ACTA UNIVERSITATIS GOTHOBURGENSIS
GOTHENGBURG STUDIES IN LITERATURE, HISTORY OF IDEAS AND RELIGION 4



Making Waves

Podcasting Among Feminist Latter-Day Saints

Kristel Torgrimsson

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Abstract

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Publicly criticizing the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints carries significant risks, prompting feminist members to turn to the internet as a crucial platform for expression. Following the excommunications of the 1990s, blogging emerged as a medium that enabled regrouping and growth. Today, podcasting has taken center stage as a preferred platform for new actors within this movement. This dissertation explores what podcasting affords Feminist Latter-day Saints through a qualitative case study of three podcasts: *The Faithful Feminists*, *At Last She Said It*, and *Year of Polygamy*. Drawing on the concept of "technological affordance" as the interplay between the medium's performativity and its attributed discourses, the study develops a bipartite analytical model. This model comprises two frameworks: "performed media" which examines podcasting through the communicational and technological topologies of parasocial relationships, liveness, and seriality, and "discursive framing" which considers how media technologies are constructed and validated through discourse. The findings reveal that podcasting enables Feminist Latter-day Saints to 1. Foster what they perceive as caring and advocative communities, where hosts build intimate, friendly relationships with listeners as an alternative to what they construct as the Church institution's bureaucratic care; 2. Create a setting of spontaneity and informality, allowing for the revaluation and reframing of the Church's communicative patterns; 3. Navigate the tensions between feminism and faith by providing a dynamic temporality that facilitates the recovery of women's voices and ongoing faith development, while also introducing a hurried pace that limits reflection and expansion; 4. Evolve personal faith journeys,

sometimes through continuous conversion and other times through processes of departure. These findings demonstrate how podcasting enables Feminist Latter-day Saints to foster community, reframe institutional narratives, navigate the complexities of faith and feminism, and construct their personal faith. They contribute to (a) a deeper understanding of contemporary Latter-day Saint Feminism, (b) a critical and nuanced perspective on women's agency in digital media, and (c) advancing conversations on methodological and theoretical approaches to religious podcasts.

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1. Introduction

Following the 2014 disciplinary trial against Latter-day Saint Feminist Kate Kelly, *The Guardian* published an article titled "Mormon church excommunicates Kate Kelly over women's advocacy work."[1] The news article, featuring a large image of Kelly wiping her tears with a napkin, was one of many depicting the excommunication. The reason for her apostasy verdict, was that she had publicly called for the ordination of women. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is an organization led by an exclusively male priesthood, a result of a doctrine where gender complementarianism runs deep. While she was "entitled to [her] view[s]" the excommunication letter explained, she was "not entitled to promote them and proselyte others to them."[2] Her course of action it suggested "threatened to erode the faith of others."[3]

Alluding to the famous quote by Latter-day Saint and environmental activist Terry Tempest Williams, one could say that Kelly had disturbed the calm waters of the Church. Williams says in her renowned memoir *Refuge: An Unnatural History of Family and Place* from 1991 that "in Mormon culture, authority is respected, obedience is revered, and independent thinking is not. I was taught as a young girl not to 'make waves' or 'rock the boat.'"[4] Making waves alludes to turbulence in the water and is used to describe acts that cause disturbance. The "boat" furthermore, is not rarely portrayed as a symbol for the Church by its leaders. In other words, saying the wrong thing may cause not only a disturbance of one's own beliefs, but also "rock" the entire faith of one's community. In a General Conference speech from 2014, apostle and ordained leader in the priesthood, M. Russell Ballard for example referenced Brigham Young, the Church's second president and leader, who talked about members doubting and leaving Zion as "jumping overboard."

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1 Amanda Holpuch, "Mormon church excommunicates Kate Kelly over women's advocacy work," *The Guardian,* June 23, 2014.

2 Quoted in Kristen Moulton, "Kelly on Excommunication from Mormon Church: 'I've Done Nothing Wrong,'" *The Salt Lake Tribune,* June 24, 2014.

3 Moulton, "Kelly on Excommunication from Mormon Church: 'I've Done Nothing Wrong.'"

4 Terry Tempest Williams, *Refuge. An Unnatural History of Family and Place,* (New York: Vintage Books, 1991/2018), p. 285.

> [Brigham Young] said on one occasion: "We are in the midst of the ocean. A storm comes on, and, as sailors say, she labors very hard. 'I am not going to stay here,' says one; 'I don't believe this is the "Ship Zion."' 'But we are in the midst of the ocean.' 'I don't care, I am not going to stay here.' Off goes the coat, and he jumps overboard. *Will he not be drowned? Yes. So with those who leave this Church.* It is the 'Old Ship Zion,' let us stay in it."[5]

This quote where Ballard echoes the sentiments of Young is an example of an obedience discourse where leaving the fold – Zion – or doubting becomes disruptive and possibly dangerous. However, "making waves" can also be identified in a positive light, as an act that makes an impression or initiates change or movement. The emphasis on water is also significant for its representation of femininity, flexibility, ambiguity and uncertainty, values which have a recurring presence in the online community of Mormon Feminists that Kelly was a part of.[6] This community is part of a broader digital landscape that emerged in the early 2000s and can be traced back to the pre-internet inauguration of the Mormon Feminist movement during the 1970s whose representatives, in turn, viewed themselves as a continuation of the 19th century suffrage movement among Latter-day Saints.[7] In short, then, Mormon Feminism has a long history.

But while blogging was the go-to medium for Mormon Feminists like Kelly who were active in the early 21st century, however, many contemporary actors on this scene use podcasts. Returning to the water analogy, it is a medium that quite literally implies the act of making (sound) waves. That is, rather than just writing – an act easier to make anonymous – they are recording their own voices in critique of the Church. This development begs the question what this new medium affords Feminist Latter-day Saints. It is to this subject my dissertation is devoted.

1.1 Purpose Statement

This dissertation is concerned with the technological affordances of podcasting for Feminist Latter-day Saints. In short "technological affordance" denotes an interest in the capacities or enabling qualities for human actors that a technological object encom-

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5 M. Russell Ballard, "Stay in the Boat and Hold On!" *General Conference*, October 2014.

6 See Caroline Kline, "Mormon Feminist Blogs and Heavenly Mother. Spaces for Ambivalence and Innovation in Practice and Theology" in Gina Messina-Dysert and Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Feminism and Religion in the 21st Century: Technology, Dialogue and Expanding Borders*, (London: Routledge, 2015), pp. 34–46; Jenny, "Leaving the Old Ship Zion to Walk on Water," *The Exponent II,* October 24, 2014, https://exponentii.org/blog/leaving-the-old-ship-zion-to-walk-on-water/, accessed May 9, 2024.

7 Claudia L. Bushman, "Exponent II is Born," *Exponent II,* 1, 1, 1974, p. 2.

passes, or in simpler terms, what a specific technological object "is good for."[8] My analysis draws upon the modifications of this concept by sociologist Ian Hutchby, who interprets technological affordances as the "functional and relational aspects which frame, while not determining, the possibilities for agentic action in relation to an object."[9] Hutchby's position is preceded by decades-long discussions within sociology of scientific knowledge on whether technology has inherent or essential qualities, or if they are ruled by the agential capacities of individuals and society. Representatives of realism suggest that there are features of technological artefacts that are not constructed, whereas adherents to constructionism says that they have no inherent properties beyond the interpretive work of humans.[10] Seeking a middle ground between realism and constructivism, Hutchby suggests a position where both material and human agency can be acknowledged. Drawing on Hutchby's discussion, I identify technological affordance as a convergence between the technological and communicational dispositions of the medium and the discourses attributed to it, what I will later refer to respectively as "performed media" and "discursive framing." Thus, the physical and communicative capacities of media – by deciding how Latter-day Saint Feminists record, store and transmit communication – affect and change how they perform themselves and relate to their followers. This means that they work with an already confined set of meanings and capabilities, to which they then discursively add and extend upon.

1.1.2 Research Questions

The purpose of this dissertation is to *explore how the podcast technologically affords Feminist Latter-day Saints spaces to interact, build community, construct and negotiate feminism and faith*. This aim will be pursued through four research questions:

(1) What forms of community and host-listener relationship does the podcast foster?
(2) What types of interactions are facilitated by the podcast's recording format?
(3) How does the podcast condition the construction and negotiation of feminism and faith?
(4) How does the podcast condition the construction of personal faith among its hosts?

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8 Robert Kozinets, *Netnography: The Essential Guide to Qualitative Social Media Research*, (London: Sage, 2020), p. 117.

9 Ian Hutchby, "Technologies, Texts and Affordances," *Sociology*, vol. 35, no. 2, 2001, pp. 441–456, p. 444.

10 Hutchby, "Technologies, Texts and Affordances," p. 443.

These research questions differ in their level of focus. Questions 1-3 concentrate on community dynamics and the collective experiences of women, while question 4 specifically targets individual experiences, examining how the podcast influences the hosts' personal faith construction.[11] These are not treated as social levels "out there" or as already existing, but as different levels constructed within each podcast project. Accordingly, podcast communities are in the making, as will be returned to later when rephrasing Heidi Campbell's theory on Religious Social Shaping of Technology.[12] Because there is no research as of yet on podcasting among Feminist Latter-day Saints, I have been inspired by previous research on Latter-day Saint Feminist blogging, as well as previous research in Social Science and Digital Religion when articulating the following four research questions. When these questions are posed, they take for granted the definition of technological affordance just described.

RQ1: Community

It is widely recognized that the onslaught of internet has enabled Mormon Feminists to build a community of likeminded. From previous research we learn that blogging fosters a community and a space for Latter-day Saint women otherwise separated by both distance and harsh Church politics.[13] This is often described by Mormon Feminists themselves as a "safe space."[14] The *Feminist Mormon Housewives* blog for example described its purpose as providing "a safe place to be both feminist and faithful."[15] If we lift our gaze, we will also find that the term "safe space" is a common reference among feminist and LGBTQ+ communities more broadly.[16] It is not only a label used by those it concerns however, but also a phrase common in previous research. In the context of Latter-day Saint women, private Facebook pages have been noted to "act as safe spaces"

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11 In social science it is common to distinguish between three levels of analysis: macro, meso and micro. While there is no general consensus around what they signify or how they relate to each other, (see Randall Collins, "Jonathan Turner's Macro-Micro-Meso Theory," in Seth Abrutyn & Kevin McCaffree (eds.) *Theoretical Sociology. The Future of a Disciplinary Foundation*, (New York: Routledge, 2021), pp. 129–143) for pedagogical purposes we can simplify *macro* level as encompassing a focus on larger societal structures, *meso* level featuring groups, communities or organizations, and *micro* level focusing on individuals in a particular social setting. My focus here can be compared to micro and meso.

12 Heidi Campbell, *When Religion Meets New Media*, (Oxon: Routledge, 2010.)

13 Gavin Feller, "A Moderate Manifesto: Mormon Feminism, Agency, and Internet Blogging," *Journal of Media and Religion*, vol. 15, no. 3, 2016, pp. 156–166.

14 Joanna Brooks, "Mormon Feminism: The Next Forty Years," *Dialogue*, vol. 47, no. 4, 2014, pp. 1–18, p. 11.

15 Feller, "A Moderate Manifesto: Mormon Feminism, Agency, and Internet Blogging," p. 160.

16 Rosemary Clark-Parsons, "Building a Digital Girl Army: The Cultivation of Feminist Safe Spaces Online," *New Media & Society*, vol. 20, no. 6, 2018, pp. 2125–2144.

where women can openly share their experiences as mothers.[17] While research on podcasting and religion is still scarce, similar uses of the phrase "safe space" can be witnessed within its scope – for example statements along the lines of podcasting providing "safe spaces in which participants feel and experience radically open, loving, and supportive community."[18] How "safety" is constructed, however, is rarely substantiated. As Rosemary Clark-Parsons argues, the term "safe space" is "overused" across different feminist, queer, and anti-racist movements online, yet still "undertheorized."[19] Consequently, she calls for scholarly investigation "into the construction of these activist spaces."[20] Heather Rosenfeld and Elsa Noterman similarly argue that safe spaces should not be understood "through static and a-contextual notions of 'safe' or 'unsafe,' but rather through the relational work of cultivating them."[21] It is in critical response to this tendency, that I endeavor to uncover *(1) what forms of community and host-listener relationship the podcast fosters.* This question will be answered in chapter five.

RQ2: Live Interaction

When talking about Mormon Feminism online it is common to recognize the abilities of its participants to engage in discussions on specific practices and doctrines of their Church.[22] The blogging community, for example, keeps alive topics such as priesthood, polygamy and feminine aspects of the Godhead,[23] which are touchstones continuously also returned to by their predecessors.[24] Some suggest that earlier forms of media, like blogging, have enabled Mormon Feminists to evolve in their discussions of recurring

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17 Alexis Romero Walker, "Digital Discussions among Women Members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Vulnerability in Private Facebook Groups Grounded in Motherhood," *Journal of Religion, Media and Digital Culture*, vol. 12, no. 2-3, 2023, pp. 185–203, p. 200.

18 Steven Fekete & Jessica Knippel, "The Devil You Know: An Exploration of Virtual Religious Deconstruction Communities," *Journal of Religion, Media and Digital Culture*, vol. 9, no. 2, 2020, pp. 165–184, p. 165.

19 Clark-Parsons, "Building a Digital Girl Army: The Cultivation of Feminist Safe Spaces Online," p. 2125.

20 Clark-Parsons, "Building a Digital Girl Army: The Cultivation of Feminist Safe Spaces Online," p. 2125.

21 Heather Rosenfeld & Elsa Noterman, "Safe Space: Toward a Reconceptualization," *Antipode*, vol. 46, no. 5, 2014, pp. 1346–1365, p. 1346.

22 Feller, "A Moderate Manifesto: Mormon Feminism, Agency, and Internet Blogging;" Jessica Finnigan & Nancy Ross, "I'm a Mormon Feminist: How Social Media Revitalized and Enlarged a Movement," *Interdisciplinary Journal of Research on Religion*, vol. 9, no. 12, 2013, pp 1–26.

23 Sarah K. S. Hanks & Nancy Ross, *Where We Must Stand. Ten Years of Feminist Mormon Housewives*, (Cataloging-in-Publication Data, 2018.)

24 Maxine Hanks, *Women and Authority: Re-emerging Mormon Feminism*, (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1992); Joanna Brooks, Rachel Hunt Steenblik & Hannah Wheelwright, *Mormon Feminism. Essential Writings*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016.)

issues, helping them to avoid the pitfalls of repetition and redundancy.[25] However, there is less focus on the communication methods used, particularly in podcasts, a medium that remains unexplored. Given that the podcast is largely an audio-based medium focused on the liveness of speech and often conducted as a conversation between several hosts,[26] it provokes the question of how that format affects the content of Mormon Feminism. Christian feminists and especially post-Christian feminists have continuously stressed, for example, that subversion does not necessarily lie in the content, but is equally or more importantly found in the communicational format.[27] I am therefore enticed to ask *(2) what types of interaction the recording format of the podcast facilitates*. This question will be answered in chapter six.

RQ3: Feminism and Faith

Much research has demonstrated how digital media enable religious women to negotiate tensions between religion and gender equality or balance progressive values with conservative religious frameworks.[28] Research dedicated more specifically to religious feminism also addresses the significance of digital media for religious critique and how affordances of visual and textual media enhance their activism.[29] Zooming in on the Latter-day Saint context, internet is frequently recognized as allowing Latter-day Saint Feminists to take up positions between feminism and faith perceived as otherwise disabled – seen for example in the sentence quoted above where blogging is framed as a safe space to be "*both* feminist and faithful," but also in how internet is postulated to enable Mormon Feminism to survive despite a tradition of institutional reprisals.[30] But few have sought to answer the question of how a continuous participation in various media – and especially audio-dominated media – affects or changes the ability to con-

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25 Finnigan & Ross, "I'm a Mormon Feminist: How Social Media Revitalized and Enlarged a Movement."

