

“No One Else Was Talking About It, So It Must Be Taboo”
Social Responses to Mormon Feminists

by

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Signature Page	2
Abstract	4
Introduction	4
Background	5
Literature Review	23
Methods	25
Findings	28
Theme: Social Control	28
Theme: Fear	31
Theme: Loss	39
Conclusion & Reflection	43
References	45
Appendices	48

ABSTRACT

This study examines the social consequences Mormon feminists face when they advocate for gender equality in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS or Mormon). Ten in-depth interviews with Mormon feminist women reveal they face both informal and formal social controls or sanctions within their religious communities. Initial emerging themes include: fear, loss, and persistence. Despite facing these issues, many Mormon feminists persist in social activism and remain committed, faithful members of the LDS Church notwithstanding the often-painful consequences encountered.

INTRODUCTION

In March 2013, Ordain Women, a Mormon feminist organization, was founded to advocate for gender equality in the LDS Church. Fifteen months later, founder Kate Kelly was excommunicated for her involvement in the organization and for her support of ordaining women. Following this occurrence, several Mormon feminists who also advocate for women's ordination have been and continue to be threatened with social sanctions and other forms of alienation from their families and religious communities. Despite these negative consequences, Mormon feminists continue their participation in social reform movements.

Previous research has studied the emergence of and justification for the Ordain Women movement (Stromberg 2015; Finnigan and Ross 2013). Scholars acknowledge that "identifying as a Mormon feminist may bring social and religious risks, as feminists were once viewed as a 'danger' to the Church" (Ross and Finnigan 2014:48). My study

aims to understand what happens to these women's public personas in their religious communities and how this impacts their private lives.

The study utilizes in-depth interviews with ten supporters of Ordain Women (OW) to understand the motivations and social consequences of participation with Ordain Women and feminist activism. It explores how the LDS Church, as a gendered organization (Acker 1990), reacts to Mormon feminists, what formal or informal social controls women experience when challenging institutional inequality, and what motivates participants to persist despite potential sanctions. Additionally, the study explores how Mormon feminists plan to navigate their future involvement within their religious communities.

BACKGROUND

From its small beginnings in upstate New York, to its emergence as an international religious institution, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has held a captivating presence and fascination on both the local and the world stage. Officially organized by Joseph Smith on April 6, 1830 in a small cabin in Fayette, New York, five men were asked by Smith to join him as founders to the institution, "to meet New York's legal requirements for incorporating a religious society" (LDS 2003). Noticeably absent in the official record is any mention of women's participation in the organization of the Church. However, what is mentioned is the baptism of two women that day; Lucy Mack Smith, the mother of Joseph Smith, and family friend Sarah Witt Rockwell (Platt 1989:18). Histories outlining the foundational activities of the Mormon Church claim women were important and instrumental in the formation of the Church.

Despite the claims of their integral role, women have largely been absent, or excluded from full participation in the LDS Church. Although women have participated extensively in supportive or auxiliary roles, women's participation as leaders, ministers, theologians, bishops, or any other position of authority is virtually nonexistent.

Andrea Radke-Moss, Professor of History at Brigham Young University – Idaho, argues that “Early women converts and members of Joseph Smith’s immediate family participated in important activities related to the Church’s restoration. From Lucy Mack Smith’s support of her young son’s revelations to Emma Hale Smith’s assistance in the translation of the Book of Mormon, women’s significant contributions to early church history are important and undisputed” (Radke-Moss 2010:352). Even in her claim that women made significant contributions, Radke-Moss identifies women in supportive roles, appendages to the important restoration work of the men. Radke-Moss’ illustration of women’s important contributions advances her assertion that “a woman’s importance in the Church is often interpreted as a one-size-fits-all role or by her relationship to someone else – usually as a supporter or helper to male authority” (2010:351). What is not disputed however, is that Mormon women are participants and contributors to their communities despite confining gender roles.

As mentioned earlier, women were among some of the most committed, engaged, and enthusiastic participants of the early Mormon converts. This era of religious fervor has been called the Second Great Awakening, and areas of New York were so engaged in revivalist movements and gatherings that the region is referred to as the Burned Over District, making reference to the Spirit feeling like a burning in one’s bosom (Vance 2015:20). It was not uncommon for participants of these revivals to have had great

spiritual experiences, including visions, speaking in tongues, and hearing heavenly beings or angels speak. These religious camp meetings also led to mass baptisms and other moral commitments, or conversions to organized religion. It is in this environment that the beginnings of the Mormon faith grew, the foundation of which set important precedent in terms of doctrine, practice, organization, and administrative procedures, most of which either excluded women or restricted their roles to participants, support, or auxiliary functions (Allen 2010:9). Early Mormon women's activities, as mentioned by Radke-Moss, corresponded with women's evangelism of the Second Great Awakening.

Mormon women, like their counterparts, not only experienced personal conversion but also turned their renewed Christian sensibilities toward reform activities like temperance activism, the abolition movement, and charitable relief for the poor. Indeed, when the Relief Society was organized in Nauvoo, Illinois, on March 17, 1842, it mirrored other organizations of its same type throughout New England and the Midwest that were connected to women's reform idealism and community charitable work. (2010:353)

The Relief Society was an organization for women that was formed during the Nauvoo era to fulfill the service needs of the community. Eliza R. Snow drafted a constitution and bylaws for the organization and had them reviewed for acceptance by Joseph Smith. Smith acknowledged that the by-laws, as well as the formation of an official association for women, was indeed a good idea, however, he said "the Lord had something more important for the women and that he would organize them as an auxiliary of the Church" (Thiriot 2010:107). This statement is at once empowering and invalidating, in that it affirms that the work women engage in is important and worthwhile, yet reflects the patriarchal view that women are to serve as or in support roles to the larger, more important organization, the Church. What the prophet Joseph did

in that instance, was to take an idea and organization that was conceived and created by Mormon women, and turn it into an auxiliary that would be overseen and ultimately controlled by the male authority structure of the Church. Smith's action summarily dismissed any female authority or autonomy that would have been associated with an all-woman organization.

Although the Relief Society was organized as an auxiliary to the Church, it did provide a structure for women to participate in leadership functions or otherwise engage in ways within the organization to bring about personal empowerment, as well as a way to engage in service and activities not readily available to women in the larger society. Early records indicate that the Relief Society's guiding principles included caring for the poor, caring for the Church, and promoting economic self-sufficiency. They accomplished these objectives by being active participants in blessing the sick, teaching, storing food to share in time of need, and setting up cooperative stores. Additionally, they helped send women to medical school, and trained nurses and midwives who could in turn spend many years in service to their communities.

The women of the Relief Society engaged in publications to advance education and to raise understanding of diverse issues such as, politics, women's rights, and suffrage. One publication, the *Woman's Exponent*, published from 1872 to 1913 had a masthead that read, "The Rights of the Women of Zion, and the Rights of the Women of All Nations," indicating that Mormon women were concerned not only with advancing equity in their own communities, but in the Nation and the World (Thiriot 2010:108). Social reform was at the forefront of their minds. Nineteenth-century Mormon women enjoyed many of the privileges early feminists and suffragettes did not achieve until the

twentieth century. Women in Utah were the first to receive the right to vote, enjoyed liberal divorce laws, and benefited from child custody laws that were friendly to women. Radke-Moss asserts that, “male leaders encouraged women’s contributions as doctors, teachers, journalists, suffrage activists and politicians and even extended official calls to women to pursue these fields” (2010:354). It’s important to note that one of the male leaders who encouraged women to pursue fulfillment beyond the confines of the home included then-president of the Church, Brigham Young. As the head of the Church, his opinions and admonitions had serious weight and legitimized Mormon women’s desire to engage in activities outside the home. Furthermore, early Mormon women in Utah,

published their own newspaper...and they ran their own independent organization, the Female Relief Society, without interference. Utah women were the first women in the United States to vote in a public election. Inside the church, they preached, gave healing blessings, led organizations, and voted with men to sustain leaders. Outside the church, they attended medical school and were among the first to join the National Council of Women. (Basquiat 2001:6)

In addition to more empowering worldly pursuits, Mormon women were active participants in the development of their faith and spiritual communities, through the structure of the Relief Society. Organized after the pattern of the all-male priesthood quorums, the Relief Society leadership hierarchy consisted of a President and her two counselors. However, as an auxiliary or appendage to the Church, the Relief Society was not a fully autonomous organization. Although the women enjoyed a tremendous amount of freedom and independence in areas concerning fundraising, publications, and election of officers, contemporary members of the Relief Society are constricted in their ability to raise funds, publish information, or select their own officers - a task currently assigned to the local male Bishop.

