

A Genre Analysis of the Facebook Mormon Stories Podcast FB Community

RACHEL NYE
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Introduction

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, formerly nicknamed the “Mormons,” claims a membership of 16 million strong. Within the last decade, Mormonism has been besieged by the internet, causing thousands to religiously disaffiliate from the faith. In 2012, a group of Utah State University students came to church historian, Elder Marlin K Jensen, to acknowledge “their concerns” on why the LDS church membership was “leaving in droves” (Henderson, P. et al, 2012). In the last 15 years, “the Church has been embattled by the efficiency of the internet” (Larson, 2019). With the click of a button or google search, you can access historical Mormon papers and documents at the tip of your fingertips. “Where the unsavory specifics of an older faith’s origins may have been eroded by time, reduced to a handful of too-old-to-question texts and some shriveled relics, the early years of Mormonism are well-documented and easily examined online” (Larson, 2019).

For those who discover the historical inaccuracies and whitewashing of Mormon church history, questions pile onto a metaphorical shelf. Investigators begin to fight a lifetime of programming and cognitive dissonance that the church is true. These mental gymnastics to “prove” the church is true can result in a faith crisis - a spiritual awakening. During a “Mormon faith crisis” learning the difficult parts of church history can send members into a tailspin of immense mourning so deep, that many if not all, former Mormons seek places of “love and validation, and understanding during a time of unbelievable turmoil and loss” of their faith (*Former Mormon, Leah*). Out of the need for love and validation, evolved “another religious community...: ex-Mormons” (Chadwick, 2005).

Due to the internet's influence, ex-Mormons started to “gather” in online support groups that allowed acceptance, inspiration, a place to vent, validation, support, laughter, and healing. Ex-Mormons coin this process out of Mormonism, a faith transition. On Facebook, the largest support group for those questioning/transitioning out of Mormonism is the Mormon Stories Podcast Community with over 13,000 members. I would like to discuss how the specific genres of this community aid ex-Mormons through a faith transition from a literary perspective. These texts “help others transition out...through” the “use of various texts” (Kericksen, 2017) into healing. These supportive genres become literary tool kits or grief processing tools for those transitioning out of Mormonism.

Quantification As A Discourse Community

Common goals

We know discourse communities are defined to have common goals and specific mechanisms of communication and genres. These genres allow individuals to disperse information and feedback that engage specialized lexicon. Communities generally have a few members who are experts or mentors to others. With these defined, let's discuss how the FB Mormon Stories Podcast Community (MSPC) is a discourse community. Mormon Stories Podcast Community's top goal is to be "...a support community that seeks to help people constructively navigate the waters of uncorrelated Mormonism. We attempt to create a respectful, safe place for believers and non-believers alike. We feel strongly that in order for MSPC to be a safe bridge between traditional belief and uncorrelated or non-belief we must strive to make MSPC safe for believers and non-believers alike" (MSPC, 2020).

Lexicon

Community members communicate through personal posts, commentary on live FB podcasts where members/scholars are interviewed in the group, and reply to personal posts. Collectively, this allows effective communication within the community. A part of due process in communications among community members is specific ex-Mormon jargon. To understand ex-Mormon jargon, one must have been a member of the LDS church. The lexicon in ex-Mormon texts "provide a basic understanding...as they contain numerous characters and stories that are key to Mormon culture" (Keriksen, 2017). Former Mormon Jean shared, "I appreciate ex-Mormon vernacular because it creates a quick way to communicate meaning with the necessary cultural subcontext."

Mentorship Creates Expertship

Community members range in how long it's been since they left Mormonism, from 0-30 years. Those who transitioned out many years ago provide insight and help mentor those who are at the beginning of their faith transition. Former Mormon, Anthony, feels that to effectively process through a faith transition, there comes a "...need for one or more mentors who have traversed these things before and come out on the other side." Having a mentor inside the community allows "newbies" to "know there's life, and even community, on the other side" (Chadwick, 2005). These quantifications of the discourse community evolutionized ex-Mormon genres out of a need to "constructively navigate the waters" (MSPC, 2020) through a faith transition. Although we have an understanding of why these communities exist, there is little research with specificities on their genres and lexicon. This paper will address specific genres MSPC community members use in a faith transition out of Mormonism.

Research

The first research used in this analysis was eleven personal interviews with former Mormons. It should be noted again that genre analysis of ex-Mormon communities has very little research so primary research was of importance in collecting data. There has been some genre analysis on ex-Mormons but not on the online communities.

Participants were asked the same questions but not everyone completed all the questions and feedback varied in length. Given the ex-Mormon community is large, eleven interviews were not a large sample but did allow examination of how ex-Mormon genres are used in faith transitions out of Mormonism.

