



4-1-2003

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Diana L. Mahony

Marla D. Corson

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Recommended Citation

Mahony, Diana L. and Corson, Marla D. (2003) "Light-Mindedness versus Lightheartedness: Conflicting Conceptions of Laughter among Latter-day Saints," *BYU Studies Quarterly*. Vol. 42 : Iss. 2 , Article 6. Available at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/byusq/vol42/iss2/6>

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Light-Mindedness versus Lightheartedness

Conflicting Conceptions of Laughter among Latter-day Saints

Diana L. Mahony and Marla D. Corson

Therefore, cease from all your light speeches, from all laughter . . . and light-mindedness, and from all your wicked doings.

—D&C 88:121

A merry heart doeth good like a medicine: but a broken spirit drieth the bones.

—Prov. 17:22

These two scriptures illustrate the conflicting messages about laughter that exist not only in scripture but in the culture of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Our interest in this subject was piqued by the comments of two Church members. The first, a temple sealer, remarked that anytime he laughs loudly he feels guilty because he believes such behavior is unrighteous and inappropriate. He reports being perplexed by this feeling because he is a cheerful individual who smiles and laughs readily. The second man, a bishop for many years, commented that he always “feels a twinge” whenever the injunction about laughter in Doctrine and Covenants 88:121 is mentioned because it has never seemed quite right to him. The purpose of our study is to discover whether the guilt and confusion expressed by these two men is anomalous or representative of other active Church members.¹ We will begin by discussing a language-based problem with the term *laughter* and then give some references to and instruction concerning laughter in scripture and other Church writings. We then present our survey of attitudes about laughter among Latter-day Saints of different ages and levels of experience with Church doctrine.

The Ambiguity of *Laughter*

The problem with talking about *laughter* is that the word is used to mean many different things, some of which are diametrically opposed to each other. These differences include a broad range of acoustical properties, causes, internal states, spiritual attitudes, and social and psychological functions. For example, laughter can refer to sounds which are loud or soft, high or low pitched, shrill or bubbling, a short burst or a gradual crescendo. Laughter can be caused by humorous stimuli but also by tickling, breathing nitrous oxide, or psychosis. It can reflect internal states of amusement, nervousness, embarrassment, tension, relief after tension, or a sudden sense of exhilaration and well-being.

Human ethologist Robert Provine reports, on the basis of twelve hundred observations, that more than 80 percent of laughter that occurs during conversation is not “a response to . . . a formal attempt at humor.” He reports further that in conversation the speaker laughs more frequently than the audience and that laughter may serve to “modify the behavior of others by shaping the emotional tone of a conversation.”²

From a spiritual perspective, laughter can accompany an attitude of joyful and reverent lightheartedness or irreverent light-mindedness. Socially, laughter can function to deride and humiliate or to cheer and encourage; to define group membership; to strengthen or weaken a group’s identity or its hierarchy; to include or exclude individuals from the group; to enforce conformity to group mores; to facilitate criticism, apologies, or the introduction of a serious or delicate topic; and to satisfy the need for play. Psychologically, laughter can serve to reduce stress and anxiety or to provide a socially acceptable outlet for aggressive or sexual impulses (“I was just kidding!”). Laughter may be an expression of derision, triumph, or amusement.

Without adequate context, one cannot know which function the laughter serves and, more importantly, whether the laughter is a reflection of the “merry heart” recommended in Proverbs 17:22 or a species of the “wicked doings” proscribed in Doctrine and Covenants 88:121. In high-context situations such as conversation, there is rarely confusion because only one interpretation is reasonable. However, in low-context situations or in general statements about laughter quoted apart from their context, this linguistic underdifferentiation can be the source of much confusion and heated disagreement. The problem results not only from the ambiguity itself but also from persistent lapses in awareness of that ambiguity (for example, the lapses of aggressive ticklers who believe and insist that their

protesting victims are actually enjoying themselves, as evidenced by their hysterical laughter).

