Journal of the

Mormon Social Science Association

Volume 3 • 2025–2026

MORMON SOCIAL SCIENCE ASSOCIATION

MSSA

Journal of the Mormon Social Science Association (*JMSSA*) is the official publication of the Mormon Social Science Association. We welcome papers from all social science disciplines, as well as work in other disciplines using a social science approach. We accept original research, synthetic reviews, and theoretical or methodological essays on topics relevant to all aspects of the Latter Day Saint movement.

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Online ISSN 2832-1901 • DOI: 10.54587

Table of Contents

Journal of the Mormon Social Science Association

Stack, Peggy Fletcher. 2025. "Covering an Evolving Mormonism: A Journalist's Barometer of Prophets, Problems, and Progress," *Journal of the Mormon Social Science Association* 3, no. 1: 1–15.

https://doi.org/10.54587/JMSSA.0301

Covering an Evolving Mormonism: A Journalist's Barometer of Prophets, Problems, and Progress

Peggy Fletcher Stack, *Salt Lake Tribune**

In 1993, apostle Boyd K. Packer identified feminism, LGBTQ issues, and "so-called intellectuals" as the three greatest threats to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Award-winning reporter Peggy Fletcher Stack, who has covered the church and other religions for *The Salt Lake Tribune* since 1991, notes that these three issues are some of the most contentious she has covered in her career, taking up a large percentage of the more than 5,000 news stories she has written over more than thirty years. This article is adapted from the 2023 Glenn Vernon lecture she gave at the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion meeting in Salt Lake City, Utah.

It is January 2015, and Latter-day Saint leaders have called a news conference to declare that they want to promote a more gracious, civil dialogue on homosexuality. After the announcement, the public affairs office of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is offering reporters a brief one-on-one with a couple of apostles, and I spend time thinking about how to phrase my questions.

"When I am in a fight with my husband, the best thing I can do is apologize for my role in the conflict," I say first to Elder D. Todd Christofferson, and repeat again to Elder Dallin H. Oaks. "Would the church ever apologize for the harsh rhetoric about LGBTQ issues used by some of its members?"

Christofferson, whose brother is gay, acknowledges that the church could "express things better." But Oaks, a former Utah Supreme Court justice, is emphatic. The church doesn't "seek apologies," he said, "and we don't give them" (Stack 2015a).

I am taken aback by his answer but dutifully report it. Then comes the pushback from members who accuse me of misrepresenting the apostle or even making up the quote since it wasn't in other reporting. When questioned

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a few days later, though, the apostle is asked about it, and makes the point even stronger—and this time during a video chat on a "Trib Talk" podcast—by insisting that the word "apology" doesn't appear in LDS scriptures (Napier-Pierce 2015).

In the ensuing years, I have been somewhat astonished to see Oaks's "no apology" statement repeated again and again out of the context of our conversation or even on the same topic as if it is a generally accepted Latter-day Saint policy, even doctrine. And that anecdote reflects so much of my decades of experience as a journalist covering Mormonism—publishing a surprising quote accurately and readers being skeptical but then passing it off as something else entirely.

Since its founding in 1830, the fledgling faith wanted and needed newspapers to help spread the word about it. The problem, of course, is that it couldn't dictate the tone or approach those reporters would take. On the positive side, it was in response to a query from a newspaper editor, John Wentworth, that founder Joseph Smith, Jr. laid out the faith's history and its Articles of Faith, which have become almost a theological creed for the church (Smith Jr. 1842). The church celebrates that exchange. Conversely, another newspaperman, Thomas Sharp, wrote editorials that excoriated Mormons in Illinois and encouraged their neighbors to force them out of the state. The church was horrified by these attacks.

To this day, the now more than 17-million-member faith—like many other religious movements—wants good press but is frustrated by its inability to control the narrative. During my 33 years reporting on Mormonism for *The Salt Lake Tribune*, I have found myself smack in the middle of that dual desire.

There are those, even in the church hierarchy, who believe journalists like me should write only good news as if we are the faith's publicity arm. And there are others who think it is my job to dig up and expose every miscreant, untoward act, or seemingly salacious practice.

Yet, there is no question that even-handed journalism has helped to prompt many of the church's changes over the years by holding up a mirror to the sometimes insular faith, allowing it to see itself more clearly. For me, the work is about seeking facts, using my news judgment, asking the right questions, and finding good sources. I am not without my biases and blindspots, of course, but overall I strive to be fair.

It is, I argue, a humbling but essential assignment.

Grappling with the Church's Public Relations Problem

In 1972, Wendell Ashton was asked by soon-to-be-Church-President Harold B. Lee to take charge of the church's communications department and, if he agreed, was promised complete access to Church leaders (Stack 1995). With that assurance, Ashton set a policy of frequent news conferences and openness with reporters. He and Lee held such news conferences in New York and Europe. When Lee died 18 months later, his successor Spencer W. Kimball had no experience with the press but was willing to continue the strategy, holding conferences in Asia, Australia, New Zealand, Samoa, Tonga, and Tahiti, among other places. After one particularly "spirited" exchange at a news conference in Washington, D.C., Kimball remarked: "These news conferences are tough but if it will help the church, I'll keep doing them."

The 1960s and 1970s were dominated by public discussion of the church's priesthood/temple ban on Black members—an issue that did not lend itself to a good sound bite or satisfying retort. Shrill critics attacked the church in the press, while many members cried religious discrimination (Harris 2024). There were also women's issues, including the church's all-male priesthood and its opposition (sometimes surreptitious) to the Equal Rights Amendment (Young 2007).

Still, Ashton felt the best policy was candor. "I've always felt you should be open and honest with the media," Ashton told me in a later interview (Stack 1995). "Even about things that are difficult like the ill health of the [church] president."

In 1985, when Mormon forger Mark Hofmann killed two people with homemade pipe bombs, national reporters descended on Salt Lake City, trying to explain what had happened. I was there when they gathered for a historic news conference in 1985 with Gordon B. Hinckley, a counselor to Kimball, flanked by apostle Oaks and Hugh Pinnock of the First Quorum of the Seventy. They answered questions about church involvement with Hofmann in defensive, angry tones (Stack 1995). They summarily closed the conference after only a short while, lecturing journalists about their questions.

After that, there were very few church-sponsored news conferences.

The "Enemies" List

When I started my job in 1991, Ezra Taft Benson, who had been a controversial figure for his ultraconservative views and associations with the right-

wing John Birch Society, was the church's president. But he was too ill to speak publicly, and his absence allowed rumors about him, his counselors, and the church to run rampant. Some even speculated that Hinckley, who was shouldering church leadership, had somehow "silenced" the prophet.

In August 1993, my colleague and I wrote a story based on documents on file with the state of Utah, which showed that in May 1989 Benson had given absolute control over the Corporation of the President to his counselors (Semerad and Stack 1993). We saw the story as pointing out that Benson's counselors knew as early as 1989 that the president was incapacitated mentally. We did not know about the attacks from the right aimed at Hinckley, who condemned our piece over the pulpit in General Conference.

A month after that story, the so-called September Six were excommunicated and Benson's grandson, Steve Benson, a cartoonist for *The Arizona Republic*, attempted to share publicly what he knew of his grandfather's ill health. He subsequently had his name removed from church membership (Skordas 1993).

From his vantage point, apostle Boyd K. Packer knew who was causing all these conflicts and bad press. The controversial leader told the All-Church Coordinating Council that the three greatest threats to the church at the end of the 20th century were "so-called intellectualism," feminism, and the "gay-lesbian movement."

Looking over the more than 5,000 stories I have written for *The Trib*, I see these three topics emerging repeatedly in my reports as the church has evolved in its approach to them and how to portray its principles to the public. Yet, they remain among the knottiest issues the church faces.

"So-called Intellectuals"

My first summer on the job, I thought I would give some publicity to the annual Sunstone Symposium. I had been instrumental in launching it before starting at *The Trib*, and it rarely got much attention in the press. I was not involved in the program, but thought it had a fascinating array of LDS topics.

Just two weeks after that reporting on the 1991 symposium, though, the church's First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles issued a statement discouraging association with "symposia" that result in "ridiculing sacred things or injuring the Church of Jesus Christ, detracting from its mission, or jeopardizing the well-being of its members" (*Church News* 1991). The late Eugene England, one of the founders of *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon*

Thought, somewhat kiddingly asked me how I felt about "killing my baby."

In other words, my reporting had brought Sunstone and all its critical thinkers to the leaders' attention in ways they hadn't been before.

But with the rise of the internet, questions about the church's founding, its scriptures, polygamy, racism, and same-sex attraction—many of which were raised by Sunstone presenters—could no longer be avoided. They continued to bedevil the leaders, especially as more and more media were writing about them, including me.

"Never before have we had this information age, with social networking and bloggers publishing unvetted points of view," emeritus general authority Marlin Jensen said in a 2012 interview (Stack 2013a). "The church is concerned about misinformation and distorted information, but we are doing better and trying harder to get our story told in an accurate way."

Many of the scholars whom Packer had disdained now came to the aid of their church—especially during Mitt Romney's run for the White House, when multiple misperceptions abounded. These scholars helped to explain the controversies in the past in an honest but generous way in a series known as the "Gospel Topics" essays (Harris and Bringhurst 2020). The result was that Latter-day Saint authorities, including Packer, signed off on the essays.

And Deseret Book, the church's own publishing house, now regularly publishes works by scholars who might once have been seen as disloyal for raising issues. Still, the works of the faith's "intellectuals" continues to vex church leaders, who hope to be the last, most authoritative word on every subject. They are, after all, called "general authorities."

Feminism

In 1992, I got a tip about a general authority removing quotes from the wall of an exhibit on the Relief Society's sesquicentennial at the Church History Museum. Loren C. Dunn, a Seventy, spied three quotes from Joseph Smith and early LDS women blown up on placards that he found objectionable and had them removed, saying he could not justify them to his superiors. According to a church employee, the quotes in question "all pointed out an identity of Relief Society that would prepare women to officiate in the temple" (Sunstone 1992).

One was particularly sensitive to feminists: founder Joseph Smith saying, "I now turn the key to you in the name of God." (The quote was changed in the official histories of the church sometime in the 1940s to "I turn the key in your behalf.") Dunn said that the original quote revealed "too much" about

the temple ceremony. Over Dunn's strenuous objections—and his patronizing and verbal attacks on me—I wrote about his removals.

Beyond priesthood, there have been questions about the visibility of women in the patriarchal faith. In 1993, Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, the church's first female Pulitzer Prize-winning author and a devout member, was rejected as a speaker for Brigham Young University's Women's Conference, and organizer Carol Lee Hawkins's contract was not renewed. In response, some feminists at BYU and elsewhere launched an alternative, known as the "Counterpoint Conference," but skirmishes between the Utah-based faith and many of its women continued unabated. And Counterpoint eventually faded away.

In September 1997, President Hinckley scolded me like an exasperated parent when I asked him about the Mormon doctrine of Mother in Heaven, a co-deity with God and why the LDS Church was downplaying rather than celebrating that feminist idea.

"Now, Peggy, you know I have already spoken about this," he said sternly during a question-and-answer session at the annual Religion Newswriters convention in Albuquerque. He was referring, of course, to his earlier instruction not to pray to Heavenly Mother (Hinckley 1991), and several feminists were punished for publicly advocating that.

The most visible feminism effort was the 2012 movement known as Ordain Women, which garnered national and international media attention when a line of women dressed in their Sunday clothes peacefully walked to the Tabernacle and asked to be admitted to the all-male priesthood session of the church's General Conference (Stack 2013b).

Church public affairs personnel were ordered to turn them away—ever so politely—but they couldn't stop reporters from writing about it. No matter how politely the church rejected the women's plea for ordination, the leaders looked bad in the eyes of the world. Gender inequality was not a good "optic" for the 21st century.

Later, Ordain Women's co-founder, Kate Kelly, was excommunicated, but, one general authority told me, every small change for women that followed—auxiliary leaders sitting in the midst of the all-male hierarchy, the women's photos being in the Church News and on the office building's walls and so forth—was a response to OW (Stack 2015b). Ironically, in April 2014, in response to the Ordain Women movement, Oaks himself explored the idea that women have a kind of priesthood power. "Relief Society is not just a class for women," Oaks said, "but something they belong to—a divinely established

appendage to the priesthood" (Oaks 2014). Then Oaks quoted fellow apostle M. Russell Ballard, who said, "When men and women go to the temple, they are both endowed with the same power, which is priesthood power …" (Ballard 2014).

More than a quarter century after Packer's declaration, the church issued a more nuanced, but still cautionary, position on "feminism" in its official magazine, the *New Era* — one that is neither an endorsement nor a denunciation (Stack 2020). Feminism can mean "different things to different people," the 2020 statement said. "Sometimes it refers to efforts to ensure basic human rights and basic fairness for women, as well as efforts to encourage women to obtain an education, develop their talents, and serve humankind in any field they choose. Latter-day Saints support these things."

But then came the warning: "Sometimes certain philosophies and social movements bearing the feminism label advocate extreme ideas that are not in harmony with the teachings of the gospel. These can lead people to become distracted from (or even work against) the ideals of marriage and family. Latter-day Saints frown upon such things."

Also in recent years, the concept of Heavenly Mother has grown in popularity. Yet, in 2022, apostle Dale G. Renlund cautioned LDS women against "wanting to know more" about this feminine deity (Stack 2022). "Speculation "can sometimes … divert us from what has been revealed," he said.

As long as gender inequity continues in the church, though, it seems out of step with much of American society, so journalists will be drawn to it.

"Gay-lesbian Movement"

Of the three "enemies" Packer listed, the "gay-lesbian" movement he condemned has received the most widespread publicity, partly because it included actions, rather than just rhetoric.

When I checked the newspaper's archives, I discovered nearly 700 of my articles with the word "gay" in them. The pieces told personal, spiritual, and institutional stories as well as sometimes evolving data. They did not all involve the LDS Church—for example, I broke the story of Utah's retired Episcopal bishop coming out—but the bulk were.

One of my first stories in 1992 was about the fact that an unusually high number of Utah women had AIDS, due to their husbands being closeted gays who were having anonymous sex rather than acknowledging their sexuality (Stack 1992).

I also reported the church's language changes from describing LGBTQ attractions as "sin" and a matter of choice to the slow recognition that most experienced their attractions as inborn, a part of their identity (Prince 2019). I tracked the development of church books and pamphlets, websites, and support groups. Many stories discussed the church's political involvement opposing same-sex marriage legislation in various states, including Hawaii and California, then finally its efforts to build bridges with LGBTQ activists.

One of the most direct connections between my journalism and the church's response was in my General Conference report in the fall of 2010 (Stack 2010a). Elder Boyd Packer addressed the question of homosexuality, reiterating that any type of union other than marriage between a man and a woman was morally wrong. He decried some LGBTQ advocates' insistence that same-sex attractions "were pre-set" and that individuals "cannot overcome what they feel are inborn tendencies toward the impure and unnatural." Packer said this was untrue: "Not so! Why would our Heavenly Father do that to anyone? Remember he is our Father."

The *Tribune* was alone with this headline: "Apostle: Same-sex attraction can change." Packer's speech generated national controversy and protests from those inside and outside the Salt Lake City-based faith, many of whom saw the apostle's statements as contributing to the self-loathing and suicides of gays (Brundin 2010).

Church public affairs officials screamed at me about the headline and the approach, saying I had overemphasized his meaning and had upset the apostle. Ultimately, it was Packer who had to change his wording to align with church teaching, which by 2010 had taken the position that it was not a sin to be homosexual, only acting on it was (Stack 2010b).

Five years later, a policy change—deeming same-sex married couples "apostates" and generally barring their children from baby blessings and baptisms—was quietly inserted into the church's handbook and was then leaked to the press. Such harsh and restrictive rules triggered widespread protests and soul-searching that were reported in the local and national press (Goodstein 2015).

"Hundreds, maybe more, resigned their church membership. Even believers felt wounded and betrayed," I wrote. "Families were torn. Tensions erupted. Some were disciplined by the church. Some died by suicide."

Though as an apostle, Russell M. Nelson had defended the policy, even calling it a "revelation," by 2019, now-church President Nelson walked back all

the hotly disputed elements (Stack 2019). Church rituals for children became okay again, and LGBTQ couples were no longer labeled apostates. It is unclear what role the public reports and opposition played in the reversal, but to me, the impact was not negligible.

Then in November of 2022, the church announced—not in a news conference but an emailed release—that it was supporting the "Respect for Marriage Act," a proposed federal law that would codify marriages between same-sex couples, while protecting "religious freedoms" (H.R.8404 2022). "We believe this approach is the way forward," the church release said. "As we work together to preserve the principles and practices of religious freedom together with the rights of LGBTQ individuals, much can be accomplished to heal relationships and foster greater understanding" (CJCLDS 2022).

The way the church's support for the law was first relayed brought praise from progressives, but concerns from more orthodox members, despite the church's reiteration that its doctrine that marriage should be between a man and a woman remained unchanged.

A month later, when LDS representatives were present for the bill signing, the two parts of the bill were mentioned in reverse order: the protections for religious freedom were highlighted first and at length, while codifying the Supreme Court's support for same-sex marriage was second and not emphasized.

Could the reporting have played a role in the wording of the second release?

Hinckley's Journalistic Camelot

When President Benson died in 1994, the gentle Howard Hunter took over the church presidency, and, as a reporter, it was a delight for me to write about the man and his speeches. Sadly, he lasted less than nine months before his health gave out. Then, in 1995, a vigorous 84-year-old, Gordon B. Hinckley, became the church's 15th president.

Hinckley had a background in journalism and public relations—had even considered a career as a reporter—and he made it a priority to improve the church's image with the public. Within his first year, he gave interviews with most of the major newspapers in the country and hired a New York-based PR firm, The Edelman Group (Stack 1995). Historian J. B. Haws writes, "The Edelman Group arranged for a 'meet the press' lunch at the Harvard Club, and it was at that lunch that Hinckley agreed to sit for an interview with

60 Minutes' Mike Wallace" (Haws 2015). "'Can you tell me,'" Wallace asked in that interview, as if to underscore just how remarkable he found the occasion, "the last president of the Mormon Church who went on nationwide television to do an interview with no questions ahead of time so that you know what is coming?'"

The interview and the attendant *60 Minutes* feature, which aired in April 1996, Haws writes, "signaled something of a sea change to the wider media world and foreshadowed the type of Mormonism that would be on display in 2002," when the Winter Olympics were scheduled to come to Salt Lake City.

During the next decade-plus, the amiable Hinckley globe-trotted around the world, meeting with members and media alike. I followed him to Ghana, Zimbabwe and South Africa, and to temple dedications in Boston and Santiago, Chile (Stack 2008). For me, his openness with the press was a kind of a journalistic Camelot. I enjoyed sparring with the witty prophet while reporters with church-owned publications watched in horror at my apparent irreverence.

In Zimbabwe, he gave me a private interview about the church in Africa, lamenting the level of illiteracy among members who couldn't even read the Book of Mormon. They were converted, Hinckley said, on the faith of the missionaries.

At the dedication of the rebuilt Nauvoo Temple, I asked him if the church had re-created the building down to its smallest detail, why was the angel on top standing, rather than flying horizontally.

"I like it better," he responded.

At the dedication of the Boston Temple, the faith's 100th, I asked him why the church had spared no expense on the carpets, chairs, and chandeliers, but had cheap reproductions or no art on the walls. It's because the church was building these temples so quickly, Hinckley told me, that leaders hadn't had time to commission any. But now it had.

I learned that that was, well, not true. A source in the church office building later called to say, "Thanks for that question. President Hinckley came right home and commissioned some art."

My conversations with him were mostly face to face, though we did chat a few times on the phone, and he once told me: "I read everything you write." I was never sure whether that was meant as a compliment or a threat, but it did make me smile to think of him as one of my readers.

I continued reporting on the charismatic leader until just weeks before he died and even wrote an essay about him for the paper after his death.

No Deference to Authority

Here's a fact about me that runs counter to many Latter-day Saints: Though I may revere certain religious figures and respect their office, I have no natural deference to authority. That includes presidents, kings and magistrates. To me, respect has to be earned; it does not come automatically. That can come into conflict with a church built on hierarchical authority that is presumed with an office.

I once wrote a story about the church's response to sexual abuse among its members. I remember the church representative at the time read it and said, "You quoted our lawyer, then you quoted someone who disagreed with him."

Well, yes, that's what I do.

After Hinckley died in 2008, Thomas S. Monson took the church's helm. Though long associated with the church-owned Deseret News, the newly installed leader held but a single news conference at the beginning of his tenure and allowed only one question per reporter. I asked: Can Mormons disagree with church politics without being disciplined?

"That depends on what the disagreement is … if … [it's] an apostasy situation, that would not be appropriate," Monson said. "If it were something political … there's room for opinions" (Stack 2014).

Monson never took questions from journalists again.

And that was the year of Proposition 8 in California, with the church enlisting its members to donate and volunteer to support it.

Gone were the days of a church president who loved the press, and with it, much of the faith's response to journalists, too.

But 2012 was a time when the country was experiencing its "Mormon Moment," with Mitt Romney's presidential nomination and *The Book of Mormon* musical.

It was during that campaign when a story in *The Washington Post* exposed continued racist explanations for the church's ban (Horowitz 2012). The writer quoted BYU religion professor Randy Bott as saying that LDS scriptures indicate that descendants of the biblical Cain—who killed his brother Abel and was "cursed" by God—were Black and subsequently barred from the priesthood. He also noted that past LDS leaders suggested Blacks were less valiant in the sphere known in Mormon theology as the "premortal existence."

In a response for the paper, the church strongly denounced racism and dismissed Bott's views, calling them "folk beliefs about why the Utah-based faith banned blacks from its all-male priesthood until 1978" (Stack 2012).

In the following years, there was so much negative press, according to McKay Coppins's 2024 biography of Mitt Romney, that apostle M. Russell Ballard approached the Utah senator asking him to explore the possibility of an LDS version of the Jewish Anti-Defamation League (Coppins 2024). Romney declined.

In 2018, Russell M. Nelson became the church's 17th president and held his first news conference. (He has only had two in Utah since then, both having to do with the church's association with and donations to the NAACP.) That first one was a memorable—some might say existential—moment for me. Again, the handlers allowed a small group of reporters only one question each so I planned my words carefully, using as many commas as I could.

The church has made much progress on women's issues, I said, but "what will you do to increase the involvement of international members, women, and people of color in your decision-making?"

The then-93-year-old Nelson launched into a list of my relatives that he knew, and ended with: "What was your question?" He then remembered only the clause about non-Americans and addressed that. Returning to my chair, I feared he would wind up not answering anything about women. So I broke the rules and called out, "What about women?"

"We love them," was Nelson's response.

Though not particularly satisfied with his answer, I was undaunted.

His tenure in office, though, has been fairly eventful, starting with his strong statements about "rooting out racism" among members, outreach to the historic Black group, NAACP, and his willingness to donate church funds to their projects (Stack 2018).

Speaking of church funds, the public airing of its huge Ensign Peak investment portfolio has prompted major conversations among members of the faith's finances and whether it should direct some of the reserve to humanitarian efforts.

Nelson, a former surgeon, also presided over the church's first online-only General Conference due to the global COVID-19 pandemic. He set the example for members by letting himself—and the top leaders—be photographed getting the vaccine.

These five-plus years have also seen the rise of ultraconservatives in the U.S., during Donald Trump's time in office. And now there is a war in the Middle East.

There is never enough time or space in the paper for me to write all the faith stories I would like. But I do remember what *New York Times* religion reporter Peter Steinfels told me years ago.

"You have a better job than I do," he said. When I balked at that, he said, "Your readers care about religion. They talk about it. You can get on the front page any time you want. I have to fight to get editors to care."

Indeed, Utah is a great place to report on faith. It is the Vatican of Mormonism, and I have a front row seat.

I continue to believe that the church needs journalists like me to report fairly and ask questions that others won't. (Me to apostle David Bednar: "What kind of hair gel do you use?" Him: "None. Want to touch it?" Me: "Yes." Conclusion: No gel.)

We serve an important, even noble, purpose. While I often find myself on the firing line, taking hits from all sides, there's no place I'd rather be than reporting on this American-born movement as it rolls across the globe.

