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**Navigating Faith Transitions: A Four-Year Longitudinal Examination of Religious
Deidentification Among LGBTQ+ Latter-day Saints**

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Abstract

Many lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer/questioning (LGBTQ+) individuals raised in conservative religious traditions present to therapy with questions about how to navigate tension between their sexual/gender and religious identities. For therapists, having accurate information about (a) the typical process of religious de-identification, (b) its antecedents, and (c) its outcomes is critical to empowering these clients to make the decisions that are best for them. We present data from a pre-registered, four-year, longitudinal study of 164 LGBTQ+ people who were active members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (CJCLDS) at baseline to examine the phenomenology, antecedents, and outcomes of religious change. Across the four years of our study, we found that two-thirds of our sample religiously deidentified to some degree. On average, participants shifted their attendance at the worship services from weekly to a few times a year and 40% of participants disaffiliated with the CJCLDS. Longitudinal multi-level models suggested that age predicted de-identification with younger participants de-identifying more quickly than older participants. Religious de-identification was positively related to engagement with LGBTQ+ communities, and follow-up cross-lagged panel analyses suggested that engagement with LGBTQ+ communities was predictive of subsequent decreases in service attendance rather than vice versa. No relationships were observed between religious deidentification and mental health or well-being. These data suggest that religious deidentification is normative and developmental for LGBTQ+ Latter-day Saints, this process is most active among younger individuals, and connecting with other LGBTQ+ people is a key facilitator for this process.

Keywords: LGBTQ+; religion/spirituality; longitudinal data analysis; faith transition; community connectedness

Public Significance Statement: This study suggests that declines in religiousness are both normative and developmental for LGBTQ+ Latter-day Saints and, most strikingly, highlights the fast rate of declines in religiousness. This religious decline appears to happen fastest in LGBTQ+ Latter-day Saints who are younger and more connected with LGBTQ+ communities.

Navigating Faith Transitions: A Four-Year Longitudinal Examination of Religious Deidentification Among LGBTQ+ Latter-day Saints

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, and other sexual/gender minoritized (LGBTQ+) individuals often grapple with arduous experiences within religious communities. For many LGBTQ+ people, religion is a place of connection, support, and purpose (Lefevor et al., 2021; Skidmore et al., 2023a, 2023b). However, for many others—including those who find connection, support and purpose from religion—religion is a source of stress, conflict, dissonance (Hamblin & Gross, 2013; Rodriguez et al., 2019), and even depression, suicidal thoughts, and self-injurious behaviors (Etengoff & Lefevor, 2020; McGraw et al., 2023). LGBTQ+ people describe often feeling excluded, rejected, and discriminated against within religious communities (Dahl & Galliher, 2012; Lefevor et al., 2020). Likely as a consequence of these experiences and the stress they cause, many LGBTQ+ people ultimately religiously deidentify (Lefevor, Bouton et al., 2023).

LGBTQ+ Latter-day Saints (members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints) likely experience the harms and benefits of their religious engagement more intensely than other LGBTQ+ individuals, due to the high-demand nature of their religious tradition (demanding, theologically and culturally exclusive religious groups; Scheitle & Adamczyk, 2010; Skidmore et al., 2023b). The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (CJCLDS) is considered by many LGBTQ+ people to be among the least affirming religious traditions for LGBTQ+ people (Barringer, 2019), due in large part to their unwavering doctrines regarding the necessity for marriage between a cisgender man and a cisgender woman in order to achieve the highest degree of salvation. LGBTQ+ Latter-day Saints are taught that same-gender sexual behaviors and gender expansive expression are sinful and that the consequence of engaging in these behaviors

or expressions include church membership restrictions (CJCLDS, 2016, 2024b). LGBTQ+ Latter-day Saints often experience distress stemming from their religious beliefs (Lefevor, McGraw et al., 2022), confusion regarding how best to navigate their LGBTQ+ and religious identities (Lefevor & Skidmore, 2024a), and conflict with their coreligionists (Lefevor & Skidmore, 2024b).

Emerging longitudinal evidence suggests that many LGBTQ+ Latter-day Saints religiously deidentify over time (Lefevor, Skidmore et al., 2023). This process of religious deidentification is complex and typically includes shifts in religious beliefs, ways of engaging with religious communities, religious affiliation, and relationship with divinity (Lefevor, Bouton et al., 2023). Although it seems clear that many LGBTQ+ Latter-day Saints religiously deidentify, it is not clear *how* they deidentify, *how many* deidentify, what *predicts* deidentification, and what *results from* deidentification. Perhaps more importantly, these questions are precisely the questions that many LGBTQ+ Latter-day Saints who find themselves navigating tension between their experience of gender/sexuality and religious beliefs ask themselves to help them make decisions about their optimal life path. The present study investigates each of the four questions with the goal of helping scientists, therapists, and LGBTQ+ Latter-day Saints better understand the antecedents and outcomes of religious change.

Religious Deidentification Among LGBTQ+ Latter-day Saints

Religious deidentification is a multifaceted experience that includes some combination of religious disbelief (i.e., cognitive separation), disengagement (i.e., social separation), discontinuance (i.e., behavioral separation), and disaffiliation (i.e., psychological separation; van Tongeren & deWall, 2021). Disengagement and discontinuance are often exhibited by observable shifts in religious service attendance. Service attendance has been linked with

increased depression and minority stressors (e.g., internalized homo/transnegativity) among LGBTQ+ Latter-day Saints (Skidmore et al., 2023a), likely stemming from exposure to hetero/cisnormative doctrines (Skidmore et al., 2023b). These mental health difficulties likely lead some LGBTQ+ Latter-day Saints to disengage from their religious community and discontinue service attendance.

Religious deidentification can also manifest psychologically (disbelief, disaffiliation), with some LGBTQ+ Latter-day Saints decreasing or altogether abandoning their sense of commitment to their religion. Considering that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints encourages Latter-day Saints to invest substantial amounts of time and energy in their faith practice, intentionally decreasing commitment to this faith practice may create dissonance and also raise broader questions of how to meaningfully engage with self and the world. LGBTQ+ Latter-day Saints may religiously deidentify by questioning, altering, or abandoning religious beliefs (i.e., orthodoxy). Decreases in orthodoxy are common among LGBTQ+ Latter-day Saints who feel conflicted regarding their LGBTQ+ and religious identities (Lefevor, Meter et al., 2023), with shifts in their belief being used as a coping strategy to maintain both identities (Skidmore et al., 2023b).

Although religious deidentification is becoming increasingly common (Pew Research Center, 2022; Smith & Cragun, 2019), conservative religious traditions often obscure this trend, putting the onus of deidentification on the individual in an effort to retain members. As such, understanding rates of deidentification can also be helpful for LGBTQ+ Latter-day Saints as it may normalize their experience.

Antecedents of Religious Deidentification among LGBTQ+ Latter-day Saints

LGBTQ+ Latter-day Saints religiously deidentify for a variety of reasons. One of the most salient reasons that LGBTQ+ Latter-day Saints deidentify is in response to the profound challenges and conflicts they face within their religious communities. Specifically, LGBTQ+ Latter-day Saints have noted that they commonly face a lack of belongingness, identity conflict/confusion, minority stressors (e.g., internalized homo/transnegativity, discrimination, identity concealment, and prejudice), religious/spiritual struggles (e.g., doubt struggles, interpersonal struggles), mental health concerns, and struggles with their gender/sexual identity in Latter-day Saint communities (Skidmore et al., 2023b; Sorrell et al., 2023). Many LGBTQ+ Latter-day Saints continue to struggle with these various challenges and ultimately choose to reject their religious identity in favor of prioritizing their LGBTQ+ identity (Dehlin et al., 2015). Navigating LGBTQ+ and LDS identities can be a daunting and confusing journey, particularly considering some LGBTQ+ individuals feel comforted by their religious community and beliefs (Skidmore et al., 2023a, 2023b), leading some LGBTQ+ Latter-day Saints to disengage socially but continue to believe psychologically (Lefevor, Meter et al., 2023).