This tendency to ignore the different meanings of laughter influences both the conception and the perception of laughter. The disparate causes, intentions, and functions of laughter do not come readily to mind. Instead, laughter is often conceptualized as the expression of a single state of being, and most, if not all, instances of laughter are then perceived and remembered as evidence of this state. There is considerable disagreement, however, about what this state is and about its desirability. The views cluster around opposite poles of the positive-negative dimension. While laughter is seen as one concrete concept, views about what that concept is and means are polarized.

Influences on Church Members' Attitudes

Church members are often confused because popular psychology expounds on the benefits of laughter while scriptures are mostly negative about laughing. Modern Church teachings give both positive and negative aspects of laughter.

Popular Psychology. The popular psychology of humor and laughter began unofficially in 1979, with the publication of *Anatomy of an Illness*, Norman Cousins's description of the role of "humor intervention" in curing himself from a serious and painful collagen disease.³ During the two decades since then, there has been a proliferation of workshops and seminars, occupation-specific magazines and newsletters, trade books, videos, and tapes that promote the benefits of humor and laughter in every possible activity or event from spilling a drink on one's host to coping with the discovery of a malignant tumor. A brief inspection of the periodicals on sale at any supermarket will yield at least one article on how to use humor and laughter to strengthen a marriage, communicate with teenagers, or improve the functioning of one's immune system.

Ancient and Modern Scriptures on Laughter. The term *laughter* or *laugh* appears in twenty Old Testament verses and in five New Testament verses. In these twenty-five occurrences, the term has a positive meaning in three verses, a neutral or ambiguous meaning in three verses, and a negative meaning in the remaining nineteen verses. In the topical guide to the scriptures, the entry "Laughter, Laugh" is cross-referenced with the terms happiness, levity, and scorn.⁴ Scorn and derision are the most frequent intents of laughter recorded in the Bible. The following examples are representative:

He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision. (Ps. 2:4)

He said unto them, Give place: for the maid is not dead but sleepeth. And they laughed him to scorn. (Matt. 9:24)

With the exception of Ecclesiastes 3:4, “a time to weep, and a time to laugh,” there is no information or instruction in the Bible about the place or appropriateness of laughter in religious life.

The term *laugh* indicates scorn in the only two Book of Mormon verses (Alma 26:23; 3 Ne. 9:2) and in the single Pearl of Great Price verse (Moses 7:26) where it appears. The term refers to levity in Doctrine and Covenants 45:49, similar to the majority of references to *laughter* in the Bible. However, in contrast to the Bible, there are three verses in the Doctrine and Covenants containing direct instructions concerning laughter:

And inasmuch as ye do these things with thanksgiving, with cheerful hearts and countenances, not with much laughter, for this is sin, but with a glad heart and a cheerful countenance . . . the fulness of the earth is yours. (D&C 59:15–16)

Remember the great and last promise which I have made unto you; cast away your idle thoughts and your excess of laughter far from you. (D&C 88:69)

Therefore, cease from all your light speeches, from all laughter, from all your lustful desires, from all your pride and light-mindedness, and from all your wicked doings. (D&C 88:121)

These proscriptions against laughter are contained in instructions on Sabbath observance (section 59) and on reorganizing the School of the Prophets, contexts not always known or remembered by Church members when they encounter these verses in isolation.

Modern Latter-day Saint Teachings on Laughter. In *Mormon Doctrine*, Bruce R. McConkie writes, “Joyful laughter meets with divine approval, and when properly engaged in, it is wholesome and edifying.”⁵ The *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* article on light-mindedness by William N. Fillmore, quoted below in its entirety, is a concise explication of the difference between light-mindedness and lightheartedness and summarizes the body of statements by Church leaders on the topic:

Modern scripture deals with “light-mindedness” as trivializing the sacred or making light of sacred things. Latter-day Saints were admonished early in the history of the Church to “trifle not with sacred things” (D&C 6:12, 8:10). At its worst, light-mindedness may become ridicule and then sacrilege and blasphemy—a deliberate irreverence for the things of God.

