University of Pennsylvania
ScholarlyCommons

Publicly Accessible Penn Dissertations

1-1-2015

Constructing Religion in the Digital Age: The Internet and Modern Mormon Identities

Rosemary Avance
University of Pennsylvania, rosemaryavance@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: http://repository.upenn.edu/edissertations

Part of the American Studies Commons, Communication Commons, and the Religion Commons

Constructing Religion in the Digital Age: The Internet and Modern Mormon Identities

Abstract

This dissertation explores the discursive construction of identity among members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS or Mormons) in the digital age. Religious identity emerges at the intersection of multiple and often conflicting voices with varying amounts of normative power to speak for and about the group. The polyphony of the internet during this digital age makes it increasingly difficult to identify the boundaries of acceptable belonging within religious groups, particularly traditionally firmly-bounded and authoritarian ones such as the LDS Church, in part because the internet itself provides an unprecedented platform for conflicts and discourses that shift these boundaries. Particularly during the "Mormon moment" in 2012-2013, as media and the public scrutinized the LDS Church, mediated platforms gave voice to competing narratives that challenged traditional notions of what it means to be Mormon. Employing participant observation, in-depth interviews, and discourse analysis, this dissertation uses a case study approach to consider the ways that modern Mormon identities emerge dialogically from multiple, often conflicting sources: normative authorities, faithful members, the secular media, and heterodox and former Mormons. This multi-vocal rendering is a negotiation of structural and agential processes often emerging from internecine conflicts on the internet, and resulting in pressure on the institution to accommodate new forms of Mormon life. In particular, nuanced, highly visible, and wide-ranging communities of heterodox Mormons extend unprecedented challenges to traditional understandings of authority in the LDS context, dismantling views of Mormons as monolithic and providing a window into processes of institutional change.

Degree Type
Dissertation

Degree Name
Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)

Graduate Group
Communication

First Advisor
Carolyn Marvin

Keywords
identity, institutional change, internet, Mormonism, social activism, vernacular communities

Subject Categories
American Studies | Communication | Religion

CONSTRUCTING RELIGION IN THE DIGITAL AGE:

THE INTERNET AND MODERN MORMON IDENTITIES

Rosemary Avance

A DISSERTATION

in

Communication

Presented to the Faculties of the University of Pennsylvania

in

Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the

Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

2015

Supervisor of Dissertation

_____

Carolyn Marvin, Ph.D.

Frances Yates Professor of Communication

Graduate Group Chairperson

_____

Joseph Turow, Ph.D.

Robert Lewis Shayon Professor of Communication

Dissertation Committee

John L. Jackson, Jr., Ph.D.   Dean, School of Social Policy & Practice, Richard Perry

University Professor of Communication, Africana

Studies, & Anthropology

Sharrona Pearl, Ph.D.   Assistant Professor of Communication

CONSTRUCTING RELIGION IN THE DIGITAL AGE: THE INTERNET AND MODERN MORMON

IDENTITIES

COPYRIGHT

2015

Rosemary Avance

To Andrew, my partner and friend;

and to the dozens of Mormons who, sharing their stories, made this work possible.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The completion of this dissertation is the culmination of several years of unflagging dedication and interest, only a fraction of which I can claim as my own. This project would not have been possible without the constant help and enthusiastic support from many devoted friends and colleagues. First, I thank the faculty and staff of the University of Pennsylvania's Annenberg School for Communication and the University of Utah's Tanner Humanities Center for extending fellowships, collegiality, and intellectual support which made this project feasible and shaped my potential as a scholar. Thank you for seeing the value in my vision and for making its fruition possible.

I would like to thank my dissertation committee at the Annenberg School: Drs. Carolyn Marvin; John L. Jackson, Jr.; and Sharrona Pearl. Each of you contributed fresh ideas, warm praise, and much-needed critiques, always ready to offer a perspective I had not considered. Dr. Pearl, your early interest in my research and thoughtful suggestions guided the direction of this project at crucial moments. Dr. Jackson, your tireless support in moments when I was afraid to pursue my own potential made me believe not only that I am capable, but that my voice is one that needs to be heard. Dr. Marvin, in so many more ways than I can count, I could not have done this without you. You have always been my biggest ally.

To my colleagues and friends at the Annenberg School, especially Tim Fallis, Le Han, Kara Garrity Liebeskind, Susan Mello, Holli Seitz, and Andy Tan -- and all of your wonderful spouses and partners-- thank you for making this Okie feel comfortable in the big city and making my family feel like a part of the group. I treasure my memories of ASC in large part due to your camaraderie. To my colleagues and friends with interests in communication and religion and in Mormon Studies, and especially to Richara Heyward, Jessica Finnegan, and Ben Peters: your encouragement and excitement about my project lit a fire in me at crucial junctures of research and writing that I have not been able to extinguish. Thank you for reminding me this work is important, and that I am not alone in thinking so! Thanks too for the endless draft readings,

suggestions, and helpful nudges. To those dozens of Mormons and ex-Mormons who willingly shared their stories and experiences with this curious investigator, your openness and frankness made this study not only possible but useful and important.

To my family in Oklahoma: you may not have always understood why this was so important to me, or why I would sacrifice years with you in pursuit of this dream. But you were always proud and supportive, and that meant everything. I want you to know I did this because of you. Three very beloved grandparents passed on while I pursued this dream, and I would be remiss if I didn't acknowledge that it was their support and excessive pride in my ability that spurred me on—from my early days in school as a child, to now even after they are gone. In those moments when I doubted myself, I felt their warm embraces and heard their voices saying "We are so proud of you, sweetie."

Finally, and most of all, to my husband Andrew and our sweet children Ruby, Cortez, and Evelyn: I have written an entire dissertation, but now when I need them most, words fail. Photos of you at my desk reminded me why my effort matters in the grand scheme of things. My children, it is for you that I have sought both the achievement of education and the clarity of mind and soul that accompanied this venture. I am a better mother because of this, and it is my hope that our family will reap the rewards for generations to come. And Andrew—what can I say? You deserve an honorary degree for the contributions you have made to this project-- in concrete ways like relocation, transportation, transcription, and tech support, and in your irreplaceable emotional support felt in both your gentle encouragement and stern insistence that I. Must. Finish. This. Dissertation. I didn't always think it would happen, but you never doubted. And now look! It did!

ABSTRACT

CONSTRUCTING RELIGION IN THE DIGITAL AGE: THE INTERNET AND

MODERN MORMON IDENTITIES

Rosemary Avance

Dr. Carolyn Marvin

This dissertation explores the discursive construction of identity among members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS or Mormons) in the digital age. Religious identity emerges at the intersection of multiple and often conflicting voices with varying amounts of normative power to speak *for* and *about* the group. The polyphony of the internet during this digital age makes it increasingly difficult to identify the boundaries of acceptable belonging within religious groups, particularly traditionally firmly-bounded and authoritarian ones such as the LDS Church, in part because the internet itself provides an unprecedented platform for conflicts and discourses that shift these boundaries. Particularly during the "Mormon moment" in 2012-2013, as media and the public scrutinized the LDS Church, mediated platforms gave voice to competing narratives that challenged traditional notions of what it means to be Mormon. Employing participant observation, in-depth interviews, and discourse analysis, this dissertation uses a case study approach to consider the ways that modern Mormon identities emerge dialogically from multiple, often conflicting sources: normative authorities, faithful members, the secular media, and heterodox and former Mormons. This multi-vocal rendering is a negotiation of structural and agential processes often emerging from internecine conflicts on the internet, and resulting in pressure on the institution to accommodate new forms of Mormon life. In particular, nuanced, highly visible, and wide-ranging communities of heterodox Mormons extend unprecedented challenges to traditional understandings of authority in the LDS context, dismantling views of Mormons as monolithic and providing a window into processes of institutional change.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1: Identity in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

"Modernity fragments; it also unites. On the level of the individual right up to that of planetary systems as a whole, tendencies towards dispersal vie with those promoting integration. So far as the self is concerned, the problem of unification concerns protecting and reconstructing the narrative of self-identity in the face of the massive intensional and extensional changes which modernity sets into being." (Anthony Giddens 1991: 188)

In the 21st century, religious identity as a social category is both confounded by unprecedented challenges to orthodoxy and orthopraxy, and afforded unmatched opportunities for expression and expansion. American faith continues to diversify at an unprecedented rate[1], but at a cost: the mediation technologies that make this both possible and visible challenge institutional hegemony within the nation's various faith communities. Groups whose members have been popularly depicted as streamlined or even uniform in belief, practice, and conformity to moral codes have gained increasing visibility from new media technologies, particularly the internet. With this growing visibility comes new recognition that membership in a faith community does not always equate to full acceptance or assent to that community's codes. Instead, as members of faith communities engage with these mediation platforms, identities are negotiated and diverse voices are heard, complicating easy social categories for membership and belonging. For scholars of religious identity, the question is no longer whether or not an individual affiliates with a particular religious group; instead, we must ask how individuals navigate membership and what tools and strategies they employ as they craft their particular, situated religious identities.

Just as individuals must navigate religious identities in an era of digital pluralism, religious institutions themselves must accommodate the polyphony of the internet, which proffers alternative narratives and challenges longstanding, authoritative discourse and cultural norms. As

---

[1] According to the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life's Religious Landscape Survey, American religious life is "both diverse and extremely fluid": 44% of adults have switched religious traditions from that in which they were raised. Additionally, for the first time since American independence, Protestantism is on the cusp of losing its majority status, and is itself highly fragmented into hundreds of denominations. See Pew 2010 for more detailed analysis of America's religious composition.

members gain access to information and unorthodox communities of practice on the internet,
their capacity to challenge institutional authority-- both officially, through protests, petitions, and
mass actions; and unofficially, through dangerous talk and the proliferation of unorthodox ideas--
also increases. And because the internet puts these in-group debates and disagreements in the
public square, institutions must deal with threats to their hegemony in similarly public ways.

In this brave new religious world, recent mediated visibility of the Church of Jesus Christ
of Latter-day Saints (hereafter, LDS or the Church) provides an important and compelling case
study for the challenges and opportunities confronting religious identity construction and
maintenance in the digital age. Normative Mormon identity has traditionally been understood as
signifying both strict orthodoxy and orthopraxy, idealized in the active, temple-worthy member
who must both affirm his or her belief in the institutionally-sanctioned narrative of the Church and
its leaders, and also embody and avoid particular behaviors. On the one hand, the Church's
traditional top-down communication and modern "correlation"-- LDS institutional efforts beginning
in the 1960s to streamline all Church materials with normative, single-purpose messaging--
contribute to this construction of Mormons as homogeneous. Simultaneously, popular culture
representations like *The Book of Mormon* Broadway musical, television shows about Mormon
fundamentalists[2] like TLC's *Sister Wives* and HBO's *Big Love,* and commentary on the faith of
2012 Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney contribute to a paradoxical public image of
the Mormons as-- according to free-word association in a recent Pew Research poll-- a "cult;"
simultaneously associated with "family/family values" and yet linked to "polygamy/bigamy;" and
comprised of "good people" while still "strict/restrictive" (Pew 2011). During the recent "Mormon
moment," as the powerful and incredibly wealthy Church pushed back against public scrutiny and
worked to mainstream its image through public relations efforts like the "I'm a Mormon" campaign,
lay Mormons themselves vied for a say in their own representation. For American Mormons, it

---

[2] It must be noted that The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints refuses to recognize such a category as "Mormon fundamentalist" and insists that anyone who practices polygamy is not properly Mormon. This is, of course, only one instance of the institution's modern effort to police Mormon identity.

was a "white-knuckle moment – a moment of self-searching [and] of wondering, 'What will they say about us next?'" (Tippett 2011).

Amid contending representations from the Church and the mainstream media, new opportunities emerged for everyday Mormons to join the conversation. The digital age has provided unprecedented platforms for various voices, including heterodox and dissenting members, to contribute to the social construction of Mormon identity. Features of internet culture and digital life contribute to a modern renegotiation of what it means to be Mormon at both the micro level, as vernacular communities push back against institutional norms; and at the macro level, as the institution responds to pressure and alters its emerging discourses on various issues of social concern. First, unprecedented (though by no means universal) access to the internet contributes to the balkanization of LDS identity as nontraditional members and those entirely antagonistic to the Church problematize traditional conceptions of legitimate Mormon identity. Indeed, Mormon identity no longer rests solely on acceptance by the traditional Mormon community, as "cultural Mormonism" (an understanding of identity more akin to a tribal affiliation than a belief system) proliferates as an identity construct. Similarly, the semblance of privacy and anonymity online frees members to express unconventional and even heretical ideas about Mormonism and its proper expression. Despite these challenges to institutional control, the digital sphere also offers a unique opportunity for Church leadership to stay abreast of the perceptions of members and the broader society, and respond immediately to threats to institutional hegemony. These three features of digital culture—access, anonymity, and surveillance—together contribute to shifts in modern LDS identity and expression.

As Mormonism confronts the challenges and affordances of the digital era, how do members navigate what it means to belong? How are norms for Mormon identities negotiated and circulated in a digital landscape? How, then, does the institution grapple with shifting Mormon identities and cultural norms? This dissertation brings together various, often contradictory voices as they strive for control over the definition of Mormon identity and for a say

in who counts as a legitimate member of the community. The normative although eroding view of Mormons as homogeneous and orthodox hints at the relative strength of certain authoritative voices—and implies the silencing of others. But today, the erosion of that hegemony narrative marks an important historical shift in Mormon identity toward autonomy, individualization, and privatization. Moreover, this evolution in LDS identity—so visible in the recent Mormon moment— is indicative of broader cultural shifts in America toward nuanced and gradually de-institutionalized religious identities, thanks in large part to the competing structural nodes present in digital culture and expression.

The following pages will situate the dissertation historically and theoretically; discussion of methodologies can be found in the Appendices. In this chapter, I first set the scene for an exploration of modern Mormon identities amidst the LDS Church's fraught history of identity construction and contested representation. Following that brief overview, I outline the literature that informs this study, including important work by scholars of identity, religious community online, and LDS identity in particular. Then, I offer the research questions undergirding this research, which reflect an attempt to locate modern Mormon identity as a ritual outcome generated through digital discourse. I next explain my own theoretical orientation to Mormon identity, particularly how I operationalize various constructs related to my research questions. Finally, I offer an overview of the contents of this dissertation.

A Brief History of Mormonism and Its Representation

The contemporary history of Mormonism began in 1820 during the height of America's Second Great Awakening, when a teenaged Joseph Smith prayed to know which of the many New England churches was true. In response to his prayers, he experienced a series of supernatural visions from which he learned that all churches were corrupt and that he would be responsible for restoring Christ's true church, thus ushering in the latter days before Christ's

return. Soon Smith was divinely led to a buried ancient record written on plates of metal in an unknown language he called "reform Egyptian," which he translated with the help of special glasses, a hat, and a seer stone.[3]   His translation became the Book of Mormon, a collection of ancient prophetic writings which tell the story of a group of Jaredites, a lost Israeli tribe, who fled Jerusalem to the Americas by boat more than five hundred years before Christ. Written in narrative prose at times resembling the Early Modern English of the King James Bible, the book climaxes in Christ's post-Resurrection visit to the Jaredites' descendants, and culminates with the death of these early western Christians in warfare with wicked indigenous tribes. According to the book's narrative, upon his death the last surviving ancient prophet buried the record of his people in the hill where Smith would later unearth it.

After a series of fits and starts, by March 1830 Joseph Smith had completed the translation of the plates found in Hill Cumorah, filed for copyright[4], and began selling the Book of Mormon. The next month, having amassed several dozen followers, he officially founded the Church of Christ, renamed eight years later as the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Over the next several months Smith and his followers converted many family members and friends, and by that autumn sent out the first Mormon missionaries (Bowman 2012).

The burgeoning new faith did not escape scrutiny from the rest of the nation. To be sure, a major element of Mormon history, spilling over into current manifestations of LDS identity, involves accounts of persistent hostility and violence perpetuated against early Church members. These narratives include an 1838 government-sanctioned "extermination order" in Missouri, which resulted in forced migration westward, and the 1844 death of Joseph Smith due to jailhouse mob violence (Bushman 2007; Bowman 2012). This early persecution is at least in part attributable to unfavorable media depictions: newspaper treatment of the Saints emphasized

---

[3] See Bushman 2007 for excellent overviews of the First Vision and Book of Mormon translation. See also LDS 2014 for a recent Church-sponsored explanation of various competing accounts of Smith's translation process.
[4] For an interesting account of copyright laws and processes vis-à-vis the Book of Mormon, see Wadsworth (2006) , who suggests that while historians have generally attributed a 1830 copyright date to Smith, he may have actually failed to meet complex statutory requirements to obtain full legal protection. Questions about proper ownership of the sacred narrative, of course, are echoed in current concerns over Mormon identity.

controversial elements of Mormonism like esoteric temple rites and the early practice of polygamy as divinely sanctioned and integral to the gospel plan (see Shipps 2000, Farmer 2012). Even some popular novels included "anti-Mormon" sentiment, including Mark Twain's *Roughing It* (1872), which famously derided the Book of Mormon as "chloroform in print;" and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's *A Study in Scarlet* (1887), which depicted Mormonism under Brigham Young as corrupt and murderous.

After Mormon settlers fled to Utah territory to escape persecution and ultimately disavowed polygamy, they for a while evaded public scrutiny, but at a cost: their seclusion in the Great Basin led to increasing suspicion among the non-Mormon public, who feared the Mormons' opacity and secretiveness (Lythgoe 1968, Shipps 2000). Yet despite continuing popular perceptions of them as Other and dangerous, Mormons have since gradually gained a measure of favor as one of America's "model minority" groups, like Asians and Jews, lauded for their hard work and traditional values (Chen & Yorgason 1999, Shipps 2000). Of course the "model minority" status masks prejudices of its own: this ambivalent public image is reflected in a Pew survey that found the most common word Americans freely associate with Mormons is the culturally loaded term "cult"-- followed, with no small bit of irony, by "family/family values" (Pew 2011).

Correlation and LDS imagined community

Mormonism rapidly expanded globally in the mid-20th century thanks to its large-scale missionary program, but it became difficult to control the message of the growing Church, threatening cohesion among thousands of worldwide congregations. By 1950, the Church's membership tallied 1.1 million (LDS 2003); religious historian Matthew Bowman explains by that time

> … fragmentation, overlap, and dysfunction had grown almost unmanageable. The curricula of the various auxiliaries overlapped and sometimes contradicted one another;

they claimed different influences and priorities, and bureaucratic turf battles were common. … The problem remained: if they attended all their meetings, church members would be instructed from three or four different curricula, each at best vaguely aware of the others. (Bowman 2012:194)

During that decade, then-President David O. McKay traveled the globe more than any previous Church leader -- including visits to Europe, South Africa, South America, the South Pacific, and New Zealand (LDS 2003). His extensive travels revealed the extent of fragmentation and waning institutional control across the global membership. As a remedy, in 1960 McKay began Church-wide efforts known as "correlation" to streamline all Church materials-- curricula, magazines, handbooks, videos-- with single-purpose messaging. The new Correlation Committee would ensure that all Church media was streamlined and non-contradictory; anything unapproved by this committee was and continues to be referred to as "uncorrelated," implying it is unofficial and thus untrustworthy, sometimes even anti-Mormon.

After correlation, the LDS Church enjoyed a period of "retrenchment" (Bowman 2012:191, after Mauss 1994) and ensuing communal solidarity. In his discussion of nationalism as imagined community, Benedict Anderson (1991) notes that the early days of European capitalism saw a standardization of print media which led to a homogenization of culture over dispersed geographic regions. Individuals who would never know one another in the flesh could imagine themselves unified, holding important things in common. This model of media-induced homogenization was taken to the extreme during the years of strict LDS correlation prior to the internet: official teaching manuals, magazines, pamphlets, and videos ensured that Mormons across the globe were exposed to the same messages, often at the same times. Despite geographic peculiarities or cultural disparities, Mormon imagined community meant that belonging to the same Church was quite easily mistaken for homogeneity of belief and practice. Christ's church seemed unified.

Today, the polyphony of the internet makes it clear that actual members of the Church are anything but unified in their interpretations and embodiments of LDS teachings, though the

Church still attempts to correlate its messages-- internally, through the ongoing efforts of the Correlation Committee; and through extensive Public Relations work geared at those on the outside, as well as attempts to police and discipline voices in the mainstream media. This discipline, which can be understood as a form of "impression management" or "brand imaging," manifests in defensive strategies for communicating with the world outside.

Contested representation of modern LDS identity

Just as in the early days of Mormonism, almost two centuries after its inception, the Church still struggles to maintain control over its representation in the public sphere. Digital media compound the issue like never before, introducing unprecedented access to information online and the impossibility of evading public scrutiny in the age of instant sharing across social networks. But far from simply being the problem, the Church also uses media as the solution: for decades the Church has shown media savvy, with its massive corporate holdings including media firms like Bonneville Communication, which uses marketing strategies including public opinion polling and tactical message framing to both proselyte and correct what the Church considers public "misinformation."

The focus of the Church's public relations efforts has shifted in recent decades, reflecting tensions in the institution's paradoxical efforts toward mainstreaming and differentiating from the rest of the largely Christian, American culture (Mauss 1994). In the late 1970s, 80s, and 90s the Church made its way into American households through a series of televised family-centric commercial advertisements, which featured pro-social vignettes about family life that rarely mentioned faith or doctrine and simply concluded with a comforting male voice saying, "This message brought to you by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints." Later, the first decade of the new century saw emphases on religio-spiritual messages in the "Truth Restored" ad campaign, consisting of emotional interviews, shot in black and white and interspersed with

images of family photographs and dramatic vignettes, featuring members who testified to ways Mormon teachings had impacted their lives (see Skinner 2008). These two approaches, the first all but ignoring spiritual or religious content and the second one focusing almost exclusively on it, underscore the paradox of a Church at once attempting to position itself as a viable Christian option in the American marketplace of religion while recognizing its murky status as a distrusted outsider.

Church branding also reflects these changing social perceptions. In the 1990s, in response to public concern that Mormons were not "really" Christian, the Church recruited graphic designers and marketing experts to rebrand its image through use of a new logo bearing the name of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The new logo was intended to feel "non-designed" rather than modern, and to be "less corporate-looking" with a "warm, friendly, inviting feel." Prior to the redesign, the Church's logo appearing on publications and buildings emphasized equally the words "Church," "Jesus Christ," and "Latter-day Saints." The new logo, premiering in 1995, literally put "Jesus Christ" at the forefront, centering and enlarging those words and framing them with smaller words above and below (Fletcher Stack 2012a). Since that time, the logo has become a ubiquitous brand image, a shift that coincides with institutional efforts to mainstream Mormonism as authentically Christian and, in many ways, just another option in the Christian marketplace of religion.

On the heels of a 2002 Olympics bid scandal in which prominent Mormon businessmen were accused of bribing the International Olympic Committee to secure the Winter Olympics in Salt Lake City; and during the height of a massive April 2008 federal raid at the Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints' Yearning for Zion Ranch in which some media outlets obscured distinctions between the practices and beliefs of the polygamous FLDS and the mainstream LDS, internal LDS research reflected the Church's conflicted public image in America. The 2008 research asserted that American ambivalence to Mormonism stemmed from "confusion" and "misunderstanding" about the Church's history, practice, and unique vocabulary.

The report concluded that there were six main factors in American's perceptions of the Church: ignorance of the Church's teachings, misunderstandings around the history of polygamy, fear of the Church's extensive power and wealth, assumptions that Mormons and their beliefs are "weird," fear of the unknown, and the feeling that Mormonism is exclusive and self-important. The researchers noted in particular that Americans who did not personally know any Mormons were more likely to have negative impressions of the Church (Lawrence 2008).

Partially in response to this research, in 2010 the Church began new efforts to repackage and rebrand the faith, launching a public relations campaign entitled "I'm a Mormon" in nine U.S. markets (Campbell 2010b). The campaign began with televised and YouTube videos designed to normalize Mormon identity by equating it with constructions of idealized American life. In these upbeat and colorful ads, individual Mormons described their secular jobs, hobbies, and interests-- which tended to be remarkable rather than average (e.g., an internationally recognized musician; a world champion surfer; a wheelchair-bound homeland security consultant; a female Haitian American mayor in Utah; a mustachioed sculptor for Harley Davidson). Each ad was interspersed with B-roll of the subject's family, home and work and, harking back to the ads of the 1970s through 90s, did not mention faith or religion until the subject ended the ad by adding simply "I am a Mormon"[5]—implying, of course, that Mormonism is not contraindicated for ideal, successful, and happy American lives.

In addition to the video ads, the missionary website[6] mormon.org was refurbished to serve as an extension of the campaign, complete with a searchable database of individual Mormons' biographies. Mormon leaders urged members to submit personal profiles to the site to help correct misconceptions about Mormons and what they believe, and members responded in droves. The site now features thousands of profiles searchable by gender, age, ethnicity, and previous religion; site visitors are invited to "Discover Mormons who share your personal

---

[5] For instance, one interviewee ends by saying: "I am fun, I am spontaneous yet disciplined, I am the mother of three beautiful little girls, my name is Cassandra Barney, and I am a Mormon."
[6] The Church has long hosted two main websites: lds.org, which is meant for Mormons; and mormon.org, intended for non-Mormons. The bifurcation of online communications through insider and outsider sites mirrors broader institutional communicative strategies.

experience." Importantly, the submission process involves each submission being moderated or "screened" for content by a team of young missionaries at the Missionary Training Center in Utah. If the submission is found to be too long, confusing, or doctrinally unsound -- terms that are subjective and never explained -- the submitter is invited to revise and resubmit their profile.[7]

Beyond the "I'm a Mormon" campaign, the pendulum of control over the image of Mormonism continues to swing, in popular culture and beyond. In March 2011 the satirical musical *The Book of Mormon,* written by the creators of the often raunchy and impious adult cartoon *South Park*, launched on Broadway-- much to the dismay of many Mormons who felt ill-represented by the play's construction of Mormons as uniform, naïve, and unthinking. Just three months later, the "I'm a Mormon" campaign expanded into the coveted New York market, with two million-dollar, forty-foot digital billboards in Times Square, along with hundreds of smaller ads placed on taxis and in subways stations throughout the city and even in the *Book of Mormon* playbill itself, offering an alternate reading of Mormonism to play-goers (Kaleem 2011). Some missionaries even stood outside the theater, introducing themselves to audience members after the show so that they could meet a "real" Mormon missionary (Telushkin 2014).

Again and again, the institutional Church talks back to the public realm, wrangling for control over who can say what about Mormons, and negotiating which construction of belonging will be accepted by the American populace as the "right" or "true" image of Mormonism. Moreover, this dialogue is complicated by the proselytizing emphasis of the Church; the stakes are high for a group who not only seek control over their own, oft-maligned image, but seek to recruit new members to share in that identity.

Perhaps as a part of a broad cultural shift ushered by the Church's PR campaign, the media declared 2012 a "Mormon moment," a moment which arguably began over ten years ago during the Salt Lake City Olympics, when the phrase was first coined (Newsweek 2001) and gained increased traction throughout 2011 and 2012 (c.f., Applebome 2011, Kirn 2011, de Groote

---

[7] The screening process itself can take many months and is opaque and never explicitly disclosed; some Mormons I have interviewed have expressed disapproval that college-aged men mediate the voice of "real" Mormons before they are presented to the world.

2011). With a Mormon candidate a recent viable contender for the most powerful political office in the land, and popular cultural depictions of Mormons garnering major media attention, now more than ever is the time to seriously consider what it means to be Mormon-- a meaning that changes and evolves through a dialectic process between those who are Mormon and those who are not.

As the contest for control over Mormonism's public image rages, an internal struggle within the Church goes mostly unnoticed by those on the outside. In a church with an increasingly large and diverse membership and with growing opportunities for both gathering and disseminating uncorrelated information online, institutional control over individual piety and practice is increasingly stifled. More visibly now than ever before, individual Mormons defy institutional norms in practice and belief, or in the extent to which they embody Mormon orthopraxy (right actions) and orthodoxy (right thinking). These negotiations can range from practice-based resistance like pushing back against Mormon sartorial injunctions or not following norms concerning dietary restrictions, to belief negotiations or doubts involving the historicity of the Book of Mormon or the inspired nature of an all-male Priesthood. In addition to individuals with isolated issues with the Church, a large movement of "cultural Mormonism" is gaining traction among those who want to identify as Mormon for the cultural and emotional benefits of affiliation but who do not believe literally in the Church's teachings or inspired nature.

It bears mentioning that Mormonism has always been home to many heterodox members – some of which, like the September Six[8], have been notoriously punished for voicing their heterodoxy. As with members of all faiths, individual Mormons embody varying degrees of assent and reservation both in belief and in action. Lingering fears about social and institutional sanction for outspoken heterodoxy still prevent many Mormons from being public with their heterodox status. But digital media is "changing the game" by offering a platform for voiced

---

[8] In September 1993, six Mormon academics were excommunicated or disfellowshipped (i.e., excluded from certain ritual practices such as temple attendance) for variously challenging, undermining, or reinterpreting Church teachings on issues like Heavenly Mother, the history of polygamy in the Church, and interpretations of end times prophecy. These disciplinary actions were taken by some to be evidence of anti-intellectualism in the Church and the Church's efforts to quash divergent points of view.

dissent and creating a pronounced wedge in Mormon identity, normalizing heterodoxy for some, and reinforcing traditional boundaries for others. The Church, for its part, struggles against the vastness of the internet, which is by its very nature "uncorrelated."

Situating Mormon Identity: A Literature Review

The particularities of modern Mormon identity are situated in a rich history of scholarly inquiry. This dissertation draws on several areas of study, which can be envisioned as concentric circles: the broadest circle, identity studies, includes scholarship which seeks to explain identity as a social and cultural product. Within that circle lay studies of religious identity and community, which consider the communicative, discursive ways that religious identities are created and understood in relation to institutions, within specific communities, or between institutions, communities, and the broader society. Still more specific is the area of Mormon studies, a small subset of scholarly inquiry concerned with the historical trajectory of identity construction among members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Theoretical approaches to the study of identity

Any study of identity is necessarily an inquiry into the often-debated space where institutional, hegemonic structure meets and collides with individual agency or choice. The structuralist approach to identity construction argues that the hegemonic state creates subjects without their necessary assent. Following the tradition of Marx, such theorists as Althusser, Derrida, and Foucault emphasize what they see as the relative powerlessness of the individual in the construction of the self. For these and other structuralist thinkers, identity is a subject position constructed through ideology and constituted by discourse, which reflects inherent power differentials. Identity itself is a thing signified. French deconstructionist Jacques Derrida (1972)

describes the sign as "deferred presence" (87), explaining that "every concept is inscribed in a chain or a system within which it refers to the other, to other concepts, by means of the systematic play of differences" (89). Religious identity, then, is defined or "constituted 'historically' as a weave of differences" (90). As with other aspects of identity, it is defined socially against what it is not; functionally, religious identities are boundary markers, categories for exclusion or inclusion.

In this way, identity is closely tied to semiotics. Ferdinand de Saussure (2006) shows that words themselves are not inherently meaningful but are rather "signifiers" that must be mentally associated with the "signified" or the thing itself, in order to become a "sign" which has meaning. Signs in a particular community emerge through both collective and individual mental conceptions – signifieds – of what those signs essentially capture. Thus it is not simply an individual's self-concept that matters in defining his or her identity; it is the ways that he or she is socially categorized. In religion, this categorization often hinges on institutional affiliation. Barthes (1972) elaborates on Saussure's semiology to indicate the role of second-order signs, or connotations. According to Barthes, meaning can be altered depending on context to reinforce the bourgeois status quo. Thus members of minority religions are defined in relation to the culture's religious majority—the social status quo.

Likewise Louis Althusser (1969a) is concerned with the ideological power structures that enable concepts of the self and Others. Althusser describes identity as the result of interpellation, a process whereby ideologies of the ruling elite create identities or roles for individuals to inhabit. Interpellation creates subjects who are sutured to these identities subconsciously. Moreover, the ideological identity roles become naturalized and reflected in an individual's utterances (Althusser 1969b) so that the individual is passive and non-agential in the construction of his or her own identity. For Althusser and other Marxist thinkers, identity constructs like religion are always already ways of inhabiting domination and subjugation; they cannot be neutral constructs in a democratic state. As a contributing theory in the study of identity, the ideological frame

underscores the ways in which identities monitor appropriate participation in a community; in this view, identity is constrained or even entirely determined by hegemonic ideals.

But many postmodern thinkers have challenged a strict structuralist reading of identity, instead suggesting that individuals can "script" their own identities according to their own reflexive sense of self. Taylor (2003) argues that while past conceptions of identity were based on religion, socio-economic status, race, or other characteristics that were imaged to be immutable, modern identities come from within. In this view, individuals imagine and negotiate their own sense of distinct selfhood in reflexive and self-conscious ways, and individuals are free to choose their identities with little or no constraints. In the study of identity, the postmodern approach reminds us that individuals are agents who may construct their senses of self in reflexive, individuated ways.

While both structuralist and postmodern approaches offer insight into how identity is constructed, their explanatory reach is limited particularly in regards to religious identities, as both fail to take seriously aspects of *belief, community,* and *practice* simultaneously. In particular, the ideological emphasis ignores individuals' complicity through choice and participation in the ritual community (e.g., how do we account for conversion? for spiritual experiences?), and ways that they may use strategies such as narrative to resist or nuance their relationship to their faith. The postmodern frame, on the other hand, misses important implications of religious identity as historically contingent, ideological, institutionalized, highly canonic, and a construct which– because of its normative implications – automatically legitimizes and delegitimizes various other identity constructs.

My approach to religious identity eschews both theoretical extremes and attempts a more careful balance between the two imagined poles. Normative Mormon identity is not blindly interpellated by unconscious, unwilling actors; nor is it chosen by agents free to negotiate and adapt it to their liking. Instead, it involves negotiation, submission, interpretation, and subjugation of given narratives to personal circumstances and idiosyncrasies. These complex negotiations involve the interplay of competing norms and values, and to the extent that they are performed

externally, form a ritual public sphere wherein identity is publicly constructed and performed amidst various pressures and constraints.

The idea that identity is constructed via social, communicative processes is not a new one, in the field of Communication and elsewhere. John Dewey explains the role of community in shaping the self:

> Society not only continues to exist *by* transmission, *by* communication, but it may fairly be said to exist *in* transmission, *in* communication. There is more than a verbal tie between the words common, community, and communication. Men live in a community in virtue of the things which they have in common; and communication is the way in which they come to possess things in common. (1916:5, emphasis in original)

Communities and the identities they support are created through social processes, or what Berger and Luckmann (1966) famously called the social construction of reality. Interactions create and maintain ourselves and our world as we know it, so that communication itself can be seen as the basis for identity. Carey's ritual view suggests that communication "is directed not toward the extension of messages in space but toward the maintenance of society in time; not the act of imparting information but the representation of shared beliefs" (1989:18). Sociologist Erving Goffman's (1959) notion of dramaturgical analysis treats social interactions as performances which construct identity along agree-upon narrative lines, and Turner (1969) examines the ways that social interaction shapes (and even determines) individual identity. As Buber (1970, 2011) establishes, sacred selves appear by entering into relation with other persons.

In this way, conceptual dichotomies between public and private selves can be misleading. For Habermas, private identity cannot exist without the public sphere giving it shape and content. Thus religious identity as an aspect of our privatized interiority results from our interactions with the public sphere. Habermas notes the constructedness of interiority vis-à-vis the public: "Subjectivity, as the innermost core of the private, was always already oriented to an audience" (1962:49). Castronovo (2001) critiques the elitist Habermasian view, showing that historically "interiority becomes possible only with the rise of a public that privileges the private

recesses of bourgeois domestic intimacy" (103). Postmodern ideas about true or essential interior selves are only possible, then, as they are juxtaposed with social norms. As sociolinguist John Gumperz argues, the parameters of identity "are not constants that can be taken for granted, but are communicatively produced" (1982:1).

If identity is established through social interaction, what happens when conflict arises in social institutions? The dynamics in conflicted identity construction can be understood, in part, through economist Albert Hirschman's (1970) classic categories of exit, voice, and loyalty, which he employs to understand responses to perceived declines in one's firm or organization. Hirschman argues that when individuals disagree with the direction of an organization to which they belong, they are limited to three options: maintain the status quo, vocally dissent, or leave. His categories map onto other conflicted aspects of identity and association, but provide a working framework for understanding Mormon affiliation and the dynamics of attempting to "speak" in an authoritarian system.

This dissertation extends theories of the social construction of identity by examining mediated social discourse as a mode of constructing religious identity. If "being Mormon" is a social, discursive process which links individual actors to the narratives of the group, then the internet as a mediator of discourse should have observable effects on the construction of these identities in the modern moment. Thus I extend theories on the social construction of identity by examining the ways that religious identity as a social category is created, modified, or maintained dialogically in the internet age.

Increasingly, scholarship on identity construction must account for the performance of identity online, where identities appear more porous and allow for more "play." In early studies of online identity, scholars generally held a negative view of this porosity, both privileging an individual's offline self over constructions of self online as somehow more authentic or "real," and assuming that the relative anonymity afforded by online spaces would promote insincerity and duplicity (c.f., Reingold 1993, Turkle 1995). However, ethnographies of internet communities

have largely refuted these assumptions and illustrated that both off- and online identities are legitimate, though differently nuanced, constructions and performances of self (c.f. Pearson 2009). Just as individuals perform different aspects of self in different offline milieus (work, church, home), individuals craft meaningful and socially relevant selves situated in particular online environments and constructed vis-à-vis expectations of online communities —as Goffman might predict.

This implies, of course, that the "self" performed online is not always contiguous to the offline self. The availability of so many types of online communities, combined with the (seeming) anonymity of some forms of online participation, gives individuals the opportunity to construct alternative or idealized identities online that they cannot enact in their embodied lives (c.f. Ellison et. al 2006, boyd 2006). For instance, gay people who are not "out" in their offline social circles due to pressure or fear may find a space to express previously unarticulated aspects of their identities online. Still, as Pearson (2009) emphasizes, due to the nature of symbolic mediation on the internet, online identities are often more *deliberately* constructed than offline ones-- but no less authentic[9]. Mormons performing Mormonism online often perform a different version of self at church, at home, or at work.

Formal features of internet culture—those technologically-imposed constraints against which individuals enact self digitally—provide a structural framework for doing life online, and help to illuminate the evolution of modern Mormon identities by revealing aspects of Mormon life less visible in an offline context. Scholars of digital identity have identified several features of online participation, three of which I draw on extensively throughout this dissertation. These are access, (perceived) anonymity, and surveillance/control.

Access:

---

[9] The exception is, of course, so-called internet "trolls" who deliberately mislead others about their identities or post inflammatory comments on message boards or other social networking sites to incite controversy. While these types of participants are certainly present on the types of sites I analyzed throughout this study, they were generally recognized and flagged as trolls by board moderators and are unlikely to affect my research.

Unprecedented high internet penetration rates in the United States mean that the majority of American Mormons have access to the technology and thus can choose to participate in online conversations and communities centered around religious identity, belief, or culture. Manuel Castells (2010) has famously documented the rise of internet culture as a result of this unprecedented access, but notes too how that access is still far from universal. The "digital divide" – or the discrepancy in social capital between those with and those without internet access—is particularly salient among those of differing languages, nationalities, socioeconomic backgrounds, and generational placement. Thus "internet culture" tends to reflect a white, Western, middle class, educated, and youthful population.

Still, high rates of internet access means that niche communities have developed online for nearly every conceivable interest group, providing opportunities for community building among groups that otherwise would not have access to other likeminded individuals. In the context of this dissertation, for example, feminist Mormons who report knowing few or no other feminist Mormons in their offline lives are able to interact daily with feminist Mormons from around the world, reinforcing and strengthening their own identities as such. Similarly, high internet access among Mormons means that the average Mormon is more likely now than in the pre-internet era to encounter potentially troubling narratives that contradict official Mormon accounts of history or that paint Mormon teachings or practices in a negative light, whether through their intentional own use of search engines or websites, or through articles or ideas shared in social media. Thus access to the internet challenges the hegemonic, institutional image of Mormon identity presented by the Church with heretofore unexposed voices and experiences from the heterodox.

(Perceived) anonymity:

Another feature of internet participation on Web 2.0 platforms involves users' perception of anonymity. Because of the ability to participate in "closed" (membership-restricted) groups, to select pseudonymous usernames and/or remain anonymous textually online, individuals feel free

to act in ways that they may not act offline simply because of the perception that the space is unmonitored by those they know "in real life." According to Qian & Scott (2007), who studied bloggers in particular, perceptions of anonymity online influence the actor's willingness to self-disclose. The more an actor feels a particular online space is anonymous, the more likely the actor will divulge personal information that is otherwise kept private. Even when privacy features like closed groups and pseudonyms are not used or available, the physical separation of mediated interlocutors often reduces feelings of reticence or inhibition for many users.

As mentioned previously, some early studies of internet culture reflected a fear that online anonymity would lead to duplicity (e.g., individuals would pretend to be someone they are not). While this is certainly possible given the online context, the majority of *regular* participants in online social networks such as chat rooms, blogs, and listservs are highly invested in their online communities and devote large amounts of time to discussions in these spaces. In the case of today's Mormon online communities, many if not most of these participants know or have met at least one participant offline. Regardless, the question of duplicity is difficult if not impossible to answer because the identities that individuals craft online are *not* reducible to their offline selves, but are instead performances specific to the online milieu. For the purposes of this study, the element of perceived anonymity is salient to understanding how and why individuals might use internet space to craft narratives of resistance and negotiation vis-à-vis the institution.

Surveillance/control:

In a seeming contradiction of the feature of anonymity, a third feature emphasizes the ability of those with social and/or institutional power to employ the internet as a surveillance tool, and the cognizance of internet users that they may be monitored online. Many scholars have considered the role and function of the internet as a modern-day Panopticon, allowing government, corporations, and other institutions the ability to monitor users' behaviors and

opinions in an effort to variously control, police, or market to them (e.g. Brignall 2002, Campbell & Carlson 2002).

Many internet users tack back and forth between comfortable assurance that they are anonymous and safe, and a fear of surveillance and discipline by those in power. While online actors enjoy a semblance of privacy—especially when acting in closed or private groups or when operating under a pseudonymous username—they do so with an on-again, off-again cognizance that "nothing is ever really private online." This recognition manifests in inconsistent yet frequent attempts to self-censor and police online expression and action. In my research on Mormonism, many heterodox LDS expressed fears that their bishops, ward members, or LDS family members may be monitoring their online activities, and these fears were regularly confirmed by reports of members being called to disciplinary councils as a result of their online activities. Thus even in online groups, some individuals were reluctant to fully disclose issues with the Church.

At the institutional level, the ability to monitor members' behavior online enables the Church to respond to concerns and punish members whose dissent crosses lines of acceptable speech. This surveillance comes at both the informal, local level (e.g., ward members reporting an unorthodox blog post to their bishop) and at the institutional level (as in bishops themselves monitoring social media postings or the Church's official Strengthening Church Members Committee, which we will discuss). Changes in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints' official narratives and policies, which this dissertation explores, often result from these types of local and institutionalized surveillance of the online sphere.

Religious identity and community

In addition to scholarship on identity and online performance, this dissertation draws strongly on previous research into religious identity in particular. Religion and religious identity – like all expressions of culture– are not inherent qualities of the individual, nor are they merely

expressions of individual belief, faith, opinion or preference. Religion and religious identity are

social constructions, derived by communicating and negotiating meaning, which situate the

individual in a cultural collective. An understanding of the "constructed" nature of religious identity

helps us to clear away some of the semantic debris that threatens to mark some versions of said

identity as more or less "authentic." In my view, a range of interpretations of what it means to be

Mormon are, rather than competing perspectives that should be analyzed for their doctrinal

proximity to some imagined standard, instantiations of power that can be analyzed for their social

effects in real time. As pioneering sociologist W.I. Thomas noted, "It is not important whether the

interpretations are correct-- if men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences"

(Thomas & Thomas 1928: 572).

In the field of religious studies, quotidian expressions of personal religiosity both with and

against organizational norms are studied as "lived religion" (beginning, arguably, with Orsi's 1985

study of Italian immigrant Catholicism in Harlem), distinct from the study of religion as a

theological or organizational construct. The study of lived religion, then, focuses on lay religiosity

and its conflicts and correlates with institutional religion. Before we can talk about the social

manifestations of lived religion, then, we must begin with an outline of the boundaries of religion

itself. Cultural anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1966) famously defined religion as

> a system of symbols which acts to establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods
> and motivations in men by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and
> clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations
> seem uniquely realistic. (90)

If religion is "a system of symbols," what do those symbols signify? Geertz argues that religion is

a "model of" and a "model for" society itself. Religion's symbolic system situates the individual in

the group by allowing him or her to partake in the shared symbols manifest through language. In

confessional faiths, the act of confessing – *saying* – literally communicates an assertion of

identity. Christianity, in its varied forms, emphasizes this act as vital to participation in the faith

community. St. Paul the Apostle, revered as the first Christian missionary and author of many books of the New Testament, highlights this impetus when he promises:

> If thou shalt *confess with thy mouth* the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and *with the mouth confession is made unto salvation*. (Romans 10:9-10, King James Bible, emphasis mine)

Here, one is not a partaker in the faith – not a Christian – until one has communicated one's Christianity socially. This urgency is evident in ubiquitous religious words like "witness," "testify," "share," and "confess"—confessional religion is lived, religious identity established, through voice. Just as one "puts on" culture, religion must be put on in the public sphere.

Thus, individuals establish their religious identities through narrative cohesion. In a nod to the centrality of narrative in religious identity construction, Susan Friend Harding (2000) argues that conversion itself is primarily "a process of acquiring a specific religious language or dialect," which starts "when an unsaved listener begins to appropriate in his or her inner speech the saved speaker's language and its attendant view of the world" (34). Friend Harding describes conversion as rebirth, or the creation of a new identity, which "aims to separate novice listeners from their prior, given reality, to constitute a new, previously unperceived or indistinct reality, and to impress that reality upon them, make it felt, heard, seen, known, undeniably real" (37).   In Mormonism, this change is manifest through religious testimonies that bind the actor to the group through narrative cohesion-- in other words, the type of story a person tells about herself locates her within a particular community of like-minded others, who also tell the same stories about themselves. Various disciplines address the role of narrative in shaping and extending religious identities. In psychology, religious narratives are described as tools for coping with and negotiating traumatic occurrences (Ganzevoort 1998). Political psychology recognizes similarities between religious identity and nationalism, particularly the way that religious belief supplies discourses (narratives) which convey a sense of security in the world (Kinnvall 2004).

So too, ritual theory underscores the centrality of religious narratives, which take various forms in different religious traditions and which identify an individual as a member of the group.

Ritual theorist Catherine Bell (1997) distinguishes between "formal" and "informal" modes of ritual speaking by noting that formality "appears to be, at least in part, the use of a more limited and rigidly organized set of expressions and gestures, a 'restricted code' of communication or behavior in contrast to a more open or 'elaborated code'" so that "formal speech tends to be more conventional and less idiosyncratic or personally expressive" (139). For Mormons, bearing testimony becomes a formal, ritualized process which relies on codes and scripts specified by the group's shared history. Indeed, Victor Turner (1969) considers a main function of ritual to be the performance of the group's formative myths, and Bruce Lincoln (1996) sees identity as a construct resulting from *triadic codefinition,* a process whereby "a social group, a set of ritual performance, and a set of mythic narratives produce one another" (166). Just as in Erving Goffman's notion of interaction rituals (1967), religious people "perform" identity using a social "script," which is established through ritual conventions. In this way, religious identity can be parsed and analyzed through rhetorical analysis of religious narratives. In Mormonism, identity is indeed normatively scripted, but also allows for cultural resistance as individual members self-construct their own narratives and thus their Mormon identities.

As with any other product in an economic marketplace, religious groups must deal with threats and pressures from outside and inside forces. Unlike some organizations with more tangible products to sell, religion offers an identity and a community. In his sociological exploration of the reasons for religious organizations' success or failure, Rodney Stark describes the importance of maintaining both continuity and tension with the host society (Stark 1996). Groups must be different enough that they have something to "offer" potential converts, but similar enough that joining does not "cost" the convert too much in social capital. Although Stark does not draw a connection to narrative, continuity and tension -- rather than some tangible actuality of identity -- can be understood as products of specific stories told within and without the group about the meaning of belonging. In Mormonism, then, the success or failure of the Church hinges on its own narrative strategies. Moreover, and more central to this study, individual

Mormons must also navigate these tensions and continuities between their Mormon identities and other aspect of their idealized identities (e.g., gender, race, socioeconomic level, political leanings, sexual orientation, etc.), sometimes resulting in disjunctures which cause intense social and personal dissonance. Resolution of these tensions becomes necessary to ensure continued feelings of belonging in the religious community, but is only possible by negotiating, or re-writing, the narrative concerning what it means to belong in the first place.

Although empirical research on the performance of religious identities online is still in its early stages, scholars are beginning to recognize the internet as an arena of meaningful religious identity construction and enactment. Scholars generally agree that -- just as in other studies of identity-- supposed dualisms between on- and offline religious identities do not hold up to empirical scrutiny (e.g. O'Leary and Brasher 1996, Beer 2008). So while religious individuals may express different aspects of their religious identities online, those identities are not somehow less authentic or real than offline identities.

Religion and media scholar Heidi Campbell (2010a) proposes one model for studying relationships between religious communities and new media, suggesting that scholars should consider the interplay of religious history, contemporary community values, negotiation of technology vis-à-vis the religious community, and communal discourses that justify use of technologies; Campbell cites these as elements contributing to the religious-social shaping of technology. Her perspective is essentially a refinement of the uses and gratifications perspective (Katz et. al 1974) applied specifically to religious communities; but it is missing, importantly, the recognition that religious communities are not monolithic and that modern religious individuals often navigate interactions online in ways that are not reducible to their offline religious affiliation. Her focus on institutional approaches to media misses individual resistance and negotiation among individuals who are heterodox, non-practicing, or unorthodox, a gap which I attempt to remedy in this dissertation.

Scholarship on Mormon identity

The majority of current, high-profile research on Mormon identity explores and promotes a homogeneous and nearly monolithic view of what it means to belong to the LDS Church. This work largely emphasizes normative identities, idealizing the active, temple-worthy member as representative of what it means to *be* Mormon and leaving other manifestations of Mormonism unexplored (c.f., Shipps 2000, Givens 2007, Davies 2010, Bowman 2012). The exception, from notable scholar of Mormonism Armand Mauss (1994), parses limited distinctions between institutional and what he calls "grassroots" approaches to LDS identity. Still, like the majority of research on Mormon identity, Mauss' scholarship lacks any in-depth discussion of the nature of modern Mormon identities vis-à-vis digital technologies and modern media platforms which necessarily change the form and enactment of both communication and religious identity. The extant studies are largely studies of the Mormon religion, not of lived Mormonism or LDS identity; they present normalized versions of Mormonism that coincide with institutional narratives. There are likely several reasons this is the case: on the one hand, the majority of scholars concerned with Mormonism are members of the Church who maintain activity and who promote the norms of belonging in the Church; some of these scholars benefit from what has been called "faith-promoting scholarship," and these scholars' own social identities could be threatened by alternate representations of LDS belonging. For example, Richard Bushman (Professor of History, Columbia University) and Terryl Givens (Professor of Literature and Religion, University of Richmond), perhaps the two most prominent scholars of Mormonism both within and without Church circles, are both frequently cited by Church authorities to give academic credence to the Church and its history and/or practices[10].

Another reason for the scholarly proliferation of a monolithic view on Mormon identity, which I have experienced firsthand, is the difficulty of studying heterodoxy in a controlling

---

[10] For example, see these articles from the Church's online public relations site: Newsroom 2007b, Newsroom 2008a and 2008b, Newsroom 2012c. Bushman and Givens have also been cited by many LDS bishops and members in conversations and interviews with me, and Bushman's 2007 biography of Joseph Smith, *Rough Stone Rolling,* was even recommended to me by Mormon missionaries, who as a rule do not recommend non-correlated materials.

religious space like Mormonism. In order to gain access to openly and ethically study Mormon communities, researchers must often follow an authoritarian chain of command which necessitates gaining clearance from local bishops, stake presidents, as well as Church leaders at higher levels. A researcher may be "marked" once he or she begins investigating alternate Mormon narratives, and he or she may then lose access to other useful sources, like spokespeople and Church leaders. A researcher may even be suspected of being "anti-Mormon" simply for investigating non-normative Mormon sources or lifestyles. In many ways, researchers must choose whether to tell stories of orthodoxy or heterodoxy. Telling both becomes fraught with methodological constraints[11].

Despite the implications of homogeneity among scholars of Mormonism, these researchers have teased out some important structural constraints on traditional constructions of Mormon identity. In a classic study of nineteenth century utopian communities (of which the original Mormon Church was one), Kanter (1968, 1972) famously identified traits of successful groups that she described as "commitment mechanisms." These mechanisms function by dissociating the individual from the rest of society while associating him or her with the group. King & King (1972) extended Kanter's analysis to show how formal elements of Mormonism function as commitment mechanisms, reinforcing organizational boundaries by affirming individual commitment to the group. Among these mechanisms are expectations and rules for behavior and belief, which I adopt and adapt as central structural constraints in LDS identity construction.

More recent scholars of Mormon identity see inherent tensions at the center of LDS identity—both historical and modern—and have noted the peculiarities of a faith that at once embraces and distances the broader American culture, through, among other things, a desire to be seen as mainstream and "Christian" coinciding with a contradictory impulse to exclusivity and chosenness. In Mauss's (1994) influential work on Mormon identity, the author describes the

---

[11] For a discussion of my own experiences with these limitations, see Appendix I.

tensions between Mormons and the broader American culture. He traces the historical

development of what was once a small sect into a mainstream church, locating how tensions with

the broader society actually served to reinforce Mormon identity and commitment and are thus

key elements of Mormon identity today, manifesting in narratives of persecuting and

misunderstanding (e.g., Mormons as a "peculiar people" forever outside the mainstream).

Throughout its history the Church moved in and out of discernible phases of mainstreaming and

retrenchment, assimilation and exceptionalism; by the 1960s the Mormons were largely

assimilated into mainstream American culture. Mauss' data leaves off in the 1980s, offering

evidence to suggest that period was one of retrenchment and differentiation from the broader

society. Applying Mauss' model today might suggest that efforts like the "I'm a Mormon"

campaign, which seeks to make Mormonism a viable option in the Christian marketplace, indicate

an institutional move toward assimilation once more (a strategic shift that seemed to occur just in

time for the Romney candidacy).

     More recently, Terryl Givens (2007) has gone so far as to assert that paradox itself is at

the root of Mormon identity, and manifests variously as an emphasis on the preeminence of

bureaucratic authority while also privileging personal freedom and revelation; the primacy of

knowledge and certainty pitted against the need for constant searching and self-improvement;

and the chosen, elect status of Mormons contrasted with their cultural marginalization and even

persecution. These particular tensions manifest in unique rhetorical strategies for navigating

identity and managing norms for who is on the "inside" and who is on the "outside" of legitimate

Mormonism.

