


**The #Exvangelical Reformation: American Evangelical #deconstruction**  
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A thesis submitted to the faculty of Radford University in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Science in the School of Communication


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## Abstract

America is experiencing a crisis of both identity and faith. People are leaving the Evangelical church through a process called deconstruction. Who they are, what they say, and how they build their online experiences can tell us a great deal about this phenomenon. Social media analysis was used in this project to explore the public discourses on Twitter regarding deconstruction. Tweets shared from November 25 to December 31, 2022 were collected through NodeXL Pro (cloud version). The research identified main voices of this social movement on Twitter. It also found that deconstructionists primarily shared their experiences by talking about their reasons of leaving the church, such as systematic/institutional sexual abuse, gay rights, and religious abuse/questions about teachings. Empty pews can signal those unresolved problems within the church. There is no one clear path for deconstruction, but the aggregated stories on Twitter provide insight into the deeply personal and often painful process of shedding the Evangelical identity. While these conversations are currently small compared to larger social movements such as BLM, examining the public discourses on deconstruction has implications for understanding the Evangelical voting block, the church's future revenue stream, and potentially the social rhythms of American communities.

Keywords: deconstruction, Christianity, Evangelicalism, social media analysis, Social Identity Theory

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### **Dedication**

This is dedicated to my father, Dr. Gary L. Long, whose immense kindness and patience have allowed me to become the best version of myself. Abba, you will always be my greatest teacher.

## Introduction

Half a century ago it would have been inconceivable that a few keystrokes and button clicks could give a voice to a social movement. While innovations in communication have always been at the heart of such movements (e.g., the printing press, the telegraph, the camera), social media accomplishes something once impossible: the instantaneous transmission of information between individuals and groups via a “radically individualistic and freelance format” (Carty, 2015 p. 9). People are not just receivers but active participants in the creation and distribution of information (Carty, 2019).

Thanks to this stunning leap forward, our now increasingly interconnected society can achieve something that once was a monumental task: connecting people over time and space to create social change (Yilmaz, 2017). These online strategies allow activists to adapt to the “more flexible[,] more fragmented, atomized nature of new social movements” (Yilmaz, 2017, p. 158). Social media is by no means a silver bullet when it comes to the effectiveness of social campaigns, but it can do the heavy lifting of creating awareness and organizing grassroots efforts as part of a larger movement (Yilmaz, 2017). For example, in the case of #MeToo movement, Twitter has served as an important platform for activists to amplify their messages. Among all the available social media platforms, Twitter has received much attention from scholars (e.g., Artz, 2021; Brünker et al., 2020) when examining the influence of social media in society.

When using Twitter, the general purpose of users is to connect with others and also have a channel through which to share their thoughts with a larger audience. According to the Pew Research Center, 23% of American adults use Twitter. “A much larger share of U.S. adults who use YouTube (81%), Facebook (69%) and Instagram (40%)” but Twitter users make up about the same share as those who use Snapchat (25%) and WhatsApp (23%) (Odabaş, 2022).

Statistically, Twitter is not hoarding the bulk of the social media attention, but it still comprises a vast network of millions of Americans.

Twitter is particularly relevant to this study because the demographics of Twitter users overlap with the demographics of American adults who are deconstructing. First, the average Twitter users' age overlaps with the age of a typical individual who chooses to exit their religion (which this study refers to as *deconstructionists*). Pew Research Center (2022) data shows that deconstructionists are usually between the ages of 15 and 29. Meanwhile, 30% of people who are raised as Christians will leave the faith before the age of 30 (Pew Research Center, 2022). The largest group of Twitter users fall into that first range: being between the ages of 18 and 29 years of age (Auxier & Anderson, 2022). This makes up 42% of the users on Twitter. The second overlap is the education level. The Pew Research Center (2022) reports that 35% of individuals who are leaving the church hold college degrees. In comparison, "Twitter users are younger, more likely to identify as Democrats, more highly educated, and have higher incomes than U.S. adults overall" (Wojcik & Hughes, 2021, para. 3).

These overlapping demographics of Twitter users and deconstructionists make Twitter an ideal platform to study how the conversations about this movement are constructed on social media, who are the most vocal about deconstruction on Twitter, and what meanings are manifested on the social media platform.

The goal of this project is to study the messages of Evangelical deconstructionists to gain clarity about the movement; learning about this movement on social media has significant implications for communication scholars and religious studies about the changes in American society. There are two parts to the research project: the first phase is a social network analysis that will determine the top influencers using Evangelical-related hashtags and the second phase

is a semantic analysis of the Twitter feeds in order to determine emerging themes in the deconstruction movement.

### **Social Media and Social Movement**

Over the past 10 years, social media, especially Twitter, have served as a battleground for activists to raise awareness of social issues, share their opinions, and create social movements in America (Bosch, 2016; Li et al., 2020). It also attracts much attention from researchers. Some main topics in social media research include the general function of social media (e.g., Ryan et al., 2014) or the role of social media in society (e.g., Shaw, 2016; Słupińska et al., 2022)—specifically the role of social media in social movement (e.g., Greijdanus et al., 2020; Leong et al., 2019; Mishra, 2022; Mundt et al., 2018; Shahin & Ng, 2022).

### **The Function of Social Media**

When considering the functionality of social media in a social movement, uses and gratifications theory (UGT) can provide a framework to examine the reasons behind social media usage. Katz et al. (1974) outlined several unique elements that set UGT apart from other communication theories. These assumptions include that the audience members are considered active and self-aware; the audience uses the medium, not the other way around; and not only do mediums compete with each other to satiate the audience's needs—mass media can only fulfill a certain range of human needs with varying success (Katz et al., 1974).

When it specifically comes to social media, Whiting and Williams (2013) found 10 uses according to the UGT framework: “social interaction, information seeking, pass time, entertainment, relaxation, communicatory utility, convenience utility, expression of opinion, information sharing, and surveillance/knowledge about others” (p. 362). *Social interaction* (that is, social integration in UGT terms) function was favored by majority of participants in Whiting



and William's (2013) research to keep in touch with their relatives and loved ones, as well as connect with old and new friends.

The utility of social media and its attributes also lends itself as a formidable tool for social movements looking to gain traction in order to become a larger societal conversation (Graybill-Leonard et al., 2011). For example, Kietzmann et al. (2011) created a framework for describing the use of social media by breaking it down into seven function building blocks: “identity, conversations, sharing, presence, relationships, reputation, and groups” (p. 241). While their purpose was to encourage organizations to use these blocks as avenues to engage the public online—it serves as a helpful blueprint to describe how both individuals *and* organizations utilize social media to initiate or facilitate a social movement. *Identity* refers to volunteered information—anything from biographical facts to thoughts or feelings. The *conversations* block represents the dialogic aspect of online platforms, specifically in terms of content and frequency—which the authors referred to as *conversation velocity* (Keitzmann et al., 2011). The authors defined *sharing* as the “extent to which users exchange, distribute, and receive content” (Keitzmann et al., 2011, p. 245). *Presence* is the visibility of a user: whether they are hidden (which can be referred to as *lurking*) or observably active. The *relationships* block represents the spectrum, or extent, of how users relate to each other. Some platforms allow for more formalized relationships (such as Facebook “friends”), while others have loose categorizations of personal contacts. The social standing of a user is what the authors called *reputation*, which can include such metrics as endorsements, view counts, likes, subscription numbers, and reach. Finally, the last block of *groups* is the ability of users to create and build communities. The authors explained that “the more ‘social’ a network becomes, the bigger the group of friends, followers, and contacts” (Keitzmann et al., 2011, p. 247).

While not all users engage with social media for the exact same reasons—research suggests that individuals tend to use social media to maintain their relationships, experience companionships, seek escape from their daily lives, establish reputation, pass time, and find entertainment (Ryan et al., 2014).

### **The Role of Social Media in Social Movement**

Unlike the casual individual user, social campaigns strategically utilize social media in terms of broadening the reach of their message and recruiting more participants. Particularly Twitter can provide “a favorable environment for users seeking to form and spread opinions” because of its ability to transmit information from any internet-capable device (Venkatesan et al., 2021, pp. 1683-1684)

For example, Mundt et al. (2018) studied the role of social media in the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement, particularly in terms of its ability to “scale up” the movement (p. 1). The authors pointed out that social media creates the possibility for “building connections, mobilizing participants and tangible resources, coalition building, and amplifying alternative narratives” (Mundt et al., 2018, p. 1). Building coalitions is imperative for social campaigns because they help to sustain the movement. By utilizing social media, activists can build networks of strong ties that then provide *social capital* to the movement (Mundt et al., 2018). What unites these individuals and associated networks (coalitions) is the *shared narrative* and *collective identity* that emerges from the *meaning-making* process in which users discuss and share person frames and ideologies (Mundt et al., 2018). These interactions shape dialogues and coalesce into a common purpose.

There are disadvantages in using social media to push for social movement. For example, Mundt et al. (2018) argued that opposing dialogues can also develop on the same platform, like

what happened with #BlackLivesMatter when #AllLivesMatter was created on social media and inevitably received much support as well. There are also the issues of leadership burnout and *slacktivism*, which referred to the phenomenon of individuals engaged in social movements who only participate virtually but not in any other capacity (Mundt et al., 2018).

Regardless of those challenges, participants in Mundt et al.'s (2018) research still perceived social media as an important tool for building direct personal ties within the community of BLM activists because "social media can open a path for transmission of ideas and knowledge among widely dispersed activists within a given movement" (p. 7). Users who might otherwise be geographically disconnected are able to connect with each other while amplifying *preferred narratives* through functions such as *likes*, *retweets*, and *shares* (Mundt et al., 2018). Being able to control these narratives can create social awareness and visibility for the social movement (Mundt et al., 2018). A coalition forms when users have common narratives, ideologies, and identities—which can happen between members of a group or between leaders of different groups with that share the same purpose (Mundt et al., 2018). As the authors explained, this allows for *collective meaning-making*.

Without this collectivity, social movements can fail. Shahin and Ng (2022) studied India's Aadhaar movement, which centered around concerns over the government's use of a 12-digit ID number for citizens that links to their personal and biometric data. The authors illustrated that because the online movement never gained a *collective sensibility*, it failed to sustain itself and accomplish any meaningful societal changes.

The same concept resonated in Mishra's (2022) research: shared identity (or collective sensibility) and *collaborative meaning-making* are truly keys to creating *collective action*. Because social media allows for the effective and timely transmission of information, online

movements can direct their cohesive identity and energy into creating specific goals for change (Mishra, 2022). This has allowed social media to make a big impact on how such movements coalesce, structure themselves, and transform their energy into *collective action* (Mishra, 2022).

Greijdanus et al. (2020) also discussed the creation of *collective action* in their study. The authors found that social media helps online movements “particularly by documenting and collating individual experiences, community building, norm formation, and development of shared realities” (Greijdanus et al., 2020, p. 49). When social media users encounter the online movement’s call to action in their own personal networks, it allows the user to transfer this online momentum into offline participation, which is called *bottom-up mobilization* (Greijdanus et al., 2020). These bottom-up movements have existed for centuries, with one example being the protests during the Reformation (the schism that split the Catholic Church and led to the creation of the first protestant denomination of Lutheranism). In this case, the mediums would have been distributed flyers, town meetings, and rumors (Greijdanus et al., 2020). Nevertheless, these efforts resulted in *collective action* on a historical scale. Social media offers a more instantaneous and convenient way for *collective action* to happen.