Divine personages and their names, temple ceremonies, the priesthood and its ordinances, and the saintly life, for example, are intrinsically holy. Other things are holy by association. The Lord has said, “That

which cometh from above is sacred, and must be spoken with care, and by constraint of the Spirit” (D&C 63: 64). The Saints were warned against “excess of laughter,” “light speeches,” and “light-mindedness,” yet were taught to worship “with a glad heart and a cheerful countenance” (D&C 59:15; 88:121).

In practice, Latter-day Saints distinguish light-mindedness from lightheartedness; the latter is a triumph of the zestful, joyful spirit of the gospel over life’s trials. Such cheerfulness and good humor do not preclude, but rather can complement, spirituality. While imprisoned in Liberty Jail, Joseph Smith wrote that the things of God are only made known to those who exercise “careful and ponderous and solemn thoughts” (*History of the Church* 3:295); yet he later spoke of himself as “playful and cheerful” (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, p. 307). The Church counsels against a light-minded attitude toward sacred matters but encourages joyfulness in worship and wholesome pleasure in recreation.⁶

During the last two decades, the Church magazines have published an increasing number of articles praising the positive values of laughter and humor, particularly in the development of character, in friendship, and in family life. The following excerpts from the *New Era* and the *Ensign*, respectively, are typical:

The ability to laugh at yourself and display a good sense of humor helps to ease painful or difficult situations, and is usually welcome anytime.⁷

Humor is a sensible, intelligent way to diminish tension and stop overrating the trivia of daily living. The family without it need not be, and the family with it is better fortified for tomorrow.⁸

It should not be surprising that Church teachings about laughter should reflect to some extent the popular attitudes and use of language current at the time of their writing. These articles would be no different from the bulk of those found in current popular literature were it not for the fact that most Church articles contain a caveat and often a list of types of humor and laughter that are inappropriate. While some contemporary comedians and comedy writers take the position that nothing is sacred and thus exempt from becoming the subject of a joke, the message in Church publications has been that “while the gospel is sacred and serious, sometimes we take ourselves a little too seriously.”⁹

The *Church News*, in selecting excerpts from speeches and interviews, has also focused on the theme that we, as a people, need to “lighten up.” The following example cites Hoyt Brewster at a 1985 Brigham Young University symposium:

I am concerned that in our desire to be serious about the saving principles of the gospel, we mistakenly take ourselves too seriously. I am not suggesting that we become jolly jesters in the courts of the world nor sup-

porters of spectators of slaphappy or sordid sideshows. However, I believe appropriate humor is an integral part of God's "great plan of happiness." (Alma 42:8)¹⁰

And a 1995 *Church News* interview with President Gordon B. Hinckley quotes him saying, "We need to have a little humor in our lives. We better take seriously that which should be taken seriously, but at the same time we can bring in a touch of humor now and again. If the time ever comes when we can't smile at ourselves, it will be a sad time."¹¹

In *Church News* summaries of conference talks, descriptions such as the following are commonplace: "Both speaker and audience joined in laughter, before he continued the discussion more seriously."¹² "Sensitive and solemn moments—with occasional laughter prompted by informal quips—highlighted a gathering of priesthood bearers."¹³ Such statements send the unmistakable message that the ability to intersperse serious topics with humor and laughter is a praiseworthy trait in Church leaders.

The Study

Church members are exposed in varying degrees to these seemingly contradictory laughter messages. We wished to discover whether the resulting confusion we have noticed is measurable and whether that confusion is consistent in various demographic groups.

Purposes. Our primary purpose was to investigate the extent of feelings of confusion and guilt concerning laughter in a sample of active Church members. Additionally, we wished to identify variables in individuals' lives that might be related to the presence or absence of these feelings. We expected that age would be an important variable for several reasons: First, as we have noted, popular psychology promotes laughter as an aid to good relationships and to general well being. Young adults have been immersed in the pervasive messages and values of popular psychology's current promotion of laughter for their entire lives, while their parents and grandparents were first exposed to it during adulthood. Second, we had observed that throughout the twentieth century there were a large number of more gradual changes in social norms including those governing the acceptability of humor and laughter in various situations. We expected that the older a person is, the more likely it is that a puritanical attitude about laughter prevailed in the home, school, and religious training of his or her childhood.