Sociologist Laura Vance in *Women in New Religions* explains that Mormon feminist scholars view the following as evidence that women had access to priesthood authority,

...women in the Relief Society began to participate in many of the religious rituals that before that time had been restricted to priesthood holders - men - such as consecrating believers with sacred oil, healing via the laying on of hands, and speaking in tongues. (Vance 2015:27)

Despite these restrictions, Joseph Smith encouraged the women to exercise their spiritual gifts. Vance continues that it was not uncommon during the Second Great Awakening for religious leaders to encourage women to participate in public religious activities such as prayers and worship, or to spend time involved with charitable organizations. However, “the Mormon Relief Society conveyed exceptional religious authority to women” (Vance 2015:27). Additionally, Relief Society women actively participated in blessing other LDS women and children, not only in times of sickness or ill health but important blessings of comfort and well-being were performed before childbirth (Radke-Moss 2010). For example, in 1884, Patty Sessions, an early pioneer midwife, wrote in her journal her experience with administrating in the priesthood.

I felt as though I must lay hands on her... I knew I had been ordained to lay hands on the sick and set apart to do that. She had been washed clean and I anointed her, gave her some oil to take, and then laid hands on her. I told her she would get well if she would believe and not doubt it.
(Sessions 1997:362)

In fact, historian Linda King Newell asserts that there were documented instances of women performing ceremonial washing, anointing with oil, and laying hands on the sick, well into the twentieth century, and states that early Mormon women participated in “rituals the contemporary church reserves for male priesthood holders” (Vance 2015:27).

Mormon women continued to perform these priesthood acts up through the mid-twentieth-century, when shifts within the larger community took place following the end of the second World War. Dr. Martha Bradley writes of this shift:

Toward the end of World War II, male leaders redefined the role of women in Mormon society and placed a new emphasis on raising families. In perhaps the single most important official move affecting the relationship of women to their church, on 29 July 1946, general Relief Society President Belle Spafford received a letter from Elder Joseph Fielding Smith of the LDS Quorum of the Twelve Apostles stating that it was no longer approved “for sisters to wash and anoint other sisters.” Instead, women were to “send for the Elders... to come and administer to the sick and afflicted.” Institutional sanction for women performing ordinances of healing was thus officially revoked. (Bradley 2013)

It wasn't until after World War II that then Church president, Joseph Fielding Smith, outlined official Church policy that restricted women from participating in any ceremonial healing blessings, that the tradition of women using priesthood authority to bless others was discontinued. Scholars of Mormon history argue that “as priesthood roles became more strictly defined in the early twentieth century, women’s spiritual and religious roles increasingly eroded” (Radke-Moss 2010:354). The only remnant that remains of women’s authority to administer and bless is found in the washing and anointing ceremony performed for women, and by women in the LDS temples, which is traditionally performed before one marries or when one enters into a covenanted religious adult life.

Women’s early participation in the sacred ceremonies of washing and anointing in the endowment ritual was viewed as progressive, “considering women’s traditional exclusion from temple rites during biblical times” (Radke-Moss 2010: 352). Justification for female leadership and participation in the Church can be found in several places in the

Christian Bible. Examples of Jesus and his dealings with women and the more egalitarian writings of Paul, serve as examples and form the supportive theological foundation and reasoning for inclusion of females in the authority structure of the Church. According to Amy-Jill Levine, scholar at Vanderbilt University, Jesus violated the norms of his day to include women in his ministry as well as his teachings and parables (Austin 2016:2). Women regularly traveled with him, he was a defender of women by example of the woman taken in adultery, and women were the first to witness the risen Jesus. Additionally, women remained in Jerusalem to carry on the teachings of Jesus even after the male disciples had returned to their homes (Austin 2016:3). All of these incidents work together to create a consistent story that Jesus included women in his ministry, that women carried out important functions of that ministry, and that Jesus was not afraid to violate social norms concerning how men interacted with women, in order to spread his own ministry. These and other examples serve to advance feminist theologians arguments for gender equality and greater inclusion of females in the ministry functions of the Church.

However, the writings of Paul can be problematic when presenting an argument for women's participation in church, since his writings have served to bolster the argument against women's equality. One of his most often quoted passages used to support the exclusion of women is his admonition that women are to be silent in the church (1 Cor. 14:34); however, it must be noted that Paul's words were directed toward the Romans whose culture did not allow for or view women as equal in neither ability nor status to men (Austin 2016:3). It could be argued that because Paul's mission was to spread the gospel to the Romans, he needed to be sensitive to the culture and norms of his

audience and therefore, he tailored his message for better reception by the Romans. This argument of women's participation in the administration of the Church is supported upon examining Paul's more egalitarian writings directed toward his own, Hebraic roots. Biblical writings support women as ministers, prophetesses, deacons, co-workers, apostles, evangelists, and as leaders of the Church. For example, two women, Aquila and Priscilla invited a "learned" man into their home to better expound the gospel to him, thus taking on the role of ministers in their own home (Acts 18:23-26). In Paul's letter to the Romans, he addresses many women in the opening greetings and calls them out by name and position: Phoebe as deacon, Priscilla and Aquila as co-workers, Junia as outstanding apostle, and he acknowledged that Tryphena and Tryphosa worked hard for the Lord. These and other examples serve to demonstrate that women were included in various positions of authority and ministry within the early Church (Romans 16: 1-12).

Issues of female ordination is another area that receives attention from contemporary feminist theologians. Female ordination is a socially and culturally important issue "because when women are in leadership positions and involved in formulation of the official theology, there is much less likelihood of misogynistic policies and ideologies." Moreover, "when women are not ordained and in leadership positions, there is a greater likelihood that the meaning systems will develop with a strong bias against women" (Roberts and Yamane 2016:286, 308). Bullough has reinforced these ideas by stating that "regardless of what a religion teaches about the status of women, or what its attitudes toward sex might be, if women are excluded from the institutions and positions which influence society, a general misogyny seems to result" (1973:134). Clearly, it is important to understand how influential religious institutions reproduce

gendered ideologies and the consequences of those doctrines. Additionally, religious scholars contend,

the lack of women in leadership positions can subtly influence attitudes, especially of small children. The absence of women in important positions often communicates to children - much more vividly than any words to the contrary - the social inferiority of females. (Roberts and Yamane 2016: 286)

This illustrates just one of the insidious ways in which gendered thinking is reinforced through religious practices.

Consequently, grassroots efforts have developed across many denominations to advocate for women to be officially added to the authority structure of predominately patriarchal churches. Some scholars declare this to be problematic because the Bible provides no precedent for male ordination, therefore there is no precedent for female ordination (Austin 2016:8). However, the power structures of current Western theology systems ordain men only. Therefore, in order to achieve equality, it is necessary for women to have access to those positions and offices of authority. These grassroots movements are imperative to bringing awareness to inequalities that exist in patriarchal churches because government agencies are hesitant to enact legislation requiring equal gender rights in religious organizations for fear of violating the separation of church and state. Nordic countries which have governments with state run churches have eliminated “sex-based restrictions on ordination” by enacting legislation that guarantees gender equality within those state-run churches (Roberts and Yamane 2016:289). Chaves states, “Religious organizations, as a population, are slower than other types of organization to institute formal gender equality because of their greater autonomy from the state” (1997: 42). Therefore, pressure and agitation from parishioners will be necessary for churches to implement more egalitarian policies and teachings.

