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GIVING YOUR ALL: EVALUATING CHANGING SOCIAL IDENTITIES
THROUGHOUT THE ASSIMILATION PROCESS IN FULL-LIFE VOLUNTEER
ORGANIZATIONS

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Dedication

To Leah, Alice, Josie, Mom and Dad for supporting me through all of this craziness

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Table of Contents

| | |
|--|----|
| Acknowledgements | iv |
| Abstract..... | ix |
| Chapter 1 | 1 |
| Rationale..... | 1 |
| Chapter 2 | 7 |
| Literature Review | 7 |
| LDS Missionary Organization..... | 7 |
| Purpose. | 7 |
| Structure. | 8 |
| Missionary Training. | 9 |
| Socialization/Assimilation..... | 10 |
| Anticipatory socialization..... | 12 |
| Role anticipatory socialization. | 12 |
| Organizational anticipatory socialization. | 17 |
| Organizational encounter/entry. | 20 |
| Metamorphosis. | 26 |
| Organizational disengagement/exit. | 28 |
| Voluntary exit. | 29 |
| Involuntary exit. | 31 |
| Sensemaking..... | 33 |
| Social Identity Theory (SIT) | 36 |
| Individual identity. | 38 |
| Social identity..... | 39 |
| Social identity salience..... | 44 |
| Chapter 3 | 49 |
| Method..... | 49 |
| Participants | 49 |
| Field Observation, Document Collection, and Interview Data Collection..... | 49 |
| Data Analysis..... | 52 |
| Validation | 52 |
| Chapter 4 | 55 |
| Results and Interpretation..... | 55 |
| RQ1: Assimilation process and identity | 55 |

| | |
|--|-----|
| Anticipatory Socialization..... | 57 |
| Exposure..... | 57 |
| Exploration..... | 62 |
| Engagement..... | 72 |
| Summary..... | 78 |
| Entry/Encounter..... | 79 |
| Lifestyle entry..... | 79 |
| Role entry..... | 89 |
| Continuing to explore..... | 96 |
| Metamorphosis..... | 98 |
| Mastering missionary skills..... | 99 |
| Building motivation..... | 100 |
| Exit..... | 104 |
| Preparatory exit..... | 105 |
| Reentry into home environment..... | 108 |
| Identity reintroduction..... | 110 |
| Summary..... | 113 |
| RQ2: Sensemaking of social identities..... | 113 |
| Transcendence..... | 115 |
| Eternal consequences..... | 115 |
| Servants of God..... | 117 |
| A rite of passage..... | 118 |
| Outgroup to ingroup..... | 118 |
| Childhood to adulthood..... | 120 |
| An opportunity for personal development..... | 121 |
| Summary..... | 125 |
| Chapter 5..... | 127 |
| Discussion..... | 127 |
| Identity Development..... | 129 |
| Organizational osmosis..... | 129 |
| Identity Filtering..... | 134 |
| Organizational influence..... | 134 |
| Environmental influence..... | 136 |
| Full-life immersion..... | 137 |

| | |
|--|-----|
| Identity Reconstruction | 139 |
| Foundational identities. | 140 |
| Challenges to foundational identities. | 143 |
| Full-life Volunteer Sensemaking..... | 145 |
| Limitations and Directions for Future Research | 146 |
| Conclusion | 148 |
| Chapter 6 | 150 |
| References | 150 |

Abstract

The present study evaluates the assimilation process for full-life volunteers in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS) missionary program. The focus on full-life volunteers provided an opportunity to observe the assimilation process for volunteers for whom their volunteer identity becomes the dominant identity in their lives for the duration of their service. The first research question addressed the assimilation process of these full-life volunteers. By examining the assimilation process of full-life volunteers through the lens of SIT, this study explores how individual full-life volunteers experience the assimilation process and the identity changes associated with organizational identification. Although much of the assimilation process for full-life volunteers conformed to previous assimilation phase models, several important differences were discovered. First, the results demonstrated that for full-life volunteers in this study, the anticipatory socialization phase is broken into three distinct phases: *exposure*, *exploration*, and *engagement*.

Congruent with other assimilation phase models, the entry phase was marked by high levels of uncertainty and anxiety. Unique to full-life volunteers, the entry phase was not merely an entry into a new organization, but into an entirely new lifestyle that was centered on organizational membership. As participants became accustomed to the full-life volunteer lifestyle and role, they transitioned into the metamorphosis phase where their organizational and role identities became more solidified in the center of their self-concept. In the exit phase, full-life volunteers' organizational and role identities became the foundational identities to which other congruent identities were added so as to create a new self-concept.

The results of the second research question sought to describe how these full-life volunteers used sensemaking to frame their volunteer service. The results indicated that these volunteers made sense of their experience in three ways: *transcendence, a rite of passage, and an opportunity for personal development.* Through these sensemaking tools, full-life volunteers were able to find meaning in their service.

Chapter 1

Rationale

A considerable amount of organizational research has investigated the assimilation/socialization process of organizational members (Jablin, 1987; Kramer, 2010; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). Nearly all early research into assimilation focused on employment or work relationships (Kramer, 2011b), and ignored or explicitly excluded volunteer organizations from investigation (e.g., Jablin, 2001). More recently, research into volunteer assimilation has become somewhat more popular as researchers came to understand the importance of volunteer service in people's lives and identified the unique characteristics of the assimilation process for volunteers (Haski-Leventhal & Bargal, 2008; Kramer, 2011a). Further, with more than one in four Americans volunteering in organizations annually (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015b), Haski-Leventhal and Bargal (2008) argue that "Volunteers are the backbone of civil society" (p. 68).

Despite the prevalence and importance of volunteering in modern society, in the United States, this type of labor is typically not considered to be a "real job" (Clair, 1996) and has commonly been classified as a "third-space" in management and communication literature implying a subordinate position for volunteering for most people below their work and home lives (McNamee & Peterson, 2014). Although volunteer work is generally considered nonessential compared to work and home life, Kramer (2002) explains that "most of us know individuals who seem to work and live for their memberships in these groups out of commitment to sports, religion, or the arts" (p. 151). Thus, instead of a "third-space," Kramer characterizes these collections of

unified volunteers as “life-enrichment groups” (p. 151). These “life-enrichment groups” play an important role in defining the volunteer’s personal and social identities by providing an outlet for the performance of individual skills, characteristics, and interests, and by providing a social community in which the volunteer can claim membership.

Participation in these groups range from “rather limited participation – such as occasionally donating money to charity or blood to the American Red Cross – to attending activities such as festivals, performances, or religious services, to active participation as planners and producers of those activities or in roles as officers who maintain the viability of the organizations” (Kramer, 2010, p. 42). Although this range covers a wide variety of volunteers and volunteer organizations, there remains a large category of volunteers that are excluded from assimilation research.

Nearly all volunteer literature focuses on volunteering in the context of fitting in volunteer work while maintaining other life responsibilities such as work and family. “Full-life” volunteers are those that leave their existing lives and engage fully in promoting the goals of a volunteer organization with little or no remuneration for their labor. Instead of volunteering being a “third-space,” it becomes the dominant space even to the exclusion or elimination of role performance in other life spaces. Volunteer commitments in these organizations can last from several months to several years. Thus, as volunteers are socialized, they are not merely socialized into a volunteer position or organization, but into a new lifestyle. Examples of “full-life” volunteer organizations include the Peace Corps in which nearly 220,000 Americans have served since it was established in 1961 (Coverdell, 2014), Americorps, which engages

approximately 75,000 volunteers every year and has had more than 900,000 volunteers since its founding in 1994 ("AmeriCorps," 2016), and Doctors Without Borders or Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) which has approximately 30,000 people working for it at any one time. Additionally, in 2010, there were approximately 400,000 international missionaries, not counting those who engage in missionary work in their home countries. Of those, 127,000 missionaries came from the United States (Center for the Study of Global Christianity, 2013). Although most people working for the Peace Corps, AmeriCorps, MSF, and many missionaries receive a monthly stipend to cover basic living and housing expenses, their income is typically much less than what they otherwise would be able to earn for performing labor in a non-volunteer capacity. For example, Peace Corp volunteers receive approximately \$200 to \$800 per month depending on their location (Peace Corps Wiki, 2010) to “live modestly by the standards of the people they serve, yet not in a manner that would endanger their health or safety” (Peace Corps, 2013, p. 4). Many other full-life volunteers labor with no financial compensation.

One such organization with a full-life volunteer program is the missionary program of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS). The LDS Church is the fourth largest Christian denomination in the United States (*Yearbook of American and Canadian churches*, 2012) and has nearly 80,000 full-time 18-25 year old volunteer missionaries at any given time who receive no financial compensation for their work and even pay their own living expenses for the 18-24 months that they serve on a mission. Missionaries are assigned to one of 405 missions in 120 different countries throughout the world and do not return home during the duration of their missions (The

Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2014a). Based largely on the labor of these young missionaries, nearly 300,000 converts join the LDS Church per year (McCombs, 2015).

Before their missions, these young people are typical young adults; however, once they leave on their missions, they give up the lives they have known and become full-life volunteers. Upon arrival, missionaries are assigned a companion with whom they are to be at all times and are expected to maintain strict standards regarding their dress and appearance and behavior. For example, men are instructed to “always wear a white shirt with a tie that is conservative in color, pattern, width, and length.” And for women, “Wear clothing that is neither too tight nor too loose, is not transparent or revealing in any way, such as sheer, tight, or stretch fabrics, does not draw attention to any part of the body, and is not casual, wrinkled, sloppy, or faddish” (*Missionary handbook*, 2010, pp. 7-42). Their daily schedules include arising at 6:30 a.m. to prepare for the day, beginning proselyting or other work at 10:00 a.m., and returning home by 9:30 p.m. (*Missionary handbook*, 2010).

Missionaries are not to watch television or movies, listen to popular music, read non-religious books, or use the Internet other than to email. They are given one day per week from 6:30 a.m. until 6:00 p.m. to write emails home, shop, and engage in other approved activities before returning to their work. Contact with family and friends at home is limited to weekly emails and two telephone calls on Mother’s Day and Christmas (*Missionary handbook*, 2010).

Allowing for an hour for lunch per day, this 66-and-a-half-hour work week generally consists of door-to-door proselytizing, performing service, and teaching

investigators (i.e., potential converts) about the doctrines of the LDS Church, and is performed with minimal oversight. Despite the extreme life changes associated with serving as a full-life volunteer missionary, thousands of young people put aside their other life spaces and willingly conform to these expectations.

With the strict rules and restrictions regarding the use of time, dress, and association for LDS missionaries, this group provides a particularly theoretically interesting population for studying full-life volunteers considering that, although the experience of LDS missionaries is not typical for a majority of volunteers, even full-life volunteers, Kreiner, Hollensbe, and Sheep (2009) explained that “extreme cases are often tremendously helpful for building or elaborating theory since their dynamics tend to be highly visible, bringing into sharper focus the processes that can exist in other contexts” (p. 707). Using a communication-centered approach to investigate the assimilation process for these full-life volunteers is particularly relevant and valuable because it is through communication that individuals develop and maintain identities, including organizational identities.

Therefore, this study attempts to understand how LDS missionaries experience the assimilation process so as to adapt their social identities to be successful as full-life volunteer missionaries. To accomplish this goal, this study explores organizational assimilation through the lens of social identity theory (SIT) (Ashforth & Mael, 1989), a perspective which is not often used in assimilation/socialization research, but “provides a useful framework for studying socialization” (Kramer, 2010, p. 18) and is particularly relevant when discussing the shifting identities required by full-life volunteer organizations in general and the LDS missionary program in particular. I begin by

briefly explaining the LDS missionary program followed by a review of the existing literature that formed the foundation for this interpretive research including assimilation/socialization perspectives and theories of identity and identification. Then, I will describe the methodology of this research including data collection using participant observation, document collection, and in-depth interviewing (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011) and data analysis using a constant comparative approach (Charmaz, 2006).

Chapter 2

Literature Review

LDS Missionary Organization

Purpose. Since its creation in 1830, the LDS Church has placed a strong emphasis on missionary work. LDS Church President Thomas S. Monson stated, “Missionary work is an identifying feature of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Always has it been; ever shall it be” (Monson, 2013). The LDS Church encourages all of its members to share their beliefs with friends and family, but has also created a missionary program where young men and women leave their homes and serve as full-life volunteer missionaries. This belief in missionary work stems from the Bible as Jesus Christ commanded his apostles to “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost” (Matthew 28:19). In response to this call for missionary work, the LDS Church has sent out more than one million missionaries since its founding in 1830 (Walsh, 2007).

Because of the importance of missionary service to the Church, LDS Church President Thomas S. Monson stated, “Every worthy, able young man should prepare to serve a mission. Missionary service is a priesthood duty – an obligation the Lord expects of us who have been given so very much” (Monson, 2010). The LDS Church has specific criteria that determine whether a person is “worthy” to serve. Prospective missionaries are expected to abide by the LDS Church’s code of health, called the Word of Wisdom, which includes abstaining from alcohol, tobacco, drugs, coffee, and tea. Additionally, prospective missionaries are expected to abstain from any sexual activities. Because missionary work is considered primarily a priesthood duty and since

only men hold the priesthood in this church, only men are obliged to serve missions. However, despite not having a mandate to serve missions, young women are also encouraged to serve. LDS Church President Thomas S. Monson said, addressing young women, “while you do not have the same priesthood responsibility as do the young men to serve as full-time missionaries, you also make a valuable contribution as missionaries, and we welcome your service” (Monson, 2010).

Structure. The LDS Church’s missionary program is a highly organized institution which integrates new missionaries into the organization seamlessly as others finish their service and return home. Each of the 405 missions of the Church is run by a mission president, also a volunteer, who oversees the work of the missionaries assigned to that mission. Mission presidents are typically retired adults who are asked to serve in this capacity for two or three years. Missions range in size from a few dozen missionaries to several hundred and are divided into zones, districts, and companionships. The sizes of districts and zones vary according to the needs of the mission, but typically, between three and five companionships make up a district, with one of the young adult missionaries acting as the district leader, and several districts making up a zone with one young adult missionary acting as the zone leader.

Missionary companionships are assigned to serve in one or more of the Church’s local congregations, or wards, and work closely with ward members to help find and teach those wishing to investigate the Church. Ward members are encouraged to share their beliefs with friends and family members and then refer those who are interested in learning more to the missionaries to be taught the basic principles and doctrines of the LDS Church. Missionaries prepare and teach investigators a minimum of five church-

approved lessons about the Church's origins, fundamental beliefs, and expectations of members to prepare them for baptism and Church membership.

Missionary Training. Although mission preparation begins in childhood for most missionaries, official Church preparation begins with mission preparation courses offered to young people who are considering mission service. These voluntary courses are intended to teach young people what and how to teach people, some habits that are beneficial for missionaries, and ways to strengthen their beliefs (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2014b). Once young people turn 18 years old and graduate from high school, they can turn in their application for missionary service. Shortly after receiving their call to serve in a specific mission, they enter one of 14 Missionary Training Centers (MTC) located throughout the world in which they spend between two and nine weeks learning how to teach their beliefs to potential investigators and, if needed, a foreign language (Taylor, 2011). MTC training is highly intensive with missionaries attending classes, devotionals, and group meetings and engaging in personal study for up to 12 hours per day (Hansen, 2005). Upon completing their training, missionaries are sent to the mission field and partnered with an experienced companion with whom they will serve for a time. Each companionship is assigned an area in which they operate. Companionships change periodically and missionaries are moved to different areas and/or cities throughout their mission's geographic boundaries. Although missionaries regularly engage in service projects in the communities in which they work, their main objective is to teach, baptize, and engage in fellowship with those who investigate the Church. To perform these tasks effectively, these full-life

volunteers must learn how to properly think and act as an organizational member through the process of assimilation.

Socialization/Assimilation

Socialization/assimilation has been defined as the “process by which individuals join, participate in, and leave organizations” (Kramer, 2010, p. 3) and has been a subject of extensive investigation in many fields including sociology, management, psychology, and communication. Communication is vital to assimilation and acts as the vehicle by which organizational members travel through the process. Additionally, communication facilitates understanding of how organizational newcomers come to understand and negotiate their roles within the organization and how existing organizational members come to adapt to the newcomer. Jablin (2001) defines this overall process of mutual adaptation as *assimilation* and breaks this broad process down into two parts: *socialization* and *individualization*. Jablin’s (2001) definition of socialization refers to the process by which organizations influence newcomers, intentionally or unintentionally, to make changes in their behavior and/or thinking to meet the needs of the organization. Conversely, individualization is the process by which organizational members attempt to “change their roles and work environments to better satisfy their values, attitudes, and needs” (p. 755).

Although most researchers agree with this basic breakdown, researchers in this field have struggled to establish consensus regarding the definitions of terms, making navigating this research rather confusing sometimes. For example, Moreland and Levine (2001) describe the overall process of mutual adaptation as *socialization*, Jablin’s *assimilation*, and the individual’s changes to acquiesce to the group norms as

assimilation, Jablin's *socialization*. The various terms and often interchangeable use of assimilation and socialization in the literature makes it difficult to maintain consistency; however, Jablin's terms will be used predominantly throughout this paper and specific definitions of terms will be explained as needed.

In addition to the basic breakdown of socialization and individualization, many researchers have presented phase models of the assimilation process that aid in understanding the processes that organizational members experience. Despite the prevalence of phase models, they are not without their critics (e.g., Bullis, 1993; Smith & Turner, 1995). Detractors have claimed that these models limit and constrain research because they describe organizations as static "containers" with defined boundaries "*in* which socialization takes place and *into* which the novice/newcomer must *enter*" [emphasis in the original] (Smith & Turner, 1995, p. 166) instead of depicting organizations as dynamic and intricate social constructions made up of individuals and relationships. Additionally, critics claim that phase models oversimplify the assimilation process and fail to accurately depict its complexity by describing assimilation as a linear process with workers moving steadily from one phase to the next. In reality, workers often vacillate between phases or skip phases altogether (Jones, 1986; Kramer, 2010). Despite the flaws in phase models, these models are helpful in providing an easily understood visual depiction of the experiences of organizational members as they pass through different phases.

Building on Van Maanen's (1975) original model of socialization, researchers have identified and explained four main time periods most individuals experience in the assimilation process including a pre-membership phase called *anticipatory socialization*

(Jablin, 2001) or *investigation* (Moreland & Levine, 2001), an early membership phase called *encounter* (Feldman, 1981) or *entry* (Jablin, 2001), a phase of full acceptance and membership within the organization, called *metamorphosis* (Van Maanen, 1975) or *maintenance* (Moreland & Levine, 2001), and a final phase called the *exit* or *disengagement* phase in which a person leaves a group or organization (Jablin, 1987, 2001). In investigating volunteers, Kramer (2011b) and Haski-Leventhal and Bargal (2008) presented models of volunteer assimilation that contain essentially these phases but with aspects that are unique to the experience of volunteers, which will be explained later.

Anticipatory socialization. Long before applications are filled out and interviews are conducted, individuals are developing expectations of what kinds of experiences they are likely to encounter as a member of an organization. *Anticipatory socialization* is the time period before a person enters an organization (Kramer, 2010) and serves two purposes for the individual aspiring for organizational membership: (1) increasing the likelihood that the individual will be admitted to the organization, and (2) enabling a more fluid adjustment to organizational life after the individual joins the organization (Merton, 1957). This phase is made up of two subcategories: *role anticipatory socialization* and *organizational anticipatory socialization*.

Role anticipatory socialization. The socialization process begins in early childhood with *role anticipatory socialization*. Although Jablin (2001) titled this process *vocational anticipatory socialization*, so as to include volunteers and other organizational members not employed by the organization I will use Kramer's (2010) title. For adolescents, the formation of occupational identity is one of the most

influential variables in the development of one's personal identity (Erikson, 1968). Research demonstrates that children intentionally and unintentionally seek out information regarding occupations and organizational roles based on environmental factors such as family, education, peers, previous organizational experience, and the media (Jablin, 2001; Kramer, 2010; Van Maanen, 1975). Through each of these sources, young people learn what vocations are available, which are important and valuable, and the steps one must take to be qualified for a certain role.

Families provide extensive information for role anticipatory socialization because they are usually the earliest source of information for young people (Parke, 2004). Listening to narratives of parents and other family members regarding their work and observing the benefits (e.g., high pay, prestige) and costs (e.g., long hours, extensive travel) helps young people understand the realities of a certain role. Additionally, family narratives provide information regarding what is valued and important and what is not. For example, Lucas' (2011) investigation into the working class discovered that family narratives were often expressed so as to teach children about the "nobility in being working class" (p. 362) and instilling "working class values" such as hard work and humility. Families also often apply implicit or explicit pressure on young people to follow a certain occupational path, usually by following in the footsteps of a parent or by attempting to achieve a higher status occupation than a parent (Kramer, 2010). This phenomenon is evident in many LDS homes as parents express their desire for their children to volunteer for missionary service overtly and they and/or other family members often relate positive or interesting stories of their missionary service, display artifacts or souvenirs from where they served, or associate

with people from their mission. If family members have not served missions, parents may express remorse for missing the opportunity to volunteer for missionary service as a way to influence their children to take advantage of the opportunity to serve.

In addition to the influence of the family, *schools* are also an important source of occupational or role information because they act as a “transition institution between childhood and full-time work” (Jablin, 2001, p. 737). Indeed, one of their explicit goals is to “prepare students who can successfully transition to the next level, whether it is a college or university, a community college, a technical institution, or a job” (Hughey & Hughey, 1999, p. 207). To help students decide which path is best for them, most schools offer career counseling by an academic advisor and personality tests that match students’ proclivities to certain careers as resources (Feller, 2003). Even in the earliest educational settings where schools provide a standardized curriculum, students are provided with opportunities to interact with others in task settings where they can establish roles and develop skills in relationship building and maintenance that can prepare them for future roles. Importantly, schools also provide standards against which students’ skills and abilities are measured. As students move into high school and college, they are given more freedom in choosing classes and joining clubs and organizations that teach them specialized skills and prepare them for a future vocation or volunteer role. Although schools may not explicitly encourage young people to join full-life volunteer organizations, they often provide a setting in which young people can interact with peers and learn of these opportunities.

A great deal of research has investigated the influence *peers* exert, especially on young people (e.g., B. B. Brown, 2004; Gardner & Steinberg, 2005). Upon entering

adolescence, peer relationships play an increasingly important role in influencing life choices and peers become a more important source of information (B. B. Brown, 2004). Often, this research focuses on the overt negative aspects of peer-pressure; however, research has shown that more subtle and indirect social cues, such as modeling socially desirable behaviors, regulating normative behavior through gossip or teasing that reinforce group norms and expectations, and providing opportunities or contexts that allow for the pursuit of certain behaviors, can be more influential on adolescents than explicitly telling them the social rules and expectations (B. B. Brown, 2004). Through these forms of influence, peer groups, like family members, communicate to the individual what behaviors, skills, and aspirations are valuable and worthy of pursuit. For example, young people may observe members of their social group preparing for and departing on LDS missions, adopt the belief that missionary service is desirable, and seek to emulate their example.

Another important source of information that influences role anticipatory socialization is *previous organizational experience*. In Jablin's (2001) writings, he refers to this information source as *part-time employment*; however, Kramer (2010) explains that this term is too narrow and does not account for those people who are already working full-time and change careers or volunteers who work for an organization, but are not technically employees. Therefore, the term *previous organizational experience* accounts for a wider variety of experience that can prepare an individual for their chosen profession. Although most part-time or volunteer work typically does not provide knowledge or skills that directly transfer to later occupations (Levine & Hoffner, 2006), these experiences do provide opportunities for task-related

interpersonal communication, customer service, and basic problem solving that train a worker for future organizational membership.

