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"Come for the Memes, Stay for Defending the Faith": Far-Right and Anti-Feminist Red Pill Influences in the #DezNat Twitter Hashtag

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Abstract. Scholarship on the intersection of Mormonism and the internet has often focused on progressive online voices. However, in recent years, the DezNat movement has challenged the assumption that online Mormonism necessarily trends more liberal than the Latter-day Saint mainstream. In this study, we examine the influence of *red pill* communities—which include far-right and anti-feminist movements on the internet—on DezNat. We collected 1,378 screenshots of tweets containing the #DezNat hashtag (which often included additional data and context) and engaged in open coding of these tweets, guided by our understanding of *red pill* concepts and tropes. We found considerable evidence of far-right and anti-feminist influences on DezNat-tagged tweets, suggesting that it is disingenuous for DezNat defenders to describe the movement as merely about Latter-day Saint orthodoxy. However, interpreting our findings through an *affinity space* framework, we argue that it is impractical—and perhaps impossible—to definitively establish the motivations of all those who participate in the movement. Rather, we suggest that the clear *red pill* references by DezNat participants provide an opportunity to consider overlaps between Mormonism, the far right, and aggressive anti-feminism—as well as the tensions between intentional ambiguity and boundary maintenance in Latter-day Saint institutions.

Scholarship on the intersection of Mormonism and the internet has often focused on progressive online voices. Brooks (2016) described Mormon feminism's 1990s retreat "to safer, more private spaces like Internet discussion groups" (19), and Finnigan and Ross have described the role of blogs and social media platforms in contemporary Mormon feminist thinking (2013; 2015; Ross and Finnigan 2014). McDannell expanded this emphasis, noting that Mormon populations "marginalized in the eighties and nineties—intellectuals, feminists, gays—gravitated to social media as a safe place to express their ideas" (2019, 174). Along these lines, live-tweeting of General Conferences has

often been queer-friendly in a way that the conferences themselves have not (Burroughs 2013; Johns and Nelson 2015).

In recent years, the DezNat Twitter hashtag has challenged the assumption that online manifestations of Mormonism necessarily trend more liberal. The headline of Hitt's (2019) *Daily Beast* article describes the movement as "alt-right Mormons," and critics of the movement understand its name to be an abbreviation of "Deseret Nationalism," an interpretation bolstered by the context surrounding the hashtag's creation (see Mary Ann 2020). Indeed, one of the first tweets to ever use the #DezNat hashtag asked readers whether "what you are doing today [is] helping to build Deseret tomorrow," a celebration of—and seeming desire to return to—nineteenth-century Latter-day Saint leaders' near-total political and religious sovereignty over their people in the pre-Utah territory called Deseret.

In contrast, DezNat participants have typically insisted that their sole purpose is to gather orthodox Latter-day Saints and defend the Church against critics. Correspondingly, they see the term "alt-right" as inaccurate and even defamatory; similarly, they argue that "DezNat" is simply a reference to "Deseret Nation." Acknowledging these arguments, Stack's (2021) description of the movement in the *Salt Lake Tribune* concedes that it may "not [be], strictly speaking, an alt-right political group." Thus, in addition to simply being a controversial Mormon movement, DezNat has succeeded in making the purpose and identity of the movement part of the controversy.

To better understand DezNat and better situate it within (online) Mormonism, we document participants' use of *red pill* tropes associated with far-right and anti-feminist movements. We conceive of these tropes as being expressed within a hashtag-associated *affinity space* (Gee 2005; 2017), a conceptual framework that intentionally sets aside the question of social boundaries in order to focus instead on shared practices and identities. We argue that this framing is key to understanding not only DezNat but also its implications for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Indeed, our findings demonstrate that DezNat participants regularly drew on far-right and anti-feminist tropes, suggesting that it is disingenuous to describe the movement as merely about Latter-day Saint orthodoxy. However, even in documenting extremist practices and identities present within this space, we acknowledge that questions about individual and collective purposes may be more complicated; ultimately, we consider these tensions in the context of intentional ambiguity and boundary maintenance.

Background

In this section, we define and describe core concepts that underpin our examination of the DezNat hashtag space.

Red Pill Communities

Although much of the discourse around DezNat has focused on whether it is appropriate to describe the movement as "alt-right," we prefer Zuckerberg's reference to *red pill communities* (2019). The phrase *red pill*—"the alt-right's number one metaphor" (Wendling 2018, 29)—is appropriated from the 1999 movie *The Matrix*, whose protagonist must choose between taking a (literal) red pill that will awaken him to a hidden reality or a blue pill that will allow him to continue his life as it is. Thus, the *red-pilled* "are clear-eyed, truth-seeking heroes—by extension, the *blue-pilled* are the intellectually lazy, scale-eyed, soma-taking masses" (30). In short, the alt-right sees itself as aware of a political reality, including "purported biological racial differences, problems associated with racial diversity, and various conspiracy theories about Jewish subversion," of which the rest of the world is unaware (Hawley 2017, 83; see also Hartzell 2018).

Yet, Zuckerberg notes that the *red pill* metaphor has also been used to (self-)describe those who believe that "society is unfair to men—heterosexual white men in particular—and is designed to favor women" (1–2; see also Ging 2017; Hawley, 2017; Niewert, 2017; Wendling, 2018). Indeed, Massanari and Chess (2018) describe the mid-2010s misogynist Gamergate movement as a precursor of the contemporary alt-right (see also Niewert 2016; Wendling 2018). As Marwick and Caplan write, both the alt-right and the online, anti-feminist *Manosphere* "rely on a white male identity seen as under attack by feminists, SJWs [social justice warriors], and people of color" (2018, 554). Likewise, Kimmel (2018) has documented the ways that far-right movements have appealed to hegemonic masculinity as a recruitment strategy, and Bjork-James (2020) has described how Neo-Nazi and KKK support for the Trump campaign sometimes drew on concerns about gender and sexuality rather than "explicitly racial theme[s]" (58).

We therefore use the term *red pill* to emphasize the convergence of extreme views on gender, race, and politics—on the internet broadly as well as specifically within DezNat. Our use of this general term also acknowledges that both the anti-feminist and far-right manifestations of the *red pill* move-

ment are loosely organized and go by a number of names (Hawley 2017; Zuckerberg 2019)—though there is also value in distinguishing among manifestations (Hartzell 2018). Given the vastness of the *red pill* landscape (and its various tropes), we will refrain from any more specific explanations of particular communities and tropes except when they become relevant to our findings.

Although it would be inaccurate to describe Mormonism as part of this *red pill* landscape, it is important to note ways that it connects with far-right politics and anti-feminist movements. Perhaps the clearest such connection is Ezra Taft Benson, who helped establish U.S. Mormons as a reliably right-wing population (Harris 2020, Shipps 2016). During Benson's tenure as a Latter-day Saint apostle, he was granted rare permission to engage in politics, serving as Secretary of Agriculture under Dwight Eisenhower; upon his return to full-time ministry, Benson continued to feel a political calling. Influenced by the far-right John Birch Society, he repeatedly described the civil rights movement as a communist conspiracy and even accused Eisenhower of being soft on or manipulated by communism (Harris 2020). He also asked for permission for another leave from ministry in order to run on an ultraconservative third-party presidential ticket with either George Wallace or Strom Thurmond; however, church leaders refused this request, so Benson ultimately did not join the ticket (Harris 2020).

Another connection may be found in official Latter-day Saint campaigning against the Equal Rights Amendment in the late 1970s and early 1980s, described by Brooks (2016) as one of the more compelling indicators of institutional Latter-day Saint anti-feminism. Given the overlap between far-right and anti-feminist thinking, it is perhaps unsurprising that Radke-Moss (2019) described Benson as the Latter-day Saint leader who "locked Mormonism into an anti-feminist narrative" (197). Yet, these efforts were motivated not just by concern about women's roles but "a whole system that favored heterosexuality" (Petrey 2020, 116). Indeed, Quinn argued that Latter-day Saint organization against the ERA would inform its later "campaign against same-sex marriage" (1997, 403). Institutional anti-feminism (in the service of shoring up heterosexual masculinity) was also strong in the next decade. In a May 1993 address, apostle Boyd Packer described "the gay-lesbian movement" and "the feminist movement" as two of the major threats facing the church (Quinn 1997, 890). Packer was also considered the driving figure behind the high-profile "September Six" excommunications of a half-dozen feminists and intellectuals later that year.

Intentional Ambiguity and Boundary Maintenance

Cultivated ambiguity is a key feature of the contemporary, online far-right. For example, in 2021, far-right figure Nick Fuentes adopted the slogan "White Boy Summer" to describe a series of events he was organizing. Although meant to be understood as a reference to a seemingly apolitical (if poorly titled) music video, the reappropriation of the same phrase by white nationalist and neo-Nazi groups during this same time period emphasizes that Fuentes likely intended his audience to understand a deeper and darker message behind the phrase (Evans and Davis 2021). Other far-right actors have appropriated even more mundane symbols like Hawaiian shirts (Pérez de Acha, Hurd, and Lightfoot 2021) and the "OK" hand gesture (Swales 2019) as messages to those in the know.

This ambiguity can be understood as an attempt to either transcend or redefine maintained boundaries. In this vein, mainstream Republican politicians have used the strategy of "dog whistling"—composing a message so that different audiences hear different things—to appeal to racial panic without using explicitly racist language (Henderson and McCready 2018; Niewert 2017). Bhat and Klein (2020) provide an example from former Speaker of the House Paul Ryan, who once argued that a culture of work was absent in inner cities. Because Ryan pointedly did not mention race, he was able to respond to subsequent criticism by insisting that his remarks had nothing to do with race but rather family values and poverty; however, terms like " inner cities" and "culture" served as dog whistles to those who hold the racist belief that Black men lack the strong work ethic found in (superior) white culture. This careful language allowed Ryan to appeal to this population without explicitly agreeing with them. Such an approach is intended to maintain boundaries between respectable conservatism and taboo racism—while also reaching beyond those boundaries to obtain support. Along similar lines, Hartzell describes the alt-right as trying to redefine (or even tear down) maintained boundaries by "reach[ing] white folks who might not seek out 'white nationalist rhetoric' but would perhaps be sympathetic to white nationalist arguments" (2018, 20).

Latter-day Saint leaders have also sometimes cultivated intentional ambiguity—including in distancing the Church from previous *red pill* associations. For example, although an elderly Ezra Taft Benson continued to privately espouse Bircher views after he became president of the Church, his counselors and colleagues engaged in an "intensive campaign to remake Ben-

son's image" (Harris 2020, 116), supported by Benson's largely apolitical presidency. Thus, since 1985, the Church has papered over Benson's right-wing views while never explicitly denouncing them. Unlike "dog whistle" tactics, the Church's ambiguity is not likely intended to allow right-wing Mormons to read extremist views into Latter-day Saint teachings; however, it is not without that consequence. During Benson's presidency, his counselors' steps to rein in right-wing extremism in the Church led to accusations from Benson supporters that they had usurped power from an ailing church president (Harris 2020; Quinn 1997). Similarly, Harris (2020) has noted that contemporary Mormon figures and organizations such as Glenn Beck (see also Brooks 2010), the Bundy brothers, and apocalyptic prepper movements have not forgotten Benson's views and clearly draw from them today.

This example of intentional ambiguity is also related to boundary maintenance. Efforts to silence Benson's far-right views without casting doubt on his credibility as a prophet of God can be understood an example of Mormon tensions between assimilating into the American mainstream and redefining "distinctive Mormon boundaries" through "new Mormon fundamentalism" (Mauss 1994, xi). Attempts to carve out a unique space for Latter-day Saint identity also extend to the political realm. Despite Mormons' being "the most heavily Republican-leaning religious group in the U.S." (Lipka 2016, paragraph 1), the Church insists it "is neutral in matters of party politics" (LDS n.d.). Latter-day Saint leaders have taken positions on immigration (Stack, 2011, 2016) and the COVID-19 pandemic (Stack, 2021) that have clearly distinguished them from standard right-wing positions in U.S. politics (see also Campbell et al. 2016). This boundary maintenance has sometimes complicated the position of Mormonism in the U.S. political landscape; indeed, Mormons' ambivalence about Donald Trump during his first campaign for president was pronounced enough that state-supported information operations portrayed Mormonism as both insufficiently conservative and insufficiently liberal for their fellow Americans (Greenhalgh 2021).

Conceptual Framework

We argue that the DezNat hashtag and its connections to Mormonism are best understood through an *affinity space* framework (Gee 2005; 2017). This framework is based on Gee's (2005) argument that it is more helpful to focus "on a *space* in which people interact, rather than on *membership* in a community" (214; emphasis in original). Whereas a community-based framework

such as Wenger's popular *community of practice* (1998) invites questions about "who is in and who is not" (Gee 2005, 215), a space-based framework forgoes questions of formal membership and interpersonal ties in order to focus on shared meaning-making practices within a given physical or virtual space. Indeed, as Gee further notes, in online contexts "participation, membership and boundaries" (215) are inherently difficult to define. This is particularly true of the Twitter hashtag, which allows for bad faith (e.g., Kosenko, Winderman, and Pugh 2019)—or even accidental (e.g., Greenhalgh, Rosenberg, and Wolf 2016)—participation. Yet, despite the difficulty of defining membership, Gee (2005) has suggested that it remains possible to define the "content … and social practices" (218) that characterize a given space.

Methods

This research falls into the broad category of digital methods, "the use of online and digital technologies to collect and analyse research data" (Snee, Hine, Morey, Roberts, and Watson 2016, 1).

Research Design and Ethics

Our respective institutions consider this research to involve public data and therefore as not subject to ethical oversight. However, questions of publicity in internet research are complex (Markham and Buchanan 2012), users do not always understand how public their data are (Proferes 2017), and Twitter users have expressed discomfort with the possibility that researchers would study their posts (Fiesler and Proferes 2018). To navigate these risks and tensions, we adopted the Ethics of Care approach to internet research described by Suomela, Chee, Berendt, and Rockwell (2019), whose work analyzing *red pill* data made this approach particularly relevant.

Guided by a focus on "uneven power relations" (Suomela, Chee, Berendt, and Rockwell 2019, 7), we determined that this study was necessary for drawing attention to DezNat's claiming of and exercising power over others. However, we also hold power over our (largely unwitting) research subjects and have therefore done our best to grant them privacy, including using pseudonyms and lightly editing direct quotes that could be otherwise used to identify Twitter accounts. Similarly, when selecting images of tweets to include as figures, we prioritized since-deleted accounts and tweets, and we obscured account information to reduce the likelihood of user identification. In cases

where we felt that a detailed description of DezNat's harassment was important to demonstrate a point but could potentially identify individuals targeted by DezNat, we obtained explicit consent from those harassed and worked with them to tell their story in a way that represented both our findings and their wishes. Finally, we were attentive to potential negative impacts of a close analysis of these data on us as researchers and discussed power dynamics within our research team, including possibilities that each of us might be at higher risk for retributive harassment in different contexts.

Researcher Positionality

Qualitative research requires us to note that the contexts and lived experiences of researchers intersect in ways that may influence research interpretations (St. Louis and Barton 2002). In particular, Decoo (2022) describes the way in which insider and outsider perspectives may influence qualitative research related to Mormonism. We therefore include here a description of each author and their positionalities in engaging in this research. The first author is an upper-middle-class, white, straight, cis-gendered man who holds a PhD in educational psychology and educational technology. He was a practicing member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints for most of his life and is now affiliated with Community of Christ. The second author is an upper-middle-class, white, straight, cis-gendered woman who holds a PhD in educational psychology and educational technology. She was raised as a Roman Catholic and continues to practice that faith.

Data Collection

The dataset for this study came from our collecting tweets containing the #DezNat hashtag using a series of Twitter Archiving Google Sheets (TAGS; Hawksey 2014). For this study, we limited our consideration to tweets composed between April 3 and April 9, 2019 in order to focus on the April 2019 General Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. General Conferences are accompanied by a strong live-tweeting tradition (Greenhalgh, Staudt Willet, and Koehler 2019; Johns and Nelson 2015) and may represent a peak of Mormon activity on Twitter (Kimmons, McGuire, Stauffer, Jones, Gregson, and Austin, 2017). We redownloaded the relevant tweets using the *rtweet* package for the R programming language (Kearney 2019); any tweet deleted between the original TAGS collection and the subsequent *rtweet*

download does not appear in our analysis, providing an additional layer of respect for participant privacy.

We then used the *webshot* package in R (Chang 2019) to capture PDF screenshots of each tweet, which we refer to in this paper as "documents." Some screenshots revealed that associated accounts had been deleted or suspended prior to this step in the process; we removed these screenshots prior to analysis, resulting in a final dataset of 1,378 screenshots. Studying screenshots afforded additional, helpful context, including embedded media, glimpses of users' profile pages, and interactions with the tweets; however, this also meant that different screenshots represented different amounts of data. Notably, our data collection methods frequently captured entire threads of tweets (not all of which included the #DezNat hashtag), which facilitated our subsequent analysis. Conversely, we also note that screenshots did not always successfully capture media embedded in single tweets, limiting our analysis. Nonetheless, we generally limited our analysis to only that which was visible in the screenshots. We are aware of further cases in which DezNat participants have had their accounts suspended due to violations of Twitter policies or have deleted tweets or accounts to avoid scrutiny. However, because account suspensions and tweet deletions speak to the controversy of DezNat (and because it would be impractical to review each tweet analyzed in this study), we have decided to not remove these data from our analysis, though we have attempted to protect these users' privacy in other ways.

Data Analysis

We uploaded all screenshots of tweets to the NVivo qualitative data analysis software. We began analysis with one round of inductive coding in which two researchers open-coded all data (Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña 2014), wrote researcher memos, and built a codebook. Then, each researcher independently applied the codebook to half of the data. We wrote research memos and met regularly to discuss our coding; through these conversations, we discussed our interpretations of the data, resolved discrepancies, and refined our codebook (Saldaña 2021). Because of the layers of interpretation required to analyze the meaning of each document, we chose to come to consensus on all of our coding rather than to rely on statistical measures of interrater reliability (Saldaña 2021).

We used multiple methods to address potential issues of trustworthiness, credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Patton 2015). We

engaged in researcher reflexivity by considering how our assumptions, values, and biases could influence our interpretations. We developed an audit trail by creating researcher memos including notes of our methodological decisions, questions, and emerging insights. Throughout our data analysis, we asked whether there were other explanations for the emerging themes in our data.

Results

In the following sections, we describe the areas of overlap that we found between data associated with the DezNat movement and tropes present in various *red pill* movements.

DezNat and Far-right Red Pill Tropes

In this section, we describe our findings related to DezNat's self-positioning with regard to right-wing political views. DezNat tweets frequently referenced right-wing figures, ideas, and movements, often combining them with distinctly religious sentiments. For example, one DezNat participant approvingly described apostle David Bednar as "no respecter of feelings" (document 1186), combining the scriptural phrase "no respecter of persons" with conservative commentator Ben Shapiro's catchphrase "facts don't care about your feelings" (which is also referenced in another DezNat tweet; document 293). Echoing a common conservative complaint, another participant expressed concern about the rise of "woke fascism" among Latter-day Saints (document 270). These references to (relatively) mainstream U.S. conservatism were also accompanied by more specific *red pill* references and by an embrace of violent rhetoric.

Red Pill References. Other DezNat tweets reference ideas particular to *red pill* communities. Orthodox Christianity has become popular among the far-right (e.g., Kelaidis 2016; Hawley 2017); thus, when one Twitter user announced his intent to "found a . . . classically American ortho[dox] church with based [i.e., *red pilled*] American priests," a DezNat participant responded with an image depicting Joseph Smith, Jr. in the style of an Orthodox icon, inviting the first account to "come home brother" (document 27; see fig. 1). Later in the thread, the same account claimed to be speaking for "many of us in #DezNat" in expressing excitement about blending Orthodox and Mormon influences. This account's profile picture features Groyper, a cartoon frog associated with

Figure 1. Screenshot of Twitter thread showing #DezNat enthusiasm for Orthodox Christianity.

white nationalism and frequently customized for individual users (Mak 2017); indeed, this particular Groyper is clearly intended to be former Church president Brigham Young.

DezNat's embrace of internet memes broadly (e.g., "come for the memes, stay for defending the faith"; document 177) seems to draw from similar sentiments among the alt-right (Hawley 2017; Heikkilä 2017). In response to progressive concerns that apostle Neil Andersen's sermon on the "The Family: A Proclamation to the World" (a 1995 document that serves as the basis for contemporary Latter-day Saint teachings on sexuality and gender) might turn

into a canonization of the Proclamation, one participant rejoiced that "meme magic is real, my #DezNat brothers and sisters" (document 771). *Meme magic* refers to the half-joking alt-right belief that sharing internet memes and content led to Donald Trump's election in 2016 (Wendling 2018).

Also present in our data is the "[person] did nothing wrong" meme, which a DezNat leader used to defend two different General Authorities (documents 130 and 588). Sometime after the timeframe of this study, the phrase "Brigham Young did nothing wrong" also became popular among DezNat participants. This *snowclone*—a meme consisting of variations on a phrase with a standard structure—began as "Hitler Did Nothing Wrong" in an effort on 4chan (a *red pill*-associated website) to troll a contest for naming a new Mountain Dew flavor (Rosenfeld, 2012).

Some of the clearest references to white nationalism were in response to critics of DezNat. When one account derogatorily described DezNat as "alt-right Mormons," one partisan (with coded anti-Semitic language in their username) responded by recommending a book written by a 20th-century American fascist (document 234). Another reference came in response to a critical account that frequently employed the mocking term "dezgasm." Replying to a tweet by that account, one DezNat sympathizer suggested as an alternative the play on words "1488 DezGasEm" (document 32). The number 1488 is frequently used in white supremacist circles (Hawley 2017; Niewert 2017; Wendling 2018) for its combined reference to a 14-word white supremacist slogan and to "Heil Hitler" (because "H" is the eighth letter of the alphabet); likewise, "GasEm" is a clear reference to Holocaust death camps.

Other posts may hint at racist ideas among DezNat participants but are more ambiguous. One account laughingly dismissed criticism of the term "Pharisee" as anti-Semitic (document 346) but appropriated the term "blood libel" (derived from anti-Semitic hysteria) to describe a queer Mormon's criticism of a General Conference sermon (document 583). Although both phrases are commonly used, they could also represent deeper, more explicit anti-Semitic beliefs—especially because the username of the account in question references a prominent Mormon known to have such beliefs. Likewise, DezNat references to measuring foreheads (documents 41, 45, 468, 1317) are not straightforward but appear to be references to phrenology, which was once entertained in Mormon circles (e.g., Bitton and Bunker 1974) and corresponds with the scientific racism popular among contemporary *red pill* communities (Niewert, 2017).

Take your vitamin pills, it's time for
#GeneralConference
#DezNat

Figure 2. Screenshot of #DezNat tweet including an image of a "laser-eyed" Russell Nelson.

Beyond the Red Pill. In October 2018, Church president Russell Nelson encouraged Latter-day Saints to "Eat your vitamin pills. Get your rest. It's going to be exciting" (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2018). In doing so, he inadvertently provided DezNat a metaphor to work with. Building on the existing metaphor of *blue pills* and *red pills*, DezNat participants repeatedly referred to the *vitamin pill* in our data. Tweets described the need to take vitamin pills prior to General Conference (documents 297, 308), suggested that the presence of General Authorities "activated" their vitamin pills (document 1012), or listed "taking daily vitamin pills" as a requirement for divinely approved DezNat participation (document 1417). Evidence of "Vitamin Pill Status" was often visually signified by adding "laser eyes" to a person, a meme sometimes used in right-wing circles (and other contexts) to indicate power (e.g., Lee 2020). Thus, Nelson (see Figure 2) and his counselors in the gov-

erning First Presidency were frequently shown with laser eyes to show their spiritual power (documents 304, 308, 673, 712, 725, 1045, 1047, 1062, 1083, 1085, 1180, 1321), as were former Church presidents Brigham Young (document 844) and Spencer Kimball (document 1411) as well as contemporary apostle Neil Andersen (document 612). Some DezNat participants also added laser eyes to their profile pictures to demonstrate that they, too, had been vitamin-pilled in the same way as General Authorities (documents 1422, 1433).