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Journal of the Mormon Social Science Association

Brady, Reilly H. 2025. "'Guard Your Virtue with Your Life': Current and Former Latter-day Saint Women's Experiences with Purity Teachings and Gender-Based Violence," *Journal of the Mormon Social Science Association* 3, no. 1: 17–42.

https://doi.org/10.54587/JMSSA.0302

"Guard Your Virtue with Your Life": Current and Former Latter-day Saint Women's Experiences with Purity Teachings and Gender-Based Violence[1]

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This study investigates purity expectations directed toward girls and women in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS). The 19 semi-structured interviews explore current and former LDS women's conceptualizations of purity teachings, the impacts of those teachings, and any connections between purity and gender-based violence. The vast majority of interview participants discussed receiving lessons in their youth communicating that LDS girls and women must maintain not only their own purity, but also the purity of boys and men, a concept that this study defines as "responsibility rhetoric." Purity expectations resulted in increased shame for many participants, including in connection to experiences of gender-based violence. Although this study's initial flyer recruited participants solely based on experiences with purity teachings, 42% of interview participants discussed an experience that falls within this study's definition of gender-based violence. This highlights the embedded role purity expectations have played in these participants' experiences and reveals a prevalence of gender-based violence among this study's participants. This study identifies two categories of analysis to understand the mutual embeddedness of purity and gender-based violence: (1) themes of violence embedded in gendered purity teachings and (2) themes of gendered purity embedded in experiences of gender-based violence.

> They would say things like, "Guard your virtue with your life," but what does that mean? How do you do that? Just pray? Cause I remember praying for it to not … I thought God would rescue [me] or intervene, right? But I thought I didn't fight hard enough. So I went straight to the bishop, and he agreed with me. "You didn't fight hard enough." That phrase, "guard your virtue with your life," haunted me for years and years and years, and it still gets perpetuated.

[1] Portions of this article have been adapted from a larger study, which was conducted for an undergraduate thesis at Washington University in St. Louis. See Reilly H. Brady. 2024. "'Guard Your Virtue with Your Life': Purity Expectations and Dynamics of Purity and Gender-Based Violence for Latter-day Saint (LDS) Girls and Women." Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Honors Papers, 3. https://openscholarship.wustl.edu/wgss_honors/3.

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In sharing this experience with sexual violence when she was 17, Caroline (pseudonym) discussed the integral role the phrase "guard your virtue with your life" played in both how she conceptualized her experience and how her bishop responded when she sought spiritual guidance. Throughout the 20th and 21st centuries, leaders in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS) have repeated phrases such as "safeguard your power through purity of thought and action," "it is better to die in defending one's virtue," and "guard and protect your virtue as you would your very life" (Dalton 2009; Kimball 1969; Benson 1986). Although church leaders have long communicated messages on chastity and purity to mixed-gender audiences, these phrases have manifested in particularly gendered ways in the LDS Church.[2] While the interconnectedness of purity and gender-based violence that emerges in Caroline's story exists outside of the LDS Church, such as in American evangelical contexts, Caroline's discussion of "guarding your virtue" and her bishop's reinforcement of that rhetoric reveal the importance of analyzing the unique and specific contexts of LDS structures of purity.

This study investigates gendered purity expectations within the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and their connections to experiences of gender-based violence. It aims to understand how these teachings shape LDS women's lived experiences and whether they contribute to a culture of victim-blaming and invisibility around issues of consent. In LDS programs such as Young Women, with meetings on Sundays as well as weekday activities, teenage girls have learned about purity expectations through messaging connecting purity to other doctrine such as worthiness, temple marriage, raising children, and attaining eternal salvation in the highest degree of glory after death (Moslener 2020). In these contexts, gendered purity expectations communicate future implications for young women's ability to fulfill what are believed to be divinely-established gendered roles of wifehood and motherhood that remain after death. In using a term such as "purity expectations," I refer to purity not simply as something deemed important for LDS girls and women, but rather as an expectation that holistically constructs their religious and gendered identities.

The particular constructions of gender and purity in LDS contexts raise important questions for researchers. In her historical overview of sexual pu-

[2] I use a variety of shortened terms to refer to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints throughout this study, such as "LDS Church," "the Church," "LDS," "Latter-day Saint," and "Mormonism." In 2018, current prophet Russell M. Nelson shifted toward referring to the church by its full title to emphasize Jesus Christ as the center of religious worship and belief, also releasing a revised style guide. I made intentional decisions in my use of terms, balancing these recent structural shifts with a body of research that uses "Mormonism" and "the LDS Church" as scholarly terms.

rity in Mormonism, Sara Moslener (2020) described sexual purity in the LDS Church as "a deeply embedded and theologized principle, not merely borrowed from evangelicals, but grown out of long-standing church teachings on the family and eternal salvation" (271). Thus, while LDS purity functions within frameworks also applicable to purity in American evangelicalism, understanding the particular doctrinal contexts and cultural constructions within Mormonism suggests the existence of LDS purity as operating with its own particulars.

My focus on gendered purity in the LDS Church involves the perspectives and lived experiences of current and former LDS women, a group often overlooked in current scholarship on American religious purity movements. Studies on American Christianity, for example, may not extend intentional efforts to gather the perspectives of women with experiences in the LDS Church due to divides between that church perceiving itself as Christian while Protestant and evangelical Christian groups most often consider it outside the category of Christianity (Jackson 2000). Current and former LDS women themselves may not respond to calls for participants for a study on American Christian purity culture either because they do not recognize themselves within that category or because they think the study's creators might not include them in it. Looking specifically at the LDS Church reveals the unique experiences of LDS women—sources not fully represented within scholarly conversations on purity and gender-based violence in American Christianity (Fahs 2010; Gish 2018; Owens, Hall, and Anderson 2020).

This study identifies specific and unique dynamics shaping constructions of purity in the LDS Church as well as ways in which purity and gender-based violence intertwine. This underscores the importance of conducting an intentional and culturally-specific analysis of gendered purity expectations in the LDS Church. Using qualitative methods of 19 interviews detailing the lived experiences of current and former LDS women, I argue that purity and gender-based violence must be studied together as mutually embedded concepts to fully understand the experiences of LDS girls and women with purity expectations.

Terminology and Definitions

I approached this study with broad definitions of purity and gender-based violence to include a variety of perspectives and experiences from which potential participants entered this study.

Defining Purity in LDS Contexts

When I refer to "purity," I refer to concepts of sexual purity such as chastity, but also to those under the umbrella of "moral purity." This latter umbrella includes pure thoughts and modesty in dress, concepts that are not inherently sexual themselves but often become sexualized in purity frameworks. My discussion of gendered purity in the LDS Church does not conceptualize purity as a set of teachings that only girls and women receive, but rather communicates the particular ways that purity has been embedded within the very constructions of girlhood and womanhood in the LDS Church. Scholar Colleen McDannell (2020) described LDS leaders' increased focus on the body when discussing purity in the mid-20th century, which included the gendered message that "boys were tempted to break the law of chastity because girls flaunted their bodies" (152). This presents unique dynamics for LDS girls and women by instructing them that they must maintain not only their own purity, but also the purity of the boys and men with whom they interact, a concept I call "responsibility rhetoric." David B. Haight's 1977 conference talk titled "Young Women—Real Guardians," for example, exemplifies responsibility rhetoric by instructing young women who date priesthood holders to become "real guardians" of those men's sexual purity so they could prepare to receive higher priesthood authority and embark on LDS missions (Haight 1977).

Defining Gender-Based Violence

I entered this study with a focus on the dynamics of gendered purity in the LDS Church, though also with particular attention to how themes of gender-based violence might emerge within these purity teachings. I define gender-based violence as harm committed on the basis of gender involving dynamics of power and control. In this study, the forms of gender violence most relevant to participants' discussions of purity included sexual violence, child sexual abuse, sexual harassment, and spiritual abuse, among other related forms of violence. I purposefully use a broad definition to include the contributions of participants who discussed experiencing any form of gender-based violence, as very few previous studies have included the lived experiences of LDS girls and women with gender-based violence (Choruby-Whiteley and Morrow 2021).

Literature Review

Discussion of the impacts of LDS purity teachings have increased within as well as beyond scholarly spaces in the past decade, in part influenced by the

writings of Elizabeth Smart, a survivor of child abduction and sexual violence who critiqued the purity messaging she received in LDS settings in her youth (Smart 2013). Over time, scholars have become more attentive to the gendering of LDS purity teachings, and recent studies have begun to ask questions about connections between American religious purity teachings and experiences of gender-based violence. However, this scholarship is still emerging, especially in LDS-specific contexts (Fahs 2010; Gish 2018; McKinzie and Richards 2022; Choruby-Whiteley and Morrow 2021).

In her sociological research, Dynette Ivie Reynolds (1996) critiqued existing surveys gathering data on premarital sex among LDS members, highlighting how these studies did not ask whether or not these encounters were consensual, thus rendering sexual violence invisible. Despite Reynolds's call to investigate gender-based violence in LDS contexts, there remains no large-scale data on rates of abuse among LDS members, a fact highlighted by Amber Choruby-Whiteley and Susan L. Morrow (2021) in their study analyzing how messages about femininity influence experiences of LDS survivors of child sexual abuse and their lives in the LDS Church thereafter. Choruby-Whiteley and Morrow found that interview participants felt increased "shame for not fighting off their abuser(s)" due to lessons that stressed protecting one's virtue (303). Additionally, in the interviews, women of color discussed how the setting of a predominantly white congregation in which women of color "already felt excluded" exacerbated existing realities of not being believed (305). Multiple scholars have also discussed how the lack of formal training for LDS bishops—including no trauma-informed training—results in bishops being unprepared to respond to disclosures of abuse, increasing the possibility of retraumatization (Choruby-Whiteley and Morrow 2021; Prince 2020; Hinderaker 2020). This study expands upon these works by directly examining connections between purity teachings and gender-based violence through semi-structured interviews.

Methods

I obtained approval with the Washington University Institutional Review Board (IRB) to recruit participants and conduct interviews. To gather participants, I used a flyer distributed online and snowball sampling. Of the 83 people who contacted me after seeing the study's flyer, I sent 30 individuals more information about participating in an interview. To select the 30 to contact, I considered the importance of obtaining a wide range of perspectives in terms of church status while also knowing that I intentionally did not require

that those interested in the study disclose their activity status to me in initial communications. I sent information about an interview to the first 10 people who contacted me and who did not describe any church status, the first five people who described having left the LDS Church, the first five who indicated an inactive status, the first five who identified as active members, and the first five who described occupying another relationship to the church that did not fit into the previous categories. The final group of 19 interview participants does not necessarily reflect this exact ratio of relationships to the LDS Church, as some prospective participants ended their communication before interviewing.

I conducted 19 semi-structured interviews ranging from around one to two hours in length in the summer and fall of 2023. Of these interviews, 17 took place on Zoom, and two took place in person. Participants' ages ranged from 20 to 62. Five interview participants described having left the church or no longer attending or believing. Seven described themselves as active members; four of these participants used the word "nuanced" or "progressive" to define their membership, and one of these participants used the phrase "active, but questioning." Seven others fell into a broad category of inactive, semi-active, or some other combination of attending church in some instances but not others; one described their relationship to the church with the words, "It's complicated." Participants had unlimited time to review the informed consent document before setting up an interview time.

I chose a semi-structured approach to the interviews as part of my aim to provide agency, allowing participants to shape their interviews in a way most comfortable and meaningful to them. While the initial flyer only asked about interest in discussing purity, participants received information ahead of time about the types of questions I would be asking, including that I would ask about gender-based violence. While there is no large-scale data on rates of sexual violence among LDS women, anywhere from one out of every six to one out of every four U.S. women experience attempted or completed rape (RAINN; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC] 2024). Thus, while interviews were not based on whether participants had directly experienced violence, this statistic presented the possibility that participants might discuss experiences of gender-based violence, direct or proximal, in interviews. Aware of this possibility, I implemented trauma-informed principles. For example, if participants mentioned an experience of gender-based violence, they were not asked to discuss details they did not want to share, as recounting experiences of violence can be re-traumatizing (SAMHSA 2014). I employed fem-

inist methodologies by grappling with the potential power relations between interviewer and participant and attempting to center the voices of participants (DeVault and Gross 2012).

I offered confidentiality to participants; a few requested to use their real name. Interview participants received $10 Target gift cards with funding provided by the Washington University Office of Undergraduate Research through the Andrea Biggs Undergraduate Research Award.

Results

This study collected data with the understanding that how purity teachings are actually experienced by LDS women themselves cannot be fully comprehended without their perspectives. These interviews reveal how LDS girls and women resist and grapple with purity expectations, as well as how they are not simply the passive recipients of purity teachings. About 42% of interview participants discussed a direct experience with gender-based violence, suggesting possible thematic connections with the concept of purity and prompting future studies to investigate the prevalence of gender-based violence among current and former LDS women.

I break up these interviews into three sections, starting with an investigation of how purity teachings manifest in particularly gendered ways for LDS girls and women and how those teachings affect various aspects of their lives. The second and third sections discuss connections between purity and gender-based violence; this study's interview responses reveal the need to discuss purity and gender-based violence together as mutually embedded concepts to fully understand the impacts of purity teachings. To render the interconnectedness of purity teachings and gender-based violence intelligible, I offer two categories of analysis: themes of violence embedded in gendered purity teachings and themes of gendered purity embedded in experiences of gender-based violence. While these categories of analysis may also apply in other American religious and cultural contexts, engaging with these themes in LDS contexts reveals the distinct dynamics of each of these categories in the lived experiences of current and former LDS women.

Examining Dynamics of Gendered Purity Teachings in LDS Contexts

Purity as All-Encompassing. Interview participants often understood LDS purity as an all-encompassing concept. While all participants identified a shift in how they understood purity after age 12 once they entered into the Young Wom-

en program, many also discussed being introduced to purity around the time of their baptism at age 8, or even before. As Laura (pseudonym, 43, cautious nuanced active member) described the all-encompassing nature of purity: "I just was born into it." Maya (pseudonym, 36, non-attending, non-believing) also identified purity as all-encompassing "from the very earliest conception" in her life because she was born out of wedlock. As Maya stated, "I don't know that it's really possible to separate myself from [purity] because it was such a foundational principle to how I viewed myself, to how I viewed marriage, to how I viewed what my life's purpose should be." Courtney (real name, 38, resigned from the church) also discussed the eternal nature of purity expectations:

> I was so afraid of getting excommunicated or not making it to the celestial kingdom that I felt like I was taking a constant moral inventory of myself, just because I was so afraid of where I would end up, and like, if I mess up so much as a teenager, then I'm not going to be deserving of a worthy husband. And so it's all just so intertwined.

Some interview participants also described a shift when entering marriage, identifying the difficulties of an easy transition after receiving constant messaging about the value of their sexual purity. Harper (pseudonym, 32, active member) identified marriage as a "really hard transition." Another participant, Jade (pseudonym, 25, active member), described her sister's experiences with the transition to marriage, saying, "That was hard for my sister. She had the…'good girl syndrome,' is that the term? Where before she was married, it was like, 'No, no, no, avoid everything, everything's bad and evil and wrong — oh, now you're married, go ahead.'" Jade also expressed desires to address this aspect in LDS contexts and to reframe how leaders and members discuss sex and purity in church settings.

Impacts of Object Lessons. The majority of participants identified receiving a Young Women lesson on purity in the form of an "object lesson," in which Young Women leaders, who are women themselves, compared an object to girls' worthiness in connection to their virginity. One of the most common lessons that participants identified was the "chewed gum" demonstration, in which a leader would offer them a piece of chewed gum, used to symbolize a decrease in worth in connection to losing one's purity. Some participants also discussed object lessons taught by men in Sunday School or other youth settings.

Stephanie (pseudonym, 45, no longer a member) identified the 1990s, during which she was a teenager in the Young Women program, as a time in

which object lessons were frequent, listing multiple examples such as chewed gum, muffins made with dirt, wadded up pieces of paper, and a licked lollipop. Participants who recalled receiving object lessons often identified the long-lasting impacts of these messages on their perceptions of purity expectations. Fiona (pseudonym, 62, recently stepped away from the church) remembered the message relayed with a "piece of cake that everybody touches," describing how her leader said, "Who would want this cake now?"" For Fiona, that message "is very, very much embedded in my mind."

Kendrah (real name, 28, active but seriously questioning) recalled lessons involving a licked cupcake, chewed-up gum, and a crumpled piece of paper, with the message that "you can try to smooth out the piece of paper, but it'll always have those wrinkles, it'll always have these remnants of your past." Kendrah noted how leaders tied these demonstrations of worthiness to future ideals of marriage, conveying the message, "Your future husband doesn't deserve that, he deserves someone who's clean and pure." Kendrah also recalled a lesson referencing the concept of a "v-card," with hole punches in cards symbolizing sexual acts, which Kendrah described as sending the message, "You might still have your piece of paper and everything, but there's a hole in it, and you're never going to be able to fill it or get that back."

Sara (pseudonym, 44, out of the church) described a lesson involving a wrinkled dollar bill, an object which implied that "although you're still worth the same amount of money, it's not the same crisp dollar bill that you once were." Caroline (pseudonym, 54, complicated current church status) recalled a lesson in which leaders explicitly labeled girls' purity as distinct in terms of relationships to repentance, involving a cup of bleach and red dye.[3] As Caroline explained, no amount of bleach could fully remove the red dye, communicating that "even with the Atonement, there's still some residue that you can never take away." Victoria (pseudonym, 45, active member) recalled a lesson involving a fence with holes, which was compared to a woman's sexuality in that "it still serves a purpose as a fence, but those marks will never go away." Victoria described the pressure and anxiety these lessons placed on her, recalling feeling "almost scared or ashamed that I'm a sexual being."

Victoria's experience provides an example of object lessons going beyond concepts of LDS girls' virginity, instilling shame around any expression

[3] Caroline's full description of her current church status: "It's complicated. I love the gospel. I love the Church. I love Christ. Am I actively participating at this time? No, I am not. And I feel peaceful about that. But I'm very connected…I live right in the heart of Utah, which is predominantly LDS –– many disaffected, but nonetheless, predominantly LDS. And I feel like, because I'm 7th generation Mormon, and so I feel like these are my people."

or thought related to sex. Keira (pseudonym, 29, less active member) also recalled an experience in which object lessons extended outside the realm of virginity by acting as a metaphor for immodesty. Keira described a lesson given by a man at Especially For Youth (EFY), a week-long seminar program for LDS teenagers, to a group of girls. He compared immodesty to a donut dangling from a string. As Keira recalled, the leader stated that "when you show your body, it's like literally dangling a donut in front of someone," adding, "imagine how difficult that would be for the young men." In Keira's example, girls and women were regarded as the ones responsible for purity, presenting immodesty as having the potential to shape a young man's purity.

Gendered Responsibility Rhetoric. The vast majority of participants discussed how lessons they received on purity placed added pressures and anxieties on girls by framing impurity as having consequences not only for themselves and their own salvation, but also for the purity and salvation of the boys and men around them. Participants identified that narratives of men's uncontrollable desires, paired with blame and responsibility placed on women they deemed immodest, also existed in broader cultural contexts outside of the LDS Church. However, they specifically recalled hearing that rhetoric repeated in church contexts and discussed the added pressures of compounded messaging both outside and inside the church.

Dominant messaging often framed girls' responsibility for maintaining purity in combination with the idea that boys were unable to control themselves sexually. As Fiona explained, "Think about the double pressure. So if you had sexual urges, you had to control your own and somebody else's." Many participants also identified the term "gatekeepers" within this messaging. Jasmine (pseudonym, 45, inactive) referenced the term "gatekeepers" in describing notions of boys being unable to control their sexuality:

> There was a lot of, in the '90s, of talking about how, "Women or girls, you really are the gatekeepers of the boys' purity, they just can't help themselves, you're going to have to be the ones to" — as if girls didn't have any sex drive, and that they needed to be the brakes on every situation because the men "just couldn't help themselves." So we just needed to be dressing modestly so that they wouldn't be having bad thoughts. There's a lot of that, "It's our responsibility to control and manage your sexuality."

All participants identified that messaging on purity reaches both boys and girls in the church; however, responsibility rhetoric framing girls as "gatekeepers" stood out to many participants as an example of the added pressures

for girls and women to adhere to purity expectations. Keira identified responsibility rhetoric and modesty expectations as elements of LDS purity teachings that boys and men did not receive:

> I think there's some level of equality in terms of what is expected in terms of purity and sexual activity. I think where it starts to slant significantly is [that] women are supposed to almost gatekeep men's sexuality and gatekeep sexuality in general…It's this idea of like, you as a woman have to stop their sexual attraction or ambition, and also not have it yourself.

As Keira's quote suggests, the "slant" of these gendered expectations lies not only in the portrayal of boys and men as having uncontrollable sexual desires, but also in emphasizing that girls and women do not have those desires themselves.

Maya identified how responsibility rhetoric resulted in particularly gendered pressures, saying, "the lessons that [the boys] were taught on controlling their lustful feelings were very different than being taught that you are the source of those lustful feelings." Participants also referenced words such as "temptress" used to describe girls in such lessons. Phoebe (pseudonym, 26, mostly non-believing, semi-active) recalled messaging such as, "Girls, you're the attractive ones, you're the ones that lure men, so you have to make sure you know what your boundaries are so that you can tell the guy 'no.'" This notion of girls as more "attractive" led to a focus on appearance, with many participants identifying negative impacts of these messages on body image for LDS girls. Jasmine identified perceptions of the body as an impact of purity teachings for LDS girls in particular:

> When there is so much focus on appearance, what you're wearing, how you're coming across to people, what you're looking like, how you're dressing, carrying yourself, and because they start that so young, you are going to be more hyper aware of your body in a way that is not positive…I think it does get under the skin of women or girls in a different way.

These participants' experiences suggest that gendered purity teachings for LDS girls call attention to the female body as the site of self-surveillance and moral vigilance in maintaining purity in particularly gendered ways and from a young age.

Molly (pseudonym, 30, nuanced progressive member) discussed how portraying women as both the "gatekeepers" of men's sexuality and as devoid of their own sexual desire can impact power dynamics within marriage:

> I thought of it just like, "Oh, I'm responsible for these boys' feelings, if they're feeling tempted, that's on me." And then I think it flips when you get married, where it's a little bit like, "Oh, now I belong to my husband, my body is his." So it goes 180 where it's like, you need to be a gatekeeper, because here's this person that can't control themselves, and then you get married, and all of a sudden, they're in control of you.

Other participants also said purity rhetoric portrayed women as passive actors who lacked sexual desire. As Sara explained, "In an underlying way, they teach it that women are not sexual beings." Bianca (pseudonym, 37, nuanced active) recalled internalizing the message that "[sexual pleasure] is for a spouse," and thus that sex "isn't for you." As Maya commented, "[men] were the actors, and women were to be acted upon; however, we were responsible for their actions." These quotes suggest tensions between the gendered responsibility to be the "gatekeepers" of purity paired with conceptions of women as those who are "acted upon."

Experiences with Bishops and Other Church Leaders. Participants identified bishops as the source they were told to consult for any perceived loss of purity as well as other spiritual counseling. Bishops in the LDS Church are volunteers, are not required to have any experience in relevant professional or academic areas, and do not receive formal training (Prince 2020). Bishops meet individually with youth each year for what are often referred to as "worthiness interviews." Bishops and other local leaders also interview adult members every two years to renew their temple recommends. Multiple participants recalled experiences in temple recommend interviews in which they were asked specific questions about sexual activity and masturbation, as one of the required questions revolved around one's chastity in order to receive a recommend.

Multiple participants recalled being required to stop taking the sacrament for an extended period of weeks in relation to purity expectations set by bishops and church leaders. Mia (pseudonym, 32, has stepped back from the church, but still participates in her calling) recalled an experience in which a bishop didn't approve her temple recommend. She was unable to go to the temple for the next eight months, and the bishop also required that she stop taking the sacrament for the following eight weeks. As Mia described, "He had such a negative impact on how I viewed sexuality." Participants who described requirements to temporarily abstain from the sacrament identified increased shame due to the public element of the punishment, especially in a setting

in which other members of the congregation understood the implications of someone not taking the sacrament.

At age 25, Caroline became pregnant while not married, and she did not want to get married to her then-boyfriend, who was emotionally abusive to her. Caroline's bishop instructed her that since she would not get married, she needed to give up her baby for adoption. As Caroline explained, "The implicit message is, you're not worthy enough to raise this child." For Caroline, her perceived loss of purity led to a loss of worthiness for motherhood, exemplifying compounding pressures of purity and motherhood as religiously defined gender expectations with eternal consequences.