26 Alyn Euritt, *Podcasting as an Intimate Medium*, (New York: Routledge, 2023.)

27 Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation*, (Boston Beacon Press, 1973) for example suggests that women cannot stop at a critique of worldviews but must challenge its externalization through language and ritual.

28 Mia Lövheim describes "Negotiating Tensions, Merging Social Spheres" as a prominent theme in previous research, see Mia Lövheim, "Gender and Agency in Digital Religion" in Heidi Campbell & Pauline Cheong (eds.) *The Oxford Handbook of Digital Religion,* (online edition, Oxford Academic, 2022), pp. 237–253 doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780197549803.001.0001, accessed May 8, 2025.

29 Alparslan Nas, "'Women in Mosques': Mapping the Gendered Religious Space Through Online Activism," *Feminist Media Studies*, vol. 22, no. 5, pp. 1163–1178; Beverly M. Weber, "Kübra Gümüşay, Muslim Digital Feminism and the Politics of Visuality in Germany," *Feminist Media Studies*, vol. 16, no. 1, 2016, pp. 101–116.

30 Joanna Brooks, Rachel Hunt Steenblik & Hannah Wheelwright, *Mormon Feminism. Essential Writings*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016.)

struct and negotiate feminism and faith. With this gap in mind, the present study aims to answer the question (3) *how the podcast conditions the construction and negotiation of feminism and faith.* This question will be answered in chapter seven.

RQ4: Personal Faith

Significant research has explored the role of digital media in facilitating feminist activism among Latter-day Saints,[31] and has detailed their engagement with complex theological concepts, such as the feminine divine[32] and women's leadership roles.[33] However, there is a gap in understanding how these engagements affect hosts' personal faith experiences. While platforms like *Feminist Mormon Housewives* and *The Exponent II* often discuss the challenges to faith following feminist awakenings,[34] little is known about how individual faith evolves or changes through their ongoing involvement in these discussions. Moreover, scholars are increasingly advocating for nuanced explorations into how media shape women's agency.[35] In addressing personal faith, this suggests the importance of recognizing that faith development is neither static nor uniformly positive. As a medium that unfolds over time, podcasting offers a unique longitudinal perspective on this dynamic. Therefore, a final question that has guided my explorations is *(4) how the podcast conditions the construction of personal faith among its hosts.* This question will also be answered in chapter seven.

1.2 Terminology & Definitions

In the following list I will explain important terms and definitions, beginning with a short description of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and the appropriate terms to describe the Church and its members.

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31 Finnigan & Ross, "I'm a Mormon Feminist: How Social Media Revitalized and Enlarged a Movement."

32 Kline, "Mormon Feminist Blogs and Heavenly Mother. Spaces for Ambivalence and Innovation in Practice and Theology."

33 Feller, "A Moderate Manifesto: Mormon Feminism, Agency, and Internet Blogging."

34 For example, experiences of cognitive dissonance and grief found in blogposts such as fMh Lisa, "Faithful and Feminist: Toward Balance," *Feminist Mormon Housewives,* October 5, 2010, republished in Hanks & Ross, *Where We Must Stand. Ten Years of Feminist Mormon Housewives*; Amy, "Leaving Eden," *The Exponent*, June 30, 2014, exponentii.org/blog/mourning-molly-leaving-eden/, accessed November 24, 2024.

35 Lövheim, "Gender and Agency in Digital Religion."

1.2.1 Latter-day Saints

The women whose online performances this dissertation investigates are or were at the initiation of their podcast projects, members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. This church stems from a larger group of religious worshippers commonly referred to as Mormons, which all trace their roots to the prophet Joseph Smith who founded the first church in Palmyra, New York in 1830. The nickname "Mormons" references one of their most central scriptures, The Book of Mormon. The book is said to be derived from Joseph Smith's translation of ancient inscriptions found on golden plates. According to Smith, the existence of these plates was disclosed to him by the divine messenger Moroni in 1823, and he was later granted access to their location in 1827. With the scribal assistance of Martin Harris and later Oliver Cowdery, Smith transcribed the plates and published The Book of Mormon in 1830. As a biblically fashioned text, The Book of Mormon tells the story of a people's migration from Jerusalem to the promised land of America. However, "Mormon" is not an unproblematic nickname. In 2018 The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints issued a statement advising against the use of "Mormon" and "Mormonism" preferring instead the full name "The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints."[36] Another aspect to be cautious of is that "Mormon" is also a reference to a group of believers that extends far beyond The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Mormons also include groups such as Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and Community of Christ (former Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints) – groups that differs in both doctrinal, practical, and organizational manners. In the style guide referenced in the same statement mentioned above, the abbreviation "LDS" was also advised against. Using "the Church," "Church of Jesus Christ" or "restored Church of Jesus Christ" for the Church name, and "members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints" or "Latter-day Saints" to refer to its members was suggested instead.[37] In this dissertation I have chosen to alternate between "The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints," "the Church" and "Latter-day Saints." I will, however, use "Mormons" and "Mormonism" when referring to the general group of individuals following Joseph Smith. Additionally, when I speak of the women studied here, I will occasionally use the word Mormon Feminist (interchangeably with Feminist Latter-day Saints or Latter-day Saint Feminists). This is a reference to the emic term of the online community, i.e. the words used by themselves.

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[36] Russell M. Nelson, "The Name of the Church," *The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints,* August 20, 2018, news-gb.churchofjesuschrist.org/article/the-name-of-the-church, accessed December 16, 2024.

[37] "Style Guide – Name of the Church," *The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints,* news-uk.churchofjesuschrist.org/style-guide, accessed December 16, 2024.

1.2.2 Podcasting

Mormon Feminism has from its outset been intimately tied to media, their latest addition being the podcast, a type of digital audio accessible through the internet. The podcast is often identified as an audio file consisting of speech that is downloadable to portable devices such as an iPod.[38] Hence the name "podcast." While the podcast "routinely gets referred to as a new 'medium' and championed as a disruptive technology" I take the podcast as "more a case of evolution than revolution," as media and communication scholar Andrew Bottomley puts it.[39] A central argument of his is that the podcast is an "iteration" of radio,[40] an idea building on the notion of "remediation" which can be explained as "the way in which one medium is seen by our culture as reforming or improving upon another."[41] Radio can be defined as "an auditory medium that requires the use of a transmitter and receiver to distribute a linear stream of content that is heard synchronously by listeners in a specific area."[42] The listener to a radio can therefore experience content by tuning in to a specific program, which (at least pre-internet) was only available at that specific time. Following media scholar Henry Jenkin's term "convergence culture" however,[43] the radio has also met and converged with different media/media cultures under its development. When the radio converged with internet it evolved. While the earliest internet radio, which emerged already during the 1990s, was dominated by experts, the turn of the millennium saw a broadening of the practice to include amateurs and hobbyists.[44] The podcast continues this trend as it is often performed by individuals without training or connection to a broadcasting agent. Because of its wide accessibility and ease of use, podcasting at its inception stood out for being accessible to laypeople, which, some proposed, allowed broadcasting to accomplish its "democratic" potential.[45] As many scholars recognize however, the podcast as well as the radio it emerged from is continuously changing. This backgrounds

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38 See Jonathan Sterne, Jeremy Morris, Michael Brendan Baker, & Ariana Moscote Freire, "The Politics of Podcasting," *Fibreculture Journal*, vol. 13, 2008, for more information.

39 Andrew Bottomley, *Sound Streams. A Cultural History of Radio-Internet Convergence*, (University of Michigan Press, 2020), p. 2.

40 Bottomley, *Sound Streams. A Cultural History of Radio-Internet Convergence*, p. 3.

41 Jay David Bolter & Richard Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media*, (London: The MIT Press, 1999), p. 59.

42 Richard Berry, "Podcasting: Considering the Evolution of the Medium and its Association with the word 'Radio,'" *Radio Journal: International Studies in Broadcast & Audio Media*, vol. 14, no. 1, 2016, pp. 7–22, p. 10.

43 Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*, (New York: New York University Press, 2006.)

44 Bottomley, *Sound Streams. A Cultural History of Radio-Internet Convergence*, p. 96.

45 Sterne, Morris, Baker, & Freire, "The Politics of Podcasting."

arguments such as Andrew Dubber's, where "radio does not actually have any essential characteristics," but "changes from place to place in different legislative and cultural contexts as well as over time."[46]

What perspectives such as these imply, is the difficulty of identifying the podcast as a distinct and isolated medium. Its borders are at best porous. It stretches backward into older media such as radio and converges in different ways with the internet. Nevertheless, to study the podcast some scholars suggest a kind of pragmatic border-making.[47] In chapter four where I present my analytical methods, I will therefore draw a line around what I consider to be relevant podcast characteristics for the purpose at hand.

1.2.3 Transmediality

It should come as no surprise then, that podcasting rarely finds itself as a stand-alone medium. On the contrary, the podcast often has an intermedial context encompassing platforms such as social media, websites, blogs, shops, and newsletters. Podcasting Latter-day Saints are no exception. As such, the podcasts studied here are accompanied by various other media such as Instagram, whose visual and textual content alters or strengthens the virtues found in the podcast. Consequently, the podcast is more like an ocean whose wave power is partially spun through the atmospheric circulation and winds of social media. A term reflective of this entanglement is what Jenkins calls "transmedia," which denote how media content travels over and translates into several other media. The term stems from Jenkin's exploration of "convergence culture" introduced earlier, by which he means "the flow of content across multiple media platforms, the cooperation between multiple media industries, and the migratory behavior of media audiences who will go almost anywhere in search of the kinds of entertainment experiences they want."[48] As a part of this he looks at *The Matrix* (1999) as an example of "transmedia storytelling."[49] The storytelling of this franchise "unfolds across multiple media platforms," he says, "with each new text making a distinctive and valuable contribution to the whole."[50] Podcast researcher Alyn Euritt similarly observes in storytelling podcasts how "each medium" encompassed in its transmedial web, "adds a new element to that story."[51] In this dissertation I will approach podcasting as carrying both some distinct characteristics inherited from its predecessor, the radio, yet simultaneously

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46 Dubber, *Radio in the Digital Age*, p. 16–17.
47 Euritt, *Podcasting as an Intimate Medium.*
48 Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*, p. 2.
49 Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*, p. 95.
50 Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*, p. 95–96.
51 Euritt, *Podcasting as an Intimate Medium*, p. 101.

recognize its convergent/transmedial nature, implying that the value and meaning to those characteristics are built on or added to through the visual and textual media that accompany them.

1.3 Disposition

In *chapter two* I will position Mormon Feminist podcasters against a historical and thematic background focusing on the precariousness of public criticism and the recurrence of three issues: priesthood, theology on Heavenly Mother, and polygamy. I will also describe research within Digital Religion related to this dissertation, discuss its gaps and the contribution that this study makes. In *chapter three* I discuss the dissertation's theoretical framework, and more specifically construct a revised version of Heidi Campbell's theoretical model, Religious Social Shaping of Technology,[52] that incorporates the duality of how I have identified technological affordance above. It results in a bipartite model for theorizing on religious podcasts, meant to be both sensitive to media technology while also capturing discourses attached to it. In *chapter four* I present the study's project design as a qualitative and abductive case study, present material, discuss methodological issues, ethical approaches, and my own positionality. I also operationalize the revised model of Religious Social Shaping of Technology formulated in the previous chapter through two frameworks, "performed media" and "discursive framing." The former identifies the technological and communicational characteristics of podcasting, through three terms: "parasocial relationships,"[53] "liveness,"[54] and "seriality,"[55] as well as their relation to an overall transmediality.[56] The latter presents an analytical toolkit based on Discourse Theory.[57] *Chapter five* which aims to answer RQ1 delves into the significance of parasocial relationships, which will be more clearly defined later but centers around the type of long-term relationships that podcasting via its interactive and episodic nature enables its users to develop, and the meaning Latter-day Saint Feminists

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52 Campbell, *When Religion Meets New Media.*

53 Jayson L. Dibble, Tilo Hartmann, Sarah F. Rosaen, "Parasocial Interaction and Parasocial Relationship: Conceptual Clarification and a Critical Assessment of Measures," *Human Communication Research,* vol. 42, no. 1, 2016; Laith Zuraikat, "The Parasocial Nature of Podcast," in John Allen Hendricks, *Radio's Second Century: Past, Present, and Future Perspectives*, (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2020), pp. 39–52.

54 Euritt, *Podcasting as an Intimate Medium.*

55 Frank Kelleter, "Five Ways of Looking a Popular Seriality," in Frank Kelleter (ed.) *Media of Serial Narrative*, (Ohio State University Press, 2017), pp. 7–34.

56 Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide.*

57 Ernesto Laclau & Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy. Toward a Radical Democratic Politics*, (New York: Verso, 1985/2001.)

discursively attach to them. As a part of answering RQ2, *chapter six* explores podcast liveness, which is a term used to describe the type of live interactions occurring when recording the podcast. It ventures into the subversive significance of liveness as a format enabling what are perceived as a positively messy, intuitive and exposing dialogues. *Chapter seven*, which seeks to answer RQ3 and RQ4, elaborates on the question of seriality, meaning the podcast's episodic nature and how it both troubles and secures constructions and negotiations of feminism and faith as well as affecting the podcast hosts' construction of personal faith. In *chapter eight* I summarize the study's results, discuss their theoretical and methodological implications, and point to future research within the study of Digital Religion.

2. Background and Previous Research

This chapter is structured into two main sections. The first offers a historical background of contemporary Mormon Feminism, detailing the pivotal events and issues that have shaped its development. The second section critically reviews relevant prior research, analyzing existing literature to pinpoint gaps that lay the groundwork for this study.

2.1 Background

Podcasting among Mormon Feminists actualizes several historical and contemporary aspects of the Latter-day Saint community. First there is the very case of why podcasting along with other forms of public criticism is such a precarious matter, and why the threat of excommunication hangs over the head of Latter-day Saint Feminists. Here, a historical introduction to the Church's contention over media representation and public scrutiny is necessary. Second, contemporary podcasters must also be positioned as part of the Mormon Feminist tradition with questions of importance for them, such as priesthood, theology on Heavenly Mother and polygamy.

2.1.1 The Precariousness of Public Criticism

As high-profile cases like Kate Kelly illustrate, Mormon Feminists have a complex history in connection with public expression, often facing scrutiny and backlash for publicly criticizing Church doctrines. This backdrop sets the stage for modern podcasters, who I suggest are navigating the legacy of what historian of religion Martin E. Marty termed the "crisis of historical consciousness."[58] These debates, where faith is tested by the introduction of critical and contextual perspectives on scripture, are not new in American Christianity. However, contrary to other Christian groups' responses to historical critical scholarship on the bible, this crisis emerged much later among Latter-day Saints.[59]

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[58] Martin E. Marty, "Two Integrities: An Address to the Crisis in Mormon Historiography," *Journal of Mormon History*, vol. 10, 1983, pp. 3–19, p. 8.

[59] Marty, "Two Integrities: An Address to the Crisis in Mormon Historiography."

