

The Young Single Adult Male Experience of Being “Older” in the LDS Church

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Abstract

Researchers in this study set out to explore the young single adult male experience of being “older” in the LDS church where marriage by the age of 25 is emphasized. Guided by the Life Course Perspective, a qualitative study was designed that surveyed 43 single men in the greater Washington DC area between the ages of 25-31. The survey was administered electronically and consisted of 20 demographic and open-ended questions. Questions were geared towards understanding how LDS men make sense of their experience of being older and single in the Church as well as the influence their social groups have on their experience. Thematic analysis of participant responses revealed two major themes: “It just hasn’t worked out yet,” and “I’m failing.” Further findings suggest themes of not fitting in, the clock is ticking, the women’s role, and wanting to get married for the right reasons. Additional sub-themes are addressed as well as their clinical implications and suggestions for further research.

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CHAPTER I - INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

In The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, marriage is more than just a lifestyle change, or social convention. It is the foundation on which covenants are made with God, and eternal families are created. Members of the Latter-day Saint church (also known as Mormons or LDS) view this ordinance of eternal marriage in one of the LDS temples, as one of the greatest blessings and duties of this life.

The LDS Church currently has over 14 million members worldwide (Hales, 2011). Of those members, 48% live inside the US, which makes it the fourth largest US religious body. The Church's core principles and values are centered in the teachings and gospel of Jesus Christ, in addition to revelations and communications received today through modern day prophets. Latter-day Saint members place a strong emphasis on marriage, believing that marriage is ordained of God (Doctrine & Covenants, 49:15) and is a prerequisite for obtaining the highest heavenly state after mortality (Doctrine & Covenants, 131:1-4). These values are endorsed and further reinforced in the LDS Church's official statement of The Family: A Proclamation to the World,

“We...solemnly proclaim that marriage between a man and a woman is ordained of God and that the family is central to the Creator's plan for the eternal destiny of His children... We declare that God's commandment for His children to multiply and replenish the earth remains in force. We further declare that God has commanded that the sacred powers of procreation are to be employed only between man and woman, lawfully wedded as husband and wife.” - (The First Presidency and Council of the Twelve Apostles of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints)

LDS members take the commitment to marriage seriously. A survey conducted by The Pew Forum on Religious and Public Life in 2007, found that 71 percent of the LDS population 18 and older is married. Comparatively, they found only 54 percent of those 18 and older in the general population to be married. According to the 2010 Census, the National median age at first marriage for women and men in the US are 26 and 28 years old. Although official LDS Church statistics on the age at first marriage are not made available to the public, for the state of Utah (which is the central headquarters for the Church and whose population is 62.1 percent LDS), the average age at first marriage for women is 22, and for men is 24 (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2010).

Although LDS members tend to marry earlier and at a higher percentage than the general population, their demographics, too, are changing as they increasingly delay marriage. In his counsel directed at the single men of the Church, President Thomas S. Monson (current President of the Church) stated, “I see lovely young ladies who desire to be married and to raise families, and yet their opportunities are limited because so many young men are postponing marriage” (Monson, 2011). The Church has not formally disclosed any official statistics on this trend, however, Dallin H. Oaks (one of the current twelve apostles) stated, “The average age at marriage has increased in the last few decades... It's marriage time. That is what the Lord intends for his young adult sons and daughters” (Oaks, 2006). These words from Church leaders reflect their concern over this growing trend. The LDS church has not suggested a specific age at which one should marry, however there does seem to be a path that the majority of LDS men are expected follow.

In their youth, LDS men prepare for the day when they will serve a two year mission around the age of 19. During this process, they leave behind all current endeavors and assume a full time responsibility to share the gospel message wherever they are called to serve at their own expense. After their two years are complete, they return home to reengage the life they left behind. Upon returning, their duty is fourfold, “All returned missionaries should be encouraged when they return home to remain active in the Church, secure an education, acquire employment skills, and move in the direction of finding an eternal companion” (Tingey, 2007). It does not seem by coincidence that most LDS members graduate college between 22-25 years old and tend to marry within that same timeframe. The decisions these singles make about marriage and a profession during this phase will greatly influence their experience into adulthood.

In 1973, the Church made an effort to better meet the needs of the single adult population and created congregations nationwide called “singles wards.” These were originally designed for students attending college, but now include all other single adults who are 18-30 years old. They were designed for singles to be able to attend religious services and associate with individuals of their faith and marital status. In the decades since then, as church membership has grown, so too, have the needs and demographics of its single members. Recently the Church separated singles wards into two different groups: Young Single Adult wards for those under 31, and Mid-single Adult wards for those ages 31 to 45. Not all areas of the country have these Mid-single Adult wards, however, this change was made in response to the growing number of single adults over 30 years old in the Church. Notwithstanding the Church’s attempts to meet the needs and changing demographics of single adults as they delay marriage, many single members are

struggling to make sense of their experience being out of step with the LDS culture regarding marriage.

In an interview done with Mike Wallace of the television program '60 minutes' years ago, Steve Young (a retired National Football League player) expressed his sentiments about being a single LDS member; "You want to talk about the pressure I feel? Brigham Young [an early LDS church leader] once said...that [a man] over 27 years of age that's not married is a menace to society. So here's my grandfather telling me to get with it. You don't think I feel the pressure? I guarantee it." Although the 'menace to society' quote is commonly attributed to Brigham Young (an early President in the Church), it's origins have yet to be substantiated. Further, depending on the rumor, the age at which one becomes a 'menace' is believed to be somewhere between 25 and 27 years old. Whether or not the quote is ever accurately cited or remains simply a rumor in jest, it appears that it's message is being perpetuated and felt today in the LDS single culture.

As these members attempt to make sense of their experience as a single adult in the Church, they encounter both internal pressure and pressure from the LDS culture to move on and get married. Many express a feeling of failure if they have yet to do so. When exploring some of the specific sources of this pressure, researchers identified the Church itself (and its teachings), attitudes of their families, and their own personal beliefs to be the greatest sources of pressure. Interestingly, those same sources of pressure were described as being their greatest source of support as well (Darrington, Piercy, & Niehuis, 2005).

Church leaders have been vocal about their desire for LDS singles to marry and move on to the next phase of life. A current apostle in the Church, Elder Richard G. Scott, spoke recently

in the LDS General Conference (semi-annual meeting for all church members) to the subject: "If you are a young man of appropriate age and are not married, don't waste time in idle pursuits... Get on with life and focus on getting married. Don't just coast through this period of life" (Scott, 2011). In the same year, President Monson stated, "Now, I have thought a lot lately about you young men who are of an age to marry but who have not yet felt to do so... We are not doing our duty as holders of the priesthood when we go beyond the marriageable age and withhold ourselves from an honorable marriage..." (Monson, 2011). Thirty years ago it was estimated that 30 percent of the membership was over 18 and single (Goodman & Heaton, 1986). Current statistics have not been released, yet of the older statistics, this still is a sizable population of people that are not married in a religion that expects all of its members to strive for marriage. So, a significant number of young LDS men are finding themselves single in a religious culture that may feel being "older" and single is at best a problem, and at worst a threat to society.

As the number and age of young single adult LDS men rises, the experience of being out of step with the LDS life-cycle becomes more common. Despite the prevalence of this trend, there is a lack of research that represents the experience of the single LDS male population. While the issue may impact both men and women, this study will examine specifically the experience of young single adult men in the Church. The LDS culture tends to follow the traditional model of courting where the onus is on men to initiate dating, engagement, and marriage. Church leaders have made an effort to address men directly in reference to this issue. "My heart reaches out to our single sisters, who long for marriage and cannot seem to find it. ... I have far less sympathy for the young men, who under the customs of our society, have the prerogative to take the initiative in these matters but in so many cases fail to do so" (Hinckley,

1991). For the purpose of this study, we will focus on the experiences specific to those men within the age range of 25-31. The minimum age of 25 seems to appropriately capture those LDS men that return home from their missions at 21 and graduate after four years of college. This will help target those that recently graduated college single and might feel like they “missed the boat,” are “older,” or a “menace to society” since they did not marry when many of their LDS peers did. This also includes those who are approaching the age of 31 when the transition into the family or mid-single ward begins. Once they have transitioned, opportunities to meet and interact with a marriageable population are greatly diminished compared to young single adult wards. The purpose is to identify and explore the experience of those that may feel out of step with the normal LDS life-cycle.

Significance

Single males are of concern to the church and some, at least, are suffering themselves. Yet, we know little formally about their experience. This study will help us better understand the experience of these young men. While the populations of singles continue to grow outside and inside the church, it is important to further study and understand the experience of those out of step with their cultural norms and the meaning these individuals make of their experience. Understanding this population’s experience could be beneficial to those members who participate, as well as other members as we seek to understand them. Having this information could potentially help clergy and therapists alike assist single members that might be struggling with this time in their life. Research done on this LDS population could potentially fuel insight and further research into other Christian or religious groups that share similar attitudes about marriage.

Rationale & Theoretical Framework

When thinking of ways to explore the experience of these single LDS Men, doing individual person-to-person interviews appears to be the best choice to explore individual first hand accounts. Doing interviews this way could potentially yield richer data, however, there is also a chance for participants to be more hesitant to respond fully or accurately in person. There might be deep, vulnerable, embarrassing, and even shameful feelings over this topic that would be best shared anonymously. To this end, the study will be done electronically through open ended questionnaires. The lack of face to face interaction and increased anonymity might foster a more open environment, thereby creating more genuine responses to the research questions. The hope is that participants will be less likely to censor themselves while having sufficient time to process and reflect on how they feel and how they would like to express it. In addition, this could provide a larger and more diverse sample size since there is no need for geographic proximity for an electronic questionnaire. Conducting the study this way has the potential to reach a population that might be less enthusiastic about sharing their experience in the presence of another person.

This study will be guided by the Family Life Cycle (Duvall & Miller, 1985), focusing on stage one (Establishment Phase- courtship and marriage) of it's eight-stage model. Each stage in this model has a set of tasks (defined by normative expectations for the life stage) that the individual must accomplish to best prepare for the next stage in life. In the establishment phase, individuals that successfully accomplish the normative tasks will go through a courtship phase, establish themselves as a couple, prioritize the couple's interests over the individual's, and have a marriage ceremony which validates their relationship and establishes the family. According to this model, "if the challenge of development is met positively, then the individual will be happier

and have more success with later stages of development” (Smith, et al., 2009, p.67). For those individuals that do not meet the “challenges of development,” and do not complete the expected normal tasks, what is their experience being “out of step” with this normal life cycle?

Using the life course perspective will help take into account what meaning these single men make of their experience of not having accomplished the tasks of this stage (establishment Phase). Specifically, it will explore how single men personally perceive this experience through their own eyes (Ontogenic), and how the attitudes and perceptions of single men’s social groups (family, peers, and the Church) influence them over the years (Generational). In order to focus on the social group interaction within the LDS culture, the Historical perspective (how these men experience being single amid the current social trends and marital attitudes of today’s US society) will not be addressed in this study (Smith, et al., 2009). The study’s questions will be guided by this Life Course Perspective and used in evaluation of the data. The study will be concentrated on those single LDS males over the age of 25 and under 31, in an effort to explore their experience and provide them a voice at this time of life.

