Cohesion in a Utah Sample of Latter-Day Saint Couples

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COHESION IN A UTAH SAMPLE OF LATTER-DAY SAINT COUPLES

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Joe Edgar Glenn
This manuscript of a journal article, by Joe Edgar Glenn, is accepted in its present form by the Department of Family Sciences of Brigham Young University as satisfying the thesis requirement for the degree Master of Science.

Leslie L. Feinauer, Committee Chair

D. Eugene Mead
Committee Member

Robert F. Stahmann, Committee Member

11/21/88
Date

Robert F. Stahmann, Department Chairman
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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To my wife Loretta, without whom none of the good things in my life would have ever occurred, thank you for everything. Special appreciation goes to my children, James, Heather, and Rachel, who patiently tolerated my absence during the process of learning marriage and family therapy and writing this thesis.
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It was hypothesized by Olson and his colleagues (Olson, et al., 1983) that "Mormons" were more likely to be enmeshed than many other cultural groups. The purpose of this study was to determine if in fact individuals affiliated with the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (Mormon) scored significantly more often in the enmeshed category of the cohesion dimension of the Circumplex Model, using FACES III data, than the norming sample for the FACES III instrument. The study also examined the level of satisfaction that the Mormon sample expressed for their level of cohesion. Data from 61 L.D.S. couples living in the three major urban counties of Utah were compared to the FACES III norming sample using chi-square and t-test procedures. The Mormon sample scored significantly more often in the enmeshed category than the norming sample, for both individual scores and couple mean scores. Those in the enmeshed category were significantly more satisfied with their level of cohesion than those in the lower categories of cohesion.
COHESION CATEGORIES IN A UTAH SAMPLE OF L.D.S. COUPLES

Joe Edgar Glenn
Department of Family Sciences
M.S. Degree, December 1988

ABSTRACT

It was hypothesized by Olson and his colleagues (Olson, et al., 1983) that "Mormons" were more likely to be enmeshed than many other cultural/religious groups. The purpose of this study was to determine if individuals affiliated with the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (Mormon) scored significantly more often in the enmeshed category of the cohesion dimension of the Circumplex Model, using FACES III data, than the norming sample for the FACES III instrument. The study also examined the level of satisfaction that the Mormon sample expressed for their level of cohesion. Data from 61 L.D.S. married couples living in the three major urban counties of Utah were compared to the FACES III norming sample using chi-square and t-test procedures. The L.D.S. sample scored significantly more often in the enmeshed category than the norming sample, both for individual and couple mean scores. Those L.D.S. couples in the enmeshed category were significantly more satisfied with their level of cohesion than those in the lower categories of cohesion.

Leslie L. Feinauer, Committee Chair
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Cohesion in a Utah Sample of L.D.S. Couples

The purpose of this study was to examine the assumption of enmeshment in Latter-Day Saint (Mormon) families and couples made by Olson and his associates during the development of the Circumplex Model of Marital and Family Systems (Olson, McCubbin, Barnes, Larsen, Muxen, & Wilson, 1983; Olson & Killorin, 1985). Derived from systems theory approaches to marital and family interaction, enmeshment has traditionally been defined as an over-involvement between family members (for example, see Minuchin, 1969). Enmeshment was usually described as less than optimal for individual and family health.

Olson's first hypothesis derived from the Circumplex Model states: "Couples/families with balanced (two central levels) cohesion and adaptability will generally function more adequately across the family life cycle than will those at the extremes of these dimensions" (Olson, Russell, & Sprenkle, 1983, p. 73). This implied that people in the enmeshed range of cohesion were less functional in couple/family systems than those who were more balanced on the cohesion dimension.

This original hypothesis was later qualified because of normative expectations within certain ethnic and religious groups. Olson et al. (1983) stated:

... most parents allow their children to become somewhat autonomous and differentiated from the family system.
However, a sizable minority of families have normative expectations that strongly emphasize family togetherness . . . and they strive for high levels of consensus and loyalty. Such American ethnic groups as Slovak-Americans, Puerto-Ricans, and Italians, as well as religious groups such as the Amish and Mormons, have high expectations regarding family togetherness. Many of these families could be described as extreme on the cohesion dimension (i.e., enmeshed), and they function well as long as all family members are willing to go along with those expectations. (p. 67)

This consideration of normative expectations due to cultural differences lead Olson to generate Hypothesis III: "If the normative expectations of a couple or family support behaviors extreme on one or both of the Circumplex dimensions, they will function well as long as all family members accept these expectations" (Olson, Russell, & Sprenkle, 1983, pp. 66-67).

The present study was designed to examine the assumption of culturally-induced enmeshment in Mormons. The study also examined the assumption that high levels of cohesion were acceptable or even desirable to Mormons.

A review of the literature revealed little empirical evidence concerning levels of cohesion within the Mormon population. The information available in the literature regarding Mormon couple/family expectations and experience provided a basis
for Olson's assumptions. Further, it provided additional impetus for an empirical examination of the question.

Marriage has very strong theological implications for members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (Mormons). While many religions place a high value on marriage, Mormons believe that marriage is a necessary prerequisite to exaltation, or eternal life in the presence of God. This is exemplified in the following quote from a former leader of the Mormon religion:

It is the normal thing to marry. It was arranged by God in the beginning, long before this world's mountains were ever formed . . . Every person should want to be married. There are some who may not be able to. But every person should want to be married because that is what God in Heaven planned for us.

Marriage is ordained of God. It is not merely a social custom. Without proper and successful marriage, one will never be exalted. (Kimball, 1982, p. 291)

Because 'successful' marriage is seen as necessary for eternal life, according to Mormon theology, it would be expected that this would have a significant impact on marital system interactions. This may be reflected in their level of enmeshment.

