



Value Transitions During Religious Disaffiliation from the Latter-day Saints Faith

Justin Sciarini, Weber State University
Justin Lee, Weber State University

Abstract

Transitioning from a high-demand religion such as the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS; Mormon) is a complex process that includes many losses and personal evolutions. Among those losses is a transition from values taught by the LDS Church to personally identified values. Coupled with this, the period of emerging adulthood is generally a time of self-exploration and change. This qualitative study explores the relationship between reasons for leaving the LDS Church and subsequent value transitions among 24 emerging adults (18-29) who had transitioned or were transitioning from the Church. The findings from this study indicate a change in value priority for individuals who have left the LDS Church. Through qualitative analysis, responses show that individuals' reasons for leaving the Church can relate to the values' priority movements. The findings emphasize the need for mental health professionals to assist individuals in affirming and understanding their values and personal identities after disaffiliation.

Keywords: religious transition, value congruence, mental health, Latter-day Saints, emerging adulthood

Introduction

High-demand religions are organizations that require significant costs and sacrifices from their members, primarily focusing on time requirements to fulfill membership expectations, resulting in strong ties to the in-group and a fusion of identity with the religion (Scheitle and Adamczyk 2010, 325). The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints requires a substantial time commitment, high volunteer hours, and 10% tithing with additional monetary contributions required (Iannaccone, Olsen, & Stark 1995, 3). Individuals who leave a high-

demand religion often face a great deal of uncertainty. Jindra (2022) finds that these religious transitions can bring about intense feelings of guilt, shame, and a loss of identity. Prior research has examined various reasons individuals provide for transitioning away from the LDS Church, including obtaining higher education, experiencing cognitive dissonance around behaviors like alcohol use or premarital sex, and undergoing life course changes like marriage or cohabitation (Uecker, Regnerus, and Vaaler 2007, 1668), identity confusion (Jindra 2022, 325), grappling with social/political issues, gender roles, race, Utah residency status (Cranney 2019, 104–106), increasing income, and substituting scientific knowledge for religious beliefs (Gunlach and Paldam 2012, 419–21). Boyd (2013, 16) noted that a qualitative approach has been used to explore more deeply the issues at play to better understand individuals' experiences. As the LDS Church has recently seen its highest rate of members leaving in its 175-year history (Cheong and Fisk 2013, 1), it is important to understand both the reasons for leaving and potential contributions to mental health distress. Multiple mental health interventions, including Acceptance and Commitment Therapy and Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, acknowledge the importance of acting in accordance with firmly held values on mental health (Harris 2021, 212; Sokol and Fox 2019, 11–12).

Value congruence is defined as the subjective similarities between personal and organizational values (Edwards and Cable 2009, 656). As individuals transition out of adolescence and into early adulthood, a stage referred to as early adulthood (Barry and Nelson 2004, 245), they may begin to follow personally held values that are potentially in opposition to values held by the LDS Church. This study seeks to understand the relationship between values gained while individuals were members of The Church and the development of individually held values during their disaffiliation process of questioning, doubting, and reconfiguring their faith. We hypothesize that individuals experiencing value incongruence, defined as a lack of subjective fit between their values and LDS values, will be more likely to report this incongruence as a reason for disaffiliation from the Church.

Background

In 2021, a Pew study revealed a significant trend: 28% of Americans now report no religious affiliation, marking a 16% increase since 2007. This trend is even more pronounced among emerging adults, with 36% of those aged 18–29 identifying as non-affiliated. Numerous studies highlight the benefits of religious engagement, such as reduced depression rates (VanderWeele 2017, 477), lower divorce rates (Li, Kubzanski and VanderWeele 2018, 5), healthier lifestyle choices (Hill et al. 2007, 2019), increased lifespan (Hummer et al. 1999, 277), and overall psychological wellbeing (Green and Elliott 2010, 155). Hodge (2020, 128) argues for religion's pivotal role in diminishing human suffering and enhancing well-being, though we must assume one must adhere to religious dogma to enjoy the benefits of affiliation.

