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# Employment and Happiness Among Mormon and Non-Mormon Mothers in Utah

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Employment and Happiness among Mormon and Non-Mormon Mothers  
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A Thesis

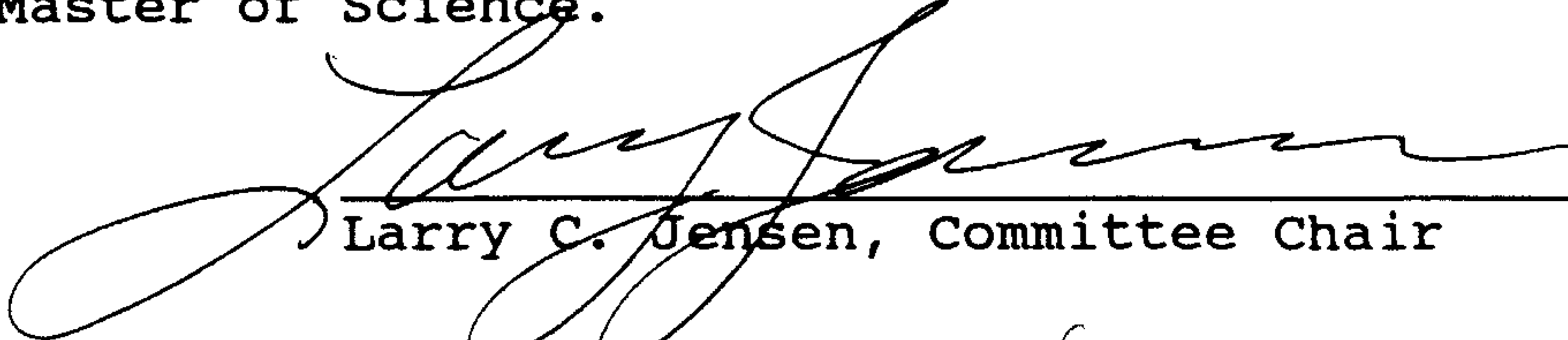
Presented to the  
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In Partial Fulfillment  
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Master of Science

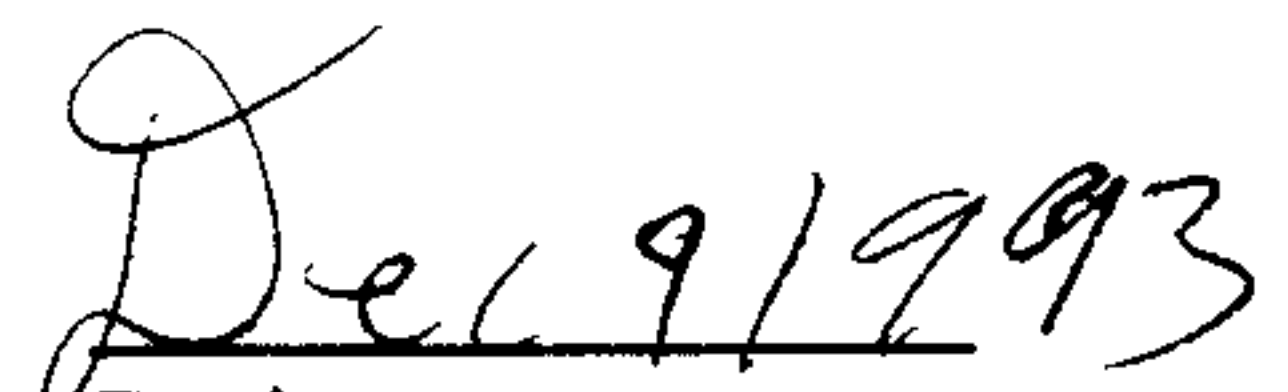
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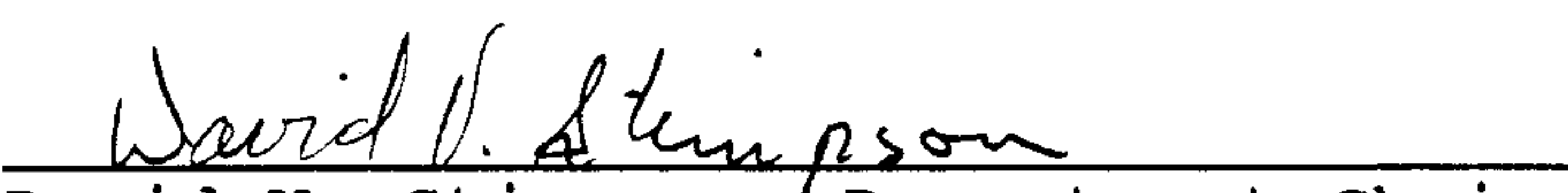
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This thesis, by Kimberly Andersen is accepted in its present form by the Department of Psychology of Brigham Young University as satisfying the thesis requirement for the degree of Master of Science.