Research Questions

Understanding that the LDS Church places a strong emphasis on all of its members to marry and have a family, this study is interested in understanding the experience of those single men in the LDS Church who are “older” and have yet to marry or transition to the family and mid-singles wards. This study is interested in answering the following following questions: What is their experience of being between 25-31 and single in the Church? How does young single men’s relationship status influence their relationship with God? What influence do their social

groups have on them at this stage in life? What would they like their social groups to know about being single at this stage in life?

CHAPTER II - LITERATURE REVIEW

The focus of this literature review will be on marital trends of the general single adult population in the United States, as well as LDS Church member's marital attitudes and trends. Literature on the Life Course Perspective and its application to the young single adult population will be addressed.

Marriage Trends in the US

Traditionally in the United States, there has been a general consensus that the passage to adulthood includes the bonds of marriage. Today as trends and views on relationships and marriage develop, the traditional role of marriage in the transition to adulthood has become less clear. Recent results from the US Census have shown a decrease in the number of marriages. In 2000, there were 2.3 million marriages within a population of 281 million (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2000). Comparatively in 2010, even though the population had grown to over 308 million, the number of marriages decreased to under 2.1 million (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2010). Not only do statistics reveal that people are marrying less frequently, they also show that people are progressively marrying later in life. The 1960 Census statistics found that the median age for men's first marriage was 22.8 (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1960). Forty years later the median age rose to 26.8. In the 10 years since, that age has jumped to 28.2. As young adults are delaying marriage and marrying less frequently, the role of marriage in "becoming an adult" has become less recognizable.

In a study of 536 young adults from five college sites across the US, Carol et al. (2009) found that many young adults perceive that becoming an adult and becoming ready for marriage

are two distinct life transitions. Participants suggested that becoming an adult requires a shift from being taken care of by others to taking care of oneself. Subsequently, becoming ready for marriage involved a transition from self-care to caring for others. From data in this same survey, Willoughby et al. (2012) examined young adults' attitudes about marriage compared to their parents' marital ideals for their children. Survey results revealed statistically significant differences between the two groups. Parents felt it was better for their children to marry later than their children did (mothers' Mean = 25.91, fathers' Mean = 26.01, children's Mean = 25.21). Researchers hypothesized that parents potentially endorse later marriage in an effort to promote education and economic stability. Parents may also hope delaying will improve their child's chances for a successful marriage. In addition, parents placed lower importance on marriage as a life goal and differed on criteria of marriage readiness than their young adult children. Specifically, just under one-third of young adult children felt that living with their partner was necessary before marriage. Parents however, saw cohabitation as a less important step before marriage as only 14% agreed. Other areas where criteria differed were in importance of "norm compliance" (e.g., driving close to the speed limit, avoiding becoming drunk etc.) and "reduced risk taking" (e.g., illegal drugs, unprotected sex etc.) before marriage. Results from the study further supported contemporary trends of delayed marriage among young adults, and suggested that this delay may be encouraged by parental attitudes.

Thornton and Young-Demarco (2001) explored young adult trends in attitudes and values concerning marriage by analyzing five data sets from studies done in the 1960s through the late 1990s. Youngest participants in the study were high school seniors; however, the majority was at least 24 years old. Data from the 1960s through late 1970s revealed a sharp decline in

participants' feelings toward remaining single, and an increase in negative attitudes towards marriage. However, since then, marriage has become more valued, desired, and expected.

“Although the overwhelming majority of Americans continue to value marriage, children, and family life, these institutions are now much more voluntary and less obligatory than they were in previous decades. Marriage and parenthood are no longer seen as requirements for adult manhood and womanhood. (p.1031)”

Further results suggest that traditional expectations concerning the necessity of marriage, staying married, having children, and limiting sexual expression and childbearing to marriage are fading. There has been an increased emphasis on tolerance and acceptance of more diverse values and behavior. Specifically, behaviors such as remaining single, premarital sex, unmarried cohabitation, divorce, and choosing to be childless are more widely accepted.

Marriage trends and attitudes have shifted even further since the 1960s. The decades since have manifested increased average age at first marriage, rising levels of cohabitation, higher divorce rates, and lower levels of childbearing (Smock, Manning, & Porter, 2005). Unmarried cohabitation itself has dramatically impacted the marriage process. A study conducted by the Center for Disease Control from 2006-2010 found that 48% of women (15-44) in the US cohabited as a first union. That number has increased from 43% in 2002 and 35% in 1995 (National Health Statistics Report, 2012). According to the US Census Bureau (2010), the number of unmarried couples living together increased tenfold from 1960 (439,000) to 2005 (4.85 million). However, even as couples are progressively cohabitating before marriage, the majority of men and women still plan on marrying at some point in their lives (Walsh, 1995), and

74% of them will be married by their 35th birthday (Fields & Casper, 2001).

As marital trends and attitudes continue to shift within the general US population, their impact is starting to be seen among the upcoming generation of young adults. A piece done by Time Magazine (2005) attempts to describe this situation:

“Social scientists are starting to realize that a permanent shift has taken place in the way we live our lives. In the past, people moved from childhood to adolescence and from adolescence to adulthood, but today there is a new, intermediate phase along the way. The years from 18 until 25 and even beyond have become a distinct and separate life stage, a strange, transitional never-never land between adolescence and adulthood in which people stall for a few extra years, putting off the iron cage of adult responsibility that constantly threatens to crash down on them.” - (Lev Grossman, Time Magazine - *Grow Up? Not So Fast*)

As previous research on marital trends and attitudes have suggested, young single adults in the general population are increasingly putting off one of the traditional transition markers to adulthood, marriage.

Marriage in the LDS Church

Compared to the substantial amount of research available on young single adults in the general population, there is very little academic research that has been publicly released on the young single adult LDS population. Although Church leaders' remarks suggest that research has been done internally by the LDS Church, information and statistics regarding marriage trends and the young single adult population of the church have not been released to the public.

Therefore, most of the information and research in this section will come from official Church doctrine and teachings as well as from public addresses given by LDS General Authorities, who are the leaders in the LDS church.

As the general population expands the definition of a socially acceptable relationship, the LDS Church has made it a point to further emphasize what it believes to be God's standard for marriage. An official Church document released by the First Presidency of the Church, the primary leadership, declared that "marriage between a man and a woman is ordained of God and ... is central to the Creator's plan for the eternal destiny of His children" (The Family: A Proclamation to the World, 1995). Despite the many acceptable forms of relationships among the general population, the Church and its members continue to only endorse traditional marriage between a man and a woman. For LDS members being *sealed* or married eternally in an LDS temple is one of the most important decisions a person can make. Members believe that because of this sealing, their families can live together eternally after this life. Thus, it is the common goal of all LDS members to marry and be sealed to one's family in an LDS temple.

As new trends and attitudes about marriage in the general population develop, LDS singles increasingly operate in a world that is moving further from the norms and standards that LDS Church members are trying to uphold. Church leaders remain clear that God's standards for relationships and marriage have not changed. Sexual relations are held sacred, to be used only "as the Lord has directed [in marriage]" (Packer, 1972). Members believe premarital and extramarital sexual relations are serious transgressions in the eyes of God. Cohabitation or any form of sexual relationship is not an option for single members before marriage. Attempting to maintain stricter standards of sexuality and expectations of marriage while living in a society that does not generally promote the stricter morals, can seem to be difficult for LDS Church members.

As society increasingly delays marriage, LDS Church leaders have discouraged the

Church's single members from following this trend. However, Church leaders have acknowledged that the impact of this new trend has indeed reached the LDS population as well.

“This tendency to postpone adult responsibilities, including marriage and family, is surely visible among our Latter-day Saint young adults. The average age at marriage has increased in the last few decades, and the number of children born to LDS married couples has decreased.” -(Dallin H. Oaks, of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. *Ensign*, 2006)

Church leaders have shared their concerns about this trend with their members. Lately they have specifically tried to re-emphasize to young single adult members not to delay marriage, nor to place other worldly pursuits ahead of an eternal marriage (Monson, 2011). In addition, these marital trends also appear to have had an influence on LDS single men's Church participation. According to Goodman and Heaton (1986), the longer young single adult men remain single, the more they seem to struggle with church activity and attendance. Goodman and Heaton mailed questionnaires to a random sample of LDS adults (n=7,446) 18 and older in the US and Canada with an 81% response rate. Of participants that were over 30 and single, only 19 men attended Church weekly for every 100 women who attended weekly. Men, in particular, appear to be at risk for decreasing or even ending their church attendance as they age without marrying. Studies have yet to further explore the emotional influence growing older and remaining single has had on men in the Church.

Research on Young Single Adults

Although we know that LDS young adults are delaying marriage to some extent, we know little about their reasons for doing so. Again, since research on the LDS single population is sparse, information provided in this section on LDS young single adults must predominantly

come from non-academic resources as well as from studies of the general population.

In 1987, Paul Warner (Director of Seminary and Institute teacher training at Brigham Young University) administered an informal survey (for a local religious project in Utah) to 250 LDS young single adult men that recorded respondent's attitudes and personal beliefs about marriage. Results from the survey suggested that over 80% of single men desire to marry as soon as they find the right partner. When asked what they felt was keeping them from marriage, 60% of the participants were reluctant to marry due to financial concerns, while 55% reported the main reason was that they had not found the right person.

In a 2011 interview published in USA Today, David Dollahite, a BYU professor in the School of Family Life, who interacts regularly with the LDS young single adult population in his position at BYU, suggested that LDS men who delay marriage do so for one of six reasons: Finances—concerns about being able to provide for a spouse or family. Faith— it takes persistence to continue dating after being rejected in addition to committing to one person amidst so many options. Family—parents often feel less enthusiasm about their children marrying than the children themselves, and encourage their children to take their time. Fun—spending too much time doing recreational activities without placing a priority on marriage. Fear—anxiety about current divorce statistics or their ability to maintain a marriage prevents them from entering the commitment. Finickiness—looking for the perfect person. “The young men think, 'I am dating a 9.7, but if I wait, maybe I could get a 9.9'...these kids are terrified of making a mistake... they think too much and overanalyze everything” (Fletcher, 2011).

Based on comments from Church leaders, educational professionals that work with LDS

single men, and informal research studies, LDS single men seem to be encountering obstacles that are delaying them from marriage. As these men delay marriage, it appears to have an influence on their church activity and participation. How these obstacles such as family influence, fear, or meeting the right person etc. are impacting other dimensions of LDS men's single experience has yet to be explored. However, researchers have explored the experience of women in the general population's single experience later in life, and this work may be somewhat instructive. These studies could help provide models for developing similar studies for LDS single men.

Sharp and Ganong (2011) set out to better understand what messages unmarried women were hearing from their social groups during what they call "limbo time"—their late 20's early 30's. The study consisted of semi-structured qualitative interviews with 12 single women between the ages of 28-34 in a mid-western college town. Considerations of ontogenetic, generational, and historical time from the life course perspective were used to guide the research. Results from the study suggested that the ontological experience of these women appeared to prime their preconceptions of their social environment. Participants reported becoming acutely aware of the changing reality that their increasing age brought on: Their pool of eligible men was declining, watching friends and coworkers marry, while risks and concerns over late childbearing started to become more apparent. Generational pressure created a paradox wherein single women felt both highly visible because they stuck out for being "not married" and at the same time invisible since they were "not married," unlike the majority. One woman shared an example of this experience being "visible" as she described her feelings lining up for the traditional bouquet toss at a wedding; "you feel like a reject, like I'm a loser, I'm not married, let's just all look at

me” (p.971). Other times women described feeling “invisible” as family members stopped taking an interest in their dating lives. Often, this was interpreted as family members giving up hope that they would ever marry. As these women remained single, triggers such as friend’s marriages, baby births, Valentine’s day etc., served as painful reminders that they were “getting older” and on a “different path” in life.

