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# When They Called Us Jie Mei (Sister) An Autoethnographic and Narrative Study of Religious Development in Emerging Adulthood

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“WHEN THEY CALLED US JIE MEI (SISTER)”  
AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC AND NARRATIVE  
STUDY OF RELIGIOUS DEVELOPMENT  
IN EMERGING ADULthood

by

Katie Nichole Ball

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree

of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

in

Family, Consumer, and Human Development

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Logan, Utah

2011

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**ABSTRACT**

When They Called Us Jie Mei (Sister)

An Autoethnographic and Narrative

Study of Religious Development

in Emerging Adulthood

by

Katie Nichole Ball, Master of Science

Utah State University, 2011

Major Professor: Dr. Kathleen W. Piercy  
Department: Family, Consumer, and Human Development

The years from the late teens through the twenties increasingly have become an important area of study. The age range between 18 and 25 makes up a new, distinct developmental period that is referred to as “emerging adulthood.” Recent work has suggested that individuals engage in their most extensive identity exploration during emerging adulthood. This study uses autoethnography and narrative biographical material to study emerging adulthood in the contexts of spiritual and personal growth. The study explored adult development among young women serving abroad as missionaries for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS). The sample consisted of five women, including myself, all of whom shared similar background characteristics and served in the same mission. Interviews were conducted in which

participants gave a unique description of their LDS mission experiences while responding to open-ended questions. Data analysis was done by gathering participants' stories and then "re-story (ing)" them into a framework that made sense. Stories presented here were based on the primary themes identified in participant interviews and my own experiences. These themes included: it was the right decision to serve a mission, development happened through experiencing adversity and through positive experiences, the mission lifestyle either helped or deterred participants' growth and development, and the participants are who they are today because of this experience. Future longitudinal research could focus on how a mission has affected women's lives throughout adulthood, or on the relationship between exposure to other cultures and individual psychosocial development.

(121 pages)

## **DEDICATION**

To the beautiful friends I made in Taiwan. To my parents who have taught me and continue to teach me, who support me and offer their unfailing love: Ben Craig Ball and Melissa Stokes Ball.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank Dr. Kathleen Piercy for helping me through this process. She has been my teacher, mentor, and friend through my entire program and thesis. I could never have done this without her constant help and encouragement. I would like to thank her for her example and her dedication to enriching the lives of her students. I will always be thankful for her kindness and the motivation she lent me as I pushed to finish this project. I would also like to thank my committee members, Dr. Linda Skogrand and Dr. Tom Lee, for their support and assistance throughout this entire process. I am grateful for their willingness to work with me on this project. I want to thank them for their insights and their enthusiasm for my project. I could not have done this without these three people.

I would like to thank family and friends who supported me through this process. I know it has not been easy on any of us. I would first like to thank my parents for their unfailing support and love. Next, I would like to thank my sister and my friends who have acted as my proofreaders, my soundboard, and my cheerleaders. I want to thank the beautiful women who permitted me to interview and include their personal stories in my research. I respect and love each one of you for your courage and strength. What we experienced has bound us together for life. I would also like to thank the friends who appear in the many stories included in this thesis. I think I speak for all the participants when I say, “thank you for giving me these stories to tell; you have made me who I am today.” I could not have done this without all of you. Thank you.

K. Nichole Ball

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## **CHAPTER I**

### **INTRODUCTION**

For most young people in industrialized countries, the years from the late teens through the twenties are years of profound change and importance. During this time, many young people obtain the level of education and training that will provide the foundation for their incomes and occupational achievements for the remainder of their adult work lives. It is during this time that many people experience a large degree of change in their lives. These areas of change include love, work, and perhaps changes in their worldviews, including views about religion. By the end of this period, the late twenties, most people have made life choices that have enduring ramifications. When adults later consider the most important events in their lives, they most often name events that took place during this period (Arnett, 2000).

The age range between 18 and 25 make up a new, distinct developmental period, which is referred to as “emerging adulthood.” Moreover, the period is characterized by heightened risk-taking behavior and self-exploration in numerous domains, including one’s spirituality (Barry & Nelson, 2005). Arnett proposed a new and historically unprecedented period of the life course, a developmental period from the late teens through the twenties, with a focus on ages 18-25 (Arnett, 2004).

Arnett (2000) argued the following:

Emerging adulthood is neither adolescence nor young adulthood but is theoretically and empirically distinct from them both. Emerging adulthood is distinguished by relative independence from social roles and from normative

expectations. Having left the dependency of childhood and adolescence, and having not yet entered the enduring responsibilities that are normative in adulthood, emerging adults often explore a variety of possible life directions in love, work, and worldviews. (p. 469)

In a study entitled “Religiosity, Sexual Behaviors, and Sexual Attitudes during Emerging Adulthood,” the researchers repeatedly referenced Arnett, explaining that recent work has suggested that individuals engage in extensive identity exploration during emerging adulthood – the period between the ages of 18 and 25 – rather than in adolescence (Lefkowitz, Gillen, Shearer, & Boone, 2004). Researchers at Northwestern University and Northern Arizona University conducted a Longitudinal Study of Autobiographical Memories in Emerging Adulthood. The study examined the life stories of young people between the approximate ages of 18 and 25, a period in the life course that Arnett (2000) labeled emerging adulthood (McAdams et al., 2006). The results of this study document important patterns of personality development that theorists of emerging adulthood have proposed.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The years from the late teens through the twenties have increasingly become an important area of study for many researchers. Transitions to adulthood have changed, both in their timing and order of occurrence.

Until the late 1990s researchers have specified certain events such as marriage, finishing an education, or career development as markers of adulthood. However, new

research shows, through self-report format, that individuals who are actually in the process of making the transition to adulthood are not considering marriage and other traditional events as important markers or criteria for adulthood (Nelson & Barry, 2005).

Many demographic changes have taken place over the past half century that have made the late teens and early twenties not simply a brief period of transition into adulthood, but instead a distinct period of the life course, characterized by change and exploration of all possibilities in life directions. As recently as 1970, the median age of marriage in the United States was about 21 for women and 23 for men; by 1996, it had risen to 25 for women and 27 for men (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1997).

More people are living on their own as the number of single adults has nearly doubled over the past two decades. At the same time, more young adults live with their parents, delaying a launch or returning home for financial reasons. The number of unmarried couples living together has risen dramatically to nearly 9% of all unions. Nearly half of all adults live in a cohabiting relationship without marriage at some time in their lives (Walsh, p. 12).

Since midcentury, the proportion of young Americans obtaining higher education after high school has risen steeply from 14% in 1940 to over 60% by the mid-1990s. These changes have been taking place all over the world (Arnett, 2000).

Recent work has suggested that individuals engage in their most extensive identity exploration during emerging adulthood. For individuals attending residential colleges, this period of exploration may be intensified by the experience of living away from home, living in an environment surrounded by many social, political, religious, and

interest-related activities. One area of development that is especially impressionable during this period of maturation is religiosity (Lefkowitz et al., 2004).

As individuals begin the transition from adolescence to adulthood, they become more committed to religion and their religious beliefs become more intrinsic; in contrast, their attendance at religious activities decreases. Whereas religious practices may have been prescribed while living at home, once individuals are away from home they have more opportunities to examine different religions and beliefs (Lefkowitz et al., 2004).

Emerging adulthood may best be described as a time during which young people (a) question the beliefs with which they have been raised, (b) place more importance on personal spirituality than affiliation with any particular religious institution, and (c) pick and choose the aspects of religion that suit them best (Barry & Nelson, 2005). This gives researchers reason to wonder about individuals who do place a lot of importance on the religious or spiritual aspect of their lives, participate in religious organizations and activities, and who immerse themselves rather deeply in their religious culture (i.e., attend religious institutions). There is some evidence that emerging adulthood for these individuals may be different than for their peers (Barry & Nelson, 2005), but relatively little is known about these emerging adults and their development.

One of the most convincing pieces of evidence that emerging adulthood is a unique period in development is the ambivalence that adults in this age group express about their own status as adults. When asked about their own status as adults, young people between the ages of 18 and 25 tend to respond with “in some respects yes and in some respects no” (Nelson & Barry, 2005, p. 243). Thus, the personal accounts of

emerging adults of their spiritual experiences during this stage of their lives are a good way to examine personal and spiritual growth and development during this life phase.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has a missionary program, in which many people participate. In 2009 there were 51,736 missionaries serving worldwide (Hales, 2009). Of this 51,736, the vast majority were young men and women ranging in age between 19 and 25. These missionaries are immersed in religious experiences for 18 to 24 months of their own free will. Collecting personal accounts and interviews of missionaries serving for this church could provide new insight and knowledge regarding the religiosity of emerging adults.

### **Using Autoethnography and Personal Narratives to Explore Religiosity**

#### **Autoethnography**

Using one's own personal account in research is a type of qualitative research called autoethnography. Autoethnography is a form of ethnography. Autoethnography overlaps art and science; it is part *auto* or self and part *ethno* or culture. It is also something different from both of them, greater than its parts (Ellis, 2004). Ellis also explains that similar to ethnography, autoethnography refers to the process of actually doing the research as well as what is produced by the process. Stories are the way humans make sense of their worlds. Stories are essential to human understanding and are not unique to autoethnography. Stories are the focus of Homeric literature, oral traditions, narrative analysis, and fairy tales. "Given their importance, I argue that stories should be both a subject and a method of social science research" (Ellis, 2004, p. 32).

Autoethnography refers to writing about the personal and how it relates to culture. Autoethnography is an autobiographical way of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness. Back and forth autoethnographers gaze from a wide angle lens, focusing on outward social and cultural aspects of their personal experience; then they look inward, exposing to the world a vulnerable self that is moved by and may move through, refract, and resist cultural interpretations (Ellis, 2004).

### **Narrative Research**

“Narratives might be the term assigned to any text or discourse, or, it might be text used within the context of a mode of inquiry in qualitative research, with a specific focus on the stories told by individuals” (Creswell, 2007, p. 54). Narrative research is best for portraying in detail stories or life experiences of a single life or the lives of a small group of people. One type of narrative research is called a biographical study; this is a form of research in which the researcher writes and records the experiences of another person’s life (Creswell, 2007).

I used autoethnographic and narrative biographical material to study emerging adulthood and spiritual and personal growth beginning with my own life and experience. I then moved to study what happened to a small number of participants who share my faith and other similar background characteristics. I have intertwined my story with those of the participants.

### **Purpose of Study**

The purpose of this autoethnographic study is to understand young female adult development for women serving abroad as missionaries for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. For this study I wove narratives of my own personal experience along with the narratives of those women that I interviewed. A special focus was to examine the place of spiritual growth in shaping emerging adulthood lives. Through my own experience and from the interviews I conducted, I explored how a mission was a positive or negative experience for emerging adults.



## **CHAPTER II**

### **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

#### **Overview**

This chapter discusses the theoretical frameworks of Erik Erikson and Symbolic Interactionism, and offers an explanation of autoethnography and narrative research. It provides a review of emerging adulthood literature, an explanation of the structure and purpose of serving an LDS mission, and a brief section on moral and spiritual development in adulthood, with an emphasis on emerging adulthood. This chapter concludes with the research questions that were posed for this study.

#### **Theoretical Frameworks**

I used the Lifespan Psychosocial Theory of Erik Erikson and Symbolic Interactionism Theory for this study. Both of these theoretical frameworks applied to my own study by helping to explain the development of young adults and their identity formation while serving a mission during this emerging adulthood. These theoretical frameworks also helped to explain how individuals can be sent to the same mission, experience the same culture, language and trials, and yet come out of the experience with differing ideas and understandings.

#### **Lifespan Psychosocial Theory**

Erik Erikson became a psychoanalyst and life cycle theorist by chance. He had a brief career as an artist. In his mid-20s he became a teacher of art, history, and other

subjects to young children in an unusual school, the one associated with the Vienna Psychoanalytic Institute where the new vocation of child psychoanalysis emerged under the leadership of Anna Freud. Today no developmental theory is better known than Erikson's. The eight-stage chart of the life cycle that appeared in the first edition of *Childhood and Society* (1950) has appeared in virtually every textbook of human development, and has taken its place in a long history of life cycle ichnography (Weiland, 1993).

Erikson made substantial advances in the psychoanalytic theory of development with his new, enlarged picture of the child's tasks at each of Freud's stages. However, beyond this, he added three new stages -- those of adult years -- so the theory now encompasses the entire life cycle (Crain, 2005).

The stages I focus on here are among the later stages incorporated by Erikson. The first stage I would like to explore is called "puberty." According to Sigmund and Anna Freud, adolescence is a turbulent stage because of the dramatic physiological changes occurring at this time. Erikson described adolescents as disturbed and confused by new social conflicts and demands. The adolescent's primary task, Erikson believed, is establishing a new sense of ego identity -- this means finding oneself and finding one's place in the larger social order. Erikson describes this as the crises of identity versus role confusion (Erikson, 1968).

Erikson believed that adolescents, with their rapidly expanding mental powers, begin to feel overwhelmed by the countless options and alternatives that are before them. "Because adolescents are so uncertain about who they are, they anxiously tend to identify

with in-groups. They can become remarkably clannish, intolerant, and cruel with their exclusion of others who are ‘different’” (Erikson, 1959, p. 92).

To understand identity formation we need to understand and recognize that it is a lifelong process. In part, we form our identities through identifications. Although we are not aware of it, we identify with those who appeal to us and, therefore, become like them. “Each person’s identity is partly a synthesis of various partial identifications” (Erikson, 1959, p. 112). Identity formation is a largely unconscious process. Erikson believed that young people are often painfully aware of their inability to make lasting commitments. They feel there is too much to decide, too soon. They also feel that every decision will reduce the opportunity for future decisions and alternatives. Erikson believed that because commitment is so difficult, they (emerging adults) sometimes enter into something he referred to as a psychosocial moratorium: a kind of time out period for finding oneself (Crain, 2005).

The moratorium subject is in the crisis period with commitments rather vague; he is distinguished from the identity-diffusion subject by the appearance of an active struggle to make commitments. Issues often described as adolescent preoccupy him. Although his parents’ wishes are still important to him, he is attempting a compromise among them, society’s demands, and his own capabilities (Marcia, 1966, p. 552).

Erikson believed it was during this time period that emerging adults tend to travel, explore, and find who they are outside of their adolescent self. Erikson commented on the prolonged adolescence typical of industrialized societies and on the psychosocial

moratorium given to young people in such societies, “during which the young adult through free role experimentation may find a niche in some section of his society” (Erikson, 1968, p. 156). The time a young man or woman serves a mission for the LDS church falls directly in the same timeframe Erikson believed emerging adults enter into a psychosocial moratorium. A mission in many regards will be for a LDS emerging adult, a timeout period for finding themselves, or what we may refer to as their spiritual moratorium.

The adolescent often postpones commitments because of an inner need to avoid identity foreclosure, a premature acceptance of compartmentalized social roles.

The adolescents central tasks, then, is to find some way of life to which he or she can make a permanent commitment. The struggles of this stage lead to the new ego strength of fidelity, the ability to sustain one’s freely pledged loyalties.

(Erikson, 1964, p. 125)

Erikson’s next stage was labeled as “young adulthood.” Erikson’s stages of adult development describe steps by which people widen and deepen their capacities to love and care for others. Erikson describes the adolescent as self-centered. Adolescents are concerned with who they are and how they appear to others, along with what they will become in the future. Adolescents do become sexually attracted to others and may even fall in love; however, such attachments are most often efforts at self-definition. The adolescent is too preoccupied with who he or she is to take up the task of young adulthood – the attainment of intimacy. “Real intimacy is only possible once a reasonable sense of identity has been established. Only one who is secure with one’s

identity is able to lose oneself in true mutuality with another (Erikson, 1959, p. 95).

Erikson (1959) noted that during young adulthood some marry before they have established a good sense of identity. In these marriages young people are hoping to find themselves. According to Erikson, such marriages rarely work out. “What the individual needs is some “wisely guided insight” into the fact that one cannot expect to live intimately with another until one has become oneself” (p. 95).