A second potentially relevant variable is the amount of exposure to Church teachings about laughter and also the depth of study and understanding about these teachings. We expected that mere familiarity or a first exposure to the three Doctrine and Covenants verses containing

instruction about laughter without a thorough understanding of their context and intent and without the mediation of other Church statements about laughter—such as those in the Church magazines and other Latter-day Saint resources—might also contribute to feelings of confusion and guilt.

Participants. The three populations we selected to sample differ, on average, in the two variables we investigated: participant's age and participant's training in the context of Doctrine and Covenants 59:15, 88:69, and 88:121. The first group consisted of undergraduate students from a variety of majors at Brigham Young University–Provo and Brigham Young University–Hawaii. Students on the Provo campus were volunteers from several religion classes; they were not primed in any way. Students on the Hawaii campus were enrolled in introductory psychology and volunteered to participate as an option for completing the methodology requirement for the course. The second group were senior missionaries: retired couples serving full-time missions in the Laie Hawaii Temple and Visitors Center, the Polynesian Cultural Center, and Hawaii Reserves Incorporated and full-time education missionaries at BYU–Hawaii. The third group were full- and part-time religion faculty at BYU–Provo and BYU–Hawaii. A total of 220 completed surveys were returned: 145 from students (mean age = 21.9 years), 43 from missionaries (mean age = 65.2 years), and 32 from religion teachers (mean age = 53.5 years).

We anticipated that the religion faculty would better understand the context of the proscriptions against laughter in the Doctrine and Covenants; as noted earlier, section 59 gives instructions for appropriate Sabbath observance and section 88 contains the instructions for organizing the School of the Prophets. There is no suggestion that these proscriptions apply to all laughter in all situations. We expected that this understanding would lead the religion teachers to indicate the least confusion and guilt. We expected that the senior missionaries would be less likely to remember the context of these scriptures. Thus we anticipated that the senior missionaries would indicate feeling the most guilt and confusion of the three groups not only because they are the oldest but also because they would be less likely to think of the Doctrine and Covenants statements in their contexts. We anticipated that a large number of the young students' responses would reflect the current popular attitudes about laughter.

The Survey. Participants provided demographic data and rated their level of agreement or disagreement with a series of nineteen statements on four-point scales (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = mildly disagree, 3 = mildly agree, 4 = strongly agree). The three statements in table 1 concern their beliefs about the compatibility of laughter with heavenly places and beings.

TABLE 1

Percentage of BYU–Hawaii and BYU–Provo Students, Senior Missionaries, and BYU–Hawaii and BYU–Provo Religion Faculty Agreeing with Statements 1–3

Statement	Stu- dents	Sr. Miss.	Rel. Fac.
1. There will be some laughter and playfulness in the Celestial Kingdom.	97	93	100
2. Heavenly Father laughs heartily on occasion.	96	84	94
3. The Savior laughs heartily on occasion.	96	81	94

Participants were asked to consider sixteen quotations that embody the philosophy of the current popular view toward laughter. Here is a representative sample of the statements:

Laughter is the shortest distance between two people. —Victor Borge

The person who can bring the spirit of laughter into a room is indeed blessed.—Bennett Cerf

A person who belly-laughs doesn't bellyache.—Susan Thurman

If you can laugh together, you can work together.—Robert Orben

If you can't make it better, you can laugh at it.—Erma Bombeck

Participants were asked to rate their level of agreement with the five statements (4–8) in table 2 about the quotations.

The three Doctrine and Covenants verses containing instruction about laughter (59:15 and 88:69, 121) were next presented in the survey. Participants were asked to consider the verses and then rate their level of agreement or disagreement with the seven statements (9–15) in table 3.

The entire *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* article on light-mindedness (see pages 118–19) was then presented in the survey. Participants were asked to carefully read and consider it and then rate their level of agreement or disagreement with the four statements (16–19) in table 4.