Church history among Latter-day Saints is contentious in a manner that is unfamiliar to the experiences of other American Christians.[60] A core belief among Latter-day Saints is that the original Church of Jesus Christ fell into apostasy after the deaths of the apostles, and that it was restored through the prophet Joseph Smith during the early nineteenth century. Smith's acts and sentiments were not only biblically informed but considered by himself a continuation of the bible narrative itself. Because of this, the early saints occupied a sacred history and a sacred geography, and their actions have since received almost canonical status. Because of this, contemporary Latter-day Saints have great reverence for pioneer Latter-day Saints.[61] This is exemplified by the celebration of Pioneer Day on July 24, commemorating the day the pioneers arrived in the Salt Lake Valley in 1847; historical monuments such as the "This is the Place" portraying the pioneers as they first settled; and movies like *Legacy: A Mormon Journey* from 1993 depicting the story of their trek from New York to Utah.[62] The decision to migrate and settle in Salt Lake City was influenced both by the persecution faced by the members and their intention to establish Zion on earth. Throughout its history, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has designated various gathering places where it was believed that the Saints would be exalted in the last days.[63] This journey began in Kirtland, Ohio, moved through Jackson County, Missouri, then Nauvoo, Illinois, and finally to Salt Lake City, Utah. The early movement was intensely focused on this objective of building Zion on earth, and its initial missions also aimed to encourage people to make pilgrimages there.[64] It became, as Mormon Studies scholar Jan Shipps explains, "a journey through the wilderness that recapitulated the Old Testament exodus to the Promised Land."[65] As such, the journey itself became important for the conversion process – "the trek is for making Saints," as the Church's second president Brigham Young (1801–1877) proclaimed.[66]

Due to this reverence, discussing the Church's early nineteenth century history is fraught with risk. Few other Christian denominations have "as much at stake so far as

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60 John G. Turner, "'All the Truth Does not Always Need to be Told'. The LDS Church, Mormon History, and Religious Authority" in Patrick Q. Mason & John G. Turner (eds.) *Out of Obscurity: Mormonism Since 1945*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 320.

61 Jan Shipps, "An Interpretive Framework for Studying the History of Mormonism," in Givens & Philip L. Barlow (eds.) *The Oxford Handbook of Mormonism,* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 7–23.

62 Shipps, "An Interpretive Framework for Studying the History of Mormonism"; Kieth Merrill, dir., *Legacy: A Mormon Journey,* Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1993.

63 Shipps, "An Interpretive Framework for Studying the History of Mormonism."

64 William Mulder, *Homeward to Zion. The Mormon Migration from Scandinavia*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1957.)

65 Shipps, "An Interpretive Framework for Studying the History of Mormonism," p. 17.

66 Shipps, "An Interpretive Framework for Studying the History of Mormonism," p. 18.

'historicness' is concerned as do Mormons" claims Marty.[67] There are several explanations for this beyond the reverence for the pioneers who occupied this early history,[68] however, for example the persecution of the early Saints, including the destruction of the printing press in Independence, Missouri in 1833, which resulted in a protective stance over historical records.[69] From this emerged a culture of defensiveness that has influenced Mormon historiography for decades.[70] For this reason, the Church Historian – a priesthood holder (and therefore male) – has often been appointed based on whether he would portray the history favorably.[71]

By the mid-20th century, however, the Church began to adopt a more open stance towards its history, spurred by figures like Leonard Arrington and the emergence of "New Mormon History."[72] Arrington's tenure as Church Historian marked a significant shift, granting more access to archives and encouraging a more nuanced examination of the Church's past.[73] This period also saw the rise of significant Mormon Feminist scholarship. Pivotal contributions came from Mormon Feminists such as Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, Judith Rasmussen Dushku, and Claudia Bushman. They utilized platforms like the newly founded, peer-reviewed journal *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* and their own publication, *The Exponent II*. Additionally, researchers such as Jill Mulvay Derr, Linda King Newell, Carol Cornwall Madsen, and Lavina Fielding Anderson, who were part of Arrington's History Department, played significant roles.[74]

However, the rise of feminist and scholarly voices within the Church was met with institutional resistance. Apostles like Boyd K. Packer and Ezra Taft Benson voiced concerns about the impacts of historical criticism on faith. In a speech delivered at Brigham Young University in 1977, Benson argued that the person depicting Church history must "be persuaded by God's truth."[75] The "new history" that was beginning to

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67 Marty, "Two Integrities: An Address to the Crisis in Mormon Historiography," p. 8.

68 Turner, "'All the Truth Does not Always Need to be Told'. The LDS Church, Mormon History, and Religious Authority."

69 David J. Whittaker, "Mormon Studies as an Academic Discipline," in Terryl L. Givens & Philip L. Barlow (eds.) *The Oxford Handbook of Mormonism*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 93.

70 Whittaker, "Mormon Studies as an Academic Discipline."

71 Turner, "'All the Truth Does not Always Need to be Told'. The LDS Church, Mormon History, and Religious Authority."

72 Turner, "'All the Truth Does not Always Need to be Told'. The LDS Church, Mormon History, and Religious Authority."; Whittaker, "Mormon Studies as an Academic Discipline."

73 Turner, "'All the Truth Does not Always Need to be Told'. The LDS Church, Mormon History, and Religious Authority."; Whittaker, "Mormon Studies as an Academic Discipline."

74 Brooks, Steenblik & Wheelwright, *Mormon Feminism. Essential Writings*; Claudia L. Bushman, "Mormon Feminism After 1970," in Amy Hoyt & Taylor G. Petrey (eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Mormonism and Gender*, (New York: Routledge 2020), pp. 157–168.

75 Ezra Taft Benson, "God's Hand in Our Nation's History," Brigham Young University, March 28, 1977.

infiltrate the Church, he said, "underplays revelation and God's intervention" and "inordinately humanizes the prophets of God so that their human frailties become more apparent than their spiritual qualities."[76] Not only were the "timeless" truths at stake, but the new history seemed to imply that "the Church ha[d] not been telling the truth."[77] In other words, the critical perspectives on Church history were perceived as undermining not only the sacredness of history but the Church's prophetic authority.[78] These reservations continued into the 1980s where several apostles expressed similar concerns. Packer argued in a speech to Latter-day Saints educators at Brigham Young University that "some things that are true, are not very useful."[79] As a result, the 1980s saw a tightening of control over Church archives and a discouragement of independent scholarly activities, culminating in the institutional reprisals against several prominent feminists and scholars in the early 1990s, an event known as "September Six."[80] This event marked the surveillance, excommunication and firing of Mormon Feminists, and especially scholars and faculty members from Brigham Young University.[81] It followed a warning issued in 1993 by apostle Boyd K. Packer where he recognized intellectuals, feminists, and homosexuals as the three greatest threats to the Church.[82] The fear of institutional reprisals that such events resulted in caused a heavy backlash for the Mormon Feminist movement. Many women who now felt reluctant to speak out discontinued their activism or ceased participating in the Church. Magazines struggled to find editors and feminist retreats and conferences were difficult to gather together.[83] By the late 1990s Latter-day Saint Feminists were either outsourced or being excommunicated. The situation seemed so hopeless that prominent Mormon Feminist Claudia Bushman wondered if the movement would even survive into a new generation.[84]

Despite these challenges, the turn of the millennium brought renewed opportunities for dialogue and reassessment.[85] The Church initiated projects like the Joseph Smith Papers and Gospel Topics which signaled a greater willingness to confront and disclose

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76 Benson, "God's Hand in Our Nation's History."

77 Benson, "God's Hand in Our Nation's History."

78 Turner, "'All the Truth Does not Always Need to be Told'. The LDS Church, Mormon History, and Religious Authority."

79 Boyd K. Packer, "The Mantle Is Far, Far Greater Than the Intellect," *Brigham Young University Studies*, vol. 21, no. 3, 1981, pp. 259–278.

80 Bushman, "Mormon Feminism After 1970."

81 Bushman, "Mormon Feminism After 1970."

82 Bushman, "Mormon Feminism After 1970."

83 Brooks, Steenblik & Wheelwright *Mormon Feminism. Essential Writings*, p. 16.

84 Claudia Bushman in interview with Peggy Fletcher Stack, "Where Have All the Mormon Feminists Gone?" *Salt Lake Tribune,* October 4, 2003.

85 Turner, "'All the Truth Does not Always Need to be Told'. The LDS Church, Mormon History, and Religious Authority."

complex aspects of its history and doctrine. Such changes were partly influenced by the broader availability of information online.[86] Hans Mattsson, previously a part of the Area Authority, explains how his own struggles began when finding out about polygamy through online sources.[87] According to some scholars, members are also leaving due to the doubts caused by such issues. An article from 2012 in the *Salt Lake Tribune* quotes scholar Terryl Givens, who interprets it as a "real crisis" and an "epidemic."[88]

This openness coincided with a resurgence in Mormon Feminist activity, facilitated by the internet and blogs like the *Feminist Mormon Housewives* and *The Exponent II*, which provided new spaces for expression and organization outside traditional Church structures. The evolving landscape of Mormon Feminism shows a community still grappling with the balance between faith and critical engagement, and the personal costs of public activism. As scholars Jessica Finnigan and Nancy Ross articulated it in 2013, there is still a "personal emotional toll associated with visible activism."[89] The truth of this statement would later be demonstrated through the excommunication of Kate Kelly in 2014. Today, Mormon Feminists continue to utilize various media to voice their concerns and advocate change, despite the risks this is associated with.

2.1.2 Recycled Issues

Partly due to backlashes like the "September Six," Mormon Feminists often find themselves repeating the same messages.[90] As theologian Maxine Hanks explains, this recurring issue stems from the inability to sustain a continuous historical tradition, with feminist efforts repeatedly emerging and fading with each new generation.[91] As a result, Mormon Feminists frequently "reinvent the wheel,"[92] preventing progress from being built on past achievements.

One such issue is women's lack of leadership roles. The Church exhibits a conservative stance toward women's roles,[93] especially evident in the exclusion of women from

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86 Turner, "'All the Truth Does not Always Need to be Told'. The LDS Church, Mormon History, and Religious Authority."

87 Turner, "'All the Truth Does not Always Need to be Told'. The LDS Church, Mormon History, and Religious Authority," p. 340.

88 Terryl Givens, quoted in Peggy Fletcher Stack, "Mormons Tackling Tough Questions in Their History," *Salt Lake Tribune,* February 3, 2012.

89 Finnigan & Ross, "I'm a Mormon Feminist: How Social Media Revitalized and Enlarged a Movement," p. 17.

90 Hanks, *Women and Authority: Re-emerging Mormon Feminism*.

91 Hanks, *Women and Authority: Re-emerging Mormon Feminism*.

92 Josephine Donovan, as quoted in Hanks, *Women and Authority: Re-emerging Mormon Feminism*, p. xx.

93 Amy Hoyt, *Agency, Subjectivity and Essentialism within Traditional Religious Cultures: An Ethnographic Study of an American Latter-day Saint Community*, PhD. Diss. Claremont Graduate University, 2007.

priesthood ordination. Leadership within the Church is predominantly male, rooted in the belief in ongoing revelation channeled through a hierarchical structure led by the Church President. The Church President is given to the senior-tenured apostle, which is currently Russel M. Nelson. He is assisted by two counselors, Dallin H. Oaks (first counselor) and Henry B. Eyring (second counselor), and together they constitute The First Presidency. To their aid they also have The Quorum of Twelve Apostles who serve as "special witnesses of Jesus Christ" and oversee the global missionary work of the Church.[94] The Quorum of the Twelve in turn are supported by The Quorum of Seventy. The Seventy are equal in authority to The Twelve but act under the direction of the latter, who alone have the "keys" to proclaim the gospel to others. The Seventy give full-time Church service, and encompass their own Presidency, General Authority, and Quorums. Most of them are based at the headquarters in Salt Lake City, although a few are stationed at other global headquarters. As such, they are an important "link between the local and the central church."[95] Additionally, the Church also has a Presiding Bishopric which consists of a council of three men who are directed by The First Presidency to manage things like humanitarian aid, welfare programs, tithing and fast offerings, physical facilities, and the membership record.[96] These groups, The First Presidency, Quorum of the Twelve, Quorum of the Seventy and the Presiding Bishopric are sometimes referred to as the General Authorities.[97] These leaders are seen as divine mediators whose words hold doctrinal weight.

Women, while active within certain organizations like the Relief Society, Young Women, and Primary,[98] are restricted in their roles, lacking the authority to make financial or doctrinal decisions. This structure underscores a significant gender disparity within the Church's governance. Many scholars argue that early Mormon history was more

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94 "Quorum of the Twelve Apostles," *Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, www.churchofjesuschrist.org/learn/quorum-of-the-twelve-apostles?lang=eng, accessed July 13, 2023.

95 Gregory A. Prince, "Mormon Priesthood and Organization," in Terryl L. Givens & Philip L. Barlow (eds.) *The Oxford Handbook of Mormonism*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 179.

96 "Presiding Bishopric," *Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, www.churchofjesuschrist.org/learn/presiding-bishopric?lang=eng, accessed November 20, 2022.

97 "General Church Leadership," *Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, www.churchofjesuschrist.org/learn/global-leadership-of-the-church?lang=eng, accessed March 12, 2025.

98 "Women in the Church," *Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/gospel-topics/women-in-the-church?lang=eng, accessed November 20, 2022; Primary is an organized program of activities and religious instruction for children between eighteen months and twelve years.

inclusive of women's spiritual roles.[99] A frequent reference is Smith's address to the Relief Society in 1842 – the first women's organization in Church – that "the keys of the kingdom are about to be given to them, that they may be able to detect everything false – as well as to the Elders" and the notes from the meeting saying that "he was going to make of this Society a kingdom of priests as in Enoch's day – as in Paul's day."[100] As for example historian of religion Colleen McDannell acknowledges, some early Latter-day Saints also understood their sister Saints as occupying that role. McDannell references Emmeline Wells who wrote about how her friend Eliza R. Snow "ministered in that Temple in the holy rites that pertain to the house of the Lord as priestess" and how women officiated in the temple "in the character of priestess."[101] The first woman suggested to have received a promise of ordination, historian Claudia Bushman suggests, was the prophet Joseph Smith's first wife Emma Smith who he said in 1830 would be "ordained… to Expound scriptures, and to exhort the Church."[102] These ordinations were, however, never fully realized, and since Smith did not systematize his ideas on women and priesthood, many struggled to comprehend what authority women had been given.[103]

Smith's era, which historian Jonathan Stapley argues was marked by a view of priesthood that included women in spiritual practices and leadership, was a stance that significantly receded after his death.[104] The Relief Society for example, initially a platform for women's leadership, faced discontinuation and saw its role significantly diminished under Brigham Young's leadership (between 1847–1877) following Smith's death. The diminishing of women's authority within the Church, Stapley suggests, can be related to two movements, the *priesthood reforms* and the *correlation.* Stapley describes the former as "a set of progressive reforms designed to increase and improve the religious participation of men and boys in the church" that were initiated by the tenth president of the Church, Joseph Fielding Smith in the beginning of the twentieth century.[105] Through these reforms the priesthood was increasingly promoted as a patriarchal and

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99 Jonathan Stapley, *The Power of Godliness: Mormon Liturgy and Cosmology*, (New York 2018, online edition, Oxford Academic, 2018), doi-org.ezproxy.ub.gu.se/10.1093/oso/9780190844431.001.0001, accessed May 8, 2025.

100 Nauvoo Relief Society, Minutes, April 28, 1842, referenced in Colleen McDannell, *Sister Saints. Mormon Women Since the End of Polygamy*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), p. 10.

101 Emmeline B. Wells, "Pen Sketch of an Illustrious Woman," *Woman's Exponent,* October 15, 1880, p. 74, referenced in McDannell, *Sister Saints. Mormon Women Since the End of Polygamy,* p. 9.