For those whose previous work experience is in full-time employment, previous organizational experience can play an enormous role in influencing future vocational choices. Unlike in previous generations, workers in modern society can expect to change jobs and even vocations several times throughout their careers (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015a). The influence of previous full-time employment is obviously greater when job changes occur within the same industry or vocation, but even in dramatic career changes, previous organizational experience can play a powerful role in future career choices (Kramer, 2010). For example, after working more than 60 hours per week in a high-stress job for several years, a worker may forgo a high-salary position and choose a new “lifestyle career” that provides more time for home life, volunteering, or other life-enrichment activities. For volunteers, Haski-Leventhal and Bargal (2008) found that nearly all of their participants, once they participate in meaningful volunteer activities, expressed a commitment to continue in volunteer work even if they decided to leave the initial volunteer organization. For LDS missionaries, experience with other LDS programs such as humanitarian disaster relief or LDS education programs could affect missionaries’ decisions to join the missionary program and serve as full-life volunteer missionaries.

A final source of information that influences role socialization is the *media*. Television shows, movies, books, magazines, newspapers, and online content can be influential by exposing people to occupations or volunteer opportunities that they otherwise would not consider (Hoffner, Levine, & Toohey, 2008). Unfortunately, the

media's portrayal of most occupations is unrealistic as nearly all jobs contain mundane or tedious tasks that are not depicted in entertainment media (Jablin, 2001). The same is true for depictions of full-life volunteer organizations. For example, promotional advertisements for full-life volunteer organizations often depict the fun, exciting, or impactful aspects of volunteer work and minimize the difficulties associated with homesickness, adjusting to living in a new and often impoverished environment, or learning a new language.

As people sift through the information provided by these sources, they begin to narrow their focuses and make decisions and commitments that lead them to a specific occupation or role (Hoffner et al., 2008). To be clear, role socialization is not reserved strictly for children or young adults. Realistically, the role anticipatory socialization phase does not have an end and is happening throughout an individual's life as a person's present positions and roles constitute prior experience for future positions and roles.

Organizational anticipatory socialization. Once individuals choose a vocation or volunteer activity and receive the training and education needed to perform necessary tasks, they typically seek organizational membership in their chosen field. Workers or volunteers research potential organizations and through interpersonal interactions with other applicants, potential coworkers, and the worker's social network, begin to formulate expectations regarding what roles they might play in the organization, what relationships might be beneficial or detrimental, and how being a member of a particular organization might impact other aspects of their life. This time period of learning about the organization and creating expectations of what organizational

membership entails is called *organizational anticipatory socialization* (Jablin, 2001). Unfortunately, the recruitment process incentivizes both the organization and the worker to overemphasize their most positive aspects and deemphasize those aspects that are negative. As a result, workers and organizations often have unrealistically high expectations of each other, which often leads to dissatisfaction and higher turnover (Jablin, 1984; Wanous, Poland, Premack, & Davis, 1992).

Because of the negative repercussions of these unrealistic expectations, Jablin (2001), Kramer (2010) and others emphasize the importance of *realistic job previews* (RJPs) where the interviews also include the actual performance of job duties including both the pleasant and the boring or mundane aspects of the job. Despite evidence that RJPs lower turnover (see Meglino, DeNisi, Youngblood, & Williams, 1988), most organizations persist in using traditional recruitment methods because, unfortunately, applicants seem to respond more favorably to employment advertisements that only portray the organization in a positive light (Saks, Wiesner, & Summers, 1996).

The LDS Mission program encourages RJPs as a preparation method for potential missionaries. Young men and women contemplating serving a mission can schedule times during the week to accompany full-life missionaries serving in their ward. Occasionally, prospective missionaries can serve “mini-missions,” during which they spend a weekend living with a full-life missionary companionship near their home and accompanying them on all of their engagements. These preparation tools are designed to match organizational and individual expectations more closely with reality so that when missionaries enter the program, they can adapt quicker and easier to full-life missionary service.

Although descriptions of anticipatory socialization often depict role anticipatory socialization occurring before organizational anticipatory socialization, Gibson and Papa (2000) demonstrated that role and organizational anticipatory socialization can occur simultaneously and wield a powerful influence on individuals' life choices. In their investigation of factory workers, they discovered that children were socialized and prepared to work at a particular factory through *organizational osmosis*, "or the seemingly effortless adoption of the ideas, values, and culture of an organization on the basis of preexisting socialization experiences" (p. 79). Through organizational osmosis, prospective organizational members learn the norms and culture of an organization through numberless communication messages throughout their lives. For example, if a parent complains about the behavior of a coworker during a dinner conversation, children begin to understand what behaviors are acceptable and unacceptable. In this way, daily interactions can be indirect teaching opportunities for children regarding how to be a successful organizational member. In Gibson and Papa's (2000) study, those that experienced organizational osmosis had a clearer and more accurate understanding of the expectations associated with organizational membership and were generally successful in their work. Because of the hard work and intense pressure to produce applied by team members, most of those who had not been inculcated in the rules, rituals, and expectations of the organization experienced difficulty adapting and significantly more turnover.

This concept of organizational osmosis may be particularly relevant for full-life volunteers, especially missionaries. For many people, religion is an essential aspect of their individual identity from an early age (Lopez, Huynh, & Fuligni, 2011). Similar to

the participants in Gibson and Papa's (2000) study who were socialized into a role and organization, people probably do not select the role of missionary and then seek a religion for which to proselyte. Instead, the role anticipatory socialization and organizational anticipatory socialization occur simultaneously.

Organizational encounter/entry. The encounter phase is the most researched phase of the assimilation process and is when the newcomer actually enters the organization (Kramer, 2010). This phase is a time of learning and adaptation both for newcomers and other organizational members as newcomers attempt to learn what "normal" patterns of behavior and thinking are and where they fit in the organization. Likewise, the existing organizational members attempt to teach newcomers "how things are done" and may have to adapt their roles to accommodate the newcomer. This phase is marked by a high level of uncertainty and surprises arise when expectations formed in the anticipatory socialization phase are different from reality (Jablin, 2001). Newcomers and existing organizational members evaluate these inconsistencies between expectations and reality and attempt to reconcile them so as to move forward and achieve the organization's and individual's goals effectively (Jablin, 2001).

Whether intentionally or unintentionally, organizations attempt to socialize newcomers through the use of one or more socialization strategies. Van Maanen and Schein (1979) identified six pairs of strategies organizations use in attempting to socialize new members: group versus individual, formal versus informal, sequential versus random, fixed versus variable, serial versus disjunctive, and investiture versus divestiture. In the *group versus individual socialization* strategy, *group socialization* is "the tactic of taking a group of recruits who are facing a given boundary passage and

putting them through a common set of experiences together,” whereas *individual socialization* is processing an organizational member individually through more or less unique experiences (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979, p. 232). For *formal versus informal socialization* (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979), *formal socialization* calls for newcomers to be segregated from other organizational members during the training period where trainees are often provided staged scenarios that are intended to simulate real-life situations, but in which failure to properly execute does not negatively affect the organization. *Informal socialization* occurs when the newcomer is not distinguished from other organizational members and trainees learn by performing the actual tasks of their job in real-life situations. These first two of pairs of strategies are often used in combination with *group* and *formal* socialization occurring together and *individual* and *informal* occurring together; however, this is not necessarily the case for every organization. Although Van Maanen and Schein present these and other pairs as dichotomies, Kramer (2010) explains that organizations can use a combination of both sides of each pairing effectively though they would probably be used in different phases of organizational entry. An example of this combination strategy is seen in the LDS full-life missionary program where new missionaries begin their missions in an MTC and are placed in a district with other new missionaries (group, formal) with whom they live, attend classes, eat meals, and attend church services. At the end of the MTC experience, each missionary is sent to his or her respective mission and area to be further trained one-on-one with an experienced missionary (individual, informal).

The next socialization strategy, *sequential versus random*, deals with the order in which skills are learned. Many organizations mandate that all newcomers learn new

tasks through a step-by-step *sequence* of experiences that lead to the target role (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). In the MTC, missionaries spend much of their time in classes with a set curriculum carefully ordered so as to build missionaries' theological knowledge, teaching skills, and, if needed, foreign language skills. Conversely, *random socialization* occurs when the training sequence is unknown, ambiguous, or continually changing (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979, p. 241). This type of training typically occurs “on the job” as the tasks randomly appear in the work (Kramer, 2010). For missionaries, random socialization occurs once they leave the MTC and begin working with their trainer and have to deal with day-to-day issues of living in an unfamiliar place and engaging in missionary work.

Instead of focusing on the sequence of training, the *fixed versus variable* strategy relates to the timetable for the completion of each step in the sequence. In *fixed socialization* the recruit is aware of the time he or she is given to learn a skill, whereas *variable socialization* gives the recruit no definite information regarding the time given for each step in the training process (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). Before LDS missionaries enter the MTC, they are told explicitly how long their training there will be. For missionaries that are not learning a language, MTC training is typically completed in two weeks, whereas, those learning a new language are given several more weeks depending on the difficulty of the language. Once the prescribed time in the MTC is completed, each missionary is sent to his or her respective mission. Training in the mission field with an experienced missionary is variable and could be as short as several weeks or as long as several months.

The fifth socialization strategy pair is *serial versus disjunctive*. *Serial socialization* is seen when an experienced organizational member is assigned as a mentor to a newcomer to groom him or her to fulfill similar roles as the mentor in the future. When no role models are available to newcomers and they must figure out their roles and duties themselves, the process is a *disjunctive* one (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). As mentioned earlier, once LDS missionaries leave the MTC, they are assigned a “trainer,” or an experienced companion who further teaches and demonstrates the skills necessary to be successful in the role of a missionary.

The final socialization strategy pair discussed here is *investiture versus divestiture*. The *divestiture socialization* strategy entails the organization attempting to strip away the recruit’s unique or individual characteristics and replace them with standardized organizationally beneficial characteristics (Kramer, 2010). Divestiture is demonstrated in the LDS missionary program through their strict standardized dress and appearance code, standardized schedule, limitations on media exposure, and limited and regulated interactions with family and friends at home. Additionally, missionaries are expected to be addressed by the titles “Elder” followed by their surname for men and “Sister” followed by their surname for women instead of their first names. In the *investiture socialization* strategy, the organization encourages, highlights, and celebrates newcomers’ unique characteristics and does not wish to change the recruit, but merely to build upon the skills and characteristics the newcomer already possesses (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979).

These socialization strategies are intended to assist the recruit in learning the necessary skills for accomplishing work tasks, but also to teach the newcomer the social

rules of the organization so he or she can “fit in” and “get along” with other organizational members. Obviously, different strategies selected by an organization and the degree to which individual newcomers adopt the prescribed behaviors, values, and characteristics intended by the organization vary and yield different outcomes. Based on Van Maanen and Schein’s (1979) hypothesized outcomes of these socialization strategies, subsequent research demonstrated that institutionalized strategies (i.e., group, formal, sequential, fixed, and serial) produced a more *custodial* response from recruits where newcomers identify with the organization and seek to preserve the goals and values of the organization as they exist. Individualized tactics (i.e., individual, informal, random, variable, and disjunctive) produced more *innovative* responses from recruits where newcomers viewed their roles and other organizational processes as more fluid and available for change (Ashforth & Saks, 1996; Jones, 1986).

Importantly, Van Maanen and Schein (1979), Jones (1986), and others argued that the major goal of organizational newcomers is to reduce uncertainty and that the socialization strategies selected by the organization can influence the way newcomers come to make sense of their roles and experience their organizational life. Therefore, those who experience institutionalized socialization strategies experience less role conflict, role ambiguity, intention to quit, and role innovation and experience higher job satisfaction and organizational commitment and identification. Individualized socialization strategies produce more stress, uncertainty, and intentions to turnover, but also produce more innovation, creativity and less personal change (Ashforth & Saks, 1996; Jones, 1986).

As organizational members make sense of their new environment and come to understand their place in it, they have the option to remain with the organization or to exit. In describing volunteers, Haski-Leventhal and Bargal (2008) explain that during this early phase of organizational membership, instead of transitioning to the *emotional involvement* (metamorphosis) phase, volunteers are often susceptible to turnover “due to three main obstacles: not fitting in with the group; unfavorable attitudes from their social environment; and/or lack of suitability between the individual and the organization” (p. 84). Even if “ejection” of a volunteer is in everyone’s best interest, it is often emotionally and practically difficult for all parties.

For LDS missionaries, leaving the mission early because of physical or mental health concerns, disobedience to mission rules, or unresolved transgressions from before their missions is emotionally difficult because most young people spend many years planning and preparing to serve a mission (Walsh, 2013). For example, children as young as four years old sing songs entitled “I Hope They Call Me on a Mission” and “I Want to be a Missionary Now” among other missionary-centered songs and listen to lessons extolling the value of serving a mission in Sunday School. Thus, missionary preparation and serving a mission becomes an important part of young people’s religious identity. As explained earlier, not only do families and religious communities exert pressure on young people to serve missions, but “the Lord” expects missionary service from young people. Therefore, missionaries, mission leaders, family members, and religious community members often experience feelings of failure when missionaries return home before their missions are complete (Walsh, 2013). Therefore,

all of these parties are motivated to exhaust all other options before a full-life missionary returns home early.

Metamorphosis. In the encounter/entry phase of assimilation, newcomers are often distinguished from other organizational members, formally or informally, until they establish an identity within the organization and become fully integrated into the organizational routine and culture. Often, formal titles such as initiate, trainee, or recruit, or informal titles, such as rookie, greenhorn, newbie, or, in the case of LDS missionaries, greenie, are used to establish and maintain a newcomer's status within the organization. Once the newcomer becomes "an accepted, participating member of the organization by learning new attitudes and behaviors or modifying existing ones to be consistent with the organization's expectations" (Jablin, 1984, p. 596), he or she crosses the threshold from newcomer to full member. Instead of constantly needing assistance or support to complete tasks, full members are the experts of their respective positions. Importantly, because socialization comes from existing organizational members, they are the ones who determine when the newcomer has become "properly" socialized into his or her role and the transition from newcomer to full member is complete (Jablin, 1987).

During the metamorphosis phase, uncertainty declines and work life often becomes routine. As workers become more comfortable in their role and relationships with other organizational members and become more adept at operating within the organizational culture, they become less dependent on their peers for assistance in interpreting uncertainty in the work environment (Jablin, 1987). Further, as they come to understand the rules, formal and informal, of the organization, they are more able to

individualize their roles within the organization to more fully meet their intra- and extra-organizational needs (Feldman, 1976; Jablin, 1987).

In their model of volunteer socialization, Haski-Leventhal and Bargal (2008) divide this phase into two phases: *emotional involvement* and *established volunteering*. In the *emotional involvement* phase, instead of describing it as one of full membership as decided by existing organizational members, Haski-Leventhal and Bargal (2008) emphasize that full organizational membership is determined by the combination of the individual's emotional identification with the organization and those they serve with the skills to accomplish the necessary tasks. These volunteers seek new responsibilities and often innovate to make the organization better. Highly emotionally involved volunteers feel a mutual commitment between the group and the individual volunteer and view themselves as an integral part of the group. It is typically with these highly motivated and skilled volunteers that the organization achieves its goals.

After a time of *emotional involvement*, volunteers gain knowledge and skills that allow them to become *established volunteers*. *Established volunteers* are those that are highly skilled, but may start to become tired, cynical, and burned out. These volunteers work well in their roles or on their projects, but are less likely to take on new challenges or responsibilities. These volunteers have two possible transitions: renewal or organizational exit. *Renewal* can come from taking on new roles, self-reflection, or taking time away from volunteering. Kramer's (2011b) model of volunteer socialization emphasized the fluidity and ambiguity between the metamorphosis and exit phases as volunteer work is typically one of the first activities cut when time conflicts arise with other important responsibilities. However, when these conflicts are

resolved, volunteers are typically able to return with little difficulty. If volunteers are unable to find renewal in volunteering, they transition to the exit phase.

For full-life volunteers, taking time away from their service is less of an option because their lifestyle revolves around their organizational membership. These volunteers are typically unable to take time off from their organizational responsibilities for an extended period of time and then return and continue their service. In the case of LDS missionaries, once they leave the mission due to burnout, they typically do not return. However, renewal often occurs for these missionaries through taking on new responsibilities such as training a new missionary, fulfilling leadership roles in the mission, or moving to a new area. Those experienced volunteers who become tired and burned out and do not experience renewal, often receive the title “trunkie,” meaning that they already have their “trunk” packed and are just waiting out their time until they return home.

Organizational disengagement/exit. Organizational exit is inevitable. Despite organizational exit being just as common as entry, this phase has received far less attention from socialization researchers (Kramer, 2010). This dearth of research investigating organizational exit is regrettable considering that the transition out of an organization can be just as difficult and stressful as the transition in (Jablin, 2001). Research on the health impacts of retirement, for example, suggest that retirees’ risk of cardiovascular disease peaks in the first year after retirement due, in part, to the “environmental changes that reshape health behaviors, social interactions, and psychological stressors” (Moon, Glymour, Subramanian, Avendano, & Kawachi, 2012, p. 526). Previous research arranges organizational exit into two types: voluntary and

involuntary. Although the outcome of both voluntary and involuntary exit is the same, the processes that lead to disengagement and the impacts of disengagement on both the person leaving the organization and those who remain in the organization are quite different. Lee, Mitchell, Wise, and Fireman (1996) explain that there are four main types of voluntary exit: planned exit, shock resulting in quitting, shock resulting in a job search before quitting, and gradual disenchantment. As all of these forms of voluntary exit can exist with full-life volunteers, a closer examination of each type is warranted.

Voluntary exit. For the vast majority of full-life volunteers, organizational exit is planned and anticipated before the volunteer even enters the program. When disengagement is planned, workers feel free to discuss the upcoming organizational exit with co-workers, supervisors, family, and friends and the organizational exit is primarily viewed positively by all involved (Kramer, 2010). For LDS missionaries, planned organizational exit is celebrated and missionaries are often asked to deliver a talk, or short sermon, in the main church meeting, and given gifts, letters, or pictures in appreciation of their service.

Organizational exit that is the result of a *shock resulting in quitting* typically occurs when an organizational event is serious enough to cause the worker to leave immediately. This shock could be the result of the worker discovering unethical behavior in the organization, being passed over for a promotion, or another traumatic experience. For some full-life volunteers, the reality of their assignment in impoverished, difficult, or even dangerous circumstances could provide a sufficient shock to lead them to exiting their organizations immediately. Full-life volunteers, including LDS missionaries, frequently serve in impoverished areas and occasionally

encounter circumstances where they are in physical danger (e.g., Fidel, 2010). For some full-life volunteers the shock of leaving home and entering a new environment could be sufficient to induce voluntary exit.

For others, a shock may not be severe enough to induce immediate quitting, but it could induce the volunteer to actively seek alternative opportunities. When other prospects are perceived to be scarce or when the shock is considered less severe, workers often seek new opportunities before exiting their present organization (Kramer, 2010). For most full-life volunteers, service begins directly after high school or during or after college. Returning home typically means returning to life as usual (Walsh, 2013). Consequently, a shock could cause them to investigate starting or returning to college or other vocational training or cause them to reach out to friends or family members to gather information about getting a job when they return home.

Finally, many workers experience *gradual disenchantment* with their present work experience that leads them to exit the organization, or enter what Haski-Leventhal and Bargal (2008) call the “retirement phase.” Unlike the previous two motivations for exit, workers who experience gradual disenchantment do not experience a singular event or shock that induces change; rather, this process is protracted over time (Kramer, 2010). Contrary to Kramer’s (2004) observations that (1) because of the nonessential nature of volunteering, when time conflicts with other life commitments arise, volunteering is often the easiest to eliminate and (2) that organizational exit for volunteers is much more fluid than employment with organizational members leaving and returning as they wish with little difficulty, the LDS missionary program is more congruent with the organization investigated by Haski-Leventhal and Bargal (2008)

where most volunteers who “retire” from volunteering do not return. Haski-Leventhal and Bargal (2008) found that especially in those volunteer organizations where retiring is permanent, despite feeling tired and burned out, in this process of gradual disenchantment and retirement, volunteers often feel conflicted about taking the final step to actually step away. This emotional ambivalence may be even more pronounced in volunteer organizations since “volunteering is a value-based and emotional activity” (Haski-Leventhal & Bargal, 2008, p. 94). In the case of full-life volunteers, gradual disenchantment leading to early organizational exit is probably rare considering that the terms of service are often relatively short and volunteers know when their service will end. Therefore it is more likely that full-life volunteers will simply emotionally detach from their work while waiting for their contracted time in the full-life volunteer organization to expire.

Involuntary exit. Involuntary organizational exit occurs when the individual’s organizational membership is terminated by the organization. For volunteer organizations, this is often a difficult process both for the individual and for other organizational members as both tend to experience feelings of failure and loss (Haski-Leventhal & Bargal, 2008). Additionally, a majority of volunteer organizations have the problem of finding enough people who are willing to donate their time to further the organization’s goals (Kramer, 2004). Thus, requiring a volunteer to exit the organization often places more work on remaining volunteers. Kramer (2010) argues that in volunteer organizations, unless volunteers are blatantly disruptive in the organization’s activities or cause other volunteers to quit, they rarely go through formal disciplinary procedures common in non-volunteer organizations. Instead, these

unwanted volunteers might be reassigned to an alternative place or position or not be informed of future volunteer opportunities. For full-life volunteer organizations, making a volunteer leave is difficult because the option of withholding information about volunteer opportunities and hoping the volunteer will simply stop showing up is not available. Additionally, the logistics of sending a person home require more planning than if individuals simply volunteer during their free time. In the LDS missionary program, only an estimated 2.2% of missionaries return home early (Stack, 2013; Walsh, 2013). Of these early-returning missionaries, 70% return because of mental or physical health issues (Walsh, 2013). Therefore, although involuntary exit occurs, it is infrequent.

Though voluntary and involuntary exits seem most common in organizations, Cox and Kramer (1995) and Cox (1999) demonstrated that there exists a middle ground between voluntary and involuntary exit that almost certainly applies to volunteer organizations. They argue that other organizational members can be influential in encouraging or persuading individuals to voluntarily exit the organization through social isolation, discussing the positive outcomes of other options, assigning that individual less-desirable tasks, or generally making that person's work environment difficult or undesirable. In this way, the individual's exit is not necessarily involuntary, nor is it completely voluntary.

Although a considerable amount of research has explored the assimilation processes of workers and other types of volunteers, this extant literature has neglected full-life volunteers. These volunteers are expected to encounter unique experiences as they pass through the assimilation process because, unlike employees and other types of

volunteers, full-life volunteers not only assimilate into and out of an organization, but into and out of a lifestyle that is almost completely dominated by their organizational membership and volunteer activities. This commitment to alter nearly all aspects of life is expected to affect all phases of the assimilation process as volunteers prepare for, engage in, and leave their organizations.

Sensemaking

In Western capitalistic societies, the creation of wealth through labor is a celebrated endeavor that gives meaning and purpose to labor and, subsequently, to workers' lives. Therefore, Kuhn and his colleagues (2008) explain that much of people's self-concept is derived from their vocation and their ability to provide for themselves economically. However, because full-life volunteers are typically either minimally compensated or not compensated at all for their labor monetarily, they must find alternative benefits or meaning from their organizational membership. Without the benefits of financial gain, full-life volunteers must construct a new definition of what type of labor is meaningful and what benefits constitute adequate compensation. Scholars have demonstrated that volunteers in non-profit organizations often use the process of sensemaking as a tool to frame their labor as a spiritual calling (J. A. Scott, 2007), an altruistic sacrifice for others (Musick & Wilson, 2007), or a way to promote a good cause (Wilson, 2000) so as to find meaning in their labor.

The concept of sensemaking, as the name implies, explains this process of how people make sense of their lived experiences (Weick, 1995). Although Weick (1995) explains that the sensemaking process is ongoing and that the individual is constantly making sense of her or his environment, because most of ordinary life is routine

(Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005), sensemaking is typically a subconscious process through which people interpret, categorize, and process their experiences. Only when the present state of the world is different from the expected state of the world is the process of sensemaking brought to conscious awareness (Weick et al., 2005).