Statistical Analyses for Group Differences. T-tests were used to compare mean responses of missionaries to those of the religion faculty and then to compare the responses of participants over age fifty to responses of those under age fifty. Results indicated five statistically significant differences between the missionaries and the religion teachers (see table 5): Compared to the religion faculty, the senior missionaries were more likely to indicate that the Church teaches that laughter is unrighteous, that the

Doctrine and Covenants verses about laughter contradict their own views, that they have felt confused about how to interpret these Doctrine and Covenants verses, that they were less familiar with the distinction between lighthearted and light-minded as presented in the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* article, and that they were less in agreement that this distinction is correct. These results suggest that, as we expected, the religion teachers have a greater familiarity with and understanding of the context of the cited Doctrine and Covenants teachings about laughter than do their near contemporaries.

Results indicated seven statistically significant differences between age groups (see table 6): Compared with participants age fifty or younger, participants over age fifty were less in agreement that either Heavenly Father or the Savior laughs heartily on occasion. These participants judged that the individuals who raised them would not agree with the popular quotations about laughter. Participants over age fifty were more familiar with the Doctrine and Covenants verses about laughter, were more in agreement that these verses contradicted their own views, and more frequently reported feelings of guilt and confusion because of these verses. One possible explanation for these differences is that many of the older individuals

TABLE 2

Percentage of BYU–Hawaii and BYU–Provo Students, Senior Missionaries, and BYU–Hawaii and BYU–Provo Religion Faculty Agreeing with Statements 4–8

Statement	Stu- dents	Sr. Miss.	Rel. Fac.
4. The ideas expressed in the quotations, taken as a group, are true.	98	100	97
5. The ideas expressed in the quotations, taken as a group, are in harmony with the spirit of the gospel.	96	95	97
6. Gordon B. Hinckley would agree with the ideas expressed in the quotations.	98	98	97
7. Most of the church leaders and religion teachers I have been personally acquainted with would agree with the ideas expressed in the quotations.	97	88	94
8. My parents (or the people who raised me) would agree with the ideas expressed in the quotations.	95	81	88

TABLE 3

Percentage of BYU–Hawaii and BYU–Provo Students, Senior Missionaries, and BYU–Hawaii and BYU–Provo Religion Faculty Agreeing with Statements 9–15

Statement	Stu- dents	Sr. Miss.	Rel. Fac.
9. The Doctrine and Covenants is the revealed word of God.	97	98	100
10. I was already familiar with the general content of these scriptures concerning laughter prior to reading them right now.	75	95	97
11. It is the position of the church that laughter is unrighteous.	9	16	0
12. The statements about laughter in these scriptures contradict my personal views about laughter based on my life experience.	39	49	9
13. There have been times when I have laughed loudly, then thought of these scriptures (or of teachings in the temple) and felt a bit guilty about my laughter.	24	44	38
14. I feel, or have felt, confused about how to interpret these scriptures and apply them to my life.	44	44	16
15. These scriptures refer only to certain types of laughter in limited situations, but not to all laughter in all situations.	97	93	97

reflect the more negative attitudes about laughter we assume were prevalent during their youth.

Participants' Comments. At the end of the survey, space was provided for feedback. Participants were invited to share comments, insights, or experiences they had on the topic or about the survey. The bulk of the students' comments clearly reflected the influence of the current popular trend in favor of laughter and showed a level of sophistication that we did not anticipate. Many shared anecdotes illustrating the important role of laughter in their relationships with family and friends and in coping with everyday stresses. The phrases "I love to laugh" and "Laughter is the best medicine" appeared again and again. Others reiterated the distinction between light-heartedness and light-mindedness and emphasized that they understood the distinction before participating in the survey. Several

implied that they view laughter and spirituality not only as compatible but as belonging together. A twenty-two-year-old male in Provo wrote, “I can’t imagine the Savior being with children and not laughing with them.” Many referred to President Hinckley as a model for righteous humor and laughter. Several comments were amusing. A twenty-four-year-old Samoan woman wrote, “As a Latter-day Saint, I am aware of the importance to avoid loud laughter . . . [but] if some people have larger vocal cords, is it their fault?”

