

Latter-day Saint Returned Missionaries in the United States

A Survey on Religious Activity and Postmission Adjustment

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Each year, approximately twenty to thirty thousand Latter-day Saint young adults leave to serve missions throughout the world.¹ Once these young adults return home from their missionary service, most go on to further their education, begin a career, marry, and establish a family. Returned missionaries are a unique group in the Church and are often a point of interest. Parents, for example, note the challenges their missionary has as he or she makes the transition from the mission field to home. They sometimes observe their returned missionary confronting increased stress levels as he or she shifts from the singular focus of the mission field to making multiple and major decisions about school, work, and dating. Ward and stake leaders also have an interest in returned missionaries, often giving them counsel and encouragement as well as assigning them a suitable calling during this transitional time. President Gordon B. Hinckley emphasized the importance of this duty to Church leaders by saying, “I am satisfied that if every returning missionary had a meaningful responsibility the day he or she came home, we’d have fewer of them grow cold in their faith. I wish that you would make an effort to see that every returned missionary receives a meaningful assignment. Activity is the nurturing process of faithfulness.”²

Missionary service and returned missionaries are also a point of discussion in day-to-day conversations among Latter-day Saints Church-wide. Statements or questions such as “He is a returned missionary” or “She went on a mission” or “Did you serve a mission?” are often heard wherever Church members are gathered. Why are Latter-day Saints interested in knowing whether someone is a returned missionary? One reason might be that when members learn that someone has served a mission,

they see that person differently. Members somehow expect that returned missionaries are spiritually grounded, that they ought to be leaders in the Church, that their homes and families should be stable, and that they ought to be successful in their schooling and careers.

These assumptions, although often experienced, are not always the case. While serving as a bishop in a Brigham Young University singles ward, one of the authors observed a number of returned missionaries who regretted the “loss of the Spirit” since returning from the mission field, including some whose Church attendance gradually dropped off until they eventually disappeared from the Church landscape. Others had dropped out of school, were working in low-paying, dead-end jobs, were waiting a long time to marry, and were alienated from their family. Some had experienced severe depression during their first two years home, while others had committed rather serious sins including sexual transgression and involvement with drugs, alcohol, and pornography.

Are these behaviors isolated cases or part of an emerging pattern of secularization among returned missionaries in the United States? We set out to further investigate this and other questions by surveying five thousand returned missionaries scattered across the United States, hoping to collect more accurate data about their postmission lives—both at the early stages of their return home as well as at the later stages as they settled into adulthood.

Three general areas were assessed in this study. (1) How successful are returned missionaries in their current spiritual, familial, and educational pursuits? We answered this question by looking at a number of the demographic factors concerning returned missionaries. These factors include the educational attainment, socioeconomic status, family life, and religious experiences of those who had been back from their missions two, five, ten, and seventeen years.³ Assessing these areas in the lives of returned missionaries provided a barometer for how successful they are in the various life roles they have ventured into. Part of this assessment was also intended to identify similarities and differences between the demographic traits of men and women. Duke and Johnson surmise that for Latter-day Saints “the experiences of men and women are quite different and have a significant impact on the way they feel and worship.”⁴ Thus, we sought to understand the unique differences and similarities in life outcomes of returned missionary men and women.

(2) A second question we set out to answer is whether more recently returned missionaries are as committed to gospel values and Church activity as those who returned from their missions decades ago. Unlike most recent research on returned missionaries that has mainly looked at the impact of the mission experience itself, our objective here was to examine whether

social change in America over the past several decades has influenced returned missionaries' religiosity in some way.⁵ In the 1970s, Madsen found that, overall, returned missionaries were doing very well in their religious activity. He summarized his findings by saying that "the vast majority of returned missionaries attend church meetings regularly, possess a current temple recommend, serve in church callings, pay tithing, and observe the Word of Wisdom."⁶ We used Madsen's study as a baseline to compare the religious behavior and marital status of returned missionaries in our sample, thus allowing us to observe any changes that have occurred in the interim.

One of the theoretical foundations for hypothesizing whether returned missionaries of today should be any more or less religious than those studied back in the 1970s comes from the secularization thesis, a commonly discussed theme in sociology. Scholars who accept this thesis propose that religious commitment in American society has been in a decline over the past several decades.⁷ They believe that as modernization and science have increased in the United States, faith in God has dwindled. Taking this view, we might predict that the religiosity of returned missionaries is also in decline and that our sample of returned missionaries would have lower religiosity than those in Madsen's sample.

On the other hand, those who reject the secularization thesis argue that, despite science's increasing influence, religion is reviving rather than declining and that religious devotion in the United States is as high as it has ever been.⁸ Given this perspective, we would anticipate that religiosity among returned missionaries has actually increased over the past three decades or has at least remained steady.

(3) Finally, a third question we desired to answer was, What things will help returned missionaries stay active and committed to the gospel after they return home? We assessed this area with two approaches. First, we asked those in our sample to report their own insights about postmission adjustment challenges as well as the ways returned missionaries and the Church can help with that adjustment. Second, because private religiosity is a significant part of a Latter-day Saint life, we applied statistical modeling procedures to identify the most important factors that lead to private religiosity in adulthood among returned missionaries. Private religiosity involves such things as reading scriptures, having personal prayer, and thinking about religion.

In summary, an assessment of these three areas showed that as a whole returned missionaries are adjusting well to the religious and the secular aspects of their postmission lives. The vast majority of returned missionaries hold strong to their religious convictions, and their religiosity levels remain relatively high compared with the 1977 study.

RESEARCH METHODS

In winter and spring 1999, four random samples were generated of one thousand men and five hundred women who had been back from their missions for two, five, ten, or seventeen years. A final sample of 4,884 returned missionaries (3,082 men and 1,802 women) from the United States was produced. Data were then collected via standard mail survey procedures, which included four separate mailings. A response rate of 73 percent was obtained.

Given that the primary focus of our study was the religiosity of returned missionaries, we were concerned that those who did not respond to the survey might be significantly less active than those who did, which would introduce a nonresponse bias. To investigate this possibility, a phone survey was conducted of a random sample of the bishops of those returned missionaries who did not respond to the survey. Among the bishops contacted, 76 percent indicated that the returned missionary in question attended Church meetings at least three or more times a month and in their opinion was active in the ward. Based on this figure, we concluded that nonresponsiveness to the survey was based on factors other than significant inactivity or disassociation from the Church.

RESULTS

Our study showed how returned missionaries in this sample compare with the larger United States society and with returned missionaries of the 1960s and '70s. The results also indicate ways returned missionaries can adjust to life after the mission.

Returned Missionaries: Socioeconomic Status, Family Life, and Religiosity

As we mentioned earlier, it is commonly believed that missionary service not only produces a strong testimony in missionaries but also prepares young people for success in a number of other areas of their life. Our findings, presented below, provide solid evidence to support this claim.

Socioeconomic Status. Church leaders have consistently stressed the value of preparing oneself for life's work through proper education. In 2000, President Hinckley counseled youth and young adults:

You are moving into the most competitive age the world has ever known. All around you is competition. You need all the education you can get. . . .

