

**I Like to Help My Mother:
Divine and Performative Femininity as Presented to LDS Children**

Senior Thesis
Submitted in partial fulfillment
of requirements for graduation in
Integrated Studies Emphasis in
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By

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Approval Page

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PERSONAL STATEMENT

When I was eight years old, I was baptized a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, as most children raised Mormon are. I remember a few things about that day. I do not remember getting in the water or its temperature. I don't remember "feeling the spirit" as many people report. I don't even remember my father being there, although he was, since he was the one who baptized me. I remember that it all took place in one room. I had to share my baptism with Sheldon Scott, who had also turned eight that month. I wore a normal church dress before and after my baptism, probably purple and certainly homemade, as all my clothes were. I remember my mother giving a talk, which I now know must have been about baptism, but all that I remember was her telling an embarrassing story about the time I used my parents' plane tickets as a bookmark, causing them to nearly miss a trip to New York. After the baptism, we went to dinner at Pizza Hut.

At the beginning of this year I started to think more about my own baptism as my daughter, Bridget, approached eight years old, her own baptism about 6 months away. Things had changed with LDS baptisms, specifically for girls. As many of Bridget's friends had already turned eight, I had seen new patterns and norms emerging. All of the girls wore white dresses, looking more like little brides than the second-grade children they were. They had professional photographs taken in front of LDS temples, sometimes with scriptures in hand, sometimes flowers (making them even less distinguishable from bridal shots). Fancy invitations to the baptisms were mailed and after-parties were sometimes catered events. I wondered where and when this had all started. Then I remembered a framed poem I saw hanging in a friend's

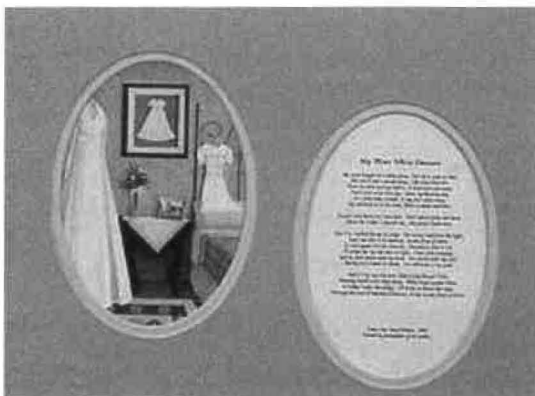


Figure 1 *My Three White Dresses* by Linda Gay Perry Nelson

bedroom after I moved to Utah as a teenager.

The Poem, *My Three White Dresses*, by Linda Gay Perry Nelson, describes the most important days of a girl's life; her baby blessing, her baptism, and finally, her marriage in a temple, as marked by the three white dresses she will wear to them. The poem also emphasizes the symbolic purity of the dresses as the goal of a girl's life: purity as an infant, clean from sin

at baptism, and remaining chaste and pure to enter the temple. I was uncomfortable with the poem. It felt foreign. It was supposed to represent me, my aspirations, and my divine role in life. Yet, I couldn't see myself in the poem or the accompanying image of the three simple dresses, prominently displayed in the clean, non-descript room. It seemed to reduce girls and women to uncomplicated feminine essences. I knew that the church preached a strict, divinely ordained gender binary, which was both exhaustive and mutually exclusive, but I wondered just how early in life these messages were being given to children through church channels of communication.

From both a social construction and a socialization standpoint on gender, it is important that we examine the existing gender norms and expectations within a societal subset, such as Mormons. Learning how gender is explained and modeled, in terms of both femininity and masculinity, to children can help us to think more critically about our existing binary assumptions and our personal lives.

The roles of men and women are becoming confused. Girls are dressing like boys and the boys are looking more and more like girls. We have a great need in the Church today to develop masculinity in our boys and femininity in our girls. This is counter to much of what is happening in the world. (Insights from June Conference, Victor B. Brown, Ensign, October 1975)

One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman. (Simone de Beauvoir, The Second Sex)

INTRODUCTION

In *The Hallmarks of Righteous Women: Gendered Background Expectations in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints*, authors J. Edward Sumerau and Ryan T. Cragun examine LDS archival material to determine how the church constructs gendered background expectations. They looked specifically at how femininity is defined and taught by Mormon leaders and subsequently re-disseminated by LDS women. They found that femininity is stressed as both a divine attribute with qualities with which all women are endowed and also as performative: something that must be practiced.

Using the framework provided by Sumerau and Cragun as well as the conclusions that they reached, this thesis will examine Mormon constructions of femininity as communicated to children in the LDS church. This project will attempt to determine if femininity is defined for children, how it is presented, and whether that definition is consistent with the construction offered by church leaders to Mormon women.

Mormon texts for this study have been selected because they are used specifically in communication to children. This research has examined these texts for the way that they portray ideal femininity. Texts pertinent to this research include official church publications such as the *Friend Magazine*, the *Primary Children's Songbook*, and *Primary and Family Home Evening*

Manuals. Non-church publications were also examined such as websites used by members for sharing teaching ideas (specifically Sugardoodle.net), and other cultural artifacts as appropriate.

This research has identified the ways that femininity is communicated specifically to children (ex., what mothers do, how girls help and serve, etc.), and has established categories of being and doing, providing examples of each. New patterns not observed in communication to LDS women have also emerged and are explored in this project. This research is largely qualitative and as such does not involve any surveys or quantifying data. While future studies may be concerned with the frequency of discussions of femininity within Mormonism, this research is primarily concerned with the specific content of the discussion itself.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Social theorist Emile Durkheim saw religion as a social fact developed within societies to define and demonstrate the collective conscious. Most religions, he said, stress group welfare over the individual by teaching that the good life is achieved through service to community (Durkheim, 2008). While the manifest purpose of religious rituals, such as songs, prayers, and pageantry, is to strengthen an individual's bonds to god, the latent result of rituals is that they strengthen an individual's bonds to their religious community. Durkheim asserted that religious experiences are real, but that they are the result of what he called "collective effervescence." Collective effervescence is the energy that flows through a group participating in a ritual experience together. This experience can produce a euphoric sensation that bonds an individual to a group and makes them feel that they are engaged in something greater than themselves. Collective effervescence is not limited to religious rituals. It can be felt anytime a group gathers for a common purpose such as at a concert or sporting event or at a convention (Durkheim,

2008). Although Durkheim could certainly be considered a social constructionist as well as a functionalist, he saw women as being outside of the sphere of social influence, and therefore viewed their role in society as having a more natural or biological origin. Durkheim may explain religion from a functional perspective, but for him, women's roles in religion would be simply an extension of their biology.