The decline in religiosity and the increase in disaffiliation has prompted a growing body of academic research that focuses on the process of leaving a religious community. Current models of religious transition, as detailed by Fisher (2017), outline the process of transition as beginning with questioning, which, depending on the individual's resolution with their questions, can lead to either reconfiguration or doubt. The model continues by outlining that from doubt, the individual may either deconvert (separation from the religious community), undergo disaffiliation (ending one's membership and "dropping out of activity in the

religion”), or undergo opposition (engaging in a chain of acts of revenge against one’s spiritual past) (Fisher, 2017). As individuals progress through the states of religious disaffiliation outlined by Fisher (2017), they may encounter significant challenges that can impact their well-being and sense of self-identity. Disaffiliation often results in significant challenges, including loss of social and familial relationships, feelings of abandonment, suicidal thoughts, and deteriorating mental health (Scheitle and Adamczyk 2010, 330; Berger 2015, 674). Nica (2020, 2130) notes profound impacts on personal identity and self-concept. Nica (2019, 552) also notes the challenges that people face when developing new, supportive, non-religious social networks, but finds that those who can experience greater well-being. Leaving high-demand religious groups can reduce well-being (Fenelon and Danielsen 2016, 54). Brooks (2020, 193) describes this as “. . . acute psychological distress after undergoing . . . a sudden and acute collapse of faith.”

Although religious affiliation seems to be correlated with generally positive outcomes, people who remain in these organizations enjoy the benefits reserved for group membership. One benefit is that of value congruence. In the case of high demand religions, value congruence is achieved by adherents accepting the structured morals and values identified by the Church. The Latter-Day Saint faith, for instance, requires members to be interviewed by ecclesiastical leaders (Bishop and Stake President) in order to pass a worthiness interview so they can attend the temple and hold certain responsibilities in the Church. When members leave the Church, it is often because they experience conflict between personally held values and those espoused by the Church, for example, conflict between values around gender or sexual identity and those of the LDS Church and their accompanying policy positions. Others feel they are pushed away by the intolerance of other members and leaders. Sumerau and Cragun (2014, 344) found that those who espoused biblical literalism and those self-identifying as religious were more likely to hold negative views of sexual and gender minorities.

This issue poses a challenge for mental health clinicians, who are generally trained to view religion as a source of support rather than a potential cause of distress. Adults leaving high-demand religious groups often seek professional help, facing identity and worldview dissolution alongside a rapid decline in community support (Jindra and Lee 2021, 6; Jindra 2022, 340). Current treatment models are not fully equipped to address these unique challenges, lacking specialized training for clinicians. This growing issue underlines the need for targeted research to better support those experiencing the complex ramifications of religious disaffiliation.

Burke (2004, 11) used identity theory to explain how religious groups that are largely “closed societies” have a powerful influence on the personal identity development of adherents. As young people emerge into early adulthood (18–29), they grapple with differentiating a sense of self from the religious identity imposed and expected from high-demand religions. Gull (2022) explored a process of disaffiliation that included five steps: pre-coming out, coming out, exploration, re-imagining close relationships, and finally, integration or identity synthesis. Identity synthesis is when “. . . an individual is ready to integrate a highly salient personal identity into their identity hierarchy” (115). This point of transition and identity development can coincide with other stages of development marked (according to psychologist Erik Erikson) by periods of conflict between competing values. Early adulthood

is a period of value transition and identity formation where emerging adults must navigate social relationships while maintaining a burgeoning sense of self.

Method

The data for this qualitative study was compiled via mixed methods using a combination of nonprobability sampling methods, including convenience and snowball recruiting and solicitation for research participants on social media. Researchers posted a link to the survey on social media sites and sent the questionnaire to personal contacts. The survey was completed electronically for all participants. Each participant was asked screening questions regarding their identity, including pregnancy status, incarceration status, documentation status, and mental capacity, to assess their eligibility to participate in the study according to IRB standards.