You belong to a church that teaches the importance of education. You have a mandate from the Lord to educate your minds and your hearts and your hands.⁹

How are returned missionaries doing in this endeavor? We found that 96 percent of those who had been back from their missions the longest (seventeen years) had at least some college or skill training (see table 1). Thirty-seven percent of the men and 45 percent of the women had completed an undergraduate degree. Another 33 percent of the men and 14 percent of the women had earned an advanced degree. The rate for both men and women combined in these two categories is 40 percent with an

Table 1
Educational Attainment and Socioeconomic Status of LDS Returned Missionaries Compared with National Rates

Education Level (1999)				
	Returned Missionary (%) (17-year group)			United States (%)^a (Age: 35-44)
	Men (N=453)	Women (N=308)	Combined (N=761)	Combined (N=44,462)
Did Not Finish H.S.	0	0	0	12
High School	4	3	4	34
Some College/Skill Training	26	38	31	18
College	37	45	40	18
Graduate/Professional School	33	14	25	8
Total	100	100	100	100
Employment Status (1999)				
	Returned Missionary (%) (17-year group)		United States (%)^b (Age: 35-44)	
	Men (N=451)	Women (N=306)	Men (N=n/a)	Women (N=n/a)
Employed	98	57	93	77
Not Employed	1	44	7	23
Total	99	101	100	100
Family Income (1998)				
	Returned Missionary (17-year group)	United States (Age: 35-44)		
	Family (%) (N=749)			Family (%)^c (N=18,823)
Under \$19,999	3	Under \$14,999		10
\$20,000 to \$29,999	7	\$15,000 to \$24,999		9
\$30,000 to \$39,999	12	\$25,000 to \$34,999		11
\$40,000 to \$49,999	17	\$35,000 to \$49,999		18
\$50,000 to \$74,999	30	\$50,000 to \$74,999		24
\$75,000 and Over	31	\$75,000 and Over		28
Total	99	Total		100

^aSource: U.S. Census Bureau, *Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1999*, 119th ed. (Washington, D.C.: Bernan, 1999), no. 265.

^bSource: U.S. Census Bureau, *Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1999*, no. 650.

^cSource: U.S. Census Bureau, *Statistical Abstract of the United States, 2000*, 120th ed. (Washington, D.C.: Bernan, 1999), no. 746.

Note: This scale is not exactly the same as the returned missionary scale, but is close enough to see the relative differences between the two groups.

undergraduate degree and 25 percent with an advanced degree. These rates are considerably higher than the national average. For example, among those in the United States of about the same age (thirty-five to forty-four) in 1998, only around 18 percent of men and women combined had a college degree, and an additional 8 percent had an advanced degree.¹⁰

It is important to note here that this and other comparisons between returned missionaries and the national population in this study must be viewed with caution since the differences between them may be a result of other factors that we could not statistically control. For example, the age of most of the returned missionaries in the seventeen-year group is around 40 to 41 years old. The age of those in the national sample is between 35 and 45 years old. Other factors that may represent any differences between these two groups are race, premission economic status, and educational goals.

Two other important indices of socioeconomic status are employment and income. Returned missionaries rank relatively high in both. We found that 95 percent of the men and 63 percent of the women were gainfully employed at the time of this study. Employment among the seventeen-year group was at 98 percent of the men and 57 percent of the women (see table 1), while the national rate for men of the same age group was almost 93 percent for the men and about 77 percent for the women.¹¹ The lower employment rate among returned missionary women when compared to women in the United States is not surprising given the Church's view that the primary role of women is centered on home responsibilities.¹²

The higher rate of education found among returned missionaries is evident in family income, which was a little above the national average. Eighty-five percent of the men in the seventeen-year group and 67 percent of the women (78 percent combined) made \$40,000 or more in 1998 (see table 1). By comparison, around 70 percent of families in the United States¹³ made \$35,000 or more in 1998.¹⁴

Family Life. The Church is known for its strong family values. Accordingly, we looked at a number of family indicators to ascertain the family life of returned missionaries. Table 2 shows the marital status of returned missionaries in the seventeen-year group. Among the men, about 90 percent were in their first marriage while 6 percent had been divorced or remarried. Only 1 percent were currently divorced, and 2 percent were still single. Among men in the national sample in 1998, around 69 percent were married (first marriage or remarried), almost 12 percent were divorced, and almost 19 percent had never married.¹⁵ This difference is considerable. Returned missionary men are more likely to get married and less likely to divorce than men across the United States.

Among women returned missionaries, 76 percent of those in the seventeen-year group were married (first marriage), 5 percent were remarried, about 4 percent were separated or divorced, and 13 percent had never married. The national marriage rates (1998) of women of comparable age indicate that about 72 percent of women were married (first marriage or remarried), around 14 percent were divorced, and about 12 percent had never married.¹⁶ Like those for the men, these figures show that the divorce rate among returned missionary women is much lower than the national rate. The percent of returned missionary women who had not yet married was nearly identical to the national rate of single women.

We also found that nearly all returned missionaries who were married had a spouse who is a member of the Church, and 96 percent either had married in the temple or had been sealed later. In addition, a relatively high fertility rate was discovered. Latter-day Saints have been known for having larger families than the national average, and this study

Table 2a
Marital Status of LDS Returned Missionaries
Compared with National Rates

Marital Status (1999)	Returned Missionary (%) (17-year group)		United States (%) ^a (Age: 35-44)	
	Men (N=454)	Women (N=312)	Men (N=22,055)	Women (N=22,407)
	Single, never married	2	13	19
Cohabiting	0	2	n/a	n/a
Married, first marriage	89	76	} 69	} 72
Remarried	6	5		
Divorced	1	3	12	14
Widowed	1	0	0	1
Total	99	99	100	99

^aSource: U.S. Census Bureau, *Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1999*, no. 63.

Table 2b
Family Characteristics of Married LDS Returned Missionaries, 17-year group

	Men (%) (N=438)	Women (%) (N=260)	Combined (%) (N=698)
Marriage Type			
Temple Sealing	91	87	90
Civil Ceremony	3	7	4
Civil Ceremony/ Temple Sealing	6	7	6
Total	100	101	100
LDS Spouse			
Yes	99	95	98
No	1	5	2
Total	100	100	100
Number of Children			
None	4	15	9
One	3	5	4
Two	12	14	13
Three	25	20	23
Four	30	20	26
Five	14	16	15
Six +	12	10	11
Total	100	100	101

verifies this pattern. The average number of children among returned missionary families for the seventeen-year group was 3.7 for the men and 3.2 for the women. In contrast, the average number of children born to women between the ages of thirty-five and forty-four in the United States in 1995 was around 1.9.¹⁷

Religious Activity. Full-time missionary service provides young adults with an opportunity unlike any other to develop personal spiritual habits. Results from our research suggest that these habits are not abandoned once missionaries return home. For example, 87 percent of all returned missionaries attend sacrament meeting almost every week (see table 3). Sunday School and priesthood/Relief Society attendance are slightly lower with 81 and 82 percent weekly attendance reported respectively. Forty-eight percent read their scriptures at least a few times a week, 79 percent pray privately at least a few times a week, 87 percent hold a current temple recommend, 90 percent are full-tithe payers, and 97 percent keep the Word of Wisdom. A comparison between men and women reveals women are consistently higher in their religiosity than men. This fits the same pattern found nationally: women are often much higher in their religious belief, commitment, and behavior than men.¹⁸

Table 3
Religious Activity of LDS Returned Missionaries
(All Age Groups)

	Men (%)	Women (%)	Combined (%)
Sacrament Attendance	(N=1,882)	(N=1,337)	(N=3,219)
Never	1	1	1
Few times a year	2	1	2
Every other month	1	0	1
Once a month	2	1	2
2-3 times a month	10	7	9
Almost every week	<u>85</u>	<u>90</u>	<u>87</u>
Total	101	100	102
Sunday School Attendance	(N=1,880)	(N=1,332)	(N=3,212)
Never	3	2	3
Few times a year	2	2	2
Every other month	1	1	1
Once a month	4	2	3
2-3 times a month	12	8	10
Almost every week	<u>79</u>	<u>85</u>	<u>81</u>
Total	101	100	100
Priesthood/Relief Society Attendance	(N=1,880)	(N=1,333)	(N=3,213)
Never	3	2	3
Few times a year	2	2	2
Every other month	1	1	1
Once a month	3	2	3
2-3 times a month	11	8	10
Almost every week	<u>79</u>	<u>86</u>	<u>82</u>
Total	99	101	101
Personal Scripture Study	(N=1,876)	(N=1,330)	(N=3,206)
Not at all	5	3	4
Less than once a month	11	9	10
About once a month	9	6	8
2-3 times a month	13	13	13
About once a week	20	15	18
A few times a week	30	34	32
Every day	<u>13</u>	<u>20</u>	<u>16</u>
Total	101	100	101

