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A Case Study of the Impact of Filmmaker Decisions in the Construction of a
Documentary: Helen Whitney's (2007) *The Mormons*

Elizabeth J. Mott

A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

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Department of Communications

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ABSTRACT

A Case Study of the Impact of Filmmaker Decisions in the Construction of a

Documentary: Helen Whitney's (2007) *The Mormons*

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Informed by theories of media framing, exemplification, and non-fiction film production, this case study used as its sample for textual analysis the typed transcripts from the final cut of Helen Whitney's (2007) documentary film, *The Mormons*, and the interview transcripts of the 15 key commentators interviewed for the documentary. These theories suggest that (a) media producers condense topics in the media by selecting information that connects news stories to a larger context and imbues them with symbolic value; (b) verbal and visual examples have been shown to be more easily retrieved in memory than abstract ideas and are consequently judged by audiences to be more common in the real world; and (c) expository non-fiction films are organized in ways that convey objectivity, belying their constructed nature. With the aid of NVivo (2002), the themes in each text were identified and compared in order to evaluate which themes about Mormons were given salience in the film and which themes were de-emphasized in the film. It was found that the themes about Mormons' unusual commitment to their faith, as well as the Mormon Church's historical conflict in the United States and more recently with disaffected church members were accentuated in the film; the film did not equally incorporate the themes of LDS Church officials' self-description of Mormon beliefs and social practices. By coupling a close examination and comparison of the texts with the filmmaker's own personal statements about the making of the film, this thesis suggests that Helen Whitney constructed the film through a process that gave voice to minority viewpoints, challenged institutional or ecclesiastical authority, and favored complexity. As a result of these decisions, for example, the film perpetuated confusion about whether Mormons are Christians, the 19th-century LDS practice of plural marriage, and the current treatment of homosexuals within the LDS Church.

Keywords: framing, exemplification, non-fiction film, documentary, case study, textual analysis, Mormons, Latter-day Saints

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Brigham Young University

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

When Helen Whitney's film, *The Mormons*, originally aired on PBS in the midst of the campaigns leading up the 2008 U.S. presidential election, immediately people began talking about the film. The documentary's viewership broke ratings records in Utah, according to the *Salt Lake Tribune*. "It's the highest [ratings] we've ever had," said KUED General Manager Larry Smith, adding that such attention on a weeknight was highly unusual (Morehead, 2007, May 3). A large audience outside of Utah also tuned in; KBYU spokesman Jim Bell told the *Salt Lake Tribune*, "At a 3 rating, the documentary captured nearly double the viewers of a normal PBS weeknight" (Morehead, 2007, May 3).

A premier non-Mormon historian of Mormonism, Jan Shipps, said Whitney's 2007 documentary would define the way non-Mormons think of Mormons for years to come (Fabrizio, 2007). Terryl Givens, a scholar who has written extensively about the portrayal of Mormons, disagreed with Shipps that the documentary would be that determinative, but expressed hope that it would arouse interest in the religion for a while and also provide an opportunity for people to examine how to better tell the Mormon story (Fabrizio, 2007). Givens, for example, critiqued the film's inclusion of the Fundamentalist Latter-day Saint (FLDS) practice of polygamy because he argued that it blurred the lines between the LDS Church and its early-20th-century offshoot, which has been accused of promoting spousal and child abuse in recent years (Fabrizio, 2007).

Years later in 2010, when Whitney visited Utah to raise funds for her latest film project, entitled *Forgiveness*, people in Utah still preferred to discuss *The Mormons*. Whitney participated in panel discussions at the University of Utah, Utah Valley University, and Brigham Young University, and in all three cases, she was still answering questions about *The Mormons*.

Why did her 2007 film about the Utah-based Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints engender such long-lasting commentary from all directions? A mass communications theory about the hostile media effect predicts that in cases of media coverage of controversial topics, highly-partisan audiences will perceive an unfair bias in media and say that the media favor the opposing position (Schmitt, Gunther, & Liebhart, 2004; Gunther, Miller, & Liebhart, 2009). A producer at the University of Utah PBS affiliate KUED, Ken Verdoia, said that after the film aired, the studio received complaints from many people saying that it was too favorable toward the Mormons; many others complained to the station that the film was too critical of the Mormons (Fabrizio, 2007). Fairness and objectivity are difficult concepts to measure. Another approach, and the one employed in this study, is to examine the way that Helen Whitney and her team constructed the documentary film. The goal is to illuminate the filmmaking decisions made in this case and the impact of these decisions on the portrayal of the Mormon Church.

By taking a closer look at the sources available to the filmmaker and comparing them with the final product, the text of the film, this study attempts to evaluate some of the decisions made by the filmmaker in structuring and selecting content for her film.

Thus, some understanding of theory about non-fiction film production is needed, along with mass communications theories on framing and exemplification.

First, “to frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communication text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation” (Entman, 1993, p. 52; Kiousis & Wu, 2008, p. 61). While the exact relationship is under debate, Lopez-Escobar, Llamas, & McCombs (1998) connected agenda setting with framing by proposing that news media’s selection of certain objects (or topics) and their emphasis on certain attributes (or frames) can, in fact, influence how people think about a topic (Lopez-Escobar et al., 1998; Kiousis & Wu, 2008). According to this theory, there are two parts to the process: the substantive element is defined as the cognitive structure of the frame, e.g., a unifying framework of “equal rights”; the affective element is defined as the emotional perception of the frame, e.g., whether the particular frame of “equal rights” comes across as positive, neutral, or negative (McCombs, 1995; Kiousis & Wu, 2008, p. 62).

Second, exemplification theory explains the weight that verbal and visual examples carry in the formation of audiences’ cognitive perceptions of the world. This theory suggests that concrete examples of events are better understood, stored, and remembered than complex, abstract events. This means that statistical or wordy descriptions of the incidence of floods, for instance, are not understood, encoded, and remembered as readily as is a specific example of a flood. Significantly, it has been demonstrated that what is easily recalled in memory is judged to be more common in the real world. Additionally, the quantification heuristic (a short-cut in thinking and

processing of information) predicts that people keep track in their minds of how often events occur in the real world, and then unconsciously use these gut impressions to set their expectations of the likelihood of certain events occurring (Zillmann, 1999). Therefore, Zillmann argues that news media should choose representative, typical exemplars to communicate information to audiences so that audience perception of issues is not skewed by atypical exemplars. This requires mindfulness of media producers because news naturally tends to pay attention to what is unusual or out of the ordinary (Zillmann, Gibson, Sundar, & Perkins Jr., 1996), and news media also are trying to attract attention so that they receive funding for their work. It is not sufficient for media to simply provide the base rate (the abstract or statistical) information alongside atypical exemplars because what people remember and retrieve from memory is based on the actual examples chosen to represent the whole; they don't tend to remember the numerical data or the abstract descriptions (Zillmann, Gibson, Sundar, & Perkins Jr., 1996). While this study is not specifically looking at exemplification of themes in the film, the theoretical effects of exemplification provide reason to be aware of this theory in relation to this film. Also, the texts of interviews of Church leaders and scholars primarily provided base rate information for the filmmaker--the abstract concepts about the Mormons, or the "big picture," so to speak. The nature of filmmaking itself means that Helen Whitney chose and selected concrete narrative and visual exemplars for the film in order to represent the larger concepts or themes being described.

Third, Nichols (2001) has identified six different types of non-fiction film production. So while in informational media production, such as news reporting, objectivity is king, non-fiction film theory demonstrates that different filmmakers take

different approaches to representing reality. According to the genre theory of cinema, non-fiction film can be divided into six sub-genres or modes of representation: poetic, expository, observational, participatory, reflexive, and performative (Nichols, 2001). Each mode follows a particular set of conventions for the filmmaker to adopt, and the mode of representation then provides cues for the viewers, setting their expectations. Expository film, for instance, is designed to advance a rhetorical position and gives the impression of objectivity through conventions such as the voice-over commentary, which explains and judges actions in the historical world; the commentator's official tone conveys "distance, neutrality, disinterestedness, or omniscience" (Nichols, 2001, p. 107).

Since this documentary film was aired by PBS instead of by the LDS Church or its critics, it provided a way for Americans who were curious about the religion to learn about the religion from a reputable news authority. Unlike other commercial media producers, PBS has high credibility as a producer of authentic representations of history, news, and culture because of its emphasis on educational and social purposes; further, PBS is perceived to not be influenced by the desire to "create compelling images from historical documents" (Choi, 2009). Choi argued that because audiences presume PBS is credible, they may not be aware of the "constructed nature" of its programs. Therefore, PBS programs deserve a more careful examination than do products of commercial news institutions.

One hot topic related to Mormons in the media is the status of women in the LDS Church. Therefore, this study in particular will examine how the filmmaker constructed the portrayal of Mormon women in the film. The following examples provide evidence of the questions journalists and the public have had about Mormon women in recent years.

When Rachel Esplin, a 20-year-old Mormon student at Harvard, agreed to do a public interview with journalist Sally Quinn for a Harvard Hillel interfaith forum on religion, little did she know her recorded interview would go viral on the Internet (Paulson, 2009, March 6, www.boston.com/news/local/articles_of_faith/).

Fellow members of the LDS Church began to discuss with each other online how they would have answered the tough questions had they been in Esplin's situation. Quinn asked Rachel about the role of women in the LDS Church.

Quinn asked, "I know a lot of people are concerned, and I've actually read books by ex-Mormons, particularly women, who say that the Mormon Church is—that there's not equality of women in the Mormon Church. How do you feel about that?" Esplin responded by saying that this question partly depends on how you define equality, and that the status of women in the church is actually "exalted, in a way" because Mormons view Eve as the crowning creation and an equal to Adam. Esplin also said that some women may feel there isn't equality because the church has a patriarchal priesthood, but that the church culturally has progressed on women's issues over the years. According to church doctrine, she emphasized, men and women are equal.

Raising the same issue in *USA Today*, Mary Zeiss Strange, a professor of Women's Studies and Religion at Skidmore College in Saratoga Springs, N.Y., and a member of the magazine's board of contributors, wrote a column about "the stained-glass ceiling" in U.S. religious organizations. She wrote, "The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, the nation's fourth-largest denomination with more than 5 million members, is similarly hostile to the idea of female equality, let alone leadership" (Strange, 2009).

Utah NOW aired a discussion between an Episcopal female minister and an LDS humanities professor on whether or not producers of the HBO show *Big Love* crossed an ethical line in portraying a secret LDS Temple ceremony as part of its plot about a Utah polygamist family (Fabrizio, 2009, March 27). The Reverend Canon Mary June Nestler said it was really moving to her to see this lone woman being excommunicated from the LDS Church for practicing polygamy by a “tribunal of men,” and that this fictional program effectively conveyed the experience of a woman not being given a voice in the religion that she loved so dearly. Nestler interpreted the scene in terms of a lack of gender equality in the LDS Church.

The American public has manifested a great deal of suspicion about the LDS Church’s treatment of women, as well as confusion about the church’s stance on polygamy. When the LDS Church commissioned a survey about its perceived connection to a polygamous group in Texas calling itself the Fundamentalist Latter-day Saints (FLDS), results indicated that 91 percent of respondents had heard of or read stories about the April 2008 raid by Texas authorities on the Yearning for Zion Ranch because of alleged child abuse (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints News page, 2008). More than a third of those surveyed (36 percent) said they believed the polygamous compound was part of the LDS Church based in Salt Lake City; 6 percent said the two groups were partly related; and 29 percent said they were not sure about the connection.

A prime question in America currently about the LDS Church relates to the role of women in a religion that historically practiced polygamy and is still believed to do so by many Americans. Further, Mormon Mitt Romney’s 2008 U.S. presidential run put the question of Mormonism’s relationship to U.S. politics on the agenda.

In sum, this thesis takes a close look at how Whitney's film portrayed the Mormons. It is not within the scope of this study to determine the extent to which the documentary impacted public perception about Mormons, but rather the purpose is to examine how filmmaking decisions impacted the framing and representation of the Mormons.

This study uses textual analysis to compare the themes about Mormon beliefs and Mormon women which arise out of the documentary *The Mormons* with the themes about Mormon beliefs and Mormon women which could have been included, but were not, as evidenced by the commentary provided in the transcripts of interviews with LDS Church officials, members, and scholars. NVivo (2002), a computer software program for qualitative textual analysis, was used to code and categorize these three texts for the sake of comparison: the text of the transcribed interviews with LDS Church officials conducted by the filmmaker during the production of her film (hereafter referred to as the Interviews Text--Church Officials), the text of the transcribed interviews with scholars conducted by the filmmaker during the production of her film (hereafter referred to as the Interviews Text--Scholars), and the transcribed text of the final cut of the documentary film (hereafter referred to as the Film Text).

This thesis will explore the following research questions:

- RQ1: What general themes emerged in the Interviews Text (Church Officials and Scholars)?
- RQ2: What themes about Mormon women emerged in Interviews Text (Church Officials and Scholars)?
- RQ3: What general themes emerged in the Film Text?
- RQ4: What themes about Mormon women emerged in the Film Text?
- RQ5: How were the Interviews Text and the Film Text the same?
- RQ6: How were the Interviews Text and the Film Text different?

RQ7: Based on the themes given emphasis in the film, how did Helen Whitney frame the Mormons?

Chapter 1 introduces the topic and rationale for this research and outlines the content of this thesis.

Chapter 2 reviews the literature on the following topics: the framing of religion in the media, with an historical overview of the Mormon image in film; the significance of exemplification theory for documentary film; and background on the production process of non-fiction film with reference to the stylistic preferences of Helen Whitney as a filmmaker.

Chapter 3 explains in further detail the method of textual analysis and the procedure used by the author for this study.

Chapter 4 details the analysis of the Interviews Text--Church Officials. Using a grounded theory approach, the emergent themes about Mormons and more specifically the themes about Mormon women contained in these interviews of various church leaders are summarized.

Chapter 5 summarizes the themes found in the Interviews Text--Scholars.

Chapter 6 details the analysis of the Film Text. The emergent themes about Mormons, and more specifically Mormon women, selected for the film are summarized.

Chapter 7 summarizes the similarities and differences between the three texts.

Chapter 8 contains a discussion of the research questions, explores the findings of this research in relation to the theories outlined, discusses how Helen Whitney's personal statements about the making of the film inform this study, and provides suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER 2

Review of the Literature

This chapter begins by reviewing the literature on framing religion in the media, specifically providing an historical overview of the Mormon image in film. The significance of exemplification theory for documentary film is then explained, and finally, background is provided on the production process of non-fiction film with reference to the stylistic preferences of Helen Whitney as a filmmaker.

Framing Theory

Definitions

Entman (1993) wrote: “to frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communication text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation” (Entman, 1993, p. 52; Kioussis & Wu, 2008, p. 61). Goffman (1974) proposed that frame analysis “is the study of how events in everyday life are organized or made sense of in coherent ways. We react to things in the world based on the information coming to us through frames. Mass media frame events by organizing them into news stories, which are the products of a journalist’s perceptions and a business organization’s effort to attract audiences” (Stout & Buddenbaum, 2003, p. 1).

Framing Effects (Significance)

A frame is a way of representing reality, by connecting a particular event to a larger context and imbuing it with symbolic value. Contrary to the prevailing limited-

effects theory and Cohen's assertion that media do not tell people what to think, framing theory opens up the possibility that "objective" media may actually tell people how to interpret events, after all.

While the exact relationship is under debate, Lopez-Escobar, Llamas, and McCombs (1998) connected agenda setting with framing by proposing that news media's selection of certain objects (or topics) and their emphasis on certain attributes (or frames) can, in fact, influence how people think about a topic (Lopez-Escobar et al., 1998; Kiousis & Wu, 2008). That is, "...agenda-setting may not just sway people's cognitions, but may also play a role in shaping public attitudes" (Kiousis & Wu, 2008, p. 59).

Two major classes of the attributes used to describe media objects have been defined: the substantive element refers to the cognitive structure of the frame, e.g., whether a news piece describes another country in terms of "conflict" or "U.S. involvement"; the affective element refers to emotional perception of the frame, e.g., whether the "U.S. involvement" frame comes across as positive, neutral, or negative (McCombs, 1995; Kiousis & Wu, 2008, p. 62).

Through exposure and attention to media, the public adopts the frames depicted in public debate and interprets events through these frames, formulating their own opinions (Brewer, 2003). "Political entrepreneurs" deliberately convey frames of issues to the media, hoping that the media will then spread these favorable frames to the public, and that the public will use these frames to make their judgments (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989; Brewer, 2003). Brewer wrote that since the public understands issues in terms of values, it is only natural that frames tend to "make use of widely shared values" (Brewer, 2003, p. 176).

Framing has been effectively used as a campaign tool (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007). In 1997, a Republican pollster, Frank Luntz, sent out a memo to certain members of the U.S. Congress, with the message, “It’s not what you say, it’s how you say it” (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007, p. 9). Luntz’s ideas drew on several decades of research in sociology, economics, psychology, cognitive linguistics, and communication (Goffman, 1974; Kahneman & Tversky, 1979; Kahneman & Tversky, 1984; Lakoff, 2004; Entman, 1991; Iyengar, 1991; Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007).

In contrast to agenda setting theory, which requires the public only to remember a topic or issue, framing is “based on the assumption that how an issue is characterized in news reports can have an influence on how it is understood by audiences” (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007, p. 11). Simple word alterations in “what-would-you-do” scenarios were found to significantly impact people’s decisions, even when the actual scenario went unchanged (Goffman, 1974). Goffman researched framing as a microconstruct, analyzing how individuals apply “interpretive schemas” to make sense of the world around them (Goffman, 1974, p. 24; Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007). Framing in media studies is a macroconstruct, or a model for how journalists and other communicators link new information to already familiar symbols.

While scholars have said public relations framing is deliberate, Scheufele & Tewksbury (2007) maintained that framing is not intentionally used by journalists to manipulate public perceptions; rather, it is a “necessary tool to reduce the complexity of an issue, given the constraints of their respective media related to news holes and airtime” (Gans, 2004; Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007, p. 12). A complex issue like stem-

cell research, then, can be reduced efficiently and explained coherently to non-scientific audiences by use of cognitive schemas, Scheufele & Tewksbury wrote.

Researchers in framing have identified the social forces that influence the frames incorporated into the news (Gamson & Modigliani, 1987). Scheufele (1999) coined the term “frame building” to describe these processes. “The activities of interest groups, policymakers, journalists, and other groups interested in shaping media agendas and frames can have an impact on both the volume and character of news messages about a particular issue” (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007, p. 12).

Framing Religion

The way in which religion is depicted in the media is an important topic for researchers to explore (Stout & Buddenbaum, 2003). In his introduction to *American Jesus: How the Son of God became a National Icon*, Prothero (2003) explained that all Americans, whether Christian or not, currently have to establish a mental conception of Jesus: “...while Christian insiders have had the authority to dictate that others interpret Jesus, they have not had the authority to dictate how these others would do so” (p. 16). In other words, the United States is both Christian and non-Christian, both sacred and secular. One does not have to make a Solomonic choice between the two positions, Prothero maintained, but one does have to form a personal perspective. In this sense, religion is of necessity on the agenda of the pluralistic U.S. and the globe. The topic of religion in the media is currently inescapable because of significant news events related to religion. How religion is framed then in the media has consequences for important “social processes such as religious assimilation and accommodation” (Stout & Buddenbaum, 2003). As examples, Stout and Buddenbaum cited the way in which the

Gilded Age press of Chicago facilitated the revivalism and religious awakening of the late 19th century (Evensen, 2000; Stout & Buddenbaum, 2003). On the other hand, newspapers in Nazi Germany “framed stories in ways that ostracized Jews and invited persecution” (Lasswell, 1971; Stout & Buddenbaum, 2003).

Framing theory provides an approach that researchers can use to answer this important question, raised by Stout and Buddenbaum (2003): “What is the nature of the process by which journalists present religion to their audiences?” Scholars disagree in their interpretations of religious news coverage. For example, Olasky (1990) maintained that the press follows secular guidelines in its framing of religion, while Silk (1995) was convinced that the press’s framing of religion reflects religious values. Here is evident the secular-sacred U.S. debate so well characterized by Prothero.

Framing Mormons

In media originally, the Mormons were portrayed as lecherous murderers (Chen, 2003; Arrington & Haupt, 1968; Bunker & Bitton, 1983; Lynn, 1981). Remarkably, though, in half a century, as Shipps (2000) wrote, the Mormon image was transformed from “satyr to saint” (Chen, 2003, p. 31). This transition occurred simultaneously as Mormons integrated themselves into the mainstream American lifestyle (Chen, 2003). Lythgoe (1968, 1977) and Stathis (1981) analyzed news coverage of the Mormons and concluded that the media was generally positive during the 1960s and 1970s, and only occasionally negative, such as when the Mormon Church took opposing stances on controversial events like the race issue of the 1960s and 1970s and, during the 1980s, the Equal Rights Amendment and the MX missile controversy (Chen, 2003). Through an analysis of news coverage of the Salt Lake Olympics, Chen (2003) found that the

Mormon image of a quickly growing church corresponds to the theory of model minority discourse; while the image is relatively positive, “this image possesses an underside. Through its growing power, the church poses a threat to American society” (Chen, 2003, p. 31). Even though Mormons are portrayed as “clean-cut, patriotic,” and “law-abiding,” they are also seen as “unknowable, un-Christian, and un-American Others” (Chen, 2003, p. 31).

Recent research has indicated that the Mormon image is complex. Givens (1997) and Austin (1998) found that fictional stories about Mormons make use of old stereotypes, but also incorporate paradoxical images of sexual repression, and unwavering obedience. “The Mormon caricature remains a touchstone against which America defines itself” (Chen, 2003, p. 31). In contrast to the 1800s, though, more Americans today value tolerance and diversity over orthodoxy, Chen explained, though the author disagreed with Givens and Austin that all of mainstream America had shifted from orthodoxy to liberalism.

De Pillis (1996) concluded that Mormonism has come to stand for a conservative tradition in the midst of the American “culture war,” as Mormons are associated with capitalism, conformity, heterosexuality, and Republicanism. Kushner’s (1994) stage play, *Angels in America*, is particularly representative of this, De Pillis and Givens (1997) maintained. The Mormon story represents to Kushner all that is wrong with the American past, according to De Pillis’ interpretation of the play, as the play advocates tolerance and a sexually mature society.

Shipps particularly has studied whether or not the LDS Church has joined the mainstream of American religions; Shipps (2001) argued that the religion is losing its

protected minority status because of its worldwide growth, meaning that the media are “likely to be less tolerant of evasive statements,” including statements about the “so-called new polygamy among Mormon culture” which keeps popping up like so many skeletons in the closet (Shipps, 2001, p. 67).

Portrayals of Mormon women.

An observer of Mormon women for *Harper's Weekly* wrote in 1857:

I could not listen to the sermon for looking at those wretched and deluded women, who first enslaved by this atrocious fanaticism, were then swayed at the will of their prophet. I asked myself what new principle of mental magnetism or psychology could fully explain their submission and his power. (Dunfey, 1984, p. 523; Bitton & Bunker, 1978, p. 192)

Many Americans and Europeans were scandalized by the LDS practice of polygamy when the church began to publicly acknowledge and promote the practice in 1852 (Grow, 2006), and these anti-Mormon crusaders assumed that if Mormon women were given the right to vote, the women would abolish the practice of plural marriage themselves (Iversen, 1984). Surprisingly, a nineteenth-century feminist group of Mormon women defended both their right to vote and their practice of plural marriage, which they also called “patriarchal marriage” (Iversen, 1984). Utah was the second territory in the United States to grant female suffrage, and Utah women were the first to vote in the country (Iversen, 1984).

Nevertheless, critics of the Mormon practice of polygamy portrayed Mormon women as the “degraded, depraved, and debased victim of the Mormon priesthood, her situation equated with that of women in the Turkish harem and under slavery”

(Casterline, 1974, p. 129, as cited in Iversen, 1984, p. 505). Meanwhile in the Utah territory, Mormon women published a firmly feminist periodical, the *Woman's Exponent*. The second women's periodical west of the Mississippi, it was managed, supported, and produced by Mormon women (Iversen, 1984, p. 505). Iversen noted that the magazine's masthead declared its intent to support "The Rights of Women of Zion, and the Rights of Women of All Nations" (p. 505).

While paradoxical on the face of it to outside observers, Mormon suffragists saw their feminism and plural marriage as firmly linked (Iversen, 1984). Non-Mormon feminists could not believe that a patriarchal religious system could be compatible with concepts of women's equality and rights. Mormon women defended plural marriage on the basis of their theology and also Victorian notions of ideal womanhood (Iversen, 1984). Theologically, Iversen explained, at the root of plural marriage was a patriarchal organization of society in this life and in the afterlife: women and children were seen as "the appendages of the Mormon males who all held priesthood. Wives gained their status in the afterlife through their husbands" (Iversen, 1984, p. 507). Iversen noted that a modern observer, understandably, would simply dismiss the nineteenth-century Mormon feminist as "the pawn of a monolithic culture and history" (Iversen, 1984, p. 507). However, Iversen (1984) argued that the relationship between polygyny (polygamy), patriarchy, and feminism is more complex than what is assumed at first glance.

From a vantage point of modern feminism, Iversen (1984) examined the relationship between the Mormon practice of plural marriage and Mormon feminism by studying the arguments for and against the practice, as found in the *Woman's Exponent*, personal observations of Utah's plural wives, and the writings of the antipolygamy

crusaders. Iversen found that from a modern vantage point, plural marriage, “a practice based upon patriarchal power and privilege, resulted in an assault upon the ideology of romantic love which produced unplanned outcomes” (Iversen, 1984, p. 507). Such surprising outcomes included intense female bonding and mutual support, greater autonomy for women apart from their husbands, and a measure of economic self-sufficiency as their cooperative efforts freed them from a 100-percent devotion to the domestic sphere, allowing them to engage in educational and career endeavors. Iversen concluded that while the Mormon practice of plural marriage sacrificed the ideal of romantic love, it led to a “path of less male-identified womanhood alluded to by the Mormon woman who posed the question: ‘Is there nothing worth living for, but to be petted, humored, and caressed, by a man?’” (Iversen, 1984, p. 519; *Woman’s Exponent*, 1874, p. 67).

The *Exponent* was a feminist publication with explicitly stated goals to affirm the rights and worth of women, especially Mormon women. The publication was inspired by a desire to “furnish to the world an accurate view of the grossly misrepresented women of Utah” (Bennion, as cited by Baker, 1988, p. xvii). At this time, the public image of Mormon women was full of “negative perceptions of their religious beliefs, moral standards, intelligence, and even their appearance” (Bennion, as cited by Baker, 1988, p. xvii).

Popular images of Mormon women were very negative during the polygamy years. The popular image was established in textual and pictorial depictions in the American press in the 1850s, before the Civil War (Bunker & Bitton, 1983, as cited by Baker, 1988). Bunker and Bitton identified ten categories for the negative portrayals of

Mormon women: They were portrayed as commodities who were owned by their husbands in the same way animals are; their domestic lives were full of discord; they were impoverished; they were overworked slaves in their husbands' households; they were lustful; unattractive; and flirtatious; they competed with other plural wives for fashions and material possessions; they were seen as domineering. These contradictory stereotypes made use of various negative stereotypes about women in general (Baker, 1988). Casterline (1974) studied common images of Mormon women from 1852 to 1890 (as cited by Baker, 1988). Casterline found that in the popular press, the Mormon woman was a "haunting, pathetic figure—woman captive, beleaguered, belabored, befouled—woman 'in the toils'" (Casterline, 1974, p. 29; as cited by Baker, 1988, p. 43).