The following questionnaire consisted of seven demographic questions, questions that identified length of membership and current level of attendance, six questions pertaining to mental health, two value lists, and six free response questions. It was anticipated that the survey would take 15 minutes for participants to complete. Participants were asked to provide demographic information (age, gender identity, racial/ethnic identity, state/country of residence) through free response. Relationship status, education level, membership length, and current attendance level were obtained through set scales. Information regarding current subjective physical health and mental well-being was obtained through Likert scales. Participants were then asked to select their current top five values and their top five values during their active membership from a list that included the LDS young women's values (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, n.d.) among other commonly used top values. Finally, participants were asked six short-answer questions about the main factors contributing to their reconfiguration, their subjective understanding of how their values were in agreement or in conflict with the LDS Church, and if they subjectively believed their values had shifted or changed when they began questioning their religion. It was anticipated that the questionnaire would take participants 15 to 30 minutes, depending on the depth of their short-answer responses.

After a collection period of two weeks, the researchers received forty-one completed responses, which were then compiled into a spreadsheet. Forty-one surveys were received at the time of analysis. Of these surveys, 24 responses (58.5%) were from participants in the emerging adulthood criteria of ages 18–29. Demographic information was separated from value and other short response answers.

Participants

This study comprised 24 individuals aged 19 to 29 (median, 23). Twenty-three (96%) of the participants identified as white; eighteen (75%) identified as female, with one identifying as gender fluid and one as non-binary. Seventeen (71%) participants resided in Utah, with the remainder from other U.S. states. Twelve (50%) were married. Eleven (46%) had a bachelor's degree, and thirteen (54%) completed some college. Twenty-one (88%) participants were born into the faith they considered themselves in transition out of. Eighteen (75%) of the participants were no longer attending church, with the remaining still attending weekly or less than four times a month.

Data Analysis

Quantitative demographic, subjective health, and mental health symptomology data were analyzed through statistical analysis programs, and qualitative data were examined through inductive thematic analysis. While the number of survey responses from individuals outside the age range was higher than expected, the intent of the research analysis was to guide the design of a religious transition support group of emerging adults in a university setting. As such, the current examination will focus on the responses from individuals in the emerging adulthood range to provide the best insight into the needs of the university setting.

The open-ended responses and values data were reviewed and divided into themes. Values were analyzed by frequency reported. The researchers coded and tagged short-response questions into agree, disagree, and not applicable categories. Further analysis was done by identifying specific themes and linking like-responses together through thematic analysis.

Results

Responses from 24 individuals were included in this study (see Table 1). Of these responses, the majority were from self-identified White (95.5%), female (75%) individuals who were born into the LDS faith (87.5%), no longer attending (75%), and living in the state of Utah (70.8%). There were responses with low numbers, such as non-binary and gender fluid, each of which had one self-identified participant.

Table 1: Demographics of Survey Participants, N=24

<i>Racial/Ethnic Identity</i>		
White	23	95.8%
Latine	1	4.2%
<i>Gender Identity</i>		
Female	18	75.0%
Male	4	16.7%
Non-Binary	1	4.2%
Gender Fluid	1	4.2%
<i>Relationship</i>		
Single, Never Married	9	37.5%
Married	12	50.0%
Committed Relationship, Not Married	3	12.5%
<i>Education Level</i>		
Completed some college	13	54.2%
Completed undergraduate college degree	11	45.8%
<i>Length of Membership</i>		
Born into faith	21	87.5%
Converted in Childhood	3	12.5%
<i>Attendance Level</i>		
Never / No longer attending	18	75.0%
At least once a year	2	8.3%
At least once a month	3	12.5%
At least once a week	1	4.2%

Trends in Data

Regarding subjective mental and physical health and subjective life satisfaction and happiness, participants were asked to rate themselves using a Likert scale (see Table 2). Most responses showed positive subjective life satisfaction and subjective happiness (satisfaction = 75%; happiness = 62.5%). Regarding subjective physical well-being, most responses were good-few concerns (66.7%). Most responses for subjective mental well-being were good-few mental health concerns (50.0%), but with a higher amount of fair-some mental health concerns (37.5%) compared with physical well-being (12.5%).