Interview Questions

1. When you joined your online ex-Mormon FB group, did you answer a set of questions to join?
2. Do you feel those were appropriate to ask potential members? If so, why?
3. When you joined the ex-Mormon community, did you feel compelled to write an introduction post? If so, why and what did you include?
4. Do you feel introduction posts are necessary?
5. Did you write a letter to friends or family members or make a social media post to inform others you were leaving the Mormon church? If so, why did you do this? Was it important to you? Do you feel every ex-Mormon should do this?
6. Is it appropriate to announce on social media or should it be kept for private conversations/letters/emails to loved ones?
7. Do you post ex-Mormon memes? If so, why?
8. What type of posts do you enjoy writing or participating in?
9. Do you feel the posts in ex-Mormon FB groups allow members to heal?
10. If so, what type of posts allow members to heal?
11. What specific written ex-Mormon resources do you find most helpful?
12. Do you write about leaving Mormonism on social media (other than ex-Mormon groups)? If so, why do you post about it?
13. Do you feel ex-Mormon jargon/vocabulary helps members communicate effectively?
14. Do you feel specific types of posts are exclusive to these groups? If so, why?
15. Anything else you want to add?

Leah Young from the personal interviews supplied a large submission of anonymous statements from members who were questioning or transitioning out of Mormonism. Leah and her husband, Cody Young, were excommunicated by the LDS church for running a support group in Ohio for those transitioning out of the church. For their hearing/trial, members of that support group came together to submit anonymous statements in support of Leah and Cody's goodwill. The LDS church found them guilty of apostasy in a church court. Some of the statements used in this paper were relevant to faith transitions/support communities.

Secondary research used in data collection came from newspaper articles or online submissions from blogs discussing ex-Mormon communities.

Results

The responses for the primary interviews are recorded in the appendix. Data collected in the primary interviews highlighted four primary genres used in faith transitions: personal stories, podcasts, ex-Mormon memes, and grief processing support posts (GPSP). People found these genres (texts) helpful in transitioning out of Mormonism (faith transition). Secondary data helped supplement and support the hypothesis these genres help aid former members through a faith transition from a literary perspective. Secondary research articles discussed why ex-Mormon support communities came about, the specific use of ex-Mormon jargon, ex-Mormon memes, and the importance of ex-Mormon support communities in faith transitions.

Discussion

Personal Stories and MS Podcast

Personal Stories

“...Ex-Mormons love to share with one another” especially “telling” their “leaving story” (Chadwick, 2005). Because faith transitions are “like a grieving process...so all-encompassing. It is like a death. The death of a whole paradigm that you built your life around” (Chadwick, 2005). Members of the community share personal stories so others do not feel alone in their transition. Former Mormon, Jean, expressed why these stories are crucial to faith transitions: “Hearing other people’s stories made me feel less alone. Eventually, I wanted to share my own story, not because I felt compelled but in the hopes that it would give other people that same sense of support.” Shannon reiterates this importance, support posts are “the ones that make people feel less alone, especially when they feel isolated from their church community and haven’t yet built a new one.” Former Mormon, Ginger, “appreciated” these “posts from people who were years down the road and promised it was going to get better.” These posts enable those in the beginning stages of a faith transition out of Mormonism to “express their sadness and frustration” (former Mormon, Ginger).

Collectively, “the personal stories shared are most relatable” by letting “us see that we’re not alone in our suffering/negative experiences. This unifies us into a new-subculture of a post-religious community” (former Mormon, Stephanie). “Knowing people’s stories” (former Mormon, Alicia) allows members to “be seen, heard and understood. I can’t imagine how much harder this experience would’ve been for me, had I not had others to gather around me who had been through it themselves” (anonymous

former Mormon). Sharing personal stories among its members validates the path many former members can no longer abide or “fit” within the LDS model.

Mormon Stories Podcast

The MSPC has a second genre used to share personal stories of those in a faith transition out of Mormonism. The second personal stories genre is unique in the fact it evolved not just from those desiring to find community transitioning out of Mormonism but from a specific podcast that originated in 2005. “Founded in 2005, Mormon Stories podcast is the longest-running and most popular Mormon-themed podcast” (MS foundation website, 2020), hosted by Dr. John Dehlin. The podcast and Facebook community were created to provide:

support to Mormons who are transitioning away from either orthodox Mormonism, or from Mormonism altogether, with a particular emphasis on:

- Minimizing the anxiety, depression, and occasional suicidality that can accompany a transition away from religious orthodoxy.
- Reducing the number of unnecessary divorces attributable to a Mormon faith crisis. Creating a community of support for liberal/progressive and post-Mormons. (MS foundation website, 2020)

These podcast interviews with former members of the church or academic scholars invited to discuss historical issues of importance are cast live via the Facebook group, YouTube, their FB page, and website. Community members can jump on to comment and interact with those being interviewed. Host Dr. John Dehlin often uses viewers' live comments in his interviews, making it an interactive interview experience. Former

Mormon, Emily, said in her FB review of the podcast, “I love the Mormon Stories podcast! One year ago my husband and my beliefs in the LDS church changed. Listening to several of these interviews helped us realize that we weren't the only ones and that our family was going to survive the transition” (2019). Former Mormon, Sian, who was interviewed by Dr. John Dehlin and shares her journey in the group said, “I love hearing people's personal journeys. It helps me to feel connected, validate my own journey, and...realize I’m not alone with my experiences.”