Further research on single women suggests that the amount of pressure and stigma one experiences may vary based on age. White (1992) attempted to measure “well-being” differences between 11,131 single and married Canadians. In addition to finding variations in well-being between married and single members, the author suggested that single members experience varying amounts of social stigma depending on their age. Women between 25-35 appeared to experience the highest level of stigma as it was socially expected that they would marry and have children by their 30’s. Women younger than 25 did not experience the same degree of stigma because singlehood is normative for those under 25 years old. Therefore, hypothetically, being single at different times in the life course could have varying impacts on the single population. Although this research specifically applies to single women in the general population, there is potential for exploration of single LDS male experiences during this same “limbo time.”

Involuntary Childlessness

In order to better understand the experience of being out of step, potential parallels can be drawn between the young single adult population and married couples or individuals that wish for children, but are unable to have have them (involuntary childlessness). This topic has been well addressed over the years, and findings from men’s childless experiences could provide

insight for further exploration into the experience of single men who hope for marriage, but are unable to attain it.

One study in particular explored the experience of childless men and their desire for fatherhood (Hadley & Hanley, 2011). Researchers in this qualitative study interviewed 10 biologically childless men and surveyed their experience being childless over the life course. Findings from the study revealed that many of these men experienced depression, exclusion, isolation, and risk taking behaviors (negative coping strategies, alcohol use, suicidal ideation etc.) resulting from what they described as a distressful experience. Specifically, eight of the participants stated that childlessness had a depressive influence on them to varying extents. The participants reported experiencing family and cultural pressure and expectations to father children. Some participants believed their childless state led to negative discrimination in both work and family environments which made them feel like “outsiders.” Their awareness of how others perceived them evoked a wide range of reactions from mistrust and envy, to acceptance and isolation. The study found that participants desire for parenthood peaked in their 30s and gradually decreased from there, however, never completely subsiding. Over the life course, participants described a changing experience “from the expectation and anticipation of becoming a parent to wistfulness at not being a father and, for some, a grudging concession to their childless state” (p.64).

Another study examining the male childless experience explored comments in an online support group for men dealing with infertility (Malik & Coulson, 2008). The 728 responses on the forum revealed that the men in this group were experiencing a range of negative emotions and difficulties as a result of infertility. They felt that they were supposed to be a source of

strength and support for their partner, and in order to do so, needed to suppress their own distress and anxieties. Even though these men struggled internally with being childless, there was a social expectation that they not become upset about the situation. “We feel every loss, every failure, every set back... We’re men, we should just take it on the chin and deal with it without showing emotion.” The study further suggested that anonymous online forums are helpful for men to properly process their emotions around being childless.

While studies suggest that men who desire children and remain childless through the life cycle, there is potential for men who desire marriage but are not able to attain it, to be similarly distressed regarding their unmet aspirations. However, their experience has yet to be explored. Additionally, there appears to be significant negative social influences on childless men that could be assessed in the population of older single men as well.

Life Course Perspective

Bengtson and Allen (1993) developed the Life Course Perspective that seeks to take into account changes over time within an individual’s social context. Examining an individual’s experience through different levels of time can provide an understanding of the social meanings a person attributes to their own life development. The three types of time explored within this perspective are: Ontogenetic—the way one sees their experience at different ages and stages of life through their own eyes. Generational—the meaning an individual makes through social interactions during this life stage with those that surround them. And Historical—includes the influence of the social context of the greater historical period of which an individual is in. This framework goes well with the research questions of this study, which are designed to explore the

experience of the young single adult LDS population.

For the young single adult LDS male population, ontogenetic time factors include how these men have experienced the process of being single over time. Specifically exploring the meaning they make of being single well past when they were socially expected to marry, witnessing the marital success of others, all while trying to maintain the standards and expectations of the LDS culture. Considering generational time for these men includes exploring the influence of their close social groups (parents, peers, Church leaders, etc.). Specifically, investigating the power and impact these groups have on singles' dating habits, participation in Church, and general experience of being single. Exploring this population through both ontogenetic and generational time has the potential to help researchers understand how being single in the LDS church shapes the life course of these men.

The Life Course Perspective emphasizes that expectations and social interactions during an individual's life course helps shape and develop the trajectory of that individual's life (Elder et al., 2004). Developmentally, normative tasks and events such as graduation, marriage, and parenthood are markers of successful transition into adulthood that help individuals establish identities that give them a sense of self, status, and purpose (Thoits, 1999). If these identities are valued and expected by an individual or culture and are not achieved, there is potential for that individual to feel distressed (Mossakowski, 2011). Single adults in the LDS Church that are not accomplishing these life-cycle markers well into their later 20's and 30's could be at risk for feeling out of step within the LDS culture.

Summary

After reviewing the research available on the young single adult population of both of the general population and of Latter-day Saints, there appear to be many areas that have yet to be explored. What is known about both populations is that they are both delaying marriage to some extent. New forms of relationships in the general population are developing and becoming more prevalent as LDS members remain resolute in their support of traditional marriage. Some research has explored the attitudes and perceptions on marriage in the general population, however, very little has been done on the LDS single male population. Particularly, little is known about the experience of LDS single men as they grow older and remain single in amid the LDS culture. Further, in the general population, we have seen that men who are behind in their life cycle development (with regard to being childless) are experiencing a significant amount of distress from this experience of being behind, and could potentially parallel that of single men that are feeling behind. As studies of single women growing older in the general population have brought to light this “limbo time,” a case can be made for further study of the single male population at this life-cycle stage as well. Using principles from the Life Course Perspective to guide exploration could help provide a foundation of understanding the experience these men make over time. Specifically, the study uses the ontogenetic and historical time perspectives to focus on single men’s own perceptions of their experience and their unique cultural and social influences of the LDS community. Studying this population in this way has the potential to provide a depth and breadth of information on a population about which little is known.

CHAPTER III - METHODS

Overview

This qualitative research study was designed to explore the experience of young single adult men in the Latter-day Saint community. The study's questions were rooted in and developed through the life course perspective with regard to Single LDS men over the age of 25 and under 31. An open ended survey was administered in the form of an electronic questionnaire, and disseminated throughout three LDS singles listservs in the greater Washington DC area. Data analysis were performed using Thematic Analysis.

Recruitment and Participants

After receiving approval from the Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board to commence the study (see Appendix A), a link to the electronic survey was created and recruitment began. Young single adult men were recruited predominantly by email invitation (see Appendix B) through three LDS singles listservs in the greater Washington DC area. Combined, these listservs served over 1,000 singles in DC as well as other areas of the country that have members still connected to the listservs. Individuals on the listservs were singles who have opted in to participate on the forum and included LDS members from: The DC 2nd ward in Chevy Chase, Maryland, the Langley ward in McLean, VA, and both the Colonial 1st and 2nd wards in Mount Vernon, VA. These listservs were selected as the medium for recruitment due to their electronic accessibility and large population of LDS single members connected to them. In addition to email notices through the listservs, a few participants were recruited by word of mouth (since they were not connected to one of the listservs) and forwarded the survey link by a friend.

In order for individuals to be included in this study, they had to meet the qualifications for inclusion into the study. Those that qualified were LDS men (regardless of length of membership, or current church activity) over the age of 25 and under 31 living in the United States. In order to ensure that only qualifying participants were included in the study, all individuals that attempted to participate were screened electronically through six eligibility questions at the start of the survey (see Appendix C). These questions assessed their gender, age, religious affiliation, marital status, if they had children, and their current residence to make sure inclusion criteria were met.

Those that were disqualified from the study were individuals that did not meet the above inclusion criteria, had previously been married, had children, were currently cohabitating, or lived outside of the US. The reason for these specific criteria was to focus on those LDS men that had not yet progressed through the first life cycle stage (Establishment Phase - courtship and marriage). The purpose for geographic limitations was to target the unique cultural experience of Latter-day Saint men within the US.

Procedures

Recruitment emails were sent out through the listservs with this message stating, “Single men, what do you think? If you’re a single man between the ages of 25 and 31, please share with us your concerns, joys and struggles in this anonymous survey.” (see Appendix B). Those that had questions or needed more information were encouraged to contact the principal researcher by email (made available in recruitment email). Roughly 10 people contacted the researcher with varying reasons. Some inquired if a similar survey would ever be created for women, others

expressed a desire to be included although they did not meet age or other demographic requirements. The majority, however, asked if they could be kept up to date with the results once the study had been completed.

If individuals met all qualifications, they were then sent to the informed consent page describing the purpose, risks/benefits of participation, and instructions for the study (see Appendix D). Once participants read through the informed consent description, they had the opportunity to click “next” and voluntarily agree to participate. Those that did not click “next” were not permitted to continue on in the survey. Participants that agreed were presented with a new set of demographic questions which assessed aspects of each individual’s religious activity and family of origin (see Appendix E). For example, question number 8 stated, “Are you currently active in the Church (attend Church at least once a month).”

After completing the demographic questions section, participants were prompted with the following instructions for the open ended question section: “There are no right or wrong answers. Please describe in detail your own personal experience in relation to the following questions. As a reminder, all responses are anonymous and encouraged to be at least a few paragraphs.” (see Appendix F). These final 10 questions were designed to assess their experience with regard to the four main research questions. After participants completed this section, they were thanked and exited from the survey. Although crisis numbers were listed on the informed consent form, and participants were encouraged to use them if needed, no individuals notified the researcher of becoming upset as a result of having participated in this study.

Data Collection

During the data collection phase, those participants that provided at least one response in the open ended question section had their data included in the study. Those that did not meet inclusion criteria, did not agree to the informed consent, or provided no responses to the open-ended questions, were not included in the study. Once participants completed the survey by selecting “Done,” they were then notified that their survey was completed. From there, all survey responses were collected and held password protected by the survey website where all responses (with no personally identifying information) were only made available to the research team.

The survey was left open for just under a week until data saturation was achieved. Saturation was judged after the principal researcher read over participant responses several times, identified initial codes and patterns in the data, and determined that no new significant themes were emerging as newer participant responses came in. The principal researcher shared these initial codes with the principal investigator, compared and discussed themes that appeared to be present, and both came to a consensus that saturation had been attained, and the data were ready for analysis. In addition to data saturation, the initial goal of having at least 30 participants was surpassed with the final number of quality responses being 43. Once final data were submitted and the study was closed for analysis, the principal researcher downloaded the data onto his personal computer.

Instruments

This survey, consisting of 10 demographic and 10 open ended questions, was designed to explore the experience of single Latter-day Saint men today. The creation of these questions was guided by the life course perspective. Questions were developed to explore the meaning LDS men make of their single experience through their own eyes (ontogenetic). They also sought to understand how these men's social groups influenced them over time (Generational).