Table 2: Subjective Life Satisfaction, Happiness, and Physical and Mental Well-being of Participants

<i>Subjective Life Satisfaction</i>			
“How satisfied are you with your current life?”			
5	10	41.7%	
4	8	33.3%	
3	5	20.8%	
2	1	4.2%	
1	0	0.0%	
<i>Subjective Happiness</i>			
“Taken all things together, how happy would you say you are?”			
5	1	4.2%	
4	14	58.3%	
3	7	29.2%	
2	1	4.2%	
1	1	4.2%	
<i>Subjective Physical Well-Being</i>			
Excellent – No concerns	5	20.8%	
Good – Few concerns	16	66.7%	
Fair – Some concerns	3	12.5%	
Poor	0	0.0%	
<i>Subjective Mental Well-Being</i>			
Excellent – No mental health concerns	2	8.3%	
Good – Few mental health concerns	12	50.0%	
Fair – Some mental health concerns	9	37.5%	
Poor- Many mental health concerns	1	4.2%	

The prompts asked for information regarding values: “Choose your current top five values” and “Choose your top five values while you were an active member” from a list of 25 values with the option to write in their own (see Table 3). The top five values while participants were active LDS members were faith (70.8%), spirituality (58.3%), belonging (41.7%), family (37.5%), and virtue (33.3%). No individuals indicated that individuality was a top value while a member. Contrarily, participants indicated their current top five values as love (66.7%), happiness (50.0%), family (41.7%), honesty (37.5%), and individual worth (33.3%). No individuals noted their current values as authority or virtue.

Participants were then asked the question: “In your opinion, did the feeling of personal values and LDS values being incongruent cause mental health distress?” Eighteen (75.0%)

responses noted that value incongruence subjectively caused mental health distress. Four (16.7%) participants stated no; however, more elaboration on their responses is given in the discussion of the following themes. Two responses neither affirmed nor denied a relationship between mental health and values.

Likewise, participants answered the question: “In your opinion, do you believe your values shifted when you left the religion/began questioning the religion?” Of the responses, 20 (83.33%) claimed their values shifted, while only two (8.33%) said their values did not change.

Table 3: Current Top Values versus Top Values When Active Member of Participants

<i>Current Top Five Values</i>			<i>When LDS, Top Five Values</i>		
Love	16	66.67%	Faith	17	70.83%
Happiness	12	50.00%	Spirituality	14	58.33%
Family	10	41.67%	Belonging	10	41.67%
Honesty	9	37.50%	Family	9	37.50%
Individual Worth	8	33.33%	Virtue	8	33.33%
Health	7	29.17%	Service	7	29.17%
Independence	6	25.00%	Sacrifice	6	25.00%
Integrity	6	25.00%	Honesty	5	20.83%
Choice	5	20.83%	Acceptance	4	16.67%
Gratitude	5	20.83%	Community	4	16.67%
Patience	5	20.83%	Gratitude	4	16.67%
Service	5	20.83%	Knowledge	4	16.67%
Knowledge	4	16.67%	Love	4	16.67%
Loyalty	4	16.67%	Choice	3	12.50%
Accountability	3	12.50%	Individual Worth	3	12.50%
Belonging	3	12.50%	Patience	3	12.50%
Freedom	3	12.50%	Accountability	2	8.33%
Acceptance	2	8.33%	Integrity	2	8.33%
Individuality	2	8.33%	Authority	1	4.17%
Spirituality	2	8.33%	Freedom	1	4.17%
Community	1	4.17%	Happiness	1	4.17%
Faith	1	4.17%	Health	1	4.17%
Sacrifice	1	4.17%	Independence	1	4.17%
Authority	0	0.00%	Loyalty	1	4.17%
Virtue	0	0.00%	Individuality	0	0.00%

