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**LIFE AFTER RELIGIOUS DISAFFILIATION IN
FINLAND
EX-MORMON PERSPECTIVES**

ABSTRACT

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Life After Religious Disaffiliation in Finland: Ex-Mormon Perspectives

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This thesis concerns ex-Mormons (former members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints or LDS) in Finland and the processes they experience. Religious disaffiliation, or exiting a religion, is an increasingly relevant trend today. Research about more specific groups, such as ex-Mormons in Finland, is relatively scarce in academic literature. The aim of this thesis was to provide a general overview of religious disaffiliation and subsequently focus on an ex-Mormon perspective. Research questions related to ex-Mormons in general, ex-Mormons in Finland, and social service implications for this group. Uskontojen Uhrien Tukiryhmä (Support for Religious Victims Association) was the partner organization for this thesis. Six Finnish ex-Mormons were interviewed. The results of this thesis highlighted some of the many complex issues that a sample of Finnish LDS religious disaffiliates have experienced. These issues included: narrative processes, LGBTQ+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transsexual, Queer) issues, gender roles, sexual assault, cultural differences, health, and relationships after leaving. One interviewee described a negative experience at a peer support group at the partner organization Uskontojen Uhrien Tukiryhmä. Therefore the way these groups are run as well as the nature of peer support meetings in general is reflected on. More specific Finnish research about awareness of high-cost religious disaffiliates in the social service field could be a promising future research subject. Another potential future research area could include research about other religious disaffiliate groups in Finland.

Keywords: ex-Mormon, religious disaffiliation, identity, qualitative research, Finland

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1 INTRODUCTION

The goal of this thesis is to provide a deeper understanding of the process that individuals experience when leaving religion. The first sections of this paper will provide a brief general overview of religious disaffiliates for context. Thereafter, this thesis will focus on ex-Mormons in Finland. Since I am also an ex-Mormon, there will potentially be elements of autoethnographic reflection in the interviewing process.

The latter sections of this thesis primarily focus on issues that an ex-Mormon might experience, as well as struggles with their faith. There will also be discussions on the resources available in Finland to this population of people in making adjustments in both their values and worldviews. The resources available to them via online websites will also be discussed. There will also be a discussion on social services or other organizations as well when the loosely structured interviews take place. Ideally, this thesis will serve both as an opportunity for ex-Mormons to reflect on their experiences and share them in a comfortable setting.

The research questions are:

- 1.) a. According to the literature, what kinds of issues does a person face when they leave the Mormon faith?
 - b. What are the issues related to leaving the faith for a group of Finnish ex-Mormons?

- 2.) What is the function of social services within Finland for ex-Mormons?

The connection to working life for this thesis is Uskontojen Uhrien Tukiryhmä (UUT), which translated to English means Support for Religious Victims Association. Their primary tasks in this thesis process were to assist in recruitment of the interviewees as well as clarify social service implications for disaffiliates. See section 2.2 below for a more full description of UUT and their important contributions to the social sector.

2 BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Firstly, a brief overview of religions in Finland from a statistical point of view is necessary for context. In 2018, 69.8% of the population belonged to the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland. This is in stark contrast to the membership in 2000, which amounted to approximately 85.1%. This shows that resigning from the official church of Finland is a relevant current trend. Membership in the Greek Orthodox Church, in comparison, comprised around 1.1% of the population in 2018. Other religions grouped together amounted to around 1.7% of the population in 2018. (Statistics Finland, 2020).

Since 2003, leaving the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland became simpler because legislation passed which allowed resignation from the church to be submitted by paper and via internet. Meeting personally was then omitted as a requirement for leaving. According to data gathered by the Church Research Institute in 2003, men in their twenties and thirties living in metropolitan areas are the most common demographic who resign from the Church of Finland. It has also been argued that youth are becoming more apprehensive towards religion and having the Church of Finland as an authority in their lives. Instead they are more inclined to want a more independent and personal life. Around two thirds of those leaving the Church of Finland are young adults. (Niemelä, 2007).

Because disaffiliation is a current trend, social services for disaffiliates is a very important topic of research. The occurrence of religious decline in Western Europe has also been discussed. According to Voas & Doebler (2011), the decline in religion is occurring because the elderly are with time being replaced by less-religious young people.

2.1 Mormonism

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (the LDS or Mormon church) was started in 1830 by Joseph Smith, who is considered to be the first prophet of the Mormon church. Mormons believe that Joseph Smith received a vision in which God and Jesus Christ appeared to him and told him that he was responsible to restore the

church Christ organized when he was on the Earth. Mormons believe that each president of the Church, called their Prophet, is called by God to be their leader today. There are around 15 million members of the Mormon church today. (About Us, 2020)

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints originally sent missionaries to Finland as early as 1875. More official Mormon meetinghouses began to be built by the church in the 1950s. There are around thirty Mormon congregations in Finland today, as well as a temple in Espoo which operates as a place for worship and special ceremonies for practicing Finnish Mormons. (Östman, 2007).

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints official website has the total membership in Finland listed as 4880. This equates to approximately 0.09% of the population of Finland being Mormons. (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, 2020). While this percentage of members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints might be considered small, it is a population that has not been studied in Finland as prominently as it has been in the United States. Additionally, the issues Finnish ex-Mormons go through might be different because of cultural dissimilarity.

2.2 Uskontojen Uhrien Tuki ry (Support for Religious Victims Association)

Uskontojen Uhrien Tuki ry (UUT) is the partner organization for this project. UUT is a non-governmental organization in Finland. Translated, their name in English means Support for Religious Victims Association. It should be clarified that the UUT ry website is only accessible in Finnish. The main aims of UUT are to influence society through supporting victims of human rights abuses, spiritual violence, and discrimination within religious organizations. This is accomplished through gathering research and presenting their research to authorities, politicians, researchers, media and other organizations. UUT also gathers information about religious communities with the intention of social advocacy. (Uskontojen uhrien tuki UUT ry, 2020).

The roots of UUT began in 1987 after YLE People's Radio broadcast interviews with ex-Mormons and former Jehovah's Witnesses. After the YLE broadcast, someone decided to call YLE to try and get in contact with some of the formerly religious in-

dividuals interviewed on the radio and extend an invitation for a group meeting. That meeting took place in Tampere in 1987 and included former Jehovah's Witnesses, Seventh Day Adventists, Laestadians, and Mormons. UUT eventually became a registered organization in 1993. (Uskontojen uhrien tuki UUT ry, 2020).

One of the functions of UUT includes organizing peer support groups throughout Finland for those in distress in many different cities and across many different religious backgrounds. Further discussion about UUT and its important role in the organization of peer support groups for religious disaffiliates will be included in the result (section 6.9). (Uskontojen uhrien tuki UUT ry, 2020).

3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND KEY CONCEPTS

Firstly, this section will focus on a brief overview of literature regarding religious disaffiliation in general. This will cover terms in the literature like high-cost disaffiliation as well. Secondly, literature regarding ex-Mormons in general will be discussed. Lastly, the final subheadings will focus on research specifically about ex-Mormon narrative processes.

3.1 Religious Disaffiliation

Fenelon and Danielsen (2016) define religious disaffiliation as "leaving the religious tradition in which one was raised for no religious affiliation in adulthood." High-cost religious groups has been defined in previous literature as groups with exclusivity regarding cultural, social, and theological aspects (Schiele & Adamczyk, 2010).

Religious disaffiliates from high-cost religions report poorer health but not lower subjective well-being. In the context of Fenelon and Danielsen's (2016) research, well-being refers to self-reported happiness levels. Fenelon and Danielsen (2016) define high-cost religions to include Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Seventh Day Adventists. According to data from Fenelon and Danielsen (2016), around 17% of high-cost religious members disaffiliate. Disaffiliation from high-cost religions has been associated in other research with negative health effects (Schiele and Adamczyk, 2010).

One explanation for this observance of negative health effects might be the behavioral restrictions religious attendees of these high-cost religions adhere to (Fenelon & Danielsen, 2016). For instance, smoking tobacco and drinking alcohol (activities strictly avoided for high-cost religious attendees) are widely agreed to have a potentially poor effect on ones' health. Still, this effect of poor health because of lifted behavioral restrictions is not clear or demonstrated in any literature so far. Reduced resources for emotional coping might be a possible reason for a decrease in disaffiliates' health. Disaffiliation's impact on health and well-being might be related to loss of social support that the attendees previously received from church attendance. (Fenelon and Danielsen, 2016).

Religious disaffiliates are more likely to be young, male, unmarried, have higher incomes, higher education, and come from well-educated parents. Disaffiliates are also more likely to have experienced family instability in childhood. Disaffiliates who, despite non-belief, continue to regularly attend church do not have lower health or well-being disadvantages. This seems to highlight that the social elements of religion, specifically attending church frequently, might be one of the main reasons for health benefits of religious attendees. (Fenelon and Danielsen, 2016).

