What Positive Psychologists and Mormons Can Learn from Each Other

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Abstract

Positive psychologists work to identify cultural practices from across the world that contribute to the good life (Peterson, 2006). Research frequently finds that religious engagement is positively correlated to well-being. The mechanisms by which religion influences well-being, however, are not fully understood and may vary widely by faith. This paper focuses on members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints ("Latter-day Saints" or "Mormons") who report particularly high well-being—some of the highest well-being of any religious group in America (Newport, Witters, & Agrawal, 2012a). Through the lens of positive psychology, I explore how Latter-day Saint (LDS) practices and teachings may foster well-being. By analyzing similarities between well-being theories and LDS doctrine and behavior, I identify five possible mechanisms through which Mormonism might increase well-being, including fostering pro-social behavior, a focus on family, purpose and meaning, autonomy and agency, and physical health. I also identify areas in which Latter-day Saints struggle and how they might use well-being research to improve their level of flourishing. This investigation suggests that studying Latter-day Saints can (1) provide insight about the benefits and possible harm of certain well-being interventions in real-life application and (2) offer new practical well-being interventions that could be empirically tested. In sum, I propose that the study of Latter-day Saints could increase our understanding of how religion influences well-being and how well-being is cultivated.

Table of Contents

Introduction to Positive Psychology

Positive psychology is the scientific study of well-being and what makes life worth living (Peterson, 2006). It is the empirical study of positive subjective experience, positive individual traits, and positive institutions (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Co-founded by Martin Seligman and Dr. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, positive psychology builds on foundations from philosophy, cognitive behavioral therapy, humanism, and moral psychology (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Prior to the Second World War, psychology had three missions: 1) to cure mental illness, 2) to make life more productive and fulfilling, and 3) to identify and nurture talent (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). After the Second World War, governments began issuing grants and compensation to researchers who treated mental illness. As a consequence, psychologists became increasingly focused on the first mission of psychology, to the extent that the other missions of psychology were almost completely ignored. Nonetheless, the focus on mental illness produced positive results. Psychologists created the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* which allowed psychologists to use universal terms to diagnose and treat mental illness. In addition, the single-minded focus on pathology led to the discovery of cures and treatments for fourteen cumbersome disorders (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). While psychologists became experts at knowing how to treat psychological problems, they knew very little about how to cultivate human strengths and well-being. Obsessed with identifying and fixing problems, some psychologists began to view their patients as victims in need of repair.

But that focus began to change in 1998 when the president of the American Psychological Association, Martin Seligman, founded "positive psychology"—a movement to return psychology to one of its original objectives: building positive well-being (Seligman &

Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Seligman argued that psychologists should not only fix what is broken but also nurture what is working. As important, Seligman asserted that the absence of negative emotion was not equivalent to positive well-being and that psychology should not only be concerned with the treatment of psychological damage; it should also be concerned with what people do to fulfill their potential. He argued that in addition to mental illness, psychologists should study virtues, growth, play, humor, work, education, insight, and love (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). According to Seligman, psychologists should not only treat pathology, they should also discover empirical methods for prevention. Seligman viewed psychology as a means to help miserable people be less miserable, and also to help people who were doing relatively well do even better. Thus, the intention of the "positive" branch of psychology was not to replace or undermine traditional psychology, but to encourage psychology to return to and incorporate all of its original goals.

Since its official launch in 1998, the field has made tremendous headway. Seligman and Peterson created a positive equivalent to the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* titled a *Classification of Character Strengths and Virtues*. This manual has established a universal language for researchers and practitioners to identify and construct assessment strategies to measure character strengths. Positive psychologists use empirical methods to discover what conditions and behaviors allow individuals, organizations, and communities to flourish (Seligman, Steen, Park, & Peterson, 2005). Researchers have found interventions empirically shown to improve well-being such as using signature strengths in a new way and writing down three good things and their causes every night for one week (Seligman et al., 2005). Positive psychology seeks "…to build a science that supports: families and schools that allow children to flourish, workplaces that foster satisfaction and high

productivity, communities that encourage civic engagement, therapists who identify and nurture their patients' strengths, the teaching of Positive Psychology, and dissemination of Positive Psychology interventions in organizations & communities" (Positive Psychology Center, 2013, para. 3). The field encompasses subjects such as positive emotion, resilience, accomplishments, character strengths, relationships, engagement, grit, flow, and meaning (Keener, 2013). Positive psychology research and application extend across the domains of life including work, leisure, education, health, family, relationships, and religion and spirituality (Keener, 2013).

Religion and Spirituality

One domain of specific interest to the field of positive psychology is religion and spirituality. Religion is akin to positive psychology in that they both often seek to answer questions such as "What is the good life?" and "What makes life worth living?" (Pargament, 2002). Historically, psychologists have held polarized opinions about the value of religion and spirituality (Pargament, 2002). For example, American psychologist Albert Ellis (1980) argued that religiosity had a negative impact on mental health and that religiosity was "in many respects equivalent to irrational thinking and emotional disturbance" (p. 637). He explained that therapeutic treatments are quite unreligious and that "the less religious people are, the more emotionally healthy they will be" (p. 637). Similarly, others have argued that religion was dangerously illusionary (Freud, 2012) and punitive and exploitive (Skinner as citied in Pargament, 2002). On the other hand, some psychologists have viewed religion as a vehicle that promotes coping, healing, and change (Richards, Rector, & Tjeltveit, 1999). Philosopher and psychologist William James (1929) stated "In opening ourselves to (God's) influence our deepest

destiny is fulfilled" (p. 516).[1] In recent years, there has been tremendous growth in

understanding religion and spirituality from an empirical perspective (Pargament, Mahoney,

Shafranske, Exline, & Jones, 2013). According to Pargament (2002), the empirical research has

established five conclusions about religion: 1) "some forms of religion are more helpful than

others"; 2) "there are advantages and disadvantages to even controversial forms of religion" (i.e.

fundamentalism); 3) religion is especially useful for groups that are socially marginalized; 4)

religion is helpful when people are stressed and at the limits of their own resources; and 5) the

efficacy and benefit of religion largely depends on how well the religion is integrated into the

individual's life (p. 1).

Recently Gallup, one of the largest research companies in the world, conducted a special

multipart series on religiosity and well-being in America (Newport et al., 2012a). The series

investigated the relationship between religiosity and well-being, including both emotional and

physical health (Newport et al., 2012a). Gallup's research revealed that very religious

Americans of all major faiths (Jewish, Mormon/ Latter-day Saints, Muslim/Islam, Roman

Catholicism, Protestant/ Other Non-Catholic) have higher well-being than people who are non-

religious or moderately religious.[2] On a scale of zero to 100 where 100 would represent

supreme well-being, non-religious Americans had an average well-being score of 65.3,

moderately religious Americans had an average score of 63.7, and very religious Americans had

a well-being score of 69.2 (Gallup Well-being, 2013; Newport et al., 2012b). The study, which

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[1] See Judd, (1999).

[2] Religiosity was defined by frequency of church/ synagogue attendance and self-reported importance of religion.

[3] The average composite score was determined by averaging the well-being score of very religious, moderately religious, and non-religious Mormons. The same procedure was employed for Jews.

[4] Controlling for age, gender, race and ethnicity, region and state of the country, socio-economic status, marital status, and child-bearing status.

[5] For complete questions and detailed methodology report see Gallup Healthways Well-Being Index (2009).

[6] LDS converts are defined by frequency to attend church than lifelong members (Heaton et al., 2004, p. 57). This factor may also be influential as church attendance is related to well-being (Lim, 2012).

[7] It is also possible that only upwardly mobile Mormons experience an intergenerational transfer of faith.

[8] Although Latter-day saints distinguish the restoration of Christ's church from the reformation, they believe that many leaders of the

included over 676,000 interviews, showed that the differences were highly statistically

significant even after controlling for age, gender, race and ethnicity, region and state of the

country, socioeconomic status, marital status, and child-bearing status (Newport et al., 2012a).

While all denominations had a positive correlation between religiosity and well-being (i.e. the

more religious, the higher the well-being), some sects had higher well-being scores than others.

Of the faiths examined, Mormons and Jews had the highest well-being with an average

composite score of 69.4 (including those who were non-religious, moderately religious, and very

religious within the faith) (Newport et al., 2012a; see Figure 1).[3] While very religious Jews had

slightly higher well-being than very religious Mormons (composite score 72.4 vs. 71.5), these

differences were not statistically significant and only 16.9% of Jews identified themselves as

very religious compared to 73.4% of Mormons (Newport et al., 2012a; Dan Witters, personal

communication May 28, 2013). The majority of Jews (53.3%) identified themselves as non-

religious with a composite score of 68.8 while the majority of Mormons (73.4%) identified

themselves as very religious with a composite score of 71.5. Interestingly, Mormons have higher

well-being for a larger percentage of their members, while Jews have the least amount of

variance in well-being across different levels of religiosity. Mormons have the highest well-

being for the majority for their members, but moderate or non-religious Mormons have

considerably less well-being than moderate and non-religious Jews.

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[3] The average composite score was determined by averaging the well-being score of very religious, moderately religious, and non-religious
Mormons. The same procedure was employed for Jews.

	Well-Being Index composite score
Jewish	69.4
Mormon/Latter-Day Saints	69.4
Muslim/Islam	67.2
Roman Catholic	67.0
Protestants/Other non-Catholic Christians	66.4
Other non-Christian religion	66.0
No religion/Atheist/Agnostic	65.3

Figure 1. Gallup Healthways Well-being Index composite score, by religious identity.[4] Taken from Newport et al. (2012a).

The composite scores of general well-being were made up of six sub-indexes: life evaluation, work environment, emotional health, basic access, physical health, and healthy behaviors (Gallup, 2008). The life evaluation index included a self evaluation of present life situation and anticipated life situation five years from now (rated on a scale of zero to ten with zero being the worst possible life and ten being the best possible life). The work environment index included perceptions of one's work environment including job satisfaction, ability to use one's strengths, treatment from supervisor, and work environment. The emotional health index measured the respondent's daily experiences such as smiling and laughing, being treated with respect, enjoyment, happiness, worry, sadness, anger, stress, learning or doing something interesting, and depression. The basic access index measured socioeconomic and community factors such as access to shelter, clean water, medical and dental care, affordable fruits and vegetables, feeling safe to walk alone at night, having satisfaction with one's community, and viewing the community as a place that is getting better to live. The physical health index measures sickness and disease, obesity, energy, and rest. Lastly, the healthy behavior index measures healthy lifestyle habits including smoking, eating habits, and exercise (Gallup, 2008).[5]

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[4]Controlling for age, gender, race and ethnicity, region and state of the country, socio-economic status, marital status, and child-bearing status.

[5] For complete questions and detailed methodology report see Gallup Healthways Well-Being Index (2009).

Analyzing the sub-indexes provides insight about where some faiths excel and where others are lacking (Newport et al., 2012a). Jews, for example, scored highest on the basic access index; Muslims scored highest in life evaluation and physical health index; and Mormons scored highest on the emotional health index, work environment index, and healthy behaviors index (Newport et al., 2012a).

While informative, Gallup's data sparks a host of questions: "What causes this variance among religions? Why do very religious Americans in all major faith groups have higher well-being than moderate and non-religious Americans? Does religiosity increase well-being and through what mechanisms? As indicated by the varying scores in the sub-indexes, the mechanisms by which more religious people experience well-being most likely varies from faith to faith. An analysis of how all these denominations contribute to well-being would be extremely helpful. For example, understanding why Muslims score higher on physical health and why Jews score higher in basic access could be very informative. In particular, the data from the Gallup study prompts a specific exploration about Mormonism: If religion were viewed as a well-being intervention, both Judaism and Mormonism might be the most attractive intervention because they have the highest well-being scores. If the level of religiosity is considered, however, only 16.9% of Jews are very religious, while 73.4% of Mormons are very religious (See Figure 2, 3, & 4). Thus, of all the faiths analyzed by Gallup, Mormon religiosity is related to higher well-being for the greatest percentage of people within the "intervention."
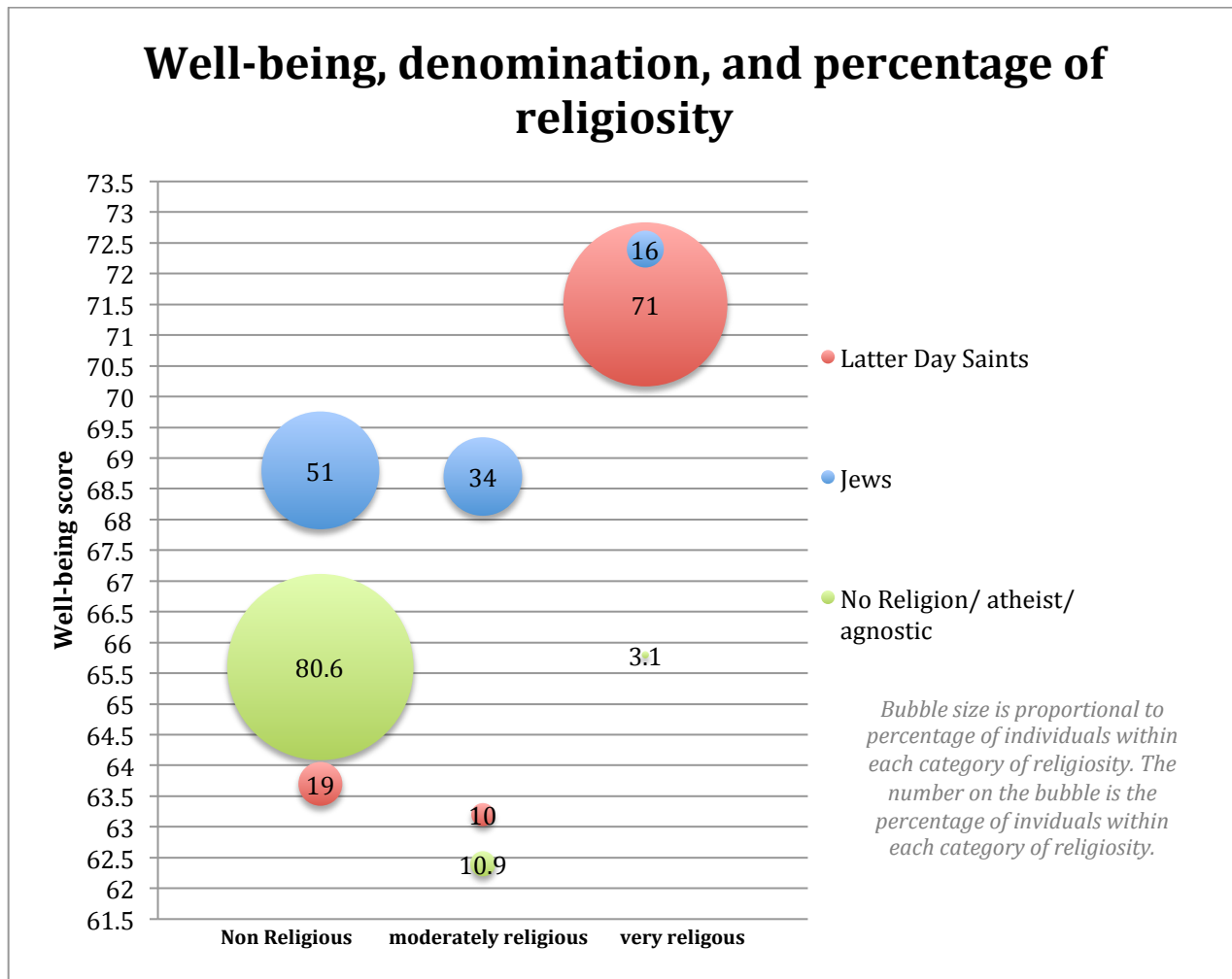
Figure 2. Well-being, denomination, and percentage of religiosity.

Well-being of Jews

- Non religious with well-being score of 68.8
- Moderately religious with well-being score of 68.7
- very religious with well-being score of 72.4

16%
50%
34%

Well-being of Latter Day Saints

- Non religious with well-being score of 63.7
- Moderately religious with well-being score of 63.2
- very religious with well-being score of 71.5

19%
10%
71%
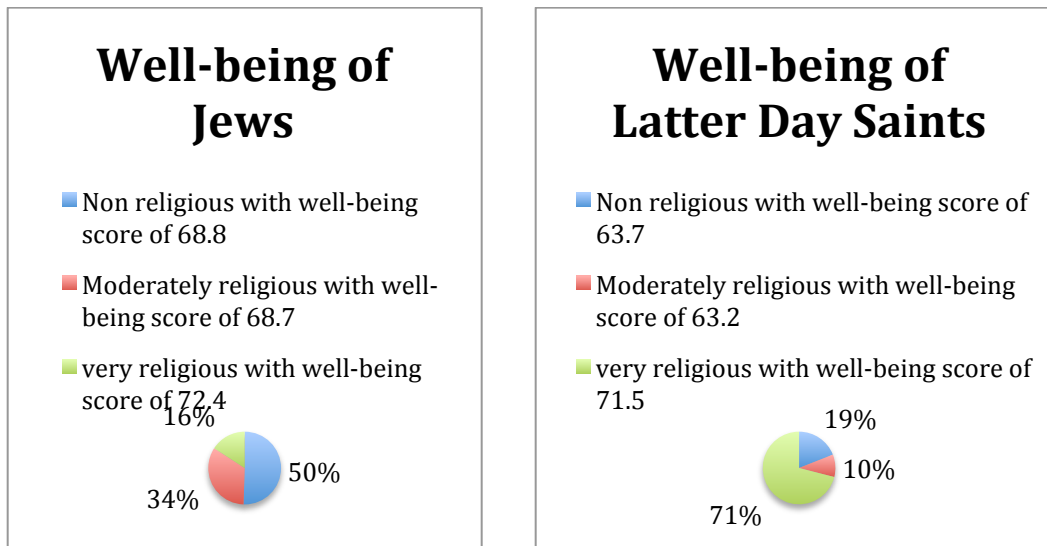
Figure 3 and 4. Religisty and well-being of Jews and Mormons.

To be sure, this insight does not mean that Mormonism is theologically correct or that it is superior to other faiths. While theologians and apologists argue about the validity of religions, the question of whether certain religious practice is related to well-being is different—especially for faiths where well-being is not the theological goal. Nonetheless, for those who are interested in cultivating well-being, it may be extremely valuable to understand what religious teachings and practices are related to flourishing. Moreover, the purpose of understanding this relationship would not be to convince individuals to adopt or abandon any particular theological position, but to increase individuals' well-being regardless of the doctrine they hold. Because Latter-day Saints score high in religiosity, they are an excellent group to study the effects of their religion (Johnson, 2004). Specifically, because data indicates that the majority of Latter-day Saints experience high well-being, this paper asks: What aspects of Mormonism may be contributing to its members' well-being? And to the extent that there are aspects of Mormonism that increase well-being, what elements could be empirically tested and shared with others?

According to Chris Peterson (2006), positive psychologists should attempt to identify cultural practices from across the world that contribute to the good life. For example, researcher and explorer Dan Buettner (2012) discovered "blue zones" or communities on the Earth with the longest life expectancy. After discovering these "blue zones" he began to investigate what cultural phenomenon were contributing to their longevity, and then tested and shared these best practices with others (Buettner, 2012). Similarly, the largest and most comprehensive study of well-being and religion (Dan Witters, personal communication May 28, 2013) has discovered that well-being is particularly high for most Latter-day Saints. Without seeking to validate or disprove theological teachings, it may be useful to identify what qualities contribute to Latter-day Saint (LDS) well-being and how these qualities can be shared with others. This paper analyzes Mormonism from a positive psychology perspective while exploring the mechanisms by which LDS practices and teachings may foster well-being. It also addresses areas in which Mormons could improve. The paper then discusses why this information is helpful and how positive psychology and Mormonism could inform each other to lead to greater flourishing for all.

Do Latter-day Saints really have high well-being?

In addition to the Gallup report about religiosity and well-being, there is considerable research indicating that Latter-day Saints have high well-being. Utah (where Mormons account for roughly 60%-70% of the population) tends to rank high, if not highest, in well-being in the United States (Yakovlev & Leguizamon, 2012; Canham, 2013; Rentfrow, Mellander, & Florida, 2009; Gallup, 2012ba; see Figure 5). Rentfrow et al. (2009) conducted a study where they compared states' well-being, wealth, class structure, education, social diversity, and personalities across the nation. Their research confirmed that well-being was significantly related to the

economic indicators of the state (i.e. median income, housing value, and per capita Gross

Regional Product (GRP)), with the exception of Utah. Notably, Utah was the clear outlier, as it

had the highest level of well-being but scored relatively low in GRP per capita and incomes

(Rentfrow et al., 2009; see Figure 6). Additionally, Provo, Utah, which is the most highly LDS-

concentrated city in the country (and by far the most religious city in the United States (Newport,

2013)), is considered one of the top five cities in the nation with the highest well-being.