All the religion teachers except one wrote comments. Several wrote “Mormon jokes”; one teacher wrote a detailed account of the historical contexts of the Doctrine and Covenants verses. A fifty-five-year-old male wrote, “How can I lighten up and learn to laugh more? Are there exercises a person can do?” A fifty-one-year-old male wrote, “I would be unhappy if the Celestial Kingdom was a realm without a good sense of humor.” We conclude that these comments reflect the two competing influences of the impact of their generation and the depth of their Church education. Overall, the religion teachers endorsed lightheartedness as enthusiastically as the students did.

The responses of the missionaries showed the greatest diversity.¹⁴ One missionary made a verbal comment when returning the survey, asking how we could even pose questions suggesting that Heavenly Father might ever laugh. A sixty-seven-year-old sister missionary wrote, “I cannot imagine

TABLE 4

Percentage of BYU–Hawaii and BYU–Provo Students, Senior Missionaries, and BYU–Hawaii and BYU–Provo Religion Faculty Agreeing with Statements 16–19

Statement	Stu- dents	Sr. Miss.	Rel. Fac.
16. I understand the distinction made in this article [in the <i>Encyclopedia of Mormonism</i>] between light-mindedness and lightheartedness.	94	93	100
17. The views expressed in this article are correct.	97	88	100
18. Knowing the distinction between light mindedness and lightheartedness can relieve much of the guilt and confusion many people feel about laughter.	96	91	97
19. I was already clear about the distinction between light-mindedness and lightheartedness prior to reading this article.	78	81	97

the Lord heartily laughing.” But others endorsed a lighthearted approach to life. Several expressed regret that they had not laughed more during their life.

A religion teacher and a student shared what can only be described as testimonies of heavenly laughter. The religion teacher, a forty-year-old woman, wrote, “I have shared a laugh with Heavenly Father often over my own foibles or incidents that have given me pleasure. And I believe the laughter was shared.” The BYU–Hawaii student, a forty-six-year-old woman from the U.S. mainland, wrote, “I also had an experience where I *know* that Heavenly Father was chuckling at something I did. I will always remember the feeling of surprise I felt.”

Summary and Conclusion

A majority of the Church members we surveyed expressed a love of joyful laughter and an understanding—in many cases probably only intuitive—of the crucial differences between types of laughter.¹⁵ Nevertheless, we found that feelings of confusion and guilt about laughter are not uncommon, particularly among older members. Their situation was summarized by a sixty-two-year-old sister missionary:

I feel this study is of real importance to members of the church. Many of us are confused with what seem to be contradictions with how we were raised, the scriptures, and the ways of the world. I need to learn to use humor more in my life. I feel it is a real stress reliever and wish I had learned to use it appropriately as a young woman.

At first glance it would appear that the younger generations have a healthier and better-informed conceptualization of laughter. However, there are two problems with this conclusion. First, popular attitudes prevalent during youth are a major factor in shaping the lifelong attitudes of each generation, and popular attitudes swing widely and are rarely gospel attitudes. So while many older individuals in the Church may have a bias that discourages laughter, many younger individuals may have a bias that permits too much laughter. Second, the relationship between laughter and spirituality is complex. Recitation of the distinctions detailed in this article does not imply a meaningful or useful understanding of them. We concur with the religion teacher who wrote, “It takes some spiritual growing up and some life experience and coming to know the Lord better to come to understand what such words as ‘excess of laughter,’ ‘light-mindedness,’ and ‘soberness’ mean.”

Diana L. Mahony (mahonyd@byuh.edu) is Associate Professor of Psychology at Brigham Young University–Hawaii. She received a Ph.D. in cognitive sciences from the University of California, Irvine.

Marla D. Corson (Marla.Corson@alcoa.com) is the manager of organizational effectiveness for Alcoa Engineered Products in Cressona, Pennsylvania. She received a B.A. in psychology at Brigham Young University–Hawaii and a Master of Organizational Behavior at Brigham Young University–Provo.

We wish to thank the following persons (who were serving in these positions at the time of our survey) for their encouragement, suggestions, and support in the collection of data: Robert Millet, Dean of Religious Education at Brigham Young University; Brent Top, Associate Dean of Religious Education, BYU; Garth Allred, Associate Dean of Religious Instruction, BYU–Hawaii; and Lee Cantwell, an education missionary at BYU–Hawaii.