     Focusing on the LDS Church's public image, historian Jan Shipps (2000) traces

American perceptions of Mormons over time and shows that the between 1847 and 1947,

Mormons were largely secluded behind their western "mountain curtain" (98) in the Salt Lake

Basin and were only known by outsiders through print media and "hearsay"-- which almost

universally portrayed the Mormons as secretive, cult-like, ignorant, and dangerous. Shipps notes

the improved public image of the Church after World War II, when many members moved to other

parts of the country in a "Mormon diaspora" and Americans were finally able to actually meet

members of the Church. From then until the 1970s and 80s, she says, Mormons gained

mainstream acceptance as virtuous, model citizens, partially thanks to public relations efforts in

then-new media, especially television. Shipps traces further change over time, noting that:

> in the years between 1960 and the end of the century, Mormonism experienced a
> transformation in which it changed from being an institution and a people embedded in
> a particular culture to being a church, belief system, and worshipping body able to thrive
> in many cultures. (7)

While Shipps' research was published in 2000, the Church's public relations move toward

universality and "big-tent" Mormonism is even more pronounced now, particularly because for the

first time in its history the LDS Church is no longer predominantly an American church—by

Church estimates there are now just over six million American members and eight million

international members. Still, as I will show, despite its global impact and international growth,

Mormonism remains entrenched in Americanized particularities. The culture of the Church, if not

the majority of individual members, is still largely American, white, upper-middle class, and deeply

conservative, reflecting the Utah milieu in which it is headquartered.

Still, in order to become increasingly mainstream, the public face of the Church has

emphasized what Shipps calls "LDS atonement discourse" -- focusing on the role of Christ's

redemption because it is held in common with mainstream Christianity, and blunting elements of

Mormon doctrine that are anathema to the mainstream such as the idea of mankind's eternal

progression toward godhood. Still, as the Church expands, it invites scrutiny from the media, and

its image as "model minority" has become fraught (112). Shipps' analysis self-consciously stops

short of analyzing the impact of digital media on representations of Mormonism, an analysis I

suggest is vital to an understanding of Mormonism in modernity. Additionally, like most scholars

of Mormonism, Shipps fails to account for heterodox perspectives and privileges the institution's

narratives.

Despite the saliency of Mormon identity construction during this ongoing "Mormon moment," no research has been done on the discursive processes or multi-vocal negotiations involved in its development. Moreover, studies that directly consider Mormon convergence with digital media are lacking. This dissertation expands on previous work by offering a robust treatment of how members of constraining religious institutions like Mormonism negotiate their multivalent identities, particularly online, with and against normative institutional narratives about how to properly *be a Mormon*.

Research Questions

Broadly, then, this dissertation questions what it means to belong to a religious community in America today by exploring the gaps in the existing literature on Mormon identity. American values of self-determination and agency, as well as the arguable hegemony of confessional faiths, contribute to a socially normative view of individual religiosity as predicated on a series of binaries: membership or non-membership in a group; belief or disbelief in a doctrinal canon; acceptance or rejection of an identity. Affiliation with a particular religious group is taken as evidence of an individual's adoption of an entire canon of belief and practice. Indeed, many religious groups rely on these categories for boundary maintenance. In most organized religions, cultural gatekeepers determine who is "in" and who is "out" by bounding off salient identity constructs.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints -- a religion which requires both belief and participation as markers of belonging-- provides a compelling setting to study of the processes underlying religious identity construction. The institutional Church recognizes specific categories for belonging which loosely represent a hierarchy of communal legitimacy: from active and temple-worthy members at the one extreme, to nonmembers and the excommunicated at the other, each category marked by its own behavioral and belief expectations. But beyond institutional categories, how are conceptions of appropriate and legitimate identity changing both

during the recent "Mormon moment" and in this age of internet community, as Mormonism comes increasingly under public scrutiny in highly visible, mediated environments?

While popular media depictions and Mormon institutional categories idealize and normalize the active Mormon and promote an image of homogeneity in both Mormon belief and practice, my preliminary inquiries into Mormon identity have shown that individual Mormons nuance their faith and practice, crafting negotiated versions of what it means to be Mormon, particularly in online spaces where access and anonymity create opportunities for heterodox expression and expansion. Some do so in ways that challenge the culture or doctrine of the Church; to the extent that their beliefs or behavior threaten the authority of orthodox teachings and practice, they may be marginalized, ostracized, disfellowshipped, or even excommunicated.

This dissertation investigates these various contestations of the meaning of religious identity and belonging as a way of considering, in our digital and diverse age, what narratives are privileged in the definition of religious identity. It is also a window into the ways that individuals use personal agency to negotiate structural constraints in the ongoing task of crafting their religious identities. Mormonism provides a compelling environment for this study, as the LDS Church is a highly bureaucratic and authoritarian organization with the power to speak normatively increasing as bureaucratic authority increases. Thus normative, public Mormon voices offer constructions of Mormonism that conflict with lived Mormon identities in stark and explicit ways. What is officially said in the public sphere by those with the power to speak normatively regarding Mormon identity sometimes conflicts with conceptions of identity among individuals within the Church itself. Moreover, because of the nature of the Church's teachings about morality, values, modern-day revelation, and order, certain delegitimized identity constructs are silenced altogether.

These tensions between institutional and individual discourses often result in mediated and publicly visible internecine conflicts online, which offer real-time instantiations of the negotiation of power inherent in religious belonging. While much has been written on the

marginalization of minority groups within the broader American culture, little research has been done on the ways that minority groups themselves marginalize particular members or particular identity constructs, or on the role of the internet in shaping and negotiating borders of belonging within closed religious groups. In the case of the Mormon faith, an array of actors—normative Mormon authorities, orthodox practitioners, heterodox members, dissidents, former members, and the non-Mormon public—converge online in a discursive interplay aimed at crafting the very definition of Mormonism. This interplay is competitive in nature, with each voice contending for the role of identity gatekeeper; and the stakes are high for American culture, the Mormon institution, and Mormons themselves.

The following research questions highlight my attempt to understand Mormon identity construction as a process of both individual negotiation and dialogic interplay between these competing voices in the digital age:

- What are the roles of *institutional structure* and *personal agency* in the construction of modern Mormon identities?

- What is the role of *internecine conflict* in the negotiation of these identities?

- How are these processes complicated by *mediating technologies*, especially the internet? In particular, to what extent and how do features of internet culture contribute to a shift in modern Mormon identities?

Dissertation Structure and Operationalization of Categories

The research questions undergirding this dissertation foreground "structure" versus "agency" as conceptual categories for understanding how identity is created and maintained in the context of Mormon experience. Structure and agency as orienting categories are relevant here both for their salience to Mormon history and doctrine, a connection which will be parsed out in the following chapter, and for their role as orienting categories in the academic discipline of

cultural studies more broadly. Those categories stem from a long tradition of cultural studies research, with a particular connection to work by Anthony Giddens (1991). Giddens conceptualizes identity as a project that tacks back and forth between *expectations, constraints, and norms created and enforced by social institutions of power* (what he calls and I adopt as *structure*), and *an individual's desire and capacity to independently pick and choose among available options for their own behavior and identity* (an ability I conceptualize as *agency*). My research attempts to locate these negotiations in real time and analyze their connection to internet mediation.

I draw on fieldwork among Mormons to foreground the importance of *internecine conflict* in these negotiations, which I define as *discursive and ideological contestations over appropriate interpretation and/or enactment of identity, and involving two or more subgroups within the community who take differing ideological stances on a given issue*. While conflicts of various intensities exist in any organization, I restrict my inquiry to those internecine conflicts that threaten the cohesion of the broader Mormon community. In my previous work, it was apparent that internecine conflicts in Mormonism are ongoing and often volatile and divisive. Informants indicated that their experiences of acceptance or rejection in Mormon communities are often shaped by these conflicts; thus internecine conflicts in Mormonism work as largely grassroots efforts to police the borders of the community, often forcing out certain heterodox perspectives.

To understand the function of internecine conflict in Mormon identity construction, I employ the concept of "voice." If Mormon identity is dialogically constructed, then its meaning is socially constituted by the interplay of competing voices engaged in internecine conflict. "Voice" as a theoretical category implies construction of identity that is active, intentional, and social. Rather than considering the narratives of various Mormon voices in isolation, I use Michael Holquist's (2002) dialogic analysis as a way to locate each element of interanimated Mormon identity from various key players in its construction and consider these various and often competing voices *in conversation with one another.* As a dialogic analysis of the concept of

"Mormon identity," this project juxtaposes categories of various relevant voices competing to define LDS identity, which I draw from my own previous fieldwork and research on Mormon identity, in an attempt to locate emerging Mormon identities as they are constructed.

To that end, following this introductory chapter, this dissertation is divided into five subsequent chapters which examine the interplay between various voices with competing interests in the construction of Mormon identity. Chapter two, "Normative Voices: Caffeine, Agency, and the Role of Rules in Mormon Identity," examines the relationship between the structure of the LDS Church—both bureaucratic and theological—and the way it is practiced by faithful members. It is an examination of how norms develop as signifiers of LDS belonging, and how those norms are circulated online and variously adopted or resisted among practitioners. This is an investigation of the distinctions between institutional religion ("official" doctrine) and lived religion (culture), illustrating that while the two constructions of normalcy may differ in type, they do not differ in kind: both are normalized constructions that have the weight of authority and serve the function of bounding off the ritual community. Culture becomes structure in Mormon practice, and discourses circulated on the internet provide fodder for internecine conflicts that solidify the values of the group. Resistance to hegemonic cultural narratives discursively locates individuals within fragmented Mormon communities -- ever more ubiquitous due to increasing access to and participation in online forums -- and signals fault lines within Mormonism as a group. Moreover, ways of parsing Mormon identity serve as surveillance technologies for members of the community to monitor the identities of other members, particularly when these are broadcast via mediating technologies.

Chapter three, "Mitt Romney and Bifurcated Mormon Representation," draws on the previous chapter's explanation of group monitoring and idealized LDS normativity as a way of understanding the discourse surrounding Mitt Romney's 2012 Presidential run within Mormon interpretive communities As national attention focused on the LDS faith, three major stakeholder groups seized upon the opportunity to interpret Mormonism variously for public consumption.

First, the press -- with its own tensions between the duty to inform and the need to entertain -- wavered between respectful avoidance and salacious digging, hinting at Mormonism's precarious standing in the national conversation between mainstream and decidedly weird. Second, Mitt Romney himself and his conservative Mormon supporters obscured Romney's Mormonism, depicting him as a patriotic, blue-blooded American for whom Mormonism was an important yet tangential aspect. This perspective parallels the modern LDS Church's public relations strategy with its attempt downplay significant differences. Third, progressive Mormons supportive of Barack Obama's incumbency used the political moment to circulate online critiques of Romney as a poor example of lived Mormonism-- indeed, as a bad Mormon-- simultaneously advancing their own vision of proper Mormon identity and circumventing cultural taboos on critiquing the conservative institution. These narratives represent diverse camps in Mormon identity and ideology, and the conflicts and tensions between these groups came to a head on the internet, where their narratives were circulated and reproduced in public view. In addition to shedding light on the ways that members of the group use in-group social cues to determine one's standing in the faith, these narratives highlight the tensions between structure (e.g., roles and norms) and agency (individualization and interpretation) in Mormon identity construction today.

Chapter four, "Wars and Rumors of Wars: Apologetic and Dissent Communities," examines the limits of belonging in Mormonism by considering two largely mediated communities on the periphery. If Mormon identities fall on a spectrum from conservative and orthodox to progressive and heterodox, apologetic and dissent communities online map out the margins for belonging. In a prominent instance of internecine conflict between two primarily male LDS communities on the periphery of Mormon identity, institutional forces policed and contained unacceptable discourse. I generate a two-part analysis of this conflict: in the first part, I focus on normative expectations for proper interpersonal exchanged, built on gendered notions of group cohesion and deferral to authority. But ongoing, volatile conflicts between apologetic and dissent groups violate these norms, marking moments of agential renegotiation of group boundaries. I

argue that the disruption of fundamental Mormon traits in these groups' performance of what I call "Mormon machismo" places them outside the limits of Mormon belonging, and because their discursive performances are publicly visible via the internet, they constitute a threat to the institution which must be policed and contained. In the second part of the chapter, I analyze the mechanisms used by the institution to police the community's boundaries through recent public censuring of prominent leaders of these groups.

Chapter five, "Negotiating Mormon Womanhood: Patriarchy, Feminisms, and Digital Discourse," examines ways that women in particular negotiate belonging within the LDS Church, which is both theologically and institutionally patriarchal. Examining the institutional rhetoric around womanhood, I argue that the Church creates an ideal feminine which Mormon women then adopt, negotiate, or resist in their own identity articulation. Grounding my analysis in a case study of a prominent Mormon feminist mass action called "Wear Pants to Church Day," I show how Internet communities of feminist Mormons resist the Church's gender essentialism, yet in their rhetoric still ground their identities in Mormon's essential reliance on community through the reappropriation of historical narratives and through their use of testimony sharing as a defensive communication strategy.

Finally, chapter six, "Shifting Voices: Changing Constructions of Mormon Identity in a Digital Age," examines the internet as an agent of change vis-à-vis religious institutional narratives, signaling historic shifts in Mormon identity. The LDS Church has a history of policing media content through "correlation," a strict process of monitoring church-related materials for content cohesion. Today, the open-text of Web 2.0 interfaces that allow social media dialogue and user-generated content, while threatening institutional control, creates openings for new negotiations of what it means to be Mormon. In this chapter, I juxtapose two institutional efforts to confront the reality of the digital age: efforts toward greater institutional transparency and accountability, exemplified in the Gospel Topics essay initiative; and a recent rash of excommunications aimed at those who have campaigned for greater institutional transparency

and accountability. I argue that these two contravening efforts are two sides of the same coin, and evidence of an institution grappling with the reality of shifting cultural norms. I conclude with a revisitation of the role of the internet in Mormon identity construction, considering the evidence for a shift in both the *cultural and sacred meaning* of Mormon identity and considering the implications of "change" within an institution whose *raison d'être* is its supposed sacred immutability. Beyond Mormonism, I suggest that the analysis of religious identities and the Internet, which must be located within a dynamic field of historical and political contingencies, points toward a revolution in religion in the digital era.

Chapters two through five open with a focusing narrative, a widely-circulated mediated example of internecine conflict which occurred during my research period (2012 through early 2013). These events, true "Mormon moments," are case studies that introduce, contextualize, and challenge ways of being Mormon in line with the practice of "incident analysis" within the field of history. As cultural historian Robert Darnton explains, incident analysis

> deals with the concatenation of events rather than merely the events themselves. It attempts to find their meanings—what they meant to the people who experienced them and to those who learned about them later. It therefore concentrates on reports of incidents and the way they echoed through various modes of communication. (Darnton 2004)

I chose particular "incidents" or mediated moments because of their importance and high circulation within Mormon communities online, and because the conflicts featured largely *mattered most to Mormons*, not to the broader American public. The types of conflicts disrupted the community, and the narratives deployed as strategies for negotiating these conflicts highlight Mormon values and norms by exposing the structural constraints on Mormon identity in particular contexts. I contend that these events offer a glimpse of the structures at work in Mormon identity construction, and responses to these events help pinpoint the limits of Mormon agency. My aim, then, is not to play the role of the empirical historian in parsing out exactly what happened in each internecine conflict, but to track how the narratives of these events circulated and transformed as

they moved through the media and through Mormon communities, and to draw on these

circulations as evidence for the structural and agential elements of Mormon identities[12].

---

[12] For more on the methodology of this dissertation, see Appendix I.

CHAPTER 2: Normative Voices: Caffeine, Agency, and the Role of Rules in Mormon Identity

"Wherefore, men … are free to choose liberty and eternal life, through the great Mediator of all men, or to choose captivity and death."
(2 Nephi 2:27, The Book of Mormon)

"Whatever the unifying nature of religion… the history of religions has been the history of great discord. It would seem that nothing can more effectively set people at odds than the demand that they think alike. For, given our many disparate ways of life, we couldn't really think alike, even if we wanted to. Though we repeated exactly the same articles of faith, we'd understand them differently to the extent that our relations to them differed." (Kenneth Burke 1961:v)

Throughout 2012, critical national attention on the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints seemed at an all-time high as the media worked to translate Mormonism for public consumption. In one broad-reaching instance of this attention, on August 23 NBC featured a special Mormon-themed edition of its prime-time television news show *Rock Center with Brian Williams.* Titled "Mormon in America," the hour-long episode explored various aspects of Mormon life. The ostensible aim of the special-- airing as it did just four days before the start of the Republican National Convention at which Mitt Romney would become the first Mormon ever nominated for president by a major party-- was to educate the American public on little-known aspects of Romney's faith. One topic, mentioned only in passing during the hour-long report, was the oft-cited but ill-understood relationship between the Mormon faith and the proscription on caffeine consumption.

Amidst representations of diversity in Mormon identity, such as noted feminist Joanna Brooks, gay progressive Mitch Mayne, and former Mormon Abby Huntsman (daughter of one-time presidential hopeful Jon Huntsman), the report highlighted one suburban Utah family as archetypal Mormons, fulfilling cultural stereotypes (prevalent both within and without the Church) of Mormons as traditional and orthodox practitioners. On *Rock Center,* the Jacksons were models of normativity and assent to the institutional Church, illustrating idealized Mormon belonging underscored by film footage and discussion of their dedication to family and congregation, daily

family prayer, faithful service to Church callings, and devotion to even the minutia of LDS belief and lifestyle expectations. In one brief moment, stay-at-home mother of five Juleen Jackson was asked by the interviewer whether she drinks caffeine; with a slight smile she responded, "No." Then, pressed on whether she had ever had a cup of coffee, she said "No," but laughed and added apologetically that she did *once* consume a Coke. These questions were followed by other inquiries into her Mormon *bona fides*—whether she consumes alcohol and wears her temple garments. Later in the program her husband, a convert to the Church, joked that he struggled with his Coke habit, a reference not to the illicit drug but the soft drink.

These casual inquiries into Mormon caffeine consumption on a primetime news special sounded no alarms in the secular media (except as a way of marking Mormons as "different"), but set off a discursive firestorm within Mormon communities online about the contested role of caffeine in the LDS lifestyle—whether or not it actually is against LDS doctrine and/or policy to avoid it, and what it says about a Mormon who chooses to forgo its consumption (or not). Many Mormons believe that avoiding caffeine is a "higher law," and their avoidance of it serves as a status symbol or mark of commitment to righteous living, or orthopraxy. Other Mormons routinely drink caffeinated soft drinks or even energy drinks, avoiding coffee and tea but not caffeine per se, and believe the avoidance of caffeine to be a legalistic and ignorant misinterpretation and failure to properly divide culture from doctrine. Because caffeine consumption or avoidance is a personal practice that occurs in relatively private settings, over the years most Mormons engaged in this practice apart from the prying eyes of other members of the community and without much social fallout for their choices; but online debates about caffeine's propriety turned a relatively private issue into a community-wide debate.

The debate, of course, was never just about caffeine; it was about the porosity or density of boundaries for being Mormon, about the role of rules in religious life, about the function of online surveillance within the community, and about the nature of authority and revelation in the context of Mormon praxis. Using this mediated moment as a launching point to dissect questions

of authority and normativity, this chapter examines the construction of Mormon identity through discourses of boundary delineation and negotiation in online spaces. As Foucault (1990; 1976) reminds us, our experiences of reality are mediated by the discourses we use to describe them. These discourses are never neutral, being over-determined by structures of power; and yet they are also never static, being negotiated and re-imagined through an individual's own agency. Institutionally, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints provides an ideological structure through which faithful Mormons interpret its edicts, transforming these spoken and unspoken rules into cultural norms. Thus in lived Mormonism, discourses differentiating between "culture" and "doctrine" serve as ways to police belonging, but because of their ambiguity, allow for renegotiation of Mormon norms by practitioners. The polyphony of the internet brings these previously-private renegotiations to the fore for analysis, while the transparency of the internet allows us to capture the process of identity construction in real time. Using data from discourse analysis and interviews, I will show how institutional, Church-sponsored representations of Mormon identity become constructions of normativity which presuppose a form of power and authority apart from theological ideas about doctrine, which are in turn negotiated by members in a cultural dance of meaning-making. This is the interplay of structure and agency, the intermingling of constraint with choice and play.

First, I outline briefly some structural considerations which may seem ancillary to our main points of discussion but which provide an important framework for understanding identity negotiation within the Mormon context. I then describe the history and role of dietary rules in Mormon identity, as an entryway into a discussion of two important nodes of LDS institutional control, authority and normativity; these nodes form the "structure" against which Mormons enact their religious identities. This is followed with an exploration of orthopraxy, or right living, as a cultural lynchpin for "being" Mormon and a prime example of the role of agency in negotiating identity within the bounds of structure. I conclude with a discussion of Mormon imagined community and the threats posed to it by digital interactions.

Contextualizing Mormon Identity: A Structural Sketch of the LDS Church

As an entrée into discussion of the roles of structure and agency in Mormon identity, we first must go into some detail about the institutional Church. The history, governing structure, rules, policies, and teachings of the institution, as well as the cultural disciplinary mechanisms that maintain those norms, form the structure against which agency is exercised in the LDS context. These structural elements are interwoven, albeit often loosely, forming a complex cultural system in which norms often go unspoken.

Relevant points of departure from mainstream Christianity

The organization that would become the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was founded in 1830 not as a new religion, but as a *restoration* of Christ's original church and the "true" Christian gospel which, according to Smith, had been corrupted and ultimately lost from the earth after Jesus' death. These two competing impulses – that of new religious movement versus ancient faith restored—manifest in a modern tension between progressivism and change on the one hand, and conservatism and tradition on the other. Moreover, the Church-as-restoration paradigm has, since the Church's inception, defined Mormon identity both with and against mainstream notions of Christianity, as the power of Mormonism is found in both its claim to continuity with Christ's gospel and its selfsame avowed difference from the corruption of that very gospel. The Church has grown from its original six members to its current worldwide estimate of fourteen million members, and Mormons now comprise about 1.7% of the United States' population (CIA World Factbook 2011), or just over 6 million people. For comparison, the number of Mormons in the United States as well as worldwide is almost identical to prominent estimates of the number of Jews, a detail which is one of many parallels between LDS and Jewish identity. In some ways the LDS Church positions itself as both a restoration of true Christianity, and true

Jewry, teaching that nearly all Mormons are literal genetic descendants of a tribe of Israel[13]. But perhaps more interesting for our purposes, both groups' population counts are loose estimates and highly controversial[14], signaling difficulty within and without the groups in accounting for who belongs—and who does not.

Despite their reliance on Jesus Christ in theology and worship, other distinctive and central beliefs and practices place Mormons squarely outside the American mainstream, a difference which has historically led to the perception among many mainstream Christians that Mormonism is a dangerous cult rather than a legitimate Christian denomination[15]. This aversion is centered in many major doctrinal and practical departures from historical Christian norms, not the least of which is that while mainstream Christian churches teach that the canon of scripture is closed, the LDS Church emphasizes "continuing revelation"[16]. In theory, if not in frequent practice, the canon of Scripture is never closed in Mormonism, and not only can new revelations be received, but prior ones can be revealed to be outmoded (e.g., the once "new and everlasting covenant" [D&C 132:6] of plural marriage was later declared to have been necessary only for a "time and season") or even wrongly ascribed revelatory status (e.g., the priesthood ban on men of African descent is now said to have never been an actual doctrine, just a mere cultural practice wrongly afforded doctrinal status). The doctrine of continuing revelation specifies that new truths are revealed as God communicates directly with modern day prophets, of whom Joseph Smith was the first; he has been succeeded by subsequent presidents of the Church who are sustained as "prophets, seers, and revelators." Because of continuing revelation, then, the question of doctrinality is an open one that applies not only to new issues that arise, but that is also

---

[13] Individual Mormons receive personalized "patriarchal blessings" which, among other things, declare their individual lineage to be from particular houses of Israel; see Ludlow 1991 for a more thorough explanation of this teaching.
[14] Some scholars and critics feel that the Church grossly overestimates its membership through reported practices such as "baseball baptisms" – whereby some missionaries have been said to increase their baptism rates by inviting young boys to participate in sports activities and yet requiring them to be baptized first – and by counting inactive members, even those who have not stepped foot in a church building since childhood, until they reach the age of 110.
[15] See Farmer 2012 for a pictorial overview of representations of Mormonism in the media from 1830 to 2012, a primary source collection which highlights Mormons' outsider status in largely-Christian America.
[16] The belief in continuing revelation is summarized in the Ninth Article of Faith: "We believe all that God has revealed, all that He does now reveal, and we believe that He will yet reveal many great and important things pertaining to the Kingdom of God" (Articles of Faith 1:9, *Pearl of Great Price*).

retroactively applied to norms already accepted by the Church which have fallen out of favor. Missionaries and other LDS proselytizers often challenge the Western hegemonic conception of a closed canon by asking mainstream Christian investigators[17], "Why would God stop speaking to his children?"

The Mormon canonization process

Because of Mormonism's open scriptural canon, the sacred text known as *Doctrine and Covenants* (D&C) is viewed by Mormons as a living document, a record of revelations received by the Church's founding prophet Joseph Smith and—to a much lesser degree— by his successors[18]. Despite the importance of the open canon in Mormonism, while new revelations were prolific in the Church's early years, the most recent addition to the *Doctrine and Covenants* is "Official Declaration 2," which in 1978 extended the LDS priesthood to men of African descent; prior to that, the "Vision of the Redemption of the Dead," recorded in Section 138, was accepted as doctrine in 1976, although it had been received and taught by President Joseph F. Smith in 1918 (see Woodford 2001).

In a church founded and dependent on this idea of an open canon, new doctrines must go through a ritualized canonization process in order to attain the weight of authority necessary to become naturalized in members' beliefs and behaviors (see Geertz 1966, Rappaport 1999, Heilman 2001). Thus the ritual processes surrounding the acceptance and institutionalization of doctrine functions sociologically to reaffirm group cohesion and commitment among Mormons. Only four months after officially organizing his church, Smith received revelation instituting a practice of "common consent" (see D&C 26:2 and 107:27:31), ritualizing the addition of doctrine to the Mormon canon as the proposed addendum is "sustained," or voted on, by the LDS

---

[17] "Investigator" is the emic Mormon term for anyone who is asking questions about the LDS faith with the perceived potential to convert. It is often used to describe those who allow missionaries to come into their homes to teach lessons about Church history and practice.
[18] Along with the *Doctrine and Covenants*, the *Pearl of Great Price* is another sacred LDS text that is open-canon.

membership (an early nod to democratic American norms that figured in Mormonism's early practice, but that obfuscates the hierarchical nature of modern Mormonism).

Sustaining a new doctrine, much like sustaining the Church's leaders as they are inaugurated, is an oblique process that Mormons often refer to as the litmus test of whether or not a particular teaching or belief is legitimately "doctrine" or not – and thus, whether complicity to it is binding and can, implicitly, be used as a social means of gauging other members' standing. In current practice, a new doctrine (or leader) is sustained at the Church's largest meeting, General Conference, in the Salt Lake City Conference Center by a show of hands (Pixton 2001). Bodily investment is a necessary means by which religious ritual increases individual and group commitment to any religious community (Rappaport 1999); as a new doctrine is presented by leaders who are *a priori* deemed revelators in communication with the divine, Mormons raise their hands, literally putting their bodies on the line to signal their assent to the liturgical order. This question of bodily investment is further implicated in the issue of caffeine consumption, as we will see.

Like all rituals, meant to be faith-affirming and cohesion inducing, the process of sustaining new doctrine is largely symbolic; votes are not counted. As the process is not clarified in LDS scripture, it is unclear if a majority or unanimous vote is required for a new doctrine to be canonized, but that matters little since negative votes are rare (in fact, in April 2015 a small protest group stood and yelled "opposed" during General Conference to signal their opposition to LDS leaders, but despite gathering some media attention, the protest had no noticeable effect). While doctrine must be approved by a sustaining vote of the members, the Church employs no systematic way of ascertaining that the membership does in fact sustain the doctrine[19].   Still, the process of proposing, sustaining, and recording new teachings in the Mormon scriptural canon is counted as evidence of a teaching's status as "doctrine," which lends it the status of divine mandate, and implies group commitment to the terms of the doctrine. The myth of common

---

[19] Anecdotally, some members have told me that in their local congregations when new officers are proposed and voted on, dissenting voters are "taken aside" afterwards and questioned on why they opposed. However, the bishop or other presiding authority can then move forward with whatever decision they feel led to make, regardless of opposing voices.

consent, that the Church's positions and leaders are unequivocally supported by the entire membership in a democratic voting process, contributes to feelings of unity and imagined community.

Because doctrine is seen as divinely revealed, acceptance of it is generally taken as a necessary requirement for belonging within the Mormon community; indeed, today's biggest threats to group-wide cohesion in Mormonism often stem from claims by marginal groups and individuals that challenge status quo interpretations of doctrine (e.g., claims by Mormon feminists that women should hold the all-male priesthood; or claims by progressive LDS that same-sex marriage should be recognized or at least not opposed by the Church). Among countless points of doctrinal distinction, adherence to the Word of Wisdom is one way that Mormons mark their bodies as properly Mormon (Rappaport 1999). In Mormonism, proper belief (or orthodoxy) is implicit unless stated otherwise; but it is through *doing* things the right way that Mormons signal their assent to the Church's regulations, and thus communicate their normative membership and submission to the group. But when the wording of Mormon doctrine is ambiguous (and it nearly always is), and when leaders offer no clarification, individual Mormons must determine how to follow it according to their own interpretation, which they often refer to emically as "agency" and which involves a negotiation of practical considerations, social expectations, and an affective response or feeling about what is right. This navigation underscores the tension between structure and agency in Mormon identity construction.

The bureaucratic structure of LDS normativity and control

In addition to the divine appointment of latter-day prophets, Smith taught that Christ's ancient priesthood was restored, giving authority in various increments to all worthy men over the age of twelve. "Priesthood authority" refers to this divine authority, received through the laying on of hands, to conduct ritual ordinances and give blessings (special prophetic prayers) in God's

name. Women's access to priesthood is limited to marriage or other close association with a male priesthood holder. The concept of Priesthood authority not only sets Mormonism apart from other Christian groups, it also creates a structure within the LDS culture that gives both spoken and unspoken normative authority to those with divinely sanctioned "voice." In practical terms, this means Church leaders have more sway than congregants, that men have more authority than women, and that ultimately the refusal to accept or submit to counsel from leaders is tantamount to rejecting God's chosen leadership, and thus God himself. The stakes are high in a culture built on the concept of Priesthood authority.

Partially as a result of this hierarchy of leadership, the LDS Church has evolved to become an institutional monolith, highly bureaucratic and authoritarian in structure, with a clearly demarcated chain of command among those in leadership positions. Headquartered in Salt Lake City, Utah—where early Mormon pioneers settled under the leadership of Brigham Young to avoid persecution and prosecution– the leadership of the Church is structured hierarchically and known as the "General Authorities," comprised of five interrelated governing bodies. At the apex of authority is the prophet, currently Thomas S. Monson, who together with his two counselors comprises the First Presidency; they are spiritual and temporal figureheads and carry the most normative weight as mouthpieces of God on Earth, the prophet most of all. The normative authority of the prophet cannot be overstated; he is revered and nearly worshipped, in a fashion similar to the Catholic Pope.

Below the First Presidency in structural authority is the twelve-member Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, who primarily travel and give religious "talks" (LDS parlance for the equivalent of sermons or homilies). Continuing down the chain of command is the seven-member Presidency of the Seventy, who primarily preside over both the First Quorum of the Seventy and the Second Quorum of the Seventy, both of which may have up to seventy members at a given time. Below all of these is the Presiding Bishopric, who oversee the Aaronic Priesthood and who

are responsible largely for administrative affairs[20]. All of these hundred-odd General Authorities are men, and the vast majority are American, white, and from upper-middle class business backgrounds. Men are divinely "called" to all of these positions generally after years of faithful local service and success in their secular careers.

In addition to the all-male General Authority structure, there are "General Auxiliaries" each consisting of a President and two counselors: the Primary General Presidency (overseeing children's programs), the Relief Society General Presidency (overseeing women's programs), the Sunday School General Presidency, the Young Men General Presidency, and the Young Women General Presidency. Women's leadership at the structural level is relegated to presiding over other women (in the Relief Society and the Young Women's program) and over children (Primary) (LDS 2013). Auxiliary leaders have less normative sway than General Authorities, but considerably more than local leaders or especially lay members.

Mormons' scripted roles

Mormons' individual roles within the structure are constrained by various additional considerations. Traditionally the Church has been a firmly-bounded, "closed" organization (King & King 1972), with access to membership difficult and internal cohesion and control high. Categories which emphasize practice and faith embodiment (orthopraxy) classify individuals' standings in the faith: a "member" assents to the Church's teachings verbally and is subsequently baptized by someone with priesthood authority. While membership is the least necessary requirement to be counted as "Mormon," membership is itself a multivalent category: an "active" member embodies his or her assent to the organization through attendance and service, fulfillment of voluntary service called callings, tithing ten percent of his or her income, and following prescriptions for morality and daily living. An "inactive" member, generally referring to

---

[20] See http://www.lds.org/church/leaders for an organizational flowchart of the current General Authorities and descriptions of their various responsibilities.

someone who has once been baptized but no longer attends services, has fulfilled the basic

obligations but has neglected practice—thus this category includes as diverse a group as

believing Mormons who have fallen out of habit, to individuals baptized as children but who left

the Church as adults and never autonomously accepted the doctrine. A "non-member," then, is

one who has never been a part of the faith or who has resigned his or her membership or been

excommunicated. Occasionally, and only in internal discourse, an even stronger term

demarcates outsiders: they are referred to as Gentiles (see Ludlow 1991, Sitati 2009), the

ultimate outsider to the Mormons' chosenness[21].

These emic terms – "active," "inactive," and "non-member/Gentile," serve to reinforce

organizational boundaries through "us" and "them" distinctions and are helpful for increasing and

maintaining group solidarity. Based on the Church's emphasis on individual praxis, it seems easy

to judge a Mormon as "in" or "out" of the firm boundaries provided by the institution and to

categorize them according to the Church's taxonomy. But the terms also create an illusion of

homogeneity within the faith itself, conflating participation with assent to the tenets, doctrines, and

even history of the Church; and this illusion is complicated by the understanding that individuals

with heterodox perspectives must keep them to themselves or face social and/or institutional

sanction.

As an institutional tactic to maintain a high level of member control, pervasive rules for

members function as commitment mechanisms and contribute to group cohesion and member

retention (cf., Kanter 1968, King & King 1972). Members are effectively rank-ordered in terms of

personal "worthiness": the institutional Church primarily emphasizes orthopraxy – right action, or

rule keeping—to distinguish legitimate members from outsiders; but the Church also prizes

orthodoxy, or right thinking, as a central characteristic of model or worthy members. To be

"temple-worthy," and thus able to partake in the highest rites of the Church, members must

engage in appropriate moral action (such as tithing ten percent of one's income, keeping the

---

[21] Of course, the use of the word "Gentile" is another self-imposed linkage between Mormonism and Judaism; it has been said that only in Mormonism can a Jew be referred to as a Gentile.

health code known as the Word of Wisdom, conforming to the Law of Chastity, and—after going through esoteric temple ceremonies—wearing particular garments). These are ways individuals embody Mormonism. Temple-worthiness is lauded as the ideal status for Mormon faithful: as Elder Russell M. Nelson of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles put it, "The Lord would be pleased if every adult member would be worthy of—and carry—a current temple recommend" (Ballard 2010).

But temple attendance also requires that Mormons verbally testify to the Church's truthfulness (and, implicitly, its literality). Moreover, members are expected to give regular talks in the church and "bear their testimonies," emphasizing that they *know* the Church is true[22]. Additionally, requirements and social expectations for active membership include attendance at weekly church meetings and other special meetings, volunteer service in various capacities, responsibility to visit assigned ward members, and many other expectations, all of which are time-consuming and make church the primary social sphere for a faithful member. In this way, the Church constructs a scale of belonging—necessary requirements for *mere* membership privilege action and embodiment, but necessary requirements to be "worthy" or an *ideal* member involve belief and implied internalization of the teachings of the Church. Tellingly, in interviews many members have said, "As a Mormon, you can believe anything you want—as long as you don't tell anyone." This tension between orthopraxy and orthodoxy—and the mixed messages the Church sends about which it prioritizes-- are integral to the framework or structure against which modern Mormon identity is negotiated.

The Word of Wisdom and Beyond: Rule-Keeping and Mormon identity

Situated within this web of structural constraints shaping LDS identity lies the distinct Mormon dietary code known as the Word of Wisdom. Juleen Jackson's public declaration that

---

[22]Differentiating between knowledge versus mere belief or faith is a major narrative strategy distinguishing true insiders; see Avance 2013.

she eschews caffeinated beverages and *Rock Center's* offhanded representation of this as a peculiar, and peculiarly Mormon, edict represents a contentious if common interpretation of this code, outlined in Section 89 of one of Mormonism's sacred scriptural texts, the *Doctrine and Covenants*. To understand the function of the Word of Wisdom in Mormon praxis, it is necessary first to explain its source.

A history of the Word of Wisdom

History is a vital reference point for Mormon identity, and the history of the Word of Wisdom at once elucidates the ways Mormons embody it today and provides an illustration of the way norms are circulated and advanced within the community. Revelations received by the acting prophet and recorded as doctrine are historically contingent textual creations which, stamped with the title of "official Church doctrine," become inexorable truth for Mormon faithful. Despite the "aura of factuality" (Geertz 1966) they garner, Mormon doctrines' specificity as historical products matters when considering evolving Mormon identities. This history marks the ways that religious rules become part of an "invented tradition" (see Davies 2011), which taken together creates a religious ethos around which the community is structured.

The Word of Wisdom was received and recorded by Joseph Smith in 1833 after his wife Emma complained about Smith and his colleagues' habit of chewing and spitting tobacco in her home during their meetings. Smith said he prayed about tobacco use and in response received the divine revelation which would become Doctrine and Covenants Section 89 (see D&C 89). In addition to tobacco, the passage specifically mentions avoidance of "wine," "strong drink," and "hot drinks;" and goes on to prescribe proper uses of various foodstuffs including scant meat, reliance on grain, and consumption of seasonal produce. But the wording of the passage is ambiguous, leaving room for personal interpretation: verse 9, relevant for our purposes here, simply says, "And again, hot drinks are not for the body or belly." Debates over what constitutes

"hot drinks" and whether these are prohibited or simply cautioned against highlight LDS efforts to define clear boundaries for the community, and help explain the accompanying emphasis on orthopraxy[23] that these boundaries inculcated in the early Church.

Hyrum Smith, acting as Assistant President, clarified "hot drinks" specifically as coffee and tea in 1842 in the Church's magazine *Times and Seasons* (Smith 1842:800); and yet at that time LDS faithful saw the pronouncement on coffee and tea, as well as the rest of the health code, as sound advice to take or leave (indeed, it was a "word of wisdom" rather than a command). It was not until the later presidency of Heber J. Grant, who served from 1918 to 1922, that strict observance of the Word of Wisdom became a moral code (Bowman 2012:170), reinforcing the Church's political posturing during America's movement toward Prohibition. It was also at this time that observance of the Word of Wisdom was rhetorically reduced to specifically refer to a prohibition against alcohol, tobacco, coffee, and tea. By 1933, observance of the Word of Wisdom was listed in the *General Handbook of Instructions* as a requirement for admission to the temple and thus participation in the Church's highest sacraments (McConkie and Ostler 1964). Since that time, according to religious historian Matthew Bowman, "the Word of Wisdom has become perhaps the most recognizable social marker for Mormons in America" (Bowman 2012:170)—both marking Mormons as different from non-LDS society, and serving as an in-group marker of commitment and status.

Proscriptions like the Word of Wisdom are found in most religious traditions, and were particularly common among groups established during the Second Great Awakening when Mormonism was born. As Rosabeth Moss Kanter shows in her study of 19th century utopian societies, swearing off particular practices like coffee and tea prior to baptism is not unique to Mormonism. The ritual practice of requiring new members to sacrifice particularly dear luxuries and pleasures increases the success of a community by asserting control over individual members. Pervasive rules function as commitment mechanisms and contribute to group

---

[23] In addition to its emphasis on orthopraxy, Church teachings and cultural norms emphasize orthodoxy, or right belief, as discussed in following chapters.

cohesion and member retention (cf., Kanter 1968, King & King 1972). Kanter (1968) defines

commitment as "the process through which individual interests become attached to the carrying

out of socially organized patterns of behavior which are seen as fulfilling those interests, as

expressing the nature and needs of the person" (500); in modern lived Mormonism, the Word of

Wisdom functions to increase commitment to the faith and also stands as a public and visible

symbol of that commitment.

Yet the arbitrariness of avoiding alcohol, tobacco, coffee and tea as primary markers of

LDS commitment and differentiation is perhaps best highlighted by noting that other elements of

the Word of Wisdom are not rigidly adhered by faithful LDS. For instance, the Word advises to

only eat seasonal produce, meat sparingly, and suggests that while members should avoid wine,

the exception is wine taken in the sacrament, which should be "pure wine of the grape of the vine,

of your own make" (D&C 89:6). In fact, contemporary LDS sacrament consists of sliced white

bread and water—never wine—and no emphasis is placed on proper consumption of other

foodstuffs beyond admonitions to treat the body as a temple and thus eat healthfully (an

admonition that does not bear the weight of divine command among most Mormons, known for

their love of ice cream and superb home-baked goods). While alcohol, tobacco, coffee and tea

may be arbitrary, their proscription is a frequent and public reminder to faithful Mormons of their

commitments to Christ and his Church. As one LDS bishop explained, as a businessman who

frequently entertains clients, he must explain and defend his religious convictions on a regular

basis with high stakes for his own social standing and income. The Word of Wisdom forms a

boundary between Mormons and non-Mormons, as a commitment to keep the Word of Wisdom is

one of several requirements for baptism into the Church in the first place.

The ways that Mormons practice the Word of Wisdom in their daily lives hints at a

broader cultural emphasis on orthopraxy even beyond the "letter of the law." Although caffeine

itself is not mentioned in the Word of Wisdom, its avoidance has become a signifier of orthodoxy

in many Mormon communities, particularly in Utah where the LDS population predominates.

Since Hyrum Smith's elucidation that the textual phrase "hot drinks" is meant to refer to coffee and tea, some LDS leaders have publicly speculated that coffee and tea in particular are to be avoided specifically because they contain caffeine, which is habit-forming and thus harmful to the Mormon value of agency (cf., Sill 1980); non-caffeinated herbal teas are not verboten.

Mormon discourse around the proscription of caffeine focuses on its harmful effects: it is habit-forming, it is a harmful drug. An article in the Church owned magazine *Ensign* describes "caffeine addiction" and lists its potential side effects: insomnia, heart disease, depression, and even death. The author notes that the Word of Wisdom "does not specifically prohibit caffeine," but that "if we follow the spirit of the Word of Wisdom, we will be very careful about what we consume, particularly any substance that can have a negative impact on our bodies… This includes caffeine" (Boud 2008). Thus as a pollutant to the body, caffeine is moralized and becomes taboo as "pollution beliefs can uphold the moral code" and are a way of policing the community (Douglas 1996: 134). "Addiction," a devil-word in Mormonism, suggests the sacrifice of agency to evil influence; it is a word applied regularly in Mormon discourse not only to obvious addictions like alcohol and illicit drugs but also to caffeine, pornography, and masturbation, all signifiers of a lack of mastery over the body.

Because of these implications, many modern Mormons, particularly those raised in the Intermountain West, grew up in families that decried caffeine consumption not only in coffee and tea but also in the form of soft drinks—exemplified by Juleen Jackson and her family featured on *Rock Center*. But this avoidance of caffeine is a particularly contentious cultural construction which some Mormons differentiate from "official" doctrine in a rhetorical move that underscores the function of authority, norms, and rule-keeping within the LDS tradition. After *Rock Center,* when the issue was confronted and debated in 2012 by both the LDS institution and its members, fractures in LDS community became publicly visible on the internet.

Mediated fallout: Public declarations, private control

After Juleen Jackson's high profile, public declaration that she does not consume caffeine and *Rock Center's* implication that this is a distinctly Mormon proscription, the Church issued a statement through their Public Affairs Department via its online "Newsroom" blog, located at www.mormonnewsroom.org. The website (originally located at www.newsroom.lds.org) was launched in 2000 as "The official resource for news media, opinion leaders, and the public" (Newsroom 2012) in anticipation of the 2002 Salt Lake City Winter Olympics. It was to be a source for journalists and other news media to find reliable information about the Church and a venue for publicly correcting misconceptions or misrepresentations of Mormonism (particularly its more controversial doctrines) in the media[24], giving the Church a say in the public construction of Mormonism and attempting to police that construction following the tradition of correlation. Responding to *Rock Center*, the Public Affairs statement praised NBC for its "evenhanded" treatment of Mormonism, particularly its positive portrayal of Church welfare programs, but took issue with the implied claim that the Church teaches against the use of caffeine. The statement read:

> Despite what was reported, the Church *does not prohibit the use of caffeine*. The Church's health guidelines, known in our scriptures as "the Word of Wisdom" (Doctrine and Covenants 89), prohibits [*sic*] alcoholic drinks, smoking or chewing of tobacco and "hot drinks" — taught by Church leaders to refer specifically to tea and coffee. The restriction does not go beyond this. (Newsroom 29 August 2012, emphasis mine)

After years of ambiguity on the issue of caffeine, the Church had finally made its stance clear. Many Mormons took to Facebook, Twitter, and personal blogs to celebrate this unique example of Church leadership clarifying an ambiguous point of contention within LDS culture, many echoing the lighthearted celebration evident in a Salt Lake Tribune headline that read: "OK, Mormons, drink up – Coke and Pepsi are OK" (Fletcher Stack 2012b). But the next morning, the

---

[24] See Kirkland (2009) for screen captures of the original site and its development over the years.

Newsroom's statement had changed; with no notation that the entry had been altered[25], it now

read:

> Despite what was reported, the Church revelation spelling out health practices (Doctrine
> and Covenants 89) *does not mention the use of caffeine*. The Church's health
> guidelines prohibits [*sic*] alcoholic drinks, smoking or chewing of tobacco, and "hot
> drinks" — taught by Church leaders to refer specifically to tea and coffee. (Newsroom
> 30 August 2012, emphasis mine)

The Newsroom's parsing of words differentiated carefully between "not prohibiting" caffeine and

"not mentioning" caffeine, and the phrase "The restriction does not go beyond this" was omitted,

which left many Mormons scratching their heads as to whether or not Church leadership – and by

extension, God himself—actually had an opinion on caffeine consumption. If caffeine is not

frowned upon, why did the wording warrant alteration? The vagueness signaled to some

members that the Church in fact does prohibit the use of caffeine, or at the very least does not

recommend it, while still leaving room for the interpretation by other members that caffeine

consumption is acceptable.

In the midst of the discussions that ensued, some began to ponder the statement's

implications. *The Salt Lake Tribune's* religion writer, Peggy Fletcher Stack – herself a heterodox

Mormon known for her critical reporting on the LDS Church—noted that the confusion over

whether or not caffeine is prohibited might stem from the fact that Brigham Young University, a

Church-owned institution, does not sell caffeinated beverages on its campus; its vending

machines and beverage fountains are stocked exclusively with caffeine-free sodas (Fletcher

Stack 2012c). Known for being a strict and conservative campus, BYU is often seen as a

Mormon microcosm and its lifestyle edicts are often extrapolated as broader cultural ideals; even

a 2009 food service industry newsletter, *Food Management,* made the conflation between LDS

culture and teachings in an article which highlighted BYU's dining services:

> To draw customers, [dining services director Dean] Wright must tap into the needs of a
> fairly unique student population. BYU is an institution of the Church of Jesus Christ of

---

[25] Several days later, the entry was marked with an asterisk that indicated "This posting has been updated since it was
originally published."

Latter-Day Saints (LDS). Among other things, that means not just no alcohol, but no caffeine either. (Buzalka 2009).

The issue of caffeine at BYU highlights generational and geographical peculiarities in a worldwide Church still so enmeshed in and reflective of white, upper-middle class Utah culture. At BYU, students bring their cultural baggage from all over the world and encounter the stark reality of a deeply conservative culture. As one caffeine-abstinent professor at BYU explained regarding caffeine and BYU culture, the Word of Wisdom is as much a communicative strategy as it is a health code; just as Jewish dietary laws "set them apart" from other peoples, the Word of Wisdom is one of many Mormon practices that says, according to the professor, "I'm telling you who I am. This is my notice that tells you what I am and what I believe." At BYU, where everyone is assumed to be LDS, caffeine use is a signifier of a lack of commitment to the group; he explains,

> Here at BYU, if I were to walk around with a Coke in my hand, I'm making a statement that I'm not all the way in. Culturally, here, that's what that means. Regardless of whether I think caffeine is good for me or not. In New Jersey if I'm holding that Coke in my hand, it doesn't make the same statement. (Interview, 10 November 2012)

After the *Salt Lake Tribune* pointed out the irony that BYU does not sell caffeinated beverages despite the Newsroom*'s* clarification that the Church has no position on it, confusion abounded about the relationship between BYU's policies and LDS expectations. In response to media queries, BYU campus spokesperson Carri Jenkins explained that the university's abstention "was not a university or church decision, but made by dining services, based on what our customers want," and that there is "no demand" for caffeinated beverages on the campus (Fletcher Stack 2012c). Yet BYU's online newspaper, *The Digital Universe,* quoted BYU's dining services director saying that while dining services does conduct online surveys to determine demand for other items, they had never asked their students about caffeinated drinks and had no plans to do so (Graff 2012).

BYU students took to social media to petition the school to change its position and to illustrate that there is indeed a demand for caffeine at their school. An online petition at change.org titled "Brigham Young University: Please offer caffeinated beverages on campus and at venues" gathered 1,040 signatures in a matter of days (Belnap 2012). One returned missionary and BYU senior, Skyler Thiot, created a community page on Facebook titled "BYU for Caffeine" in hopes of illustrating enough "demand" to sway campus policies. Comments left there primarily by other BYU students and alumni ranged from support for "dispelling a Mormon myth" to accusations of "stirring the pot." Within two weeks, despite garnering over 2,300 page "likes," Thiot removed the page because the issue had become "too contentious" (Fletcher Stack 2012c, Winslow 2012). A second "BYU for Caffeine" Facebook page was created (this time anonymously but presumably by another student), promoting a policy protest on BYU's campus which would entail distributing free cans of caffeinated soda on September 14. The issue was settled, at least for the time being, after only three minutes and fifty free cans of soda: BYU campus police arrived on scene and asked the two lone student protestors to leave, citing their lack of permit to assemble (Myler 2012). Despite the flurry of attention the issue of caffeine consumption had received during these two weeks, the issue quickly died down with no further clarification from Church or BYU leaders. In Utah, at least, non-normative interpretations of the Word of Wisdom had been silenced.

Authority, Normativity, and Voice in LDS Identity Construction

Why do everyday Mormons, like those students protesting BYU's caffeine ban and the Mormons who criticized them for it, disagree about proper practice? Is it possible that faithful, lifelong Mormons such as the Jacksons, avid eschewers of caffeine, could somehow misinterpret Church doctrine? When did Church Public Affairs become the mouthpiece of Mormon leaders, and by extension of God himself, clarifying important points of contention for both the media and

the faithful? These questions highlight some pitfalls in locating the boundaries of modern LDS identities, all of which are compounded by the expansiveness of the internet as a mediating technology and the visibility of online participation which renders these identities susceptible to surveillance and policing. First, various strategies for interpreting the Word of Wisdom and the concomitant controversies around these interpretations highlight the ambiguous role of authority and normativity in Mormonism as a disciplinary structure. Next, the Word of Wisdom and Mormon rule-keeping as particular points of cultural contention underscore the tension within Mormonism between mainstreaming with the broader American culture, and self-segregation via purposeful differentiation, issues both of organizational strategy within the marketplace of religion and of individual navigation of cultural norms in identity formation. Finally, the difficulties encountered in parsing out the ways in which Mormons embody various interpretations of the Word of Wisdom, and what these interpretations tell us about Mormon identity, illustrate the difficulty in simplistically categorizing Mormonism *in toto*, and hints at the role of individual agency in Mormon identity construction.

Doctrine and authority: Who speaks for Mormon identity?

Who defines what it means to be Mormon, and draws lines to determine who is in and who is out of the bounds of the legitimate community? Answering that question requires starting at the top: in this theologically and pragmatically top-down organization with clearly demarcated hierarchy, Mormon leaders are considered divinely installed and their words are revered as messages from on high. As mentioned previously, these leaders are annually "sustained" by active members of the Church -- both during biannual General Conference proceedings as a community, and in personal worthiness interviews which assess a member's standing in order to enter the temple -- as divinely appointed and inspired to lead righteously. But the status of Mormon authority is steeped in paradox, much like other aspects of Mormon belief and identity

(Givens 2007). This paradox makes it difficult to delineate where "structure" (e.g., constraint) ends and "agency" (or choice) begins in LDS identity construction: when are leaders offering normalizing discourse? When are Mormons choosing? While General Authorities, especially the First Presidency, are said to be called to their authoritative positions by God himself, the Church is quick to emphasize to the non-Mormon media that not everything an Authority says is said with authority, illustrated in this 2007 statement from the online LDS Newsroom:

> Not every statement made by a Church leader, past or present, necessarily constitutes doctrine. A single statement made by a single leader on a single occasion often represents a personal, though well-considered, opinion, but is not meant to be officially binding for the whole Church. With divine inspiration, the First Presidency … and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles … counsel together to establish doctrine that is consistently proclaimed in official Church publications. This doctrine resides in the four "standard works" of scripture (the Holy Bible, the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants and the Pearl of Great Price), official declarations and proclamations, and the Articles of Faith. (Newsroom 2007a)

That is, a leader is speaking authoritatively when he (and it is almost always a he) is saying things that have already been given normative weight through canonization. These qualifications of what counts as doctrine and what is simply opinion or outmoded teaching respond to critics' and the media's tendency to draw out particularly controversial teachings from specific, often long-dead Mormon leaders and emphasize them as central to the faith, such as the past practice of polygamy or the belief that God resides on a star called Kolob.

For many faithful members who revere their leaders, the question of what counts as doctrine and what is mere opinion is of little practical concern. Members are taught from an early age that their Church is uniquely led directly by God through its leaders. Many members express their ultimate faith in *anything* said by someone in leadership (even down to their bishop, who serves on a volunteer, rotating basis with no ecclesiastical training but who is believed to have been called to his position by God). In fact, the degree to which members accept *all* words of General Authorities as divinely inspired and binding is a generally accurate way to measure LDS orthodoxy and conformity to Mormon institutional norms. In particular, faithful members generally receive public addresses and publications from General Authorities as having the weight of

authority expected from someone inspired of God; when pressed, they express a reliance on affective evidence to decide whether these messages are "right" or "true." One missionary explained to me, "When the prophet speaks, I feel warm and happy. And I know what he is saying is true." This common affective response stems from not only the actual words of the Authority, but from a deep, personal conviction that each Authority is divinely installed. It was not uncommon in my interviews and observations for faithful Mormons to become visibly emotional or even weep as they bore their testimony of the divine inspiration of General Authorities and complete confidence in their words, especially the prophet. The tendency for orthodox Mormons to accept leaders' messages on their face is often mocked and used by those on the outside and even by internal critics as a way of denigrating Mormons as "sheep" who blindly follow their shepherds. A rather obscure line from the Church's official periodical in 1945, *Improvement Era,* is often invoked -- both by critics mocking what they see as the blind faith of members, and occasionally by zealous members themselves-- as an overly simplistic and dismissive explanation for this confidence in leadership: "When our leaders speak, the thinking has been done" (Palmer 1945: 354).