Erikson is the first Freudian and one of the few developmental writers of any persuasion to propose separate stages for the adult years. Crain explained, “If his thoughts (Erikson’s thoughts on young adulthood) seem sketchy, we should remember that he was writing about an uncharted area” (Crain, 2005, p. 289).

### **Symbolic Interactionism**

**A brief history.** Central to symbolic interactionist perspective is the idea that humans share a set of commonly understood symbols, and the acquisition and generation of these symbols is at the heart of human interactions (White & Klein, 2008). Through symbolic interactionism, it is assumed that behavior can only be understood in terms of the meanings an actor attributes to it. Therefore, it may be safe to assume that meanings are learned in social settings.

Without social interactions, an individual will not develop an understanding of the meanings attached to symbols and behaviors in a society. Individuals come to understand meanings through their social interactions. According to symbolic interactionists, humans learn and grow in very complex social environments. These environments include complex sets of symbols about which individuals make evaluative distinctions.

In other words, symbols come to hold different values and meanings for each individual (White & Klein, 2008). “It is also suggested that, individual are profoundly influenced by society. Social norms, values, expectations, and patterns of behavior and interaction all contribute to the meanings one comes to understand” (White & Klein, 2008, p. 237).

George Herbert Mead was influential in symbolic interactionism and its history. He believed people’s selves are social products, and that by sharing common symbols humans adapt and survive in their environment. In describing socialization of the family, he used specifically stated interactional learning through play and games (White & Klein, 2008).

Herbert Blumer coined the term Symbolic Interactionism in 1937 and his largest contribution to the theory is the notion that human beings interpret or define each other’s actions instead of merely reacting to each other’s actions (White & Klein, 2008).

**Themes and assumptions of symbolic interactionism.** Symbolic interactionism may be said to rest on seven assumptions that reflect three central topics or themes.

Theme 1: The importance of meanings for human behavior. Assumption 1: Humans act toward things on a basis of what types of meanings those things hold for that individual.

Assumption 2: Meanings arise out of the interactions people have with each other.

Assumption 3: Meanings are handled and modified through an interpretive process used by an individual when dealing with things that he or she may encounter (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993).

Theme 2: Development of the importance of self-concept: Assumption 4: Individuals are born with a sense of self but develop self-concepts through social

interactions. Assumption 5: Self-concepts, once they are developed, provide motive for behaviors (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993).

Theme 3: Relates to symbolic interactionists' assumptions about society.

Assumption 6: Individuals and groups are influenced by other cultural and social processes. Assumption 7: It is through social interaction that a person works out the details of their own social structures (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993).

**Variations.** Although there are several prominent symbolic interaction theorists, for this study I focus on Blumer's (1969) assumption that meanings are handled in and modified through an interpretive process used by the person in dealing with things he or she encounters. Blumer postulated that the things we experience and the way we interpret those things, are related to previous experiences and social interactions. Through use of this theory I explain why one missionary who has gone through similar experiences to other missionaries will leave the field with totally different ideas, opinions, and feelings about their mission. According to symbolic interactionism each missionary has had an entirely different experience based on their past experiences and according to their own social structures. Symbolic interactionism also explains that people are influenced by larger cultural and societal processes. This means that each missionary went into the service with cultural and societal processes already in place. These multilevel processes impacted the way each person interpreted their experience. Larger cultural and societal processes may have included their families, communities, and religious influences.

According to this theory, each missionary has been influenced by society and

their families. They feel and live the social norms, feel the pressure of expectations placed upon them, and already have in place patterns of behavior that will influence the way they interpret their mission.

### **Emerging Adulthood**

Emerging adulthood is a developmental period from the late teens through the twenties, with a focus on ages 18-25. Arnett argues that emerging adulthood is neither adolescence nor young adulthood, but is theoretically and empirically distinct from them both.

Emerging adulthood is distinguished by relative independence from social roles and from normative expectations. Having left the dependency of childhood and adolescence, and having not yet entered the enduring responsibilities that are normative in adulthood, emerging adults often explore a variety of possible life directions in love, work, and worldviews. Emerging adulthood is a time of life when many different directions remain possible, when little about the future has been decided for certain, when the scope of independent exploration of life's possibilities is greater for most people than it will be at any other period of the life course. (Arnett, 2000, p. 469)

The latest phenomenon in the dense set of life-course transitions in early adulthood is the "return to the nest." The likelihood that young adults in the U.S. return home for four months or more after having been away for at least that length of time increased from 22% to about 40% between the 1920s and the 1980s (Goldscheider &



Goldscheider, 1994).

Most young Americans leave home by age 18 or 19. In the years that follow, emerging adults' living situations are diverse. About one third of emerging adults go off to college after high school and spend the next several years in some combination of independent living and continued reliance on adults, for example, in a college dormitory or a fraternity or sorority house (Goldscheider & Goldscheider, 1994). For emerging adults, this is a period of semiautonomy (Goldscheider & Davanzo, 1986) as they take on some of the responsibilities of independent living but leave other responsibilities to their parents, college authorities, or other adults. About 40% move out of their parental home for independent living and full-time work. Some remain at home while attending college or working or some combination of the two (Goldscheider & Goldscheider, 1994).

The transition from college to career has changed drastically over the past 20 years as postponement of major decisions relating to work, family, and responsibility, in general, has become the norm among many sectors of the U.S. population (Arnett, 2000). Emerging adults have postponed adult roles and responsibilities for further exploration of unusual work and educational possibilities. This period of time characterizes the first few years out of college in which recent graduates spend time exploring their life options (Murphy, Blustein, Bohlig, & Platt, 2010). While emerging adults begin to explore their life options, they seem to find themselves in a sort of in-between period. Often times emerging adults feel they are neither adults nor adolescents.

Emerging adults do not see themselves as adolescents, but many of them also do not see themselves entirely as adults. When emerging adults are asked whether

they feel they have reached adulthood, the majority of Americans in their late teens and early twenties answer neither no or yes but the ambiguous in some respects yes, in some respects no. This reflects a subjective sense on the part of most emerging adults that they have left adolescence but have not yet completely entered young adulthood. They have no name for the period they are in -- because the society they live in has no name for it -- so they regard themselves as being neither adolescents nor adults, in between the two but not really one or the other (Arnett, 2000, p. 471).

The focus on identity issues in emerging adulthood can be seen in several different areas. These areas include: love, work, and worldviews. According to Arnett (2000), identity formation involves trying out various life possibilities and gradually moving towards making long-term decisions. In all three areas: love, work, and worldviews, the process begins in adolescence but takes place mainly in emerging adulthood.

Beyond love, work, and worldviews, there is evidence from other areas that suggests emerging adults show heightened risk-taking behaviors (Arnett, 2000). Although there is a voluminous literature on adolescent risk behavior and relatively little research on risk behavior in emerging adulthood (Jessor, Donovan, & Costa, 1991), the prevalence of several types of risk behavior peaks not during adolescence but during the years encompassing emerging adulthood (ages 18-25). These risk behaviors include: unprotected sex, most types of substance use, and risky driving behaviors such as driving at high speeds or while intoxicated (Arnett, 2000). Emerging adults vary in their

behaviors and in how they approach identity exploration.

Emerging adults are distinctive demographically, subjectively, and in terms of their approach to identity exploration. With the increase in opportunities and the decrease of immediate responsibilities, many emerging adults hit the ground running as they exit college, viewing the multitude of options as exciting and empowering. Others seemingly become psychologically paralyzed, listless, and in more extreme cases, depressed as they leave college in search of their identity, which is often most clearly manifested in the exploration of a meaningful career. (Murphy et al., 2010, p. 174)

#### Emerging adulthood

can be a turning point: some young people who falter and flounder during the transition come from the ranks of well-functioning adolescents; likewise, some troubled adolescents demonstrate a turnabout through successful experiences with the new opportunities and tasks of this transition. (Murphy et al., 2010, p. 175)

It is during this time period that some emerging adults enter the military, others pursue graduation education, and others serve missions for their church.

### **Spiritual and Moral Development in Emerging Adults**

As individuals transition to emerging adulthood, they become more committed to religion and their religious beliefs: however, it is during emerging adulthood that a marked decline in religious participation has been shown. There is also a marked reduction in religious attendance during this time period. Many emerging adults tend to

question their religious beliefs and become skeptical of religious institutions during this time period. Some researchers attribute this to identity exploration and changing worldviews (Barry & Nelson, 2008).

Despite this dearth of religious participation during emerging adulthood, it has been documented that subsets of individuals during this period have deeply held religious beliefs (Barry & Nelson, 2008, p. 509). A study conducted by Arnett and Jensen (2002) revealed that 82% of individuals in their early to mid-twenties claim that their religious beliefs are important to them. Also, of that sample, 48% considered themselves to be either a Protestant conservative or liberal Christian, 29% deist, and only 24% were agnostic/atheist. Part of the process of exploration, in the view of most emerging adults, is forming a distinctive set of beliefs about religious issues. Several studies have indicated that deciding on one's own beliefs and values is one of the criteria young people view as most important to becoming an adult (Arnett & Jensen, 2002).

Recent research examining students attending Brigham Young University (BYU), a private university owned and operated by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS, Mormon), found that young Mormons tend to (a) endorse certain criteria, (b) hold certain beliefs, and (c) engage in behaviors that appear to differ from their emerging-adult peers in the United States. (Barry & Nelson, 2005, p. 116)

The study conducted at this university concluded that Mormon students tend to be experiencing the opposite to national trends, including adopting religious beliefs (rather than religious liberalism), emphasizing emotional control (rather than impulse

expression), and supporting and fostering interdependence (rather than autonomy). This was not reported as either positive or negative, but rather strongly emphasizes the impact of culture, especially when it is instituted in a place like a university, can have on development (Barry & Nelson, 2005).

Recent work has suggested that individuals engage in their most extensive identity exploration during emerging adulthood. For individuals attending residential colleges, this period of exploration may be intensified by the experience of living away from home, living in an environment surrounded by many social, political, religious, and interest-related activities. One area of development that is especially impressionable during this period of maturation is religiosity (Lefkowitz et al., 2004).

### **The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Missionary Program**

#### **Your Calling**

Missionaries are expected to fulfill what the President of the Church expects of them as expressed in a letter each missionary receives at the beginning of their mission.

A missionary's call letter explains:

You have been recommended as one worthy to represent the Lord as a minister of the restored gospel. You will be an official representative of the church. As such, you will be expected to maintain the highest standards of conduct and appearance by keeping the commandments, living missionary rules, and following the counsel of your mission president. You will also be expected to devote all your time and attention to serving the Lord, leaving all other personal affairs behind. (The

Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2006, p. 4)

Women missionaries for the LDS church submit their papers as candidates for a mission when they turn age 21. They are allowed to submit them any time after the age of 21. The women missionaries serve an 18 month mission. Women in the church are not expected to serve missions; it is completely voluntary. Men who serve for the LDS church as missionaries submit their papers when they are 19. All worthy men in the church are expected to serve a 24 month mission. Once men and women are serving as missionaries they are all expected to live by the same rules and guidelines.

### **Missionary Purpose**

What is my purpose as a missionary? The purpose of a Mormon missionary is to “Invite others to come unto Christ by helping them receive the restored gospel through faith in Jesus Christ and His Atonement, repentance, baptism, receiving the gift of the Holy Ghost, and enduring to the end” (The First Presidency, 2004, p. 1). Being a missionary comes with a responsibility to live worthy of the calling. As the Lord’s representative, a missionary is to be “an example of the believers” (1 Timothy 4:12). A missionary strives to live according to God’s commandments and keep the covenants they made in the temple; a missionary should know the scriptures; be courteous, on time, and dependable; follow missionary standards of conduct, dress, and grooming; love the people with whom they serve and work. According to church standards a missionary honors Christ’s name with their actions (The First Presidency, 2004, p. 4). According to the leaders of the church, a missionary can know they are successful when they:

Feel the Spirit testify to people through you, love people and desire their

salvation, obey with exactness, live so that you can receive and know how to follow the Spirit, who will show you where to go, what to do, and what to say; develop Christlike attributes, work effectively every day, and seek earnestly to learn and improve, help build up the church wherever you are assigned to work, warn people of the consequences of sin, invite them to make and keep commitments, teach and serve other missionaries, go about doing good and serving people at every opportunity, whether or not they accept your message. (The First Presidency, 2004, pp. 10-11)

### **Mission Rules**

Missionaries are called to a specific mission. There are currently 340 missions worldwide. Once a missionary arrives at their designated area, they are then assigned to a specific city or area. These specific areas are called “proselyting areas.” They represent the Church in those specific areas. If for any reason they need to leave their area, permission from leaders is required. Missionaries strive to live the highest standards of obedience and conduct. They are asked to keep words, thoughts, and action in harmony with the message of the Lord’s gospel. Missionaries should be conscious of how they speak, and strive for humility, dignity, and simplicity in their language. They should avoid slang and inappropriately casual language (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2006).

The church expects missionaries to adhere to specific dress and grooming standards. Men are expected to wear a suit and tie every day. Shoes should be modest and of a dark color. Hair is to be kept relatively short. Extreme or faddish styles are not

appropriate. They cannot wear earrings, necklaces, or any kind of bracelets. Tattoos, nose rings, other body piercings, or toe rings are not acceptable. Women missionaries are to maintain a high standard of modesty. Women missionaries are expected to wear, skirt and blouse combinations, skirt and jacket, or dresses. Accessories should be simple and should not attract attention. They cannot wear more than one earring in each ear. Hair and makeup should be attractive but not call attention to itself (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2006).

Missionaries live by a specific schedule that is not to be altered unless authorized by the missionaries' mission president. The schedule is as follows: Everyday a missionary rises at 6:30 a.m., they eat on a schedule taking an hour for lunch and an hour for dinner, and every night missionaries return to their homes at 9:00 p.m.

The missionary handbook and rules state

Do not watch television, go to movies, listen to the radio or use the internet (except to communicate with your family or your mission president or as otherwise authorized). Watch only videos or DVD's that have been authorized by the Church or your mission president. Listen only to music that is consistent with the sacred spirit of your calling. (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2006)

Missionaries preach the gospel two by two. They are never to be alone. It is extremely important that missionaries stay with their companion at all times. Staying together means staying within sight and sound of each other. The only times missionaries should be separated from their assigned companion is when they are in an



interview with the mission president, on a companion exchange, or in the bathroom.

Missionaries are never to be alone with, flirt with, or associate in any other inappropriate way with anyone of the opposite sex. They are not allowed to telephone, write, email, or accept calls or letters from anyone of the opposite sex living within or near mission boundaries. Companionships should not visit or accept rides from individuals of the opposite sex unless another responsible adult of their own sex is also present (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2006).

Missionaries may telephone their parents on Christmas and one other time during the year (usually Mother's Day), according to guidelines from the mission president. Other than these calls, telephone calls to family members or friends are forbidden without permission from the mission president. Visits from family members, friends, and acquaintance are against Church policy. The impact of such visits may extend far beyond the visit itself, both before and after the visit and among other missionaries. It can often take some time for missionaries to refocus on the work they are supposed to do (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2006).

### **Research Questions**

The purpose of this qualitative study is to understand emerging female adult development for women serving abroad as missionaries for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. I will focus on spiritual and personal growth in young adulthood. I will examine development of self-confidence and spiritual growth in women through serving a mission. Through my own experience and from the interviews I conduct, I will

explore how a mission is a positive or negative experience for young adults, which enables them to grow in a numbers of ways. These ways may include confidence, maturity, spirituality, leadership, personal relationship, career goals, and material goals.

The questions that will guide this study are as follows:

1. Why do emerging adult women decide to serve a mission for the LDS church?
2. What are experiences during the mission that helped emerging adult women develop as a person spiritually?
3. How do missions help or deter the development of emerging adults? What aspects of development do missions cultivate?
4. How does a mission shape who a person is today?

## **CHAPTER III**

### **METHODS**

#### **Overview of Research Design**

The methodologies chosen for this research were autoethnography and narrative. I used autoethnography and narratives to study emerging adulthood and spiritual and personal growth. This study began with my own life and experience, and then moved to examine what happened to a small number of participants who shared my faith, other background characteristics, and the same mission setting. Because autoethnography and narrative research are not commonly understood, I included a more in-depth review of the topic below.