Ex-Mormon memes

On the internet today, memes have sprung up on phones, social media platforms, Pinterest, etc. Ex-Mormons have their own unique memes that reference Mormon lexicon. Ex-Mormon memes help former members find laughter in the loss of their former faith. This community provides a “...space” that is “needed to be able to share inappropriate laughter” (former Mormon, Ginger). Memes or posts aimed at laughter “make us laugh. It feels good to laugh at the things that once made us feel crazy” (former Mormon, Stephanie).

“We all know the benefits of laughter in our lives and its role as a stress reducer. When we laugh, we feel better at the moment but there are also long-range effects” (Mendoza, M. 2016). Many ex-Mormons enjoy these releases of laughter over shared memes that culturally relate to their former faith. Ex-Mormon memes are generally shared only in the support group out of respect for still believing family members. “As it stands, I still respect the beliefs of my friends and families who are still affiliated with the church, and I want them to see me as a safe space” (former Mormon, Jean). These memes allow

“laughter through the faith transition” (former Mormon, Melissa) at a time when grief and sadness can become overwhelming.

Grief Processing Support Posts (GPSP’s)

With little research done on ex-Mormon genres, it should be noted the author has taken the liberty to define a new genre that was highlighted in the primary research.

Number one, faith transitions out of Mormonism have been described as a loss comparable to death. Former Mormons feel a shift in their personal lives, marriages, and beliefs. A common phrase often coined is “a part of you dies,” the person you once were is gone. Grief commences for what was. Former Mormon Ginger relates “from my experience, I believe the most important posts that are helpful for someone going through a faith crisis relate to the stages of grief. The five stages of grief are denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance.”

Number two, community members mourn with those who mourn through the stages of grief and loss as they transition out of Mormonism. “Posts that explain that what people are experiencing in a faith crisis is often Grief, that is a natural developmental process to experience Grief, and the kinds of support that a person needs when processing other kinds of Grief are similar for those experiencing a faith transition” (former Mormon, Anthony). These posts allow members to “feel comfortable and safe sharing sensitive thoughts and feelings” (former Mormon, Katie). These posts allow members to ebb and flow through these stages of grief, asking for advice, processing triggers, or simply crying out for help. Former Mormon Alicia enjoys participating in Grief “support posts for people who are dealing with issues with which I’ve also encountered.”

Out of the evolutionary need to create a fluid-like emotionally supportive genre came Grief Processing Support Posts (GPSP's). GPSP's help aid members to process their grief through a faith transition with the help of those in their community.

Conclusion

Professor Brene Brown defines “connection as the energy that exists between people when they feel seen, heard, and valued; when they can give and receive without judgment; and when they derive sustenance and strength from the relationship” (2010).

Ex-Mormon support groups have helped thousands transition out of Mormonism. “When I started transitioning in my beliefs and had a million questions, online support groups provided friends...and to not feel alone” (anonymous former Mormon). Former Mormon Jean shared, “Healing is an internal process, and is very individual. My opinion is that nothing outside ourselves allows us to heal but outside sources can provide a space with people who understand and support us in our efforts” to heal through a faith transition. These outside genres mobilized within the Mormon Stories Podcast Community allow members access to a literary tool kit that collectively works to aid them through a faith transition into healing. Further research on these genres could potentially help community members better understand their own religious trauma and refine the genres used in faith transitions out of Mormonism.

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Author Bio

Rachel Nye is currently a Junior at Western Oregon University. A mother of five who was an early childhood educator and business owner before returning back to school is now a pre-nursing student who aspires to be a hospice nurse. She is an avid runner who finds solace in the early morning hours and backpacking around the Pacific Northwest. Her passions are also hiking, kayaking, and camping with her family.

Appendix: Primary Research Results

Jean

When you joined your online ex-Mormon FB group, did you answer a set of questions to join?

I'm a member of a couple exmormon FB groups, and I don't recall having to answer any questions to join either of them. It is possible that I just forgot about doing this. If, indeed, I did not answer questions, it was probably because a long-time friend was an admin in the first group I joined, and he invited me. After mentioning in a comment in the first group that I lived in the Portland area, Jennifer, an admin from our local group, invited me to join a second group with just people from Oregon and SW Washington.

Do you feel those were appropriate to ask potential members?

N/A

If so, why?

Although I don't recall going through any vetting process, I do think it's important for exmormon support groups to verify the authenticity of group members. This is mostly due to the fact that the church's "strengthening church members committee" has actual spies keeping tabs on people in these sorts of groups. Exmormon group members have been outed to family and made to answer to church leadership for comments they've made in what they thought was a safe space.

When you joined the ex-Mormon community, did you feel compelled to write an introduction post?

I didn't introduce myself right away, but I felt thankful for everyone else's introductions. Hearing other people's stories made me feel less alone. Eventually I wanted to share my own story, not because I felt compelled, but in the hopes that it would give other people that same sense of support.

