BEYOND DELAY: A QUALITATIVE EXAMINATION OF THE SUCCESSFUL

DELAY OF POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION OF LATTER-DAY SAINT

RETURNED MISSIONARIES

By

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To Mom and Dad, my first teachers.

To Christy, my eternal classmate.

To Isaac, James, Matthew, Samuel, Adam, Joseph, and Rachel, my favorite pupils.

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Abstract

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This qualitative study fills a void in the research on postsecondary education

delayers by examining the postsecondary experiences of six male Latter-day Saint Return

Missionaries from the North Texas area who delayed enrolling in college in favor of

serving two year missions for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. As a

group, Latter-day Saints have shown to be successful at attaining bachelor's degrees

despite the risks of delay. But until this study, little has been understood about their

experiences. Using Bronfenbrenner and Morris's (2006) Bioecological Model of Human

Development as a conceptual framework for the coding and analysis of the data, findings

showed that unlike most delayers, Latter-day Saint delayers tend to exhibit the

characteristics of traditional on-time college enrollees, in that they possess academic

readiness and momentum (Adelman, 2006).

Their decisions to delay college are strongly influenced by their home and church

environments. Despite choosing to delay, each participant aspired and expected to earn

bachelor's degrees after their missionary service. They were able to do so in under four

years from the time of their initial postsecondary enrollment, and despite initially

enrolling in community colleges, and transferring to four-year universities, challenges

that deter other delayers.

Each of the participants perceived the time spent as a missionary was the most

significant influence on their degree achievement because of the attributes and skills they

developed during that time. Developed skills and attributes included: critical thinking and

time management skills; determination and perseverance; leadership and communication

skills; maturity and perspective on life; personal accountability and self-discipline; study

and lifelong learning skills; and work ethic and capability. In addition, the findings of this

study showed that aggressive attendance patterns, and maintaining financial balance

through work and financial aid contributed to their success.

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CHAPTER 1

BEYOND DELAY: A QUALITATIVE EXAMINATION OF THE SUCCESSFUL

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RETURNED MISSIONARIES

Over the past 20 years, there has been a substantial increase in postsecondary

enrollment, especially among non-traditional students (Aud, KewalRamani, & Frohlich,

2011). Yet, graduation rates have not increased accordingly; thus, for the majority of U.S.

postsecondary students, college degree completion continues to be an elusive

accomplishment (Ginder & Kelly-Reid, 2013; Gururaj, 2011; Lauff & Ingels, 2013). For

example, the recent results of a national 10-year study of high school sophomores showed

72% of them expected to earn a bachelor's degree (Ingels, Burns, Chen, Cataldi, &

Charleston, 2005). However, the 2012 follow-up study showed only 33% of those

students had actually earned a bachelor's degree or higher—a full eight years beyond

their high school graduation (Lauff & Ingels, 2013).

Delaying postsecondary education (PSE) is one factor educational researchers

have identified as having a negative effect on student graduation rates (Aud et al., 2011;

Bozick & DeLuca, 2005; Horn, Cataldi, & Sikora, 2005; Niu & Tienda, 2013; Rowan-

Kenyon, 2007). For the majority of delayers, poor academic preparation or inadequate

financial resources create barriers to postsecondary enrollment (Bozick & DeLuca, 2005;

Hearn, 1992; Horn et al., 2005; Kirst & Venezia, 2004; McGrath, Donovan, Schaier-

Peleg, & Van Buskirk, 2005). While delays linked to these factors are often unplanned,

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Wells and Lynch (2012) found that 11% of college-bound seniors intentionally delayed their PSE.

Students who postponed their enrollment did so because of family formation, full-time entry into the work force, military service, or other opportunities researchers have yet to explore (Bozick & DeLuca, 2011).With the number of high school graduates choosing not to enroll immediately in college on the rise (Niu & Tienda, 2013), many researchers have issued calls for further research into the rationale and experiences of those who plan to delay their postsecondary education, and do so by using qualitative methods (Bozick & DeLuca, 2005; Goldrick-Rab & Han, 2011; Gururaj, 2011; Rowan-Kenyon, 2007; Wells & Lynch, 2012). Specifically, Bozick and DeLuca (2011) contend, "the motives guiding transitions out of high school are shaped by a range of factors that extend beyond academic and economic resource constraints, and therefore deserve further scrutiny" (p. 1261).

Regardless of the causes of delay, whether it is planned or circumstantial, U.S. studies examining the outcomes of delayed enrollment paint a picture of educational jeopardy for those who do not enroll into college the semester following their senior year of high school (Hearn, 1992; Horn et al., 2005; Niu & Tienda, 2013; Rowan-Kenyon, 2007). Horn et al. (2005) stated that students who delay college enrollment earn postsecondary degrees "at lower rates" (p. xii), and "are at considerable risk of not completing" college than those who enroll immediately after they graduate from high school (p. iii). According to Bozick and DeLuca (2005), delayers are 64% less likely to graduate with a four-year degree.

Research has found that students most likely to delay college enrollment are first-generation college students, male, non-White, speak English as a second language, come from low socioeconomic circumstances, and have lower educational expectations than their peers (Aud et al., 2011; Hearn, 1992; Bozick & DeLuca, 2005; Horn et al., 2005; Niu & Tienda, 2013; Rowan-Kenyon, 2007). Horn et al. (2005) found that once delayers do enroll in college, their institutional choices tend to be in vocational schools and/or community colleges. This may be an appropriate postsecondary choice for those seeking vocational certifications or associate degrees; yet, for those seeking a bachelor's degree or higher, enrollment in community colleges may threaten their degree attainment (Long & Kurlaender, 2009; Niu & Tienda, 2013). For instance, Bozick and DeLuca (2005) found that those students whose initial postsecondary enrollment was at a community college or vocational school were three times less likely to earn a bachelor's degree.

Despite the negative effects associated with delaying PSE on bachelor degree attainment, members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints[1], an increasing sub-population of postsecondary delayers, seem to be less affected by the risks of delay. More than ever before, Latter-day Saint young men and women are choosing to postpone college enrollment in favor of missionary service for the Church after high school graduation (Monson, 2013). In part, the increase is in response to a policy change the Church made in October of 2012, which lowered the minimum age requirement for

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[1] Members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints are often referred to by the nickname, Mormons. However, throughout this study, they will be referred to as "Latter-day Saints." When referring to the Church, the title will be shortened to "the Church" or "the Church of Jesus Christ." These referencing choices are in keeping with the requested usage found in the Church's Style Guide (http://www.mormonnewsroom.org/style-guide).

missionary service to 18 years old for men and 19 years old for women (Monson, 2013). Prior to the policy change, there were approximately 58,500 missionaries serving worldwide. One year later, the number exceeded 80,000 (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2013).

During their missionary service, which is 24 months long for men and 18 months long for women, all education, employment, relationships, hobbies, etc., are put on hold (Condie, 1992). Upon returning from their missions, many of these *returned missionaries*, as they are referred to within Latter-day Saint populations (Condie, 1992), enroll into postsecondary institutions. They attain undergraduate degrees at double the rate of the national average (Albrecht & Heaton, 1998; Chadwick, Top, & McClendon, 2010; McClendon & Chadwick, 2004). Specifically, McClendon and Chadwick (2004) found that 37% of Latter-day Saint men and 45% of Latter-day Saint women who had served Church missions had successfully completed an undergraduate degree, while the national average at the time of the study was 18%. These findings are significant especially when considering that the national averages included both delayers and graduates who had enrolled on-time.

Yet, there are few studies examining Latter-day Saint returned missionaries as postsecondary delayers. While previous studies on Latter-day Saint returned missionaries have determined that their service has a positive quantifiable effect towards their academic success (Albrecht & Heaton, 1998; Chadwick et al., 2010; McClendon & Chadwick, 2004), little is understood as to why after delaying enrollment they persist to earn bachelor's degrees when other groups of delayers do not.

Problem Statement

Thus, while we know that attaining a college degree is a formidable challenge (Lauff & Ingels, 2013), it is even more difficult for those who delay their enrollment (Aud et al., 2011; Bozick & DeLuca, 2005; Doyle & Gorbunov, 2010; Horn et al., 2005). Furthermore, there is a growing number of college-bound seniors who are intentionally choosing to delay continuing their postsecondary education (Niu & Tienda, 2013; Wells & Lynch, 2012). Latter-day Saints are one group that are seeing significant increases in enrollment delays (Monson, 2013). Accordingly, Latter-day Saint returned missionaries provide a rich opportunity to examine how they contend with the issues that come with delaying PSE and how they have successfully matriculated to graduation. Presently, there is little research examining this population as PSE delayers.

Like most national studies on delaying PSE, previous research on delay and the academic success of Later-day Saint students were conducted using quantitative research methods that focused on predicting the most likely reasons for delay, and generally profiling the type of students that are most likely not to enroll into college immediately after high school graduation. However, the findings of these studies do not offer a deep, nuanced understanding as to the college experience of these successful students to better understand how they were able to attain a bachelor's degree after an initial delay.

Purpose of the Study

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to examine the postsecondary pathway of successful Latter-day Saint returned missionaries by seeking to uncover how they navigate the college experience after a delay and what factors they perceived as

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contributing to their degree attainment. Thus, data were collected and analyzed by

qualitative research methods (Creswell, 2013) and through the lens of Bronfenbrenner

and Morris's (2006) Bioecological Model of Human Development. By understanding

how this sub-population has overcome the challenges of PSE delay, implications from

this study may contribute to future research, policy, practices, and theory that will aid

other PSE delayers.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

1. How do Latter-day Saint returned missionaries describe their
   postsecondary experience?

2. What do they account for their success in attaining an undergraduate
   degree?

3. How do they perceive the effect their enrollment delay had on their degree
   attainment?

4. In what ways can Bronfenbrenner and Morris's (2006) Bioecological
   Model of Human Development help to explain Latter-day Saint returned
   missionaries' academic success after a postsecondary delay?

Personal Biography

A common issue when using qualitative methods is that the researcher's personal

biases can blind him or her throughout the research process (Creswell, 2013; Gall, Gall,

& Borg, 2003; Maxwell, 2013). With this in mind, the following section is a brief

personal biography that seeks to place me within this research and acknowledge personal biases.

In 1994, after my freshman year of college at the University of Utah, I put my educational pursuits on hold to serve a two-year mission for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, in the Baltic state of Estonia. While there, I spent the majority of my time striving to share with others the joy I found in the gospel of Jesus Christ. Because my mission call was focused on the Russian minority in Estonia, I was required to learn to speak Russian and to come to understand the Russian and Estonian cultures. Those two years dramatically shaped every facet of my life since then. Upon returning home from my mission, my schooling was impacted in both positive and negative ways.

Because my missionary service went from October of 1994 to October 1996, I did not return home until after the fall semester had already begun. Hence, I could not enroll in college until the following January, a full two and a half years from when I was last enrolled. This added delay created hurdles that I was not anticipating upon returning home. Prior to leaving, I was the beneficiary of the Terrell H. Bell Teaching Scholarship through the Utah State Board of Regents, which covered my full tuition for four years. Both the board and the university had deferment policies, which held my scholarship and admission status in place for two years, but the added delay put my deferment at risk. Having spent all my personal money on missionary service, I was counting on that scholarship for my college tuition. Fortunately for me, my parents were able to labor through the policy problems with both the university and the Board of Regents before I returned to the U.S. and resumed my schooling.

Despite these unforeseen challenges, the positive effects of my missionary service outweighed the challenges mentioned above. Because of the time I spent living in Estonia and working with Russians, upon my return to school I was able to test out of my foreign language requirements and earn 16 credits of Russian—a savings of both time and tuition. In addition, I had gained a better sense of how to handle my finances and how to meet my needs living away from home. I gained interpersonal skills, which were very helpful in working with faculty and peers and even landed me an additional scholarship. I also found I was better able to handle adversity and to persevere through difficult times. Mostly, I gained a sense of direction and purpose for my education and my life beyond college.

While I acknowledge that my mission impacted my academic success, I am not suggesting that it was the sole factor. For example, I was the fourth son in a family of five boys. Four of us served missions and graduated from college. Thus, I had the advantage of learning from the examples of my brothers. Most of my high school peer group delayed or disrupted their education for missionary service and returned back to successfully pursue their degrees as well. Thus, my family and peer groups provided a stabilizing force for my postsecondary pathway.

Other factors that played a role in my academic success include the many ways that I was involved with extra-curricular groups. For instance, I was a member of the marching band both before and after my mission, was highly involved with intramural sports, and eventually became the team manager for the University of Utah women's

volleyball team. Each of these experiences were rich and rewarding in their own ways and surely helped me in my path towards a degree.

A final contributing factor was my membership in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints; it played a vital role in my outlook and perseverance in school. Even though I lived away from my home congregation, I was able to quickly find a congregation on campus made up of other college-going young adults. Many of them participated in the Lambda Delta Sigma fraternities and sororities sponsored through the Institute of Religion program of the Church. My participation with these groups and the Latter-day Saint Student Association gave me plenty of opportunities to continue to provide service and volunteer time in positive ways like I had done as a missionary.

The other part of my interest in this topic stems from my professional role as a leader for the Church Educational System of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. As such, I work with Latter-day Saints students on a daily basis. The vast majority of those I work with are high school-aged youth, their parents, and Church leaders. I also work with college-aged young adults, many of whom have served missions or are contemplating doing so.

As a result of my own personal experience as a returned missionary and because of my professional work with Latter-day Saint youth and young adults, I have reflected on the postsecondary delay phenomenon and have sought to understand how others succeeded after a prolonged delay, what their motivations have been, and what their experiences have entailed. The findings from this study will help me counsel them about their postsecondary pursuits.

Significance of the Study

This qualitative study is positioned to be a unique and needed contribution to the field based upon the methodological design and sample population. While a qualitative study of Latter-day Saint returned missionaries who successfully graduated from college cannot provide broad generalizations to all students who delay PSE, the insights gained from this sub-population do have implications for research, policy implementation, institutional practices, and theory about those who purposefully postpone PSE.

From this research on Latter-day Saint returned missionaries who successfully delayed their college enrollment, more can be understood concerning what institutional policies and practices either aided or hindered their academic success. Findings from this study could benefit policy makers and institution administrators as they establish policies and practices that seek to influence the academic success of returning veterans, transfer students, non-traditional students, and other groups that have delayed or deferred their enrollment. Lastly, by applying the Bioecological Model of Human Development (Brofenbrenner & Morris, 2006) to Latter-day Saint delayers, a sub-population not previously examined under this lens, an understanding of the theory can be extended.

Summary

The risks associated with delaying postsecondary education are well documented. There is also a clear profile of those students most likely to delay PSE. Some researchers have shown that there is an increasing number of students purposefully choosing to delay their PSE; thus, there is a growing need to understand delaying postsecondary enrollment beyond socioeconomic and academic preparation factors. Beyond the causes and effects

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of delay, there is a need to understand how delayers overcome the risks once they enter a postsecondary pathway.

Although the field is saturated with quantitative explanations and predictive factors expressed in broad, normative terms, there is a limited amount of qualitative research on delaying PSE seeking to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences of delayers. Thus, the purpose of this study is to conduct a qualitative study examining Latter-day Saint returned missionaries. As a sub-population, they are not unique in delaying their postsecondary pathway, but rather they have unusually high rates of college enrollment and graduation. They are consistently overcoming the risks of delay and succeeding academically by attaining degrees. Previous research has identified factors for their academic success but have not offered the deep understanding of their experiences beyond delay from which others can learn.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this literature review is to provide an overview of relevant

research with regards to delaying postsecondary education. To accomplish that objective,

this chapter is presented in three sections. The first section presents findings describing

how postsecondary delay has been defined and analyzed in past studies with the known

consequences of delay, as well as the causes, predictors, and choices of delay given. The

second section reviews research focused on the college experience of those that delay,

with a specific focus on the college experiences and academic outcomes of Latter-day

Saint returned missionaries. This literature review concludes with a brief summary of

what conceptual frameworks have been used to examine PSE delay in the past and gives

the rationale for using Bronfenbrenner and Morris's (2006) Bioecological Model of

Human Developmental as the conceptual framework for this study.

Delaying Postsecondary Education

Compared to the vast amount of research on postsecondary education, studies

examining postsecondary education (PSE) delay are relatively few. However, over the

last 30 years there has been an increase of research examining the postsecondary

enrollment patterns of high school graduates. With each study there have been minor

variations in the definition of delaying PSE and differences in the length of time for

which each study sample has been analyzed. As these studies tend to build on each other,

for the purposes of this review, they will be taken in chronological order, thus showing

how an understanding of this topic has developed over time. Also, to provide distinction

between the units of analysis, the articles will be separated between national and statewide studies. The earliest studies reviewed examine PSE delay on a national level, which is followed by a synthesis of the more recent research conducted at a state and local level.

National Studies

While not the earliest study on postsecondary delay, Hearn (1992) is considered seminal in the field for responding to previous calls for more specific research on delaying students as a distinct sub-population (for earlier studies see Bean & Metzner, 1985; Carroll, 1989; Eckland & Henderson, 1981; Marini, 1984; Tinto, 1987). Seeking to identify distinct characteristics between those "traditional" students who enroll in college the semester after their high school graduation and the increasing population of "non-traditional" students, which includes PSE delayers, Hearn (1992) conducted descriptive and discriminant analyses, as well as logistic regression of 8,203 high school graduates from the national High School and Beyond data set of 1980/1982 (HS&B 1980/1982). For his study, he defined delay as initial enrollment occurring one to two years after high school graduation. Delay was then analyzed against the following independent variables: demographic (i.e., race/ethnicity, gender, parental SES, and family size), academic (i.e., high-school academic track, tested ability, and high-school grades), and educational aspirations (i.e., the lowest amount of education with which participants would be satisfied).

During the two-year time frame of the study, from 1980-1982, 53% of the high school graduates enrolled immediately into a postsecondary institution and 10% delayed

their enrollment. From his analysis, Hearn profiled delayers as most likely being Black, male, from low socioeconomic families, and having graduated from a low academically intense high school. He also noted that the delayers' educational expectations were lower and that they tended to enroll in vocational or community colleges at a higher rate than those who enrolled on-time.

Hearn's (1992) research, while setting the stage for future studies on PSE delay, especially by providing a descriptive national profile of delayers, is limited by the narrow scope of observation (Bozick & DeLuca, 2005). By looking at students' enrollment trends with only a two-year window from graduation, it is unknown how many of the 37% non-enrollees from Hearn's study actually ended up enrolling at a later date. Furthermore, Hearn's study does not offer any insight into postsecondary educational outcomes of delayers.

By lengthening the observation time frame of PSE delayers, Bozick and DeLuca (2005) positioned their study to be one of the first to ask whether or not delaying one's postsecondary enrollment affects eventual degree completion. Their study pushed the observation time out to eight years beyond high school graduation by drawing data from the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988 (NELS:88). The NELS study began with a cohort of 24,599 eighth graders and followed up with them as sophomores (1990), as seniors (1992), two years after high school graduation (1994) and finally, six years later (2000).

Bozick and DeLuca (2005) initially set up their research by sharpening the definition of delay to mean a seven-month enrollment delay from the time of high school

graduation. This provided greater clarity to the population being examined from Hearn's (1992) research, because it placed delayers, at a minimum, one semester/quarter behind their graduating high school class. They used many of the same variables as Hearn (1992) in their multivariate analysis of the data (n = 11,366, high school seniors in 1992); namely, delayed enrollment, degree completion, institutional type; and a series of covariates, such as SES, academic marginality based on math and reading scores, and basic demographic variables.

Two variables were unique to Bozick and DeLuca's (2005) study, however. The first was life course transitions to adulthood, which asked participants about the timing of a possible marriage and whether or not they had a child before enrolling into college. The inclusion of this life course variable was to determine if transitions to the role of spouse and/or parent factored into delaying PSE. The second variable of note referred to the region of the country participants lived and attended school. The intent was to determine if postsecondary delay varied by regions of the country. The inclusion of these variables, in addition to the lengthier observation time, yielded a broader understanding of delaying PSE while at the same time reinforcing Hearn's (1992) profile of delayers.

Bozick and DeLuca's (2005) findings reaffirmed that delayers come from low SES, are less academically prepared for college, tend to be Black, male, and choose non-four year postsecondary institutions. They also found that delayers tend to transition to other roles that inhibit PSE enrollment, such as parent or spouse. Furthermore, they found that delayers were more likely to come from the South than other regions of the country (Northeast = 16%; Midwest = 24%; West = 22%; South = 33%; unidentified = 5%).

Additionally, with the study's time frame extended to eight years post-high school graduation, Bozick and DeLuca (2005) were able to demonstrate that 83% of the high school class of 1992 had enrolled in a postsecondary institution, with 16% of those delaying their enrollment, whereas Hearn's (1992) two-year window yielded only 63% of the class of 1982 that had enrolled in college. These findings seem to demonstrate that a two-year study window beyond high school graduation is not sufficient when striving to account for those who delay postsecondary enrollment. While other factors may have played a role in the 20% difference between the two cohorts, the 6% increase of delayers from the 1992 cohort seems to indicate that because they had more time in which to enroll, their overall enrollment numbers were higher than in the earlier study.

Beyond simply describing a profile of delayers, Bozick and DeLuca (2005) were among the first to show the effects of delay on degree completion (see also Jacobs & King, 2002). Most notably, they found that those who delay PSE by at least seven months fall at risk of not completing a bachelor's degree by 64%. Additionally, those students who first enrolled in a four-year institution were three times more likely to attain a bachelor's degree than those who chose community colleges or vocational schools. Not everyone enrolls in college seeking a bachelor's degree, but for those who do, these findings have become a warning voice.

Horn, Cataldi, and Sikora (2005) expanded the study window even more than Bozick and DeLuca (2005). Horn et al.'s study relied on data from three national studies: the 1999-2000 National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS:2000, n = 44,500), the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988 (NELS:88/2000, n = 12,000), and the

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1996/01 Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study (BPS:96/01, n = 9,000).

The researchers set up their sample into four observable groups: 1-year delay[2], 2-4 year

delay, 5-9 years delay, and 10+ years of delay. The first two groups were labeled "short-

term" delayers and the last two were deemed "long-term" delayers. They then analyzed

the data relying on *t* tests, ANOVA, and multivariate methods to determine, among other

things, if length of delay had an impact on degree attainment.

      Horn et al.'s (2005) findings confirmed those of Hearn (1992) and Bozick and

DeLuca (2005) regarding the profile of delayers, who tended to lack academic

preparation and financial means to enroll and persist in college. They also confirmed the

institutional choice of delayers as being non-baccalaureate granting schools and that life

situation such as family formation did play a role in PSE delay, even in the short-term.

Furthermore, the delayers tended to both work and attend college part-time.

      Interestingly, as the length of delay increased, the impact on degree completion

was not negatively impacted as Horn et al. (2005) hypothesized. Instead, the financial

obstacles to delay were reduced over time, because the delayer had spent more time in the

labor market. While their college enrollment was delayed, they still went on to graduate,

in part, because they were more financially secure.

      Horn et al. (2005) did find other characteristics regarding this population. For

instance, as length of delay increased so did the likelihood of the student being White.

Thus, they concluded that because short-term delayers tended to be minorities, they were

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[2] This group included those who delayed as little as one semester of college, which aligns
with the definition of delay that Bozick and DeLuca (2005) used.

at a greater disadvantage than long-term delayers. Also, they surmised that long-term delayers, once they enrolled in college may be doing so with a differing set of motivations that assisted them to degree attainment, such as seeing the market-value a degree has in the work place.

Continuing chronologically, Adelman's (2006) approach to understanding delay brought the scope of research back to the eight-year window provided by the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988 (NELS:88/2000; n = 12,000), but he added to that dataset the high school and college transcripts of sample participants. Thus, in addition to including demographic background, he performed an episodic investigation at several key points from high school to college completion as follows: 1) high school history (i.e., course taking, class rank, GPA), 2) postsecondary entrance (i.e., timing of enrollment, institution type), 3) first postsecondary year history (i.e., freshman GPA, credits earned), 4) factors of financing in early college years (i.e., financial aid accepted), 5) postsecondary attendance patterns (i.e., number of institutions attended, course loads), 6) extended postsecondary history (i.e., change of major, cumulative GPA), and 7) the final model, with complete academic history. PSE delay was defined as postsecondary enrollment no earlier than seven months after high school graduation.

The episodic method yielded several intriguing findings that helped to unravel why the national profile of delayers tended to be holding constant. While previous studies (Bozick & DeLuca, 2005; Hearn, 1992; Horn et al., 2005) showed that a lack of academic preparation was predictive of delay, Adelman (2006) exposed specific differences between those who enrolled immediately after high school with those who delayed.

When comparing high school transcripts of on-time PSE enrollees with delayers, the curricular intensity of a student's high school years was the most significant factor of pre-PSE history that led to attaining a bachelor's degree. That intensity was determined by identifying the highest level of English, math, and science courses taken during a student's high school career. The students' curriculum was defined as being more intense if the highest course levels were taken earlier during their time in high school. Thus, a student's curriculum was determined to be more intense if STEM courses were at a higher level and taken earlier in their school career.

There was an additional finding relative to the academic preparation of on-time students' versus delayers, namely the use of dual credits and summer courses prior to actual institutional enrollment. Adelman (2006) found that those students who had taken advantage of pre-college options to thereby accumulate at least 20 credits by the end of their first year of college were significantly more likely to graduate college with a degree in hand. Since delayers tend to be traditionally underserved students in K-12, and since traditionally underserved students attend high schools that do not offer dual-credit classes or summer courses, their academic preparation is already disadvantaged. Thus, their academic momentum begins to slide before finishing high school. Being less prepared to enter college, they delay, in part because their test scores, high school rank, and GPA do not qualify them entrance into most four-year institutions. Thus, when they finally choose to enroll, they tend to choose institutions with open enrollment policies, such as vocational schools and community colleges (Adelman, 2006).

Adelman (2006) concurred with Bozick and DeLuca's (2005) risk assessment that

the longer students wait to enroll, the chances of earning a bachelor's degree decreases, in

part, because of the loss of academic momentum explained above. These findings,

however, contradict what Horn et al. (2005) found regarding long-term delayers. An

explanation for the contradiction may be the difference in the unit of analysis used by

each study. Adelman focused on academic preparation while Horn et al. focused on

financial capabilities. Nevertheless, Adelman argued that academic momentum, while

difficult to regain, can be achieved by delayers with institutional support and

"considerable effort" academically (p. 50).

Three additional points were made in Adelman's (2006) study. First, most

delayers initially enroll part-time, something he described as being "hazardous" for

degree attainment (p. xxi). Second, nearly 60% of all students experience an institutional

transfer during their postsecondary experience. Other researchers demonstrated that

students who transfer face further obstacles towards degree attainment, than those who

stay at the same institution (Kirk-Kuwaye & Kirk-Kuwaye, 2007; Laanan, 2001;

Tobolowsky & Cox, 2012). Thus, for those delayers who also experience a transfer, they

essentially experience a double-whammy of risks for completion. Third, students who

"swirl" between institutions, or go back and forth between community colleges and

universities, are also less likely to earn a degree. Thus, the chances of earning a degree

are less likely if delayers enroll in non-baccalaureate granting institutions in the first

place, which has been shown to be detrimental for attaining a bachelor's degree (Horn et

al., 2005), and then only enroll part-time, transfer institutions, or swirl from institution to institution.

Adelman's (2006) work has laid a firm groundwork for understanding the academic challenges facing the majority of those who delay their postsecondary education. However, although his research helped to explain why some students delay PSE and struggle to regain academic momentum, it did not include social or psychological variables, such as the post-high school experience of family formation or workforce entry. Rowan-Kenyon (2007) contends these variables "may play a greater role in the decision to delay enrollment than high school characteristics and experiences play" (p. 210).

Using a conceptual model that drew upon background characteristics (i.e., SES, race, and gender), human capital (i.e., academic prep and achievement), social capital (i.e., parental involvement in education), cultural capital (i.e., parental educational attainment), and financial resources (i.e., family income, tuition, and financial aid), Rowan-Kenyon (2007) limited her study to just the high school graduates of the 1992 class from the NELS: 1988-2000 data set. Her definition of delay was the same as Bozick and DeLuca (2005) and Horn et al. (2005)—enrolling no sooner than seven months after high school graduation. Her observation of delay was the eight-year period provided by the NELS data set. Thus, she considered anyone who was not yet enrolled by the year 2000 as a non-enrollee.

Rowan-Kenyon (2007) determined that a mother's postsecondary expectations were a strong cultural predictor of PSE enrollment patterns. For example, 85% of those

who enrolled on-time were expected to earn at least a bachelor's degree by their mothers. In contrast, delayers' mothers expected those outcomes only 68% of the time and non-enrollees only received such expectations 42% of the time. Because Horn et al. (2005) found that delayed enrollment can occur well beyond eight years after graduation, Rowan-Kenyon's (2007) findings about non-enrollees may have implications for long-term delayers too.

Findings of Rowan-Kenyon's (2007) study confirmed the academic and socioeconomic challenges delayers face posited by earlier research. She also uncovered social and cultural factors that led to delaying PSE—an aspect of delay that had only been explored minimally in the past (see Cabrera & La Nasa, 2001; Perna, 2000). Yet, while her quantitative work brings to light the role of social and cultural factors, both the quality and the specific interactions parents had with teachers, school administrators, and their children were lacking. Additionally, Rowan-Kenyon's study did not look at the academic outcomes of delayers, something she acknowledged is needed within the community of scholarly research, specifically, "the [college] experience of students who delay enrollment . . . including their persistence to degree completion" (p. 212).

Goldrick-Rab and Han (2011) explored socioeconomic differences that exist between PSE delayers and those who enroll on-time, just like Adelman (2006) investigated academic differences between the two groups. Specifically, Goldrick-Rab and Han sought to understand if high school academic course-taking could be used to observe SES differences among delayers and whether or not timing of family formation

among different SES groups factored into enrollment delay, thus extending Bozick and

DeLuca's (2005) study.