Karl Marx agreed with Durkheim to some extent, but he emphasized the role of the bourgeoisie in the generation of the collective conscious and the religion derived to support it. Marx famously called religion, "the opium of the people" because of its ability to dull the outrage of the oppressed proletariat who would instead assume justice would be done in a world to come (Marx, 2017). While Marx believed that religion would come to an end at some time in the future when capitalism would fail, and communism would emerge, eliminating social classes, Durkheim thought that even in a completely just world, religion would still exist to support the collective conscious. It might instead emerge as civil religion. A civil religion is a functional alternative to traditional religion. Not all religions require a deity. Civil religions would still have sacred texts, icons, and rituals. Sociologist Robert Bellah described the American Civil Religion as a certain set of values, including individual liberty and democracy, held by Americans (Bellah, 1975).

Max Weber shared some of the perspectives of Marx and Durkheim, but stated that ideas had more of an effect on individual actions than materials. While Marx looked at the way that economies influence society and religion, Weber looked at the way religion influenced economies (Weber, 2003). He also identified three types of authorities: traditional, routinized, and rational. Religion can be associated with all three. Religion relies at its inception on traditional authority, authority granted to people based on social facts. Traditional authority can

include patriarchy, monarchy, theocracy, and gerontocracy. The authority need not be charismatic, elected, or educated. It is simply power claimed by the powerful. Religion is generally used to reinforce power (Queen of England as head of Church of England). Routinized authority is the authority granted to people simply for holding the position that they hold. Their authority is routinized by costumes, rituals, etc. The routine itself gives a sense of charisma to a person who might not actually be charismatic. "Respect for the office" is an example of routinized authority. Rational authority is the authority given to people who actually hold education or expertise in a specific area. While someone with traditional authority might be seen as having authority on all matters, a person with rational authority would have authority only over their area of specialization. Weber theorized that the protestant work ethic (work as not a means to an end but the end itself) produced rational capitalism, but that rationalism eventually no longer needs the support of religion. Most religions are still based on traditional authority, but as rational authority becomes more valid to people, traditional religions rationalize traditional authority via communication.

Drawing on the works of Hegel and Marx, Nancy Hartsock developed Feminist Standpoint Theory. Commonly referred to as simply Standpoint Theory, it claims that power relations structure society, and that men are the dominant, privileged group. Women's lives are, in this context, systematically and structurally different from men's. A standpoint is not based just on belonging to a specific group, but to the individual's experience within that group in opposition to or relationship with the dominant (Wood, 2005). Standpoint Theory asserts that the position of women and other oppressed populations should be privileged because they understand both their own position as well as the position of the dominant group whose needs they serve. According to standpoint theorist Sandra Harding, "...the activities of those at the

bottom of such social hierarchies can provide starting points for thought- for everyone's research and scholarship- from which humans' relations with others and the natural world can become visible" (Harding, 1993)

Muted Group Theory shares the idea with Standpoint Theory that men are represented as the dominant group in society and goes on to examine the ways language reinforces patriarchy. Muted does not mean that the group has no voice at all. Instead, it refers to the ways the group must change their language to communicate with the dominant group. Ethnographic stories and the development of language overrepresent the dominant group. The Muted Group theorist Cheri Kramarae says that language, "embodies the perspective of the masculine more than the feminine" (Kramarae, 1991).

A Social Constructionist approach to femininity would hold that our ideas about gender emerge out of a dynamic process of interactions with the world around us. Social Construction differentiates sex and gender, stressing that "Sex...was what was ascribed by biology; anatomy, hormones, physiology. Gender...was an achieved status; that which is constructed through psychological, cultural, and social means." (Zimmerman, 1987) Performative gender theory views gender as an accomplishment achieved by correctly doing ones prescribed gender role in a variety of situations. Performed gender results in reinforcement of essential gender categories (Butler, 2004).

Gender Essentialism assumes that women have a fixed, universally feminine essence. This reductionist theory limits the effects of time, space and experience on female character and emphasizes biological traits (Witt, 2011). Mormonism stresses gender essentialism. Femininity in Mormonism is taught, "in ways that sanctify gender inequality" (Cragun, 2015). Scripture is

often used to reinforce feminine virtue by emphasizing women's roles as obedient, virtuous, and nurturing.

Background Information

Raising children is a major focus of Mormon life. Mormon theology teaches that all people are all spiritual children of a heavenly mother and father. Biological parents have a custodial role in raising their children, unless they are sealed as a family in a Mormon temple. Raising righteous children is a core component of a Mormon's test during earthly life (Dollahite, 2009).¹ To better institutionalize and highlight this message, the church released a document called *The Family: A Proclamation to the World* during a general meeting of the Relief Society² in September of 1995. Gordon B. Hinckley (then president of the church) described it as, "a declaration and reaffirmation of standards, doctrines and practices relative to the family which the prophets, seers, and revelators of this church have repeatedly stated throughout its history" (Hinckley, 1995). The proclamation states that marriage between a man and a woman is "ordained of God" and that gender is "an essential characteristic of individual pre-mortal, mortal, and eternal identity and purpose." It goes on to describe the roles of men and women as fathers and mothers:

By divine design, fathers are to preside over their families in love and righteousness and are responsible to provide the necessities of life and protection for their families. Mothers are primarily responsible for the nurture of their children. In these sacred responsibilities, fathers and

¹ D&C 93 41-50.

² The Relief Society is the Women's auxiliary of the LDS Church.

mothers are obligated to help one another as equal partners. Disability, death, or other circumstances may necessitate individual adaptation.

Extended families should lend support when needed. (Hinckley, 1995)

Soon after its release, printed and framed copies of the proclamation were made available, and the proclamation quickly gained popularity with LDS families (Scott, 2017). Over the past twenty years, it has been taught in all church auxiliaries including Primary. It is frequently quoted in talks given by church authorities and referenced by Mormons throughout the world when explaining their beliefs about topics ranging from marriage equality to feminism. The church-owned university, Brigham Young University, even offers a class about it (Walch, 2015).

The church has published two books about parenting and the proclamation; *The Family Guidebook* and *Strengthening the Family*. Both begin with the full text of the Proclamation to the family and reference it frequently. They offer instruction on teaching children, family home evening, family activities, etc. While both texts use mostly gender-neutral terms, such as “parents” instead of “mothers” or “fathers,” certain instructions seem specific to mothers. The term nurture is reserved in the Proclamation for mothers. Therefore, when the text (which begins with the Proclamation) instructs parents to nurture, or “see that the family has a clean home, wholesome food...” (Saints, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day, 2006), readers may reasonably assume the instructions are directed at women. When the text says, “The head of the family offers the prayer or asks a family member to offer it...” (Saints, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day, 2006), readers know such passages address men because the Proclamation states that presiding in the home is the responsibility of the father.³

³ LDS Handbooks do state that in the absence of a father in the home, such responsibilities do fall to the mother.