1. We use the term “active Church member” to refer to individuals who regularly involve themselves with Church activities and functions and have, therefore, been exposed to Mormon culture; we are not inferring anything about their level of spirituality. Also, we are not suggesting that the sample of active members who participated in this study represent the entire active membership of the Church.

2. Robert Provine, “Laughter,” *American Scientist* 84, no. 1 (1996): 41, 42.

3. Norman Cousins, *Anatomy of an Illness as Perceived by the Patient: Reflections on Healing and Regeneration* (New York: Norton, 1979).

4. “Laughter, Laugh,” in “Topical Guide,” appendix to *The Holy Bible* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1979).

5. Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 2d ed. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1979), 432.

6. William N. Fillmore, “Light-Mindedness,” in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, ed. Daniel H. Ludlow, 5 vols. (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 2:836–37.

7. Chris Crowe, “A Good Sense of Humor,” *New Era* 16 (May 1986): 36.

8. Eileen Gibbons Kump, “A Year’s Supply of Humor,” *Ensign* 13 (August 1983): 67.

9. Glenn L. Pace, “Follow the Prophet,” *Ensign* 19 (May 1989): 26.

10. “It’s OK to Be Spiritual and Still Have Fun,” *Church News*, published by *Deseret News*, March 10, 1985, 11, quoting Hoyt W. Brewster Jr., speech given at the Sidney B. Sperry Symposium on January 26, 1985, at Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

11. “Messages of Inspiration from President Hinckley,” *Church News*, February 3, 1996, 2.

12. “Accepting Divine Parentage Leads to Greater Purity,” *Church News*, October 14, 1984, 15.

13. John L. Hart, “Familiar Voice, Familiar Words,” *Church News*, April 14, 1985, 14.

14. It is axiomatic in lifespan psychology that older groups show greater diversity than do younger groups.

15. We base our conclusions only on the responses of the sample we surveyed and do not suggest that they necessarily apply to other samples or to the Church membership as a whole. We invite other researchers to use our survey with other samples of Church members in other locations.

TABLE 5

Summary of T-tests for Difference in Mean Scores of Senior Missionaries (N=43) and Religion Faculty (N=31)

Survey Item	Sr. Miss.		Rel. Fac.		t-value
	mean	SD	mean	SD	
1. There will be some laughter and playfulness in the Celestial Kingdom.	3.81	(0.40)	3.61	(0.76)	1.41
2. Heavenly Father laughs heartily on occasion.	3.44	(0.62)	3.41	(0.91)	0.18
3. The Savior laughs heartily on occasion.	3.34	(0.97)	3.41	(0.62)	0.33
4. The ideas expressed in the quotations, taken as a group, are true.	3.77	(0.43)	3.81	(0.40)	0.40
5. The ideas expressed in the quotations, taken as a group, are in harmony with the spirit of the gospel.	3.62	(0.54)	3.65	(0.49)	0.21
6. Gordon B. Hinckley would agree with the ideas expressed in the quotations.	3.79	(0.42)	3.71	(0.46)	-0.74
7. Most of the church leaders and religion teachers I have been personally acquainted with would agree with the ideas expressed in the quotations.	3.45	(0.67)	3.45	(0.57)	-0.01
8. My parents (or the people who raised me) would agree with the ideas expressed in the quotations.	3.29	(0.92)	3.48	(0.68)	1.01
9. The Doctrine and Covenants is the revealed word of God.	3.88	(0.50)	4.00	(0.00)	*
10. I was already familiar with the general content of these scriptures concerning laughter prior to reading them right now.	3.56	(0.73)	3.75	(0.62)	1.19
11. It is the position of the church that laughter is unrighteous.	1.43	(0.77)	1.09	(0.30)	-2.33†
12. The statements about laughter in these scriptures contradict my personal views about laughter based on my life experience.	2.29	(1.09)	1.34	(0.83)	-4.08§
13. There have been times when I have laughed loudly, then thought of these scriptures (or of teachings in the temple) and felt a bit guilty about my laughter.	2.26	(1.16)	2.06	(0.91)	-0.78
14. I feel, or have felt, confused about how to interpret these scriptures and apply them to my life.	2.21	(1.15)	1.56	(0.84)	-2.70‡
15. These scriptures refer only to certain types of laughter in limited situations, but not to all laughter in all situations.	3.74	(0.54)	3.84	(0.58)	0.81
16. I understand the distinction made in this article between light-mindedness and lightheartedness.	3.67	(0.57)	3.88	(.033)	1.84
17. The views expressed in this article are correct.	3.61	(0.63)	3.88	(0.34)	2.16†
18. Knowing the distinction between light-mindedness and lightheartedness can relieve much of the guilt and confusion many people feel about laughter.	3.71	(0.56)	3.75	(0.51)	0.34
19. I was already clear about the distinction between light-mindedness and lightheartedness prior to reading this article.	3.33	(0.87)	3.75	(0.51)	2.40‡