Table 3 (continued)

	Men (%)	Women (%)	Combined (%)
Private Prayer	(N=1,877)	(N=1,330)	(N=3,207)
Not at all	2	1	2
Less than once a month	6	2	4
About once a month	4	2	3
2–3 times a month	7	4	6
About once a week	7	6	7
A few times a week	26	23	25
Every day	49	62	54
Total	101	100	101
Current Temple Recommend	(N=1,885)	(N=1,339)	(N=3,224)
Yes	84	91	87
No	16	10	14
Total	100	101	101
Tithing Status	(N=1,886)	(N=1,338)	(N=3,224)
Full tithe payer	89	92	90
Partial tithe payer	7	5	6
Non tithe payer	5	4	5
Total	101	101	101
Word of Wisdom	(N=1,887)	(N=1,339)	(N=3,226)
Yes—Completely	96	98	97
Most of the time	3	1	2
No	1	2	2
Total	101	100	101

The relatively high rates of religiosity for returned missionaries is notable. This is especially significant given that our sample not only included recently returned missionaries but also those who have been home for a considerable length of time. These findings, when added to results from previous research on returned missionaries,¹⁹ provide consistently strong evidence that the vast majority of returned missionaries stay faithful to gospel values not only immediately upon their return home but also later in their lives.

Family religious activities are at the core of a Latter-day Saint home. Elder Russell M. Nelson counseled, “Happiness at home is most likely to be achieved when practices there are founded upon the teachings of Jesus Christ.

Ours is the responsibility to ensure that we have family prayer, scripture study, and family home evening.”²⁰ We assessed these three religious activities among returned missionary families. As table 4 illustrates, we found that 73 percent of married or divorced returned missionaries have family prayer at least a few times a week, 40 percent hold family scripture study that often, and 55 percent hold family home evening at least two or three times a month. Given the complexities and demands on the modern family, these figures indicate a relatively sound commitment to family religious practices in homes of returned missionaries.

Comparing Recently Returned Missionaries to Those of a Generation Ago

Research on secularization of Latter-day Saints shows that they may have a unique immunity to the acceptance of so-called worldly values.

Table 4
Family Religious Activity of LDS Returned Missionaries
(Only Married and Divorced, All Age Groups)

	Men (%)	Women (%)	Combined (%)
Family Scripture Study	(N=1,657)	(N=1,084)	(N=2,741)
Not at all	14	14	14
Less than once a month	16	11	14
About once a month	10	8	9
2-3 times a month	12	10	11
About once a week	12	13	12
A few times a week	23	23	23
Every day	<u>13</u>	<u>22</u>	<u>17</u>
Total	100	101	100
Family Prayer	(N=1,659)	(N=1,091)	(N=2,750)
Not at all	7	7	7
Less than once a month	6	5	6
About once a month	5	3	4
2-3 times a month	5	4	5
About once a week	7	6	7
A few times a week	21	18	20
Every day	<u>50</u>	<u>58</u>	<u>53</u>
Total	101	101	102
Family Home Evening	(N=1,589)	(N=1,068)	(N=2,657)
Not at all	16	7	16
Less than once a month	16	11	14
About once a month	15	12	14
2-3 times a month	21	21	21
About once a week	<u>31</u>	<u>38</u>	<u>34</u>
Total	99	99	99

Stark found little evidence to support that the Church was in any kind of religious decline.²¹ He explained that the “secularization thesis would hold that religious movements such as Mormonism will do best in places where modernization has had the least impact. . . . These assumptions about secularization are refuted by research. . . . Mormons thrive in the most, not the least, secularized nations.”²² In 1984, Albrecht and Heaton found that among many religious groups in the United States “educational achievement impacts negatively on religious commitment and that increased levels of education often lead to

apostasy as individuals encounter views that deemphasize spiritual growth and elevate scientific and intellectual achievement.”²³ Among Latter-day Saints, however, Albrecht and Heaton found a positive relationship between education and religiosity and concluded that there was very little evidence to support the secularization thesis. Others have found similar results.²⁴

To test the secularization notion among returned missionaries, we compared the religiosity of returned missionaries of the 1960s and 1970s to those of the 1980s and 1990s. In 1977, Madsen conducted a survey of returned missionaries from the United States who had been home from their missions up to ten years.²⁵ This information provided a baseline against which we compared our sample in both private and public religiosity as well as marital status. Private religious behavior includes such things as conducting personal scripture study, having personal prayer, holding a current temple recommend, and paying tithing. Areas of public

religious behavior are sacrament meeting attendance, Sunday School attendance, priesthood/Relief Society meeting attendance, and adherence to the Word of Wisdom.²⁶

Private Religious Behavior. We found that returned missionaries in our sample read their scriptures and prayed somewhat less than those in Madsen’s study. Forty-nine percent of current returned missionaries had personal scripture study at least a few times a week or daily compared to 55 percent of those thirty years earlier (see table 5). In addition, 54 percent had daily prayer, compared to around 71 percent in Madsen’s sample. About 85 percent in each group held a current temple recommend, and both groups were between 90 and 92 percent full-tithe payers.²⁷

Why returned missionaries are praying and reading their scriptures less today than they did thirty years ago is not clear. Certainly secularization could account for this decline. Modernization has set up a more competitive world requiring greater time demands on the family. More fathers are working longer, more mothers are entering the work place, and children are competing and specializing at school more than they were thirty years ago.²⁸ For returned missionaries, as with the rest of society, this tide of busyness may be sweeping them up, perhaps leaving them less time for private religious observances. Another possible explanation is that, given the added emphasis the

Table 5
Private Religious Behavior of LDS Returned Missionaries in 1977 and 1999 (Collapsed Scales)

	1977 Study (%)	1999 Study (%)
Personal Scripture Study	(N=1,122)	(N=2,600)
Not at All ^a	4	4
Infrequently	21	18
Weekly	20	30
Few times per week	35	33
Daily	20	16
Total	100	101 ^b
Personal Prayer	(N=1,118)	(N=2,594)
Not at all ^c	3	2
Infrequently	8	20
Few times per week	18	24
Daily	71	54
Total	100	100 ^d
Tithing Status	(N=1,123)	(N=2,613)
Non tithe payer	3	4
Partial tithe payer	5	7
Full tithe payer	92	90
Total	100	101 ^e
Temple Recommend	(N=1,128) ^f	(N=2,611)
Yes	85	85
No	15	15
Total	100	100 ^g

^aMadsen’s wording for this category was “Seldom or Never.”

^bFor Madsen’s (1977) study, Mean=3.473 SD=1.141. For our (1999) study, Mean=3.386 SD=1.065. The *t*-value is 2.18 and is statistically significant at *p* ≤ .05

^cMadsen’s wording for this category was “Specific occasions or rarely.”

^dFor Madsen’s (1977) study, Mean=3.570 SD=0.773. For our (1999) study, Mean=3.305 SD=0.847. The *t*-value is 9.46 and is statistically significant at *p* ≤ .01

^e $\chi^2 = 4.95$

^fMadsen (1977) did not provide the *N* for this category, so 1,128 (*N* for his total response rate) was included as the *N* in order to calculate the χ^2 value.