If so, why and what did you include?

Why: I feel like the church maintained so much power over me by simply making me feel like I shouldn't speak my truth when it fell outside of their narrative. Sharing my introduction was intended to help other people feel less alone, but it was incredibly cathartic for me to feel empowered to express what I had been through and explain the hurt I experienced because of the church. When I started writing my introduction, I realized that I could finally be myself among people who understood the gravity of what that meant for me.

What did you include: I began my introduction with background about my orthodox upbringing and my religiously faithful past, aka. Mormon street cred. Then, I talked about the

little issues I had with the church that kept piling up over the years. Next, I told about the family tragedy that became the catalyst for my major faith transition. After that, came my reaction to learning about the mountain of evidence showing that the church had lied about so many things. Finally, I shared where my beliefs stand currently and how my life has improved because of it.

Do you feel introduction posts are necessary?

I think they're nice, but they should always be considered optional.

Did you write a letter to friends or family members or make a social media post to inform others you were leaving the Mormon church?

I called members of my immediate family to let them know about my shift in beliefs. I also kind of made an exit post on social media, but it was purposefully vague, and it also included the explanation of another struggle that our family was going through. I kept it vague because I had never posted about religion before that point. Honestly, I had been ashamed to admit I was a member of the mormon church for a few years prior to leaving, so many of my friends wouldn't have understood the specific religious implications anyhow.

If so, why did you do this? Was it important to you?

It felt incredibly important to me because I wanted to live my life as authentically as possible - not publicly portraying my life to be anything other than it really is just to make other people feel comfortable. I also wanted to soften my friend's and family's potential shock at what my newly authentic life might include: public support of LGBTQ rights, drinking "hot drinks" (coffee and tea) and alcohol, Sunday recreational activities, wearing tank tops and normal shorts, etc.

Do you feel every ex-Mormon should do this?

There are several factors that need to be taken into account before making a public profession that could potentially alienate you from your support network. There are also many ways to handle how you reveal your change in beliefs, and there is no one size fits all solution to how it should happen or if it should happen at all. Each person should feel free to explain their faith transition in a way and at a time that feels safe and authentic to them; sadly, for some, it never feels safe.

Is it appropriate to announce on social media or should it be kept for private conversations /letters /emails to loved ones?

I think that either option could be appropriate and should be left to individual discretion. Maybe the deciding factor would be how publicly Mormon you were or how public you are with your thoughts in general, but it's definitely not for me to say.

Do you post ex-Mormon memes? If so, why?

I have never posted ex-Mormon memes on my public Facebook page. I think if I had posted memes and quotes supporting the Mormon church prior to my exit, I might be inclined to refute my previous posts with ex-Mormon memes.

As it stands, I respect the beliefs of my friends and family who are still affiliated with the church, and I want them to see me as a safe space. I don't want them to feel secretly defensive or angry around me because of something I've posted.

I do express my disagreements with the church to believing friends and family in conversations where I can control my tone and vocal inflection, and we can have a real-time dialogue.

What type of posts do you enjoy writing or participating in?

The ex-Mormon posts I usually participate in are those that ask for opinions or suggestions in areas where I feel like I have a solid understanding of what I currently think. (I've figured out what I don't believe, but it takes extra time to understand what I do think and believe now.)

When I write a post, it is usually to get advice or emotional support from the only group of people who could possibly understand the weird religious undertones of what I'm going through at the time.

Do you feel the posts in ex-Mormon FB groups allow members to heal?

The Facebook posts in my ex-Mormon groups represent a very wide range of feelings about life and the church: anger, hope, sadness, rejection, adventure, fear... I imagine that each post feels healing for the original poster, but I've also seen that they can be upsetting for other group members who are at different places in their journey or have arrived at a different existential conclusion in regards to their life and/or spirituality. Regardless, there are always people who can relate and find healing in simply knowing that their experience is not totally unique.

If so, what type of posts allow members to heal?

The question for me isn't so much "what allows members to heal", as it is "what can other group members relate to or empathize with?" Healing is an internal process, and it is very individual. My opinion is that nothing outside ourselves allows us to heal, but outside sources can provide a space with people who understand and support us in our efforts to heal. It's a little bit like a large-scale group therapy session. Outside sources in the group that would aid this: support posts, laughter and sharing personal stories)

What specific written ex-Mormon resources do you find most helpful?

I do listen to some ex-Mormon podcasts, but I don't really follow written ex-Mormon sources aside from the Facebook groups. I know there are several valuable resources out there, and my not following them is simply a matter of what I can make space for in my already hectic life.

Do you write about leaving Mormonism on social media (other than ex-Mormon groups)?

I don't. I'm pretty private on social media. Plus, my only social media account is on Facebook.

If so, why do you post about it?

NA

Do you feel ex-Mormon jargon/vocabulary helps members communicate effectively?

I appreciate the ex-Mormon vernacular because it creates a quick way to communicate meaning with the necessary cultural subtext.