Dynamics of LDS Purity and Race. Maya highlighted how "being a mixed-race woman of color" played a significant factor in her own perceptions of body image and the sexualization of girls' bodies, as "your body is eroticized and fetishized because you're ethnic, but they also aren't supposed to want that either." For Maya, responsibility rhetoric intersected with the pervasiveness of racism both outside and within LDS doctrine that posited whiteness as pure and desirable. This placed her in an impossible bind in understanding her relationship to her body. Maya also discussed some of the specific LDS rhetoric contributing to complicated relationships to body image and purity expectations for LDS women of color:

> Especially because within Mormonism, the predominant originating ethnic members are of European descent, Scandinavian descent, you have these bodies that are idealized of being blonde, skinny, small chested, not very curvy. And so when you're not that, it's so much more than just that's the body ideal — it's that that's God's body ideal, that's God's chosen people…and given more racist teachings in the Book of Mormon about becoming "white and delightsome," this all really heavily impacts how women of color in Mormonism perceive their bodies and perceive their ethnicity in turn.

Stephanie expressed similar experiences to Maya as a Black woman who grew up in a very predominantly white community in Utah:

> I developed an eating disorder in high school because of it, partially because of that culture, partially because I was the only Black kid in high school, and all of my friends were like "this big" and skinny and white, Nordic, Swedish origin, so I had a completely different body than they did, so I was desperately trying to fit in…Also, I kind of felt like, as I was

> developing and everything, that my body was too sexual because of the purity culture…it affected everything.

For Stephanie, her experiences with body image growing up stemmed from purity messaging that sexualized girls' bodies. This, compounded by her identity as a Black girl, led her to label her body as "too sexual." Stephanie, like Maya, also identified similar racialized language within purity teachings, quoting the scripture about becoming "white as snow":

> I remember there would be lessons about being pure and being as white as snow … and so every time it came up, I was just like, I felt like I was not enough. And then I thought, and then for a while I remember, well, if I do all of the right things and I get to heaven, then I will be enough because then I will have that countenance as white as snow.

Because of constant messaging directly associating purity with whiteness, Stephanie internalized descriptions of purity and cleanliness as "white" during chastity lessons she received in Young Women. Stephanie's and Maya's discussions of phrases such as "white and delightsome" and "white as snow" in conjunction with LDS scripture describing dark skin as a "divine curse" suggest the racialization of purity in Mormonism, paralleling existing scholarship on associations between whiteness and purity in American evangelicalism (Harris 2013, Natarajan 2022). Stephanie also highlighted how associations between purity, whiteness, and the concept of the "divine curse" directly influenced how others perceived and interacted with her, especially in dating and relationships:

> When I was [15], the bishop…told me in one of my interviews that I couldn't marry somebody, I needed to basically not be dating anybody right now and wait until I got to BYU and found somebody who was Black to date, that I couldn't marry anybody who was white because if I did, I would curse him and my children.

For Stephanie, racialized purity teachings impacted not only her own body image and religious identity, but also others' perceptions of her purity, resulting in significant harm and stress. Both Stephanie and Maya identified that purity expectations, notions of whiteness, and doctrine on race intersect in all-encompassing and harmful ways for women of color in the LDS Church.

Dynamics of Agency and Control. Elle (pseudonym, 20, non-active) discussed how leaders would sometimes present purity expectations as a form of "agency over

your body." Despite this ideal, for Elle, the reality reflected LDS girls and women lacking agency over their bodies:

> If you dress this way, a man's going to sexualize you. If you don't dress this way, a man's going to sexualize you. If you don't act this way, you're going to struggle with sex. So it's like, you have the option to act, but no matter which way you act, you're doing it wrong.

Elle's conclusion that "no matter which way you act, you're doing it wrong" suggests that gendered responsibility rhetoric can be applied to any perceived loss of purity, rather than operating from a defined and clear set of rules. Phoebe described a "false sense of agency," stating that "it was always presented that we did have a choice, that we did have control, but just with the sense that the consequences are predetermined for you."

Other participants discussed ways in which they were able to exercise agency in defining purity for themselves, or in choosing to embrace their personal sexual and gendered identities. Victoria described complex processes of allowing herself to exist outside of purity expectations while remaining an active member of the church, saying, "I felt like I was betraying something, but then I've learned to realize, no, I've been given that agency and that own power of choice." Jade reframed purity as a personal endeavor between herself and her religious identity, rather than based on others' perceptions, sharing that "I was doing it because I went to the Lord, I found that it was right for me." Jade added that her exercise of agency in choosing to embrace this definition of purity for herself came from her own conclusions, stating, "I don't feel like it was presented to me that way; I feel like that is something that has to be found, unfortunately. I don't know if that's the same today, but for me personally, that is how it happened."

Themes of Violence Embedded in Gendered Purity Teachings

In the interviews, the vast majority of participants indicated that they had never, or rarely, experienced a conversation on the topic of gender-based violence in church settings. However, several had received purity lessons in church settings that alluded to rape as a "danger" or "consequence" of impurity, though they did not think of these moments as discussions of gender-based violence.

This dynamic suggests that themes of gender-based violence appear in purity teachings in ways not intelligible as "discussions" of gender-based violence. Rather, they are entrenched within gendered purity expectations them-

selves, blurring a variety of experiences into one category of perceived "impurity." When participants did recall direct references to rape during lessons on purity, they most often left with the understanding that an experience of rape would be their fault.

Gendered Responsibility Rhetoric as Victim Blaming. When first asked about receiving lessons on gender-based violence, the vast majority of participants responded that they did not discuss gender violence in church settings; as Harper described, "There was no form of consent lessons." However, when asked about purity teachings, multiple participants identified victim-blaming narratives and references to sexual violence as a "consequence" of impurity, suggesting that for these participants, discussions of gender-based violence more frequently emerged in connection to teachings on purity rather than in independent conversations. For example, when asked if she remembered any conversations about gender-based violence in church settings, Courtney responded that she did not. However, Courtney later recalled references to sexual violence when discussing purity in LDS settings. For example, she remembered reading and hearing phrases indicating that "it would be better for you to die fighting a rape than [you] survive and have been raped." This quote likely references, or pulls inspiration from, the 1969 book by former LDS prophet Spencer W. Kimball titled *The Miracle of Forgiveness*, which states that "it is better to die in defending one's virtue than to live having lost it without a struggle" (196).

Multiple participants identified the ways in which gendered responsibility rhetoric communicated that survivors were responsible for experiencing abuse. Victoria remembered receiving messaging that "rape wouldn't happen if a woman was dressed appropriately, or wasn't flirtatious, encouraging a man's behavior." Participants recalled some messages from leaders as using vague terms such as "danger" to reference rape while other lessons explicitly used terms such as rape and assault. Stephanie remembered hearing this messaging directed toward LDS girls and women in church settings:

> If something bad happens to you as a woman, you were in the wrong place, you put yourself in the wrong place…If you were out past curfew, if you were with a boy alone in a car longer than, you know what I mean, you should be, if you were making out with somebody, if you were wearing something that was immodest, if you were drinking — big thing, if you as a female drink — you are setting yourself up to be assaulted. I had a Young Women's leader actually say that verbatim.

Similarly, Phoebe recalled a lesson in which a leader used the word "rape" in describing the "dangerous position" LDS girls would be in if they were to dress in ways deemed to be immodest. This led Phoebe to internalize the message that "if I were ever to get raped, then it would be my fault."

Themes of Gendered Purity Embedded in Experiences of Gender-Based Violence

In addition to identifying themes of violence entrenched within gendered purity teachings, many interview participants viewed purity expectations as holistically shaping experiences of gender-based violence. This section addresses the ways in which LDS purity teachings affect experiences of gender-based violence, from informing survivors' understandings of their experiences to shaping the ways the institution responds to survivors.

Increased Shame for Survivors. Laura described how gendered purity expectations result in increased cycles of shame and self-blame for LDS survivors of gender-based violence who are women. This is compounded with the fact that gender-based violence is already "just a beast to try to heal from" without the added purity frameworks:

> All three of [my sisters] have been sexually assaulted or raped. All three. And so watching them recover from that and how long it has taken to recover from that, I think part of it is because of the purity teachings that they received all their whole lives long, that something happened to them that broke their, like, best gift that they ever had to give the world. Something broke that, so they could never, they couldn't get it back, so they felt terrible about themselves for years.

As Laura identified, framing purity as girls' and women's "best gift" places intense pressure on LDS girls and women and amplifies the existing trauma from gender-based violence.

Responsibility Rhetoric and Gender-Based Violence. Caroline discussed her own experiences after being sexually assaulted when she was 17, and how her internalization of gendered responsibility rhetoric in church settings influenced how she understood sexual violence:

> It was so fast. I remember saying, "no, no, no." And maybe there was a part of me that was like, "Oh, men, they just can't control themselves, my

> sin was even getting in the back seat, that's where I went wrong." And so I thought, "I set this up. I set it up because men can't control themselves. Boys can't control themselves." [In the church], we're literally taught that what we wear, how we talk, even expressions on our face, could set a boy off on a chain of events hormonally that he will never be able to control.

Caroline also discussed the ways in which the phrase "guard your virtue with your life" shaped her experience:

> They would say things like, "guard your virtue with your life," but what does that mean? How do you do that? Just pray? Cause I remember praying for it to not … I thought God would rescue [me] or intervene, right? But I thought I didn't fight hard enough. So I went straight to the bishop, and he agreed with me. "You didn't fight hard enough." That phrase, "guard your virtue with your life," haunted me for years and years and years, and it still gets perpetuated.

Caroline's quote reflects how gendered responsibility rhetoric can shape survivors' understandings of their experiences as well as influence bishops' responses. For Caroline, LDS language around "guarding your virtue" and expectations to "fight back" seen in texts like *The Miracle of Forgiveness* shaped how she understood her experience.

Lack of Trauma-Informed Approach. Participants often referred to "bishop roulette." This means that, because of the lack of standardized training for bishops, how a bishop might react to a disclosure of gender-based violence will vary. As Caroline stated in describing bishops' responses to people disclosing nonconsensual experiences, "They're not trauma-informed, and so they don't know that when you're in that situation, that you literally freeze."

Multiple participants also discussed not having the language or framework to understand experiences as nonconsensual. As Harper explained:

> He took me on a date, and then we went back to his room and, just, you know, one thing went to another, and I didn't have vocabulary, I did not know about consent, and I was sexually assaulted. And back then, I was so unaware of anything, right? I was just like, I didn't even know the trauma that had happened.

Harper went to her bishop, who acknowledged her as "the victim," saying to Harper, "You're good; you're the victim. So you don't need to repent in the eyes of God." However, reflecting on the experience later has led Harper to realize the harm in associating perceptions of chastity with worthiness.

As Harper stated, "He assaulted me, and you're worried about my salvation? … How was that even the mindset?" Harper's experience demonstrates that discussions of salvation do not adequately address traumatic experiences. As Harper discussed, she instead needed resources to help her process and heal from her trauma.

Keira shared similar reflections on her conversation with a bishop about a nonconsensual experience (noting that she did not have the language of "nonconsensual" at the time):

> I went to the bishop that Sunday, and I told him everything. And he just was like, you know, "I see you, it's going to be okay, you can repent and it'll be fine." … Now with just more experience in the world, I wish that he had been better prepped to have the conversation of like, "That sounds non-consensual, let's talk about what that is, how are you doing emotionally, this is not something you have to repent for," … [but there was] like no recognition that like it had not been consensual. I don't know if I even blame him. I just feel like he was so unequipped to handle that kind of conversation or see the nuance or the complexity in the relationship and what had happened.

As discussed by multiple participants, church structures that operate from a framework of purity rather than from trauma-informed practices render consent invisible. Additionally, as Keira identified, her bishop likely received little to no training on how to respond to trauma or recognize signs of abuse, despite being appointed to a position in which lay members may directly or indirectly disclose abuse. Participants' experiences suggest that institutional structures leave bishops unprepared for these conversations and allow abuse to remain unaddressed at the systemic level.

In addition to lack of trauma-informed approaches in bishops' interviews and meetings, participants similarly perceived Young Women lessons as lacking trauma-informed principles. As Mia shared, chastity lessons in a Young Women setting did not include any discussion of gender-based violence, despite the fact that "there were young women in there who had been molested, and I actually had an experience with that when I was young." This ultimately led Mia to internalize her experiences with abuse as something to "get in trouble" for in connection to purity expectations. Also discussing the harm of these lessons for survivors, Maya shared, "For sexual abuse victims, the rhetoric around purity is really painful because it feels reductive. It feels like it's victim blaming. It feels like being re-traumatized over again."

A boy in Kendrah's LDS ward sexually assaulted her in high school. When Kendrah reported the assault to her bishop, he connected her with the police and provided her with "bodyguards" of men in her ward who kept her perpetrator away from her while the court case was in progress. As Kendrah explained, her bishop's knowledge of resources stemmed from the fact that he worked at the courthouse rather than from any preparation he received as a bishop:

> I have talked to so many women in 10 plus years since that happened — I have never ever heard of that happening anywhere else. And I think that's really, really sad, because honestly, that was so simple. … As I've talked to other people who have been through the same thing, they received so much shame from their bishops and so much blame. … And I just overall do not feel like the church educates people enough on how to handle abuse or assault.

Kendrah discussed her experience as an exception rather than the norm, though pointing out that the support she received from her bishop was "so simple." Kendrah also identified hearing about sexual violence in LDS contexts in the news, such as reading about the LDS Church's cover-up of sexual abuse in Arizona (Rezendes 2022). She added, "I don't know where I would be in my life if that had been me, like if my bishop had not believed me," or if he had discouraged her from reporting. Referencing the church's attempts to cover up that abuse, Kendrah concluded, "I honestly, in the last two years or so since that has come out, I've felt a deep sense of unsafeness at church around like, if this happens to anybody, women aren't safe here."

Discussion

This study finds that an analysis of purity expectations for girls and women in the LDS Church is incomplete without considering relationships between purity and gender-based violence. These two concepts must be understood as mutually embedded—not simply overlapping, but rather conceptually intertwined. In these contexts, gendered violence becomes centered within structures of purity, rendering consent invisible. For many interview participants, gendered purity teachings in the LDS Church existed as victim-blaming rhetoric, labeling girls and women as responsible for their own purity as well as the purity of boys and men regardless of considerations of consent. An analysis of gendered purity in the LDS Church remains incomplete without investigating

allusions to violence, and discussions of experiences with gender-based violence for LDS girls and women cannot be fully understood without analyzing the all-encompassing nature of gendered purity expectations entangled within one's identity as a Latter-day Saint woman.

This study found interview participants based solely on their interest in discussing LDS purity teachings, with no mention of gender-based violence in the initial flyer. I was not directly recruiting participants based on experiences with gender violence. Before conducting interviews, I communicated to participants that I would ask a few questions about gender-based violence to provide informed consent about the interview process, but no question directly required participants to disclose experiences with gender-based violence. Despite these factors, I found that 42% of interview participants discussed experiences with gender-based violence (including sexual violence, child sexual abuse, sexual harassment, spiritual abuse, and other forms of gender violence).

This study found that participants with a variety of religious commitments to the LDS Church (including active members, inactive members, and ex-members) discussed experiences with gender-based violence. While religious commitments may have impacted the 19 participants' relationships to purity teachings, their self-identified religiosity was not a statistically significant measure of whether they discussed an experience of gender-based violence. This finding suggests the importance of acknowledging paths toward healing for survivors both inside and outside church structures.

Interview participants' contributions reveal the ways in which lessons on purity may reference gender-based violence without invoking specific terminology, instead alluding to "dangers" or "asking for it." Multiple participants discussed references to sexual violence as a "consequence" of impurity despite indicating that they had not talked about gender-based violence in LDS settings. This conflation suggests that the lessons these participants received presented impurity and sexual violence as mutually intertwined, rather than separate, concepts. In this framework, sexual violence implies impurity, and impurity indicates the possible "consequence" of violence. While participants who experienced gender-based violence had a range of interactions with church leaders, some received responses that drew from victim-blaming narratives and rendered consent invisible.

Interview participants' experiences with bishops and other church leaders demonstrate a need for the LDS Church to institute trauma-informed training. As multiple participants acknowledged, phenomena such as "bish-

op roulette," in which some participants received support from church leaders while others did not, suggest that these harms cannot be explained by the actions of individual bishops alone. Rather, they stem from the lack of trauma-informed training at the institutional level. Trauma-informed training may involve teaching bishops about possible signs and comorbidities of abuse as well as the various ways in which trauma can impact survivors into the future (Herman 1997). Preparation for bishops should also involve specific training on how to respond to a disclosure of abuse to avoid retraumatization. However, interview participants' experiences suggest that as long as purity structures remain in place, the possibility of retraumatization remains, as survivors may not explicitly label an experience as abuse and thus may be asked to repent for an experience of gender-based violence. Additionally, participants discussed feeling intense shame after being asked to repent or abstain from the sacrament for a perceived "impurity" even if they had not experienced abuse, revealing that gendered purity structures harmed survivors and non-survivors alike among this study's participants.

These interviews provide a framework to understand gendered purity expectations as all-encompassing; purity has the capacity to shape all aspects of everyday life, and is tied directly to LDS girls' identity formations. Within these all-encompassing expectations, interview participants discussed shame as a central theme in their experiences with purity. Shame is present in their relationships to their sexual desires, their bodies, and their perceptions of their worthiness, all with eternal implications. The vast majority of participants also described messaging that fell within this study's definition of "responsibility rhetoric," which often further contributed to feelings of shame. These elements combine with victim-blaming rhetoric within and beyond church structures in ways that can compound shame for survivors of gender-based violence.

Additionally, LDS purity expectations presented impossible tensions for women of color in this study, as lessons framing purity as an active choice became implicated within doctrine portraying dark skin as inherently impure. These dynamics also present the possibility of increased vulnerabilities for LDS women of color in connection to gender-based violence.

Limitations

This study's sample population of 19 participants is not large enough proportionally to be representative of entire populations of current and former LDS women. It does not fully capture their diverse experiences, particularly when

considering factors such as socioeconomic status, geographic location, race, and varying degrees of religiosity. This study's finding that 42% of participants experienced gender-based violence is also not representative of broader populations of LDS women. It is possible that individuals who have experienced gender-based violence may have volunteered for this study at a disproportionate rate due to the significant impacts that purity teachings can have on those experiences. However, this percentage may still be an underestimate, as I did not directly ask participants to disclose experiences with abuse. This statistic may also have been different if I had asked participants to self-report experiences of gender-based violence, as survivors may not label their experiences as such (Wilson and Miller 2016).

Finding participants based on their interest in talking about purity presents the possibility of self-selection bias. Those who felt deeply harmed by LDS teachings, or those who remained strongly committed to them, may have been more likely to volunteer for this study, which may have skewed the data. Participants' ideological commitments, or lack thereof, to the LDS Church may have also played a role in how they discussed purity teachings. Scholars of cultural anthropology have described ideological commitments to religious identity as socially constructed categories, and in this study, participants' self-identification of their religious commitments through terminology such as "active member," "ex-Mormon," or "nuanced" or "progressive" member likely reference existing social and cultural groupings rather than entirely new constructions of identity (Brooks 2018). Thus, the language with which participants have come to discuss purity in the LDS Church may have been influenced by their identification with these categories.

As a final limitation, conclusions about LDS girlhood in this study stem from participants' reflections on their childhood, meaning that time may have impacted how they discuss or recall the purity lessons they received.

Implications for Future Studies

This study's interviews focus on American facets of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Since more Latter-day Saints now reside outside of the U.S. than within it, future scholars may explore new questions about differences in LDS purity teachings in various cultural contexts and geographical locations (Schneider 2024).

Additionally, a few participants in this study identified that the purity teachings they received operated within a heteronormative structure that

may have resulted in added stressors for queer youth. Future studies would do well to focus specifically on the perspectives of LGBTQ+ people who received lessons on purity in LDS settings. Building on this study, future scholarship should investigate the racial dynamics of purity teachings in the LDS Church, including how intersecting identities of gender and race may uniquely impact relationships to purity and experiences of gender-based violence. Researchers should also analyze the specific dynamics of purity for LDS boys and men, as multiple participants in this study emphasized purity teachings as harmful to boys and men as a key part of their understanding of purity in LDS contexts. Finally, 42% of this study's participants discussed experiences with gender-based violence, prompting future studies to investigate the prevalence of gender-based violence among broader populations of LDS girls and women.

Conclusion

While various thematic aspects of LDS purity expectations exist in other American religious and secular manifestations of purity, this study finds that LDS purity operates with its own particulars, evidenced by participants' discussions of its interconnectedness with their identities as Latter-day Saint girls or women. Factors that were particularly relevant to the LDS Church in participants' experiences included "worthiness interviews," connections between purity and the ability to take the weekly sacrament, and emphasis on girls and women as the "guardians" of boys' and men's purity.

This study adds to existing literature by including the voices and experiences of current and former LDS women on the topics of purity and gender-based violence. Participants who discussed experiences with gender-based violence held various relationships to the LDS Church, prompting future scholarship to consider how healing processes can occur while remaining in religious structures as well as while operating in post-religious contexts.

Finally, this study offers new analytical frameworks of themes of violence embedded within gendered purity teachings and themes of gendered purity embedded within experiences of gender-based violence. Based on this study's findings, future scholarship discussing purity in the LDS Church should consider its interconnectedness with gender-based violence, and studies that investigate abuse in the LDS Church should examine the role of purity as the framework from which the institution may respond to gender-based violence.

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Journal of the Mormon Social Science Association

Hulme, Alyssa Calder. 2026. "Sexism in Silicon Slopes: Religion and Gendered Organizational Structures in the New Economy." *Journal of the Mormon Social Science Association* 3, no. 1: 43–77.

https://doi.org/10.54587/JMSSA.0303

Sexism in Silicon Slopes: Religion and Gendered Organizational Structures in the New Economy

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This study investigates the role of religion in perpetuating gender inequality within contemporary workplaces, focusing on Silicon Slopes. Applying gendered organizational theory, I show how religious beliefs sustain discriminatory organizational norms and practices because religion is built into the gendered logic employed by company founders and their employees. Through 94 in-depth interviews and 147 hours of ethnographic fieldwork, I use an innovative social network strategy to examine the impact of Mormon religious beliefs on gender and labor dynamics in Utah's emerging tech space. This study reveals three key insights: (1) Religion shapes educational and professional norms, leading to the structural disenfranchisement of women within organizations, irrespective of women's religious affiliation. (2) Religious teachings continue to influence corporate norms and language, even when divorced from their original source, thereby perpetuating gender biases in the workplace. (3) Despite shifts in religious dedication among company founders, religiously influenced gendered logics persist, impacting organizational dynamics of a growing company with employees from around the world.

These findings underscore the profound and direct impact of religion on women's economic precarity, particularly when they are closely associated with LDS male professional gatekeepers who adhere to gender complementarian beliefs. Furthermore, religious leaders wield significant influence over the global economy through the creation of structuring documents on gender, labor, and family dynamics.

Christian religiosity in the United States has dropped significantly in the last 30 years; according to the Pew Research Center, the number of American Christians is projected to fall below 50% of the population within the next 50 years (Pew 2022). What might these trends mean for the influence of religion on American lives, education, and careers? How do religion and gendered organizations interact, and what are the outcomes for women entering the workforce? To explore these questions, I trace legacies of religious beliefs

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on gender and labor over the life course of Mormon women, from Sunday school lessons to business school ethics debates and from sacrament tables to corporate boardroom tables.

I extend Acker's 1990 gendered organization theory and Williams et al.'s 2012 application in the "new economy" by showing how religion functions as a gender inequality reproduction mechanism in the 21st-century economy. I show how religion sustains the tenacious hold gender inequality has in the workforce because religion is built into the gendered logic that 1) influences childhood aspirations and career choices; 2) shapes the educational institutions that develop labor talent pipelines; and 3) structures work organizations and the decision-making of the gatekeepers they employ. I demonstrate how religion sustains these gender inequality mechanisms across the same four characteristics defined by Williams et al. in the 21st-century economy (job security, teamwork, career maps, and networking), in this case, within a religious MBA program and a Utah-based tech company started by Mormon men.