Essentially, a person makes sense of lived experiences by asking the question, “same or different?” when presented with a new experience. When the observed experience is similar to previously identified experiences, the answer to this question is “same,” and the subconscious mind is capable of labeling and grouping experiences without the need of conscious participation. Occasionally, however, the subconscious process of sensemaking is disrupted when the answer to the above question is “different,” resulting in ambiguity and discomfort (Weick et al., 2005). Only when this shift from subconscious processing to conscious processing occurs does the individual become aware of the opportunity for sensemaking (Weick et al., 2005).

Once a sensemaking opportunity is recognized, the sensemaker attempts to resolve the discrepancy between previous experience and current experience by answering the question, “what’s the story?” through retrospective examination of the disruptive past experience, interpreting salient cues, labeling the episode, and negotiating the meaning of the present experience through social interaction (Gioia & Mehra, 1996; Weick, 1995). Important to communication scholars, Weick et al. (2005) emphasize the importance of the social aspect of sensemaking through the recipe, “how can I know what I think until I see what I say?” In other words, it is through the process of attending to salient cues embedded in the experience, constructing the story based on these cues, communicating the story, and receiving feedback from others that people

actually make sense of their experience. Ideally, people would be able to assign meaning to their own and others' actions accurately, but in reality, when constructing and articulating the story, sensemakers rely on *plausibility* rather than *accuracy*. This means that the story does not have to be *correct*, but that it merely needs to seem reasonable within the context of the specific circumstance (Dougherty & Smythe, 2004).

Once the question, "what's the story?" is answered, the sensemaker then uses this newfound information as a "springboard to action" (Weick et al., 2005, p. 409) by asking the question "now what should I do?" As experiences are constructed and reconstructed through interaction, meaning becomes more stable and the experience becomes a part of the sensemaker's identity, or "that which is core, distinctive, and enduring" about the sensemaker (Weick et al., 2005, p. 416). In turn, this constructed identity becomes a lens through which future experiences are interpreted. That is, through the process of sensemaking, people create meaning out of experiences that can be used as context for future action (Weick et al., 2005).

Because most sensemaking is conducted subconsciously, opportunities to observe and study sensemaking are limited to times of ambiguity or equivocality. Many life transitions are marked with high levels of ambiguity and are therefore prime opportunities for observing the sensemaking process. For example, new organizational members often feel high levels of equivocality and stress as they attempt to forge new relationships, master their work tasks, and adapt their work environment to meet their needs (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). Full-life volunteers' transitions through the assimilation process may provide especially interesting scenes for observing the

sensemaking process because the opportunities for flux and subsequent equivocality are not limited to individuals' work life, but are evident in all other aspects of their lives as well. Additionally, common resources for assistance in resolving this equivocality (e.g., family members, friends) are often unavailable or do not have the necessary expertise to effectively assist in reducing uncertainty. Thus, individuals must rely on new relationships and methods for making sense of their lived experiences as they continuously reconstruct their identities.

Social Identity Theory (SIT)

SIT is a specific sensemaking process that originated in the 1970s as a way to explain why people form and demonstrate ingroup versus outgroup biases and promote ingroup goals over one's personal goals (Ellemers, Haslam, Platow, & Van Knippenberg, 2003; Tajfel, Billig, Bundy, & Flament, 1971). In their early experiments, Turner, Brown, and Tajfel (1979) found that people often acted in ways that are detrimental to their own self-interest and the achievement of their personal goals so as to benefit a larger group to which they belonged. Based in part on these observations, SIT proposes that individuals do not operate independent of the social influences of the various groups of which they are a part, but are intricately and personally connected to the groups' outcomes (Hogg, 2006). SIT is particularly helpful in the study of full-life volunteers because it provides a theoretical grounding for understanding why these volunteers willingly sacrifice their time for the benefit of the organization and/or cause of their choice.

Building on the early framework, researchers applied SIT in an assortment of circumstances and developed it into the dominant theoretical framework used in

organizational studies of identity (Alvesson, Lee Ashcraft, & Thomas, 2008).

According to SIT, people tend to make sense by classifying themselves and others into social categories instead of viewing people as individuals. They do this for two reasons: (1) social comparison, or to classify and order their social environment systematically so as to assess the relative worth of groups and individuals by comparing them against other relevant groups and (2) self-categorization, or to come to make sense of their relative position within that environment (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Ellemers et al., 2003).

As social categories are continuously produced and reproduced, individuals observe their own and others' characteristics so as to determine into which categories each person fits and what the relative worth and position of each group and individual. Although there may be some social categories that are common in most people's social schema, such as race, age, religious affiliation, political affiliation, and gender, each individual may utilize a unique or personalized schema for determining where people fit based on their perceptions of the other's characteristics and affiliations. Those viewed as similar to the self are assigned categories similar to the self and considered the individual's "in-group," while those who are perceived as different from the self are considered the "out-group" (Stets & Burke, 2000). Once people are assigned categories, stereotypical characteristics of that category are then assigned to that individual. For instance, by claiming membership in a full-life volunteer organization, individuals could come to view themselves as the embodiment of the group's positive characteristics such as selflessness, compassion, and hard work.

Tajfel and Turner (1985) explain that self-concept is made up of two identities: individual identity and social identity. Although a clear distinction between individual identity and social identity can be helpful in simplifying the complex concept of identity, it is important to be cautious when attempting to differentiate these categories as these forms of identity almost certainly overlap and interact such that the distinction between them may be somewhat artificial (Alvesson et al., 2008).

Individual identity. Individual identity has been described as the enduring characteristics that are central to an individual (Czarniawska-Joerges, 1994). These characteristics include the individual's physical features, abilities, core beliefs, values, and attitudes that influence what the individual views as valuable or important. Identity also provides a set of rules and resources that can be called upon by an individual when the proper course of action is in doubt (C. R. Scott, Corman, & Cheney, 1998). However, the durability of identity has been called into question by some researchers (e.g., Alvesson et al., 2008; Gioia, Schultz, & Corley, 2000). Although Alvesson et al. (2008) explain that identities have regularities and patterns, they also emphasize the temporary and context-specific set of constructs that make up identity. Drawing on Mead's (1934) "parliament of selves," Weick (1995) explains that an individual is made up of many identities that are created through interaction and experience. To illustrate this point, C. R. Scott and Stephens (2009) demonstrated that volunteers invoked different identities based on the person or people with whom they were conversing and the work motivations experienced by the volunteer. Thus, as the environment changes, so too does the individual identity. The variable nature of identity may be particularly

evident in full-life volunteers as their environment, associations, and role expectations change drastically when they enter and exit the organization.

Consistent with structuration theory, identity is fluid and is constantly being produced and reproduced as individuals act according to their perceived identity, observe others' reactions to their actions, and adjust their identity based on this feedback (C. R. Scott et al., 1998). As individuals and organizational actors, people's identity enables and constrains their interpretations, thoughts, and actions when confronted with decisions. These interpretations, thoughts, and actions then affect how others perceive and treat these actors, which either supports or destabilizes the actors' identity (Weick et al., 2005). Therefore, identity refers to the constant attempts to answer the questions "who am I?" and, by extension, "how should I act" (Alvesson et al., 2008)? Or perhaps more accurately "who am I in the current situation?" and "given the current circumstances, how should I act so as to be consistent with my current identity?" These questions may not be answered easily especially when organizational members pass through assimilation phase boundaries as these transitions are often marked with high levels of ambiguity (Jablin, 2001). As organizational members seek to make sense of the new and changing environment and find their place in it, they often refer to their group affiliations and experiences as sources of information and stability (Cheney, 1983a).

Social identity. Social identity refers to the individual's group classifications. Because people are born into a structured society, the relative social positions of most categories are often determined long before they are aware of them. Some social identities to which an individual belongs are broadly defined, predetermined, and group

members are only loosely connected because no specific membership is required (e.g., race, gender). Other social identities are selected consciously by the individual and have more clearly defined inclusion criteria (e.g., religion, family, work group) (Alvesson et al., 2008). Although people maintain many identities simultaneously, Czarniawska-Joerges (1992) explains that organizations often provide a main source of people's identity. Social identification is commonly defined as the perception of belonging or oneness with a group and the internalization of a social category such that it becomes a part of an individual's self-concept (Mael & Ashforth, 1992; Turner, 1982). As people choose their vocation, work organization, and volunteer organizations, they create a unique "cocktail" of identities that make up their individual self-concept (Alvesson et al., 2008). When people identify with a category or organization, they adopt an emotional stake in the group's successes and failures such that they come to view these as their own individual successes and failures (Ashforth & Mael, 1989).

As individuals begin to identify with a group, they tend to adopt similar values and beliefs and behave in similar ways as other in-group members (Stets & Burke, 2000). In this way, the individual identity "takes a back seat to social unit's as the major source of identity" (Alvesson et al., 2008, p. 13). Thus, SIT suggests that as individuals come to classify themselves as members of a social group, they begin the process of "depersonalization," or viewing oneself as the prototype of ingroup characteristics instead of as a unique individual (Stets & Burke, 2000). Simon (1997) further explains that once an individual identifies with a group, "in making a decision, he evaluates the several alternatives of choice in terms of their consequences for the

specified group” (p. 284). When people view themselves as part of a group, the line between individual and group is blurred and the group, psychologically, becomes part of the self (van Knippenberg & Ellemers, 2003). For full-life volunteers, the process of depersonalization is expected to be particularly pronounced because these volunteers willingly remove themselves from many other competing identities and group affiliations that could balance or hinder their identification with the full-life volunteer organization. In this way, organizational identification is expected to become stronger and organizational success and personal success become nearly synonymous.

Equally important to the construction of social identities as *identification* with a group is *differentiation* from other groups (Jetten, Spears, & Manstead, 2001). One way to understand who or what a group or individual is, is to determine who or what that group or individual is not. Interestingly, SIT research has demonstrated that intergroup differentiation becomes most salient when an outgroup is perceived to be too similar to the ingroup (Roccas & Schwartz, 1993). That is, the more a group’s distinctiveness is threatened by a similar outgroup, the more likely ingroup members will work to restore their group identity by identifying and highlighting differences that frame the ingroup positively (R. Brown & Abrams, 1986). Through this process of differentiation, groups and individuals seek to carve out their own unique identity in their environment. Group differentiation is particularly important for LDS missionaries and provides a theoretically interesting scene. In order to convince others that joining the LDS Church is essential and motivate them to action, missionaries must sufficiently differentiate the LDS doctrine and practices from the investigators’ present belief systems. However, social judgement theory (Sherif & Hovland, 1961) predicts that if a concept is too

disparate from people's existing beliefs, it will be automatically rejected. Thus the work of missionaries is to find a balance between differentiation and similarity in the social environment.

These processes of depersonalization, identification with an ingroup, and differentiation from outgroups naturally have important implications for organizations and organizational researchers. Beginning with Ashforth and Mael's (1989) seminal essay which brought SIT to organizational research, SIT has been applied to many organizational settings. Most prominently, SIT has been applied in research on organizational identification (Alvesson et al., 2008). For organizations, because identified workers make decisions based on perceived consequences to the group, workers' identification with the organization "guarantees that decisions will be consistent with organizational objectives, even in the absence of external stimuli" (Tompkins & Cheney, 1985, p. 191).

When organizational members identify with the organization and make decisions so as to most benefit the organization, they are not regulated by written rules or regulations imposed by a hierarchical authority, but by *concertive control*, or the internalized values, norms, objectives, and methods of action that are regulated by the individual and enforced by peers (Tompkins & Cheney, 1985). Therefore, concertive control directs organizational members' decisions and actions without managerial oversight. As LDS missionaries are expected to perform their labor with minimal oversight, these concepts of organizational identification and concertive control are particularly important. In LDS missions, although there is little oversight by authority figures, missionaries are placed in companionships, districts, and zones with peers who

enforce the values and expectations of organization. An example of the principle of concertive control in LDS missions is seen in an oft-quoted statement by Church founder Joseph Smith when asked how he managed the growing Church, he stated, “I teach them correct principles, and they govern themselves” (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2011, p. 281). Thus, the early phases of the assimilation process consists of teaching “correct principles,” or how to think and act in particular circumstances, and once these principles are sufficiently adopted and organizational members develop a strong organizational identification, they can “govern themselves” and individuals act based on motivation generated from within themselves and from expectations of peers (Cheney, 1983b).

Researchers have demonstrated the benefits for organizations of member’s identification on such important outcomes as organizational commitment, loyalty, job performance, job satisfaction, turnover, and extra-role behavior (Riketta, 2005). Further, when presented with negative intergroup comparisons, highly identified organizational members are more likely to defend the group and work to improve the group’s relative social position, whereas low identifiers are more likely to distance themselves from the group (Veenstra & Haslam, 2000). In addition to these organizational benefits of identification, Cheney (1983a) argues that “Perhaps most important for students of communication, identifying allows people to persuade and to be persuaded” (p. 342). For full-life volunteer organizations, the development of volunteers’ organizational identification is essential to achieving their goals. Essentially, the LDS missionary program is built upon missionaries’ willingness to be

persuaded to identify with the organization and its goals so that they will serve and be willing to persuade others that membership in the LDS Church is necessary.

Social identity salience. As described above, each person is made up of a myriad of social identities; however, not all social identities are equally important or contribute equally to an individual's self-concept (Jetten et al., 2001). Additionally, not all social identities are active or salient all the time (Thoits, 2013). Some social identities may only be active in specific and rare circumstances while others are constantly being enacted. Several researchers have sought to explain how and when certain social identities become activated (e.g., Oaks, 1987; Stryker, 1968; Thoits, 2013) and two dominant perspectives regarding identity salience have emerged. The first perspective asserts that identities become salient based on the subjective importance of the identity to the individual. In other words, the individual groups and ranks his or her identities from least to greatest importance with the most important identities being most salient (Rosenberg, 1979; Thoits, 2013). Several models of this phenomenon have been presented with slight variations and using different terms to describe this process such as *prominence* (McCall & Simons, 1978), *psychological centrality* (Rosenberg, 1979), and *salience hierarchy* (Thoits, 1992). From this perspective, the regularity of enacting a certain identity is not necessarily reflective of its importance to the individual. For example, an individual may not enact a religious identity as regularly as a work identity, but it may still remain a more central or essential social identity for the individual.

Conversely, the second perspective regarding identity salience focuses on the individual's probability of enacting a specific identity within and across situations

(Thoits, 2013). The more salient an identity is, the more readily available it is and the more likely it is to be invoked across a wide variety of situations. Operationally, Stryker (1980) explains that the social identities that individuals invoke when they describe themselves to others when there is little or no external pressure demonstrate their centrality or importance to the individual. Stryker (1980) further suggests that specific social identities are not made salient simply based on social or environmental stimuli that draw one's attention, but are influenced by the number, intensity, and density of the social ties associated with each identity. If an identity is embedded in a large, socially enmeshed, and dense social environment, then it is more likely to be salient to the individual and, therefore, more likely to be invoked in more situations. For full-life volunteer organizations, the effect of social relationships on identity salience can have important implications. For those full-life volunteers who associate predominantly with others who are affiliated with the organization, this social influence can make organizationally relevant identities more available and, therefore, more important to the individual.

This concept of social identity salience stemming from the subjective importance and availability of the identity raises important questions for the individual and organization regarding how a specific identity's centrality or importance can change if the circumstances in which that identity is typically enacted are altered or are removed from the individual's life. New circumstances may cause new or previously peripheral identities to become more central or important and cause previously important social identities to drift away (Thoits, 2013). Indeed, large life changes may cause a complete reshuffling of the individual's social identity centrality.

Additionally, changes in an individual's environment may highlight the centrality of certain identities because contrasting identities become salient. Hogg and Abrams (1988) point out that social categorizations only exist in contrast to other categories. Thus, without the category of "female," a "male" category has no meaning. In the case of full-life volunteers, if a white American who grew up in a predominantly white area is assigned to serve in Africa, previously peripheral or taken-for-granted identities such as "white" or "American" may suddenly become salient due to the availability of contrasting categories. Additionally, new tasks and goals may make new or previously peripheral social identities such as "teacher," "missionary," or "volunteer" more central in volunteers' self-concept because their daily goals, tasks, and social ties call for the enactment of these identities.

Access to circumstances that enable the invocation of a specific identity may be deliberately encouraged or discouraged by the organization or the individual based on perceived needs and goals. For example, for full-life volunteers, access to circumstances that would stimulate identity salience of pre-full-life volunteer identities may be limited or eliminated due to physical distance (e.g., I can't hang out with my old group of friends because I live in a different place), limited access to information (e.g., I can't watch my favorite sports team's games because I don't have access to TV), because the organization specifically forbids practices that foster that identity (e.g., I can't call my family regularly because the mission rules prohibit it), or because the individual simply chooses not to invoke that identity regardless of the circumstances. Conversely, identification with the volunteer organization, work team, or host population, among others, is encouraged through providing time for social interaction,

studying of the host culture, learning about the organization and its culture, and establishing expectations regarding conduct when volunteers are acting as organizational representatives. In the case of LDS missionaries, congruent with C. R. Scott and Stephen's (2009) findings of volunteers' organizational identification, full-life volunteers' role as Church representatives and the expectation that missionaries should spend most of their working time communicating with investigators likely makes the missionary identity highly salient and strengthens missionaries' commitment to their service.

As individuals change environments, affiliations, age, and relationships, they continuously add and remove identities so that an individual's self-concept is in a constant state of evolution and development so as to better suit the individual's needs (Yip, Kiang, & Fuligni, 2008). With this myriad of social allegiances, some of these identities are complementary of each other, meaning that the development of one social identity fosters the development of another. For example, one's identification with a work group could foster greater identification with the overall organization. Conversely, some identities compete with or undermine the development of others (C. R. Scott, 1997). For example, because labor unions are often pitted against a work organization when negotiating terms of employment, identification with one of these groups could inhibit the identification with the other.

Therefore, using SIT as a theoretical framework, this study seeks to (1) understand the unique experiences of full-life volunteers as they pass through the various phases of assimilation and (2) discover how they make sense of the stability and/or changes in their identity as they engage in a full-life volunteer experience.

Based on the previous discussion of the extant literature, the following research questions are proposed.

RQ1a: How do full-life volunteers describe their assimilation process?

RQ1b: How do full-life volunteers communicate what social identities are most salient to them in the different phases of assimilation?

RQ1c: How do full-life volunteers describe changes to the centrality of their social identities in their self-concept during role transitions?

RQ2: How do full-life volunteers make sense of the consistency and/or changes in their social identities during the assimilation process?

Chapter 3

Method

Participants

The full-life volunteers in this study were prospective, active, and returned missionaries for the LDS Church. In-depth interviews were conducted with 38 participants. These participants included eight prospective missionaries, 10 new missionaries, those who began their missions less than four months before data collection, 10 experienced missionaries, those who had been serving longer than one year at the time of data collection, and 10 recently returned missionaries, those who had returned from missionary service less than one year before data collection. Of the 38 participants, 18 were female. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 23 years old. All of the active LDS missionaries were members of the Oklahoma City, Oklahoma mission. Prospective missionaries were from Norman, Oklahoma and would be serving in various missions throughout the world. Returned missionaries had served their missions in various locations throughout the world and resided in Norman, Oklahoma at the time of data collection.

Field Observation, Document Collection, and Interview Data Collection

Despite acknowledging the existence of multiple identities, much of the extant research on social identities explores identities in isolation, one at a time, thus ignoring the complexity and nuance of the interactions of social identities (Frable, 1997; C. R. Scott & Stephens, 2009). Some researchers have called for more comprehensive investigations into individuals' identities from a "whole person" perspective (Frable, 1997; Yip et al., 2008) so as to capture a more realistic understanding of how social

identities are developed and change over time. This comprehensive approach is necessary in studying full-life volunteers so as to capture the changes in social identity salience as these volunteers progress through the assimilation process. Qualitative inquiry including participant observation, in-depth interviewing, and document collection was necessary to provide a more holistic approach to understanding full-life volunteers' identities and how these identities were developed, maintained, and/or changed throughout the assimilation process. Therefore, this study employed these three methods of collecting data. Data collection was conducted between the fall of 2015 and the spring of 2016.

Interview questions were aimed at understanding how full-life volunteers structured and communicated their social identities in the different phases of assimilation and how major transitions in the assimilation process induce changes in missionaries' communication of their social identity centrality (see below for interview questions). A total of 38 semi-structured formal interviews were conducted (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011) lasting between 26 and 53 minutes with an average length of 36 minutes. These interviews were conducted in LDS Church buildings, missionaries' apartments, or University of Oklahoma offices. Interviews were recorded using a digital voice recorder. Recordings were transcribed by the researcher or by professional transcribers through rev.com. All transcriptions were reviewed against the audio recordings and edited for accuracy by the researcher. Transcriptions yielded 483 pages of single-spaced text.

In order to gain a deeper and more rich understanding of the experiences of participants, I engaged with the participants as a "play participant" (Tracy, 2013, p.

109) or “active member researcher” (Adler & Adler, 1987, p. 50). In this role, the researcher can *play* at becoming a full cultural member by engaging in various cultural activities, but is also able to disengage from the culture in ways full members cannot (Tracy, 2013). As a former LDS full-life volunteer, assuming this temporary role was easy because I was familiar with the organizational culture and could relate to the participants. Data collection included ethnographic participant observation at weekly LDS Church services, missionary preparation and seminary classes, and ride-alongs with active missionaries. A total of 112 hours of participant observation were conducted. Field notes were written during several activities that were conducive to writing such as during church services and missionary preparation classes. When note taking would be distracting or inappropriate (e.g., during ride-alongs and lessons with people who were investigating the LDS Church’s teachings), field notes were written at the earliest available time. Field notes yielded approximately 50 single-spaced pages. Because returned missionaries are not actively engaging in missionary life, only interviews were used to capture their experiences.

In addition to interviews and participant observation, the LDS Church has produced an extensive library of handbooks, manuals, and sermons regarding missionary service that were used to gain insight into the organization’s procedures, protocols, and expectations regarding their missionaries. These documents were accessed through the LDS Church’s website lds.org. Because the *Missionary Handbook* and *Preach My Gospel* were the most used resources by missionaries, these were analyzed in full while excerpts of other handbooks and sermons were also analyzed.

Data Analysis

To answer the research questions posed above, I used a modified constant comparative analysis. This procedure is a valuable tool in constructing theoretical insights because it offers a logical and systematic method for analyzing large amounts of qualitative data (Charmaz, 2006). Constant comparative analysis was conducted using the qualitative data analysis software QDA Miner. This process was accomplished by, first, reading and rereading the data in an iterative fashion and all data that were not relevant to the research questions, such as interruptions in the interviews or logistical discussions about the interview protocol were eliminated in a process of data reduction (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). Second, in the process of open coding, the remaining data were read and reread continuously for the purpose of identifying emergent and recurrent categories. Next, the codes generated in open coding were grouped together into larger categories so as to determine the most significant and/or frequent categories into which all of the data could fit. This process is called focused coding. Finally, in a process of axial coding, the interrelationships between the remaining categories were identified and explored. In this phase of analysis, codes that were originated in focused coding were reexamined for possible alternative explanations that could account for the discovered interrelationships (Charmaz, 2006). Through this process of constant comparative analysis, all data was accounted for within the theoretical framework presented.

Validation

Some within the social sciences have criticized qualitative research methods for failing to “adhere to canons of reliability and validation” (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982, p.

31) claiming that these methods produce impressionistic, anecdotal, and a-theoretical results. Baym (2006) explained that one of the problems with evaluating qualitative research is that, unlike quantitative research, there is often no .05 significance threshold that is universally accepted or standardized effect size measurements. Because these universal standards of research quality are not present in qualitative research, qualitative researchers have devised other methods of ensuring that the quality and trustworthiness of qualitative inquiry is upheld (e.g., Creswell, 2013; Tracy, 2010). Creswell (2013) recommends qualitative researchers use at least two methods of validation in any given study. In accordance with this recommendation, I incorporated five: reflexivity, time spent in the field, triangulation, thick rich description, and member checking.