DezNat participants clearly associated the *vitamin pill* with *blue* and *red pills* in a shortlived-but-widespread meme begun shortly after the conclusion of General Conference. The structure of the meme described inferior things as *blue pills*, acceptable things as *red pills* and superior things as *vitamin pills*, suggesting that DezNat was sympathetic to *red pill* communities but saw themselves (and Mormonism broadly) as an improvement on those communities. Thus, if "President Donald Trump" was an improvement on "President Bernie Sanders," "President Russell M. Nelson" was superior to both (document 1350). Similar tweets contrasted "Government Education," "School Choice," and "Home based, Church Supported" (a reference to a contemporary religious education initiative; document 1351) or "Vox.com," "FoxNews.com," and "Newsroom.ChurchofJesusChrist.org" (document 1354). One example that was "liked" by several prominent DezNat accounts (document 1450; see fig. 3) described moving the U.S. Embassy in Israel to Jerusalem as merely a *blue pill* position, with the *red pill* alternative being "Retake Jerusalem, Deus Vult," a Crusades reference popular in racist video game communities (Winkie 2018). However, "Build the new Jerusalem on the American continent" (a distinct Latter-day Saint belief) was judged a superior position to either of those options. In other memes, pills represented different positions within Mormonism. For example, one prominent account described "The Church has made mistakes" as a *blue pill* position, "The Church is true" as a *red pill* position, and "The Kingdom of God or nothing"—a Brigham Young quote in a sermon by then-apostle John Taylor defying an approaching American army and rejecting American assimilation—as the *vitamin pill* position.

Violent References in DezNat. In another echo of far-right groups, some DezNat tweets flirted with the idea of violent solutions to perceived problems. Two tweets depicted Church president Russell Nelson as the genocidal Marvel villain Thanos, who had recently been depicted in film as making half the living beings in the universe disappear. Drawing from this imagery, DezNat's Nelson-as-Thanos was shown as wiping out either perceived "apostates" (docu-

🔵Blue Pill:
Move the Israeli embassy to Jerusalem
🔴Red Pill:
Retake Jerusalem, Deus Vult
💊Vitamin Pill:
Build the new Jerusalem on the American continent

#DezNat

10 Retweets 36 Likes

Figure 3. Screenshot of a tweet using the #DezNat "pill" meme and employing racist references to the Crusades.

ment 673) or progressive Mormons who shared a then-current rumor that the Church would soon no longer forbid coffee (document 1047). This reactionary transformation of a genocidal villain into a hero is not limited to DezNat; Walker, Ramirez, and Soto-Vásquez (2021) describe Thanos as embodying—and fueling—far-right discourses. Indeed, a few months after DezNat's use of the character, the Trump campaign tweeted a video of Marvel footage edited to superimpose their candidate's head onto Thanos's body (Pulliam-Moore 2019). After the villain snapped his fingers, the video showed prominent Democrats being reduced to dust—the same fate these DezNat accounts reserved for their perceived enemies.

Other tweets also included echoes of right-wing violence. One participant (document 1416) described DezNat as sheepdogs serving "the shepherd," a reference to both Jesus Christ and a popular right-wing metaphor that divides the world into helpless sheep, violent-but-evil wolves, and violent-but-heroic sheepdogs (see Cummings and Cummings 2015). Similarly, a DezNat leader tweeted a link to a story that the Church was building firing ranges for its security forces with the comment "#DezNat summer camp" (document 13). Another participant combined right-wing survivalist thinking and Latter-day Saint exclusivism by expressing hope for the opportunity to raid Mormon fundamentalist compounds after an apocalyptic disaster (document 281). After the congregation at the priesthood session of the April 2019 General Con-

ference sang a Latter-day Saint hymn with militaristic language, First Presidency member Henry Eyring quipped that he "felt like we were ready to go" (Eyring 2019; quote appears only in video). One DezNat account responded with "Ready when you are," accompanied with a picture of Captain Moroni, a military leader in the Book of Mormon (document 707).

In a separate thread, this same account leveled violent rhetoric against critics of the Book of Abraham, a controversial entry in the Latter-day Saint canon. Attaching an image of the book's first facsimile, a supposed depiction of attempted human sacrifice, the participant commented, "what I love most about the Book of Abraham is that it contains an instructional diagram showing how to deal with those who criticize the Book of Abraham" (document 186). In a second tweet, the participant made his interpretation explicit, labeling the person doing the sacrificing as "DezNat" and the person being sacrificed as a "retarded ex-Mormon about to be blood atoned" (document 188), a reference to former Church president Brigham Young's since-repudiated teachings on blood atonement, which held that some sins must be paid for with the sinner's own life (see Mason, 2019). DezNat critics present in our data suggested that this was not the only account during this time to employ these references (document 239; see also Hitt 2019).

(Partial) Rejections of Right-Wing Affiliation

Despite repeated references to *red pill* tropes in the DezNat hashtag, many participants rejected any political intent behind the hashtag. Participants were particularly quick to reject any accusation of far-right leanings. One account described accusations of Nazism as a "particularly silly" critique (document 57), and another argued that "calling #DezNat alt-right isn't just wrong, it's misleading" (document 235). Yet even this pushback sometimes implicitly acknowledged right-leaning tendencies. One defender of DezNat accused critics of using the label "alt-right" to smear "anyone who's conservative" (document 776), and another argued that people overused alt-right to describe anyone who "said mean things" but acknowledged that there are "probably no communists on the tag" (document 244). This second post should be read considering the American right's hyperbolic criticism of the American left as communists, which was also on display in one account's description of DezNat critics as "commie murmurers" (document 228), implicitly placing the movement in opposition to the left.

Other DezNat sympathizers insisted that the movement had nothing to do with partisan politics. One such account argued that "DezNat is the least

political group of Latter-day Saints on Twitter, outside of politics that grow out of sustaining church leaders" (document 1277), arguing that any shared political beliefs were a function of religious observance. Another described participants as "rarely get[ting] into conservative viewpoints … just religious ones" and argued that the group wasn't "pounding the table for or against Trump or for political solutions to Church challenges" (document 239). In the same thread, which included an argument about whether the terms "Nazi" or "alt-right" were appropriate for describing DezNat, one sympathizer argued that whatever terms critics applied, "the will of God is always right" (document 776), rejecting any political framing of the movement. Similarly, a prominent DezNat account argued that if Mormon feminists went looking for supposed "#DezNat Nazis," all they would find were Latter-day Saint men in their Sunday best (document 272). Another account suggested that if there was anything radical about DezNat, it was simply the fact that "we actually believe our religion" (document 239).

It is important to note that because of the focus of this study, we are necessarily overlooking the many tweets in our data that are indeed "just" religious in that they have no obvious *red pill* influences. If only those tweets are considered, it might be difficult to distinguish DezNat from mainstream U.S. Mormonism; this is especially true during DezNat live-tweeting of General Conference, an activity that unites a range of different Mormon identities (Greenhalgh, Staudt Willet, and Koehler 2019; Johns and Nelson 2015; Kimmons, McGuire, Stauffer, Jones, Gregson, and Austin 2017). However, this is more than a nuancing of our findings—indeed, it raises questions about overlap between the religious and political identities that DezNat is trying to separate. For example, when First Presidency member Dallin Oaks (2019) gave a General Conference talk suggesting that particular identities were eternally insignificant, one DezNat participant summarized this as "race is trivial in eternal terms" (document 713). Should this post be read as a right-wing attempt to downplay the importance of race, a summary of official Latter-day Saint teaching, or as an example of each informing the other?

Taking a different approach, some DezNat participants acknowledged troubling behavior in the hashtag but rejected critics' problematizing of that behavior. Some fell back on a "just joking" defense, including dismissing aggressive DezNat in-fighting as humor that others didn't understand (document 59). Similarly, one DezNat participant dismissed blood atonement rhetoric as "in-group humor" and "just dudes on the internet saying dumb stuff" (document 241). This same participant also suggested that "people can say whatever

they want on Twitter" (document 239), thereby arguing that the whole DezNat movement shouldn't be held accountable for individual participants' actions. Another participant took a similar tack in asking not to be judged by "the 'sins' of others" (document 288) and relativizing the issue by suggesting that he blocked accounts "on all sides who aren't Christlike" (document 465). One prominent account took this logic a step further, arguing that because people "are complicated and imperfect and multi-dimensional," DezNat observers should "value tweets, like people, individually by merit" (document 302).

Like DezNat's denials of political identity, these arguments are not entirely baseless but ultimately further complicate the question. DezNat did practice other forms of uniquely Mormon humor, including joking about hot chocolate drinking games (documents 888, 1138, 1161, 1179), making fun of General Conference rumors (documents 348, 1262), and proposing over/under wagers on temple announcements (document 1208). Thus, it is impossible to entirely rule out the possibility that references to blood atonement could be distasteful examples of Mormon humor rather than a literal embrace of right-wing violence. Likewise, it is clear from our data that not all who use the DezNat hashtag agree with each other—or even with the movement writ large. We must therefore acknowledge that the behavior of individual accounts is not necessarily representative of the hashtag. However, *red pill* communities are not only characterized by humor and irony but also actively use these tactics as "a weapon and a shield" (Wendling 2018, 75; see also Hawley 2017); that is, members can defend anything as a misunderstood joke and mock their critics for not being in the know. In short, ambiguity and humor are less likely to distinguish DezNat from red pill communities than to emphasize their similarities.

DezNat's Centering of Masculinity

DezNat participants regularly drew on anti-feminist ideas and tropes present in *red pill* communities. Ging describes the *red pill* Manosphere as characterized by multiple masculinities united by "a common preoccupation with male hegemony as it relates to heterosexual … gender relations" (2017, 653). Similarly, Bjork-James argues that the far-right and religious right both engage in "defending hegemonic heterosexuality [as] a way to defend patriarchy" (2020, 59). The overlap with Mormon cultural norms—where "masculine, manly men … ultimately become [heterosexual] husbands and fathers" (Petrey 2020, 88)—is perhaps obvious. *Red pill* communities villainize feminism

to preserve the centering of masculinity (e.g., Braithwaite 2016; Massanari and Chess 2018), and Latter-day Saint leaders have similarly expressed concern about feminism and other threats to (or failures of) Mormon masculinity (Petrey 2020).

The centering of masculinity in DezNat is evident in speculation about whether Church president Russell Nelson would use the occasion of General Conference to invite adult men of the church to participate in a "social media fast." Nelson had previously invited youth and women to forgo social media for ten days but had not yet extended such an invitation to adult men. One DezNat participant demonstrated the anticipation that existed around this question: "#Deznat You realize that our social media fast is about to start, right?" (document 677). Note that the author feels no need to say "men, you realize…": #DezNat participants are already assumed to be male. That DezNat is seen as masculine by default is further emphasized by one participant's reasoning when no such challenge was issued to men: "the brethren [i.e., Church leaders] need #DezNat to continue supporting the gospel of Jesus Christ with exactness and to fight against the enemy #Apostake & #twitterstake" (document 1291). This tweet frames DezNat as a sort of belligerent missionary organization, needed—as put by another participant—"to cry repentance to Twitter" (document 1073). Thus, like official Latter-day Saint missionary efforts, DezNat activity is clearly understood as a primarily masculine responsibility.

This default masculinity is also seen elsewhere in the way that DezNat talks about itself and its purpose. Users of the hashtag described themselves as "dudes on the internet" (document 241) who "have wives & kids and smile and wear #WhiteShirts and ties," the uniform of the churchgoing Mormon male (document 272). In response to the latter statement, one female DezNat sympathizer asked "is #DezNat only men?" (document 1324). Once reminded of the possibility, the original writer was confident that women were present. However, in modifying his description, he continued to frame women as extensions of men, referring to participants' "wives and other strong women" and describing them as "#DezNat Relief Society" (document 1324), a reference to the Latter-day Saint women's organization that was until recently described as an auxiliary to the exclusively-male priesthood governance of the church.

Ideal Masculinity. DezNat participants described their normative experience as not only masculinity but a certain type of masculinity. Implicit in this perspective is a framing of DezNat's alleged superiority over progressive Mormons in terms of fidelity to gender—not just fidelity to doctrine. Consider, for exam-
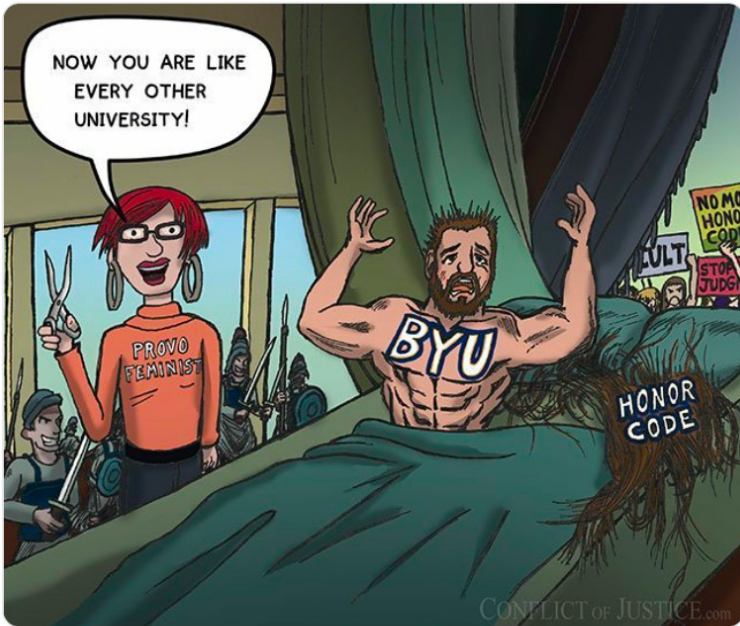
Figure 4. #DezNat tweet containing an anti-feminist cartoon critical of BYU protesters.

ple, the following tweet: "If progmos are always so upset about #DezNat being 'mean', how do they feel about people being passive aggressive?" (document 242). The author's scare quotes around "mean" seem to echo religious conservatives' "nostalgic vision of aggressive, even violent masculinity" (Du Mez 2020, 54), whereas the condemnation of "passive-aggressiveness" is perhaps seen as a damning, feminine combination of softness and shrewishness. Thus, when, further in the thread, another DezNat participant describes passive-aggressiveness as the "currency" of progmos (document 242), they are criticizing both progressive Mormonism and perceived feminine values by comparing them to each other.

Similar overlap can be found in a DezNat-tweeted cartoon (see Figure 4) depicting protests of the BYU Honor Code that began shortly before General Conference (document 194). The Honor Code consists of strict rules of conduct that govern not only academic behavior but also gender performance (through dress and grooming) and sexual activity (Waterman and Kagel, 1998). The far-reaching and strictly enforced nature of the code has raised periodic controversy, including for its forbidding of same-sex dating and for BYU's treatment of victims of sexual assault as violators of school rules (see, e.g., Tanner and Miller 2019). However, DezNat participants in our data rejected that controversy and defended the Honor Code's institutionalization of Latter-day Saint views on gender and sexuality. Thus, in this cartoon, female Honor Code protestors are branded as "Provo feminists" and made to play the role of the Biblical figure Delilah, who betrayed Samson (here representing BYU) by cutting the long hair that is the source of his power. In the context of the cartoon, the traitorous haircut represents the removal of the BYU Honor Code, though the metaphor is somewhat muddled by the fact that the Honor Code prohibits men from wearing long hair. The Encyclopedia Britannica notes that the name Delilah has "become synonymous with a voluptuous, treacherous woman." While DezNat certainly believed women protesting the Honor Code to be treacherous, this Delilah is not voluptuous so much as short-haired and flat-chested, an "angry androgyny" (Massanari and Chess 2018, 539) understood to be "unattractive, at least according to hegemonic standards of … femininity" (p. 531). This contrasts with the half-naked, ultra-masculine figure representing both Samson and BYU, whose also-Honor-Code-violating shirtlessness is presumably forgiven because of his impossibly muscled figure. Once again, faithfulness to hegemonic gender norms and to Latter-day Saint teachings and institutions are intertwined with each other; this pattern has a particular history in the context of the BYU Honor Code.

Specific examples of ideal masculine figures are also present in our data. One DezNat participant (document 12) jokingly suggested that Bryce Harper—a successful, attractive professional baseball player—might be called as an apostle. In another tweet (document 1468), this same account compared DezNat participants to Indiana Jones, a film character who combines physical strength, sex appeal, and intelligence. A separate series of tweets similarly emphasized health and fitness as part of ideal masculinity. DezNat participants discussed their workouts (document 1335) and reported attempts to go without soda (document 1420), perhaps recalling ties between the Word of Wisdom and Mormon masculinity (see, e.g., Hoyt and Patterson 2011; Tos-

cano 2020). In another conversation (document 1357), one DezNat participant summarized a General Conference sermon by Church president Russell Nelson as encouraging men to lose weight and dress better, suggesting that this was harder and more important than any social media fast.

Other tweets indicated the importance of virility to this masculine ideal. In one series of tweets (document 1437), sympathizers argued that "DezNat people are better in bed" and quoted a conservative humorist's quip that no one has fantasies about being "sexually ravished by someone dressed as a liberal" (a rare, indirect embrace of DezNat's political reputation). Later in the thread (document 1443), participants also linked the ideal masculine with having children, boasted about "the art of multiple orgasms" associated with the *vitamin pill*; and interpreted the previously mentioned Nelson sermon as counseling men to "put out more" for their wives.

This ideal masculinity was sometimes contrasted with *subordinate* approaches to masculinity. In conservative evangelical (Du Mez 2020) and Latter-day Saint circles (Hoyt 2020), it is the role of men to lead and the role of women to submit. Thus, when one DezNat partisan—Charles—drew the ire of the rest of the movement, one tweet bemoaned that he only "lasted 5 days after being engaged to a feminist" (document 39), implying that this couple had inappropriately traded gender roles. Another participant, responding to a request to provide examples of women in DezNat, quipped that they "used to have Charles … We miss Charles dearly" (document 1324).

This metaphorical emasculation of the *subordinate* male was echoed in one DezNat partisan's joking about the possibility of divine emasculation (document 1399). They referenced a 1963 speculation by then-apostle (and future Church president) Joseph Fielding Smith that sexual characteristics were only eternal for residents of the celestial kingdom, the highest tier of heaven in Latter-day Saint theology. Because the Latter-day Saint theology of the afterlife presumes embodiment and—more ambiguously—sexuality for all humanity, Smith's speculation was an attempt to rule out the possibility that "unmarried males and females [could] have illicit sex in the afterlife" (Petrey 2020, 43). Although Smith's 20th-century speculations stand in tension with 21st-century Latter-day Saint (and DezNat) views about the eternality of gender (officially understood as synonymous with biological sex), they remained useful for this DezNat participant to argue that only the most God-fearing of men would continue in their manliness (and the most God-fearing of women in their femininity).

For all of DezNat's embrace of masculine excess, the example of Charles demonstrates that there remains what Toscano (2020) describes as "tensions in the notion of 'true masculinity' that Mormon men are urged to achieve" (581). For example, Haglund writes of crying as a "ritual [act] among Mormon men" (2012, paragraph 3; see also Brooks 2010), noting that it is common for men to shed tears while giving sermons. Thus, DezNat participants were not shy to suggest that they were crying in one thread responding to a specific sermon (document 398). Despite clear *red pill* influences on DezNat, these distinctly Mormon views of masculinity should not be overlooked. Indeed, DezNat's disagreement with Charles was focused on a discussion about the appropriate level of physical intimacy for an engaged couple. Much of the argument took place outside the timeframe of this study, but our data suggest that the DezNat consensus fell along the lines set by one participant (document 35) who argued for "exact obedience" to General Authorities' warning against "passionate kissing" before marriage. In short, if DezNat participants were to embody sexual prowess and virility, they were to limit those talents to the bonds of matrimony; if they were to wield aggression and violence, they were to also retain some level of subordination to their ecclesiastical leaders.

Femininity as Deference to Masculinity. DezNat's ideal feminine was also expected to be subordinate to masculine Church leaders—but not in the same way. When Church president Russell Nelson encouraged married men to prioritize their wives and take their advice, one female DezNat participant reframed this as a feminine "responsibility to become more temperate and wise" because women "can't help men get better by just existing" (document 753). If the default masculinity of the DezNat space is seen as an acceptable stepping-stone to the masculine ideal, this tweet demonstrates the way that the default ("just existing") feminine is seen as deficient and needing to be overcome—in this case, by self-improvement at the invitation of and for the benefit of men. Similarly, another DezNat participant (document 1156; see also fig. 5) distinguished between "Latter-day Saint Women," who were grateful to Nelson for their social media fast, and "Mormon Waahmen," who complained that men were not asked to do the same. This tweet frames reasonable default behavior (asking about a discrepancy in treatment) as a corrupt femininity, as whining rather than valid criticism. In contrast, deferring to the ideal masculine serves as a redemption of the default feminine. When one DezNat participant tweeted about his wife's interest in apostle Neil Andersen's remarks on gender roles, another participant replied, "your wife is an immediate follow then." The wor-

Latter-day Saint Women: "I'm so grateful that Pres. Nelson invited us to do a social media fast. I learned so much."

Mormon Wahmen: "The men werent told to do social media fast? No fair!"

#WomenvWahmen #KnowtheDifference

#GeneralConference #DezNat #TwitterStake

25 Likes

Figure 5. #DezNat tweet mocking women critical of gender disparities in Nelson's ministry.

thiness of the participant's wife was implied to be a function of her acceptance of Church leadership and teachings (document 594).

A similar example can be found in tweets that responded to one of the few sermons given at General Conference by a woman. Because General Conference speakers are selected from the leadership of the Church, and because Church leadership is overwhelmingly male, there has long been a severe gender imbalance in General Conference sermons. For example, even setting aside the all-male priesthood session, the general sessions of the April 2019 General Conference saw 23 sermons given by men and two by women. Although Mormon feminists have often expressed concerns about this disparity, DezNat participants in our data (unsurprisingly) did not. However, Becky Craven's talk—which emphasized obedience to church leaders—prompted responses like "Okay, yes more women speakers please lol" (document 390). That is, more women speakers would be desirable so long as they shored up masculine authority in the Church. The same account went on to repeatedly refer to Craven as a "matron saint" of #DezNat (documents 387, 755), a play on the concept of protecting and interceding patron saints in Roman Catholicism, Orthodox Christianity, and Anglicanism. In those traditions, the term "patron saint" applies to both male and female saints, but this variation on the term intentionally invokes femininity, highlighting that there is something particular and different in having a female who protects and intercedes for DezNat.

> The homosexualy community seems to cause so many problems everywhere they go. They state endlessly they just want to be treated equally, but it will never be enough. Look how they view conference and the gospel, it ALWAYS has to be about their issues. #DezNat

9 Likes

Figure 6. #DezNat tweet depicting queer Latter-day Saints as monopolizing General Conference.