102 Bushman, "Mormon Feminism After 1970," p. 157.

103 Stapley, *The Power of Godliness: Mormon Liturgy and Cosmology*.

104 Stapley, *The Power of Godliness: Mormon Liturgy and Cosmology*.

105 Jonathan Stapley, "Women and Priesthood," in Amy Hoyt & Taylor G. Petrey (eds), *The Routledge Handbook of Mormonism and Gender*, (New York: Routledge, 2020), pp. 569–579, p. 575.

male-exclusive authority. The correlation, in turn, which was a program introduced by the Church during the 1960s and early 1970s to correlate and centralize its message, further amplified earlier changes. A consequence of these reforms was that women's organizations were subsumed under and sometimes replaced by the priesthood offices. This shift, Stapley proposes, marked a transition from a "cosmological" to an "ecclesiastical" understanding of priesthood, where the power of God went from being imbued in all Saints, to increasingly seen as mediated through male-only priesthood lines.[106]

The question of women's ordination and authority continuously evoke debate within the Church. In 1984, Margaret Toscano suggested at a Sunstone Symposium, called "The Missing Rib: The Forgotten Place of Queens and Priestesses in the Establishment of Zion," that Joseph Smith had planned for a female ordination.[107] Michael Quinn echoed these works in his article "Mormon Women Have Held the Priesthood since 1843."[108] Similar sentiments can be found in the contemporary organization that Kate Kelly founded called *Ordain Women*, which proclaims the rights of women to be ordained.[109] As an organization that combines online blogging with public manifestations, they are most known for their recurring demonstration outside the General Conference, a biannual gathering where church leaders meet to share their thoughts on different spiritual topics. That women should hold the priesthood is by no means a uniting argument among Mormon Feminists, however. Some feminists holding more moderate views, such as Neylan McBaine, believe greater gender equality can be achieved without women being ordained.[110]

Another question continuously addressed by Mormon Feminists is Heavenly Mother. The feminine divine in Mormon theology rests on a corporeal understanding of God, contrasting with the immaterial and transcendent deity of classical philosophy and mainstream Christianity.[111] Joseph Smith, the founder of the Church, taught that God has a physical body and was once a man himself, emphasizing a material continuity between humans and the divine.[112] This belief underpins the concept of humans pro-

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106 Stapley, "Women and Priesthood," p. 575.

107 Margaret M. Toscano, "The Missing Rib: The Forgotten Place of Queens and Priestesses in the Establishment of Zion," *Sunstone*, vol. 10, no. 7, 1985, pp. 16–22.

108 Michael Quinn, "Mormon Women Have Had the Priesthood since 1843," in Maxine Hanks, *Women and Authority: Re-emerging Mormon Feminism*, (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1992), p. 365–409.

109 Ordain Women, ordainwomen.org, accessed March 28, 2025.

110 Neylan McBaine, *Women at Church: Magnifying LDS Women's Local Impact*, (Utah: Greg Kofford Books, 2014.)

111 David L. Paulsen and Hal R. Boyd, "The Nature of God in Mormon Thought," in Terryl L. Givens & Philip L. Barlow (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Mormonism*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 246–259.

112 Joseph Smith, *Scriptural Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, Joseph Fielding Smith and Richard C. Galbraith (Eds.), (Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret, 1993), p. 349.

gressing to become like God, encapsulating the Church's teaching that existence is eternal, and that God organized the universe from pre-existing matter and intelligence.[113] The concept of Heavenly Mother is rooted in early Latter-day Saint teachings and was notably articulated through texts like a hymn by William W. Phelps (1792–1872) and a poem by Eliza R. Snow (1804–1887), which conferred canonical status on the idea of divine parenthood.[114] Theologically, this asserts that both Heavenly Father and Heavenly Mother are necessary for the creation of spirit children, emphasizing a partnership that reflects broader teachings on the eternal nature of gender and marriage. Doctrine and Covenants, published first in 1835 and part of the Church's scriptural canon recording Joseph Smith's (and a few other Church prophets') revelations, explicates that both an exalted man and woman – bound in eternal marriage – are necessary for godhood, positioning gender and marital relations as central to divine progression. This covenant not only underscores the sacredness of marriage but also posits it as essential for salvation and exaltation, defining the roles of men and women in both mortal and eternal contexts.[115]

Ideas such as these give value to specific ways of performing gender. Motherhood is therefore an important aspect of Mormon femininities. Mormon Studies scholar Amy Hoyt explains that "bearing and raising children is the most sanctified duty within LDS femininities and is considered a divine calling."[116] In her research on a local Latter-day Saint congregation in Bay Town, Hoyt demonstrates that corporeal acts of parenting – bearing, raising and nurturing children – is "considered transformative to one's interior."[117] Even women who for various reasons do not have children allegedly understand themselves as mothers, because they believe they will have children in their postmortal existence. Hoyt explains that many women feel comfort in knowing that if they live virtuous lives, they will be blessed in the life to come. While lived femininity varies depending on which part of world it is practiced in, the "official LDS feminine subject," which is based on a North American context, is "privileged enough to stay at home and raise children."[118]

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113 *Doctrine and Covenants* 93:33.

114 Fiona Givens, "Feminism and Heavenly Mother," in Amy Hoyt & Taylor G. Petrey (eds.) *The Routledge Handbook of Mormonism and Gender*, (New York: Routledge, 2020), pp. 553–568.

115 Valerie M. Hudson, "Mormon Doctrine on Gender," Terryl L. Givens & Philip L. Barlow (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Mormonism,* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 349–362.

116 Amy Hoyt, "Femininities," in Amy Hoyt & Taylor G. Petrey (eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Mormonism and Gender,* (New York: Routledge, 2020), pp. 50–59, p. 52.

117 Hoyt, *Agency, Subjectivity and Essentialism within Traditional Religious Cultures: An Ethnographic Study of an American Latter-day Saint Community*, p. 158.

118 Hoyt, *Agency, Subjectivity and Essentialism within Traditional Religious Cultures: An Ethnographic Study of an American Latter-day Saint Community*, p. 58.

With this background it is perhaps easy to recognize both the promises and dilemmas of having a feminine divine or Heavenly Mother in terms of female liberation. Apologetically oriented feminists and scholars such as Valerie M. Hudson believe that Heavenly Mother is evidence of how "Mormonism is the most feminist of all the Christianities."[119] Some would agree about the potential of a feminine divine yet argue that Heavenly Mother is shrouded in silence. While she "has achieved acceptance in Mormon theology and culture" Margaret Toscano writes, she "is still marginalized by the LDS Church."[120] Heavenly Mother she concludes is "mostly absent in church worship and everyday orthodox practice and primarily referenced not as an individual deity but as one of the heavenly parents."[121] Among those resisting this silence there are several perspectives. One type of resistance laments over Heavenly Mother's "maternal absence" where Mormon Feminists occupy the role of "traumatized" child.[122] As Carol Lynn Pearson exclaims in her one-woman play *Mother Wove the Morning*, "Where is my mother? Did she abandon us on the doorstep without even a note?"[123] A more contemporary example of this can be found in the poems of Rachel Hunt Steenblik in *Mother's Milk: Poems in Search of Heavenly Mother,* who similarly refers to her relationship with Heavenly Mother through the perspective of a child with "separation anxiety."[124] But for others, she has meant a solidification rather than challenge to gender inequity.[125] Mormon Studies scholar Taylor Petrey writing in his capacity as theologian argues that even Mormon Feminists' depictions of Heavenly Mother reproduce essentialist understandings of gender. The revaluation of both male and female gods typically couches binaries between masculinity and femininity and in extension activity/passivity, thus reinforcing a gender dualism where men occupy the role of spiritual instigator and women the role of mothers and nurturers. In Petrey's words, for apologetical feminists it is not derogatory to identify "women with the womb" but rather a celebration that "allows one to value women and the maternal body together."[126] He believes, however, that the "monogamous heterosexual relationship" that the godhead is described as constituting, renders

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119 Hudson, "Mormon Doctrine on Gender."

120 Margaret M. Toscano, "In Defense of Heavenly Mother: Her Critical Importance for Mormon Culture and Theology," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, vol. 55, no. 1, 2022, pp. 37–68, p. 37.

121 M. Toscano, "In Defense of Heavenly Mother: Her Critical Importance for Mormon Culture and Theology," p. 37

122 Taylor G. Petrey, "Rethinking Mormonism's Heavenly Mother," *Harvard Theological Review*, vol. 109, no. 3, 2016, pp. 315–341.

123 Carol Lynn Pearson, "Mother Wove the Morning," 1995.

124 Rachel Hunt Steenblik, *Mother's Milk. Poems in Search of Heavenly Mother*, (By Common Consent Press, 2017), p. 12.

125 Melodie Moench Charles, "The Need for a New Mormon Heaven," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought,* vol. 21, no. 3, 1988.

126 Petrey, "Rethinking Mormonism's Heavenly Mother," p. 326.

"single women, lesbians, intersex, and transsexual persons" as exceptions, consequently dismissing and dehumanizing them.[127]

A third issue, considered by many Mormon Feminists a particularly troublesome one,[128] is polygamy.[129] A 2012 Salt Lake Tribune article emphasized how modern access to information has propelled Church members to confront uncomfortable historical truths, particularly the practice of polygamy by Joseph Smith, who was reported to have had up to forty wives, including a 14-year-old.[130] While Smith is believed to have married other women before that, the first official plural marriages were officiated in in 1841 in Nauvoo, Illinois, and were tied to theological and ritual developments such as sealings, where members' earthly kinship was tied together in what were believed to be everlasting bonds.[131] Joseph Smith's revelation on eternal marriage, officially recorded in 1843, was initially practiced discreetly but became a public doctrine and a central theological pillar once the Mormons had settled in Utah under Brigham Young's leadership in 1852.[132] This period marked a significant expansion of the practice, which was not only theological but also social, intertwining with the broader fabric of Latter-day Saint community life.

The relationship between polygamy and women's rights within the Church has been complex. In the 19th century, Utah was at the forefront of women's suffrage in the United States, with Mormon women actively participating in the suffragette movement.[133] Surprisingly to many, these women used their newfound electoral power to defend polygamy, a practice they were deeply entrenched in, both culturally and spiritually. Publications like *The Woman's Exponent* provided a platform for these women to voice their unique perspective, arguing vehemently for their way of life against widespread national criticism.[134]

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127 Petrey, "Rethinking Mormonism's Heavenly Mother," p. 327.

128 Lindsay Hansen Park, "P-p-p-polygamy Mega Post!," *Feminist Mormon Housewives,* February 2, 2012, www.feministmormonhousewives.org/2012/02/p-p-p-polygamy-mega-post/, accessed May 12, 2024.

129 In this dissertation, I employ the term "polygamy" to align with the prevailing scholarly discourse, although "polygyny" would be a more precise descriptor since the marriages in question typically involved one man and multiple women.

130 Peggy Fletcher Stack, "Mormons Tackling Tough Questions in Their History," *The Salt Lake Tribune,* February 3, 2012.

131 Benjamin E. Park, "Joseph Smith, Plural Marriage, and Kinship," in Amy Hoyt & Taylor G. Petrey (eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Mormonism and Gender*, (New York: Routledge, 2020), pp. 75–85; Stapley, *The Power of Godliness: Mormon Liturgy and Cosmology*.

132 E. Park, "Joseph Smith, Plural Marriage, and Kinship."

133 Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, "Mormon Gender in the Age of Polygamy," in Amy Hoyt & Taylor G. Petrey (eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Mormonism and Gender*, (London: Routledge, 2020), pp. 86–99.

134 Petrey, "Rethinking Mormonism's Heavenly Mother."

That members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints practiced polygamy officially from the 1850s, however, troubled their relationship to the state. The US government, labeling polygamy as a "barbaric" practice,[135] began a long and painful anti-polygamy campaign, with legislation specifically targeting the practice starting in the early 1860s.[136] Considering it a religious principle that should be protected under the Constitution, the Church took their case to the Supreme Court.[137] Despite being ruled against, Church members continued to live in polygamy, which caused the government to pass several laws aimed specifically at Mormons. In 1882, the Edmunds Act was passed, which prohibited men from cohabiting with more than one wife. And in 1887 the Edmunds-Tucker Act dissolved the Church as a legal entity, which meant that parts of the Church's property were seized.[138] Because of their "civil disobedience," as the Church describes it, the practice was not sustainable in the long run, and after two decades they started looking for solutions.[139] Some, for example, moved to Canada and Mexico and continued to live in polygamy.[140] But when the US court confirmed in 1890 that the Edmund-Tucker Act was under the protection of the Constitution and it was viewed as an approval to continue confiscating Church property, church leaders decided to discontinue the practice.[141] That same year, Church President Wilford Woodruff (1807–1898) therefore wrote an official announcement that since Congress prohibited polygamy, he and his members intended to submit to those laws. While plural marriage was officially discontinued in 1890 it continued surreptitiously well into the twentieth century,[142] and lives on today primarily among fundamentalist Mormons.[143] One group in particular, that we will return to later, is the Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, which has received a lot of media attention due to the criminal activities of their leader Warren Jeffs (1955–).

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135 In 1856 the Republican Party referred to polygamy along with slavery as "the twin relic of barbarism," see Sarah Barringer Gordon, *The Mormon Question: Polygamy and Constitutional Conflict in Nineteenth-Century America*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), p. 55.

136 Gordon, *The Mormon Question: Polygamy and Constitutional Conflict in Nineteenth-Century America.*

137 Gordon, *The Mormon Question: Polygamy and Constitutional Conflict in Nineteenth-Century America.*

138 Shipps, "An Interpretive Framework for Studying the History of Mormonism."

139 Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, "The Manifesto and the End of Plural Marriage," Gospel Topics, www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/gospel-topics-essays/the-manifesto-and-the-end-of-plural-marriage?lang=eng, accessed November 25, 2024.

140 Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, "The Manifesto and the End of Plural Marriage."

141 Gordon, *The Mormon Question: Polygamy and Constitutional Conflict in Nineteenth-Century America.*

142 Gordon, *The Mormon Question: Polygamy and Constitutional Conflict in Nineteenth-Century America*; Cristina M. Rosetti, Joseph White Musser. *A Mormon Fundamentalist*, (Illinoi: University of Illinoi Press, 2024.)

143 E. Park, "Joseph Smith, Plural Marriage, and Kinship."

Despite ending the practice, there are theological residues left within The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.[144] In 1878 Joseph Smith's 1843 revelation of plural marriage was canonized in one of the Church's scriptures, Doctrine and Covenants where Smith's other revelations were recorded. Besides the fact that the revelation is still part of the Church's scripture, sealing practices also enable a man to be sealed to more than one wife if his first wife passes away or divorces him. Thus "while polygamy *during life* is still forbidden" historian Benjamin E. Park explains, "a version of Smith's eternal polygamy remains fully in force."[145] Smith's notion described earlier of humans being destined to become gods was also entwined with the practice of plural marriage. His ideas included, as Park explains, "not only receiving a body that could be resurrected and sanctified but also, according to his closest interpreters, uniting with plural wives who would reign over new worlds and populations."[146] Those who had learnt of the doctrine from the prophet himself, furthermore, suggested that patriarchs would create spirit children with their plural wives to occupy those worlds. Such abstract ideas, Park suggests "have substantial implications for how Mormon women view their own activities in the afterlife" – will they be "co-rulers" or "expected to serve as mothers and birth billions of spirits, along with a myriad of other wives" in a world where their husbands are rulers?[147] This is the "ghost of eternal polygamy" as Mormon Feminist Carol Lynn Pearson expresses it, "haunting the hearts and heaven of Mormon women and men."[148]

Mormon Feminists manage this issue differently. For some feminists active during the 1970s, such as Judith Dushku (1942–), the practice of plural marriage has been approached as an important part of their pro-suffrage foremothers – while the nation viewed them as suppressed, they fought openly for their rights to practice their religion.[149] Yet, it is becoming widely recognized today that such public rebuttals of anti-polygamy legislatives were coupled with private writings where women on the contrary expressed their grief.[150] While plural wife Mary Lois Walker Morris (1835–1919) for example sacralized the principle "by linking it with Christ's ultimate act of love and submission to

144 E. Park, "Joseph Smith, Plural Marriage, and Kinship."
145 E. Park, "Joseph Smith, Plural Marriage, and Kinship," p. 83.
146 E. Park, "Joseph Smith, Plural Marriage, and Kinship," p. 83.
147 E. Park, "Joseph Smith, Plural Marriage, and Kinship," p. 83–84.
148 Carol Lynn Pearson, *The Ghost of Polygamy. Haunting the Hearts and Heavens of Mormon Women and Men*, (Cornwall: Pivot Point Books, 2016.)
149 Judith Rasmussen Dushku, "Feminists" in Claudia Bushman (ed.) *Mormon Sisters: Women in Early Utah,* Utah State University Press, 1976.)
150 Paula Kelly Harline, *The Polygamous Wives Writing Club: From the Diaries of Mormon Pioneer Women*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014.)