This type of agitation has found its way into the LDS Church and was capitalized on by Mormon feminists. Lori Stromberg described how a very public interview given by then-Church president Gordon B. Hinckley, helped encourage agitation for women's ordination. "When asked by a reporter if the Church's exclusionary priesthood policy could change for women - much as it had for black men in 1978 - Hinckley responded, 'Yes. But there's no agitation for that.'" (Stromberg 2015: 17). This statement was a catalyst for inspiring contemporary Mormon feminists. They have created an argument, using historical indicators and current LDS Church theology, to support their efforts in advocating for female ordination.

A group founded in 2013, known as Ordain Women, asserts that gender equality is a fundamental teaching of the Church and that those same teachings support their position. Ordain Women calls for "the ordination of women and their full integration into the governance of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints" (Ordain Women 2013). The members of Ordain Women are committed to creating a public awareness and dialogue to advocate for women's ordination and equality within the LDS Church. They believe that since "leadership and positional authority in Mormonism is inextricably tied to priesthood ordination, it is clear that Mormon women must be ordained in order to be full and equal participants in the church" (Ordain Women 2013). They further believe that public agitation can lead to policy changes that will address the inequalities faced by LDS women and girls.

Opponents to female ordination consider it heretical to advocate for female admittance to the ranks of official priesthood authority. However, those who support female ordination believe that because leadership and authority in the LDS Church is tied

to priesthood ordination, Mormon women must be ordained in order to be full and equal participants in the hierarchal and administrative functions of the Church.

However, the voices of Mormon women have not always lacked institutional acknowledgment or authority. In addition to instances of engaging in historical healing and ceremonial ritual, a select few Mormon women contributed to the theological and doctrinal foundations of the emerging faith. In 1845, Eliza R. Snow, an advocate for women's equality, published words to a hymn that she had written, introducing the concept of a Mother in heaven (Basquiat 2001:20). Originally titled "Invocation, or The Eternal Father and Mother", it is known today simply as "O My Father" and includes the following verses:

In the heavens are parents single?
No; the thought makes reason stare!
Truth is reason, truth eternal
Tells me I've a mother there.

When I leave this frail existence,
When I lay this mortal by,
Father, Mother may I meet you
In your royal courts on high?
(Snow 1985:292)

In Mormon tradition, it is believed that the hymns included in the hymnal reflect approved doctrine and theology, therefore, Snow's introduction of a Mother in heaven, and the publication of those verses indicates that this is an accepted belief, making Snow the first and arguably only female to contribute a significant concept to Mormon theology. The introduction of a female equivalent to God "appealed to women as an empowering notion of women's heavenly equality, usually evoked to raise the political, legal, and religious status of women" (Radke-Moss 2010:352). What is notable about the

name change of the hymn is that the original referenced both a father and a mother, whereas the amended title includes just a father. This is both symbolically and literally significant because it noticeably removes a woman, and not just any woman, a God – a female God, from the vocabulary of Mormon printed liturgy. Literally, because Mother in Heaven has lost her title and symbolically because if Mother in Heaven has lost her position as equal to God the Father, then where do earthly women stand? In fact, it is currently taboo to mention or talk about Heavenly Mother. When one participates in discussions or offers prayers to Heavenly Mother, one can be subject to Church sanctions; whether these sanctions are formal or informal is the determination of local leaders. It is important to recognize and discuss these changes and omissions because to erase Mother in Heaven from the written texts is to recognize that she existed and is a powerful example of the divine feminine.

The doctrines and beliefs concerning Heavenly Mother are not the only ideas that have changed, nor are they the only indication of the need for more empowering gender roles for women in the Church. When examining more current developments in the construction of women's roles within the LDS Church, we find that as the Church moved from the early to late phases of the church-sect continuum, the roles of women have contracted into more restrictive functions. Vance offers an explanation as to why early Mormon women enjoyed more autonomy and authority.

New Religious Movements often afford women access to possibilities not available in more established religious traditions in the wider social context. New religions provide a break from tradition, defining themselves in opposition to established patterns, and so they allow women positions of authority and other opportunities generally denied them (Vance 2015:8).

Vance continues by describing the evolution of women's roles within religious movements on a more global scale. She compares the known progression of religious movements to the historical progression of cultural Mormon women's roles.

Sociologists have long postulated that gender ideals evolve within a religious movement as a consequence of the evolution of the relationship between the movement and its sociocultural context. Weber (1922) was the first to suggest that as religious movements emerge, they exist in a high "state of tension" with their "surrounding sociocultural environments" (Stark and Bainbridge 1985:23) and provide greater opportunities to those, such as women, who are disprivileged in the larger culture, as to do so serves to heighten the movement's distinction from the world. As these movements become bureaucratized and increasingly seek to accommodate secular society, authority and freedoms previously available to women diminish. Weber contends that while women are allowed greater authority in the initial stages of religious development, "only in very rare cases does this practice continue beyond the first stage of a religious community's formation, when the pneumatic manifestations of charisma are valued as hallmarks of specifically religious exaltation." (Vance 2002:92)

This means that as a religious organization gains more influence within the larger society, gender roles become more aligned within and to that society. Vance argues that the history and evolution of women in the LDS Church follows the church-sect continuum. From a sociological perspective, a sect is most often associated with new religious movements. Furthermore, Vance quotes Armand Mauss who indicated that the evolution of cultural norms for Mormon women has regressed from its earlier origins. According to Mauss' view of the church-sect continuum:

One can expect the value and power of women to diminish from the first to the third stage: In the earlier [more sectarian] stages, especially the first one, women are much needed for all kinds of church service. However, in the third stage, the membership is large enough that men can almost always be found for the most important roles. Accordingly, women can be shunted off into the less visible and less powerful auxiliary roles. (Vance 2002:94).

With our understanding of the church-sect continuum we can apply our findings to the current status of women in the LDS Church and how that status is changing. The evolving nature of women's roles within the Church has been explored by Dr. Claudia Bushman, Professor of American history, who specializes in Mormon women's studies. Her contention within the LDS culture is that "women are considered their equals [men] in spirituality, intellect, efficiency, human relations and hard work. Mormons know that their all-volunteer congregations would collapse without this participation. Yet men hold the priesthood, while women do not" (Bushman 2006:111). In other words, Mormons give lip service to equality, but deny it in this most important way. The Ordain Women Board of Directors believes that "despite their gifts, talents, and aspirations, women are excluded from almost all positions of clerical, fiscal, ritual, and decision-making authority" in the LDS Church (Ordain Women 2013). This produces contradictions that lead to confusion with the Church's core teaching of equality. Mormon women's roles in the Church have spanned the spectrum of ideals that have both aligned with and departed from feminist ideologies, thus illustrating the difficulty women find in making changes to their limited roles in a patriarchal society (Radke-Moss 2010).

The priesthood authority in the LDS Church is used in two distinct ways. First, it is believed that those who hold the priesthood, or are ordained to receive the priesthood, have the power and authority to act in the name of God, or to perform both healing and spiritual rituals. The second main function of the priesthood is to have the authority to function in administrative positions such as: bishops, stake presidents, patriarchs, and other general authorities. Additionally, to participate or volunteer as a financial clerk or executive secretary requires one to be ordained to an office of the priesthood. Modern

Mormon women participate in Church when they pray in public, teach classes, speak in Sunday sacramental meetings, and serve formal proselytizing missions. Furthermore, under the authority of the priesthood, women administer the women's and children's auxiliary organizations known as the Relief Society, Young Women's Program, and the Children's Primary. Basquiat explains:

Mormon women entered the twentieth century on the crest of a wave of institutional and personal power. They had joined with national feminists in the National Peace movement, the drive for female suffrage, and the national agenda for reform. The Mormon Relief Society, the young Women's Mutual Improvement Association, and the children's Primary organization gave them opportunities for organizational power, leadership opportunities, and autonomy...In other words, they were still actively engaged in spiritual and social work. (2001:22)