Queerness as Threat. Homosexuality has long been seen in in Mormon circles as a corruption of ideal masculinity (Petrey 2020), and queer approaches to gender challenge the deferential binary at the core of DezNat thinking. In keeping with these views, DezNat persistently frames queerness as a threat to the Church and to civilization more broadly. Affiliated accounts depicted a prominent queer Mormon as the devil (document 1446) and accused him of trying to supplant God and invite worship of himself (document 649). Other tweets described him and associates as "evil" (document 1166), suggested they had been "raked over the coals … in #GeneralConference" (document 779), and argued—quoting a General Conference sermon—that "time is running out" for them to repent (document 1148). More broadly, DezNat accounts described queer communities as posing an aggressive, unrelenting threat, taking over the agenda of the Church (document 1345; see also Figure 6) and never being satisfied with changes (document 246). Continuing in this vein, one DezNat tweet quoted former Church president Spencer Kimball describing homosexuality as a rampant, threatening evil (document 1410).

Harassment and Trolling of Gendered Communities

Masculine-oriented *red pill* communities perceive feminist—and often queer—communities as threats to masculinity and therefore as legitimate targets for harassment and trolling (e.g., Braithwaite 2016; Marwick and Caplan 2018). DezNat engaged in similar harassment; for example, one account used implicit references to the Latter-day Saint endowment ceremony to compare

one feminist to the devil (document 255). Another account provided (publicly known) information about another feminist so that DezNat could "do with that information what they will" (document 1372). This can be understood as a junior version of *doxxing*, the *red pill*-beloved practice of releasing private information about a person in order to coordinate harassment (though we note that activists have also doxxed certain anonymous DezNat accounts). In the rest of this section, we describe two sustained instances of DezNat harassment that correspond with *red pill* patterns.

Social Media Fasts. In the mid 2010s, feminist communities responded to accusations of misandry with joking references to "drinking male tears" (Marwick and Caplan 2018), and by Donald Trump's 2016 victory, the meme of "drinking liberal tears" had been reappropriated by members of *red pill* communities (Duncan 2017). In the leadup to the April 2019 priesthood session of General Conference, one DezNat partisan expressed hope that Nelson would not challenge men to a social media fast, "not because I don't wanna give up social media, but because I want to drink the tears of apoplectic feminists" (document 672). When his hope was realized, the user announced that "Conference dreams do come true" (document 748) and asked, "has the meltdown started yet?" (document 760). Later, after complaints about the discrepancy had begun, he quoted one such tweet, crowing that "Feminists need some new moves. It's almost not even fun anymore #waaaambulance" (document 1070). In these tweets, he included several Mormon hashtags—including the official General Conference hashtag—in his tweets, eager to share his glee with most of Mormon Twitter.

Feminist and Queer Events. Preceding and presaging the public emergence of the alt-right, Gamergate was a *red pill* movement that aggressively and systematically targeted feminist critics of video games and pop culture (Braithwaite 2016; Massanari and Chess 2018; Niewert 2016; Wendling 2018). In a similar vein, one DezNat account used threatening language to troll two feminist events happening around the same time as the April 2019 General Conference. One such event was a retreat for writers at *The Exponent*, a Mormon blog and feminist periodical. Nancy Ross, a regular contributor to the blog and an ordained minister in Community of Christ, tweeted about her plans to prepare communion for the retreat, drawing attention to her denomination's ordination of women. In response to perceived transgressions of gender and orthodoxy, this participant quoted Ross's tweet with a threat to crash the party: "See

you there #DezNat" (document 489). Through "likes" and replies, five other DezNat accounts demonstrated their support for the trolling.

This same DezNat partisan used verbatim language to troll the Twitter account of a Utah-based Women's March organization organizing an event in support of LGBTQ+ Latter-day Saints (document 260). Seemingly in response, multiple accounts associated with the organization expressed concern that DezNat partisans would disrupt the event and provided an email address where supporters of the organization could request training to help defuse potential incidents. The troll responded with an extended thread demonstrating a combination of 1) mocking the organization's concern ("Uh oh #DezNat might show up   "; document 280); 2) accusing it of being the persecutor ("Creating a boogeyman out of people you don't know doesn't seem very tolerant"; document 1317); 3) continuing the trolling that had caused the concern in the first place ("Training requested!"; document 1317); and 4) mocking the idea of the training ("Because of the vigorous email training we received, I was able to find and eject all those smiling #DezNat agitators"; document 1317).

Discussion and Implications

As described in the introduction to this article, much of the popular and media discourse around the DezNat movement has focused on whether it can accurately be described as "alt-right." Our findings in this study contribute to this discussion in two ways. First, they establish that during the timeframe of this study, there were regular and consistent references to far-right individuals and ideas. Second, they broaden the question; rather than focus on alt-right influences, we have identified a breadth of *red pill* tropes present in DezNat activity—including those related to masculinity, anti-feminism, and queerphobia. These two contributions suggest that it is disingenuous for DezNat participants and defenders to describe the movement as merely about Latter-day Saint orthodoxy.

However, it is important to note that strictly speaking, our findings do not answer the question being asked. That is, while we have found ample evidence of *red pill* tropes within the DezNat hashtag, we stop short of determining whether DezNat is conclusively a *red pill* movement. Indeed, the *affinity space* framework we have employed (Gee 2005; 2017) intentionally focuses on meaning-making practices present in porous, overlapping spaces rather than asking difficult questions about formal membership within or sharp boundaries between those spaces. This stance should not be misinterpreted as a de-

fense of DezNat. Indeed, we have documented how the movement uses the ambiguity of online spaces to defend itself from controversy, which further demonstrates the overlap between DezNat participation and *red pill* ideas. Rather, this stance is a concession that the very nature of online spaces—as described by Gee and Twitter researchers in particular (Greenhalgh, Rosenberg, and Wolf 2016; Kosenko, Winderman, and Pugh 2019)—makes "hashtag ontology" an unproductive pursuit.

Yet, if the affinity space framework refrains from certain observations, it is only to draw attention to other phenomena. Thus, we set aside the question being asked by many DezNat observers to ask other questions that we argue are more important for understanding the movement in the context of (online) Mormonism. Whatever the ontology and purpose of the DezNat movement or its individual members, the presence of meaning-making practices common to both *red pill* communities and to mainstream Mormonism suggests that this hashtag is a space in which the affinity spaces associated with both groups overlap. While this conclusion is limited to discussions about a single Twitter hashtag, our framework also invites us to ask about other shared practices and overlapping spaces. For example, when BYU religion professor Hank Smith used his Twitter account to call a gay BYU student "Korihor" (a reference to a Book of Mormon anti-Christ; see Tanner 2021), it was in implicit approval of DezNat participants' criticism of the same student. Smith's seeming support for a DezNat argument thereby raises questions about the extent to which mainstream conservative spaces on Mormon Twitter overlap with DezNat—which, in turn, clearly overlaps with far-right and aggressively anti-feminist spaces on the internet.

When, the following year, Smith approvingly (but seemingly ignorantly) endorsed a white nationalist Twitter thread praising Mormonism (see BHodges 2022), this raised further questions about overlap. (It should be noted that Smith apologized for both events and deleted associated tweets.) It is understandable that a mainstream Latter-day Saint Twitter user would approve of the "run-of-the-mill LDS exceptionalism" (BHodges 2022, paragraph 6) present in the thread, but it remains concerning that a BYU professor would not be able to identify the boundaries between Latter-day Saint thinking and far-right thinking. As previously described, however, the Latter-day Saint leadership has been loath to define these boundaries in the context of Ezra Taft Benson (Harris 2020), leaving Church members unpracticed at doing so. Similarly, in the context of the 2022 television series *Under the Banner of Heaven*, some Lat-

ter-day Saint academics specifically identified DezNat in public commentary, seeing the group's rise as a consequence of the Church's resistance to acknowledging and wrestling with its history of violence (Petrey 2022; Stack and Noyce 2022). Finally, Brooks (2020) has argued that Mormonism's shoring up of prophetic authority—the public and explicit goal of DezNat—is an important component of its complicity in white supremacy. In short, the DezNat hashtag (and related examples) suggest that the consequence of all these actions has been to allow for continued overlap between Latter-day Saint and *red pill* affinity spaces. While the Church has described DezNat as neither affiliated nor endorsed by Latter-day Saint leadership (see Stack 2021), such a statement also stops short of condemnation, allowing for further ambiguity—and overlap of spaces.

Perhaps more pressing are questions about overlap between the approaches to gender and sexuality advanced by DezNat, *red pill* communities, and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Despite tactical ambiguity regarding their past positions, Latter-day Saint leaders' recent condemnations of white supremacy and political violence suggest an intent to distance themselves from the modern far-right. Indeed, a Latter-day Saint spokesperson cited these condemnations when asked for comment on DezNat (Stack 2021). However, this framing sidesteps an important emphasis of this paper—that *red pill* movements are broader than just racist and political views and that DezNat draws from all this breadth. DezNat participants imply—or outright argue—that Latter-day Saint doctrine justifies their harassment and trolling of female and queer Mormons, and official Church distancing from the movement has not said anything to the contrary. Indeed, despite tentative efforts to back down from explicit anti-feminism (e.g., Stack 2013), Mormonism has both "clung to and struggled to discard in recent years" (197) the anti-feminism it embraced in the 1980s, as Radke-Moss argues (2020, 197). While it would be inaccurate to describe aggressive—and often violent—*red pill* views on gender and sexuality as identical to Latter-day Saint teachings, our conceptual framework for this study invites us to consider where these broader social spaces overlap—and our findings suggest that DezNat participants already see compatibility between the two.

Because our work has emphasized ambiguity and overlap, future work may benefit from an approach that teases out more distinct patterns related to red pill views within Mormonism. Whitehead and Perry (2020) provide a possible model for this work in their exploration of Christian nationalist views in

the United States. Echoing the various overlaps between red pill views, mainstream conservative Mormonism, and DezNat, they have demonstrated that only about 7% of (U.S.) Americans entirely reject Christian nationalism and only about 1% fully embrace it, with the remaining, vast majority falling somewhere along a "widely distributed" (9) spectrum. However, these statistics are only possible thanks to a clear operationalization of "Christian nationalism," which Whitehead and Perry demonstrate to be "intimately intertwined with" (154) but ultimately distinct from race, racism, partisan affiliation, or denominational membership. Being able to make these measurements and distinctions in the context of Mormonism would certainly lend further insight into phenomena like DezNat.

Conclusion

Social media platforms such as Twitter allow Latter-day Saints to engage in a wider variety of practices and display a wider variety of identities than Latter-day Saint institutions (Greenhalgh, Staudt Willet, and Koehler 2019). In this study, we have considered the DezNat movement, which presents itself as a defender of orthodoxy but which we have shown to be heavily influenced by the far-right and anti-feminist ideas present in online *red pill* communities. A number of studies have considered the role of online spaces in fostering a liberal Mormonism; participants in these spaces are often in open disagreement with Church leaders and outside of the approved bounds of Latter-day Saint faith. In contrast, this examination of DezNat highlights ambiguity present in Latter-day Saint boundary policing. Participants believe their *red pill* practices to be compatible with Latter-day Saint orthodoxy, and Church leadership has made few, if any, explicit statements that would suggest otherwise. In this way, DezNat raises important questions about the boundaries of identity and practice in the contemporary—and future—Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

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Not Before Jesus Comes, If Ever: Mormon Views on When Women Will Receive the Priesthood

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While there has been agitation in recent years among some members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS Church) for women to be ordained to the priesthood, research has established that the leaders of the religion and most members continue to oppose the idea. Drawing on data from an online purposive sample (n=49,568), we examine how likely members of the LDS Church are to think that women will be ordained to the priesthood and contrast that likelihood with a similar estimation of when Jesus will return and the leadership of the LDS Church will call on some members to move to Jackson County, Missouri in preparation for the Second Coming. Our results suggest that the Mormons in our sample believe that it is more likely that they will move to Missouri to greet Jesus than that women will receive the priesthood.

There has long been tension within religions over the question of whether women should be ordained (Chaves 1997). In pluralistic countries where religious affiliation is a choice, whether religions allow women to be ordained reflects their positioning in the religious marketplace: conservative religions tend not to allow women to be ordained, in contrast to more progressive religions. Within any given denomination, the specific forces that advocate for the ordination of women vary. The present study examines the views of members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS Church) regarding gender, ordination, and power. While some aspects of this study are unique to the LDS Church, we draw on research that extends beyond the scope of a single denomination.

One framework for understanding religion and gender is offered by Woodhead (2007), who proposes two dimensions to understand religions and their relationship with gender. The first dimension varies from mainstream to marginal religions, in which mainstream religion is an important part of existing power structures, and marginal religion deviates from power structures. The second dimension ranges from confirmatory to challenging the current social order. Crossing these two dimensions results in four quadrants that reflect different relations religion may have with gender in a given context. The first quadrant, *consolidating*, occurs when religion is mainstream and confirms the existing gender order. The *tactical* quadrant describes religion that is intertwined with the existing gender order but seeks to open access to power, a strategy of "change from within." Third, *questing* conveys change from external forces, when the religion is marginal (not very well-integrated into the power structure) but is used as a means to access gendered power. Finally, *countercultural* refers to religion that is marginal and is used to redistribute power within a gendered society.

 This typology is relative to a denomination, congregation, or religion's social context. For instance, a denomination's category would vary dramatically based on whether it was located in highly egalitarian metropolitan Sweden or in a community in rural El Salvador where *machismo* and gender inequality are more pervasive (World Economic Forum 2020). A progressive religion that allows women to be ordained and serve in all the same roles as men would be categorized as *countercultural* in El Salvador but *consolidating* in Sweden given the context.

Additionally, a given religion, denomination, or even congregation may demonstrate more than one of these four relations. For example, Woodhead (2007) cites Brasher's (1998) study of women in conservative megachurches, which revealed that women were more likely to be drawn to them for their small, women-led groups than for the large worship services that people associate with megachurches. The same was true of Griffith's (1997) study of the Women's Aglow Fellowship, a charismatic evangelical movement in which women organized prayer and healing groups to meet their needs. These represent, in Woodhead's framework, a *tactical* change in which women who were relatively disempowered within the religious group formed a parallel organization within that religious group that offered them the ability to "deal with the high costs of their subordination" while the formal power structure remained in place (Woodhead 2007, 574).

Women's access to formal power via priesthood ordination is another context that illustrates the processes Woodhead (2007) describes. Women's ordination carries significant symbolic value, is a subject of conflict within many denominations, and is affected by both extra- and intra-denominational forces (Chaves 1997). The LDS Church provides an interesting example in which to apply Woodhead's framework. Priesthood that aligns with a gender hierarchy is deeply ingrained in Mormon life, practice, and belief, and forms an important part of Latter-day Saint identity (Toscano 2020). As of 2023, the LDS Church does not ordain women to its lay priesthood (Cragun et al. 2016). However, some groups and individuals within the church are actively trying to change the gender order, whether in subtle or radical ways (Shepherd, Anderson, and Shepherd 2015). As a result, the LDS Church, at least in the US context, could be considered either *consolidating* or *tactical* (or both), depending on which element of the religion is under consideration. The all-male upper leadership—the Apostles and First Presidency—continue to advocate for the existing gender order even while some within the religion support changing it. Understanding the priesthood and its history regarding women's roles in the church offers some necessary context for this study.

Mormons believe the priesthood is the power to act in God's name (Keogh 2016), and only those who hold the priesthood are eligible for important leadership roles within the church (Peterson 1992; Hammarberg 2013). Patriarchy is deeply embedded in the structure and ethos of the LDS Church (Kline 2013). Bushman (2020) notes that in 1967 prayers in sacrament services were to be given only by men. Three years later the church placed the women's Relief Society under the budgetary oversight of the male priesthood as part of the church's "correlation" effort, so that women no longer controlled the organization's finances (Hatch 1975). Although the policy regarding prayers in sacrament services was later rescinded (Gardner 1978), norms within LDS culture made clear that the male priesthood remained the center of power. This era also saw increased criticism of the women's liberation movement by LDS leaders. In 1971 LDS apostle Thomas Monson, who later would become president of the church, wrote in the Ensign, the church's official monthly magazine, an article titled "The Women's Liberation Movement: Liberation or Deception?" concluding it was the latter.

At this same time, some Mormon women began to assert their independence and agitate for greater attention to the gendered power structure of the religion. For instance, a group of women edited a special issue of *Dialogue: A*

Journal of Mormon Thought that was dedicated to exploring women's issues. That group also established the *Exponent II* newspaper, which continues to explore women's perspectives in the LDS Church.

When the Equal Rights Amendment was proposed again in the 1970s, LDS Church leadership saw a socio-cultural threat and organized "grassroots" opposition to the amendment's ratification in Utah. After the amendment fell short of ratification, apostle Ezra Taft Benson clearly linked the masculine priesthood with obedience to the institutional power structure when he proclaimed that church members should place their trust in "the living prophet and the First Presidency—follow them and be blessed—reject them and suffer" (Benson 1981, in Bushman 2020, 161). Benson and other church leaders continued to promote traditional gender roles, encouraging women to prioritize home over career (Benson 1987), a message reemphasized by Apostle Boyd Packer (1993), who warned listeners not to follow "alternate voices." Shortly after Packer's speech, six high-profile intellectuals were excommunicated, five of whom had spoken in favor of feminism.

Church leaders' concerns about sex roles and gender continue to the present day. Political intervention opposing same-sex marriage efforts in Hawaii in the 1990s and California in 2008 illustrate this (Bushman 2020; Ostler 2021; Petrey 2020). While the Hawaii case was in the news, the church issued "The Family: A Proclamation to the World" in 1995 to further concretize gender roles. This document continues to be cited and has achieved nearly canonical status, although it has not been voted on as the "law of common consent" would require for new scripture (Doctrine and Covenants 26:2).

Although LDS Church leaders have voiced concern through the years about changing the gendered power structure, research addressing such changes in other religious institutions shows positive effects associated with female clergy. Research by Knoll and Bolin (2018) shows that women who grew up in churches with female clergy fare better educationally and show better psychological well-being than women who did not, even after controlling for other factors. They also fare better economically and are more likely to be in professional jobs.

There is little doubt that ordaining women to the priesthood would trigger a seismic change in the culture and polity of Mormonism (White Jr. and White 2002; Chaves 1997). Nevertheless, the prohibition against ordaining women has become controversial in recent years, and activists now lobby the church to change this policy (Shepherd, Anderson, and Shepherd 2015). In

short, despite some members' *tactical* efforts to bargain with the patriarchal order of the LDS Church, the religion remains squarely in the *consolidating* element of Woodhead's typology—it reinforces and reproduces the historically gendered power structure of the US.

The governing church hierarchy has resisted calls to ordain women. Prior research finds that 80 to 90 percent of rank-and-file Mormons also oppose the ordination of women (Campbell, Green, and Monson 2014; Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life 2009). However, these studies do not assess what Mormons think about the likelihood that women will be ordained to the priesthood in the future. Mormons believe in a doctrine of "continuing revelation" and expect church policy to change and evolve (White and White 1980; Mauss 1994). For example, the church once allowed polygamy, but this was abandoned in theory in 1890 and in practice in 1904 (Van Wagoner 1989). The church once prohibited people of African descent from holding the priesthood, but this policy was discontinued in 1978 (Mauss 2003).

Historians and social scientists argue that church policy often changes in response to social pressure (Prince and Wright 2005; Chaves 1997). Mormons believe that these policy changes are directed by God via divine revelations to the church hierarchy (Hammarberg 2013). One study shows that rank-and-file Mormons would support the ordination of women if the governing hierarchy announced that the change had been mandated by God via revelation (Cragun et al. 2016).

In this paper we investigate whether Mormons anticipate a change in the policy prohibiting women from holding the priesthood. We do this with a series of survey questions, and by comparing respondents' perceptions of the likelihood of female ordination with the occurrence of another unlikely event, one that Mormon leaders have prophesied will occur in the future. This comparison highlights the degree to which rank-and-file Mormons expect a change in the priesthood ordination policy.

Divine Revelation and Mormon Theology

Mormons expect revelation from God to trigger some momentous future events (McConkie 1966), some of which would transform the church as thoroughly and dramatically as would ordaining women to the lay priesthood. For example, in the 1830s Mormons built settlements in Jackson County, Missouri. Joseph Smith, the religion's founder, proclaimed that this county—situated near the geographic center of the continent—would be the "center place" of

Zion. He taught that this would be the site of Jesus's return, where Jesus would govern the earth throughout his millennial reign (see Doctrine and Covenants 29:7–11; 42:9; 45:65–75; 57:1–3; and 84:2–3). However, shortly after founding these settlements, the Mormons were expelled (Bowman 2012). Joseph Smith vowed that they would one day return to inhabit the area, and future revelation from God would determine when they would reclaim the land. These events are slated to occur sometime before the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, and the prophecy is canonized in Mormon scripture (Johnson 1992).

Jackson County became less central to the church as the nineteenth century progressed. Shortly after Joseph Smith was murdered by a hostile mob in 1844, the Mormons fled across the Great Plains to escape persecution. In 1847 they founded what would become Salt Lake City (Bowman 2012). The church grew rapidly, and its headquarters and bureaucracy became firmly ensconced in Salt Lake City. Today there are over 1 million self-identified Mormons in Utah, and over 2 million in the other 49 states (Phillips 2018; Phillips et al. 2011; Lawson and Cragun 2012), estimates that are substantially lower than the members claimed by the LDS Church leadership. Thus, a wholesale return to Jackson County presents logistical hurdles that appear insurmountable. For this reason, church leaders have attempted to reframe the prophecy as something limited or metaphorical (Doxey 1979). The church's propensity for buying property and building temples around the globe can be interpreted as a sign that the hierarchy does not expect a revelation on the matter soon. Belief in some sort of literal repatriation to Jackson County persists among some Mormons, but this doctrine is rarely invoked and is now eschatological lore.

Given that a return to Jackson County is deemphasized in modern Mormonism and a revelation mandating such a return would have untold human and financial costs, this eccentric doctrine provides a useful point of comparison with a potential change in the lay priesthood to permit the ordination of women. Ordaining women would fundamentally alter the polity of the church, but the policy could be changed by the prophet at any time with fewer logistical issues and less expense than returning to Jackson County. Do rank-and-file Mormons think that the ordination of women is more or less likely than a mass migration to Jackson County, Missouri?

One theoretical framework that may be useful to understand Latter-day Saints' perspectives on these two issues is construal-level theory, which proposes that people construe (think about) an event or stimulus more abstractly as that event or stimulus becomes more psychologically distant or removed

(Trope and Liberman 2010). A meta-analysis of 106 papers reporting 267 experiments testing construal-level theory found the effect of psychological distance on abstraction to be robust (Soderberg et al. 2015). People think more abstractly about events that may occur in the distant future. Or, to frame it inversely, they think more concretely about events that are likely to occur in the near future. This is because, with more concrete limiting factors present, it is more difficult to think about the event abstractly. Abstract events, in contrast, have fewer concrete limiting factors, so people are better able to imagine them happening.

We can apply this reasoning to the question of women's ordination and the Second Coming of Jesus. While the LDS Church does hold as doctrine that Jesus will return and, at least historically, has espoused the idea that some of the church faithful will be called to move to Missouri for this event, it is likely that church members experience a great deal of psychological distance regarding this prophecy. This is true for several reasons: (a) Christ's return will take place at some unknown point in the future; (b) LDS teachings do not specify which individuals will be called to participate; (c) it is supposed to occur in a location where very few members of the LDS Church currently live—Jackson County, Missouri; and (d) eschatological themes are infrequently addressed by the leadership in General Conference (Shepherd and Shepherd 2015).