The process of religious deidentification—and even *which* LGBTQ+ Latter-day Saints religiously deidentify—may be shaped by LGBTQ+ Latter-day Saints’ various other identities and familial experiences. Indeed, nonreligious individuals generally tend to be younger, more educated, and more likely to be cisgender men than religious individuals (Smith & Cragun, 2019). Age likely acts as a crucial determinant in ultimate religious deidentification, as older adults often rate themselves as being more religious and holding stronger beliefs than their younger adult counterparts (Wilder et al., 2023). Younger LGBTQ+ individuals are also less likely than older LGBTQ+ individuals to hold stigmatizing views toward their LGBTQ+ identities, which may make them more likely to religiously deidentify to more fully embody their

LGBTQ+ identities (Dehlin et al., 2015). Gender identity and same-gender attraction may also influence religious deidentification, as they can impact the way in religious engagement is experienced. For example, women overall tend to hold stronger religious beliefs than men (Wilder et al., 2023), which may lead men to be more likely to religiously deidentify. Further, transgender and genderqueer Latter-day Saints may feel more depressed and experience more conflicts from their religious engagement than their cisgender counterparts, which likely lead to more frequent religious deidentification as a way to improve mental health and well-being. Given that same-gender sexual behaviors are so strongly discouraged in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, it is also likely that LGBTQ+ individuals with stronger same-gender sexual attraction may be more likely to religiously deidentify to decrease their dissonance and potentially seek a same-gender partner. Finally, the degree to which LGBTQ+ Latter-day Saints' families practice religiousness may impact how likely they are to religiously deidentify. Many religious families may push back against LGBTQ+ family members who want to religiously deidentify and can pressure such individuals into maintain religious engagement, whereas families who provide a supportive foundation for LGBTQ+ individuals to deidentify from their religion—or are themselves deidentified from religion—may aid in LGBTQ+ individuals' ultimate choice to deidentify.

The Impact of Religious Deidentification on LGBTQ+ Latter-day Saints' Connectedness and Well-being

The process of religious deidentification can be fraught with emotional, social, and psychological turbulence. Anecdotally, individuals who religiously deidentify often note experiences of fear, guilt, sorrow, pain, grief, and existential suffering (Björkmark et al., 2022). For individuals in high-demand religions (Scheitle & Adamczyk, 2010) such as the Church of

Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, religious deidentification can mean an alteration in one's entire culture, community, and perspective on life. Many LGBTQ+ Latter-day Saints grow up with a specific belief system and sense of purpose, which can lead to a sense of upheaval and distress as they religiously deidentify. LGBTQ+ Latter-day Saints who deidentify may thus face not only intense internalized conflict, but interpersonal conflicts with family, friends, and community members. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints places a strong emphasis on the importance of family and the need for all family members to adhere to religious doctrines in order to be together in heaven, which can lead to intense interpersonal conflict with family members, who may take religious deidentification as a personal offense or betrayal. Further, many LGBTQ+ Latter-day Saints maintain a strong sense of connection to their religious community and can thus feel disconnected and isolated upon religiously deidentifying.

Simultaneously, religious deidentification can be an empowering and liberating process. For many LGBTQ+ individuals, religious deidentification is part of rejecting a cis/heteronormative worldview that creates structural, distal, and proximal stress (Lefevor, Huffman et al., 2020). Religious deidentification often runs parallel to secular or atheist identity formation, comprising several stages including discovering ideas, discovering self, and discovering the collective (LeDrew, 2013) as well as recognizing the ubiquity of theism, questioning theism, rejecting theism, and coming out (Smith, 2011). Developing a secular or atheist identity and engaging in some degree of organized nonbelief may offer many of the group-based, health-promoting aspects of organized religion (Cragun & McCaffree, 2021; Galen et al., 2014; Galen, 2015). Similarly, developing a secular or atheist identity can also offer identity-based support that can promote well-being (Smith, 2013).

Because religious deidentification can be a painful process, LGBTQ+ Latter-day Saints who reduce their religious engagement may initially experience reduced well-being (Lefevor, Skidmore et al., 2023). Indeed, the reduction of religious engagement seems to be more clearly associated with worse health outcomes than either full or no religious engagement (Galen, 2015; Galen et al., 2010; Lefevor, Blaber et al., 2019). LGBTQ+ Latter-day Saints may thus experience a decrease in well-being following religious deidentification, particularly when they initially deidentify and are facing the internal conflict inherent in changing one's community, belief system, and perspective on life.

Although LGBTQ+ Latter-day Saints often struggle feeling connected to their religious community, their well-being may be further influenced by religiously deidentifying as their sense of connection to others may decline. Relationship conflicts are particularly apparent among people who religiously deidentify (Björkmark et al., 2022), which can potentially impact their overall sense of well-being (Diener et al., 2010). LGBTQ+ Latter-day Saints often face pressure from their families to continue to religiously engage, and choosing to deidentify could lead to a lack of support from family members. In addition to potentially losing family support, many LGBTQ+ Latter-day Saints note that religiously deidentifying left them feeling isolated and lonely due to the loss of their religious community (Skidmore et al., 2023b). Ways of socially navigating religious deidentification vary, with some LGBTQ+ Latter-day Saints seeking to maintain connections with their religious friends, family, and community, and others turning to other sources of support, such as LGBTQ+ communities. Although connection with other LGBTQ+ people may decrease loneliness and enhance overall well-being, transitioning communities and sources of support may be a tricky and time-consuming process, with many

LGBTQ+ Latter-day Saints still noting feelings of loneliness as they initially seek for support (Skidmore et al., 2023b).

Longer-term, however, religious deidentification does not seem to have lasting, negative effects on health or well-being (Speed & Fowler, 2015; Speed & Hwang, 2019). Religious engagement appears to be well-being enhancing for religious individuals but to do little for nonreligious, secular, or atheist individuals (Speed & Fowler, 2021; Speed & Hwang, 2019). Considering that LGBTQ+ Latter-day Saints often face conflict and minority stressors within religious spaces (Lefevor, McGraw et al., 2022; Skidmore et al., 2022) deidentifying may lead to fewer stressors. As many LGBTQ+ Latter-day Saints feel at odds with their LGBTQ+ identity (Skidmore et al., 2023b), religiously deidentifying may also enhance their authenticity as they may feel more open to act in accordance with their same-gender sexual attractions and/or gender expansive expression, as well as disclose their LGBTQ+ identities to others with less fear of rejection (Skidmore et al., 2023c). Such a sense of authenticity also ultimately leads to greater well-being among LGBTQ+ individuals (Kim et al., 2024).

Present Study

Considering the varying challenges and methods of navigating religious deidentification among LGBTQ+ Latter-day Saints, it is imperative to comprehensively assess the prevalence, antecedents, and consequences of religious deidentification for this population. We organize our core areas of inquiry into three core research questions and corresponding hypotheses:

Research Question 1: What percentage of LGBTQ+ Latter-day Saints report changes in religiousness over time?

Hypothesis 1: We expect that LGBTQ+ Latter-day Saints will generally report decreases in religiousness over time but do not have specific expectations of how larger or small those changes will be.

Research Question 2: Do LGBTQ+ Latter-day Saints' age, gender identity, sexual orientation, and family religiousness predict subsequent changes in religiousness?

Hypothesis 2: We expect that LGBTQ+ Latter-day Saints who are (a) older, (b) cisgender, (c) more bisexually oriented, and (d) coming from more religious families will show fewer decreases in religiousness than other LGBTQ+ Latter-day Saints.

Research Question 3: How do changes in religiousness impact LGBTQ+ Latter-day Saints' connectedness, health, and well-being?

Hypothesis 3: We expect that decreased religiousness will be associated with increased connectedness with LGBTQ+ communities. We do not expect a relationship to emerge between decreased religiousness and health or well-being.

Method

This study's sampling and analysis plan were pre-registered prior to collecting Wave III data. The pre-registered method section, the data, and analysis files can be found at https://osf.io/pkfd5/?view_only=9f7dddf91c84a7c8296d38b2aaac685. We detail departures from this method section in text. We report how we determined our sample size, all data exclusions (if any), all manipulations, and all measures in the study.

Procedures

The present study is part of a 10-year, longitudinal exploration of LGBTQ+ Latter-day Saints experiences of religiousness, gender/sexuality, and health. After procuring IRB approval from Utah State University (#11707), participants were initially recruited from January to

December, 2020 (Wave I) using a comprehensive community sampling approach (described below; Lefevor et al., 2022). In 2022 (Wave II), participants were given the chance to take a second version of the survey, and new participants were recruited using a similar comprehensive community sampling approach (Lefevor, Skidmore et al., 2023). Returning participants completed the survey in January-February 2022, and new participants completed the survey in March – August 2022. The 2024 sample (Wave III) was recruited entirely from follow-up emails sent to participants who filled out surveys at Wave I and/or Wave II in January 2024. Participants at Wave I and Wave II were compensated \$10, and participants at Wave III were compensated \$25.