Still, the utility of defining specific Church teachings as doctrinal (or not) is reflected in a recent General Conference remark by Elder Neil L. Andersen who acknowledges that some Mormons "question their faith when they find a statement made by a Church leader decades ago that seems incongruent with our doctrine." Andersen goes on to say:

> There is an important principle that governs the doctrine of the Church. The doctrine is taught by all 15 members of the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve. It is not hidden in an obscure paragraph of one talk. True principles are taught frequently and by many. Our doctrine is not difficult to find. (Andersen 2012)

The discursive strategy of distinguishing between culture and doctrine relies on the Mormon emphasis on continuing revelation; merely by *not speaking* frequently of a once-popular teaching, Mormon leaders thus imply its lack of official status in the here-and-now.

Yet in lived experience, Mormon doctrine is indeed difficult to find. This confusion about what counts as doctrine (and is therefore "true") and what is "merely" culture or policy is not relegated to curious outsiders and detractors looking for chinks in the Church's armor; indeed, faithful, lifelong LDS cannot always pin down where "doctrine" ends and "culture" begins.[26] For instance, "The Family: A Proclamation to the World," a statement issued in September 1995 by the First Presidency only months after the LDS Church's failed attempt to intervene in a court case in Hawaii to nullify same-sex marriage, summarizes the Church's position on gender roles, marriage, and family. Most of its 630 words reassert accepted doctrine; but it also appends the concept of gender as an essential and eternal characteristic (that males and females were gendered before, during, and after Earthly life), which, among other issues, raises important ethical questions about the status of transgendered or intersex people. Although it is framed and prominently displayed in the homes of many LDS faithful, frequently cited in ecclesiastical talks, and widely considered inspired, it has never been officially canonized, and it is unclear if its contents are "doctrine" or not. For members, ambiguity concerning the doctrinal status of particular teachings such as those in the Family Proclamation often leads to in-group sectarian battles and policing of others' legitimacy as Mormons.

The bureaucratic processes of differentiating what counts as "doctrine" (and is thus binding) and what is only merely "culture," "policy," or "opinion" (and therefore elastic) serves an important functional role in Mormon identity construction on two levels. In the most basic sense, it serves as an organizational communicative strategy that diverts or dissolves criticism from the outside. As many critics of the Church point out, the ambiguity over what the Church actually teaches as doctrine is a convenient (and, critics say, intentional) way for Church leaders to claim "plausible deniability," or to easily sidestep controversial doctrines or historical teachings (see Shafovaloff 2009 and Johnson 2013 for detailed critiques of this kind). In this view, the Church is able to deemphasize or gloss over statements by past leaders that have now fallen out of cultural

---

[26] A brief anecdote will illustrate this difficulty: At a conference consisting of mostly Mormon academics, during a question-and-answer session I expressed consternation at pinpointing where the line falls between doctrine and culture. The audience laughed a knowing laugh, and one prominent Mormon academic shouted out to me, "Welcome to our world."

acceptability without ever retracting them or apologizing, such as patriarch Brigham Young

arguing for the death penalty for miscegenation (see Young 1863), simply because the

objectionable teaching is not current.

Ambiguity around doctrine can be linked historically to the "defensive communication

strategy" long employed by the Saints. Linguistic anthropologist Daymon Smith (2007) notes that

particularly around the history of polygamy, the Saints have adopted and adapted this strategy, a

process of evasion or obfuscation involving telling one story to outsiders and reserving another

for insiders. The Mormon defensive strategy traces back to Joseph Smith himself, who—in

various, often contested accounts—claimed to be morally outraged when he was accused of

polygamy, when in fact he had been practicing it for years. Smith was, in the view of apologists,

protecting the Church from federal interest in the question of polygamy (see Smith 2005 for an

example of this type of apologetic defense). To others, he was establishing a narrative tradition

for dealing with those on the "outside," particularly those with normative influence that might

help—or hinder—the Church's progress.

In one oft-cited modern instantiation of this defensive strategy, during a 1997 interview

with *TIME* magazine, then-President Gordon B. Hinckley responded to questions about the LDS

teaching that God the Father was once a man, by hesitating and then ambiguously explaining, "I

don't know that we teach it. I don't know that we emphasize it... I understand the philosophical

background behind it, but I don't know a lot about it, and I don't think others know a lot about it"

(*TIME Magazine*, Aug 4, 1997). The teaching that God was once a man, while ambiguous, is

central to the LDS doctrine of eternal progression, giving every faithful LDS man hope of

becoming divine; but it is Mormon peculiarities like this one that create friction with the broader

Christian mainstream, who reject it as heretical. Hinckley's response on this fraught issue shows

a careful parsing of words, essentially refusing to give a straight answer because such an answer

is too risky. Critics like Sue Emmett, the great-great granddaughter of LDS patriarch and second

president Brigham Young, call this rhetorical strategy "lying for the Lord" and claim that Church

leaders encourage members to lie or omit information to protect the Church or avoid making negative impressions (Reno 2012).

For those faithful to the Church, this strategy is not devious but instead makes pragmatic sense. One faithful Mormon told me that sometimes the Church has to "simplify" its message to explain it to a non-Mormon public; because the witness of the Holy Ghost is required to understand more complicated (and controversial) elements of the Mormon faith, it is important to present "milk before meat" (a biblical reference conjuring images of an infant who cannot digest solid foods first requiring sustenance from simple liquids). The implication is that telling the "whole" truth about issues like polygamy, the Church's racial past, or other complicated issues to a non-initiated audience would alienate them before they have had the chance to gain a spiritual witness of the truthfulness of the Church.

On a personal rather than institutional level, the LDS tendency to bifurcate between doctrine and culture serves another important function: it provides a cognitive and discursive strategy for members who are themselves struggling with tough issues. For members who disagree with particular teachings or policies, points that are contested can be written off as "not doctrine" even if the issues are still normative among the majority of Mormons. Thus individual Mormons can reasonably navigate and dismiss nearly any peripheral issue that they do not fully support (ranging from the Church's stance on same-sex marriage to the question of whether or not polygamy will be practiced in the Celestial Kingdom, the Mormon equivalent of Heaven). Speaking during a conference panel on LDS women and agency, Mormon feminist Claudia Bushman explained: "Mormons choose which doctrines to feel strongly about… We define doctrines that we don't approve of as policy" (Bushman 2012); her words were followed by knowing laughter from the crowd, suggesting the ubiquity of this strategy for dealing with dissonance. Progressive Mormons like Bushman are able to maintain their LDS identity in the face of what they consider gender, racial, or sexual orientation discrimination, among countless other issues, by parsing what they see as mistreatment as cultural baggage, separate from the

nature and contents of the true Church. Thus, innumerable issues on which the Church has taken a normative stand cannot be said to be "official" Church policy or doctrine, despite real-world consequences of the Church's normative sway. Instead, they are discounted as "culture" when distasteful to particular members or when seen as particularly strange or noxious by outsiders.

Still, the choice to employ this strategy as a means of keeping intact one's Mormon identity places individuals on the periphery of Mormon belonging: despite the 2007 Newsroom statement (tellingly directed at non-LDS media, and not at Mormons themselves) to clarify what counts as doctrine, because leaders are considered divinely installed it is almost always ambiguous when leaders' words are meant to be taken as "inspired" and when they are simply sound advice or even opinion (in Mormon parlance, when they are "speaking as a prophet" or "speaking as a man"). This ambiguity means that it is taboo for Mormons to criticize their leaders or suggest that anything they say is merely opinion (or, even worse, wrongheaded entirely), until and unless other, higher leaders have offered a public correction of the offending words. Mormons who publicly reject particular teachings on even minor points label themselves as not completely committed to the Mormon community, and risk surveillance and even ostracism for doing so.

Authority and its conflation with Mormon media: A growing reliance on Public Affairs

The rhetorical differentiation between doctrine and culture serves as a unique communicative strategy which is both particularly Mormon and which complicates the bifurcation of influences on Mormon identity into neat "structure" versus "agency" boxes. Increasingly, the Church's reliance on online Public Affairs efforts to communicate with both the membership and the broader public accentuates the strategy of functional ambiguity surrounding authority in Mormonism. As in official responses to the issue of caffeine consumption, rather than ecclesiastical leaders themselves directly communicating with the membership or the public,

increasingly the LDS Newsroom (which disseminates information online via its website, Facebook page, Twitter feed, and via press releases) has become the primary source for "official" information from the Church. Updates, postings, and press releases made via LDS Newsroom are generally published with no byline, and the Mormon (and non-Mormon) audience is left with no knowledge of the source or process by which the information came about-- a rather unusual development in a church so committed to process, procedure, and proper authority. This circuitous way of communicating with both the inside and the outside is highly problematic in this top-down system, as the relationship between "official" information, rhetorical public relations spin, and doctrine (e.g., "truth") remains unclear.

Even before the Church began to focus much of its efforts online, sociologist of religion Armand Mauss referred to those working for the LDS Church but not in official ecclesiastical positions as its "civil service bureaucracy" and noted that there was "a certain amount of ambiguity (some of it perhaps calculated and functional)… associated with operational directives out of the bureaucracy" (1994:125). For the LDS Newsroom, this functional ambiguity centers on what it means for the page to be "official" and whether, in fact, the Newsroom's outputs are simply strategic marketing rhetoric or whether they provide information that is both relevant and binding for Mormons and how they conduct their lives. Church leaders are not unaware of questions of authority regarding public affairs information; one LDS spokesman speaking to me on condition of anonymity told me that the title "Public Affairs Department" (rather than "Public Relations") was specifically and consciously chosen by Church officials to avoid the common perception of PR work as "spin" and thus unreliable. Still, the Newsroom is ostensibly geared primarily at the non-Mormon public[27], not at the church body, which raises questions of "insider" and "outsider" discourse. That is, to what extent is the Newsroom meant to clarify ambiguous teachings for Mormons? Is it, rather, intended as a way to control public discourse about the Church by putting

---

[27] As of June 2013, the tagline on the LDS Newsroom's website reads: "The Official Resource for News Media, Opinion Leaders, and the Public."

a particular "spin"—dreaded though the term may be—on points of contention with the broader American public?

Although it is represented as an official Church website and is increasingly used as a voice for the Church, the authority of press releases, articles, and blog posts from the Newsroom is unclear. The institutional Church is highly bureaucratic, and proper process and procedure is emphasized in all aspects of both administrative and sacred rhetoric and praxis; thus members recognize that the process of receiving and sustaining doctrine is necessary to make a given teaching official. Yet the Newsroom bills itself as "official," bypassing the process that grants this necessary approval. It is unclear whether Church leaders have any input on what is written there; because entries on the Newsroom blog contain no byline, yet bear the Church's logo and name, they aim to communicate an aura of authority, however ambiguous, and thus function to establish norms for the community. This ambiguity allows the Church to respond to important threats to its perceived legitimacy in ways that inculcate it from criticism.

The problematic nature of the Newsroom as an official voice for the Church is perhaps best illustrated by the particularly heated issue of race and Church history. On February 28, 2012, the *Washington Post* quoted a BYU religion professor on the origins of the notorious "priesthood ban" that, prior to the 1978 revelation which reversed it, barred black men of African descent from the priesthood that all otherwise-worthy Mormon men hold (Horowitz 2012). In the article, Professor Randy Bott noted what he called some "possible" theological explanations for the ban, grounded in ambiguous Mormon scripture and historical teachings by leaders of the Church (one possible explanation being that dark skin is the curse of Cain, the first murderer; another being that black people were less valiant in their pre-mortal existence and thus cursed with dark skin and barred from the priesthood of God).

The views that Bott relayed in his interview with the *Post* are obviously culturally fraught and divisive, shining an unflattering light on a church struggling to mainstream. But Bott's views also reflect historical teachings promoted by Church leaders as well as common folk teaching

passed on by many conservative Mormons even today. While the leaders of the Church have

distanced themselves from these teachings in recent years, at the time of the *Post* article they

had never been officially denounced and no official apologies have ever been issued for the

Church's past racism. Since the article was published during a time of intense national scrutiny—

Mitt Romney's presidential run—the online Newsroom responded immediately with its own

"Church Statement Regarding 'Washington Post' Article on Race and the Church." The statement

read:

> The positions attributed to BYU professor Randy Bott in a recent *Washington Post*
> article absolutely do not represent the teachings and doctrines of The Church of Jesus
> Christ of Latter-day Saints. BYU faculty members do not speak for the Church. It is
> unfortunate that the Church was not given a chance to respond to what others said.
>
> The Church's position is clear—we believe all people are God's children and are equal
> in His eyes and in the Church. We do not tolerate racism in any form.
> For a time in the Church there was a restriction on the priesthood for male members of
> African descent. It is not known precisely why, how, or when this restriction began in
> the Church but what is clear is that it ended decades ago. Some have attempted to
> explain the reason for this restriction but these attempts should be viewed as
> speculation and opinion, not doctrine. The Church is not bound by speculation or
> opinions given with limited understanding.
>
> We condemn racism, including any and all past racism by individuals both inside and
> outside the Church. (Newsroom 2012a)

Problematically, of course, Bott's statements *did* reflect "teachings and doctrines of the Church,"

albeit *past* ones—a distinction that makes all the difference in a Church built on the doctrine of

continuing revelation, but which can be lost on a public that does not share its epistemological

orientation to truth.

Orthopraxy Versus Orthodoxy as a Cultural Lynchpin

While the Word of Wisdom is inarguably part of the structural framework around which

faithful Mormons must organize their identity (that is, its observance is mandated by the institution

as a prerequisite for belonging), its enactment in everyday life is also circumscribed by cultural

expectations and norms which -- despite their much-touted non-doctrinal and thus non-official

status-- become structural constraints as well, in many ways just as powerful as doctrine itself. Similarly, the distinction between "doctrine" and "culture" is an emic one that overlooks the cultural nature of doctrine itself, locating it discursively beyond normative critique among faithful LDS; this is, as Geertz reminds us, necessary for religious symbolic systems to maintain the sense that they are natural and not naturalized in order to properly function (Geertz 1966:90). Labeling some things as doctrine and others as culture also overlooks the authority of culture in establishing norms that are powerful, pervasive, and binding as preconditions for membership in any community. Thus, effectively, all doctrine is always already culture, and all culture has the potential to become doctrine in Mormon praxis.

The functional ambiguity in Mormon discourse creates difficulty identifying what is and is not requisite for belonging in the LDS Church. Because the source of information is at once viewed as inspired but also cannot always be assumed to speak officially, or can easily be debunked or disclaimed later, Mormons toe a line between institutional structure and personal agency that appears flexible to those on the outside while implicitly constraining those on the inside. This ambiguity is brought to the fore by the Church's modern-day reliance on unattributed sources in digital media for disseminating information about the Church and its teachings rather than direct instruction from leaders.

Just as individual Mormons must navigate the doctrine-culture distinction, rule-keeping and commitment in Mormonism relies on the practice of applying individual agency as an interpretive lens. Open-ended rules like the Word of Wisdom are instrumental in their vagueness, allowing for various interpretations. As LDS philosopher and BYU professor James Faulconer notes,

> Latter-day Saints often speak of the Word of Wisdom as a health law, and there is evidence for that way of understanding it. Nevertheless, there is no official explanation of its prohibitions and there is anything but a universal practice, especially regarding, for example, the consumption of caffeine. There is little consistency among LDS practices regarding caffeinated drinks and no more consistency regarding the explanations of those practices. Consider that many LDS abstain from all caffeinated drinks, presumably believing that it is the caffeine in coffee that makes it forbidden; and thus, other drinks with caffeine are also forbidden. However, few of them who abstain from

> caffeinated drinks in general will drink decaffeinated coffee, though consistency would dictate that decaffeinated coffee is not prohibited. (Faulconer 2006)

While Faulconer's comments are specific to the Word of Wisdom, the sentiment extends to many rules in Mormonism which rely on individual interpretation-- often referred to as agency by Mormons themselves, despite the lack of true choice available when cultural and doctrinal constraints abound. Still, this vagueness is intentional and utilitarian, allowing individual Mormons to engage in self-surveillance and concomitantly to judge the worthiness of others based on a mutable scale that varies generationally, geographically, and according to countless other individual factors.

As the 2012 controversy around Mormon caffeine use illustrates, doing things the "correct way," or religious orthopraxy, matters among faithful Mormons. It matters so much that when the "correct way" is not spelled out by leaders, Mormons themselves take a position on the issue and rationally defend it using *belief* as the basis for *practice*. For both those who find caffeine off-limits and those who find it acceptable, arguments around the proper orientation to caffeine often center on privileging the LDS value of agency. For caffeine users, these reasons involve an appeal to the "letter of the law": the Word of Wisdom, as the Church noted through its public affairs statement, does not mention the use of caffeine, and therefore Mormons are free to choose for themselves. This choice is the essence of Mormon belief, which values agency above all other human traits. Those who avoid caffeine appeal to the "spirit" rather than the letter of the law, claiming that caffeine is an addictive substance, and its avoidance is one way to secure their agency as unfettered by outside influences. These "correct reasons" are illustrations of divergent orthodoxies that establish an individual's praxis as doctrinally sound.

This rhetorical strategy illustrates that Mormon identity does not neatly fall into etic categories of "orthodoxy" or "orthopraxy" (a nuanced understanding of any religion is likely to complicate those binaries); Mormons – to be faithful and temple-worthy—must largely both do the right things *and* believe the right things (or at least say so). Of course, the surveillance of belief is challenging for this or any religious institution, and is also often less pragmatically important as a

means to ensure group cohesion. As one self-described Mormon apologist noted during an academic panel on Mormonism, Mormons can "believe anything they want as long as they don't teach it" (Gordon 2012). The social consequences of voiced heterodoxy are the institution's primary concern; indeed, grounds for excommunication include not heterodox belief, but disseminating those beliefs in a public way (e.g., the September Six). For the apologist and other Mormons, because belief is not strictly policed by Church leaders (beyond, perhaps, standard temple worthiness interviews that ask whether one has "a testimony" of Christ and of the Restoration and whether one "sustains" the current Church leadership as "prophets, seers, and revelators" [c.f. Hunter 1995]), actions speak louder than words, so to speak. But "telling" one's heterodox perspective is taboo, and many unorthodox LDS fear the social consequences of socially "coming out" (a phrase they themselves employ in a self-conscious appropriation of the LGBT experience), underscoring the implied premium placed on correct belief *as well as* correct practice in the form of observance of LDS narrative norms. And as Skyler Thiot shutting down his "BYU for Caffeine" Facebook page illustrates, social policing is the standard Mormon response when a member publicly breaks these norms for acceptable speech. The Mormon who wants to appear faithful, even if he or she harbors heterodox beliefs, must fall into line in practice to avoid social censure.

If Mormonism is not strictly a faith that privileges orthodoxy over orthopraxy or vice versa, Mormon blogger Alan Hurst offers a third way. He explains that Mormonism is not just about doing the right things, or believing the right things, but covenanting the right things. Mormonism begins with a baptismal covenant, renewed through weekly covenants during Sacrament to keep Christ's commandments, and culminates with a temple covenant to consecrate the faithful Mormon's life and possessions to God and the Church. For LDS faithful, writes Hurst, "both to make that covenant and to remain faithful to it, a mixture of physical acts and inward intentions is required" (2012). Yet Hurst also explains that Saints often create a "hedge about the law" as a

safety net to avoid breaking the law, which implies that not only are Mormons orthoprax, but often beyond what is required by the institution.

The concept of idealized Mormonism as a covenant identity explains, in part, why some Mormons may find caffeine acceptable and not others. Mormonism as a culture paradoxically prizes both institutional rule-setting, thought to be divinely inspired, and personal revelation; it is a tension between "authority and radical freedom" (Givens 2007:1). For some Mormons, the tension is easiest resolved by avoiding any practice that is unclearly defined, out of an abundance of caution, by *not acting* as a form of faithful *acting.* For others, exercising freedom in grey areas is a way of highlighting trust in the ultimate guidance of the institution and/or the affective guidance of divinity, which would no doubt create parameters for behavior if they were required for righteousness. Parsing "culture" and "doctrine" at different fault lines creates ambiguity around Mormon identity—what it means to be Mormon will vary depending on the values and opinions of each Mormon practitioner as well as their cultural location within various Mormon universes.

Conclusion: Mormon "Imagined Community" and its Digital Fractures

In Mormonism as in all cultures, the "dominant cultural order" is made up of codes so naturalized that they appear to not be constructed at all (Hall 2001:170; see also Geertz 1966). The institution, through its naturalization of processes around doctrine, authority, and revelation, creates these codes in its disciplinary structure, normalizing them and embedding them in daily life. The differences between Mormon belief and culture and mainstream American society render it incomprehensible and thus easily misconstrued and maligned, leading to the institution's defensive Public Affairs strategies and its outward-focused voice. This tension also manifests in the institution's careful balance between mainstreaming and differentiation so emblematic of religious communities but present, indeed, in any type of alternate community. Individuals, then, negotiate this line, factoring values and discourses particular to their own specificities (of place, of

generation, etc.); for faithful Mormons, the line must be toed with care, and divergences from mainstream norms must be carefully examined and rhetorically justified to maintain a place in the community.

This rhetorical practice not only maintains Mormon identity; it creates it in the first place. Mormon identity itself is a thing signified. French deconstructionist Jacques Derrida (1972) describes the sign as "deferred presence" (87), explaining that "every concept is inscribed in a chain or a system within which it refers to the other, to other concepts, by means of the systematic play of differences" (89). Religion, then, is defined or "constituted 'historically' as a weave of differences" (90). As with other aspects of identity, it is defined socially against what it is not; functionally, religious identities are boundary markers, categories for exclusion or inclusion. Within Mormonism, rule-keeping on issues like caffeine consumption—along with numerous other signs with varying importance—is an inscription within an inscription, and its situatedness denotes commitment, community, agency and priority.

If correlation provided an imagined worldwide Mormon community that was at once cohesive and united in purpose and vision, the internet challenges this myth of homogeneity and threatens the cohesion of Mormon identity. Despite institutional attempts to craft a holistic image of Mormon identity in the minds of both its members and the broader public, Mormonism as a community is increasingly fractured. Nowhere is the fracture more evident than on the internet, which provides space for alternate voices. The mediated conversations about caffeine use and Mormon belief and praxis highlight growing trends among Mormons online to challenge the traditional status quo in ways that are at once threatening to imagined Mormon hegemony and potentially enabling to new, or at least previously private, forms of Mormon life. Just as the internet provided the forum for the Church and its members to explore the seemingly benign issue of caffeine, Mormons on the web are exploring the limits of belonging on every issue from homosexuality to temple attendance to female ordination. Beliefs, practices, and the bounds of

what it means to be Mormon seem to be up for grabs in this mediated environment, as Mormon communities reinvent themselves in public view.

CHAPTER 3: Mitt Romney and Bifurcated Mormon Representation

"From the Mormon perspective, [their] radical difference is the believer's sign of blessedness. But from the opposite perspective, such difference is threatening and dangerous; opposing it becomes a display of patriotism, not intolerance."
(Terryl L. Givens 1997:44)

"Religious criticism, confronted by indigenous American visions, is compelled to become a national criticism, aware that we are a dangerously religion-soaked, even religion-mad, society."
(Harold Bloom 2006:20)

On September 18, 2012, less than two months before presidential votes were cast, a pre-election bombshell hit the media circuit. In clandestine video footage of a closed-door session with elite campaign donors, Republican candidate Mitt Romney derided opponent Barack Obama's supporters, declaring that nearly half of Americans would vote for Obama because of some innate sense of entitlement and dependency. Romney argued that forty-seven percent of the population believes "they are entitled to health care, to food, to housing," and conceded that these voters would never support his own candidacy because they are "dependent on government," "believe they are victims," and would never "take personal responsibility and care for their lives" (Corn 2012). Romney's strong and condemnatory language, unusual for the generally guarded and equivocating candidate, was swiftly (if predictably) circulated in the media to underscore his seeming elitism and lack of empathy for average Americans. In some circles, moments like this one were not just used to dissect Romney's politics; they were also used to question his faith.

When Mitt Romney announced his presidential candidacy in June 2011, media commentators immediately pinpointed his Mormonism as an anomaly and a liability: the media had already identified "Romney's Mormon problem" during his earlier quest for the nomination in 2007 (c.f. Lawrence 2007, Pruden 2007), an epithet that extended into the 2012 race (c.f. Fletcher 2011, Lamb 2011, Miller 2012a). Soon questions arose about whether or not Romney would attempt to explain, justify, or use his difference to his advantage as a candidate in a party typically swung by Evangelicals-- or whether he might "pretend it away" altogether. Although it

ultimately did not impinge his ability to cinch the nomination, Romney's Mormonism was a constant talking point, and not just among the mainstream media: it also came under fire from closer quarters. In particular, disputations concerning the relationship between Romney's politics and his religion marked divisions within Mormon ideological communities -- divisions that were made visible and amplified by digital media, and which visibly re-imagined the borders of Mormon belonging.

Drawing on the previous chapter's exploration of group monitoring and idealized normativity, in this chapter I examine media representations of Mitt Romney's faith during his 2012 Presidential run -- but rather than considering only mainstream, non-Mormon media, I also focus on internet-based media largely for and by Mormons. Doing so enables an investigation of not only the still-contested role of Mormon identity in American society, but the ways that mediated scrutiny informs intergroup dialogue and, in the case of the fraught issues of politics, contributes to an intensification of internecine conflict. First, I situate discourse about Romney's faith by locating Mormonism within a broader national political context, showing the cultural push-and-pull that paradoxically establishes Mormonism as both quintessentially American and simultaneously foreign and suspect. The remainder of the chapter analyzes the major narratives about Romney's faith that emerged during his run, from three major stakeholders invested in the public's perception of Mormonism: from the mainstream press; from Mitt Romney himself and his conservative supporters; and from progressive Mormons who did not support Romney's candidacy. Finally, I show how these latter two narrative trajectories underscore the divide between conservative and liberal Mormons and ultimately highlight the tensions between structure (e.g., roles and norms) and agency (autonomy and individualization) in modern Mormon identity.

Contextualizing Romney's "Mormon Moment"

Attempts by various stakeholders to interpret the significance of Romney's faith were inevitably colored by Mormonism's paradoxical relationship to the American mainstream. In some ways, Mormonism's solid place in American culture seems incontrovertible. It is increasingly commonplace—in academic writings, in news reports, and in conversation—to see the Mormon faith described as quintessentially American: an American invention, a reflection of American creative genius, the embodiment of American values and priorities (c.f., Bloom 2006; Critchley 2012; Hughes 2012, Bowman 2012). Noted literary critic and self-avowed religious critic Harold Bloom goes as far as to claim that Mormonism, the innovation of an "authentic religious genius" found in Joseph Smith, is "the American Religion" (Bloom 2006). The LDS Church is an entrepreneurial religion, so the argument goes; it was founded in the heat of nineteenth century pioneer imagination and triumphed through hardship and persecution, unabashedly setting itself against popular and traditional norms for religious belief, culture, and practice. Its founding myth – the incarnation of the American dream-- involves an uneducated plowboy innovating religion from the dust, and through hard work and unfailing commitment creating an institutional empire that now exerts global influence politically, economically, and socially—not to mention its undeniable spiritual pull on millions the world over.

Not only is the faith solidly American, Mormons themselves may be the most patriotic of any American religious group. Their scriptures place America at the center of ecclesiastical drama, calling it "the land of promise" (1 Nephi 13:14, Book of Mormon) and positing that Christ himself came to the Americas after his Resurrection (3 Nephi) and will return to gather his church in Missouri (D&C 57); that God uniquely cares about America, divinely directing Christopher Columbus' discovery (1 Nephi 13:12) and foreordaining the American Revolution and its outcome (1 Nephi 13:17-19; Bushman 1976); and that the Constitution of the United States is divinely inspired (D&C 101:80; see also Oaks 1992). One enigmatic prediction attributed to Joseph Smith, known as the "White Horse prophecy," even foretells that the US Constitution will one day be "on the brink of ruin" and "the very verge of destruction" and will be saved by the Latter-day Saints

(c.f. Stewart 1976)-- a prophecy of no little import among a handful of very staunch Romney advocates and which was cited in some corners of the media to ridicule Romney's candidacy.

Despite the Church's international growth which means the majority of members today live outside the United States, Mormon culture, doctrine, and practice continue to be deeply intertwined with American history and culture. And yet for all its Americanness, Mormonism stands at odds with the mainstream as one of the most contested groups in America: In addition to a history of persecution and distrust, Gallup polls in 2011 indicated that the percentage of Americans who said they would not vote for a Mormon candidate-- about 22%-- was more than double those who would not vote for a Hispanic or Jew, and quadruple those who would not vote for a woman or black person. Public reluctance to elect a Mormon, which was unchanged since Gallup first asked the question in 1967, was only surpassed by opposition to a homosexual or atheist nominee (Saad 2011). Prejudice and distrust against Mormons is particularly strong among Evangelicals, who make up about 30% of the Republican party's voting base (Sullivan 2005); while 21% of mainline Protestants and 22% of Catholics see Mormonism as "not a Christian religion," that number is 47% among white Evangelical Protestants (PewResearch 2011).

As detailed in earlier pages, the tension between Mormonism and the American mainstream can be traced to Joseph Smith's day. To the non-LDS public, since its inception Mormonism has "threaten[ed] as an example of radical otherness that [does] not blatantly manifest otherness" (Givens 1997:22), a living example of Freud's notion of the uncanny. Because Mormons are both "Christian" and "not Christian," they are viewed with ambivalence and hesitancy; their place in American society is an important cultural marker precisely because of Mormonism's inherent Americanness and the American tendency to reject it out of hand.

In 2012, Mormonism's fraught history as at once a respected part of society and a distrusted imposter faith required not just Romney-as-candidate, but Romney-as-Mormon to be both vetted by and interpreted for the public; his Mormonism was automatically a weakness to his

candidacy, his first and obvious "flaw" as a potential American leader. Because his difference demanded it be accounted for and justified, the Romney candidacy inevitably put the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints itself in the limelight. What did it mean for a candidate to affiliate with this little-known and less trusted faith? What would be the implications of a Mormon presidency? Mormonism needed defining for a concerned and curious public; and groups with a vested interest in controlling the public perception of Mormonism found in his candidacy the serendipitous opportunity to put forward their own interpretations of proper Mormon identity. Romney's candidacy became a battle to control the narrative about what it means to be Mormon.

To be sure, during any high-profile campaign the mainstream media behaves schizophrenically: on the one hand, adversarial reports depict any given candidate cartoonishly as the media digs for salacious details and prods at potential weaknesses. Undeniably, controversy sells-- or, more likely in the digital age, leads to online "clicks." Meanwhile, other media outlets, in a bid for journalistic purity, "stick to the issues" and attempt to avoid or downplay any discussion of difference. Few outlets attempt to describe and explain difference, with the goal of a more informed voting public; these press informers are the exception to the media's predictably bifurcated approach to candidates' latent flaws.

Religious faith is one aspect of presidential candidates' profiles that seems to evoke discomfort among the media and voters. On the one hand, a staunch tradition of the separation of church and state, canonized as an essential element of American democracy, makes commentary on a candidates' religion taboo. Although the interpretation of the separation of church and state is vague in American jurisprudence, the Constitution's Article VI, paragraph 3, expressly forbids a "religious test" as a requirement for public office.

And yet, religious faith itself is not generally regarded as a flaw or weakness in American presidential elections, and despite discourse that valorizes a separation of church and state, candidates' religious beliefs and practices are gauged and discussed in the media in coded ways. In what Habermas calls today's "post-secular society," religious discourse during a campaign is

expected, but must conform to established norms (Dillon 2010). In many ways, just as American presidents have historically been male and (with one exception) white, the issue of religious affiliation is also taken as a given: American presidents are Protestant. Only one non-Protestant (Catholic John F. Kennedy, in 1960) has ever been elected president, and he became a national sacrifice after his assassination three years later. Of fourteen major party nominees since his presidency, only one was non-Protestant and failed in his bid (Michael Dukakis, a Greek Orthodox).

During the campaign cycle, the media tends to comment on the denominational preference and church attendance of its Protestant candidates, though candidates themselves are not expected to be too forthcoming or transparent on the minute details of their faith-- it is generally enough for them to claim a Protestant heritage, and evoke God or faith vaguely but regularly on the campaign trail. Such faith-based but generic discourse is part of the liturgical language of the ritual of campaign season. Increasingly since the Moral Majority's dominion in the 1980s and despite the Constitutional ban on "religious tests" for office, Evangelical candidates on the right are vetted by the media and by conservative voters for the degree of orthodoxy and literality in their belief, a litmus test of sorts of their commitment to what have become Republican norms (Wilcox & Robinson 2010). At issue, for those Evangelicals, is whether or not they are *Christian enough*-- an entirely different issue than what would face a Mormon candidate, who is presupposed by many Americans to not be truly Christian at all.

Romney's Mormonism in the Media

In this religio-political context, it was clear from the start what Mitt Romney's Achilles heel would be. Wealthy, white, Harvard educated, business minded, from a family of politicians-- little about Romney-as-candidate was foreign to voters, save his lifelong involvement with the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Romney was raised LDS, served a two-year religious

mission in France, and devoted his adult life to service in his local congregations; his Mormonism was not subtle, and could not be disguised during the invasive frenzy of a campaign. Perhaps more than any other Christian denomination or group, a Mormon candidate faces unique obstacles: proving his Mormonism is not "weird," that it is not threatening to the Christian status quo, or better yet, that he is uncommitted to its literality and unbound by orthodoxy.

Faced with the challenge of a presidential candidate with such an obvious and contentious difference, press discourse about Romney's Mormonism tended to take one of three approaches: Othering his faith through adversarial reporting; reticence to dissect it reflected in debates about the place of religious critique in politics; and, the rarest approach of all, attempts by true press informers to parse out Mormonism's relevance to Romney's candidacy.

Adversarial reporting on Mormonism

In the 2012 campaign, major contenders for the Republican ticket represented various faith groups: conservative Baptist Ron Paul; Baptist Herman Cain; Catholics Newt Gingrich and Rick Santorum; Lutheran Michele Bachmann; conservative Evangelical Rick Perry; and Mormons Mitt Romney and Jon Huntsman, Jr. American familiarity with Protestantism and Catholicism immediately placed the last two on the outside. Huntsman was early identified as a nominal Mormon, less committed and much less orthodox than Romney (a type of cultural Mormon known as a "Jack Mormon" in LDS circles); leaving Romney as an object of difference, a target for media attention focusing on salacious details from Mormon history, belief, and practice.

Adversarial reporting on Romney's faith focused on distrust, fear, and the Otherness of Mormons in American society, bringing to the fore obscure Mormon beliefs and other particularities that place Mormonism at odds with mainstream society. Much of the negative or salacious coverage of Mormonism occurred during the early stages of the campaign, prior to Romney's nomination, particularly as a result of attempts by competing conservative candidates

to establish Romney as dangerous and Other. Indeed, the most circulated episode in the media related to Mormonism during the election cycle (PewResearch 2012b) centered on controversial comments made in October 2011, during the race for the Republican nomination.

On October 7, a Southern Baptist megachurch pastor named Robert Jeffress introduced Republican party candidate Rick Perry to an audience at the Values Voter Summit by contrasting the faith of his Evangelical candidate with that of Mitt Romney, Perry's top challenger. Jeffress stated:

> In a few months, when the smoke has cleared, those of us who are evangelical Christians are going to have a choice to make. Do we want a candidate who is skilled in rhetoric, or one who is skilled in leadership? Do we want a candidate who is a conservative out of convenience, or one who is conservative out of deep conviction? Do we want a candidate who is a good moral person, or do we want a candidate who is a born-again follower of the Lord Jesus Christ? (King 2011)

Cueing the assumption that Evangelicals do not consider Mormons "born-again follower[s] of the Lord Jesus Christ," Jeffress played on long-held antipathy between the Moral Majority and the Mormon faith. But it was Jeffress' comments following the Summit, in a moment of candidness with reporters outside the venue, that went viral on the news and the internet as a potential precursor to the type of rhetoric around a Romney candidacy. Jeffress invoked the word "cult" to describe the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, explaining:

> That is not some right-wing, fringe view, that Mormonism is a cult. The Southern Baptist Convention, which is the largest Protestant denomination in the world, has labeled Mormonism as a cult. So that is a mainstream view, that Mormonism is a cult. (Jeffress 2011)

Jeffress' use of the cult label to describe the Mormon faith was widely circulated in the news media and on social media sites like Facebook and Twitter. News reports de-contextualized the "cult" remark, finding in it a calculated political strategy to alienate Evangelical voters (Oppel & Eckholm 2011); Michael Otterson, head of LDS Public Affairs, immediately issued a response to counter Jeffress' suggestion that Mormons are not Christian, but also insisting that Jeffress' opinion was not a mainstream one: "I've known a lot of wonderful Baptists over the years and this outburst was not at all typical of those I've met" (Otterson 2011).

Before clinching the Republican nomination, comments like Pastor Jeffress' reference to Mormonism as a cult came as no surprise given the history of Mormon representation and the relationship between Mormonism and the Christian mainstream. But in August 2012, after securing the nomination in the Republican primaries, Mitt Romney officially became America's first Mormon presidential nominee from a major party, signaling at least a partial acceptance of this would-be "cult member" by the Republican party. In October, news media described another major shift in Evangelical discourse about the LDS Church that seemed to confirm this acceptance: after its eponymous founder met personally with Mitt Romney, the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association officially scrubbed Mormonism from its website's "cult list" (Marrapodi 2012). In fact, there was never any kind of definitive "cult list" *per se*. Rather, in a question-and-answer section of the website, Mormons were mentioned along with other groups in response to the question "What is a cult?":

> A cult is any group which teaches doctrines or beliefs that deviate from the biblical message of the Christian faith… Some of these groups are Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, the Unification Church, Unitarians, Spiritists, Scientologists, and others. (Billy Graham Evangelistic Association 2010)[28]

By Graham's definition (a sectarian one to be sure, unrelated to the already-problematic and imprecise sociological use of the term), Mormonism is indeed a cult, as is any non-Protestant faith. More to the point, the fact that questions over Mormonism's "cult" status -- and concerns over its acceptance by Evangelicals -- were afforded so much air time during the early stages of the campaign speaks to Americans' nervous anxieties about Mormon secrecy. While other presidents who have been less than forthcoming about the intimate details of their faith or religious practice have not been called "secretive," the stigma was used to evaluate Romney's reticence based on a longstanding public concern, part-and-parcel of public perception of Mormonism since its seclusion in the Great Basin in the nineteenth century (Lythgoe 1968,

---

[28]The webpage described "features common to most cults," including "They do not adhere solely to the sixty-six books of the Bible as the inspired Word of God… They do not accept that our relationship to Jesus Christ is a reality 'by grace through faith' alone, but promote instead a salvation by works… They do not give Jesus Christ… full recognition as the second Person of the Trinity." By these definitions, of course, all non-Protestant religions, including Islam, Judaism, and Catholicism, would qualify as "cults." The media never mentioned this important detail.

Shipps 2000). Though the seclusion has ended, the stigma has endured: in a 2007 Pew Forum survey, respondents were asked to say the first word that comes to mind when they hear "Mormon"-- and the most frequent word reported was "cult" (Pew 2011).

Fear of secrecy and hidden agendas was at the front of media critiques of Romney's faith. In op-ed for the *New York Times,* Yale literary and religion critic Harold Bloom articulated these fears, in a seemingly drastic departure from his earlier praise for Mormonism and its founder. Portentously writing of "omens that will darken a year hence," he described the modern day LDS Church as a secretive, money-hungry bureaucracy; and a Romney presidency as one of allegiance to Salt Lake corporate oligarchs and a Mormon theocracy (Bloom 2011). Blooms' 2006 praise of Joseph Smith's creative genius and 19th century Mormonism certainly does not extend to its 21st century iteration, which he distrusts as concerned with money and ever-growing power. Bloom articulated, somewhat fantastically, the basis of American reticence toward Mormonism.

Similarly, press attention to the so-called "White Horse prophecy," with its accompanying suggestion of the LDS Church overtaking the country, crystallized American fears and paranoia about the sinister intentions of a Mormon candidate. In what reads like an exposé of Romney's fanatical Mormon machinations to overtake the country, *Salon* writer Sally Denton describes Joseph Smith's own presidential ambitions, then claims "Smith viewed capturing the presidency as part of the mission of the church," and despite his own failure, "the time is now for a Mormon leader to usher in the second coming of Christ and install the political Kingdom of God in Washington, D.C." She goes on to argue that "The seeds of Romney's unique brand of conservatism, often regarded with intense suspicion by most non-Mormon conservatives, were sown in the secretive, acquisitive, patriarchal, authoritarian religious empire" (Denton 2012).

While other stereotypes and depictions of Mormonism as "weird" circulated in the media, their overriding focus was always on secrecy and esotericism: Mormon undergarments ("Under his pants he is wearing magic underwear. Magic underwear!" joked atheist comedian Penn

Jillette [Jillette 2012]), hidden from public view, marked fear of the unseen; discussion of

polygamy and other controversial elements of Mormon history ("They are pretty much over that

extra wives thing" [Doris 2012] quipped an article in *Esquire*) underscored fears of a hidden and

sinister past with real but unknown repercussions in the present.

Public fear of secrecy has deep roots in American political discourse, where openness

and transparency are vital for the success of the democracy and for keeping political powers in

check. As Harvard political theorist Archon Fung articulates, unfettered access to information is

central to democratic processes, enabling citizens to "use information to exercise influence …

and to navigate life choices in ways that are more likely to advance their own welfare and

flourishing" (Fung 2013:185). Thus transparency is central to the notion of an informed voting

public, who are in turn rightly alarmed by institutions or individuals that refuse disclosure. Secrecy

in relation to political discourse is an added threat as it prevents fully informed voting behavior in

the public's best interests.

But accusations of secrecy hit a nerve among Mormons, long distrusted by Americans on

precisely this account. The tendency of media voices to use this socially-embedded stereotype of

LDS secrecy against Romney was noted by Brigham Young University journalism professor and

active Mormon Lane Williams, writing for the Church-owned *Deseret News*. For Williams, painting

Mormonism as "secretive" leads to conclusions that there is something "sinister" about the faith

(indeed, noted atheist and polemicist Christopher Hitchens opined in *Slate* that Romney

espouses a "weird and sinister belief system" [Hitchens 2011]). Williams relies on a familiar

Mormon strategy when he goes on to argue that Mormons are actually not secretive at all, but

rather choose "to not disclose cherished beliefs with those who wouldn't appreciate them, who

wouldn't or couldn't hold them sacred" (Williams 2012a). The secrecy-versus-sacredness

rhetorical flourish (the same defensive communication strategy discussed in Chapter 2 and long

used by Church authorities to dissuade members from disclosing controversial temple practices,

personal spiritual experiences, and sacred undergarments, among other elements of faith and

practice) underscores a deep Mormon cognizance of the American social taboo against
esotericism.

Debates on the role of religious critique in politics

Despite these salacious and widely-circulated exceptions, by-and-large religion was
downplayed by most major news outlets throughout the 2012 campaign season. The Pew
Research Center's Journalism Project found that only 1% of major campaign press coverage[29]
focused on the candidate's religion or the role of religion in the election, about the same as in
2008; and of that coverage, only 18% focused on Mormonism specifically. Still, Romney was the
subject of twice as much religious reporting as Obama, although only 8% of religion stores were
prompted by statements or actions from the Romney campaign (PewResearch 2012b). More
specifically, 43% of the coverage of Romney's faith focused on whether conservative Christians
and other religious groups would support a Mormon candidacy, and only 30% of it focused on his
actual beliefs or background. But that 30% included deep profile pieces as well as mere mentions
that he is Mormon.

Rather than merely dissecting or critiquing his difference, many press outlets used the
Mormon moment to discuss whether refusing to vote for a Mormon amounted to a "religious test"
as prohibited by the Constitution. Some argued that it is useful and sometimes necessary to
"question a political candidate about the implications of his religion for public policy" (Becker
2012). Progressive Mormon writer Joanna Brooks noted on National Public Radio's *All Things
Considered*, "It is fair to ask questions about the culture of leadership Mitt Romney was raised in
and that he assumed as a young man in Mormonism, both in terms of the networks of power he's
associated with and the way he was raised as a Mormon to think about what it means to be a
leader" (Raz 2011). Columbia religion professor Randall Balmer wrote for the *New Republic*,

---

[29] According to Pew, "major news outlets" here includes broadcast and cable television, radio, newspaper front pages,
and popular news websites.

"What ought to interest us about Romney's faith are not the vagaries of Mormon theology, fascinating as they are, but how he understands that theology, how his faith informs the way he lives, his sense of responsibility toward others and how that might affect the way he governs" (Balmer 2012).

Often, a call for open discussion of Mormonism was embedded in a larger partisan critique, as was the case in *Salon* writer Sally Denton's assertion, after providing a sinister and dark depiction of Romney's faith, that "Mormonism define[s] not only Mitt Romney's character, but what kind of president he would be and what impulses would drive him in both domestic and foreign policy" (Denton 2012), implying that of course Romney's character is also sinister and dark, and that a Romney presidency would be marked by that darkness. Christopher Hitchens took the same approach, describing Mormonism as a deeply vicious and closed system, and then insisting that voters are "fully entitled to ask Mitt Romney about the forces that influenced his political formation… and his voluntary membership in one of the most egregious groups operating on American soil" (Hitchens 2011). Journalist and one time Mormon Stacey Solie, in the *Daily Beast*, posed a challenge to presidential debate moderator Jim Lehrer to ask Romney: "Why do Mormons continue to treat women of the faith as second-class citizens?" She wrote that a "perverse instance of religious tolerance" is the only way to explain the fact that Mitt Romney had not been asked to account for his faith's treatment of women (Solie 2012).

Likely because of this transparency argument being used as a front for what many saw as deeply offensive religious bigotry, others contended that discussing difference in Romney's beliefs or practice at all was an indication of discrimination. *TIME* magazine writer Amy Sullivan observed, "Americans wouldn't accept an ethnic or gender test for office. Why then do so many voters impose a de facto religious requirement on their candidates?" (Sullivan 2011). Tim Rutten in the *LA Times* noted that "objections to the former Massachusetts governor's presidential hopes because of his Mormon religion mark a dangerous turn in American politics" (Rutten 2011). Rabbi Shmuley Boteach argued in the Jerusalem Post that criticizing Mormon beliefs as "weird" is

always hypocritical and short-sighted, since all religious beliefs are fantastic, and that politicians "should be judged on their merits as people and politicians, whatever their faith and whatever their beliefs" (Boteach 2011). These arguments put Romney's Mormonism beyond the scope of properly democratic debate.

True press informers

In the midst of the two extreme approaches to LDS faith found in these aforementioned examples of gotcha journalism and avoidance, few press informers were able to adequately interpret Romney's Mormonism and its implications for his potential White House service. These rare attempts, such as an October 2011 *New York Times* exploration of Romney's time as a Massachusetts bishop (Stolberg 2011), delved into the centrality of Romney's faith to his life and perspective; but even this lengthy piece did little to distinguish Mormonism from its Christian counterparts except to parallel it in procedural norms and terminology (e.g., explaining that a "bishop" is analogous to pastor, or that a "ward" is akin to a diocese). These informative pieces, lacking in salacious intrigue, failed to go viral on social media, marking a lack of social interest in the representation of Mormonism as normal and safe.

However, one unlikely press informer working at a popular internet entertainment mill joined the conversation just in time. A former *Newsweek* journalist who joined the online social news and entertainment company *BuzzFeed* in January 2012, McKay Coppins used his insider knowledge as a Mormon himself to sensitively but accurately address head-on issues of Romney's faith. He wrote on Romney's lifelong tithe to the LDS Church, and the institution's oft-criticized and rarely disclosed use of tithing funds (Coppins 2012b); on Romney's reluctance to speak about his faith and its historic roots in Mormon persecution and the modern Mormon experience (2012a); and on the much discussed Mormon undergarment, which he demystified by normalizing it as a sacred vestment rather than a magical amulet (2012c). He made the media's

pervasive anti-Mormon sentiment personal: recounting his time on the campaign press bus, Coppins described how other reporters giggled discussing the Romneys' underwear, not realizing Coppins too was Mormon. He also noted that by the end of the campaign, "Romney's career had provided a national education" on Mormonism (Coppins 2012d).

Coppins provided a useful model for engaging in democratic dialogue about the potential impact of Romney's faith on his candidacy, but it was not merely his status as a Mormon insider that left him qualified to interpret Mormonism for the public. Instead, he modeled journalistic objectivity and the importance of nuance and detail in reports on religious faith; Coppins' lone voice during the campaign spoke to the urgency of a more comprehensive religious education for would-be journalists and social media writers in an era when Protestants are no longer the only viable candidates for office.

A poll conducted in December 2012 by the Pew Research Center's Religion and Public Life Project found that 82% of Americans claimed to have learned "little or nothing" about the Mormon religion during the campaign season, and most respondents were unable to answer basic questions about LDS teachings and history. Still, between Romney's campaign, the LDS Church's "I'm a Mormon" campaign, and pop cultural nods to the Church like *The Book of Mormon* Broadway musical, American sentiment seemed to warm slightly toward the LDS Church: that same poll found a slight decrease in the percentage of Americans who consider Mormonism "very different" from their own beliefs, and a slight increase in the number who say Mormonism has "a lot in common" with their own beliefs (PewResearch 2012a)[30].

Mormon Candidate, Mormon Narratives

The narratives that circulated about Romney's faith in the press differed not only in substance, but also in purpose, from those circulated in closer quarters. Among Mormons

---

[30] In November 2011, 65% of respondents said Mormonism was "very different" from their own religion, and in December 2012, that number was 61%. Twenty-five percent of adults in December 2012 said Mormonism has " a lot in common" with their own faith; that number was 22% in 2011.

themselves, the Romney candidacy became a momentous opportunity to define Mormonism for public consumption; the ways Mormons discussed Romney's faith showcased the diversity in Mormon identity and ideology. In the dizzying array of diversity among Mormons, Romney's run brought out two particular camps, conservative and progressive Mormons, who aggressively presented two very different interpretations of Romney's Mormonism for the public. What appear on the surface to be natural political divisions among citizens mark deeper ideological orientations to the whole of Mormon identity and practice, where Mormons increasingly find themselves forced to align with the conservative status quo or to self-identify as progressive, the Other in Mormon communities.

During Romney's run, internecine conflict and mounting tensions between these two ideological groups came to a head on the internet, where their narratives were circulated and reproduced. Rather than reflecting a cohesive faith community, both groups used the Romney moment as an opportunity to advance their own visions of ideal Mormonism, visions that contrasted sharply and no doubt left mainstream observers more befuddled than ever before about what constitutes true Mormon identity. First, Romney himself and his conservative Mormon supporters depicted Romney's faith as nonthreatening and generic (when they depicted it at all), reflecting the institution's defensive communication strategy for dealing with those on the outside. At the same time, however, progressive Mormons took the opportunity to deride Romney as a false face of their faith, attempting to make their agenda a part of the national conscience. These narratives highlight the tension between structure (e.g., roles and norms) and agency (individualization and interpretation) in lived Mormon identities today, and also provide insight to the narrative tactics available to Mormons of varying orthodoxies to cohere or criticize their religious community.

Mitt Romney & conservative Mormons: Obscuring difference

Although Romney's Mormonism was marked as significant and a potential weakness by strategists, pundits, and the press during his first presidential run in 2007, Romney's discursive strategy throughout his 2012 campaign involved a "practiced avoidance" of the subject of religion (Coppins 2012b); Romney was consistently tight-lipped on the particularities of his faith.

But pure avoidance had not always been his tack. Early in his first unsuccessful bid for nomination, in December 2007 Romney tried to head off concerns about his "Mormon problem" with his one and only "religion speech" at the George Bush Presidential Library in College Station, Texas. Analysts recognized the speech as the narrative progeny of John F. Kennedy, who set the precedent for a religious minority candidate in his 1960 Houston address, in which he famously quelled public concerns about his Roman Catholic faith (c.f. Keck 2007; Neuman & Bradley Hagerty 2007). In that speech, Kennedy assured his audience at the Greater Houston Ministerial Association that were he elected neither the papacy nor any other ecclesiastical body would have influence on public policy. Having been the only president from a minority religion, Kennedy certainly set the precedent for public reassurance around concerns of religious difference.

Like Kennedy in his day, Romney recognized the urgency of retaining the Evangelical vote which was then swinging to his competitor, Arkansas Governor and Southern Baptist minister Mike Huckabee. In his address, then, Romney seemed to specifically target evangelical concerns about the LDS institution exerting influence over White House policy. Just as Kennedy had done, Romney promised that "no authorities of [his] church, or of any other church for that matter, [would] ever exert influence on presidential decisions. Their authority is theirs, within the province of church affairs, and it ends where the affairs of the nation begin." Throughout the speech, Romney avoided details about his Mormon faith and practice, suggesting that his reticence to delve into particularities was an expression of tolerance and a civic compartmentalization. In remarks that would prove prescient of the "religious test" debate in the

media during his 2012 run, Romney rebuked the public for its questions into his Mormon

distinctiveness:

> There are some who would have a presidential candidate describe and explain his
> church's distinctive doctrines. To do so would enable the very religious test the founders
> prohibited in the Constitution. No candidate should become the spokesman for his faith.
> For if he becomes president he will need the prayers of the people of all faiths.
> (Romney 2007)

Although Romney attempted to replicate the Kennedy moment, he was no Kennedy. Where

Kennedy was taken as warm and engaging, Romney was seen as robotic and controlled. And

where Romney devoted his life to his faith, Kennedy was a nominal Catholic, believable when he

insisted that his faith would not dictate his policies. Moreover, as religion reporter Dick Ostling has

noted, "non-Catholics expected Kennedy to say his faith would make no difference, which is

hardly what today's Republican Christian conservatives want to hear" (Keck 2007). Moreover, by

Kennedy's time, prejudice against Catholicism had lessened in America, and Roman Catholicism

was not seen as so esoteric; its rituals and teachings were open and transparent to non-Catholics

despite their prejudices against Catholic dogma. Mormonism, on the other hand, is still largely

perceived as secretive and cult-like-- due in part to its esoteric temple rituals that are shielded

from non-members, but also to purposive LDS obfuscation of teachings, practices, and history.

Perhaps partially as a result of his failed '08 bid, Romney took the opposite tack in 2012:

he very purposefully did not address his faith or its role (or lack thereof) in political discourse.