Religious disaffiliation is potentially linked with a change in social relationships associated with the practices and behavior of those involved in religion (Uecker, et al., 2007). Those entering adulthood who do not attend higher education are more likely to diminish religiosity, according to research by Uecker, et al. (2007). This is in contrast with the later research done by Fenelon and Danielsen (2016) cited above which suggested that religious disaffiliates are more likely to have higher education.

Obligations often involved with becoming an adult (like work and school) as well as freedoms (such as more autonomy) associated with early adulthood might displace religious participation for some. It was also found that nonmarital sexual activity, frequent alcohol consumption, and marijuana use are linked with diminishing religiosity for young adults. (Uecker et al. 2007). Still, all three of the above behaviors listed by Uecker, et al. (2007) could be related to the obedience also referenced above by Fenelon and Danielson (2016).

Literature related to terms like religious switching, or leaving one's religion and joining another, and health has also been discussed in previous literature. (Scheitle and Adamczyk, 2010). It has been suggested that poor health might be related to leaving high-cost religious groups. Similarly, it has even been suggested that poor health might be a motivating factor to leave a religion related to disillusionment with the religious group. (Scheitle and Adamczyk, 2010).

"Strained or severed family relationships, loss of self-identity, social isolation, and the personal stress that accompanies these issues are all representative of the costs that are enacted upon exit from a high-cost religion." (Scheitle & Adamczyk, 2010, pg. 327)

According to Scheitle and Adamczyk (2010), individuals raised in a high-cost sectarian religion (specifically Mormons and Jehovahs Witnesses) who switch to a different religious group or become non-religious report having worse health than individuals who remain in the group. This association doesn't exist for other non high-cost religious groups (Scheitle and Adamczyk, 2010).

3.2 Ex-Mormons

It is important to make the distinction that while not all people that might be colloquially classified as 'Mormons' are necessarily members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (there are many different variations and sects of Mormonism). However, for the purposes of this research when I refer to 'Mormons' or 'Ex-mormons' I will be referring to members or former members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. Another term which will be used in the text is 'LDS,' which is an acronym for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints.

The majority of previous research about Mormonism has, according to Östman (2008), been focused on a North American context. Some former members of Mormonism take more official public stances opposing the Church. In contrast to these, others might only leave behind types of thought that most often coincide with Church membership, while continuing with attendance for social or other reasons (Östman, 2008). This thesis will attempt to follow up on Östman's (2008) review of the scholarly study of Mormonism in Finland by giving context to more specific situations of ex-Mormons in Finland.

Disaffiliation is something many Mormons deal with at certain times of life. Payne (2013) cites a study by Stan Albrecht which claims that eight out of ten current members of the Mormon church will experience some type of disengagement from the church at some point of their lives. Still, Albrecht claims that most of these questioning individuals oftentimes still identify with the church in some way. However, Payne argues that this might not apply today since Albrecht's study was done in an era when internet use was not common. (Payne, 2013).

Payne (2013) does give a brief overview of a variety of reasons that Mormons might leave the Church. The Church has a policy of financial non-disclosure. Payne (2013) notes that for some people, this practice might be viewed with suspicion. Payne (2013) also reported that 32% of the narratives he examined described being upset by temple experiences. Payne (2013) notes that another common thread is discomfort with Mormon doctrine, for example the claim of the LDS Church as being "the one true Church." Payne (2013) also discussed doctrinal and historical concerns as being present in almost all the narratives he reviewed. For example, when a member is taught one version of Mormon history in church lessons only to later learn through personal study that the events happened differently or some details were left out or altered. Payne (2013) notes that Joseph Smith's practice of polygamy is something cited by many ex-Mormons as disturbing. Payne (2013) claims that cultural estrangement is often related to most of the narratives of Ex-Mormons. Another common reason for leaving Payne (2013) highlights is leaving because of being offended by another member or Church leader. Payne (2013) found this to be the case for 34% of the narratives in his sample.

Oftentimes there is a large amount of social pressure to comply with beliefs and behaviors in the Mormon Church. It is common for Mormon leaders to present a black-and-white picture in regards to participating in Church. Oftentimes this is linked with the individual's beliefs in specific things the church claims are true. For example, the truthfulness of Joseph Smith's first vision. (Payne, 2013). Payne (2013) also makes the important observation that doubting members of the church are often fighting to find why, or if, the church matters to them.

Sometimes the Mormon Church might be viewed as adopting business strategies in order to expand membership. For example, Mormon missionaries knocking on doors is much like sales work. This is a practice which is not only used by the LDS church but is also common among those of the Jehovah's Witness faith. Payne (2013) notes that the church even uses advertising campaigns like "I'm a Mormon" which are Youtube videos of church members describing themselves. Payne (2013) views this as a means to establish Mormonism as a brand. It is not too far of a stretch to understand that such terminology as Payne terms it might be problematic for some members of the Mormon church. Contrarily, there are also a series of videos and

Youtube channel titled "I am an Ex Mormon" in which former members share their exit stories. (I Am an Ex Mormon, publishing date unknown).

In contrast, some ex-Mormons even practice spreading information about their groups, and instead seek to advertize websites (such as www.postmormon.org) or more specific support groups for questioning or former Mormons. Becky Mckinnon and Timmy Chou, who run a support group in Salt Lake and sometimes offer their business cards to practicing Mormons, even had an article published in Newsweek discussing this. In a way this type of recruitment of members out of the fold mirrors the way missionaries in the Mormon church teach. (Miet, 2014).

It is common among Mormon believers that certain members leave because of their desire to violate commandments. For example, using alcohol, coffee, or tobacco. (Payne, 2013). Members who violate these established norms might naturally feel a certain distance from other practicing members who do not. Still, Payne (2013) argues that the majority of those members who end up culturally alienated do so because of issues of thought or belief and not because of a desire to sin.

Myers (2017) study involving religious disaffiliates and art therapy found that most subjects left their church because of three or more reasons. The majority of the participants in Myers' study were ex-Mormons. For example, doctrinal issues, historical issues, and disbelief in the truth claims of the church were cited as some of the reasons for disaffiliation.

According to Payne (2013), Ex-Mormonism as a subculture has shifted in recent years from a mostly Evangelical counter-cult movement to a predominantly secular form. Payne (2013) claims that this new wave of ex-Mormon thought is often accompanied by a secular mindset and a distrust of the majority of types of religious conservatism. Instead, there is often a focus on what Payne (2013) terms scientific rationality.

In Payne's (2013) text, he discusses Bromley's observation that exiting from an organization oftentimes involves the potential for that individual to discredit the group they are leaving. As a result, organizations might attempt some form of control over the exit process.

Mormonism today is often linked with political conservatism, and Payne (2013) claims the Church has used its organizational influence in backing controversial conservative issues. Because of such actions, this puts the Church in opposition to certain liberal activist causes and those people affected by conservative policies. (Payne, 2013).

Sometimes there develops groups within the Church which attempt to change or expose certain things. One group, called the Mormon Alliance, were intellectuals and feminists in the church in the 1990's. The Mormon Alliance were whistleblowers in the sense that they tried to expose claims of sexual abuse and what they termed "ecclesiastical abuse." They were excommunicated from the Church. (Payne, 2013).

There are also groups referred to as contemporary conservative anti-Mormon groups, who attempt to teach Mormons about Jesus. Such groups include the Utah Lighthouse Ministry, Concerned Christians, and Ex-Mormons for Jesus. Some of these groups, including Ed Decker's Saints Alive, the Prophecy Club, and With One Accord claim that Mormon leaders worship Satan. (Payne, 2013). Still, disaffiliates of the Church are not always part of other conservative groups, and in particular secular disaffiliates might identify as conservative, moderate, or radical on an individual basis. (Payne, 2013).

The most relevant examples of other ex-Mormon groups might be the Exmormon foundation, founded in 2001. The Exmormon foundation has been involved in spreading awareness of Mormon topics via conferences, as well formed many helpful Exmormon communities and groups. The Exmormon foundation is loosely affiliated with the groups "Recovery from Mormonism" (www.exmormon.org) and Post-Mormon (www.postmormon.org). (Payne, 2013). While the Exmormon foundation has explicitly stated its goals are contrary to the churches, the Post-Mormon approach is instead focused on creating a community which supports the individuals leaving without claiming outright to be in opposition to the church. (Payne, 2013)

Payne (2013) notes that the end result of the efforts of these groups listed above are oftentimes resulting in "apostates" from the Church. Apostates are individuals that, instead of simply becoming ambivalent and attending meetings less, take a rigid opposition in defiance of their previous role within the Church. Some apostates even

send in resignation letters in order to have their names removed from Church records.