The research team felt that the best way to present these questions would be in the form of vignettes. An example of this can be seen in question number 13 (Appendix E). "Adam recently graduated college single and decides to return home to visit his family. On Sunday he attends his home ward and after sacrament meeting is approached by a ward member and family friend. After they chat for a couple of minutes the member asks, "why aren't you married yet?" If you were in Adams place, what would you be thinking or feeling internally, and how might you react?" The purpose of doing so was to entice each individual participant to provide a richer response than a simple question would elicit.

Because researchers are often the instruments through which qualitative studies are assessed, it is important to note that the principal researcher currently falls into this population of LDS men over 25 and single. As a single LDS man, the principal researcher has witnessed first-hand the struggles that LDS single men are going through. Living among them provided him with a first-hand knowledge of the LDS culture and experience of being an "older" single at this stage of life. It is understood that the experiences of the principal researcher are not universal, and are simply based on his perspective and experience. However, this insider perspective can be

an advantage as it provides an awareness of specific issues relating to the single experience, that otherwise might not be noticeable to the general population. It is also important to note that the principal investigator for this study was not single or affiliated with the LDS church. Having this non-LDS perspective enabled both an insider and outsider perspective on the LDS culture. Every effort was made to ensure that data from the study was accurately represented as the principal researcher and research team attempted to remain open to the wide range of experiences single LDS men had.

Throughout the research process, the principal researcher attempted to take the appropriate steps to increase reliability and validity of the study. This was done as the principal researcher took the study's survey himself in order to be aware of potential biases (before reviewing participant responses). After reading through individual participant responses, identifying codes and preliminary themes, he met with the principal investigator to review the process and check for continuity. This pattern was followed for several weeks as the principal researcher bracketed out biases, journaled reactions, and reviewed findings with the principal investigator.

Analysis

The coding and analysis process were guided by the six phases of thematic analysis as described by Braun and Clarke (2006). In phase one, researchers first become familiar with the data while reading through participant responses to get a sense of the depth and breadth of the topic while taking time to sit with the data and reflect on how each individual described their unique experience. In the second phase, researchers generated initial codes by first selecting out

interesting quotes from the data that appeared to highlight significant elements of the single experience. This was done for the entire set of data responses. After initial codes were generated, the research team sought to identify larger general themes derived from the initial compiled codes. This was done by grouping quotes and assembling them into broader categories, followed by further adjustments as the themes developed. After the categories and initial themes started to take form, the team progressed into phase four by reviewing the initial themes, combining some and removing others that were not as strong. This was done using a white-board by listing both potential major and sub themes in response to four research questions. Once the team had a better idea of potential theme groupings, they started to further define and refine each theme in phase five by giving them a name. Although names were initially assigned, as the analysis continued, those name continued to develop as different groupings formed until phase six was reached, production of the report.

CHAPTER IV- FINDINGS

Results

The total number of people that attempted to take this survey was 104. Of those 104, nineteen were women, and 85 were men. Of those 85 men, 62 qualified for entrance into the study, in that they were LDS, between 25-31, had never been married, had no children, and were living in the United States. Of those 62 that qualified, 43 fully filled out the survey including at least one open ended question; therefore those 43 participants who both qualified and filled out the open ended questions are the participants included in this analysis. Among them, age was fairly evenly distributed with the most common ages being 27 and 31 years old (8 participants each). Geographically, a handful of states were represented. The men that participated were from New Jersey (1), North Carolina (1), Washington (1), Texas (1), The District of Columbia (2), Maryland (6), and Virginia (31). Of the participants, 90.6% resided in the greater Washington D.C. area.

With regard to religiosity, all who participated were members of the LDS Church. Of those members, only one listed himself as “not active” in the Church. Although five of the study’s participants were converts to the Church (11.6%), most (88.4%) were born and raised as members of the Church. The majority of the participants listed their parents as “married (never divorced)” (62.8%), while 18.6% identified that their parents “never married,” and 13.9% specified that their parents are divorced. Lastly, of all 43 participants, 72.1 % reported actively participating to some degree in the courting process (going on dates, in a committed relationship, or engaged) and 95.4% said that they would like to be married “within the next few years.” Only two respondents noted otherwise.

After reading the participant responses, the general sense is that the majority of these men fit the profile of a working professional in his later 20's living in the DC area. He attends church regularly, is actively involved in the dating process, and hopes to be married within the next few years.

Analysis

This study was guided by four research questions: The first was to understand what is the LDS male experience of being single between 25 and 31. The second was to investigate what kind of influence their relationship status has on young single adult men's relationship with God. The third was to explore what messages these single men are receiving from their social groups (peers, family, and Church community) and how the messages influence them. The last question attempted to learn more about what they would like peers, family, and the Church community to know about being single at this stage in life.

After reading each individual participant's experience and story, it was clear that being a single at this phase in life is a topic of deep emotion for LDS single men. Simply looking at the amount of time each participant took to complete the survey, in conjunction with the quantity and depth of data provided, indicated how strongly these men felt about the issue. The depth of this emotion was exemplified in two participants' responses:

“Sometimes after strong counsel from the pulpit to get married, I have felt like there must be something wrong with me that I keep failing...”

“Just put a big scarlet ‘S’ for single on my chest.”

While each individual's experience was unique and personal, common themes arose in response to the four research questions.

WHAT IS THE LDS MALE EXPERIENCE OF BEING OVER 25 AND SINGLE?

When thinking about their experience as an LDS single man at this stage in life, these men highlighted an internal philosophical battle around their capability of getting married. The question they seemed to be debating internally was, “Is getting married all up to me and within my control?” Or, “does it depend more on external factors, God’s will, and timing?” As the participants described their experience in reference to this debate, two groups and major themes arose. The first group which felt that they had more control over their success in getting married described their experience as, *I’m failing*. Those that believed the success of marriage had more to do with external factors described their experience as, *It just hasn’t worked out... yet*. Both groups’ responses revealed their struggle to make sense of their experience as a single adult in the Church today. This participant’s response highlights this internal debate:

“It makes me wonder if He [God] really can do anything about it. Since we all have agency it means God can't promise that you'll be married. ... it makes me wonder ... how much is he able to influence anything?”

Although these two distinct viewpoints between personal and external locus of control arose from the data, individuals did not fall exclusively into one group or the other; rather, many vacillated between the two depending on their current experience.

I’m Failing

A group of participants felt like they were failing at the most important thing in life because they were still single. They believed that the success of getting married rested upon their own shoulders more so than on external factors or timing. Since they felt the ability to get married was more in their hands, they felt a pressing need to work harder or do something

different to make marriage happen. As a result of this view, fueled by encouragement from the Church, family, and peers to not delay marriage, they often felt like something might be wrong with them since they had not succeeded in marrying.

“At my peak stress levels I felt alienated at church because I felt like I was failing at the most important thing in life. I thought about leaving the church. I'm very grateful I didn't.”

“I frequently felt lonely and wondered what was wrong with me. Being single was very painful as time passed and made me feel hopeless at times.”

At times, these participants felt like they were *behind the curve*, like they were *not fitting in*, like *the clock is ticking*, all while having *no blueprint for success*.

I'm Behind The Curve

Of those that felt like they were failing since they were currently single, many expressed a feeling of being “behind the curve.” Seeing their peers marry, have children, and move on with their lives while they themselves remained single, amplified this feeling of failure.

“I found it difficult when my friends started to get married, and many [other singles] have expressed similar concerns... I'm not where I eventually want to be.”

Despite years of effort to marry, the lack of marital success made many in this group question themselves.

“I've arrived at a point in my life where I do feel as though I'm behind in my eternal/mortal progression, and have often questioned many things about myself, from

more superficial things like social skills to deeper issues like sexual orientation and the possibility that I might not have the opportunity to get married in this life.”

Not marrying when they themselves (or the Church) expected them to, combined with doubts about their personal character and ability to marry, led these men to feel like they were not fitting in.

“There is a a joke that if you graduate unmarried from BYU, you failed. It felt like that...”

Not Fitting In

As a result of personal and cultural expectations from the Church community and themselves, this group of participants saw a clearly expected progression in life events as a member of the Church.

“If you're single, they ask when you're getting married. If you're married, they ask when you're going to have kids. When you have kids, they ask how many you're going to have. When you have a bunch of kids they ask when you're going to retire.”

For these men, being single in their late twenties was not part of the plan. Being out of step with their personal expectations, as well as those of the Church, was an uncomfortable experience.

“I feel that the Church likes certain people to fill certain roles. When you're a guy and under 19, you're a "premie [pre-missionary]," young married couples work in the Primary, etc. Sometimes I feel like the Church doesn't have a role for older single men and that can make us feel like outsiders.”

Other participants felt looked down upon, or like a “menace to society” because they couldn’t work in the temple or Primary [Church’s childcare class] as an un-married man over 31.

“We’re single, not terminally ill, or unworthy to go to the temple.”

These men shared feelings of anxiety and sadness surrounding their inability to be part of, what they believe to be, the “normal LDS life-cycle.”

The Clock Is Ticking

Another theme for these participants was that they consistently felt like they were running out of time. They spoke directly about the personal pressures to make a relationship work as soon as possible; for fear that they will run out of time to achieve their goals of marrying and having a family.

“For too many singles, both men and women, time can easily become the enemy because each day, week, month, and year that you wake up single, the likelihood that you will marry and be able to have children (particularly for the women) decreases.”

“it’s very easy to get sidetracked and find yourself getting older without achieving goals for a family, which can be frustrating to realize every few months.”

In addition, these men identified specifically the cutoff age for participation in the single adult wards being 31, as one of the biggest sources of pressure.

“I’ve become more aware of how quickly time is passing and how quickly I could be 30+ years old and no closer to marriage; that worries me.”

Some believed this transition out of the singles ward and into the mid-single or family wards would make their experience in the Church even more difficult.

“Last year, I "aged out" of the Young Single Adult Wards, and transitioned to the Single Adult Ward in the area. I confess that it has been more difficult than I expected. ...Now, attending church meetings feels like more of a chore and a duty than it did before. I think it is probably going to be more difficult to be a single man in all the other wards I will be in than it was in my last YSA ward.”

Although not all participants felt this strongly about the transition out of the singles ward, the majority felt the pressure of time passing.

No Blueprint For Success

While feeling like they don't fit in, and constantly like time is running out, these participants expressed frustration about the expectations that surround the dating process for single Latter-day Saints. Specifically, they felt that they are expected to be successful in an area for which they might not have the tools or personality to succeed.

“we're not encouraged to date much or at all until we're 18+, and then suddenly, we're told to get married quickly once off the mission. I've dated some. But my maturity and social interaction skills have developed much later than most.”

Some participants spoke about personal disadvantages resulting from poor parental examples of marriage, being naturally shy or introverted, as well as simply lacking knowledge/experience of how to date and make a relationship work.

“I did the best I knew how, but I didn't know how. I wasn't familiar with examples of good LDS dating, didn't know those things myself and hadn't been taught about dating and relationships. I knew I was supposed to get married but I had no idea how.”