Given the psychological distance for this event, it is possible that Latter-day Saints think about a call to move to Jackson County to prepare for the Second Coming with a high level of construal (or very abstractly). In contrast, LDS Church doctrine regarding the role of women in the religion is not abstract at all. It is a lived, daily experience for all members as they can observe: (x) males in leadership positions, (y) males blessing and passing the sacrament, and (z) males being the primary conduits for ascertaining the will of God. The gendered power structure detailed by Woodhead (2007) is "here and now," which results in a very low level of construal; it is concrete and part of the lived, everyday experience of Latter-day Saints. As a result, we hypothesize that Latter-day Saints will be more likely to think that members of the LDS Church will be called to return to Jackson County, Missouri at some point in the future than they will be to think that women will be allowed to hold the priesthood. The present data allow a comparison of rank-and-file Mormons' thinking regarding these two events.

Methods

Data for this study derive from an online purposive sample of Mormons. Links to the survey were posted in a variety of locations on the Internet, including Facebook Groups, blogs, and forums covering a wide spectrum of Mormonism-related websites, on 16 November 2014. The response was much larger than anticipated, leading us to close the survey early (December 4) rather than keep it up for an entire month as initially planned, with 71,309 completed responses. After data cleaning, elimination of incomplete responses or responses from outside the USA, we were left with a total of 57,432 respondents. However, close to ten thousand respondents were not current members of the LDS Church. Since we are interested only in how members of the LDS Church think about these issues, we restricted the sample to just the 49,568 individuals who reported they identified as LDS and were on the membership roster of the LDS Church. For more information on the study methodology, see Cragun and Nielsen (2015). Participants were asked their age (in categories), level of educational attainment, race/ethnicity, gender, income (in ordered categories), and political views. We also asked participants how active they were in the LDS Church. Descriptive statistics for all these variables are presented in Table 1 on the following page.

Two questions included in the survey are of primary interest for this paper, each with four time variations. The first question asked about the likelihood of Mormon women receiving the priesthood: "How likely is it that some time [within x time period] the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles will receive a revelation allowing women to be ordained to the priesthood?" To gain a sense of how attitudes might shift by time, we varied the text within the brackets with four options: (1) within the next 10 years, (2) within the next 20 years, (3) within the next 50 years, and (4) in the future. Participants were randomly assigned to answer a question with one of the four time periods and only saw that question. Participants were not asked about the likelihood of ordination in any of the other time periods. A total of 48,496 individuals responded to one of the variations of this question.

The second question of interest in the survey asked about gathering to Missouri: "How likely is it that sometime [within x time period] the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles will receive a revelation asking members of the church to gather in Jackson County, Missouri in preparation for Jesus Christ's return?" Like the first question about gender, the wording in the bracket above used the same variations and participants were randomly

assigned to see just one of the four time options. In order to keep the length of the survey relatively short, not all participants were assigned to see the question about returning to Jackson County, though 22,605 participants were shown this question and answered it (~ 5,000 per condition).

For both questions, the response options included: Less than 1% chance, 1–10%, 10–20%, 20–30%, 30–40%, 40–50%, 50–60%, 60–70%, 70–80%, 80–90%, 90–99%, and more than 99%. To simplify the presentation, we collapsed these options into: less than 1% chance, 1 to 50% chance, and greater than 50% chance.

Table 1

Variable	Category	Percentage	Variable	Category	Percentage
Age			**Gender**		
	18-25	20.2		Male	27.6
	26-30	22.6		Female	72.2
	31-40	33.5		Other	0.2
	41-50	11.5			
	51-60	7.8	**Income**		
	61-70	3.5		Less than $10,000	5.5
	71+	0.9		$10,001 to $25,000	9.5
				$25,001 to $50,000	19.9
Educational Attainment				$50,000 to $75,000	21.6
	Did not finish high school	.2		$75,001 to $100,000	18.5
	High school	3.3		$100,001 to $250,000	21.2
	Some college	26.6		$250,001+	3.8
	College graduate	47.4			
	Master's Degree	16.3	**Political views**		
	PhD	2.5		Very Conservative	7.9
	JD/MD	3.7		Conservative	27.6
				Moderate, but lean conservative	29.2
Race / Ethnicity				Moderate	12.5
	White, non-Hispanic	93.2		Moderate, but lean liberal	11.4
	Black, non-Hispanic	.4		Liberal	5.9
	Hispanic	2.6		Very liberal	1.5
	Asian	.8		Other	3.8
	Native American	.6			
	Pacific Islander	.5	**Religious Activity level**		
	Other	2.0		Very active	79.0
				Somewhat active	14.5
				Not too active	4.2
				Not at all active	2.2

Omitted, "prefer not to answer" and "don't know" responses are not shown in this table.

Table 2. Percent Chance of Women Being Ordained

	Within 10 Years	Within 20 Years	Within 50 Years	In the Future
Greater than 50%	.5	1.0	1.7	3.0
1% to 50%	21.1	20.0	20.6	22.0
Less than 1%	78.4	78.9	77.6	75.0

Results

To illustrate the results, we provide two tables. Table 2 shows the proportion of members of the LDS Church in our survey who believe women will be allowed to receive the priesthood within the four different time periods. As Table 2 illustrates, there is only a marginal increase in the percentage of Mormons in our study who think that women will be ordained as the time period increases; 0.5% believe there is at least a 50% chance that women will be ordained within the next 10 years, while just 3.0% believe there is at least a 50% chance that women will be ordained in the more distant future.

Table 3 shows the percentages of Mormons in our survey who think that members of the LDS Church will be asked to move to Jackson County, Missouri in preparation for the Second Coming of Jesus within different projected time periods. In the 10-year window, the percentage of Mormons in our sample is very similar to the percentages of Mormons who think women will receive the priesthood, with 0.5% indicating that they think there is a greater than 50% chance that this will occur. However, when the question was asked using a 50-year time frame, the percentage of Mormons in our sample who believed there was greater than a 50% chance that Mormons would be asked to move to Missouri increased to 4.1%. Moreover, 41.1% of the Mormons in our survey who were asked whether they thought this would occur at some time in the future believed it would happen.

In addition to comparing the likelihood of ordaining women to the likelihood of LDS leaders calling on members to move to Missouri, we also examined whether estimates of the likelihood of ordaining women varied by demographic characteristics. For all of the following analyses, we report

Table 3. Percent Chance of Returning to Jackson County

	Within 10 Years	Within 20 Years	Within 50 Years	In the Future
Greater than 50%	.5	1.5	4.1	41.1
1% to 50%	25.7	31.3	33.4	19.0
Less than 1%	73.8	67.2	62.5	39.9

Table 4. Percent Chance of Returning to Jackson County by Demographic Characteristics

Age	18–25	26–30	31–40	41–50	51–60	61–70	71+
Greater than 50%	1.7	2.3	3.9	4.6	2.7	1.9	3.5
1% to 50%	22.8	25.5	23.6	20.7	13.4	12.8	14.1
Less than 1%	78.5	72.2	72.5	74.7	83.9	85.4	82.4

Education	Less than High School	High School	Some College	College Graduate	Master's	PhD	JD/MD
Greater than 50%	0	1.0	1.7	2.7	5.3	9.0	8.3
1% to 50%	20.0	12.3	18.6	22.9	25.7	30.1	33.3
Less than 1%	80	86.8	79.6	74.4	69.0	60.8	58.3

Political Orientation	Very Conservative	Conservative	Lean Conservative	Moderate	Lean Liberal	Liberal	Very Liberal
Greater than 50%	0.9	0.6	2.3	4.4	7.8	12.9	21.3
1% to 50%	10.4	17.0	25.0	28.0	35.4	39.7	30.7
Less than 1%	88.8	82.4	72.7	67.5	56.8	47.4	48.0

here only the results from the "some time in the future" condition. There were minor differences by race/ethnicity (χ^2=23.75, p=.022); Non-Hispanic Black individuals were the most likely to think that at some point in the future women would receive the priesthood (13.3% reported a greater than 50% chance), followed by Native American (5.5%), Hispanic (4.0%), and White individuals (2.9%). There were also some differences by income (χ^2= 45.88, p<.001). The poorest individuals (less than $10,000 in income per year) were the least likely to predict women's ordination occurring at some point in the future (1.6%) while the most affluent (those making more than $250,000 per year) reported the highest likelihood (5.2%).

There were also differences by age (χ^2=99.66, p<.001), though the pattern was unclear. The age group with the smallest percentage reporting a more than 50% chance that women would be ordained in the future was individuals between 18 and 25 (1.7%) while the age group with the largest percentage was those aged from 41 to 50 (4.6%). We found a difference by sex (χ^2=40.25, p<.001). A greater proportion of men thought that the likelihood of women being ordained at some point in the future was above 50% (4.4%) than women (2.5%).

We also found a notable difference by educational attainment (χ^2= 170.45, p<.001). Higher levels of educational attainment increased the percentage of individuals who believed that women would be ordained at some point in the future; 9% of individuals with PhDs who completed the survey reported that there was a greater than 50% chance of women receiving the priesthood at some point in the future.

The demographic variable most closely related to believing women would be ordained at some point in the future was political views (χ^2=632.66, p<.001). Conservative Mormons are much less likely to think that women will ever be ordained to the priesthood than are liberal members of the religion; 21.3% of very liberal Mormons in our sample put the likelihood of women receiving the priesthood at some point in the future at above 50%.

Discussion

The Mormons in our sample were unlikely to believe that the policy preventing women from being ordained to the priesthood would change anytime soon, or even anytime in the distant future. The majority indicated that there was less than a 1% chance that women would ever be ordained to the priesthood while just 3% reported believing that there was a greater than 50% chance. On

the time dimension, it appears as though restricting women from holding the priesthood is, in the minds of the Mormons in our survey, an eternal policy.

We contrasted belief in women being ordained to the priesthood with an arguably low-probability event: Mormons being asked to move to Jackson County, Missouri in preparation for the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. The members of the LDS Church in our survey believed this event was far more likely to occur than women receiving the priesthood, particularly in the more distant future. Just over 41% of respondents reported believing that there was a greater than 50% chance that members of the LDS Church would be called to move to Jackson County, Missouri at some point in the future to prepare for the Second Coming.

That the Latter-day Saints in our sample believed Jesus was more likely to return than they could foresee the possibility of women being ordained—regardless of the time period in question—suggests just how committed they are to traditional gender roles when it comes to priesthood. This strongly supports the idea that gender is an organizing principle in the LDS Church (Sumerau and Cragun 2015), that it is tied to the market niche the LDS Church has chosen to pursue (Chaves 1997), and that a core doctrine of the religion is a gender binary that has divine status (Sumerau, Cragun, and Mathers 2016).

We believe construal level theory helps explain our findings. The doctrine of returning to Jackson County to prepare for the Second Coming of Jesus is psychologically very distant and, as a result, has a high level of construal. It's possible that, when presented with this idea, Latter-day Saints fail to consider the logistical hurdles of such an undertaking: selecting which members will move; having them sell their goods and homes; transporting thousands of people and supplies to Missouri; providing housing and food for those individuals; and so on. Logistically, such an event would be an enormous undertaking. But because Latter-day Saints have a great deal of psychological distance from this event—it will happen at some unspecified time in the future, may not directly affect them, and will take place in a distant location—the event is very abstract. Our data suggest that a sizable proportion of Latter-day Saints see this event as likely to happen at some point in the future, which may very well be the result of the high level of construal and psychological distance they have from the event.

In contrast, the everyday realities of members of the LDS Church are imbued with gendered power dynamics. From local to regional to church-wide leadership, all who have any decision-making authority are male. Men and

women in the LDS Church are currently assigned to very different roles, which all members can see. From passing the sacrament to performing baptisms to blessing children and ordaining members, the exclusion of women from the priesthood is not at all abstract. There is no psychological distance to gendered power dynamics in the LDS Church. It is part of every member's everyday life. The religion has even sacralized gender as part of God's divine plan (Sumerau and Cragun 2015). As a result, members of the LDS Church consider it unlikely that this aspect of the religion can change. Our experiment effectively compared two phenomena of radically different psychological distances. Gendered power dynamics and the ordination of women are proximate and real while being called to Jackson County to prepare for the Second Coming of Jesus is distant and abstract. Because the return to Jackson County precipitates the return of Jesus Christ, that is a high-level goal for which individual Latter-day Saints have no responsibility. In contrast, changing the gendered power structure is a goal for which they would have a great deal of responsibility.

While somewhat tangential to the primary thrust of this article, we do find it fascinating that such a large percentage of the Latter-day Saints in our study reported relatively low odds of members of the LDS Church being called to move to Jackson County, Missouri. Just 4.1% of the Mormons in our survey believed that the call to return to Jackson County, Missouri would occur in the next 50 years. This percentage goes up when the time frame stretches to the indefinite future, but this does suggest that a sizable percentage of Mormons do not believe the Second Coming is imminent. It is also possible that many current members of the religion are unaware of this idea or that LDS leaders' attempts to transform this doctrine into a metaphor have been successful (Doxey 1979).

These differences may reflect a shift toward greater reliance upon modern modes of thinking (Bruce 2013) and a general shift toward the assimilation end of the assimilation vs. differentiation spectrum along which religions fluctuate in order to maintain relevance in modern life (Cragun and Nielsen 2009; Mauss 1994). Despite their support for patriarchal gender norms (Kline 2013; Sumerau and Cragun 2015), members of the LDS Church may be shifting toward more naturalistic perspectives on how the world works rather than supernaturalistic ones (Riess 2019).

Some of the demographic differences noted in the results warrant discussion here. Black individuals were more likely than others to believe women would receive the priesthood. The idea of priesthood being given to a group

that had once been denied it may be more prescient for Black Latter-day Saints as they were not allowed to hold the priesthood until 1978 (Mauss 2003). As a result, changes in policies around who holds priesthood may seem more plausible to Black Latter-day Saints than to other members of the religion.

The trend of secularization that has played out in the US since the 1990s has affected younger people more than older ones, with more than 30% of those under 30 reporting no religious affiliation (Pew Research Center 2022). Given that tendency, the result for many religions has been a natural sorting effect. Younger people who have stayed in the LDS Church are more likely than those who leave to share the values of the religion (Riess 2019), including as relates to the gendered power structure detailed by Woodhead (2007). This is, in fact, one of the key arguments made by Chaves (1997) in delineating why some religions change their policy on female ordination and others don't—to position themselves in the religious marketplace. As a result, young people who are affiliated with the LDS Church, given the very real possibility of leaving the religion, may be more likely to find support for their values, including their support for a gendered power structure, inside the LDS Church (Avishai 2008; Woodhead 2007). In contrast, the middle-aged individuals in our study who were more likely to believe that women will be ordained in the future may not be in a position to easily extricate themselves from the LDS Church given other considerations, like a devout spouse or kids or a job that could be threatened as a result of leaving.

Similarly, Avishai's (2008) argument regarding why women remain affiliated with conservative religions where they are subordinated and marginalized may help explain the difference we found by sex. It may be the case that women in the LDS Church are similar to women in other conservative religions; female Latter-day Saints may find that the LDS Church's doctrines and policies leading to a gendered power structure validate their life choices and values if, for example, they want to be stay-at-home moms whose husbands will take care of them. Further research should examine whether this is the case. Avishai (2008) and Woodhead (2007) both argue that the certainty of women's roles in conservative religion contrasts with the uncertainty and complexity of women's roles in modern society. As a result, some women prefer the certainty of a subordinate role over that of a more egalitarian role.

There may also be some women who have reinterpreted how priesthood authority works in the LDS Church. Relevant here is Stapley's (2018, 2020) historical study of LDS priesthood. Stapley distinguishes between ecclesiastical

priesthood, which refers to the offices in which one might serve, and cosmological priesthood, which refers to a collective group of church members who are united through their participation in temple rites. Although Emma Smith was ordained to lead the Relief Society in 1842, when Brigham Young later became president of the church, he made clear that female church members were not part of the ecclesiastical priesthood, which also was the priesthood that gained increasing importance in the church (Stapley 2020). As part of this, male priesthood was considered to have "keys" to guide church affairs at all levels of the institution.

Although some advocates in the twenty-first century Ordain Women movement have been excommunicated or have resigned, Stapley notes that Dallin Oaks's April 2014 General Conference sermon, "The Keys and Authority of the Priesthood," responded to the issue by noting, "We are not accustomed to speaking of women having the authority of the priesthood in their Church callings, but what other authority can it be?" (Oaks 2014, 51). Stapley considers this a "new priesthood framework" that has been incorporated into female missionaries' having priesthood authority in performing their work, as well as in church publications. Thus, some women may conclude that they are already using the priesthood and working through it, even if they have not received the priesthood directly. This is similar to Orthodox Jewish women who have found ways to reinterpret their religion's teachings, transforming elements that seemed to marginalize women into ones that empower women instead (Avishai 2008).

Finally, the relationship between political views and support for the ordination of women to the priesthood is fairly straightforward. Conservative individuals tend to oppose change whereas progressive individuals tend to advocate for change that they believe results in greater equality (Haidt 2013). That conservative Mormons were less likely to believe that women would be ordained in the future than progressive Mormons were is not surprising.

Woodhead's (2007) framework for understanding religion and gender is useful in considering this study's results. LDS leaders have positioned the Church in a consolidating role, maintaining the established gender order. The majority of respondents in this study also expect current gender roles to continue in the future. A minority, however, expect women's ordination and are occupying what Woodhead labels the tactical quadrant, who see increasing access to power as change occurs from within the religion. Those individuals who believe such a change to be more likely, according to construal level theo-

ry (Trope and Liberman 2010), envision more specific changes to achieve that end. Remarks by leaders such as Oaks (2014), suggesting that women already have priesthood authority when they act in their church callings, reframe the issue in a way that allows the institution to maintain its current gender structure while addressing questions regarding women's ordination.

There are some important limitations to our study. The first is that we aren't sure whether all participants were familiar with the belief that Mormons will be asked to return to Jackson County, Missouri, as this has become a somewhat esoteric belief that does not figure prominently in most Sunday School manuals (Doxey 1979). Another limitation of our study is our sample. While our sample is very large, it is not a random sample of Mormons using a known sampling frame. Purposive samples are useful when investigating small groups and their benefits have been repeatedly shown in the scientific literature (Gosling et al. 2004; Kraut et al. 2004). Even so, our sampling method was problematic. As a result, we have tried throughout the article to make it clear that we are not suggesting our results can be generalized to all Latter-day Saints in the US. Instead, we have tried to use language that makes it clear we are talking about the participants in our sample and not about Mormons or members of the LDS Church more generally.

Finally, there is one other minor issue with our questions: the response options were not mutually exclusive. This was a technical oversight in the construction of the survey that we used percentages that overlapped. While we don't think this dramatically altered the results of the survey, this was a problem with our survey design and we recommend that future research into this area not use the same response options.

Conclusion

While not a random, representative sample of members of the LDS Church, our study suggests that many Latter-day Saints believe that women will not receive the priesthood even in the distant future. In contrast, a sizable percentage believe that Jesus will return and the leadership of the LDS Church will call on members to move to Jackson County, Missouri, in preparation for the Second Coming. Contrasting the possible ordination of women with the Second Coming of Jesus illustrates that in the minds of many Latter-day Saints, gender roles are distinct and eternal. Whether ten years from now or the far distant future, many Latter-day Saints believe women are not supposed to have the priesthood.

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Predictors of Differing Experiences with Scriptural Women and Heavenly Mother among Latter-day Saints

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Although the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints avows some empowering doctrines related to gender (including belief in a Heavenly Mother), its members may not be immune to the harmful effects of sexism nor uniform in their gender ideologies. With a mixed methods approach, we explored how Latter-day Saints orient to the belief in female deity, how individual experiences and beliefs about gender are associated with members' religious experiences and behaviors, and whether these links depend on one's gender. Using survey responses from a convenience sample of 1,674 adult Latter-day Saints living in the United States, we tested a structural equation model and two moderation models. We supplemented these analyses with qualitative data analysis of four focus groups (*n*=15) of Latter-day Saints living near Utah County, Utah. On average, Latter-day Saint women who had been the victims of repeated sexism noticed a lack of discussion about scriptural women and Heavenly Mother at church and sought out these topics more frequently in their personal study. Regardless of gender, the more traditional a participant's gender ideology, the more frequently they perceived that scriptural women and Heavenly Mother are discussed at church and the less frequently they reported to have studied them on their own time. Drawing on themes that emerged, we discuss gender inequalities in the Church, intentional efforts to discuss and study scriptural women and Heavenly Mother, and the impact of those stories and doctrines on members' personal and spiritual wellbeing. A celebration of women—including feminine deity—may be a balm for the souls of Latter-day Saints wounded by sexism.

Many scholars view the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (also known as The Church of Jesus Christ) as espousing traditional views on gender, similar to the "gender complementarity" noted in many evangelical/conservative Protestant faiths (Ross and Finnigan 2020). At the same time, the Church holds some unique teachings regarding gender, including a belief in a female deity referred to as "Heavenly Mother," who rules side by side with Heavenly Father, and the belief that women are made in Her divine image (The Church of Jesus Christ 1909). These teachings are buttressed by a scriptural canon containing select but influential stories of faithful women, including priestesses, prophetesses, and heroines who exemplify the important role that women play in scriptural contexts. The belief in female deity and women's importance in the theology of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is a doctrine that may be empowering for some women in the Church.

Of course, these empowering teachings about Heavenly Mother and scriptural women are experienced in the context of many traditional teachings and policies in the Church. The result is that LDS women and men may find themselves navigating a collection of faith-based ideologies, some of which evoke traditional gender roles and others which promote potentially empowering beliefs about women's spiritual strength and female deity. The intersection of traditional and empowering beliefs may shape how (and how often) Church members think about women—including their doctrine on female deity and scriptural women. Against this backdrop, we were interested in how Latter-day Saints orient themselves to the belief in female deity, which we analyzed using focus group interviews and descriptive statistics. We also wished to know how their gender ideologies and experiences of gender discrimination were associated with those orientations toward female deity. For this, we measured their perceptions about how often scriptural women and Heavenly Mother are discussed at church and their own personal study of scriptural women and Heavenly Mother, then analyzed these findings using structural equation modeling. We further examined whether these associations would be moderated by gender (analyzed using moderation models), as seen in Figure 1 on the following page. Finally, we supplemented these analyses using qualitative data from four focus groups with Latter-day Saints to provide further insight and nuance to our quantitative findings. The findings from this study will advance the field's understanding of factors that influence personal spiritual study and experiences in the LDS Church.

Figure 1: Conceptual Model
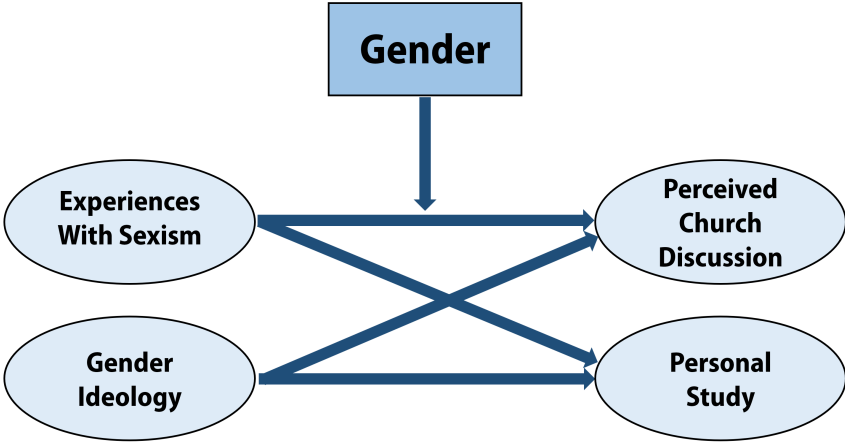
Gender in Latter-day Saint Doctrine and Culture

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints holds an arrangement of practices and teachings around gender, which could evoke both "traditional" interpretations (which support and justify gender-differentiated roles and labor) and "egalitarian" interpretations (which emphasize equal participation in the home and workplace by the sexes). Structurally, the denomination's leadership reserves exclusive authority to priesthood keys and priesthood offices for male priesthood holders. The presiding authorities that oversee all organizations and members are strictly men, with the Church President, First Presidency, and Council of the Twelve Apostles leading the worldwide Church. At the local level, congregations are overseen by men: the stake president, stake presidency, high council, bishop, and bishopric. Leaders across other major Church organizations such as mission presidents, temple presidents, and regional leaders are also strictly men. Women do hold leadership positions within local and general organizations; however, they are primarily over other women, female youth, and children. Because of this leadership structure, some have stated that the Church of Jesus Christ follows a patriarchal order that aligns with traditional ideologies (Petrey 2020; Silva 1994).