God's will" her private journal also described her "abhorrence of plural marriage."[151] This has led some to simply consider the practice a sad mistake, hoping that the Church will one day disavow and condemn the principle entirely.[152]

2.2 Previous Research

This dissertation seeks to contribute to the research field of Digital Religion, which as Heidi Campbell explains, investigates how "digital media are used by religious groups and users to translate religious practices and beliefs into new contexts, as well as the reimagining of religion offered by unique affordances within these new mediums and spaces."[153] While there are several themes of interests in this field, the purpose here is not to provide an exhaustive review of them but to discuss those of relevance to this study. Three areas of more immediate importance will be introduced in this subchapter, (1) Mormonism, digital media and gender, (2) digital media and women's agency and (3) podcast studies. As a bridge toward the next chapter's theoretical framework I will also reflect on a few more general theoretical premises within the field that they belong to. Finally, I will conclude with a summary of gaps and how this dissertation aims to meet them.

2.2.1 Mormonism, Media, and Gender

The research field of Mormon Media Studies is a subfield under Mormon Studies and Media and Religion that has emerged only recently. This scholarship has in large parts focused on mass media or popular culture and the representation of Mormons therein.[154] My research relates more specifically to a small subfield that borders to Digital Religion and focuses on digital media and Latter-day Saint women. In "Blogging the Boundaries. Mormon Mommy Blogs and the Construction of Mormon Identity," Kristine Haglund has for example researched how conservative Latter-day Saint mommy bloggers construct their identity online. She argued that Mormonism has an "ideological flexibility" that has "helped it to thrive,"[155] and that this creates an ability for mommy bloggers to

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151 Harline, *The Polygamous Wives Writing Club: From the Diaries of Mormon Pioneer Women*.

152 Pearson, *The Ghost of Polygamy. Haunting the Hearts and Heavens of Mormon Women and Men*.

153 Heidi Campbell, "Surveying Theoretical Approaches within Digital Religion Studies," *New Media & Society*, vol. 19, no. 1, pp. 15–24, 2017, p. 17.

154 See for example Brenda R. Weber, *Latter-day Screens: Gender, Sexuality, and Mediated Mormonism*, (London: Duke University Press, 2019).

155 Haglund Kristine, "Blogging the Boundaries. Mormon Mommy Blogs and the Construction of Mormon Identity," in Patrich Q. Mason & John G. Turner (eds.), *Out of Obscurity: Mormonism since 1945*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 234–256, p. 241.

write their religion in a manner which is subtle and seamless. There is also a certain ubiquity to their writing where one only after longer scrolls starts to notice "certain 'tells'" of their Mormon identity.[156] Haglund interpreted this as a form of "theological play" and a "sacralization of the material world and quotidian life" that is enabled by the Latter-day Saint belief in continuous revelation, open canon and personal revelation.[157] Being "heavily socialized to avoid contention" however, Latter-day Saint women feel uneasy about expressing themselves online, which results in an "oblique communication style."[158] This cautious approach was highlighted when one blogger was criticized by a fellow Church member for claiming unauthorized authority on the subject. The blogger responded not with defense of her topic, but with discomfort about being at odds with another Church member, acknowledging that she should not be writing about the Church as if she held any authoritative position.[159] Thus, while allowing mommy bloggers avenues for theological play, blogging also situates them in the limelight, exposing them to readers' critical scrutiny.

Another scholar who has written on a subject related to Mormon mommy bloggers is Deborah Whitehead. "When Religious Mommy Bloggers Met Mommy Porn: Evangelical Christian and Mormon Women's Responses to Fifty Shades" is an exploration of how Latter-day Saint women and evangelical Christian women used their blogs to discuss E. L. Jame's best seller *Fifty Shades of Grey*. Although the book, for many Latter-day Saint women "is off limits because it violates church teaching" and especially proscriptions within the Law of Chasity, several of them also reported positively on the book.[160] For example, they discussed the positive effects on their libido and how the book initiated a dialogue about intimate topics, which are often absent in their offline interactions. One woman commenting on the blog post, shared that as a Latter-day Saint girl, she was discouraged from exploring sexual topics. She noted that her Latter-day Saint friends rarely engaged in open discussions about sex. She questioned where she could turn to understand her "sexual potential," [161] and although it was not the only

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156 Haglund, "Blogging the Boundaries. Mormon Mommy Blogs and the Construction of Mormon Identity," p. 240.

157 Haglund, "Blogging the Boundaries. Mormon Mommy Blogs and the Construction of Mormon Identity," p. 243.

158 Haglund, "Blogging the Boundaries. Mormon Mommy Blogs and the Construction of Mormon Identity," p. 245.

159 Haglund, "Blogging the Boundaries. Mormon Mommy Blogs and the Construction of Mormon Identity," p. 245–246.

160 Deborah Whitehead, "When Religious Mommy Bloggers Met Mommy Porn: Evangelical Christian and Mormon Women's Responses to Fifty Shades," *Sexualities*, vol. 16, no. 8, 2013, pp. 915–931, p. 924.

161 Whitehead, "When Religious Mommy Bloggers Met Mommy Porn: Evangelical Christian and Mormon Women's Responses to Fifty Shades," p. 925.

solution, she found reading an erotic book helpful. The article highlights a broader issue: Latter-day Saint women often lack platforms to discuss sexuality, a gap that some have filled by joining a book club that read *Fifty Shades of Grey*.

There are few scholars who have written about contemporary Mormon Feminism. Jessica Finnigan's and Nancy Ross's article "I'm a Mormon Feminist: How Social Media Revitalized and Enlarged a Movement," from 2013 constitutes the "first academic survey of online Mormon Feminists."[162] Based on a combination of qualitative and quantitative measures, the article describes the demographics and actions of online Mormon Feminism. Based on 1, 864 responses, the survey answers questions about "identity, religiosity, activist participation, and reactions to Mormon Feminist activism."[163] It shows for example that Mormon Feminists are not exclusively female, but that 19 percent are men, and that 91 percent identify as white/Caucasian. A recurring "emotion" surrounding their activism was fear – "fear that if they express their feminist views, they will be ostracized by family members, church leaders, and friends."[164] The findings reveal that social media platforms have played a crucial role in connecting isolated individuals, fostering a community that supports and sustains feminist activism within a religious framework. This community not only debates and discusses issues but also mobilizes around specific campaigns, such as "Wear Pants to Church Day" and "Let Women Pray."[165] The authors concluded that the digital engagement has not only sustained but also expanded the Mormon Feminist movement, enabling participants to challenge traditional gender roles while remaining within the religious community. Furthermore, they found that while blog topics follow "a form of cyclical pattern" where they "revisit particular issues," a comparison between earlier blogposts and later ones shows that "the conversations surrounding the topics have evolved significantly."[166] In other words, blogging allows for the well-known problem of "generational loss of continuity" mentioned earlier,[167] where the same issues are re-hashed again and again,[168] to be at least partially resisted.

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162 Finnigan & Ross, "I'm a Mormon Feminist: How Social Media Revitalized and Enlarged a Movement," p. 2.

163 Finnigan & Ross, "I'm a Mormon Feminist: How Social Media Revitalized and Enlarged a Movement," p. 7.

164 Finnigan & Ross, "I'm a Mormon Feminist: How Social Media Revitalized and Enlarged a Movement," p. 9.

165 Finnigan & Ross, "I'm a Mormon Feminist: How Social Media Revitalized and Enlarged a Movement," p. 14, 15.

166 Finnigan & Ross, "I'm a Mormon Feminist: How Social Media Revitalized and Enlarged a Movement," p. 19.

167 Gavin Feller, *Eternity in the Ether. A Mormon Media History*, (University of Illinoi Press, 2023), p. 118.

168 Hanks, *Women and Authority: Re-emerging Mormon Feminism.*

Also focusing on textual media, Gavin Feller analyzed a blog post called "A Moderate Mormon Manifesto," written by Neylan McBaine who is a vocal advocate for moderate feminist perspectives within the Church. The Manifesto was originally published as a guest post on *Feminist Mormon Housewives* and – according to its founder Lisa Butterworth – was the blog's fourth most popular post in 2013. The paper scrutinizes how McBaine effectively navigates the contentious arena of religious feminism by utilizing "strategic ambiguity" and separating Church doctrine from cultural practices,[169] thus advocating for a nuanced middle path that could foster incremental but meaningful change within the Church. For example, while Church doctrine postulates that a male bishop – on account of his priesthood – should preside over a local congregation, McBaine points out that there are cultural practices separated from this which cause men to speak more often than women in worship meetings. It is by this separation of doctrine and culture that McBaine wants to "reinscribe divine gender differences and argue against female ordination" yet "challenge specific cultural practices, such as unfair budgetary differences between male and female Church youth groups."[170] Feller also explores what the blog as a medium provides, for example finding that it allowed McBaine to reach a much vaster audience than otherwise possible. "The algorithmic nature of Internet search" furthermore, "ensures that the Manifesto will circulate more to relevant readers than to unintentional searchers."[171] In addition, internet allowed McBaine to use hyperlinks to her other work in order to enhance her credibility as an experienced and respected activist and to show that the Manifesto was "not her first rodeo."[172] In the links one can find both writings on similar themes as the Manifesto, as well as references to her professional work for the Church, such as the "I'm a Mormon" campaign, hence producing an image of authenticity and legitimacy that allows the manifesto to be effective. Importantly, Feller adds that this ability "revives elements of a historical print media tradition" where Latter-day Saint Feminists wrote their own journals, and which "gradually (though not entirely) dissolved through LDS Church correlation efforts throughout the second half of the 20th century."[173]

Feller has also in later work on the Church's media history addressed the pre-world-wide-web internet. In *Eternity in the Ether. A Mormon Media History,* he described the 1990s mailing lists among Mormon Feminists, driven by individuals such as Lynn Matthews Anderson. Through interviews with its users, he concluded that the mailing list

169 Feller, "A Moderate Manifesto: Mormon Feminism, Agency and Internet Blogging," p. 157.
170 Feller, "A Moderate Manifesto: Mormon Feminism, Agency, and Internet Blogging," p. 162.
171 Feller, "A Moderate Manifesto: Mormon Feminism, Agency, and Internet Blogging," p. 164.
172 Feller, "A Moderate Manifesto: Mormon Feminism, Agency, and Internet Blogging," p. 164.
173 Feller, "A Moderate Manifesto: Mormon Feminism, Agency, and Internet Blogging," p. 164.

was perceived as a "validating experience" that made Latter-day Saint women feel less "alone."[174] He quoted Anderson saying that the mailing list was like a "virtual ward" which reproduced "what goes on in the hallways [of Church]" – they could engage in both "doctrinal discussions" and "fluff."[175] Anderson also attributed "coping" characteristics to the mailing list.[176] The mailing list as Feller described it "aimed to help its participants deal with the pain, anger, and alienation many Mormon women experienced as active members of a patriarchal institution," thus enabling some to stay in Church "at least for a season."[177]

The article "Digital Discussions among Women Members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints: Vulnerability in Private Facebook Groups Grounded in Motherhood" by Alexis Romero Walker explores how Latter-day Saint women utilize private Facebook groups to discuss their lives and challenges, especially around themes of religion, motherhood, and identity. The study is based on a qualitative observation of a Facebook group with around 15,000 Latter-day Saint mothers, focusing on how these women navigate their identities through discussions about Church doctrine, politics, and gender roles. Key findings suggest that these digital spaces provide a sanctuary for expressing vulnerability about spiritual, political and gender issues, often revolving around personal and controversial topics that might be uncomfortable or unsafe to discuss in more public or real-life settings. The group serves as a space for women to reinforce or question their beliefs, share experiences, and seek advice on sensitive issues like marital roles, child-rearing, and professional challenges. Romero Walker infers that private Facebook groups may "act as more of a safety ground than their personal meeting houses or their public forms of social media," and therefore "act as a safe-space for many of these women."[178] Nuancing these findings, she also notes that while these groups offer a supportive environment they also become arenas for conflict when discussions touch on doctrinal disagreements, feminist ideologies, and the Church's cultural expectations.[179]

In the article "Outcast Women: Gender and Authenticity in Ex-Mormon Women's Disaffiliation Narratives," Bethany Gull, Jesse Smith, and Ryan Cragun explore the gender-specific factors influencing religious disaffiliation among women formerly affi-

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174 Feller, *Eternity in the Ether. A Mormon Media History,* p. 118.
175 Feller, *Eternity in the Ether. A Mormon Media History,* p. 118.
176 Feller, *Eternity in the Ether. A Mormon Media History,* p. 118.
177 Feller, *Eternity in the Ether. A Mormon Media History,* p. 118.
178 Romero Walker, "Digital Discussions among Women Members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Vulnerability in Private Facebook Groups Grounded in Motherhood," p. 200.
179 Romero Walker, "Digital Discussions among Women Members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Vulnerability in Private Facebook Groups Grounded in Motherhood," p. 194–196.

liated with the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Utilizing a qualitative methodology, the authors conducted twenty semi-structured interviews with members of a women-only Facebook group, Outcast Women, which supports women transitioning away from the Church. The study reveals that gender plays a critical role in why they disaffiliate, with many women citing gender-related grievances, including the Church's stance on polygamy and its patriarchal structure, as key reasons for their departure. Authenticity emerges as a central theme in the women's narratives, with participants striving for alignment between their internal beliefs and external actions. The process of leaving the Church is often described as a journey toward a more authentic self, free from the constraints imposed by the Church's gendered expectations. However, the study also finds that gender plays an important role in the disaffiliation process itself, where some ex-Mormon spaces are considered equally "patriarchal."[180] Even after their departure from the Church, participants of the Outcast Women group reported ongoing challenges in interactions with male ex-members of the Church. Many participants were also members of other mixed-gender Facebook groups aimed at supporting individuals disaffiliating from the Church, where they continued to encounter patriarchal dynamics reminiscent of those within the Church. These accounts underscore the persistence of ingrained gender-related beliefs and practices even after disaffiliating from a patriarchal religious context.

While not oriented toward digital media, relevant for this project is "Mormonism's First Bad Girl: Lucy Harris and the Gendering of Faith and Doubt," by Newell D. Quincy and Sara M. Patterson. They argue that the discourse on doubt within the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints – which as we will see later is of central importance for podcasting Mormon Feminists – has deep historical and gendered roots, and more specifically that doubt has been traditionally framed as a manifestation of undesirable femininity. They illustrate this through the example of Lucy Harris, who expressed skepticism towards her husband Martin Harris's involvement with Joseph Smith and consequently, the authenticity of the Book of Mormon. Despite a visionary experience purportedly affirming the divine nature of the golden plates, Lucy persisted in her demands for physical proof, actions that led to the loss of the manuscript's first 116 pages. Throughout Mormon pedagogy, Lucy Harris is continually cited as a negative model for feminine conduct. This is evidenced in historical lessons and children's books, which contrast her unfavorably with figures like Emma Smith, who is depicted as a compliant and unquestioning wife. Such portrayals reinforce a dichotomy where certainty in religious conviction aligns with ideal femininity, while skepticism or demands for

[180] Bethany Gull, Jesse Smith, & Ryan Cragun, "Outcast Women: Gender and Authenticity in Ex-Mormon Women's Disaffiliation Narratives," *Nova Religio,* vol. 26, no. 3, 2023, pp. 7–29, p. 17.

evidence are disparaged as traits of the "bad girl." Quincy and Patterson conclude that Lucy Harris's legacy serves as a cautionary tale within the Mormon community about the perils of doubt and the breach of prescribed gender roles.

