

Exploration of Experiences and Psychological Health of Same-sex Attracted Latter-day Saints

A Utah State University Research Project

Volume 1

Our Thanks to Study Participants

This document is intended as a newsletter in which we report the findings of our recent survey of LGBTQ Latter-day Saints. We are grateful to those who took the time to participate in this study (1635 individuals), and are committed to provide feedback to them about

its results. The survey was extensive, covering a broad set of important questions. Thus, a complete analysis of all the data will require months of intensive work. In this first newsletter, we will only attempt an initial report of some of the demographic characteristics of the study participants, along with a few preliminary findings.



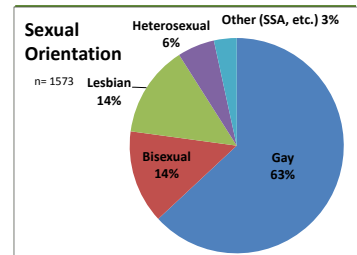
A choir of LGBT Mormons and allies from the "Circling the Wagons" conference held in Salt Lake City (11/5/11)

A little about study participants:

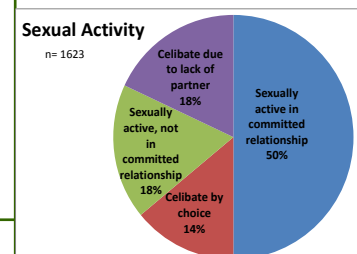
- 75% were male and 9% were non-white.
- Participants were widely distributed geograph-

ically: all US states and 22 other countries are represented.

- 34% were college graduates and an additional 29% earned professional or graduate degrees
- 42% of respondents are single, 35% maintain committed same-sex relationships, 16% are married heterosexually, 4% are divorced, and 3% reported another relationship status.
- 31% were married heterosexually at some point, 29% are parents



The 6% who self-identified as "Heterosexual" reported an average score in the "Bisexual" range of a continuous scale of erotic same-sex attraction.



About 50% of participants described their communities and families as "closed or non-supportive" of LGBTQ individuals. Only 3-4% described their families and communities as "very open or supportive"

Sexual Orientation Histories and Self-labeling

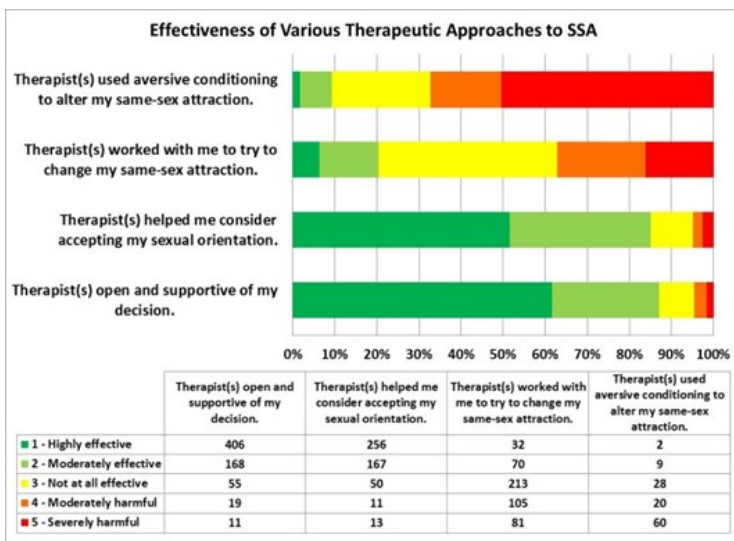
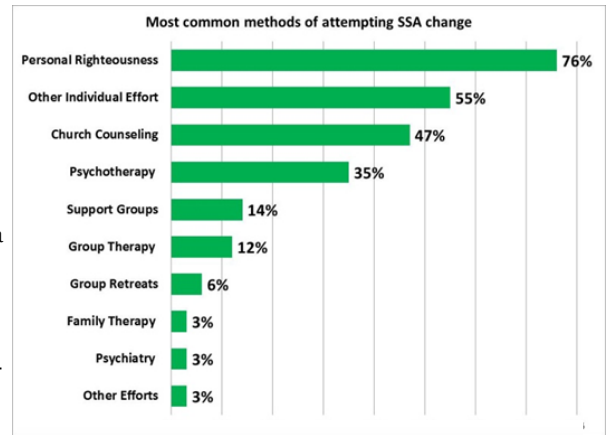
Same-Sex Attraction Development

