Material drawn from:
Cragun, R. T., & Hammer, J. H. (2011). "One person's apostate is another person's convert": What terminology tells us about pro-religious hegemony in the sociology of religion. *Humanity and Society, 35,* 159-175.

To set the stage for the discussion of 'apostasy' terminology, here is a figure detailing the terminology which was used from 1961-2007 in two popular sociology of religion journals: the *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* and *Sociology of Religion*.

Figure 1. Frequency of Terms in JSSR (1961-2007) and SofR (1961-2007).
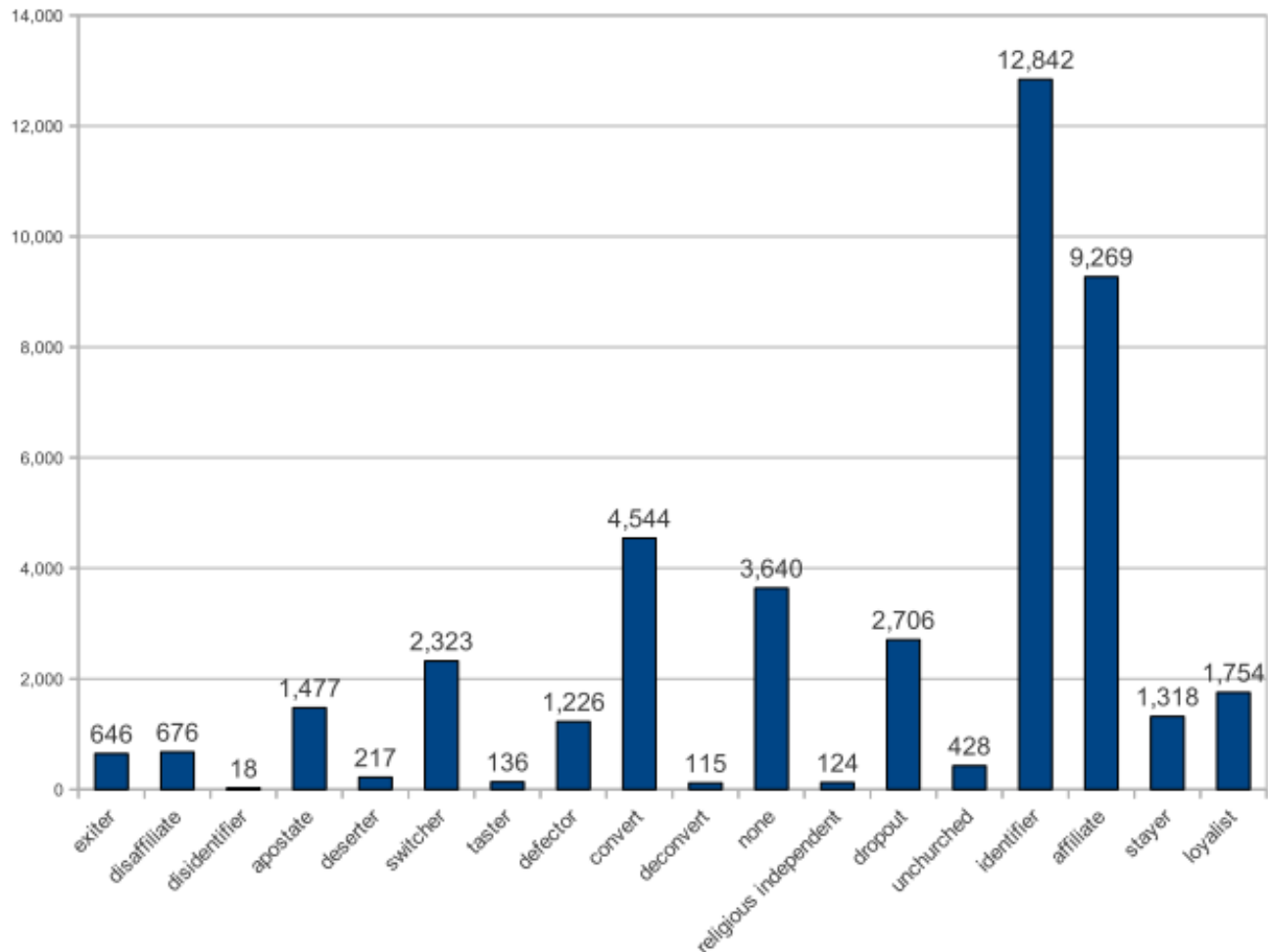
In our paper, we examine five groups of terms that refer primarily to the identification or "belonging" dimension of religiosity. These terms include: exiters, switchers, religious nones, converts, and identifiers/affiliates. The discussion of these five groups cannot be adequately summarized within this short conference paper, so interested readers are referred to the source article (available for NRSN conference participants at http://www.stuorg.iastate.edu/gsp/Cragun%20Hammer%2011%20-%20H&S%20Terminology.pdf)

