

ABSTRACT

THESIS: Toward a Better Understanding of Role Exit: A Qualitative Study of Former Mormon Women

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Studies show that more people are switching or leaving religions within their lifetime (Suh & Russell, 2015, Cooper, Cox, Lienesch, & Jones, 2016). This study applies Ebaugh's (1988) role exit theory to the lived experiences of former Mormon women. To investigate this issue, I conducted qualitative interviews with 26 women who have left the Mormon Church. The experiences of these women generally fit within the four stages of role exit identified by Ebaugh. I examine how first doubts and tipping points lead to the creation of a new role identity, while addressing how Mormon women seek alternatives to their former religious lives. The women in this study have all severed their ties to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and have taken pieces of their previous identities to form a new one outside of the church. Furthermore, although reasons for leaving differ among the women in this study, the role exit process was difficult and often painful as they navigated a future outside a ritualistic religion with a structured plan of salvation.

Keywords: *role exit, Mormonism, religion.*