- Average age felt "different": 9.6
- Average age "difference" was identified as sexual: 13.9
- Average age experienced 1st SS romantic or sexual experience: 19.8
- Average age 1st told someone of SSA: 22.5
- Average age labeled self as LGBT: 24.2
- 43% mostly "in closet" w/ friends, family, etc.

Efforts to Change Sexual Orientation

Sixty-five percent of participants sought to change or alter their sexual orientation through a number of different strategies. Of those who attempted sexual orientation change, 76% engaged in efforts at greater religious faith and behavior (e.g., prayer, church attendance, scripture reading). Individual efforts to change same sex attraction included reading books, avoidance, or controlling thoughts. Thirty five percent engaged in psychotherapeutic counseling to change sexual orientation, and 12% sought group therapy.

With respect to the efficacy of therapeutic counseling, the figure below shows that the therapeutic approaches that were most beneficial were those that were non-directive (the therapist did not impose a specific model or set of goals on a client), or those that helped clients understand and accept their homosexual orientation.

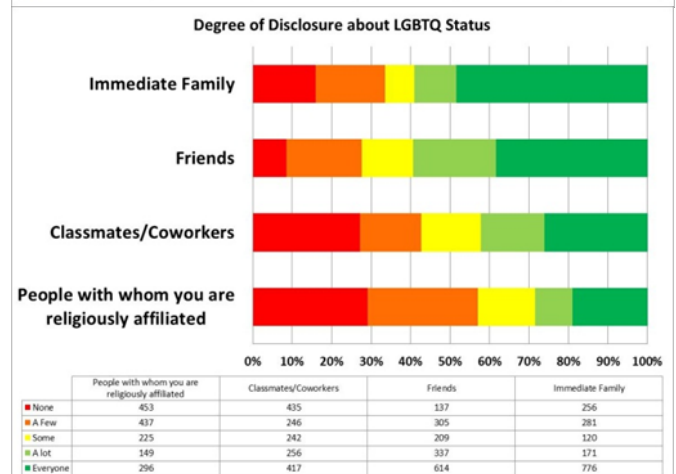
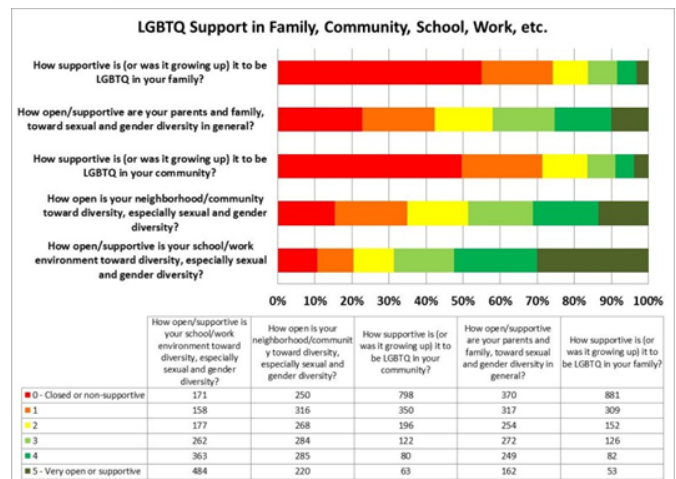


“My therapist was fantastic in that he was a former bishop...and very open-minded/ supportive and affirming....Though my sexual attractions never changed (one of my original goals), I consider [therapy] to be moderately effective because I learned to deal with my depression.” Participant #1459

