

The Flinders University of South Australia
School of Education

Spiritual, Moral and Social Development as the Outcomes of a Program for Youth

Thesis submitted for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

by
Michael J. Carthew
BSc (Deakin), GradDipEd (Monash),
MEdPA (Monash)

January, 2008

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES	VII
LIST OF TABLES	VIII
DECLARATION	IX
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	X
ABSTRACT	XI
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	1
Study Background and Conception.....	3
Current Academic Environment.....	3
The Aims of This Study	5
Outline of this Report.....	7
<i>Literature Review</i>	7
<i>Study Concept, Methodology and Results</i>	7
<i>Discussion and Conclusions</i>	8
Definitions	8
<i>The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints</i>	8
<i>Religiosity and Spirituality</i>	8
<i>Moral and Morality</i>	9
<i>Social</i>	9
Limitations and Constraints of Scope	9
Conclusions	11
CHAPTER 2: RELIGIOSITY AND SPIRITUALITY - A SELECTIVE REVIEW	12
Introduction	12
The Teenager and Religion	12
<i>The Nature of Teenage Religiosity and Spirituality</i>	14
<i>Factors Important to the Religiosity of Adolescents</i>	19
The Measurements of Religiousness	23
The ‘Spiritual Revolution’ and Current Research Directions	26
The Measurement of Spirituality.....	26
Conclusion.....	29
CHAPTER 3: SOCIAL ATTITUDES AND MORAL REASONING - A SELECTIVE REVIEW ..	30
Introduction	30
Attitudes and Behaviour	30
<i>A Useful Model</i>	32
<i>Measuring Attitudes and Predicting Behaviour</i>	34
The Concept of Moral Development.....	36
<i>Piaget on Moral Development – Beginnings of the Cognitive Developmental Approach</i>	38
<i>Kohlberg on Moral Development – A Foundational Paradigm</i>	39
<i>Kohlberg’s Stages of Moral Development</i>	40
<i>Building on the Cognitive Developmental Approach</i>	42

<i>Alternative Models for Understanding Moral Thinking</i>	43
Religion, Attitudes and Moral Development	47
<i>Religion and Attitude</i>	47
<i>Moral Reasoning and Religion</i>	48
Conclusion.....	52
CHAPTER 4: LATTER-DAY SAINT YOUTH – A REVIEW OF RESEARCH.....	53
Introduction	53
Considerations When Interpreting Research Involving Latter-day Saints.....	54
Religious Expectations on Latter-day Saint Youth	55
Religious Practice, Belief and Interest	56
<i>Public Religious Practice</i>	56
<i>Private Religious Practice</i>	58
<i>Religious Belief, Spiritual Experiences and Commitment</i>	59
LDS Teenagers and the Family	61
LDS Teenagers and their Peers	63
Gender Differences.....	63
The LDS Seminary Program - Religious Education for Teenagers	64
Latter-day Saint Youth and Social Factors.....	65
<i>Latter-day Saints and Measures of Moral Development</i>	65
<i>Delinquency</i>	67
Conclusion.....	68
CHAPTER 5: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND INSTRUMENT SELECTION.....	69
Introduction	69
The Population of Interest	69
The Guiding Questions.....	71
<i>Relationships Among Factors and Dimensions</i>	71
<i>Change in Religious and Spiritual Dimensions Over Time</i>	72
The Scope and Nature of the Study.....	72
<i>A Note on the Scope of the Study</i>	72
<i>A Note on the Nature of the Study</i>	73
A Model for Investigation	73
<i>Relationships Among Factors and Dimensions</i>	74
<i>Accounting for Student Dropout</i>	75
<i>Change in Religious and Spiritual Dimensions Over Time</i>	75
Background Factors.....	76
Age.....	76
Gender	77
Socio-Economic Status	77
School Experience	77
LDS Peers.....	78
Family Religious Practice	78
Parent-Child Relationships	78
Religious Training and Experience	80
Religious Practice	80
Seminary Experience	80
Religious Belief and Feelings.....	81
Spirituality Characteristics	81
Spirituality.....	81
Religious Problem Solving	84