Themes of Data

The researchers used inductive thematic analysis to identify common themes across the open-ended survey responses regarding participants’ reasons for disaffiliating from the LDS

Church. Open coding was used to identify concepts and categories in the data. Through an iterative process of comparing concepts and responses, codes were combined into categories based on shared meaning and content. For example, codes related to “racism,” “sexism/gender roles,” and “LGBT+ issues” were grouped under the theme “Social Justice Values.” Ultimately, six themes were found: (1) abuse/trauma, (2) doctrine/beliefs, (3) the Church organization (church current events and church history), (4) the culture of the religion, (5) family, and (6) social justice values (feminism/sexism, racism, and anti-LGBT+ rhetoric). Each response was coded under one of these themes. Researchers examined the connection between the themes and changes in the individuals’ self-reported values from when they were active LDS members compared with current values. As discussed previously, individuals’ current top five values are love, happiness, family, honesty, and individual worth. The top values while participants were members were faith, spirituality, belonging, family, and virtue.

Abuse/Trauma

Two participants indicated that their decision to transition was influenced by abuse or trauma. Both participants indicated that their top values while active members were faith, spirituality, belonging, and virtue, suggesting that they placed importance on the faith and spirituality of the religion. Both individuals selected *virtue* as a value. Virtue, as defined by the doctrine of the LDS religion, includes chastity, cleanliness, goodness, holiness, modesty, purity, and sacred (Topical Guide 2013, 541), which are values that would be in contrast with abuse and trauma situations. Both individuals listed *honesty* as the current top value. One individual noted that their primary reason for transitioning away from the faith was due to the direct abuse, stating: “A God who lets that happen is either not real or doesn’t deserve my worship.”

Doctrine

The team chose to combine religious faith, beliefs, and specific rules of the Church as *doctrine*. The Doctrine of the LDS Church has been provided through both “official” doctrine and other authoritative teachings of church leaders. The official doctrine of the Church includes the core, eternal teachings, supporting teachings, policy teachings, and esoteric teachings (Sweat, MacKay, and Dirkmaat 2017, 105). Other teachings given by church leaders may be seen as authoritative teachings. However, there are criteria (conformity to previous revelation, common consent, and personal revelation) that must be met for those teachings to be regarded as the doctrine of the Church (Ash 2003, 1–2). Due to the common confusion between official church doctrine and other teachings given by church leaders, all teachings and rules given either officially through the Church, by individual church leaders, or by common social consent have been grouped together.

Eleven participants reported that their reasons for leaving the Church were due to beliefs, faith, or overall doctrine of the Church. Responses indicated that specific teachings such as physical ordinances like garments, doctrinal teachings such as the validity of prophethood, cosmological beliefs including Heavenly Mother, and specific scripture passages impacted their decision. Other responses expressed a “lack of faith,” stating that the teachings “were not aligning with my experiences as a human.” 72.7% of responses indicating that doctrine played a role in their transition included *faith* or *spirituality* as a top value during their time as a

member. Of those responses, two still hold *faith* or *spirituality* as a top value, and the remaining participants identified *individual worth* or *individuality* as the top value. One respondent articulated the differences between the LDS religious doctrine and their spirituality, stating: “My spirituality was not aligning with those [LDS] teachings.”

Church Organization

The team chose to combine church history and current church events into a single category: church organization. Six responses indicated that either current church responses to recent events or learning about church history impacted their transition or questioning. Answers included responses such as “things that were happening that I just couldn’t agree with or defend” and “the dishonesty in their history regarding Black members and the pedophilia of Joseph Smith.” Individuals who noted church organization had a role in their transition frequently indicated pro-social values such as *service*, *belonging*, *community*, and *sacrifice* as their top-held values while they were members. Only one respondent indicated *service* as a current value, while other responses indicated values such as *acceptance*, *independence*, *freedom*, *individual worth*, and *choice* as current values.