Family, Community, and Work Environments

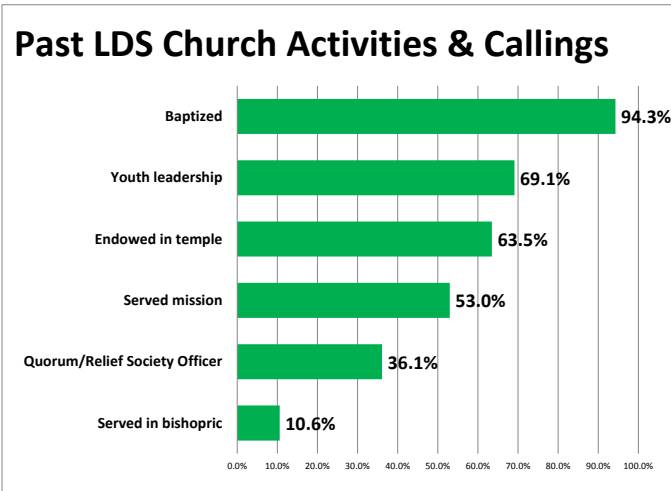
The family and community environments in which the participants grew up were mostly non-supportive of LGBTQ individuals. The current community and school/work environments in which participants live are somewhat more affirming. The difference between childhood and current environments may be a function of increasing awareness of LGBT issues in US culture, or it may reflect participants’ ability to select more affirming environments for themselves in adulthood.

Lastly, participants reported the extent to which they are open about their LGBTQ status. Fifteen percent remain closeted to their families, and twice that number to those in their religious communities.



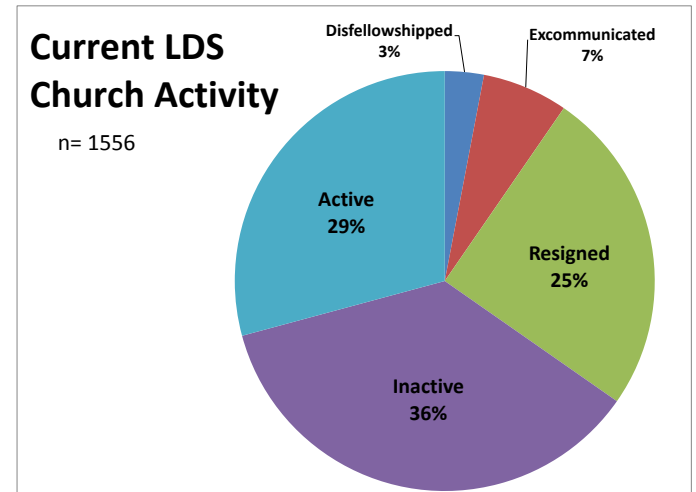
Religious Histories and Experiences

Virtually all (94%) of the study participants were baptized as members of the LDS church. The percentages who: were endowed in the temple (64%), served missions (53%), have served in adult leadership positions (36%), and served in bishoprics (11%) indicate strong commitment levels to the LDS church through early adulthood for most participants



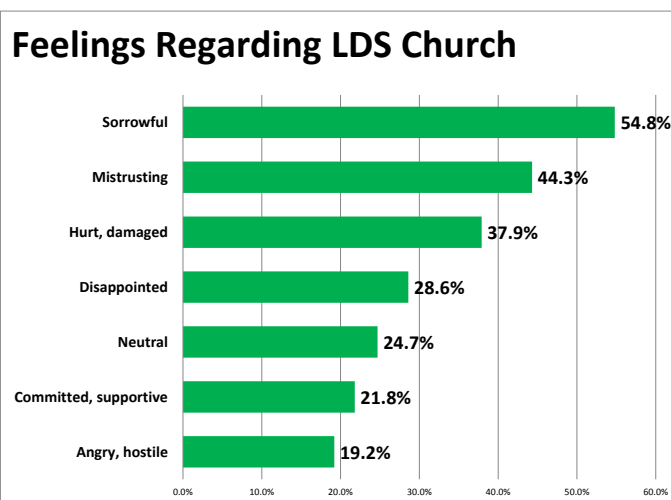
Current Church Activity

A sizable portion of study participants (29%) still actively participate in LDS church activities on a regular basis (at least monthly). Notwithstanding, the majority of participants no longer participate in church activities. When asked about the church attended most frequently, 49% selected the LDS church, with the next closest churches listed as Episcopalian (2%) and Unitarian Universalist (2%).