Like the bulk of the studies thus far reviewed, Goldrick-Rab and Han (2011)

relied upon the NELS of 1988. They used logistic regressions to highlight and explain the

differences between those high school graduates from the bottom 20% socioeconomic

status (SES) (n=850), from those in the top 20% (n=2,165). Delayers were defined as

those who enrolled in PSE no sooner than eight months after high school graduation. The

independent variables included math course taking (i.e., Algebra II or more, total math

credits, highest math completed overall); science course taking (i.e., total science credits,

core lab science, at least one core), high school type (i.e., public, private); high school

performance (i.e., GPA, 12th grade test scores, 8th grade math test scores); demographics

(i.e., race, gender, SES); parental expectations (i.e., at the time the student was in 8th

grade); and family formation (i.e., age at first marriage, age at first childbirth).

Overall, Goldrick-Rab and Han's (2011) research showed that 31% of the

students in the bottom 20% SES delayed college enrollment compared to only 5% of the

top 20% SES. Also, the length of delay differed between groups with students from the

bottom 20% SES delaying for an average length of 13 months compared to only 4.5

months for students in the top 20% SES. The descriptive statistics, coupled with the

results of the logistic regressions, showed that low-SES students did take less advanced

high school science and math courses and form families earlier than those who were

high-SES, which may explain the 26% enrollment gap between the bottom and top SES

delayers. The researchers expected that because low-SES students marry earlier than

high-SES students that the impact would be easy to observe with their data analysis. Surprisingly, they found that marrying before enrolling in college was equally predictive of delaying PSE across SES groups. However, childbearing did not have a similar effect. Among those students in the high-SES group, the likelihood that having a child before college would cause a delay in enrollment was 18% higher than for those in the low-SES group.

While Goldrick-Rab and Han's (2011) research is helpful in expounding the socioeconomic gap between students who enroll in college on-time and those who delay, because "it is quite possible that SES advantaged students are accruing additional advantages during their time off," they call for more research explaining how "educational decisions, career decisions, and experiences of family formation interact" for college-going students (p. 441). Furthermore, they call for more studies in how PSE delay is experienced by students of different backgrounds and what they do during their gap between high school graduation and college enrollment.

Six years after their initial study, Bozick and DeLuca (2011) shifted their attention from the profile of delayers and predicting factors of delay to better understanding the decision-making processes of non-enrollees. According to their analysis, non-enrollees were defined as those who had not enrolled in college after two years since their high school graduation. But, as has been shown by Horn et al. (2005), such non-enrollees may end up enrolling at some future date, at which point, they become delayers. In fact, in several of the studies previously reviewed, a delay of two or more years was common. With this in mind, and because a delay that exceeds two years is a

key component of this study, understanding Bozick and DeLuca's (2011) findings are relevant.

Using data from the National Education Longitudinal Study of 2002 (NELS:2002) the authors pulled two analytic samples. The first sample of participants (N=2640) had not enrolled in college after the second follow-up survey of the NELS:2002 study; whereas, the second sample (N=13,060) included all of the participants through the follow-up survey regardless of their enrollment status. With these two samples, Bozick and DeLuca (2011) were seeking to identify, 1) reasons youth decided not to enroll in college, 2) identify types of non-enrollees, and 3) identify factors that distinguish those non-enrollee types.

To analyze their data, Bozick and DeLuca (2011) studied the effects of four independent variables on postsecondary enrollment: academic and economic barriers (i.e., math achievement scores and family income); family and neighborhood context (i.e., parents' education levels, the degree of college-going support/knowledge in the family, neighborhood college enrollment levels as expressed in the ratio of 18- to 24-years-old enrolled in college for a given zip code, and the percentage of local jobs requiring a bachelor's degree in a given zip code); orientations toward school (i.e., postsecondary educational expectations and the value they place on education); and orientations toward work (i.e., employment experience in the 10th grade and the type of occupation the respondent expected to have at age 30).

When asked why they had yet to enroll in college, the youth were given 13 options, with the ability to choose more than one response (see Table 2.1).

Table 2.1
Reasons delayers do not attend college

Reasons for non-attendance	Weighted %
Rather work and make money	50.7
Can't afford to go to college	49.4
Has a good job	43.1
Help support family	41.0
Career does not require more education	16.7
Grades/admission scores not high enough	14.6
Does not like school	14.4
Personal health/traumatic experience	12.5
Pregnancy/childcare/marriage	8.1
Feels going to school is not important	6.9
Not accepted at desired schools	6.8
Military	3.5
Other	15.4

Note. $N = 2640$; Adapted from Bozick and DeLuca, 2011, p. 1255

Since participants were allowed to select more than one response, the researchers grouped the respondents together based upon the response patterns using latent class analysis. Doing so yielded five different classes of the total two-year delayers: work-driven (18.3%), economic constrained (27.6%), multi-disadvantaged (7.1%), military (3.5%), and other (43.5%). Each class was defined by its groups' characteristics. Work-

driven youth were defined by their satisfaction with the rewards of the labor force. They did not feel that college would benefit them. The economically constrained class, on the other hand, saw great value in furthering their education and felt they were qualified to enroll, but were unable to meet the financial obligations of PSE. The multi-disadvantaged group indicated that they had both academic and financial barriers to enrollment. The military group was purposefully left out of the latent class analysis so as to stand alone as its own distinct group. The final group reported a broad range of reasons that were not strongly aligned with either work-force motivations or any constraints. Such findings caused Bozick and DeLuca (2011) to conclude that college-going decisions are "more heterogeneous than is typically regarded in existing literature" (p. 1261).

Because Bozick and DeLuca (2011) are specifically looking at those who had yet to enroll in any postsecondary educational institution at least two years removed from high school, their findings have great relevance to this study on delayers. As the previous studies in this review clearly show, the national profile of delayers is dominated by those who are academically and financially disadvantaged. However, Bozick and DeLuca's (2011) findings suggest that when exploring the decision-making processes of those who have yet to enroll after two years, their rationale and motivations are far more wide-ranging. Bozick and DeLuca (2011) conclude their study with yet another call for a range of methodological approaches to understand students' decisions to delay college apart from academic and financial reasons.

Wells and Lynch (2012), the second study to use the NELS:2002, built on the work of both Goldrick-Rab and Han's (2011) and Bozick and DeLuca (2011) by seeking

to understand the interactions of SES with the decision-making processes of high school seniors who were intentionally choosing to delay enrolling in college upon high school graduation. Assuming that such students' motivations for delay were different from those students for whom delay was more circumstantial, the researchers used data from the National Educational Longitudinal Study of 2002 (NELS:2002, n=10,900) to break the composite SES factor used in previous studies out into distinct factors. In their words, they "disaggregated" the components of SES from the composite measure to determine how each component affected students differently, especially those who planned a delay (p. 677). The SES factors were family income, parental education, and parental occupation. They also used a series of control variables that conformed to previous research, such as demographic variables (i.e., gender, race, immigrant status, and number of siblings), academic variables (i.e., standardized test scores, math course level), cultural variables (i.e., parental postsecondary expectations, college plans of peers), and student's personal academic expectations for a bachelor's degree.

Wells and Lynch (2012) found that 11% of high school seniors who expected to go to college planned to delay their enrollment. Of those, only 18% planned to delay for more than one year. The surprising finding was that of those who planned a delay, just over half enrolled immediately instead of delaying as they had planned. This was particularly true for those students who had taken advanced mathematics coursework in high school. Additionally, income and first-generation status were found to be predictive of students planning to delay entry into college. Parental education, on the other hand, was a significant predictor of immediate college enrollment, contingent on students not

having planned to delay. For example, for those students who have a parent with a bachelor's degree, the likelihood of them choosing to delay is lower by 34%.

Not surprisingly, low-SES students and first-generation students were more likely to plan to delay PSE. For those who planned a one-year delay only, but then failed to enroll after a year delay, none of the SES components were significant predictors that they would eventually enroll. Thus, the authors concluded that SES seemed to be more closely tied to the decisions to delay rather than determining the length of delay. Interestingly, when looking at students who planned to delay the enrollment for longer than one year, gender was the significant factor; males planned multiple-year delays 50% more frequently than females. Finally, Wells and Lynch (2012) found that a student whose peer group planned to attend college increased the odds of that student planning for and enrolling immediately into college.

As with Bozick and DeLuca (2011), Wells and Lynch (2012) acknowledged that delayers can be very intentional in their decisions and actions regarding postsecondary enrollment. With that said, many are being influenced by their academic preparation and the financial circumstances of their families. Still, there appears to be a group for which college-going is not being hampered by academic or financial constraints that are still choosing to delay postsecondary education, despite the risks associated with such delay (Bozick & DeLuca, 2005; Hearn, 1992).

Studies in Texas

Finding that students in the south experience PSE delay at rates 9% higher than any other region in the U.S. (Bozick & DeLuca, 2005) gives ample reason to conduct

state-specific research regarding PSE delay. Texas provides a good opportunity to understand PSE delay in the south because of its diverse population. According to the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB), it projects that 42% of the state's population by 2020 will be made up of Hispanics (THECB, 2007). While enrollment rates have increased among minority students in Texas as high as 50% from 2000 to 2008, minority graduation rates of students who have earned a bachelor's degree or higher have remained static (THECB, 2009).

These statistics led to some state-specific research into delay. Similar to the national studies, Gururaj (2011) determined delayed enrollment was a contributing factor for the lack of degree attainment in Texas. She used data from a myriad of state educational agencies – including the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB), the Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS), the Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS) of the Texas Education Agency (TEA), and the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) – to examine the characteristics of those who immediately enrolled in two- or four-year Texas public and private colleges and those who delayed their enrollment short term (i.e., only missing the fall semester after high school) and long-term (i.e., anything beyond a year).

With a very robust sample of Texas public high school graduates (n = 238,653), Gururaj (2011) found that Texas had a higher percentage of delayers, 23% in 2004 (9% in the short-term and 14% in the long-term), compared to that of the national cohort of 2004 at 14% delay (Aud et al., 2011). Texas delayers had lower rates of both one-year and two-year persistence compared to those Texans who enrolled on-time (short-term

delayers = 43% and 31%; long-term delayers = 37% and 24%; on-time students = 78% and 68%), demonstrating that delaying PSE had a significant effect on college persistence, which ultimately affects degree attainment. Just as Wells and Lynch (2012) found in their national study, academic preparation was a predictor of PSE enrollment regardless of delay in Gururaj's (2011) findings. Further, while those who attended a four-year private college were more likely to persist for two years compared to those at a four-year public college, delay affected persistence negatively at any institution. Ultimately, Gururaj (2011) concluded her study stating, "Delayed enrollment could exacerbate an individual's ability to persist, in spite of all their other characteristics and circumstances" (p. 217).

Gururaj's (2011) research, despite using a comprehensive amount of extant datasets, only looks at those students from Texas that stayed in Texas. Furthermore, in relationship to this study, while looking at one- and two-year persistence can present a trajectory toward degree attainment, actual graduation outcomes would have been more useful. However, Gururaj (2011) acknowledged that "what individuals choose to do instead of enrolling in PSE may be just as important as their choice for not enrolling" (p. 38). She also agreed with Rowan-Kenyon, Bell, and Perna (2008) who posited that college enrollment decisions can only be fully understood by taking into account several layers of students' social circumstances, a point about this study's conceptual framework more fully discussed later in the chapter.

Niu and Tienda (2013) also studied delaying PSE in Texas. Using both descriptive and multivariate analysis, these two researchers sought to better understand

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how the timing of college enrollment along with institutional choice was related to a student's college expectations and subsequent attendance at four-year colleges in Texas. They used data collected over time by the Texas Higher Education Opportunity Project (THEOP), of Texas high school seniors who graduated in 2002 (Wave 1, initial survey = 13,803; Wave 2, subsample re-surveyed the next spring = 8,345; Wave 3, subsample surveyed four years from graduation = 4114).

To analyze the data, Niu and Tienda (2013) first defined delay into different lengths from the time of high school graduation: on-time (i.e., within seven months), one-semester delay (i.e., within 8-12 months), one-year delay (i.e., within 13-19 months), two-year delay (i.e., within 20-31 months), three/four-year delay (i.e., with 32-48 months), and non-enrollees (i.e., not enrolled after 48 months). Independent variables included: demographic (i.e., race/ethnicity), academic (i.e., class rank, standardized test scores), college predisposition (i.e., college entrance exams, AP courses, first thought of college enrollment, college expectations senior year of high school) SES background (i.e., parents education and home ownership status), and college orientation of high school (i.e., SES composition of high school and four or more friends planning to attend college).

Niu and Tienda's (2013) analysis found that 80% of Texas high school seniors from the 2002 cohort had enrolled in a postsecondary institution within four years of high school graduation, while 14% delayed their enrollment. Half of the delayers postponed their enrollment by only one semester. Students that delayed longer than one year were substantially less likely to pursue bachelor degrees, while three-year delayers enrolled in

four-year institutions only 10% of the time compared to 28% in community colleges, and 61% in vocational schools.

Such findings confirmed what Horn et al. (2005) stated regarding the institutional choices and degree aspirations of most delayers; namely, students who delayed two years or more attended a four-year institution nearly 60% less often than on-time enrollees four years after high school graduation. Niu and Tienda (2013) also found that in Texas, those students who delayed PSE enrollment were less prepared academically, were negatively affected by their SES status, had lower academic expectations, and were less likely to be enrolled in a four-year college four years after high school, which was similar to the findings from the national studies.

Additionally, Niu and Tienda (2013) contended that delay "need not undermine pursuit of baccalaureate degrees if the hiatus from academic work allows students to mature, to acquire work experience, and to accumulate resources for college" (p. 2). Still, they acknowledge that if such time away causes the students' desires for a college degree to decrease, then naturally their college persistence weakens compared to on-time enrollees.

Niu and Tienda's (2013) work only observed the effects of delay for four years beyond high school graduation. As seen in the national studies detailed above, extending the window from high school graduation provides a better understanding of the postsecondary decisions of delayers. Therefore, future research regarding degree attainment in Texas should extend the time frame post-high school graduation. This is

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true especially as Niu and Tienda (2013) contended, as did others (Adelman 2006) that the time from enrollment to completion has increased.

In summary, over the course of the past 30 years, there has been greater national interest in understanding the college-going patterns of postsecondary students. Earlier studies, such as Bozick and DeLuca (2005), Hearn (1992), and Horn et al. (2005) focused their research on describing the difference between those who enrolled in college on-time or traditionally, with those who delayed their enrollment or did not enroll at all. As has been shown, the window of observation has tended to set the parameters of the definitions of delay with the majority agreeing that delayed enrollment begins as early as seven months after high school graduation or one semester/quarter of college. The majority of national studies tend to extend the length of delay up to eight years from graduation; but, such parameters have mostly been determined by the terms of the longitudinal datasets with which the authors are using.

Additionally, the goal of these early national studies has been to establish clear predictive factors of delayed enrollment. As such, they have determined that the most likely students to delay enrollment are those students who are typically identified as underserved and underrepresented throughout our nation's educational systems. All of the later national studies (Adelman, 2006; Bozick & DeLuca, 2011; Goldrick-Rab & Han, 2011; Rowan-Kenyon, 2007, Wells & Lynch, 2012) have confirmed this profile. These more recent studies have also sought to explore more nuanced aspects of the causes of delay, from the academic and financial constraints, so frequently cited, to the motivational factors and individual choices of delayers.

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With the exception of Adelman (2006), Bozick and DeLuca (2005), and Horn et al. (2005), each of the national studies seems content to focus on the causes and predictive factors of delay, whereas the three mentioned above push the analysis to explore the results of delay on bachelor's degree attainment. The results of which are grim. Simply put, those who delay for whatever reason, by choice or circumstance, are far less likely to graduate with a bachelor's degree than those who enrolled straight out of high school.

The conclusions from these studies have been shown to affect students in Texas in similar ways. But, because Texas has higher populations of minority groups, the total percent of PSE delayers is higher than national rates. Thus, understanding the experiences of delayers and the contributing factors that lead to degree attainment beyond delayed enrollment are relevant aims of this research.

College Experience of PSE Delayers

The bulk of research on delaying postsecondary education has focused primarily on the predictive factors that lead a student to delay, whether by choice or circumstances, with the vast majority examining the circumstantial factors. Fewer studies have examined the effects of delay on degree attainment, primarily because the time frame of the studies have not extended long enough. Yet, of those that do, the results are not disaggregated between intentional delayers and circumstantial delayers. As has been shown, minority groups are the most likely affected by circumstantial factors, such as low-SES or low academic preparation for college. However, because the college experience may be different for those who choose to delay (Bozick and DeLuca, 2011; Rowan-Kenyon et al.,

2008; Wells & Lynch, 2012); and, because this sub-population of delayers receive far less attention in the research, this section will focus on those studies aimed at understanding the experiences of intentional delayers.

For the purposes of this study, intentional delayers are those for whom college-going is not inhibited by the circumstantial factors outlined in the studies above, such as low-SES or lack of academic preparation. Instead, intentional delayers[3] are being defined as having the abilities and desires to pursue postsecondary education, but only after a planned hiatus from further schooling upon high school graduation. These students are commonly know as "gappers" as they plan to have a larger than traditional gap between high school graduation and college enrollment (Heath, 2007; Martin, 2010; King, 2011).

Unfortunately, rigorous studies exploring intentional delayers in the U.S. are limited and there exists a healthy debate about the effects of taking a gap year on the academic success of these students (O'Shea, 2014; Simpson, 2004). Taking a gap year has traditionally been far more common internationally, especially in the U.K. and Australia (Heath, 2007). However, as O'Shea (2014) contends, the number of students taking a purposeful delay in the U.S. is on the rise.

Where the negative effects of delaying PSE cannot be ignored in the U.S., international perceptions of gap year participation are generally cast in a favorable light

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[3] By way of delimitation, intentional delay is not being defined as forgoing college in order to test the job market with PSE enrollment acting as a backup plan should the job route not work out. Additionally, those who enter the military are not included in this group of intentional delayers as they receive specific formal training and education as members of their service units. In fact, according to Gururaj, "in Texas, military service is considered as successful an outcome as college enrollment (2011, p. 112-113).

and have even become institutionalized by some international governments (Heath, 2007). Heath (2007) conducted a content analysis of gap year literature and websites that promoted such experiences within the U.K in 2005 and found five claims in the literature that were communicated most frequently as quoted below:

- the gap year provides an opportunity for self-reflection, enhancing students' sense of perspective and facilitating better-informed decisions about their degree plans and future career options;

- the gap year provides an opportunity for self-development and personal enrichment;

- 'gappers' adapt particularly well to university life as they have greater maturity than non-gappers, are less distracted by the freedoms of university life and are less likely to drop out, rendering them attractive to admissions tutors;

- gappers acquire 'soft skills' that are not necessarily acquired during their formal education, such as communication skills, organizational skills and team working skills; and

- for all these reasons, employers favor gappers. (p. 94)

Again, these findings represent claims made by mainstream media sources and may not have been verified by rigorous scientific research. But, they do demonstrate common perceptions of the benefits of gap year participation. Heath (2007) found that some gap year behaviors had claims of greater benefits than others, with service-based

volunteerism being considered the most beneficial and work-force participation considered the least beneficial.

King (2011) theorized that young people in the U.K. used a gap year as a way to form a sense of identity, which then benefits them during their college years. King conducted a qualitative study that consisted of a sample of 23 students from the U.K. recruited by convenience and snowball sampling. The sample was required to have taken a gap year within the previous five years. While the aim was to gain a heterogeneous sample overall, it ended up that two-thirds were female and only two self-identified as minorities. Unstructured interviews, 60-90 minute in length, invited participants to tell the story of their gap year.

In addition to discovering themselves, participants linked their gap year participation with developing confidence, maturity, and the necessary soft skills to succeed in college. Furthermore, they felt their participation was a benchmark moment that provided them a meaningful transition from high school to college, prepared them better for college life, and to take advantage of future educational opportunities (King, 2011).

The results of King's (2011) qualitative interviews seem to support the claims the U.K. gap year industry has touted (Heath, 2007). Yet, because the type of activities vary from the formal (volunteerism, working) to informal (tourism, leisure), further research is needed to examine specific types of gap year participation and the effect such activities have on degree attainment.

Latter-day Saint Returned Missionaries as PSE Delayers

Despite the unknowns about gap year participation in the U.S., Latter-day Saint return missionaries provide a unique sample to study as PSE delayers for several reasons. First, the length of delay is fairly consistent, typically falling between a two- and three-year delay. Secondly, the cause of the delay is also known, they choose to forgo immediate college enrollment in favor of two-year voluntary missionary service, which may be domestic or international. Hence, they are delaying their education intentionally, similar to European gappers. Finally, we know that as a sub-population, they have been far more successful in obtaining postsecondary degrees than the national average (McClendon & Chadwick, 2004).

Nevertheless, it is reasonable to conclude that the predictive factors and the consequences of delay affect Latter-day Saints generally like every sub-population, because the national studies do not separate the data out by religious affiliation. Further, there have been no studies looking specifically at Latter-day Saints like the national studies reviewed above. There have been three quantitative studies conducted that provide an understanding about Latter-day Saints as students of higher education, generally. A fourth study, qualitative in nature, examines the perceptions of Latter-day Saint return missionaries regarding how they felt their missionary service impacted their college experience.

Albrecht and Heaton (1998) conducted a large-scale study of Latter-day Saint members 18 years old and older (n = 7446), from three regions of the U.S. (Utah, Western States, and States East of the Rocky Mountains). They found that 54% of Latter-

day Saints males completed at least some postsecondary education in comparison to 37% of the total U.S. population. Latter-day Saints women had a similar advantage compared to the national percentage, at 44% to 28%.

Albrecht and Heaton's (1998) study tested the premise known as the secularization thesis (Argyle & Beit-Hallahmi, 1975; Caplovitz & Sherrow, 1977; Stark, 1963), which posits the more education one acquires, the less religious they become. Instead, they found a positive relationship between highly educated Latter-day Saints and their religiosity. Latter-day Saint postsecondary graduates were more likely to pray frequently, have strong religious beliefs, and to attend Church meetings regularly compared to students across various educational levels and compared to seven major Christian denominations. While these findings do not explain why there seems to be a positive relationship between Latter-day Saints religiosity and their educational attainment levels, it serves to reinforce the cultural premise that Latter-day Saints strive to be educated, a finding that is significant to the conceptual framework of this study.

Chadwick, Top, and McClendon (2010) sought to understand if Latter-day Saint students' religious beliefs and values aid their educational attainment. Specifically, they investigated whether Latter-day Saint students with higher religiosity do better in school and further their education more than less-religious Church members do. To accomplish this, the authors conducted two main studies. The first study targeted postsecondary students and the second focused on high school students. For their postsecondary study, they conducted a mail survey with students from Brigham Young University (BYU) and BYU-Idaho, with 2311 students responding. The survey asked about their educational

goals and aspirations, peer and family pressures to succeed, and religious beliefs and activities. They found that private religious behaviors such as prayer, scripture reading, and fasting were significantly related to positive feelings about college, a high cumulative GPA, and ambitious educational aspirations. Furthermore, religiosity following a mission was significantly associated with eventual educational achievement. In other words, the higher the religiosity among returned missionaries, the more education they obtained.

The high school study was conducted with six separate samples, which included four areas of the U.S. (East Coast, n=1,398; Pacific Northwest, n=658; and two Utah samples, Utah County, n=1,122; and Castle Dale, Utah, n=354), Northern Mexico (n=1,303), and Great Britain (n=475). Each sample took the same 12-page questionnaire that asked about religiosity, self-esteem, risk taking, family life, attitudes about school and academic performance, and delinquent activities (i.e., drug use, premarital sex, and peer pressures to participate in various activities). Then, using bivariate correlations compared the results within Latter-day Saint groups and then compared several of the results against national studies of high school students.

Among the four groups of Latter-day Saint youth from the U.S., when controlling for all other factors, six religiosity variables were the most strongly related to educational plans and performance. Spiritual experiences and private religiosity were the two most highly correlated factors with educational achievement. The four other religiosity factors were the religiosity of parents, charitable service, Church doctrine about education, and social support from Church members. For example, Chadwick et al. (2010) stated,

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It is clear that LDS doctrine strongly encourages the pursuit of knowledge, both secular and sacred. Church leaders encourage young people to stay in school and to seek higher education. In addition, leaders invite members to make learning a lifelong adventure. (p. 133)

In addition to the six religiosity variables above, the researchers also found that the level of a father's education was also a significant factor to the educational plans and performance of their children. When compared against national populations, Chadwick et al.'s (2010) findings showed that 30% of fathers of the Latter-day Saint young men have a graduate degree, double the national average of 13.8%.

Further findings showed that Latter-day Saint seniors spend more time doing homework than do their peers and, consequently, are more clustered at the higher end of the GPA scale than students in the national sample. Over 50% of Latter-day Saint young male seniors expect to obtain a graduate or professional degree compared to only 15% of the national sample. Hence, the Latter-day Saint youth in Chadwick et al.'s (2010) study seemed to fall within the category of those most likely to enroll in college immediately and to successfully earn a bachelor's degree based upon the advantages of academic momentum discussed by Adelman (2006) and the cultural capital gained in a home from educationally-minded parents spoken of by Rowan-Kenyon (2007).

Both Albrecht and Heaton (1998) and Chadwick et al.'s (2010) findings illuminated the relationship between the Latter-day Saints' faith and educational attainment. However, it is important to note that the data from which these studies drew were, in some cases, 20 years old, did not include the Southern region of the U.S., and

did not isolate returned missionaries in their samples as delayers. Additionally, in case of Chadwick et al. (2010), the sample of college students only targeted two private universities owned and operated by the Church, thus limiting the demographic profile of Latter-day Saint students. Even though both studies were very detailed in how they sought to avoid bias, replication studies with other sub-populations of Church members are needed.

It is also important to note that the correlation between religiosity and educational attainment is not unique to members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Beyerlein, 2004; Jeynes, 1999; Loury, 2004; Regnerus & Elder, 2003; Trusty & Watts, 1999). For example, Astin, Astin, and Lindholm's (2011) work with the national study, Spiritual Development of American College Students, demonstrated that religious students, regardless of affiliation, achieve more academically and have more positive perceptions about the college experience than those who did not engage in religious activities. Even with that said, the authors were quick to point out that high school academic factors were the strongest predictor for high college GPA.

Unlike the two previous studies, McClendon and Chadwick's (2004) research provides an examination of return missionaries' educational pursuits once their missionary service has completed. Using four random samples each with 1,000 men and 500 women throughout the U.S. who had been back for 2, 5, 10, or 17 years from serving missions, they produced a final sample of 4,884 who responded to their mail survey. Using basic descriptive statistical procedures, they compared their sample to similar studies conducted in the 1960s and 1970s to determine how returned missionaries

commitment to the faith has been affected by societal changes. Independent variables

included: demographic (i.e., gender, educational attainment, SES, family life, and

religious experiences 2, 5, 10, and 17 years back); religiosity (i.e., Church attendance,

church calling, payment of tithing, observation of health code, and temple recommend

holders[4]); and private religiosity (i.e., scripture study, personal prayer, thinking about

religion).

While their study is mostly geared towards comparing generations of missionaries

over time, the authors do draw comparisons to national findings of educational

achievement. For instance, they found that 96% of the missionaries who had been home

for 17 years, which put them between 40 and 41 years old, had some college/skill

training. Comparatively, the U.S. census of the same year found that of 35 to 44 year-

olds only 44% had some college/skill training. Additionally, McClendon and Chadwick

(2004) found that 37% of the Latter-day Saint men and 45% of the women had completed

an undergraduate degree within the 17 years, which was much higher than the national

average of 18%.

While McClendon and Chadwick's (2004) study focused solely on returned

missionaries, there are limitations to their study as well. Most significantly, it failed to

differentiate between those LDS graduates who postponed their initial enrollment by

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[4] For members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, there is a distinction
made between weekly church attendance (where members meet to partake of sacraments
and to hold Sunday School, Priesthood meetings, Relief Society meetings, and hold
weekday youth activities) and temple attendance. Only members in good standing are
permitted to hold a *temple recommend* which gives them access to any of the Church's
temples worldwide. Temples are sacred places of personal worship and are deemed as
being the Holy House of the Lord (Luschin, 1992).

serving a mission first and then attending college from those who enrolled into college on-time and graduated before serving a mission. While the researchers cautiously suggested that their findings point to an academic benefit gained by serving a mission, further research is needed to better understand if this claim has merit.

Palmer (2009) explored the perceptions of 13 Latter-day Saint returned missionaries who stopped out of college to serve their missions. The participants took part in 45-60 minute semi-structured individual interviews and were asked to reflect upon what they gained from missionary service that aided them during their college experience. While each participant had unique missions and college experiences, Palmer (2009) found the following similarities from their responses: increased self-discipline and effective time management skills, increased critical thinking, clarity of degree aspirations and life-long learning, and an increase in self-efficacy and social development. These findings are similar to King's (2011) study on gap year participants. Even though Palmer (2009) studied students who stopped out rather than delayed college to serve their missions, their perceptions of the mission's effect on their college experience are informative.

In summary, educational attainment is valued by Latter-day Saints and even deemed a religious pursuit (Chadwick et al., 2010). Generally, Latter-day Saints tend to expect more, plan for, and obtain higher degrees than the national average for both men and women (Albrecht & Heaton, 1998; Chadwick et al. 2010). This is especially true of returned missionaries (McClendon & Chadwick, 2004). There appears to be a relationship between a Latter-day Saint's religiosity and their educational attainment,

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although that relationship has not been fully explained (Chadwick et al., 2010), nor is this a unique finding to this religious group (Astin, Astin, & Lindholm, 2011).