^g $\chi^2 = 0.013$

Church has placed on the family during the past several decades, private religious practices are being replaced by family religious practices. In other words, married couples, although recognizing the value of private religiosity, may end up substituting family prayer and scripture study for personal prayer and scripture study in order to keep up with the demands of other responsibilities.

Public Religious Behavior. As for public religiosity, 86 percent of the returned missionaries we studied attended sacrament meeting on a weekly basis (see table 6). This is higher than the 78 percent reported by returned missionaries thirty years ago. Both groups of returned missionaries ranged between 74 and 79 percent weekly attendance at Sunday School and priesthood/Relief Society. Adherence to the Word of Wisdom for both groups was extremely high, with 99 percent of the current sample indicating adherence and 97 percent of the earlier group of returned missionaries indicating the same.²⁹

Even though sacrament meeting attendance is significantly higher now than thirty years ago, a second look at where the significant shift occurs is between those who attended “2–3 times a month” and “almost every week” (see table 6). In other words, the difference is found among those who were already very active and then became even more active.

Table 6

Public Religious Behavior of LDS Returned Missionaries in 1977 and 1999 (Collapsed Scales)

	1977 Study (%)	1999 Study (%)
Sacrament Attendance	(N=1,120)	(N=2,604)
Never	1	1
Infrequently	2	2
Once a month ^a	1	2
2–3 times a month	18	10
Almost every week ^b	78	86
Total	100	101 ^c
Sunday School Attendance	(N=1,119)	(N=2,602)
Never	1	2
Infrequently	3	3
Once a month ^a	2	4
2–3 times a month	19	12
Almost every week ^b	75	79
Total	100	100 ^d
Priesthood/ RS Attendance	(N=1,121)	(N=2,601)
Never	2	3
Infrequently	3	3
Once a month	1	4
2–3 times a month	20	12
Almost every week	74	78
Total	100	100 ^e
Word of Wisdom Status (%)	(N=1,128) ^f	(N=2,613)
Yes	97	99
No	3	1
Total	100	100 ^g

^aMadsen’s wording for this category was “One time per month.”

^bMadsen’s wording for this category was “Every week.”

^cFor Madsen’s (1977) study, Mean=4.686 SD=0.710. For our (1999) study, Mean=4.777 SD=0.650. The *t*-value is -3.64 and is statistically significant at $p \leq .01$.

^dFor Madsen’s (1977) study, Mean=4.638 SD=0.773. For our (1999) study, Mean=4.636 SD=0.849. The *t*-value is 0.07.

^eFor Madsen’s (1977) study, Mean=4.616 SD=0.807. For our (1999) study, Mean=4.603 SD=0.898. The *t*-value is 0.40.

^fMadsen (1977) did not provide the *N* for this category, so 1,128 (*N* for his total response rate) was included as the *N* in order to calculate the χ^2 value.

^g $\chi^2 = 13.55$ and is statistically significant at $p \leq .01$.

The increase of public religiosity during the past thirty years can certainly be attributed to an increase in personal faith. There may be, however, a couple of structural explanations as well. One is that the Church has continued to construct meetinghouses closer to the people, allowing members to attend Church more often than they used to. A second possibility may arise from the establishment in the early 1980s of the three-hour block of Church meetings. Prior to that time, members attended Sunday morning meetings comprised of priesthood and Sunday School, and later in the evening they would return for sacrament meeting. The establishment of the more time-and-travel-efficient three-hour meetings may have played a part in higher Church attendance among returned missionaries of the 1980s and 1990s. Whatever the reasons, in the end, returned missionaries continue to remain extremely active in the public aspects of their religiosity.

When looking at the overall trend in religiosity among returned missionaries during the past several decades, then, we can see that some measures in the private realm have declined while others have held steady. In the public sector, some indicators have increased, and others have remained the same. It would be premature to suggest that secularization is found among returned missionaries. Other than private prayer, it is our belief that, as a whole, the religious behavior of returned missionaries today is generally similar to those studied in 1977.

Marital Status and Temple Marriage. Another indicator of religious conviction among Latter-day Saints is temple marriage. We found that 63 percent of all returned missionaries in our sample had a current temple marriage as compared to 67 percent of Madsen’s sample (see table 7). This marks a decrease of four percent over a thirty-year period. However, the number of those remaining single has increased by six percent to 34 percent in our sample as compared to 28 percent in Madsen’s sample.³⁰ It appears that the decrease in temple marriages is attributed to the higher numbers of those not yet married rather than to an increase in civil marriages. This tendency for returned missionaries to wait longer to marry follows the pattern in the United States over the same period of time. In the 1970s, men and women in the United States married around the age of twenty-three and twenty-one, respectively. The average age in 1990 for men was twenty-six and for women, twenty-four.

Table 7
Marital Status of LDS Returned Missionaries in 1977 and 1999 (Collapsed Scales)

	1977 Study (%)	1999 Study (%)
Marital Status	(N=1,114)	(N=2,618)
Current temple marriage	67	63
Current civil marriage	4	2
Single, never married	28	34
Single, divorced	1	1
Total	100	100 ^a

^a $\chi^2 = 19.15$ and is statistically significant at $p \leq .01$.

Increased opportunities for both education and work are two of the reasons attributed to the postponement of marriage among Americans.³¹

Helping Returned Missionaries Adjust and Stay Committed to Gospel Values

As mentioned earlier, Church leaders have encouraged returned missionaries to continue living the same standards after their missions as they did while serving. Elder Dallin H. Oaks reminded:

I say to our returned missionaries—men and women who have made covenants to serve the Lord and who have already served Him in the great work of proclaiming the gospel and perfecting the Saints—are you being true to the faith? Do you have the faith and continuing commitment to demonstrate the principles of the gospel in your own lives, consistently? You have served well, but do you, like the pioneers, have the courage and the consistency to be true to the faith and to endure to the end?³²

We found that the large majority of returned missionaries in the current study were doing well in their early postmission adjustments. For example, when asked how difficult it was for them to adjust to postmission life, only about 20 percent indicated that it was either “quite difficult” or “very difficult.” The vast majority (80 percent) indicated that this adjustment was either “somewhat difficult,” “a little difficult,” or “not at all difficult.”

We further examined adjustment issues by asking returned missionaries to respond to three open-ended questions about the specific difficulties they encountered as they returned home, things family and Church leaders could do to help ease the stress of this transition, and things returned missionaries themselves could do to help ease transition stress.

Adjustment Concerns. The major concerns among returned missionary men are handling dating and marriage issues, adjusting to family and friends, and dealing with culture shock (see table 8). One man wrote, “Dating was a challenge as relationships with young women had been carefully monitored by myself for two years. Also, dating leads to marriage and with my parent’s marriage ending in divorce, this activity was scary.” Another man reported the most difficult adjustment he faced was how “to make so many critical decisions about my schooling, career, employment, social adjustment in such a short time.”

