



Association of Mormon Counselors and Psychotherapists

# Issues in Religion and Psychotherapy

Journal of the Association  
of Mormon Counselors  
& Psychotherapists

**2013**  
**VOLUME 35**

**EDITOR**

Lane Fischer, PhD  
*Brigham Young University*

**ASSOCIATE EDITORS**

John M. Rector, PhD  
*Brigham Young University–Idaho*

Marie C. Ricks  
*Web-Content*  
*Brigham Young University*

**EDITORIAL BOARD**

Victor B. Cline, PhD <i>Salt Lake City, Utah</i>	S. Brent Scharman, PhD <i>LDS Family Services</i>
Susan L. Ericksen, RN, MS, LMFT <i>Utah State University</i>	Russ Seigenberg, PhD <i>Logan, Utah</i>
Melissa K. Goates Jones, PhD <i>Brigham Young University</i>	Thomas D. Sevy, MSW <i>Taylorsville, Utah</i>
Michael D. Howard, EdD <i>Jacksonville, North Carolina</i>	Marilyn J. Simpson, PsyD <i>Pepperdine University</i>
Ronald W. Jacques, EdD <i>Brigham Young University–Idaho</i>	Marleen Williams, PhD <i>Brigham Young University</i>
Ian S. Kellems, PhD <i>West Virginia University</i>	Esben S. Strod, PhD <i>Queensland University of Technology</i>
P. Scott Richards, PhD <i>Brigham Young University</i>	Wendy Ulrich, PhD <i>Alpine, Utah</i>

---

*Issues in Religion and Psychotherapy* is published biannually by the Association of Mormon Counselors and Psychotherapists and is archived at <http://www.amcap.net>. Subscription prices are \$35.00 per year for members (paid as part of Association dues). Single issues are available for \$20.00. Subscriptions and changes of address should be emailed to [mail@ldsamcap.net](mailto:mail@ldsamcap.net). Periodical postage paid at Salt Lake City, Utah, and additional entries.

---

Contributors need not be members of the Association of Mormon Counselors and Psychotherapists. All manuscripts, books for review, and other editorial matter should be sent to: Rachel E. Crook Lyon, PhD, Editor, <https://ojs.lib.byu.edu/spc/index.php/IssuesInReligionAndPsychotherapy>, 340 Q MCKB, Brigham Young University, Provo UT 84602. Manuscripts should be submitted in accordance with the Instructions for Contributors in this Journal.

---

Printed by the Brigham Young University Press, Provo, Utah. Copyright © 2013 by AMCAP. Graphic design by the Humanities Publication Center, BYU.

---

*The Mission of the Association of Mormon Counselors  
and Psychotherapists is to provide information and support  
for the LDS mental health professional*

---

## THE ASSOCIATION OF MORMON COUNSELORS AND PSYCHOTHERAPISTS

Lili Anderson, PhD – President  
Debi Gilmore, MA – Vice President  
Rod Jeppson, MA – Treasurer  
Karen Gardner MSW – Board Member  
Janet Madsen PhD – Board Member  
Russell Gaede PsyD – Board Member  
Christine Holding MA – Board Member  
Michael Williams PhD – Board Member  
John Goodson MSW – Board Member  
Emily Coombs MEd Executive Secretary  
Andrew Hutchins – Director of Development  
Doug Le Cheminant, LCSW – Committee Chair  
John Livingstone EdD – Committee Chair  
Robert L. Gleave, PhD – Committee Chair  
Richard Williams, PhD – Committee Chair  
Amy Curtis MSW – Convention Committee Chair  
Kevin Lindsley MCoun – Networker Editor  
Dennis Dahle, JD – Assistant to the Board

---

AMCAP Bylaws, Article 1, Section 2, as amended October, 2007: AMCAP shall exist: a) As a non-profit (501c(3)) corporation that provides education as well as professional development and interaction for mental health professionals who adhere to the principles and standards of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (hereafter “the Church”) in both personal life and professional practice. b) To teach and promote ethical standards, models, theories, therapeutic methods, and research consistent with the doctrines of the Church. c) To promote fellowship and facilitate collaboration among LDS mental health professionals in advancing the mission of AMCAP. ***AMCAP supports the principles and standards of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints; however, it is an independent professional organization which is not sponsored by, nor does it speak for, the Church or its leaders.***

---

**Disclaimer:** All methods, techniques, procedures, applications, theories, research findings and other information described in this Journal, and the views and opinions expressed by the authors, are their own and do not necessarily represent those of the Association of Mormon Counselors and Psychotherapists, nor does their publication in the AMCAP Journal represent or constitute endorsement or promotion of the methods, techniques, procedures, applications, theories, treatments, research or findings by the Association of Mormon Counselors and Psychotherapists. The Association of Mormon Counselors and Psychotherapists expressly disclaims any warranties or guaranties, express or implied, and shall not be liable for damages of any kind in connection with the methods, techniques, procedures, applications, theories, treatments, research findings and other information described or the views and opinions expressed.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

---

### ARTICLES AND ESSAYS

Robert Frost's "Mending Wall" as an Allegory of Tolerance:  
Understanding, Acceptance, and Invitation

*Kristina Hansen* ..... 1

Value Conflicts in Psychotherapy

*Aaron P. Jackson, Jamie Hansen, and Juliann M. Cook-Ly* ..... 6

Religious Acculturation and Spirituality in Latter-day Saint Committed Converts

*Kristin Hansen, Laurie Page, Lane Fischer, and Marleen Williams* ..... 16

Longitudinal Course of Female Eating Disorder Risk at Brigham Young University

*Lane Fischer, Jacob Fischer, LaNae Valentine, Erin Winters, Joy Wiechmann, Karen Gochnour,*

*Kristina Hansen, and Maren Kanekoa* ..... 30

Baptized in Acid or Breathed with Life?

An Exploration of Psychology's Bridging Capacity

*Michael J. Richardson* ..... 37



# Robert Frost's "Mending Wall" as an Allegory of Tolerance: Understanding, Acceptance, and Invitation

KRISTINA HANSEN

BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY

*Lane Fischer's discussion of the nature of law in Turning Freud Upside Down (2005) describes tolerance as the combination of understanding, acceptance, and invitation to do better. This conceptualization of tolerance is equated to love for the other. The poem "Mending Wall" by Robert Frost is analyzed as an allegory of tolerance so defined.*

## MENDING WALL

Something there is that doesn't love a wall,  
That sends the frozen-ground-swell under it  
And spills the upper boulders in the sun,  
And makes gaps even two can pass abreast.  
The work of hunters is another thing: 5  
I have come after them and made repair  
Where they have left not one stone on a stone,  
But they would have the rabbit out of hiding,  
To please the yelping dogs. The gaps I mean,  
No one has seen them made or heard them made, 10  
But at spring mending-time we find them there.  
I let my neighbor know beyond the hill;  
And on a day we meet to walk the line  
And set the wall between us once again.  
We keep the wall between us as we go. 15  
To each the boulders that have fallen to each.  
And some are loaves and some so nearly balls  
We have to use a spell to make them balance:  
"Stay where you are until our backs are turned!"  
We wear our fingers rough with handling them. 20  
Oh, just another kind of outdoor game,  
One on a side. It comes to little more:  
There where it is we do not need the wall:  
He is all pine and I am apple orchard.  
My apple trees will never get across 25

And eat the cones under his pines, I tell him.  
He only says, "Good fences make good neighbors."  
Spring is the mischief in me, and I wonder  
If I could put a notion in his head:  
"Why do they make good neighbors? Isn't it 30  
Where there are cows? But here there are no cows.  
Before I built a wall I'd ask to know  
What I was walling in or walling out,  
And to whom I was like to give offense.  
Something there is that doesn't love a wall, 35  
That wants it down." I could say "Elves" to him,  
But it's not elves exactly, and I'd rather  
He said it for himself. I see him there,  
Bringing a stone grasped firmly by the top  
In each hand, like an old-stone savage armed. 40  
He moves in darkness as it seems to me,  
Not of woods only and the shade of trees.  
He will not go behind his father's saying,  
And he likes having thought of it so well  
He says again, "Good fences make good neighbors." 45

Kristina Hansen

## TOLERANCE (Re)DEFINED

Fischer (2005) suggests that tolerance, based on God's order of kingdoms as described in the Doctrine and Covenants sections 76 and 88, is founded on understanding, acceptance, and an invitation to do better. In Fischer's model of ecologies of law, organisms relate with environments according to variable levels of laws, which they are free to choose. Understanding this concept allows a person "to engage people where they are while simultaneously inviting them to a more adequate law" (p. 49). Fischer explains that although a person may not be striving to live according to the highest possible order of law, he or she can still be fulfilled while meeting the demands of lower orders. The variable laws that compose this model may be fundamentally hierarchical, but humankind's experiences are nested within these laws in a neither horizontal nor vertical fashion. Each person has the opportunity "to live the most adequate laws that they can abide" (p. 49). Each person's "tolerance" of the other, then, is the phenomenological experience of understanding the other in his or her current situation, accepting and engaging the person, and inviting the other to do better.

It is through this trifold of understanding, acceptance, and invitation that tolerance becomes more than its synonyms: open-mindedness, lenience, or forbearance. According to Fischer's explanation, tolerance moves beyond its common misconception of recognizing and then overlooking another's differences to what is appropriately described as love. Love conceptualized as an understanding, accepting, inviting relationship shared between two people is ultimately applicable to any meaningful relationship. For example, Rodriguez (2005) explains Erich Fromm's position that love is not a feeling, but an attitude—a way of being in the world and with others—a truly existential quality. For Fromm (1956/1989) respect is inherent in love if love is defined as "the ability to see a person as he is, to be aware of his unique quality" (p. 26). This "seeing" and "awareness" sounds remarkably like Fischer's understanding and acceptance. Other definitions of love make their equation with tolerance just as appropriate. Vida (2002) describes love as "an experience of deep human connection, on an unconscious as well as conscious level, that involves generosity, recognition, acceptance, and something like forgiveness" (p. 438). If this "something like forgiveness" is understood as Fischer's

godlike invitation to do better, rather than a simple absolution of sin, it might be difficult (and unnecessary) to differentiate between tolerance and love.

## INVITATION

It is important here to emphasize that the invitation in tolerance is just that—an enticement or incitement for positive change. With an invitation, there is no suggestion of force or coercion. Moss (1996) explains Whitehead's conceptualization of this change as process. He states, "Process is the universal notion of actual entities working toward experiencing novelty and reaching the 'subjective aim' or satisfaction of its potential as illuminated by God" (p. 72). God is necessary in this ecology as the ultimate guide, support, and exemplar of self-creation. Whitehead (1929/1978) explains,

God's role is not the combat of productive force with productive force, of destructive force with destructive force; it lies in the patient operation of the overpowering rationality of his conceptual harmonization. He does not create the world, he saves it: or, more accurately, he is the poet of the world, with tender patience leading it by his vision of truth, beauty and goodness. (p. 346)

According to this idea, God's receptive love works to bring about goodness and harmony in the universe. This form of inviting based on "tender patience" is akin to the tolerance and love described above. Humankind, in this ecology, is both a receiver of God's invitation and a partner in his poetry.

## FROST'S "MENDING WALL"

A different "poet of the world," Robert Frost (1874–1963), was a contemporary of Whitehead and artfully confronted some of the same issues about which Whitehead wrote. The issue of tolerance as described in this paper is found in Frost's 1914 poem "Mending Wall." At first glance, Frost appears simply to be describing his annual landscaping encounter with his neighbor—an event that Frost seems to regard as traditional, rather than necessary. Of course, as with most Frost poems, a closer inspection of the work reveals that the setting and activities detailed in the poem are less important than the social or philosophical themes. The themes described here—understanding, acceptance, and invitation—are central to this colloquial, thoughtful, and tolerant reflection on

an interaction with the other. In short, the poem is an allegory of tolerance.

#### MENDING

The title of this poem is important to consider. While the subsequent lines describe with realistic, vivid imagery the setting, action, and characters in the poem, the title suggests a journey together, a common cause. The title is not simply "Wall," "Standing Wall," or "Fallen Wall," but "*Mending Wall*"—almost an invitation for improvement in itself. The title, "Mending Wall," celebrates the process of interaction with the other. This is an important element in Frost's poetry and is inextricably tied to tolerance and love as defined earlier. Even though many of Frost's works rely on inanimate objects in nature for structure, inevitably it is man's interaction with nature or his ecology (such as in mending a wall) that is more important. After all, as Moss (1996) explains, "man is united with and intricate to nature and the universe" through process (p. 84).

Frost begins his allegory with the playfully mysterious description of the mess of stones no longer resembling the garden fence with the phrase

Something there is that doesn't love a wall,  
That sends the frozen-ground-swell under it  
And spills the upper boulders in the sun,  
And makes gaps even two can pass abreast.

By not naming the culprit "something" to which he is referring, Frost plays with the reader and allows him or her to determine what Frost is talking about. The "something" here is most likely the winter frost, born of groundwater from the spring and summer and frozen during the cold winter months. When the springtime sun appears again to "spill the upper boulders," the frost, in its nonlove of the wall, makes gaps. Notice that the frost is the "something there is that doesn't love a wall." Perhaps, in this case, *frost* might just as appropriately be replaced by *Frost*.

#### INDIVIDUALITY AND COMMONALITY

After a moment's clarification about what the narrator really means when he's talking about the gaps in the wall, the poet enters a section of the poem that captures both the individuality of the two characters in the work and their mending process:

The work of hunters is another thing:  
I have come after them and made repair

Where they have left not one stone on a stone,  
But they would have the rabbit out of hiding,  
To please the yelping dogs. The gaps I mean,  
No one has seen them made or heard them made,  
But at spring mending-time we find them there.

The narrator describes this coming together with the other as

I let my neighbor know beyond the hill;  
And on a day we meet to walk the line  
And set the wall between us once again.  
We keep the wall between us as we go.  
To each the boulders that have fallen to each.

It seems important to Frost, here, that although the two have met together, the wall remains squarely fixed between them. Pragmatically, this is probably the most efficient way to mend a wall—working at it from both sides—but the fact that Frost says both that they "set the wall between [them] once again," and that they "keep the wall between [them] as [they] go," might suggest that this arrangement is particularly noteworthy. Does the separation bother Frost? Might the wall here represent a figurative or perceptual barrier of which only Frost is aware?

This separation is contrasted with his use of the words *we* and *us* in lines 13 through 15, suggesting once again the common process that has brought the two together. The mending is a joint effort in that the wall and work are shared, but the two individuals described in this section ultimately work only with "the boulders that have fallen to each." If the process of mending could be equated to the development of the self (a comfortable cognitive stretch), such a dialogical conceptualization of the development of the self might be similar to the postmodern notion of self as described by Moss (1996). Throughout this process of mending, the self is both relational and momentary. Moss explains Gergen's suggestion that "reality is a relative and variable consequent of personal and social interaction or construction" (p. 95). Construction in this case might mean a very literal building of a structure, but it seems plausible that this building, or rebuilding, might also be considered both a "personal and social interaction."

Lines 18 through 20 include several uses of the words *we* and *our*, suggesting again a shared effort or outcome. This time, however, the tone is playful, and the reader can easily imagine the two men looking over their shoulders with pointed fingers threatening the magically balanced stones to "Stay where you are until our backs are

turned!" Carse (1986) explains that "to be playful is not to be trivial or frivolous, or to act as though nothing of consequence will happen" (n.p.). He suggests that playfulness allows relation as free persons, open to surprise. In this type of relationship, "everything that happens is of consequence" (n.p.). Lines 21 through 27, however, grow philosophically more serious while shrouded by Frost-like good humor. Describing the process again Frost says,

Oh, just another kind of outdoor game,  
One on a side. It comes to little more:  
There where it is we do not need the wall:  
He is all pine and I am apple orchard.  
My apple trees will never get across  
And eat the cones under his pines, I tell him.  
He only says, "Good fences make good neighbors."

In this section of the poem, both characters use personification to distance themselves from the true meaning of their words. The author states outright that the wall is not needed. Frost uses tongue-in-cheek banter to refer to hypothetical rascals who might try to steal and eat apples fallen from his orchard trees by jokingly reassuring his friend that his own trees are unlikely to poach the valueless pinecones off of the forest floor of his friend's property. It seems in this section that the narrator of the poem is not committed to any defined ends, but to the process itself, which he sees as having nonutilitarian value: "There where it is we do not need the wall." The boundary is clearly defined and the trees are unlikely to mingle, so the building of the wall is essentially an "outdoor game." To this suggestion, however, the other recites his father's cliché, "Good fences make good neighbors." It is here that the narrator's understanding and acceptance are exemplified.

#### UNDERSTANDING, ACCEPTANCE, AND INVITATION

With instantaneous understanding, the narrator's reaction to the neighbor's cliché is to invite him to do better. In this case, the "better" might be explained as more imaginative, more creative, or more playful. Carse (1986) maintains that "we are playful when we engage others at the level of choice" (n.p.). With evidence of his desire for engagement with the other, Frost's narrator does not give up easily; he tries again to tempt his neighbor to enter into the fictive world with him and to share his experience of play. In this section, the narrator becomes the

voice of possibilities, the voice of mischief, and even the voice of insight. In lines 28 through 38 he states:

Spring is the mischief in me, and I wonder  
If I could put a notion in his head:  
"Why do they make good neighbors? Isn't it  
Where there are cows? But here there are no cows.  
Before I built a wall I'd ask to know  
What I was walling in or walling out,  
And to whom I was like to give offense.  
Something there is that doesn't love a wall,  
That wants it down." I could say "Elves" to him,  
But it's not elves exactly, and I'd rather  
He said it for himself.

Frost has created a narrator who demonstrates an uncanny amount of thoughtfulness and curiosity surrounding his neighbor's maxim. The narrator wants to understand the other ("Why do they make good neighbors?"), by inviting the neighbor to reconsider his own statement. Although in line 29 the narrator wonders about his ability "to put a notion in his [neighbor's] head," by line 38 he admits that what he really wants is for his friend to raise his thoughts to a higher (and ultimately more playful) order of thinking. This inviting coincides with Carse's proposal that "to be playful is to allow for possibility" (1986, n.p.). The narrator recognizes that he could force the issue and, just to be funny, suggest "elves" as the tiny sprites who tear down walls. Alternately, he could castigate his neighbor for being so close-minded or mechanical that he is willing to spend an entire day each year rebuilding an unnecessary wall for some unknown reason ("Isn't it / Where there are cows? But here there are no cows. / Before I built a wall I'd ask to know / What I was walling in or walling out"). He could take offense at the idea that an inanimate, unfeeling wall might actually be a better neighbor than he is. But instead, he chooses to invite his friend to enlarge, to examine, and to consider. His playfulness invites possibility.

The final lines of the poem tie nicely to Moss's (1996) concept of acceptance and peace:

Peace as described by Whitehead becomes the hallmark of the mentally healthy—understanding the tragic element of life and consciously integrating it, along with elements of beauty, into a changing harmony. . . . Peace, the acceptance of life and the life processes, is the defining quality. (p. 114)

According to Moss's and Whitehead's above definition, Frost's narrator exemplifies this peace and acceptance by



understanding the darkness in which this neighbor man moves, by accepting him as he is, and by acknowledging and encouraging his potential for betterment. This consciously integrated understanding coupled with the process of mending results in peace.

He moves in darkness as it seems to me,  
Not of woods only and the shade of trees.  
He will not go behind his father's saying,  
And he likes having thought of it so well  
He says again, "Good fences make good neighbors."

A positive interpretation of the final two lines admits that this short, trite statement is still fairly clever. And while it doesn't allow for much process, the fact that the narrator can recognize that his neighbor is pleased with himself and enjoys his little truism suggests that the narrator may see some value in this observation in itself and that this value is enough on which to ponder. The poem ends not in a lack of hope, but in a willingness of the narrator to accept the neighbor as he is and acknowledge his friend's reasons for choosing, as Fischer might put it, the most adequate law that he can abide. This acknowledgement then, or practice of tolerance as defined as understanding, acceptance, and invitation, emerges as the poem's central tenet. The wall itself is trivial, but the process of mending is invaluable.