Payne (2013, p. 114) describes the term pastoral apologetics "as a response to doubt that focuses primarily on the spiritual, social, and psychological desire for meaning, purpose, and mysticism." There are apologists within Mormonism, which are groups that attempt to counteract what they view are anti-Mormon claims. Such groups include the FARMS Review of Books, FAIRMormon, the Interpreter Foundation, and SHIELDS. (Payne, 2013) Relatively recently (within the past approximately 15 years), what is known as the Bloggernacle has formed. The Bloggernacle is a group of blogs associated with in-depth discussion of Mormon issues. (Payne, 2013).

3.3 Ex-Mormon narratives

Previous research has focused on the narrative process of ex-Mormons telling their story. One important example of this is Payne's (2013) overview of ex-Mormon narratives collected from a few different sources, the majority of which came from the website 'Recovery from Mormonism' (<http://www.exmormon.org>). Payne's (2013) review of ex-Mormon narratives identify common narrative threads among ex-Mormons describing their leaving process such as: "introduction (establishing credibility), statement of disenfranchisement or detachment (the apology), doctrinal and historical concerns, and the testimony (out of captivity)." (Refer to Figure 1 on the following page for a visual representation of this process.)

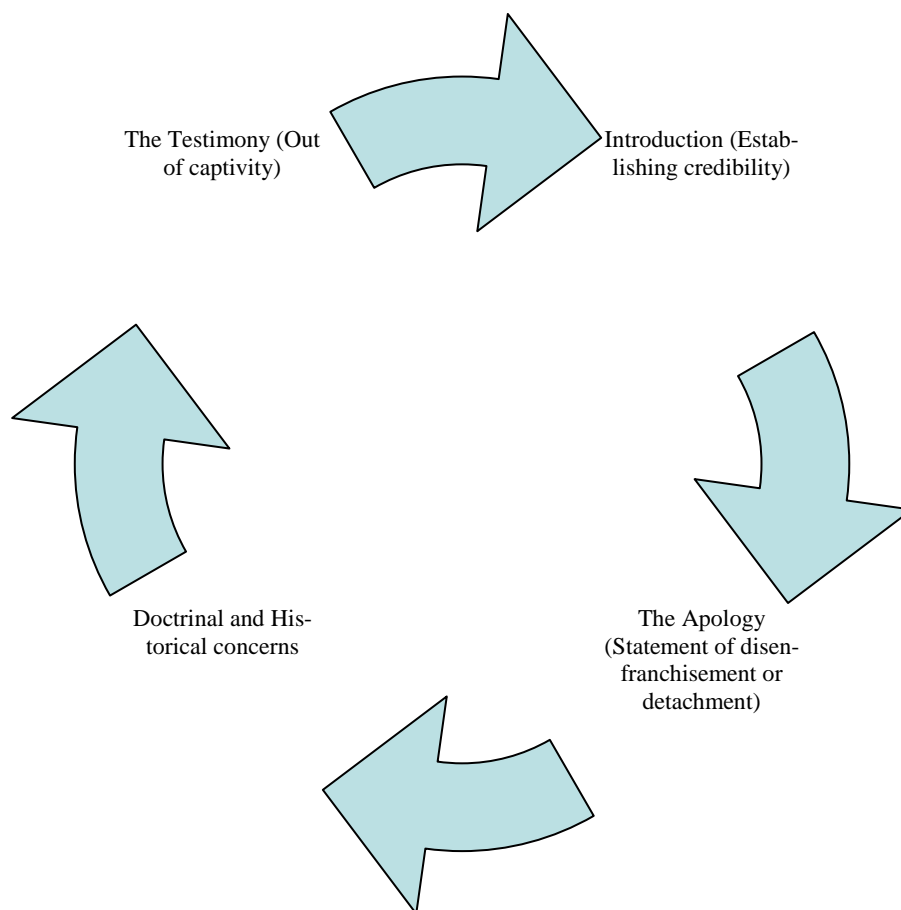


Figure 1. Common ex-Mormon Narrative threads according to Payne (2013)

Payne (2013) describes that the first common stage of narration, introduction (establishing credibility), of ex-Mormons typically involve a description of that individual's history within the Church. This seems to be done because it is a way for the author to point out that they were once a full-fledged believer and participating member.

Payne's (2013) second stage of common ex-Mormon narrative he identified, statement of disenfranchisement or detachment (the apology), most often contains a description of why the author was part of the Church. The authors often also describe feelings of discontent with their time as a member. After disaffiliation, converts often describe feeling they became a member because they were emotionally vulnerable at the time they joined the church. Another common occurrence Payne (2013) identified is the narratives' discussion of cultural pressure, and disengagement.

Thirdly, doctrinal and historical concerns were identified as common parts of ex-Mormon narratives. This is a broad category that can include many issues. Still, it

must be highlighted that doctrinal and historical concerns are rarely the single reason ex-Mormons leave. Payne (2013). Historical issues function to widen the gap between the individual and other problematic issues they have with the Mormon church. The narratives Payne (2013) reviewed also tend to focus on the emotional result of discovering difficult doctrinal issues and less on the specific issues themselves.

The final categorization of common narratives is the author's testimony as an explanation of being grateful for their new independence (Payne, 2013). For example, the narratives might compare their freedom and individuality with what they perceive as the LDS Church's constrictive and stricter norms. Payne (2013) notes that the individuals' process is unique. Despite this, Payne (2013) claims that when an individual decides to resign from the Church or cease attending, they have been through the narrative process he describes many times.

Scharp and Beck (2017) analyzed narrative data from Postmormon.org. In their study, they analyzed 150 exit stories. Scharp and Beck (2017) used an interpretive narrative for data analysis, specifically thematic narrative analysis. This method takes entire stories and simplifies them down into simple types instead of going into detail about specific word choices in the texts. Scharp and Beck (2017, p. 138) identified five prevalent identities of ex-Mormons: "(1) disenfranchised victim, (2) redeemed spiritualist, (3) the liberated self, (4) (wo)men of science, and (5) Mormon in name only." Scharp and Beck (2017) note that only two of the labeled identities involved distress (the disenfranchised victim and the redeemed spiritualist). Contrarily, some of the narratives wrote that actually being a member of the LDS Church caused them more distress than exiting the LDS Church.

Sometimes internet access can establish losing faith and gaining a new type of spiritual identity. Many ex-Mormons have used the internet for developing a new religious identity as well (Avance, 2013). In addition to using data from online message boards (using participant observation as well as even some interviews with site users), Avance (2013) examined ethnographic data from in-depth interviews with current and ex-Mormons regarding conversion.

Avance (2013, p. 19) argues that religious identity is formed through something

called "ritualized interpersonal exchange." In other words, ex-Mormons construct new identities through explaining their stories. Avance (2013) compares the deconversion to the process that many converts experience. Even much of the terminology is similar. For example, Mormon converts report seeing a light, while disaffiliates report a light coming on. Avance (2013) refers to two different types of questioning Mormon communities online: escapists and pathists. The escapists were defined as individuals who leave completely, while the pathists seem to be on the surface still practicing but secretly harboring certain levels of dissent within the church. (Avance, 2013).

Much like many practicing Mormons recite their testimony (story of their conversion and assuredness of the truth of the church) in front of the congregation once a month, ex-Mormons telling their story of deconversion in an online community could be compared to the same practice. Pointing out the similarities between the identity construction of converts and deconverts is an important comparison to make. Both groups are, to use a Mormon term, bearing testimony of their faith (or non-faith). Not only does it show how similar they are, it also emphasizes the importance of the individual forging identities for themselves while sharing their story. (Avance, 2013).

4 RESEARCH METHODS

Much of the previously mentioned literature involved individuals in high-cost religions. Individuals formerly involved in high-cost religions have been argued to have more health issues than former members of other less rigid religious groups (Schietle and Adamczyk, 2010; Fenelon and Danielsen, 2016). I decided to focus on interviewing high-cost religious members in the population of interviewees, specifically ex-Mormons. Interviews with this group could prove beneficial to understand perspective in a more direct way and in a Finnish context.

4.1 Autoethnographic approach and reflexive dyadic interviews

In this chapter I aim to describe the autoethnographic method as it relates to my thesis process. This will include explaining the interviewing methods I used and why they were chosen. I aim to justify why these methods were chosen over other methods.

According to Holman Jones, Adams, and Ellis (2013, 32), purposes of autoethnography include the following: "(1) disrupting norms of research practice and representation; (2) working from insider knowledge; (3) maneuvering through pain, confusion, anger, and uncertainty and making life better; (4) breaking silence/(re)claiming voice; and (5) making work accessible."