Not only does social media allow for this collective effort, but it also lowers the cost of contribution in comparison to in-person activism (Leong et al., 2019). The multimodality of platforms allows users to *like, post, share, retweet*, form groups, create events, and interact with various kinds of content as part of grassroots efforts. This interactivity means that users can participate based on individual abilities and interests. Leong et al. (2019) posited that while some people will only operate as *slacktivists* or keyboard warriors, many others will actively engage with personally meaningful campaign: “like the Internet in general, social media allows the members of a community to have a voice at a lower cost” (p. 15).

This lowered cost allows disenfranchised Evangelicals to combine their voices online into a small (compared to larger movements such as BLM) but salient conversation that creates shared meanings, narratives, and group identity about deconstruction.

## **Deconstruction Movement**

### **History**

Although there is no official date for the beginning of the deconstruction movement, scholars know this is not a new trend. In an article for the *Religious News Service*, Andre Henry (2022) argued that the deconstruction movement can potentially be traced back to 1517—when Martin Luther nailed his 95 treatises to a church door. Henry (2022) said we can even find examples of deconstruction in the Bible itself: “One potent example comes from the Book of Acts, in which the apostle Peter breaks a religious taboo to visit a Roman centurion named Cornelius” (para. 5).

The largest and most unavoidable name in deconstruction authorship is Jean Luc-Nancy. His philosophical treatise on deconstruction, *Dis-Enclosure: The Deconstruction of Christianity*, is often referenced by other scholars. Nancy (2009) described the act of “dis-enclosure” as creating an opening or “raising a barrier” (p. 6). He also explained that the “movement of deconstruction” means to disjoint or dismantle: “It is also not a question of repainting the skies, or of reconfiguring them: it is a question of opening up the earth— dark, hard, and lost in space” (p. 1).

In his treatise, Nancy foresaw the end of Christianity. His argument was that Christianity has its own demise written into its DNA.

It seems to me superfluous to repeat all the grievances that can legitimately be leveled against Christianity, from the divestiture of thinking to the ignoble exploitation of pain

and misery. We should even push the accusation farther— indeed, farther than mere accusation— to interrogate the conditions of possibility of a so powerful and durable religious domination exerted upon a world that, simultaneously, almost never stopped outmaneuvering and deposing this domination, and that found in it weapons to be used against it (freedom, the individual, reason itself). (pp. 9-10)

These *weapons* represent characteristics within the religion that threaten its permanence. Two of these are the emphasis on *self-critique*, and its love for narratives (Dickinson, 2021). Christianity “introduced a love for all narratives as a link to whatever narrative already exists, ending, in the process, the exclusionary mechanisms that had governed other early monotheistic religious narratives” (Dickinson, 2021, p. 15). In this way, Christianity acts like a double-edge sword: it is both the reason for enclosure (the inflexible, fused theological construct) and the dis-enclosure (the deconstruction) (Nancy, 2009). Thus, the structure of Christianity itself leads its followers to inevitably reach the end of their spiritual journey... to only be confronted by its finality (Dickenson, 2021). What comes next is unknown, but Nancy suggested that the same forces that transition a Christian society into a more secular society will also allow humankind to move beyond atheism into something still yet undiscovered (Dickenson, 2021).

### **Current Trend**

In September 2022, the Pew Research Center released a report that predicted that in less than 50 years, Christians could potentially only make up 35% of the U.S. population in comparison to other religious memberships and number of non-practitioners. The report highlights an *accelerating trend* of Christians leaving the faith to join the ranks of *nones*, meaning persons who consider themselves unaffiliated with any religion (Pew Research Center, 2022). Those *nones* made up 30% of the population in 2020 (Pew Research Center, 2022). For

comparison, practitioners of other religions only comprised 6% of the population that year. Based on the rates of *switching*, the current projections point toward Christianity dwindling from 64% of the U.S. population to somewhere between 54% and 35% by 2070 (Pew Research Center, 2022). The researchers describe the *switching* process as the “movement into and out of broad categories of religious identity” (Pew Research Center, 2022, para. 6). In the four scenarios provided by the Pew Research (2022) study (differentiated by rates of *switching*), the researchers found that the *nones* will increase in size and could potentially outnumber Christians within a half-century.

It is crucial to understand that deconstructionists should not be confused with Christians who seldom or almost never attend church but still heavily identify as conservative Christians. In a *Christianity Today* article, Daniel Williams (2022) reported that 45% of White Christians in the South didn't attend church more than once annually (Williams, 2022). Williams (2022) referred to this group as “lapsed Evangelical protestant” and explained by size alone it would constitute “the largest religious body in the South” (para. 12). These *lapsed* Christians still retain their religious beliefs and support conservative politics (Williams, 2022). However, deconstructionists enter an intentional process of questioning and dismantlement.

### **Deconstruction as a Process**

While various scholars have examined the deconstruction process, not all of them have used the same terminology to refer to this phenomenon. Religious scholars and some researchers tend to use the labels *deconversion* and *disaffiliation* to describe the deconstruction movement while social media users tend to use the term #deconstruction (Beaudoin, 2013; Harrold, 2006).

Fazzino (2014) was one of the scholars using the term *deconversion* to refer to the process of deconstruction. According to Fazzino (2014), deconstruction is a “dynamic multi-

stage experience of transformative change marked by both liberation from and opposition against religion and a repertoire of symbolic meaning that supports a rapidly growing secular culture” (p. 250). This process is possible in our current (Western) climate because religion is no longer compulsory (Fazzino, 2014). What we have now is what Fazzino (2014) called a *spiritual marketplace*.

In her study, Fazzino (2014) used the term *deconversion* to describe this process but did admit that it fell short of offering a fuller picture of the deconstruction process. However, by choosing to associate with the term *deconversion*, the participants were able to frame their exit from formal religious practice as a rejection of constrictive dogma—instead of a rejection of the faith itself. Fazzino explained that *deconversion* and *conversion* cannot be considered equal opposites. While the process of *conversion* into religion can be a nebulous process of aggregation in terms of rites, rituals, and understanding, *deconversion* (deconstruction) on the other hand can have *distinct and perpetual* narratives.

Fazzino (2014) explained that deconversion has three distinct stages: pre-deconversion, cognitive deconversion, and post-deconversion. In the pre-deconversion stage, the individual experiences “spiritual doubt and emotional distress” that prompts them to reflect on their beliefs (p. 255). During the cognitive deconversion stage, the individual moves from belief to non-belief. Finally, in the post-deconversion stage, the individual sheds their previous spiritual views through what Fazzino referred to as *paradigmatic work*. Although Fazzino used a different term, *deconversion*, other than deconstruction, her research about the different deconversion stages still provided great insights on the process experienced by deconstructionists.



## Social Media Discourses About Deconstruction

Unlike the beginnings of the deconstruction movement, there is a specific birth year of the #exvangelical Twitter hashtag in 2016 (Onishi, 2019). *ExVangelical* podcast creator Blake Chastain (@brchastain) is responsible for coining the term (Onishi, 2019). In a 2021 article, Chastain wrote about the underwhelming response of Evangelical leaders to deconstructing members... or as Twitter would refer to them: #exvangelicals. He challenged the commonly held belief by some religious leaders that deconstructionists were *never real Christians to begin with* by explaining these new *nones* were actually dissatisfied with theological justifications (Chastain, 2021). Chastain opposed this idea that deconstructing Christians lack Biblical literacy—arguing instead that deconstructionists no longer agreed with Evangelical teachings about what the Bible means—and instead are rallying around new narratives online as they test and explore their faith.

To put the hashtag in perspective: #exvangelical is a personal starting point and a social counterpoint. It is also a hashtag whose uses cannot be dictated by any single person. It does give language to the liminal spaces many people find themselves in after questioning the tenets of their faith; it does not make any discrete or particular theological demands on those who use it. (Chastain, 2021, para. 12)

Using this hashtag (or similar hashtags), deconstructionists communicate their experiences through Twitter. In these narratives, Chastain explained, is “a profound sense of grief, anger and lament” at the numerous injustices of the Church (para. 21).

## Defining Evangelicalism

It is important to distinguish the target population of this research project (Evangelicals) from the other numerous Christian sects. In today’s religious climate, Evangelicalism is an

umbrella term that covers numerous denominations. For its Religious Landscape Study, the Pew Research Center (2014) included the following denominations as part of its Evangelical Protestant category: Assemblies of God, Church of God (Cleveland, Tennessee), Church of the Nazarene, Churches of Christ, Independent Baptist (Evangelical Trad.), Interdenominational (Evangelical Trad.), Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod, Nondenominational charismatic, Nondenominational evangelical, Nondenominational fundamentalist, Presbyterian Church in America, Seventh-day Adventist, and the Southern Baptist Convention.

Despite the individual differences among these denominations, they share the core tenets of Evangelicalism that contain specific liturgical performances and expectations. The long-held definition of Evangelicalism comes from David Bebbington, a British historian. The *Bebbington Quadrilateral* contains four important parts: 1) conversionism, 2) activism, 3) biblicism, and 4) crucicentrism (Bebington, 1989). Basically, this includes converting people to the faith, being involved in activism, “belief that all spiritual truth is to be found in [the Bible],” and the emphasis on Christ’s crucifixion as the means of humanity’s spiritual salvation (Bebington, 1989, p. 33). “Together,” Bebbington said, “they form a quadrilateral of priorities that is the basis of Evangelicalism” (p. 16). These four pillars comprise the identity of American Evangelicals.

The term Evangelical is somewhat nebulous outside the constraints of the Bebbington Quadrilateral as it also has political and personal connotations. During former President Trump’s term in office, the influx of people who began to identify as White Evangelicals outweighed the number of those who chose to leave the Church during that time period (Smith, 2021). However, there is no indication whether the adoption of that label was religious or political for those individuals. This makes survey findings sometimes inconsistent and confusing (Merritt, 2015).

“Evangelical” can mean different things to different people and therefore could represent anywhere from 7% to 47% of the U.S. population depending on the definition (Merritt, 2015).

This study relied on the Bebbington Quadrilateral as well as the choice of individuals who self-disclosed their Evangelical (or former Evangelical) identity. It is proffered here that these key characteristics define and shape the communication of the Evangelical Church.

According to its tenets, the Church is supposed to actively recruit and convert people into new Evangelicals and position itself within society with the goal of scriptural-based activism—while pointing to the cross as the ultimate test and sacrifice of its followers and its Messiah. This impacts how the messages of the Church, and its members, are constructed and distributed. The study of how Evangelicals (and #exvangelicals) choose to build and disseminate their experiences of leaving the church gives us a window into how deconstruction is affecting this religious practice.

### **Social Identity Theory in the Deconstruction Process**

This inward critique that deconstruction requires, as well as the untangling of personal beliefs and dogmatic instruction, lends itself to the theoretical framework of social identity theory. Firstly, because social identity theory involves the concept of *self*, there is a connection to symbolic interactionism (Deaux, 2000). The theory focuses on the “(a) the self-structure of individuals, as they are defined by categorical memberships... (b) the character of intergroup relations... or (c) the relationship of the individual to the broader social structure” (Deaux, 2000, p. 15). Basically, it seeks to learn about the process in which we construct the *self* (the individual identity), the *us* (the group identity), and the *them* (the delineation between in-group and out-group members). This includes exploring the self-categorization process that differentiates social and personal identity based on *situational saliency* (Deaux, 2000). Categorization plays a big

role in the theory because it is hypothesized that some kind of social categorization act precedes intergroup behavior (Deaux, 2000). Because identity carries a lot of weight and connotations, social identity theory also looks at the consequences of identity abandonment, maintenance, or improvement (Deaux, 2000).