Casterline (1974) argued that other images could have more accurately represented Mormon women during this time period: Mormon women were religious disciples; celestial wives; women in patriarchy; Western pioneers; and emancipated women. In fact, Casterline pointed out that a substantial number of women in Utah held professional positions in medicine, literature, business, education, and social work by the 1870s, well in advance of women in other parts of the country. Baker's (1988) study of *The Young Woman's Journal*, an indigenous periodical written for young Mormon women, revealed that in the 19th century, Mormon women perceived themselves as sharing in the priesthood; these women saw themselves as "an integral, viable force within the kingdom" (Baker, 1988, p. 42). The *Journal* also offered young Mormon women positive ideals which countered the negative stereotypes (Baker, 1988). The way Mormon women perceived themselves, then, was in stark contrast to how they were depicted in the mainstream media outside of Utah.

After the LDS Church issued the Manifesto 1890 which officially discontinued the practice of polygamy, Mormons began to integrate themselves into mainstream America; their ideal role of women followed suit. Foster (1979) proposed that their controversial marriage system drew Mormon women into the political arena during the antipolygamy and suffrage struggle. In place of their “frontier activism and daring utopianism,” though, Mormon women developed “Victorian gentility” after polygamy was abandoned (Foster, 1979, as cited in Iversen, 1984, p. 519). Accordingly and ironically, their female role became more limited (Iversen, 1984).

A study of periodicals regarding popular opinion about Mormons from 1860 to 1960 found that the most “strenuous objection” to the Mormons over this 100-year time period was due to polygamy (Shipps, 2000, p. 71). Shipps clarified, “the ‘gross sensuality’ aspect of plurality was not nearly as important as the way it seemed to threaten the institution of marriage and the nuclear family” (Shipps, 2000, p. 71). In contrast, by the sexual revolution of the 1960s with its increasing sexual permissiveness in America, Mormons’ eschewing of such behavior meant that they “looked the way most people...thought Americans ought to look and acted the way Americans ought to act” (Shipps, 2000, p. 73).

After the practice of plural marriage was abandoned by the LDS Church, historians began to evaluate the impact polygamy had had on women in the church; such scrutiny has continued to the present time. Valeen Tippetts Avery was a Mormon feminist, Western historian and women’s studies scholar, who published, along with co-author Linda Newell, *Mormon Enigma: Emma Hale Smith, Prophet’s Wife, Elect Lady, Polygamy’s Foe* in 1984; the first edition of the book sold more than 10,000 copies in

hardback, and the second edition in 1994 similarly did well (Shipps, 2006, p. 5). The book was not an orthodox account of Emma's experience with plural marriage, and it raised questions about the messy beginnings of the practice.

Shipps (2002) interpreted polygamy as "the preeminent signal of Sainthood in the nineteenth century" within the LDS Church (p. 18). In her Leonard J. Arrington Mormon History Lecture, she identified the cultural signifiers that historically and currently have been used as cues for fellow Mormons and outsiders to determine a church member's place within the community. During the nineteenth century, the Saints' polygamous familial structure set them apart, Shipps said, much more so than their familial structures today. Currently, large families and family closeness signify Sainthood, but "from the outside, however, domestic Mormonism at the beginning of the twenty-first century is not very different from domestic Evangelicalism or domestic Fundamentalism" (Shipps, 2002, p. 19). LDS women's modesty in dress is a current cultural signifier, Shipps wrote.

The popular press perpetually confused schismatic offshoots of the Mormon Church who had continued the practice of polygamy with the official Mormon Church, which was confusing to outsiders not familiar with the religion (Shipps, 2001). Further, Shipps predicted that with the church's less protected status in the media, and as "plural relationships have been tied in certain cases to the victimization of women and children and possible abuse of welfare funds...what had been tolerable in the Mormon culture region for the past half-century will probably become less acceptable in the future" in Utah (Shipps, 2001, p. 68).

The proposed Equal Rights Amendment in the U.S. put Mormon women in the media spotlight in 1979: the excommunication of Sonia Johnson, president of "Mormons

for ERA,” caused a firestorm in the media and gave the impression that the excommunication of this woman was a measure designed to punish her for supporting the ERA (Shipps, 1980). Shipps, however, countered that assumption, writing that excommunication functioned as a means for a religion to define the boundaries of acceptable behavior for church membership in a pluralistic society. Even though the intent of this Washington-based group was to convince LDS Church leaders to change the church’s anti-ERA position, the group’s attempts backfired because “Confrontation is...alien to Mormonism” (Shipps, 1980, p. 6). In order to quell the storm, the church’s spokesperson made a statement explaining that the church did not object to a member supporting the ERA, but that Johnson was charged with, as Shipps put it, “undermin[ing] the authority of church leaders and [urging] potential converts to turn Mormon missionaries away,” as well as publicly teaching a concept of God that was contrary to Mormon doctrine (Shipps, 1980, p. 6). Drawing on historical precedent, Shipps concluded that the media attention probably would not alter the church’s position on the ERA, but that it probably did seriously reduce the LDS Church’s influence. Significantly, Shipps also concluded that, at the time, “Mormon family values trumped the Church’s anti-ERA stance in the image game” (Shipps, 2001, pp. 64-65), so ultimately the church’s reputation fared well in spite of the controversy.

More recently, for the purpose of identifying ideal roles for women in the LDS Church, Vance (2002) conducted a content analysis of Mormon periodicals between the years of 1897 to 1999. The analysis revealed a tension between desires to accommodate and also resist secular gender norms. During the early 1900s, the periodicals advocated women’s participation in activities outside the home, but a shift occurred, so much so that

during the 1970s, the periodicals insisted upon women's primary and exclusive obligations as wives, mothers, and homemakers. Positions regarding women's roles became inconsistent during the 1980s and 1990s, the author found. Vance concluded that these findings were due to the LDS Church's reaction to its changing sociocultural environment. By the beginning of the 21st century, the LDS Church has taken a position as protector of the "traditional" heterosexual nuclear family (Vance, 2002).

Shippo (2001) predicted that women's role in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints would become a salient topic which the media would mostly likely use to highlight the church's idiosyncrasies in the future. Shippo also forecast that there will never again be simply one Mormon image; rather as new three-dimensional images replace the two-dimensional image of the previous era when the church was protected in the media as a minority religion, "a multiplicity of images [of a worldwide church] is likely to be viewed in a multiplicity of ways" (p. 68). These more nuanced portrayals could ultimately be of benefit to the church, Shippo wrote, but the church will also have to face additional scrutiny. For example, having been invited to appear in both an ABC news segment and a PBS news segment about the church's 1997 sesquicentennial celebrating their arrival in the Salt Lake Valley in 1847, Shippo was on set and saw firsthand the way the producers chose to use the church's public relations' materials. Shippo explained that, previously, Mike Wallace, in his *60 Minutes* interview with President Gordon B. Hinckley, had willingly constructed the Mormons as a model minority, but PBS and ABC did not treat the religion so gingerly. In the PBS NewsHour segment, the producer (who was also the interviewer) focused on Gail Houston, a BYU English professor, who said she had failed to receive tenure because she had discussed

the Saints' belief in a "heavenly mother" in her classes (Shipps, 2001, p. 68). Shipps concluded that in making such production decisions, the interviewer was "direct[ing] attention not only to the LDS acceptance of a female deity but also to the clear preference of the Church authorities for keeping this part of the LDS belief system under wraps" (Shipps, 2001, p. 68).

While Mormon studies and media studies have explored and continue to explore the Mormon image, there is a gap in the literature as it specifically relates to the portrayal of Mormon women currently in the mainstream media. This thesis will contribute to the literature on Mormon women in the media in the first decade of the 21st-century.

Exemplification Theory

While this study is not specifically looking at exemplification in the Film Text, this theory explains why it is so important to consider the examples which a filmmaker selects to represent the whole, as concrete exemplars have been shown to have an inordinate effect on observers' memories and perceptions. Also, the interviews being examined for comparison to the Film Text in this study essentially provide what is called the "base rate information" for the filmmaker; that is, the abstract concepts described by the scholars and Church leaders, for instance, make up the larger picture of the Mormons, while the specific examples chosen by the filmmaker illustrate the more abstract truths or concepts in concrete ways. This theory is instructive in allowing for discussion on how the filmmaker chose to represent the Mormons and whether the specific narratives and visuals included in the film were typical of the religion as a whole.

Definitions

Zillmann (1999) has proposed exemplification theory as a model for explaining the effects of selected exemplars in the news media on audience perception of social reality. Key aspects of this theory include that, first, comprehension, storage and retrieval of basic, concrete events are generally superior to those of complex, abstract events. This means that base rate information such as statistical or wordy descriptions of the incidence of crime, for example, is not understood, encoded, and recalled as readily as is a specific example of a car hijacking, for instance. What is easily retrieved in memory is judged to be more common in the real world; this is called the availability heuristic.

Second, events of consequence attract more attention and are more vigorously processed than irrelevant events (Zillmann, 1999). This means that events which could directly impact individuals are paid more attention to than occurrences far removed from their daily lives.

Third, the quantification heuristic (a short-cut in thinking and processing of information) predicts that people keep track in their minds of how often events occur in the real world, but they don't tally up such events; it's more an ordinal concept of "greater than" or "less than" something else, or an expectation of the likelihood of certain events occurring (Zillmann, 1999). For example, people who watch movies or news reports about college drinking practices tend to report that high percentages of college students engage in social drinking (Andsager, Bemker, Choi, & Torwel, 2006).

Therefore, Zillmann (1999) argues that news media should choose representative, typical exemplars to communicate information to audiences so that audience perception of issues is not skewed by atypical exemplars. This is difficult because news does tend to pay attention to what is unusual or out of the ordinary (Zillmann, Gibson, Sundar, &

Perkins Jr., 1996), and news media also are trying to attract attention so that they get funding for their work. Even if media include disclaimers or make clear what the base rate information is regarding farm failures in the Midwest, for instance, or the incidence of handgun crimes, the research has shown that what people remember and retrieve from memory is based on the exemplars chosen to represent the whole, for example, of farm failures or handgun crimes (Zillmann, Gibson, Sundar, & Perkins Jr., 1996).

Exemplification Theory and Effects

Image exemplars which affect audience members emotionally have been shown to remain especially dominant in memory (Zillmann, Gibson, & Sargent, 1999; Brown & Kulik, 1977; McGaugh, 1990; Zillmann, 1996). U.S. involvement in Somalia has been attributed to public outrage incited by news photographs and film footage of starving children (Zillmann, 1997). Zillmann, Gibson, & Sargent (1999) noted however, “Compellingness is usually granted in retrospect (i.e., after an image is thought to have generated a dramatic effect),” and that “the vast majority of news images are not linked to spectacular consequences” (p. 208). News personnel “tend to provide rather vague answers” as to why they employ certain images over others: “Images are to support, not contradict, the overall focus of a report; or they are to support various foci in a multifaceted report. On occasion, however, it is acknowledged that images are also used to make the layout more lively and aesthetically pleasing, thereby making a paper or a newscast more attractive to consumers” (Zillmann, Gibson, & Sargent, 1999, p. 208; Rivers & Matthews, 1988).

Because of this fact, the authors decided to investigate the effects of more “humdrum” images. Zillmann, Gibson, & Sargent (1999), in a study on the effects of

photographs in news-magazine reports on issue perception, found that the perception of farming economics was greatly influenced by the one-sided use of photographs, as opposed to photographs which accurately represented the number of farms in the U.S. that failed and succeeded. Since people do not remember well the source of information, in the delay condition of the experiment especially, assessments were biased in the direction suggested by the photographs, as the images of farm failures were more easily retrieved in memory than the base-rate information provided in the articles. Because of this scientific support for the effects of exemplification on issue perception, the authors urged news producers to use images in a balanced and accurate way in stories about multifaceted issues.

Grimes (1990) found support for the idea that information presented in advertisements which used both text and images tended to combine and fuse in observers' memories with the passage of time. For example, when verbal statements, such as "The bird was perched atop the tree" were accompanied by images, e.g., an eagle perched on top of a tree, then respondents said they believed the sentence had been, "An eagle was perched atop a tree" (Zillmann, Gibson, Sargent, 1999, p. 209; Pezdek, 1977). Similar effects were found with online dating information, where the text about a dating candidate was neutral, but a picture showed the person drinking. After a 2-day delay, "respondents recalled the text as essentially saying that daters do not reveal their alcoholism, among their vices" (Zillmann, Gibson, & Sargent, 1999, p. 209; Grimes, 1990).

Research on Paivio's (1986) dual-coding theory, the idea that mental representations retain properties of evocative accompanying stimulations, has shown that

logogens (word units) and imagens (visual units) are integrated in the memory automatically over time, and that these concepts in the mind are dominated by imagens, especially over time. This “picture-superiority effect” is well documented (Madigan, 1983; Paivio, Rogers, & Smythe, 1968). According to Zillmann, Gibson, and Sargent (1999), Paivio’s dual-coding theory explains the dominance of images in the perception of phenomena, especially with the passage of time, as being due to the “greater directness of concreteness in the representational quality of images” (Zillmann, Gibson, & Sargent, 1999, p. 210).

Along with images, strong emotions of observers are also associated with heightened encoding and retrieval of information (Kety, 1970). The amygdala appears to be the structure that “computes” and “signals the salience of happenings to the individual” (Zillmann, Gibson, & Sargent, 1999, p. 210; LeDoux, 1992). “Events that stir emotions are obviously more important and, considering the individual’s welfare, more worthy of retention than nonarousing circumstances” (Zillmann, Gibson, & Sargent, 1999, p. 210; Heuer & Reisberg, 1990). The long-lasting vivid impressions associated with “flashbulb memory” have been found to be produced by accompanying extreme emotions (Brown & Kulik, 1977). “But all more moderate emotions also appear to provide conditions for superior long-term storage” (Zillmann, Gibson, & sargent, 1999, p. 210). These memory models, along with the availability heuristic, suggest that images are more memorable than text alone, and that images exert a greater influence on judgment than text, and that images that stir emotions or that are observed during a strong emotional state will amplify this effect.

Exemplification and Religion Journalism

Only one study has been conducted on the effects of exemplification in media on topics related to religious controversy. Gan, Hill, Pschernig, & Zillmann (1996) conducted an experiment of viewer responses to various types of exemplification of Israeli citizens' reactions to a massacre of Palestinians. On February 25, 1994, Israeli settler Baruch Goldstein had gunned down Islamic worshippers in a mosque in the West Bank town of Hebron. The atrocity drew international attention to the Arab-Israeli conflict; broadcast television presented images of the attack by the gunman, including personal and official reactions from Israelis. Some Israelis expressed outrage and condemned the Jewish radical while others praised Goldstein for his deed.

For example, Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin called the massacre “a disgraceful, loathful, criminal act of murder” and said that it brought shame upon all Israelis and Jews (Gan, et al., 1996, p. 123). Many Israelis supported such sentiments. However, “initial broadcasts of the atrocity featured a disproportional number of interviews of Jewish radicals who were jubilant about the slaughter and ready to sanctify its perpetrator. The massacre was characterized as ‘a courageous, moral act’ and ‘a good beginning’ in killing of the Palestinians” (Gan, et al., 1996, p. 123). Even the prestigious *New York Times* led the way in focusing on Jewish hatred of Palestinians. A front-page article in the *Times* quoted Rabbi Yaacov Perrin’s eulogy of Baruch Goldstein: “One million Arabs are not worth a Jewish fingernail” (Gan, et al., 1996, p. 124).

In an unusual move, the media began some introspection of their coverage. Jeff Greenfield of ABC made this point:

“[We] see this over and over, whether the issue is the Middle East, race relations, or abortion, to name a few. A handful of extremists may well

speak for no one but themselves; but if they're loud enough or outrageous enough, they're going to get their 15 minutes of fame....representative or not, such sentiments are clearly provocative, clearly dramatic...but when the pictures we paint of the world on such occasions are filled with colors from the farthest edge of the spectrum, we paint a picture that at best reflects only a small part of reality.” (Gan, et al., 1996, p. 124)

Gan, et al. (1996) explained, “Unfortunately, in this and uncounted similar cases, it is left entirely unclear exactly how far out on the spectrum the views of the featured radicals were. It is left to the citizens’ imagination to infer the extent to which a news report provided exemplars that are rare or common in a population under consideration” (p. 127). Further, “In the absence of information that allows a determination of the distribution of particular reactions to the massacre in the population at large, all viewers are placed at risk of misestimating the incidence of prevailing views and dispositions-- views and dispositions that were selectively exemplified in a news report” (Gan, et al., 1996, p. 127).

This experiment by Gan, et al. (1996) measured news viewers’ reactions to broadcast news coverage of the Hebron massacre. The study used four experimental conditions: the same factual description of the event was included in the beginning of each condition. The conditions varied according to the type of interviews/exemplars that followed the factual description. In the first condition, the Jews interviewed condoned, even glorified, the carnage; in the second condition, the Jews interviewed deplored and condemned it; and in the third condition, both reactions were included, those who condoned it and those who condemned it. The control condition omitted the interview

coverage altogether and simply provided the factual description seen in the beginning by all the groups.

Viewers in the first condition who saw interviews with Jews who approved of the violence concluded that the Jews and Israelis in general were to blame for the violence, that they were less willing to make peace, and that they were more likely to commit similar attacks on the Palestinians. Also, these viewers overestimated the numbers of Israelis who were potentially violent and underestimated the numbers of Israelis committed to peace (Gan, et al., 1996). On the other hand, the complementary hypothesis was not supported: the group that viewed the examples of Jews who strongly condemned the massacre did not overestimate the Israelis' peace resolve, as had been expected by the researchers. The authors theorized that strong denunciations of Israeli violence by Israeli officials only reinforced in viewers' minds that there were violent members of the population who needed to be curtailed and controlled by strong leaders. Since the broadcast had featured condemnations mostly by persons in some official capacity, it is possible that such condemnations and "apologies for violence do not diminish the perceived likelihood of violence perpetrated by other members of the population" (Gan, et al, 1996, p.126). "If anything," the authors surmised, "the necessity for official apologies seems to have highlighted, and thereby focused attention on, the proclivity for violent action by some Israeli factions" (Gan, et al., 1996, p.126).

Gan, et al. (1996) concluded that the findings support the use of balanced exemplifications in news reports and the strict avoidance of sensational, one-sided, selective exemplification. Viewers' perceptions in the third condition which alternated testimonies of Jews for and against the violence were at the same level as viewers'

perceptions in the control group who were not exposed to any interviews of Jewish reactions.

This study had several limitations. Since it was limited to the exemplification of a single event, these findings should not necessarily be generalized to all events. Other variables need to be controlled for in future experiments, such as the degree of contempt expressed, and various populations' awareness of the events from more direct experience. "It is conceivable that the reported effects are specific to the expression of extreme contemptuousness and hatred as well as to a comparatively high degree of ambiguity about the exemplified realities. Moreover, different populations might react differently" (Gan, et al., 1996, p. 127). Israelis, for instance, are likely to be more aware of the actual percentage of the radical Israeli minority. Palestinians, in contrast, who have had experiences with Jewish hostility, might misjudge Israeli peace resolve when exposed to further examples of Jewish hatred in the media. Also, what if the official apologies were not included and only Israeli citizens were interviewed and expressed condemnation of the massacre, would viewers then decide that more Israeli citizens supported peace efforts?

Non-Fiction Film Editing

Definitions

According to the genre theory of cinema, documentary film can be divided into six sub-genres or modes of representation: poetic, expository, observational, participatory, reflexive, and performative (Nichols, 2001). Each of these six modes follows a particular set of conventions for the filmmaker to adopt, and the mode of representation provides cues for the viewers, setting their expectations (Nichols, 2001).

When a film is categorized into one of these sub-genres, this does not mean the film solely follows the particular conventions of that sub-genre; rather, it means that particular mode is the dominant one, but that other stylistic techniques may also be used (Nichols, 2001). New modes of representation arise partly due to a “sense of dissatisfaction among filmmakers with a previous mode” (Nichols, 2001, p. 100). For example, Nichols (2001) explained, the observational mode came about with the development of portable 16mm cameras and magnetic tape recorders in the 1960s, which made it possible for filmmakers to easily capture events as they were happening: poetic documentary then was considered too abstract, “and expository documentary too didactic” (Nichols, 2001, p. 100).

Poetic.

Different modes have their positive aspects as well as limitations. Closely associated with the modernist movement, the poetic mode stresses mood, tone, and affect rather than information or a rhetorical view (Nichols, 2001); lacking continuity editing, this mode is appropriate for evoking moods through the juxtaposition and patterning of fragmented images. A limitation is that the poetic mode can be too vague and abstract.

Expository.

The expository mode, in contrast, is designed to advance an argument or a rhetorical position instead of evoke a mood (Nichols, 2001). This mode provides authoritative commentary, originally through a voice-of-God commentary where the narrator is heard but not seen, but later also through a voice-of-authority commentary where the speaker is heard and seen (Nichols, 2001). A classic example of this style is Capra’s *Why We Fight* series, made to encourage American soldiers to serve in WWII, but television news today and other informational documentaries also make use of this

style. The spoken word takes precedence over the image, ironically; the visual serves in a supporting role to the organizing logic of the film. Since the spoken argument or perspective is key, editing is used for the “continuity of the spoken argument or perspective,” which is called evidentiary editing (Nichols, 2001, p. 107). Expository film gives “the impression of objectivity” through conventions such as the voice-over commentary, which explains and judges actions in the historical world; the commentator’s official tone conveys “distance, neutrality, disinterestedness, or omniscience” (Nichols, 2001, p. 107). This mode is well-suited to conveying information or advancing an argument, but Nichols (2001) maintained that expository documentary films, at the core, rely on the filmmaker’s and audience’s beliefs instead of logic. For example, Capra’s *Why We Fight* series attempted to persuade American men to enlist by appealing to such values as American patriotism and democratic ideals, as well as by emphasizing the horrors of the Axis powers’ war methods. Nichols argued that when the alternatives are seen as the “free world” or the “slave world,” the decision seems simple. Such common sense, though, Nichols argued, is conditioned on pre-existing worldviews. “Common sense is less an enduring than a historically conditioned set of values and perspectives. For this reason some expository films that seem classic examples of oratorical persuasiveness at one moment will seem quite dated at another” (Nichols, 2001, p. 109).

Observational versus participatory modes.

While the observational mode shied away from expository and poetic forms, it raised questions about the authenticity of events captured by the camera: to what degree does the filmmaker’s or the camera’s presence alter how people being filmed behave?

The participatory mode, then, took some lessons from anthropology and made use of participant-observation by the filmmaker. Even with this style however, the methods of social science research are less important than the goal of “moving and persuading an audience” (Nichols, 2001, p. 116).

Observational documentary de-emphasizes persuasion to give us a sense of what it is like to be in a given situation but without a sense of what it is like for the filmmaker to be there, too. Participatory documentary gives us a sense of what it is like for the filmmaker to be in a given situation and how that situation alters as a result. (Nichols, 2001, p. 116)

Participatory.

There are many strands of the participatory mode, including cinema vérité, investigative films, personal testimonials, and films that represent broad social issues and historical perspectives through interviews and compilation footage. The main feature of participatory documentaries is that the participative presence of the filmmaker is visible. Audiences therefore expect to “witness the historical world as represented by someone who actively engages with” that world, in contrast to expecting a representation made by an unobtrusive observer, poet, or expositor (Nichols, 2001, p. 116).

The filmmaker steps out from behind the cloak of voice-over commentary, steps away from poetic meditation, steps down from a fly-on-the-wall perch, and becomes a social actor (almost) like any other. (Almost like any other because the filmmaker retains the camera, and with it, a certain degree of potential power and control over events.) (Nichols, 2001, p. 116)

Limitations of the participatory mode include that it can put too much faith in witnesses and be too intrusive (Nichols, 2001).

Reflexive.

The reflexive mode, which emerged in the 1980s, questions documentary form, and de-familiarizes the other modes, but it tends to lose sight of actual issues (Nichols, 2001). The performative mode, which also emerged in the 1980s, stresses the “subjective aspects of a classically objective discourse,” but its disregarding of objectivity may turn such films into avant-garde film, and they may use stylistic techniques “excessively” (Nichols, 2001, p. 138).

According to the *auteur* theory of cinema, “Every documentary has its own distinct voice” (Nichols, 2001, p. 99; Rabiger, 1997).

Broadcast Television Documentaries and Codes of Objectivity

Television news documentaries came into their own in the late 1960s. On one hand, entertainment television almost took over the airwaves, but on the other hand, network news grew in its reach, devoting more in-depth coverage to the tumultuous topics of the day, including the civil rights movement and the Vietnam War (Dow, 2004, p. 57; Barnouw, 1990; Baughman, 1992; Watson, 1988). CBS’s *60 Minutes* premiered in 1968, and “America’s prime news source” by 1970 was television; “TV news was becoming more acceptable, believable, and profitable” (Hammond, 1991, p. 106; Dow, 2004, p. 57). Dow (2004) explained that television news came under increasing pressure from institutional and political sources.

The increasing prominence of TV news and its investigative reports of the U.S. Government in the 1970s led to a backlash from the Johnson and Nixon administrations.

Nixon's vice president, Spiro Agnew, launched a tirade against the TV news networks in New York, saying *their* credibility was in question, not the government's (Barnouw, 1990; Dow, 2004). The Nixon-appointed chairman of the Federal Communications Commission vocally supported the Nixon administration, and because of this, networks and affiliates came under pressure to "modify their coverage of political protest" (Barnouw, 1990; Dow, 2004, p. 58). Dow (2004) asserted that the evidence from this time period supports the idea that TV news and documentaries were made in a climate of "rhetorical constraints arising from the intersecting personal... institutional, and political contexts" (Dow, 2004, p. 58).

Codes of objectivity, such as talking-head interviews, visual footage, and a point-counterpoint organization, have been found to give the impression of objectivity, and therefore, lend greater credibility to documentary films; these conventions also cloak the rhetorical stances of the filmmaker. Dow (2004) concluded from a study of a 1970 ABC television documentary about the burgeoning Second-wave feminist movement that "the 'Women's Liberation' documentary was far more than an introduction to the ideas and activities of the movement: it was a considered attempt to stabilize those ideas and activities for a presumably middle American audience that had little concrete experience with the second wave of feminism beyond its representations in public discourse" (p. 54). Dow argued that the form of this documentary (its conventions), its historical analogies to the civil rights movement (framing), and its use of verbal and visual refutation meant that the documentary had a rhetorical or persuasive agenda behind it. These rhetorical moves, Dow wrote, served to "fix" feminism, to stabilize and repair audience perceptions of the significance of the Second-wave feminist movement. "The evidence is persuasive that

Sanders [the female ABC news reporter] felt pressure to improve the poor media image of women's liberation but also needed to avoid explicitly highlighting her own sympathies for the movement. In addition, she was working within the form of documentary, a genre that, like network news in general, had become more politicized by 1970" (Dow, 2004, p. 58).

Watkins (2001) found that certain broadcast news conventions contributed to the credibility of the network news coverage of the Million Man March: on-camera soundbites, the use of dominant media frames, the inclusion of prominent persons who were the "chief definers" of the situation, and the use of point and counterpoint all contributed to giving the perception of balance (p. 91). Framing of controversy also plays a role in the portrayal of objectivity. Watkins (2001) explained that while the practice of providing point and counterpoint (one perspective and then a contrasting perspective) is typical of news coverage of legitimate controversies, in contrast during times of national solidarity, such as national mourning or a presidential inauguration, news coverage adopts a consensual stance, abandoning the point-counterpoint convention because it is perceived as unnecessary in such situations.

Finally, journalists and news institutions tend to frame forms of protest as deviant which operate outside of the boundaries of normative behavior (Hallin, 1994; Watkins, 2001). Watkins elaborated that even within the sphere of legitimate controversy, though, network television news is still "cloaked in ideologically charged presuppositions," and that "the dominant conventions of television news are elaborately designed to efface traces of ideological bias" (Watkins, 2001, p. 93).