Some of the purposes of autoethnography cited above help to provide some insight into why these methods were chosen for this thesis project. I recognize that insider knowledge could be very beneficial during the research process. This is because it might be difficult for someone to fully understand issues related to Mormonism without direct experience.

Holman Jones et al. (2013) also argue that acknowledging the researcher as an element in the research improves the craft of the research, more specifically when the researcher is a member of the social world being studied. Other types of methods do not always seem to clearly acknowledge the vital role that a researcher has. One key

factor of autoethnography research is methodological openness. For this reason and for ethical reasons, the methods, ethics, and discussion section will go into detail regarding the process of this project. (Holman Jones et al., 2013).

According to Holman Jones et al. (2013, 70), "Reflexive dyadic interviews resemble a traditional interview protocol, with the interviewer asking questions and the interviewee answering them, but with the added dimension of the interviewer sharing personal experience with the topic." The key difference between this type of interview and the types of interviewing that I previously have studied and practiced is the potential for self-disclosure and experience. Also, there is possibly direct insight into the experiences the interviewees may be going through which researchers from an outside perspective would not necessarily always understand.

Using the reflexive dyadic interview method means that I also needed to be prepared to discuss the semi-structured interview questions with interviewees. It also was about embracing the unknown in a way. Considering the interview process was less strict, I was also able to sometimes reflect very briefly on the issues which were brought up during the interviews as well as potential themes that emerged or specific cultural nuances.

Since I am an ex-Mormon living in Finland studying ex-Mormons living in Finland, using reflexive dyadic interviews was my attempt to be on an equal ground with the interviewee in order to receive beneficial content for this project. It made the interviews a more relaxed process and the interview environment less formal. It also made the interview sometimes more like a discussion and less like a clinical interview. While the autoethnographic approach for interviews being used is reflexive dyadic interviews, the following results and discussion sections will not be so autoethnographic.

4.2 Data collection

Data was collected via in-person interviews, and recorded on a password protected cell phone. There were 11 questions as part of the interview (see Appendix 2). It was my goal to allow room and space for listening and interacting with the interviewee,

in order to help them provide a platform to share and reflect on their story and experiences. The most vital questions were determined beforehand, and those were included in each of the interviews for consistency and comparability among different interviews. I came up with the interview questions through reviewing the previous research about narrative processes. I then asked for feedback from my thesis supervisor. I printed the questions and gave a copy to both myself and the interviewees as the interview began.

The time frame for each interview was relatively flexible. I originally expected the interviews to take between 20 and 60 minutes. I realized after the first two interviews that my time frame ideas from the beginning were not realistic. This was most likely the case because the narrative processes are so complex that in order to fully explain their story the interviewees needed much longer than 20 minutes. Interviews ranged between 50 minutes and 75 minutes. All of the transcribed interviews totaled to around 37,700 words or 51 single-spaced pages of narrative data.

The consent form for the interviewees was signed before participation in the interviews. (see Appendix 1). Consent forms covered use of the data collected, storage of the data, as well as how long the data will be kept. Anonymity and change of names in the final thesis was emphasized. Since the population being interviewed were adults, extra research permit forms were not needed.

Prior to carrying out the interview as well as while drafting interview questions, I reviewed Ivey, Ivey, and Zalaquett's (2010) textbook *Intentional Interviewing and Counseling: Facilitating Client Development in a Multicultural Society*. I used some techniques practiced around 10 years ago while studying a clinical interviewing course at Utah Valley University. While I am not a clinician nor conducting clinical interviews for this thesis, there are many approaches within this textbook (such as the key skills of active listening and sections of the text concerning multicultural interviews and competences) that are vital for creating a supportive interviewing atmosphere (Ivey, Ivey, & Zalaquett, 2010).

After recording the interviews on the phone, I slowed down the recordings transcribed them to my personal computer. The files that included the audio interviews and the further transcribed text from the interviews have been stored on

password-protected devices, available only to me, the researcher. No personally identifiable information was included in the thesis report because of confidentiality and anonymity purposes.

It was clarified after one interview that the interviewee wished to add information to their interview. This was done via note taking during the conversation which took place after the interview was completed. Additionally, more information was clarified from this interviewee via e-mail. It was agreed with the interviewee that this follow-up information would be included as part of their interview.

Interviewees were recruited via UUT ry. A short recruitment text (see Appendix 3) was written for the potential interviewees to read describing the goals and approach of my research. My contact information was attached to the text. This text was then broadcast onto secret Facebook groups which UUT ry has access to. In the recruitment text I clarified that, although I would be interviewing native Finns, it was important that they were comfortable having the interview in English.

The number of interviewees was kept loosely defined because of unpredictable conditions. In the end, interviews with six former Finnish Mormons were conducted. Four interviews involved myself and the interviewee only, and these would classify as reflexive dyadic (see section 4.1). At the request of two of the interviewees and because of reasons related to interview space and convenience, one of the interviews involved three people (myself and two interviewees). However, the method and techniques used were largely the same. For example, the same set of questions was given to each interviewee, only in this case they took turns answering the questions.

Interviewees consisted of six ex-Mormons (4 females, 3 males) born in Finland. All but one of the interviewees were currently living in Finland at the time of the interview. Two interviewees had been living in a different country than Finland during some part of their process of disaffiliation from the LDS church. Four of the interviewees fell between the age range 26-33 years old, while two interviewees were 40-42 years old.

4.3 Data Analysis

For the analysis portion, I used thematic analysis. This was chosen because it was my goal to classify the interviewees in different categories based on their experiences, then compare and contrast their experiences and issues that they described in their narrative. The analysis was done alone. I aimed to compare and contrast themes that emerged in the interviews, as well as select relevant themes to the research questions. Braun and Clarke (2006) proposed a six-phase method when describing how to conduct a thematic analysis: familiarizing yourself with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report.

Table 1: The Six-phase method of Thematic Analysis according to Braun and Clarke (2006)

Phase	Description
1. Familiarising yourself with the data	Transcribing data, reading and re-reading data, noting down initial ideas
2. Generating initial codes	Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each potential theme
3. Searching for themes	Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme
4. Reviewing themes	Checking the themes work in relation to the coded extracts and the entire data set, generating a thematic 'map' of the analysis
5. Defining and naming themes	Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells; generating clear definitions and names for each theme
6. Producing the report	The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back of the analysis to the research question and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis

I followed the six phases described by Braun and Clarke (2006) (shown above in Table 1) in order to produce the result section below. I applied these steps in my analysis procedurally. Familiarizing myself with the data was done firstly by conducting the interviews. I then listened to and typed the interviews into a word document. Along this process I was doing lots of reflection about the interview content and how the interviews compare to one another as well as previous research.

For the second phase, I re-read the texts in order to begin producing key words or codes for each interview. This was done liberally and the codes ranged from between 89 and 207 words for each interview. The codes were largely descriptive and many of them consisted of short phrases or sentences. Some examples of codes I used include: born in church, historical issues, agnostic/atheist, authentic relationships... (for a longer list of code words and phrases used see Appendix 4. I did not include some descriptive codes used in Appendix 4 because of anonymity purposes)

For the third, fourth, and fifth phases (searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes) I then compared the key codes for the interviewees. This was done in order to search for similarities and differences. Since not all the codes used the exact same descriptions, I referred back to the text extensively in order to verify the information and for context. This was also an important part of the process because it allowed me to verify that the content was actually similar. I then reflected back on the research questions to verify that the content of my results attempted to address them. I also took into account the previous research regarding narratives as well as my research questions when deciding what kind of data was important to report.

The final phase (producing the report) was done along with the fifth phase (defining and naming themes). These steps were done together because naming themes allowed me to begin producing the first draft of the results section. I mention how many interviews contain similar themes in order for the reader to understand the significance of these themes. It's also important to note that some of these phases in the end blended together. For instance, I had to review themes as well as the actual interview text in order to verify certain information while I was producing the report. After completion of these phases the results section (section 6) was produced.

5 RESEARCH ETHICS

This is a group that has potentially been through some difficult life adjustment and the interview questions needed to be presented with care so that they were not feeling stressed or overwhelmed. One way this was accomplished was by printing the interview questions so that the interviewee could read them and reflect on them without feeling pressure. Also, feedback from the supervisors on the interview questions was received before proceeding with the interview process. Confidentiality forms were modified from previous Diak templates (see Appendix 1) to include descriptions about data storage and goals of the research. These consent forms were signed by each participant before proceeding with the interviews.