Despite this patriarchal organizational structure, Latter-day Saint doctrine avows teachings that frame men and women to have equal status and

potential (The Church of Jesus Christ 2015), which can evoke empowering spiritual narratives. For example, Latter-day Saints believe in a divine Heavenly Mother. The Church acknowledges that "our present knowledge about a Mother in Heaven is limited. Nevertheless, we have been given sufficient knowledge to appreciate the *sacredness* of this doctrine" (paragraph 6). The Church holds that Heavenly Mother is Heavenly Father's eternal spouse and rules "side by side" with Him (paragraph 3). In this way, Heavenly Father is considered God with a complementary Goddess, and vice versa. Furthermore, Church doctrine holds this as the model for which humans can live in the highest realm of heaven and become like their Heavenly Parents: as a man and woman sealed together in an eternal marriage (D&C 132:19–20). In this way, Latter-day Saint doctrine maintains that "neither is the man without the woman, neither the woman without the man, in the Lord" (1 Cor. 11:11, KJV).

Additional Latter-day Saint teachings about gender can be interpreted as either traditional or empowering, depending on the person. For example, "The Family: A Proclamation to the World" (1995), a document written by the First Presidency and Council of the Twelve Apostles of the Church, outlines the ideal attributes of a successful family unit. It highlights the importance of equality and companionship between husband and wife, emphasizing that while each partner has different responsibilities, they are equal in significance and positive effect. The Proclamation also states that mothers are responsible to oversee the nurture of their children and that fathers are to preside over and provide for the family. Whereas the statement about equal partnership could resonate with egalitarian beliefs, the statement about gendered responsibilities aligns with traditional Western norms surrounding division of labor in the home. That is, some church members may perceive these teachings as supporting flexibility in gender role adherence, while others might find justification for male headship and patriarchy. For example, 58% of Latter-day Saint adult members believe that marriage is more satisfying when the man provides for the family and the woman takes care of their home and children, compared to 30% of the general public (Pew Research Center 2012).

Indeed, Latter-day Saint doctrine and culture is embedded with concepts that, in the context of prevailing gender role norms in the United States, can evoke both traditional and empowering ideologies (Hermkens 2011; Paulsen and Pulido 2011). This paradox of ideologies may create considerable heterogeneity in how members of the Church orient themselves to female deity. Specifically, it may particularly affect their own personal study and their per-

ceptions of how often scriptural women and Heavenly Mother are discussed in church settings.

Visibility of Female Deity

Historically, conversations about scriptural women and Heavenly Mother have been infrequent in Latter-day Saint circles. A recent survey of over 5,000 Latter-day Saints suggested that most members (i.e., 70%) report a non-existent or distant relationship with Her (Majeske et al. 2022). Part of this is likely explained by both a relative lack of revealed doctrine about Her compared to Heavenly Father and the instruction from Church leaders to pray only to Heavenly Father (Hinckley 1991; Renlund 2022). Still, the revealed doctrines that Latter-day Saints have about Heavenly Mother (see Paulsen and Pulido 2011) appear to be largely untouched by most members, and a relationship with Her often goes unexplored out of fear that She is too sacred to discuss.

The discussion of scriptural women is also relatively infrequent compared to the discussion of scriptural men. Latter-day Saint scripture contains select inspiring stories of strong, righteous women: three Marys who nurtured, walked with, and knelt at the feet of Christ; Emma Smith, an "elect lady" (Doctrine and Covenants 25:3); God-fearing midwives Puah and Shiphrah of the Book of Exodus; seven prophetesses, such as Deborah and Huldah; and dozens of others. Despite these many women from whom Latter-day Saints can learn and to whom women can look as role models of righteous femininity, it seems rare for scriptural women to be included in talks, lessons, and testimonies at church and at home. For example, some evidence suggests that in talks given at General Conference (a semi-annual conference broadcast for all Church members), only 1.3% of scriptures referenced are about women (Wells 2020). This discrepancy likely derives, in part, from there being fewer stories written about women than about men (Morrill 2017).

Ultimately, because conversations surrounding scriptural women and Heavenly Mother are fewer in comparison to those about scriptural men and Heavenly Father, many individuals may seek scriptural women and Heavenly Mother in their personal lives to compensate for the focus on men. In this study, we are interested in those members who intentionally study scriptural women and Heavenly Mother, as these practices may affect not only their testimony and understanding of divinity but also how they view women's eternal value and potential (Shurtz 2019).

Gender Ideology and Religious Experience

In examining members' orientations to female deity, we were also interested in how their overall gender-based experiences shaped their perception of and search for greater visibility of female deity, specifically through their engagement with scriptural women and Heavenly Mother. Gender ideology refers to a person's subjectively held beliefs about the differences and relations between men and women, such as those about gender-differentiated labor (e.g., providing vs. caretaking; Davis and Greenstein 2009). Scholars use a person's gender ideology as a key index of overall attitudes and belief systems about gender and gender roles.

These gendered attitudes and belief systems, referred to by some as *gender schema* (Bem 1984; Martin and Halverson 1981), shape the way individuals process information and how they behave in their environments, particularly when gender is perceived as situationally salient. For instance, when a person perceives gender as meaningful to the situation, their gender schemas will activate and subsequently filter the way they interpret events and interactions. As such, a person's gender ideology in their religious settings has the power to shape how they interpret gendered distinctions in their environment. For example, individuals with traditional gender ideologies are more likely to perceive differential treatment of men and women in organizational settings as fair (Forste and Fox 2012; Nordenmark and Nyman 2003). On the other hand, individuals with more progressive or egalitarian ideologies might see the same circumstances as evidence of oppression and inequality.

By extension, we anticipated that members' gender ideologies would likely filter their experiences of gender at church, including their perceptions of how often scriptural women and Heavenly Mother are discussed there. We also expected their perception to affect their own personal attempts to study scriptural women and Heavenly Mother. We anticipated that Latter-day Saints who have traditional gender ideologies would perceive more frequent discussion about scriptural women and Heavenly Mother at church than their counterparts with egalitarian ideologies. These "traditional" members might be less aware of or concerned about how rarely women are discussed in church settings, potentially viewing those disparities as "normal" and justifiable (e.g., "sacred silence" [Paulsen and Pulido 2011]). Therefore, they may perceive there is "sufficient" discourse about women and in turn may be less likely to proactively seek women in their personal religious study. Meanwhile, we anticipated that more egalitarian members—regardless of their gender—would

view differences in how often women are discussed in church settings as meaningful and important, given their beliefs about equal participation and equal visibility. Therefore, we hypothesized that egalitarian members would be more likely than traditional members to perceive the gap in discussion of women in church settings and compensate by seeking out mentions of feminine deity in their personal religious study.

Gender Discrimination and Religious Experience

Gender discrimination, or the negative treatment of a person due to their gender identity, is a common experience, particularly for girls and women (Leaper and Brown 2008), and these experiences may also shape how Latter-day Saints interact with doctrine about female deity. Negative experiences for women and girls can include stereotypes, prejudice, sexual harassment, or other forms of sexism (Brown 2017). In this study, we focused particularly on women's and men's experiences of being a direct target of negative treatment because of their gender. Scientific research on gender discrimination has focused mainly on girls and women because of the greater frequency of gender discrimination for women compared to men. Research has clearly shown that experiencing gender discrimination is a distressing event that can diminish self-esteem (Brown et al. 2010), undermine social and institutional belonging (Andrews et al. 2018; Rogers et al. 2021), and increase psychological distress (Rogers et al. 2022), including anxiety and depression (Foster 2000; Landrine et al. 1995; Swim et al. 2001).

Because of adverse side effects, discrimination demands a phenomenological process in which victims attempt to cope with and interpret the experience and its implications for their social identity (Spencer et al. 1997). People evaluate and respond to experiences of sexism in variable ways, again with most studies focusing on girls and women. For some girls and women, discrimination can raise the perceptual salience of gender, capitalizing on and reinforcing prevailing gender norms (Martin and Halverson 1981; Rogers et al. 2021). Consequently, it can heighten their internalized stereotypes about their gender group (Rogers et al. 2021) and even diminish their sense of pride in their gender identity (Hewlett et al. 2008; Rogers et al. 2022). Alternatively, some girls and women may experience strengthened identification with their gender group and seek more solidarity with other girls and women to the degree that they engage in active coping responses, such as seeking social support from others (Kaiser and Miller 2004).

There is considerable research on how women experience discrimination within religious contexts, and how gender and religion intersect in complex ways to shape experiences, worldviews, and ideologies of men and women (Avishai et al. 2015). This means that women's experiences with discrimination will constitute their faith experiences, and vice versa, and that religious understandings are a relevant filter through which they make meaning of their experiences of discrimination (Burke 2012). For Latter-day Saints, experiencing gender discrimination could reinforce prevailing gender norms common to many conservative Christian traditions that profess that men and women have innately different desires and capabilities that naturally delineate gendered responsibilities within the religious organization (Homan and Burdette 2021; Perry 2019). In such a context, experiencing discrimination might strengthen beliefs in a traditional division of men's and women's roles (Burn and Busso 2005; Taşdemir and Sakallı-Uğurlu 2010), lessening one's orientation toward seeking female deity and/or increasing the likelihood of perceiving "enough" of these discussions in church settings. Other members might actually be more inclined to seek female deity in response to discrimination in that doing so represents a meaningful coping mechanism. That is, reading about the experiences of scriptural women and seeking connection with Heavenly Mother may help some women to better understand their own identities.

Ultimately, the association between experiencing discrimination and orienting to feminine deity is likely dependent on one's gender. Discrimination does not happen in a vacuum, but within social systems that devalue feminine-typed qualities while elevating masculine-typed ones. This means that discrimination in patriarchal contexts poses a greater threat to women than to men, whose elevated status is taken for granted. As a relevant example, although religious participation is generally associated with positive health outcomes (Krause 2002; Schieman et al. 2006), that may only be true for those who are not systematically excluded from power and status within their religious organizations (Etengoff and Lefevor 2021). Women experiencing structural sexism within religion often have lower mental and physical health due to this stressful source of internal conflict (Etengoff and Lefevor 2021; Homan and Burdette 2021).

This phenomenon may be especially true for individuals who regularly participate in church activities (Homan and Burdette 2021), such as Latter-day Saints, who have generally high expectations of involvement: attending multiple meetings a week, holding a service position (i.e., a "calling"), wearing their

temple garments daily, and studying the scriptures and attending the temple in their personal time. This involvement creates an added level of salience of religion in members' lives that could render connection with female deity a more substantial coping opportunity.

Research Question and Hypotheses

Given previous literature, we formed the following research question and hypotheses:

RQ1. How do Latter-day Saints orient to female deity?

H1a. Experiences with sexism will be negatively associated with the perceived amount of discussion about scriptural women and Heavenly Mother at church.

H1b. This negative association will be significant for women but not for men.

H2a. Experiences with sexism will be positively associated with the amount of personal study of scriptural women and Heavenly Mother.

H2b. This positive association will be significant for women but not for men.

H3a. Traditional gender ideology will be positively associated with the amount of perceived discussion about scriptural women and Heavenly Mother at church.

H3b. This positive association will not be moderated by gender.

H4a. Traditional gender ideology will be negatively associated with amount of personal study of scriptural women and Heavenly Mother.

H4b. This negative association will not be moderated by gender.

Method: Survey

Participants and Procedure

Data were from the *Divinity of Women Project*. Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was received prior to data collection, and all participants consented to participation. The survey was conducted using Qualtrics Panel from March to May 2022. Using an IRB-approved script, we advertised the study in various Latter-day Saint social media groups, and participants were recruited using snowball sampling. The script included the following description: "The

survey will include questions related to experiences with religion and God, women in the scriptures, Heavenly Mother, personal scripture study, self-esteem, and ideas about gender." The sample was therefore not random or representative, but a self-selected convenience sample. All study participants were members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 18 years or older, and residing in the United States. The original sample size was 2,935, but the following records were dropped from the sample during data cleaning: 222 for completing the survey in less than 300 seconds, 131 for failing the first attention check question, 320 for failing the second attention check question, four for reporting more daughters than children, and 584 for suspicious email addresses (as determined by two researchers). Thus, the final sample is 1,674 Latter-day Saints. The first 250 (of 1,422) women who completed the survey and the total 221 men who completed the survey were emailed $10 Amazon gift cards.

Participant age ranged from 18 to 77, with a mean of 36.12 (SD=9.80). Most participants (1,422; 84.9%) were women, with 221 (13.2%) men, 26 (1.6%) who identified as another gender (i.e., agender, gender queer or gender fluid or nonbinary, questioning or unsure, trans woman, or other), and five (.3%) who preferred not to answer. Almost all participants (1,592; 95.1%) were White, with other participants being Hispanic or Latinx (63; 3.8%), Black or African American (23; 1.4%), Asian (18; 1.1%), American Indian or Alaskan Native (15; .9%), or Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander (10; .6%), and the remaining participants reporting "other" (7; .4%) or preferring not to answer (12; .7%). Racial/ethnic responses add up to more than 1,674 because participants could select more than one response category. The majority of the sample was college-educated, with participants having received the following levels of education: less than high school (2; .1%), high school or equivalent (37; 2.2%), some college (271; 16.2%), associate's degree (115; 6.9%), bachelor's degree (792; 47.3%), master's degree (336; 20.1%), and advanced degree (i.e., J.D., M.D., Ph.D., etc.; 117; 7.0%). Two participants (.1%) preferred not to answer. Thus, in terms of education level our sample is considerably more educated compared to LDS members in the United States as a whole (i.e., 74.4% of our sample has a four-year college degree vs. 33% of LDS members in the United States; Pew Research Center 2014). The majority of participants attended religious services once a week or more (1,078; 64.4%), with 296 (17.7%) attending two to three times a month, 93 (5.6%) attending once a month, 129 (7.7%) attending a few times a year, and 77 (4.6%) never attending. Despite this

high attendance rate and all participants reporting they were current members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, fewer than half (722; 43.1%) considered themselves to be "very religious," with the other participants categorizing themselves as "fairly religious" (536; 32.0%), "somewhat religious" (214; 12.8%), "a little religious" (121; 7.2%), or "not religious at all" (66; 3.9%).

Measures

Independent Variables: Experiences with Sexism and Gender Ideology

Participants indicated how often they had experienced six sexist events in the past year: receiving unwanted or inappropriate romantic attention, being told embarrassing or mean jokes about their gender, being called a nasty or demeaning name related to being a man or woman, being teased about their physical appearance, receiving unwanted physical contact, and being teased or threatened with harm by an other-gender person. Participants were asked to rate the frequency of each occurrence on a 4-point scale: (1=*no, never happened*; 2=*yes, happened once or twice*; 3=*yes, a few times*; 4=*yes, several times*). This scale was not administered to non-binary individuals because it has been validated only in cisgender populations (Klonoff and Landrine 1995). This scale achieved adequate reliability (α=.90).

Participants also reported on their gender ideology with 15 statements from the Family Attitudes Questions in the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (see Davis and Greenstein 2009). They responded to items such as "It is much better for everyone concerned if the man is the provider outside the home and the woman takes care of the home and family" and "There is some work that is men's and some that is women's, and they should not be doing each other's." Participants responded on a scale of 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). After six items were reverse coded, higher scores reflected a more traditional gender ideology. Due to a low α (.52) with the full scale, we dropped seven items with factor loadings below the standard cutoff of .4, and this revised scale with eight items achieved adequate reliability (α=.84).

Dependent Variables: Perceived Church Discussion and Personal Study

A two-item scale measuring perceived church discussion about scriptural women and Heavenly Mother was created for the *Divinity of Women Project*. The survey asked participants, "How often do you hear discussion about wom-

en in the scriptures in church settings (e.g., gospel doctrine, Relief Society, sacrament meeting)?" and "How often do you hear discussion about Heavenly Mother in church settings (e.g., gospel doctrine, Relief Society, sacrament meeting)?" Participants responded on a scale of 1 (*never*) to 5 (*always*), with higher scores reflecting perception of more frequent church discussion. This scale achieved adequate reliability (α=.71).

A three-item scale measuring personal study of scriptural women and Heavenly Mother was also created for the *Divinity of Women Project*. Participants received the following three questions: "How often do you purposefully seek out stories of women in your personal scripture study?" "How often do you personally study the topic of Heavenly Mother?" and "How often do you seek personal connection with Heavenly Mother in some capacity?" Participants responded on the same scale of 1 (*never*) to 5 (*always*), with higher scores reflecting more frequent personal study. This scale also achieved adequate reliability (α=.86).

Moderator: Gender

Gender was recoded to be binary, with 0=man, 1=woman, and nonbinary individuals coded as missing. Although the experiences of nonbinary members of the Church are likely unique and certainly important, this type of gender exploration is beyond the scope of the current study.

Controls: Age, Educational Attainment, and Number of Children

We controlled for the following variables in our analyses: age (continuous from 18 to 77), educational attainment (continuous from "less than high school" to "advanced degree"), and number of children (continuous from 0 to 10+).

Data Analysis Plan

First, we determined descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations in SPSS. Then, we estimated three models in Mplus Version 8.

The first of these was a structural equation model (SEM). Missing data on our study variables ranged from 0 to 2.3%, with most being from nonbinary individuals on experiences with sexism. We handled missing data using full information maximum likelihood (FIML). We used the following as indicators of model fit (Kline 2016): comparative fit index (CFI), root-mean-square

error of approximation (RMSEA), and standardized root-mean-square resid-ual (SRMR). According to Little (2013), CFI>.95, RMSEA<.05, and SRMR<.05 indicate "good" model fit. In Model 1, we tested the direct associations of ex-periences with sexism and gender ideology (as well as the controls) with per-ceived church discussion about scriptural women and Heavenly Mother and personal study of scriptural women and Heavenly Mother. SEM allowed us to utilize latent variables for all four constructs, reducing measurement error (Schumacker and Lomax 2004). We used the latent variance method so that each latent variable was standardized and its factor loadings could be freely es-timated (Beaujean, 2014). The independent variables (and controls) were cor-related with each other, and the dependent variables were correlated with each other. We employed seven modification indices (i.e., all correlations between items of the same scale) to improve model fit. The following cutoffs from Co-hen (1988) were used to determine effect size of standardized effects: .1=small, .3=medium, and .5=large.

The second and third models were moderation models, where we tested gender as a moderator in all four paths (the two paths from experiences with sexism in Model 2, and the two paths from gender ideology in Model 3). That is, we tested whether the four direct effects differed between men and women. In these models, we used mean scores in place of latent variables; thus, there were no missing data besides educational attainment (.2%) and gender and ex-periences with sexism, which both had 1.9% missing—the nonbinary individ-uals and those who preferred not to report their gender in the sample. Missing data were again handled using FIML. In Model 2, we created an interaction term using experiences with sexism and gender. In Model 3, the interaction term was created using gender ideology and gender. In both models, regres-sion paths were estimated from experiences with sexism, gender ideology, gen-der, and the interaction term (as well as the controls) onto perceived church discussion and personal study. As in the SEM, the independent variables (and controls) were correlated with each other, and the dependent variables were correlated with each other. We then used the model constraint subcommand to test simple slopes of the conditional effects for men and women, and we used loop plots to plot these conditional effects. Simple slopes (and accompa-nying plots) were tested twice for each of the two moderation models, once for each path; thus, each plot depicts one conditional effect. Finally, we conducted post-hoc Wald tests (for each of the four paths) to determine whether men's and women's slopes differed significantly from each other.

Method: Focus Groups

Participants and Procedure

At the conclusion of the quantitative survey, we invited participants who resided in or near Utah County to indicate whether they were interested in attending an in-person focus group conducted in May 2022. In order of survey completion, we invited interested individuals to participate until the focus group slots were full. Specifically, we reached out to potential participants until 20 individuals (10 men and 10 women) agreed to participate in one of four focus groups, two with only men and two with only women. Because four men and one woman did not show up to the focus groups, final participants were six men and nine women (including one trans woman). The following demographics about the focus group participants are based on 16 participants, although one woman (who we afterwards were not able to identify from the others) who is included in the following demographics did not show up to the focus group. Participants ranged in age from 24 to 49. Thirteen participants were married (with two never married and one separated), and 12 were parents. Although all participants considered themselves current members of the Church, they had varying experiences within the Church. Nine considered themselves to be "very religious," five "fairly religious," and two "somewhat religious." Similarly, 10 reported attending church once a week or more, with four participants attending two to three times a month, and two participants attending once a month.

A male researcher conducted the focus groups with men, while three female researchers conducted the focus groups with women. The interviewers used a semi-structured interview approach, with questions focusing on participants' experiences as a man or woman in the Church of Jesus Christ and their personal efforts and experiences in studying and discussing scriptural women and Heavenly Mother.

Data Analysis Plan

The focus group interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. Using a team-based approach to qualitative data analysis (Levitt et al. 2018; Marks 2015), two researchers reviewed the transcripts and open coded the data independently. After individually identifying prevalent and salient themes, the two researchers came together and discussed what they had each

found, to agree about a codebook. The codebook was created following recommendations from Braun and Clarke (2006) and was agreed upon by the two researchers before being given to two trained coders. The coders used the codebook to independently code the interviews in NVivo 12 software. Two of the four (50%) focus groups (one with women and one with men) were coded independently by both of the coders to calculate interrater reliability. The Kappa coefficient calculated in NVivo 12 was .55, indicating moderate agreement (Landis and Koch 1977). While the researchers identified six overarching themes, we explore only the three that most closely connect to our research questions in the current paper; the remaining themes will be explored in future research. In reporting our findings, we heavily rely on participants' own words as we strive to best represent their experiences (Marks 2015).

In integrating our quantitative and qualitative findings, we employed an explanatory mixed methods design (Creswell & Creswell, 2005), in which the purpose of the qualitative findings is to provide additional insight and nuance to the quantitative results.

Reflexivity

We note that all authors are active members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. While recognizing the benefits of insider perspectives, we also acknowledge the limitations of not having non-member perspectives in our analysis process. Despite all authors belonging to the Church, each has had their own unique journey and experiences with gender and religion. We are acutely aware of how religion can be both a helpful and a harmful influence on individuals and families (Dollahite et al. 2018; Kelley et al. 2020, 2022). We also note that we have worked to be aware of and to limit our personal biases; one way this is executed is through our heavy reliance on participant quotes in our reporting of the qualitative findings.