Culture of the Religion

Eight responses indicated that the Church and Utah culture impacted their decision to transition or begin questioning the LDS faith. Responses did not go into detail regarding specific facets of the culture. Instead, responses included “the culture in Utah county was really bad” and not wanting family to be “torn apart by judgmental culture.” Themes in this concept included feelings of judgment. One participant noted that they “always felt like [they] didn’t belong” because the teachings did not include “families that looked like [theirs].” Five responses (62.5%) indicated that *family*, *spirituality*, and *faith* were in their top values while a member. Current top values include positive self-concept values such as *love*, *health*, *independence*, *individual worth*, *honesty*, and *happiness*.

Family

Family is one of the highest-held values of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. *Family* as a value occurred in the top five values for both time as a member (37.5%) and current (41.7%). However, responses that included the family concept as a reason for transitioning away from the Church included negative connotations such as “family becoming increasingly overbearing” and “saying I was in the wrong for thinking differently.” Other responses included spousal relationships, such as their partner leaving the Church or divorce as reasons for leaving. Another response indicated that the Family Proclamation (1995) and specific doctrine regarding family (Doctrine and Covenants, 132) contributed to their transitioning. Of note, only one response that indicated family as a contributing factor for their disaffiliation listed *family* as a top value during their time as a full member, and only one response listed family as a current top value. Other responses indicated personal self-worth values such as *integrity*, *independence*, and *individual worth* as current values.

Social Justice Values

The authors included three distinct value concepts in this section: racism, sexism/feminism, and LGBT+. Of the sixteen responses that indicated social justice values,

only one (7%) did not include faith as a top value versus the 92.8% who explicitly stated faith as a top value while they were members. Specific responses regarding race included “the racism in their history,” “equality in relation to race,” and the “dishonesty in their history regarding Black members.” All individuals who listed racism as a contributing factor for transitioning had listed *faith* as a top value before leaving. After disaffiliation, all responses listed *love* as a top value. Responses indicating sexism/feminism reported ideas such as “women’s roles,” “equality in relation to gender,” and “becoming a mom.” One response discussed the concept of Heavenly Mother, a topic that has recently invited controversy in the LDS community (Stack, 2022). Finally, six (25%) of all responses indicated that LGBT+ rights contributed to their reasoning for questioning or transitioning from the Church. Many (83%) reported that the Church’s views and stances on LGBT+ individuals were a contributor, while one response stated that coming out as LGBT+ was the reason for leaving, indicating a more personal impact. All (100%) of individuals who listed LGBT+ reasons for leaving listed *faith* as a top value while they were members. Five (83%) individuals indicated that *love* was one of their current top five values.

Discussion

Value shifts in participants could be reflective of their reasons for questioning or transitioning away from the Church. Participants that indicated doctrine was a major factor no longer listed *faith* or *spirituality* as top values. Individuals whose transition was impacted by LGBT+ social justice no longer prioritized *faith* but had listed *love* and *family*. Responses that listed abuse or trauma as contributing factors had replaced *virtue* with *honesty*. Participants who had negative experiences with family members no longer listed *family* as a value; instead, they listed *individual worth* and *independence* as top values.

Although there appears to be a relationship between value congruence and religious transition, it is harder to identify the direction of the relationship. When answering the question, “In your opinion, do you believe your values shifted when you left the religion/began questioning the religion?” twenty (83.33%) participants stated yes. However, responses included statements such as: “No, if anything, my values became more inclusive,” implying that their values had not changed but that they became more accepting. Other responses stated: “They didn’t shift; they just became more congruent and less performative.” Some responses provided a time scale of values and transitioning: “I feel my values shifted, then I began questioning the religion,” while another reported: “[after I left] I started to become more left-leaning and not so conservative.” These two comments show that changes in values can happen at various times throughout the religious transition. Additionally, responses indicate that the initial transition from the religion is caused by both external factors (trauma, abuse, or family) as well as internal value positions (LGBT+, feminism, racism, culture).