  
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**Employment and Happiness Among Mormon and Non-Mormon Mothers  
in Utah**

This research addresses the general question of the relationship between depression and living a traditional versus a non-traditional role for mothers. The traditional role will be operationalized as being a non-employed homemaker/mother working inside the home, and the non-traditional will be those who are employed full-time. Mothers who work part-time are viewed by this study as being in between these two polarities. There are those who point out the hazards of conforming to the traditional non-employed role, and others who point to the hazards of deviating from the traditional role.

The purpose of this study is to evaluate life satisfaction and unhappiness or depression in Mormon and other Christian women who live in Utah and who choose to live either a traditional or non-traditional lifestyle. The data were gathered from the state of Utah, where approximately eighty percent of the women in the metropolitan Wasatch front are Mormon. The research is designed to study a basic question:

***Are traditional non-employed mothers less happy than those who are part and full-time employees?***

In answering this question, the research design will include the variables of denomination, age, husband's

income, number of children, and woman's health. Literature addressing this issue will be presented next.

Research indicates that women are more depressed than their male counterparts, but there are differing hypotheses to explain this observation. Nolen-Hoeksema (1990) documents the well established finding that women report more depression than do men, and reviews several explanations in the literature for these conclusions: 1) Biologic and genetic theories, 2) Prevailing inequality of men and women, particularly in the workforce, 3) Maladaptive self-concepts and thinking styles, 4) Absence of multiple sources of gratification, and 5) Conformity to the undervalued full-time homemaker role. Some researchers implicate gender-role socialization (Rosenfield, 1980) and self-concept issues (Jacobson, 1971; Stricker, 1983). Studies done by Aneshensel, Frerichs, and Clark (1981), Cleary and Mechanic (1983), Paykel (1974), and Pearlin (1983) suggest that it is the stress associated with employment outside of the home combined with the responsibility of doing most of the housework and childrearing which contributes to the increase in distress and unhappiness among married women.

The focus of this research has been on the explanation that the high incidence of depression in women is due to conformity to the traditional role of homemaker. This has been proposed by several theorists, including Gore and



Mangione (1983), and Kandell, Davies and Raveis (1985). Recently Helson and Picano (1990) have also pointed out the hazards of the full-time homemaker, non-employed role for women. They cite the research of Sorenson & Verbrugge (1987), and Verbrugge & Madans (1985), to show that homemakers are even less physically healthy than women who work outside of the home.

There is less research and theory which is supportive of the traditional role for women, but it has been noted in some comparative studies that housewives are not more depressed than married, employed women (Aneshensel, Frerichs & Clark, 1981; Radloff, 1975; Roberts & O'Keefe, 1981; and Crosby, 1992). It has been suggested that this is due to the role overload and strain that is commonly experienced by women who are employed full-time outside of the home while concurrently maintaining a maternal role in the home. (Gove and Tudor 1973). Other research supports this view (Crosby, 1987).

#### **Other Related Variables**

Children have become more of an economic burden rather than an asset in modern developed countries (Miller & Myers-Walls 1983). The time pressures and energy demands imposed by children are noted by Gove and Geerken (1977) as being greater among wives than husbands and highest among employed wives. Logically, it could be assumed that the greater the

number of children in the family, the greater the increase in a woman's role overload.

Income influences stress and depression. This has been documented repeatedly. Higher socioeconomic class families have less psychological distress than those with lower socioeconomic status (Dohrenwend & Dohrenwend, 1969; Ensel, 1986; Hollingshead & Redlich, 1958; Myers et al, 1974; Thoits & Hannan, 1979)

A further life strain, and contributor to depressive symptoms is being in a state of poor physical health, particularly if the infirmities are chronic in nature (Pearlin et al., 1979). Studies show that even when social support systems are strong, over time, physical impairments are likely to result in a deterioration in mental health. (Williams, Ware, and Donald 1981).