Quantitative Results

Descriptive Statistics and Bivariate Correlations

For descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations, see Table 1. Many participants in our sample have had repeated experiences with sexism (M=2.79 out of 4; SD=.86), with women reporting more experiences with sexism. Average gender ideology leaned toward nontraditional (M=2.19 out of 5; SD=.76), with

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics and Bivariate Correlations among Main Study Variables (N = 1,674)

Variables	1	2	3	4	5
1. Experiences with Sexism[a]	—				
2. Gender Ideology[a]	-.27***	—			
3. Perceived Church Discussion[a]	-.26***	.45***	—		
4. Personal Study[a]	.32***	-.26***	-.12***	—	
5. Female[b]	.30***	-.19***	-.15***	.26***	—
Mean or Percent	2.79	2.19	2.24	2.92	84.9%
Standard Deviation	.86	.76	.71	1.05	—
Range	1–4	1–5	1–5	1–5	0–1
Mean for Men	2.15	2.55	2.52	2.24	—
Mean for Women	2.89	2.13	2.20	3.03	—
T-value	13.42***	7.34***	6.31***	12.00***	—

Note: [a] Mean scores were created for scales. [b] Comparison group is male.
***p < .001.

more men than women reporting traditional gender ideology. The average response for perceived church discussion about scriptural women and Heavenly Mother was just more than *rarely* (M=2.24 out of 5; SD=.71), with men perceiving more frequent discussion. The average response for personal study of scriptural women and Heavenly Mother was just less than *sometimes* (M=2.92 out of 5; SD=1.05), with women reporting more frequent personal study. All correlations were in the expected directions and were significant at the p< .001 level.

SEM (Model 1)

For standardized direct associations from Models 1, 2, and 3, see Table 2. Model 1 fit the data well: CFI=.95; RMSEA=.05 with 90% Confidence Interval [.044, .050]; SRMR=.04. The model explained 36% of the variance in perceived church discussion and 17% of the variance in personal study. Experiences with sexism were negatively associated with perceived church discussion (β=-.18, p<.001; small-medium effect size) and positively associated with personal study of scriptural women and Heavenly Mother (β=.28, p<.001; about medium effect size). Meanwhile, traditional gender ideology was positively associated with perceived church discussion (β=.52, p<.001; large effect size) and

Table 2

Standardized Direct Associations for Structural Equation Models

	Perceived Church Discussion			Personal Study		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Experiences with Sexism	-.18***	.17*	-.14***	.28***	.03	.22***
Gender Ideology	.52***	.39***	.46***	-.23***	-.17***	-.14*
Gender[a]	—	.27***	.04	—	-.05	.21**
Sexism*Gender	—	-.50***	—	—	.33**	—
Ideology*Gender	—	—	-.09	—	—	-.07
Age	.05	.09***	.09**	-.04	-.06*	-.06*
Educational Attainment	.01	-.01	-.01	-.07**	-.05*	-.05
Number of Children	-.10**	-.10***	-.10***	.08**	.07**	.07**

Note: Bolded coefficients indicate significant associations. [a]Comparison group is male.

*p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001

negatively associated with personal study of scriptural women and Heavenly Mother (β=-.23, p<.001; small-medium effect size). Thus, we found support for H1a, H2a, H3a, and H4a.

Moderation Models (Models 2 and 3)

In Model 2, the interaction term (i.e., experiences with sexism * gender) was significantly associated with both perceived church discussion about scriptural women and Heavenly Mother (β=-.50, p<.001) and personal study of scriptural women and Heavenly Mother (β=.33, p=.003), providing evidence of moderation in these two paths. For the path from experiences with sexism to perceived church discussion, tests of simple slopes were significant for both men (b=.14, p=.01) and women (b=-.15, p<.001), indicating that both men's and women's slopes were different from zero, (i.e., there was an association between the two variables for both men and women). The one positive slope (men) and one negative slope (women) can be seen in Figure 2; these slopes show that while experiences with sexism for women were associated with perceiving less church discussion, for men, experiences with sexism were associated with perceiving more church discussion. A post-hoc Wald test confirmed that men's and women's slopes for this association were indeed significantly different from each other (p=.02).

**Figure 2**: Plot of the Conditional Effect of Experiences with Sexism on Perceived Amount of Church Discussion for Women versus Men
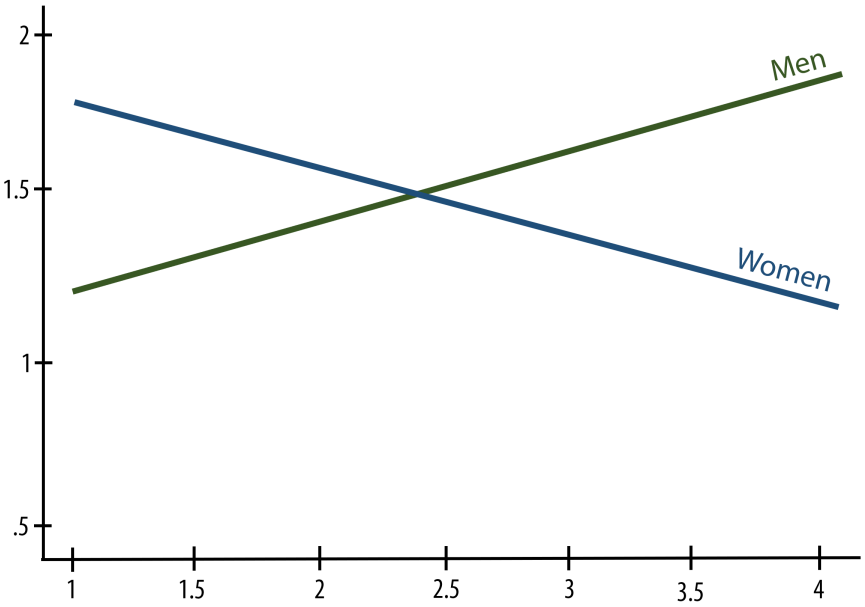
Figure 3: Plot of the Conditional Effect of Experiences with Sexism on Amount of Personal Study for Women versus Men
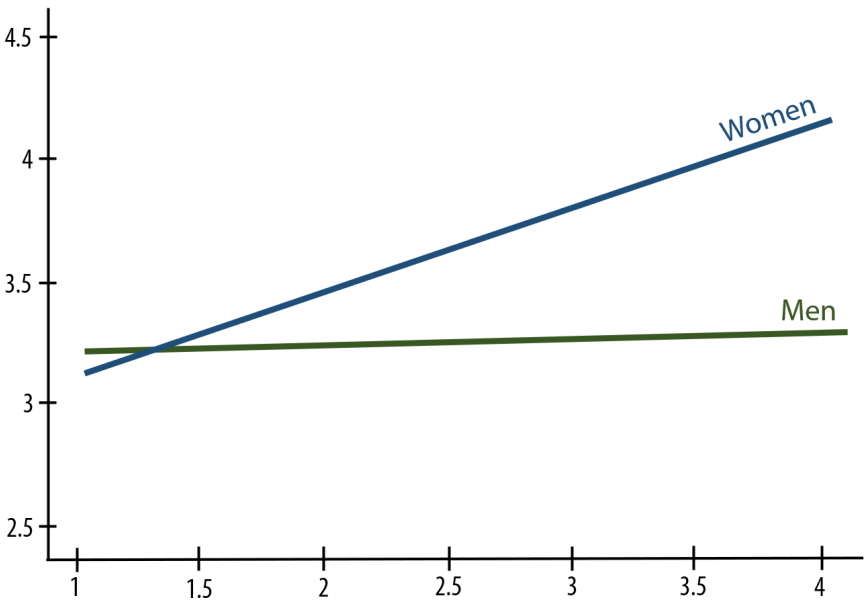
For the path from experiences with sexism to personal study, tests of simple slopes were significant for women (b=.31, *p*<.001) but not for men (b=.04, *p*=.68), indicating that there is only an association between these two variables for women. These slopes can be seen in Figure 3 and show that while experiences with sexism were associated with more personal study for women, experiences with sexism were unrelated to personal study for men. However, a post-hoc Wald test indicated that men's and women's slopes for this association were not significantly different from each other (*p*=.48). Taking all the evidence from Model 2 combined, we found support for H1b and H2b.

In Model 3, the interaction term (i.e., gender ideology * gender) was not significantly associated with either perceived church discussion about scriptural women and Heavenly Mother (β=-.09, *p*=.30) or personal study of scriptural women and Heavenly Mother (β=-.07, *p*=.43), suggesting that gender does not moderate either of these associations. Thus, we found support for H3b and H4b.

Qualitative Findings

Three themes provide additional insights into our research questions: experienced and observed gender inequalities in the Church, intentional efforts in discussing or studying scriptural women and Heavenly Mother, and the impact of hearing women's stories.

Theme 1: Experienced and Observed Gender Inequalities in the Church

Across all the focus groups, participants[1] often struggled to identify the precise source of the gender inequality they were discussing. While participants spoke of specific Church policies or practices that perpetuated gender inequalities, they also often acknowledged that it was impossible to separate the Church's role in creating or exacerbating these inequalities from the role played by our larger society. In response to a question regarding gender inequalities in the Church, one man, Charles, stated, "I don't know that [it] has anything to do with the Church as much as it has to do with the gender norms in North America." A woman similarly contextualized the patriarchal attitudes and gender inequalities of the Church within what she generally saw in society:

[1] Participants in the focus groups are referred to by pseudonym to preserve confidentiality. Women's Group 1: Emma, Charlotte, Amelia, Anna, and Sophia; Women's Group 2: Tessa, Katie, Lauren, and Wendy; Men's Group 1: James, Michael, and Henry; Men's Group 2: Charles, Ben, and Oliver.

> **Amelia:** [A] study was done forever ago about men and women in meetings together, [about] how men felt like women were overpowering the conversation, when in reality, they were only speaking 20% of the time. And it was at the 20% threshold that men then felt like women were speaking equally, and I feel like that's reflected in any patriarchal society, including in the Church, and not that it was done maliciously. But our scriptures were written by men, our Church is led by men, and so women's stories are overlooked so much of the time.

Amelia further differentiated between the *gospel* (i.e., the core doctrines of the Church of Jesus Christ) and the *Church* (i.e., the culture, policies, leaders, and members of the Church) when alluding to the inequalities she faced as a woman: "In the gospel, I feel very confident and loved and known and seen. In the Church, I often feel very spoken over and overlooked." Others emphasized the role of individual differences in exacerbating or mitigating gender inequalities in the Church. James, for example, explained that he had "experienced bishops[2] who were very autocratic. I think sometimes it's just, what's their background? We had a bishop who was very autocratic, but his background was that he had been a highway patrolman." Other bishops, he said, had been "on the other end. … Our [current] bishop is really good at counsel. … He is very reticent."

While acknowledging individual differences and the role of larger historic inequalities in creating or contributing to the gender inequalities observed in the Church, participants also mentioned a number of LDS-specific policies, practices, or doctrines that they reported created painful inequalities. Specific issues that were mentioned included the practice of polygamy in the early years of the Church, the fact that only men can be ordained to priesthood offices and thus only men can be in top leadership roles, and the differing expectations for men and women pertaining to missions and parenthood. These issues led a number of our female participants to feel "uncomfortable" in the Church, as illustrated in the following account:

> **Tessa:** I wouldn't say I've always felt uncomfortable, but lately, it just feels like it's not a space that was built for or by women and with their best interest in mind. … It's uncomfortable sometimes to be in there when you start becoming aware of all of the differences or discrepancies. … As I've gotten older and have daughters of my own, I've been more aware of the disparity between my daughters' and my sons' opportunities … I love the gospel of Jesus Christ, and it's always been my norm, my base, and my safe space. So

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[2] Bishops are leaders of local congregations.

there are growing pains with coming to realize that maybe I'm not as comfortable in the roles that were prescribed to me as I used to be.

Some men provided additional insights into how the "deference" to priesthood holders that was often culturally expected created problems. James noted that even when he was serving as a nursery worker, female nursery workers tended to defer to him although "theoretically, there really is no reason whatsoever for that kind of a structure." Michael recounted an uncomfortable discussion when he and his wife were at the dining table with his parents:

> **Michael:** [My father] got into a little bit of a huff, walked out the door, told my wife to respect the priesthood authority, and closed the door. That is a core memory of my wife that she brings up often when we discuss issues of gender in the Church that she was straight up told that by her father-in-law [to respect priesthood authority].

In addition to this deference to priesthood holders, both the men and the women in our sample discussed how women or motherhood is often placed on a "pedestal" within the Church and the harm or discomfort that this and other instances of benevolent sexism (Haggard et al. 2019) create. In one of the men's focus groups, Charles noted that he had grown up in a family with no sisters, so "women were a little bit alien creatures" who were placed "on a pedestal." He said, "I learned later that women can be bad just like men can be bad." Ben also noted complicated messages around gender:

> **Ben:** I didn't grow up in a family that felt like women were second class. It was kind of the opposite. But, also, maybe not equal in a way that would have been healthier. There's a little bit of complex gender stuff.

A similar conversation took place in the women's focus group regarding the inequality in the importance of motherhood in comparison to fatherhood:

> **Lauren:** I feel like the Church talks about motherhood as the end all, be all of womanhood. So it seems like once you've achieved that, you should be done, right? …

> **Katie:** That's not all that's expected of men, is that they're just like, "Great, you fathered a child, like gold star." … But what else?

Despite the many persisting inequalities participants discussed, they also frequently mentioned progress that the Church has made to reduce these inequalities, as seen in the following quote:

> **Anna:** I remember was it 2012, and enough of us started saying, "Hey, why aren't we praying in General Conference?" You know, I was part of that. And I had a lot of people that are like, "Well, I have enough responsibilities at home, I don't need to." That was women, other women that were negating my experience. … But I'm not going … to take this. Because now my kids don't even know that … women never prayed in [Conference].

The above quote mentions that although previously only men prayed in the Church's General Conference, now women are sometimes invited to pray in this semi-annual Church-wide Conference.

Theme 2: Intentional Efforts in Discussing or Studying Scriptural Women and Heavenly Mother

Both men and women reported making intentional efforts to seek out stories of women in the scriptures. One participant, James, said, "We do it a lot at our house. We have four daughters and one son, so we really take an active role in that. … I want my daughters to feel they have role models in the scriptures that they can say, 'I want to be like this person.'" Other participants discussed that while they didn't intentionally search for stories about women in the scriptures, they paid more attention to stories about women than ones focusing on men when they came up during normal scripture study. Henry reported studying scripture every day using the Church's *Come, Follow Me* curriculum and explained, "We don't actively look for female occurrences in the scriptures when we study, but when we come across some … we do discuss. Extrapolating is a great idea; dig a little deeper. What are these circumstances? What must she have been going through? … With the females involved in the scriptures, that is a very appropriate and smart thing to do because it's obvious, as we all know, that the scriptures were, for the most part, written and compiled by men." Charlotte said that when she comes across women in the scriptures, "it's so rare that it's an oasis … finally this woman!"

Some participants discussed how they had seen concerted efforts to highlight women's stories on a Church-wide scale:

> **Amelia:** I think they put a lot of effort in the new Come, Follow Me program to include more quotes from female Church leaders, both past and present, and to include female stories. I really do notice almost every lesson has either a story from the scriptures about a woman or it has a quote by a female Church leader.

Across the focus groups, it was clear that whether or not participants intentionally sought out and studied the stories of scriptural women, they noticed and valued these stories because of their rarity. Although an in-depth discussion of the following themes is outside the scope of this paper, we note that participants did report personally connecting to Heavenly Mother in a variety of ways. They also reported barriers to discussing and studying Her, including lacking sufficient information, feeling the topic was "taboo," and worrying about disrespecting Her accidentally or viewing Her as too sacred to openly discuss.

Theme 3: The Impact of Women's Stories

This final theme builds upon the previous one to provide insights into why intentionally seeking out women's stories and elevating women's voices was so important to some participants. Both male and female participants frequently mentioned how they wished there were more stories of women. James reflected, "I feel so strongly about trying to figure out ways to have women in leadership roles in the Church so that men can have that experience in the formative years of having powerful women in leadership roles so they can really see women can be this amazing force for good." And Sophia, another focus group participant, desired that experience for herself and her kids: "I think it's interesting in my growing up and my testimony building … I didn't recognize how I was just kind of following this kind of patriarchal order where we don't seek women. They don't have power, they don't have influence, so we just stick to the men, until I'm a grown-up woman with children of my own and thinking, 'No, our voice matters. And my story matters.'"

Despite the frustration some participants mentioned at the disparity of women's stories and voices in the scriptures compared to those of men, many also communicated their appreciation for the ways that the Church and the scriptures and the doctrine of Heavenly Mother have strengthened their identity as women, as seen in the following conversation:

> **Katie:** I'm a gospel doctrine teacher in my ward [congregation]. … [As I teach], I'm always conscientious of … finding the womanhood in the scriptures and finding the female roles and finding Heavenly Mother. … Because it's so important for some people to be able to have that female connection in order to feel safe, in order to feel their connection to Deity.

> **Wendy:** I remember hearing the story of Abish[3] for the first time and just being so, I don't even know how to explain the first time I had ever heard a woman's story of faith, of her power, of what she brought, and how that affected generations. It was really powerful, and I love that story. That means so much to me but imagine if there were books in the Book of Mormon that I could draw inspiration from.

As seen in Katie's comment, participants also reported making intentional efforts to bring female deity into church conversations. Some had been inspired by stories or discussions of women that were not found in sacred texts but rather were shared in church meetings or taught in sacred temple ceremonies:

> **James:** I will make sure that I always mention Heavenly Mother specifically every time I speak. … I have noticed that that's starting to make a difference. We've had several of our sacrament meetings, people are starting to just mention Her.

> **Amelia:** I think so much of the stories of women in the scriptures, the strength and power I find in them is what I infer from the stories rather than what it actually says. Like Eve, my hero, but she's my hero because of what I learned in the temple, not what I learned in the scriptures.

Ultimately the impact of hearing and reading women's stories can be deeply personal for many Latter-day Saint women, as seen in this final quote as a participant expressed her gratitude to the other members of the focus group for the opportunity to discuss these issues and share personal experiences with each other:

> **Wendy:** I just appreciate so much being able to be a part of this and being able to experience communion and community with other women who feel similarly. … I just so appreciate that I got to be a part of this. I know it's for research purposes, but it's been so uplifting for me.

Discussion

The current study explored how women and men who are members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints orient to the concept of female deity, measured by their perceptions of how often women are discussed in church settings and their own tendencies to study scriptural women and Heavenly Mother. We also examined how their gender ideologies and their experiences

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[3] Abish is a woman described in Alma 19 in the Book of Mormon.

with sexism are associated with these orientations. Finally, we examined the moderating role of gender in these trends. We found support for almost all hypotheses. The majority of Latter-day Saint women (and many Latter-day Saint men) in our quantitative sample have experienced sexism. Although the data did not capture whether these sexist experiences occurred in church settings, our focus group participants described several examples of sexism experienced at church. Further, they articulated various ways they perceive sexism is perpetuated in the Church, including its patriarchal structure, frequent occurrences of benevolent sexism (Haggard et al. 2019), and some sexist leaders.

We further explored whether experiences with sexism were associated with individuals—specifically, women—(1) intentionally seeking women (scriptural women or Heavenly Mother) in their religious studies or (2) perceiving a lack of discussion of women (scriptural women or Heavenly Mother) at church. As expected, quantitative results showed that discussion of scriptural women or Heavenly Mother at church were quite rare in our sample. However, personal study of these topics was slightly more common, though certainly not frequent. Thus, it appears that the survey respondents tend to engage in personal study of scriptural women and Heavenly Mother as opposed to hearing them addressed in formal church settings. Qualitative results provided additional insights into this, showing that for those who did not intentionally seek out women's stories in the scriptures, their attention to these stories was heightened given their rarity. Focus group interviews further revealed that having daughters and becoming more educated about gender inequalities were important motivators for intentionally seeking out women's stories.

Although church-based discussions of scriptural women and Heavenly Mother would likely be beneficial, the focus groups revealed that personal study has also helped men and women internalize the divine nature of women. Several individuals (spurred on by personal study) have made a point to include discussions of scriptural women and Heavenly Mother each time they taught a lesson or gave a talk in church. Indeed, several focus group participants described how their own personal study affected their identity and feelings of divine worth. However, the lack of formal discussion may discourage others from personal study and leave them wondering whether they should even engage with the topic at all (Majeske et al. 2022).

In the quantitative data, experiences with sexism were directly associated with both personal study and perceptions of church discussion of scriptural women and Heavenly Mother, though these associations depended on

gender. For women, experiences with sexism were associated with a perception of less frequent church discussion of women. However, the opposite was found for men, with more experiences with sexism relating to a perception of more frequent church discussion of women. It is possible that women who have been victims of sexism are particularly attuned to discussion (or lack thereof) surrounding women in formal church settings. Sexism often includes putting down, ignoring opinions, or treating one unfairly because of their gender (Glick and Fiske 2001). It is likely that women who have experienced high levels of this discrimination might notice inequality around gender because of their own experiences. Conversely, men who have experienced sexism (i.e., been made to feel bad about being a man) tend to notice higher levels of church discussion of scriptural women and Heavenly Mother. Given how rare these discussions are in general, it is worth considering whether the typical man simply does not notice when scriptural women or Heavenly Mother are discussed. Men who have experienced sexism may be more attuned to discussions around gender and may simply notice when women are discussed in formal settings.

Experiences with sexism were also associated with higher rates of personal study of Heavenly Mother for women only. Sexism is a distressing event that reduces one's locus of control and beliefs in a fair world, while eliciting significant psychological distress. As a result, it necessitates a coping response (Spencer et al. 1997). There is a wide variety in how women cope with sexism, but for Latter-day Saint women specifically, they may rely on religious teachings as a means of coping and may find particular strength and empowerment in the unique Church teachings about gender—including scriptural women and Heavenly Mother. It is likely that if these same women perceive fewer instances of formal church discussion, they will supplement this with their own personal study. This finding was consistent with the focus groups, where several women discussed the healing power of learning about scriptural women and Heavenly Mother. Several described the power of this study in healing wounds of sexism and discovering their divine worth as women. We found that this type of personal study was more common among women than among men. When men experience sexism, they may turn to other coping strategies, perhaps study of Heavenly Father, scriptural men, or Jesus Christ to reinforce their worth as a man.

Finally, we found that—regardless of gender—traditional gender ideology was associated with perceiving more frequent church discussion of women and with having lower levels of personal study. In other words, those that sub-

scribe to more traditional gender roles are likely more satisfied with the infrequency of discussion regarding scriptural women and Heavenly Mother. Traditional ideologies support a belief where it is expected for men to have power and authority—thus, even a brief mention of women feels adequate, and they feel less need to engage in personal study on these topics. Conversely, those with more progressive gender ideologies perceive there is less frequent church discussion of women and likely desire more, given that their views surrounding men and women are more egalitarian in nature. This gap of discussion then feeds into their likelihood of pursuing personal study on these topics.

Limitations

One of the major strengths of the study was that the sample included members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, who are a part of a minority religion with specific beliefs on gender. However, this strength also may be a limitation since the findings may not be generalizable to other religions, particularly those without a belief in female deity. Future research might study these associations in other faiths, tailored to each faith's gendered beliefs. Additionally, the sample was cross-sectional, and the direction of results cannot be known. It is possible that a lack of discussion regarding Heavenly Mother or scriptural women may contribute to perceived sexism, as opposed to the model we tested in the current study. Future longitudinal research could explore direction of effects. Our sample was not random but was a convenience sample, meaning the results are not generalizable to all Latter-day Saints. For example, in terms of education level our sample is considerably more educated compared to LDS members in the United States as a whole (i.e., 74.4% of our sample has a four-year college degree vs. 33% of LDS members in the United States; Pew Research Center 2014). This may have affected our findings because education level is tied to gender ideology (Davis and Greenstein 2009), perceptions of sexism (Phillips 2020), religiosity (Schwadel 2015), etc. Additionally, our focus group participants all lived in or near Utah County and thus may only reflect the experiences of Latter-day Saints in that particular area, which is highly saturated with LDS Church members (i.e., 72% of Utah County is LDS compared to 1% of the United States; Public Religion Research Institute, 2020). Also, the sample was self-reported and self-selected, making our conclusions limited and subject to some bias. Individuals who are interested in gender may be more likely to have participated in the study. Finally, our sample consisted primarily of women, so conclusions on men are limited.