Although not explicitly about Mormon Feminists, Rosemary Avance's article, "Seeing the Light: Mormon Conversion and Deconversion Narratives in Off- and Online Worlds," should also be mentioned, as it explores heterodox and questioning Latter-day Saints and describes tendencies among them that will reappear among podcasting Mormon Feminists. The article looks at how the internet influences and shapes religious identity among members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Utilizing both in-depth interviews, and participant observations on two online message boards, Avance delved into the narratives of heterodox, questioning, and former Mormons within online forums, comparing these with the testimonies of faithful Mormons. In her analysis, she identifies narrative structures that both groups use to legitimate their belonging and to delineate the boundaries of their respective communities. These Narratives typically follow a Latter-day Saint "conversion" or "revelation" pattern where individuals recount transformative experiences leading to new understandings and affiliations. In other words, former Latter-day Saints follow the same narrative structure as faithful Latter-day Saints. As Avance articulated it, "they imagine a worldview predicated on logic and rationality rather than emotion and faith yet discursively mirror the experience they denounce."[181]

2.2.1.1 Discussion and Contribution: Theorizing Media and Exploring New Media Venues

This dissertation is indebted to the previous research described above and especially its contextual sensitivity – i.e. its recognition of how media content relates to the specific environment and tradition of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. While not stating so explicitly, Haglund's research captures a sort of dual precariousness in the writings of mommy bloggers – they are both conditioned by a tradition of "oblique communication style" fostered through their culture, and by the interactive features of blogging, where followers can add to that obliqueness by criticizing and demanding bloggers to not be so assertive. As I will return to later, this type of contextual recognition could be placed in relation to what some view as a more critical and nuanced theme of research on women, agency and media, where media are not only positive and empowering but also filled with challenges.[182] Feller's work similarly shows how blogging enabled McBaine to step forward as an experienced opinionmaker, thereby reviving

[181] Rosemary Avance, "Seeing the Light: Mormon Conversion and Deconversion Narratives in Off- and Online Worlds," *Journal of Media and Religion*, vol. 12, no. 1, 2013, pp. 16–24, p. 23.

[182] Lövheim, "Gender and Agency in Digital Religion."

a long tradition of public writing among Latter-day Saint women. The research of Ross and Finnigan also mentions in passing that the content of Latter-day Saint Feminists' discussions has "evolved" rather than just been recycled in the same manner as before, which implies that something about blogging enables that to occur. Thus, some attention is given to the significance of the medium and its interaction with Latter-day Saint women's specific religious milieu and history.

Based on the present state of this research, I am, however, left wondering about two things. First, what blogging entails in terms of Latter-day Saint women's performances besides anonymity, hyperlinks and comment sections. Previous research focuses much on textual media yet does not delve into what writing as a medium signifies or in extension make distinctions between genres. In the blogging community they reference there are multiple genres at play, such as various forms of life writing. Whether one writes a manifesto or engages in life writing, I suggest, matters for the content of Mormon Feminism. The tendency to neglect how media format conditions content is not unique to scholars studying Latter-day Saints but is an issue I will engage with critically throughout my discussion of previous research. In 2003, previous research on Mormonism and media was described by Sherry Baker and Daniel A. Stout as predominantly focused on the message. In addition, previous research was also "a-theoretical," meaning they had not provided theoretical explanations for their findings.[183] A few scholars have since attempted to fill that gap, and endeavors have been made to introduce media theory to the field.[184] A similar motion would be beneficial to the subfield described above.

Second, given that all examples are a few years old and focus on textual media, it leaves the significance of other media to our imagination. If we return to the historical and thematic background earlier – where certain issues were recycled again and again – and if we place that in relation to what Finnigan and Ross mentioned about blogging enabling Latter-day Saint Feminists to "evolve" on said issues, we could for example ask whether these new media venues and their expressive potential not only evolve previous issues but bring new ones to the surface. My study builds upon this foundation by delving into how podcasting, as a dynamic and interactive medium, not only carries forward the evolutionary trajectory of feminist discourse within Latter-day Saint communities but potentially allows the emergence of new perspectives.

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183 Sherry Baker & Daniel Stout, "Mormons and the Media, 1898–2003: A Selected, Annotated, and Indexed Bibliography (with Suggestions for Future Research," *Brigham Young University Studies*, vol. 42, no. 3/4, 2003, pp. 124–181, p. 133.

184 See for example Feller, *Eternity in the Ether: A Mormon Media History*; John Durham Peters, "Mormonism and Media" in Terryl Givens & Philip L. Barlow (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Mormonism,* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 407–422.

2.2.2 Digital Religion, Women and Agency

Another subject of interests in the field of Digital Religion is research on women's agency.[185] As Mia Lövheim suggests, this research can be divided into three themes, "personal voice and connected public," "negotiating tensions, merging social spheres," and "handling complexities and new challenges."[186] In the following text, I will draw and elaborate on Lövheim's themes.

"Personal Voice and Connected Public" is a type of research that examines how digital media empower women by allowing them to express their religious experiences and interpretations of religious texts on a personal level while also linking their individual perspectives to a broader audience through interactions with readers and followers. The work of Feller on Neylan McBaine mentioned earlier, is referenced as an example of this theme. Another case mentioned is the research of Anna Piela which highlights how Muslim women use online, women-only, English-speaking newsgroups to discuss and apply Islamic teachings to their everyday lives.[187] Through a content analysis of online archival discussions, she showed that such forums provide a space for addressing sensitive issues that may be difficult to voice in mixed-gender settings. She further argued that participation in these online groups not only helps Muslim women engage in collaborative Islamic interpretation but also exposes them to a wide range of perspectives on Islam and gender. This interaction fosters the development of their Islamic knowledge and enhances their ability to argue within their tradition. Similarly, Meri-Anna Elina Hintsala finds that both men and women in the conservative Finnish Laestadian movement use digital media to express emotions like doubt, anxiety, and weariness regarding strict community rules, such as the prohibition on contraceptives – topics they find challenging to discuss within their families or congregations.[188]

"Negotiating Tensions, Merging Social Spheres" explores how women leverage digital media applications and devices to navigate the tensions between traditional religious gender norms in their communities and the broader societal ideals of gender equality and women's independence. Such studies, Lövheim explains, "bring out how women in and through digital media construct new religious subjectivities."[189] Here we find for example Whitehead's study on evangelical and Latter-day Saint mommy bloggers' dis-

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185 Lövheim, "Gender and Agency in Digital Religion."

186 Lövheim, "Gender and Agency in Digital Religion," p. 240.

187 Anna Piela, "Claiming Religious Authority: Muslim Women and New Media," in Mia Lövheim (ed.) *Media, Religion and Gender: Key Issues and New Challenges*, (New York: Routledge, 2013), p. 125–140.

188 Meri-Anna Elina Hintsala, "Weary and Grateful: The Power of Expressed Emotions on the Internet Among Conservative Laestadians," *Journal of Digital Culture*, vol. 5, no. 2, 2016, pp. 356–375.

189 Lövheim, "Gender and Agency in Digital Religion."

cussion of *Fifty Shades of Grey*, explored earlier. Another example Lövheim identifies with this theme is Rivka Neriya-Ben Shahar and Azi Lev-On's research on ultra-orthodox Jewish women's use of and attitudes to computerized environments in Israel.[190] Because many women perceive internet as a threat to their religious lifestyle but must nonetheless use it both in private and public due to the demands of modern society, they engage in a complex process of negotiation. Such processes include the strategy of only using internet in workplaces or using a filtering technology to make internet kosher.

The third theme, "Handling Complexities and New Challenges," explores how digital technology can both empower and limit women's agency, introducing new challenges and complexities. Lövheim uses her own previous research on Swedish women's blogs as an example. In "Young Women's Blogs as Ethical Spaces," she explores the content of blogs written by young Swedish women in 2009. By drawing on strategies such as creating invitations for readers to respond to certain issues, provoking discussions by making statements or by sharing personal experiences, these bloggers create "ethical spaces."[191] Central to this concept is how bloggers, in interaction with their readers, "make their personal experiences and opinions into objects for reflections on ethical issues concerning the values and norms forming young women's lives."[192] The topics through which values and norms are negotiated are often linked to traditionally feminine themes such as love and relationships, self-confidence and body ideals. While rooted in personal experiences, these narratives invite collective reflections on ethical and social issues which resonate with wider issues like gender and body ideals. The study draws on and contributes to theoretical perspectives on "counter public" by showing how blogs represent a novel way to engage in public discourse, not characterized by traditional political discourse but by the negotiation of personal and ethical issues in a highly visible and interactive manner.[193] Lövheim described this work as "reveal[ing] how blogs can simultaneously enable and challenge women's agency and authority," adding that "as this new form of agency is constructed in conjunction with readers, it demands constant work to negotiate sometimes contradicting ideals and norms among a variety of readers."[194]

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190 Rivka Neriya-Ben Shahar & Azi Lev-On, "Gender, Religion and New Media: Attitudes and Behaviors Related to the Internet among Ultra-Orthodox Women Employed in Computerized Environments," *International Journal of Communication*, vol. 5, no. 1, 2022, pp. 875–895.

191 Mia Lövheim, "Young Women's Blogs as Ethical Spaces," *Information, Communication & Society*, vol. 14, no. 3, 2011, pp. 338–354, p. 348–349.

192 Lövheim, "Young Women's Blogs as Ethical Spaces," p. 348.

193 Lövheim, "Young Women's Blogs as Ethical Spaces," p. 350.

194 Lövheim, "Gender and Agency in Digital Religion," p. 234.

This complexity of dealing with responses from followers and readers is perhaps even more distinct in Evelina Lundmark's study on Atheist American women on YouTube. She suggests that the self-performances of atheist vloggers on YouTube are a "product of a relational performance, and…co-effected by technological, social, affective and emotional dimensions, situated in specific context, and coming into being in and with the medium itself."[195] Lundmark draws, she explains, on a performativity perspective that in "emphasizing relationality…contend[s] that agency and structure co-constitute each other in emergence."[196] Lundmark shows both the precariousness of being visible in a space that blurs private and public as well as the possibilities of it by "challeng-[ing] notions of what can and should be said in public."[197] It depathologizes the visibility of atheism but simultaneously subjects vlogger's confidence in building such a visibility or public, to other online participants who frequently criticize and troll them for coming out as non-religious.

In an article called "Gender, Religion and Authority in Digital Media," Lövheim and Lundmark compare their previous research findings to explore their significance for women's authority online. They suggest that women's authority online expresses itself as a form of self-performance rather than self-claimed authority. In other words, women gain influence by performing their identities. This is for example demonstrated through atheists on Youtube who "are more often concerned with authentic self-expression than explicit activism or leadership."[198] Central to this self-performance, and crucial for forging a new type of authority, is authenticity. Lövheim and Lundmark suggest that the self-performances they have studied, are "characterized by a communicative intention or drive towards authentic self-expression."[199] This authenticity is relationally dependent and builds not only on "genuine" self-expression or what is "true to your inner self," but on expressing shared values with a specific audience or "social setting."[200] An important part of being authentic furthermore is to be vulnerable. Vulnerability is presented as a double-edged sword: while it exposes women to critique and verbal abuse, the "emotional work" it entails "should not be seen as a deficiency," but as work that enables "different types of public imaginings" that construct "spaces marked by solida-

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195 Evelina Lundmark, *This is the Face of an Atheist." Performing Private Truths in Precarious Publics,* Diss. Uppsala University, 2019, p. 14.

196 Lundmark, "This is the Face of an Atheist." Performing Private Truths in Precarious Publics, p. 62.

197 Lundmark, "This is the Face of an Atheist." Performing Private Truths in Precarious Publics, p. 238.

198 Mia Lövheim & Evelina Lundmark, "Gender, Religion, and Authority in Digital Media," ESSACHESS. *Journal for Communication Studies*, vol. 12, no. 2(24), 2019, pp. 23–38, p. 34.

199 Lövheim & Lundmark, "Gender, Religion, and Authority in Digital Media," p. 24.

200 Lövheim & Lundmark, "Gender, Religion, and Authority in Digital Media," p. 36.

rity, hope and encouragement."[201] These findings are also contextualized by Lövheim and Lundmark against historical instances where women have engaged themselves in public religious expression. They recognize that women's religious authority has been most visible in periods of religious transformation, or when non-institutional forms of spirituality have been prevalent.[202]

After presenting these themes of Digital Religion research, Lövheim compare them to sociologist Kelsy C. Burke's distinction between four different categories of agency found in previous research on gender and religion: *Resistance agency* views agency among traditionally religious women as especially visible when they are resisting or attempting to break free from constraining gender roles. *Empowerment agency* does not focus on how women challenge religious beliefs or practices but places its emphasis instead on how "women change their response to beliefs or practices" and on affect, i.e., how religion makes women feel.[203] Contrary to empowerment agency, *Instrumental agency* entails an interest in how women use religion for extra-religious advantages, such as material or relational benefits. Whereas resistance, empowerment and instrumental agency are based upon the idea of autonomy and the capacity of women to act in their own interests, the critique to this approach recognized in *Compliant agency*, suggests that many women on the contrary value submission and religious obedience as ends in their own right.[204] Whereas the first two themes of research in Digital Religion, Lövheim suggests, are comparable to the first three agency approaches (resistance, empowerment and instrumental agency) the more nuanced third theme is related to compliant agency. This implies a focus not only on how digital media "empower" women, she says, but on medias dual characteristics of both enabling and challenging, as well as on how women use them "in ways that are compatible… with their religious tradition."[205] In relation to the latter, Lövheim calls for more critical assessments regarding women's agency and digital media.

2.2.2.1Discussion and Contribution: Re-imagining the "Critical" in the Critical Turn

Lövheim's advocacy for a critical reevaluation of agency offers crucial insights that can significantly enhance both the theoretical frameworks and methodological approaches in our research. While heeding this call, however, I move in a slightly different direction. I identify the problem with previous research on agency, not only with its focus on "empowerment," but also its reliance on intentionality. If we choose to operate in accor-

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201 Lövheim & Lundmark, "Gender, Religion, and Authority in Digital Media," p. 31.

202 Lövheim & Lundmark, "Gender, Religion, and Authority in Digital Media."

203 Kelsy C. Burke, "Women's Agency in Gender-Traditional Religions: A Review of Four Approaches," *Sociology Compass*, vol. 6, no. 2, 2012, pp. 122–133, p.125–126.

204 Burke, "Women's Agency in Gender-Traditional Religions: A Review of Four Approaches."

205 Lövheim, "Gender and Agency in Digital Religion," p. 247.

dance with a compliant agency perspective, as Lövheim suggests, that does not change. For example, referencing Burke, Lövheim says that "in order to bring out the variety and complexity of women's religious agency, we need a sensitivity to how 'the ways in which women understand their world – what they are capable of – may lead to *intentional* actions of conformity or resistance, both of which should be considered as agency.'"[206] The problem with the compliant agency approach, I claim, is that it does not solve the alleged focus of previous research on autonomous action but instills, yet again, a delimitation to conscious cultivation of self. An important reason for this is that the compliant agency approach is tied to Saba Mahmood's re-definition of agency and more importantly its intimate connection to her definition of habitus. Mahmood's view on habitus to which her popularized agency approach is linked, is formulated through an Aristotelian framework. Habitus, "in this older Aristotelian tradition," she explains, "is understood to be an acquired excellence at either a moral or practical craft, learned through repeated practice until that practice leaves a permanent mark on the character of the person."[207] This counters sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's version of habitus, which is contingent upon social structures and argues that human beings are pre-dispositioned to act in a certain way due to unconsciously internalizing certain environments.[208] In other words, Aristoteles' habitus has a "pedagogical" emphasis that leaves room to interpret how one's agency can be more intentionally constructed.[209] Habitus in Mahmood's approach thus concerns how individuals are self-cultivated rather than unconsciously molded by social structures.