As women began to enjoy more freedom and opportunities during the second wave feminist movement, Mormon women began to see their roles and opportunities for service diminish. The 1960's saw the correlation¹ of all auxiliary organizations: the children's primary, the Sunday School, and the Relief Society. Correlation refers to the consolidation of policy making power and the centralizing of all Church education materials. In practice, this took most of the decision making out of the hands of local leaders, in favor of committees and other professional administrators, usually male, located in the Church's headquarters. Additionally, the Relief Society lost all remaining autonomy it once enjoyed; the building they had raised funds to construct was taken over by Church headquarters, their publication was combined with the general Church's

¹ The word correlation is the word Mormons use to describe the bureaucratic reform policy that redefined the Church's organizational chart "consolidating governance in the Quorum of the Twelve and stripping independent authority from the women's association" (Bowman 2012).

monthly magazine; and women were encouraged by their Church leaders to oppose the ERA. Vance discusses the reaction Mormon leaders had to shifts in the social landscape:

during the 1970's faced with a societal movement for gender equality that penetrated Mormonism, Mormon leaders told women that their obligations were as wives and homemakers, and if it was possible for them to have children, as mothers. (Vance 2015:33)

In fact, Spencer W. Kimball, then-Church president told women to “come home from the typewriter, the laundry, the nursing, come home from the factory, the café” (Bushman 2006:117), implying that women should not be working outside of the home and that the home was where women belonged. This idea was reinforced by Prophet Ezra T. Benson when he said,

No career approaches in importance that of wife, homemaker, mother – cooking meals, washing dishes, making beds for one's precious husband and children. Come home, wives, to your children, born and unborn. Wrap the motherly cloak about you and, unembarrassed, help in a major role to create the bodies for the immortal souls who anxiously await.
(qtd. in Vance 2015:33)

The social issue positions and rhetoric of individual Church leaders have significant effect on the perceived roles of women in the LDS Church. These ideals serve to construct aspirations for women as well as instructing the membership to embrace those “righteous desires,” thus creating norms and values that informal social control will serve to enforce.

As the Church becomes more institutionalized, it follows that it should also begin to conform to or adhere to the larger sociocultural norms and ideals. However, I assert that women's roles, both within the Church and in the community, supports that they, in fact, do not command same privileges or positions of authority that their foremothers once possessed. It has been shown that from the emergence, or beginnings of the

Mormon faith, women were allowed a greater degree of freedom, a greater degree of participation, and a greater degree of autonomy than current female adherents possess. Despite evidence that confirms the lack of female authority, or even a presence, in the power structures of the Church, Mormon women, like their ancestors before them, find ways to navigate issues of inequality, and to find fulfillment in their families, in their communities, and through their personal contributions to the world.

This process creates cultural norms and values that informal and formal social controls serve to enforce.

Norms, then, state what *ought* or *ought not* to be done if such values are to be realized. So, although humans can disobey norms to some extent and do so without instantly self-destructing, their reality and binding force is often evinced most clearly when they are disobeyed. (Clouser n.d.: 3)

Mormon feminists are not immune to consequences of norm violation, particularly religious norm violation. Their religious communities perceive feminist activism at best as disobedience, or at worst, deviance. Opponents to women's ordination believe it to be heretical, or an act of apostasy to advocate for admittance into the ranks of priesthood ordination. However, supporters believe that because leadership and authority in the Church is tied to priesthood ordination, Mormon women must be ordained to be full and equal participants.

An example of this process of norm creation and violation in Mormon culture can be found in an incident that occurred in May 1993, when Church leader Boyd K. Packer delivered perhaps the clearest indicator of the Church's position concerning Mormon feminists. In his address, Packer cautions members against the three "dangers" that have "made major invasions into the memberships of the Church. ...the gay-lesbian movement, the feminist movement, ...and intellectuals" (Peck 1993:74). Five months later, six

prominent Church members were targeted, labeled, and excommunicated for their public position and advocacy in the gay, feminist, and intellectual communities. They are now referred to as the *September Six* and many of my research participants, when speaking of their feminist activism, refer to the time that they first became aware of the *September Six*. More than two decades later, LDS culture regarding social activism has seen little change concerning gays, feminists, or intellectuals.

In fact, in November 2015, the Mormon Church introduced a new policy, commonly referred to as “the exclusion policy”. The policy states “children living in a same-sex household may not be blessed as babies or baptized until they are 18. ...once they reach 18, children may disavow the practice of same-sex cohabitation or marriage and stop living within the household and request to join the church.” The policy further states, “those in a same-sex marriage are to be considered apostates” (Bailey 2015). The “exclusion policy” is viewed by many Mormon activists as a step in the wrong direction, and is evidence that little to no progress has been made toward acceptance or inclusions of gay Mormons. Despite the implementation of the “exclusion policy” Mormon feminists continue to advocate for policy change that will lead to gender equality in the Mormon Church.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Previous Research

A review of recent literature reveals that contemporary Mormon feminist activity is understudied - “few articles refer to Mormon feminists” (Ross and Finnigan 2014: 48). Previous scholarship discusses the “oxymoronic dilemma” that being Mormon and

feminist creates (Ross and Finnigan 2014; Brooks 2014), meaning that it seems contradictory that someone could be both Mormon and a feminist. However, “Mormon feminists do exist and are trying to reclaim their shared history of resistance” (Basquiat 2001:5). Nevertheless, research has “rarely probed the public identity of Mormon feminists as individuals or as a group” (Ross and Finnigan 2014:48). Additionally, they suggest that further studies “should allow individuals to speak for themselves in order to gain insights into their lived experiences as Mormons.” They also acknowledge that “identifying as a Mormon feminist may bring social and religious risks, as feminists were once viewed as a ‘danger’ to the Church” (Ross and Finnigan 2014:49). Moreover, little is known about what motivates participation in this type of activism, or what the consequences and outcomes are to participants. In fact, scholars agree that “less is known and written about contemporary Mormon women,” further illustrating the need for research that highlights their voices (Bushman 2013: xiii).

There is limited research based on archival materials that examines how the LDS Church "constructs gendered background expectations" and what it means to be a woman in the structure of a conservative religion (Sumerau and Cragun 2014:49). Ross and Finnigan’s work on the identity of Mormon feminists reveals the demographics of this group. Through their research they also demonstrate that gender equality is an important issue to Mormon feminists (Finnigan & Ross 2013; Ross and Finnigan 2014).

Consequently, my project narrows the research gap by providing qualitative research that adds to the knowledge of religious social phenomena.

As Mormon women began to see their roles constrict while women in the United States began to experience new forms of freedom and opportunity, a thriving feminist

movement began. Most recently, this emergence has manifested in the organization, Ordain Women, which aims to “create a space for Mormons to articulate issues of gender inequality they may be hesitant to raise alone” (Wallace and Silverman 2014). Why would women be hesitant? Because they fear the social consequences that their words and actions would bring. Participation in feminist activism can have significant consequences for Mormon women. A survey of Mormon Feminists was conducted before the public emergence of Ordain Women that illuminates what some of those consequences are.

Identifying as a Mormon feminist often imposes a heavy social cost, and 56% of respondents reported that they have experienced negative consequences as a result of expressing feminist views. The most common are social ostracism, loss of callings, loss of friendship, exclusion from the temple, and family pressure. (Ross and Finnigan 2014:59)

These themes emerged in my research as well. In analyzing the interview data, I have found that Mormon feminists experienced a wide range of consequences or social controls as a response to their public activism. Sociologists define social controls as “efforts to construct and ensure conformity to a norm,” and social controls have both formal and informal components. Norms are rules for behavior with the implications that violators will be punished or sanctioned when they violate community expectations (Goode 2015:51).

METHODS

The data for this research was drawn from 10 in-depth telephone interviews with Mormon feminist women. Using an interview protocol, I conducted semi-structured in-depth interviews that were audio recorded and later transcribed. Interviews ranged between 40 to 165 minutes in length. Participants were recruited using a combination of

purposeful and snowball sampling techniques. It was purposeful in that I approached women whom I knew to be public supporters of Ordain Women (OW) and had submitted a profile to the OW website. I approached several potential informants on the social media platform, Facebook, after having cultivated relationships of trust through several months of online interactions, which resulted in four interviews. I also posted a request for research participants in a closed Facebook group of Mormon feminists, which produced three interviews. To extend my research reach, I used snowball sampling, which resulted in three additional participants. For this research study, a Mormon feminist is defined as someone who self-identifies as both a Mormon and a feminist.