First, before embarking on any research project, it is important to clarify the researcher's perspective and potential biases through reflexivity (Creswell, 2013). The author is a member of the LDS Church and a former LDS missionary. This affiliation provides the potential for both positive and negative outcomes. Having a deep understanding of the LDS culture and of the missionary program offers opportunities for greater insights into the assimilation process, the development and changes in full-life volunteers' social identities, and how full-life volunteers make sense of their experience. However, there could be some potential dangers that should be discussed. First, missionaries might feel pressured to give socially appropriate answers instead of divulging their true feelings or experiences if they know the researcher's background. Second, as a member of the LDS Church, my interpretations could reflect a bias toward presenting the LDS mission program in an overly positive light.

In collecting data, I spent extensive time in the field with the participants and collecting several forms of data including field notes, interviews, and documents in order to provide multiple bases of support for interpretations and understand the circumstances and experiences beyond the verbal recitation of the narrative captured by interviews. Thick description was achieved by uncovering the deep contextual meanings and providing ample detail about the processes, people, and activities that existed in this culture (Geertz, 1973; Tracy, 2013). As part of the analysis process, I engaged in member checking which entails presenting my findings and interpretations to the participants so as to allow them to question, critique, clarify, or provide other feedback that would more accurately portray their experience. No changes to the results were necessary after member checking.

Chapter 4

Results and Interpretation

RQ1: Assimilation process and identity

In investigating the first research question, this study sought to understand how participants described their assimilation process in a full-life volunteer organization. Specifically, using SIT, I investigate how full-life volunteers communicate the social identities which were most salient to them in the different phases of assimilation and how they described changes to the centrality of their social identities in different phases of assimilation. First, these full-life volunteers experienced anticipatory socialization as a three-phase process with an exposure phase followed by an exploration phase and engagement phase. Next, in the entry/engagement phase, participants described their experience as a two-part adjustment as they adapted to both the *lifestyle* of being a full-life missionary and to the *role* of being a full-life missionary. Then, volunteers described their metamorphosis phase as a time of a complete investment in the goals of the organization. Finally, the exit phase includes a period of disengagement with the role of a full-life missionary, the actual exit, and an adoption of a new identity as a returned missionary. As described earlier, male LDS missionaries are given the title of “Elder” and are addressed by this title and their surnames despite their young ages. Female missionaries are addressed by the title “Sister” with their surnames. The examples presented reflects this terminology; however, names presented are pseudonyms.

In describing the assimilation process, participants identified two main interrelated identities that permeated the process – an organizational identity as a

member of the LDS Church and a role identity as a prospective, active, or returned missionary. During anticipatory socialization these two identities, although strongly influenced by one another were somewhat distinct as prospective missionaries could retain a strong organizational identity without embracing the missionary identity. Upon entering the mission, these two identities became so intertwined that they became almost indistinguishable from one another. As full-life volunteers returned home, once again these two identities became independent, but closely related.

First, the organizational identity describes the extent to which participants felt connected to or personally invested in the outcomes and goals of the LDS Church. The LDS Church promotes a strong organizational culture that permeates its members' lives. Organizational members communicate the degree of their organizational identity through performing behaviors expected of members, such as attending weekly services, fulfilling a calling (a voluntary unpaid organizational responsibility), paying a tithe of 10% of a member's income, sharing their beliefs with family members and friends, and holding family and personal scripture study and prayer. Those who are highly organizationally identified are more likely to perform the expectations associated with organizational membership.

Second, the role identity as a prospective, active, or returned missionary describes the extent to which participants demonstrated a commitment to the full-life voluntary missionary service. Participants could communicate this commitment through declaring a desire to serve a mission or taking steps to join the missionary program, living according to missionary standards and expectations, and positively describing promoting the missionary program.

Anticipatory Socialization. Because young LDS missionaries experience role anticipatory socialization and organizational anticipatory socializations concurrently, the expectation was that they would conform to Gibson and Papa's (2000) concept of *organizational osmosis*. Indeed, the beginning of these volunteer missionaries' anticipatory socialization phase was quite similar to that of Gibson and Papa's participants who began the process at an early age. Despite the early agreement with organizational osmosis and the expectation that these participants would represent a clear example of this concept throughout their anticipatory socialization phase, surprisingly, very few LDS missionaries in this study explained their anticipatory socialization process as a smooth process or in Gibson and Papa's words: "The seemingly effortless adoption of the ideas, values, and culture of an organization on the basis of preexisting socialization experiences" (p. 79). Instead, participants typically experienced anticipatory socialization in three phases – *exposure*, *exploration*, and *engagement*.

Exposure. The first phase, *exposure*, was the period where the role identity of a prospective missionary and the organizational identity of being a member of the LDS Church were initially presented to the prospective missionary as a child. In this phase, participants were simply given these identities with little option for rejecting it. Speaking of his ward, or local congregation, Elder Hall, a new missionary from Utah, explained,

They always just had that as a goal for me. When I like adopted that goal for myself, you know, I kind of got that from them. Just the leaders and primary

[Sunday school for children] and in the Aaronic priesthood [program for male youth] offices just all those leaders.

Because children have less volition regarding their associations and experiences, for children growing up in this environment, parents usually have control over with whom the child associates. Therefore, the identity-developing messages came from close others who tended to share the same belief system as the parents. In the previous example, we see that Elder Hall received these messages from a variety of sources; however, these sources were all from the parents' associations. In addition to Church settings, parents exert a powerful influence on the development of children's organizational and role identities through interactions and teachings in the home. In a publication distributed by the LDS Church intended to assist parents in raising their children, this concept of identity exposure is described. It states,

Perhaps most significant of all classrooms is the classroom of the home. It is in the home that we form our attitudes, our deeply held beliefs. It is in the home that hope is fostered or destroyed. Our homes are the laboratories of our lives. What we do there determines the course of our lives when we leave home
(Marriage and family relations, 2000, p. 36).

From this example, we can see that parents are encouraged to expose children to beliefs, values, and attitudes that are conducive to developing strong organizational and role identities.

Identity Centrality. In the exposure phase, there are few competing identities that could hinder the development of the future volunteer's identities as a member of the LDS Church and a prospective missionary. Thus, from the beginning of their lives,

these identities occupy a central position in the individual's self-concept. From childhood, volunteers were inculcated in the beliefs, traditions, and norms of the LDS Church and developed an identification with that organization. For example, in discussing the most important influences on his decision to serve as a full-life missionary, Elder King, a missionary from Utah nearing the end of his mission, talked about his identification with the Church. He stated,

I felt that the Church had provided so many things, like the Gospel, that I really loved and something that had changed my life and that I wanted to be able to go out and share with other people. I could see who I would be if I didn't have the Gospel in my life and who I was. I was very thankful for that, so that was probably the biggest thing I saw was seeing who I could be and who I was.

That's probably what influenced me the most.

This identification with the LDS Church and the desire to share the blessings believed to come from their membership in the Church began with influential messages that concurrently strengthened their identification with the Church organization and their future role as a full-life voluntary missionary.

These influential messages were presented in a variety of ways and came from diverse sources. They are organized here as *individualized messages* and *general messages*.

Individualized messages. Individualized messages were those that were communicated specifically to the individual, tailored to the individual's circumstances and were used to encourage missionary service. Elder Young, an experienced missionary from Idaho, demonstrated these direct messages when he explained,

I grew up always talking about going on a mission. My parents always talked about all of us kids ... all of us boys, serving missions. My dad always talked about his mission. Growing up, the church leaders always talked about how it's important to make the decision to serve a mission, and they talked about how they loved serving their mission.

Here we see that these participants were exposed to role anticipatory socialization messages from parents and Church leaders through their expressing how valuable serving a mission was to them, and an expectation of positive outcomes for the participant should he/she decide to serve.

General messages. In addition to individualized persuasive messages, participants were also exposed to general messages that promoted role anticipatory socialization. General messages are those that are not directed at a specific individual or are more general in nature. For example, Sister Morris, a missionary from Utah who was nearing the end of her mission, remembered,

One of my earliest memories of wanting to serve, I was probably about six years old in primary [Sunday School for children] and started hearing the songs about missionaries and I had no idea what that was and so I asked my dad and he ... I remember him getting all excited. He pulled out his mission scriptures and told me all these stories.

Additionally, Caleb, a recently returned missionary who served in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, stated,

I definitely remember I was 6 or 7 I think when my oldest brother went on a mission. I remember that's when I really decided it was going to happen. Ever since then, it's just always been part of the plan. I knew it was going to happen. From these examples, we can see that general messages such as singing songs about missionary service and observing others' examples are influential in solidifying both the role of being a prospective missionary and the identification with the Church organization.

The cultural expectations regarding serving a mission are intense and come from nearly all members of a prospective missionary's social life. Parents, siblings, extended family members, Church leaders, peers, and, perhaps most importantly, God all exert pressure to conform to the cultural expectations and serve a mission. Several participants admitted that these relationships were the major influence on their decision to serve a mission. Many even said that they were reluctant to go on a mission or openly did not want to serve, but because of the pressure they felt, decided to serve anyway. This unobtrusive control that cultural and relational influences exert on participants was extensive. However, although the LDS Church does not publish statistics regarding the percentage of young people who serve missions, a survey of LDS male young adults in the U.S. and Canada between the ages of 19 and 21 suggests that only 32% of young men in the Church served missions in 1991 and the percentage of women who served was only 15% (Anderson, 1992; McCombs, 2013). For young men, that number is estimated to have remained fairly steady since that time, but for young women, the percentage has risen somewhat due to the LDS Church allowing women to serve when they are 19 years old instead of 21 (McCombs, 2013; Roundel,

2015). The relatively low percentage of young people who serve missions for the LDS Church indicates that despite the pressures to serve, many potential missionaries are able to exercise their agency and choose to follow different paths.

Exploration. The second phase of anticipatory socialization experienced by these participants, *exploration*, typically occurred during high school or shortly after graduating from high school as participants experienced greater independence from their parents and were able to make decisions for themselves. Although the exploration phase is considered here to be a part of anticipatory socialization, many missionaries exhibited signs of the exploration phase well after entering their missions. In this phase, participants began to question their commitment to their organizational and/or role identities and other identities became more central to the volunteer's self-concept. Four related categories help to define the experience of the exploration phase – *weakening spiritual identity, observing others' negative experiences from volunteer service, accumulating new identities, and identification avoidance.*

Weakening organizational and role identities. The extent to which participants' role and organizational identities drifted from centrality varied. Some participants continued to attend Church meetings during this phase, but described themselves as “unmotivated” (Sister Reed), “lazy” (Elder Thatcher), or “bored of it” (Sister Lee). They explained that they “didn't have a testimony” (Sister Walker), “just didn't like it” (Elder Young), or “I was just going through the motions, and I didn't really feel committed to it” (Cathleen) while others completely “went inactive” (Sister Thompson) or “didn't consider myself like a Mormon at that time” (Diane). As an experienced

missionary from Northern Utah, Elder Lewis's comments typified the exploration phase for a majority of participants. He stated,

Before I came on my mission, I was a regular LDS kid. Just kind of did whatever my parents told me to do, but I guess I didn't really have a testimony. I didn't really believe that the Church was, well, I believed that the Church was true, but I didn't know, and a mission was something that I knew I was going to do, but it wasn't really real.

These participants attended Church services and accepted the mandate to serve missions because of a desire to please others, their desire to obey their parents' directives, or because they did not have enough conviction to resist the social pressure to serve a mission. This uncommitted blasé attitude toward their religious beliefs and their future role as full-life missionaries was common among those in the exploration phase. For many, they were never actively against having an identification with the Church or with their role as missionaries, but they were not committed enough to actively foster these identities.

For several participants, this phase of exploration was triggered by a traumatic event that shook the participant's faith or conviction. For example, Greg, a returned missionary who served in Provo, Utah, explained,

When I was 14, I had a spinal cord injury and I lost the ability to walk, and I entered into a pretty severe state of depression. My family, likewise, entered a state of depression, so we stopped going to all three hours of church. Our church meetings are three hours long. We just would go to the first hour, and

then go home, and then that became intermittent, and then I just was accepting of that, a casual approach to it.

For Elder Henderson, a new missionary from Utah, it was the loss of his father that caused him to question his identity. He described,

I think everyone is a convert, at some point, even if you're born in the church. If you're not, then you don't stay in the church. You don't ever get converted. So mine happened when my dad died, that's when I had to decide, 'Is God a hateful God? Is God even there?' Because my dad was a good guy, or 'Is there a bigger purpose on why my dad's no longer here.'

Obviously these examples are extreme and serve as highly visible instances of trauma; however, for others, seemingly more innocuous experiences such as moving to a new city during adolescence or the illness of a family member caused considerable emotional and spiritual turmoil and led participants to explore alternative identities. For those who experienced a traumatic event, the identification with the LDS Church and, the identity as a prospective missionary became peripheral or were rejected altogether.

Those that experienced these severe traumatic experiences were the minority. Most participants who experienced the exploration phase found that their organizational identity drifted to the periphery of their self-concept slowly. Jennifer, a returned missionary who served in Arizona, explained that her experience was typical. She stated,

When it comes to that [becoming less-active] there's always a pattern. When you give a little, you end up a giving a little more and a little more and then eventually, I, every now and then, would make it to sacrament [first hour of

services]. Every now and then I would maybe sit in for the last 30 minutes of sacrament and then go to class and then leave. Sometimes I would say that I'd be going to my family ward and my family ward would think that I'd be going to the YSA [young single adult] ward and I'd take a nap somewhere because my parents, they would get home before and if I was home when they got home, then they knew that I was skipping out. That's what I would do.

As this example shows, the path from the exposure phase to the exploration phase can be gradual and, for some, barely noticeable.

Observing others' negative experiences from volunteer service. During this time of exploration of a variety of different identities, many missionaries expressed concern about the difficulties of enacting the full-life missionary identity. Some participants indicated that during their exploration phase, they were aware of negative experiences or outcomes of others who served missions. These observations often caused the participant to question whether enacting the missionary identity was safe or worth the effort. Elder Young explained some of his reservations about serving a mission because of his brothers' experiences. He said,

I've actually had, my two older brothers had gone out of missions and come home early for stress and anxiety. Well, my first brother did. My second brother, he had some other issues as well, like with his learning disability, and high anxiety... I didn't want that to happen to me, and I knew I had high anxiety already.

By viewing the difficulties of his brothers, this missionary questioned his likelihood of succeeding as a missionary considering that he was also susceptible to high anxiety.

Rebecca, a prospective missionary who was preparing to serve in Chicago, Illinois, remembered the contrast of what she thought missions would be like and the realities of the difficulties experienced by her sister who was called to serve in Korea, but was reassigned to a mission in the United States due to high anxiety and stress.

She left and then it was hard. It was like, 'Oh, she's not going to Korea anymore; she's getting reassigned. Oh she's crying on the phone, and oh she might come home.' All these things that I never even thought were going to be an option or even... Didn't even cross my mind that that would become an issue. I kind of got scared of missions. That kind of seems silly but I was just like, 'This isn't supposed to be. This isn't how it's supposed to be. What if that's just like a family curse? Like our family just has this like predisposition to be super anxious about that?'

In both of these examples we see how the participants' observations of others' struggles made these prospective missionaries question their desire or capability to become missionaries.

Accumulating new identities. In the exploration phase, participants began to explore a wide variety of identities and construct a self-concept where these competing identities supplanted participants' organizational identity as a member of the LDS Church and role identity as a prospective missionary as the most central identities. For example, Elder Johnson, a new missionary from Northern California, described how school work took priority over his organizational identification.

When I turned 18, I began going to college and I didn't have the strongest testimony at the time. Going to college in California, it's extremely liberal and

everyone looks down on religion. I just went with the flow and didn't really uphold my beliefs that well. I'd start making excuses like, 'Oh, you know, I need to study. That's more important than going to church,' and things like that, but I still went to institute and occasionally go to church.

Likewise, for Sister Walker, a new missionary, she became more invested in her image and how she appeared to others. She said, "I think one thing that was important to me off the mission was like being cool, I guess." This comment demonstrates that perhaps enacting the organizational and role identities may not be considered "cool" by this participant's social network. During this phase, some participants added identities that undermined or competed with their organizational and role identities. For example, Diane, a returned missionary who served in Fresno, California, explained that her identity as an advocate for LGBTQ rights caused her to distance herself from her organizational identity. She explained,

Actually the prop 8 [a proposition that amended the California constitution to define marriage as between one man and one woman] caused me to do that, there was a lot of confusion about I wasn't really agreeing with the LDS stance on gay marriage at that time... I was just confused, and that confusion made me just really angry, and I was angry for about four years.

Although this new identity as an advocate for LGBTQ rights was the instigation for her to reject her identities as a member of the LDS Church and a future missionary, she continued to adopt additional identities that further distanced her from these identities such as "go[ing] to parties" where she would "drink" alcohol, a practice that is forbidden by the LDS Church. For most participants, the new identities that they added

to their social identities were not necessarily opposed to their organizational membership or their plans to serve as a full-life volunteer. Instead, the exploration phase was an accumulation of a multitude of identities that demanded attention and occupied the participant's consideration, thus allowing for less time or attention to be paid to developing their identities as members of the LDS Church or their role as missionaries.

Participants described themselves during this phase based on sports they played such as football, softball, volleyball, soccer, and extreme pogo sticking; hobby groups such as a community orchestra, ballroom dance group, or a rock band; school groups such as a radio broadcasters' club, Future Farmers of America, and a filmmakers' group; work groups such as working for a family business, managing a KFC, or working for Chick-fil-a; political associations such as university campus Republicans or Democrats groups; or lifestyle choices such as being a "granola" (Sister Walker) or "outdoorsy" (Sister Lee). As these identities became important and therefore more central to the participants' self-concept, they often found it difficult to give them up in order to serve as a full-life volunteer. For example, Jennifer, who served in Arizona, related that her work group prior to her missionary service was a central part of her life and provided a great deal of fulfillment. For her, the prospect of leaving this group to serve a mission was difficult because she "felt like [she] was abandoning them in a way." By focusing on the previous identity with her work group, it was difficult to identify with her identity as a prospective missionary.

Many of these new identities were not considered "bad" by the participants. Indeed, many of them took pride in these identities; however, those who moved to the

next phase in anticipatory socialization explained that the only problem with many of these identities was that they became more central to their self-concept than their identification with the Church or their role as prospective or active missionaries.

Avoiding identities. Avoiding identities refers to participants' resistance to identifying with the Church organization and/or the role of a prospective missionary so as to maintain the centrality of competing identities. During the exploration phase, participants explained that they were reluctant to commit to their religious or missionary identities for a variety of reasons. Even after making the decision to serve a mission, many participants were reluctant to tell even their closest friends. Sister Walker's experience was common. For her, identifying with the role of a missionary carried high expectations and she was afraid that if she publicly identified with her role as a missionary and then decided not to go, others would be disappointed in her. She explained,

When I got my call I didn't post it on Facebook, I didn't post it on Instagram, Twitter, nothing, and I actually didn't even tell people I was leaving. The week before I left, I was like, 'Hey guys, I'm leaving if you want to come to my farewell,' on Facebook. The morning I left, like at five in the morning, I posted on Instagram, it was like, 'Hey, I'm leaving on a mission. This is my email.' I think just because I was so stressed out that I would decide to not go and then people would be disappointed because I think there's such a high mantle of LDS young adults that you have to go on a mission or you have to get married. I didn't want to disappoint people. That was my big thing.

Instead of embracing the commitment to serve a mission, many prospective missionaries wanted to allow themselves an “out” just in case things didn’t work out and they decided to not serve.

Beyond holding a desire to resist the pressures to socialize into the full-life missionary role properly, some participants actively derogated the organizational or role identity and expressed their desire to change what it means to be a member of the LDS Church or a missionary. Sister Thompson, who had arrived in the mission field one day before this interview, demonstrates her negative perception of her own organizational identity as a member of the LDS Church by stating.

I went on this mission because I wanted to become friends with people. That was my goal was to just be friends with you and just to know that there are actually good LDS people out there. They're not all rude, and stuck up, and think they know everything... When I was younger, I kind of went inactive for a little bit just because of things that happened with a lot of people, I guess.

When was I saying that they’re stuck up and stuff like that, I dealt with a lot of that when I was back home. That's why I say that. I want to be able to make a good impression on everybody, and show that LDS people aren't that bad. They can come across that way, but not all the LDS people are that way.

For this missionary, her negative perception of the LDS identity as “rude, and stuck up, and think[ing] they know everything,” compelled her to serve a mission so as to prove to others that “LDS people aren’t that bad.”

For those missionaries who had made the decision to serve full-life volunteer missions, but remained in the exploration phase, the purpose of their missionary service

was unclear to them. Sister Thompson, a new missionary, stated, “For me, I knew that I needed to be here for some reason. I didn’t know why. It was just – might as well keep going. It’s going to get better.” Another experienced missionary, Sister Murphy, claimed,

This is the hard part because I didn’t know what I was supposed to be getting out of this, coming into it. Like I said, it was something I never wanted to do. I fought it tooth and nail going in.

From these examples we can see that although these missionaries made the decision to serve full-life missions, they were unsure about the purpose or value of their service.

For these missionaries in the exploration phase, the decision to serve was less about their commitment to their organizational or role identities and more about conforming to social expectations or trying to avoid stigma for not serving. Elder Cooper, a new missionary, explained,

It's just something that's expected. There's social pressure in Utah to go on a mission, because of the high number of members. It was always awkward for my dad because he didn't serve a mission, and so it was just assumed in Utah that you served a mission. Whenever people were talking about missions and stuff, they'd ask my dad where he served, and he was like, ‘Oh, I didn't go on a mission,’ and that's awkward that he always has to say that.

This missionary saw clearly the lifelong social consequences of not serving a mission and made the decision that two years of full-life missionary service was better than a lifetime of awkward conversations and social stigma. Regardless of the reason for deciding to serve a mission, as volunteers made this decision and especially as they

entered the missionary organization, they began to restore their organizational and role identities to a more central position in their self-concept.

Engagement. The final phase of anticipatory socialization experienced by these full-life volunteers is engagement. In this phase, these full-life volunteers became committed to their role identity as a full-life volunteer missionary. In the engagement phase, organizational members restored their organizational and role identities to a central position in their self-concept. Like the exploration phase, volunteers began the engagement phase at various times throughout their anticipatory socialization experience. Some missionaries identified strongly with their decision to serve long before they entered the mission, whereas others only became committed to their decision to serve a mission after entering the mission. This phase is defined by three themes: *building and sharing testimony, sacrificing, and feeling excitement.*

Building and sharing testimony. While those in the exploration phase expressed uncertainty about why they wanted to serve a mission, those in the engagement phase knew clearly their purpose and motivations. The word testimony is a common term in the LDS culture that is used to describe Church members' set of beliefs that are held as true. All Church members, and especially missionaries, are encouraged to gain and build their own testimonies regarding Church doctrine through prayer, scripture study, Church attendance, and family discussions of Church doctrine. Richard, a prospective missionary, viewed his mission as an opportunity to further his testimony development. He stated,

I think it's going to strengthen my membership, going on a mission. I can't imagine ever deteriorating from my, I can't imagine my testimony deteriorating

after that. Of course, I could make decisions in my life that would lead to that, but how I'm living my life right now, all I want to do is continually live better. I think that going on a mission is really going to solidify that. Not saying that I don't have a testimony right now, or that I'm not trying my best to try to solidify my position right now, but I believe that a mission is really just going to benefit me overall and is just going to be an amazing experience for me and really help me grow.