As it pertains specifically to Latter-day Saint return missionaries, quantitative methods have demonstrated that they are successful in their educational attainment and even suggest that their religious beliefs and practices, specifically missionary service, aid their educational efforts (Chadwick et al., 2010). One qualitative study showed that returned missionaries perceive significant benefit in navigating college life after serving a mission (Palmer, 2009). Yet, none of the studies were specifically designed to explore PSE delayers, specifically. All of which argues the need for additional research on this sub-population of PSE delayers.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study strives to account for the complexity of factors at play in the life experience of Latter-day Saint return missionaries who delayed PSE and successfully completed a bachelor's degree. While there are many different ways to conceptualize PSE delay and its effects on degree achievement, Bronfenbrenner and Morris's (2006) Bioecological Model of Human Development, which examines human development through the dynamic interactions of *process, person, context,* and *time,* is well suited to serve as the conceptual framework for the data analysis of this study. Figure 2.1 illustrates the interactions of the four defining components.
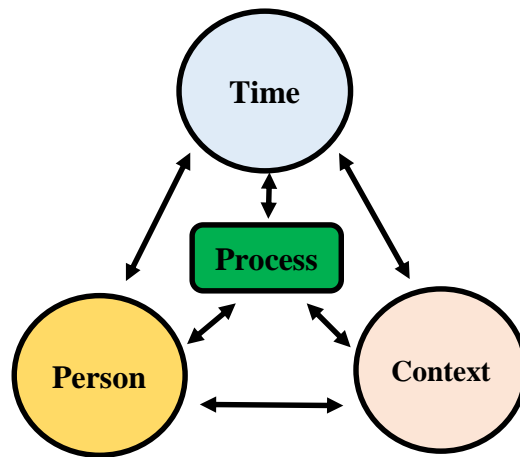
Figure 2.1. The Bioecological Model of Human Development

In addition to the four main components, there are supplementary aspects of person, context, and time that comprise the model (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). As is illustrated in Figure 2.2, at the core of the model is a subcomponent of process, called *proximal processes*. Proximal processes define the interactions persons have with their context over time and are considered "the primary mechanisms producing human development" (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006, p. 795).

A second subcomponent of process, *developmental outcomes*, is also illustrated in Figure 2.2. Developmental outcomes result from person-process-context-time interactions and constitute one's overall development or experiences. Developmental outcomes serve to shape the aspects of a person's character seen in future settings as they engaged future proximal processes.
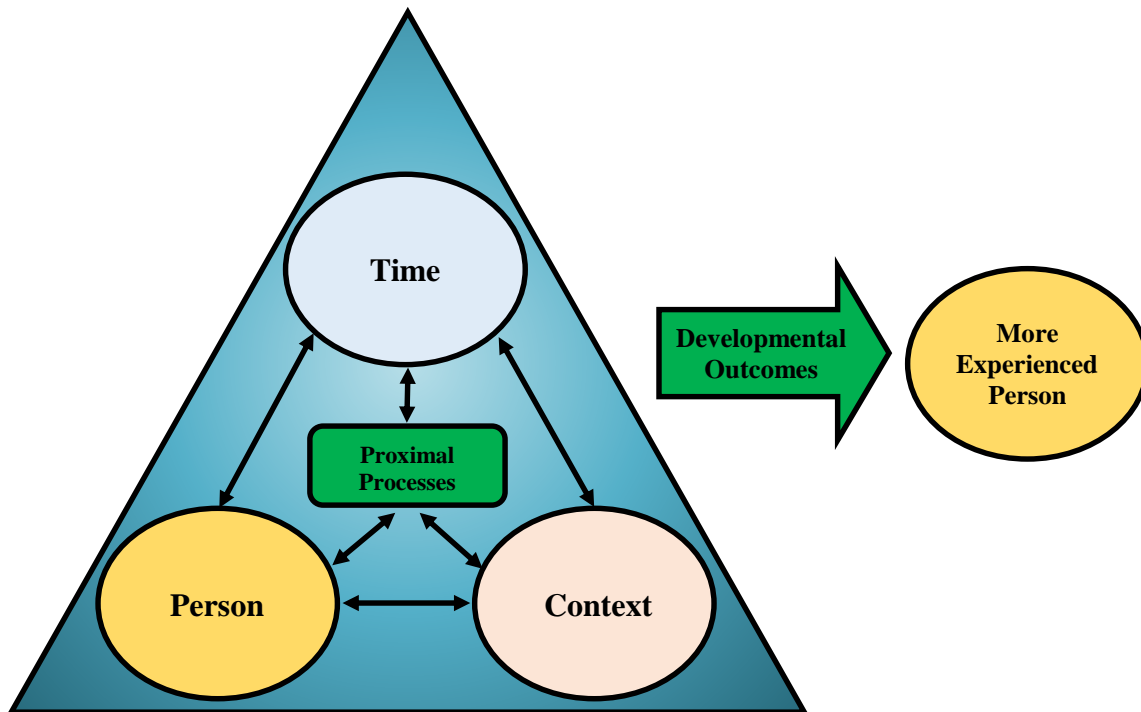
Figure 2.2. The developmental person-process-context-time interaction

In order to show more fully how a person both affects and is affected by proximal

processes, three types of characteristics are expounded as being most influential:

disposition, resources, and *demand* (see Figure 2.3). Disposition is the degree to which a

person is naturally inclined to act or respond to a developmental process. For example,

athletes who strive to improve in their sport may be responding to a competitive

disposition or attitude, which motivates their development. *Resources* refers to one's

abilities, skills, talents, and knowledge. An athlete may have the disposition to compete at

a high level, but lack the resources to do so, e.g., they may lack tactical knowledge or

skill sets that a higher level of competition in their sport requires. *Demand* is the

invitation or discouragement a person receives to interact with proximal processes. In the

example of the athlete, demand is the internal pressure an athlete places upon himself or herself to perform in a given context.

Context is explained with four interacting environments affecting an individual's development: *micro-¸* one's personal and immediate environment; *meso-,* one's home environment; *exo-,* one's community or neighborhood environment; and *macrosystems,* or the society at large in which the other systems interact (see Figure 2.3). These four systems are described as being embedded within each other much like Russian stacking dolls, with each able to be examined individually, but better understood as a part of a larger whole. Additionally, the model acknowledges that the development of a person, in a given context, can also be influenced by their interactions with objects and symbols as well as other people. For example, the development of a student is affected by their interactions with books and other study materials, not solely through the interactions of teachers or other students.

The final defining component of the Bronfenbrenner and Morris's model is *time*. Much like the component of context is layered, time has three successive levels: *micro-*, *meso-*, and *macro-* (see Figure 2.3). However, they are not well delineated in the model. Essentially, *microtime* deals with proximal process in short periods of time—the here and now. Such episodes last minutes and/or hours, like an episode of a television show. *Mesotime* examines these episodes across greater lengths of time, like a television show over the course of one season. *Macrotime* extends beyond that to look at the development of proximal processes over the course of a lifetime, or like a television show over the entire course of its production from season to season.
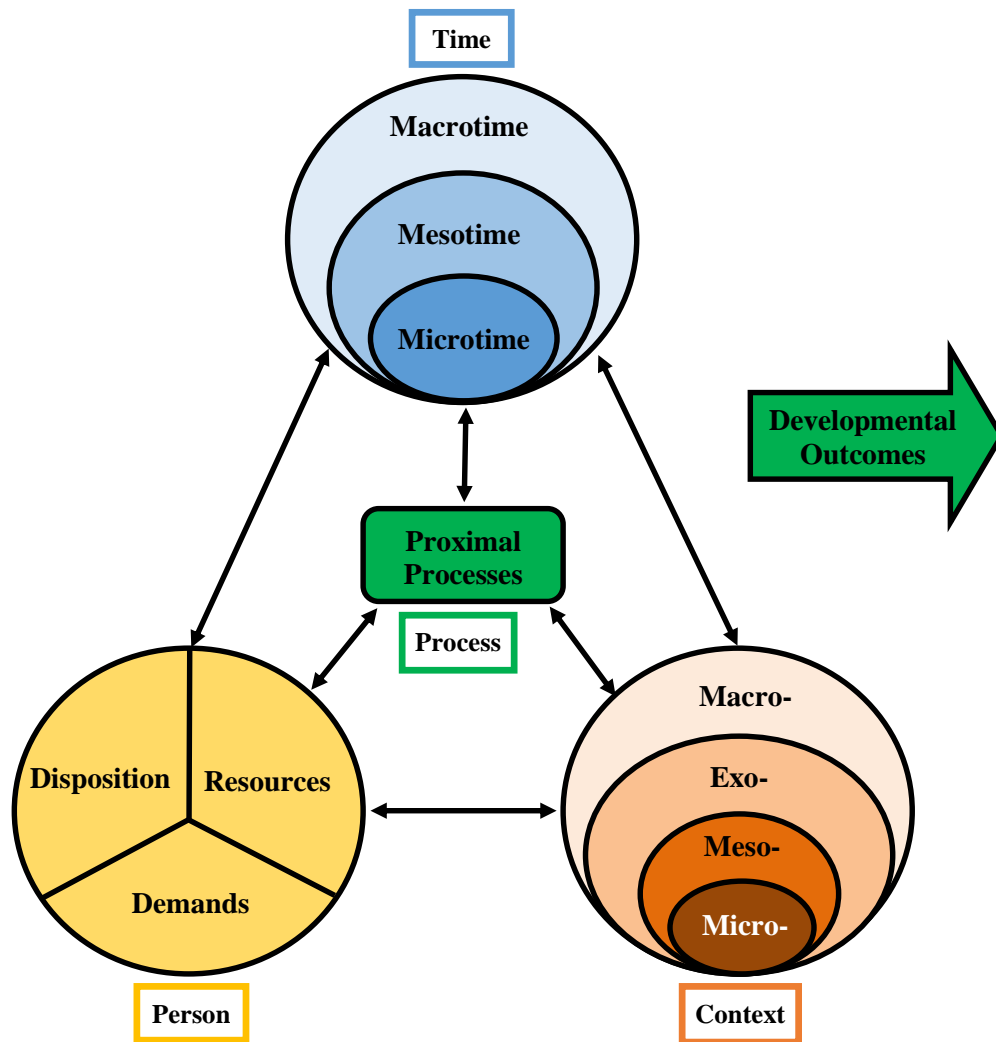
Figure 2.3. The Bioecological Model of Human Development with subcomponents.

While Bronfenbrenner and Morris's (2006) model has not been used to explore PSE delay prior to this study, it seems to be well suited for such research because it provides a framework for striving to understand the multiple environmental and personal factors that shape one's experience. It also recognizes that development is a balance between the subjective experience of individuals and the objective circumstances with which individuals interact (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). For example, two people

can be engaged with the same proximal process, in the same context, at the same time, but because they are unique people, their development will differ. In addition, because this study is examining the effects of college delay during a stated time of observation, the time component of this model may be helpful.

Another reason Bronfenbrenner and Morris's model is a good theoretical guide for this study is that it seems to be able to incorporate the theoretical lenses of previous studies. For example, those studies that use life course perspective, such as Bozick and DeLuca (2004) and Goldrick-Rab and Han (2011), would see the interplay of the model's four environments affecting life course events. For those studies that use variations of rational choice models (Gururaj, 2011; Niu & Tienda, 2013; Wells & Lynch, 2012), results could be viewed in how an individual's choices are being informed by the three personal characteristics shaping his or her decisions. Finally, those national studies that use combined theories of human, social, and cultural capital to explain PSE delay (Bozick & DeLuca, 2011; Rowan-Kenyon, 2007) might see in Bronfenbrenner and Morris's (2006) model an incorporation of these theories with the process-person-context-time model.

Specifically to Latter-day Saint studies, Bronfenbrenner and Morris's (2006) model provides a context in which to view religious commitment, both privately, in the family, and in the community. Yet, it still takes into account the multitude of other forces that affect one's personal development.

Summary

In summary, according to the vast majority of studies on delaying postsecondary education, the consequences are real and significantly detrimental to postsecondary completion (Adelman, 2006; Bozick & DeLuca, 2005; Goldrick-Rab & Han, 2011; Horn et al., 2005; Rowan-Kenyon, 2007; Wells & Lynch, 2012). Research on Texas students suggests similar factors influence their college attendance and success (Gururaj, 2011; Niu & Tienda, 2013). The few studies that explored the postsecondary education of Latter-day Saints, found that Latter-day Saint return missionaries are beating the odds of college delay and are attaining bachelor's degrees in higher numbers than other groups who delay enrollment. However, no studies have looked at this group of delayers to understand why they successfully attained bachelor's degrees. While research has shown that their religious affiliation plays a role (Albrecht & Heaton, 1998, Chadwick et al, 2010; McClendon & Chadwick, 2004), there is much that is unknown about their postsecondary experiences.

CHAPTER 3

METHOD

This chapter presents the research methods employed in the study. It begins by restating the research questions, then details the design of the study. How the six participants of this study were recruited is shared, followed by a brief biographical sketch of them. An explanation of data collection and analysis comes next, followed by steps taken to ensure validity. Finally, the chapter concludes with ethical considerations for this research and the study's limitations.

Because the purposes of this study are to examine how Latter-day Saint returned missionaries describe their college experience after a prolonged delay; and, to understand what they perceived as contributing to their degree attainment, qualitative methodology was employed as described by Creswell (2013). The characteristics of qualitative research are presented in Table 3.1. Qualitative methods are used in this study to give a voice to those who successfully delay. By using the participants' own words to describe the struggles and the strategies they used to seemingly beat the odds of college delay, insights and practices can be identified that may be applied by other delayers.

Table 3.1
Characteristics of qualitative research

- Is conducted in a natural setting; a source of data for close interaction.

- Relies on the researcher as the key instrument in data collection.

- Involves using multiple methods of data collection.

- Involves complex reasoning going between inductive and deductive.

- Focuses on participants' perspectives, their meanings, and their multiple

Table 3.1—*Continued*

subjective views.

- Is situated within the context or setting of participants' social, political, and/or historical context.

- Involves an emergent and evolving design rather than tightly prefigured design.

- Is reflective and interpretive; sensitive to researcher's biographical and social identities.

- Presents a holistic, complex picture.

Note. Adopted from Creswell, 2013, p. 46.

Research Questions

The following research questions, which will be summarized in the final chapter, guided the methodological choices of this study and shaped my findings:

1. How do Latter-day Saint returned missionaries describe their postsecondary experience?

2. What do they account for their success in attaining an undergraduate degree?

3. How do they perceive the effect their enrollment delay had on their degree attainment?

4. In what ways can Bronfenbrenner and Morris's (2008) Bioecological Model of Human Development help to explain Latter-day Saint returned missionaries' academic success after a postsecondary delay?

Design

In order to obtain an understanding of the returned missionaries' college experience and degree attainment, I conducted semi-structured individual interviews using episodic interviewing techniques as the main data source (Dere, Easton, Nadel, & Huston, 2008; Flick, 2000; Tulving, 2002). These techniques ask participants to recollect events from their past in a time-sequenced manner rather than topically or thematically. In this way, memory is stimulated and previous experiences are more readily recalled (Dere, Easton, Nadel, & Huston, 2008; Flick, 2000; Tulving, 2002). This data collection method seemed to be the most appropriate choice as participants were asked to recall experiences from their past. Additionally, I collected data with the use of an online pre-screening questionnaire that asked for some basic demographic information about my sample. Finally, I collected the college transcripts of those participants who were interviewed as a means of verifying college-attendance and course-load patterns (see Triangulation below).

Interviews

I conducted semi-structured individual interviews with six males Latter-day Saint returned missionaries who successfully graduated from college with a bachelor's degree. In considering the number of participants for this study, Creswell (2013) suggests the range may vary from three to 15 individuals. I settled on six interviews after reviewing Palmer's (2009) qualitative study of returned missionaries where he interviewed 10 people, however only five of those were males. Thus, my choice of six participants fell within Creswell's suggested range and followed closely the precedent laid out by Palmer.

Site

I conducted each of the interviews face-to-face at a location chosen by the

participants. This was ethically important as a way to extend control of the interview

environment and process to participants (Maxwell, 2013). Two were conducted at the

local Institute of Religion building where participants often gather for weekly activities,

classes, and worship services. Two were conducted at the church buildings that

participants attend as congregational members. One was conducted on the campus of

TCU and another was conducted at the participant's home. The interviews lasted around

60-100 minutes and were audio recorded for transcription purposes.

Interview Protocol

I designed the interview protocol to explore the participants' postsecondary

pathway beginning with their high school experiences, their missionary experiences, and

finally their college experiences. Examples of the protocol questions were, "After high

school graduation, what was your plan for gaining a postsecondary education?", "What

role did your mission play in your college experience?", and "What were your academic

experiences in college?" (See Appendix A for the full interview protocol).

Triangulation

As was noted on Table 3.1, multiple data sources are a characteristic of qualitative

research. Thus, while the pre-questionnaire survey was a means of identifying

participants who met my study's research criteria, I also used it to gather information

about my sample to compare with previous research (see Appendix D). For example, I

asked about parental education levels and the use of any financial aid, because these were

key variables in previous research. The survey responses of the participants also allowed me to cross check the data I collected from them during our interviews concerning timing of delay and postsecondary enrollment (see also Validation below).

Because of Adelman's (2006) approach of exploring the academic history of his sample through the use of high school and college transcripts, I sought to do the same. However, none of the participants had access to their high school transcripts. I was able to collect their college transcripts that showed their attendance patterns throughout their college experiences. This enabled me to see how many classes they took each semester, if they were enrolled continuously or not, if they had taken the ACT and/or SAT tests prior to college, and if they had received any credit via AP testing or from transferring institutions. All of which was helpful in determining the academic momentum the participants maintained during college and to identify any swirling enrollments (Adelman, 2006).

Sample Selection Criteria

There were three criteria for inclusion in this study. First, participants who graduated from high school no earlier than 2004, and ultimately earned a bachelor's degree from an accredited 4-year university no later than 2012, were considered eligible. This criterion was influenced by the NCES longitudinal study of the 2002 high school sophomore cohort through 2012 (Lauff & Ingels, 2013). It presents the most recent national data focusing on postsecondary academic outcomes and provides an academic context for my study. Because I desired my sample to be closely associated with this national cohort for future comparative studies, I initially set the academic parameters for

inclusion in my study to match Lauff and Ingels' cohort. Doing so created an eight-year window of observation from high school graduation to college degree, which several previous studies used as was shown in Chapter Two. However, there was difficulty in identifying six participants who met this criterion perfectly. Thus, if a participant's college experience fit within an eight-year window of time from the point of their high school graduation, I deemed them eligible. Preference was given to those whose date ranges came nearest to the 2004 to 2012 range (see Table 3.2).

Second, participants had to be members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and delayed enrolling into any postsecondary institution until after the completion of serving a full-time mission for the Church. Until October of 2013, Latter-day Saint men could not begin missionary service until the age of 19 and women had to be 21. Therefore, because of this policy, it is more likely that Latter-day Saint men postponed college enrollment than women during the observation window of this study. Thus, only Latter-day Saint male returned missionaries who delayed their initial enrollment to college were eligible.

A final criteria for inclusion in the sample was student's enrollment in Institute of Religion classes anytime following their high school graduation. Addition of this criteria was a conditional requirement placed upon me by the Seminaries and Institutes of Religions' Educational Review Committee (ERC) in order to have access to their student databases (See Appendix E for ERC approval letter) and use of their facilities for research purposes.

Recruitment

I chose to target the Latter-day Saint population among the North Texas area. Texas has the fifth largest population in the nation of Latter-day Saint youth and young adults (Seminaries and Institutes of Religion, 2014), but has received little attention in previous studies on Latter-day Saints students. In order to avoid bias in the sampling procedures, I used a combination of purposeful random sampling methods and criterion sampling (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003)

To create the sampling frame of the population, I used the Potential Student Tracking (PST) database within the Worldwide Institute and Seminary Enrollment (WISE) software program of the Church. PST pulls information for all young adults 17-30 years of age from the Church membership records into usable reports for employees of Seminaries and Institutes of Religion (S&I). As an employee of S&I, I had access to the WISE website and the PST data throughout the study. The following is a description of the sampling procedures I used to reduce the sampling frame down to a random sample of participants who were sent the pre-screening questionnaire. The questionnaire was used to identify those participants from the random sample who best matched the research criteria.

After downloading all young adults (N = 7534) from the region into an Excel spreadsheet, I filtered the sampling frame first by gender (n = 3770, males only) and then by birthdate from Sept. 1, 1984 to Aug. 31, 1988 (n = 1550). At this point, I randomly selected every third participant from the sampling frame (n = 517) and ran their names through the WISE database to identify any who had previously enrolled in institute

classes and included an email address on their student records (n =179). Those people were sent a pre-screening questionnaire via email in order to identify six individuals who met the criteria of this study outlined above.

After the pre-screening participant sample was identified, I sent an invitation email to each participant explaining the purposes of this study. An electronic link was provided with the introductory email that took them to the online questionnaire I created with the use of Qualtrics (see Appendix C). The opening webpage acted as the consent form for questionnaire participation (see Appendix D for the pre-screening questionnaire with consent form). Only those who agreed to give their consent were allowed by the software to continue on to the questionnaire. Those who did not give their consent were not allowed to proceed and were thanked for their consideration. No participants received compensation for taking the pre-screening questionnaire.

Of those who gave their consent, completed the questionnaire, met the research criteria, and indicated with the final question that they would be interested in being interviewed by the researcher, I purposefully chose six participants as matching the study's research criteria. I then sent these six individuals a follow-up email formally inviting them to participate as an interview subject (see Appendix B). I attached with the email a consent form for interview participation (see Appendix F). Upon consent, I contacted interview participants to arrange interview procedures. I offered interview participants compensation with a $50 gift card to either local restaurants, national retail stores, iTunes, or whichever they preferred.

Because the initial recruitment procedures did not yield six participants for interviews, three modifications were made with the recruitment procedures (see Appendix I for IRB modification approvals). The first increased the sample size from 100 to 200. The second included an email verification protocol that was conducted via a phone call to the final sample members to ensure that email addresses were correct (see Appendix G). The third included a snowball sampling method that invited those who participated in the pre-screening questionnaire to recommend other participants via email (see Appendix H). Any person identified by these modifications was ultimately asked to take the pre-screening questionnaire. Although 179 were sent the initial email, only 79 completed the questionnaire and six agreed to participate in the study who met the revised criteria.

Participants

As is shown in Table 3.2, the age range for the six participants is from 26 to 30. All but one of the participants graduated in 2004 or after with the exception of Paul, who graduated in 2002. Each of them served a two-year mission but left at different intervals after their high school graduation. Half of them began their postsecondary education at a four-year university, while the other half began at a local community college. Three graduated from Church-owned universities out of the state of Texas and three graduated from universities within the state. All of the participants earned their bachelor's degree in six years except Jeffrey, who took seven years.

Table 3.2

Interview participants

Participants	Age	H.S. Graduation	Missionary Service	Length of PSE Delay	College Enrollment Year	Initial Postsecondary Institution	Graduating Institution	College Graduation	H.S. Graduation to College Degree
Paul	30	2002	Jan. 2003 to Jan. 2005	3 Years	2005	TCC[a]	UTA[b]	2008	6 Years
Calvin	28	2004	Jan. 2005 to Jan. 2007	3 Years	2007	BYU[c]	BYU	2010	6 Years
Dave	27	2005	Mar. 2006 to Mar. 2008	3 Years	2008	TCC	UTA	2011 (Master's)	6 Years
Jeffrey	27	2005	Nov. 2005 to Nov. 2007	3 Years	2008	TCC	BYUI[d]	2012	7 Years
Cory	27	2005	Nov. 2005 to Nov. 2007	3 Years	2008	BYU	BYU	2011	6 Years
DeRon	26	2007	Dec. 2007 to Dec. 2009	3 Years	2010	BYUI	TCU[e]	2013	6 Years

Note. *a* = Tarrant County College. *b* = University of Texas at Arlington. *c* = Brigham Young University. *d* = Brigham Young University – Idaho. *e* = Texas Christian University

Data Analysis

Once the interviews were conducted, I followed the procedures of analysis and representation of qualitative research as outlined by Creswell (2013). This was accomplished by creating memos following each interview to capture initial impressions and to begin the process of analyzing the data. Then, each interview transcription was coded in order to reduce the data into smaller categories of information. These codes were organized into the four defining properties of the Bronfenbrenner and Morris's (2006) Bioecological Model of Human Development: *Process*, with a focus on *proximal processes* (i.e., actions and interactions between the participants and their environments); *Person,* with sub-categories of *disposition, resources,* and *demand; Context*, broken up into the four nested environmental systems, *micro-, meso-, exo-,* and *macro-*; and *Time,* with three divisions, *micro-, meso-,* and *macro-*.

However, during the coding process it became apparent to me that some of the sub-components of the Bronfenbrenner and Morris's model were difficult to account for or were unrealistic to code. For example, I purposefully ignored coding on either the macrotime or macrosystem level because doing so did not seem to aid an understanding of my research questions. Instead, because I sought to understand participants' experiences in more nuanced ways, I expanded both the microsystem of context and the mesotime division. In other words, because the interviews themselves were naturally broken into three distinct time frames, each was coded as a mesotime period: *prior to delay*, *during delay*, and *beyond delay.*

Finally, to the category of person, I felt an additional sub-component was necessary to help explain the findings. Thus, to that category was added *perception*, meaning how the person viewed or perceived their interactions with proximal processes in given contexts during certain periods of time. Thus, the application of Bronfenbrenner and Morris' model (2006) on this study was adapted according to the model below (see Figure 3.1; see also Appendix J for detailed coding criteria).
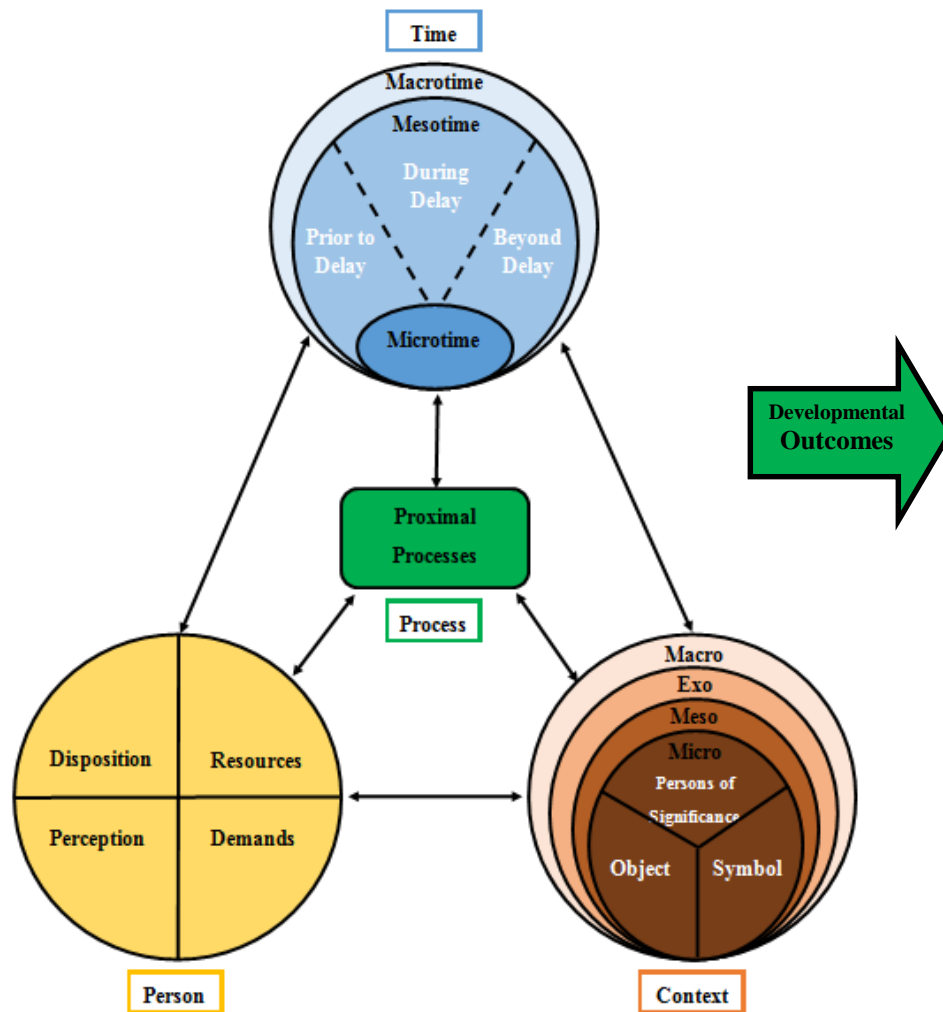
Figure 3.1. The application of the Bioecological Model of Human Development

Findings are presented in Chapters Four through Six representing the three main divisions of *time* at the meso- level: *prior to delay, during delay,* and *beyond delay.* In each chapter, the findings illustrate the complexity of the participants' environmental *contexts,* the emergent *proximal processes* and the *persons of significance* with whom they interacted.