Do you feel specific types of posts are exclusive to these groups?

The types of posts that I think are likely unique to ex-Mormon groups are ones where people discuss fashion/underwear changes, discussions about what coffee or alcohol to try, and conversations about awkward temple stuff.

If so, why?

Fashion/underwear: Mormons have strict dress standards where shoulders and thighs are considered surprisingly scandalous. This is mainly due to the hyper-modest undergarment that Mormons, who have been through the temple, are required to wear. When people leave religion, it can be emotionally difficult to deviate from those modesty standards, so support is vital.

Coffee/ alcohol: Mormons are forbidden from drinking coffee and alcohol. These particular beverages are socially important in our society, but those who followed the orthodox Mormon traditions never developed a taste for these unique flavors. It's ok not to like them, but a lot of ex-Mormons want to learn how to enjoy them and ask for advice.

Awkward temple stuff: As believing members, our understanding was that we should not discuss anything about the temple outside of the temple. But the temple is rife with odd practices, and you are doomed to ponder the oddities alone until, as an ex-Mormon, you can finally have an open discussion. It is healing to communicate your true feelings about weird temple stuff and learn that you're not alone in your feelings.

Anything else you would want to add?

Like moving away from a small town, being an ex-Mormon is merely a statement of where you are from, even though you have relocated to somewhere else. The ideological perspectives people come to espouse after leaving the Mormon church are widely varied, and the paths people travel to arrive at their new truths are just as unique. Still, being from that same place gives ex-Mormons a unique camaraderie that can be fully enjoyed in the support communities.

Alicia

When you joined your online ex-Mormon FB group, did you answer a set of questions to join? I honestly don't remember.

Do you feel those were appropriate to ask potential members? If so, why?

Yes, it is reasonable to have a vetting/screening process, I think it helps allow for vulnerability within the group.

When you joined the ex-Mormon community, did you feel compelled to write an introduction post?

I was asked to introduce myself and was willing to share a bit of my story.

If so, why and what did you include?

I included a brief history of my time in Mormonism, my reasons for leaving, and where my thoughts were at the time of joining.

Do you feel introduction posts are necessary?

Not necessary, but helpful and valuable to a sense of community within the group. I like knowing people's stories and feel like I can better relate to them when they've taken the time to introduce themselves.

Did you write a letter to friends or family members or make a social media post to inform others you were leaving the Mormon church?

I wrote an email to my parents and siblings. I have not made a social media post.

If so, why did you do this? Was it important to you?

I knew I would need to let my parents know. They are the super supportive, involved type, who always came to the children's primary program, and are involved in a lot of the details of my family life. I knew my children would not be participating in the primary program, and I wanted to be the one to control the narrative, rather than have it be a reactionary conversation. I dreaded having the resulting conversation, but felt it important to my integrity, to let family know where I stood.

Do you feel every ex-Mormon should do this?

No. Everyone has different expectations and family situations. This is something that should be addressed individually.

Is it appropriate to announce on social media or should it be kept for private conversations/letters/emails to loved ones?

Whatever people are most comfortable with. It's certainly not inappropriate to post publicly about it.

Do you post ex-Mormon memes? If so, why?

I do not. When I was leaving, I made a commitment to be a safe person for my still believing friends and family. Part of that commitment is to respect their beliefs, even as they differ from mine. Posting content like that wouldn't feel in line with that commitment to my loved ones.

What type of posts do you enjoy writing or participating in?

Support posts for people who are dealing with issues with which I'd also encountered.

Do you feel the posts in ex-Mormon FB groups allow members to heal? If so, what type of posts allow members to heal?

Yes, but healing is also very personal, and a lot more goes into healing than is posted in internet fb groups.

What specific written ex-Mormon resources do you find most helpful?

Mormon Stories Podcasts, The Wardless Podcast, From Where I Stand group-seeing other families which looked like mine, thriving after leaving was really helpful, and made me feel less alone and crazy.

Do you write about leaving Mormonism on social media (other than ex-Mormon groups)? If so, why do you post about it?

I do not.

Do you feel ex-Mormon jargon/vocabulary helps members communicate effectively? Do you feel specific types of posts are exclusive to these groups? If so, why?

Jargon may help people feel like they are part of a new tribe after a painful transition away from their belief system/community. I can't speak to their exclusivity.

Anything else you would want to add?

Leah Young

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What type of posts do you enjoy writing or participating in?

Support posts for people who are dealing with issues with which I'd also encountered.

Do you feel the posts in ex-Mormon FB groups allow members to heal? If so, what type of posts allow members to heal?

Yes, but healing is also very personal, and a lot more goes into healing than is posted in internet fb groups.

(specifically - support posts, memes and personal stories)

What specific written ex-Mormon resources do you find most helpful?

Mormon Stories Podcasts, The Wardless Podcast, From Where I Stand group-seeing other families which looked like mine, thriving after leaving was really helpful, and made me feel less alone and crazy.