I selected a qualitative approach because according to Michele Dillion, “Sociologists [use qualitative methods to] seek to explain the context in which particular social patterns and meanings emerge. ...to understand the meanings that they, and their peers who are involved in a particular activity inject into that activity” (Dillion 2014:121). This research design addresses the research questions, which can be found in the appendix, because in-depth interviews are considered the best tool to gather rich details for understanding social science phenomena concerning someone’s lived experiences. The research is exploratory in nature with the intent to understand, describe, and explain the social consequences and sanctions that Mormon women face when participating in feminist activities. Interview data was analyzed to look for patterns to draw conclusions about the meaning, motivations, and consequences of norm violation that Mormon feminists experience.

Demographics

Participants ranged in age from twenty-three to forty-nine years old. All participants were women who self-identify as Mormon and as feminist. Six participants reported being married, while four were single. Of those who were single, three were never married and one divorced. Seven participants have children, while three do not. According to Ross and Finnigan, Mormon feminists tend to be well educated (2014:52). My interview participants were no exception, with eight holding at least a bachelor's degree or higher, while one had some college, and another had never attended college. The educational attainment of Mormons in general is 33% of adults have completed a bachelor's degree or higher (Wormald 2015). Therefore, my research participants were more highly educated than the general LDS Church membership.

Overwhelmingly, 80% of participants were raised in the LDS faith, one converted as a teenager, and the other as an adult. Participants' current church activity as measured by attendance at Sunday religious services is:

- 4 report none to very little attendance
- 2 report some attendance (meaning at least monthly)
- 4 report regular church attendance

Four of the six who report very little to some attendance claim they would like to participate more regularly in weekly church meetings if it were a safer place for either themselves or for their children. Of the four with regular church attendance, two claim they have joined another Church. One would like to attend but has stopped participation because she believes Church is not a "safe" or welcoming place for her and her children. Another believes it to be an environment too hostile for her children. Of those who attend

regularly, one says she will discontinue attendance if and when it becomes too damaging or hostile an environment for her children. Another, who no longer attends the LDS Church, left because it was a hostile environment for her children, yet stated she has since joined another church. This illustrates an emerging theme that women draw the line of church participation when it begins to negatively affect their children.

FINDINGS

Emerging Themes in Mormon Feminism

THEME: SOCIAL CONTROL

Because they are part of Ordain Women, my respondents face informal sanctions at home, and Church. Two examples include “policing codes” of how to dress when attending church services and sanctioning the topics of conversation. One respondent recalls talking with her in-laws about a feminist action:

What do you think of this “Wear Pants to Church Day” thing? And I had a nephew, who was like in high school age, just 15 or 16-year-old boy. Who just went off about how women need to wear dresses and women shouldn't be trying to advocate for things that they are never going to get. He just was really, really against the idea of any kind of change in the Church. Regardless of giving women the priesthood or women being able to wear pants to church. It just struck me that this teenage boy felt like he had the authority to tell me that even thinking that that was a good idea was wrong. And here I am, I could be his mother, and it really, really bothered me. ...But I never brought it up again with my family. Ever, ever, or anything like that because I knew nobody would support me.

One participant shared how she felt about a conversation that she had with her mother and brother about women's Ordination, “she looked disapproving, but she didn't say anything. It was my brother who spoke up, and was like, um, saying things like ‘I'm afraid you're going to apostatize' if women were meant to have the priesthood, they

would have been given it.” She reflected, “And so to hear him just shoot me down like that. He didn’t even ask questions why, or explore at all, why I would want to pursue that. He just shot it right down. And I really felt, like he had no respect for me as a woman. For me as his sister, you know?” Many Mormon women had similar conversations with important members of their families. Another participant voiced her fear of talking about her secret support for women’s ordination.

So anytime it was brought up [at church] it was always squashed really quickly. And so, to hear women who were actively advocating and doing really good logical arguments as to why women should be ordained it was just amazing. Because I had agreed with it, but I was just always afraid to say that I agreed with that. ...I didn't think I was going to be, you know, pulled out of class, and sternly talked to or anything like that. It was more that I didn't want to be thought of as the outsider, as the weirdo because no one else was bringing up these sorts of questions. And no one else seemed to care if there was any inequality between the young men and young women, and things like that. So there really was peer pressure, honestly. I just didn't feel like I could speak up. No one else was talking about it, so it must be taboo.

These informal social controls – potential rejection from the in-group, and comments on appropriate dress from a 16-year-old boy – contributed to controlling the topic of conversation at both home and church.

Formal social controls

There are other, more direct methods the LDS Church can use to enforce policies. The most drastic is the disciplinary council. The most severe punishment which the council can apply is excommunication. One participant described her experience with excommunication this way:

So, a little over a year ago, the Church put out the exclusion policy for LGBTQ Mormons, and I was very outspoken online about that and my Stake President called me in [to his office]. This Stake President had been my Bishop 20 years before so he knew me. He called me in and said, “we need to talk about your apostasy” and brought up, well, he had a whole file on me that he said someone had given him from Salt Lake [Church Headquarters]. It was posts I had written on blogs, it was comments I said on Facebook, it was memes that I’d created, it was just comments that I had left on other people’s Facebook pages. Like someone had really done their homework on me and had given it to him. And he said, “according to everything I’m seeing, you should be excommunicated.”

To understand the gravity of what this means, excommunication in the Mormon Church is the “highest punishment which the Church can impose upon its members. This consists in cutting the person off from the Church so that [they] are no longer a member. Every blessing of the gospel is thereby lost, and unless the excommunicated person repents and gains [their] Church status again, [they] cannot be saved in the celestial kingdom” (McConkie 1979:258). This means that they are separated from their families forever and they are barred from entering heaven. One interview participant recalled her experience with being summoned into her Church leader’s office. She was stripped of all the rights and privileges she enjoyed as a member in good standing, and referred to her experience as having been spiritually raped. Excommunication from the LDS Church is “often an act of spiritual violence masquerading as an act of ‘love.’ In fact, Church leaders euphemistically call disciplinary councils ‘courts of love.’ ... [and] when done on grounds of ‘apostasy’ over matters of conscience, its primary purpose is to silence and marginalize, not to love or redeem” (Hansen 2015: 241). Formal social control in the LDS Church has a profound and defining effect upon the women in my study. It is the foundational fear that keeps most women from feeling like they can participate in asking for changes to the institutional structures of the Church.

THEME: FEAR

Participating in Ordain Women creates much fear in my respondents. For example, Mormon feminists fear include: loss of job or economic stability, fear of losing family or Church support, fear of changes to current friendships with other Mormon women, fear of losing ecclesiastical endorsements that are necessary for attendance and employment at Church universities, and the fear of losing one's personal commitment to faith. Moreover, women fear loss of social capital, alienation from spouse or parents, loss of privileges that allow them to attend family weddings and funerals, and loss of volunteer positions within the Church to self or spouse. Fear is one theme with several aspects. Additionally, there is significant courage needed to simply "like" Ordain Women on Facebook, because that unassuming act can get you in an online debate about your worthiness to be a member of the LDS community. At the time of this writing, 7,155 people have "liked" the official Ordain Women Facebook page (Ordain Women 2017).

Fear of Being "outed" as an online supporter of Ordain Women

One participant recounts her experience with being "outed" on social media.

I was at a critical point about women and the priesthood, but I still didn't want to attract that much attention to myself. So, I didn't really say anything. In April, I was listening to a Sunstone presentation when I decided to put up a profile. I wrote it but didn't tell anyone but my husband. Yeah, I didn't tell anyone.