Religion is known to have a correlation with marital satisfaction and family commitment. Kennedy, Cleveland, & Schumm
(1983) found a high correlation between levels of religious commitment and family commitment. After measuring religious commitment and family commitment, the researchers found a significant difference on family commitment between those people with low religious commitment and high religious commitment. This correlation between religious and family commitment increased the levels of behaviors and attitudes that constitute high cohesion levels.

Several studies found a positive correlation between religious affiliation and participation and marital satisfaction (Albrecht, 1979; Glenn & Weaver, 1978). In fact, Williams (1983) found that in 17 major studies concerning marital satisfaction and religion, 13 of the 17 reported a significant positive relationship between religious belief and activity and marital satisfaction.

These findings lend credence to the assumption that high levels of enmeshment may be expected in L.D.S. couples. Couple's decisions concerning procreation are also impacted by religious expectations and doctrines of the L.D.S. church. In 1981 it was reported that Utah, a predominantly Mormon state, experienced a 70% higher birth rate than the rest of the United States (Thornton, 1985). When an important couple function such as fertility is affected by L.D.S. religious beliefs then it seems logical and consistent to expect other marital/family functions to be affected also.
Additionally, Mormon religious practices such as family, couple, and individual prayer and scripture study, Family Home Evening, frequent church and temple attendance, when combined with frequent admonitions from church leaders to maintain close family and marital ties, can be expected to have an impact on the various components of cohesion. These components include time together, boundaries, emotional bonding, and interests and recreation.

Based on the review of the literature and the statement of the problem, two hypotheses were generated and tested.

I. (null form) There will be no difference in the cohesion categories of a Mormon sample of couples and individuals and a non-Mormon sample of couples and individuals.

II. (null form) Within the Mormon sample there will be no difference in the level of discrepancy between the perceived cohesion score and the ideal cohesion score, as measured by the FACES III instrument, between those with high cohesion scores (enmeshed) and those with low cohesion scores (nonenmeshed).

Method

Sample

The Mormon sample consisted of 249 married individuals, including 122 of whom were couples married to each other. These 61 married couples were used for the data analysis. The subjects were randomly selected from the telephone directories of Salt Lake, Davis, and Utah counties of the state of Utah. All of the
respondents were members of the Mormon Church. The married couple respondents had an average of 3.6 children, (s.d. = 2.2).

The average male in the sample was 37 years of age, with a range from 23 to 64 years of age. The husbands worked an average of 43.4 hours per week; hours worked ranging from 0 to 99.

The average female in the sample was 34.4 years of age, ranging from 22 to 52 years of age. The females averaged 20.1 working hours per week, (s.d. = 22.0) ranging from 0 to 50.

The mean yearly income for the couples was $32,500. Mean years of education were not available, but the majority of both males and females reported attending or graduating from college.

Insert Table 1 about here

The sample respondents indicated that 83% of them participate in religious activities at least once a week. The average Dyadic Adjustment Scale total score for the sample was 116.4. The average perceived cohesion FACES III score was 39.0 for males and 41.6 for females.

Instruments

FACES III (couples version) was developed by Olson, Portner, & Lavee (1985). This instrument is a 40 item, two part pencil and paper instrument (5 point Likert scaling) designed to measure adaptability and cohesion, the two major dimensions of the Circumplex Model. Reliability and validity measures for the
instrument, as reported by Olson (1986), are good. Olson's summary of these measures are presented in Table 7.

The first section of the FACES III Instrument measures the levels of cohesion and adaptability as the respondents perceive them. The second section measures the levels of cohesion and adaptability respondents desire. This two-part format allows a discrepancy score to be generated. (Discrepancy being the difference between the current levels and the desired levels.)

This discrepancy score can be used to measure the level of satisfaction with the current levels of cohesion and adaptability.

Procedure

Individuals were randomly selected from the telephone books of the three most urban counties in Utah. An original group of 939 possible subjects were telephoned to determine if they met the following criteria: 1) couple was currently living together; 2) husband was employed; 3) couple had been married a minimum of 1 year; 4) couple had at least one child; and 5) both spouses were willing to participate in the study, and 6) were L.D.S.

After this screening process, questionnaires were sent to 240 couples. Demographic and FACES III data were returned by 249 individuals. Because of partial information being returned, complete FACES III and demographic data were available for only 61 couples. All of these data were coded and entered into the SPSSX statistical computer program.
Results

In order to test the study hypotheses, data were analyzed using a t-test procedure and a nonparametric chi-square test. The nonparametric chi-square goodness of fit test, available on SPSSX software, allowed a comparison of the Mormon sample's level of cohesion with that of the Olson sample which generated the norms and cutting points for the FACES III instrument. By entering the percentages of the Olson norming sample which fell into each of the four cohesion categories (disengaged 16.3%, separated 33.8%, connected 36.3%, enmeshed 13.6%) (Olson & Killorin, 1985) expected frequencies for the chi-square analysis were provided. These percentages were used for comparisons of both individual and couple mean cohesion scores.

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Insert Tables 2 and 3 about here

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In order to test the idea that being higher on the cohesion measure is culturally-induced and therefore more acceptable to Mormons, a t-test was used. A discrepancy score was generated for each respondent by subtracting their total perceived cohesion score from their total ideal cohesion score. Thus the larger the discrepancy, the more dissatisfied the respondent was with the current level of cohesion. The t-test was used because norms for ideal cohesion and discrepancy do not exist at this point.
By placing all of the enmeshed respondents in one group and all of the non-enmeshed respondents in another group, the t-test allowed a determination of whether the difference in the level of discrepancy (dissatisfaction) between the two groups was statistically significant.

As shown in Table 4, the chi-square goodness of fit test for the respondents as individuals shows a significant difference in the levels of cohesion between the Olson norming sample and the Mormon sample.