A search of the literature indicates that there is not a clear consensus regarding relationships between age and depression. Beck (1967) reports that the average age at first onset varies significantly from study to study. Weissman and Myers (1978) found that rates of depression among women were at a maximum between the ages of 35 and 45, whereas the rates for men continued to increase with age. Early in the century Kraepelin (1913) suggested a higher incidence of depression between 20 and 30 years of age, but later Cassidy, Flanagan, and Spellman (1957) along with Ayd

(1961) identified the age span between 35 to 45 for containing the highest rates of reported depression. A study done by Pearlin (1983) and Pearlin & Lieberman (1979) showed a curvilinear relationship between age and depression, with the occurrence of mental illness being of greater significance in both early and later life, rather than in middle life. In another study, Cox and Radloff (1981) concluded that depression for both sexes was highest between the ages of 18 and 24.

Some researchers assert that religion is directly related to personal, marital, and family satisfaction. However, the research findings have yielded conflicting results. For example, Hadaway (1978) and Hunsberger (1985) found a positive correlation between religion and life satisfaction, while Markides, Levin, and Ray (1987) discovered no association between religion and personal satisfaction. There is a popular belief that Christian women experience more depression and are less happy than others due to patriarchal family structures and or religious opposition to maternal employment (Andreas, 1971; Kimball, 1963). Male dominance is confirmed in the opinion of some, by religious practices which allow only men to hold the highest positions of leadership and authority, such as in churches where the highest offices are held exclusively by men (Daly, 1975). De Beauvoir (1963) believes Christianity



perpetuates the idea that women are naturally inferior to men.

Of particular interest in this study is the LDS or Mormon religion (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints) because the data are obtained in Utah which is eighty percent Mormon. The Mormon religion provides a particularly good test of the effects of a patriarchal religion on women's happiness and depression, due to the fact that within the LDS church the husband is the patriarchal leader in the home, and as long as he is living in accordance with righteousness, his role is that of head of the family (Kimball, 1965; Larsen, 1982). Mormon women are exhorted to remain in the home as full-time nourisher of the family, rather than to seek outside employment (Kimball, 1963, 1977; Packer, 1964; Peterson, 1974; Tanner, 1974).

A television documentary produced by KSL television in Salt Lake City (Dejn, 1979) stated that specific beliefs and values espoused by the LDS church possibly contribute to female depression. Depression in Mormon women was said to be associated with role overload i.e. pressure to be over-involved in church, community, and family activities. Another contributor to depression, as cited on this same program, is traditional role restrictions. The idealization of the role of wife and mother by the LDS church was said to be restrictive of personal development. Also proposed was

excessive guilt in Mormon women who could not conform to idealized role expectations. It was also suggested that intractable attitudes of perfectionism, noted frequently among Latter Day Saint women, are predisposers of depression. Other writers believe the Mormon religion oppresses women by restricting roles and emotional expression (Johnson, 1981; Warenske, 1978). A newspaper published by Mormon women agreed that conformity to traditional roles may be a major contributor to the depression noted in their cohorts (Exponent II 1979).

Spendlove (1982) conducted the one well designed empirical study of married Mormon mothers and married non-Mormon mothers both with young children in the home. His findings were that the non-Mormon mothers had a slightly higher mean depression score than did the LDS mothers, as measured by the Beck Depression Inventory. In this same study, adjusted risk ratios were used to control for confounding, and several peripheral issues were noted as contributors to depressive symptoms in Mormon women: not having a college degree, little caring from one's spouse, a perception of being in less than good health, and having an annual income below \$16,000. Spendlove (1982) concluded that "Perhaps the Mormon woman's traditional role is not associated with depressive symptoms" (pp 31). Members of the Mormon church consider the bonds of marriage and

parenthood to be divinely sanctioned and eternal in scope. As pointed out by Mormon leaders Kimball (1979), Benson (1979), and Monson (1971), it is a belief of the Mormon church that there is nothing more highly esteemed of a woman, than to become a wife and a mother. Spendlow speculates that this religious significance of women combined with the emphasis on the woman's traditional role, is the reason for the LDS woman's lower susceptibility to depression.

