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"DETERMINED TO MAKE RIGHTEOUS HOMES": LDS EXPRESSIONS OF MASCULINITY IN EMERGING ADULTHOOD

Warren Jensen (Dr. Claudia Geist)
Department of Sociology

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ABSTRACT

In “The Family: A Proclamation to the World” (1995), the LDS church leadership lays out a protocol for its members that mandates family formation as the most central component of an individual’s life, both on earth and for eternity. Unsurprisingly, Mormons stand out as demographic exceptions when it comes to marriage rates, median marriage age, and birthrates. This paper aims to explore the ways in which this emphasis on family formation impacts the discourse on masculinity amongst LDS men in emerging adulthood. Original focus group data generated for this paper offers insights into the uniqueness of LDS masculinity construction and how this unique view on masculinity is reproduced via rigid expectations for men relating to family formation during their early lives.

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Introduction

The Pew Research Center (2014) reports that 55% of adults in the state of Utah identify as members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (hereafter "LDS" or "Mormon"). This figure gives Utah the largest religious monopoly of any state in the U.S. In addition to this, the LDS church (hereafter "the church", a common phrase within Mormonism) has a significant presence within the public sphere. Not only do LDS elected officials have a strong majority over non-LDS individuals, but the church also owns private businesses and runs Seminary and Institute—largely independent theological education centers on high school and college campuses, respectively—which students typically attend regularly, along with their standard course load.

It stands to reason that such an influential church would have a significant impact on local culture. Taking this as a sociological point of interest, I decided to study the way in which this influence manifests itself in the construction of gender roles for men. Theologically, church doctrine is dense with references to masculinity and the role of men within the church at different stages of their lives. However, theology does not always equate neatly with the lived experiences of believers. With this in mind, my research aim was to explore the uniqueness of Mormon masculinity and how it affects practicing young Mormon men, as well as those men who choose to disavow the tradition. Thus, in keeping with a contemporary push within the field of sociology of religion to "increasingly ground . . . research in everyday experiences and talk," I use a

[1] Title quote from *The Teachings of Presidents of the Church: David O. McKay* (LDS.org 2012).

qualitative approach to pursue an "analysis of lived religion" through which "we see how people actively construct their religious identity [and] how they *do* religion [emphasis added]" (Burke & Hudec, 2015, 332)

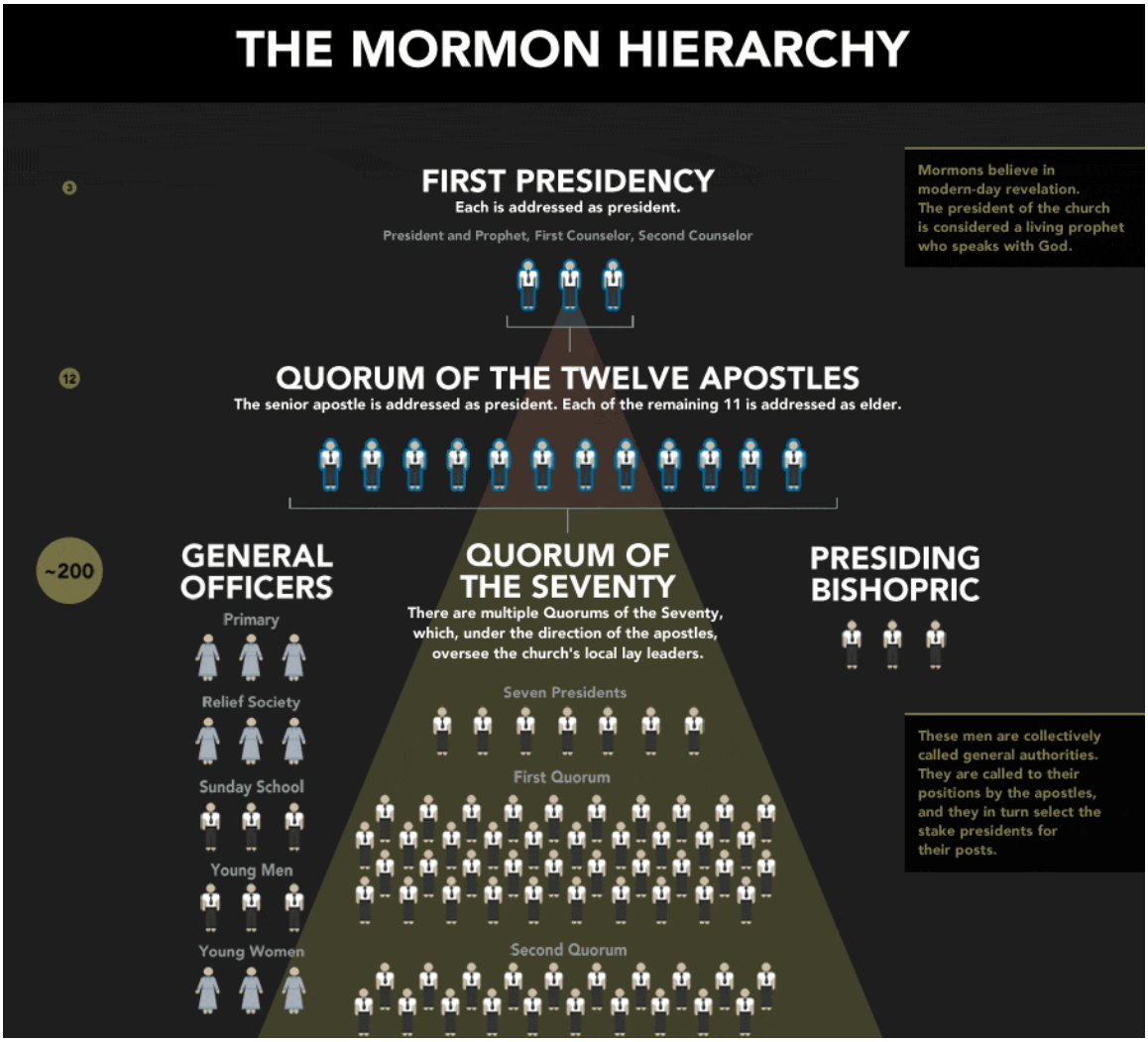
Combining original qualitative research with social theory and supporting work on LDS constructions of masculinity, I argue that contemporary mainline[2] LDS masculinity uniquely emphasizes family formation by linking it deeply to status indicators within the church; emphasis on these themes at a theological level is mirrored by a unique social pressure on young men to pursue certain aspects of an accelerated life course in order perform "as men"—in this context by fulfilling church missions and getting married.

Background

Mormon Gender Hierarchy

In an attempt to address a gap in the broader literature on LDS gender roles, my research specifically explores the ways in which LDS men—specifically young men—engage—whether consciously or unknowingly—with their own dominant status within the church. While an impressive body of work has been dedicated to the study of women's roles and marginalized sexual and gender identities within the arena of LDS gender studies (see, for instance Sumerau & Cragun, 2015 and Bushman & Kline, 2013), fewer pieces, as noted by Burke and Hudec in their own exploration of the topic, have investigated the nuanced ways in which men's own understandings of their lived experiences relate to the reproduction of their power within the same social arenas.

[2] Within the confines of this paper, LDS and Mormon will refer only to the dominant Mormon denomination, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints; it does not include the several FLDS or Community of Christ denominations, the majority of which identify as authentically Mormon by tradition but are not recognized by the mainstream branch of the faith.



(Fig. 1: A visualization of the LDS church hierarchy, all of whom must be married. For the full chart, including local level authorities, see Slate.com 2012)

As a social institution, the LDS church is overwhelmingly patriarchal, denying positions of authority—both material and spiritual—to women as well as to homosexual or non-binary individuals; these positions include local authorities such as bishops and stake presidents as well as national and international leaders, such as the General Authorities, which include the prophet-president, who is regarded as a direct spokesman of God. Moreover, LDS social practices are typically associated with what might be labeled conservative gender norms. A Pew Research Center case study entitled

"Mormons and Family Life" (2012) reports that 58% of Mormon couples allot housework and caretaking to women and sole earner status to men. Finally, theological tenets solidify patriarchy at a spiritual level. Not only is Father God described and broadly understood as a literal and quasi-biological male, but "a Mormon man's power is far more pervasive than temporal dominance. His dominance and the gender norms that regulate his relationship with his wife extend into the afterlife" (Ruchti, 2007, 141).

Consequently, in exploring male perspectives within the church, the significance of a dominant patriarchy cannot in any way be ignored. Despite this, I hope to avoid the pitfalls of "scholarship that counters the male focus within the academy by . . . cast[ing] men as one-dimensional patriarchs" (Burke & Hudec, 331). I wanted to be careful to avoid projecting an internalized sense of authority or patriarchy into the lived experiences of the young men I interviewed. While their demographic information almost guarantees them a power position within the church, their own reflections on what they see as masculine roles may or may not reflect this situation in their own understandings. Thus, I took cues from Dawne Moon's (2004) summation of her approach as follows:

> I explore the socially contingent aspects of those things many members of the religious groups I study take for granted as timeless, God-ordained truths. And as a critical sociologist, I seek to understand how people's taken-for-granted assumptions can reproduce forms of power, even when they intend otherwise. (1)

My research, then, is not intended to ignore the experiences of underprivileged populations within the church but instead to bolster the literature surrounding these topics

by taking an "inside" look at masculinity construction and the nuanced ways in which it perpetuates itself through ritualistic and morally-embedded mechanisms.