Do you write about leaving Mormonism on social media (other than ex-Mormon groups)? If so, why do you post about it?

I do not.

Do you feel ex-Mormon jargon/vocabulary helps members communicate effectively? Do you feel specific types of posts are exclusive to these groups? If so, why?

Jargon may help people feel like they are part of a new tribe after a painful transition away from their belief system/community. I can't speak to their exclusivity.

Anything else you would want to add?

List of why support groups are important. IN EMAIL

Heather

Sorry it has taken me a few days to get to this. For the first question: I initially joined 3 or 4 ex mormon groups all around the same time 4 years ago when I was leaving the church. 2-3 of them had initial questions to answer before being allowed to join or some sort of thing where I had to explain why I wanted to join. For instance, I joined Former Mormons with Believing Spouses, which is a private group and wanted to hear me say the words, "I have left or been thinking of leaving and my spouse still fully believes." I understood the screening for a group like that because for those members it is literally the ONLY place they feel free to really say how lonely they feel and how hard everything is in that situation. They need to know no one is joining who is not in that situation, although they have no way of verifying the truth of anything, but hey, they try. I think they also would look at our FB pages to see if there were obvious signs of our waning faith.

I don't recall any questions for the MSP group and for a little while I joined A thoughtful faith, although they may have changed their name now. There were questions for that group as well. Those were geared towards making sure I wasn't anti-mormon and could still have an open mind, even if I had left.

I didn't mind answering a few questions. If anything it was more to set the tone to us who wanted to join what it was all about. Particularly since they had no way to verify our answers.

I only wrote an intro post for the Former Mormons group, not any of the others. All of the groups would announce me as someone who just joined the group and invite an introduction but I didn't feel compelled. The only reason I wrote it in that one group was because I was so desperate to connect and wanted to take advantage of the resource and start asking questions right away.

I don't feel like intro posts are necessary in a large FB group. If it is a smaller and more intimate group then I do feel it is important. For instance, I belong to a Thrive beyond Mormonism FB group (we all got together for an in person conference in 2019) and right before the conference John set up the FB group and there were 40 of us. We were each able to provide an introduction or some of our story with the church and it was so great to already know a little about one another before meeting for the weekend. To already know all the similarities in experiences.

I never wrote a letter or social media post to inform family and friends I had left the church. It never crossed my mind. I didn't realize that was a thing until I got more involved in the ex-mo community. Those first few months-up to the first year after leaving I made a point to tell family and friends in person or phone call that I was no longer a member (I had my records removed within months of leaving). I wanted them to know so they didn't engage me in conversations about the church or my calling or whatnot and then have it be awkward when I explained why I had no calling. So I would tell them, hey, just so you're aware I am no longer a member of the church, but I am happy to still hear about your calling or issues or things you might want to mention about the church. Unless they asked, I didn't go into why I left or had my name removed. It was hit or miss on whether they actually asked.

I knew that anyone friends with me on FB would pick up on the fact that I must not be a member by things I was saying or advocating. But yeah, in the last 4 years since leaving I have not once mentioned the church in my general social media post. I save all of that for my ex-mo groups.

I don't think there is a right or wrong here. I understand why some feel the need to write these letters or post something about their departure and give their reasons. I certainly enjoyed reading some of these letters and people's responses to them. I just knew that most of my family and friends in the church were pretty orthodox, like I used to be, and would never read that kind of letter from start to finish. They would see it as contaminated and potentially full of misleading statements.

There are still family and friends who we have not officially told, some who are on FB and others who are not. At this point I don't feel the need to inform them or make them aware. The church promotes this idea of collective identity. This, I think, is why so many feel like they need to explain themselves to the collective. When I discovered the untruthfulness of the church, I no longer felt like I owed anything to the collective. Not even parting words.

I have never posted an ex-mormon meme, at all, not in my FB page, not in ex-mo groups. It just never occurred to me to do it. I actually don't really post memes on FB, I do that more on Twitter and even still they are not ex-mo, although I am more open about being ex-mormon on Twitter and have joined up with many other ex-mo's there.

I feel like twitter allows people to have many different interests or topics they like to bounce between, and my ex-mormon status or critiques of religion are more welcome on that platform. In FB, I am very aware that if I were to fully do that, I would lose contact with some

long-standing friends and family who would simply unfriend me and since ex-mo groups exist I decided not to fill up my own feed with my takes on the church or religion so I can keep them around.

This was hard and I felt censored and silenced by this knowledge (that they would unfriend me) but now I don't care so much. I understand that even if I am not talking about the church at all, things I say will offend them and I still risk them leaving so I proceed more without worrying about it. But in general FB is where I am most careful about my word choice and tone. I haven't decided if I am happy about this choice of mine or not, but that is where I stand on it for now. I think if I didn't have other outlets then I would do it on my regular FB page but thankfully I have other options.

Shannon

When you joined your online ex-Mormon FB group, did you answer a set of questions to join?
Yes

Do you feel those were appropriate to ask potential members?

Yes

If so, why?