Instead, whereas Kennedy worked to assure the public of his independence from papal dictates,

throughout Romney's second campaign it was his Church that stressed its own political neutrality.

The LDS Church issued press releases as well as letters to be read in every congregation urging

members to vote but reaffirming the officially neutral position of the Church itself (Newsroom

2012b)[31]. Rather than swear allegiance to his country over his faith, Romney allowed the LDS

---

[31] Of course, the Internal Revenue Code makes it incumbent on religious organizations to remain "politically neutral" in
order to qualify for tax exempt 501(c)(3) status. But that status has always been fraught with contradiction for the Church
of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Mitt Romney was not the first prominent Mormon to campaign for the Presidency:
Joseph Smith himself ran for President in 1844 on an Independent platform, sending ambassadors to all 26 states to
campaign and simultaneously preach the gospel (Garr 2009).

Church to do the talking-- a poor move, given the public's general hesitancy to trust the Mormon institution and generalized social fears of LDS institutional control. The PR discourse strategy of claiming neutrality was also complicated by the pervasive conservative political culture in almost all stateside LDS congregations, especially those along the geographic Wasatch Front; the Church's official stance on hot-button political topics like gay marriage and abortion; and the highly publicized influence of the LDS Church on California's Proposition 8 in 2008, where local Church officials urged their congregations to donate millions of dollars and to vote in favor of the proposition to define marriage as between a man and a woman. Despite continued claims of neutrality, the Church also sponsored internet advertisements on Romney's name (Schultheis 2012), so that Google searches for "Mitt Romney" returned a sponsored ad linking to an official Church website—albeit a link reaffirming the Church's neutrality. They of course sponsored no such ad for the search term "Barack Obama."

Throughout his 2012 race, Romney rarely addressed his "Mormon problem." As McKay Coppins noted,

> Romney spent much of 2012 publicly evading the subject of his faith. In speeches, he conducted all manner of rhetorical gymnastics to avoid uttering the word "Mormon." In interviews, he quickly changed the subject every time the topic came up. And to his staff, his instruction was to dodge and deflect all questions regarding his religious beliefs. He regularly employed variations of the declaration, "I'm not running for pastor-in-chief." (Coppins 2012d)

Romney was intent on eliminating discussion of his faith, specifically assembling a team of strategists to avoid discussion of Mormonism altogether (Coppins 2012d). Their responses to media inquiries were reportedly unreceptive and even hostile: journalists like Coppins and *CNN Belief Blog's* Jessica Ravitz reported resistance from Romney's campaign strategists to answer questions on his faith. According to Ravitz, campaign spokeswoman Andrea Saul responded to inquiries with the following email: "What makes no sense to me is how you continue to push forward in writing about Gov. Romney's faith journey when we've made it clear in every way possible that this is not a story we want to participate in" (Ravitz 2012).

Perhaps recognizing his reticence as a poor strategy inspiring suspicion among voters, toward the end of the race Romney softened slightly on the subject of religion, allowing reporters to attend church services with him in August 2012. But he continued to use generalities when discussing his religion, conflating it with mainstream Christianity and talking broadly about "faith" rather than addressing Mormonism's particularities. His hesitancy was at least in part attributed to his fear that open discussion would result in his faith being "dragged through the mud" (Coppins 2012d)[32]. Ironically perhaps, Romney's choice to downplay and normalize his faith obscured rather than addressed the differences that make Mormonism what it claims to be: the one true Church, distinct rather than analogous to other forms of Christianity, which the LDS Church since its founding has taught are bastardized versions of Christ's true Church.

Mitt Romney's conservative Mormon supporters used similar strategies to present his Mormonism to the broader public. Rarely did these commentators opine on the particularities of Romney's belief or practice. Instead they presented him as a trusted politician not needing explanation or details. As they attempted to obscure his distinct Mormon attributes and downplay the role of faith in his life, Romney became a patriot, a good American, but one missing personal details and individuality.

When conservative Mormon supporters did address Romney's faith, it was in an attempt to mainstream by talking about it in ways Protestants would identify with. Conservative talk show host and Mormon Glenn Beck minimized differences between Mormonism and mainstream Christianity by calling polygamy "a perversion of what we believe in" and dismissing concerns over esoteric temple rituals by claiming "there's nothing that you'll find in the Temple that you won't find in the Old or New Testament" (Beck 2012). The LDS-Church owned *Deseret News* attempted to water down the significance of Mormonism and its potential to sway the vote: citing other reports, one article suggested that Americans may be warming to the idea of an LDS candidate (Taylor 2011), and another suggested that his religion would not be a factor at all

---

[32] Incidentally, this is the same logic that the LDS Church employs as to why Heavenly Father is venerated but not Heavenly Mother: she is too sacred and if she were discussed, she too might be dragged through the mud.

(Askar 2011a). One such article notes that "the perceived biases that potentially derailed Mitt Romney's 2008 presidential campaign are dissolving and, lo and behold, a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints could realistically be elected president of the United States in 2012" (Askar 2011b)

Supporters also focused on his patriotism and his policies, rather than his religious affiliation; this trend was noticeable beginning in Romney's first campaign. Blogging for the *Idaho State Journal* in 2008*,* one supporter contrasted Obama's one-time pastor Jeremiah Wright's remarks about America ("God damn America!") with the LDS prophet Gordon B. Hinckley ("Bless this chosen land!"), attempting to deflect criticism and point to Obama as the true imposter (Larsen 2008). Likewise, supporters in 2012 downplayed the role of faith in obtaining votes. At Church-owned Brigham Young University, students were energized by Romney's candidacy, but as election night neared, according to BYU College Republican co-social media chairwoman Emily Kinard, "Just because Mitt's Mormon, I don't think it's necessarily turned votes. Lots of people are pretty aware and making their decision issue-based" (Morgan 2012). Other Mormons supported Romney as a positive, inspiring face of the faith, but did so without detailing or describing Mormonism itself: hotel chain mogul J.W. Marriot gushed, "There has never been as much positive attention to the church, thanks to the wonderful campaign of Mitt Romney" (Burr 2012).

Some conservative Mormon writers wished Romney would talk more about his faith, but with the recognition that while he should frame it as central to his life and character, he should not detail its doctrinal particularities. Conservative Mormon columnist Lane Williams criticized the religious content of Romney's convention acceptance speech, but rather than suggest Romney should differentiate himself, he lamented that Romney had not done more to "put [the Latter-day Saints] at the heart of the American story" (2012b), describing the Mormon climb from despised and persecuted to nominated for the highest office in the land, or telling the story of the handcart pioneers or the Mormon Battalion.

Conservative authors Linda and Richard Eyre opined in the *Deseret News:*

> For the most part, Mitt has avoided speaking about his faith, and there are good reasons for this. The problem is that his faith and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints are so much a part of who he is that it is almost impossible to know or understand him and Ann without knowing at least some things about the church.

They went on to claim that "most of Mormonism is very much like most other Christian churches, including the central focus on Jesus ....We are also very similar to other churches, synagogues, mosques and other major faiths and places of worship." They described what they consider "unique" aspects of Mormonism that Romney ought to share, including its lay ministry and emphasis on family. Although they asserted that "understanding and appreciating the unique aspects of our faith can help us know each other better and trust each other more" (Eyre & Eyre 2012), the agenda they proposed for Romney precisely avoids all mention of controversial or less-understood areas of Mormon practice and belief-- the areas that are of concern to the mainstream public.

Journalist and supporter Pat Bagley even went so far as to sacralize media criticism of Romney's Mormonism as part of a long history of press criticism, making it part of Mormons' sacred duty to passively accept it: "Our great grandparents bore up under the ridicule, so Mormons today might as well get used to the scrutiny and let the nonsense roll off their sturdy tabernacle-turtle backs" (2012).

The avoidance of details of Romney's faith was pragmatic, to be sure; these orthodox supporters are the Mormons many mainstream Americans would have disagreed with the most, if they had actually addressed their faith and explicated it for the public. But as religion scholar Randall Balmer noted, "Not only does [Romney's] caginess reinforce his image as evasive, his reticence about his faith reflects Mormonism's lack of openness" (Balmer 2012). Chapter 1 described in some detail the long history of Saints evading scrutiny through obfuscation. As linguistic anthropologist Daymon Smith (2007) has shown, persecution around the 19th century practice of polygamy led to the development and maintenance over time of a uniquely Mormon

defensive communication strategy for dealing with those on the outside by obscuring differences that make a difference.

Thus the approach taken by Romney and his conservative Mormon supporters-- to downplay and even ignore the role of difference -- mirrors the historic tendency of the institutional LDS faith as well as their public relations approach taken in recent years, through efforts such as the "I'm a Mormon" campaign and the online LDS Newsroom which seeks to make of Mormonism just another option in the Christian marketplace. In that way, Romney and his supporters were acting particularly Mormon by obfuscating, attempting to illustrate Mormonism's assimilative capacity rather than addressing its true difference. In many ways, Romney and his supporters tendency to deflect and hide gave a measure of validity to American concerns about LDS secrecy and obfuscation.

Progressive Mormons: Othering Romney

Because conservative Mormons chose *not* to speak on the subject of Mormonism, they gave more airtime to those who represent a minority and often fringe strain in the LDS community: progressive, heterodox members. On the blogosphere and social media, in particular, progressive Mormons used Romney's visibility as a public resource to both put forward their vision for proper Mormon identity and to justify their own agendas for Mormonism. Romney became a convenient and publically-available way to offer up a countercultural vision for Mormonism, and in some circles became a way to bypass taboo and surreptitiously critique Mormon culture and even the institutional Church itself.

Immediately after the footage of Romney's comments about "the 47%" went viral, elite progressive Mormons responded, publicly and vocally. On September 19, well-known Mormon public figure Gregory Prince declared in the *Huffington Post*, "Mitt Romney is *not* the face of Mormonism." Prince, a scientist and leading Mormon studies author, expressed the fear that because of Romney's prominence, Americans would judge Mormonism based on Romney's

conservative views, which Prince felt "sullied" the faith. He went on to explain that "the very basis of Mormon community" is service to the poor and needy; Mormons, he argued, are obligated to support and give to those in need (Prince 2012). Implicit in his argument was Romney's failure to live up to this central Mormon tenet; indeed, Prince suggested that Romney's Mormonism is somehow a bastardized and substandard version of an inherently caring, giving faith. Prince's eloquent and emotional denunciation concealed his status as a minority voice in his own faith; as an outspoken liberal Mormon, Prince is hugely outnumbered in his highly conservative faith, and his personal distaste for Romney's perceived elitism was as much political as it was religiously founded.

Soon Mormon Senator (and Democrat) Harry Reid was quoted agreeing with Prince's condemnation of Romney's brand of Mormonism, asserting that members of the Church "understand that [Romney] is not the face of Mormonism" (Burr 2012). Noted historian and Mormon Kathleen Flake similarly argued that Romney's harsh words reflected less his religion than his political posturing: "That's Republicanism. That's not Mormonism" (Miller 2012b). Mormon religion writer Peggy Fletcher Stack (2012d) criticized Romney for his shortsighted gaff on "the 47%," pointing out that many LDS couples rely on welfare because they are encouraged by the institution and by Mormon culture to have large families early in life. These prominent public figures attempted to create a visible public narrative of Mormonism as a socially conscious and even liberal institution.

Bloggers took Romney to task, as well, with less reticence than these prominent public figures. One feminist LDS blogger said that she was "deeply uncomfortable about sharing a faith community with him, and frankly anyone like him" and opined that his Mormon constituents have "painted broad brush-strokes on our religious identity without getting permission from the rest of us." She went on to literally call Romney and his supporters to repentance: "I have a few words to say to the vocal minority who have so brazenly claimed a religious identity for Mormonism that they had no right to manufacture in the first place-- its [sic] time for you to repent!" She went on to

argue that *true* Mormonism, finding its roots in the grand narratives of the Book of Mormon, is opposed to all that Romney's supporters represent (Colvin 2012).

Heterodox blogger Jana Riess concurred, noting that "the Book of Mormon is unequivocal in its insistence that a society succeeds or fails on the basis of how it treats the poor- and that our very salvation is related to how well we heed that call." While thus expressly calling into question Romney's salvation, Riess went onto acknowledge that indeed, Romney does represent a face of Mormonism, albeit "one that has always celebrated wealth and success," as Mormonism's "communitarian impulses to help the poor and share the load have often been counterbalanced by an acquisitiveness that has perennially equated financial prosperity with spiritual blessing" (Riess 2012).

Writing for *CNN Belief Blog*, self-styled progressive Mormon spokesperson Joanna Brooks vowed that she would not vote for Romney regardless of their shared religion (Brooks 2012b). What is more, she turned public concerns on their head by asking not whether Mitt Romney is too Mormon to be a good president, but whether he is not Mormon enough. In her words, "What if it's not that Romney is *too Mormon*, but that faith has played virtually no role in shaping his approach to foreign policy issues?" (Brooks 2012c). Brooks verbalized the view of many progressive Mormons that Mormonism is at its core a truly progressive, not conservative, faith; and that a truly faithful Mormon's politics and faith should mutually reflect that.

Beyond criticizing Romney's politics, implicit in these progressive Mormons' critiques is a subtle critique of the institutional Church itself. By making their version of Mormonism public, they claim it for all Mormonism, including the very conservative institution. The public versions they put forward strategically ignore the structural, doctrinal, and historical aspects of the LDS institution which are criticized *ad nauseum* in progressive Mormon forums-- critiques that depict the Church as a bureaucratic oligarchy that builds vast temples and shopping malls rather than concerning itself with the needs of the poor. These pronouncements are more akin to ritual factive performatives, explicated by Roy Rappaport (1999), than pronouncements of the nature of reality.

By claiming their ideal version of Mormonism, they hope to create it. They simultaneously offer a

critique of Mormonism in a language only other Mormons are likely to understand: by claiming

that Romney's lack of social consciousness is a false version of Mormonism, they call his

righteousness into question and by implication the righteousness of scores of Mormons

(including, presumably, top Mormon leaders) who adhere to the same political perspectives. They

thusly also offer a surreptitious critique that the institutional Church, which reifies the same

conservative impulses, is also falling short of some imagined and idealized progressive Mormon

standard. Since criticizing the LDS Church is taboo and tantamount to criticizing God's divine

order, Romney provided a convenient work-around for progressive Mormons to air their

grievances in a way that remained discursively faithful to the Church and thus above reproach.

Conclusion: The Role of the Internet in Constructing a Mormon Candidate

As national attention focused on the LDS faith during Mitt Romney's candidacy, these

three major stakeholder groups seized upon the opportunity to interpret Mormonism variously for

public consumption. The press -- with its own tensions between the duty to inform and the need

to entertain -- wavered between avoidance and salacious digging, hinting at Mormonism's

precarious standing in the national conversation between mainstream and decidedly weird. The

dearth of true press informers points to a need in American journalism to seriously consider the

ethics and methods of reporting at the intersection of religion and politics.

Mitt Romney himself and his conservative Mormon supporters obscured Romney's

Mormonism, depicting him as a patriotic, blue-blooded American for whom Mormonism was

simultaneously a central and a peripheral aspect-- a paradox the public never quite untangled.

The seemingly contradictory perspective that Mormonism can be both a central, determining part

of one's identity and also insignificant and not appropriate for dissection by an intelligent

democratic public parallels the modern LDS Church's public relations strategy with its attempt to

downplay significant differences and mainstream with the broader Christian public. No doubt this is why the public remained ambivalent about Mormonism; Mormonism is ambivalent about Mormonism.

For their part, progressive Mormons supportive of Barack Obama's incumbency used the political moment to depict Romney as a poor example of lived Mormonism-- indeed, as a bad Mormon-- simultaneously advancing their own vision of proper Mormon identity and critiquing the larger conservative impulses of the institution. Because Romney and his conservative supporters took the Church's cue and evaded frank talk about faith and difference, instead focusing on Mormonism's assimilative capacity, heterodox Mormons had almost unchecked freedom to dictate the public conversation about the meaning of Romney's faith. Romney's conservative, bureaucratic faith mirrored his conservative, bureaucratic politics, and served as an easy point of critique for liberal and heterodox Mormons. By critiquing Romney, they circumnavigated taboos around critiquing the institutional Church itself. The open platform of the internet allowed minority voices to publicly mark Romney as a black sheep. By suggesting that his Mormonism was a poor example of the broader Church, these progressive Mormons both misrepresented what is largely a politically conservative membership, and simultaneously re-imagined a Mormon Church wherein voiced difference is acceptable and diversity of political opinion welcome.

These narratives represent diverse camps in Mormon identity and ideology, and the conflicts and tensions between these groups came to a head online, where their narratives were circulated and reproduced. In addition to shedding light on the ways that members of the group use in-group social cues to determine one's standing in the faith, these narratives highlight the tensions between structure (e.g., roles and norms) and agency (individualization and interpretation) in Mormon identity construction today.

Beyond increased visibility and public acceptance, the presidential candidacy of a Mormon certainly reverberated among Mormon communities. The clearest impact of Romney's run was a visible reimagining of the borders of belonging, solidifying the political diversity of the

faithful. Mormons themselves used Romney as a talking point to question proper LDS identity norms. Indeed, the paradox of a faith that struggles between the impulses of liberalism and conservatism were on full display.

In terms of public perception, the viable candidacy of a Mormon provided legitimacy to Mormonism as an American faith on an unprecedented scale. Although the press behaved schizophrenically in regards to Romney's difference, Mormonism's moment in the limelight certainly made the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints a topic of household conversation. Moreover, despite Romney's ultimate failure to secure the White House, his nomination signals at the very least that Mormonism's one-time nemesis -- Evangelicals themselves -- may have finally accepted the LDS into their political, if not religious, fold.

Despite the fraught status of Mormonism in the American landscape, ultimately Mitt Romney's nomination was not impinged on a national scale by his religious identity[33]. While it served as a curiosity for some reporters, its usefulness as a marker of weakness was limited to the primaries. After he secured the Republican ticket, his faith's erstwhile opponents among conservative Christians were largely silent on his faith. It was something of a surprise, then, that the most vocal opponents to Romney's brand of Mormonism after his nomination were members of his own faith. While the media made of Romney's faith a joke to be exploited or a difference to be ignored, the internet-enabled visibility of in-group narratives around Mitt Romney's presidential candidacy provided an interesting glimpse into processes of internecine conflict that work to build notions of proper Mormon belonging in the modern moment.

Mitt Romney's run unavoidably put the Mormon Church in the public spotlight, forcing stakeholders to take a public position on the meaning of modern Mormon identity. The lesson of his run may well have been the multiplicity of meanings given to that identity. In modern America, Mormon identity is precisely this complex and multivocal amalgamation of competing narratives, each bespoken from a position of competing interests and ideologies. In a battle for narrative

---

[33] While his nomination suggests that he had enough support in the Republican party to serve as the nominee, whether or not his bid for presidency ultimately failed because of his faith is a question that has not been thoroughly explored by social scientists.

supremacy, who ultimately gets the final say in what makes a good Mormon is largely a product of who has the most visible platform. Thus progressive Mormons on the internet have the power in the modern moment to redefine the borders of belonging in Mormonism, as I discuss in subsequent chapters.

If narratives about Romney highlight the public face of Mormonism, a simultaneous internal conflict -- which went largely unnoticed by the preoccupied and largely disinterested non-Mormon public -- marks the inner most face.

CHAPTER 4: Wars and Rumors of Wars: Apologetic and Dissent Communities

"In the Lord's Church there is no such thing as a 'loyal opposition.'
One is either for the kingdom of God and stands in defense of God's prophets and apostles,
or one stands opposed." (Elder M. Russell Ballard 1999:62)

"Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned
and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial. As such, their ambiguous and
indeterminate attributes are expressed by a rich variety of symbols in the many societies that
ritualize social and cultural transitions." (Victor Turner 1969:94)

A secret article. Somewhere in the ether, it circulated among staunch Mormon defenders, and soon would be published for all to see. This was personal, and it contained proof, the hard-sought and meticulously cited evidence that might finally be the blow to take down that wolf in sheep's clothing, so long amassing his forces against the Church while pretending to be a friend of truth and a shoulder for the wounded. Finally, everyone would learn the truth.

Or so they said.

As with any contentious issue, contradictory narratives surrounded the article. To others, it was nothing more than slanderous lies. It became known as "the hit piece," a personal, ad-hominem attack in the guise of a 100-page social-scientific article, written expressly to take the focus off the Church's history of obfuscation and put it directly on the personal shortcomings of one wounded warrior.

As we have seen, Mitt Romney's unavoidably public run focused mainstream attention on the LDS Church, resulting in competing representations of Mormonism strategically articulated to control public perceptions. Those representations, of course, were outward-focused, designed to manipulate a skeptical voting public's perceptions of a controversial church. But while that public battle raged, behind the curtains conflicts among Mormons themselves revealed other facets and faces of modern Mormonism, arcane and only comprehensible to insiders. But like public contestations over the image of Mormonism, these private conflicts also drew lines in the sand, solidifying who is ultimately in charge of designating -- and policing -- proper Mormon identity.

One particularly intense internecine conflict resonated in elite Mormon communities in 2012, in a debacle that highlighted the Mormon cultural practice of intra-group surveillance. The *dramatis personae* in this contentious episode, highly circulated within these influential groups, included members of two opposing communities on the periphery of Mormon identity: orthodox apologists and heterodox dissenters. The conflict was largely instigated by certain members and supporters of the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies (known as FARMS), a collaboration of LDS apologists at the time working out of the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship at Church-owned Brigham Young University. In addition to scholarly attempts to defend the Church's historical claims, these writers and academics were known for their work "separating the wheat from the tares," unabashedly calling out what they saw as disingenuous threats to authentic faith.

This time the target of the apologists' fervor was a well-known if contentious internet podcaster named John Dehlin. A vocally heterodox and sometimes doubting Mormon at the time, Dehlin founded the Mormon Stories[34] podcast in 2005 to explore the Church's history and truth claims from various perspectives. To date he has produced over five hundred hour-long episodes, in which he interviews diverse participants ranging from prominent Mormons to heterodox, former, and "anti-Mormons," tackling subjects from controversial Mormon mission practices to Joseph Smith's polygamy to archaeological evidence for and against the Book of Mormon's truth claims. As the popularity of his podcasts spread, Dehlin became a figurehead for dissenting and ex-Mormon communities and a lightning rod for controversy due to his unorthodox explorations and his outspokenness about his own doubts.

If Mormon identities encompass a range of agential possibilities tethered to a structural ideal, communities of apologists and dissenters map the borders of acceptability. At one extreme, apologists such as those associated with FARMS are known as orthodox, conservative, and devout; Dehlin and his allies are comparatively considered heterodox, liberal, and secular. Both

---

[34] http://mormonstories.org/

groups are educated, elite, dogmatic and abrasive, imagining themselves as the apotheosis of Mormon identity and vilifying the other as a bastardization of that identity. Antipathy between Dehlin's community and FARMS in particular runs deep, each viewing the other as representative of the most cogent threat to Mormonism today. The conflict between apologists and dissent groups is primarily a disembodied one: engaging in a perpetual war of words, supporters of each group spend countless hours in online debates and arguments, often reverting to seemingly juvenile personal attacks and site-to-site stalking.

Volatility between these groups reached new heights in a particularly violent if disembodied online battle early in 2012, when FARMS-affiliated author Gregory L. Smith completed a detailed article dissecting the implications of John Dehlin's internet activity. From the start, Smith intended to publish his lengthy article in *The Mormon Studies Review*[35], a peer-reviewed academic journal then sponsored by FARMS and BYU, thus escalating and legitimating this ongoing internecine conflict by confirming it in the academic record. But although he did eventually publish the article, it found its home elsewhere, after the dissolution of the entire FARMS enterprise, the ejection of the Board of Directors of the Maxwell Institute, and a complete reconfiguration of BYU's approach to religious studies-- a restructuring which came as an institutional attempt to dissociate with marginal, extreme orthodox voices such as Smith's, and which foreshadowed later events in 2014-15 that would similarly distance the Church from extreme heterodox voices like Dehlin's.

Greg Smith described his article as an analysis of Mormon Stories and of Dehlin's assumed role of exit counselor. Smith circulated it among his colleagues, some of whom approached me to discuss its contents on condition of anonymity, and who described it as objective, scholarly, and well supported. But other early reviewers saw it as personal and unprofessional. In March 2012, one such reviewer and employee of the Maxwell Institute, after reading an early draft of Smith's article, surreptitiously contacted Dehlin to warn him of its

---

[35] Formerly *FARMS Review.*

impending publication. Dehlin then spread news of the article through his own social media channels, where the "leak" led to prolific discussion and speculation on online message boards[36] about the contents of the mysterious article. Although Dehlin himself had not read it and could only guess at its contents, it became known among his supporters as "the hit piece." Online speculation at its contents predicted it would be an *ad hominem*, aggressive attack against Dehlin's character, a speculation based on Smith's well established combative rhetorical style (see Smith 2011) and on anonymous tipsters with supposed insider information. Some said it would contain details purportedly linking Dehlin to the untimely death of his mission companion years before; others said it would attempt to prove Dehlin was apostate and dangerous. Finally, in November 2012, after the drama surrounding Smith's article had largely dissipated and yet before it had actually been published, Smith himself sent me a copy of his article to review.

Titled "Dubious 'Mormon' Stories: A Twenty-First Century Construction of Exit Narratives," Gregory L. Smith's 116-page article is framed as an academic review which treats Dehlin and Mormon Stories as texts to debunk. Using the rhetoric of both a social scientist and a religious purist, Smith begins with a caution concerning the digital era's potential to dilute Mormon sensibilities, as the internet offers a platform for groups that he calls "New Order Mormons" (a moniker taken from a website of that name) or "leavetakers from traditional or literal-interpretation Mormonism" (Smith 2013:5)[37]. What follows is a heavily cited, intricate timeline of Dehlin's activities, primarily online, brought together as a rhetorical deconstruction of "cultural Mormonism" using Mormon Stories and Dehlin as representative of this dangerous trend. Painstakingly cataloging Dehlin's (mostly) public online activities, Smith argued that Dehlin is not only a thinly-veiled "exit counselor" in the tradition of evangelical ex-cult movements, but that he is also a wolf in sheep's clothing. While the article was ostensibly about Mormon Stories as a community and as a social project, Smith used Dehlin as a stand-in for dissenting perspectives more generally.

---

[36] These discussions took place in many forums, most notably the message boards at www.mormondiscussions.com and www.exmormon.org, and in closed Facebook groups.

[37] Quotes from Smith's article are taken from its public 2013 form, published in *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture,* a grassroots, open-access apologetic journal founded by Daniel Peterson and others after his ouster from the Maxwell Institute. The journal can be found at www.mormoninterpreter.com.

Intertwining social scientific literature and Mormon scriptures throughout, Smith at once examined

Dehlin's online rhetorical strategies and-- both implicitly and explicitly-- criticized him as an

insincere and dangerous Saint who uses his "expert status" as an insider to defiantly guide others

away from the Church[38], all while feigning sincerity as an advocate for Mormons to remain active

and faithful.

But the article was never published with FARMS. Within weeks of rumors of its existence

leaking online, more news spread that the article's publication had been suddenly halted.

Speaking anonymously out of fear for their jobs, two employees of the Maxwell Institute explained

in interviews that the article was suppressed personally by Cecil O. Samuelson, president of BYU

and an emeritus General Authority of the LDS Church, as well as another unnamed General

Authority after Dehlin reached out to the latter and pleaded for an intervention. Throughout the

ensuing debacle, Smith remained unconvinced whether Church leaders were involved at all and

wondered whether the story of General Authority involvement was fabricated to justify a purely

political decision on the part of BYU.

The fallout from the controversial article did not stop at its censorship. Just months later,

in June 2012 the editorial board of the *Mormon Studies Review*, including its founder and editor

Daniel Peterson-- a well-know figurehead among LDS apologists and conservative intellectuals--

was unceremoniously dismissed and the 23-year old journal's publication halted. Maxwell

Institute executive director Gerald Bradford issued a statement via the Institute's website (his only

public statement on the episode) indicating that the *FARMS Review* would be re-titled and

restructured as an outlet for Mormon studies research and that the replacement of the editorial

team was intended "to better position the new *Mormon Studies Review* within its academic

---

[38] Smith had long been openly critical of Dehlin's online activism. For instance, in a 2011 critique of a Mormon Stories podcast, Smith wrote that despite Dehlin's claims, his podcast is "hostile to the truth of the Book of Mormon," denouncing Dehlin as a biased "cultural Mormon" who is ignorant of the Book of Mormon (Smith 2011a). His critique represents a longstanding and bitter resistance toward groups like Mormon Stories from conservative Mormon apologists. This genre of written critique of those he considers marginal Mormons was nothing new; just the year before, Smith had written a similar critique of the website Mormons for Marriage and its organizer to show her hypocrisy and faithlessness (c.f. Smith 2011b).

discipline" (BYU 2012)[39]. The Maxwell Institute as an entity, and BYU by extension, seemed to

be moving away from abrasive apologetics and positioning itself as an objective scholarly

organization, an historic move for an institution centered so precariously between academic and

faith-based magisteria. The apologetic efforts to remain would be solely "pastoral" and "faith-

promoting," rather than "polemic," one employee told me.

Rather than simply redrawing lines for appropriate and inappropriate University

behaviors, the firing of Peterson et. al. suggested censure of aggressive apologetics as a

rhetorical style befitting Mormons. Indeed, the firing of Peterson was a form of institutional

discipline. In a scathing letter[40] in which he resigned from his position of Director of Advancement

at the Maxwell Institute, Peterson referred to the event as "my public crucifixion" (Peterson 2012)

and in August, during a question-and-answer session at FairMormon's annual conference, he

expressed disappointment with the involvement of General Authorities in the debacle, saying it

had felt like he, rather than Dehlin, "was the one being disciplined" (Daniel Peterson, FairMormon

conference remarks, 3 August 2012)-- a term implying ecclesiastical sanction emanating directly

from Church leadership.

For his part, Dehlin continued his vocal online heterodoxy using social media, particularly

his personal and Mormon Stories Facebook pages, to publicly express his doubt in the

truthfulness of many central Mormon tenets and historical narratives[41] and to call for greater

---

[39] As an ethnographer, my own role in this unfolding story was an interesting and complicated one. I first met Dehlin in late March 2012 when we, along with FairMormon President Scott Gordon, spoke on a panel at an academic conference at Utah Valley University. The tension between Gordon and Dehlin was palpable, and a strong contrast to the general affability I had always sensed in my public interactions with Mormons. After the panel, I watched as Louis Midgley, an apologist with FARMS, confronted Dehlin; and although I did not hear what was said, I saw him shake his finger in Dehlin's face and yell angrily. Later that day I had lunch with Dehlin, and during that lunch he took a phone call from a General Authority (which I later learned concerned the article). In August, I spoke at the annual conference of FairMormon (then FAIR), and was approached afterward by several different men who claimed "insider" knowledge of the article. I received unsolicited personal emails (including an advance copy of Smith's article, before even Dehlin had seen it) and even a phone call from different sources who wanted to tell their side of the story (anonymously of course). It was clear that both sides saw me as a potentially "unbiased" outsider who could help them publically construct their narrative to their advantage. Piecing together the actual happenings became less important (and virtually impossible anyway) than understanding the ways the two communities constructed history for their own ideological purposes.

[40] The letter of resignation was "leaked" online on various Mormon interest message boards; it was unclear if the source of the leak was the same source that leaked news of Greg Smith's article, another party at the Maxwell Institute, or perhaps Peterson himself.

[41] For instance, on the "About" page on the Mormon Stories website, he states: "I am deeply troubled by [Church leaders'] historical and current treatment of women, racial and sexual minorities, and scientists/intellectuals... I am also troubled by their historical and current approaches to faith/doubt, sexuality, the pursuit of vast commercial interests along with

institutional transparency around these troubling issues. He came under "investigation" by Church

leadership-- the third time over the course of his involvement with Mormon Stories-- and in mid

2014 was contacted by his local authorities for a disciplinary hearing with the possibility of

excommunication for apostasy. The timing of Dehlin's investigation coincided with another high

profile case-- the controversial excommunication of feminist activist and Ordain Women founder

Kate Kelly (discussed in the following chapter), which together with Dehlin's case drew national

media attention. After months of postponements, in February 2015 Dehlin was excommunicated

by local leaders on charges of apostasy[42]. Though certainly this extreme ousting from the

community is not on par with Peterson's firing, both highly mediated instances worked to maintain

strict boundaries on Mormon identity and to keep marginal members cognizant of their always

precarious place in a bureaucratic faith.

Disputes concerning the Smith article, the firing of Peterson and dismissal of his board,

and the discipline of Dehlin underscore what is at stake in this ongoing, online war for control over

representations of proper Mormon identity. Conflict between members of apologetic and

dissenting groups is par for the course on the dialogic and interactive Web 2.0[43]. Internecine

conflict involving religious interpretive communities is nothing new; in-group fighting in

Mormonism is as old as the religion itself, and in and of itself is not noteworthy. Still, the rhetorical

strategies used by these groups during volatile exchanges helps shed light on the ethos of the

group; the ways that apologetic and dissent groups fight, and subsequently the ways that they are

reigned in and disciplined by the larger institution, highlight essential elements of Mormon identity

and mark moments of renegotiation of group boundaries.

---

financial non-disclosure, the coercion/shaming of members through the withholding of temple and priesthood privileges, and the current culture of leader worship within the LDS church. I believe that the discouraging of criticism of LDS church leaders is possibly the single most pernicious and damaging aspect of LDS church culture — and that sunlight and candor are ultimately the best disinfectants" (Dehlin 2014).

[42] The narratives that surrounded Dehlin's excommunication also did important boundary work, as Dehlin framed his discipline as a direct result of his LGBT and women's ordination advocacy work, while Church leadership described it as resulting from his public and repeated questioning of Church leaders and teachings.

[43] It is important to note that online trolling --comments left to intentionally incite antipathy and debate-- is an incredibly common aspect of Web 2.0 platforms regardless of the topic and is in no way a unique feature of discussions of religion and/or Mormonism.

In the remainder of this chapter, I explore how these arcane communities operate within the structural constraints of their faith and the implications of their roles for the ethos of the broader institution. I begin with a detailed history of the relationship between these two vernacular communities, contextualizing their ongoing conflict. Then I generate a two-part analysis of this conflict and its closure: first, I establish normative expectations for proper interpersonal exchanged, built on Mormon expectations of a community-over-self orientation and deferral to authority. But ongoing, volatile conflicts between apologetic and dissent groups violate these norms, marking moments of agential renegotiation of group boundaries. I argue that the disruption of fundamental Mormon traits in these groups' performance of what I call a "Mormon machismo" places them outside the limits of acceptable discourse, which puts their roles in the broader Mormon community in jeopardy. In the second part of my analysis, I show how the recent public censuring of members of these groups by the LDS Church illustrates the importance of the ritual of boundary maintenance for ongoing Mormon cohesion. I argue that the outcomes of this particular dramatic episode -- rather than asserting or supporting marginality as a viable Mormon identity construct-- instead serve to reassert the authority of the institution and of the hegemonic status quo.

Apologetic and Dissent Groups in Modern Mormonism

Before exploring the role of apologetic and dissent groups in modern Mormonism, we must first establish working definitions for our terminology. First, in broad use "apologetics" refers to a rhetorical practice and a social exercise rather than a static identity, and so the term "apologist" generally refers to an individual taking on a particular social role at a particular time and in a particular place. In practice, apologists are defenders of the institutional party line. They are social activists, seeking out what they see as misinformation (any information that contradicts the institution's official position on any matter, or even opinions or perspectives that fail to present

the institution in a flattering light), and employing a combination of rhetorical strategies to defend the institution. This definition is not limited to Mormonism, and in this sense, it is true that any Latter-day Saint may act as an apologist by actively engaging in these defensive debates, starting with the assumption that the Church's teachings are literally, historically true and the LDS Church is the legitimate church established by Jesus, re-established through Joseph Smith, and maintained through the process of continuing revelation through subsequent prophets.

But the term "apologist" as a demarcation of identity within the Mormon community has a more specific connotation, referring to a conservative, faithful member who dedicates considerable time and effort to actively seeking out opportunities to engage in apologetics (generally in internet forums), as a hobby or self-appointed responsibility, and who self-identifies as an apologist. These Mormons form social networks on- and offline around shared apologetic enterprises. These socially connected groups share the objective of amassing their intellectual and textual efforts using rational argument, Scripture, and hermeneutics to confront challenges to the Church on websites, blogs, and social networking sites (primarily Facebook). They circulate their textual work with other apologists and socialize around these efforts in disembodied online space. Among some dissenting and heterodox Mormons, the term "apologist" is itself a devil term, denoting blind allegiance to authority, privileging of religious narratives over empirical evidence, and abrasive interpersonal style[44].

Mormon apologists are-- and this is key-- almost exclusively highly educated, white American men between the ages of about 45 and 65. In Mormon circles, there are no well-known women who are referred to consistently as "apologists;" although apologetic websites may occasionally feature women authors, and apologetic conferences may feature women speakers, in my ethnographic work only men are consistently referred to and self-describe as apologists[45].

---

[44] For instance, when some prominent (and heterodox) Mormon academics questioned Dehlin's account of the reasons for his disciplinary council (in particular, his insistence that his LGBT advocacy was the impetus), he responded by describing them as apologists-- denoting to his supporters that their allegiance is with the institution, and not with "truth" as Dehlin conceives it.

[45] Perhaps in recognition of the gender imbalance in apologetics, the newly launched *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* offers the Ruth M. Stephens Article Prize to submissions by women authors.

They are often highly regarded professionals and professors (most often at BYU, but also elsewhere), the most prominent of whom have backgrounds in fields such as ancient languages, political science, and history. Some of them are academics whose apologetic work is tied to their research; others are not academics at all, but lawyers or medical doctors who take up apologetics exclusively as a hobby or volunteer effort.

The largest and most well-known LDS apologetic organization today is FairMormon (frequently referred to by its former name, the Foundation for Apologetic Information and Research, or FAIR), a registered non-profit run entirely on volunteer labor. Its website features a blog, Answers Wiki for difficult topics, embedded videos, podcasts, and an online bookstore; aside from its annual conference, it exists as a virtual entity. FARMS, prior to its disbanding, was widely considered FairMormon's sister[46] organization, often overlapped in purpose, approach, and membership. Although FairMormon is considerably less abrasive in style, today it continues in the tradition established by FARMS, and with the support and participation of many former FARMS writers and contributors.

Mormon dissent communities, particularly on the internet, are much more diverse and prolific. I use the term "dissent community" as a wide net, including a range of groups from sympathetic reformers to those hostile to the Church, its leadership, and even its people. It should be noted that some groups I classify as "dissenting" would take issue with my use of that term, which carries connotations of unfaithfulness in Mormon culture and bifurcates Mormon identity in problematic ways. Yet I find it a useful term because it refers to an active, not passive, withholding of assent or approval; these groups are unified by their active doubt, by open criticism of some major or minor aspect of Mormon culture, history, or practice. The term dissent underscores that, unlike groups that fully assent to (or, in Mormon parlance, "sustain") the institution, these groups do not necessarily start from the perspective that the Church is true, or that its policies or doctrines are right, a perspective that in and of itself is anathema in a church

---

[46] An ironic word choice, this, since both groups are almost exclusively male.

reliant on full and unconditional doctrinal and practical acceptance. In that way, these communities dissent from the party line in ways that make them outsiders to idealized Mormonism.

Dissent groups are slightly more demographically diverse than apologetic communities, but are still dominated by educated white American men. They tend to be a slightly younger demographic, in the 20-50 age range. Their demographic similarity to apologetic communities is an important feature we will return to. In this chapter I use John Dehlin's Mormon Stories communities as representative of dissent groups more generally; these are of particular interest because of their size, reach, and visibility (as of this writing the main Mormon Stories Podcast Community group page on Facebook has over 6700 members); their interaction with and codependence on Mormon apologetics; and because they represent approaches to heterodoxy and dissent which employ distinct rhetorical styles and strategies. But the Mormon Stories groups are best understood as a community center or hub around and beside which other groups have formed; their membership, ideologies, and discursive strategies overlap and depart with other distinct dissent groups[47]. Even among dissent groups not directly affiliated with Mormon Stories, Dehlin is widely considered a figurehead and spokesperson for the disaffected and dissenting.

"Community" may be the most problematic term in use here, and rightly so: in our increasingly fractured digital age, it is problematic to make claims about community, once a place-based identifier. When I refer to these groups as communities, I am highlighting specific features: the members of the groups interact frequently; share particular central values, goals, and motivations; and most importantly, by self-selecting into the affinitive community, self-identify as a member of the group and signal the adoption of a particular identity construct. I do not mean to suggest that members of these groups socialize on an individual level, or know even one another by name (in fact, many operate online under pseudonyms to protect their offline identity);

---

[47] Dissent communities range from sympathetic forums for progressive Mormons like New Order Mormon (http://forum.newordermormon.org/) and the public Facebook group for LGBT allies Mormons Building Bridges (https://www.facebook.com/groups/mormonsbuildingbridges/), to hostile communities for former members like Facebook's closed group Ex Mormons Worldwide (https://www.facebook.com/groups/70210653951/), and the bulletin board style communities Post-Mormon (http://postmormon.org) and Recovery from Mormonism (http://exmormon.org).

although it is safe to say that group leaders and figureheads (like Dan Peterson or John Dehlin) are known of by all. "Community" also should not be taken as a suggestion of establishment or permanence, or even of obligation to the group; especially in dissent communities, turnover is high and new members are added daily as others leave[48].

While apologetic and dissent communities serve a variety of functions that could be analyzed separately for their impact on Mormon identity, in this chapter I am specifically interested in the ways that these communities *interact* and what that interaction itself tells us about Mormon identity construction and mechanisms for boundaries formation. I rely on interviews with members of both communities (most of whom requested anonymity because of the precariousness of their own marginality), as well as discourse analyses of postings on social networking forums on the internet to analyze these communities' discursive strategies as self-reflexive ways of making sense of their standing and status as Mormons on the margins.

The LDS tradition of lay apologetics

As a discursive strategy, apologetics make use of public forums or mass communication technologies to speak back to public criticism. Apologists cull linguistic, historical, doctrinal, or other types of evidence to form a systematic and cohesive argument with a goal of defending particular doctrinal claims as truth. As a communicative impulse, apologetics bridge that often impossible gap between non-empirical issues of faith and belief, and reason and proof so valued by the post-Enlightenment purview. Apologetics as a form of Christian rhetoric are as old as the religion itself; Catholics and Protestants trace the tradition from Christ's ministry, to the New Testament letters of Paul, through the Middle Ages, and to the present day (Dulles 2005).

---

[48] In my ethnographic work, I have seen some evidence that the turnover in these and other heterodox Mormon groups online follows a pattern, reflecting the gradual dissociation of leave-takers from Mormonism as their primary social sphere. The pattern of awareness of issues, immersion in heterodox groups, and construction of a new identity is loosely reflected in my work on deconversion narratives (see Avance 2013); many subjects then become less active and eventually leave these communities, presumably because their social needs are eventually met elsewhere, though more work needs to be done to understand whether they replace their involvement in online communities with other groups, return to Mormon orthodoxy, or what becomes of them.

Apologetics in the Mormon tradition is a very necessary and yet very precarious undertaking. Since the founding of the always-controversial LDS Church, Mormon writers have defended their beliefs to a skeptical and often hostile public in newspaper articles, book publications, and pamphlets. Generally, these early apologists were leaders of the Church and held some normative sway; yet often despite their individual authority, their apologetic work was contested because of its autonomy. One illustrative example involves Orson Pratt, an inaugural member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. Pratt very briefly published *The Seer* from 1853-1854, an "official" LDS periodical commissioned by Brigham Young himself as a platform for explicating and defending the Mormon doctrine of polygamy, or "celestial marriage," to a skeptical and hostile national public. Yet despite his status as a Church authority, and despite the "official" status of his publication, a decade later in 1865 the First Presidency issued a statement in the Church-owned *Deseret News* publicly disciplining Pratt and denouncing his writings, including *The Seer*, due to Pratt's doctrinal declarations which amounted to "hypotheses and theories" (Clark 1975: 239). The proclamation explains the danger of speaking on behalf of the Church:

> It ought to have been known, years ago, by every person in the Church — for ample teachings have been given on the point — that no member of the Church has the right to publish any doctrines, as the doctrines of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, without first submitting them for examination and approval to the First Presidency and the Twelve. There is but one man upon the earth, at one time, who holds the keys to receive commandments and revelations for the Church, and who has the authority to write doctrines by way of commandment unto the Church. And any man who so far forgets the order instituted by the Lord as to write and publish what may be termed new doctrines, without consulting with the First Presidency of the Church respecting them, places himself in a false position, and exposes himself to the power of darkness by violating his Priesthood. (Clark 1975:239)

The policing of apologetic discourse is central to its history in the LDS context. As we saw in Chapter 2, unlike many other Christian churches, Mormonism sponsors no official theology, and doctrine is in many ways undeveloped and often difficult for even lifelong members to pin down. Correlation and its legacy ensure that "official," Church-sponsored messaging is consistent in content across speakers and throughout Church media, and members are discouraged (officially and implicitly) from putting any stock into "unofficial" sources of any kind. In

keeping with the very top-down nature of hierarchy in the Church, even apologists who are

attempting a defense of the Church are not free to speak on its behalf. This policing of who can

speak for Mormonism is reflected in the Church's internet policy, canonized[49] in the official

Handbook's Administrative Policies section:

> Members may not create websites, blogs, or social media profiles on behalf of the Church or to officially represent the Church and its views. However, they may create websites, blogs, or social media profiles to assist with their callings. When doing so, members must include a disclaimer such as "This is not an official website of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints"... As members express their own thoughts and feelings, they should not give the impression that they represent or are sponsored by the Church. (LDS 2010)[50]

Despite institutional ambivalence, in the first part of the twentieth century, many other

Church leaders-cum-apologists like Elders B.H. Roberts and John Widtsoe also engaged in

defensive work. Interestingly, although Roberts lived and died a faithful Mormon, he wrote

investigative studies on inconsistencies and anachronisms in the Book of Mormon, even

suggesting that Joseph Smith may have plagiarized it (Roberts 1985). These studies went

unpublished until more than fifty years after his 1933 death, and are now fodder for dissent

groups who use his insider status to validate concerns over Book of Mormon authenticity.

Although Mormon leaders have long engaged in intellectualist apologetics, many modern

apologists see prolific BYU linguist Hugh Nibley as a sort of founding father of Mormon lay

apologetics. Nibley was one of the first lay members to engage in mass-media driven apologetic

work, publishing his extensive works through Church-owned Deseret Book throughout the 1980s

and 90s. An acutely intelligent academic (Nibley trained at UC Berkeley in the 1930s and was

fluent in some sixteen languages) and a faithful member of the Church (Peterson 2002), Nibley

also established a tradition of what has come to be called "faithful scholarship," an approach that

upends the scientific method by presupposing the veracity of all of Mormonism's truth claims

---

[49] I use this term only somewhat facetiously; the official Mormon canon includes Scriptures (the Bible, Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, and Pearl of Great Price), but in practice, institutionally sanctioned manuals, especially the Handbook of Instruction (Vols. 1 & 2), are treated as inerrant and inspired.
[50]The inclusion or exclusion of such a disclaimer on any given Mormon's website or blog is often a telling first clue as to the level of orthodoxy represented there; nearly every orthodox blog and website I have studied has included this disclaimer.

(from cosmology, to history, to linguistics) and analyzing data in light of these foregone conclusions. Since Nibley, LDS apologetic work has been institutionally separate from the Church itself, avoiding the risks of "official" sanction on whatever tactics and information the groups themselves employ.

Aside from individual apologists working to defend the Church's claims, visible and active Mormon apologetic organizations are relatively new phenomena. The largest and longest-lived, FARMS began in the late 1970s as an informal collaboration of Mormons thinkers interested in primarily historical scholarship. FARMS was officially annexed by Church-owned Brigham Young University in 1998 under the direction of then-Church President Gordon B. Hinckley, who intended it to "provide strong support and defense of the Church on a professional basis" (LDS 1998); in 2006 it merged with BYU's newly organized Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, which originally focused mostly on faith-affirming initiatives. FARMS-affiliated apologists continued Nibley's tradition of "faithful scholarship" until the effective dissolution of their organization in 2013.

As with many aspects of LDS culture, the internet revolutionized Mormon apologetics, allowing independent groups of researchers and thinkers to come together in their common goal of defending the Church. Today's largest LDS apologetic organization, FairMormon (formerly the Foundation for Apologetics Information and Research, or FAIR) largely owes its genesis as an organization to the internet. According to FairMormon President Scott Gordon, in 1997 during the heyday of America Online message boards, one particular religion-themed board became a heated battleground. Fueled by the Mormon proselytizing impetus, faithful members and critics of the Church (at that time, largely Evangelical Christians, who no doubt saw their engagement on these boards as a form of proselytizing or witnessing as well) engaged in often-heated discussions and debates around Mormon authenticity. Frustrated at having to constantly retype the same rebuttals to misperceptions and challenges posed again and again by various detractors, Gordon and several others created the FairMormon website as a centralized database

of information and responses to these common critiques (S. Gordon, interview, 20 September

2012).

In an interview, Gordon said his motivation for starting the website centered on his desire

to present correct and unbiased information about the Church for individuals on the cusp of major

faith decisions (particularly those considering leaving the Church). He explained:

> It's disconcerting to me when people make major decisions in their life based on
> information that I feel is either inaccurate or at least deserves a little more explanation
> before making a decision based on it. So … I just want people to have their eyes wide
> open. If they still make a decision one way or the other, that's ok with me. I mean I may
> be disappointed but … I'm ok with that because I feel like they've thought about it,
> they've thought it out, they've made their decision, and they've moved on. (S. Gordon,
> interview, 20 September 2012)

His intention, he explained, was to show doubters and seekers that they can make faith work

despite difficulties. Today his nonprofit, volunteer-only organization is headquartered online at

the sleek website www.fairmormon.org. It features articles by regular contributors on various hot-

button topics like polygamy, the translation of the Book of Mormon, and Mormonism and science;

a child organization called MormonVoices formatted for the public; an "Ask the Apologist" feature

that puts readers in direct correspondence with FairMormon writers; an expanding podcast called

the FAIR-Cast; and a wiki frequently updated by apologists with information and rebuttals to

various challenges of the day.

The internet has made Mormon lay apologetics both more difficult and more necessary,

according to FairMormon's Public Relations representative Steve Densley, a corporate lawyer

who devotes ten to thirty hours a week volunteering for the organization. In an interview Densley

explained that prior to the internet, anti-Mormon claims from both Evangelicals and former

Mormons – often the most outspoken adversaries to the Church-- were generally easy to refute.

In his recollection, critics then were largely ignorant or dismissive of complicated problems in

Church history and anachronisms or other textual issues in the Book of Mormon. Instead,

challenges then focused on sectarian quibbles, generally nonfalsifiable claims like whether or not

God has a body, or esoteric aspects of Mormon practice raised in an effort to paint the Church as a dangerous cult (S. Densley, interview, 17 September 2012).

In those pre-internet days, some in-depth criticisms did exist, such as "No Man Knows My History: The Life of Joseph Smith," a notorious 1945 expose by historian and former Mormon Fawn Brodie (Brodie 1945); or the mimeographed writings of Jerald and Sandra Tanner-- former Mormons turned Evangelicals who founded the still-operational Salt Lake City-based Utah Lighthouse Ministries in the 1960s, publishing exposé-style writings on Church history and beliefs (c.f. Tanner & Tanner 1964, Tanner & Tanner 1990). The former-member-turned-critic is a familiar trope in religious experience, particularly in controversial or marginalized religious groups; these are analyzed sociologically as the apostate role of "whistleblower" (Bromley 1998:19). Mormonism's tradition of correlation provides a simplistic heuristic for orthodox members to easily dismiss these types of writings as "anti-Mormon."

Allow me to take a brief moment to underscore Mormon culture's easy dismissal of whistleblower activists. After I presented a talk on narratives of former Mormons at FairMormon's annual conference, a Mormon woman approached me and said, "This is all very interesting, but the real question is: Why do so many people leave the Church, but they can't leave it alone?" That question-- repeated often among conservative members-- has a history of connection to authoritative discourse, masking the derision that many orthodox LDS feel for those who have left the Church but still invest time in discussing and even dissecting it. Perhaps not coincidentally, it was Elder Neal A. Maxwell-- namesake of the BYU institution that first housed FARMS-- who coined the phrase "leave the Church but can't leave it alone" as an epithet for former Mormons still actively engaged in conversations about the Church. In 1980 he said:

> Newcomers, you may even see a few leave the Church who cannot then leave the Church alone. Let these few departees take their brief bows in the secular spotlight; someday they will bow deeply before the throne of the Almighty. (Maxwell 1980:14)

Maxwell repeated the phrase even more forcefully and derisively a few years later in General

Conference, expanding on the caricature of former, critical Mormons which would become a

standard heuristic among orthodox LDS as a way to understand and dismiss them:

> Some real tares even masquerade as wheat, including the few eager individuals who lecture the rest of us about Church doctrines in which they no longer believe. They criticize the use of Church resources to which they no longer contribute. They condescendingly seek to counsel the Brethren whom they no longer sustain. Confrontive, except of themselves, of course, they leave the Church, but they cannot leave the Church alone … Considering their ceaseless preoccupation, one wonders, Is there no diversionary activity available to them, especially in such a large building—like a bowling alley? Perhaps in their mockings and beneath the stir are repressed doubts of their doubts. … Therefore, brothers and sisters, quiet goodness must persevere, even when, as prophesied, a few actually rage in their anger against that which is good (see 2 Ne. 28:20). Likewise, the arrogance of critics must be met by the meekness and articulateness of believers. (Maxwell 1996)

As recently as General Conference in April 2004, Maxwell noted that in his lifetime he had seen

"a few leave the Church who could then never leave it alone. They used often their intellectual

reservations to cover their behavioral lapses" (Maxwell 2004). The idea that some disgruntled

members "leave the Church but can't leave it alone" became a cultural truism among many

mainstream LDS, as did the idea that vocal criticism of the Church was a mask for secret sinful

proclivities. In my own observations, the notion that leavetakers "can't leave the Church alone"

does important work as a cultural reaffirmation of hegemony. If Mormonism is *the only truth,* then

those who have experienced its truthfulness and still choose to leave must forever harbor some

vestige of its truthfulness in their hearts and minds. They leave, as Maxwell explained, because

they cling to some sinfulness they cannot extinguish; but even after leaving, they feel the draw of

the Church, manifesting in their blatant desire to fight against it. This notion is of course offensive

and even laughable to many leavetakers, who say that their choices to leave the Church are

complex and heartfelt, and that their inability to "leave the Church alone" has to do with the depth

of their Mormon acculturation, their embedded social and familial connections to Mormonism, and

often with the concern they feel for those still in the fold.