I use both R.W. Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity and Schrock and Schwalbe's "manhood acts" to frame my approach to interpreting the research generated in a coherent way and tying it into the broader literature. Hegemonic masculinity is described as a societal power structure that lays out an "ideal type" masculinity and subordinates masculinities that are perceived as outside of this construction. Similarly, manhood acts can be understood as individual behaviors that are functionally an outgrowth of hegemonic masculinity that "[tell] us about what men do, individually and collectively, such that women as a group are sub ordinated to men as a group and such that some men are subordinated to others" (Schrock & Schwalbe, 2009, 278).

While lived realities dictate that "only a minority of men [actually] enact" hegemonic masculinity in its entirety, a culturally-defined set of manhood acts create normative narratives that "embod[y] the currently most honored way of being a man" (Connell, 2005, 832). "An immediate consequence" of constructing such a dominant masculinity is that this "culturally exalted form . . . may only correspond to the actual characters of a small number of men" (Carrigan, Connell, & Lee, 1985, 592).

This theoretical paradigm suits a study of Mormon masculinity quite well. Not only does the idea of a hierarchy of masculinity within a single system allow for the authority structures and subverted masculinities within the church, it also posits the co-existence of multiple systems of masculinity construction. Such a view allows for the framing of Mormon masculinity within broader American constructions of masculinity. Within the church, we may see conflicts and crossovers between what Mormon men

themselves see as "outsider" mainstream masculinity and what they describe as "true" LDS manhood.

I hope to expand on the way in which uniquely LDS masculinity constructions lend themselves to an exceptional emphasis on the mission and marriage as both manhood acts and rites of passage that put unique pressures on young LDS men to make accelerated life choices in transitional adulthood. The pursuit of hegemonic norms amongst LDS men in transitional life course stages may result in the prioritization and reproduction of oppressive structures even subconsciously or unwillingly and, ironically, even at the expense and potential psychological detriment of the dominant group.

Mormons as Outliers in Emerging Adulthood

In focusing on the way family formation relates to the narrative of dominant masculinity within the church, I controlled for age variables by focusing on young men—specifically those in and around the age range sometimes referred to as "emerging adulthood"—who are most likely to be finishing degrees, forming families, and starting careers. While exact delineations on the limits of emerging adulthood are amorphous at best, the terminology refers to a relatively modern, flexible cultural subgroup "that exists only in cultures that postpone the entry into adult roles and responsibilities until well past the late teens," like that of the U.S. (Nelson, 2003, 33).

While emerging adulthood as defined above has generally become more widely recognized, indicated by a rising median marriage age (Nelson; Uecker, 2014) as well as extension of the traditional transition-to-work period (Oppenheimer, 1988), Nelson and Uecker both note the unusual nature of the Mormon subculture in regards to broader demographic changes, by which they seem largely unaffected. "Contrary to what is now

typical of emerging adults in the United States, Mormons are given clear roles and responsibilities during these years," argues Nelson, indicating that more rigid cultural expectations of young adults have shaped LDS demographic trends, in that "the median ages of marriage and first childbirth are much lower among Mormons than in the American population as a whole" (34).

Uecker similarly supports these claims in his investigation of religious effects on marriage timing, which not only deepens prior analysis by introducing new, potentially significant variables, but also demonstrates that the exceptional trend recognized by Nelson has continued well into the 21st century. Analyzing data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, Uecker explores the significance of a variety of religious variables in marriage timing, including "religious affiliation, religious commitment, and [specific] religious beliefs" (393). He finds that "Mormons, conservative Protestants, and adherents to 'other' religions . . . have higher odds of early marriage" but that Mormons, in particular, "remain distinct from other groups," after controlling for intragroup factors (see Uecker Table 1-3, 403-410) and are "most likely to marry early," even when compared exclusively to other religious groups (410), ultimately reinforcing Elizabeth Mott's statement (2013) that "Mormonism's theology of marriage is unique" (46).

In this way, Mormons stand out as a highly unique religious subculture (Merrill, Lyon, & Jensen, 2003). This demographic uniqueness is enabled and enacted by a powerful subcultural moral discourse on the centrality of family formation in the lives of young adults. The Pew Research Center reports that "Mormons are more likely than the general public to feel that marriage and childrearing are some of the most important

things in life" (2012). Nelson argues that marriage and family formation—as well as the mission, advancement in the priesthood, and church "callings," which are necessarily preceded by marriage—serve as rites of passage for young men within LDS society, which "provide structure to LDS emerging adults . . . [culminating in] adult status in the community" (35).

Unsurprisingly, the expectations for such ritualistic behaviors are grounded in a moral discourse that serves both as a justification for the acts themselves as well as a point of comparison by which LDS individuals can delineate themselves from others. In *The Dignity of Working Men*, Michele Lamont notes that "morality is generally at the center" of discussions of "differences between [oneself] and others" (2). Such a framework helps substantiate cultural norms with deeper moral claims. When surveyed, LDS individuals do not typically perceive rites themselves as necessarily of more importance than the moral background that shapes these behaviors; instead, they inform one another:

> These religious transitional events appear to be significant to Mormons, but not as much as internal character qualities, such as responsibility for one's actions. It may be that these rites of passage are important to Mormons because going through them may help individuals, particularly young men, acquire the internal attributes needed for adulthood (Nelson, 46).

Nelson further notes that this same emphasis distinguishes Mormons from their non-LDS peers by contributing to a decrease in the rate of observed "risk behaviors" more common throughout the general emerging adult population, such as "binge drinking, substance

abuse," and "unprotected sex" (37). Such a delineation most likely helps contribute to a heightened sense of difference between young LDS adults and the emerging adults they observe outside the church environment.

The Mission and Marriage

The mission and marriage are the most important of the LDS rites for young men. In keeping with Belgian Anthropologist's Arnold van Gennep's definition of rites of passage, they serve as "community-directed experiences that transmit cultural values and knowledge to an individual . . . [that guide] the individual's transition to a new status . . . and [reaffirm] . . . community values" (qtd. Blumenkrantz, 2010, 42). Not only are they emphasized from youth in Primary classes through curriculum such as the *Eternal Marriage Student Manual* as well as other culturally significant texts (see the song "I hope they call me on a Mission," *Children's Songbook*), but they also lay the foundation for young adults to pursue higher callings as they age and progress through the church. All authorities from the General Authorities down to local bishops must be married and all except for the General Officers specifically entrusted with the Relief Society, Primary, and Young Women's must be male. Additionally, Elder status is granted via the completion of a Mission and typically signals the first step in ascension within the hierarchy. While men who have not served missions will receive callings, just as all women will receive callings, they are typically denied broader authority roles. Thus, both the mission and marriage, as rites of passage, must chronologically precede other important accomplishments in a young LDS man's life course and are therefore typically discussed in tandem as vital goals that all young men should share.

The mission. The mission serves as the first step in a young man's progression towards full-fledged LDS adulthood, sometimes referred to as a "shortcut to maturity" (Bytheway, 2002, 131*)*. In Nelson's survey of (Utah-based) Mormons, he found that 90% of the young men surveyed self-reported as having served a Mission. Likewise, Rick Phillips (2008) notes the huge number of recruits in missionary service within the contemporary LDS church and the responsibility with which they are endowed (to grow the church): "In 2007, there were over 53,000 missionaries spreading the Mormon gospel worldwide. Missionaries teach all potential converts . . . and must approve the baptism of those who want to join the church" (632). Further, both studies mentioned took place before the church made a significant decision to lower the minimum service age for males from 19 to 18 years old with potentially broad social implications encouraging greater participation (Monson, 2012; Kantor & Goodstein, 2014; Schenker, 2012; Rabada, 2014). In his speech disclosing the lowering of the minimum mission age, LDS prophet-president Thomas S. Monson summarized the importance of the mission as rite in the following manner:

> We affirm that missionary work is a priesthood duty—and we encourage all young men who are worthy and who are physically able and mentally capable to respond to the call to serve. Many young women also serve, but they are not under the same mandate to serve as are the young men. (Monson, 2012).

Thus, the mission stands as a deeply-gendered "mandate" for young men, and LDS men respond accordingly by overwhelmingly participating in mission service.

Throughout the mission, young Mormon men are held to high standards of behavior, as the mission, as suggested by Nelson, often serves as a vehicle through which young men's character is tested and developed (46). While Nelson (36) suggests that "in regard to work . . . the time spent on a mission" might limit the amount "of time to explore career options and . . . select a career path," Phillips (2008), in his ethnography of missionary interactions with clergy in a New Jersey ward, notes the way in which intra-mission authority dynamics often resemble demanding jobs and are typically viewed in this way by their participants:

> In addition to the lifestyle restrictions imposed on all Mormons, missionaries must wear a white shirt and tie at all times, and refrain from watching television, listening to the radio, or going to movies. They are also expected to work and study on a specific schedule, and make weekly reports of their labors to district and zone leaders. Missionaries are never addressed by their first name, and are called by their ecclesiastical title: "elder"—a title that many find strange for 19- or 20-year-old boys (632).

The granting of this title in regards to the completion the mission reflects a culturally-ingrained shift towards social adulthood. In experiencing this shift, many young LDS men might also experience pressures not only to perform an honorable mission but also to perform it well, resulting in a variety of prestige markers within the mission setting as well, such as bringing "investigators" to Sunday services and baptism quotas (Phillips). In fact, so high is the perceived pressure to perform well within the mission setting, that LDS scholars have dedicated significant work to addressing and coping with mission-related stress (Thomas & Thomas, 1990).

