an effect on the family members' emotional wellbeing, coded here as *affects family*. Apostates specifically made mention of how much their decision distressed family members, and these apostates didn't want their families to suffer in that way. For one respondent, Stewart, watching how his family was treated and how they felt after he left was the sole negative:

> The consequences of my leaving that was bad, wasn't bad for me. Like it didn't affect me directly, it's been bad for my parents in a sense because not only have they felt embarrassed at church, which I think is silly, but my Bishop called my parents in for a meeting a few years ago and I think the topic was to discuss my leaving the church and my being bi-sexual and he told them in no uncertain terms that the reason I left the church and the reason I am not a good heterosexual Mormon was because they failed as parents to do Family Home Evening…Now, I loved that Bishop and I love that man still, because I don't think his saying that was malicious, it's just ignorant of him to say. But it hurts me because it hurt my parents. They should not be—I just hate the idea of them blaming themselves for my leaving. So whatever bad consequences were incurred, they weren't incurred by me unfortunately.

Michael's experience was similar:

> I view my parents as victims of the church and so while I find their reaction irritating, I have a hard time being angry at them because they suffered so much more than I did. In fact, my suffering leaving the church was only secondary watching them. Otherwise it was an unmitigated positive, I mean, absolutely terrific. But you know I love those people. And they're real believers, and they were really suffering and it's because of a story that isn't true, but it doesn't mean that what they're feeling isn't real…As soon as you tell them that [you've left the church] it just destroys them and so they just lash out. I didn't mind the lashing out part so much because I could see inside their box, but it was just awful to see them go through that and when we told them—I, honestly, it was like watching—if I had been a cop telling them we'd all been killed in a car wreck I don't think they would have reacted any differently. I mean the fear and horror in their faces, and it still just [pause] gives me the creeps to think about it.

These are two examples of how one member's apostasy negatively affected the other family members, although not all came across as quite so severe. For most there

was the general sense that family members were mostly upset and disappointed. Jocelyn noted, "I think a lot of it is an overall disappointment from my parents that their kids didn't gravitate towards going on missions and holding church callings and attending church and paying tithing; I think there is a lot of disappointment from my parents about that."

The third theme regarding family focused on *family events*. For many of the interviewees there were at least some changes to the dynamic of family gatherings. For some it was simply increased tension, the 'elephant in the room' as some called it. Jackson put it this way:

> We have pretty much conceded to the traditional religious process. Religious traditions continue as nothing had happened… [but] it's changed from my wife and I planning and carrying out the activity as we used to, to where she plans it and carries it out and my son and I quietly attend. I'm sure you're familiar with the elephant in the corner idea. We bring an elephant to every religious and nonreligious activity.

For others, some kinds of family gatherings in which they previously participated simply ceased altogether. After the formal interview, Lydia made a few comments about the experience she had when her son was married in the temple and she was unable to attend. My shorthand notes of her description are as follows:

> [Lydia] had emotionally prepared herself for her son to get married in the temple. She had convinced herself that the ceremony was not important, and that she was ok with it, but at a later point in time when she thought back to the idea of being excluded from the wedding—being told that she could not come—it hit her. She was very emotional, and cried. She said she was 'pissed and hurt.' Her response to the church at that point was to think 'damn them.'

For others even holiday gatherings were impossible to attend for one reason or another. For those who were simply rejected from all gatherings, the underlying cause was sometimes due to *divorce or disownment*, themes mentioned by five interviewees.

Four of these individuals had gone through or were seriously discussing divorce, and two experienced disownment by some or all of their family members (one person both suffered disownment by siblings and a divorce from his wife).

Of the individuals who went through a divorce, or at least had considered divorce, their abandonment of the LDS Church was a primary reason for the marriage to end. David said "during the time I was going through [the process of leaving the church] I was going through a divorce with my wife because she is still a devout believing member and if I wasn't going to believe she didn't want anything to do with me."

When Anna was asked whether or not her divorce was influenced by her decision to leave the church she replied, "I think if I would have stayed in the church we could have worked through the problems."

Disownment by family also occurred. When asked whether leaving the church impacted relations with her family Susan's response was:

> Oh yeah. My parents disowned me in December, before Christmas. I haven't seen or talked to any of my family members since then. I spent Christmas at a friend's house. I've missed birthdays I've missed family stuff…I see my older [adopted] sister occasionally. She's Catholic and doesn't care. But that's about it. Like my younger siblings are not allowed to text me or their phones get taken away. That type of thing…I have been to one cousin farewell since then. My parents were there, my siblings weren't and they didn't even say anything. It was as if we didn't know each other. It was really weird….The goal [now] is to humor the Grandparents. I don't know. I imagine I could tell them, they would be heartbroken, but as far as I'm concerned it's technically not their business either. This is my life, I love them and I respect them, but what are they going to do about it? It's just going to upset them.

For this 18-year-old college student, being disowned by her nuclear family had far reaching repercussions. As she stated later, not only is she cut off from her primary ties, but she has also had trouble getting financial aid for school because she no longer has

access to her parent's financial records, a necessary part of any federal aid application.

Negative Consequences: Individual. The remaining negative repercussions for apostasy existed solely at the individual level, these consequences were negative emotions or fear felt by the individual apostate in regards to a variety of concerns. Within this category are the themes *anger*, *judged*, *fear for job*, *anomie*, and *misunderstood*. Of these themes *anger* and frustration towards the church and church members—and sometimes expressions of depression—appeared most often, in 18 of the 21 interviews. Sometimes the anger that a person had towards the church had no definitive cause "[I was] just sort of pissed at the church too for some reason" (Lydia Interview 2010). In other instances the respondent specified that their anger resulted from a feeling that they had been misled about church history, or they were angry about the church's ideological stance on various human rights. For some it was the ensuing consequences, often reactions of friends and family or an overwhelming sense of isolation which initiated the anger. Christian was particularly explicit in his reactions, both anger and depression, that occurred subsequent to leaving the church:

> …and the suicidal thoughts do come up, but never like they did in that time frame from like 14-25 or so, 23. I had grandiose plans of making statements with my suicide, including slicing my stomach open and tying myself to the temple fence with my own intestines…I blamed my sense of isolation, of not belonging, on the existence of the church, maybe not the church itself, but the fact that it is such a massive part of this part of the world and I don't fit in there. I think, like everybody, everybody wants to belong to something, and just the only thing that seemed to exist in this environment didn't work so I felt isolated and alone and disconnected. And I blamed the church for that, whether it's rational or not.

For some it was a combination of both the consequences of leaving the church and the reasons for leaving that created the resentment:

> I experienced anger when I realized how they didn't bring up these deep dark historical things, but the time that I really felt the most anger was when I looked at the life that I had, and the way that my children were treating me and the way that members and my friends treated me after I left and they found out I was ex-Mormon. That was what caused the anger, was realizing that it was false, I knew it was false, and there was nothing they could do to deny it was false, but um, these people were judging me as if I was an evil and bad person. In fact my brother who is in the Stake Presidency told me that he thought I was being deceived by Satan and that I was under Satan's influence (Sylvia 2010).