Thus in days prior to the proliferation of internet use among American Mormons, criticisms like those found in the writings of Jerald and Sandra Tanner (severely partisan and vitriolic to be sure, but many founded in matters of fact) were generally dismissed as "anti-Mormon literature" and disregarded by apologists and adherents, likely because average Mormons had no exposure to the majority of these complicated issues (and, being faithful, would not even read such literature), and saw their claims as outlandish and patently false. These whistleblowers were simply sinful apostates who had left the Church, but because of their guilt and shame and deeply embedded knowledge of the Church's truth, could not leave the Church alone.

Prior to the internet, the simplistic approach to whistleblower exposes was accompanied by a simplistic approach to most lay apologetics. Apologists lacked access to advances in the fields of archeology, science, and history, which meant they were unable to craft sophisticated responses to many challenges, like anachronisms in the Book of Mormon. Densley explained that so many complicated issues had to be accepted on faith alone in those days, and apologists often had to admit, "I don't know. But I've prayed about the Book of Mormon and I'm confident that the Book of Mormon is the word of God… We'll figure that out later" (S. Densley, interview, 17 September 2012).

The World Wide Web changed the game, bringing together people who are or have been Mormon and thus have a deep knowledge and concern for Church history, together with unprecedented access to information about complicated historical issues like Joseph Smith's polyandry, the Kinderhook plates, the Book of Abraham, and DNA evidence—consequential issues, these, all of which have been repeatedly cited in my interviews with former Mormons as contributing factors in their decisions to leave the Church. These days, too, Evangelical Christians are no longer the Church's biggest detractors; in Densley's words, "The stuff that has been more time consuming, or the stuff that's captured the attention of the apologists more [today] are the attacks that are coming from Mormon dissidents" (S. Densley, interview, 17

September 2012). Disgruntled former Mormons organize websites like www.mormonthink.com, the internet-era version of Jerald and Sandra Tanner's work, which takes an "empirical" approach, featuring in-depth and heavily cited accounts of both the Church's position and critical takes on dozens of sticky issues. FairMormon is not alone in recognizing the dangers of former Mormons on the internet: General Authority Neil L. Anderson recently noted in a Church-wide address, "There have always been a few who want to discredit the Church and to destroy faith. Today they use the internet" (Andersen 2012). So while detractors use the internet to gain a widespread audience for their perspective on Mormonism, so too apologists make use of this technology to respond to detractors.

Because issues raised by former or dissident Saints threaten the Church, Mormon apologists engage in a kind of surveillance of dissident groups. When asked how they gauge what issues to address on their website, Scott Gordon explained that among other things, several FairMormon volunteers "monitor" various Mormon-related message boards (particularly those Gordon calls "hostile" and "anti-Mormon"), and then address issues that are frequently cited in those venues.

This surveillance does not go unheeded. Members of dissident groups are cognizant that there are often "moles" in their midst, which they attribute to a Mormon culture of tattling rooted in a history of peer surveillance: since at least the mid 1980s, the Church has sanctioned a clandestine Strengthening Church Members Committee (SCMC), tasked with monitoring other Mormons (primarily but not exclusively their mediated writings related to the Church) through reliance on tips or complaints from other members, and then passing information to local leaders for potential disciplinary action (see Religious News Service 1992:5B, Quinn 1997:311, FairMormon 2014). By design, the SCMC has operated so surreptitiously that among some members it is thought to be little more than a folktale or byproduct of anti-Mormon rumor mongering. Although the existence of the SCMC has been confirmed by the Church, the scale of its operations has never been clarified or even hinted at, but that may be beside the point; just by

virtue of its existence, it works as a sort of Panopticon for members, especially in online groups where potential lurkers might be operatives for the SCMC. On the other side of the coin, some orthodox members take surveillance and tattling as an acceptable and even institutionally-encouraged behavior, effectively electing themselves to the SCMC by reporting suspicious or unorthodox behaviors and words to Church leaders. Members who are concerned about potential disciplinary action know to self-censor their speech to avoid the network of tattling that might lead to bishop notification of online dissent.

Despite the deep connections between surveillance and institutional mandate, the relationship between the LDS Church and apologist groups is not clear cut. Both Densley and Gordon see their work with FairMormon as time given to their Church and to God; but Church leaders have remained ambivalent about the work of these and other lay apologists. FairMormon is an independent organization which provides the requisite disclaimer on its website common to faithful LDS pages:

> FAIR is not owned, controlled by or affiliated with The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. All research and opinions provided on this site are the sole responsibility of FAIR, and should not be interpreted as official statements of LDS doctrine, belief or practice. (FAIR 2012)

But FairMormon's relationship to the Church is, of course, more complicated than the disclaimer implies. The disclaimer obfuscates what one FairMormon writer told me is the actual function of the organization: to "say what the Church can't say." He often chooses topics based on what he thinks might be "bad PR" coming from the Church but which still needs to be said: controversial or complicated issues on which a definitive answer from Salt Lake would risk exposing naïve members to information for which they are mentally or spiritually unprepared. This FairMormon writer said he has received requests from General Authorities for specific topics to be covered that the Church would rather not go on record about.

Gradually, the Church has begun to address some of these issues on its official website through quasi-historical essays (necessitated, in large part, by the work of dissent groups like

Mormon Stories and Mormon Think); in future, these institutional efforts (described in further detail in Chapter 6) could make some apologetic efforts obsolete. Certainly, they represent some effort by the institution to divest apologetic groups of their influence by correlating even defensive arguments and information.

For now, though, apologists are able to offer more detailed defensive responses to many critical issues without the risk that comes with an official stamp of approval from the institution. While Church leaders themselves have not endorsed FairMormon, in July 2012 the Church's Public Affairs spokesman, Michael Otterson, mentioned the organization's website in an YouTube presentation intended to help members confront "anti-Mormon material" (Otterson 2012)[51]. As Chapter 2 indicated, the role of LDS public relations is a complicated one with intentionally ambiguous normative authority, so while Otterson's support cannot be taken as an endorsement by the Church, it at once signals approval and a certain strategic plausible deniability.

While it allows them a bit of rhetorical leeway, the unofficial status of FairMormon also leads to its marginal status among many Mormons, particularly older members who are offline and unconnected to the shifting norms ushered in by the polyphony of the internet. A residual effect of correlation, it is sometimes seen as taboo for lay Mormons to attempt to clarify doctrine and policy beyond official Church statements; it is viewed as impertinent to speak up for the Church and borderline sinful, out of an overabundant caution to "follow the manual" (that is, the Church Handbook of Instructions) which warns members to only use approved materials when teaching about Mormonism. These conservative members understand the legacy of correlation to mean that unless the Church officially issues a statement on an issue, members should not opine. In interviews, some of these members have told me that they consider apologetics work to be "against Church policy" because Mormons should "turn the other cheek" when misrepresented and not argue back: "If someone wants to believe a lie about the Church, let them," one former bishop told me. These Mormons feel that "no one was ever converted through argument" and

---

[51] Otterson misstated the website address as "fair.org" instead of (at the time) "fairlds.org", which ironically directed faithful Mormons to an anti-censorship media watchdog website completely unrelated to Mormonism.

that the Holy Ghost must work in order for someone to "feel" the truth of the Church, so time spent in persuasion is better spent simply spreading the Gospel. These Saints often seem oblivious to the sophistication, proliferation, and effectiveness of anti-Mormon claims online. Densley noted that these cautious Mormons "really want to be careful not to do something they're not supposed to do. But then they misunderstand what it is they're supposed to do." He sees this fear of apologetics stemming from "the misunderstanding that [a Mormon] can't say anything unless it's been cleared by Salt Lake first"-- a view strategically promoted by the institution itself to maintain its top-down authority structure.

Densley argued that these ultra-conservative members miss the point of apologetics. In his view, many Mormons are wrongly fideistic, viewing approaches that incorporate reason or logic as hostile to true faith: "I think that there are some members of the Church who think that's what our doctrine is, that you just need to believe, and that logic and reason, argument, rational argument has nothing to do with testimony." He has encountered members who use this logic, and his response to them is to present an *apologia* for apologetics, creating a case for his practice ("Come now, let us reason together" from Isaiah 1:18) in an attempt to use the authority of the Scriptures as a bridge to ultra-conservative mentalities. For Densley, apologetic defense of the Church finds its precedence in Christ himself:

> How should we respond when people are attacking the Church? You know, it is appropriate some times to step back and say, "We still love you." Other times it is appropriate to turn the tables of the temple over and pull out the whip. (S. Densley, interview, 17 September 2012)

John Dehlin's Mormon Stories: Creating community at the borders of Mormon identity

If the internet provided the impetus for new forms of lay apologetic work, it also provided the platform for what might be considered the opposite: social communities formed around the common denominator of dissent. Where apologetic groups work to defend the Church's party line, dissent groups deconstruct it.

In 2005, with his testimony shaken after learning about controversial parts of Church history, John Dehlin felt unsatisfied with the support available for Church members experiencing crises of faith. Even online, he told me in an interview, there were only two options: blatantly anti-Mormon sites which were, in his words, "negative…critical, [and] cynical," and apologetic sites, which he felt were often "mean-spirited" and "trying to distract people with complexities about the difficult issues" (J. Dehlin, interview, 4 October 2012). Hoping to create a space for objectivity and support for struggling Mormons, Dehlin launched Mormon Stories Podcast. Now one of the most popular Mormon themed podcasts, Dehlin says Mormon Stories averages thirty to eighty thousand downloads per episode.

Through his own personal journey in and out of belief and practice, and in and out of Church discipline for his vocal heterodoxy, Dehlin acknowledges that the Church may not work for everyone and that each person should decide for themselves, given the evidence, whether or not they want to remain affiliated. This stance has led to accusations from critics that Dehlin is nothing more than a "cultural Mormon," a term often used derisively to refer to people who are not true believers, not quite in and not quite out of Mormonism's bounds.

Dehlin has long established himself as a sort of spokesperson for disaffected Mormons, using his own research as a psychology doctoral student to represent particular Mormon teachings as dangerous and damaging. For instance, Dehlin has taken a public stance against LDS proscriptions on homosexual sex, masturbation, and other Mormon orthodoxies, suggesting that they are psychologically and socially damaging and abusive. He has also argued that the LDS Church has not been honest about its own history with members, leading to deep resentment and disillusionment when individuals discover the truth. His online reach is prolific: in addition to Mormon Stories, Dehlin maintains or oversees at least six current "sister sites,"[52] all of

---

[52] These include: Mormon Matters (www.mormonmatters.org)*,* a podcast exploring Mormon current events; *StayLDS* (www.staylds.com), a message board forum designed for anonymous discussions of remaining active despite doubt; Mormon Stories Sunday School Podcast (www.mormonsundayschool.org)*,* intended to supplement Church materials for weekly lessons; Gay Mormon Stories (www.gaymormonstories.org), a podcast featuring interviews with GLBT Mormons*;* Mormon Research Foundation (www.mormonresearchfoundation.org), a fledgling site intended to centralize Internet-

which are organized under his non-profit organization known as the Open Stories Foundation. He also hosts several Facebook pages with thousands of members, and there are over eighty regional and affinity-based support groups on Facebook, which while unaffiliated with the Open Stories Foundation are nevertheless linked through the Mormon Stories site[53]. While most of his outspokenness is relegated to the internet, he also organizes and travels to regional Mormon Stories conferences and retreats, publicizes and marches in Gay Pride Parades to show solidarity with the LGBT community, and solicits and gives media interviews. In short, Dehlin is a highly visible and highly polarizing figure.

Many bloggers and participants in online forums share his perspectives, of course, but it is a combination of Dehlin's open skepticism and his charisma that at once make his online communities successful and pose a real threat to orthodoxy, making him a figurehead and target for criticism and surveillance. By creating communities for heterodox Mormons under the premise of providing support and psychological healing, Dehlin has amassed a following in the thousands of former and current Mormons who say he has saved them. They flock to him at conferences and gatherings, effusively thanking him for his work with Mormon Stories and for providing an online space for them to be honest and authentic with their doubt. His status is part celebrity, part spiritual guru: when I met John Dehlin at a conference on Mormonism and the internet at Utah Valley University, we had lunch together with a man on his way out of Mormonism. When Dehlin stepped away to take a phone call, this man turned to me and said "I keep pinching myself. I can't believe I'm having lunch with *John Dehlin!*"[54]

While he is popular among many dissenters, most conservative Mormons who know of him consider him dangerous and heretical. His audacity in both laying claim to LDS identity and

---

based survey research on the (largely heterodox) Mormon experience*;* and Mormon Stories Germany (www.mormonstoriesgermany.org), a German-language support site.

[53] www.mormonstories.org/local-communities. Originally Dehlin organized regional support groups for those in faith transitions or crises, but when the tone of some of these groups became increasingly hostile, and local conferences and meetings became difficult to oversee-- there were reports of drunken revelry and marital infidelity-- Dehlin distanced himself from official affiliation with any groups but his own, which he closely monitors and oversees.

[54] His popularity is not unquestioned among heterodox and dissenting Mormons, however; some feel that he takes his ownership of his podcast communities too seriously, censors members too authoritarian, fails to create a safe space for women and feminism, and reproduces the hierarchical structure of the Church that he criticizes.

openly criticizing the Church—two things generally thought to be mutually exclusive by faithful Saints—has made him a figure of enormous reproach. The Greg Smith article was not the first time John Dehlin had been singled out for criticism by orthodox ranks, and certainly would not be the last. As LDS writer Rosalynde Welch noted, "Dehlin is a charismatic figure and a lightning rod for the cultural tensions the church is experiencing in this political moment, and he has attracted both adulation and criticism" (Welch 2012).

Of his motives for creating Mormon Stories Podcast, in an interview Dehlin said that while his publicly stated objective was to create open and honest dialogue, his private motivation was to keep people in the Church. He explained,

> I was sad any time someone left the Church. I felt like *I* was able to make the Church work, and I was naively optimistic that all I had to do was get these issues out on the table and let the critics do their thing. But then if I could get the believers to say, yeah I know all this stuff but I still believe, that would be really compelling. If people were struggling, then those people would choose to stay in the Church. (J. Dehlin, interview, 4 October 2012)

The parallels between Dehlin's motives for starting Mormon Stories and Gordon's motives behind FairMormon are striking: both say there was no objective information on the internet for people in crises, both say they were motivated by a desire to help people stay active in the Church, and both believed that openness around difficult issues was the best way to keep people in the Church.

Dehlin's narrative is not uncontested; his "real" motives for creating and maintaining Mormon Stories have been debated since the start. Many apologists and conservative members dislike his unorthodox approach and feel he is duplicitous, a "wolf in sheep's clothing." They are certain that despite his claims to the contrary, Dehlin secretly wants to convince people to *leave* the Church, not to stay, and that he uses his membership in the Church and his purported goals of objectivity as masks to fool gullible Mormons in faith crises. One Facebook commentator asserted that Dehlin is leading a "campaign against Mormonism under the guise of unbiased research." It was this debate over intentionality that sparked the controversial article by Gregory Smith, threatening to expose Dehlin's purported real motivations.

Whatever similarities or differences may exist between their origins and motives, FairMormon and Mormon Stories now operate at odds. The incivility between the two is a microcosm of the hostility between apologetic and dissent groups more broadly. Every apologetic critique of a dissident for "leaving the Church but not leaving it alone" is accompanied by a parallel accusation by dissidents that apologists are simply "lying for the Lord," knowingly obfuscating truth to protect the image of the Church. Members of both communities often refer to the other camp in ways that suggest that the real battle of Mormon representation is between apologetics and dissent communities—between Mormons on the fringes.

In previous research, I have noted narrative strategies among what might be considered "orthodox" members who approach faith conservatively and literally, and "heterodox" practitioners who approach religious identity progressively and non-literally. These narratives challenge normative assumptions about what it means to be Mormon, belying the notion that Mormon identity is monolithic and homogeneous (see Avance 2013). If possibilities for LDS identity form a continuum from conservative to liberal, or orthodox to heterodox, these two internet communities – orthodox apologists on the one hand, and dissenting heterodox groups on the other—appear to map out the margins and define the borders of affiliation.

While there have always been communities on the margins of Mormon identity, the internet provides unprecedented platforms for the expression, expansion, and policing of these communities' narratives. Indeed, the very nature of life online—participatory, disseminatory, and heterogeneous—makes the proliferation of these communities at once possible and necessary: apologetic groups largely respond to "anti-Mormon" information widely circulated via the internet, and dissenting LDS often find anonymous and disembodied community online necessary to avoid perceived real-world threats to their heterodox beliefs or practices. Each of these online communities reject the other as misguided if not disingenuous, illegitimate, and even dangerous representatives of the broader Mormon faith community and yet rely on the other as a foil for their own version of legitimate LDS identity.

Where Apologetics and Dissent Meet: Negotiating the Narrative Enemy

Not only does the ongoing conflict between the groups provide their respective *raison d'êtres*, but its volatility also makes them the targets of broader institutional monitoring and occasional discipline. Significant because of their scope, visibility, and normative sway, apologetic and dissent groups' conflicts violate central institutional Mormon norms that prioritize the institution's interests over and above the interests of the individual member. It is the violation of these norms that then places these groups beyond the limits of acceptable Mormon identity, jeopardizing their roles in the broader Mormon community. Because these major violations occur in influential groups and are circulated widely via social media, the Church must respond in clear, punitive ways to reaffirm the boundaries of acceptable Mormon praxis.

In Mormonism as in all cultural systems, complex values and priorities contribute to normative expectations for proper public deportment and interpersonal exchange. Among these, the Church's patriarchal values are central, crafting clear hierarchies within the structure that demand specific if often unspoken obeisance. It is important to note that rather than an etic, feminist classification of Mormonism as patriarchal, my use of that word honors its emic meaning. The "patriarchal order" is a Mormon phrase, not my own, describing God's eternal structure for both temporal family life, ecclesiastical hierarchy, as well as the eternal structures of the cosmos. Mormonism is a quintessential American hierarchical corporation: its basic unit is the family, which is presided over by a husband and father; geographically close families comprise a ward, presided over by a bishop; geographically close wards comprise a stake, presided over by a stake president; and geographically close stakes comprise missions, presided over by a mission president. The entire organization of missions is the Church, presided over by General Authorities. In every case, the presiding authorities are men who are "head" of those beneath them on the organizational flow chart, but who must also submit to the men above them.

 The patriarchal order of Mormonism structures all relations organizationally and politically, but also flavors relations in affective ways. A counterpoint might be found in Elizabeth

Brusco's analysis of Evangelical churches in Columbia, where gender-imbalanced conversion

rates and the resulting predominance of women in religious leadership roles gives Colombian

Evangelicalism

> a "tone" or "flavor" that is distinctly consistent with Colombian femininity: what we might
> call a "feminine ethos," [where] ethos sets a definite tone of appropriate behavior and a
> standardized system of emotional attitudes. (Brusco 1995: 129)

Similarly, the Mormon patriarchal order situates men above women as leaders in the church and

in the home, giving Mormonism an American *masculine ethos*, a strong androcentrism, that is

hard to miss[55].

Structurally, emphasis on priesthood authority yields a lack of leadership roles and

visibility for women. Moreover, the highly bureaucratic corporation's top-down leadership

composition is not only literally gendered (as only men can hold high-stakes leadership roles) but

also reflects the gender bias in postmodern hierarchical organizations more broadly, which are a

site of male dominance (Acker 1990). When women do hold leadership positions, their decisions

and meetings must be "presided over" by male priesthood holders; even girls' camps must have

men present to preside and protect the women and girls in attendance[56]. Spatially, even in weekly

meetings men occupy positions of highest visibility; although women can and do frequently give

talks or lessons, men preside over every meeting physically and spiritually, sitting "on the stand"

in positions of authority. Theologically, Mormons are unique in their belief in Heavenly Parents

instead of just a Heavenly Father, but absolutely no emphasis is put on Heavenly Mother's role.

Merely mentioning her is taboo, but there is a clear if implicit understanding that in Heaven as it is

on Earth, the Father presides. The Book of Mormon itself can be read as a story about the

relationships between fathers and sons-- indeed, the record is said to have been passed down

from father to son for safekeeping (see Benson 1985, Sorenson 1995). Ritualized rites of

passage for men, like the emphasis on boys' activities like Scouting and the expectation that all

---

[55] See Ruchti 2007 for an excellent overview of Mormonism's embodiment of American ideals for masculinity as a way of attempting to mainstream with the broader culture.
[56] See *Latter-day Saint Woman* 2000: 93-96 for more on the expectations for female deferral to priesthood authority.

men serve a mission, institutionalize masculinity, and are "the price of admission to the Mormon 'Good Old Boys' club" (Knowlton 1992: 24).

The patriarchal context is central to Mormonism's expectations for demeanor as ethical and religious obligations in interpersonal exchange, which privilege a white male body and masculine authority. By default, the authoritative Mormon voice is a male voice. Speaking, especially in public forums, is a male task; discussion is first and foremost a male activity. Understanding apologetic and dissent groups' interactions begins with a recognition that these are primarily male spaces in a culture where maleness is a privileged and idealized subject position. It is no small irony, in this hypermasculine context, that the violations that mark dissent and apologetic groups as outside the bounds of acceptable Mormonism are inextricably tied up in over-zealous, stereotypically masculine rhetoric. These groups take their masculinity too far, and in doing so usurp the bureaucratic chain of command.

When apologetic and dissent groups violate two interconnected normative expectations which are central to idealized male comportment, they cross an unspoken and invisible line that separates orthoprax and unorthoprax behaviors, pitting them against the religious institution and thus marking themselves as public offenders. When the institution reigns in this behavior, they reinforce the hegemonic status quo as definitive and authoritative. These two expectations include a community-over-self orientation and deferral to authority, which together are united by their silencing effects.

A community-over-self orientation has long been a feature of orthodox Mormonism, from its early experiments with communalism to its modern emphasis on service, volunteerism, and self-sacrifice. To remain in good standing, members are routinely expected to sacrifice time in volunteer labor and money in a ten percent tithe to the Church, a network envisioned as a worldwide community of Saints united through this sacrifice. But along with the emphasis on cohesion comes a fear of disagreement and argumentation. Mormons shy away from contention (see Ch. 4), and avoid "rocking the boat" or upsetting the status quo. This penchant for avoidance

of contention leads to a phenomenon known emically, and rather jokingly, as "Mormon nice"--forced pleasantries despite ill feelings.

Cohesion as a Mormon moral priority is closely linked to deferral to authority as a moral injunction. Avoidance of contention in the Mormon context means explicit and unconditional submission to hierarchical authority figures as the exclusive proprietors of truth. As we have detailed, Mormon identity is hierarchically structured along lines of masculine Priesthood authority, deferral to which is mandatory and symbolic of submission to God. Refusal to submit to one's authorities suggests a contentious spirit. Together, the cohesion impetus and deferral to ecclesiastical authority tie to a deeply embedded cultural fear of speaking. Structurally, lay members are not entitled to voice opinions that conflict with the Church's teachings and certainly not to present these opinions as fact. When apologetic and dissent groups violate these norms--publicly and with mass followings-- their violations cannot go unnoted by the institution. These groups must be punished.

Mormon machismo

Apologetic and dissent groups are on shaky ground online where they openly defy or renegotiate the institutional norms of cohesion and deferral to authority. During intense disembodied rhetorical battles, these groups violate norms of cohesion by promoting contention and violate norms of "Mormon nice" by promoting *ad hominem*, aggressive attacks[57]. Worse for Mormon orthodoxy, these groups defy authority by claiming personal authority. Of course, orthodox apologists tend to be more careful about this than dissidents, but line-crossing regularly occurs in both groups (Greg Smith's article was roundly criticized not only for its harsh tone but for its presumptuousness in taking Dehlin's worthiness to task, a judgment that is to be reserved

---

[57] Rhetorical violence has become so standard among these groups that in 2014 one apologist organized what he called an annual "Friends and Foes Rendezvous" as "an opportunity to lay down your proverbial weapons and meet your Internet opponents face-to-face" (Wilson 2014).

for his bishop and stake president). Yet, this defiance is also a negotiation; each group attempts to lay claim to authority in order to validate their own political positions.

After Gregory Smith's article on John Dehlin had been suppressed, two versions of events circulated online. In the version of events circulated by dissident Mormons and those critical of the apologists, the "shake-up" directly resulted from the attempted publication of the controversial article and Church leaders' disdain for the *ad hominem* rhetoric style of FARMS' publications. In the narrative offered by Peterson and Smith, internal politics had gone sour at the Maxwell Institute; its director, Gerald Bradford, went *against* the vision of the Institute's namesake, Elder Neal A. Maxwell, himself a General Authority. The question of Church leadership involvement reflects these Mormons' reliance, regardless of their particular stance on issues of Church infallibility, on leadership authority to legitimize their identity constructs; both camps invoke LDS Authorities as a way of providing legitimacy for their perspectives on appropriate LDS identity.

Despite their attempts to cull credibility from invocations of General Authorities, many leaders and members of apologetic and dissent groups override institutional authority by directly contradicting the Church or attempting to speak on its behalf. This paradox -- relying on institutional authority and simultaneously ignoring it-- is part of a deeper paradox at the heart of these groups. In their quest for authority, these communities ooze what I call "Mormon machismo"-- an attempt to surpass and ignore the so-called "feminine" qualities of Mormonism as an affective faith that values spiritualism and sensitivity (that Mormon "burning in the bosom") with the "masculine" qualities of scientific discourse: logic, argument, and debate. But in practice, empiricism in these groups occasionally gives way to affect of another type: their rhetoric enacts violence and evokes war and plunder. In the case of *FARMS* and Mormon Stories, "personal attacks" and "hit pieces" pitted one side against the other in an ongoing, territorial struggle for control over the narrative of Mormon identity.

Conclusion: Institutional Censure and the Ritual Function of Discipline

Because of the complex relationship between apologetic groups and the institution and because of the top-down structure of the Church which circumscribes tolerable dissent, tension arises between the agential construction of masculine identities (and their freedoms of speech as Mormon actors) and the institutional policing of these identities. Institutional discipline (whether official or implicit-- though these distinctions are not insignificant within the community) functions to create a state of indeterminacy (Turner 1969), wherein an individual's relation to the community is precarious and their status neither in-nor-out. An effective disciplinary process can have one of two outcomes: it can reincorporate an individual into the group by forcing a public assimilation into the group's norms (via an abandonment of threatening practices); or it can cut ties with an individual altogether, banishing the perpetrator from the group to clearly designate acceptable behavior to those who remain. Thus liminal figures are central to rituals meant to identify the group and its values: liminal Mormons -- like John Dehlin and Daniel Peterson-- legitimate the status quo by showing where the borders are for affiliation.

In authoritarian religious systems, peripheral groups threaten the hegemonic status quo by offering alternative narratives around which members can organize their lives. In Mormonism, peripheral groups generally operate without institutional intervention, though surveillance of these groups is expected and assumed. Rarely, institutional discipline directed at members of peripheral groups is necessary, resulting from their disregard of central Mormon norms around authority and interpersonal comportment. Both the censure of apologists and of dissenters are institutionally-imposed liminality, social sanction designed to reify the limits of the group. Practically, the LDS Church attempts to head off schisms by censuring extremist voices, catering to the more moderate middle ground. Ritually, the institution reinforces boundaries. The dissolution of *FARMS* and the ouster of Daniel Peterson from his priestly academic role and the two year-long discipline and ultimate excommunication of John Dehlin both point to an authoritarian system in which limitations on acceptable speech are tightly policed.

In the case of apologetic censure, it might seem counterproductive for the institution to punish its most ardent supporters. Indeed, some supporters of Greg Smith and Daniel Peterson maintained that the 2012 conflict was just "politics" at BYU and not reflective of a larger censuring of their speech. But Mormonism's tightly structured bureaucratic model, in which BYU is embedded, means that academic discipline has ramifications in the larger Mormon community, giving it spiritual overtones. In another high profile case of censuring (and censoring) out of BYU, discussed in Chapter 2, religion professor Randy Bott retired from his position and left for a senior mission after his statements to the *Washington Post* on the priesthood ban on men of African descent were publicly reproved by the LDS Church. His statements regarding "possible theological underpinnings" (Horowitz 2012) of the ban were not "wrong" in the sense that they accurately reflected what has long been taught to be true: that black skin either reflects the cowardly behavior of black souls in the preexistence or descends from the biblical Cain and Ham as a curse on their lineage, and that God withheld priesthood from black-skinned men because prior to 1978 they were not prepared to handle the responsibilities associated with it (a sort of benevolent racism). And yet, those longstanding teachings (which were never demarcated "doctrine" but still marked a pervasive teaching in many LDS circles) led to Bott's infamy because he dared to speak them publicly during a time of national attention.

Of course, any speculation on the relationship between Bott's censuring and his retirement is merely that. But where there are parallels between his situation and that of *FARMS* and Daniel Peterson, they support a reading of the Mormon institution as invested in policing even its most ardent and loyal supporters to ensure that even they do not detour from the approved discursive course. Daniel Peterson's punishment was not ecclesiastical, but because it came as it did in the context it did, it served the same function.

In the case of the censure of dissenting voices, punishing dissenting identities is a necessary way for the institution to police its boundaries and suppress dangerous talk. Dissenters, by definition, push back against institutional narratives; this pushback threatens

institutional control over members' social, emotional, and financial commitments. In his letter of excommunication, John Dehlin's stake president explained that the decision of his disciplinary council had been a result of Dehlin's "categorical statements opposing the doctrine of the Church, and their wide dissemination via your Internet presence, which has led others away from the Church" (King 2015). Of course, it is not only insiders the institution must protect from this dangerous talk: it is equally important to mark this type of behavior as intolerable for the outside world who are watching.

For Daniel Peterson and John Dehlin, public censuring acted as visible discipline for their overt Mormon machismo, reigning in dangerous displays that challenge institutional authority. The scale and type of discipline varied, with the culturally heterodox excommunicated and the conservatives publicly humiliated and brought to heel. But in both cases, the institution asserted its ever-watchful eye and ultimate disciplinary power over all participants in its cultural system.

CHAPTER 5: Negotiating Mormon Womanhood: Patriarchy, Feminisms, and Digital Discourse

"All human beings—male and female—are created in the image of God. Each is a beloved spirit son or daughter of heavenly parents, and, as such, each has a divine nature and destiny. Gender is an essential characteristic of individual premortal, mortal, and eternal identity and purpose."
(LDS 1995: "The Family: A Proclamation to the World")

"The taboo-- it is stronger than prejudice-- against women's entry into public discourse as speakers or writers, was in grave danger of being definitively broken in the mid-nineteenth century as more and more educated, literate women entered the area as imaginative writers, social critics and reformers. The oppression of women within the dominant class was in no way as materially brutal as the oppression of women in the working class, but it had its own rationale and articulation. " (Cora Kaplan 1985:138)

In late 2012, in what prominent Mormon feminist Joanna Brooks called "the largest mass action of Mormon feminists in our history" (All Enlisted 2012), a collective of LDS women united through social media took a stand for gender equality in Mormon wards[58] around the world. The event garnered international media attention, led to Church disciplinary meetings for some participants, fractured the LDS feminist movement, and even incurred death threats against participants and organizers. Despite the outcomes, to outsiders the event itself was not readily identifiable as a radical or volatile feminist demonstration; rather, it was the simple act of wearing pants to church, an act that does not violate any written policy or teaching of the Church.

Structural constraints around idealized gender roles in Mormonism, particularly those articulated as doctrine in semantic "doctrine versus culture" debates, mark some issues as clearly off limits for faithful lived Mormonism. But just as with caffeine use described in Chapter 2, less-defined issues vis-à-vis gender and gendered roles become testing grounds for orthodoxy beyond doctrinal requirements. In 2012, a series of highly visible mediated events highlighted tensions and breaks within the LDS community, while also providing evidence of new strategies in the institution's discourse about women.

---

[58] A "ward" is an LDS congregation, geographically designated much like a Catholic diocese. Depending on the density of Mormons in a particular geographic area, more than one ward might meet at different times in a given meetinghouse.

The evolution of the movement that led to the media event "Wear Pants to Church Day," as well as its mediated backlash, provides an important case study into the structural constraints and cultural norms surrounding Mormon womanhood. It also highlights the ways marginalized members of already-marginalized groups make sense of and locate their own identity within the confines of the group. That the event was made possible through the use of social media marks an important development in the modern construction of social movement groups as well as the ways that modern feminisms are articulated and enacted. Mormon feminists navigate life on the fringes by appropriating Mormon narratives in digital space, creating community not in spite of but because of their Mormon roots.

"Wear Pants to Church Day" and online feminist activism

On December 5, popular feminist Mormon blogger "Mormon Child Bride" (whose real name is Stephanie Lauritzen) composed a lengthy post lamenting her growing disillusionment with Mormon feminism, which she felt was fighting "the same fight, generation after generation. Petitions signed and sent, marches organized, pamphlets distributed" (Lauritzen 2012b), and all with no measurable effect on the LDS institution or its culture. Despite her conviction that women are not treated equally within the Church structure, she recognized the stagnancy of much of the LDS feminist movement and expressed a desire to mobilize to provoke real change. After her blog post was shared and discussed among members of the Feminist Mormon Housewives Society (fMhs) Facebook community group[59] (originally started by members of what is far and away the most popular feminist LDS blog, Feminist Mormon Housewives[60]), Lauritzen and her readers created a new Facebook group, All Enlisted, as "a direct action group for Mormon women

---

[59] Although the fMhs group has over 3,700 members, it is a closed, private page and members must agree to a code of confidentiality and be approved by moderators in order to participate. Therefore, in this and other discussions of that page, only information that I obtained or substantiated from interviews or other sources (on- or offline) and/or received explicit permission to share are cited. This is not unlike information obtained in offline ethnographies, where the privacy of informants is always prioritized in ethical research.

[60] www.feministmormonhousewives.org

to advocate for equality within our faith" (All Enlisted 2012). Rather than merely bemoan inequality and discuss hopes for the future, the group would actually engage the institution to instigate change from the inside. Modeling their efforts after the Civil Rights movement and female suffragettes, All Enlisted was a private forum for brainstorming tangible actions its members could take on behalf of their conviction that women in the LDS Church should be, but are not, treated and regarded equally. Their name was taken from an LDS hymn which says:

> We are all enlisted till the conflict is o'er;
> Happy are we! Happy are we!
> Soldiers in the army, there's a bright crown in store;
> We shall win and wear it by and by. (LDS 2002a)

The group's moniker foreshadowed stereotypes of militancy often associated with any hint of feminist ideology from their critics in more orthodox Mormon ranks.

After a few days of brainstorming and contributing to an extensive list of possible activities for "peaceful resistance" (All Enlisted 2012), All Enlisted members agreed on their first collective act. As a way of testing the waters, they planned an event that most assumed would be mild, faithful, and well-received in their churches: "Wear Pants to Church Day" encouraged women to replace their standard, culturally normative Sunday dresses and skirts with dressy pairs of slacks as they attended their local wards. They chose to move quickly, organizing and promoting the event for Sunday, December 16, just 11 days after Lauritzen's initial blog post calling for action.

Wearing pants as a symbolic action is, of course, not without precedent: this self-conscious decision to appropriate clothing reserved for men in a particular cultural space parallels 19th century female suffragettes, who also donned men's apparel as a symbol of equality (the term "bloomer" comes from its association with mid-nineteenth century American suffragette Amelia Bloomer, who argued that women's apparel was restrictive and impractical[61]). The

---

[61] See Carol Mattingley (2002), "Approprate[ing] Dress: Women's Rhetorical Style in Nineteenth-Century America". Southern Illinois University Press: Carbondale, IL.

connection between Mormon and suffragette pants-wearing, however, was not widely cited by Mormon feminists until after the pants-wearing event, likely an intentional strategy meant to keep the event tame by avoiding its conflation with radical feminism. Instead, early discussions of wearing pants suggested it was intended to challenge what some considered to be the sexist norms in Mormon culture that ostracize women who do not wear skirts or dresses to church.

Event organizers said they expected the event to receive little critical attention: LDS women are not officially discouraged from wearing pants to church meetings nor are they explicitly encouraged to wear dresses or skirts. The Church has set no policy on it, except that members should wear "their best" as a sign of respect, and in 1971 issued a statement through the LDS magazine *New Era* stating:

> The Church has not attempted to indicate just how long women's or girls' dresses should be nor whether they should wear pant suits or other types of clothing… We have not… felt it wise or necessary to give instructions on this subject relative to attendance at our church meetings, although we do feel that on such occasions they should have in mind that they are in the house of the Lord and should conduct themselves accordingly. (LDS 1971a)

Some members of All Enlisted balked at the plan, arguing that merely wearing pants to church was too small to be a meaningful act of resistance, and represented more of the non-action that Lauritzen criticized in her blog post. To help garner attention, then, the group turned to the media: event organizers sent out press releases, and soon the *Salt Lake Tribune's* religion writer, Peggy Fletcher Stack—a feminist Mormon herself whose articles frequently criticize the Church-- quickly issued a brief article on the event (Fletcher Stack 2012e). The story was eventually picked up by *National Public Radio* (Douglas 2012), the *New York Times* (Pratt 2012:25)*,* the online feminist newsmagazine *Jezebel* (Baker 2012)*,* and the UK's *Daily Mail* (Whitelocks 2012a & 2012b), as well as many other news sources.

"Wear Pants to Church Day" struck a sensitive cultural nerve. In the week leading up to the event, its Facebook page (Wear Pants to Church Day 2012a) garnered 2,026 commitments to attend (and 667 "maybes"), but because it was posted publicly and shared widely among feminists and non-feminists alike, it also received heavy backlash. Many comments by those

declining the invitation to participate echoed the sentiment of this Mormon woman, commenting

on the event page:

> I don't think sacrament meeting is an appropriate place to "protest". For me it's about renewing my covenants and worshipping God, not about "proving a point." As a woman, if I have ever felt unequal to men in the church, it is only because I have felt more special, more treasured than men, never less. (Cummings 2012)[62]

Over the following two days, her comment received 12,043 "likes" and 1,233 replies, arousing

heated debate about the dangers of protests and the proper place of women and men. While

members of All Enlisted worked to gain the upper hand in these intense exchanges, the sheer

amount of support for the orthodox status quo proved overwhelming, even on their own event

page.

Not every person who posted on the event page was as gracious as Cummings; many

detractors called the event "stupid," "ridiculous," or a "non-issue," and one man called its

supporters "pants-wearing femanazis." One man expressed a sentiment at once misogynistic

and homophobic:

> LMAO! Geez! haha...what the hell is WRONG with women in our society these days? If you're going to wear pants, they might as well get penis implants too, to make them even MORE masculine. I'm exhausted with feeling the obligation to be "half gay" in order to feel attracted to the "new and improved" arrogant "manly" women in American society. I'll tell ya, the damn liberal women's movement has all be destroyed God's amazingly beautiful art of "femininity". I'd love to 'weigh in', but a bunch of liberal HE-girls are not going to like my opinion of their angry, masculine ways! Haha (Bowman 2012)

While many comments reflected the extreme one above, others relied on particular Mormon

tropes as a way of decrying the impropriety of Pants Day. One man, for instance, condemned the

organizers in no uncertain terms:

> Go ahead and follow Satan's path carefully down to your own destruction. Apparently the prophet isn't the one who recieves Revelation for the Church anymore? Seriously you women who started this movement should be ashamed of yourselves. YOU are leading away MANY of God's children down the wrong path and some day you will have

---

[62] Rather than make cumbersome notations of spelling and grammar errors and/or and stylistic choices of Internet commentators, I will instead note here that all such original language idiosyncrasies are retained throughout.

to answer for that. If you believe in the Church than by default you believe this is wrong. Period. End of story. I will keep you in my prayers that your lost souls will one day realize their mistakes and repent and come back to the True Church. (Waite 2012)

While his suggestion that pants-wearing has demonic connections seems extreme, it was by no means isolated or exceptional as a response to the event and its organizers. In addition to copious Facebook-based backlash, many conservative LDS used their personal blogs as a place to address the issue and weigh in on whether or not it is appropriate for Mormon women to wear pants to church. The associate editor of the widely read, largely conservative online *Meridian Magazine*, Erin Ann McBride, opined that the "instigators" of Pants Day had "disappointed" her because Sacrament Meeting "is not the time or place for rebellion or taking a stand… This call to action is an act of contention" (McBride 2012). The buzzword "contention" is often invoked by conservative Mormons as a powerful way to quash opinions that differ from the Mormon mainstream (recall in Chapter 2, it was Skyler Thiot's fear that his efforts to bring caffeine to BYU had become "contentious" that led to his choice to remove his Facebook page; and in Chapter 3, "contention" is invoked as a reason why some orthodox Mormons dislike the practice of apologetics). McBride went on to quote at length from a *Book of Mormon* passage in which Christ tells his newly formed church:

> … And there shall be no disputations you, as there have hitherto been; neither shall there be disputations among you concerning the points of my doctrine, as there have hitherto been. For verily, verily I say unto you, *he that hath the spirit of contention is not of me, but is of the devil, who is the father of contention*, and he stirreth up the hearts of men to contend with anger, one with another. (3 Nephi 11:28-29, Book of Mormon, emphasis mine)

With one word, McBride communicated to her orthodox audience that wearing pants to church is a corruption inspired by the devil himself.

Vicious online trolling and threats of violence are par for the course when women dare speak in cyberspace, and Mormons are no exception. A male philosophy student at Church-owned Brigham Young University posted publicly on the event page that "every person who is a minority activist, should be shot.. in the face… point blank… GET OVER YOURSELVES…."

(Richardson 2012, ellipses in original). Additionally, just days after the event page went public, an organizer reportedly received a direct message on Facebook threatening her life. All Enlisted organizers reported the threats to Facebook, to local police, and to Brigham Young University's Honor Code office. Those issues, coupled with many conservative Mormons' decision to report the Pants Day page as a Facebook violation (some reportedly claiming that the page itself was hate speech and represented religious intolerance), led to the page being completely deleted by Facebook on December 13, just three days before the planned event. Despite the controversies and threats, All Enlisted organizers forged ahead, organizing a separate community page also called "Wear Pants to Church Day" (Wear Pants to Church Day 2012b).

For some, the cultural backlash from the event was not restricted to the comfort of cyberspace. In an interview, one of All Enlisted's members described being called in for a special meeting with her bishop to discuss whether she should be permitted to retain her temple recommend (e.g., whether or not her involvement in the group compromised her worthiness as a Mormon woman). She explained that her bishop questioned whether someone willing to publicly protest could possibly support the leadership of the Church.

In the midst of this heated online rhetoric and the fear of offline reprisal, as the day approached, rumors that pants-clad women would be asked to leave Sacrament meeting or that orthodox Mormons would form a human wall outside the ward house to prevent their entry began to circulate on private Facebook groups, stirring the nerves of many would-be participants. Amidst this uncertainty, some initial supporters of the event backed out. Some were concerned about social sanctions and backlash. Others felt that the event had become too political and divisive, and identifying themselves as moderates, did not want to be mistaken by their ward members as "radical" feminists-- that phrase being routinely circulated in conservative circles as a way to demonize any feminist agitation -- merely for showing up to church in pants. Some women explained that they could not participate in the event because it was becoming increasingly fragmented, and they were not sure what statement they would be making by

wearing pants. Indeed, the event had been labeled by some organizers as a stand against unfounded cultural practices that become unduly normalized and granted doctrinal weight; by others as a way of supporting those women (largely converts and investigators, thus already marked as outsiders) who routinely wear pants, to keep them from feeling marginalized; by others as a show of solidarity to help women who left the Church on feminist grounds begin to feel more welcome and comfortable attending; and by still others as a way of drawing attention to greater issues of women's inequality in the LDS Church. Some women insisted that it was *not* a protest but merely a demonstration; others explained it was neither a demonstration nor a protest -- those words being too culturally loaded as unfaithful, radical feminist activities -- but merely a way of "mourning with those who mourn" (a carefully chosen and, in social media and interviews, often-repeated scriptural reference) or standing in solidarity with other sisters; and still others routinely called it a protest, explaining that the protest was against doctrinally unfounded cultural norms that should have no place in church.

Polarizing participants even more was the frequent conflation of "Pants Day" with the idea that these women might want to "wear the pants"-- or take over men's leadership roles in the Church through ordination to the all-male priesthood. In an interview broadcast on Utah's Fox 13 News, a reporter noted matter-of-factly that event organizer Stephanie Lauritzen "hopes women will one day serve in the priesthood" (Dinha 2012), a reference to the fact that the LDS priesthood -- which is open to all worthy men over the age of twelve -- is closed to women. Lauritzen herself did not mentioned priesthood in any of her numerous interviews (most likely a deliberate strategy on her part). However, because she had advocated women's ordination on her blog in the past (c.f. Lauritzen 2012a), soon the idea that she was subversively using the issue of pants to grasp for priesthood became part of the oppositional narrative surrounding the event. Women's ordination is arguably the most divisive issue associated with Mormon feminism and a lightning rod for controversy among orthodox members, and because the televised report quoted the organizer of the event conflating that issue and Pants Day symbolism (whether or not that was

Lauritzen's intention), many women backed out for fear of marking themselves publically as radical feminists opposed to "God's order" -- the patriarchal order -- in the Church.

December 16 proved underwhelming. Although there were participants across the US and in a handful of other countries, the event was small by all accounts. While no hard data exists on the number of participants, high estimates place the number around a thousand; only several hundred actually reported back that they had participated. My own interviews combined with information from private online groups suggests the number to have been between 200 and 400 participants worldwide, with the vast majority centered in the Intermountain West where most US Mormons reside. Most participants reported that they were the only woman in pants at their ward, while a few mentioned that they saw one or two other women in pants but could not be certain if it was for Pants Day. Many critics as well as feminists who did not participate and some male supporters reported that no women in their ward wore pants[63], and despite the media attention given the event, most Mormons seemed to not even know the event was taking place. Despite rumors that circulated prior to the event that all women in pants at certain wards would be called in for disciplinary meetings, or that women in pants would not be admitted, in actuality the reported negative consequences were few. While some people did report negative comments or perceived piercing glares from people at their wards, the majority reported no response at all.

None of this mattered, though, as Pants Day quickly became inscribed in the group's collective ethos. Besides bringing momentary national attention to the role of women in the LDS Church[64], which put pressure on the institution to examine its own inequities, Pants Day served as a touchstone in the narrative of Mormon feminist identity in the months to follow. On the one hand, the day was frequently invoked as an example of the possibilities of a unified social movement (encouraging one another with a vague invocation like "You can do this! Because pants!"); Mormon feminists sometimes even playfully used the term "the pants" to refer to

---

[63] Indeed, at the ward I attended that day (Midvale 3rd ward in Utah), zero out of around eighty women wore pants—including two investigators, and myself.
[64] Despite the relatively small scale of the actual event, it's outcome was circulated widely in the media (McKitrick 2012; Green-Miner & Goodell 2012); even the *New York Times* covered it (Pratt 2012).

someone or something that is both positive and boundary-pushing (e.g., when one woman dared to turn down a calling because she was too busy with other aspects of her life, a Facebook friend commented to her, "You're the pants!"). Perhaps more than that, the rhetoric around the event helped solidify Mormon feminist identity as marginalized, owing in large part to the heated rhetoric on the internet and the ways that Mormon feminists came together to talk back to conservative perspectives. Sharing the experience of negative social response, or even the anticipation of that response, reinforced their own outsider status. Many Mormon feminists "came out" (their phrase) as such by wearing pants or posting about the event to their Facebook pages. Even when the sign went unrecognized by those in their wards, by wearing pants Mormon feminists marked themselves as different and chose to publicly align with the narrative of the Mormon feminist community. Wearing pants and sharing the experience online united Mormon feminists across space in ways that pre-internet feminist activism simply could not do.

Inflammatory responses by conservative Mormons, almost exclusively found online, also became an important part of the feminist narrative. Of course, vitriolic comments like those mentioned in the pages above are incredibly common on nearly any topic in online spaces. People like these commentators are often written off as "internet trolls," individuals who take a strange pleasure in stirring up disembodied fights online. But despite their trollish nature, those comments and others like them became rallying points for the community, playing a vital role in the construction of Mormon feminist identity. Mormon feminists themselves employed these overtly misogynistic responses as foils for their own identity, re-circulating these comments all over the internet in blogs, on Facebook posts, and even in media reports, as representative of the type of challenge that Mormon feminism faces and as proof of the urgent role that Mormon feminism has to play in LDS culture (c.f. DefyGravity 2012, Brent 2012, hannahwheelwright 2012). One Pants Day participant explained in an interview that the misogyny and vitriol from conservative Mormons was emblematic of "what we're up against," indicating that these types of responses are not atypical or exceptional but mark the norm in feminist Mormon experience, and

reaffirming the "us versus them" mentality between Mormon feminists and more traditional Mormons.

These important social responses and conversations around Wear Pants to Church Day highlight tensions surrounding discourses of womanhood within the Mormon tradition. That Pants Day became a significant cultural moment for many Mormons illustrates that it is more than just "doctrine" that constrains women; like the expectations around caffeine consumption described in Chapter 2 and the rules for proper male comportment identified in Chapter 3, culture forms normative constraints on female identity. Expectations that women should wear dresses in the ward house, and social outcry when these norms are violated, illustrates the interplay of doctrine and culture which form intersecting and limiting narratives around what appropriate Mormon womanhood looks like in lived practice.

Examining the institutional rhetoric around gender and gendered roles, in the remainder of this chapter I draw on interviews and discourse analyses of online social networks and news media to explore the processes by which Mormon femininities are imagined and discursively produced, against normative assumptions about Mormon womanhood. I argue that the Church creates a culturally ideal feminine narrative around specific normative traits of LDS identity, over and beyond doctrinal distinctions between men and women, which individual women then adopt or adapt. I begin with an exploration of the structural constraints on Mormon womanhood, including a look at historical discourse around gender and the institutional model for idealized womanhood. I then explore ways that women themselves experience gender and gendered roles as Mormons by considering the antithesis of Mormonism's idealized femininity found in the modern LDS feminist movement, which has developed in large part due to the internet. I then explore the rhetorical strategies used by Mormon feminists to locate themselves within the two marginalized and paradoxical identity constructs to which they belong (being both "Mormon" and "feminist"). I conclude with a discussion of another once-fringe feminist movement, Ordain

Women, to illustrates the interplay of choice and constraint in lived Mormon womanhood, and how these are complicated by life online.

My interest here is not to conduct a feminist critique of Mormonism, nor a history or feminist critique of Mormon feminism. It is, however, an exploration of the ways that identity emerges as a social narrative project in a marginal community—in this case, a doubly marginal community, as Mormon identity is itself outside the American mainstream, and Mormon feminism finds itself marginalized by both the Church and the broader secular community. The marginalization of Mormon feminism is, in fact, the crux of its identity narrative.

Contextualizing Mormon Womanhood: Structural Constraints on Gendered Identity

As an all-encompassing identity construct, "being Mormon" erects particular constraints as a way of differentiating identity from what it is not. One area in which these constraints are both highly pronounced and highly contested is the social construction and lived expression of gender. Like other aspects of normalized LDS identity, these structural constrictions have complementary nodes: those that are "official" in the sense that they are built into Mormon doctrine and religious teaching, handed down by religious authorities; and those that are "cultural" as normative expectations that develop within orthodox Mormon communities with little to no emphasis or explanation from leaders. Both the official and cultural nodes are pervasive in the lives of active LDS women.

Traditional LDS gender roles and idealized Mormon womanhood

Before discussing recent trends in Mormon discourse around womanhood, we must first situate these narratives within the history and theology of the LDS Church more broadly. Despite the conservative and rather rigid gender binaries in the modern Church, the history of Mormonism

reveals the role of social milieu on its evolving practices regarding lived gender roles. After the westward migration of the Mormon people to the Utah territory and the institution of the doctrine of "celestial marriage" (e.g. polygamy) in the 1850s, Latter-day Saint women prior to the turn of the century were necessarily more "liberated" by modern standards than those in much of the United States. With husbands incapable of providing for such large families on their own, and some serving time in prison on federal bigamy charges, many Mormon women sought employment outside the home when mainstream American society frowned on the practice (Foster 1979). In 1868, LDS President Brigham Young even sent several women to medical schools on the East Coast to learn useful skills and return to Utah to establish medical and midwifery practices, not out of a desire to promote gender equality but out of a practical concern that obstetrical care should be both a Mormon and female province (see Wilcox 1979). Moreover, partially in an effort to garner needed votes for statehood and to secure additional support for polygamy, in 1870 Utah became the second territory to grant women the vote-- a full fifty years before the nation would adopt the 19th Amendment (Alexander 1970, Iversen 1984). Mormonism's gender roles have historically been nothing if not pragmatic for the broader social goals of the institution.

After the cessation of polygamy, the Church at the turn of the century began efforts to mainstream with American Protestant culture. However, it was not until the 1950s and 60s, as historian Lawrence Foster (1979) has show, that the Church took a sharp institutional turn toward "traditional" family units and strict gender roles, with male career-oriented heads of household and women as nurturing stay-at-home mothers. These roles became increasingly strict as the feminist movement gained traction in the nation, coming to a head in the early 1980s. Indeed, under the leadership of Elaine A. Cannon, the general president of the Church's Young Women organization (for girls aged 12-18) from 1978-1984, rhetoric directed at women and girls began to directly and purposefully counter the cultural messages of the feminist movement. As Cannon explained, the feminist "movement was brilliantly presented [and was affecting] all the aspects of

girls' lives—movies, clothes, press, etc. No longer was there a single voice saying that a woman behaves this way, thinks this way, does this, and so on" (Cannon 1990:161). The Church responded to these social pressures by pressing "traditional" values and women's roles, tying these to women's spirituality and religious duty.

More and more since the traditional turn within the Church, as in many conservative religious traditions Mormonism's culturally constructed gender dynamics have gained increasing support from its evolving doctrine. While doctrine on gender roles was sparse in the Church's early years, the Church now officially posits that women and men are gendered by divine order, an "eternal principle" that accounts for what are seen to be innate differences between the sexes. In the LDS origin story, all humans existed pre-mortally as spiritual beings born of Heavenly Father—who is worshipped and discussed regularly—and his consort, a mysterious Heavenly Mother figure who is not described in any detail in any official Mormon teachings (in fact, whether there is only one Heavenly Mother or whether Heavenly Father is polygamous is a source of much quiet speculation). As spirit children in the pre-existence, all souls were male or female; gender is considered "an essential characteristic of individual premortal, mortal, and eternal identity and purpose" (First Presidency 1995:102).

Structurally and theologically, because of gender's eternal nature, one's gender over-determines one's roles in this life and in the life to come: men represent God through the priesthood and are the "presiding authority in the family" (LDS 2002b:56) while women's roles are as nurturers, as they are considered to be naturally "compassionate, self-sacrificing, [and] loving" by nature (Scott 2008:3). Women are taught from an early age to "plan and prepare for marriage and the bearing and rearing of children" as it is their "divine right and the avenue to the greatest and most supreme happiness." This so-called "patriarchal order," discussed in the previous chapter, follows its heavenly model: it is "the Lord's system of government" (Larsen 1982) which "will continue throughout time and eternity" (Smith, cited in Barlow 1973) as "the Lord has told us that the patriarchal order will be the order of things in the highest degree of the celestial kingdom"

(Kofford 1998). Men and women who are "sealed" or married in the LDS temple create a dynastic bond that extends into eternity, as they are likewise sealed to their ancestors and to their progeny; thus marriage and childrearing gain spiritual importance, quite literally determining one's eternal fate[65].