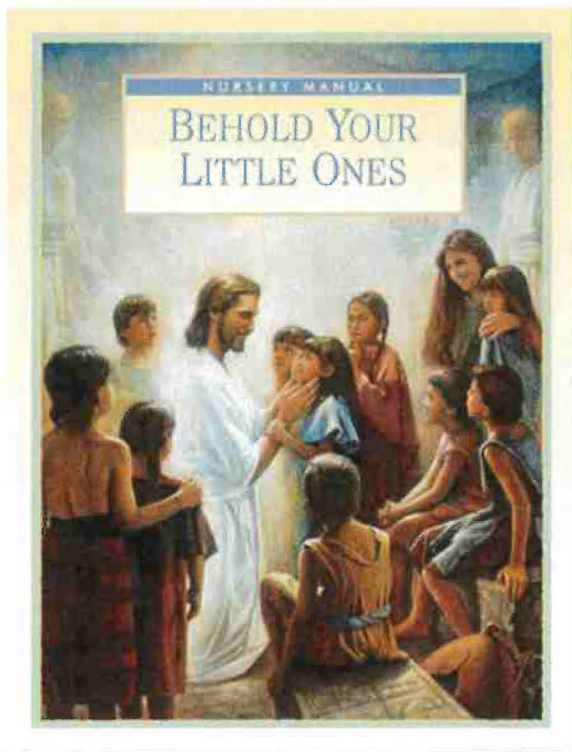


Figure 2 LDS Nursery Manual

From the age of eighteen months, LDS children attend two hours of nursery each Sunday during the three-hour block of worship services. These two hours are mostly spent playing and socializing with other toddlers under the supervision of adults called to serve in this capacity as nursery leaders. Religious instruction in church at this age is limited to participating in prayers, music from the LDS Children's Songbook, and occasionally brief lessons as deemed appropriate by the nursery leaders. The

LDS class manual for nursery is called "Behold Your Little Ones." The purpose of the lessons as stated in the manual is to "help nursery-age children learn basic doctrines of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ" (Primary 1, p. v). The Primary 1 manual is used for both the nursery children and the three-year-old "Sunbeams." This manual is very similar to the nursery manual, containing many of the same lessons in the same order. The main difference seems to be in the complexity of the language and activities recommended for children as they transition from the toddler stage to the preschool stage.

The Primary 2 and Primary 3 manuals, also known as Choose the Right A and Choose

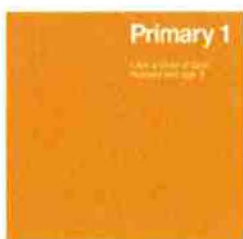


Figure 3 LDS Primary 1 Manual

the Right B, are used for the four, five, six, and seven-year-old children.

These manuals are alternated each year so that by the time LDS children have been baptized at age eight and reach the "Valiant" classes, they have learned from both Primary 2 and 3 twice. The purpose of both manuals is

“to help teach the children that by following Jesus Christ’s example they can choose the right, be



Figure 4 Primary 2 Manual

baptized, and become members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints” (Primary 3, p. vii). As with the Nursery and Primary 1 manuals, the CTR A and CTR B manuals contain lessons in a nearly identical style and sequence. The CTR B manual seems to draw more source material from Mormon church history, while CTR A may draw more from biblical sources.

Neither, however, cite exclusively from either the Bible or Book of Mormon, and both use sermons from contemporary church leaders to supplement scripture.

Eight, nine, ten and eleven-year-old children move into the Valiant primary classes. These classes use four different manuals titled Primary 4, 5, 6, and 7. Children in these classes are assumed to have already been in LDS Sunday School, adapted for their age group. The Sunday School classes study a different set of scriptures each year on a four-year rotation. Primary 4 is about the *Book of Mormon*, Primary 5; *The Doctrine and Covenants*, Primary 6; the *Old Testament*, and 7; the *New Testament*. In Mormonism, these scriptures together are known as the Standard Works. Each of these manuals have a different stated purpose, but the overarching goal is for children to leave the primary program at age twelve having become familiar with the Standard Works and with a testimony of the restoration of the church. Boys should be prepared for the priesthood and girls should be prepared to enter the Young Women’s program⁴.

⁴ LDS girls enter the Young Women’s program at 12 years old. The program includes six years of classes with the stated goal (according to LDS.org) “to help each young woman be worthy to make and keep sacred covenants and receive the ordinances of the temple. To accomplish this purpose, Young Women leaders guide each young woman in accomplishing the following objectives:

1. Strengthen her faith in and testimony of Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ.
2. Understand her identity as a daughter of God.
3. Be worthy by obeying the commandments and living gospel standards.
4. Receive, recognize, and rely on the promptings of the Holy Ghost.
5. Prepare for her divine roles as a daughter, wife, mother, and leader.

Table 1 Primary Manuals

Age	Class	Manual
1	Nursery	Behold Your Little ones or Primary 1
2		
3	Sunbeams	Primary 1
4	CTR	Primary 2 Choose the Right A
5		Primary 3 Choose the Right B
6		Primary 2 Choose the Right A
7		Primary 3 Choose the Right B
8	Valiant	Primary 4 Book of Mormon
9		Primary 5 Doctrine and Covenants
10		Primary 6 The Old Testament
11		Primary 7 The New Testament

Methodology

Each year, the church announces a new course of study for all church members. The curriculum is the same for all wards and members worldwide. For children, this includes a

6. Understand and keep her baptismal covenants." See <https://www.lds.org/handbook/handbook-2-administering-the-church/young-women?lang=eng>.

“Sharing Time” theme and outline, as well as specific songs to learn, selected from the Children’s Songbook to complement the theme. Rather than study each manual, for the purposes of this research a sample was selected based on this year’s Primary curriculum. For 2017, the Sharing Time theme is “Choose the Right.” Sunbeams always use the *Primary 1* manual. “CTR” children use *Primary 3: Choose the Right B*, and “Valiant” children use *Primary 5: Doctrine and Covenants and Church History*.

This research begins with an examination of the presentation of femininity in the above church-published sources. The presentation of femininity to LDS children is complex. Primary is taught by church members who are given a calling by the Bishop (leader) of their ward. A calling in the LDS church, in contrast with the way the term is used in other Christian churches, is not something chosen by the person being called as they respond to God. It is instead thought to be revealed by God to the Bishop, who then offers the calling to the church member. Members can turn down these callings, but such a practice is highly discouraged by the church.⁵ Most callings are temporary assignments, not lasting more than two years.⁶ Although the church offers teacher training and a teaching manual,⁷ primary teachers are church volunteers and are not specifically trained or certified to teach. Primary teachers can be men, but all primary leaders (the Primary Presidency) are women. The primary manuals also use phrasing and instructions that seem to assume that the teacher is a woman.⁸ The authorship of the manuals is unstated. They are most

⁵ See <https://www.lds.org/general-conference/2002/10/rise-to-your-call?lang=eng> “First, you are called of God. The Lord knows you. He knows whom He would have serve in every position in His Church. He chose you. He has prepared a way so that He could issue your call.”