Marriage. Marriage is similarly emphasized throughout Primary and into young adulthood, both for men and women. Given the exceptionalism of Mormon marriage age as discussed, it should come as no surprise that the church builds their social and hierarchical structures around marriage. Young Mormons within dense LDS populations such as that in Utah and neighboring states often have an advantage in finding a spouse. Deeply interconnected social networks within the church provide the backdrop for a higher level of confidence when it comes to making the choices required to move away from transitional adulthood and into family life. Men within the "LDS church are strongly encouraged to marry within the church" (Nelson, 36). Such an emphasis narrows the field of view for prospective couples, a la Oppenheimer's marriage market model, which suggests that, within "different organizations and institutions . . . the density of potential mates [are concentrated or dispersed] . . . in ways that are related to the individual's age" (Oppenheimer, 1988, 571). In this way, young Mormons are placed within a closed but rich market, which, in many ways, helps to alleviate the "uncertainty" factors that often accompany the search for a mate (Oppenheimer, 566).

Similarly, the church discourse surrounding these admonishments promises the kind of support and confidence that many young adults may feel they lack. Doctrinally, the Gospel Principles proclaim not only the "highest degree of the celestial kingdom of God" for married couples but also the "outpouring of the spirit on [each] marriage" that has been sealed in "God's ordained way"—i.e., in the Temple (LDS.org, *Gospel Principles*). In addition to direct clerical encouragement, Mormon writers and public figures often encourage young LDS couples to put away potential uncertainties and doubts in favor of faith in "the blessings that follow" (Strong, 2013). A piece in Ensign, a

prominent LDS magazine, entitled "The Right Time to Marry" nicely captures a common narrative surrounding young marriage with an anecdotal example of a young couple—still in college—who ask their church leaders about their doubts concerning marriage. Ane, the narrative's "wife-to-be" begins the story in a state of fear only to find her doubts assuaged:

> Ane felt sad because she knew that few people would consider her marriage at that age something to be happy about. But she chose to focus on learning to recognize the promptings of the Spirit and on what the Lord thought instead of what her peers thought . . . "Some people may have thought that I had to sacrifice many things to get married and start a family," she says, "and it could have looked that way. But in reality I have gained everything. I know that when I choose to put the Lord first, everything else will be given me. I am very excited and thankful to get my degree. But most of all I am thankful that we have the opportunity to be an eternal family!" (Strong).

Thus, LDS cultural cues not only narrow the potential marriage market but also bolster these advantages with a deeply-embedded cultural support of marriage, specifically geared towards members at a young age.

In this way, Mormons stand out as exceptional, both in their completion of a momentous 2-year mission prior to college education and in their marriage patterns, which seem to defy more traditional cultural and economic factors that, at a more widespread level, are pushing American men towards delayed marriage. I argue that LDS discourse of masculinity couches both the mission and marriage within a moral

framework (Lamont, 3) that in many ways resembles traditional rite-of-passage concepts of manhood. This discourse pushes young men towards a more accelerated life course model, when compared to their non-LDS peers. Such a model creates pressure for young men to not only perform these rites and perform them well but also to perform them within a very restricted, expedited timeline. Again and again, in emphasizing these processes and necessary prerequisites for a "boy" to become a "man," the church delineates between men who properly accomplish the expected manhood acts and those who remain "adrift" off the model path.

The Current Study: Key Contributions

Both the mission and marriage, as well as the potential for authority that the completion of these rites entails, serve as culturally-embedded, clearly-defined manhood acts for Mormon men. The completion of these acts—or the failure to complete them—speaks to the (gendered) moral character of a male individual within the church and his potential to be perceived as a successful man. By completing a mission and marrying early, a Mormon man is essentially initiating his involvement in the broader church community as an authority figure and, ultimately, an extension of hegemonic masculinity. Such a pressure to conform to the rigid life course model presented by the church may encourage him to prioritize status within the church over broader cultural prestige and church rites over the establishment of a career or the self-discovery process. Moreover, if his personal decisions dictate a deviation from the "ideal" life course model, he may find himself feeling alienated or incapable as a man. Thus, in light of the hegemonic masculinity model, both the mission and marriage and their surrounding behaviors could be defined as manhood acts within the context of the LDS church community. An LDS

man's performance of precisely-delineated male roles will have long-lasting implications in terms of his community acceptance and potential for social elevation, which will likely impact not only his decisions but also the ways in which he articulates his personal conceptions of his masculine identity. My research intends to navigate within the manifestations of these individualized personal effects by analyzing the ways in which Mormon men frame these social models.

Rather than take for granted a perfect correlation between the dominant narratives within the church and the personal experiences of individual men, I explore the intersection between the established languages of authority and the personal languages of individual believers, wherein "everyday theologies"—which "shape the choices [believers] perceive as available to them"—are constructed (Moon, 1).

Methods

In designing a study to focus on masculinity and how it is negotiated by Mormon men, I drew inspiration from Dawne Moon's qualitative work in *God, Sex, and Politics* (2004). Since my work specifically set out to explore everyday languages, I decided to prioritize depth of expression by the participants over breadth of recruitment. While an online survey would have been a potential option, its results and methodology might have been questionable in regards to my study's intent. Namely, questions that are simple and direct enough to answer via an online survey don't tend to illuminate some of the tensions practicing members might feel even while maintaining full allegiance to the church. A survey such as the one conducted by Nelson cannot help but suggest broadbrushed results; while the vast majority of Mormon men will acknowledge the importance of LDS rites of passage and surrounding behaviors, the way in which they

negotiate their personal interactions with these acts may vary and intersect with doubts, concerns, and deviations.

For this reason, I conducted three focus groups to allow for an inductive method of research that allowed for depth of personal expression which a survey would not accomplish. My goal was to figure out how young men use language and power as tools (Moon, 2) to negotiate hegemonic masculinity and manhood acts. I had only four main guiding questions (see Appendix A) and a few follow-up questions prepared depending on the direction that the focus groups took.

Given my focus on young men, I set a participant age range from 20-30. This essentially entails that most men participating will have had the opportunity to complete a mission and that many, given the young age of Mormon marriages, will be married. Since this age range typically consists of LDS men in what is seen as the "crucial" period for family formation, I felt they would be well-equipped to express the thought processes of Mormon men when approaching family formation and masculinity.

I additionally decided to include a group of young men who had formerly considered themselves practicing members of the LDS church but no longer identified as LDS. I wanted to explore the ways in which LDS masculinity might alienate some men to the point of leaving the church and to explore whether or not former LDS men had similar impressions of LDS masculinity narratives when compared to their practicing LDS counterparts. Thus, I wanted to talk with an audience that was familiar with LDS conceptions of masculinity but perhaps no longer found them compelling.

I ultimately recruited three groups of five, five of which were married LDS men, five of which were single LDS men, and five of which were former LDS men. While the

former LDS men were interviewed together in the same session, the married and non-married LDS individuals were mixed within two groups of four and six. Thus, there was some interchange of ideas between the married and non-married LDS individuals. The basic demographic information for these group can be found in Table 1. All but two of the LDS participants had completed missions. None of the former LDS participants were married and none had completed missions, but one had gone and come back early. One of the married participants had children. One of the married participants was an expecting father. All of the former LDS participants were unmarried.

The focus groups ran for 2 hours; 1 hour, 24 minutes; and 2 hours, 22 minutes, respectively. Such a time frame gave participants ample time to express nuanced ideas and take unique directions in expanding on the guiding questions. My participation was as minimal as possible, and I generally attempted to encourage conversation between the participants. Due to their commonality of experiences and a positive group environment, all volunteers contributed significantly and interacted with one another, engaging on agreements and disagreements. Each focus group was coded according to three broad categories after analysis based on the patterns and themes that occurred consistently throughout the texts. Tables 2-4 summarize the coding. All names have been changed to protect participant confidentiality.

Table 1: Participant Summary

No.	Age	Religious Affiliation	Marital Status
LDS Participants			
Participant 1 (Zach)	22	LDS	Married
Participant 2 (Logan)	23	LDS	Married
Participant 3 (Noah)	23	LDS	Married
Participant 4 (Jackson)	25	LDS	Married
Participant 5 (Alex)	23	LDS	Married
Participant 6 (Carter)	24	LDS	Single
Participant 7 (Daniel)	20	LDS	Single
Participant 8 (Michael)	22	LDS	Single
Participant 9 (Matthew)	21	LDS	Single
Participant 10 (Jonathan)	22	LDS	Single
Former LDS Participants			
Participant 11 (Luke)	28	None	Single
Participant 12 (William)	20	None	Single
Participant 13 (Gabe)	27	None	Single
Participant 14 (David)	22	None	Single
Participant 15 (Caleb)	21	None	Single

Table 2: LDS Married Participants Coding

	Zach	Logan	Noah	Jackson	Alex
RITES:	7	14	25	17	7
Mission	1	2	6	3	1
Marriage	6	12	19	14	6
MASCULINITY CONSTRUCTION:	8	12	16	13	8
Priesthood	1	1	2	1	2
Restraint (also see key phrase "natural man")	3	3	7	3	2
Work	2	2	3	4	2
Emotional Support/Availability	1		3	2	0
Like God	1	2	2	2	2
Conflicts & Tensions:	0	16	14	16	5
Mission	0	2	2	0	1
Marriage	0	9	7	4	4
Work	0	3	2	6	0
Generational Differences	0	0	3	4	0
Masculinity	0	0	0	0	0

Table 2: LDS Unmarried Participants Coding

	Carter	Daniel	Michael	Matthew	Jonathan
RITES:	15	12	11	14	15
Mission	6	4	3	6	5
Marriage	9	8	8	8	10
MASCULINITY CONSTRUCTION:	18	10	13	9	10
Priesthood	0	2	2	1	1
Restraint (also see key phrase "natural man")	6	5	5	4	4
Work	0	0	1	2	1
Emotional Support/Availability	6	1	2	1	1
Like God	3	1	2	1	1
Conflicts & Tensions:	22	3	7	10	16
Mission	6	0	2	4	5
Marriage	6	2	5	4	7
Work	3	0	0	1	1
Generational Differences	1	1	0	1	2
Masculinity	0	0	0	0	0