In addition to the point-counterpoint organization, other codes of objectivity also obscure the traces of personal, institutional, and political bias. Talking-head interviews and visual footage are used in television news as well as long-format non-fiction films. Hoerl (2007) identified these two prominent features as codes of objectivity in the documentary *Berkeley in the Sixties*. Hoerl (2007) found that this film “obscur[ed] the appearance of partiality” by making use of the convention of talking-head interviews with former Berkeley activists and by inserting archival film footage as evidence of the activists’ commentaries. These stylistic conventions “encouraged audiences to perceive that they are able to generate objective understanding about 1960s activism for themselves” (Hoerl, 2007, p. 4).

Evidentiary editing benefits from the persuasive power of photographic realism: the fact that visual images provide such natural “proof” of an event in the real world as it happened hides the fact that such archival footage can be edited to support certain points of view (Rosteck, 1994; Hoerl, 2007). Visual images are often seen not as representations of events, “but actual copies of events that once existed outside filmic construction” (Hoerl, 2007, p. 11). Sontag (1973) explained that the photographic proof of an event effectively overcomes the skepticism of hear-say. Cloud (2004) concluded from a study of photographic images of Afghan women after the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks that “photographs are rhetorical constructions that mask their framing strategies, such as the photographer’s selection, editing, use of light, arrangement of subjects, by the appearance of having captured reality” (p. 289; Hoerl, 2007, pp. 11-12).

Non-Fiction Film and Mormons

Anti-Mormon cinema had its roots in 19th-century literature (Astle & Burton, 2007). The Mormon image was first mediated through film with the 1905 nickelodeon film *A Trip to Salt Lake City*, a standard comedy, but unique for its subject (Astle & Burton, 2007). The picture shows the interior of a Pullman railway car where several women each come in and put young children into their sleeping berths. Finally, one lone man enters the car and is overwhelmed by his lively children, then picked at by his many wives. He exits, then returns with a large water canister, which he hooks up to hoses; each bunk receives its own hose, and this is how he provides water to his large family. This film was prompted by the Reed Smoot hearings of 1904, in which the U.S. Congress hotly debated whether or not to seat a Mormon apostle in the U.S. Senate (Astle & Burton, 2007). There was a trend in early motion pictures of responding to current events and also banking on stereotypes found in Victorian literature (Nelson, 1987). Victorian literature often treated Mormonism in a sensationalist way (Cornwall & Arrington, 1983; Austin, 1998). The financial and popular success of a Denmark-made, high-profile film, *A Victim of the Mormons* began an onslaught of anti-Mormon films that lasted from 1911 to 1913. (Astle & Burton, 2007; Nelson, 1987; Olmstead, 2004). Astle and Burton (2007) wrote, “The experience of these two years determined how the [LDS] Church has seen and approached cinema ever since” (p. 31). Astle and Burton called this the First Wave of Mormon cinema (1905-1929).

A 1917 film marked the high-point of anti-Mormon film in the U.S (Nelson, 1987). *A Mormon Maid* (1917) merged the portrayals of the Ku Klux Klan in D.W. Griffith’s *Birth of a Nation* with the Danites; it came with intertitles that said the Danites’ hooded costumes were the predecessor of the KKK’s (the Danites were lawmen

appointed by Brigham Young to deal with stealing and cattle rustling during the Mormons' very early years in the Utah Territory; they were later replaced by sheriffs and policemen with civil rather than religious powers; anti-Mormon books and films portrayed them as dangerous characters). This film had an impact on LDS missionaries as far away as Tasmania: "In 1918, missionaries reporting from Tasmania expressed less concern about World War I than they did over *A Mormon Maid* (1918), that 'immoral, villainous, and slanderous picture,' which gave them 'some pretty warm times' while they were tracting" (Burton, 2007, p. 8). D'Arc (2007) studied such "Mormonsploitation films" and drew parallels between Winifred Graham's *The Love Story of a Mormon*, the film *Trapped by the Mormons*, and Bram Stoker's *Dracula*. Nelson (1987) stated that *A Mormon Maid* was an example of silent film functioning as commercial propaganda.

Astle and Burton (2007) saw a distinct shift in the treatment of Mormons in film because of the Hays Production Code (adopted by the Motion Picture Association of America in 1930) and called this period, which showed a kinder, even positive, portrayal of Mormonism, The Second Wave (1929-1953). The Code included a stipulation against misrepresenting faiths or ministers of religion (Astle & Burton, 2007), and so Mormons were represented only in a geographic sense, the authors observed; their religion remained absent from the films. In *The Man from Utah* (1934), John Wayne's portrayal of a presumably Mormon man (who doesn't drink and is morally upright) provided a sharp contrast to the lecherous, greedy, power-hungry Mormon male of previous eras. In the emerging newsreels and travelogues, Mormons also were portrayed positively during the Depression of the 1930s because of their humanitarian efforts to relieve the poor (Astle & Burton, 2007). Astle and Burton (2007) called the Hollywood big-budget film

Brigham Young (1940) a “public relations victory [for the LDS Church] of the highest order” (p. 50), and considered *Wagon Master* (1950) an under-appreciated gem of a film for its humanistic, authentic portrayal of the Mormon settlers who came through the Hole in the Rock; this film is critically regarded now as one of John Ford’s greatest films (Berg, 2001). Astle and Burton (2007) summarized that the positive portrayals of Mormonism during the Second Wave indicate that the Mormon image improved dramatically when it became merged with the mythology of the American West.

Astle and Burton (2007) explained that during The Third Wave (1953-1974), American filmmakers transitioned into a post-classical Hollywood style which made use of “sex, violence, and narrative and stylistic disjunction” (p. 77). This meant that, with the exception of television which was still very much controlled, mainstream portrayals of Mormons again became more sensational, returning to the topic of polygamy. The combination of European influences and the new rating system in the U.S. allowed for sexual explorations of Mormonism in the theaters. *The Bordello* (1972) was an openly pornographic film with some minor characters who were identified as Mormons. An American film, *Advise and Consent*, portrayed Mormons’ homophobia, and a German film, *Mealtimes*, treated the subjects of troubled marriage, sexuality, conversion to the Mormon Church, and suicide.

Never limited by censorship like their American counterparts, European film producers had simply avoided Mormonism because it was not commercial. In the wake of the sexual revolution, however, and with their new conservative image as an attractive foil to changing mores, Mormons again found their way into European films. (Astle & Burton, 2007, p. 93)

Television and informational film was more positive, the authors stated. News and informational programming replaced newsreels: Ed Murrow featured then-Secretary of Agriculture Ezra Taft Benson at home with his family, and documentaries portrayed BYU performing groups, Brigham Young's Lion House, and Mormon families (Astle & Burton, 2007). The BBC, since this time and to this day, Astle and Burton (2007) concluded, has made the most even-handed portrayals of Mormons in documentaries, indicating a substantial shift in Britons' perceptions of Mormonism since the 1920s.

Astle and Burton (2007) distinguished two strands, with endless variations, in the depictions of Mormons during The Fourth Wave (1974-2000). Documentaries tended to treat the LDS Church in a fair and balanced way, but fictional films returned increasingly to old stereotypes and fear-mongering. Utah KUED producer Ken Verdoia's documentaries compared the Mormon experience to the greater American experience, while Mormon-exploitation films emerged on television as versions of true-crime dramas; similar sensationalistic, but more pornographic, films which portrayed Mormons were made for theaters, including Trey Parker's *Orgazmo* (1997). Scholars have theorized that the LDS Church's growth, along with its controversial stances on social issues, repeatedly make Mormonism the "Other worthy of fear and attention" (Astle & Burton, 2007, p. 122; Givens, 1997). However, the definition of what is "Other" has changed (Givens, 1997). As Austin (1995) put it, "In the nineteenth-century, Mormons... were portrayed as promiscuous misfits in a Victorian society. In the 1990s the typical Mormon character has become a Victorian misfit in a promiscuous society" (pp. 141-142). The technical development of VHS also offered an affordable outlet to filmmakers who intended to damage the LDS Church's reputation, as was the case with

Ed Decker's *The Godmakers* (1983) (Astle & Burton, 2007). Even though Decker, a former member of the LDS Church, promoted the anti-Mormon film as a legitimate documentary, third parties agreed the film was propaganda (Mackey, 1985).

The trend for how Mormons are portrayed currently in cinema, or in Astle and Burton's (2007) *Fifth Wave* (2000-present), is toward more three-dimensional, complex representations. The LDS Church itself gained more credibility in the media with the 2002 Winter Olympics in Salt Lake City and the 2007 presidential campaign of Mitt Romney, the authors concluded. This means that audiences are more skeptical of flat, stereotypical portrayals which are throwbacks to previous eras. *Angels in America*, a film based on a stage-play about religion and homosexuality during the AIDS epidemic in New York, *Big Love* (2002), about a contemporary polygamist Utah family, and Helen Whitney's documentary *The Mormons* (2007) all suggest more nuanced, complicated portrayals of Mormons in film.

However, as this thesis was being written, a documentary film came out about the LDS Church's involvement in Proposition 8, or the California Marriage Protection Act, during the 2008 election. Passed by a slim majority of voters, a constitutional amendment was added to the California Constitution, stating that "only marriage between a man and a woman is valid or recognized in California." The 2010 film by Reed Cowan and Steven Greenstreet (who both grew up as members of the LDS Church), entitled, *8: The Mormon Proposition*, was released on the second anniversary of California's legislation of gay marriage. One reviewer of the film, Michelle Orange, wrote, "...the film assembles a damning case against the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (LDS), which spearheaded a massive campaign to revoke gay marriage rights. Directors [Cowan and

Greenstreet] make their agenda clear from the first frames, which depict a Mormon ‘prophet’ calmly denouncing gay marriage in extreme close-up, his face distorted with scary, *Poltergeist*-style pixilation. The opening impression--that the LDS acted villainously with regard to Prop 8--will soon be supported by a raft of facts; that the Mormon church couldn’t have done it alone is a complication the film sidesteps almost completely.” Also, the reviewer commented that the LDS Church “raised a huge sum of money by strong-arming their congregants with encoded threats of God’s wrath” (Orange, 2010, Movie Line Web site).

Helen Whitney as Filmmaker

Whitney’s film projects have been devoted to issues of faith and spirituality: her resume includes *The Monastery* (1981), *John Paul II: The Millennial Pope* (1999), and *Faith and Doubt at Ground Zero* (2002). *The Monastery* began her fascination with people’s “radical commitment” to religion, the kind of commitment that sets them apart and makes them a puzzle to outsiders (Phillips, 2007). Whitney said she is “an intermittent believer,” and that “the big existential questions rivet [her]” (Phillips, 2007).

Cultural events, such as Mitt Romney’s presidential run, HBO’s show *Big Love*, about Utah polygamists, and the arrest of Warren Jeffs, the leader of a Mormon fundamentalist sect, piqued public curiosity about Mormonism prior to the airing of the her recent documentary, *The Mormons*. These events did little to dispel stereotypes about polygamy (Phillips, 2007). “I hope people will come to look at this religion with the seriousness and respect they look at other religions,” Whitney said (Phillips, 2007). Whitney said that many people outside of the LDS Church do not realize the church has not sanctioned polygamy since 1890 (Phillips, 2007). “Polygamy was the defining

otherness to this religion,” she said. “Once Mormons gave that up, they entered mainstream America with a vengeance” (Phillips, 2007). Whitney told *Current* magazine her goal was to capture the inspirational potential of the faith rather than the limitations members may feel; she said she was personally moved by the conviction of a 23-year-old Mormon opera singer dying of a rare heart disease, and the amount of certainty she expressed instead of mere hope in an afterlife (Phillips, 2007).

Whitney said she thinks Mormonism is one of the great, neglected narratives because so little is generally known about the religion. Even literate people, she said, come to her with assumptions that Mormons are like the Amish, live on farms without televisions, and that they are afraid to leave their narrow confines of Utah (Fabrizio, 2007). The depth and breadth of people’s ignorance about Mormons amazes her, she told the interviewer, Doug Fabrizio.

Helen Whitney said she is constantly being asked, “How can people believe in golden plates in the age of the printing press?” She referred to Harold Bloom who said that all religion depends upon revelation, supporting spirituality and Mormonism by saying, “Then how can you believe in the immaculate conception or in burning bushes or in Christ rising....We seem to give a freer past to religions whose messiness is lost in the mists of time. For Mormonism, there’s no place to hide. I think that’s unfair, I really do” (Fabrizio, 2007).

Whitney said more Mormons know their religion’s past than is typical among other religions, but she asserted that the “shadow side” of Mormonism’s history is not well-known among the faithful (Fabrizio, 2007). She senses a greater openness among

Mormons to explore the messier parts of their history than, say, 20 years ago (Fabrizio, 2007).

When asked why she spent so much time telling the story of polygamy and Mountain Meadows Massacre, (a shocking incident in which some 50 to 60 local militiamen in southern Utah, aided by American Indian allies, massacred about 120 emigrants who were traveling by wagon to California; see Walker, Turley Jr., and Leonard, 2008, *Massacre at Mountain Meadows*). Whitney responded with her justification by saying that these stories are representative of something larger to her (Fabrizio, 2007). Something that fascinates her about polygamy and that is so little known, she said, is that it was practiced for spiritual reasons, not strictly sociological ones. It was a spiritual principle intimately connected with Mormons' belief in salvation (Fabrizio, 2007). Whitney referred to Kathleen Flake's commentary, which was included in the documentary: Flake compared requiring Mormons to stop the practice of plural marriage to asking them to stop baptisms. Whitney summarized that polygamy was one of the central reasons Mormons were so persecuted, it was central to Mormons' belief in salvation, and it was central to the limits of religious freedom in the U.S.

She hoped this documentary would be the first of many programs to explore the Mormon Church more in more detail. She said she wanted to increase non-Mormons' literacy of the religion and dispel stereotypes; she wanted to make clear what is distinctive, what is "Other," and also what is familiar about Mormonism for Americans—"how it reenacts the early stages of Christianity in other religions" (Fabrizio, 2007).

Ken Verdoia, a documentary filmmaker who has also made documentaries about Mormon history and a producer at the Utah PBS affiliate KUED, said of Helen

Whitney's style that she's exceptionally good at "[capturing] the fullness of the spirit in the moment of crisis," and at showing the joy of people who have found direction through Mormonism (Fabrizio, 2007). He said, though, he stays far away from the ineffable experiences of religion; he prefers to tell stories which document historical fact, the Latter-day Saints' migration from New York to Kirtland to Nauvoo, and farther West, for instance, while Whitney likes to delve into spirituality in her documentaries on religion.

Whitney also participated in an online question and answer forum about her film, made possible by the Washington Post in its religion and public affairs Web site. Whitney agreed that it is extremely difficult to capture religion because it is something that is essentially ineffable. "I think the best approach is minimal analysis, maximum imagery, music and personal stories. The great challenge is to get people to talk about these elusive subjects with poetry and precision" (WashingtonPost Web page). A viewer asked Whitney why she left out the role of LDS women in the suffrage movement; Whitney responded that with only four hours to cover the entire history of the church, she had to leave out interesting and important details (WashingtonPost Web page). With the help of scholars, Whitney said she chose the topics she did because they were the "defining themes, events and ideas of Mormon history. Each was focused on one of these themes. Revelation; Persecution; The Latter Day Saints; [Mountain Meadows Massacre], polygamy, The Great Accommodation, The Missionaries, Exiles and Dissenters; Family and The Temple" (WashingtonPost Web page). In agreeing with a viewer who asked her a question online, Whitney said she would have liked to have been able to develop the Mormon doctrine of polygamy here and in the next life (WashingtonPost Web page).

Whitney said she supported the efforts of an excommunicated woman by saying this woman's intentions were to help the church, not hurt. When challenged by a Mormon viewer about her decision to include substantial commentary by excommunicated members of the Church, Whitney replied that out of the entire two hours, she had devoted relatively little time talking to people whom this questioner described as "bitter." She added that she didn't know to whom the viewer was referring—the segment on the missionary who left the church was no longer than three minutes; the woman who was excommunicated [Margaret Toscano] was hurt but not bitter. "She [Toscano] considered herself as a member of the loyal opposition who was trying to help the church, not hurt. She believes (as do many active members) that for an institution to be spiritually healthy, it should encourage questioning" (WashingtonPost Web page). She also said that she deliberately chose "tempered, measured voices" and not the vitriolic ones easily found on the Internet, for instance.

Whitney indicated she was glad if LDS viewers became more introspective about their culture after seeing the film. One viewer wrote in to Whitney that he/she was especially touched by the personal accounts of individuals "who are the victims of a sometimes hard and rigid culture. Perhaps we as members of the Church will remember that it is [more] important [to] love than to judge and shun," to which Whitney responded: "Arguably, yours is one of the most moving tributes to our documentary. If your response is similar to others, then we truly have created an important work" (WashingtonPost Web page).

CHAPTER 3

Methodology

A case study methodology which combined textual analysis with an examination of the filmmaker's personal statements about the film was appropriate for this inquiry into the production decisions made for Helen Whitney's film because through this method, the researcher was able to draw some conclusions about the impact of the filmmaking decisions on the portrayal of Mormon beliefs and the representation of Mormon women. First, the textual analysis allowed the author to determine the themes that were apparent in the Film Text and the themes that could have been included in the film, but were not. Specifically, the transcripts of the interviews that Helen Whitney conducted with scholars and church leaders provided the pool of commentary from which the filmmaker and editors drew in order to provide the base rate (or abstract, general) information of the film; these interviews also provided some of the exemplars incorporated into the film. Second, by taking into consideration the filmmaker's perspective on the making of this particular film, this thesis can shed light on the usually hidden process of filmmaking and the consequences of such decisions, both intended and unintended, on the portrayal of the Mormons.

Case Study

A case study methodology is appropriate when a researcher is relying on "multiple sources of evidence" (Yin, 1984, p. 23). Yin defined the case study as an

“inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (p. 23). Further, he stated that case studies are appropriate for examining explanatory “how” and “why” research questions in situations where the investigator does not have much, or any, control (Yin, 1984, p. 20). This methodology allows the researcher to trace “operational links...over time” (p. 18). In another definition of a case study, Stacks (2002) explained that it is an in-depth study of “particular people, organization, events, or even processes” that provides “richly detailed and complete understanding of the case” (p. 71). Similarly, Berg (2007) compared this methodology to Geertz’s (1973) idea of “thick description” inasmuch as a case study examines the processes that individuals use to make sense of a phenomenon.

As this research incorporates both the textual analysis of the Interviews Texts and the Film Text as well as the filmmaker’s perspective on making the film, a case study methodology is appropriate. This research provides “thick description” of the texts under analysis and links the decisions made in the making of the film with their consequences.

As a qualitative methodology, case studies are well-suited to exploring complex relationships, developing theory, and evaluating the impact of variables on outcomes, though not measuring the degree of impact (George & Bennett, 2005, p. 25). A limitation of this methodology is that it suffers from small sample sizes and is not generalizable to larger populations. However, George and Bennett (2005) have pointed out that “case study researchers are more interested in finding the conditions under which specified outcomes occur, rather than uncovering the frequency with which those conditions and outcomes arise” (George & Bennett, 2005, p. 31; as cited by Wilson, 2009, p. 52).

Case studies and other qualitative methods such as textual analysis have been critiqued for their vulnerability to researcher bias, or the tendency for researchers to find results that match their preconceived notions (Flyvbjerg, 2006; as cited by Wilson, 2009, p. 53). According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), though, by following well-established and rigorous procedures, researcher bias can be reduced and the reliability of the research can be increased.

Textual Analysis (Qualitative Content Analysis)

Theoretical Validity of Thematic Analysis as a Method

As this study seeks to identify the major themes about Mormon beliefs and about Mormon women in two texts for the purpose of comparing those themes, this methodological justification begins with a summary of how qualitative textual analysis has been used as a legitimate method for discovering the thematic content of mass communication texts.

Kracauer (1952) addressed the challenges and benefits of qualitative textual analysis. His three points included that (1) quantitative analysis, as it is so focused on turning elusive meanings into hard numbers, may actually reduce the accuracy of the analysis; thus, in certain cases, qualitative analysis better handles texts which defy hard-and-fast numerical coding; (2) the assumptions on which quantitative analysis is based tend to prevent a fair evaluation of the benefits that qualitative textual analysis may offer communications research; and (3) "Since quantitative analysis proves to be inadequate to describe more involved communications, it would seem advisable to inquire into the prospects of an analytical approach which emphasizes qualitative rather than quantitative procedures" (p. 637).

As to the first point, Kracauer (1952) provided an example to demonstrate that communications messages lie on a continuum: on one end, a text such as a news report on a train wreck, is easily coded numerically; on the other end of the continuum would be communication texts such as a modernist poem, which defy consistent interpretations, and thus, numerical coding. As Kracauer has observed, “Qualitative analysis by definition differs from quantitative analysis in that it achieves its breakdowns without special regard for frequencies. What counts alone in qualitative analysis--if the verb is permissible in a context which defies counting--is the selection and rational organization of such categories as condense the substantive meanings of the given text, with a view to testing pertinent assumptions and hypotheses” (p. 638). Further, “As Berelson points out, qualitative studies usually focus not so much on the content of communication as rather on its underlying intentions or its presumable effects on the audience; ‘quantitative analysis’ on the other hand, ‘is more likely to focus first upon the straight description of the content itself, if for no other reason because of the amount of energy devoted to the counting procedure.’ The more involved communications, however, reverberate with so many latent meanings that to isolate their manifest content and describe it in a ‘straight’ manner is not only almost impossible, but can hardly be expected to yield significant results” (Kracauer, 1952, p. 638). Kracauer asserted that since a qualitative analyst is not limited or biased by pre-defined categories, he or she is able to “[explore] the whole of the content in quest of important categories” (p. 638).

To provide an illustration of texts which are inaccessible to quantitative techniques, Kracauer (1952) described how if an international communicator wanted to determine whether his texts showed respect for his audience, certain communication

patterns would not be discernible through quantitative techniques. In such a case, a qualitative analysis of the content, though, would allow him to pick up on the juxtaposition of praise and criticism in his text (pp. 639-640). “The absence or presence of respect could obviously be better inferred from the manner in which the positive and/or negative references to the audience are interwoven; recognizable patterns of reference would no doubt appear in the communication” such that he could determine whether, according to Max Weber’s types, he was treating his audience as a friend or peer, or whether he was trying to manipulate his audience, doubting their ability and dignity (p. 640). A text, then, is conducive to a qualitative content analysis when “What is relevant are the patterns, the wholes, which can be made manifest by qualitative exegesis and which can throw light upon a textual characteristic which is allergic to quantitative breakdowns” (p. 640). And even though qualitative analysis does not allow for objective truth or generalizability, Kracauer has pointed out two counterarguments: (1) “Any historical period produces only a limited number of major philosophical doctrines, moral trends and aesthetic preferences, and if qualitative analysis operates, as it should, below the level of sheer opinion, these influences can be discerned and controlled. (2) “Moreover, communications which are sufficiently outspoken to canalize the imagination usually prove a powerful factor in bringing about a convergence of viewpoints and approaches. It is therefore a reasonable guess that different analysts will arrive at similar conclusions with regard to many texts” (p. 641).

Qualitative content analysis is of necessity a subjective process (Schilling, 2006). It allows researchers to identify recurring messages or themes in a text. For example, Roberts and Pettigrew (2007) used both quantitative and qualitative content analysis

methods in their examination of children's food advertising in Australia. The higher-level themes identified by the qualitative content analysis added to the study's descriptive statistics of food types commonly advertised. As the authors stated, "This study provides both frequency data and a thematic interpretation that in combination offer greater insight into the extent and nature of the messages children are exposed to when viewing food advertising" (Roberts & Pettigrew, 2007, pp. 358-359). The authors identified four common messages through a thematic textual analysis, which involved "constant iterations between the data and emerging themes to ensure soundness of fit" (Roberts & Pettigrew, 2007, p. 359; as per Schilling, 2006): the prevalence of grazing, the devaluing of core foods, overstated health claims, and the implied ability of certain food to enhance children's popularity, performance and mood (Roberts & Pettigrew, 2007, p. 363). Thus, this method enabled the researchers to pinpoint underlying messages or themes inherent in the advertising as a whole which were not readily apparent without a careful evaluation of the meaning of the representative sample of children's food advertising: "...the messages contained in the advertisements communicated numerous themes that disregard healthy eating practices," the authors concluded (Roberts & Pettigrew, 2007, p. 365).

The method of textual analysis provides a way of "reading" a text for its dominant themes and most-likely interpretations (Garyantes, 2006; McKee, 2001). As Darling-Wolf (2008) noted in her study comparing themes in press coverage of racial issues, this kind of textual analysis does not attempt to answer how individual audience members would interpret a given text. Cormack (1995) articulated the fact that there is not a single way to interpret a text, and Hall (1993) theorized that a text's meaning is created and re-

created through a combination of events during the text's "production, circulation, distribution/consumption, and reproduction" (Hall, 1993, p. 91). At the same time, Hall asserted that a dominant meaning does emerge, and this preferred meaning comes out of popular cultural discourse.

Stuart Hall's Theory about Encoding and Decoding Mediated Communications

During (1993) introduced Stuart Hall's important essay about the process of encoding and decoding messages communicated through television:

[Hall] suggests a four-stage theory of communication: production, circulation, use (which here he calls distribution or consumption) and reproduction. For him each stage is 'relatively autonomous' from the others. This means that the coding of a message *does* control its reception but not transparently--each stage has its own determining limits and possibilities. The concept of relative autonomy allows him to argue that polysemy is not the same as pluralism: messages are not open to any interpretation or use whatsoever--just because each stage in the circuit limits possibilities in the next. (During, 1993, p. 522)

Thus, Hall (1993) has argued that since popular cultural discourse impacts both the production side and the receiver side of mediated communications, dominant meanings of the textual message do emerge, and therefore, textual analysis can identify the most-likely recurring interpretations, or themes, of a text.

On the production side of mass communication, researchers have identified various factors that affect the formation of news stories in capitalist environments, including definitions of newsworthiness (Fishman, 1980; Molotch & Lester, 1974;

Roshco, 1975), the professional norms and daily routines of journalists (Bennett, 2003; Tuchman, 1978), reporters' relationship to their sources (Gans, 1979); organizational influences (Breed, 1955); Shoemaker & Reese, 1996), and external factors such as advertisers (Hermann & Chomsky, 1988). Darling-Wolf (2008) has summarized:

Thus, news is ultimately the product and reflection of a broad cultural and socio-political environment (Bennett, 2003; Gans 1979; Hall, 1973; Shoemaker & Reese, 1996). In other words, news is significantly influenced by the ideological context in which it is produced and distributed, if we are to accept Hall's definition of ideology as 'those images, concepts and premises which provide the frameworks through which we represent, interpret, understand, and 'make sense' of some aspect of social existence. (Darling-Wolf, 2008, p. 358)

Emic and Etic Perspectives

Emic (insider) and etic (outsider) journalistic perspectives have been shown to differ in their construction, even if, according to news standards, the journalism follows objective news standards of fairness and balance (Darling-Wolf, 2008; Wilson and Gutierrez, 1985; Dixon, 2004). For example, Darling-Wolf's thematic comparison of insider versus outsider portrayals of race relations in both U.S. and French presses has demonstrated the impact of the press's emic or etic perspective on the content of the news. In the case of that study, Darling-Wolf commented that the "East-West divide further disguises the internal consequences of trans-national influence, particularly as they relate to race, gender, and class. Feminist scholars have pointed to the need to address the interlocking nature of culture, globalization, national identity and gender"

(Darling-Wolf, 2008, p. 358; Enloe, 2004; Parameswaran, 2002). The author found that each newspaper's coverage of crises at home (Hurricane Katrina and the race riots in France) "greatly differed from their handling of crises abroad" (Darling-Wolf, 2008, p. 367). Each newspaper pointed critically to the inadequate and inherently unjust social structures of the foreign country but not of their own country. More specifically, Darling-Wolf wrote:

By examining these newspapers' negotiation of racial issues both *internally* (in *The New York Times*' coverage of Katrina and *Le Monde*'s coverage of the riots), and in their representation of a foreign event (Katrina in *Le Monde* and the riots in *The New York Times*), this essay addresses how two powerful Western nations represented each other in their coverage of these events, and, more broadly, how such press coverage contributed to the construction of internal representations shaped by the reporting of international news. (Darling-Wolf, 2008, p. 358, emphasis added)

Thus, the main objective of Darling-Wolf's (2008) study was "not simply to identify ideological biases in the newspapers' coverage of race (as other scholars have already established their presence), but to examine the articulation between the global and the local in the construction of such biases" (Darling-Wolf, 2008, p. 360).