Women rated “adjusting to family and friends” and “dating, courtship, and marriage” issues as the top two problems they faced. One young woman explained that because she saw her family in a new light, she was “very critical of them. This caused big problems with [her] mother.” Other women found

Table 8
Top Adjustment Problems and Concerns among LDS Returned Missionaries (1999)

Men (N=1,639)		Women (N=1,245)	
Response	Rate (%)	Response	Rate (%) ^a
Dating, courtship, and marriage	22	Adjusting to family and friends	28
Adjusting to family and friends	21	Dating, courtship, and marriage	20
Adjusting socially, culture shock	14	Adjusting socially, culture shock	19
Finding employment	13	Adjusting psychologically: feeling lonely, selfish	15
Lacking routine, rules, structure, goals, and effective use of time	13	Maintaining spirituality	15
Maintaining spirituality	13	Encountering identity crisis— not being needed	14
Schooling	12	Lacking routine, rules, structure, goals, and effective use of time	13
Adjusting psychologically: feeling lonely, selfish	9	Finding employment	10
Encountering identity crisis— not being needed	7	Longing for companionship, associations, and activities of mission field	11
Longing for companionship, associations, and activities of mission field	7	Schooling	8

Question: Upon arriving home from your mission, what were the most difficult adjustments or problems you faced?

Answer: Because this was an open-ended question, some returned missionaries gave several suggestions. Up to the first three suggestions were included in the response rates. Thus, the total response rate for each group may exceed 100%.

that old friends had changed. “My friends were all married,” one woman wrote, “so the friends I had were all in the mission field. I was very lonely.” Another commented, “All of my closest friends were either married or currently serving a mission, so I felt the adjustment of making new friends. Also, I had a boyfriend who had waited for me and we went through an adjustment phase and the stresses of deciding whether to get married, etc.”

Women ranked psychological adjustments higher on the list than men. One woman explained that the most difficult adjustment she faced was “having a focus on *myself!* I felt so guilty. . . . [F]inding a new social group seemed so daunting and impossible. I felt so ‘nerdish’ and that was a new feeling and made me feel guilty that I cared about all that.” It appears that some young women may be more prone to experience a sense of guilt or frustration than men as they make the transition from the mission field to home.

Although our focus here is on returned missionaries, it should be pointed out that these types of feelings and adjustments are certainly not

Table 9
Top Ways the Church Could Help Returned Missionaries

Men (N=1,397)		Women (N=1,146)	
Response	Rate (%)	Response	Rate (%) ^a
Call to responsible position	38	Call to responsible position	52
Involve them in service	18	Involve them in service	18
Encourage involvement in YSA programs	11	Encourage involvement in YSA programs	10
Interview at regular intervals	9	Hold special classes/ firesides for RMs	7
Hold special classes/ firesides for RMs	7	Interview at regular intervals	7
Place less emphasis on marriage immediately after release	5	Call RMs as stake missionaries	6
Provide educational and career counseling and job placement	5	Hold RM gatherings/ support/reunions	6
Call RMs as stake missionaries	4	Place less emphasis on marriage immediately after release	5
Offer special programs through elder's quorum/ RS/Sunday school	4	Offer special programs through elder's quorum/ RS/Sunday school	3
Hold RM gatherings/ support/reunions	3	Provide educational and career counseling and job placement	3

Question: What could the Church (stakes and/or wards) do to help missionaries successfully cope with the adjustments or problems they face upon returning home?

^aBecause this was an open-ended question, some returned missionaries gave several suggestions. Up to the first three suggestions were included in the response rates. Thus, the total response rate for each group may exceed 100%.

unique to returned missionaries. Latter-day Saint young adults, regardless of returned-missionary status, experience similar challenges and must navigate their way through what is termed “the transition into adulthood.”

Ways the Church Could Help. When asked how the Church could help returned missionaries successfully cope with adjustments upon their return home, the respondents’ most frequent suggestion was for them to receive a call to a responsible position as soon as possible (see table 9). This is important in light of the statement by President Hinckley mentioned earlier that if all returning missionaries had a “meaningful responsibility” once they returned home, they would have a greater chance of remaining strong and active in the Church. Confirming President Hinckley’s invitation, one young man stated, “Put the R.M.’s to work right away, meaning a calling. Don’t let them drift for weeks or months with no responsibility. Challenge them. Most missionaries enjoyed the challenge of knocking on stranger’s doors, etc. Don’t feel like they need ‘time off.’”

This sentiment was also expressed among the women in the study. For example, one women declared, “I think that missionaries need to be involved immediately in church positions so they stay active in serving and teaching.” She concluded, “They need to feel that their experiences and service to the Lord are valued and appreciated. The best way to do that is use them.” Another women advised, “Give them a calling, or keep them busy. Be their friend. Talk with them on an individual basis. Really care about them.”

Other insightful suggestions from both men and women included Church leaders involving returned missionaries in service, providing strong young single adult programs, conducting interviews at regular intervals, and holding special classes or seminars for returned missionaries. Counsel, support, and encouragement from Church leaders concerning educational pursuits, the launching of careers, and dating would perhaps ease the difficult decisions following mission service.

Ways Returned Missionaries Could Help Themselves. The most frequent suggestion on how returned missionaries could help themselves was for them to request a Church assignment, keep busy, and get involved in Church activity and service (see table 10). In other words, newly returned

Table 10
Top Ways Returned Missionaries Could Help Themselves

Men (N=1,469)		Women (N=1,204)	
Top Responses	Rate (%)	Top Responses	Rate (%) ^a
Request Church assignment, keep busy, get involved in Church activity and service	23	Request Church assignment, keep busy, get involved in Church activity and service	36
Get involved in school/work	18	Have personal prayer	22
Study gospel regularly (scriptures)	17	Study gospel regularly (scriptures)	22
Have personal prayer	16	Get involved in school/work	20
Date/Get involved socially	13	Set goals; priorities	14
Set goals; priorities	13	Date/Get involved socially	12
Get involved generally (social and community)	10	Get involved generally (social and community)	11
Maintain mission standards	10	Maintain mission standards	11
Stay close to Spirit, God, Christ, build testimony	5	Seek spiritual associations	8
Attend all church meetings	3	Stay close to Spirit, God, Christ, build testimony	8
Seek spiritual associations	3	Attend all church meetings	5

Question: What could missionaries do to help themselves with the adjustments of returning home from the mission field?

^aBecause this was an open-ended question, some returned missionaries gave several suggestions. Up to the first three suggestions were included in the response rates. Thus, the total response rate for each group may exceed 100%.

missionaries should be proactive in finding ways to serve. Setting goals, getting involved in school and work, having a regular gospel study program, and continuing to hold personal prayer were also important activities suggested by returned missionaries. One young man said, “Continue to keep mission grooming standards and scripture study and prayer schedules. Don’t ‘take a break’ from serving in the Church (go on splits, home teach, attend firesides and socials, etc.)” Other suggestions were getting involved in dating, maintaining mission standards, seeking spiritual associations, attending all Church meetings, and accepting personal responsibility for adjustment.

Commitment to Private Religiosity in Adulthood

Another way in which we probed the dynamics of the postmission experience was by statistically assessing what factors in returned missionaries’ high school and mission years are related to helping them stay strong in their private religiosity after they return home. In other words, we wanted to know what things people can do before, during, and soon after their missions that will help them to maintain a strong commitment to reading their scriptures, praying, and thinking often about religion later in their adult life.

Figure 1 shows a conceptual model of the various dimensions or factors that we hypothesized influence private religiosity in adulthood. Private, public, and family religious practices at various times in life; parent and peer influences during adolescence; mission experiences; and religious education and Church social involvement after a mission were all included in the model.³³ From this conceptual model, a statistical model was constructed using variables that measure each dimension in the conceptual model. The statistical model was then tested using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM).³⁴ Essentially, SEM assesses the simultaneous interaction between multiple variables, thus providing a more realistic picture of the complexity of human behavior. The results of all significant factors are modeled in the figures in the appendix.

The strongest correlation in the model was between early postmission private religiosity and later adult private religiosity for both the men and the women. (The men had a coefficient of .40, and the women had .43.) The relationship between premission private religiosity and early postmission private religiosity was also significant (men, .39 and women, .37). Thus, if returned missionaries had a strong commitment to reading their scriptures, praying, and thinking about religion during their high school years, they were more likely to continue these practices during the first year home from their mission, which itself led to higher commitment in this area later in life.