While this turn has been appreciated for the argument that agency or capacity for action is not limited to women who resist, but also women who consciously mold themselves according to more conservative ideologies and beliefs, it has its downsides, one being that many researchers limit their analysis to descriptions of women's emic portrayals or "own voices" and therefore neglect an equally important subject which is the format or conditions of their speech. The first part of a "critical turn" in Digital Religion, I suggest, should therefore seek to retain some of sociology's classical perspectives rather than reject it wholesale. An important part of doing so is deconstructing agency as exclusive to self-conscious individuals acting in their own interests. In this dissertation I therefore take agency to be a capacity for action distributed also over non-volitional forces such as technology. My contribution to this field, returning to my defi-

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206 Lövheim, "Gender and Agency in Digital Religion," p. 246, Emphasis my own.

207 Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety. The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), p. 136.

208 Mahmood, *Politics of Piety. The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject,* p. 138.

209 Mahmood, *Politics of Piety. The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject,* p. 139.

nition of technological affordance, is to think critically about agency by giving equal weight to both human meaning-making and the performativity of the medium itself – the full meaning of which I will return to later.

A further area for discussion is that prior research on agency in Digital Religion tends to show a preference for content-focused analyses. One can of course look at these examples or previous research through different lenses – a thematic overview based on their main conclusions as seen above, is one way, another is to look more closely at methodology and how they define media or technology. In Piela's research mentioned earlier, she says "I addressed the multiple, complex ways in which technology, which I see as a *social construct*, has shaped identities and social realities."[210] Similarly, Hintsala's results she says, favor "the significance of qualitative analysis when studying emotions on the internet: the content and the context regulates the final meaning of the emotional expression."[211] While religious contexts may have their own "emotional regime" the same could be said about different forms of media. Shahar and Lev-On's study in turn is not really a study of the capacities for action online but attitudes thereon – thereby lengthening the already tangible distance to the medium itself. Lundmark's definition of Youtube performances as a "co-effected by technological, social, affective and emotional dimensions, situated in specific context, and coming into being in and with the medium itself,"[212] serves as a break from that tendency. Although I will return to this question later it suffices to say that my study dives deeper into the interplay between technological format and content, emphasizing how the medium itself not only hosts but actively shapes discourse.

2.2.3 Podcast Studies

A range of media has been studied within the field of Digital Religion, such as blogs, Twitter, Youtube, Instagram, and internet forums. Despite the podcasts increasing popularity in recent years, however, it remains an understudied phenomenon. One of the earliest research projects on religion and podcasts can be found in the article "Listening Communities? Some Remarks on the Construction of Religious Authority in Islamic Podcasts" written by Jan Scholz, Tobias Selge, Max Stille, and Johannes Zimmermann in 2008. Four podcasts were analyzed based on their style and content as well as their connections with other media. The aim was to analyze how the use of podcasts ("and to a smaller extent of videocasts") contributes to the "emergence of a Muslim online

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210 Piela, "Claiming Religious Authority: Muslim Women and New Media," p. 129.

211 Hintsala, "Weary and Grateful: The Power of Expressed Emotions on the Internet Among Conservative Laestadians," p. 371.

212 Lundmark, *"This is the Face of an Atheist." Performing Private Truths in Precarious Publics*, p. 14.

'counter public' sometimes challenging, sometimes reinforcing existing authority structures" and the role of established symbols and practices as instruments in that regard.[213] Their analysis foregrounds the significant role of technological advancements in shaping religious dialogues and authority online. By focusing on the interplay between traditional Islamic scholarship and contemporary digital communication forms, the study highlights how these media are utilized to legitimize religious authority and influence communal beliefs and practices. The authors argue that these digital platforms facilitate the redistribution of "Definitionsmacht" (definitional power) by allowing various interpretations of Islam to circulate beyond traditional geographical and institutional boundaries. Furthermore, the paper critically explores how podcasts act as a modern continuation of older Muslim media for "*da´wa*-purposes and propagandistic aims" and intersecting virtual spaces with real-world interactions where audience for example can "independently from time and space" participate in their leader's pilgrimage experiences.[214] This dual nature underscores podcasts' potential in reshaping religious discourse and authority. By examining specific case studies of popular podcasts, the research elucidates how different groups employ these tools to assert religious authenticity, engage with global Muslim communities, and address contemporary religious issues.

Two years later Douglas J. Swanson explored the role of podcasts among Christian Renewalist Ministries. In the article "Preaching, Prosperity, and Product Sales: A Profile of On-Demand Digital Audio Offerings of Christian Renewalist Ministries" Swanson used a systematic content analysis of podcast episodes to find out what "podcast listeners could expect to encounter in renewalist programming, and the level of originality of that content."[215] Media frame analysis was used to "isolate claims made to faithful listeners through podcasts, as well as the kinds of responses asked of listeners and the rewards promised to listeners by ministries."[216] The results showed that none of the podcasts were originally meant for podcasting but re-released audio tracks from a television broadcasts, and that episodes followed the structure of sermons, conference lectures, and questions/answers with invited guests. Furthermore, podcasts were used for merchandizing – highlighting promises of divine favor in exchange for financial

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213 Jan Scholz, Tobias Selge, Max Stille, & Johannes Zimmermann, "Listening Communities? Some Remarks on the Construction of Religious Authority in Islamic Podcasts," *Die Welt des Islams*, vol. 48, no. 3, 2008, pp. 457–509, p. 458.

214 Scholz, Selge, Stille, & Zimmermann, "Listening Communities? Some Remarks on the Construction of Religious Authority in Islamic Podcasts," p. 493.

215 Douglas J. Swanson, "Preaching, Prosperity, and Product Sales: A Profile of On-Demand Digital Audio Offerings of Christian Renewalist Ministries," *The International Journal of Listening*, vol. 24, no. 2, 2010, pp. 106–124, p. 107.

216 Swanson, "Preaching, Prosperity, and Product Sales: A Profile of On-Demand Digital Audio Offerings of Christian Renewalist Ministries," p. 107.

contributions. The content also followed a "health and wealth" doctrine where the line between spiritual guidance and product promotion blurred.[217] Most of the content was also declarative rather than open and inquisitional, yet its host often drew on personal experience to make claims. These findings led Swanson to conclude that podcasts enabled ministries to have a more personal connection with their listeners – which differed from what traditional radio and television programming could offer.[218] Yet, there were also utilizations of the medium that conflicted with what allegedly can be expected from a podcast. While a podcast is episodic in nature, ministries did not release podcasts consistently, with the consequence that "the faithful listener who might hope to hear a new podcast every day (as one would expect with other forms of podcast programming) would have been disappointed by each of the five ministries."[219] Also, the content was very formulaic, leaving little to be surprised by as a listener. This lack of spontaneity he suggests "seems antithetic to the concept of podcasting as a new medium that is edgy and different from the traditional media it supplants."[220] Another aspect of podcasts is their relational nature – "through their inherent interactivity," Swanson suggests, "Christian podcasts have the potential to open a relationship between listeners and ministries."[221] However, the podcasts he studied provided limited opportunities for engagement between the two parties beyond financial donations or product purchases. The article ends with a call for more research on religious podcasts through aspects such as listener experiences and the process of making podcasts within religious organizations.

From Swanson's article there is a long gap where no research was conducted on podcasts related to religion. In 2020, the article "The Devil You Know: An Exploration of Virtual Religious Deconstruction Communities" by Steven Fekete and Jessica Knippel, explored the role of podcasts in facilitating the deconstruction and potential reconstruction of religious beliefs among post- or ex-evangelical. The emergence of these podcast communities coincides with a broader cultural shift within American evangelicalism, where evangelicals are responding to political and social conservatism linked to the movement. This has given rise to digital platforms – often podcasts – seeking to

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217 Swanson, "Preaching, Prosperity, and Product Sales: A Profile of On-Demand Digital Audio Offerings of Christian Renewalist Ministries," p. 107.

218 Swanson, "Preaching, Prosperity, and Product Sales: A Profile of On-Demand Digital Audio Offerings of Christian Renewalist Ministries," p. 118.

219 Swanson, "Preaching, Prosperity, and Product Sales: A Profile of On-Demand Digital Audio Offerings of Christian Renewalist Ministries," p. 118.

220 Swanson, "Preaching, Prosperity, and Product Sales: A Profile of On-Demand Digital Audio Offerings of Christian Renewalist Ministries," p. 119.

221 Swanson, "Preaching, Prosperity, and Product Sales: A Profile of On-Demand Digital Audio Offerings of Christian Renewalist Ministries," p. 121.

address people's transitions away from evangelicalism. Through interviews with podcasters and content analysis of podcast episodes and associated social media, Fekete and Knippel find that podcasts serve as disseminating dissenting views but also as foundations for building supportive networks. These digital spaces allow for a communal reevaluation of faith that is less hierarchical and more collaborative than traditional religious settings. As the authors articulate it "these deconstruction communities are safe spaces in which participants feel and experience radically open, loving, and supportive community (something that was promised or sought in previous religious spaces but was rarely experienced)."[222]

One article published in 2021 also investigates methodological questions related to the subject of religion and podcasting. Markus Lundström and Tomas Poletti Lundström propose a novel methodological framework termed "podcast ethnography." Consisting of a three-stage process it is tailored to the study of podcasts as a cultural and communicative phenomenon, offering a lens to examine the dialogues and interactions within specific social or ideological groups. The first stage, "Explore," emphasizes understanding the podcast as a "field site" where social interactions occur.[223] This involves identifying why the podcast is relevant to the research question, understanding its content, and characterizing the speakers and their roles within the podcast's community. The second stage, "Engage," focuses on active, reflexive engagement with the podcast.[224] This includes documenting the researcher's method of interacting with the podcast – such as the times and places of listening – and reflects on how the podcast is consumed, enabling a deep immersion into its content and context. The third and final stage, "Examine," involves the analytical examination of the collected data to develop themes or typologies that answer the research questions at hand.[225] This stage integrates the insights gained from the first two stages and applies theoretical frameworks to analyze the interactions, content, and implications of the podcast narratives.

As a part of her ethnographical research published in 2022 on broader digital media use among evangelicals in America, Corrina Laughlin explores black evangelical podcasts. Podcasting as a technology provides advantages to black podcasters, she claims. Partially because it is an "asynchronous medium" where content is recorded in "advance,"[226]

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222 Fekete & Knippel, "The Devil You Know: An Exploration of Virtual Religious Deconstruction Communities," p. 165.

223 Markus Lundström & Tomas Poletti Lundström, "Podcast Ethnography," *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, vol. 24, no. 3, 2021, pp. 289–299, p. 290.

224 Lundström & Poletti Lundström, "Podcast Ethnography," p. 292.

225 Lundström & Poletti Lundström, "Podcast Ethnography," p. 294.

226 Corrina Laughlin, *Redeem All. How Digital Life is Changing Evangelical Culture*, (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2022), p. 142.

which allows for conversations without disruptions – which for example can happen in live streaming. In her words, podcasts are "somewhat inoculated from trolling."[227] In using the podcast to spread their voice, black Evangelicals, Laughlin finds, create "enclaved spaces" where "black listeners can feel at home and cocoon themselves in black cultural idioms" as well as a "counter-public space that engages with the larger Christian public."[228] The podcast plays a dual role, one where black evangelicals can feel comfortable or shielded, while also pushing a critical dialogue into the public consciousness. In consequence also of the accessibility of recording through platforms such as GarageBand and Adobe Audition, nearly anyone can start a podcast. Such affordances enable marginalized voices to be heard, and as one of her interviewees explains, "evens the playing field."[229] The "pulpit is just one of the voices now," he continues, the podcast another.[230]

2.2.3.1 Discussion and Contribution: What about Podcast Technology?

What we find in this review of research on religious podcasts is first that they are frequently approached through content analysis methodologies, seen for example in Fekete and Knippel's article on ex-evangelical podcasts. This is very much in line with and demonstrative of a larger tendency in Digital Religion to approach both podcasts and other media as social phenomena meant to be studied by harvesting their content. The article written by Markus Lundström and Tomas Poletti Lundström, does not account for podcast technology, even while meticulously outlining ways forward for researchers interested in ethnographical approaches to digital media and religion – and thereby contributing to a discussion on methods currently lacking. Rather than focus solely on content, Laughlin's attempt to understand the podcasts as a form of "enclaved space" due to the "asynchronous" recording aspect of the podcast therefore introduces some novel insights. I am not entirely sure of her categorization of podcasting as "asynchronous" however, since that excludes the moment of recording itself which carries aspects of what podcasting research calls "liveness."[231]

In that regard, articles from 2008 and 2010 seem much more aware of the technological aspect of the podcast. While Swanson's article is rather descriptive, its mere mentioning of the podcast's own qualities, such as its episodic nature and interactions

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227 Laughlin, *Redeem All. How Digital Life is Changing Evangelical Culture,* p. 142.
228 Laughlin, *Redeem All. How Digital Life is Changing Evangelical Culture*, p. 143.
229 Laughlin, *Redeem All. How Digital Life is Changing Evangelical Culture*, p. 141.
230 Laughlin, *Redeem All. How Digital Life is Changing Evangelical Culture*, p. 141.
231 Euritt, *Podcasting as an Intimate Medium,* p. 14; Given that many podcasts today promote themselves through "co-presence," it would have been interesting to see whether and why it does not appear as significant in the black evangelical podcasts Laughlin investigates.

between host and audience, makes it more progressive than contemporary studies where the technology of the medium is not reflected on at all or only partially. It is possible that this situation is symptomatic of the fact that the podcast today is so familiar that we have ceased to think about its characteristics. As Lisa Gitelman and Geoffrey Pingree put it, before new media are "fixed" and "accepted as natural" their "meanings are in flux,"[232] which as Gavin Feller adds, is when "various stakeholders fight about what a new medium does and for whom."[233] Swanson for example reports that the podcast was expected to be episodic and publish material continuously, and that it was "edgy and different" compared to traditional media,[234] meaning there were at the time of his writing certain expectations of what a podcast should do. My study extends this observation by closely examining the technological qualities of podcasts. This examination is informed both by previous scholarship within the field of Media and Communication and by a thorough analysis of my own dataset. In chapter four, I will explore these technological attributes in detail and discuss how I plan to operationalize them in my analysis of Mormon Feminism. This approach not only highlights the specific features of podcasting but also underscores how these features can be systematically analyzed to deepen our understanding of their role in shaping discussions within religious movements.

2.2.4 Theoretical Premises in Previous Research

A recurring concern in this review of previous research has been the lack of attention to the role of media formats in shaping religious expression. This state of content-bias is telling of a larger theoretical proclivity in the field of Digital Religion. Although diverse in theoretical approaches and interests, a few frameworks in Digital Religion have been more prominent.[235] These frameworks vary – among other ways – in how they depict the relationship between media and sociocultural structures.[236] We can imagine a con-

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232 George B. Pingree & Lisa Gitelman (eds.), *New Media: 1750–1915*, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003), p. xi–xxii.

233 Feller, *Eternity in the Ether. A Mormon Media History*, p. 2.

234 Swanson, "Preaching, Prosperity, and Product Sales: A Profile of On-Demand Digital Audio Offerings of Christian Renewalist Ministries," p. 119.