In summary for this first group of participants, the major theme among them was that they feel they are failing at the most important thing in life because they are single. The personal and social pressures to marry have contributed to their feeling behind the curve, and as if they don't fit in within the Church community. The pressure they are under to make a relationship work before they must leave the singles ward, as well as the deadline before they can no longer have children, has created frustration and disappointment with themselves and the dating process. In some cases, it made it more difficult for them to remain active in the Church. Ultimately, their experiences have led them to question if they have the tools and capability to ever get married at all.

It Just Hasn't Worked Out... Yet

In contrast to the first group that felt like they were personally failing, a greater number of participants believed that being single was more a result of external factors and timing than something they personally were doing wrong. Like the first group, this second group wanted to get married, but believed that it just hadn't worked out yet, despite their efforts and desire. They struggled as well at times with their experience being an older single man in the Church, However, they were more optimistic and upbeat about their own personal efforts, single journey, and outlook for marriage in the future.

With regard to this second group's single experience in the Church, they expressed frustration with how they feel others in the Church community perceive them as purposefully delaying marriage.

“The dating experience is different now than what our parents went through. There are also many great men out there who would like to be married, but for whatever reason in their dating experiences - it hasn't happened yet.”

There was a unified voice among these men expressing three sub-themes saying, “just because we're *not married*, *doesn't mean we're not trying or don't want to be*.” Marriage takes two people, and *the woman's role* needs to be taken into account. Lastly, they don't want to simply get married, they want to *get married for the right reasons*. These men voiced that there are multiple factors determining why they are not married; however, in the end, the marriage decision is not one they can make alone.

Not Married, Doesn't Mean We're Not Trying or Don't Want to Be.

Of the frustrations from this group of single men, none was greater than the belief that their single status suggested to others that they do not want to be married, or that they are not trying.

“Sometimes it seems that people just assume men choose to be single. It's like they don't believe us that we're trying. ... Marriage isn't like a light switch where you can just turn it on and get married.”

Hearing Church leaders compare them to “twenty something peter-pan's” or stating that they are purposefully “delaying marriage” was hurtful and confusing for many. Since, in their experience, they were doing all they could to pursue marriage, they reported feeling misunderstood and at times demoralized.

“When I would read [quotes from Church leaders] I would feel guilt and shame, but also some bitterness and anger because in my past relationships I had always been more willing to get married than my girlfriends. It was deeply frustrating.”

This previous quote brings up the second area that these men felt they were not in control over: The woman’s role.

The Women’s Role

This second group believed that the women’s role is not being properly accounted for when discussing the topic of men delaying marriage in the Church. They believed that much of the attention is unfairly focused on how men are responsible for the delay or lack of marriages in the Church.

“I feel that the church focuses tons of attention on the men, and don't get me wrong, I think there are many circumstances where it is warranted. But the women are getting off scott free, and I don't think that's right.”

What they believed was an exclusive focus on the men’s role, created frustration among the participants. While they ascribed to the belief that it is in the man’s hands to initiate a relationship, many felt that when they attempted to, they were regularly overlooked by women.

“In my experience, there are just as many guys who want to get married but girls won't go out with them. It seems like there are usually 5-10 popular guys and 5-10 popular girls in each congregation... they want someone from one of those 5-10 select to reciprocate their feelings. To the remaining 100+ people, they really aren't really interested.”

Others brought up the topic of being rejected by women when they made attempts to court and pursue marriage.

“I have asked out many girls that have turned me down. I hear Church leaders telling us that there are so many single girls out there that want to be married. I do believe that they want to be married but I believe they want a guy to marry who doesn't exist.”

The consensus was that although there may be many men not marrying, these participants believe it is not for lack effort or desire on their part. Rather, they felt women's roles in rejection, choosing other pursuits (school, career, etc.), and overlooking the men who are pursuing them need to be accounted for as well.

Getting Married for the Right Reasons

Even though this second group believes it just hasn't worked out...yet, they still believe getting married is extremely important. However, they want to make the best decision possible, and not just marry the first woman that comes their way.

“I would like to be married, but there are worse things than being single--a bad marriage comes to mind. I believe [marriage] is important both from a religious perspective and just a general happiness/what I want to do, but it's a decision that I only want to make once and not regret. ”

Many others felt factors (not necessarily in their control) such as school, careers, and geographical access to potential partners, have potentially impeded them for marrying.

“it is wrong to think that single members older than the early 20's are just postponing marriage. It's wrong to think that marriage should always come first, before education

and career. I think focusing too much on one's career or on just wanting to be single can be a bad thing, But [thinking men are purposefully postponing marriage] ...misses the mark of the real life LDS single experience.”

Those that believe their single status has to do more with external factors, do not feel the same sense of failure as those who feel marriage is entirely up to them. Even though others may perceive their single status as not wanting to get married, or that they aren't trying, they personally feel good about their efforts they have made, and continue to make to pursue marriage. They want to get married for the right reasons that will help them sustain a marriage and not just get into one. They feel that the man's part in process is being accounted for, but that more work needs to be done to incorporate how women influence it as well. Although they are bothered by the stigmas and perceptions that may exist, they continue to be hopeful about marriage and believe things will all work out in due time.

Summary of Their Experience

In summary, responding to the question, “What is the LDS male experience of being over 25 and single,” we found that there are many complex emotions attached to the subject. Young single adult LDS men are struggling to make sense of their experience of being single in a culture that encourages them to be married. Although they are pursuing marriage and have hopes of being married, many are struggling to understand why it is that they are still single. Some feel as though they are failing personally because they have not been able to achieve marriage. This sense of failure has led to feeling out of step, out of place, and like they are running out of time, all while not knowing the right path to success. The majority, however, are not as distraught and feel that things just haven't worked out as a result of factors not in their control. The desire to

create a strong foundation for marriage that will last, propels these men to focus on getting married for the right reasons despite pressure or stigmas that arise about them from the Church community.

As they tried to answer the internal debate of, “is the success of marriage all up to me, or does it depend on eternal factors,” each individual participant’s experience was not static, but rather fluctuated between the two viewpoints like varying degrees on a continuum. At some points in their experience, they were more hopeful and upbeat, while at others they were more confused and distraught. Overall, these participants are still trying to make sense of their experience, and never would have anticipated going this long through their life journey single.

HOW DOES THEIR RELATIONSHIP STATUS INFLUENCE THEIR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD?

The majority of the participants felt that their belief in, and relationship with, God was *independent of success or failure in their dating life*. However, the participants’ responses indicated the belief that a healthy relationship with a woman provided them an *arena for spiritual growth and progression*. Thus, being part of a relationship offered opportunities otherwise unavailable to them and inspired them to want to be better individuals and members of the Church.

Belief in God is Independent of Relationship Status

Their testimonies [belief in God and the Church] are based on the knowledge gained through active study of church doctrine and personal experiences which have brought them closer to God. As they have remained single to this point in their lives, they have had to rely predominantly on the support and strength offered by their own faith.

“I feel that I have a relationship with the Lord that exists regardless of any other circumstance or situation in my life, and that whether or not I am dating or in a relationship does not significantly impact how much faith I have, my views on repentance or my hope for the future, nor my appreciation of the Atonement or testimony of Jesus Christ.”

“Just because things don't go the way you hope [in dating relationships], doesn't mean that you can slack off. My testimony is not based on my dating life; it is based on my Savior Jesus Christ and on the Book of Mormon. I am active in my calling [unpaid Church job or responsibility] and do what I have to because I know that it is true and the right thing to do.”

Even though these men felt their relationship with God did not rely on a dating relationship, they believed that they needed to get married for them to ultimately progress and fulfill God's commandments.

“My relationship status has no influence on my personal relationship with God, but my spiritual progression requires temple marriage and having a family.”

Arena for Spiritual Development

The participants expressed that when they are in a healthy relationship with a woman, often it can be an arena for spiritual development. Being in a relationship affords them the opportunity to develop personal attributes that they want to have in their lives. The maturation of these attributes allowed them to progress toward cultivating a more Christ-like demeanor; the goal of all active LDS church members.

“It has always been better with a supportive woman. More opportunities for service. More chances to be selfless, humble, loving and tender.”

While in a dating relationship, these men feel accountable and responsible for their partner’s welfare. Which they believed, helps inspire them to become more responsible, and better members of the Church.

Opportunities to Serve and Progress

The participants believed that although their relationship with God can grow and develop without the benefit of a partner or spouse, they unanimously felt that their spiritual development was capped at its current level until they could engage in a [dating] relationship.

“I do think being a single man makes me less attuned to God than if I had a companion to whom I was accountable, and who could have a steady positive influence on me.

...having a clear purpose, such as developing one's marital relationship or raising children, and direct accountability for the welfare of other people are both burdens and blessings which help one stay close to God.”

“When we're in relationships, it makes us squirm and gets us (as in single folks) out of our comfort zones and assists us in our overall progression and learning, and I think it can help our relationship with God.”

They also found that this improved progression and learning helped facilitate their drive to become better people.

Inspires to Be Better

Not only do these men believe that a healthy relationship with a woman can help them develop spiritually, but they also felt that having a healthy relationship inspired them to improve in all areas of life.

“I try to be the same person when I am not in a relationship as I am in a relationship. But I feel when you are dating someone who is just out right amazing; it makes you want to be better for them. I feel that it has a direct correlation to my relationship to God as well. If the girl is spiritual and happy, who wouldn't want to try to be better for them in all things?”

Having this increased drive to better all around, these men naturally felt propelled closer to God.

“...it does strongly influence my desires in wanting to be close to God, in wanting to be a worthy husband soon, in wanting to have the spiritual discipline to keep close to God and be worthy to give inspired Priesthood blessings to my soon-to-be wife, to be a worthy Priesthood holder and father, etc.”

Summary

As can be noted by the participants’ responses, these men value their individual relationships with God and their time as a single member of the Church; but also identified the importance of finding a spouse, suggesting that a marriage can lead to further spiritual growth. These men felt they could be their best when meeting the demands of a positive and uplifting relationship, as it allowed them the opportunity to serve someone else and evolve personally. In participating in such relationships, they were encouraged to not only emphasize qualities they

already possessed, but to work towards gaining and strengthening qualities they lacked. This desire for personal betterment set them on a more focused path to God; and, therefore, improved their relationship with Him.

WHAT INFLUENCE DO THEIR SOCIAL GROUPS HAVE ON THEM AT THIS STAGE IN LIFE?

In this survey, participants were asked about their experience interacting with their social groups at this time in life. The questions explored what kind of messages these men were hearing about themselves from their peers, family, and Church leaders. Some of the participants felt that statements made in the past by Church leaders have implied that they "...are not doing [their] duty as holders of the priesthood when [they]...withhold [themselves] from an honorable marriage (Monson, 2011)," and are "[Wasting] time in idle pursuits (Scott, 2011)" simply because they are older and not married.

"I get very, very bothered by [these messages] ... because it implies the assumption that I do not want to get married or raise a family. Which is not true."

For the participants that felt this way, many felt misunderstood and that these messages had a negative impact on their desire to participate in church. Other participants however, were not as significantly influenced by statements from peers, family, and the Church. Rather, they felt that the messages were appropriate and applied to some single men, but not necessarily to themselves since they were doing all they could to actively pursue marriage.

"I think there are guys that the quote [about many young men purposely delaying marriage] definitely applies to. I'm trying my best, that quote doesn't necessarily apply to me."