Table 4: Former LDS Participants Coding

	Luke	William	Gabe	David	Caleb
RITES:	7	11	6	13	7
Mission	1	3	1	6	1
Marriage	6	8	5	7	6
MASCULINITY CONSTRUCTION:	2	6	2	5	3
Priesthood	0	0	0	0	1
Restraint (also see key phrase "natural man")	0	4	1	0	0
Work	2	2	1	1	1
Emotional Support/Availability	0	0	0	0	0
Like God	0	0	0	0	0
Conflicts & Tensions:	16	11	8	17	10
Mission	1	2	1	6	1
Marriage	6	8	4	7	6
Work	1	2	2	0	0
Generational Differences	2	0	0	0	0
Masculinity	5	1	1	3	3

Three broad categories of interest, each one with its own subcategories, arose: *rites, masculinity construction*, and the *conflicts and tensions* that arose in association with these ideas. It is worth noting that the coding scheme was largely conceptualized based on the LDS volunteers' responses, given that the intention of the study was to flesh out specifically LDS ideas of masculinity. The same coding schemes were then applied as a means of demonstrating a contrast between the LDS groups and the former LDS group. However, when the former LDS volunteers discuss aspects of Mormon masculinity and their significance, those instances are marked and explored.

All LDS respondents listed marriage and children as major life goals and discussed them in ways that supported the notion that they serve as rites within LDS culture. The significance of the mission was brought up independently by every participant interviewed without explicit prompting in the questionnaire and linked to the explicit questions regarding family. Thus, I categorized and coded these one-time actions

or events by labeling each independently-occurring instance in which these concepts were discussed and grouped them under *rites*.

On the other hand, some patterns of discourse were more abstract and had less to do with what a man should *do* and more with what a man should *be* or how he should behave within the community (i.e. moral justification and framing, as discussed in Background). I refer to these themes as patterns of *masculinity construction*, once again building on Moon's ideas regarding framing as well as the previously-introduced theoretical work on how hegemonic masculinity is narrated. These themes of masculinity construction represent the everyday theologies of the Mormon men involved in the study. I subdivided masculinity construction to include a variety of expressed values, of which 5 occurred with enough frequency or intention to appear significant as follows (each mark indicates a separate instance in which the concept was tied to masculinity):

1. *Priesthood*: explicit mentions of holding the priesthood and priesthood authorities
2. *Restraint*: controlling natural impulses in favor of temperance
3. *Work*: achieving and maintaining a career or revenue stream
4. *Emotional support/availability*: being open and vulnerable, particularly to wife and children
5. *Like God:* being explicitly like Jesus or God the Father.

In sum, rites can be seen as "what you do" as a man in the church, and masculinity construction can be seen as "the way you talk about what you do" as a man in the church. The mission and marriage, which are typically discussed as at least conceptually connected, can be done or accomplished in a holistic action and are highly

quantifiable in that, culturally, a man can easily be observed as having completed a mission or being married (or not) by the community. On the other hand, masculinity construction is more abstract and amorphous, highly subject to individual interpretations and contextual change. However, this does not make masculinity construction insignificant, as it provides the basis upon which rites and other behaviors are often judged.

Finally, *conflicts and tensions* naturally arise in the discussion. More rigid ideas of masculinity naturally set up "winners" and "losers" within the paradigm, meaning that, in my focus group discussions, both practicing and non-practicing participants expressed some degree of discomfort with the norms that they perceived as part of church culture. I largely coded these in relation to the codes for *rites* and *masculinity construction*, since the three areas were often discussed in tandem. For instance, a volunteer might bring up mission work as a key point in a young man's life; simultaneously, that volunteer might suggest that this creates undue pressure on men who feel unable to perform missions early. Such an instance would result in a code of "1" for *Mission* under *Rites* as well as *Mission* under *Conflicts and Tensions*, since the ritual nature of the act was acknowledged simultaneously with potential conflicts.

In addition to mirrored categories such as this, I also included two additional categories under *Conflicts and Tensions* based on frequency: *generational differences* describes instances in which volunteers saw older Mormons (particularly older males or authority figures) as in conflict with themselves or potentially even morally suspect; *masculinity* refers to instances in which volunteers took issue with the actual idea of masculinity itself and with strict gender roles. Interestingly, this category resulted in a

total of zero for the LDS groups but was highly significant within the former LDS group's discussion.

Results

Rites

In the focus group discussions, the mission and the act of marriage were discussed in terms of the view of rites laid out above. Not only did a few participants use the term "rite" or "rite of passage" when describing or framing these acts, but every participant independently confirmed the centrality of these acts in their lived experiences and the Mormon construction of masculinity. LDS participants saw the mission and marriage as crucial to their performance as LDS men across the board, whether or not they had completed these acts. Former LDS men maintained that, within the context of their LDS background, these rites were emphasized to a high degree—even an extreme degree according to many who felt alienated by these traditions. Thus, when coding, I marked every instance in which the mission and marriage were mentioned and rated with significance, even if the significance carried negative connotations (as noted in conflicts and tensions). This could be accomplished either by explicit expression of their significance or by a thematic exploration of the topics as connected to personal life goals and masculinity. With this coding in mind, every LDS participant affirmed the importance of both the mission and marriage consistently and frequently, within a variety of contexts.

LDS Perspectives on rites. Many LDS participants framed both rites as taken-for-granted essentials in the life of a man; "that's just how it is," Michael, a recently returned missionary currently on the "dating market," succinctly confirmed. "You just go

[on a Mission],'" "you just have a family." Jackson, a recent college graduate who's been married for 4 years, explained the presence of these rites within the LDS culture in a similar way accordingly: "Growing up, like with my mission, it was never an option not to go, or not to do it. Same with being married." Carter, one of the two LDS participants who had not completed a mission, confirmed, regarding the mission and marriage as one connected sequence, "it was an expectation . . . growing up, that's just what you did. You don't question it really." The idea that these rites are integral to manhood is seen as so essential that they become commonplace within a young man's experience.

The specifically gendered importance of these rites is likewise affirmed time and again by the LDS focus groups. Noah, an expecting father who was married within a year of returning from his mission—an exemplary time frame for many LDS young men—attached a special significance to the completion of the mission in the transition towards marriage, explaining that, "once you are in the . . . church's sense 'a man,' when you get home from a mission, that [is] when [the idea of marriage] is concrete. Like, okay, this isn't just talking about it anymore, this is, like, application." The mission and marriage—consistently tied together in every discussion—seem to offer a clear path for young LDS men to follow. Matthew, a recently returned missionary saving money for college, affirmed the sequential nature of these rites in conjunction, explaining the "roadmap," so to speak, laid out for males within the church:

> Growing up, in the church, from day 1—a little baby—
> everybody's asking you 'are you going to get married in the
> temple?' Like, primary, up through your adolescent years,
> everything is focused on—for men—A: mission and B: are you

> going to get married in the temple after you've successfully completed your mission, so it's always been present.

In this way, both the mission and marriage not only transition men into a new stage of life, they also set up clear ramifications for a "successful" life as a man. The mission, almost by necessity, precludes the marriage and signals that young men are prepared to begin life as the head of a family. In discussion of expectations for men, volunteers rarely mentioned the mission without bringing up marriage and family in some capacity. Both are seen as linked, quantifiable acts that are often taken for granted as an integral part of a boy's upbringing and a man's life.

Many of the LDS respondents further attached significance to the mission and marriage by describing the personal responsibilities and character-building associated with them, which ultimately lead to more palpable duties. As Nelson (2003) contended, "it may be that these rites of passage are important to Mormons because going through them may help . . . young men acquire the internal attributes needed for adulthood, . . . sooner rather than later" (46). In the focus groups, many volunteers echoed this conclusion. "That's like your preparatory phase," Matthew explained, referring to acquiring the priesthood as a boy and completing a mission. This "pre-marriage" phase is intended to equip young LDS men with the moral "skills" necessary to navigate husbandhood and ultimately fatherhood. Thus, each young Mormon man must accept these tasks as integral to his maturity in order to be a successful missionary and man. Typically, in approaching the prospect of a mission or marriage, the volunteers describe a moment in their personal maturity in which they acknowledged the importance of these acts and accepted the responsibility to complete them. Michael encapsulated these moral

underpinnings by explaining, "it was like understanding the 'why' . . . What good does it do? So, like being married, it was like, well why do I want to get married? What does it mean? . . . Why have a family?" Michael, like many of the other Volunteers, suggested that the answers to these questions came through his mission experience, which was therefore integral to his growth as a man. Noah similarly affirmed:

> On my mission, there was a point where you say to yourself, like, "are these my goals," but also "is this really what I believe?" Because you're facing daily, hourly, multi-hourly opposition to that . . . [especially] in California, where everybody speaks English, and they were happy to tell you their opinion and what they think about Mormonism . . . So for me it was on my mission, I had to decide "is this really what I believe," . . . for me . . . I decided to have a family. . . the second my feet touched the ground. I was like "alright, it's time. It's go time."

Thus, the attitudes of the volunteers reflect the idea of the mission and marriage as formative acts that shape a man's character and prepare him to lead a truly effective life. The mission prepares a man for marriage, acting as a "shortcut to maturity," and marriage itself prepares a man for ultimate responsibility. While not all volunteers viewed these acts in such a grand light, Logan drove home the concept with theological clout:

> The core of our dogma is you are being prepared . . . That is the essential core tenet of everything that we do, of marriage, of every religious practice that we participate in . . . if you're behaving in a way that you can't control yourself when you have no power, how are you going to be trusted to have any more power?