### **Social Identity in Social Media Discourse**

Every group (the “us” identity) is a network, and similarly, every social media platform is a network. Barabási (2011) explained that “networks exist for a reason. They spread ideas; they spread knowledge; they spread influence” (p. 12). Walther et al. (2011) studied the intersection between interpersonal and mediated communication and the interplay that happens there. The authors briefly explained the two-step flow of how individuals can 1) use media and personal interactions to gather information and then 2) elaborate on that information in discussions with others to order to better understand it (Walther et al., 2011). This interactivity facilitates the ability of its users (anonymous or otherwise) to connect, communicate, share, and consider information. The concept of *communication utility* represents “the awareness about a topic about which the individual expects to interact” and also “connects the utilization of mass communication to a superordinate interpersonal functionality” (Walther et al., 2011, p. 30).

The interactivity of social media allows people to build their identities through online interactions or what Baldauf et al. (2017) called *identity through discourse*. The modality of social media assists in this process of building, expressing, and re-affirming the identities of its users through the use of text, pictures, video clips, and GIFS (Baldauf et al., 2017). The accumulation of these experiences is presented in two ways: through *internal artifacts* such as memories and *external artifacts* such as physical objects, which include the *digital traces* the individual leaves behind on social media. These traces (or artifacts) help to explain the

individual's actions (Baldauf et al., 2017). Ruth Tsuria (2022) also discussed how these online interactions allow individual users to build a *networked self* through the aggregation of shared posts, retweets, and follows. In this context, identity is a fluid concept that is built, negotiated, and performed through interpersonal interaction via digital networks. These digital footprints provide a glimpse into the lived experience of users, including *the lived ex-religion*. One way in which we can observe these constructive efforts is through the use of the hashtag (such as #exvangelical), which can help in the construction of community and group identity. Through the use of social media platforms, Tsuria (2022) explained that individuals can confront problematic religious practices as well as offer individuals the opportunity to self-reflect on their own identities. Because the *self* cannot be singularly described by any one facet of identity, including *lived ex-religion* or faith practices, it is important to consider the entire nature of the individual through an inclusive framework.

### **Intersectionality**

Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw (1989) coined the term *intersectionality* in her 1989 essay. She pointed out that the existing structures of legal analysis marginalized Black women because they could not accommodate for the fact that Black women are both women *and* Black—and instead treated these identities as mutually exclusive (Crenshaw, 1989). This essentially ignored the lived experience of Black women, who, according to Crenshaw (1989) do not share their distinct experiences with either White women or Black men. As she explained, “the intersectional experience is greater than the sum of racism and sexism” (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 140). New intersectional frameworks needed to be built to consider the whole individual.

Since Crenshaw's 1989 essay, intersectionality has grown as a framework to examine how the various and complex identities of an individual influence each other. This includes race,

gender, age, class, sexuality, physical ability, etc. (Collins & Bilge, 2020). It examines how power structures intersect and influence these identities and promotes the need to address *social inequity* (Collins & Bilge, 2020). In terms of social media, researchers have used intersectionality as a framework for a variety of studies, from examining how staffing agencies depicted age and gender on their LinkedIn pages (Xu & Previtali, 2022)—to critiquing the exclusionary nature of the #MeTooIndia movement on Twitter, which failed to incorporate the experiences of lower-caste, LGBTQ, and rural women (Nanditha, 2021).

In the case of deconstruction, it is important to approach this phenomenon with the understanding that individual identity is complex and multifaceted. A deconstructionist is more than just the sum of their religious experiences and personal convictions. Their membership in the Church is also intricate. The process of unraveling these threads of Christian connection is not a singular exit or severance but a multi-stage emotional, psychological, and societal exodus. The ability to determine the current core voices of deconstruction will help us gain insight into the nuanced nature of deconstructionist identity.

RQ1: Who are the people at the center of the deconstruction movement on social media?

### **Social Interaction and Deconstruction**

Fekete and Knippel (2020) also observed this negotiation and reformation of identity among deconstructionists. The authors found that social media users experiencing a *crisis of faith* relied on social interaction to share their stories and build connections. The authors found three distinct paths for questioning Christians: 1) discarding their own narratives and convictions in favor of Church norms, 2) experiencing a falling “house of cards” crisis that destroys their current worldview, or 3) choosing the route of deconstruction which involves entering into a process of “exploration and transition” (Fekete & Knippel, 2020, p. 175). For those who chose to

become deconstructionists, their ability to leave their old religious dogma behind and enter into a new space of supportive dialogue with others on social media was instrumental. Many deconstructionists in rural or isolated areas rarely had access to physical safe spaces in which to pursue discussions about doubt and spirituality and therefore greatly benefitted from being able to digitally connect with like-minded individuals online. Some of the study's participants reported that they were able to "re-explore questions of belief" after leaving the church many years ago (Fekete & Knippel, 2020, p. 181). Fekete and Knippel (2020) emphasized how these digital communities play a critical role in the deconstruction process:

As simple as it sounds, these acts of presence, care, unconditional love, acceptance, and shared stories remind members that they are not alone. These are the radical forces driving these communities in their formation and sustaining their sense of presence. Our research reveals the importance and value of a community in which support is found while one is going through the deconstruction and reconstruction process. (p. 182)

By participating in this digital community, deconstructionists were able to regain an important component of social belonging that they lost upon leaving the Church (Fekete & Knippel, 2020).

This research project seeks to examine deconstruction discourses on Twitter in terms of identity, specifically, the *who*, *what*, and *how*. Exploring those questions can provide insight as to how deconstructionists communicate the process online and what the common topics are in their conversations.

RQ2: What are the most frequent terms used on Twitter regarding deconstruction?

RQ3: How do deconstructionists construct their identity-switching experiences on social media?

## Methods

This study is modeled after Lai and To's (2015) study and Hansen et al.'s (2020) research. Lai and To (2015) proposed a four-step systematic approach for social media analysis. The first step is to determine the area and size of the study. Then pick the mediums (social network platforms) as well as the total and categorical sample sizes. The third step is to use computer-based analysis to identify important characteristics. The final part of the process is the interpretation of the findings (Lai & To, 2015). The computer software used for this project was NodeXL Pro (the paid version), which assists with the retrieval of data through the Application Programmer Interface, or API, as well as visualization and analyses of such data (Hansen et al., 2020). It allows researchers to study and visualize connections between people, words, and ideas and how they relate and interact with one another (Hansen et al., 2020). Because of its ability to generate network maps, it is useful for discovering themes within online conversations and communities. This is different than the free version, NodeXL, which can only navigate files that have already been created in the Pro version (Social Media Research Foundation, 2016).

### Data Collection

Data collection occurred during the season of Advent: specifically, from 12:01:00 AM on November 25, 2022 (Black Friday) to 11:59:00 PM on December 31, 2022 (New Year's Eve). Advent is significant to the Christian calendar as it is the second holiest season (after Easter). It represents the birth of Christ and therefore the emergence of salvation for all people, according to Christian teachings.

Using Twitter's developer API via NodeXL Pro, a Twitter Network Search 2.0 (Beta) was used to pull the following hashtags: #deconstruction, #exvangelical, #deconversion, #exvie, #emptythepews, #churchtoo, and #exchristian. As mentioned earlier, religious scholars use the



terms #disaffiliation and #deconversion when referring to deconstruction. Evangelical deconstructionists created the hashtags #Exvangelical, #exvie, and #emptythepews. #ChurchToo is a derivative of the #MeToo movement. #ExChristian is frequently paired with #exvangelical and #deconstruction tweets. These hashtags were chosen due to their frequent cooccurrences with the main hashtag #deconstruction. It was decided to include more than one hashtag for the data connection for two reasons: 1) Deconstruction is still a fairly small social movement as it is still in the starting stage. Including more hashtags helps yield a decent amount of data for analysis. 2) Although #Evangelical is the most popular hashtag used on Twitter, it by no means is the universally agreed label used by all deconstructionists. It is important to include other hashtags to have a relatively complete picture of how deconstructionists construct their experiences online. In total, 8,019 tweets were withdrawn for the data analysis.

### **Analyses**

Each hashtag search was saved in a separate file to maintain the original data. Afterward, metrics were run on each set and saved into new files. Because the data set was relatively small, all metric options were selected for calculation.

### ***Influencers (RQ1)***

When considering how to quantify influence, degree, betweenness centrality, and page rank were considered. In-degree is the number of inbound edges (tweets) for a vertex (person) while out-degree is the number of outbound edges from a vertex (Hansen et al., 2020). Betweenness centrality is the rate at which a vertex acts as a bridge to other vertices in a network. Page rank is essentially the connectedness of a person's connections, meaning these connections are weighted in terms of value. The more *connected* connections are more highly valued than connections with individuals who have few connections of their own. The top

influencers, therefore, have the most connectedness within the network and serve to tie other users together. Because one of the foci of this project is to determine the core voices in these deconstructionist conversations, page rank was chosen as the determinate metric.

### ***Semantic Analysis (RQ2)***

After running the initial graph metrics, another set was run just for “words and word pairs.” This involved opening the options menu and selecting “tweet” from the “on the edges worksheet” drop-down options. The resulting words and word pairs were evaluated for relevance (to the topic of deconstruction) and salience: how often that word appears in relation to other words (Hansen et al., 2020). The words that did not meet this criterion were added to the stop words list—and the metrics were run again as part of a cleaning process. Stop words are words that might occur often within a data set but have little to no salience in the conversation (Hansen et al, 2020). For example, words such as “lines,” “shapes,” “earn,” “certificate,” etc., although used frequently in the tweets, are not relevant or meaningful in the research. Those are therefore considered stop words and were removed from the data. In between rounds of this cleaning, the worksheets were saved as a separate file in the event the process had to be corrected. This was done for each hashtag data set. For the list of stop words, please refer to Appendix A. Each of the remaining word pairs represent a semantic structure that can be examined for thematic value.

### ***Visualization***

To create a network map, the word pairs that appeared at least four times or more were copied and pasted into the edges tab of a new NodeXL Pro worksheet as an undirected network this time. The count column was also copied and pasted into the “Add New Columns” portion. This time graph metrics were calculated for degree, Eigenvector centrality, betweenness centrality, and group metrics. Then “Group by Cluster” was selected from the Groups menu. The

default Clauset-Newman-Moore cluster algorithm was used (Clauset et al., 2004). This generated a list of semantic structures. Harel-Koren Fast Multiscale layout option was used for the network map (Koren & Harel, 2004). Each group was then placed into its own box using the layout options function. Under the vertices tab of the worksheet, the vertices' names were copied and pasted into the label column. Then under the group and group options, the shape of the vertices was changed to label. Lastly, the vertices' shape was changed from disk to label under the vertices tab in graph options. This method was used to generate a network map for each hashtag data set. In a study with larger data sets, it would be prudent to cut off the word pairs at a higher count. However, because deconstruction is currently a smaller conversation, it was decided to include word pairs with only four or more mentions in order to populate the network maps with enough semantic structures.