## REFERENCES

- Carse, J. P. (1986). *Finite and infinite games*. New York, NY: Ballantine Books.
- Fischer, L. (2005). The nature of law: Universal but not uniform. In A. Jackson & L. Fischer with D. Dant (Eds.), *Turning Freud upside down: Gospel perspectives on psychotherapy's fundamental problems* (pp. 36–50). Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press.
- Fromm, E. (1956/1989). *The Art of Loving*. New York, NY: Harper and Row.
- Frost, R. (1975). Mending wall. In E.C. Lathem (Ed.), *The poetry of Robert Frost: The collected poems* (pp. 33–34). New York, NY: Henry Holt and Company.
- Lathem, E. C. (Ed.). (1975). *The poetry of Robert Frost: The collected poems*. New York, NY: Henry Holt and Company.
- Moss, R. K. (1996). *An introduction to Whitehead's process psychology: A positive postmodern perspective* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Brigham Young University, Provo, UT.
- Rodriguez, L. (2005). What's love got to do with it: Thinking about love in the therapeutic relationship from a philosophical and existential perspective. *Existential Analysis: Journal of the Society for Existential Analysis*, 16(2), 370–377.
- Vida, J. E. (2002). The role of love in the therapeutic action of psychoanalysis. *American Imago*, 59(4), 435–445.
- Whitehead, A. N. (1929/1978). *Process and reality: An essay in cosmology* (corrected edition; D. R. Griffin & D. W. Sherburne, Eds.). New York, NY: Free Press.

# Value Conflicts in Psychotherapy

AARON P. JACKSON, JAMIE HANSEN, AND JULIANN M. COOK-LY

BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY

*Psychotherapy has historically been viewed as value neutral; however, over the last half-century, developments have led many scholars to conclude that we can no longer dismiss the role of values in therapy. Our position is that therapists and clients will inevitably encounter value conflicts during the course of psychotherapy. This article postulates how such conflicts can be addressed so as to preserve and promote the integrity and well-being of both client and clinician. We review challenges to value neutrality and summarize ethical considerations. We discuss strategies to manage values in psychotherapy and conclude by recommending areas for consideration in professional training.*

Psychology has had a longstanding goal of developing an objective, unbiased understanding of human beings. In the same vein, the profession's understanding of psychological dysfunction and treatment has been based on a positivistic philosophy with its accompanying empirical epistemology. Although therapists have their own values and beliefs, they have been expected to suspend those in therapy and adopt a position of neutrality. However, many philosophers (Gadamer, 2004; Tjeltveit, 1999) now doubt the viability of the idea that therapists can somehow suspend their values. These scholars contend that therapist and client values are inescapable in therapy. However, this need not impede therapy. We will suggest that the value conflicts inherent in therapy are important and can be utilized to promote positive change if managed appropriately and ethically.

Ethical guidelines alone do not direct the negotiation of delicate issues often involved in value conflicts. An example of this is the recent lawsuit filed against Eastern Michigan University by a student who was expelled from the school's counseling graduate program for refusing, on religious grounds, to counsel gay and lesbian clients (DeSantis, 2012; see also Mintz et al., 2009). This case

highlights the need for strategies to address and manage value differences in therapy.

This paper will provide a working definition for values as well as a historical background of influential psychology theories and how those theories include or disregard the role of values in therapy. Value neutrality is a dominant theme, and we will challenge that notion and emphasize the role of values in psychotherapy along with inherent ethical considerations. We will conclude with recommendations for professional training as a way to manage value conflicts as they arise in therapy.

## WHAT WE MEAN BY "VALUES"

In order to understand the role of values in psychotherapy, we must first understand the definitions of values used by those in the field and the implications these definitions have for therapy. Rokeach (1973) suggests that *values*, as differentiated from *attitudes* and *interests*, are the foundational commitments upon which attitudes and in-

---

*Direct correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Aaron P. Jackson, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT 84602. Contact aaron\_jackson@byu.edu.*

terests are based. He defines a value as "an enduring belief that a specific mode of conduct or end-state of existence is personally or socially preferable to an opposite or converse mode of conduct or end-state of existence" (p. 5). According to Beutler and Bergan (1991), "value connotes both a prescriptive (what is good and should occur) and a proscriptive (what is bad and should not occur) judgment regarding the target of one's attitude" (p. 7). Similarly, Heilman and Witztum (1997) suggest that values be viewed as "judgments (based on behavioral, cognitive, and affective appraisals) as to what is good (what ought to be) and what is bad (what ought to be avoided)" (p. 524). Schwartz (1992) defines values as "1) Concepts or beliefs, which 2) pertain to desirable end-states of behaviors, that 3) transcend specific situations, 4) guide selection or evaluation of behavior" (p. 4). Jensen and Bergin (1988) build on Rokeach's (1973) definition by describing therapist values regarding therapy as a set of "orienting beliefs about what is good and bad for clients and how that good can be achieved" (p. 290). In writing specifically about the role of values in counseling psychology, Mintz et al. (2009) build on Schwartz's (1992) definition by adding that these "orienting beliefs about what is good and desirable . . . guide behavior across professional counseling psychology roles and interactions" (p. 8). Thus values can be understood as core beliefs that provide a moral guide for human action across multiple contexts.

#### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

In its early years, psychology attempted to model itself after the natural sciences, which included adopting the physical sciences' methods of inquiry and emphasis on objective, value-free theory, investigation, and practice. Because of its apparent independence from subjective beliefs, scientific knowledge was believed to be trustworthy, while personal values and beliefs were viewed as hazardous to the process of inquiry. This led the field of psychology to view psychotherapy from its inception as a fundamentally technical enterprise in which therapists applied scientific knowledge to client problems. Given this view, the human experiences, values, and commitments of therapists were seen as either irrelevant or potentially harmful. For example, Freud (1912/1964) likened the work of a therapist to that of a "surgeon who puts aside all his feelings" (p. 115) and asserted that a therapist should "be opaque to his patients, and like a

mirror, show them nothing but what is shown to him" (p. 118), suggesting that it is not only possible, but also desirable for the therapist's personal attitudes to be kept out of therapy.

Furthermore, Skinner (1971) felt that the behavior modification techniques he advocated were "ethically neutral," saying, "There is nothing in a methodology which determines the values governing it use" (p. 150). For Skinner, values were superfluous to core elements of behaviorism, as the goodness or badness of a behavior was derived not from a moral assessment, but from the contingencies of reinforcement. Thus, the advent of behaviorism reinforced the notion of value-free therapy.

Later humanistic psychologies broke from earlier theories by rejecting the view of the therapist as an objective, neutral scientist, and instead held that the therapeutic relationship with a genuine, involved counselor was essential for therapeutic change. However, this subjective involvement did not extend to the inclusion of therapist beliefs or values in the interactions. Instead, Carl Rogers (1951) held that therapists should "assume . . . the internal frame of reference of the client" and "lay aside all perceptions from the external frame of reference while doing so" (p. 29). In essence, all of the major schools of psychological thought that existed in the middle of the twentieth century advocated either a value-neutral approach to psychotherapy.

#### THE DEBATE ABOUT VALUE NEUTRALITY

Both theoretical writing and data-based research have called into question the tenability of a value-free strategy for counseling. Some scholars have begun to question the notion of value neutrality and conceptualize therapy as a value-laden enterprise. As Fisher-Smith (1999) states, "Values are the bedrock upon which therapeutic decisions are made" (p. 12). Ethical concerns have also been raised about the influence of values in therapy, and this has led to further discussions on appropriate and ethical value management for therapists (cf. Mintz et al., 2009).

Some have suggested that the impact of counselors' values can still be avoided by having the counselor bracket or suspend his or her values in therapy and by leaving the determination of therapeutic goals to the client. Tjeltveit (2006) finds several problems with this solution. For example, client symptoms may interfere with a client's ability to effectively choose therapeutic goals. In prac-

tice, therapeutic goals are typically determined by the therapist and client in collaboration. However, Tjeltveit notes that even if clients are allowed to independently choose their own therapy goals, such a practice—which he terms *liberal individualism*—is still rooted in a value. By valuing the clients' choosing their own treatment goals, the therapist has imposed a value and a treatment goal. No matter who chooses the goals, the therapist has foundational beliefs about what constitutes positive mental health for clients, which is inherently a value judgment. We must also recognize that *tolerance* and *respect* for client autonomy are both values as well. In essence, values underlie our very definition of healthy, normal, or well-adjusted states of being and are at the core of psychological theories themselves.

Others have suggested that values can be avoided simply by implementing a given scientific method. However, scientific methods and their underlying assumptions are themselves based on certain values and beliefs and preclude other assumptions. The problem is aptly summarized by Slife and Williams (1995).

Objectivity calls for the scientist to achieve some grounds from which to observe that are independent of, or shielded from, all subjective influences . . . . Because subjective influences—values, emotions—are essential to the very identity of the scientist as a person, and because our history, culture, and so forth are often held implicitly rather than explicitly, it seems unlikely that we would ever achieve this kind of objective ground . . . . (p. 193)

Over the past several decades, a considerable body of research has provided evidence that client values undergo a shift during the course of therapy to become more like those of the counselor, a phenomenon that has come to be known as *value convergence*. This seems to occur outside the conscious intent or control of the therapist, leading Kelly (1990) to conclude that “therapists do not remain value-free even when they intend to do so” (p. 171). Furthermore, value convergence seems to occur most notably when there is an initial dissimilarity between counselor and client (Kelly, 1990; Beutler, Arizmendi, Crago, Shanfield, & Hagaman, 1983) and has been consistently linked with ratings of client improvement. However, while an earlier study (Beutler, Pollack, & Jobe, 1978) shows that clients rate their global improvement higher when they adopt their therapists' point of view to a greater degree, a later review article (Kelly, 1990) finds that value convergence is significantly associated with

therapists' ratings of improvement but not with clients' ratings or with standardized measures of symptom improvement.

The relationship between initial value similarity and therapeutic outcome also appears to be mixed. The types of values on which the therapists are matched seem to be at least as important as the degree of similarity and dissimilarity within those values. Arizmendi, Beutler, Shanfield, Crago, and Hagaman (1985) find that “a complex pattern of similarities and differences in specific values promote maximal improvement” (p. 16). Kelly and Strupp (1992) find that religiously oriented values appeared to function differently than other values and suggest that religion could be investigated as a trait on which therapists and clients are specifically matched in order to improve outcome. Martinez (1991) finds that both clients and therapists tended to rate client improvement higher when the therapists' religious orientation was more conservative theologically than the clients' and that the clients' ratings of their own improvement in therapy was correlated with initial dissimilarity in religious values. When referring to this change in values, Tjeltveit (1986) prefers the term *value conversion* to value convergence because, as Schwen and Schau (1990) discovered, counselor values tend to remain stable over the course of therapy while client values show significantly less stability. The idea of therapists converting clients, of course, contradicts several values traditionally held by the profession, such as respect for client autonomy, and it raises ethical issues regarding how values should be managed. Given that empirical data consistently demonstrates that value conversion does in fact occur, it would be naïve to ignore or discount the impact of values on the counseling process.

#### ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Because of added attention to the issue of values in counseling, value-neutral approaches are increasingly seen as untenable (Bergin, Payne, & Richards, 1996) and perhaps even undesirable. However, this raises ethical questions for many therapists. The influence of therapist values appears to be a threat to psychology's core commitments of client autonomy and respect for differences as articulated in the American Psychological Association (APA) (2002) code of ethics. Five general principles summarize these core values, of which Principles D and



E specifically address therapist “biases” (which necessarily stem from values) as harmful elements of psychotherapy (APA, 2002). APA’s admonition “to eliminate the effect . . . of biases” on professional work seems to echo the traditional notion of value neutrality. The possibility that values are affecting psychologists’ work seems to challenge the fundamental ethical concerns of protecting client rights and reducing unjust or unfair influence stemming from therapists’ beliefs and attitudes.

However, Principle A (Beneficence and Nonmaleficence) asserts that “psychologists strive to benefit those with whom they work” and “seek to safeguard the welfare and rights of those with whom they interact professionally” (APA, 2002). Tjeltveit (2006) argues that any argument of beneficence rests on value judgments about what constitutes a good outcome, as opposed to a bad one, and that psychologists may differ among themselves on what they consider to be a good outcome. Principle A does not clarify whose definition of beneficence takes priority or how therapists should resolve conflicts that arise when the goals of clients conflict with the goals of therapists. Thus, even a principle as fundamental as beneficence is laden with value issues that present ethical concerns.

Other ethical questions arise from the possibility of value conversion in therapy. Tjeltveit (1986) identified the following as possible ethical issues: the reduction of client freedom, failure to provide clients with informed consent, violation of the therapeutic contract, and therapist incompetence in effecting such conversation. Regarding this last issue, Vachon and Agresti (1992) stated, “Because research has provided evidence of the therapists’ values affecting their clients’ choice of values, it is imperative that psychologists know how to work with both their own values and the values of their clients in order to practice ethically” (p. 510). While ethical discussions are important in raising concerns and shaping professional practices, it is clear that existing ethical guidelines alone do not offer sufficient direction on how best to navigate these delicate issues. A primary concern is how to ethically manage values in counseling to minimize the threat of therapist values on client freedom and autonomy.

#### STRATEGIES FOR MANAGING VALUES IN THERAPY

Despite a growing consensus that values are an inescapable part of psychotherapy, there is considerably less agreement about how values should be ethically man-

aged in therapy. We will outline several different strategies, with the understanding that much work remains to be done in addressing this important issue.

#### SEPARATING PROFESSIONAL VALUES FROM PERSONAL VALUES

While counselors can certainly be expected as human beings to have personal feelings about what constitutes desirable behavior, they can also be expected as psychology professionals to have professional beliefs about what constitutes psychological well-being and what outcomes are desirable for clients who are experiencing emotional distress. The ethical threat personal belief systems pose can be minimized if personal feelings can be distinguished from professional beliefs. This way, therapists may still draw upon values, if only professional ones, to guide therapy. Williams and Levitt (2007) coined the term *value atomization* to describe this strategy (p. 160). They suggest a *morally relativistic stance* (p. ??) in which therapists attempt to situate themselves within their clients’ values and guide therapy according to those values. They interviewed 14 therapists and found that they would challenge client values only when they felt that such values would hinder therapeutic progress or when the clients’ values differed sharply from their own views of positive mental health. Furthermore, some of the therapists explained that they would directly and explicitly disclose their values to their clients in order to encourage the clients to explore their own values.

Strupp (1980) suggested that practitioners share *essential therapeutic values* (professional values) as opposed to *idiosyncratic values*, which are unique to the individual therapist and can be kept out of the therapeutic encounter. For Strupp, this reduces the issue of indoctrination and other ethical ills associated with value convergence. Strupp held that “to the extent that the therapist’s commitment to essential therapeutic values is realized, a number of issues that are frequently discussed in the therapy literature become more or less irrelevant” (p. 400). These issues include gender, sexual values, religious beliefs, and other characteristics. Tjeltveit (1986, 1999) similarly felt that an ethical method for managing values might include a distinction between values directly relevant to the counseling process (such as a belief that depressive symptoms are undesirable and ought to be reduced) and other irrelevant beliefs (including religious and political values).

A value atomization approach assumes that a set of professional values that are fairly consistent across practitioners can guide the process of therapy. Jensen and Bergin (1988) explored this notion and found they could group values into 10 themes: (1) perception and expression of feelings; (2) freedom, autonomy, and responsibility; (3) coping and work satisfaction; (4) self-awareness and growth; (5) interpersonal and family relatedness; (6) physical fitness; (7) mature values; (8) forgiveness; (9) sexual regulation and fulfillment; and (10) religiosity and spirituality. They found a high degree of consensus among the professionals surveyed that the first 7 factors were important for mentally healthy lifestyles, somewhat less consensus about the importance of forgiveness, and even less consensus about the importance of sexual regulation and religiosity. They further found that therapists' personal characteristics and theoretical orientation influenced their views of the 10 values. Their research questions the viability of any consensus around a comprehensive core of therapist values.

Furthermore, some writers have suggested that value atomization is neither tenable nor desirable because values are meaningfully interconnected in complex ways, and therapists cannot be expected to tease apart which values are mental health related and which are not (Fisher-Smith, 1999). It may be that mental health values are interwoven with other values, including those that are more obviously of a moral or ethical nature (Slife et al., 2003, Slife, 2004). Tjeltveit (2006) concedes this point: "It may in some instances be impossible to change health values without also changing moral, religious or political values" (p. 519). If this is the case, the central problem of knowing how and when it is ethically appropriate for the therapist to influence the values of the client remains unresolved. As O'Donahue (1989) opines, "The results of our efforts to understand and help other human beings are a function of our entire web of beliefs" (p. 1468). Thus all of therapists' beliefs, not just professional ones, may be relevant to our work as therapists.

#### DISCLOSING PERSONAL VALUES

A commonly discussed alternative to either neutrality or value atomization is for therapists to be explicit about their values and openly discuss them with clients, whether it be prior to therapy, during therapy, or both (Bergin, 1980, 1985; Giglio, 1993; Slife, 2004). Such self-disclosure can be a way to open a dialogue about differ-

ences in values and reduce covert value convergence by making implicit values explicit. However, Lewis (1984) found that subjects in her study had a more negative impression of therapists about whom they had received value information, suggesting that clients may feel more negatively toward counselors whose value positions are disclosed prior to the start of therapy. Given the desire to enhance client autonomy, some therapists may still feel that, despite its potential negatives, self-disclosure remains the most ethical and philosophically consistent choice.

Fisher-Smith (1999) interviewed practicing psychologists about values management in their sessions and found that therapists tend to adopt either a *disclosure mode* (as described above) or a *neutrality mode*, where they attempt to suspend or put aside their own values and beliefs in favor of those of their clients. Regardless of the method of managing values, Fisher-Smith found that all of the therapists interviewed share values of individualism (described as authenticity, agency, and autonomy), and want to promote clients' inner sense of self and their ability to make independent decisions and manage their own lives.

#### REFERRING CLIENTS TO THERAPISTS WITH SIMILAR VALUES

Tjeltveit (1986) proposed that matching clients with counselors prior to therapy, particularly in areas such as religion, would increase the likelihood of positive outcomes. However, Propst (1992) found that religious clients had positive outcomes with non-religious therapists when the therapists had been trained in religious values and religiously oriented therapeutic techniques, which suggests that therapists' ability to respect and understand religious values is the critical variable in outcome rather than personal religious similarity, *per se*. While matching client and counselor values may appear to have merit, empirical literature does not demonstrate that value similarity between client and counselor improves treatment outcome considerably. In fact, some of the literature seems to suggest that the opposite is true, and that dissimilarity actually predicts greater improvement (Beutler et al., 1983; Kelly, 1990). Also, for many clients, therapist matching may not be an option due to logistical constraints (e.g., size of practice, locale, insurance requirements, etc.).

## ADJUSTING THERAPEUTIC GOALS

Situations may arise in which the values of the therapist and the values of the client obviously collide. After all, if all therapist-client pairs shared identical values, then value convergence would not present the ethical dilemma it does, and disclosure of counselor values would be unnecessary. As such, Heilman and Witzum (1997) suggest a *value-sensitive* approach to therapy because significant value conflicts can change the entire course of therapy. The value-sensitive approach aims to protect the larger value-grounded interests of the client, even when doing so conflicts with typically accepted therapy goals or the personal values of the therapist. In other words, the therapists value the client's values more than their own. The result is that, at times, therapists may have to settle for "less than a full resolution of the problem and only deal with some of its limited symptoms" (Heilman & Witzum, 1997, p. 524) in order to preserve clients' value systems. They illustrate this point with examples of therapy with clients from ultraorthodox Jewish backgrounds, for whom pursuing goals that reflect the values of the field, such as open acknowledgment and acceptance of homosexual feelings, would isolate the clients from their social and cultural groundings and may cause greater harm overall than the original problem for which the client sought treatment. The therapist must understand and be sensitive to the cultural values the client brings into therapy and, in some situations, may have to alter the goals of therapy in order to preserve those values.