Similarly, other highly LDS-concentrated cities such as Salt Lake City and Ogden also have

relatively high levels of well-being (Gallup, 2012b).

Figure 5. Map of state level well-being scores. Taken from Rentfrow et al. (2009).
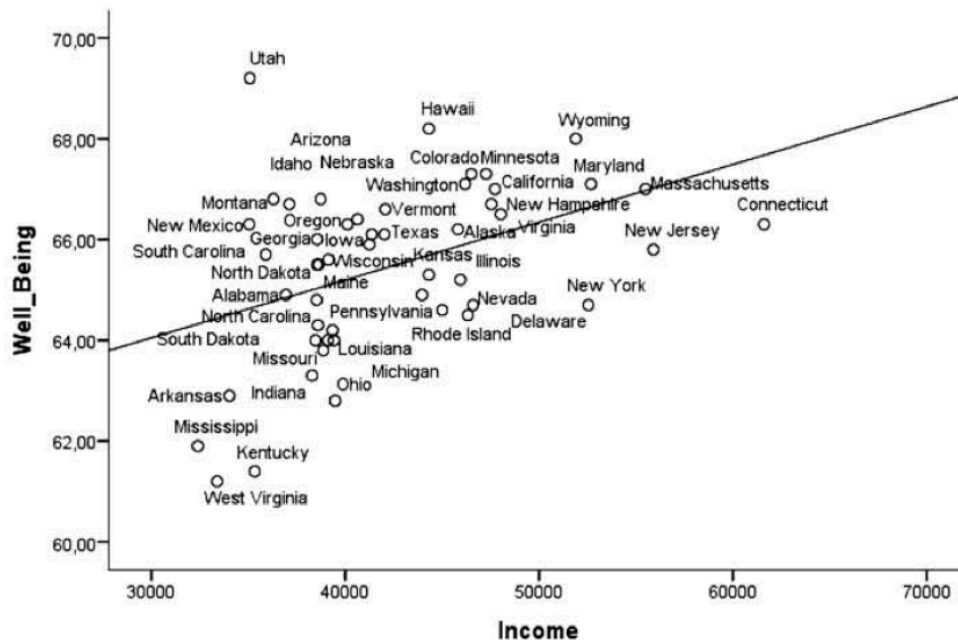
Figure 6. Scatterplot of well-being and income. Taken from Rentfrow et al. (2009).

Furthermore, research specifically on Latter-day Saints, and not on geography, also

indicates that Latter-day Saints have higher well-being. For example, according to the Pew

Research Center (2012a), significantly more Mormons (87%) say they are satisfied with their

lives compared to the general public (75%) (see Figure 7). Twenty five percent of LDS

adolescents report that they are very happy compared with 19% of non-LDS adolescents

(Monitoring the Future Survey, as cited in Heaton, Bahr, & Jacobson, 2004). Forty percent of

LDS adults report they are very happy compared with 32% of the non-LDS population (General

Social Survey, as cited in Heaton et al., 2004). More LDS than non-LDS adults rate their health

as good or excellent (General Social Survey, as cited in Heaton et al., 2004). A study comparing

the mental health of Latter-day Saints and non-Latter-day Saints reported that LDS adolescents

scored significantly higher on self concept (i.e. self perception) and that LDS adults scored

significantly lower on anomie (i.e. feeling alone, unattached, see the world as an unpleasant

place to live, perceive things as getting worse, and think that people only look out for

themselves) (Heaton et al., 2004). A study conducted by Ellison (1991) reported that Latter-day

Saints and a few other nontraditional groups had higher life satisfaction than those who were not

affiliated with these faiths, even after the effects of other aspects of religiosity (e.g. social

support) were controlled. Indeed, in a study of all the major religions in the United States,

Latter-day Saints scored the highest on emotional health and healthy behaviors than any other

religious group (Newport et al., 2012a). While Mormons may generally have higher well-being

than non-Latter-day Saints, other research supports that people in Utah (and Mormons) may

experience above average levels of depression (Heaton et al., 2004). This finding is interesting

because it seemingly conflicts with the considerable research showing that Mormons have higher

well-being. This will be discussed later.
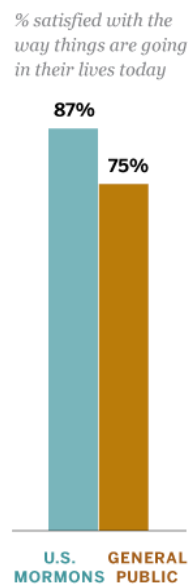
Figure 7. Percentage of people who are satisfied with the way things are going in their

lives today. Adapted from Pew Research Center (2012b).

The chicken or the egg?

Does Mormonism increase well-being, or is it simply that many people with high well-being choose to be Mormon? While a causal analysis will not be conducted here, there are some clues that indicate that Mormon religiosity actually does increase well-being. First, there is a positive relationship between how actively religious Latter-day Saints are and their well-being scores. According to Gallup, Latter-day Saints who are less engaged in their faith have a well-being score of 63.7, while Latter-day Saints who are consistently practicing have a score of 71.5. Further, Merrill and Salazar (2002) found that very religious Latter-day Saints in Utah have better mental health than non-religious and moderately religious Latter-day Saints. After analyzing 12 studies that evaluated LDS religiosity and mental health, Judd (1999) concluded, "the research evidence clearly indicates that Latter-day Saints who live their religion report better mental health than those who are less committed to the faith" (xiii).

Second, it appears that those attracted to Mormonism may, if anything, begin with relatively lower well-being. According to historian Claudia Bushman (2006), "Since the beginning the LDS church has attracted socially and financially disadvantaged converts" (p. 106). She explains that early LDS converts were predominately poor farmers and factory workers and that even today converts typically come from lower working classes in the U.S. and from "peasant families displaced to cities" in developing countries (Bushman, 2006, p. 106). This claim is supported by the Pew Research Center (2009) which found that LDS converts are markedly different from those who have been LDS their entire lives. The data suggests that converts may generally start with lower levels of well-being than life-long members. For example, marriage, education, and income each has a positive relationship with well-being. Compared to life-long members, converts are less likely to be married (64% vs. 74%), less likely

to be educated (16% of converts did not graduate from high school compared to 6% of life-long members), and more likely to make significantly less money (40% of converts make less than $30,000 a year, compared with 21% among life-long members). Converts are also much more likely to come from minority and ethnic groups and are more likely to have participated in smoking, drugs, and alcohol.[6] The fact that 26% of Latter-day Saints are converts (Pew Research Center, 2009) may help explain why Latter-day Saints scored relatively lower in the basic access sub-index in the Gallup study than other sub-indexes. According to Bushman (2004), "With its promise of stability and transcendence, Mormonism appeals to poor and unsettled people who want to improve their lives" (p. 106). The fact that first generation Mormons (converts) have less education, income, and healthy habits than 2nd and 3rd generations of Mormons could support that Mormonism may increase well-being over time.[7] On the other hand, it is likely that those who are attracted to Mormonism are people who are looking to better their lives and thus posses personal well-being qualities such as hope and optimism for the future. Additionally, because Mormonism requires a committed lifestyle, Mormonism may attract and maintain people who have heightened ability for self-regulation. Differences in well-being in religiosity could also be explained by cognitive dissonance. Due to the limited data available, further research is required to better answer this inquiry. However, there is substantial evidence supporting that Latter-day Saints experience high well-being and data suggests this is not completely explained by selection.

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[6] LDS converts are also slightly less likely to attend church than lifelong members (Heaton et al., 2004, p. 57). This factor may also be influential as church attendance is related to well-being (Lim, 2012).
[7] It is also possible that only upwardly mobile Mormons experience an intergenerational transfer of faith.

Introduction to Mormonism

Before analyzing how Mormonism may promote higher well-being, it may be helpful to understand some of the basic tenets of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints:

The nature of God. LDS doctrine states that God is the literal, spiritual father of all people on Earth. Unlike the doctrine of the Trinity, Latter-day Saints believe that God has a perfected body of flesh and bone and that Jesus Christ is his literal son; they are two separate and distinct beings. Latter-day Saints believe that all people lived with God before birth as his spirit children. Like a parent sending a child to college, they believe God sent his children to Earth, away from his presence, so that they could learn and grow and obtain a physical body. While God is not in their physical presence, they believe that God wants to communicate with each of his children through prayer and personal revelation.

Communication from God. LDS doctrine states that throughout history God called prophets to be his messenger, to teach his "Plan of Happiness" ("Plan of Salvation", 2012, para. 1), and to give his children specific guidance (e.g. the ten commandments) so that they could flourish. Latter-day Saints believe that though God sent messengers to teach his children how they could flourish through adherence to his gospel, people often disregarded, disobeyed, and persecuted the prophets and their message. LDS doctrine asserts that since the beginning of time, the world has cycled through periods or "dispensations" when prophets have been called by God to reestablish sacred truths and teach God's "Plan of Happiness" (e.g. Noah, Abraham, Moses). Each of these dispensations, however, have been followed by periods of apostasy— where the prophets and the sacred truths of the gospel have been rejected and distorted. This pattern both preceded and followed the coming of Jesus Christ. Like other Christians, Latter-day Saints believe that God sent Jesus Christ, his only begotten son, to teach these sacred truths and

establish his church. While on the Earth, they believe Jesus Christ performed many miracles, called 12 apostles, and conferred priesthood authority upon them to act in his name and govern his church. And then, like prophets before him, Jesus Christ was rejected and killed. Latter-day Saints believe that Christ suffered for the sins of all mankind in the garden of Gethsemane and on the cross of Calvary. Latter-day Saints refer to this act as the atonement, which allows all of God's children to be cleansed from sin, receive special strength, and live in the presence of God after they die. In addition to suffering for the sins all mankind, Latter-day Saints believe that Christ, through his atonement, overcame death for all mankind (allowing all people to be resurrected) and experienced the pains of all mankind (allowing him to comfort and strengthen all people).

Apostasy. Consistent with prior dispensations and periods of apostasy, Latter-day Saints believe that after Christ was killed, many of the simple truths he taught about flourishing were rejected, lost, and distorted. They believe that after Christ's apostles were killed the divine authority to act in his name and govern his church was lost from the Earth. Over time the Earth fell into a great apostasy (i.e., the Dark Ages). Although Christianity expanded across western civilization during that time, Latter-day Saints believe that the fullness of Christ's gospel was not on the Earth anymore and the churches at the time lacked some of the truths to enable flourishing.

Restoration. Latter-day Saints believe that as religious liberty blossomed in America, God reached out to his children to restore the same gospel and church that Christ had established. In 1820, an American young man named Joseph Smith was seeking to know which of the many religions he should join. Joseph studied other faiths and sought guidance in the Bible. He read "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth

not, and it shall be given him" (James 1:5, King James Version). Inspired by this passage,

Joseph went to a nearby grove of trees to pray and ask God which of the churches he should join.

In his own words he wrote that, while praying, "I saw a pillar of light, exactly over my head,

above the brightness of the sun, which descended gradually until it fell upon me…when the light

rested upon me I saw two personages, whose brightness and glory defy all description, standing

above me in the air. One of them spake unto me, calling me by name and said, pointing to the

other—this is my beloved son, hear him" (Smith, 1838, para. 9). According to Joseph, Jesus

Christ told him not to join any of the churches and that although they had parts of the truth, none

of them had the fullness of Christ's gospel. Latter-day Saints believe that God eventually called

Joseph to be a prophet to restore his teachings and establish his church on the Earth. The Church

was officially organized April 6, 1830 and received the title, "The Church of Jesus Christ of

Latter-day Saints." [8]

     Distinctions. Not surprisingly, many of the restored beliefs held by Latter-day Saints

differ from commonly held Christian beliefs. In contrast to the tenets of other Christian faiths,

Latter-day Saints believe that: 1) husband and wife can be married eternally (family relationships

extend beyond this life); 2) that God still speaks through prophets and apostles as he did in

Biblical times (i.e. modern day revelation); and 3) God's "work and glory" is to help his children

cultivate a fullness of joy in this life and in the life hereafter and to ultimately progress to

become as he is (Moses 1:39, Pearl of Great Price). Latter Day Saints also reject the notion of

original sin (i.e. infants are born tainted with sin). They believe that each individual is born with

an inner light (i.e. the "light of Christ") which helps each person discern good from evil.

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[8] Although Latter-day saints distinguish the restoration of Christ's church from the reformation, they believe that many leaders of the reformation (e.g. Martin Luther, etc.) were inspired actors in preparing the Earth for the complete restoration.

Mormon Terms

Listed below are some key terms that may be helpful to understanding LDS doctrine and culture:

Book of Mormon. According to LDS doctrine, the Book of Mormon is an ancient religious record written on gold plates that Joseph Smith was able to translate through God's inspiration. It is similar to the Bible. Latter-day Saints believe the Book of Mormon is another testament of Jesus Christ and a record of God's dealings with people in the ancient Americas from approximately 600 B.C. through A.D. 421. Latter-day Saints read the Book of Mormon in tandem with the Bible and consider it as evidence that Joseph Smith was a true prophet of God. It is from this book that the Latter-day Saints receive the nickname "Mormons" ("The Book of Mormon," 2011).

Doctrine and Covenants: The Doctrine and Covenants (D&C) is a book containing "revelations given to Joseph Smith, the prophet, with some additions by his successors in the presidency of the church" ("Doctrine and Covenants," n.d., para. 1). It, along with the Book of Mormon, Bible, and Pearl of Great Price is considered scripture in LDS theology ("Doctrine and Covenants," n.d.).

Apostles and Prophets: Latter-day Saints believe that prophets and apostles lead God's church today as they did in ancient times. Just as other Christians believe that ancient apostles (i.e. Peter, James, and John) had authority to act in God's name, Latter-day Saints consider modern day prophets' and apostles' counsel as scripture. In the organization of the LDS church there is one prophet (president), two supporting counselors in the presidency, and twelve apostles.

LDS Church today. The LDS church is one of the fastest growing religions in the U.S.

(with a 45% growth rate from 2000 to 2010), and has the largest women's organization in the world (Stack, 2012; Barlow & Bergin, 1998).   The church's current membership is over 14.7 million people with about 8.3 million members residing outside the United States (Newsroom, 2013a). Its population makes up about 2% of the population of America today (Newport, 2012).

Analyzing Mormonism from a Positive Psychology Perspective

Mormonism is one of the fastest growing religions in the U.S., yet few Americans know about the faith (Stack, 2012; Campbell, 2012). While there are as many Mormons in America today as there are Jews, Americans are much less informed about the Mormon population than they are of the Jewish population (Campbell, 2012). According to the Pew Research Center (2012a), less than one-third of American adults (29%) are able to correctly answer two basic facts about the LDS church. When Latter-day Saints were asked what is one of the most important problems Mormons face today, more than half (56%) reported discrimination and misperceptions (Pew Research Center, 2012a). The majority of Mormons (62%) say that as a whole, the American people are uninformed about Mormonism. Yet, research demonstrates that as a religious group they have some of the highest well-being in the country. Through what mechanisms do Mormons have high well-being? There are several possible reasons why Mormonism may contribute to high levels of well-being. Here, five major topics will be explored: pro-social behavior, focus on the family, meaning and purpose, autonomy and agency, and physical health.

Pro-Social Behavior

Service and Love

Perhaps one of the major contributions to Latter-day Saints' well-being is their pro-social behavior. A tremendous amount of research suggests that a focus on the welfare of others is

more satisfying than a focus on one's own pleasure (Peterson, 2006; Seligman, 2012). Volunteer work and altruistic behavior enhance happiness, life satisfaction, self-esteem, sense of control over life, good health, and longevity (Thoits & Hewitt, 2001; Dulin & Hill, 2003; Post, 2005; Dulin, Gavala, Stephens, Kostick, & McDonald, 2012). The evidence that altruism increases well-being is so strong that positive psychologist Chris Peterson (2006) stated that positive psychology could be summarized in three words: "Other People Matter."

Similarly, LDS doctrine states that well-being resides in loving others (LDS church, n.d). The Bible states that Jesus Christ summarized his gospel with the words "to love God and to love thy neighbor as thyself" and stated that on "these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets" (Matthew 22: 37-40, Bible King James Version). Specifically, the Book of Mormon supports the Biblical teaching that the best way one can serve God is through loving others: "when ye are in the service of your fellow beings ye are only in the service of your God" (Mosiah 2:17, Book of Mormon). Mormons are taught that Jesus spent his life helping others and that following his example brings lasting happiness (LDS Church, n.d.). Mormon doctrine holds that "Love is the greatest of all the commandments" and that "It is the one trait that, if developed, will most improve our lives" (Wirthlin, 2007, para 53).   Consistent with this teaching, when the Pew Research Center (2012a) surveyed Latter-day Saints to explain what was most essential to their faith, almost 75% reported that working to help the poor and needy was an essential part of what it means to be a good Mormon. Researchers were surprised to see that this ranked higher than Mormon practices such as avoiding coffee and tea (49%), and having regular family home evenings (51%). In fact, it ranked almost as high as believing that Joseph Smith actually saw God the Father and Jesus Christ (80%) (Pew Research Center, 2012a).

Callings. As an essential LDS belief, research supports that service is a vital component

of LDS practice and culture. Latter-day Saints have many different programs through which they volunteer and care for others. First, the church is run by lay clergy and volunteerism. Within the church, members take turns fulfilling different "callings" or assignments they receive from local church leaders. Members are asked by a church leader to fulfill a specific "calling" or role in the local church congregation. Examples of various callings include: a facilities manager, a nursery worker, a Boy Scout leader, a compassionate service coordinator, or a Bishop—the clergy of a local congregation. Some callings require a few hours a month, while others resemble a full-time job. Callings often go on for a few years. Once members are "released" from a calling, they will most likely be asked to fulfill a different one shortly thereafter (Cnaan, Evans, & Curtis, 2012). Members see callings as a way to serve others and God and rarely turn callings down. Recently, researchers from the University of Pennsylvania conducted a study where they examined the volunteer behaviors of active Latter-day Saints (Cnaan et al., 2012). The study was the largest of its kind (n=2,664) and included four different states. Of the people that participated in the study, 86% of the Latter-day Saints reported they were currently fulfilling a volunteer church calling. When bishops (LDS clergy) were asked if people ever refused callings, one bishop reported, "I've been a bishop for eight years. I had five refusals" (Pew Research Center, 2012, para. 23). When research participants were asked if they ever refused a calling in the last five years, only 4.4% said they had refused—"which is less than 1% annually" (Pew Research Center, 2012, para. 20). Ram Cnaan, Associate Dean for Research at the University of Pennsylvania explained, "So this is a culture that when people are asked to fulfill any task, 99% of the time they say yes" (Pew Research Center, 2012c, para. 24). Children are asked to fulfill callings as young as 12 years old; thus, the attitude and culture of serving is likely instilled at a young age.

Home teaching. In addition to fulfilling callings, nearly all adult Latter-day Saints are assigned a few individuals and families within the congregation that they are assigned (in pairs) to visit at least once a month. Referred to as "Home Teaching" and "Visiting Teaching", individuals are to befriend, "watch over, and strengthen the families they are assigned" ("Handbook Two", 2012, p. 43) and establish a relationship of trust so that the families will feel comfortable calling upon them in times of need ("Home Teaching", n.d). For example, visiting and home teachers bring meals to their assigned families when they are sick and are to "offer help when members are unemployed, ill, lonely, moving, or have other needs" ("Handbook Two," 2012, p. 43). Individuals are assigned to members different from the ones assigned to them, so it is not a reciprocal service. This is noteworthy because research supports that an equitable relationship is not the most satisfying. Rather, the most satisfying relationship is one in which an individual provides love and support regardless of reciprocity (Grant, 2013; Peterson, 2006). Indeed, research also suggests that giving social support is more beneficial than receiving it (Brown, Nesse, Vinokur, & Smith, 2003; Liang, Krause, & Bennet, 2001; Chappell & Funk, 2011).