At Wave I and II, we recruited participants using a comprehensive community sampling approach. This approach involves sampling participants from a variety of community venues including: (a) news media stories/advertisements (e.g., an op-ed in the Salt Lake Tribune, a story run in the Cache Valley Herald), (b) announcements in popular LGBTQ+ Latter-day Saint podcasts (e.g., Mormon Stories, Listen, Learn, Love), (c) physical and virtual advertisements made by therapeutic organizations serving LGBTQ+ Latter-day Saints (e.g., Flourish Therapy, Encircle Therapy), (d) posts made by the research team in social media groups catered to LGBTQ+ Latter-day Saints (e.g., Affirmation LDS Facebook page, North Star Facebook page), (e) social media posts made by prominent LGBTQ+ Latter-day Saints, and (f) snowball sampling.

Participants

All participants must have met the following criteria to be included in the study when they first were recruited into the study: (a) currently experience some degree of same-gender sexual attraction, engage in some degree of same-gender sexual behavior, experience some degree of gender dysphoria, and/or identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or

queer/questioning (LGBTQ+); (b) have been baptized a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints; (c) be 18 years old or older; (d) live in the United States, and (e) be willing to be contacted by the research team to participate in follow-up surveys. In addition, because the initial sample gathered in 2020 had far more participants who had stopped attending church services than who currently attended, new participants recruited at Wave II must have reported attending church services a few times a month or more. To be included in the present study, participants must (a) have been part of the overarching longitudinal study, (b) have indicated at their baseline measurement that they attended services at the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints a few times a month or more, and (c) provide data in Wave III about their service attendance.

A total of 164 participants met inclusion criteria for the present study. Of these, 65 (39.6%) participated at Wave I and 149 (90.9%) participated at Wave II. In general, participants were formally educated, White, gay, cisgender men who were on average 36.56 years old in 2024 ($SD = 12.32$). See table 1 for participant demographic characteristics at each wave.

Table 1

Participant Demographic Characteristics

	Wave I ($n = 65$)	Wave II ($n = 149$)	Wave III ($n = 164$)
Gender			
Cisgender Woman	32.3%	24.2%	23.8%
Cisgender Man	61.5%	66.4%	64.6%
Transgender/Nonbinary	6.2%	9.4%	11.6%
Race/Ethnicity			
White	93.8%	93.3%	95.1%
Person of Color	6.2%	6.7%	4.9%
Education			
High School or Less	1.5%	2.0%	1.2%
Some College	47.7%	23.5%	14.0%
Bachelor's Degree	44.6%	40.9%	45.1%
Graduate Degree	6.2%	33.6%	39.6%

State of Residence			
Utah	50.8%	57.7%	57.9%
Outside of Utah	49.2%	42.3%	42.1%
Religious Affiliation			
Latter-day Saint	100.0%	93.3%	75.0%
Other Religious Affiliation	0.0%	5.4%	1.8%
None/Unaffiliated	0.0%	1.3%	23.2%
Sexual Identity			
Gay/Lesbian	53.8%	57.7%	60.4%
Bisexual/Pansexual	26.1%	14.1%	15.2%
Same-Gender Attracted	6.1%	12.8%	9.8%
No Label	3.1%	4.0%	1.8%
Asexual	1.5%	5.4%	4.9%
Queer/Other	9.2%	6.0%	7.9%

Examining attrition in our sample was complicated because new participants were recruited both in 2020 and in 2022, and we used a subsample from a larger study (see Lefevor, McGraw et al., 2022). Consequently, we examined (a) whether participants meeting study criteria who completed the study for the first time in 2020 and returned in 2022 or 2024 differed from those who did not return in 2022 or 2024 and (b) whether new participants meeting study criteria who completed the study for the first time in 2022 and returned in 2024 differed from those who did not return in 2024.

Participants who completed the survey for the first time in 2020 but who did not return to the survey in 2022 or 2024 were on average older ($t = 2.69, p < .01, d = .44$), more educated ($\chi^2(3) = 20.29, p < .01$; Cramer's $V = .37$; 84.4% vs. 53.3% had a college degree), and more likely to identify as bisexual/pansexual or same-gender attracted ($\chi^2(11) = 32.64, p < .01$; Cramer's $V = .46$; 42.9% vs. 28.0% identified as bisexual/pansexual and 19.5% vs. 6.4% identified as same-gender attracted) than participants who returned. We did not observe differences in race/ethnicity ($\chi^2(3) = 4.29, p = .23$; Cramer's $V = .23$) or gender ($\chi^2(4) = 9.37, p = .05$; Cramer's $V = .25$). Participants who completed the survey for the first time in 2022 but who did not return to the survey in 2024 were more likely to identify as transgender or nonbinary

($\chi^2(5) = 13.52, p = .02$; Cramer's $V = .27$; 24.1% vs. 8.3%) than participants who returned in 2024 but did not differ in age ($t = 0.80, p = .21$; $d = .12$), education ($\chi^2(4) = 4.02, p = .40$; Cramer's $V = .15$), race/ethnicity ($\chi^2(3) = 3.58, p = .31$; Cramer's $V = .14$), or sexual identity ($\chi^2(13) = 14.93, p = .31$; Cramer's $V = .29$).

Measures

Most measures were administered at all three timepoints. We organize our measures based on which research question they are used to answer. All measures addressing research questions 1 (changes in religiousness over time) and 2 (baseline variables predicting changes in religiousness) were administered at all waves. All measures addressing research question 3 (consequences of changes in religiousness) were administered at Wave III.

For each measure, we cite the measure development article associated with the measure, which contains extensive information about the reliability (e.g., test-retest, internal consistency) and validity (e.g., content validity, discriminant validity) of the measure. All of the measures have been used with other samples of LGBTQ+ Latter-day Saints (c.f., Lefevor, Beckstead et al., 2019; Lefevor, Meter et al., 2023), demonstrating acceptable reliability and validity in these contexts.

Religiousness

Service Attendance at LDS Services. Service attendance was assessed at all three timepoints using Koenig & Büssing's (2010) organizational religious behavior item of the Duke University Religiousness Index. Participants were asked to indicate how often they attend church or other religious meetings using a 6-point Likert-type scale ranging from *Never* to *More than once a week*. If participants reported identifying as a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, their scores were retained for this variable; if participants did not identify as a

member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, their scores were transformed to the lowest value (1; *Never*) for this variable. Because the expectation among Latter-day Saints is to attend church weekly and there are not formal religious services offered more often, we combined the *More than once a week* and *once a week* categories.

Orthodoxy. Orthodoxy was assessed at all three timepoints using Hunsberger's (1989) short version of the Christian Orthodoxy Scale. Participants were asked to indicate their agreement with six items such as "Through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, God provided a way for the forgiveness of people's sins" using a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from *Strongly disagree* to *Strongly agree*. The scale evidenced excellent internal consistency at Wave I ($\alpha = .90$), Wave II ($\alpha = .93$), and Wave III ($\alpha = .96$).

Religious Commitment. Religious Commitment was assessed at all three timepoints using Worthington and colleagues (2003) Religious Commitment Inventory. Participants were asked to indicate the degree to which a series of 10 items are true for them, with items such as "My religious beliefs lie behind my whole approach to life" and "I enjoy working in the activities of my religious organization." The Religious Commitment Inventory measure uses a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from *Not at all true of me* to *Totally true of me*. The scale evidenced good internal consistency at Wave I ($\alpha = .88$) and excellent internal consistency at Wave II ($\alpha = .92$) and Wave III ($\alpha = .96$).

Baseline Variables That May Predict Changes in Religiousness

Family Religiousness. Family Religiousness was assessed at Waves I and II using the frequency questions regarding family religious values from Lambert and Dollahite's (2010) Faith Activities in the Home Scale. Participants were asked to indicate the frequency with which their parents and/or siblings are currently involved with four activities such as "Family reading of

scripture or other religious texts” using a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from *Never or not applicable to More than once a day*. The scale evidenced excellent internal consistency at Wave I ($\alpha = .90$) and Wave II ($\alpha = .95$).

Same-Gender Sexual Attraction. Same-Gender Sexual Attraction was assessed at Waves I and II using two questions developed by the authors of the present study, asking participants to indicate to what degree they currently experience sexual attraction to men and women. These items use the following scale: *None* (0%), *Mild* (around 17%), *Some* (around 33%), *Medium* (around 50%), *Moderate* (around 67%), *Strong* (around 83%), and *Very Strong* (around 100%). Responses to these questions were coded based on the participant’s indicated gender identity to create a same-gender sexual attraction variable. Participants identifying as gender nonbinary/genderqueer were coded as missing for this variable.

We also asked about participants’ attractions to nonbinary/gender expansive individuals. However, we ultimately decided to exclude nonbinary individuals from analyses about “same-gender” attraction since, the construct of “same-gender attraction” is rooted in such a cisnormative framework that the experience of a nonbinary individual being attracted to another nonbinary individual has such different sociocultural meanings than a cisgender woman being attracted to a cisgender woman.