Social and Moral Factors.....	87
<i>Social Attitudes and Values</i>	88
<i>Moral Thinking</i>	89
Considering Change Over Time.....	91
A More Detailed Investigative Model.....	92
Conclusion.....	94
CHAPTER 6: STUDY DESIGN AND ADMINISTRATION	95
Introduction	95
Considerations for Instrument Design and Administration.....	95
<i>Questionnaire Brevity</i>	95
<i>Questionnaire Simplicity</i>	96
Selecting the Sample	96
Scheduling the Surveys	97
Ethics Committee	98
Administering the Surveys	98
Testing and Developing the Scales	99
<i>Pilot Testing</i>	99
<i>The Use of Rasch Scaling</i>	99
The Survey Instrument: The Selection of Items, Scales and Instruments.....	102
<i>Test of Scale Structure, Reliability and Fit</i>	102
<i>Antecedent and Background Factors</i>	105
<i>Religious Practice and Training</i>	108
<i>Spirituality</i>	111
<i>Social Attitudes and Moral Thinking</i>	114
A Note on the Level of Explanation of Data Analysis Procedures.....	117
Conclusion.....	117
CHAPTER 7: AN ANALYSIS OF ANTECEDENT VARIABLES DESCRIBING THE	
 SAMPLE	118
Introduction	118
Study Participation	118
Location of Participants.....	119
<i>Differences Between the States</i>	121
Gender	121
<i>Differences Between the Genders</i>	122
Age and Seminary Year of Participants	123
<i>Age and Seminary Year Basic Correlations</i>	125
Home Life of Participants	126
<i>Siblings</i>	126
<i>Parental Circumstances of Participants</i>	126
Age When Students Joined the LDS Church	131
<i>Differences Between Converts and Life Long Members</i>	131
Conclusion.....	132
CHAPTER 8: CHARACTERISTICS OF STUDENTS DISCONTINUING THE STUDY WITHIN	
 THE FIRST YEAR.	133
Introduction	133
Characteristics Correlated with Student Dropout.....	133
<i>Dropout and the Home Environment</i>	134

<i>Dropout and Educational Background</i>	135
<i>Dropout, Religious Practice and Spirituality</i>	135
A Hierarchical Linear Model to Assist in Explaining Dropout.....	137
<i>Developing the Model</i>	137
<i>An HLM Model for Dropout</i>	139
Summary of Findings	143
Conclusion.....	144

CHAPTER 9: INVESTIGATING RELATIONSHIPS AMONG KEY DIMENSIONS 146

Introduction	146
A Descriptive Summary of Responses to Background Scale Variables	146
A Descriptive Summary of Responses to Religious and Spiritual Variables.....	147
A Descriptive Summary of Responses to Social and Moral Variables	148
The Use of Path Analysis	149
The Selection of Latent Variables for Path Analysis	150
<i>Age</i>	151
<i>Gender</i>	152
<i>Home Socio-Economic Status</i>	152
<i>Family Religious Practice</i>	152
<i>Parental Bonding</i>	152
<i>School Marks</i>	152
<i>Public Religious Life</i>	153
<i>Seminary Participation</i>	153
<i>Seminary Quality</i>	153
<i>Private Religious Life</i>	154
<i>Spirituality</i>	154
<i>Collaborative Religious Problem Solving</i>	155
<i>Independent Moral Thinking</i>	155
<i>Social Attitudes</i>	156
The Path Model: A Snapshot of Relationships	156
<i>The Outer Model</i>	160
<i>The Inner Model</i>	160
Discussion: Responding to the Research Questions.....	166
<i>Personal Background Factors</i>	167
<i>Family Background Variables</i>	169
<i>Relationships among Religious and Spiritual Factors</i>	171
<i>Relationships between Religious, Spiritual, Moral and Social Factors</i>	172
<i>Summary - What influence does religiosity and spirituality have on the moral and social outlook of religious youth?</i>	174
<i>Summary - What effects does the Latter-day Saint Seminary program have on the religious, spiritual, moral and social lives of its participants?</i>	175
Conclusion.....	176

CHAPTER 10: CHANGE OVER TIME OF RELIGIOSITY AND SPIRITUALITY

VARIABLES..... 177

Introduction	177
The Research Questions	177
Measuring Change Over Time	178
<i>The Basic Model</i>	179
<i>A Note on Suppressor Effect using HLM</i>	181

A Model to Investigate Change in Religious and Spiritual Variables Over the Study Period	182
<i>Data Used for the Three-Level Model</i>	182
<i>The Exploratory Method</i>	184
Reporting Change Over Time in Religious and Spiritual Variables	185
<i>Change in Private Religious Practice</i>	185
<i>Change in Public Religious Practice</i>	188
<i>Change in Seminary Participation</i>	190
<i>Change in Seminary Feeling</i>	193
<i>Change in Spiritual Experience</i>	195
<i>Change in Religious Interest</i>	197
<i>Change in Collaborative Religious Problem Solving</i>	198
<i>Change in Awareness of God</i>	200
Responding to the Questions	202
Conclusion.....	210