### ***Content Analysis (RQ3)***

RQ3 explores how deconstructionists build their experiences on social media. A content analysis was conducted using the network maps generated for RQ2, using the grounded theory as guidance (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Tweets with similar content were grouped into categories and then labeled for each hashtag. These conversations were then aggregated into a single, larger list of emerging themes.

## **Results**

During the data collection process, the following hashtag searches were pulled: #deconstruction, #exvangelical, #deconversion, #exvie, #emptythepews, #churchtoo, and #exchristian. Because of the low number of unique edges in the #disaffiliation, #deconversion, and #exvie conversations, as seen in Table 1, those data sets were dismissed. The analyses,

therefore, focused on the #deconstruction, #exvangelical, #churchtoo, #exchristian, and #emptythepews data sets.

**Table 1**

*Hashtags by Metrics*

---

Search Terms	Edges (Tweets)	Unique Edges	Vertices (Accounts)
#deconstruction	1149	363	618
#exvangelical	1254	354	586
#churchtoo	4388	743	1207
#exchristian	556	131	215
#disaffiliation	23	7	12
#deconversion	18	6	11
#exvie	10	2	4
#emptythepews	621	189	298

---

Overall, #churchtoo was the largest conversation in terms of the number of unique tweets (unique edges) followed by #deconstruction, then #exvangelical, then #emptythepews, and then #exhchristian as shown in the table above.

**RQ1: Top Influencers**

In order to determine the top three influencers for each hashtag, the data sets were sorted by clicking on the Page Rank column and sorting vertices by highest to lowest. The corresponding usernames are listed below. The following accounts almost exclusively belonged

to individuals with the exception of @SnapNetwork in the #ChurchToo data set, which is a support network for the sexual victims of Catholic priests, and the @DivorceReligion—the Twitter account for the Divorce Religion consultation services, which offers workshops on religious trauma for a fee.

Christa Brown (@christabrown777) had the highest Page Rank score of all the influencers. Andrew Pledger (@4ndrewpledger) was the only influencer to appear in more than one data set: both #deconstruction and #exvangelical.

**Table 2**

*List of Top Three Influencers by Search Term and Page Rank*

---

Search Terms	1	2	3
#deconstruction	@thepursuinglife 0.003894	@lecrae 0.003326	@4ndrewpledger 0.003275
#exvangelical	@aprilajoyr 0.007023	@josiemcskimming 0.00664	@4ndrewpledger 0.004345
#churchtoo	@christabrown777 0.02234	@davidgclohessy 0.014615	@emilyjoypoetry 0.00503
#exchristian	@ripleydrifter 0.01487	@goodbye_jesus 0.014213	@divorcereligion 0.011737
#emptythepews	@cannoli1000 0.009647	@shirospirit 0.00936	@c_stroop 0.008324

---

### ***#Deconstruction***

This particular data set required more rounds of cleaning, 10 in total, due to the current different uses of the #deconstruction hashtag in various contexts. French political critics in particular used this term in response to policies, such as vaccine mandates, that they personally found problematic. #Deconstruction also appeared in discussions concerning architecture, mathematics, humanitarianism, robotic development, or general ideology and not American

Christian Faith practices. As a result, the following accounts were excluded from top positions: @\_2019\_ncov, @factuel60, @stephan\_meller, @charbellakis, @david\_gunkel, @l3capitan, and @audiocoffee1. After removing these unrelated accounts from the top positions, the following influencers emerged: @thepursuinglife, @lecrae, @4ndrewpledger, @nakedpastor, and @frostinthepines.

Meghan (@thepursuinglife) identified as a bisexual feminist, professor, progressive Christian, and co-host of the *Thereafter Podcast*. Lecrae (@lecrae) is a hip-hop artist who released a new album in late 2022, *Church Clothes 4*, which included a song about deconstruction. Andrew Pledger (@4ndrewpledger) identified as a queer man and a cult survivor who hosts the *Speaking Up w/ Andrew Pledger* podcast. David Hayward (@nakedpastor) described himself as a cartoonist. His artwork focuses on deconstruction themes. Chris Lilley (@frostinthepines) identified as Episcopalian and a Princeton Seminary alum, who writes about religious topics.

### ***#Exvangelical***

The @ingalls4in50 account was excluded from a top position because it focuses on American politics but not anything related to the deconstruction movement. Afterwards the top influencers for this hashtag were @aprilajoyr, @josiemcskimming, @4ndrewpledger, @exvangelicarol, and @mrbwalmsley.

April Ajoy (@aprilajoyr) self-identified as an ex-conservative who is “Humorously Detoxing Christianity” (Ajoy, n.d.). She also co-hosts the *Evangelicalish* deconstruction podcast. Dr. Josie McSkimming (@josiemcskimming) is an #exvangelical, a clinical social worker, and the author of *Leaving Christian Fundamentalism & the Reconstruction of Identity*. Andrew Pledger (@4ndrewpledger), as mentioned earlier, also appeared as the third leading influencer in

this data set. Exangelicarol (@exvangelicarol) did not list any specific biographical information other than several hashtags, which include #exvangelical, #exgop, #emptythepews, #exchristian, and #atheist. Mr. Walmsley (@mrbwalmsley) described himself as an exvangelical and “Lorax English Teacher” (Walmsley, n.d.).

### ***#ChurchToo***

The @ginalovell545 account was excluded from #ChurchToo because the account was concerned with police reform and politics and not deconstructionist practices. The five top influencers for this data set were @christabrown777, @davidglohessy, @emilyjoypoetry, @mboorstein, and @snapnetwork. Christa Brown (@christabrown777) is the author of *This Little Light: Beyond a Baptist Preacher Predator & His Gang* and described herself as the “Mother of all abuse bloggers” (Brown, n.d.). David Clohessy (@davidglohessy) described himself as an abuse survivor and the former director of the SNAP Network, which stands for Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests. Emily Joy Allison (@emilyjoypoetry) is the author of #ChurchToo and identified as a poet with a Master of Divinity Studies degree from VU Divinity School. Michelle Boorstein (@mboorstein) shared that she is a writer for the Washington Post on issues of religion and “other words for meaning-making” (Boorstein, n.d.). The SNAP Network (@snapnetwork), as mentioned earlier, is a sexual abuse survivor support network. It is not specific to the Catholic Church, as it includes survivors of any type of religious leaders, according to its website.

### ***#ExChristian***

The @pranshul140616 account was excluded as a top influencer due to the account’s suspension, which removed all the associated content. As a result, @ripleydrifter,

@goodbye\_jesus, @divorcereligion, @wise\_counsellor, and @atheistmonica were the top influencers for this data set.

The bio for Ripley the Drifter (@ripleydrifter) was short. It began with “Infotainment is the new tobacco. Science is real” (Drifter, n.d.). Ripley described themselves as an #exchristian. Tim Sledge (@goodbye\_jesus) is the author of the book *Goodbye Jesus*. He identified as a #nontheist, #exchristian, #eXvangelical, and #humanist. @DivorceReligion is the Twitter account for the Divorcing Religion consultation website. The bio information disclosed the following: “Former evangelical fundamentalist devoted to exposing the trauma of religions” (Divorcing Religion, n.d.). It included the description of #Exvangelical, #Atheist, #secular, and #humanist. Janice Selbie (@wise\_counsellor) was affiliated with the Divorce Religion organization as a religious abuse consultant and also the host of the *Divorcing Religion* podcast. She provided a link to the Conference on Religious Trauma. Finally, Monica (@atheistmonica) was a self-described ex-fundie Baptist, humanist, atheist, #exchristian, #exvangelical, and #apostate.

### ***#EmptyThePews***

No accounts had to be excluded from this data set. The top influencers were @cannoli1000, @shirospirit, @c\_stroop, @smartstatistic, and @kausikdatta22. Even though the @cannoli1000 account is no longer available on Twitter, in late 2022 the bio information listed Chocolate Chip (@cannoli1000) as the account holder. The self-description included “Religion is Poison! Realist! Woke as fck” (Chocolate Chip, n.d.). VoidScreamer (@shirospirit) categorized himself as a secular humanist and used the hashtag #goodwithoutagod. Chrissy Stroop (@c\_stroop) described herself as a senior correspondent for Religious Times and co-editor of the book *Empty the Pews: Stories of Leaving the Church*. Laurie Bertram



(@smartstatistic) used the pronouns they/she and self-described as an “openly black queer NB feminist” as well as a disabled mother, and ProAbortion Mom of the Year (Bertram, n.d.).

Kausik (@kausikdatta22) listed his “faves,” some of which were science-based medicine, atheism, and “progressive-liberal-rational views” (Kausik, n.d.).

## **RQ2: Topics**

For each hashtag data set, word pairs that appeared four or more times were subjected to a semantic analysis. In total, 1,073 semantic structures were analyzed. The top 10 word pairs for each hashtag are listed below. The stop word lists that were used for the cleaning processes are listed in Appendix A. Other semantic structures (not in the top 10 list) repeated at least four times are provided in the network maps in Appendix B.

### ***#Deconstruction***

Ten rounds of cleaning produced the following top 10 word pairs. All semantic structures that appeared more than four times can be found in the network map. See Appendix B, Figure 1.

**Table 3**

*Top 10 Word Pairs for #deconstruction*

---

Vertex 1	Vertex 2	Count
#deconstruction	#deconstructingfaith	32
#exvangelical	#deconstruction	24
#deconstruction	#exvangelical	18
#truthseeker	#purityculture	17

#deconstructingfaith	#exvangelical	17
#exvangelical	#truthseeker	17
coffee	hour	15
#deconstruction	coffee	15
#deconstructingfaith	#deconstruction	15
twitter	spaces	13

---

Most of the word pairs (such as #deconstructing faith, #exvangelical) serve as a type of contextual shorthand for users who wish to share their experiences in deconstructionist conversations. #Purity Culture refers to the Church teachings against premarital sex. #Truthseeker seems to be used in conjunction with tweets that are about theological accuracy. For example, @mikemaeshiro tweeted “Jesus never used hell as a motivator for sinners to convert” while also using the #truthseeker hashtag (Maeshrio, November 25, 2022).

Three of the word pairs (coffee hour, #deconstruction coffee, and twitter spaces) are most likely a reference to @ThePursuingLife’s tweets about her weekly “#deconstruction coffee hour” on Tuesday mornings at 6 am PST on Twitter Spaces. Elon Must suspended this Twitter function mid-December, so it is possible that the word pairs appear so many times due to deconstructionists notifying their fellow users about the cancellation.

### ***#Exvangelical***

Six rounds of cleaning produced the following top 10 word pairs. All semantic structures that appeared more than four times can be found in the network map. See Appendix B, Figure 2.

**Table 4***Top 10 Word Pairs for #exvangelical*


---

Vertex 1	Vertex 2	Count
#deconstruction	#deconstructingfaith	32
religious	trauma	30
calling	deconstruction	25
shoulders	incoming	25
exposed	shoulders	25
sexy	beware	25
response	matt	25
late	response	25
deconstruction	sexy	25
chandler	calling	25

---

The first two word pairs (#deconstruction #deconstructingfaith, and religious trauma) seem to be used in a broad, general sense in deconstructionist conversations. Individuals used these hashtags in order to attach their tweets to deconstructionist conversations.

The other eight word pairs (calling deconstruction, shoulders incoming, exposed shoulders, sexy beware, response matt, late response, deconstruction sexy, chandler calling) refer

to a tweet from the leading #exvangelical influencer, April Ajoy (@aprilajoyr). The original post is from January 17, 2022 and contained a satirical video response to Matt Chandler calling deconstruction “sexy,” basically describing it as a fad (Ajoy, January 2022). Numerous Twitter users retweeted April Ajoy’s response during the data collection period. The screenshot of the original post can be found in Appendix C.