⁶ There are exceptions to this unwritten rule. Leadership callings for the local level including Bishopric and Elders Quorum Presidencies tend to last for 5 years. Apostles are called for life.

⁷ See, “Teaching: No Greater Call” <https://www.lds.org/manual/teaching-no-greater-call-a-resource-guide-for-gospel-teaching?lang=eng> and “Teaching in the Savior’s Way” https://www.lds.org/callings/teachers?lang=eng&cid=rdb_short-url_teaching_eng_teaching

⁸ For example, both the Primary 1 and Primary 3 manuals used in this study frequently include lessons which instruct the teacher to “invite a priesthood holder to the class to talk about X”. Another lesson

likely written by teams of church employees, which include women and teaching professionals, and are then edited and approved by church leadership. It is also very difficult to determine how often the manuals are updated. For example, many of the stories, poems, and songs included in the Primary 1 manual (with a copyright date of 2000) are from the 1950's. The manuals all seem to avoid naming current prophets and general authorities while frequently publishing stories written by or about them. The current LDS prophet, Thomas S. Monson, is titled as a member of the First Presidency of the Church in a story included in the current Primary 5 manual (Primary 5, p. 95). Monson has been President of the church since February of 2008.

The LDS church is governed by men. Only men may hold the priesthood and LDS doctrine teaches that the priesthood is required for administering ordinances which those in the highest levels of leadership are authorized to perform. The Primary Presidency reports to the Bishop. While they can make recommendations and requests, they do not have the authorization to extend callings to teachers. Teachers can and do look to a variety of sources outside of official publications to supplement the lessons offered in the manual. These sources are usually found on the internet and are overwhelmingly written by women. This study will examine some of those sources as well.

Findings

A review of the source material for this study revealed clear patterns in the description of the ideal behavior of both women and girls. This ideal is in line with divine femininity as taught by male church leaders for several decades (Cragun, 2015). The discussion of femininity is framed in language accessible to children and is usually taught by women. Descriptions of ideal

instructs the teacher to make some statements about things that they children can see, offering as examples, "I am wearing a dress," "I have a flower in my hair."

femininity progress as children age through the program, but the emphasis found in this study was on performative femininity.

The Primary I manual, used for the 3-year-old Sunbeam class, teaches LDS children the basics of the Mormon Gospel. Lesson topics include titles such as, *I am a Child of God*, *I have Feelings*, *I am Thankful for Water*, *I Have a Body*, and *I Can Forgive Others*. The lessons involve a variety of activities, visual aids, stories, and songs. Most of the lessons lack descriptions of girls, women, or mothers. They emphasize Heavenly Father and Jesus while drawing comparisons between them and the children's own fathers, ostensibly in an effort to make these important religious figures more real to them. An example of this is in a lesson titled *Heavenly Father's Plan for Us*:

With the approval of your Primary president, invite a father to bring his baby into the classroom. Talk about fathers and how they love their children. Tell the children that they have two fathers who love them: their father here on earth and their Heavenly Father. Before babies are born on earth, they live with Heavenly Father. (Note: Be sensitive to the situations of the children in your class, some of whom might not have fathers in their homes.) (p.9)

Although an important tenet of Mormon doctrine is the belief in heavenly parents, including a Heavenly Mother, she is not mentioned in any primary manuals that I examined. Another lesson, *I Love my Brothers and Sisters*, is the only one that suggested inviting a mother and baby to class. For comparison, this is the instruction to the teacher from for that lesson:

With the approval of your Primary president, invite a mother to bring her baby to class. Ask her to talk about how she cares for the baby, including

things that she and her family do to keep the baby safe. Encourage her to tell about the love she feels for her baby. If a mother with a baby is not available, you could invite a mother to come with pictures of her child as a baby. (p.78)

Both descriptions of mothers and fathers emphasize their love for their children, but the mother's visit goes into much greater detail on the ways in which she physically cares for her children.

Mentions of mothers and female children in the manual usually involve elements of obvious domesticity. *I Have Feelings*, directs the teacher to show a picture of a girl doing dishes (part of the gospel art picture kit included with the manual),⁹ and to "Help the children do the following activity verse:"

I like to help my mother (pretend to put on apron);

She has so much to do

I help her dry the dishes (pretend to dry dishes)

And feed the baby, too (pretend to feed bottle to baby). (p. 68)

This lesson also includes telling a story "about a child who does something nice for his or her mother, such as doing a household task." (p. 69) In another lesson, *I Belong to a Family*, children learn about families using a picture of a nest with baby birds in a tree:



Figure 5 Gospel Art Picture 1-23

⁹ Gospel Art 1-45

Mother bird sits on the nest (cup left hand, place right hand on top)

To hatch the eggs, all three (hold up three fingers)

Father bird flies round and round (move arms in a flying motion)

To guard his family. (p. 76)

This short poem presents the descriptions of mothers and fathers found in the *Proclamation to the Family* in a way that is easy for preschool age children to understand. There are no mentions of mothers in the Primary 1 handbook who deviate specifically from the ideal prescribed by the proclamation.

Children ages 4-7 use the Primary 3 manual in their “CTR” classes. The lessons in this manual focus on preparing children for membership in the LDS church through baptism at age eight. Lessons for this age group have less singing and action play. Instead, they focus on storytelling, using stories from scriptures, church history, and fictional moral tales. Lesson topics include titles such as, *Choose the Right*, *The Baptismal Covenant*, *We Can Show our Faith by Being Obedient*, and *I Can Be a Missionary*. The majority of stories in this manual are about men and boys, probably because they are about scripture characters (who are mostly male) or church leaders (who are all male). Fictional moral tales are used to teach and encourage children to think about choice and accountability in real life situations that might be similar to their own. Stories about boys still outnumber stories about girls, but the actual ratio of stories about girls to stories about boys is much closer to equal. A close examination of the stories about boys, girls, mothers, and fathers reveal consistent patterns in thinking about femininity and the perceived intrinsic divine nature of women in Mormonism. A typical story about any child in the manual features a boy or girl who is faced with a decision to choose the right (in accordance with the gospel) or to