Although this participant acknowledged that he already had a testimony of the truthfulness of the LDS Church, because of his missionary preparation, he anticipated that a mission would “solidify” his testimony and membership in the Church and allow for further personal growth.

In addition to building their own testimonies, Church members, and especially missionaries, are expected to share their testimonies with others or to inform others about the teachings of the LDS Church. Elder Wright, an experienced missionary, described his engagement phase in this way.

I had a huge desire to serve, and not because people were forcing me, but because I wanted to. In the past couple or past year, and even before that, I've realized why I need to be on a mission. The people's lives that I've affected because of my testimony, and what I've done to help them out.

For those in the engagement phase, serving a mission was a deeply personal goal that motivated them to prepare for missionary service. Many participants identified the joy they experienced through developing their own testimony as the source of their desire to

serve a mission and help others find happiness through learning about the LDS Church.

In explaining his purpose for serving, Elder Hall, a new missionary, stated,

I would say that I like to find joy and happiness in life. One of the greatest ways that I've done that is through the Church, and that's why I'm in Oklahoma for my mission is I want to help share that with as many people as I can because I've seen it help bless my life and I want that to be part of other people's lives.

This example demonstrates one of the most common themes for those in the engagement phase of finding happiness, fulfillment, and peace due to their Church membership and testimony of the truthfulness of the LDS Church and, subsequently, the desire to communicate that happiness with others.

Feeling excitement. For most participants in the engagement phase, preparing for and serving a mission was the fulfillment of a lifelong dream. All of the participants had strong support groups that encouraged prospective missionaries and celebrated when the prospective missionary chose to serve. In thinking about the response he got when he communicated his decision to serve a mission, Elder Wright, an experienced missionary remembered,

They were really happy. I think everyone that I talked to, there wasn't anyone that was like, 'Oh, no, you shouldn't do this.' They all supported me. I had a couple non-Mormon friends that actually really supported it too, as well. I was really impressed, since they didn't know a lot of what we believe, but they still supported me in that choice.

Missionaries are revered in the LDS community and so the prospect of joining this group and becoming someone that others look up to was exciting. In reminiscing about the first time he put on the missionary nametag, Elder Johnson, a new missionary stated,

Honestly, it is surreal. It's like, 'what the heck? this is actually it. I'm actually a missionary now.' All my life, I'd always looked up to missionaries. It's like, 'oh, I know these guys are perfect. These guys are awesome.'

In addition to these general feelings of excitement about fulfilling their goal and desire to serve a mission, participants also expressed an understanding that missionary service is not easy and requires hard work and dedication. Elder Anderson, a new missionary, described himself and his feelings of commitment as he prepared for his missionary service as,

Eager, and ready to meet the challenges of the mission, knowing very well that there will be challenges at times, homesickness, and being discouraged of how the work is going, but at the end of the day, just ready to meet the challenges that the day had for the entire two years.

Despite an expectation that volunteering would include difficulties and disappointments, those in the engagement phase were excited and eager to serve.

Sacrificing. Although those in the engagement phase felt positive emotion toward serving a mission, participants outlined a long list of material and social sacrifices that they had to make in order to serve. First, full-life volunteers make *material sacrifices*. The LDS mission program does not pay for living expenses for its missionaries. Therefore, missionaries, their families, and/or their communities must contribute \$400 per month to the LDS Church's missionary fund for the duration of the

volunteer's mission. For many missionaries, saving money toward missionary service begins in the exposure phase and is a symbol of the individual's commitment to missionary service. Elder King, an experienced missionary from Utah, explained,

Since we have to save up money for missions, they'd always start out the separate fund for our missions so they always, it was something important enough. Ever since I was really young and could get some money, they always made sure there was a fund ready for it.

In addition to sacrificing the cost of the mission, many of the participants referred to the opportunity cost of serving a mission. For example, 31 of the 38 participants discussed putting off a college education, and 26 referenced leaving jobs and career opportunities so that they could serve a mission. These material sacrifices were real and clearly understood by the participants.

Second, full-life volunteers make *social sacrifices*. All of the participants expressed that one of the biggest difficulties in serving a full-life volunteer mission was being separated from their families. Richard, a prospective missionary who was awaiting his mission assignment, expressed concern about leaving his family. He said,

Not living with my family, that's going to be hard, because my family's pretty much, that's my key, that's like my main source of happiness is spending time with my family. If I'm feeling down, and I go home and I see all my family, I almost always feel better and feel happier. It's going to be really hard for me to spend two years away from them. It will be worth it, for sure, but it's going to be hard.

For this prospective missionary, the prospect of not being near his family was his greatest deterrent for serving as a full-life volunteer; however, his comment that “it will be worth it” indicates that despite this great sacrifice, he expects the rewards to outweigh the costs.

In addition to sacrificing time with their families, many participants discussed other social relationships that were affected by their decision to become a full-life volunteer. Elder Wilson, an experienced missionary, explained the social toll of his decision to serve a mission after telling his rock-bandmates that he would not be able to “chase [his] dreams with them.” He stated, “It was tough. I didn't talk to my best friend for probably a month and a half or something like that. It was just, it was tough.” Similarly, Sister Reed, a missionary nearing the end of her mission who attended Brigham Young University Idaho (an LDS university) prior to serving her mission, decided to sacrifice a romantic relationship in order to serve. She explained,

I just continued to want to date him and it was really not a very good choice on my part. I just kept dating him and like, ‘Well, it's okay, you know I'm going on a mission but we can just date for now.’ He was like, ‘Going on a mission is a great thing. I don't want to discourage you or deter you from it at all.’ He was very supportive of the mission. He tried to not date me because he didn't want to get in the way of that but I was just like, ‘No, I like you.’

Although Sister Reed decided to continue the relationship into her mission, after a while, she felt like the relationship was hindering her commitment to her mission and so she ended it. She said,

I was just like, ‘Okay, this is ridiculous now. It's starting to make me lose focus on the things that I need to focus on because I was just concerned about that.’ I told him to stop writing me. I didn't say it like, ‘Stop writing me.’ I nicely told him that it would be best if we didn't write each other or communicate until I got home and I said, ‘If you want to, you can come find me when I get home.’

For these missionaries, full-life volunteering to serve a mission was not a simple decision, but had significant social consequences.

Although these missionaries all experienced significant sacrifice in order to serve, they also expressed a reassurance that their decision to volunteer was the correct or best choice for them. Tucker, a prospective missionary who was leaving an apprenticeship and a girlfriend to serve in Brazil, explained his anticipated feelings when he joins the missionary program as a full-life volunteer as “a calm feeling that it was the right thing to do. I feel like it is. I don't have any doubts about it. That's why I anticipate probably a calm feeling that I did the right thing.” Because those volunteers who are in the engagement phase are committed to their decision to serve, participants were willing to accept the sacrifices that were required of them.

Summary. As demonstrated above, for these full-life volunteers, the anticipatory socialization phase of the assimilation process was really a three-phase process that included an exposure phase where volunteers were introduced to the organizational and role identities, an exploration phase where volunteers’ organizational and role identities drifted to the periphery of the individual’s self-concept and were replaced by numerous other identities, and an engagement phase where volunteers reestablished the centrality of their organizational and role identities. As volunteers

moved into the entry/encounter phase of the assimilation process, they were faced with new challenges to their identities.

Entry. Similar to the assimilation process observed in other types of organizations, the entry phase for full-life volunteers is a period marked by high levels of uncertainty and anxiety. Unlike in other organizations where newcomers are only socialized into the organizational culture, the socialization process into this full-life volunteer organization included a socialization process both into the organizational culture and into a new and foreign lifestyle. As stated above, these young people are generally unsupervised and expected to labor nearly 70 hours per week, but are also expected to maintain a lifestyle that is congruent with organizational values and rules 24 hours per day seven days per week. Learning to maintain this missionary lifestyle requires a process of adaptation and training. For this missionary organization, the entry phase was when these young people were put through extensive training in order to develop and strengthen their organizational and role identities. This training began in the Missionary Training Center (MTC), but continues well into the time in the mission field.

Unlike employees or other types of volunteers, the full-life volunteers in this study did not have the option of “clocking out” at the end of the day and using the rest of their time as they wished. The missionary experience permeates all aspects of an individual’s life. Therefore, the entry phase for these full-life volunteers is divided into *lifestyle entry* and *role entry*.

Lifestyle entry. Upon arriving at the MTC, participants entered a lifestyle that was completely foreign to them. For most of the participants, before entering the MTC,

they had never lived away from their families. One of the purposes for the MTC is to begin the process of filtering out missionaries' previous identities that conflict with the full-life missionary identity. Elder Johnson lamented losing some of his previous identities as he stated, "It felt like, it's like I can't do any of these things I used to do. No more movies, no video games, nothing of that nature." This process of divestiture (see Van Maanen & Schein, 1979) was demonstrated clearly by participants as they described the lifestyle of the MTC. Although most participants generally had positive attitudes about their experience in the MTC, they also described three challenging lifestyle changes that promoted divestiture – *adhering to the strict MTC schedule, never being alone, and feeling confined.*

Adhering to the MTC schedule. From 6:30 AM to 10:30 PM, missionaries are expected to adhere to their assigned schedule. As full-life volunteers, missionaries' time was not their own, but "the Lord's time" (Ballard, 2007, n.p.). As such, volunteers submitted to the strict and demanding schedule of the missionary lifestyle. Elder Young explained, "Probably the biggest difference was, at the MTC specifically, I didn't have any say about what I was doing. Everything was set up. Every hour of the day, someone else already has planned for you." Before entering the MTC, most missionaries described having plenty of free time, having few obligations, and waking up whenever they wanted. Elder Johnson explained one of his most difficult lifestyle changes in this way.

Getting used to the schedule, waking up at 6:30, going to bed at 10:30. I think that first night, I didn't go to bed until one in the morning and then woke up and it was just like someone slapping you in the face.

Elder Lewis surmised that the MTC schedule was so rigid “Cause they want to get you in good habits on your mission of kind of how the day feels, so they’re very strict in your scheduling. It’s just ch, ch, ch, one thing right after another.” In this case, “good habits” include embracing the missionary identity through adhering to the strict schedule.

Never being alone. The rules for missionaries are explicitly stated in The Missionary Handbook. It reads,

Stay Together. Never be alone. It is extremely important that you stay with your companion at all times. Staying together means staying within sight and hearing of each other. The only times you should be separated from your assigned companion are when you are in an interview with the mission president, on a companion exchange, or in the bathroom.

According to The Missionary Handbook, the purpose for such a strict mandate is for the safety and wellbeing of the companion. It continues,

Be aware that you have a responsibility to protect your companion from physical and spiritual danger. If you do not fulfill this responsibility and your companion engages in serious misconduct, you may be subject to Church disciplinary action.

This statement indicates that missionaries are responsible for the conduct of their companions and could be disciplined even if they themselves do not participate in the “serious misconduct.” By having somebody with them at all times, missionaries are accountable to somebody else and are more likely to adhere to the missionary identity.

Although missionaries understood the reasons behind the rule to always be with a companion, they nevertheless had difficulty adapting to it. Elder Lewis explained, "When I got to the MTC? Um, suddenly I was stuck with this person 24 hours a day and I was like, and I really like people, but like I literally, everything you do, you have to have them with you and you have to be with them and it's a huge change right off the bat you are changing something about yourself."

Nearly all of the participants expressed that getting used to having a companion with them all the time was difficult or annoying at first regardless of whether or not they liked or got along with their companion because they were unable to have their own time.

Feeling confined. The highly controlled environment in the MTC caused a great deal of discomfort for participants as it did not allow them to engage in activities outside of the small campus. For some, this confinement deprived them of stress-relieving mechanisms that allowed them to cope with the stresses of life. For example, Elder Wilson who spent six weeks in the Mexico City MTC, related,

Before, I used to just get up, like sometimes when I'd hang out with my friends, they got used to me randomly getting up and getting in my car and I'd just go for a drive in the mountains or something. While I was in the training center, I was inside one of the biggest cities in the world, but I couldn't just go drive somewhere, or I couldn't just get away. I was used to, when things got tough, I was like, 'Well, not worth my time. I'm leaving.'

Because access to the outside world was restricted, missionaries were forced to rely on their companions, districts, teachers, and other leaders that were present in the MTC

when presented with difficulties, stresses, or anxiety. This transition created unity with other missionaries and leaders and strengthened the role identity as a missionary by presenting new resources for support within the missionary program. However, this transition also created feelings of being confined or limited in their ability to enact previous identities because resources that had previously been used by the full-life volunteer were now unavailable. This confinement led some participants to use descriptive metaphors to define the experience. Diane, a returned missionary, for example, described the MTC in this way.

I liked it a lot, I liked the people, and I liked my teachers. I think it was just the fact that you're inside so much, that was really shocking to me. Kind of like prison. It's really good, spiritually uplifting, but it's also like prison a little bit because you're just stuck. That's what I would describe it as I guess... A good prison, it's not bad.

In addition to comparing the MTC to a prison, another common metaphor was that of boot camp or the military to describe the MTC. Sister Thompson, a new missionary from Idaho, explained,

It's like, you know how the military when they throw you into the boot camp, they teach you obedience and how to respect your, what is it called...? Officer, commanding officer. They teach you obedience, right? The mission, the MTC, it teaches you obedience also and how they want you to be. You have to follow these rules, this, and this, and this. We have a white handbook that helps us be that way, so we can help more fully help the people. I think that the MTC is a great tool to help us to learn to communicate. It has helped me.

Interestingly, even as these participants were comparing the MTC to prison or boot camp, both seemingly unflattering comparisons, they communicated a stronger identification with the missionary role by promoting the experience as helpful, good, and as a growing experience. As demonstrated by the previous examples, participants viewed the MTC as a place where a large proportion of their identities that they had developed throughout childhood and adolescence were cut out of their lives. Elder Lewis explained some of this process. He said,

It's almost like you lose a part of yourself, I guess... you step up to the MTC, and they put your nametag on and they say, 'alright Elder Lewis, right this way,' and they like they run you through the MTC and then you sit down in classes and you like really you are no longer who you were. Like, they just kind of took your first name away and they were like, 'K, you won't need that. You can have that back in two years. Here's your title.' It's kind of weird, it's a weird experience.

This loss of “a part of yourself,” or the previous identities that served to define the individual’s self-concept, left participants with conflicted feelings regarding how they viewed themselves and how they related to others in their new environment. Thus, for participants, the MTC was viewed both positively and negatively as a place where they felt stifled and strictly controlled, but also helped in their development as a full-life volunteer missionary.

As missionaries leave the MTC and enter the mission field, their training changes from what Van Maanen and Schein (1979) call group, formal, sequential, fixed, disjunctive, and divestiture to individual, informal, random, variable, serial, and, to

some extent, investiture. Each new missionary, or “greenie” as they are often called, is paired with a more experienced missionary to complete his or her training. Entry into the mission field is marked by *expanded freedom* and *mental and physical strain*.

Expanded freedom. Compared to the MTC lifestyle, the mission field is more relaxed and missionaries are given more freedom to direct their own activity. Sister Walker, a new missionary from Washington, described the transition from the MTC to the mission field this way.

It's weird to go from the MTC where they teach you all day long with all these teachers, and everyone around you, and the janitors, and you get to the field and it's just you and your companion. They just trust you by yourselves. Really, there's no one coming to check my skirt length? You know what I mean? That was weird to just be one on one with a companion.

Several missionaries mentioned this transition as a dramatic change. In the MTC missionaries felt “patrolled” (Elder Cooper), but in the mission field, missionaries felt trusted to do the right thing without extensive oversight by the mission president or other authority figures. This expanded freedom made participants feel proud and that they had transitioned into a “real missionary” (Elder Thatcher). This feeling of being a “real missionary” communicates a strengthening of the role identity as a full-life missionary. Because full-life volunteers had experienced the transition in their self-concept from maintaining multiple and often competing identities to only enacting a few organizationally sanctioned identities, they strengthened their identification with the LDS Church and with their role as missionaries. Consistent with Tompkins and Cheney’s (1985) concept of unobtrusive control, as identified organizational members,

these full-life volunteers were more likely to make decisions that were in accordance with organizational goals and could, therefore, be trusted with expanded freedoms.

Emotional, and physical strain. Because new missionaries were paired with an experienced companion, much of the traditional difficulties associated with moving to a new city or country were mitigated. For example, new missionaries did not need to find a dentist, barber, or grocery store because the experienced companion already had these necessities established. New missionaries simply followed their senior companions' directions until they were more experienced and were comfortable making decisions for themselves. However, simply because these missionaries entered into an established lifestyle did not mean that their transition into the role of a full-life missionary was smooth. New missionaries often felt out of place and unsure of their role identity as a missionary. Elder Johnson explained his first weeks in the mission field this way,

They were some of the hardest ever. It was completely different lifestyle, completely different environment. I've never been to Oklahoma before. It was just like a new place, new people that I've never met and just having to get used to all that on top of now, you're going to have one of the busiest schedules that you'll ever have in your whole life. It's like being taken completely out of my environment and placed in something totally new and it's just like adapt and adapt quickly.

Adapting to being a “real missionary” as a full-life volunteer was difficult as many participants felt like the expectations they formed about what it meant to perform the missionary identity were different than what they encountered as they entered the

mission field. Elder Johnson explained this violation of his expectations regarding what being a full-life missionary entailed. He stated,

I guess in the MTC, at least, I felt like everyone tried to create this dream, not like their mission really was, where I feel all the teachers and the speakers, they talked about their mission and it was like, ‘Oh, it's the best experience you'll ever have.’ I definitely agree with that. It is. I love being out here, but at the same time, it feels like they gloss over all the hardships and stuff that you go through. Being out on a mission, one of the first things I, I think it was like my third day out, I said to my trainer, ‘It's really hard.’ He's like, ‘Yeah, of course, it is. It's a mission.’ It was just something that I guess in a way, no one necessarily prepared me for. Everyone says that going on a mission, your mission's going to be hard, but they never really say how it's going to be hard. I guess just figuring how, I had to learn from myself exactly how it's hard. It's interesting.

The reality of what adopting the role identity of a full-life missionary entailed made entry into the mission field overwhelming for most participants. The physical changes of entering a new and foreign environment were often exacerbated by social stresses as new missionaries were in a foreign environment where they did not know anybody and partnered with a companion with whom they often struggled.

All of the prospective missionaries talked about expecting their companions to be their “really good friends, even borderline sisters” (Jane) or “guys I just love being around and probably be buddies with for the rest of my life” (Robert). In reality, most

participants had difficulties adapting to living with companions and especially with their trainers. Elder Wilson, an experienced missionary from Utah, explained,

I definitely wasn't prepared for companions as much as I thought, particularly for their imperfections and the patience that it takes. I really wasn't prepared for; I think patience is the hardest part. Just realizing that everyone's in their own sphere of growth. They've all had different experiences and we need to treat them like individuals and lift them where they stand, and also help lift ourselves where we stand. But I wasn't very patient, that's for sure.

Adapting to the new missionary identity and learning to live and work with a companion was tiring mentally and emotionally, but the missionary lifestyle was also taxing physically. Full-life missionaries were expected to work nearly 70 hours per week proselyting and giving service. For many, the physical toll of missionary work was particularly difficult. Elder Anderson, a new missionary from Utah, stated,

I'd say I wasn't prepared for just the amount of time that you're being busy because someone said that there's, like, being tired, and then there's being missionary tired. Those are like way different. Feeling missionary tired all of the time was something I did not imagine or expected.

The mental, emotional, and physical strain associated with adopting the missionary identity was difficult for all of the participants and caused them to feel overwhelmed. Although learning the missionary lifestyle was essential to a full-life volunteer's success, this process only served as a supplemental aspect of the missionary identity. The main purpose for their becoming full-life volunteers was to “to invite others to come unto Christ by helping them to 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” (Sister Murphy).

Role entry. Learning how to be a full-life volunteer missionary for the LDS Church requires extensive training and practice, which begins, again, in the MTC. Separate from the day-to-day logistics of the missionary lifestyle, new missionaries needed to adapt so as to be effective in their roles as missionaries. Role entry in the MTC consisted of two aspects – *developing a testimony* and *learning how to teach the organizational message*.

Developing a testimony. The first aspect of role entry in the MTC, developing a testimony, was essential for missionaries because it formed the foundation for their willingness and ability to teach others and recruit them to join the LDS Church. Through participant observation, I observed that, initially, missionaries were reluctant to enact their missionary identity by engaging in Gospel-related conversations or were unwilling to direct the conversation toward religious topics. Elder Thatcher, a new missionary from Utah, described one of the difficulties he often experienced with his companion because of this. He explained,

I think that's the biggest problem with me and my companion is I don't think that we work well in conversations just because we, like the way that we are with people is different. It's harder for me to have the same conversations, like to keep the same conversation that he is having because I don't like the things he says... they're just having normal conversation and then he'll bring something up that's just like, 'what?' Like the other day, some girl who was like talking, one of the members in our ward. We were talking there last night and she's like

talking about how she's having, like has a hard time learning things if she just reads them. She doesn't like stick in her head, she just do it. Then he came in with like, talk about the atonement and I just wasn't like ready for it. Like so yes with the enabling like power of the atonement is. I was just like, see I wouldn't have like gone into that from there. There's just like little things like that. He'll bring up like spiritual things where I wouldn't at that point in time. Like in those conversations, just because like I'm so like, 'what, where that come from?' It's hard for me to go off a bit. I don't talk as much as I should or like to.

Enacting the missionary role required the full-life volunteers to take on a new identity that they were not accustomed to and often found uncomfortable. This reluctance to embrace the missionary identity was communicated in a variety of ways beyond conversationally. For example, these newcomers were often self-conscious about their appearance and how conspicuously they demonstrated their missionary identity through wearing missionary clothing, backpacks, and name tags and riding bikes.

The development of a testimony of the importance and truthfulness of their message aided these full-life volunteers in overcoming their aversion to identifying fully. Sister Reed, an experienced missionary from Washington, explained one important aspect of role development that many participants experienced in the MTC. She stated,

In the MTC, that's when I really began to understand how the atonement applied to me and how I could rely on the Savior Jesus Christ not just for sin but for becoming stronger and better than I was and for being able to overcome challenges.

Although many of the participants talked about developing a personal testimony during the engagement phase that served as motivation to serve a mission, in the entry phase, testimony development focuses on learning specific doctrines and gospel topics that can be useful in teaching others about the Church and its teachings. That is, in order to be a successful recruiter, missionaries must know the material they are teaching and develop a firm belief in the truthfulness of the message that they are disseminating. Therefore, studying the doctrine of the Church and scriptures became an important part of their training. Elder Anderson, a new missionary, stated, “I guess, my focus is one hundred percent different. I didn't wake up in the morning thinking, "Ah, let's study scriptures for two hours straight," you know? Now, I actually look forward to that time.” For those training in the MTC, personal study comprised an important aspect of role identification; however, the bulk of time spent in the MTC was in the classroom where missionaries learned the organizational message.

Learning how to share the organizational message. Each day in the MTC is divided into three blocks. One teacher, a former full-time volunteer missionary, leads lessons during each block. Lessons cover an extensive range of topics regarding the doctrines and teachings of the LDS Church. In addition to classroom lessons, MTC missionaries are placed in roleplaying situations where they practice delivering lessons to members of the LDS Church who pretend to be interested in investigating Church teachings. These roleplaying situations give new missionaries a safe environment where they could work on their teaching skills.

Beyond the technical skills of teaching, missionaries in the MTC are instructed to “teach with the spirit” (*Missionary preparation teacher manual*, 2014, n.p.).

Teaching with the spirit means that missionaries are not the source of conversion for others, but merely an instrument through which the Holy Ghost can touch others' hearts. This is explained in the LDS Church's missionary preparation manual.