The chi-square statistic of 61.1 (3 degrees of freedom) had a significance of \( p < .001 \). An examination of the residuals shows that the much greater than expected number of people in the enmeshed categories were at the expense of the two lowest categories. Table 5 demonstrates that the same chi-square goodness of fit test using couple’s mean cohesion scores yielded similar results. The chi-square statistic of 30.9 (3 degrees of freedom) was also significant at \( p < .001 \). Again, the much greater than expected number of couples in the enmeshed category came from the two lowest cohesion categories.

Examination of hypothesis II results indicated that couples in the enmeshed category desired a mean change in cohesion level of 1.2 points (s.d. of 2.3). The couples in the three lower
cohesion categories desired a mean change in cohesion level of 4.3 points (s.d. of 5.3). The t-test provided a t-value of 3.78 and a p-value of <.001 indicating a significant difference in the discrepancy scores. The lower discrepancy score for the enmeshed group indicates a higher level of satisfaction with their cohesion level.

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Insert Table 6 about here

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A simple multiple regression analysis yielded no significant results. The mean male perceived cohesion score (40.6) was slightly lower than the female mean perceived cohesion score (41.6) but a t-test analysis indicated that the difference was not statistically different.

Discussion

The chi-square goodness of fit test for both individuals and couples provided sufficient information to reject null hypothesis I. It is therefore possible to conclude that there was a significant difference in the level of cohesion between the Mormon sample and the Olson norming sample.

In both samples, the largest block of respondents fell in the connected category (38.5% of the Mormon sample and 36.3 of the norming sample).

The major difference in cohesion in the 2 samples was in the enmeshed category. While only 13.6% of the norming sample
described themselves as enmeshed, 28.7% of the Mormons described themselves as enmeshed. In other words, Mormons saw themselves as having high levels of cohesion when compared with the norms.

The examination of how comfortable the Mormon sample was with their level of cohesion indicated that those that described themselves as enmeshed were significantly more comfortable with their cohesion level than were those in lower categories. Only 13% of the respondent couples wanted less cohesion than they currently had. These figures lend credence to the idea that high levels of cohesion are a culturally held ideal for Mormons.

Olson describes cohesion in more behavioral terms such as spending time together, other recreational activities, and time with friends. These items may lead to an impression of functionality in enmeshed families. These high levels of cohesion could appear as dysfunctional in other populations, but may serve well in a Mormon population.

Implications
It is important for therapists and researchers in the marital and family fields to recognize that this particular population has ethnic and cultural differences which may affect marital or family interactions and structure. More specifically, cohesion among the L.D.S. reflects the religious ideals of a close, united family which will be an eternal family if the precepts of the religion are followed.
This study indicated that Mormon couples value cohesion and were comfortable with high levels of cohesion. This information will be helpful to family professionals called upon to deal with Latter-Day Saint couples, individuals, and families. Most of the questions that measure cohesion in the FACES III instrument are related to time spent together, not the more problematic lack of individual boundaries and loss of autonomy usually associated with the concept of enmeshment. Peterson (1988) in a comparison study of cohesion in clinical and non-clinical samples of L.D.S. couples found no statistically significant difference in the two groups. The clinical group's perceived cohesion scores were somewhat lower than the non-clinical sample, but were still in the high range of the cohesion dimension. Both the clinical and non-clinical samples ideal cohesion scores tended to be in the enmeshed category. The mean ideal cohesion score for the clinical group was 45.3 and the mean ideal cohesion score for the non-clinical group was 45.8. Based on these samples, enmeshed cohesion functioning appears to be an L.D.S. ideal, and should not be associated with family pathology based on FACES III scores alone.

**Limitations**

There are several limitations to this study. The sample is non-clinical, therefore generalization to that sub-population cannot be made. The fact that the sample was selected from telephone books introduced some unknown degree of bias. Those who could not afford telephone service and those who chose not to be
listed in the directory were eliminated from the sampling frame in a non-random manner. Additionally, the sample is from urban Utah. Mormons living in rural areas or from other geographic areas may or may not value high cohesiveness to the same degree.

It will also be important to develop appropriate multiple regression models so that other variables within the Mormon sample which affect cohesion might be examined. Life-cycle stages, marital satisfaction, length of marriage, and level of religious commitment and activity are other factors known to affect cohesion.

Conclusions

The results of this study support Olson et al.'s (1983) assumption that L.D.S. couples value cohesion more highly than their normative sample. It is apparent from the data that the individuals who responded were more satisfied with a higher level of cohesion or connectedness than those who were less cohesive.

This study also provided a basis for further investigation. After having established that these L.D.S. couples had high levels of cohesion, further investigations need to examine additional components of the phenomenon. These include life stage issues, religiosity levels, parental cohesion levels, income, and marital satisfaction.
REFERENCES


Mormon Couples

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Table 1
Demographic Summary of the L.D.S. Sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Unit of Measure</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>s.d.</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Range</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Min.</td>
<td>Max.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Husband</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>years</td>
<td>37.0</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>23.0</td>
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<td>Work</td>
<td>hr/week</td>
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<td>61</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>64.0</td>
<td>99.0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wife</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>years</td>
<td>34.4</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>22.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work</td>
<td>hr/week</td>
<td>20.2</td>
<td>22.0</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>52.0</td>
<td>99.0</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Children</td>
<td>number</td>
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<td>2.2</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>10.0</td>
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Table 2

**Mormon Sample Cohesion Category Summation-Individual Scores**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Percentage of Sample</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Disengaged</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>15.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separated</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>17.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connected</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>38.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enmeshed</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>28.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>122 individuals</td>
<td>100.0</td>
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</table>
Table 3
L.D.S. Sample Cohesion Category Summation-Couple Mean Scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Percentage of Sample</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Disengaged</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separated</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>18.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connected</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>39.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enmeshed</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>29.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>61 couples</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4