There are, of course, other dimensions to religiosity (e.g., belief and behavior, among others; see Kosmin 2007), but we limited our scope to the "belonging" dimension of religiosity. Thus, for instance, when discussing terminology to describe those who switch between religions, we did not have the expectation that our terminology would also account for deeper complexities, such as the possibility that some people continue to subscribe to practices or beliefs from their prior faith. We also made recommendations for not using some terms and suggest some new terms to replace others that could be seen as pejorative.

The table below delineates our suggested sub-categorization of these terms, and identifies those terms we believe are inappropriately pejorative. We would advocate for inclusion of the appropriate (non-shaded) terms into the NSRN glossary.

Table 1. Religious change terminology.

exiter	any person who leaves a religion
disaffiliate	a person who leaves a religion by formally requesting their name be removed from the membership roles of the religion
disidentifier	a person who leaves a religion by no longer self-identifying as a member of the religion
apostate	a person who leaves a religion and then fights against that religion
deserter	a person who leaves a religion with no intention of returning
switcher	a person who leaves a religion and joins another religion
within family switcher	someone who leaves a religion and joins a religion that belongs to the same broad religious family (e.g., Methodist to Baptist)
between family switcher	a person who leaves a religion and joins a religion that belongs to a different broad religious family (e.g., Catholic to Buddhist)
taster	a person who repetitively joins and leaves religions
defector	a person who leaves a religion with the intent of joining a rival group
convert	anyone who experiences a change in religious identity
deconvert	a person who leaves a religion
none	a person who does not associate with a religion
re-none	a person who leaves a religion and becomes a religious none
native none	a person raised without a religious identity who has not joined a religion
religious independent	a person with no religious affiliation
dropout	a person who leaves a religion and becomes a religious none
unchurched	a person raised without a religious affiliation who has never joined one
identifier	a person who self-identifies as being associated with an organized religion
affiliate	a person who claims formal membership status in an organized religion
stayer	a person who was raised with a religious affiliation and remains religiously affiliated later in life, regardless of any changes in affiliation
loyalist	a person raised with a specific religious affiliation who maintains that affiliation later in life

* Terms shaded are either terms with a pejorative connotation that we suggest should not be used except in the context of reporting how those who still belong to a religion view those who have left, terms that are not widely used but have been used, or terms that are confusing in this context and we recommend should not be used.

Certainly, as Lois queries, our concepts would benefit from reflecting more dynamic and less linear changes in relationships with religion. The suggestions provided above represent, we would hope, a static foundation upon which more dynamic terminology can arise.

In our paper, we go on to discuss the construction of deviance and some implications of the terminology for pro-religious hegemony in the sociology of religion. In short, the deviant status of the nonreligious is reinforced by the terminology used in the discipline. Since the sociology of religion is interested in "religion," that which is not religion is contrasted with that which is. In this sense, we do not think it is prejudicial to call those who have no religious affiliation "nones," as religion is not a part of their identity. But to call them "apostates" or the

"unchurched" clearly suggests favoritism towards religion. In fact, there is not a single widely used term in the sociology of religion to refer to those (1) without a religious identity, (2) those who change their religious identity, or (3) those who lower their commitment to religion that is not at least somewhat pejorative: apostate, dropout, defector, deserter, none, disaffiliate, disidentifier, disengager, unchurched, deconvert, taster, and switcher. Contrast those terms with the terms used to describe religious affiliates who join a religion or remain members – stayers, loyalists, and converts – and the bias in the terminology is apparent.

The goal of our article was to move past delineations of deviance or non-deviance and offer terms that are fair, neutral, and that minimize bias as much as possible. Removing all bias from terminology is, of course, impossible. But sociologists should have more to offer than labels that reflect, implicitly or explicitly, a tradition of pro-religious hegemony.

References

Kosmin, Barry A. 2007. "Introduction: Contemporary Secularity and Secularism." Pp. 1-16 in *Secularism and Secularity: Contemporary International Perspectives*, edited by Ariela Keysar and Barry A. Kosmin. Institute for the Study of Secularism in Society and Culture.