



WHY LATTER-DAY SAINT GIRLS MARRY OUTSIDE THE CHURCH: A STUDY & IMPLICATIONS

Deon & Ken Price

Question: Why do Latter-day Saint girls marry non-Mormons?

Answers: "L.D.S. boys are away on missions or at school, and those not away date non-L.D.S. girls." "L.D.S. boys don't date much, but L.D.S. girls want to date." "We never have a chance to see, much less meet a boy at M.I.A." "Often we can't get our parents to provide transportation for special M.I.A. events where we might meet fellows." "Girls who don't date in the Church date wherever they can." "Boys in the ward seem like brothers." "L.D.S. fellows have poor manners." "Non-members are more interesting conversationalists and have more of a spirit of adventure and excitement." "There is no place in the Church for single girls over age twenty-five."

Question: What suggestions do you have to improve the Church social program?

Answers: "Tell L.D.S. boys to date L.D.S. girls for Church activities instead of going stag because they assume the girls will be there." "We want a broader scope of activities than the Church offers." "We'd like to go to more cultural events like plays, concerts, and sports events." "We need more dances." "More sports for girls, and for girls and boys on the same teams." "Let us do more of the planning; use more talents of the fellows and girls in M.I.A." "Put the new members to work—too few are running the show." "Invite girls to the Priest Cottage Meetings." "Mail calendars to everyone about coming events."

Listed above are a few of the questionnaire responses given in a recent survey of young women in a stake of the Church. This article is a summary of the problem, methodology, findings, and discussions of the survey. The material is relevant for today's young people in the transition period as they emerge from their childhood family and get ready to begin their family of adulthood. The article concludes with several broader implications for members of the Church who have research skills.

PROBLEM

The current marriage statistics in Inglewood Stake (California) point to a problem among young adults, especially among young women. In 1965, of the

seventeen members of the Church who married non-members, fifteen were women. These fifteen represent 33% of the women in the stake who were married during the year and the two men represent only 6% of the men married during the year. The totals for the six years from 1960 through 1965 show that although the stake population consists of the same number of single women as men, more than twice as many women married non-members as men, and that more than one third of all the women's marriages were to non-members. These figures are rather alarming in a church whose theology teaches eternal marriage performed in a sacred temple between partners who are both worthy Latter-day Saints.

Because of this problem the stake president, Ralph W. Chalker, in March, 1966, appointed an *ad hoc* committee, composed of one woman from each ward in the stake, to study the reasons L.D.S. women were marrying non-members and to make any appropriate recommendations. This committee, in consultation with a behavioral scientist, developed a pilot study which it hoped would be useful in accomplishing these purposes. The results of this rather extensive pilot study are contained in an unpublished fifty-page report entitled "Why Women in Inglewood Stake Marry Non-Mormons."¹

METHODOLOGY

A questionnaire was developed which included questions on background (church, family, educational, and social), opinions (why L.D.S. women marry non-Mormons, attitudes toward the Church and toward social opportunities in the Church), and suggestions (for improvements in the local Church social program). After receiving limited training to be interviewers, the committee members administered the questionnaire in confidential interviews to a purposive sample of sixty-seven women, ages fourteen to forty-five, from all wards in the stake. Seventeen of the women in the sample are presently married to non-members and fifty were not yet married. The sample included mostly active members of the Church since these were the most easily accessible to the interviewers.²

¹The committee members were Deon N. Price, Chairman, Berta N. de Mik, Lois D. Graham, Lula A. Howard, Beverly A. Petty, and Jeanette L. Turner.

²The results of this survey cannot be widely generalized because of weaknesses in the methodology such as the limited sample. The analysis of the questionnaire responses perhaps would have been more meaningful if they could have been compared to responses by a sample of women who had married members, a sample of male members, and a sample of inactive women married to non-members. Also, those women chosen to be in the sample were not chosen randomly, but rather on a basis of accessibility. However, since there was consensus on many of the findings, it may be that they can be taken more seriously as representing a trend of thinking than the sampling procedure would warrant. Also, some interviewer error can be expected, especially since open-ended questions rather than those with a fixed set of alternative answers were used in the questionnaire. The interviewers were instructed to beware of their own biases, but no reliability check was made on their interviews nor on the coding of the answers to the questions. Reliability was obtained, however, on the tabulations of results. Anonymity was generally guaranteed for the respondents, although in one instance, several younger girls were questioned together in a Sunday School class.

The committee was aware of the weaknesses in the methodology of the survey. Limited funds, research skills, and experience, however, made it impossible to complete this research in an entirely

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Since the time this report was completed in June, 1966, many formal and informal discussions of its findings have been held with adults and with youth. The findings and discussions are summarized in this section.