Patriarchal hierarchy is built into Mormon doctrine and practice. Worthy men and boys over age 12 are ordained first into the Aaronic priesthood, then at 18 into the higher order known as the Melchizedek priesthood[66], giving them both temporal and eternal authority to act in the name of God; thus only men can directly access the spiritual blessings and power that come with priesthood authority[67] (indeed, one active, faithful woman-- who had served a mission, married in the temple, and dedicated her life to the church and to service-- lamented to me in an interview that her 13 year old son held more authority in the eyes of her church than she ever will). Women, for their part, are taught to view motherhood as the highest possible womanly achievement, their equivalent of priesthood authority in its echo of the divine: "Eve and her daughters can become cocreators with God by preparing bodies for his spirit children to occupy on earth and later in eternity" (Rasmussen 2001:17). It has even been argued that during the pre-existence, women chose the nurturing role of motherhood over the leadership role of priesthood, the role of the "family heart" over the role of "family head" (c.f. Bednarowski 1993: 13). The tendency to equate motherhood and priesthood follows Church "gender complementarity" rhetoric: that while men have the priesthood, women have motherhood, and these callings are different but equally vital to God's plan. After all, women bring souls into the world and men have the authority to help them get back to Heavenly Father through rituals and ordinances only they can conduct.

---

[65]So central are marriage and childbirth that those who cannot or do not marry in this life are sealed in marriage posthumously through esoteric temple rituals done on their behalf; teachings also suggest that women have the opportunity (if not the obligation) to bear children throughout eternity.
[66] Within these priesthood orders are many hierarchically organized "offices", such as deacon, teacher, bishop, elder, seventy, etc., further solidifying Mormon commitment to hierarchy.
[67]Though they cannot hold it, Church leaders repeatedly point out that women are entitled to *access* the priesthood and its accompanying blessings through their husbands and other worthy priesthood leaders.

Temporally, too, these cosmological underpinnings have consequences in the day-to-day operations of the LDS Church. The patriarchal order in the home reflects the prominence of men in leadership positions in the Church. As discussed in Chapter 1, men comprise all of the Church's General Authorities. But beyond spiritual and ecclesiastical decisions, the General Authorities direct the local and global business and financial operations of this incredibly wealthy organization[68], and any input from females is at the discretion of the males in power. As LDS feminist Joanna Brooks explains,

> The global operations of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints are governed and directed by an all-male organizational chain of command. Mormon women may participate in some decision-making at the congregational level. But at all levels most forms of institutional power—from the power to shape the church's global policies and finances to the power to bless the sick, administer sacraments, baptize, and excommunicate—belong only to men. (Brooks 2013c)

The historical and theological underpinnings of women's roles in the Church lead to ambiguity around the place of women in the Church today, an issue that is fraught with political and spiritual tensions. "The Church is really schizophrenic about women right now," one high-profile Mormon woman and Church employee said to me on condition of anonymity. On the one hand, the Church's Public Affairs paints a view of unencumbered women free to choose their own life paths (including educational opportunities, marriage and family, and/or career), as epitomized in the prolific "I'm a Mormon" campaign; at the same time, internal discourse continues to privilege the stay-at-home mother as the ideal Mormon type and the most respectable life path.

One recent production illustrates this tension: in November 2012, the LDS Church posted a video to its "MormonMessages" YouTube channel titled "You Are Not Alone." The video featured a voice-over vignette using fairy tale motifs to tell the story of a faithful Mormon woman whose greatest desire was to be a wife and mother. Unfortunately, she never met her "Prince Charming," as the video said, and became an elementary school teacher instead. As the story develops, she is depicted as angry and bitter about her lot in life; she is shown taking out her

---

[68] While the Church's total assets and worth are unknown largely because of its tax-exempt status, its many for-profit holdings alone are valued at multiple billions of dollars (Winter:2012).

anger on her students and sinking into depression. At the end of the video, she realizes she has

been blessed with entire classrooms of children, in her pseudo-mother role as their teacher. The

video went viral on Facebook and other social media sites and was removed from YouTube after

just a few hours and dozens of comments from Mormon feminists condemning its misogyny and

stereotypical representation of singleness. But its creation in the first place highlights the ways

Church discourse privileges motherhood as the highest womanly calling even when representing

career-focused women.

In the modern Church, womanhood is idealized and constructed as a sacred calling, yet

devoid of authority and voice. The construction of idealized womanhood creates scripted roles

for orthodox women to fill, roles which rely on various cultural narratives and build on doctrine

underpinning gender.

Mormon Feminisms: Adopting, Negotiating, and Resisting Structural Constraints

Idealized Mormon womanhood differs, of course, from lived experience, wherein Mormon

women variously adopt, negotiate, and/or resist the constraints to their identities imposed by both

the institution and the culture of their faith. In this section I explore institutional and popular

discourse surrounding a community of LDS women on the fringes of accepted belonging. These

self-described feminists see the Church as structurally (and sometimes doctrinally) oppressive

and call for a reconsideration of the roles of men and women in the Church, sometimes including

advocating for women's ordination.

The use of the word "feminist" as a self-identifier mediates both orthodox and feminist

Mormon women's experiences of gender (Foucault 1990), as the appropriation or rejection of the

label is one way that these communities draw lines in the sand, cordoning off identity as fitting

neatly into narrative categories. Like other conservative groups, orthodox Mormon women often

denigrate the term "feminist" as a devil word, finding what they take as its connotations directly

counter to their own self-perceptions. These women adopt the Church's gender narratives as their own, a narrative that promotes separate but equal spheres for men and women, and often depict feminist Mormons as misguided, confused, or intentionally "stirring the pot" to cause contention because of their own unbelief or unrighteousness. In this view, being a feminist marks one as clearly misunderstanding or failing to properly internalize the Church's teachings about gender, which orthodox members see as inherently equal or even elevating of women.

Self-described feminist perspectives and critical attitudes toward the patriarchal structure of the Church are not new in Mormonism. As institutional rhetoric around gender roles became more traditionalized, so too arose factions of LDS feminists who took issue with the implications of that shift. While there have always been advocates for gender equality in LDS communities, the issues came to a head in the 1970s when some Mormons, most notably Sonia Johnson, supported the Equal Rights Amendment despite the Church's vocal opposition (Johnson was swiftly excommunicated for her involvement and stands as a foremother for the modern day LDS feminist movement [see Johnson 1981]). It was also during the 1970s that several East Coast Mormon women founded the *Exponent II,* a progressive quarterly meant to open dialogue about women's issues in the Church. Still in publication today, *Exponent II* arguably instituted a tradition of using mass media to further the cause of Mormon feminism (see Hilton Sheldon 1999).

The internet and feminist activism

Although organized LDS feminism has been ongoing since at least the 1970s (a period that some LDS feminists refer to as their movement's "first wave"), most of the concerns raised by these early feminists -- for instance, the idealized relegation of women to the domestic sphere, the lack of female leadership positions in the Church, the issue of women's ordination -- remain unchanged by the institution. So while today's LDS feminism is in (at least) its third generation, it remains in its "first wave" of concerns addressing basic institutional inequities (c.f. Petrey 2013).

The stagnancy of early LDS feminism makes the role of today's internet-based social networks even more striking, as the articulation and development of Mormon feminism online is unprecedented both in scope and in outcome. Because of increasing access and participation online, the perception of safety and anonymity by users, and the visibility of online activity, the internet provides a space for community building, identity policing, and increased exposure to culturally-relevant feminist issues. In a year of activism online, Mormon feminists arguably helped achieve several (albeit small-scale) institutional shifts that earlier articulations of feminism had only hoped for.

Beginning with small e-mail listservs in the 1990s for mostly academic, progressive Mormons (which, like the *Exponent II,* were largely out of the East Coast rather than the more conservative, and more Mormon, Intermountain West), LDS feminists have always made use of internet space to find likeminded members and forge connections and communities. These communities were generally closed, private spaces, until 2004 when Lisa Butterworth began the first major feminist LDS blog, Feminist Mormon Housewives[69] (fMh) as a safe place to discuss issues affecting Mormon women from a progressive perspective. The site features several permabloggers (regular contributors) of various orthodoxy levels (from completely inactive and nonbelieving, to "temple-worthy" and fully active believers). These bloggers write under pseudonyms, often to protect their "offline" identities, but many of them are so prolific and active in the bloggernacle that their offline identities are widely known.

Over time, fMh became a community hub and agenda setter for issues around which Mormon feminists agitate, but perhaps most significantly it became a support group of sorts for women who found themselves precariously situated between the expectations of a conservative religion and the ideologies of progressive feminism. In interviews and across Web platforms, many Mormon feminists cite fMh as the place where they first "cut their teeth" as feminists, learning the parlance and issues specific to Mormon feminism after discovering the blog. They

---

[69] http://www.feministmormonhousewives.org/

also credit fMh as the source of their continuation as Mormons: without it and the community support it provides, these feminists say they could not remain in the faith at all. Although there are now several blogs and forums specifically organized around Mormon feminism[70] and many more that address gender issues as an ancillary focus, fMh is still the most popular blog for Mormon feminists and as of 2013 boasted 30,000 unique visitors a month (Finnigan and Ross 2013).

More recently, groups have created parallel, closed Facebook pages (often overlapping in membership from one to the next) where thousands of individuals network, strategize, and offer support through various faith transitions. In 2011, fMh organizers founded the Facebook group Feminist Mormon Housewives Society (fMhs), which changed the nature of online feminist activism. This group is "closed" but not "secret," which in Facebook parlance means that users must request to be "added" to the group by a page administrator, and only members of the group can see postings to the group.

However, because it is not secret, anyone on Facebook can see what groups a "friend" belongs to. Conservative family, friends, and ward members could locate a clandestine feminist simply by noting her participation in the fMhs group. More problematically, because the group is large and unwieldy[71], participants often report feeling anxiety that "moles" are in their midst. A handful of early reports of disciplinary actions against members of fMhs, from participants whose ward members had reported them to bishops, coupled with the Mormon culture of "tattling," maintains some level of tension and nervousness among members.

Thus the affordances of the fMhs group makes participants at once feel a sense of privacy and security while leaving them open and vulnerable to a real threat of surveillance. Still, fMhs has opened unprecedented possibilities for networking not available on anonymous platforms like blog comment streams. On fMhs, Mormon feminists could see one another's real

---

[70] Most notably, Young Mormon Feminists (http://youngmormonfeminists.org/) launched in 2012.
[71] At the time of this writing, the fMhs Facebook page had 3,703 members and 34 page administrators.

names, faces, geographic locales, and even locate mutual friends. Regional, national, and global

networking became only a post away.

Despite the threat of surveillance, in interviews feminist Mormons report that they feel

safe -- or at least *safer* -- to be "real" or "authentic" in these spaces; although nothing is truly

private on the internet, the closed nature of these forums provides a semblance of anonymity and

privacy, allowing them to feel secure sharing intimate aspects of not only their faith or doubt but

also of their personal lives and histories. Many participants in these groups express relief at

having found an outlet for their frustration, "venting" to the group about issues that they feel

unsafe sharing in their wards or on their "open" social networking accounts, which are visible to

their offline family and friends. Because so many people participate in these groups, this open

sharing is often rewarded with the empathy only available from others with shared experience.

These forms of online community often fill a void that cannot be duplicated offline; many LDS

feminists say they have no other feminist friends offline and rely on support through the internet to

maintain their status as Mormons.

At the same time that online community provides support and networking, it also works to

maintain and develop the identity constructs around which it is built. Just as faithful LDS women

describe increased fulfillment in their own roles and strengthened testimonies of their rightness

through their association with likeminded others, feminist Mormon women develop feminist

perspectives by participation online. Many participants in online feminist spaces begin with one

or two relatively small issues -- for instance, a frustration with institutionalized budgetary

disparities for Mormon youth based exclusively on gender, or a desire to participate in the baby

blessing ceremonies currently relegated only to (male) priesthood holders -- and eventually come

to recognize structural or doctrinal inequality in other, unrelated spheres. Thus they adopt the

narratives of the feminist groups in which they participate.

Many LDS feminists ultimately fall out of activity in the Church, and some lose their

"testimony" that the Church is true in a spiritual sense; like members of John Dehlin's Mormon

Stories communities discussed in the previous chapter, in interviews and in posts on social media these women often attribute their loss of activity or faith directly to their online exploration of feminist issues in the Church. This cycle -- from isolated initial issues with the Church to full-blown disillusionment -- is not a feature of every online heterodox or feminist Mormon's experience, but it occurs with enough frequency and predictability that even some Church leaders have begun to recognize the threat of the digital world to idealized Mormon womanhood.

But despite the power of the internet to forge new communities and to facilitate the development of particular sensibilities, its vastness makes Mormon feminism unwieldy as a unified community. The Pants Day event and its on- and offline repercussions highlighted these fractures in Mormon feminism which threaten it as a cohesive social movement. While Mormon feminism is united by its overarching recognition of gender inequality within the LDS Church, like many young social movement groups, it is disjointed at several basic levels. It has no defined goals, no agreed-upon strategies, and no clear leaders who can consistently articulate such points. Even its one point of unification, the recognition of gender inequality in the Church, is ambiguous: What would gender equality look like? Is the doctrine of the Church unequal, or just the culture? Must women have the priesthood to be "equal"? Opinions vary wildly on these and other questions, and because the internet provides a platform for the full spectrum of feminist voices, "Mormon feminism" as a movement displays its fractured nature regularly.

Beyond these basic definitional issues, within the umbrella of the movement exist various opinions concerning what the group's objectives, strategies, and tactics should be. At the heart of these issues, there is little agreement around the acceptable semantics for framing Mormon feminist activism for its non-feminist target audiences: should Mormon feminists actively campaign for change, lobby, raise awareness, protest, petition, demonstrate, or even ask their leaders to reconsider particular issues? In one case, a feminist Mormon told me she declined to sign a petition which "call[ed] upon the First Presidency… to thoughtfully consider and earnestly pray about the full integration of women into the decision-making structure of the Church and the

question of women's ordination" (All Are Alike Unto God 2012), not because she was uncomfortable with the idea of ordination (she is not), but because she felt it was inappropriate to "call upon" God's chosen leaders to do anything at all, even merely to "pray about" and "consider" a new position; her Mormon sensibilities found it presumptuous to suppose that an everyday member could make any demand in the first place.

In addition to its own framing dilemmas, Mormon feminism faces the challenge of confronting a pre-existing organizational frame for their own movement. The conservative LDS Church has not been shy over the years in expressing its position that feminism is a misguided, if not outright dangerous, perspective. Elder Boyd K. Packer of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles famously said in 1993 that the three greatest threats to members of the Church came "from the gay-lesbian movement, the feminist movement … and the ever-present challenge from the so-called scholars or intellectuals" (Packer 1993). To be sure, any movement that seeks to lobby for change is seen as suspect in a Church that bases its hierarchy in God's revelation.

Feminist Discourse: Rhetorically Locating Within Marginal Communities

Facing institutionalized and cultural resistance, feminists rely on Mormon narrative strategies and coded speech to rhetorically locate themselves within the LDS community and publicly declare "We belong," in an effort to legitimate their identities, reduce suspicion, and ultimately effect change from within. By appropriating idealized Mormon womanhood, LDS feminists speak the language of the institution and mark themselves as authentically Mormon despite discrepancies in belief, activity level, or sympathy with the organization. Their narrative strategies mark concessions to the larger ritual community's structural and cultural norms for belonging, and by crafting these narratives Mormon feminists attempt to illustrate their commitment to community over and above individual rights.

As mentioned in Chapter 4, this community-over-self orientation has long been a feature of orthodox Mormonism, from its early experiments with communalism to its modern emphasis on service, volunteerism, and self-sacrifice. The re-articulation of this priority in Mormon feminist circles underscores the value of community as a basic Mormon trait. Most (but decidedly not all) Mormon feminists accept the Church's paradigm for change—gradual and revealed, rather than revolutionary. While some Mormon feminists hope for immediate and ground-breaking changes—such as priesthood for women—many opt for strategies that privilege gradual cultural shifts over larger theological battles, exemplified by the choice to merely wear pants to church as a large-scale group action. Despite views that make many of them marginal members by the Church's own standards, LDS feminists emphasize community and commitment to distinguish themselves from the liberal mainstream (that is, non-LDS) feminist movement, important because of LDS institutional and cultural suspicion of all things "feminist."

Mormon feminists must strategically signal their commitment to the institution and thus their in-group status using coded speech. Their commitment to community over individual rights is discursively marked through two major discursive strategies explored here: a reliance on and appropriation of Mormon historical narratives, and testimony sharing as a defensive communication strategy.

Reliance on and appropriation of historical narratives

One major principle undergirding modern Mormonism is its reliance on historical legitimacy. The use of historical accounts to garner legitimacy is an important strategy for marking oneself as part of the group (explaining in part the Mormon fixation on genealogy, which has eternal dynastic implications in LDS cosmology). Mormon identity fetishizes historical narratives, particularly concerning lineage and precedence: one important Mormon ritual involves a "patriarchal blessing" given to every member which discloses, among other things, the

member's ancestral line in the ancient twelve tribes of Israel (c.f. LDS 2004), but in practice it is a Mormon's genealogical roots to pioneer ancestors that serve to confer social authority and legitimacy. Institutionally, the Church links itself to Christ's church; individually, members link themselves to Joseph Smith's. Mormons often identify their ancestry within the faith as a way of establishing their bona fides as members, with members who can claim pioneer ancestry or ancestral ties to the early LDS Church having more legitimacy in many ways than others, especially first-generation converts (Avance 2012:22). Similarly, institutional and bureaucratic processes in the early Mormon church are taken as blueprints for such processes today[72].

Like their conservative counterparts, modern Mormon feminists find their identities intricately rooted in their histories. As both a means of constructing identity and as a political rhetorical strategy, LDS feminists historicize the nineteenth century roles of women in the Church as a way to illustrate women's intended equality in Mormonism, and even, among some feminists, their claim on priesthood authority. As blogger Caroline Kline says, "Women who want expanded roles for women's leadership have only to go back to our own Mormon past to see women who were really running their own programs, controlling their own funds, and highly visible in their callings" (Kline 2011).

Mormon feminists have long relied on this appropriation of traditional LDS sacred narratives: much of the early work of Mormon historian and feminist Linda King Newell (1981, 1985), for example, explored the ritual roles of women in the early Church. Such research imperiled some members of the September Six, notoriously excommunicated in part for feminist reinterpretations of LDS doctrine and history[73]. Today, these narratives are circulated in blogs,

---

[72] The complex relationship between historical narrative and modern Mormon identity underscores a paradox inherent in a tradition that at once reifies its historical foundations as a pure past (a conservative impulse), and valorizes the concept of continual revelation and evolving doctrine (a progressive impulse). While Joseph Smith's infant church and Mormon pioneer ancestry are valorized as the most pure example of Mormon identity, the doctrine of continuing revelation problematizes an easy categorization of LDS faith as conservative.

[73] Of the six, three were disfellowshipped or excommunicated on the basis of their public feminist teachings: Lynne Kanavel Whitesides, disfellowshpped for both her public teachings on Mother in Heaven and for making televised comments on the Church's mistreatment of women; Maxine Hanks, who the year before her excommunication published "Women and Authority: Re-emerging Mormon Feminism"; and Lavina Fielding Anderson, who co-edited a history of Mormon women and published a list of intellectuals targeted by the Church. Then as now, institutional discipline for feminist Mormons is generally reserved for those who dare proselytize their feminist worldview through media.

podcasts, and forum discussions, evidence of feminists engagement with and privileging of

Mormon history. Popular feminist blogger Joanna Brooks argues that Joseph Smith intended

women to have priesthood power:

> He ordained his wife Emma Smith (D&C 25:7); he told women in the Relief Society that
> he intended to make of them "a kingdom of priests"; and he welcomed women to
> receive temple endowments, including the wearing of a garment that symbolized
> priesthood authority. (Brooks 2013b)

Historical accounts are staples of feminist Mormon blogs. For instance, *Feminist Mormon*

Housewives regularly features podcasts and blog posts that explore historical narratives meant to

buttress feminist causes, sometimes written as responses to Mormon leaders or spokespeople

who question feminist activity. One such post identifies early Mormon woman (and one of many

wives to Church patriarch Brigham Young) Susa Young Gates who allied with the national

women's rights movement and establishes her as a precedent for modern LDS feminists doing

the same (Kimberly 2013).

The attempt to locate feminism in Church history marks a particular strategy for co-opting

memory. As Michael Schudson has noted, "Memory selects and distorts in the service of present

interests. The present interest may be narrowly defined—memory may be called up and shaped

in an instrumental fashion to support some current strategic end" (1997:351). The location of

feminist identities in Mormon history is strategic both as a means of legitimating feminist ideology

as well as a method for signaling belonging for Mormon feminists themselves.

Bearing testimony as defensive communication strategy

The second narrative strategy that marks Mormon feminists' commitment to community

involves a reliance on the Mormon ritual of bearing testimony as a way of grounding their

identities within the ritual community. This is a way of declaring themselves "faithful" and co-

opting that identity, in effect further marginalizing the experiences of many heterodox feminists by aligning the movement with orthodoxy as a defensive communicative strategy.

Online, several vocal (yet unofficial) leaders of the movement have emerged, such as the founder of *Feminist Mormon Housewives* (Lisa Butterworth) and its myriad bloggers; Joanna Brooks, the self-styled spokesperson for heterodox Mormonism; and Kate Kelly, prominent proponent of women's ordination to the Mormon priesthood and co-founder of the activist group *Ordain Women*. These figureheads craft narratives about what a Mormon feminist looks like, believes, and does. Of course, like any narrative bent on highlighting similarities and banishing difference, these narratives craft an ethos that, while enticing, obscures the actual lived realities of Mormon feminists themselves. This narrative was recently summed up by Joanna Brooks:

> Here is the central idea of Mormon feminism: the Mormon movement founded by Joseph Smith offers some very powerful truths that promote the dignity and equality of all people ... But there are also aspects of the church—its bureaucracy, or some aspects of the temple—that some Mormons feel do not affirm the equality or dignity of all people. And when we encounter these, we encounter contradictions at the heart of our faith. The way we deal with these contradictions is going to be very personal to every Mormon woman. Every women must find her own answers. But to be a Mormon feminist is to support your sisters without judging their paths. Mormon feminism is solidarity. And it's knowledge. (Brooks 2013a)

Mormon feminism, then, is a faithful proposition. Not only that, but it builds on Mormon doctrinal norms around personal revelation, agency, and obtaining a personal testimony about truth ("Every woman must find her own answers" parallels the oft-repeated Mormon dictum "Everyone must receive a testimony for him/herself"). Even as this statement of essential Mormon feminism has echoes of Third Wave secular feminism, it reflects Mormon feminists' tendency to use doctrine itself to assimilate themselves into Mormon community -- just as orthodox Mormons and the institution use doctrine to marginalize them.

Similarly, the website titled "I'm a Mormon Feminist" at www.mormonfeminist.org -- set up as a counterpoint to the Church's "I'm a Mormon" campaign at www.mormon.org and designed to mimic the latter's series of profiles highlighting particular Mormons and their stories-- features a

"Frequently Asked Question" concerning whether Mormon feminists sustain their leaders, and offers this response:

> Yes, we do sustain our leaders. Mormon feminists love being Mormon. As members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, we also have a testimony of the Restored Gospel. Because of this, we do believe that our current leaders were divinely placed and do receive modern revelation. ("I'm a Mormon Feminist" 2013)

The spokeswoman for a feminist action group known as *WAVE* (Women Advocating for Voice and Equality) explained her group's framing choices: "We're trying very hard to be viewed as faithful members trying to contribute, rather than some evil feminists" (E. Peterson 2010).

This pervasive narrative depicts Mormon feminism as a faithful movement and implicitly defines faithful in ways that resonate with hegemonic Mormon identities. But my interviews and ethnographic work in social networks highlights a different reality: a significant number of feminist Mormons do not believe the Church's historical claims, doctrinal claims, or claims of authority-- all points of departure that the vast majority of orthodox Mormons, including most bishops and other leaders with disciplinary powers, would consider decidedly *unfaithful*. But in order to craft a narrative that can potentially alter the culture or teachings of the Church, the Mormon feminist narrative self-consciously alludes to its own faithfulness.

This tactic was on full display during the Pants event, when the *Washington Post's* faith blog featured an editorial proclaiming "Mormon women wearing pants love the gospel." The author, herself a member of the movement, explained that the feminists involved in *All Enlisted* were "active, faithful members of the church" with "strong testimonies of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and a desire to serve God and His children by, among other things, attending church meetings and fulfilling callings" (Jeppsen 2012). But in my interviews, cross-referenced with publicly available blog and Facebook posts, I learned that a number of participants and organizers were not active members, and many had ceased believing years ago; many attended their wards for the first time in years in order to do so wearing pants.

The contradiction between the framing of Mormon feminism as faithful and the recognition that not all LDS feminists are faithful according to cultural and institutional definitions

of that term is the Achilles' heel of online Mormon feminist identity. Interestingly, the framing of Mormon feminism as faithful mirrors that time-honored Mormon defensive communicative strategy, discussed in Chapter 2, employed by the Church and regularly criticized by progressive Mormons: obfuscating some important things to focus on other important things, with the basic motivation that the audience for a difficult message may not be prepared to understand the whole truth.

Ordain Women and The Boundaries of Tolerable Dissent

If Pants Day seemed a small and timid feminist action, only months years later another movement would develop, testing the limits of Mormon feminism as a cohesive effort. Building on the efforts of previous internet-based petitions, in March 2013 human rights lawyer Kate Kelly and several other prominent Mormon feminists organized "Ordain Women" (OW), an organization specifically calling on the LDS Church to open its all-male priesthood for women's ordination. The group's website originally featured a dozen or so profiles of feminists in favor of ordination, and quickly gained momentum. When the website first launched, the issue of women's ordination was considered "radical" and most Mormon feminists were unwilling or unable to publicly align with its goals for fear of backlash or because they simply did not agree with its goals. But in October 2013, Kelly organized the group's first mass action: a march on Temple Square itself during the biannual General Conference priesthood session, a time ritually set aside for men only. The group requested stand-by tickets for admission to the priesthood session, and were turned away.

The group repeated their action the following spring, requesting advance tickets for attendance at the priesthood session in April. Their request was denied, and in an unusual move, the Newsroom posted a public memorandum to the group's leaders (naming them individually) and chastising their ongoing efforts:

> Women in the Church, by a very large majority, do not share your advocacy for priesthood ordination for women and consider that position to be extreme. Declaring

such an objective to be non-negotiable, as you have done, actually detracts from the helpful discussions that Church leaders have held as they seek to listen to the thoughts, concerns, and hopes of women inside and outside the Church leadership. Ordination of women to the priesthood is a matter of doctrine that is contrary to the Lord's revealed organization for His Church.

Your organization has again publicized its intention to demonstrate on Temple Square… Activist events like this detract from the sacred environment of Temple Square and the spirit of harmony sought at General Conference. Please reconsider. (Newsroom 2014a)

Thus by directly calling out the organizers and invoking the Mormon values of cohesion and submission, the institution directly refuted the efforts of OW and its participants.

Kelly and other participants moved forward with their plans but were again denied entrance. Within a month, Kelly had been placed on informal probation by her local leaders, and in June she was excommunicated. While some cultural norms around gender like appropriate Sunday dress have some leeway, the gendered division at the root of the patriarchal order proved too central to withstand the threat of rebellion. And yet, despite the clear and present danger from supporting women's ordination, OW succeeded in making the issue a topic of bloggernacle-wide conversation, obliterating the taboo that had surrounded it for the whole of Mormon history, and increasing the number of visible supporters from a dozen to several thousand[74]. In only two years' time, this most divisive issue of Mormon feminism has spread and grown in numbers and reach in unprecedented ways.

Conclusion: Feminisms on the Mediated Margins

Evolving doctrine and cultural norms provide structural constraints which outline a complex picture of the possibilities for acceptable Mormon womanhood. For many LDS women, this constraint provides purpose and fulfillment. Some orthodox Mormon women say they find power in their roles as wives and mothers; others say they have no concern with power but

---

[74] At the time of this writing, the website features several hundred profiles and the group's Facebook page has nearly 7,000 publically viewable "likes."

believe that God's design for traditional family life provides the only path to real happiness in this life. These women rely on the narratives of the Church regarding the importance of structure and hierarchy to understand their position vis-à-vis male leadership.

For feminist Mormons, community online serves to reinforce progressive ideologies while increasing dissatisfaction with scripted roles. These women often find "real life" expression of their heterodoxy problematic or dangerous, and often attend their local wards as closeted feminists. Even among those who do "come out" in their wards as outspoken feminists, narrative tropes strategically locate them within the ritual community. These tropes mark LDS identity as centered on community loyalty over and above individual rights.

Many Mormon women who believe the Church is led by God through his prophets still feel uncomfortable with their role within its structure but hesitate to name themselves "feminist." These women use discursive strategies to avoid associating themselves with the negative emic connotations of "feminist" while still quietly harboring hopes for changes within the Church. Cognizant of the social sanctions at risk when adopting the label "feminist" or openly advocating for change in the Church, some Mormon women reject the term altogether to obfuscate their deeply held feminist sentiments.

The fallout around Ordain Women illustrated the very real risk that Mormon feminists undertake by stirring up contention in the Mormon universe. Taking care not to "rock the boat" as one Mormon woman told me, feminist Mormons choose their battles carefully on Sunday, surrounded by their fellow Saints. But outside their ward houses and behind the computer screen, feminist Mormons form communities online where—under anonymity of screen names— they advocate eloquently for change within their Church.

CHAPTER 6: Shifting Voices: Changing Constructions of Mormon Identity in a Digital Age

"Mormons' continued eagerness to be accepted as fully American, as "mainstream," may seem a little desperate. But it is also testament to the enduring appeal of an idealized America that lives up to its pluralistic creed. Even as Mormons recognize their continued, unwilling exile from that America, we are affirming those ideals by learning, haltingly, to cope with our own messy history and to tolerate, albeit imperfectly, difference and dissent within the faith." (Kristine Haglund 2014)

"Though they seem to invoke an origin in a historical past with which they continue to correspond, actually identities are about questions of using the resources of history, language and culture in the process of becoming rather than being: not 'who we are' or 'where we came from,' so much as what we might become, how we have been represented and how that bears on how we might represent ourselves. Identities are therefore constituted within, not outside representation… They arise from the narrativization of the self, but the necessarily fictional nature of this process in no way undermines its discursive, material or political effectivity, even if the belongingness, the 'suturing into the story' through which identities arise is, partly, in the imaginary (as well as the symbolic) and therefore, always, partly construed in fantasy, or at least within a fantasmatic field." (Stuart Hall 1996:4)

As the smoke cleared from the 2012 "Mormon moment," the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints emerged arguably more a part of the American mainstream than at any time in its 182 year history. Its public relations campaigns, combined with extensive (often excessive) media coverage of Mitt Romney's Mormonism, feminist activism, and wildly proliferating heterodox voices demystified the faith, offering Mormons an unprecedented place at the table of American society. But the Church that emerged thus victoriously was, in many ways, an altogether different Church: one that made significant concessions to this internal and external scrutiny, and one in which fractures and fissures belied its narrative of global unity and community.

Changes to in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and to Mormon identity itself can be easy to overlook. In this vast, bureaucratic system, change does not happen all at once; it happens in increments, in small moments that often seem insignificant to outsiders— often even to Mormons themselves. It happens in moments that mark minute discursive shifts, moments that are negotiated and circulated. These eventually gain social sanction and ever so

slowly shift cultural norms and official policy. Recent changes in Mormon discourse—from the muddled clarification of the Church's stance on caffeine, to the role of political ideology in a conservative faith, to the roles of orthodoxy and orthopraxy in determining legitimate Mormon identity, to shifting discourses on the roles of women in Church organization —mark responses to publicly visible online pressure from both inside the organization and outside scrutiny, and signal adaptation in an increasingly digital world. This evolution in LDS identity—so visible in this Mormon moment—is indicative of broader cultural shifts in America toward nuanced and gradually de-institutionalized religious identities, thanks in large part to the competing structural nodes present in digital culture and expression.

All signs point toward incremental yet significant structural changes within the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints over the past few years, changes made possible and necessary by the flattening, opening power of the internet which threatens hegemonic discourses and forces the hand of an institution reliant on positive media attention for sustainability in member retention and growth. Thus far this dissertation has shown how lay members have appropriated digital space as a means of re-imagining Mormon community: by debating and pushing back against cultural norms (Ch. 2), by challenging longstanding stereotypes about political identities (Ch. 3), by re-mapping borders of acceptable identity vis-à-vis orthodoxy and orthopraxy (Ch. 4), and by questioning and challenging gendered expectations and roles through organized social action (Ch. 5). In this final chapter, I will rely on the data from these chapters to argue that the reality of a new media environment challenges the traditional authority structure of the Church, which the institution accommodates by altering its emerging positions on various issues of social concern.

This is not an argument without controversy. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is built on the twin doctrines of priesthood authority and continuing revelation (discussed in detail in Chapters 1, 2, and 5). Together, these doctrines insist that changes in policies and doctrines of the Church do not and cannot come as a result of external or internal pressures but only through direct divine revelation to the Church's all-male hierarchy in Salt Lake City. Recent

shifts in doctrine and practice, coming on the heels of such external and internal pressures and made so visible by the affordances of the internet, require the institution to double down in other areas of orthodoxy and orthopraxy in order to combat the perception that the Church's hand (read: God's hand) can be forced by the whims of social action and popular opinion. Thus, in arguing that the digital age forces *change* on the institution, I am also paradoxically arguing that the digital age forces *continuity* on the institution, mandating updated discourses while reaffirming some conservative impulses-- a sort of battening down of the institutional hatches. In this way, some of the strongest evidence for change in Mormonism today is institutional retrenchment and an increasingly strict policing of its members.

In this final chapter, I will use institutional discourse around one highly circulated shift, concerning the history of race in the LDS Church, to describe how a digitally connected world forces institutional narratives into alignment with emerging public discourse. Then I will discuss the relationship between this and other shifting discourses, and the rash of recent discipline and excommunications occurring across the United States, both of which I argue signal strategic institutional efforts toward adaptation to the internet era. I end with a rumination on the effects of the internet on modern Mormonism itself, and the implications of this study beyond Mormonism.

The Internet and Institutional Response

Media have always been central to the extension across space and maintenance in time of Mormon institutional narratives. Of course, Mormonism has not always had the exacting, organized bureaucratic structure of today from which to extend cohesive narratives in the first place. As described in Chapter 1, as the LDS Church expanded globally in the late 19th and early 20th century, it faced complications from institutional decentralization; church auxiliaries operated independently and manuals, lesson plans, and local practices and teachings varied widely in various geographical regions. Because this decentralization threatened institutional authority and

the potential for cohesion among its many congregations (Bowman 2012:194), Church-wide correlation efforts beginning in the 1960s intentionally streamlined all Church media-- Scriptures, handbooks, manuals, lesson plans, tracts, videos, and more-- with single-purpose messaging. The prophetic voice became the mediated and correlated voice.

In the decades that followed, Mormon leaders at both the institutional and local level cultivated fear of uncorrelated media, both implicitly and explicitly. The most dangerous of these were labeled "anti-Mormon literature," at the time mostly print material with claims and arguments against the veracity of the Mormon faith or against its historical narratives. Because anti-Mormon literature does not promote itself as such, faithful Mormons shunned, at the behest of their leaders, all non-church approved publications on topics related to Mormonism (sometimes including history, philosophy, and other related subjects) for fear of confronting anti-Mormon literature with its power to beguile and deceive. As one Mormon who grew up pre-Internet explained in an interview, when faithful Mormons had questions, or if they sought ammunition to defend their faith from detractors, or as they prepared materials for Church talks and lessons, they relied exclusively on information published by the Church. They did not turn to the local library or the religious section of local bookstores. These unmoderated sources were understood to pose a real spiritual threat to the reader, an ability to plant seeds of doubt in the guise of scientific or rational "truth."

Correlation begat a Mormon imagined community across the globe, creating a homogenization of Mormon culture and teachings over dispersed geographic regions. Prior to the Internet, correlation efforts ensured that Church media synchronized Mormon narratives across space and time. The legacy of correlation is also responsible for a black-and-white bifurcation of media-- Church-approved sources were and are "official" and thus "right;" unapproved sources "unofficial" and thus "wrong."

Thus it was print (and to a lesser degree, audio-visual) media that provided a semblance of imagined community for Mormons worldwide beginning in the mid 20th century; and today, it is

new media that pose an unprecedented threat to this media-induced unification. The Church still

attempts to correlate its message with its own sophisticated appropriation of the internet, born

from its proselytizing emphasis coupled with its need to connect with an increasingly global

membership. From its public relations campaigns, search engine optimization, advanced market

research techniques, interactive Church websites (with user-generated content and a "Chat with

a Missionary" feature on mormon.org), and its ubiquitous presence on social networking sites

such as Facebook and Twitter; the institution has invested millions of dollars in staying up-to-date

with current new media trends. The Church's own websites provide streamlined access to

"official," Church-approved texts at the click of a mouse, which, coupled with its often-militant

policing of members' blogging and social media activities (often, but not always, done at the local

level), enforces the legacy of correlation in a new media environment.

In an April 2008 Church-wide address, Second Counselor in the First Presidency Dieter

Uchtdorf praised new technologies for their ability to advance the Church's message:

> New technologies such as [the Internet] make it possible for the gospel message to be
> spread throughout the world. The Church Web sites are good examples of how you can
> use this technology as a wonderful resource of inspiration, help, and learning…

However, despite its potential to spread Mormon ideology, the Church remains ambivalent about

the internet itself, as Uchtdorf went on to explain:

> Be cautious. These same technologies can allow evil influences to cross the threshold
> of your homes. These dangerous traps are only a mouse click away. Pornography,
> violence, intolerance, and ungodliness destroy families, marriages, and individual lives.
> (Uchtdorf 2008:n.p.)

Moral panics around new media are a common religious response, but Mormon institutional

ambivalence about the internet reflects a cognizance of a more surreptitious threat than that

found in such overt examples of immorality as pornography or violence. Indeed, the Church's own

problematic history is also "a mouse click away."

The understanding that the Web is a vast and dangerous trove of anti-Mormon

information permeates Mormon understanding. Let me illustrate this with an anecdote: When I

began studying Mormonism I visited with missionaries who taught me several basic lessons about the Church. After one of our earliest meetings, where we discussed Joseph Smith and the Restoration, one missionary told me if I was interested in learning more, he could recommend some good books (such as Mormon historian Richard Bushman's *Rough Stone Rolling*) or bring me more reading materials. But, he cautioned, "Don't Google 'Joseph Smith.'" His statement came from a knowledge of the fraught nature of online texts, which are potentially challenging to Mormon orthodoxy; he told me that there is so much "garbage" online, and that most sources are unreliable and "just want to attack" (true enough). Of course, I did Google "Joseph Smith" that very day, which led to website hits ranging from the official page of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the top of my search results, to information from Utah Lighthouse Ministries on Joseph Smith's history of fraud and criminal record, to message boards at exmormon.org describing the LDS founder as an emotionally abusive pedophile who used threats of eternal damnation to lure his plural wives into bed.

It is not only Joseph Smith who is under attack from the World Wide Web. Indeed, every potentially controversial point of Mormon doctrine or history similarly yields threatening results. Links to blogs, wikis, and online communities create an endless challenge to the LDS narrative. These digital texts are in many ways the modern equivalent of Luther's pamphleteering, directed at arousing popular sentiment against the authority of the Church. To outsiders, the ubiquity of this kind of information likely comes as no surprise; but it can be jarring to Mormons who have dedicated their lives to the Church and faithfully and ritualistically avoided anti-Mormon information. As one former Mormon told me in an interview, upon reading online that scientific research has debunked the Book of Mormon's claims about the ancient world, "One minute I was a true believer and a moment later I was sobbing on the floor repeating over and over, 'It's all a hoax! What are we going to do?'" Certainly not all reactions are this visceral and immediate. More common in my interviews was a tendency for contradictory information to build up over time in what participants commonly referred to as a mental "shelf," which eventually created such levels

of dissonance that the shelf "broke" and they were no longer to maintain their belief in the Church's narratives.

While the internet is rife with this type of challenging information, one prominent example is Mormonthink.com, a popular site whose authors are often anonymous for fear of reprisal but widely trusted and cited among doubting and former Mormons and other Church critics. This site features in-depth articles on many contentious issues relating to Mormon history and doctrine, such as Book of Mormon historicity and authorship, anachronisms in its text, and the practice of polygamy. The majority of the issues on the site are things that even faithful, lifelong Mormons may have never heard of-- such as differing accounts of Joseph Smith's first vision, the Kinderhook plate controversy, or the practice of polyandry; faithful Mormons who approach the site for information may get more than they bargained for. While the website claims to neutrally examine the facts, it goes to great lengths to offer historical and scientific evidence disproving the Church's narrative. The page is so threatening to LDS leaders that in 2012 David Twede, then editor of Mormonthink, was threatened with excommunication (he elected to resign from the website and from the LDS Church).

While some Mormons dismiss this type of information as anti-Mormon and unreliable, others find it disconcerting. After discovering the contradictory record on the internet, some Mormons negotiate a nuanced relationship to the Church, like one man who told me in an interview that after his brush with Mormonthink he now believes the Book of Mormon is "inspired but not historical." Still others feel betrayed, embarrassed, or angry and leave altogether. Church leaders have acknowledged that members are leaving at an unprecedented rate, particularly in the younger, tech-savvy generations, and many have attributed this exodus to the internet. Marlin Jensen, emeritus General Authority and official Church Historian and Recorder from 2005-2012,

recently shared that his own daughter once came to him and asked "Dad, why didn't you ever tell me that Joseph Smith was a polygamist?" (Henderson and Cooke 2012).[75]

While all traditionally closed faiths and belief paradigms increasingly face these problematic aspects of the open text of the internet, Mormonism's historical model of top-down communication faces unique challenges, particularly because of the beliefs that its authority structure is divinely designed and that the prophetic voice is inerrant. With threats to orthodoxy only a mouse-click away, the complex consequences of new media convergence increasingly force the Church's accommodation. This accommodation comes about in emerging institutional positions on various current issues of social concern, which have the power to alter the Church at the structural level. In other words, the Mormon Church is using the internet to counter the internet-- by offering up new, negotiated narratives to counteract the information that Mormons and others will inevitably encounter online. In one recent and markedly high profile instance of this re-negotiation, the Church confronted historical narratives vis-à-vis race and institutional exclusion.

Toward transparency: The Church confronts its past

The modern LDS Church fosters inclusivity and a "global church" image: while Mormonism is an American-born religion with a distinctly American narrative and headquartered in the Western United States, Church growth statistics boast nearly 150% more non-US Mormons than US Mormons today[76]. Mormon promotional materials, like the recent "I'm a Mormon" campaign and the "Meet the Mormons" film, released in select theaters in October 2014, routinely feature images and stories of international Mormons alongside their American counterparts. But

---

[75] Of the 35 interviews with Mormons I myself have conducted, over a dozen expressed that their first exposure to information that countered the Church's narrative happened online; and of those, half ultimately lost faith altogether. This tally does not include innumerable such accounts from my participant observation online, where such stories are ubiquitous but likely also reflect the self-selection bias of the heavy Internet users who populate these spaces.

[76] As of May 2015, the LDS Church claims a total worldwide membership of 15.3 million worldwide, with just over 6.4 million members in the United States. See http://www.mormonnewsroom.org/facts-and-statistics

this image of a diverse global church welcoming to all is threatened by the historical record, which shows a very different image of a Church with racist policies and doctrines. In addition to impeding international growth by potentially thwarting proselytizing efforts among those with particular ethnic and racial backgrounds, this record raises important questions for faithful Mormons about the nature of doctrine and authority in a church where doctrine changes and authority can be wrong.

Racial differentiation and exclusion is built into the structure of Mormonism. The Book of Mormon is in many ways a racially-charged narrative, describing the ongoing battles between two Native American tribes, the Lamanites and the Nephites. In one instance, God curses the once "white, and exceedingly fair and delightsome" Lamanites with "a skin of blackness" for their unbelief to ensure that they would "not be enticing" to the righteous, pale Nephite tribe.[77] Later, they are promised that they might turn "white and delightsome"[78] after conversion-- a text that was officially altered to read "pure and delightsome" in 1981. As recently as the 1970s, brown-skinned Native people from across the Western hemisphere (including North and South America, Mexico, Hawaii, Tonga, Samoa, and New Zealand) were routinely referred to as "Lamanites"[79] (see LDS 1971b). To this day Native people retain a special place in Mormon missionary fervor because of Book of Mormon prophesies that the Lamanites will turn to the Gospel. This missionary zeal reached its apex in the infamous LDS Indian Student Placement Program, which officially began in 1954 (though it had been in operation unofficially since 1947) and lasted through 2000, removing baptized Hopi and Navajo children from their reservation homes to place

---

[77] "And he had caused the cursing to come upon them, yea, even a sore cursing, because of their iniquity. For behold, they had hardened their hearts against him, that they had become like unto a flint; wherefore, as they were white, and exceedingly fair and delightsome, that they might not be enticing unto my people the Lord God did cause a skin of blackness to come upon them." (2 Nephi 5:21, Book of Mormon)

[78] "And then shall they rejoice; for they shall know that it is a blessing unto them from the hand of God; and their scales of darkness shall begin to fall from their eyes; and many generations shall not pass away among them, save they shall be a white and a delightsome people." (2 Nephi 30:6, Book of Mormon; pre-1981)

[79] Although this term appears to have fallen out of favor among LDS leaders in recent years, in my ethnographic work I heard this term used repeatedly by Mormons of Native ancestry who consider themselves to be Lamanites; and by other faithful Mormons to describe their Lamanite (Native) friends and acquaintances.

them in white LDS foster homes during the school year for "educational and spiritual enrichment" (see Pavlik 1992).[80]

This preoccupation with Native people, with its paternalistic racism, is only one part of the Mormon racial past. More titillating in critical media coverage and in anti-Mormon writings of late has been the historic place of African and African American people in Mormon teaching and practice. With the known exception of two or three black men[81] ordained to the priesthood in the early years of the Church, from its founding the Church systematically excluded men of African descent from holding the priesthood that all otherwise worthy men over the age of 12 hold, and black men and women were excluded from temple participation. Thus those of African descent as well as those of indeterminable descent with black skin were excluded from all church leadership roles and from many temple ordinances, including the endowment and celestial marriage, a rite which is essential to Mormon exaltation in the afterlife. These policies effectively barred blacks from the highest levels of Heaven itself. Brigham Young, who succeeded Joseph Smith as Church president and prophet, stated: "Shall I tell you the law of God in regard to the African race? If the white man who belongs to the chosen seed mixes his blood with the seed of Cain, the penalty, under the law of God, is death on the spot. This will always be so" (*Journal of Discourses* 10:109).

For over a hundred years, this exclusion was enforced and justified by Church leaders such as Brigham Young, Wilford Woodruff, and John Taylor, who variously explained the priesthood ban as a result of the curse of Cain, or the behavior of black souls in the preexistence.[82] In the first explanation, God punished Cain, the first murderer in the Book of Genesis, and all of his descendents with black skin. The second explanation builds on Mormon

---

[80] In light of the lack of genetic evidence linking modern day Native tribes to Israel, some LDS scholars favor what has been called a "limited geography model," suggesting that not all Native American tribes should be viewed as descendents of the Lamanites. Traditional folk teaching and vernacular use of the term "Lamanite," however, is not nearly as nuanced.

[81] Elijah Abel and Walker Lewis are known to have been ordained as elders, and a man known as "Black Pete" is thought to be the first black convert but little is known about his church membership. LDS historians have only recently begun to circulate these men's stories as evidence that the Church's founder was not as exclusionary as his Church eventually became after his death.

[82] Official Statement of the First Presidency on the Negro Question, July 17, 1947, quoted in Mormonism and the Negro, pp. 46-37; The First Presidency on the Negro Question, 17 August 1949; Official Statement of First Presidency, August 17, 1951)

doctrine concerning the War in Heaven, when pre-mortal souls sided with either Jesus or Lucifer's plan for the salvation of humanity: a third of souls sided with Lucifer and became demons without mortal bodies, and the remaining two thirds became humans who were rewarded or punished in mortality for their degree of devotion to Christ. According to this explanation, less-valiant souls who did not take sides or were "fence sitters" became black people. Both explanations describe black skin itself as the outward curse marking an inward ill, but in practice and in policy African lineage became the barometer for measuring worthiness.

As the Civil Rights movement challenged American social norms vis-à-vis race and integration, the LDS Church held fast to its stance on people of African descent, even excommunicating some white members who dared protest the policy. It was not until 1978, during a time when missionary expansion in Brazil was hampered by the indeterminate racial lineage of many dark sinned Brazilians, that the First Presidency received a revelation lifting the priesthood ban (Pavlik 1992). In 1981 an updated version of the Book of Mormon changed the passage regarding dark-skinned Native converts from "white and delightsome" to "pure and delightsome," though the verse describing the original curse placed on the Lamanites, 2 Nephi 5:21, remains unchanged, still specifying that their "skin of blackness" was a result of their iniquity.

Since lifting the Priesthood ban, the Church has shied away from officially addressing its history, leaving opaque the origin of the ban in the first place and never offering any statement or direction to thwart "folk" explanations, and certainly never offering any form of official or unofficial apology. It ran as a quiet undercurrent in various books and pamphlets, largely "anti-Mormon literature" written by evangelicals or former members as exposés to challenge the authority of the Church. Historians published important books on the subject, but without the imprimatur of the Church they were largely unread by the lay membership; and the Church's official teaching manuals and publications rarely explored the issue beyond mentioning the lifting of the ban as a glorious time for the Church and an answer to the long-suffering prayers of its leaders, a day faithful members had always believed would come.

In 2012, the issue of race and the Church came to a head in large part due to the national spotlight on Mormonism during Mitt Romney's presidential bid. Several media outlets, both on and offline, began mining the issue along with other titillating topics like polygamy and Church finances. As discussed briefly in Chapter 1, on February 28, the *Washington Post* ran a feature on race and the LDS Church, quoting a popular religion professor at Brigham Young University on the origins of the Priesthood ban. Citing both the historical teaching that black people descended from Cain and that they were less valiant in the pre-existence as potential explanations for the ban, Bott also opined that withholding the priesthood from blacks was a blessing in disguise:

> "What is discrimination?" Bott asks. "I think that is keeping something from somebody that would be a benefit for them, right? But what if it wouldn't have been a benefit to them?" Bott says that the denial of the priesthood to blacks on Earth — although not in the afterlife — protected them from the lowest rungs of hell reserved for people who abuse their priesthood powers. "You couldn't fall off the top of the ladder, because you weren't on the top of the ladder. So, in reality the blacks not having the priesthood was the greatest blessing God could give them." (Horowitz 2012)

The article quickly circulated on Facebook, blog posts, and Twitter (see Larsen 2012 for a chronology of its online virality), and became a part of political discussions around Romney's viability as a candidate, making it relevant to many non-Mormons and Mormons alike. The Church's racial past was no longer a boutique hobby of historians and former Mormons; now, thanks to the disseminatory power of the internet, the record was open to the world.

The LDS Church responded immediately with an "official" statement on its *Newsroom* website, strongly denouncing Bott's comments and insisting that they "absolutely do not represent the teachings and doctrines" of the Church, that the Church does not "tolerate racism in any form," that the origins and meaning of the "restriction" are unknown, and that the Church "condemns any and all past racism by individuals both inside and outside the Church" (Newsroom 2012a).

Only a month later, Provo's *Daily Herald* announced Bott's impending retirement from BYU (Daily Herald 2012), perhaps a casualty of the Church's struggle to maintain control over its

own narrative in the digital age.[83] But because Bott's statements shone a light into an

embarrassing corner of the Mormon past, the Church was forced to respond. The initial

statement, although it came from a public relations website and not from the First Presidency,

marked an important moment in the shifting of the official narrative about the priesthood ban. As

opaque as it may have been, for the first time, past statements and teachings were labeled

"racist."

That statement proved to be the first small step in a gradual institutional disavowal of the

ban and a move toward greater historical transparency. Beginning in the latter half of 2013, the

Church slowly began opening its historical record for inspection, expanding and thus shifting its

own explanations of this and other controversial topics. Unceremoniously in November of that

year, new articles began to appear on its Gospel Topics webpage (www.lds.org/topics), a site

with articles and resources for members. Observers quickly noted that these new topical essays

offered "more complete and detailed information on doctrinal beliefs, practices and historical

events of the church than at any other time in its history" (Pugmire 2014). Compared to the

Church's previous approach to controversial topics, these articles were so extensive and open

that some Mormons at first believed the Church's website had been hacked, and that these were

actually anti-Mormon literature.

Between late 2013 and late 2014, a total of eleven Gospel Topics articles appeared on

the website, one every few months, covering many of Mormonism's most controversial topics.

Some of these included "First Vision Accounts," which attempts to explain the many differing

accounts Joseph Smith offered during his lifetime of his seminal First Vision; to "Book of Mormon

and DNA Studies," which tackles the Mormon belief in literal DNA connections between Native

---

[83] In the *Herald's* announcement, Bott's son went on record claiming that retirement had been Bott's "plan for at least the last year." Although this certainly may have been a plausible coincidence, one wonders if this pending retirement may have been hastened by the public condemnation he received from his leaders, or alternately, if his pending retirement may have loosened his lips in the first place, helping Bott feel more comfortable sharing his perspective with the *Washington Post* regardless of the fallout. Such notions are speculation, but all were featured in the social media talk surrounding the announcement, most prominently the idea that Bott's retirement came as a direct result of his daring to speak an embarrassing and divisive -- but all too common--- perspective. Despite the speculative nature of these conversations, the sheer plausibility (and, from this writer's perspective, likelihood) that there may have been more to this story than coincidence speaks to the well-established nature of Mormon authority and the precariousness of individuals speaking out in this Church.

Americans and ancient Israelis; to "Plural Marriage in Early Utah," which along with two other

special topics dealing with polygamy, attempts to offer historical contextualization to assuage

concerns about the past practice[84]. The articles range from around one to four thousand words

(exclusive of footnotes), and vary in authorial style. Some have few citations, or cite only the

official Church canon (the Standard Works), such as "Plural Marriage in the Church of Jesus

Christ of Latter-day Saints;" others have extensive citations and endnotes, most notably "Peace

and Violence Among 19th-Century Latter-day Saints" which has forty-seven. As with most of the

Church's online content, the origin of these articles is not disclosed; each article briefly notes at

its conclusion, "The Church acknowledges the contribution of scholars to the historical content

presented in this article; their work is used with permission." None of the scholars are identified,

and none of the articles feature a byline.