Anna was particularly verbose when she explained all the different ways in which she experienced anger after leaving the church:

> Oh I definitely [felt anger], and my husband was even like 'I think you're, you are an angrier person since you left the church.' He said something to that effect: 'you're not as happy' or 'you don't seem happy.' And I was like 'well when you look at it from my side and you are seeing all of the stuff' and you are like 'I have lost these years of just being me, I've been trying to fit myself into this round hole this whole time, and now I've realized I could have just been me, and been at peace and happy with myself and not trying to make myself into something else.' I also feel anger when I see my brother who's in a bad marriage right now and the main reason he is sticking it out is because he's like 'I made that commitment, this is an eternal marriage' and it's very much like 'I don't want to be a statistic, I don't want to be one of the members that divorces, that's not…' I mean, he really thinks that because of the church he shouldn't divorce. And I'm like 'you would be happier if you did.' And it's just kind of holding him down in that way. And I see a sister who—she just got married—and she was single for all of her 20's and she was so sure that she needed to get married that she was unhappy all that time. I was like 'you could have not had that in the back of your head and just be like, just be you and when you find the right person it'll be right, it's not a big deal.' But all the emphasis on 'you have to have *this*' to go to the Celestial Kingdom. And she really bought into that and I think that—she's found someone since—but for those 10 years she was really unhappy and I think a lot of it had to do with the church. And I hate to see my nieces getting pushed into the roles of, you know, you are supposed to be a mom, you need to grow up and be a mom, take care of your family…I always try when I get the chance to be like 'you can be anything you want, whatever you dream, follow your heart.' That kind of influence, but it frustrates me when I see that they're getting 'here's what the boys do, here's what the girls do,' you know, and I see them getting indoctrinated and I feel frustrated because it is going to be just as hard for them if not impossible, like it is for so many to really look at it subjectively and decide if it's right for them. Because it's what they've been told is right their whole life and how do they know? When I see a niece getting baptized at eight and she's chosen to get baptized its like, how does she know? She's just doing what everyone around her is telling her to do.

> And I know that's what I did when I was eight and of course it was right, Dad thinks it's right and everyone else around thinks it's right so of course I will choose to get baptized. I will get a pretty white dress… So, I get frustrated, I have major issues [laughs].

Anger expressed by the respondents was the result of many things, in some cases because of a feeling of being "duped" by the church in regards to church history, in other cases because of perceived violations of human rights and sometimes this feeling was the result of feeling *judged* by others, the next theme to be discussed.

The next most frequently cited consequence of leaving the church—cited by 13 individuals—was the feeling that the respondent had been essentially condemned by friends, family, or the community at large. This condemnation for most took the form of an assessment by friends and family that the apostate made an erroneous decision because of faulty logic, immoral living, or some other reason. This sense of feeling judged did not always result in anger for the apostate, sometimes the feeling was a sense of sadness or frustration. For one apostate it was their family that seemed to pass judgment on him the most, leaving him with a sense of bewilderment:

> There was this brief time when my poor parents had all five kids temple married and in the temple. They had completed the checklist, you know? And then we, my brother and I, just robbed them of their victory. But the interesting thing in doing that was—is—you [unbeknownst to them] change [your beliefs] and they treat you just the same, they love you, they admire you, think you're great, you have good judgment, you're a smart person, you are a good person. And you know, well, if they knew they might feel differently. But you don't realize to what degree. And then you tell them one thing. You're the same guy before and after, and then you say 'oh by the way I don't believe in your particular brand of superstition about the afterlife or people who populate the unseen worlds' and all the sudden you are deceived by Satan, you're murdering their grandchildren, you are an idiot, you're selfish, you've lost the spirit, you must be sinning, you [must] have been offended, you are a person to be avoided. You are dangerous. And you're like 'shit, I was the same person five minutes ago, and I have been [unbelieving], by the way, for a year and you didn't, you didn't suspect a thing' (Michael Interview 2010).

For Jocelyn, the feeling was more as though the greater community had passed sentence on her as being an individual unworthy of association:

> I don't think that I am targeted out for negative treatment, I don't believe that there is a conspiracy from the Mormon Church to do that to me, but I think that indirectly that it's so easy for people to judge people's character and say that you are a bad person or saying that to me, that I am not worthy of this or I am not worthy of that [pause] [its] appalling, the things that they do, how they can just write somebody off.

The remaining consequences are those consequences which garnered indications in fewer of the interviews than those previous themes. These consequences are*: fear for job, anomie*, and *misunderstood*. Concerns about maintaining employment, or possible discrimination in a workplace environment, was observed in seven of the interviews. This theme was coded *fear for job*. In most instances a general undercurrent of uncertainty about reactions from employers in regards to the apostates religious status were apparent. When Sean was asked if there were any implications for him at work he responded saying:

> I don't know if it will because I haven't told my boss. They are very active members in the church, and I haven't told them simply because I don't think it's any of their business. It's added a little bit of strain in my head from the aspect of, they are constantly talking about different things they are doing in the church and talking about this and that and the other and 'oh we need to do this', and 'I gotta go to this meeting' and I can't really say anything about that. I can't say 'oh I'd rather you didn't talk about the church to me.' Because you just can't, that creates a lot of awkwardness. So, they don't know that we've left the church and I don't know that I'll ever tell them, frankly because, like I said, it's not their business. They don't need to know that.

Others mentioned that fear of reactions from others was a real concern, as it was for Vaughn:

> Well my job is a position that has to be affirmed every few years through an election process. You—if you are tagged as being a vocal apostate or an apostate

> it may have an implication, impact, on whether or not [you get voted out of office]. Not based on how you do your job, but whether or not you are a member of the church.

For the rest mentions of impacts to jobs included general feelings of unease, especially if conversations at the workplace turned to topics with religious overtones, or if group prayers took place, such as what Susan experienced: "[At work] it's always kind of awkward because 90% of the employees are very strongly LDS…[and] people will say things awkwardly like 'just pray it will come through' and people will quite literally sit down and have a prayer over something."

Another consequence presented in the interviews was the varying reactions apostates had—sometimes anger, sometimes regret, and in some cases relief—over the loss of a moral paradigm or *anomie*. Regardless of the emotional reaction, former members noted that having specific moral guidelines already in place removed the need for the active member to formulate their own opinions of right and wrong:

> As I visit with my son I say that life isn't easier 'cause you leave the church. I think it takes more work because the church—some people refer to the church as a crutch. I think it is. Its, everything is cut and dry for you in the church you don't really have to think you don't have to, you know, figure out life's mysteries on your own because they're all fully laid out for you (Jackson Interview 2010).

Because these specific axioms take away the need to make moral decisions independently, the former member faces a sense of anomie, or normlessness. Sylvia described the loss this way: "it just took me a while to realize that I had lost everything foundationally that told me who I was and so it was a process of trying to find myself again after that." Stacey's reaction was similar, describing both how the loss was simultaneously scary and exhilarating:

> It's very scary to be making your own decisions, to realize you don't have all the answers anymore. The fact that when we left I felt like the floor had been pulled out from underneath me, and having to pick up each piece, re-examine it, decide if it fits in my world or not, but ultimately deciding everything is in my control. And it's not some little path that I have to just keep following. It's very liberating.

For others, the loss of a moral paradigm created problems for their family as the apostates (in some cases both spouses left the church together) had to start from scratch, and find a way to socialize their children. According to Michael:

> Mostly I was mad at being 34 years old with 4 kids in the mix who expected me to know everything, and have my hands firmly on the steering wheel, guiding us along and [now] having to figure out a whole new paradigm for life on the fly when I should have been doing that my Freshman year of college when everyone else does it. [Laughs]. Like, that was a bad time for my existential crisis. So, I was ticked about that.

Finally, there is one result of leaving the church identified during the process of this research cannot be easily categorized as a negative or a positive consequence. For eight interviewees there was the desire for active members of the church, often friends and family, to understand the reasons the apostate had for leaving, and to acknowledge those reasons as legitimate, regardless of whether or not the faithful agreed with the decision to leave. I coded this theme as *misunderstood*. Michael described this yearning while noting that there are some active members of the LDS Church that do try to make inroads for both the believer and non-believer to communicate:

> What I crave is some way to help people understand, and [John] Dehlin[7] tries to do this but then everyone who he communicates with just leaves the church. So, it doesn't really help on the inside, but it would be nice to have room in the culture to say 'I disagree, I understand how you could see it that way, but, with the eyes of faith it looks different, and I disagree with you' rather than just saying 'oh, you know, you're deceived by Satan.' The problem with 'deceived by Satan' is it

[7] In this instance Michael refers to John Dehlin, the founder of Mormon Stories podcast who is known throughout LDS and former LDS communities for his attempt to bring together the stories from all sides of the LDS spectrum (www.Mormonstories.org). For an example of John Dehlin in the media see Goodstein 2011.