Figure 3.2 illustrates how the three mesotime periods of this study build upon each other; (A) prior to delay, (B) during delay, and (C) beyond delay. It represents how (D) successive interactions of person, process, and context throughout time build upon one another to produces an individual's human development (see also Figure 3.1). Thus, in order to understand (E) the outcome of degree attainment, gaining an insight to previous experiences in various periods of time proves to be foundational.
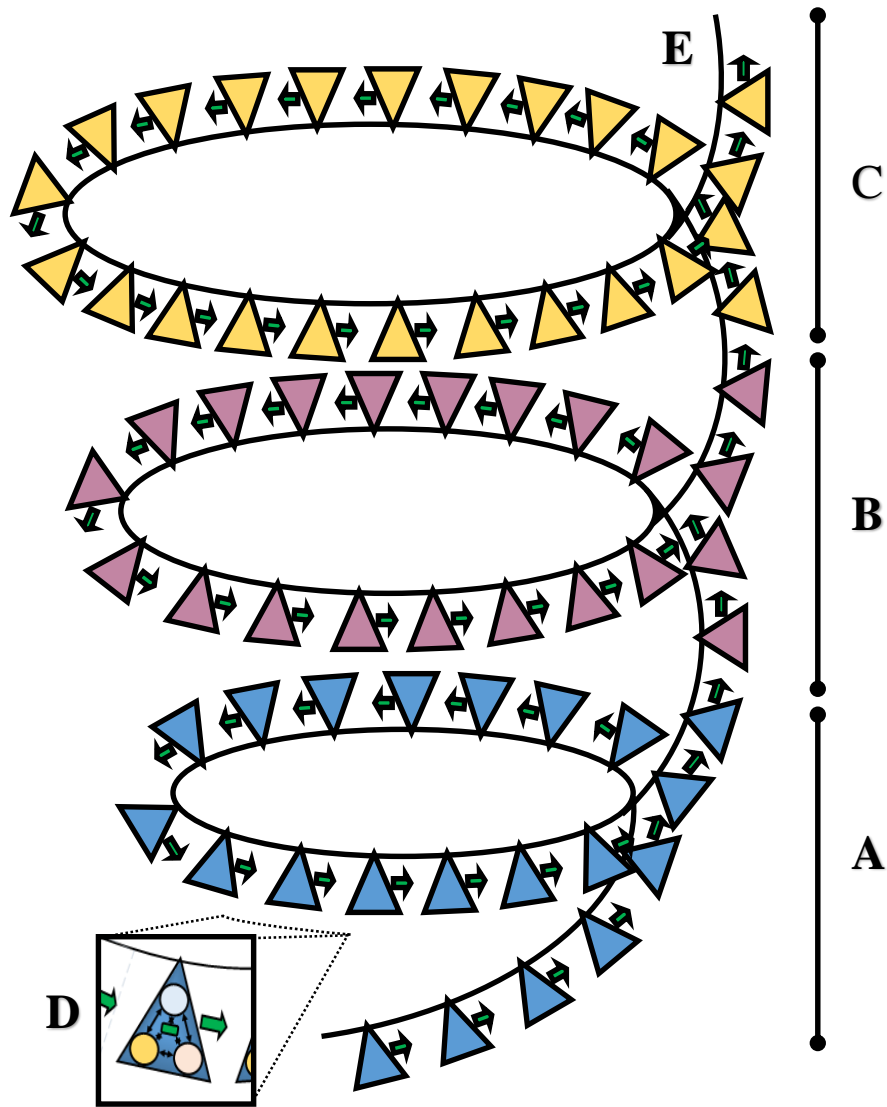
Figure 3.2. A developmental helix of Latter-day Saint PSE delayers

Validation

According to Creswell (2013), validation of qualitative research can be accomplished in many ways. The goal is to validate the findings as being accurate as can best be determined by both the researcher and outside sources. Creswell (2013) lists eight types of validation and recommends that qualitative researchers employ a minimum of two. For this study I have engaged in seven of them as will be described below.

Prolonged Engagement

As a lifelong member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, I have an intimate understanding of the cultural context of this study. I also have a personal knowledge of the type of impact a missionary experience can have on academic achievement. As an Institute Director for S&I, I work with those preparing for and returning from missions on a regular basis. I also see their college experiences first hand. The challenge this intimate understanding of Latter-day Saint culture presents to this research is the blind spots it can create during the study. To guard against such an insulated point of view, I have employed many other forms of validation.

Rich, Thick Description

As will be shown in Chapter Four, I have made it a point to include rich, thick descriptions. While some of my personal experiences may have been similar to those of the participants in this study, their experiences are unique to them. Thus, during the interview process, I constantly asked the participants to explain, define, and describe Latter-day Saint terms or behaviors that were otherwise commonly understood between us. I wanted their voices, descriptions, and perceptions to carry all the weight in the findings chapters for two reasons. First, so the reader could clearly see the participants' experiences coming through, and so the reader would have enough data to determine validity for themselves.

Clarifying Researcher Bias

This was accomplished in Chapter One as I gave a brief biography of my own mission and college experience.

Member Checking

To ensure that participants felt that their views and voices were being well represented, I sent them each a copy of the transcription of their interview for their review. I withheld coding the interviews until they had the opportunity to make any corrections or offer any clarifications to the transcripts.

Triangulation

As triangulation is also a method of data collection, the specifics of how I triangulated the data are given earlier in the chapter as a subsection of Design.

Peer Review

I asked three of the doctoral candidates to provide peer review validation (Creswell, 2013) by coding and analyzing sections of each interview according to the theoretical model. Afterwards we compared them to my own work and discussed any variances between the analyses. Doing so aided my understanding of how best to apply the theoretical lens to the transcripts.

External Audit

Finally, I asked a fourth doctoral candidate, who was familiar with Bronfenbrenner's theoretical work to read through all of the findings, the discussion, and concluding chapters of the study checking for researcher bias and to ensure that he agreed with the usability and application of the theory.

<div align="center">

Ethical Considerations

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I took every effort during each phase of this study to ensure that no harm was done to any participant by following all procedures outlined by The University of Texas

at Arlington's Institutional Review Board (see Appendix I for IRB approval forms). All artifacts I collected as a part of this study were photocopied and stored with the interview transcriptions in a manner designed to protect participants' identities. Thus, I blotted out all information from school records that could be used to identify a participant, such as their name, address, student ID numbers, etc. Finally, I changed all names of participants on the interview transcriptions to pseudonyms and the audio records were destroyed. In this way, participants are at virtually no risk of being identified in this study.

Limitations of the Study

Because this study only examines the postsecondary pathway of six male Latter-day Saint returned missionaries from Texas, the stories of other Latter-day Saint males may be very different from my participants. This study is further limited because the descriptions and experiences of returned missionaries from other regions of the state and of the country have not been included. Also, because this study only focuses on the experiences of men, there is no indication of how Latter-day Saint women experience postsecondary delay. Furthermore, members of the Church in other countries who delayed postsecondary education may have experienced a far different educational pathway because of the social environment of their postsecondary institutions.

Also, because this study is limited to the experiences of Latter-day Saint participants, the experiences of other delayers who delay for religious reasons are not presented. Further, this study does not provide any insights into the experiences other groups of students have who intentionally delay their college enrollment. For example,

this study does not examine the perceptions of military servicemen and women or those who delay in order to serve in the Peace Corps or other service organizations.

Finally, this study is also limited because it asks its participants to reflect into the past and remember events and frames of mind when faced with decisions, transitions, etc. It is possible participants' perceptions and memories have changed with time. Regardless of these limitations, this study provides an in-depth look into Latter-day Saint experiences with PSE delay after serving their missions, which is a unique contribution to the field. Recommendations for future research are given in Chapter Eight.

Summary

The intent of this chapter was to present the manner in which this study was conducted, including the methodological choice, the design of the study, and the recruitment procedures. It also provided an introduction to the six participants that met the study's research criteria to be interviewed. A description of how the data was analyzed was detailed and was followed by sections explaining the validation and ethical procedures taken. The limitations of this study concluded the chapter.

CHAPTER 4

PRIOR TO DELAY

The purpose of this study is to gain an in-depth understanding of the successful attainment of bachelor's degrees after delaying postsecondary education by Latter-day Saint returned missionaries. The Bioecological Model of Human Development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006), which explains human development through the dynamic interactions of *context, process, person,* and *time,* served as the conceptual framework for this study. Therefore, in this chapter, I present the emergent themes in context, process, and personal perception raised by my participants prior to delay and connect their perceptions to previous literature regarding PSE delayers and Latter-day Saint students. In detailing the findings prior to delay, I first give a general profile of Latter-day Saint delayers. Next, I offer the participants' college aspirations and expectations and how they were affected by the interplay between three social contexts and the persons of significance within those environments, in their homes, at school, and at church.

A Profile of Latter-day Saint Delayers

The six Latter-day Saint delayers of my study contradict the national profile of PSE delayers (Bozick & DeLuca, 2005; Hearn, 1992; Horn et. al, 2005) and the profile of delayers in Texas (Gururaj, 2011; Niu & Tienda, 2013) in notable ways. Unlike most delayers, these students were White and non-first generation (except for one student), and English was their native language. Furthermore, while most delayers were shown to derive from low-socioeconomic circumstances, these students came from relatively

modest socioeconomic circumstances. By all accounts, had these six participants been included in any of the national or state-specific research, they would have been predicted to enroll in college on-time. It is clear from the histories they are best categorized in the group Wells and Lynch (2012) labeled, "intentional delayers," or those who expected to go to college after a period of delay. For the six participants, college was in their plans, but only after serving a mission.

Comparing Socioeconomic Factors

While I did not specifically ask about or collect socioeconomic (SES) information from the participants, I concluded that none of them were from low-SES backgrounds, as most delayers tend to be. For example, DeRon described his neighborhood as being a "nicer neighborhood" than most the other kids in his high school. Dave saw his neighborhood as being full of "cookie-cutter houses, cookie-cutter-type income bracket," suggesting the middle class. Only Jeffrey, who moved around almost every two years, mentioned growing up in "low-income areas," but noted "a lot more money" in his neighborhood and school upon arriving in Texas.

While each of the Latter-day Saint delayers probably had more financial stability than most delayers, none of them had actively saved financially for college. For instance, Calvin, like all the others, worked during the summer after high school graduation to afford serving a mission. In his case, he explained that the "total cost [of his mission experience] was somewhere around $9,600." Because the cost of missionary service can vary so dramatically from mission location to mission location around the world, the Church encourages its missionaries to pay $400 a month regardless of mission location to

cover expenses. Calvin recalled, "I basically started with nothing and just put up everything I could in savings from that work and put it all to the mission." Therefore, although these students seemed to come from middle class backgrounds, they did not have the means to cover both missionary costs and college tuition. They each described working to save money for their missions at the expense of having nothing saved for college. (More will be detailed regarding the use of financial aid in Chapter Six.)

College Aspirations and Expectations

Each of the participants stated that they aspired to and expected to attend college. While not all of them detailed how early they began considering getting a college education, for most it was pre-high school. This supports the conclusion of Gururaj (2011) who found that early college planning is more likely to lead to degree completion than if it occurs during the high school years. Their college aspirations were fostered primarily by their families, school teachers, and church leaders. In this section, I will cover the perceptions of the participants regarding the role their families, the school environment, and the church played in their college aspirations.

Family Influences

Each of the participants described their parents as having high academic expectations for them. This was particularly true of their mothers. For example, Dave detailed an experience he had in high school with his mom when she went back to get a Master's degree. Describing himself as having "been pretty good at editing," his mom would invite him to edit her papers before sending them in to her professors. He remembered when her papers came back with a high grade, she said he "should have

earned that Master's degree instead of her." Her high praise made a clear impression on him. He stated, "That really helped me a lot at the end of high school knowing that college was something I could do." Thus, he took his college preparation much more seriously. Such an experience supports the findings of Rowan-Kenyon (2007), who found that a mother's expectations for education form a significant predictor for college attendance.

Unlike the profile of delayers, not only were these students, on the whole, not first-generation college students, but they came from families where both parents had earned college degrees and in many cases, the fathers had earned graduate degrees (See Table 4.1). Their high achievement levels echo the findings of Chadwick et al. (2010), who found the educational level of Latter-day Saints fathers predicted the educational plans and performance of their children. Jeffrey specifically recalled his father pursuing a graduate degree "just for that purpose—to show us that school was important."

Table 4.1
Educational levels of participants' parents prior to delay

Participant	Mother	Father
Calvin	some college	bachelor's
Cory	high school	high school
Dave	master's	master's
DeRon	bachelor's	master's
Jeffrey	some college	master's
Paul	some college	master's

Note. Information collected from pre-screening questionnaire (see Appendix D).

The college aspirations and expectations of my six participants were not only shaped by the perceived expectations of their parents, but also were set by personal interactions they had with their parents about postsecondary education. As Jeffrey explained, "I always knew that I was going to college. My parents made sure to let us know that school was important." Similarly, Dave reported several experiences he had with his parents that shaped his views of college. Describing early interactions he recalled, "I knew that my mom and dad had degrees; I actually saw a copy of their diplomas on the computer room wall." His mom even showed him her college transcript.

One moment that had a marked impact on Dave was when he came home from earning his first paycheck in high school, which was $200 from the local movie theater. He was excited by the fruits of his labor and could not wait to share his excitement with his mom. After looking at his paycheck, she handed him a copy of her pay stub for $1,800. He was floored at the difference. He continued:

> And the thing she said to me really stuck on my mind. She said, pointing to her check, "David, this is a pro-college experience." And I realized, okay, there is a value difference here. I worked really hard at the movie theater. I worked the night shifts and I worked weekends—every weekend I worked—and I got pretty much nothing.

Dave saw that a college degree could bring him significant financial returns for his future work. His anecdote demonstrates the powerful influence a single interaction can have from a person of significance. His views of college were changed and his motivation to go to college was further developed by this one comment from his mother.

Even though Cory's parents did not attend college, he still felt that college-going was emphasized at home. But, he admitted, "What really first pushed me [to consider going to college] was when my [older] sister went to BYU." He said of that event, "It just started to kind of inspire me." Jeffrey was also motivated by the experiences of his family members. He offered, "I followed my older brother's example. He went to college, so I wanted to go." Although previous research explored the key role of parents in their children's college attendance, this study showed that siblings also played a critical role in these students' college aspirations and enrollment.

While parents and siblings had direct impact on students' college aspirations, they also were able to impact their eventual success indirectly. For example, Jeffrey observed,

> I knew that just by being smart was not going to get me to where I wanted to be. I knew that I had to work hard. Our parents always taught us to work hard and I liked it. I liked the feeling of accomplishing stuff.

From these statements, it is clear that Jeffrey seemed to have a sense that educational outcomes, as well as general life outcomes, were something that he could affect through personal effort.

In summary, taking into account that each of the participants came from two-parent homes, where their parents typically had some college education, it is reasonable to assume my participants were at greater advantages socially and academically than the national average and thus better prepared to succeed once they eventually enrolled in college (Adelman, 2006; Goldrick-Rab & Han; 2011; Wells & Lynch, 2012).

Each participant engaged in multiple conversations with others about college in each of their social environments prior to delay (see Table 4.2). Those conversations included topics such as college selection, degree choice, timing of college attendance, cost of college attendance, applying for college, being successful in college, and benefits of college education. Two of the participants had gone on college campus tours during high school. Interestingly, none of the participants actively saved money for college. Nevertheless, as Table 4.2 shows, their personal aspirations and expectations of college enrollment and completion were fostered in their homes.

Table 4.2
Processes participants engaged in the home environment prior to delay

Processes	Calvin	Cory	Dave	DeRon	Jeffrey	Paul
Applied to college	X	X	X			
Expected to attend college	X	X	X	X	X	X
Had college conversations	X	X	X	X	X	X
Had college enrollment plan	X	X	X	X		
Saved money for college						
Visited college campus	X				X	

School Influences

In general, my participants held positive views of school, as did the Latter-day Saint students in Chadwick et al.'s (2010) study. As an example, Jeffery said, "I enjoyed the schools here in Texas." Part of Jeffrey's positive views of school were the results of

being engaged in a lot of different things, from "the hands-on stuff," like 4H, small machines class, and woodworking, to playing for the basketball team.

Paul was the only participant who did not view high school favorably. Sharing his perceptions, Paul said,

> High school, and just school in general, was not really for me. I am better than this kind of thing; not really better than this, but I would look around at other students and I would see them wasting time.

Paul felt like high school was merely something to be endured until he could have the means to pursue his personal goals. Instead, Paul dreamed of "owning and managing 20 real estate properties" and running "a paint ball field" from his home. Paul's pre-college views of postsecondary education were more in-line with Bozick and DeLuca's (2011) latent class of delayers for whom work was the driving force of delay.

Even though most of the participants held positive views of school, for Latter-day Saints in Texas, school is a place where they often can feel out-of-the-ordinary, because of their religious affiliation. For example, Dave recounted only six Latter-day Saint people in his graduating senior class that he would only occasionally see in the hallways, and there were none in his neighborhood. Thus, being in the religious minority, my participants' social networks were based upon other commonalities, such as extracurricular activities or hobbies. Jeffrey, DeRon, and Paul all played on sports teams, for instance, while Calvin and Dave participated with the band programs. Because most of my participants had positive views about school and learning, they typically associated with others who felt similarly. Calvin, for instance, acknowledged that most of his friends

were in band. He described those friends as being "very driven" and noted that they "also wanted to go to college and be educated too." The majority of the participants described their peers as aspiring to attend college, which supports an additional finding of Rowan-Kenyon (2007) who stated that another strong predictor of college attendance was encouragement of a person's peer group.

In addition to the important role of peers, all of my participants remembered with fondness those teachers who impacted their lives for good and guided their thinking towards postsecondary education. DeRon mentioned two such teachers, recalling, "I truly attribute most of my success in learning and growing and self-confidence in that area to Miss Hamilton and Miss Rothchild (names changed) at Riverbend Elementary school." As one with dyslexia, DeRon said, "[They] brought me up and taught me how to cope with my learning disability. It's still there, but I have learned to overcome it. I've learned to use it." Their effect was evident as he was in honors programs throughout high school.

Other participants identified how teachers played a key role in developing their academic aspirations as well. Dave described how a teacher helped prepare him for college. Mr. Terry (a pseudonym), his first AP course teacher and academic decathlon coach was deemed instrumental in helping Dave get ready to go to college. Dave recalled the way Mr. Terry built up his academic confidence: "You guys will go to college. You are all smart enough, you're all bright enough, I've seen the way you work, you guys have the right mind set, you just need to buckle down and do it." Similarly, it was the one-on-one attention that Cory received from an attentive accounting teacher that encouraged his eventual college degree choice.

As with most students, each of my participants had interactions with their school counselors during high school as well. For most, those meetings were considered formalities to address the class schedule. However, for Paul, once he heard the counselors reinforcing the same message about the importance of college taught by his parents, he recalled, "I kind of put two and two together and said that maybe there is something to this. So, I looked into it further." His self-prescribed research entailed "seeing the statistics" of college outcomes online. They had a positive effect on his thinking. He reported his newfound outlook as such:

> I knew I was going to college from the get go. I knew that for me to make enough money to be able to do the things I wanted to do with my life and enjoy life, I had to go to college to at least get my foot in the door. I also understood that having a college degree sets you apart from all the other people who did not go to college. It would set you apart from everybody else.

Paul's experience demonstrates the developmental nature of college aspirations. Initially, he saw high school as a waste of time, something he had to put up with. However, over time, the combination of messages from his parents at home and from personnel from school peaked his curiosity enough to find out more about attending college. As a result of all those interactions, he had a changed attitude and perspective of education.

In addition to personal interactions with influential people, my participants took other actions during high school that shaped their college aspirations and expectations. For instance, the majority of my participants took Advanced Placement (AP) classes and AP tests prior to high school graduation (see Table 4.3 for other college-preparation

actions). Given the fact that all of them ultimately received scholarships, I assumed their

academic momentum was high at the time of graduation. This is supportive of what

Adelman (2006) found regarding the predictive nature of high school academic intensity

being the most important indicator during pre-college history in creating academic

momentum towards degree completion.

Table 4.3
Processes participants engaged in the school environment prior to delay

Processes	Calvin	Cory	Dave	DeRon	Jeffrey	Paul
Had college conversations						
w/ friends and/or peers	X		X	X	X	
w/ school admin. / counselors			X		X	X
w/ school teachers		X	X			X
Took AP classes	X		X	X	X	
Took AP tests	X		X	X		
Took ACT and/ or SAT	X	X		X	X	X

What Table 4.3 does not account for is the quantity of AP classes and/or AP tests

the participant took or their scores on those tests. In Dave's case, he shared that he took

almost 30 tests: "I took one in my sophomore year and I took like six or seven in my

junior year and then almost 10 or 12 in my senior year." As a result, Dave reported, "I

ended up earning 57 college credit hours before I even left high school."

AP tests can pose a financial hardship for students (Kirst & Venezia, 2004), but

the school picked up the cost of Dave's AP tests after he paid for the first "four or five."

Therefore, in his case, testing did not create financial challenges and he was able to invest his time and resources to researching and preparing for each AP test by purchasing testing preparation materials online. He rationalized,

> If I paid $47 for a test and I passed, I could get three, four, or five college credit hours or more. That's like a couple thousand dollars in real money later on and it's also a lot of saved time.

So, Dave's costs for the tests totaled $235, but he felt the greater savings was in the cost of tuition he would no longer need to pay once he got to college.

In summary, all but one of the participants held a favorable view of high school and excelled in their studies. They were influenced by teachers and counselors who encouraged them to seek a postsecondary education. Academically, they were prepared to enter college and had even taken steps to be admitted into a postsecondary institution, such as taking college entrance exams and attained some college credits through AP testing.

Church Influences

The findings of Albrecht and Heaton (1998) and Chadwick et al. (2010) both showed significant positive effects on college aspirations and expectations of Latter-day Saints based upon the levels of their religious involvement. Thus, the impact of the church environment on the perceptions of my six participants is not unexpected. The actions taken by my participants, as shown in Table 4.4, seem to support the findings of Chadwick et al. (2010) regarding the correlation of Latter-day Saints religiosity and school performance, which in turn affect one's college academic readiness (Adelman,

2006). And, as will be shown in Chapter Five, these processes also play a significant role in shaping the participants' decision to delay their postsecondary education.

Table 4.4
Processes participants engaged in the church environment prior to delay

Processes	Calvin	Cory	Dave	DeRon	Jeffrey	Paul
Attended church weekly	X	X	X		X	X
Attended seminary classes	X	X	X	X	X	X
Attended weekly youth activities	X	X	X	X	X	X
Had college conversations						
w/ Church leaders	X	X	X		X	
w/ friends and/or peers	X	X	X	X		
Planned to serve a mission	X	X	X	X	X	X
Saved money for mission	X		X		X	X

My participants described attending church services weekly, youth activities regularly, and attending early morning seminary classes daily during high school. Only DeRon reported a period of less church activity during a part of his childhood. The majority of my participants recall having college discussions at church or with church leaders. Dave recalled having "a lot of youth leaders who stressed the importance of college." Many of whom were lawyers, accountants, and other professionals. He further clarified the influence it had on him as not "preaching," but rather "more of a nice influence." He said, "You could see the results based off of their careers, and their jobs,

and how well off they came across." Similarly, Cory also told how his church youth

leaders "got us all thinking about what we should do for a career."

Not only did the local church leadership impact their thoughts about college, the

worldwide leadership also influenced their thinking about college. Jeffrey recalled, "That

is what the prophet[5] talked about that you need to do. You've got to get your education.

You don't have to be a rocket scientist, but whatever you do, be the best at what you can

do." He went on to express that Church leaders had stressed the need to "get as much

education as you can" for years and that same message is presented in lesson manuals

and other pamphlets prepared for church membership. Thus, while they did not recall the

exact frequency of such discussions by local or general leadership, they referred to

college-going as an expected behavior in their Church culture.

Calvin's experience, on the other hand, was unique to the group. His parents and

sister did not share the Latter-day Saint faith with him as he converted to the faith his

senior year of high school. However, prior to his conversion, he described his college

aspirations as being affected by his parents' faith as it was in the home that "the idea of

going to college was formulated." For instance, his parents took him on campus tours to

several different Church of Christ colleges.

Even before joining The Church of Jesus of Christ of Latter-day Saints, the

educational culture of the Church influenced him. As a junior in high school, he was

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[5] For member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, "A belief in prophets and their messages lies at the heart of [Latter-day Saint] doctrine" (Britsch & Britsch, 1992, httm://eom.byu.edu/index.php/Prophet#Prophets). As such, not only do they revere Biblical prophets, but also believe there are modern-day prophets. The president of the Church, is referred to as "the prophet" by Church members.

introduced to the Church, by his friends in marching band. As a result, he "went to some seminary classes and attended some church," but reported, "when [my parents] found out what church it was, they told me I couldn't go anymore, and so that was kind of an issue." However, Calvin "joined the Church when [he] was 18, the beginning of [his] senior year of high school."

His decision to join the Church was a challenge for the family. Poignantly, he described their reaction and his perceived rationale for their reaction:

They were really let down by that personally. I think their religion was very important to them and they kind of thought I was betraying the family faith because it went back a couple of generations on both sides. And they had a lot of doctrinal concerns too, which we would have long discussions about. It was pretty hard; it usually ended in some tears on both sides.

Not only were his parents upset with his conversion to the LDS Church, but at the same time he began to think about attending BYU. Consequently, Calvin felt a significant decrease in his family's support of his college plans, which became even more complicated once he decided to delay college to serve a mission.

In summary, my participants were each influenced to aspire for and to expect to receive a college education from their associations with church leaders, peers, and the emphasis the teachings of the Church place on education. Furthermore, because their homes were also a place where these cultural values were promoted and supported, the value of gaining a postsecondary education was doubly reinforced. In Calvin's case,

while his parents were supportive of him attending college, he did not receive the same religious support at home like the other participants did.

The driving forces of an individual's development are the actions or processes he or she engages in within any given contexts (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). The description of my participants' high school experiences reflects both their postsecondary knowledge and readiness because of their frequent conversations about college with people who had college experience (Kirst & Venezia, 2004) and because of their high level of academic intensity (Adelman, 2006). Furthermore, similar to the findings of Chadwick et al. (2010) there seems to be a positive relationship between the religious involvement of my participants and their positive outlook towards higher education. This finding is quite different from the profile of most delayers who are often unprepared academically an lack adequate college awareness (Bozick & DeLuca, 2005; Hearn, 1992; Horn et al., 2005).

Summary

This chapter began with comparative profile of Latter-day Saint delayers, which showed that in nearly all respects, Latter-day Saints delayers are more like those who immediately enroll for college than those who delay. However, in categorizing them as delayers, it is best to align them with Wells and Lynch's (2012) description of intentional delayers because their choices to delay are neither brought on by a lack of academic preparation nor socioeconomic obstacles.

Next was shown how the participants perceived their interactions with three distinct social environments; their homes, their schools, and their church. Within each of

these environments were similar persons of significance—parents and siblings, peers and teachers, and finally, church leaders—who encouraged their college attendance. It was shown that each context impacted the personal development of the participants by influencing their dispositions towards college-going and by creating opportunities for them to act towards college enrollment. The next chapter explores the student perceptions during their delays.

CHAPTER 5

DURING DELAY

This chapter discusses the mission experiences of the six Latter-day Saint postsecondary education (PSE) delayers of my study. For each participant, there was at least three years between the time they graduated from high school and enrolled in college, because they elected to participate in missionary service. Yet, examining their period of delay will help provide insights into how they were able to delay going to college and still attain a bachelor's degree.

Hence, this chapter follows the subsequent format. First, using Bronfenbrenner and Morris's (2006) model as a lens, the personal *dispositions* and *demands* participants held toward delaying college instead of immediately enrolling for PSE are given. Then, a general description of missionary service is detailed, focusing on the environmental *context* of missions and *persons of significance* with whom missionaries regularly interacted. Finally, the *proximal processes* or common actions inherent in missionary service are detailed. In each instance, the impact of this type of PSE delay on the eventual degree attainment of my participants is highlighted, although the stronger connections to that ultimate outcome are made in Chapter Six.

Dispositions and Perceived Demands for Delaying PSE

According to the Bioecological Model of Human Development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006), and as was demonstrated in Chapter Four, the social context of one's circumstances can create *demands* or expectations to act within a given context in any number of different ways. Those actions tend to be guided by one's *dispositions* towards

certain types of responses. For example, in Chapter Four, we saw Dave had developed a favorable disposition towards college enrollment that was fostered through parental interaction. Thus, when the situation to take AP tests arose, he acted in a way that further promoted the likelihood of him attending college. However, even though Dave was predisposed to enroll in college, he instead elected to serve a mission, just as all the other participants did. Detailed below are the participants' descriptions of their dispositions for wanting to serve a mission, as well as the rationale towards delaying college instead of enrolling for PSE immediately out of high school.

Cultural Expectations to Serve a Mission

Educational researchers (Bozick & DeLuca, 2011; Wells & Lynch, 2012) have acknowledged decisions to delay PSE go beyond the lack of academic preparations or financial considerations. For instance, one researcher concluded, "Post-high school experiences (e.g. marriage, children, home ownership, and occupation) may play a greater role in the decision to delay enrollment than high school characteristics and experiences play" (Rowan-Kenyon, 2007, p. 210). However, religious considerations were not identified as a viable cause of delay.

The findings of my study show that even though my participants had the characteristics and experiences in high school that most likely predicted immediate college enrollment, my participants' expectations and aspirations to serve a mission for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints were stronger than their expectations and aspirations to enroll in college. These desires were instilled before high school graduation

as the result of personal experiences with the teachings of the Church, and through interactions with family, friends, and leaders both in the home and at church.

The timing of when those desires were fostered varied by individual, but in all but one case, because my participants "grew up in the Church," its influence on their desires to serve a mission began much earlier than any influencing factors on college-going. For instance, Dave recalled:

> I was seven years old and I remember being in church one time. We were singing a song about serving a mission and helping other people. I had this very strong overpowering feeling, "You know what? You need to serve a mission." I didn't know the significance of it; but, I knew that I wanted to serve a mission. And so, for the rest of my life, from about seven years old onward, I was preparing for a mission.

As Dave mentioned in Chapter Four, his college aspirations did not begin crystallizing until high school. Jeffrey expressed desires to go to college happening around the 8th grade, but said that he "always" remembered wanting to serve a mission. Even coming from a self-described "less-active" religious home and irregularly attending Church during his formative years, DeRon said he "always" wanted to go on a mission. He put choosing to serve a mission into simple cultural terms, "It just made sense. I was Mormon; I was worthy; I wanted to serve."

Cory's experience demonstrates the cultural expectation that the Church environment played in shaping his disposition to serve. He said, "My parents are both converts, so they did not serve missions." But, since he "grew up in the Church,"

missionary service was "always in the back of my mind." Similar to Dave, he also referred to a song he frequently sang as a child at church, "I Hope They Call Me on a Mission" that inspired him to want to serve. Furthermore, Cory explained, "especially as you get into priesthood…right when you're a deacon[6]…they are always talking about [missionary service] a lot in the lessons." Cory clarified that "deacon age is when you are 12 years old." He went on to say, "It's mostly expected that if you grow up in Church that you're going to become a deacon, the first level of priesthood, and then a teacher at 14 and a priest later at 16." All during these years of adolescence, priesthood lessons frequently focused on the need to serve a mission.