Thus in order to adequately understand the mental health implications of the recent national trend towards increased maternal employment, the factors of denomination, age, number of children, health, and income, which have not typically been included in studies of relationship between maternal employment and mental health, need to be controlled. The following research design was therefore used to study the relationship between maternal employment and mental health indicators within members of the LDS church.

## **METHOD**

### **Sample**

The questions reviewed in this study were taken from a broader study conducted by Bruce Chadwick at the Center of Family Studies and H. Dean Garrett of the department of Religious Education, both at Brigham Young University. In



June of 1990, a questionnaire was mailed to 3000 women between the ages of 18 and 60 living along the Wasatch front in Utah. The R.L. Polk Company drew a random sample of women living in the metropolitan strip from Ogden to Provo, which includes Salt Lake City. Approximately 1400 completed questionnaires were returned. Because the emphasis of this study is on married women with children, only married women with children will be researched. The final sample size was 948 married women with children.

The demographic characteristics of this sample are as follows: 112 women were under the age of 29, 411 fell between the ages of 30-39, 335 were between 40 and 49, 87 between 50 and 59, and 3 women were over the age of 60. Twelve women reported having some high school education, while one hundred forty-eight were high school graduates. Three hundred nineteen reported having attended college briefly, while two hundred seventeen were college graduates. Ninety-eight women pursued a post graduate education. Forty-nine women had attended some sort of vocational school, and one hundred five were vocational school graduates. Ninety-eight percent of the women studied were caucasian, and two percent were hispanic. The number of women not working outside of the home was 351, and the number of women working part-time was 314, while 283 reported working full-time jobs.

Regarding the number of children in the home, 137 of the mothers surveyed, had no boys, 316 had 1 boy, 277 had 2 boys, 135 had 3 boys, 63 had 4 boys, and 17 had more than 5 boys in the home. One hundred eighty-five of the mothers had no girls, 352 had 1 girl, 248 had 2 girls, 107 had 3 girls, 39 had 4 girls, and 17 mothers had more than 5 girls in the home. The women surveyed could be divided into two categories of religious affiliation with 814 being members of the LDS church (Mormons), and 133 being Protestant or Catholic.

The packet sent to each woman included a letter explaining the study, and stressing the confidentiality of the information revealed and requesting their participation. A questionnaire was included, along with a self-addressed business reply envelope. A postcard reminder was mailed approximately three weeks following the packet. One month after the postcard, a new packet including letter, questionnaire and return envelope was sent. A final approach, one month later was made with another full packet. The letter was modified for each subsequent contact. The questionnaire used, is entitled Women's Experience in Family, Work, Religion and Community. It is divided into seven short sections, as follows: Section 1 is for all women; section 2 is for women who work outside the home; section 3 is for women who are not in the work place;



section 4 is for married women; section five is for women with children; and section 6 is for women who are members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (Mormons).

The first dependent variable was unhappiness or depression, and was measured by asking "on average, how many days during the past month did you":

1. Feel bothered by things that usually don't bother you? \_\_\_\_\_ days
2. Feel that you could not shake off the blues, even with the help from your family and friends? \_\_\_\_\_ days
3. Have trouble keeping your mind on what you were doing? \_\_\_\_\_ days
4. Feel depressed? \_\_\_\_\_ days
5. Feel that everything you did was an effort? \_\_\_\_\_ days
6. Feel that you could not get going? \_\_\_\_\_ days
7. Feel fearful? \_\_\_\_\_ days
8. Sleep restlessly? \_\_\_\_\_ days
9. Feel lonely? \_\_\_\_\_ days
10. Feel sad? \_\_\_\_\_ days

Reliability analysis of these scores added together, using a Chronbach Alpha was found to be .90.

The second dependent variable, happiness, was measured by asking the following three questions:

- 1.) Taking all things into consideration, how would you say things are these days - would

you say you are:

- 1) Very happy
- 2) Happy
- 3) Not too happy
- 4) Unhappy
- 5) Very unhappy

2.) How satisfied are you with your family life? on a scale of 1 to 5, 1 being very satisfied, and 5 being very dissatisfied.

3.) Everything considered, how happy is your marriage?

- 1) Very happy
- 2) Happy
- 3) So-so
- 4) Unhappy
- 5) Very unhappy

Responses to these 3 questions were summed, with scores ranging from 3 to 15. Then the score was subtracted from 16 so that a high score was indicative of greater happiness. The Chronbach Alpha for this scale was found to be .69.