Bradford (2007) has advocated an emic approach to the study of and portrayal of religion, writing that students of religion, or those who are trying to understand others' religious traditions, should approach a particular religion "from the vantage point of adherents" (p. 135). Specifically, Bradford encouraged outsiders trying to study a

religious tradition to employ “informed empathy” by suspending their own beliefs and values as much as possible: “...students should seek to portray accurately the rich array of ritual practices, symbols, experiences, and beliefs they observe from this insider perspective” (pp. 135-136). Bradford also warned students to be aware of the fact that the academic study of religion traditionally stems from well-established Western, post-Enlightenment philosophy, and therefore, such an approach “may at times get in the way of their fully grasping what it is that others are doing and how they experience and act in the world” (p. 136). On this point, Bradford clarified:

The reason behind trying to internalize a religious tradition's worldview is not sentiment, nor is it an attempt simply to be neutral. Rather, it is to get at the ways things are, to get at the facts, which include importantly the way religious followers feel and think about the world. What is being emphasized here lies at the heart of religious studies, methodologically speaking. It is a technique long known and practiced by anthropologists, sociologists, and other students of the human experience. (Bradford, 2007, p. 136)

Comparison of Emic and Etic Perspectives through Thematic Analysis

Inasmuch as this study will follow a procedure of textual analysis similar to Darling-Wolf's (2008) study which compared national and foreign journalism's perspectives on race, Darling-Wolf's procedure is here explained in greater detail. Darling-Wolf's two texts were representative samples from both newspapers' coverage of Hurricane Katrina and the race riots in France. Darling-Wolf conducted her textual analysis in a three-step process: In the first reading of each text, Darling-Wolf (2008)

identified major themes. In the second reading, the researcher classified the text into the themes identified. In the third reading, each text was analyzed using Cormack's (1995) "checklist of items worth considering" as a guide (p. 35) "The checklist includes: (1) the actual content of the text; (2) the text's structure, including the order in which themes appear; (3) absence, or what elements are missing from the text; (4) the literary style of the text; and (5) its mode of address, defined as 'the way in which the cultural product is aimed at us, the way in which it 'speaks' to us" (Cormack, 1995, p. 33). "These categories were employed as a broad context for the close examination of the press coverage rather than as a rigid framework" (Darling-Wolf, 2008, p. 361).

In the discussion, Darling-Wolf answered such questions as: "What dominant themes emerged in the newspapers' coverage? What were the similarities and differences in these themes between the French and American newspapers? How did the two newspapers negotiate the issue of race relations when covering an 'international' event and how did this negotiation differ when taking place 'at home'? How did the two newspapers represent their country's position in relationship to the rest of the world? What were the possible consequences of such a representation?" (Darling-Wolf, 2008, p. 360).

Procedure for this Study

This study followed a procedure similar to Darling-Wolf's (2008) in order to compare and contrast the themes found in two related texts: the Interviews Text and the Film Text. Darling-Wolf compared the local with the global coverage of race relations; this study compared the text provided by Mormon insiders with the text provided by a reputable documentary film--in a way, also a juxtaposition of local (insider) and global

(outsider) viewpoints. Textual analysis allowed the researcher to compare the dominant themes which emerged out of the final cut of the documentary with the themes inherent in the full commentary provided by people interviewed; thus, this study compared the themes about Mormon beliefs and Mormon women included in the documentary with the themes about Mormon beliefs and Mormon women left out of the documentary.

For the sake of keeping the units of comparison as similar as possible, this study used as its sample for textual analysis typed transcripts from the documentary and the interview transcripts provided online of the 15 key commentators interviewed for the documentary. The first text to be analyzed was made up of the transcripts provided online of the full interviews of 15 key commentators: the full interviews of Jon Butler, Michael Coe, Kathleen Flake, Terryl Givens, Sarah Barringer Gordon, Gordon B. Hinckley, Jeffrey Holland, Marlin Jensen, Daniel Peterson, Greg Prince, D. Michael Quinn, Margaret Toscano, and Ken Verdoia were made available on The Mormons program Web site on pbs.org (Whitney, 2007). The LDS Church provided full transcripts of two additional interviews: Dallin H. Oaks, and Boyd K. Packer (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2007). An Editor's Note on *The Mormons* Web site indicated, "Due to limitations of time and resources, all the interviews conducted for this program could not be published. However, the LDS Church had also recorded the interviews conducted with Elder Packer and Elder Oaks and has published these on its own web site" (Whitney, 2007b). The full transcripts of certain commentators included in the documentary, then, were not available: transcripts of the full interview of Richard L. Bushman, an emeritus Columbia University historian and biographer of Joseph Smith, were not available, for instance (he was quoted three times in the film); the interview transcripts of the persons

whose individual stories became the exemplars in the film, were not available, nor were the interview transcripts of people who were only quoted once or twice in the film. This was unfortunate, but the volume of full interview transcripts available (318 pages), and the fact that the full interview transcripts provided the key base rate information of official and expert sources, means that there was an adequate text to consider themes about Mormon beliefs and Mormon women that could have been included in the documentary, but were not.

Transcripts of the documentary were made available online by PBS (Whitney, 2007a). The documentary text was made up of the section titles provided by the producer, a narrator's voice-over written by Whitney, segments selected from the commentators' interviews, and anecdotal experiences or examples added by additional persons included in the documentary.

A textual analysis of these two texts was conducted by the author with the aid of NVivo (2002) qualitative analysis software. Both texts were entered into NVivo in the computer research lab in Brigham Young University's Brimhall Building. Then the analysis of the text followed a similar method as the one Darling-Wolf (2008) used to compare two texts. Because this analysis was concerned first with the portrayal of Mormon religious beliefs, a first reading was aimed at identifying major themes about LDS doctrine in the text of interviews. A second reading classified each commentator's remarks in the interviews into the themes about Mormon doctrine previously outlined in the first reading; a final reading further analyzed this text using Cormack's (1995) "checklist of items worth considering" as a guide (as cited by Darling-Wolf, 2008, p. 35). Cormack's checklist includes: (1) the actual content of the text; (2) the text's structure,

including the order in which themes appear; (3) absence, or what elements are missing from the text; (4) the literary style of the text; and (5) its mode of address, or “the way in which the cultural product is aimed at us, the way in which it ‘speaks’ to us” (Cormack, 1995, p. 33). These categories were not meant to be used as an inflexible construct, but rather were used to provide a broad context for the detailed examination of the documentary’s portrayal of Mormon beliefs and Mormon women versus individual commentator’s views. Also, the researcher made memos of the gender, occupation, and relationship to the LDS Church of each individual commentator interviewed, as Campbell (2010) also compared the themes of religious authority voiced by online bloggers with the demographics of the bloggers. Next, the same analytical process was used to identify the themes about Mormon women in the text of interviews.

Once the first text was analyzed and categorized by its themes about Mormon beliefs and Mormon women, the researcher began the analysis of the second text--the documentary film. The same four-step procedure as outlined above (identifying major themes, coding the text according to those themes, referring to Cormack’s checklist, and making memos of the demographic traits of the sources quoted in the film) was used to identify first the themes about Mormon doctrine contained in the film’s text and then the themes about Mormon women included in the film’s text. Finally, to identify and analyze the exemplars selected for the film, the anecdotal narratives and representations of individuals’ experiences as Mormons were isolated from the rest of the documentary film text. The text of these exemplars was then analyzed as well in order to explain the themes which were given special weight in the film--by use of the chosen exemplars.

NVivo (2002), a computer-aided analytic software package, was used to track searching and coding, to sort and re-code and write memos of the themes as they arose (Krayner, Ingledew, & Iphofen, 2008). “In the case of qualitative analysis there is no real equivalent to the calculation of statistics....The real heart of the analysis requires an understanding of the meaning of the texts, and that is something that computers are still a long way from being able to do. Essentially the function of qualitative analysis software is more akin to that of a database, though it supports ways of handling text that go well beyond most databases” (Gibbs, 2002, p. 10). NVivo allows qualitative researchers to keep good records of their initial hunches and ideas, and it also gives them instant access to qualitative data so that they can be examined analyzed more easily (Gibbs, 2002). Gibbs has stated that computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) “can make qualitative analysis easier, more accurate, more reliable and more transparent” (p. 11). While CAQDAS such as NVivo provide many analytical tools, such as summaries and reports of categories, the interpretation of the qualitative data, or the text, remains the responsibility of the researcher (Gibbs, 2002, p. 11). NVivo has the ability to retrieve text based on a key word or key phrase search, to sort and organize data, to code and then retrieve the data previously encoded at a later time, and to assist the researcher in testing hypotheses; also, a researcher can use NVivo to create diagrams, concept maps, and charts (Gibbs, 2002, p. 12). NVivo calls its connected passages of text “nodes.” As Gibbs has explained, “A node in NVivo is a way of bringing together ideas, thoughts and definitions about your data, along with selected passages of text. Passages of text from one or more documents are connected to a node because they are examples of the idea or concept it represents” (p. 31). This process is called coding the text at a node. This

process was key to this study because coding various passages of the text at a node allowed the researcher to connect together all the passages of text where a recurring theme was discovered in the identified, and then browse these recurring ideas as a group or category (Gibbs, 2002, p. 31).

In a cyclical manner, themes were identified and refined. The commentary about Mormon beliefs and Mormon women was read line by line with questions in mind (How does what this commentator said connect to what has been said elsewhere?)

An interview the researcher conducted with Helen Whitney on February 18, 2010, also informed this analysis because it allowed the filmmaker to speak to the topic of production decisions she made while making the film (see Appendix for notes of the interview).

Lastly, the researcher considered the following research questions, relying on the data found in the textual analysis of the interview and film transcripts:

- RQ1: What general themes emerged in the Interviews Text (Church Officials and Scholars)?
- RQ2: What themes about Mormon women emerged in Interviews Text (Church Officials and Scholars)?
- RQ3: What general themes emerged in the Film Text?
- RQ4: What themes about Mormon women emerged in the Film Text?
- RQ5: How were the Interviews Texts and the Film Text the same?
- RQ6: How were the Interviews Texts and the Film Text different?
- RQ7: Based on the themes given emphasis in the film, how did Helen Whitney frame the Mormons?

CHAPTER 4

Themes of Interviews Text--Church Officials

This chapter explores the themes that arose in the text of Interviews with LDS Church Officials. The general authorities of the LDS Church spoke repeatedly about the Church's doctrinal teachings and beliefs on the purpose of life and Christianity. More specifically, the main points of this doctrinal framework included "the plan of happiness;" a view of God as a glorified, embodied Being and the Father of humankind; Jesus Christ as Redeemer and Savior; the role of prophets in proclaiming these concepts; people's freedom to choose; the faith and sacrifices of believers for their convictions; and Mormonism's faith in its miraculous foundational stories.

"The Plan of Happiness"

In speaking about the meaning of the temple in LDS theology, Elder Marlin K. Jensen, the Church's historian, summarized this "plan of happiness" or "plan of salvation" espoused by the Church:

It's instructive maybe to think about just the synonyms that we use in the church for the word "temple." You hear the word "happiness"; you hear the word "family"; you hear the word "cosmic," because I think for many of us it's a place where we go to get our bearings on this universe....If I were to describe sort of the overarching narrative that occurs [in the temple], I would say it's God's way, he being the master teacher, of teaching us his plan of salvation, his plan of life....It's a dramatic narrative

with participation on our part. And it's a rehearsal, really, of where we were before we came to this life, how the world was created and prepared for us to come here, what we're to do while we're here, including these promises that we make that would indicate that we should live our lives in a certain way. We should be chaste, for instance. We should be committed to Christ. We should be willing to consecrate and sacrifice what we have for his interests, the interests of his church. Nothing that occurs there could ever be interpreted as anything but wholesome and uplifting and ennobling.

His comment provides a succinct outline of what the Church teaches about the purpose of life.

Nature of God and Humankind's Relationship to Him

Whitney posed the question to Elder Holland, "Others have said Joseph Smith gave us a weeping God; God is not distant and angry." Holland elaborated on the significance of Mormonism's concept of the nature of God: "I think Joseph Smith was a revolutionary in the holiest, most redemptive, most sacred sense of that word; that he came to testify and show and to let us experience that God not only lives but loves us, that the heavens are open, that this is real....Joseph Smith is not divine. We do not worship him. I hope no one out there misunderstands our view of Joseph Smith. He is a man, a mortal, as temporal as any of the rest of us. But his witness, his testimony was of that God and of that Son [Jesus]--of those spiritual truths, of redemption, of hope, of happiness, of future, of peace, of renewal, of sanctification; that there are better things than we see in the newspaper every day." Holland added, "When Joseph Smith saw [God

and Jesus], he saw embodied beings. He saw men the way you and I would see men, with all the biblical features, the way Moses said he saw them, with eyes and ears and hands and faces. And behind that is the great humanity of such men: hearts....So we are unequivocal in our declaration that Joseph Smith saw beings, glorified and beyond description, not looking like I look to you--thank heavens--but nevertheless embodied, with arms and fingers that touch, and the same finger that Moses saw write those tablets, yes.”

Holland spoke on the bold idea of Mormonism that man can become God. “What does that mean?” Whitney asked. Holland answered by saying that it is very bold and that he could understand why if it is cavalierly said that it would be deeply offensive. He explained, “There is nothing in this that is intended to offend. Where this starts with us is we take literally the fact that we’re children of God,...and if children, then heirs, heirs of the Lord Jesus Christ.... It does not mean any displacing of God,” he emphasized. “Our God will always be our God forever and forever and forever. And Christ will always be Christ forever and forever and forever. But then we would say that we’re divine, at least in spiritual heritage. That’s why we call him our Father in Heaven. And we believe that we have a destiny with him in his company,...given growth, the idea of progression and development eternally....How much time that takes, ...I do not know and wouldn’t presume to know....It’s to hope that people will see the divinity in women and men and achieve that--pursue it, live for it, act like it, want it. That’s as much as I know to say about that part of destiny.”

Dallin H. Oaks similarly elaborated on this theme: “Before the close of his ministry, in Illinois, Joseph Smith put together the significance of what he had taught

about the nature of God and the nature and destiny of man. He preached a great sermon not long before he was murdered that God was a glorified Man, glorified beyond our comprehension, (still incomprehensible in many ways), but a glorified, resurrected, physical Being, and it is the destiny of His children upon this earth, upon the conditions He has proscribed, to grow into that status themselves. That was a big idea, a challenging idea. It followed from the First Vision, and it was taught by Joseph Smith, and it is the explanation of many things that Mormons do--the whole theology of Mormonism.” Whitney asked, “Is it the core of it? Oaks answered: “That is the purpose of the life of men and women on this earth: to pursue their eternal destiny.”

Christianity

Holland explained that it is from the Church’s teaching of the physical resurrection of Christ that the idea of an embodied God is strengthened. “What is the big deal about Christianity if there’s no resurrection? We’ve had other good teachers. There have been other good men and women. This case, this is the first time that anyone who was dead, under his own power and the power given to him by his Father, got up, took off his own burial garments and ascended into heaven, embodied.”

President Gordon B. Hinckley said, “Well, this is a very personal thing for me [that Mormons believe in a concrete afterlife] because I lost my wife two years ago, so I’ve experienced something that I believe is real and personal, and there’s no question in my mind that life goes on. The whole essence of the Christian religion is based on the atonement of Christ, his death and his resurrection. There would be no Christmas if there was no Easter. The fact that he was resurrected gave credibility to his whole life’s mission, and that’s the essence of it. We go on living. This is a stage in our eternal

journey. We lived before we were here. This is our mortal existence, and we shall go on living after this.” Hinckley connected his view of heaven concretely with Christ’s mission to save mankind from death and hell. He also emphasized that Mormons are Christians--that the name of the Church, the Book of Mormon, and the Church’s goals all testify of Mormons’ belief in Jesus Christ as “savior of the world,” “redeemer,” “the Son of God,” “the great creator.”

Prophets

Holland emphasized that Mormons do not see prophets as divine, but as fellow human beings who have nonetheless been called by God to teach the purpose of life to others (this same quote was also referred to above to illustrate the Church’s view of God): “I think Joseph Smith was a revolutionary in the holiest, most redemptive, most sacred sense of that word; that he came to testify and show and to let us experience that God not only lives but loves us, that the heavens are open, that this is real....Joseph Smith is not divine. We do not worship him. I hope no one out there misunderstands our view of Joseph Smith. He is a man, a mortal, as temporal as any of the rest of us. But his witness, his testimony was of that God and of that Son [Jesus]--of those spiritual truths, of redemption, of hope, of happiness, of future, of peace, of renewal, of sanctification; that there are better things than we see in the newspaper every day.”

Jensen added: “We don’t have to believe anything that isn’t true in this religion, but there is something that holds sway over just the intellect, and that is the counsel of God. When that comes through men, who may be very fallible, that’s probably very difficult for people to accept.”

Packer described both the firmness of prophets' teachings as well as individuals' freedom to choose: "We know [God] to be our Father and that He lives and Christ lives. We cling to that. And in the strength of that we can meet the challenges that come. We are very rigid and strict on some things. You've noticed that. And yet individually, we're very independent, very free." Whitney asked him about the sense of urgency conveyed in Packer's talks and sermons. "We have a responsibility to teach and to share what we have and to warn. The prophecies of the scriptures speak of calamities that are to come. We are to warn--whether anyone heeds the warning or not is their own choice."

The Church's Boundaries and Men and Women's Freedom to Choose

Jensen's previous quote about the role of prophets also illustrated men and women's freedom to follow or not follow such counsel, as they choose (repeated here as an example): "We don't have to believe anything that isn't true in this religion, but there is something that holds sway over just the intellect, and that is the counsel of God. When that comes through men, who may be very fallible, that's probably very difficult for people to accept." On following authority and scholars who criticize and leave, Jensen suggested, "But if they [intellectuals] can retain just a modicum of humility, usually they come out just fine, because we have tremendous intellectual achievement in the church, professors at Harvard and MIT and you name it... in business and so one, very accomplished people who also are extremely humble and accepting of the mantle of the prophet and his 14 associates."

When Whitney asked Packer about his alleged statement regarding gays, feminists, and intellectuals, Packer responded:

“First, in the Church, we don’t criticize; we don’t discipline members for what they think. But if they teach things that are going to lead people astray and to unhappiness, then we sound the alert. We don’t discipline them for their attitudes or their tendencies. We warn people if they go on that path: there are snares there, so stay away from them. It’s just that simple.”

Whitney: “But could you help me understand why those particular groups or movements were of special concern to you?”

“In the center, we do feel and think and know that the ultimate end of all activity in the Church is that a man and his wife and their children can be happy at home. When influences come that challenge or disturb the possibility that our home will exist in the next world, provided you have the ordinances, we find great dangers in them. Families come apart if they follow those paths--individuals pull away from families. I remember saying those things. And if it’s in print, I said it. That’s part of the alert and learning. It’s very simple. Down some of those paths, you have a right to go, but in the Church, you don’t have a right to teach and take others there.” He added, “If our people are teaching false principles--distributing it, destroying others’ faith--there has to be a protection. Someone is willfully destroying faith. They can do that, but they can’t do that under the credentials of membership in the Church.”

Whitney asked Holland to talk about why people in the church are excommunicated. Holland answered, “Every institution has to define itself somehow....As much as I admire it, this is not the Rotary Club. This is not an overly large scout troop, boy or girl. We are a church, and we have beliefs that define us, and that has to be for anything that would be a religion in the sense you and I talk about it.... You

don't have to be in this church. You can be in any church you want....Now, for those that want the blessings of the church, ... there's a little bit of a price for that. Maybe it's a big price in terms of sacrifice and loyalty. Maybe it's a big price. But there's some price that's paid for the blessing, the participation, the identity and laying claim on the covenantal promises....We don't discipline people in this church for very much. In a church of over 12 million people, I keep hearing about the September Six [the 1993 excommunication and disfellowshipping of six Mormon academics]....All I'm saying is, I think this church has a history of being very, very generous. There are some lines."

Believers' Faith and Sacrifices for their Convictions

Men and women who believe in the teachings of the Church follow the counsel of the Church, even when it is particularly hard for them individually (chastity, tithing, the pioneers' trek West, plural marriage, the adjustments new converts make, etc.)

Packer responded to Whitney's question about the many gay Mormons who love the Church but find following some things too difficult by saying: "We don't discipline for the thoughts and tendencies, but for the actions. In one way there's little different than a heterosexual person being under terrible pressure to misuse those sacred powers of procreation immorally. And the line is drawn there. That's the individual's responsibility to keep the commandments. They're free to do as they want and go their way, but that's the cost. We have a tremendous sympathy for them."

Hinckley told Whitney he would like the audience of this film to come away with an appreciation for the LDS Church, its history, of the sufferings of its people, of the terrible things through which they went, as they were driven out across the United States. "They made terrible sacrifices," Hinckley said, "and that element of sacrifice which

represents faith is the foundation stone on which this church is established and on which it will go forward in the future.”

Epistemology of Faith in the Miraculous Foundational Stories of Mormonism

Whitney asked LDS Church President Hinckley about his statement that there is no middle ground in regard to the foundational stories of the church, pointing out that many religions have turned toward myth. Hinckley responded, “Well, it’s either true or false. If it’s false, we’re engaged in a great fraud. If it’s true, it’s the most important thing in the world....And that’s exactly where we stand, with a conviction in our hearts that it is true: that Joseph went into the Grove; that he saw the Father and the Son; that he talked with them; that Moroni came; that the Book of Mormon was translated from the plates; that the priesthood was restored by those who held it anciently.”

Holland said of Joseph Smith’s translation of the Book of Mormon: “My fourth great-grandfather said when he heard of the Book of Mormon in England, he walked away from the service saying no good man would have written that, and no bad man could have written it. And for me, that’s still the position.”

Holland maintained that almost all religions ask a leap of faith: “In the end, when you push Mormonism, when you push the greater circle of Christianity, Judaism, other religions, ... it always comes to faith...or it isn’t religion in any way that I understand religion....Why is the appearance of angels in the Old Testament less satisfying or more threatening than the appearance of an angel in upstate New York in the early part of the 19th century or today? The miracles of the Old Testament should not have been startling to people in the time of the New Testament, and New Testament miracles should not be

foreign to us today.” He noted, though, that “It’s much easier to believe or conceive the traditions of 4000 years ago--a lot easier than 40 years ago, let alone four weeks ago.”

Believers develop conviction and certainty over time, church officials said. Elder Marlin K. Jensen explained that when he left on his mission that he didn’t have the certitude that he felt he should have in order to try to persuade others to join the Church, but that a remarkable experience happened on his mission in Germany in which, while sharing his beliefs with a group of Germans, he gained the conviction he had been seeking. Of questioning and doubting, Jensen suggested that these were natural tendencies of many people: “I think it’s in that questioning, if you’re honest and if you’re really a true seeker--if you’re not just a skeptic sitting back and taking potshots at everything and everybody and their philosophy of life--I think it tends to bring one to a deeper seeking, and I hope that’s what my doubts have done. They’ve caused me, I think to study and to ponder and to compare and in the long run to become even more convinced that the way I’ve chosen, the way that came to me early in Germany, is the right way.”

Packer said of developing certainty over time: “There comes a time when that confirmation comes and they know. The Prophet Joseph Smith said, ‘Then I knew of a certainty.’ Another prophet said, ‘Nevertheless I do not know the meaning of all things.’ So you go through life collecting experiences of certainty until you’re very secure. You can say, ‘I know.’ That’s kind of a power on which the Church works. Each individual has to come to that himself, so we have a pattern in the Church of keeping people busy doing good things so they can come to that certainty.” As a grandfather, his desires are to warn and counsel the younger people, encouraging them that if they follow the path the

Church teaches, they will come to that certainty over time also and they will find happiness.

Themes about Women in the Church Officials' Interviews Text (sub-theme)

Since one hot topic related to Mormonism in the media has been the status of women in the LDS Church, this next section explores the subtext about women found in the church officials' interviews. Specifically, three themes regarding women in the Church emerged in these interviews: 1) women and men share an eternal identity as children of God and are equally heirs to the promises; 2) Mormon women were/are strong; and 3) the LDS Church's 19th-century practice of plural marriage was biblical in nature.

Women and men's equal eternal nature and destiny.

For example, Hinckley said of this: "Well, this is a very personal thing for me because I lost my wife two years ago, so I've experienced something that I believe is real and personal, and there's no question in my mind that life goes on [because of Christ's death and resurrection]." Heaven, Hinckley said, would be a place with "a great deal of activity.... We'll be personalities. We'll be individuals. We'll be purposeful in what we do." Marlin Jensen, the official church historian, echoed:

If someone were to say to me, "What has Mormonism got to offer?," I would say it offers eternal love, and it offers eternal progression. Those are the two concepts of Mormonism that always appeal to me. And now, in my old age, after 38 years of marriage, if someone were to say, "What motivates you?," I would say my relationship with God and my

relationship with my wife and the desire that she and I have to have a relationship with our family forever.

Boyd Packer, president of the church's Quorum of the Twelve, explained why the church is so conservative when it comes to women's roles within the family, putting such concerns in the context of the eternal potential of the human soul of man and woman, according to church doctrine. Packer quoted a statement from the church's Proclamation on the Family: "Gender was determined before mortal birth." He went on, quoting a hymn:

"If I could hie to Kolob [the center place] in the twinkling of an eye, and then continue onward with that same speed to fly, do you think that I could ever, through all eternity, find out the generations where Gods began to be? [the verse goes on]: There is no end to matter, there is no end to space; there is no end to wisdom; there is no end to race"That is a very profound song that you should read when you're studying about what's going on in the world today. When you read that and talk and look into the eternities, you see the endlessness of it all—There's so many things that we don't know, but it's a wonderful world that we live in. There's no end to what we can learn, but we only use about 15 percent of the room there.

Oaks concisely said, "That is the purpose of the life of men and women on this earth: to pursue their eternal destiny." Thus, while the church officials did emphasize family-centered roles for women, they also emphasized family-centered roles for men, the

unlimited potential of the individual woman and man, and their absolute equality before God.

The individuality and strength of women.

The individuality and strength of Mormon women was a theme in the interviews with Church officials. Jeffrey Holland, a member of the church's Quorum of the Twelve, responded to Whitney's question if Juanita Brooks, who wrote a historical account of Mountain Meadows Massacre, was ever ostracized by members for doing so. Holland, who knew Brooks, commented on her intellectual and emotional strength:

I didn't sense any great burden for her. Juanita was a strong woman. She was a very, very strong woman out of the hardscrabble world that southern Utah and southern Nevada settlers came [from]...I did not sense a sort of personal anguish...I saw her living out her life with the peace and tranquility [of someone] who had done a good piece of history and probably helped the church come to grips with something that all of us which had never happened.

Oaks similarly commended LDS scholar Kathleen Flake for her book about the "Mormon compromise," triggered by the Manifesto in 1890, saying that her writing taught him things he didn't know about Mormon legal history in regard to polygamy, even after having already been a lifetime student of the subject.

Another theme in the interviews was that women were physically strong and worthy of emulation. Packer told the story of his great-grandmother from Denmark who came West to Utah by handcart. She had vowed not to walk into the Salt Lake Valley barefoot, so she saved her last pair of shoes. Her company had a terrible time, Packer

said, and she had to cross the Platte River several times in one day, which was completely exhausting. Ultimately, it was a cold, late fall by the time her company arrived in Salt Lake, and her feet were so swollen and bleeding from walking barefoot that she could not put on her feet the shoes which she had saved for that moment, he said. Packer concluded that such stories of strength and sacrifice were typical of the early members of the church who immigrated West to Utah.