Group service. LDS members also volunteer through their respective age and gender groups within the Church. Each week, LDS women attend Relief Society, the church's organization for women. The Relief Society's purpose is to help those in need, strengthen home and families, and build faith and personal righteousness ("Handbook Two," 2012). There are also similar groups for men and youth. Youth are encouraged to complete character development programs (i.e. "Personal Progress" for females and "Duty to God" for males), which are meant, in part, to help cultivate an attitude of service at a young age. In addition, many Mormons volunteer through community programs independent of the church. Although

this is the area in which Mormons volunteer the least, the amount of time volunteered in this area

by Latter-day Saints is still equal to the amount that an average American volunteers (Cnaan et

al., 2012).

        Missionary service. Lastly, Latter-day Saints volunteer through missionary service.

Approximately one out of four (27%, with 58,900 currently serving) Latter-day Saints choose to

serve voluntary full time missions (Pew Research Center, 2012a; "Facts and Statistics," 2012).

Missionaries are typically ages 18-21 and are called to serve for 18 to 24 months (See Appendix

A). Missionaries often refer to their missions as some of the hardest and yet most rewarding

time of their lives (Bushman, 2006). LDS missionaries are asked to "lose themselves" in serving

others and to leave personal interests (entertainment, hobbies, romance, etc.) behind (Bushman,

2006). They are typically only allowed to bring two suitcases of personal belongings and are

only permitted two phone calls home a year (Newsroom, 2012a). Missionaries are assigned a

companion that they must remain with 24 hours a day (Bushman, 2006, p. 64; Newsroom,

2012a). Although missionaries are paired with someone not of their choosing ("and in some

cases, definitely not of your choosing," (Bushman, 2006, p. 64) as one returned missionary

noted), missionaries are taught to learn to love and serve their companion ("Preach My Gospel,"

p. 94). Missionaries also do not get to choose where they serve and are encouraged to learn to

love the people and culture with where they are called to serve (Bushman, 2006). Missionaries

work 10-14 hours a day and in addition to their regular proselytizing and teaching "do such

things as disaster clean up, helping people move, teaching English, visiting the Elderly, and

more" (Newsroom, 2012a, para. 5). It is possible that this experience helps some Latter-day

Saints develop a more pro-social orientation. According to the Pew Research Center (2012c),

LDS members who have served missions are significantly more likely than LDS members who

have not served missions to say "it's essential to provide aid and assistance to the needy" (para.

38). They are also more likely to view Mormonism as similar to other faiths (Pew Research

Center, 2012a). Additionally, 80% of LDS returned missionaries report that their mission was

very valuable in preparing for career success and 92% report it as very valuable in growing their

own faith (Pew Research Center, 2012a, p. 13).

     Culture of volunteerism. All together, not including full time missionary service,

researchers found that active Latter-day Saints volunteer an average of 427.9 hours annually

(Cnaan et al., 2012; Also see Appendix B). This breaks down to 35.6 hours monthly (8.2 hours

weekly) which contrasts noticeably from the average American volunteer rate of two hours a

month (or 4 hours a month if you exclude people who don't volunteer at all) (Cnaan, Jones,

Dicken, & Salomon, 2011).[9] [10] It is possible that these self-reported numbers are inflated.

Because LDS doctrine emphasizes service, LDS members may have felt pressure to over-report.

While it is possible that the self-reported numbers could be exaggerated, there are other

indicators that suggest LDS have high rates of volunteerism. For example, Latter-day Saints are

well-known for showing up to volunteer in community and disaster relief efforts (i.e. "Mormon

helping hands") (e.g. Wilson, 2011; see Newsroom, 2013b for a review). In the aftermath of

Hurricane Sandy, more than 28,000 Latter-day Saints came to help community members clean

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[9] The study was conducted at church, so the population sample includes mostly active members of the church. In the study researchers tracked four different kinds of volunteering: 1) volunteering for religious purposes within the church and its auspices, 2) church-affiliated volunteering to meet the social needs of members; 3) church-affiliated volunteering to meet the social needs of people in the community regardless of the LDS membership; and 4) volunteering outside the church to assist people in the community. "The area in which most Latter-day Saints volunteer and to which most volunteer hours are dedicated is religious volunteering (94.4% of the respondents; 242 hours annually). Social volunteering of all sorts was also carried out by most of the respondents (95.5% of the respondents; 185.9 hours annually). One type of social volunteering was secular volunteering to meet social needs outside the church, with an average, church-going Latter-day Saint providing 34 hours per year. Latter-day Saints provide the fewest volunteer hours to causes independent of the church. Yet, even if this were the only volunteer activity of Latter-day Saints, it would equal the national average of volunteering of all Americans" (Cnaan et al., 2012, p. 17).

[10] These numbers do not include service from full-time missionaries.

flood-damaged homes and provide emergency relief (Newsroom, 2012b). Similarly, after

Hurricane Katrina a local Louisiana resident reported "Nobody was there on the ground with us

except for the Mormons… They didn't just come in to hand us a piece of food; they actually got

down and cleaned and worked" (PBS, 2007, p. n.a.). The claim that Latter-day Saints embody a

culture of volunteerism is also supported by the high percentage of young people who choose to

serve full time missions and make large personal sacrifices to do so (Pew Research Center,

2012a; "Facts and Statistics," 2012; Newsroom, 2012a).[11] According to David Campbell, a

professor at the University of Notre Dame and author of award winning *American Grace: How*

Religion Divides and Unites Us, "There is no doubt that Mormons are the highest when it comes

to religious volunteering and other types of volunteering…and that comes from multiple data

sources" (Pew Research Center, 2012c, para. 59).

Well-being benefits. Given the substantial research that relationships, love, and service

are essential to well-being, such pro-social behavior is likely a large contributor to Latter-day

Saints' well-being. In addition to reaping the psychological and social benefits of volunteerism,

callings and visiting teaching may also provide Latter-day Saints with a sense of purpose,

meaning, and an enhanced sense of community. The church's administration handbook states

that new converts should be given a responsibility to serve as quickly as possible ("Handbook

Two," 2012). Service may help Latter-day Saints feel that they matter within a community. This

could enhance well-being because feeling that you matter to others is associated with global self-

esteem (Marshall, 2001; Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Additionally, the benefits of receiving

callings may be especially potent for senior citizens who frequently suffer from feeling they

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[11] LDS missionaries (or their families) pay about $10,000 a year to cover expenses. Missionaries are only allowed to bring with them 140 pounds of personal possessions and do not participate in any "worldly" entertainment such as watching movies or listening to music (See Appendix One).

don't matter and losing purpose in life (Pinquart, 2002). According to Pinquart (2002), one way

to counter a declining sense of life purpose in the elderly is social integration and meaningful

engagement. The Washington Post explains that for "older Mormons 'retirement' means

something else all together" (Otterson, 2011, para. 3). Not only are LDS senior citizens given

callings but they are also encouraged to serve full time missions and about 5,400 do so each year

(Bushman, 2006).

Culture of Giving

In addition to giving their time, many Latter-day Saints also donate their money.

Research supports that people with both modest and comfortable incomes are happier when they

spend money on others (Dunn & Norton, 2013; Dunn, Aknin, & Norton, 2008). For example, in

one study, participants who were randomly assigned to spend money on others reported higher

levels of happiness than those who were assigned to spend money on themselves (Dunn et al.,

2008). Consistent with these findings, Latter-day Saints are taught that true joy will come if they

use their money to help others. The Book of Mormon states "if ye seek for riches…seek them

for the intent to do good—to clothe the naked, and to feed the hungry, and to liberate the captive,

and administer relief to the sick and the afflicted" (Mosiah 2:18-19, Book of Mormon).

Tithing. Research supports that charitable giving is not only an essential LDS doctrine,

but it is an active practice. As directed in the Bible, Latter-day Saints are taught to tithe (give

10% of their income) to the Church. The Church uses tithing funds for the maintenance of the

Church, to spread the gospel, and to care for others. While this is a decree for most Judeo-

Christian traditions, the Barna Group (2011) reported that in America tithing is rarely practiced.

Only 5% of Americans give a full tithe (giving 10% of household income to churches or other

charities) and the national donation rate among Americans is 4% of one's income (Barna Group

(2011). In comparison, the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life (Smith, 2011) found that 79%

of Latter-day Saints pay a full tithe (donate at least 10% of their income) and 1% partially tithe.

This study, however, was conducted over the phone and may serve as a low estimate because it

most likely included non-practicing Mormons (Cnaan et al., 2012). According to the research

conducted by the University of Pennsylvania, of the active LDS members interviewed, 88.8%

reported that they pay a full tithing and about 6% reported that they pay a partial tithing. Taken

all together, the average percentage of income paid to tithing, including part-tithers and non-

tithers in the study was 9.3% (Cnaan et al., 2012). Part of the reason Latter-day Saints may tithe

at a higher rate is because even young children are expected to tithe ("Primary 6", 1996). The

habit of tithing and donating is thus encouraged at a young age.

Fast offerings. In addition to paying tithing, many members donate through "fast

offerings" (Cnaan et al., 2012). On the first Sunday of each month, Latter-day Saints are

encouraged to fast for two consecutive meals and then donate the money they would have spent

on the meals to those in need (Cnaan et al., 2012). The "fast offering" is collected by local

clergy and then distributed to both members and non-LDS persons in need within the local

geographic boundary (Cnaan et al., 2012). If extra money remains, the money is shared with

other geographic boundaries (Cnaan et al., 2012). According to the study conducted by the

University of Pennsylvania, 70% of the LDS respondents report that they donate fast offerings.

In addition to fast offerings, members can also donate to specific humanitarian programs within

the church (Cnaan et al., 2012). The church's international humanitarian programs help those in

need who are primarily *not* members of the church and includes programs such as providing

emergency response, installing clean water, giving neonatal resuscitation training, providing

vision care, supplying wheel chairs, teaching food production and nutrition, and giving

immunizations (LDS Charities, 2012). Not including tithing, an average active Latter-day Saint (including those not donating) donates an additional $650 each year to church sponsored humanitarian programs (Cnaan et al., 2012).

Other donations. Lastly, in addition to donating to church run programs, 48% of Latter-day Saints report they donate money to non-church related charities. In addition to tithing, fast offerings, and other church sponsored welfare programs, Latter-day Saints donate an average of $1,171 (this average includes Latter-day Saints who do not donate) to philanthropic, non-church related causes. Some Latter-day Saints also donate to other religious causes ($203 on average) aside from tithing. All together, active Latter-day Saints report they donate an average of $2,024 annually in addition to paying tithing. Although one should be skeptical of self reported data, this is consistent with data from the IRS which regularly reports that Utah (roughly 60-70% LDS) is ranked number one in the nation for the amount of charitable donation per taxpayer, despite the point that it only ranks 21st for average income per tax payer (Sauter, Charles, & Allen, 2011; Chronicle of Philanthropy, 2013). According to exact dollar amounts released by the IRS, in 2012 residents of Utah donated on average more than 10% of their income annually which is double the national donation rate of 4.7% (Charity Navigator, 2012). Thus, the evidence suggests that compared to other Americans, even the most religious Americans, Latter-day Saints give a greater percent of their income to charity (including all causes) and are the least variable in the proportional amount given (Cnaan et al., 2012; Hoffmann, Lott, & Jeppsen, 2010).

Summary

Whether it's through volunteerism or philanthropic giving, there is substantial evidence to support that Latter-day Saints are an "other" focused people. In concluding their report, the

researchers from the University of Pennsylvania stated:

> Overall we found that members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints are
> the most pro-social members of American society. Regardless of where they live, they
> are very generous with their time and money. Through a theology of obedience and
> sacrifice and a strong commitment to tithing and service, Latter-day Saints are model
> citizens. (Cnaan et al., 2012, p. 18)

 The claim that pro-social behavior is correlated to life satisfaction and physical health outcomes is consistent with Latter-day Saints' high levels of life satisfaction, physical health, and pro-social behavior.

Focus on the Family

While LDS doctrine asserts that love and service are essential to well-being, the faith declares that the most important place to exercise love and service is within the family. A church leader stated, "God has placed us in families, for he knows that is where we can best learn to overcome selfishness and pride and to sacrifice for others and to make happiness and helpfulness and humility and love the very essence of our character" (Groberg, 1982, para. 3). The church affirms that family, marriage, and having children within the bonds of marriage is central to the eternal destiny of God's children ("The Family: A Proclamation to the World," 1995). This contrasts noticeably with societal trends where there is a decline of the normative importance to marry, to remain married, to have children, and to limit sexual relationships to marriage (Thornton, 1989).

Marriage

Although marriage rates are declining throughout the nation (Heaton, 1999), LDS teachings maintain that marriage is essential to God's plan of happiness for his children ("The

Family: A Proclamation to the World," 1995; Jenson, 2002). Likewise, substantial research has found that married people are more satisfied with their lives, have better health, and live longer than those that are single (Diener & Suh, 2000; Seligman 2002; Waite & Gallagher, 2000; Brockmann, & Klein, 2004; Sbarra, Law, & Portley 2011). Some researchers are unconvinced that marriage causes well-being: instead, they believe that people with higher well-being tend to marry (Seligman, 2002; Watson, Hubbard, & Wiese, 2000). Other researchers, however, posit that marriage contributes to increased well-being because married people are inclined to take fewer risks, eat healthier, and have someone to talk with about personal problems (Horn, Xu, Beam, Turkheimer, & Emery, 2013; Waite & Gallagher, 2000). Marriage may also offer economic and sexual benefits[12], appease the human need for emotional and physical closeness, offer individuals more social support (i.e. having more circles of extended family, friends, etc.), allow spouses to take advantage of each others' strengths, and help different sexes obtain the benefits of gender specific advantages (VanDenberghe, 2000). In one recent study, researchers used young-adult twin and sibling pairs to conduct a genetically informed analysis of the causal (vs. selection) benefits of marriage and cohabitation (Horn et al., 2013). Researchers concluded that physical benefits were explained by selection but that internalized and externalized behaviors were not. According to Horn et al. (2013) people who were coupled (married and co-habituating) were more likely to be protected against self- reported depression, risk of suicidal ideation, and alcohol use. People who were married or cohabitated also had more positive supports such as a shared emotional life, companionship, and practical assistance, all of which could possibly lead to greater happiness and lower levels of depression (Horn et al., 2013, p. 35).

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[12] Research from the National Health and Social Life Survey and the Journal of the of the American Medical Association consistently find that married people report being well-satisfied with their sex lives more so than any other category of sexually active people (Michael et al. as cited in Dollahite, 2000).

They also suggested that marriage and cohabitation safeguarded against loneliness and social isolation, which in turn may also protect against anxiety and depression.

Furthermore, the study reported that there were some differences between couples that married and those that cohabitated. Compared to cohabitation, marriage reduced the risk of engaging in antisocial behavior and externalizing problems (Horn et al., 2013). Some researchers have suggested that people who marry rather than cohabitate demonstrate a greater commitment to one another and thus espouse a broader perspective in both their intimate relationship and other aspects of their lives (Emery, Horn, & Beam, 2012; Stanley & Markman, 1992). Researchers also explained that those who marry may feel more long term investment in their partner and are thus more apt to monitor their partner's behavior and foster pro-social activities and discourage antisocial ones (Horn et al., 2013). Although there are apparently some well-being benefits associated with marriage, and marriage over cohabitation, there is most likely substantial variation depending on the type of relationship. The differences between the benefits of marriage and cohabitation may depend on the quality, duration, and stability of the relationship, the presence of children, and whether couples cohabitate with the intention of marrying or cohabite without such an intention (Horn et al., 2013). Although further research is required, data suggests marriage is positively associated with high well-being and that this relationship is not completely explained by selection.

Because of the varied potential benefits to marriage, the Mormon doctrinal emphasis on marriage may contribute to Latter-day Saints high level of well-being. Latter-day Saints are much more likely to be married, as nearly three fourths (71%) are married compared to just over half (54%) of the general population (Pew Research Center, 2012a; Heaton et al., 2004). Additionally, Latter-day Saints get married younger than the general population and are thus

married for longer amounts of time (Heaton et al., 2004; Utah Governor's Commission on Marriage, 2003). Although marrying young is typically predictive of higher divorce rates (Kreider & Ellis, 2011), LDS marriages appear to be less impacted by age compared to national averages. Notwithstanding that the biggest single risk factor for divorce is getting married before the age of 24 (Feiler, 2013), Latter-day Saints marry on average at the age of 21.8 (Heaton et al., 2004) and still maintain lower divorce rates compared to the general population (Pew Research Center, 2012a; Heaton et al., 2004). Taking into account three national surveys, self proclaimed Latter-day Saints were about one fourth less likely to divorce in the 1990's (Heaton et al., 2004). Specifically, active Latter-day Saints who marry in Mormon temples are estimated to have about a divorce rate that is about 40% less than national divorce rate (Heaton et al., 2004). This is consistent with data that shows that Utah has relatively lower divorce rates compared to the rest of the nation (Center for Disease Control, 2012; Utah Governor's Commission on Marriage, 2003). Latter-day Saints are also more likely to obtain the benefits of marriage because if they do divorce, they are more likely to remarry (Heaton et al., 2004). Not only are Latter-day Saints more likely to be married, but they also put more emphasis on their marriages compared to the general population (Pew Research Center, 2012b). There are several possible reasons why Mormonism might promote flourishing marriages:

A spiritual priority. First, Mormon doctrine states that marriage is ordained of God and "a treasure of infinite worth" (Clayton, 2013, para. 3). While some faiths view celibacy and the monastic life as higher paths of spiritualty, LDS doctrine holds that marriage and intimacy are

essential to God's plan of happiness (Bednar, 2006).[13] As such, Latter-day Saints are taught to

make marriage one of their most important priorities. Mormon doctrine teaches that spouses

honor God by loving and caring for their spouse. It is no surprise then that 73% of Latter-day

Saints report that having a successful marriage is one of the most important things in life. In

contrast, only 34% of the general American public shares this view (Pew Research Center,

2012b). The trend of Latter-day Saints placing more value on marriage may help explain data

showing that Latter-day Saints are more likely to report their marriage is very happy compared to

the rest of the nation (General Social Survey, as cited in Heaton et al., 2004). This finding is

consistent with other data indicating that married people who live in Utah are more likely to

report being very happy in their marriage (74%) compared to married couples nationally (62%)

(Utah Governor's Commission on Marriage, 2003). Further, residents of Utah who attended

religious services most frequently and who considered themselves very religious reported having

higher levels of marriage commitment, higher levels of marital satisfaction, less frequent

conflicts, and a decreased likelihood of having thought about divorce compared to those who are

less religious (Utah Governor's Commission on Marriage, 2003).

      Eternal investment. Second, LDS doctrine states that in God's plan of happiness, a man

and a woman can be married not just "until death do you part," as Christians commonly believe,

but that marriage can be for "all eternity" ("Gospel Principles," 2011). This promise of marriage

for eternity is given to couples married in the temple who remain true to their covenants to God

and to each other. Just as people who marry rather than cohabitate may demonstrate a greater

commitment to one another (Emery et al., 2012; Stanley & Markman, 1992), it is possible that

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[13] If not married in this life, Latter-day Saints believe that those who do not marry will have future opportunities to marry in the after life. Additionally the LDS church provides extra support to single Latter-day Saints so they do not feel ostracized. There is actually a higher percentage of active single adults then there are married Latter-day Saints (Bushman, 2006).

people who believe their marriage is eternal and under covenant with God will put forth more energy and long term investment into their relationship. Likewise, a series of research demonstrates that the more permanent people see a choice, the more likely they are to psychologically invest in that choice, and as a result, they become more satisfied with their choice (Schwartz, 2004, p. 145).