Background of Respondents

Four-fifths of those married to non-members came from families in which both parents were members of the Church; 68% of the women married to non-members were either not active or only partially active in the Church while the respondent was growing up; about half the sample had not talked often with their parents about marrying in the Church; 71% of the women married to non-members said no one had tried to discourage them from marrying non-members once their plans had been made. Nearly all of the marriages to non-members had been approved by the parents.

It is surprising that so many of the parents of those married to non-members had not talked with them about the importance of marrying in the Church and that so many had given their approval to the marriages. Perhaps the parents did not care. This possibly may be a reflection of the high percentage of inactivity or only partial activity of the families of those married to non-members.

One correlation was found which was statistically significant—if the parents' social life had centered in the Church, the respondent's social life did also. Most of the sample rated themselves active or partially active in the Church while growing up; however, of all the women over age eighteen interviewed, more than half became inactive when they reached Gleaner age.

The statistics show that ages seventeen to eighteen, during the transition between families, is the critical time of decision about whether to remain active in the Church. Because so many who had been active while growing up did marry non-members, it appears that the girls' program failed to have the desired impact on them. When asked if they had received guidance on marriage in the Church, only half of the women married to non-members replied yes; but 95% of the girls not yet married replied yes and indicated that they are mainly receiving this guidance in M.I.A. and Seminary.

About 80% of the respondents over sixteen began dating before age sixteen and 81% of the unmarried (62% of the total sample) did not think the Church should take upon itself the responsibility of making a restriction on dating age. The finding that so many of both the married and the unmarried over age sixteen in the sample dated before age sixteen may raise questions about not allowing girls to date until they reach this age. If young girls do not date until they are sixteen, this leaves very few years when they are able to have parental guidance in their dating habits and dating problems. Most respondents married to non-members (69%) approved the Church dating age restriction even though nearly all of them had begun dating before age sixteen. Perhaps in their ma-

professional fashion. The total time spent was 480 hours, or about eighty hours for each member of the committee. The committee are all active in the Church, holding other ward and stake responsibilities which they were expected to carry out at the same time this study was being completed; all are mothers, and half have professional occupations in addition.

turity, they had forgotten how interested in dating they had been at an early age; or perhaps they had learned how unwise they had been to date so early.

Opinions on Why L.D.S. Girls Marry Non-Mormons

At the age when L.D.S. girls are concerned about marriage, they felt that L.D.S. fellows are often unavailable, away on missions, in the service, or at college. A critical question that arises is "Why aren't the girls also at the same time taking part in similar activities which contribute both to their own development and the growth of others?" It may be that because the girls are so anxious to marry, they marry non-members rather than wait for the suitable Church member to come along. A discrepancy is becoming apparent: the girls' program is directing them almost exclusively toward wifehood and motherhood; whereas, the boys' program is directing young men toward missions, military service, and education, but not husbandhood and fatherhood. The girls should be helped to see the role of mother and wife in proper perspective, as only part, however important, of one's whole life. They need to be taught that although wifehood and motherhood are sanctified, cherished, and self-fulfilling roles, they are not the only roles in life in which a girl can self-actualize and make a contribution.

Because the Church apparently has a greater interest and concern for boys as Priesthood bearers than with girls who are not given the Priesthood, many girls and women feel that they are perceived by men and boys as being relegated to a secondary position and, therefore, in some ways inferior to men. Some girls, therefore, seek what they consider a more equal and less stilted relationship through dating and marrying a non-member.

Another opinion given by the girls in this sample, that L.D.S. boys have less appeal and fewer social skills, may be accurate since there is so much emphasis in the boys' program on sports, scouting, and Priesthood activities, none of which are designed to facilitate effective boy-girl relations. Appearance, dancing skills, etiquette, rules of dating courtesy, knowledge about places to eat and how to order in a restaurant, familiarity with exciting and interesting places to spend an evening, how to be an effective host or hostess, etc., are not ordinarily part of the Church program for boys. Non-members may have more sophistication on these matters, though lacking some of the other character traits which L.D.S. boys are noted for; perhaps training in both areas would prepare the boys to be more attractive to L.D.S. girls.

Unpopularity was given as another reason why girls marry non-members. Girls who mature early often feel out of place at Church, too old for the young group and too young for the older group. Unattractive or obese girls without close girl friends in the Church, or girls not living by Gospel standards, sometimes seek friends outside the Church with whom they feel more comfortable. Dating non-members and falling in love with them and a lack of understanding of the significance of marrying members were additional reasons given often for marrying non-Mormons.

Opinions tabulated from some other questions show that of the women married to non-members, 41% said they would marry a non-member again, 41% said they would not, and 18% said they might. Similarly, 41% of the married

women said their marriages were satisfactory, 41% said they were less than satisfactory, and 18% felt they were partly satisfactory. Of the fifty girls in the sample who are not yet married, only half consider the M-Man and Gleaner organization to be a place where they may meet someone to marry. Another opinion stated by more than half the sample is that the Church social program for teenagers and young adults needs improvement.