Feelings Regarding the LDS Church

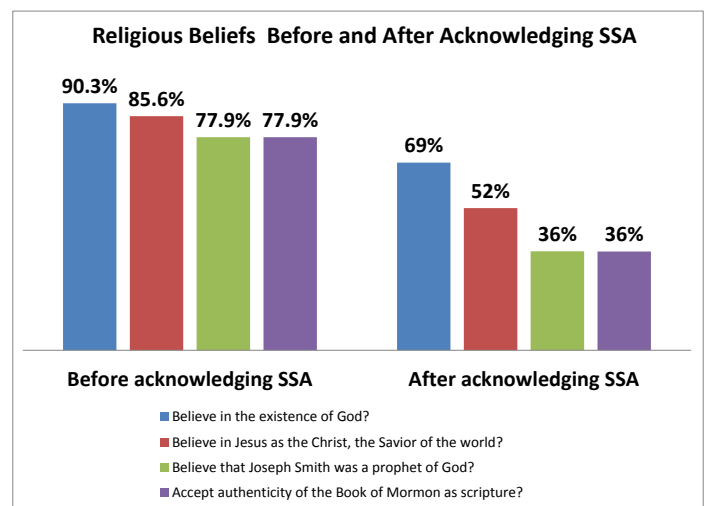
Participants endorsed a range of emotions regarding the LDS church, ranging from sorrowful (55%) mistrusting (44%) and hurt/damaged (38%) to neutral (25%) and committed/supportive (22%). Those who felt angry/hostile towards the LDS church represented the smallest percentage (19%)



Note: more than one response was allowed for this question.

Religious Beliefs Before and After

Before acknowledging their SSA, participants overwhelmingly believed in God (90%), Jesus Christ (86%), Joseph Smith as a prophet of God (78%) and the Book of Mormon as scripture (78%). Acknowledging same-sex attraction has led to a decrease in these beliefs across the board, with belief in Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon experiencing the largest declines (from 78% to 36% for both). Sixty-nine percent of participants still believe in God, while about half (52%) still believe in Jesus Christ.



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Next Steps

Some additional questions that we will be exploring are the following:

- Assessing the prevalence and outcomes (effectiveness and/or harm) of LDS sexual orientation change efforts.
- Exploring experiences associated with mental health outcomes among participants.
- Exploring and describing the journeys that participants have made in their efforts to find acceptance of their sexual orientation.
- A more detailed examination of the impact of sexual orientation on religious faith.

Look for additional updates in future newsletters and web postings. Some participants will be invited to participate in follow up studies in the coming months.

Additional Resources

- American Psychological Association Page on “Sexual Orientation and Homosexuality”: <http://www.apa.org/helpcenter/sexual-orientation.aspx>
- American Psychological Association “Appropriate Therapeutic Responses to Sexual Orientation”: <http://ldshomosexuality.com/wp-content/uploads/therapeutic-response.pdf>
- LGBTQ-Affirmative Psychotherapist Guild of Utah: <http://www.lgbtqtherapists.com>
- Affirmation: <http://www.affirmation.org>
- North Star: <http://northstarlds.org/>
- LDS Family Fellowship: <http://www.ldsfamilyfellowship.org/>
- Parents, Family and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG): <http://community.pflag.org/>
- Family Acceptance Project: <http://familyproject.sfsu.edu>
- Equality Utah: <http://www.equalityutah.org/>
- Utah Pride Center: <http://www.utahpridecenter.org/>
- The Trevor Project: <http://www.thetrevorproject.org/>
- It Gets Better: <http://www.itgetsbetter.org/>