Oaks told the story of his great-grandmother, Louisa Hall, who was only 6 years old when Joseph Smith was murdered and mobs burned her home in Nauvoo. Louisa and her mother, he said, fled into a cornfield as a mob burned their home. Oaks said:

Then, as they hid in the cornfield, her mother dashed back into the burning home and told her daughter later that she had gone back to get a pewter pitcher. She said, “I’m not gonna leave that there for them to melt into bullets to kill us with!”

This story was especially meaningful to Oaks, he said, because it made him admire his great-great-grandmother and desire to follow her example of faith and dedication.

Oaks also told the story of his mother’s aunt, Belle Harris, who had gone to prison for a few months in the 1880s for refusing to testify against her husband in a polygamy trial; she was a plural wife. “She was something of a cause celebre at the time...because the eastern press couldn’t imagine that there was a woman who was not oppressed by polygamy. Here was a woman who went to jail to defend her husband and to defend the practice. She was a heroine and served her time.” Oaks, in fact, was born in Belle Harris’s home in Provo with doctors in attendance.

Women’s spiritual strength also was a recurring theme. Holland told Whitney that over his lifetime, he had observed greater innate spirituality in women than in men:

All I can offer at this point, I think, is the feeling that belief as I see it in my own wife, as I see it in my own mother and I see it in my daughters—this is not to disparage men in any way—but there is something more given to spirituality in most women than I think there is in most men. ...I just believe that women are more inclined to things spiritual.

Packer told a story that depicted his mother’s spiritual insight; she married just after the turn-of-the-century and the official renunciation of polygamy. In the early years of her marriage, the family was very poor, trying to farm in northern Utah with poor soil. Packer said his father invited his mother to go with him to Brigham City to get the plow fixed, and after all the children were in the buggy, she tried three times to climb in.

Father asked what the matter was, and she said, “I feel like I shouldn’t go.”....And so Father said, “Well, if you feel that way, you should probably stay home.” So she lifted the children out of the buggy....So then he shook the reins and disappeared. She told us on a number of occasions, “There I stood with crying children, and I couldn’t call him back, he was too far away.” So she went back to go ahead with the washing. And after not too long she could smell smoke. She went in the bedroom and the ceiling was on fire! She didn’t go to town that day because she felt she shouldn’t go. Everything was in that home—the mortgage money, everything. Now that’s typical—that’s one of the stories I grew up with on how this [revelation] works.

CHAPTER 5

Themes of Interviews Text--Scholars

The interviews with scholars showed a great variety of themes and perspectives because they developed organically as a combination of the scholars' expertise and individual experiences along with Whitney's probing questions about issues of power and authority in the church. In other words, Whitney did her research well before sitting down with the scholars because she asked them questions based on their individual expertise; when relevant to their particular circumstances, she also asked them pointed questions about their viewpoints on church authority, women's issues, gay rights, civil rights, and Mormon history. Therefore, the topics covered in the interviews were a combination of the subjects native to the scholars and the subjects of particular interest to the filmmaker. Some of the subjects frequently discussed, for instance, included the Second Great Awakening, Joseph Smith's personality and character, the origins of the Book of Mormon, persecution of the early Saints, their exodus West to the Great Basin, polygamy, Mountain Meadows Massacre, the Church's 20th-century accommodation to American culture, and its growing influence.

Three categories based on the scholars' interviews emerged in the Interviews Text and will be explored in the following order: 1) LDS Scholars; 2) formerly LDS scholars who were ex-communicated from the LDS Church; and 3) non-LDS scholars.

LDS Scholars

The LDS scholars interviewed for the film bridged the usual divide between faith and scholarship: they spoke both the language of academia and the language of personal faith, expressing themes similar to the ones described by LDS Church authorities as well as outside historians of American religion. What the scholars added to the discussion was the significance of Mormonism's uniqueness in the American landscape historically and currently. Therefore, they defended Mormonism on some fronts and critiqued the religion on other fronts. The Mormon scholars brought faith to the table as well as objectivity and original insights because they were willing and able to speculate upon the themes of Mormon beliefs. More specifically, the following themes emerged in their interviews: faith in the miraculous or "the collapse of sacred distance," as Givens called it; the tension between Protestant America and the Mormons; the complexity of polygamy and the Mormon concept of eternal families; believers' faith and sacrifice for their convictions; and the LDS Church's boundaries in relation to intellectuals, feminists, and gays.

The LDS scholars interviewed for the film were: Daniel Peterson, professor of Islamic studies and Arabic at Brigham Young University; Terryl Givens, professor of literature and religion at the University of Richmond; Kathleen Flake, assistant professor of American religious history at Vanderbilt Divinity School; and Greg Prince, a doctor of pathology and co-author of a biography of LDS Church President David O. McKay.

Peterson is a Mormon apologist who is a member of BYU's Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies (FARMS) and a contributor to both the

Foundation for Apologetic Information and Research (FAIR) and the Scholarly & Historical Information Exchange for Latter-day Saints (SHIELDS).

Since Givens's book *The Viper on the Hearth: Mormons, Myths, and the Construction of Heresy* examined popular Victorian literature for its caricatures of Mormon polygamy, Givens spoke in detail about this subject to Whitney.

Flake is the author of *The Politics of American Religious Identity: The Seating of Senator Reed Smoot, Mormon Apostle*. The themes of her interview included the connection between revelation and authority in Mormonism, the grounding of Mormon utopian ideals in 19th-century America and the ensuing religious conflict that came from this, and the place of the individual woman or academic in the larger Mormon culture historically and currently.

Redefining Christianity and the "collapse of sacred distance"

Reiterating President Hinckley's position about the miraculous origins of the Church, Givens's main theme was the way that early Mormonism "[collapsed] sacred distance." The sheer physicality of Mormonism's foundational stories about Joseph's first vision of God the Father and Jesus Christ and about the gold plates make it very difficult, Givens said, to argue for a middle ground of Joseph as a "inspired dreamer," for instance.

Joseph describes the plates, yes, and he describes them as a connoisseur describes a fine book in his library collection....[it] is very striking, because right away what he is doing is he is turning our attention to the absolute physicality. What Joseph does there, see, he takes a very important step from which he would never, never retreat, and that is that he creates a foundation from which it is virtually impossible to

mythologize or allegorize the foundations of Mormonism....It's not the message in the Book of Mormon which is true; it's the message about the Book of Mormon. If Joseph really was visited by an Angel Moroni and really was given gold plates, then he was a prophet, and he has the authority to speak on God's behalf. That's how the logic worked.

Peterson shared in all its matter-of-factness the story of Joseph's first vision of God the Father and Jesus Christ, as well as the boy prophet's later vision of the angel Moroni and his finding the golden plates buried in the hillside in upstate New York near his home. "People will say...there are topics you won't touch. No, I'll touch them, but the position I'll probably take will be orthodox. But that's not because of fear. That's because--crazy as it may seem--I believe these things," Peterson said. Of translating through a "seer stone," Peterson described how the young Joseph Smith "would read off what he saw in the stone, apparently in passages of about 25 to 35 words."

Givens articulated the evolution of Joseph Smith's teachings, a point which was also made by Elders Dallin H. Oaks and Jeffrey Holland. Over 14 years, Givens said, Joseph's teachings grew from the familiar Christian themes of the Book of Mormon to the doctrines and teachings "that are characteristic of Mormonism," such as baptism for the dead, pre-mortal existence, the degrees of glory, and the Word of Wisdom. "None of those are found in the Book of Mormon," Givens pointed out. "Yet by the end of [Joseph Smith's] life, in 1844, when he gives the King Follett Discourse, he's propounding doctrine that is radically unlike anything that one sees in the Book of Mormon or in historic Christianity for the most part." (The King Follett Discourse was a funeral sermon

delivered by Joseph Smith in which he announced the belief that men and women's destiny as children of God is to become joint-heirs with Christ in heaven.)

Givens explained the argument over whether or not Mormons are Christians by saying that people are talking past each other. "Mormons are using 'Christians' in one sense; everybody else is using it in another. When Mormons say we're Christian, [what] we mean is we believe in Christ. And we do. We believe there is no salvation outside of Christ, that he is the Son of God. But when everybody else uses the term, what they mean is there's this historically defined tradition that gives us definition through a set of formal creeds of Christianity, and you don't participate in that tradition or that belief, and they're right."

Givens proposed that one main reason 19th century Mormons were persecuted, even before polygamy emerged, was "Mormonism's propensity to redefine the conditions of faith....In other words, Mormonism tends to collapse that distance that generally is held to be an absolutely essential ingredient in our experience of the divine, that sense of worshipful distance that should [be] attain[ed] between man and his God."

Tension between Protestant America and the Mormons

While Givens consistently used the pronouns "we, us, our," and spoke about Mormonism in a way that identified himself as a follower, Kathleen Flake took the historian's stance of objective observer. Whitney asked Flake to elaborate on her comment that "Mormonism is a religion that cuts, but doesn't destroy. There are casualties because of this religion." Like Peterson, Flake connected Mormonism to the Old Testament, only she did not speak as an apologist but an observer.

Mormonism is a radical religion. It plays with fire. This religion manifests in a very modern world an archaic notion of communication with the divine....[Mormons] believe God talks to them. And this is dangerous in a pluralistic society where various visions of what is right and good are in competition, because Mormons will look to God to tell them what is right and good....They believe in a righteousness that extends beyond morality. It is a kind of an Old Testament righteousness, a covenant order within this community.

Flake highlighted the difference between the Mormon concept of revelation and the more traditional concept of “revelation” as a “good feeling.” She said that when it comes to interpreting the Bible and the Book of Mormon, for instance, “This is not some exercise in reading the Bible and saying, ‘This is what God meant.’ They believe they stand there and speak for God, and certainly their prophet speaks for God.” Therefore, revelation is an important concept for the church as an institution: “Moses was a lawgiver, and they believe that their Mormon president is a lawgiver, and when he speaks, he speaks the law, not from Sinai, but from the Great Basin and the same power of representing God’s will on the earth.” Significantly, also on a personal level, she maintained, Mormons have an expectation of personal revelation and a conviction that they should be dreaming dreams and experiencing communication from God just as the people of the Bible did, and this in a very modern people. “You have a mission to perform, and if you do not get direction on that through revelation, you have failed in your own religious life. The Bible is lived in all its immediacy, and God does have an

expectation that you will come and talk to him about this and get this revelation.” The whole message of Mormonism, Flake said, is “God speaks today.”

Flake described her view of Joseph Smith by comparing him to Henry Ford. “Henry Ford wanted a car in every home. Joseph Smith was the Henry Ford of revelation. He wanted every home to have one, and the revelation he had in mind was the revelation he’d had, which was seeing God.” She also said that a person can understand Smith as a man who was trying to bring Catholicism and Protestantism back together-- “the liturgy of the word, the liturgy of the sacrament, and Smith is trying to weave those back together.” Thus, the Bible, Book of Mormon, and other Mormon religious books carry equal weight as church and temple ordinances, such as baptism and the sacrament (or eucharist).

Flake expressed her personal views on the complex character of Joseph Smith by saying, “I like those complications myself. To many people those complications contradict an idealized portrait of what a prophet ought to be. They forget that Moses killed an Egyptian, that Abraham lied about his wife....To me it almost makes Smith’s claim more legitimate that he’s got this temper, because it fits with the extremity of his emotions....I would expect to find these contradictions in a human being who is trying to mediate the divine and is still human.”

Flake called Joseph Smith “a thorn in the side of America” because he went against three powerful movements in American Protestant Christianity of the 19th century. First, “He is all about narrative, not theology, at the very time when most of American Christianity, and certainly European Christianity, is long down this path, is applying methods of higher criticism and history to the Bible.” Second, “...at the time

America is desiring to be homogenous in its morality, Smith says: 'Let's experiment with marriages. Let's experiment with the construction of families.' At the very time that the family is becoming sacrosanct and women are trying to empower,...Smith says, 'No, go back, back, and let's do this patriarchal/matriarchal family.'" Third, Smith was designing a system of beliefs that became credible to people. "These are huge ideas about people acting in the name of God to change themselves, their physical environment, their human relations, to welcome the reign of God on earth....In Smith's idea you have to become holy and you have to do holy things, as guided by God, so God can return." Smith's grand idea was of a religion that would change people on an individual level "to be like Jesus Christ," and also to fill the world with holy cities that would transform the world. In sum, Flake described three themes: the historical literality of the Bible and Book of Mormon, a biblical vision of family organization, and an idealistic vision of creating heaven on earth in literal ways.

Peterson, for instance, saw polygamy as a way of distancing 19th-century Mormons from the wider society:

One of the things that people pointed to in the 19th century that clearly distanced Latter-day Saints from everybody else was plural marriage, or polygamy....One of the functions of that was to distance us from other people. In a sense, once you had entered into plural marriage, you just couldn't go back very easily....It created a sense of almost ethnicity, a peoplehood....That doctrine, I think, or that practice was never as fundamental as certain others, such as the idea of exaltation, but it's related to them.

Flake said that the Mormon cities on the frontier integrated political and religious authority even more than the Puritans did. Thus, what Givens called the “collapse of sacred distance”--that grounding of religious ideals on American soil in real space and time-- was similarly called by Flake a point of genuine tension between Mormon settlements and the surrounding communities. America had been forced to be pluralistic because of its colonial history, but the question became, “Can an inherently theocratic religion be part of a pluralistic nation?”

Flake described the scene in 1901: Joseph F. Smith becomes the president of the LDS Church, and in his first public speech, he says, “We’ve got a problem. There are good people on this earth who think they’re doing God a service to kill us.” So the church’s missionaries weren’t even being heard because their reputation was so bad. On the other side, she said, the Protestants in America had their own concern: “Polygamy is still abhorrent to them, not only a danger to home and hearth, but that danger itself undermines democracy. It is a threat to the United States government that the home is, in their terms, dissipated by this family practice.” With the seating of Senator Reed Smoot, Flake said, the reputation for polygamy finally waned and Mormons fully embraced American patriotism. As a result, Europe opened up to the Mormon Church’s proselytizing efforts. Simply put, “The internationalization that you see in the next 60 years--it is the story of 20th century Mormonism--begins in the Smoot hearings.”

Flake explained how the schism occurred between the LDS Church and what became called the Fundamentalist Mormon Church (FLDS). The LDS Church accepted Joseph F. Smith as an equal revelator as Joseph Smith, she said, and so the abandonment of the public practice of polygamy was accepted as the law of God, even though “to some

extent the belief in plural marriage is maintained” as part of the afterlife. “Those who did not [accept Joseph F. Smith as a prophet when he enforced the abandonment of polygamy] were those who led to the creation today of what we call the... FLDS, those who continue to practice polygamy.” Flake went into more detail, but Elder Oaks was essentially saying the same thing when Whitney had asked him about the abandonment of polygamy; he, in fact, referred to Flake’s book on this subject as providing insight to him. Mormons were not saying they no longer believed in this order of kinship, Flake said; they were rejecting the practice in order to conform to American law, not rejecting the revelation of Joseph Smith, which is still “in the books” (as Doctrine & Covenants Section 121). According to Flake:

No one speaks to that issue about the afterlife. No one speaks about plural marriage anymore at all. There is no more theologizing on it. There is no more looking over your shoulder at it. There is no defense of it. It’s not on the table anymore.

This echoes Elder Holland’s comment that the present-day Church is reluctant to talk about 19th-century polygamy and is still frustrated by the stereotypes and the ongoing confusion in the media with the FLDS. Flake succinctly said that the entering into and leaving of polygamy had to do with “some revelatory experience” individually, “and a conviction about their leader as a prophet of God.”

Interestingly, today in the 21st century, Flake said, Mormons “see themselves as a modern people, as integrated into their culture, and are at best puzzled and at worst irritated, aggravated by the stereotypes that would exclude them from the major project that is American culture.”

Expressing his personal opinion of Mormons conforming to American culture, Peterson said:

There's still that Zion-building ideal....But I worry that we may become too assimilated to the surrounding model. I glory in the distinctives of 19th-century Mormonism. I don't want to return to all of them....I'm not calling for the restoration of plural marriage. But I do think that we need to remember that we were in tension with the surrounding society and that there always ought to be some. We ought to be bothered if everybody always thinks we're just peachy-keen.

The Complexity of Polygamy and the Mormon Concept of Eternal Families

As is evident from the above comments, a subtext of the Mormons' strained relationship with Protestant America was the difficulty of making sense of polygamy, even for believing Mormons. Peterson, Flake, and Givens, in fact, each took different stances on polygamy, whether it was true revelation from God, and the status of women in the LDS Church.

Whitney asked Peterson about polygamy, "not just as another bold idea within Mormonism, but as a religious principle." Peterson answered that the practice reinforced the Mormons' unique identity and was also connected to their view of eternal families. "That doctrine, I think, or that practice was never as fundamental as certain others, such as the idea of exaltation, but it's related to them," he said.

Peterson added that the Mormon doctrine that family ties survive beyond death separates the LDS Church from other religious faiths. "They not only survive; they are necessary; they are essential. We're not saved as atomistic individuals; we're saved as

family groups. And Mormonism in the 19th century was unabashedly patriarchal. It was a restoration of Old Testament forms as well as New Testament.” Peterson said that one of the things that 19th century Mormons took very seriously was polygamy. “They entered into as a matter of religious commitment. It was a covenant they made. It was not just some quirky passing fad. It was something they were willing to go to prison for, and many of them did, as leaders of the church.” Peterson continued by pointing out how difficult it was for church members to give up polygamy after the 1890 Manifesto because they had made so many sacrifices for it, such as moving to Mexico, Canada, hiding from marshals, going to prison. He said that he thought present-day Church members are “overly-embarrassed” by the Church’s polygamous history. “I read the accounts of some of the early plural wives as well as some of the early husbands, plural-marriage patriarchs, and it’s clear to me that they saw this as something they were religiously committed to. This was not some sort of lascivious harem....” Peterson expressed his personal opinion of polygamy by saying:

I have been uncomfortable, I have to say, sometimes, as we’ve tended to distance ourselves from that. These were heroic people, even if you don’t agree with them. They sacrificed to a great degree to [do] something they really believed in. They believed that they had been told to do this by a prophet, and they were going to do it. What you saw in a lot of the caricatures from the 19th century [were] these Mormons living in this kind of lecherous luxury out in the Great Basin. That is simply, utterly foreign to the practice as we know it. It was rigorous; it was patriarchal; it was

demanding. It took a lot to support numerous wives and large families, and it was difficult to do...

Flake elaborated on the doctrinal significance of plural marriage in 19th-century Mormonism, but also expressed ambivalence as to whether she believed it was revelation from God to Joseph Smith. Flake's expertise is based on her historical research of the seating of Senator Smoot in the early 1900s when America was not convinced of Mormonism's abandonment of polygamy. Thus, she spoke extensively to the topic of Mormonism's modernization and integration into American society and the related difficulties of abandoning polygamy. She and Sarrah Barringer Gordon were the only scholars who elaborated on how plural marriage was taught and understood as a religious principle connected to salvation in 19th-century Mormonism. Flake said she thought that people miss the doctrinal significance of polygamy. "This desire to become like God included thinking about God as Father and themselves as fathers and mothers. Of course, one of Smith's teachings was there was a God the Mother as well. So this idea of becoming like God included this idea of becoming like God the Father and God the Mother. So parenting was hugely important, and this parenting occurred in these kinship structures, whereby you not only parented by giving birth, but you parented by adopting families into your family. So it's a web." She added that for Mormons to walk away from polygamy was not really about walking away from a sexual arrangement. Rather, it was to walk away from "an entire kinship structure that not only gave meaning to their most intimate associations but also was related very directly to their understanding of how one was saved," such that "at the bar of judgment," it wouldn't just be about their faith in Christ or their personal actions in life, but was also about being able to stand there with

their kin and say, “Yes, this person helped me in my spiritual growth and my spiritual life.”

When asked about her personal opinions about polygamy, Flake answered that the historical record indicates that it was lived poorly in many instances. The historical record and the explanations of contemporaries for why the practice was discontinued say it was “because people lived it wrong. That meant a lot of hearts were broken; a lot of foolish things and cruel things were done under this system.”

Flake tied the question of plural marriage back into the complexity of Joseph Smith as a prophet. In regard to whether or not she believed plural marriage was a true revelation from Joseph Smith, Flake said that she didn’t believe it was as simple as Smith’s desire for multiple wives, or as Joseph Smith biographer Fawn Brodie put it, his megalomania. “And maybe the explanation is that simple. But I think he is a complex enough character that you need to struggle a little further than either of those.” She also said that she didn’t think it was a case of him being an infallible “puppet” who only did what God told him to on one hand, or that he was a charlatan pretender on the other hand. Simply put, this is a puzzle for Mormons as well as outsiders.

Givens said he found the idea of plural marriage relationships problematic. When asked by Whitney how polygamy was connected with salvation, he said it was “too vexed an issue” for him to touch, and that for him, personally, he could only understand polygamy in terms of a sacrifice for faith akin to the sacrifice God required of Abraham:

I can’t make sense of it, because there is a fundamental contradiction between elevating the marriage to kind of the apotheosis of spiritual life and rendering sacred and eternal that bond between a man and a woman

and the necessary diffusion of that relationship that certainly must occur in any kind of a polygamous relationship.

Instead of elaborating on Mormon polygamous family arrangements, Givens philosophized about the doctrinal significance of the family in Mormon thought and discussed the status of women in the LDS Church.

The paradox about the status of Mormon women.

When Whitney asked Terryl Givens, point blank, “What is the role of women in the LDS Church?” Givens answered:

I think the role of women in the LDS Church and in LDS theology is something of a paradox. To an outsider what is most immediately apparent is that the priesthood is limited to men and that there are no women who officiate in the church, and even an institution like polygamy seems to privilege the man over the woman.

Givens explained that, on the other hand, Mormons were “ahead of their time in emphasizing the need and the desirability of women obtaining an education,” and that Utah was very early in giving Utah women the right to vote, that it was, in fact, the U.S. Congress who took that right away. Further, he said, in more profound ways, women are in a position of absolute equality with men: the centrality of the family, he said, means for Mormons that “a man cannot be saved or exalted independently of a woman nor a woman independently of a man; that it is the perfect union of those two that constitutes a unit that can proceed all the way to salvation.” He added that Mormons are unique in revering Eve as a heroine for her decision and that “ultimately, any religious faith that believes that women ultimately can progress to inherit all the forms and status and

privileges of godliness is a religion that is very, very empowering to the woman, as much as to the man.”

Givens also situated the Mormon worship experience within the context of family relationships and local congregations.

I think one of the great myths of our day is the distinction we try to make between religion and spirituality. It’s so common for people to say, “I’m not very religious and I don’t go to church, but I go into the mountains and I commune with God.” The problem with that is that true religion is found only in service. Finding God is only possible by serving other people. And the function of church, among others, is to create that context in which we can come together and serve each other and minister to each other. One can’t find those opportunities by going alone to a mountaintop and contemplating the mysteries of life.

Mormonism’s grounding in the physical world, even in its worship practices, emphasizes Givens’s observation about the collapse of sacred distance. These mortal relationships, when perfected, Givens explained, constitute Joseph Smith’s vision of heaven. Of the temple, Givens connected it to a revelation of the prophet Joseph in which he said the same sociality which exists among us here will exist among us there in the celestial kingdom; only it will be coupled with the eternal glory, which we do not now enjoy. “Now that’s a wonderful vision of heaven,” he said, “because what he’s saying is that heaven is constituted really out of a set of exalted relationships that we’re a part of. Those relationships are familial, but they also extend to friends.” This view accentuates the happy quality of the relationships between family members and friends as being the point

of gospel living, not the relationships in and of themselves. The requirements for Mormons entering the temple, Givens said, is not their being perfect but rather, their being committed to trying to “live as true disciples of Christ.”

Faith and Sacrifice for Convictions

Peterson shared his personal mission experience, expressing the difficulty of leaving his family for two years. It was the first time he had seen his father cry. “I thought, I must be nuts,” he said. “What kind of a church would ask this kind of thing of somebody, to split up a family like this?” His mission turned out to be a wonderful experience, he said. “I don’t regret any of it even slightly--and for them, too. But there is that pain. The church does ask for sacrifices. We don’t have to cross the Plains anymore with a handcart; we don’t have to do those sorts of things, but it does ask things of us that sometimes are tough.”

Although she expressed some personal ambivalence about whether or not she thought Joseph Smith was inspired by God to institute plural marriage, Flake maintained that women and men began and abandoned polygamy because of their own personal revelatory experience; they believed their leader was a prophet, but they also felt inspired themselves that the practice was correct.

The Church’s Boundaries and Intellectuals, Feminists, and Gays

Whitney asked Peterson to discuss his involvement with FARMS, and the position on the Book of Mormon of FARMS. He said the impression is that FARMS scholars are “just rigid literalists. They’re wrong on that....all of us view the Book of Mormon as authentically historical that is, that it is a record of real ancient peoples who came to the Americas at a time before Christ....We do not believe necessarily that the

Book of Mormon is inerrant....We have a high view of the Book of Mormon, but we aren't inerrantists; we don't believe that it's infallible.”

“People will say...there are topics you won't touch. No, I'll touch them, but the position 'll probably take will be orthodox. But that's not because of fear. That's because—crazy as it may seem—I believe these things,” Peterson said.

Whitney asked Peterson about the archaeological challenges to the Book of Mormon as a historical document. Peterson supports the statement made by Church President Gordon B. Hinckley that the foundational stories happened the way Joseph Smith said they did, that it is an either/or situation. He said he doesn't believe there is a middle ground about the historical authenticity of the Book of Mormon, for instance. Similarly, Peterson echoed the comments of President Boyd K. Packer, who said that intellectuals, for instance, have a right to research and write whatever they would like to, but as Peterson said, “they aren't allowed to preach [ideas the Church disagrees with] in church meetings or in Sunday School classes.” He added that the Church has no right to censor anyone, but that it “does probably have the right to ensure that certain views are not advocated on its property. It can say, well, you can teach that if you like, but you can't teach that on our university campus; you can't teach that on our pulpit.” When asked about whether or not homosexuality was an ex-communicable offense in the Church, Peterson echoed the position of Elders Jeffrey Holland, Packer, and Marlin Jensen. To be of the inclination is not ex-communicable, he said, but to be a practicing homosexual is because the rules for full fellowship in the church are “No sexual relations except within marriage.” Peterson argued that the church's avoidance of teaching youth about controversial historical subjects such as Mountain Meadows Massacre and the

origins of polygamy discredited the teaching authority of the church, that these topics should be addressed before youth stumble across them on the Internet.

Whitney asked Givens and others about the culture of certainty within Mormonism and whether that tends to create anxiety among members who have doubts or who tend to question things. Givens called faith the “poor stepchild of Mormonism.” He said that three factors have contributed to the development of the culture of certainty: “Joseph’s emphasis on certainty,” the “possibility [for believers] of a kind of confirmatory revelation from God,” and the church’s history of being “under siege for so long by persecutors, by critics, by skeptics and now by revisionist historians that there is a tendency to associate doubt with calling into question the fundamentals of the church, so I think that those two categories [faith and doubt] get confused sometimes.” He didn’t believe there was any stigma on personally wrestling with questions; the concern was with public attacks on the church’s fundamental teachings. Givens reiterated the same message of church leaders and of Peterson in regard to the church’s right to “safeguard its members from those who would deliberately set out to undermine the foundations of faith,” as Givens put it.

Of authority and the church’s international reach, Flake pointed out that because of its lay leadership, the LDS Church treads very lightly in comparison to the Catholic Church during its 2000 years of history:

So all this talk about hierarchy and control and power and making people do things misses this point that leadership in Mongolia is Mongolian. And yes, Salt Lake City will say: “Tithings are 10 percent. You can’t charge 5 percent; you can’t charge 20 percent.” But the other story of 20th-century

Mormonism that doesn't get told is the extent to which they do not feel in control. They're perceived to be this juggernaut of organization, but internally, my guess is they have all their fingers in the dike.