### ***#ChurchToo***

Two rounds of cleaning produced the following top 10 word pairs. Due to the larger nature of this conversation, the word pairs were cut off at a much higher count: 14. That means all the semantic structures appeared at least 14 times during the data collection period. See Appendix B, Figure 3 for the network map, which contains those semantic structures.

### **Table 5**

#### *Top 10 Word Pairs for #churchtoo*

---

Vertex 1	Vertex 2	Count
#csa	#clergy	286
#snapheals	#rccabuse	170
#clergy	#snapheals	167
wanted	service	165
young	body	164
pastor	wanted	164

balked	chastised	164
body	balked	164
service	young	164
chastised	mary	164

---

The first three word pairs are related to religious and sexual abuse. #CSA stands for Child Sexual Abuse. #Clergy can be used to describe anyone in a position of leadership within a church, not necessarily an ordained priest. #SNAPHeals is a reference to the SNAP Network. RCC can stand for multiple different faith organizations, such as the Reformed Christian Church or the Resilient Catholic Community, but in this context, #RCCabuse most likely refers to the multitude of sex crimes concerning the Roman Catholic Church due to its proximity to the #snapheals hashtag.

The last seven word pairs are linked to the first of five posts in a Twitter thread by Christa Brown (@christabrown777), the top #churchtoo influencer. Her post described her sexual assault at the hands of her pastor:

When my pastor wanted service of my young body & I balked, he chastised me: “Where would we all be if Mary hadn’t trusted God even when her special role was something she couldn’t understand?” As a girl who loved God, I pondered that a lot. (Brown, 2022) Twitter users heavily interacted with this tweet: retweeting it 180 times, earning it 1,223 likes, and more than 183,000 views.

***#ExChristian***

A single round of cleaning produced the following top 10 word pairs. All semantic structures that appeared more than four times can be found in the network map. See Appendix B, Figure 4.

**Table 6**





*Top 10 Word Pairs for #exchristian*

---

Vertex 1	Vertex 2	Count
#exchristian	#exvangelical	19
#pride	#lgbt	19
#lgbt	#gay	17
#atheist	#exchristian	16
#exvangelical	#exchristian	16
#religioustrauma	#exchristian	16
#gay	#ally	15
#exjw	#exmuslim	12
years	later	12
tells	wait	12

---

The word pairs such as #exchristian #exvangelical and #atheist #exchristian appear to be used in a general sense.

Three word pairs, #pride #lgbt, #lgbt #gay, and #gay #ally appeared to originate from the @eltonsherwin account, which is connected with *Affirming Podcasts*. There is no one particular tweet that can be definitively pointed to as the source, but rather it is an aggregation of tweets that seem to be the genesis. For instance, @eltonsherwin tweeted “ The straight men of Sodom tried to Rape the visiting angels.  What?  Ten minutes of truth  You weren’t taught in Sunday school” followed by a number of LGBTQIA+ related hashtags (@eltonsherwin, 2022).

The word pairs #religioustrauma #exchristian and #exjw #exmuslim are linked to a tweet from @divorcereligion, the third most influential account in the #exchristian data set. It reads “#religioustrama #ExChristian #EXMO #EXJW #ExMuslim” and then includes the text “When you discover that people in other religions also receive spiritual confirmations that their church is the only true church” over a meme (@divorcereligion, 2022). See Appendix D.

### ***#EmptyThePews***

A single round of cleaning produced the following top 10 word pairs. All semantic structures that appeared more than four times can be found in the network map. See Appendix B, Figure 5.

**Table 7**

*Top 10 Word Pairs for #emptythepews*

---

Vertex 1	Vertex 2	Count
#emptythepews	#atheist	18
churches	#emptythepews	14

drag	shows	14
purity	culture	13
culture	very	13
very	high	13
safe	churches	13
police	realize	13
morality	police	13
high	form	13

---

Two word pairs, #emptythepews #atheist and church #emptythepews, seemed to be used by deconstructionists in a general sense.

Six word pairs (purity culture, culture very, very high, police realize, morality police, and high form) are related to a tweet from @smartstatistic: “Nevermind me I’m just waiting for evangelicals and morality police to realize that purity culture is a very high form of childhood sexualization that leaves girls especially at higher risk for victimization. #EmptyThePews” (Bertram, 2022). See Appendix E.

The word pairs “drag shows” and “safe churches” are possibly related to a tweet from @shirospirit that links to an article about a Missouri youth pastor charged with child sex abuse: “Drag shows are safe. Bathrooms are safe. CHURCHES ARE NOT. #EmptythePews #atheist” (@shirospirit, 2022). The post was retweeted 12 times. See Appendix F. “Drag shows” also



appeared in a tweet from @punishedmother that also contrasted the difference between those stage performances and the exploitive nature of child pageants:

“You wanna talk about child exploitation? My sister was a child beauty pageant winner. It’s a disgusting industry filled with abusers that exists solely to make little girls look like fuckable adults. I don’t want to hear another word about drag shows. Y’all don’t care about kids” (Merrik, 2022).

The comment was retweeted 551 times.

### **RQ3: Constructed Experiences**

After open coding the semantic structures from the various network maps, several themes emerged from the data. These include timeline, reasons, purity culture, emotions, reflections, in-between, labeling, communication channels, and legitimacy.

#### ***Timeline***

In the #exvangelical and #exchristian network maps, there are mentions of the length of time it took for individuals to begin the deconstruction process. It is not a light-switch moment in which a practicing Evangelical goes from belief into a period of questioning; rather, it seems that this initial preparatory stage that takes much longer. The #exchristian semantic structure cited “decades followed belief system,” while the #exvangelical semantic structure said “years later realized.” Both support the notion that deconstructionists arrived at the decision to leave the church after a lengthy period of reflection. There are also the word pairs “years later” and “tells wait” as found in #exchristian conversations, both of which were mentioned at least 12 times during the data collection process.

#### ***Reasons***

Sharing thoughts about why someone exits the church is a main theme identified across all the hashtag data sets. Specifically, several of these reasons were highlighted in the twitter users' conversations regarding deconstruction, including systematic/institutional sexual abuse, gay rights, and religious abuse/questions about teachings.

Tweets specifically mentioned child sex abuse at the hands of Catholic, Protestant, and Baptist clergy members and the resulting trauma. The #churchtoo (a derivative of the #MeToo movement) discussion was particularly focused on this issue. Users mentioned #churchtoo influencer and sexual assault survivor Christa Brown and her work to aggregate a sexual offender list of Southern Baptist church leaders and the poor response of the Vatican to the sexual crimes of priests. #ChurchToo influencer @mboorstein pointed out the case of Meghan Lively in a tweet linking to a *Washington Post* article that Boorstein wrote about Lively and her efforts to combat sexual assault within the Southern Baptist Church (Boorstein, 2022). Additional hashtags such as #endclergyabuse, #sbctoo (Southern Baptist) were also used in conjunction with these discussions. There are also several word pairs that express this theme. In #metoo, #csa clergy, #snapheals #rccabuse, and #clergy #snapheals; and in #emptythechurches, safe churches.

Gay rights and the treatment of LGBTQIA+ individuals also appeared repeatedly in different data sets, including #deconstruction, #exvangelical, and #exchristian. Those discussions mentioned trans people, gay marriage, gay pride, allies, and coming out. Similarly, when it comes to word pairs, we see #pride #lgbt, #lgbt #gay, and #gay #ally in the #exchristian data set. Some churches do not allow LGBTQIA+ people to become members; others ask their LGBTQIA+ members to take a vow of chastity in order to remain in the church—both of which could serve to influence a person's departure from the church.

The separate but often coinciding issue of religious trauma is also cited as a reason for deconstruction. This refers to manipulative and/or problematic teachings that result in psychological and spiritual trauma. Issues of questionable teachings appeared in #exchristian and #exvangelical conversations. Users pointed to “problematic teachings” and “Leviticus double standards.” The word pair “religious trauma” appeared in the #exvangelical data set 30 times during the data collection period.

The influencer, @4ndrewpledger, illustrated the clear connection between trauma and leaving the church: “Believers” shaming religious trauma survivors for leaving religion, just proves why they left. Healthy places encourage people to seek healing, even if this means looking for a new community or a new approach to life. #igotout #exfundie #deconstruction #exvangelical (Pledger, 2022).

### ***Purity Culture***

This category overlaps in terms of religious trauma but is specifically cited in the #deconstruction and #exvangelical network maps and appears as a word pair in the #exvangelical data set 13 times. Additionally, the semantic structure “sex life” also appeared in the #exchristian network map, linked to the semantic structure of #religioustrauma. This justifies its use of purity culture as a specific reason for leaving.

For context, depending on the church in which the teaching was situated, purity culture can be anything from sermons against premarital sex, to rules about clothing (i.e., length of hemlines, or the banning of certain types of clothing), to social limitations (i.e., no kissing, curfews).

One user, @churchheathens, illustrated the problematic way in which purity culture has been unfairly applied to women in particular—and explained that “the men of the church know

their wife’s bodies better than they ever will” (@churchheathens, 2022). Another user talked about the lack of sex education within churches that preach purity culture: pointing to a screen grab of a Reddit post by a man asking if his girlfriend could be pregnant from having anal sex—which they were using to avoid premarital, vaginal sex (@feralgirlife, 2022). See Appendix G.

### ***Emotions***

As mentioned earlier, there are consequences of identity abandonment, some of which manifest as emotional responses. There are mentions of grief and loneliness in these conversations. The semantic structure “difficult understand isolation unbelief bring” appeared in the #exchristian data set.

However, grief and shame are also part of the Christian identity itself. Biblical teachings describe the default nature of every human being as inherently sinful as part of the original sin concept. This is best illustrated by the #emptythepews semantic structure “strictly sin sinner broken,” which seemed to be related to a tweet by influencer @cannoli1000 addressing this issue: “YOU are not broken! YOU are not a sinner! Sin is strictly a religious belief and outside the context of religious dogma it is entirely meaningless” #thesepeoplearesick #religionispoison #emptythepews (Chip, 2022). There is also a link to a church leader denouncing transgender identities so this tweet could also be categorized as “reasons.” Similarly, in a tweet influencer @aprilajoyr responds to a video of a woman claiming that masturbation is witchcraft and will lead to generational curses, to which April Ajoy comments: “I don’t miss these pentecostal circles at all. So much needless shame” (Ajoy, 2022).

### ***Reflections***

Some deconstructionists shared posts containing semantic structures that indicated they were doing their own research into biblical teachings and possibly looking for alternative

explanations. In #exvangelical there were mentions of “God’s image, #truthseeker, #mythology, #superstition, and #cults.” In #emptythepews, the network map produced the semantic structures “non religious dogma, context, and outside belief.” Two word pairs in #deconstruction also contained the hashtag #truthseeker: “#truthseeker #purity culture” and “#exvangelical #truthseeker.” One user in particular, Mike Maeshiro (@mikemaeshiro), tweeted videos about the importance of language in the process of translation (specifically citing the physical impossibility of Jonah’s survival inside of a whale), and the lack of archaeological evidence of Jericho’s walls mentioned in the Book of Joshua (November 2022, December 2022).