In establishing men as morally responsible and capable, the mission and marriage logically result in the acquisition of higher status markers. They not only indicate that a man is "doing something right" but also push him towards new opportunities. Missionaries gain the title "elder" after completion, and temple marriage opens a variety of doors to a newly-married man. Alex, a husband of two years and a new father, explained that:

> Definitely . . . there is [a shift after marriage], because with the LDS church, it promotes marriage . . . [so] if you are married, there's a lot of help, a lot of…I wouldn't call them perks, but . . . the church does . . . help you, you know what I mean? Whereas if you're not married, you're just lone-wolfing it.

Logan humorously explained the expectations associated with this transition: "Yeah, so [at first] you're in the 'dating pot,' [then] you make it, you do it—yeah, nailed it!—and [then] you get to go to the big boy ward." He went on to note that "all of a sudden, you're expected to be much more mature." Noah, when discussing the attitude towards him within his ward, described his experience after marriage as being "in the club." Not only was he able to participate in Elders Quorum, but he also felt his social circle within the ward changed. "Yeah. It's definitely a step upwards," said Matthew, referring to each act in the sequence of rites:

> As a man, you're expected to: first, get the priesthood as a 12-year-old. That's like step 1. You're on your way. Then you've got to go on a mission. Step 2. And then you gotta get married. Otherwise, there's like this…I don't know. Nobody wants to be that 30-year-old guy in the

church who's not married, and nobody wants you to be that 30-year-old guy in the church who's not married.

Single men are not only unable to hold significant leadership positions but also are "odd men out" when it comes to church meetings and other important proceedings, which are traditionally held by groups of married men. "We will never look to a single man for leadership," Logan affirmed succinctly. "Doctrinally," both Daniel and Matthew explicitly stated, "starting with the bishop . . . [church leaders] all have to be married, in order to fill those roles." In this sense, single men are seen as incapable of accomplishing the integral community duties that come along with these positions, such as administering priestly blessings to local households, providing counsel to individuals, and exercising group leadership within the ward. A man without marriage is ultimately not yet fully capable of living as a man "should."

Ultimately, then, the LDS volunteers unanimously recognized the significance of the mission and marriage in propelling a young man towards authentic and fully-realized masculinity. Thus, these cultural behaviors can be described both as rites and as essential manhood acts within the framework of everyday Mormon theologies.

Former LDS perspectives on rites. The former LDS participants similarly echoed the idea of the mission and marriage as essential rites within the LDS framework. While the participants were not comfortable endorsing these concepts and in many cases expressed a degree of distaste for these elements of doctrine, their reports of the centrality of these ideas in their upbringing and their families were unanimous. Much like the LDS

participants, they characterized these rites as taken-for-granted traditions that influence both the status and perceived character of young LDS men.

"It was kind of always there," explained Caleb, who left the church during high school, when framing the presence of the mission and marriage rites within an LDS household. "So from when I was very little, it was like: go to college for one year, go on a mission, come back to college, find someone to marry, have kids …that was just assumed on a very basic level." Luke, a former Mormon whose parents have also left the church, noted the specifically gendered nature of this ever-present narrative: "So I know that women are kind of going on missions more, but I do really get the sense that it's really . . . ritualized . . . it's so expected for 18 year old LDS [men]." Speaking about his recently-engaged cousin, he expanded further on the idea: "I'm sure they think, like, 'that's just how it's going to be. At one point, I will get married.' It never even occurred to them." William, who recently left the LDS tradition after serving approximately half of his mission, during which he became alienated with the church, similarly explained the taken-for-granted nature of these rites as necessary goals for all young men. "When I was LDS, that was like the biggest thing. Go on a mission, come home, meet a girl, start a family . . . it was just there. You just start a family at some point in your life early on."

Like the LDS participants, the former LDS participants also note the association between the rites and character growth within the church. David, a university student currently studying LDS history, explained the expectations for young men: "They need to go on their mission . . . and then . . . they've learned life; they're ready to progress into marriage is my impression." Thus, the mission prepares young LDS men for the next essential step in their progression towards authentic masculinity and adulthood. David

added a caveat to his statement by mentioning that the timeframe for young men to complete this kind of progression is limited: "So it's like 'young single men, you're cool, just don't get too old.'" Gabe, an IT professional who left the church after moving to Utah as a teenager, similarly explained, "there's a certain level of 'you'll be a different, better person when this [marriage] happens to you.'" He contended that returned missionaries and especially married men are immediately perceived as more capable within the ward environment. Caleb supported this notion by setting up a contrast between a married LDS man and a man who is "adrift in [his] 20's," who he argued is perceived as "selfish or not noble [for] put[ting] off family."

Accordingly, the former LDS participants also recapitulated the idea that—along with a perceived growth in character—young LDS men who complete the core rites experience major status shifts, often contrasting this achievement of church status with their own life choices. Accordingly, David joked, "Oh yeah. I'm supposed to be married by now. I mean I'm 22. 'Come on,' right? . . . That's the key goal . . . alongside the endowment ceremonies . . . and Missionary work too." He argued that being single or failing to complete a mission "affects your standing in church callings, too. Like you're going to get pegged with Primary . . . Maybe you get clerk, maybe. If you're lucky, but I seriously doubt it." Similarly, Gabe explained this status shift accordingly:

> In my experience . . . and in talking with people who are still practicing members, it's like [a single] person is just in limbo. They're just in a holding pattern, just waiting. "When are you going to move on?" So they're not quite complete. And that's both in a social setting in the church and also in a theological way.

While he applied this idea both to men and women within the church, he argued that young men experience a more direct push to initiate the completion of the rites: "I would say that typically, if [a] man is single for too long, it's like 'why don't you have your shit together?'" William echoed this notion by recalling the questions directed towards men within the church who had "failed" to fulfill these duties:

> People [would] say . . . "man, why aren't you married?" "Are you married yet?". . . [and] it's . . . the same as if you didn't go on a mission . . . there's a certain level of respect that they're not getting, because they didn't serve a mission.

Ultimately, he concluded, "you get kind of looked down upon."

In this way, the former LDS participants supported the idea that the rites of mission and marriage serve core social roles, acting both as taken-for-granted manhood acts and status signifiers within a church environment.

Masculinity Construction

In order to give rites and manhood acts significance, a discourse must be created. Without an accompanying narrative to substantiate the "why" of these individual behaviors, the mission and marriage in themselves would have no content. Thus, the discussion of rites and masculinity as a whole was consistently couched in a firm moral discourse by the LDS participants, who explored their personal senses of morality in a nuanced way, often with some level disagreement. Unlike rites, masculinity construction is more abstract, allowing for a higher degree of leeway and a potentially deeper process of negotiation when it comes to determining whether or not an individual "lives up" to the community standard. Consequently, the framing used by the focus group participants

in discussing masculinity construction was less fully unanimous, with some themes occurring only within the language of one or two participants. Despite this, a few core themes occurred with striking frequency, namely the importance of restraint as a core part of manhood and how it relates to family and career.

LDS Perspectives on masculinity construction. When discussing the ethical dimensions of manhood, the LDS volunteers consistently brought up the necessity of control, restraint, and loyalty as essential qualities. Ryan Cragun, J.E. Sumerau, and Trina Smith (2017) provide context for this recurring notion, noting that church leaders in many instances "represent manhood as the ability to signify control over self" (1). LDS volunteers consistently elaborated on this idea of restraint or moderation as essentially to "true" or authentic masculinity. In fact, it occurred with greater frequency than any other identifiable marker and with complete consistency, as it was discussed by every LDS volunteer.

Theologically, this concept could be encapsulated as an opposition to the idea of the "natural man," the more carnal, sinful side of man who desires self-satisfaction and the pursuit of pleasure and sin. This "natural" or hedonistic man was often used by the LDS volunteers as a point of contrast for the self-identified "moral" model of LDS masculinity, which, according to David Newman, "[articulates] an alternate masculinity which distinguishes Mormon[s] from . . . other American men" (2). For instance, Logan created a contrast between what he saw as a popular archetype in secular masculinity versus a more "true" masculinity:

> But—to me—yeah, you can elevate the natural man. You can venerate him. You can bow down before how great he makes

> everybody feel . . . [but] to me family is about becoming a crucible. And it's entering into this purification process, because you are trying to become someone better than who you were . . . And I think [that's] that concept of becoming a trustworthy man. I would say . . . someone who controls themself, is someone you can trust.

Similarly, Jackson explained, "You want people to look at you and think, 'you know, he's a good person. I respect that man.' I think that restraint is a good word . . . restraint is venerated in the church." While hedonism and selfishness, the opposing viewpoints consistently brought up by the LDS volunteers, might appear appealing at a surface level, they ultimately fail to capture "true" manhood expressed by the church.

This true manhood is tied deeply to the discussion of rites, in that it echoes the responsibility that is intentionally shaped via the mission and affirmed with marriage. Restraint is constantly tied to family roles, which are seen as the epitome of a man's calling. Carter captured this succinctly by explaining what he saw as the necessary thought process for being a husband and father: "[you think] 'okay, now I'm not living for myself, now I'm sacrificing myself,' and I think that's what it means truly to be a man." In this way, the contrast between a hedonistic, material masculinity—centered on selfishness (the word used most often in association with the "natural" or undesirable man in the transcripts)—and a moral masculinity—centered on temperance and moral strength—were set up as contrasting perspectives within the discourse of the LDS volunteers to substantiate the centrality of family from the perspective of masculine morality. Michael set up this contrast in the following terms:

> He [the natural man] doesn't really care about his family or whatever else until after he's fulfilled his own desires. Whereas, in the family, the role of the man needs to be very altruistic. I provide for you, and then, if I still have time, I can do something for me.