#### **Autoethnography and Narrative Research**

Carolyn Ellis (2004) explained that qualitative research is a label that refers to a variety of research techniques and procedures associated with the goal of trying to understand the complexities of the social science world in which we live by exploring how we act and think, and make meaning in our lives. Qualitative research practices emphasize getting close to those we study, attempting to see the world through participant's eyes, and conveying the experience in a way faithful to their everyday lives (Ellis, 2004).

Qualitative methods include participant observation, interview, life histories, focus groups, and grounded theory. Qualitative methods also include, "autoethnographic,

phenomenological, narrative, performative, visual, and most ethnomethodological and feminist methods; particular forms of documentary, content, discourse, and conversational analysis research; and some critical, cultural studies, and social action research” (Ellis, 2004, p. 25). In this study I use two qualitative methods: autoethnography and narrative.

Ethnography studies an entire culture group. Ethnography is a qualitative design in which researchers describe and interpret the shared and learned patterns of values, behaviors, beliefs, and language of a culture-sharing group. Ethnography studies the meaning of the behavior, the language, and the interactions among members of the culture-sharing group (Creswell, 2007).

Ethnography is that form of inquiry and writing that produces descriptions and accounts about the ways of life of the writer and those written about (Denzin, 1996). Ethnographic writings in the twentieth century have been more focused on intense reflection, “messy texts,” or short stories and narratives of the self. These “messy texts” are often grounded in the study of epiphanal moments in people’s lives. The focus is on those events, narratives, and stories people tell one another to make sense of the epiphanies or existential turning-points in their lives (Denzin, 1996).

Autoethnography has been defined as part art and part science, but it has also been described as something all its own. Autoethnography is part auto or self and part ethno or culture (Ellis, 2004). Autoethnographies are usually written in first person voice. Autoethnographic texts appear in a number of forms, and can be written as short stories, poetry, fiction, novels, photographic essays, scripts, personal essay, journals,

fragmented and layered writing, and social science prose. Social science often uses the term now to refer to stories that feature the self or that include the researcher as a character (Ellis, 2004).

Narrative research has many forms, uses a variety of analytic practices, and is rooted in different social and humanities disciplines. “Narrative might be a term assigned to any text or discourse, or, it might be text used within the context of a mode of inquiry in qualitative research, with a specific focus on the stories told by individuals” (Creswell, 2007, p. 54). Creswell notes that the procedure for implementing this research consists of focusing the study on one or two individuals, and then the researcher gathers stories about that individual, and reports individual experiences and meanings from those experiences (Creswell, 2007).

Narrative refers to the stories people tell – they are a way people organize their experiences into temporally meaningful episodes. Ellis discussed three ways analysis takes place in narrative, which she calls, “narrative analysis, thematic analysis of narrative, and structural analysis of narrative” (2004, p. 195). Narrative analysis assumes that a good story itself is theoretical. Researchers present their stories as case studies, life histories, biographies, or autoethnographies. Thematic analysis refers to treating a story as data and using the data to arrive at themes that illuminate the content and hold within or across stories. The third kind of analysis occurs when researchers address questions such as what strategies did the storyteller use to reach the audience or convince oneself, or to find one’s way in the world (Ellis, 2004).

According to Ellis, these approaches can be combined in several ways. She

explained “you may simply want to position yourself in your research by telling your story, then move to analyzing the stories of others, which you connect back to your story. Your focus would be on analysis of narrative” (Ellis, 2004). Telling my story and situating it in the stories of fellow LDS missionaries was the intended outcome of the study.

Laura Ellingson (1998) wrote a narrative called “Then You Know How I Feel: Empathy, Identification, and Reflexivity in Fieldwork.” In this study, Ellingson conducted research in an oncology clinic after she had experienced surviving cancer herself. She explored how her experience shaped how she understood staff and patients; how viewing the clinic from different viewpoints affected her understanding of it; and how this process affected her own understanding of her own experience as a cancer survivor. Ellingson explained her research saying:

This is a confessional tale in that I am writing ethnographically about my experiences during the beginning stages of an ongoing study. While many confessional tales have as their goal the reassurance of the reader that my findings are “uncontaminated” and hence “scientific” and “valid,” I have as my goal the opposite: to reassure the reader that my findings are thoroughly contaminated. This contamination with my own lived experiences results in a rich, complex understanding of the staff and patients in the clinic I am observing. (1998, p. 4)

Like Ellingson’s work, my research was “contaminated” with my own story, and my own experience, which gave me a deeper, more meaningful understanding of the

experiences of those participating in the research. Through this approach I, therefore, used both autoethnographic and narrative research.

## Sample

### Description

This research explored young adult development for women serving abroad as missionaries for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The sample consisted of five women, all of whom shared my faith and other similar background characteristics. Demographic information was supplied by each participant in response to a brief questionnaire (Appendix A).

All five participants had served a full-time mission for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The mean age for participants in this study was 26.2 ( $SD = .84$ ). The mean length of time participants have been members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was 26.2 ( $SD = .84$ ). The participants now range in age from 24 to 27. The average number of immediate family members, including parents and siblings who served a mission for the church was 3.4 ( $SD = 1.14$ ). The length of time each participant had been home from their mission was an average of 3.7 years ( $SD = .97$ ). One participant was married, one was divorced, and three were single. One participant had a graduate degree, one had some graduate school, two had a bachelor's degree, and the fifth had some college. The occupations of the participants were school teacher, humanitarian/nonprofit sector worker, administrative, student, and housewife. All reported comfortable financial levels. All participants were from the United States and

had served in the same mission, the Taipei, Taiwan mission during the same time period or with some overlap with my mission. The participants were chosen with these similarities in mind for several reasons: (a) because all served in the same area they are likely to have faced similar challenges and difficulties adapting to an unfamiliar culture. An example of a common challenge is learning the language required to participate in this particular mission (Mandarin, Chinese), and (b) having served during the same time period also helped to ensure participants had as much situational experience in common as possible. Creswell explained that one needs to find one or more individuals who are accessible, willing to provide information, and distinctive for their accomplishments and ordinariness that can shed light on the specific issue being studied (Creswell, 2007).

### **Sample Selection**

A purposive sample was used given the goals and sample necessary for this study. Participants were selected by myself from a pool of women all of whom I met and served with as a missionary in Taiwan. I selected four individuals for this study and included myself as a fifth participant. Creswell (2007) explained that for a narrative sample an individual is usually chosen, and for an ethnography, members of a culture-sharing group or individuals representative of the group are preferred. It has been approximately three years since the completion of their missions. Given the time lapse, some participants used journals as springboards for their storytelling.

I contacted women who fit the criteria for this research via phone, email, and Facebook<sup>®</sup>. Initially I contacted all participants via an inbox on Facebook<sup>®</sup>. The first four I contacted agreed to participate. Once the participants agreed to participate in the



study other means of communication were used: phone, email, Skype<sup>®</sup>, and Facebook<sup>®</sup>. After I contacted them all, I asked if they would be willing to participate in a research study that I would be conducting for my thesis. I informed each one of the thesis topic and explained that I wished to interview them. I explained they should not feel obligated to participate and that this study would be for personal experiences from the mission field. They were all informed that they would be granted anonymity if included in the study. To ensure anonymity, all participants were given a pseudonym.

After the sample of women had been recruited, I emailed each participant the questions (Appendix B) I planned to ask them in the interview. Because this study was narrative, I asked the participants to tell me stories to gain better insight into the questions I asked them. I felt that most people were more comfortable having some time before the interview to ponder what experiences they wanted to share that would best portray their personal growth and mission experiences.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

After the participants were selected and they each had the interview questions in hand, I started the interview process. Each participant was interviewed once and interviewed individually. All participants but one traveled to my home where I conducted the interview. One participant is currently living in Paris, France. Her interview was conducted via Skype<sup>®</sup>. Each interview was audio-recorded and later transcribed.

My personal experience as not only a missionary but also as a missionary serving during the same time as many of the participants allowed me to understand better the

participants and their experiences. I also felt that because we served together and were acquainted at a more intimate level than most research/participant relationships, the participants felt more comfortable sharing personal things that added to the data collection and analysis procedure. Scholars have supported this model of conducting narrative research.

Moving away from the orthodox model of distance and separation, interactive interviewers often encourage self-disclosure and emotionality on the part of the researcher. Researcher involvement can help subjects feel more comfortable sharing information and close the hierarchical gap between researchers and respondents that traditional interviewing encourages. (Ellis & Berger, 2001, p. 851)

Each participant was given two copies of the IRB approval information form (Appendix C), one of which was for their records. The interview began as soon as the consent form had been reviewed. For the Skype<sup>®</sup> interview I read aloud the consent form and her consent was given verbally. I also emailed her a copy of the informed consent form. A brief survey seeking demographic data was completed by each participant, including myself (Appendix A).

### **Data Analysis Process**

Creswell (2007) has suggested analyzing narrative data by gathering participants' stories, and then "restory(ing)" them into a framework that makes sense. Restorying is a process in which the stories gathered are reorganized into a more general type of

framework. This process may include analyzing them for key elements of the story and then rewriting them within a chronological order. From the chronology of narrative research one can analyze basic elements of the story; these may include things that would typically be found in a novel. These involve a predicament, conflict, or struggle; a protagonist, or main character; and a sequence with implied causality (Creswell, 2007). Beyond the chronology a researcher might detail themes that emerge from the data that may provide more detailed discussion of the meaning of the story.

Carolyn Ellis (2004) has suggested writing one's own story first as field notes organized chronologically. Following this step, Ellis also suggests reading other personal stories as well as analyses of whatever is being studied.

By writing my own story first and later analyzing other woman's stories, I extracted from the data specific themes about development and change. Once the data had been collected, I searched for patterned regularities in the data and derived themes from these regularities. I took successive passes through the data and progressed from simple categories and concepts to patterns of thought and eventually to development of themes. These themes may have included personal growth, spiritual growth, being tested, feeling fear, and so forth. To assist me in this process, data were organized with the help of a word processor.

Throughout interviews with each of my participants I prompted them to give me more in-depth answers and asked them to elaborate and reflect on the story they had chosen to share. By asking participants to reflect on certain experiences I was able to have a more in-depth interview with answers that applied directly to my research

questions. After each interview had been conducted and my own stories had been recorded, I transcribed all interviews. After transcription I began to search for the patterned regularities and continued to develop the themes. Once this was completed, I organized the data according to research questions and re-storied as necessary. The answer to each research question is organized by primary themes that emerged from the stories told by myself and my participants, with relevant stories as illustrations of these themes.

### **Validation Strategies**

Given that the data for this research is narrative, how those stories are told and retold may reasonably occur in different ways. It would be misguided then, to attempt to empirically validate this type of qualitative data for consistency or stability (Sandelowski, 1991). Creswell (2007) also explained that reliability can be addressed in qualitative studies if the researcher employs a good way of recording word for word what the participants have to say. He also suggests that the recordings need to be transcribed to indicate the trivial, but often crucial, pauses and overlaps.

Interview transcriptions were reviewed to ensure consistency. After transcription and my write-up had been completed, I took portions of the write-up of other's stories and asked those participants for feedback and validation of their authenticity.

Creswell suggested several strategies in validation. Prolonged engagement and persistent observation in the field include building trust with the participants, learning the culture, and checking for misinformation that stems from distortions introduced by the

researchers or informants (Creswell, 2007). Although I was not “in the field” for prolonged periods during this study, I was engaged for long periods of time with many of the participants, and the trust that was built while we served side by side was beneficial in the validation of this study.

Creswell also suggested clarifying researcher bias from the outset of the study so the reader understands the researcher’s position and any biases or assumptions that impact the inquiry (Creswell, 2007, p. 208). Writing my own story first, and then examining it for views that might differ from those of other participants allowed me to journal my biases and bracket them as I analyzed others’ stories and data.

My committee chair acted as colleague or peer reviewer of the research process and data analysis. The committee chair reviewed portions of taped interviews, transcribed interviews, and the restorying of narrative data along with the emerging coding scheme. Once the narrative data had been restoried, it was sent back to the participants to get their feedback regarding my representation of their experiences. Once the participants had reviewed the narrative data they responded with positive feedback about the story’s accuracy. There were no changes made to the data after the participants had reviewed it. After this had been completed the student researcher and committee chair discussed emerging findings. Discrepancies were discussed and resolved. This process made for a more reliable analysis.

### **Ethical Considerations**

“We consciously consider ethical issues – seeking consent, avoiding the

conundrum of deception, maintaining confidentiality, and protecting the anonymity of individuals with whom we speak” (Creswell, 2007, p. 44). Confidentiality was maintained by first providing each participant with the Utah State University approved consent form explaining the purpose of the research, the nature of possible risks and benefits of the research, and the conditions surrounding the security of taped and transcribed interviews (in a locked filing cabinet that only the researcher had access). Each participant received an alias in order to protect the privacy of the individuals involved. Before the interview each participant was informed of all questions asked during the interview in order to avoid deception or discomfort.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **RESULTS**

This chapter is organized according to research question. Each section begins with the research question followed by an explanation of the themes and categories.

Following the explanations of themes and categories are stories based on the experiences of the participants in this study. I chose specific stories as they illustrated and answered each research question. My own accounts are included in each section. I am the only participant not using a pseudonym and as such my accounts will be labeled “Nichole.”

#### **Research Question One**

Why do emerging adults decide to serve a mission? “It was the right decision to serve a mission” is the theme I have chosen for this research question. The categories included in this theme are: receiving spiritual confirmation, others’ encouragement, having a change of heart, and searching for adventure. All but one sister missionary told how she had received a definite spiritual confirmation that the decision to serve a mission was what she needed to do. All women experienced encouragement from others to make this decision. The encouragement came from direct suggestions to serve or simple conversations with others about mission stories and experiences. All women but one had experienced a change of heart in their desire to serve before they served their missions. All but one expressed never having the desire to serve but after their experiences, they felt a change of heart.

### **Nichole – Long Time Coming**

I could never shake the feeling or the idea of a mission. No, I did not always want to serve a mission. In fact, I had my life planned out and a mission was nowhere in the future for me. Let me tell you about three experiences that may help you understand why I finally made this decision.

I am early for class; I sit outside the classroom waiting. I pick up my phone to call my mom; it's been difficult being away from her. I am a sophomore in college and I'm still getting used to living away from home. The phone rings and she picks up on the other line. We talk about this and that for some time and the conversation eventually turns to what I would be doing in the near future. Like most moms seem to be so good at, she begins to gently nudge me and prod me into talking about my feelings towards serving a mission. "I just think it may be something you should consider." I can feel the irritation rising in my chest, I feel like we have talked about this before but she doesn't seem to be listening. I sit for a moment thinking of how I can let her down gently. Finally I decide there is no sugar coating the way I really feel. "Mom, listen, I'll be totally honest with you. I have thought about it, but it's not for me. I am never going to serve a mission." "Why are you so definite in your answer with this? I think it would be so good for you. I think you would have a wonderful experience." "I'm sure it would be Mom, but I just don't see it happening for me." I think a lot of Mormon girls at my age have at least thought about a mission; at 21 if you are not married people begin to ask if you will serve a mission. It's almost impossible not to think about it while people are constantly bombarding you with the question, "So are you going to go on a mission?" I



continue to explain to my Mom, “It’s just not something I have a desire to do at all.” She sighs, “Well desires can change.” I can’t help but roll my eyes and reply, “Don’t count on it.” We can both feel the tension rising a little and we both silently opt for a change of subject.

After I hang up the phone, the conversation about a mission makes its way back into my mind. This thought is accompanied by a feeling. I don’t like this feeling, and it’s a feeling like maybe, somewhere inside of me I know I need to go. I make a conscious decision to ignore this feeling. I have my four years all planned out and a mission is not included in it. Besides, I don’t want to go, and as a girl, I don’t have to go.