### ***Labeling***

There was a range of terms that deconstructionists applied to themselves. Some influencers used several labels (such as @goodbye\_jesus), while others used none at all (such as @christabrown777). Mr. Walmsley, @mrbwalmsley, called himself an exvangelical. Meghan, @thepursuinglife, called herself a prog xian (shorthand for progressive Christian). User @ripleydrifter called themselves an exchristian. Tim Sledge, @goodbye\_jesus, called himself a #nonthiest, a #humanist, an #exchristian, and an #exvangelical.

In terms of word pairs, #exvangelical, #exchristian, #truthseeker, and #athiest appeared numerous times in the #deconstruction and #exchristian data sets.

The network maps include numerous labels not found in the top 10 word pair lists. For example, #apostate appeared in the #exvangelical and #exchristian maps. Those two maps also contained labels concerning LGBTQIA+ identities: specifically, #gaychristian, #lgbt, #lgbtqa, #lgbtqia #gay, and #trans. The labels of ex-Mormon and ex-Jehovah’s Witness appeared in the #exchristian map as both the long form and shortened hashtags: #xmormon, #exmo, #exjehovahswitness, and #exjw. The term “survivors” appeared in the #churchtoo,

#exvangelical, and #exchristian network maps. Less frequent terms such as #exgop and #agnostic appeared in the #exchristian map while #exfundie appeared in the #deconstruction map.

### ***Communication Channels***

Deconstructionists mention various platforms such as podcasts, blogs, and Twitter Spaces as places to congregate in the #ExChristian, #ExVangelical, and #Deconstruction data sets. Twitter Spaces is a tool that allows users to start and join live audio conversations that are open to anyone (Twitter, 2023.). In mid-December, when Elon Musk temporarily suspended the Twitter Spaces feature, top #deconstruction influencer @thepursuinglife tweeted that she and her #deconstruction coffee hour host, @CortlandCoffey, would move the virtual meeting to another platform in order to keep the interaction going:

One influencer, @thepursuinglife, mentioned that this affected their Twitter participation: M\*sk took away the Twitter Spaces feature last night 🗣️ No more Tuesday morning #deconstruction coffee hour No more pop up happy hour. 🗣️ @CortlandCoffey & I will either do those in Discord or Clubhouse. Keep you posted. Thanks @JamesPrescott77 for telling me. I'm so sad. 🗣️ (Meghan, 2022)

Some of the podcasts mentioned were IndoctriNation, Sheology, and Flying Free, but there are numerous podcasts now available concerning the process of Christian deconstruction.

These digital spaces serve as a replacement for the physical church spaces that deconstructionists left behind, which provided a regular communal experience.

### ***Legitimacy***

One of the recurrent discussions in #EmptyThePews and #ChurchToo was about the legitimacy of the Church, specifically its tax-free status. Section 501(c)(3) of the current U.S. tax

code states that churches that meet IRS requirements are exempt from taxes (Internal Revenue Service, 2023). In order to retain this distinction, the church “may not participate in any campaign activity for or against political candidates,” meaning it cannot be considered an “action organization” (Internal Revenue Service, 2023). While the government has the power to strip politically active churches of their tax-exempt status, it is rarely enforced. It appears that deconstructing #exvangelicals wish to see this change as indicated by their use of the #taxchurches, #taxthechurch, and #taxthechurches hashtags.

In what largely appears as a reaction to the sex abuse scandals, the Church’s legitimacy was also challenged in tweets about compensating abuse victims and the issue of the statute of limitations on rape cases. One #ChurchToo semantic structure included the words: “tell everyone know thousands now seek justice.”

### **Discussion**

The current project explored the public discourses on Twitter regarding deconstruction in order to identify the main voices in this social movement and understand how their conversations were built. Deconstructionist tweets were analyzed and the resulting emerging themes from those online conversations provided insight into deconstruction and the issues that motivate individuals to undertake this process.

### **Social Identity and Religion**

Christian identity, and particularly Evangelical identity, is a deeply personal and an important part of many people’s lives. It determines their weekly schedule, how they spend their money, where and how they volunteer their time, and how they see themselves. And it is not just on an individual level, but also on a group and communal level. There are rituals that indicate belonging, such as communion and baptism. These practices serve not just as personal

milestones, but also the induction into the body of the Church. The Church represents both a physical location and ideological network for its believers.

As social identity theory argues, people in a society are members of many social groups that “stand in relative power and status relationships to each other” (Greenfield & Marks, 2007, p. 246). All social groups have the potential to create longstanding influence on one’s self concept and guide one’s behaviors when interacting with others. Religion is a powerful guiding belief system that can shape one’s social and psychological processes in society. As Ysseldyk et al.’s (2010) research showed, a strong religious identification can provide a support system to individuals, offer cognitive certainty, and promote psychological well-being; however, it can also be a double-edged sword. When individuals question their religious identity and start exiting the church, they are pulling away from a significant part of their social identities. The process will not be without a struggle.

Who we are and how we see ourselves has a lot to do with the labels we choose and the memberships we keep. A Christian who is part of the Evangelical church has a clearly labeled self-concept and group membership. To strip away any part of this identity is complicated and for many deconstructionists, painful. For example, user Mystic KootenayGirl referred to deconstruction as a “good but very painful process” (@Kootenaygirl69, December 2022). The same tweet contains a link to a poem about deconstruction. It includes the lines: “Some of us trauma lingers / Healing wounds, strong thinkers” (@Kootenaygirl69, July 2022). User @beyondthewound also tweeted “going through a crisis of faith can be painful and isolating” and offered tips to help fellow deconstructionists deal with the transition (Beyond the Wound, 2022).



## Agonizing Process with Struggles and Strong Emotions

What can be seen in the various conversations surrounding deconstruction are the stories of individuals who are confronting a profoundly intimate part of their identity: their faith. They must choose a path, but there is no clear map or designated road signs. There are only the options of response perceived by the individual. Do they leave? Do they stay silent? Do they reassess? The process is neither clean nor painless. As Deaux (2000) and Fekete and Knippel (2020) pointed out, there are consequences to this kind of self-work.

Once the choice is made to leave the Church, the next step of the journey involves the struggle of *emotional labor*. The original definition of this term, coined by Arlie Russell Hochschild (1983), has to do with viewing *emotional labor* as a commodity because it is performed as a professional function and therefore sold as labor. Hochschild (1983) used the terms *emotional work* or *emotion management* when referring to instances of personal (not work) life in which the labor would not be a commodity, but still a resource.

This is not dissimilar from the introspective work required to perform the negotiation of self that occurs during the deconstruction process. Therefore, for the purposes of this study, *emotional labor* is defined as the emotional hard work an individual undertakes as part of their deconstruction journey. This involves the laborious and often uncomfortable reassessment of identity.

Emotions such as grief and regret about their previous religious experiences were mentioned in tweets. In a thread, user Mr. Walmsley said, “I regret ever being part of such a community” (Walmsley, 2022). Some users looked to an alternate basis of faith, such as different religions, humanitarianism, atheism, or agnosticism. None of this, however, happens overnight. There is no singular switch with which a deconstructionist can turn off the parts of their faith

they no longer identify with anymore. It is a slow demolition followed by a slow, new construction. It is worth noting that this process does not actually require the deconstructionist to leave their current body of faith. Some individuals begin this lengthy process while still going through the motions of their old Christian practices. Some users said they had been part of the church for decades before they finally left. This deconstruction self-reflection happens whenever and wherever the individual is situated. It is not a demarcated exit ramp.

What is clear is that many deconstructionists make efforts to find each other by reaching out on social media platforms such as Twitter and using self-identifying hashtags (i.e., #deconstruction, #exvangelical, #exchristian). Communication channels such as Twitter feeds, blogs, and podcasts offer a virtual place of respite for deconstructing individuals looking to find a community: a collective identity. The sense of belonging they lost after leaving the church is eased through the sharing of stories and the forming of new relationships using these channels. It is of sorts, not a new church, but a new type of spiritual network.

### **Main Voices and Intersectionality**

Because identity is more than just the sum of its parts, we must also view this deconstruction process through an intersectional framework. The deconstruction influencers are not a monolith, which the data clearly illustrates. The top positions according to Page Rank include a sexual abuse survivor turned advocate (@christabrown777), a queer man (@4ndrewpledger), a hip hop artist (@lecrae), a trans woman (@c\_stroop), and a cartoonist (@nakedpastor), just a name a few.

Their tweets have different focuses but live under the same umbrella of deconstruction. Chrissy Stroop (@c\_stroop) and Andrew Pledger (@4ndrewpledger) frequently tweet about LGBTQIA+ issues. Meghan (@thepursuinglife) and April Ajoy (@aprilajoyr) often post about

political topics. Christa Brown (@christabrown777) and @divorcereigion regularly tweet about sexual and religions abuse.

Some of these individuals serve the deconstruction community as a bridge to larger networks of people. Influencer David Clohessy (@davidgclohessy) served as a director of the SNAP Network for 30 years, advocating for sexual abuse victims of the Church. Chrissy Stroop (@C\_Stroop) writes for the Religion Dispatch. Christa Brown (@christabrown777) has written columns for several different publications. She and Dr. Josie McSkimming (@josiemcskimming), Emily Joy Allison (@emilyjoypoetry), and Tim Sledge (@Goodbye\_Jesus) are all published authors.

Influencer @Lecrae is also a bridge to an entirely different community. In his song Deconstruction on his album *Church Clothes 4*, @Lecrae (2022) discusses his reaction to the killing of Michael Brown and the criticism he received as a Black Christian for being vocal about his feelings:

Is black evil?

Why do they hate and attack people?

I'm vulnerable and cautious, I'm reading Baldwin

Ta-Nehisi got me thinking, now I'm going all in

I ain't know if God was real no mo'

Everyday we gettin' killed, and I can't deal no mo'

I started slipping in the darkness, I'm feeling heartless

Christians got me traumatized, I'on know who God is

(Lecrae, 2022, stanza 4)

This is a perfect example of intersectionality in the social movement for deconstruction. It is impossible to account for all the reasons that individuals choose to undergo this process. There are a variety of personal and cultural reasons to do so. White evangelicals will most likely not deconstruct for the exact same reasons that BIPOC individuals deconstruct. There are fingerprints of colonialism on Christianity particularly in the way it was introduced in Africa and Central America (Comaroff & Comaroff, 1986; Dussel, 1981). Therefore, some Christians will choose to both deconstruct and *decolonize* their faith, meaning they examine the effects of White supremacy on their religion (Stone, 2022).

What unites these influencers is their use of labels. They identify as people who are deconstructing. They signal this both individual and collective identity through their use of hashtags such as #exvangelical, #churchtoo, #emptythepews, #deconstruction, and more. These voices represent the many deconstructionists who seek clarity and belonging as part of their ongoing negotiation of identity.

### **Empty Pews**

Many of Twitter deconstruction conversations centered around reasons for leaving Evangelicalism, which point to unresolved problems within the Church. Users cited the horrific, systematic abuse of individuals by clergy. Others mentioned problematic teachings that were used to justify double standards. Some specifically mentioned purity culture. There is also the issue of divisive politics.