   Couple prayer. Third, LDS couples are encouraged to study and ponder scriptures together and pray morning and evening together. In accordance with LDS practices, prayers are not rote or memorized but are encouraged to include expressions of gratitude and humble requests for help and direction according to needs ("Prayer," 2009). Past prophet and president Gordon B. Hinckley (1971) stated, "I know of no single practice that will have a more salutary effect upon your lives than the practice of kneeling together as you begin and close each day. Somehow the little storms that seem to afflict every marriage are dissipated when, kneeling before the Lord, you thank him for one another, in the presence of one another, and then together invoke his blessings upon your lives, your home, your loved ones, and your dreams" (para. 35). This practice could increase flourishing by cultivating regular gratitude, a well-documented contributor to well-being (Watkins, Van Gelder, & Frias, 2009; Fredrickson, 2004; Emmons & McCullough, 2003). It could also help facilitate regular discussion about needs, concerns, thoughts, dreams, and desires between a couple which are essential ingredients to enhancing constructive relationships (Harvey, Pauwels, Zickmund, 2002; Harvey & Omarzu, 1997; Harvey & Omarzu, 1999). Additionally, recent studies have suggested that praying with ones partner is significantly related to relationship trust (Lambert, Fincham, LaVallee, & Brantley, 2012). For example, in one experimental study research participants either prayed with their partner or were assigned to a control positive interaction over a four week time period. Compared to those in the

control group, the individuals that prayed with their partner reported more unity with, and trust

in, their partner (Lambert et al., 2012). Another qualitative study suggested that relationship

prayer was a significant "softening" event for religious couples where prayer decreased hostile

emotions and emotional reactivity, and increased empathy, reconciliation, and problem solving

(Butler, Gardner, & Bird, 1998). Lastly, Mahoney et al. (1999) found that marital well-being

(e.g. marital satisfaction, commitment, less conflict, and marital problem solving strategies) was

better predicted by religiosity tied to the marital relationship (e.g. time spent together in religious

activities, degree couple perceived their marriage as sacred) than the individual religiosity of

each spouse.

Continual counsel. Lastly, as marriage is considered a high spiritual priority, the church

offers many publications, lessons, talks, and classes focused on marriage. Latter-day Saints are

encouraged to have weekly date nights (Orgill, 1991), which has been suggested to contribute to

higher levels of communication, sexual satisfaction, and commitment (Wilcox & Dew, 2012).

Latter-day Saints are also actively encouraged to establish marital traditions (Stevens & Burton,

n.d.), have financial transparency, view their spouse as he or she has the potential to become,

treasure sex to build marital intimacy, and avoid pornography (Brinley, 2012).

Children and Family

Latter-day Saints' emphasis on marriage may benefit their families as "the happier people

are in their marriages, the happier their families tend to be" (Feiler, 2013, p. 149). In addition to

marriage, LDS doctrine places a similar emphasis on children, home, and family. Latter-day

Saints are taught that "the family is central to the Creator's plan for the eternal destiny of His

children" and that "husband and wife have a solemn responsibility to love and care for each other

and for their children" ("The Family: A Proclamation to the World," 1995, para. 6). LDS

doctrine also holds that the commandment "to multiply and replenish the earth remains in force" and that raising children in truth and righteousness is central to God's plan of happiness (Family Proclamation to the World," 1995, para. 4). This attitude diverges from societal trends in that people are having fewer children and are becoming less focused on child-rearing (Wilcox & Marquardt, 2011). For example, in 1992 nearly 80% of graduates in one of the top business schools in the country (Wharton School of Business) were planning on having children. In 2012, however, the number declined to 42% (Friedman, 2013).

   Parenting and well-being. At first glance it appears that research does not support that having children increases well-being. Research indicates that couples become less satisfied after their first child (Twenge, Campbell, & Foster, 2003) and that the pleasure from having a child is surpassed by the challenges of parenthood (Evenson, Ranae, & Simon, 2005). Consistent with this data, research indicates that LDS women who tend to have more children, have higher levels of depression than non-LDS women (Heaton et al., 2004). On the other hand, some researchers have argued that although not easy, having children ends up bringing more meaning and satisfaction in the long run (Brooks, 2008; Evenson, Ranae, & Simon, 2005). To further investigate, a nonpartisan and nonsectarian institute undertook a comprehensive study incorporating three nationally representative data sources and investigated how parenthood was associated with global happiness and depression among Americans of childbearing age (Wilcox & Marquardt, 2011). The research supported that married couples with children reported less marital happiness than couples who did not have children. The research also indicated, however, that while parents experienced decreased happiness with their first child, childless couples experienced a similar decline in happiness over time. Interestingly, after about eight years, the marital quality of couples with and without children was about the same. The difference,

however, was that couples with children came out with significantly higher levels of meaning (especially for mothers) compared to their childless peers. The study revealed that the more children parents had, the more likely they were to "strongly agree" that their life had an important purpose. Interestingly, religious mothers of large families (four or more) were about two to three times more likely to report that they were "very happy" in their marriage compared to those with less children or those who were less religious (Wilcox & Marquardt, 2011, p. 56). Looking even further down the road, research supports that having grandchildren is positively and significantly related to people reporting they are very satisfied with their lives (Powdthavee, 2011). Thus, while parenthood may bring suffering and sacrifice in the short term, it appears that the difficult challenge of parenting can lead to more satisfaction and meaning in the long run (Powdthavee, 2011; Wilcox & Marquardt, 2011; Brooks, 2008; Evenson, Ranae, & Simon, 2005; Angeles, 2009). This might help explain Latter-day Saints' high level of life satisfaction even though they are more likely to have children and have more children compared to the national average (Heaton et al., 2004).

Child well-being. Regardless of how parenthood impacts the well-being of LDS adults, the LDS church's strong doctrinal focus on the family may benefit LDS childhood development. According to the Oxford Handbook of Positive Psychology, "Child well-being and health is developed within the context of the family" (Sheridan & Burt, 2009). The home environment has one of the greatest influences on a child's development (Sheridan & Burt, 2009). There are various practices within Mormonism which may contribute to child and family well-being:

Parenting is a sacred calling. First, parenting is viewed as a sacred responsibility and a partnership with God ("The Family: A Proclamation to the World," 1995; Holland, 2012). According to the Pew Research Center (2012b), 81% of Latter-day Saints believe that being a

good parent is one of the most important things in life, whereas only 50% of the general public

believes likewise. Specifically, LDS doctrine states that motherhood should be revered and

honored (Mckay, 1968). While contemporary society tends to place less value on motherhood

and some women view motherhood as something that holds them back from professional

achievement (Lewis, 2011; Badinter, 2012), LDS doctrine holds that motherhood is the most

sacred, honorable, and powerful role in society (Mckay, 1968). Speaking of motherhood, former

LDS president David O. McKay taught, "Motherhood is the greatest potential influence either

for good or ill in human life" (Mckay, 1966). In contrast, feminist and best selling author

Elisabeth Badinter stated "The baby is the best ally of masculine domination" (as cited in

Bennett, 2012, para. 5). It appears that LDS doctrine and culture may help women have positive

feelings about motherhood. According to the National Family Health Survey (NFHS), LDS

mothers are more likely than non-LDS mothers to report that they wanted to get pregnant and

that the timing was good (Heaton et al., 2004).[14] While 53% of the mothers in the nation said

that the timing of their child's birth was the right time or that they would have preferred to have

children sooner, nearly two thirds (66%) of LDS mothers said the timing of their child's birth

was right or that they would have preferred to have children sooner (Heaton et al., 2004). LDS

mothers are also less likely to say their pregnancy was unwanted (Heaton et al., 2004).

Similarly, the National Survey of Family Growth shows that LDS women are more likely to

report positive feelings about their baby than the national average (Heaton et al., 2004). LDS

women rank higher in reporting "positive feelings about their pregnancy," "being happy to teach

and care for the child," "happy for the new experience," and "being happy to tell friends," and

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[14] Contrary to stereotype, LDS mothers are not less likely to use contraception, are slightly more likely to be employed at the time of the baby's birth, and have higher education attainment compared to national averages. "This statistic on birth control and employment are not consistent with folk notions that Mormon women are kept barefoot and pregnant against their own preferences" (Heaton et al., 2004, p. 83).

scored nearly a perfect score on "being happy to buy things for the baby" (Heaton et al., 2004, p. 83). This may be consequential because women's attitudes about their pregnancy and their baby are associated with child outcomes (Joyce, Kaestner, & Korenman, 2000). For example, unwanted pregnancies are associated with prenatal and postpardum maternal behaviors that have a negative affect on infant and child health (Joyce et al., 2000). Additionally, if "wanted" or "unwanted" attitudes continue, the degree to which children feel they are wanted by their parents is related positively to child self esteem and mental health and negatively to juvenile delinquency (Rosenberg & McCullough, 1979). The data indicating that more LDS children are born into homes where they are wanted is consistent with data that shows that, after controlling for age, gender, and socioeconomic status, LDS high school seniors are significantly less likely to steal, participate in violent behavior, and use drugs compared to high school seniors of the general population (Heaton et al., 2004). Additionally, the LDS emphasis on the importance of motherhood may also help explain why LDS women are more likely to breastfeed (67% versus 46.8%) compared to national averages (Heaton et al., 2004). This may be of consequence as breastfeeding is related to beneficial health outcomes for both the baby and the mother (U.S. Department of Health Services, 2010).

Further, viewing motherhood as sacred may also help LDS mothers receive more strength in coping with family challenges and give more affection. While many studies have demonstrated an inverse relationship between family size and family affection, one study showed that large LDS families did not follow this relationship (Wilkinson & Tanner III, 1980). The study was comprised of 223 adolescents and showed a small but significant positive correlation between family size, family activities, and family affection. The analysis showed that religiosity was a key correlational variable and it was suggested that the degree to which the mother felt her

work was important might be the primary variable in managing large families (Wilkinson &

Tanner III, 1980). Likewise, additional research indicates that parents who view their role as

"having divine character and significance" are more likely to report participating in nurturing

and other similar parental behaviors (Murray-Swank, Mahoney, & Pargament, 2006, p. 274).[15]

      Secure marriages. Second, as previously discussed, Latter-day Saints are more likely to

marry and less likely to divorce. LDS children may benefit from being more likely to have two

parents in their home. Research indicates that in general children who live with both of their

parents experience high levels of psychological, emotional, physical, educational, and economic

well-being (Notare & McCord, 2012).   According to Wilcox & Marquardt (2011), the trend

toward single parent families is the most consequential trend affecting children because "children

in such families have negative life outcomes at two to three times the rate of children in married,

two-parent families" (p. 87).

      Family time. Third, Latter-day Saints are continually taught to spend time together as a

family. Particularly, Latter-day Saints are encouraged to set aside Monday evenings as "Family

Home Evening"—where families gather to have a spiritual lesson, discuss family goals, share

individual talents, and recreate together (Hinckley, 2003). In addition to Monday nights,

Sundays are also meant to be a day to spend time with family. Latter-day Saints are also

encouraged to have daily scripture study, participate in wholesome recreation together, have

daily mealtime discussion, and build family traditions (Baadsgaard, 1998; Hales, 1999; "The

Family: A Proclamation to the World," 1995). These teachings are consistent with data showing

that Latter-day Saints place a greater importance on family centered recreational activities and

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[15] On the other hand, the cultural emphasis on motherhood may also have some negative consequences for LDS women. This will be discussed later in the paper.

sharing personal problems with family members compared to Catholics, Protestants, and those with no religious affiliation (Bahr, 1982). This could be consequential because a qualitative review of 32 publications have suggested that family rituals and routines (such as these) are associated with marital satisfaction, adolescents' sense of personal identity, academic achievement, children's health, and stronger family relationships (Fiese et al., 2002). Additionally, in two national studies, family outings and joint activities were associated with fewer problems in children and subsequently in young adults (Moore, 1993). This finding is consistent with data showing that after controlling for age, gender, and socioeconomic status, LDS adolescents are more likely to be in a gifted and talented program and less likely to repeat a grade (Heaton et al., 2004).[16] LDS youth are also more likely to get a college education (Heaton et al., 2004). Additionally, while having more siblings tends to have a negative impact on educational achievement, this impact is reduced for LDS youth (Heaton et al., 2004).

Family prayer and scripture study. Fourth, Latter-day Saints are encouraged to have morning and evening family prayer and have regular family scripture study. In the Book of Mormon it states, "Pray in your families unto the Father, always in my name, that your wives and your children may be blessed" (3rd Nephi 18:21, Book of Mormon). Church leader John Groberg (1982) stated:

> Think of the strength that will come to your family as, daily, one member or another
> pours out his or her soul in love to God for other family members…Of course, our
> prayers must be more than words…the efficacy of our prayers depends on how we care
> for one another. Family prayer is fully effective, then, only as we rise from our knees

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[16] Interestingly, LDS youth report somewhat lower grades in math and English (Heaton et al., 2004).

and, with increased love and understanding, take better care of each other. (para. 8)

Research suggests that family religious activities have the potential to facilitate family cohesion and marital satisfaction (Mahoney et al., 1999; Dudley & Kosinski, 1990). Routine family prayer may also provide a setting where children can exercise gratitude, express deep thoughts and feelings, or simply come together to laugh and build memories with other family members. Latter-day Saints are likely to receive these benefits as 91% of Latter-day Saints pray and read scriptures with children compared to 63% of the general population (Pew Research Center, 2009).

Genealogy. Fifth, LDS doctrine states that the "divine plan of happiness enables family relationships to be perpetuated beyond the grave," and Latter-day Saints are encouraged to learn about and uncover their family history ("The Family: Proclamation to the World," 1995, para. 3). Modern day apostle Russell M. Nelson (n.d.) stated, "When our hearts turn to our ancestors, something changes inside us. We feel part of something greater than ourselves" (para 1). Indeed, the LDS church owns the largest family history library in the world and has genealogical records with names for more than three billion deceased people (Newsroom, 2013c). According to the church's website, "Knowledge of our ancestors shapes us and instills us with values that give direction and meaning to our lives" ("Family History", n.d., para. 4). How could doing genealogy work possibly add to well-being? A study from Emory University found that children's and adolescent's knowledge of family history was significantly correlated with internal locus of control, higher self-esteem, better family functioning, greater family cohesiveness, lower levels of anxiety, and lower incidence of behavior problems. The correlation was so strong that researchers suggested that practicing clinicians could quickly determine a child's well-being and his or her chances of overcoming psychological and

educational challenges by measuring the child's knowledge of his or her family history (Duke, Lazarus, & Fivush, 2008). Pratt and Fiese (2004) argue that through knowing family history stories, children develop a sense of self as connected to previous generations. According to Fivush, Bohanek, & Duke (2005) "Children who know their family history, who have shared in these stories, develop a sense of self embedded in a larger familial and intergenerational context, and this sense of self provides strength and security" (p. 9). The LDS church has encouraged all members to research their family history, including youth and children (Bednar, 2011).

Record keeping for future generations. Sixth, in addition to knowing their family history, Latter-day Saints are also encouraged to preserve a record of their own history. Former president Kimball taught, "Everyone can and should keep a journal" and that journaling not only benefits posterity but the individual (Woodruff, 2011; "Family Home Evening Resource Book," 1997, para. 2; see also "Sunday School," 2013). The LDS family home evening manual states, "As we record our activities and feelings, we can more clearly see the Lord's influence in our lives" ("Family Home Evening Resource Book," 1997, para. 2). This practice could also contribute to well-being as research suggests that writing can increase well-being by promoting health, relationships, self regulation, positive emotion, flow, and learning (Rebele, 2010). For example, participants who wrote 15-30 minutes about deep thoughts or feelings for three to five days per week had reductions in doctor visits, autonomic improvements, behavioral improvements (school/work performance), reductions in negative affect and depression (Pennebaker, 1997). Although not all writing cultivates well-being (it can cause anxiety, negative affect, and OCD), well-being and writing specialist Reb Rebele (2010) stated that writing was the "Swiss army knife" of personal change because it had the potential to improve well-being, health, relationships, and learning.

Positive parenting. Lastly, LDS religiosity may be conducive to positive parenting. According to Baumrind (1971), there are four different parenting styles. Authorit*arian* parenting is characterized by telling your child exactly what to do, offering little warmth, and demanding strict obedience. In contrast, authorit*ative* parenting is characterized by providing rules and guidance, offering consistent warmth, and allowing the child to exercise autonomy. Permissive parenting is distinguished by letting the child do whatever he or she wants and rarely offering punishment. Lastly, neglective parenting is described as disregarding the child, offering little warmth, and giving too much autonomy. The type of parenting that is associated with the most positive outcomes for children is authoritative parenting. Research supports that authoritative parenting is related to children having greater positive emotion, more self-reliance, increased confidence, advanced socio-emotional skills, and more social responsibility as compared to children who are exposed to the other parenting styles (Maccoby & Martin, 1983; Baumrind, 1971). Further, authoritative parenting is also related to teenagers being mature, optimistic, self-reliant, achievement oriented, and less likely to use drugs (Baumrind, 1971; Steinberg, Lamborn, Darling, Mounts, & Dornbusch, 1994).

Some have suggested that LDS teachings and practices encourage the authoritative parenting style (Behling, 2010). Latter-day Saints view God as a loving authoritative father who loves his children and desires their happiness. To that end, he established rules and guidelines for them, yet he encourages them to exercise their free will. Latter-day Saints are encouraged to follow God's example. For example, one of the 12 current LDS apostles stated:

> Parents should work to create loving, eternal connections with their children. Reproof or correction will sometimes be required. But it must be done sensitively, persuasively, with an increase of love thereafter...[Also], parents need to give children choices and should

be prepared to appropriately adjust some rules, thus preparing children for real-world

situations...[however], it can be equally destructive when parents are too permissive and

overindulge their children...Parents need to set limits in accordance with the importance

of the matter involved and the child's disposition and maturity. Help children understand

the reasons for rules, and always follow through with appropriate discipline when rules

are broken. It is important as well to praise appropriate behavior. It will challenge all of

your creativity and patience to maintain this balance, but the rewards will be great.

(Ballard, 2006, p. 31)

In a recent study, Behling (2010) sought to examine if Mormon religiosity was indeed

correlated to authoritative parenting. As expected, Behling (2010) found that the more religious

behaviors LDS mothers demonstrated, the more likely they were to have an authorit*ative*

parenting style and the less likely they were to be authorit*arian*. Not expected, however, was the

finding that intense religious *belief* did not facilitate authoritative parenting. The author

explained, "It appears that mere belief in the foundations of a church that promotes these types of

parenting behaviors is not sufficient to produce them; rather, one must actively consume and

reflect upon such teachings through personal study and prayer" (Behling, 2010, p.112).

Specifically, higher private religious behavior (i.e. fasting, personal prayer, studying scriptures

and pondering about religion) and spiritual experiences were significantly related to "promoting

warm, autonomy-granting behaviors, and reducing harsh, coercive, or indulgent practices"

(Behling, 2010, p. 128). This finding revealed that religiosity within Mormonism differed from

religiosity within other conservative Christian religions. According to a meta-analysis including

48 studies, Christian conservatism (particularly within Protestantism) and literal beliefs about the

Bible were related to authoritarian parenting and approval of corporal parenting practices

(Murray-Swank et al., 2006). This difference is consistent with research that demonstrates that while Latter-day Saints believe the Bible to be the word of God, the majority of Latter-day Saints do not believe the Bible should be taken literally (Pew Research Center, 2009). Behling (2010) stated, "Leaders of the (LDS) Church…leave little room for ambiguity regarding the Church's support of warm but firm, autonomy-granting practices and its rejection of harsh or overindulgent parenting (Ballard; Holland, as cited in Behling 2010). Therefore, it makes sense that parents who spend more time consuming and reflecting upon such messages would be more inclined to engage in behaviors promoted by the Church and conversely, avoid practices discouraged by the Church" (p. 109).

Summary

There is considerable evidence that Latter-day Saints have a doctrinal and behavior emphasis on the family. This emphasis may contribute to well-being as marriage and family practices have considerable impact on one's life.

Purpose and Meaning

Perhaps part of the reason Latter-day Saints focus on the family is because LDS doctrine asserts that forming family relationships is essential to the purpose of life. According to Emmons (1999), one of the greatest ways religion can add to well-being is by giving people a sense of meaning and purpose. Many studies support that people who have more meaning in their lives have greater well-being, less psychopathology, and experience more benefits from spirituality (Steger, Oishi, & Kashdan, 2009). Meaning in life is defined as having comprehension of the world around you and investing in a self-concordant purpose (Steger et al., 2009). Latter-day Saints may receive these benefits as LDS doctrine answers questions such as: What is the purpose of life? Where did I come from? Where am I going? ("Purpose of life,"

2012). LDS doctrine also offers answers to life's toughest questions such as "Why does pain and sorrow occur?" and "Why do bad things happen to good people?" (Ballard, 1995). For some Latter-day Saints these answers give them peace, direction, and meaning. For example, in a study analyzing religiosity, coping, and psychological well-being among LDS Polynesians, researchers found that strong religious belief was both independently and directly associated with well-being and a desire to live a meaningful life (Allen & Heppner, 2011).

There are several reasons why LDS beliefs about the purpose of life may help them to have higher well-being.