Suggestions for Improvement

The survey committee made the following suggestions for L.D.S. girls: the girls need guidance in establishing their values in life. This includes preparing them to meet the world and people in it who have values different from theirs; helping them to know how to handle themselves in disturbing situations; helping those who take Church teachings so seriously that they are "tied up in knots" to relax and have fun in life; and having young girls understand that their callings in life are as important as those for boys. Stake presidents and bishops need to spend time with girls in groups as well as with boys, and to know them individually by name as well as they know their deacons, teachers, and priests. Bishops could help the girls who need special counseling or therapy by calling on the services of professionally qualified Church members or providing funds for consultation with non-Church experts.

The overwhelming suggestion from the women in the sample for improvement in the local Church social program was to make possible much more activity of greater variety conducive to social interaction, especially between boys and girls in all age groups. They want more activity on ward, interward, stake, interstake, and regional levels.

Older adult leaders often underestimate the energy of youth and, therefore, perhaps encourage fewer activities than youth would plan for themselves. There were requests to have more regularly scheduled casual and informal activities and also to schedule more activities on the weekends when boys and girls most often seek social activity. More social experiences were recommended for the twelve to fifteen age group who are excluded from so much just when their group needs to feel accepted, make friends, and find their place in the Church. Because single people over twenty-five do not presently fit into the existing Church programs, a number of the older unmarried persons in the sample urged that a Church-wide program be established for them. The M-Man and Gleaner organization as now organized does not have attraction for them, and local Church clubs on a regional basis have not been entirely successful.

Next to the need for more activities, the respondents to the questionnaire emphasized the importance of young people themselves planning and carrying out their own activities. Perhaps Church organizations need the mission field atmosphere in which more members are actually relied upon—"Come and make" rather than "Come and partake." In discussions about the report, young people have expressed a feeling that no one usually "takes them up on it" when they are asked to express their own ideas, or that no one wants ideas from youth which conflict with the plans of adult leaders, and so they often are reticent to give their opinions. They want much more opportunity to grow by doing and have more room to learn by having a chance to make mistakes.

Adults need to give youth more responsibilities, to train them with the skills to carry out these responsibilities, and to provide them with experiences in facing ward and community problems.

Another frequent suggestion was to teach social manners and dancing, especially to the boys. This included planning special activities with the aim of teaching teenagers how to behave like ladies and gentlemen, as in the teenage dances and clubs sponsored by civic and society groups for this purpose. It was also suggested that L.D.S. boys should be instructed that they are responsible that girls in their wards are asked to dance at dances and are having a good time generally at all mixed activities.

Another request stated often was to get better teachers and better advisors who are more intellectually stimulating. One possible recommendation regarding this request is to place those who are best qualified in teaching positions rather than having such people in executive positions. The authors feel "best qualified" teachers would be those with teaching skill and knowledge to teach but with the ability to let young people lead themselves, with a concern that Christ-like behavior be the goal of each young person, and with a desire to teach.

The final suggestion from the sample was to allow current styles of dancing and better music of the popular type. Teenagers continue to be interested in dancing to the kind of music which their generation prefers even though it may have an unpleasant effect on older members of the stakes. In the nineteen-forties, the dancing was too close together and today it is too far apart! No easy recommendation is possible on this point or others discussed above except to hear what young people who are in the transition period between families have to say before making arbitrary decisions about their problems.

IMPLICATIONS

The critical contribution of this research, in spite of its obvious methodological weaknesses,¹ is to open the pathway for greater response from young people. In the February 4, 1967, issue of the *Church News*, Lawrence E. Nelson, director of the Commission on Youth Activities for the Lutheran Church in America, is quoted as saying: "Let's find some ways to let our young people speak to us of the realities of their world—it's the real one, you know." There are many persons in our wards and stakes who have the training and interest to obtain more of this kind of feedback from our young people. Behavioral scientists with backgrounds in psychology, social psychology, sociology, economics, political science, and other areas have the methodological skills to be of great use as special advisors to bishops or stake presidents—with research as their primary Church responsibility. It is unfortunate that many of these professionals have not been asked to contribute their special skills to the Church.

There are three interrelated implications which we feel come out of this survey and discussion of its findings:

1. Once it is recognized that problem areas of the type discussed exist in the

¹There are several benefits from this survey in that the problem now has been more clearly defined, and in future research of this kind the coding categories have been well enough established so that closed-ended rather than open-ended questions could be used.

Church and are identified, research is essential to obtain detailed feedback from those involved.

2. The skills necessary to research the problem areas have been acquired by many professional individuals who are members of the Church.
3. The authors believe that persons with both skills and a commitment to the Church have a dual responsibility: to do research in the problem areas of their interest and expertise on the conceptual level, and to work in Church positions where their insight and understanding can be applied on the practical level.