Flake said she personally took issue with church members' involvement in campaigning against the ERA because some were sincere, sure, but others seemed to just jump on the conservative bandwagon because the Church took a moral stance on the proposed amendment. Of being an intellectual in the Church, Flake said that she has never found anything "as intellectually stimulating as Mormonism, and I've been a lawyer, and I have a couple graduate degrees." The problems come, she said, when an academic person pushes up against church management publicly. The question is only one for American intellectuals who are the children of the pioneers, she said. Salt Lake City, she said, has a lot on its plate with its practical concerns about the international church, building chapels, managing resources abroad, etc. Church meetings, she pointed out, are about "holiness. [Sunday School] is not about thinking through answers to questions in a certain way." Significantly, Flake said her faith is in the sense of rightness from her own personal experiences that what the Church has taught her about God and life is the right way. "My faith is about me, not about them [Joseph Smith and other prophets], and what I've experienced through this system." The church, she said, is a sharp-edged tool, and she expects to have conflicts with fellow members and the structure at times, but "What keeps me coming back is the substance."

Some scholars have left the LDS Church over disagreements about publishing Mormon history, Mormon feminism, and homosexuality. This next category addresses

the themes found in the interviews of two former LDS scholars who were interviewed by Helen Whitney.

Scholars Excommunicated from the LDS Church

Margaret Toscano, a professor of classics at the University of Utah; and D. Michael Quinn, a historian of Mormonism and former BYU professor, both spoke of their research in Mormon women's issues and church history, respectively. Shared themes between them included a view of church leadership as being about control, and criticism of a judgmental Mormon culture; they saw themselves as loyal opposition to an overly-strict Church in their efforts to raise awareness about women's equality and controversial church history topics. Their experiences of being ex-communicated revealed their original loyalty to the church's foundational beliefs, their belief in the complexity of Joseph Smith as a "prophet puzzle," and spoke to the issue of intellectuals, feminists, and gays in the Church.

Church Authority as Control

Quinn said that the massive growth of the Church since the 1960s has resulted in "an inward concern about maintaining control"--that what happened in early Christianity will also happen in the LDS Church as it spreads internationally unless there is tighter control of the lessons taught. "So conformity has become almost a watchword among the leaders as well as the rank and file in a way that never was true of Mormon experience prior to the 1960s," Quinn said. "This has had an effect on independent thinking...and it has resulted in a kind of watchdog mentality, which even has a committee that is specifically assigned to look for any evidences of departures from orthodoxy or criticism

by members of the church, especially if they're academics." Toscano also said this committee exists at Church headquarters and kept track of her research and writings.

According to Quinn, Church mission presidents were more concerned about adding numbers to the congregations than the welfare of converts. Quinn described the "baseball baptisms" that happened during his mission in England in which over-zealous missionaries baptized children into the Church without the children being aware they were now on the official membership rolls of the Church. Quinn said this phenomenon came about because "the mission presidents were in competition with each mission to get the highest numbers of mission baptisms."

Quinn said that an unnamed general authority of the Church put pressure on Quinn's stake president to take action against him for researching and writing about topics such as theocracy in the Mormon Church, the secret practice of polygamy by Joseph Smith, the ongoing practice of polygamy after the Manifesto, and certain policy changes in the Church. According to Quinn, that particular stake president would not carry out the general authority's request because he found nothing wrong with an article Quinn had written. But a following stake president delivered a letter accusing him of apostasy. Eventually he was excommunicated. He said he was very angry; he still believed these men were "prophets, seers and revelators, but I believe they're wrong." He saw himself as loyal opposition; when he was excommunicated, "it was like death; it really was," he said. Whitney asked him if he would like to be invited back into the LDS Church, and he said that as long as the Church continues to use its political power "as a club against gays and lesbians," he could not "go back into that closet of being a silent

dissenter.” “So many of [the Church’s] current policies are contrary to what I believe is the will of God,” he said.

Toscano characterized the church court she attended as a “kangaroo court,” in which “the decision had been made” beforehand to excommunicate her, and that she didn’t feel like she was given any chance to defend herself. “The second thing is it did feel a little bit like an inquisition and a little frightening in the sense that they had all the power and I had none.” She gave an analogy to the Middle Ages: “if these men had not only the ecclesiastical power but if they had the power of the state, where they could give a physical punishment to me, I realized in this moment that they would have burned me at the stake. And they would have done it smiling, thinking that they were saving my soul.” She dubbed the feeling afterwards as this “horror of niceness--that on the one hand they’re cutting me off from eternal salvation and telling me that I’m this apostate...and then I’m this nice woman that they’re going to shake my hand....the niceness covered over the violence of what was being done.”

Loyal Opposition in behalf of Women, Intellectuals, Gays

As a homosexual male and historian, Quinn spoke up for gay rights and for truthful history even if it’s controversial and difficult for Church members to learn about. Whitney asked Quinn: “Do you see an irony here in that the jewel in the crown of Mormonism is the family, yet on the issue of homosexuality, they break up families?” He answered by saying it is very hard for LDS families and for the homosexual family member because the family is told by the Church, Quinn said, to “avoid even the appearance of evil, and homosexuality is evil. So there has been almost a kind of expectation that if your child will not conform, then you should abandon them.” Also,

gays, he said, “have to develop a private faith, which I have, that God accepts all loving relationships. But this separates you from the orthodoxy of the Mormon Church, and many gays and lesbians cannot make that step. They accept themselves as inferior eternally, because they’ve never been taught otherwise.”

Toscano also saw herself as loyal opposition: “I am Mormon on a deep level. I’m not LDS anymore, but I’m Mormon, and I care about the community, and I do not believe that a community can be spiritually healthy when it silences people. That was my reason for not obeying the stake president in the first place. I told at the time; I said, ‘I cannot be silent, because for me to be silent is to participate in an abuse of authority and to damage the community that I care about.’”

Toscano described her experience of attending the temple as a spiritual awakening and a feeling of being privileged with priesthood power in the same way that men were. She concluded about this time of questioning gender roles:

What spiritual, intelligent woman wouldn’t ask these questions? That’s the hard thing for me to understand. I mean, on the one hand, I don’t want to criticize any of my sisters that feel happy in the church, and yet on the other hand, it’s been very hard for me to feel condemned because I had certain feelings. It wasn’t like I became a secular feminist first and then I wanted to drag this all into the church. For me, my feminism started because I loved my religion and because I read the Scriptures and because I wanted to be a good person. It was in the process of that spiritual quest that I became the feminist and started questioning roles. I only questioned

roles because I felt so negated as woman who had desires for spirituality and for intelligence.

Toscano said she finds the church's emphasis on motherhood for women damaging in several ways: first, it creates horrible guilt for women because they evaluate themselves based on how devoutly they're following the church's counsel on motherhood; second, it makes them confine themselves to a limited role and not develop their talents; and third, "because men are given the leadership role in the church, it means that women and the work that they do in the church is always subordinate to what the men are doing....it's not an equal partnership."

Judgmental Mormon Culture

Quinn said that Mormons see homosexuality as "disgusting," and that he, as an intellectual gay male, experienced a kind of death when he was excommunicated from the Church.

Toscano said the most painful part about the ex-communication was the way in which it hurt her relationship with her family. Again, the theme about the temple and families being combined arose because she described how she was not allowed by her "patriarchal" brother-in-law to participate in a Mormon temple-related ritual at her sister's funeral. "That cut me so deep, I haven't gotten over it. I don't know if I ever will," she finished.

Joseph, the "Prophet Puzzle"

Toscano called Joseph Smith the "endless prophet puzzle," adding, "for a lot of Mormons, when they find out that the Sunday School [version of the] story is not true, they lose their faith. For me, when I found [that out], I discovered my faith....because, for

me, that sort of whitewashed history did not make any sense to my own experience as a person in my everyday life. I'm a person with struggles....I mean, these things were all very complex, so when I found that Joseph Smith was this complex man who made a lot of mistakes and did things that were troubling, I was intrigued.”

Non-LDS Scholars

The outside scholars of American religious history interviewed for the film included Jon Butler, professor of American history and dean of the Graduate School of Arts & Sciences at Yale University; Sarah Barringer Gordon, the Arlin M. Adams professor of constitutional law and a professor of history at the University of Pennsylvania (she is also the author of *The Mormon Question: Polygamy and Constitutional Conflict in 19th-Century America*); Michael Coe, the Charles J. MacCurdy professor emeritus of anthropology at Yale University and curator emeritus of the Division of Anthropology at the school's Peabody Museum of Natural History; and Ken Verdoia, a Utah historian, documentarian and journalist. These outside experts put the story of the LDS Church in the context of the American landscape. Specifically, they theorized about why the LDS Church grew and survived while in competition with other American religions, provided their personal perspectives on Joseph Smith, explained how the church's practice of plural marriage was representative of its genuine conflict with the United States, and discussed the church's relationship with its own historians and philosophers.

The Complexity of Joseph Smith

Butler, Gordon, and Coe all said that they could not reduce Joseph Smith to simply a fraud or a prophet. Rather, they all indicated that he was a much more complex

character. Butler called him a “visionary, an organizer, a schemer, a mover of people, an inventor of a religion that brought polygamy to American society; someone who was assassinated and also, in a sense, created an entire state, the state of Utah.” The reason Smith was assassinated, Butler said, was because he was such a controversial figure in the 19th-century--he was loved by his followers and hated by others. Butler called Joseph Smith a “quintessentially American man” because he enacted the widespread spiritual desires among people of the 1800s to create a visionary society. He said that Smith and his successor, Brigham Young, both possessed an extraordinary organizational genius which led to the creation of “one of the great religions systems” in the world today; this structure inevitably rubbed some individuals the wrong way.

Butler likened Joseph Smith to other complicated Old Testament prophets and other historical figures in Christian history, including Moses, Augustine, Luther, and Calvin. “Each one was famed for emotional outbursts,” Butler said. Smith’s humanness “actually accentuated his stature, made him real, made his vision and made the validity of the Book of Mormon all the more real. In short, he was a prophet; that is, a human being through whom the divine spoke. Therefore he didn’t surrender any of his humanity. His humanity magnified his divinity.” Gordon similarly stated that Joseph Smith was a “mesmerizing” person. “He had great charm. We’ve all known people who fill a room; he filled an entire faith.” She added that “prophets are as human as they are a divine channel, if you will.”

Gordon expressed her personal view of Joseph Smith:

I’ve been asked many times whether I believe Joseph Smith was a fraud or whether he was a prophet. I am among those who believe he was a

prophet, but let me make it clear he was not my prophet. I am an Episcopalian; I do not believe in ongoing revelation....we can get a sense of the excitement that must have been in the air in the 1830s when this new prophet appeared and galvanized audiences--those piercing blue eyes, that amazing new Scripture.

Mormons Survived and Thrived

Butler described how Smith emerged from the “extraordinary spiritual hothouse that was the result of the American Revolution,” pointing out that Smith’s “enunciation of visions in his own world, his reception of revelations that created the Book of Mormon, was not particularly unusual. Smith was also not unusual in his organization genius.” He perfected what had been begun by Baptists, Methodists, and Presbyterians. At this time, Butler said, “it was a modern America; it was a plural America; it was a visionary America; it was a difficult America; it was a contentious America.” Butler attributed Smith’s singular success in developing a religious system that would survive the competition to the fact that Smith “made America the center of his religious vision.” Smith likened America to the Middle East in its spiritual significance, and the Mormon religion was designed to “fan out across America,” Butler said. “They would redefine the way men and women lived their organized lives. They would attach themselves to families in a way that wasn’t true for many Protestants or even Roman Catholics in the U.S. in the 19th century. They would, in fact, create a society inside a society, and in doing so they believed they would reshape the whole of society.” Butler concluded, “In that regard 19th-century Mormonism is one of the most astonishing creations ever put forward in American society and certainly ever put forward in American religion,” and

“the creation of an entirely new way of thinking about Christianity and about religion. He has to be given credit for the creation of the priesthood within Mormonism so that it has a basic organizational structure that’s linked to its religious doctrines.” Gordon similarly added that Joseph Smith laid the visionary foundation, and Brigham Young was the cement. This church turned “this brand-new revelation and [its] existence as a small, very cult-like sect into a flourishing and worldwide religion. So we see...the painful birth, the early childhood, the flourishing and the maturation of a whole new religion.”

The Biblical Mormons versus Protestant America

Butler said that Smith was controversial because his views were controversial. He “upstaged the Christian Gospel by translating the Book of Mormon into a published text that upended the Old and The New Testament as the final books of Christianity.” He was controversial because he created and endorsed polygamy in America, upending “contemporary notions for marriage, contemporary notions of the family, contemporary notions of childhood, contemporary notions of sexuality.” Also, he was controversial because his strict organization “elevated some” and “diminished others.” Smith was the father of communitarian settlements and of Mormon hierarchicalism in a “wildly, almost chaotically democratic society.”

Butler pointed out that Smith’s claims about Christianity were “way out there at the end of a diving board.” Smith was “claiming a miracle in America...having seen an angel,” “the creation of a new biblical texts that he is delivering through a revelation that he had through a seer stone.” Butler compared such claims to the original claims of Christianity that were so miraculous: life over death. Smith, Butler said, didn’t just take one or two steps out from the existing religious systems:

Smith simply transcends Christianity through the miraculous and perfects it at the same time. So he opens up a whole new world that simply didn't exist before, and it is a whole new world. It's a world with a text; it's a world with an angel; it's a world with a prophet. And it didn't exist before Joseph Smith. And that is truly extraordinary.

Therefore, Smith's religious system was Christian, but it was also seen as wildly different from the Protestant and Catholic traditions in 19th-century America.

This fact is significant, Butler argued, because "Mormonism is not a historical religion; it's ultimately a religion of personal transformation and the perfection of personal religious beliefs in the family especially, in the community and then in society. It's therefore a living historical religion in a peculiar kind of way." So Mormon believers are not so much concerned with whether or not there is proof of the historical authenticity of the Book of Mormon, for instance, he explained. Rather, they're concerned about the way in which living their religion ultimately transforms their personal lives, families, and communities for the better.

Butler and Gordon both emphasized the religious significance of the family structure in Mormon thought. "In many other religious systems, what is important is the belief in the individual, the belief of the child, the belief of the parent, the parent's belief transferred to the child, but the child still remains an independent unit. Within Mormonism there is an emphasis on the collective: the collective sense of the family, the collective sense of moral responsibility, the collective sense of an enterprise. The family is in turn related to the church."

Mormon plural marriage was part of the Mormon communitarian vision, according to Butler and Gordon. Shakers, the Oneida settlement, and other communitarian groups were all experimenting with different family arrangements at the time in America. Whitney asked Butler, “Is it true that 19th-century Americans were shocked by the notion of polygamy, unaware that it had been practiced in four-fifths of the world?” Butler answered that it was, in fact, hypocritical of Americans to come down so hard on the Mormons for a practice that most of the world and the whole of human history had engaged in. “But because Mormonism was practicing polygamy within the U.S., within its borders and inside a somewhat odd, mysterious and difficult, secretive religious group, then federal authorities came down on Mormonism with extraordinary power and simply shut it down.” Butler seems to be saying that it was polygamy’s connection to a theocratic religion within the pluralistic, democratic American borders that made Americans so alarmed.

Gordon posited a law-based argument on the compromise that came about between Mormonism and the United States. By the 1840s in Nauvoo, Illinois, Joseph Smith’s city-state was beginning to look like its own country, with its own military and a theocratic government. The public announcement from Utah of polygamy in 1852 renewed further political anger against the Mormons; their Exodus to the West had not freed them from the boundaries of protestant American sensibilities and the ensuing rule of Constitutional law. Gordon explained that modern Protestant impulses informed the legal structure of early America, having been handed down from Britain where Protestant Christianity was part of common law; the British legal philosopher Sir William Blackstone had maintained that Christianity was part of the common law, and polygamy

had always been odious to the common law, punishable by death in England. A tsunami of anti-polygamist legislation from the U.S. Congress crippled the Utah Territory, but it was not until the government seized church properties, including the Salt Lake Temple, that the LDS Church raised a white flag. In the 20th century, Mormonism became increasingly modern and patriotic; Mormons assimilated into the American landscape politically, economically, and culturally. Gordon summarized that there was a genuine conflict between the U.S. government and the Mormon Church and that both had to compromise to accommodate the other: “Everyone agrees that the government went too far,” Gordon said. At the same time, she described how the church was openly defiant of the nation. The U.S. had to negotiate the kind of Utah “political entity” which it could legally contain within its pluralistic borders.

Gordon described the debate between the anti-polygamists and the Mormon defenders of polygamy:

In the 1850s, the 1860s, the 1870s and beyond, people believed, as they do today, that marriage is the fundamental institution of the family, and as the family goes, so goes the country. So it’s not just overheated rhetoric; it’s also the case that there’s a lot at stake....The Mormon defenders of polygamy...said: “You bet marriage makes a difference. Take a look at your own societies and the prostitutes and the abandoned women that are there. And look at our society, and see every woman have the opportunity to be married to a man who not only will marry her, but who is an upstanding member of the faith.”

Gordon similarly said that the family organization followed biblical precedent, and that “blaming Smith in particular or Mormonism in general for ongoing Fundamentalist polygamists [like Warren Jeffs] is like blaming Karl Marx for communist China.” She added that early Mormons’ practice of polygamy was a natural outgrowth of the Protestant reformation. “There were often attempts to recover Christian purity that in some sense meant going back to the social practices of Jesus’ era, and of course the social practices of Jesus’ era did not look like monogamy, right?” Gordon told Whitney. In contrast to the stereotypes, she said plural marriage in Mormon communities was “tightly controlled” in a way that respected women during pregnancy, for instance.

As did Mormon scholar Kathleen Flake, Gordon explained that plural marriage was understood as a religious principle by 19th-century Mormons so much so that they had a difficult time giving up the practice and keeping the religion in tact. For these 19th-century Zionist city-builders, monogamy was seen as the problem, not the solution. “It was by overcoming that nuclear family that Mormons believed that they could bring on the millennium and create a new, more sanctified race for the earth,” Gordon explained. According to Gordon, the question arose, “...is the nuclear family still celestial in the ways that polygamist families had been?”

And the answer very quickly became yes, and the nuclear family inherited both that super-heated quality and that supportive quality that had gone into that investment in polygamy. It’s through and in and by and with the family that Mormons are saved, and it’s how they think primarily of their relationship both to the afterlife and to the church as a whole.

The Mormon Church versus its Modern Historians and Philosophers

Butler critiqued the modern-day LDS Church for what he sees as its reflexive fear of dissent. He maintained that, ironically, Smith “thrived on controversy. Smith thrived on his own exchange with elders inside the Mormon Church to create a better church,” while such controversy is shunned today within the institutional church. Beginnings of new religious movements are always messy, Butler argued, and it is no different in Mormon history. Therefore, Butler said, the modern church authorities “need to come to grips with the modern understanding of the history of Mormonism as something that doesn’t intrude upon the practice of Mormonism.” In contrast to early Christianity, for instance, Mormonism doesn’t have any place to hide--its historical documents are available and continue to turn up new insights about its the church’s beginnings through journals, newspapers, letters, memoirs, account books, and so on.

Butler encouraged the Mormon Church to modernize and allow place for Mormon philosophers and intellectuals to examine the church’s messy history and express essential Mormon beliefs:

All religious systems have to move beyond their own creation, have to move beyond their own founding, and many religious systems have found that very difficult to do. Christianity did it; Islam did it; Judaism did it. the question is, can Mormonism do it?

Mormonism, Butler said, “really replicates the history of early Christianity”; he compared Smith’s assassination to Christ’s execution, Brigham Young’s rescuing of the fractured church to Paul’s missionary labors; and the recurring dissensions and conflicts in Mormon congregations to the ones described in the New Testament. Therefore, he argued that the Mormon Church really shouldn’t be afraid of its controversial history.

Ken Verdoia, a Utah historian, documentarian and journalist expressed themes about Mormon history similar to the ones expressed by previous scholars. His native focus was on Mormon history, and he provided a narrative of Mormon history from its beginnings in the East to its Exodus to the West, with little commentary about his own opinions.

Interestingly, when Whitney challenged him about the status of women in the LDS Church, he defended the Mormons as his fellow friends and neighbors. Verdoia said that the vast majority of women that he'd interviewed who were members of the Mormon Church "take extraordinary comfort from the sense of order and direction that their membership in the church provides....Over time I've met women who have been uncomfortable, who believe that the defined role of a woman in the church is limited; that education may be encouraged, but to a point....But I'll come back to the vast majority that I talk to, that women in the LDS Church take extraordinary comfort and certainty and pleasure from this notion of order."

Whitney: I believe you could be both. I have certainly met so many who want to be priests, as many Catholic women do also, so many women...[who] feel themselves to be faithful Mormon women who at the same time feel a kind of tension.

Verdoia then pointed out that the LDS Church should not be singled out for not ordaining women to the priesthood, as most in the Christian tradition have limited the priesthood to men. Verdoia added:

Let me say this: At times you may be uncomfortable with what sounds like I'm defending the LDS Church; I am, in fact, defending the LDS Church. I am, in fact, a person who lives in very close proximity to men

and women who embrace the LDS faith as one of their most fundamental acts of living.

He compared the respect he has for Mormons to the respect he has for Muslims, Catholics, Jews, and any group of people who find “joy and order and sense of purpose” in their lives through their religious practices, even though he does not share the same worldview.

CHAPTER 6

Themes in Film Text

The structure and framework of the Film Text led to the emergence of the following prominent themes: 1) Joseph Smith was enigmatic, loved by his followers and hated by others; 2) the LDS Church has made the transformation from being an outcast to being a key player in the nation politically, economically, and religiously; 3) an ongoing tension remains between the Church and the U.S.; 4) believers enjoy spiritual benefits because of the Church's teachings about family, the temple, and the community; 5) individuals who don't conform are exiled, including women in a patriarchal church; and 6) the Film Text raises the question of whether the Mormon faithful show blind obedience to an extreme religion.

Joseph Smith: Enigmatic, Loved and Hated

Mormon scholar Kathleen Flake's metaphor about Joseph Smith as a Rorschach test is an apt one for the entire film:

Superficially, one thinks of revealed religions as providing answers, and Smith provides as many questions as he does answers. Nobody is exempt from struggling with who he is. Whether you're an insider or an outsider, thinking about Smith causes you to struggle, and that struggle brings as much of you into the question as it does Smith himself. He's a bit of a religious Rorschach test.

When they look at Joseph Smith, the faithful see a prophet who was directed by God to translate the Book of Mormon from actual gold plates dug up in a hillside in New York, a prophet who saw God and Christ face to face and who spoke with angels. The narrator of the film put it this way: “For nearly two centuries, Mormons have rooted their faith in the truth of the golden plates and of Joseph Smith’s original vision in the grove. They are the foundation of this church, and for its leaders there is no middle ground. Their prophet is righteous, and he saw and talked to God.” The film included a clip of then-President Gordon B. Hinckley speaking to the church at its 2002 General Conference, referring to this first vision of the boy prophet Joseph. Hinckley said in this sermon that Mike Wallace, host of 60 Minutes, asked him if he actually believed that happened. “I replied, ‘Yes, sir. That’s the miracle of it.’ This is the way I feel about it. Our whole strength rests on the validity of that vision. It either occurred or it did not occur. If it did not, then this work is a fraud. If it did, then this is the most important and wonderful work under the heavens.”

Similarly, Givens eloquently compared Mormonism’s foundational stories to Christianity’s: “History as theology is perilous. If it turns out that the whole story of Christ’s resurrection was a fabrication, then Christianity collapses. That’s the price we pay for believing in a God who intervenes in human history...in real space and time.”

On the other end of the spectrum in the film were people who concluded that Joseph Smith was a fraud and attributed the desire for power and control to him and to contemporary church leaders as well. For example, Ken Clark, a former LDS seminary instructor, concluded that Joseph Smith used his position to justify his adultery: “I came to the conclusion that his sexual desire drove the practice and that he found a way to

sanctify it, to make it respectable and to couch it in scriptural terms with revelations of convenience.”

From Pariah to Power Broker

Another theme of the film was that when the LDS Church relinquished the practice of plural marriage, it gradually gained acceptance within the wider American culture; the church grew in its economic and political influence in the nation and its membership numbers, but distrust of the authoritarian church has lingered to this day.

The narrator of the film introduced the accommodation the Mormons made with American society over the past hundred years: they “transform[ed] themselves from reviled outsiders into central figures in the American establishment....In the United States Senate, that a century ago tried to reject Reed Smoot, Senator Harry Reid, a Mormon convert from Nevada, now leads the new Democratic majority. Former Governor Mitt Romney of Massachusetts is a contender for the Republican nomination for president.”

In addition to the shift in political influence in the nation, the Film Text also emphasized Mormonism’s profound shift in its socio-economic organization. As Ken Verdoia explained in the film, “It’s a profound shift from the pioneering days of isolated Christian socialism to the end of the 20th century. And what you see is the emergence of an extraordinarily sophisticated financial management organization, the LDS church ownerships in media, extraordinary land holdings, livestock and agricultural interest, great stock portfolios.”

The film made the point that the church has also conformed to mainstream Christianity in the U.S. As the narrator said, “As the choir tours the world, it still sings the old Mormon hymns, but there is a new emphasis on Jesus and biblical themes. It is

part of a long campaign to place the Mormon faith within the traditions of mainstream Christianity.”

According to the Film Text, the church also adjusted to the American landscape after the Civil Rights movement. Richard Ostling commented that with the removal of the ban on blacks holding the priesthood in 1978, the LDS Church rid itself of “theological racism.” This adjustment “made the church fully acceptable after American society had undergone this tremendous Civil Rights revolution. It really was the moment for the modernization of the Mormon Church.”

Tension between Church and State

A corollary theme in the film was that the tension between the U.S. and the LDS Church remains, that this accommodation has been an “uneasy truce.” The narrator opined, “At the edge of Salt Lake City stands a pure white granary. It is an enduring symbol of the original fiery millennial visions at the Mormon core.” Mormon scholar Terryl Givens articulated in the film that a main challenge the Church is wrestling with today is the merging of its membership with American society. He pointed out that Brigham Young said he feared the day when Mormons “would no longer be the object of the pointing finger of scorn. It’s one of these paradoxes that you want to have acceptability, you want to mainstream enough that people will give your message a fair hearing, so you can fraternize with them as fellow Christians. But at the same time, you don’t want to feel so comfortable that there’s nothing to mark you as a people who are distinct, who have a special body of teachings with special responsibilities.” When the walls of isolation came down, the question came up, Givens said, of how the church will maintain its sense of peoplehood.

Likewise, the film made clear, a sense of suspicion of this church lingers among Americans. The narrator indicated that polls had shown that from one quarter to as many as 43 percent of voters would not vote for a Mormon for president. Richard Ostling wondered aloud on the film what it was about Mormonism that causes people to be wary of a Mormon in the White House. While the Constitution makes clear there should be no religious test for office, “people are nervous about--you know, this kind of an authoritarian church. Is Mitt Romney somehow subject to some church leader in Salt Lake City? Are Mormons Christians? Where did these Mormon scriptures come from? Who was Joseph Smith? Where did polygamy come from?”

Church, Community, Family, and Temple intertwined to show Spiritual Benefits

The film text did present the ideal of family relationships continuing into the life beyond as a central tenet of Mormonism. The parts of the film which emphasized this concept were Part 2, “Act IV: The Family,” and “Act 5: The Temple.” Church members enjoy deep fellowship with their families and their church communities because of their faith that these relationships are meant to continue, according to the Film Text. At the same time, the film compounded the spiritual blessings to members of the Church with their family relationships and the temple. For instance, the narrator stated, “Smith’s concept of families sealed together for eternity was part of his revelation on celestial marriage, which also endorsed polygamy.” This statement was supported by the commentary of scholars such as Sarah Barringer Gordon. She explained that plural marriage was understood as a religious principle by 19th-century Mormons so much so that they had a difficult time giving up the practice and keeping the religion in tact.

