SOCIALIZATION

In general, socialization refers to the processes used to internalize the ways of a particular group in order to function therein (Elkin and Handel, p. 4). In this light, LDS socialization faces a number of challenges in the contemporary world, notably in aiding its members to observe a health code (see WORD OF WISDOM); to oppose all forms of premarital and extramarital sexual behavior (see CHASTITY); to spend two years at their own expense in MISSIONARY work; and in the face of social pressures to the contrary, to have large families—generally two more children than the national average (Heaton; Thomas, 1983).

Many processes that lead to effective socialization within the LDS culture are similar to those found in American culture generally. Mormon parents are similar in many respects to other American parents, including the love and support they express to their children and the nurturing and disciplinary controls they exercise within the family (Kunz; Thomas, 1983). Nevertheless, some researchers contend that Latter-day Saints are more effective than some other groups in socializing their members to accept specific group values and behavior (Christensen; Smith). Some hints at possible reasons may be found in the degree to which LDS families participate in home religious observance (family prayer, SCRIPTURE STUDY, and FAMILY HOME EVENING).

The influence of home religious observance is perhaps best understood through research conducted by the Church on young men between the ages of twelve and eighteen. It found that home religious observance is a reliable predictor of what an adolescent’s private religious observance (individual prayer, study of the scriptures, etc.) will be. Home religious observance also somewhat predicts public religious observance, but only half as accurately as does private religious observance. In turn, private religious observance is the single best predictor of a young man’s internalizing religious goals and values specific to the LDS lifestyle, such as serving a mission for the Church, temple marriage, premarital chastity, and Church activity (Thomas, Olsen, and Weed). Having these as part of one’s future plans is the best predictor of both private and public religious behaviors during the young adult years, ages twenty to twenty-eight (Roghaar).

This research also indicates that LDS male adolescents decide at a relatively young age on a general lifestyle that either includes or excludes plans to serve a mission or marry in the temple. In interviews, many said they could not remember when they made their mission decision but that it was a long time ago. Some said it was made before baptism (eight years of age). Thus, many adolescents at an early time form a general view of themselves that either includes or does not include a mission, and then they construct a lifestyle consonant with that orientation.

Research shows that other dimensions of the young person’s religious world are important to understanding LDS socialization. While Church programs such as participation or nonparticipation in AARONIC PRIESTHOOD activity, SCOUTING, and daily religious education (see SEMINARY) during the school year have limited direct effect on socialization outcome, independent of family influences, research shows that these programs can reinforce basic orientations and internalization of values begun in the family. Cornwall shows that religiously committed LDS families usually channel their children into seminary, which in turn influences their peer associations, who then reinforce the religious values held by the parents. Roghaar further shows the positive influence of seminary education by pointing out that children from Latter-day Saint families who do not participate extensively in Church-sponsored activities will more likely remain active as young adults if they do complete four years of religious education during their adolescent years.

During the expanding social world of the late adolescent years, the family influences tend to weaken, whereas the influence of an adult adviser who represents the religious organization increases. Indeed, the influence of these adult representatives of the Church often exceeds that of the family for late adolescents between the ages of sixteen and eighteen. The crucial dimension of this relationship between the adolescent and the adult seems to center on the degree to which the adolescent has association with an adult whom he or she
respects, admires, wishes to emulate, and finds easy to talk to.

[See also Individuality; Values, Transmission of.]

BIBLIOGRAPHY


DARWIN L. THOMAS

SOCIAL SERVICES

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints calls upon LDS Social Services, a separate corporation, to help meet the social and emotional needs of Church members and others. Services include:

1. Placement of children for adoption with couples who meet legal requirements and the Church’s personal worthiness standards.

2. Counseling and support for unwed parents, to help them with issues and decisions pertaining to MARRIAGE, ADOPTION, and single parenthood.

3. Placement of children in foster homes that will promote healthy individual development and positive family relationships.

4. Therapy and referrals for members having personal or family problems, to allow them to receive help from resources that are respectful of LDS values.

Members are generally referred for assistance to LDS Social Services by their BISHOPS. The agency staff strives to work in harmony with ecclesiastical leaders and, at moderate fees, to provide services consistent with LDS values, such as individual responsibility, the sanctity of the FAMILY and human life, the eternal worth of souls, and the importance of experiences in mortality.

Charitable work among Latter-day Saints dates back to the organization of the Church in 1830. In the nineteenth century, most charitable work was done through the women’s RELIEF SOCIETY, whose representatives began regularly calling upon members in their homes to obtain contributions for the poor, assess the needs of families, distribute food or clothing, or perform other compassionate services. Care of the needy is still viewed as a local responsibility, best addressed at the ward level and provided through local ecclesiastical leaders, mainly the bishop. The bishop regularly involves the RELIEF SOCIETY and, when needed, the local Social Services agency.

To help with the relief effort in World War I, the Church sent Amy Brown LYMAN, General Relief Society President, together with another Relief Society delegate, to the National Conference of Charities and Correction in 1917. There these two women learned of charity and relief methods used by the Red Cross and became convinced that adopting these could strengthen their own charity program. Encouraged by Presidents Joseph F. SMITH and Heber J. GRANT, Sister Lyman founded the Relief Society Social Service Department in 1919. The department provided casework services for LDS families, served as a liaison between the Church and public and private charities, operated an employment bureau for women, and provided