Positive Orientation

First, the LDS explanation of the purpose of life may encourage LDS members to seek behaviors that foster positive emotions. Latter-day Saints are taught that God's plan for his children is to teach them how to be truly happy. Just as earthly parents generally seek to help their child flourish and attain everything they have and more, LDS scripture states that God's "work and glory is to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man"[17] (Moses 1:39: Pearl of Great Price; see also 2 Nephi 2:27, Book of Mormon) and to help his children have a fullness of joy ("God's Plan of Salvation," 2012). In the Book of Mormon, the word happy or happiness appears 39 times (David, 2007). The LDS prophet Joseph Smith taught, "Happiness is the object and design of our existence; and will be the end thereof, if we pursue the path that leads to it; and this path is virtue, uprightness, faithfulness, holiness, and keeping all the commandments of God" (as cited in De Hoyos, 2005, para. 13). In the LDS view, happiness is not pleasure, amusement, or hedonism, but similar to what Aristotle referred to as Eudemonia: peace,

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[17] Immortality refers to unending life. Eternal life refers to living the kind of life that God lives.

meaning, joy, and flourishing (Costa, 2002; Pawelski, 2012; Robinson, 1999). Latter-day Saints

are not taught that happiness is reserved only for the next life but that "Happiness is not only the

destination, it is also the path" (Uchtdorf, 2012, para. 61). LDS doctrine encourages Latter-day

Saints to seek out that which leads to greater well-being and to avoid that which diminishes it

(Faust, 1998; "Agency and accountability", 2012). Past President Spencer W. Kimball taught

that the cure for mental and physical sin was "Constructive activity so full of good works there is

no time nor thought for evil" (Kimball, as cited in Brown, 1987, para 12). Indeed, the

concluding tenet of the 13 tenets of LDS faith states "If there is anything virtuous, lovely, or of

good report or praiseworthy, we seek after these things" ("Articles of Faith", 2012, para. 3).

As such, LDS lessons and speeches are frequently focused on cultivating positive

emotions including optimism, joy, peace, love, kindness, creativity, and hope. Many of the

practices encouraged by the LDS church are similar to other religions and are empirically shown

to benefit well-being, including expressing gratitude, filling your heart with love and kindness

for others, savoring, meditating, and developing individual gifts and strengths. (To see examples

of LDS quotes and scriptures that support some of these principles see Appendix C, D, & E).

Perhaps more distinctive to LDS practices, Latter-day Saints follow fairly strict

guidelines about the type of media they consume. To help foster positive emotion and

enlightenment, LDS doctrine instructs its members to seek music, media, and entertainment that

edifies, inspires, or uplifts[18] ("For the Strength of Youth," 2012). Similarly, 79% of Latter-day

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[18] According to the BYU's animation director R. Brent Adams "Without being preachy about it...if we can add something to the culture that makes people think about being better human beings — more productive, more kind, more forgiving — that's what we want to do" (Mooallem, 2013, para. 8).

Saints say that avoiding rated R movies is an important part of their faith (Pew Research Center, 2012a). Apparently Latter-day Saints are also relatively good at cultivating positive media. The church owned Brigham Young University is a farm team for top animation studios in the country (Dreamworks, Pixar, etc.) and according to Time Magazine, "when Hollywood wants good clean fun…it goes to Mormon country" (Mooallem, 2013, p. 1). The slogan for the church-owned television station (BYUTV) is "See the good" and states that its mission is to "inspire people to see, do, and be the good in the world by providing uplifting content. . . and elevating ideals into action" (BYUTV, 2013, p. 1). Encouraging positive media may have significant consequences as media can have a powerful impact on well-being (Keener, 2012). While media has the potential to be a powerful generator of positive emotion and to teach character strengths, it can also foster negative emotion and encourage poor behavior (Keener, 2012). Although one's experience with media is often virtual, research suggests that the process of daydreaming stimulates the same parts of the brain which processes reality (Seligman, Railton, Baumeister, & Sripada, 2012). "So when we watch films that vividly stimulate future potential realities, it likely feels very natural to our brains" (Keener, 2012, p. 6). Because a media experience may have some similarities to real life experience, seeking positive media may help Latter-day Saints have more positive experiences and cultivate more positive emotion.

In addition to seeking positive media and entertainment, LDS doctrine encourages a positive orientation in language and in thoughts. Latter-day Saints are encouraged to use "clean and intelligent language" that "uplifts, encourages, and compliments" and to view all people as children of God with infinite divine worth ("For the Strength of Youth," 2012, para 1). LDS doctrine states that having a positive orientation will foster more truth and "light" which will help people reach their full potential. LDS scripture states, "That which is of God is light; and he

that receiveth light, and continueth in God, receiveth more light; and that light groweth brighter and brighter until the perfect day" (Doctrine and Covenants 50:24). The idea that "light" induces more "light" is similar to Dr. Barbara Fredrickson's (2006) "Broaden-and-Build" theory which states that positive emotions can induce more positive emotions in an upward spiral. The LDS orientation towards the positive may be consequential as research demonstrates that positive emotion can broaden awareness (Fredrickson & Branigan, 2005), build better memory for details (Talarico, Berntsen, & Rubin, 2009), increase creativity (Rowe, Hirsch, & Anderson, 2006), build resilience for challenges (Fredrickson, Tugade, Waugh, & Larkin, 2003), and reduce cardiovascular recovery time (Fredrickson, Mancuso, Branigan, & Tugade, 2000).

Positive to negative ratio. It is important to note that while positive emotion can increase well-being, having too much positivity may be detrimental (Seligman, 1998). Positive emotion encourages and empowers, but negative emotion can be helpful for improvement. According to Fredrickson and Losada (2005), language interactions should have a positivity/ negativity ratio of roughly three to one in order to cultivate flourishing (Fredrickson, 2013; Fredrickson, 2009; Fredrickson & Losada, 2005). They suggest that this balance of positivity to negativity is the ideal ratio for effective business teams and couple relationships (Fredrickson, 2009; Losada, 1999; Fredrickson & Losada, 2005). To examine the general balance of positivity and negativity of LDS speeches and discourses, the author of this paper put the entire text of the most recent April 2013 LDS international general conference (including over 8 hours with 27 speeches) into the text analysis software program Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count Analysis (LIWC). Developed by a sociologist from the University of Texas, the LIWC calculates the degree to which texts use positive and negative emotions (LIWC, n.d.). The author was surprised to find that the ratio for the eight hours of conference (not including music) was very

similar to the Losado ratio—with a final ratio of 3.19 (3.44/ 1.08) (see Appendix F). Although

this ratio demonstrates the positive to negative language ratio of an LDS General Conference, it

does not demonstrate the positive to negative ratio of Latter-day Saints themselves. It is helpful,

however, to understand how positive the LDS church is as an institution. While there is no

available research indicating the ratio of positive to negative emotion for Latter-day Saints as a

population, there is evidence that Latter-day Saints do experience a high amount of positive

emotion. As previously mentioned, religious Latter-day Saints score high in optimism, life

satisfaction, and mental health (Newport et al., 2012a; Pew Research Center, 2012a; Heaton et

al., 2004; Ellison, 1991; Gallup, 2012a; Gallup, 2012c). For example, Latter-day Saints scored

higher than any religious group in Gallup's mental health index which measures the respondent's

daily experiences of some emotions such as enjoyment, happiness, worry, sadness, anger, and

stress (Newport et al., 2012a; Gallup, 2008). These scores could be influenced by the LDS belief

that the purpose of life is to obtain a fullness of joy and that Mormon theology is centered on

reaching that goal.

Growth, Hard Work, and Character Development

While LDS doctrine states that the purpose of life is to have joy, the doctrine also

clarifies that a "fullness of joy" does not come without growing pains. In order to have deep joy,

"there must be opposition in all things" and through difficult "heart excavating" experiences, one

can have a larger capacity to feel greater joy in the long run (See 2 Nephi 2:21; Patterson, 2010).

Thus, according to LDS doctrine, the purpose of life is also to learn and grow. As such, the LDS

church has several programs meant to foster personal spiritual and character development. For

example, although the LDS church only makes up 2% of the American population, the LDS

church sponsors more than one-third of the American Boy Scouts units (Eckholm, 2012).

"Scouting fits in nicely with our spiritual goals," said David L. Beck, the general Young Men

President of the LDS church. "We want our young men to be upstanding citizens and good

husbands and fathers" (as cited in Echholm 2012, para. 4).[19] The church also has a similar

program for young women called "Personal Progress" ("Personal Progress," 2012). As another

example, the church sponsors a daily spiritual education program ("Seminary") for LDS youth.

The program is four years long and 375,000 students ages 14-18 are enrolled (Mormon

Newsroom, 2013). For many LDS youth, the program is before school and begins at 6:00 am

(Bushman, 2006). Some sociologists have hypothesized that this program is the reason that LDS

youth are on the top of social outcomes (Vasiey, as cited in Bushman, 2006, p. 47). Believing

that the purpose of life is spiritual growth may encourage parents to send their children to this

somewhat demanding program. The claim that LDS doctrine has a particular emphasis on

growth is supported by the data indicating that LDS parents are slightly more likely than non-

LDS parents to report that they value that their child "tries hard to succeed" (Heaton et al.,

2004).[20]

Meaning, Resilience, and Post Traumatic Growth

Believing that growth is a central purpose of life and that life on Earth is a small part of

an eternal journey may help Latter-day Saints be more resilient during difficult times. According

to Wilson and Murrel (2004), it is easier for people to weather enduring challenges when they

are aware of a larger mission. In one study examining coping and psychological adjustment in

LDS Polynesians, research demonstrated that most LDS Polynesians defined life trials (e.g., loss

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[19] To review the outcomes of the Boy Scout Program see "Scouting" (2007).
[20] Although LDS parents rate "tries hard to succeed" (as a desirable quality for their child) somewhat higher than the national average, they rate "good student" somewhat lower than the national average (Heaton et al, 2004, p. 85). Although both reflect an achievement orientation, the difference may be that "tries hard to succeed" may reflect a value on effort whereas "good student" may reflect a value on results and outcome.

of a loved one or a significant financial burden) as opportunities to learn and to prove their

resilience to God (Allen & Heppner, 2011). In another study including Latter-day Saints and

Catholics[21] after the earthquake in Haiti 2010, researchers hypothesized that spirituality helped

individuals transform a traumatic event "from a moment of destructiveness to a moment of

challenge and new perspective" (O'Grady, Rollison, Hanna, Schreiber-Pan, & Ruiz, 2012, p.

297). Additionally they suggested that peoples' psychological growth and spiritual

transformation was significantly related to their perceptions that God was involved in their lives

and that he cared about them individually (O'Grady et al., 2012). Because Latter-day Saints

view life as a small part of an eternal plan of happiness, secular problems and setbacks may seem

smaller with a broader perspective. Research supports that certain religious and spiritual beliefs

and practices (i.e., believing you have support from God) can contribute to resilience even after

the effects of social support and coping activities are controlled for (Gall; Krause, as cited in

Pargament et al., 2013). The hypothesis that LDS doctrine fosters resilience is conducive with

the finding that there are at least 11 empirical studies showing a positive relationship between

most types of spirituality and post traumatic growth (Shaw, Joseph, & Linley, 2005). There is

also research indicating that people in Utah score significantly lower in neuroticism (anger,

anxiety, depression, or vulnerability) than people in any other state (Rentfrow, Mellander, &

Florida, 2009; see Figure 8).

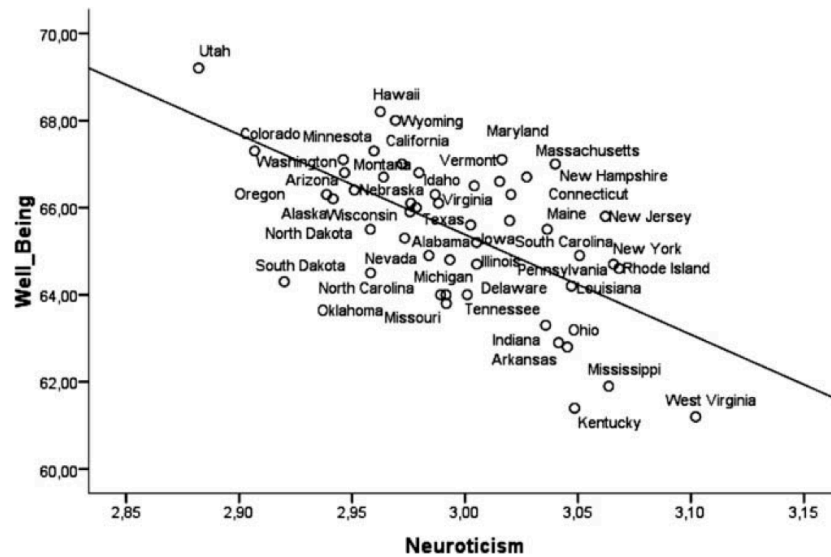[21] (K. O'Grady, personal communication, May 31, 2013)

Figure 8. Well-being and neuroticism by state. Taken from Rentfrow, Mellander, and Florida (2009).

Hope in death. One area where Latter-day Saints may demonstrate resilience is in the death of a loved one. Like many other religions, LDS doctrine states that when the physical body dies, the spirit of the deceased person continues to live (Mormon.org, 2012). Rather than seeing death as the end, some Latter-day Saints may view death as a step forward in God's plan. Indeed, according to the Pew Research Center, 98% of Latter-day Saints state that they are certain that there is life after death (Pew Research Center, 2012a). LDS doctrine also holds that everyone will be resurrected, where their body and spirit will be reunited again. As previously mentioned, Latter-day Saints also believe they can live with their families after death. Indeed, 95% of Latter-day Saints report they believe families can be bound together eternally in temple ceremonies (Pew Research Center, 2012a). Because death is seen as a temporary separation, Latter-day Saints may cope more positively with death than those who view death as a permanent ending. For example, when Nathan and Brenda Toone's two daughters died

tragically from someone improperly applying pesticides in their home, the family stated they found "strength to move forward" because of their LDS beliefs (Eyring, 2013, para. 9). A family member stated, "I know that I will be able to be with them again…and we can be a family forever" (Eyring, 2013, para. 10). In addition to offering peace about death, LDS doctrine states that all individuals will be resurrected with a perfected body. Latter-day Saints with illness and disability may feel comfort and hope believing that their ailments are temporary.

   Grit and self-efficacy. In general, religion may be particularly beneficial when people face a challenge they feel they cannot conquer on their own (Pargament, 1997). Research supports that spirituality can give people pathways and tools that are meant to help with human limitations (Pargament et al., 2013). For example, when faced with an insurmountable challenge, Latter-day Saints may gain a heightened sense of power and self-efficacy through their belief in the Book of Mormon (and biblical) teaching that in the strength of the Lord they can do all things (Alma 26:12, Book of Mormon; see also Philippians 4:13, New Testament) and in the promise that God will make their weaknesses strong as they turn to God for help (Ether 12:27, Book of Mormon). These views, that weaknesses are potential strengths and that the purpose of life is to grow, may also help Latter-day Saints have grit and achievement throughout their life. Empirical research supports that people who have a sacred vision of their lives are more invested in their goals (Emmons, Cheung, & Tehrani, 1998; Mahoney et al., 2005). Having a broader, spiritual perspective may increase meaning and intrinsic motivation which can lead to heightened goal fulfillment (Brown & Ryan, 2004).

Meaning at Work

   Lastly, the LDS explanation of the purpose of life may encourage Latter-day Saints to seek things that provide personal meaning. Latter-day Saints are encouraged to use their time for

things that are "eternally important" and focus on growing relationships and creating a masterpiece of their life. According to LDS Apostle Dieter F. Uchtdorf (2010), "As we turn to our Heavenly Father and seek His wisdom regarding the things that matter most, we learn over and over again the importance of four key relationships: with our God, with our families, with our fellowman, and with ourselves" (para. 25). Similarly, because Latter-day Saints view wealth as insignificant to eternal life, Latter-day Saints may be more likely to pursue jobs that provide deeper meaning than material wealth. This is consequential because research supports that meaning is more related to well-being than wealth (Peterson, 2006). According to Wrzesniewski (2003), there are several different ways people perceive their work. Some people work for the sake of money or pay while others see their work as something that contributes to a greater good. Because of the broad perspective LDS doctrine fosters, Latter-day Saints may be more likely to pursue jobs that provide them with deep personal meaning. According to the General Social Survey, Latter-day Saints are more likely than the general public to say that the most consequential job characteristic is one that is "important" and gives one a sense of accomplishment (as opposed to high income, chances of advancement, no danger of being fired, and short working hours) (Heaton et al., 2004, p. 38). Latter-day Saints are also slightly less likely to report that "being successful in a high paying career" is one of the most important things in life (Pew Research Center, 2012a, p. 51) and are more likely than the general public to report that they would continue to work if they were rich (Heaton et al., 2004). Similarly, in the Gallup study measuring well-being and religiosity, Latter-day Saints had the highest scores compared to other faiths in the "work environment" sub-index, which includes measuring job satisfaction (not wealth) and the ability to use ones strengths at work (Newport et al., 2012a). The doctrinal encouragement to pursue things that are "eternally important" may encourage

Latter-day Saints to use their time for things that provide personal meaning.

Summary

There is a substantial relationship between an individual having purpose and meaning in life and their well-being. LDS doctrine offers its members an explanation for the purpose of life. The explanation that life is a short term learning experience to help God's children develop lasting joy may help Latter-day Saints have positive emotion, character development, resilience, grit, and meaning. With an eternal, broader perspective, some Latter-day Saints may view life as not just being about increasing individual well-being but about fulfilling the measure of their creation, carrying out God's plan, and developing their strengths to reach their ultimate divine nature and potential.

Free Agency, Intrinsic Motivation, and Autonomy

LDS doctrine holds that part of the purpose of life is to "exercise agency and learn to choose between good and evil" ("Purpose of life, 2012, para. 3). Thus, another contributor to Latter-day Saints' well-being may be their emphasis on agency, autonomy, and free-will. According to the Self Determination Theory (STD), the motivation that drives behavior has a significant impact on well-being (Brown & Ryan, 2004). A person's motivation can range from being completely extrinsic and non-autonomous to completely intrinsic and autonomous (Brown & Ryan, 2004). Behavior that is more autonomous and intrinsic results in more positive outcomes (Brown & Ryan, 2004). According to an international study analyzing happiness, the most influential factor of a nation's happiness was freedom of choice and autonomy (Inglehart, Foa, Peterson, & Welzel, 2007). Indeed, research shows that religion that is "internalized, intrinsically motivated, and based on a secure relationship with God" has a positive relationship with well-being, whereas religion that is "imposed, unexamined, and reflective of a tenuous

relationship with God and the world" has a negative relationship with well-being (Pargament, 2002, p. 1; Dezutter, Soenens, & Hutsebaut, 2005). As described more fully below, the LDS church teaches that free-will (or agency) is an essential element for growth.

Pre-mortal Council and Free will

LDS doctrine states that compulsion and control is not God's way. To best understand this concept, it is helpful to understand the LDS view of the "Pre-Earth life." According to LDS doctrine, before God's children came to Earth, they existed as spirits and lived in the presence of God. During that time, God presented his plan to them whereby they would obtain a physical body and could become like him. In this "Pre-mortal Council," God set forth his plan for all his children to come to Earth. While he would provide his children with messengers and guidance to lead them in the right way, he also told them "that out of love he would not shield them from the perils of freedom, from the right and responsibility to choose" (Hanks, 1983, para. 10; see also 2 Nephi 2:26). In that council, Lucifer (Satan), in rebellion, presented an opposing plan in which he would impose a "forced salvation, for imposed survival, for an agency-less round trip to the earth and back again" (Hanks, 1983, para. 10). Lucifer failed to understand that, although no one would make mistakes, "none would be any wiser, either, or any stronger or more compassionate or humble or grateful or more creative, under his plan" (Hanks, 1983, para. 10). In the pre-Earth council, a majority of God's children voted in favor of God's plan. In effect, they decided that the price of freedom and growth was worth the risk of failing and enduring the heartache, pain, and disappointment of life (Hanks, 1983). LDS doctrine states that Satan's ongoing goal is to diminish free will and stop God's children from progressing. Agency (or the ability to choose) is thus one of God's greatest gifts because it allows His children to grow. The importance of personal freedom, autonomy, and choice is therefore essential to LDS doctrine.