By themselves, missionaries cannot bring the blessings of testimony and conversion to another person, no matter how expert or experienced they are. Only the Holy Ghost can bring true conversion. When investigators feel the Spirit working within them, or when they see evidence of the Lord's love and mercy in their lives, they are edified and strengthened spiritually, their faith in Jesus Christ increases, and they are more likely to be converted (*Missionary preparation teacher manual*, 2014, n.p.).

In order to be a good teacher, missionaries must be worthy of having the Holy Ghost present in their lessons, meaning that they are obedient to the mission rules and living in accordance with the doctrines of the Church. From this excerpt above, we can see that missionaries are encouraged to develop their spiritual strength and understanding in addition to the practical skills of teaching effectiveness.

In the MTC, full-life volunteer missionaries simply learned what the missionary identity was and developed their commitment to it. Once the MTC experience was completed, full-life volunteer missionaries were expected to enact the role identity as missionaries in the mission field where they could fulfill their goal of sharing the organizational message with others. Instead of practicing, missionaries were suddenly confronted with "teaching real people" (Sister Myers). In the mission field, role entry was comprised of *being the junior companion*, and *acting as an organizational representative*.

Being the junior companion. The full-life volunteer missionary role is one of extraversion and constantly engaging with people so as to share the Gospel. However, for greenies, the first few weeks or months of the mission is often spent as a quiet observer. Through participant observation, I observed the role differences between senior and junior companions. Elder Thatcher's experience as a new missionary was typical. He, explained,

I don't really talk that much at lessons and stuff. He usually does the talking, because he likes to talk, and I'm fine with that. I just learn from what he says, and how he teaches the lessons and stuff, and then if I have something to say or if I feel like I should say something, then I do. Just kind of that learning from him.

Many missionaries felt inadequate in teaching experiences because they felt that they did not have the expertise or understanding to answer potential questions investigators might have. Despite feeling inadequate, for many new missionaries, staying quiet and letting the trainer dominate teaching opportunities was not acceptable and caused conflict within the companionship. Elder King describes his first companionship where he was considered the "junior companion." He stated,

We just bumped heads. He had been on the mission for a long time. He felt like he knew the exact right way to do it and that if I did anything that was not consistent with the way he wanted it to be done, it was wrong. I was very against that because I felt like I needed to be myself, and I needed have my own style, and just because my style is different than your style, it doesn't make it wrong. We're not teaching any different things; we're just talking differently.

He was a very robotic person and that really bothered me, but because I wasn't robotic it bothered him.

This discomfort with the junior companion role that they were forced to play for the first few weeks or months of their missions was a common theme. For these missionaries, this temporary identity of the “greenie” was frustrating as they felt disrespected and unheard. Through my observations, those participants who were considered “greenies” often resisted this identity by trying to prove themselves and demonstrate that they were competent and ready to be considered a full member of the organization through learning the lessons in *Preach My Gospel* so that they could participate more in discussions, taking on more responsibility in running the area, and being obedient to the mission rules. *Preach My Gospel* is the missionary handbook that is given to missionaries and is a resource intended to teach missionaries how to study, teach, and act as missionaries. What further confused newcomers’ understanding of their role was contrast between how they were often treated as “greenies” and their belief that they were called to act as representatives of the LDS Church organization.

Acting as a representative of the organization. The missionary handbook describes the expectations of missionaries’ conduct. It reads,

Strive to represent the Lord according to the highest standards of obedience and conduct. Keep your words, thoughts, and actions in harmony with the message of His gospel. Righteous conduct will influence your effectiveness as a missionary and your personal salvation. Your conduct also affects the trust and confidence nonmembers, members, and other missionaries have in you. Conduct yourself at all times in such a way that everyone who sees you will

recognize you as a representative of Jesus Christ (*Missionary handbook*, 2010, n.p.).

As we see in this excerpt, full-life missionaries are described as representatives of the Church organization and, by extension, of Jesus Christ. As such, the consequences for “righteous conduct” includes “personal salvation” and implied is the idea that disobedience to the “message of His gospel” jeopardizes the missionary’s “personal salvation.” These high-stakes consequences are hugely important to missionaries as they begin learning how to properly enact the missionary identity. Elder Wilson demonstrated the internalization of this identity through this statement. “As a missionary, I’m a representative of Jesus Christ, and who I want to be, who I am to just anybody, is someone who wants to change the world, but I want to do it God’s way.” This acceptance of the role of being a representative of the LDS Church and of Jesus Christ affected how missionaries acted and communicated. Often, participants talked about focusing on making their communication more in accordance with this role identity. Elder Wilson described the difference in the way missionaries speak when he said,

There’s not as much slang and sarcasm and stuff like that... I’m still working on cutting out all the slang and everything and all the sarcasm. Now, the way that I speak is a lot more proper. I’m just trying to be a proper representative of Jesus Christ; however, you can’t just be a robot either. You have to be personable, you have to be yourself. You just have to have self-control.

Many missionaries stressed this idea of speaking and acting formally as they engaged with others and described how the role of being a representative of Jesus Christ exerted

pressure on them to change the way that they acted and communicated. Diane, a returned missionary who served in California, explained this pressure when she said,

In my mission we had that huge, ‘Don't do anything that you wouldn't do with Jesus Christ right beside you.’ You just want to make sure that any, the first impression that you get as a missionary, that person can only see maybe you, that one missionary in their whole life. Are they going to think that Mormons like cuss, or are they doing something stupid.... You have to make sure you represent yourself well. It was a big thing in my mission like, ‘don't do anything dumb.’ It also gave me a lot of pressure, but righteous pressure.

This pressure to embrace the role identity expectations of the mission were felt strongly by missionaries as they learned and performed their role.

The organizational entry phase in the LDS missionary program, as with other organizations, is a time of uncertainty for newcomers. However, the LDS mission program is more unique compared to other types of organizations in that the training program both in the MTC and in the mission field is designed to filter out previously held identities that conflict with the role and organizational identities and foster an extremely high degree of organizational and role identification. As newcomers develop this identification, they are afforded more freedom to act according to their own volition because, as identified members, they are more capable and likely to act in organizationally beneficial ways.

Continuing to explore. Even after entering the mission field, some full-life missionaries, remained, to some extent, in the exploration phase by adhering to their past identities and/or concentrating on identities that were forbidden by the mission

rules such as, seeking out unapproved media or flirting with people of the other sex. By clinging to these other identities, participants kept their role and organizational identities more peripheral to their self-concept. I observed that instead of focusing on the missionary identity and attempting to fully assimilate into the missionary organization, several missionaries held themselves back from fully identifying out of fear that they would change too much. Elder Hall, a new missionary from Utah, said, “I was afraid of am I gonna come back and not like any of the same stuff.” Likewise, Elder Johnson, a new missionary from Northern California, when talking about his interests and plans for the future, stated, “I’d like that to stay the same when I come back.” This hesitation to change too much demonstrates that the previous identities remain strong and more central to the individual even after the volunteer has entered the mission.

Some participants rationalized that they were actually better in their roles as missionaries because of their avoidance of fully adopting the missionary identity. Elder Hall, from Utah, explained,

One thing I found is that you have to find a balance because if you're completely a consecrated missionary and that's not what the people need because they need the person that you are. If all you were is just being really reverent and trying to be like Jesus every second, no one's going to like that. At the same time you can't be the same person that you were at home because that would not be being a missionary so you have to find somewhere in the middle where you can be that missionary but still be yourself. So I found out I would just be the exact person that I was but not doing any of the same things. I wouldn't like think about

home and the things that I like but I'd still act like the same person that I was at home.

For most missionaries, trying to be like Jesus is the ultimate goal; however, for this missionary, being a “consecrated missionary” or “trying to be like Jesus every second” was considered a negative characteristic that diminished a missionary’s effectiveness. Likewise, Elder Cooper, a new missionary from Utah, explained that being a “Preach My Gospel” missionary stripped the missionary of individuality. This missionary described his perspective of a “Preach My Gospel Missionary” when he stated,

They all act similarly. The best example I have is my aunt and my uncle served missions, and my aunt became a “Preach My Gospel” missionary over her mission, and when she came back, she was completely changed from when she'd left, but she had become zealot in her religion. And when I came out here to the mission field, some of the missionaries are like my uncle, where they didn't change and they were still cool, but they just preached the gospel. I've also met missionaries, who I'm like, ‘you're exactly like my aunt. The way you're talking, the things you're talking about, the way you act, that's my aunt.’

In this example we see that changing so as to exhibit a complete devotion to the missionary identity was considered to be negative and associated with becoming a “zealot” whereas not changing meant that a missionary was “still cool.”

Metamorphosis. In the metamorphosis phase, missionaries fully adopted the full-life missionary role and acted, for the most part, in accordance with missionary expectations. For these missionaries, the distinction between the lifestyle and role becomes less pronounced, meaning that all aspects of the missionary’s life and identity

become “consecrated” (Conner). Unlike most volunteers who assume the voluntary role for selected times during the week, for these full-life volunteers, there is no time off from their missionary identity. Many of the issues that missionaries in the entry phase complained about, such as the hard work and the long hours, were embraced by those in the metamorphosis phase. Sister Green, a missionary near the end of her mission, explained, “I’ve gotten to the point in my mission where I’m kind of used to it. I’m used to being a missionary, I’m used to living a schedule and doing what we do.” In the metamorphosis phase, full-life missionaries’ identities have merged with role expectations and missionaries have mastered the technical skills necessary to be successful as a missionary. This combination of proficiency and motivation allows these full-life volunteers to effectively accomplish their goals.

Mastering missionary skills. Missionaries in the metamorphosis phase began identifying positive changes in themselves and viewed their identity as a missionary as their most dominant identity. When asked about the quickly approaching end of his mission and the prospect of returning home, Elder Young became emotional and reflected on the importance of his missionary identity. He stated,

I’m going to miss teaching about the gospel, and learning about it all the time. I think that’s something that’s going to be really hard for me to leave behind. Being able to say that I’m a missionary. I learned so much as a missionary. I don’t really want to go back home. I don’t want, part of me, I’m afraid I’m going to become the same person that I was before. I don’t want to be that person. I want to be who I am now forever, and continue to get better at it. That’s what I’m afraid of.

Instead of trying to hold on to past identities as those in the early period of their missions often did, Elder Young had completely forsaken those identities and was afraid of returning to them because he felt that he would lose the growth and development he had worked so hard to cultivate in himself. As full-life missionaries in the metamorphosis phase developed, they began to view themselves as new people who are strong, competent, and confident in performing their role. Sister Reed, an experienced missionary described the perspective that she gained as she developed as a missionary. She explained,

I feel like I've gained so much personal strength on my mission too. I was pretty weak when I first came out. I didn't have to get medication or anything like that, but I was definitely really shell-shocked... now I am able to recognize better my limits, I guess. Also, that things aren't as bad as they seemed, they're really not.

When you're going through a rough time, it's going to end.

As missionaries matured into their role and shed their pre-mission identities, they became more capable of committing to their work and building their identity as missionaries.

Building motivation. Because the role and organizational identities did not have to compete for time or attention with conflicting identities in the missionaries' self-concept, they were able to grow without interference. In surmising what she would miss the most from her mission, Sister Reed described the total focus on the development of her role identity in the metamorphosis phase. She said,

I think being able to go out every single day and honestly trying to help people.

I can still do that, but the purpose and the focus that you have on the gospel and

on Jesus Christ, that's probably what I'll miss the most because I feel like you can still focus on it when you go home but it's not the same. It's every thought, everything that I do is for the gospel and to help people understand the gospel and to help people better their lives.

Although those in the metamorphosis phase were completely committed to their full-life volunteer role identity, they also recognized that this reprieve from competing identities was temporary. Eventually, missionaries have to reenter “normal life” and face the challenges of balancing multiple identities again. Sister Reed continues,

I want to be able to bring that with me but I don't think it can be my focus every second because I have to worry about paying for school and going to school and studying and after that getting a job. I would have to do a lot more focus on myself. I don't have to focus on myself hardly at all out here, it's all about other people. That's going to be hard.

Often, the transition from the entry phase to the metamorphosis phase was the result of a missionary being asked to assume a leadership role as a full-life volunteer such as becoming a senior companion, training, serving as a district or zone leader, or sister training leader. When these missionaries became leaders, they further internalized the missionary role and identity because they felt greater responsibility for the consequences of their work. Elder Wright described his feelings when he was asked to train a newcomer. He said,

You're responsible for this person that's coming out, what they need to know, what they need to learn. They only have two weeks in the MTC to know the information and come out here. You're supposed to teach them the rest, and so

it all relies upon you, and what you set. You set them up for their future, basically, and so it's a lot of pressure, a lot of stress. That's been challenging.

It's probably the hardest companionship I've had so far.

This stress associated with assuming a leadership role caused most missionaries to identify more strongly with their full-life role, become more obedient to the mission rules, and focus more on their role and responsibilities as missionaries.

As missionaries enter the metamorphosis phase, their personal goals coincide more with organizational goals and these missionaries focus on getting work done. Haski-Leventhal and Bargal (2008) call, this phase of understanding how to perform the work and the commitment to accomplish it, the *emotional involvement phase* and explain that it is with the volunteers in this phase that volunteer organizations accomplish their goals. Elder Young, an experienced missionary who was acting as a zone leader at the time of this study, demonstrated this point as he described his companionship. He stated,

It's alright. It's not anything close to my best relationship ever. We've been together for two weeks now... He's not my companion that I clicked the most with, but we don't really have conflict. We get along pretty well, and for the most part, we work really hard together, which is all that I want to do now. I just want to work hard, and baptize people before I go home. He's working really hard at doing that. That makes me really happy.

Elder Young explains that personally, he and his companion hadn't "clicked," but despite some personality differences, he clarifies that what he really cares about is working hard and baptizing people before he goes home. In this case, regardless of his

personal feelings, his companion worked hard with him and, therefore, Elder Young was “really happy.” Other missionaries in the metamorphosis phase were not as lucky as Elder Young with having companions that shared a desire to work hard.

Interestingly, the friction experienced by newcomers with their trainers was not only one-sided. Those who had trained newcomers often expressed frustration with newcomers’ neediness, lack of motivation, and disobedience to mission rules. For example, Sister Reed, who was acting in a leadership role within her zone, expressed her frustration with her trainee in this way.

She wasn't a particularly obedient missionary. She didn't like to follow any of the rules. I was actually her trainer and that was really hard for me because I'm a very obedient missionary. I like to follow all the rules that I can. It was really, it wasn't that she wasn't trying though, like now that I have perspective, I've seen that she was trying really hard, it's just that the rules were a lot harder for her to adapt to than they were for me and I just lack that patience. We're friends now. We get along great.

In this example, we see that in a personal sense, Sister Reed was compatible with this companion, but because of her companion’s disobedience to mission rules, she was unhappy. Interestingly, although some missionaries in the exploration phase described “Preach My Gospel” missionaries pejoratively, by claiming that they were “robots” (Sister Thompson), “too strict,” (Elder Miller), or “all the same” (Elder Cooper), for missionaries in the metamorphosis phase, embracing a “Preach My Gospel” missionary identity was something to which a missionary should aspire. Elder Wilson explained,

A “Preach My Gospel” missionary just means that you are a dedicated servant and representative of Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. That you're willing to have an eye single to His glory, to God's glory, and to really focus on those around you. Forget yourself. Stop doing things all your way. Learn new skills, become more like the Savior. Be a true disciple where you're not just speaking. You're not just saying, but you're doing. You're becoming what you're preaching and you're helping others do the same.

In this phase, missionaries focus on becoming a “Preach My Gospel” missionary by truly eliminating competing identities and focusing fully on developing their skills and identity as a missionary.

The metamorphosis phase of the assimilation process is marked by an increase in the skills and abilities needed to perform the role of a missionary and the dedication and commitment to engage fully in the work. These missionaries were committed to being obedient to the rules and expectations of the organization and were often intolerant of those who were not dedicated or obedient.

Exit. As Jablin (2001) explained, organizational exit is not simply an event, but a process of disengagement that can last for an extended period of time. The event of leaving the organization occurs in the middle of this process and is preceded by cues that signal the organizational member’s intention to disengage and followed by consequences from exiting. For most volunteers, the timeframe of service is indefinite. Some volunteers serve for only a few weeks or months while others stay for years or even decades. Because the timeframe for full-life volunteers and particularly for LDS

missionaries is definite and volunteers are not allowed to prolong their term of service; volunteers are not presented with a question of whether or not they wish to exit.

Preparatory exit. The knowledge of how long the service will last causes mixed feelings for missionaries as the end of their mission approaches. As missionaries approach the end of their full-life volunteer assignment, they typically experienced a variety of emotions about their identities as they continued their service while contemplating their post-mission lives. Greg, a recently returned missionary explained his last few months. He stated,

Mixed feelings. I felt ready to be done. I remember as I concluded my mission everybody asked you how you feel. For probably the last three months of my mission people would ask me... Everybody would just say, 'Oh wow, you're almost done. How do you feel?' I didn't know how to answer that question because I had never finished a mission before. I didn't know how I was supposed to feel... In a lot of ways, when you're in a mission, because it's the same thing every single day, you feel like that's all you've ever done and that's all you ever will do. At a certain point, when it starts to conclude, you're like, 'No, it's just going to keep going. It's never going to end...'

This example demonstrates the fundamental questions addressed by SIT. "Who am I?" and "How should I act?" or, as explained earlier, "How should I act so as to be consistent with my present identity?" For the majority of these missionaries' service, their role and organizational identities were all-encompassing and there were clear rules and expectations regarding how they should act so as to be in accordance with this identity. As missionaries near the end of their missions, they experience something of

an identity crisis. They still identify as full-life missionaries, but also begin peeking into the future to anticipate future identities as college students, employees, romantic partners, etc. As they anticipate these future identities, they necessarily start making plans such as applying for college, choosing housing, finding roommates, setting up employment, and planning vacations. However, these behaviors conflict with the missionary's present identity as a "consecrated" missionary and can lead missionaries to be viewed as "trunky." In LDS missions, the term "trunky" has become the common vernacular to describe missionaries who are emotionally disengaged and are simply waiting out their time before the end of their missions. To be described as "trunky" carries a pejorative connotation that most missionaries would choose to avoid.

For volunteers, Haski-Leventhal and Bargal (2008) explained that as volunteers master their role, they often begin to get bored, fatigued, and burned out. If these volunteers do not find renewal, they will often experience emotional disengagement from the goals of the organization. Missionaries nearing the end of their missions often take one of two paths emotionally. Speaking of his companion who was nearing the end of his mission, Elder Anderson explained these paths. He said,

My companion definitely has a lot of things that takes us away from the work. He gets sick a lot, so there will be days that we just don't go out, because he had his surgery. I always hope that he's being truthful, because, I mean, a missionary that's been out twenty one months, either they're super motivated, or they can be pretty trunky about going home.

In questioning the motives of his companion, Elder Anderson demonstrates the importance placed on maintaining the "consecrated" missionary identity to the end of

the mission. The implication here is that being “super motivated” is the correct way to end one’s mission, whereas being “trunky” is inconsistent with the missionary identity.

Because missionaries know exactly when they will be exiting the organization, they have time to prepare themselves and others for their exit. Many participants talked about developing a plan for how they would reenter their lives at home. These plans often included goals regarding identities that they had suspended during their full-life volunteer experiences, such as education, dating and marriage, and continued service in the Church. Some friends and family members would offer advice and begin setting expectations for when the missionary would return. Paul, a returned missionary who served in Cambodia, received an email from his mother before he returned home explaining what he should expect when he got home. He remembered,

I knew it'd be hard. I wanted to try to get myself mentally ready. I was definitely trying to. My parents would email me, too. My mom was like, ‘Hey, we realize it's going to be an adjustment for you, so here's what's going to happen. Here's what we're doing right now, just want to let you know, because we're going to keep doing it even when you're home.’ They're like, ‘We're not quite as righteous as you. Sometimes we want to just relax and watch a movie instead of go out and give service to other people.’ She was like, ‘But it's fine, it's fine,’ and she was trying to ease me into it, and so that was fine. I tried to anticipate a little bit and loosen up my strict guidelines that I set on myself for my mission as far as being super hard working and obedient, and still, of course, keep those same principles, but not to the same extent as I was as a missionary.

Even for the most dedicated missionaries, the prospect of returning home brought expectations of future identities and activities. As missionaries prepared to return home, they began to “loosen up” on their full-life volunteer identity and focus on reentry into their normal lives and other identities.

Reentry into home environment. Returning home is an exciting time for missionaries and for their families and friends at home. Returning missionaries are typically treated to parties and celebrations and asked to give a report of their mission to their ward during Church services. This initial period of time after the missionary returns home is something of a honeymoon time. After the celebrations are over and missionaries begin to create their new lives, many missionaries experience feelings of loss of identity or disorientation of identities. Chad, a recently returned missionary who had served in Cambodia, explained,

Coming home from my mission was awesome, for like a day. The plane ride over was really exciting, and you're mind-blown, you're super excited that whole time, that whole plane ride. You're in the airport, you're stoked. You get home and you see your family, and that's really cool. Then you get home, and you're like, 'Wow, I missed my house, it smells so good, feels so nice.' Then you eat American food for the first time in two years, and that was awesome. You go to bed and you wake up, and it's like, 'Dang, I wish I was back on my mission.' That's pretty much how I felt that whole first week or two... I still do, actually, a lot of times. When I'm having those days that I'm just like, 'School and work is cool, but serving others is way cooler. I wish I was back in Cambodia.'

Ex-full-life volunteer missionaries particularly talked about missing having a purpose every day for which to work and a feeling of comradery with the other missionaries in their mission and with missionaries in general. While on a mission, these participants understood their role and the expectations of them, but once they were home, they were back to experiencing high levels of uncertainty and anxiety. In describing his transition back into “normal” life, Stewart, who served in Utah, explained,

Man, coming home may have been harder than leaving, actually. Going from knowing exactly what you're going to do the next day, and you know your total purpose and what you're doing for two years, to coming home to trying to figure out what you're going to do for work, and what you're going to do for school, your goals that you're going to have for the next year and the next five years, things like that. It wasn't easy.

These ex-full-life volunteers again experienced an identity crisis. Interestingly, this identity crisis was not the result of being placed in a foreign environment, but returning to a familiar environment after the participant had embraced a new and different identity. For the most part, participants described their home environment as unchanged from when they left it, but they often described feeling like foreigners in their own home because of the dramatic changes they had experienced to their self-concept. Jennifer explained her experience when she returned home after her mission in Arizona this way.

It was surreal. A lot of returned missionaries that I had also talked to while I was on a mission said that it was like a dream, like waking up from a dream but for me, it was like being in a dream. You see, when you're in a dream, your

brain provides certain information just out of nowhere. ‘Oh this person, she's your friend,’ or whatever, and you go home and it's like you vaguely remember some things. You see things that are so familiar and yet alien in a way. It was a little disconcerting in a way.

Jennifer and many other returned missionaries experienced this feeling of disorientation as they attempted to reenter their previous lives and construct a new self-concept as a returned missionary.

Identity reintroduction. As returned missionaries readjusted to life outside of the mission, they took on a new identity of a returned missionary. Brody discussed his new identity as a returned missionary by saying,

The majority of my friends are returned missionaries and I feel like I'm in this group of, ‘Oh, we just served a mission. We are back and we're veterans and we know how things run in the church and I know what I need to do...’ I kind of feel like I'm in this group of elite guys because a majority of return missionaries come home and they're just studs. I really enjoy hanging out with them because they buoy me up pretty well and they make sure I'm doing the right thing, and they're very great at being accountable. I'd say that's probably the biggest group or the best group I could say I'm a part of is that.

Although returned missionaries do not perform the missionary identity as they did on their missions, most of these participants adopted the returned missionary identity as a central identity in their self-concept. The returned missionary identity was one of confidence and strength in their identity as a member of the LDS Church and a

competent individual. Paul, who served in Cambodia, explained this identity in this way.