## SEEKING OUTSIDE CONSULTATION

Williams and Levitt (2007) report that several therapists they studied would seek outside consultation or referral when therapist values and client values were too different. Some therapists felt that a failure to join the clients in examining their lives from the clients' value system reflected an inadequate understanding or ability on their part. In addition, Williams and Levitt observe that the category of values that would be considered sufficiently problematic to initiate a values discussion was very narrow for some practitioners and much broader for others. Accordingly, their recommendation is that therapists make greater use of consultation in order to gain perspective on such differences.

## A MORE RADICAL STEP

Our perspective on addressing the issue of value conflicts is more radical than those we have reviewed. We see a need for a comprehensive overhaul in the way that (a) psychotherapists are trained and (b) psychotherapy is presented to the public.

First, we believe that therapists need to be trained to articulate their values—both therapeutic and personal—and understand the interplay of the two. Williamson (1958), an early counseling psychologist, proposed that all counselors should be experts at understanding how values and morality are inherent in counseling. He stated,

I have further argued for making explicit our own value orientations as individual counselors, not in order that we may adopt a counselor's orthodox creed, but rather that we may responsibly give societal and moral direction to our individual work. (p. 528)

We concur and suggest that today's pluralistic society makes this awareness and articulation even more important. One way to begin to address this need would be to develop an axiological taxonomy; that is, a system for articulating therapist values. At the very least, therapists need to be trained to articulate their ontological and philosophical assumptions and show how they relate to their theory of change, interventions, and evidence of change. For example, therapists who identify as traditional cognitive-behavioral theorists could articulate their value system as follows:

1. Ontology
  - a. the individual mind is the fundamental reality
2. Philosophical Assumptions
  - a. Autonomy—the mind has the capacity to change and become more rational and more functional in its evaluations and assessments
  - b. Hedonism—happiness, pleasure, and freedom from symptoms are primary motivators
  - c. Universalism—there are fundamental laws or rules of functional, effective thinking that apply across situations and time
  - d. Stoicism—the ideal attitude is a reasoned restraint in expectations and commitments, along with the capacity to defer gratification

Once psychotherapists have identified a guiding ontological assumption and some fundamental philosophical assumptions, they can more readily articulate how their treatment goals and interventions are based in those as-



sumptions. For example, cognitive-behavioral therapists, making the assumptions listed above, can readily support their use of interventions focused on changing thought patterns to reduce symptoms of anxiety or depression. Alternatively, psychotherapists with a relational ontology and philosophical assumptions of interdependence, altruism, contextualism, and Christian love might focus on the meaning and quality of a client's relationships as gauge of their improvement and quality of life. Clients, once educated about the differences across the various approaches to psychotherapy, could make more informed choices about the psychotherapist values they might want to engage with in therapy.

#### MORE TRAINING CONSIDERATIONS

Programs that train new psychologists have particular interest in how therapists handle value differences and the gaps between recommendations and actual practice. One of the most striking consistencies found in the literature on values and psychotherapy is a call for practitioners to more critically examine their own value systems and the way these are communicated in therapy (e.g. Mintz, et al., 2009; Slife, et al., 2003; Tjeltveit, 1986, 2006). Furthermore, therapists are not usually trained in what Tjeltveit (1999) refers to as *ethical acuity*, which is recognizing the value-laden underpinnings of therapy or the way their own values enter into therapy. Also, therapists are not generally trained to help clients clarify their own values, despite the recognition of the role that values play in counseling. Vachon and Agresti (1992) state that it is a skill to understand how the counseling process is value laden, and it is possible to teach people this skill. Training can help practitioners develop the necessary skills in understanding and clarifying values that will allow them to practice ethically and competently.

Issues of value conflicts have been seen as increasingly relevant to training programs due to actual experiences and conflicts between trainees and programs concerning values management. As noted earlier, Eastern Michigan University recently terminated a graduate student from its school psychology program because she refused to counsel LGBT clients. The student subsequently filed a lawsuit, which was dismissed. The ruling specified that instead of exploring options that might allow her to counsel homosexuals about their relationships, the student insisted that she would not engage in gay-affirming

counseling, which she viewed as helping a homosexual client engage in an immoral lifestyle (Schmidt, 2010). Subsequent legal action led to a settlement in which the student was paid \$75,000 (Kraft, 2012).

In 2004, similar situations occurred which prompted the training director of an APA-accredited counseling psychology doctoral program to initiate a listserv describing the conflicts the program was encountering with students strongly desiring not to work with LGBT clients due to religious beliefs. Other posts followed, with more trainers expressing concern about the consequences of the conflicts between trainees' personal values and professional expectations (cf. Mintz et al., 2009).

The idea that trainees prefer to see clients who are more similar to themselves has received some empirical support (Teasdale & Hill, 2006). Several studies have explored clients' preferences for counselor characteristics, but few have investigated therapists' preferences for client characteristics. Tryon (1986) found that therapists preferred to see clients who were young, attractive, verbal, intelligent, and successful (YAVIS). No studies specifically investigated the preferences of therapists currently in training until Teasdale and Hill (2006) used a paired comparison model to examine preferences for demographic variables as well as "psychological" characteristics. Their findings suggested that students consistently preferred to see clients with similar attitudes and values and that psychological mindedness was the trait most preferred in clients. They speculated that students see clients with similar values as easier to identify and empathize with than those with different values.

When trainees refuse to work with clients with different values, training programs are presented with a problem, because the field places a high value on providing services for underserved or marginalized populations and respecting differences among individuals. Following the 2004 listserv, the training directors who were involved in the discussions reached several conclusions, namely that the general standards and codes of the field, together with a goal to promote social justice, had to outweigh individual trainees' values that allowed intolerant or discriminative attitudes to affect their professional roles. They also agreed that increasingly frequent and complex value conflicts point to a need for greater guidance for trainers on how to manage these difficult situations among their own trainees (Mintz et al., 2009). Mintz et al. (2009) suggested a Counseling Psychology

Model Training Values Statement Addressing Diversity (CPMTVSAD), which would explicate the professional values upon which students' clinical work should be based. While they hold that the field should not influence values that relate exclusively to nonprofessional roles, they argue that the profession can specify expectations for professional roles, even when these expectations are based on values that trainees themselves may not share. To illustrate this point, they cited examples from other fields, such as the debate currently going on about whether pharmacists should be required to dispense birth control pills or other medications to which they are morally opposed.

Mintz et al. (2009) further suggest a value management strategy based on three fundamental skills: (1) understanding the philosophy that undergirds theories and beliefs, (2) deeply examining and reconciling divergent perspectives, and (3) recognizing and attending to transcendent values. Kelly and Strupp (1992) also noted that it might be appropriate for training programs to include a *values sensitization component* as part of training to assist students in increasing both their awareness of their own values and their ability to deal sensitively with the values of clients.

Vachon and Agresti (1992) also presented a proposal for training practitioners to clarify and manage values during psychotherapy by becoming more aware of not only individual and group values, but also the values that underlie therapy interactions and psychological theories themselves. Their recommendations include the ability to translate counseling interactions into their implicit value statements followed by skills in managing these values in ways that benefit the client. They suggest that training programs help students not only to clarify personal values, but also to understand the values underlying theories, techniques, and interventions. They also recommend assisting students in evaluating the value-related issues at work in various particular cases.

#### CONCLUSION

In summary, developments over the last half-century have led to a generally accepted position that values cannot be dismissed in psychotherapy. Empirical research has repeatedly confirmed that therapists and clients have encountered and will inevitably continue to encounter conflicts in personal values during the course of therapy.

A number of strategies for dealing with value conflicts inherent in counseling have been proposed. These include (a) learning to separate professional values from personal values, (b) clarifying implicit values through therapists' examination of their own value system, (c) disclosing versus remaining neutral regarding therapists' personal values in therapy, (d) referring clients to therapists with similar values, (e) adjusting therapeutic goals, and (f) seeking outside consultation. We propose a somewhat more radical approach that requires psychotherapists to clarify and articulate their values and training programs to teach their students to do so. Furthermore, programs that train new therapists can provide guidance on what is expected in terms of professional values. The proposals discussed will hopefully serve as points of departure in the ongoing and evolving dialogue of professional training values and expectations, with the goal of ultimately preserving the integrity and well-being of both clients and clinicians.

#### REFERENCES

- American Psychological Association. (2002). Ethical principles of psychologists and code of conduct. *American Psychologist*, 57, 1060–1073. Retrieved from <http://apa.org/ethics/code/index.aspx?item=3>
- Arizmendi, T. G., Beutler, L. E., Shanfield, S., Crago, M., & Hageman, R. (1985). Client–therapist value similarity and psychotherapy outcome: A microscopic approach. *Psychotherapy: Theory, Research and Practice*, 22, 16–21.
- Bergin, A. E. (1980). Psychotherapy and religious values. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 48, 95–105.
- Bergin, A. E. (1985). Proposed values for guiding and evaluating counseling and psychotherapy. *Counseling and Values*, 29, 99–116.
- Bergin, A. E., Payne, R. I., & Richards, P. S. (1996). Values in psychotherapy. In E. Shafranske (Ed.), *Religion and the clinical practice of psychology* (pp. 297–325). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Beutler, L. E. (1979). Values, beliefs, religion and the persuasive influence of psychotherapy. *Psychotherapy: Theory, Research and Practice*, 16, 432–440.
- Beutler, L. E., Arizmendi, T. G., Crago, M., Shanfield, S., & Hageman, R. (1983). The effects of value similarity and clients' persuadability on value convergence and psychotherapy improvement. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, 1, 231–245.
- Beutler, L. E., Crago, M., & Arizmendi, T. G. (1986). Research on

- therapist variables in psychotherapy. In S. L. Garfield & A. E. Bergin (Eds.), *Handbook of psychotherapy and behavior change* (pp. 257–310). New York: Wiley.
- Beutler, L. E., Pollack, S., & Jobe, A. M. (1978). "Acceptance," values and therapeutic change. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 46, 198–199.
- Beutler, L., & Bergan, J. (1991). Value change in counseling and psychotherapy: A search for scientific credibility. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 38(1), 16–24.
- DeSantis, N. (December 11, 2012). Eastern Michigan U. settles counseling student's lawsuit for \$75,000. *Chronicle of Higher Education*. Retrieved from <http://chronicle.com/blogs/ticker/jp>
- Fisher-Smith, A. M. (1999). *From value neutrality to value inescapability: A qualitative inquiry into values management in psychotherapy*. (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Department of Psychology, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT.
- Freud, S. (1964). Recommendations to physicians practicing psychoanalysis. In J. Strachey (Ed.), *The standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud* (Vol. 12). London: Hogarth Press. (Original work published 1912).
- Gadamer, H. G. (2004). *Truth and method* (2nd ed., J. Weinsheimer & D. G. Marshall, Trans.). New York: Continuum.
- Giglio, J. (1993). *The impact of patients' and therapists' religious values on psychotherapy*. *Hospital and Community Psychiatry*, 44, 768–771.
- Heilman, S. C., & Witztum, E. (1997). Value-sensitive therapy: Learning from ultra-orthodox patients. *American Journal of Psychotherapy*, 51, 522–541.
- Jensen, J., & Bergin, A. (1988). Mental health values of professional therapists: A national interdisciplinary survey. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, 19(3), 290–297.
- Kazdin, A. E. (1998). *Research design in clinical psychology* (3rd ed.). Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon.
- Kelly, T. A. (1990). The role of values in psychotherapy: Review and methodological critique. *Clinical Psychology Review*, 10, 171–186.
- Kelly, T. A., & Strupp, H. H. (1992). Patient and therapist values in psychotherapy: Perceived changes, assimilation, similarity, and outcome. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 60, 34–40.
- Kraft, W. (December 12, 2012). Resolution of Julea Ward case leaves programs, policies intact at Eastern Michigan University. Retrieved from <http://www.emich.edu/univcomm/releases/release.php?id=1355161741>
- Levitt, H. M., Neimeyer, R. A., & Williams, D. C. (2005). Rules vs. principles in psychotherapy: Implications of the quest for universal guidelines in the movement for empirically supported treatments. *Journal of Contemporary Psychology*, 35, 117–129.
- Martinez, F. I. (1991). Therapist-client convergence and similarity of religious values: Their effect on client improvement. *Journal of Psychology and Christianity*, 10, 137–143.
- Mintz, L. B., Jackson, A. P., Neville, H. A., Illfelder-Kaye, J., Winterowd, C. L., & Loewy, M. I. (2009). The need for a counseling psychology model training values statement addressing diversity. *The Counseling Psychologist*, 37, 644–675.
- O'Donahue, W. (1989). The (even) bolder model: The clinical psychologist as metaphysician-scientist-practitioner. *American Psychologist*, 44(12), 1460–1468.
- Propst, R. L. (1992). Comparative efficacy of religious and nonreligious cognitive behavior therapy for the treatment of clinical depression in religious individuals. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 60, 94–103.
- Richards, P. S., & Slife, B. D. (1999). Beyond objectivism and relativism in psychotherapy. *PsyCRITIQUE*, 44, 238–240.
- Rogers, C. R. (1951). *Client-centered therapy*. Oxford, England: Houghton-Mifflin.
- Rokeach, M. (1973). *The nature of human values*. New York: Free Press.
- Schmidt, P. (2010, 27 July). Federal judge upholds dismissal of counseling student who balked at treating gay clients. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. Retrieved from <http://chronicle.com/article/Judge-Upholds-Dismissal-of/123704/>
- Schwartz, S. H. (1992). Universals in the content and structure of values: Theoretical advances and empirical tests in 20 countries. In M. P. Zanna (Ed.), *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology* (Vol. 25, pp. 1–65). New York: Academic Press.
- Schwehn, J. & Schau, C. G. (1990). Psychotherapy as a process of value stabilization. *Counseling and Values*, 35, 24–30.
- Skinner, B. F. (1971). *Beyond freedom and dignity*. New York, NY: Knopf/Random House.
- Slife, B. D. (2004). Theoretical challenges to research and practice: The constraint of naturalism. In M. Lambert (Ed.), *Handbook of psychotherapy and behavior change* (pp. 44–83). New York: Wiley.
- Slife, B. D., Smith, A. F., & Burchfield, C. (2003). Psychotherapists as crypto-missionaries: An exemplar on the crossroads of history, theory and philosophy. In D. B. Hill & M. J. Kral (Eds.), *About psychology: Essays at the crossroads of history, theory, and philosophy*, 55–70. Albany, NY: SUNY Press.
- Slife, B. D., & Williams, R. W. (1995). *What's behind the research?* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Strupp, H. H. (1974). Some observations on the fallacy of value-free psychotherapy and the empty organism: Comments on a case study. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*, 83, 199–201.
- Strupp, H. H. (1980). Humanism and psychotherapy: A personal statement of the therapist's essential values. *Psychotherapy: Theo-*

- ry, *Research and Practice*, 17, 396–400.
- Teasdale, A. C., & Hill, C. E. (2006). Preferences of therapists-in-training for client characteristics. *Psychotherapy: Theory, Research, Practice, Training*, 43, 111–118.
- Tjeltveit, A. C. (1986). The ethics of value conversion in psychotherapy: Appropriate and inappropriate therapist influence on client values. *Clinical Psychology Review*, 6, 515–537.
- Tjeltveit, A. C. (1999). *Ethics and values in psychotherapy*. New York: Routledge.
- Tjeltveit, A. C. (2006). To what ends? Psychotherapy goals and outcomes, the good life, and the principle of beneficence. *Psychotherapy: Theory, Research, Practice, Training*, 43, 186–200.
- Tryon, G. S. (1986). Client and counselor characteristics and engagement in counseling. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 33, 471–474.
- Vachon, D. O., & Agresti, A. A. (1992). A training proposal to help mental health professionals clarify and manage implicit values in the counseling process. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, 23, 509–514.
- Williams, D. C., & Levitt, H. M. (2007). A qualitative investigation of eminent therapists' values within psychotherapy: Developing integrative principles for moment-to-moment psychotherapy practice. *Journal of Psychotherapy Integration*, 17(2), 159–184.
- Williamson, E. G. (1958). Value orientation in counseling. *Personnel and Guidance Journal*, 36, 520–528.
-



# Religious Acculturation and Spirituality in Latter-day Saint Committed Converts

KRISTIN HANSEN, LAURIE PAGE, LANE FISCHER, AND MARLEEN WILLIAMS  
BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY

*This study examines religious acculturation and spirituality in committed Latter-day Saint (LDS) converts living in Utah. We conducted a qualitative analysis using interviews from a sample of 20 North American and 20 International Latter-day Saint converts attending or working at Brigham Young University (BYU)—a western LDS private university—of varying age, time since baptism, and country of origin. Of the 40 converts, 39 were classified as committed in their LDS religious affiliation using Henri Gooren's (2007) Conversion Career Model. Based on our analysis of the interviews, several pertinent themes emerged: converts (1) recognize and choose to acculturate; (2) report positive changes in identity; (3) report that changes in identity are linked to a relationship with God; (4) rely on spiritual emotions to acculturate; (5) differ in their "fit" with the LDS religious culture; and (6) demonstrate a somewhat predictable psychological pattern in how they navigate their new religious culture involving initial idealization, then potential devaluation, and then integration of prior idealization and devaluation. Both a psychosocial and a spiritual process emerged, and in both cases, acculturation occurred in a relational context—one with the members of the LDS church and one with God. Although, most converts struggle to find their way in their new religious culture, their reported relationship with God and their associated spiritual feelings are described as a type of protective factor that help converts with the psychosocial challenges of the acculturation process.*

Religious conversion is difficult to define and study. Researchers have debated its definition since William James wrote *The Varieties of Religious Experience* in 1902. In the past 60 years, there have been many theoretical pieces written on conversion (e.g., Gooren, 2007, Lofland, & Stark, 1965; Paloutzian, 1999; Paloutzian, Richardson, & Rambo, 1999; Rambo, 1993; Snow & Machalek, 1983; Stark & Finke, 2000;), mainly from within sociology, psychology, anthropology, and theology.

Rambo (1993) uses the word "process" to describe conversion. While on occasion religious conversion may be sudden, as was Paul's experience on the road to Damascus, conversion tends to be mediated over time through

---

Kristin Hansen, Ph.D., Associate Affiliate Research Faculty CPSE, BYU.

Laurie Page, Counseling Psychology Graduate Student CPSE, BYU.

Lane Fischer, Ph.D., Faculty CPSE, BYU.

Marleen Williams, Ph.D., Faculty CPSE, BYU.

We would like to express thanks to the following students for their contributions funded by BYU mentor grants, BYU Counseling and Career Center research grants, or CPSE: James Phillips, Jonathan Bibeau, Sara Susov, Loren Brown, Denia Marie Ollerton, and Brittany Landrum. We would like to also thank Scott Richards, Ph.D., Steve Smith, Ph.D., and John Scileppi, Ph.D., for their suggestions.

Direct correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Kristin Hansen, Department of Counseling Psychology and Special Education (CPSE), Brigham Young University, Provo, UT, 84602. Contact: kristin-langhansen@gmail.com.



people, communities, groups, and institutions. Debates in the literature have moved from a pure context-determined view of conversion, as in the case of brainwashing where an individual passively takes on a new set of beliefs (Singer, 1979), to studies that have pointed out the role of volition, or agency, and its need to be considered in converts' decisions to commit to new religious beliefs (Straus, 1979). While studies demonstrate converts' use of agency and commitment, conversion does not occur outside of a social context (Regnerus, Smith, & Smith, 2004); instead, converts use their volition within a social context. For example, using a theoretical model based on rational individual choice that depends on the cost of switching and having the "wrong" religion, Barro, Hwang, and McCleary (2010) hypothesize that religious conversions are more likely to occur among the more educated in areas where religious pluralism flourishes and are less likely to occur in areas with government restrictions on conversion or a history of Communism. Conversion involves both the use of agency to commit and a context that encourages convert commitment.

Conversion does not end once an individual has become a member of a particular faith. Following conversion, individuals in a new church community continue to make decisions about ongoing identity development and commitment to the new community. In a sense, they must decide whether or not they will acculturate to the new religious culture. Gibson (2001) defines acculturation as referring to "changes that take place as a result of contact with culturally dissimilar people, groups, and social influences" (as cited in Schwartz, Unger, Zamboanga, & Szapocznik, 2010, p. 237).

For converts, post-conversion acceptance in their chosen religious culture requires that they leave behind values and cultural practices from their previous culture. Sometimes, converts find previous cultural values and practices to be of worth to them in spite of having recently adopted the values and practices of their new religious culture. Schwartz et al. (2010) refers to this bi-dimensional view as an interplay between the cultural values and practices of the *heritage* culture and the *receiving* culture. In the case of the new religious convert, the receiving culture is chosen, unlike a refugee or an asylum seeker. According to Schwartz et al. (2010), the degree to which converts acculturate into their receiving culture depends on the dynamic relationship between their heritage culture's and their receiving culture's values and

practices, and how the convert identifies with each cultures.

While acculturation has been studied extensively in individuals living outside of their country of origin (immigrants, refugees, asylum seekers, sojourners, international students, and seasonal farm workers; Sam & Berry, 2006; Schwartz et al., 2010), in ethnic minorities (Cross, 1991; Helms, 1990), and among all these groups with a focus on religious acculturation (e.g., Benson, Sun, Hodge, & Androff, 2011; Grigoropoulou & Chrysoschoou, 2011; Gungor, Bornstein, & Phalet, 2012; Navara & James, 2005; Russo, 1969), there is little in the literature exploring acculturation within religious communities. In a study that could suggest the presence of acculturating converts, Paloutzian (1981) studies the perceived purpose of life in recent converts to an evangelistic movement and found differences depending on proximity to conversion. Converts of less than one week had a very high score on this measure compared with converts who were one week to one month away from conversion. Interestingly, those who had been converted for longer than one month scored higher than the one-week to one-month group and almost as high as the less-than-one-week group. Paloutzian suggests that this dip reflects "a period of reassessment of one's decision to adopt the belief, during which time the convert gains understanding, reassurance, and stability of the decision" (Paloutzian, 1981, p. 1158). We were interested if this reassessment period was also reflective of some predictable acculturation pattern that was occurring.

#### CURRENT STUDY AND HYPOTHESES

It can be assumed that the new evangelical converts in Paloutzian's (1981) study were interacting with a religious community that was influencing their ongoing assessment of their new religious beliefs, rather than the shift happening in the individuals independent of the relational context. Finding little research, we decided to examine if some predictable patterns could be observed in studying how converts acculturate to a new religious faith post-conversion. For example, do they recognize that they are doing so; do they use conscious choice to engage in this process; what do they say about their interactions with members of their new church culture; and do they report changes in their identity both psychologically and spiritually? We decided to look at those con-

verting to the Latter-day Saint (LDS) religion because we not only have personal experience with this faith but we think that it provides a unique environment to study religious acculturation.

Why does the LDS faith provide a unique environment to study religious acculturation? First, those converting to the LDS faith most often have had little prior exposure to it (although this has rapidly changed with the 2008 and 2012 U.S. presidential races but was not true at the time this study was conducted) and must acculturate to learn about the LDS faith and culture. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS church), also known as the Mormon Church, identifies itself as a Christian, American-born religious faith based upon the founder Joseph Smith's self-reported inspired translation of ancient scripture about Jesus Christ: the Book of Mormon. While the LDS religion claims to be a Christian faith, its unique beginnings and some of its beliefs and practices place it outside mainstream Christianity (Shipp, 2000). Although LDS church members assimilated into their American host culture mostly in the first half of this last century, since the 1960s, they have resisted the pull to assimilate with mainstream American culture due to the secularization of American culture and due to their desire to maintain a consistency in their practices and beliefs (Mauss, 2008). Thus the LDS faith maintains a relatively distinct culture from mainstream Christianity.

Second, the uniformity of religious practice and belief makes the LDS church a unique setting to study acculturation of converts. The LDS church provides consistent church practices and doctrine throughout the world because of its top down organizational structure (Knowlton, 2008) and its underlying value of unity of belief based on the teachings of Jesus Christ. Beginning with their baptism (the religious ordinance performed as a symbol of entrance into their new faith), individuals converting to the LDS church can attend church anywhere in the world and find members who espouse similar religious practices, such as valuing family, serving others, fasting once a month, and engaging in daily scripture study and prayer. While practice tends to be uniform, the local church culture varies from place to place around the world.

Given this uniformity of religious practice and belief, we were interested in what themes might emerge following a qualitative analysis of semi-structured interviews

(Hill, Thompson, & Williams, 1997) across nationalities as converts join and participate in an already established community of practicing LDS members. We defined converts as those not born into the LDS church who chose to become members or to "convert" by being baptized. The converts we sampled varied in age, which addresses a concern in the literature that current conversion research does not look at a range of ages (i.e. Gooren, 2007). While religious culture can change across time, we used a cross-sectional analysis, given the uniformity and top-down structure of the LDS church. This means that when we refer to the new convert interviewees, they can be anywhere from a few months post-conversion to more than 10 years post-conversion.

We will now describe our methods and the themes that emerged from our qualitative analysis of the interviews of 39 *confessing* converts acculturating to the LDS church. A quantitative approach was also employed to further analyze one of the themes that emerged from the qualitative analysis, which will be detailed in the results section. The discussion has been merged with the results section to unfold our conclusions in conjunction with the presentation of the themes.

## METHOD

### PARTICIPANTS AND PROCEDURES

To gather our participants, we placed flyers across the Brigham Young University (BYU) campus requesting research participants that met the following inclusion criteria: subjects must be aged 17 or older; conversion occurred at the age of 12 or older and was not the result of a family converting together as a group but was initiated by the individual; they could not be born into or raised by an LDS family; and subjects were BYU students or employees. We had a large response to our flyer. Of the 60 calls we received over the course of a month, 40 baptized members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints were randomly selected and interviewed. Of the 40 selected, 20 were from the United States and Canada and 20 were from 15 countries outside the United States and Canada. All participants, at the time of the interview, were affiliated with BYU as either students or employees. There were 23 females and 17 males between the ages of 17 and 54 ( $M=26.6$ ), all residing in or near Provo. One male was dropped, which we will describe shortly. See

**Table 1.** Results of Survey Information for Convert Participants

	N
TOTAL PARTICIPANTS	39
GENDER	
Female	23
Male	16
AGE	
≤ 23	15
24–30	16
≥ 31	8
EDUCATION	
In college	24
College degree	6
Some graduate	2
Graduate degree	7
ETHNICITY	
<i>North American Sample</i>	
Caucasian American	14
Latin American	3
African American	3
<i>International Sample</i>	
South and Middle American	6
East Asian	6
Former Soviet bloc	7
YEARS SINCE BAPTISM	
0–2.3	10
2.4–6.9	10
7–9.9	10
10+	9
FAMILY MARITAL HISTORY	
Parents married	28
Parents divorced	11
PRIOR RELIGION	
Catholic	10
Christian, non-Catholic	12
Non-Christian religion	5
Atheist, agnostic, “no religion”	12

Table 1 for a summary of the demographic information of our sample (N=39).

Two undergraduate psychology interviewers from the same faith were trained in qualitative interview procedures by an experienced interviewer (Hill, Thompson, & Williams, 1997; Kvale, 1996). In the summer of 2007, the undergraduate interviewers interviewed the converts for 30 to 60 minutes using several questions as guides to increase the consistency of the interviews across participants and allow greater depth in the interviews. See Table 2 for a list of the guiding questions used. Interviewees were required to give written consent and fill out a brief demographic questionnaire that provided us with the information in Table 1. In return for their participation, in-

means to classify the converts as committed beyond their self-report.

After conducting the interviews, we came across Gooren's (2007, 2010) conversion career categories. He proposes, based on James T. Richardson's (1978) term, the idea that individuals cycle through different phases of religious affiliation or have "conversion careers." Gooren suggested five possible stages of religious participation: *pre-affiliation*, *affiliation*, *conversion*, *confession*, and *disaffiliation* (see Gooren, 2007).

Using Gooren's classification, by consensus, two raters classified the converts into stages by requiring at least three factors for classification in his conversion category and at least three factors or patterns of rhetoric plus clas-

**Table 2.** Interview Questions Used to Guide Qualitative Interviews

---

How did you come to join the LDS church?
Tell me about your conversion experience. What was your previous religious/spiritual culture?
What do you like/dislike about your previous experience before converting?
How is LDS culture similar/different?
Tell me about the process of adapting to the LDS culture?
Was it consistently easy or hard, or did it vary?
Were there parts of your pre-LDS experience that you kept and parts you did not?
How did you make these choices?
How has your thinking changed? Your emotions/feelings? Your behavior?
How do you experience LDS doctrine and LDS culture?

---

interviewees received \$10. Interviews were transcribed and reviewed for accuracy.

#### CLASSIFICATION OF CONVERTS AS COMMITTED

Studying acculturation after religious conversion requires some type of determination about which converts are truly converted, committed, and engaged in the acculturation process post-conversion. Paloutzian (1999), in reviewing the literature on personality change and conversion, suggests that stable changes in goals, behavioral adaptations, and identity in converts are more likely when conversion is preceded by an in-depth analysis of the religious choice rather than when conversion happens for superficial reasons and with less careful analysis. We hypothesized that acculturation to a new religion cannot occur outside of an ongoing commitment to the new religion. While all but one of the converts self-reported to be active participants in the LDS church, we wanted a

sification in the conversion category for classification in Gooren's confession category (see Gooren, 2007 for a detailed explanation of his classification system and definitions of his factors and patterns of rhetoric). Of the 40 converts, 39 were classified in the *confession* stage, which occurs when a person has a core member identity and high participation in the new church community while demonstrating strong evangelism outside it. One convert was classified in the *disaffiliation* stage. The disaffiliated convert was dropped from the study. The raters agreed that the findings were unchanged without the disaffiliated convert. This was consistent with the converts self-report of activity level in the LDS church.

#### QUALITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS: CODING

The researchers examined the participants' experience as reported in the semi-structured interviews using a variation of the Consensual Qualitative Research (CQR)

inductive qualitative analysis (Hill, Thompson, & Williams, 1997). We drew conclusions based on the data via performing successive readings, engaging with the interview texts, coming to consensus about emerging themes, and repeating this process multiple times for both the North American and the international interviews. We avoided developing clear hypotheses in advance so that the data collected from the qualitative interviews could be analyzed with openness. Biases on the part of the researchers were reflected in the interview-guiding questions. We did assume that acculturation was occurring, but we were unclear about what specific patterns would emerge and how apparent the role of volition would be. We were aware that converts would most likely engage in some idealizing and devaluing rhetoric, but we did not know to what extent and how. We thought that some converts would discuss both the role of spirituality in the process and the positive and negative changes in identity; however, we were again unclear about how and what specific patterns would emerge. We focused our analysis on themes that emerged related to the acculturation process post-conversion and remained aware of our biases. We took them into account throughout the process so that we would be open to new themes and themes that contradicted our biases.

Using the previously described qualitative method, four raters first examined the data of the North American transcripts independently and then discussed their ideas until they reached conclusions that all raters endorsed as representative of the data. After the themes were identified, the raters discussed specific examples within each theme to create understanding and develop generalizations, which revealed comparisons, concept developments, and other relationships. We engaged in this process four times for the North American transcripts and then five times for the international transcripts, replacing two of our North American transcript raters

with two new ones for the international transcripts. Two raters remained constant throughout the entire analysis. All raters are committed members of the LDS church by their own self-report, but each one had different experiences with conversion. For example, one was a convert, two had been inactive members for several years prior to recommitting, and two were a lifelong members, one of whom had been married to a convert. The raters' different experiences with conversion lessened bias related to how conversion and acculturation might occur, since we had all had diverse experiences related to conversion and acculturation.

Our analysis was completed when we achieved consensus among the raters for both the North American transcripts and the international transcripts. Additionally, as a validity check, two of the original interviewees were asked to review our proposed themes for the American transcripts. Both agreed with the findings. Finally, an independent auditor was asked to review our themes for both the American and international interviews. Some changes were made by consensus in three more meetings to arrive at the present findings.

The results that follow reflect themes that arose in several (sometimes in most) interviews from the 39 converts from our study (16 were male, 23 were female). The participants were classified, according to Gooren's (2007) classification and by their own report, as being committed to their LDS religious faith and varied from each other in time since baptism, stage of life, and country or state of origin.

## RESULTS

Several themes emerged from the data with our 39 committed LDS converts related to converts' recognition of the acculturation process and how they engaged in the process (see Table 3). These themes included the following: (1) converts recognize the need to and choose

**Table 3:** Acculturation Themes from Qualitative Analysis of 39 Committed LDS Converts

- a. Converts recognize and choose to acculturate.
- b. They report experiencing positive changes in identity.
- c. Converts link changes in identity to relationship with God.
- d. Converts rely on spiritual emotions to acculturate.
- e. They differ in their "fit" with the culture.
- f. They make idealizing, devaluing, and integrating comments in a predictable pattern.



to acculturate; (2) converts report experiencing positive changes in identity; (3) converts link changes in identity to relationship with God; (4) converts rely on spiritual feelings and relationship with God to acculturate; and (5) converts differ in their “fit” with the culture. A somewhat predictable pattern was revealed in a (6) linguistic analysis of interviewees’ idealizing, devaluing, and synthesizing (integration of idealizing and devaluing) statements. Converts first idealized their new LDS faith, then showed potential to devalue it, and then integrated both their idealized and devalued experiences into a transcendent and integrated understanding.

#### RECOGNIZING THE NEED TO AND CHOOSING TO ACCULTURATE

Shore (2002) defined culture as shared meanings, understandings, or referents held by a group of people (Shore, 2002; Triandis, 1995). The converts in our study encountered a new culture with new terminology when they joined the LDS religious faith. They recognized that they needed to learn new terminology and new cultural rules in addition to religious beliefs and doctrine. All of the converts we interviewed discussed the continuing change in identity that follows conversion with respect to beliefs, emotions, behaviors, and inner construction of self in relation to doctrinal learning and encounters with the receiving culture. While many of our converts commented on the new terms they encountered, many also commented that the learning they did was a “process.” For example, a male convert from Mongolia who is 10 years post-conversion noted, “[I was] not just converted completely. It was a process.” We viewed the challenges with terminology and the description of what they were doing as a process, as evidences of the converts’ acknowledgement of acculturating.

Not only did converts acculturate, but they also perceived themselves as consciously choosing to do so and gave multiple evidences of such. For example, a male Caucasian North American who is 8 years post-conversion stated, in reference to giving up swearing and drinking coffee, “When it came down to it, [it] was my choice . . . that I could do it, and it was mine to make.”

#### POSITIVE CHANGES IN IDENTITY

Converts spontaneously report positive changes in identity when asked how their thoughts, feelings, and behavior changed post-conversion. Their reported changes

include improved self-confidence, a shift in internal locus of control (Rotter, 1966), more outward focus (i.e., less selfishness, more service-oriented), new positive ways of thinking by gaining an “eternal perspective,” positive changes in behavior, greater access to emotion and its healthy expression, improved decision making, and a heightened awareness of previously felt spiritual emotions or the experience of new ones. These changes were consistent with changes in goals, behavior, spiritual intelligence, and identity found in the literature on personality changes and conversion (Paloutzian, 1999; Paloutzian, Richardson, & Rambo, 1999). Negative changes were not reported except for one convert who wanted to hold onto parts of her old religious identity, such as wearing a cross (something the LDS church discourages in their focus on Christ’s Resurrection rather than His death), and another convert who mentioned that he liked that he was more open-minded prior to joining the LDS church. Several others reported that they became less open-minded when they chose to live LDS doctrine but viewed this as positive because of the psychological and spiritual benefits. They viewed themselves as closing out some options (such as not drinking alcohol or watching movies with adult themes) in order to enhance their spiritual sensitivity. A male Vietnamese convert—eleven months post-conversion and formerly Buddhist—noticed a shift in internal locus of control and self-confidence that he made post-conversion when he said, “It’s the way I’m seeing the world, not the world seeing me.”

Converts who become committed not only acculturate but *enculturate* (see Grusec & Hastings, 2007, p. 547), which is the acculturating individual’s process of selectively deciding what to keep and what to discard from the heritage culture and what to acquire from the receiving culture. This process of sorting out priorities and values plays an important role in developing an internalized identity, which is associated with a greater internal locus of control (Kalven, 1982) and is consistent with research that points out that converts who engage in central processing, or careful consideration, rather than more peripheral processing, such as persuasion from an attractive source, tend to experience more enduring attitude change following conversion (see Paloutzian, Richardson, & Rambo, 1999).

Snow and Machalek (1983) observe that converts who “embrace the convert role” make changes in identity that allow them to be consistent with their new identity, such

as changing their autobiographical history and refocusing their sense of meaning and purpose around a master attribution scheme. While it could be argued that the converts report mainly positive changes in identity as a way to be consistent with their newfound convert identity, we did notice genuineness in the converts' enthusiasm that seemed to be centered on a "real" relationship with God. In other words, converts felt that God had intervened in their lives, and this intervention was the source of their changes in identity.

#### CHANGES IN IDENTITY ARE LINKED TO A RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

Many converts talked spontaneously about the role of their relationship with God in the changes they had made in their identity post-conversion. For those who previously had a relationship with God, their attachment to God seemed to be restructured. Those with no prior relationship described their newfound relationship with or attachment to God. In both cases, they consistently attributed these changes to a real relationship with God. They considered God to be an actor in their lives.

For example, a Russian male who is 5 years post-conversion reported losing an undesirable self-consciousness: "I guess I didn't think so much of what other people thought of me [post-conversion] because I knew my Heavenly Father was thinking of me as His son and that He made me the way He wanted to make me." A male Caucasian North American who is 35 years post-conversion talked about how his relationship with God has changed his feelings and life.

When I came out of the waters of baptism I felt completely clean. When I was confirmed I was filled head to toe with warmth, with love, and I knew that a Father had accepted my repentance and my efforts to keep the commandments . . . So your feelings change in the sense that one goes from insignificance to someone the Lord has died for, which changes your life.

#### RELIANCE ON SPIRITUAL EMOTION TO ACCULTURATE

In the context of a real relationship with God, converts described having spiritual emotions or "feeling the Spirit." Some reported having had past experiences with these feelings, and others seemed to discover them upon conversion. Converts frequently mentioned their reliance on their spiritual emotions or feelings as giving them strength in the acculturation process. This pattern

was seen consistently with all the committed converts. For example, a Latino American female who is 7 years post-conversion relied on spiritual emotion to resolve a conflict: "I just turn to the Lord with it . . . I seek the Spirit and pray . . . The spirit will confirm it to me, or I'll feel bad if I don't do the right thing; but never is it because someone else thinks it's the right thing for me . . . I try to never base my decisions on what other people think." The convert is describing an ability to access spiritual feelings. A Caucasian American male 35 years who is post-conversion noted, "You see new converts . . . if they are not accepted and welcomed, many times they fall away. On the other hand, we socialize people, but if they don't have a spiritual conversion [an experience feeling the Spirit] and a firm testimony then they may not last either."

We saw a spiritual process at work in acculturation in LDS converts. In a sense, the converts were not acculturating alone but described themselves as having the help of "God" or "Jesus Christ" or "the Spirit" in the process. Memories of spiritual emotions or feelings gave converts a spiritual perspective that grounded their decisions to continue to acculturate and make changes in identity. We have labeled this *spiritual perspective-taking*. With their newfound relationship with God and spiritual perspective, converts gained a new view of reality that enhanced their ability to acculturate in spite of some of the psychosocial challenges they faced. This is consistent with Emmons' (2000) use of the idea that converts might have an underlying spiritual intelligence that draws them to conversion or that through conversion they have an opportunity to increase spiritual intelligence (Emmons, 2000; Paloutzian, Richardson, & Rambo, 1999) and the idea that religious transformation, given through religious/spiritual teachings and resources, can give the convert a new sense of meaning and life purpose (Emmons, 1999; Emmons & Paloutzian, 2003).

#### DEGREE OF FIT

We asked converts about how they adapted to the LDS church post-conversion. Most of the converts fell into one of two categories. For some, belief systems were familiar, but the culture seemed strange. For example, a former "Christian who attended Catholic school"—a North American female who is 5 years post-conversion—stated, "It's the social culture that's been a little awkward, but spiritual culture fits perfectly." For others

(including many of the international converts), both culture and beliefs seemed comfortable. A male convert from Nepal who is two months post-conversion stated, "In fact, the way of life at BYU [referring to the LDS standards of modest dress, chastity, and refraining from alcohol, coffee, and drugs]—it's kind of the same life and society as ours." Many obstacles to adapting that they described were decreasing anger, avoiding obscenities, giving up coffee and tea, keeping the Sabbath day holy, avoiding R-rated movies, and being more loving to non-LDS family members who were not supportive of their decision to convert.

The converts described three different relationships with the receiving culture. The first entailed a bicultural identification where the convert had embraced the LDS culture without losing his or her heritage-culture identification. For example, a male North American Caucasian—35 years post-conversion and formerly Catholic—explained, "I don't feel like I shed anything or left who I was or my background or my family or any of my upbringing. Granted, I changed a religious belief system and practice. I didn't go to Mass and wasn't ritualistic anymore, so I left that part behind. But everything else I carried on."

The second relationship with the receiving culture suggested a lack of fit with the receiving culture but also a sense of no longer belonging to the heritage culture. For example, a female Caucasian North American who is 5 years post-conversion reported, "It's hard because I feel like I don't fit into the Evangelical faith anymore . . . I could never go back, but here [at BYU] I feel different all the time, and so I don't fit either way."

Some converts simply rejected their past altogether, fully embracing their new LDS receiving culture. A male Caucasian North American, 8 years post-conversion and formerly Lutheran, explained, "Outright I would say everything did change—who I was before and who I was after is a complete transformation."

Degree of fit with the LDS culture did not seem to influence converts' desire to continue to commit to identity development and acculturation, which points to the idea that converts were not simply acculturating to LDS culture but had a relationship with God and with LDS beliefs. Interestingly, a recent Pew Forum on Religious and Public Life survey (2012) found that 59% of LDS converts write the LDS "beliefs" as their reason for converting when asked to answer why they have converted

in their own words. Again, this suggests converts' engagement in central rather than peripheral processing and in elaboration (Paloutzian, 1999; Paloutzian, Richardson, & Rambo, 1999) as they acculturate and commit to their new religious faith.

#### PATTERNS OF ACCULTURATION

While converts attributed their conversion and desire for continued acculturation to the LDS faith to their spiritual experiences, their relationship with God, and LDS beliefs, the converts' conversions occurred in the context of human relationships. Regardless of the uniformity in belief and practice, the LDS community members' backgrounds and attitudes are more heterogeneous than converts may at first realize. There are subtle differences within different congregations depending upon the geographical location, the number of members in an area, or the degree to which LDS converts are in the majority or minority. As converts acculturated, they encountered LDS members with varying degrees of understanding of LDS beliefs and members who were motivated by an extrinsic rather than an intrinsic religiosity (see Allport & Ross, 1967).

As converts both acculturated and enculturated, they would sometimes idealize the membership and at other times devalue those they met in the receiving culture. In the interviews, we observed converts needing to make choices between receiving culture and heritage culture values when these values were in conflict. Many of the converts made comments that integrated idealizing and devaluing perspectives, showing an appreciation of the complexity of interacting with others who are also trying to interpret and practice a system of beliefs. To track if any patterns emerged from idealizing, devaluing, and integrating commentary and converts' time from baptism, we identified and scored this commentary. We will first provide examples of each of these three types of commentary and then present the pattern that emerged in a quantitative analysis based on the converts' time from baptism.

**Idealizing the receiving culture and devaluing the heritage culture.** We noted that 30 of our 39 committed converts made idealizing comments about the LDS church or its members. These comments were made while either describing their conversion experiences or their feelings at the time of the interview. For example, a male Vietnamese convert, 11 months post-conversion



and formerly Buddhist, stated, "The people that I'm meeting are really, really friendly and very nice. And the doctrine is the same from everywhere, and that's unique. I realize everyone has the same doctrine and talks about it the same way." A female North American who is 5 years post-conversion stated, "My friend says, it's not just me, seriously Church members are just like that and then I found out it was right . . . there was something about him, very charismatic but there was more than that; he had a kind of happiness."

Idealizing comments sometimes went hand in hand with converts' devaluing of their heritage culture. For example, a female Ukrainian convert who is eight months post-conversion stated, "A lot of people, most of my friends actually, would be . . . saying that you're Orthodox or Catholic but not doing anything for it, like they weren't even going to church or doing anything with no standards or no moral values. So, I didn't like that." Inappropriate sexual behavior, substance abuse, dishonesty, lack of interpersonal connection, and selfishness were some of the common behaviors and attitudes that they devalued in their heritage culture.

Additionally, as part of idealizing the LDS culture, some converts commented on their perceived inadequacy relative to LDS church members. A female Russian convert, 5 years post-conversion and previously Catholic, devalued herself relative to her lifelong-LDS BYU classmates who grew up learning LDS doctrine: "I felt embarrassed in my classes when everyone would raise their hands and answer questions . . . I was just sitting there. I was like, why did I join; like there's no way; I could never keep up with someone who went to seminary [LDS religious education for adolescents] . . . I don't know any of this knowledge."

**Devaluing the receiving culture and missing the heritage culture.** Devaluing comments about the LDS church or its members were made by 29 converts. Devaluing comments reflected the convert's disappointment with some aspects of LDS culture that followed an initial idealistic assessment of the culture. A female Caucasian American convert who is 5 years post-conversion reported the following:

People here [at BYU] tend to think I'm not a member because I wear a cross. [Like the LDS church members], I don't worship it; it's just a cross . . . but then they try and become my friend real quick and to try and get me baptized. And then they realize I am a member and then they

stop being my friend . . . If I'm just different in my speech or language or approach . . . I feel almost discriminated against because I am a convert here.

Just as devaluing one's heritage culture occurred with idealizing the receiving culture, missing aspects of one's heritage culture occurred with devaluing the receiving culture. For example, the same convert as above showed this most clearly,

Sometimes it makes me sad because sometimes I'll forget things about my old faith that are really, really good things to remember. Like one day I was in the car. I was listening to . . . the Christian station . . . and there is this one song that said something about the name . . . I was like, "Oh, I totally forgot." As an Evangelical Christian we are all about the name of Christ saving you.

**Integrating comments reflect recognition of the tendency to idealize and devalue.** In our sample, 34 of our 39 converts interviewed had at least one integrating comment in their transcript. Integrating comments show how a convert's understanding transcends idealization and devaluation. Such statements usually demonstrated accepting the LDS beliefs along with recognizing that not all LDS members are practicing a particular belief or interpreting the beliefs in the same manner. It also demonstrated the converts' ability to integrate former aspects of their identity with those parts that they chose to adopt from the LDS religion. For example, a male Caucasian North American, previously Catholic and 35 years post-conversion, stated, "I think the core of who a person is—their background and culture—is completely accepted and welcomed in the gospel. There is no limit on one's culture or one's background. You don't leave that behind when you join, and in fact that's the beauty of the gospel; it encompasses people all over the world, for it truly is no respecter of persons."

A male Korean convert, 8 years post-conversion and formerly culturally Buddhist, stated, "All of the members of the church want to follow the example of Jesus Christ and live the gospel and LDS doctrine, but you know not all the members are active and obedient. So some members might not follow the doctrine, but they want to, and some people do not want to. And some people cannot follow." This same convert further demonstrated how he integrated the LDS faith and culture with his previous Buddhist culture: "I think there are some similar features, similar attributes between LDS culture and Korean cul-

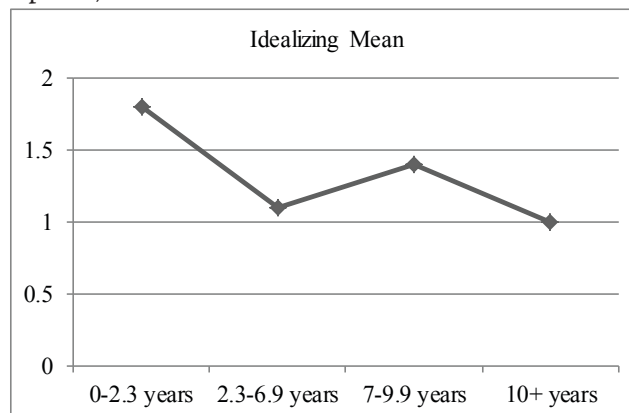
ture . . . like obedience to older people. In Korea we emphasize the humility, being humble."

**Pattern observed based on converts' idealizing, devaluing, and integrating comments.** To analyze the patterns of idealizing, devaluing, and integrating comments, two raters gave a score to each convert on the following basis. A convert was given a "0" for no idealizing, devaluing, or integrating comments, a "1" for some, and a "2" for a high amount of idealizing, devaluing, and integrating comments relative to both the convert's own use of these three types of comments and the entire sample's use of these types of comments. Scores were used since a simple count of the number of comments was prohibited by comments that varied in length and comments that were brought up multiple times in the interview. Once scores were tabulated, 39 participants' interviews were divided into four almost-equal groups of varying time from baptism (0–2.3 years, 2.4–6.9 years, 7–9.9 years, and 10+ years; see Table 1).

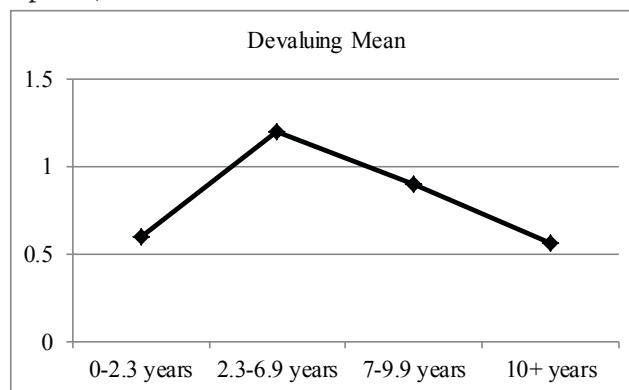
Although the sample sizes were small, we conducted exploratory quantitative analyses. We used the nonparametric Kruskal-Wallis test to estimate whether there were significant differences among the four groups in terms of each of the three outcome variables (idealizing, devaluing, integrating). Significant differences were found among the groups in terms of idealizing ( $p = 0.003$ ) and integrating ( $p = 0.009$ ) but not in terms of devaluing ( $p = 0.064$ ). Given the significant findings of the nonparametric tests and the need to run post-hoc tests, we determined that a parametric test would be used to further explore the source of the significant differences. Three ANOVA with Tukey's post-hoc tests were conducted. Overall, significant differences were found between the groups in terms of idealizing ( $p = 0.001$ ) and integrating ( $p = 0.005$ ) with a trend toward significance for devaluing ( $p = 0.057$ ). Tukey's post-hoc tests revealed that group 1 was significantly higher in idealizing comments than group 2 ( $p < 0.006$ ) and group 4 ( $p < 0.002$ ). Group 1 was significantly lower in integrating comments than group 2 ( $p < 0.037$ ), group 3 ( $p < 0.009$ ), and group 4 ( $p < 0.013$ ) (see Figures 1–3).

While further analysis should be done with a larger sample size, our findings indicate that converts 0–2.3 years are going through a significantly different process, including making more idealizing and less integrating comments, than converts who have been in the church longer. While only a trend, there is some indication that

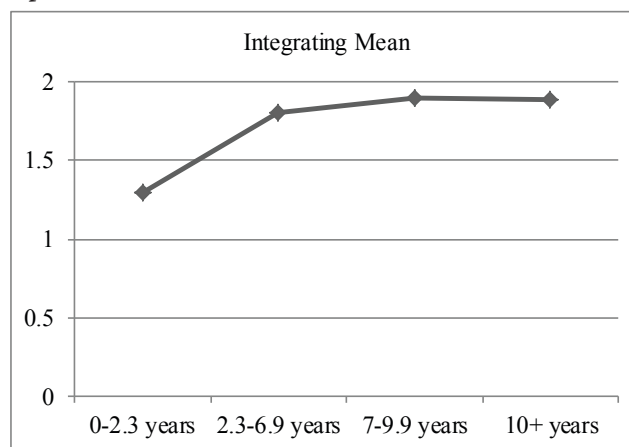
**Figure 1.** Mean idealizing score by groups (time from baptism)



**Figure 2.** Mean devaluing score by groups (time from baptism)



**Figure 3.** Mean integrating score by groups (time from baptism)



converts roughly 2.4–6.9 years in the church may be going through a devaluing phase given that they make more devaluing comments than those converts 0–2.3 years and 10+ years in the church. While converts make integrating comments as early as 0–2.3 years after baptism, it appears that converts make significantly more integrating comments after approximately 7 years in the church. Converts seem to acculturate to the LDS religion in a somewhat consistent psychological pattern.

We found that converts exhibited a pattern of psychological identity development that was related to their interactions within their new religious culture. They predictably began by idealizing it. When they encountered inconsistencies between belief and practice or when they encountered LDS members who professed beliefs that are not reflected in the LDS core teachings or that result from a lack of knowledge of core doctrine, they began devaluing members of the majority LDS culture. Some felt devalued themselves or found that some of their cherished values and beliefs were not valued, understood, or considered within the majority mainstream LDS culture. These observed inconsistencies led to a reassessment and, in the case of committed converts, recommitment to their new faith.

Although this study was conducted in Utah, converts did not seem to be reacting specifically to “Utah” LDS culture. While the converts saw it as different from LDS culture elsewhere, they displayed a range of both positive and negative experiences with it, which reflects that the psychological and spiritual patterns observed are not simply about acculturation to Utah LDS culture. Additionally, converts reported several experiences they had with LDS church culture prior to living in Utah that gave evidence of the idealizing, devaluing, and integrating pattern. However, the patterns observed in this study may have some relation to Utah LDS culture being the vehicle for disseminating LDS doctrine around the globe, given that 78% of lifelong LDS members live in Western states and 40% in Utah (Pew Forum on Religious and Public Life Survey 2012).

By choosing to continue to commit to their new faith, converts must be able to construct an integrated, faithful LDS identity through synthesizing idealization, disappointment along the journey, and understanding of their heritage and receiving culture and values. For the committed converts, the acculturation process that they go through is often viewed as an important trial of their

faith, and they draw upon their relationship with God and the spiritual emotions they experience throughout the conversion process. In a sense, converts’ spiritual experiences protect them from the vicissitudes of the acculturation process when connected to their new faith.

#### LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

One limitation relates to our ability to generalize. Most of our converts converted outside Utah, and they shared their process of acculturating outside Utah in their narratives. Given this, we believe that some generalizing across converts can be made. We do so with caution, however, because all of our converts were living in Provo, Utah, at the time of the interview, retrospectively recalling their acculturation process. There is also a limitation in our chosen use of a cross-sectional analysis (Paloutzian, 1999). Further research could be done in a longitudinal research design.

Another related limitation is that we have only observed committed converts. It would be useful to conduct the same study in persons exploring, converting to, or disaffiliating from the LDS church in comparison to our sample. When reviewing the transcript of the one disaffiliated convert baptized in Uganda five months prior to his interview at BYU, we noticed some notable differences. Unlike the committed converts, he was intrigued by the LDS religion but did not express a relationship with a transcendent being or any significant spiritual feelings or emotions that occurred with his conversion. He also didn’t demonstrate a desire to acculturate to the LDS faith. His transcript lacked idealizing or integrating comments like the ones our committed converts had. When asked how he adapted, he stated, “I can’t say I’ve adapted . . . the Church thing is kind of tolerated; I’m going to school [at BYU] so I have to tolerate that.” His cognitive processing appeared to have been more peripheral (Paloutzian, Richardson, & Rambo, 1999). In contrast to the committed converts, the disaffiliated convert had neither a spiritual nor psychosocial acculturation experience that seemed integral to the experience of the committed converts. It would be interesting to see if the patterns observed in the LDS committed converts and in the disaffiliated convert would similarly be observed in committed and disaffiliated converts of other faiths.

A third limitation is that we were unable to discuss ethnicity and ethnic differences among the international converts with the small sample sizes of international

converts from each country represented. In addition to using bigger sample sizes from various countries within our current BYU population, it would also be important to corroborate our findings by studying LDS samples of committed LDS converts in different regions. Special attention could be paid to regions where converts are more of the majority, relative to those born and raised in the LDS church, versus regions where they are in the minority to see if converts still engage in similar patterns of idealization, devaluation, and integration.

Additionally, further research could be done to explore the ways religious communities can help converts develop healthy identities that incorporate both heritage and receiving culture values and practices. While religions are meant to strengthen the spirituality of its members, and the converts interviewed in this study had that experience, more research can be done to understand the psychological experience of new converts and the relational context in which they find themselves.

#### CONCLUSION

Further research is encouraged to better understand the human psychosocial and spiritual processes involved in religious acculturation. Two independent processes were observed in post-conversion acculturation of committed LDS converts. One was psychosocial and the other was spiritual. First, committed converts recognize the need to acculturate to their new religious culture and demonstrate a predictable psychosocial struggle involving idealizing, devaluing, and integrating experiences with individuals in their new religious culture. They report making careful, thoughtful decisions about aspects of their identity, which they will either change or keep. Second, converts also undergo a change in identity that is based on the experience of spiritual emotions, reflecting a new or renewed relationship with God and LDS beliefs during and after conversion. Spiritual emotions, relationship with God, and beliefs underlie the converts' attributions for identity change, giving them spiritual perspective-taking and commitment to acculturation in the face of psychosocial struggles with both the heritage and the receiving cultures. These spiritual experiences were powerful motivators for further acculturation, suggesting that spirituality may be a protective factor that transcends the human psychosocial processes involved in acculturation.

#### REFERENCES

- Allport, G. W., & Ross, J. M. (1967). Personal religious orientation and prejudice. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 5(4), 432.
- Barro, R., Hwang, J., & McCleary, R. (2010). Religious conversion in 40 countries. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 49(1), 15–36.
- Benson, G. O., Sun, F., Hodge, D. R., & Androff, D. K. (2012). Religious coping and acculturation stress among Hindu Bhutanese: A study of newly-resettled refugees in the United States. *International Social Work*, 55(4), 538–53.
- Emmons, R. A. (1999). *The psychology of ultimate concerns: Motivation and spirituality in personality*. New York: Guilford.
- Emmons, R. A. (2000). Is spirituality an intelligence? Motivation, cognition and the psychology of ultimate concern. *International Journal for the Psychology of Religion*, 10, 3–26.
- Emmons, R. A., & Paloutzian, R. F. (2003). The psychology of religion. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 54, 377–402.
- Gibson, M. A. (2001). Immigrant adaptation and patterns of acculturation. *Human Development*, 44(1), 19–23.
- Gooren, H. (2005). Towards a new model of conversion careers: The impact of personality and contingency factors. *Exchange*, 34(2), 149–66.
- Gooren, H. (2007). Reassessing conventional approaches to conversion: Toward a new synthesis. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 46(3), 337–53.
- Gooren, H. (2010). *Religious conversion and disaffiliation: Tracing patterns of change in faith practices*. United States: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Grigoropoulou, N., & Chrysoschoou, X. (2011). Are religious minorities in Greece better accepted if they assimilate? The effects of acculturation strategy and group membership on religious minority perceptions. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology*, 21, 499–514.
- Grusec, J. E., & Hastings, P. D. (2007). *Handbook of socialization: Theory and research*. New York, New York: Guilford Press.
- Gungor, D., Bornstein, M. H., & Phalet, K. (2012). Religiosity, values and acculturation. *International Journal of Behavioral Development*, 36(5), 367–73.
- Hill, C. E., Thompson, B. J., & Williams, E. (1997). A guide to conducting consensual qualitative research. *The Counseling Psychologist*, 25(4), 517–72.
- James, W. (1902). *The varieties of religious experience: A study in human nature. Being the Gifford Lectures on Natural Religion delivered at Edinburgh in 1901–1902*. London: Longman, Green & Co.



- Kvale, S. (1996). *InterViews: An introduction to qualitative research interviewing*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Kalven, J. (1982). Personal value clarification. In B. P. Hall (Ed.), *Readings in value development*, (pp. 7–19). New York: Paulist Press.
- Knowlton, D. C. (2008). Go ye to all the world: An LDS church and the organization of international society. In C. K. Jacobson, J. P. Hoffman, & T. B. Heaton (Eds.), *Revisiting Thomas F. O'Dea's The Mormons: Contemporary perspectives*, (pp. 389–412). Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press.
- Lofland, J., & Stark, R. (1965). Becoming a world-saver: A theory of conversion to a deviant perspective. *American Sociological Review*, 30(6), 862–75.
- Mauss, A. L. (2008). From near-nation to new world religion? In C. K. Jacobson, J. P. Hoffman, & T. B. Heaton (Eds.), *Revisiting Thomas F. O'Dea's The Mormons: Contemporary perspectives*, (pp. 289–327). Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press.
- Navara, G. S., & James, S. (2005). Acculturative stress of missionaries: Does religious orientation affect religious coping and adjustment? *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 29(1), 39–58.
- Paloutzian, R. F. (1981). Purpose in life and value changes following conversion. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 41(6), 1153–60.
- Paloutzian, R. F. (1999). Religious conversion and personality change. *Journal of Personality*, 67(6), 1047–79.
- Paloutzian, R. F., Richardson, J. T., & Rambo, L. R. (1999). Religious conversion and personality change. *Journal of Personality*, 67, 1047–80.
- Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion & Public Life. (2012). *Mormons in America: Certain in their beliefs, uncertain of their place in society*. Retrieved from <http://www.pewforum.org/2012/01/12/mormons-in-america-executive-summary/>.
- Rambo, L. R. (1993). *Understanding religious conversion*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Regnerus, M. D., Smith, C., & Smith, B. (2004). Social context in the development of adolescent religiosity. *Applied Developmental Science*, 8(1), 27–38.
- Richardson, J. T. (1978). *Conversion careers: In and out of the new religions*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Rotter, J. B. (1966). Generalized expectancies of internal versus external control of reinforcements. *Psychological Monographs: General and Applied*, 80(1), 1–28.
- Russo, N. J. (1969). Three generations of Italians in New York City: Their religious acculturation. *International Migration Review*, 3(2), 3–17.
- Sam, D. L., & Berry, J. W. (Eds.). (2006). *Cambridge handbook of acculturation psychology*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Schwartz, S. J., Unger, J. B., Zamboanga, B. L., & Szapocznik, J. (2010). Rethinking the concept of acculturation: Implications for theory and research. *American Psychologist*, 65(4), 237–51.
- Shipp, J. (2000). *Sojourner in the promised land: Forty years among the Mormons*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press.
- Shore, B. (2002). Taking culture seriously. *Human Development*, 45(4), 226–28.
- Singer, M. T. (1979). Coming out of the cults. *Psychology Today*, 12(8), 72–82.
- Snow, D. A., & Machalek, R. (1983). The convert as a social type. *Sociological Theory*, 1, 259–89.
- Stark, R., & Finke, R. (2000). *Acts of faith: Explaining the human side of religion*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Straus, R. A. (1979). Religious conversion as a personal and collective accomplishment. *Sociological Analysis*, 40(2), 158–65.
- Triandis, H. C. (1995). *Individualism and collectivism*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

# Longitudinal Course of Female Eating Disorder Risk at Brigham Young University

LANE FISCHER, JACOB FISCHER, LANAE VALENTINE, ERIN WINTERS, JOY WIECHMANN,  
KAREN GOCHNOUR, KRISTINA HANSEN, AND MAREN KANEKOA  
BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY

*Three cohorts of entering freshman women were assessed over the course of four years at Brigham Young University (BYU). The Eating Attitudes Test (EAT-26) and the Body Shape Questionnaire (BSQ) were administered at the beginning of each fall and winter semester. Results showed (a) steadily decreasing average levels of eating disorder risk and body shape dissatisfaction over time, which was mirrored in each cohort; (b) significantly lower eating disorder risk than other college samples; (c) a typically high percentage of women with clinically significant body shape dissatisfaction; (d) significant correlation between the EAT-26 and the BSQ; and (e) notable subgroups (according to anticipated academic major) of higher-risk students. The findings suggest that, although body shape dissatisfaction was similar to estimated rates on other college campuses and the measure thereof was correlated with eating disorder risk, the overall level of eating disorder risk at BYU was lower than that reported on other college campuses. It is proposed that unique aspects of the BYU campus might mitigate the development of eating disorders.*

Research has indicated that several aspects of college life are associated with increased risk of eating disorders in female students. For instance, studies of college campuses using the Eating Attitudes Test (EAT-26) have shown eating disorder risk rates ranging from 14% to 17% (Edwards-Hewitt & Gray, 1993; Kirk, Singh, & Getz, 2001; Prouty, Protinsky, & Canady, 2002; Forney & Ward, 2013). Further, a recent study by Forney and Ward (2013) based on the Body Shape Questionnaire (BSQ) reported a risk rate of 28.7% at a midsized midwestern university (J. Forney, personal communication, March 21, 2013). Simon-Boyd and Bieschke (2003) suggested that emphasis on academic achievement, competition, and attractiveness are particularly salient risks to vulnerable students. Boskind-White and White (1983) and Prouty et al. (2002) showed that Caucasian, reli-

gious, achievement-oriented females are at particularly higher risk for developing eating disorders.

Brigham Young University (BYU) is a church-sponsored university whose campus fits these criteria for a high eating disorder risk among young women. The student body is 86% Caucasian (Brigham Young University, n.d.). The school has a decidedly religious emphasis with a scripturally based honor code, a board of trustees primarily composed of ecclesiastical leaders, and a president who is both the institutional leader and a religious leader "called" to his position by the board of trustees. The stu-

---

*This research was sponsored by the Women's Services Center at Brigham Young University. All authors collaborated as a team over the course of several years. Rachel Crook-Lyon, PhD, served as action editor for this article. Correspondence should be directed to Lane Fischer, PhD, Counseling Psychology and Special Education, 340-L MCKB, BYU, Provo, UT 84602.*

dent body is 98% Latter-day Saint (LDS). BYU has a very competitive academic environment with freshmen admitted in 2012 averaging 28.4 composite ACT scores and 3.81 high school GPAs (Brigham Young University, n.d.). It is unclear whether elevated risks at such campuses are “hotbeds” (attracting vulnerable or previously disordered students) or “breeding grounds” (encouraging the development of disorders in previously healthy students) for eating disorders. To estimate the comparative degrees of eating disorder risk for females on campus and to determine where to focus prevention efforts, a research team consisting of Student Life professionals, faculty, and graduate students conducted a longitudinal study of three cohorts of entering freshman women using both a measure of body shape dissatisfaction and eating attitudes. Both instruments were administered twice each year over the course of four years.

## METHOD

### PARTICIPANTS

A new cohort of 1,800 entering freshman women was randomly selected each year for three successive years. The three cohorts were assessed at the beginning of each fall and winter semester for four years, three years, and two years, respectively. The average age of the women was 18.2 years with a range of 18-24. The initial response rate averaged 36% with steady subject mortality over the course of time. Table 1 indicates the response rates for each cohort across the four years.

### INSTRUMENTS

The Eating Attitudes Test (EAT-40; Garner & Garfinkel, 1979) was administered to all participants twice each year. Participants' risk scores were calculated using all 40 items on the EAT-40 as well as the subset of 26 items on the EAT-26 recommended by Garner, Olmsted, Bohr, and Garfinkel (1982). Garner et al. demon-

strated that the EAT-26 was highly correlated with the EAT-40 ( $r = 0.98$ ). The current researchers calculated the EAT-26 scores to allow comparison of this sample to other college samples that were administered only the EAT-26. The EAT-40 has rendered internal consistency coefficients of 0.79 for anorexic patients and 0.94 for control (nondiagnosed) subjects. Mintz and O'Halloran (2000) showed that the EAT was 90% accurate at differentiating between diagnosed and nondiagnosed college-age women. The clinical cut score on the EAT-40 is 30. The clinical cut score on the EAT-26 is 20. Participants whose scores were above the cut scores were considered to be at risk for manifesting an eating disorder. The EAT-40 and EAT-26 are used to support diagnoses of eating disorders.

The Body Shape Questionnaire (BSQ; Cooper, Taylor, Cooper, & Fairburn, 1987) does not globally measure eating disorder risk but rather focuses on one important correlate of eating disorders. It is a “self-report measure of concerns about body shape, in particular the phenomenal experience of ‘feeling fat’” (p. 490). Cooper et al. reported excellent concurrent validity of the BSQ with the Body Dissatisfaction subscale of the Eating Disorders Inventory ( $r = 0.66$ ). Rosen, Jones, Ramirez, and Waxman (1996) reported that the temporal stability of the BSQ met accepted standards ( $r = 0.88$ ) and showed excellent concurrent validity with the Body Dysmorphic Disorder Examination administered to college-age women ( $r = 0.77$ ). Participants whose BSQ scores exceeded 110 were considered to have significant body image concerns.

A demographics questionnaire asked incoming freshman women to self-report their age, residence, collegiate sports participation, dance team participation, and anticipated choice of college major. The anticipated majors were grouped according to similar subject matter and collapsed by the researchers into 20 major categories sponsored by the university.

**Table 1.** Number of Participants in Each Semester, by Group

COHORT	FRESHMAN		SOPHMORE		JUNIOR		SENIOR	
	FALL	WINTER	FALL	WINTER	FALL	WINTER	FALL	WINTER
1	658	487	342	272	185	162	102	102
2	696	499	269	256	186	194		
3	572	321	199	241				

## PROCEDURE

Each year, for three years, 1,800 incoming freshman women were randomly selected and mailed the demographics form, the EAT-40, and the BSQ at the beginning of their first fall semester. The instruments were mailed again at the beginning of the winter semester. This pattern was repeated at the beginning of fall and winter semesters for four years. The first cohort was sampled eight times. The second cohort was sampled six times. The third cohort was sampled four times. In the third year of the study, after all participants were enrolled and familiar with the instruments, the instruments were e-mailed to participants to decrease the burden of completing hard copies and mailing them back to the research team.

## RESULTS

Estimates of psychopathology typically distribute with significant positive skew. Results of all measures (EAT-40, EAT-26, and BSQ) distributed with significant positive skew. Critical Ratio Tests of skew for the EAT measures ranged from 37.6 to 7.4. There was a clear pattern of decreasing skew over time, which indicates progressive normalization of the EAT distributions, but the distributions were still significantly skewed. Critical Ratio Tests of skew for the BSQ ranged from 8.3 to 2.4. As with the EAT measures, there was a clear pattern of decreasing skew over time, which indicates progressive normaliza-

tion of the BSQ distributions. Because the BSQ is not a measure of psychopathology, the reduced skew relative to the EAT measures was expected. Nevertheless, the last samples of the BSQ were still significantly skewed. Rather than report mean values, which are destabilized in skewed distributions and may misrepresent phenomena, results are reported here in terms of percentages of students who scored in the clinical range for the EAT and the BSQ. Because the patterns of risk estimated by EAT-40 and EAT-26 were very similar, only the EAT-26 results are reported.

The longitudinal course of eating disorder risk and body dissatisfaction seemed to follow the same trend across all three cohorts. As seen in Tables 2 and 3, the percentage of students in clinical (at-risk) ranges steadily declined over time.

These values were collapsed across all samples and cohorts to estimate the typical risk according to year in school. As seen in Table 4, freshman women were at greatest risk according to both the EAT-26 and the BSQ. Risk rates steadily declined across year in school.

These data were further collapsed to estimate a single risk rate of eating disorders for female students on BYU campus. Estimates were generated in two ways: weighted and unweighted. The weighted risk rate is based on the total number of questionnaires completed regardless of cohort or year in school ( $N \sim 5700$ ). Because of subject attrition over time, the weighted risk overrepresents underclassmen, who have higher rates of eating disorder

**Table 2.** Percentage of Women in At-Risk Range by Group Based on the EAT-26

COHORT	FRESHMAN		SOPHMORE		JUNIOR		SENIOR	
	FALL	WINTER	FALL	WINTER	FALL	WINTER	FALL	WINTER
1	14.0	12.5	10.3	12.8	6.9	3.9	7.8	7.8
2	12.7	11.3	9.3	8.4	8.1	5.2		
3	11.3	10.8	10.1	13.7				

**Table 3.** Percentage of Women in At-Risk Range by Group Based on the BSQ

COHORT	FRESHMAN		SOPHMORE		JUNIOR		SENIOR	
	FALL	WINTER	FALL	WINTER	FALL	WINTER	FALL	WINTER
1	34.5	32.8	31.3	30.5	20.2	23.7	19.2	22.8
2	31.8	30.9	25.8	30.8	25.3	25.8		
3	37.0	39.1	32.2	30.2				



**Table 4.** Year-In-School Percentage in At-Risk Range Based on the EAT-26 and BSQ

MEASURE	FRESHMAN	SOPHMORE	JUNIOR	SENIOR
EAT-26	12.1	10.8	6.0	7.8
BSQ	33.5	30.0	23.8	21.0

risk. The unweighted risk is based on the average of the year-in-school averages and compensates for the overrepresentation of underclassmen.

Based on the EAT-26, the single weighted risk rate was 10.8%, and the unweighted risk rate was 9.2%. Single-sample  $z$  tests of proportions using the average annual sample size of 690 showed that both the weighted and unweighted risk rates were significantly lower than a conservative estimate of 15% based on risk rates recorded on other college campuses. The  $z$  was  $-3.0$  ( $p = .0013$ ) when testing against the weighted risk rate of 10.8% and  $-4.1$  ( $p = .00003$ ) when testing against the unweighted risk rate of 9.2%.

The single weighted risk rate based on the BSQ was 31.1%, and the unweighted risk rate was 27.2%. Single-sample  $z$  tests of proportions using the average annual sample size of 720 showed that the weighted and unweighted risk rates were not significantly different than a recent estimate of 28.7 at a midsized midwestern university. The  $z$  was  $1.4$  ( $p = 0.0808$ , NS) when testing against the weighted risk rate of 31.1% and  $-0.88$  ( $p = 0.1894$ , NS) when testing against the unweighted risk rate of 27.2%.

Because of the extreme skews in all distributions, the estimates of the relationship between the EAT and the BSQ were based on Spearman's Rho. Depending on the point in time or cohort used, coefficients ranged from 0.61 to 0.72 with an average Spearman's Rho of 0.67.

After considering the overall risk, the research investigated whether there were specific subgroups that represented notably higher risk. Participants were separated into 20 subgroups according to their anticipated major in the fall semester of their freshman year. Whether students maintained those majors over time is undetermined. Subgroups were ranked according to risk, which was estimated in multiple ways, including mean values, median values, and percentage of students scoring above critical cutoffs on the EAT or BSQ. Based on the first-semester declared major and across multiple estimates, six subgroups emerged as having notable risk. The six academic-major groups at higher risk were dance, com-

munications, dietetics, physical education, theater, and business. The three academic-major groups at lower risk were engineering/technology, math/science, and biology.

## DISCUSSION

Although BYU students possess many of the attributes typically associated with elevated levels of eating disorder risk, this study shows that BYU female students displayed significantly lower risk than female students on other college campuses. Additionally, BYU women entered the university at their highest level of risk in the fall of their freshman year and then steadily declined in risk throughout their time on campus. It is notable, however, that BYU women's level of body shape dissatisfaction was similar to a trustworthy estimate from another college campus. This is consistent with Carroll and Spangler's (2001) finding that female LDS college students had body image issues that were similar to their non-LDS counterparts. Both groups seemed to have been influenced by the media's thin ideal. However, in a subsequent study, Sandberg and Spangler (2007) found that female LDS college students had lower BSQ scores than their non-LDS counterparts. Across the three samples, the BYU or LDS women were estimated to have the same or better body images than non-BYU or non-LDS women.

Although body shape dissatisfaction is an important component of eating disorder risk, and the correlations between the EAT and the BSQ were quite high, the actual level of eating disorder risk for BYU female students was significantly lower than for female students on other college campuses. Women who scored high on BSQ tended to score high on the EAT. However, correlations ignore mean values and do not estimate actual levels of risk. In this case the apparently typical high body shape dissatisfaction did not result in typical levels of eating disorder risk. In fact, the estimated risks of BYU women's eating disorders were significantly lower than expected.

There are several possible explanations for why a college campus with many of the markers that predict elevated

risk for eating disorders would have scores that were lower than expected. One reason may be that Student Life prevention efforts are effective. Women's Services and Resources (WSR) sponsors eating-disorders prevention programming throughout the school year that addresses eating and body image problems. All of this programming is under the umbrella of WSR's yearlong *Recapturing Beauty* campaign. The campaign includes:

- **The 10-Day Body Image Challenge.** Held at the beginning of each school year, this program focuses on body image. The challenge includes one exercise each day that encourages students to address the way they view themselves and helps them develop a greater love and appreciation for who they are as divine beings. The exercises shift focus away from the messages of the world to define beauty from an internal standard.
- **A Week of Mindful Eating.** The purpose of this activity is to educate students about the dangers of dieting and teach them about intuitive eating, an approach that focuses on being attuned to their bodies and learning to recognize hunger and satiety signals rather than being dictated by an external authority regarding how to eat.
- **National Eating Disorders Awareness Week.** This event includes a variety of activities to educate students about eating disorders, including how to recognize the signs and symptoms of eating disorders and how to help themselves or a loved one who is dealing with an eating disorder. Activities include an array of lectures about body image and the media, media literacy, perfectionism, and self-esteem.
- **Fed Up with Food.** "Fed Up" is a weekly support group for students who want to have a healthy view of themselves and a healthy approach to eating. Weekly discussions provide participants with skills to challenge thinking and attitudes that lead to problematic eating and to empower them to be true to themselves.
- **Confidential Consultations.** Confidential consultations are available for students struggling with depression, anxiety, body image issues, or eating problems. Consultants assess needs and provide information, making referrals to the counseling center as needed.
- **Nutrition Consultations.** Nutrition consultations help students determine healthy eating patterns, and

portion sizes, create variety in their meals, and plan healthy meals, and snacks.

- **Lecture Series.** Occasionally WSR hosts speakers who have overcome eating disorders and are willing to speak about their journey and what approaches helped them. Speakers address theology regarding the doctrine of the body, the role of our physical bodies in our salvation, and the sacred stewardship of the body. These lectures help students to have a reverence and healthy respect for the body.

WSR's activities are ongoing throughout the school year and can be reviewed at [recapturingbeauty.byu.edu](http://recapturingbeauty.byu.edu).

Another reason for lower-than-expected eating disorder risk might be BYU's unique social structure. One of the ecological factors associated with eating disorder risk for college-age women is the removal of intimate family and social support. Leaving home and entering a competitive academic environment without social support can elicit the onset or exacerbation of eating disorder symptoms (Vohs, Heatherton, & Herrin, 2001). The BYU experience may be atypical in this regard. All students are assigned to a geographically based ward (church congregation). Within the ward system, students have extensive social support in the form of bishops (pastors), home teachers (males assigned to visit and support specific ward members on a monthly basis), visiting teachers (females assigned to visit and support specific female ward members on a monthly basis), home evening groups (small groups of males and females that meet every Monday evening for activities and shared worship), weekly congregational worship services, and ward-wide service and recreational activities on a monthly basis. All students receive and provide social support for each other through the ward system. The enhanced opportunity to have satisfying social and interpersonal relationships may be a protective factor against eating disorder risk.

Another reason for lower-than-expected eating disorder risk might be the predominant doctrine taught in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS). In LDS doctrine, the physical body is considered essential for eternal progress and is to be treated with care and reverence. The concept that the body is sacred and is a receptacle of divine presence is clearly taught. For example, tattoos are eschewed and considered analogous to writing graffiti on a temple building. Body piercings are to be avoided. It is not inconceivable that the same logic that prompts individuals to revere and protect their physi-

cal bodies would be a protective factor against many of the outward symptoms of eating disorders. Binging and purging, laxative abuse, or severe dietary restrictions may be seen as harmful to the sacred body. Carroll and Spangler (2001) opined that the doctrine of the sacredness of the body might be more salient for men than women. They also proposed that while the doctrine may be equally salient for men and women, it could be compromised more for women because of the power of the thin ideal in the media. Nevertheless, samples show that BYU females are faring better than non-BYU females, and it may be due to religious doctrine. There is also very specific scripture within the LDS belief system, called the Word of Wisdom, that provides both proscriptions and prescriptions regarding substances that should be avoided and food that should be eaten to enhance spiritual and physical health. Of course, doctrine can be distorted in the thoughts of a student suffering from eating disorder symptoms and ironically used as a rationalization that perpetuates unhealthy behavior. However, the young women on BYU campus may be benefitting from the predominant doctrinal messages within the LDS church.

Another related factor might be addresses by ecclesiastical leaders and publications of the LDS church that have moved beyond the general doctrine of reverence for the body to specifically referencing eating disorders. For example, in the 2001 article "Who Do You Think You Are?—A Message to Youth," James E. Faust of the First Presidency of the LDS church advised:

In your quest to define yourselves, do not get caught up in comparisons with role models or body types that may seem to be macho or chic but in reality are not becoming to you as sons and daughters of our loving Heavenly Father. One 17-year-old girl became so obsessed about her figure that she began to skip meals and ended up with an eating disorder. When it became apparent to her father, he insisted that she eat a substantial meal. This confrontation eventually brought her to her senses. (p. 4)

Also, an article in the *New Era*, which is a monthly publication dedicated to adolescent members of the church, focused specifically on eating disorder risk (Maynes, 2006). The author highlighted warning signs and listed helpful resources. Letters to the editors of LDS church magazines openly reference eating disorders and acknowledge the salutary influence of some articles and talks. For example, in the October 2005 *Ensign* (which is a monthly publication for adult members), a reader wrote:

Thank you for your July 2005 article "The Body, a Sacred Gift." For more than seven years an eating disorder has been the lens through which I see my body. My battle to turn to the Lord and the healing power of the Atonement was considerably aided by your article and its timing. I appreciate your constant sensitivity to today's problems and your courage in addressing them. (p. 79)

Another reader wrote in the September 2006 *Ensign*:

I want to thank you for the article "My Battle with Anorexia." I had kept my eating disorder secret for a long time and this article helped me realize that what I was doing did not coincide with the gospel and hurt me spiritually, though I would have never admitted it. (p. 48)

Any one or a combination of such unique factors in the BYU ecology may be influencing the diminished risk of eating disorders on campus. Although it is clear that the thin-ideal message promulgated by the popular media is having the same impact on body dissatisfaction of BYU females as measured by the BSQ, the risk rates of their self-reported eating disorder symptoms as measured by the EAT are less than those estimated on other college campuses. Although one or a combination of such unique factors in the BYU ecology are not completely effective, as BYU still has a 9% to 10% overall risk and some subgroups are at higher risk, something in the ecology seems to be blunting the expected risk.

We have speculated about the surprising findings in this study. Perhaps the most effective design that can explore what ecological factors might be at play will be a qualitative study utilizing in-depth interviews of BYU women at the various stages of their academic careers. There may be developmental processes as well as ecological influences that are only accessible through qualitative inquiry. Qualitative design can be used for confirmatory purposes and is not limited to exploration only. Such a study is strongly recommended.

## REFERENCES

- Boskind-White, M., & White, W. C. (1983). *Bulimarexia: The binge/purge cycle*. New York, NY: Norton.
- Brigham Young University. (n.d.). *BYU Demographics*. Retrieved from [yfacts.byu.edu/Article?id=135](http://yfacts.byu.edu/Article?id=135)
- Brigham Young University. (n.d.). *Quick Facts 2013*. Retrieved from [yfacts.byu.edu/Article?id=143](http://yfacts.byu.edu/Article?id=143)
- Carroll, A., & Spangler, D. L. (2001). A comparison of body image

- satisfaction among Latter-day Saint and non-Latter-day Saint college-age students. *AMCAP Journal*, 26, 6–18.
- Cooper, P., Taylor, M., Cooper, Z., & Fairburn, C. (1987). The development and validation of the Body Shape Questionnaire. *International Journal of Eating Disorders*, 6, 485–495.
- Edwards-Hewitt, T., & Gray, J. J. (1993). The prevalence of disordered eating attitudes and behaviors in Black-American and White-American college women: Ethnic, regional, class, and media differences. *Eating Disorders Review*, 1, 41–54.
- Forney, K. J., & Ward, R. M. (2013). Examining the moderating role of social norms between body dissatisfaction and disordered eating in college students. *Eating Behaviors*, 14, 73–78.
- Garner, D. M., & Garfinkel, P. E. (1979). The Eating Attitudes Test: An index of the symptoms of anorexia nervosa. *Psychological Medicine*, 9, 273–279.
- Garner, D. M., Olmsted, M. P., Bohr, Y., & Garfinkel, P. E. (1982). The Eating Attitudes Test: Psychometric features and clinical correlates. *Psychological Medicine*, 12, 871–878.
- Kirk, G., Singh, K., & Getz, H. (2001). Risk of eating disorders among female college athletes. *Journal of College Counseling*, 4, 122–132.
- Mintz, L. B., & O'Halloran, M. S. (2000). The Eating Attitudes Test: Validation with DSM-IV eating disorder criteria. *Journal of Personality Assessment*, 74, 489–504.
- Prouty, A. M., Protinsky, H. O., & Canady, D. (2002). College women: Eating behaviors and help-seeking preferences. *Adolescence*, 37. Retrieved from <http://www.search.com/search>
- Rosen, J. C., Jones, A., Ramirez, E., & Waxman, S. (1996). Body Shape Questionnaire: Studies of validity and reliability. *International Journal of Eating Disorders*, 20, 315–319.
- Sandberg, M., & Spangler, D. L. (2007). Eating, substance use, and body image: A comparison of Latter-day Saint and non-Latter-day Saint college age females. *Issues in Religion and Psychotherapy*, 31, 2–14.
- Simon-Boyd, G. D., & Bieschke, K. J. (2003). *Predicting eating disorder continuum groups: Hardiness and college adjustment*. Poster presented at the Annual Conference of the American Psychological Association, Toronto, Canada.
- Vohs, K. D., Heatherton, T. F., & Herrin, M. (2001). Disordered eating and the transition to college: A prospective study. *International Journal of Eating Disorders*, 29, 280–288.
-



# Baptized in Acid or Breathed with Life? An Exploration of Psychology's Bridging Capacity

MICHAEL J. RICHARDSON

*Three influences are described as contributing to a changing understanding of “secular” that ultimately excluded a consideration of theistic considerations: First, the separation of religious and scientific domains following Cartesian dualism opened the door for the popularization of a naturalistic science with a central characteristic of being independent of theistic considerations. Dualism eventually emphasized a distinction between subjective and objective experiences, rather than a distinction between spiritual and material realities—allowing the possibility of a purely naturalistic dualism. Second, naturalistic science made inroads back into traditionally religious questions involving the “objective” realm, particularly through the work of Charles Darwin. Third, drawing on assumptions from naturalistic science, psychology made inroads into the “subjective” realm, which helped popularize naturalistic science and marginalize theistic religion by substituting naturalistic explanations for religious explanations of mental, spiritual, and physical experiences. Implications regarding potential opportunities and obligations for responding to this trend are explored for religious psychologists.*

Applied social and behavioral sciences, such as psychology and education, of necessity reach beyond descriptions of what is and aspire to facilitate healthy change. Practitioners of the social and behavioral sciences who believe in an active and involved God, without whom we cannot work as effectively as we might wish, are often frustrated by the “God-free” assumptions that underlie their respective disciplines. Many are committed to bridging the chasm between the assumptions and practices that seem inherent in their profession and their personal religious and spiritual beliefs and practices. Indeed this chasm exists, and to the extent that the assumptions underlying our disciplines and those underlying our religious and spiritual practices are incompatible, the chasm may be impossible to bridge (Richardson & Slife, 2013; Slife, Stevenson, & Wendt, 2010). However, to the extent that believing practitioners continue to be both believers and practitioners, we seem to hold out hope that things might be otherwise. After all, as agents

of change, shouldn't we be as interested in what might be as in what has been?

In order to understand the possibilities of the future, we would do well to take a deeper look at the past. In the present paper, I explore the influence of psychology on the secularization of society—its influence on removing consideration of God from our professional change processes (such as psychotherapy and education)—thereby creating a chasm between religious and professional practices involving change. I also argue, however, that this secularizing influence of psychology and other social sciences reveals a bridging capacity and that by under-

---

*Michael J. Richardson, PhD, is a developmental and theoretical psychologist at Brigham Young University. Prior to joining the faculty at BYU he worked in family preservation with troubled youth and their families. Address for correspondence: Michael J. Richardson, 201 MCKB, Teacher Education Department, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT 84602. E-mail: michael\_richardson@byu.edu*



standing that bridging capacity we might make better use of it in the future.

#### REFORMATION, PLURALISM, AND ORIGINAL SECULARISM

Several authors trace the roots of secular society to the Reformation and the resulting religious plurality and conflict (Nord, 1995; Pannenberg, 1996; Taylor, 2007). Religious differences eventually undermined the establishment of a particular religion as a foundation for society in general (Pannenberg, 1996). Charles Taylor (2007) has argued that part of the effect of the Reformation was that a broad middle ground ultimately opened up between theistic and nontheistic worldviews, allowing people to explore a wider range and variety of belief or disbelief. Freed from a particular dogma, the individual, as well as broader society, was then able to explore both religious and nonreligious points of view in a pluralistic setting. In addition to reforming religion and society, this pluralistic setting also opened the possibility for the restoration of older beliefs and practices that had been suppressed during a time of monolithic religious dominance.

However, it was in this context of religious plurality and dissent that the possibility of a secular society based on the value of free thought also arose (Jacoby, 2004). If a shared belief in religious faith could not unify society, then perhaps a shared belief in reason and critical thinking could. This sort of "original secularism" (Reber, 2006, p. 194) was not intended to exclude religious influence but rather to avoid unexamined constraints against free thought. Still, it replaced the unifying value of seeking to understand God's will with the unifying value of reason—or of experience, or both—and the unfettered exploration of ideas.

Many early free thinkers were devout religious believers who were united not by opposition to religion but by opposition to any sort of oppression or uncritical acceptance of dogmatic assumptions (Pannenberg, 1996; Reber, 2006). Wolfhart Pannenberg argues that most of these early free thinkers "would have been scandalized by the thought that they were depriving Christian truth claims and morality of public influence" (sec. III, para. 5) and calls this early approach to free thought a "classical alliance" (sec. VI, para. 4) between faith and reason. Similarly, Huston Smith (2001) argues that science and religion were "allies" at this time in history (p. 80).

#### THE CHANGING MEANING OF "SECULAR"

Modern definitions of secularism are quite different from this original secularism in that they emphasize an independence from or even opposition to religious perspectives while often maintaining that secularism is neutral toward religion (Slife & Reber, 2009). For example, Dictionary.com defines secularism as "1. secular spirit or tendency, esp. a system of political or social philosophy that rejects all forms of religious faith and worship" and "2. the view that public education and other matters of civil policy should be conducted without the introduction of a religious element" (Secularism, n.d.-a). Merriam-Webster Online similarly defines secularism as "indifference to or rejection or exclusion of religion and religious considerations" (Secularism, n.d.-b). According to these definitions, modern secularism no longer implies a freedom of dialogue between different points of view, whether religious or not. Rather, modern secularism by such definitions implies the exclusion of religious thought and the favoritism of nonreligious thought.

Several historical developments were involved in reshaping our modern understanding of secularism and the movement toward exclusion of religious ideas from the public sphere. For the purposes of examining the role psychology played in this process, I will describe three of these historical developments: (a) the separation of religion and natural science, reflected in a mind-body dualism; (b) natural science inroads into traditionally religious questions about the "objective" world, including the question of our physical nature; and (c) inroads from the social sciences, driven in important ways by the influence of psychology, into the "subjective" world, including the nature of consciousness or mind.

#### SEPARATION OF RELIGION AND NATURAL SCIENCE

As noted, original secularism or free thought included a dialogue between religious and nonreligious points of view, and the exclusion of religious perspectives in particular would have been unthinkable (Pannenberg, 1996). In order for secularism to take on the connotations of rejection and exclusion of—or even simply independence from—religion suggested by the modern definitions, an initial separation between the "religious" and "nonreligious" would have to occur. This distinction arose from the separation of religion from natural science and has been traced to an ontological separation of mind

(or spirit) from body (or the physical world) associated with Cartesian dualism (Griffin, 2000).

David Ray Griffin (2000) argues that Cartesian dualism initially allowed for an assumption that theistic considerations were independent from inquiry into the natural or material world. In one sense, this dualism was thought to protect a belief in God from scientific challenges to belief—which was perhaps Descartes' intent—but this hope was ultimately not realized. Another result of dualism was the converse assumption that the natural world could be studied without reference to divine influences.

This assumption became foundational for a mechanistic, materialistic, or “naturalistic” worldview that came to dominate scientific inquiry (Griffin, 2000). Whereas early dualists subordinated mechanistic nature to spiritual and divine forces, later dualists ultimately eliminated reference to these “supernatural” forces and focused exclusively on a “natural” world (Griffin, 2000, p. 28), which was assumed to be composed solely of “disenchanted” (Taylor, 2007, p. 773) matter and mechanistic processes devoid of spiritual or divine influence.

Furthermore, what had been associated with divine or spiritual influence by early dualists was later ascribed solely to mental, or subjective, experience—as simply “epiphenomena” of objective material realities (Griffin, 2000). This latter sort of dualism entailed both a subject-object split (Bishop, 2007)—rather than a spirit-matter split—and a reversal of the relationship between mind and body. Rather than subjecting matter to the influence of spirit/mind, an epiphenomenal mind was now subjected to the mechanistic processes of the material world. This version of dualism was described by Taylor (2007) as a “modern ontic dualism: Mind over against a mechanistic, meaning-shorn universe, without internal purposes such as the older universe had” (p. 773).

This new vision of science, described as “scientific naturalism” (Griffin, 2000, p. 11), can be distinguished from the earlier view of science in which religion and science were seen as allies (Smith, 2001). As scientific naturalism became a dominant force in society, some held out hope that naturalistic science might provide a “common faith” in an increasingly relativistic milieu of moralities—or instead of oppressive religious dogmas of the past. One notable thinker who explicitly argued this point, John Dewey (1934), has had a particularly important influence in both psychology and education. In this sense, the

absence of universal religious grounding allowed for the laws described by natural science as universal—including naturalistic theories regarding human nature and development—to become a possible foundation for a “secular” social order (Johnson, 1995; Nord, 1995; Panzenberg, 1996).

#### NATURAL-SCIENCE INROADS INTO THE “OBJECTIVE”

Taylor (2007) describes the way we collectively view ourselves as a society as the “social imaginary.” According to Taylor, in order for an idea to be translated into common practice it must “infiltrate the social imaginary” (p. 172) or become part of a common understanding in society. Thus, in order for naturalistic science to become the common ground for a secular social order (and thus alter the meaning of “secular”), the ideas and assumptions of natural science would need to spread to the social imaginary.

Natural science—which following dualism had been considered independent of, or even neutral toward, religion—initially confined itself to inquiries about what was considered the material or “objective” world (e.g., physics, chemistry, and astronomy), leaving the spiritual or “subjective” world to religion. Although conflict had once erupted over descriptions of a material world and universe that differed from religious authority, religious pluralism along with Cartesian dualism may have allowed for such inquiry to be less threatening to believers. However, a notable exception occurred when natural science tackled the question of biological development. The advent of Darwinian evolution, in the minds of some, provided a naturalistic alternative explanation for such “objective” phenomena as the diversity of species and the origins of humankind (Brickhouse & Letts, 1998; Griffin, 2000; Johnson, 1998). However, separating God from *this* aspect of the material world seemed particularly offensive to believers, perhaps because Darwinian evolution appeared to contradict scriptural accounts of the creation of man and animals, which were widely shared by religious adherents in spite of religious pluralism.

Accordingly, Griffin (2000) calls Darwinian naturalism “the very heart of the conflict between science and theistic religious belief since the time of Charles Darwin” (p. 20). In addition to seeming to contradict scripture, Darwinian naturalism potentially altered the traditionally accepted relationship between mind and body as well

as between God and the material world. That is, whereas the material world (including the body) had once been thought of as subject to influence from the mind (or spirit) and God, Darwinian evolution seemed to reject this possibility in favor of naturalistic explanations for physiological processes. According to Griffin,

the idea that all the behavior of matter is governed by laws of nature, combined with the recognition that the human body is comprised of the same material elements as everything else, led to the conclusion that all bodily activities must be as law-governed as the events in the laboratory or the interactions of billiard balls. (p. 29)

That is, laws of nature, rather than spiritual or divine influences, were now thought to be the source of physiological activity. Griffin cites Darwin as arguing that “allowing mind to introduce ‘caprice’ into the world . . . would make science impossible” (p. 29). According to Griffin, Darwin also “rejected the idea of any divine intervention to explain the origin of the human mind” (p. 34). Thus, under Darwinian naturalism, mind, spirit, or even God could no longer be thought of as having supremacy over biological activity.

#### NATURAL-SCIENCE INROADS INTO THE “SUBJECTIVE”

In spite of the central role Darwinian naturalism played in the conflict between science and religion (Griffin, 2000), Darwinian thought was initially insufficient to displace religious perspectives in the social imaginary. In spite of Darwin’s apparent hopes that his theory would not require appeals to divine activity (Griffin), evolutionary theory itself was frequently altered or subsumed by religious thinkers as simply God’s method of creation (Eyring, 1983; Johnson, 1998). Thus, a second type of movement of natural science into traditionally religious questions must be considered in order to account for a popularization of naturalism sufficient to displace the dominant role religion continued to play in society.

This second movement involved social science inquiry into “subjective” experiences. Psychology in particular played an important role in further popularizing naturalistic science through inquiry into such experiences, including many considered central to religious thought (Meador, 2003). What Darwin’s theory lacked, psychology and the social sciences began to increasingly offer. If important matters of the mind, heart, and spirit could be explained naturalistically, the final stronghold of theistic

religion would be invaded and perhaps the primary reason for its existence undermined.

Psychology, in this sense, frequently addresses phenomena traditionally left to religionists (Williams, 2001), such as mental, spiritual, and moral experience, but largely confines itself to strictly naturalistic assumptions and explanations regarding these phenomena (Slife & Whoolery, 2006). For example, in research about how people think about God, references to divine influence as a possible *cause* for such thoughts are avoided, whereas the idea that beliefs about God are simply effects of naturalistic processes dominates the field (Slife & Reber, 2009).

From one perspective, such movements into the “subjective” might be seen as a natural result of the failure of dualism to resolve the philosophical problem of how two separate realities (i.e., “subjective” and “objective” realities) could interact (Griffin, 2000). Thus, inquiry about the physical body would naturally lead to inquiry about the mind. However, others suggest that these social science renderings of experience may have been more purposive as attempts to displace religion as a basis for social order, at least in some cases. According to Warren Nord (1995),

the great scientists of nature were not, for the most part, avowed opponents of religion, but many of the great social scientists were. One important reason is that the social sciences were, in the beginning, morally and politically motivated: early social scientists were social critics who saw organized religion propping up reactionary regimes, inhibiting free inquiry and social progress. Of course, social science also inherited the tension all scientific method had with religion. As a result, many of the great social scientists of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries took it as a special responsibility to discredit religion by arguing . . . that it had naturalistic causes. (p. 28)

Nord suggests here that inroads of the social sciences into religious questions may have been a deliberate attempt to “discredit religion” in order to undermine and perhaps replace the dominance of religion in society—a dominance that was considered by some to be oppressive. Thus, although inroads into the “objective” may have simply been a result of the failures of dualism, inroads into the “subjective” realm may have been more deliberate.

Psychology, for example, with the apparent weight of empirical authority and therapeutic practices that promised to alleviate such (formerly spiritual) ills as sadness and guilt, seemed to represent an improvement over



strictly religious approaches (Meador, 2003). With this hope, psychological explanation and therapeutic practice rapidly proliferated throughout the twentieth century, even being welcomed and promoted by influential religious leaders as offering solutions they no longer found in their theology (Kugelman, 2005; Meador, 2003). Whereas Darwin opened the door for theorizing about the naturalistic evolution of religious and moral thought, Freud (1930/1961) did some of the initial work of explaining how such thought might emerge from inborn naturalistic tendencies, such as unconscious drives and pressures from the natural world.

Theistic religion might have resisted such thinkers as Freud and Darwin, but the rapid proliferation of alternative psychological theories may have overcome many objections. For those who questioned the scientific grounding of Freud's theory, behaviorism emerged with its empirical demonstrations. For those who disliked the arguably dim view of humanity posed by both psychodynamic and behavioral thought, humanistic psychology emerged with its focus on a naturalistic human tendency toward self-actualization—giving practitioners and consumers of psychology many choices of theoretical approaches but none that took God's influence seriously.

B. F. Skinner (1953) advocated the view that all experience, including religious experience, could be explained naturalistically and without a consideration of the possible action of God. For Skinner, "traditional descriptions of Heaven and Hell epitomize positive and negative reinforcement" (pp. 352–353). In *Walden Two*, Skinner pressed further into religious terrain when his protagonist identified with Jesus, not as a God but as a great psychologist and honored colleague (Woefel, 1977). Jesus's love was recast as positive reinforcement and Jesus was praised for favoring this behavioristic principle over less effective punishment. The protagonist is described as god-like in acting as both creator and redeemer of a better society and also as one who had come further even than Jesus in his understanding of reinforcement principles and their applications (Woefel, 1977).

Humanistic psychology might have played a particularly influential role in making inroads from psychology to religion. Mike Arons (1976) argues that humanistic psychology was well situated to transform both psychological science and religion. Humanistic psychology was seen as restoring such considerations as value, meaning, consciousness, and subjectivity to a psychological science

that had become primarily concerned with the objective and empirical. Conversely, humanistic psychology was seen as potentially broadening Western religious views of salvation, in part through the influence of Eastern philosophies on humanistic psychology. Humanistic psychology supposedly offered Western religion a freedom from its former "irrationality," "blind faith," "servility," and "acquiescence to authority" (Arons, para. 4).

In addition to these reformulations of mental experience offered through psychological inquiry, psychotherapeutic practice soon offered religionists a new sort of ministry, promising empirically tested relief from psychological, emotional, and perhaps even spiritual suffering. Lifelong human struggles formerly associated with such theistic themes as pride and humility, sin and self-sacrifice, repentance and redemption were now able to be relieved in perhaps a few short sessions with a psychotherapist, and at a quantifiable cost. The rapid adoption of psychological solutions to ministerial concerns in both Protestant (Meador, 2003) and Catholic (Kugelman, 2005) circles has been documented.

For example, Keith Meador (2003) argues, "It is no longer uncommon to interpret Christianity as a vague set of therapeutic practices dedicated to personal health and well being" (p. 269). Meador goes on to describe his analysis of what he calls the "most influential American Protestant journal" of the early twentieth century, the *Christian Century*. Meador argues that during the time Charles Clayton Morrison was editor and writer for the magazine, articles referring to psychology and the use of psychological language increased. Meador supplies several telling quotes from Morrison, supporting the idea that the influence of psychology on Protestant thinking was increasing during this time—at least as represented by the *Christian Century*. In a 1910 editorial, called "From Laboratory to Pulpit," the *Christian Century* editors wrote:

It has long been our conviction that the most important testimony to the truth of religion and the reality of a spiritual world is yet to come, not from theologians, but from psychologists. The day of dogma is past. The scientific method of study and proof sweeps the field. . . . A new type of proof is forthcoming—the professors call it a new apologetic—which grounds itself in the bed-rock of experience and follows the most rigid method known to any science and comes out, fairly and without stumbling, on the side of faith. The psychologists are the apostles of this new gospel. (as cited in Meador, p. 281)

Morrison thus appears to argue that psychology could make up for some of the failings of theologians and that dogma could be replaced by psychological empiricism—even as “a new apologetic” for faith.

A few decades later, however, Morrison had apparently had second thoughts about borrowing a methodology grounded in naturalism. Nevertheless, Morrison’s later lament also represents a sort of testimonial to the extent of psychology’s influence on Christianity (Meador, 2003):

I had baptized the whole Christian tradition in the waters of psychological empiricism, and was vaguely awakening to the fact that, after this procedure, what I had left was hardly more than a moralistic ghost of the distinctive Christian reality. It was as if the baptismal waters of the empirical stream had been mixed with some acid which ate away the historical significance, the objectivity and the particularity of the Christian revelation, and left me in complete subjectivity to work out my own salvation in terms of social service and an “integrated personality.” (as cited in Meador, p. 269)

Thus, contrary to his earlier hope that psychology would be a “new apologetic” for faith, Morrison now seemed to think that his faith had not been supported by psychology but rather replaced. In this sense, his earlier reference to a “new” gospel might have been more prescient than he supposed.

Robert Kugelman (2005) argues that the older conflict between Catholics and Protestants gave way (beginning in the 1960s) to a conflict between liberal and conservative Christians, defined in part by a liberal adoption of psychological theory and practice and a conservative adherence to traditional approaches. He argues that this shift was taking place as much within churches as between them. Although Meador’s (2003) analysis suggests that this shift came somewhat earlier within Protestantism, Kugelman claims that the boundaries between psychology and religion began to weaken in Catholicism primarily after 1960. Prior to that time, although psychology was granted autonomy within the church in matters of “fact” and “treatment” as long as it didn’t contradict doctrine, Kugelman cites Pope Pius XII as limiting psychology’s role in what were considered more foundational matters. The church maintained the final word on “spiritual and moral issues” (p. 348) and on such important doctrines as the nature of the soul. This seems not unlike the current balance often hoped for, if

not always achieved, in LDS counseling contexts, and apparently this is a boundary the LDS church intends to maintain (Gleave, 2012).

However, reminiscent of Arons’s (1976) hopes, Kugelman (2005) suggests that humanistic psychology played an important role in weakening the boundaries between church and psychology for Catholics and that these changes came from both directions. Humanistic psychologists opened the door by considering the “higher reaches of human nature” (p. 349) and broadening their view of legitimate psychological science. Catholic theologians and philosophers largely “welcomed” this new psychology as they began to question their own views of both themselves and of the sciences (Kugelman).

In spite of humanism’s softening of psychology’s hard empiricist edge, it appears that, contrary to Arons’s (1976) vision, psychology has largely represented a one-way bridge between naturalism and theism. Several religious researchers and practitioners of psychology, including LDS psychologists, have convincingly argued that psychology remains firmly rooted in naturalistic assumptions that are in many ways incompatible with theism (e.g., Gantt & Williams, 2008; Slife & Whoolery, 2006). According to Kugelman (2005) and Meador (2003), however, the effect of psychology on some aspects of theistic religion has been profound. If the historical relationship between psychology and religion has indeed been so imbalanced—with psychology having profound influences on religion, while religion has had only superficial influences on psychology—then the firm boundaries that the LDS church seems intent to maintain (Gleave, 2012) are certainly understandable, and organizations such as AMCAP, along with individual religious psychologists and educators, face a serious professional if not spiritual challenge.

One reason for this one-sided influence might be that, according to Slife and Whoolery (2006), the often-unexamined assumptions of psychological science include such ideals as objectivism and materialism. Objectivism assumes a subject-object split (Bishop, 2007), placing the object of psychological inquiry external to, and fundamentally separate from, the observer. This “objectivity” supposedly allows for observations to be free of “opinions, biases, values and feelings” (Slife & Whoolery, 2006, p. 222). This assumption may be problematic for religious psychologists primarily because of the “value-freeness” dimension. Whether doing research or therapy,



a psychologist is expected to remain “objective,” “value-free,” or “value-neutral.” Thus psychologists, no matter how religious, are expected to eliminate or “control for” a valuing of God’s influence in their research and practice (Slife & Whoolery). It has been argued that the valuing of value-freeness or value-neutrality pervades modern secular education as well (Johnson, 1995). This may be due in part to the pervasive influence on public education of such notable psychologists as John Dewey and Edward Thorndike, who both grounded their otherwise contrasting theories in naturalistic assumptions that ignored the possibility of divine influence (Richardson & Slife, 2013).

Similar to objectivism, the related notion of materialism assumes that what matters in psychological research and therapy is the tangible, material, measurable, and observable (Slife & Whoolery, 2006). An example of this view might be found in an assumption that mental experience, including religious experience, can be fully explained by efficient causal chemical activity in the brain (Slife & Williams, 1995). Outside of neuroscience, even the humanistic aspirations of describing and promoting “higher” human experience often rely on material, observable operationalizations. These operationalizations give constructs such as love, hope, faith, and divine inspiration a sense of empirical weight as encapsulated descriptions of behavior and emotion.

Furthermore, although humanism may soften the deterministic assumptions of earlier schools of psychological thought, it may fail to fully extract itself from determinism, thus denying the value of human agency so central to many religious people and to LDS doctrine in particular. Humanistic determinism is notably manifest in the assumption that an inborn actualizing tendency drives much of human behavior, needs, and even desires (Slife & Williams, 1995). Humanistic psychology also typically retains assumptions of individualism and instrumentalism (Bishop, 2007), which may conflict with such religious values as self-sacrifice and altruism.

Thus the meaning of spiritual and religious experience, as understood by many theists, may be distorted by psychology to the extent that psychology retains these naturalistic assumptions. What psychology typically gives us, then, may be at best an impoverished view of religious and spiritual experience and at worst a view that is completely disconnected from or even hostile to that experience. Religious experiences of the divine are

then transformed such that they become described in fully humanistic and materialistic terms, while psychology remains firmly grounded in naturalistic assumptions (Reber, 2006; Slife & Whoolery, 2006). Psychology may then leave theistic religion with what Morrison calls “hardly more than a moralistic ghost” (Meador, 2003, p. 269) while itself remaining relatively unaltered by the encounter. This lopsided encounter may be largely due to a widespread embracing of psychology by religion and a highly limited embracing of religion by psychology.

So although this psychological bridge between secular and religious questions, between the subjective and objective, between mind and body, between spirit and matter, might have provided an opportunity for mutual influence and dialogue, according to some theorists, religious ideas have tended to be distorted, subsumed, replaced, or ignored in favor of naturalistic ideas when it comes to the relationship between psychology and religion (Bishop, 2007; Reber, 2006; Slife & Whoolery, 2006). The chasm between natural science and religion has widened, with psychology making incursions into religious territory while staying grounded in the assumptions of the new secularism, represented by naturalistic (God-free) science.

#### IMPLICATIONS FOR THE RELIGIOUS PSYCHOLOGIST

The word “psyche” refers to the soul or spirit. As a study of the spirit, then, psychology *should* ideally be situated at the confluence of mind, spirit and body. It makes sense that historically psychology was a center point for materialistic inroads into matters of mind and spirit. Unfortunately, with the adoption of strictly materialistic assumptions associated with the natural sciences, psychologists created inroads with no outlets and thus a stagnating science of the mind.

However, the history of psychology’s largely one-sided influence on religion might provide clues for how religion might inform psychology and, through psychology, perhaps other sciences. By taking the spirit or soul that should be the center of our discipline seriously, religious psychologists might breathe some life (Gen. 2:7) into psychology and other sciences, which have otherwise tended to focus primarily on the temporal and material elements of experience—instead of allowing their understanding of truth to being baptized in the acid (Meador, 2003) of

a “one-sided [materialistic] dualism” (Bartlett, 2003; Slife & Whoolery, 2006).

The influences of science on religion through the medium of psychology, as described here, involved first a conceptual separation of the spiritual and material (described elsewhere as death) and then the purposive application of materialistic assumptions to the spiritual. The reverse path might then involve a conceptual reunification of the spiritual and material (a type of at-one-ment, or rebirth of the discipline) and a purposive consideration of spiritual assumptions when considering material realities—which should now be seen as inseparable from the spiritual. Religious psychologists, particularly LDS psychologists, should take seriously the belief that “all things...are spiritual” (D&C 29:34).

Historically, rationalism, with its emphasis on logical truths, has both competed and cooperated with empiricism’s emphasis on learning through the physical senses. The tenuous marriage between rationalism and empiricism in modern science has neglected a third element: “heart,” or spirit. This third element (variously described as intuition, insight, inspiration, and an innate moral sense—and in LDS circles as the light of Christ) can serve as a bridge between logic and the physical senses. It is this element that often anchors truth when our minds seem to tell us one thing and our physical senses seem to tell us another. With spirit, our mind (intelligence) and our bodies are united, our thoughts and physical senses can be aligned, our outward behavior can be made consistent with our inward beliefs, and whole or complete truth can be made manifest. Reliance on only one, or even two, of these three gates to truth can lead to various forms of error.

Whereas true religion should encompass all three elements, following the popularization of dualism and an acidic baptism in psychology and other social sciences (e.g., education), religion has to a certain extent relinquished its interest in temporal or material things (such as a study of the body or brain and its senses and a study of social processes), considering them primarily “secular” concerns. However, this ignores that secularism is no longer understood inclusively, and taking this exclusivity (separation) seriously inevitably tends toward a dangerous redefinition of spiritual as things not relevant to temporal life. Separated from spiritual understanding, the spiritual element found in temporal or physical experiences is inevitably redefined in materialistic terms

(e.g., as purely biological, chemical processes originating in the brain, or as a social dynamic or construction). This separation keeps the bridge functioning only in one direction, if it functions at all. Eventually even belief in God is redefined, for example, as simply a manifestation of primal fear in the personal or collective imagination (Dewey, 1934).

In spite of this weakening and constraining of the role of religion, facilitating communion between mind and heart (D&C 8:2), or reason and faith, continues to be largely the domain of religion. It is in understanding and facilitating communion between these elements and the physical world—including physical senses and overt behavior—that psychology might be of particular use. With the separation of science and religion, psychology attempted to keep a foot in both camps. Thus situated, psychology could have been an ambassador for reunion, or at least communion. Instead it became a “crypto-missionary” (Slife, Smith, & Burchfield, 2003) for naturalistic (God-free) science. Thus, it may be the responsibility of religious psychologists to re-establish this communion by being active ambassadors of mind and spirit to believers in a solely materialistic science—including clients and students with such a one-sided orientation. Believing psychologists often have unique inroads into the scientific community, even in comparison to other believing scientists, because we have a particular interest in matters of the mind and spirit as well as the body and behavior. It may be time for us to make better use of these opportunities.

However, this work of serving as ambassadors to the scientific community might not alone be sufficient. We might also be responsible for helping to repair some of the damage to religious belief done historically by our discipline. In this regard we might help religious people, including many of our clients and students, remember that material things, such as the brain and body, are also spiritual things—and the truths that govern spiritual things also apply to these material elements. In the modern sense of God-free secularism, there are no secular topics or issues with which religious people need not concern themselves. All things are spiritual. In our theology, separation is often equated with death: the separation of the body from the spirit and the spirit from God. In some ways, this bridging of elements that were formerly seen as separate and the seeking of unified truth—taking into consideration the relationships

between mental, spiritual, and physical realities—might itself be an important form of therapy as well as education. Our unique situation at the confluence of science and religion, as well as our professional interest in mind, spirit, and body, might allow the believing psychologist, while certainly not supplanting the role of an ecclesiastical leader, to provide unique insights into these bridging pathways. Such pathways need not be presented covertly, as psychological “crypto-missionaries” (Slife, Smith, & Burchfield, 2003) might at times have presented secular values. They also need not be pushed on clients or students with evangelical zeal. Rather, they can be considered in open dialogue as alternatives to what has in many ways become a lopsided influence: science on religion, or body on mind. Psychology, in cooperation with spirit, may help to balance the influence between these realities.

#### REFERENCES

- Arons, M. M. (1976). Transformations of science and religion through humanistic psychology. University of West Georgia, Department of Psychology. Retrieved from [http://www.westga.edu/psydept/index\\_8574.php](http://www.westga.edu/psydept/index_8574.php)
- Bartlett, W. (2003). *Living by surprise: A Christian response to the ecological crisis*. New Jersey: Paulist Press.
- Bishop, R. C. (2007). *The philosophy of the social sciences*. London: Continuum.
- Brickhouse, N. W., & Letts, IV, W. J. (1998). The problem of dogmatism in science education. In J. T. Sears & J. C. Carper (Eds.), *Curriculum, religion, and public education: Conversations for an enlarging public square* (pp. 221–230). New York: Teachers College Press.
- Dewey, J. (1934). *A common faith*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Eyring, H. B. (1983). *Reflections of a scientist*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book.
- Freud, S. (1930/1961). *Civilization and its discontents*. New York: W. W. Norton.
- Gantt, E. E., & Williams, R. N. (2008). Explaining religion to death: Reductionism, evolution, and the psychology of religion. *Issues in Religion and Psychotherapy*, 32(1), 3–13.
- Gleave, R. (2012). Gospel-centered “therapist” or gospel-centered “therapy”: Is there a difference and does it matter? *Issues in Religion and Psychotherapy*, 34(1), 1–9.
- Griffin, D. R. (2000). *Religion and scientific naturalism: Overcoming the conflicts*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Jacoby, S. (2004). *Freethinkers: A history of American secularism*. New York: Henry Holt and Company.
- Johnson, P. E. (1995). *Reason in the balance: The case against naturalism in science, law, and education*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.
- Johnson, P. E. (1998). The two controversies over evolution. In J. T. Sears & J. C. Carper (Eds.), *Curriculum, religion, and public education: Conversations for an enlarging public square* (pp. 231–239). New York: Teachers College Press.
- Kugelmann, R. (2005). An encounter between psychology and religion: Humanistic psychology and the Immaculate Heart of Mary nuns. *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences*, 41, 347–365.
- Meador, K. G. (2003). “My own salvation”: The Christian Century and psychology’s secularizing of American Protestantism. In C. Smith (Ed.), *The secular revolution: Power, interests, and conflict in the secularization of American public life* (pp. 269–309). Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Nord, W. A. (1995). *Religion and American education: Rethinking a national dilemma*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press.
- Pannenberg, W. (1996). How to think about secularism. *First Things*, 64, 27–32.
- Reber, J. S. (2006). Secular psychology: What’s the problem? *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, 34, 193–204.
- Richardson, M. J., & Slife, B. D. (2013). A “Narrowing of Inquiry” in American Moral Psychology and Education. *Journal of Moral Education*, 42(2), 193–208.
- Secularism. (n.d.-a). In *Dictionary.com*. Retrieved from <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/secularism>
- Secularism. (n.d.-b). In *Merriam-Webster Online*. Retrieved from <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/secularism>
- Skinner, B. F. (1953). *Science and human behavior*. New York: The Free Press.
- Slife, B. D., Fisher Smith, A., & Burchfield, C., (2003). Psychotherapists as crypto-missionaries: An exemplar on the crossroads of history, theory, and philosophy. In D. B. Hill & M. J. Kral (Eds.) *About psychology: Essays at the crossroads of history, theory, and philosophy* (pp. 55–72). Albany, NY: SUNY Press.
- Slife, B. D., & Reber, J. S. (2009). Is there a pervasive bias against theism in psychology? *Journal of Theoretical and Philosophical Psychology*, 29(2), 63–79.
- Slife, B. D., Stevenson, T. D., & Wendt, D. C. (2010). Including God in psychotherapy: Strong vs. weak theism. *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, 38(3), 163–174.

- Slife, B. D., & Whoolery, M. (2006). Are psychology's main methods biased against the worldview of many religious people? *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, 34, 217–231.
- Slife, B. D., & Williams, R. N. (1995). *What's behind the research? Discovering hidden assumptions in the behavioral sciences*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Smith, H. (2001). *Why religion matters: The fate of the human spirit in an age of disbelief*. New York: HarperSanFrancisco.
- Taylor, C. (2007). *A secular age*. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
- Williams, R. N. (2001, June). Psychology in the breach: The importance of being earnest. Invited keynote address. presented at the International Society for Theoretical Psychology, Calgary, Alberta, Canada.
- Woefel, J. W. (1977, November 30). Listening to B. F. Skinner. *Christian Century*, p. 1112.
-



Association of Mormon  
Counselors and Psychotherapists  
P.O. Box 225 Kayville, UT 84037

<http://www.amcap.net>

PRESORTED  
STANDARD  
U.S. POSTAGE PAID  
SLC, UT  
PERMIT NO. 5407