> means you're dumb, because you were deceived. But not only are you dumb, but you're bad. Because only bad people will listen to Satan. And I know he's not real, but, you know, it's still just the implication that you were sort of immoral just chaffs because I just wanted to figure it out, just wanted to do the right thing. It wasn't about them. It was about me and my family and my little kids who are looking to me and what I'm putting into their head and telling them they should do, so that sucks.

Sylvia's opinion was that it wasn't necessarily the individual church members who should be obligated to listen to the stories of former members, but that the church as an institution should have an obligation to discuss the troubling aspects of church history with an eye to how these topics could be bothersome to some members and perhaps find a way to come to a spiritual consensus on how to grapple with these difficult topics:

> I wish the LDS Church would talk about these things, the things that I learned, to people when they are young, when they are young enough to understand anything, and to try and teach things that are so—I should say—that are never mentioned, they talk about 'milk before meat' but really, with the internet, and with things happening the way they are in the world now, there is no milk before meat. People can find out anything. They can get all sorts of information and I think it shakes their faith. And I think that these things, if they would present them in a way so as to help people to see the point of view that they have, at least people from an early time would have a chance to make up their mind. Um, there's things like that that need to be changed and I—you know, it saddens me because I see a lot of people that want to remain socially in the church even though they don't quite believe. But it's a matter of integrity when they see that the church lies about a lot of their history, or white washes it. Which is essentially the same, it's just a deception, but a different form.

Regardless of the specific reasons for or consequences of leaving, some of the former members simply wanted an outlet to share their story with those who remained faithful. They wanted understanding, and maybe even acceptance from the LDS community.

Positive Consequences: Individual. Another surprising result of this research was the degree to which positive consequences were prevalent throughout the interviews. In fact, all 21 of the respondents mentioned experiencing at least one positive consequence

subsequent to leaving the church. The degree to which individual apostates elaborated on the positives of leaving the church indicates some tension and ambivalence about their decision. On the one hand so many negative experiences might possibly lead an outside observer to believe that apostasy is an inherently negative life event. However, positive outcomes were frequently mentioned results of leaving the LDS Church. Of these positive consequences, most could be considered to have implications for the individual only, such as an increased sense of happiness, but others have impacts for the individual's sense of community and for the family unit.

Positive consequences consists of 5 highly variable ideas, the main theme undergirding this category simply being that these consequences generally seem to be viewed as positive by the respondents. These codes are: *autonomy, happiness, saved time or money, new friends,* and *better relationships*. The following three themes, *autonomy, happiness,* and *saved time or money,* are consequences that affected the apostate on the individual level. I address the individual consequences first because the majority of the positive outcomes were concentrated there. After individual consequences the next two categories, *better relationships* and *new friends,* are two consequences that demonstrated positive results for the family and community units, but were mentioned less frequently than the individual consequences.

Again, each of the themes that fall under the individual category of positive consequences is addressed by the frequency in which they appeared in the interviews. The most frequently mentioned theme, *autonomy,* noted in 18 of the interviews, does not have a cut and dried definition or operationalization. The increased autonomy and the ability to be one's self as a result of apostasy ranged from the chance for apostates to

leave their insular community to their ability to determine their own moral paradigm without the strictures of a religious organization. In some instances references to this newfound freedom was simply described in vague terms, but with far-reaching implications, as identified by Anna: “I definitely feel happier and more at peace with who I am, I am not trying to make myself be something that I am not or profess to be something that I am not. I can just be me, and that’s great.”

For some it was a combination of experiences that never would have otherwise occurred, knowledge that was gained, and decisions made. For example, Craig, a recent graduate from graduate school in his 20’s listed all the things that made his decision to leave the church a positive experience:

> I think that leaving the church has helped me, you know, it’s exposed me to people that I never would have met. It’s opened my mind to experiences I never would have experienced. It’s kind of been the catalyst for everything. It was my catalyst for kind of leaving [the] valley and experiencing Spain. It was my catalyst for, you know, the reason that I decided to go back to [graduate] school. Otherwise I would be married to somebody back in [the valley], just kind of living in a small town, you know, my main focus would be just on the church…because [LDS people] are so involved [with the church] they don’t get to experience anything.

Gordon also felt as though leaving the church opened up horizons for him in terms of having autonomy with decision making and responsibility:

> Yes, there were many positive things that came from leaving the church. The first that comes to mind is accountability. Many things didn't link up or correlate while in the church. For instance, living the word of wisdom didn't bring me health. A much more comprehensive nutritious diet and exercise plan did. Fasting (starving oneself) is more of an Indian rain dance and doesn't cause moisture to come out of the sky or change a teenager’s rebellious behavior. Conserving water or directly getting to what's causing the teenagers behavior gets to the root of the problem. Paying tithing doesn't mysteriously solve my bills or financial issues—managing my money and hard work does. Also, the concept of blaming temptations on Satan is another way of just blaming a third party and not taking accountability. I

> wasn't influenced and tempted. I take accountability in my choices because I made them. Which brings me to the biggest bullshit story told in the church—obedience to the gospel (church) brings happiness. Happiness comes from so many other areas and one of those is not being so damn hard on yourself. So yes, I am happier, or at least I'm good with me.

One of the most important positive aspects of leaving the church was the sense of liberation, the ability to form opinions based on individual experiences and knowledge. The idea that these individuals could take any number of countless paths in their lives and not be limited to certain social rolls, often played out within the church, was another implication. Often these feelings of liberation translated into the next positive consequence, *happiness*.

A sense of greater happiness was noted in 16 of the interviews. While only some of the respondents spent significant amounts of time discussing how leaving the church made them happier individuals, few had to hesitate when asked whether or not they were happier. For Stewart the answer was simple "This is the shortest response I will give you: I am happy." Regardless of the context, a respondent's reply to questions about his or her happiness was almost always the most succinct response. Like Stewart, Craig's response was pithy "I think that I am a happier person. I think that I have better mental health if that makes sense." For others the discussion of happiness was directly tied to the ability they felt that they now had to be themselves. Karol stated:

> I am happier [laughs]...I'm more at peace with myself. I'm not always second guessing. I'm more, I feel more like I did when I was a kid and everything was fine. I don't, I'm not trying to live up to anybody's standards. I'm not trying to be what anybody wants me to be. You know when you're—I just, I'm just freer, I'm just me. I'm more myself.

The brevity with which most respondents noted their happiness does not encapsulate the emphasis the participants placed on their happiness. While these answers were indeed

short, the overwhelming response to the question of happiness was of unmitigated certainty. David's reaction to the question of his happiness is the best example of this certainty when he said, "oh, no comparison, seriously, no comparison."

Saved time or money was yet another individual theme, mentioned by seven of the respondents. Vaughn specifically mentioned how he has changed the use of his time "I have more time to do things for people that we feel like. We don't spend all of our time in meetings; instead of listening to people tell us how we should live, we have an opportunity to go out and do good for other people." When asked what some of the other positive consequences were for her Jocelyn replied "I don't pay tithing [both laugh]… give 10% of my earnings to buy my way [into heaven]."

Positive Consequences: Community and Family. Trailing behind the individual consequences are consequences for community (*new friends*) and family relations (*better relationships).* The first code, *new friends*, had nine mentions among the different interviewees. Reflective of responses given about the increased autonomy, the reflections upon new friendships were sometimes seen as relationships that never would have happened if the interviewee had not left the church because:

> [The church] already decided for you what's good and what's bad and what you should do and what you should be involved in and what you shouldn't be involved in, and the *people* that you shouldn't be involved with, um, because you are really not supposed to associate with people who are not members because they could drag you away from the church (Sean Interview 2010).