Noah likewise couched his discussion of the natural man within family terms, proposing that "it's kind of widely accepted that, when [it] shifts from "I'm focusing more on my family" to "I'm focusing more on myself," . . . that's when a marriage fails, that's when a family falls apart." A man, especially a husband or a father, is seen as a failure "when the paradigm shifts from 'you guys' to myself." "Some of the most immediate, initial demands of the natural man is lust," explained Daniel, "and that will not stand for family."

Ultimately, in summarizing this type of restraint, both in personal behavior and within a family context, Noah used the popular LDS phrase "moderation in all things."

> Any virtue taken to its extreme is then a vice. Like my dad was so focused on keeping things out of our lives and keeping us making specific decisions that he pushed [us] away—So I think, in that sense, the role of the defender…it's kind of like…it's always gotta be like an equilateral triangle. As soon as you try to overdo one thing [it fails] . . . Those edges are always growing and receding in different ways. You have to make sure you're not pushing so hard that you're pushing people away from you in your family.

This idea of restraint and "moderation in all things" was also extended into the discussion of leaderships roles, mostly within a family context. Zach encapsulated the

"motto" for leadership with the "3 P's," laid out as "preside, provide, and protect." In action, Daniel explained that this paradigm encourages "the father to preside and not to override. To officiate the decision making . . . not [be] the decision maker." Logan likewise suggested that, his "concept is that the dad is the leader and the example" but tempers the absolute nature of the leadership by explaining that "we have such a bastardized sense of leader in our society right now." He saw the leadership role not as a domineering position but as one that requires a man to "[be] able to lead from behind," "admit weakness," "[maintain] accountability," and "[take] control in a way that's constructive." In concluding, he admitted: "I don't know. It's still a hard balance that I miss a lot."

The LDS volunteers similarly emphasized the importance of moderation within community leadership. The concept of the priesthood was repeatedly mentioned in conjunction with the man's role within the family. Just like the acts of mission and marriage can be seen as linked, the symbolic ramifications of leadership within the home and leadership within the community often arose as importantly interconnected. Leadership within the family serves as a link to broader leadership, indicating that a man with a family can better serve his ward or stake community. Jackson described this as his ability as a married man to better "relate" with married men in the community, while always maintaining the ability to relate to single men. Similarly, Logan elaborated on the significance of the priesthood in his life as deeply tied to the role of priesthood in his family:

> We have priesthood meetings . . . where we're asking 'how are we doing' as men . . . and when I hear that it's . . . 'as the divinely appointed man of

> the household.' . . . I very rarely think of 'oh my gosh, what position in the church am I going to hold,' and I much more think of: what kind of husband am I being? And every week when I think of what has been asked of me—by the church—it's always reflective of how am I treating my wife.

Similarly, Michael emphasized the idea of being readily available in the community as a priesthood holder:

> Since men do have the priesthood, it is the responsibility that we all feel to know…to be able to discern when and how to use that, in giving blessings . . . We [have to] make sure that we live in such a way . . . that we're worthy, so if the time ever does come where we have to use the priesthood, . . . that's available.

Within these contexts, a man is expected to be able to "discern" the right time to exercise leadership roles. A leader who is "overbearing," as Logan put it, is ineffective and ultimately not Christ-like. He argued that a man's job within the family and community is "not just [to hold] offices, but [to] … be a good person." Alex explained community "authority positions" with these terms, contending that "the more authority you have, the more responsibility you have, so the more time you give up . . . so it is a service." For this reason, he expressed a level of disappointment in his current bishop, who he describes as a "politician," who seems to be more concerned with his image than serving the community in a balanced way.

From a pragmatic standpoint, this approach bleeds into the young men's attitude towards the relationship between a man's work and a man's role in his family life, which

tie in deeply to the nature of his leadership roles within the family and community. The volunteers consistently brought up work as important but almost always temper it by framing it within the broader significance of family and more abstract moral qualities. That is to say, work should never be prioritized at the expense of family life. Alex stated that the man should be willing "to help the family when trials come," both "financially and emotionally" and that his role as "provider" is equally as spiritual as it is material. Matthew explained this balance accordingly:

> Because, what's the point of being a father if you just make the money and you never see your family? So there needs to be a boundary set somewhere that says "yes I need to work," but, equally if not more important . . . there needs to be a boundary drawn between spending the time with your family and doing what needs to be done to provide for that family.

Logan likewise set up the idea of balance between material, concrete "provision" and the more abstract moral duties of the man within a family: "so there's this goal . . . to be able to . . . say 'I'm providing for you physically and emotionally.' And I need to be able to do both of those things." The participants almost never mentioned work as essential to a man's family role without subsequently tying it in to their perspectives on spiritual leadership. Such an insistence of moral qualities as a foundation for more material roles supports Nelson's (2003) idea that Mormon emerging adult men see emotional and spiritual maturity as skills necessary for adulthood, which may be best acquired

through manhood acts such as the mission and marriage. An established career or steady income is not necessarily a prerequisite for marriage.

Logan, an undergraduate at BYU, and his wife, a graduate student at the University of Utah, are both putting steady careers on hold as they pursue their education. Despite this, Logan felt confident in his role as a husband despite what he described as the "social pressure of like 'you're the man, you provide.'" In fact, he argued that "emotional support [is] a lot more important to me in a lot of ways." Thus, while many young participants like Logan hope to advance their careers and find more stable work opportunities, the vast majority of both the married and unmarried LDS participants express a confidence in establishing a spiritually sound marriage along with or even prior to a lucrative career.

Former LDS perspectives on masculinity construction. The former LDS responses made mention of the same ideas in regards to LDS masculinity construction but only sparsely elaborated on their significance. In general, the former LDS men had fewer things to say about specific masculinity construction, distancing themselves from the more well-defined notions of the practicing groups. However, they did take some time to explore the ways in which LDS men construct masculinity. Like the LDS participants, they noted the significance of restraint of the natural or carnal man in LDS discourse on manhood, often noting the ways in which this discourse hinges on family. Caleb explained this connection:

> There's this whole sense [that] a man with no responsibilities who isn't raising a family and working or providing, who is doing anything they want, is kind of seen as the natural man. And the anchor of having to

> provide and having, like, a wife and children, is a positive influence that reigns in the natural man . . . Not following the natural man . . . is doing the hard, . . . moral, structured thing.

This notion is often set in contrast with other forms of masculinity. David, specifically, elaborated on the contrast between what he sees as the variety of acceptable "secular" masculinities that encourage "American independence" and "more sexual partners" with the more rigid, restrained masculinity of the church. Gabe likewise compared LDS masculinity to other notions of masculinity in a similarly morally-coded way: "They're ditching some of these other, like hypersexual, norms of patriarchy, of masculinity in favor of the . . . more conservative . . . norms for what men are supposed to be." In this way, family tempers and molds a young man, within the LDS framework, to be a better, more "authentically" masculine version of himself, who can resist the temptations of an ultimately weaker carnal manhood.

Further, the former LDS participants supported the notion that LDS men are expected to exercise balance as leaders in the family, exercising emotional support and material support in equal measure. David explained this balance, like the LDS participants, by exploring the ideal role of the LDS husband:

> That sort of support role was something that was super emphasized . . . The support and, relatedly, being a peace maker. Both of those things were emphasized as what . . . my job was supposed to be. Not just monetary support but emotional labor. Like, not using that term, but that's what it was, right? You're supposed to be a caring, loving father. And you could see that difference between who accomplished that best and who didn't.

He contended that, rather than prioritize their careers, LDS men were expected to be able to balance their community leadership, their family responsibilities, and their work life. Contrasting this notion with what he saw as the more mainstream conception of masculinity, in which "you're implementing . . . other things outside of your quest to get married, like moving towards success in the marketplace, or . . . pursuing achievement generally." In this non-LDS context, he saw marriage as a more secondary priority, something that one "arrives" at after establishing oneself in other ways. "Whereas in the LDS context," he continued, "I don't think that's the case. You're supposed to be able to do both. Like, the good husband is supposed to have a family life and still pursue . . . success." This kind of schema allows for young Mormon men to prioritize family formation as an initial goal before committing to broader cultural markers of adulthood, such as an established career.

In discussing their own perceptions of masculinity—as opposed to those with which they were familiar in the church—the former LDS participants, unlike the LDS participants, often mentioned the problematic or amorphous nature of assuming that the concept of "masculinity" as gender expression should hold sway in men's lives. This distinctly set them apart from their LDS counterparts who unanimously confirmed the concrete nature of their respective concepts of masculinity, even when they acknowledge their complexities. The presence of this counter-discourse in the former LDS group serves as a clear point of contrast, delineating an element of masculinity discourse with which the LDS participants are unwilling or unable to engage. Gabe discussed this notion at length by exploring his own sense of how notions of masculinity have played out in his life:

> I have such a love/hate relationship with masculinity . . . like I'm not super conflicted about [identifying as masculine] . . . but, on the other hand, like, I see the negative impact of hypermasculinity and of patriarchal masculinity, because there's distinctions in my mind . . . I'm a guy, and masculinity does influence the way that I [act] . . . I have things that I express my masculinity through, but I also . . . [advocate for] leaving those lines less strictly drawn.

He contrasted these ideas with the rigid gender norms of the church.

> And then the church's patriarchal order within that little microcosm is a direct result of the larger patriarchal system, . . . but, that being said, I think it hyper focuses the patriarchy as well, because, instead of being just a general social understanding . . . of like "the order of things," there's literally a written word. And it's not just written by a dude. It's written by an all mighty, omnipotent, ever-existing creator of everything . . . who's also a dude!