But I got involved and people kind of found out about my support of Ordain Women around the first action. And of course, the minute they put up the event I "liked" it and said that I might be going. I started following the conversation on the [OW Facebook] page. And of course, all my friends see that I have "liked" this and that I may be going. I didn't understand Facebook privacy settings at the time, so I didn't realize that I'd be outed. I'm making comments on Facebook, you know, and people are

writing mean comments and I'm trying to respond in still a very faithful voice, but in support for Ordain Women, still trying to walk that bridge.

And my father, and one of my close friends saw this [conversation], and they started commenting. ...They were quite upset at having seen this [Facebook post] and start more or less attacking my faith, my faithfulness. And it really put some rifts between me and these friends. Rifts that are still, I'm still trying to heal. How many years are we now – four years later? So yeah. And my own father was like, “You're such an embarrassment to me.” So that was that. And that was hard.

Her continued reflection expresses why this interaction struck her as so significant and hurtful:

It was hard, especially that reaction from my father. It was probably the worst, right? “You're such an embarrassment” like “I'm ashamed” or something like that. So that was really hard for me, coming from my dad. ...But my dad has been very encouraging of me in academics and in sports and stuff growing up. He was just always very encouraging of me to push gender norms in some ways. And for him to be the person who had the most vehement reactions was really hard for me.

This example illustrates the experience of being “outed” on Facebook of at least three of the Mormon feminist women I interviewed. Another example of fear comes from a woman who has several Mormon feminist friends, but not all of them were willing or capable of taking the risk of submitting a public profile to Ordain Women.

We would get together with other women who were sympathetic but were too afraid to put up profiles. Well, we had one woman whose husband said he'd divorce her if she did. We had another woman who really loved the Church. She was in the Relief Society presidency in the ward, and she didn't want to lose that calling. She was afraid she would lose her calling if she put up a profile. And another woman who I think probably was going to put up a profile, but was also in the middle of a move to another area and didn't want to move into the new area with that baggage.

These women were sympathetic to Ordain Women, but fear kept them from putting up a public profile. Loss of family connection, divorce, removal from leadership positions in

the Church, and concerns about being accepted in new congregations were effective social controls against these women. The fear of losing standing in the institutional Church is significant because it effects their ability to officially serve others as agents of the Church. Their ability to teach lessons, direct music, hold leadership positions, or otherwise participate in any significant way, other than simply attending Sunday services, is at stake. They might even lose their ability to take part in the weekly sacramental ritual or to pray in public meetings. In extreme instances, some have lost their privileges to attend weddings or funeral services of family members because of their public support of Ordain Women.

In addition to the examples already provided about the fear of being publically outed as a Mormon feminist, another told me about her decision to post a profile on the Ordain Women website.

Like I said, I'd seen it [Ordain Women] when it first launched because I was on the Feminist Mormon Housewives blog and there was some post about it there, so I knew the day that it had gone up [the launch of the Ordain Women website]. I watched every profile go up. I read every single one of them over the course of a couple of years. And I got to the point where, and it had been happening for a while, I'd go to church and I don't feel the spirit there. And it's kind of hard to keep going and to not know why you go because I'm just not feeling it. But every time I read a new profile, I would feel the spirit, this overwhelming feeling that "you need to put one up too."

But I was just too scared. I thought, "what if somebody in the ward sees it? What if the bishop sees it and I get in trouble? What if people make trouble for my husband if they saw it and asked him about it and things like that. So, I was really afraid to. But I finally got to the point where I felt like if I didn't start listening to the prompting that it was going to go away. If that was the only time that I was ever feeling the spirit, I was really nervous about losing it entirely. And so, I did, I made a profile and it took me three or four days to write it. And I had my husband read it, which I was a little nervous about. But he said it was good and he supported me.

We were at about the time of year for tithing settlement when I did that. So, when we were meeting with the Bishop I just wanted to give him a heads up and kind of asked him, “how would you feel if I put this profile up?” He just looked at me like a deer in the headlights and he didn’t even know what to say. He was like “I don’t know, I guess that’s fine.” So, I didn’t really pursue it with him anymore and he didn’t ever bring it up with me. I mean, I never had anyone complain or anything like that, but yeah, I finally put it up and I felt so good about it. It was, I felt like it was a strong step for me.

There are many aspects of fear described in this passage, and it also reflects many of the themes and findings of my research. She has concerns about the social consequences her husband might experience because of her feminist views. She mentions being concerned about changes to her faith or spirituality, even though she attends church services on a regular basis. She is most spiritually fed by reading personal accounts of Mormon feminists who have posted public statements and testimonies of why they support female ordination in the LDS Church on the Ordain Women website. There are hints of the empowerment she felt in acting on her desire to publicly post her feminist views. Yet, in her attempt to be proactive in informing her ecclesiastical leader about her intentions, she submitted to the potential of being told to “stand down.” This participant was fortunate to have a Bishop who was not well enough informed or prepared with a ready response as to why she should not submit a profile on the Ordain Women website. This is sometimes referred to as “leadership roulette,” meaning outcomes for feminist participation are determined by the gamble of one’s local priesthood leadership. Responses by local Church leaders are not the same across the board, nor are they consistent from the institutional Church, or Church headquarters.

Fear of Economic Loss

Fear extends to being seen in public as a supporter of Ordain Women, the “what if someone sees me?” fear. Women expressed concern about attending public actions, protests, or meetings that were sponsored by Ordain Women. They feared their picture might appear in local newspapers or on television, which would “out” them as sympathizers of female ordination. This public outing can have serious outcomes that range from job loss, to loss of social standing in local congregations, and loss of ecclesiastical endorsements necessary to attend or teach at Church universities.

Employment in a predominantly LDS area can be tied to religious activity and commitment. It is a legitimate fear that employment could be at stake when engaging in feminist activism. The most dramatic example of this fear was articulated by a woman who is a professor at Brigham Young University, which is owned and operated by the LDS Church. When asked about her initial participation with Ordain Women, this was her response.

I heard about it online when it first started and they had their first public meeting... and I thought “I’m gonna go to that meeting and see what’s going on.” It was so exciting to me because finally, it was an organized attempt to articulate feminism within the Mormon Church and ultimately take it on in my lifetime...I sat towards the back and there were some news reporters there taking pictures. I found myself every time that the camera would take pictures over by where I was, I just would duck down. Because I was terrified that my picture would be in the Tribune and there I am a university, a BYU professor, with her picture on the front page of the Tribune at this Ordain Women activity.

This participant has a legitimate fear of losing her job because of her interest in supporting Ordain Women. She decided that the social cost was too high to submit a public profile to the Ordain Women website, or attend any other public events. Her silent

support of female ordination and feminist ideals continues on the back-end, in less public and less risky ways. Her fear of not only being publically outed, but also of her potential loss of job and income, has forced her to change the ways in which she supports feminist ideals. Her feminism is practiced largely in small one-on-one interactions, and certainly in an underground and covert manner. She is always aware and cognizant of how she must frame her actions and classroom rhetoric to conform with dominant Church ideologies about gender, while encouraging her female students to find fulfillment and empowerment through pursuing educational goals.

Another example that hints to the consequences Mormon women face, and in fact did face, in their employment when “discovered” for their support of female ordination. This participant reflects on what others experienced as she was growing up and becoming aware of the penalties Mormon feminists face.

Mormon feminism in my upbringing was very violent, it was highly opposing. It tore a lot of my father's siblings apart with my aunt being involved in the ERA movement. I realized in that moment I had all of this angst around it. Plus, I had witnessed [Professor] Cecelia [Koncher Farr] get kicked out of BYU in 1993 for her [feminist] views. And there was a lot of punitive repercussions around being an outspoken Mormon feminist. But I was so supportive and intrigued by what was going on. So that was the beginning.

Again, this participant did not submit a public profile to the Ordain Women website, but she continues quietly to advocate her feminist views in the way she mentors young women in her church and university communities. She suppresses feminist views in public settings so that she can maintain the social capital necessary to have influence and standing within her religious community.

Another academic spoke about learning to navigate feminist issues while attending Brigham Young University as an undergraduate student. She reflects on watching professors and mentors get pushed out of Church employment for their intellectual pursuits and feminist writings.