Gender Identity. Gender identity was assessed at Waves I and II using the question, “What is your gender?” Possible responses include “Cisgender woman,” “Cisgender man,” “Transgender woman,” “Transgender man,” “Non-binary/genderqueer,” and “You don’t have an option that applies to me. I identify as ...,” where participants were prompted to indicate their gender identity. Brief definitions of cisgender and transgender were included alongside this

question. Participants were grouped by those reporting a transgender or nonbinary identity and those who did not.

Age in 2024. Participants reported their age each time they took the survey. If they missed a wave, we calculated their age in 2024 to use for analyses with age.

Variables Assessing Potential Consequences of Changes in Religiousness

Subjective Well-Being. Subjective Well-Being was assessed at Wave III using Diener and colleagues' (2010) Flourishing Scale. Participants were asked to indicate their agreement with eight items such as "I lead a purposeful and meaningful life" using a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from *Strongly disagree* to *Strongly agree*. The scale evidenced excellent internal consistency in the present study ($\alpha = .91$).

Loneliness. Loneliness was assessed at Wave III using the short form of the De Jong Gierveld Loneliness Scale (De Jong Gierveld & Van Tilburg, 2006). Participants were asked to indicate the extent to which a series of six items such as "I miss having people around" apply to their current situation using a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from *No!* to *Yes!*. The scale evidenced good internal consistency in the present study ($\alpha = .85$).

Family Support. Family Support was assessed at Wave III using the Family Support subscale of Zimet and colleagues' (1988) Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support. Participants were asked to indicate their agreement with four items such as "My family really tries to help me" using a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from *Strongly disagree* to *Strongly agree*. The scale evidenced good internal consistency in the present study ($\alpha = .88$).

Authenticity. Authenticity was assessed at Wave III using Wood and colleagues' (2008) Authenticity Scale. Participants were asked to indicate the degree to which a series of 12 items describes them, with items such as "I always stand by what I believe in." The Authenticity Scale

uses a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from *Does not describe me at all* to *Describes me very well*. The scale evidenced good internal consistency in the present study ($\alpha = .83$).

Connectedness with LGBTQ+ Communities. Connectedness with LGBTQ+ Communities was assessed at all waves using Frost and Meyer's (2012) community connectedness measure for diverse sexual minority populations. Participants were asked to indicate their agreement with seven items such as "You feel you're a part of your local LGBT community" using a 4-point Likert-type scale ranging from *Disagree strongly* to *Agree strongly*. Internal consistency at good at Wave I ($\alpha = .83$) and excellent at Waves II and III ($\alpha = .90$; $\alpha = .92$).

Analysis Plan

We checked our data for bots and fraudulent respondents at each wave using four kinds of data checks. First, we included a question at each wave asking participants to tell us something they knew about a specific Latter-day Saint prophet (e.g., Joseph Smith) to help us be sure that they were not a bot. These responses were checked for (a) depth of response and (b) duplicates (bots were much more likely to reproduce the same, publicly available information). Second, we examined response times (flagging participants finishing quicker than 2 *SDs* from the mean) and straightlining counts. Third, we examined the temporal stability of demographic data from one wave to the next (e.g., race/ethnicity, age). Fourth, we included three attention check questions (e.g., "please mark 'slightly agree' to let us know you're paying attention"). Responses on these four indicators was assessed holistically to determine the likelihood that any given response was a bot, and fraudulent responses were consequently eliminated.

We initially pre-registered an analysis plan that used latent growth modelling to analyze our data. However, the fit indices for the unconditional latent growth model indicated poor fit,

$\chi^2(1) = 5.74, p = .02, CFI = 0.93, TLI = 0.79, RMSEA = 0.17, SRMR = 0.06$, likely because so few participants had data at all three timepoints ($n = 50$).

Because longitudinal multi-level models can be used to answer the same research questions as latent growth models, we used longitudinal multi-level models to answer our research questions. Multilevel models conceptualize change as the within-person variable, Time. This variable can then be interacted with other time-invariant variables (i.e., variables that stay the same across waves) to examine how these variables impact the rate of change of a focal variable. As such, we can conceptualize antecedents as time-invariant variables measured at baseline and outcomes as time-invariant variables measured at Wave 3. We use this framework to (a) examine the rate of change of service attendance in a null model (Research Question #1), (b) examine how antecedents may interact with this rate of change (i.e., Time; Research Question #2), and (c) examine how outcomes may interact with this rate of change (Research Question #3). Because participants were selected for values on Service Attendance—and consequently had similar intercepts—we only included a random effect for Time and did not include a random effect for the intercept. We also report the percentage of participants who reported changes in Orthodoxy, Religious Commitment, and Service Attendance over time.

Results

Data Checking and Descriptive Statistics

We found a total of five univariate outlying values ($|z| > 3.29$). We examined each of these cases to judge whether they were indicative of meaningful data or careless responding. Two participants had outlying values on Wave I Family Religiousness with correspondingly high (though technically not outlying) values on Wave II Family Religiousness. One participant had outlyingly low values on Wave I Same-Gender Attraction and identified as asexual. Finally, one

participant had an outlying value on Wave III Subjective Well-Being but also had extreme values (greater than 2 standard deviations away from the mean) on Loneliness and Authenticity. Given that each outlying value represented a meaningful response, we determined to retain the outliers rather than remove them from the dataset. All variables evidenced acceptable skewness and kurtosis (between -4 and 4). No variables evidenced intercorrelations greater than .8. Because the survey used force response to key variables, there was no missing data on variables. See Table 2.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations Between Variables of Interest

	Range	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.	11.	12.	13.	14.	15.	16.
1. W1 Service Attendance	1-5	4.83 (0.38)																
2. W2 Service Attendance	1-5	4.44 (1.09)	.23															
3. W3 Service Attendance	1-5	3.57 (1.70)	.32	.60														
4. W1 Orthodoxy	1-7	6.04 (1.17)	.32	.19	.27													
5. W2 Orthodoxy	1-7	6.00 (1.23)	.25	.55	.48	.48												
6. W3 Orthodoxy	1-7	5.39 (1.73)	.12	.49	.71	.35	.75											
7. W1 Religious Commitment	1-5	3.60 (0.82)	.30	.16	.32	.35	.26	.19										
8. W2 Religious Commitment	1-5	3.46 (1.04)	.19	.69	.60	.24	.68	.57	.47									
9. W3 Religious Commitment	1-5	2.98 (1.31)	.15	.53	.80	.17	.56	.76	.38	.75								
10. Baseline Family Religiousness	1-7	4.80 (1.77)	.11	-.10	-.10	.07	-.07	-.05	-.03	-.08	-.04							
11. Baseline SGA	1-7	5.92 (1.46)	.05	.03	.06	.07	.06	-.01	.03	-.02	-.03	< .01						
12. W3 Age	20 -82	36.56 (12.32)	-.09	.20	.27	-.11	.14	.22	.09	.17	.22	-.11	.17					
13. W3 Well-Being	1-7	5.61 (0.95)	-.16	.02	.11	-.15	.09	.06	.23	.26	.23	-.02	.01	< .01				
14. W3 Loneliness	1-5	2.44 (0.82)	-.07	-.05	-.09	.18	-.08	-.06	-.07	-.17	-.21	-.06	-.03	.07	-.65			
15. W3 Family Support	1-5	3.54 (0.93)	-.06	.07	.05	-.27	.14	.07	.04	.20	.12	.28	-.01	-.20	.34	-.58		
16. W3 Authenticity	1-7	4.89 (0.82)	-.04	-.03	.14	.04	.12	.10	.16	.18	.19	-.10	.06	.04	.61	-.52	.23	
17. W3 LGBTQ+ Connectedness	1-4	2.49 (0.71)	-.05	-.23	-.30	-.12	-.23	-.33	.04	-.30	-.35	.05	.01	-.07	.11	-.10	-.01	.13

Note: SGA = Same-Gender Attraction; bolded values indicate significance at $p < .05$; Range indicate scale ranges rather than observed ranges, except for Age which is an observed range

What Percentage of Participants Report Changes in Religiousness?

We examined participants' changes in Orthodoxy, Religious Commitment, Service Attendance, and affiliation with the CJCLDS (a) from Wave I to Wave II, (b) from Wave II to Wave III, and (c) from Wave I to Wave III. Because we recruited new participants at Wave II and because not all participants at Wave I returned for subsequent waves, the sample for each of these comparisons is slightly different. See Table 3.