The other former LDS participants similarly supported these ideas by proposing more amorphous roles for masculinity, or describing multiple possible constructions of masculinity narratives. In responding to LDS conceptions of gender roles within the home, Caleb described his ideal family situation: "I don't want there to be any gender role consideration in who [does what] . . . I think it can be pretty fluid." William likewise said he has no specific ideas of what masculinity means at all, in contrast to his experiences in the church. "None at all. And it took me a long time to get there, but no, I don't think that there's any one definition to masculinity at all." Finally, Luke

acknowledged the presence of a societal masculinity narrative without being able to pinpoint what function it plays for him or others:

> Okay, is there such a thing as masculinity? Well…we could try and . . . define it by other things that it's not, like is there such a thing as femininity or is it kind of the case that there's neither of those categories or whatever. I don't know . . . It's kind of this cultural narrative that . . . exists, and people can pick up on it and think "okay well, I can pick up on the script of being a man if I do this."

Thus, in exploring the ambiguities and complexities of masculinity construction, the former LDS participants explicitly set themselves apart from the LDS participants, wrestling with the very concept of masculinity itself, rather than taking it for granted as a base-level assumption.

Conflicts and Tensions

Ultimately, the processes of adhering to a dominant masculinity narrative yields tensions and conflicts. As individual young men negotiate these norms and languages associated with their gender expression, they often find themselves either feeling inferior or ousted by these standards or simply not fully on-board with every tenet. Some participants saw these modifications and tensions as human error or misinterpretations of doctrine, whereas some participants—particularly the former LDS participants—saw them as more deeply problematic elements of the religion itself and reason to doubt its healthiness as a whole. Despite this discrepancy on causality, the description of the conflicts and tensions within the church tended to be relatively unified, centering on

feelings of inordinate pressure and social stigma associated with not completing a mission or being married.

LDS perspectives. As observed, half of the LDS participants were "successfully" married, so to speak, and eight of ten had completed missions. Thus, it is to be expected that there would be some variation within their perspectives on the problematic components of the LDS rites. Generally, however, the married and unmarried groups were not clearly delineated in the codes as more or less likely to express conflicts and tensions. Instead these codes differed largely by individual.

On the other hand, the two participants that had not completed missions—Carter and Jonathan—stood as outliers not only within the selected groups but also within the local LDS population as a whole. As Nelson (2003) and Phillips (2008) both demonstrate, an overwhelming number of practicing LDS men successfully complete missions, and the vast majority of these individuals do so within the designated time frame of their late teens to early 20's. Both Carter and Jonathan expressed an intense awareness of this fact and explored the ways in which their lack of mission service affected their reputation within their communities. Both expressed a feeling of significant stigmatization when it came to their status within the church. They felt that their status as men and their ability to pursue a family through dating was severely limited by their lack of an "elder" title. Carter explained this feeling of external pressures poignantly in the following terms:

> I didn't go on a mission right away like I was "supposed to," and thought I was going to go later, but I realized that would be a very bad idea because of my mental [health] . . . But I still feel pressure to this day . . . But I wouldn't understand, because . . . all [my mom's] ever wanted for us is to

> all go on missions . . . And I could be judging them . . . It could be an assumption that they're judging me . . . But . . . I do feel like there's this idea in the church . . . It's kind of like, I'm 24, haven't gone on a mission, haven't gotten married. I'm not even dating . . . I mean, who's gonna want me? I mean, I want to marry a . . . woman who practices the LDS faith, because that's . . . where I come from and how I want to raise my family, and I know I'm not the only one who's come home from their mission early, [or] didn't serve at all.

He went on to express his desire for more understanding within the church regarding single men and men who did not complete missions. Like Jonathan, who went to the MTC (Missionary Training Center) but opted out of actually departing the state for mission service, he perceived a severe lack of empathy within the church towards those who "fail" to complete the rites expected of them.

Jonathan described the significant sense of turmoil he experienced after returning from the MTC after only one month:

> It wasn't so much pressure from my family. [My brother] didn't complete a mission. And since he's not going to church anymore . . . it was like they weren't disappointed . . . my dad was almost happy to have me back . . . but at my ward, and at the singles ward when I moved [for college] I just felt like . . . I was treated . . . differently . . . Girls always want to date RM's [Returned Missionaries], and sometimes . . . on a first date, I would get asked . . . and they'd never call back . . . Also, after I came back . . . there was a year . . . where it just felt like, 'what do I do now?' I had [had]

> a plan . . . like, this is where you go . . . and when that didn't work out I had no idea . . . what I was doing.

Both Carter and Jonathan were coded as expressing more conflicted accounts of mission service and expectations for young men than their counterparts who had completed missions. Carter, in particular, even differed in his general accounts of masculinity construction, emphasizing to a higher degree the need for compassion and emotional availability among fathers and other male figures in the church, who he often described as distant and lacking in empathy:

> [My house was] a house of order. [My parents] thought that then everything would turn out great, it would . . . work itself out. But . . . for me, it just made way for more lying and hiding . . . and a non-intimate relationship with my Creator, you know in . . . my household, and I think many in the church are pretty similar. You go on a mission, you have a family, and that's where you'll find happiness . . . but it's [actually] about the truth and realness.

In this way, both were more willing to express alternate routes within the church of expressing "true" masculinity. While both Carter and Jonathan expressed their belief in many of the faith's traditions, they also explored their feelings of alienation with the rites and other rigid expectations within the church

Even the men who had completed missions expressed a level of dissatisfaction towards the stigmas within the church towards men who did not adhere to the rites laid out for them, echoing Elizabeth Mott's sentiment (2013), "Is it possible to emphasize a theology based on eternal kinship relationships without alienating unmarried LDS Church

members?" (45). Logan lamented the connection between the completion of rites and the judgment of a man's moral character: "We will never look to a single man for leadership. Because…we just don't. And the subtext there is, if you're single, you are not capable of leadership." Similarly, Michael expressed this dichotomy, explaining:

> I really do feel bad that we have developed this kind of culture within our church. It's not doctrine, but it is a culture, to where, if you are that 30-year-old guy in a singles ward, it's like "crap dude, just give up."

Finally, Noah expressed his frustration in church participation prior to his marriage:

> If you're not married in the church, every time you make a comment in class, or you get mentioned…put in a calling or something, you're just kind of grouped in this group of single people. And I don't want to say they value you less in the ward, but you're almost treated like . . . you'll get there one day. You just don't know how it is, . . . and I always felt like, when I was single . . . it drove me nuts, like, I was like "my opinion is just as valid as anybody else's here."

All the LDS participants acknowledged the presence of these types of negative or condescending attitudes towards single men and men who had not completed missions and expressed a level of empathy for young men like this within the church, arguing that the assumption that these individuals are not living up to the ideas of masculinity construction is often unfounded and non-doctrinal. "I hate . . . this concept that if I didn't do either of those [the mission and marriage], I'm somehow diminished in my worth as a human being or . . . as a man," Logan lamented. Jackson explained the incongruity between judgments of character based on the completion of rites and true character:

> It [marriage] is of value . . . [but] if you really think about it, a lot of callings are given to you according to what they think your value is . . . It's all service, but how can you serve, but there's a fine line, it's like . . . how much can you serve but also how valuable are [you] to our community . . . And that's a judgment. Are they receiving these callings through revelation or are they just saying "he's a married dude, he can do it"?

Noah suggested that a failure to complete the rites often suggests to the church community that young men are "doing something wrong." Matthew, who argued that "no one wants to be that 30-year-old guy in the church who's not married," suggested that he saw this as a cultural overextension of doctrine. The idea of a "30-year-old guy" who is unmarried came up frequently as an archetype of disdain within church communities, often to the disappointment of the participants who acknowledged the presence of this stigma. Ultimately, they rejected these intense stigmas as misappropriations of valuable concepts. "There's a right time for everyone," Matthew argued, "and it's not the same for anyone." Logan likewise hoped to see a change in these attitudes, contending that "the church changes very slowly . . . but it does change."

Finally, LDS participants noted the potential problems that rushed early marriage could cause within lifelong partnerships, a perspective sometimes echoed within the broader literature on the subject of LDS marriage (Moen, Bradford, Lee, Harris, & Steward, 2015). Logan, along with several other participants, critiqued what he labeled "BYU culture," a paradigm associated with Brigham Young University, within which young couples get married within astoundingly brief periods of time. "I'm very much

against, kind of on principle, that whole . . . push to be married for marriage's sake," he explained. "I get that you feel strongly about someone, but. . . If you didn't have that push to be married, would you have married her?" Similarly, Alex, who has already been married for over two years at 23, expressed his own personal regrets when it comes to early marriage:

> I'm going to be completely honest with this . . . I haven't been that happy with being married . . . I feel like . . . maybe that wasn't the right choice for me . . . maybe I should've known her better . . . looking back, I realize everything has its due time . . . you shouldn't rush it.

Thus, the LDS participants acknowledged the potential consequences of the pressure associated with the performance of masculinity within the church.

Former LDS perspectives.

Similarly, the former LDS participants brought up the uniquely stringent pressures associated with the mission and marriage as expectations for young men. Unlike the LDS participants, they rarely saw the value in these activities in and of themselves, at least within the life course time frame delineated by the church. Having completed a year of a mission, William explained at great lengths the pressures associated with mission work and the incentives of going:

> [The mission is] just something that's expected [of] you. Some people do go out there because they truly believe that's what they need to be doing, . . . but it wasn't that way for [many] . . . I wasn't planning on going on a mission . . . I mean, it was a nice time getting ready, but when I got out there, it was a lot different than anyone ever explained it, way different

> than I imagined it would be . . . I realized I wasn't per se stoked for the mission itself or for the good I was going to be doing out there, but rather: my life had a direction. It had a plan. For 2 years, I don't have to think about anything after that. Two years, and then stop. Think about the rest when you get home.