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“This is my first semester back.” She looks at me as if I am supposed to know what she means. “Back from what?” I ask. “Oh, sorry I just assume sometimes, just back from my mission. Are you Mormon?” She asks a little bit apprehensively. I am sitting on the floor in one of the oldest buildings on campus, Old Main. It’s one of my favorite buildings on campus, all you have to do is walk into Old Main and you can feel the languages and history that are taught here in the air. We are waiting for class to start. I don’t know what I was thinking signing up for Latin, but here I am waiting to be tortured by Latin declensions and vocabulary words. Mary has become a friend of mine from this class. She is pretty, with brown hair and brown eyes. She is smart and really nice to work with. I am glad I have her in this class. This is the first time we have ever really discussed our personal lives. I give Mary a smile like, don’t worry I’m not offended you asked me and say, “Yeah, I’m Mormon. I had no idea you served a mission! Where did

you go?” Her face glows as she tells me, “I served in New Zealand, I loved it!” She continues to tell me a few things about her mission. I can’t help but notice how her entire body dances with enthusiasm as she talks. I can hardly get a word in; “oh wow” and “that’s amazing” seem to be all I can squeeze in. As caught up in her stories as I am, I begin to take note of my own reaction to this conversation. My heart is burning, and I feel like it keeps catching on something. I begin to look at Mary with a new respect. Mary sighs, “Anyway, I have been talking for too long.” She glances at her watch and says, “Oh, we better hurry in, we are going to be late!” I stand up and I reach down for my backpack. Silently I think to myself how amazing her experiences were. Next I catch myself by surprise when I feel a pang of jealousy run through my chest. Next, almost as if my inner voice were mocking me, it says, how odd to be jealous of something you could so easily do. The thoughts move on as I sit in class and try my best to concentrate on translating the Latin version of the Christmas story into English.

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I am bursting with excitement. “Hello?” said the voice on the other end of the line. “Hi, how are you?” I can’t wait for him to answer my question, “I have some news.” He laughs at not even having a chance to answer my first question. “Ok, what is your news? Are you engaged?” Now it’s my turn to laugh. “No, no way. Do you remember a long time ago when you said if I served a mission you would serve a mission?” There is a pause, “Yes. I remember that.” I’m literally bouncing up and down while talking, “Well you better get your papers ready because I am going!” Another pause. “Are you serious? What? When? When did you decide to do this?” The news is

out, I can sit down now. “I just decided a few days ago, but I have already started my papers.” “I can’t believe this. Why did you decide to go?” “Well, I think it has been coming on for a little while now. I don’t know. I just have not been very happy lately. I couldn’t figure out what was wrong with me. I felt down and depressed, and you know that’s not me! I had a really bad week a few weeks ago and every time I was thinking about the future I was drawing blanks.” I am interrupted when he says, “are you sure you have thought this through? I mean are you sure?” I laugh, “yes, I have thought this through, let me walk you through what happened last Sunday and maybe this will make a little more sense to you.” He responds, “Do tell.”

“Well it is Sunday and I am getting ready to leave for church. I start to think back on the past few weeks and how sad and depressed I have been. It makes me seriously start to consider my life and what I want to do with myself. I finish my toast with honey and start for my bedroom. I need to grab my purse and a few other items before I leave for church. I round the corner to my room when a thought comes to my mind so clearly and so strongly, it stops me in my tracks. The thought says to me, go on a mission. My hand goes to my throat as if to protect myself. Protect myself from what? From a mission of course! They are hard; I would be leaving behind my family, my friends, school, boys, basically my life. All these thoughts are streaming through my mind faster than the speed of light. The thought once more comes to me, overpowering all these other thoughts, and it seems to speak peace to both my mind and my heart.

“That is basically how it happened, and I’m telling you, I have not felt this kind of peace in weeks, and I wonder if I have felt so out of sorts because the Lord has been

trying to tell me that I'm in the wrong place. Maybe I need to make some changes; maybe I really need to consider going on a mission?" He replies, "Ok, well did you pray about this? I mean this is huge. You could have just been having a "moment" or something ya know?" I purse my lips. "Don't be irritating. Of course I prayed. Let me finish my story." "Ok, sorry, please continue."

"I continue on to my bedroom. I shut the door and kneel down next to my bed. I can't believe I'm going to do this, but I can't shake the feeling or the thought, it's so poignant in my mind. I close my eyes and I pray. I pray that I might know if this thought is what I am indeed supposed to do. I have never had this desire before, but it may just be the answer I have been searching for. I start my prayer, but I don't even get through it before I realize what I need to do. I have my answer. I have had my answer for months. I have just been ignoring it! I stand up. My mind has been made within seconds. If a mission is where the Lord wants me, than a mission is where I am going."

"And so you have your answer. Wow, that is crazy! You are going to be an awesome missionary, Nichole. I am happy for you." I smile into the phone. "Thanks, I'm really excited."

### **Jane – Growing Desire**

Over the last couple months I have been fasting and praying for guidance. I want to make sure this decision is the right one for me. Today I find myself in the temple. It's a beautiful building where everyone speaks in hushed, reverent voices. Everyone is dressed in white and people are walking in out of the room with smiles of contentment. I glance at a woman sitting near me. She is seated in an over-stuffed chair, covered in a

beautiful flower patterned cloth. Her hands are folded neatly in her lap and her eyes are closed in peaceful thought and meditation. I like to come here when I have big decisions to make, and I always find peace and comfort here as well.

I think back on the past year. I had been dating someone, and writing to a missionary at the same time; oops. I had not felt the spark I was looking for with either, and when both relationships were over I realized I had a bright, open future. I was the one who had ended both relationships. It was difficult to end them, but at the same time once I had said goodbye to them, I felt so free. I wanted adventure, I wanted to see and do things. I realized there was nothing holding me back, and the Peace Corps was front and center on my brain. I had always wanted to serve in the Peace Corps, and as I began to think about it another thought continually came to mind. I began to wonder if I should serve a mission. These thoughts surprised me; in high school I had what I would consider a “struggling testimony.” I came to college at Brigham Young University and gradually my testimony was growing in strength. It seemed that no matter where I went or who I was talking with, the conversation of a mission was brought up continually. I finally decided I better start to think about a mission more seriously. I set a date in March as the time when I would begin to fast, pray, and decide if a mission is what I was going to do.

It’s now March. I sit back in my chair and raise my eyes to the ceiling. In my mind, the question that has been lurking for months is turning circles. I feel like the words “should I go on a mission?” are bouncing on my brain’s screen saver. My head is still tipped back and I close my eyes to try to focus a little better. Once my eyes are

closed and I can hear nothing but the quietness the temple offers, a feeling begins to descend on me. It's like warm water being poured over me and I feel an intense peace settle over my mind and heart. The words in my mind stop, and it's not a question anymore, it's a statement. Go on a mission. Slowly a tear trickles down my cheek, and I realize, I have my answer.

This answer is going to be something that will stick with me for the remainder of my mission. This answer had to be strong; it had to be something I would remember. This answer would serve as a foundation for why I served a mission, and a memory that would help propel me through more difficult times on my mission.

### **Emma– Encouraging Encounters**

We sit together on the sofa and watch as the news continues to come in about a horrible tsunami that has hit in Indonesia. I have been dating Tanner on and off and I'm glad he is sitting next to me as I see horrific stories about loved ones being ripped from each other in the tsunami's terrible rage. I hug his arm and lay my head on his shoulder. I feel like crying.

We turn the television off and talk for a while about what we have just seen. Tanner looks at me, his chocolate brown eyes melt my heart every time. He says, "Have you ever thought about serving a mission?" His question shocks. "No, I have never considered it." I giggle as I tell him. "I always thought I would be married by now. I am after all reaching the age in our culture of ripe old maid." We both laugh, and he becomes serious once again. "You know Emma, if you were to go on a mission, who knows, you could be called to serve somewhere in Asia where they could really use you

right now.” I’m not sure why, but this comment strikes at my heart. In fact it penetrates so deeply I decide I am going to start looking into serving a mission immediately. I have never really seen myself as the missionary type and when I think of missionaries I usually pictures men as missionaries, not women. Our attention turns once more to the television, but my mind is far away. My brother’s face comes to my mind. He is serving in Chicago right now. He has told me that his mission has been the hardest thing he has ever done, but the best decision he has ever made. He had also been encouraging me to serve. Tanner’s comment seems to be the final straw, and I feel like somewhere inside of me I have already made my decision.

Elizabeth’s account below is different from all other participants. Where others had never had a desire, she always had a desire. Where others reported receiving a strong spiritual confirmation, she did not report that at all. The only similarity I found in her report with the others is the encouragement she received from those around her.

### **Elizabeth – Hoping for Asia**

I have always wanted to serve a mission. When I was 12 years old I remember sitting in my Sunday school class and my teacher giving a lesson on missionaries. I remember sitting there thinking, I want to do that. I know it’s not something that is expected of girls or anything like that, but I just really want to go.

A few years ago we had a family friend stay with us; she had served a mission in Slovenia. I would sit on the end of her bed at night and we would chat about anything that came to our minds. She would often tell me about her mission and how exciting it was. I can still picture her in my mind as I did on those nights, riding her bike through

foreign streets I could only dream about.

I am now standing in a foreign street, weaving my way back to my apartment. I have been living in China on a study abroad program. I love it here. Everything is an adventure and I find myself mystified by the culture that surrounds me. Right before I left for China my parents informed me that they are getting ready to serve a mission, in fact I'm sure by now their papers have been submitted. Once I arrived here, I started giving the mission thing some serious consideration, and I have decided I want to go as well. I think it will be fun to serve at the same time as my parents. I know we most likely will not get called to the same place, but it will be nice to be serving together. It will make it easier knowing I'm not missing out on them being home. We will be in this together.

As I continue on my way, I stop to buy a boazi; it is a delicious meat-filled dough. The aroma of it makes my mouth water. I hand the man selling boazi a few coins and smile at him as he stares at me for far too long. People here stare at me all the time. I have bright, thick blonde hair and large blue eyes. Many people in China have no qualms with staring at me; they rarely see people with my coloring. I don't mind it really; I just think it's funny. Now that I have decided to serve I begin to wonder where I could possibly be sent. Secretly I hope it is somewhere foreign. I love China and would love to come back here or somewhere in this general area, I also wouldn't mind going somewhere and learning Spanish. I try to clear these thoughts from my mind. If I get my mind set on one thing or one place I may be disappointed in my call when it comes and I don't want that to happen.



I dig my keys out of my purse and I unlock the heavy metal gate that opens into the courtyard of my apartment complex. I open the door and smile to myself thinking of my families' faces when they find out what I have done. Nobody at home knows I have decided to serve a mission, nobody at home knows I have already submitted my papers. Nobody will know I am going on a mission until my call arrives at my parent's house and they have to read the call to me over the phone.

### **Research Question Two**

What are experiences during the mission that helped emerging adult women develop as a person spiritually? I found two common themes in this portion of the data, dealing with adversity and positive experiences. Dealing with adversity is shown in three concepts: challenge of language learning, challenges in testimony, and facing rejection. Positive experiences are shown through two concepts: witnessing the conversion of others, and answered prayers. A common concept among many of the sisters I interviewed was the spiritual growth they experienced while learning Chinese. All of them at some point in the interview also expressed how their testimonies had been tried in one way or another on their mission. All participants but one enjoyed their missions. This participant had a difficult time talking about her mission. She was very emotional during the interview process and explained to me that because of the way her testimony was challenged on her mission, she has had a difficult time viewing her mission in a positive way. This participant has been home from her mission for 2 ½ years. Despite negative experiences, all women shared how having their testimonies challenged

eventually strengthened their spirituality. Each woman also shared experiences of watching others convert to their faith; with these experiences all expressed how this developed a deeper spirituality for them. In several of the interviews, the women shared stories of rejection as a result of who they were (missionaries). It appeared that all felt these experiences brought them closer to their God and helped them gain a deeper level of spirituality.

### **Jane – Elders and Cockroaches**

I have been here in Taiwan for only a month or so. Things are going well, but I am struggling. The language is so difficult for me. My Chinese really started to take off once I learned how to drill myself; I study constantly. I drill myself before I go to bed at night and I drill myself when I wake up in the mornings. I tape note cards on the front of my bike so I can memorize Chinese phrases as I bike through the city. I laminate flashcards and tape them to the wall in the shower; not a spare moment goes by that I am not trying to pick up everything I can about this language and it is still slow in coming. My senior companion has decided it's time I start making phone calls at night. This scares me because when you call someone it's just your voice and their voice, no body language to help with what you are trying to communicate.

I stare at the phone and recite my lines one more time. I pick up the receiver and dial the number. I should not be so nervous, I'm only calling a member and she is really nice and will understand that I am a new missionary; she will work with me. Even with this reassurance, my palms are a little sweaty. I am watching my companion as the phone rings. She is frantically jumping around the apartment with a shoe in her hand. Our

nightly ritual is if you are not on the phone, you are killing the cockroaches that have infested every corner of our apartment.

Our apartment is another issue entirely. I have heard it is the worst missionary apartment in the mission. The first time I saw the building from the outside, I thought my eyes were playing tricks on me. The building itself is 18 floors high and forms a half circle, therefore all the walls inside the building are curved as well. The apartment is tiny, really tiny. There is a small living room, a tiny bedroom, a kitchen, and a bathroom. The kitchen has only a sink, a stove top, and cupboard space. There is no dishwasher, no oven, and the refrigerator is placed in the living room. Not having an oven is something I have never become accustomed to, but here in Taiwan nobody owns an oven. I attribute this to the diet, which consists mostly of either boiled or fried foods. Most people here eat out, and that is what we do as well. Our washer and dryer are also miniature; they sit out on the “patio,” which is so small I have to crouch to get into it. There are random holes in the wall; they have been filled by previous tenants (missionaries) with odds and ends. We found out earlier this month why the holes are filled. There are rats. If we unplug the holes our apartment is not only infested with cockroaches but rats as well.

My companion is a very pretty girl, and it’s strange to think what she must look like at home. Here she is sweaty, dirty, and dresses like she is almost homeless. As I watch her killing cockroaches I wonder if she ever pictured herself in this place killing cockroaches before she went to bed. “Wei?” Someone has picked up the phone. “Hello,” I say in Chinese and I begin the conversation. Things have gone really well and before we hang up she asks me how my companion is doing? I tell her, “She is doing

great, she is killing cockroaches!” From the other end of the line comes a very confused exclamation. I have no idea what it means, but she is quite frantic now and I repeat myself. “Don’t worry she is just killing cockroaches, everything is fine.” This only seems to upset her more. At this point I am really confused. My confused expression has caught my companion’s attention and she hurries over. She takes the phone from me and speaks very quickly to the sister on the other end of the line. She hangs up the receiver and looks at me with a slight smile. She giggles as she hands the phone back to me and says, “you just told her that I was busy killing Elders, not cockroaches.” The word zhang long in mandarin is cockroach and zhang lao is Elder (like a boy missionary). I had mixed up the two in my head and kept saying that she’s killing an Elder.

It has taken me a long time to realize that learning this language has taught me how to rely on God. I have prayed so much and I realize that I can’t do anything on my own. I’m most fluent in my language when I have the spirit and when I am speaking about gospel truths. The moment I get cocky is the moment something happens to humble me. It is very clear to me that I must always look to God.