Chi-Square Goodness of Fit Test Comparing Perceived Cohesion Category of Individuals in an L.D.S. Sample With the Perceived Cohesion Category of Individuals in the FACES III Norming Sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Cases Observed</th>
<th>Cases Expected</th>
<th>Residual</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Disengaged</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>19.89</td>
<td>-0.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separated</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>41.24</td>
<td>-20.24</td>
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<tr>
<td>Connected</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>44.29</td>
<td>2.71</td>
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<tr>
<td>Enmeshed</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>33.86</td>
<td>18.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>122 individuals</strong></td>
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**Chi-Square**

<table>
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<th>d.f.</th>
<th>p</th>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>&lt; .0005</td>
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</table>

Expected values derived from FACES III individual norms.
Table 5

Chi-Square Goodness of Fit Test Comparing Couple's Mean Perceived Cohesion Category in an L.D.S. Sample With the Perceived Cohesion Category of Individuals in the FACES III Norming Sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Cases Observed</th>
<th>Cases Expected</th>
<th>Residual</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Disengaged</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9.94</td>
<td>- 1.94</td>
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<tr>
<td>Separated</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>20.62</td>
<td>- 9.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connected</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>22.14</td>
<td>1.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enmeshed</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>8.30</td>
<td>9.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>61 couples</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
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Chi-Square d.f. p
16.373 3 .0001

Expected values derived from FACES III individual norms
Table 6

Means and T-Test Results Comparing the Discrepancy in an LDS Sample Between Individual's Current Cohesion Levels and Ideal Cohesion Levels by Enmeshed and Non-Enmeshed Cohesion Categories

<table>
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<th>Enmeshed (n = 35)</th>
<th>Not Enmeshed (n = 87)</th>
<th>t-value</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Discrepancy</td>
<td>0.17</td>
<td>2.90</td>
<td>5.10</td>
<td>6.99</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5.51</td>
<td>&lt;.0005</td>
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Mormon Couples
Table 7
Means and T-Test Results Comparing the Discrepancy in an L.D.S. Sample Between the Couples' Current Cohesion Level and Ideal Cohesion Level by Enmeshed and Non-Enmeshed Cohesion Categories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Enmeshed (n = 18)</th>
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<tr>
<td>X s.d.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Discrepancy</td>
<td>.81  2.79  4.60  5.91</td>
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<td>.001</td>
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Table 8
Reliability and Validity Measures for the FACES III Instrument

<table>
<thead>
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<td>Internal Consistency</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cohesion (r = .77)</td>
<td>Adaptability (r = .62)</td>
<td>Total (r = .68)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Test/Retest (4-5 weeks)</td>
<td>r = .83 for cohesion</td>
<td>r = .80 for adaptability</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Validity

Correlation between Scales

| Cohesion and adaptability (r = .03) |

Correlation with Social Desirability

| SD and Adaptability (r = .00) |
| SD and Cohesion (r = .39) |

Appendix A

Approved Prospectus
Chapter I

Introduction and Statement of Purpose

Families which have expectations of close involvement in marital and family situations are often defined as enmeshed. This was pointed out almost 20 years ago by Minuchin (1969) in his classic treatise on slum families. The over involvement and "tight interlocking" between family members described by Minuchin are still essential features of enmeshed families and couples.

There are a number of ethnic and religious groups such as Orthodox Jews, Puerto Ricans, and Latter-Day Saints which are commonly stereotyped as maintaining family systems which tend to be overly involved in one another's lives. Although the empirical evidence is limited, families from these groups are generally expected to present themselves as enmeshed families. Enmeshed family and marital systems are thought to be less adaptive to stress and less able to facilitate differentiation and individual development of the family members.

David Olson and associates (1979) developed a typology of marital and family behavior called the Circumplex Model to measure the dimensions of adaptability and cohesion in families throughout the United States. In several discussions related to the development of the Circumplex Model, he stated that Slovak-Americans, Puerto Ricans, Italians, Amish, Orthodox Jews, and Mormons tend to be categorized as enmeshed due to cultural norms and expectations (Olson, McCubbin, Barnes, Larsen, Muxen, &
While there is some evidence to show that Slovak-Americans, Puerto Ricans, and Latter-Day Saints have expectations of close involvement in marital and family situations (Stein, 1978; Minuchin, Montavalo, Guerney, Rossman, & Schumer, 1967; Schvandeveldt, 1973), validation of the assumption of enmeshment due to cultural influences will require a comparison of the level of enmeshment in these religious and ethnic groups with the level of enmeshment of a control group in which cultural enmeshment is not expected.

Olson's Circumplex Model is an integration of the various concepts and terms used to describe the phenomenon of cohesion and adaptability. Because Olson's Circumplex Model may serve as the basis for assessing problem families or marriages and defining marital or family types for research purposes, it is important that precise, accurate information regarding cultural differences be established using this instrument.

Statement of the Problem:

The purpose of this study is to empirically test the assumption of enmeshment regarding Latter-Day Saint (Mormon) families and couples made by Olson and his associates during the development of the Circumplex model of Marital and Family Systems (Olson, McCubbin, Barnes, Larsen, Muxen, & Wilson, 1983; Olson & Killorin, 1985). Therefore, a sample of Mormon couples will be
compared to the sample used by Olson and associates (Olson et al., 1983) to develop the norms on L.D.S. couples for the FACES (Family Adaptability and Cohesion Scales) III (third version) instrument (Olson, 1981).

**Definition of Terms:**

Cohesion is defined as the emotional bonding (family) members have with one another. Enmeshment, for this paper, means a high level of cohesion. Cultural enmeshment is enmeshment that occurs primarily because of the influence of particular ethnic or religious norms upon members of the defined groups.

References to Latter-Day Saint or Mormon identification indicates that the people in question are self-described as members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. These terms will be used throughout the paper, with Latter-Day Saint (abbreviated as L.D.S.) and Mormon used interchangeably.
Literature Review

The review of literature will address two major areas. The first section will review material related to the development and norming of the Circumplex model and the FACES III instrument. The second section will review materials concerned with religious affiliation and cohesion.