An LDS apostle stated:

> Latter-day Saints are not obedient because they are compelled to be obedient. They are
>
> obedient because they know certain spiritual truths and have decided, as an expression of
>
> their own individual agency, to obey the commandments of God. Those who talk of
>
> blind obedience…do not understand the doctrines of the gospel. (Packer, 1983, para. 6-8)

Internal and Intrinsic Motivation

There are several ways this emphasis on free-will is demonstrated throughout

Mormonism. First, unlike some Christian faiths who baptize at infancy, Latter-day Saints are not

allowed to be baptized until the age of eight—which is considered the age of accountability,

when children are able to choose for themselves and distinguish between right and wrong ("True

to the Faith," 2004, p. 22). Second, some efforts are made so that people do not feel obligated or

coerced into practices of the LDS faith. For example, instead of passing a collection plate in the

public's view, tithing is paid in private. As another example, when someone is asked to accept a

leadership role in the church, it is done confidentially. Third, there is a strong emphasis for each

individual to develop an internalized, personal testimony of the LDS doctrine before he or she

becomes a member of the church. LDS theology states that each of God's children is entitled to

personal revelation from God to receive knowledge of what is true for themselves ("True to the

faith," 2004, p. 140-144). An LDS apostle has stated, "Individual testimonies are the foundation

and strength of the Church" (Hales, 1994). When LDS missionaries preach the gospel, they

frequently advise their listeners not to take their word that the LDS church is true, but that they

should study, pray, and ask God for themselves if their message is true ("Preach My Gospel,"

2004, p. 39). Indeed the Book of Mormon invites each person to conduct an experiment in their

own lives, to test the efficacy of the Gospel for themselves:

27) But behold, if ye will awake and arouse your faculties, even to an experiment upon my words, and exercise a particle of faith, yea, even if ye can no more than desire to believe, let this desire work in you, even until ye believe in a manner that ye can give place for a portion of my words.

28) Now, we will compare the word unto a seed. Now, if ye give place, that a seed may be planted in your heart behold, if it be a true seed, or a good seed, if ye do not cast it out by your unbelief, that ye will resist the Spirit of the Lord, behold, it will begin to swell within your breasts; and when you feel these swelling motions, ye will begin to say within yourselves—It must needs be that this is a good seed, or that the word is good, for it beginneth to enlarge my soul; yea, it beginneth to enlighten my understanding, yea, it beginneth to be delicious to me.

29) Now behold, would not this increase your faith? I say unto you, Yea; nevertheless it hath not grown up to a perfect knowledge.

30) But behold, as the seed swelleth, and sprouteth, and beginneth to grow, then you must needs say that the seed is good; for behold it swelleth, and sprouteth, and beginneth to grow. And now, behold, will not this strengthen your faith? Yea, it will strengthen your faith: for ye will say I know that this is a good seed; for behold it sprouteth and beginneth to grow.

31)And now, behold, are ye sure that this is a good seed? I say unto you, Yea; for every seed bringeth forth unto its own likeness.

32) Therefore, if a seed groweth it is good, but if it groweth not, behold it is not good, therefore it is cast away.

33)And now, behold, because ye have tried the experiment, and planted the seed, and it

swelleth and sprouteth, and beginneth to grow, ye must needs know that the seed is good.

(Alma 32: 27-33, Book of Mormon)

Likewise, to know if the Book of Mormon is the word of God, people are fervently

encouraged to gain a personal testimony for themselves. The introduction of the Book of

Mormon states, "We invite all men everywhere to read the Book of Mormon, to ponder in their

hearts the message it contains, and then to ask God, the Eternal Father, in the name of Christ if

the book is true" ("Book of Mormon Introduction", n.d.). It is thus expected that before an

individual joins the LDS Church he or she will have a personal testimony of the truth of the

doctrines and be personally committed to live the commandments (Anderson, 1976).

Authoritative Parenting

In addition to being intrinsically motivated to follow LDS doctrine, LDS parents are

encouraged not to force their beliefs on their children. One of the current LDS apostles stated:

When our teenagers begin testing family values, parents need to go to the Lord for

guidance on the specific needs of each family member. This is the time for added love

and support and to reinforce your teachings on how to make choices. It is frightening to

allow our children to learn from the mistakes they may make, but their willingness to

choose the Lord's way and family values is greater when the choice comes from within

than when we attempt to force those values upon them. The Lord's way of love and

acceptance is better than Satan's way of force and coercion, especially in rearing
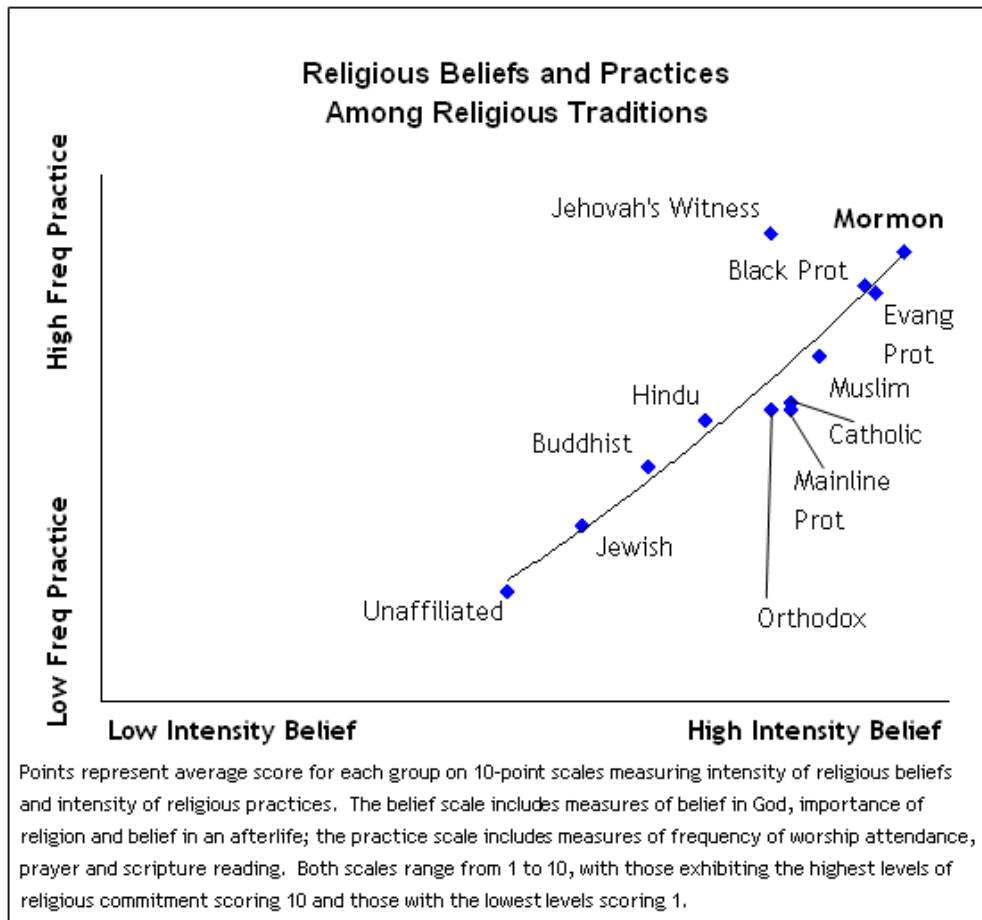
teenagers. (Hales, 1999, para. 49)

As such, there is a noteworthy emphasis on free will, autonomy, and intrinsic motivation

within the LDS church. This may well have two well-being benefits. First, as previously

mentioned, this focus may encourage parents to have a more authoritative parenting style which is linked to many well-being outcomes for children. Second, religiosity that is internalized and intrinsically motivated (versus extrinsically) is positively related to well-being outcomes such as sociability, sense of well-being, tolerance, and intellectual efficiency (Pargament, 2002; Bergin, Masters, & Richards, 1987; Donahue, 1985). Similarly, people who choose and personally value their religion have less anxiety, depression, and social dysfunction than people who involve themselves in religion because of fear, guilt, or external pressure (Ryan, Rigby, & Kind, 1993). The hypothesis that LDS youth receive these benefits is supported by research indicating LDS youth are the most engaged in practicing their faith and "When belief and social outcomes are measured, Mormon kids tend to be on top" (National Study of Youth and Religion, as cited in Bushman, 2006, p. 47).

Religious Commitment

The claim that Mormonism fosters autonomy and intrinsic motivation is supported by the fact that Latter-day Saints have a strong commitment to their religion and a high degree of personal certainty in their beliefs. According to the Pew Research Center (2009; 2012), Latter-day Saints have the highest religious commitment (as measured by high frequency of practice and high intensity of belief) of any religious group (See Figure 9; See also Putnam & Cambell, 2012, p. 23-24). For example, 76% of Latter-day Saints read scripture outside of religious services at least once a week which is more than double the general population (35%) (Pew Research Center, 2009). Additionally, according to a study analyzing religious knowledge in the United States, Latter-day Saints know more about the Bible and Christianity than any religious group (Pew Research Center, 2010). More than four out of five (83%) Latter-day Saints pray at least once a day and almost (64%) say they pray multiple times a day. Eighty

three percent of Latter-day Saints report that religion is very important in their lives, compared

with 56% of the general population (Pew Research Center, 2009). In addition to frequency of

practice, Latter-day Saints also have more certainty about their beliefs compared to other

religious groups. For example, Latter-day Saints are unanimous (100%) in saying they believe

in God which is higher than any other religious group and 90% report they are "absolutely

certain" in this belief which is considerably higher than the general population (Pew Research

Center, 2009). Almost all (98%) Latter-day Saints say they believe in life after death and 88%

report they are absolutely certain of this belief (Pew Research Center, 2009). Additionally, 96%

believe that miracles still occur today as in ancient times and 80% report they are completely (as

opposed to mostly) sure of this. In comparison, members of evangelical Protestant churches are

also highly likely to believe in life after death (86%), but with somewhat less absolute certainty

(71%). They also believe in miracles (88%), but are considerably less likely (61%) to be

completely sure miracles exist today (Pew Research Center, 2009).

Religious Beliefs and Practices Among Religious Traditions

Points represent average score for each group on 10-point scales measuring intensity of religious beliefs and intensity of religious practices. The belief scale includes measures of belief in God, importance of religion and belief in an afterlife; the practice scale includes measures of frequency of worship attendance, prayer and scripture reading. Both scales range from 1 to 10, with those exhibiting the highest levels of religious commitment scoring 10 and those with the lowest levels scoring 1.

Figure 9. Comparing Beliefs and Practices of Major Religious Traditions. Taken from "A Portrait of the Mormons in the U.S." by Pew Research Center (2009).

Well-being benefits. The high levels of intense belief and practice could be representative of Latter-day Saints having a deep personal conviction of church doctrine. The claim that LDS children are encouraged to develop a personal conviction for themselves is supported by the finding that Latter-day Saints born into Mormonism are least likely to change or lapse from the religious tradition they were raised in compared to other American faiths (Putnam & Campbell, 2012, p. 138). Having a personal conviction may lead to well-being outcomes because internalized and intrinsically motivated religiosity is related to sociability,

sense of well-being, tolerance, and intellectual efficiency (Pargament, 2002; Bergin et al., 1987; Donahue, 1985). This may also contribute to health benefits, as strong spiritual belief is associated with better health for those with chronic health conditions (Campbell, Yoon, & Johnstone, 2010) and spiritual doubt is related to reduced satisfaction with health (Krause & Wulff, 2004). Similarly, religious individuals who are more certain of their beliefs evaluate their well-being higher (Ellison, 1991; Galen & Kloet, 2011) and religious individuals who are less certain of their beliefs are more likely to have anxiety and depression (Kezdy, Martos, Boland, & Horvath-Szabo, 2011). The doctrinal focus on the importance of receiving a personal testimony and having autonomy in religious participation also may explain why LDS commitment is so high. This may also help lead to well-being outcomes as "the efficacy and benefit of religion largely depends on how well the religion is integrated into the individual's life" (Pargament, 2002, p. 1). The more that people integrate their religion into their lives and "apply means that are appropriate to their religious ends" (Pargament, 2002, p. 178), the more likely they are to experience well-being benefits from their religious belief.

        Internal locus of control. Lastly, the LDS doctrinal focus on agency may help Latter-day Saints feel that they have control over their destinies. One of the key tenets of positive psychology is that people must feel their well-being is within their voluntary control. According to Seligman (2012), one of the reasons depression has become more prevalent in our society is because people view themselves as victims and feel helpless to change. LDS scripture states:

        Wherefore, men are free according to the flesh; and all things are given them which are

        expedient unto man. And they are free to choose liberty and eternal life, through the great

        Mediator of all men, or to choose captivity and death, according to the captivity and

        power of the devil; for he seeketh that all men might be miserable like unto himself. (2

Nephi 2:27, Book of Mormon)

Thus, according to Koltko (1991), "Mormons are comfortable with the notion that they must DO something to make progress and see change" (p. 10). This emphasis is supported in a national survey where Latter-day Saints were more likely than their non-LDS peers to say that people get ahead by hard work (78% vs. 65%) and less likely to say that people get ahead by luck or help (5.6% vs. 12%) (Heaton et al., 2004, p. 38). Feeling in control of their destinies and understanding that others have agency may also help Latter-day Saints feel empowered and have resilience during adversity. For example, when Latter-day Saint Robert Parker's daughter died in the tragic 2012 Newtown, Connecticut Elementary School shootings he stated that he was not angry at God because he knew that the shooter had his free agency and that God could not take that away from him. He also stated that he was going to use his free agency to not let the event define him and stated that the event should be "something that inspires us to be better, to be more compassionate and more humble people" (Carter, 2012, para. 5; see also Parker, 2012).

Latter-day Saints' focus on free-agency may foster internal and intrinsic motivation, authoritative parenting, religious commitment, and an internal locus of control. This may help Latter-day Saints receive more benefits from their religiosity and feel empowered over their lives.

Physical Well-being

LDS doctrine states that one way Satan tries to diminish free agency and well-being is through getting people to misuse and abuse God's sacred gift of the body (Tanner, 2005). According to Shusterman (2006), the body and mind are so inseparably connected that it is misleading to speak of them as different entities. The body is important to how we think, feel, and behave (somatopsychic principle) (Shusterman, 2006). For example, physical activity can

increase well-being by preventing mental disorders, treating mental illness, increasing quality of

life for people with psychological problems, and improving the psychological well-being of the

general public (Mutrie & Faulkner, 2004). Physical activity can also increase positive affect,

reduce stress, decrease anxiety, increase self-esteem, aid with sleep, and improve cognitive

functioning. The body is the essential instrument for human performance, perception, action, and

thought (Shusterman, 2006). It is the center of how the world is experienced. Bodies determine

what expectations people have for themselves and for others and what people aspire to become

(Shusterman, 2006).

Similarly, LDS doctrine asserts that the body is sacred and is largely connected to how

people think and feel. Latter-day Saints are taught that physical, emotional, and spiritual health

are inseparable and they are encouraged to follow a code of health (referred to as the "Word of

Wisdom") revealed by God (Doctrine and Covenants 89). One church authority said, "Our

physical body is the instrument of our spirit. In that marvelous revelation the Word of Wisdom,

we are told how to keep our bodies free from impurities which might dull, even destroy, those

delicate physical senses which have to do with spiritual communication" (Packer, 1989, para.

6). According to LDS doctrine, adherence to the Word of Wisdom not only leads to enhanced

health, it helps one maintain a clearness of thought, receive spiritual enlightenment, and avoid

addictive substances that diminish good judgment and self-control (Hales, 2009). Similar to

somaesthetics, Latter-day Saints are encouraged to follow the health guidelines not just for

physical well-being, but for emotional and spiritual well-being (Hales, 2009).

There is substantial evidence that Latter-day Saints enjoy better physical health than the

general population. The adult LDS population has less coronary artery disease (McClure et al.,

2007; Enstrom, 1989), a lower risk for most cancers[22] (Enstrom, 1989; Lyon, Gardner, & Gress, 1994; Merrill & Lyon, 2005; Merrill & Folsom, 2005), less multiple sclerosis disease (Hawkes, Ramkumar, & Lyon, 2007), and experience greater longevity (Enstrom & Breslow, 2008; Merrill, 2004) compared to national averages. One study examining the life expectancy of Latter-day Saints and non-members in Utah found that LDS males were expected to live 7.3 years longer than non-member males and that LDS females were expected to live 5.8 years longer than non-member females (Merrill, 2004). Tobacco use only partially explained the differences (approximately 1.2 years). Merrill (2004) hypothesized that higher life expectancy may also be due to social support, lifestyle behaviors, and religious activity. Another study showed that active LDS members in California who attended church weekly, refrained from smoking, obtained an education (at least 12 years), and were married, lived substantially longer (9.8 years for males and 5.6 years for females) than similar Caucasian non-LDS populations in the United States (Enstrom & Breslow, 2008). Additionally, more Latter-day Saints report their health as excellent compared to the general public (National Survey of Family Households & General Social Survey, as cited in Heaton et al., 2004) and LDS members along with Jehovah's Witnesses show higher self-reported health ratings than those in other religions (Scheitle & Adamczyk, 2010).

Avoiding substances. There are at least seven possible reasons why Latter-day Saints enjoy greater physical health.[23] First, active Latter-day Saints follow the "Word of Wisdom", a code of health they believe is divinely inspired (Heaton et al., 2004). Latter-day Saints are

[22] While LDS typically have lower risk for most cancers, LDS men in Utah have higher than average prostate cancer rates. Researchers attributed this finding, at least in part, to more aggressive screening rates (Merrill et al., 2003).

[23] Five of these possible reasons are borrowed from Heaton et al. (2004).

commanded to avoid tobacco, alcohol, illegal drugs, or other addictive substances such as tea

and coffee. According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (2012), alcohol plays a

role in about 100,000 deaths each year and is responsible for an estimated 2,618,065 years of

potential life lost. While some research indicates that there are health benefits to having

moderate levels of red wine, some research shows that the same heart benefits are available in

red and purple grape juices (Mayo Clinic, 2012). Also, smoking is considered the primary causal

factor for at least 30% of all cancer deaths and for nearly 80% of deaths from chronic obstructive

pulmonary disease and early cardiovascular disease. This practice has resulted in at least

443,000 premature deaths and approximately 5.1 million years of lost life (Disease Control and

Prevention, 2008). The evidence regarding whether coffee is harmful is mixed. While some

research suggests that coffee is linked to a lower risk of cancer, lower risk of diabetes, decreased

depression, delayed onset of Alzheimer's disease, and longevity, other research suggests that it is

associated with sleep deprivation, depleting neurotransmitters, increased risk for heart disease,

depression, cancer, dementia, osteoporosis, stillbirths, and liver damage (Fitzgerald & Hyman,

2012). Following the Word of Wisdom, Latter-day Saints are much less likely to use all of these

substances (Heaton et al., 2004). After controlling for education, gender, and religious activity,

LDS adolescents and adults are considerably less likely to drink alcohol, smoke cigarettes, or use

marijuana (Heaton et al., 2004). This could help explain why LDS women are more than half as

likely than the general population to have a newborn baby fall below the desirable weight (3.7%

vs. 7.8%) (Heaton et al., 2004). While almost three-fourths of Americans consume alcohol,

almost three fourths of Latter-day Saints completely abstain. Additionally, LDS youth are

significantly less likely to participate in binge drinking and smoking, behaviors which are related

to severe health consequences (Heaton et al., 2004).

Encouraging healthy behaviors. Second, in addition to encouraging Latter-day Saints to stay away from certain substances, the "Word of Wisdom" also prescribes healthy behaviors such as eating fruits and vegetables, eating meat sparingly, and eating a moderate diet "with prudence and thanksgiving" (Doctrine and Covenants 89:11; Heaton et al., 2004). Since 1833, when the revelation was received, church leaders have also encouraged additional healthy behaviors such as regular exercise, getting adequate sleep, and avoiding extreme dieting ("For the Strength of Youth", 2012). Correspondingly, national polls indicate that LDS adolescents are more likely to eat breakfast, eat fruits and vegetables, and exercise regularly (Heaton et al., 2004). Further, in Gallup's national well-being survey, Latter-day Saints scored higher in healthy behaviors than any other religious group (Newport et al., 2012a). On the other hand, one study revealed that Latter-day Saints in Utah are slightly more likely to be at risk for being over weight compared to other Utahns (Mason, Xu, & Bartkowski, 2012). Both LDS and non-LDS Utahns score relatively well compared to national averages but the discrepancy between these two groups will be discussed later in the paper (Merrill & Hillam, 2006).