To make sure that the person joining knew what they were getting into. Also, to help them feel that they were "safe" from friends and family who might be disappointed with their lack of faith.

When you joined the ex-Mormon community, did you feel compelled to write an introduction post?

No.

If so, why and what did you include? N/A

Do you feel introduction posts are necessary? No. I think if someone wants to post an introduction so they don't feel like a stranger, that's fine. But I tired of reading them, they're usually long and similar.

Did you write a letter to friends or family members or make a social media post to inform others you were leaving the Mormon church?

No. I fought the temptation until it finally subsided.

If so, why did you do this? Was it important to you?

I knew it wouldn't really interest those inside and potentially just offend them.

Do you feel every ex-Mormon should do this? No. But I understand why they want to.

Is it appropriate to announce on social media or should it be kept for private conversations/letters/emails to loved ones?

I think it depends on the person.

Do you post ex-Mormon memes? If so, why?

No. I try to be respectful of believing friends and family.

What type of posts do you enjoy writing or participating in? As time goes on, I feel less of a need, but I enjoyed venting about the frustrations and stolen things for a while.

Do you feel the posts in ex-Mormon FB groups allow members to heal? Yes.

If so, what type of posts allow members to heal?

The ones that make people feel less alone, especially because they are in a space where they feel isolated from their church community and haven't yet built a new one. And years of gaslighting can make it nice to find other people to affirm their experience.

What specific written ex-Mormon resources do you find most helpful? Not specifically exMo, but I loved reading the real history, such as In Sacred Loneliness, No Man Knows My History, Mormon Enigma, etc.

Do you write about leaving Mormonism on social media (other than ex-Mormon groups)? No. I've mentioned it, but have never publicly stated my reasons.

If so, why do you post about it? N/a

Do you feel ex-Mormon jargon/vocabulary helps members communicate effectively? Yes. It gives a common shorthand.

Do you feel specific types of posts are exclusive to these groups?

Possibly, but I think they would be similar in other groups leaving religions or abusive situations. Specific ones I can think off the top of my head are introductions, support posts, questions on what to do, exmormon firsts and transition posts.

If so, why?

There are probably a pretty common set of issues that people work through as they transition from a high-demand religion. It helps to know you're not alone.

Anything else you would want to add? Nope.

Ginger

I should first explain, from my experience I believe the three most important posts that are helpful for someone going through a faith crisis relates to the stages of grief. The five stages of grief are: Denial, Anger, Bargaining, Depression, and Acceptance.

Out of these five, I believe the last four are the most crucial. For me I needed the denial phase to be on my own. The denial phase was just too difficult to put into words, it almost

feels like your spirit goes into shock and experiences similar symptoms of physical shock (like being disconnected from your body).

Once the shock wore off, I needed to be allowed to express and feel anger. There are some great groups in the Exmo world that allow this space to say and feel whatever you want. This space was needed to be able to share inappropriate laughter and to express rage at even the simplest of things. But, after some time, this group became toxic and it was time to remove myself.

From my perspective some people stay in this phase for way too long. These groups encouraged crossing boundaries with our TBM family and friends and while it may feel good to do so in the beginning, it's only going to make things worse overall. Posts of converting our family and friends out of the church was not right for me and felt they did more damage than good. If we want to have healthy relationships with them, they won't listen when we are disrespecting their beliefs. But for some they must do this to not only heal in their journey but learn the hard way. Anger and disrespectful posts were very much needed in the beginning, but I don't recommend staying in these groups for long.

Next... the Bargaining. The mental gymnastics of what I just went through and figuring out if there was a place to stay and make it work was brief, and there were not very many posts from others that encouraged staying. For me those who provided rationale and emotionally removed insight into the benefits of staying helped me to see some good in it. I NEEDED to see the good in it so I could still see the good in my family and friends. I wish there were more of those posts from people who still strived to see the good in the church. But unfortunately, those posts are welcomed, or they seem to be made fun of.

Third, Depression. This is the most vital. The depression posts helped me immensely. It's not that I wanted people to be depressed, it just helped me realize that there was nothing wrong with me and that the grief was needed for healing. I also appreciated posts from people who were years down the road and promised that it was going to get better. But I also appreciate the posts where people who were farther down the road, allowed the newbies to express their sadness and frustration and not tell them to just move along or get over it. The depression posts made me feel human.

Finally, acceptance. I did not find this necessarily in the exmormon groups, but I found this needed through a podcast called Listen, Learn, and Love. This is a podcast run by a believing member of the church who interviews the marginalized and those who are openly suffering with things in the church. But the way this man interviews is done with such love, and acceptance and not just from those who leave the faith, or those who are in the LGBT community, or who have porn addictions, or depression, but from those who choose to stay and try and make it work. This man (Richard Ostler) has brought more healing to me than anything. But this group may not be for everyone. I enjoy this group because he helps me create more healthy relationships with my family.