For example, Twitter deconstructionists pointed to the negligence of the Vatican in its handling of priest sex abuse cases in the #churchtoo data set. In the #emptythepews, users specifically mentioned a 66-year-old Montana pastor charged with sexually abusing four young girls (Scripps Media, 2022). Three of the victims were younger than 12 years old (Scripps

Media, 2022). Sexual abuse blogger and survivor advocate Christa Brown (@christabrown777) cited the disturbing case of Southern Baptist leader Paul Pressler. Pressler was accused of sexual misconduct in 2016 (Downen, 2023). However, 12 years earlier, influential GOP politician Jared Woodfill was warned that Pressler had sexually assaulted a child and did nothing to cut ties or report the behavior, according to his court testimony (Downen, 2023).

There is a wealth of media dedicated to explaining and exploring the effects of purity culture, including articles and documentaries. Purity culture appeared in multiple data sets as well, in which Twitter users talked about how purity culture negatively affected their lives. Influencer Ripley the Drifter (@ripleydrifter) posted: “Actually, I DO regret waiting until the wedding night. Also regret the shame bequeathed to both my ex and I by #purityculture” in response to a post calling sexual compatibility a satanic lie (2022). User @eltonsherwin pointed out the fact that Jesus never discussed premarital sex in the Gospels, but that churches still preach “sexual purity doctrines” (2022).

Fundamentalist practices and conservative politics also played a role in the departure of many Evangelicals. As mentioned earlier, churches are technically restricted from certain speech practices including trying to influence legislation and political races (Internal Revenue Service, n.d.). Regardless, some churches openly condone conservative politicians and policies. The White evangelical voting block played a significant role in Donald Trump’s presidential win in 2016 to the point that the Associated Press described it as the “linchpin of the president’s political base” (Schor & Crary, 2020). The fallout of the 2016 election led some pastors to drop the Evangelical label from their churches due to its perceived toxic nature (Bailey, 2021). Writer Peter Wehner (2022) described the shift this way:

The root of the discord lies in the fact that many Christians have embraced the worst aspects of our culture and our politics. When the Christian faith is politicized, churches become repositories not of grace but of grievances, places where tribal identities are reinforced, where fears are nurtured, and where aggression and nastiness are sacralized. The result is not only wounding the nation; it's having a devastating impact on the Christian faith. (para. 11)

The question of the Church's legitimacy concerning the guardianship of its "flock" illustrates how many deconstructionists question whether the Church is even in a position to mandate and uphold the spiritual and ethical standards cited in the Bible. Why follow a corrupt leader? What kind of God does an abuser worship? This emotional and spiritual friction, the difference between what the Church teaches and what the Church does, results in cognitive dissonance for many believers, as well as the emotional fallout that follows.

This is a pivotal point for many future #exvangelicals. When individuals reach the conclusion that either these inadequacies cannot be overcome by the Church *or* that the Church has no intention of rectifying the disparities, then deconstruction begins. The individual cannot persist to endure this kind of incredible dissonance and therefore has to be the un-twining of self and Christian identity in order to pacify their spiritual struggle. Because it takes a great impetus to justify this identity abandonment, we cannot view a deconstructionist's reason for leaving *outside* the context of religious significance. The Church teaches its believers that from the very beginning of their existence, God formed them for the purpose of His own plans and glorification. They symbolically consumed the body and blood of Jesus Christ during church services. As a human they embody the essence of creation and are destined to be reunited into the presence of God in an everlasting state. The consequence of forsaking this identity is

immense. That is why it is important to understand this decision is neither passive nor impromptu.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

One of the primary limitations of this study is that the data only represents a singular period of time and does not track how different deconstruction conversations are emerging, expanding, mixing, or winding down. This data set is a static moment in time focused on the 2022 season of Advent. It does not capture any possible New Year's resolutions concerning faith practices that may coincide with deconstruction or potential changes in personal observances in relation to the period of Easter. It is clear that there are multiple conversations about deconstruction happening on Twitter in various contexts and different cultural arenas. This study therefore represents a singular cross-section of these conversations and cannot be considered conclusive in terms of deconstructionist behavior as a whole.

Another limitation is that this study only utilizes the Twitter Developer API and no other social media platform where other deconstruction conversations could be taking place. Because some deconstructionists leave the church over ethical concerns, it is possible that some deconstructionists also chose to leave Twitter for similar reasons during the unfavorable press coverage of the platform's reorganization. It is important to notice that shortly before the data collection period, Twitter had a significant leadership change. It is possible that the turbulent nature of the platform governance prompted some deconstructionists to leave the site, post less frequently, or stop posting altogether—such as the incident in which @thepursuinglife had to shift platforms in order to maintain the #deconstruction coffee hour. Potentially, incidents such as this one could have affected Twitter participation and motivated other deconstructionists to migrate to a different platform such as Mastadon or Discord.

Future researchers could include semantic analyses of deconstruction conversations on other social media platforms such as Facebook, TikTok, Instagram, or Snapchat. An examination of YouTube comments on deconstructionist videos could also yield fruitful data. A more qualitative approach would be to interview individuals about their religious and deconstruction experiences. In comparison, it would also be interesting to study anti-deconstructionist rhetoric on social media platforms involving hashtags that are pro-church such as #reconstruction, #believer, or #christian.

### **Conclusion**

When defining things, it is sometimes helpful to explain what it is *not*. Many deconstructionists would say that the American Evangelical church is not a place of growth, healing, or safety. They might describe it as not welcoming to LGBTQIA+ individuals. From the tweets collected in this study, it is clear that many people currently feel this way about the Church. In trying to reconcile what they *are* and what the church is *not*, the choice to leave the Church itself and begin shedding their Christianity is one of the first steps in a long and emotional process.

It is impossible to guess what the face of American Evangelicalism will look like in 50 years. The Church may face more than just shrinking congregations. As mentioned earlier, White Evangelicals represent a powerful voting block. In 2018, 77% of White evangelical protestants voted for Donald Trump in the presidential election (Nortey, 2021). Then in the 2020 presidential election, that number rose to 84% (Nortey, 2021). This is the same voting block that believes that the United States was intended to be a Christian nation (81%), that it should be a Christian nation (81%), and that the Bible should dictate the country's laws (65%) according to a Pew Center Research survey (Nadeem, 2022). This stands in contrast to the finding that the



majority of U.S. adults wanted the Church to stay out of politics (67%) and not promote political candidates (77%) (Nadeem, 2022). This illustrates the clear division between the political desires of White Evangelicals and the larger U.S. population.

Fewer congregants could mean a less stable voting block, but it could also mean less revenue in terms of tithes and donations. The financial fallout of deconstruction is not to be overlooked in terms of its potential to affect the monetary influence of the Evangelical church. It is possible that community calendars may eventually shift towards more secular celebrations as the historically strong emphasis on Christian holidays wanes.

But while we may not be able to guess the evolving identity of the Church, or the deconstruction movement, we can gather clues based on the newly constructed communities and identities of deconstructionists. The influencers can tell us about the deconstruction zeitgeist. The experiences they build together can tell us what they thought the church was lacking. The labels they use can serve as bread crumbs along this highly personal journey of identity transition.

Perhaps this is best summed up in a #deconstruction tweet by Dan White Jr.: “The next Reformation is rumbling just below the surface and it is overturning the Sunday-centric, consumer-oriented, celebrity-driven, moral-political project of Evangelicalism” (White, 2022). While this might not be the heralding of the ultimate end that Nancy foresaw, it might be the discomfort and pains of metamorphosis. Into *what* remains to be seen.

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## Appendix A: Stop Words List for Hashtag Data Sets

The following list contains the stop words for the #exvangelical data set: rt s amp t re p m ve lot hey ch isn oh wasn f w d u didn y abou ich wh ing ll r x na ach ry auch mst aren h q ifb sic da bc je et ad nd os und ai ti #pentagon6thwish #dawgsinthenfl redbubble store o word pursu #ps5share #ps5live pr tig ole via blonde bitties #lilithuntamed #covidioy lilithuntamed certificate earn #stitch #fyp #duet #follow gcrr duet stitch fyp

The following list contains the stop words for the #deconstruction data set: rt la b x vous et le de les à s un t sur en l f si des ce est m \_2019\_ncov @\_2019\_ncov par ne n qui du c que re don #stitch #duet #follow rt #rt il au d pu p po ils g w je j y sk sa ll l'humour russe installer d'aller aux mais quoi #numbertheory #metaphysics wm amp artefr @artefr #mathematics #settheory #ia l'envie venait laptop sticker lines shapes vidéo même #comores quand beaucoup cette quand jetez sérieux bordel soir #demolition faire confiance avec leur 6am pst peut prétendre centrales fonctionnent pas culot https co #pixar #princerogernelson #prince sont #tafkap #characterdesign disneyfied #blagis pierremarionnet emiliedefresne equinumerate corrompus chez figuré comme sens arlimitednet lumière prene #gopro #déconstruction projet #reconquete continuons déplore piteux faudrait votre ciblées territoire résultat #eelv règne arbitraire jamás sera l'expression plastique l'objet dessiné déconstruction #vivelafrance #dictaturefacebook métal l'importance exclusif série ses mots débat rencontre hors #le7930inter #ggrmc #désindustrialisation désamorcée #fontenayauxroses #nucleaires #mai #architecture #disney elon #marcon #stylized afternoonist @afternoonist l3capitan @l3capitan shower curtain strings #photocollage #photography logocentric amiante tin 1 0 28minutes 20h05 #edifice idées pour marche vers priorité écolos ve n'est qu elles propre masculinité masculinité notre combats gt @au\_haus au\_haus #wittgenstein #frege #dedekind #peano #cantor #judaism #logic #ethics #politics



#liebznz #Nietzsche #Heidegger #derrida #badiou #marx #philosophy #mathematics #settheory  
#buddhism #phenomenology #existentialism #kripke #descartes #meta #metaphysics  
#numbertheory #photography #photocollage #descartes #phenomenology #existentialism  
#kripke #buddhism #halobearers wadden

The following list contains the words that were translated from French to English in the  
#deconstruction data set: cette quand jetez beaucoup sérieux faire confiance soir touhfat leur  
avec

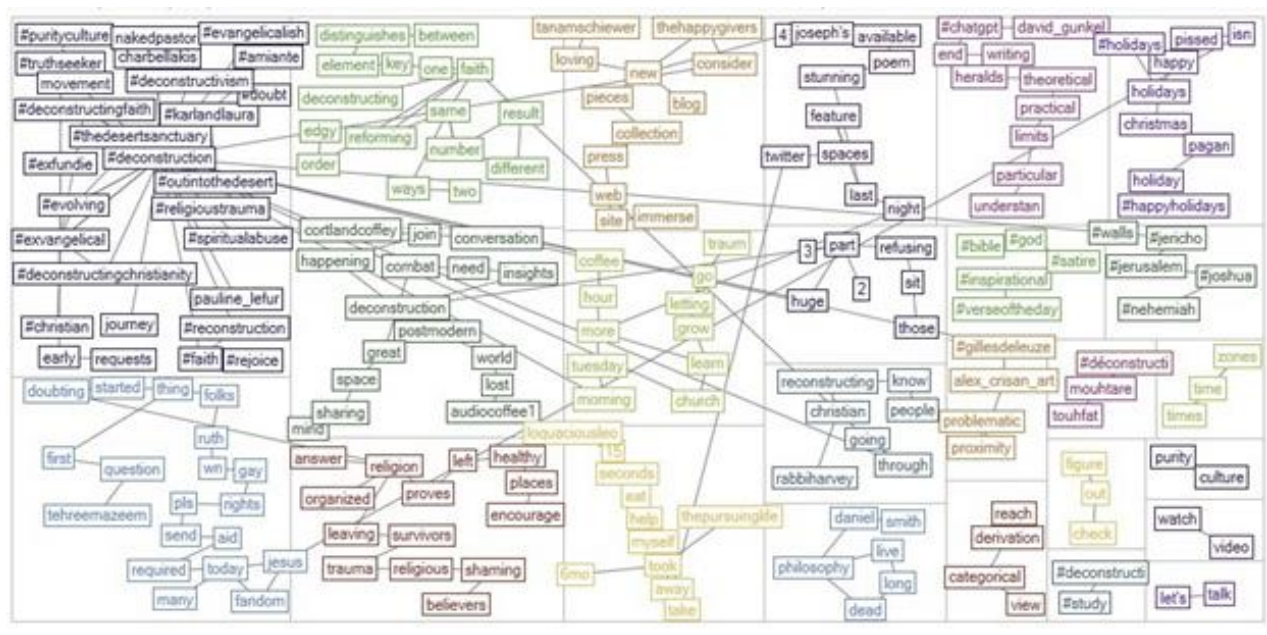
The following list contains the stop words for the #emptythepews data set: rt s t ry ve f g