Since I would personally qualify as an ex-Mormon religious disaffiliate, I tried to be objective and neutral in my interviews. I am not conducting this research with any sort of ill will towards any religious institution. Although some researchers might consider my previous Mormon affiliation a potential bias, I feel it was advantageous through various stages of the process. I believe that working from insider knowledge, as detailed by Holman Jones et al. (2013), is important for the research process of this type of study.

My main goals were to highlight and further understand the type of issues that religious disaffiliates (specifically, ex-Mormons) experience in a Finnish context. I also aimed to discuss social services or online resources that might have been used as part of their exit process. Methods of autoethnography which were used for the reflexive dyadic interviews were done while attempting not to influence the interviewees in any particular way. This autoethnographic interviewing method was chosen because of previously discussed access to insider information described by Holman Jones et al. (2013). Additionally, Avance's (2013) description of the importance of ritualized interpersonal exchange when forming a new religious identity was also considered. It was my carefully reflected intention that my interviewing process could allow some kind of ritualized personal exchange for the interviewees to explore and reflect on their identity through the narrative process.

Openness regarding research, as discussed by Holman Jones et al. (2013), is something I value and it is extremely important because of the methods chosen. Still,

applying certain autoethnographic methods to the process might be viewed by some as less academic. Contrarily, autoethnographic processes allowed me to be upfront regarding potential biases and discuss and address some of these issues. Still, it was my aim to find the right balance between autoethnographic approaches used for the interviews and an academic approach for the result and discussion sections. Still, it should be noted that autoethnography is a relatively broad method that can include many different types of methods including but not limited to methods such as interpretive autoethnography and collaborative autoethnography. For an in-depth overview of the use of autoethnography as a research method, refer to the *Handbook of Autoethnography* by Holman Jones et al. (2013).

Since I was familiar through previous projects with quantitative analysis, this thesis was an opportunity for me to practice what Gothoni (2018) calls 'active learning' in her outline about Ethical principles in Exploratory and Developmental work. I did this also through reflection and discussion with peers and supervisors. In these discussions, I was mindful of revealing any personal information to outsiders regarding the interviewees. It was my aim that this thesis would be an opportunity to learn new skills and refine old ones, which is something I have come to value as a professional and as a student. As cited in Gothoni (2018), "the basic principles are integrity, carefulness and preciseness throughout the thesis work process. One obeys ethically sustainable methods for information acquisition, research and evaluation methods as well as transparency."

One important topic to address is how the publication of this thesis could effect me personally. Since I have many friends and family that are practicing Mormons, it could be likely that they read this paper. I would not want them to feel as if I was criticizing their religion. However, I feel that this is an issue I have taken into consideration throughout the process by aiming to be objective. All of my friends and family know about my disaffiliation from Mormonism, so that in itself is not something that I consider problematic.

Anonymity of the interviewees was considered crucial when reporting the results. It was important to follow ethical standards highlighted by ARENE regarding proper ethical standards for handling of personal data (Raivo & Rissanen, 2019). Some of these recommendations include having the consent of the interviewees and also

anonymisation of materials included in the results. For this reason, I have used age ranges for grouping the interviewees together. I have also not included which part of Finland the interviewees were from. I have used the gender neutral pronoun 'they' in order to mask the gender of the interviewees. Still, I have mentioned in the results how often the interviewees talked about certain subjects because I think it is necessary in order to understand the prevalence of these issues in the narratives. I do not believe that the interviewees are identifiable based on including this information about how many interviewees discussed specific issues.

Lastly, it was my aim to conduct this research in an honest way, while keeping my supervisor informed throughout the different stages of the process. Further ethical considerations will be reflected on in the discussion section of this paper (see section 7.8).

6 RESULTS

This section will consist of a thematic analysis on the interview material. This method was chosen because it will allow the in-depth interviews to be mined for common themes. Also material that the interviews touched on which is most relevant to the research question and previous literature will be included in this brief results section. In order to clarify how prevalent some of the general results were, I have included how many of the interviews most of the issues being discussed occurred in. Reporting the results this way could help the reader to understand how important each issue is to the this general group of ex-Mormons in Finland.

The results of the thematic analysis highlighted many different important themes. This results section will be arranged accordingly: general results (section 6.1), Narrative Processes (section 6.2), LGBTQ+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transexual, Queer) issues (section 6.3), Gender roles (section 6.4), Sexual Assault (section 6.5), Cultural Differences (section 6.6), Health (section 6.7), Relationships After Leaving (section 6.8), and Social Service Contexts and Peer Support (section 6.9).

6.1 General Results

Five out of the six of the interviewees fall under the definition of religious disaffiliation (leaving one religion for no religious affiliation) according to Fenelon and Danielson (2016). One of the interviewees falls under the definition of religious switching (leaving one religion and joining another) as defined by Scheitle and Adamczyk (2010).

Five of the interviewees were raised in the church, while one interviewee was a teenage convert to the church. Three out of the six interviewees had not officially resigned from the church by having their membership records removed, while three interviewees had removed their membership records. Despite that all of the interviewees viewed themselves as former Mormons, two of the interviewees discussed still feeling some kind of attachment to Mormon culture.

Five out of the six interviewees described their current spiritual/religious views as either atheist or agnostic. Many of the interviewees juggled between the terms atheist and agnostic when describing their current belief system. One interviewee remained Christian and converted to the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland as part their exit process. Payne (2013) argued that ex-Mormonism today seems to have taken a largely secular form. This can be compared with our interviewees, with five out of six of our interviewees describing their current spiritual/religious views as atheist or agnostic.

Regarding resources for assisting the transition process of interviewees, Facebook groups were prevalent in all interviews. Since some of the Facebook groups were private groups for local members, they will not be named specifically in this thesis because of anonymity. Some interviewees reported using non region-specific Facebook groups as well for discussion and research. At least two of the interviewees had been attending informal meetings with groups of ex-Mormons locally. These local groups were reported to range from informal group discussions for ex-Mormons to social meet-ups.

Sometimes internet access can establish losing faith and gaining a new type of spiritual identity. Many ex-Mormons have used the internet for developing a new religious identity. (Avance, 2013). In light of Avance's observation, all of our interviewees made use of the internet in order to find a community. All interviewees had been active in Facebook groups targeted to ex-Mormons, both public and private. Some interviewees had used other sites like the ex-Mormon sub-reddit (reddit.com page for ex-Mormons) for support or finding community. Mormon Stories podcast run by John Dehlin was also an important resource for several of the interviewees.

6.2 Narrative processes

Reading apologetics (response to criticism of the church) and historical issues in Mormon history, which covers a broad range of subjects, were noted as important in the faith transitions of at least four of the interviewees. Some of the most mentioned subjects in this category among interviewees include Joseph Smith's translation of the Book of Abraham, polygamy, and women's role in the history of the church.

Some resources for the research of these issues that interviewees mentioned included FairMormon, MormonThink, the CES Letter, and the Church essays published on the official LDS website.

6.3 LGBTQ+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transexual, Queer) issues

While LGBTQ+ issues were mentioned in at least 4 of the interviews, it was a predominant theme in the narrative process of two interviewees. Specifically, the November 2015 policy change in which the LDS church began to disallow the children of same-sex marriage to be baptized without denouncing their parents' lifestyle. This policy change was noted to be very important in the faith transition process for these two interviewees. (Wamsley, 2019).

6.4 Gender roles

Three of the interviewees discussed gender role issues in the Church as important in their transition to disbelief in the Church. Two of the interviewees discussed their experience regarding feeling uncomfortable in the church because of their gender. While one interviewee attended therapy for depression in conjunction with church attendance, they were given a calling (a calling is most of the time a volunteer position which a local congregational leader requests for a specific member) in the Church. This interviewee's struggles with serving their calling in the local congregation blossomed doubts about women's role in the church.

6.5 Sexual Assault

One interviewee described being sexually assaulted in Church as a teenager. While the interviewee described wanting the perpetrator to be punished, they didn't feel that reporting the assault would have an overall good effect on their life. Fearing that they would be negatively talked about among the congregation, as well as that the sin would be placed on them in the minds of leaders or other members, the interviewee chose to remain silent and not report the assault to local congregational leaders.

6.6 Cultural Differences

Three interviewees mentioned how cultural differences between Mormonism (an American exported religion) and Finnish culture played a large role in their process. Three of the interviewees described how they felt that sometimes Mormon culture, even locally, was at odds with Finnish culture. Some specific examples which were discussed in the interviews were: the equality of men and women in Finland versus the Mormon church, differences in culture surrounding nudity, as well as differences in political ideologies.