Once you come to a place of accepting that the church is not true, that they lied to us, that it has many, MANY problems, and that it is going to continue having many problems, this is when the real healing begins. But it takes so much time to get here, so much pain, so much heartache and ruined relationships..... This is my most favorite part of the journey. It is when conversations start to happen, questions are finally being asked, and hearts from those of us outside and within are softened and can come together to figure out our two new worlds and how they collide. When you finally accept, you'll start seeing the good in the church again (that doesn't mean you have to believe it or be a part of it), it just means your heart has finally turned to butter.

I loved the support posts. They gave me hope and they gave me courage to keep putting one foot forward in climbing out of the darkest fucking abyss I had ever fallen into.

Anthony

First, posts that explain that what people are experiencing in a faith crisis is often Grief, that it's a natural developmental process to experience Grief, and the kinds of support that a person needs when processing other kinds of Grief are similar for those experiencing a faith transition.

Second, explanations that relate to the secular application of Buddhism in that our natural tendency as human beings is to enmesh our sense of personal and moral identity with our beliefs, our shared communities, our roles, our reputations—Eckhart Tolle would call it “attachment to form.”

Third, they have a natural tendency for regret because they made choices based upon now crumbled constructs, they have a natural human desire to test behavioral boundaries and limits. This can result in problems for a person to go extreme on behavioral boundary testing when they are in deep Grief, flirting with nihilism, being treated poorly by people still in the faith who experience criticisms of the Church as attacks on their personal and moral identity, and doing things that the rest of the world does in their teenage and early college years, but with the consequences of being an adult, with kids, career, a marriage, etc.

Fourth, are resources for deconstruction and reconstruction. They would be podcasts and videos, books, support groups, etc., along with the near vital need for one or more mentors who have traversed these things before and come out on the other side, but without a need to have the person reconstruct and attribute meaning the same way as the mentor.

Katie

When you joined your online ex-Mormon FB group, did you answer a set of questions to join?

Yes

Do you feel those were appropriate to ask potential members?

Yes

If so, why?

They seemed to want to make sure they were creating an environment where people could feel comfortable and safe sharing sensitive thoughts and feelings.

When you joined the ex-Mormon community, did you feel compelled to write an introduction post?

Not at first.

If so, why and what did you include?

Do you feel introduction posts are necessary?

Yes. I feel like they allow you to share your thoughts and story.

Did you write a letter to friends or family members or make a social media post to inform others you were leaving the Mormon church?

No

If so, why did you do this? Was it important to you?

Do you feel every ex-Mormon should do this?

No

Is it appropriate to announce on social media or should it be kept for private conversations/letters/emails to loved ones?

Yes - I think that the individual needs to do whatever works best for them and their situation.

Do you post ex-Mormon memes? If so, why?

Yes.. I think it's important for other former members of the church to see they aren't alone. I also think it's a way for current members to at least partly understand why people leave.

What type of posts do you enjoy writing or participating in?

Mostly just posts where I'm processing difficult emotions and they are common to people who have left. I think it helps to know we aren't alone.

Do you feel the posts in ex-Mormon FB groups allow members to heal?

Yes

If so, what type of posts allow members to heal?

Probably all of them to some degree or another. Everyone is so different that it's good to have different types of posts available.

What specific written ex-Mormon resources do you find most helpful?

The CES Letter and Letter for my Wife were most helpful to me

Do you write about leaving Mormonism on social media (other than ex-Mormon groups)?

Yes

If so, why do you post about it?

To help others know they aren't alone and to help give a voice to others who aren't able to speak for themselves, and also give meaning and value to my own painful experiences. This is helpful for me in processing them in a positive way.

Do you feel ex-Mormon jargon/vocabulary helps members communicate effectively?

Yes

Do you feel specific types of posts are exclusive to these groups?

No

Sian

1) I love hearing people's personal journeys. It helps me to feel connected, helps validate my own journey and help me to realise I'm not alone with my experiences.

2) I love to continue to learn so posts about church history information and current issues and changes too. It's good to stay in the loop, and there's so much to learn I don't think I could ever 'know it all'. I've been amazed how over 18 months of learning, I'm always continuing to learn more.

3) Meme's are great. Laughter really helps to get through this journey. If we didn't laugh about all the crazy, we'd go crazy ourselves!

Stephanie

1 - The personal stories shared are most relatable - the things that let us see that we're not alone in our suffering, our negative experiences (yeah we were all gaslit). Unifying us into a new sub-culture of a post-religious community.

2 - How to find your values foundation/how to teach your children to be good people

3 - How to deal with holidays/traditions

4 - The ones that make us laugh! It feels good to laugh at the things that once made us feel crazy (or maybe still do!).

Melissa

The posts that were the most healing were podcasts (especially the stories of strong members who left the church), memes - brings laughter to the faith transition, support posts

Jennifer

The posts that I've found are the most beneficial through a faith transition are: Grief posts, support posts, memes, and hearing personal stories.

Leah and Cody's excommunication trial statements

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/120jCoV0fx1EEGEwDwphM6-wkEqkmG3YGT3cb5-JV8z0/edit>