make a wrong choice, requiring repentance. The child will ultimately make the right choice or correct any wrongs. When the story is about a boy, the problem is usually a wrong choice made by the boy, or his feelings of anger about something that has happened or something that he must do. When the story is about a girl, the dilemma is typically her own feelings of fear, sadness, or concern for how she can help another person (often her mother). With rare exceptions, girls do not actually wrong choices in the stories. Stories about boys are centered around play, such as including friends in a ball game or sharing a favorite toy. They are more likely to be found outdoors, exploring places they should not go, working, and otherwise being active. Girls are usually at home, helping with siblings. For example, *Choose the Right* tells the story of two boys who were playing in their neighbor's yard without their neighbor's permission when they broke a swing. They ran away and struggled with deciding what to do until they remembered what CTR meant. One of the boys later apologized to the mother at the home, who responds by praising his honesty (p. 2). *Priesthood Blessings and Ordinances*, tells of a young girl who is worried about starting school. She tells her parents about her fears and her father offers her a blessing. In the blessing, the father promises her that she would have a kind teacher and make many friends. After the blessing, she thanked her father and told him that she felt better already (p. 43).

The manual contains two stories about children, both boys, stealing.¹⁰ The closest a girl in the moral tales ever comes to theft is finding a necklace her friend was missing and failing to promptly report it in hopes that she could keep it. Mormon girls in these stories are often very pious and self-sacrificing. *Baptism*, tells the story of a girl named Alice who had been dreaming

¹⁰ Lesson 10: Repentance- A boy named Ricardo stole candy when he went to buy thread for his mother and in Lesson 22: The Atonement of Jesus Christ, a boy named Josh steals while shopping with his mother.



of baptism for the last two years when her mother and older sister joined the church. She wanted to be baptized on the day she turned eight, but three days before her birthday, she became very ill. She continued to get worse until the afternoon before her birthday when her

mother found her:

... kneeling in fervent prayer on her bed. This little girl was pleading with Heavenly Father for fulfillment of her great desire to become a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. On the morning of her

Figure 6 The Gift of the Holy Ghost Primary Manual 2-30

birthday, Alice got up, got dressed, and prepared for baptism. Her fever was gone, and she felt well and happy. Some hours later her mother checked Alice's temperature again and it still registered normal. (p. 53)

In *The Gift of the Holy Ghost*, a girl named Jan deals with her feelings of fear and sadness about moving to a new town through praying for comfort from the holy ghost (p.58). In another lesson, a very poor girl named Ma-ling who provides for her family by selling rice and fish at a food stand, meets the LDS missionaries and decides that she wants to keep the commandment on keeping the Sabbath day holy. She decides not to open her stand on Sunday anymore and is blessed with "more money than ever before" (p.86).

Fathers in the lessons are usually portrayed as teachers. They guide their children through difficult situations and their children look to their example and work to please them. In one lesson, a child named Susan is guided through a dark cave by her father until she emerges at the

end, “into the sunlight and her father’s waiting arms” (p. 6). A boy named Jaime loses his baby lamb, and remembers a story his father told him of being lost and praying for help. Jaime prays and finds the lamb. When questioned by his mother about how he found the lamb, Jaime replied, “I just did what dad would have done” (p. 92). The not at all subtle suggestion in this and other stories is that fathers are like Heavenly Father.

All missionaries mentioned in the Primary 3 manual are men. *The Lord Helps Missionaries*, begins by explaining that missionaries go by the titles of Elder or Sister, but this brief mention is the only acknowledgement of women serving missions. The rest of the chapter tells the stories of three missionaries—all male. It also includes an activity with the instructions, “Tell the children that they can help a missionary by writing a letter to him” (p. 115). Gender exclusive language about missionary work using male pronouns can be used by a dominant group to send a message to the muted group over whom they wish to maintain power (Wood, 2005). The cultural message to children is clear. Girls may serve missions, but the important missionaries, the ones whose faith-promoting stories we tell, are boys. Male missionaries are supported by the spirit in their ministry.¹¹ The next lesson is titled *I Can Be a Missionary*. It encourages children to share the gospel with friends and neighbors. The only example given in the lesson is about a boy who invites his teacher over for dinner to teach her about the church. Six months later she is baptized (p.118).

While fathers in primary lessons appear to be placeholders for Heavenly Father, the same does not seem to hold true for mothers and a Heavenly Mother. Mothers are present in the

¹¹ Although both Men and Women in the LDS faith may serve missions, missions are still considered a priesthood duty. Priesthood in this and many LDS contexts is code for “male”. Thomas S. Monson said in 2012, “... 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. We assure the young sisters of the Church, however, that they make a valuable contribution as missionaries, and we welcome their service.” See <https://www.lds.org/callings/missionary/faqs?lang=eng#4>

stories, but they are not usually an authority figure. Instead, they are an object of pity. Many are widows. Most are sick or in need of assistance from their children- overwhelmingly their daughters. Here are just a few descriptions of mothers coming from fictional and real stories, or activities in the lesson book:

“Mother was puzzled and concerned.” (p. 53)

“he heard about a mother who was paralyzed...” (p. 37)

“Your mother is sick, and she seems sad. You would like to help her feel happy again.” (p. 28)

“Joseph asked his mother to go outside during the operation. He knew it would be hard on her and didn’t want to upset her.” (p. 17)

“Tim could see that his mother was worried.” (p. 99)

“Pretend that your mother is sick and asks you to clean part of the house.” (p. 131)

“Your mother asks you to watch your little sister.” (p. 132)

“You are helping mother bake cookies.” (p. 132)

“One day, when their mother came home from delivering the washing, she was discouraged.” (p. 147)

“His mother is trying to clean the house.” (p. 163)

“Sister Castro...is old, always sits alone, and looks sad.” (p. 182)

“There are toys all over the floor, the baby is crying, and your mother is trying to prepare supper.” (p. 182)

These mothers are often sad, engaged in some kind of domestic work, or both. If femininity in Mormonism is made up of doing and being, a child taught these lessons might

regard womanhood to mean doing chores and being needy. Indeed, the demonstrated femininity presented to children is even more paternalistic than when it is presented to adults.

The Primary 5 Manual, used for children ages 8-11, focuses on the Doctrine and Covenants and Church History. The Doctrine and Covenants is a piece of LDS scripture which stands alongside the Bible and Book of Mormon. It contains revelations given to Joseph Smith during his time as prophet of the church, as well as general historical accounts. All church members age eight and up learn the same course subject in Sunday School each year, with the Primary 5 manual tailored for children. The lessons are in the same order so that families can study at home together in preparation for church lessons.