Sylvia explained how leaving the church enabled her to look past certain features of any given person to appreciate the personality beneath the exterior, something she felt unable to do before leaving the church:

> Now I also feel a sense of community that is stronger in me and a sense of acceptance with people of…from all different walks of life. And I thought I was a very accepting Mormon when I was a Mormon, but it took getting out of the church for me to really broaden my view of God and who that can be and who that is and my sense of community, and people of the world and how I no longer look at somebody because they have tattoos all over their bodies or hair down to their waist—a man who has hair down his waist and a long scraggly beard. I no longer look at that person and think 'oh that person could use the church' [laughs]. So it has, it has um, broadened me quite a bit.

Others specifically mentioned that they had not only gained new social contacts as a result of leaving, but they found very specific groups of former members of the LDS Church to communicate with who could appreciate the circumstances which now impacted all interactions the apostate had with friends and family. In this sense these niche communities seem to have replaced the communities that were lost. Ronald made a similar observation when discussing his affiliation with one of these groups, the primary interactions of which often seem to occur in online discussion forums. He stated:

> One of the things that got me going involved in Post Mormonism…I've been involved…from the beginning of putting it together, but it was getting, when the world wide web came into existence and people could start communicating with one another about 'why did you leave' and people started to express their stories, that really resonated with me because that wasn't an experience that I had. And as you look now whether it is the Ex-Mormon board, or the Post Mormon board or even some of the other like the New Order Mormons or so on, it seems to be very important to people to tell their story and get responses from others as to why they left the church and what kind of experiences they had…We felt very alone, 30 plus years ago. So that was kind of an unfilled part of my life I guess that getting involved with Post Mormon kind of took care of. Because I mean, coming from the background I came from, and the families that I came from, the church was extremely important. I am descended from the people that came out here to build Zion [laughs] and when you finally have to say 'grandpa, great-grandpa: I think that you were sold a bill of goods,' that's a hard thing to deal with I think. So it's good to have people to talk to.

The development of new social networks is critical, considering the loss of former communities for some individuals resulted in a near complete annihilation of social ties.

Evidently, some former members of the LDS Church either seek out, or in some other ways establish social ties with non-members or other former members of the LDS faith. Several mentions of social media sites and message boards seem to indicate that at least some of this sense of communityness is formed online.

While some saw their friend base become more inclusive and others gravitated towards other former members, eight individuals actually had improved relationships with family members as a result of leaving, a theme coded as *better relationships*. For the most part the relationships that became stronger were with other family members that had also left the church. Jackson noted that while relations with some actively religious members of his family had deteriorated, the relationship with his son became closer. He described the reason for this unity this way:

> My relationship with my son who lost the faith has been enhanced because we have something in common in addition to what we already had…I mean, if you understand the Mormon doctrine all the way through its' a war wouldn't you agree? So my one son and I are on the same team we're at war spiritually with the family members who are on the other side and it's not a war to convert or anything like that but we represent the opposing side and so I guess that forms a bond between my son and I.

Other respondents noticed that more time spent with family meant better communication and greater intimacy:

> As far as positive changes go it's hard to even begin. We spend a lot more time together as a family; we look forward to the weekends because we spend every Sunday doing some sort of an activity as a family; going to the zoo or going to the aquarium or going up to the mountains or whatever. My relationship with my wife has become much more close because we don't have this other thing that's between us. It's just, everything just seems so much better now. We're much more relaxed, we are much happier, there's a lot less stress in our lives. (Sean Interview 2010).

Discussion: Aftermath of Apostasy

The limited exploration in previous research on the consequences of apostasy have both been refuted and supported in different ways by this research. On the one hand, consequences of apostasy from the LDS Church somewhat reflect the findings in the 2008 article by Wright et al. Although their review of the consequences for leaving Christian denominations was much more abrupt than their discussion of the causes, Wright et al. do include a discussion of aftermath of leaving a Christian faith. However, general themes were not identified, only a few descriptive quotes were included in the article. The quotes that were included did appear to reflect some of the themes identified here such as *impacts to family* and the *autonomy*. Such an example is when the authors quote a few of the narratives that they used in their research to describe the implications for friends and family:

> The social costs were especially high when they involved family. One respondent compared revealing his decision to his parents as akin to a gay person "coming out" to their straight parents. He wrote: "I had to face a more daunting and more real situation---and that was dealing with my Evangelical parents. Coming out as a non-believer or a follower of a different philosophy or religion, comes with the same stigma as being Gay/Lesbian/Bisexual/ Transgender/Intersexed in this country (Wright et al. 2008: 24).

For the most part, Wright et al.'s discussion of the consequences of apostasy appeared to be included as more of an afterthought, than as part of the core research questions. Because Wright et al.'s article is the most of recent of only a few minor attempts at observing the various impacts of apostasy on the individual outside of general feelings of happiness there is little else to compare my results to. One notable exception that can be made is that the level of normlessness felt by respondents in this research appears to be a reflection of similar findings by Durkheim (1951) when he discussed how

losing a moral paradigm negatively impacted former religious adherents, sometimes leading to suicidal tendencies. Of course, this current research is limited to simply identifying such feelings of anomie and at this point there is no indication that feelings of anomie may translate to additional consequences, such as suicide, although additional consequences are possible and were simply not identified here.

Other research has only hinted at consequences that reflect themes in this research such as negative implications for family ties, loss of community, and increased autonomy (Altemeyer and Hunsberger 1997; Barbour 1994; Hoge 1981; McKnight 2008). Other scholars noted that those who leave their church suffer from a loss of happiness. In contrast, self described levels of happiness are higher among this group of apostates than has been found previously (Brinkerhoff and Mackie 1993; Feigelman et al. 1992; Zelan 1968). However, previous reviews of the consequences of apostasy are generally perfunctory, and do not elaborate on the nuances of these consequences to the degree that I have here. For example, although other research has found that there are negative implications for family ties, the breadth and depth of these implications had been previously unexplored—such as the degree to which some relationships strengthen while others crumble.

Regardless of the degree to which research has explored the experiences of and reasons behind apostasy, it seems evident that those who leave the LDS Church have stories to tell, and many want to share their experiences. This desire to share experiences concerning their abandonment of the LDS Church is in part indicated by the 100% response rate to request for interviews concerning this topic. Response rates are rarely so high (Neuman 2006). Clearly something about the experience of apostasy has a profound

effect on many individuals. It may be that continuing to live in Utah, which is predominantly LDS has the result of making apostates more reflective about their reasons for leaving, or it may be that the consequences of leaving the church are ongoing and therefore a more salient issue in their day to day lives. Surely the simple act of leaving a religious institution alone has not led to these types of responses. The loss of community as an addendum to apostasy does appear to have a large impact on many of the lives of former Latter-day Saints.

In this research loss of community was one of the key consequences of leaving the church. Former members noted a generalized sense of not belonging, being rejected by friends and family, and discontent with the LDS institution and its members after leaving. The new social position of the apostate appears in many respects to be of a more marginalized status. The apostate is often closed out from privileged spaces such as temples and family gatherings. The new marginal status of the former LDS adherent is reflective of research on other types of community lost, such as migration (Cullen and Pretes 2000). The apostate also faces experiences with discrimination, often from the individuals in the world they just left, also similar to inferences in other research focused on the process of leaving a variety of social roles (Ebaugh 1988).