That was really my first grounding in a tradition of Mormon intellectualism and, in particular, Mormon feminism. So, you know, that said, that undergraduate education came on the heels of the *September Six*, right? And Maxine Hanks, on authority [and the priesthood], and Gayle Houston being guilty as charged, fired while I was an undergraduate. I was working with her when she had to leave and go to Arizona. Eugene England was, I won't say fired, but there was that fiasco where he had to go to Utah Valley. ...So, we're coming up on all those things where you have the Church and BYU doubling down on Mormon intellectuals, even when their scholarship was sound.

And so that moment of being an undergraduate, and being mentored by feminist English department professors, those men and women at the time, the lesson that I was taught at that point was be very, very careful. If you want to go on in academia, if you ever want to have a relationship with the Church in academia or if you want to be back at BYU, you don't publish in *Dialogue*, you don't publish in *Exponent*, you don't publish in *Sunstone*, you stay far, far away from *Sunstone*. And so, I was privy to a lot of the behind the scenes conversations in history of what a mess the Church had made of the faculty in that English department in the 1990s, particularly the first half of the 1990s. And being very aware of that, I'm sure has, well it pushed feminism underground. It pushed Mormon intellectualism underground for at least a decade. And it taught me caution. It certainly taught me that I can get [fired or excommunicated], ...but it certainly taught me to be very wary, and to recognize the consequences of my choices before I make them, so I could be informed about what I'm doing. So that informs me even today.

This same sentiment was expressed by Dr. Kristy Money during her interview with John Dehlin on the Mormon Stories podcast in July 2015. When Dr. Money and her husband Rolf Straubhaar discussed submitting profiles to the Ordain Women website, they both understood that any chance for future employment as

professors at a Church university would be destroyed because of their public and visible support of female ordination (Money and Dehlin 2015).

Fear of Changes in Faith - Involuntary Faith Transitions

Another surprising theme of fear emerged; fear of changes in personal expressions of faith, or involuntary faith transitions. Several women I spoke with told me their religious lives and beliefs have changed because of how the Church has responded to Mormon feminism. Some even indicate that it is the Church's lack of response that is challenging to their faith. Here is one participant's observation.

The lack of response from the Church, about Ordain Women, them not giving them any audience, or any kind of response has really made me doubt [the brethren] I kind of doubt that they are actually Prophets, Seers, and Revelators now. I don't have a temple recommend anymore because I don't think I could go to the interview and answer that question, "Do you believe that they are called to be prophets, seers or revelators" question. It's kind of a big change. I hate to say I'm losing my faith over it, but I kind of am.

A statement of belief in the prophetic call of the Church leadership is necessary to receive a temple recommend. Another stated:

I've become more distrustful of Church leadership. I feel like I mistrust the institution of the Church more. And so, I may have made changes to sort of avoid them or hedge against them or even internally sort of build this wall around, because I just feel very unsure and mistrustful of Church leadership, and so that's probably the biggest thing. I still go to church and I still worship with the saints, but I just don't respect or trust the leadership like I used to, and a lot of it, I think, is from feeling unsupported and just watching the whole thing unfold. And of course, there are many other women who were not treated well and I know of their situation. So, I feel like outwardly it would look like my life hasn't changed very much. But inwardly I do feel more guarded and more mistrustful of the institution.

The women that I interviewed have also experienced changes to key indicators of religiosity. Some of the dimensions specific to their religious practices that emerged in my interviews are: reductions in the amount of money donated to the Church in the form of tithing, less regular Sunday church attendance, and reduction in participation of religious rituals at the temple. Some women will even intentionally put off laundry day with the intention to run out of clean religious undergarments, in favor of wearing her regular panties. Three of the ten women have discussed attending different churches. One woman now attends the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, where she is an ordained Deaconess. Additionally, two women have attended services at the Community of Christ, one of whom will be baptized into that Church later next month. The Community of Christ is similar in doctrine and theology to the LDS Church because both were founded on the teachings of Joseph Smith, yet the Community of Christ, Ordains Women.

These examples reflect the thinking and practices of many of the other women I interviewed. When asked about how their involvement with the Church has changed since they began public support of Ordain Women, almost all of them have had significant shifts in not only how they practice, but in the dimension of their beliefs.

THEME: LOSS

Public supporters of Ordain Women have risked alienation from their families, friends, and Church community not only because of their activism, but because their theological views do not align with the hegemonic ideologies of gender.

Loss of Volunteer Positions within the Church

Volunteer positions in the LDS Church are referred to as callings. Holding a calling is so common that not having one would be viewed as a sign of being unworthy or unfit to serve at any level. Therefore, when women lose a calling, they also lose social capital, and social standing in their religious communities. One participant discusses who quickly she lost her calling after it was discovered that she supports women's ordination.

There was an immediate consequence. There was an immediate withdrawal of friendship, withdrawal of their kids playing with my kids... You know, no longer invited to the birthday party or whatever it is, you know. So that was immediate and fast, and like a black and white line. I was very quickly released from my calling in the Young Women's presidency.

The fear of becoming someone in the out-group is significant because it is quick in its execution and severe in its consequences.

Loss of Connection

A board member of Ordain Women lost her connection to family and community. In fact, Dr. Money received formal Church discipline for her position on the board and for her determination to adhere to the tenants of equality. Dr. Money lost her temple recommend, her ability to speak to fellow members when she attended church, and her family forbid contact with her younger siblings. She wrote a blog post about what this action means to her.

Local priesthood leaders threatened to remove my temple recommend because I am on the Executive Board of Ordain Women. Exactly one year after I witnessed the Church excommunicate my friend Kate [Kelly] ...they stripped me of my recommend. ...Taking my recommend harms me as a person, places a man between me and God, and labels me as worthless (the natural meaning of not being worthy).

...my leaders also put me under formal sanction to not speak because of my questions regarding inequality, a sanction my former leadership in Texas had similarly imposed on me before we relocated to Georgia. “Not even in the hallways,” my Texas leader decreed. But I could *not* remain silent, especially after I heard Church Spokeswoman Ally Isom publicly state that conversations about difficult topics including women’s ordination and the priesthood/temple ban for Black members were welcome in a congregation, in Sunday School, in women’s meetings. Sadly, my experiences have not mirrored Isom’s inclusive invitation.

...I admit, the thought crossed my mind to comply to priesthood leaders’ demands, acquiescing to a silent and obedient existence. But when I soul-search, study, and pray about the decision, I received my own answer: Equality always comes at a price to those who fight for it. (Money 2015)

Not only was Dr. Money forbidden to speak at church, her temple recommend was revoked and with it her ability to attend religious rituals or family weddings. From the podcast interview with John Dehlin, Money states that her parents have forbidden her from interacting with her younger siblings who still live at home, and she was asked not to attend the funeral of a beloved family member (Money and Dehlin 2015). Temples are important to members of the Mormon faith because they are sacred spaces where religious ceremonies and covenants occur. Interestingly enough, temples are closed on Sunday because weekly worship services are not conducted in those sacralized spaces. However, to enter a Mormon temple, one must possess a recommend endorsed by two local leaders, after having answered a series of questions which serve as a litmus test for worthiness and adherence to essential Church doctrines.

Loss of Fear

I asked these women why they continue participation in Ordain Women despite the negative consequences. The emerging theme in their responses lead me to one

conclusion. They have nothing else to lose because they have lost all fear. Their social capital is spent, and many of their former connections to their religious communities are gone. They persist because they no longer have anything left to fear losing. One woman told me she speaks up because she recognizes her privilege.

Well, I mean part of it is that I don't have as many challenges as other people. ...I try to say as much as possible because I know that I am safe where I am, and the Bishop is not going to excommunicate me. And other people do not have that luxury. And so, I need to stick my neck out. Like, it's kind of like privilege. *I have California Mormon privilege* where I can do things that Utah Mormons can't do without dire consequences to their membership. And you know, their idea of what their eternal family means to them. If they lose their membership in our community, there are consequences – eternally, and things like that. I do not have those consequences and so I feel like I ought to be doing some stuff.