The Circumplex Model and FACES III:

The Circumplex Model of Marital and Family Systems is a typology of couple and family interaction designed for use by researchers, theoreticians, and practitioners (Olson, 1981). The model attempts to integrate the plethora of seemingly unrelated concepts and terms generated over the years by family researchers and therapists into a workable, systematic model (Olson, Russell, & Sprenkle, 1983).

The two major concepts of cohesion and adaptability were developed inductively with factor analytic techniques providing the means of reducing the multitude of system-based concepts and terms into major categories (Olson et al., 1983). A third concept, communication, was identified as a facilitating dimension which allows couples and families to move along the two other dimensions (Olson, Russell, & Sprenkle, 1983).

Cohesion was originally defined as "the emotional bonding members have with one another and the degree of individual autonomy a person experiences in the family system" (Olson, Sprenkle, & Russell, 1979, p. 5). The inclusion of autonomy in
the definition was severely criticized as mistakenly including an individual developmental term (which indicates more the level of maturity) into a definition of couple and family interaction (Beavers & Voeller, 1983). Later definitions of cohesion by the Circumplex model authors have deleted the reference to autonomy (Olson, Russell, & Sprenkle, 1983).

There are several variables which may be examined to evaluate the degree of cohesion. These include emotional bonding, boundaries, time, friends, decision-making, and interests and recreation (Olson et al., 1983). (How these variables have been incorporated into the FACES III instrument may be seen by referring to the instrument in Appendix 2.)

The odd-numbered questions are those which measure cohesion. Questions 1, 11, and 19 are designed to examine emotional bonding, questions 5 and 7 examine boundaries, question 9 examines time, question 3 friends, question 17 decision-making, and questions 13 and 15 attempt to measure interests and recreation.

Cohesion is presented on the Circumplex model along a continuum from a low level of cohesion to a high level of cohesion. This continuum is divided into four categories which are labeled disengaged, separated, connected, and enmeshed respectively. (Appendix 1 provides a visual display of the Circumplex model for greater clarity.)

It has been hypothesized that a curvilinear relationship exists between effective family and couple interaction and the
cohesion (and adaptability) dimension (Olson, Russell, & Sprenkle, 1980). This means that families and couples that function at the separated or connected level of the model will function better than those families at either extreme of the cohesion dimension.

The hypothesis of a curvilinear relationship between the Circumplex dimensions and family functioning has been vigorously criticized. Beavers and Voeller (1983) argue that placing optimum family and couple functioning at the middle ranges of the Circumplex Model ignores the concept of negentropy (the idea that a family can increase in competence infinitely), an important concept from systems theory on which the Circumplex Model is based.

Beavers, Hampson, & Hulgus (1985) present an empirical comparison of the Circumplex Model and another marital and family typology called the Beavers Systems Model (with various subscale measures). These researchers argue that the evidence derived from this comparison indicates that the cohesion dimension, as measured by both models, is linear in nature; that is, even high levels of the cohesion dimension does not automatically lead to lower levels of functioning as would be evident if the curvilinear hypothesis was valid.

In a recent paper comparing the Olson Circumplex Model and the Beavers Systems Model, Lee (1988) noted that in Olson et al.'s major study (Olson, McCubbin, Barnes, Larsen, Muxen, & Wilson, 1983) a linear relationship was found between family functioning
and cohesion and adaptability. In the paper the authors proposed that this finding may be related to differences in life cycle or perhaps to the notion that enmeshed families cannot express dissatisfaction.

Lee (1988) suggests that the Olson instrument used to place marital or family systems on the Circumplex Model might be psychometrically flawed (with part of the questions leading to curvilinearity and part leading to linearity between family satisfaction and the Circumplex dimensions). This criticism is based on intuitive review of the questions.

Empirical evidence for FACES III not adequately measuring the concepts of cohesion and adaptability so that a potential curvilinear relationship would be shown comes from Pratt and Hansen (1987). These researchers compared a group of people measured on both FACES II and FACES III.

Additionally, an instrument was given that forced observers to place dysfunctional families in an extreme category, as Olson's hypothesis concerning family functioning would indicate. By comparing the FACES data with the other instrument, Pratt and Hansen determined that a curvilinear relationship existed between family functioning and the cohesion and adaptability dimensions, but that both FACES II and FACES III failed to show this relationship.

It appears, based on the above criticisms, that the notion of curvilinearity between satisfaction and well-functioning and
either dimension of the Circumplex Model needs further empirical testing before being accepted as valid.

Most relevant to this investigation is a related hypothesis that states: If the normative expectations of a couple or family support behaviors on one of both extremes of the circumplex dimensions, it will function well as long as all family members accept these expectations (Olson et al., 1983). The FACES III instrument measures both perceived and ideal levels of cohesion.

It is then possible to determine the level of acceptance of the expectations of marital and family functioning. Perceived cohesion is the level of cohesion currently seen in the family or couple by the respondents. Ideal cohesion is the level of cohesion that the respondents would like to see in their family or marriage. For example, if an individual within a couple desires less cohesion than they currently perceive, this is an expression of dissatisfaction with current cohesion levels.

This is the important tie-in to the Mormon couples under investigation. It is during the discussion of this hypothesis that it is stated that Mormons are one of the cultural/religious groups which could be expected to be enmeshed due to cultural values and norms.

The only empirical evidence of this assumption offered is a paper which describes Mormon adolescents' likes and dislikes about their parents (Schvaneveldt, 1973). The adolescents in the study were measured on responses to items related to areas of conflict.
between adolescents and parents, their perception of the severity of the drug problem in their peer groups, things that produce guilt feelings, as well as some questions related to how they felt that their parents perceived them. The paper reports that there is a significant amount of love and trust between the parents and the children, but little that could be accurately described as showing empirical evidence of enmeshment. It is not clear from the paper how the above conclusion was derived from the data collected.