* Data insufficient for analysis; † $p < .05$; ‡ $p < .01$; § $p < .001$

TABLE 6

Summary of T-tests for Difference in Mean Scores of Participants Ages 50 or Younger (N=145) and Ages over 50 (N=75)

Survey Item	Age ≤ 50		Age > 50		t-value
	mean	SD	mean	SD	
1. There will be some laughter and playfulness in the Celestial Kingdom.	3.81	(0.46)	3.69	(0.62)	1.59
2. Heavenly Father laughs heartily on occasion.	3.65	(0.57)	3.42	(0.79)	0.50*
3. The Savior laughs heartily on occasion.	3.65	(0.57)	3.37	(0.83)	2.95†
4. The ideas expressed in the quotations, taken as a group, are true.	3.74	(0.47)	3.78	(0.41)	-0.73
5. The ideas expressed in the quotations, taken as a group, are in harmony with the spirit of the gospel.	3.54	(0.57)	3.63	(0.51)	-1.21
6. Gordon B. Hinckley would agree with the ideas expressed in the quotations.	3.66	(0.52)	3.75	(0.43)	-1.26
7. Most of the church leaders and religion teachers I have been personally acquainted with would agree with the ideas expressed in the quotations.	3.54	(0.60)	3.45	(0.63)	1.02
8. My parents (or the people who raised me) would agree with the ideas expressed in the quotations.	3.37	(0.58)	3.37	(0.83)	3.08†
9. The Doctrine and Covenants is the revealed word of God.	3.88	(0.49)	3.93	(0.38)	-0.78
10. I was already familiar with the general content of these scriptures concerning laughter prior to reading them right now.	3.06	(1.07)	3.64	(0.69)	-4.28‡
11. It is the position of the church that laughter is unrighteous.	1.39	(0.78)	1.28	(0.63)	1.04
12. The statements about laughter in these scriptures contradict my personal views about laughter based on my life experience.	2.20	(1.05)	1.88	(1.09)	2.13*
13. There have been times when I have laughed loudly, then thought of these scriptures (or of teachings in the temple) and felt a bit guilty about my laughter.	1.76	(0.96)	2.17	(1.06)	-2.89†
14. I feel, or have felt, confused about how to interpret these scriptures and apply them to my life.	2.32	(1.05)	1.93	(1.07)	2.55*
15. These scriptures refer only to certain types of laughter in limited situations, but not to all laughter in all situations.	3.70	(0.58)	3.78	(0.56)	-1.07
16. I understand the distinction made in this article between light-mindedness and lightheartedness.	3.68	(0.63)	3.76	(0.49)	-0.88
17. The views expressed in this article are correct.	3.78	(0.48)	3.76	(0.53)	0.75
18. Knowing the distinction between light-mindedness and lightheartedness can relieve much of the guilt and confusion many people feel about laughter.	3.72	(0.52)	3.73	(0.53)	-0.14
19. I was already clear about the distinction between light-mindedness and lightheartedness prior to reading this article.	3.13	(0.96)	3.51	(0.76)	-2.98†

* $p < .05$; † $p < .005$; ‡ $p < .001$