According to Gordon, the question arose, "...is the nuclear family still celestial in the ways that polygamist families had been?"

And the answer very quickly became yes, and the nuclear family inherited both that super-heated quality and that supportive quality that had gone into that investment in polygamy. It's through and in and by and with the family that Mormons are saved, and it's how they think primarily of their relationship both to the afterlife and to the church as a whole.

Likewise, Jon Butler argued that Mormonism differs from other religious systems in the way the religion emphasizes "the collective, the collective sense of the family, the collective sense of moral responsibility, the collective sense of an enterprise"; in many other religious systems, Butler maintained, "what is important is the belief of the individual, the belief of the child, the belief of the parent, the parents belief transferred to the child, but the child still remains independent."

Kimber Tillemann-Dick spoke of her connection to her family and her family's following of the church practice of holding a Family Home Evening together once a week. "The church and my family are so intertwined, and I just can't begin to imagine trying to bifurcate those. And when you come into a home that has priesthood leadership and that has people living together focused on the same eternal goals, it just creates a kind of aura of love and peace. It makes your home a holy place." The narrator affirmed the strength these relationships and Mormons' beliefs in the temple sealings provide to Mormon families facing serious crises, such as the death of a family member. Significantly, though, the narrator offered the caveat that this peace comes to those "who do conform to the church's doctrines."

Tension between Church and Individuals

A contrasting theme of the film was that those who do not conform to church authority experience a kind of exile, not only from the church, but also from their families and communities. Part 2, Act III of the film is entitled “Dissenters and Exiles.” This section detailed the pain experienced by Margaret Toscano, a former church member who was ex-communicated for continuing to teach feminist principles after church leaders had asked her not to. Similarly, in the section about family, Travis Southey shared his story about losing his idyllic family life because of his homosexuality.

Toscano claimed in the film that there was an anti-intellectualism strain the Church. She said that there were certain topics that were off-limits to questioning or intellectual inquiry, including the temple and feminism. She had been researching and writing about Joseph Smith’s statements regarding women holding the priesthood and the Mormon concept of a Mother in Heaven. “Questioning authority in any way--I think that this is probably one of the biggest taboos in Mormonism,” she said. She described her experience of attending a church court in great detail: her experience with local church authorities ex-communicating her is exemplified in the film, with visuals of chairs for the men of the stake high council and the stake presidency, and the isolated chair she said she sat in while on trial. She said the most painful part about the ex-communication was the way in which it hurt her relationship with her family. Again, the theme about the temple and families being combined arose because she described how she was not allowed by her “patriarchal” brother-in-law to participate in a Mormon temple-related ritual at her sister’s funeral. “That cut me so deep, I haven’t gotten over it. I don’t know if I ever will,” she finished.

Church historian Elder Marlin K. Jensen expressed sympathy in the film for church members who do not have children for whatever reason, for women who never marry, and for those who are divorced. He admitted that church members “can be quite hard, in a sense, unwittingly, but nevertheless hard on those people in our culture because we have cultural expectations, cultural ideals. And if you measure up to them, it’s a wonderful life. If you don’t, it can be very difficult.” So while not intentional, Mormon communities sometimes develop a kind of culture that can be difficult for individuals who don’t fit in easily to that culture.

Women in a Patriarchal Church (sub-theme)

Since this study intended to examine the film’s portrayal of Mormon women, this next section discusses a sub-theme of the Film Text. The film was not so much about Mormon women per se, as it was about how Mormon men, who have the priesthood responsibility, treat the women in the Church and in their families. Three sections of the Film Text addressed the status of women in the church: “Polygamy,” “Dissenters and Exiles,” and “The Family.” The overriding theme in these sections was that the LDS Church is a patriarchal church.

It was found that Whitney did, in fact, organize the documentary section “Polygamy” around the three themes which she cited as reasons for her focus on the topic: the practice of polygamy was linked with the Mormon belief in salvation, it was a main reason why the Mormons in the 1800s were so persecuted, and the Mormons eventually had to compromise on this practice in order to be admitted into mainstream America. What is significant here, though, is the way the role of women factored (or did not factor) into these themes in the documentary. Rather, the filmmaker especially

emphasized the role of male church authorities in the institution of the practice and its later abandonment. By extension, then, Mormon women were portrayed only in a one-dimensional, sociological sense; the prominent themes about women had to do with their role in polygamous families and in a patriarchal church.

Significantly, moral ambiguity was a major theme in this section. It was unclear whether women were the victims of sexual improprieties by Joseph Smith, and then such practices became institutionalized and justified, or if women willingly embraced the practice. Mormon women were portrayed as believing deeply that their compliance to this practice was connected with their salvation, so much so that while initially resistant to the directions, over a generation, they became so committed to it that they were reluctant to give it up. The only story about plural marriage in the 19th-century church told from a woman's perspective was the account provided by Judith Freeman of her great-grandmother who became the 16-year-old plural wife of her great-grandfather. Freeman emphasized the concept of absolute obedience that was expected of women: even if heartbreaking, the voice of the bishop, as the ecclesiastical leader, was the voice of God. That women were pressured to comply out of obedience to God was a recurring theme in discussion of the early church. However, the theme that women were reluctant to give up the practice when the Manifesto was issued also recurred. Scholars explained this contradiction by emphasizing the connection between plural marriage and salvation in the minds of Mormon women.

While polygamy in the early Mormon Church was portrayed as a very painful, morally ambiguous experience for women, present-day polygamy was represented as a practice that three FLDS plural wives desired to be a part of because of their religious

convictions. So while the Film Text cast doubt on the character of Joseph Smith, it also acknowledged that the contemporary practice is not inherently criminal in its treatment of women: not all polygamists follow the dictates of Warren Jeffs, the documentary made clear, even if whether or not Joseph Smith was a Warren Jeffs is less clear. The polygamous FLDS women's reasons for practicing polygamy emphasized the idea that for them plural marriage was a holier way of life, devoid of romance. Ellie, a first wife, said in the documentary, "We have 15 people in our family, three mothers and 11 children. Even as a little girl, I saw the beauty in plural marriage and always wanted to live it...the process by which I got married was through prayer and a lot of inner work. It's not through courtship." The second wife, Alyne, added, "Living the principle of plural marriage, it is a refiner's fire....It's pretty much a process of development that you get in no other way." This process of development, the husband David explained, was the way to transform their character into the nature of God; the focus of plural marriage was on teaching their children to do the same, he said.

In "Dissenters and Exiles," Margaret Toscano's church court experience accentuated the role of the stake high council and stake presidency, all men, in her excommunication for teaching and writing about feminism in Mormon history. The church's stance against the Equal Rights Amendment was also discussed. Finally, the emphasis in "The Family" on women's roles as nurturers and caregivers was framed as being determined by male church leaders.

Blind Obedience to an Extreme Religion?

The long segment of the Film Text in Part 1 devoted to telling the story of the Mountain Meadows Massacre provided the most explicit example of frightening and violent obedience to the direction of church leaders. Historian Kathleen Flake concluded:

Mountain Meadows may be that moment when you can look and say this is where Mormonism's own checks and balances failed them, and they lost control and they burned to the ground. This fire, this sense of being God's anointed, of speaking in the name of God, having a work to do, being above the law- Mountain Meadows may be the symbol of that. And until Mormonism itself comes to terms with Mountain Meadows and how that happened, it will remain alive for them, as well.

The combined themes of the Film Text raise questions in viewers' minds about how and why church leaders have such influence, why members follow and are so obedient, and the extent to which members would be obedient.

CHAPTER 7

Comparison and Contrast of Church Officials, Scholars, and Film Text

The Interviews Text and Film Text shared many similarities. Both focused on the history of the Mormon Church within the United States from the time of the Second Great Awakening to its present day cultural conflicts in regard to women's issues and gay rights. Both texts described in detail the genuine conflict and truce the LDS Church had made with American society with the abandonment of polygamy at the end of the 19th-century and Mormonism's ensuing modernization. Both texts stressed the importance of family relationships in Mormon thought, as they are believed to continue into the next life. Joseph Smith as a spiritual enigma was a theme in the Interviews Text as well as the Film Text. The observer's perspective on religious authority and on epistemology both came to bear on how he or she understood this Mormon prophet. That Mormons continue to make sacrifices for their religion was a theme in both texts, but the moral ambiguity of such obedience to religious principles was emphasized more in the Film Text.

Thus, there were some notable differences between the Interviews Text and the Film Text. Church doctrine as explained by church leaders was not incorporated into the Film Text. This is significant because the examples of key events provided a rather extreme view of Mormonism in terms of church leaders' responses to feminists, homosexuals, and intellectuals, as well as their instigation of questionable practices (missions, polygamy, Mountain Meadows Massacre, and excommunication of gays, feminists, and intellectuals).

For the most part, LDS Church doctrine as explained by the general authorities of the church who were interviewed for the film was left out; also, the film put a greater emphasis on Mormon sociology, inaccurately exemplifying modern Mormon family relationships with its inclusion of the Fundamentalist Latter-day Saints' contemporary practice of plural marriage; and a greater emphasis on the extreme case of Mountain Meadows Massacre.

Some of the finer points of church belief not included in the Film Text were: Church leaders emphatically stated that the church worships God the Eternal Father and Jesus Christ; however, in the film, Joseph Smith is called the "alpha and omega" for the church. That Mormons see God as an embodied, glorified Being was included in the film's description of the first vision, but the significance in Mormon thought of this belief was not discussed in the Film Text. That Mormons seek salvation through a plan and through the temple ordinances and family relationships was a theme of the film; the role of individual choice and Christ's redemption did not appear prominently in the film in the way that they did in the Interviews Text. Also, the extreme, anti-modern portrayal of plural marriage as practiced by the FLDS Church did not accurately represent modern LDS women and families. Mormon women's individual talents and contributions were not portrayed in the Film Text. Finally, the Interviews Text provided theological context for the church's emphasis on gender roles and identity, and this was not featured in the Film Text.

From the scholars' perspective, the "paradox" about Mormon women was not discussed in the Film Text; rather, women were portrayed simply as wives and mothers in a patriarchal religious organization. In the Film Text, the LDS Church was not placed in

the long historical context of ancient and Western Christian history the way that it was in the Interviews Text--Scholars.

In regard to the Film Text's portrayal of women, after highlighting the themes in the source interviews which could have been included, but were not, the evidence indicates that the filmmakers chose not to include: "the paradox" about the role of women, as Terry Givens put it, that doctrinally they are equal to men and have the same potential even if gender roles suggest otherwise; the individuality and strength of women during the polygamy years of the Mormon Church; and context for the patriarchal or biblical organization of the church.

Within the context of Mormon doctrine espoused by the church authorities, women are considered equal to men; and women and men are both meant to pursue their "eternal destiny," neither favored over the other; also church authorities placed gender roles within the context of the importance of family in this life and the hereafter, with family relationships being just as crucial to men as to women. Women were encouraged to develop their individual talents and skills, and many noteworthy women were referred to for their individual contributions to their families and scholarly communities. At the same time, Givens acknowledged the paradox within Mormonism about women's status, that at face value, it could appear that men have the advantage in the LDS Church because they are given the priesthood authority and because of the church's history of plural marriage. These facts remain paradoxically alongside the elevated status women are given spiritually in the Church. At the other other end of the continuum, scholars such as Toscano discussed what they saw as the abuse of power over women in the Church in denying women priesthood, in silencing women, and in controlling their choices, such as

in the case of the Equal Rights Amendment, and in family relationships by defining women solely as wives as mothers. Other scholars discussed a middle ground view: Flake and Gordon placed the LDS Church's practices in the context of Christianity anciently and in Western history: plural marriage was part of biblical family relationships, and many restorationist, utopian communities experimented with different social and family arrangements as a way of solving social problems and achieving a Christian purity. Verdoia pointed out that the LDS Church is not unique in only ordaining men to the priesthood.

It was really the dissenters from the church and a minority of scholars who argued that LDS women were treated as inferior because they were denied priesthood responsibilities. Even Sarah Barringer Gordon and Ken Verdoia, not members of the church, maintained that the church was largely positive in its treatment of women. Verdoia and Givens both asserted that, for the most part, Mormon women do not feel inferior or limited because they don't exercise the priesthood authority.

Since the finer points of Mormon beliefs and practices as explained by LDS Church officials were left out of the documentary, perhaps because Whitney did not want the film to sound like a public relations effort for the church, a more detailed account of church doctrine regarding the eternal nature of the individual, whether male or female, was also left out; this was an extremely prominent message in the interviews by church leaders and also LDS scholars.

Whitney compounded the idea of salvation for Mormons with polygamous family arrangements, while church authorities consistently said they did not know how polygamy was taught to be connected with salvation by Joseph Smith, since they were

not there at the time to hear such teachings firsthand; it was only a handful of scholars who emphasized this idea, specifically, Kathleen Flake (who is LDS) and Sarah Barringer Gordon. Dallin Oaks, a church official in the Quorum of the Twelve, agreed that the principle of plural marriage was understood by his ancestors to be associated with salvation, but he asserted that he did not know any more about it than that. Givens, the most conservative of the scholars with the exception of Daniel Peterson, when asked by Whitney how polygamy was connected with salvation, said it was “too vexed an issue” for him to touch, and that for him, personally, he could only understand polygamy in terms of a sacrifice for faith akin to the sacrifice God required of Abraham:

I can't make sense of it, because there is a fundamental contradiction between elevating the marriage to kind of the apotheosis of spiritual life and rendering sacred and eternal that bond between a man and a woman and the necessary diffusion of that relationship that certainly must occur in any kind of a polygamous relationship.

In sum, the theme about women in the Church and family found in the interviews but left out of the documentary included romantic love, the lack of clarity about polygamy's connection with the religion's concept of heaven, the perpetuation of individual identity, and the importance of education and growth in addition to raising children. Kathleen Flake, an LDS scholar, said that Mormons see God literally as their Father, and so, for Mormons, parenthood is seen as a sacred opportunity. Mormons do define heaven by family relationships, but the eternal nature and equal potential of the individual woman or man was an equally important theme in the interviews with LDS leaders and scholars. A

woman as a wife and mother was not portrayed as limited or demeaned; rather, woman's opportunities were portrayed as limitless and exalting.

That the church is patriarchal in nature was a theme apparent in both the documentary and the interviews, but Whitney's editing choices emphasized the moral ambiguity of the motives of male church leaders in regard to women. If one reads the full interviews, one finds that a commentator's stance on this issue corresponded to their position toward church authority in general, with about half being critical of church authority and the other half accepting of it. Half of the scholars in the full interviews, whether LDS or not, asserted the benign nature of this patriarchal organization.

Historian Daniel Peterson and female scholars Flake and Gordon put the practice of plural marriage in the context of biblical precedent. Peterson said he thought one of the main purposes of plural marriage was to distance Latter-day Saints from the surrounding society in order to create almost an ethnicity, "a peoplehood." He added, "Mormonism in the nineteenth century was unabashedly patriarchal. It was a restoration of Old Testament forms as well as New Testament....One of the things that was there was polygamy, and they took it very seriously." He argued that the idea the practice was driven by sexual motives was "foreign to the practice as we know it." Flake commented that Joseph Smith's biblical views about family organization made him a "thorn in the side of America":

...at the time America is desiring to be homogenous in its morality, Smith says: "Let's experiment with marriages. Let's experiment with the construction of families." At the very time that the family is becoming

sacrosanct and women are trying to empower,...Smith says, “No, go back, back, and let’s do this patriarchal/matriarchal family.”

Gordon similarly said that the family organization followed biblical precedent, and that “blaming Smith in particular or Mormonism in general for ongoing Fundamentalist polygamists [like Warren Jeffs] is like blaming Karl Marx for communist China.” She added that early Mormons’ practice of polygamy was a natural outgrowth of the Protestant reformation. “There were often attempts to recover Christian purity that in some sense meant going back to the social practices of Jesus’ era, and of course the social practices of Jesus’ era did not look like monogamy, right?” Gordon told Whitney. In contrast to the stereotypes, she said plural marriage in Mormon communities was “tightly controlled” in a way that respected women during pregnancy, for instance.

Such context is significant because it highlights the notion that the Mormon utopian order imitated biblical practice in quite literal ways, and therefore plural marriage could be interpreted as more of an anachronism than an aberration. Further, that such a communal order was not necessarily hurtful to women was a theme in the interviews that was left out of the documentary film section on polygamy.

While polygamy in the early Mormon Church was portrayed as a very painful, morally ambiguous experience for women, present-day polygamy was represented as a practice that three FLDS plural wives desired to be a part of because of their religious convictions. So while the Film Text cast doubt on the character of Joseph Smith, it also acknowledged that the contemporary practice is not inherently criminal in its treatment of women: not all polygamists follow the dictates of Warren Jeffs, the documentary made clear, even if whether or not Joseph Smith was a Warren Jeffs is less clear. The

polygamous women's reasons for practicing polygamy emphasized the idea that for them plural marriage was a holier way of life, devoid of romance. Ellie, a first wife, said in the documentary, "We have 15 people in our family, three mothers and 11 children. Even as a little girl, I saw the beauty in plural marriage and always wanted to live it....the process by which I got married was through prayer and a lot of inner work. It's not through courtship." The second wife, Alyne, added, "Living the principle of plural marriage, it is a refiner's fire....It's pretty much a process of development that you get in no other way." This process of development, the husband David explained, was the way to transform their character into the nature of God; the focus of plural marriage was on teaching their children to do the same, he said. The identity of women in this patriarchal organization, therefore, was based on their eternal roles as wives and mothers, an ultra-conservative position foreign to contemporary Americans. It also painted a picture of the Mormon concept of heaven as a strictly patriarchal and joyless place, a heaven which is perhaps particularly unappealing and even offensive to the sensibilities of modern women.

Of the sources included in the documentary section on polygamy, 12 were not members of the church: they were scholars, dissidents, or present-day polygamists. Six of the sources included in the section were members of the church: the only official church voice came from clips of conference speeches by then-President Gordon B. Hinckley, asserting that the church currently does not practice polygamy; two LDS scholars were featured rather extensively; one LDS historian was featured one time; one female LDS author told a story about her polygamous ancestors; and one church member was featured one time at the very beginning of the section, as he looked back on his understanding of the persecution his ancestors went through for polygamy and for their religion. This is

significant because a pattern was observed regarding how sources viewed polygamy and the role of women in the church: If one pictures a continuum, on one end were the dissidents, and at the other, the present-day polygamists. The dissidents were the most free-thinking and tended to be critical of church authority; at the other end of the spectrum were the current polygamists, who were even more orthodox, in a sense, than the official church leaders. Loyal church members tended to be orthodox, like the church officials. Scholars, whether LDS or not, showed an extensive range between orthodoxy and liberal stances toward church authority and the role of women.

The overall prominent voice of film section on polygamy was of the scholars' perspectives on polygamy, both from inside and outside of the church; and perhaps in order to put a face on polygamy, Whitney included accounts of present-day polygamists, or "Fundamentalist Mormons," as they call themselves. The scholars were found to be the most divided on their opinions about polygamy. And so the documentary's portrayal of Mormon women in this section was a debate between scholars about how women were treated during the polygamy years and the motives of the male church leaders, along with a misrepresentation of "Mormon" (Fundamentalist) women who are actually more conservative than the present-day church officials. The inclusion of the FLDS practice of polygamy blurred the lines between the LDS Church and this early-20th-century offshoot.

Perhaps Givens's statement in his interview with Whitney is instructive here: Givens argued that the media currently continue to invoke the polygamy issue "as a way of sensationalizing Mormonism." Ironically, he pointed out, Mormons can't win for losing because now they are "mocked as white-bread, Ozzie and Harriet, 1950s families,

too good to be true, with boring personalities, and so clean-cut that they're slightly nauseating."

CHAPTER 8

Discussion of Findings and Conclusion

This case study concludes with a summary of the findings of the textual analysis of the film and the interviews texts, reports of Helen Whitney's personal statements about the making of *The Mormons*, and a discussion about the manner in which the filmmaker constructed the film. Finally, the limitations of this research are noted and suggestions for future research are provided.

Summary of Findings

First, the themes of the Interviews Text--Church Officials were: (a) the plan of happiness; (b) the nature of God and mankind's relationship to Him; (c) Christianity; (d) the role of prophets; (e) men and women's freedom to choose to follow the guidelines for fellowship in the LDS Church; (f) believers' faith and sacrifice for their convictions; and (g) Mormonism's faith in its foundational miraculous stories. The sub-text about Mormon women included that they share equal eternal opportunities as men within Mormon beliefs; they were and are intellectually, physically, and spiritually strong; and they participated in the biblical practice of plural marriage in the 19th-century as an expression of their faith.

The themes of the Interviews Text--Scholars were outlined by specific categories. The LDS scholars spoke of the following themes: (a) early Mormonism redefined Christianity and "collapsed the sacred distance" traditionally held as the appropriate relationship between God and mankind, as Terryl Givens expressed it in his interview

with the filmmaker; (b) there has always been tension between Protestant America and the Mormon Church; (c) while the historical evidence indicates that 19th-century Mormons connected plural marriage with salvation, present-day LDS scholars expressed varying levels of comfort with this belief; (d) echoing Church leaders, the LDS scholars also discussed believers' faith and sacrifice for their convictions; and (e) the LDS scholars tended to support the LDS Church's decisions in regard to intellectuals, feminists, and gays.

The excommunicated LDS scholars expressed the following themes: (a) Church authority is controlling; (b) they saw themselves as the loyal opposition in behalf of women, intellectuals, and homosexuals within the Church; (c) Mormon culture is judgmental; and (d) Joseph Smith was the "prophet puzzle."

The non-LDS scholars defended Mormonism on some fronts and critiqued the religion on other fronts: (a) they saw Joseph Smith as a complex and powerful historical figure, akin to other religious revolutionaries in Christian and Jewish history; (b) the Mormon Church survived and thrived past the Second Great Awakening and in spite of religious persecution because of the great leadership capacities of Joseph Smith and Brigham Young; (c) the Mormons practiced a theocratic, Biblical religion in the 19th-century democratic and pluralistic United States, and this led to conflict; (d) a sub-theme of this was that Mormonism's practice of plural marriage in the 19th-century was biblical in nature, and that it was seen by Mormon polygamists as benefiting women, families, and their communities; (e) the federal government went too far in curtailing Mormons' freedom in the late 1800s, but the United States had justifiable concern with this theocratic religion within its borders, a religion perceived as being intent on re-making

the fabric of society; and (f) the present-day LDS Church is perhaps too afraid of its modern historians and philosophers, they said. Finally, Ken Verdoia, the Utah documentarian, producer, and journalist, narrated Mormon history for Helen Whitney with little commentary; he defended the status of Mormon women when challenged by the filmmaker, and spoke of himself as part of the Mormon community even though he is not a member of the LDS Church.

The Film Text was found to contain the following themes: (a) Joseph Smith was enigmatic, loved and hated; (b) the LDS Church has gone from pariah to power broker in its 180 years of existence, a remarkable and strategic transformation; (c) there has been and is continuing tension between the Church and the nation; (d) the concepts of the Church, community, family, and temple were intertwined to show the spiritual benefits members feel they receive from the Church; (e) there is tension between the Church and individuals who do not conform to Church teachings; (f) a sub-theme here was that the LDS Church is patriarchal by nature and this is difficult for many Mormon women; and (g) the film raised the question of blind obedience within Mormonism (as in the examples of Mountain Meadows Massacre and the practice of plural marriage).

Theory: Framing, Exemplification, and Documentary Film Production

Based on the findings of this study, it can be argued that the film framed the Mormon Church in terms of authority and power, not only in relation to the United States historically and currently, but also in relation to individuals who are and have been members of the LDS Church. The film defines the Mormon Church in terms of its political, economic, and social influence. Therefore, the substantive element of the frame can be called “power” or “authority.” It can be argued that the affective element, or the

emotional perception, of such a frame would be negative or positive, depending on the individual preferences of an observer: that is, a Mormon believer may take a sense of satisfaction from the LDS Church's mainstream acceptance and influence, whereas an individual angered by the Church's involvement in opposing gay marriage may perceive the Church's power in a negative way. Even non-partisan observers could still find a frame of power or authority threatening; for example, such could still be the case for Americans in a "wildly, almost chaotically democratic" nation, to borrow the words of Jon Butler from his interview with Helen Whitney when he spoke of the 19th-century persecution of Mormons on the Illinois frontier.

This study relied on the base rate information provided in the texts of interviews with Church officials and scholars, and it did not distinguish between base rate information and exemplars in the Film Text. The film was true to the scholars' interviews and provided balanced perspectives on controversial issues such as polygamy and the character of Joseph Smith, in that a wide range of opinions were included. However, the overriding architecture of the film and the themes that resulted from the inclusion of some topics and not others suggest that Mormons may blindly follow their church leaders. For example, by including representative stories from Mormon history and from current events about Mormon obedience to their leaders but not including a discussion of LDS doctrines and beliefs about freedom to choose, it could be argued that the film portrays Mormons as blindly obedient to church authority.

It is helpful to consider two factors in relation to the stories selected for the film: accuracy and representativeness. For example, the present-day FLDS practice of polygamy was not an accurate depiction of historical or present-day Mormonism. It was a

tangent by the filmmaker; the FLDS are not even LDS, and this point was made repeatedly by the scholars interviewed for the film and by the church leaders. The inclusion of the FLDS did nothing but blur the lines between the Mormons and this fundamentalist offshoot group, giving the impression that how the FLDS practice plural marriage is representative of the Mormon doctrinal view of family. This portrayal ignores the fact that Church officials and scholars expressed discomfort with such a view and refrained from philosophizing about it. Secondly, the story about Mountain Meadows Massacre was accurate and well-told. As Kathleen Flake suggested, until Mormons come to understand how this tragic event happened, it will haunt Mormon history. At the same time, was the story of Mountain Meadows representative of Mormons as a whole over the past 180 years of the church's existence? It could be argued that the Mountain Meadows Massacre was overly-emphasized.

It could be valuable, therefore, to specifically examine exemplification in this film, to distinguish between base rate information and the examples incorporated into the film. For example, an experiment could be conducted in order to measure which parts of the film remained especially dominant in participants' memories immediately following the film and also over time. Exemplification theory would posit that the stories about Mountain Meadows Massacre, the feature on the FLDS family, and Toscano's and Southey's excommunications, for instance, would remain especially dominant in memory over time, and could be judged to be typical of the Mormon way of life, even if disclaimers were included in the film's base rate information.

While the conventions of the film convey objectivity, this film was constructed. The bias is not blatant: the facts and commentary included, for the most part, are accurate

and balanced. Where the bias is exhibited is in the way in which the film was organized, in the topics which were emphasized, and in the examples which were chosen: any filmmaker has to make decisions about how to connect certain events to a larger reality; such framing allows for conciseness as well as significance. For example, by merging the Mormon belief in the eternal importance of family with ideas about the temple and close-knit Mormon communities, the film succinctly communicates these related concepts. Also, the images of the LDS temple, the family, and the worship services vivify abstract concepts. The drawback is that this way of condensing these topics fails to delineate crucial details about Mormon beliefs. It results in an over-simplification of Church doctrine and beliefs and allows for miscommunication about the inherent value and freedom of the individual within LDS families and congregations. For instance, the film draws on a unifying framework of male authority. An alternative framework, for instance, could have been a democratic one which focused on the prosaic functions of priesthood leadership within the home and local congregations; another could have been to portray a realistic montage of individual Mormon women--many are not married or work outside of the home; many find great joy in their lives as mothers and wives. Also, a film could explore the dynamics of the relationships between husbands and wives in the LDS Church.