Contrasting with the CTR manuals, the 8-11-year-old, known as “Valiant” courses, eliminate most games, activities, and fictional stories. They focus solely on the scriptures being studied. While women such as Lucy Mack Smith (Joseph Smith’s Mother) and Emma Smith (his first wife) are mentioned frequently in the Doctrine and Covenants course, they are not described in greater detail as three-dimensional characters, other than to say that they were present for various events. Lucy Mack Smith’s book, *History of Joseph Smith* is cited as the source of many of the historical accounts in the manual. Still, these stories lack descriptions of female church members as much more than peripheral witnesses.

While the Sunday School class for this age range spends little time discussing gender and femininity, another church program becomes perhaps more important in social and religious education for LDS primary children. At age 8, children begin working on completing requirements to earn their “Faith in God” award. The church publishes two booklets (one for each sex) containing a list of things that the children must do to earn this award by the time they turn 12 years old and graduate from primary. Most of the requirements are the same, except for a

section for boys on preparing for the priesthood and one for girls on preparing to enter the young women's program. To assist children in accomplishing these requirements, LDS boys in the United States and Canada become Cub Scouts. LDS girls participate in "Activity Days."

Cub Scouts meet weekly with leaders who serve in their positions as a church calling. Each Cub Scout age group (Wolves, Bears, and Webelos) has their own book of activities (called "adventures") and specific requirements for earning belt loops and merit badges displaying their achievements. They also earn a "religious knot" by completing many requirements that are also part of the Faith in God award. They have monthly Pack meetings where all of the groups meet together, along with family members of the scouts, to have activities and to give awards to the scouts based on completed adventures from the previous month. In summary, boys are supported through a detailed program with highly structured adventures. Their achievements are recognized frequently by their family and friends in awards ceremonies.

"Activity Days" was designed by the church to similarly help the girls to complete the Faith in God award. Girls meet twice a month, either all ages together or occasionally broken up into two groups if there are enough girls in a ward (8 and 9-year olds, 10 and 11-year olds). There is no program or book of activities. There are also no celebrations for achievements made during their time in Activity Days, as there is each month for Cub Scouts. In fact, the Faith in God Handbook states:

When all required activities are completed, the Primary president and the bishop or branch president sign the Faith in God Award certificate on the last page of this guidebook. A member of the bishopric, branch presidency, or Primary presidency recognizes the child's accomplishment in Primary. Parents and leaders should help the children understand that

the joy of living the gospel is the most important reward.” (Faith in God guidebook [2003], 19)

Activity Day leaders (also a church calling) attempt to design activities for the girls that will coordinate with Faith in God requirements. To help with this lack of structure, women share ideas on the internet via Pinterest and blogs. Sugardoodle.net bills itself as “faith based inspiration” and is one of the most popular resources for LDS lesson ideas (Sugardoodle, 2016). People submit their own activity plans and share links to supplemental material all over the web. Sugardoodle is used in this study as a reference for the Activity Days program, because it was cited by various primary presidency and activity days leaders as an important source for activity ideas. It also encompasses people who may use other sources such as Pinterest because it links to those sources as well. While Cub Scouts have a standard schedule for their meetings which includes reciting the Pledge of Allegiance, Talk Time, Activities, and assignments for next time, Activity Days has no such agenda. This suggested agenda is offered on Sugardoodle:

I have enjoyed the following schedule with my Activity Day girls. For most of the activities I schedule for 1 hour and 15 minutes. When they arrive at my house I have them work on cross stitch or needlepoint projects for the first 10-15 minutes to allow all of the girls to get there. We then say our opening prayer and work on memorizing one of the articles of faith for 5-10 minutes. We then do our scheduled activity. We then spend the last 5-10 minutes writing in our journals.

While cub scouts are participating in activities centered around a variety of topics designed to offer boys a vast array of experiences; from science, nature, and robotics, to history and community service, girl’s activities center around the Faith in God categories which include

“Serving Others,” “Learning and Living the Gospel,” “Developing Talents,” and “Preparing for Young Women.” Here are some typical examples of activity ideas shared on Sugardoodle.net for

Learning and Living the Gospel:

Dresser Drawer Derby - Teach the girls how to fold their clothes and organize their drawers. At the end I want to have some sort of relay game like at one end of the room there will be a pile of clothes and the girls will have to fold them, put them in a basket, then run to the other side and put them into drawers. To end it you could have them modge [sic] podge a picture on a bar of soap to make their drawers smell nice or a potpourri sachet.

Pedicures for Pedigree - One night we had a lesson on family history and how to fill out the forms. I gave the girls each their own form and told them to ask their families for help. They were supposed to bring them filled out to the next activity and they would each get a pedicure. I got a few aluminum pans and we set up a row of chairs outside on the sidewalk. The girls soaked their feet and then us leaders toweled them off, lotioned [sic] their feet and painted their toenails. They had a lot of fun with that!

In the first example, “Living the Gospel” is taught to the girls as the ability to handle a basic domestic task (laundry). The girls are rewarded with objects to keep their clothes smelling nice. The second example does come closer to fulfilling an actual requirement in the Faith in God book.¹² The activity itself rewards the girl’s genealogy efforts with spa pampering. This

¹² Girls are required to “Prepare a pedigree chart with your name and your parents’ and grandparents’ names. Prepare a family group record for your family and share a family story. Discuss how performing temple work blesses families.”

pattern of activities centered around domesticity and beauty continues in many of the ideas for the "Serving Others" requirements:

Clothing Swap - Every Spring and Fall we have a clothing swap by having the Activity Day girls bring in:[sic] clothes, shoes, belts, any type of accessories that can be worn. To keep some sort of order, the girls draw a number and we let three girls at a time "shop" for up to three items at a time, then the next three girls have a turn and so on... We take the opportunity to talk about modesty and style; how both can be achieved. For example: dress or skirt is too short, it can be worn with jeans or leggings. So, when one of our girls shows up at Church wearing one of her NEW outfits, I say: "Wow, what a nice "new" dress!" Our girls always look forward to this activity.

Cook a dinner for Primary Presidency and their husbands - The girls come early to prepare the meal and serve. Have the girls write questions they would like to ask each other, to get to know their leaders.

Nursery Service - Last night we did a service project of cleaning the nursery closet and toys. We cleaned, straightened, vacuumed, and organized the nursery closet. Before we started I had the girls look at the closet and then when we had finished I had them look again and compare the two. I asked which they liked better. They, of course, said the cleaned closet. I then explained that the messy closet is like someone's life before baptism. We helped "baptize" or bring the closet to Christ by cleaning it and then the clean closet was like a newly baptized life. However, it will

probably be messy again after several Sunday's. Does that mean the closet is lost forever? That there is no hope for the closet? NO! was the emphatic response of the girls. I told them that just because they have been baptized does not mean if they make a mistake in life that there is no hope or happiness for them. I asked them if they understood why and one of the girls in the back responded, "Repentance". I smiled and told them that even if they make a mistake in life they can repent and "clean up their closet". It does not mean there is no hope for them and they need not come to church. I told them that Christ knows what is in their hearts/closet and He wants them to come back to Him. They really seemed to grasp the concept I was trying to get across on top of the act of service.