6.7 Health

One interviewee described experiencing serious health concerns during her process of being a member and leaving the church. This interviewee described experiencing panic attacks during church meetings. Other medical issues this interviewee experienced included fainting, a reoccurring rash, irregular menstrual cycle, as well as getting reoccurringly sick with a sore throat. The interviewee even visited a medical doctor but there were never conclusive answers as to the cause of these health concerns. The interviewee stated that they believed these health issues were likely caused by stress. One interviewee experienced depression at some point of their disaffiliation process. Two interviewees attended therapy at some point in their process of disaffiliation.

6.8 Relationships After Leaving

Five of the interviewees described either feeling that their relationships (friends, family, significant partners, etc.) had become generally more authentic since they left the church or that some of their relationships had been improved in some way since leaving. Still, four interviewees described that some relationships with Church members had either been lost or were made less authentic because of a difference of belief. One interviewee described losing a close family member to suicide after leaving the church.

6.9 Social Service Contexts and Peer Support

Of the more formal groups for ex-Mormons in Finland, two interviewees had attended a peer support meeting for disaffiliates via the Support for Religious Victims Association (Uskontojen Uhrien Tukiry). One of the interviewees stated feeling that their views about religion were unwelcome in the meeting of that group and that it was run in an unprofessional manner.

Peer support is a term used in previous research to refer to "a system of giving and receiving help founded on key principles of respect, shared responsibility, and mutual agreement of what is helpful" (Mead, Hilton, & Curtis, 2001, 6). It is important to acknowledge that peer support is not based on psychiatric methods or other methods of diagnosis. It is more related to creating a connection with others and finding strength through a communal emotional or psychological pain. It might be thought of as more focused on community building than being a type of therapy (Mead, Hilton, & Curtis, 2001).

It is important to discuss the negative experience which one interviewee had attending Uskontojen Uhrien Tukiry (UUT ry) meetings. While one interviewee reported a positive experience, the other interviewee that had attended a peer support meeting at Uskontojen Uhrien Tukiry described a negative experience. Since the interviewee describing a negative experience felt that the meeting was not inclusive to them, it is important to consider why that happened and how it can be prevented in the future. Still, the interviewee reporting this negative experience also acknowledged that they knew of others who had important and meaningful experiences participating in the peer support meanings offered by UUT ry. It is difficult to know if the situation regarding our interviewee reporting the negative experience was a rare occasion or if it is more systematic in the way the meetings are run.

After the interviews were completed, I sent some e-mail interview questions in the form of some additional questions to the director of UUT ry in order to further clarify how their peer support groups function. UUT ry largely operates the peer support meetings via volunteers. However, these volunteers do undergo training and are given guidelines as to how the groups should function. Each peer support group is run by two volunteers in order to keep the meeting on track and to see that every individ-

ual gets the support they need. UUT ry collects feedback from attendees after the meetings as well using numerical ratings (1=poor, 5=excellent). Based on feedback collected over the past three years from many different groups, the average scores given by attendees are around 4.5.

UUT ry has meetings for groups of many different backgrounds: Jehovah's Witness, Laestadian, Pentecostal or other charismatic Christian groups, Muslim, women, sexual and gender minorities. There are also periodically groups for ex-Mormons. Still, it was clarified that the peer support meetings for ex-Mormons are more rare than meetings for other groups. They also tend to be smaller than meetings for other groups.

Contrarily, the UUT ry director explained that the Facebook group for ex-Mormons in Finland seems to be more active than the peer support groups they run. The Facebook group for ex-Mormons was started by UUT ry several years ago, and is also moderated by UUT ry. In this group, Finnish ex-Mormons have discussions as well as plan social events. In a sense, this group functions as an online form of peer support. It's interesting to consider why the peer support meetings at UUT ry are less attended by ex-Mormons in spite of an active online community. It might be the case that ex-Mormons in Finland find that the informal social events are more rewarding somehow. Still, it's important to not make any assumptions as it's difficult to know the reasons why.

It might be the case that the interviewee that had a negative experience was because of the small group size. After all, peer support meetings aim to provide a type of community for the attendees. If the group is small there might not be enough attendees for the interviewee to feel like the experience they share is being heard. Still, more research about peer support and its importance for religious disaffiliates could be an important topic of future research.

7 DISCUSSION

In this section I will reflect on the results through the filter of previously mentioned literature and concepts. The topics found in the previous result chapter have been included here in the form of more elaboration on the issues in comparison with the literature. It was done this way because there was not enough space in the results section to discuss the issues in more depth with literature. The original research question of what important issues ex-Mormons in Finland are dealing with in their lives will also be addressed through these subchapters.

Additionally, new literature or newspaper articles will be introduced in order to give important sociological or cultural context on specific issues which might need more elaboration in order to fully reflect on the topics. I have chosen to include this new literature in this section because of transparency in the thesis process. The new literature which is being introduced is a result of further research after the interviewees were completed. This was done in order to give a more complete picture and well-rounded discussion of the issues which the thematic analysis brought forward.

The research questions were able to be answered to an extent. Research question 1a, which related to issues after leaving Mormonism according to previous literature, were most easily summed up by Payne's (2013) overview of ex-Mormon narratives. (See section 3.3 for a more full discussion of this.) Research question 1b, which related to issues specific to a group of Finnish ex-Mormons, was answered partially through the following discussion sections which include: narrative processes (section 7.1), LGBTQ+ issues (section 7.2), gender roles (section 7.3), sexual assault (section 7.4), cultural differences (section 7.5), health (section 7.6), and relationships after leaving (section 7.7). Research question 2, which related to the function of social services in Finland for ex-Mormons, was also partially answered (see section 6.9). While not fully discussing all contexts of social services for ex-Mormons, the overview above in section 6.9 allows for a discussion of more specific support available for ex-Mormons through the partner organization UUT ry.

7.1 Narrative processes

Narratives from our interviewees largely followed a similar structure as Payne's (2013) narrative process (see section 3.2.1.). All of the interviewees' stories expressed in their narratives the importance of Mormonism to them at one point, a subsequent change in belief regarding the Church, and their story of distancing themselves from the Church.

As Payne's (2013) previous article summarizing Ex-Mormon Narratives and Pastoral Apologetics pointed out, the LDS Church has a policy of financial non-disclosure. One of our interviewees did mention issues regarding how the Church manages its' finances as being an important issue for their process. Much like Payne's (2013) research, doctrinal and historical concerns were part of the narrative of four of our interviewees.

Myers (2017) study involving religious disaffiliates and art therapy found that most subjects left their church because of three or more reasons. All of the interviewees had more than three reasons to discuss when describing their process of leaving the church.

7.2 LGBTQ+ issues

As previously discussed in the literature review, the LDS Church sometimes uses its organizational influence to support controversial conservative causes. This is at odds with marginalized people who are effected by these policies in a negative way. (Payne, 2013). While four interviewees mentioned LGBTQ+ issues during their interview, two of the interviews discussed these issues in-depth when describing their exit process.

The most relevant recent example of one of these causes is LGBTQ+ policies in the Mormon church. In 2015, the LDS church announced a change of policy which would classify those in same-sex marriages as heretics or apostates. In addition to this, the new 2015 policy stated that the children of same-sex marriages could not be baptized until they were 18, moved out of their parents home, and made a statement

against their parents' lifestyle. These 2015 policies were later reversed by Mormon leadership in 2019. Still, two of our interviewees stated that the 2015 policy change regarding LGBTQ+ issues was a major catalyst in their exit process from the church because it was contrary to their values. (Wamsley, 2019).

7.3 Gender Roles

According to Kline (2014) Mormon men are instructed to take a leadership role in their family and in the church. This puts women's role as more of a supportive figure of the man in the marriage and not one of control. In the modern Mormon church woman's role is often associated with terms like motherly and nurturing. While it is not explicitly stated as one role being inferior to the other, the practice of these roles might be viewed by some critics as linked with unequal power dynamics. Within Mormonism, the view that every woman's identity is inherently linked with motherhood can be psychologically difficult for some single women without children as well as women who do not have the opportunity or ability to have children. (Kline, 2014)

Payne (2013) notes that Joseph Smith's practice of polygamy is something cited by many authors of the apologetic narratives he examined as disturbing. This might be related to the unequal power dynamics which was described above (Kline, 2014). Discussions around polygamy were present in three interviews. Three of the interviews highlighted that gender roles within the Mormon church were problematic for them. The specific focus on motherhood, homemaking and feminine traits for Mormon women was described as particularly problematic for two of the interviewees.

In the key concepts I described the Mormon Alliance, which were intellectuals and feminists in the church in the 1990's. The Mormon Alliance were whistleblowers in the sense that they tried to expose claims of sexual abuse and what they termed "ecclesiastical abuse." They were excommunicated from the Church. (Payne, 2013). One of our interviewees mentioned researching the story of Lavina Fielding Anderson (a feminist and one of the founders of the Mormon Alliance,) and her

subsequent excommunication as an important step in her exit process. (Stack, 2014; About Us - Goals of the Mormon Alliance, publishing date unknown).