Although apostasy does appear to have many consequences for the individual, it is not clear at this point whether or not the apostate experiences loss of community with regards to the material benefits of community that has been made mention of in other research. For instance, some scholars note that community contributes to financial, physical, and individual welfare (Hwang et al. 2009; Lombe and Ssewamala 2007; Wilkinson 1991). Effects to these particular aspects of life for the apostate cannot be

clearly discerned at this point. The consequences to which the participants in this research referred (thus inferring their importance) were the implications to sense of community in terms of a general loss of community, negative effects on family ties, and the loss of friends. Only one of the former members of the LDS Church noted how the loss of these social ties meant a loss of material assistance of one kind or another:

> Two weeks ago I saw some old relief society "friends" on the side of the road. Two of the wheels had fallen off their car and the axle had slipped out. I saw the home teachers pull up and I realized I had no home teachers to call. Then I remembered I can call a mechanic…I lost fake friends, I lost obligations, admittedly I also lost them as a support system and as a place of comfort. In hind sight, I'm much better off though (Susan Interview 2010).

For the rest, other types of social and material contributions from community such as help with car problems or health problems, financial assistance, or aid for any other physical limitations were never mentioned, implying that material assistance is of peripheral importance at best. This finding puts great credence in the idea that a community is not purpose driven as posited by other authors (Bender 1978; Warren 1978). Rather, social ties appear, at least in this case, to have inherent value outside the material goods and services that may arise from social contacts.

What is most notably absent in other research on apostasy is the degree to which the former member may enjoy a number of positive benefits after leaving their faith. It is clear that a certain degree of tension is present as the apostate suffers from many negative consequences and yet still sees many positive outcomes as a result of leaving. Although not discernable at this point, it may be possible that the positive outcomes of leaving outweigh the negatives, which may be one reason why an apostate chooses to abscond from their faith, even in the face of such consequences as loss of community. However,

the positives of leaving noted in this research has been mostly absent in the literature on apostasy. Most other research, as noted previously, has stated that apostates are less likely to be happy after leaving, whereas most of the individuals here indicated the opposite to be true. In addition, other benefits of apostasy noted and examined here that have not been made mention of elsewhere including the time and money saved, the creation of new friendship relationships, increased autonomy, and the improvement of certain familial ties.

Finally, having discussed the consequences accrued by individuals as a result of apostasy and having made comparisons of these findings to the literature, I spend the remainder of this section discussing the relationships between variables and other themes that were hinted at in this research. In this study, multiple consequences for leaving an institution of faith have been identified, both positive and negative, and have to some degree or another affected every individual participant included in this study. While some appeared to suffer from a greater number of negative consequences and others garnered more positive repercussions, without exception each person had at least one negative and one positive outcome subsequent to their decision to leave. For most, a good mix of each was evident in the interviews, and many of the consequences for leaving seem to be interconnected. While it is difficult at this point to tease out the specific relations among the consequences, some clues to possible relationships were evident. However, I must be clear that I make no claim to actual relationships between variables here. Rather, there are indications of and hints that there may be relationships that are worth exploring. For instance, for some, levels of happiness were contingent upon the current belief status of family members, especially spouses and children. Evidently the simple decision to leave

the church did not equate to increased happiness for all former members if they were not able to share their lives with members of their family.

Additionally, it is not clear why some respondents experienced multitudes of consequences while others experienced relatively few. It is possible that the degree to which members of the LDS Church acted as the primary community for the apostate prior to leaving the church might at least to some extent determine the degree and severity of consequences for the apostate. However, this relationship is unclear at best. Even those respondents that indicated that the LDS Church did not form their primary community stated that they lost social ties to that community, and they considered the loss to be at least somewhat undesirable.

The only other pattern that did emerge while reviewing the consequences of leaving was the degree to which former members either reinforced or supplemented their reasons for leaving. In some cases, the apostate might have originally left because he or she felt as though they did not belong, “a square peg in a round hole” as one person called it. For others it was the hypocrisy that seemed evident either in the church, or coming from members of the church. Regardless of the initial justification for leaving, every single apostate developed some form of intellectual reason for leaving the church at a later point, in most cases itemizing at least three or more. The development of the additional causes may be the result of a desire to reinforce the correctness of their decision. However, whether or not this is the case is unclear, it is unknown whether or not the former member specifically looked for additional reasons to justify their choice to remain separate from the church or if those reasons simply developed as a by-product of spending time with others not affiliated with the LDS Church. Regardless of how these

additional reasons developed they clearly played a part in the continued decision to remain outside of the church.

Other relationships could not be inferred with this research. These relationships included the association between the level of religiosity prior to leaving the church and subsequent consequences. Regardless of how often the respondent attended church, held callings, or otherwise engaged in the religious and social sphere, negative consequences still abounded. Doug is one example of an individual who indicated both low levels of religiosity prior to leaving the church, and that his community was comprised of those from outside the LDS Church, yet still suffered consequences with his family in the form of extremely strained familial ties, and the loss of family events:

> Even simple things about hanging out with my family…My brother and I both feel like we cannot be entirely ourselves around our family. They don't, they expect us to take an interest in their religious lives, but they take no interest in our non-religious lives…My brother and I don't really do holidays with [them] anymore…they want to read from the scriptures and talk about Christ, where we want to cook food, we want to have seasonal beers, seasonal cocktails, stay up and have a good time, and it doesn't mesh.

Additionally, there was no apparent connection between demographic variables and either the reasons for apostasy or the consequences for apostasy. As noted earlier, all the respondents listed at least one negative and one positive repercussion for leaving the church, and all the respondents mentioned at least one intellectual reason for leaving the church. Also, no relationship between formal resignation and consequences was discovered. Interestingly, those who had not formally left the church suffered many of the same consequences, and to the same degree, as those who officially eschewed formal ties. Instead of formal resignation being the determining factor concerning consequences for social ties, sentiments that revealed a loss of faith, and the reduction of church attendance

on the part of the apostate seemed to hold greater weight. Resignation seemed to result in minimal impacts, if any, for most of the individuals interviewed for this project. However, there were a few respondents who noted that their choice to retain formal affiliation was the result of their desire not to compound the angst felt by other members of their family at the thought of the individual formally leaving the church. Outside of concern for the emotional well-being of family members, apostates did not appear hesitant to resign for any other reason.

Finally, in the course of this research I have attached either negative or positive connotations to many of the consequences for leaving. It is possible that the consequences of leaving the church might not be so clearly delineated by the former member. For example, while it was very liberating for some of the apostates to relinquish their moral paradigm and have the opportunity to form their own moral decisions, some saw this as a very daunting task that had long term consequences for their children, and felt very overwhelmed when faced with so many decisions. In other instances impacts on familial relationships were bittersweet. On the one hand tighter bonds formed with other family members who had also left, but antagonistic and sometimes hostile relations emerged in those relations with still believing family members. Whether the former member would conclude that the resulting consequences were decidedly more positive or negative is unknown.

CONCLUSION

The causes and consequences of apostasy are multifaceted, intertwined, and plentiful. In this research I utilized an inductive grounded theory approach to identify several new categories of the causes for, and consequences of, apostasy. I have identified 14 individual themes that demonstrate reasons for rescinding affiliation with the LDS Church and 17 individual themes describing the repercussions for leaving this particular faith. The causes both reflect findings in other research and tread new ground with regard to the specific and often intellectual reasoning that determines the decision to apostatize. While demographic factors in other quantitative research give one glimpse of the picture of apostasy, qualitative in-depth interviews of former religious adherents show that in many cases the choice to leave a religion is not undertaken lightly, and that many different kinds of factors can play into the change. On the one hand all of the apostates interviewed for this research stated one or more intellectual reasons for leaving the LDS Church and for remaining apart. These reasons were historical, scientific, or based on concerns about human rights, and more often than not more than one reason was given. Additional justifications included spiritual experiences, previous doubts about the church and lack of belief, and the view that church practices, whether in the temple or with their financial holdings, were questionable. Alternative rationale included the lack of tolerance and hypocrisy by the church and its members. Of course this research and the quantitative research reviewing the demographics of apostates can go hand in hand by giving a profile of apostate that covers not only their sex and age, but also the logical and cognitive reasons that they rely upon when making such a change.