We invited a woman from the Stake that is helping find sponsors for orphans in Uganda. She has been making girls headbands, decorated with fabric flowers to send to the girls there. They have to keep their hair shaved short for sanitary purposes and it makes it difficult to differentiate them from the boys and to "feel pretty". She taught the girls how to make the flowers and sew them on the headbands. They made one to send and took one home to keep. They loved it and have asked if they can do it again.

While all of these acts of service are useful and needed by someone, it is impossible to ignore the fact that most of the service projects suggested for girls reinforced the discursive LDS notion of divine femininity centered around being essentially feminine and doing feminine things. Cragun and Sumerau (2015) found that "While LDS leaders taught women to properly do

femininity, Mormon women especially linked the home to women's moral development" (p. 63). Activities involving beauty and domesticity seem to be quite popular and versatile in this program, as they continue to apply in the "Developing Talents" category:

Princess Power - When they first come in they will be making a 'Princess Crown' out of pipe cleaners. It takes four per crown. Then they will pair up and trace each other on a long piece of butcher paper. We will use this later. They will learn about proper etiquette - how to set a table, how to fold napkins, proper manners at a table. They will then set their own place setting (with our fine china!) with a place card and all. Then they will come in for a presentation on modesty. They will get to search in magazines for modest clothing. They will cut out an outfit and then go to their life-size paper doll and color it on them. Then they will sit down and be served a luncheon and get to practice their etiquette. The theme of 'Princess Power' is to show them that they really are special young ladies and that when they behave as one, they will become one.

The previous example brings up an important topic in LDS femininity; modesty. One of the requirements in "Developing Talents" is "Learn about and practice good nutrition, good health, and good grooming, including modest dress" (2003, p. 11) Modesty is extremely important to Mormons (Dollahite, 2009). LDS underwear worn by adult members who have completed certain temple rites (known as temple garments) enforces modest dress, covering the shoulders, trunk, and legs to the knees. It is a well-recognized cultural signifier of worthiness. Mormons can identify in-tribe others through their dress. Although children are not required by garments to dress modestly, they are taught to follow the same standards as though they were

wearing garments. Each year includes a modesty lesson taught to all children ages 3-11 during sharing time. There is only one mention of modesty in lesson book 3 for the CTR classes. In *The Holy Ghost Can Help Us*, Anita is invited to go swimming with her friends:

Before she went, Anita tried on her swimsuit from last year. She was surprised to see how much she had grown. As a result, the swimsuit did not cover her as it should and was now immodest. Anita knew that her friend was waiting for her to come over, and Anita wanted to run quickly over to her house to play. However, a thought that came into her mind helped her decide what to do. She was reminded that Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ wanted her to be modest. If she went to her friend's house with this swimsuit on, she would feel uncomfortable around her friend's family. She knew that she should dress differently. Quickly Anita found her older sister and asked if she had a swimsuit that might fit and that she could borrow. Together they looked and found an old suit that fit Anita well. Anita thanked her sister, changed immediately, and ran over to her friend's house, happy that she had chosen the right thing to do. (Primary 3, p. 124)

The lesson was not specifically about modesty. Children are expected to know what modest dress is and how to adhere to church standards of modesty based on what they have been taught at home. Although modesty is expected of both boys and girls, it is problematic because of its unequal application. The sheer number of activities around modesty for girls and its emphasis in contrast to those for boys is connected to control of women's sexuality.¹³ These

¹³ I could not locate any lessons on modesty in any of the Cub Scout Handbooks.

activities and discussions only increase in numbers as the girls enter the Young Women's program at age 12. Sugardoodle.net includes a page devoted to modesty activities for girls and a virtue activity.¹⁴ Another modesty activity:

"Modesty Shots" is a takeoff on glamour shots. We combined this activity with the Young Women. The girls were asked to bring three modest outfits. One casual, one Sunday dress and one formal, like they would wear to a prom (just the Young Women did the formal shots). The older girls helped to do the younger girls' hair and very light makeup. I was very impressed with the care they took in making up the younger girls being careful not to "overdo" it due to their age. Of course, the younger girls just loved the attention and interaction with the older girls. I took their individual pictures in a park setting across the street from the church. Then did some group shots of each group and them all together. One of the Young Women took the pictures when they were done and made a scrapbook entitled "Modest Girls are the Hottest Girls" for her Young Women in Excellence project. Each girl was featured on a page of their own with brief journaling about a positive trait of the girl. The whole activity was a great success! I think it did a good job of showing how beautiful our girls are.... on both the inside and the outside.

The final section of requirements for the Faith in God Award, *Preparing for Young Women*, is reserved for 11-year-old girls who will be turning 12 and entering the Young Women's program in the next year. The requirements include talking with the Beehive class

¹⁴ This activity is too long to include, and my description could not do it justice. http://www.sugardoodle.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=7989 .

presidency,¹⁵ scripture reading, and journaling. Since these requirements are personal, it might seem odd that there are so many recommended activities around it on social media. The activities seem to be derived at least in part from one of the requirements to study the 13th Article of Faith:¹⁶

We believe in being honest, true, chaste, benevolent, virtuous, and in doing good to all men; indeed, we may say that we follow the admonition of Paul— We believe all things, we hope all things, we have endured many things, and hope to be able to endure all things. If there is anything virtuous, lovely, or of good report or praiseworthy, we seek after these things.

Activities to prepare for Young Women's are, like the previous requirements activities, centered around domesticity and beauty. Here are some examples:

When candle makers dip candles, the first dips are not very noticeable. But each dip of the candle holds more wax and slowly a candle emerges and takes shape. Each experience that a girl has in the young Women's program puts more "wax" onto her candle and by the end of 6 years, there is a beautiful, well tapered Young Woman 'candle'.

Babysitting Stations - One station involved making snacks for children and making it fun. I had them use cookie cutters to cut out fun shapes of cheese with crackers and graham crackers with peanut butter and various sprinkles. The next station was diaper changing and I used the idea where you put chocolate syrup in a dolls diaper. They also learned how to hold and wrap a newborn. The next station, I had the girls play act that

¹⁵ The Beehive class is the first class in the Young Women's program. It is made up of 12 and 13-year-old girls.