7.4 Sexual assault

One of the interviewees, who described experiencing sexual assault in the Mormon church, weighed many considerations when deciding, in the end, not to report the assault to ecclesiastical or civil authorities. An article was published in *The Salt Lake Tribune* (Alberty, 2017) which discussed the experiences of sexual assault victims at Brigham Young University (BYU), which is a University owned by the LDS church. At BYU, a strict Honor Code is followed regarding behaviors like dress, sexual behavior, substance use, and curfew. Disobedience of the Honor Code is sometimes grounds for being banned from BYU. Some of the victims that reported sex crimes at BYU noted that they were subsequently interrogated about chastity (sexual purity), and in some cases the investigator claimed that the victim was lying about their assault in order to get away with sex. Some of these victims even described how previous consensual sex and attire were up for discussion by the reviewer of their case after reporting their assault. So, in a sense, these sexual assault victims were potentially having the blame placed on them and not the perpetrator. (Alberty, 2017).

While it is important to acknowledge that the interviewee was not attending BYU at the time of their assault, the above-mentioned article does highlight some possible elements of the situation regarding sexual assault reporting and victim blaming in what might be thought of by some as a similar environment. It might be difficult for some to equate BYU in the United States to a local Mormon congregation in Finland. Still, the mindset of chastity (sexual purity) could be argued to be largely similar. It helps to give perspective and understand our interviewee's process and to realize the extent for the potential of victim blaming within a Mormon context. Understanding the complexity of sexual assault in a culture so focused on abstaining from sexual activity also helps to understand why this interviewee chose not to report their assault to anyone. When it comes to sexual violence in the Mormon church or Mormon-owned universities it's important to take into account the focus on abstinence from all sexual behaviors. Because abstinence is such a focal point in Mormon doctrine, it needs to be said how this can possibly impact a sexual assault victim.

While sexual assault isn't the topic of this thesis, for that reason there's not much space to continue with this subject. Still, it was something that one interviewee brought up regarding their process and it clearly had an impact on their experience in the church. It is difficult to know if this experience relates to reasons the interviewee disaffiliated from the Mormon church. Still, it was an important finding from the interviews because it highlighted some complications regarding sexual assault reporting and the Mormon practice of chastity (sexual purity).

7.5 Cultural differences

Mormonism in Finland as a foreign import has been discussed in previous literature. One article discussed how and methods of operation and policies of the Mormon Church are formed in the United States and exported through the hierarchical leadership. Despite having spread throughout the world, the Mormon church does not modify the way it operates to the specific cultures it has occupied. Instead, the same structures, practices, and cultural nuances formed in the USA are applied to the organization as a whole. This leaves almost no room for adapting the practices to the individual cultures of the countries in which they operate. (Östman, 2007).

It is not too difficult to understand how discrepancies between the cultures could cause difficulties for Mormons practicing in Finland. Mormonism originated and is officiated from the United States, and eventually was exported to Finland. While sometimes the differences discussed in the interviewees was minor, some of these issues could potentially cause strong dissonance.

7.6 Health

All of our interviewees are former members of what has been previously defined in the literature as high cost religious groups. Theoretically, they might have been at risk concerning the potential negative health effects of leaving a high-cost religion (Scheitle & Adamczyk, 2010; Fenelon & Danielsen, 2016).

One of our interviewees that switched from one religion to another did not describe poor health outcomes as a result of their decision. Although this interviewee described struggles with depression while being a member of the Mormon church, their descriptions of their mental health after switching religions was largely positive. The process of this interviewee can be contrasted with some previous research that associated religious switching with poor health outcomes (Scheitle & Adamczyk, 2010). This highlights the need for more research regarding religious switching and health.

Another interviewee suffered significant health effects during and after their process of disaffiliating from the Church. This interviewee suffered from panic attacks as well as other physical symptoms like fainting, a reoccurring rash, an irregular menstrual cycle, as well as getting reoccurringly physically sick with a sore throat. The health issues that this interviewee described experiencing might be considered a glaring example of the potential health problems a high-cost religious disaffiliate might face. While correlation is not always causation, when taking into account the interviewees situation and experiences it must be considered that our interviewee might have suffered extensively from these symptoms. Reflected through the lens of previous research on high-cost religious disaffiliates' potential health problems (Scheitle & Adamczyk, 2010; Fenelon & Danielsen, 2016) it is a topic that needs more research.

7.7 Relationships after Leaving

The fact that five interviewees discussed feeling more authentic in many relationships after leaving the church is important to discuss. It is possible this had to do with the fact that Mormonism is still a minority in Finland, so there were many relationships within this group that were already not affiliated with the LDS church. It might be that it was these relationships outside the church that the interviewees were describing.

One interviewee described suffering from the suicide of a close family member after leaving the LDS church. Since this is related to the research question 1b, I have included it in the results and discussion. I also feel that since it came forward in the

interviews it is an important topic to mention. It is difficult to examine and discuss all the complexities of suicide, and doing so is outside the scope of this essay. It is surely crucial to the lives of those effected by it. Whether or not this had to do with the interviewee leaving the church is difficult to assess. Still, this goes to show how prevalent dealing with suicide in the family might be in this group of high-cost religious disaffiliates. It also highlights the importance of mental health with religious disaffiliates. Since this is a qualitative research thesis and not quantitative, it doesn't necessarily point out how common it is. More research needs to be done on this subject in the future in order to fully understand and discuss this complex issue.

7.8 Limitations and further ethical reflections

I am including a SWOT Analysis here in order to more fully reflect on limitations for the interpretation of the results. SWOT is an acronym for Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats. (Grant, 2020). (Refer to Table 2 below.)

Table 2. SWOT Analysis of thesis process

<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> --Abundant relevant literature --Working from insider knowledge --In-depth interviews --Personally relevant topic keeps me motivated 	<p>Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> --Personal topic, must be mindful of bias --One-person research team --Active learning presented challenges in the process --Long hours writing caused fatigue during late stages of the process --interviews limited to those comfortable speaking English
<p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> --Chance to discuss and examine issues relevant to Ex-Mormons in Finland --Possibility to weigh interviews' stories against previous literature 	<p>Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> --Limited time --Language barrier for some research articles --COVID-19 limited some visits to the library --Limited access to a portion of research articles

As can be examined in the above Table 2, some strengths to my process might include the abundance of literature on the subject of religious disaffiliates and ex-Mormons. This has been a blessing in the sense that there was not too little material and no chance of hitting a wall regarding how much there is to read on the topic. The interviews were also very in-depth so there was not a problem with the amount of information in the same way. Contrarily, it did end up being a lot of material to review for the analysis portion in a very short period of time. Another strength is that since the topic is relevant and important to my own life, I have been able to stay motivated.

Weaknesses include the potential for biases during the research process. In particular, bias during the interview process against influencing the interviewees answers was something that I aimed to be mindful to prevent. I am also writing this thesis alone so that has been a challenge. I have never previously tried using reflexive dyadic interviewing methods nor thematic analysis, so researching about these methods in order to use them for the first time for this thesis has proved to be challenging. Another potential weakness is the limited time for completing the manuscript draft and final thesis after interviews. Yet another limitation is the fact that, although native Finns were being interviewed, only those interviewees that were comfortable speaking English could participate.

Opportunities included the chance to discuss with other ex-Mormons issues relevant to their life in Finland. Additionally, reflecting on the issues brought forward by the interviewees in light of the abundant previous research has been an important element in the thesis process. One interviewee gave feedback that they felt it was beneficial to be interviewed and narrate through their process to someone that understood the culture they were describing.

Threats include the limited time which the thesis process must be completed after data collection took place. One barrier was the COVID-19 pandemic. I had initially made plans for accessing a thesis article at Helsinki University Library regarding Finnish Mormon Feminism in the '90's, which might have shed some light on some further issues. However, the person that agreed to help me understand the Finnish translation got sick.

One ethical dilemma which arose from the thesis process was the fact that one interviewee reported a negative experience attending meetings at the partner organization UUT ry. It was not my intention to tarnish UUT ry's name by bringing this information forward in the results and discussion section. However, since it is information that is so relevant to the topic, it would be unwise to omit. Still, I do not want UUT ry to regret that they agreed to be my partner organization for this thesis. It is also relevant to mention that this feedback might be important for future peer support meetings at UUT ry, so in that sense it could potentially help them to improve their peer support groups in the future by knowing about this feedback and taking additional steps in order to prevent marginalization in the small ex-Mormon peer support groups.