Table 3

Changes in Religiousness Across Four Years

	Change from Wave I to Wave II (<i>n</i> = 50)						
	Wave I <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	Wave II <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	Change <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>d</i>	% Decrease	% Increase	% No Change
Orthodoxy	6.09 (1.18)	5.53 (1.52)	-0.56 (1.41)	-.41	68.0%	22.0%	10.0%
Religious Commitment	3.58 (0.84)	2.92 (1.23)	-0.66 (1.11)	-.62	68.0%	26.0%	6.0%
Service Attendance	4.86 (0.35)	3.76 (1.59)	-1.10 (1.54)	-.96	44.0%	0.0%	56.0%
LDS Affiliation	100.0%	80.0%	-20.0%	---	20.0%	0.0%	80.0%
	Change from Wave II to Wave III (<i>n</i> = 149)						
	Wave II <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	Wave III <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	Change <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>d</i>	% Decrease	% Increase	% No Change
Orthodoxy	6.00 (1.23)	5.45 (1.74)	-0.55 (1.15)	-.37	51.7%	20.8%	27.5%
Religious Commitment	3.46 (1.04)	3.04 (1.31)	-0.42 (0.87)	-.36	62.4%	30.9%	6.7%
Service Attendance	4.44 (1.09)	3.68 (1.66)	-0.77 (1.34)	-.54	35.6%	3.4%	61.1%
LDS Affiliation	93.3%	77.2%	-16.1%	---	16.1%	0.0%	84.9%
	Change from Wave I to Wave III (<i>n</i> = 65)						
	Wave I <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	Wave III <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	Change <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>d</i>	% Decrease	% Increase	% No Change
Orthodoxy	6.04 (1.17)	4.92 (1.82)	-1.12 (1.78)	-.73	66.2%	15.4%	18.4%
Religious Commitment	3.60 (0.82)	2.60 (1.32)	-1.00 (1.26)	-.91	76.9%	21.5%	1.5%
Service Attendance	4.83 (0.38)	2.97 (1.79)	-1.71 (1.86)	-1.44	66.2%	1.5%	32.3%
LDS Affiliation	100.0%	60.0%	-40.0%	---	40.0%	0.0%	60.0%

Both between Wave I and Wave II and between Wave II and Wave III, between half and two-thirds of participants reported decreased Orthodoxy and Religious Commitment, with differences being about half of a scale point on these measures. In contrast, between a third and

half of participants reported changes in Service Attendance, with differences being about a full, scale point on this measure. Further, between both waves, about 20% of participants shifted from affiliating with the CJCLDS to no longer affiliating. These trends suggest that it is more common for participants to modify the cognitive aspects of their religiousness (i.e., Orthodoxy, Religious Commitment) but that these changes are relatively small and gradual. In contrast, when participants moderated the behavioral aspects of their religiousness (i.e., Service Attendance), these changes were much larger. These changes ranged from small to large in terms of effect size, with the average change being “moderate” ($d = .54$; Cohen, 1988).

In the four years from Wave I to Wave III, two-thirds of participants reported decreased Orthodoxy, Religious Commitment, and Service Attendance. Changes for Orthodoxy and Religious Commitment were a full, scale point with changes in Service Attendance being about two scale points. Further, about 40% of participants reported no longer affiliating with the CJCLDS across the four years. These changes were large in terms of effect size (range of Cohen’s d from $-.73$ to -1.44).

Antecedents and Outcomes of Change

For each indicator of religiousness, we first examined a null model with only an intercept and slope. The slope was negative and significant for each (i.e., Time; $b_{\text{Service}} = -.34$, $b_{\text{Commit}} = -.17$, $b_{\text{Orthodoxy}} = -.19$), suggesting that participants attended services less often, were less religiously committed, and became less orthodox over time. Because we coded time in years, the b-values mean that approximately every three years for Service Attendance or every five years for Religious Commitment or Orthodoxy, participants went down one scale point on the measure. This means, for example, that with the Service Attendance measure, which had anchors for *Once a week or more* (5), *A few times a month* (4), *A few times a year* (3), *Once a year or less*

(2), and *Never* (1). Given that the intercept was 4.95 and significant ($SE = 0.07, p < .01$), we can conclude that participants on average moderated their service attendance from attending about once a week or more at baseline to a few times a month over the course of approximately three years.

Table 4

Intercept and Slope Only Models for Orthodoxy, Religious Commitment, and Service Attendance

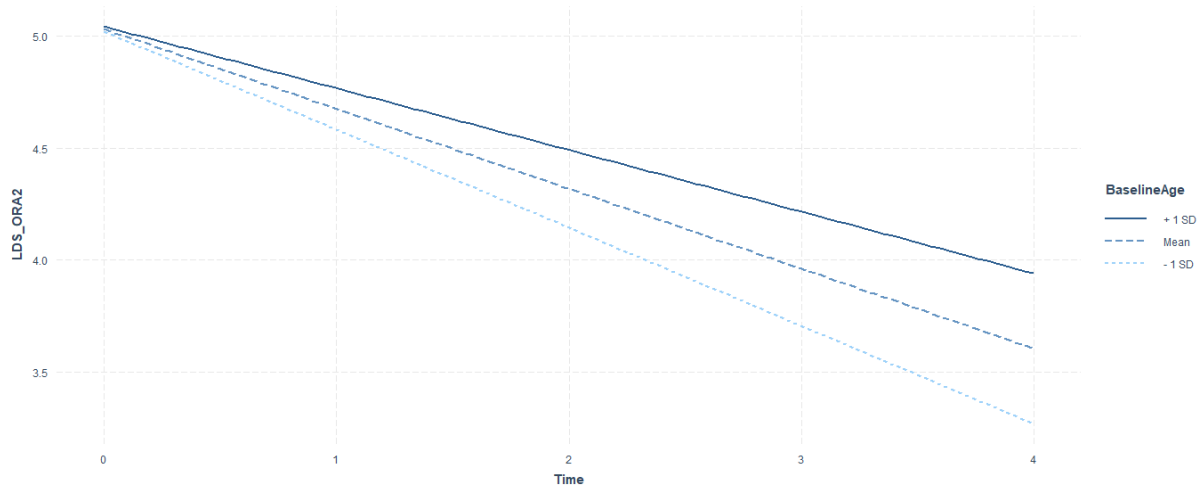
	Orthodoxy	Religious Commitment	Service Attendance
	b (SE)	b (SE)	b (SE)
Intercept	6.21* (0.09)	3.69* (0.07)	4.95* (0.07)
Slope	-0.19* (0.04)	-0.17* (0.03)	-0.34* (0.04)

Note: * $p < .05$

We next examined whether four potential antecedents of change (i.e., Same-Gender Attraction, Age, Gender, and Baseline Family Religiousness) significantly interacted with Time, which would suggest slower or quicker rates of change based on an antecedent (see Table 4). Our antecedents models indicated that only Age significantly interacted with Time ($b_{\text{Service}} = .007$), suggesting that Service Attendance declined more slowly for older participants (Service Attendance: $+1 SD M_{\text{age}} = 48.88; b = -.26$) and declined more quickly for younger participants ($-1 SD M_{\text{age}} = 24.24; b = -.43$; see Figure 1). Thus, for a participant who was 49, it would take approximately 4 years for that participant to change from attending weekly to attending a few times a month while it would take approximately 2 years for a 24-year old participant to make the same change. Age also significantly interacted with Time in the Orthodoxy model ($b_{\text{Orthodoxy}} = .01$); however, this effect is harder to interpret in this model because the main effect for Time was negative but nonsignificant. Gender was also significantly related to baseline Service Attendance ($b = .38$) and Religious Commitment ($b = .33$), indicating that cisgender participants reported greater baseline Service Attendance than transgender and nonbinary participants.

Figure 1

The Interaction Between Age and Time in Predicting Service Attendance



Finally, for each indicator of religiousness, we examined five potential outcomes of change (i.e., Subjective Well-Being, Loneliness, Family Support, Authenticity, LGBTQ+ Connectedness; see Table 5). These outcomes models suggested that only the intercept ($b_{\text{Service}} = 6.92$, $b_{\text{Orthodoxy}} = 6.24$) and the interactions between Time and LGBTQ+ Connectedness were significant ($b_{\text{Service}} = -.20$, $b_{\text{Orthodoxy}} = -.16$, $b_{\text{Commit}} = -.17$). These interactions suggest that participants with low degrees of LGBTQ+ Connectedness at Wave III ($-1\ SD$; $M_{\text{Connect}} = 1.78$) had a much slower annualized decrease in Service Attendance ($b = -0.36$), Orthodoxy ($b = -.28$), and Religious Commitment ($b = -.30$) than participants at mean degrees of LGBTQ+ Connectedness ($M_{\text{Connect}} = 2.49$; $b_{\text{Service}} = -0.50$, $b_{\text{Orthodoxy}} = -.40$, $b_{\text{Commit}} = -.42$) or high degrees of LGBTQ+ Connectedness ($+1\ SD$; $M_{\text{Connect}} = 3.20$; $b_{\text{Service}} = -0.64$, $b_{\text{Orthodoxy}} = -.51$, $b_{\text{Commit}} = -.54$; see Figure 2). In other words, participants who were more connected with LGBTQ+ communities reported a steeper decline in attendance at church services, orthodoxy, and religious commitment. Because we measured LGBTQ+ Connectedness at Wave III in this model, this interaction is most clearly interpreted to mean that decreases in Service Attendance, Orthodoxy,

and Religious Commitment are related to subsequent LGBTQ+ Connectedness. We also noted a significant positive association between Subjective Well-Being and Religious Commitment ($b = .29$).