Income was measured by asking the following: "How much income did your husband earn at his job last year?" The responses ranged from 1, which was zero income, thru 10, which indicated an income of over \$50,000. Because most non-employed mothers do not have a separate income it is not possible to meaningfully include the mothers income in this study.

Two age categories were arbitrarily established to maintain a large cell "n" in the 3-way analysis. Age was recorded into categories of 20-40, and over 40. Health was measured by asking "How satisfied are you with your health?"

Responses ranged from 1 thru 5, with 1 being "very satisfied" and 5 being "very dissatisfied". Number of children ranged from 1 thru 12.

Employment status was measured by the question "Are you currently working?" and could have been answered no, part-time, or full-time. Denomination was measured by asking "What is your religious preference?" and recoded into 1 equals LDS, 2 equals other than LDS.

### **RESULTS**

The data were analyzed with a 3-way analysis of covariance design. The independent variable in this 3-way ANCOVA design was employment status classified as; non-employed, employed part-time, and employed full-time. Two other independent variables examined, were age (over and under 40) and denomination (LDS and non-LDS). The covariates were, satisfaction with health, husband's income, and number of children. The dependent variables were the depression and happiness scores which were described in the method section.

Analysis of the first dependent variable, depression, was performed on a score consisting of the mean of the number of days reported for the previously listed ten questions. The analysis of variance with the covariates; satisfaction with health, husband's income, and number of children produced the following significant effects. There

was a significant age effect  $F = 3.99$  ( $df=1/928$ )  $p=.046$ . There was not a denominational or employment effect or any other higher order interaction. The significant age effect resulted from the 20-40 age group ( $n = 365$ ) scoring higher, indicating more depression, with a Mean = 4.00 days vs. Mean = 3.72 days for the 40+ age group ( $n = 563$ ).

The second dependent measure was happiness which was computed by adding the three happiness items together. Since they were each measured on a 5-point scale, the maximum number was 15. These scores were then subtracted from 16, resulting in a high score being indicative of a happier person. The three-way analysis yielded two significant effects. The first was for age  $F = 7.01$  ( $df=1/928$ )  $p=.008$ . The second was for employment status  $F = 3.66$  ( $df=2/928$ )  $p=.026$ . The significant age effect was due to the young being happier; Mean = 10.69 for the young vs. 10.17 for the older. The employment difference was due to the non-employed scoring higher; Mean = 10.77 ( $n=351$ ) vs. Mean = 10.49 for the part-time employed ( $n=314$ ), and the full-time employed scoring lowest Mean = 10.10 ( $n=283$ ).

A Tukey HSD (Honest Significant Difference) analysis yielded scores of 0.3454, 0.3664, and 0.3868 for the non-employed, part-time employed, and the full-time employed respectively. The difference among means for the non-employed vs. those employed part-time was found to be .28,

and for the non-employed vs. those employed full-time it was .67. Finally, for those employed part-time vs. those employed full-time, the difference among means was determined to be .39. Using the most conservative HSD of .3868 for comparison, the differences between non-employed vs. employed full-time, and employed part-time vs. full-time are both statistically significant at a .05 significance level.

#### **DISCUSSION**

There are some obvious limitations to using secondary data in that the questions can not be modified and the sample size and nature is predetermined. Fortunately the measures used in the original survey were rather straight forward in focusing on depression and happiness, and the sample size was large.

The first and most important conclusion of this study, is that employment status was not related to the depression measure and that being non-employed was related to more happiness for these married women with children. These findings are not consistent with reports by Barnett & Baruch, (1985); Brown & Harris, (1978); and Thoits, (1983). The least happy of the groups surveyed were those women employed full-time, which goes contrary to the findings of many studies, including earlier research done by Seiber (1974), and again Thoits (1983); which suggest that



employment, full or part-time is associated with greater happiness for married women. The data gathered for this study is more supportive of the role overload theory of depression. The employment difference found in this study may be in part, due to the fact that more contributing variables were controlled for: health, number of children, and husband's income. Many women in poor health may not be working for health reasons and thus, are part of the reason why non-working mothers may have scored as a group, in some other studies, lower on happiness measures. Clearly there is a selection factor, with those persons in better health being able to work full and part-time. The finding that younger persons reported more happiness is not surprising and is consistent with other studies including Sorenson, Sutter and Aneshensel (1991), along with Krannich, Riley, and Leffler (1988). The finding of less depression among older women was not expected but is consistent with some research cited earlier. One interpretation is that older women may be less happy, but have adapted to life by having lower expectations, which leads to less reporting of depression as measured here. Mormons and Non-Mormons did not differ in either depression or reported happiness, which is consistent with Spendlove's research showing that Mormon women are not more at risk and suggests that their patriarchal religion may have compensating elements that

work against the experience of depression or contribute to life satisfaction.