I think, my perspective that I gained from the mission was a pretty big deal. Again, the perspective of the world, like I mentioned earlier, but also the perspective that I, as an individual, have a lot of influence over who I am and what I can accomplish, and how I can affect other people. Before, I used that, but I didn't realize my own potential, and I think now I have a better understanding of who I am and my potential in the world. That was also really good. That was probably the most significant one.

Additionally, returned missionaries understand how the organization should operate. Upon returning from missions, these full-life volunteers joined a ward that is comprised of young single adults between the ages of 18 and 30. In this environment, returned missionaries predominantly occupy leadership positions and help to fulfill the needs of the organization.

Participants also explained that their identity as a returned missionary also included an inviting and outgoing personality. Stewart, who served in Orem, Utah, related a humorous interaction he had after returning from his mission. He said,

I definitely know how to talk to people a whole lot better. I know how to start conversations. Basically, just communication skills, both in times where you're trying to get your point across without being offensive or pushy, or just starting a nice conversation with somebody. One day, I went with my mom and my sister to Sam's Club, and the greeter at the door, I just stopped and started talking to the greeter. My mom thought it was hilarious, but I was just talking to

her, this older lady. We laughed. It was just about a three or four-minute conversation, but it was nice. I wouldn't have done that before.

For all of the participants in this study, the returned missionary identity was pervasive in their lives and influenced many of their decisions such as who they dated, what careers they pursued, and where they went to college. Unlike in the exploration phase where new identities often supplanted participants' organizational and role identities in participants' self-concept centrality, as participants began to reincorporate pre-mission identities or introduce new identities, they tended to add only those that were compatible with their organizational or role identities. In this way, these additional identities served to protect returned missionaries' identities rather than displace them. Diane explained how she decided what identities to allow back into her life. She stated,

When you get home, you're surrounded by contingencies all the time that you're not surrounded by in the mission... There came a point where I'm like, 'Do I want to keep the changes I made on my mission spiritually or do I want to go back to where I used to be?' I had to cut out a lot of stuff that I used to do to be able to maintain the person that I want to be.

Here we see that returned missionaries were conscious of their identity and how that identity would be influenced by the choices they made. Surrounding themselves with others who shared this identity, as Brody demonstrated, and strategically introducing new identities such as romantic relationships, friendships, jobs, and other volunteer organizational memberships, placed these participants on what they considered to be a long-term trajectory of involvement in their Church and the desire to pass their identity

as returned missionaries to their future children. As these identities are communicated to the next generation, this process is expected to repeat.

Summary. As demonstrated above, identity plays an important role in how full-life volunteers construct and adapt their self-concepts throughout the assimilation process. Instead of experiencing a smooth transition into the missionary identity, participants experienced a period of identity exploration before committing to their role as a missionary. As these full-life missionaries transitioned into the organization, they experienced identity confusion as they attempted to learn what it meant to be a “real missionary” and perform that identity. By continuously practicing the enactment of the missionary identity, participants became comfortable in their role and began to identify strongly with the organization. However, upon completing their service, these full-life volunteers again experienced an identity crisis as they attempted to reenter their lives and determine what new identities to adopt as they moved forward in their lives.

RQ2: Sensemaking of social identities

As described in RQ1, the extensive identity work involved in serving as a full-life volunteer was often uncomfortable, anxiety arousing, and even painful for participants. Additionally, the physical demands of full-life volunteer work compounded their discomfort. Being asked to leave family, friends, TV, movies, romantic relationships, college, jobs, and many other important identities for 18-24 months and pay their own living expenses for the opportunity to work nearly 70 hours per week while trying to share the organization’s message with people who, in many cases, did not want to hear it, was taxing to say the least. Missionaries and returned missionaries often related stories and experiences about their missions which described

extreme, sometimes even traumatic, episodes that missionaries had to endure such as being shot at (Stewart), dealing with insect infestations (Elder Anderson), enduring extreme heat (Paul) or sub-zero temperatures (Caleb), being spat on (Stewart), and other unpleasant experiences. Many of them described periods of depression, frustration, and a desire to quit and go home. Despite the difficulties associated with serving as a full-life volunteer, all of the returned missionaries expressed a deep love for their experience and used phrases that are so common in the LDS culture that they have become cliché like, “it's the best two years of your life” (Elder Young, Sister Murphy, Sister Walker).

Most organizations, if they promised the working conditions described above, would have extreme difficulty recruiting and keeping organizational members; however, the LDS Church has been successful at maintaining this large missionary force for decades. So why do these full-life volunteer missionaries walk away from their missions with such positive attitudes? It appears that participants were able to manage the incongruity between the difficult volunteering conditions and their positive retrospective perceptions through a process of sensemaking. Weick (1995) explains that sensemaking is a coping mechanism that allows individuals to make sense of interruptions in the expected course of life. Important to the concept of sensemaking is the identity construction of the sensemaker. When members construct an organizational identity, that is, they are highly identified with the organization, their “self-concepts and personal identities are formed and modified in part by how they believe others view the organization for which they work” (Dutton & Dukerich, 1991, p. 548). Thus, we see that as organizational members become more identified with an organization, they also become more motivated to make sense of their organizational experiences and

communicate that sensemaking to others in a way that frames the experience and organization positively.

Importantly, through the process of sensemaking, people interpret their circumstances and assign meaning to their experiences in a way that helps them resolve uncertainty. In this case, despite their awareness that their missionary conditions were less than ideal, full-life volunteer missionaries maintained positive attitudes about their missions because of the way that they made sense of their experiences and the changes they observed in themselves as a result of serving as full-life volunteers. As participants passed through their missionary experience, they made sense of these experiences and changes in three interrelated ways – *transcendence*, *a rite of passage*, and *personal development*.

Transcendence. Transcendence as a sensemaking strategy describes how full-life volunteers make sense of their volunteer experience as having outcomes that go beyond the tangible or visible environment and affect the spiritual or eternal realm.

Eternal consequences. According to the LDS Church’s statistical report, (2014a) approximately 3.4 people are converted to the LDS Church per missionary per year. When compared to the number of hours missionaries are expected to labor, missionaries invest approximately 1,000 working hours per conversion. Despite the expressed purpose for missionary work being to bring people into the Church, this relatively low return on time investment did not trouble missionaries as they made sense of their labor not as ordinary recruitment, but instead, as seeking to save souls. As such, nearly any amount of time is worth investing so as to teach an individual how to gain

salvation. This concept is demonstrated in The Doctrine and Covenants, an LDS book of scripture. It reads,

Remember the worth of souls is great in the sight of God... And if it so be that you should labor all your days in crying repentance unto this people, and bring, save it be one soul unto me, how great shall be your joy with him in the kingdom of my Father! And now, if your joy will be great with one soul that you have brought unto me into the kingdom of my Father, how great will be your joy if you should bring many souls unto me (*The doctrine and covenants*, 1952, p. 29)!

From this example we see that the importance of the outcome of full-life volunteers' labor transcends the amount and extent of the labor performed by full-life volunteers. Thus, full-life missionaries constructed their environment in which the goal of their labor was of infinite value and, therefore, infinite investment.

Sister Morris, an experienced missionary from Utah, described how she made sense of the transcendent nature of her labor as she explained her feelings as she witnessed others accept the teachings of the LDS Church. She stated,

Getting to see people firsthand as they go through that changing experience, where they start to get that light in their eyes. I had seen that a little bit before with my boyfriend and a few other friends who had joined the Church when I was in high school and college, but as a missionary, you get to experience that change that happens in them in a completely different way. You get to share in that spirit with them, you don't just get to watch them become happier, but you

get to actually experience what they are feeling and be a part of it. It is so spiritually enriching. I can't imagine life without having those experiences. This belief that what they were doing as missionaries was affecting others' eternal salvation bolstered missionaries' identification with their role and the organization for which they labored and helped them focus on performing their role more fully. In their role as missionaries, participants often felt like they were the answers to others' prayers. Jennifer, a returned missionary, explained, "I miss the feeling of it, the Spirit. Being able to be an answer to people's prayers. Being able to relish and enjoy helping someone find a light in their darkened world." Because missionaries made sense of their missions as not merely fulfilling an expectation or recruiting new members so as to benefit the organization, but as a means of bringing light and faith to people who were in need of it, they were able to ascribe more meaning to their labor and overlook the physical and emotional difficulties associated with missionary work such as long hours and diminished personal freedoms.

Servants of God. In addition to making sense of their effort as a method of bringing eternal benefits to those whom they served, full-life missionaries also used transcendence as a way to elevate for whom they were laboring. Ostensibly, missionaries served those whom they taught and the organization of which they were a part; however, through transcendence, participants constructed an identity in which they described themselves as laborers for God. In describing one of his companionships, Elder Wilson explained,

We just had a great time together. We had an eye single to the glory of God.

We wanted to do His will and His will only, and we just put ourselves aside and

just focused on everyone else around us. With it, we just had amazing spiritual experiences, stuff that people who don't know about the Gospel wouldn't even believe. Stuff that just, it's unexplainable without the Gospel. Yet, when you're serving God and you're putting everyone else around you first, and you'll be able to have such powerful experiences that change lives. There's nothing better than being able to be united in that kind of joy, that kind of happiness.

As laborers for God, missionaries made sense of their less-than-ideal working circumstances as a sacrifice that was expected not by the organization, but by Deity.

From these examples, we can see that these full-life volunteers were willing and even eager to enact the role identity as a missionary because they made sense of the object and the outcomes of their labor as to transcend the physical realities of their lives and (1) help others to learn about and achieve salvation for themselves, and (2) act as servants of God in performing His work on earth.

A rite of passage. The second way full-life volunteers made sense of their experience was through viewing their volunteer labor as a *rite of passage* from the outgroup to ingroup and from childhood to adulthood.

Outgroup to ingroup. Because sensemaking is retrospective and social, storytelling is often the primary means of making sense of lived experiences (Boje, 1991). For these full-life volunteers, relating retrospective accounts of harrowing experiences from their missions that made their missions difficult was a common and expected practice. Instead of complaining about these circumstances, missionaries relished telling of these difficult experiences and these stories became a type of currency that purchased missionaries and returned missionaries credibility and

inclusion. When several missionaries and returned missionaries engaged socially, these “crazy stories” (Robert) often became the focal point of interaction and the extremity of experiences related through storytelling often escalated as participants attempted to “one-up” each other with how extreme their experience was.

In many places around the world, the LDS religion is still largely undeveloped and missionaries play crucial roles in the organization and leadership of the Church. Serving in strange places or where the Church was somewhat new and/or dysfunctional provided leadership opportunities for missionaries that translated into respect and trust at home. As missionaries or returned missionaries, this practice of storytelling allowed participants to demonstrate their variety of experience and communicate their strengths in a socially acceptable fashion. For those in the LDS culture who had not yet served or who chose not to serve missions, this lack of organizational experience caused them to feel left out of the in-group because they did not have the same experiences, and therefore, credibility of having served a mission. Sarah, a prospective missionary awaiting her assignment, explained,

There's the age block. The before mission, and after mission. Most everyone in the ward has served missions or at least the group that I find myself in regularly. That's usually where the conversation goes and that's fine. It's just I haven't been there yet and that's okay... I guess the whole ward is the club. It's just that that's always a conversation topic.

Thus, In order to feel included in “the group,” or in her ward, Sarah felt that she needed to serve a mission and have her own stories to share.

Childhood to adulthood. In addition to gaining credibility and inclusion in the LDS community, participants made sense of their full-life volunteer experience as a rite of passage from childhood to adulthood. When talking about themselves before they entered the mission, many participants used terms such as “children” (Chad), “a punk kid” (Sister Morris), and “immature” (Sarah) whereas returned missionaries were considered “adults” (Elder Morris), “mature” (Jennifer), and “responsible” (Cathleen). Sarah echoed these sentiments as she considered the changes she expected upon returning from her mission by claiming, “I feel like I'll be an adult. Like I get to be a grown up now. Like, ‘you earned that.’”

An important aspect of sensemaking is that it provides a “springboard to action” (Weick et al., 2005, p. 409) and answers the question “what do I do next” (p. 412)? Upon completing their full-life service, returned missionaries determined that they had crossed the threshold from childhood to adulthood and must, therefore, act in accordance with this new identity. Diane, a returned missionary, explained that she adopted an adult mindset and developed adult perspectives on how to act and use her time. She explained,

I was way into social media before my mission, I was really into TV shows, and I was just really the things that wasted time, like video games, all of these things that are super big time sucks. Now as a missionary, every single second of your day is planned out. You learn that thirty seconds is a lot of time, you can do something; you can talk to someone. I value my time a lot more. Now I don't do social media, I don't watch rated-R movies, I limit the things that are not as good, not as uplifting, way more than I did before.

In making sense of her missionary service as a rite of passage from childhood to adulthood, Diane assigned value judgments regarding what activities were “valuable” based on her new identity as an adult. Those that were considered inconsistent with the identity of an adult, were discarded. Other returned missionaries echoed this assumption of an adult identity by focusing on more adult goals such as getting married, raising a family, starting a career, and serving in the Church.

An opportunity for personal development. The third way full-life missionaries made sense of their missionary experience was through interpreting their service as a method of developing the skills and characteristics of a “good person.” That is, the difficulties associated with full-life volunteering were interpreted as character-building opportunities that assisted volunteers in becoming “the best version of [themselves]” (Elder Wilson). For example, Sister Green, an experienced missionary from Utah, expressed,

Why do I do a mission? Because I love it. I’m still here because I feel like I’m still needed here. I feel like I haven’t gotten to the point where I want to be yet in my life. I know that it’s going to spiritually develop and spiritually develop and grow a lot and that it will bless me through the rest of my life because of what I’ve done here. I’ll be able to help my family, help my kids, help everyone. It’s going to be able to teach me to do what’s the best things, the best thing to do in life. It’s going to prepare me for life. I already feel that.

Likewise, Diane explained that as she developed a stronger identification with her role as a missionary and as a members of the church, she also understood more clearly what she should do to improve herself. She stated,

I guess I was just under prepared as well for what the mission really does to people. The mission is really great, and it's really great because you have all this time to look at your life introspectively, and it puts a magnifying glass on every single problem that you've ever had. The closer you come to Christ the more your weaknesses are magnified. I wasn't prepared to how exhausting that would be, just to be like, 'Oh my gosh, I have so much to work on.' I felt kind of discouraged sometimes because I'm like, 'I have all of these things to work on.' I think that it made me feel kind of guilty, but then I remembered, 'Oh wait, that's what life's about is getting better.'

As Diane explained, serving a mission exposed volunteers to a greater understanding of what they should strive to become like. Through full-life missionary service, participants were active in creating what Weick (1995) calls sensible environments. He explains that sensemakers are not passive observers of their environments, but active participants in establishing the reality around them. For example, in the above example by Diane, we can see that in she is actively constructing the standard for being a good person as being like Christ, or in other words, perfect. Although she acknowledged that this type of perfect life is certainly unattainable, she explained that she gained a better understanding of how she wanted to live her life through making sense of her missionary experience as an opportunity for personal development.

In making sense of the identity changes they experienced due to serving a mission, many participants explained that through the difficulties associated with full-life missionary service, they experienced a significant change in the focus of their attention. Before their missions, many participants explained that they were most often

focused on themselves and their needs, responsibilities, and plans and only rarely focused on others. Through their experiences as full-life volunteers, participants came to turn their focus outward. One of the most important orientations of attention was focusing on what God would want them to do. Jennifer remembered that as she attempted to decide whether or not to serve a mission, she began attending to what God wanted her to do rather than what she wanted to. She stated,

Part of my mind recognized Him [God] talking to me and saying you know, 'I would like you to go on mission.' Granted, I've been told several times to pray about it but I wouldn't because I didn't want to hear the answer, you know?

In reorienting to attend to God's will, participants also began focusing their attention on others around them. Sister Reed remembered, "I feel like everything is different about me. I understand so much more about other people and I think about other people so much more, and I was so selfish... as a teenager." In retrospect, participants distinguished their pre-mission identity as a selfish person from their post-mission identity as an others-focused person. By ascribing this change to their missions, they were able to make sense of the difficulties associated with full-life missionary work as being opportunities to become an altruistic person.

Many participants talked about having a desire to focus on other people and help them, but not knowing how to help people. In making sense of their missionary experience, participants explained that before serving a full-life mission, they did not know how to provide meaningful service to others and that through their volunteer service, they gained this understanding. Conner, a returned missionary who served in upstate New York, explained, "Before my mission, I always had a desire to help people,

but being on my mission, I realized how I could do that. My mission really magnified and made that firm wanting to help other people.” As a missionary, participants explained that instead of worrying about their own needs, they focused almost exclusively on fulfilling others’ needs. Sister Lee, a new missionary from Utah, explained,

My mind isn't focused on me. I'm focused on other people all the time. I don't care about what is going on in my life, I care about how I can help other people. I'm constantly thinking of someone else and I feel like that's a huge thing that's different, is I'm never focused on me.

Likewise, Sister Walker explained,

Here, it's like you're honestly trying to help them. I think it's easier that way because you know like hey, I'm not committing myself to going out every Saturday with this person, I'm committing to give them what they need. Here, yeah, I definitely talk to everyone and I think I'm just more aware of their needs. I'm not saying I was rude before my mission, but if someone needed to talk to me, like, ‘Oh yeah, I'm really busy.’ I never thought, ‘Do you need any help?’ Here it's like, ‘What can we do for you?’ I feel like I got a lot more sensitive to people's needs.

In developing an understanding of what being a good person means through sensemaking, and gaining the skills to enact that identity, participants used this sensemaking process to affect their future identities. Although returned missionaries recognized that after returning from their missions they must attend to their own needs and make plans for their future, importantly, many returned missionaries expressed

desires to continue to serve other people and to maintain a focus on other people. Greg, a returned missionary who served in Provo, Utah, stated,

I think I'm better at seeing people who they really are and seeing people of how they can be. That helps me to love them better, and that helps me to have a desire to serve them, and to help them, and that's something that's important to me now that it wasn't before, is making sure that I'm helping people, and that I'm useful to them.

For these participants, missionary service not only fostered a desire to serve others, but taught them that the most meaningful help they could offer was through sharing their beliefs in God.

Summary. LDS missions provided an opportunity to observe the sensemaking process for full-life volunteers as they experience a substantial interruption in their normal life routine and engage in a foreign lifestyle. The abrupt changes and the circumstances of missionary service caused a myriad of difficulties of which participants needed to make sense. As demonstrated above, participants made sense of their full-life missionary experience through three main ways – *transcendence, a rite of passage, and an opportunity for personal development*. Instead of complaining about the difficulties of serving an LDS mission, participants retrospectively interpreted the experiences so as to demonstrate the benefits of full-life missionary service. By focusing on the spiritual value of their labor, participants found added meaning to what they were doing. Through sensemaking, instead of focusing on the daily tasks such as going door-to-door, or performing physical service for people, they understood their service as saving souls and serving God. Further, participants made sense of their

experience as a rite of passage that afforded them entrance to the in-group of the LDS culture and provided the benefits of adulthood. Last, participants made sense of their volunteer service as an opportunity to develop personally into a better person through becoming others-focused.

Chapter 5

Discussion

The present study evaluates the entire assimilation process for full-life volunteers in the LDS missionary program. The focus on full-life volunteers provided an opportunity to observe the assimilation process for volunteers for whom their volunteer identity becomes the dominant identity in their lives for the duration of their service. Most assimilation/socialization research focuses on traditional working environments and often views assimilation from a managerial perspective, that is, how to get newcomers to integrate into the existing organizational culture. By examining the assimilation process of full-life volunteers through the lens of SIT, this study explores how individual full-life volunteers experience the assimilation process and the identity changes associated with organizational identification.

Thus, the objective of the first research question was to understand the assimilation process for full-life volunteers from a SIT perspective. Particularly, in this study, I set out to explore how full-life volunteers' identities were shaped by this experience and how the centrality of an individual's social identity was affected by participation in full-life volunteering. Although much of the assimilation process for full-life volunteers conformed to previous assimilation phase models, several important differences were discovered. First, the results demonstrated that for full-life volunteers in this study, the anticipatory socialization phase is broken into three distinct phases: *exposure*, *exploration*, and *engagement*.

The exposure phase often began in early childhood as full-life volunteers were exposed to their organizational and role identities through personalized and general

messages encouraging the acceptance and development of these roles. As participants became more independent most of them entered a period of identity exploration where they experimented with a variety of different identities and considered whether or not to embrace the organizational and role identities to which they were exposed in the exposure phase. Finally, those who decided to accept these identities and join the full-life volunteer organization entered the engagement phase where they embraced their decision to join the organization and sought to re-center their organizational and role identities.

Congruent with other assimilation phase models, the entry phase was marked by high levels of uncertainty and anxiety. Unique to full-life volunteers, the entry phase was not merely an entry into a new organization, but into an entirely new lifestyle that was centered on organizational membership. As participants became accustomed to the full-life volunteer lifestyle and role, they transitioned into the metamorphosis phase where their organizational and role identities became more solidified in the center of their self-concept. In the exit phase, full-life volunteers' organizational and role identities became the foundational identities to which other congruent identities were added so as to create a new self-concept.

Vital to the interpretation of the development and changes in full-life volunteers' identities throughout the assimilation process is understanding how full-life volunteers make sense of their experience. Thus, the results of the second research question sought to describe how these full-life volunteers used sensemaking to frame their volunteer service. The results indicated that these volunteers made sense of their experience in three ways: *transcendence*, *a rite of passage*, and *an opportunity for personal*

development. Through these sensemaking tools, full-life volunteers were able to find meaning in their service. These findings demonstrate interesting similarities and differences between full-life volunteers, employees, and other types of volunteers and extends assimilation and volunteer research by highlighting several important implications.

Identity Development

Organizational osmosis. First, the results of this study extend research concerning organizational osmosis and assimilation by demonstrating that for these participants, organizational and role identity development through the anticipatory socialization phase was a tumultuous process that included three phases: exposure, exploration, and engagement phases (See Table 1). Participants in the present study experienced very similar anticipatory socialization environments to those described by Gibson and Papa (2000) in their study that experienced organizational osmosis. These similarities include, (1) being exposed to their organizational identity at an early age through socializing messages from family members and close friends, (2) having strong social ties to the organization because participants had many family members who were also members of the organization, and (3) participants feeling a strong pressure from their social networks to join the organization and adopt an organizational identity.

Surprisingly, despite these similarities in the environments in which anticipatory socialization occurred, most participants in this study did not conform to Gibson and Papa's (2000) concept of organizational osmosis as anticipated. Instead, most participants experienced a somewhat tumultuous path to organizational entry compared to the "seemingly effortless adoption of the ideas, values, and culture of an

organization” (p. 79) described by Gibson and Papa. Therefore, the present study presents an opportunity to perhaps establish some boundary conditions for organizational osmosis so as to better understand how organizational osmosis influences organizational members’ anticipatory socialization.

Table 1: Full-life Volunteer Anticipatory Socialization Phases

| Anticipatory Socialization | | |
|--|---|--|
| Exposure | Exploration | Engagement |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Begins in childhood • Limited freedom to reject presented identities • Assumption of identity adoption | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Typically occurs in adolescence or early adulthood • Increased freedom to reject presented identities • Questioning desirability of identity adoption | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Makes commitment to join organization • Chooses to embrace presented identities • Begins shedding incongruent identities |

The most prominent difference between the anticipatory socialization process for the participants in the present study and those in Gibson and Papa’s study is the discovery of an “exploration” phase within the anticipatory socialization phase where participants’ identities as LDS Church organizational members and potential missionaries drifted from self-concept centrality and participants resisted adopting and internalizing socialization messages. Participants demonstrated their experience of this phase through communicating an identity of ambivalence, apathy, or anger regarding their organizational and/or role identities or by communicating a preference for competing identities. Several influences in the lives of LDS missionaries may lead to the presence of the exploring phase.