¹⁶ A list of LDS beliefs written in a letter by Joseph Smith to a newspaper editor named John Wentworth. It was later canonized and included in the Pearl of Great Price.

they were receiving a phone call and how to politely handle the call and take a message. The next station was a game/activity station where the girls chose which activity and play acted that one of them was the child and one of them was the babysitter. The last station was a first aid station where they pretended to have a minor scratch and then they would switch roles and then play act that they had a minor bump to the head. I had them go around the stations in groups of two.

So we did a cleanliness and personal grooming night, we talked about how important it was to keeping our bodies and minds clean. After the mini-lesson we painted nails with nice neutral colors and did hair in simple ways that the girls could duplicate!

Our handouts were the little shower poofs and attached was the quote:

"Keeping our bodies clean and pure will get us one step closer to 'poofection'."

Discussion

Mormon ideas of gender as a divinely ordained essence of individuals is certainly expressed within its instruction to children. Gender is presented as both fixed and essential with no deviation from ideals described in the Family Proclamation present in any official church manuals that I explored.¹⁷ Cragun and Sumerau's analysis "focuses on the ways Mormon leaders construct the gendered background expectations these women must navigate" (Cragun, p. 54). This research was designed to follow their approach to understand the way that leaders construct the same expectations for children. There is a vast amount of material available for this research. A study exclusively of the *Children's Friend Magazine* might have more closely mirrored the original research, and a larger team with more resources would be able to complete such a task in

¹⁷ There were several places in the "notes to the teacher" before lessons where they were instructed to be sensitive to children with different family situations when giving the particular lesson.

the future.¹⁸ Primary Manuals provided a broad and accurate picture of what children in the LDS church actually learn both past and present because they were produced long ago and are still in use today. Their repetition also means that even if children have a teacher one year who deviates completely or does not use the manual, they will likely learn all of the lessons again another year from a new teacher. If children attend church frequently, they will be exposed to all of the lessons. LDS children receive two hours of Primary instruction each week, plus an hour every other week for LDS girls in Activity Days. While this is a large amount of religious instruction, it is just a small fraction of instruction that they are exposed to each week at home and school. This study interprets the messages being given to LDS children, but it does not attempt to determine their reception. Most LDS parents use church published parenting guides¹⁹ and hold weekly in home religious devotionals,²⁰ ensuring consistency in messaging. Future research could seek to determine the attitudes of LDS children toward gender roles and essentialism. To model prior research, I asked, “what is going on here?” and “what do these materials tell us about gender in Mormonism?” (Cragun, 2015). Communication materials whose intended recipient is LDS children demonstrate both divine (essential) and practiced (performed) femininity. Although children are not told directly that “gender is an essential characteristic of individual pre-mortal, mortal, and eternal identity and purpose” (Hinckley, 1995). They are shown examples of girls who are gentle, selfless, faithful, and nurturing; always eager to help with younger siblings. Mothers are busy doing femininity. They are cooking, cleaning, endlessly working at home and always in need of assistance. As girls age into the Activity Days program, their activities center around learning to do femininity. They spend their time in the program

¹⁸ See Cragun and Sumerau's *Methods* (Cragun, p. 55).

¹⁹ *Family Guidebook* and *Strengthening the Family*.

²⁰ Family Home Evening <https://www.lds.org/topics/family-home-evening/purpose?lang=eng&old=true>.

learning how to do household chores, practice etiquette, grooming, and modesty. When they are twelve years old and finally enter the Young Women's program, they will start receiving direct messages about divinely ordained femininity, as taught by LDS leaders for at least the last half-century. By this time, they have already been closely observing and learning to do practiced femininity for years. Accepting messages about divinely ordained femininity, reiterated by Mormon women (their leaders), is much more palatable when it has already been your practice for as long as you can remember. (Zimmerman, 1987) This research was an attempt to demonstrate how femininity is socially constructed and communicated to the youngest adherents of the faith. While this explains why so many LDS women are comfortable with a gender essentialist framework emphasizing strict "divine" gender roles in their lives, social construction does not necessarily explain how adult female converts to the religion accept this framework. Future research could focus specifically on this group of women, examining what, if any similarities existed between the defining gender roles that they were raised with and those that this research has shown are presented to children raised in the LDS faith.

Afterword

When I began this project roughly a year ago, I was serving in a calling in my LDS ward as a Bear Den leader in Cub Scouts. After reading Cragun and Sumerau's research, I felt compelled, based on my experiences in teaching various ages of primary children, to find a way to understand how young LDS communication about ideal femininity started and what it might look like. Still, I was hesitant to take on a "Women's Studies" project. Even though I felt that getting the answers to my questions would be valuable, I struggled with my own biases that a woman doing research on the issues of women and children in religion would be dismissed as

cliché and not a serious enough topic. I started my research by reviewing the most recently produced church tract, the *Family Guidebook*. It was surprisingly well balanced and absent of most gendered language, especially regarding children. As I continued through the primary manuals however, patterns began to emerge about ideal and desired behavior of women and girls. Although I expected to find mothers engaged in traditional domestic roles, I had expected that within those roles, they would be empowered and seen as essential in their domestic and maternal duties. Instead, women were often portrayed as weak and reliant on the help of children to survive. One might brush this observation aside, as object lessons predictably teach children to be helpful. The problem with such an assertion is that fathers in the object lessons are not needy. They are strong, reliable teachers. When I mentioned my research to others who might be able to offer their own unique perspectives on the topic, I was surprised at how uninterested people seemed. Because of this, I am very interested in continuing this project and promoting the idea that the lives of children and the social realities of our upbringing are key to understanding our assumptions about gender.

Shortly after completing this thesis, I was given a new calling in my LDS ward, as an Activity Days leader. I eagerly accepted. As part of my thesis defense, Scott Abbott, my Integrated Studies Mentor, asked what we (family members of LDS children) could do to counteract the effects of the negative and possibly dangerous messages about gender roles children receive from the LDS church. For many members, this question might never even arise, as their beliefs about gender roles and performance come from the church and therefore match seamlessly with what they learn at church. There is however, a growing number of LDS adherents whose beliefs are more progressive than the church on a variety of issues, including gender roles. Many of us operate on the margins of Mormon belief, for a variety of reasons. The

LDS church is a top-down organization run largely by white octogenarians from the intermountain west. Change in the LDS church does happen, but at a glacial pace. It is understandable that many leave the church rather than wait for changes to occur. As someone who is still “in”, my main reason is that I do believe that lay members can be influencers for change, but only if there are enough of us. The fewer “progressive” Mormons there are, the more slowly change will happen. If only status quo Mormons are active, leadership will never have to respond to the needs of members who demand change. I can’t pretend that my sphere of influence, as a subversive Activity Days leader, will be large enough to change the institution as a whole. I do know that my daughter is part of my Activity Days group. If teaching her and her friends is all the influence I can hope for, that’s enough for me (for now).

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