Another no longer feared what her local priesthood leaders would do or say to her if she continued her support.

I still do participate [in Ordain Women] and I think that I've gotten to a point where it doesn't matter as much. Like, if I were to go and participate, and the stake president got wind of it, and was upset, and I got called into his office. That's what I always feared before, and that's what held me back. But... it doesn't really matter what this guy says or not. I believe, and I have felt the spirit confirm, that women should be ordained and being a part of this organization is what I should do... I just think there is strength in numbers. And as more people see that this isn't just some tiny offshoot but that there's hundreds, there's thousands of women that feel this way - I want to lend my support to their voices. I think that it's right and it makes me feel that I have some control in my life and a little bit of power. And that maybe I don't have a Church, but that I can speak up.

Another no longer feared standing up to her local leader.

I'm never going to put myself in a position where a priesthood leader isn't equal with me. Where I don't speak up for myself. So, I am reminded of how I'm not just advocating for myself in that room, but I'm advocating for all women.

While fear is such a prominent theme as women engage in Ordain Women and deal with consequences, once they become committed to gender equality, they move past their fear. Thus, the loss of fear seems to be a stage in the process of leaving the Church.

CONCLUSION AND REFLECTION

Mormon feminists and supporters of Ordain Women have done more than advocate for gender equality in the LDS Church. They have found their voices, their power, and their strength. They have organized, inspired, and changed the conversation about women's roles in the Church. Before the emergence of Ordain Women, female ordination in the LDS Church was only something that was whispered about in the online progressive, communities of what is affectionately called the "bloggernacle" - or written and talked about at *Sunstone* and other publications. Today, the Mormon community is more willing to hold conversations and explore forgotten doctrines that point to the fact that early women had access to the priesthood to perform blessings and serve others in a way that is not available to contemporary Mormon women.

There are many questions my study explored about what motivates women to speak up, if they could. When did they first notice gender inequality in the Church? What did it feel like to push against the power structures of the Church? How have they created community and space to practice their beliefs - even if they are shifting away from the main body of the Church? The research interviews produced rich data that could be used to further understand the lived experiences of Mormon feminists. The data could be used to look at how experiences with Ordain Women influenced women to succeed in their

activism. Advocating not only for female ordination, many women also enlarged their understanding in how marginalized groups experience oppression.

The process of conducting, transcribing, and analyzing the data from these women's interviews has at times been heartbreaking, yet I still witnessed incredible hope, strength, and resilience. In advocating for structural changes in the Church, these women opened themselves up to an incredible amount of vulnerability. They shared brave stories of not backing down in the face of oppression, standing up for others, reaching out to the marginalized, and caring for the welfare of all the women in the Church who yearn for more inclusion in not only the administration of the Church, but in the spiritual practices not officially offered to women. The experiences of these women reminds me of what Maya Angelou said in reference to Hillary Clinton, "Each time a woman stands up for herself, without knowing it possibly, without claiming it, she stands up for all women" (Jones 2007). The indomitable spirit of Mormon feminism is one of determination, tenacity, resiliency, and courage to challenge authority and systems of oppression. They are steadfast like their pioneer foremothers, forging an uncharted landscape in the hopes of reaching their own idea of Zion.

The paradox of Mormon feminism is that they are often ejected from their religious communities because of their beliefs and for their advocacy of an expansive inclusivity. In working to make a space for more participation - their ability to participate in meaningful ways has diminished, their ability to influence others has evaporated, and they are often left to forge new ways to practice belief that do not always align with the main body of the Church.

Nevertheless, they persisted

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APPENDIX A
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1. Tell me about your background in the Mormon Church. (Age at time of baptism)
2. Tell me about a time when you felt you were pushing up against the Mormon practice that women are second to men.
 - What was the setting? How did people respond?
 - In a Formal church setting?
 - Informal church settings? (social groups, enrichment nights, etc.)
 - Has there been other experiences? If so how many?
3. Tell me about what brought you to thinking about why women should be ordained?
4. Is there a time you felt uncomfortable with speaking about gender equality and the Church? Tell me more about that.
5. How did you become involved with or interested in Ordain Women?
 - Why did you decide to submit a profile? How did people respond?
 - How did you feel when that happened?
6. Tell me about reactions you receive from family or friends for your views and participation in Ordain Women.
 - How did they respond? How did you feel when that happened?
7. Are your priesthood leaders aware of your involvement with Ordain Women? If so, walk me through how your local priesthood leaders reacted to this?
 - How did you respond? How did you feel when that happened?
8. How do women in your religious community respond to you?
9. What about women opposed to your participation in Ordain Women?
 - Why do you think that is?
10. Did you make any changes to your life because of the opposition you faced?
11. Tell me about how you participate in church now?
 - How has that changed since your participation in OW?
12. Has your commitment to the Church changed since participating in OW?
13. Why do you continue participation in OW despite the challenges you have mentioned?

IRB
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
 Office of Research Compliance,
 010A Sam Ingram Building,
 2269 Middle Tennessee Blvd
 Murfreesboro, TN 37129



IRBN001 - EXPEDITED PROTOCOL APPROVAL NOTICE

Wednesday, February 15, 2017

Investigator(s): Jennifer Cros(Student PI) and Gretchen Webber (FA)
 Investigator(s') Email(s): jmc2dd@mtmail.mtsu.edu; gretchen.webber@mtsu.edu
 Department: Sociology/Anthropology

Study Title: Mormon feminist activism and ordain women: Social responses to religious norm defection in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints
 Protocol ID: 17-2133

Dear Investigator(s),

The above identified research proposal has been reviewed by the MTSU Institutional Review Board (IRB) through the **EXPEDITED** mechanism under 45 CFR 46.110 and 21 CFR 56.110 within the category (7) *Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior*. A summary of the IRB action and other particulars in regard to this protocol application is tabulated as shown below:

IRB Action	APPROVED for one year from the date of this notification	
Date of expiration	2/28/2018	
Participant Size	10 (TEN)	
Participant Pool	Adult female individuals (18 and older)	
Exceptions	1. Allowed to collect identifiable contact information to facilitate the research 2. Permitted to audiotape non-identifiable research survey 3. Approved to administer verbal informed consent	
Restrictions	1. Mandatory informed consent 2. Destroy/delete audio data after transcribing data	
Comments	None	
Amendments	Date	Post-approval Amendments
		None at this time

This protocol can be continued for up to THREE years (2/29/2020) by obtaining a continuation approval prior to 2/28/2018. Refer to the following schedule to plan your annual project reports and be aware that you may not receive a separate reminder to complete your continuing reviews. Failure in obtaining an approval for continuation will automatically result in cancellation of this protocol. Moreover, the completion of this study MUST be notified to the Office of Compliance by filing a final report in order to close-out the protocol.

Continuing Review Schedule:

Reporting Period	Requisition Deadline	IRB Comments
First year report	1/31/2018	TO BE COMPLETED
Second year report	1/31/2019	TO BE COMPLETED
Final report	1/31/2019	TO BE COMPLETED

The investigator(s) indicated in this notification should read and abide by all of the post-approval conditions imposed with this approval. [Refer to the post-approval guidelines posted in the MTSU IRB's website.](#) Any unanticipated harms to participants or adverse events must be reported to the Office of Compliance at (615) 494-8918 within 48 hours of the incident. Amendments to this protocol must be approved by the IRB. Inclusion of new researchers must also be approved by the Office of Compliance before they begin to work on the project.

All of the research-related records, which include signed consent forms, investigator information and other documents related to the study, must be retained by the PI or the faculty advisor (if the PI is a student) at the secure location mentioned in the protocol application. The data storage must be maintained for at least three (3) years after study completion. Subsequently, the researcher may destroy the data in a manner that maintains confidentiality and anonymity. IRB reserves the right to modify, change or cancel the terms of this letter without prior notice. Be advised that IRB also reserves the right to inspect or audit your records if needed.

Sincerely,

Institutional Review Board
Middle Tennessee State University

Quick Links:

[Click here](#) for a detailed list of the post-approval responsibilities.
More information on expedited procedures can be found [here](#).