The apostate also faces many challenges; they leave their spiritual world, and face the need to form new moral paradigms, cope with strained relationships with family members and friends, and must attempt to navigate a social field that is sometimes hostile towards their change in belief structure. In these ways the individual faces a significant loss of community and must find ways to recreate community, and by default, the benefits of community, by establishing themselves in a new realm. The apostate may gravitate towards others who have left the church, and in some cases these social bonds and an ensuing sense of communityness may be formed online with the use of supportive forums, similar to findings in Wellman (2001).

These consequences of apostasy also ranged in terms of intensity and variety. Some experienced several negative consequences, some experienced more positive consequences. Some experienced a few relatively minor consequences, while others faced what many would consider to be extreme events such as disownment or divorce. There was no discernable relationship between prior commitment to the church, or the level of religiosity, and the consequences for leaving. Each apostate experienced at least one negative and one positive consequence as a result of leaving the church. Most commonly, negative impacts to family relations and the deterioration of sense of community were noted. Other impacts, such as feelings of being judged, anger at the church or members of the church and the desire to be understood were very much a part of the aftermath of leaving.

Even after knowing all of the negative outcomes for former members it was still interesting to discover the many ways in which an apostate viewed their decision to leave the LDS Church as positive. As noted, every respondent made mention of at least one

thing that they considered to be positive that resulted from their decision to apostatize. While not completely unexpected, the degree to which positive outcomes resulted from leaving the LDS Church was nevertheless somewhat surprising. While this research was conducted with the use of grounded theory, it is still impossible to completely shun all possible preconceptions about what the outcomes of research may be. In this case I am aware that I entered into the study assuming on some level that the negative consequences of leaving the church would be more significant than, and outweigh, the positive outcomes. However, because this research was primarily inductive I was able to identify and include the numerous ways in which leaving the church was considered a positive experience. These consequences, both positive and negative, had not been fully explored or elaborated upon in the literature previously, and it is this portion of my thesis that provides the most by way of supplementing other research on religion and religious change.

While this research seeks to offer an in-depth, ground up, approach to viewing and telling the stories of apostasy, it is not without its limitations. First and foremost, a small and non-randomized sample of only 21 participants means that the findings in this study cannot be generalized to the greater apostate population in any way. In addition, the respondents had the option of opting out of the research, which meant that the data was the result of self-selection. Because of these reasons, there is no way to make general statements about the apostasy process of other former LDS individuals, much less to apostates from other faiths. For example, even though every individual included here has left the church and has not chosen to join another does not mean that all or even most apostates from the LDS Church become a “none.” Likewise, regardless of the fact that

most apostates from the LDS church in this research experienced anger, some degree of loss of community, and negative implications for family relationships, there is no guarantee that these same experiences are felt by every other former member of the LDS faith, much less felt in other religions.

Additionally, the causes and consequences of apostasy that have been identified in this paper and other research could be transferred into a quantitative study that uses both a larger sample size, draws from a larger sampling frame, and uses a survey in order to take responses and transform them into computable statistical information. This data could be useful in determining the extent to which any of the causes of apostasy or its aftermath identified here has an effect on other former members of the church. The data could also be used to find demographic patterns and how they relate to the specific reasons given for leaving the church. For instance, are women more likely to leave over concerns about human rights than men? Are men are more likely to leave for historical or scientific reasons? How does age play into the decision making process, and does age have an influence on the types of reasons offered by the former members?

Quantitative studies may also fill the gaps with regards to other limited aspects of this investigation. The limited scope of this research is such that no significant relationships were easily discernable. There appeared to be no clear connection between the reasons for apostasy and the consequences for leaving, nor did there appear to be a link between prior levels of religiosity or the consequences. There was also no link between formal apostasy (name removal) and the type or degree of consequences. Statistical analysis of a larger sample may very well be able to identify relationships between previous levels of religiosity and consequences or may identify other patterns

that are unknowable within the confines of this qualitative study. Additionally, research that combines both methods of Bahr and Albrecht (1989) and this research may paint a more accurate picture of apostasy from the LDS Church by utilizing a simple random sample and then interviewing former members by others who have also left the faith to help build and maintain levels of trust. Because I was unable to find any significant relationships between themes and variables this research can be considered descriptive at best.

Additionally, the interviews that were conducted here only show a glimpse into one specific point in time. Longitudinal studies of those both within and outside of the church would make it possible to track changes in belief while simultaneously making real time observations about attitudes and events without relying on what might be apostates faulty memory or desire to reduce cognitive dissonance, as has been noted as a potential problem by other researchers (Bahr and Albrecht 1989; Wright et al. 2008).

Other research questions have emerged from the new themes identified in this study. First and foremost, this research noted that many of the respondents lost part or all of their community when abandoning their faith. How do these individuals position themselves in their community thereafter? As seen in previous research expansions in communication technology has facilitated the retention of ties to the previous community for those who have migrated away (Hampton and Wellman 2001). A similar phenomenon seemed to be hinted at in this research. As noted by a few participants, and as is indicated by the number of participants that I was able to identify with the use of various online support groups, online networks seem to play a role for at least some of the former members. Message boards, forums, and social networks may be a supplemental

community to some degree for those who have left the church, but this particular topic was not explored in this research. With the continued debate over whether or not communities can exist online, and whether former LDS members find community there, it is certainly one area open for further exploration.

With this in mind there are a few questions to be answered in regard to apostasy and online communities: 1) do most apostates turn to online forums and networks? 2) to what degree is an online community beneficial to an apostate, and in what ways? 3) what are the consequences for an apostate with regard to the physical and material benefits of community; are they stripped completely, or not at all, or are they replaced in some other manner?

Second, many of the themes identified in this research revolve around scientific or historical inconsistencies as the underpinnings for disbelief. How does a religious adherent with no specific tie to the historical or scientific academic communities come across information that so completely invalidates their faith? Is this information passed by word of mouth, found online, or simply read in books? What distinguishes an apostate who knows of these pieces of history from a believing member with the same knowledge?

Third, to what degree does the experience of a former LDS person in Utah reflect experiences of apostates in other counties, countries, and regions? What about the experiences of apostates from other religious groups in areas where the population is dominantly one religion? Additional research should explore the degree to which the themes identified in this research are reflective of experiences elsewhere.

Finally, as mentioned earlier, what happens to an apostate 5, 10, or even 20 years hence is certainly worth observing. In other research most individuals who leave a religion of one kind eventually turn up in another, even if that person experienced a period of being considered a “none” (Putnam and Campbell 2010). However, as I established at the beginning of this research, observations about religion needs to have room for focus on individual sects. In this case it would be interesting to know whether or not LDS apostates are more likely to identify as “none” as they did in this research, or claim some other identity as the respondents did who participated in Bahr and Albrecht’s 1989 research. In addition, more research on the “none” population should be undertaken, especially to see if the transition into the status as a “none” has any particular impact that in some way can be distinguished from the transition between a “something” and a “something else.”

REFERENCES

Albrecht, Stan L. 1998. "The Consequential Dimensions of Mormon Religiosity." Pp. 253-292 in *Latter-day Saint Social Life: Social Research on the LDS Church and its Members*, edited by J. T. Duke. Provo, UT: Brigham Young University.

Albrecht, Stan L. and Marie Cornwall. 1989. "Life Events and Religious Change." *Review of Religious Research* 31: 23-38.

Albrecth, Stan L., Marie Cornwall, and Perry H. Cunningham. 1988. "Religious Leave-Taking: Disengagement and Disaffiliation among Mormons." Pp. 62-80 in *Falling from the Faith: Causes and Consequences of Religious Apostasy* edited by D. G. Bromley. London, England: Sage Publications.

Allen, John C. and Don A. Dillman. 1994. *Against All Odds: Rural Community in the Information Age*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Altemeyer, Bob and Bruce Hunsberger. 1997. *Amazing Conversion: Why Some Turn to Faith and Others Abandon Religion*. Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books.