The impact and pressure of these messages was felt in different ways for different groups of participants. However, the majority of participants agreed that their experiences with peers, family, and the Church (local leaders especially) seem to be improving.

Family and Peer Messages

When the participants were asked what they hear about themselves in the messages their family and peers are sending, multiple indicated that they had been hurt in the past by comments made about their single status.

“My parents, and my grandparents -with much frequency -ask me when I will start dating someone and settle down and be married. They tell me that I am wasting my time and being selfish.”

Some heard things like: “you’re getting old,” “what’s wrong with you,” or “be a man and get married.” The majority felt that although there has been pressure in the past from their family members and peers, things are getting better. They described this shift in family and peers attitudes to being more supportive and understanding as time goes on.

“They [family members] are more concerned with my happiness. The days of asking whom I'm dating or interest in pursuing are over for the most part. They would love to see me married but know I'm not ready...”

Among their peers, many respondents found their single friends most understanding since they were in the same situation.

“The message from my peers is that I should be doing everything in my power to get married, but no one thinks less of me that I'm not since we are all in the same boat.”

The following comment was most likely made in jest, however, it does highlight the spoken/unspoken pressure many men experienced from their peers of the opposite sex to hurry up and get married.

“My girlfriend tells me there's a way that I can stop being single. I'm not sure what she means.”

Influence of Peer/Family Messages

When family and peers sought to be supportive and understanding of these men's experiences, the men reported feeling more relaxed and confident in themselves and their ability to marry. When messages from family and peers were not as supportive or understanding, their experiences were quite the opposite. Overall, most of these men believed that suggestions and counsel from family and peers was often sent with best of intentions, however, their counsel and approach at times still had negative side-effects.

“They [family members] encourage me to go on dates, which is good. But it also makes me feel inadequate sometimes.”

“It makes me feel like I should be dating more. Sometimes I feel that my worth is determined by my marital status, according to my married peers...”

When peers and family members became more invested and provided analysis or suggestions on things these singles could do differently, it often added unhelpful pressure.

“They [family and peers] make me anxious about it. It makes me even more frustrated when things don't work out.”

The participants valued the concern and support of those close to them, however, they felt that this was extremely sensitive topic full of complex factors, and it should be approached with care.

“The best kind of support, I think, is to give advice when asked for. Free advice is a recipe for disaster. Tone down the... "when will you be married," "how come you're not married/dating anyone?" ... Ease off the gas and just make it clear that it [marriage] is indeed an integral component of exaltation, but don't build so much pressure around it and make good hard working men feel unfulfilled just because they have not had luck in their dating lives. Be a support, not a hovering parent.”

Messages From The Church

We asked the participants what messages they were receiving from the Church leaders regarding their single status. Similar to their experience with friends and family, the participants felt that there is an interest on the Church's part that they get married as soon as possible. Some Church leaders suggest that single men might be “having a little too much fun being single, taking extravagant vacations, buying expensive cars and toys, and just generally enjoying the carefree life with [their] friends,” (Monson, 2011) instead of actively pursuing marriage. Other statements such as, “I have far less sympathy for the young men, who under the customs of our society, have the prerogative to take the initiative in these matters but in so many cases fail to do so,” (Hinckley, 1991) were perceived as critical and even chastising. For those that felt this way, what they heard was:

“you are failing, and as a man it's your fault”

“...regardless of what I am doing in life with my career, my studies, and other endeavors they amount to nothing if I am not trying to find a wife.”

However, the majority of participants felt that there has been steady improvement, especially on the local Church level, to decrease the amount of pressure, and focus on meeting the spiritual needs of the single adult Church members.

“My bishop has been good so far, he hasn't said much. He says there's enough unspoken pressure that he doesn't need to say anything.”

“I honestly think local church leaders on the whole have not been pressuring about the issue, which has been wonderful. It's expected and understood that they have a hope [that singles will marry], but that hope for our happiness is rarely translated into frustrated public messages.”

The respondents sometimes found the messages from the General Authorities [head leaders of the Church] towards the single adult men in particular, to be more candid.

“From the general level of the Church, the message has been a little bit more accusatory and direct, although even this seems to have softened in the past few years.”

The majority of these men understood the intent for Church leaders' bold messages, however, many felt that their personal efforts were going unnoticed and that they themselves were misunderstood.

“The Church and its leaders teach general principles, and offer more specific warnings as they see them, so there may very well be a substantial segment of the young male

population for whom this message is relevant ... while honestly I feel it doesn't quite apply directly to myself and my circumstances.”

“I wish we could be rewarded for our good dating. Instead we're always told to keep dating. ... I wish there was more appreciation for effort.”

The Influence of these Messages

Some participants found messages from the Church leaders towards single men to be encouraging and uplifting. For others, they were painful reminders of their personal failure to marry. Here is an example from one individual who struggled:

“One of the times I have been most angry and upset in recent years was during a general conference when several church leaders chastised men for being single and comforted women who were single. ”

For some singles, these direct messages regarding their singlehood were hard to hear, given the personal guilt and pain they already experience. After hearing these messages, one of the first areas to be impacted was their church attendance and religious devotion.

“When all we hear at Church and other activities is how horrible we are, or how we aren't progressing in life, it doesn't create the welcoming environment that helps us want to remain active [in going to church].”

“Being less active [in church attendance] helps reduce the guilt of being single ...”

The majority however, have learned to sift through the messages they hear, and to take to heart the messages that personally apply to them.

“I have already made up my mind that I will seek after marriage. My actions do not change in terms of what messages I receive from leaders, family, peers.”

“The point being that while counsel of church leaders, friends, parents etc. can be helpful, you've ultimately got to live with yourself and your decisions. So know why you make your decisions and learn to live with the consequences.”

As single adults in the LDS community, these men have many people interested in the welfare of their lives. Although most of them are well-intentioned, their messages aren't always perceived that way, and can create added pressure that these men do not find helpful. In more extreme cases, some men have considered or became less active in the Church as a result of this pressure. However, the majority of the participants feel that things are improving as family members, peers, and the Church become more supportive and understanding. Notwithstanding this progress, these men feel that there is still much to be done to better support singles at this phase of life.

WHAT WOULD THEY LIKE THEIR SOCIAL GROUPS TO KNOW ABOUT BEING SINGLE AT THIS STAGE IN LIFE?

When these single men were asked what they would like their peers, family, and the Church community as a whole to know about being single at this stage in life, there was a resounding theme that they want others to understand their experience before making a judgement or suggestions. Single men said that they are aware of the importance and responsibility to settle down and get married, and they have sincere desires of making that a reality. However, many feel stuck, or that things just haven't worked out yet. Each individual's circumstance was different, but three main themes emerged from their responses. The first was to

seek to understand before being understood. The second was to *focus on the how.* The third was to *build up and empower* them in their quest for marriage.

Seek to Understand, Before Being Understood

The most common response to this question was that they were more encouraged when Church leaders took time to converse “with them,” instead of talking “at them.” They felt that although parents, leaders, peers etc. have been married and have experience with the dating process, the challenges young men face today are different than years before.

“Others need to realize that just because there are both great single men and women doesn't mean that a marriage between us will happen. ... The dating experience is different now than what our parents went through. ... Yes, they should be encouraging us to be married, but do it with an understanding that people’s lives are complex and we don't fully understand everyone's situation and love them for who they are and encourage us to be the best we can be.”

“Realizing that being single is a multifactorial thing and does not represent my overall obedience to the Gospel. Support includes understanding individual circumstances and not stereotypical thought process.”

One of the greatest desires the participants had was for others to try and understand their personal experience by withholding judgement until they after they sought to understand them.

“...be supportive of all people. Many individuals have difficulties such as shyness, feelings of inadequacy, same sex attraction, failed relationships, and anxiety when confronting this subject.”

Focus on the How

Some participants struggled with knowing how to go about the process of dating and getting married. They expressed understanding the need for marriage, but not necessarily having the tools to navigate issues or fears that keep them from it.

“There are so many voices telling us what we need to do, but not so much how to do it”

“I love the gospel and I feel that the leaders of the church are inspired. However I would be grateful if they would spend more time teaching us single men HOW to date and be married than that we need to. We know we need to, the ones that aren't tend to not know how to deal with certain problems, how to buckle down or be aware of their own feelings and needs. I think the problem is addressed as being one of desire and not one of knowledge.”

These men expressed that all too often those of their social group were quick to remind them of the importance of marriage, but rarely took the time to ask if they could be of help or support. In addition, they felt this was best done through personal one on one discussions.

Build Up and Empower

The single men in our study repeated that they want to be encouraged, trusted, and uplifted as they navigate this phase of life. They want their testimonies and hearts to be built up and strengthened through their interaction with the Church, family, and peers.

“Strengthen them. "Build the boys!" Satan already is trying so hard to get us to fall. He will use anything he can to put a wedge between young single adult men and the church or their Heavenly Father. Encourage these young men to build their testimonies and rely

on the Savior for support and help. Encourage them to meet with priesthood leaders. Give them responsibilities that will help them to grow.”

“I want to go to Church to be uplifted, taught, and edified, not lectured, nagged, and brought down. Life like I mentioned for single people is hard enough as it is, and Church should be a place where we feel good about ourselves, not worse.”

For these men, having Church leaders focus on making church a place to be uplifted and edified where they can draw closer to God was something they hoped would be made first priority.

“I think we need to be built up and empowered to address the things which personally get in the way of our progress towards marriage. The times I've been most emotionally and spiritually lifted is when I have felt loved and understood.”

As the participants shared their concerns and suggestions on what they would like the Church community to know, three things were clear: For those that felt especially like “they were failing,” They wanted less judgement and more understanding. They wanted to be helped and taught ‘the how’ instead of the importance, of getting married. For those that felt like “it just hasn’t worked out yet,” they wanted to be empowered and uplifted as single men to act, grow, and develop into the person they hope to be. All of the participants wanted more positive messages that encourage instead of discourage during this phase of life.

CHAPTER V - DISCUSSION

Overview

Researchers in this study set out to explore and describe the experience of the young single adult men in the Latter-day Saint Church. The study and survey were guided by the Life Course Perspective and surveyed 43 men between the ages of 25-31. Questions were geared towards understanding how LDS men make sense of their experience of being older and single in the Church as well as the influence their social groups have on their experience. After collection and analysis of the data, it appeared that this phase of life is a complex and emotional time for the majority of the participants as they try to make sense of being single longer than they had expected. The participants each told a unique story of their experience and how they understood the situation. However, thematic analysis (Braun & Clark, 2006) of the data produced several common themes that help give a voice to the commonalities of their experience.

Their Experience

Ontogenetic Experience

While commenting on how they view being single at this time in life through their own eyes, participants revealed deep emotions about their experience thus far being as single man in the LDS Church. The majority of responses seemed to portray their single experience as one that “just hasn’t worked out yet,” meaning that they found themselves unmarried at a time when they expected to be married but they had not lost hope and were not primarily seeing this as a personal failure. They cited factors such as the women’s role in a relationship, and wanting to get married for the right reasons to explain their unmarried state. Single men reported focusing

on preparing for and entering into a marriage that they felt good about, and not just marrying the first person that they met. They specifically said that remaining single up to this point did not mean they were not trying or did not want to be married.