I also extend knowledge about traditional gender-based roles/relationships among the members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (commonly referred to as Mormons), including what is unique to the decision-making of Mormon women entering higher education and professional spaces, the logic and biases of Mormon men who perpetuate specific patterns of gender inequality within professional business settings, and the high level of influence the Church's current leaders inadvertently have on the gender policies instituted by global Mormon-led companies and the subsequent experiences of women employees therein, regardless of those women's faith and geographic proximity to the leaders of the Church or company.

Literature Review

Gendered Organizational Theory. Joan Acker developed the theory of gendered organizations to explain persistent gender disparities in the workplace (Acker 1990). Acker shows how jobs, work rules, evaluation systems, and organizational logic are built on a foundation that systematically disenfranchises women through the division of labor, cultural symbols, workplace interactions, individual identities, and organizational logic. Acker's framework has since been applied across diverse industries, reinforcing how workplace structures privilege men (Pierce 1996; Williams 1992; Britton 1995; Holmberg and Alvinius 2023; Tanquerel and Santistevan 2022; Chakraborty 2023; Rumpf 2023; Brewer et al. 2020; Quadlin 2023; Rahilly 2020).

In 2012, Williams et al. published an interaction of Acker's work but applied it to what they called "the new economy" (Williams et al. 2012). Focusing specifically on Acker's emphasis on organizing logic, Williams et al. showed how the basic gendered organizational logic had been transformed over the previous decades to further rationalize and legitimize organizational hierarchies. Their application identified gendered mechanisms actively disenfranchising non-men in the 21st-century workforce. That workforce has now accepted the following as the norm: job precarity with frequent downsizing, mergers, and lay-offs; employment on "teams" evaluated by results and outcomes by peers rather than hands-on managers; individualized and vague career development maps; and networking as an essential element for career advancement within and outside one's organization.

No research has yet explored how secular gendered organizations in the 21st century are influenced and sustained by religiosity using William et al.'s 2012 iteration of Acker's 1990 theory. To do so, I draw upon scholars from religious, organizational, gender, geography, and childhood socialization studies.

Religion and Organizations. Current literature on the intersection of religion and organizations in the 21st-century for-profit sector is limited. Most applications focus on the organization of the religions themselves (Demerath 1998; Hall 1997) or associated non-profits (Seigler and Cadge 2023). Studies on religion in the for-profit sector focus on religious individuals or small networks within secular organizations (Ernst et al. 2024; Cadge et al. 2023; Lofti Dehkharghani et al. 2023; Apelt et al. 2023). Some examine how companies purposefully incorporate religion to increase worker profitability (de Wildt and Aupers 2023).

Religious Organizations and Gender. Only a handful of scholars have examined organizational structures through the lens of both religion and gendered organizational theory, but they do not address economic factors. For example, Whitehead (2013) and Stalp and Winders (2000) highlight how religious doctrine shapes gender roles in leadership, though their focus is not explicitly corporate.

Religion, Organizations, Gender, and Geography. A community's conservative religious demographics are related to white individuals' gender attitudes in organizations within that state (Chan-Serafin et al. 2013; Moore and Vanneman 2003). For example, businessmen in "traditional" marriages in the U.S. and U.K. have higher rates of discriminating against women coworkers (Desai et al.

2014). Religious homogeneity is related to well-being, likely in proportion to the number of coworkers with similar levels of religiosity (Diener et al. 2011; Chan-Serafin et al 2013).

As Americans are the most religious in the industrialized world (Diener et al. 2011), and the Protestant work ethic remains a potent force in shaping the U.S. economy, it makes sense to look more closely at religious organizational interactions and gendered organizational structures in a densely populated and religiously homogeneous region, where members of the dominant religion hold positions of organizational power in the local economy.

Religion, Organizations, Gender, Geography, and Childhood Socialization. Religious density and exposure shape girls' aspirations, with the degree of socialization influencing long-term educational and career planning from an early age. Horwitz et al. found that by age 13, girls' proximity to religious subcultures predicted whether they would prioritize education/careers or motherhood, aligning with later degree attainment. Social networks play a key role, with Jewish girls benefiting from same-gender role models, unlike their Christian counterparts (Horwitz et al. 2022; Henningsen et al. 2022).

Methods

Williams et al. (2014) used a case study of geoscientists in the oil and gas industry to show four new organizing logics that reproduce gender inequality in the 21st-century workplace (Williams et al. 2012; Williams et al. 2014). I extend this conversation by showing how religion in the 21st century also functions as a mechanism that reproduces gender inequality in the modern economy. To investigate how religion upholds these new organizing logics, I draw upon my research on the life course of Mormon women with MBAs, global corporations influenced by the LDS church, and the people affected by those institutions.

Using snowball sampling and social media recruitment flyers, I began with a cohort of 37 Mormon women with MBAs from 10 universities across the U.S. and U.K. After being introduced to the rich social and professional networks these women interact with over their life course, this initial pool expanded to include a total of 94 participants. All interviews were either performed in person or over video calls.

Using feminist in-depth interviews and relational ethnography methods (Small and Cook 2023; Desmond 2014; DeVault and Gross 2012; Hard-

ing 1987), I conducted interviews with classmates, professors, recruiters, and coworkers, uncovering interconnected relationships among most of the 94 participants. They often knew one another and, unwittingly, were able to add insight, nuance, and triangulated validity to my findings by recounting the same event and interaction from multiple angles. These methods allowed me to map relationships among participants and vicariously experience the networks and divisions within their social circles (Saldaña 2013). Deep exposure to these enmeshed networks was essential for me to locate the religious beliefs and relationships that guide my analysis. These results informed and supported my choice to include a tight geographical boundary for the tech company I chose to explore.

At the invitation of my participants, I also conducted 147 hours of ethnographic participant observation in 2023 and 2024. I attended classes, conferences, and networking and social events across four campuses, with both in-person (139 hours) and virtual (8 hours) participation.

I was initially interested in understanding Mormon women's networks and how they use them in the business world, including mentors and role models. I quickly found that not only an unproductive line of questioning (most did not have networks or mentors), but most participants immediately turned the topic of conversation to matters of religion, gender, and the barriers they faced in business because of their identity, upbringings, and beliefs. Following their lead, I changed my line of inquiry to investigate religious socialization and gender tension to better understand what these women face. I asked about their motives for getting into an MBA program, their plan to obtain an MBA, previous work experience, why they chose their university, how others responded to their educational and career choices, and how their Mormon religious affiliation (whether upbringing, current attendance, or relationship with the church) had affected their choices and experiences.

Interviews lasted 30 minutes to two hours, averaging 60 minutes. I did follow-up interviews with a handful of subjects and continued to accept new participants until I reached result saturation; even then, I pursued more participants until I reached the limits of the various networks I had been connected to. There are likely more Mormon women with MBAs out there, but, as I will show in my analysis, they are often disconnected from the networks that otherwise would connect them to my study.

Using grounded theory, inductive coding techniques, and thematic analysis (Charmaz 2006), I created process and chronological maps to help me

analyze the relationships between people, events, and ideas. I used MAXQDA qualitative coding software to confirm and refine the relationships I found between sites, beliefs, structures, and people through the use of process, emotion, verses, and evaluative coding techniques.

By combining the previous research at the intersections of religion, organizations, gender, geography, and childhood socialization, I propose that organizations with a high density of homogenous religious white male organizational leaders will enact policies and procedures informed by their religious context that disenfranchise women. Research has demonstrated the strength of influence that religion has on the development of an individual's morality and opinions (Finke and Adamczyk 2008; Du Mez 2020; Nie 2023), and especially executive decisions made concerning company policy and culture (Ananthram 2019). Finke and Adamczyk's (2008) analysis was done at the national scale. However, I position my study on the logic that a similar finding can be found within smaller population segments when the homogeneous religion holds enough power to enact corporate structures and policies.

Thus, in order to extend Acker's 1990 gendered organizational theory and Williams et al.'s 2012 application to show how religion functions as a gender inequality reproduction mechanism in the 21st-century economy, I locate my study in Utah's people, organizations, and geography, ending with a deep analysis of the relationships between the LDS church and one global tech firm started and run by Mormon founders.

Positionality

As a Mormon woman, BYU graduate, and University of Chicago graduate student, my background provided unique access to this study. I navigated MBA spaces with familiarity, shared socio-religious experiences with participants, and had the academic foundation to analyze religion's role in shaping gendered career trajectories. My positionality fostered deep trust and rapport, allowing fluid conversations without the need for constant explanation. This shared language enabled participants to conserve energy for more substantive discussions. However, I periodically asked them to explain concepts as if I were an outsider, ensuring accuracy and uncovering nuances (DeVault and Gross, 2012, 179).

By integrating relational ethnography and feminist methodologies, I not only mapped interactions and networks but also examined my own position within the system (Olson 1998, 448; May et al. 2014).

I chose to use the term "Mormon" to identify members of this church because it is how my participants refer to themselves. This nickname persists despite recent church leadership's strong discouragement of the moniker and recent publication standards. Confusion over the different names is reflective of larger identity politics in the church culture; it also helps differentiate between the structural organization of the religion and what its people do and say as they interpret church teachings.

Background

Utah's Economy

Utah's economy is ranked highest for job growth in the U.S. and is predicted to be the state with the most tech job growth over the next decade (Utah: State Economic Profile, n.d.). However, it is also consistently one of the worst states in the nation for women's equality, if not the worst (McCann 2025). Utah is ranked 50th out of 50 states in the nation for women's rights (McCann 2025) and is home to the eighth-largest gender pay gap in tech; women make 76% of the salaries of their male counterparts (Salt Lake Tribune 2024).

As a state with significant gender disparities in professional settings (McCann 2025), benevolent sexism is common in Utah (Stevenson 2014). Utah has the geographic and religious homogeneity needed for my approach, combined with the force of a growing tech company presence that positions Utah's tech company founders to have a profound influence on emerging companies across the globe.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

The LDS church is a global organization with 17.5 million members, 6.9 million of whom reside in the U.S (CJCLDS 2025). More than half of those members are women (Pew 2014), yet women are restricted from the highest church offices and all positions of ultimate authority. This patriarchal structure, run by fifteen elderly men, is headquartered in Utah. One of the densest Mormon populations (82% in U.S. Religious Census 2020) is found in Utah County. It is home to the church's flagship university, Brigham Young University, and to Silicon Slopes (a nickname coined to promote Utah's growing technology community).

The LDS church is unusual in its top-down approach to managing and teaching members; it has an official correlation department that manages all

church messages, manuals, and programs to ensure they comply with official church policy and practices (CJCLDS 2022). In addition to these libraries of texts and media, members spend many hours a week at structured church events. Specific messages and quotes are reiterated to drive home particular messages and instructions. The messages in these texts range from typical Christian teachings about Christ, service, and scripture to more specifically LDS doctrines. A 1995 document called "The Family: A Proclamation to the World" (hereafter referred to as the Proclamation) structures the church's teachings on men's and women's gendered relationships, labor, and assignments as parents (CJCLDS 1995). In its first 25 years of publication, this document was cited more than 150 times in the twice-annual global church conferences (Walker 2020).

The document starts by declaring the centrality of the family to God's plan and that "gender is an essential characteristic of individual premortal, mortal, and eternal identity and purpose." It defines the eternal responsibilities of men and women as husbands/fathers and wives/mothers. According to Momon teachings, even those not blessed with a spouse or children in this life will have the opportunity to have them in the next. Thus, all women and girls are spoken to as if they are already or are destined to be mothers (interestingly, the same logic is not consistently applied to men). After declaring that parents are tasked with a solemn, divine responsibility to love and provide for their children's physical and spiritual needs, the Proclamation divides who does what:

> By divine design, fathers are to preside over their families in love and righteousness and are responsible to provide the necessities of life and protection for their families. Mothers are primarily responsible for the nurture of their children. In these sacred responsibilities, fathers and mothers are obligated to help one another as equal partners.

The explicit gendered assignments in the Proclamation are one example of the gender complementarianism that many conservative Christian churches use to justify binary gender "roles," abilities, and access to power (Ross and Finnigan 2020). Although the Proclamation allows for adaptation in the case of disability, death, or other unforeseen circumstances, it warns that "the disintegration of the family will bring upon individuals, communities, and nations the calamities foretold by ancient and modern prophets."

Members report that this text has been used in weekly religious services to push women to be stay-at-home mothers to avoid the dire calamity described in the document. When a woman does choose a career to "provide"

for her family, church leaders depicted her as going against the divine measure of her creation (Benson 1987). Unsurprisingly, young girls have been taught to primarily prepare themselves for motherhood, not financial stability. This directly leads them down paths that result in economic precarity and dependence that is compounded by the church's high value of avoiding debt (Blackburn and Madsen 2025).

Orienting girls toward childcare is embedded within a deeply ingrained expectation that influences life planning: to be economically dependent on an imagined future husband who will be solely responsible for providing her economic stability. By devaluing economic independence, education, and long-term career planning at a tender age, girls are encouraged to dream about a future husband and children. This is a future they have very little ability to control, unlike creating an educational and career plan. Other studies show that American girls are already prone to this phenomenon, but religion and social proximity increase that narrowed vision of what is possible (Horwitz et al. 2022).

The tension between the church's high value for education and its high value for "traditional gender roles" in marriage comes to a head at Brigham Young University (BYU), specifically in its MBA school. Doctrinally, members of the LDS faith are taught that formal education is a gift from God that will only enhance their lives in the next world. BYU embodies this belief in its mission statement, which declares it "a university dedicated to education for eternity."

As a private religious school, BYU extends the religious socialization of childhood into adulthood. Approximately 99% of the students are members of the LDS church, and some of the university's board members are general authorities or general officers of the church. Two of the current fifteen top men in church leadership are former BYU presidents (Holland and Oaks), while another is a former president of BYU-Idaho (Bednar).

MBA

Master's in Business Administration (MBA) programs are often used to change career fields and speed up one's professional role attainment; they serve as an interesting socializing space for those new to particular business industries (Haski-Leventhal et al. 2020). They are at the forefront of preparing graduates for the "new economy" and have to grapple with each of the four areas that Williams et al. explore (Williams et al. 2012).

Studies show that in the U.S., post-MBA pay trajectories diverge for men and women (Patterson et al. 2017; Thamrin et al. 2023). Upon graduation and controlling for years of work experience, men are paid 8% more on average in their first role out of MBA school; after 9+ years of experience, that gap widens to 34%.

Women's graduate education attainment rates have increased rapidly in the last few decades, doubling previous generations and outpacing men (Eagly et al. 2020). However, this is not as true for Mormon women. While Mormon women graduate high school at about the same rates as Mormon men and have achieved college degrees at a higher rate than Mormon men (67% versus 59%), Mormon women only achieve graduate degrees at half the rate of Mormon men (7% versus 14%) (Religious Landscape Study 2014).

While many top-ranking MBA programs have developed a 50% acceptance rate for women students, BYU's Marriott School of Business administrators admit that they have struggled to maintain 20% of their students as women over the last ten years (Financial Times 2025). Female admission peaked in 2023 at 26% (Brigham Young University Marriott School of Business 2025) but has since dropped to 16% in 2025 (Financial Times 2025). Low participation rates among women are even more dramatically reflected in the number of people hired as faculty at the university. According to former employees and students, and confirmed in school records, in the last 15 years, the Marriott school has had at most two women professors on staff at one given time, including professors on leave. The Financial Times places female faculty rates in 2025 at 14% (Financial Times 2025). In an interview, a former recruiter for the BYU MBA program told me that for the six years they worked specifically to recruit more women students at the direction of their boss, no women professors were actually on the admissions committee.

Global Tech

To extend my exploration of gendered job insecurity and the influence of religion in organizations, I explore the lived experiences of women working for a global Utah County technology company that, for anonymity, I call "Global Tech." This is a real tech company located in Silicon Slopes with all-male Mormon founders with BYU degrees. Several of these founders are rumored to no longer be affiliated with the LDS church, but their ties to BYU remain strong. Global Tech is a late-stage startup with an annual revenue of over $1 billion and over 5,000 employees across North and Central America, Asia, Europe, and Oceania.

The social education literature highlights that education is a mechanism for mobility or socioeconomic advancement. However, in the case of Mormon women seeking MBAs, women say that their religion has more influence on their ability to be mobile and to have choices than the actual MBA school itself. Therefore, I am examining religion's ability and relationship to the MBA program because they are interconnected. BYU's MBA program is not just any MBA program, but one within a religious institution. The interrelated institutions of religion and education work with and for each other to organize Mormon women's place in the 21st-century labor market.

Findings

I extend Acker's 1990 gendered organization theory and Williams et al.'s application in the "new economy" by showing how religion functions as a mechanism that reproduces gender inequality in the 21st-century economy. Using gendered organizational theory, I show how religion sustains the tenacious hold gender inequality has in the workforce because religion is built into the gendered logic that 1) influences childhood aspirations and career choices, 2) shapes the educational institutions that develop labor talent pipelines, and 3) structures work organizations and the decision making of the gatekeepers they employ.

The general trends of Mormon women's disadvantage in the workplace and reasons for choosing particular educational routes are not unique; Protestant girls likewise learn they should prioritize family over career, resulting in younger marriage, younger childbearing, and staying out of educational institutions and the labor force (Glass and Jacobs 2005; Sherkat and Darnell 1999; Uecker and Pearce 2017). Yet Mormons are unique in the sources they cite for these choices (i.e., not the Bible), the degree of anxiety and risk they read into their decisions, the young age at which they create future plans, the structuring documents they use to make choices, the lack of space they give for individual differentiation, the feelings of isolation and betrayal they experience when they perceive themselves as deviating from God's ideal family, and the constraints they face when making educational and professional choices concerning their current or imagined futures.

Failed Life Plans, "Mom Jobs," and Financial Insecurity

Conservative Protestants cite the Bible as their source for complementarian gender assignments and divisions of labor (Horwitz et al. 2022). Mormons do

not cite it when explaining gender complementarianism, as they read the Bible with a less rigid and prescriptive lens (CJCLDS n.d.). However, Mormons achieve similar labor division outcomes by using documents and speeches given by current and recent church leaders. I share study participant quotes in italics below to illustrate how religious beliefs based on structuring documents shape early life planning and pivotal decision-making. These decisions include the level of education pursued, the selection of higher education institutions, and the choice of career paths, and even specific job opportunities post-graduation and throughout the life course.

Kelly, a BYU MBA graduate now in her mid-40s, shared her original life plan; she expected to attend college, marry, and start bearing children all in her early 20s. She expected her education and earning potential to be used only for a short time and only in emergencies.

> I never planned or wanted to work; I was a rule-following Mormon girl. The Proclamation says I should be home with my kids and that it was my husband's job to provide for us. That was always my plan. So, in college, I picked my major because it was a good "mom career" just in case something really bad happened, like my husband dying, and I had to work.

After staying single into her 30s and having to provide for herself as a music teacher, Kelly later found she needed to pivot her career in order to build a financially stable future. She returned to school to get an MBA, later married, and eventually became a mother. By then, she had established a substantial business career with benefits and fulfilling personal growth. Since her children were born, she has wrestled with guilt over continuing to work, returning again and again to the Proclamation, seeking to reconcile her personal calling to be a working mother with the general guidelines given by her church.

A vast majority of study participants like this one never planned to work. They articulated the heightened degree of anxiety and risk they felt in going against the assigned labor roles prescribed in the Proclamation. The risk to their families goes beyond this life and extends to eternal consequences, based on the LDS doctrinal belief of eternal family structures. Therefore, these women's angst is heightened to an almost existential level while also pitting them against the economic needs of providing for a family.

Alison, a BYU MBA first-year student in her mid-30s, shared her frustration over her husband's failure to provide, the choice she felt forced to make to be a working parent, and the shock of unmet expectations:

> I am actually really pissed that I've been forced to work. Growing up, I was taught that making money would be my husband's job. However, he has never made enough, so I've always had to work. And then, a few years ago, we realized we needed to bring in more money. We were both teachers then, but my husband wasn't willing to give up his job, so I had to. I didn't want to work in the first place, and then I had to give up my teaching job, and I didn't want to do that either. So now I am here getting an MBA, something I never expected to do and never planned on. This all has been super stressful; I'm worried about our marriage, my kids, and what this will mean for our family's future to have me out of the home even more.

Cassidy, a top MBA school graduate in her early 30s, explained how hard it was for her to decide if she would continue to work after her kids were born, despite always planning since she was nine years old to have a career in addition to being a mother. Despite this strongly articulated dream and vision of her future life, scenes from her childhood echoed in her mind as she struggled to decide how to use her time and talents. She paints a picture of how the Proclamation functioned as a structuring document in creating social expectations in childhood. Her resulting choices directly led to her current job insecurity and inability to map her career, network with coworkers and other professionals, and interact with her management and team.

> I reread the Proclamation for the hundredth time and kept thinking about all those Sunday school lessons and stuff my mom would say about women having careers—my mom is very anti-career for women—how it was terrible for marriage and my kids, and how all of that matters for all eternity in heaven. I worried about all that stuff—the eternal trajectory of my kids, marriage, family, and all that. So I decided to quit.
>
> I was working at Global Tech then, so I felt like I could never return. I walked away from thousands of dollars' worth of unvested stock. However, my time away as a full-time stay-at-home mom did not even last a year and a half.
>
> At first, it was great. I enjoyed my pregnancy and baked, and was just really content. But at about the six-month mark, I got really antsy and started signing up for all kinds of volunteer work that used all the business skills I'd worked so hard to develop. At a certain point, I decided I might as well return to my job and get paid to do what I was doing for free!
>
> I returned to Global Tech and tried to pitch doing my previous people management role part-time, but they wouldn't go for it. Instead, a

> manager referred me to a different role without a team to manage. It's not the people management role I wanted—not the one I went to [top five business school] for—but that is the price I have to pay for a 30-hour week flex schedule.

Cassidy went on to share how unique her position was, not realizing that I was aware of a few long-term flex positions similar to her own at Global Tech and that Global Tech actually *did* allow for people management with a flex schedule if you had the right boss. Like her arrangement, this was a "unique" setup negotiated privately between an individual woman and her manager according to the willingness of her manager. She continued:

> I do worry, though, that if my manager leaves or I get put into a different department, I'll just get fired. I'm really lucky my manager is willing to put up with this arrangement. The other org leaders I have to work with are always super weird about my schedule, and I can tell they think less of me as a worker until they get to know me. But that takes a long time!

I asked her about her career plans, especially after her kids need her less.

> Well, I really don't know. I constantly perform at the top of my sector despite only working two-thirds of the time as my peers. My paycheck reflects the portion of my time in the office, not my team's deliverables or spheres of influence. So it's actually really hard to see how I would negotiate for more money even if I moved into a full-time position; I'm already negotiating with lower pay despite my deliverables.
>
> I don't really want to advertise my unique setup, so I never talk about it with anyone. That makes it hard to even know if another manager might be willing to do something similar in a different role, but I don't want to ask and get branded as less committed or difficult to work with.
>
> Now that I think about it, it's actually a big barrier for me in networking and inside and outside of Global Tech; my flex schedule is extremely important to me, but I can't risk losing it. I know they are underpaying me for what I do, but I can't risk asking for better compensation because they could just take it all away, and I'd lose everything all over again.

Cassidy's childhood religious socialization, reinforced by her mother's stories and worries, established a value system for stay-at-home parenting embodied by the church's Proclamation document. Despite setting extremely early childhood ambitions (the few participants who did plan to work likewise

claimed they "always" planned to do so and cited specific memories of that orientation from ages 9 to 11), the strength of her childhood experiences and lack of working mother role models led her down a complicated path of job insecurity, opaque career mapping, limited networking opportunities, and complex management and teamwork interactions. These were likewise shaped by the same religious belief in gender complementarianism, formalized, shaped, and standardized in the Proclamation.

45-year-old Heather shared a similar story about the Proclamation's influence on her childhood and educational choices as an adult. She was struggling to choose her major and future career, so she came home from her university studies during break to consider her options. Before she could even begin to seek guidance, her mother returned from her new job (one she secured after her children were living out of the house and then only due to her husband's inability to earn enough money) and painted a vivid picture of the dangers of being a working mother:

> My mom was talking about a coworker whose daughter was struggling and making poor choices. My mom said, "I just wonder if it's because the mom worked her whole life and didn't have time to have a relationship with her daughter."
>
> Comments like that throughout my childhood just made it clear: If you're a working mom, your relationship with your children suffers, and your children don't turn out as well. That was the very, very clear message in church and in my home. Being a stay-at-home mom is the right thing to do.
>
> So, I chose a "mom job" that I could do until I got married and had kids.