The cultural duty for young men to serve missions (Monson, 2013) was a major factor in Dave's decision to delay college for missionary service. The "expectation that young men will go serve a church mission," was reinforced by the "influences" of his priesthood leaders "who were very supportive in talking about the positive experiences they had." In addition, Dave mentioned that both his father and older brother had served missions and "talked about their experiences pretty frequently" with "some really interesting and great stories." Thus, further shaping his dispositions toward fulfilling his "priesthood duty."

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[6] In The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, "the word 'priesthood' has several meanings…the power of God,…the authority to perform ordinances,…[and] the right and responsibility to preside within the organizational structure of the Church" (Ellsworth & Luthy, 1992, http://eom.byu.edu/index.php/Priesthood). Typically, male members can be ordain to the priesthood beginning at the age of 12 and "may subsequently be ordained to other offices as he grows older and receives new Church callings…the young men 12 to 18 are organized into three quorums: deacons (ages 12 to 14), teachers (ages 14 to 16), and priests (ages 16 to 18)" (Tingey, 1992, http://eom.byu.edu/index.php/Priesthood_Quorums).

Just as college-going can be impacted by the encouragement of peers (Rowan-Kenyan, 2007), culturally, the decision to serve a mission can be, too. Cory recalled when he was a priest he was a part of "a big priest quorum," and that "the vast majority" of his quorum members served mission at age 19. His decision to serve was directly influence by his peers at church.

On the other hand, peers at school could present different challenges for the participants as they had to explain to their friends why they were not heading off to college. Dave recalled telling a classmate of his decision: "They thought that was kind of weird that I would take two years of my life, instead of going to college, instead of going out and having fun, and being a young adult and just going crazy." For Dave, the avoidance of being socially "weird" was not reason enough to forego missionary service.

Unlike all of the other participants, Calvin did not grow up as a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and his family members were not members of the Church. Thus, it seems reasonable that he might not have as strong of a desire to serve a mission as males who grew up with those cultural expectations. Yet, he said, "When I made the decision to join the church, it was basically a given fact in my mind that I would go on a mission." Explaining his decision further, he said, "I had a couple of good [Latter-day Saint] friends from band and would spend a lot of time at their houses." As a result he "would pray with their families," "talk about serving a mission," and "share stories." He would also "go out with the missionaries and kind of have a limited experience of what it was like." In addition, he explained that the youth leaders at Church

"definitely taught us [to have] that goal." Thus, like the others, Calvin's mission-going behavior and desire were born in and supported by the church culture.

While motivation to serve was influenced by cultural identity, religious responsibility, and by family, friends, and leaders, the personal decision to delay college in favor of missionary service often times went deeper than any social demands could place on these participants. For instance, Paul recalled, "I knew that I had a testimony of Jesus Christ and of the restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ. I had a testimony of the Book of Mormon and of the divine calling of Joseph Smith, and so, I had the desire to share what I knew to be true with others." He expressed how he "always looked forward" to being able to serve a mission. Paul continued, "I knew that there was something that [others] did not have that I had and I felt a responsibility to share that."

Choosing to Delay College Rather than Stopping Out

The decision to serve a mission did not preclude immediate college enrollment. In fact, the data from the pre-screening questionnaire showed the majority of the respondents who served a mission and earned bachelor's degrees did so after starting college. Thus, the following section details the rationale these six students had about choosing to delay enrollment instead of delaying missionary service.

Each of the participants acknowledged in one way or another that delaying their schooling came with risks. Those risks focused primarily on the loss of academic momentum. The participants unanimously expressed that if they were going to take two years out of their academic momentum that it was better, in their estimation, to do it at the beginning of college rather than interrupting the college flow.

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For example, DeRon stated, "It never made sense to me, if I'm going to go and take a year of college, take a break for two years, and then come back to college, I'm not going to remember anything." Had he stopped out, he also worried he "would not care" about his first year of college in anticipation of "leaving to go on my mission." He reiterated, "It didn't really make a whole lot of sense to me why I would do that." Instead, DeRon planned "to go on my mission, so that [he] could get back and take college all in one."

Similarly, Paul desired to be able to return from his mission and "focus entirely on my schooling." Dave rationalized, "I could've done college for a semester but I thought it would be too disjointed." Jeffrey felt delaying college presented "less distractions" than stopping out, meaning that he could concentrate on his studies better once his missionary service was completed.

In summary, these findings help fill gaps in Bozick and DeLuca's (2011) study on non-enrollees of postsecondary education by exploring the decision-making processes of those who have yet to enroll after two years, including their rationale and motivations. Additionally, because all of my students expressed concerns about the effects stopping out might have on their college momentum, they elected instead to delay their enrollment. Their concerns may shed added light on the concept of academic momentum posited by Adelman (2006). Their perceived apprehensions suggest that they felt continual college momentum was more important than any academic momentum lost transitioning from high school to college.

The Influence of the Mission Environment

Despite being academically prepared and having high aspirations and expectations to attend college, each of my participants instead chose to delay their postsecondary education in order to fulfill a two-year church mission. However, the participants were unable to select the specific location or timing of the service; rather, they were only able to notify the Church of their desires to serve. Regardless, each shared specific experiences about their missions and the service they gave that provide an understanding link to their college experiences detailed in Chapter Six.

A brief summary of the various places each of the six participants served their missions for the Church is provided in Table 5.1. As can be seen from the table, the context for each mission was somewhere other than North Texas. Not only are the locations different, but also the dates of service vary. Because the service dates do not optimally align with the beginning or ending of most academic calendars, the length of delay was increased beyond the two years of missionary service alone.

Table 5.1
Mission locations and date range of service of the six participants

Participant	Mission Location	Dates of Service
Calvin	Utica, New York, USA	Jan. 2005 to Jan. 2007
Cory	Salt Lake City, Utah, USA	Nov. 2005 to Nov. 2007
Dave	Kiev, Ukraine	Mar. 2006 to Mar. 2008
DeRon	Las Vegas, Nevada, USA	Dec. 2007 to Dec. 2009
Jeffrey	Manila, Philippines	Nov. 2005 to Nov. 2007
Paul	Buenos Aires, Argentina	Jan. 2003 to Jan. 2005

The Mission Call

After an extensive application process, the Church leadership considers each missionary applicant in terms of where in the world he would be the most needed based upon his background, personality, and talents. Mission assignments to serve in one of the 406 world-wide mission locations are then issued by mail to the missionary. Thus, for each of the participants, the locations of their individual missions came as a surprise. For example, of his mission call to Salt Lake City, Utah, Cory recalled the response of his large family, "When I opened my call their reactions were a lot different than what my reaction was. I remember one of the first things they said was, 'What are you going to do there? Aren't they already all Mormons?'" Further, one of his siblings quipped, "Are you sure that isn't just the return address?"

Calvin shared his initial reaction to receiving a call to the state of New York:

First of all, I didn't know how to pronounce Utica. I didn't know where it was. I had never been to New York before. I was excited about staying in the states and speaking in English. I just wanted to get out there and start working instead of having to worry about a language barrier or something else.

For others, Dave, Jeffrey, and Paul, learning a new language presented challenges. Paul reported, "I thought I was going to struggle with the language immensely because of my high school experiences with Spanish class." Once he got to Argentina he said, "Speaking with the people down there, I struggled a lot earlier on." But, he overcame that challenge by telling himself: "Oh, just accept the fact that I do not know the language now, but I will know it if I continue trying and continue immersing myself in the

language." Further he explained, "I believed that the ability to speak would come to me if I continued to put forth effort." Eventually he reported that the language did come, even to the point where he was "picking up rare grammatical errors in the natives when they were speaking."

Jeffrey also spoke about the location of his mission:

Serving in the Philippines I learned a lot from [the] people about just being happy no matter what your situation is; there is always something good you can look on. The gratitude from the people, I got a lot of that. Because they would have very little, but were always so happy.

Jeffrey's perspective was affected by an incident just prior to leaving for his mission. After hurricane Katrina had ravaged New Orleans, he and his family headed back to their old neighborhood to help out their former friends and neighbors. He recalled being struck by how the people of New Orleans reacted, "They blamed everybody, 'Oh, it's the governments fault. They didn't step in and fix my fence fast enough.'" He had similar opportunities to help clean up from destructive storms in the Philippines and contrasted the people's reactions, "When we would have storms in the Philippines, they would just get out and sweep their porch, pick up the branches, fix the poles—they didn't expect anything." He carried the lessons of self-reliance with him into college.

The Missionary Training Center (MTC)

Prior to arriving in any service locations or "mission fields," missionaries are sent to training centers where they are introduced to the missionary way of life. As missionaries, their conduct is expected to be focused exclusively on the objectives of

missionary service, thus anything that can shift their efforts away from those goals is to be avoided. For example, missionaries are limited in their personal relationships with family or friends back home and they are to avoid seeking entertainment that may distract them from the purposes of the mission. Avoiding inappropriate distractions was aided by the full schedules missionaries keep.

Dave explained, "[At the MTC] they prepare you for the language, for culture, for what you are going to teach, and how you're going to teach it." If the missionary needs to learn another language, then they may spend up to 12 weeks of training at the MTC. Dave shared his perceptions of a typical day at the MTC:

It seemed like, you would go, you'd eat breakfast, you'd study, you'd learn a language, you'd learn missionary skills, and you'd learn tips. You would learn what to teach, how to teach it, and it was just study, study. And then you'd eat lunch and, you know, study more. And you have dinner and you'd study more.

For those called to speak English in their mission fields, their stay at the MTC was only three weeks, but following the same schedule.

DeRon appreciated the regimented study time stating, "For the first time in my life, I actually studied. Before that I didn't know what it meant to study. And so, there was this yearning for learning that I had never had before." Even though he felt like in high school he had learned how to study in spite of his dyslexia, he felt like this was different. "I was reading something for the first time to understand every concept and aspect about it rather than reading to get through so that I could, you know, pass the test." He admitted that up until that point in his life, his attitude toward learning was, "Let me

put in the least amount of effort for the highest yield of grade points." Now it had become, "There is no grade; let me put in the most amount of effort so that I can have the most knowledge. So I can understand something at a greater level." Surprisingly, DeRon then reflected back to his high school learning and quipped:

> High school was too easy. I never did homework. I showed up and I took tests and I got A's and B's, but I think if I could be frank, the education system did me a huge disservice because I was never stretched.

> All of the participants noted their study skills improved during their time in the MTC. Consequently, gaining study skills in these training sessions proved helpful to the participants when they got to college.

The Mission Field

Once in their mission fields, each of the participants found a similarly rigid schedule. Calvin recalled, "It's very intensive," while Dave called it "strict." Cory gave a detailed outline of a typical day:

> Being a missionary is very regimented, for the most part. You get up at 6:30. You shower and then you exercise for a little bit and then by eight o'clock until about 10 o'clock, you study. Then from, like 10 to 12 you go out and proselyte until lunch and then you proselyte again until about five o'clock. You have dinner and then you proselyte until nine. And then you come back with your companion and you plan for the next day.

Once a week, missionaries have a "preparation day" or a "P-day" to take care of all their personal needs. Calvin shared what happens on those days:

You have to be organized. You only have one day to kind of accomplish all your

chores for the week. So, that day you have to have a plan. You go write your

letters, do your laundry, do your grocery shopping and everything.

Despite the tightness of the schedule, these 19- to 21-year olds were left on their

own to determine how they filled their schedule. DeRon said, "There's no mission police,

there's no enforcement other than, 'Hey, I don't feel good about this.'" Dave shared,

There was no one looking over our shoulders to say, you know, 'You are being

inefficient with your time,' or 'why aren't you doing this?' It was us determining

what we are going to do that day, and then it ended with a hard cut off at nine

o'clock.

Because of the demanding schedule, each of the participants mentioned the importance of

learning to be organized and have a plan. These developed skills became very useful in

their eventual college settings.

The Influence of Missionary Companions and Mission Presidents

Each participant mentioned two types of persons of significance with whom they

interacted regularly throughout the mission. The first were missionary companions and

the second were mission presidents.

Missionary Companions

Every day of a mission is spent in the company of a missionary companion.

Companions are always the same gender and roughly the same age as each other. These

companionships are determined by the Mission President and last no less than six weeks.

Dave explained,

The mission president could decide if missionaries would be switched with other

people or if you were moved to a different city or if you would stay where you

were. . . [every six weeks]. He would make an executive decision of where

everyone's going to be.

Thus, each missionary had about 10 or so different companions over the course of their

missions.

Furthermore, there is "a seniority ranking" within each companionship assigned

by the mission president, but usually was based on time in the field. Dave explained,

"Missionaries who have been out longer than missionaries who have just arrived kind of

have a senior status because they have more experience." As their missions continued and

individuals came and went, this provided my participants daily experiences of either

practicing principles of followership or leadership, depending on their companionship

status. The practical purpose of having a more experienced companion when you first

arrived was so that he could pass along the practices of being a missionary. For example,

Dave said, "When I first went to Ukraine, I had a senior companion who kind of showed

me some of the things he had learned."

Overall, Jeffrey felt that he gleaned something from each of his companions. For

example, he recalled that he "just kind of copied" his first companion who had already

"been in the routine and serving for over a year." He described his second companion as

being "more on the street savvy side." Jeffrey recalled, "I trained someone else my third

transfer out, I had to train another missionary, so I really had to learn it. We kind of had

to learn it together because I wasn't out that long." From that point on, he was always the senior companion, providing direction and training to other missionaries.

Companionships did not always work well together as Calvin explained through the example of trying to organize a schedule,

When you are on a mission it's all on your shoulders to organize. I mean, you are with someone else but, you know, if you are both not on the same page and doing your part to keep things organized, it can slow you down. So, you have to be organized.

Dave noted, "There were some missionaries where it was a two year slack off, I won't say vacation because you were limited by your activities, but there were missionaries who just kind of flew by. They wouldn't really do that much." He went on to explain, "I'd say 5%-10% would be like, 'You know what? I'd rather just go sit in the apartment and do nothing.'" DeRon offered his strategy for overcoming those difficulties,

You have to learn to say to people, 'This is what we are doing.' And, you have got to convince them that it's going to make them feel better or that they are going to be a better person for doing what you said or that they are going to have more success.

From those experiences he came to realize that "ultimately, what people wanted on their mission was to have success." The daily practice of small group dynamics, including the practice of leadership skills, proved helpful when the men worked on group projects in college.

For several of the participants, the interactions they had with companions had direct bearing on their college choices. Jeffrey mentioned,

> Other missionaries asked me where I was going to go. You know, if I was going to school in the Western States, if I was going to go to Utah State or the University of Utah or…they would ask me if I wanted to go to school with them.

Similarly, Dave recalled some of the missionaries had "gone to college before hand, maybe a semester or two" and they would "share stories" about their college experience, which made impressions on his college expectations.

Paul's outlook was different than Dave's. While he reported that other missionaries were "talking about applying for school," he did not "really see much of a need to apply." The whole application process seemed to irritate him. He surmised, "The way I saw it was I had money, I wanted to pay it to a school, and they were going to take my money regardless of, you know, what my test scores were and things like that." Paul's thinking at the time seems to reflect the lack of college readiness he detailed in Chapter Four.

Mission Presidents

A mission president and his wife volunteer their time for three years to oversee and direct the missionary work in a given location. In addition to determining companionship assignments and locations as was already mentioned, they meet with each missionary regularly, usually about once every six weeks. For Calvin, who did not have support at home, it was the mission president who provided moral support. He said, "He would meet with us individually to just see how we were doing personally. And even

outside of [group meetings] he would occasionally stop in and check with us just as individuals. And that was nice."

For each of the participants, missionary presidents impacted their missions, but for many, they impacted their college-going directly. Cory said his mission president's influence "really helped" him in college. Cory went on to explain how "shy" he was all throughout high school. He admitted that he found his mission president to be "a little bit intimidating" and so he would "shy away" during interviews with him. "But, as time went on," Cory recounted,

> I saw that he really believed in me as a missionary and he would constantly tell me, "Have you seen the ways that you are changing yourself?" He would encourage me saying, "You can do better than you are doing now" and things like that.

Cory recalled that in his "final interview he talked about getting an education specifically." As a result of these interviews, Cory shared, "I started believing in myself more. I just think having that kind of belief in myself I realized that I could do hard things." Those regular challenges from his mission president developed in Cory a desire "to set more goals and challenges for myself." He took that newfound confidence with him to college.

Dave, who spent almost six months working in his mission president's office as an assistant, recalled a poignant encounter he had with his mission president that entirely set the course of his post-mission life. He labeled it "a critical point" in determining his college path. He detailed:

The last couple days of my mission, I sat down and had an interview with my
mission president and we talked about things that went well, things that didn't go
well, things that I learned, and personal growth and development that I had
achieved. Like my goals of being a missionary. He asked me about college, "So,
where are you going to college next?" And I said, "Oh, you know, maybe I'll go to
BYU. We'll see what happens." And he asked what I was going to study and I
said, "I don't know, Mechanical Engineering, but I kind of like this business office
atmosphere." And then he paused for a moment and looked at me and he said,
"You should try accounting." And I thought, "Okay, I can try accounting." It was
something totally out of the blue, but he was like, "I think you would be really
successful in accounting." When I got home, I found a college that had a good
[accounting] program.

The trust Dave placed in his mission president's judgment was born from "seeing him
make critical decisions throughout the mission in guiding the missionary work."
Nevertheless, from that instance, Dave set a path towards a degree in accounting.
Consequently, he would not enroll in BYU as will be detailed in Chapter Six.

Jeffrey had a similar experience, but not as pointed. He said his missionary
president "had a lot of suggestions." But, was mostly interested in "prepping you for your
plans after [a mission]." Jeffrey recalled, "he gives you goals," which included becoming
"a family man," "making sure you are honest," "making an honest income," and doing
"something you can be proud of, you know, a good working job." They also discussed
how attending college was one of Jeffrey's goals. Ultimately, the message Jeffrey took

home from his mission president was "get a family started and also get to school quick wherever you want to go. Go to school."

As was shown above, missionary companions and mission presidents were instrumental in influencing post-mission college decisions. Those missionary companions who had already attended college prior to serving, shared stories of their experiences in college while others engaged in college planning discussions. Mission presidents were the most influential on my participants during this time. All but one of the participants pointed to specific ways their mission presidents impacted their college decisions and plans directly. These findings support the conclusion of Chadwick et al. (2010) regarding the influence Church leaders can have on Latter-day Saints' educational aspirations.

The Influence of Missionary Service

As was detailed above, my participants felt the context in which they served a mission had a significant effect on their eventual college attainment. Generally speaking, Cory felt his mission increased his desires for lifelong learning. He said, "It's really influencing you to always rise to the next level rather than just being complacent," which for him, rising to the next level meant "going to college." While all the participants engaged in very similar activities common to missionary service, two processes or actions, identified here as interpersonal relations and daily persistence, emerged as playing a key role in the men's lives after they returned from their service and prepared to enter college and are detailed below. The remainder of actions participants engaged in while missionaries that impacted their degree attainments will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Six as they relate specifically to the college experience (see Table 6.3).

Interpersonal Relations

As stated, one of the key skills the participants gained through their mission experiences was developing interpersonal relationships. Dave shared that the main purpose of missionary work consisted of "this two-year process" when you are "fully committed" to "talking to people." He continued, "You're preaching, finding people to teach, you're helping people, you're helping the congregation, but you're really just talking with people all the time." Jeffrey said, "You get to meet a lot of different people. It helped me break out of my shyness and meet a lot of different personalities."

Paul remembered, "Prior to my mission, I would not go out of my way to talk to people." Comparatively, as a missionary he recalled, "Every day I was going out of my way to initiate conversations with people, kind of draw information out from them, and get to know them, and be able to make judgments based on the information I gathered." He explained what he meant by that: "You know, like short conversations with judgments—'Is this person receptive to what I am saying?' or …. 'What is this person lacking?' or 'What do they need?' or 'How can I help this person?'"

Working with different people from different circumstances every day provided DeRon with a new perspective. He said,

While as a missionary, you have no ties to anything or anybody and so you can see this box this person's walking within with clarity. And you can see beyond where they can't. And you can see the cliff in front of them—you can see different things that they're running into.

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He felt that this perspective "allows you to recognize certain…patterns that people make, the same mistakes that end up down the same sad, sorrowful road." This awareness helped DeRon understand that in college "[he] would have to lean on other people that aren't in my box so that I could see beyond my box."

Calvin also expressed the impact observing and interacting with other people from different backgrounds had on his development:

> You know, you grow up a certain way and you see things the way you see it and it's a lot narrower than you think it is when you're experiencing it. Then you go out in the world and you see people with a lot less than you or with a lot harder situations than you deal with and just struggling with addiction, struggling with all kinds of things and really tough lives. You see what it's like, how people treat each other as adults. I just think it really helped me mature and grow up in a way that I couldn't have experienced any other way at that time in my life.

Consequently, Calvin felt his added maturity aided him once he began his postsecondary education. In a similar way, Cory confided, "I think that had I started college immediately I wouldn't have been as ready for it." After the mission, Cory felt more mature, more adequately prepared to handle the challenges of college. This was a view each of the participants shared, which seemed to stem from their constant interactions with others.

Daily Persistence

Missionary work was difficult for the participants because of the constant rejection they faced. However, they each expressed that enduring that type of "failure"

was strengthening to their character. Calvin expressed that one of the things that helped him "grow the most" was "always having to, for lack of a better word, just fight for it." Meaning, "fighting for your opinion, your beliefs." He explained this resolve results from "just hearing 'no' all the time" or being told, "No, that's not right" or "No, I'm not interested." In other words, "very seldom do you hear someone say, 'Yeah, you know, I get that; I accept that."

Jeffrey looked back on the whole process of the mission and summed it up this way:

> Finishing the mission, you know, it shows that you can stick through it even though you are going to have ups and downs like a roller coaster. High points—some of the highest of highs—you feel so good while on your mission. But then, you'll have some low points when you are out there in the middle of nowhere, you're by yourself, and everybody's said 'no' to you all day. And you're like, "What am I doing here?" You know, but you stuck it out, you did what you were supposed to, you accomplished it.

Goldrick-Rab and Han's (2011) conclusion about delayers rings true of the delay experience of my six participants. They said, "It is quite possible that SES advantaged students (or in this case, intentional delayers) are accruing additional advantages during their time off [than other delayers]" (p. 441). While the purpose of missionary service was not focused on college preparation, the demands of missionary work and the interactions with those who had gone or were planning to go to college helped my participants prepare for college life. As will be shown in Chapter Six, the skills and

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attributes developed on their two-year missions proved invaluable when the participants started college.

Summary

This chapter details findings of my six participants' experiences during the time of their delay from high school graduation to college enrollment. It explains that the cultural environment and expectations to serve a mission, which were reinforced by family, friends, and church leaders, were established much earlier than the participants' college aspirations and expectations.

This chapter also gave a general description of serving a mission, including the general context of missionary life, the interpersonal relationships that further shaped college aspirations and expectations, and the activities participants regularly engaged in that promoted skill and attribute development. Findings showed that the structure of missionary life played an important role in helping my participants develop the skills and attribute that would eventually aid their college success. Missionary companions and mission presidents had the most significant impact on shaping the post-mission college-going expectations of my participants. The following chapter demonstrates how the personal developments gained from missionary service aided the success of my participants in attaining bachelor's degrees.

CHAPTER 6

BEYOND DELAY

The purposes of this chapter are to present the college experiences of this study's

six participants and to detail findings they perceived accounted for their success in

attaining a bachelor's degree despite delaying postsecondary education (PSE). While

each participant had a unique postsecondary pathway to degree attainment, the findings

of this chapter detail three emergent themes my participants used to describe their

experiences: 1) transitioning off their missions and into the classroom, 2) transferring

schools, which four of the six experienced, and 3) completing their degrees. In addition,

throughout the chapter, discussion of my findings is given in relationship to previous

research.

Transitioning from the Mission Field to the College Classroom

This section explores the participants' descriptions of their college experiences in

terms of the social environments they encountered and the interactions they had with

those whom they feel influenced their college success. As shown in Table 6.1, Calvin and

Cory enrolled in and matriculated to graduation at Brigham Young University (BYU), a

private Church-owned four-year institution. They were the only ones to spend their entire

postsecondary experience at one institution. DeRon began at Brigham Young University-

Idaho (BYUI), another Church-owned four-year school, and then transferred to Texas

Christian University (TCU), a private four-year institution. The remaining three students,

Paul, Dave, and Jeffrey, initially enrolled in Tarrant County College (TCC), a local

community college in the North Texas area, and then transferred to four-year universities

in the following manner. Paul and Dave each transferred to the University of Texas at Arlington (UTA), a public four-year university. Dave transferred after one semester and Paul after two years at TCC. Jeffrey, after one year at TCC, transferred to BYUI. Regardless of where they initially enrolled, all of the participants expressed their goal was to earn a bachelor's degree.

Table 6.1
Participants' postsecondary pathways

Participants	Age	H.S. Graduation	Missionary Service	Length of PSE Delay	College Enrollment Year	Initial Postsecondary Institution	Graduating Institution	College Graduation	H.S. Graduation to College Degree
Paul	30	2002	Jan. 2003 to Jan. 2005	3 Years	2005	TCC[a]	UTA[b]	2008	6 Years
Calvin	28	2004	Jan. 2005 to Jan. 2007	3 Years	2007	BYU[c]	BYU	2010	6 Years
Dave	27	2005	Mar. 2006 to Mar. 2008	3 Years	2008	TCC	UTA	2011 (Master's)	6 Years
Jeffrey	27	2005	Nov. 2005 to Nov. 2007	3 Years	2008	TCC	BYUI[d]	2012	7 Years
Cory	27	2005	Nov. 2005 to Nov. 2007	3 Years	2008	BYU	BYU	2011	6 Years
DeRon	26	2007	Dec. 2007 to Dec. 2009	3 Years	2010	BYUI	TCU[e]	2013	6 Years

Note. a = Tarrant County College. b = University of Texas at Arlington. c = Brigham Young University. d = Brigham Young University – Idaho. e = Texas Christian University

The above observation yields an interesting connection to Niu and Tienda's (2013) study of Texas delayers. They stated, "Students who delay were less likely to expect a bachelor's or higher degree and much less likely to attend a postsecondary institution four years post-high school graduation" (p. 21). Yet, my participants both expected to earn bachelor's degrees and ended up attending college within four years of graduating from high school.

BYU and BYU-Idaho

Calvin, DeRon, and Cory chose to attend either BYU or BYU-Idaho once they returned from their missions. Thus, unlike the other participants, their college-choices involved going to college outside the state of Texas. They described their transition into school in terms of support systems: social, institutional, and cultural.

Social support. Cory got home off of his mission right at the beginning of the holiday season in November, 2007. Thus, he was able to spend that time with his family before heading up to Provo, Utah for the spring semester at BYU. Once he arrived at school, he recalled, "It was a little bit difficult at first and definitely took some getting used to." The hardest part was "the loneliness" he felt. While he had been away from home and family during his mission, he acknowledged being away at college was different. He explained, "On a mission you had somebody (a companion) that was with you 24/7, so, you never felt like you were alone." Whereas, at BYU, he experienced being by himself for the first time. Cory dealt with his loneliness the best he could by "just focusing on class." After the first couple of months, Cory had made new friendships. He said, "even though I was by myself, in a sense, I knew that there were other people around me that I could turn to."

Knowing that his mission was now behind him, Calvin was excited about the transition into college. He recalled "riding the excitement of being in school."

After not being in school for a couple of years, almost three years. It was just good to be back, you know? All the classes; I liked the people; I liked my professors. I was just pretty happy to be there.

Consequently, Calvin seemed to have an easier adjustment into college than Cory. He described his transition in this way:

> There was an hour or two where I was a little stressed when I first got up [to BYU], but I figured it out quickly. I think if I would have gone before [my mission] I probably would have been more overwhelmed than I was.

> Despite the overall positive attitude Calvin had about being in school, and the relatively quick adjustment to the college environment, he did describe his initial introduction to BYU as being "different" because he lacked social support. He explained, "All my friends were gone on missions." Consequently, he recalled, "The first day was kind of tough. I just picked random roommates at campus housing. I didn't know them or really anyone else around me and it took a couple weeks to connect." Interestingly, he connected with some of the people he knew from his mission in New York. It also helped once other missionaries from his mission began returning home and enrolled at BYU. As the first semester went along, he reported making friends at church and in class.

> Unlike Cory and Calvin, who knew they would attend BYU after serving a mission, DeRon was still trying to figure out where to go to college during the final months of his missionary service. Before the mission, DeRon had "no thoughts" of going to college anywhere besides the University of Texas: "I liked watching those guys play football and all my buddies wanted to go there." Then, while on his mission, his father urged him to apply to the Air Force Academy, but he did not have a high enough ACT score to be accepted at that institution. Not wanting to return home only to retake the ACT exam, he instead applied at UTA and was accepted. While in the process of picking

classes at UTA, his "close buddy of forever" emailed DeRon and said, "Let's go to BYU-Idaho." He was miffed, "Wow, dude, I'm in the middle of picking classes." But, at his friend's insistence, DeRon, after much thought, decided to join his friend in Idaho. Ironically, two weeks before arriving home from his mission and less than two weeks before classes started, his best friend backed out. DeRon was upset, but went to BYUI anyhow, without his friend, because he had "prayed and knew [he] was supposed to go."

DeRon seemed pleased with how his decision turned out as he described having the "best bunch of roommates I could have ever asked for." They were all returned missionaries, "clean," "helpful," and "fun." He described those people as becoming a big part of his college experience. In fact, DeRon said that on his first night at BYUI, he and his roommates went to a church social activity where he ended up meeting his future wife.