Our interpretation of the employment difference is straightforward. For married women who have children, two factors operate to cause those who are not working to report more happiness. They are, first that more time is available to accomplish the work of being a mother and also to have adequate time to experience the pleasures associated with the role. It is observed that employment is most often engaged in for financial necessity and consequently produces both a role and time strain on the complex demanding homemaker role. Second, the extra stress and time demand caused by employment is suggested to result in less happiness for working mothers.

The actual mean difference and variance accounted for is not great and suggests that other contributing variables need to be included in the analysis. The data here suggest that health is an important determinant. The patriarchal families appear to be no more at risk for depression and unhappiness than more liberal, non-Mormon family types. This is exemplified in the failure to find a difference between the Mormon and Non-Mormon women in this study. These two variables, patriarchy and employment, are of course at the heart of community life for married LDS women with children. It is important to provide accurate

empirical based information about choices these women make in regards to patterns of employment which impact their mental health and present happiness.

The finding of no difference in depression measures between employed and non-employed women is an important one as it contradicts those who purport that non-employed traditional women are more prone to depression and unhappiness. Also, the small difference in happiness measures between the employed and non-employed groups of women indicate that the non-employed are not less happy than those women working full-time outside of the home.

Perhaps this offers support and encouragement to those women who wish to pursue the traditional roles for women, but who have felt like anomalies in a society that generally encourages achievement in the workplace, and implies that women who choose to stay at home as full-time home makers are less fulfilled and less happy than their counterparts.

When comparing happiness measures between mothers who work outside of the home, and mothers who are full-time homemakers, the actual mean differences and variance were significant but small. This suggests that Mormon women who choose to stay at home as full-time homemakers, contrary to popular belief do not have feelings of subjugation, and are not less happy than mothers who opt for a career outside of the home.



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Employment and Happiness Among Mormon and Non-Mormon Mothers  
in Utah

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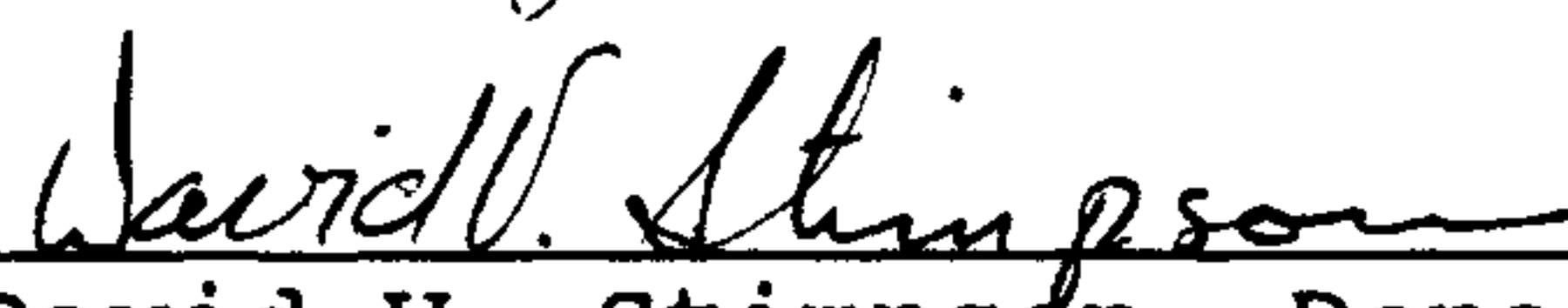
ABSTRACT

The effects of maternal employment status on the happiness and/or unhappiness of married Utah women with children were studied. The independent variables were employment status, age, and denomination. Covariates were health, husbands income, and number of children. Denominational differences were not found to impact happiness, but age and employment status were related to happiness, with non-employed and younger mothers being happier.

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