Just a few years later, Heather had to grapple with the fact that her plan for marriage and motherhood was not going to happen anytime soon. Not only that, but her career had hit a plateau, so she decided to get an MBA and start a business career. Years later, when she was a married mother at the peak of her career, this religious socialization returned to haunt her. Rather than focusing on growing and mapping her career and family, she dealt with massive guilt for working when her husband finally made enough money to support their family on his income. Heather described spending months reading church publications about motherhood and working women from the 1970s, '80s, and '90s. After reading and rereading the Proclamation for four months, she said, "The message I got was very clear." She quit the job she loved, leaving

behind tens of thousands of dollars in unvested stock options, considering it a "closed door."

> Everyone in my life was SO happy for me. I got so much approval for quitting, like moral approval. Especially my mom. It was like she was so relieved. Everyone was so relieved. I had no idea they were so stressed about the future of my marriage and kids and eternal salvation until I quit, and then I suddenly got the message from friends and family like, "Oh, finally you have repented and made the right choice! Now your family won't end up destroyed and lost to God."
>
> But then I was home with my kids for six months, and I hated it. So, I pored over the document [the Proclamation] again to see if I could justify returning. I felt like I was born wrong. Motherhood is supposed to be my eternal calling, right? I felt like I was broken for not enjoying being a stay-at-home mom. I knew this wasn't a good fit.

She spent another year trying to conform to the "rule" of being a stay-at-home mom before finally allowing herself to be an exception to the rule. Even after making that choice for herself and returning to her same place of work, she continued to listen to weekly sermons hosted at BYU's campus on the topic and podcasts by other Mormon women seeking social approval. For now, she decided that she is some kind of deviation from the norm, and to shelve her confusion, and carry on, shouldering the anxieties of her extended family.

Pivots and Competing Priorities

One recruiter summarized the challenges for recruiting Mormon women to MBA programs this way: While their undergraduate graduation rates are high, many, like Kelly, Alison and Heather do not plan for graduate school because they expect to get married to Mormon men in their early twenties, have children within a year or two, and stop working once they have children (Horwitz et al. 2022).

> When this plan (or its timing) fails (which happens more frequently in this generation than in the past), many Mormon women find themselves in precarious financial situations. Some women find themselves single long after they expected to be married and hit a career plateau in a career they had only expected to stay in for a year or two; many are recently divorced and need to support themselves and their children for the first time; some are wrestling with resentment for a husband who is not

> making enough money to support the family on his income alone and mourning the reality of a shattered homemaker dream.

Participants who turned to an MBA to increase their earning potential reported working on a truncated timetable necessitated by a quick life change. However, without the forethought needed, many struggled to complete competitive applications. Recruiters emphasized that these women were almost universally highly educated, fantastic interviewers, and would make exceptional students and employees if they had only prepared even a few months earlier. However, many women only consider an MBA for a few weeks and accept the first program that still accepts applications for the fall cycle. One recruiter compared this to many of the men in the program who had been preparing and planning for an MBA for five or more years.

> For some of these women, it was like, "I decided to do an MBA, I took the GMAT, I applied, and I was in," start to finish, four weeks. And most of those men have been planning on it since they were juniors in college! They've been prepping for that for six years! So the preparation for someone who's been planning on that for six years versus someone who decided a month ago is going to be different, you know? I think it goes back to the fact that there are not a lot of models, and you know, it's not expected.

BYU MBA recruiters report that women who would be competitive candidates do not even complete their applications because they have yet to save up enough money to take the GMAT. Even with funds available for the test and free test prep sessions, many women only recently decided to pursue an MBA due to a sudden life crisis, and do not have enough time to sufficiently study in order to apply to the current cycle. Instead, many take lower-paying jobs that will get them money now and never return to school.

When single women leave the BYU MBA program, they report feeling extreme pressure to choose a job located in an area near other Mormon men. They make these career-altering choices at the crucial launching pad moment of their future business careers, based on the rumors about which geographic locations hold the most Mormon men.

In one case, a woman used a six-month study abroad program to delay her official graduation. She feared graduating without a significant other or job offer and used the extra time trying to locate a city with many single Mormon men where she could try to find employment. She believed that it was more

important for her future to move to a location with a high population of Mormon men rather than capitalize on the career potential she was now in debt to secure. At the time of our interview, she was six months post-graduation, still hunting for a city to settle in and struggling to explain her delayed graduation to potential employers. Even after years of seeking the same goal, her methods continued to rely on gossip from other single and newlywed Mormons she encountered at conferences and online.

In another case, a participant chose economic uncertainty over a solid job offer. This woman had initially chosen to become a medical doctor in a feminized field because she thought it would be a "good mom job" later down the line when she had a family and children. After a decade of working, and still without a family or spouse she desired, she found that her field of medicine did not offer her any way to advance in her career or generate more income. She had economic dreams of house ownership and early retirement that she could not achieve on her current, static income. Her story is a classic example of Williams et al.'s 2012 version of gendered organizational theory in the 21st-century economy, except that the gendered, feminized career path choice was again based on beliefs cultivated in childhood, deeply influenced by the Proclamation.

Despite her squarely economic reasons for returning to school, this woman could not find a job that would give her the life she wanted at the time of our last interview. Her primary goal at that point was based on geography; she believed she had the best chance of finding a future spouse of her same religion if she stayed in Utah. However, as she entered the job market, she was met with the reality of the economic environment of Utah; she could not find a role that would pay her enough to have the life she returned to school to obtain. The kicker was that she had had a great job offer from her summer internship—one she turned down because it was out of state.

In both these cases and those like them, single Mormon women are making career choices based on a future that has not yet come into reality. Despite the money they invested in an MBA program and two years of lost income, at the most crucial moment for their economic security, they feel stuck, at the mercy of rumors of possibilities of meeting mates based on geographical density. This example shows the extreme depth of commitment these women have to the ideal of marriage and family, and the value they place on finding a spouse with the same religious belief system. Thus, religion constrains their educational and professional choices concerning their current or imagined fu-

tures before they even have the chance to experience job insecurity, teamwork, career maps, and networking complications in the workplace that characterize the 21st-century economy.

Questioning Promotion and Career Mapping: Are Women Really Allowed to Work?

The Proclamation and complementarian beliefs about gender roles in the LDS church complicate women's experiences in BYU's MBA program, too. As a church-run organization, BYU serves as a bridge for Mormon women who cross their assigned gender roles and work for pay outside the home in the business world. It provides them with a logical framework for navigating gender role transversal, women role models to follow, and a religiously (theoretically) safe place to exercise new professional muscles. While mothers who enter the program report it taking months for them to accept that they are no longer full-time stay-at-home mothers, their male classmates are also confronted with a version of church-sanctioned "gender role" deviation that clashes with what they were taught as children. Historically, this has caused tension that required the business school to officially address each new student's MBA education at the start.

Participants recounted several versions of this scenario: It is the first week of the BYU MBA program, and all students attend the orientation in August. One of the program leaders, a man, gets up at the very start of the first session to set the record straight: the women are here because they deserve to be, not because of some quota. He then cites the Proclamation, pointedly calling out the language of the document, and explaining how, just as business managers are ultimately responsible for the work of their team despite not physically doing every single step themselves, so too can mothers still oversee the care and nurture of their children through outsourcing child care to daycares and babysitters. Thus, he goes on, men should never question the women here, and he does not want to hear anything about it.

Many women cite this initial speech as valuable for legitimizing their place in school, but also express frustration that if it's really true, why is that message not shared with the rest of the church? Many report the disappointment their parents, friends, in-laws, and community express upon learning these women have enrolled in school with the intent to work full-time. They cite the director's explanation above as bringing them some consolation after they have struggled with their choice. The school's repeated use of this logical

workaround to justify enrolling women MBA students validates the extent to which women's presence elicits cognitive dissonance for both men and women. It also points to the fact that the church, by running the school, is also aware of the confusion that binary labor assignment causes in its most faithful members.

After women graduate from BYU's MBA program and move on to the workplace, they sometimes discover that Mormon religious teachings are operative there as well. Work organization managers likewise use the Proclamation to justify gendered labor practices, both directly and indirectly, at places like Global Tech. For example, mid-20-year-old Ashley explained her experience going up for a promotion at Global Tech just as she was becoming visibly pregnant. She had tried to keep the news private because she knew that the five women in her previous position had all quit once they got pregnant; she needed health insurance for her delivery in just two months. But at seven months pregnant, rumors were spreading, and she could not hide it any longer. A few weeks before her scheduled promotion, one her boss had been enthusiastic about in every one-on-one weekly meeting in the 12 months leading up to the promotional cycle, she "came clean."

> Every day at lunch, my boss talks "off the record" about his life and makes it really, really clear that he is Mormon and believes women's proper place is to stay home once they have children. It's super awkward, too, because my team is pretty much all women. Some are even mothers. But he blabs away about politics and religion and his stay-at-home wife and everything, so we know exactly where he stands . . .. He will gossip and complain about women leaving the company after maternity leave, too. We (the women on my team) all just have to sit there and take it.
>
> So, I wanted to try and control the narrative around my rumored pregnancy—I am absolutely coming back to work after the baby is born. I didn't want there to be any questions about that. I announced all of this to my team, and my boss's demeanor immediately shifted. He stopped answering my emails, he stopped giving me updates on my promotion applications, and avoided me at all costs. Finally, I pinned him down to get an update on my promotion, but it went even worse than I expected.
>
> I walked in and made my case for promotion. My metrics are great, and I'd been in this one role for a long time. But my manager just sat back and straight up told me he didn't believe that I would return to my work after the baby was born, and couldn't promote me. He asked me over and over again if I was going to come back and wouldn't take my answers seriously.

> And I DO plan to come back to work. I love working. This is the one company that is located in a place where I can actually see myself as both a mom and employee. He really abused me in that meeting, but there's nothing I can do about it. He reports directly to the CFO, who is even worse in the way he treats and thinks about women, even though he's not even Mormon anymore. No one in HR is remotely empowered to do a single thing. I do not have the bandwidth or knowledge on how to begin to hold the company accountable. The whole thing makes me sick.
>
> I don't know what I am going to do now. There really is no other way for me to progress in my career; I guess I'm just going to have to keep working for this guy and figure out what to do once the baby comes.

Ashley shared that she felt that her boss's knowledge of their shared religious affiliation only strengthened his disbelief in her future plans to return to work. Instead of speaking as equals or investing in understanding the system that discourages mothers from returning to work, he assumed a rigid interpretation of the outcome of their shared value of family. He used that common ground to enforce gender norms from the religion's leadership.

Other participants reported similar experiences and gendered policies in specific work sectors of Global Tech. Dana, a former employee of Global Tech, explained what she felt all the women at the company "knew":

> We (women and non-Mormon coworkers) all know that leadership really doesn't think women should be working at all, let alone mothers.

Dana used this understanding to explain why Global Tech Executives recently fired a bunch of women and has not changed policies and procedures that contribute to the turnover of women at their company.

> I know management looks at the employee engagement metrics, and I was the one to present it to them alongside a female manager. Employee intent to leave is at an all-time high among women of all ages at Global Tech, and a whole bunch of women were recently laid off, and a bunch more quit. We lose women employees like crazy at the one- to two-year mark once the "honeymoon phase" of the job has worn off. Our attrition rates are atrocious for mothers after maternity leave.
>
> During maternity leave, women's books of business metrics are not adjusted. We get ratings scores that are supposed to affect our promotions directly, but when they aren't weighted for an excused leave of absence, it throws off the number for up to two quarters! Those metrics determine promotions for the next several YEARS.

> Managers are supposed to maintain a woman's book of business while she is on maternity leave, but in Sales, they never do. Those who would stay there after maternity leave with a giant black mark on their employee stats that marks them as a mother willing to take leave. A similar thing happens for fathers taking paternity leave, too, but since the time allotment is shorter and they can space out their leave, they can still manage their customers and numbers and everything, so there's no black mark on their company file.

While I cannot access the employee engagement results referenced by this participant, a simple Glassdoor.com search provided evidence that this opinion is not unique to the women I interviewed (Glassdoor, n.d.). As far back as 2017, anonymous employees at Global Tech have been saying that women have no room to grow, and that they have seen blatant sexism and borderline sexual harassment. They cite the consistent lack of women in leadership roles. Each complaint relates to the "blurred line" between religion and work and a particular brand of "bro-y" culture unique to white Mormon men. Of the twenty reviews that cite women, the culture, and the structure of Global Tech and its leadership, only one from several years ago identifies it as a good place for parents to work, citing changes in schedule due to sick kids and their particular team of understanding coworkers. Overall, though, the messages duplicate the general message from my participants; as one Glassdoor poster said, "Don't work here unless you are a man or a Mormon: This place is hell on earth." This general interpretation of company policies and norms as being sexist and informed by the executives' religion is shared across Global Tech's employees, even beyond Utah and those familiar with Mormonism.

Mixed-Gender Networking and the Appearance of Evil

Significantly, the norms created in this tight crucible of religion and culture extend beyond the site of creation, beyond conscious religious maintenance. They have an afterlife that far outlives the religious dedication of the company's founders, despite their continued involvement in running the company. One example of what this looks like comes from another Global Tech employee, Rosa. Rosa is not Mormon and has never lived in Utah or around Mormons, but this religiously informed and enforced culture has affected her career. She has worked at many companies in the U.S. and taught at top MBA programs. She describes a unique brand of Mormon sexism she has only experienced while working at Global Tech.

> It's different from any other company I've ever worked for. I have multiple higher degrees in business, I've been a professor at [top business school], and I know lots of Christian businessmen who don't act this way. And the Global Tech execs I work with really closely here don't even seem to really believe in the Mormon church anymore, and have not for like ten years. But the sexism and patriarchy in the LDS church still hold so much power in our organization. I have a high-profile role and am a top performer. But at the end of the day, that doesn't matter.
>
> There's this natural, back-door, Mormon men network bro culture at Global Tech. They golf, go to the gym, and the bar, drink eggnog, and have all these informal mentorships and networks that the women aren't a part of. And we know its sexism is from the LDS church.

She went on to explain that an unspoken sort of Billy Graham/Mike Pence rule applied in the workplace, in which no men were permitted to be alone with any female coworkers for fear of sexual temptation. This has been a longstanding cultural norm in the LDS Church since at least 1987, when, in an address given at BYU to the student body, President Ezra Taft Benson said that "Many of the tragedies of immorality begin when a man and woman are alone in the office or at church or driving in a car" (Mahler 2017). A decade later, the then-current-day prophet Gordon Hinckley reiterated this idea in his annual global address to women, "You work alongside men. More and more, there are invitations to go to lunch, ostensibly to talk about business. You travel together. You stay in the same hotel. You work together. Perhaps you cannot avoid some of this, but you can avoid getting into compromising situations. Do your job, but keep your distance. Don't become a factor in the breakup of another woman's home" (Hinckley 1998). Two decades after Hinckley's address the culture continued to hold onto these fears and practices. In a 2017 poll, 70 percent of "very active" Utah Mormons said it is inappropriate for a man and woman who are not married to have dinner together, while 47 percent felt the same way about lunch (Mahler 2017). Even as the church acknowledged the necessity of men and women working together, they advise employees to "avoid the appearance of impropriety" as much as possible (Mahler 2017). Global Tech leadership appears to be following these guidance points with great fear and anxiety, according to Rosa.

> Even our bosses, the C-suite leaders themselves, are scared to go to lunch with us or be alone with us in a public setting. They are worried about being seen with us. It puts a ton of pressure on us women. It's like they

> have to have a reason to talk to us. And it's still not enough to justify spending time together. Not once in 5.5 years has anyone reached out—my formal, C-suite exec level formally assigned mentor included—for a casual interaction outside of work. They are worried about the optics of eating a meal with me.

I want to point out the prevalence of not only the fear surrounding associating with women in social networks but also the specific mechanism of social oversight at work in this religiously and culturally homogenous community in a geographically dense population of Mormons. Participants repeatedly brought up the social consequences of appearing to be crossing a line in their social interactions with Momon men. As graduates of BYU's undergraduate and master's level business classes, Global Tech's leaders' behavior can be traced back to BYU ethics class discussions around lunch with a woman coworker.

Because professors at BYU are church employees whose employment depends on their belief and activity in the church (Fletcher Stack 2025), they hold unique power akin to religious authority in the classroom. Compared to faculty members at other Christian universities, Mormon professors are much more likely to comply with the teachings of their religion (Lyon et al. 2002, 339). BYU ethics professors, therefore, have an opportunity to guide discussions on sexism, misogyny, and discrimination in the workplace and set standards of conduct that are associated with the church-sanctioned "correct" way to do Mormon business. However, despite professors insisting the reverse is true (Fletcher Stack 2017), participants from BYU MBA cohorts spanning the last 15 years reported that this opportunity is repeatedly used to solidify gender discrimination in the workplace. Students described nearly the same incident regarding a discussion in an ethics class about the prospect of a man going to lunch with a woman coworker. Sitting in stadium-style, U-shaped desks, the ethics professor posed the following question, per usual, framed from a man's perspective: "Would you go to lunch with a female coworker?" 36-year-old Jill reported:

> So many of my classmates (mostly all men) were like, "Absolutely not. Avoid the appearance of evil. Nothing would happen, of course, but, oh my gosh, it would just look bad!" I just remember sitting there, and I was like, "Does anyone see me? Like, I'm right here. And you are telling me that you will network with everyone except me? Do you realize how left out women will be from so many meaningful conversations? Like, do you even?" And it didn't even occur to them. Didn't even occur to them.

She went on to explain that she directly attributed this behavior to proximity to the church:

> There's this level of like sin, right? "The appearance of evil." I remember just being red in the face and like, "We're right here. Do you not see the five women sitting around you and what you were saying and what you were doing to us?"

Even when the conversation had gotten too sexist for the professors, they refused to step in and say anything to the contrary.

> The professor is maybe uncomfortable with what the guys said, but he's not standing up to the students or standing up for us. He didn't come out with a stance of like, "But what about women? And, like, what opportunities they're losing, and how is this fair?" Probably because they don't care, they don't think women should be working anyway.

Women described their fear of speaking up in these settings; they were worried about being labeled as "dramatic" or "feminist" based on interactions they had seen in the program previously. The social forces that kept these women quiet serve as a prime example of how their interaction in this space was bounded by their gender, regulated by religiously informed and enforced social norms. Those normative cultural and religious expectations continued to impact their ability to network later in their careers.

The limitations of social networks are bounded by fear of sinning, the appearance of sinning, and the social consequences for each, which hold very real professional consequences for women at Global Tech. Thus, church teachings on gender relationships reproduce a social and spiritual precarity that results in women's disadvantage in professional and educational spaces. Women participants in top executive roles with formal mentor/mentee relationships to C-suite level executives report being left off emails and being avoided for in-person one-on-one meetings. They have watched men from each level and branch of the company exclude women from networking, mentorship, and career advancement opportunities.

Trisha gave a particularly telling example of how her lack of access damaged her career and the careers of those she managed. She said this is about more than just lunch. The company culture of restricted gender interactions extends to "any kind of social interaction. Informal social interaction does not happen for me with my male superiors." She volunteered an example of the impact of this from her first job at Global Tech. Fresh from her MBA at a top

university, her initial role at the company was to manage a large team of entry-level employees. One of the most significant parts of her job was helping these rising stars find their next position within the company. "Part of your effectiveness as a manager depends on your ability to network throughout the company, but there are no tools in place to help you do this," she said.

She went on to explain that in regular surveys of her team, she "always" got one piece of negative feedback that harmed her career progression; her team complained that her fellow peer manager (a man) always got the best subsequent roles for his teammates. His reputation was so compelling that her own teammates went to him for mentoring and support, even though she was their assigned manager.

> I thought, "Wow! How's he doing that?" So, I scheduled a meeting with him, and he told me his social schedule. It included nightly activities with the company's high-ranking male leaders: guys' poker night, basketball, and meals. And I just thought, "Wow. I'm not invited to any of these. That would feel so inappropriate for me to attend the guys' poker night."

Here, Trisha mirrors the men's anxiety over mixed-gender social events. Her feeling of her presence being "inappropriate" indicates her familiarity with the norm of not mixing genders in employees' social interactions. Women at BYU explained this discomfort as a product of what they saw in childhood. They attributed their networks of almost entirely Mormon women to a mutual "comfort" that was achieved between women because the "cultural bias" allowed for it. Amanda, a late-thirties BYU MBA student, explained how she developed comfort with only socializing with other women.

> There's a cultural bias in the LDS church, in particular, that teaches that men and women do not associate as friends in the church. There's a weird barrier. And women are the people I like talking with more because it's more comfortable, right? The church doesn't teach men and women to be friends. We are divided by gender at church so early. Certainly, by the time they are 11 and entering the youth program, but possibly even earlier if there are a lot of kids in a Sunday school class. And then, growing up, I never saw my parents hang out with members of the opposite sex. Ever.

She explained how the clash between the LDS social norms and business networking demands harmed all students at BYU, especially women. Due to the small number of female students, socializing with just females was particularly limiting.

> But a lot of networking is based on working lunches, right? So I have to do it anyway to progress my career, but these guys don't have to because they have enough men to interact with. Their future career is not nearly as limited by the church's standards about not being alone with a member of the opposite sex. So I just miss out.
>
> And I am in this MBA program, right? I'm a mommy-blogger-turned-entrepreneur; I've never had to network before. And they are telling me this is an essential skill for my career progression and advancement, and the school is allowing these men to think they can't go to lunch with me! In a freaking public place! How am I supposed to learn this skill if I only practice with other women who are, like me, unskilled at networking? BYU isn't solving this problem; instead, it is enabling it in those ethics class discussions.

Left Out of Leadership

In addition to being shut out of social interactions that can determine success and access to promotions at work, women at Global Tech see the company's male founders and male-dominated executive teams play out the same pattern of excluding the (very few) executive women from team meetings. Laura reflected on an important reorganizational call earlier that week; Global Tech announced massive layoffs for various company sectors. The one woman executive—the one actually in charge of people ops—seemed to have been entirely left out of all decision-making conversations.

> It seemed like the agenda had already been laid out by the men in the C-suite, so she was just kind of listening as everything transpired. And I thought, "I wonder how much of the conversation occurred at these informal events where the decisions were actually being made as opposed to in that meeting room."

Global Tech has attempted some structural changes to support women and respond to feedback, but with limited results. The HR department created structured mentorship programs to give a formal stamp of approval on cross-gender networking. However, based on participants' reports, even a formalized mentor/mentee relationship does not appear to be enough to justify a male C-suite executive taking the time to meet in person with the women they were officially assigned to mentor.

In response to a request for more women leaders on global weekly meetings, they assigned one of the few women executives to help run meetings.

However, instead of asking her to lead, she was given "an emcee role," which participants described as "a flop." Jessica said:

> It just seemed like another way to appease our requests for more female representation. It was kind of embarrassing, actually, because she is an executive-level employee, but she wasn't empowered to actually run the meeting, just facilitate it. And besides, they chose the one woman on their level who doesn't manage a large team and has no influence on the overarching strategy of what people are doing. It just made her role seem not quite as important.

I found out that within just a few weeks of this incident, the mceeing woman executive quit her job, leaving Global Tech leadership even more heavily weighted with men.

Women at Global Tech shared with me that when their male co-workers needed something from them during the typical work day, the men often asked in an apologetic way, citing their guilt for taking the women away from their children. This same belief was used as a reason to keep women off essential emails and meetings. Lisa, a non-Mormon working virtually for Global Tech, inadvertently quoted the Poclaimation while quoting the reasons her coworkers gave for leaving her off of meetings and emails:

> They said they didn't want to take me away from my "primary responsibility." They did not even let me decide; they decided for me!

Note that this language is lifted directly from the Proclamation, which states, "Mothers are primarily responsible for the nurture of their children."