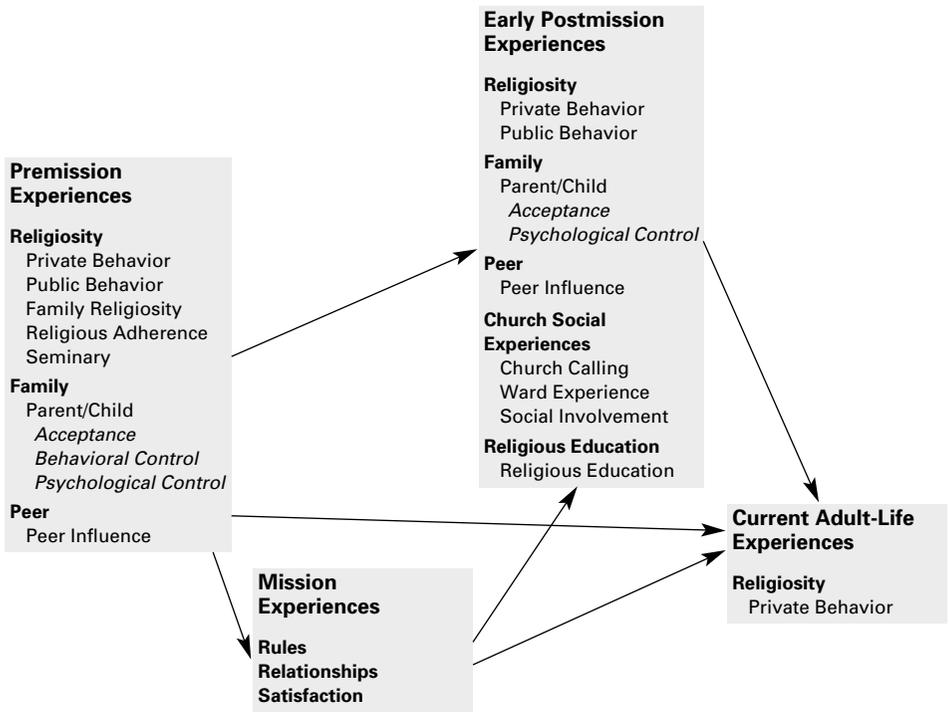


FIG. 1. Conceptual model for predicting early postmission, mission, and premission factors on private adult religiosity.

Another essential factor that led to strong private religiosity in adulthood, at least for the men, was the avoidance of R-rated movies and videos after they came home from their mission. (The coefficient for this relationship was .13; see appendix.) We used R-rated media as an indicator of exposure to things such as profanity, violence, and pornography in the media. A strong relationship between avoiding R-rated movies and videos before a mission and staying away from them immediately after was also found (.47). In other words, if youth disciplined themselves not to see R-rated media (and, for that matter, any media regardless of rating that offers exposure to inappropriate behavior) while in their high school years, they were less likely to view this material during the first year home from their mission as well as later in their adult life.

Private religiosity in adulthood was influenced by the type of mission experience as well, albeit indirectly. Findings vary between men and

women, but, in general, missionaries who kept the mission rules, who got along well with their companions, and who had a satisfying mission experience were more likely to continue to read their scriptures, pray, and think about religion right after their missions, which as we showed above is strongly linked to private religiosity in adulthood. In addition, men who kept mission rules (.17) and were more satisfied with their mission (.08) were more likely to avoid R-rated media immediately after their missions, which was correlated with higher religiosity in their adult life. So, the mission experience seems to matter when it comes to religious commitment later in life. However, we are cautious when interpreting these correlations because we are unsure whether they represent a causal relationship or are the outcome of selection bias. In other words, certain missionaries bring with them into the mission field traits that help them keep mission rules or get along with a companion. Thus, the indicators we used to measure the mission experience may actually be measuring premission characteristics.

In addition, we found that family experiences, including family religious practices and the parent/child relationship, had a significant influence on private religiosity in adulthood. Specifically, men who were raised in homes where family home evening, family prayer, and family scripture study were practiced had higher adult private religiosity (.09). Notably, this direct relationship was not found for the women. They seem to be more resilient to any neutral or negative experiences in their family than the men in terms of premission family religious practices. Perhaps the influence of Church advisors and/or friends during adolescence helps to moderate these effects in some way.

We also found that the parent/child relationship during high school is indirectly related to adult private religiosity through their mission experiences. For both men and women, their mother's level of acceptance before their mission influences their experiences in the mission field. Social scientists refer to "parental acceptance" as the positive interpersonal relationship and emotional ties between parents and children.³⁵

In addition, returned missionary women were influenced by their mothers' psychological control, which directly influences how these women get along with their mission companions. Social scientists explain that psychologically controlling parents intrude upon their children's development of individual identity, sense of efficacy, and feelings of self-worth. Such parents refuse to listen to or quickly dismiss their teenagers' ideas, opinions, and feelings.³⁶ Thus, women who experience this while teenagers may be hindered from developing a strong sense of self and the inner control necessary to resist selfish impulses that cause conflict with mission companions.

The significant negative relationship that seminary (years of seminary completion) has on several factors in the men's and women's models is opposite of what we expected (see appendix). As we further investigated this outcome, we found several possible reasons why this is the case. Perhaps the most important of these is that this outcome is simply a statistical aberration. In multiple regression analysis, this type of outcome happens once in a while and is often attributed to a phenomenon known as suppression.³⁷ This occurs when an independent variable, which originally has no significant bivariate correlation with a dependent variable, becomes highly significant to that dependent variable when it is tested in a multivariate model with one or several other independent variables with which it has a strong correlation. In our case, seminary (years of seminary completion) was found to have no significant bivariate relationship with keeping mission rules, early postmission religiosity, avoiding R-rated movies, or adult private religiosity for the men and the same for early postmission private religiosity for the women. However, when seminary was put into a multivariate model that included premission private religiosity (with which it has a significantly strong positive correlation), the interaction between these two variables creates a suppressor effect that renders seminary to have a significant negative relationship with the variables mentioned above. In the end, although seminary is found to be negatively correlated to several factors in both the men's and women's multivariate models, these relationships are a statistical anomaly and should therefore be considered spurious.

CONCLUSION

Many feel that the postmission experience is a pivotal time for Latter-day Saint young adults where maintaining the religious identity they developed in the mission field is tested. Latter-day Saints tend to attach high spiritual and social expectations to returned missionaries given their unique "life-transforming" experiences in the mission field. Results from this study indicate that such expectations may be warranted. Returned missionaries as a whole are doing very well, not only in the religious aspects of their lives, but in a number of other areas as well. Of significance is the finding that the socioeconomic status among returned missionaries exceeds that of the national average. Family characteristics are also different than those nationally, with returned missionaries showing a much lower average of divorce and also more children than their peers across the United States. As we have stated earlier in this article, these differences must be viewed with caution since we cannot statistically control for age, race, premission economic status, and educational goals.

High religiosity across a number of indicators was also found among these returned missionaries. Although it is unfortunate that any returned missionary falls into inactivity, the fact that almost nine out of ten returned missionaries continue to regularly attend Church up to seventeen years after their missions is remarkable. A comparison of returned missionaries' private religiosity over the past thirty years shows a modest decline in their scripture study and prayer, yet these levels still remain relatively high. On the other hand, an increase in their Church attendance was also found. A number of other factors remained the same. These findings (1) underscore the point that the vast majority of returned missionaries in our 1999 study continue to hold strong to their religious convictions and (2) refute the notion that there is an emerging pattern of inactivity or secularization among them. The recent raising of the bar for missionary eligibility and personalizing their teaching of the gospel would only tend to strengthen these positive results in coming years.