### **Nichole – Fumbling with Words**

I look at her with an expression of confusion and disbelief! She gives me a nudge and a look of complete assurance. With her eyes my companion (whose Chinese is almost flawless) is telling me, I know you can do this. I take a breath and I look at the gentleman and woman sitting in front of me. They are two middle-aged Chinese people living in a small apartment in the middle of Taipei, Taiwan. They look expectantly at me, waiting for me to recite what is to be my portion of the lesson. I take a breath and

begin to repeat what has taken me hours and hours to memorize. The Chinese words come stumbling from my mouth. Slowly, they come; I am half way through what I am to recite when I notice the man has started to laugh. He is laughing, and it takes me only a second to realize, he is laughing at me! I have discovered here in Taiwan a culture that is brutally honest. They will say things like, “oh my, your nose is large” or “you are looking fatter today.” Most days I find these comments amusing, even if in my culture they would be considered rude. Today, however, I do not find this gentleman’s lack of American scruples to be amusing. My first instinct is to stand up and march right out of this sick tiny little apartment; who does he think he is anyway! I continue to rant in my mind thinking, well I’d like to see him recite this in English and then we will see who is laughing at whom! The anger passes quickly, I try hard to swallow the tears and I stick my chin up in defiance. I finish what I have practiced for months and clamp my mouth shut. I was not going to say another word to these people. I feel humiliated, and discouraged. I am so frustrated. We leave the house and I climb onto my bike. I ride behind my companion through the crazy streets of Taiwan. I am for once grateful for the dreadful Taiwanese rain; it is hiding the tears that now streak down my face. I wonder if I will ever be able to speak this language. Angrily I shout in my mind, why was I sent here! I am not smart enough to speak Chinese! What were you thinking? From somewhere in my mind, a gentle yet reprimanding voice says, Sister, you have only been learning it for four months; patience. I huff the air out of my lungs and think “patience,” something I have never been very good at. The tears stop and I trust in the voice.

**Elizabeth – 7-11 Miracle**

I have only been on the Island a couple of months. I love my companion. She is so cute. She has long, brown, wavy hair. She is from the southern part of the United States and she has the best accent. She does not fit the stereotype of the “sister missionary” I had before I went on a mission. Before my mission I thought sisters were most likely homely looking and they probably didn’t wear makeup. I thought maybe some of them had facial hair. But my companion is thin and she in shape. She has a really bubbly personality and I love being around her.

We have been praying to Heavenly Father to help us find someone to take to a Christmas concert our church is putting on at the end of the week. This morning I had an interesting thought; we had just finished our morning prayers when the thought came to me, “you will find her at a convenience store.” As I hop on my bike, I remember having that thought and I wonder which of the thousands of convenience stores am I going to find this woman? I was surprised the first time I arrived in Taiwan to find so many 7-11 convenience stores, along with hundreds of McDonalds and KFC restaurants. They dot every corner of every street here in the city. We ride for several blocks and find ourselves a little lost. My companion glances over her shoulder at me to make sure I’m still alive and following her. I pull up directly behind her and glance around our surroundings. My companion reaches for her map. “Let me just look at the map again. I’ll get my bearings and we will be there in no time.” I’m in no huge hurry. I like taking my time to get to places. It gives me time to look around and relax a little.

As I look at my current surroundings I find a bike shop to my left and a 7-11 to

my right. As I glance over the 7-11, a woman walks out of the doors. She is neatly dressed in a woman's business suit, she has her hair nicely combed and slightly curled. As I watch her walk towards her moped the same thought from this morning pops into my head, and I immediately ride my bike over to her. As I approach her, she seems a little nervous. As an American I am much larger than most Asian women, and men for that matter. I seem to intimidate people here, which is counter to my purpose. She must be wondering why a white girl is hurling herself and her bike across the street at her. Before she can get on her moped and ride away I quickly say, "Hi, would you like to come with us to our church?" I would like to say more, but I don't have the words; this is about the extent of my Chinese at the moment. My companion has quickly made her way to where we are. I'm grateful for her language abilities as she explains that we are having a Christmas program and we have people who will be singing and performing. She then invites her to join us. I watch as my companion's pretty blue eyes sparkle as this woman explains, "I have seen missionaries for your church all over the city. You are always on bikes and always smiling at people, but usually I just see male missionaries. There are girls as well?" My companion smiles, knowing that we as sisters here are far outnumbered by the Elders. "Yes, there are girl missionaries as well, and we are two of them." The woman starts to warm up to us. "Oh, I see. I have always wondered what you are sharing and what you are doing here in Taiwan. I could probably go to your concert with you, when is it?" We exchange information and plan to meet at the church for the concert. As we pull away from the 7-11 I cannot believe how good I feel. It is at this moment I realize God has heard our pleas, and he has answered our prayer.

Over the next few weeks I am able to get to know this woman. I fall in love with her. I watch as she struggles to overcome bad habits, like smoking. I watch as she changes her life and prepares to be baptized. As I have worked with her to make these changes, and as I have been an active participant in this process, I have gained a deep love for her, but also I have developed some really deep spiritual feelings. I have no other words to describe this experience other than it has strengthened me spiritually.

### **Anne – Budding Leaves, Budding Testimony**

Before I started my mission I had read the Book of Mormon all the way, but it had taken me years to get through it. As I sat in my classroom at the MTC I began to realize that I had never had one of those experiences where you read the Book of Mormon and then ask God if it is true. I decided I would read the Book of Mormon cover to cover and then ask God if it was true. I wanted to have a for sure answer. I wanted to have a solid testimony of the Book of Mormon. I knew I would need it, if I was to testify to people.

Our schedule at the MTC is set up so we are in class with teachers half the time and the other half is dedicated to personal study. Personal study is a time we are allowed to study what we have learned that day in either language or gospel class. We also have other activities planned throughout the week. With all the scripture study time I get here in the MTC it has only taken me a few weeks to finish reading the Book of Mormon. I know the next step is to ask to see if the words are true. I tell my companion that I need to step into an empty classroom just next to ours for a few minutes. I know it's against the rules but I feel really strongly that I need to be alone to do this. She nods her approval and I step inside the classroom. I shut the door behind me, and I kneel at a



chair. I start my prayer and no sooner have the first few words left my mouth when I begin to cry. I am so overwhelmed with the spirit I cannot even form the words; I just sit and cry with emotion. I feel so happy. I look out the window; its spring, so the leaves are all just starting to come out. Through my tears I notice how the leaves are beginning to bud, just like my testimony. What I am feeling right now will never leave me; I know it's true with all my heart.

### **Anne – Shaking Testimony**

My experience as a missionary has been abnormal. I was spiritually really solid before I came on my mission. When I was a child I was very sensitive to the spirit and many adults pointed that out to me. I was more spiritually mature than most people my age. Before my mission I had a really good relationship with God. I was confident about myself, and life was good. At the start of my mission things were good, but somewhere along the way my testimony has been shattered. There are times when I am teaching, and I think to myself, do I even believe what I am teaching? I know deep down I believe it is all true, but I am experiencing more doubt than I ever have before. This is emotionally really difficult for me because for as long as I can remember I have based my identity on what I believe.

I have been serving in Xin Dian. It's a beautiful area; mostly city, but we get to wander the green hillsides that create the bowl of Taipei City. In Taipei City there are hundreds of people on the streets. We don't have to go far to find people to share our message. We are doing some street contacting -- just talking to people as they walk down the road and I see a middle-aged woman approaching us. As she draws near I fall

into step next to her. I say “hello, I’m a missionary and I am wondering if I can give you a pamphlet about our church?” She snorts and shakes her hand in my face. Shaking a hand in the face is not a very polite rejection in Taiwan; it happens, but usually people are not so rude. Taiwanese people are generally very well-mannered and polite. I turn to walk away from her. I am surprised when she suddenly stops and turns to me. She says, “well what is it you have to share?” I sense this woman is not ready to hear about the gospel; she seems very upset and filled with anger. People like this generally are not willing to listen to be converted; they listen so they can argue with me. Despite this I begin, “Well we believe in a book called the Book of Mormon. We also believe that God still continues to give us revelation through a living prophet.” I smile at her and hold out one of our pamphlets; I am completely taken back when she knocks the pamphlet out of my hand and becomes really angry with me. She says, “Look the Bible is it; there is nothing but the Bible. God does not talk to us anymore and that is it!” I back away from her; my face falls and I bend down to pick up my pamphlet. I don’t turn my back to her; I feel like she may pounce on me if I do. The woman turns on her heel and waddles away from me.

I turn and walk back to where my companion is standing. I look at my companion, but I don’t feel like talking. Her eyes search mine. I know she is looking to see if I am ok. I give her a reassuring nod, letting her know I just need a minute. I need to think. I am a very empathetic person. I believe one of the things I am struggling with here in the mission is seeing people who believe what they believe as strongly as I believe what I believe. This is kind of shaking me. When someone else is telling me that

Buddhism has blessed their family, or that they know Catholicism is true, I just think, why the heck am I here? They are obviously happy.

My companion and I walk in silence to a beautiful park in downtown Taipei. I sit down at a park bench with my companion and watch as a group of old people practice their tai-chi. I love the slow, controlled movements they make. It's peaceful to watch them. If you come out early in the mornings you will see hundreds of older people in the parks "exercising." As an American I find these activities strange. They consist of old people dancing and hitting themselves in strange ways. At first I had a difficult time not laughing at what they considered exercise, but I have warmed to it and wish I were able to join with them. I continue to ponder my thoughts. As I watch these beautiful people practice their beautiful culture in this park, I realize that God loves all His children. It doesn't matter what religion they are practicing because any good step towards God is a good step. Whatever they believe or whatever religion they are practicing does not mean they are ready to accept the gospel now. I feel like most religions have a good influence on people and it may be preparing them in some way to accept our message.

I stand up and move away from my peaceful retreat. I wonder what it will be like to return home. I wonder how my family and my friends would react if they knew how much I am questioning the gospel? I'm sure it would freak them out.

### **Emma – Miss Chen**

Before my mission I felt pretty spiritually strong. It wasn't like I was reading my scriptures daily but I prayed daily. Right before I came on my mission I started reading and praying a lot more diligently. Last night I prayed super-duper hard; I need help.

Please help us find someone with the last name Chen. My companion and I have decided we want to teach and baptize someone with the last name Chen. As I finished my prayer, I thought to myself, I don't even know if God hears my prayers, that is how down-trodden I had become over the last little while. This work takes its toll on me more than I would like to admit. Before coming on my mission I had no idea just how taxing this experience would be emotionally, spiritually, and physically. As I pull my body off my bed this morning I can feel muscles I never knew existed. I am aching everywhere. I was involved in a bike accident yesterday and it seems like it's catching up to me today. My mind feels like a battlefield. I am constantly fighting battles with my inner self and my spiritual self. At the end of the day my mind is exhausted from fighting on both sides. Speaking Chinese all day is another thing that wears me out. I had no idea you could become physically tired from mental exertion. After my long morning of exercise and studies we leave the house, I climb on my bike (if maybe just a little bit more apprehensively because of yesterday's events) and peddle through the winding streets onto a more crowded main road. We come to a stop light and I pull my bike up next to a woman. I turn to her and I say, "Hi, I'm a missionary. I am sharing a really happy message about our Heavenly Father and His Son, Jesus Christ." I glance at the stop light and realized I don't have much time with this woman. I give her my most charming smile, "My name is Sister Emma, what is your name?" For the first time since pulling up to her she turns her head and looks at me. She lifts up the visor of her helmet and I see her pretty round face. "My name is Chen, my last name Chen." Right then it hits me like a ton of bricks that God does hear my prayers and He does answer them. This was just a

huge testimony builder to me. Even though it was so small, it is still impactful for me today.

### **Nichole – Family and God**

I pull up next to a man on a moped. I glance over at him and my first instinct is to pull forward and ignore this man. He is large, he is not well-groomed, and he is leering at me. I try my best to stay neutral about his appearance. If there is one thing I have learned it's that we should not judge someone based on how they look. He is a child of God and as such he deserves my attention just as much as anyone else. I say hello, and ask if he has ever heard of our church before. I pull my name tag away from my shirt to give him a clear view of our church's name. I look into his face and he smiles at me. I can see his mouth is full of the Taiwanese chew called BingLan. It's a red beetle nut. It dyes the inside of the mouth red, and turns the saliva red as well. I find it completely repulsive. Before I have time to say anything more, he spits every single bit of chew he has in his mouth onto my shoe. I look down and watch as it seeps down into my shoe and off onto the road. I look back up at his face; he winks at me, and rides off. I watch as he speeds off. I take a deep breath and I think there are two things on this earth that I am willing to take this kind of abuse for, one would be my family, and the other is God.

### **Research Question Three**

How do missions help or deter the development of emerging adults? What aspects of development do missions cultivate? The theme I found in this section is Mission lifestyle. Mission lifestyles take us out of our comfort zones. We are challenged by

schedules, relationships, and unfamiliar surroundings.

Every sister I interviewed had stories of companions who tried their patience, and of having to live with someone they really didn't like. They also talked about companions they grew to love and really care about even though there were differences with them. Leaving families and loved ones behind was a struggle for all of them. Through this experience each seemed to gain a deeper love and appreciation for their families.

Living in a foreign country and dealing with the challenges that came along with that was also a major topic of discussion for many of the sisters. With this experience came greater maturity, appreciation, and experience. The structure of the mission schedule seemed to cultivate better study habits and lead to a more regimented life once sister missionaries returned home. Achieving a goal or doing something they all felt proud of was also something many of them mentioned. This helped in the development of self-confidence and self-assurance in many of the women.

### **Nichole – Leaving Personal Affairs Behind**

I walk through the door with my stomach in knots. As I try to decide what these knots mean exactly, I come to two conclusions. The first conclusion I come to is nervousness. I cannot seem to remember the last time I was this nervous. The second reason for the knots I attribute to excitement. I am excited at what this mission holds for me. I reach the doors to the main building of the Missionary Training Center (MTC). The MTC is set up like a mini campus. From what I have been able to see, there are tons of buildings that all look the same except for the one I'm about to enter. This building

looks much larger than the rest. The glass doors of this building are adorned with signs. The sign over the first set of doors reads, “Missionaries enter here,” and over the next set of doors is another sign that reads, “Family enter here.” I begin to feel like I have no idea what is going on. I try to hide the “deer in the headlights” look as much as possible. As I separate from my family and mechanically step through the doors, I notice this room looks much like one of our church foyers, only much larger. The sides of the room are lined with couches and chairs. The walls are decorated with pictures of Christ. Everything is very clean and orderly. As the line steadily moves I think to myself, I cannot believe I am actually going to go through with this.

I have reached the front of the line quickly. I feel like everything is starting to move too fast. Behind the desk are seated a few older, pleasant looking ladies. There is something about them that exudes comfort. I tell these nice ladies my name; I wait. After a few moments of searching they pull out my badge and hand it to me. I read the name on the badge, Sister Ball. The characters under the name Sister Ball, a name I would from this point forward be known as, were Chinese characters. I slowly run my thumb across the white characters which are engraven on the black badge. As my thumb catches on each groove, the solemnity of the moment jolts through my body.

I look up searching the crowd for my family. My stomach does a little turn as I find their faces, knowing I am looking at the ones I will miss for a year and a half. My father’s face is the first one I can see. His handsome face is showing signs of emotion, but from the way his eyebrows are consciously raised and his jaw is set, I can tell he is trying to hide this from everyone. From the time I was born, I have looked into this face

and known he would protect and love me. Today as I look into his face I can still see that, but today there is something else, but what is it? As I search his face again, I find it. I don't know how, but it's just through the way he is looking at me, I know he loves and is proud of me. This gives me courage and I more confidently continue my walk towards my family. I can now see my mother very clearly; her features are deceptively delicate because she is strong. Looking at her face is like looking at my mother and my best friend. The emotions spread across her face are those of worry, love, and dedication. She will be the one who sends me packages, prays incessantly for me, and tries to learn Chinese while I am gone. My brother and sister are the last two I see. My sister's face matches my mother's, except her eyes give off a hint of excitement. She is excited for me! I am refreshed by this, and give her a thankful smile. My littlest brother is watching me carefully. He has always been the one to make me laugh. However, there are no jokes from him today. His expression is sad. I want him to tell me something funny or do something totally inappropriate, but he won't. He is not in the mood. I know I will not be allowed to see or call my family except for two special occasions, on Christmas and Mother's day. The special occasion will only allow a phone call, but does not allow for me to see my family. I walk to them, and try to look as happy and confident as I possibly can.

My mother takes my badge and pins it onto my nicely pressed white button up shirt. The shirt is tucked neatly into a black skirt, reaching two to three inches below my knees. It is followed by a pair of black nylons and comfortable, conservative black shoes. As she pins the badge on my shirt I try to memorize her hands, her face, and her smell.