While male coworkers verbally claim to support working mothers and families, Global Tech provides no formal on- or off-ramping structures for parents to roll in and out of paid work. Individual managers and teams have to shoulder the added workloads that come when some take parental leave. Although part-time and flexible work does exist and is possible, this option is kept private, almost secret, and is not formally guided or structured by HR, leaving individuals to negotiate with their managers and teams on their own. Those who do arrange for flexible schedules (mostly women) report being initially viewed with suspicion by managers, being held back from promotion despite no decline in outcomes, and facing increased job-mapping ambiguity. They are always one managerial change away from being out of a job. The work-from-home policies during and following the COVID-19 pandemic that created more flexibility for parents were subsequently swiftly and rigidly re-

tracted, and participants agreed that past rounds of lay-offs disproportionately harmed women who had established flexible schedules. Mormon women employees at Global Tech, facing these circumstances once again, report turning to the Proclamation to help them decide what to do with their careers.

Because the Proclamation has not been formally accepted as LDS church doctrine by its members, church leaders could theoretically update or change its language at any time. One study on active Mormon populations indicated that if revised teachings on gender came through church channels as "revelation," a majority of even the most conservative U.S. Mormons would accept the doctrine (Nielsen et al. 2015). Given the historically close relationship between Mormonism and Utah's population, LDS leadership has the unique potential power to directly shape Utah's tech industry.

Conclusion

Religion can function to uphold gendered organization in the new economy in ways that further structurally disenfranchise women. Mormon women face a double bind of precarity in the modern era's job market because they are socialized to depend on a future spouse to finance their future; they have not been taught to plan for a future career and must overcome professional, social, and religious barriers when confronted with unforeseen economic realities. At Global Tech, Mormon religious teachings structure corporate norms and language even when divorced from their original source and despite organizational leaders' or members' current religious activity or beliefs.

One of my most significant findings, especially since my sample population for religiously informed gendered organization creation is so dense and geographically dependent, is that the norms created in that tight crucible of religion and culture extend beyond their site of origin. This occurs beyond conscious religious maintenance, as gender socialization has an afterlife that far outlives the religious dedication of the founders, despite their continued involvement in running the company.

These findings indicate that 1. Women's economic precarity increases in relation to their degree of childhood socialization in conservative religious gender norms; and 2. Religion has the power to structure gendered organizations around the globe in ways that are difficult to trace without a unique language and shared religion that allows for the use of that unique language in the workplace. Religious leaders influence the global economy when they create structuring documents on topics of gender, labor, and family.

Further analysis might use the 24-item scale developed by Miller et al. (2019) to assess an array of faith manifestations in the for-profit work sector at the individual level. This tool would be especially interesting to use on the decision makers of various companies and compare with their company's cultural norms and instituted practices. Future studies might also use van Hoorn's (2019) scale to calculate the generational value shifts taking place across different cohorts of Mormon professionals.

This study is limited in its application to a single religious group and those it influences. Other religions without a central leadership team and religious press may be less effective and influential in supporting gendered organizations. The Mormon population in this study is also almost entirely white women. Thus, the same study conducted on a population of BIPOC Mormon women would likely bring forward even more systematic issues that harm BIPOC members but would be even harder to locate in the homogenous religion. Many critiques of Global Tech were made alongside critiques of the company's lack of racial and ethnic diversity. Further research into the religious elements of sustained gendered organizations should explore intersectional identities and the influence of religious proximity on organizational structures (Cho et al. 2013).

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Journal of the Mormon Social Science Association

Poulsen, Alexander. 2026. "What Missionary Activities Lead to Baptisms? Evidence from a Latter-day Saint Mission in Brazil," *Journal of the Mormon Social Science Association* 3, no. 1: 79–101.

https://doi.org/10.54587/JMSSA.0304

What Missionary Activities Lead to Baptisms? Evidence from a Latter-day Saint Mission in Brazil

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What missionary activities lead to convert baptisms into the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints? Is it most important to contact many new people, making it more likely that missionaries find potential converts with whom the church's message resonates? Or is it more important to teach lessons in cooperation with local members, to help potential converts learn what church participation might look like in their lives, and begin to be integrated into the church community? I provide a statistical framework to answer these questions using data on weekly missionary activities (missionary key indicator data). While the answers to these questions may vary by setting, I provide an answer for one setting by analyzing weekly missionary data from 89 mission areas and 233 missionaries in a mission in southern Brazil for the year 2011. I find that lessons taught with a local member of the church present are associated with almost two times greater an increase in baptisms compared to lessons without a member present and over two times greater an increase in sacrament meeting attendees. I find that in the mission being studied, contacting additional new people and finding new potential converts does not increase subsequent baptisms.

These findings suggest that (1) social connections are an important driver of church affiliation; and (2) in the mission studied, there could have been an increase in convert baptisms if missionaries spent less time trying to find additional people to teach and more time recruiting local members to join them for lessons. This same statistical framework could be used to gain similar insights about other settings, given the appropriate data.

1. Overview

Background

Full-time missionaries for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints make many decisions every day about how to spend their proselyting time. This article provides a framework for how to gain more information about the effects of some of these decisions using weekly data on missionary activities (missionary key indicator data) and presents an application of this framework

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using data from Brazil. This overview section provides a non-technical synopsis of the empirical approach and findings, while subsequent sections provide the technical details of the analysis.

Missionaries find people to teach by contacting strangers in public spaces, knocking on doors, and soliciting referrals from local members of the church. They then schedule times to meet with these people and share the church's teachings—sometimes with local members of the church present to assist with the teaching and testifying, and sometimes without. Finally, missionaries invite the people with whom they are meeting to attend church, follow the church's teachings, and be baptized.

We can think about various informal theories of missionary work that missionaries implicitly hold in their minds. Some missionaries may feel that successful missionary work should be focused on simply finding the right person, who is prepared to accept the church's teachings and join the church. This is the so-called "golden investigator."[1] If this theory of missionary work is correct, then we would expect the most important predictors of missionary success to be the number of people the missionaries contacted and the number of new potential converts they found. Statistically, the more people a set of missionaries finds who are willing to be taught, the more likely they are to find one that is ready to accept the message. Teaching lessons is merely a matter of course once they have found the "right" person.

On the other hand, missionary work may be less about finding the right "prepared" person, and more about following the right process. This might involve teaching lessons accompanied by local members of the church so that potential converts can hear from people like them about how church participation has affected their lives and begin to be woven into the community of the congregation. If this theory of missionary work is correct, then we would expect the most important predictor of convert baptisms to be the number of lessons taught with a member present.

While no missionary believes exclusively in either one of these theories of missionary work, every missionary has some mental model of how the conversion process occurs that implicitly favors one of these two theories (or some other related theory) and influences the decisions they make.

Which of these theories is "right" may depend on the region and culture within which the missionaries are operating. Missionaries operate in contexts

[1] "Investigator" is the term historically used to describe a person who is learning about the church and being taught by the missionaries, though this term has been de-emphasized in favor of "friend." For clarity in exposition I use the term "potential convert."

that vary widely, and missionary work in North America functions differently from missionary work in South America, which is in turn different from missionary work in Asia, Africa, or Europe.

Empirical Approach

To distinguish empirically between these different theories of missionary work, I provide a framework for analyzing weekly missionary activity data, and I apply this method to analyze a data set from the Brazil Santa Maria Mission in southern Brazil. This data was shared with all missionaries serving in the mission while the author was a missionary there. For each companionship[2] in the mission I observe their area of service (usually corresponding to a single congregation), the numbers of baptisms, the number of sacrament meeting (church service) attendees, the number of lessons missionaries taught to prospective converts with a local member present ("lessons with a member"), the number of lessons missionaries taught without a local member present ("other lessons"),[3] new people taught by the missionaries who agreed to be taught again ("new potential converts"), and the number of new individuals the missionaries approached ("contacts"[4]) during each week of 2011.

To test the effectiveness of different missionary actions in inviting people to attend church and be baptized, I use a fixed effects regression model where the outcome of interest is either baptisms or sacrament meeting attendance. The explanatory variables are the number of lessons with a member present, other lessons, new potential converts, and contacts, as well as five weeks of lags of each of these variables. I also control for mission area fixed effects, week fixed effects, and fixed effects for the individual missionaries serving in the area.

In plain terms, the question this regression model answers is this: If the same missionaries in the same mission area and in same week of the year had taught the same number of other lessons, the same number of new potential converts, and done the same number of contacts in that week and the previous five weeks *but* had taught one more lesson with a member than they actually taught that week (while teaching the same number of lessons with a member in the previous five weeks), by how much would we expect baptisms to

[2] All Latter-day Saint missionaries work in duos (or occaisionally trios) called "companionships."

[3] Lessons with non-participating members or recent converts were also recorded separately.

[4] While "contacts" was not an officially recorded key indicator at the time (and isn't now), it was recorded by missionaries and tracked by leadership in the Santa Maria Mission at this time.

increase? That is the question this model answers for each of the missionary activities examined here (lessons with a member, other lessons, new potential converts, and contacts).

A key point to note is that this means the model estimates the associated increase in baptisms of an additional lesson with a member taught (or an additional new potential convert, etc.) at the prevailing level of that missionary activity in the Brazil Santa Maria Mission in 2011. In other words, if every missionary companionship teaches 10 lessons per week, then the model will tell us the average associated increase in baptisms of a 10th lesson (but not the fourth or fifth lesson, for example).

It is important to note, however, that this is *not* a causal model, strictly speaking. To be specific, even though we are controlling for the mission area, week of the year, and the missionaries working in the area, we don't know why the same missionaries in the same area might have more lessons with a member one week and less another. If it is due to some kind of quasi-random chance—for example, random variation in the availability of members to join the missionaries—then the model has causal interpretation. However, if variation in lessons with a member is due to some unobserved (to the researcher) factor that is correlated with baptism, then the model does not have causal interpretation. For example, missionaries may be more likely to exert effort in coordinating with members to come to lessons with potential converts who they feel have a high potential to be baptized. If this is the case, then any relationship between baptisms and lessons with a member may have more to do with the latent potential of the missionaries' potential converts than the lessons with a member. Of course, both of these are likely reasons why there is week-to-week variation in lessons with a member, but the relative importance of these different mechanisms influences how we would interpret results. Because we lack data on the potential converts themselves (and their potential for baptism), we cannot test these mechanisms.

Findings

In the data from the Brazil Santa Maria Mission, I find that on average an additional lesson with a member is associated with 0.0158 additional baptisms in the subsequent week, while an additional other lesson (lesson without a member present) is associated with 0.00856 additional baptisms in the subsequent week. In other words, while 100 additional lessons with a member present would be associated with 1.58 additional baptisms, 100 additional other les-

sons would be associated with only 0.856 additional baptisms. Therefore, an additional lesson with a member is associated with 1.8 times more baptisms in the subsequent week compared to a lesson without a member present. At prevailing levels of weekly new potential converts and contacts in the Santa Maria Mission in 2011, additional new potential converts and contacts are not associated with any increase in baptisms even up to five weeks later. This finding also holds up to 11 weeks later, but I do not report these regression results in this article in the interest of space.

Similarly, I find that an additional lesson with a member is associated with 0.111 additional sacrament meeting attendees in the same week, compared to an additional other lesson, which is associated with 0.0428 additional attendees in the same week. So an additional lesson with a member is associated with 2.6 times more sacrament meeting attendees in the same week compared to a lesson without a member present. An additional new potential convert has only a weak relationship with future sacrament meeting attendance, and an additional contact is not at all associated with an increase in sacrament meeting attendance.

I also examine the effect that receiving a reference[5] may have on missionary work. A reference received increases the number of lessons with a member in the same week and the week after, and also increases sacrament attendance in the same week. However, effects trickle off and are statistically insignificant after that. Additional references received are not statistically significantly associated with increased baptisms in the Brazil Santa Maria mission in 2011.

If the model has causal interpretation (which it may, given certain assumptions outlined below), then these findings together suggest that in the mission studied here, missionary time may have been more effectively spent by shifting away from activities geared toward finding new potential converts to teach and shifting towards making sure that every existing lesson possible had a member present. On average, missionary companionships taught five lessons with a member per week and 15 other lessons, leaving considerable room for more lessons with a member. This is not to say that contacts and new potential converts are not relevant for missionary work, just that at the level of contacts and new potential converts in the Brazil Santa Maria mission in 2011, additional contacts and new potential investigators have no relationship to subsequent baptisms. Another implication is that for members of the church

[5] A "reference" is when an existing member of the church recommends a friend or other acquaintance to meet with the missionaries.

in this mission who wanted to advance missionary work, the best thing they could do is make themselves available for lessons with the missionaries, rather than trying to refer people to the missionaries.

Finally, I use a Shorrocks-Shapley decomposition (Shorrocks, 1982) to understand how much of variation in baptisms and sacrament meeting attendance is explained by missionary activities, versus the missionaries serving in an area or the mission area itself. I find that of the variation in baptisms explained by the model, the missionaries working in the area explain 39.3% of variation in baptisms, while the mission area is responsible for only 17.9% of variation. All the missionary activities combined—lessons with a member, other lessons, new potential converts, contacts, and all their lags—explain 15.7% of the explained variation in baptisms. So, while some areas are harder to work in than others, the missionaries themselves are paramount in determining missionary success. The missionaries stationed in the mission area are, in a way, even more important than what the missionaries *do*, as measured by the missionary activity data.

The findings from this model are valid for the Brazil Santa Maria Mission in 2011, and the level of applicability to other missions in other time periods will vary widely. The findings may be applicable for missions that are similar to the Brazil Santa Maria Mission in terms of prevailing levels of lessons taught, sacrament meeting attendees, baptisms, and new potential converts, as many other Latin American missions will be. However, applicability for missions in North America, Europe, Africa, and Asia is unknown and would require similar analysis to be conducted on missionary activity data from those regions.

Sociologists of religion have long held that social networks play a critical role in the process of conversion and church affiliation (Lofland and Stark 1965). This article provides empirical support for this idea, since I find that lessons with local members are vital for baptism. Until now, qualitative studies have largely stressed the spread of church affiliation through *existing* social networks (Shepherd and Shepherd 1998; Stark 2005; Stewart 2008; Bryant et al. 2014). In contrast, the evidence in the present article suggests that at least for Latter-day Saints in Brazil, the formation of *new* social connections is more important than existing social connections, since I find references are not associated with future baptisms. Quantitative studies on the role of social networks and community in religious affiliation and practice have also focused on existing social networks and found that these predict church involvement (Cornwall 1987; Stroope 2012; Cragun et al. 2021).

This article contributes to the literature on Latter-day Saint missiology, in Brazil specifically (Grover 1985; Martins 2020). Quantitative studies of Latter-day Saint missionaries have largely been restricted to studying missionaries' post-mission lives (see Whittaker 2000), likely because missionary performance/activity data is not generally available to researchers, whereas researchers are able to more easily conduct surveys among recently returned missionaries at Latter-day Saint universities.

Finally, this article also contributes to the literature studying Latter-day Saint missionary effectiveness. While this literature is largely self-help books (see Whittaker 2000 for a review), Stewart (2007) provides a critical and systematic treatment, involving interviews across many countries and a detailed look at many aspects of missionary work. Of particular relevance for the present study, Stewart puts strong emphasis on contacts and finding new potential converts and very little on teaching lessons with a member. The present article suggests that some attention should be shifted to lessons with a member.

This article proceeds as follows. Section 2 describes the data used for the analysis, Section 3 describes the methodology in detail, Section 4 shows the results of the analysis, and Section 5 discusses the results and concludes.

2. Data

Missionaries typically work in duos (called a companionship), and work in an assigned mission area, typically a section of a town or city, that corresponds to a given congregation. In 2011, missionaries in the Brazil Santa Maria Mission would track their daily lessons taught, new potential converts found, and contacts made with strangers in handheld planners. Typically, the number of lessons taught and new potential converts found would be counted up at the end of each day by reviewing all the lessons taught, which were recorded in the handheld planner, while contacts were tallied up throughout the day as they happened. At the end of the week, totals would be added up and reported to mission leaders. Missionaries reported these numbers to district leaders[6] by phone, who then sent numbers to zone leaders[7] by email. The zone leaders would then forward numbers to the assistants of the mission president,[8] who produced the final report. The mission president's assistants would then send

[6] District leaders typically oversee districts of two to six missionary companionships and are missionaries themselves.

[7] Zone leaders typically oversee two to four districts and are also missionaries themselves.

[8] The assistants are also missionaries themselves.

Table 1: Summary Statistics

	Mean	Std. Dev.
Baptisms	0.22	0.65
Sacrament meeting attendance	3.01	3.32
Lessons with a member	5.03	3.56
Other lessons	15.1	8.62
New potential converts	8.07	6.93
Contacts	54.22	40.19
References received	1.49	2.73
References contacted	1.07	1.77
Observations	3476	
Distinct mission areas	91	
Distinct missionaries	233	

Weekly averages and standard deviations for each missionary companionship's baptisms, sacrament attendance, lessons with member, other lessons, new potential converts, contacts, references received, and references contacted for each area.

aggregated mission numbers to church headquarters and, each month, sent the full report out to all missionaries in the mission—with the weekly numbers for all companionships for the month. These reports included data on the number of contacts made, new potential converts, lessons with a member taught, other lessons, references received, references contacted, baptisms, and confirmations.[9] These data are known as key indicators.[10]

A contact refers to any time a missionary approaches a new person to ask if they would be interested in meeting with the missionaries and hearing their message about Jesus Christ. In the Brazil Santa Maria Mission, contacts occurred often at people's homes, where missionaries would either knock on a person's door or clap in front of their gate, and ask the person if they could come in. Many contacts also occurred in the street where missionaries would approach a person and ask if they would be interested in receiving the missionaries at their home another time.

[9] Confirmation is a blessing that occurs after the baptism, which confers the gift of the Holy Ghost upon the receiver.

[10] The church has since changed practices. It now collects only the number of converts baptized and confirmed, the number of potential converts with a baptismal date scheduled, the number of potential converts who attended sacrament meeting, and the number of new potential converts who were taught and agreed to meet with missionaries again. The key difference is that lessons are no longer counted. Also, rather than reporting by phone and email, missionaries report directly through an app.

A new potential convert was defined as a person that the missionaries taught for the first time and who agreed to a return visit. Missionary lessons generally occurred in people's homes, where the missionaries would visit the person, open the lesson with a prayer, share a message usually lasting 30 to 60 minutes that included doctrine and invitations, and then end with a prayer.

Summary statistics for this data are presented in Table 1. On average, every week each missionary companionship had 0.22 baptisms, 3.01 potential converts attend sacrament meeting, taught 5.03 lessons with a member present, taught 15.1 other lessons, had 8.07 new potential converts, received 1.49 references, and contacted 1.07 references. We observe data from 91 distinct areas where 233 distinct missionaries worked over the course of the year.

Self-reported performance data can be unreliable. While it is possible that some of this missionary performance data may have been intentionally reported inaccurately, anecdotally, this practice was extremely uncommon in the Brazil Santa Maria Mission in 2011. The author of this study knew almost all the missionaries in the mission during this period, worked directly with many of them, and never encountered the practice. To the extent that there was any misreporting, it more likely would be classified as exaggeration rather than fabrication. This could include counting an extended conversation in a park as a lesson rather than just a contact, or counting a lesson as a lesson taught with a member present when there was actually just a member of the church in the next room over and who did not participate actively in the conversation. Inventing church attendees or lessons taught out of whole cloth was unheard of in the author's experience in this particular mission.

Importantly, even if there was fabrication, it would almost surely occur in a manner that would *attenuate* this study's regression estimates rather than accentuate them. The main performance metric that matters for missionaries is baptisms, and baptisms would have been very difficult to falsify. A baptism is accompanied by official paperwork that includes the signatures of the person who was baptized and the leader of the local congregation (i.e., bishop or branch president). Reports of baptisms were also often accompanied by pictures. Since such records would have been difficult to counterfeit, an underperforming duo of missionaries could have felt tempted to fabricate lessons taught or other metrics in order to appear productive, despite not having baptisms. Having inflated numbers of lessons taught or new potential converts found, accompanied by low baptisms, would bias the estimated relationship between these actions and baptisms downward, if anything.

Two main results from this article are that lessons with member are more effective than lessons without a member, and that contacts and new potential investigators don't matter on the margin. For fabricated or exaggerated data to invalidate these results, it would have to be the case that under-baptizing missionaries disproportionately exaggerate lessons without member compared to lessons with member, and disproportionately exaggerate contacts and new potential converts compared to lessons taught. Furthermore, this would have to happen at such a scale to be statistically meaningful in a sample of 233 missionaries. So fabrication or exaggeration alone are not a concern for the results of this study, rather only very specific patterns of fabrication or exaggeration, and only at a large scale. Again, while data inaccuracies are possible, there are not strong reasons to suspect that these *particular* patterns of fabrication or exaggeration existed, particularly at scale, given that no fabrication was detected by the author in two years of working in this mission.

3. Methodology

In order to estimate the relationship between missionary activities (contacts made, new potential converts, lesson with a member, and other lessons) and desired outcomes (potential convert sacrament meeting attendance and baptism), I use a multi-way fixed effects regression of the following form:

$$y_{it} = \sum_{s=0}^{5} \beta_{1s} LessonsMember_{it-s} + \sum_{s=0}^{5} \beta_{2s} LessonsOther_{it-s} + \sum_{s=0}^{5} \beta_{3s} NewPotentialConverts_{it-s} + \sum_{s=0}^{5} \beta_{4s} Contacts_{it-s} + \lambda_i + \delta_t + M(i,t) + \varepsilon_{it}$$

Here, y_{it} is the outcome of interest for mission area i in week t (either weekly baptisms or weekly potential convert sacrament meeting attendance[11]). The variables $LessonsMember_{it}$, $LessonsOther_{it}$ [12], $NewPotentialConverts_{it}$, and $Contacts_{it}$ are respectively the number of lessons with a member taught, the number of other lessons taught, the number of new potential converts taught, and the number of contacts made, all by the missionaries in mission area i in week

[11] One could also imagine sacrament meeting attendance as an independent variable rather than an outcome variable. However, I am interested in the effects of actions that missionaries can take, and have (mostly) direct control over.

[12] I also include an interaction between the variables and an indicator for whether the week was during three months when recent convert lessons were counted with other lessons. This controls for the "dilution" of the effect of an other lesson when lessons with less active members and recent converts were also included in the count. For simplicity I do not show this interaction in the equation.

t. The summations include the contemporaneous week, along with five weeks of lags (i.e., the previous five weeks).[13] These lags are all included because, for example, contacts likely do not influence baptisms in the same week that the contacts are made, but they may influence baptisms some weeks later—and similar things can be said for other explanatory variables. In addition, $\boldsymbol{\lambda}_i$ is a set of mission area fixed effects; $\boldsymbol{\delta}_t$ is a set of week fixed effects; $M(i,t)$ is a set of indicators for if a given missionary is serving in mission area i at time t, for all missionaries in the dataset;[14] and $\boldsymbol{\varepsilon}_{it}$ is the error term, containing all other factors that affect the outcome. Standard errors are clustered by mission area.

The coefficients of interest that I estimate here are the $\boldsymbol{\beta}$ coefficients, which show the relationship between various missionary actions and outcomes of interest like baptism and sacrament meeting attendance. Due to the controls included in the model, each $\boldsymbol{\beta}_{vs}$ coefficient can be interpreted as the relationship between the outcome y and the explanatory variable v *on the margin*, s weeks beforehand, while holding the other variables (missionary actions, the mission area, the week, and the missionaries themselves) constant. To be concrete, the coefficient $\boldsymbol{\beta}_{12}$ tells us the relationship between baptisms (or sacrament meeting attendance) and the number of lessons with a member taught two weeks beforehand, while holding constant the number of other lessons, new potential converts, and contacts in the contemporaneous week and in the five previous weeks, and also holding constant the mission area, the week of the year, and the missionaries working in the area.

As discussed above, while the inclusion of area, week, and missionary controls does account for a significant number of unobservable factors that influence sacrament meeting attendance and baptisms, other unobservable factors could confound causal interpretation of this model. For example, missionaries may exert higher effort in arranging for a member to be present at lessons with particularly promising potential converts, and if so, any association between lessons with a member and baptism could be accounted for by the unobserved "quality" of the potential convert pool. However, if missionaries exert constant effort across weeks in arranging for members to be present, and then variation across weeks (within the same area and missionaries) is just due to random chance in terms of when members happen to be available to

[13] Anecdotally it was common in this mission to find and baptize converts within a six-week span, though this cannot be verified in the data because we observe only weekly key indicators rather than observing data for individual potential converts.