The following list contains the stop words for the #exchristian data set: rt c y re s t m

### Appendix B: Network Maps

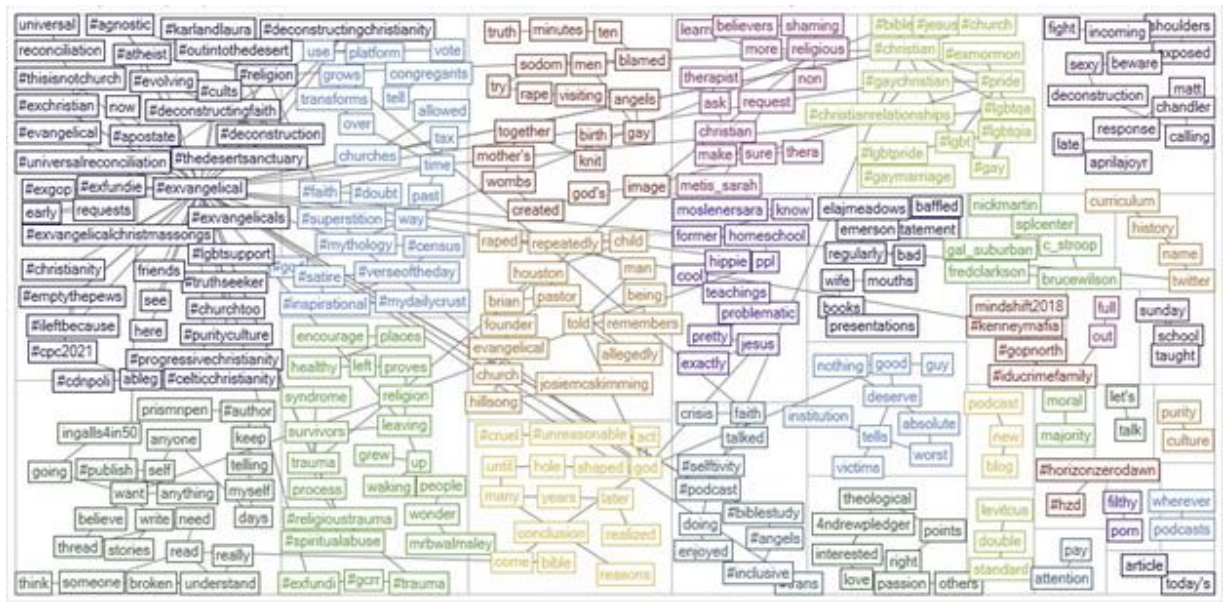
**Figure 1**

*Network Map for #deconstruction*



**Figure 2**

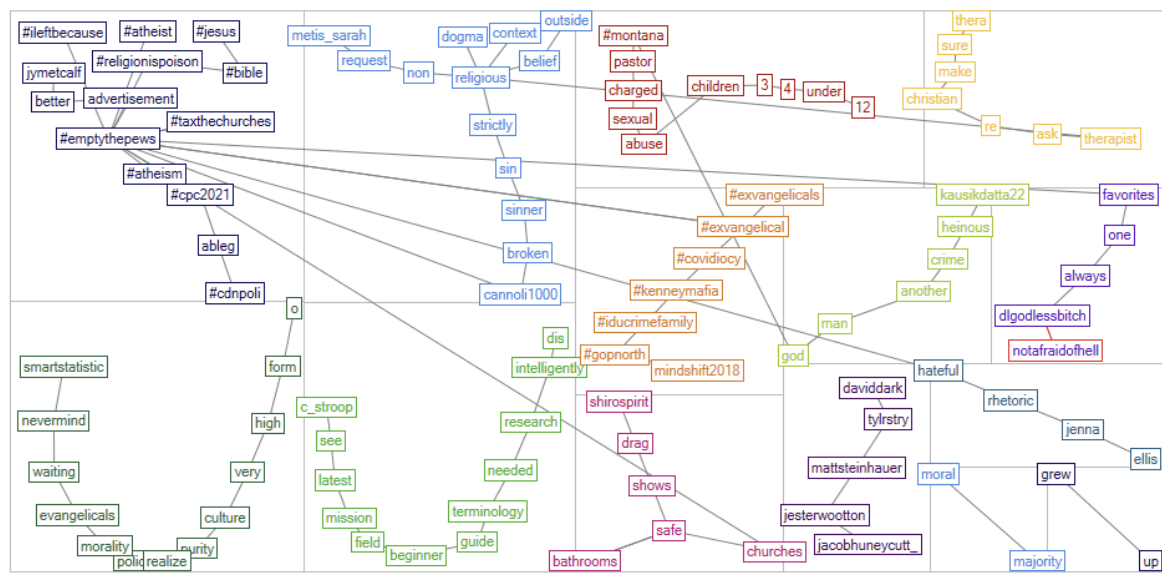
*Network Map for #exvangelical*





**Figure 5**

*Network Map for #emptythepews*



## Appendix C: @aprilajoyr Tweet



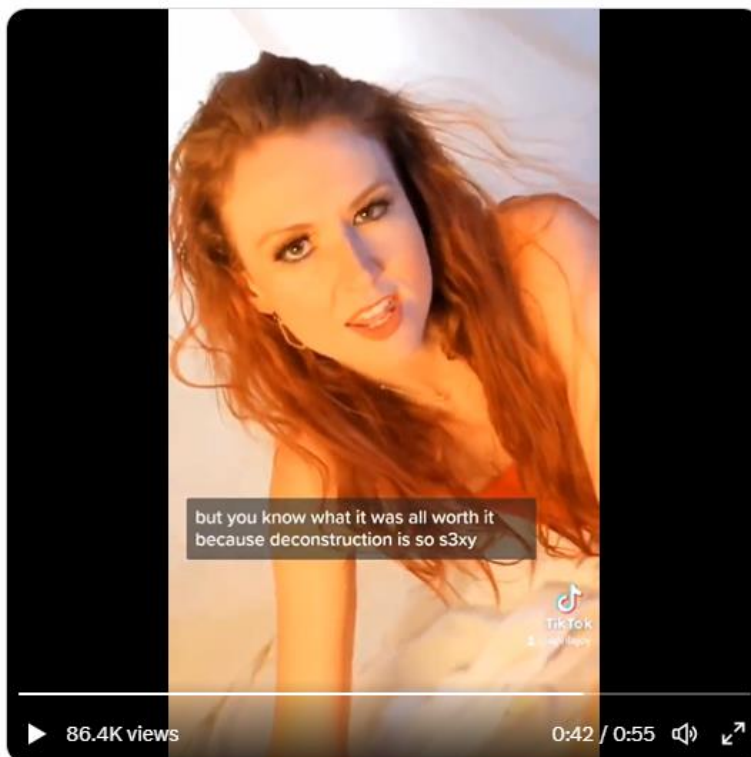
April Ajoy  
@aprilajoyr



A late response to Matt Chandler calling deconstruction sexy.

Beware: exposed shoulders incoming.

P.s. Had to fight some ingrained purity culture to post this 🙄🙄  
[#exvangelical](#)



8:59 PM · Jan 17, 2022

188 Retweets 67 Quotes 1,673 Likes 130 Bookmarks



### Appendix D: @divorcereigion Tweet



@DivorceReligion  
@divorcereigion



#religioustrauma #ExChristian #EXMO #EXJW #ExMuslim

When you discover that people in other religions also receive spiritual confirmations that their church is the only true church






12:24 PM · Dec 3, 2022

12 Retweets 56 Likes 1 Bookmark

## Appendix E: @smartstatistic Tweet

↻ Alma Retweeted



**Laurie Bertram** no spoons left only knives    ...  
@smartstatistic

Nevermind me I'm just waiting for evangelicals and morality police to realize that purity culture is a very high form of childhood sexualization that leaves girls especially at higher risk for victimization.

[#EmptyThePews](#)

6:28 AM · Dec 2, 2022

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21 Retweets 1 Quote 103 Likes 1 Bookmark

### Appendix F: @shirospirit Tweet

 erceon Retweeted



**VoidScreamer**  
@ShiroSpirit



Drag shows are safe.

Bathrooms are safe.

CHURCHES ARE NOT.

[#EmptythePews](#)  
[#atheist](#)



**Beks** @antifaoperative · Dec 1, 2022

A former Missouri youth pastor has pleaded guilty to sex crimes with a minor after raping a child over the course of several years that started when she was only eleven years old.

[Show this thread](#)

9:48 AM · Dec 2, 2022

12 Retweets 44 Likes



## Appendix G: @feralgirllife Tweet



Feral Girl  
@FeralGirlLife

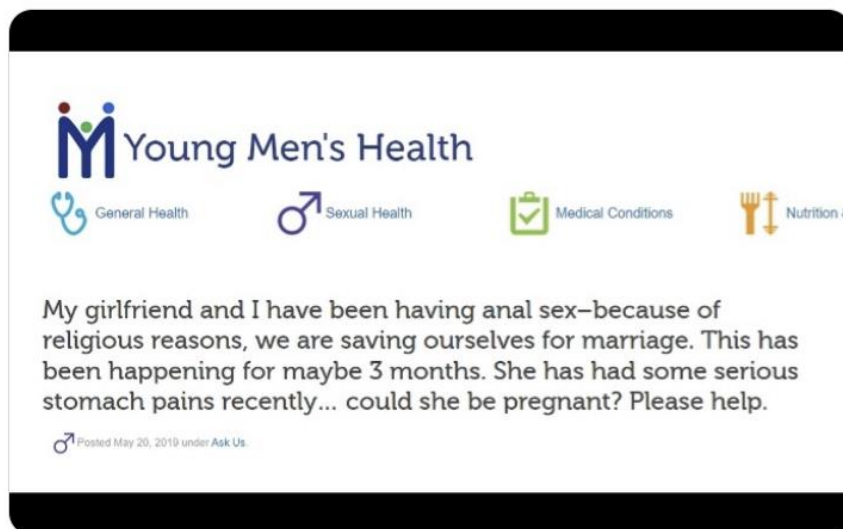


Found on Reddit.

Purity culture has some of y'all believing anal sex keeps you pure bc it's not PIV sex. Also, sex education, folks.

P.S. get this woman to a Dr.

[#purityculture](#) [#exvangelical](#) [#Hypocrites](#)



7:16 PM · Dec 10, 2022