Social support seemed to be an important part of the transition experience for the three participants who left the state of Texas to go to school. While the transition off of a mission back to regular life is difficult for most missionaries (McClendon & Chadwick, 2004), turning around and leaving family and friends to go to college presented different challenges. While each of the participants entered a new, unfamiliar environment, they found that making friends helped them in their transition to college.

Institutional supports. Because Calvin and Cory knew they would be attending BYU after their missions, they took advantage of an academic deferment program offered by the university. Prior to serving their missions, they were able to apply for and be accepted into the school. Upon notifying the school of their intentions to serve missions,

the university put their enrollment status into a period of deferment. Once they returned home, they were able to immediately enroll in classes without needing to reapply for admission. Dave, who thought he was going to go to BYU, said of that program, "It's like a pause button for two years when you go and come back," which he felt provided a "nice easy process" for returning missionaries.

For Calvin, BYU's deferral program was a distinguishing feature over his other college choice of Texas Christian University (TCU). Prior to the mission, he was accepted at both schools and had scholarships at each institution as well. He recalled TCU was "unsure if his acceptance would hold after two years." Furthermore, TCU admission officers said he "might have to reapply and then weren't sure if the scholarship would hold." Thus, BYU's deferment process proved helpful to Calvin upon returning home.

Of other institutional supports or programs for returning missionaries provided by BYU, Calvin recalled, "There was definitely a lot available; however, I don't know if I took advantage of it." One of the things BYU had was "a set of advisors to help you know what classes to take and what the requirements were" for each degree. But, rather than relying on advisors, he "found it faster" to design his degree plan himself. Other programs the university provided were student associations, welcome activities, and a freshman orientation. But, Calvin did not engage in any of those because, "I was old and just felt like I could figure it all out on my own."

Being older influenced Cory's experience at BYU as well. He lived in a freshman dorm his first year on campus, which he initially considered a mistake. While the intent

of freshman residence halls is to provide a way for incoming students to adjust to college life away from home as a cohort, Cory thought that requirement was not ideal for students in his circumstances, "I found out quickly that I was already older. It was kind of a weird experience." Noting the three-year age difference between them, Cory described the younger freshman as "all very goofy." Yet, he perceived, "It was interesting because [they] kind of looked up to me. They were, like, 'Oh look, there is this one guy who is more mature.'" Accounting for why his roommates' perceived him in that way, he reflected, "I think it was both age and coming right off of a mission."

Despite the awkwardness Cory felt with his living arrangements, he did feel that a program called, Freshman Academy, was beneficial. This program put all of the freshman class together in a cohort. Cory felt it was helpful because "about once a week or so, we would come together and discuss our classes and what we had been doing. We were able to kind of help each other out." In other words, this institutional program provided him with both academic and social support.

Cory also felt the institutionalized honor code aided his transition from the mission field into college. The honor code provided some of the same moral standards of living that he was accustomed to living as a missionary. Although he perceived the honor code as very strict compared to other colleges, he found it beneficial, "You really knew that it [the honor code] was better for you because you weren't thinking about other things so much." He clarified that those "other things" included "out partying with friends." Thus, it was easier for him to focus on his studies.

Further, the majority of participants to attend schools sponsored by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints felt recognizable cultural support during their college experiences also. According to Calvin's perspective "at BYU, everyone is LDS." Thus, he felt "surrounded by people that believed the same thing." Additionally, he felt the professors were "supportive," "encouraging," and "sharing" in his beliefs and "motivations." Calvin explained that knowing he was not going to be constantly confronted about his beliefs "made it a lot easier and less distracting to go somewhere where you didn't have to worry about those things." Coming from a home environment that was not religiously united, and after spending two years defending his faith, it was comforting to him to be in the BYU environment.

In summary, because BYU and BYU-Idaho are sponsored universities of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, it makes sense that institutionally, they are prepared for and equipped to deal with the challenges of receiving delaying returned missionaries. They also provide an environment that is culturally supportive of these LDS students. As is shown later in the chapter non-Church schools were not as supportive of the transition to the classroom.

Tarrant County College (TCC)

Paul, Dave, and Jeffrey all began their postsecondary experience by enrolling in general classes at their local community college. As they all had aspirations and expectations of earning bachelor's degrees, they knew their time there was limited. Yet, for each of them, Tarrant County College (TCC) served a valuable purpose in their postsecondary experience.

Re-establishing academic momentum. Paul did not apply to any college prior to his mission because he did not feel it was necessary. However, all that changed the moment "the plane landed back in Dallas." Paul knew "college was the next big step in life." He said, "My number one focus was getting in some college classes to get that ball rolling, get that next phase of my life started, so I could finish it sooner." Not wanting to waste time by waiting a semester to begin or lose "the momentum and the excitement" of coming home, he had his parents take him from the airport to TCC to sign up for classes.

Returning home from the Philippines, Jeffrey did not know exactly what he was going to do about school, only that it was his next step. He saw three possibilities: "I could do a Church school in either Hawaii, Idaho, or Utah; or I could go to school in Texas; or I could go to school in Georgia where my parents were going to move." He needed money for school regardless, so he started working right away. Because Jeffrey was unsure where he wanted to go, he ultimately began his postsecondary pathway at TCC. He explained, "I needed to get school started quickly and so I took one semester at TCC while I worked." Jeffrey explained his desire for a quick start as a way signal to those around him that he was intent on attending college.

Essentially, TCC became an academic place-holder for Jeffrey until he figured out to which university he would transfer. After working a summertime job in Georgia with his cousins, Jeffrey looked into applying at the University of West Georgia. However, work kept him so busy that he missed the cut-off date. Assuming it was not meant to be, Jeffrey was persuaded by his aunt and cousin to go to BYU-Idaho. His cousin wanted him as a roommate and his aunt wanted him to "help her son stay on the right path" by

motivating him in his studies. Thus, he applied to BYUI and was accepted. However, he would not start until the following January. Thus, he ended up going back to TCC to earn general credits once the summer was over. Unfortunately, his two semester's worth of credits did not all transfer to BYUI. However, Jeffrey admitted that even though "it didn't help much towards the degree . . . in my objectives of staying in school, it was fine."

Dave's transition to TCC was not as direct as Paul or Jeffrey's; in fact, prior to his mission, he had made plans to attend the same school as his parents, BYU. However, his plans changed when he married his longtime girlfriend after returning home from his mission. He decided instead to attend school locally at the University of Texas at Arlington (UTA) because his wife, a UTA graduate, was currently employed in the area. Also, he retained the support of his family, because both of their extended families and friends lived close by. Additionally, his wife became his personal college advisor with her "background knowledge of college" and UTA, specifically.

However, despite a change of plans from BYU to UTA, Dave started his education at TCC, because they would accept all of his AP credits. As he explained, unlike BYU, "UT Arlington didn't accept all 57 college credits hours" he had amassed from AP tests in high school. Fortunately, while researching online, he "found a loophole." When he compared the course equivalency chart, he recalled, "They [UTA] accepted all my [TCC] college credit hours 100%." This was confirmed when a TCC counselor explained that the schools had "a reciprocity agreement;" namely, any credits from TCC would be accepted by UTA. Thus, by beginning his postsecondary experience at TCC, he was able to retain all the academic momentum he had stored up in high

school. At his wife's advising, he enrolled in core classes at TCC that were more difficult at UTA, thus avoiding the perceived rigor there.

For the three participants who began their postsecondary experience at the local community college, it was clear that their intentions were not to stay enrolled there any longer than necessary. They were all seeking bachelor's degrees and perceived TCC as a means to get their academic momentum started up again after the period of a delay. Thus, while Horn et al. (2005) found that initial enrollment in a community college was detrimental to degree attainment, for these three, it was a needed springboard to their success.

Institutional supports. While the reciprocity agreement between TCC and UTA was extremely helpful to Dave, other aspects of his transition into college from his mission were challenging. He reported that since he chose to go on a Church mission and thereby was no longer a young student, he did not receive any kind of orientations from TCC. In his words,

> I wasn't in that age bracket, so I didn't have that kind of welcome. Another thing is, I didn't have a peer group of friends that all went to college together. So at TCC, I was one of the old people in the classes.

While Dave desired an orientation but did not receive one, Paul expressed frustration receiving more from the school than he wanted. He recalled "being required to go meet with counselors at certain intervals" to check on his degree plan. Of the experience he said,

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It almost appeared to me as if they were still trying to hold your hand like you

were in high school. The way I saw it was, "I'm not a child anymore. I am paying

money. I know what I am paying money for. Just let me sign in for my classes,

take classes, and leave."

Jeffrey's experience was much more neutral than what Dave and Paul experienced. He

noted of his reception at TCC, which is an open-enrollment college, "It was pretty much,

'If you want to be here you can be here. We are fine if you're here and we're fine if you're

not.'"

Transferring Schools

Adelman's (2006) research showed that nearly 60% of all students experience an

institutional transfer during their postsecondary experience. Thus, it is of no surprise that

of my six participants, four of them transferred colleges. As Tobolowsky and Cox (2012)

pointed out, there is no single transfer experience. In the case of my transferring

participants, Dave and Paul both stayed locally in Texas by transferring from TCC, a

two-year college, to UTA, a four-year university. DeRon and Jeffrey, on the other hand,

experienced interstate transfers. Jeffrey transferred from TCC to a four-year university in

Idaho, BYUI. Whereas, DeRon started college at BYUI, then left to attend school back in

Texas at a four-year university, Texas Christian University (TCU). This section will

discuss the participants' varied purposes for transfer and their experiences while

switching institutions.

Purposes of Transferring

The main objective for each participant in attending college was to earn a bachelor's degree. Thus, for those who began their postsecondary pathways at TCC, in order to attain that goal, a transfer was inevitable. As mentioned earlier, Dave used TCC as a way to maintain his college credits amassed in high school. Because of that decision, Dave started at UTA as a junior.[7] Jeffrey had been attending TCC as a means of establishing and maintaining academic momentum until he chose a school to attend where he could earn a bachelor's degree.

Just prior to finishing his Associate's degree, Paul began looking at schools to transfer to and degrees to pursue. He applied to and received scholarships from both BYU and UTA. His choice to attend UTA was a business decision. He explained his rationale at the time: "I had lower living expenses, I already had a good job locally, and I figured that it would be kind of hard to find a job up there in Provo, Utah, considering it is a college town."

Shortly after his marriage, DeRon's wife graduated from BYUI and wanted to find a job. However, DeRon explained, "You couldn't really get a job [in Rexburg] because locals were afraid that you were going to leave if you were part of the student population." However, because he was still pursuing a degree, they looked around the country where job prospects were high for his wife and there were college transfer

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[7] A careful examination of Dave's transcripts reveal that TCC actually only accepted 14 credits from his AP exams. He earned 16 credits during his initial semester at TCC for a total of 30 credits. When he transferred to UTA, they accepted all 30 credits from TCC and an additional 28 credits from previous tests taken in high school for a total of 58 credits, 42 of which came from AP tests.

opportunities for him. They ultimately found what they were looking for back in North Texas. Although they left BYU-Idaho before DeRon could earn an associate's degree, this was of little concern to them, because he was focused on earning a bachelor's degree. He said, "Most colleges don't care if you have associates; they are only looking at the credits and credit transfers." However, DeRon faced unexpected hurdles when dealing with the transfer of his BYUI credits to TCU.

Institutional Obstacles

As Tobolowsky and Cox (2012) stated, transfer students often face institutional roadblocks at the time of transfer (e.g. course registration, unfamiliar campus policies). The most common challenge each of my participants who transferred voiced was the difficulty they had ensuring that their new institutions would accept all their previously earned credits. For example, both Jeffrey and Paul had credits not transfer to their respective schools, as a result, they both felt like the time and money spent on those credits were wasted.

Upon his arrival at TCU, DeRon met with a counselor for transfer students, but discovered that not everything transferred. He was quick to point out why his classes should count, but felt frustrated by the process. Instead of "just talking to one counselor," he had to do the same thing with the business school and then again with the finance department. Despite the frustration, all the credits ended up counting, some as electives. Of the experience, DeRon said, "I had to really hound on people to make sure that [the courses] transferred but [they] did. I'm good at being a bull dog."

After having ensured that all of his TCC credits would transfer to UTA, Dave started UTA as a junior. However, his challenges had only begun. He faced a lot of roadblocks pursuing his chosen major's degree path. There were a number of prerequisite courses he was required to take before he could enroll in several of his major classes, classes that he should have taken as an underclassman. However, when he met with any academic advisors for program guidance, he felt they were "really bad at explaining any solutions," "very unhelpful," and "useless." Instead, Dave went "online for resources and mapped [his] own route" with the help of his "wife's practical knowledge."

Paul did not recall if UTA did anything to assist him with his transfer[8], he admitted however, "Even if they did reach out to offer me something, I probably ignored it." Furthermore, he said he could not think of a time when he "met with anybody on campus or an advisor." Rather than accepting institutional assistance, his degree path was entirely self-directed. Jeffrey did recall feeling like the people at BYU-Idaho made efforts to ease his transfer, "They were very helpful through emails, since I was far away, and if I made a phone call, they were quick to respond." Like all of the other participants, Jeffrey essentially created his own degree course and checked in with a school counselor to verify his plans would work.

While each of the participants who transferred were met with various challenges upon arriving at their new institutions, Jeffrey, Paul, and Dave, each expressed an understanding that some challenges were to be expected transferring from a community

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8 Paul's UTA transcripts show that he had 70 credits transfer from TCC. All of those credits were not earned prior to his transfer to UTA as he continued to enroll in classes at TCC throughout his time at UTA, mostly during summer semesters.

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college to a four-year university. DeRon, on the other hand, seemed taken aback that his credits from BYUI did not transfer to TCU with greater ease since both institutions were four-year universities. These findings seem to support what Kirk-Kuwaye and Kirk-Kuwaye (2007) found about the expectations of transferring students; namely, lateral transferring students (e.g. four-year institution to another four-year institution) tend not to anticipate such problems whereas vertical transfer students (e.g. community college to four-year institution) do.

Adapting to New College Environments

For those participants who ended up transferring during their postsecondary experience, they each had to deal with adjusting to new campuses and sometimes new communities and states. Upon arriving at BYUI, Jeffrey said:

Classes weren't too big, not bigger than high school, 35 - 45 people. So, you knew your teacher pretty well. They knew you and would call you by name. So that was nice. I enjoyed that. It was very similar to high school, so that wasn't very intimidating.

When Jeffrey was not in classes he was taking advantage of the opportunities the surrounding environs gave him. Those activities included, intramural basketball and volleyball teams, mountain biking, kayaking, snowmobiling, snowboarding, and white water rafting. He admitted, "I did a lot of things that I didn't have access to in Texas." Interestingly, rather than becoming sources of distractions for Jeffrey, those activities became motivating factors to study hard and do well in school so he could have the time to enjoy himself away from the campus. Of those activities he recalled,

They became another push to get through all of my school stuff. I always thought

that you can work really hard and play really hard, just find time for it. And, it

was like a good stress relief from the work.

If nothing else, he saw it as a fun way to make friends.

Similar to how Calvin and Cory described the BYU campus in Provo, Utah,

Jeffrey described BYU-Idaho as "a safe environment," "a safety net," and as having "a

very community feel." Additionally, he reflected, "I had never been around a lot of

Church members because of where I grew up. So, being surrounded by a group of

members, you know, it was a good feeling. It helped me." He said the help came in the

form of everyone "having the same goals" as him, meaning, "We want to have a good

home life and be able to support a family." Toward the end of his time in Idaho, he

recalls thinking, "I'm going to look back and miss this." He continued, "Rexburg has a

deep spot in my heart. I just really enjoyed it. I had a lot of fun and I got a lot done."

DeRon, who left the small college-town of Rexburg in part because the job

prospects for his wife were low and because he was ready for a change of scenery, was

surprised upon arriving at TCU. He was expecting TCU, by virtue of its name

recognition, cost of tuition, and status as a research institution, to be state-of-the-art.

However, DeRon did not find TCU as technologically advanced as BYUI.

Another adjustment he was not prepared for was how his social environment

changed because of his marital status:

I was coming from where it was normal to be married to it not being normal at all.

'What, you are married? What, you are about to have a kid? Wait, you are 26

years old? You went on a two-year service mission? That's weird.' That kind of stuff was very different.

A final adjustment DeRon had to make was in the classroom. At both universities, DeRon felt like he "always had a great relationship with most professors;" however, he anticipated a more intense learning environment at TCU than what he experienced at BYUI. It surprised him that BYUI was more challenging. It was not until he began courses related to his major that the courses at TCU reached the level of rigor he had expected. He also assumed there would be higher quality teaching at TCU, but felt like his lower-level courses were not much different than what one would find at a local community college. The types of challenges DeRon faced by transferring schools, both in terms of educational and campus environment are similar to what previous researchers have found to be true of most transfer students (Laanan, 2001).

Completing College

There were three main actions and processes that these students credited for their academic success: 1) aggressive college attendance patterns, 2) managing finances with financial aid and jobs, and 3) using skills and attributes developed on a mission. Table 6.2 provides a summary list of the emergent processes and actions described by the participants as having an effect on their college success.

Table 6.2
Processes participants engaged in during the college experience

Processes	Calvin	Cory	Dave	DeRon	Jeffrey	Paul
College attendance patterns	X				X	X
Family formation			X	X		X

Table 6.2—*Continued*

Managed finances

    Financial aid*

Grants	X	X	X	X	X	
Scholarships	X	X	X	X	X	X
Student loans			X	X		
Held job(s) during college	X	X	X		X	X
Used skills developed on a mission	X	X	X	X	X	X

Note. Financial Aid information was gathered from the pre-screening questionnaire (see Appendix C).

College Attendance Patterns

It became apparent from the participants' interviews and from examining their college transcripts that their college attendance patterns and course loads played a major role in their success. They all took full course loads and often took classes over the summers. Paul, reported: "I took every mini-mester there was. I took classes every summer. At the very end, I took 18 hours at UTA and then three hours simultaneously at TCC, for 21 to finish up. I just really buckled down." In addition, he took Saturday classes "when I could fit them in."

In addition to arriving at college with 57 credit hours, Dave also sped up his degree path by taking at least 15 credits each semester and six credit hours in the summer. Jeffrey reported, "I finished school in three years instead of four" and attributed

that to averaging about 18 or 19 credits a semester. Jeffrey also benefited by testing out of 13 credits of language requirements thanks to his mission language.

Calvin took a comparatively more tempered approach but still finished in under four years. He said of his strategy, "I didn't want to overbook my schedule so I only took 15 hours max, maybe 16 one semester. Mostly, 14 was a good number, especially with working." He only took one summer off to go home to Texas during his college years, because "I liked being at BYU and I didn't feel like I needed the summers off. I felt like I was getting good rest time with the Christmas break and with the short breaks that were in between the semesters."

Each of my participants detailed ways in which their course-taking patterns were accelerated throughout their college experience. In fact, their course-taking patterns support the findings of Adelman (2006) who said part-time attendance, less than 12 credits per semester, is "hazardous" to degree completion and that "continuous enrollment increases the probability of degree completion by 43 percent" (p. xxi). Each of my participants maintained full-time enrollment status and was enrolled continuously. The majority of my participants were aggressive in the number of credits taken each semester and also in the lack of breaks they took throughout their postsecondary pathways. Thus, their time from enrollment to completion was under four-year's time. Furthermore, based upon the cumulative college GPAs of each participant, it is safe to assume that they not only survived college, they thrived.

Managed Finances

Because most of the participants used any available personal funds they had saved for their missionary service, each had to find sufficient money for college expenses. As can be seen from Table 6.2, all of the participants benefited from some form of financial aid, with scholarships being common to all of them. Paul thought paying for college was the most challenging part of college because he did not want to borrow money for it. He stated, "I had the foresight to say I don't want to be repaying student loans when I am done with college. So, I paid for college as I went along in cash and without my parents help." Consequently, even though Paul reported receiving a full-ride scholarship to BYU, he chose UTA's smaller scholarship and higher tuition because, "I could still live at home and lower my expenses."

Dave's scholarship came by surprise. He was fully expecting to put his first semester of college on a credit card hoping he could pay it off as he worked. However, upon earning a 4.0 his only semester at TCC, he received an automatic scholarship from UTA and a second scholarship later on. Regardless of having all his schooling expenses covered, Dave still worked full-time his entire college career.

Jeffrey received a financial gift from his parents. He recalled, "What they ended up doing was surprising me with my money that I had saved for my mission. They actually didn't use it for the mission." Instead, they ended up giving the money back to him so he would have something after his mission with which to start college. Jeffery's intentions were very clear, "I didn't want to have debt." He continued:

It sounded so scary, like, all these people owe all this money for their cars, their

houses, and schooling. You know, I wanted to have money to do what I wanted to

do and so I worked a lot during school.

He had two jobs in Idaho, working on cars at a car shop and a janitorial job at a local

surgery center.

Calvin felt that his two-year absence from the labor market, in addition to his

independent tax-status, more easily qualified him for financial aid programs and

scholarships. Thus, he relied mostly on Pell grants, at first, and then through his own

work. He recalled, "I liked working a lot, and so I just kept working to have something to

do, I always liked my job." He first worked as a resident assistant, then as a counselor for

various sports camps on campus, and then in the computer labs. "I loved all my jobs so,

you know, once I started, I didn't really want to stop."

For Cory, finding a job at the campus cafeteria was one of the things that helped

him adjust to college life, but mostly for social rather than financial reasons. However,

the money was still important as his parents helped pay for his tuition for his first

semester only: "After that it was pretty much on my own." He reported typically working

between 15 and 20 hours a week because he "couldn't hardly handle working more than

that." DeRon never mentioned working during school semesters, only during summer

breaks, but did mention that he received VA funds for school.

In summary, because my participants were planning for mission expenses before

college expenses, they each relied on some form of financial aid during college. All

received scholarships of some kind, all but one received Pell grants, and only two

received student loans. They all worked 15-40 hours a week at one or two jobs to afford their education. These findings are interesting in relation to Horn et al. (2005) who posited in her profile of PSE delayers that the longer the delay, the more likely the level of income went up due to more time in the labor market.

In the case of all but one of my participants, because of a lack of college savings, and because they spent two years earning zero income, their financial outlook upon returning from their missions was often times no better than before their missions. The exception was Jeffrey, whose parents gave him the money he had saved for his mission to use for college instead. So, while he did not intentionally save money for college, he ended up having college savings collected.

While it may seem like going to school full-time and working at least part-time could be detrimental to degree completion, for the participants of my study who engaged in such behavior, it did not seem to pose a risk. This outcome is supportive of what Gururaj (2011) found; namely, students who worked during or after their delay persisted at a higher rate than those who did not work.

Using Skills and Attributes Developed on a Mission

Throughout each interview, my participants made multiple references to the effects their time spent as missionaries had on their eventual degree attainments. Each felt what they learned as missionaries had a direct impact on their college success. Perhaps this can best be explained by revisiting Bronfenbrenner and Morris's (2008) model of human development. As the model posits, the processes or actions a person experiences repeatedly overtime shapes their overall development. These developmental outcomes are

then able to be employed by an individual in new circumstances (see Figures 2.2 and 3.2). In the case of my participants, the skills and attributes they developed as missionaries were directly applicable to their college experiences.

Table 6.3 provides a summary list of these skills and attributes. While the list makes an attempt at drawing a correlation between skills gained through the mission experience and college actions, it is probable that the skills were shaped by multiple actions in combination, and not at a one-for-one ratio. Hence, further empirical research is needed to determine exact relationships.

Table 6.3

Development outcomes of missionary actions affecting degree attainment

Missionary Actions	Development Outcomes
Goal setting, planning, decision making, problem solving	Critical thinking / time management
Overcoming hardships and failures	Determination / perseverance
Leading and following others	Leadership / communication skills
Learning a new language, culture, and customs; serving others	Maturity / perspective on life
Reporting results and avoiding distractions	Personal accountability / self-discipline
Individual and companionship study	Study skills / lifelong learning skills
Working and teaching daily	Work ethic and capability

While many of these skills and attributes were discussed in the context of missionary service, below are representative quotes of how participants' linked these developmental outcomes with their college experiences.

For the purposes of this study, the developmental outcomes to emerge from the experiences of my participants are being identified as skills and attributes. *Skills* are those knowledge, talents, and abilities a person has at his or her command that act as a resource to an individual in any given context or process (Bronfenbrenner &Morris, 2006). *Attributes* are those developed personal characteristics that manifest in a person's dispositional nature and determine the use of one's skills (Bronfenbrenner &Morris, 2006). The skills and attributes to be discussed are: critical thinking and time management skills; determination and perseverance; leadership and communication skills; maturity and perspective on life; personal accountability and self-discipline; study and lifelong learning skills; and work ethic and capability.

Critical thinking and time management skills. All of the participants felt they learned to plan and set goals through their mission experience. In doing so, they learned to problem solve and critically think about the best course of action to take to achieve their goals and overcome obstacles once they got to college. Dave explained how his critical thinking was developed:

> There was no one really to go to. If I had a big problem with [something]; you had to figure stuff out on your own. There was no one to babysit you, no one to tell you [what to do], no one to help you figure it out. It was almost like a great internship program for professional skills.

Paul said, "Making those decisions really helped me grow and be an adult about the decisions I would be faced with later on in college." He then gave an example of both planning his degree path and managing the semester's courses. Jeffrey shared why he felt having these skills were a benefit in college:

I had to be organized because I had a lot going on. I had a very full schedule. Whereas, I think most college students have a lot of free time. Free time isn't always the best in college because you would procrastinate and not get things done. Whereas, I knew how I would spend my time.

Calvin mentioned, "When you are going out and teaching people, talking to people and teaching lessons you need to keep track of who you've talked to and what you've taught them and, you know, how things are going with that." Consequently, Calvin felt the quantity of interactions demanded "organization" to handle the busyness of daily missionary work. Calvin, who did not keep a calendar before his mission, described the difference:

Every day on the mission you are carrying a planner with you writing down everything you do. You make goals and write down if you've accomplished them. It's very much checking in with yourself and checking in with your planner. I definitely gained from that process.

For Cory, his planning skills "carried over into college life," which helped him not feel "overwhelmed" with the demands of his college schedule. He continued, "The thing that really helped me was learning how to organize my time better and how to spend my time better."

Because missionaries were tasked with daily responsibilities to set goals, plan their days, and manage their schedules, they developed critical thinking skills, time management skills, and were able to set meaningful goals for themselves throughout their college experience. Furthermore, it was most common for missionaries to plan and manage their time in clearly defined segments of time, e.g. daily, weekly, and monthly. Thus, the goal-oriented mindset of a returned missionary is well-suited for a college setting where success is determined by the completion of classes, semesters, and years.

Determination and perseverance. The six participants discussed how they learned perseverance through their mission service, which served them well in college. Dave reflected,

I wouldn't give up on obstacles [in college] because I had persistence to overcome them in a foreign country [on my mission]. When I came back and went to college, it was pretty easy to do; I've done it before.

Similarly, DeRon said that his classmates commended him for "being a determined guy" in the face of rejection or failure on an assignment or project. He agreed saying, "I'm very diligent. I think a lot of that translated from my mission. I wasn't afraid to go knock on doors, be rejected, and do it over and over and over again."

Paul pointed to the fact that for two years he was basically "given the opportunity" to practice self-determining behavior, which he said "helped him later" in college life. When Cory was asked what he thought made him different than the other freshman at BYU, he said, "I had more of a determination than I felt that they did." Thus,

in a college environment that demands personal drive and endurance, these two attributes are needed.

Regardless of where they went to school or the type of social interactions they had, each of the participants described their college experience in terms of persevering or enduring to the end. They each described their self-determination to plan their degree paths and to overcome any challenges. Several of them felt that college was easy or doable because they had been through more difficult things while on their missions.

Leadership and communication skills. As was noted by each participant, the one thing that missionaries do all day long is talk to people. Doing so helped the shy become confident in their abilities of communicating as was the case with both Jeffrey and Cory. Paul said, "Being able to practice [talking to people] every day for two years, I think that really helped me in college be able to approach people in class."

Dave highlighted the fact that on a mission, you are exposed to a lot of opportunities to solve interpersonal conflict. Dave gave the example of how, at times, companionship "situations just don't work out; where people are banging heads." From those situations, he gained "relevant experience of how to overcome interpersonal differences." Thus, when problems or conflict happened at school, he was able to "resolve the conflict because [he] had done it before." Further, the participants felt that these skills supported the development of their leadership skills.

As they explained, each of the participants, while on missions, were at one point a "senior companion." From those opportunities to practice leadership in the mission field, their leadership skills grew. Dave spoke about the development of these skills when he

described himself in high school as "a quiet leader," but felt that his leadership skills were "developed and honed" on a mission. Once he got to college, he found he was able to apply them in class. He explained:

> When it came time to do group projects at UT Arlington, I naturally evolved as a leader in those settings because I could manage 16 people without a problem. I could organize small groups based off of my experience being a leader on the mission.

All of the participants spoke about how these mission-developed skills assisted them once they got to college.

Maturity and perspective on life. Cory stated that he gained maturity serving his mission and this benefited him academically when he got to college. He said, "I think the biggest thing was my maturity level changed. I think that had I started college immediately, I wouldn't have been as ready for it." Likewise, Jeffrey sensed more confidence in himself than other students because he was older.

Dave said before the mission he "would get frustrated easily with goals and stuff." However, he felt serving a mission "really hardens you. It makes you more of a prepared, responsible adult, in a short amount of time." The results, in his view, were "a much higher maturity level than anybody going into college." He continued, "The professors and the older individuals who were training for degrees, they recognized something was different about the way I approached college and the quality work that I did compared to my peers." Clearly, the participants perceived a valuable connection between the growth they experienced as missionaries and its effect in the classroom.