Helen Whitney's Personal Statements about the Making of The Mormons

The Sunstone Lecture

Helen Whitney gave the 2007 Smith-Pettit Lecture at a *Sunstone* conference in Salt Lake City after the airing of her film on the Mormons. She described the making of the film in detail and spoke of her four years as a "stranger in the strange land of

Mormonism” (Whitney, 2007c). This case study is enriched due to the fact that a personal statement of the filmmaker was available which provides insight into her thought processes while the film was being made.

First, she said the genesis for *The Mormons* film grew out of her fascination with spiritual themes, especially people who manifest “radical religious commitment” (Whitney, 2007c, p. 34). Her graduate school friends in Chicago, of whom many were Mormon, had recommended she read Fawn Brodie’s biography of Joseph Smith, *No Man Knows My History*. “It was riveting, beautifully written, and not, as so many feel, a debunking biography,” she said. “Joseph Smith emerges from its pages as one of the most complex, contradictory, and fascinating religious leaders of all time. And his life was so dramatic that if you scripted it for a Hollywood movie, it would be rejected as implausible” (Whitney, 2007c, p. 34). She said that Joseph Smith as a character stayed with her over the years and when she eventually proposed *The Mormons* to WGBH in Boston, they almost immediately agreed to the project and offered her development money to begin preliminary research and to write the script for a 90-minute film.

Whitney described the “special challenges” she faced in the making of this film. One was the difficulty of getting religious films made. Mormonism “presses a lot of buttons,” she said, and “Reporting on religion can be dangerous” (Whitney, 2007c, p. 34). “Television executives fear the controversies surrounding religion,” she said, likening it to an object that “touches the third rail.” Second was the problem of access. “Mormonism is a top-down church, and while I could have spoken to many liberal or disaffected Mormons and all the non-Mormon historians in America, I would not have been able to explore the heart and mind of the average faithful Mormon if the LDS

hierarchy had put out the word: ‘Don’t talk to her!’” (p. 34). Happily, she said the Church granted her enormous access. Speculating about the Church’s reasons for doing so, she said, “Mitt Romney’s candidacy was going to put them under a klieg light whether they liked it or not. So why not make their network debut on PBS with a filmmaker, albeit an outsider, but one whose work they liked? Church leaders had no control over the content of the film, nor did they ever try to get such control” (p. 35).

A third concern was her own bias. “How do you properly make use of, but not be used by, your own biases,” she pondered. “I am a questioner. So are my friends, both the believers and the unbelievers. I am drawn to these people, and I put them in my films. These are the people who are asking the big questions about life and death and ultimate meaning. I am not drawn to those who think they have the answers” (Whitney, 2007c, p. 35). Whitney confessed that she found Mormons’ expression of certainty off-putting. “I was stunned by my first LDS testimony meeting where people got up and said, ‘I know.’ Not ‘believe,’ not ‘hope,’ not ‘intuit,’ but the ubiquitous phrase: ‘I know this church to be true’” (p. 36).

Fourth she named the esthetic challenge of spiritual films: “How do you illuminate spiritual themes such as belief and unbelief, the absence of God, the presence of God in epiphanies, or signals of transcendence embedded in our everyday lives? How do you find the apt image that is neither too literal nor too abstract. And if the religion is shockingly literal--as Mormonism is--how do you suggest this literal quality without allowing the visual metaphors to be too obvious and merely illustrative” (Whitney, 2007c, p. 36). Her favorite sequence in the film, she said, was the dance sequence because this was her best solution to the esthetic challenge: she used Terry! Givens’

description of the pioneer Saints dancing on the plains as a metaphor for the religion's "collapse of sacred distance" and belief in an embodied God. She liked the "indirectness and subtlety" of this approach, but acknowledged it can be "puzzling and disorienting for some people" (p. 36).

Fifth was the question of information balance. "How much information is too much information? This was an especially vexing problem for this film because the public knows so little about the Mormons" (Whitney, 2007c, p. 36). She said she wanted to avoid a film with "icebergs of historical data." "Equally vexing was the problem of describing some but not all of Mormonism's complex religious ideas without getting lost in a theology lesson" (p. 36). She said her priorities were to "bring the viewers 'inside' so they could experience the ecstatic *leap-of-faith element* at the heart of all religions while at the same time unfolding *what is distinctive* about this particular religion" (p. 36, emphasis added).

Sixth she described the challenge of "fitting it all in." She found Trevor Southey's interview about being gay and Mormon in a church that celebrates family as "insightful" and "textured" and she included his story in the final cut of the film (he left the religion). She acknowledged, "...I was always uncomfortable having it stand for all gay Mormons. I worked very hard to find time for other gay Mormons, in particular those who struggle to remain chaste and within the Church." She said that ultimately she "couldn't find the time for very moving interviews with people such as Rex Goode and Ty Mansfield" (p. 36).

Of the question of tone, Whitney said:

How do you avoid both the hagiography of the devout and the reflexive critique of the skeptics? How do you move beyond the extremes without succumbing to another trap: the overly respectful balanced portrait that is without edge and complexity? In the case of Smith, such a portrait would strip him not only of his boldness and visionary insights but also of his recklessness and the ruthlessness that made him both loved and hated. (Whitney, 2007c, p. 37)

Representing Joseph Smith's psychology was another dilemma. She refers to Fawn Brodie's epitomization of the Mormon prophet, with his cry of, "No man knows my history," as postmodern. A final challenge that she faced was the problem of truth claims. As a new religion, Mormonism has no place to hide, she said. She had to determine the tone the film would take in addressing truth claims--skeptical, inquisitive, or reverent, etc.

Next, Whitney detailed the research phase of the film. Of note here is that she "cast [her] net widely" (Whitney, 2007c, p. 38). She talked to the people whom she identified as the big thinkers about Mormonism, including Jan Shipps, who later became one of her consultants (p. 38). She talked to Mormons in Utah, outside Utah, and outside of the U.S., and believers who were as intellectually and spiritually as diverse as possible. She studied the contemporary world of *Big Love*-style polygamy, as opposed to that of Warren Jeffs (p. 38). In these early stages, she said her greatest concern was that, "Many of the conversations I had were boring, not illuminating. All too often, historians were unduly attached to a small piece of the picture

and were unable to stand back and see it whole. The gulf between the faith-promoting folks and the ‘let the chips fall where they may’ folks was huge” (p. 38).

Further along these lines, “Early on, the dissidents were the most interesting while the faithful frequently expressed themselves in pieties. I was not finding storytellers who could capture the astoundingly dramatic narrative of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Mormonism. I was hearing only dry exegesis--factually accurate, but detached and academic. I needed narrative voices that were objective, yes, but urgent and personal as well” (Whitney, 2007c, p. 38). She was looking for individuals who could answer basic questions for viewers as to why they should pay attention to the film in order to learn about this strange faith, she said.

Her breakthroughs, she said, came with the finding of several people for the film: a Denver family was “faithful to the core but without piety” (Whitney, 2007c, p. 39). They were struggling with their daughter’s illness and the possibility of her death. “They were living out these big bold ideas,” Whitney said (p. 39). Then she found Terry Givens, whom she described as “a truly smart, elegant, conservative thinker” who could speak of his personal faith and doubt, as well as about Mormonism’s connection to other religions with “poetry and precision” (p. 39). She also found additional devout believers “who also spoke with conviction and elegance, and, when necessary, with sound and fury” (p. 39). Finally, with the meeting of Ken Verdoia, the director of documentaries at KUED, Salt Lake City’s PBS affiliate, she said that she found her storyteller and that she knew she had a film.

How well the actual interviews for the film went had a huge impact on what was included in the film, according to Whitney (Whitney, 2007c, p. 40). She prepared all of

her participants in advance, but in some cases, people froze in front of the camera, or rambled, or would not discuss on camera what they had previously rehearsed. Others became so upset when talking about a particular experience that Whitney had to turn the camera off. Even how they were dressed was a concern, as “polka dots and stripes” were not going to work on film (p. 39).

Of the “art of the interview,” Whitney said:

I am looking for someone--whether expert or amateur, insider or outsider-- who can communicate with urgency and passion, whose head and heart are equally involved, whose language is fresh and uniquely his or hers.

(Whitney, 2007c, p. 40).

She named her pleasant surprises as Betty Stevenson and Marlin Jensen. Stevenson was a black convert who had lived a hard life on the streets; her language was “juicy, irreverent, soulful--funny” (Whitney, 2007c, p. 40). Whitney was amazed, as were others, she said, of how fresh and unrehearsed Jensen’s answers were, that his position as a general authority of the LDS Church and as its official historian did not hamper his candidness (p. 41).

Of the editing process, Whitney remarked that she lives for this phase. The shooting of a film is wrought with difficulties, but during the month in the editing room with her editor, she comes with her treatment written, and finds peace and quiet. “When editing, I am in control,” she said (Whitney, 2007c, p. 41).

Finally, Whitney commented quite candidly about her own assessments of Mormonism. She critiqued Mormons for their secrecy in regard to the temple; their “slipperiness,” or unwillingness to tell others what they really believe about becoming

like God, polygamy, and the necessity of Mormon ordinances; their “smugness,” or certainty; their power and influence in politics, business, and academia; and their “hypocrisy” due to their elevation of the family while at the same time rejecting gay family members, for instance (Whitney, 2007c, pp. 42-43).

Author’s Interview with Helen Whitney

An interview conducted by the author with Helen Whitney on February 18, 2010, provided additional insight into her thinking about the film. While the Sunstone essay was written in 2007 shortly after the debut of the film, this interview occurred almost three years later. Thus, Whitney was more distanced from the event. It is probable that her comments in this interview were less guarded and less structured than those of her previous statement about the making of the film.

Whitney reiterated that Fawn Brodie’s biography of Joseph Smith was a key piece for the genesis of the film; she said she thought 1800s Mormonism was “beyond colorful,” and that this was and is a religion that “asks for a lot.” When asked what she thought about contemporary Mormons’ understanding of their own history, she said she got the impression that members of the LDS Church now don’t know as much about polygamy and Mountain Meadows Massacre as previous generations did. According to the historians she spoke with, polygamy was so central to 19th-century Mormonism’s concept of salvation, she said, that the time spent revealing its messy beginnings, development, and abandonment was justified. In addressing the probability that the inclusion of contemporary polygamy would be confusing to outsiders, Whitney said that her film wasn’t intended for an ignorant and lazy audience.

Whitney said that the time in the film given to individuals who were disaffected from the LDS Church “wasn’t a conscious choice.” Rather, these people were selected for the film because they were better on camera, more specific, and more passionate; in leaving the Church they were able to articulate what they felt they were missing. She had a completely positive experience with the access she was given at Church headquarters. Many of the Church officials interviewed were comfortable with the camera because they were so practiced, she said. Marlin Jensen distinguished himself, though, as “the great Marlin Jensen,” she said.

Whitney said she is concerned with how religion translates into people’s lives, and this was part of why the topics of polygamy and Mountain Meadows Massacre were so important to her. She was “flabbergasted” by the “certainty” Mormons expressed in their “testimony meetings” (Sunday meetings in which members can stand at the pulpit and speak unscripted about their religious convictions). In contrast, her goal in filmmaking is to raise questions in the viewers, to show that there are complex perspectives and interpretations of the religious experience.

The film ended up containing more narration, or “icebergs of information,” than she cares for, she said. Her esthetic ideal for non-fiction film is to make use of stories which act as metaphors for the central ideas she wishes to communicate, such as she did with the dancing sequence described by Terryl Givens in the film.

This thesis would suggest that she is saying she relies on exemplification in her films, preferring dramatic and compelling footage that vivifies central themes or concepts, and as much as possible, avoiding clear-cut information which closes the book on questions.

Several points were particularly striking from this interview. First, the interviews mattered a great deal in the construction of the documentary. In other words, Whitney seemed very concerned about the visual and emotional qualities of the film, and this resulted in certain consequences--intended (a compelling film which people would watch) and unintended (the emphasis given to disaffected persons). Her personal viewpoint of the complexity of Joseph Smith had been established with the reading of Fawn Brodie's biography years earlier. She has a personal preference for complexity and intellectual wondering in non-fiction film. Perhaps she saw herself as educating not only outsiders, but also contemporary Latter-day Saints about the controversies of their own religious history, convinced as she was that leaders and members alike are either ignorant of, or not owning, the big, bold ideas of Joseph Smith's Mormonism.

That Whitney said that she really liked Elder Marlin K. Jensen, the Church's historian, is significant. She found him disarming and credible. If one examines his interview transcripts, one sees his sincerity and non-defensiveness. He acknowledged that Mormon culture can sometimes be a little rigid and uncomfortable to those who struggle with same-gender attraction or do not marry and have children, for instance. At the same time, he did not back down on his own convictions about the lines the Church sometimes has to draw in regard to its critics. He made ample space for doubt and questioning as they can lead to learning and greater faith, he said, distinguishing between a person who is overly-critical and skeptical and a person who is honestly seeking. He spoke personally about his own experiences on his mission and with his family and his relationship with his wife.

Discussion

The following three examples illustrate the impact of filmmaker decisions on the ways in which Helen Whitney portrayed The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in her documentary. This list is merely representative, not exhaustive.

Christianity--Are Mormons Christian?

The film perpetuated the debate over whether or not Mormons are Christians. As she said herself, her goal was to encapsulate Mormon believers' "leap of faith," (shared by most religious traditions) and Mormonism's distinctive beliefs without falling into a dry theology lesson. This framework led to the inclusion of the themes about Mormons' faith in the miraculous and their religious devotion; it also led to the inclusion of the beliefs that are unique to Mormonism--the belief that Joseph Smith was a prophet of God, and the belief that temple ordinances are necessary to preserve families beyond the grave, for example. Such a framework, though, did not allow for a theology lesson, and therefore, many of the themes spoken of by LDS Church officials did not feature prominently in the film.

As a case in point, Helen Whitney was admittedly influenced by Fawn Brodie's biography on Joseph Smith. In fact, her fascination with him as a religious character in American history was a prime motivation to create the film. The narrator in the film even called Joseph Smith the "alpha and omega" for Mormons. In understanding and portraying Mormonism's distinct theology, the filmmaker neglected to illustrate the religion's essential Christianity. It cannot be ascertained whether or not the filmmaker herself believed Mormons' expressed faith in Jesus Christ was sincere or merely a strategic effort to join the Christian mainstream. At any rate, the film highlighted the role

of Joseph Smith and seemed to reject Mormons' reverence for Christ. This example demonstrates Fawn Brodie's likely influence, the impact of emphasizing what is unique about Mormonism, and is a result of choosing some themes and excluding others in order to avoid overloading the film with information.

FLDS Polygamy--Intentional Blurring of Lines

Perhaps due to what she called Mormons' "slipperiness," or unwillingness to tell others what they truly believe about polygamy and Godhood, Whitney justified the time spent on polygamy in the film. The end of the section on polygamy in the film illustrated the contemporary practice of plural marriage and articulated the FLDS teaching that individuals become like God through this practice. Whitney indicated in a personal interview with the author (see Appendix C) that during her research phase, she discovered that many Mormons themselves were ignorant of their own history and were not aware that plural marriage was taught in 19th-century Mormonism as being centrally connected to salvation, according to historians. However, regardless of present-day Mormons' understanding of their history, the inclusion of contemporary polygamy blurred the lines between the LDS Church and the FLDS. It cannot be maintained that the way in which contemporary Big Love-style polygamists practice plural marriage is necessarily representative of the way it was lived and understood by 19th-century Mormons; nor can it be maintained that the FLDS Church today share the same beliefs as the LDS Church. The family dynamics of the FLDS family depicted in the film do not accurately represent contemporary LDS family life, and the themes which were articulated by the LDS Church Officials in their interviews are what Latter-day Saints believe. Perhaps Latter-day Saints are too cagey when it comes to concepts they don't

really know how to explain--such as polygamy, and the nature of eternal life--but this does not mean that the basic principles to which they hold fast and which were described by LDS Church officials were misleading.

Time for Trevor Southey but not Others?

The film seemed to give the impression that there is no place in the LDS Church for homosexuals. The filmmaker admitted that she included the stories of two individuals in the six-hour director's cut of the film who shared their experiences of struggling with homosexuality while remaining in the LDS Church. This raises the question of why Southey's story was chosen to stand for all gay Mormons. Also, the transcripts of the interviews indicated that Whitney challenged Church officials and LDS scholars on the position of the Church toward homosexuals and on the status of women but did not challenge those who were disaffected from the LDS Church for their position. Thus, the filmmaker seemed more sympathetic to individuals and to the disaffected than to the institutional church.

That the logistics and effectiveness of the interviews had a decided impact on who made it into the film was made clear by the filmmaker. She said that the dissidents did better in the interviews--they were more articulate, more precise, and moving.

It was found that the themes about Mormons' unusual and sometimes puzzling commitment to their faith, as well as the Mormon Church's historical conflict in the United States and more recently with disaffected church members were accentuated in the film; the film did not equally incorporate the themes of LDS Church officials' self-description of Mormon beliefs and social practices. This thesis suggests that Helen Whitney constructed the film through a process that gave voice to minority viewpoints,

challenged institutional or ecclesiastical authority, and favored complexity. The filmmaker's acknowledged preferences and biases, the interviewing constraints of documentary film, and the journalistic mode of acting as a watchdog over powerful institutions took precedence over the goal of representing the LDS Church and its people in as realistic a way as possible.

The bias of the researcher is a natural limitation to this qualitative study. Also, a complete text of all of the film footage obtained by the filmmaker during her interviews and research was not available for comparison to the final cut of the film. What was available was essentially the base rate information about the Mormons provided by Church officials and academics. This study also was not able to examine the vast and detailed collection of information Helen Whitney gleaned during the research phase of making this film. For instance, did she speak to any sociologists of religion, and would a sociologist provide a different perspective on Mormon life currently than what was depicted through the individual accounts of members of the Church? There essentially was no scientific base rate information about Mormon family life and Mormon sociology available in the filmed interviews. Data on Mormons' (and other religions') perception of authority and control could be valuable to future research and future journalism on religion.

In conclusion, this thesis argues that the film was structured based on scholars' historical descriptions of the Church, and was connected to controversial public affairs topics currently on the agenda in the nation, including homosexuality and women's issues. It did not rely as heavily on the information provided by Church leaders regarding the doctrine and beliefs of Mormonism. The Film Text was true to the interviews but was

framed in a way that emphasized complexity, the authoritarian nature of the LDS Church, and the zeal of the Mormon faithful. The themes about Mormon beliefs incorporated into the film put greater emphasis on Mormonism's belief in Godhood and minimized Mormonism's foundational Christianity, as it was explained by LDS Church officials in their interviews. Such was the impact of the filmmaker's decisions. This case study was possible because the key interviews conducted in the making of the film were made available on the PBS Web site, because Helen Whitney gave a published speech about the making of the film, and because of a personal interview conducted by the author with the filmmaker. This case study suggests that Whitney's predispositions and biases (interest in complexity, bias against a sense of certainty) were determinative in the construction of the documentary.

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Appendix A. Names and Titles of Persons Interviewed for the Film

CHURCH OFFICIALS (in order of seniority)

President Gordon B. Hinckley, the 15th president of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

President Boyd K. Packer, acting president of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, the second highest governing body of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

Elder Dallin H. Oaks, a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland, a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

Elder Marlin K. Jensen, LDS Church Historian and a member of the First Quorum of the Seventy

SCHOLARS (in alphabetical order by last name)

Jon Butler, a professor of American history and dean of the Graduate School of Arts & Sciences at Yale University

Michael Coe, the Charles J. MacCurdy professor emeritus of anthropology at Yale University and curator emeritus of the Division of Anthropology at the school's Peabody Museum of Natural History

Terryl Givens, professor of literature and religion at the University of Richmond

Sarah Barringer Gordon, the Arlin M. Adams professor of constitutional law and a professor of history at the University of Pennsylvania

Kathleen Flake, assistant professor of American religious history at Vanderbilt Divinity School

Daniel Peterson, professor of Islamic studies and Arabic at Brigham Young University

Greg Prince, a doctor of pathology and author of *Power From On High: The Development of Mormon Priesthood*

D. Michael Quinn, a historian of Mormonism and former history professor at Brigham Young University

Margaret Toscano, founder of the Mormon Women's Forum in 1988, and professor of classics at the University of Utah

Ken Verdoia, a Utah historian, documentarian and journalist

Appendix B. Table of Themes

Themes of Interviews Text--Church Officials

1. Plan of happiness
2. Nature of God and mankind
3. Christianity
4. Prophets
5. Freedom to choose
6. Faith and sacrifice
7. Faith in miraculous
8. Women:
 1. eternal nature/identity/ opportunities
 2. women were/are strong
 3. polygamy was biblical

Themes of Interviews Text--Scholars

1. LDS Scholars
 - a. redefining Christianity or "the collapse of sacred distance"
 - b. tension between Protestant America and the Mormons
 - c. the complexity of polygamy and the Mormon concept of eternal families
 - d. faith and sacrifice for convictions
 - e. support the church's boundaries in regard to intellectuals, feminists, and gays
2. Excommunicated LDS Scholars
 - a. Church authority as control
 - b. loyal opposition in behalf of women, intellectuals, gays
 - c. judgmental Mormon culture
 - d. Joseph, the "prophet puzzle"
3. Non-LDS Scholars
 - a. defend Mormonism on some fronts
 - i. the complexity of Joseph Smith
 - ii. Mormons survived and thrived
 - iii. the Biblical Mormons versus Protestant America
 1. polygamy was biblical, communal, benefited women
 - b. critique on others
 - i. genuine conflict with U.S. b/c a transformative religion
 - ii. The Mormon Church versus its modern historians and philosophers

Themes of Film Text

1. Joseph Smith: enigmatic, loved and hated
2. From pariah to power broker
3. Tension between Church and state
4. Church, community, family, and temple intertwined to show spiritual benefits
5. Tension between Church and individuals
 - a. women in a patriarchal church
6. Blind obedience to an extreme religion?

Appendix C. Notes from Researcher's Interview with Helen Whitney on

February 18, 2010

Mott: What was the genesis for *The Mormons*? Was there a particular occurrence or event that made you want to produce a film on the Mormons?

Whitney: Fawn Brodie's book, taught at Harvard, U. of Chicago; met Mormons while at U. of Chicago. beyond colorful 1800s--was intrigued by 19th century past; knew about daily practices; "a religion that asks for a lot" similar to monks/film; "radical commitment"; read Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*

Mott: Do you think contemporary Mormons view their history differently than previous generations, or not?

Whitney: That's a good question. I got the impression that members don't know as much, e.g., 1800s, didn't know about MMM, polygamy

Brad Barber: Why so much time on polygamy?

Whitney: so central--seen as key to salvation, Mormons didn't know that; e.g., "Aunt Tilly's memoirs" surprise about polygamy, denial; would say to Dan: "honoring centrality of that doctrine" in portrayal of modern polygamy; only 2.50 minutes in 42 minute section--modern polygamy, there and offshoots; "Dan sort of agreed" (who's Dan? Dan Peterson, or an executive producer?) messiness of its beginnings; confusion fostered growth; refusal to acknowledge;

Dr. Swenson: Maybe that has to do with location? Because I always knew about polygamy and it didn't bother me.

Whitney: Some people I interviewed were very uncomfortable with the polygamy in the past. Terry (Givens) was definitely that way. Huge range of reaction to it.

Brad Barber: *Big Love*, confusing because of continued blurred for average Joe viewer who doesn't understand about polygamy

Whitney: "Can't play to those people anyway" 33 percent believe 9/11 was manipulated by the government; "you're not pitching your show to these people" "ignorant, laziness. I couldn't tell the story without component of polygamy because "every historian I spoke with" said it was central to LDS concept of salvation. Maybe LDS PR would say differently, but every historian said that. Especially Kathleen Flake "dispassionate" and ___? "so many historians." Of course, the more you leave Utah, the more diversity there is between some see the past metaphorically, some take it extremely literally.

Whitney: Origins of church are either loved or denied, by various members of Church. Question of “how you distinguish yourselves to” broader / outside culture. No longer a charismatic prophet receiving revelation. the Church has entered “middle age.”

Brad Barber: Exemplars chosen (justify time to disaffected)? Was it a conscious choice in being member or disaffected, the weight given to those disaffected?

Whitney: “It wasn’t a conscious choice.” The people selected were more “eloquent,” better on camera, more specific, more passionate about “what they had lost” even by leaving the church.

Mott: What do you think about the LDS Church’s current engagement with media...did you discern any tensions between the Church’s desire to be viewed positively and its desire to be distinctive? (Secrecy and credibility?) referred to her speech at Princeton about the LDS Church’s secrecy as raising suspicions to outsiders (temple).

Whitney: that’s two questions, really. I can’t speak to the church’s engagement with media, really. but in my own experience...That’s “just how the church sees itself;” portion that wants to enter mainstream full blast, others more reluctant to like Dan Peterson: he loves the old time religion and said we’re not doing something right if we are mainstream. I love the metaphor Bushman used for his title--rough stone rolling. A great metaphor for the church smoothing off its rough edges.

Mott: Did anything surprise you about Mormons responses? like you mentioned that they were surprised by polygamy. (she refers to meeting church authorities.)

Whitney: Not in anything people said in interviews. More so when I was doing research and reading beforehand. As for church authorities, I have “no complaints.” They simply put everything out there for me. It was “unprecedented” in a way. There was “nothing they weren’t willing to talk about.”

Brad Barber/Dr. Swenson: were any of them anxious about being on camera?

Whitney: Dallin (Oaks) and Jeff (Holland?) so practiced; I think Packer was a little “shy.” Marlin Jensen was great, of course, “He is the great Marlin Jensen.” (She really liked Marlin Jensen, the Church Historian.) You should check out a NYTimes article from 4 to 5 years ago; it was a hostile interview, but the reporter was a good writer; you should talk to him, find it through a Lexus Nexus search. But my experience was completely positive.

Dr. Swenson: You don’t take a pro or con position in your films. You like to raise questions. It allows a lot of room for individual choices (of audience) the human connection emerges;

Whitney: yes, I'm concerned with how religion translates into people's lives and how people treat each other. that "uninflected piety." MMM and polygamy are an example of this.

After all of the research and the reading...Were you surprised what came... (Dr. Swenson)

Whitney: Going to testimony meetings. I was "flabbergasted" by the "certainty" Mormons spoke about. It was really "off-putting" to me.

Dr. Swenson: Audience reaction to film: We react not to what's on screen but we react to our own issues;

Whitney: Yes, if you are a "discerning critic" then you can recognize what I brought--the "complexity" vs. their own life history. Often, we're uncomfortable with complexity.

Brad: So when someone holds up a mirror to us with that complexity, we're uncomfortable with that...

Whitney/Swenson?: a reaction to complexity instead of to content.

Mott: Would you change anything if you were to do it again?

Whitney: I would cut back, prune the narration. They are "icebergs of information." Film can't compete with book, nor should it try. I would search for those metaphors, I loved the one about dancing that Terryl Givens talked about. I would vivify ideas as opposed to A, B, C. that's what informational documentaries do it it's really boring. You gotta be selective What they take with them is the take away, and I like image, metaphor, then you bridge it with narration. No one remembers that iceberg stuff. You've gotta be really selective, OR it becomes an illustrated slide lecture. For example, to capture the idea of family in Mormonism, I chose the story about the young woman facing death. view of heaven--laid out; specificity of heaven is unique, but this story illustrated that without laying it out A, B, C, etc. This [technique]leaves more room for interpretation, to see it embodied and embedded in the film.

"Much more experiential complexity" in film.

Whitney: "I agree."

Swenson: Like how you begin "Forgiveness," you find issues, exploring and representing many points of view, along the way you embed

Whitney: Yes there is a central idea in every one of those stories. It's not about the Amish but the concept of unconditional forgiveness. embedded ideas and dramatic stories that vivify.

Swenson: Can you give an example of that in the Mormons?

Whitney: I thought I just did! Look, I'm tired.... I don't want to talk about this film anymore...

[End of interview]