Table 5

Longitudinal Multilevel Models Examining Antecedents and Outcomes of Changes in Service Attendance, Orthodoxy, and Religious Commitment

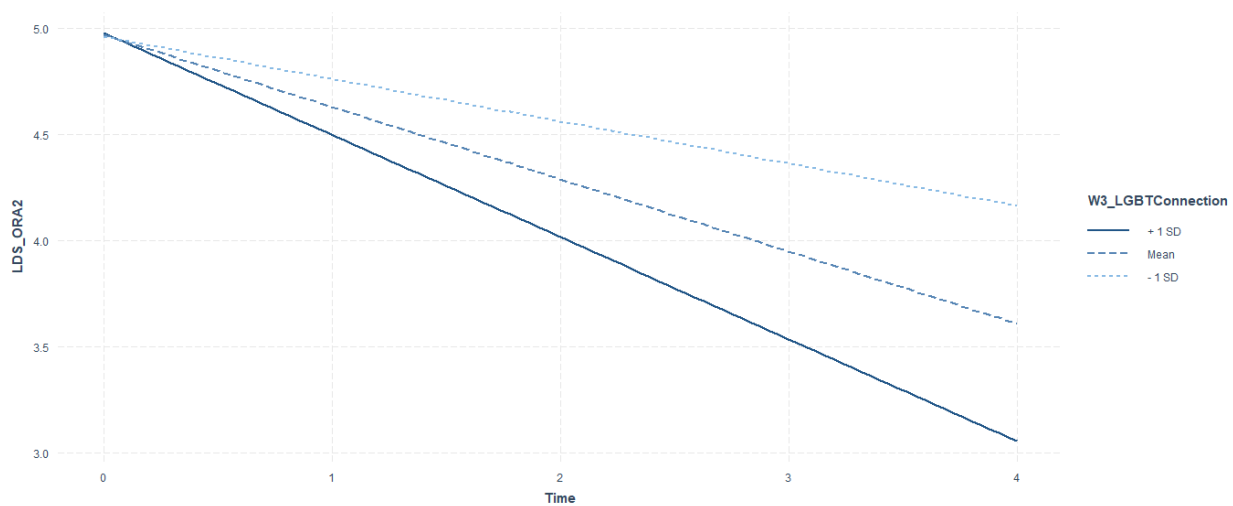
Orthodoxy			
Antecedents Model		Outcomes Model	
Variable	b (SE)	Variable	b (SE)
Intercept	5.62* (0.53)	Intercept	6.24* (1.37)
Time	-0.26 (0.26)	Time	-0.23 (0.63)
Same-Gender Attraction	0.10 (0.07)	Subjective Well-Being	-0.08 (0.16)
Family Religiousness	< 0.01 (0.07)	Family Support	-0.14 (0.13)
Age	< 0.01 (0.01)	Authenticity	0.23 (0.15)
Gender	0.32 (0.19)	LGBTQ+ Connectedness	-0.17 (0.13)
Time x Same-Gender Attraction	-0.03 (0.03)	Loneliness	0.09 (0.17)
Time x Family Religiousness	-0.01 (0.03)	Time x Subjective Well-Being	0.02 (0.07)
Time x Age	0.01* (0.004)	Time x Family Support	0.07 (0.06)
Time x Gender	0.02 (0.10)	Time x Authenticity	0.02 (0.07)
		Time x LGBTQ+ Connectedness	-0.16* (0.06)
		Time x Loneliness	-0.02 (0.08)
Religious Commitment			
Antecedents Model		Outcomes Model	
Variable	b (SE)	Variable	b (SE)
Intercept	3.55* (0.41)	Intercept	0.97 (1.05)
Time	-0.24 (0.20)	Time	0.56 (0.47)
Same-Gender Attraction	< 0.01 (0.05)	Subjective Well-Being	0.29* (0.12)
Family Religiousness	-0.03 (0.05)	Family Support	0.10 (0.10)
Age	0.01 (0.01)	Authenticity	0.09 (0.11)
Gender	0.33* (0.15)	LGBTQ+ Connectedness	-0.07 (0.10)
Time x Same-Gender Attraction	-0.02 (0.02)	Loneliness	0.19 (0.13)
Time x Family Religiousness	0.01 (0.02)	Time x Subjective Well-Being	-0.02 (0.05)
Time x Age	< 0.01 (< 0.01)	Time x Family Support	-0.02 (0.04)
Time x Gender	0.02 (0.08)	Time x Authenticity	0.02 (0.05)
		Time x LGBTQ+ Connectedness	-0.17* (0.05)
		Time x Loneliness	-0.08 (0.06)
Service Attendance			
Antecedents Model		Outcomes Model	
Variable	b (SE)	Variable	b (SE)
Intercept	4.93* (0.04)	Intercept	6.92* (1.09)
Time	-0.59* (0.22)	Time	-0.74 (0.56)
Same-Gender Attraction	-0.03 (0.05)	Subjective Well-Being	-0.16 (0.13)
Family Religiousness	-0.02 (0.05)	Family Support	-0.02 (0.11)

Age	< 0.01 (0.01)	Authenticity	-0.12 (0.11)
Gender	0.38* (0.15)	LGBTQ+ Connectedness	0.01 (0.10)
Time x Same-Gender Attraction	0.01 (0.03)	Loneliness	-0.17 (0.13)
Time x Family Religiousness	-0.01 (0.02)	Time x Subjective Well-Being	0.07 (0.06)
Time x Age	0.01* (0.003)	Time x Family Support	< 0.01 (0.05)
Time x Gender	0.03 (0.08)	Time x Authenticity	0.09 (0.06)
		Time x LGBTQ+ Connectedness	-0.20* (0.05)
		Time x Loneliness	0.03 (0.07)

Note: * $p < .05$

Figure 2

The Interaction Between LGBTQ+ Connectedness and Time in Predicting Service Attendance



Note: the relationships between LGBTQ+ Connectedness and Time in Predicting Orthodoxy and Religious Commitment are visually similar.

Disentangling Causality

Because we detected a relationship between changes in religiousness and connectedness with LGBTQ+ communities—and we had data on connectedness with LGBTQ+ communities at all three waves—we conducted cross-lagged panel models to better disentangle the directionality of effect between Service Attendance, Orthodoxy, and Religious Commitment with LGBTQ+ Connectedness (three models, each featuring one indicator of religiousness). We conducted the analyses using the “lavaan” package in R (Rosseel, 2012). The cross-lagged panel model

evidenced acceptable and explained a large portion of variation in both T3 variables (Service Attendance $R^2 = .43$; Orthodoxy $R^2 = .58$; Religious Commitment $R^2 = .58$; LGBTQ+ Connectedness $R^2 = .54$) but much smaller portion of variation in T2 variables (Service Attendance $R^2 = .05$; Orthodoxy $R^2 = .17$; Religious Commitment $R^2 = .20$; LGBTQ+ Connectedness $R^2 = .27$), with all autocorrelations being positive and significant (See Table 6). The cross-lagged path from W2 LGBTQ+ Connectedness to W3 Service Attendance was significant while the path from W2 Service Attendance to W3 LGBTQ+ Connectedness was not significant. Similarly, the cross-lagged path from W2 LGBTQ+ Connectedness to W3 Religious Commitment was significant while the path from W2 Religious Commitment to W3 LGBTQ+ Connectedness was not significant. Taken together, these analyses suggest that connectedness with LGBTQ+ communities predicted subsequent service attendance or religious commitment and not the other way around. No cross-lagged relationships between W1 and W2 variables were significant. *Figure 1* for a depiction of the Service Attendance model.