Ash, Michael R. 2003. *What is "Official" LDS Doctrine?* for The Foundation for Apologetic Information and Research. Retrieved April 3, 2011 (http://www.fairlds.org/FAIR_Brochures/What_is_Mormon_Doctrine.pdf. Accessed April 16, 2011).

Bahr, Howard M. and Stan L. Albrecht. 1989. "Strangers Once More: Patterns of Disaffiliation from Mormonism." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 28: 180-200.

Barbour, John D. 1994. *Versions of Deconversion*. London, England: Sage Publications.

Beck, Julie B. 2007. "Mothers Who Know." *October 2007 General Conference Address*. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. Retrieved August 6, 2010 (http://lds.org/general-conference/2007/10/mothers-who-know?lang=eng).

Bender, T. 1978. *Community and Social Change in America*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

Berg, Bruce L., Ed. 2009. *Qualitative Research Methods*. Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.

Brinkerhoff, Merlin B. and Marlene M. Mackie. 1993. "Casting Off the Bonds of Organized Religion: A Religious Careers Approach to the Study of Apostasy." *Review of Religious Research* 34:235-258.

Bromley, David G., Ed. 1988. *Falling from the Faith: Causes and Consequences of Religious Apostasy*. London, England: Sage Publications.

Buxant, Coralie and Vassilis Saroglou. 2008. "Joining and Leaving a New Religious Movement: A Study of Ex-Members' Mental Health." *Mental Health, Religion & Culture*. 11: 251-271.

Caplovitz, David and Fred Sherrow. 1977. *The Religious Drop-Outs: Apostasy among College Graduates.* Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications.

Chaskin, Robert J. 1997. "Perspectives on Neighborhood and Community: A Review of the Literature." *The Social Service Review* 71: 521-547.

Choi, Heeseung. 2001. "Cultural Marginality: A Concept Analysis with Implications for Immigrant Adolescents." *Issues in Comprehensive Pediatric Nursing* 24:193-206.

Church Handbook of Instructions Book 1: Stake Presidencies and Bishoprics. 2006. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Salt Lake City, UT: Intellectual Reserve Inc.

Cullen, B. T. and Michael Pretes. 2000. "The Meaning of Marginality: Interpretations and Perceptions in Social Science." *The Social Science Journal* 37: 215-229.

Davidman, Lynn and Arthur L. Greil. 2007. "Characters in Search of a Script: The Exit Narratives of Formerly Ultra-Orthodox Jews." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 46: 201-216.

Dudley, R. L. 1999. "Youth Religious Commitment over Time: A Longitudinal Study of Retention." *Review of Religious Research* 41: 109-120.

Durkheim, Emile. 1951. *Suicide: A Study in Sociology*. Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press.

Ebaugh, Helen Rose Fuchs. 1988. *Becoming an Ex: The Process of Role Exit*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.

Effrat, Marcia P. 1974. "Approaches to Community: Conflicts and Complementaries." *Sociological Inquiry* 43: 1-32.

Emerson, Robert. 2001. *Contemporary Field Research: Perspectives and Formulations*. 2nd ed. Los Angeles, CA: Waveland Press Inc.

Erikson, Kai T. 1976. *Everything in Its Path: The Destruction of Community in the Buffalo Creek Flood*. New York, NY: Simon and Schuster.

Feigelman, W., B. S. Gorman, and J. A. Varacalli. 1992. "Americans Who Give Up Religion." *Sociology and Social Research* 76:138-144.

Fischer, Claude S. 1982. *To Dwell Among Friends: Personal Networks in Town and City*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Freudenburg, W. R. 1986. "The Density of Acquaintanceship: An Overlooked Variable in Community Research?" *American Journal of Sociology* 92: 27-63.

Geertz, Clifford. 1977. *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books.

Goldkuhl, Göran and Stefan Cronholm. 2010. "Multi-Grounded Theory: Adding Theoretical Grounding to Grounded Theory." *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 9: 2.

Goodstein, Laurie. 2011. "Trying to Relish the Big Time, Even When it Brings a Cringe." *New York Times*. Retrieved March 30, 2011 (http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/31/us/31mormon.html)

Hadaway, C. Kirk. 1989. "Identifying American Apostates: A Cluster Analysis." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 28:201.

Hadaway, C. Kirk and Wade Clark Roof. 1988. "Apostasy in American Churches: Evidence from National Survey Data." Pp. 29-46 in *Falling From the Faith: Causes and Consequences of Religious Apostasy*, edited by D. G. Bromley. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Hadaway, C. Kirk and Penny Long Marler. 1993. "All in the Family: Religious Mobility in America." *Review of Religious Research* 35: 97-116.

Hampton, K. and B. Wellman. 2001. "Long Distance Community in the Network Society: Contact and Support Beyond Netville." *American Behavioral Scientist* 45: 476-495.

Harty, Wendy J. 1996. "A Qualitative Analysis of Religious Transition." *Dissertation Abstracts International*: Section B: The Sciences and Engineering, ProQuest Information & Learning, US.

Hillery. George. A. 1955. "Definitions of Community: Areas of Agreement." *Rural Sociology* 55: 111-123.

Hirdes, John P. and Kathy A. Scott. 1998. "Social Relations in a Chronic Care Hospital: a Whole Network Study of Patients, Family and Employees." *Social Networks* 20: 119-133.

Hoge, Dean R. 1981. *Converts, Dropouts, Returnees: A Study of Religious Change Among Catholics.* New York, NY: Pilgrim Press.

Hoge, Dean R., Benton Johnson, and Donald A. Luidens. 1993. "Determinants of Church Involvement of Young Adults Who Grew Up in Presbyterian Churches." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 32: 242-255.

Hunsberger, Bruce. 1980. "A Reexamination of the Antecedents of Apostasy." *Review of Religious Research* 21:158-170.

Hunsberger, Bruce. 1983. "Apostasy, A Social Learning Perspective." *Review of Religious Research* 25: 23-38.

Hunsberger, Bruce and L. B. Brown. 1984. "Religious Socialization, Apostasy, and the Impact of Family Background." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 23:239-251.

Hunter, A. 1975. "The Loss of Community: An Empirical Test through Replication." *American Sociological Review* 40: 537-552.

Hwang, S. W., M. J. Kirst, S. Chiu, G. Tolomiczenko, A. Kiss, L. Cowan, and W. Levinson. 2009. "Multidimensional Social Support and the Health of Homeless Individuals." *Journal of Urban Health-Bulletin of the New York Academy of Medicine* 86:791-803.

Jacobs, Janet. 1987. "Deconversion from Religious Movements: An Analysis of Charismatic Bonding and Spiritual Commitment." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 26:294-308.

Kanter, Rosabeth M. 1972. *Commitment and Community: Communes and Utopias in Sociological Perspective.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Kasarda, John D. and Morris Janowitz. 1974. "Community Attachment in Mass Society." American Sociological Review 39: 328-339.

Kosmin, Barry A., Egon Mayer and Ariela Keysar. 2001. *American Religious Identification Survey.* New York, NY: The Graduate Center of the University of New York.

Kosmin, Barry A. and Ariela Keysar. 2009. *American Religious Identification Survey: Summary Report*. Hartford, CT: Trinity College.

Krannich, Richard S. and Clyde Eastman. 2002. "Community And Social Well-Being in Contemporary El Cerrito." Pp. 117-141 in *Persistence and Change in Rural Communities*, edited by A. E. Luloff and R. S. Krannich. Wallingford, UK: CABI Publishing.

Lawton, Leora E. and Regina Bures. 2001. "Parental Divorce and the "Switching" of Religious Identity." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 40:99-111.

LDS.org. 2009. "Statistical Information: Worldwide Church Statistics." *The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*. Retrieved Dec. 8, 2009 (http://newsroom.lds.org/ldsnewsroom/eng/statistical-information).