The first reason for the existence of an exploring phase for these full-life volunteers is that during the exploring phase, most participants in the present study

exercised their agency by pushing their organizational and role identities to the periphery of their self-concept or eliminating these identities altogether. This restructuring of the individual's self-concept indicates that they felt that they had multiple identity options from which to choose when directing their lives beyond the organizational and role identities to which they were exposed in the exposure phase. For example, nearly all of the participants attended some college before their full-life volunteering or explained that college and/or career opportunities were available to them if they chose not to serve a mission.

This availability of other viable options may explain why many of these participants chose to explore a variety of identities and question whether or not they really wanted to invest the time, effort, and costs (real and opportunity) to engage in full-life volunteering. Participants in Gibson and Papa's (2000) study were blue collar workers who perhaps felt that their options for gainful employment were limited and that joining the organization was the only viable option they possessed. This limitation in options, real or perceived, may have served to eliminate the exploring phase for those workers studied by Gibson and Papa.

The second reason participants in the present study may have experienced the exploring phase more acutely is due to the fact that the organization for which they would work was a volunteer organization that did not fiscally compensate its organizational members. For workers who trade their labor for money, it is easier to see the benefits of organizational membership because these benefits are tangible. For volunteers, the benefits of organizational membership are more emotional (Haski-Leventhal & Bargal, 2008) or, in this case, spiritual. Thus, for volunteers, the

questioning of role and organizational identities may have come from a lack of physical or concrete benefits.

Third, the level of commitment for full-life volunteers, and especially for LDS missionaries, is considerably higher than for most employment or other volunteer opportunities. As described above, leaving one's home for 18-24 months to serve in a foreign environment with people with whom they have no prior relationship is a considerable commitment and one that the participants in this study did not take lightly. Participants may have found the requirements of full-life volunteer service excessively difficult and, therefore, explored other identities that would be less demanding. For these participants, committing to the missionary lifestyle and identity took extensive consideration, prayer, and spiritual introspection.

Finally, it may be that Gibson and Papa's participants did, in fact, experience an exploration phase during their adolescence, but because the focus of the study was not on identity development, this phase was unreported. The existence of a period of exploration during adolescence is well established in adolescent development literature (e.g., Erikson, 1968; Marcia, 1966; Meeus, van de Schoot, Keijsers, Schwartz, & Branje, 2010). This literature indicates that many youth in adolescence experience an identity crisis and explore a variety of identities before achieving what Marcia (1966) calls *identity achievement*, or a time period where the adolescent begins to make decisions and that provide direction and stability based on identities that have been developed through exploration. Importantly, full-life missionaries begin their service for the LDS Church at the end of adolescence or in early adulthood. This timeframe is important because it is during this time that adolescents' identities begin to solidify and

individuals begin to establish a more stable self-concept. Thus, the participants in this study were either still in this exploration phase or had only recently exited this phase. The recency of this phase may have contributed to its clarity and prominence in this study compared to Gibson and Papa's participants. Seeing that an extensive body of literature supports the existence of an exploration phase during anticipatory socialization, it is likely that Gibson and Papa's participants also experienced a period of exploration during their anticipatory socialization phase.

Because of the identification of the three phases of anticipatory socialization, the present investigation sheds light on some of the strengths and limitations of the concept of organizational osmosis. That is, participants in this study explained that they learned the rules, norms, and expectations of the organizational culture through organizational osmosis. However, their commitment to the values, beliefs, and culture of the organization fluctuated based on the development of multiple and often competing identities and ultimately required a significant amount of effort. Therefore, organizational osmosis may serve to describe how full-life volunteers come to *learn* about organizational culture and expectations regarding roles within that culture, but the decision to *accept* that culture and engage emotionally with it is better understood through the present model. This distinction is important and is likely to transfer to other contexts where adolescents are expected to adopt specific organizational and role identities, such as following in their parents' careers or joining the family business. For example, adolescents that are encouraged to join a branch of the military by family members may initially accept others' goals for them, then question whether they really want to enact that identity, before finally embracing the military identity.

Identity Filtering

The second implication of the present research focuses on how social identities can be pruned and shaped to fit the needs of the individual within an organizational culture. These findings extend SIT by demonstrating that the full-life volunteer identity is fostered through a combination of socialization factors intended to suppress competing identities and promote identities that allow an individual to be successful in a full-life organization including: (1) those initiated by the organization, (2) those that are a result of relocating to a new and foreign environment, and (3) those that result from the complete immersion into the full-life organization lifestyle. This process of identity filtering typically occurred during the entry phase. Full-life volunteers communicated that these competing identities had been removed from their self-concepts through obedience to mission rules and showing a dedication to missionary work. Through shedding incongruent identities and developing congruent identities, full-life volunteers transitioned into the metamorphosis phase.

Organizational influence. In the present investigation, the full-life volunteer organization practiced all of the socialization strategies described by Van Maanen and Schein (1979). However, participants reported that the most influential one in shaping identity was divestiture. Organizational rules acted to promote the development or enactment of certain organizationally beneficial identities while discouraging the enactment of competing identities. For example, these full-life volunteers were expected to abide by a specific dress code, schedule, living arrangement, and rules regarding how to talk, what to talk about, with whom to associate, and how to act so as to enact the missionary identity and shed competing identities. Because these

restrictions limited the ability of full-life volunteers to enact competing identities, the strategies were effective in promoting the identities that full-life volunteers needed to be successful in achieving the goals of the organization.

Through their training experience both in the MTC and in the mission field, most of the participants' previous identities were filtered out of their lives through organizational and social pressure to become a "consecrated," "Preach My Gospel," or "real" missionary. As these full-life volunteers demonstrated a willingness to adopt the organization's goals as their personal goals and act so as to promote these organizational goals, they were given more freedom to act according to their personal judgment.

One of the most important methods for fostering organizational identification and assisting full-life volunteers to transition into the metamorphosis phase was through assigning them to leadership positions or roles of authority. For LDS missionaries, fully embracing the missionary identity often coincided with the participant being made a senior companion, trainer, district leader, or zone leader. As participants assumed more responsibility, they became more invested in their work and more committed to the organization and the organization's goals.

This finding has obvious application in other volunteer contexts considering that volunteer organizations often have difficulty with retaining committed members (Kramer, 2011a). By giving volunteers a specific leadership role, they would be more likely to feel needed, valued, and connected to the organization and would, therefore, be more likely to stay with the organization. For example, members of a community choir may treat their membership as fluid and can come and go as they please because they

feel like their individual contribution is not integral to the success of the organization. By giving choir members responsibility, they would feel that their contribution is more than a single voice among many, but a unique and important role.

Environmental influence. C. R. Scott and Stephens (2009) explained that many identities require a specific environment in which to emerge. Because full-life volunteers are placed in an environment that is foreign to them, they have little or no opportunity to enact many of the identities that were developed in their home environments. For example, Elder Wilson could not enact his identity as a member of his rock and roll band because he could not hang out with his bandmates, practice with them, or go to gigs with them. As a result, this identity was rarely enacted, became weakened, and eventually faded to the periphery of his self-concept. This new environment was crucial in filtering out organizationally undesirable identities; it also played a large role in the development of the full-life volunteer identity.

Being in a new environment also provided an opportunity for participants to enact their new identity as full-life missionaries without feeling restricted by their previous identities. At home, those people who made up participants' social networks had expectations of them based on the social identities the participants had developed. By leaving their home environment, full-life volunteers also left these expectations of who they were and how they should act. Without these expectations, full-life volunteers were free to make changes to their self-concept makeup and enact their new identity as missionaries with less regard for whether this identity was congruent with other identities that made up the full-life volunteer's self-concept. Thus, in a new

environment, full-life volunteers may be more willing to engage in behaviors or activities that they would be reluctant or refuse to engage in at home.

For these full-life volunteers, the missionary environment also included a social aspect that undoubtedly influenced the development and maintenance of organizational and role identities. LDS missionaries are expected to seek out and interact with those who are interested in learning about the teachings and doctrines of the LDS Church. In investigating volunteers' identification with their organizations, Tornes and Kramer (2015) found that when volunteers communicate directly with customers, they develop a stronger identification with their volunteer organization. This finding indicates that by representing the organization in communicative interactions, volunteers feel connected with the organization and find meaning in their labor to further the organization's goals. For the full-life volunteers in this study, constantly acting as a spokesperson for the LDS Church had the effect of increasing their identification with the organization and their role within that organization.

Full-life immersion. Organizational members experienced a unique assimilation process because organizational entry includes an entire lifestyle change rather than merely adapting to a new organizational culture. Other types of organizational members, such as those who relocate in order to join an organization (Gudykunst & Kim, 1984) and transferees (Kramer, 1993), experience lifestyle changes and difficulties during organizational entry due to the need to fulfill lifestyle necessities such as a new doctor, church, grocery store, gym, coffee shop etc. However, for these organizational members, joining an organization does not permeate all aspects of life the way joining full-life volunteer organizations does. For the full-life volunteers in this

study, the organization determined where they lived, with whom they lived, when and with whom they could associate, when they would be transferred to a new area, what clothes they could wear, and even by what name they were to be addressed. For these full-life volunteers, there was no “clocking out” of work because the work of being a missionary was constant. When missionaries were not actively proselytizing or performing service outside of their apartments, they were expected to engage in personal and companionship scripture and doctrine study, prayer, planning, and other missionary-related activities. Thus, missionaries were fully immersed in the missionary role and identity 24 hours per day seven days per week.

The full-life commitment expected by the LDS missionary program leaves no room in an individual’s self-concept for competing identities. Thus, in order to become a “consecrated” missionary, the organizational and role identities needed to become the dominant identities in volunteers’ lives. This transition from maintaining multiple identities before entering the mission to only supporting organizationally approved identities often took considerable time and effort by the full-life volunteers and those around them. As with participants in Kramer’s (2011a) study, for participants in this investigation, role anticipatory socialization did not end upon organizational entry, as asserted by Jablin (2001). Instead, participants continued to explore their role identity well into their organizational membership. Important to the establishment of participants’ role identity was their willingness to let competing identities go. Some participants found that removing previous identities from their self-concept somewhat easy and were able to embrace the missionary identity with little resistance. However, although participants were unable to enact these previous identities in a wide variety of

situations due to the rules of the mission, the changes in their environment, and restrictions on with whom they could associate, most volunteers were determined to maintain some of their previous identities for a time by not conforming fully to the missionary lifestyle and/or role.

This resistance was often communicated through denigrating the missionary identity. For example, some participants used the term “Preach My Gospel missionary” in a derogatory manner to describe those missionaries who became overly committed or acted like “zealots” (Elder Cooper). Other participants demonstrated their resistance to identifying through not being obedient to mission rules, complaining about their circumstances, and/or constantly discussing identities from home. For these resistant volunteers, breaking rules was seen as a demonstration of individualism, freedom, or not becoming a “robot.”

Although one or two participants remained resistant to fully adopting the missionary identity to the end of their missions, these were rare cases. A majority of participants transitioned into the metamorphosis phase through willingly shedding incompatible identities and embracing the missionary identity. They demonstrated their adoption of the missionary identity through acting in accordance with mission rules and expectations. For full-life volunteers in the metamorphosis phase, acting obediently to mission rules, working hard, and diligently trying to become a “Preach My Gospel” missionary provided harmony between the identities that made up their self-concept.

Identity Reconstruction

A third implication of this research focuses on the identity outcomes of full-life volunteering. All of the full-life volunteers in this study expressed a belief that they had

experienced positive identity changes through their service. Despite these positive changes, as full-life volunteers neared the end of their service, they explained that they were fearful that they would not be able to maintain these changes after reentering their home environments.

Foundational identities. As ex-full-life volunteers returned home, they took steps to ensure that their organizational and role identities that they developed on their missions persisted beyond exiting the missionary program and maintained a central position in their self-concepts. Although this study only interviewed ex-full-life volunteers that had returned home within a year of completing their experience, all of these participants had maintained their organizational and role identities as central components of their self-concept. A main reason for the persistence of the organizational identity was the fact that returned missionaries were not exiting the LDS Church organization upon exiting the missionary program. Therefore, they continued to attend Church services, study Church doctrine, and socialize with other organizational members. Through the communication with other organizational members, these identities were supported and participants continued to identify with their role as missionaries, which was socially rewarded within the LDS culture. SIT research has found that the more positively a role is viewed socially, the more likely an individual is to define him or herself according to that social identity even after organizational exit (Teuscher, 2010). The full-life missionary identity was certainly viewed positively in the LDS culture, thus, it was socially beneficial for participants to maintain this identity.

Unlike in the LDS culture, other full-life volunteers may not receive positive communication affirming their perceived positive identity changes or have social

support to maintain their organizational or role identities developed through full-life volunteering. For example, McNamee, Peterson, and Gould (2014) found that upon returning from full-life volunteering, many full-life volunteers' social networks did not appreciate or understand their experience. Instead of the volunteer experience granting ex-full-life volunteers inclusion and credibility, full-life volunteers were greeted with off-handed comments such as "How was your *trip*?" [emphasis in the original] (p. 153) as if the years of full-life volunteer service was merely a vacation or trivial excursion instead of a life-changing and identity-shaping experience. In these instances, when ex-full-life volunteers return to a home environment that does not value or support the identity changes made by the ex-full-life volunteer, it is expected that either individuals will allow their newly developed organizational and/or role identities to drift to the periphery of their self-concept, or they will seek out a new social environment where these new identities are valued.

All of the returned missionaries in this study expressed that their missionary identity remained an important part of their lives and that their current identity as returned missionaries served to shape their future decisions. As such, for the ex-full-life volunteers in this study, organizational and role identities acted as the foundation of a new self-concept that was a fusion of some pre-full-life volunteering identities, organizational and role identities that were developed through full-life volunteering, and new identities that are added to the ex-full-life volunteer's life after returning home. This reconstruction of a post-full-life volunteering self-concept was a strenuous process that required significant attention for newly returned missionaries.

With the establishment of their LDS organizational identity and ex-full-life volunteer role identity as foundational identities, participants began constructing a new self-concept by adding identities that were generally congruent with these foundational identities. Returned missionaries were encouraged to pursue, among other things, an education, a romantic relationship with a member of the LDS Church, and service opportunities in their local LDS ward. Although the organizational and role identities did not dominate all aspects of ex-full-life volunteers' lives, like they did on their missions, these new identities acted to support the foundational identities through continually reaffirming their importance in social interactions.

This social engagement with others in the organization and enacting portions of the role well after the full-life volunteer experience is certainly, at least partially, responsible for the persistence of LDS returned missionaries' identification with the organization and their role as missionaries. Several other full-life volunteer organizations, such as the Peace Corps, have social networks or groups for returned volunteers that offer support, advice, and friendship. For many other full-life volunteers, after they complete their service, they will not have the same opportunities to maintain an affiliation with the organization for an extended period of time. In this case, ex-full-life volunteers may find that their organizational and role identities drift to the periphery of their self-concept. However, in many instances, full-life volunteers can gain education and skills that can be easily transferred to future employment or volunteer opportunities. For example, volunteers for Teach for America, a program that places volunteer teachers into inner-city schools, often leverage their volunteer experience and continue in education after their service. In this case, the identity as a

Teach for America volunteer may persist because the subsequent vocation is similar to the volunteer experience. Further, as suggested by Haski-Leventhal and Bargal (2008), once individuals engage with a volunteer organization, they are likely to continue to volunteer even if they leave the organization for which they originally volunteered. Thus, ex-full-life volunteers may find that other volunteers in a traditional volunteering environment are more likely to communicate support for the full-life volunteer identity, making the maintenance of their full-life volunteer identity easier.

Unlike during the exploration phase when new identities often pushed organizational and role identities to the periphery of the individual's self-concept, as the full-life volunteers in this study reentered their home lives and added identities to their self-concept, new identities served to protect and support these foundational identities so that they could more easily maintain self-concept centrality. For example, by marrying a fellow member of the LDS Church, an ex-full-life missionary would have social support in continuing to attend Church services, serve in leadership positions, and perpetuate Church membership and full-life volunteering expectations in the next generation through anticipatory socialization.

Challenges to foundational identities. As ex-full-life volunteers, the restrictions that filtered out pre-mission identities were removed and returned missionaries were free to reestablish pre-mission identities and add new identities to their self-concept. This freedom was often overwhelming as ex-full-life volunteers attempted to integrate these identities while maintaining positive identity changes. For example, participants no longer had hours to devote to doctrinal study as they previously had done on their missions because of the demands of new identities. As ex-

full-life volunteers reentered their home environment, they encountered challenges to their organizational and role identities in many forms. For example, many of their friends and family members expected them to act in accordance with their pre-mission identities, which often included identities that were contrary to the organizational and role identities developed through full-life volunteer service. Participants found it difficult to maintain their perceived positive identity changes and maintain relationships with those who challenged these identities. Ex-full-life volunteers discussed having to sever relationships with some pre-mission friends because these people behaved in ways that were contrary to their post-full-life volunteer self-concept of service.

Although ex-full-life volunteers had regained their freedom to add whatever identities they chose, they often described a thoughtful process of self-concept reconstruction and were quite selective about what identities they allowed to enter their self-concept. Identification with types of music, movies, parties, and organizational affiliations that were appealing to the participants, but that contradicted their foundational identities often remained unexplored.

The main importance of this finding is that full-life volunteer service is a significant identity-shaping experience that can have long-lasting impact on the volunteer's life. However, these identity changes are unlikely to persist if ex-full-life volunteers do not purposefully protect and develop these newly-established foundational identities through establishing a home environment that is conducive to and supportive of the maintenance of those identities developed through full-life volunteer service. Without this supportive home environment, it is likely that full-life volunteers would succumb to the pressures to revert back to their pre-service identities.

Future research exploring the strength and longevity of these foundational identities after full-life volunteering is needed to substantiate these expectations.

Full-life Volunteer Sensemaking

The fourth implication of this research deals with the sensemaking of full-life volunteers. As demonstrated by the results presented here, full-life volunteers were able to make sense of their volunteer experience so as to find deep meaning and value in their service, even in the midst of less-than-ideal living and working circumstances. Social exchange theory (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959) explains that people will weigh the costs and benefits associated with a relationship to determine whether or not to continue to engage in that relationship. Because full-life volunteers do not receive any direct financial benefit from their service, they must find alternative justifications for their continued affiliation with their full-life volunteer organization such as, laboring for God, gaining social inclusion and esteem, and making themselves better people. Without these transcendent motivations, social exchange theory would predict that these volunteers would find the costs too great compared to the benefits and terminate their membership.

This finding certainly has important implications for volunteer organizations as they are attempting to recruit and retain volunteers. Finding and retaining volunteers is often one of the most difficult tasks for volunteer organizations (Kramer, 2011a). Volunteer organizations may be more successful in recruitment and retention by framing their volunteer labor in terms of transcendent values. For example the website for the Bay Area Red Cross explains that in return for their service, volunteers receive “fulfillment, enrichment, gratification, and a spirit of belonging and giving”

("Volunteer FAQs," 2016, n.p.). These intangible benefits transcend the daily tasks associated with volunteering which are often tedious or difficult. Likewise, the Doctors without Borders (MSF) website uses language that communicates the transcendent value of volunteering by focusing on the "lifesaving" outcomes of volunteer service. It states, "MSF field staff worldwide give lifesaving medical and technical assistance to people who would otherwise be denied access to basics such as healthcare, clean water, and shelter" ("Work with Us," n.d.). By focusing on the "lifesaving" benefits of their service, MSF gives its volunteers a moral purpose. Therefore, by establishing and continuously emphasizing the value in volunteering that transcends the immediate tasks and provides volunteers with a spiritual or moral purpose, volunteer organizations provide their volunteers with social acceptance into an in-group, and provides volunteers with skills and opportunities to make themselves better people through service.

For full-life volunteer organizations, these intangible benefits are important forms of payment when financially compensating volunteers is fiscally prohibitive for the organization. In fact, it may be that *because* full-life volunteer organizations do not financially compensate their members that volunteers adopt strong organizational identities and are willing to work diligently for the good of the organization. As demonstrated by Festinger (1961), people who can justify their labor through financial means are less likely to commit to their tasks. By contrast, those who perform a task without financial compensation reported enjoying the work more and being more invested in the outcomes of the work.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Although this research provided several important insights, there are also some limitations that need to be acknowledged. First, this study only investigated one full-life volunteer organization. This narrow investigation makes broader claims regarding full-life organizational experiences somewhat limited. However, the in-depth exploration of this full-life organization and its practices provided a rich and nuanced understanding of how these full-life volunteers navigated their experience and made sense of their decision to serve as a full-life volunteer. Additionally, the extremity of the LDS full-life volunteer experience was tremendously helpful in identifying theoretically interesting communication patterns of assimilation and sensemaking that are likely to transfer to other like contexts.

Second, the timeline of this investigation did not extend beyond the first year after full-life missionaries returned home. However, it is expected that during this first year that the fusion of pre-service identities, those identities developed during service, and post-service identities were most clearly established and decisions regarding the ex-full-life volunteers' environments are enacted. Future research should extend this timeline and observe how ex-full-life volunteers' organizational and role identities are communicated throughout their lives.

Third, in investigating the anticipatory socialization of these full-life volunteers, this study only focused on those who made the decision to engage their organizational and role identities and enter the missionary program. In further establishing the parameters of organizational osmosis and the anticipatory socialization model presented here, future research should investigate why some organizational members choose not to engage these identities and serve as full-life volunteers.

Conclusion

By studying the assimilation process of a full-life volunteer organization, this investigation extends the assimilation literature to a previously unstudied context. Unlike typical volunteer settings, full-life volunteering occupies a dominant space in volunteers' lives and, as such, they experience a somewhat unique assimilation process. A particularly relevant contribution to assimilation research and the concept of organizational osmosis is the emergence of three phases within the anticipatory socialization phase: *exposure*, *exploration*, and *engagement*. Although the exploration phase may not be pronounced in all organizational and role anticipatory socialization contexts, this phase is likely to emerge in circumstances where the individual feels social pressure during childhood and adolescence, from family members and friends, to join an organization or pursue a particular career, but has the freedom to explore a variety of options. These conditions are likely to occur even beyond full-life volunteer organizations such as when an individual is socialized to enter the military, attend a specific university, join a fraternity, or sorority, or work for a family business.

This research also identified three key implications for other volunteer organizations and three implications more specifically for other full-life volunteer organizations. These implications for more general types of volunteer organizations include: (1) by framing benefits and outcomes of volunteering in terms of transcendent values, volunteers can find deeper meaning in their service beyond the immediate tasks; (2) having volunteers act as organizational representatives through communicating with organizational outsiders increases organizational identification; and (3) giving all volunteers some kind of leadership position or responsibility can increase member's

feelings of ownership and connectedness to the organization and important organizational outcomes.

The implications for other full-life volunteer organizations include: (1) removing individuals from their home environments promotes the development of identities that assist volunteers to fulfill their organizational role and can filter out previous identities that may hinder the adoption of organizational and role identities; (2) the maintenance of organizational and role identities after organizational exit requires a supportive home environment that communicates to the ex-full-life volunteer that these identities are valuable and important; and (3) in order to maintain identities developed through full-life volunteering, ex-full-life volunteers must add new identities that are congruent with their full-life volunteer identities as they construct a new self-concept.

Additionally, this research demonstrates that observing the assimilation process through the lens of SIT is valuable and particularly relevant in the context of full-life volunteer organizations. Because full-life volunteers are not remunerated for their labor, much of their motivation to serve the organization is based on their identification with the organization and the adoption of the organization's goals as their own personal goals. By developing organizational and role identities, full-life volunteers made sense of their experience in a way that provided balance to their self-concept and allowed them to view their volunteer experience as a net benefit to them. This finding is likely to transfer to many volunteer contexts and especially to other full-life volunteer organizations that place their volunteers in somewhat difficult or extreme circumstances such as the Peace Corps, Doctors without Borders, AmeriCorps, and various missionary programs.

Chapter 6

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