Conclusion

We found that, despite enjoying some empowering teachings related to gender (including belief in a Heavenly Mother), members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints are not immune to perpetuating or experiencing sexism and hold a range of gender ideologies. Further, our findings suggest that individual experiences with sexism and beliefs about gender are associated with members' religious experiences and behaviors. While men's experiences with sexism do not seem to influence their views or behaviors toward female deity, women who have been the victims of repeated sexism tend to notice a lack of discussion about scriptural women and Heavenly Mother at church and seek out scriptural women and Heavenly Mother more frequently in their personal study. Regardless of gender, the more traditional a Latter-day Saint's gender ideology, the more they perceive that scriptural women and Heavenly Mother are discussed at church and the less they personally study them. Given these quantitative findings, it seems that women who have experienced sexism and members with nontraditional gender ideologies may be susceptible to feeling unwelcome or dissatisfied at church. Our qualitative findings suggest that hearing about scriptural women and Heavenly Mother is deeply meaningful for some members, especially when those members experience and observe gender inequalities in the Church.

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Strangers and Foreigners or Fellow Citizens with the Saints? How Leaders of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Have Portrayed Immigration Over Time

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Although The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is considered a conservative religion and for decades its U.S. members have been among the most reliable supporters of the Republican Party, the Church's position and rhetoric in recent years and the opinions of many of its members toward immigration clearly diverge from the Republican agenda and the opinions of other conservative religious Americans. This study seeks to better understand Latter-day Saints' view of immigration by evaluating how leaders of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints have talked about immigration over time. To do this it examines all addresses given in the Church's General Conferences from 1851 to 2019. It finds that Church leaders have consistently portrayed immigration and immigrants in positive terms and that the support today is in line with the tone and approach that Church leaders have exhibited in the past. Among other things, Church leaders have identified themselves as descendants of immigrants, coupled immigration with the history of the Church, emphasized the need to help immigrants, and used immigrants as examples of behavior that people should emulate. The article concludes by discussing how Church leaders have addressed immigration in recent years when members' opinions about immigration are anything but uniform.

Largely because of the stances the Republican and Democratic parties have taken on a number of important social issues, Latter-day Saints, beginning in the 1970s, have become perhaps the most reliable supporters of the Republican Party in the United States (Campbell, Karpowitz, and Monson 2016, 141–142, chap 4). Latter-day Saints identify with and vote Republican and, more than any other American religious group, call themselves conservative (Campbell, Green, and Monson 2014, 78–80).

Despite their partisan and ideological loyalties, Latter-day Saints' view of immigration strays from conservative and Republican orthodoxy and from

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the typical position of Evangelicals and other religious groups closely aligned with the Republican Party. A 2011 national survey, for example, showed that Latter-day Saints are more supportive of increasing immigration than people of other religions, except for Jews, while Evangelicals are less supportive than any other religious group (Campbell, Karpowitz, and Monson 2016, 146). In a 2011 Pew Research Center survey, 45 percent of Latter-day Saints viewed immigration as strengthening the country and 41 percent considered it a burden. By contrast, 27 percent of white Evangelicals felt immigration strengthens the country and 59 percent saw it as a burden (Pew Research Center 2012). The 2016 Next Mormons Survey showed that close to 60 percent of Latter-day Saints agreed that "immigrants today strengthen our country" (Riess 2019, 125). Similarly, a 2018 study conducted by NORC at the University of Chicago found that 55 percent of Latter-day Saints believed that immigrants help the country (Fingerhut and McCombs 2018).

Not surprisingly, support for undocumented immigration is noticeably less than for immigration as a whole. However, it is still greater among Latter-day Saints than other religious adherents. A 2019 study showed that 58 percent of Latter-day Saints held a negative view of undocumented immigrants and 37 percent favored deporting them, compared to 69 percent of white Evangelicals who viewed undocumented immigrants negatively and 55 percent who wanted them deported (Cox 2019).

Although these studies illustrate that Latter-day Saints are divided over their views of immigration and immigrants, they also have a more favorable view than adherents of other conservative religions. One researcher wrote, "In several national surveys, including research from Pew and the Next Mormons Survey, Mormons have demonstrated support for the idea that immigrants 'strengthen' America 'because of their hard work and talents.' The difference is especially noteworthy when Mormons are compared to other groups that are also predominately white and politically conservative" (Riess 2018a).

To better understand the perspective of Latter-day Saints on immigration, this study examines how leaders of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints have talked about it over time. How often have Church leaders discussed immigration, and how has it been portrayed? Does the Church's pride in its pioneer heritage affect how leaders have depicted immigration? Has the message changed now that the majority of Church members in the United States are integrated into the mainstream of American culture and immigration is but a distant experience in their family tree? How have Church

leaders rhetorically handled the divide in Latter-day Saint opinion about immigration in recent years, and has their rhetoric changed now that the Church is more of a global institution?

Studying the rhetoric of Latter-day Saints leaders is relevant to understanding Latter-day Saint opinion. Although there are examples to the contrary (e.g., Van Leer 1995; Fertig 2021), the literature shows that members follow their Church leaders, even when it "runs counter to their ideological inclinations" (Campbell, Green, and Monson 2014, chap. 6; see also Campbell and Monson 2003; Nteta and Wallsten 2012; Campbell, Karpowitz, and Monson 2016, 141–146; Wallsten and Nteta 2016). In large measure this reflects how Church members view their highest leaders, whom they sustain as prophets, seers, and revelators. Members are taught to give strict heed to their leaders, especially the president of the Church (also referred to as the prophet), whose role is to reveal the word of God to the people (Britsch and Britsch 1992; McConkie 1992). With their belief in prophets and modern and ongoing revelation, "it would be difficult to propose a modern religion in which the rhetoric of religious leaders plays a more significant role than in Mormonism" (Shepherd and Shepherd 1986, 126).

Methods

To evaluate how Church leaders have talked about immigration, this study examines the addresses they have given in General Conferences from 1851 to 2019. These conferences are semi-annual, multi-day meetings held in Salt Lake City the first weekends of April and October. They have been widely disseminated to Church members throughout the world via television, radio, the Church's satellite system, and the internet; all of the addresses are published the next month in the Church's monthly magazine and are available on the Church's website. General Conference addresses are subsequently used in Sunday meetings across the world and families and individuals are encouraged to make them a source of study.

Certainly, Church leaders have said more about human migration in other venues and a search of books, newspapers, and websites could be used to ascertain their views. However, General Conferences provide an ideal source of material. They provide a consistent and uniform measuring stick and more accurately reflect the dogma and thinking of the Church's highest leaders. They are broadly circulated to the membership of the Church, and, for a researcher, are accessible to obtain (Shepherd and Shepherd 1984a; Shepherd

and Shepherd 1986). As an example, it is likely that a researcher would find more about what Church leaders say in modern times because of the ease of accessing newspapers, although that might not be an accurate reflection of how often or in what ways Church leaders have addressed immigration issues over time. Moreover, Latter-day Saints' belief in ongoing revelation along with "their devotion to prophetic authority make these conferences a particularly useful source for understanding official Mormon convictions and concerns" (Shepherd and Shepherd 1984a, 30), and "conveying to members an official position on matters of doctrine, policy and a variety of other institutional expectations" (Shepherd and Shepherd 1984b, 131).

The Conference talks were searched using www.lds-general-conference.org, which covers 1851 to present. The search terms were emigration, immigration, and migration, and variations of these words. Any Conference address that had at least one mention of one of the search terms and was relevant to human migration in some way was included in the database, even if immigration wasn't the main point of the talk.

1. **Example**. Addresses included in this category portray migrants as having certain characteristics, attributes, or behaviors, or describe them as attaining certain accomplishments or failures.
2. **Welfare**. This category includes addresses that argue that migrants need help or are the beneficiaries of help; portray migrants of taking advantage of people's generosity; or discuss whether people should help migrants.
3. **Church History**. This category of addresses recount stories from the Church's past, including Church members coming to the United States, crossing the plains, or building up the Church in some way.
4. **Personal History**. This includes speakers who identify with immigrants, perhaps by discussing their ancestors who were immigrants, identifying themselves as immigrants, or telling of an immigrant who played a meaningful role in their life.
5. **Scripture**. This is counted when the address refers in some way to immigration in the Bible or the Book of Mormon.

Not all addresses fit into one of these five categories, and some addresses are counted in multiple categories. For example, a speaker could recall the migration of Saints from Great Britain to Utah as both Church History and Example if the speaker endorses immigrants as an example of industry, perseverance, and faith in building up the Church and Utah.

Findings

Table 1 on the following page shows the number of talks that had the keywords in them, broken down by decade. There are 590 addresses that contained at least one of these terms; because some addresses contained more than one keyword, the figures in Table 1 add up to 695 rather than 590.

Not surprisingly, the 1850s, 1860s, and 1870s had more talks about immigration than any other decade besides the 1920s, when immigration consumed much of the political discussion in the country. Together the 1850s, 1860s, and 1870s comprise 32 percent of all the General Conference talks that mention immigration. It was during these three decades that the Church experienced the largest influx of immigrants moving to Utah, with an estimate of more than 85,000 members who emigrated from Europe from 1846 to 1887 (Arrington and Bitton 1992, 136). The addresses in the early years often discussed the current situation of Saints coming to the Salt Lake Valley; they encouraged Church members to be generous with their money in bringing immigrants to Utah and also helping them once they arrived. In later years there were not as many talks addressing immigration. When the topic did occur, it was not the central focus but usually was used to exemplify or build upon a different point.

These first three decades also contain the most negative portrayals of immigration of any period. Of the 590 total addresses, only 25 portrayed immigration negatively, but 14 of those were delivered in the first three decades. Seven of the 14 were in the 1850s, one was in the 1860s, and another six were in the 1870s. Twelve of the 14 dealt with the Perpetual Emigrating Fund (PEF), a program that was created in 1849 to provide loans for members who needed financial help to reach Utah. The program called for individuals who received loans to repay them once they arrived in Utah and had the ability to pay; this repayment would then be used to loan money to others who needed help. From 1852 until 1887, when Congress disincorporated the fund and took over its assets (Mathieson and Oman 2017, 19; Mulder 1956, 426–427), the PEF assisted 26,000 Latter-day Saints who traveled from Europe to Utah (Jensen and Hartley 1992, 674).

These 12 addresses were categorized as negative because the talks were critical of immigrants who had not paid their debts to the PEF. President Brigham Young gave three such speeches (in 1854, 1856, and 1870). In the one from 1854, titled "Debtors to the Perpetual Emigrating Fund," Young maintained that people who had been helped through the PEF should pay their

Table 1. Number of General Conference Addresses, 1851–2019, by Keyword and Decade

	1850s	1860s	1870s	1880s	1890s	1900s	1910s	1920s	1930s	1940s	1950s	1960s	1970s	1980s	1990s	2000s	2010s	Total
Emigration	10	33	23	15	6	5	8	11	4	2	2	0	1	1	1	0	4	126
Emigrated	0	1	10	8	5	9	10	11	3	5	3	9	4	1	4	3	2	88
Emigrants	18	6	10	5	6	4	9	5	4	2	5	1	1	0	1	0	1	78
Emigrating	18	4	14	3	1	2	3	2	1	2	0	0	0	0	1	2	0	53
Emigrate	8	10	12	2	2	5	2	3	1	2	1	0	0	0	1	2	0	51
Emigrant	2	0	1	0	1	1	2	3			1	1						12
Emigrations								1			1							2
Emigrational								1										1
Subtotal	**56**	**54**	**70**	**33**	**21**	**26**	**34**	**37**	**13**	**13**	**13**	**11**	**6**	**2**	**8**	**7**	**7**	**411**
Immigration	12	4	0	7	2	2	4	11	3	1	2			4		1	1	54
Immigrants	5	1	1	2	1	2	5	4	1	3	1	2	3	4	4	1	3	43
Immigrant	1		0		1	2	2	3	1	2	3	3	5	1	2	5	2	33
Immigrated	2	1	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	2	1	1	2	2	4	3	22
Immigrate	1		1		1		1	1								1		6
Immigrating	2						2						1			1		6
Immigrations															1			1
Subtotal	**23**	**6**	**3**	**9**	**6**	**6**	**15**	**19**	**6**	**6**	**8**	**6**	**10**	**11**	**9**	**13**	**9**	**165**
Migration	1	1			1	1	2	12	5	8	2	6	3		10	3	1	56
Migrated		1	1				2	4	2		2	1	3	1	1		1	19
Migrate		1		1		2	2	2	1	1	1		1					12
Migrating	1	1		1		2	3	2	1	1			1					13
Migrations			1	1		1		1	1	1	1	2	1		1			11
Migratory							1					1			1			3
Migrants								1				1						2
Migrant										1			1	1				3
Subtotal	**2**	**4**	**2**	**3**	**1**	**6**	**10**	**22**	**10**	**12**	**6**	**11**	**10**	**2**	**13**	**3**	**2**	**119**
Column Total	**81**	**64**	**75**	**45**	**28**	**38**	**59**	**78**	**29**	**31**	**27**	**28**	**26**	**15**	**30**	**23**	**18**	**695***

*The total number of addresses is 590. The column adds to 695 because some of the individual addresses contained more than one keyword.

debt rather than putting it off until they became richer (Young 1854, 53). In that same General Conference, Orson Pratt, an apostle, encouraged members to "pay up your debts, pay them up to the Perpetual Emigrating Fund; and let the means be sent back immediately, that those who are starving to death, and are ground down with tyranny, may enjoy the same privileges as you." Later he said, "What is the duty of the Saints who have come here by the aid and benefit of the Perpetual Emigrating Fund? It is their duty to pay back the debt they own immediately" (Pratt 1854).

John Taylor, an apostle who succeeded Brigham Young as president of the Church in 1880, gave two addresses in 1877 and another two in 1878, all hammering the point that people who had benefited from the fund and were now able to repay their debt should do so. "I hope that those who are still owing for their emigration will be led to reflect upon these things, and consider the situation of the brethren who are now in the same position as they themselves were some years ago" (Taylor 1878).

Joseph F. Smith, an apostle and later president of the Church, decried "the ingratitude, want of charity and dishonor which attaches to individuals who have been so generously assisted out of poverty and oppression, and placed in circumstances to become free and independent, and then neglect or fail to do their duty in these matters." He continued by saying that "if all was paid up, [there] would be more than sufficient to immigrate to this country all the Saints now in Europe" (Smith 1879).

Although these talks are categorized as negative because they criticized immigrants who had not paid their debts, they were not discouraging immigration. Rather, the speakers exhorted people to pay their debt so the PEF would have more money to distribute and provide more immigrants the same opportunity that the debtors had.

The 1920s, next to the 1850s, was the decade with the most mentions of immigration. Although by the 1920s the migration of Church members had mostly dried up, the number of talks referencing immigration reflects the topic's importance in the national dialogue. Following a surge of immigration in the late nineteenth century to the early twentieth century in the United States, a backlash against immigration developed which culminated with Congress passing the Immigration Act of 1924. This Act distinguished among different groups of immigrants and established race distinctions. Among other things, it created a policy that favored immigrants from western and northern Europe, limited those coming from southern and eastern Europe, and continued the exclusion of Asian immigrants (Perlmann 2018, 201).

Despite the tough talk and discriminatory immigration laws that were passed in that era, the rhetoric of Church leaders did not follow suit. Out of 78 addresses that mentioned immigration during the 1920s, only one of them was negative, and it was not critical of immigration in general. It was given by Joseph W. McMurrin, the president of the California mission. He warned Church members to be careful about leaving their current situations and moving to California, cautioning that if they did not have money they would be "better off" where they were (McMurrin 1925).

It should be mentioned, though, that although their rhetoric was favorable of immigration, Church leaders likely had western and northern Europeans in mind when they talked positively about immigration. The bulk of immigrants to Utah were from western and northern Europe, and when they arrived they were celebrated, helped, and widely accepted (Arrington and Bitton 1992, 135-137). Immigrants from other areas of the world, on the other hand, were not as welcomed among the saints. It seems that Church leaders and members shared many of the same attitudes about certain racial and ethnic groups that the country harbored at the time (Harris 2010a; Harris 2010b; Reeve 2015). The most negative reference to immigration was given in 1941 by J. Reuben Clark, first counselor in the First Presidency. In the address he discussed the war in Europe and the United States being a choice land. He mentioned that in 1923, and many times since (but not in General Conferences), he had warned of many trends that he labeled "perils of these times," which included "the unrestricted immigration of aliens who were foreign and in tradition hostile to our systems of government" (Clark 1941).

Since 1941 only four talks were given that were categorized as negative. Two of them revisited a point made many decades before: they encouraged members to stay in their home countries and promised the people that they would enjoy the same blessings of the gospel, regardless of where they lived (Nelson 2006; Uchtdorf 2005). Russell M. Nelson, who is now the president of the Church, said, "in the early days of the Church, conversion often meant emigration as well. But now the gathering takes place in each nation. … Every nation is the gathering place of its own people. The place of gathering for Brazilian Saints is in Brazil; the place of gathering for Nigerian Saints is in Nigeria; the place of gathering for Korean Saints is in Korea; and so forth. … Zion is wherever righteous Saints are" (Nelson 2006).

Table 2 on the following page highlights how the keywords were used in all of the talks indexed from 1851 to 2019. It shows that speakers tied Church

Table 2. Number of General Conference Addresses Mentioning Variations of Immigration, Emigration, and Migration, 1851–2019, by Topic

Example	Welfare	Church History	Personal History	Scripture
128	131	345	59	46

history with immigration 345 times, by far the most common way immigration was referred to. The Church has always placed emphasis on its history, and it is not uncommon for a General Conference address to refer to that history in some way. Perhaps this helps explain why Latter-day Saints are slightly more sympathetic to immigration than some other religious conservatives. Although the United States is a nation of immigrants and the people opposed to immigration are the descendants of immigrants, the fact that the Church has discussed immigration in mostly positive ways may make it more likely that Church members know their family history and Church history and more closely identify with immigrants.

A few Conference talks in recent years provide a taste of how immigration has been portrayed in General Conference talks. One, given in 2001 by Gordon B. Hinckley, who at the time was president of the Church, shows how Church history is used to build support for a modern day program. He spoke of the importance of the Perpetual Emigrating Fund in helping converts to the Church immigrate to Utah, and praised their contributions to Utah and the Church. "They became a great strength to the work here. Some of them came with needed skills, such as stone masonry, and others developed skills. They were able to perform a tremendous service in constructing buildings, including the Salt Lake Temple and Tabernacle" and became "an important part of the family of the Church in these mountain valleys." He specifically tied them to the people of the Church today: "I believe that many within the sound of my voice are descendants of those who were blessed by reason of this fund. You are today prosperous and secure because of what was done for your forebears" (Hinckley 2001).

President Hinckley then introduced the Perpetual Education Fund, which was to work similarly to the Perpetual Emigrating Fund. Through the Perpetual Education Fund, money would be loaned to help young people in the Church in other countries to pay for the training and schooling necessary to get better jobs. Once they completed their training, they would pay back the money to the Perpetual Education Fund so others would also have that opportunity.

One talk, categorized as both Personal History and Example, was delivered by Joseph B. Wirthlin, an apostle, who related the influence a bishop had on young men, including Wirthlin and others who had become prominent Church leaders. In the first of five paragraphs about this bishop, Wirthlin described him as a "German immigrant, a convert to the Church, and he spoke with a thick accent" (2007, 46). He then discussed what a wonderful person he was: "You could scarcely think of Bishop Perschon without thinking of his concern and compassion for others and his untiring commitment to teach that same quality to others" (2007, 47).

Another talk that was categorized the same way was given by Henry B. Eyring, counselor in the First Presidency of the Church. He told a story of two of his ancestors who joined the Church. One was a young girl in Switzerland and another was a young man who was "an immigrant to the United States from Germany, living in St. Louis, Missouri. The two met as they crossed the plains to Utah and got married." President Eyring continued, "I am among the tens of thousands of descendants of that boy and that girl" (2010, 59).

The Church's Immigration Communications in Recent Years

In reaction to the increasing salience of immigration issues in national politics and the differing positions and strong opinions that Church members and the public have about immigration, the Church has increasingly been drawn into the immigration debate. In doing so, leaders' actions and statements have been consistent with the rhetoric of previous generations of Church leaders. They have shown that they are more accepting of immigration than public opinion, current immigration policy, and even many of their own members.

One indication of the controversy surrounding immigration in recent years came with an Arizona law that passed April 23, 2010. The law received widespread notoriety and at the time was labeled the nation's strictest law against illegal immigration. Among other things, the law required law enforcement officers to ask about a person's legal status if they had reasonable suspicion the person was in the country illegally. Notably, the legislation was sponsored by Senator Russell Pearce, who was a member of the Church (Archibold 2010a; Archibold 2010b). Although the Arizona law had support among many conservatives and some members of the Church, Utah took a different approach, an approach that was supported by the Church. On November 11, 2010, a number of groups in Utah who favored a pro-immigrant policy held a press conference introducing the Utah Compact, which outlined

five principles they argued should be included in future legislation in Utah: (1) the federal government should handle immigration issues; (2) law enforcement should focus on criminal activities rather than civil violations; (3) families should be supported and kept together; (4) immigrants should be recognized for the economic role they "play as workers and taxpayers"; and (5) Utah should "adopt a humane approach" to the immigrants who are already a part of the community (Utah Compact 2010). On the same day that a press conference was held introducing the Compact, the Church released a statement supporting it (Petrzelka and Jacobs 2016, 157).

Just four months later, on March 15, 2011, Utah passed an immigration policy that mirrored the principles laid out in the Utah Compact. Given the state's political and demographic characteristics, many experts would have predicted that Utah would pass restrictive immigration laws more in line with what Arizona had done (Petrzelka and Jacobs 2016). Instead, the opposite occurred. Petrzelka and Jacobs argue that the Compact passed in large measure because the Church supported it, both through its initial advocacy and also through subsequent public statements, its lobbying efforts, and the fact that most legislators were Church members (2016; see also Campbell 2012; Jacobs, Keister, Glass and Petrzelka 2015; Mortensen 2011, 6–11).

Other states followed the lead of Arizona instead of Utah, however. With Georgia and Alabama passing tough anti-immigration laws in May and June and other states considering such measures, the Church, on June 10, 2011, issued a statement addressing illegal or undocumented immigration and calling on the federal government to take action. In the statement the Church said that immigration issues "must ultimately be resolved by the federal government," and that such an approach should be "balanced and civil" and be "consistent with its [the Church's] tradition of compassion, reverence for family, and its commitment to law." It also "discourages its members" from being in any country illegally and that nations have the right to enforce their laws. However, it also emphasized that "the bedrock moral issue for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is how we treat each other as children of God" (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints 2011).Since this statement the Church has referred to it a number of times when the news media has questioned it on various immigration topics.

The concern about families has been a recurring issue in the Church's statements. In 2018, in the wake of controversial Trump administration policies, it issued two official statements. On January 26, 2018, less than two weeks

after a new First Presidency was established, the Church issued a statement addressing President Trump's reversal the previous September of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program. This policy, started under President Obama, allowed some unauthorized immigrants who had been brought to the United States as children a legal path to work (Mims and Noyce 2018; McDonnell Nieto del Rio and Jordan 2022). The Church stated that "the Church does not advocate any specific legislation or executive solution" but hoped for "a provision for strengthening families and keeping them together." It pushed for those "sometimes referred to as 'Dreamers'" and stated that "these individuals have demonstrated a capacity to serve and contribute positively in our society, and we believe they should be granted the opportunity to continue to do so" (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints 2018a). Similar to many General Conference talks over the years, the Church personalized the issue in the statement by tying its past with modern immigration issues, explaining that "most of our early Church members emigrated from foreign lands to live, work, and worship, blessed by the freedoms and opportunities offered in this great nation" (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints 2018a).