Implications for Mental Health Practice

Incongruence between values and action congruence has been shown to increase the incidence of mental health distress (Harris 2019, 230). If individuals in high-demand religions hold personal values that are in contrast with the teachings and doctrinal values of the Church structure, we would anticipate higher levels of internalized mental health distress. As such,

helping professionals working with individuals going through faith questioning or transitioning can begin the helping process by allowing the clients to make explicit their core values to affirm their personal identities and beliefs and help them understand the congruence between theirs and the Church's values. With a growing understanding of the impact of religion on mental health and focus on the cultural intersectionality of social determinants of health appearing in the DSM5-TR (APA 2022, 871–79), it is essential to understand how religious and spiritual journeys affect, either positively or negatively, mental health outcomes. Ultimately, faith and belief are very personal choices. Mental health practitioners should not persuade clients toward or against a specific set of beliefs but should help lower the incidence of mental health distress due to competing and conflicting value sets.

Limitations

A key limitation of this study is the non-representative sampling method, which may introduce biases in the unique experiences of disaffiliated members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. As the small convenience sample was comprised of emerging adults who chose to voluntarily respond to the survey, they may exhibit different characteristics and reasons for transitioning compared to individuals of other age groups or individuals unwilling to discuss the reasons for their transitions.

After accounting for the emerging adulthood range, the demographics of the study participants were similar to those of the broader LDS community in the Pew Research Center's Religious Landscape Study (2014) in terms of being predominantly college-educated, white, and in a married or committed relationship. The LDS community, however, is nearly equally split between gender identities, with 46% male and 54% female (Pew Research Center, 2014), whereas the participants were predominantly female (75%). Cranney (2019, 105) found that male members of the Latter-day Saints faith tend to leave disproportionately compared with females, a trend he attributes to men's overall less religiosity compared to women. Because of these factors, the experiences of men, women, and gender-diverse disaffiliates could impact their reasons for leaving and the members' before values (as young women have specifically taught values), which, in turn, would affect the weight of specific values in categories like social justice, family, and abuse. Similarly, while the other demographics may be similar to the broader demographics of the LDS Church, they do not highlight the diverse populations that have been shown to have higher rates of disaffiliation, such as Black individuals, less educated, lower income, divorced, and living outside of Utah (Cranney 2019, 105–106). Individuals in these demographics may have different personal values and experiences contributing toward disaffiliation. A probability sample that either targeted a representative cross-section of the larger LDS community or demographics with higher disaffiliation rates could allow for greater generalization of how values transitions are related to reasons for leaving.

The self-report survey method also introduced limitations, as respondents could choose how detailed their responses about their experiences and reasons for leaving were. In-person or more structured surveys could gain deeper qualitative data and the ability to ask clarifying follow-up questions. However, resource, time, and advertisement constraints necessitated the survey approach to capture a wider demographic of participants.

While valuable insights did emerge, the sample composition and methods limit the generalizability of the results. Claims about value transitioning and reasons for disaffiliation

would require confirmation through representative sampling of both former LDS members and those in the process of transitioning.

Direction for Future Research

As stated above, future research would benefit from a distinctive qualitative or quantitative approach, contrary to a hybrid research approach as with this study. A time-unrestricted quantitative study would, ideally, be able to gain more data, better understand the values of individuals transitioning from the faith and compare those values with reasons for leaving the Church. Likewise, a more in-depth qualitative analysis with a population either representative of the LDS community or of demographics within the LDS faith with higher rates of disaffiliation would allow for more clarification of the changes in values during transitioning and increase generalizability. Part of the research survey included mental health questions, diagnostic symptom criteria, and personal insight into improvements and diminishments of life with an idea for future research analyzing the connection between reasons for leaving and current mental health conditions. Potential links indicating the connection between mental health, values, and reasons for transitioning may provide benefits in shaping interventions to target individuals working through faith transitions.

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