Table 6

Results of Cross-Lagged Panel Models of the Associations between Indicators of Religiousness and Connectedness with LGBTQ+ Communities

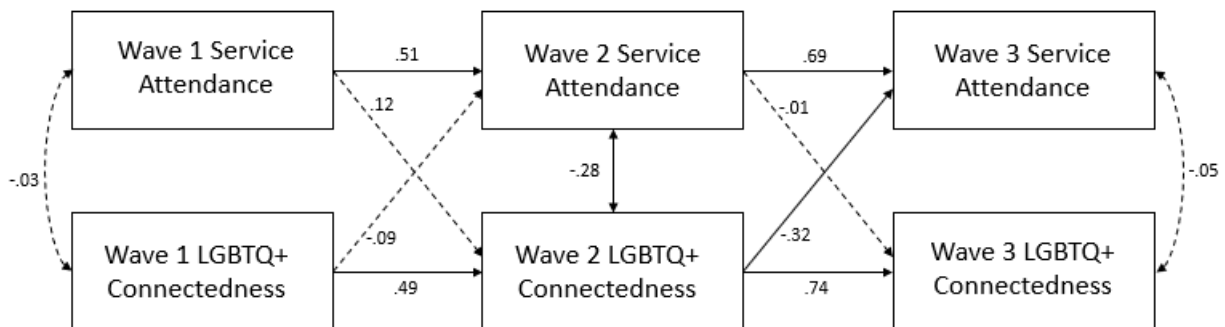
Variables	Service Attendance	Orthodoxy	Religious Commitment
W3 Religiousness			
W2 Religiousness	.69* (.08)	1.02* (.08)	.90* (.07)
W2 LGBTQ Connection	-.31* (.14)	-.25 (.14)	-.22* (.10)
W3 LGBTQ Connection			
W2 Religiousness	-.01 (.03)	-.02 (.03)	-.03 (.04)
W2 LGBTQ Connection	.74* (.06)	.74* (.06)	.73* (.06)
W2 Religiousness			
W1 Religiousness	.51* (.25)	.48* (.11)	.59* (.13)
W1 LGBTQ Connection	-.09 (.16)	.19* (.16)	.06 (.13)
W2 LGBTQ Connection			
W1 Religiousness	.12 (.15)	.09 (.07)	-.01 (.09)
W1 LGBTQ Connection	.49* (.09)	.51* (.09)	.48* (.09)

Fit Statistics			
Chi-Square	248.98	314.33	309.34
CFI	.99	1.00	.99
TLI	.95	.99	.95
RMSEA	.07	.01	.07
SRMR	.04	.03	.03

Note: * $p < .05$

Figure 3

Cross-Lagged Panel Model of the Associations between Service Attendance and Connectedness with LGBTQ+ Communities



Discussion

Because religious change is often at the heart of the questions LGBTQ+ people from conservative religious backgrounds ask themselves and the therapists who work with them, we examined the phenomenology, antecedents, and outcomes of religious change in a sample of 164 LGBTQ+ current and former Latter-day Saints. We found that the vast majority of participants (~66%) religiously deidentified to some degree over the four-year span of our study, including losing belief in religious principles, lessening their commitment to their faith tradition and religious community, decreasing their attendance at religious services, and disaffiliation from the CJCLDS. We found that this religious deidentification process was much quicker among younger participants and participants who were more connected with LGBTQ+ communities.

Cross-lagged panel models suggested that, developmentally, connection with LGBTQ+ communities typically preceded religious deidentification rather than vice-versa.

Religious Deidentification as a Normative Process for LGBTQ+ Latter-day Saints

The fact that roughly half of Latter-day Saints religiously deidentify over the course of two years and roughly two-thirds religiously deidentify over the course of four years suggests that the process of religious de-identification is best described as *normative* for LGBTQ+ Latter-day Saints. These rates of deidentification are greater than rates among cisgender and heterosexual people, suggesting that they may be particularly related to participants' experiences as LGBTQ+ people (Pew Research Center, 2022). The doctrines and standards around sexuality and gender held by the CJCLDS (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2016, 2024b) likely create tension for LGBTQ+ Latter-day Saints as they more clearly understand their experience of sexuality and gender. Given that efforts to change sexual orientation and gender identity are likely to be ineffective in reducing this tension, LGBTQ+ Latter-day Saints likely moderate their religious engagement as their only recourse to reducing this tension.

Although others have noted that long-term engagement with the CJCLDS is rare for LGBTQ+ Latter-day Saints (Dehlin et al., 2015; Lefevor, Meter, et al., 2023), this is the first study to quantify the rate at which LGBTQ+ Latter-day Saints deidentify. We found full scale-point average decreases in both orthodoxy and religious commitment and a nearly two scale-point average decrease in service attendance in the span of four years. We also found that 40% of participants disaffiliated with the CJCLDS over the course of the study. These rates are particularly notable as the scales used to measure religious commitment and service attendance only had five scale points. Further, given that between 1/4 and 1/3 of participants did not religiously deidentify, the rates of deidentification for those who did deidentify were even

higher. These high rates of deidentification are best understood to estimate the rates of deidentification for LGBTQ+ Latter-day Saints who (a) are currently active members of the CJCLDS and who (b) are out to some degree.

We also noted that religious deidentification does not appear to occur simultaneously across domains of religiousness (van Tongeren & deWall, 2021). A closer comparison of the percentage of participants evidencing religious change and the mean level of change suggests that LGBTQ+ Latter-day Saints most commonly reduce their religious belief (i.e., orthodoxy) and bonding (i.e., religious commitment). In contrast, reductions to religious behavior (i.e., service attendance) are slightly less common but tend to be bigger than changes to religious belief or bonding (i.e., larger mean differences). Finally, changes in religious belonging (i.e., affiliation) were least common but most drastic. As such, it is likely that the process of cognitive and affective change is more gradual while the process of behavioral change tends to be more drastic. Cognitive and affective religious change can often be a painful experience that includes feelings of distress and isolation (Björkmark et al., 2022); however, this change may pave the way for clearer behavioral changes.

Notably, a sizeable minority of participants maintained the high degree of religiousness they exhibited at baseline. Undoubtedly, some of these participants will ultimately religiously deidentify; however, at least some of these participants are likely to maintain their high degrees of religiousness into the future. Likely, these participants differed from their counterparts in important ways that better enabled them to maintain their religious participation. For example, previous work has noted that continued engagement with the CJCLDS is more possible for sexual and gender minorities who are (a) in relative positions of power in their religious community (e.g., are cisgender men, are White), (b) experience some degree of other-gender

attraction, and/or (c) have strong family commitments within their religious framework such as a spouse or children (Bridges et al., 2019; Lefevor, 2024).

Religious Deidentification as a Developmental Process for LGBTQ+ Latter-day Saints

Although we set out to understand the antecedents and outcomes of religious change among LGBTQ+ Latter-day Saints, we found relatively few significant predictors of religious change. In particular, participants core experiences of sexual orientation, gender, and family religiousness did not impact their change trajectories. Similarly, we did not observe differences in health or well-being related to religious change. In contrast, general (i.e., age) and sexual/gender identity-specific (i.e., connectedness with LGBTQ+ communities) were related to religious change with younger participants evidencing greater rates of religious deidentification and connectedness with LGBTQ+ communities being closely related to religious deidentification. Taken together, these relationships suggest that religious deidentification is a developmental process that tends to occur earlier in life and that is facilitated by having other meaningful communities to connect with.

Age-related trends in deidentification may also be representative of the different role that religion plays in the lives of younger vs. middle-age/older LGBTQ+ Latter-day Saints. Older adults generally tend to be more engaged in religion and hold stronger beliefs than younger adults (Wilder et al., 2023), and nonreligious adults tend to be younger than religious adults (Smith & Cragun, 2019). Older LGBTQ+ adults also have more time religiously engaging, which may lead to more difficulties in modifying both cognitive and behavioral aspects of their religious identification than younger LGBTQ+ adults, who have less time and perhaps less overall feelings of commitment and belonging to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Age may also alter the speed at which LGBTQ+ Latter-day Saints deidentify due to societal

influences. Younger LGBTQ+ adults are less likely to hold stigmatizing views toward their LGBTQ+ identities and often face more societal acceptance than their older adult counterparts (Dehlin et al., 2015), which may make the process of religious deidentification easier and swifter.

Our cross-lagged panel models suggested that connection with LGBTQ+ communities precedes and predicts religious deidentification. Many LGBTQ+ Latter-day Saints report fearing a loss of community if they religiously deidentify (Skidmore et al., 2023b), so garnering a sense of connectedness to LGBTQ+ communities may help alleviate some of this fear and allow people to more easily navigate deidentification. It may also be that LGBTQ+ Latter-day Saints religiously deidentify because of the friendships and experiences they have in LGBTQ+ communities, and not specifically due to having a different community. For example, hearing the experiences of other LGBTQ+ people and feeling a heightened sense of acceptance toward their own experience of gender and sexual orientation could lead Latter-day Saints to question hetero- and cis-normative doctrines and ultimately feel conflicted regarding their religious beliefs and behaviors (Lefevor & Skidmore, 2024b). As such, it may be that LGBTQ+ Latter-day Saints religiously deidentify not because of their connection to other LGBTQ+ people and communities directly, but due to the emotional and thought process that such connection evokes.