CHAPTER 11: THE SEMINARY PROGRAM AND THE STUDY OF RELIGIOUS YOUTH.... 211

Introduction	211
Investigation Goals Revisited.....	211
The Research and Reporting the Findings	212
A Review of Major Findings	214
<i>Observations Concerning Student Dropout</i>	214
<i>Relationships Among Key Factors</i>	215
<i>Change in Religious and Spiritual Dimensions</i>	216
Implications for Understanding Youth Religiosity and Spirituality	220
<i>The Importance of the Family in the Religious and Social Lives of Youth</i>	221
<i>The Influence of Age and the Decline in Religiosity through the Teenage Years</i>	222
<i>Religion and Spirituality</i>	223
<i>The Relationship between Religion and Moral Thinking</i>	224
<i>The Relationship between Religion and Social Attitudes</i>	224
Implications and Recommendations for the Seminary Program Arising from this Study.....	225
<i>The Influence of the Seminary Program</i>	225
<i>The Characteristics of Discontinuing Students</i>	227
<i>Factors Influencing Seminary Participation</i>	228
<i>Factors Influencing the Decline in Seminary Participation and Feelings</i>	229
<i>The Impact of the Class Environment</i>	230
Implications for Future Research	231
Conclusion.....	232

REFERENCES 234

APPENDICES.....242

Pilot Study Survey Instrument	242
Major Study Survey Instrument, Scale Item Lists and Scale Item Fit Statistics	257
Bernoulli HLM Output for Dropout Variable	287
Scale Correlation Tables	290
Three-Level HLM Output for Change Over Time Analyses.	294

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 3.1	A two-component concept of attitude (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980).....	33
Figure 3.2	An Outline of the theory of reasoned action (from Fraser, 2001).	34
Figure 5.1	A graphical representation of the factors and characteristics investigated in this study.	75
Figure 5.2	A graphical representation of the variables and proposed relationships investigated in this study.	93
Figure 6.1	Diagrammatical illustration of survey administration dates and content.....	97
Figure 7.1	Total participants for each survey showing those also completing survey 1.	119
Figure 8.1	Graph indicating the relationship between Dropout and Private Religious Practice (HLM Analysis with Bernoulli Distribution).....	140
Figure 8.2	Chart comparing Dropout and Convert variables showing the influence of class aggregate Self-Directing Religious Problem Solving on Convert categories at 25 th , 50 th and 75 th percentiles.	141
Figure 8.3	Chart comparing Dropout and Convert variables showing the influence of class aggregate Insecurity with God on Convert categories at 25 th , 50 th and 75 th percentiles.....	143
Figure 9. 1:	Latent and Manifest Variables in Order As Used in Model	151
Figure 9.2	PLS Path Model of background, religious, spiritual and social variables from Survey 1 (or Survey 4) data.....	161
Figure 9.3	General Relationships Among Religious and Spiritual Factors.	172
Figure 10.1	Graph showing the influence of Religious Interest on the change of Private religious Practice over time.	187
Figure 10.2	Graph showing the influence of Seminary Feeling on the change of Seminary Participation over time.	191
Figure 10.3	Graph showing the influence of Religious Belief on the change of Seminary Participation over time.	192
Figure 10.4	Graph showing the influence of Awareness of God on the change of Seminary Participation over time.	194
Figure 10.5	Graph showing the influence of Awareness of God on the change of Spiritual Experience over time.	196
Figure 10.6	Graph showing the influence of Spiritual Experience on the change of Religious Interest over time.	198
Figure 10.7	Graph showing the influence of Spiritual Experience on the change of Collaborative RPS over time.....	200
Figure 10.8	Graph showing the influence of Spiritual Experience on the change of Awareness of God over time.	202

LIST OF TABLES

Table 6.1 Scale Person, Item and Reliability Data.....	106
Table 7.1 Total participants completing each survey by state	120
Table 7.2 Number of classes invited to participate and those responding to study survey	120
Table 7.3 Participants in each survey by Gender	122
Table 7.4 Participants in each survey by Age	123
Table 7.5 Participants in each survey by Year in Seminary.....	124
Table 7.6 Mean number of siblings reported with standard deviation.....	126
Table 7.7 Participants in each survey by parenting circumstance.....	127
Table 7.8 Participants in each survey by Father’s Occupation	128
Table 7.9 Participants in each survey by Mother’s Occupation.....	130
Table 7.10 Number of converts for Surveys 1 and 4 with average age of conversion.....	131
Table 9.1 Mean scores of background variables for Survey 1 and Survey 4.....	147
Table 9.2 Mean scores of religious and spiritual variables for Survey 1 to 4.....	148
Table 9.3 Mean scores of social and moral variables for Survey 1 and 4.....	149
Table 9.4 PLSPath Model: Direct, indirect and total Inner model effects.....	158
Table 10.1 Private Religious Practice as outcome variable in a 3-level HLM model .	186
Table 10.2 Public Religious Practice as outcome variable in a 3-level HLM model...	189
Table 10.3 Seminary Participation as outcome variable in a 3-level HLM model	190
Table 10.4 Seminary Feeling as outcome variable in a 3-level HLM model.....	193
Table 10.5 Spiritual Experience as outcome variable in a 3-level HLM model	195
Table 10.6 Religious Interest as outcome variable in a 3-level HLM model.....	197
Table 10.7 Collaborative RPS as outcome variable in a 3-level HLM model	199
Table 10.8 Awareness of God as outcome variable in a 3-level HLM model	201
Table 10.9 Level 1 (within student) HLM Output showing Intercept and Slope of Religious and Spiritual Variables.....	203
Table B.1 Item level scale loading, difficulty and fit statistics	280
Table D.1 Pearson correlation coefficients of background variables.....	291
Table D.2 Pearson correlation coefficients of religious, spiritual and social variables	292
Table D.3 Pearson correlation coefficients of background variables with religious, spiritual and social variables	293