Each participant shared examples of how their perspectives of the world changed while serving a mission. For example, Calvin felt his increased worldview, "definitely gave me an advantage." Paul felt his maturity resulted from developing a more selfless attitude, "For the two years during my mission from morning till night, I was always working on something and wasn't focusing on myself." In short, it was common for the participants to express that learning about other people and their lives through the mission experience helped them mature. In turn, they felt the increased maturity helped them during college.

Personal accountability and self-discipline. For each of the missionaries, reporting to mission leadership about their efforts was a regular part of their conduct. Paul explained, "We did it daily, at the end of the day." The list of items reported included: the number of contacts made, the number of lessons taught, the number of people talked to, and the progress of investigators. Paul recalled that it "did not take up a large portion of your day, but it was a regular part, and it was an important part as well." The constant environment of rendering an account of participants' missionary work yielded greater personal accountability. As a result, participants took more personal responsibility for their schoolwork in college.

Paul recalled the accountability he felt toward those with whom he worked in group projects, "They were shareholders or a stake holder in whatever I was working on." Thus, he provided regular reports to members of his groups without waiting to be asked about any progress he was making in regards to the collective efforts of the group. Similarly, Dave felt that because of the accountability he demonstrated in class that it

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affected the way his professors viewed him, thus they would often assign him to leadership positions within his classes and programs.

Each of the participants expressed desires to complete their degrees as quickly as they could. Applying self-discipline in avoiding unhealthy distractions throughout their college experience was a key to accomplishing that task. Dave chose not to "get distracted with partying, playing with friends, or relaxing" because he chose not to be involved in the campus social life at UTA. He noted that he had friends who would "show up to class and would be a little hung over." He said that while they "talked about all of the fun stuff they did," at the same time, "they couldn't study or couldn't finish their project." Dave's social life, in contrast, consisted of "going to work, going to classes, and going home to be with my family." As a result, Dave felt it helped him focus better on his studies.

Similar to how he viewed high school, Paul viewed college "as a means to an end." Thus, he confessed, "I didn't focus on [campus life] much, but I did know that the sooner I got done with [college], the better I did, the better my chances were of a good job afterwards." Thus, wanting to "get college over with" and behind him, Paul did not attend parties or social gatherings or join any clubs.

In fact, Dave and Paul saw no need for campus life at UTA. They were both married and mentioned that their families provided them the support they may have otherwise needed. Dave's marriage seemed to specifically increase his motivation to get a degree: "I have a family to take care of, so I need to have a good solid career. In order to

be stable, I need to at least hold a diploma." Thus, he wanted to "find the most efficient, fast, and best way to get through college."

While Jeffrey partially went to BYUI to motivate his cousin, it turned out the motivation flowed the other way. Jeffrey described his cousin as always switching majors, unsure of himself, and enrolled "only to get mom off his back." Consequently, it took his cousin several years longer to finish a degree than it took Jeffrey. "Oh, I made a goal that I wasn't going past four years," Jeffrey confided. "I didn't want to be seen as a slacker. I wanted to get done." Noting the stress his cousin's behavior put on his aunt, Jeffrey recalled, "I didn't want my parents worrying about me. I was treating [college] like a job."

Interestingly, my findings demonstrate that those students who were married felt their family formation was a source of motivation and support. Bozick and DeLuca (2005) indicated family formation prior to college enrollment "may hinder [students] chances of completing a four-year degree" (p. 531). However, Dave, who married prior to college enrollment, repeatedly said his marriage was a source of help and motivation to finish. While both Paul and DeRon married during their schooling, they also referred to their spouses and families as sources of support and motivation to finish. Because of the individual nature of qualitative studies, these results cannot be construed to imply Bozick and DeLuca's conclusion is wrong, rather, it suggests that perhaps this is an area for further investigation.

Most Latter-day Saint returned missionaries are accustomed to avoiding things they consider to be distractions. As missionaries, they have very strict rules about

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engaging in activities that would otherwise keep them from accomplishing the purposes of missionary work. Thus, applying that same self-discipline to avoiding activities they perceived as distractions in college may have come more naturally to them.

Study skills and lifelong learning skills. Each participant detailed how they spent two hours every morning studying during their mission experiences. In doing so, they developed both their love of learning and their capacity to study. DeRon admitted, "I did not even remotely know what studying was before my mission." Thus, he felt that his developed studies skills were the "first and foremost" important factor in his school success. Several other participants also found that they honed their study skills on the mission, which gave them an edge in college.

While most of the participants felt their study skills were improved because of their mission experiences, Dave, who was the most prolific studier of the participants before his mission was actually worried he would "lose [his] study, test taking soft skills." Consequently, he was surprised by how well he had "reintegrated into the study atmosphere of college."

Another form of studying skill that was positively affected by the mission was small group study. Because my participants engaged in an hour of companionship study daily, and regularly met with larger groups of missionaries to study together, their group study habits and skills improved. For example, they had developed their abilities to learn in a group setting, offering their reasoning and receiving other's points of view. Thus, when placed in small groups or assigned group projects in college, they were prepared to meaningfully contribute.

Work ethic and capability. While several of the participants held jobs before their missions, they each described how their concept of work expanded as a result of very long, full days of work as missionaries. As was shown in Chapter Five, missionaries were expected to wake up at 6:30 in the morning and be engaged in some aspect of their work until 10:30 at night. Cory said that work ethic carried over into college life. He continued:

> That made a big difference. Like, my very first semester of college was probably different than a lot of people's. I was really consistent in trying to go to bed by like 11 o'clock and still get up early. I was both working and going to school at the same time.

This ability to balance a full course load and a job (or two) seems to have stemmed from an increased capacity to work, which was learned on a mission.

Work habits and one's increased capacities to work go hand-in-hand. The former deals with working hard in the allotted time, whereas the latter speaks to an increased awareness that there exists more opportunity to work than previously thought. Most of the developmental outcomes listed in Table 6.3 resulted from various forms of work, e.g. studying, planning, teaching, etc. Jeffery states succinctly that he felt that missionary work "really prepares you for school." He explained his perspective, "To finish [college] you've just got to work through it. I think that is a lot of what a mission can do [for you] if you work hard because otherwise you can skate through anything." Jeffrey recalled his roommates marveling at everything he was able to accomplish throughout a day. He attributed it to his work ethic and hard work.

Looking back at Table 6.1, each of the participants took no more than seven years to complete college from the time they graduated from high school. Considering that they each had a three-year delay, it is safe to assume that they worked hard once they enrolled in school. Their abilities and skills to handle full-time schooling and, in many cases, full-time jobs, seems to be a byproduct of the work habits and capabilities they developed as missionaries.

Summary

This chapter concluded the findings chapters of this study by focusing on the college experiences of my participants. The first section detailed the participants' descriptions of transitioning from their missions and into the college classroom. The second section presented findings regarding four of the participants' experiences with transferring institutions. Three experienced a vertical transfer from the community college to a four-year university and the fourth experienced a lateral transfer, by going from one four-year institution to another.

The final section focused on presenting the perceived reasons my participants felt they were successfully able to delay their postsecondary education and still attain a bachelor's degree. Their perceptions included: maintaining aggressive college attendance patterns; successfully balancing their finances with financial aid and holding jobs; and using the skills and attributes developed during their period of delay.

Each participant felt their time spent as a missionary shaped their degree attainment more than anything else and pointed to increased or acquired attributes and skills they developed during their two years of missionary service as evidence. Seven

skills and attributes emerged as being the most influential: critical thinking and time management; determination and perseverance; leadership and communication skills; maturity and perspective on life; personal accountability and self-discipline; study and lifelong learning skills; and work ethic and capability. These skills and attributes further developed their personal dispositions towards college success and provided them with increased personal resources or skills to succeed in college.

Further, my findings also seem to align with those of Palmer's (2009) qualitative study of returned missionaries who stopped out of college to serve missions. The returned missionaries of his study felt their service yielded increased self-discipline and effective time management skills, increased critical thinking, clarity of degree aspirations and life-long learning, and an increase in self-efficacy and social development. This suggests the benefits of missionary service on academic outcomes might be the same, whether they are the results of a stop out or delay.

Clearly, the choice to delay in favor of missionary service did not hinder my participants' college completion. Rather, based upon the evidence, it propelled them to degree attainment.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this study was to fill a void in the research on delaying postsecondary education (PSE) by examining the college experience of Latter-day Saint returned missionaries and to gain an understanding of their perceptions concerning their degree attainment. This group of delayers has been shown to be successful at earning bachelor's degrees in spite of delaying college for as much as three years (McClendon & Chadwick, 2004). Because the vast majority of prior research used quantitative methods, this study sought to answer research questions that are best understood using qualitative research methods.

Research Questions

Because of the research questions that I posed, I selected qualitative interviews as the primary method of data collection in order to gain a rich understanding of the college experience of Latter-day Saint delayers (Creswell, 2013). In the following section, I provide a brief review of how each of the four questions were answered by this study.

Research Question 1: How do Latter-Day Saint Returned Missionaries Describe Their Postsecondary Experience?

For Latter-day Saints who delayed their postsecondary education in favor of church missionary service, college delay was an intentional choice. Thus, upon returning home from their missions, college enrollment was seen as the next logical step in their personal growth and development. Each participant enrolled in a postsecondary institution with an expectation that they would earn a bachelor's degree. While they each

described challenges associated with being older first-time college students, and despite the fact that three of my participants began at a local community college and four of them experienced a college transfer, they each felt obtaining a degree was possible regardless of obstacles.

The descriptions of the college experience by my participants fit well into the Bioecological Model of Human Development (Brofenbrenner & Morris, 2006). As was shown by my findings, each person engaged in a variety of activities throughout their time in college with a range of influential people and social contexts. Thus, their descriptions of college fit the person-process-context-time interchange that drives the development of individuals according to the tenets of the model.

Specifically, my participants described the social supports of family and friends as playing an important role in helping them transition from the mission field and into the classroom. For those who attended college at universities sponsored by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, the cultural environment on campus provided my participants with a sense of community, which they felt aided their degree attainment. Those who attended other institutions did not rely on their campus environments to support their college success. Instead, their home life was more important. As it was, the three who graduated from schools in Texas were each married throughout the majority of their college experience. Thus, they did not rely upon the social supports their campus environments offered like the others.

The participants perceived institutional supports in varying ways. For those who attended BYU and BYUI, they spoke of the institutional supports for returned

missionaries more favorably than did those who attended UTA and TCU. Such results are not surprising as BYU and BYUI have dealt with returned missionaries with regularity, whereas schools in Texas still may not have a clear understanding of the needs or abilities of Latter-day Saint returned missionaries.

Research Question 2: What do Returned Missionaries Account for Their Success in Attaining an Undergraduate Degree?

The participants in this study discussed experiences from three periods of time that contributed to their eventual degree attainment. The experiences they had in their homes, at school, and in their church environments prior to a delay of postsecondary education built up their academic momentum, established high educational aspirations and expectations, and developed a strong sense of college knowledge and readiness. The experiences they had as missionaries for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints were perceived to be the most significant factors which led to college success. They acknowledged that their development during their two years of service helped them to succeed when they got to college.

Furthermore, once my participants enrolled in college, they each described two additional experiences that aided their success, their college attendance patterns and their management of personal finances. As was shown, each participant maintained consistent college attendance patterns, enrolling with full course loads and enrolling in classes during summer or off-track semesters. Thus, they were each able to graduate in less than four years from the time they first enrolled. Second, each of the participants benefited from receiving financial aid in the form of scholarships, Pell grants, or student loans. Yet,

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they also worked from 15-40 hours a week at one or more jobs. Thus, they each were able to avoid crippling student debt upon graduation.

In short, the descriptions and perceptions of my participants regarding their individual experiences further demonstrates that a successful delay of postsecondary education and degree attainment does not happen by chance. Rather, it is the product of a multitude of developmental experiences that combined together to enable successful completion of college to be a reality.

Research Question 3: How do Returned Missionaries Perceive the Effect Their Enrollment Delay had on Their Degree Attainment?

As mentioned above, the skills and attributes my participants developed as missionaries for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints were some of the factors they perceived as having a direct effect on their degree attainment. Participants felt that they developed seven skills and attributes that they previously did not have or were not fully developed during their missions that helped them in college. Those included critical thinking and time management skills; determination and perseverance; leadership and communication skills; maturity and perspective on life; personal accountability; study and lifelong learning skills; and work ethic and capability.

Just as the participants in King's (2011) study felt their gap year was a benchmark moment that aided their transition into college, the participants in my study identified their mission as a significant time period of personal development, which better prepared them for degree attainment. Furthermore, the skills and attributes my participants developed as missionaries aligned with the findings for both King's (2011) international

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gap-year participants and with Palmer's (2009) returned missionary participants who stopped out of college.

Thus, my findings seem to contradict Gururaj's (2011) conclusion that delayed enrollment hinders college persistence regardless of acquired characteristics or previous experience. Rather, my findings further suggest that while delaying postsecondary education generally causes significant risks to degree attainment, those risks can be diminished if the experiences and activities during the delay yield significant skill and attribute development.

Research Question 4: In What Ways can Bronfenbrenner and Morris's (2006) Bioecological Model of Human Development Help to Explain Latter-day Saint Returned Missionaries' Academic Success after a Postsecondary Delay?

Throughout the course of this study, Bronfenbrenner and Morris's (2006) model has served as the theoretical lens by which I coded, analyzed, and presented the data. In doing so, this study has made a case that the Bioecological Model of Human Development can serve as a meaningful approach to understand college delay. This model is well suited for a study such as this one because it allows for the examination of individuals across multiple contexts, engaged in many different processes, interacting with many different persons of significance, objects, and symbols; and because it strives to account for one's development through time. Because postsecondary delay should not be viewed merely as an isolated event, but rather as a process with a wide range of factors surrounding it, Bronfenbrenner and Morris's model provided sufficient adaptation to make meaningful sense of the processes and experiences of delay.

Furthermore, the Bioecological Model provided a means to gain a sense of the impact my participants' cultural environment had on both their aspirations and expectations for college and for missionary service. Hence, an understanding of the cultural demands placed upon the individuals to serve missions was given, which showed that the primary reason for delaying PSE was due to the participants' desires to fulfill their cultural expectations before their academic expectations. In doing so, this study has filled gaps in the literature that called for more research on the college enrollment decisions of delayers (Bozick & DeLuca, 2011; Goldrick-Rab & Han, 2011; Gururaj, 2011; Rowan-Kenyon, Bell, & Perna, 2008).

Finally, the use of the Brofenbrenner and Morris's (2006) model has been helpful in shedding further light and understanding on the reasons why, for Latter-day Saints, there appears to be a relationship between their religiosity and their academic success (Albrecht & Heaton, 1998). As was shown in this study, education is widely discussed and encouraged in church environments. Thus, my participants received reinforcement of their educational aspirations and expectations from a multitude of sources including home, school, and church.

Summary of Findings

Many researchers have laid the groundwork and extended the research on postsecondary delay over time. The findings of this study can be used to further our understanding of this increasingly important topic. Foremost, this study fills a gap in the research literature by employing qualitative research methodologies to a research sample who intentionally planned to delay PSE.

Many researchers issued calls for further studies into the rationale and experiences of intentional PSE delayers (Bozick & DeLuca, 2005, 2011; Goldrick-Rab & Han, 2011; Gururaj, 2011; Rowan-Kenyon, 2007; Wells & Lynch, 2012), and to do so by expanding the research methods used beyond those of quantitative approaches. This qualitative study found that the main motivation these six participants chose to delay their education was to fulfill religious commitments, a factor no other national study or Texas study had considered.

It was clear from the detailed descriptions of the participants that serving a mission was something that they considered a top priority, one that should come before educational pursuits. Further, even though they were academically prepared, and came from seemingly stable homes where college-going was expected and college readiness was encouraged, none of those factors were strong enough to cause them to attend college first. Thus, they choose to put their academic momentum on hold and pursue their personal goal of serving a mission for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

The findings of this study fill another gap of understanding posed within the community of Latter-day Saint scholars. Previous studies on Latter-day Saint returned missionaries determined that their service has a positive quantifiable effect towards their academic success (Albrecht & Heaton, 1998; Chadwick, Top, & McClendon, 2010; McClendon & Chadwick, 2004), but these studies do not explain why these students persist to earn bachelor's degrees after disrupting college enrollment when other groups of delayers do not. Whereas, my study details how the skills and attributes gained on

missions, as well as the cultural reinforcement participants received at home and at church in their youth, contributed to their academic success.

By using the Bioecological Model of Human Development (Brofenbrenner & Morris, 2006), this study has demonstrated how Latter-day Saint return missionaries effectively navigated their college experiences beyond a delay. Figure 7.1 illustrates the difference in development that occurred for the six Latter-day Saint missionaries of this study, and which they perceived as being the primary factor in their degree attainment. As illustrated (A) represents the time prior to postsecondary education, (B) is the time spent developing through missionary service, and (C) represents postsecondary experiences.
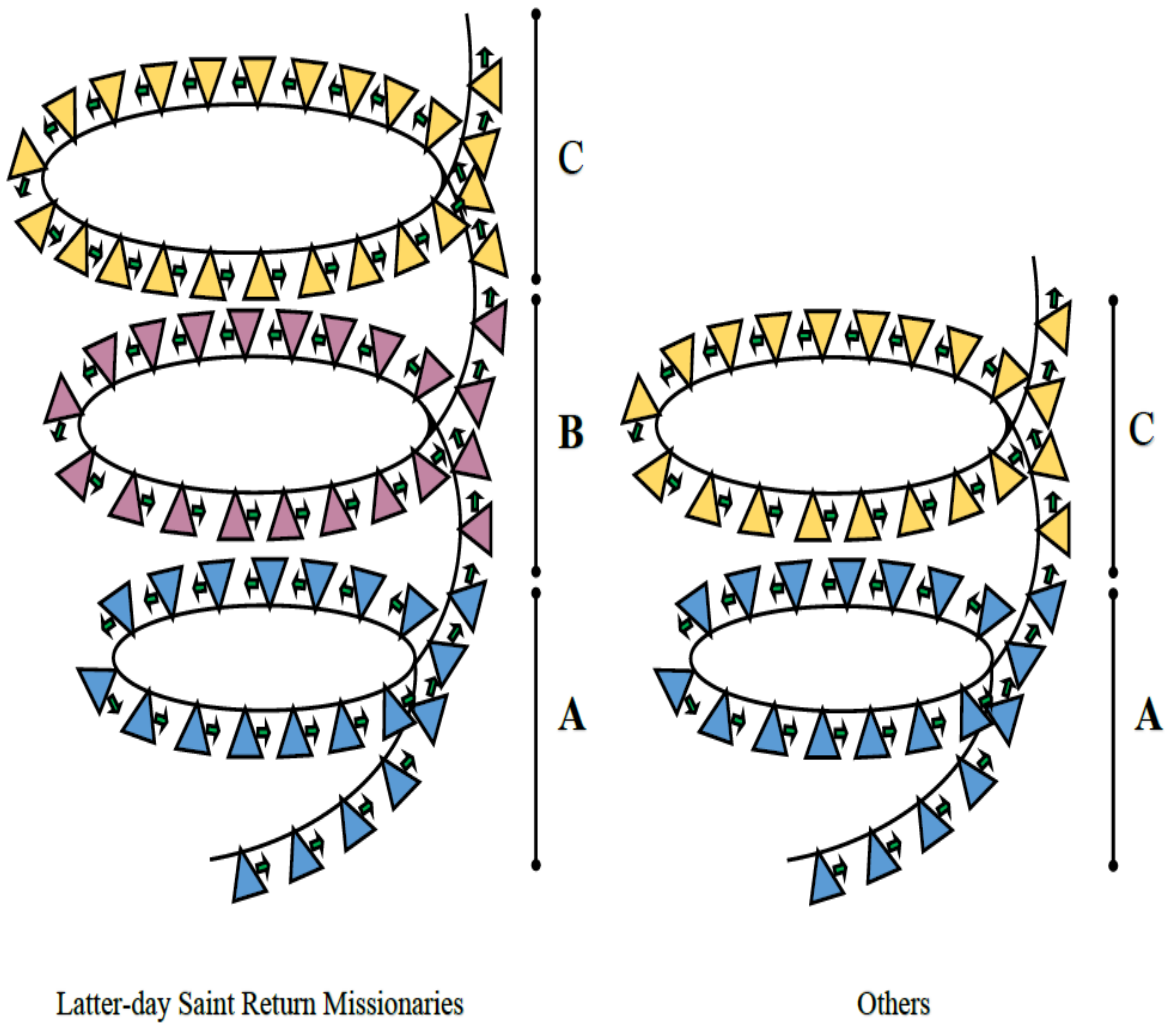
Figure 7.1 A developmental helix comparing Latter-day Saint returned missionaries who delay PSE to traditional students.

McClendon & Chadwick (2004) found that Latter-day Saint returned missionaries earn bachelor's degrees at double the national average of all college students, not just of those that delay enrollment. Figure 7.1 may be illustrating why that is happening. As the experiences of the six participants detailed, they all felt more prepared and ready for the challenges of college because of the skills and attributes they gained or polished while serving a mission, which other groups of delayers and traditional students may not have.

The participants' descriptions also portrayed several other significant factors that they felt led to their degree attainment, including their college attendance patterns and how they managed their financial situations, which included the willingness to work nearly full-time during college. Thus, while this research broadens our understanding of how some students successfully delay their postsecondary education and what accounts for that success, these findings also speak to college completion even more broadly.

Because the skills and attributes these six participants detailed learning from a mission are not exclusive to Latter-day Saint missionary service, it is proposed that other types of activities can yield similar developmental results. Thus, a delayer need not be a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints or serve a mission to have similar experiences. However, if students are choosing to delay for other activities, their ultimate college success will be aided if those activities can produce similar developmental outcomes.

Implications of this Study

The findings of this study hold implications for policy, practice, and theory, as I describe below.

Implications for Policy

The total length of college delay for students involved with this study was three years. Yet, they returned home and finished their degrees in less than four years from the time of their enrollment. This holds implications for any deferred enrollment or deferred scholarship programs that colleges or universities may have in place. Policies that allow

for deferment, but no longer than two years, may end up being detrimental to some delaying students who would otherwise earn their degrees once enrolled.

Brigham Young University and Brigham Young University-Idaho have had the most experience with dealing with Latter-day Saint students who plan to delay their postsecondary education in favor of missionary service. Whereas, other colleges or universities may not be adequately aware of the needs of Latter-day Saint delayers and may view them as other PSE delayers, students-at-risk of graduating. However, as previous studies on Latter-day Saints showed (Chadwick et al., 2010; McClendon & Chadwick, 2004), Latter-day Saint return missionaries are much more successful than even the average traditional student. Thus, public universities may need to re-consider policies and practices aimed at assisting their transitions into the classroom. Policy makers from other institutions of higher education may be able to gain valuable insight by seeking to understand the policies BYU and BYUI have in place for returning missionaries.

As was expressed by those participants who transferred between institutions, the policies governing transferable credits did not seem consistent from institution to institution. This led to some obstacles that the students needed to overcome. In doing so, they found academic advisors and counselors were insufficiently aware of what credits transferred and which did not. Attention to transfer policies is recommended, especially as it pertains to interstate transfers.

As was shown for the participants in this study, the processes engaged during their delay were fundamental in producing the developmental outcomes they credited as being

the causes of their success in attaining a degree. Therefore, policy makers and school administers should look to support programs designed to instill similar attributes and skills to incoming students, such as AVID and Upward Bound, which are pre-college programs to aid disadvantaged students gain college-readiness skills. They should also consider policies that encourage students to participate in community internships, service organization, and/or gap year activities that may yield similar developmental outcomes.

Finally, regarding the policy change that was instituted by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints to reduce the missionary service age (Monson, 2013), the findings of this study demonstrate that the academic goals of future male missionaries who choose to delay college are not necessarily being put at risk. Rather, because of the development of skills and attributes missionary service can provide them, their educational attainment may actually be aided and enhanced.

Implications for Practice

For students who do not have developmental opportunities away from a college environment, universities may consider how their campus programs provide growth opportunities to their students beyond classroom learning. Successful navigation to degree attainment is more than acquiring the necessary knowledge to earn a degree, it also involves developing and using professional skill sets that will benefit students' success beyond the classroom.

This study demonstrated how a Latter-day Saint mission structure and environment provided beneficial growth and development for my participants. Colleges and universities may want to consider becoming more familiar with the learning models

and growth experiences of Latter-day Saints missionaries and look for meaningful practices that could be replicated in their campus environments and practices. For example, how might a college replicate a missionary companionship model? Would institutionalized peer mentoring of upperclassmen to lowerclassmen yield similar learning experiences over a course of college experience?

When the participants in this study returned to school, they were doing so as first-year college students, yet their age and experiences were beyond that of incoming high school graduates. Thus, they all felt old, weird, or out of place with the younger freshman. Certainly, Latter-day Saint returned missionaries are not the only type of delaying or non-traditional students that are starting out in college. Yet, as was pointed out in previous literature, colleges most often deal with their students in broad cohorts. This practice may work well for all of those who have just graduated from high school, but clearly, the participants in this study felt it was of little value. However, they did value the support of peers their own age and with similar experience. Thus, practices or programs, such as cohorts specifically geared toward non-traditional first-year students, would be worth investigating.

Academic advising seems to be another practice the participants in this study felt could improve. Each of them mentioned that they determined their degree path virtually on their own. Any interaction they had with college counselors were for confirmatory purposes. Other studies may have shown the value of academic advisors and counselors. Their value is not being debated here. Rather, the implication for practice is the need for institutions, colleges, and departments to ensure adequate academic guides and other

resources online for those students who are self-navigating to be properly guided toward completion.

Implications for Theory

As far as can be determined, this is the first time that Bronfenbrenner and Morris's (2006) model has been used to explain postsecondary delay. As has been shown, the model is a good fit for understanding the interplay of person, processes, context, and time that shape our choices and actions, with their attendant outcomes. Whereas the majority of studies that have relied upon this theoretical model have been quantitative in nature, this study demonstrates that qualitative research practices are also well-suited for the model's use.

This study helped to explain the model by providing a way of conceptualizing the person-process-context-time interaction through the use of several figures (see List of Figures). Furthermore, because of the way in which this study adapted the model to meet the purposes of the study, the model's applicability has been extended. Unique to this study was the way in which the model was conceptualized through the use of a development helix (see Figure 3.2 and Figure 7.1), which attempts to account for the progressive nature of human development, one interaction at a time. Future studies may benefit from these conceptualizations.

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Recommendations for Future Research

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As the findings of this study attest, Latter-day Saint delayers perceived a multitude of experiences assisting them toward degree completion. However, it is difficult to ascertain the degree to which the various actions participants experienced

during their delay or prior to it affected them. It is also difficult to gauge how any perceived positive factors, such as social supports, were off-set by negative factors, such as transfer shock. Empirical studies need to be conducted to understand these delineating questions further.

Because this study only represents the postsecondary experiences of these six male Latter-day Saint returned missionaries from the North Texas area, there are many ways to expand this research. This can be accomplished by examining the experiences of a different set of male Latter-day Saint return missionaries, such as from a different part of the country, as their experiences may have been different. In addition, there is a growing need to understand the experiences of female Latter-day Saint returned missionaries since women choosing to serve missions have risen by 400% since October of 2013 (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2013).

Future studies on Latter-day Saints students should also include those students who delay college but for reasons other than missionary service, and those returned missionaries who delayed but fail to attain a college degree. Furthermore, members of the Church in other countries who delayed postsecondary education may have experienced a far different educational pathway because of the social environment of their postsecondary institutions. Thus, international studies could give a new perspective on PSE delay.

Future research should explore other groups who intentionally delay their college enrollment, such as military servicemen and women, or those who serve in the Peace Corps to better understand their college experience as well. Additionally, because this

study demonstrated that the profile of my participants aligned more with those who typically enroll immediately after high school graduation, future studies need to determine the profile of other groups of intentional delayers. Doing so might help demonstrate if intentional delayers have a common profile distinct from those who do not delay intentionally. Using Bronfenbrenner and Morris's bioecological model as a lens for any of the suggested studies would also be recommended as it would further extend the applicability of the model.

Finally, because this study was qualitative in nature and was thereby limited to only six participants, it is recommended that the developmental outcomes they identified be explored on a more general basis. A quantitative instrument could be developed which incorporates the skills and attributes as its variables to describe, predict, or with which to conduct experimental research. Furthermore, because national studies do not use religious factors as variables in their studies, it would be beneficial to strive to account for the degree to which desires to serve a mission predict college delay among Latter-day Saints. Doing so would create a more accurate profile of Latter-day Saint students in relation to postsecondary education.

Concluding Reflection

At the outset of this study, delaying postsecondary education was known to come with significant risks. It was also known that Latter-day Saint returned missionaries, who delayed their postsecondary education, have been able to avert those negative consequences and instead have earned degrees at higher than average rates. How they have been successful despite delays was yet unclear. Thus, by employing qualitative

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research methods, the experiences of six male Latter-day Saints returned missionaries were explored. Their descriptions and perceptions of their experiences yielded insightful findings in answer to the purposes of this study. Bronfenbrenner and Morris's Bioecological Model of Human Development, which served as the theoretical lens for this study, also provided a meaningful way of explaining this study's findings. As a result, this research has been the first of its kind both in subpopulation studied, in the methodological approach, and in the conceptual framework.

In conclusion, each of the participants explained their success beyond delaying their college enrollment in terms of the developmental outcomes they experienced during their period of delay, as a result of serving a mission for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The structured context of missionary life, coupled with the daily processes they engaged in for two years, together with the personal interactions they experienced with other people, served to shape their personal dispositions and perspectives toward success, and enhanced their personal resources for college. They also described the impact of their childhood and high school contexts, processes, and persons of significance, which created the foundations on which their future development grew.

The specific degree to which any of their interactions of environmental contexts, processes, or people served to affect the success of these six individuals remains unknown. However, this research demonstrates the developmental outcomes stemming from the various contextual and social interactions these six participants experienced before delay and during delay contributed to their successful degree attainment beyond delay.