At other moments, some responses reflected a more distressful personal experience. They suggested that being an “older” single member of the Church made them personally feel like a failure, or that they were behind the curve since they were not married. Just as research on involuntarily childless men has revealed their distress in not successfully having children (Malik & Coulson, 2008), similarly, some single men in this study struggled to make sense of their unsuccessful attempts at marriage. As years passed and participants continued to remain single, they increasingly felt like they were losing time. Noticing this brought on personal pressure and stress that often led to them feeling out of place. These findings appear to be similar to those of the Sharp and Ganong (2011) whose study of women between the ages of 28-34 revealed the participants becoming increasingly aware of their changing reality. Women from their study described noticing that they were on a “different path” much like those in this study felt behind the curve or out of place. Both populations reported realizing that the pool of potential spouses was diminishing and that the opposite sex’s played a major role in being able to realize goals of marriage.

Overall, participants’ ontogenetic experience seemed to fluctuate between feeling like a “failure” and believing that “it just hasn’t worked out yet.” Individual’s description of their experience of being single over time appeared to vary along this continuum, depending on the topic and how they felt about their single experience at present. At times, participant responses reflected fear, anxiety, and doubts about their ability to ever marry in the future. However, the

majority appeared resilient and optimistic despite obstacles and difficulties they had experienced along the way.

Generational Influence

When asked about the influence of social groups (family members, peers, and Church leaders), similar to the women in the Sharp and Ganong (2011) study, these participants reported feeling pressure to marry from their social groups and culture. While the majority of participants expressed feeling some amount of pressure, the consensus was also that negative pressure was decreasing as those around them made an effort to be more understanding of the situation. However, some participants continue to struggle with quotes from Church leaders that suggest single men are not doing their priesthood duty as they grow older and remain single. For some, these messages evoked a significant amount of distress and guilt since they had not yet succeeded in getting married. Similar to the experience described by involuntary childless men, these single men at times felt out of step with their life cycle stage and often expressed “not fitting in” and feeling like “outsiders” as a result of their social experience (Hadley & Hanley, 2011).

Reviewing participant responses in this study, there seemed to be an association between those that were more distressed about their single experience and those that perceived a significant amount of social pressure. When responses reflected a more distressed ontogenetic experience, they also appeared to experience more pressure from the messages of their social groups. Not only did there appear to be an increase in overall pressure, but messages also seemed to have more of a negative impact on participants’ overall single experience. When this

combination of “personal feelings of failure” and “perceived significant social pressure” were evident, participants reported feeling like they were not fitting in, and for some, it decreased their desire to interact with the Church.

As a result, it appears that many who already felt like they were failing, combined with increased social pressure, were most at risk for diminishing or ending participation in Church. “I’m beginning to feel like being involved in the Church is going to make me feel worse. ... Social views outside the church are much more accepting ... and girls don’t wonder if there’s something wrong with me because I’m single and in my 30s.” This hypothesis may coincide with the findings from Goodman and Heaton (1986) which suggested that single men became less active in the Church as they got older.

Resiliency

As single men maintain LDS standards and attitudes on marriage, some people in the general population may perceive this pursuit to be outdated or strange. Additionally, some of the men’s experiences and interactions with their own Church community have left them feeling like they don’t fit in, are doing something wrong, or are just generally out of step with the normal LDS life cycle. Although this does not necessarily reflect the feelings of the majority, there appears to be potential for some single LDS men to feel both out of step within their own culture and the general population.

Reflecting on the individual stories and experiences of these LDS single men, it appears that despite their challenges and difficulties, the majority of these men remain resolute in their pursuit of marriage and dedication to the Church. Specific challenges they listed were: feeling

like a failure, not knowing how to date or get married, struggling with addictions and same-gender attraction, feeling rejected or heartbroken by women, being called lazy or selfish, being perceived as avoiding marriage, feeling out of place amid family and the church, and lastly, general sadness that things had not working out as they had hoped. Notwithstanding these challenges, the majority of men appeared to be quite resilient and undeterred in their pursuit of marriage and devotion to God.

Limitations and Further Research

Creating this study provided an opportunity to explore the single LDS male population at this unique stage in life. Since very little research had been done on this specific population in the past, there was no previous design or format to studying the LDS single man's experience. However, reflection on the findings and outcome of this study have provided insight into the limitations of the study as well as suggestions for future research.

Because the study was done online, there were many benefits of accessibility in addition to complete anonymity, however, not having done face-to-face interviews didn't allow for further probing, follow up, or clarification. Responses had to be taken at face value, based on the text participants provided. As a result, researchers might not have been fully capable of gauging the emotion or reaction participants had to the survey questions, or may have simply misunderstood what participants were trying to convey. Because recruitment for the study was limited in its ability to reach the full LDS single male population, there were limitations with regard to participant diversity. Since the study was administered specifically in the Washington DC area, participants did not completely represent the US LDS single population as a whole. The majority

of those who participated were active church members. Those less active members, who don't attend church, might not have had the opportunity to participate because they are no longer connected to the listserv. Also, participants appeared to be of a higher socio-economic status which could have an influence in the way participants responded. Lastly, this study did not use a random sample. Therefore, only members who saw the email notice on the listserv, or were informed by word of mouth, were aware that the study was being conducted. Even though every effort was made to reach out a variety of LDS single men in the DC area, it was possible that only those who felt strongly about the topic chose to participate in the study.

Efforts to understand the experience of LDS single men have simply begun. Much remains to be done in exploring the experiences of this population. Further topics of research were brought to the researchers' attention as a result of this study. Interestingly, 15 of the initial 104 participants listed their age as "other" and attempted to participate in the survey even though it was clearly marked specifically for "men between the ages of 25-31." One could assume that many of these men were individuals above the age of 31 who would have liked to participate and share their unique experience of being single over 31. Even though the study was clearly advertised "for single men between the ages of 25-31," 19 women attempted to participate. It would appear that these women too would like to share their experience being single in the LDS church.

Clinical Implications

When single men were asked what they would like peers, family members, Church leaders, and others to know about being single at this stage of life, the major themes emerged from their

responses. First, they wanted others to seek to understand them before making judgments or giving advice. Second, they wanted others to teach them “the how” of getting married, instead of just emphasizing “the importance” of getting married. Lastly, they expressed wanting to be built up and empowered along their journey towards marriage.

Because some singles might feel out of step both within the LDS community and the general population, it is important for clergy, mental health professionals, or any others that work with young single adult LDS men, to be sensitive to each individual’s unique experience and perspective. Single men reported a desire for continued encouragement and teachings about marriage, and, they would also like to be helped in overcoming obstacles that prevent them from getting married. In conclusion, as many of these men continue to struggle to make sense of their single status, clinicians should attempt to understand their unique individual experience first, which will help them empower singles along the way.

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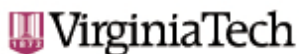
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Appendix A

IRB Approval Letter



Office of Research Compliance
 Institutional Review Board
 2000 Kraft Drive, Suite 2000 (0497)
 Blacksburg, VA 24060
 540/231-4606 Fax 540/231-0959
 email irb@vt.edu
 website <http://www.irb.vt.edu>

MEMORANDUM

DATE: April 10, 2013
TO: Eric E McCollum, Jordan R Johnson
FROM: Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board (FWA00000572, expires May 31, 2014)
PROTOCOL TITLE: A Phenomenological Exploration of the Experience of single Latter-Day Saint Menâ
IRB NUMBER: 13-329

Effective April 9, 2013, the Virginia Tech Institution Review Board (IRB) Chair, David M Moore, approved the New Application request for the above-mentioned research protocol.

This approval provides permission to begin the human subject activities outlined in the IRB-approved protocol and supporting documents.

Plans to deviate from the approved protocol and/or supporting documents must be submitted to the IRB as an amendment request and approved by the IRB prior to the implementation of any changes, regardless of how minor, except where necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subjects. Report within 5 business days to the IRB any injuries or other unanticipated or adverse events involving risks or harms to human research subjects or others.

All investigators (listed above) are required to comply with the researcher requirements outlined at:

<http://www.irb.vt.edu/pages/responsibilities.htm>

(Please review responsibilities before the commencement of your research.)

PROTOCOL INFORMATION:

Approved As: **Exempt, under 45 CFR 46.110 category(ies) 2**
 Protocol Approval Date: **April 9, 2013**
 Protocol Expiration Date: **N/A**
 Continuing Review Due Date*: **N/A**

*Date a Continuing Review application is due to the IRB office if human subject activities covered under this protocol, including data analysis, are to continue beyond the Protocol Expiration Date.

FEDERALLY FUNDED RESEARCH REQUIREMENTS:

Per federal regulations, 45 CFR 46.103(f), the IRB is required to compare all federally funded grant proposals/work statements to the IRB protocol(s) which cover the human research activities included in the proposal / work statement before funds are released. Note that this requirement does not apply to Exempt and Interim IRB protocols, or grants for which VT is not the primary awardee.

The table on the following page indicates whether grant proposals are related to this IRB protocol, and which of the listed proposals, if any, have been compared to this IRB protocol, if required.

Invent the Future

VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERSITY
An equal opportunity, affirmative action institution

Appendix B
Recruitment Email Notice

Message Title: Single men, What do you think...?

“Menace to society?”...“ Just hasn’t worked out yet?”... or “Right where you need to be?” How do you feel about being single in the Church today?

If you’re a single man between the ages of 25 and 31, please share with us your concerns, joys and struggles in this anonymous survey. You can help us understand single young men's experience and perhaps help Church leaders find ways to better support you and others like you. Follow the link below to the survey. It will take only about 25 minutes and you can help us better understand young single adult LDS men.

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/lds-single-men>

This research is being done at Virginia Tech and If you need further information feel free to contact me:

Jordan Johnson, Principal Researcher

Jordan_Johnson24@yahoo.com

(571) 766-8014

Appendix C

Eligibility and Demographic Questions

Survey Eligibility Questions

1. Are you male or female?

- Male
- Female

2. How old are you?

- 25
- 26
- 27
- 28
- 29
- 30
- 31
- Other

3. Are you LDS (Mormon)?

- Yes
- No

4. Current Relationship Status

- Single - not dating
- Single - going on dates
- Committed Relationship
- Currently Engaged
- Currently Married
- Divorced
- Widower

5. Do you have any children?

- Yes
- No

6. Current state residence?

State:

Appendix D

Informed Consent Form

Project Title: A Phenomenological Exploration of the Experience of single Latter-Day Saint Men

Researchers:

Jordan R. Johnson, M.S. Candidate, Department of Human Development, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

Eric E. McCollum, Ph.D., Professor, Department of Human Development, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

What is the purpose of this study?

The purpose of this study will be to understand the experience of single Latter-day Saint men today. This study is intended for LDS men between the ages of 25 and 31, who have never been married, are not currently living with a partner, have not had children, and live in the United States.

What will I be asked to do?

You will be asked to complete a 20-30 minute open ended survey. Questions in this survey will ask you about your experience as a LDS single adult today, including but not limited to questions about your experience in the Church. You will have as long as needed to finish the survey.

Are there any risks to me?

There are minimal risks associated with participation in this project. Minimal risks include that you may feel some discomfort as you reflect and respond to your experience. You may decline to answer any question at any time, and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time as well. In addition, if you become upset by participating in this study, we encourage you to speak with a Bishop or contact Crisislink at 703-527-4077 for 24 hour services.