[14] This means there is a separate indicator for each possible missionary that could be serving in an area. In situations where there is a trio, I only consider the two most senior missionaries.

accompany the missionaries, then the model would have causal interpretation. Likely both of these forces are active, but we are not able to test which dominates using the present data.[15]

While there are many possible ways to analyze the data, I use the model outlined above because it minimizes the number of unobserved factors that affect baptisms (given the data available), by using area, week, and missionary fixed effects, and tells us the association between baptisms and of each missionary action, controlling for other missionary actions. This is important because missionary actions do not exist in a vacuum—they exist in the context of everything else the missionaries are doing.

Results

In Table 2 on the following page, I present the estimates of equation (1). For the top panel the outcome is baptisms, while for the bottom it is potential convert sacrament meeting attendance. Each panel represents the estimates from a single regression, where the columns give the explanatory variable, and the rows denote the time lag, from time *t* (the contemporaneous period) to time *t-5*, five weeks before.

I find that holding all else constant, an additional lesson taught with a member is associated with a 0.0158 increase in baptisms in the next week (statistically significant at the 1% level), and an additional other lesson is associated with a 0.00856 increase in baptisms the next week. Additional new potential converts are *negatively* associated with baptisms in the same week and in the following week, and contacts are negatively associated with baptisms in the same week. These results merely remind us that this is not a causal model—the likely story here is that when missionaries have a baptism scheduled in the week, they spend less time looking for more new potential converts, and instead dedicate that time to making sure the baptism goes through. Notably, there is *no positive association* between either new potential converts or contacts and baptisms up to five weeks later.[16] This same result holds when looking

[15] An alternative model that could make a case for causality is an instrumental variable regression model, though finding a suitable instrument for such a model is a challenge. In analysis that I do not report here, I attempted an instrumental variables model using local rainfall as an instrument for missionary activities, but the first stage was non-existent.

[16] Anecdotally it was common in this mission to find and baptize converts within a six-week span.

Table 2: Relationship Between Missionary Activities and Key Outcomes

Outcome: Baptisms (n=2610, Clusters=84)

Time Period	Lessons with a member	Other lessons	New potential converts	Contacts
t	0.00341	-0.00602	-0.0118***	-0.00134***
	(-0.0051)	(-0.0038)	(-0.00346)	(-0.000421)
t-1	0.0158***	0.00856**	-0.00981***	-0.000333
	(-0.00577)	(-0.00362)	(-0.00321)	(-0.00043)
t-2	0.00731	0.00355	-0.00337	0.000368
	(-0.00516)	(-0.00372)	(-0.00424)	(-0.000425)
t-3	-0.00362	-0.0027	0.00613	0.0000367
	(-0.00456)	(-0.004)	(-0.00438)	(-0.000416)
t-4	0.000843	0.00129	0.00322	-0.000303
	(-0.00539)	(-0.00346)	(-0.00384)	(-0.000429)
t-5	0.00429	-0.00126	-0.00139	-0.00039
	(-0.00597)	(-0.00336)	(-0.00281)	(-0.00045)

Outcome: Sacrament Attendance (n=2610, Clusters=84)

Time Period	Lessons with a member	Other lessons	New potential converts	Contacts
t	0.111***	0.0428***	-0.0129	-0.00406**
	(-0.0168)	(-0.0127)	(-0.00968)	(-0.00163)
t-1	0.00604	0.0156	-0.00481	-0.000395
	(-0.0154)	(-0.0111)	(-0.0116)	(-0.00135)
t-2	0.0188	-0.00193	0.0153	0.000583
	(-0.0145)	(-0.0117)	(-0.0123)	(-0.00154)
t-3	0.00441	0.0307**	0.0198*	0.0000879
	(-0.0142)	(-0.0121)	(-0.0109)	(-0.00153)
t-4	0.000568	-0.00912	0.000456	0.00229
	(-0.0195)	(-0.0127)	(-0.0106)	(-0.00187)
t-5	-0.00572	0.0148	0.00466	-0.0000434
	(-0.0153)	(-0.00986)	(-0.00894)	(-0.002)

This table shows the results of two regressions. The top panel regresses baptisms on lessons with member, other lessons, new potential converts, contacts, and 5 weeks of lags of each of those variables, and the bottom panel regresses sacrament meeting attendance on the same variables. Regressions control for week and mission area fixed effects as well as indicators for the two missionaries working in the area (any third companion is omitted). Standard errors are clustered by mission area. Standard error in parentheses. *** $p<$: 0.01, ** $p<$ 0.05, * $p<$ 0.1

at 11 weeks of lags as well, though I do not report the estimates from those regressions in the interest of space.[17]

Results are similar when analyzing sacrament attendance as the outcome. All else being equal, an additional lesson with a member is associated with 0.111 additional sacrament meeting attendees in the same week, whereas an other lesson is associated with 0.0428 additional sacrament meeting attendees in the same week. An additional other lesson is also associated with a 0.0307 increase in sacrament meeting attendance three weeks later. An additional new potential convert is associated with a 0.0198 increase in sacrament meeting attendees three weeks later, though this is statistically significant only at the 10% level. An additional contact is associated with 0.00406 fewer sacrament meeting attendees in the same week. Once again, this model is not causal, and a likely explanation is that when missionaries have no potential converts that they expect to be attending church, they spend more time contacting people and inviting them to come to church.

The results show a strong association between lessons with a member and baptisms, and a weaker relationship between other lessons and baptisms. The results also show no positive relationship between contacts or new potential converts and baptisms. Even though this is not a causal model, the absence of a statistically significant relationship is notable and potentially suggests the *absence* of a causal relationship. In more specific terms, while the estimated relationship between lessons with a member and baptisms is not necessarily causal (because of the existence of accentuating confounders like the unobserved "potential" of the potential convert pool), we have strong theoretical reasons to believe it is at least partially causal. However, the absence of a positive relationship between new potential converts/contacts and baptisms suggests there is no causal relationship, unless there is some attenuating confounder. There would have to be some omitted variable that is positively associated with new potential converts or contacts but negatively associated with baptisms. A potential example of such a variable would be the number of potential converts in the missionaries' teaching pool. Specifically, if the missionaries had very few potential converts they were regularly teaching, this would potentially lead to a high number of contacts and new potential converts, but would predict few baptisms in the short run. While we do not directly observe the size of the missionaries' teaching pool, we can indirectly control for it by

[17] As an additional check of the absence of a relationship between new potential converts or contacts and baptisms or sacrament meeting attendance, I estimate equation (1) including only the new potential convert and contacts variables one at a time, without controlling for all other key indicators. This analysis is presented in the appendix in Table A1. Results are qualitatively similar.

controlling for new potential converts and contacts up to 11 weeks prior. In this model with 11 weeks of lags (not reported here in the interest of space), the same results hold[18].

To augment my main analysis in Table 3, I also estimate the same fixed effects model as equation (1) but examine how each step in the missionary/potential convert process translates into the next, *without* controlling for all the other key indicators simultaneously (only the mission area, week of the year, and missionary fixed effects). In Table 3 we find that in the Santa Maria Mission in 2011, an additional contact leads to 0.0352 new potential converts in the same week, but none the following week. In other words, if someone contacted is not taught in that same week, they are not likely to become a potential convert later.[19] An additional new potential convert is not associated with an additional lesson with a member in the same week or in the next week, but an additional new potential convert *is* associated with 0.449 more other lessons in the same week, but none the next week. This adds a bit of additional insight to the findings from Table 2, where we find that lessons with a member are strongly associated with baptisms, while new potential converts and contacts are not. Here we find that the marginal new potential convert is not taught a lesson with a member present, which may explain in part why new potential converts are not associated with an increase in baptisms.

Moving further along the table, we find that additional other lessons are not associated with an increase in sacrament meeting attendance in the same week, but are associated with a 0.016 increase in sacrament meeting attendees a week later, which is statistically significant only at the 10% level. On the other hand, an additional lesson with a member is associated with a 0.123 increase in sacrament meeting attendance in the same week.[20] Finally, we

[18] The model with 11 weeks of lags can also be thought of as an indirect way of controlling for the "quality" of potential convert pool. If missionaries have done many contacts, they are more likely to have potential converts that are likely to accept baptism (a higher "quality" pool). Because the results for lessons taught are robust to the inclusion of 11 lags, this gives some evidence that the effects of lessons with a member and others lessons may be causal.

[19] This may in part come from the fact that many contacts are done via door-to-door tracting, so if the potential convert is not taught then, it is likely that they expressed to the missionaries that they were not interested in receiving them at all.

[20] These findings are both similar to and different from our findings in Table 2. The estimated 0.123 increase from a lesson with a member is very close to the 0.111 increase above, but in contrast we find little relationship here between other lessons and sacrament meeting attendance, whereas in Table 2 we find a 0.0458 increase in sacrament meeting attendance from an additional other lesson. The difference exists because of the control variables involved. In Table 2 we estimate the relationship while holding lessons with a member, other lessons, new potential converts, and contacts constant for the same week and up to five weeks before (in addition to the mission area, week of the year, and the missionaries in the area), but in Table 3 we control only for the mission area, week of the year, and the missionaries in the area.

Table 3: Steps to Baptism

	New potential converts	Lessons with a member	Other lessons	Sacrament meeting attendance	Sacrament meeting attendance	Baptisms
Contacts	0.0352***					
	(-0.00431)					
Contacts (t-1)	-0.00108					
	(-0.00315)					
New potential converts		0.0197	0.449***			
		(-0.0131)	(-0.0322)			
New potential converts (t-1)		0.00526	0.025			
		(-0.00944)	(-0.0227)			
Other lessons				0.0116		
				(-0.00918)		
Other lessons (t-1)				0.0160*		
				(-0.00929)		
Lessons with a member					0.123***	
					(-0.0152)	
Lessons with a member (t-1)					0.0213	
					(-0.0137)	
Sacrament meeting attendance						-0.00382
						(-0.00666)
Sacrament meeting attendance (t-1)						0.0330***
						(-0.00931)
Sacrament meeting attendance (t-2)						0.0283***
						(-0.00791)
Sacrament meeting attendance (t-3)						0.00308
						(-0.00559)
Observations	3058	3339	3335	3331	3339	3109
Clusters	88	89	89	89	89	87

This table shows the effect of each step in the potential convert process on the next step. Contacts lead to new potential converts, new potential converts lead to more lessons, lessons lead to sacrament attendance, and sacrament attendance leads to baptisms. Regressions control for week and mission area fixed effects, and indicators for the two missionaries working in the area (any third companion is omitted). Standard errors (in parentheses) are clustered by mission area. ***: p<0.01, **:p<0.05, *:p<0.1

find that an additional sacrament meeting attendee is associated with 0.0330 more baptisms a week later, and 0.0283 additional baptisms two weeks later, consistent with the requirement on the mission that potential converts must attend church two times before baptism.

While my analysis has mostly focused on actions missionaries have more direct control over, I also briefly consider one variable that missionaries have less control over—references received. For this analysis I estimate equation (1), but I include only references received and up to four weeks of lags as explanatory variables. I look at the relationship between references received and references contacted, new potential converts, lessons with a member, other lessons, sacrament attendance, and baptisms. In the interest of space, the estimates table is presented in the appendix in Table A2.

I find that an additional reference received is associated with 0.18 additional references contacted in the same week, and an additional 0.0573 references contacted the week after. References received are not associated with an increase in new potential converts, even up to two weeks later, suggesting either that references contacted often do not end up agreeing to meet with the missionaries again (which is a requirement to be counted as a new potential convert), or that the time spent contacting a reference would have been used finding a different new potential convert. An additional reference received is associated with 0.0603 more lessons with a member in the same week and 0.0439 more lessons with a member in the following week, but is statistically insignificant after that. There is not a positive association between references received and other lessons—suggesting that if references are taught, they are taught with the referring member. A reference received is associated with 0.0448 additional sacrament meeting attendees in the same week, but any subsequent increase is statistically insignificant. There is no positive relationship[21] between references received and baptisms, at least within four weeks after the week when the reference was received.[22]

Finally, we implement a Shorrocks-Shapley decomposition (Shorrocks, 1982) on the model in equation (1), and report the results in Table 4. This decomposition tells us how much of the variation in baptisms (or sacrament meeting attendance) is explained by various missionary activities, the missionaries in the area, the mission area itself, and time trends (the week of the year).

[21] There is a statistically significant negative relationship, but this is likely a spurious correlation, as suggested previously with respect to the relationship between baptisms and both contacts and new potential converts in the contemporaneous week.

[22] Nor is there likely to be any relationship in any longer time horizon, because the church attendance effect is statistically insignificant after one week.

Table 4: Shorrocks-Shapley Decomposition

Outcome: Baptisms		
	Shapley Value	Percent
Missionaries in area	0.0954	39.30%
Mission area	0.0434	17.90%
Week of year	0.0659	27.10%
Key indicators	0.03796	15.70%
Total	**0.26**	**100%**
Outcome: Sacrament Attendance		
	Shapley Value	Percent
Missionaries in area	0.217	46.60%
Mission area	0.157	33.80%
Week of year	0.0274	5.89%
Key indicators	0.06394	13.77%
Total	**0.465**	**100%**

This table shows the results of Shorrocks-Shapley decompositions of equation (1). The Shapley Value represents the portion of the regression's R-squared that is explained by each group of variables, and the Percent value is the Shapley Value divided by the R-squared. In other words, the Percent value shows the percent of explained variation that is explained by each set of variables. The sets of variables are missionary indicators, mission area fixed effects, week of year fixed effects, and then all of the key indicator variables: sacrament attendance (and five weeks of lags), lessons with a member (and five weeks of lags), other lessons (and five weeks of lags), new potential converts (and five weeks of lags), and contacts (and five weeks of lags).

Specifically, the Shapley values are the portion of the regression's R-squared that is attributable to a given group of variables.

Overall, equation (1) explains 26% of variation in baptisms. Of that 26% of explained variation, I find that the missionaries that are serving in an area explain 39.3% of variation in baptisms, while the mission area itself explains only 17.9%. The week of the year explains 27.1% of the variation in baptisms. Summed together, all missionary key indicators and their lags explain 15.7% of the variation in baptisms. Anecdotally, it is common for some missionaries to complain that certain areas are particularly difficult to work and have success in, but this analysis suggests that while this may be the case to some extent

(17.9% of variation in baptisms is explained by the area), the missionaries that are working in the area explain far more of the success than anything else, over double what is explained by the mission area. Additionally, this analysis shows that some missionaries are simply much more effective than others, even after controlling for their key indicators.

I perform the same exercise for sacrament meeting attendance, for which equation (1) explains 46.5% of the variation. Of that 46.5% explained variation, I find that the missionaries that are serving in an area explain 46.6% of variation in sacrament meeting attendance, while the mission area itself explains only 33.8%. The week of the year (time trends) explains 5.89% of the variation in sacrament meeting attendance, while all of the key indicators and their lags explain 13.77% of the variation.

Discussion

The findings provide empirical evidence that social connections play a crucial role in a person's decision to affiliate with a religion. I find that lessons with a member are strongly associated with baptisms and other lessons as well, though at a much smaller magnitude—lessons with a member are 1.8 times more effective than other lessons in leading to baptisms (if the model has causal interpretation, as discussed above). Meanwhile, on the margin (meaning at the prevailing levels of new potential converts and contacts in the Santa Maria mission in 2011), additional new potential converts and contacts had no effect on baptisms.

In terms of the various theories of missionary work introduced at the beginning of this article, this suggests that the "golden investigator" theory of missionary work is not likely to be the right one. Rather, the theory that emphasizes relationships with local members of the church seems to be more reflective of reality.

This is not to suggest that new potential converts and contacts never have any effect on baptisms but rather that at prevailing levels of new potential converts and contacts in the Santa Maria Mission in 2011, additional new potential converts and contacts were not effective. If the model has causal interpretation, this suggests that to obtain more baptisms in the Santa Maria Mission, missionaries would have benefited from spending less time trying to find new potential converts and more time trying to make sure that lessons had a member present. Table 1 shows that on average a missionary companionship taught about five lessons with a member per week and 15 other lessons per

week, leaving significant room to convert other lessons into lessons with a member present by coordinating with members.

It will not surprise missionaries themselves that lessons are important and associated with baptism. Few missionaries would choose to look for new potential converts and do contacts if there is someone willing to be taught a lesson instead. Anecdotally, teaching is strongly preferred over finding. This means that it may not be straightforward to increase overall lessons taught without increasing contacts and new potential converts. Missionaries must find new people to be able to teach more lessons. However it is far more straightforward to increase lessons *with a member* without increasing total lessons. Missionaries would merely need to spend more time coordinating with members, and make that a stronger priority—turning other lessons into lessons with a member.

How applicable are these findings to other missions? Applicability will vary greatly. These findings likely have some applicability to missions that are similar to the Brazil Santa Maria Mission in terms of the prevailing numbers of lessons taught, new potential converts taught, and contacts made. However, applicability may be limited for missions that are quite different from the Brazil Santa Maria Mission. Ultimately, this article provides a framework from which similar analysis could be drawn, given the right data.

One limitation of the present analysis is that we observe only weekly totals for each missionary companionship. While the model does control for many unobservable factors using area, week, and missionary fixed effects, there are still other unobservable factors that could bias results. For example, I do not observe the level of interest of the missionaries' potential converts (though I argue I control for it by proxy using lags of the number of contacts done). One way this analysis could be improved is if instead of observing just weekly totals for each key indicator, we observe in the data the weekly progress of each potential convert or potential convert family. This could include how many lessons each potential convert was taught, the topics of the lessons, which lessons were accompanied by local members of the church, and whether or not the potential convert attended church. Such granular data would allow us to control for potential convert fixed effects, which would implicitly control for the latent potential of the missionaries' teaching pool.

Appendix

Table A1: Contacts and New Potential Converts

	Baptisms	Sacrament meeting attendance	Baptisms	Sacrament meeting attendance
New potential converts	-0.0185***	0.000605		
	(-0.00263)	(-0.00894)		
New potential converts (t-1)	-0.00700***	0.00349		
	(-0.00254)	(-0.0105)		
New potential converts (t-2)	-0.00169	0.0146		
	(-0.00333)	(-0.0118)		
New potential converts (t-3)	0.00800*	0.0434***		
	(-0.00408)	(-0.0103)		
New potential converts (t-4)	0.00286	0.00265		
	(-0.00347)	(-0.0096)		
New potential converts (t-5)	-0.00101	0.0134		
	(-0.0026)	(-0.00947)		
New potential converts (t-6)	-0.00211	-0.0054		
	(-0.0025)	(-0.00802)		
Contacts			-0.00212***	-0.00339**
			(-0.000434)	(-0.00168)
Contacts (t-1)			-0.000614	-0.000504
			(-0.00039)	(-0.00136)
Contacts (t-2)			0.000309	0.000871
			(-0.000416)	(-0.0015)
Contacts (t-3)			0.000402	0.00258
			(-0.000444)	(-0.00155)
Contacts (t-4)			-0.000207	0.00246
			(-0.000416)	(-0.00183)
Contacts (t-5)			-0.000316	-0.0000694
			(-0.000453)	(-0.00201)
Contacts (t-6)			-0.000803	0.002
			(-0.000501)	(-0.00149)
Observations	**2779**	**2780**	**2530**	**2531**

This table shows the relationship between new potential converts and contacts, and baptisms and sacrament attendance. Regressions control for week and mission area fixed effects as well as indicators for the two missionaries working in the area (any third companion is omitted). Standard errors are clustered by mission area. *Standard error in parentheses.* ***: p<0.01, **:p<0.05, *:p<0.1

Table A2: Effect of References

	References contacted	New potential converts	Lessons with a member	Other lessons	Sacrament meeting attendance	Baptisms
References received	0.180***	0.113	0.0603***	0.0498	0.0448*	-0.00888
	(-0.0622)	(-0.0678)	(-0.0222)	(-0.0743)	(-0.0255)	(-0.00578)
References received (t-1)	0.0573***	0.0364	0.0439*	-0.0923**	0.0105	0.00575
	(-0.0211)	(-0.0322)	(-0.0226)	(-0.0452)	(-0.0177)	(-0.00707)
References received (t-2)	0.0152	-0.0271	0.0314	-0.0545	-0.000744	-0.00317
	(-0.0112)	(-0.033)	(-0.0262)	(-0.0681)	(-0.0226)	(-0.00595)
References received (t-3)			-0.014	0.0714	-0.00339	-0.0107**
			(-0.0283)	(-0.0538)	(-0.0182)	(-0.00492)
References received (t-4)						-0.00467
						(-0.00403)
Observations	3223	3223	3110	3106	3110	2998

This table shows the relationship between referrals and subsequent steps in the conversion process. Regressions control for week and mission area fixed effects as well as indicators for the two missionaries working in the area (any third companion is omitted). Standard errors are clustered by mission area. *Standard error in parentheses.*

***: p<0.01, **:p<0.05, *:p<0.1

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https://doi.org/10.54587/JMSSA.0305

Book Review

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Joseph Fielding Smith: A Mormon Theologian by Matthew Bowman. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2024. 124 pages. $110 Cloth, $14.95 Paper, $14.95 eBook.

> In the fall of 1962, I was bagging groceries at the old Sudberry Maxwell Food Town in Salt Lake City on Ninth South, one block west of Liberty Park. In line to have their groceries checked were Joseph Fielding Smith and his wife, Jessie Evans. Jessie was a semi-regular customer at the store because she knew one or two of the older, female checkers and loved to visit while her groceries were being rung up. Jessie was a colorful, gregarious woman who sang with an operatic voice for fifty years in the Mormon Tabernacle Choir. Dressed in a plain, colorless grey suit, the 86-year-old Joseph Fielding stood stiff and stoically while Jessie chatted amiably. I bagged two modest sacks of groceries and began to place them in a grocery cart. Apostle Smith stopped me and said, "I'll take those." Jessie immediately turned from her conversation and said, "Oh, Joseph! Let the boy do his job!" The apostle harrumphed but said nothing further. I proceeded to push the grocery cart to the side parking lot where Joseph Fielding pointed to the couple's grey Ford Falcon. "Put the groceries on the floor in the back," he instructed, "not on the seat. I don't want them falling over." "Yes sir," I said.

Mathew Bowman has written a fine, eminently readable, intellectual portrait of the tenth president of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Joseph Fielding Smith was the son of the Church's sixth president, Joseph F. Smith, and the grandson of Hyrum Smith, the older brother of Church founder and prophet, Joseph Smith Jr. The brothers were assassinated together in Carthage, Illinois by a mob in 1844.

I indulged my boyhood memory of Joseph Fielding at the outset of this review in part because, as a freshman student at the University of Utah, I

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thought of him as a doctrinaire old man among the Church's senior leadership and as a dour and punctilious scriptorian who was out of date with the times, but never as an intellectual or scholar. This early impression was strengthened when I resumed my studies at the University of Utah three years later, after serving an LDS mission to Mexico and subsequently coming under the influence of Lowell Bennion, who was an associate dean of students at Utah and an adjunct professor of sociology at the time. Bennion became my intellectual hero and role model. He was a deeply read scholar, conversant with the best European and American thought in both theology and social science, and he combined his intellect with humility and humanity. As a budding scholar, I was drawn to Bennion, not to Smith.

In retrospect, however, was it fair of me to disparage Smith's intellect, to think of him as dogmatically uninformed, and certainly not as a theologian—a type of religious thinker I thought was necessarily trained in intellectual history, whose essential task was to reconcile religious doctrines with secular thought and scientific advancements? No, I was not objectively fair in my judgments. Bowman's concise appraisal of Fielding Smith's twentieth-century standing as a major exponent of Mormon doctrine—and hence of the Church's theology, as understood by many ordinary Latter-day Saints in the pews—is entirely persuasive.

Fielding Smith had no college degrees, no formal training in theology or philosophy or the history of ideas, and certainly none in science, whether physical or social science. But he was intelligent, rigorous, and devoted. He had a keen intellect and an overriding commitment to the exhaustive study and understanding of the teachings of his inherited faith. He was, as Bowman describes him, an autodidact. And like many autodidacts, Fielding Smith developed a kind of common sense arrogance toward the presumed superior sophistication of university-trained scholars and intellectuals. As a theologian, he was an unwavering defender of the faith and systematizer of Mormonism's core doctrines rooted in the King James Bible, the Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, and Pearl of Great Price—the Church's standard canonical works which, as he fashioned their contents, reinforced and amplified one another. This casting of the intertextual scriptural unity of the Church's standard works was, Bowman suggests, Fielding Smith's most important and enduring contribution to the theological exposition of Mormon doctrine in the twentieth century. In acknowledging this, it is also accurate to say that he was not a creative or innovative theologian. He certainly was not a theologian concerned

about reconciling Church doctrine with contemporary currents of thought or scientific advancements—the defining intellectual orientation and quality of mind that I thought as a student were necessary for one to be respected as a theologian. Instead, he was a dogmatic apologist and—in his own, self-taught way—became highly skilled in theological apologetics.