The polygamy topics, in particular, received much media attention for their

unprecedented openness and clarity-- especially for the fact that they admit openly that Joseph

Smith had as many as 35 wives, some of them as young as 15, and some of them already

married to other men. These types of controversial details have long been used by "anti-

Mormons" to denounce Mormonism, and were finally being owned and defended by the institution

instead of swept under the rug or deflected. While each of the Gospel Topics articles are

apologetic in nature and by no means unbiased (speculating, for instance, that Joseph Smith

never consummated his more controversial marriages), they challenge many long-held teachings

and "folk doctrines" which most adult members of the Church had been taught and had

themselves taught to others.

In December 2013, a new article was posted titled "Race and the Priesthood." This

nearly 2,000 word article approaches the issue of the priesthood ban historically, and while it

---

[84] The full list of these articles includes, in order of publication: First Vision Accounts (published November 2013), Race and the Priesthood (December 2013), Plural Marriage and Families in Early Utah (December 2013), Book of Mormon Translation (December 2013), Are Mormons Christian? (January 2014), Book of Mormon & DNA Studies (January 2014), Peace & Violence among 19th Century Latter-day Saints (May 2014), Becoming Like God (2014), Translation and Historicity of the Book of Abraham (July 2014), Plural Marriage in Kirtland & Nauvoo (October 2014), The Manifesto and the End of Plural Marriage (October 2014)

does take a faith-promoting approach, it marks the first time the Church has ever addressed the reasons behind the ban in any substantive, public way. The article subtly speculates that the Church's establishment during a time of racial tension in American history contributed to the priesthood ban-- in other words (words that the essay does not use), that the Church's policies were racist because American society was racist. It also acknowledges that the complexities of tracing genealogies of converts in South America to prove or disprove their African descent contributed to the lifting of the restriction.

The article marks a significant shift in the discourse about the meaning and origin of the priesthood ban, for the first time disavowing not only racist justifications for the ban, but the ban itself by suggesting (obliquely) that it was never doctrinal in the first place. Such a suggestion absolves the institution of blame for its racist past, placing that blame squarely on the shoulders of a broader racist American culture; but also creates a new problem by admitting that LDS leaders can be wrong on important issues-- in this case, for more than 100 years.

The premiere of these in-depth Gospel Topics articles was momentous, but it was also overlooked by most of the Mormon community. Unlike prophetic pronouncements in days past, read at General Conference by LDS leaders or over the pulpit in local congregations, these articles were posted quietly in a back page on a dense website. In fact, it was many months before the main page at www.lds.org/topics linked directly to the essays; prior to that, they could be located by searching the page for a specific title or keyword, but these extra steps made them difficult to find. Web-savvy Mormons and those connected to the bloggernacle learned of their existence primarily by seeing the articles linked on blogs and Facebook feeds, but no press releases or announcements on official Church social media were forthcoming. Their unheralded arrival, coupled with the erratic spacing between each article, suggested institutional experimentation, as if the Church (its public relations department? its historical department? less likely, the General Authorities?) were testing the waters of LDS response. Eventually, a year

after the articles began to appear, the Church issued a statement via its online Newsroom to explain their necessity:

> We live in a world where there is so much information available on every topic. And particularly in the age of the Internet, there are both good and bad sources of information. As a Church, it's important for us to research and provide official, reputable, historically accurate information about our history and doctrine. (Newsroom 2014b)

Some have described these articles and the surrounding institutional efforts toward greater historical transparency as a way of "inoculating" youth against the shock of learning the truth, by gradually and casually introducing these controversial elements of history before these young people eventually discover the issues themselves on the internet. In fact, some seminary and institute courses (for high school and college aged members) have begun to incorporate the essays into their curriculum (Walch 2014).

Despite the impetus that led to the articles in the first place, on the whole the articles have not been broadly circulated or publicized among the many LDS congregations. Repeatedly, Mormons reported that their local leaders, including bishops and stake presidents, remained unaware of the Newsroom and the Gospel Topics page at the time of this writing, a year and a half after their advent. Some have explained this reticence as the result of an institutional effort to walk a tightrope between explaining these difficult issues for people experiencing doubts or crises of faith while not creating doubt or crises of faith for others (Walch 2014); indeed, for at least some people I have spoken with, the articles seem to have backfired in this way, creating an awareness of difficult issues that the reader was not prepared for, and resulting in a loss of faith. Regardless of why these essays have not been broadly publicized by the Church, in effect the Church is able to address controversial issues in a way that many members will never encounter, thus maintaining plausible deniability if accused of "hiding" elements of history (an accusation that was at the fore of John Dehlin's complaints about the LDS Church, as discussed in the previous chapter).

Even when members do encounter these pages, some remain resistant to the messages in them, which oftentimes contradict the narratives they learned in previous years. Almost a year after the appearance of the "Race the Priesthood" article was posted, one Sunday School teacher in Hawaii learned this lesson the hard way: after he used the Church's essay to answer his students' questions about the priesthood ban, Brian Dawson's local Church leaders removed him from his teaching assignment and told him that "black history" was not a subject fit for Church discussion (Fletcher Stack 2015). The *Salt Lake Tribune* reported:

> The essay on race, says Tamu Smith, co-author of 'Diary of Two Mad Black Mormons,' is not all that familiar to the LDS faithful and, often, their congregational leaders. "The majority of the church doesn't know about it," says Smith, who has traveled the country for book signings and speaking events. "My former stake president in Provo would not have known about it, either, if I hadn't called it to his attention." … It's "great" that the essay is on the church website, Smith says, "but people don't believe it." (Fletcher Stack 2015)

When the controversial Gospel Topics essays premiered, some conservative Mormons questioned whether lds.org had been hacked or vandalized. But most Mormons who are skeptical about the Gospel Topics essays accept them wholeheartedly when they learn that the essays are "official" and Church-sponsored. The imprimatur of the LDS Newsroom and Gospel Topics web-pages suggests another significant shift in Mormonism, one to a digital prophetic voice. Increasingly the faithful trust the disembodied, invisible webmaster as if it were a hand etching divine commands in stone.

Toward opacity: Institutional surveillance and censure

LDS institutional efforts toward greater transparency are just one face of an institution ambivalent about the internet age. In the midst of releasing the Gospel Topics essays which seemed to encourage inquiry and hard questions, the institution simultaneously worked quickly to surveil, censure, and silence many of its most formidable online critics. Within its own ranks, prominent excommunications and disciplinary meetings ironically attempted to silence the very

critics who had long argued for institutional accountability and transparency in the first place. In

June 2014, prominent feminist and Ordain Women founder Kate Kelly (discussed in Chapter 5)

was excommunicated. The following February, vocal critic and Mormon Stories Podcast founder

John Dehlin (discussed in Chapter 4) also faced a disciplinary council and was excommunicated.

Because these two Mormons were figureheads of heterodoxy, these excommunications sent

shock waves through their communities. It was clear that certain voices were not welcome within

the ranks.

In letters posted online and circulated widely, both Kate Kelly and John Dehlin's local lay

leaders explained their respective excommunications were the results of "conduct contrary to the

laws and order of the Church" (Harrison 2014, King 2015). Kelly's bishop went on to say:

> The difficulty, Sister Kelly, is not that you say you have questions or even that you
> believe that women should receive the priesthood. The problem is that you have
> persisted in an aggressive effort to persuade other Church members to your point of
> view and that your course of action has threatened to erode the faith of others. You are
> entitled to your views, but you are not entitled to promote them and proselyte others to
> them while remaining in full fellowship in the Church. (Harrison 2014)

Similarly, Dehlin's leaders explained his excommunication as a result of his beliefs about the

nature of God, the historicity of the Book of Mormon and the Book of Abraham, and the status of

the LDS Church as the one true church. While the nature of Kelly's teachings differed from

Dehlin's, he too was told that it was his online activism that crossed the line from tolerable to

intolerable dissent. In his excommunication letter, his stake president explained:

> You have spread these teachings widely via the Internet to hundreds of people in the
> past and have shared with me… that you will continue to do so. I want you to know,
> Brother Dehlin, that this action was not taken against you because you have doubts or
> because you were asking questions about Church doctrine. Rather, this decision has
> been reached because of your categorical statements opposing the doctrine of the
> Church, and their wide dissemination via your Internet presence, which has led others
> away from the Church. (King 2015)

For both Kelly and Dehlin, the internet had been their undoing. According to these documents, it

was not their doubt or questions that endangered their membership; it was their equivalent of

modern-day pamphleteering, in classic Lutheran fashion, that had threatened the authority of the institution.

After Kelly and Dehlin's excommunications, other disciplinary actions were held for particularly vocal heterodox and feminist Mormons across the States. While some of these received some attention in blogs and podcasts (such as Marisa and Carson Calderwood, excommunicated in May 2015 for publicly stating online that they did not believe in the Book of Mormon[85]; and Kirk VanAllen, who currently faces discipline for a blog post rejecting the doctrine of polygamy as having ever been of God[86]), many others went under the radar of media scrutiny. In my interviews and observations, I found evidence for a relatively large uptake in the number of disciplinary meetings held over issues of heterodoxy, particularly in cases where members' Facebook or blogging activity was reported to a bishop and then those members were called in for interviews and, less often, disciplinary councils. Because these types of meetings are initiated at the local level (involving bishops and stake presidents but, according to official Church policy, not instigated by General Authorities or the First Presidency), and because they are considered confidential and not made public by the institution, it is difficult to say with certainty whether or not there is a larger institutional trend toward silencing vocal critics; observers such as myself only hear the stories of those who self-report by posting online, and it is easy to see that a self-selection bias might misrepresent the ubiquity of this trend. But because my deep participant observation in Mormon online circles predated these excommunications, I was able to note the change in tone and atmosphere before and after the excommunications. Prior to Kelly and Dehlin's excommunication, there was a general feeling in the bloggernacle that the LDS Church had moved beyond this type of banishment, and was interested in cultivating an open, "big-tent" approach to community, encouraging questions and even -- as reflected in the Gospel Topics

---

[85] The Calderwoods were active in online communities for heterodox and doubting Mormons, particularly Carson who blogged at rationalfaiths.com, a blog devoted to difficult questions about Mormonism. The Calderwoods were publicly supported by John Dehlin and the Mormon Stories community, and interviewed shortly after their excommunication, the video of which is available at http://mormonstories.org/marisa-and-carson-calderwood-discuss-their-excommunication/
[86] VanAllen wrote about the history of polygamy and why he does not believe it was ordained by God on his personal blog: http://mormonverse.com/2015/02/02/dc-132-a-revelation-of-men-not-god/ He and his wife were interviewed by John Dehlin; that interview is available at http://mormonstories.org/kirk-and-lindsay-van-allen-facing-church-discipline-for-rejecting-polygamy-dc-132/

initiative -- actively pursuing answers to the difficult ones. These excommunications checked that enthusiasm, reminding heterodox Mormons that the institution has a vested interest in maintaining control over its online narrative.

Dehlin's excommunication was particularly paradoxical in light of the recent Gospel Topics initiative, as his Mormon Stories efforts had long sought to encourage openness about LDS history and he had on several occasions made public appeals to the LDS Church to open its historical record and teach investigators and youth the "hard truths" about Mormon history and practice. In fact, in interviews and across the bloggernacle many individuals commented that the Gospel Topics initiative was a likely response to the advocacy work of Dehlin and others like him. Just as Kelly's excommunication paradoxically led to greater institutional efforts towards women's equality (see Ch. 5), by forcing Dehlin and others out of the organization, LDS efforts toward transparency are strategically made to appear less reactionary and more revelatory-- features that are of central importance to the future of the organization.

The internet and institutional response: Prophetic voice in the digital age

Pressures and exposure from social media catalyzed this and other institutional responses. The Web is record-keeper, as high rates of access provide unprecedented ability for Mormons and others to discover dissonant narratives about the Church's history, teachings, and practices. Online communities, enabled by the quasi-safety of internet anonymity, give heterodox members a safe place to discuss problems, critiques, and concerns about these dissonant narratives, negotiating identities that threaten the status quo. Heterodox Mormons in online spaces enact Mormon rhetorical strategies by relying on defensive communication strategies, differentiating between private and public discourse (that is, between insider and outsider talk). Taboos against "stirring the pot," "creating contention," and "protesting" are emic orthodox strategies used to contain dissenting voices.

In Mormon culture, online heterodox discourse becomes dangerous when it does not adhere to official institutional positions, and so the surveillance of these online conversations and communities at both the informal, peer-to-peer level and at the institutional level allows the Church to police these identities as they develop. The longstanding Mormon norms of surveillance and report create a tattling culture; local-level reports to bishops from concerned members, as well as the Strengthening the Church Members Committee and confirmed reviews of online activity by the bishops and stake presidents of heterodox activists, make surveillance a central part of the structure that contains Mormon identity politics. Heterodox Mormons are well aware that they may be monitored for what they say online, and in some cases are willing to risk discipline precisely because they have formed a community with likeminded others; it is a strategy of protection against the disciplinary whims of the institution.

Simultaneously, the surveillance of dissenting voices in online spaces (and in some cases, the mainstream media attention that these voices garner) allows the institution to monitor and recognize pressing issues and respond to contemporary cultural currents by altering its own discursive strategies and in some cases, like the issue of race, markedly altering its stance altogether.

While the issue of race is paradigmatic, discourses around other key issues are also subtly changing-- the question of caffeine, the role of polygamy in Mormon history, the question of whether or not homosexuality is an inborn trait or a choice. If these subtle shifts seem like a rather underwhelming Mormon Reformation, remember that small steps like this, small shifts in discourse, are how change happens incrementally in top-down social systems. Furthermore, as slow as these changes may seem, the internet is pushing these issues at a far faster rate than any other time in Mormonism's past. As each narrative shift occurs, critics and insiders alike cannot overlook the role of the internet in these shifting discourses.

Conclusions

Shifting modern Mormon identities offer a useful model for considering how traditional authority structures change as a response to narrative discontinuity on the internet, and how people make sense of identity in a digital, increasingly decentralized world. In religions that have traditionally valued the role of authority to normalize discourse around appropriate belief or behavior, the internet has confounded what it means to belong by offering new perspectives and challenging long-standing cultural paradigms. By providing a platform for instantaneous interaction across geographical space and by providing a semblance of anonymity, the internet gives voice to competing perspectives of the Mormon faith and its appropriate performance. Because of the visibility and reach of these online voices, the institution is forced to respond: in some cases forcing out intolerable dissenters to reinforce identity lines in the sand, in other cases moving those lines by altering discourses on issues of concern.

Mormonism and shifting discourse in the age of the internet

Envisioned by print and audio/visual cultures, LDS imagined community-- as an ideal of homogeneity and cohesion worldwide-- is now debunked by internet communication. The Church continues to battle to correlate its message online. But the open text of the internet and the social practices that develop around them are beyond correlation, and so the Church must adapt its emerging positions-- an adaptation seen in the release of the Gospel Topics essays, in expanded roles for women, and in the increasing delegation of both public relations and internal communication to the online LDS Newsroom. But maintaining its authoritarian structure in the face of this flattening dynamic of the internet necessitates a strict disciplinary hand, shoring up the boundaries of the religious community. Simultaneously, Mormon vernacular communities recreate, subvert, and negotiate LDS social structures, creating disjointed and disorganized interpretive communities, communities that function as disembodied churches in their own right.

Data collection for this dissertation began in 2012, when the LDS Church had not yet clarified-- then unclarified-- its stance on caffeine; when the "I'm a Mormon" campaign was new; when Mitt Romney was a candidate for President of the United States; Mormon feminists had not yet collectively worn pants to church as a mass action nor publicly petitioned for tickets to the priesthood session of General Conference; and rumors were circulating of a mysterious online "hit piece" or "expose," depending on one's perspective, of John Dehlin's various online activities by one Gregory Smith. Since then, the institution and vernacular communities have engaged in a virtual dance in historic Mormon fashion: expand, then contract; concession, then retreat. With each movement, the Overton window of Mormon possibilities shifts, and these shifts threaten cohesion and institutional control in unprecedented ways.

It has become commonplace among scholars, journalists, and interested observers to compare the modern day effects of internet-based digital culture on religious belief and practice to the massive paradigm shifts of the Protestant Reformation in the 16th century (c.f. Assmann 2012, Bawden & Robinson 2000, Dewar 1998, Peterson 2000, Krotoski 2011), a shift that similarly co-occurred with the invention and widespread use of a new communication technology, the printing press. Indeed, I myself have made and continue to make this comparison, which is rife with useful parallels to our modern situation: primarily, that sudden, ubiquitous access to information challenges religious institutions' interpretive authority and privileges the development of idiosyncratic, niche sects united through a textual imagined community. The Reformation, of course, resulted in a schism that divided Catholicism and instituted first one, then many new branches of Christianity. With today's shifts, this internet Reformation in Mormonism, the natural question arises: Will there be a Mormon schism? Will there be a grand split between orthodox and heterodox Mormon communities, resulting in new institutional organizations?

Perhaps a formal schism is unnecessary. Online communities, after all, provide catharsis and community for heterodox members unsatisfied with the narratives offered in their churches. In effect, the schisms have already occurred. The creation, for instance, of an online community

for feminist Mormons is, in my view, schismatic in both cause and effect. Heterodox (and

extremely orthodox) groups do not need a physical meetinghouse nor an official IRS sanction to

effectively be churches in many important ways (though many of these groups do meet in person

on occasion, and many are tax-exempt non-profits organizations). They have tenets of faith,

Scriptural texts, hierarchies of leadership, rules of engagement, and orientations to the cosmos

and to one another. Individuals mark themselves as members in ritualistic ways, engages in

ritualistic patterns of sharing, and recite narrative credos. They even engage in passionate

proselytizing.

The vernacular response to the open text of the Internet includes a negotiation of

belonging, challenging orthodoxy and encouraging heterodoxy and new expressions of

faithfulness. The institution's response to the threat of the internet's affordances is both a

broadening of some discourses about what it means to be Mormon, and a strict enforcement of

others. Whether or not this sea change in Mormonism from Web 2.0 is an unmitigated good is up

for debate. Over all, evidence suggests a snail's pace shift towards "big tent Mormonism,"

allowing for the inclusion of many who a generation past might have chosen to leave, or even

been excommunicated. This shift is one which many heterodox Mormons applaud and some

orthodox Mormons bemoan.[87]

Beyond Mormonism: Implications for the study of religion in the digital age

Human social belonging is one of our most central needs, something that scholars have

long sought to understand. Our need and longing for community is as old as communication itself,

and human societies of all types have historically relied on religion, among other social

institutions, to structure and restrict community into a useable, functioning system. The digital age

---

[87] The flattening dynamics of the Internet do signal a democratization in religion that is unprecedented, but it is not without exception. The availability of these publishing platforms still biases information in favor of the young and highly educated. Many Mormons, particularly those who are older than 50 and those who are less educated, are completely unaware of the existence of Internet communities. For the most part, these Mormons are unaware of the counter-narratives available on the Internet as well.

has confounded notions of community as embodied, temporally and spatially restricted, and founded on closed narratives. But the expansiveness of life online, which threatens hegemony, also proffers new definitions of community for a new generation.

Marshall McLuhan (1994, 1964) famously predicted that society's shift from "hot" to "cool" media would herald the democratization and decentralization of society. Hot media he defined as those that were data intensive and low participation, like radio in the age of the serial, or cinema; cool media were those low intensity and high participation forms like television. He believed that print communication like the newspaper homogenized language, standardized narratives, and offered a "center to margins" form of institutional control. But in society's shift to digital media, he saw a shift away from centralization to the talk of the people, who would make meaning for themselves, out from under the thumb of societal hierarchies. Though McLuhan's perspective has been lambasted as overly technologically deterministic, robbing social change of its human instigators, and though he overlooks important questions of institutional control, he was right that the decentralization of media production—epitomized in the digital age—would threaten institutional hegemony.

Still, modern individuals do not have carte blanche to construct their identities, unfettered by traditional social structures. Instead, they negotiate their own identities within the constraints of the structures in which they live, through the interweaving of available narratives for identity, which reproduces the social system. Thus the duality of structure-- or the competing forces of agency and structure-- means that actors both create and are constrained by society itself (Giddens 1994). The internet as a mediating technology showcases and *complicates* notions of duality of structure for those in complex religious systems. Indeed, the internet -- with its cultural norms and structural affordances-- is itself a structure in which we enact our daily lives. Thus we can speak of a structuration of religious identities in a digital age: religious institutions, much like individual practitioners, must navigate belonging in a world in which texts are open, voices are disembodied, and discourses are surveilled.

Beyond Mormonism, the analysis of religious identities and the internet, which must be located within a dynamic field of historical and political contingencies, points toward a revolution in religion in the digital era. Ideas about the interplay of structure and agency must take the role and features of the internet into account, as this new technology mediates structuration and religion itself in important ways.

For Mormon identity in the digital age, structure still matters. Indeed, structure defines the limits for acceptable identity narratives for members. But while Mormons and others embedded within a social system are constrained by the discourses of that institution, the internet allows shifts in the borders of belonging-- stretching possibilities and re-imagining constraints, altering the social system at the structural level.

APPENDIX I: Methodologies & Reflections

In this Appendix, I will discuss the methodologies used to collect and analyze data for this dissertation, and then describe various obstacles, limitations, and experiences that inform the results. The research for this dissertation was approved by the University of Pennsylvania Institutional Review Board in the summer of 2012. I conducted interviews between June and December 2012, and conducted participant observation in person and online between June 2012 and the spring of 2015. Sites of investigation included the cites and surrounding areas of Philadelphia, PA; Salt Lake City, UT; and to a lesser extent, Tulsa, OK; as well as numerous online websites and social media channels (see Appendix III for a partial list).

My methodological choices were made to implement an adaptation of Michael Holquist's (2002) theory of dialogism, originally formulated as a way to consider Bahktin's work and influences. While the concept of narrative generally implies one speaker and an unknown or invisible audience, dialogism finds meaning in the interplay or interanimation of voices ("dialogue") which are unique to particular instances of speech acts and situated in particular times and spaces. In Holquist's estimation, interanimation includes institutional voices and norms, the voice of the speaker, the voice of the spoken-to, as well as the genre of the speech act. Interanimation always includes tensions and resistance between authoritative ideological discourses and competing discourses that are marginalized or muted (52). Extending Derrida, Holquist emphasizes that the relationship between speakers that allows for dialogue to take place is one "in which differences—while still remaining different—serve as the building blocks of simultaneity" (39). That is, even when two speakers repeat the same word, one's utterance is always already different than that of his or her interlocutor. To explore the phenomenology of Mormon identity construction through narrative, the speaker's intended meaning of their own words and actions – and the reception, contestation, and subjugation of those words and actions among an audience and within the larger institution—takes on new importance.

Dialogism *as a methodological framework* suggests that within a broader culture or society, there exist classes and groups which exhibit distinct rhetorical strategies and styles. By studying these various groups individually and in conversation rather than attempting to study the society as a whole, these distinct groups and their contributions can be analyzed and understood. In religious groups, there is no monolithic narrative (although there are official narratives from religious leaders and sacred canons); rather there are separate interpretive communities which display distinct patterns in speaking, metacommunicative vocabularies, and the vocabularies' rhetorical invocation and subsequent use in culturally distinctive forms.

Dialogism is not only a theory of how identity is developed, but also an ethic of how it should best be studied. Because it is multidimensional and multivocal, this dissertation required a plethora of sources and sites of investigation based on an ethnographic model that privileges the voices of those under study. My research involved long-term, immersive ethnographic methodologies that allowed the subjects to speak for themselves through in-depth case studies. In order to understand the intertexuality of Mormon identity construction and its creation in multiple sites, I used a tri-part ethnographic approach involving interviews, discourse analysis, and participant observation. Through this triangulated methodology, I situated myself in the midst of Mormon identity construction in real time.

Focusing interests, locating participants: Getting my foot in the door

Although the dissertation project was approved by the Institutional Review Board in 2012, the project did not occur spontaneously but came after several years of intensive learning and immersion in various Mormon cultural worlds, both on- and offline. I began learning about the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the Spring of 2009, when I enrolled in an anthropology course at the University of Pennsylvania called "The World of the Latter-day Saints." By chance, at the same time I was visited at home by a Mormon missionary couple, on a

senior mission in Philadelphia, and when I told them I was enrolled in a course on Mormonism

they agreed to come to my home for twelve weeks for missionary lessons. This was my first

ethnographic work with Mormons, and although they knew I was learning about the LDS Church

from an academic standpoint (and not, as they hoped, from the perspective of a religious seeker),

they courted me resolutely, introducing me -- as is common practice with Mormon missionaries --

to young women in the local ward who they hoped would befriend me and entice me to attend

church. It worked-- sort of-- as I met many Mormons and expanded my research to include the

local Philadelphia ward. I also began researching Mormonism on the internet, at first as a way of

learning more about the institutional Church, its history, its policies, and its labyrinthine teachings.

Over the next year I attended many events at the local ward and at the homes of Mormon

contacts, but far and away what interested me most was the disconnect between what I

experienced in person at the ward and in these homes, and what I learned about Mormon

identities on the internet.

Online, both conservative and progressive LDS-themed blogs, Facebook pages,

message boards, and wikis comprise what is known as the "bloggernacle"-- a play on the words

"blog" and "tabernacle," signaling the religious focus of these sites. The bloggernacle is a vast but

eventually knowable and mappable network with many participants but fewer contributors.

Eventually, within a year or so of consistently reading many of these pages, I began to recognize

pseudonyms, tie them to "real" names and offline identities, and make connections from one

website to the next. A few dozen Mormon intellectuals and writers contribute the vast majority of

the writing on these sites, with several hundred commenters and many, many more readers.

Because of the intertexual and discursive nature of these web-based locations, I knew I could not

conduct an ethnography of just one or two websites. I would need to observe and analyze all of

them in relation to one another. Because I could not possibly analyze every website, I used my

own familiarity with these sites as well as the direction of informants and online chatter to locate

what were the most cited and important of these sites (see Appendix III for a partial list).

I began reading these blogs regularly, and set up a Google Alert for the term "Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints." I joined Facebook discussion groups, followed prominent Mormons on Facebook and Twitter, and made and accepted friend requests from orthodox, heterodox, and former Mormons that I met through conferences, mutual friends, and shared academic interests. As my work on Mormonism developed and I began presenting papers at conferences, I met Mormons engaged in academic work and interested in similar questions. These early conversations helped guide the direction of my dissertation research, and also provided a "foot in the door" for interviews. My early familiarity with the bloggernacle also helped inform the borders of my online ethnographic work.

Interviews

The first original data collection for this project occurred between June and December 2012, when I conducted 35 one-on-one, semi-structured interviews varying from 45 minutes to two hours in length. Participants were between the ages of 18 and 70, and included men and women who identified as "someone who is or has ever been a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints." My fellowship in Salt Lake City and research time spent in Philadelphia and Tulsa allowed me to locate participants among both heterodox and orthodox Mormons living there and to compare similarities and differences among the experiences of Mormons living in various parts of the country. My goal was to understand Mormon experience in its diversity, so I did not attempt to obtain a sample representative of the whole of Mormonism. I particularly sought out marginal or exceptional perspectives, rather than simply mainstream or orthodox perspectives, which are already well represented in the literature on Mormon identity (see Chapter 1).

Participants were located in several ways: because of previous projects I was acquainted with local Mormon leaders as well as current and former members willing to participate in

interviews, and these contacts helped to furnish additional contacts (a snowball sample which is often useful when locating members of marginal or minority groups; see Atkinson and Flint 2001). I also posted calls for interviews on online message boards, indicating my affiliation with the University of Pennsylvania and asking for individuals to participate in interviews about their experiences as members or former members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. This strategy allowed for participants to self-select into the study, but ended up returning more potential participants than I was able to accommodate with my research design. Less often, I contacted public figures to request interviews.

After initial contact, my interview protocol called for initiating participation in the study through a standardized set of emailed questions (see Appendix II), a format I employed to gather preliminary background information which "set the stage" for more substantial, in-depth verbal interviews; I also sent this set of questions to the extra participants I could not personally interview, for a total of over a hundred survey responses. These helped me to locate narrative patterns and divergences.

Early into my research on Mormonism I realized that faithful, active Mormons were less available or interested in participating in interviews. As in Kauffman's (1992) experience, "no one spoke no" -- in fact, most seemed amicable to participating, but many would-be participants "effectively said no" (193) by failing to respond to subsequent communication. This was particularly problematic among active, male Mormons—a surprising finding given the proselytizing emphasis of the Church (a limitation I will discuss below). Access to interviews with active, literally believing Mormons was limited from the start, while former or dissatisfied Mormons were eager to participate.

My research interests evolved with the availability of participants, who had vastly different relationships to the Church as measured through orthodoxy and orthopraxy. Participants included Church spokespeople and public relations officials, apologists, and orthodox members; public figures with self-described progressive perspectives and with active agendas for change

within the institution, doctrine, or both; those with more moderate positions who did not self-describe as "activist" yet who actively seek change in Church policy; and individuals who participate in online message boards for dissenters but who do not actively seek change or who are not "out" as doubters or dissenters in their public lives, as well as individuals who have left the Church or who have been excommunicated. In all categories, I sampled only individuals who currently or in the past have self-identified as Mormon, but included anyone who has ever considered themselves Mormon, however they understood that label, allowing for inclusion of a greater diversity of experience.

As I collected data, I categorized participants as "activist" (those actively involved in publicly petitioning for change in the Church), "apologist" (those actively involved in publicly defending the status quo in the Church) "faithful LDS" (literally believing, active Mormons), "feminist" (self-identified as unhappy with gender-based discrepancies in the Church, but not necessarily publicly so), "inactive/heterodox" (less participatory and/or less literally believing), "former LDS," and "active and disbelieving" (those who attend and participate but do not believe the Church's truth claims). These categories were unwieldy, and there was often overlap between them; but the interviews followed predictable narrative patterns, making some type of categorization both necessary and useful for guiding my research online as the project developed.

While some of the participants' locations made it possible to do in-person interviews, most of the interviews were conducted over the telephone or via video conference call. One heterodox participant, due to fear of being overheard by his roommates at conservative Brigham Young University, specifically asked to "chat" via an internet-based Instant Messenger and I complied, while recognizing that online text as a method of data collection unfortunately loses some of the nuance of actual conversation. Still, because of the taboo of some of the topics I was investigating, I remained open to whatever was comfortable for the participants, resulting in very different, non-standardized interviews with each participant.

The interviews were conducted as approximately hour-long, audiotaped conversations dealing with individual, particular experience and memory, using narrative storytelling. To ensure confidentiality and encourage transparency and openness, I offered participants full anonymity (with use of pseudonyms if I needed to quote them), with the exception of activists and Church spokespeople who are already well-known public figures and who consented to the use of their names. Some interviewees that I consider public figures declined to have their names included or even asked to review which comments of theirs I chose to include before deciding whether they would like to remain anonymous, a limitation and telling detail that underscores a reticence to speak on behalf of the organization that is a hallmark of orthodox Mormon identity (see Ch. 4).

Each interview was open-ended and loosely structured, using the individual's personal life story as a way of understanding their relationship to the Church. Because each interview was so personalized, there was no standard interview schedule for each participant. For example, some actual questions posed to a progressive Mormon convert included:

- Tell me about your conversion.
- You've been outspoken as a progressive Mormon woman with some views that go against Church policy and culture. Did your progressive views come before or after your conversion?
- What has it been like to be a progressive Mormon?
- Do you support women's ordination? Why/why not?
- I'm curious, for you, how do you define who is a Mormon and who is not?
- Does it have to do with actions, beliefs, or both?

On the other hand, questions posed to a conservative, lifelong Mormon included:

- Tell me about being raised in the Church.
- As a Mormon, do you do anything online to engage with your faith?

- Are there areas where you feel like your experience or beliefs differ from most other Mormons?

- What resources do you turn to when you have a question about Scripture, your faith, or experiences in life that you want to understand through a Mormon lens?

- I'm curious, for you, how do you define who is a Mormon and who is not?

- Does it have to do with actions, beliefs, or both?

While I consistently tapped certain areas of inquiry (themes of community, belonging, and identity and specific, individuated instances of interaction with structure and agency in negotiating a place for oneself in the Church), each interview was organic and, within reason, guided by the participant. As Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (1995) suggest, participants' emic categories are useful for organizing data, and in the dissertation I make liberal use of participants' conceptual categories and metaphors which emerged from these open-ended interviews.

Textual and discourse analyses

The textual, discourse analysis for this dissertation involved a broad corpus of texts and documents from which I have selected representative pieces to investigate intertextually in conversation with the interview data. Importantly, I consider this work *both* textual analysis—in that it literally interrogates each text using rhetorical criticism—and critical discourse analysis, which both foregrounds "discourse" as a discursive social practice and which privileges an interdisciplinary approach to the study of marginality and the role of social power, dominance, and inequality within social structures (van Dijk 1985).

To examine Mormon Identity, I ranged across discourses of the institutional press, popular screen culture, and the blogosphere in search of themes and narratives around which to organize this study. My strategy in choosing texts was to approximate a "citizen sample," that is,

of a type and quantity likely consumed by other voracious readers interested in Mormon goings-on. I read across the spectrum of orthodoxy and orthopraxy, including but not relying solely upon official Church sources in order to understand the broad diversity in Mormon thought and practice. Predominantly, my corpus of texts for analysis included ongoing posts and publications on social networking sites such as Facebook, blog posts, and comment sections. I also analyzed the Church's public relations website (www.lds.org/newsroom); addresses by General Authorities and publications from the Church's major magazines (publicly searchable at www.lds.org); as well as secular newspaper articles, and television commentary.

In order to track Mormon identity as it was constructed, the majority of the texts I analyzed included only very current data, including articles, blogs, and social media postings published from about 2010 to present. Because I so closely immersed myself in LDS culture and goings-on, the majority of these texts were analyzed "in real time," that is, as they were released for public consumption and discussed in the online public sphere. I "followed the stories" as they unfolded.

In keeping with a "grounded theory" approach that seeks to discover "theory from data" (Glaser and Strauss 1967), I did not begin my textual analyses with rigid hypotheses about what I would find or with an eye for only certain data at the exclusion of others. I allowed the materials to guide my inquiry by providing me with themes and topics that are relevant and central within Mormon communities. Prominent themes underscored the tension between structure and agency, the role of internecine conflict, and the role of the media (particularly the internet) in Mormonism. These are, of course, not the only themes this dissertation could have explored, but their recurrence and prominence justifies their exploration in this study.

Participant observation

In addition to interviews and discourse analysis, this dissertation also relied heavily on my own ethnographic work among Mormons, including five years of ongoing participant observation at online sites for faithful and heterodox Mormons; three years of studying Mormon communities in Philadelphia and the surrounding areas; and a year-long residential fellowship in Salt Lake City, where I conducted participant observation among both orthodox and heterodox Mormons living in the cultural and spiritual capital of their faith. Because of my relocation to Salt Lake City, I was able to participate in Mormon cultural activities and visits to local chapels, Temple Square, LDS-themed museums and art galleries, and other sites that allowed me to experience Mormonism culturally. Even quotidian activities like riding the public train and visiting new friends' homes contributed to data on what constitutes Mormon identity. In particular, because Utah's population is predominantly Mormon, living there enabled me to observe ways that Mormons and non-Mormons work to differentiate themselves and self-identify as members of their respective communities.

In addition to participant observation "in real life," I conducted online participant observation at popular online message boards for heterodox and former Mormons which was both distinct from and simultaneous to the textual analyses I completed at these sites. Often this meant following conversations in real time, which helped me identify how narratives change in relation to online interactions.

Reflections of an Inside-Outsider

This study of Mormon identity, and the ways in which is it is negotiated, would be incomplete without a reflexive account of my own role as a deeply embedded researcher. Throughout the course of my work, I have been asked repeatedly-- by academics, by Mormon leaders and lay members, by my hair dresser and by my dentist-- to account for myself and my interest in the Church. Consternation, curiosity, and-- sometimes-- suspicion flavors these

inquiries: what motivates a non-member like me to study Mormonism? In response, I have offered numerous attempts to account for my position and my particular fascination with Mormonism, sometimes positioning myself as a disinterested academic, sometimes accounting for my personal history. Both of these explanations are true but incomplete on their own.

There are several factors that contributed to my interest in Mormonism, not the least of which must have been my own roots in Tulsa, Oklahoma, an overwhelmingly conservative Evangelical area where Mormonism is viewed with curiosity and suspicion. It is no secret that very conservative Evangelicals often view Mormons as dangerous imposters, and my earliest introduction to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints came through my own religious enculturation. I was raised in a fundamentalist evangelical home, where I was taught to view Mormons with suspicion. As a teen I read with insatiability the evangelical best-seller "The God Makers: A Shocking Expose of What the Mormon Church Really Believes" (Decker and Hunt 1984), notorious Chick tracts on Mormonism and its secret teachings (Chick 1984), and other books and pamphlets in my family's bookcase—all of which reinforced the notion that Mormons are, at the least, very, very different from Evangelical Christians. "Cult," "Strict," "Strange"—all these words, found by Pew Research (2011) to be associated with non-Mormons' perceptions of Mormonism, marked the ways I viewed the LDS Church growing up.

Mormonism stayed on my periphery during my adolescence, and eventually I married a man who had been raised in the LDS Church and whose family was still active. In the first few years of our marriage, we were visited regularly by several sets of missionaries, assigned to our address to attempt to reactivate my husband. Despite my husband's ambivalence, I always invited them in, offering them refreshments and occasionally baking for them (my pumpkin chocolate chip quick bread was a favorite). We got to know these young men, sharing conversations that I found fascinating because of their dedication and conviction, but also incredibly frustrating: why did my husband have to be present for the young Elders to come inside? Why did they address him in response to my questions, quite literally looking him in the

eye when the questions were all mine? Something struck me as utterly strange yet so familiar about these interactions with Mormon missionaries: like in Freud's (1919) discussion of the "uncanny," the instantiation of something at once wholly familiar yet entirely strange and thus frightening, I saw my own experience as a woman in a fundamentalist tradition reflected back to me in different terms but with similar practical implications.

By the time I went on to study modern Mormon identity in graduate school at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia, my early and simplistic constructions of Mormons and their church had been complicated, in my mind and heart, by all the actual Mormons I met along the way. As a religious "outsider" to the Mormon faith, I cannot study identity among faithful Mormons in a completely naturalistic way – that is, I will never experience it as a Mormon experiences it. Still, attention to the phenomenology of Mormons' accounts is vital; Young and Goulet (1994) explain, "Anthropologists should, at a minimum, temporarily suspend disbelief, and attempt to take as seriously as possible informants' reports of extraordinary experiences, as well as their explanations for them" (11). Because religious beliefs and practices are immensely personal and controversial, approaching the study of religion with *a priori* convictions and opinions is nearly unavoidable. Still, my ability to successfully study Mormonism is dependent on my ability to take seriously believers' phenomenological claims.

But it was not always simply an issue of suspending my own disbelief or tendency toward skepticism. The believers and former believers themselves categorized me in accordance with their own social expectations. When a Mormon offers his or her testimony to me (or when I solicit it), my status as a nonmember, academic researcher inevitably colors the testimony's contents. In highly evangelistic religious groups and groups that have been targeted by academics or popular culture for critique (both descriptions fit the Mormons I study), suspicion is par for the course. Believers and former believers continually attempt to establish my own religious identity and whether I approach their faith with hostility or openness. As anthropologist Michael Agar notes, "When you begin doing ethnography, group members are going to wonder who you are.

They will listen to you and watch your behavior, and they will draw on their own repertoire of social categories to find one that fits you" (1996: 104-105).

Obstacles and limitations

Because orthodoxy and conformity is so highly valued in most Mormon circles, because suspicion of outsiders is so built into the fabric of Mormon consciousness, and because esoteric knowledge is often misrepresented or misunderstood by outsiders, finding faithful, orthodox Mormons willing to openly discuss their experiences was quite a daunting task. Many lay members were willing to share their testimonies, an obligation for any faithful Mormon, but less were willing to participate in an open-ended interview. I realized early in my writing that the interview portion of my research would be necessarily skewed toward heterodox and dissenting perspectives. The problem of nonresponse was less often an issue among disgruntled, former, or heterodox Mormons-- who were often eager to share their unconventional stories. Instead, nonresponse was particularly problematic among active, orthodox Mormons—a surprising finding given the proselytizing emphasis of the Church. I found orthodox Mormon men to be the most difficult demographic to secure for participation, which complicates research on the narratives of normative (e.g., adult male) LDS voices. Based on my experiences, there are at several possible explanations for the hesitance of orthodox, male LDS to participate: Perhaps men invested in a patriarchal system are ambivalent about participating in a research study conducted by a female, academic nonmember-- three identity constructs of my own that signify various threats to a traditional Mormon worldview. In particular, my gender at once signals a danger of the appearance of sexual impropriety and -- among some very traditional Mormon men -- dismisses my project as superficial. Moreover, academics and nonmembers have been seen as antagonistic to the Church dating back to the maligning of Mormonism in the 19th century press.

But fear or dismissal of my identity seems unlikely to completely explain member non-response. There are like also logistical factors, as the average active Mormon man is left with little discretionary time due to the demands of a career, church attendance, volunteer church callings, home teaching, and family demands. Or perhaps, as some participants have reported, recently estranged Mormons find it therapeutic to discuss their de-conversion, giving them more incentive to participate than active Mormons.   At any rate, my access to active Mormons was limited, while former, often disgruntled Mormons were eager to participate. My project nicely accommodates what might be seen as over-sampling of former and heterodox Mormons, as my primary focus is on the ways that these groups are effectively disenfranchised by the Church and use nontraditional means to negotiate belief or disbelief and practice. Moreover, because my focus is on media, I rely on an extended definition of Mormon normative voices which includes sources other than orthodox Mormons themselves, some of which are mediated and require discourse analysis in place of interviews.

This feature of my research carries its own limitations, as internet users in America tend to be young, highly educated, white, and affluent in comparison to non-users (Zickuhr and Smith 2012). Although I acknowledge the lack of diversity in this study, because American Mormons also tend to be highly educated, white, and affluent in comparison to non-Mormons, it is difficult to say whether this lack impedes the usefulness of my conclusions. To mitigate this concern, I attempt to note throughout the dissertation where lack of access to internet technologies may have played a role in the results I obtained.

Perhaps the biggest obstacle in this research was my own role as a non-Mormon, which raises important questions about the role of researcher neutrality, always of central concern in the study of religion-- particularly confessional, evangelical faiths like Mormonism which demand that even a researcher take a stand one way or the other. Harding (2000) claims there are only two positions from which to study confessional religion: "Either you are lost, or you are saved." She goes on to say,

> I was naïve enough to think I could be detached, that I could participate in the culture I was observing without partaking of it. I could … remain outside, separate, obscure about what I believed and disbelieved. But there was no such ground. My story about what I was doing there, instead of protecting me from "going native," located me in their world: I was a lost soul on the brink of salvation. (39-40)

At every stage of my research, faithful, doubting, and former Mormons all wanted to hear "my story" before telling me theirs. This was often couched in the question, "What's your relationship to all this?" or "From what angle are you coming at this?" One participant, upon asking her former-bishop father whether he would be interested in participating in my research, reported back to me that he had been reluctant, wondering whether she "was really sure that [I wasn't] writing some kind of exposé to 'slander' the church."

All of these tactics are participants' "boundary work" (Taylor 2006), their way of establishing my status as a believer or not early in the project, to locate me as either sympathetic to their beliefs or as antagonistic. In these situations, any answer I offered would color the rest of our interaction; my explanations were "leading behaviors" (Hammersley & Atkinson 1999) that necessitated face work among the participants. In my fieldwork, I made clear that I am not nor have I ever been Mormon, but I also tended to emphasize my familial relationship to Mormonism, through my LDS in-laws, to indicate my familiarity with the Mormon vocabulary. Certainly, though, my nonmember status always informed the responses I received.

Because "bearing testimony" is an obligation for faithful Mormons, these participants may have felt obligated to talk to me simply to share their faith; many of them, beginning with the first missionaries to grant me their time, seemed to view my ongoing interest in the Church as a seed planted by the Holy Ghost which would culminate in my own conversion. At other times, faithful Mormons (particularly those in leadership positions) made sure to caveat their participation by acknowledging that they "trust" my motives, which often felt like a very purposive way of policing my writing through subtle emotional manipulation.

Similarly, many heterodox and former Mormons treated me as a sounding board for their anger and disappointment with the Church. When they learned that I am not Mormon and that I

am an academic, former Mormon participants tended to assume that I shared their negative and often derisive opinions of the Church; after all, many of their stories of de-conversion were grounded in scientific or logical appeals to objectivity and rational truth.

Both perspectives necessarily colored the responses I received; my status and role became part of the data, as the positioning and construction of participants' identities during interviews was always in relation to their perception of me. This was not tangential detail or a "limitation" of my data per se, as identity is always constructed socially and dialogically. By researching Mormon identity I became a player in its construction.

The project is itself a paradox: while it attempts to map the voices and silences involved in Mormon identity construction, it simultaneously represents the privileged academic voice, the non-Mormon Other, speaking on behalf of the Mormons it attempts to describe. Stacey (1988) emphasizes "that ethnographic writing is not cultural reportage, but cultural construction, and always a construction of self as well as of the other" (24). Likewise, Kauffman (1992) notes that "researcher and researched 'subjects'... are both producers of meanings and accounts" (188). As participants produce accounts, I produce an account of their accounts. While I could not mitigate that discrepancy entirely, I attempted to privilege emic voices by using methodologies that draw on insider's explanations and experiences. I also drew heavily on mediated discourse and online data, constructed without the gaze of the researcher-observer, to provide additional support and substantiation for any type of analytical claims I have made in this dissertation instead of drawing solely on my interviews.

I also attempted to mitigate any limitations of my methodologies by maintaining a feedback loop between myself and my participants—I asked them to email or call me with additional insights after our initial interviews, and many did; and asked for permission to email or call them with questions or to seek clarity as I wrote. The openness of this feedback loop created challenges of its own: I became a confidante for many heterodox Mormons who felt safe sharing their private struggles. I received text messages and Facebook messages, unsolicited, from

Mormons who heard about my research and wanted to share their stories. Some wanted to

proselytize. Some wanted to confide. After a conference presentation at BYU, I was approached

by a young Mormon who described herself as a closeted lesbian, who blatantly asked for me to

tell her whether she should stay in the Church. An employee of the Church Library told me about

her disbelief in the Church's historical narratives. A person I interviewed contacted me two years

later to let me know that they had changed from a believing, faithful member to first doubting,

then coming out as gay, and finally leaving the Church altogether in the span of my project. I

became virtual friends with many orthodox Mormons and Mormon feminists, many of whom I

never met in person. My personal investment in my subjects made it at once easier to obtain

information but also harder to fairly and neutrally observe and record my insights.

I realize participants have a vested interest in being represented in particular ways (this is

itself part of their construction of Mormon identity)-- and to some of the faithful Mormons under

study, this interest is not simply about maintaining a positive reputation for themselves, but also

for their highly evangelistic religion. So my commitment to my subjects "cannot be open-ended"

(Pryluck 1988: 266) nor can they have *carte blanche* input. Still, my work in this dissertation is

motivated by an urge toward accuracy that rings true to the academic, to the doubter, and to the

believer. Like Campbell (2004), I hope to "allow as much as possible the 'voices' of those

participating in this study to 'speak' directly to the reader, endeavoring to have members of these

… communities explain their practices in their own terms" (39). This is, to me, the most crucial

element of writing the sacred experience of others.

APPENDIX II: Sample interview schedule

At the interview stage of this research, the following questions were emailed to some participants in advance of our interview to provide background information:

1. Describe your religious background. Were you raised in the Mormon Church? If so, were your parents active? If not, was your family active in any other faith? How were you first introduced to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and at what age did you become a member?

2. Do you believe the Book of Mormon is true? What reasons for this belief do you find particularly compelling?

3. Moroni 10:4 instructs investigators to pray to know that the Book of Mormon is true. Have you prayed to know the Book of Mormon is true? Describe your experience.

4. If you have prayed to know the Book of Mormon is true, did you receive an answer? How did you know?

5. There may be many instances that you have felt your belief in the Book of Mormon was either confirmed or denied. Can you give a few examples?

6. Do you feel your testimony (especially the way you received it) is the same as other Mormons? Do you feel that official church teachings on this verse coincide with the way you received your testimony?

7. Please provide some basic demographic information: Age, ethnicity, sex, marital status, education, occupation, first language

Afterwards, an in-person, telephone, or video conference interview was held lasting approximately 45 minutes to 2 hours. Some of the questions included (but were not limited to) the following:

1. Describe your religious background. Were you raised in the Mormon Church?

 If YES: Were your parents active?

If NO: Was your family active in any other faith? How were you first introduced to the LDS Church, and at what age did you become a member?

2. How do you identify yourself religiously now? Do you think of yourself as a Mormon? Why/why not?

3. Do you participate in Mormon religious activities—attending services, serving a calling, etc.?

If YES: How important are these things to how you see yourself as a Mormon?

If NO: Do you participate in some other community with similar individuals who feel the same as you do toward the Church?

4. Do you believe the Book of Mormon is true?

If YES: What reasons for this belief do you find particularly compelling?

If NO: Did you at one time?

5. At the end of the Book of Mormon, Moroni 10:4 instructs investigators to pray to know that the Book of Mormon is true. Have you prayed to know the Book of Mormon is true?

If YES: Describe your experience. Did you receive an answer? How did you know?

If NO: Why not?

6. There may be many instances that you have felt your belief in the Church was either confirmed or threatened in some way. Is this true for you?

If YES: Can you give a few examples?

7. Would you say your religion is a part of your daily life?

If YES: In what ways?

If NO: Under what circumstances if any is your religion an important part of your identity?

8. Some people describe Mormons as either being orthodox in their approach to their faith, or being heterodox. Orthodox Mormons might be considered traditional, believing literally in the Book of Mormon, that the Church was restored literally through Joseph Smith, that Thomas Monson is a literal prophet of God, etc. Heterodox Mormons often approach their religion differently. They may not believe in the historicity of the Book of Mormon, for instance they might think it is an allegory. Or they may identify as a cultural Mormon but not strictly believe in the Church's teachings.   Do you think of yourself more as an orthodox Mormon, or as a heterodox Mormon? Why?

9. Some people experience times when they doubt their faith or the Church. Have you ever doubted the Church or its teachings?

If YES: Would you explain what issues made you first doubt the Church? Do you have any other issues with the Church or its teachings? Some people have described a mental "shelf" that they have used to store doubts. Have you heard this metaphor?

If NO: Do you think anything in particular has helped you to not doubt?

10. Do you feel your relationship to the Church is the same as other Mormons? In what ways is it similar, or not? Do you feel that official church teachings coincide with the way you received your testimony, and the way you experience your faith?

11. If you had to list what you consider the most essential requirements for being Mormon, what would you say those are? Why?

Would you say it is more important for a Mormon to *believe* the right things, *do* the right things, both, or neither? Why?

12. Have there been any particular struggles that you have had as you've negotiated your identity toward the Church? Any particular issues or events that stand out?

13. For former members: What made you decide to leave? What is your relationship to the Church now?

14. For leaders and spokespeople: There has been a lot of talk lately about the diversity of the Mormon Church, and the "I'm a Mormon" campaign highlights this. Is Mormonism a "big tent" religion? How are nontraditional Mormons like gays/feminists/non-literalists accommodated,

 if at all?

15. Please provide some basic demographic information: Age, ethnicity, sex, marital status, education, occupation, first language

16. Is there anything I did not ask about that you would like to share?

APPENDIX III: Partial list of websites

The following is a partial list of websites included in the online ethnography:

All Are Alike Unto God <whatwomenknow.org/all_are_alike/>

Official pages of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints:

       LDS.org

       LDS Youth (Facebook)

       Mormon.org

       Mormon Newsroom <mormonnewsroom.org>

       Mormon Newsroom (Facebook)

       Mormons and Gays <mormonsandgays.org>

       The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Facebook)

Ask Mormon Girl (blog) <askmormongirl.com>

Doves and Serpents (blog) <dovesandserpents.org/wp/>

FairMormon <fairmormon.org>

Feminist Mormon Housewives (blog) <feministmormonhousewives.org>

       Feminist Mormon Housewives Society (Facebook)

Flunking Sainthood (blog) <janariess.religionnews.com>

Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture <mormoninterpreter.com>

Juvenile Instructor (blog) <juvenileinstructor.org>

LDS WAVE (Women Advocating for Voice and Equality) <ldswave.org>

       LDS WAVE (Facebook)

Mormon Child Bride (blog) <mormonchildbride.blogspot.com>

Mormon Scholars Testify

Mormon Stories Podcast <mormonstories.org>

       Mormon Stories Podcast Community (Facebook)

Mormon Women Bare <mormonwomenbare.com>

Mormon Women Stand (blog) <mormonwomenstand.com>

Mormon Women Stand (Facebook)

Mormons Building Bridges <mormonsbuildingbridges.org>

MormonThink <mormonthink.com>

Ordain Women <ordainwomen.org>

Ordain Women (Facebook)

Recovery from Mormonism <exmormon.org>

Young Mormon Feminists <youngmormonfeminists.org>

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Acker, Joan. (1990, June). Hierarchies, jobs, bodies: A theory of gendered organizations. *Gender & Society 4*(2):139-158.

Alexander, Thomas G. (1970). An experiment in progressive legislation: The granting of woman suffrage in Utah in 1870. *Utah Historical Quarterly, 38*(1):20-30.

All Are Alike Unto God. (2012). *What Women Know.* (Website)*.* Retrieved from http://whatwomenknow.org/all_are_alike/

All Enlisted. (2012, December 12). Group page. *Facebook*. Retrieved from https://www.facebook.com/groups/479498132093781/

Althusser, Louis.

(1969a, 2004). Ideology interpellates individuals as subjects. In P. du Guy, J. Evans, & P. Redman (Eds.), *Identity: A reader* (pp. 31-38). Thousand Oaks: Sage.

(1969b). *For Marx.* London: Penguin.

Anderson, Benedict. (1991). *Imagined communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism.* New York: Verso.

Andersen, Neil L. (2012, October). Trial of your faith. General Conference address. Salt Lake City, Utah: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Retrieved from https://www.lds.org/general-conference/2012/10/trial-of-your-faith

Applebome, Peter. (2011, July 13). A Mormon spectacle, way off Broadway. *New York Times.* Retrieved from http://www.nytimes.com/2011/07/14/nyregion/hill-cumorah-pageant-offers-mormon-spectacle-way-off-broadway.html?_r=0

Askar, Jamshid Ghazi.

(2011a, January 25). Mitt Romney and being Mormon. *Deseret Morning News*. Retrieved from http://www.deseretnews.com/article/ 700104033/

(2011b, February 1). Analysis: How a Mormon can be U.S. President. *Deseret Morning News*. Retrieved from http://www.deseretnews.com/article/700106099/

Assmann, Aleida. (2012). The printing press and the internet: From a culture of memory to a culture of attention. In N. Gentz & S. Kramer (Eds.), *Globalization, cultural identities, and media representations* (pp. 11-24). New York: SUNY Press.

Atkinson, Rowland & Flint, John. (2001, Summer). Accessing hidden and hard-to-reach populations: Snowball research strategies. *Social Research Update* 33.

Avance, Rosemary. (2013). Seeing the light: Mormon conversion and deconversion narratives in off- and online worlds. *Journal of Media and Religion 12*(1):16-24.