The results from our multivariate modeling showed that if returned missionaries had a strong commitment to private religiosity during their high school years, they were more likely to continue that practice during the first year home from their mission, which practice, in turn, continued into adulthood. Thus, it is important for parents and Church leaders to help young men and young women begin a habit of personal prayer and scripture study during the impressionable high school years. Other notable factors associated with private religiosity in adulthood were avoiding R-rated or inappropriate media; having positive mission experiences and attitudes; being involved in family home evening, family prayer, and family scripture study while a youth; and as a youth having a positive relationship with parents.

Finally, the majority of returned missionaries are adjusting well to postmission life. As suggested by the returned missionaries themselves, the most important thing they can do to help themselves during this stage is to continue to maintain good spiritual habits such as holding daily prayer and scripture study, attending Church meetings, and serving in a significant ward calling. Many of the returned missionaries recognize that such spiritual maintenance will help them have the spiritual resources to draw upon when they are challenged by other areas in life—dating, family, culture shock, school, and work.

In 1997, President Hinckley counseled Church leaders to help retain new converts by providing them with “a friend, a responsibility, and nurturing with ‘the good word of God.’”³⁸ Certainly this counsel can pertain to all members of the Church, and, based on the findings in this study, it can especially be applied to “retaining” newly returned missionaries. If returned missionaries are immediately provided with the responsibility of

a Church calling, involve themselves in Church social activities where they can develop good friendships, and continue to be nurtured through personal prayer and scripture study, they most likely will find the strength to successfully navigate their way through their postmission pursuits and continue to contribute as members of their family, society, and the Church.

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1. The total number of full-time missionaries serving at the end of 2001 was 60,850. "Statistical Report, 2001," *Ensign* 32 (May 2002): 23. A small percentage of full-time missionaries are older adults.

2. Gordon B. Hinckley, "Latter-day Counsel: Selections from Addresses by President Gordon B. Hinckley," *Ensign* 31 (March 2001): 65.

3. The original strategy was to look at those who had returned from their missions fifteen years previous to our study rather than seventeen years. However, a two-year adjustment was made because missionaries who returned fifteen years previous to our study served for only eighteen months. We thus selected the seventeen-year group who served for twenty-four months, which is the same length of time as the two, five, and ten-year groups.

4. James T. Duke and Barry L. Johnson, "The Religiosity of Mormon Men and Women through the Life Cycle," in *Latter-day Saint Social Life: Social Research on the LDS Church and Its Members*, ed. James T. Duke (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1998), 317.

5. Darwin L. Thomas, "Reflections on Adolescent and Young Adult Development: Religious, Familial, and Educational Identities," *Family Perspective* 26, no. 4 (1992): 383–404; Darwin L. Thomas, Joseph A. Olsen, and Stan E. Weed, "Missionary Service of LDS Young Men: A Longitudinal Analysis," paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion in Conjunction with the Religious Research Association, October 1989, in Salt Lake City.

6. John Max Madsen, "Church Activity of LDS Returned Missionaries" (PhD diss., Brigham Young University, 1977), abstract.

7. Frank J. Lechner, "The Case against Secularization: A Rebuttal," *Social Forces* 69 (June 1991): 1103–19; David Yamane, "Secularization on Trial: In Defense of a Neosecularization Paradigm," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 36 (March 1997): 109–22.

8. Theodore Caplow, Howard M. Bahr, and Bruce A. Chadwick, *All Faithful People: Change and Continuity in Middletown's Religion* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983); Rodney Stark and Laurence R. Iannaccone, "Sociology of Religion," in *Encyclopedia of Sociology*, eds. Edgar F. Borgatta and Marie L. Borgatta (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 4:2029–37; R. Stephen Warner, "Work in

Progress toward a New Paradigm for the Sociological Study of Religion in the United States,” *American Journal of Sociology* 98 (March 1993): 1044–93.

9. Gordon B. Hinckley, “A Prophet’s Counsel and Prayer for Youth,” *Ensign* 31 (January 2001): 4.

10. U.S. Census Bureau, *Statistical Abstract of the United States: 1999*, 119th ed. (Washington, D.C.: Bernan, 1999), no. 265.

11. U.S. Census Bureau, *Statistical Abstract of the United States: 1999*, no. 650.

12. “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” *Ensign* 25 (November 1995): 102.

13. In the United States, the measure is for families in which the husband or wife is between thirty-five and forty-four years old.

14. U.S. Census Bureau, *Statistical Abstract of the United States: 2000*, 120th ed. (Washington, D.C.: Bernan, 2000), no. 746.

15. U.S. Census Bureau, *Statistical Abstract of the United States: 1999*, no. 63.

16. U.S. Census Bureau, *Statistical Abstract of the United States: 1999*, no. 63.

17. Bruce A. Chadwick and Tim B. Heaton, *Statistical Handbook on the American Family*, 2d ed. (Phoenix: Oryx, 1999), 73.

18. Rodney Stark, *Sociology*, 9th ed., Internet ed. (Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth, 2004), 399.

19. Most of the research on returned missionaries prior to the 1980s was conducted on either a local or regional basis by stake leaders or seminary and institute personnel. See Le Roi B. Groberg, “A Preliminary Study of Certain Activities, the Religious Attitudes and Financial Status of Seventy-four Returned Missionaries Residing within Wayne Stake, Wayne County, Utah” (master’s thesis, Brigham Young University, 1936); Alma W. King, “A Survey of the Religious, Social, and Economic Activities or Practices of the Returned Missionaries of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Who Now Live in the Garland Ward of the Bear River Stake, Utah” (master’s thesis, Brigham Young University, 1936); Reed G. Probst, “A Study of Fifty-seven Returned Missionaries of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Idaho Stake of Bannock County, Idaho, 1935–36” (master’s thesis, Brigham Young University, 1936); and Wilford J. Høglund, “A Comparative Study of the Relative Levels of Physical Fitness of Male L.D.S. Missionaries Who Are Commencing and Those Just Concluding Their Missionary Service” (master’s thesis, Brigham Young University, 1971).

However, two studies by Rudger Clawson and John Madsen were more sophisticated and produced more generalizable information about LDS returned missionaries. Rudger Clawson, “The Returned Missionary: A Statistical Survey,” *Improvement Era* 39 (October 1936): 590–94; Madsen, “Church Activity of LDS Returned Missionaries.” Clawson surveyed a total of 19,880 returned missionaries in the Church (17,922 men and 1,958 women), finding almost 84 percent to be full or part tithe payers and 85 percent observing the Word of Wisdom. Also, over 82 percent were reported to be active in the Church. Clawson concluded, “Clearly, missionary service has a most excellent and lasting effect upon the missionary, from a spiritual and temporal point of view. . . . Probably no better preparation for life’s labors exists than a period of earnest, active, devoted service in the mission field.” Clawson, “Returned Missionary,” 594. Findings from Madsen’s study are discussed in detail in the next section.

20. Russell M. Nelson, "Our Sacred Duty to Honor Women," *Ensign* 29 (May 1999): 39–40.

21. Rodney Stark, "The Rise of a New World Faith," *Review of Religious Research* 26 (September 1984): 18–27; Rodney Stark, "So Far, So Good: A Brief Assessment of Mormon Membership Projections," *Review of Religious Research* 38 (December 1996): 175–78. This analysis showed that, between 1840 and 1880, the average rate of growth per decade for the Church was 40 percent. Stark made both a 30 percent (low estimate) and a 50 percent (high estimate) straight-line projection through the year 2080 of the growth rate of the Church. A follow-up study in 1996 found that the Church's actual membership in 1995 exceeded Stark's 1984 high estimate of 1995 by about 11 percent.