In this way, William captured not only the social expectations associated with the mission but also the perceived sense of direction that it gives to missionaries, even those who might feel conflicted. This sense of security can both push young men towards a mission and make the transition back to "normal" life daunting and uncertain (Thomas & Thomas 1990)).

Similarly, according to former LDS participants, immense pressures accompany marriage, and singleness during emerging adulthood is a major stigma within the church. Luke explained his impression of this pressure succinctly by stating, "A single Mormon man is not, you know, being as Mormon as he could be." David went on to describe the pressures his parents experienced simply by delaying marriage until their 30's, echoing their resentment towards the attitudes with which they were perceived:

> And they also have a sense . . . that this is . . . a bad thing for a church, because of their own experiences, [and] all the shame that was dumped on them for not being married until they were 31 [and] 36 . . . [singleness] definitely affects your standing . . . Socially too, everyone looks down on the 30-year-old in the singles ward . . . There's something "wrong" with them. They didn't find somebody by this point? . . . Sometimes it's a

> righteousness thing, like "oh maybe they weren't doing x or y or z and that's why they're still single."

Caleb likewise described the "peer pressure . . . from the inside" of student wards, which he sees as compounding an already-existing "cultural pressure" to be married. "For the guys, it's like a defect," Gabe explained. For him, to be unmarried as a man in your late 20's or early 30's was to be perceived as a wrongdoer.

For the former LDS participants, this kind of pressure to get married early often results in a broader social problem; they cited a lack of maturity and life experience amongst young LDS couples. William explained that, after leaving the church, his impression of early marriage changed entirely:

> When you're Mormon, you get home from your Mission when you're 20. Most people expect you to have at least a kid by the time you're 22 . . . It kind of astonishes me. And at the time when I was practicing, it was like, "oh there's nothing wrong with that." Like, "cool, go on your mission, come home, have a kid within a year." No. I'm not interested. I . . . haven't figured out who I am or what I want to do with my life.

Luke likewise expressed his concern and "suspicion" of the idea that "80% of the population think they've accomplished [finding a life partner] before 25 . . . give me a break!" Thus, former LDS participants suggested that LDS cultural pressures towards marriage not only result in the stigmatization of single men but also push young LDS couples towards marriage regardless of the soundness of their decision.

Discussion

Taken as a whole, the focus group results strongly point towards the presence of a robust discourse on specific rites as manhood acts within the church; these concrete expectations bolster and are bolstered by the surrounding LDS masculinity construction.

Ultimately, these results indicate a level of uniqueness within the LDS discourse on masculinity, specifically as it relates to life course. More rigid expectations for young men tend to push them towards early family formation, often resulting in the prioritization of ritualistic behaviors within the church over secular markers of adulthood status. LDS couples continue to marry young despite broader social trends to the contrary. In turn, it places high degrees of pressure on young men to perform "well" as missionaries and potential husbands and to hold themselves to high standards so that they can be entrusted with authority positions quite early in their lives. Missionaries, having just graduated high school, are almost single-handedly expected to expand the ranks of the church (Phillips 2008). Young men are expected to be able to marry early and ultimately to be able to guide their wives and children not only in concrete material decisions but spiritually. While male emerging adults in the broader U.S. continue to push off family formation due to economically uncertain conditions and an ever-expanding transition-to-work period, Mormon males continue to prioritize family formation and the character expectations associated with this behavior.

This condensed time frame encourages LDS men to take responsibility early, to avoid "drifting," as some participants put it, and to establish themselves

as potential authority figures in the church. Such a cycle aids in extending the recreation of a gender hierarchy within the church by placing unique pressures on male performance and gearing rites—which are explicitly seen as equipping valuable character traits—towards male participants. By creating a male hierarchy and pitting elevated forms of masculinity over lesser forms (in this case, namely those who have failed to "perform" properly as men), these rites and discourses not only put enormous pressure on men to take leadership positions and exercise power but also manage to frame men within the church as potentially more deserving of these roles.

Importantly, the young men involved in this process—that is the process of negotiating their own gender identity and the powerful gender expectations within the church—often participate in the recreation of gender hierarchy unknowingly and are also typically not blind to the conflicts and tensions inherent in this negotiation process. Those for whom the system works best—namely, those who complete the rites and manage to create an identity within the church that suits expectations for men—still note deficiencies in what they see as cultural norms. Those who fail to perform the rites and struggle to comfortably frame their identities within the normative gender discourse are more acutely aware of these deficiencies yet often accept deeper notions of the church's gender norms while negotiating the particulars. Finally, the former LDS participants illuminate a contrasting perspective, recognizing the ubiquity of gender discourse within the church while more firmly distancing themselves from its influence. Ultimately, all these perspectives point towards the adaptability of dominant masculinity

rhetoric, specifically within a religious context. Within this setting, rites and morality bolster each other, creating a robust sense of gender norms. Despite the power of these norms, individual young men find ways to deconstruct these notions to differing degrees, sometimes conscious and sometimes unconscious of their ramifications.

The depth of perspectives gleaned throughout the focus group research helps to illuminate the personal negotiations involved within the broader social context of LDS gender normativity and LDS demographic exceptionalism. Tying in my work with the theoretical approaches of Carrigan et. al (1985) and Schrock and Schwalbe (2009) as well as the quantitative analysis of Uecker (2014) and Nelson (2003), I hope to shed light on the microcosmic everyday theologies and gender discourses that feed into in these macrocosmic results.

Limitations. This study is limited by its scope, in that the number of participants available for discussion was relatively small. More participants would allow for a broader diversity of perspectives even within the established demographic parameters. The perspectives expressed within these focus groups cannot be generally extrapolated and must simply serve as deep explorations of individual cases.

All participants were Utah natives, a point which they themselves recognized as significant and certainly impacts their day-to-day lives in that they experience an environment in which the LDS religion is dominant and demographically significant. LDS participants in states with low percentages of Mormon residents might respond quite differently.

Conclusion

Ultimately, the original research conducted in my focus groups contributes to the larger literature on Mormon masculinity narratives, specifically in how these ideas are reinforced by their influence in the lived experiences of young men. My approach valued depth over breadth, allowing me to capture and transcribe the nuanced thoughts and opinions of young LDS and former LDS men, whose lives have been deeply impacted by Mormon constructions of manhood. What doctrines and behaviors are most important to them? Do they fully endorse LDS culture or do they sometimes break with what they perceive as the prevailing norms? I ultimately conclude that the focus group work supports existing literature in emphasizing the deep entrenchment of the rites of the mission and marriage and providing a backdrop of masculinity construction that emphasizes the moral qualities of restraint and moderation, distinguishing young LDS men from their non-LDS counterparts. It also provides a window into the personal expressions of disagreement, tension, and sometimes distress that arises when hegemonic norms involving manhood acts are laid out in this way.

This essay contributes to the general field at the intersection of sociology of religion and sociology of gender—specifically masculinities. It expands on the potent but relatively sparse literature on Mormon masculinity by supplementing quantitative work on the uniqueness of LDS culture with qualitative explorations of the nature of the church's gender narratives. Further, this study contributes to the literature on life course and its relation to marriage and career. It is valuable to note the ways in which specific

subcultures interpret, rearrange, and redefine acceptable notions of adulthood, maturity, and the sequence of significant events within their own visions of life course. Specifically, I argue that the LDS life course model, like others, are highly gendered and contribute to—and are impacted by—gender norms. However, the LDS life course model also stands apart in the way in which it seems to defy the "conventional wisdom" that ties socioeconomic stability to marriage timing.

Further study in this area should explore a broader, more diverse sample. While my intention was to glean the perspectives of young LDS men themselves, a study across generations could shed light on generational shifts as well as the progression of the masculinity narrative in tandem with advancement in life course. Participants of other genders within the church would also provide valuable insight on their own impressions of the ways in which masculinity is discussed and constructed. Within church doctrine, women are seen as complementary to men, and, thus, their perspective on masculinity would help further illuminate the subject.

Ultimately, "it is necessary to face the facts of sexual power without evasion but also without simplification" (Carrigan, Connell, & Lee 552). In exploring the experiences of the dominant group within the church in depth, I hope to illuminate the ways in which young males are shaped by dominant narratives as well as the ways in which they contribute to them. An emphasis on an accelerated life course, marked by rigid events as well as moral narratives, pushes men to conform in precise ways to "strict standards that [they] are to live by in order to remain 'worthy'" as men (Burke & Hudec 336). While these expectations work for some men and enrich their lives, others feel alienated within their own communities or estranged to the point of leaving the church. Even those who

feel most comfortable within the more exacting traditions of the faith are not uncomplicatedly at ease with them. Personal religion is a constant process of negotiation, and Mormon men consistently engage with their own beliefs and shape them with their own experiences. More deeply understanding this negotiation process allows for a greater understanding of power structures within the church as well as the uniqueness of Mormon masculinity within a broader analysis of American masculinity norms.

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Appendix A

Questionnaire

The following questionnaire consists of questions that were asked of all participating groups. Due the flow of conversation, follow-up questions varied, but these guiding points remained the same.

1. What are your future goals in terms of family?

2. What is the role of the husband/father/man within the family structure?

3. How does your religious environment inform your goals for family?

4. Do you feel that your social status as a man is/would be affected by starting a family?