To his professional credit as an academic historian, Bowman's study of Fielding Smith's stature as a major LDS thinker is not a partisan exercise. He is seeking neither to vindicate nor disparage Smith's doctrinal claims but to understand more finely what they were, how they were related to one another, how and why they were shaped in the way they were, and—implicitly—why they appealed so strongly to a large fraction of LDS Church members over the course of Fielding Smith's long life and beyond. These are the basic kinds of questions to ask and objectively attempt to answer in writing intellectual history, regardless of whether you personally agree or disagree with the ideas and beliefs set forth by your research subject(s).

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Joseph Fielding Smith: A Mormon Theologian is a singular work in a projected series of "Introductions to Mormon Thought." According to the foreword of Bowman's book, "Our purpose in this series is to provide readers with accessible and short introductions to important figures in the intellectual life of the religious movement that traces its origins to the prophetic career of Joseph Smith Jr" (vii). The ostensible goal of this series is to stimulate and contribute to a broader understanding of Mormonism in the comparative context of the larger world and culture in which it operates. Given the relatively short, introductory format of books in this series, any one volume's capacity for achieving this goal is necessarily limited, but in its aggregate, the series promises a welcome contribution to Mormon studies and the expansion of interdisciplinary work among scholars. Bowman's book in particular aims to elucidate Fielding Smith's emerging role as an ecclesiastical apologist for the LDS Church at a time when organized religion was forced to define itself in response to the rising tide of modernism and secular thought in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

A responsible author's book not only deserves critical assessment but also to be reviewed in a way that provides potential readers with a fair overview of the book's contents. What follows is my synopsis of *Joseph Fielding Smith: A Mormon Theologian*, which comprises 124 pages, a foreword, four topical chapters, a bibliographic essay, notes, and an index.

1. An Intellectual Life. Chapter 1 provides an overview of major influences on Fielding Smith's intellectual development, beginning with his birthright legacy as the son of a largely absent from home, polygamist apostle, Joseph F. Smith, who was on the lam during the tense and trying years of the 1880s federal crackdown on polygamy in the Utah Territory. Fielding Smith served a frustrating proselyting mission to England at the age of 22, in which the universal rejection of his message of the restored gospel, especially among learned members of the Protestant clergy, stimulated his lifelong dedication to mastering the dialectics of scriptural exegesis to refute if not persuade the church's detractors. In 1902, following his British mission, he was appointed by his now-church president father to a position in the Church Historian's Office. Eight years later in 1910, his father elevated him to the LDS apostleship at the relatively young age of 34. As the Church's youngest apostle, Fielding Smith increasingly worried that Progressive Era intellectuals, both outside and inside the church, were leading people astray with secular ideas that controverted scriptural truth. Subsequently, his deeply felt familial loyalty and ecclesiastical duty to combat modern heresies became major motivational concerns for the remainder of his life. Chapter 1 proceeds to specify the key administrative roles that Fielding Smith acquired over the long extension of his ecclesiastical career which bolstered his growing doctrinal influence as a dogmatic theologian, including: Church historian, president of the Genealogical Society, member of the General Church Board of Education, chairman of the Church Publication Committee, and chairman of the executive committee of the Brigham Young University Board of Trustees. All of these organizational vehicles placed Joseph Fielding at the center of overseeing the intellectual life of an embattled church seeking respectability and advancement of its global proselytizing mission as Jesus Christ's divinely restored and only true church in the first half of the twentieth century.

2. Texts. Chapter 2 explores Joseph Fielding's rational literalism and systematic proof-texting approach to studying, understanding, and applying scripture to contemporary personal concerns and social problems. The direction and tenor of his defensive theological orientation continued to be shaped early in his career by turn-of-the-century disputes with authorities of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints over the LDS Church's most controversial doctrinal claims, especially Joseph Smith Jr.'s teachings about plural marriage. As the bedrock premise of his defense against the "Reorganites" and all other detractors of Mormonism's alleged Christian heresies, Fielding Smith

never departed from his theological commitment to the authority of modern revelation contained in both LDS and RLDS scriptures. His search for, and systematization of, mutually corroborating scriptural evidence in the Church's four canonical texts emphasized that these texts should always be studied and appreciated together, not separately. In defending his religion's cosmology and origin narrative, Fielding Smith found himself in theological alignment with Protestant fundamentalists in their repudiation of modern science as the ultimate arbiter of truth and reality for sinful humanity in need of salvation. His anti-science stance in the early decades of the twentieth century put him at odds with scientifically trained general authorities of the LDS Church, including James E. Talmage and John A. Widtsoe—and especially with another autodidact, B. H. Roberts—concerning the age of the earth. To Fielding Smith, the eons of scientific geologic time postulated by scientific study contradicted the foundational Garden of Eden narrative that is the predicate of Judeo-Christian salvation history, and he was unwilling to accommodate his doctrinal views to the more progressive developments of Mormon theology. Chapter 2 ends with unresolved tension between Fielding Smith's unyielding scriptural interpretation of time and the cosmos and the more intellectually flexible views of some of his ecclesiastical colleagues.

3. Progress. Chapter 3 is an extension of the preceding chapter's exposition of Fielding Smith's rigorously consistent, scriptural approach to framing and answering fundamental questions concerning his Church's purpose and mission in the modern world. By "progress," Bowman does not mean the progressive development of Fielding Smith's theological assumptions and orientation. To the contrary, a basic hallmark of Smith's theological exposition over the entire course of his long ecclesiastical career was its emphatic fidelity to the "plain" or literal reading of LDS scripture, not its progressive development. His intellectual fidelity to scriptural literalism was precisely what put Fielding Smith on a collision course with every kind of philosophical, theological, or historical theoretical orientation grounded in principles of evolutionary or "progressive" change. This included, of course, his emphatic rejection of the Darwinian theory of evolution based on the biologically amoral laws of natural selection. To Fielding Smith, the heretical dangers of developmental, evolutionary theories went beyond the science of biology per se to include the "laws" of history in general and the history of the LDS Church in particular. For him, history could not be understood as humanly constructed and certainly not as progressively moving toward more civilized and morally upright societies. Like fundamen-

talist theologians from other faith traditions, Fielding Smith's internally reinforcing constellation of LDS scriptural truth requires believers to acknowledge a theocentric universe in which human history is preeminently teleological. In this view, the teleological character of history is God's plan for the testing of his children and their spiritual growth. God's laws and commandments are eternal, not evolutionary; so too is the authority and governance of his church to administer the eternal ordinances of salvation. Fielding Smith insists that these fundamentals have existed in their fullness in every epoch of human history since the beginning of time. He contends that human history is a cyclical tale of corruption and apostasy from compliance with God's eternal laws and the periodic need for historic restoration of eternal doctrinal truths and practices through divinely inspired and authorized priesthood leaders. If this sounds like a textbook summary of the basic proselyting message that Mormon missionaries are trained to deliver to potential converts, it is, and it owes much of its streamlined religious logic to Joseph Fielding's tireless efforts to combat what he saw as the heretical dangers of naturalistic theories of history that expel God from the center of their narratives. It is within this anti-progressive understanding of teleological, salvation history that the founding of the LDS Church and its own particularistic history in the latter days of human time is made supremely important. His dedicated commitment to defend and justify his Church's exclusive truth claims is part and parcel of Fielding Smith's theological rejection of evolutionary theories concerning human origins. It is also the basis for his rejection of liberal Protestants' suppositions regarding the historical evolution of ethical monotheism and the theological elevation of religiously mandated compassionate conduct in human relations over the importance of correct doctrine. Flowing also from his apologetic stance concerning teleological history is Fielding Smith's emphasis on the importance of divinely chosen racial lineages to drive and implement God's will on earth—especially in the last days or preordained end times, in which the divinely restored Church of Jesus Christ must perform its instrumental role in realizing God's plan for the salvation and eternal life of the entirety of the human race. For orthodox Mormons today, Joseph Fielding Smith's straightforward formulation of the Church's scriptural doctrines constitutes a theological narrative that they embrace as self-evidently true through systematic lay study of the Church's canonical books.

4. Orthodoxy. Chapter 4 is defined by a single word that captures the essence of Fielding Smith's fundamental concerns as a Mormon theologian. Ecclesi-

astical preoccupation with the twin problems of orthodoxy and heresy is a characteristic of monotheistic religions that are organized in a priestly authority hierarchy and which place a premium on the importance of correct doctrine. This was precisely Fielding Smith's institutional position as an LDS general authority (and eventual church president) and in his self-appropriated calling as a theological defender of his family's beleaguered faith tradition at the turn of the twentieth century. Smith excoriated the doctrinal claims of both liberal and conservative Protestants as false misrepresentations of true Christianity that resulted from their rejection of modern revelation. But his own abhorrence of the permissiveness and moral iniquities of modern society also aligned him theologically with the anti-modernist stance of Christian fundamentalists. With fundamentalists he shared a dogmatic insistence on the primacy of scripture for fathoming God's will and the nature of reality, religious zeal for preserving orthodox standards, and the corresponding moral necessity of squelching heresy. In his institutional roles of apostolic authority, Fielding Smith was positioned to be both a stalwart apologist for orthodoxy and a prosecutor of heretics. In this regard, Bowman reviews Smith's long-standing efforts—as exemplified in the Heber Snell case in the late 1940s—to expel liberal thinkers from employment in the Church educational system and suppress their written work. The Second World War strongly reinforced his deeply pessimistic views of human nature, which grievously reveals itself, he believed, whenever people are bereft of orthodox religious authority and revelatory guidance. Subsequently, Fielding Smith insistently pursued his theological vendetta against Snell, a Church Institute teacher who was supported by other humanistic LDS intellectuals, notably University of Utah philosophy professor Sterling McMurrin and Brigham Young University history professor Richard Poll. Over time, others were enjoined in the theological fray, including several of Smith's conservative acolytes—apostles Harold B. Lee, Marion G. Romney, and Mark E. Peterson as well as BYU President Ernest J. Wilkinson—and more liberal figures such as University of Utah LDS Institute Director Lowell Bennion and chemistry professor Henry Eyring, among others. At issue were questions of orthodox conformity to LDS scripture in opposition to academic freedom, the findings of modern science, and—especially for Bennion and McMurrin in context of the swelling political and moral ferment of the post-war Civil Rights Movement—the Church's ban on African American male ordination to the Latter-day Saint priesthood. In the short run, Fielding Smith and the conservatives had their way. Snell's book, *Ancient Israel: Its Story*

and Meaning, was withdrawn from use in Church schools, and Snell felt forced to retire from his teaching position at the Church's Institute of Religion at Utah State University. Bennion was released from his position as Director of the LDS Institute at the University of Utah and McMurrin was threatened with excommunication from the Church. Bowman concludes Chapter 4 with some reflections on heirs—not only Fielding Smith's own deeply held commitment to preserving Mormon doctrinal purity as a Smith heir but also to the ecclesiastical heirs of his own theological orthodoxy. These included especially his son-in-law, Bruce R. McConkie, an apostle who perpetrated his strict interpretation of how Church members should believe and live their lives following Fielding Smith's death in 1972.

I like Bowman's concluding statement and will quote a portion of it: "In the end, Fielding Smith is something of a mystery; a *sui generis* thinker in his own generation who became the model theologian for many after him; one definitely suspicious of the intellectual establishment of his day whose thought was as complex and comprehensive as theirs; a pessimist in a time of optimism. And yet, to understand the history not simply of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the twentieth century but of the emergence of conservative religion in the United States and beyond, Fielding Smith, and those like him, must be taken seriously" (90).

In his bibliographic essay, Bowman classifies Fielding Smith's 25 published books and numerous articles, pamphlets, sermons, and other writings into two primary categories, history and theology, while emphasizing how intimately interconnected these two intellectual projects were in his thinking. Smith's teleological study of history supplied documentary facts and events which were then filtered and interpreted through the lens of doctrinal scripture and religious belief; likewise, his exposition of Mormon theology was bolstered by reference to selected, corroborating historical facts and events. For orthodox believers, Fielding Smith's historical and theological scholarship constitute a consistent, unified religious brief for the validity of their Church's exclusive truth claims.

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Bowman does not task himself with writing a critical or theoretical analysis of Joseph Fielding Smith's emergence as Mormonism's apologetic theologian par excellence, but he does speculate on the forming factors of his childhood and young manhood that shaped his deep pessimism concerning human nature, his focused discernment of the modern forces of wickedness and evil in secu-

lar society, and his underlying defensiveness and sensitivity to being the object of persecution by the enemies of his faith. Bowman references similarities in Smith's doctrinal approach to fundamentalist scriptorians in other religions, which suggests the underlying psychological and social circumstances common to combative conservativism. He matter of factly identifies him as a cultural racist, in spite of Fielding Smith's adamant insistence that his core beliefs were uncontaminated by the culture in which he lived but formed only by a plain and careful understanding of the scriptures, illuminated by revelation and God's spirit. A similar conclusion regarding Smith's doctrinal blindness concerning sex discrimination and gender inequality is just as plausible, but these were not major issues for many Latter-day Saints during most of Fielding Smith's lifetime and he didn't systematically address them, so neither does Bowman.

Subsequently, of course, issues of gender equality and sexual identity have become major concerns for Mormons, just as they are for everyone else in twenty-first century America and throughout the world. Gender issues, hand in hand with continuing ethnic and racial conflicts over mass migration movements across international borders, political polarization, destabilized democracies, and rising authoritarianism globally, call for greater understanding of the role that religions and their leaders are playing to exacerbate or mediate these conflicts. This is particularly true for comprehending the mixed political and cultural messages that current LDS leaders are communicating both to Church members and the public at large. These mixed messages have been expressed by general authorities in the context of their unwavering commitment to sponsoring and managing a growing international church through massive missionary outreach, while the LDS Church in America is simultaneously losing the affiliation of large numbers of younger members—especially women—over political and culture war issues.

Bowman's concluding admonition to both scholars and readers of his book, that to understand religious leaders like Joseph Fielding Smith is important for understanding not only modern Mormonism but also other contemporary conservative religions, is an implicit call for much more comparative analysis. Detailed case studies are always an important start, but comparative studies of contemporary religion and religious leaders, on both a national and global scale, lead to the requirements of social science methodology and more theoretical analysis. Here is a launching point for current MSSA scholars (like Ryan Cragun and Jesse M. Smith, who have recently published *Goodbye Re-*

ligion: The Causes and Consequences of Secularization, NYU Press, 2024) to collaboratively engage with historians and religious studies scholars who share common interests.

I should conclude at this point but righteously have overcome the temptation to do so by adding a few random observations that Bowman's excellent intellectual portrait of Joseph Fielding Smith has stimulated. Historically, organized religion may function both as an agency of cultural preservation and as a driver of social change. In the nineteenth century, early Mormonism was an ecstatic religious novelty that paid a steep price for its manifest heresies at the hands of establishment Protestant faiths and the federal government. In self-preserving accommodation mode, the LDS Church increasingly became an agency of religious and cultural preservation in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. If and when new religions survive to become established churches, most also become intrinsically conservative institutions—especially those whose authority and truth claims are based on founding texts. For this reason, conservative apologists like Joseph Fielding Smith have a theological advantage over progressive, reform-oriented factions within the faith itself. Most people value stability and even certitude in their lives, not intellectual inquisitiveness and ambiguity. Basing their theological position on a "plain," common-sense reading of the faith's founding texts and credos, conservative apologists appeal to people in the pews who are comfortable with their faith and to religious seekers who are looking for clarity and certainty. The latter, in fact, constitute the primary religious market targeted by LDS proselyting missionaries.

However slowly, conservative religions must change too, of course, when responding and adapting to changing social conditions beyond their institutional control. The Roman Catholic Church is Western history's preeminent example of this kind of conservative adaptation and change over time. It is the issue of conservative change that pointedly confronts the LDS Church today in a world of intense political turmoil and polarizing cultural divisions. The Church's conservative apologists resist accommodating policy changes that seem contrary to a literalistic understanding of doctrine. Meanwhile, its liberal intellectuals push to open up the Church to empower women, accept its gay and transgender members, tolerate greater academic freedom, and welcome individual and cultural differences among its global followers. For conservatives, correct doctrine is the most important aspect of their religious faith; for liberals, it is the bonding ties of religious community. This disagreement

over what is most important is analogous to the division in politics between those who believe certain policies are the most important part of democracy and those who think shared democratic values are what is most important politically. In both cases, liberals argue that policy per se isn't democracy and doctrine per se isn't religion either. The tension between these two positions is the tension between the need to preserve traditional order (and those who benefit most from its preservation) and the need to change (and those who would benefit most from doing so). This is the kind of tension that is explicitly addressed in Armand Mauss's seminal book, *The Angel and the Beehive: Mormonism's Struggle with Assimilation* (University of Illinois Press, 1994), and, modestly, in Shepherd and Shepherd's article, "Conflict and Change in Open and Closed Systems," published in *Voices for Equality: Ordain Women and Resurgent Mormon Feminism* (Greg Kofford Books, 2015). These and other interdisciplinary works offer social science approaches to addressing the questions that underlie Matthew Bowman's lucid thesis concerning the importance of understanding conservative theologians—as epitomized in the writings of Joseph Fielding Smith—and their appeal to lay members and prospective converts.

Journal of the Mormon Social Science Association

Christine Talbot. 2026. Review of *Queering Kinship in the Mormon Cosmos* by Taylor G. Petrey. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2024. *Journal of the Mormon Social Science Association* 3, no. 1: 115–118.

https://doi.org/10.54587/JMSSA.0306

Book Review

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Queering Kinship in the Mormon Cosmos by Taylor G. Petrey. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2024. 214 pages. $99 Cloth, $27.95 Paper, $21.95 eBook.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, or LDS Church, has long been decidedly un- and anti-queer. Taylor G. Petrey's innovative book, *Queering Kinship in the Mormon Cosmos*, is a welcome and unexpected attempt to queer Mormonism. He aims not to tell the "truth" about whether and how Mormonism is queer, nor to reconcile Mormonism with queerness, nor to redeem or reclaim it for queers, but rather to demonstrate queer potentialities inherent within the tradition's central theological claims—to "undertake an act of queering" (3) Mormonism. Petrey engages with Mormonism not because it is special or unique in some way, but because the tradition is "useful to think with" (131) as an example of how scholars might "queer" any religious tradition or system of thought. As the title indicates, Mormon theologies and practices of kinship are both the sites and the instruments of Petrey's queer interventions.

The first chapter lays out the theoretical backdrop of the book. Petrey opposes the ways kinship and sexuality have been imagined as binarily opposed categories both in debates over the motivating premises of Mormon kinship experiments and in queer theory. Mormon studies scholars have long debated whether the religion's most radical kinship experiment, polygamy, was motivated by sexuality or kinship. At the same time, in collapsing the distance between the human and the divine, Mormonism imagines a God in sexual and kin relationships. Queer theorists have also long debated which—sexuality or kinship—has the most potential for queer liberation. Those supporting sexuality have often reduced kinship to the "normative politics of the state" (18)

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while proponents of kinship have "desexualized queerness" (17). Petrey aims to move our analyses of both Mormonism and queer liberation beyond this binary, showing that a "lust for kinship" (21) is and should be central to the radicalism of both traditions.

Petrey then applies this claim, alongside other insights of queer theory, to five topical chapters that each focus on a unique element of the Latter-day Saint tradition: the nature of the Godhead, Heavenly Mother and celestial reproductivity, gender fluidity and kinship in the creation of the earth, Mormon materialism, and polygamy. Through these topics, Petrey applies a queer lens to the big existential questions religions attempt to answer: what is the nature of God, what is the nature of creation, what sort of beings have been created by it, what substance are those creatures made of, and how shall they relate to each other? In some of these chapters, Petrey often finds room aplenty for queerness, but others strain against the tradition.

Petrey's second chapter about the nature of God and divine kinship finds plenty of queer space in the ways the three male figures of the godhead "are bound by covenant in love" in same-sex kin relationships (which LDS and non-LDS theologians have often compared to marriage). He also identifies multiple ways all three characters—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—subvert maleness, for example through such metaphors as being "born of the spirit," a maternal Jesus, or a God with passions. Thus, the LDS Godhead embodies queer love, queer kinship, and queer masculinity, showing both same-sex kinship and gender fluidity.

Petrey's third chapter tries to find queer space in LDS theology (or lack thereof) about Heavenly Mother and eternal spiritual reproductivity. He examines both mainstream and LDS feminist thinking about Mother in Heaven to posit a queerer understanding of motherhood. For me, the chapter struggled mightily, not because of Petrey's weakness, but because of the tradition itself. It appears that even for as expansive a thinker as Petrey, motherhood is all that is available in Mormonism to think with. The best Petrey can do in this vein is to posit "ways of thinking about motherhood that resist biological essentialism and reproductive imperatives" (52), showing less the queer potentialities within Mother in Heaven than the depth of Mormonism's attachment to maternal femininity. The tradition can imagine only a mother-Goddess, never a Goddess unmodified.

Petrey's fourth and fifth chapters offer more potential, though, the first dealing with the creation of the earth and the second with Mormon material-

ism. Through a close reading of multiple iterations of the creation story in LDS tradition, Petrey illuminates hidden pathways that re-envision LDS accounts of sexual difference. Here, he once again infuses the process by which sexual difference came to be with ambiguity and fluidity. Perhaps Petrey's most radical claim is that Adam and Eve's (hetero)sex "is not reproductive but relational." The value of sexuality is that "it creates unity from division" (87), and unity and relationality need no gender difference to matter.

Petrey finds perhaps the most potential for queering Mormonism in the chapter on Mormon materialism. In it, he shows how Mormon theology has infused physical substance with eternal spiritual and divine meaning. For Mormon thinkers, physical matter is both earthly and eternal, not static but capacious, not to be transcended but to be perfected. God has a body that matters, and human bodies exist to be sacralized. In this view, material bodies are not immutable facts but rather mythological and malleable creations; they are subjects and tools of spiritual transformation. Sexuality, too, is not to be disavowed but perfected, as God has perfected it. The reproductive aim of celestial sex may entail heterosexuality, but its kinship aim may be much more expansive. For Petrey, the pleasures of perfected sex include both coming and "kinning." Especially for kinning, more (of the right kind of) sex is better. Hence, Petrey's book finishes with an exploration of plural marriage.

If we are to take seriously the relationship of context to theology, as Petrey's work demands that we do, then whatever queerness or sex positivity people may find in Mormon materialism was nonetheless "developed and used to defend and justify the hierarchical, patriarchal practice of polygamy by emphasizing reproduction" (130). At the same time, polygamy was historically paired with a theology of adoption that expanded definitions of family beyond biological kin. Among early Mormons at least, sex was not enough to secure kinship ties, and was irrelevant to them in the case of adoption. Rather, kinship was a matter of ritual, not biology. For Petrey, kinship as ritual provides resources by which we might expand the boundaries of kinship beyond the family and its forms beyond the reproductive household, even while its origins are mired in hierarchy and patriarchy. Polygamy, though fraught, also productively troubles kinship, making it "fluid, porous, and multi-positional" (151).

Despite the queer theological potential Petrey outlines, he acknowledges that the prospects the mainstream church might accommodate queerness are slim. But this is not Petrey's aim. While his work focuses on a Mormon theological tradition, it also maintains connection to broader biblical hermeneu-

tics, queer religion, and feminist theological traditions that demonstrate the relevance of Petrey's work much more broadly. The book is a demonstration that, as queer theorists have long argued, queerness is everywhere, lurking in the margins of even the most heteronormative of thought systems. His work operates as a thought experiment in "the subversion and resignification of dominant narratives and the revaluation of the marginal in queer approaches," a model that might apply to any religious tradition (159). Readers looking for the potential for a kinder, queerer church won't be satisfied. But those looking for queerer theological options within a Mormon tradition will find them. At the very least, whether they like it or not, most readers will find the Mormon theological tradition essentially and productively queered.

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