My family takes turns taking pictures with me, each one of us trying to smile. I take a picture standing between my brother and sister. As they lean in on me for the picture, I cannot help but to touch their hands and look into their eyes. I want to take them with me! I look around and see numerous other families doing the exact same thing we are doing.

The young sons and daughters, who have been called to serve a mission in numerous parts of the world are only 19 and 21 years old. It only seems like minutes when we are all then directed into a room where we are being addressed by the President of the Missionary Training Center (MTC). He shares a beautiful message with us. As he concludes his remarks he instructs, "We would now like all missionaries to exit to the right and all family members to the left." He continues by saying, "this is much like pulling a bandaid off....usually the faster the better." I'm sure what he means by this is prolonged goodbyes only hurt much worse. I start down the line of my family members giving each one a hug. I started with my dad; his eyes were full of tears. My mom was next. She too had tears, but I could tell she is mustering all her strength in order to avoid a complete melt down. I admire her strength and squeeze her hand. Next is my little sister. I cannot believe I am leaving her. I wonder what she will do while I am gone. Will she get married? Will she move somewhere else? At this moment I reflect on the past, and if I have taken her presence for granted. She has always been there, and now she won't be. I know I will miss her terribly.

Last is my littlest brother. He is crying. I hug him tightly and tell him I love him. I step back and take one last drink of them. I force my body to turn to the right and walk

away. I am sad, but happy. I am nervous, but excited. As I walk away from them I say to myself, don't look back. I hear a voice in my mind say "let's not look back now nor at anytime over the next year and a half." I decide from this moment on, I will be committed to this 100%. I am tempted to turn around one more time to see my family. I know they are much of what my personal affairs consist of, and I know they are going to be the most difficult thing to leave behind.

### **Jane - Bad Luck Bikes**

My companion is a different kind of a person. The first time I saw her, I thought she was exactly what I had pictured a sister missionary to look like. She was a little overweight, she wore no makeup, and her social skills were very much lacking. She came to me from the east coast of Taiwan. The bugs over there are a little more aggressive than they are here in the city. She has huge bites all over her legs. They are raw and scabbed over, I know they will scar. She has had terrible luck on her bike, and I attribute it to her indecisive movements on the road. When riding your bike in the busy streets of Taipei you must be aggressive or you will be hit. Even when being aggressive you are hit, but she seems to attract bike accidents more than any other missionary in our mission.

Among many things that try my patience with this companion, her slow bike riding may just top the list. People have described my bike riding as a little reckless, but I'm never too worried. Traffic in Taiwan is notoriously dangerous. The rules here are that there are no rules. Basically the bigger you are on the road, the more "right of way" you have. As cyclists, we have zero "right of way." The buses and taxis never look

before changing lanes, if they are staying in a lane. There is not a missionary who leaves the Taipei mission without being hit at least once by some type of vehicle. I can understand my companion's concerns and problems on the road, but today we are late to an appointment so I know we are going to need to hurry. I bite my upper lip, knowing this is going to be difficult. I wonder why she can never seem to keep up? I look over my shoulder and ask if she thinks we can hurry, we need to be at our appointment in 20 minutes. I don't hear anything from her, I just see a slight shrug of her shoulders. "We can do it. We are just going to need to ride a little faster than normal, can you do that?" Again, another shrug. I inhale deeply. We can do it I say, maybe just to reassure myself. I kick off the curb and start riding fast. I am swerving in and out of traffic and make several green lights. Things are going well so far. I turn to see if my companion is still behind me and I notice that she lagged behind. I pull over and wait, and wait, and wait for probably about 10 minutes. She finally comes to a stop right behind me. I try to control my annoyance when I notice the look on her face. She is about to cry. I have seen this facial expression many times before. I ask, "Are you okay?" "Yes," she mumbles. I ask, "Can we keep riding?" As she wipes the beads of sweat from her brow she says "yes." I give her an encouraging smile and say, "ok, we just really need to try to hurry so we are not late." As we start moving into more residential areas and as we draw closer to our destination, my companion pulls up next to me and breaks down crying. I pull our bikes over to the side of the road and wait for her to tell me what is wrong. She begins by saying, "I was lagging so far behind back there, because a car hit me. I'm fine, but it really scared me and I just didn't even see it coming." This is the fourth time she

has been hit by a car. I feel terrible, not just because she has been hit, again, but because I actually feel a little annoyed because now we are even more late! “I’m so sorry you were hit again. Are you sure you are ok? Do we need to go see a doctor or do you need to rest for a little while?” “No, it’s ok, we can keep going.” I take a glance at her disheveled, scuffed clothing. I give her once last smile and as I start to pull away the curb I notice she is talking to herself again. She does this a lot. What’s seems to be even more frustrating is that she is my senior companion, but on days like this I don’t feel like much of a junior companion.

This experience among others has taught me so much about humility; it has been during this past three month period of time that I have learned more than I ever have before. I sit and watch as she talks softly to herself and moves around the apartment. She is packing to go home. Her mission is over. She looks over at me and says, “Sister, thank you for all you did for me. I will really miss you.” I am overcome by emotion as I think back on the past few weeks we have had together. “I am sorry if I was not always the best companion,” I tell her. “I really feel like we have learned a lot together and I am going to miss you.”

I actually am going to miss her. I have grown accustomed to her, and I feel protective of her. She tried my patience more than anyone else has ever done, but as I look into her eyes I can see how much our Heavenly Father loves her. I see how hard she has tried and how diligently she has worked. She has given it her all, and she has completed an honorable mission. I feel like the Lord has humbled me. Over the past few weeks I have realized I could not do this alone. I have needed him every step of the way.

He never left me, but he gave me the companion I needed. I needed her to teach me. All along I thought I was the one who was teaching her, acting as the senior companion, and taking the lead, but in reality, she taught me more than I could ever have taught her.

It's time for her to go; I stand up and walk over to her. I give her a hug and say, "Maybe I'll see you when I get home?" She takes a step back but keeps her hands on my shoulders. "Maybe -- I hope so. Keep up the good work; you are a good missionary." She drops her hands from my shoulders and turns and walks out of our apartment door.

### **Nichole - Rise and Shine, Sleepy Missionary**

Somewhere I can hear the buzzing. What is that noise? It has to be the middle of the night! There is no way the alarm clock can possibly be going off yet! However, the buzzing continues. I hear my companion mumble something, and I roll over and hit the off button. I never thought getting up at 6:30 a.m. could be such a challenge. Every day is so packed; there never seems to be a moment to sit and rest. At night the moment my head hits the pillow I'm asleep in two breaths. The morning comes way too fast and today is no exception. I try to shake off sleep and get out of bed. I know it's the rule, and I know I must be obedient. I try to roll over, but it's so hard. I don't think I can do it, but what is more difficult to overcome is the fact that I have no desire to do it. I finally muster up the energy to pull my legs up under me and in the fetal position I offer up a simple prayer. "Father, please help me get out of bed; I just can't seem to find the energy this morning." Tears spring to my eyes as I pray. "I'm too tired to do this today"; I continue in prayer. "I can't do this alone." I don't want my companion to hear my cry so I push my face in the pillow and try to pull myself together. I hate crying in the

mornings. I end the prayer and somehow find the floor with my feet. Up I go, and think to myself, wow, who would have thought that could be so difficult. I've never been so tired in all my life.

### **Elizabeth - Lights Out**

It feels so good to finally sit down at night. I am so tired at the end of the day. I have never felt so tired in all my life. I look at the clock and it reads 10:30 p.m. Lights should be out and my companion is in bed, but my back is hurting. It can't hurt to stand here by the side of my bed and stretch just for a few minutes, right? My companion rolled over in bed and says, "Sister Elizabeth, its 10:30, the lights need to be out."

"I know, I know. I'll hurry," I tell her. I continue to stretch for a few minutes. If I don't, I know I'll have a terrible night's sleep. I finish stretching and complete my nightly routine. I use the restroom and I get a glass of water. I walk back into the bedroom and literally collapse into bed. I look at my alarm clock and it reads 10:35 p.m. Only five minutes late -- not too bad.

I hear the alarm clock and it seems like I have only been asleep for a few minutes. How can the night have gone so quickly? I roll out of bed and my companion is already dressed and at her desk studying. I look at the clock again, and realize I am up at the appropriate 6:25 a.m. Sometimes she gets up early to study. I walk over to my desk and sit down to try to gather my senses before we have to head out the door for exercise. I look over and she explains to me that we need to work harder on having the light out at exactly 10:30 p.m. She tells me that the rule is 10:30 and we need to work really hard on making sure we are exactly obedient to this rule. I feel so terrible! I did not mean to

break rules, and I did not think five minutes would be that big of a deal? I feel guilty.

### **Elizabeth - Pesky Pamphlets**

We have travelled close to 45 minutes on our bikes to contact, meaning we don't have anyone to visit, so we go "contacting" people we have yet to meet. I do not agree with coming all the way out here just to knock on doors, but my companion feels this is where we should be. My companion is Taiwanese. My culture and her culture are so different. She does not like to show emotion, and she does not like to talk about things. It has been terribly difficult to have a conversation with her that is at all personal. My culture is very open and talkative. Plus, there is a language barrier between us. Her English is poor and my Chinese is not amazing yet either. With this combination, working and communicating together has been almost impossible.

I lock up my bike and follow her to a complex. We knock on a door and the door opens. She looks at me, "give them pamphlet" she says. "I don't have any. I forgot them at home." She glares at me, and then rolls her eyes. She hands the woman a pamphlet and tells her what we are doing and who we are. The woman is not interested and the door shuts in our faces. My companion turns to me and in her best English says, "We are going home to get your pamphlets! I can't believe you forgot them. That is so irresponsible." I can't believe what she is saying; I am so flustered I fumble with my words. "Well, you have pamphlets; maybe we could just use yours today? I'm sorry I forgot them. I wasn't thinking." I can't believe she actually wants to ride all the way home; that will be a complete waste of time! "Don't you think riding all the way back home is a waste of time? There are lots of other things we could be doing that are more

productive than riding all the way back home just for pamphlets.”

She takes a long deliberate breath, blows it out slowly, and points her finger right in my face. “Sister, you need to remember your things; it’s annoying that you forget them. We are going back.” She says this with such finality; I know there is no sense in arguing. I don’t have to say anything. I’m sure my silence will speak for itself. Plus it doesn’t seem like there is anything I could say that would remedy this situation. There is nothing I can do but try not to create more waves.

The decision has been made and back to the church we ride. As we ride I can’t help the feelings of frustration and anger build inside of me. It’s not like I forgot the pamphlets on purpose! I didn’t think it was that big of a deal. I feel so alone, and so upset. I feel like I’m going through all the emotions but nothing is successful because we have different ideas on how to do this and our communication is horrible. Working together is so difficult.

I push my bike as fast as it will go to work out some of the frustration I am feeling. This companionship has been the most difficult relationship I have ever experienced. I try to take a step back and think about what this is teaching me. Being with this companion has taught me a lot about myself. When things are really difficult with her, I don’t have anyone to turn to, at least not an actual person. I have had to learn how to comfort myself. I have also had to learn how to rely on God as a source of comfort. I also have never really known what it meant to practice patience. I now realized what it feels like to practice this, and to get better at it. I have learned that I am strong, but the source of my strength is the belief I have in God. Learning this about



myself is priceless. I feel like when I get home, I'll be able to do anything and face anything.

### **Nichole – Hot and Unfashionable**

I can't stand this heat for one more minute. I walk closer to the wall in search of shade, but the shade of the wall has been counteracted by the heat the building is exuding. I pull my bike back away from the wall and look at my arms. The sweat is trickling down my entire body. I have never sweat like this in my life. I can't believe how hot my body feels. A shiver runs down my spine and goose pimples rise on my arms. I give a half smile thinking to myself, I have never shivered in heat before, this is interesting. I look over at my companion and I feel a bead of sweat run from my forehead and down to my jaw; there it stops for a moment before falling to the ground. I see my companion digging through her bag. Who knows what she is searching for; I could care less at the moment and decide I want to give up for just a few minutes. I drop my bike and sit on the dirty sidewalk. I look at my gross shoes and my mid-calf skirt; the hem has come out. My shirt is soaked with sweat. The shirt itself is a hand-me-down from an unknown sister of the past. My head is still adorned with a bright yellow helmet. What makes this outfit even better is the hair my helmet is hiding. I let some of the Chinese sisters in the ward cut my hair for an activity. It's now in the shape of a very long mullet. I think to myself, "this is what hell must feel like, hot and unfashionable."

I close my eyes and take myself to a place that is far away from here. Every so often when things feel really bad I'll let myself think of something from home. I don't do this very often. It's not a good habit to get into, but every once in awhile I'll allow

myself to indulge in a memory from home. I keep a couple places tucked away in my mind, one of them, the one I pick today, is my mom's kitchen. I close my eyes and I walk into her kitchen. I let my hand glide across her counter top. I see her at the kitchen sink washing a pan; she doesn't notice me. I walk close enough to see how the sun is shining in through the window and onto her face. I can smell the lavender dish soap she likes to use. It's no use talking to her, since this is only a day dream, and I continue to walk through the kitchen opening the cupboards to see what kind of yummy food she has stored. Something lands on my nose, it's a raindrop. My companion shakes me from my daydream. "Sister let's get moving, it looks like another big storm is moving in." I let the memory of home wash out of my mind like the rain washes off my rain coat. It was a nice vacation for a few seconds, but there is work to be done and there is no time for me to think on this any longer.

If I think back on this too much it will bring tears to my eyes. Days like that were battles or maybe a race, an endurance race. It tested my inner strength, it proved my inner strength. I wanted to give up so many times; I wanted to throw in the towel and say, "I didn't sign up for this!" But every time I had one of those moments, I got back on my bike and I rode to the next appointment. I pulled my rain coat on one more time, I climbed one more set of stairs in stifling heat. I never gave up, and that's what I learned. I learned I can do it. I learned how to press on when something is not "fun" or when something is "hard." I learned from the memories I chose to indulge in, what I valued and loved the most. I learned I can do hard things.

### **Anne – Leech Street**

I have learned the worst heat usually comes right before a rain storm. I'm not sure why this is? "Hey, do you think it's going to rain?" I ask my companion. She is finally starting to unlock her bike. She glances up at the sky, "I'm sure it will start any minute, the heat is too thick for it not to rain." A loud crack of thunder lets us know we are both right. "Let's get moving to the church, it's going to take us about 30 minutes to get there from here." "Ok, let me just put on my rain coat," -- the rain has started. It falls softly at first, almost a mist; by the time I have my raincoat on, it has started to really come down. We make our way out of the maze of apartment buildings and onto a more populated street. The rain has started to come down so hard, the sewers can't seem to keep up. My companion is only a few feet in front of me on her bike. I yell over the rain, "Is it me, or are the streets filling with water?" "The streets are definitely filling with water, can you bike in this?" "I can bike in this, but I didn't think we were supposed to swim!" "Ha ha, I know right!" I glance down at the dirty water filling the streets. It has reached above my bike peddles. It's like biking through a small river. I look to my left and I notice water is being pushed out of the sewer drains like a geyser. We continue our ride, and finally reach the church. We lock our bikes as quickly as possible and start up the stairs to the church; it's then that I notice it. "Ahhhhhh!!! Oh my gosh, what is this?" "What! What is wrong?" I glance down at my leg. "It's a freaking leech! I have a leech on my leg! It's sucking my blood!" "Oh, that is disgusting!" "Well get it off of me!" "I am not touching that thing... I think I'm going to be sick, it looks so disgusting." "Yeah and it's on MY leg, sucking My blood." I hobble up the rest of the stairs, trying to

keep my leg straight; I'm not sure why, it just seems like the right thing to do. I spot four Elders in the hallway. "Hey!! I need one of you! I have a leech on my leg!" "What!" All four elders are now sprinting to see the leech on my leg. "Can someone pull it off for me? I can't do it!" You would think guys would be fine pulling a leech off a leg, but they all seemed a bit skittish. "You do it," "no you do it"! "I'm not touching it." I can't believe this. "Someone please just pull it off, its sucking my blood as we speak!" A brave Elder steps up. "Ok, I'll do it; hold still." Shhhhhllluuuuuppp. It came off rather painlessly. I don't know what I was expecting, but the leech had been removed and I was still alive.