Appendix A

Interview Protocol

1. Let's start by having you tell me a little about yourself.

   a. Describe your family growing up?

   b. What was your high school like?

   c. What was your neighborhood /community like?

2. What did you see yourself doing after high school graduation?

   a. Thinking back, what people or events in your life influenced you to want to do those things?

3. Why did you choose to serve a mission?

   a. How did you come to decide to serve a mission?

   b. What did you think about your missionary assignment when you first received it?

   c. How did you pay for your mission? Was that your plan all along?

   d. Why did you decide to serve a mission first before attending college?

   e. Looking back, would you change that decision? Why or why not?

   f. Did any in your community choose not to serve missions? If so, how were they different from you?

   g. What did you learn from your missionary service?

4. After high school graduation, what was your plan for gaining a post-secondary education?

   a. Why did you want to go to college and earn a degree? Did you always feel that way?

b. How did you decide what you were going to study?

c. How did you pay for college? Was that your plan all along? If not, how did it change?

d. How long did you think it was going to take you to earn a degree?

e. Did you receive any help planning for college? If so, from whom?

f. Were there any in your community that served missions but chose not to go to college? Why do you think they ended up not going to college?

5. Upon returning home from your mission, how would you describe your transition from missionary service into your first-year of post-secondary education?

a. What was the most difficult thing about the transition? How did you deal with it?

b. Who or what do you feel helped you the most to make the transition into the classroom a successful one?

c. How would you compare your readiness for college life before and after your mission?

d. Did your college plans change as a result of serving a mission? In what way?

e. How would you describe the efforts the university made to assist you in your transition into school, for example did you attend any new student orientation meetings or use any student services?

6. Describe the rest of your college experience generally?

   a. Take me through the remaining years of college after the first one.

   b. What was college life like for you?

   c. Were you involved with any campus groups? Tell me about them.

   d. How do you think your college experience was different from those of your community that chose not to serve a mission but enrolled in college?

   e. How do you think your college experience was different from those not of your faith?

7. What other things affected your college experience?

   a. What did you do with your time when you were not on campus?

8. You delayed postsecondary education by several years and yet you were still able to graduate from college, what do you think made that possible?

9. How would you describe the impact your missionary service (delaying) had on your degree attainment?

   a. What challenges did serving a mission pose to your education? How did you address those challenges?

   b. What benefits did serving a mission bring to your education? How did you use those benefits?

   c. What are some skills you learned or developed as a missionary that helped you graduate from college?

10. More Latter-day Saint young men are delaying college to serve missions, what advice would you give them about how to succeed in college?

11. Is there anything else you would like to share or explain about your educational success?

Appendix B

Email Invitation to Participate

Dear Sir,

My name is Jared A. Jepson. I am a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Texas at Arlington in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies conducting dissertation research.

I would like to invite you to participate in this study that seeks to understand the postsecondary experience of Latter-day Saint returned missionaries in the DFW area. Specifically, this research is designed to gain a greater understanding of how you were able to successfully attain a bachelor's degree after being away from formal schooling for several years. You have been purposefully selected to participate in this study because of a) your affiliation with The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, b) your service as missionary of the Church, and c) you are a college graduate.

Possible Benefits of the Study:
From this research on Latter-day Saint returned missionaries who successfully delayed college enrollment, more can be understood concerning what institutional policies and practices either aid or hinder their academic success. Findings from this study could benefit policy makers and institution administrators as they establish policies and practices that seek to influence the academic success of other groups that have delayed or deferred their enrollment, such as returning veterans, transfer students, non-traditional students. Your experiences may help assist future generations of Latter-day Saint missionaries who also end up delaying postsecondary education.

Participation in the Study:
I recognize that your missionary and college experiences are in the past. As such, you are being invited to take part in a personal interview designed to assist you to recall those details from your memory. If you have journals, photos, or other documents that you feel would help describe your experiences, you would be invited to share those as appropriate. If we feel that more time is needed to continue the interview, additional arrangements will be made. Some follow up from me via email, phone calls, and or text can be expected if there is clarification needed on any of your interview responses.

Participation in this research study is voluntary. You have the right to decline participation or quit at any time at no consequence. Should you be willing to participate in this study, you will need to read through the disclosure statement that is included in this letter and sign your consent to participate. Upon consent, I will contact you to schedule the best time and place for our interview. In the meantime, I would invite you to look through journals, photo albums, or other documents related to your college experience that will help detail your experience. Every attempt will be made to ensure that your identity and private information is kept confidential.

As a thank you for your time a $50 gift certificate to a local restaurant of your choice or shopping store of your choice will be offered to you.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me or my UTA dissertation chair, Barbara Tobolowsky, 817-272-7269.

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Thank you for your participation!!

Jared A. Jepson

682-233-3206

jared.jepson@mavs.uta.edu

Participation Disclosure: Your personal information was obtained using the Worldwide Enrollment of Seminary and Institute student database, the attendance software of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints' seminary and institute programs. While I am a seminary and institute coordinator, which is a paid employee of the Church, and have received approval from the Church Educational Research Committee to conduct this research, the findings and conclusions do not represent the official views of the Church.

Appendix C

Pre-screening Questionnaire Email Invitation

Dear [First name] [Last name],

My name is Jared A. Jepson, director of the Arlington Institute of Religion for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and Ph.D. candidate at the University of Texas at Arlington. I would like to invite you to participate in a study I am conducting for my dissertation research, which is an examination of the college experience of Latter-day Saints who delayed college entry because of missionary service. Your name was selected from the Potential Student Tracking (PST) database which is kept by the Seminaries and Institutes of Religion (S&I) as one who might meet the study's research criteria.

Participation in the Study:
Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You have the right to decline participation in any or all study procedures or quit at any time at no consequence. This study is conducted in two parts. You may or may not be asked to participate in all parts of the study.

The first part is a 10-question pre-screening questionnaire. It will only take 5-10 minutes of your time. Six qualifying participants will be invited to participant in the second part of the study, a 60-90 minutes personal interview.

Should you be willing to participate in the study, you will be need to read through the disclosure statement that appears on the first page of the questionnaire and click the "Yes" button. Doing so is considered the equivalent of providing your signature on a consent form. Otherwise, you will not be permitted to participate. Upon consent, you will be taken to the online questionnaire asking about your general background as well as basic mission and college information.

To proceed to the questionnaire, click here.

Possible Benefits of the Study:
From this research on Latter-day Saint returned missionaries who successfully delayed college enrollment, more can be understood concerning what institutional policies and practices either aid or hinder their academic success. Findings from this study could benefit policy makers and institution administrators as they establish policies and practices that seek to influence the academic success of other groups that have delayed or deferred their enrollment, such as returning veterans, transfer students, non-traditional students. Your experiences may help assist future generations of Latter-day Saint missionaries who also end up delaying postsecondary education.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me or my UTA dissertation chair, Barbara Tobolowsky, 817-272-7269.

Thank you for your participation!! To participate in the 5-10 minute questionnaire, <u>click here.</u>

Jared A. Jepson   682-233-3206   jepsonja@ldschurch.org

Participation Disclosure: There is no compensation for taking the questionnaire. Your personal information was obtained using the Potential Student Tracking database which is a part of the Worldwide Enrollment of Seminary and Institute student database, the attendance software of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints' seminary and institute programs. While I am a seminary and institute coordinator, which is a paid employee of the Church, and have received approval from the Church Educational Research Committee to conduct this research, the findings and conclusions do not represent the official views of the Church.

Appendix D

Pre-screening Questionnaire and Consent Form

A Qualitative Examination of the Successful Postsecondary

Education of Latter-day Saint Returned Missionaries

Jared A. Jepson, Ph.D. Candidate

The University of Texas at Arlington

INTRODUCTION

Hello, my name is Jared Jepson, director of the Arlington Institute of Religion for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and Ph.D. candidate at the University of Texas at Arlington. I am looking for potential participants for my dissertation research, which is an examination of the college experience of Latter-day Saints who delayed college entry in order to serve a mission. Your name was selected from the Potential Student Tracking (PST) database which is kept by the Seminaries and Institutes of Religion (S&I) as one who might meet the study's research criteria.

PURPOSE

The specific purpose of this questionnaire is to identify those potential participants whose high school, missionary, and college experience meet the basic criteria for inclusion in this study.

DURATION

The questionnaire should take between 5-10 minutes and asks about your high school, mission, and college experience.

NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS

Approximately, 200 people will be asked to take the questionnaire. In total, six individuals, who served a full-time mission and graduated from college before 2012, will be asked to participate in an individual interview.

PROCEDURES

This questionnaire requests that you:
1. Provide your consent to participate in this questionnaire by clicking the "yes" button below.
2. Answer the questions in the survey. (You are not obligated to answer every question.)

If you are selected to continue to the interview stage, you will be contacted via email with instructions regarding further participation and a formal consent form to do so.

POSSIBLE BENEFITS

From this research on the college experience of Latter-day Saint returned missionaries who successfully delayed college enrollment, more can be understood concerning what institutional policies and practices either aid or hinder their academic success. Findings from this study could benefit policy makers and institution administrators as they establish policies and practices that seek to influence the academic success of other groups that have delayed or deferred their enrollment, such as returning veterans, transfer students, non-traditional students. Your experiences may help assist future generations of Latter-day Saint missionaries who also end up delaying postsecondary education.

POSSIBLE RISKS/DISCOMFORTS

There are no perceived risks or discomforts for participating in this research study. Should you experience any discomfort please inform the researcher, you have the right to quit any study procedures at any time at no consequence.

COMPENSATION

No compensation will be offered for participation in this questionnaire.

ALTERNATIVE PROCEDURES

There are no alternative procedures offered for this questionnaire. However, you can elect not to participate in the study or quit at any time at no consequence.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

Participation in this research study is voluntary. You have the right to decline participation in any or all study procedures or quit at any time at no consequence.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Every attempt will be made to see that your study results are kept confidential. All data collected from this study will be stored in office 103G of Trimble Hall on UTA campus for at least three (3) years after the end of this research. The results of this study may be published and/or presented at meetings without naming you as a participant. Additional research studies could evolve from the information you have provided, but your information will not be linked to you in anyway; it will be anonymous. Although your rights and privacy will be maintained, the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services, the UTA Institutional Review Board (IRB), and personnel particular to this research have access to the study records. Your records will be kept completely confidential according to current legal requirements. They will not be revealed unless required by law, or as noted above. The IRB at UTA has reviewed and approved this study and the information within this consent form. If in the unlikely event it becomes necessary for the Institutional Review Board to review your research records, the

University of Texas at Arlington will protect the confidentiality of those records to the extent permitted by law.

Questions about this research study may be directed to Jared A. Jepson, PH.D. student at UTA, jepsonja@ldschurch.org. I can be reached at 682-233-3206. You can also reach Dr. Barbara Tobolowsky, Faculty Advisor, Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies, UTA. She can be reached at 817-272-7269 or tobolow@uta.edu. Any questions you may have about your rights as a research participant or a research-related injury may be directed to the Office of Research Administration; Regulatory Services at 817-272-2105 or regulatoryservices@uta.edu.

CONSENT
By clicking "Yes" below, you confirm that you are 18 years of age or older and have read or had this document read to you. You have been informed about this study's purpose, procedures, possible benefits, and risks. You have been given the opportunity to ask questions before you sign, and you have been told that you can ask other questions at any time.

You voluntarily agree to participate in this questionnaire. By clicking "Yes" you are not waiving any of your legal rights. Refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits, to which you are otherwise entitled.

❍ Yes, I give my consent to participate in the questionnaire.

❍ No, I do not want to participate.

Q1 Graduating high school class:

2003

2004

2005

Other

Q2 High school information:

Name of graduating high school

City

State

Q3 Did you serve a full-time mission for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints?

Yes

No

Q3a Mission information:

Mission name (e.g. Baltic States Mission)

Service time (month/year to month/year)

Q3b Did you complete your mission before attending any college?

Yes

No

Q4 Have you attended college?

Yes

No

Q4a College Enrollment Information:

What year did you first enroll in college?

What was the name of the College you first attended?

Q4b Indicate any form of financial aid you received during college:

	Select all that apply
Scholarships	
Grants	
Student Loans	
Other	
None	

Q4c Have you earned a bachelor's degree or higher?

Yes

No

Q4d College Graduation Information:

What year did you earn your bachelor's degree?

What was the name of the college from whom you received your degree?

Q5 Have you ever attended an Institute of Religion class?

Yes

No

Q5a Indicate when you attended Institute of Religion classes:

	Mark all that apply
Before your mission	
After your mission, but before college	
During your freshman and sophomore years of college	
During your junior and senior years of college	
After graduating from college	

Q6 What is your current age?

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27

28

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Q7 Where is your current place of residence?

City

State

Q8 What is the highest level of education your parents attained?

	High School Graduate	Some College	Associate's Degree	Bachelor's Degree	Master's Degree	Professional Degree	Click to write Scale point 7
Mother Father							

Q9 Are your parents members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints?

	Yes	No	I don't know
Mother			
Father			

Q9a Did either of your parents serve a mission for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints?

	Yes	No	I don't know
Mother			
Father			

Q10 Would you like to be considered as a potential interview participant? (Clicking yes does not obligate you to participate, nor does it guarantee that you will be selected to

participant. Clicking yes indicates you would be willing to participate if requested to do so by the principal investigator.)

Yes

No

Info Please provide the requested information below in order for me to contact you.

Thank you!!

    Name

    Phone

    Email

    Best time of day to reach you

Appendix E

Seminaries and Institutes of Religion Educational Review Committee Approval Letter

SEMINARIES AND INSTITUTES OF RELIGION

March 20, 2014

Jared A. Jepson
600 South Davis Drive
Arlington, Texas 76013-6689

Dear Brother Jepson:

The S&I Education Research Committee approved your research project with the following guidelines:

1. Data is to be collected as outlined in your proposal. You will need to submit any changes in the instrumentation or procedures to the Committee for approval.
2. If you are planning to publish or present any of your research findings, please submit a request to the Committee for approval.
3. Prior to submitting your findings, please forward your report to Dan Winder and Dan Skoubye for review. Their input may aid you in meeting your goals with this project.
4. S&I would like an electronic copy of your research report upon completion of your degree. The copy should be in .pdf format and include signatures. Please send to: SI_Research@ldschurch.org.

We look forward to reviewing your findings with a view to the S&I Objection.

Sincerely,

R. Kelly Haws
Associate Administrator

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Appendix F

Email Verification Protocol

"Hello, my name is Jared Jepson, I'm the Arlington Institute of Religion Director for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and am a Ph.D. candidate at The University of Texas at Arlington conducting research on the college experiences of Latter-day Saints. Last month I sent an email invitation to (name of participate), to participate in a quick five-minute online survey. I am calling today to verify that the invitation I sent to (email address I sent original invite) was the correct email address."

If it was correct: "Would you mind if I resent that invitation to participate in the survey? Thank you very much for your time. I appreciate it. Have a great day."

If it wasn't correct: "Would you mind if I sent you an invitation to participate using your most current email address? Thank you. What address would you like me to send that to? Okay, I'll be sending that invitation to (new email address) as soon as I can. I appreciate your time and participation. Good-bye."

If they do not desire to participate: "I certainly respect that decision. Thank you for your time today. Good-bye."

Appendix G

Interview Participant Consent Form

UT Arlington
Informed Consent Document

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR
Jared A. Jepson, Educational Leadership and Policy Studies, jared.jepson@mavs.uta.edu, 682-233-3206

FACULTY ADVISOR
Dr. Barbara Tobolowsky, Educational Leadership and Policy Studies, tobolow@uta.edu, 817-272-7269

TITLE OF PROJECT
Beyond Delay: A Qualitative Examination of the Successful Postsecondary Education of Latter-day Saint Return Missionaries

INTRODUCTION
You are being invited to participate in a dissertation research study that seeks to understand the college experience of Latter-day Saint return missionaries in the DFW area. Specifically, this research is designed to gain a greater understanding of how you were able to successfully attain a bachelor's degree after being away from formal schooling for several years. Your participation is completely voluntary. Refusal to participate or discontinuing your participation at any time will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Please ask questions if there is anything you do not understand.

PURPOSE
The purpose of this study is to examine the postsecondary pathway of successful Latter-day Saint returned missionaries by seeking to uncover:

1) How they navigate the college experience after a delay
2) What factors they perceived as contributing to their degree attainment.

DURATION
Participation in this study will last approximately 60-90 minutes for personal interview with the principal investigator.

NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS
The number of anticipated participants in this research study is six.

PROCEDURES
The procedures which will involve you as a research participant include:
1. Providing your consent to participate by signing this consent form

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IRB Approval Date: JUN 17 2014

IRB Expiration Date:

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2. Arrange a time with the principal investigator for a 60-90 minute personal interview. This can be done either face-to-face or via WebEx, an online video conferencing software.
3. Provide copies of high school and college transcripts.

The interview will be audio recorded. After the interview, the recording will be transcribed, which means they will be typed exactly as they were recorded, word-for-word, by the researcher. Upon completion of the transcriptions, you will be given an opportunity to check for accuracy, then recording will be destroyed and the transcript will be kept for potential future research involving the academic experience of Latter-day Saints. The transcription will not be used for any future research purposes not described here.

To protect your identity, your name will be replaced with a pseudonym of your choosing throughout the study. Any identifiable information on your school records will be blotted out and will only be identified by your selected pseudonym.

The data from the interview will be combined with the data collected from your pre-screening questionnaire and your school records in order to analyze, interrupt, and represent your college experience.

POSSIBLE BENEFITS
From this research on Latter-day Saint returned missionaries who successfully delayed college enrollment, more can be understood concerning what institutional policies and practices either aid or hinder their academic success. Findings from this study could benefit policy makers and institution administrators as they establish policies and practices that seek to influence the academic success of other groups that have delayed or deferred their enrollment, such as returning veterans, transfer students, non-traditional students. Your experiences may help assist future generations of Latter-day Saint missionaries who also end up delaying postsecondary education.

POSSIBLE RISKS/DISCOMFORTS
There are no perceived risks or discomforts for participating in this research study. Should you experience any discomfort please inform the researcher, you have the right to quit any study procedures at any time at no consequence.

COMPENSATION
There will be $50 compensational gift card offered as a thank you for taking part in this study. You can choose to receive a gift card for local restaurants, Target, or iTunes.

ALTERNATIVE PROCEDURES

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IRB Approval Date: JUN 17 2014

IRB Expiration Date:

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UT Arlington
Informed Consent Document

There are no alternative procedures offered for this study. However, you can elect not to participate in the study or quit at any time at no consequence.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

Participation in this research study is voluntary. You have the right to decline participation in any or all study procedures or quit at any time at no consequence.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Every attempt will be made to see that your study results are kept confidential. A copy of this signed consent form and all data collected from this study will be stored in office 103G of Trimble Hall on UTA campus for at least three (3) years after the end of this research. The results of this study may be published and/or presented at meetings without naming you as a participant. Additional research studies could evolve from the information you have provided, but your information will not be linked to you in anyway; it will be anonymous. Although your rights and privacy will be maintained, the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services, the UTA Institutional Review Board (IRB), and personnel particular to this research have access to the study records. Your records will be kept completely confidential according to current legal requirements. They will not be revealed unless required by law, or as noted above. The IRB at UTA has reviewed and approved this study and the information within this consent form. If in the unlikely event it becomes necessary for the Institutional Review Board to review your research records, the University of Texas at Arlington will protect the confidentiality of those records to the extent permitted by law.

CONTACT FOR QUESTIONS

Questions about this research study may be directed to Jared A. Jepson, PH.D. student at UTA, jared.jepson@mavs.uta.edu. He can be reached at 682-233-3206. You can also reach Dr. Barbara Tobolowsky, Faculty Advisor, Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies, UTA. She can be reached at 817-272-7269 or tobolow@uta.edu. Any questions you may have about your rights as a research participant or a research-related injury may be directed to the Office of Research Administration; Regulatory Services at 817-272-2105 or regulatoryservices@uta.edu.

As a representative of this study, I have explained the purpose, the procedures, the benefits, and the risks that are involved in this research study:

_____

Signature and printed name of principal investigator or person obtaining consent   Date

CONSENT

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IRB Approval Date: JUN 17 2014

IRB Expiration Date:

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UT Arlington
Informed Consent Document

By signing below, you confirm that you are 18 years of age or older and have read or had this document read to you. You have been informed about this study's purpose, procedures, possible benefits and risks, and you have received a copy of this form. You have been given the opportunity to ask questions before you sign, and you have been told that you can ask other questions at any time.

You voluntarily agree to participate in this study. By signing this form, you are not waiving any of your legal rights. Refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits, to which you are otherwise entitled.

_____   _____

SIGNATURE OF VOLUNTEER   **DATE**

4

IRB Approval Date: JUN 17 2014

IRB Expiration Date:

Appendix H

Snowball Participation Request Email

Dear [Participant's Name],

Thank you for taking the time to participate in my research survey. Do you know of anybody else from the North Texas area who graduated from college and served a full-time mission for the Church?

If so, please respond to this email by providing whatever contact information you may have for them in the space provided below. I will then send them an email with a link to the survey.

Name:

Address:

City, State and Zip:

Phone:

Email:

If you do not know of someone else, then that is not a problem. I have appreciated your consideration and participation.

Thank you.

Jared A. Jepson

Appendix I

The University of Texas at Arlington Internal Review Board Approvals

Institutional Review Board
Notification of Exemption

June 18, 2014

Jared Jepson
Dr. Barbara Tobolowsky
Educational Leadership & Policy Studies

Protocol Number: 2014-0552

Protocol Title: *Beyond Delay: A Qualitative Examination of the Successful Postsecondary Education of Latter-day Saint Return Missionaries*

EXEMPTION DETERMINATION

The UT Arlington Institutional Review Board (IRB) Chair, or designee, has reviewed the above referenced study and found that it qualified for exemption under the federal guidelines for the protection of human subjects as referenced at Title 45CFR Part 46.101(b)(2).

- (2)Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior, unless:(i) information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human subjects can be identified, either directly or through identifiers linked to the subject; and (ii) any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

You are therefore authorized to begin the research as of **June 17, 2014.**

Pursuant to Title 45 CFR 46.103(b)(4)(iii), investigators are required to, "promptly report to the IRB *any* proposed changes in the research activity, and to ensure that such changes in approved research, during the period for which IRB approval has already been given, are **not initiated without prior IRB review and approval** except when necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subject."   Please be advised that as the principal investigator, you are required to report local adverse (unanticipated) events to the Office of Research Administration; Regulatory Services within 24 hours of the occurrence or upon acknowledgement of the occurrence. All investigators and key personnel identified in the protocol must have documented Human Subject Protection (HSP) Training on file with this office. Completion certificates are valid for 2 years from completion date.

The UT Arlington Office of Research Administration; Regulatory Services appreciates your continuing commitment to the protection of human subjects in research. Should you have questions, or need to report completion of study procedures, please contact Robin Dickey at 817-272-9329 or robind@uta.edu. You may also contact Regulatory Services at 817-272-3723 or regulatoryservices@uta.edu.

REGULATORY SERVICES
SERVICES

The University of Texas at Arlington, Center for Innovation
202 E. Border Street, Ste. 201, Arlington, Texas 76010, Box#19188
(T) 817-272-3723 (F) 817-272-5808 (E) regulatoryservices@uta.edu (W) www.uta.edu/rs

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UNIVERSITY OF
TEXAS
ARLINGTON

August 14, 2014

Jared Jepson
Dr. Barbara Tobolowsky
Educational Leadership & Policy Studies
Box 19575

IRB No.:   2014-0552

Title: *Beyond Delay: A Qualitative Examination of the Successful Postsecondary*
Education of Latter-day Saint Return Missionaries

EXEMPT MINOR MODIFICATION APPROVAL MEMO

The UT Arlington Institutional Review Board (UTA IRB) Chair (or designee) reviewed and
approved the modification(s) to this exempt protocol on **August 13, 2014** in accordance with
Title 45 CFR 46.101(b). Therefore, you are authorized to conduct your research. The
modification(s), indicated below, was/were deemed minor and appropriate for exempt
determination/acknowledgment review.

- Modification to include phone verification procedures as part of recruitment

Pursuant to Title 45 CFR 46.103(b) (4) (iii), investigators are required to, "promptly report to the
IRB <u>*any*</u> proposed changes in the research activity, and ensure that such changes in approved
research, during the period for which IRB approval has already been given, **are not initiated
without IRB review and approval** except when necessary to eliminate apparent immediate
hazards to the subject."

The modification approval will additionally be presented to the convened board on September 9,
2014 for full IRB acknowledgment [45 CFR 46.110(c)]. All investigators and key personnel
identified in the protocol must have documented Human Subjects Protection (HSP) training on
file with the UT Arlington Office of Research Administration; Regulatory Services.

The UT Arlington Office of Research Administration appreciates your continuing commitment
to the protection of human research subjects. Should you have questions or require further
assistance, please contact Robin Dickey at <u>robind@uta.edu</u> or you may contact the Office of
Regulatory Services at 817-272-3723.

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September 8, 2014

Jared Jepson
Dr. Barbara Tobolowsky
Educational Leadership & Policy Studies
Box 19575

IRB No.:   2014-0552

Title: *Product Information*

EXEMPT MINOR MODIFICATION APPROVAL MEMO

The UT Arlington Institutional Review Board (UTA IRB) Chair (or designee) reviewed and approved the modification(s) to this exempt protocol on **September 4, 2014** in accordance with Title 45 CFR 46.101(b). Therefore, you are authorized to conduct your research. The modification(s), indicated below, was/were deemed minor and appropriate for exempt determination/acknowledgment review.

- Modification to include snowball sampling and increase the number of participants to 200

Pursuant to Title 45 CFR 46.103(b) (4) (iii), investigators are required to, "promptly report to the IRB *any* proposed changes in the research activity, and ensure that such changes in approved research, during the period for which IRB approval has already been given, **are not initiated without IRB review and approval** except when necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subject."

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Appendix J

Data Coding Protocol

The Bioecological Model of Human Development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006), which explains human development through the dynamic interactions of *process, person, context,* and *time,* has served as the conceptual framework for the data analysis of this study. Below is a brief summary of each of the four defining components of the model with their attendant sub-components. An explanation of how each sub-component was used for coding in the analysis of the data in this study is given.

Process. The core of the bioecological model is known as *process* and is considered the main engine that drives development. Coding triggers were found by asking, *what did the subject do or engage in?* And, *what was/were the result(s) of previous actions or experiences?*

- *Proximal Processes (PP) =* interactions between the subject, persons, objects, and symbols in their immediate environment. For example, personal study, asking questions of a parent or peer, and/or enrolling in classes.

- *Developmental Outcomes (DO) =* "qualities of the developing person that emerge at a later point in time as the result of the joint interactive, mutually reinforcing effects" of the four defining components of the model (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006, p. 798).

Person. The components of a person are affected by both processes and context. Reciprocally, a person also affects both the processes and context with which they interact. These interactions make up the experiences of a person's life. Person codes were

triggered by asking, *how did the subject think or feel about their interactions or circumstances and what were their perceptions?*

- *Disposition (Dis)* = the degree to which a person is naturally inclined to act or respond to a proximal process.

- *Resources (Res)* = the abilities, skills, talents, and knowledge that they have as a person in relationship to their social environment.

- *Demand (Dem)* = the invitation or discouragement a person receives to interact with proximal processes.

- *Perception (Per)* = the viewpoint of a person about their experiences with processes, context, and time.

Context. While the factors that make up a person's environments are virtually endless, four subcomponents made up the codes for this study. These codes were triggered by asking, *with whom did the subject interact, where did the interaction take place, and what was the role of the subject in this context?*

- *Persons of Significance (PS)* = people in an identifiable context that interacted with a person in a proximal process.

- *Objects (Obj)* = objects in an identifiable context that a person interacted with during a proximal process.

- *Mesosystems (Meso)* = is the environment in which two or more microsystems interact. For the purposes of this study, this was defined as the subject's home environment, meaning their place of residence, which would account for their home or apartment during the various times of their lives.

- *Exosystems (Exo)* = is understood to be made up of a collection of mesosystems that create a larger social environment, like a neighborhood, a church, or school campus. In this study, it included school, work environments, missionary service environments, and community environment.

Time. The defining component of time acts as a way of locating a person's moments of interactions with processes in various contexts. Time subcomponents were coded by asking, *when did the proximal process take place?* For the purpose of this study, four divisions of time were coded:

- *Microtime (MT)* = accounts for the smaller units of time that comprise the larger segments of time listed below, such as the period of study time in a given day.
- *Prior to Delaying College (PD)* = any time up until high school graduation.
- *During Delay of College (DD)* = any time between graduation and college attendance, such as work or missionary service.

Beyond Delay of College (BD) = any time after college attendance has begun.

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Biographical Information

Jared A. Jepson is a native of Utah. He earned his Bachelor's degree from the University of Utah (1999) in English and later his Master's degree from Brigham Young University (2005) in Religious Education. His master's thesis, *A Study of the* For the Strength of Youth *Pamphlet, 1965-2004*, was the first of its kind. It demonstrated how the pamphlet evolved over time, what precipitated changes to the pamphlet, and how The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints used the pamphlet to impact the mindset of its youth and youth programs worldwide. In May of 2014, Jared was inducted into Phi Kappa Phi, an honors society, which promotes academic excellence in higher education.

Jared plans to extend the research of his dissertation by exploring the impact of missionary service on the educational experience of Latter-day Saint women and international members. Other research interests include: college completion; education as a cultural value; the higher educational experience of Latter-day Saints at public universities and colleges; the college knowledge and readiness of Latter-day Saints; and to examine the educational leadership of President Gordon B. Hinckley, specifically his time as Chairman of the Board of Education for the Church Education System from 1995 to 2008. During his administration, several educational changes were implemented, such as the Perpetual Education Fund and the transition of Ricks College to Brigham Young University-Idaho.

Jared, Christy, and their seven children currently live in Mansfield, Texas where he is an educational administrator for the Seminaries and Institutes of Religion for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.