This project is not so much concerned with adaptability as it is with cohesion, but it must be stated that adaptability is an important factor in family and couple functioning. Adaptability is defined as the ability of a marital or family system to change its power structure, role relationships, and relationship rules in response to situational and developmental stresses (Olson, et al., 1983, p. 48). Adaptability also exists on a continuum with the four categories, from low to high being called rigid, structured, flexible, and chaotic, respectively (Barnes & Olson, 1985).

Adaptability is perhaps of the most important and useful concepts to come out of general systems theory as applied to marital and family systems. Positive feedback that allows the system to engage in behaviors that promote growth, creativity, and positive change is called morphogenesis while negative feedback which prevents growth-inducing behaviors is called morphostasis (Hoffman, 1983). Both of these concepts refer to adaptability,
with morphogenesis being a high level of adaptability and morphostasis being low adaptability.

Theorists have postulated that human social systems need a certain level of both change and sameness to allow for needed situational growth and yet maintain integrity as a system (Hardin, 1969). When insufficient adaptability exists, the system cannot respond to environmental change and is destroyed as a system. If the components of a system have too much adaptability, any major change will cause excessive adaptive response, leading to the demise of the system. (Wertheim, 1973; Speer, 1970). While the concept of morphostasis has been subjected to criticism by systems theorists recently (Dell, 1980), the basic notion that individual components of systems must adapt collectively to their environment is a sound principle and is reflected in the adaptability dimension of the Circumplex model.

Based on the above cited systems theory principles, adaptability is also presented as curvilinear in nature, that is the middle dimensions are better than either extreme (Olson & Killorin, 1985). Given the arguments cited above of Lee (1988), Hampson, Beavers, & Hulgus (1988), Pratt & Hansen (1987), and Beavers & Voeller (1983), the assumption of curvilinearity between family/couple functioning and adaptability is still in need of validation.

The third dimension of the Circumplex model, communication, is not directly represented on the model. It is described as a
facilitating dimension, one which allows members of families and couples to move along the other two major dimensions (Olson, Russell, & Sprenkle, 1983). Hypothesis V of the Circumplex model states,

"Balanced couples/families will tend to have more positive communication skills than extreme families"
(Olson, et al., 1983, p. 74).

This again represents a curvilinear relationship between effective couples and families and their communication skills. This hypothesis has been supported by empirical investigation in which it was found that well-functioning families at the middle of the Circumplex model used positive communication skills such as sending clear and congruent messages, empathy, and supportive comments while families at the extremes of the Circumplex Model used these positive communication skills much less. (Anderson, 1986).

Religious Affiliation and Cohesion:

Although the authors of the Circumplex model have presented very little evidence to support their contention that Mormon families and couples will tend to be enmeshed on the cohesion measure, it is quite logical to expect that this group might tend toward a high level of cohesion.

Because previous research on the L.D.S. religion and its impact on cohesion is lacking, information will be presented to establish the fact that religion has an impact on other marital
behaviors and could potentially influence cohesion levels as suggested by Olson and associates (1983).

Several studies have shown that religious affiliation and participation are positively correlated with the level of marital satisfaction (Albrecht, 1979; Glenn & Weaver, 1978). In fact, Williams (1983), in a review of the literature, found that in 17 major studies about marital satisfaction and religion carried out between 1938 and 1980, 13 of the 17 reported a significant positive relationship between religiosity and marital happiness or satisfaction.

Marital satisfaction for the L.D.S. sample will be measured by Dyadic Adjustment Scale (Spanier, 1976) total score. The DAS has a reported criterion validity in its ability to distinguish between married and divorced couples at the .001 level. The test correlates highly with the Marital Adjustment Test (.93), and has good internal consistency (Chronbach's coefficient, alpha = .96) (Spanier, 1976).

Kennedy, Cleveland, & Schumm (1983) found that religious commitment strongly influences commitment to the family. After measuring both religious commitment and family commitment, it was found that there is a statistically significant difference on family commitment between people with low religious commitment and high religious commitment.

Strong commitment to home and family could lead to a greater degree of enmeshment in a religious culture. This would be of
particular interest to Mormon couples because of the nature of religious beliefs concerning marriage. Marriage is seen not only as a religious rite by Latter-Day Saints, but as a necessary step to eternal salvation, as seen in the following quote from a former leader of the L.D.S. religion,

"It is the normal thing to marry. It was arranged by God in the beginning, long before this world's mountains were ever formed. . . Every person should want to be married. There are some who might not be able to. But every person should want to be married because that is what God in Heaven planned for us. Marriage is ordained of God. It is not merely a social custom. Without proper and successful marriage, one will never be exalted" (Kimball, 1982, p. 291).

Again, because "successful" marriage is seen as a prerequisite for eternal life, according to Mormon theology, it would be expected that this would have a significant impact on marital system interactions which may be reflected in the level of enmeshment in this research project. Other L.D.S. religious practices, such as Family Home Evening in which the couple and family is expected to spend time together weekly, family and couple prayers and scripture reading on a daily basis, expectations of frequent church attendance, as well as frequent admonitions from church leaders to maintain close family and
marital ties, could all logically be expected to have an impact on
the various components of cohesion such as time together,
boundaries, emotional bonding, and interests and recreation.
Concurrent with this assumption is the notion that those L.D.S.
people who measure higher on levels of religious activity would be
higher on cohesion measures that those Mormons with lower levels
of religious activity.

It has long been noted that the child-bearing habits of
Mormon couples has been greatly affected by religious beliefs; As
recently as 1981 it was noted that the birth rate of the
predominantly Mormon state of Utah was about 70% higher that the
rest of the nation (Thornton, 1985). If such an important marital
behavior as fertility could be greatly impacted by religious
belief, cohesiveness might likewise be affected. Very little
is known at this point about the actual level of cohesion,
according to the Circumplex model, within the Mormon culture. A
search of psychology and sociology abstracts for the last five
years reveals no actual research in which the dimension was
explored among Mormon couples. A computer search of the
literature, using the TYMNET system, produced no additional
relevant information.