Are there benefits to me?

As a result of participating in this study you may feel satisfied because you have contributed to an important research study that may benefit other single LDS men, clergy working with young single adults in the LDS Church, and mental health professionals.

Are my responses anonymous?

Yes, this survey is completely anonymous. Any potentially identifying information will be omitted from your responses. Your responses will be kept locked for the duration of the project and access will only be allowed to the research team.

Will I be compensated for my participation?

Your participation is completely voluntary and there will be no compensation other than the researcher's appreciation for your time and participation.

Do I have the freedom to withdraw?

You have the right to refuse to participate in this study. You also have the right to refuse to answer any questions and you may terminate your participation at anytime.

Approval of Research:

This project has been approved, as required, by the Institutional Review Board Involving Human Subjects at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University.

If you have any questions about this research project, please feel free to contact:

Jordan R. Johnson, Principal Researcher

(571)766-8014, Jordan_Johnson24@yahoo.com

Eric E. McCollum, Ph.D., Principal Investigator

703-538-8460, EricMcCollum@vt.edu

David M. Moore, Virginia Tech IRB Chair

540-231-4991, moored@vt.edu

* Participant's Permission *

I voluntarily agree to participate in this research project. I have read and understood the Informed Consent and the conditions of this project. I hereby acknowledge the above and give my voluntary consent for participation in this project by selecting the "Next" button below. I realize that although I choose to participate right now, I have the right to withdraw from this study at any time without any penalty.

I voluntarily agree to participate in this research project. I have read and understood the Informed Consent and the conditions of this project. I hereby acknowledge the above and give my voluntary consent for participation in this project by selecting the "Next" button below. I realize that although I choose to participate right now, I have the right to withdraw from this study at any time without any penalty.

Appendix E

Demographic Questions Continued

7. Are you a convert to the Church?

- Yes
- No

8. Are you currently active in the Church (attend Church at least once a month)?

- Yes
- No

9. Parents Marital Status

- Married
- Separated
- Divorced
- Divorced/Re-married
- Never Married
- Widowed/Widower

10. Would you like to be married within the next few years?

- Yes
- No
- Undecided

Appendix F

Open Ended Questions

There are no right or wrong answers. Please describe in detail your own personal experience in relation to the following questions. As a reminder, all responses are anonymous and encouraged to be at least a few paragraphs.

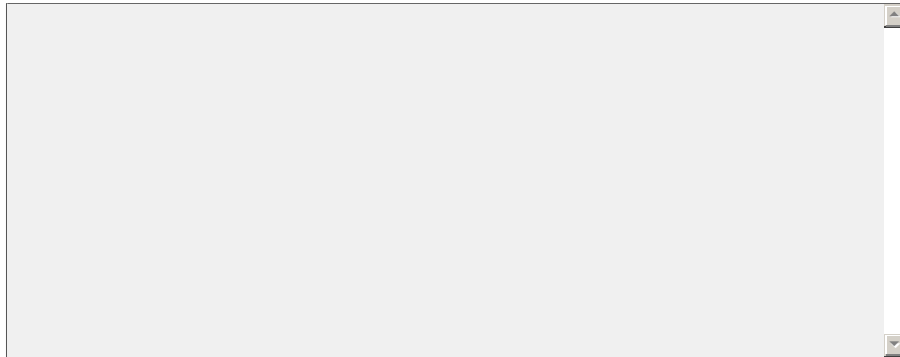
11. When thinking about being a single LDS man at this stage in life, people can have a range of reactions. Some examples might be:

-”I actually don’t want to be married right now.”

-”It just hasn’t worked out, and I feel ok with not being married yet.”

-”I’m worried that I’m behind, or that something’s wrong since I’m not married yet.”

What has been your experience so far, and what are your feelings about being a single Latter-day Saint at this stage in life?

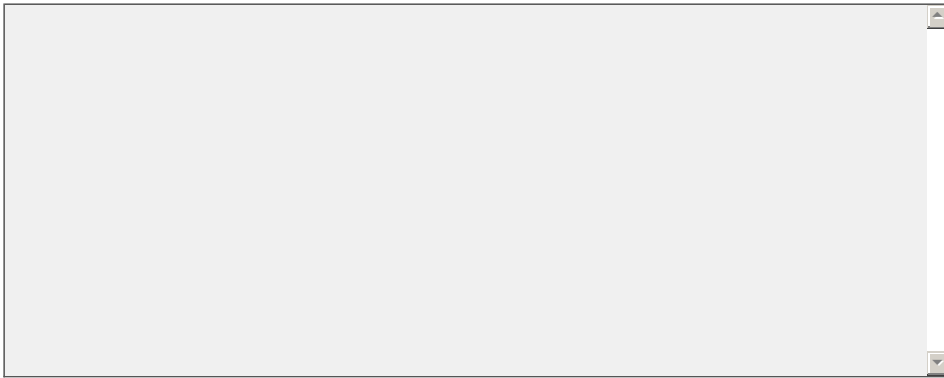


There are no right or wrong answers. Please describe in detail your own personal experience in relation to the following questions. As a reminder, all responses are anonymous and encouraged to be at least a few paragraphs for each question.

12. Please read the following quote:

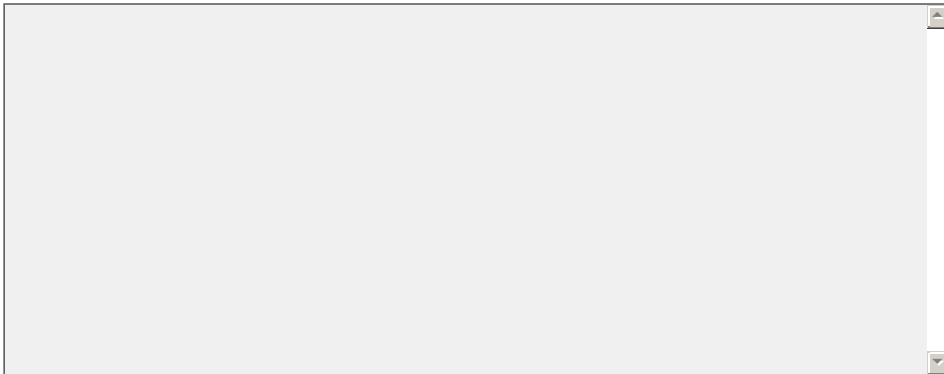
“Now, I have thought a lot lately about you young men who are of an age to marry but who have not yet felt to do so. I see lovely young ladies who desire to be married and to raise families, and yet their opportunities are limited because so many young men are postponing marriage.”- Thomas S. Monson

After reading this quote, what are your feelings and reactions in regard to your personal experience?



13. Adam recently graduated college single and decides to return home to visit his family. On Sunday he attends his home ward and after sacrament meeting is approached by a ward member and family friend. After they chat for a couple of minutes the member asks, “why aren’t you married yet?”

If you were in Adams place, what would you be thinking or feeling internally, and how might you react?



There are no right or wrong answers. Please describe in detail your own personal experience in relation to the following questions. As a reminder, all responses are anonymous and encouraged to be at least a few paragraphs for each question.

14. What messages are you receiving from Church leaders about being single at this stage of life?

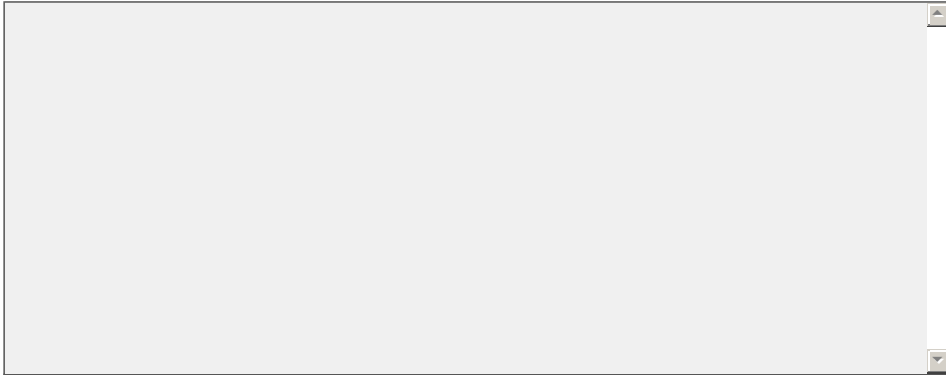
15. What messages are you receiving from your family about being single at this stage of life?

16. What messages are you receiving from your peers about being single at this stage of life?

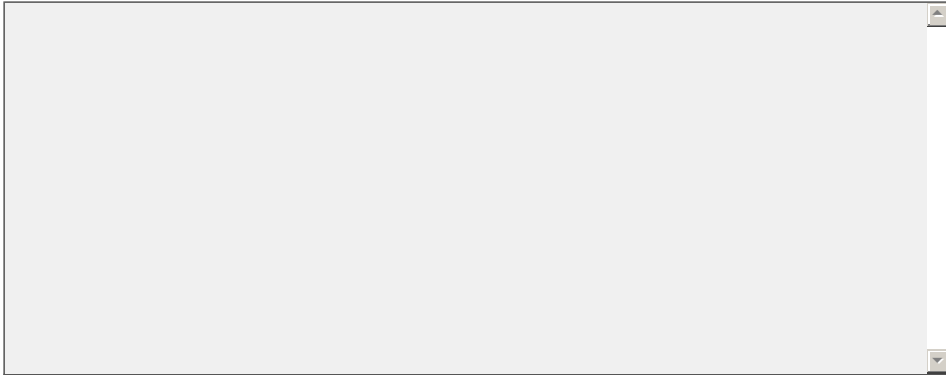
17. How do these messages influence your actions in regard to dating, Church involvement, or any other way?

There are no right or wrong answers. Please describe in detail your own personal experience in relation to the following questions. As a reminder, all responses are anonymous and encouraged to be at least a few paragraphs for each question.

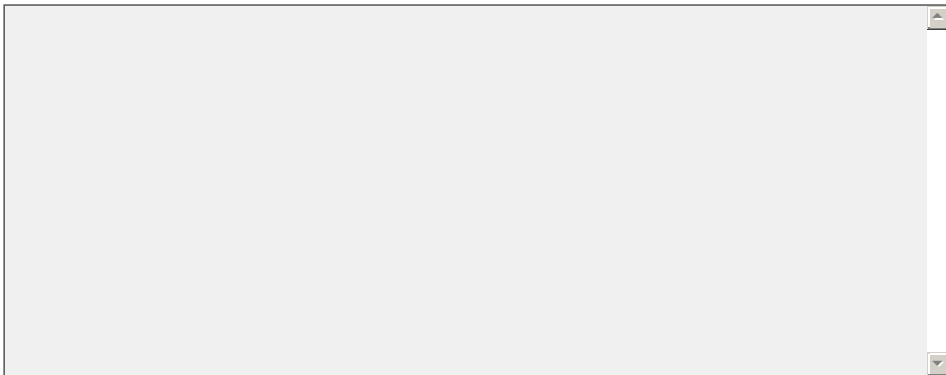
18. How do you feel your relationship status influences your relationship with God?

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19. How do you feel your relationship status influences your relationship with the Church?

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20. How can the Church community best support young single adult men at this stage of life?

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