Lombe, Margaret and Fred M. Ssewamala. 2007. "The Role of Informal Social Networks in Micro-Savings Mobilization." *Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare* 34: 37-51.

Luloff, A. E. and Richard Krannich, Eds. 2002. *Persistence and Change in Rural Communities: A 50 Year Follow-up to Six Classic Studies*. New York, NY: Cabi Publishing.

Mauss, Armand L. 1969. "Dimensions of Religious Defection." *Review of Religious Research* 10:128-135.

McNaughton, Marilyn. 2003. "Leaving My Church: A Study of Disaffiliation Among Active Churchgoers." Dissertation Abstracts International Section A: Humanities and Social Sciences, ProQuest Information & Learning, US.

McKnight, Scot. 2008. *Finding Faith, Losing Faith: Stories of Conversion and Apostasy*. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press.

Merrill, Ray M., Joseph L. Lyon, and William J. Jensen. 2003. "Lack of a Secularizing Influence of Education on Religious Activity and Parity Among Mormons." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 42: 113-124.

Miles, Mathew B. and Michael Huberman. 1994. *Qualitative Data Analysis: An Expanded Sourcebook*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Neuman, Lawrence W. 2006. *Social Research Methods: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*. 6th ed. Boston, MA: Pearson Education Inc.

Park, Robert E. 1928. "Human Migration and The Marginal Man." *American Journal of Sociology* 33: 881-893.

The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life. 2009. "A Portrait of Mormons in the U.S." *The Pew Research Center*. Retrieved October 2010. (http://www.pewforum.org/Christian/Mormon/A-Portrait-of-Mormons-in-the-US.aspx)

Poulsen, Richard C. 1977, "'This is the Place': Myth and Mormondom." *Western Folklore* 36: 246-252.

Putnam, Robert D. 2000. *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. New York, NY: Simon and Schuster.

Putnam, Robert D. and David E. Campbell. 2010. *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us*. New York, NY: Simon and Schuster.

Regnerus, Mark D. and Jeremy E. Uecker. 2006. "Finding Faith, Losing Faith: The Prevalence and Context of Religious Transformations During Adolescence." *Review of Religious Research* 47:217-237.

Richardson, James T., Jan van Der Lans, and Frans Derks. 1986. "Leaving and Labeling: Voluntary and Coerced Disaffiliation from Religious Social Movements." *Research in Social Movements, Conflicts & Change* 9:97-126.

Roof, Wade Clark. 1989. "Multiple Religious Switching: A Research Note." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 28: 530-535.

Roof, Wade Clark and J. Shawn Landres. 1997. "Defection, Disengagement and Dissent: The Dynamics of Religious Change in the Untied States." *Religion & the Social Order* 7:77-95.

Roozen, David A. 1980. "Church Dropouts: Changing Patterns of Disengagement and Re-Entry." *Review of Religious Research* 21:427-450.

Rubin, Herbert J. and Irene S. Rubin. 2005. *Qualitative Interviewing*: *The Art of Hearing Data*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Salamon, Sonya. 2003. *Newcomers to Old Towns: Suburbanization of the Heartland*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.

Sampson, R. J. 1991. "Linking the Micro- and Macro-level Dimensions of Community Social Organization." *Social Forces* 70: 43-64.

Sampson, Robert J. and W. Byron Groves. 1989. "Community Structure and Crime: Testing Social Disorganization Theory." *American Journal of Sociology* 94: 774-802.

Sandomirsky, Sharon and John Wilson. 1990. "Processes of Disaffiliation: Religious Mobility Among Men and Women." *Social Forces* 68: 1211-1229.

Smith, C. and D. Sikkink. 2003. "Social Predictors of Retention In and Switching from the Religious Faith of Family of Origin: Another Look Using Religious Tradition Self-Identification." *Review of Religious Research* 45:188-206.

Stack, Peggy Fletcher. 2011. "Mormon President Can Do No Wrong to Religion's Members." *USA Today*. Retrieved April 3, 2011 (http://www.usatoday.com/news/religion/2011-03-30-mormom-prophet_N.htm).

Uecker, Jeremy E., Mark D. Regnerus, and Margaret L. Vaaler. 2007. "Losing My Religion: The Social Sources of Religious Decline in Early Adulthood." *Social Forces* 85:1667-1692.

Usdansky, M. L. and D. A. Wolf. 2008. "When child care breaks down - Mothers' experiences with child care problems and resulting missed work." *Journal of Family Issues* 29:1185-1210.

Warren, Ronald L. 1978. *The Community in America*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America.

Wellman, Barry 2001. "Physical Place and Cyberspace: The Rise of Personalixed Networking." *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 22:227-252.

Wellman, Barry and Barry Leighton. 1979. "Networks, Neighbohoods and Communities: Approaches to the Study of the Community Question." *Urban Affairs Quarterly* 14: 363-390.

Wellman, Barry and Scott Wortley. 1990. "Different Strokes from Different Folks: Community Ties and Social Support." *American Journal of Sociology* 96:558-588.

White, Katherine J.C. and Avery M. Guest. 2003. "Community Lost or Transformed? Urbanization and Social Ties." *City and Community* 2(3): 239-259.

Wilkinson, Kenneth P. 1979. "Social Well-Being and Community." *Journal of the Community Development Society* 10:5-16.

Wilkinson, Kenneth P. 1991. *The Community in Rural America*. Middleton, WI: Social Ecology Press.

Wright, Stuart A. 1988. “Leaving New Religious Movements: Issues, Theory and Research” Pp. 143-165 in *Falling From the Faith: Causes and Consequences of Religious Apostasy,* edited by D. G. Bromley. London, England: Sage Publications.

Wright, Bradley R.E., Dina Giovanelli, Emily G. Dolan and Mark Edwards. 2008. “Explaining Deconversion from Christianity: Evidence from On-Line Narratives." *Conference Papers American Sociological Association*: 1.

Wuthnow, Robert and Charles Y. Glock. 1973. “Religious Loyalty, Defection, and Experimentation Among College Youth.” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 12:157-180.

Zelan, Joseph. 1968. “Religious Apostasy, Higher Education and Occupational Choice.” *Sociology of Education* 41:370-379.

Zick, Cathleen D. and Ken R. Smith. 2006. *Utah At the Beginning of the New Millennium: A Demographic Perspective*. Salt Lake City, UT: The University of Utah Press.

APPENDIX

ID #_____
Date:_____

Interview Questions: Spring 2010

Icebreakers: Where are you from? Where do you live now? How long have you lived there?

Intro Question: In general, what role does religion have in your life? What does it mean to you?

Exploratory Questions:
I know (or, you mentioned) that you once considered yourself a member of the LDS Church. Can you tell me a little about your previous involvement in the church? (Use back of page).

Probes for Background Questions:
How long were you LDS?

Did you hold any positions?

If so, what were they?

How often did you attend church?

Did you graduate from Seminary and/or attend Institute?

Was your family (parents/siblings) active, if so, for how long?

What positions did they hold if any?

Basic Research Question: What led up to your decision to stop identifying with/resign from the LDS Church? (Use back of page).

What would you say was the *most* significant reason for you to stop identifying as a member of the church?

How would you describe your process of leaving the church?

Ask the following if not answered by initial exploratory question:
When did you stop considering yourself a member?

Have you officially "resigned" or had your "name removed?" Please explain why or why not.

In the process of leaving the church did your perspectives towards the church change over time? For example, did your reasons for leaving the church change?

When you were active in the church, to what degree did you consider the church (your ward) to be your primary community?

Questions concerning consequences:

What were the consequences (good or bad) you faced as a result of leaving the church?

Probes:
Did your relationships with friends and family change? If so, how?

How does your family handle big events like the holidays or baptisms?

What are other things (positive or negative) that happened as a direct result of your decision to cease identification with the church?

Final Major Question:
Is there anything else that I should know?

Demographic Questions:
Age:
Gender: M F
Race:
Education: