

LDS Indoctrination and Retentive Socialization

Introduction

In [A Message To The Most Ardent Critic Of The Mormon Church](#), Ben Arkell quotes a nameless member of the church who had recently dropped off their daughter and son at the Missionary Training Center (MTC) of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (emphasis added):

“I wish I could go to those who have walked away from the Church, and those who are its ardent critics, and say, “Come with me to the MTC on a Wednesday morning and let’s just watch. Let’s stand together and watch these families say goodbye to their sons and daughters.”

“You mean to tell me you think these people are brainwashed? These individuals and families who in all other walks of life, in their education, in their careers, and in their communities are successful, smart, and industrious – you mean to tell me in this one area they are so ignorant and brainwashed that they would send away their sons and daughters?”

“Never. They would never do it.”

This document attempts to broadly address—from a scholarly perspective—the question of why many parents may be willing to send their children off as LDS missionaries for two years.

Brainwashing?

Neither parents or their children are “brainwashed”—[most psychologists today would reject such a term to describe behavior like this](#). Rather, psychologists are likely to view and analyze such actions in terms of socialization via [social learning theory](#). Social learning suggests that not only is behavior modified based on direct instruction but also through the observation of rewards and punishments (vicarious reinforcement). Virtually all psychologists recognized the power of [socialization](#) in shaping human behavior—socialization encourages some kinds of behavior and discourages other behavior.

The well-respected psychologist of religion, Benjamin Beit-Hallahmi, [explained](#):

Social learning, despite its seeming simplicity...remains the best explanation for most religious actions. It is the best explanation for the overall prevalence of religion, for individual religiosity, and for ... the most dramatic of religious acts and movements. ... The variety of religious traditions and the correspondence between the dominant tradition in the social environment and the religious beliefs of the individual are the most ob-

vious proofs to the validity of the social learning approach, which is also able to explain what are considered intense religious experiences....

More specifically, then, this document attempts to tackle the question: **What LDS programs or cultural phenomena might be contributing most to high levels of devotion and sacrifice observed in LDS members?**

What about the truth-claims?

Whether or not the LDS Church is “true” (i.e., whether its truth-claims are veridical) is sidestepped in this document. In addition, the manner in which the LDS socialization program reflects on LDS truth claims is unclear. For instance, a believing member may argue that an effective socialization program is an indicator of the truth of the LDS Church: we might expect God to implement an effective socialization program to spread truth and encourage orthodoxy in the face of evil or ignorant forces intent on undermining it. On the other hand, a critic might argue that such an intense socializing program is an indicator of the weakness of the LDS faith: why such a program if the truth-claims could stand on their own merit? One may argue—from the same data—that the LDS Church fosters devotion in part *because of* the accuracy, power, and beauty of its truth-claims, or it may be foster devotion *in spite of* its truth-claims were we to suppose that the claims were false.

A more productive question is whether the level of belief and devotion fostered in LDS members could be the product of an effective socializing culture and program *regardless of* the veridicalness of LDS truth-claims. We see, for instance, high levels of belief and devotion in groups like the Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (FLDS) or in the Jehovah’s Witnesses, and presumably at most only one of these groups has fully accurate truth-claims. The existence of high levels of devotion in groups with contradicting truth-claims itself suggests that socialization may account for some significant level of belief and devotion within the groups. Nonetheless, it must be acknowledged that one cannot fully tease apart devotion behavior from truth-claim correctness, and this document makes no attempt to do so.

Fourteen socializing influences

Below are listed what I view as the main sources of socializing influence which may drive members towards activity and discourage them from activities which might diminish their belief and participation in the LDS Church. I acknowledge that counter-examples within Church approved resources exist which moderate some of the more extreme material and examples discussed below, even though I have not included them for the sake of brevity. In addition, the level of emphasis on retentive doctrine and practices that any given member of the LDS Church experiences will vary significantly from family-to-family, location-to-location, and in which era of time a person experienced a particular LDS program. Still, I have attempted to focus on examples

which will likely resonate with *most* active members' experiences and constitute the threads which most strongly encourage devotion and retention.

1. Program involves extensive time learning doctrine

LDS members spend a considerable amount of time in meetings teaching one another and learning LDS doctrine:

1. Members attend [a minimum of 3 hours of Church each Sunday](#) (not counting other meetings like nightly "firesides") where they teach one another LDS doctrine.
2. Members are taught to pray [morning and night individually, with their family, and with their spouses, pray over every meal, and study their scriptures daily](#).
3. Boys and girls begin [bi-monthly activities with their respective gender at age 8](#). Some of the lessons directly or indirectly support LDS doctrine.
4. Youth from the age of 12 to 18 attend [a weekly activity](#). Many activities directly involve learning or acting out LDS teachings.
5. All high-school youth attend roughly one hour of [study in the doctrines and beliefs of the Church](#) nearly every single day of high school.
6. [All males are expected to serve a 2 year full-time mission and many females serve a 1.5 year mission](#). During this time, missionaries engage in daily individual and companion study of LDS material ([at least 1 hour total daily](#)) and they will spend most of their day discussing LDS doctrine within their companionship and with investigators. The socializing influence of missionary work on LDS members is considered significant enough that it merits its own point (see point #4).
7. Members are to listen to [10 hours of instruction](#) from Church leadership each half year and [carefully review those teachings](#) between conferences.

2. Members strongly encouraged to gain a testimony

Moroni's Promise

Gaining a testimony of LDS doctrine is considered an essential part of being a Latter-day Saint. The commonly prescribed method is to read and pray about the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon (see [Moroni 10:4-5](#)). The practice may be viewed as open-ended and respectful of the agency of the truth-seeker, but it may also be viewed as a process with only one inevitable outcome (see [here](#) and [here](#) for additional discussion).

Self-conditioning?

Other recommended methods appear to border on self-conditioning. For instance, members have been encouraged to record their testimony, share it with friends, and listen to it regularly. Neil L. Andersen [taught](#):

Consider recording the testimony of Joseph Smith in your own voice, listening to it regularly, and sharing it with friends. Listening to the Prophet’s testimony in your own voice will help bring the witness you seek.

Members are instructed that testifying that they know the Church is true is one way to discover their testimony. Boyd K. Packer [taught](#):

It is not unusual to have a missionary say, “How can I bear testimony until I get one? How can I testify that God lives, that Jesus is the Christ, and that the gospel is true? If I do not have such a testimony, would that not be dishonest?” Oh, if I could teach you this one principle. A testimony is to be found in the bearing of it!¹

And Dallin H. Oaks taught ([April 2008 Conference](#)):

Another way to seek a testimony seems astonishing when compared with the methods of obtaining other knowledge. We gain or strengthen a testimony by bearing it. Someone even suggested that some testimonies are better gained on the feet bearing them than on the knees praying for them.

3. Promise to sacrifice anything to the cause

Every LDS person marrying in the temple or serving a mission must receive their endowment, and all adults are encouraged to receive their endowment. In this ceremony a member will promise to:

observe and keep the Law of Sacrifice, as contained in the Old and New Testament [as Jesus Christ has laid down his life for the redemption of mankind, so we should covenant to sacrifice all that we possess, even our own lives if necessary, in sustaining and defending the Kingdom of God]

In the temple, a member will be asked to:

consecrate yourselves, your time, talents, and everything with which the Lord has blessed you, or with which he may bless you, to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, for the building up of the Kingdom of God on the earth and for the establishment of Zion

Thinker of Thoughts discusses how members [covenant and are reminded of their covenants](#) in the LDS Church. In this milieu, then, it is reasonable that members are sometimes taught to “never turn down a calling” ([example 1](#), [example 2](#)).

¹The practice of bearing a testimony to find it may take advantage of the phenomenon of “insufficient justification”. From the [1959 study](#) on insufficient justification: “If a person is induced to do or say something which is contrary to his private opinion, there will be a tendency for him to change his opinion so as to bring it into correspondence with what he has done or said.” ([video which details the experiment](#) and more on [insufficient justification](#))

And given such promises, a member may be discouraged from participating in any activity that would disrupt Church duties. For example, one individual [recounted](#):

I planned for years on going for a solo backpacking & hitchhiking adventure around the country. Finally one summer, the conditions were right, I had nothing else I needed to do, and I realized it was then or never. It was time to accomplish a dream.

When my bishop at the time found out, he sat me down for the most intense church interview I'd had up to that point in my life. His core question was how I intended to fulfill my home teaching and other priesthood duties if I went on my adventure.

4. Missions are highly controlled, socializing environments

All able males are expected to serve a two year LDS mission, and they typically serve at the age of 18 or 19. Females are encouraged to consider service and many females leave at 19 years of age to serve a 1.5 year mission. The mission is a time of complete focus on learning and teaching LDS doctrine and provides a strong socializing experience.

The missionary environment, from reading material to schedule, is [very tightly controlled](#). All communication to the missionary flows through Church controlled resources, and families must use LDS controlled email to write to their missionary. [2017 Mobile Device Standards](#) for LDS missionaries outline the following expectations:

Always sit or stand so that you and your companion can see each other's screen when using devices. Be aware of your companion's contacts, messages, and communication. Also make sure that your companion reviews anything you plan to email, post, comment, or message except for letters to your mission president and emails home. ...

With your companion, create a culture of helping each other be safe by regularly and thoroughly reviewing each other's devices. In reviewing your companion's device, look at his or her app histories, recent contacts, photos, notes, usage information, and so on. Do not reset your device or erase your online history. As directed by your mission president, missionary leaders may also conduct device reviews. ...

Anecdotes suggest that faith-disturbing content may be filtered before delivery to the missionary, and missionaries may only write home once per week.²

Leaving a mission early

²Exceptions to the communication policy are rare—for instance, a father was [denied contact information for a son](#) serving in Houston during hurricane Harvey.

Leaving a mission can be extremely difficult. Mission Presidents may use [an extraordinary number of tactics and gates](#) to prevent homesick or discouraged missionaries from returning home. This includes requiring the missionary or their family to pay for their own flight home (regardless of whether the missionary or family pre-paid for their mission). Mission Presidents also tend to hold missionaries' passports so the missionary may not leave without their permission.³ Missionaries must also sign a document stating their intention to serve, [which may be used against them](#) if they decide to return home (i.e., "you signed up for this.")

Returning home early without sufficient justification (e.g., medical release) is considered dishonorable, and the importance of serving an honorable mission is [frequently and strongly emphasized](#). A young man or woman who was not honorably released from their mission may be viewed with suspicion in the LDS community ([for example](#)) and considered less-desirable marriage potential (related to the next point, #5).

5. Members are expected to date and marry other members

Ezra Taft Benson [taught](#):

Our Heavenly Father wants you to date young men who are faithful members of the Church, who will be worthy to take you to the temple and be married the Lord's way. There will be a new spirit in Zion when the young women will say to their boyfriends, "If you cannot get a temple recommend, then I am not about to tie my life to you, even for mortality!" And the young returned missionary will say to his girlfriend, "I am sorry, but as much as I love you, I will not marry out of the holy temple."

Following the Church program is seen as far more important than love, friendship, or spiritual compatibility, and young women are consistently taught [that they should marry a returned missionary](#):

Back when I was in the Young Women program, I remember being told that RM [return missionary] needed to be at the top of my dating criteria list.

The very thought of dating a non-return missionary (non-RM) is [considered jaw-dropping](#). A person dishonorably released from service would likely be given even lower status than someone who never served a mission at all.

6. LDS doctrine and practice often trumps all

LDS Doctrine

1. All spiritual feelings that contradict the accepted revelations or authorities is not considered revelation from God, [by definition](#):

³Passports are held in the mission home of many missions. This was the practice in my mission, and has [been reported by many others](#).

When ... inspiration conveys something out of harmony with the accepted revelations of the Church or contrary to the decisions of its constituted authorities, Latter-day Saints may know that it is not of God, no matter how plausible it may appear.

2. In general, logic is carefully arranged [to support belief](#).
3. [BYU's Academic Freedom Policy](#) explains how human reason is subordinate to divine revelation: "Religion offers venerable alternative theories of knowledge by presupposing that truth is eternal, that it is only partly knowable through reason alone, and that human reason must be tested against divine revelation." Hence, when ways of knowing clash, LDS authorities always win.

LDS Orthodoxy

1. [Short engagement/dating times relative to the rest of society](#) suggests that religious affiliation often trumps other considerations of personality and personality compatibility.
2. A good reason not to marry someone [is because they didn't immediately remove extra earrings when the Prophet said to only have one pair](#).
3. Some leaders create [contracts to ensure continued activity](#).

7. Most major life events are tied into the Church

Given that religions offer a scaffold of meaning, it makes sense that they would be involved in most major life events. However, in the LDS Church the manner in which these events are gated by [declarations of worthiness and belief](#) means that orthodoxy in belief and practice is frequently re-emphasized among [those administering](#) and [those receiving](#) each ordinance or advancement.

1. Newborn babies are typically blessed in front of the congregation by their father.
2. Children are baptized members at age eight (again, typically by the father) at what is considered the "age of accountability".
3. Young men receive the priesthood (typically conferred by the father) at age 12, advance in Priesthood rank at 14, again at 16 and typically receive the higher Priesthood at age 18.
4. Fathers typically give a school blessing [before the start of each school year and when their children are sick](#).

The father must be [considered worthy by the Bishop](#) to perform these ordinances, and there is some communal shame imparted or at least implied if they are unable to perform these ordinances due to unworthiness.

Additional life events tied closely into the LDS program include missions, marriage, and funerals.

1. LDS missions are considered [a "coming of age" experience](#) (see answer by D. Michael Quinn).

2. Marriage in an LDS temple is given *strong* emphasis in the Church since it is viewed as the only way for the marriage to endure in the eternities. All other marriage ceremonies are viewed as counterfeit, at least to some degree.
3. Funerals are considered a time to teach the Gospel and reinforce the LDS conception of life's purpose.

Church Handbook 2 instructs:

Funerals provide an important opportunity to teach the gospel and testify of the plan of salvation. They also provide an opportunity to pay tribute to the deceased. However, such tributes should not dominate a funeral service.

And Boyd K. Packer taught:

When the family insists that several family members speak in a funeral, we hear about the deceased instead of about the Atonement, the Resurrection, and the comforting promises revealed in the scriptures. Now it's all right to have a family member speak at a funeral, but if they do, their remarks should be in keeping with the spirit of the meeting.

I have told my Brethren in that day when my funeral is held, if any of them who speak talk about me, I will raise up and correct them. The gospel is to be preached.

8. Attributing causation

Doctrine and Covenants 59:21 states:

And in nothing doth man offend God, or against none is his wrath kindled, save those who confess not his hand in all things...

Latter-day Saint are encouraged to continually look for God's hand influencing their life in significant and insignificant ways. Hence, causation of many events are attributed to God or seen as influenced by their own level of righteousness or devotion (particularly in the payment of tithing).

1. Leaders regularly attribute supernatural influence *to events others would likely view as natural*.
2. Members regularly attribute what others would view as natural phenomena to the efficacy of prayer (*example*).
3. Members tend to consider all positive economic windfall as *evidence of the effectiveness of paying tithes*.

Such a mindset and process provides a continual buttressing of confidence in the LDS worldview.

9. Follow the leadership

Members are taught that their eternal safety lies in always following their LDS leadership and that their leadership represents God to them. [D&C 1:38](#) emphasizes this equivalency:

What I the Lord have spoken, I have spoken, and I excuse not myself; and though the heavens and the earth pass away, my word shall not pass away, but shall all be fulfilled, whether by mine own voice or by the voice of my servants, it is the same.

And [D&C 21:4-5](#):

4 Wherefore, meaning the church, thou shalt give heed unto all his words and commandments which he shall give unto you as he receiveth them, walking in all holiness before me;

5 For his word ye shall receive, as if from mine own mouth, in all patience and faith.

Following the prophet is repeatedly and emphatically taught to young children and teenagers in the LDS Church. Toddlers and very young children often sing the song [Follow the Prophet](#). Youth are encouraged to follow leaders, [even if they were wrong on something](#):

My boy, you always keep your eye on the President of the Church, and if he ever tells you to do anything, and it is wrong, and you do it, the Lord will bless you for it.

[Videos](#) and [lessons](#) demonstrate the consequences of following or not following the prophet, and the message is typically taught in [absolute terms](#):

At times, following the prophet may be unpopular, but following the prophet is always right.

10. The perilousness of unapproved ideas or information

1. Members are warned against seeking information from unapproved sources:

As seekers of truth, our safety lies in asking the right questions, in faith, and of the right sources—meaning those who only speak truth: such as the scriptures, prophets, and the Lord through the Holy Ghost.” (Sheri Dew, [Will You Engage in the Wrestle](#))

2. The 7th temple recommend question strongly implies that agreement with those who have contrary teachings is frowned upon. Potential loss of a temple recommend is a deterrent to critical investigation:

Do you support, affiliate with, or agree with any group or individual whose teachings or practices are contrary to or oppose those accepted by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints?

3. Members have been instructed to not attend symposia that include presentations that ...could...detract from [the Church's] mission (General Handbook of Instruction 1999):

The Church warns its members against symposia and other similar gatherings that include presentations that (1) disparage, ridicule, make light of, or are otherwise inappropriate in their treatment of sacred matters or (2) could injure the Church, detract from its mission, or jeopardize its members' well-being. Members should not allow their position or standing in the Church to be used to promote or imply endorsement of such gatherings.

4. Members are to “disconnect” from proselyting of those who have lost their faith:

We should disconnect, immediately and completely, from listening to the proselytizing efforts of those who have lost their faith and instead reconnect promptly with the Holy Spirit. (April 2016 BYU Commencement Address, L. Whitney Clayton, [Getting and Staying Connected](#))

5. Faith-killers should be shunned:

Avoid those who would teardown your faith. Faith-killers are to be shunned. The seeds which they plant in the minds and hearts of men grow like cancer and eat away the Spirit. (Oct 1981 GC, Carlos E. Asay, [Opposition to the Work of God](#))

The example Asay gives of a “faith-killer” is a person who pointed out contradictions in the historical record to a new convert.

LDS members are generally reluctant to consult sources known to be critical of the LDS Church (examples [1](#), [2](#), [3](#), [4](#), [5](#)) or sometimes resources discussing LDS-related topics which are simply unapproved by the LDS Church ([for example](#)). Avoiding potentially faith-damaging information may even extend to reluctance to read official lds.org essays meant to faithfully address criticism of the LDS Church (examples [1](#), [2](#), [3](#), [4](#), [5](#), [6](#), [7](#)).

Expression of ideas countering orthodoxy may be suppressed

1. Expression of thoughts that run counter to teachings may be silenced in open microphone meetings ([example](#)).
2. Members who publicly express reasoned opposition to specific activities of the Church may be asked to remove the video or face loss of their temple recommend (recommends confer upon the holder a number of benefits and publicly signal the

faithfulness of the member to others at family events such as temple weddings) or face Church disciplinary action.

For example, this mother of five was [threatened with the loss of her temple recommend and her Church calling](#) if she did not remove [this video](#) calmly expressing disagreement with the Church's disapproval of same sex marriage.

3. Videos which are critical of the Church have been subject to [concerted copyright take-down attacks](#).
4. Sites with information critical of the LDS Church (e.g., [mormonthink.com](#)) [are blocked on wifi in LDS buildings](#).
5. In his [talk to CES teachers](#) Boyd K. Packer instructed

There is a temptation for the writer or the teacher of Church history to want to tell everything, whether it is worthy or faith promoting or not. Some things that are true are not very useful...In an effort to be objective, impartial, and scholarly, a writer or a teacher may unwittingly be giving equal time to the adversary...The idea that we must be neutral and argue quite as much in favor of the adversary as we do in favor of righteousness is neither reasonable nor safe...It is neither expected nor necessary for us to accommodate those who seek to retrieve references from our sources, distort them, and use them against us."

11. Compartmentalization of information

The compartmentalization of information may hinder a lay member's ability to fairly criticize some doctrine and practices, administrative actions, or policies.

1. Aspects of the temple are obfuscated or kept secret from the uninitiated.

Consider Elder Holland's [reluctance to discuss Mitt Romney's temple oath](#) and compare how believing members answer the question "What are the covenants that are made in a Mormon temple?" (e.g., [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#)) with the direct answer of a former member, [here](#). A typical temple initiate will only be vaguely aware of the extensive promises they will be asked to make in the temple—specific covenant verbiage is only revealed [after the opportunity to withdraw](#) has been offered and refused by the initiate.

2. Handbook 1—the book that defines which activities and beliefs are considered apostate and what kind of discipline should be dispensed for various infractions—is not available to the lay member.
3. Finances have [not been disclosed to the membership since 1959](#).
4. Permission for being sealed to a second wife in the temple [is handled in secret](#).⁴

⁴According to current Church policy, a person may only be legally married to one person at a

12. Monitoring for orthodoxy

Worthiness Interviews

[Worthiness interviews are regularly conducted](#). Those considered unworthy on some level may not be allowed to participate in ordinances, and this may carry some social stigma. Others may notice if a person does not pass or take the sacrament, for instance.

Interviews occur at expected intervals and can lead to intense pressure to conform to the LDS program. Consider, for instance, the pressure to conform felt by [Kip Eliason](#) and Steven [as related by NewNameNoah](#) [warning: last half contains explicit temple references]. A typical adult worthiness interview where the interviewee responds with all the “correct” answers may be found in this [hidden-camera footage](#) [warning: this video is likely to be offensive to many LDS members].

Leaders [were recently instructed](#) that worthiness interviews for prospective missionaries “need to be specific and explicit”.

Although questions are prescribed and must be asked word-for-word, ecclesiastical leaders are given some latitude in how to conduct the interview, particularly when the answer runs counter to the approved answer.⁵

Other kinds of monitoring

Besides worthiness interviews themselves, some other kinds of monitoring for orthodoxy may occur:

1. Files may be kept on students at BYU [cataloging activities that may not be in line with LDS thought](#).
2. The [Strengthening Church Members Committee](#) appears to monitor for threats to orthodoxy.
3. Leaders may be screened for agreement with the status quo in the leadership selection process (above and beyond worthiness interviews). For instance, the recently leaked [Utah Area Seventies Correlation Meeting](#) states “Stake presidents may want to review this policy [the November 2015 policy excluding children of same-sex married couples] with prospective bishops to determine their willingness to support this policy before extending a call.”
4. Leaders may scan social media looking to see if members are properly wearing garments (anecdote [here](#)). Not likely typical, but nor is such behavior discouraged.

time, but a man may be *sealed* to more than one living woman at a time.

⁵Worthiness interviews may vary depending on the leader, but some of them appear to be more invasive than others. Protectldschildren.org has compiled stories of invasive (and sometimes abusive) interviews: <http://protectldschildren.org/read-the-stories/>

13. Significant in-group / out-group emphasis

1. Employment with the Church or a Church owned school, visiting the temple, witnessing marriage/sealing ceremonies, all leadership callings, and other temple service is conditioned on [worthiness interviews](#).
2. The Word of Wisdom prohibits the use of drinks that are integral to sociality in most cultures. FairMormon [writes](#) (2017-08-28):

Adherence to the Word of Wisdom is often a mark of a committed Latter-day Saint and is an outward sign of their separation from the world and their participation in the fellowship of God's covenant people. Non-observance or observance of the Word of Wisdom often reflects one's commitment (or lack thereof) to their covenants with God as well as a possible indicator as to how one might approach other commandments.

3. Beards are not allowed for Church employees, at Church owned universities, and for those working in the temple. Until recently, even those students/employees at BYU of another religious faith who wished to wear a beard for religious reasons [were not allowed to do so](#).
4. Members are [discouraged from getting a tattoo](#).
5. Members use [insider and loaded language](#). Consider the terms: "Court of Love" (disciplinary councils where members may be excommunicated from the Church); "active/less-active"; "apostate" (one who has left the religion for intellectual reasons).

In particular, the doctrine of "eternal families" strongly encourages an in-group/out-group mentality:

1. If a family member chooses another religion [they may not be with their family in the eternities](#).
2. If a member marries a person of another faith tradition and that person never becomes Mormon, the relationships will be viewed as terminating at death (unlike marriages of members in the LDS temple which are [considered the only ones which can persist](#)).

Other examples of the pressure that some feel may be found in the video [Families, Eternity, & Collateral Damage](#) (LDS examples begin at 2:53).

14. No viable alternative after joining

Leaders repeatedly emphasize that there is no viable alternative to life within the LDS Church:

Elder Jeffery R. Holland [taught](#):

We board the Good Ship Zion and sail with her wherever she goes until she comes into that millennial port. We stay in the boat, through squalls and stills, through storms and sunburn, because that is the only way to the promised land. (Also captured [in this meme](#))

And Elder M Russell Ballard recently [taught](#):

If you choose to become inactive or to leave the restored Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, where will you go? What will you do? The decision to ‘walk no more’ with Church members and the Lord’s chosen leaders will have a long-term impact that cannot always be seen right now.

Strongly discourages and stigmatizes dissent

1. Those who disagree with orthodox doctrine [are considered either ignorant or proud](#).
2. When the prophet speaks, the debate is over: “Now, as he speaks to us ... it is as if the Lord Jesus Christ himself were addressing us ... Personal opinions vary. Eternal principles never do. When the prophet speaks ... the debate is over.” ([Aaronic Priesthood Manual 1](#))
3. Those who “sin against the Holy Ghost” may be [wiped from existence](#) as a Son of Perdition. This is typically downplayed, but the possibility may act to discourage those who have had the strongest spiritual confirmations from considering alternative models of LDS truth-claims.
4. As [taught in recent manuals and official Church material](#), those who leave the LDS Church become servants of Satan, become darkened and will be burned, will feel guilt and bitterness, left because they transgressed, will experience darkness and unhappiness, become darkened in their minds, are deceived because of their pride, and are deceived by the false teachings of the world.
5. Members are taught to “shun” and “flee” from those who openly disagree with accepted Church doctrine (see [The Shunning Key](#)). Not only does this counsel help members to avoid ideas or data that might contradict the LDS worldview (listed earlier), it also serves to stigmatize dissenters.

Tragic, disastrous consequences for not following

Although the consequences are [often unnamed](#), the implication is that not following the LDS program results in consequences that are always tragic. For instance, M. Russell Ballard [taught](#):

they leave the Old Ship Zion—they fall away; they apostatize. Tragically, they often experience short-term and eventually long-term unintended consequences, not only for themselves but also for their families.

As an example, [a father-in-law recently wrote to his unbelieving son-in-law](#):

If you remove your name from the church records while you are on this journey of discovery, your eternal family blessings are at risk. They can be restored, but if something happens before then. Just saying.....

... be warned, sometimes if he is having a hard time getting through, he may send a tragedy your way, to help break down the wall that you may have unknowingly built ...

Following every part of the LDS program is seen as vitally important for safety. For instance, Julie Beck tells the story of how drinking coffee was the primary reason her family fell away from the LDS Church even though they were following the other prescribed activities of paying tithing and Sunday worship:

My next story is about a woman I will call Mary. She was the daughter of faithful pioneer parents who had sacrificed much for the gospel. She had been married in the temple and was the mother of 10 children. She was a talented woman who taught her children how to pray, to work hard, and to love each other. She paid her tithing, and the family rode to church together on Sunday in their wagon.

Though she knew it was contrary to the Word of Wisdom, she developed the habit of drinking coffee and kept a coffee pot on the back of her stove. She claimed that “the Lord will not keep me out of heaven for a little cup of coffee.” But, because of that little cup of coffee, she could not qualify for a temple recommend, and neither could those of her children who drank coffee with her. Though she lived to a good old age and did eventually qualify to reenter and serve in the temple, only one of her 10 children had a worthy temple marriage, and a great number of her posterity, which is now in its fifth generation, live outside of the blessings of the restored gospel she believed in and her forefathers sacrificed so much for.

D&C 84:41 reminds all those with the Melchizedek Priesthood (which virtually all male members receive at the age of 18):

But whoso breaketh this covenant after he hath received it, and altogether turneth therefrom, shall not have forgiveness of sins in this world nor in the world to come.

And members are reminded that those who break the marriage covenant will experience “eternal misery” (Eternal Marriage Student Manual: [Covenants and Ordinances](#)).

The Covenants and Ordinances chapter of the Eternal Marriage Student manual [begins with this quote](#) by Boyd K. Packer:

Keep your covenants and you will be safe. Break them and you will not.

Conclusion

A significant number of teachings, cultural factors, and practices align to encourage LDS members to stay members and, outside of the veridicalness of LDS truth-claims, might help to explain why a parent would send their teenager away from home to engage in full-time missionary work for more than a year.

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