### **Anne - Proud Moment**

We are waiting for the subway to come. I am sitting on a bench in Xi Zhi. I look to my right and a woman has sat down next to me. She smells like most of the older people here, which is a mix of food and mothballs; yuk. I feel my nose turning up. She is pulling her groceries in a grocery bag on wheels. I had never seen one of these contraptions before I came here to Taiwan. She is wearing a pair of purple polyester pants. I have no idea how she can wear those in this heat. She has on a very thin cotton shirt; it's a little see through but, whatever. I catch her eye and I plunge ahead. I have only been here in Taiwan a few months and my Chinese is still shaky at best, but I'm not really afraid to talk to people. After I have introduced myself she starts jabbering away. I try my hardest to concentrate on everything she is saying. I pretty much have the main words in the conversation figured out, when I realize, I actually know what she is talking about! I take a mental note of the date so I remember to record this in my journal. I am

so proud of myself for understanding this conversation. The woman asks me, how long I have been studying Chinese? I tell her I have been studying for about two or three months; she is shocked! She tells me I speak very well and reaches over and pats my hand. My heart is about to burst, I feel so proud of myself. Finally, the work may start to pay off.

### **Nichole - Missing the Metro**

I run down the escalator and begin to fumble through my bag looking for my metro pass. My hand finds the plastic card and I grasp it, and with one fluid motion I swipe it across the sensor and press through the crowd gathering my strength for the sprint to the metro door. I reach the door and pause. There are hundreds of people around me all the time, but for some reason I know when my companion is not one of them. Where is my companion? I stand at the door and begin to search the crowd. It's normally not very difficult to find a tall white girl in the midst of hundreds of Chinese people, but for some reason I cannot see her! I let out a moan of frustration and surrender the spot I have fought so hard to secure on the metro. I step out of the door and they close. The Metro leaves. Then I see her, in all sorts of disarray streaking down the escalator. She reaches me, trying to wipe the sweat from her brow and zip up her bag at the same time. She is out of breath, and I am out of patience. I'm so sorry she says, but my metro pass was not being recognized by the sensor. I consider a few reactions, one of them consists of hitting her over the head with my umbrella, but I don't think that will go over well. Deciding the first option is out, I opt for the most difficult option. "Its ok." I tell her. She looks relieved as I continue, "It happens; we just need to get your card

checked to see why the sensor is having such a difficult time reading it.”

#### **Research Question Four**

How does a mission shape who a person is today? The theme for this question is that not a day goes by without thinking about the mission. The categories under this theme include, gaining spiritual experiences, giving service, gaining future perspectives, self-confidence, solidifying spiritual beliefs, and forming of daily habits and routines.

#### **Nichole - Looking Back**

Near the end of my mission someone told me that the first few months of a mission are the best kept secrets in the church. When I was told this, I asked the person to explain what that meant. Well, he said, “if people knew just how hard the first few months are, nobody in their right mind would come!” I laughed, but the comment caused me some reflection as I rode a train to my apartment that night. I sat looking out the window, knowing that I would be going home from my mission very soon. I thought back to the first few months of my mission and it brought tears to my eyes. The tears came, not because I was remembering difficult times, but because I was remembering what these times gave to me. I felt again all the heartache, but I also began to think about all the laughing and the memories I will treasure my entire life. I thought about the people I have met and how much I love them. Even now, I can still see their faces in my mind. It’s almost as if they have been etched on my heart. I carry them everywhere, and thoughts of my mission are never too far from my mind. I was also told, following my mission, there would not be a day go by that I would not think of it. This has been true.

Not a day goes by that I do not miss, love, and yearn for my friends in Taiwan. I now think about how much I had learned and how much I grew. I thought about how in serving others, I had truly found myself. That night on the train as I thought about this notion of a mission being the best kept secret in the church, I had to laugh to myself. I laughed because I think the last few months of a mission are the best kept secrets in the church. I think they are the best kept secrets, because if everyone knew how amazing they were, everyone would want to go.

### **Jane – The Yang family**

Before my mission I had probably five total spiritual experiences I could draw on. During my mission that number increased tenfold, which made my experiences and understanding grow exponentially as well. I think of my mission or something about it every day. These experiences remind me of how close I can be to the Savior, and how much potential I have to be guided through my life if I just ask and have the faith.

I once heard “a testimony is found in the bearing of it” and I have found that to be very true. My mission gave me an opportunity to share my testimony daily, and every day it grew. My mission has given me perspective. I am now more able to understand the world, understand what kind of family I want, and who I want to be later in life.

Because of my mission I am a busy body, meaning I always want to be doing something. I had this tendency before my mission, but my mission taught me just how much I really can accomplish in one day. Now if I spend too much time doing “nothing,” I feel like I am wasting precious time. It was never like that before my mission.

There was one day when it finally clicked as to why I was sent to Taiwan. I was

sent there to meet the Yang family and I now know that. I met them, and baptized them. This experience made my whole mission worthwhile. Would I make the decision to serve again? Yes. It was the best decision I made up to that point in my life.

### **Elizabeth – Finding my Calling**

My mission helped me understand that I can always give more. On my mission I was always serving and doing things for others; everything I did revolved around someone else. I would visit the sick and I would serve the down trodden. Now, whenever I start to feel sorry for myself or whenever I start to focus on just me, I think I can spend my time doing better things than this. I can do something for someone else.

Since coming home I have really missed visiting the sick and afflicted. I now volunteer with hospice, and I have had the opportunity to visit an elderly woman who is actually from France. I have really enjoyed getting to know her, and I always look forward to our visits. This is just one way I have found to keep the service spark alive in my life.

Serving a mission was one of the best decisions I have ever made. It fulfilled my life. It fulfilled the strong desire I have for others to know Christ. It fulfilled my desire to serve Christ. He suffered for us and I believe in Him so much. I wanted others to know of the impact He can have in our lives through His love and just the deep desire He has for us to return to live with our Heavenly Father. I wanted others to know that we can have eternal families, that after death we don't need to be separated. My mission fulfilled me in ways I can't even explain.

My mission has helped me create a clear path for the future. When I got home I



had a deep desire to have a family of my own. Having a family was something to look forward to, and I had realized that family is the most important thing in our lives. I was eager to find someone to begin this life with. With the lessons I had learned through my relationships with companions I had a better idea of who I was looking for. Even though I was in a companionship with a girl, not a boy, I still feel like my mission and my companions taught me that being with someone you are really compatible, makes life much more enjoyable. I felt like after these relationships I had a better understanding of marriage, and why some were so difficult, and why some were so much easier. Once I got home I was really eager to find someone I was compatible with and work on having a happy marriage.

### **Anne – Losing Everything, Gave Me Everything**

The mission is just so difficult that anything after it seems like a piece of cake. Since my mission I feel like my testimony is based more on experience than it ever was before. I really rely on Christ more than I ever have and I feel like now I am a better person because of what I experienced on my mission and just after I returned home.

Because of my mission I know Christ better. I know Him better because He more than anyone else understands what pain is, and so when I was going through all of that pain He was the only one who got it. My testimony of Him and my determination to try to focus my life around Him is totally different.

I also think I have way more trust in Him than I did before. Just a few weeks ago I had a break up and instead of completely crushing me, I was able to view it as a positive step forward and something that I was totally capable of coping with, with the help of the

Lord.

I feel like because of my mission I am a much more grateful person. I feel more grateful because once you get to a point where you lose everything; once you have it all back, you are so much more grateful for it. At this point in my life I view my mission as a positive thing. It was not always like that, it took me awhile and even now I get emotional talking about it, digging up hard times is emotional. But I am grateful to those things because now I feel like I'm much more capable of being able to help others who are going through difficult times. Before my mission I would have just been like... well.. cheer up. Now I just understand so much more than I did before. Understanding comes at a price.

### **Emma – Good Foundation**

My mission changed me in every way. Being able to throw yourself into a completely different culture, and knowing that you survived it, is something you can fall back onto. Jeffery R. Holland said it best when he said, “not a day goes by when I don't think of my mission.” There is not a day goes by that I do not think of my mission.

I have the job I have now because of my mission. With my divorce and everything that happened with that, I have often thought, if I can survive my mission I can survive this. Whatever the Lord wants to throw at me, I now know that I can handle it. If I can ride a bike every day in the pouring rain, I can do this... whatever this might be.

I'm not sure if I would make the same decision to serve again. When I left on my mission I was dating a guy. I have often thought, if I had not gone on my mission what

would have happened with him? If I had stayed home would I have married him? I can't go back and change my decision. He is happily married now and he even has a child. Even still, it's hard not to wonder. I guess when I really think about it, despite this guy, I think I would make the same decision. Yes, there were highs and there were lows, there were rights and lefts, but that is also life! Even four years after having served I still see those ups and downs, but my mission gave me a good foundation of things that I can fall back on.

### **Nichole - Solidifying My Beliefs**

When I left on my mission I thought I was a spiritual person. It was funny though, because once I was on my mission I soon began to realize how my little tiny testimony was overshadowed by others who had been through the fire and had gained a testimony and a level of spirituality that I had yet to even dream of. When I arrived home I have never been stronger. Today I am still spiritually just as strong as when I came home. I think my mission put me in circumstances and situations that tested my spirituality but with every battle I won, I became more and more strong. I think my mission gave me a spiritual foundation for the rest of my life. I don't think my mission is the most spiritual I will ever be. I think it just was a springboard for where I want my spirituality to be at the end of my life.

There is not a day that goes by that I do not think of my mission. I have found myself in situations where I may be tempted to do something I know is not right. At those times a memory from my mission or an experience that taught me something will come flooding back to me and it will impact the choice I make at that moment. An

example of this happened just a few weeks ago. Our beliefs are that we should not work on Sundays. Sunday we consider a day of rest and a day we dedicate to the Lord. We call this “keeping the Sabbath day holy.” We attend church, but we do not do things that we would do on other days like shop, ski, or work. I was offered a job recently and it would have been a really good experience for me. It would have been a job that related to my field of study. The only problem with the job was that I would have to work several Sundays a month. I thought about this job opportunity for quite some time before I came to the conclusion that I would not take it. My thoughts and the why I came to this decision were simple. As I sat thinking of this job one day, I was reminded of a situation from my mission where I had asked someone to quit their job so they could attend church and live the commandments of God. I thought back to the moment I asked this family to do this, and I thought to myself, how could I work on Sunday after preaching to people for 1½ years about living the Sabbath day and keeping it holy? I concluded I could not. I will not make myself a hypocrite.

This is a small example, but I have hundreds of experiences just like this. Many of the experiences on my mission impacted me so deeply that I will live with those consequences for the rest of my life. These experiences solidified many of my beliefs and how those beliefs actually shape who I am today.

## **CHAPTER V**

### **DISCUSSION**

#### **Overview**

The final chapter of this thesis summarizes the findings of the research and interprets findings in light of theory and existing research relevant to the research questions. Implications for theory are also given. Limitations on the research are included in this chapter along with recommendations for future research. The conclusion offers some final thoughts on the religious development of emerging adults.

#### **Significant Findings**

##### **Research Question One: Why Do Emerging Adults Decide to Serve a Mission?**

The findings for this research question were similar for all but one participant. Most of the women in this study never had a strong desire to serve a mission before they decided to serve. Thus, their decisions were based on a change of heart wherein their desires and future plans lay. It was mentioned several times by participants that before their mission, their future was “bright” or “wide open.” Arnett (2000) describes this time in an emerging adult’s life as a time when there are many decisions to be made, when little about the future is certain, and a time in which the scope of independent exploration and life possibilities is much greater for most people than it will be at any other period of their life.

The decision to serve a mission could be based on Erikson's lifespan psychosocial theory (Crain, 2005), in that this theory postulates that young people (emerging adults) have a difficult time making lasting commitments. They often times feel there is too much to decide too soon. Erikson commented on the prolonged adolescence typical in industrialized societies and on the psychosocial moratorium given to young people in such societies, "during which the young adult through free role experimentation may find a niche in some section of his society" (Erikson, 1968, p. 156). It is during this time period that a young man or woman decides to serve a mission for the LDS church. Many of the participants voiced having feelings of confusion and uncertainty about their future at the time they were considering a mission. The decision to serve for most of them was a difficult decision. However, once the commitment had been made, all participants felt a sense of relief. This sense of relief could be attributed to the fact that once they had decided to serve a mission, all other commitments or decisions were postponed for another 18 months. Adolescents often postpone commitments because of an inner need to avoid identity foreclosure, a premature acceptance of compartmentalized social roles. Erikson summarizes this idea by saying,

The adolescent's central tasks, then, is to find some way of life to which he or she can make a permanent commitment. The struggles of this stage lead to the new ego strength of fidelity, the ability to sustain one's freely pledged loyalties. (Erikson, 1964, p. 125)

Erikson's notion of moratorium in some ways describes women deciding to serve and in other ways does not. It may be argued that a mission is opposite of what Erikson

describes as a moratorium in that it is a very strict, rule bound experience. Some may argue that a mission is an example of obedience as opposed to exploration. A mission does not allow for persons to explore as free agents of themselves because a mission is a closely guided experience by leaders and those in authority.

What does fit with Erikson's moratorium is that a mission experience is different for male and female emerging adults in the LDS church. As discussed earlier, LDS young men are expected, even commanded to serve a mission for the church, whereas young women are given a choice and there is rarely any pressure for them to make the decision to serve. When a woman does decide to serve a mission for the church it is because of her desire for change, an opportunity to see different places and things, to explore other cultures, and religion. I would argue that because she is making this decision, which at times is contrary to popular opinion or others' desires, she is indeed setting out to explore and experience what Erikson describes as a moratorium. Some of the participants have accomplished what Erikson has described through serving a mission, as exhibited in their responses to research question three, discussed later in this chapter.

What also was common among all these women was how ready and willing they were to make a significant change in their lives. Most of them made reference of a desire to start new, to find adventure, and to do something that would encourage growth and development for themselves. Erik Erikson defines psychosocial moratorium as a kind of timeout period for finding oneself (Crain, 2005). Erikson believed it is during this time period emerging adults tend to travel, explore, and find who they are outside of their

adolescent “clicks” (Erikson, 1968, p. 156).

Only one participant seemed to have an easy time with the actual decision to serve. The rest all felt social pressure in two ways, both of which seemed to push and pull the participants in two different directions. The participants explain that they were pushed away by unwanted stereotypes of sister missionaries, but pulled toward serving by the encouragement of significant others whose opinions mattered. All participants made reference to the “stereotype” of a sister missionary. They all defined themselves as being different from the “stereotypical sister missionary,” and not wanting to fall into that stereotype themselves. The other social pressure many of them expressed was that their family and oftentimes friends encouraged them to make the decision to serve a mission. Erikson described adolescents as disturbed and confused by new social conflicts and demands. “The adolescent’s primary task, Erikson believed, is establishing a new sense of ego identity – a feeling for who one is and one’s place in the larger social order” (Crain, 2005, p. 287). It has also been suggested that, although his (emerging adult) parents’ wishes are still important to him, he (the emerging adult) is attempting a compromise among them, society’s demands, and his own capabilities (Marcia, 1966, p. 552).

**Research Question Two: What Are Experiences During the Mission That Helped Emerging Adult Women Develop as a Person Spiritually?**

Dealing with adversity and having positive spiritual experiences were two things that helped with development of spirituality in the participants. All of the women



expressed ways in which having to learn a foreign language helped them develop a deeper spirituality. They expressed how having to learn a foreign language like Chinese in such a short time period was very intense and difficult, so they relied on faith and God during the language learning process. It may be through the participants' past experiences that they came into the mission with the tools already in place to use their religion as a way of coping with the difficulties of learning a foreign language. Each participant came into the same situation of learning a difficult language, with different past experiences of dealing with adversity. It was through their past experiences that each one knew they could handle this trial. They would be able to rely on God for help, with past experiences that had given them the confidence they needed to accomplish such a daunting task. Each had support systems from home and from their companions that varied in how that support was given. Symbolic interaction theory helps to explain that even though they were learning the same language with the exact same teaching methods, each would invariably interpret how they were to learn and combat the trial that lays before them. Each participant spoke of the difficulties of learning Chinese and how they went about learning and studying, but in the end, each missionary turned to the same source for their ultimate support and comfort; namely, their faith and God. Learning a language while facing other types of adversity led them to practice their spirituality at levels they never had before. They felt that this strategy strengthened their spirituality.