I must also acknowledge the dichotomy during the interviewing process regarding striking a balance between being a neutral interviewee regarding this topic and myself being an LDS disaffiliate. While I feel that my interviewees were able to discuss their processes in more depth than they would have been had I been an outsider to this culture, I cannot go without acknowledging that some might view this as a bias. Still, the advantage of working from insider knowledge noted by previous autoethnographic researchers was likely beneficial to some of the interviews (Holman Jones et al., 2013). Additionally, I feel that it is important for religious disaffiliates to share and reflect on their story in order to develop their identity post-religion through what has been called in the literature 'ritualized personal exchange' (Avance, 2013).

8 CONCLUSION

The results of this thesis highlighted some of the many complex issues that LDS religious disaffiliates experience. While the interviews focused in a large degree on the narrative process of the interviewees transition in and out of the church, relevant themes were brought forward in the data analysis and later discussed. These themes included: narrative processes, LGBTQ+ issues, gender roles, sexual assault, cultural differences, health, and relationships after leaving. While the above listed themes encompasses many of the issues that the research questions aimed to answer, it must be highlighted that the health issues that two interviewees described dealing with are highly relevant.

I have also, through the use of active learning (Gothoni, 2018), been able to develop professionally as part of this thesis process. In order to improve skills, it is vital to learn new skills and practice old ones. Through researching and applying reflexive dyadic interview methods I have been able to further develop my professional competence.

Regarding social service implications, UUT ry is the organization that aims to assist religious disaffiliates and the issues related to them. Since the reports of using their services were mixed among the interviewees that had attended them, it shows that there is room for improvement. It is not clear why the interviewee had these negative experiences there or how they may be improved, yet it must be acknowledged. Social services in a larger context that could be considered for future research on this subject might include religious disaffiliates and public health centers. It would be interesting to know whether medical doctors and nurses in the public and private sector in Finland were aware of the potential health issues of high-cost religious disaffiliates.

Ethical issues that concerned this thesis include applying active learning in the context of autoethnographic methods, specifically reflexive dyadic interviews. Refraining from bias during the process was something that was considered in each step of the process. Still, since I am only one student it might be difficult to say that there haven't been things that have been overlooked during the process. I have to the best of my ability tried to prevent bias and discuss problematic issues related to the process.

It was my goal that this thesis would highlight the issues that ex-Mormon disaffiliates in Finland experience. I have been able to answer the research questions, to an extent. The narrative data could likely be used for further analysis, discussion, and reflection. However, for the purpose of this thesis the data has been used for the discussion of many important subjects. The interviews ended up focusing mostly on the narratives of the interviewees describing their exit process from the church. I feel that I have been successful, to an extent, of highlighting just some of the many important issues related to this group.

Future research projects might address other religious disaffiliate groups in Finland or other specific countries. Since Jehovahs Witnesses are also considered high-cost religious disaffiliates (Scheitle and Adamczyk, 2010), it could be an important area for future research related to this subject. More specific research regarding Mormonism, sexual attitudes related to abstinence, and sexual assault could also be a very important future research subject. Finally, more specific Finnish research about awareness of high-cost religious disaffiliates in the social service field could be a promising future research subject.

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APPENDIX 1 CONSENT FORM

**Consent form for participation in research**

This research concerns the bachelor thesis titled: "Life After Religious Disaffiliation in Finland: Former Mormon Perspectives."

Responsible student: Alex Brown (alex.brown@student.diak.fi)

Supervising teacher: Marianne Nylund (marianne.nylund@diak.fi)

By signing the form below, you agree to this interview being recorded in order to use in the thesis research. By your participation you agree that what you share during the interview can be used in the publicized thesis. Your name and identity will not be known by anyone other than the responsible student, and names as well as potentially identifying information will be changed for anonymity purposes.

The recording of this interview will be stored on a password protected device. The interview will also be transcribed onto another password protected device. This data will only be accessible to the responsible student, and will be kept for duration of this research project. On completion of the thesis and publication, your interview data will be deleted from the stored devices.

We don't anticipate there being risks with your participation, however you may withdraw from the research at any point, for any reason.

By signing this form, I agree to the above conditions and consent to the interview and information obtained from this interview being used in this thesis research. I am aware that my participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw from participation at any point. I am also aware that my identity will be known only to the responsible student conducting the interview.

Date: _____

Printed name (capital letters):

Signed name:

Age: _____

Gender: _____

APPENDIX 2 INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Background. Describe your life as a believing Mormon (When you became a member, How long you were a member, etc...)

When did you begin having doubts about continuing in the Church?

What are some of the main issues that led you to leave the Church?

Describe the process of leaving the Church.

Briefly describe your life after leaving the Church.

What are some issues that came into your life as a result of leaving?

What are some ways in which you dealt with those issues?

Did leaving the Church affect your relationships?

How would you describe your spiritual/religious views today?

Have you turned to any organizations in Finland which assisted you after you left the church?

Are there any online websites or communities which you used that assisted your transition out of belief in the church?

APPENDIX 3

Recruitment text:

Hello, my name is Alex Brown and I am a student at Diak (Diaconia-ammattikorkeakoulu) in Helsinki. I am currently researching religious disaffiliates in Finland, specifically Ex-Mormons, for my thesis.

I am also an Ex-Mormon from the United States and I am looking to interview other Ex-Mormons in Finland about their story for my research.

The interview would cover your experience in the Church, leaving the Church, and its different effects on your life and how you dealt with those issues. I will also potentially share my story, experiences, and perspectives with you during the interview.

The interview will be between 20 minutes and an hour, depending on how in-depth you wish to discuss your experiences. You will need to be comfortable speaking English. Interviews will need to be recorded, yet no names will be included in the research paper.

If you live in Helsinki, we can meet in person for the interview. If you live outside of Helsinki, it is also possible to do the interviews via telephone or Skype.

If you are interested, please contact me via email (alex.brown@student.diak.fi) so that we may set up a time to meet. I hope to hear from you!

APPENDIX 4

Preliminary Codes:

This is a list of terms produced for the data analysis procedure. This list includes some of the code words and phrases used from the interviews:

*NOTE: not all of the code words and phrases which were used to produce the thematic analysis are included in this list because of anonymity purposes.

agnostic/atheist, archaeological evidence about Book of Mormon, attended therapy, authentic relationships, blogs, Book of Abraham, Book of Mormon translation, Brother Jake (youtube), born and raised in the church, CES Letter, Church essays, compared with Truman show, convert to the church, cult, cultural minority of Mormonism in Finland versus cultural majority in Utah, definition of a cult, denying things from oneself, depression, didn't feel right with moral and ethical standards, difficult relationships when leaving, European Mormons more relaxed, equality of men and women in Finland, existence of Moses & Abraham, Exponent 2, ex-Mormon facebook groups, FAIRMormon, feeling closer to siblings who left, feeling independent, feeling more valuable, Finland culture vs Mormon culture dichotomy, ex-Mormon reddit, feeling relieved after leaving, feeling like their journey was easy and people respected their process, gender issues, group control, groupthink, homophobia, feeling the church is hypocritical, high demands religion, hundred billion dollars secret tithing stash, informal group meetings, institutional problems - spiritual abuse and sexual abuse hidden, internalized misogyny, Jonah and Noah story, Kinderhook plates, leaving brought distance in marriage, liberal European lens, lightweight cult, Lavina Fielding Anderson - september six excommunications, LGBTQ+ rights, LGBT views changed after leaving, lost meaningful relationships with church members, negative experience at UUT peer support meeting, not officially resigned, meeting with local exmormons informally, mental gymnastics, mental health suffered, Mormon history and apologetics, Mormon Stories podcast, moved as part of exit process, Mother's day sermons troubling, not wanting to be dependent on someone else, not talking to bishop to prevent them twisting it to be their fault (regarding assault), November 2015 policy change (LGBT), officially resigned, origins of mankind vs Adam & Eve, oppressive and controlling, panic attacks in church, polygamy, racism, prefer to keep to themselves about Mormon background, relationships with church members effected, reoccurring rash, perfectionism, positive affects on family relationships generally, relationships with

people outside church became more authentic, secularity of state, self-esteem improved, served a mission, sexual assault in church, sexual purity, still feels like a Mormon, stress reaction, sexual abuse, some friends became more distant, stay at home Mom vs career, suicide in the family, support from family when leaving, systems of abuse and control, systematic mistreatment of minorities, Thoughtful Faith podcast, translation issues, trauma filtered through irony, traumatic experience as a leader, true church or not, toxicity in how people were treated, uncomfortable attending church, UUT ry ex-Mormon Facebook group, U.S.-based Mormonism culture exported to Finnish culture & the clash between, Wardless podcast, women and the priesthood, visited a UUT peer support meeting, welcomed into ex-Mormon Finnish community, woman's role in the church - in relation with (or under) a man.