Marriage. Third, as previously described, Latter-day Saints are more likely to marry than the general population, and married individuals tend to be healthier than single people (Heaton et al., 2004; Diener & Suh, 2000; Seligman 2002; Waite & Gallagher, 2000; Brockmann, & Klein, 2004; Sbarra et al., 2011). As previously mentioned, there is increasing evidence that health in marriage is not completely explained by selection (i.e. that healthier people tend to marry), but that marriage itself promotes healthy behaviors such as eating a better diet, taking fewer risks, and sharing one's feelings (Horn et al., 2013; Waite and Gallagher, 2000; VanDenberghe, 2000). More than two thirds of LDS adults are currently married compared to 60% of adults nationally, and LDS youth are more likely than non-LDS youth to plan on getting married (Heaton et al.,

2004). LDS youth are also less likely to engage in adolescent sex and sex before marriage

(National Survey for Growth, AddHealth, as cited in Heaton et al., 2004) and thus have reduced

risk of sexually transmitted diseases (Maher, 2006). Some research indicates that high religiosity

is related to teen pregnancy because people who are very religious are less likely to use

contraceptives (Strayhorn & Strayhorn, 2009). While very religious Christians (Latter-day

Saints, Catholics, and Protestants) have similar disapproval of premarital sex, Latter-day Saints

are less likely than members of other faiths to actually engage in premarital sex (Carroll, Linford,

Holman, & Busby, 2000).

     Education. Fourth, Latter-day Saints may experience better health because of the

church's emphasis on education (Heaton et al., 2004). Latter-day Saints are actively encouraged

to "get all of the education that you possibly can," both secular and spiritual (Hinckley, 2007,

para. 6). Former president Gordon B. Hinckley (2007) stated, "You have a mandate from the

Lord to educate your minds and your hearts and your hands...The Lord wants you to train your

minds and hands to become an influence for good as you go forward with your lives" (para. 7;

see also Doctrine and Covenats 88:78-80). As previously mentioned, LDS doctrine states that

the purpose of life is to learn and grow, and that, unlike wealth and possessions, education and

personal development will be retained in the after-life. LDS scripture reads "Whatever principle

of intelligence we attain unto this life, it will rise with us in the resurrection" (Doctrine and

Covenants 130:18). LDS doctrine also teaches that people can enjoy "eternal progression:" that

is, one will continue to learn and progress throughout eternity. As expected, Latter-day Saints,

both male and female, have somewhat higher education levels compared to the national average

(Cragun & Philips; 2008, Heaton et al., 2004; Pew Research Center, 2009). Indeed, while some

data supports that education has a negative relationship with religiosity (i.e. the more educated

the less religious) (Shermer, 1999; Zuckerman, 2009), for Latter-day Saints, the relationship

appears to be reversed (i.e. the more education, the more religious and education does not have a

secularization effect) (Pew Research Center, 2012, Merrill, Lyon, & Jensen, 2003; Heaton et al.,
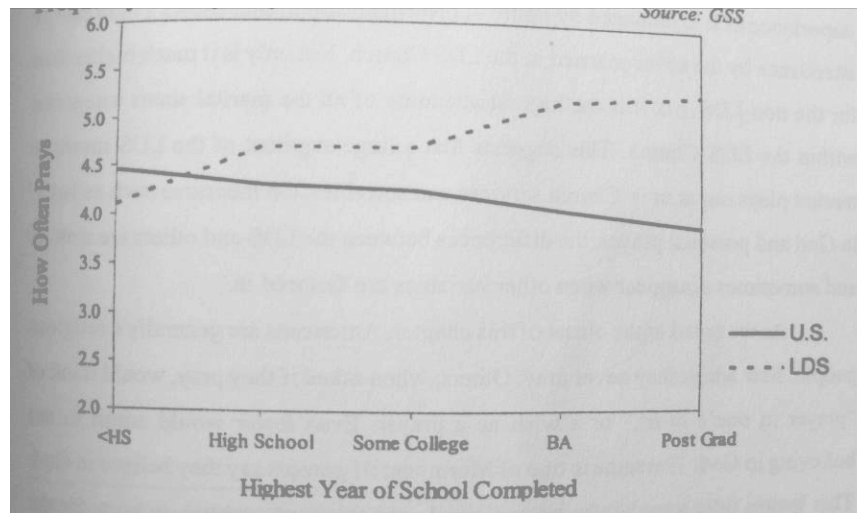
2004; Albrecht, 1998; see Figure 10 & 11).

Figure 10. Frequency of prayer by education according to the General Social Survey.
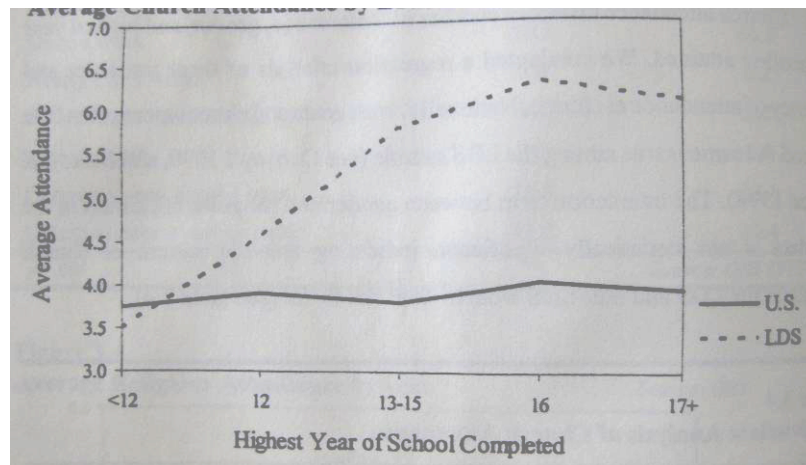
Taken from Heaton et al. (2004).

Figure 11. Average church attendance by education according to the General Social

Survey. Taken from Heaton et al. (2004).

Higher education may help explain some health differences in Latter-day Saints. According to Ratzan, Filerman, and LeSar (2000), a population's education level has a profound influence on health. Education influences health directly and indirectly. As the education of a community increases, there is greater access to health care (Shaw, Dorling, & Smith, 1999; Wang, Jamison, Bos, Preker, & Peabody, 1999). As education increases, people are more likely to know (and enact) healthy behaviors to keep themselves well (primary prevention), detect early signs of illness (secondary prevention) and seek the best care if they get sick (tertiary prevention) (Ratzan, Filerman, & LeSar, 2000).

Community support. Fifth, Latter-day Saints may enjoy enhanced physical health because of community support (Heaton et al., 2004). There is substantial evidence that community support impacts health (Debnam, Holt, Clark, Roth, & Southward, 2012; Ratzan et al., 2000; Cohen, de Moor, Devine, Baum, & Amato, 2001). As previously mentioned, Latter-day Saints are highly involved in their religious community. Within an LDS community, it is common practice to support an ill member by offering meals, babysitting their children, and offering special prayers or blessings (Heaton et al., 2004). Additionally, Latter-day Saints are also encouraged to be involved in the community and to be good friends and neighbors (Hinckley, 2001).

Fasting. Sixth, Latter-day Saints may experience lower cardiovascular disease because of the practice of fasting. As was mentioned, many Latter-day Saints participate in a monthly fast in which they give up two consecutive meals (refraining from food and drink) and then donate to the poor the money that would have been used to purchase those meals. In the recent Intermountain Heart Collaborative Study, researchers sought to find out why Latter-day Saints had lower rates of heart disease compared to the general public (Horne et al., 2008). After

controlling for other healthy behaviors such as not smoking and other traditional risk factors, researchers found that routine periodic fasting was associated with lower risk of cardiovascular disease (64% vs 76% CAD; OR 0.55, 95% confidence interval 0.35 to 0.87, $p = 0.010$) (Horne et al., 2008). Fasting was not just an indicator of other healthy lifestyles but actually worked to reduce the risk of heart disease (KSL, 2011). Researchers found that fasting was also associated with less diabetes ($p = 0.048$) (Horne et al., 2008). According to lead researcher Dr. Horne, "Fasting causes hunger or stress. In response, the body releases more cholesterol, allowing it to utilize fat as a source of fuel, instead of glucose. This decreases the number of fat cells in the body…the fewer fat cells a person has, the less likely they are to have elevated cholesterol, insulin resistance or diabetes" (KSL, 2011, para. 4). The researchers discovered that skipping at least two meals on a regular basis led to a substantial increase of human growth hormone (HGH) which regulates glucose and insulin in the body (Horne et al., 2008; KSL, 2011). The researchers concluded that it was not only a proscription of tobacco, but also routine periodic fasting that most likely explained Latter-day Saints lower risk of cardiovascular disease.

Positivity. Finally, in addition to the six possibilities listed above, there are many other LDS teachings and practices that may contribute to physical health. Although not tested within LDS samples, certain aspects of religiosity that are associated with better health are consistent with LDS practices and teachings. For example, when people believe their lives are internally controlled (by their own will, actions or choosing to follow God's will) they have better health than those who feel their lives are externally controlled with fate or luck (Masters, Hill, Kircher, Benson, & Fallon, 2004; Masters & Knestel, 2011). Similarly, LDS doctrine states that people are free to choose the outcomes of their lives (2 Nephi 2:27, Book of Mormon) and rejects the notion of predestination. As another example, religious belief in a loving, higher power, and a

positive worldview is associated with better health (Campbell et al., 2010). LDS doctrine states that God is a loving Heavenly Father who wants all of his children to return to him and have a fullness of joy (2 Nephi 2:27). LDS doctrine also declares that the world is God's beautiful creation (Reese, 2013).[24] It is hypothesized that having positive thoughts such as these is related to physiological responses to stress, which can in turn help fight disease (Ray, 2004). This hypothesis is supported with data that shows that Utah (where Mormons are the majority) is one of the most optimistic states in the nation (Gallup, 2012a) and that Provo, Utah, the most densely LDS-populated city in the US, is the most optimistic city in the nation (Gallup, 2012c).

In sum, the LDS teachings and practices pertaining to the "word of wisdom", marriage, community support, education, periodic fasting, and positive religious thoughts may contribute to Latter Day Saints' health. LDS doctrine states that the body is a temple and that people have a sacred obligation to take care of their physical health ("For the Strength of Youth," 2012).

Summary of LDS Well-being Principles and Practices

There are several reasons why Mormonism may contribute to high levels of well-being. Here five major topics have been discussed: Pro-social behavior, focus on the family, meaning and purpose, autonomy and agency, and caring for the body. Although there are several theoretical elements of Mormonism that are conducive to well-being, very religious Latter-day Saints are not likely to receive all of these benefits at one time. Some Latter-day Saints may be more committed to and more knowledgeable about some principles than others. Additionally, a high conversion rate means that Mormonism constantly has rookies who are new at attempting to live some of these principles. In general, however, it appears that Mormons have high well-

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[24] Latter-day Saints also reject the notion of "original sin" and believe all human beings are born with the light of Christ.

being and that this high well-being may be due to some correlation between LDS teachings and practices and well-being behavior.

Where Latter-day Saints Are Lacking

While Mormonism may encourage certain behaviors that foster well-being, there is also data that indicates areas of well-being where Latter-day Saints could improve. As previously mentioned, all religions and religious cultures have their advantages and disadvantages. According to Koltko (1991) "religion can be a help or a hazard and each of the facets of Mormonism can strengthen Mormons and leave them at risk simultaneously" (p. 22; see Koltko, 1991 for a review). There are a few areas where research indicates that Latter-day Saints do not do as well compared to those not affiliated with their faith. Here three topics will be discussed: obesity, sexual conflict, and depression.

Obesity

Although LDS members generally have better health than non-Latter-day Saints, research indicates that Latter-day Saints in Utah have a greater risk for obesity than non-LDS Utahns. Interestingly, Utah does not have high obesity levels, but Latter-day Saints in Utah have significantly higher levels of Body Mass Index (BMI) and weigh more (about 4.6 pounds) than Utahns who are not LDS (Merrill & Hillam, 2006; Mason et al., 2012). This is consistent with data that shows that LDS men in Utah are more likely to have prostate cancer (Merrill, Hilton, Wiggins, & Sturgeon, 2003) and prostate cancer is associated with being overweight (Rundle, Jankowski, Kryvenko, Tang, & Rybicki, 2013). There are generally two main factors that contribute to weight gain or weight loss: diet and frequency of exercise. According to Merrill & Thygerson (2001), Utah has the highest percentage of physically active adults in the United States. In Utah, those who attend church weekly are more likely to exercise regularly than those

who do not attend church regularly (Merrill & Thygerson, 2001). Thus, it is probable that

Latter-day Saints' increased BMI is most likely attributed to diet.

There are a few reasons why the LDS diet may be less healthy. First, since they abstain

from alcohol, tobacco, coffee and tea, Latter-day Saints may be more likely to participate in

"compensatory consumption habits" and turn to food to relax and alter mood (i.e. emotionally

eat) (Mason et al., 2012, p. 1). Latter-day Saints may also be more likely to eat sweets because

sweets are one of the few culturally accepted vices. For example, instead of going out for coffee,

Latter-day Saints may meet up for ice cream, a substance with significantly more fat and

calories. Additionally, Latter-day Saints have numerous social gatherings and "treats" are often

involved. The claim that Latter-day Saints eat more sweets than non-Mormons is supported by

the fact that Utah consumes more Jell-O, ice cream, marshmallows, and chocolate chips than any

other state (Bushman, 2006). Healthy weight habits such as eating fruits and vegetables, eating

meat sparingly, and exercising are part of the LDS health code (Word of Wisdom), but these

elements are less emphasized in the church. For example, while drinking alcohol would prohibit

a Latter-day Saint from being "worthy" to enter a LDS temple, eating an excessive amount of

cookies would not (Merrill & Hillam, 2006). Latter-day Saints are encouraged to eat a moderate

diet but they may find the admonition to "eat healthy" harder to follow because guidelines about

moderation are less clear than the guidelines about abstaining from harmful substances.

Second, it is possible that the LDS practice of keeping food storage may have the

unintended consequence of Latter-day Saints eating less fresh food and more food with a long

shelf life—heavy with salt and preservatives. Latter-day Saints are encouraged by church

leaders to keep at least three months of food storage on hand in case of a catastrophe. According

to the Pew Research Center (2012a), 82% of Latter-day Saints say they keep a supply of food

storage and 58% report they keep at least a three-months supply. Although there is no data indicating how much of the stored food Latter-day Saints eat, the LDS church does encourage its members to eat and rotate their three-month supply to avoid spoilage ("Family Home Storage," n.d.). The fact that Latter-day Saints have higher levels of obesity is consistent with other data indicating that religiosity is related to increased weight (De Groote, 2011).

Sexual Conflict

One study found that Latter-day Saints were slightly more likely to report that they had marital disagreements over sex (Heaton et al., 2004).[25] This is consequential because sexual satisfaction is related to marital satisfaction (Feiler, 2013). The LDS church forbids any sexual relations outside of marriage including masturbation, warns of the dangers of pornography, and strongly discourages listening to music or watching media with sexual innuendos. Indeed, while those who abstain from premarital sex may have well-being benefits such as less risk for unwanted pregnancy, sexually transmitted disease, depression, and divorce (Maher, 2006; Heaton, 2002; Rector, Johnson, & Noyes, 2003), the negative conditioning about premarital sex may have drawbacks (Brotherson, 2004). While official LDS doctrine speaks of sexual intimacy as a beautiful expression of love and as divinely appointed, Brotherson (2004) argues that some less informed LDS parents and local leaders may emphasize the sinfulness of premarital sexuality and fail to accentuate the goodness of married sexual intimacy. Such negative conditioning could lead to negative thoughts and feelings about sex and the body, and thus "result in an inhibited sexual response within marriage" (Brotherson, 2004, p. 2). Additionally, even if the goodness and beauty of marital sexual intimacy is emphasized, Latter-day Saints may

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[25] On a scale from 1 to 6 where respondents reported how often they had disagreements about sex (1=never, and 6=everyday) Latter-day Saints average score was 1.95 compared to the national score of 1.75 (p-level= .008).

struggle switching mentalities from "Thou Shalt Not" to "Thou Shalt—regularly and with great passion!" (Dobson, 2003, p. 120). Botherson (2004) coined the term, "the good girl syndrome" to classify people (especially women) who received moral training based on shame and fear and have negative and feelings and beliefs associated with sex and the body, discomfort to appropriately discuss sexual matters, and lack of complete and correct sexual education. To help LDS children form more positive views of sexuality Brotherson recommends that LDS parents begin positive sexual education from the very beginning. She argues that "lack of knowledge, lack of understanding, and incorrect and negative beliefs can not only put children at risk in their youth, but it causes unnecessary problems within marriage" (Brotherson, 2004, p. 294). She concludes, "More and improved sex education is needed to better prepare future generations for sexual fulfillment in marriage" (Brotherson, 2004, p. 294).

Latter-day Saints and Depression

      Depression and suicide rates. Perhaps the most concerning research that has been related to the LDS church is that Utah has high levels of depression and suicide rates (Goldman, 2008; Cart, 2002; Szalavitz, 2013). Utah also has a high use of anti-depressants (Walch, 2006). Considering that 60-70% of Utah is LDS, it is likely that the LDS church and culture is a contributing factor. But how can Utah have such high and low well-being at the same time? Interestingly, researchers have found that the happiest places in the world also tend to have the highest suicide rates (Daly, Oswald, Wilson, & Wu, 2011; Szalavitz, 2013). For example, Hawaii is the second happiest state in the nation but also ranks fifth for suicide rates, whereas New York ranks 45th for life satisfaction but also has the lowest suicide rate. According to researchers, this paradox is not explained by population demographics or confounding factors but is most likely explained by "relative comparisons of utility" (Daly, Oswald, Wilson, & Wu,

2011, p. 1). People compare their happiness to other people and thus it may be "particularly painful to be unhappy if surrounded by happy individuals" (Daly et al., 2011, p. 1). Thus, contrary to intuition, high depression and suicide rates in Utah are not incompatible with the claim that Mormons generally have high well-being.

This "relative comparison of utility" could exist between LDS church members and non-LDS members, but it may also exist inside the church and between church members. The data of where the majority of depression exists in Utah is mixed. Some have found that Latter-day Saints have lower levels of depression compared to their non-LDS peers (Johnson, 2004; Judd 1998) and others have found that Latter-day Saints are more likely to have depression (Norton et al., 2008). To gain further insight about the relationship between LDS religiosity and psychopathology, Bartz, Richards, Smith, and Fischer (2010) conducted a 17-year longitudinal study of LDS college students. The study suggested that LDS religious devoutness was not related to psychopathology. Indeed, as we have already seen, in the largest national study (n= 676,000) comparing faith and well-being, Mormons scored higher in the emotional health index (which included measurements of depression) than any other religious or non-religious group (Newport et al., 2012a). Contrarily, however, Heaton et al. (2004) found that on one national scale Latter-day Saints had higher depression scores than non-LDS. Apologists have explained that Latter-day Saints may be more likely to be medically diagnosed with depression because they are less likely to self medicate to relieve stress (e.g. turn to alcohol or tobacco) and they are more educated and thus more likely to receive medical attention (Walch, 2006). The claim that Mormons are more likely to seek medical help is supported by the fact that Utah also has the highest use of narcotic painkillers in the United States and ranks in the top three states for prescriptions written for thyroid medications, anticonvulsants, and anti-rheumatics (Walch,

2006). Although the evidence is conflicting, it may be helpful to explore why Latter-day Saints could possibly have higher levels of depression. Data indicates that there are two groups of people who are responsible for above average depression levels within the LDS population: those who rarely attend church and LDS women (Heaton et al., 2004).