We did not find evidence that LGBTQ+ Latter-day Saints who religiously deidentify differ in their mental health or well-being than those who continue to religiously identify. This finding supports a growing body of literature that fails to find differences in health or well-being between religious and nonreligious individuals (Speed & Fowler, 2015; Speed & Hwang, 2019) and is particularly notable given that others have noted that the *process* of deidentification can be a painful process (Skidmore et al., 2023b) and has been associated with an initial reduction in

well-being (Galen, 2015; Galen & Kloet, 2010; Lefevor, Blaber et al., 2019; Lefevor, Skidmore et al., 2023).

Likely, these findings suggest that LGBTQ+ Latter-day Saints experience both benefits and challenges when deidentifying, which may result in no difference in overall mental health (Lefevor, Etengoff et al., 2023). On one hand, religious deidentification can lead to fewer minority stressors, more identity affirmation and authenticity, which enhance well-being (Lefevor, Etengoff et al., 2023; Lefevor & Skidmore, 2024b). For at least some LGBTQ+ Latter-day Saints, religiously deidentifying can be seen as an act of liberation, as they reclaim narratives around sexuality and gender that were previously cis/heteronormative. Further, deidentification can make room for the emergence of a secular or atheist identity, which can offer many of the health and well-being promoting aspects of religious identification (Smith, 2011; Smith, 2013). On the other hand, deidentification can also lead to more conflict with religious people, greater uncertainty about how to find purpose/meaning in life, and family conflict (Lefevor, McGraw et al., 2022; Lefevor, Skidmore et al., 2023; Lefevor & Skidmore, 2024b), which can lead to more depression and suicidal ideation (Lefevor, Bouton et al., 2023).

Implications

We approached this study with the intention of providing answers to LGBTQ+ Latter-day Saints and the therapists who work with them about the typical trends and trajectory of religious identification. Navigating faith transitions is a stressful and often arduous experience for LGBTQ+ Latter-day Saints, and our findings in many ways normalize and validate this process. In particular, they suggest that faith transitions are both normative and developmental for the majority of LGBTQ+ Latter-day Saints. Further, the link between religious change and connection with LGBTQ+ communities suggests that LGBTQ+ Latter-day Saints who worry

about the loss of community if they religiously deidentify can note that many people in their shoes navigate this deidentification by finding connection with LGBTQ+ communities.

Therapists who work with and support LGBTQ+ Latter-day Saints may benefit from understanding the typically trajectory of religious deidentification, which could be used in sessions to help clients decrease anxiety and distress regarding the unknown aspects of navigating faith transitions. Therapists may also share the information about the general rates of change with clients who indicate that they aim to stay connected with the CJCLDS and use these trajectories as a starting point for clinical discussions about the likely challenges and benefits of trying to stay connected with the CJCLDS.

Future Directions and Limitations

There are several important caveats to place on our results. First, we recruited participants through community sampling techniques, which are not representative. Although we recruited from both conservative and liberal organizations, participants largely had to be connected with other LGBTQ+ Latter-day Saints in order to hear about our study, which means that the participants who engaged in the study might be different from those who would not have learned about the study. Further, we only included highly religious participants in this sample so that we could better understand religious change. Had we included a wider variety of participants, the rate of religious change would have likely been much slower as there would be less that participants could have change. Many of our participants were recruited in 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic, and their degrees of service attendance may have been initially underreported because of changes in service offerings in that time. Thus, it is possible that some participants were screened out of the study because they reported infrequent service attendance related to the COVID-19 pandemic rather than regular infrequent service attendance. Our sample

was also largely White, male, cisgender, and residing in Utah. Although this is not surprising in many ways for a sample of Latter-day Saints, it is important to hold that religious change may look different for people of color, women, gender diverse people, and/or Latter-day Saints who live in other states. In fact, we noted that gender diverse people in our sample reported much less religiousness at baseline than cisgender people. We encourage future work to explore these important, intersectional experiences.

Conclusion

Taken together, our findings suggest that religious deidentification is a normative and developmental process for LGBTQ+ Latter-day Saints. Cross-lagged panel and multilevel modeling analyses indicated that nearly two-thirds of LGBTQ+ Latter-day Saints religiously deidentified over the course of four years, with Latter-day Saints who are younger adults and/or who are connected to LGBTQ+ communities deidentifying at the fastest rate. We further found that those who religiously deidentify do not differ in mental health or well-being compared to those who continue to religiously identify. We encourage LGBTQ+ Latter-day Saints and the therapists who work with them to frame conversations around religious deidentification in the context of these norms and to examine what supports clients may need to help them navigate these processes more deftly.

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Appendix A

Table 6

Results from Multi-Level Models of Orthodoxy, Religious Commitment, and Service Attendance

Orthodoxy			
Antecedents Model		Outcomes Model	
Variable	b (SE)	Variable	b (SE)
Intercept	5.62* (0.53)	Intercept	6.24* (1.37)
Time	-0.26 (0.26)	Time	-0.23 (0.63)
Same-Gender Attraction	0.10 (0.07)	Subjective Well-Being	-0.08 (0.16)
Family Religiousness	< 0.01 (0.07)	Family Support	-0.14 (0.13)
Age	< 0.01 (0.01)	Authenticity	0.23 (0.15)
Gender	0.32 (0.19)	LGBTQ+ Connectedness	-0.17 (0.13)
Time x Same-Gender Attraction	-0.03 (0.03)	Loneliness	0.09 (0.17)
Time x Family Religiousness	-0.01 (0.03)	Time x Subjective Well-Being	0.02 (0.07)
Time x Age	0.01* (0.004)	Time x Family Support	0.07 (0.06)
Time x Gender	0.02 (0.10)	Time x Authenticity	0.02 (0.07)
		Time x LGBTQ+ Connectedness	-0.16* (0.06)
		Time x Loneliness	-0.02 (0.08)
Religious Commitment			
Antecedents Model		Outcomes Model	
Variable	b (SE)	Variable	b (SE)
Intercept	3.55* (0.41)	Intercept	0.97 (1.05)
Time	-0.24 (0.20)	Time	0.56 (0.47)
Same-Gender Attraction	< 0.01 (0.05)	Subjective Well-Being	0.29* (0.12)
Family Religiousness	-0.03 (0.05)	Family Support	0.10 (0.10)
Age	0.01 (0.01)	Authenticity	0.09 (0.11)
Gender	0.33* (0.15)	LGBTQ+ Connectedness	-0.07 (0.10)
Time x Same-Gender Attraction	-0.02 (0.02)	Loneliness	0.19 (0.13)
Time x Family Religiousness	0.01 (0.02)	Time x Subjective Well-Being	-0.02 (0.05)
Time x Age	< 0.01 (< 0.01)	Time x Family Support	-0.02 (0.04)
Time x Gender	0.02 (0.08)	Time x Authenticity	0.02 (0.05)
		Time x LGBTQ+ Connectedness	-0.17* (0.05)
		Time x Loneliness	-0.08 (0.06)
Service Attendance (not LDS-specific)			
Antecedents Model		Outcomes Model	
Variable	b (SE)	Variable	b (SE)
Intercept	4.73* (0.41)	Intercept	6.23* (1.06)
Time	-0.28 (0.22)	Time	-0.32 (0.54)
Same-Gender Attraction	-0.01 (0.05)	Subjective Well-Being	-0.05 (0.12)
Family Religiousness	0.04 (0.05)	Family Support	-0.02 (0.10)
Age	< 0.01 (0.01)	Authenticity	-0.11 (0.11)
Gender	0.03* (0.01)	LGBTQ+ Connectedness	0.02 (0.10)
Time x Same-Gender Attraction	< 0.01 (0.03)	Loneliness	-0.14 (0.13)
Time x Family Religiousness	-0.03 (0.02)	Time x Subjective Well-Being	0.04 (0.06)
Time x Age	< 0.01 (< 0.01)	Time x Family Support	< 0.01 (0.05)
Time x Gender	0.04 (0.08)	Time x Authenticity	0.08 (0.06)
		Time x LGBTQ+ Connectedness	-0.20* (0.05)

Time x Loneliness

-0.01 (0.07)

*Note: * $p < .05$*