Intuitive logic supports a possible link between L.D.S.
religiosity and cohesion; Mormon theology supports among its
membership a high level of many of the components which make up
the cohesion dimension; and finally, Mormon families tend to have
Mormon Couples

a larger number of children than the national average. However, no empirical studies are available to support the conclusion made by Olson et al. (1985) that Mormon families and couples tend to be enmeshed rather than connected.

Significance of the Study

The proposed study is important for two major reasons. First, a repeated criticism of family and family therapy research is that it too often ignores religious and ethnic minorities (McGoldrick & Rohrbaugh, 1987; McAdoo, 1977; Panitz, McConchie, Sauber, & Fonseca, 1983). This project will examine an assumption about a religious minority as it is represented in an important assessment instrument. FACES III is based on one of the most widely used and influential marriage and family typologies in the literature at this time, with over 300 research projects completed or in progress based on the Circumplex Model (Olson, 1986).

Second, empirical testing of the idea of cultural enmeshment is important because therapists who might be called upon to deal with minority groups need research-based information concerning marital and family interactional patterns upon which to base interventions which would be culturally appropriate (Pinderhughes, 1987). It would be important information for a therapist called upon to work with a Latter-Day Saint couple or family to know if the level of cohesion seen and measured is within culturally appropriate limits or part of a dysfunctional pattern in need of intervention.
Collectively, these two concepts provide powerful impetus for the completion of this project. Therefore, based on the information gathered in this review of the literature, the following hypotheses are set forth.

**Hypotheses:**

(Stated in the null form.)

I. Within the Mormon sample there will be no difference in the level of discrepancy between the perceived cohesion score and the ideal cohesion score, as measured by the FACES III instrument, between those with high cohesion scores (enmeshed) and those with low cohesion scores (nonenmeshed).

II. There will be no difference in the cohesion level of a sample of Mormon couples and a sample of non-Mormon couples, as measured by the FACES III perceived cohesion scores. This hypothesis applies to both individual scores and couple mean scores, using the norms for individuals and couples.
Chapter II
Methodology

Design:

This project will utilize an experimental/control group, $2 \times 2$ categorical design to compare group means. This design will allow comparison on the two major categorical variables of interest, religious affiliation and FACES III level of cohesion category.

Subjects:

A sample, used in a previous study, of 150 married couples has been generated from a pool of subjects which were selected from phone directories using a random procedure. The phone numbers represent individuals and families living in Utah, Davis, and Salt Lake counties of the state of Utah. Using a random number table, subjects were selected from the Salt Lake City and County telephone directory, the Utah Valley telephone directory, and the Davis County telephone directory.

A structured format was used to briefly explain the purpose of the study without creating a bias and to determine if the couple contacted meet the sample criteria. The criteria consisted of three factors:

1) the couple must be L.D.S.
2) the couple must be married for at least one year and have at least one child.
3) both husband and wife are willing to participate in the study.

The subjects for the control group (the couples that were used to norm the FACES III instrument) consisted of 1140 couples from a nation-wide stratified random sample. (The sampling frame was subscribers of an insurance company owned by the Lutheran church, thus the predominance of Lutherans in the sample.) The couples were predominantly white and members of the Lutheran Church, although the sample was compared to a nationwide Gallup sample and found to be quite similar on all major dimensions (Olson et al., 1983).

**Instruments:**

FACES, The Family Adaptability and Cohesion Evaluation Scales, third version (FACES III), is a 20 item pencil and paper instrument. It was designed to measure the levels of adaptability and cohesion in marital and family systems (Olson, 1986). The FACES III instrument used in this investigation was developed by Olson, Portner, & Lavee (1985), with the express purpose of finding out how people see their family or marriage and how they wish their family to be along the dimensions of adaptability and cohesion (Olson, 1986). In this version, the FACES III instrument meets the desired goal of orthogonality between adaptability and cohesion (r = .03) (Olson, 1986). In the same article Olson reports a test/retest reliability for cohesion of .83 and .80 for adaptability. He also states that good evidence exists for face
validity and content validity for the instrument, but provides no data.

FACES III, used in this study, employs both a perceived couples score and an ideal couples score. For this study it will be important to use the perceived score as the primary score of interest because our goal is to see if the people in our sample see themselves as significantly more enmeshed as it has been assumed that they will. The even numbered questions on the instrument measure adaptability while the odd numbered questions measure cohesion (Olson & Killorin, 1985).

The FACES instrument is designed to capture the patterns of couples and families, thus the scoring of the instrument is problematic. For couples, a mean score can be generated. If the scores of both people in the couple are similar, a relatively accurate picture of the couple is presented (Olson & Killorin, 1985). Conversely, if the scores for the couple are very dissimilar, then the mean of the two scores will tend to artificially move toward the center.

Olson and Killorin (1985) suggest that a discrepancy score be generated for each couple to identify those couples in which there is great differences in scores. The problem with the discrepancy score is that it cannot be used to place the couple on the Circumplex model grid.

For this project, the discrepancy between the perceived cohesion level and the ideal cohesion level will be summed for
each couple. This will allow identification of those couples that are dissatisfied with their current level of cohesion. Since there are currently no norms available for discrepancy scores, a t-test will be performed to determine if there is a statistically significant difference in the discrepancy scores between the enmeshed and the non-enmeshed couples.

Because of the empirical question under consideration in this study, sample mean scores will be used for an overall comparison of levels of enmeshment between the Olson sample and the L.D.S, sample (both overall individual mean scores and overall couples mean scores). However, to address the issues carefully, a multiple regression test will be used to determine the level of influence of other factors within the sample that could theoretically influence the level of cohesion (these variables will consist of age of respondents, level of religious activity, gender of respondents, stage of life, and marital satisfaction).