   Less religious LDS members. Researchers found that there was a negative relationship between church attendance and depression and that Latter-day Saints who never or rarely attend church have higher depression levels than active Latter-day Saints and non-Latter-day Saints (Heaton et al., 2004). While selection could be a factor (people with depression may be less likely to go to church) increased rate of depression could also be due to the fact that Latter-day Saints who do not attend church may not receive the benefits of the community support that comes with regular church attendance (Heaton et al., 2004). Additionally, the Gallup Well-being Index (n=300,000) indicates that across all denominations in America, attending church, synagogue, or mosque is positively related to people reporting they experience more positive emotions and less negative ones (See Figure 12; Lim, 2012). These individuals may also be less likely to participate in the LDS behaviors that may lead to enhanced well-being which were previously discussed in the first section of this paper. This is consistent with research showing that LDS males in Utah have lower suicide risk if they were active in religious participation compared to less active members (Hilton, Fellingham, & Lyon, 2002). LDS religiosity appears to be inversely associated with suicide (Hilton et al., 2002). The data indicating that Latter-day Saints who are less religious have lower well-being is consistent with other findings that suggest that religion across all denominations that is not integrated and internalized into one's life is related to detrimental mental health outcomes (Pargament, 2002).
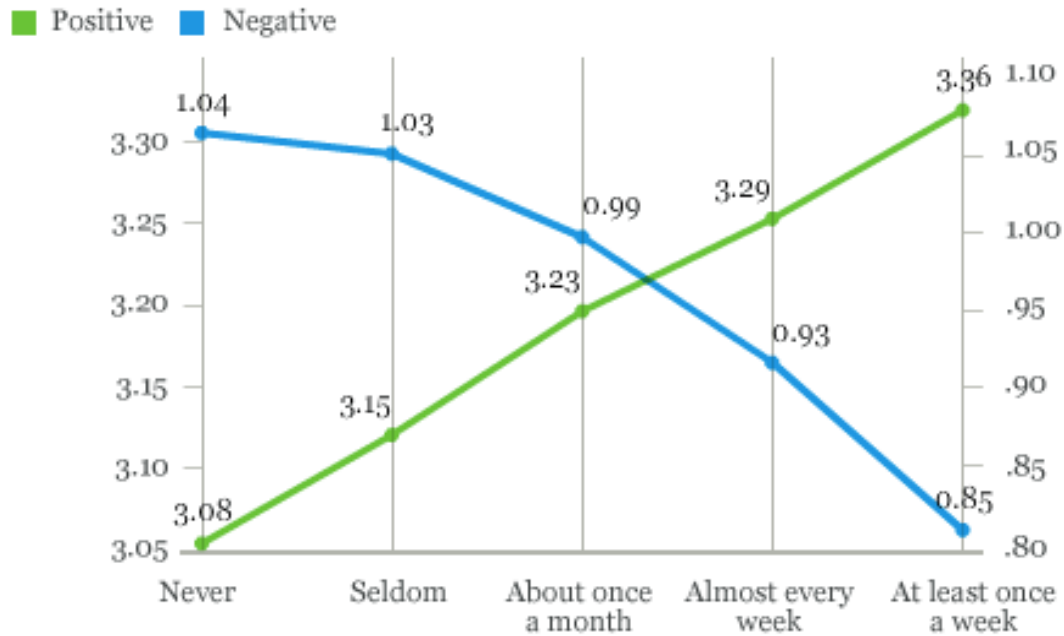
Figure 12. Average number of positive and negative daily emotions by church

attendance. Taken from Lim (2012).

LDS women and gender roles. In addition to those who are less active, some research

indicates that women within the LDS church also have higher levels of depression than non-LDS

women (Heaton et al., 2004). One possible explanation often proffered by critics is that the

predominately male church hierarchy undermines women and that LDS women are not satisfied

with gender roles within the church (Bushman, 2006). In the LDS church all worthy males are

ordained to the priesthood, but women are not.[26] According to LDS doctrine priesthood is the

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[26] "The Mormon priesthood is different than the priesthood in some other faiths; all worthy male members of the church are eligible to begin priesthood service when they reach age 12, and they may hold various offices in the priesthood at different stages in their lives…Mormon doctrine teaches that priesthood is the authority to act in God's name and that it is necessary to govern the church and to perform ordinances, such as baptisms, blessings of healing and administration of Communion, which Mormons call the sacrament" (Pew Research Center, 2012a, p. 54 & 86).

authority to act in God's name and includes the responsibility for governing the church. Critics

of the church have repeatedly argued that women suffer because the church suppresses women,

as demonstrated by the fact that the church's leadership is predominately male at every level

(Bushman, 2006). Apologists, however, explain that the church has the largest women's

organization in the world, women and men have separate but equal roles, and women are revered

for having the most influential roles of nurturing children ("Women in the Church," 2013;

Hinckley, 1996).[27] According to historian Claudia L. Bushman (2006), common LDS attitudes

and folklore hold that the priesthood is necessary to make men equal to women or that men need

specific church duties to remain engaged in religious activity. This folklore reasoning could be

supported by the fact that across all denominations females are more religious than their male

counterparts and, according to Gallup, this trend has existed since recorded history (Newport,

2012). Among Latter-day Saints, however, there is less discrepancy between religiosity in

genders than in other populations (as measured by frequency of prayer) (Heaton et al., 2004, p.

73). Whether or not the LDS church suppresses women, most LDS women do not appear to be

dissatisfied with their roles. When asked if worthy women should have the ability to receive the

priesthood, only 8% of LDS women said yes (Pew Research Center, 2012a). Ironically, slightly

more LDS men than women (13%) thought that LDS women should receive the priesthood (Pew

Research Center, 2012a). The phenomenon of LDS men being more accepting of female

leadership than LDS women was also found in the Faith Matters Survey where only 52% of LDS

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[27] Research indicates that Latter-day Saints are more likely to endorse traditional family roles (e.g. "everyone is better if mom stays home") than those who are not LDS. Interestingly, "education and age differences are reversed in LDS and national groups. In the nation, less educated and older women are more likely to support family roles" where the more educated and younger women show strongest support for family roles (Heaton et al., 2004, p. 110). While Latter-day Saints are more likely to support traditional gender roles, data also supports that they endorse gender equality. For example, in the NSFG survey, compared to national averages, Latter-day Saints were less likely to report that "men can plan for life, women cannot," more likely to report that "men should share housework," more likely to report that "girls are entitled to same independence as boys," and more likely to report that "men and women should be paid the same." (Heaton et al, 2004, p. 111).

men stated they were opposed to women being LDS priests whereas 90% of LDS women were

opposed (Putnam & Campbell, 2012). Further, given the widespread feminist sentiment across

the country, and most members of other religious traditions (roughly three quarters of both males

and females) state that women do not have enough influence in their religion, the majority of

Latter-day Saints (men and women) state that women have the right amount or surprisingly, even

too much influence in their church (Putnam & Campbell, 2012, p. 243-245). The allegation that

most Mormon women are depressed because they feel marginalized by an inequitable

distribution of power within the church is thus unlikely.

　　　Nonetheless, while most LDS women might not be dissatisfied with not having the

priesthood, other gender roles may have negative side affects for women within the LDS church.

First, because the LDS church encourages the nurturing of children and traditional gender roles,

LDS women are more likely to have children, have large families, and be stay-at-home mothers

(Heaton et al., 2004, p. 34). As previously mentioned, having children is related to a temporary

decrease in life satisfaction, and according to Gallup (2013), stay at home mothers have higher

rates of depression, anger, and sadness than mothers who work. High birth rates could also make

LDS women more susceptible to post-partum depression, which occurs after approximately 15-

20% of births (Post-Partum International, 2010). Although many LDS mothers are stay-at-home

mothers, many LDS women still work and may struggle to balance work and family life.

According to the General Social Survey, 45.7% of LDS women work either part (15%) or full

time (30.7%) (as cited in Heaton et al., 2004, p. 34). The stress of balancing work and family

life is common for many women, but this problem may be exasperated for LDS women because

of higher number of children and their view that motherhood is sacred, which may make them

more susceptible to "working mom guilt." Consistent with this hypothesis, research

demonstrates LDS mothers are more likely than non-LDS mothers to say that "preschool

children suffer when mom works," "it is harder for working mothers to establish a secure

relationship with their children," and "everyone is better off when mother stays at home"

(Heaton et al., 2004, p. 111).

In general, LDS women may suffer from the sizable demands of balancing family, church

callings, work life, religious expectations (having family home evening, going to the temple,

having personal and family scripture study, serving others, doing genealogy, visiting teaching,

etc.), and having high personal expectations. While society is moving toward a trend of general

acceptance for a variety of lifestyles and choices (Schwartz, 2000), in the LDS culture an "ideal"

family and lifestyle is more clearly articulated. According to researcher Kris Doty, LDS women

suffer from what she termed "toxic perfectionism" and comparing themselves to others (KSL,

2013, para. 3). Similarly, LDS church doctrine states that Jesus Christ was perfect and that while

not obtainable in this life, Latter-day Saints should strive to be perfect as he is (see Matthew

5:48). Thus, some LDS women may have above average expectations for themselves and be less

patient with their imperfections. One study that examined depression among LDS and Protestant

women found that depression was not significantly different among either group but that

perfectionism was significantly correlated to depression for both groups (Williams, 1999). As an

example, one critic and former member of the church stated:

> In Mormon culture females are supposed to accept a calling (voluntary church position).
>
> They are to be constantly smiling over their family of five. They are supposed to take
>
> supper across the street to an ill neighbor and then put up with their husband when he
>
> comes home from work and smile about it the whole time. There is this sense that Mrs.
>
> Jones down street is doing the same thing, and there is this undercurrent of competition.

To be a good mother and wife, women have to put on this mask of perfection. They can't

show their tears, depression or agony. (Canning, 2008, p. 1)

Perfectionism may help explain why LDS women above average depression levels as

perfectionism is strongly correlated to depression (Hewitt & Flett, 1990). High expectations

placed on LDS women may also explain one study that showed LDS women have lower self

esteem that non-LDS women (the comparability of the data sets were not certain as different

methods were used to collect data for both groups) (Johnson, 2004).

Summary

Research indicates that Latter-day Saints may be slightly more likely to be overweight

and have conflicts over sex. The data about Mormons and depression levels is mixed.

Frequently the population samples in the research about depression are small and the

comparability of the population samples is uncertain. Some data indicates Mormons are at

greater risk for depression while others show that Latter-day Saints experience relatively high

emotional health. It is possible that high depression levels are not incompatible with high well-

being levels and the two factors polarize and influence each other. If Latter-day Saints do have

above average depression levels, it is most likely attributed to LDS members who rarely attend

church and to the LDS women who have overbearing stress and high expectations (Heaton et al.,

2004).

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Who Cares?

</div>

Thus far this paper has analyzed Mormonism from a positive psychology perspective and

looked for mechanisms by which LDS practices and teachings may foster well-being. It has also

addressed where Mormons tend to suffer. The data seems to indicate that there is indeed an

interesting relationship between Mormonism and positive psychology. Better understanding this

relationship could be of value. In recent years, positive psychologists have called for further collaboration between religion and psychology (Pargament et al., 2013). The second volume of the *APA Handbook of Psychology, Religion, and Spirituality* suggests that the field of psychology will be more effective if it recognizes the varieties of religion and spirituality, links spirituality to psychological theory and practice, and is more mindful of the sacred dimension of clients (Pargament et al., 2013). As both positive psychology and Mormonism are striving to help individuals flourish, additional research could help the two fields inform each other.

Mormonism Interesting Longitudinal Population Sample

Because Mormonism considers itself a well-being intervention, positive psychology could turn to Latter-day Saints to examine the costs and benefits of some well-being interventions in real life application. Psychology has ample research about the efficacy of interventions in controlled experimental designs but it lacks substantial research about the effectiveness of interventions applied in real world settings over time (Seligman, 1995). Because of the similarities between the implications of positive psychology and LDS doctrine (i.e. both stress the importance of positive emotion, service, gratitude, grit, autonomy, self-determination, physical health, etc.) Mormons could act as an interesting longitudinal population sample to test and validate some flourishing principles in real world application. For example, the fact that Mormons have the highest rates of both volunteerism and well-being strengthens the claim that volunteerism can increase well-being throughout one's lifespan. Mormonism could also show some of the complications and "side effects" of some well-being principles. For example, positive psychology maintains that having strong community support is essential to well-being. Mormons have a large sense of community, but they are also sometimes seen as exclusive. According to researcher David Campbell, Mormons' close knit community may also come at a

cost of connecting with those outside the community (Pew Research Center, 2012a). Indeed, research supports that the majority of Latter-day Saints' friends are of the same faith (Pew Research Center, 2012a). Having a strong community can be a two-edge sword; it allows members within the community to be well bonded but discourages and lessens the need to develop relationships outside that community (Pew Research Center, 2012a). This unintended segregation may have detrimental outcomes as both Latter-day Saints and non-Latter-day Saints may have misconceptions and inaccurate judgments about each other. Further research about Mormonism could thus reveal the effectiveness and unintended side affects of some well-being principles when applied in everyday life.

Positive Psychology Can Help Mormons

In areas where Mormonism and positive psychology are not similar, they could inform each other. Mormons could turn to positive psychology to learn how to strengthen areas where they tend to suffer. For example, to help depression associated with difficulties of being a stay-at-home mother, LDS women could apply the positive intervention of "job crafting." In the workplace, job crafting is the process of employees re-defining and re-imagining their job designs to make them more meaningful (Berg, Dutton, & Wrzesneiwski, 2011). It is designing a job so that it is aligned with an individual's strengths, passions, and values (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). According to Berg et al. (2011), employees who job craft are more engaged at work, achieve higher levels of performance, and report higher levels of personal resilience. (To see how Job Crafting can be applied to stay-at-home mothers see Appendix G). Additionally, LDS women could also decrease perfectionistic tendencies by learning Albert Ellis's ABCDE model and learning how to avoid thinking traps (Reivich & Shatte, 2002; Seligman, 2011). Both are tools used to alter causal analysis and cognitive styles to increase resiliency and optimism.

By understanding thinking traps LDS women could become more aware of when they personalize (unjustly blame themselves), overgeneralize, or adopt all or nothing thinking. (For more information about resilience, the ABC model, and thinking traps see Appendix H and I. To see LDS references that could be incorporated to teach an LDS audience about thinking traps see Appendix J).

In addition to strengthening areas where Latter-day Saints suffer, Latter-day Saints could use positive psychology to bolster areas where they are doing well. For example, in setting goals at both family and church leadership levels, leaders could learn about the benefits of doing "Appreciative Inquiry" and strength based (versus problem based) strategic planning. (To learn about Appreciative Inquiry see Appendix K). Latter-day Saints could learn how to better demonstrate love and compassion by learning the skill of Active Constructive Responding (ACR) (To learn about ACR see Appendix L. To see LDS references that could be incorporated to teach an LDS audience about ACR see Appendix M). To help individuals identify their spiritual gifts, Latter-day Saints could take a signature strengths test and learn how to use their signature strengths more regularly (To learn about how signature strengths could be integrated into Mormonism see Appendix N and C).

Latter-day Saints may be particularly open to empirically supported interventions because LDS theology states that spiritual and scientific knowledge are not incongruent. According to LDS doctrine, truths are often discovered and revealed by God's children (of all faiths) developing their talents and seeking enlightenment through diligent study and research. Additionally the Book of Mormon states, "That which is of God inviteth and enticeth to do good continually; wherefore, every thing which inviteth and enticeth to do good. . . is inspired of God" (Moroni 7:13, Book of Mormon). Similarly, Latter-day Saints are admonished to "seek ye out of

the best books words of wisdom; seek learning, even by study and also by faith" (Doctrine and

Covenants 88:118). Thus, adopting flourishing principles from a secular field is not in

disharmony with LDS teachings.

Integrating positive psychology principles into the LDS church could have a substantial

impact. The LDS church is one of the fastest growing churches in the United States (Eckstrom,

2012) and also has a large behavioral health service department with services such as individual,

marriage and family counseling, addiction recovery programs, birth parent counseling and

adoption services (LDS Family Services, 2013). Thus, integrating positive psychology

principles into the LDS church could have a widespread influence.

Mormonism Can Inform Positive Psychology

Interventions. Just as the LDS church could benefit from positive psychology, positive

psychology could learn from effective LDS practices and principles that contribute to well-being.

As previously mentioned, positive psychology should seek to identify cultural practices from

across the world that contribute to the good life (Peterson, 2006). What many consider the

largest and most comprehensive study of well-being and religion has discovered that well-being

is particularly high for most Latter-day Saints. This paper hypothesized what aspects of

Mormonism could be contributing to Latter-day Saints' well-being. The connection between

religiosity and well-being is often explained by the factor that a religious community offers

social support. While social support is likely a contributing factor, this paper also demonstrated

several other elements that could contribute to Mormons' high well-being. Mormonism may

promote norms of behavior that are associated with well-being including pro-social behavior

(volunteerism and giving), focusing on marriage and family, emphasizing autonomy and agency,

encouraging caring for the body and promoting a positive orientation through meaning and

purpose. The bulk of this paper showed correlation versus causal relationships between well-being principles and further research is required to better understand which (if any) practices actually contribute to well-being. Some mechanisms that were hypothesized to contribute to well-being could be empirically tested.   For example, positive interventions researchers could empirically study include the well-being benefits of (1) periodic fasting and donating the money that would have been used for food; (2) weekly family home evening; (3) companionship prayer (or a 5 minute ritual, performed each morning and evening, where couples exchange thoughts of gratitude and heartfelt needs); (4) visiting and home teaching (where each member of an organization or community could be assigned people they are in charge of uplifting); (5) the practice of receiving callings (or giving everyone in a given community a job or task where they felt needed, especially older populations); (6) the custom of encouraging young adults to serve missions (or encouraging young adults to serve others for one to two years (e.g. Americore) before making major life choices), (7) incorporating an hour of spiritual (or character) education every weekday for youth; 8) regulating media consumption to that which is uplifting or instructional, or (9) teaching children to donate a percentage of their earnings at a very young age. If such interventions are empirically tested and proved effective, they could be shared with others as well-being interventions.

Philosophical emphasis. In addition to offering specific positive interventions, Mormonism could potentially offer unique philosophical models for flourishing. As of 2013, contemporary positive psychology has mostly focused on cultivating the well-being of individuals. In many ways, the fundamental unit of society for Mormonism is not the individual, but the family. How would positive psychology change if its focus was less individualistic and sought to strengthen family units holistically? Would flourishing be a more stable concept?

Although supporting flourishing families is one of the first stated goals of positive psychology (Positive Psychology Center, 2013, para. 3), the opportunity to use the family as a vehicle to enable individuals and communities to thrive has largely been underutilized. Discussions about the family unit are underrepresented in positive psychology academic texts and curriculum. For example, one of the leading positive psychology texts *Positive Psychology in Practice* addresses positive psychology at school, work, health psychology, clinical psychology, psychotherapy, consulting, sports, community, and public policy, but there are no applications for the family (Linley & Joseph, 2004). One reason the family has not been adequately represented in positive psychology is there are many challenges in measuring effectiveness and scaling positive psychology applications with a unit that is so decentralized (M. Seligman, MAPP class lecture, December 8, 2012). This is problematic because people seek goals that are measurable and thus it is easy for people to overlook their family. Perhaps positive psychology could seek to create tools that assess, measure, and increase family well-being. Perhaps interventions could be developed to help measure and foster family resilience and signature strengths. Studying the LDS principles and practices would encourage inquiry such as, "How would society be different if all individuals put their family needs as paramount?" "As each family focuses on their small stewardship, how might society be different?" Perhaps focusing on families is not the most efficacious model to increase well-being across all cultures. But considering Latter-day Saints' success in achieving high levels of well-being, it may be worth further examination.

Conclusion

Positive psychology should seek to identify cultural practices that contribute to flourishing (Peterson, 2006). Research supports that religiosity of most denominations in the United States is positively related to well-being (Newport et al., 2012a). Traditionally there has been a lack of

interaction between spirituality and psychology (Pargament et al., 2013). This is problematic because psychology and religion are often ignorant about the unique insights each field has to offer (Pargament et al., 2013). More collaboration between positive psychology and religious denominations could be beneficial (Pargament et al., 2013) and further research about all religions is suggested.

Due to data indicating that most Latter-day Saints have particularly high well-being, this paper has focused specifically on Mormonism and explored mechanisms by which LDS practices and teachings may foster well-being. This paper identified at least five possible mechanisms through which Mormonism may increase well-being, including fostering pro-social behavior, focus on family, purpose and meaning, autonomy and agency, and physical health. After these five elements were discussed, this paper also demonstrated that Mormons might be at risk for obesity, sexual challenges, and depression. In general, the data seems to indicate that there is indeed, an interesting relationship between Mormonism and positive psychology. Better understanding this relationship could be of value. Positive psychology could help Latter-day Saints reach their goal of flourishing, and Mormonism could potentially offer new ideas for positive psychology. As further research is undertaken, positive psychology and Mormonism could inform each other to lead to greater flourishing for all.

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