DECLARATION

I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university; and to the best of my knowledge, it does not contain material previously published or written by any other person except where due reference is made in the text.

Michael J. Carthew

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

An undertaking like the research and writing associated with this thesis would not be possible without the help, support and generosity of many people.

The patience and support of my wife, Sharon, and my children, Chelsea, Renée and Liam, have played a crucial role in the writing and completion of this thesis. They have sacrificed many hours with their husband and father in order to allow this work to go forward.

Professor John Keeves has been a patient and encouraging supervisor over the entire duration of this project. I thank him for sharing his wealth of experience, academic ability and deep insight throughout the years we have been working on this thesis together.

Of course, there would have been no thesis if it were not for the support and participation of the administrators, teachers and students involved in the Seminary program over the course of the study. I especially thank my supervisors in the Church Educational System for all the support they offered on a personal and professional level.

There have been many who have offered encouragement and support for this project in many simple but significant ways. I thank all those who have helped to strengthen my resolve and clarify my thinking throughout the course of this work.

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the development of, and relationships between, religiosity, spirituality, moral thinking and social attitudes among religious adolescents participating in an early morning weekday religious education program in Australia.

Students participating in the Early Morning Seminary program of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints form the population of interest for this study. These students demonstrate high levels of religious practice, making them an important group to research when seeking greater understanding of the outcomes of religious and spiritual developmental arising from such programs and when investigating how religiosity relates to moral and attitudinal aspects in the lives of religious youth.

The research is survey based and entails the administering of four waves over a two-year period, enabling longitudinal observations to be examined. A sample of convenience is used consisting of Seminary students from South Australia and Victoria. Various survey instruments are used to measure characteristics such as family background, educational background, student religious activity, Seminary program involvement, relationships with God, moral decision making and social attitudes. Data analysis includes the use of Rasch scaling procedures, path analysis and Hierarchical Linear Modelling software in order to investigate multilevel effects on change in key dimensions over time.

The fact that specific research regarding highly religious youth in Australia is not common and that research regarding Latter-day Saint youth in Australia is almost non-existent makes this study an important and seminal contribution in the Australian religious research field. This study provides several other important contributions to the field as it explores developmental outcomes of a specific religious education program across a range of religious and psychosocial dimensions.

The oft-reported strong influence of the family on the religiosity of teenagers is reflected in the findings of this study. There is also evidence to indicate that private religious activity is especially important for the level of spirituality among students. The findings indicate that spirituality, rather than public or private religious practice, influences moral reasoning. Furthermore, private religious practice tends to have more positive influence than spirituality on social attitudes. Participation in the Seminary program appears to influence religiosity and spirituality significantly and independently of other variables included in the study, although the influence of participation is mediated by the feelings of students concerning the program.

Generally, students show a decline in both participation levels and feelings towards the Seminary program over time. However, there is evidence of increased positive attitude toward a religious lifestyle, religious belief and awareness of God's influence in life. Religious practice appears to influence change in several practical, attitudinal and spiritual dimensions positively. The findings indicate that the developmental role of Seminary participation is largely through the influence of the class environment.

From this study it appears that religious participation in both public and private forms can have a major influence on key dimensions of spirituality and that religious

and spiritual characteristics can have some influence on moral decision making and the forming of social attitudes. Participation in a religious education program, such as the Latter-day Saint Seminary program, can influence these dimensions especially if there is a positive attitude towards the program on the part of students and the class the environment is appropriate.

In recent decades, the role of religion in psychological and social reality has seen greater attention and acceptance in academic circles. Accordingly, the body of academic research regarding religion and associated fields has increased and diversified opening the way for further exploration of the role of religion in the broader context of human life as is found in this study.