22. Stark, "Rise of a New World Faith," 25.

23. Stan L. Albrecht and Tim B. Heaton, "Secularization, Higher Education, and Religiosity," *Review of Religious Research* 26 (September 1984): 46.

24. Gerald Stott, "Effects of College Education on the Religious Involvement of Latter-day Saints," *BYU Studies* 24 (Winter 1984): 43–52; Ray M. Merrill, Joseph L. Lyan, and William J. Jensen, "Lack of Secularizing Influence of Education on Religious Activity and Parity among Mormons," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 42 (March 2003): 113–24; Brent L. Top and Bruce A. Chadwick, "'Seek Learning, Even by Study and Also by Faith': The Relationship between Personal Religiosity and Academic Achievement among Latter-day Saint High-School Students," *Religious Educator: Perspectives on the Restored Gospel* 2, no. 2 (2001): 121–37.

25. Madsen, "Church Activity of LDS Returned Missionaries." Madsen surveyed 1,757 returned missionaries who were from the United States and who had been released from full-time missionary service for one, two, three, five, and ten years. After two mailings of the survey, 1,148 of the subjects completed and returned the questionnaire, a response rate of 65 percent.

26. It is important to note that the statistical testing used to compare Madsen's sample with the current sample required that the scales for several of these measurements be collapsed or recombined in order to better match each other. This could potentially introduce some inaccuracies in the comparisons; therefore, caution should be used concerning these comparisons.

27. Madsen, "Church Activity of LDS Returned Missionaries," 58–61.

28. Chadwick and Heaton, *Statistical Handbook on the American Family*, 73.

29. Madsen, "Church Activity of LDS Returned Missionaries," 52–53, 63.

30. Madsen, "Church Activity of LDS Returned Missionaries," 57.

31. Richard J. Gelles, *Contemporary Families: A Sociological View* (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1995), 112.

32. Dallin H. Oaks, "Following the Pioneers," *Ensign* 27 (November 1997): 73.

33. Although the general design of this model applies a life course analysis, the data were collected cross-sectionally rather than longitudinally. This required the respondents to provide retrospective data about personal attitudes, behaviors, and events that had taken place years earlier. Such reflection may not always be accurate. For example, it may be that some of those who are highly religious now may think of themselves as always having been highly religious, even though they were not. The low accuracy of certain types of retrospective has been shown in findings of several studies. (See T. B. Heaton and V. R. A. Call, "Modeling Family

Dynamics with Event History Techniques,” *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 57 [1995]: 1078–90.) It is important to keep this in mind while assessing the results of each model.

34. SEM statistically estimates both the direct and indirect effects of the independent variables on the dependent variable.

35. See Brian K. Barber, “Introduction: Adolescent Socialization in Context—The Role of Connection, Regulation, and Autonomy in the Family,” *Journal of Adolescent Research* 12 (1997): 5–11.

36. See Barber, “Introduction: Adolescent Socialization in Context.”

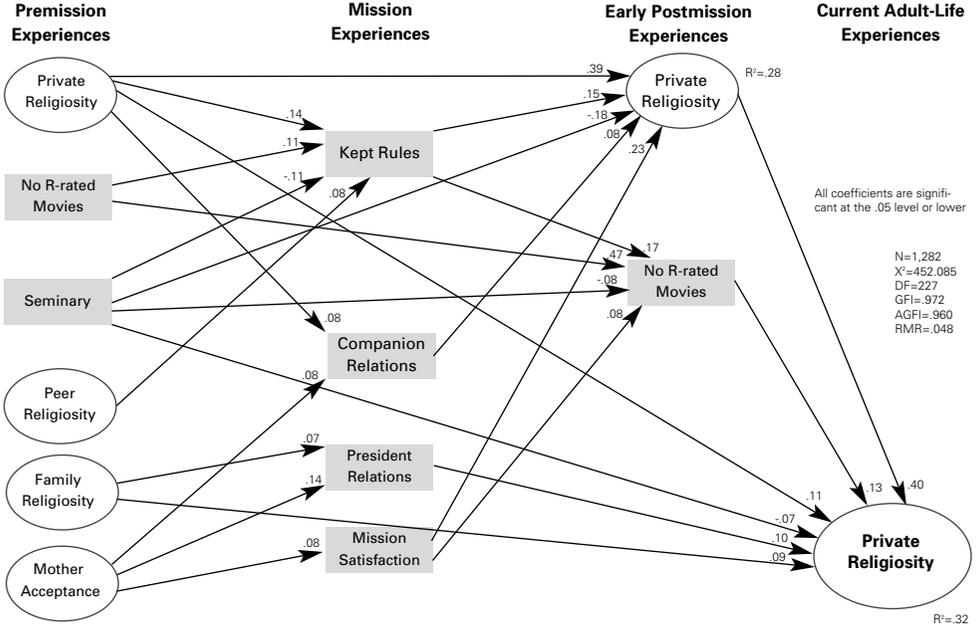
37. Judith M. Collins and Frank L. Schmidt, “Can Suppressor Variables Enhance Criterion-Related Validity in the Personality Domain?” *Educational and Psychological Measurement* 57 (1997): 925–36.

38. Gordon B. Hinckley, “Converts and Young Men,” *Ensign* 27 (May 1997): 47.

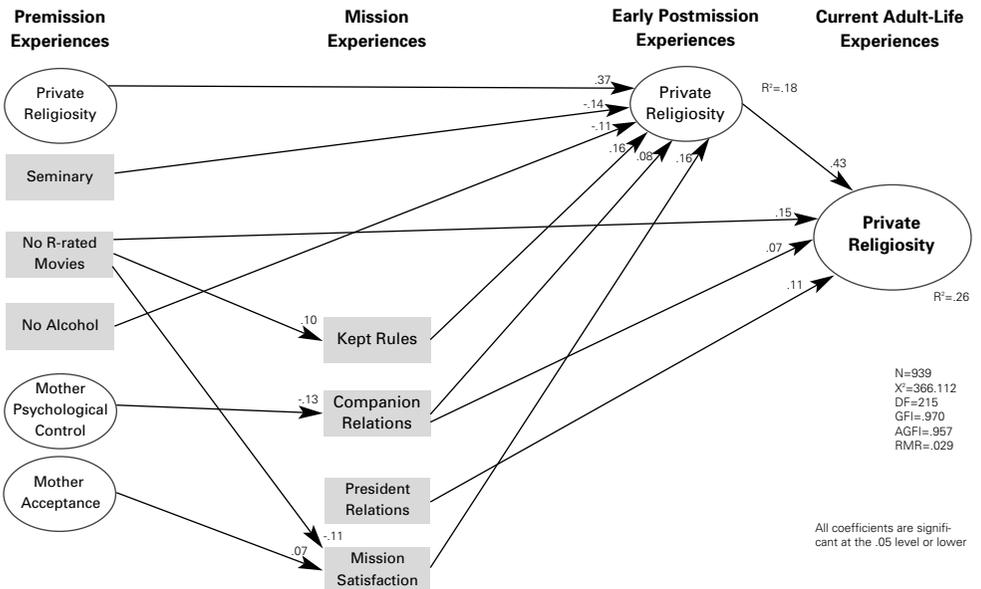
Appendix

Model of significant estimates for predicting early postmission, mission, and premission factors on private adult religiosity

Men



Women



KEY

Ovals are factors made up of *several* indicators

Boxes are factors made up of *one* indicator

Heavy arrows show strongest estimated significant indicator