Spirituality has been described by researchers as a way of providing protection and giving people a coping mechanism when dealing with trials of everyday life.

Spirituality has also been described as a tool in the clinical setting for healing emotional

wounds. Researchers also explain that spirituality may play a role in the development of resilience (Williams, 2004). It was their spirituality that helped these women missionaries through these trying times. However, it was also these adversities that strengthened and deepened their spirituality.

Facing rejection was also a finding common among all the participants. After each participant explained and gave stories of being mistreated or rejected, I thought they were going to explain how this shook their testimony. However, I found the opposite to be true. They all expressed how having these experiences solidified and increased their spirituality. Murphy et al. (2010) explained that emerging adulthood is a transitional phase, when outcomes may be uncertain.

Emerging adulthood can be a turning point: some young people who falter and flounder during the transition come from the ranks of well-functioning adolescents; likewise, some troubled adolescents demonstrate a turnaround through successful experiences with the new opportunities and tasks of this transition. (p. 175)

Having positive spiritual experiences increased the participant's spirituality. All of them described experiences in which their hard work, determination, and constant spiritual devotion brought an increased level of spirituality. I found two ways in which positive spiritual experiences were described. The first way was in witnessing the conversion of others, and the other was in answered prayers. Many of the participants also described times when their testimony or their spirituality was challenged on their mission. It seems that the positive spiritual experiences counteracted the times when

their testimonies may have been challenged. These positive spiritual experiences also helped to raise them higher on the spiritual scale than they had been before. Barry and Nelson (2005) found that emerging adulthood was a time of questioning one's childhood religious beliefs. One of the participants described how her faith was tested during her mission, but ultimately she found the experience to be one that strengthened her faith.

Answered prayers were something every participant mentioned during the interview process. Each told several stories of times when they knew God had heard and did answer their prayers. Praying to God for positive outcomes gave each woman an increased spirituality. Part of the process of exploration, in the view of most emerging adults, is forming a distinctive set of beliefs about religious issues. Several studies have indicated that deciding on one's own beliefs and values is one of the criteria young people view as most important to becoming an adult (Arnett & Jensen, 2002). It seems that through these experiences the participants were tested and "deciding on their own beliefs."

**Research Question Three: How Do Missions Help or Deter the Development of Emerging Adults? What Aspects of Development Do Missions Cultivate?**

I found that missions help the development of emerging adults in that the mission lifestyle took the participants out of their comfort zones. They were challenged by schedules, relationships, rejection, and unfamiliar surroundings. What was most evident is that their struggles are what brought the most growth and development. I found through the participant's stories that missions helped to develop self-confidence,

humility, endurance, communication, and relational skills. Struggle also helped develop resilience and an appreciation for family and friends. Arnett (2000) explained how this time period can be difficult for emerging adults.

Although the identity explorations of emerging adulthood make it an especially full and intense time of life for many people, these explorations are not always experienced as enjoyable. Explorations in worldviews sometimes lead to rejection of childhood beliefs without the construction of anything more compelling in their place. Also, to a large extent, emerging adults pursue their identity explorations on their own, without the daily companionship of either their family of origin or their family to be. (p. 474)

Arnett (2000) suggested that even though these explorations are not always enjoyable, these experiences are important in their development to adulthood.

What is so interesting about these findings is how similar and yet how diverse the participants' experiences were and what each individual took from her experiences. Symbolic Interaction theory states that people interpret things according to their previous experiences and social interactions. Because of the things that have happened in my past and the way I have been raised, there were certain things about my mission that I interpreted completely different from other participants. One participant in this study has interpreted her mission as a very difficult, painful, and unpleasant experience. She does not like to talk about her mission, and she does not feel like she has a lot of good to say about missions. On the other hand, I do not view my mission in those ways at all. We both served in the same mission, with the same mission president, with the same rules,

and yet we have emerged from this experience with completely differing interpretations. With the help of symbolic interactionism we may also conclude that there are contextual factors like our personalities and the way each of us internally processed our experiences, that help to explain the differences in how each of us view our mission today. Through the interview process it was clear that today these experiences helped both of us in our development and growth. The difference was in the way we viewed and interpreted our experiences while in the mission field.

**Research Question Four: How Does a Mission Shape Who a Person is Today?**

I found that the participants in this study had changed many aspects of their lives, often for the better, because of their mission experiences. The experiences that helped shape who they are today include spiritual experiences, giving service, gaining future perspectives, gaining more self-confidence, solidifying spiritual beliefs, and forming daily habits and routines. A mission is a time when all other things in a person's life fall to the side and she is able to focus for a year and a half on who she is spiritually. Missionaries are able to live in a "bubble" (meaning missionaries do not watch TV, movies, listen to popular music, or talk about topics that are inappropriate) and focus on who they want to become.

Barry and Nelson (2005) found that young Mormons tend to be experiencing the opposite of what the national trends are for this age group. These national trends include endorsement of certain criteria, the holding of certain beliefs, and engagement in behaviors that appear to differ from other emerging-adults in the country (Barry &

Nelson, 2005). Those “behaviors” and “certain beliefs” include things such as their beliefs in abstaining from drinking alcohol, premarital sex, attending church meetings at least once a week, rejecting cohabitation, and dressing in more conservative modest clothing. A mission is what sets up these young adults for this kind of life style. If they have not yet served a mission, they are preparing to serve one, and as such they must abide by certain rules and seek a certain level of spirituality. If they have already served a mission, then they have experienced a time in which their spiritual beliefs have been solidified by their experiences as a missionary and they want to endorse certain practices. Barry and Nelson (2005) concluded that Mormon students were adopting religious beliefs (rather than religious liberalism), emphasizing emotional control (rather than impulse expression), and supporting and fostering interdependence (rather than autonomy). According to the participants in this study, their mission is what helped them adopt or solidify their religious beliefs. Their mission is what helped them learn emotional control through living with companions and upholding their moral beliefs. They all spoke of fostering interdependence as they learned to rely on others, to support and serve others, and internalize their religion and their faith.

### **Limitations of the Research**

The small sample size of the study as well as the relatively homogeneity of the participants in their race, SES, and length of religious involvement, limits this study in its ability to represent the developmental experiences of all missionaries who have served a mission for the LDS church. A study with additional participants may have uncovered

additional categories and themes relevant to the research questions. Studying missions served in various countries, including the United States, may produce additional or somewhat different findings than what was captured from participants in this study, who all served in the same mission location far away from their homes, where they struggled with the language and culture.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

There are several possibilities for future research in this area of study. A future study might focus on how a mission affects a person's religious development throughout their lives. I recommend a longitudinal study of several participants to examine how serving a mission has affected their lives at the ages of 26, 36, 46, 56 and so on. The research could include how it affected their development, how they chose careers, family choices, relationships, and if later they decided to serve a second mission with their spouse.

This research project was rich with data. There was so much more that could have been analyzed and interpreted. Future research could include looking at exposure to other cultures and individual psychosocial development. There could be more in-depth investigation of spirituality and development, as well as examination of similarities and differences in development between women who serve missions for the LDS church and men who serve missions for the LDS church.

## Conclusion

Arnett described emerging adulthood as a time of relative independence from social roles and from normative expectations. Not yet having the enduring responsibilities of adulthood, emerging adults often explore a variety of possibilities in love, work, and worldviews. Many different directions remain possible, little about one's future has been decided, and the scope of independent exploration of life's possibilities is far greater than they are at any other point in a person's life (Arnett, 2000). Emerging adults report that deciding on one's own beliefs and values is one of the most important criteria to becoming an adult (Arnett & Jensen, 2002). As my participants have shown, emerging adulthood is a unique time period in which many options and possibilities were placed before them. Through joyful experiences and difficult trials, my participants and I experienced unique opportunities for growth and development during our missions. Though not uniformly positive, these experiences helped us to affirm and deepen our religious beliefs and values, and affected our lives in lasting ways.



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**APPENDICES**

**APPENDIX A**  
**DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY**

## Demographic Survey

**This last set of questions provides information about you and your mission. Please provide the following information that best describes you and your mission experience:**

1. Your Age:

Write your age

2. Marital Status:

Circle your marital status

Divorced
Married
Single

3a. “Financial comfort” level:

Circle your “financial comfort” level

Not comfortable
Comfortable
More than comfortable

3b. Employment:

Please write your current employment

3c. This job is:

Circle your type of employment

Non-professional
Professional
Administrative
Other (please specify)

4. Church Membership:

Please write the number of years

You have been a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

5. Missionary History:

Please write how many people in your

Immediate family have served missions



6. Level of education:

Please circle the highest level of your education

High School
Some College
Bachelors Degree
Some Graduate School
Graduate Degree

7a. Mission:

Please write the country and city you served as a missionary

7b. Mission dates:

Please write the dates of your mission

7c. Mission language:

Please write the language you learned  
for your missionary service

8. Country and City of origin:

Please write where you were born

9. Ethnicity:

Please indicate your perceived ethnicity

10. Length of time home:

Please write the day you returned from your mission

11. Current city of residence:

Please write where you are currently living

12. Chinese name:

Please write your Chinese name in both pin yin and characters

Thank you for your time.

**Appendix B**  
**Interview Questions**

Hi, (name) thank you for talking with me today. The purpose of our conversation is to understand young female adult development for women serving abroad as missionaries for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. I'll ask you a series of questions and I'd like you to respond with whatever comes to mind, in as much detail as possible. If you aren't certain of what I am asking, let me know and I'll be glad to clarify things for you.

The first set of questions has to do with your decision to serve a mission for your church. I would like to hear stories that may come to mind as you think of these questions.

### **Part I. The Decision to Serve**

1. Why did you decide to serve a mission?
  - 1a. was this something you had always wanted to do?
  - 1b. If not, what prompted you to serve a mission?

**Probe: what were you feeling during the time you were making this decision?**

**Probe: how did you feel once the decision had been made?**

2. What was your perception of a mission before you went?
3. How did your perceptions affect your desire to serve a mission?

**The next set of questions will deal with aspects of your development through doing a mission.**

### **Part II. Development through doing a mission**

4. What was it like leaving for your mission? I want you to think back to the day you entered the MTC and left your family and life as you knew it behind. Picture the scene as

best you can, then tell me about it.

4a. Can you tell me how you were feeling when you when you entered the MTC?

4b. What thoughts were going through your mind as you walked away from your family?

**Probe: Who was there?**

**Probe: What did they look like; how were they behaving/acting?**

5. Do you think if you left for a second time you would react emotionally differently than you had the first time? If so, why do you think you would react differently?

6. What was learning the language like for you?

6a. How did you view your language proficiency at the start of your mission, the middle, and near the end?

**Probe: When you think about the learning process who comes to your mind? Why do these thoughts come to your mind?**

6b. What types of things did learning Chinese teach you about yourself?

7. What is the most memorable thing you learned while on your mission?

**The next set of questions has to do with any spiritual and moral development experienced during your mission.**

**Part III. Spiritual and Moral Development experienced during the mission**

8. Reflect on where you were spiritually at the time you began training for your mission, when you arrived home, and where you are today. Tell me something about each phase.

8a. Looking at it now, to what extent and how did you change spiritually on your mission?

8b. In what ways do these changes shape who you are today?

9. Tell me about your favorite companion, and your most difficult companion?

9a. Why was she your favorite?

**Probe: can you tell me of a specific experience that really helped you bond?**

9b. With your least favorite companion, what challenges made a good relationship so difficult?

**Probe: can you describe an experience to illustrate why this was a difficult companionship?**

9c. What lessons, if any, did you learn from these experiences?

10. How did serving with a companion affect your spirituality?

11. What aspect of your mission most helped you to develop spiritually the most?

11a. Why do you think this specific thing helped you the most?

11b. Were there any instances that tested the strength of your spirituality while serving?

**The next portion of the interview will be focused around how your mission shaped who you are today.**

**Part IV. Missions and my current self**

12. What was something challenging that you recall about your mission? Please describe it in detail to me.

13. How have these challenges helped to shape who you are today?

14. How did you feel about the missionary lifestyle?

**Probe: What was difficult about it?**

**Probe: What did you like about it?**

14a. To what extent do you think living this lifestyle has changed the way you live today?

15. What was it like coming home from your mission?

**Probe: What did you do when immediately after you arrived home?**

**Probe: How were you feeling?**

**Probe: Who was there? What do you recall about this experience?**

16. How much do you think you have changed since coming home?

16a. In what ways have you changed?

16b. How do you feel about those changes?

17. Would you do make the same decision (to serve a mission) if given the chance to go back and make it again?

17a. Why or why not?

Final question: We've discussed many things about your mission experience. Are there any words you wish to add, or stories you wish to tell, even if they don't pertain exactly to my questions?

Thank you for your participation in this study.

**Appendix C**  
**IRB Approval**





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& Human Development  
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Page 1 of 2  
USU IRB Approved: 11/10/2010  
Approval Terminates: 11/09/2011  
Protocol Number: 2774  
IRB Password Protected per IRB Coordinator

#### LETTER OF INFORMATION

##### *"When They Called US Jie Mei (Sister)" An Autoethnographic Study of Religious Development in Emerging Adulthood*

Dr. Kathleen Piercy and graduate student K. Nichole Ball in the Department of Family, Consumer, and Human Development at Utah State University are conducting a research study to find out more about development of religiosity among emerging adult women. You have been asked to take part because you have served a mission for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. There will be approximately 5 total participants in this study.

**Procedures** If you agree to be in this research study, you will be asked to give one or two individual interviews of about one hour's duration. Interviews will occur at a convenient location for you, preferably your home if it is available. If face to face interview is not possible due to distance, a phone interview will be conducted, or written stories will be solicited that are typed and sent to Ms. Ball via mail. Audio recordings will be made of in-person and telephone interviews.

**Risks** Participation in this research study may involve some discomfort when discussing personal information. You have the right to refuse to answer any questions that they make you uncomfortable.

**Benefits** The researchers may learn more about the place of spiritual growth in shaping emerging adult lives. You may benefit from recalling your growth experiences and having those experiences affirmed by researchers.

**Explanation & offer to answer questions** K. Nichole Ball has explained this research study to you and answered your questions. If you have other questions or research-related problems, you may reach Dr. Piercy at (435) 797-2387 or [kathy.piercy@usu.edu](mailto:kathy.piercy@usu.edu).

**Voluntary nature of participation and right to withdraw without consequence** Participation in research is entirely voluntary. You may refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without consequence or loss of benefits. If you choose to do so, please notify K. Nichole Ball at (208) 709-7078.

**Confidentiality** Research records will be kept confidential, consistent with federal and state regulations. Only Dr. Piercy and K. Nichole Ball will have access to the data, which will be kept in a locked file cabinet or on a password protected computer in a locked room. To protect your privacy, personal, identifiable information will be removed from study documents and audio recordings and replaced with a study identifier. Identifying information will be stored separately from data. The information will be kept for one year after the research has been concluded. After one year all data will be destroyed.

**IRB Approval Statement** The Institutional Review Board for the protection of human participants at Utah State University has approved this research study. If you have any questions or concerns about



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USU IRB Approved: 11/10/2010  
Approval Terminates: 11/09/2011  
Protocol Number: 2774  
IRB Password Protected per IRB Coordinator

### LETTER OF INFORMATION

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your rights or a research-related injury and would like to contact someone other than the research team, you may contact the IRB Administrator at (435) 797-0567 or email [irb@usu.edu](mailto:irb@usu.edu) to obtain information or to offer input.

**Investigator Statement** “I certify that the research study has been explained to the individual, by me or my research staff, and that the individual understands the nature and purpose, the possible risks and benefits associated with taking part in this research study. Any questions that have been raised have been answered.”

#### Signatures of Researcher(s)

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