Bagley, Pat. (2012, September 8). Thanks to Mitt Romney, Mormonism is under the microscope. *Salt Lake Tribune.* Retrieved from http://www.sltrib.com/sltrib/news/54851585-78/mormons-mormon-cartoons-romney.html.csp

Baker, Katie J. M. (2012, December 12). Mormon feminists under fire for encouraging women to wear pants to church. *Jezebel.* Retrieved from http://jezebel.com/5967794 /mormon-feminists-under-fire-for-encouraging-women-to-wear-pants-to-church

Ballard, M. Russell.

> (1999, October). Beware of false prophets and false teachers. *Ensign.* From General Conference Address. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Retrieved from https://www.lds.org/general-conference/1999/10/beware-of-false-prophets-and-false-teachers

> (2010, October). Prepare for the blessings of the Temple. *Ensign.* Salt Lake City, Utah: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Retrieved from https://www.lds.org/ensign/2010/10/prepare-for-the-blessings-of-the-temple?lang=eng

Balmer, Randall. (2012, February 6). Why Mitt Romney needs to talk openly about his Mormon faith. *New Republic.* Retrieved from http://www.newrepublic.com/ article/politics/100375/romney-mormon-election-religion#primary-form

Barlow, Brent A. (1973, February). Strengthening the Patriarchal Order in the home. *Ensign.* Retrieved from http://www.lds.org/ensign/1973/02/strengthening-the-patriarchal-order-in-the-home

Barthes, Roland. (1972). *Mythologies.* New York: Hill and Wang.

Bawden, David & Robinson, Lyn. (2000). A distant mirror? The Internet and the printing press. *Aslib Proceedings* 52(2): 51-57.

Becker, Joseph D. (2012, May 31). Romney's religion: Should it matter? *Commonweal Magazine*. Retrieved from https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/romneys-religion

Beck, Glenn. (2012, September 6). Polygamy? Magic underwear? People on bikes? Glenn discusses Mormon myths in TheBlaze TV special! *TheBlaze TV.* Retrieved from http://www.glennbeck.com/2012/09/06/polygamy-magic-underwear-people-on-bikes-glenn-discusses-mormon-myths-in-theblaze-tv-special/

Bednarowski, Mary Farrell. (1993). Widening the banks of the mainstream: Women constructing theologies. In C. Wessinger (Ed.), *Women's leadership in marginal religions: Explorations outside the mainstream.* (pp. 211-232). Chicago: University of Illinois Press.

Beer, David. (2008). Social network(ing) sites… revisiting the story so far: A response to danah boyd & Nicole Ellison. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication 13*(2): 516-529.

Bell, Catherine. (1997). *Ritual: Perspectives and dimensions.* New York: Oxford.

Belnap, Josh. (2012). "Brigham Young University: Please offer caffeinated beverages on campus and at venues." Change.org petition. Retrieved from http://www.change.org/petitions/brigham-young-university-please-offer-

Benson, Ezra Taft. (1985). Worthy fathers, worthy sons. General Conference Address. Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Retrieved from https://www.lds.org/general-conference/1985/10/worthy-fathers-worthy-sons

Berger, Peter L. & Luckmann, Thomas. (1966). *The social construction of reality: A treatise in the sociology of knowledge.* Garden City, NY: Anchor Books.

Billy Graham Evangelistic Association. (2010). Looking for answers: What is a cult? Retrieved via Internet Archive from http://web.archive.org/web/20100605052727/http://www.billygraham.org/articlepage.asp?ArticleID=2072

Bloom, Harold.

(2006). *The American Religion.* 2nd ed. New York: Chu Hartley Publishers.

(2011, November 12). Will this election be the Mormon breakthrough? *New York Times.* Retrieved from http://www.nytimes.com/2011/11/13/opinion/ sunday/will-this-election-be-the-mormon-breakthrough.html?pagewanted=all

Boteach, Shmuley. (2011, November 28). Are Mormons any weirder than the rest of us? *Jerusalem Post.* Retrieved from http://www.jpost.com/Opinion/Op-Ed-Contributors/Are-Mormons-any-weirder-than-the-rest-of-us

Boud, Thomas J. (2008, December). The energy drink epidemic. *Ensign.* Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Retrieved from https://www.lds.org/ensign/2008/12/the-energy-drink-epidemic?lang=eng

Bowman, Bret. (2012, December 13). Comment, *Wear Pants to Church Day* event page. Facebook. Retrieved from https://www.facebook.com/ events/144815455666087/

Bowman, Matthew. (2012). *The Mormon people: The making of an American faith.* New York: Random House.

boyd, danah. (2006). Friends, friendsters, and top 8: Writing community into being on social network sites. *First Monday 11*(12). Retrieved from http://www.uic.edu/htbin/cgiwrap/bin/ojs/index. php/fm/article/view/1418/1336.

"Brent." (2012, December 12). 45: A Mormon in the cheap seats: Pants-wearing women running wild. *Doves & Serpents* (blog). Retrieved from http://www.dovesandserpents.org/wp/2012/12/45-mcs-women-running-wild/

Brignall, Tom. (2002). The new Panopticon: The internet viewed as a structure of social control. *Theory & Science 3*(1).

Brodie, Fawn. (1945, 1995). *No man knows my history: The life of Joseph Smith.* 2nd ed. New York: Vintage.

Bromley, David G. (1998). "The social construction of contested exit roles: Defectors, whistleblowers, and apostates." In D.G. Bromley (Ed.), *The politics of religious apostasy: The role of apostates in the transformation of religious movements.* Westport, CT: Praeger.

Brooks, Joanna.

(2012a, August 9). Does Mormonism encourage LDS people to lie? *Religion Dispatches* (blog). Retrieved from http://www.religiondispatches.org/dispatches /joannabrooks/6267/does_ mormonism_ encourage_lds_people_to_lie/

(2012a, September 17). Is Romney's foreign policy problem a product of his Mormonism? *Religion Dispatches* (blog). Retrieved from http://www.religiondispatches.org/dispatches/ joannabrooks/6390/is_romney%E2%80%99s_foreign_policy_problem_a_product_of_his _mormonism_|_/

(2012b, October 18). My take: Hard truths matter; I'm Mormon, and I'm voting for Obama. *CNN Belief Blog*. Retrieved from http://religion.blogs.cnn.com/ 2012/10/18/my-take-hard-truths-matter-im-mormon-and-im-voting-for-obama/

(2013a, February 4). Ask Mormon Girl: I'm a 31 year old Mexican Mormon and… feminist. Help? *AskMormonGirl* (blog). Retrieved from http://askmormongirl.wordpress.com/2013/02/04/ask-mormon-girl-im-a-31-year-old-mexican-mormon-and-feminist-help/

(2013b, June 28). Should Mormon women be ordained? Or are they already priesthood holders? *AskMormonGirl* (blog). Retrieved from http://askmormongirl.wordpress.com/2013/06/28/should-mormon-women-be-ordained-or-are-they-already-priesthood-holders/

(2013c, September 30). Why the women's ordination question will shape the future of Mormonism. *Religion Dispatches* (blog). Retrieved from http://www.religiondispatches.org/ dispatches/joannabrooks/7324/why_the_women_s_ordination_question_will_shape_the_ future_of_mormonism/

Brusco, Elizabeth E. (1995). *The reformation of machismo: Evangelical conversion and gender in Columbia.* Austin: University of Texas Press.

Buber, Martin. (1970, 2011). *I and Thou.* W. Kauffman, (trans.). New York: Scribner.

Burr, Thomas. (2012, September 24). Harry Reid: Mitt Romney is not the face of Mormonism. *The Salt Lake Tribune.* Retrieved from http://www.sltrib.com/sltrib/ politics/54958981-90/romney-reid-mormonism-prince.html.csp

Bushman, Richard L.

(1976, June). I have a question. *Ensign.* Retrieved from http://www.lds.org/ensign/1976/06/i-have-a-question

(2007). *Joseph Smith: Rough stone rolling*. New York: Vintage.

Buzalka, Mike. (2009, March 1). Mission accomplished at BYU dining. *Food Management.* Retrieved from http://food-management.com/fm-innovators/mission-accomplished-byu-dining

BYU. (2012, 23 July). A new beginning for the Mormon Studies Review. *The Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship* (website)*.* Retrieved from http://maxwellinstitute.byu.edu/news/index.php?id=150&type=news

Campbell, Heidi. (2010a). *When religion meets new media*. New York: Routledge.

Campbell, Joel. (2010b, August 21). Mormon ad campaign draws attention in 9 U.S. markets. *Deseret News*. Retrieved from http://www.deseretnews.com/article/700059008/Mormon-ad-campaign-draws-attention-in-9-US-markets.html

Campbell, John Edward & Carlson, Matt. (2002). Panopticon.com: Online Surveillance and the Commodification of Privacy. *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media 46*(4): 586-606.

Campbell, John Edward. (2004). *Getting it on online: Cyberspace, gay male sexuality, and embodied identity.* New York: Harrington Park Press.

Cannon, Elaine A. (1990, July 17). Elaine Cannon Papers, Gordon Irving (Interviewer). Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Historical Department, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University. Provo, Utah: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Castells, Manuel. (2010). *The rise of the network society: The Information Age: Economy, society, and culture. (*Vol. I). 2nd ed. New York: Wiley Blackwell.

Castronovo, Russ. (2001). *Necro citizenship: Death, eroticism, and the public sphere in the nineteenth-century United States.* Durham: Duke University Press.

Chen, Chiung Hwang & Yorgason, Ethan. (1999). "Those amazing Mormons": The media's construction of Latter-day Saints as model minority. *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought 32*(2):107-128.

Chick, Jack. (1984). "The Visitors." Chick Publications. Available at https://www.chick.com/reading/tracts/0061/0061_01.asp

Christofferson, D. Todd. (2012, April). The doctrine of Christ. General Conference Address. Retrieved from http://www.lds.org/general-conference/2012/04/the-doctrine-of-christ

Clark, James R. (1975). *Messages of the First Presidency of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, Volume 2. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft.

Colvin, Gina. (2012, September 20). Should Romney repent? "Yes!", says the prophet Mormon. *Patheos* (blog). Retrieved from http://www.patheos.com/blogs/ kiwimormon/2012/09/should-romney-repent-yes-says-the-prophet-mormon/

Coppins, McKay.

> (2012a, January 13). Mitt skips the Mormon moment. *BuzzFeed*. Retrieved from http://www.buzzfeed.com/mckaycoppins/mitt-skips-the-mormon-moment#2xvys06

> (2012b, January 24). What with Mitt's Mormon money? *BuzzFeed*. Retrieved from http://www.buzzfeed.com/mckaycoppins/whats-with-mitts-mormon-money#2xvys06

> (2012c, January 25). A brief guide to "Mormon Underwear": Your awkward Mitt Romney questions answered. *BuzzFeed*. Retrieved from http://www.buzzfeed. com/mckaycoppins/a-brief-guide-to-mormon-underwear#2xvys06

> (2012d, November 14). A Mormon reporter on the Romney bus: How American got used to his religion, and mine. *BuzzFeed*. Retrieved from http://www.buzzfeed. com/mckaycoppins/a-mormon-reporter-on-the-romney-bus#2xvys06

Corn, David. (2012, September 17). Secret video: Romney tells millionaire donors what he really thinks of Obama voters. *Mother Jones.* Retrieved from http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2012/09/ secret-video-romney-private-fundraiser

Critchley, Simon. (2012, September 16). Why I love Mormonism. *Opinionator* (blog). *New York Times Online.* Retrieved from http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/09/16/why-i-love-mormonism/

Cummings, Jaimie. (2012, December 12). Wear Pants to Church Day event page [Facebook post]. Retrieved from https://www.facebook.com/ events/144815455666087/

Daily Herald. (2012, March 22). BYU religion prof Bott retiring in June. *Daily Herald*. Provo, UT. Retrieved from http://www.heraldextra.com/news/local/central/ provo/byu-religion-prof-bott-retiring-in-june/article_7839e140-3e35-5b59-bbc4-3331e6d3d4c3.html

Darnton, Robert. (2004, June 24). It happened one night. *New York Review of Books 51*(1)*.*

Davies, Douglas J.

> (2000). *The Mormon culture of salvation: Force, grace, and glory*. Ashgate Publishing Company.

> (2011). The invention of sacred tradition: Mormonism. In J. R. Lewis and O. Hammer (Eds.), *The invention of sacred tradition* (pp. 56-75). New York: Cambridge University Press.

Decker, Ed & Hunt, Dave. (1984). *The God makers: A shocking expose of what the Mormon Church really believes.* Eugene OR: Harvest House.

"DefyGravity." (2012, December 12). Wearing pants to church. *The Exponent* (blog). Retrieved from http://www.the-exponent.com/wearing-pants-to-church-2/

de Groote, Michael. (2011, September 4). Being Mormon in a Mormon moment. *Deseret News*. Retrieved from http://www.deseretnews.com/article/ 700176225/Being-Mormon-in-a-Mormon-moment.html?pg=1

Dehlin, John. (2014). About: John Dehlin. *Mormon Stories*. Retrieved from http://mormonstories.org/john-dehlin/

Densley, Steve. (2012, September 18). Is Defending the Church Against Church Doctrine? *FAIR blog.* Foundation for Apologetics and Research. Retrieved from http://www.fairblog.org/2012/09/17/is-defending-the-church-against-church-doctrine/

Denton, Sally. (2012, January 29). Romney and the White Horse prophecy. *Salon.* Retrieved from http://www.salon.com/2012/01/29/mitt_and_the_white_ horse_prophecy/

de Saussure, Ferdinand. (2006). *Writings in general linguistics*. (R. Harris, trans.). C. Bally & A. Sechehaye, (Eds.). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Derrida, Jacques. (1972, 2004). Difference. In du Guy, Evans, and Redman (Eds.), *Identity: A reader* (pp. 87-93)*.* Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Dewar, James A. (1998). The Information Age and the printing press: Looking backward to see ahead. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation. Retrieved from http://www.rand.org/pubs/ papers/P8014

Dewey, John. (1916). *Democracy and education*. New York: Macmillan.

Dillon, Michele. (2010). Can post-secular society tolerate religious differences? *Sociology of Religion 71*(2): 139-156.

Dinha, Nineveh. (2012, December 11). Group encourages LDS women to wear pants to church. *Fox 13 News* [television broadcast], Salt Lake City, Utah. Retrieved from http://fox13now.com/2012/12/11/group-encourages-lds-women-to-wear-pants-to-church/

 "Doctor Scratch." (2012, June 16). DCP responds to getting fired from the Review. *Mormon Discussions*. Retrieved from http://mormondiscussions.com/phpBB3/viewtopic.php?f=1&t=24378

Doris, Margaret. (2012, August 30). Mitt's magic underwear and the granny ass dance. *Esquire* (blog)*.* Retrieved from http://www.esquire.com/blogs/politics/mitt-romney-mormon-underwear-12188879

Douglas, Dianna. (2012, December 16). Mormon women dare to wear pants to church. Weekend Edition. *National Public Radio.* Retrieved from http://www.npr.org/2012/12/16/167284923/ mormon-women-dare-to-wear-pants-to-church

Douglas, Mary. (1996, 1966). *Purity and danger: An analysis of the concepts of pollution and taboo.* New York: Routledge.

Doyle, Sir Arthur Conan. (1887,1995). *A study in scarlet.* New York: Penguin Books.

Dulles, Avery Cardinal. (2005). *A history of apologetics.* 2nd ed. San Francisco: Ignatius Press.

Eisenstein, Elizabeth. (1983). *The printing revolution in early modern Europe.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Ellison, Nicole, Rebecca Heino & Jennifer Gibbs. (2006). Managing impressions online: Self-presentation processes in the online dating environment. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication 11*(2), article 2. Retrieved from http://jcmc.indiana.edu/vol11/issue2/ellison.html

Emerson, Robert; Fretz, Rachel; & Shaw, Linda. (1995). *Writing ethnographic fieldnotes.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Eyre, Linda & Eyre, Richard. (2012, August 28). The Mormon speech we wish Romney would give. *Deseret News.* Retrieved from http://www.deseretnews.com/ article/865561304/The-Mormon-speech-we-wish-Romney-would-give.html

Farmer, Jared. (2012). *Mormons in the media, 1930-2012* (E-book). Retrieved from http://jaredfarmer.net/e-books/

Faulconer, James E. (2006, Fall). Why a Mormon won't drink coffee but might have a Coke: The atheological character of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. *Element* 2(2). Provo, UT: Brigham Young University. Retrieved from http://jamesfaulconer.byu.edu/papers/ coke_not_coffee.pdf

FAIR. (2012). The Foundation for Apologetic Information and Research (website). Retrieved from http://www.fairlds.org/

FairMormon. (2014). FairMormon Answers: What is the Strengthening Church Members Committee? Retrieved from http://en.fairmormon.org/Mormonism_ and_Church_discipline/ Strengthening_Church_Members_Committee

Finnigan, Jessica & Ross, Nancy. (2013). 'I'm a Mormon feminist': How social media revitalized and enlarged a movement. *Interdisciplinary Journal of Research on Religion* 9: Article 12.

First Presidency. (1995, November). The family: A proclamation to the world. *Ensign.* Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Fletcher, Michael. (2011, July 9). S.C. economy trumps other concerns in GOP primary. *The Washington Post,* p. A01.

Fletcher Stack, Peggy.

    (2012a, July 27). Sunstone: Designer recalls history of LDS Church's "visual identity." *The Salt Lake Tribune.* Retrieved from http://www.sltrib.com/sltrib/lifestyle/54575040-80/church-logo-lds-smith.html.csp

(2012b, August 31). OK, Mormons, drink up – Coke and Pepsi are OK. *The Salt Lake Tribune*. Retrieved from http://www.sltrib.com/sltrib/news/54797595-78/church-drinks-caffeine-lds.html.csp

(2012c, September 14). Just Dew it: BYU students pushing for caffeinated colas. *The Salt Lake Tribune.* Retrieved from http://www.sltrib.com/sltrib/news/54875621-78/caffeine-church-drinks-caffeinated.html.csp

(2012d, September 25). Memo to Mitt: Mormons make up that 47% on assistance, too. *The Salt Lake Tribune*. Retrieved from http://www.sltrib.com/sltrib/blogsfaithblog/54965674-180/student-medicaid-families-jeppsen.html.csp.

(2012e, December 11). Mormon women plan "Wear Pants to Church Day." *The Salt Lake Tribune*. Retrieved from http://archive.sltrib.com/article.php?id=24487268&itype=storyID

(2015, May 5). This Mormon Sunday School teacher was dismissed for using church's own race essay in lesson. *The Salt Lake Tribune.* Retrieved from http://www.sltrib.com/lifestyle/faith/2475803-155/mormon-bishop-dismisses-teacher-for-using?fullpage=1

Foster, Lawrence. (1979). From frontier activism to neo-Victorian domesticity: Mormon women in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. *Journal of Mormon History 6*: 3-21.

Foucault, Michel. (1990). *The History of Sexuality: Volume 1.* New York: Penguin.

Friend Harding, Susan. (2000). *The book of Jerry Falwell: Fundamentalist language and politics.* Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Fung, Archon. (2013, June). Infotopia: Unleashing the democratic power of transparency. *Politics and Society 41*(2):183- 212.

Ganzevoort, R. Ruard. (1998). Religious coping reconsidered. Part two: a narrative reformation. *Journal of Psychology and Theology 26*(3):276-286.

Garr, Arnold K. (2009, February). Joseph Smith: Campaign for President of the United States. *Ensign.* Retrieved from http://www.lds.org/ensign/2009/02/joseph-smith-campaign-for-president-of-the-united-states

Geertz, Clifford. (1966)*. Interpretation of cultures.* New York: Basic Books.

Giddens, Anthony. (1991). *Modernity and self-identity: Self and society in the late modern age.* Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Givens, Terryl L.

(1997). *The viper on the hearth: Mormons, myths, and the construction of heresy.* New York: Oxford University Press.

(2007). *People of paradox: A history of Mormon culture.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Glaser, Barney & Strauss, Anselm. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research.* New York: Aldine.

Goffman, Erving.

    (1959). *The presentation of self in everyday life.* New York: Doubleday.

    (1967). *Interaction ritual: Essays on face-to-face behavior.* New York: Anchor Books.

Gooren, Henri.

    (1991). "De expanderende Mormoonse Kerk in Latijns Amerika: Schetsen uit een wijk in San José, Costa Rica." Master's thesis, University of Utrecht.

    (2007, Fall). The Mormons of the world: The meaning of LDS membership in Central America. Glenn M. Vernon Lecture, Mormon Social Science Association. Retrieved from http://www.mormonsocialscience.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/11/28-2-Fall2007.pdf

Gordon, Scott. (2012, March 29). Journeys of faith on the internet. *Mormonism and the Internet.* Conference panel discussion, Utah Valley University.

Graff, Stephanie. (2012, September 11). "No demand" for caffeine at BYU? *The Digital Universe.* Provo, UT: Brigham Young University. Retrieved from http://universe.byu.edu/beta/2012/09/11/no-demand-for-caffeine-at-byu/

Green-Miner, Brittany & Goodell, Ashton. (2012, December 16). Mormon women wear pants to church. *FOX 13 News* [television broadcast], Salt Lake City. Archived at http://fox13now.com/2012/12/16/mormon-women-wear-pants-to-church-for-equality/

Gumperz, John. (1982). *Discourse strategies.* London: Cambridge.

Habermas, Juergen. (1962,1991). *The structural transformation of the public sphere: An inquiry into a category of bourgeois society.* T. Burger, (trans.). Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.

Hall, Stuart.

    (1996). *Questions of cultural identity.* Stuart Hall & Paul du Gay, eds. London: Sage.

    (2001). Encoding/decoding. In M.G. Durham and D. M. Kellner (Eds.), *Media and Cultural Studies,* pp. 163-173. Malden, MA: Blackwell.

"hannahwheelwright." (2012, December 13). Pantsgate 2012. *Young Mormon Feminists* (blog). Retrieved from http://youngmormonfeminists.org/2012/12/13/pantsgate-2012/

Harrison, Mark M. (2014, June 23). Letter to Kathleen Marie Kelly. *Deseret News.* Available at http://www.deseretnews.com/media/pdf/1365030.pdf

Heilman, Samuel. (2001). *The People of the Book: Drama, fellowship, and religion.* Livingston, NJ: Transaction Publishers.

Henderson, Peter & Cooke, Kristina. (2012, January 31). Special report: Mormonism besieged by the modern age. *Reuters*. Retrieved from http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/01/31/us-mormonchurch-idUSTRE80T1CM20120131

Hilton Sheldon, Carrel. (1999, Summer). Launching Exponent II. *Exponent II 22*(4). Retrieved from http://www.exponentii.org/history

Hinckley, Gordon B. (2004, December 26). Interview, *Larry King Live* (television broadcast). CNN.

Hirschman, Albert O. (1970). *Exit, voice, and loyalty: Responses to decline in firms, organizations, and states.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Hitchens, Christopher. (2011, October 17). Mitt Romney and the weird and sinister beliefs of Mormonism. *Slate*. Retrieved from http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/fighting_words/2011/10/is_mormonism_a_cult_who_cares_it_s_their_weird_and_sinister_beli.html

Holquist, Michael. (2002). *Dialogism: Bahktin and his world.*2nd ed. New York: Routledge.

Horowitz, Jason. (2012, February 28). The genesis of a church's stand on race. *The Washington Post* (online edition). Retrieved from http://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/the-genesis-of-a-churchs-stand-on-race/2012/02/22/gIQAQZXyfR_story.html

Hughes, Richard T. (2012, September 12). The Mormon faith and the Romney doctrine of American exceptionalism. *Huffington Post Blog*. Retrieved from http://www.huffingtonpost.com/richard-t-hughes/mormon-faith-and-the-romney-doctrine-of-american-exceptionalism_ b_1874881.html ?utm_hp _ref =religion

Hunter, Howard W. (1995, April). Your temple recommend. *New Era*. Salt Lake: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Retrieved from https://www.lds.org/new-era/1995/04/your-temple-recommend?lang=eng

Hurst, Alan. (2012, September 19). Of caffeine and covenants. *Peculiar People* (blog). Retrieved from http://www.patheos.com/blogs/peculiarpeople/2012/09/of-caffeine-and-covenants/

I'm a Mormon feminist. (2013). Website. Retrieved from http://mormonfeminist.org/

Iversen, Joan. (1984, Autumn). Feminist implications of Mormon polygyny. *Feminist Studies 10*(3):505-522.

Jeffress, Robert. (2011b, October 8). Video of Pastor Robert Jeffress at Values Voter Summit. *Deseret News*. Retrieved from http://www.deseretnews.com/article/ 700186158/ Video-of-Pastor-Robert-Jeffress-at-Values-Voters-Summit.html

Jeppsen, Catherine. (2012, December 14). Mormon women wearing pants love the gospel. *OnFaith* (blog). Retrieved from http://www.faithstreet.com/onfaith/2012/12/14/mormon-women-wearing-pants-love-the-gospel/11140

Jillette, Penn. (2012, September 18). Mitt's Magical Mormon undies: Penn Jillette's rant redux. *Big Think.* Retrieved from http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_qJDd-2tM-A

Johnson, Eric. (2013, July-August). The Mormon Taqiyya. Newsletter, *Mormonism Researched*. Draper, UT: Mormonism Researched.

Johnson, Sonia. (1981). *From Housewife to Heretic.* New York: Doubleday.

Kaleem, Jaweed. (2011, June 22). Hundreds of Mormon ads launched in New York City. *The Huffington Post.* Retrieved from http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/ 06/22/mormon-ads-new-york_n_881834.html

Kanter, Rosabeth M.

    (1968). Commitment and social organization: A study of commitment mechanisms in utopian communities. *American Sociological Review* 33:499-517.

    (1972). *Commitment and community: Communes and utopias in sociological perspective.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Kaplan, Cora. (1985). "Aurora Leigh." In J. Newton and D. Rosenfelt (Eds.), *Feminist Criticism and Social Change.* New York: Routledge.

Katz, Elihu; Blumler, Jay G.; & Gurevitch, Michael. (1974) Uses and gratifications research. *The Public Opinion Quarterly 37*(4): 509-23.

Kauffman, Bette J. (1992). Feminist facts: Interview strategies and political subjects in ethnography. *Communication Theory, 2*(3), 187-206.

Keck, Kristi. (2007, December 6). Romney takes leap of faith with religion speech. *CNN Politics.* Retrieved from http://www.cnn.com/2007/POLITICS/12/05/ romney.speech/

"Kimberly." (2013, January 21). Keep busy in the face of discouragement. *Feminist Mormon Housewives* (blog). Retrieved from http://www.feministmormon housewives.org/2013/01/keep-busy-in-the-face-of-discouragement/

King, Bryan. (2015, February 9). Letter to John Dehlin. Available at http://mormonstories.org/my-excommunication/

King, John. (2011, October 7). Perry supporter criticizes Mormonism. *CNN*. Retrieved from http://transcripts.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/ 1110/07/jkusa.01.html

King Newell, Linda.

(1981). A gift given, a gift taken: Washing, anointing, and blessing the sick among Mormon women. *Sunstone.* Retrieved from https://www.sunstonemagazine.com/pdf/115-6-30-43.pdf

(1985). The historical relationship of Mormon women and priesthood. *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought.* Retrieved from http://www.dialoguejournal.com/wp-content/uploads/sbi/articles/Dialogue_V18N03_23.pdf

King, Robert R. & King, Kay A. (1972). The effect of Mormon organizational boundaries on group cohesion. *Dialogue* 7(1): 60-75.

Kinnvall, Catarina. (2004, October). Globalization and religious nationalism: Self, identity, and the search for ontological security. *Political Psychology* 25(5):741-767.

Kirkland, Lyman. (2009, November 13). Help us improve Newsroom.lds.org. *The Newsroom Blog.* Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Retrieved from http://www.mormonnewsroom.org/blog/2009/11/help-us-improve-newsroomldsorg.html

Kirn, Walter. (2011, June 5). Mormons rock! *Newsweek magazine.* Retrieved from http://www.thedailybeast.com/newsweek/2011/06/05/ mormons-rock.html

Kline, Caroline. (2011, July 4). Good Mormon feminists vs. bad Mormon feminists: The dividing line. *Feminism and Religion* (blog). Retrieved from http://feminismandreligion.com/2011/07/04/good-mormon-feminists-vs-bad-mormon-feminists-the-dividing-line/

Knowlton, David. (1992, August). On Mormon masculinity. *Sunstone Magazine* (pp. 19-31). Available at https://www.sunstonemagazine.com/pdf/088-19-31.pdf

Kofford, Cree-L. (1998, June). Marriage in the Lord's way, part one. *Ensign.* Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Retrieved from http://www.lds.org/ensign/1998/06/marriage-in-the-lords-way-part-one

Krotoski, Aleks. (2011, April 16). What effect has the Internet had on religion? *The Guardian* (Web). Retrieved from http://www.theguardian.com/technology/2011/apr/17/untangling-web-aleks-krotoski-religion

Lamb, Christina. (2011, October 23). Gloves are off as Obama hits at "weird" Mitt; a worried presidential team has seized on the Mormon faith of his biggest Republican rival. *The Sunday Times (London),* p. 36.

Larsen, Dean L. (1982, September). Marriage and the Patriarchal Order. *Ensign.* Retrieved from http://www.lds.org/ensign/1982/09/marriage-and-the-patriarchal-order

Larsen, Kent. (2012, March 6). The Bott gaffe: A chronology. *Times and Seasons* (blog). Retrieved from http://timesandseasons.org/index.php/2012/03/the-bott-gaffe-a-chronology/

Larsen, Richard. (2008, March 22). Comparing Obama, Romney on religion. *Idaho State Journal.* Retrieved from http://www.pocatelloshops.com/new_blogs/ politics/?p=4145

Latter-day Saint Woman (Vol. 1). (2000). Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Educational System. pp. 93-96.

Lauritzen, Stephanie.

(2012a, April 4). It feels right. *Mormon Child Bride* (blog). Retrieved from http://mormonchildbride.blogspot.com/2012/04/it-feels-right.html

(2012b, December 5). The dignity of your womanhood. *Mormon Child Bride* (blog). Retrieved from http://mormonchildbride.blogspot.com/ 2012/12/the-dignity-of-your-womanhood.html

Lawrence, Gary C. (2008). *How Americans view Mormonism: Seven steps to improve our image.* Orange, CA: Parameter Foundation.

Lawrence, Jill. (2007, February 13). Will Mormon faith hurt bid for White House? Mitt Romney says his religion isn't a factor, but some voters say it is. *USA Today,* p. 1A.

Lévy, Pierre. (1998). *Becoming virtual: Reality in the Digital Age*. R. Bononno, trans. Boston: Da Capo Press.

LDS.

(1971a, July). Programs and Policies Newsletter. *New Era.* Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Retrieved from http://www.lds.org/ ensign/1971/07/programs-and-policies-newsletter

(1971b, August). People and Places. *New Era.* Salt Lake City, UT: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Retrieved from https://www.lds.org/new-era/1971/08/people-and-places

(1995). The family: A proclamation to the world. Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Retrieved from https://www.lds.org/topics/family-proclamation

(1998, January). FARMS becomes part of BYU. *Ensign*. Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Retrieved from https://www.lds.org/ensign/1998/01/news-of-the-church/farms-becomes-part-of-byu

(2002a; 1985). 250: We Are All Enlisted. *Hymns of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.* Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

(2002b). *Young Women Manual 1.* Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

(2003). *Church history in the fullness of times: Student manual.* Chapter Forty-Two: Growth into a Worldwide Church. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Available online at https://www.lds.org/manual/church-history-in-the-fulness-of-times-student-manual/chapter-forty-two-growth-into-a-worldwide-church

(2004, March). About patriarchal blessings. *New Era.* Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Retrieved from http://www.lds.org/new-era/2004/03/about-patriarchal-blessings

(2010). Internet. Administrative Policies. *Handbook 2: Administering the Church.* 21.1.22. Retrieved from https://www.lds.org/handbook/handbook-2-administering-the-church/selected-church-policies/21.1.22

(2012). General Authorities. Retrieved from http://www.lds.org/church/leaders

(2013). Organization of the Church of Jesus Christ. Retrieved from http://www.lds.org/topics/church-organization

Lincoln, Bruce. (1996). Mythic narrative and cultural diversity in American society. In L.L Patton & W. Doniger (Eds.), *Myth and method* (pp. 163-176). Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia.

"Loydo." (2012, March 30). Disclaimer. Retrieved from http://loydo38.blogspot.com/

Ludlow, Daniel H. (1991, January). Of the House of Israel. *Ensign.* Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Lythgoe, Dennis L. (1968, Winter). The changing image of Mormonism. *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought 3*:4(45-58).

Marrapodi, Eric. (2012, October 16). Billy Graham site removes Mormon "cult" reference after Romney meeting. *CNN Belief Blog.* Retrieved from http://religion.blogs.cnn.com/2012/10/16/billy-grahams-group-removes-mormon-cult-reference-from-website-after-romney-meeting/

Mauss, Armand. (1994). *The angel and the beehive: The Mormon struggle with assimilation.* Chicago: University of Illinois.

Maxwell, Neal A.

(1980, November). The net gathers of every kind. *Ensign.* Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Retrieved from http://www.lds.org/ensign/1980/11/the-net-gathers-of-every-kind?lang=eng

(1996). Becometh as a child. General Conference Address. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Retrieved from https://www.lds.org/general-conference/1996/04/becometh-as-a-child?lang=eng

(2004). Remember how merciful the Lord hath been. General Conference Address. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Retrieved from https://www.lds.org/general-conference/2004/04/remember-how-merciful-the-lord-hath-been?lang=eng

McBride, Erin Ann. (2012, December 13). Pants in church: A feminist movement. *Meridian Magazine.* Retrieved from http://www.ldsmag.com/article/1/11915

McConkie, Joseph Fielding & Ostler, Craig J. (1964). *Revelations of the Restoration: A Commentary on the Doctrine and Covenants and other modern revelations.* Salt Lake City: Deseret Book.

McKitrick, Cathy. (2012, December 17). Mormon women wear pants to church despite objections. *The Salt Lake Tribune.* Retrieved from http://www.sltrib.com/csp/cms/sites/sltrib/pages/printerfriendly.csp?id=55477393

Miller, Lisa.

    (2012a, September 1). Romney preaches the gospel of success. *The Washington Post,* p. B02.

    (2012b, September 20). Mitt Romney's hard-hearted twist on the Mormon work ethic. *On Faith* (blog). *The Washington Post,* p. B02.

Morgan, Mandy. (2012, November 6). BYU students energized by alum Mitt Romney's presidential bid. *Deseret News*. Retrieved from http://www.deseretnews.com/article/865566145/Elections-and-BYU-students-views-on-a-BYU-alum-on-the-ballot.html?pg=all

Mormon Discussions (website). (2007). Retrieved from http://www.mormondiscussions.com

MormonThink (website). (2008). Retrieved from http://www.mormonthink.com

Mountford, Roxanne. (2003). *The gendered pulpit: Preaching in American Protestant spaces.* Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press.

Myler, Crystal. (2012, September 14). "Caffeine protest stopped on BYU's Brigham Square." *The Digital Universe.* Retrieved 14 January 2013 from http://universe.byu.edu/beta/2012/09/14/caffeine-policy-protest-stopped-in-brigham-square/

Neuman, Scott & Bradley Hagerty, Barbara. (2007, December 6). Romney seeks to allay concerns about his faith. *NPR*. Retrieved from http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=16970082

Newsroom.

    (2007a, May 4). Approaching Mormon doctrine. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Retrieved from http://http://www.mormonnewsroom.org/article/approaching-mormon-doctrine

    (2007b, June 15). Positioning Church doctrine-- How Church members see themselves. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Retrieved from http://www.mormonnewsroom.org/article/positioning-church-doctrine-how-mormons-see-themselves

    (2008a, February 28). Bishops see national trend in Mormon congregations. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Retrieved from

http://www.mormonnewsroom.org/article/bishops-see-national-trend-in-mormon-congregations

(2008b, June 1). The religious experience of Mormonism. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Retrieved from http://www.mormonnewsroom.org/article/the-religious-experience-of-mormonism

(2012a, February 29). Church statement regarding 'Washington Post' article on race and the Church. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Retrieved from http://www.mormonnewsroom.org/article/racial-remarks-in-washington-post-article

(2012b, March 14). Political neutrality. *Mormon Newsroom.* Retrieved from http://www.mormonnewsroom.org/official-statement/political-neutrality

(2012c, July 31). "In one heavenly family": Scholar Terryl Givens on proxy baptism. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Retrieved from http://www.mormonnewsroom.org/article/proxy-baptism-terryl-givens

(2013). Webpage. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Retrieved from http://www.mormonnewsroom.org/

(2014a). Church asks activist group to reconsider plans to protest at General Conference. Retrieved from http://web.archive.org/web/20140723033743/http://www.mormon newsroom.org/article/church-asks-activist-group-to-reconsider-general-conference-protest-plans

(2014b). Church provides context for recent media coverage on Gospel Topics pages. *Mormon News Room.* Retrieved from http://www.mormonnewsroom.org/ article/church-provides-context-gospel-topics-pages

Newsweek. (2001, September 9). A Mormon moment. Retrieved from http://www.thedailybeast.com/newsweek/2001/09/10/a-mormon-moment.html

Oaks, Dallin H. (1992, February). The divinely inspired Constitution. *Ensign.* Retrieved from https://www.lds.org/ensign/1992/02/the-divinely-inspired-constitution

O'Dea, Thomas. (1957). *The Mormons.* Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

O'Leary, Stephen D. & Brasher, Brenda E. (1996). The unknown god of the Internet: Religious communication from the ancient agora to the virtual forum. In Charles Ess (ed.), *Philosophical perspectives on computer-mediated communication.* Albany: State University of New York.

Oppel, Richard A. & Eckholm, Erik. (2011, October 7). Prominent pastor calls Romney's church a cult. *The New York Times.* Retrieved from http://www.nytimes.com/2011/10/08/us/politics/prominent-pastor-calls-romneys-church-a-cult.html?_r=0

Orsi, Robert. (1985). *The Madonna of 115th Street: Faith and community in Italian Harlem.* New Haven: Yale University Press.

Otterson, Michael.

(2011, October 23). Michael Otterson: How do Mormons answer 'not Christian' claims? *Deseret News.* Retrieved from http://www.deseretnews.com/ article/700190377/How-do-Mormons-answer-not-Christian-claims.html?pg=all

(2012, July 2). Anti-Church material. Interview with Ruth Todd. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JSUvFTQu5nY

Packer, Boyd K. (1993, May 18). Talk given to the All-Church Coordinating Council. Text available at http://www.zionsbest.com/face.html

Palmer, Lee A. (ed.). (1945). Ward teaching. *Improvement Era: 48*(6). Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Retrieved from http://archive.org/stream/improvementera 4806unse#page/n35/mode/2up/search/palmer

Parker, Mike. (2012, June 23). Changes at the Maxwell Institute, and "controlling the narrative." FAIR Blog. Retrieved from http://www.fairblog.org/2012/06/23/changes-at-the-maxwell-institute-and-controlling-the-narrative/

Pavlik, Steve. (1992, Spring). Of Saints and Lamanites: An analysis of Navajo Mormonism. *Wicazo Sa Review 8*(1):21-30.

Payne, Seth. (2007). *Purposeful strangers: A study of the ex-Mormon narrative* (thesis). Yale Divinity School. Retrieved from Social Science Research Network. (1959555)

Pearson, Erika. (2009). All the World Wide Web's a stage: The performance of identity in online social networks. *First Monday 14* (3). Retrieved from http://www.uic.edu/htbin/cgiwrap/bin/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/2162/2127

Peterson, Boyd Jay. (2002). *Hugh Nibley: A consecrated life.* Draper, UT: Greg Kofford Books.

Peterson, Daniel. (2012). Personal correspondence to Gerald Bradford.

Peterson, Eric S. (2010, September 21). New Mormon-feminist group lobbies LDS Church. *City Weekly.* Retrieved from http://www.cityweekly.net/utah/article-77-12213-new-mormon-feminist-group-lobbies-lds-church.html

Peterson, Greg. (2000). The Internet and Christian and Muslim communities. In B. D. Forbes (Ed.), *Religion and popular culture in America* (123-138). Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Peters, John D. (in press). Mormonism and media. In P. Barlow and T. Givens (Eds.), *Handbook to Mormonism.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Petrey, Taylor. (2013, January 7). Issues in Mormon feminism. *Patheos* (blog). Retrieved from http://www.patheos.com/blogs/peculiarpeople/2013/01/issues-in-mormon-feminism/

Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life.

(2010). U.S. Religious Landscape Survey. Retrieved from http://religions.pewforum.org/

(2011, November 23). Romney's Mormon faith likely a factor in primaries, not in a general election. *Pew Research Center.* Retrieved from http://www.pewforum.org/Politics-and-Elections/Romneys-Mormon-Faith--views-of-the-mormon-religion.aspx

(2012a, December 14). Americans learned little about the Mormon faith, but some attitudes have softened. *Pew Research Center*. Retrieved from http://www.pewforum.org/2012/12/14/attitudes-toward-mormon-faith/

(2012b, December 14). The media, religion and the 2012 campaign for president. *Pew Research Center*. Retrieved from http://www.journalism.org/2012/12/14/ media-religion-and-2012-campaign-president/

Pixton, Paul B. (2001). Common consent. In D. H. Ludlow (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* (pp. 297-299). New York: Macmillan.

Poe, Marshall T. (2010). *A history of communications: Media and society from the evolution of speech to the Internet.* New York: Cambridge University Press.

Postman, Neil.

(1985). *Amusing ourselves to death: Public discourse in the age of show business.* New York: Penguin.

(1992). *Technopoly: the surrender of culture to technology*. New York: Knopf.

Pratt, Timothy. (2012, December 19). Mormon women set out to take a stand, in pants. *The New York Times.* Retrieved from http://www.nytimes.com/2012/12/20/ us/19mormon.html?_r=1&

Prince, Gregory A. (2012, September 19). Mitt Romney is *not* the face of Mormonism. *The Huffington Post Blog.* Retrieved from http://www.huffingtonpost.com/ gregory-a-prince-phd/mitt-romney-is-not-the-face-of-ormonism_b_1897404.html

Pruden, Wesley. (2007, December 14). Then it's agreed: They're sorry. *The Washington Times*, p. A04.

Pugmire, Genelle. (2014, January 17). LDS Church working on online topics project. *Daily Herald.* Retrieved from http://www.heraldextra.com/news/local/lds-church-working-on-online-topics-project/article_4afdfb8d-8cdc-5a4e-8477-7cf21de7d7e7.html

Qian, Hua & Scott, Craig R. (2007). Anonymity and self-disclosure on weblogs. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication 12*: 1428-1451.

Quinn, D. Michael. (1997). *The Mormon hierarchy: Extensions of power.* Salt Lake City: Signature.

Rappaport, Roy. (1999). *Ritual and religion in the making of humanity.* New York: Cambridge University Press.

Rasmussen, Ellis T. (2010). *A Latter-day Saint commentary on the Old Testament.* Salt Lake City: Deseret Books.

Ravitz, Jessica. (2012, October 27). The making of Mitt Romney: A look at his faith journey. *CNN Belief Blog*. Retrieved from http://religion.blogs.cnn.com/ 2012/10/27/the-making-of-mitt-romney-a-look-at-his-faith-journey/?hpt=hp_t5_7

Raz, Guy. (2011, December 2). 'Ask Mormon Girl' discusses Mitt Romney's candidacy. *All Things Considered*, National Public Radio. Transcript retrieved from http://www.npr.org/2011/12/02/ 143063003/ask-mormon-girl-discusses-mitt-romneys-candidacy

Reingold, Howard. (1993). *The virtual community: Homesteading on the electronic frontier.* Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

Religious News Service (1992, August 13). Mormon church said to be keeping files on dissenters. *The Times-News* (Hendersonville, North Carolina).

Reno, Jamie. (2012, August 7). Exclusive: Brigham Young's great-great-granddaughter on Mormonism and Mitt Romney. *The Daily Beast.* Retrieved from http://www.thedailybeast.com/ articles/2012/08/07/exclusive-brigham-young-s-great-great-granddaughter-on-mormonism-and-mitt-romney.html

Richardson, Travis James. (2012, December 12). Wear Pants to Church Day event page [Facebook post]. Retrieved from https://www.facebook.com/ events/144815455666087/

Riess, Jana. (2012, September 24). Mormon throwdown: Harry Reid goes mano-a-mano with Mitt Romney. *Religion News Service* (blog). Retrieved from http://archives.religionnews.com/blogs/ jana-riess/mormon-throwdown-harry-reid-goes-mano-a-mano-with-mitt-romney

Roberts, Brigham H. (1985). Brigham D. Madsen, ed., *Studies of the Book of Mormon*, Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

Romney, Mitt. (2007, December 6). Faith in America. Speech delivered at the George Bush Presidential Library, College Station, Texas. Transcript retrieved from http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=16969460

Ruchti, Elizabeth. The performance of normativity: Mormons and the construction of an American masculinity. *Journal of Men, Masculinities, and Spirituality 1*(2):137-154.

Rutten, Tim. (2011, June 1). A 'religious test' for Mitt Romney. *LA Times.* Retrieved from http://articles.latimes.com/2011/jun/01/opinion/la-oe-0601-rutten-20110601

Saad, Lydia. (2011, June 20). In U.S., 22% are hesitant to support a Mormon in 2012. *Gallup.* Retrieved from http://www.gallup.com/poll/148100/hesitant-support-mormon-2012.aspx

Schudson, Michael. (1997). Dynamics of distortion in collective memory. In D.L. Schacter (Ed.), *Memory Distortion: How Minds, Brains, and Societies Reconstruct the Past* (pp. 346-364)*.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Schultheis, Emily. (2012, November 5). Mormon Church runs search ads on Romney's name. *Politico*. Retrieved from http://www.politico.com/ blogs/burns-haberman/2012/09/mormon-church-runs-search-ads-on-romneys-name-134567.html

Scott, Richard G. (2001). The sanctity of womanhood. *New Era*. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Shafovaloff, Aaron. (2009). "Mormonism, officiality, and plausible deniability." Mormonism Research Ministry (Website). Retrieved from http://www.mrm.org/official-doctrine

Shipps, Jan. (2000). *Sojourner in the promised land: Forty years among the Mormons.* Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

Sill, Sterling W. (1980, July). The straight gate. *Ensign.* Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Retrieved from http://www.lds.org/ensign/1980/07/the-strait-gate?lang=eng

Sitati, Joseph W. (2009, October). Blessings of the Gospel available to all. General Conference Address. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Skinner, Jessica Lynn. (2008). *Awareness and perceptions of church advertising: Student reactions to the Mormon Church's advertising campaign* (Master's thesis). Retrieved from ProQuest. (275671975)

Smith, Daymon Mickel. (2007). *The last shall be first and the first shall be last: Discourse and Mormon history* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest. (AAI3260993)

Smith, Gregory.

> (2005). Polygamy, prophets, and prevarication: Frequently and rarely asked questions about the initiation, practice, and cessation of plural marriage in the The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Salt Lake City: Foundation for Apologetic Information & Research. Retrieved from http://www.fairlds.org/Misc/Polygamy_Prophets_ and_Prevarication.pdf

> (2011). Shattered glass: The traditions of Mormon same-sex marriage advocates encounter Boyd K. Packer. *Mormon Studies Review 23*(1):61-85. Retrieved from https://ojs.lib.byu.edu/spc/index.php/MSR/article/viewFile/35139/32965

> (2013, February 23). Dubious "Mormon Stories": A twenty-first century construction of exit narratives. *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Thought.* The Interpreter Foundation. Retrieved from http://www.mormoninterpreter.com/gregory-l-smiths-review-of-mormon-stories/

Smith, Hyrum. (1842, June 1). The Word of Wisdom. *Times and Seasons 3*(15). Retrieved from http://www.centerplace.org/history/ts/v3n15.htm

Solie, Stacey. (2012, October 2). Jim Lehrer: Ask Mitt Romney if he stands by Mormonism's views of women. *The Daily Beast*. Retrieved from http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2012/10/02/jim-lehrer-ask-mitt-romney-if-he-stands-by-mormonism-s-views-of-women.html

Sorenson, Kim Crenshaw. (1995, February). A Latter-day father's guidebook. *Ensign.* Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Retrieved from https://www.lds.org/ensign/1995/02/a-latter-day-fathers-guidebook

Stacey, Judith. (1988). Can there be a feminist ethnography? *Women's Studies Int. Forum, 11*(1), 21-27.

Stark, Rodney. (1996). Why religious movements succeed or fail: A revised general model. *Journal of Contemporary Religion 11*(2):133-146.

Stewart, D. Michael. (1976, June). I have a question. *Ensign.* Retrieved from http://www.lds.org/ensign/1976/06/i-have-a-question

Stolberg, Sheryl Gay. (2011, October 15). For Romney, a role of faith and authority. *The New York Times.* Retrieved from http://www.nytimes.com/2011/10/16/us/ politics/for-romney-a-role-of-faith-and-authority.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0

Sullivan, Amy.

(2005, September). Mitt Romney's Evangelical problem. *Washington Monthly.* Retrieved from http://www.washingtonmonthly.com/features/ 2005/0509.sullivan1.html

(2011, October 21). The de facto religious test in presidential politics. *TIME*. Retrieved from http://swampland.time.com/2011/10/21/the-de-facto-religious-test-in-presidential-politics/

Tanner, Jerald & Tanner, Sandra.

(1964). *Mormonism: Shadow or reality?* Salt Lake City: Utah Lighthouse Ministries.

(1990). *Evolution of the Mormon temple ceremony: 1842-1990.* Salt Lake City: Utah Lighthouse Ministries.

Taylor, Charles. (2003). *Modern social imaginaries.* Durham: Duke University Press.

Taylor, Scott. (2011, February 1). Mormons & media: A presidential spin, thanks to Romney, Huntsman. *Deseret Morning News.* Retrieved from http://www.deseretnews.com/article/700106097

Telushkin, Shira. (2014, January 31). The Facebook of Mormon. *The Atlantic.* Retrieved online at http://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2014/01/the-facebook-of-mormon/283467/

Thomas, William I. & Thomas, Dorothy. (1929). *The child in America*. 2nd edition. New York: Alfred Knopf.

Tippett, Krista. (2011, October 20). Mormon demystified: Interview with Joanna Brooks*. On Being:* National Public Radio. Radio broadcast.

Turkle, Sherry. (1995). *Life on the screen: Identity in the age of the Internet.* New York: Simon & Schuster.

Turner, Victor. (1969, 1995). *The ritual process: Structure and anti-structure.* New York: Aldine.

Twain, Mark. (1872, 1962). *Roughing it.* Signet Books. Retrieved from http://www.online-literature.com/twain/roughing-it/81/

Uchtdorf, Dieter F. (2008). A matter of a few degrees. General Conference Address. Salt Lake City, Utah. Retrieved from http://www.lds.org/general-conference/2008/04/a-matter-of-a-few-degrees

van Dijk, Teun Adrianus. (1985). Critical discourse analysis. In T.A. van Dijk (Ed.), *Handbook of Discourse Analysis.* New York: Harcourt.

Wadsworth, Nathaniel Hinkley. (2006). Copyright laws and the 1830 Book of Mormon. *BYU Studies Quarterly 45*(3): 77-95.

Waite, David. (2012, December 12). Wear Pants to Church Day event page [Facebook post]. Retrieved from https://www.facebook.com/ events/144815455666087/

Walch, Tad. (2014, October 25). Polygamy essays provide information about early LDS Church--and current leadership. *Deseret News.* Retrieved from http://www.deseretnews.com/article/ 865613981/Polygamy-essays-provide-information-about-early-LDS-Church-2-and-current-leadership.html?pg=all

Wear Pants to Church Day.

> (2012a). Event page, Facebook. Retrieved from https://www.facebook.com/ events/144815455666087/

> (2012b). Community page, Facebook. Retrieved from https://www.facebook.com /WearPantsToChurchDay

Weaver, Sarah Jane. (2014, August 19). Share more gospel messages on social media, Elder Bednar says. *Church News.* Retrieved from https://www.lds.org/church/ news/share-more-gospel-messages-on-social-media-elder-bednar-says

Welch, Rosalynde. (2012, June 28). The odd couple: Story and community. *Patheos.* Retrieved from http://www.patheos.com/Mormon/Odd-Couple-Rosalynde-Welch-06-29-2012.html

Whitelocks, Sadie.

(2012a, December 13). Mormon women launch 'wear pants to church day' in backlash over strict dress code. *Mail Online. UK Daily Mail.* Retrieved from http://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-2247550/Mormon-women-launch-wear-pants-church-day-backlash-strict-dress-code.html

(2012b, December 17). 'I hadn't worn pants to church for 37 years': Mormon women ditch strict dress code in push for gender equality. *Mail Online. UK Daily Mail.* Retrieved from http://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-2249477/I-hadnt-worn-pants-church-37-years-Mormon-women-ditch-strict-dress-code-push-gender-equality.html

Wilcox, Clyde & Robinson, Carin. (2010). *Onward Christian soldiers?: The religious right in American politics*. 4th ed. Boulder: Westview.

Wilcox, Linda P. (1979). "The imperfect science: Brigham Young on medical doctors." *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 12: 26-36.

Williams, Lane.

(2012, August 27). Mormon media observer: Time to end the secrecy allegation against Mormons. *Deseret News*. Retrieved from http://www.deseretnews.com/article/865561288/Time-to-end-the-secrecy-allegation-against-mormons.html? pg=2

(2012, September 4). Mormon media observer: What Mitt might have said. *Deseret News*. Retrieved from http://www.deseretnews.com/article/865561754/ What-Mitt-might-have-said.html?pg=1

Wilson, Jonathan Max. (2014, February 13). Announcing the 1st Semiannual LDS Friends & Foes Rendezvous. *Millenial Star* (blog). Retrieved from http://www.millennialstar.org/announcing-the-1st-semiannual-lds-friends-foes-rendezvous/

Wilson, Ron. (2011, October 14). "I'm a Mormon" media campaign. Interview with Brooke Gladstone. *On the Media* (podcast)*.* Retrieved from http://www.onthemedia.org/2011/oct/14/im-mormon-media-campaign/

Winslow, Ben. (2012, September 13). BYU caffeine movement fizzles. *Fox 13 Online News.* Retrieved from http://fox13now.com/2012/09/13/byu-caffeine-movement-fizzles/

Winter, Caroline. (2012, July 18). How the Mormons make money. *Businessweek.* Retrieved from http://www.businessweek.com/articles/2012-07-10/how-the-mormons-make-money

Woodford, Robert J. (2001). Doctrine and Covenants editions. In D. H. Ludlow (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* (pp. 425-427). New York: Macmillan.

Young, Brigham. (1974; 1863, March 8). The persecution of the Saints, etc. *Journal of Discourses* 10:110. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book.

Zickuhr, Kathryn & Smith, Aaron. (2012, April 13). Digital differences. Pew Research Center. Retrieved from http://www.pewinternet.org/files/old-media/Files/Reports/2012/PIP_Digital_differences_041312.pdf