The second statement addressed a Trump policy started April 2018 that separated children from their parents who had entered the United States illegally. Although the Trump Administration hoped that the "zero tolerance" approach would discourage immigrants from coming to the United States without authorization (Jordan 2018), the policy was roundly criticized (Yoon-Hendricks and Greenberg 2018), and the Church joined the chorus June 18. The statement criticized the "forced separation of children from their parents now occurring at the US-Mexico border" and affirmed that "we are deeply troubled by the aggressive and insensitive treatment of these families. It reemphasized its position "that immigration reform should strengthen families and keep them together" and called on "national leaders to take swift action to correct this situation and seek for rational, compassionate solutions" (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints 2018b).

Church leaders have also given attention to refugees. In a 2015 letter that was to be read in sacrament meetings throughout the world, Church leaders encouraged members to donate money to the Church Humanitarian Fund and to participate in local efforts to help refugees (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints 2015). In the spring of 2016, Church leaders started the "I Was a Stranger" refugee relief effort, which encouraged members to assist

refugees in their own communities. Leaders gave talks on this topic in the April General Conference and the Church established a website showing how people could participate in helping refugees. Notably, these talks, along with a video, tied the experiences of early Church members being driven from their homes because of their religious beliefs with the current plight of refugees (Wright 2018, 66–69). On December 2, 2019 the Church issued another statement supporting refugees and encouraging members to volunteer their "time, talents, and friendship" to welcome and integrate them into their communities (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints 2019).

In 2021, the Church issued a news release highlighting the "more than a dozen" welcome centers the Church has in seven states and one in Canada that are "part of the Church's Immigrant Services Initiative, which since 2015 has helped immigrants and refugees integrate into their new communities." The news release began, "When Dan and Lorrie Curriden look at the faces of the immigrants they serve in Las Vegas, they see the courage of their own immigrant grandparents. Whether one is a new immigrant or five generations removed from one, Dan said, 'we all benefit from the fact that somebody in our ancestry had the guts to leave the place where they came from, into the unknown, and find a better life for their children in this great country'" (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints 2021a).

Later that summer, the Church revised the General Handbook: Serving in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints to include a section titled "immigration," and another titled "refugees." Under "immigration" it states that "Church members offer their time, talents, and friendship to welcome immigrants and refugees as members of their communities." Under "refugees," it used the same phrase but excluded "immigrants" from the sentence (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints 2021b, 38.8.18).

Discussion

The evaluation of General Conference addresses from 1851 to 2019 reveals that Church leaders talked about immigration and rarely did so negatively. They have tied immigration in with Church history, taught that people have a responsibility to help immigrants, used immigrants as examples people should emulate, and identified their ancestors as immigrants, among other things. The fact that they have talked about immigration in General Conference suggests the ways they have discussed it in other venues, such as in other meetings, Church publications, lesson materials, and media interviews. Conference

talks represent Church teachings and thought. If leaders are saying something in General Conference, they are likely also mentioning it in other meetings and activities.

Although Church leaders' message about immigration has been consistent in its tone, the frequency of that message has varied. There were many Conference talks about immigration in the early decades of Latter-day Saints being in Utah—it was the story of the Church at the time—and again in the 1920s when immigration was a dominant issue in national politics. In recent years as immigration again became salient nationally and consequently in the Church as well, Church leaders continued with many of the same themes as before, including members' responsibility to help immigrants and refugees and the importance of immigration in Church history. The difference in recent years, though, is not in the message but what methods they are using to deliver the message. Instead of increasing the frequency of talking about immigration in General Conference, which would give more attention and credence to what they say, Church leaders have elected to address specific immigration issues through policies and statements.

One reason for this approach might be that the Church is no longer as Utah or United States-centric as in the past. With more than half of its members living outside of the United States (Walch 2023), discussing immigration in General Conference, especially in reaction to what is occurring in the United States, may be too prescriptive for a worldwide membership facing different situations in their respective countries. Moreover, immigration is a sensitive issue in other parts of the world as well and a General Conference address about immigration risks antagonizing members who do not agree with Church leaders about immigration. In the United States, for example, despite Latter-day Saints having a more positive view of immigration than members of other conservative religious faiths, a substantial number of Latter-day Saints disagree with the Church's position. Indeed, Church leaders likely believe that highlighting immigration policy in General Conference in such a politically polarizing era would further the schism between Church policy that does not ask about people's legal status (Campbell, Karpowitz, Monson 2016, 146–147) and Church members who argue that it is against Church doctrine to have a "don't ask, don't tell" policy that openly flouts the nation's laws (Mortensen 2011).

When Church leaders have spoken directly and extensively about human migration in recent years, they chose to rally their members behind

refugees rather than immigrants. Although the "I Was a Stranger" campaign addressed an international crisis that Church leaders likely would argue was more appropriate than immigration for a worldwide church, it was also an easier sell to its members. Similar to questions about the role of women and gays in the Church (Prince 2019; Jordan 2020), immigration is an issue that whatever Church leaders do, will frustrate and divide Church membership. Although studies show that Latter-day Saints are responsive to Church leaders, even when those leaders are challenging the members' own ideological beliefs (Campbell, Green, and Monson 2014, chap. 6; see also Nteta and Wallsten 2012; Wallsten and Nteta 2016), Church leaders have to be careful going too far astray from where Church members are willing to follow.

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Investigating Why Latter-day Saint Adolescents Are at Lower Risk for Suicidality: Comparing Across Sexual Orientations and Gender Identities

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Previous research has identified Latter-day Saint adolescents at particularly low levels of suicidality compared to adolescents of other affiliations or no affiliation. However, specific pathways of effects remain uncertain. The current study used data from 46,823 Utah adolescents collected by the Utah Department of Health to examine mediators of the relationship between religious affiliation and suicide ideation, suicide attempts, and depression. The study also examined how these mediators differed across sexual orientations and gender identities. Compared to those of no religion, heterosexual Latter-day Saint and Catholic adolescents were less likely to use drugs or alcohol, which proved to be the most prominent protective factor across sexual orientations and gender identities, decreasing suicide attempts by more than 20%. Less family conflict was also a protective factor for Latter-day Saints and Catholics. For LGBQ adolescents, being Latter-day Saint was protective against suicide ideation, suicide attempts, and depression through less use of drugs or alcohol and less family conflict. Being Latter-day Saint or Catholic was also protective for LGBQ adolescents given their lower likelihood of being bullied (again compared to those of no religion).

Religiousness and spirituality (R/S) are generally associated with lower rates of suicidality (i.e., suicidal thoughts, attempts, and dying by suicide; Chen and VanderWeele 2020). Various explanations for this have been proposed, including theories of religious integration and religious networks where individuals feel a sense of group belonging and receive social supports (see Stack and Kposowa 2011). Religious individuals may have lower suicidality given they are less likely to engage in behaviors linked to suicide (such as drug and alcohol use; Smith 2005).

In concert with these theories, a recent study by Dyer and Goodman (2022) found religiously affiliated adolescents at less risk for suicide ideation, suicide attempt, and depression than non-affiliated adolescents; Latter-day

Saint adolescents were at especially low risk. These results are relatively unsurprising given that studies generally find Latter-day Saints have equal and often better mental health than those of other religions or no religion (Dyer et al. 2023; Judd 1998; Overton 2005). Latter-day Saints tend to be a highly religious group (Smith 2005) and thus likely derive benefits from their religiousness. Dyer and Goodman (2022) also found Latter-day Saint LGBQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and questioning) adolescents to have the lowest level of mental health difficulties compared to LGBQ individuals of other affiliations and no affiliation. However, Latter-day Saint transgender individuals were no different in their mental health than transgender individuals of other affiliations or no affiliation. These findings are similar to other research on LGBTQ mental health which finds an overall positive association between religiousness/spirituality and mental health for LGBTQ individuals (see Lefevor et al. 2021 for a meta-analysis).

However, after controlling for community connections, risk taking (drug use by both the adolescent and family), and demographics, Dyer and Goodman (2022) found differences across affiliations were almost entirely explained (i.e., the relationship between affiliation and outcomes became, for the most part, non-significant). What remains unknown are which specific aspects of community connections and risk taking explain the relationship between being a Latter-day Saint and mental health. Further, given that religious affiliation may differentially relate to mental health for LGBTQ individuals (Dyer 2022; Lytle et al. 2018), it is important to explore how similar these protective/risk factors are across sexual orientations and gender identities. In this way we can best tailor interventions that target the factors that are most protective (or create most risk) for Latter-day Saints across sexual orientations and gender identities.

Current Study

The current study expanded on previous research (Dyer and Goodman 2022) by testing which potential mediators of affiliation had the largest indirect effect on suicidality and depression (prior research did not test specific indirect effects of potential mediators) and whether potential mediators differed for sexual and gender minorities for whom religious affiliation may differentially relate to suicidality (Lefevor et al. 2021). Data are from the 2021 Utah Prevention Needs Assessment survey administered by the Utah Department of Human Services. There were 46,823 participants in grades 8, 10, and 12. The sample

was 47.3% male, 51.4% female, and 1.2% transgender (n = 567) with 82.9% heterosexual, 1.9% gay/lesbian, 8.4% bisexual, and 6.7% unsure of their sexual orientation or "other" (LGBQ, "Q" being "questioning"; LGBQ n = 7867). Participants were an average of 15.5 years old (range 12–19). The sample was 74.9% white, 16.9% Hispanic. 1.7% Asian, 1.5% Hawaiian, 1.2% Black, along with those of other races including those who were multiracial. Using weights, data are representative of all Utah youth in grades 8, 10, and 12.

Methods

Participants were identical to those in Dyer and Goodman (2022) with full demographic information reported there. Measures were also identical to Dyer and Goodman (2022). Outcomes were suicide ideation (seriously considering suicide in the last year), suicide attempt (attempting suicide in the last year), and depression. Religious affiliations included: a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Catholic, Protestant, Other religion/denomination, and no religious affiliation. Potential mediators were: adolescent drug use, family drug use, family conflict, two-parent mother/father home (compared to other parental configurations), feeling safe at school, feeling safe in the neighborhood, being bullied, becoming sick with COVID-19 symptoms, and stressors due to COVID-19 (see Dyer, Crandall, and Hanson 2023 for how affiliation may affect COVID-19 stressors and subsequently affect mental health). Controls included adolescent race, age, and gender (male, female; separate analyses were conducted for transgender individuals) as well as parent education and whether the child lived in a two-parent home.

Mediation analyses were conducted in Mplus 8.8 with religious affiliation predicting the mediators and the outcomes and the mediators predicting the outcomes. The most robust method was used to calculate indirect effects: bootstrapped, non-symmetrical confidence intervals (Muthén, Muthén, and Asparouhov 2016). It is important to note the data are from a single timepoint and causality cannot be assessed.

Results

Table 1 contains indirect effect results comparing the various affiliations with those of no affiliation (i.e., non-affiliated adolescents were the baseline). For attempt and ideation, the indirect effect is in odds-ratios. Odds-ratios of less than 1.00 indicate a negative relationship and odds-ratios over 1.00 indicate

Table 1. Indirect Effects of Affiliation on Suicide ideation, Suicide Attempt, and Depression Compared to Those of No Affiliation

	Latter-day Saint			Catholic[a]		Protestant[a]	Other		
	Hetero	LGBQ	Trans	Hetero	LGBQ	Hetero	Hetero	LGBQ	Trans
Ideation									
Teen Drug Use	.784	.793		.962			.964		
Family Drug Use	.927			.949			.987		
Family Conflict	.914	.876		.927					
Not Bullied		.980		.984	.961				
Safe at School		.989							
Covid Stress	.962	.930							
Attempt									
Teen Drug Use	.725	.750	.782	.950			.953	1.083	1.41
Family Drug Use	.923	.952		.947			.986		
Mother/Father	.942			.969		.971	.977		
Family Conflict	.928	.893		.939					
Not Bullied		.980		.980	.961				
Safe at School	.915	.910		.961		.936			
Covid Stress	.974	.966	.858	.970					
Depression									
Teen Drug Use	-.042	-.031		-.004				.005	
Family Drug Use	-.019			-.007					
Family Conflict	-.028	-.036		-.014					
Not Bullied		-.006			-.008				
Safe at School	-.023	-.022	-.015	-.006		-.004			
Safe Neighborhood	-.009	-.006							
Covid Stress	-.011	-.012		-.007					

[a] There were only 16 trans Catholics and one trans Protestant. These numbers are too small to include. There were no significant indirect effects of being Protestant for LGBQ individuals. All values listed are at least $p < .05$.

a positive relationship. For example, the indirect effect of being a Latter-day Saint (for heterosexual individuals) is an odds-ratio of .784 through adolescent drug use. In other words, Latter-day Saints' odds of seriously considering suicide are 78.4% of the odds for those of no affiliation. Another way to say it is that the odds of a Latter-day Saint considering suicide are 21.6% lower than the non-affiliated given their lower drug use.

The largest indirect effect of being Latter-day Saint was for adolescent drug use, which reduced the odds of considering or attempting suicide by more than 20% for both heterosexual individuals and LGBQ individuals. Odds of suicide attempt were reduced by 21.8% for trans Latter-day Saints through lower levels of drug use. For depression, the indirect effect of being Latter-day Saint through teen drug use was also the strongest indirect effect for heterosexual individuals and the second strongest for LGBQ individuals. Lower levels of teen drug use were also protective for Catholics and those of other religions. However, the effects were substantially smaller and only for heterosexual individuals. For the indirect effect of being Latter-day Saint, when a risk/protective factor was significant for heterosexual individuals as well as for LGBQ and/or trans individuals, the differences in the effects appeared rather small.

For LGBQ and trans Latter-day Saints, not being bulled was a significant indirect effect across outcomes (except for trans and depression) whereas it was not significant for heterosexual individuals. The indirect effect of being an LGBQ Latter-day Saint was protective through feeling safe at school whereas it was not significant for heterosexual Latter-day Saints.

These results were comparable to the indirect effects for LGBQ Catholics where, for all outcomes, the only significant indirect effect was through not being bullied. There were many more significant indirect effects for heterosexual individuals than for LGBQ and trans individuals. There were few indirect effects of being Protestant and none for being an LGBQ Protestant. Heterosexual teens of other religions had lower drug use leading to lower odds of suicide attempt. However, for LGBQ and trans individuals, being of other religions was associated with greater drug use and a higher chance of suicide attempts as well as greater depression for LGBQ individuals.

Discussion

The current study examined what factors may play a risk/protective role for those affiliated with a religion when compared to those not affiliated and how

this may differ across sexual orientations and gender identities. There was a strong indirect effect in which Latter-day Saint adolescents were less likely to use drugs or alcohol. Research generally finds Latter-day Saints low in drug and alcohol use and less likely to use these in the face of negative emotions (Sandberg and Spangler 2007). This was protective across sexual orientations and gender identities, though, for trans individuals, it was only protective against suicide attempts. This effect for trans Latter-day Saints is, however, important as earlier analyses that did not examine individual mediators did not detect a difference between trans Latter-day Saints and other trans individuals. After teen drug use, a prominent protective factor for being Latter-day Saint (compared to those of no affiliation) across sexual orientations and outcomes was that Latter-day Saints had lower levels of family conflict. Being Latter-day Saint reduced the odds of suicide ideation and attempt by more than 10% for both heterosexual and LGBQ Latter-day Saints through lower family conflict. Religiousness is typically associated with greater parental efficacy and warmth and greater marital functioning (Mahoney, Flint, and McGraw 2020). Religious denominations typically emphasize family relationships. Latter-day Saints especially view family relationships as central, even salvific, and are likely to see them as sacred (Leonhardt et al. 2018). This "sanctification" of family relationships is typically associated with healthier family relationships (Mahoney, Flint, and McGraw 2020).

Comparing heterosexual, LGBQ, and trans individuals, the most prominent difference is the indirect effect of bullying, which was significant for LGBQ Latter-day Saints and Catholics, but not significant for heterosexual individuals. LGBQ individuals are likely at higher risk of bullying in general, but, compared to those of no religion, LGBQ Latter-day Saints and Catholics had lower levels of bullying than those of no religion. Further, trans Latter-day Saints had higher levels of feeling safe at school, which was connected to fewer suicide attempts and lower depression.

There are two likely explanations for this. The first is that religious LGBQ individuals may be less likely to be "out" (Skidmore, Lefevor, and Perez-Figueroa 2022) and are therefore less likely to be targeted for bullying. The second, and probable overlapping reason, is that religiously affiliated LGBQ individuals gain religious resources that may include a sense of belonging, social networks, and a religious worldview that provides coherence and meaning, all of which are associated with lower suicidality (Dyer, Goodman, and Hardy 2020; Stack 1983; Stack and Kposowa 2011).

Limitations

The sample in this study was drawn from Utah and therefore should not be generalized to other locations. Another limitation of the study is that it is cross-sectional. Affiliation, mediators, and outcomes likely influence each other and reciprocal relationships cannot be examined in the current study. This study assumes a single direction of effects. Still, it is useful to understand (even at the correlation level) what protective and risk factors are most prominent across affiliations. This provides parents, policy makers, ecclesiastical leaders, and others focused on intervention greater knowledge about what characteristics "bundle together." For example, that Latter-day Saint affiliation, lower teen drug use, and better mental health "bundle together" provides some insights into why, as a group, Latter-day Saint teens may be at less risk than others, though causality should not be inferred.

Another limitation is that there were no measures of religiousness. It is unknown the degree to which participants actually engaged in religion (whether affiliated or not).

This study also cannot estimate the effects of disaffiliation. It may be that many of those who have no religion are former Latter-day Saints. However, it is still useful to understand risk and resilience across affiliation, independent of how an individual came to be or not be affiliated.

Conclusion

In sum, being Latter-day Saint or Catholic was protective across sexual orientations with less drug use being the most potent protective factor. LGBQ Latter-day Saints and Catholics were uniquely protected through less bullying and, for trans Latter-day Saints, through feeling safer at school. Results are consistent with other research finding Latter-day Saints and Catholics at lower rates of suicide than those of other religions and no religion (Chen and VanderWeele 2020; Dyer, Goodman, and Hardy 2020). By identifying these specific pathways, interventionists can capitalize on areas that provide the most protection.

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Book Review

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During the past three decades, Ireland has experienced rapid societal shifts, with Irish Catholicism declining, an increasingly powerful and globalized economy, an influx of immigration, and social liberalization. It is in this fascinating context of social change that Hazel O'Brien examines two communities of Mormons in contemporary Ireland and the ways these adherents navigate their lives on the margins of both Ireland's religious landscape and of Mormonism.

Using participant observation and interviews, O'Brien gives readers an intriguing vision of LDS congregational life on the peripheries of the tradition. Her many months of attendance at Sunday meetings and weekday events, as well as the thirty interviews she conducted, provide a window into the challenges and joys of choosing Mormonism in a land so deeply tied to Catholicism. O'Brien nicely incorporates her presence into the research, clearly explaining the context of conversations she highlights as well as her experiences as a participant observer. I appreciate how open she was about her positionality as an atheist White Irish researcher and the ways her social location affected the stories she was able to collect. (She mentions, for instance, having more rapport with the White Irish congregants than the South Asian ones in one congregation.)

The first two chapters of the book serve as useful and relevant literature reviews. Topics include Ireland's past and present relationship to religion, the rapid changes of Irish society toward secularization, and Irish cultural iden-

tity with its ties to Catholicism. She writes, "Conversion to another faith is perceived by the Irish as a rejection of Irishness itself" (42–43), a reality that many Irish Latter-day Saints must find ways to navigate. Additionally, O'Brien usefully delves into the literature on the culture of Whiteness in Mormonism, thus setting the stage for discussions in later chapters on Mormons' navigations regarding race and culture in Ireland and in their church. A culture of Whiteness pervades Mormonism, O'Brien notes, even as Ireland's Mormon community "shows greater levels of diversity than the majority society it resides within" (65).

The remaining four ethnographic chapters focus on the experiences, thoughts, and choices of Mormons in Ireland. The book comes alive at this point, as O'Brien's excerpts from interviews and close descriptions of the two congregations she attended for several months—one more established, one less—leap off the page. She tackles a variety of issues and challenges Mormons in Ireland face, including family formation—it's difficult to find an LDS partner since, as one young Irish Mormon told O'Brien, "There are not enough men" (110)—and stigmatization, since conversion to Mormonism "is viewed as a breach of Irish social norms and values" (77). She details strategies Mormons use to cope with this marginalization, most notably choosing to be quiet about their religion unless directly asked. She writes, "Mormons in Ireland engage in a complex and nuanced system of strategic revealing and concealing of their religious identities" (85). She also makes an insightful point regarding family formation—that Mormonism's emphasis on temple marriages actually serves to weaken Irish Mormon families, as young people often have to leave the community in order to find a spouse in another country. For those that stay, some find non-Mormon spouses and then are faced with guilt, shame, and disappointment for not living up to the proclaimed Mormon ideal.

Particularly vibrant was O'Brien's description of a St. Patrick's Day celebration in the smaller congregation in which ethnic and racial tensions undergird congregational life. She describes how congregants—most immigrants—came together and worked to bridge distances with one another at this party through shamrock face-painting, Irish culture-themed bingo, green clothing, traditional Irish food, and singing the national anthem in Irish. O'Brien insightfully points out that "Mormons in Ireland can utilize Irishness to create a sense of belonging despite their minority status" (133).

O'Brien notes that while Irish Mormons experience a disconnect with Irish society at large due to their minority religion, they might also feel a certain amount of disconnect with the predominant church culture, which many

Irish Mormons believe "centers a White, wealthy, and North American worldview" (137). The church's emphasis on a global gospel culture might create a sense of safety and unity for non-Irish members in Ireland, but it falls flat for some Irish, as they perceive too many Americanisms pervading it. Some Irish Mormons, for example, would prefer less emphasis on nineteenth-century pioneers in America, including commemorations of the trek to Utah on Pioneer Day, since dressing up in pioneer garb can feel like an impingement on their Irish identity.

O'Brien closes the book with final thoughts for anyone who cares about the future of the tradition, suggesting that global Mormons' experiences within the religion could be improved—and shame due to part-member families decreased—if "Church culture was more representative of lived experience" (167). Regarding Ireland in particular, she hypothesizes that "greater privatization of Mormon faith there is likely, and efforts will be needed in the Church to acknowledge this and to support adherents about the realities of their religious experiences, which involves marginalization and stigmatization" (171). She also suggests that the "peculiar people" narrative is not helpful for Irish Mormons as it separates people from their society and isolates them from friends and families. This is particularly problematic for Irish Mormons since they don't have access to robust LDS social activities and circles to counteract that societal disconnect. O'Brien ends with the wise suggestion that the Church ensure that missionaries receive training on the cultures and history of the countries they serve in.

O'Brien offers many insightful comments throughout the book. She smoothly interacts with relevant literature and is a master at explicating quotes from her subjects and connecting them to larger themes, theories, and issues surrounding global religion and identity. I did not detect one particular overarching argument that creates a throughline in her chapters, but this does not take away from the importance of this work, which sheds important light on the tensions, benefits, and realities of Mormon experience and identity on the peripheries of the tradition.

This book will primarily be of interest to people invested in the fields of Mormon studies and global religion. O'Brien does a fine job introducing Mormonism to her readers, so the book is accessible to those with little background in the religion. Ultimately, this book stands as a vibrant ethnographic examination of Mormonism in a global context and will serve as a productive model for future examinations of global Mormonism.