The statistical analysis for the comparison of the experimental group with the control group will consist of a one-sample chi-square analysis (test of Hypothesis II). This non-parametric test allows the researcher to insert the expected frequencies into the chi-square formula (in this case, the percentage of the Olson sample which fell into each of the four cohesion categories), thereby allowing the determination of significance for the experimental sample. Comparison will be against both the couples and individual norms.
The chi-square analysis is appropriate because the variable of interest, cohesion categories (particularly the enmeshed category) may be considered categorical data. Likewise, the major independent variable, religious affiliation, must be considered categorical data. Ott (1984) and Norusis (1987) present chi-square analysis as appropriate for categorical data. Olson and Killorin (1985) suggest that chi-square analysis is the best procedure for the examination of the Circumplex model categories.

Chi-square analysis will be carried out on the IBM 9370 mini-mainframe computer using the SPSSx statistical software package. We will use the control sample to provide the expected cell frequencies. The chi-square statistic will provide empirical validation or lack thereof of the assumption that Mormons will score more in the enmeshed category more frequently than non-Mormons.

Demographic data (age, number of children, marital satisfaction, level of religious activity, stage of life, and gender) will be analyzed using multiple regression to determine if variability within the sample is due to any other major influence other than religious affiliation. The variables listed above will be entered into the regression formulation as independent variables with the FACES III perceived cohesion score as the dependent variable.

Perceived cohesion, age, number of children, and marital satisfaction are continuous variables while religious activity,
stage of life, and gender are categorical variables for which dummy variables will need to be created to meet the assumptions of multiple regression. Marital satisfaction will be measured by the total score of the Dyadic Adjustment Scale. The religious activity level is measured by frequency of participation in church activities, while stage of life is determined by the age of the oldest child (because of the nature of previous coding of the data, only the stages of families with young children, families with adolescents, and families with the oldest child post-adolescence will be included).

In order to examine Hypothesis I, a couples mean perceived cohesion score will be generated. Those couples whose mean scores place them in the enmeshed category will be separated from the other couples. For each couple in the sample, the absolute difference between the perceived cohesion score and the ideal cohesion score for each husband and wife will be summed to generate a couples discrepancy score. If the null hypothesis for Hypothesis I is true, there should be no difference in the discrepancy scores for the enmeshed couples and the remaining couples. This analysis will be performed with the use of a t-test to examine the difference in mean discrepancy scores for the two groups.

Limitations:

A major limitation of this project is the lack of raw data for the control group. It would be appropriate to run analyses
using age, stage of life, number of children, level of religious activity, and gender for the control sample, as will be done within the L.D.S. couple sample, allowing a comparison of the raw data for both samples. The percentages of couples in each category can be derived from the summations given by Olson and his associates, somewhat ameliorating this problem.

Another limitation is that phone samples usually skew the sample toward more middle and upper-class respondents and away from poverty level respondents. Because we are examining adherence to group norms and mores, this may not bias the sample toward the experimental hypothesis because deviance is more associated with lower classes.

This study is also limited by the fact that the Mormon sample was collected in the three largest counties in Utah. Given that Utah is a predominantly Mormon state, the factors which could possibly cause enmeshment might be more cultural than religious in nature. It would be interesting to have a sample of Mormon couples from places where they are in the minority. If there were no significant differences in the cohesion levels of the Utah sample and a non-Utah sample, we would be better able to attribute enmeshment to religion than perhaps to the culture that has grown up around the religion.

Also limiting this study is the fact that the life cycle stages in the Mormon sample cannot be placed in the same categories as the Olson sample. This means that the full amount
of life-cycle influence on the level of cohesion cannot be determined.
Mormon Couples

References


Mormon Couples

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Appendix I
FIGURE 1. CIRCUMPLEX MODEL: SIXTEEN TYPES OF MARITAL AND FAMILY SYSTEMS

(Olson & Killorin, 1985)
Appendix II
FACES III: Couple Version
David H. Olson, Joyce Portner, and Yoav Lavee

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DESCRIBE YOUR FAMILY NOW:

1. We ask each other for help.
2. When problems arise, we compromise.
3. We approve of each other's friends.
4. We are flexible in how we handle our differences.
5. We like to do things with each other.
6. Different persons act as leaders in our marriage.
7. We feel closer to each other than to people outside our family.
8. We change our way of handling tasks.
9. We like to spend free time with each other.
10. We try new ways of dealing with problems.
11. We feel very close to each other.
12. We jointly make the decisions in our marriage.
13. We share hobbies and interests together.
14. Rules change in our marriage.
15. We can easily think of things to do together as a couple.
16. We shift household responsibilities from person to person.
17. We consult each other on our decisions.
18. It is hard to identify who the leader is in our marriage.
19. Togetherness is a top priority.
20. It is hard to tell who does which household chores.
IDEALLY, how would you like YOUR FAMILY TO BE:

21. We would ask each other for help.
22. When problems arise, I wish we would compromise.
23. We would approve of each other’s friends.
24. We would be flexible in how we handle our differences.
25. We would like to do things with each other.
26. Different persons would act as leaders in our marriage.
27. We would feel closer to each other than to people outside our family.
28. We would change our way of handling tasks.
29. We would like to spend free time with each other.
30. We would try new ways of dealing with problems.
31. We would feel very close to each other.
32. We would jointly make the decisions in our marriage.
33. We would share hobbies and interests together.
34. Rules would change in our marriage.
35. We could easily think of things to do together as a couple.
36. We would shift household responsibilities from person to person.
37. We would consult each other on our decisions.
38. We would know who the leader is in our marriage.
39. Togetherness would be top priority.
40. We could tell who does which household chores.