235 Knut Lundby, "Theoretical Frameworks for Approaching Religion and New Media," in Heidi Campbell (ed.), *Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice in New Media Worlds*, (London: Routledge, 2013), pp. 225–237.

236 Others have conceptualized these theoretical variances through how the medium is defined. Giulia Evolvi argues that "the theory of mediatization allows conceptualizing media as *institutions*; and the religious-social shaping of technology thinks of media as *technologies*. The theory of mediation helps to understand the role of media *within society*" in *Blogging My Religion. Secular, Muslim, and Catholic Media Spaces in Europe*, (Oxon: Routledge, 2019), p. 47.

tinuum between media and sociocultural context, where the former stands as a pole for what is sometimes referred to as "technologically determinist" theories and the latter as an opposite pole for what we may call "culturally determinist" theories. Although such framings of media and culture as two different things are problematic, they will be used for now for pedagogical purposes to describe how scholars within Digital Religion position themselves. The "technologically determinist" position, as it is sometimes referred to in this field, is often imagined as represented by media theorists such as Marshall McLuhan who famously expressed that "the medium is the message," by which he suggested that communication is significantly altered through the technological format itself.[237] The culturally determinist position is often extended toward sociological and cultural theoretical perspectives on how media are embedded in or intersected by social and cultural structures in society. In other words, the medium is not something in itself but creates meaning and causes its effect in relation to a broader social and cultural context. What we have is thus a continuum between an emphasis on medium to culture on the one hand, and culture to medium on the other.

One popular theoretical paradigm introduced by Stig Hjarvard is Mediatization. Although it is a theory that by way of continuous development travels further to the middle of this continuum,[238] it can be placed furthest to the left.[239] Mediatization is often used to "characterize a given phase or situation in the overall development of society and culture in which the logic of the media exerts a particularly predominant influence on other social institutions."[240] Mediatization therefore often figures in research attempting to describe religious change, such as the challenges to religious authority, the reformulation of religion through more individualized and popular forms of belief, or the effects of young people coming into contact with religion primarily through media.[241] As Nick Couldry argues, mediatization thus favors a focus on the transformative force of media (i.e., something is mediatized). It is underlined, in that sense, by a linear logic where "one state of affairs has become another because of the intervention of a new element (media)."[242]

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237 Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media. The Extensions of Man*, (Oxon: Routledge, 1964).

238 See for example discussions in Hjarvard, Stig & Lövheim, Mia, "The Mediatized Conditions of Contemporary Religion: Critical Status and Future Directions," J*ournal of Religion, Media and Digital Culture*", vol. 8, no. 2, 2019, pp. 206–225.

239 Lundby, "Theoretical Frameworks for Approaching Religion and New Media."

240 Hjarvard Stig, "The Mediatization of Society: a Theory of the Media as Agents of Social and Cultural Change," *Nordicom Review*, vol. 29, no. 2, 2008, pp 105–134, p. 110.

241 Hjarvard Stig, "The Mediatization of Religion: Theorizing Religion, Media and Social Change," *Culture and Religion,* vol. 12, no. 2, 2011, pp. 119–135.

242 Nick Couldry, "Mediatization or Mediation? Alternative Understandings of the Emergent Space of Digital Storytelling," *New Media & Society*, vol. 10, no. 3, 2008, pp. 373–391, p. 376, 377.

Another popular theoretical orientation within Digital Religion is mediation, which positions itself somewhere in the middle between these two poles, with the result of depicting media as a "cultural forum" rather than an exclusive agent in itself.[243] In other words, much like other contexts, situations or ways of speaking, media constitutes a means of communication that becomes meaningful and produces its effects in relation to its social and cultural surrounding. Characteristic of research falling under the umbrella of mediation theory is an emphasis on the medium as a space, and not rarely as a space in-between.[244] One popular concept in this regard is Stewart M. Hoover and Nabil Echchaibi's definition of digital media as a "third space," which suggests that digital media establishes a space between and beyond received polarities.[245] Hoover and Echchaibi believe this third space to be characterized by an in-between-ness that encompasses "between private and public, between institution and individual, between authority and individual autonomy, between large media framings and individual 'pro-sumption' between local and translocal."[246]

While these theoretical perspectives focus primarily on how mediation and technology affect religion, Heidi Campbell presents a theory that is more tilted toward how social and religious structures shape the use of technology. Religious Social Shaping of Technology, as she refers to it, revolves around how "a religious community's historical life practice, interpretative tradition, and the contemporary outworking of their values inform their choices about the adoption and adaption of technology."[247] Inspired by scholars such as Barzilai-Nahon and Barzilai who have argued for an acknowledgement of how technology becomes "cultured," Campbell suggests an approach focused on how religious communities negotiate technology based on their religious values and ideas. In *When Religion Meets New Media* Campbell uses this approach to study decision-making, habits and attitudes to media in a variety of cases – everything from the religious motivations behind Muslim TV companies' editorial practices to evangelicals' practice of internet mission.[248] Recent work in the field of Digital Religion has suggested along similar lines of reasoning that different cultures adopt digital media differently, thus making a case for further recognition of

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243 Stewart M. Hoover, *Religion in the Media Age*, (New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 10.

244 See Stewart M. Hoover & Nabil Echchaibi (eds.), *The Third Spaces of Digital Religion*, (Taylor & Francis Group, 2023, accessed May 8, 2025), DOI: 10.4324/9781003048190-1; Evolvi, *Blogging My Religion. Secular, Muslim, and Catholic Media Spaces in Europe.*

245 M. Hoover & Echchaibi, *The Third Spaces of Digital Religion.*

246 Stewart M. Hoover & Nabil Echchaibi, "Introduction: Media Theory and the Third Spaces of Digital Religion," in Stewart M. Hoover & Nabil Echchaibi (eds.), *The Third Spaces of Digital Religion*, (Taylor & Francis Group, 2023, accessed May 8, 2025), DOI: 10.4324/9781003048190-1, p. 1–28, p. 11.

247 Campbell, *When Religion Meets New Media*, p. 41.

248 Campbell, *When Religion Meets New Media*, p. 104, 141.

cultural specificities.[249] In an article on the digital divide, Ruth Tsuria suggests that "cultural understandings – specifically, religion – shape the way users engage with digital media," and that this might "maintain gaps in internet usage."[250]

While these different camps of research vary in their outlook on how media and culture interact, I suggest that they have in common their focus on content. There may be several reasons for this. In part, I suspect that it stems from a concern about falling into "technological determinism." Tsuria for example suggests that "those who are informed by Marshall McLuhan's technological determinism would argue that tools shape human experience, and that 'the medium is the message.'"[251] Instead, she believes that "humans created the tools and tools are never created *ex nihilo*: they are born out of human experience, out of human culture and cognition."[252] The outcome is that religious groups "may shape technologies toward their own ends, rather than the character of the technology determining use and outcomes."[253] Campbell furthermore argues that the technological deterministic outlook of media and religion presents religious values as "subservient to the forces of mass media" which hinders a closer scrutiny of how religious communities adapt media "in the light of their values."[254]

In exploring the theoretical landscape within Digital Religion, however, I believe there is room to further consider the performativity of media while continuing to build upon the foundational work already done in this field. Despite the critique toward "technological determinism," the framework presented by Campbell opens up for a dual recognition of how technology is used as well as how such negotiations are framed against participants' religious background and context. This theory will therefore be employed as groundwork in the next chapter but modified to manage a different theoretical approach to technology as well as to suit the medium of podcasting.

2.2.5 Contributions

First, my dissertation (1) adds to scholarship on Mormonism, media and gender by addressing an unexplored medium among contemporary Mormon Feminists, the podcast. As my review of previous research indicates, earlier studies are exclusively focused on textual media such as blogging. By shifting my focus to podcasting, I also (2)

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249 Marcus Moberg & Sofia Sjö (eds) *Digital Media, Young Adults, and Religion. An International Perspective*, (Oxon: Routledge, 2020.)

250 Ruth Tsuria, "Digital Divide in Light of Religion, Gender, and Women's Digital Participation," *Journal of Information, Communication and Ethics in Society*, vol. 18, no. 3, 2020, pp. 405–413, p. 407.

251 Tsuria, "Digital Divide in Light of Religion, Gender, and Women's Digital Participation," p. 406.

252 Tsuria, "Digital Divide in Light of Religion, Gender, and Women's Digital Participation," p. 406.

253 Tsuria, "Digital Divide in Light of Religion, Gender, and Women's Digital Participation," p. 406.

254 Campbell, *When Religion Meets New Media*, p. 43.

contribute to an uncharted area within Digital Religion. Despite being two decades into the medium's existence, scholarly engagement with podcasts remains notably sparse. In my research, I will also (3) explore the theoretical and methodological possibilities of integrating content-interest with an appreciation for the technological formats utilized by the medium. This approach builds upon and diversifies the previous predominant focus on content alone. In my endeavors to gain a greater understanding on these subjects my dissertation also (4) adds to an ongoing critical turn in Digital Religion concerning women's agency, that seeks to nuance the image of digital media as "empowering" by considering how it both enables and conditions women's performances.

3. Theory

In the introduction to this dissertation, I explained that its purpose is to explore the technological affordances of podcasting for Feminist Latter-day Saints. "Technological affordance" denotes an interest in the capacities or enabling qualities for human actors that a technological object encompasses and is identified here as a convergence between the technological and communicational dispositions of the medium and the discourses attributed to it by its users. To accommodate this approach I will orient myself around Campbell's theoretical framework called Religious Social Shaping of Technology (RSST) which encompasses a dual focus on how technology is used among religious communities and how discourses and narratives construct the meaning thereof. Because of significant methodological and theoretical differences between our studies, however, I will create a revised RSST approach. First, I will present her framework in its original form, and then I will introduce my own. To briefly foreshadow this revised version, the most significant alteration comes through (a) the prioritization of two (of four areas) which she refers to as "negotiation processes" and "communal framing and discourses," (b) the renaming and reformulation of them into "performed media" and "discursive framing," where (c) the first one replaces Campbell's media perspective with one that takes inspiration from what Grant Bollmer refers to as "spatiotemporal materialism," and the latter is elaborated on through Discourse Theory. These two components circumvent what I argue is the original model's primary issues: its lack of understanding for media's own performativity and its risk of encouraging a static and essentialist view of religion and religious communities.

3.1 Religious Social Shaping of Technology

As the name implies, it borrows from the Social Shaping of Technology (SST) approach found in sociology of technology and science and technology studies.[255] Campbell explains that technology in this paradigm is "presented as a product of the interplay between different technical and social factors in both design and use," where "technology is seen as a social process" and where "social groups may shape technologies toward their own ends, rather than the character of the technology determining use and out-

[255] Campbell, *When Religion Meets New Media*, p. 41.

comes."[256] The studies taking place within this paradigm explore how users interact with different technologies, what social processes surround them, and how distinctive uses can "reinforce certain patterns of group life or practice."[257] The SST perspective demands that researchers give attention to "how and why a community of users respond to technology in a certain way" and "identify what values or beliefs influence this negotiation."[258] She exemplifies this through the idea of "domestication" of technology,[259] which suggests that technologies are molded or adapted to fit the activities and practices of everyday life, or "the moral economy of the household."[260] In this approach she finds valuable tools to investigate how religious communities act as user communities, and how the social processes within these groups influence their views of and interaction with media technology.[261] This concept thus highlights how religious communities adapt media technologies to align with their community's moral values, and secondly, how individual creators embed their own meanings and values into the technologies they design for religious use.[262]

Rather than apply an SST approach directly to the study of religion, Campbell argues that it needs to be adapted in a way that acknowledges the "unique" in how religious communities negotiate media based on their historical and cultural scene.[263] The *Religious* Social Shaping of Technology (RSST), then, draws on SST but "extends it in order to look at the special qualities and constraints of religious communities."[264] A religious community, she explains, is often bearer of a shared set of beliefs, symbols, ideologies and practices that will inform their negotiation and use of media. The RSST approach therefore calls for a further recognition of the religious setting of media practices, and more specifically, four areas of investigation: (1) history and tradition; (2) core beliefs and patterns; (3) negotiation processes; and (4) communal framing and discourses.[265]

3.1.1 History and Tradition

The first area of this analytical endeavor, RSST suggests, should be devoted to studying the "history and tradition" of a religious community with specific interest in how they

256 Campbell, *When Religion Meets New Media*, p. 50.
257 Campbell, *When Religion Meets New Media*, p. 50.
258 Campbell, *When Religion Meets New Media*, p. 58.
259 Roger Silverstone, Eric Hirsch, and David Morley, as quoted in Campbell, *When Religion Meets New Media*, p. 58.
260 Campbell, *When Religion Meets New Media*, p. 58.
261 Campbell, *When Religion Meets New Media*, p. 53.
262 Campbell, *When Religion Meets New Media*, p. 53.
263 Campbell, *When Religion Meets New Media*, p. 58.
264 Campbell, *When Religion Meets New Media*, p. 58.
265 Campbell, *When Religion Meets New Media*, p. 60–62.

have positioned themselves toward media over time. There may for example be certain historical events or processes that influence a religious group's attitudes or decision-making. "Understanding the development of the beliefs and ritual of a community related to early forms of media can provide valuable insights into how or why communities set certain standards in their contemporary media use and negotiation" Campbell explains.[266] The central research question, then, is "what religious traditions and interpretations in a community's past influence their current interaction with new forms of media?"[267] I take this to imply that religious groups have a history of forming opinions, philosophies, or beliefs about or in relation to technology. To understand why specific attachments are made to media like the podcast we must therefore, as Campbell suggests, understand the religious baggage individuals bring online.[268] For example, understanding orthodox Jewish communities' adoption of technology must start with an understanding of the boundaries between sacred and secular important to religious observations such as Shabbat. The observation dictates that some forms of work are not allowed. Some examples are tasks that create or generate something new, which traditionally included trade skills like grinding, or weaving, but that today have been modified to include more modern-day practices. Making fire has for example been translated to imply strict boundaries around electricity use. In the ultra-orthodox family Campbell visits, this results for example in choices like switching off electricity while using a private generator in the building, which enables them to avoid the violation of "requesting others to act on their behalf" or turning off refrigerator lights to avoid the unintentional use of electricity.[269]

3.1.2 Core Beliefs and Patterns

Another endeavor encompassed by the RSST approach, which I take as intimately connected to the previous one, is to seek an understanding of a religious community's "core beliefs and patterns."[270] Here attention is given to the religious community's "dominant social and religious values and how they are integrated into patterns of contemporary life."[271] When the community encounters media, such core beliefs, Campbell explains, will be guiding in how they respond and interact with it.

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266 Campbell, *When Religion Meets New Media*, p. 60.
267 Campbell, *When Religion Meets New Media*, p. 66.
268 Campbell, *When Religion Meets New Media*, p. 66
269 Campbell, *When Religion Meets New Media*, p. 69.
270 Campbell, *When Religion Meets New Media*, p. 60.
271 Campbell, *When Religion Meets New Media*, p. 61.

While previous research for example has found that advertisement tends to promote pro-social Muslim values such as charity and piety, especially during Ramadan, and that such core values affect consumer behaviors in the Middle East, Campbell finds, in addition, that advertisement also "communicate[s] important messages about the ideal Muslim relationship between religion and media use."[272] One advertisement shown on Arab Regional Television is the public service campaign "PAUSE, it's prayer time" where young men and women are encouraged to commit themselves more to prayer.[273] In one ad, two boys are sitting in a couch playing video games but are interrupted by the call to prayer – an event that causes the game console and the popcorn thrown into the air to freeze. The two boys get up to leave and one says, "After I hear the call to prayer, I pause the game and will continue the game after I pray."[274] The ad then depicts the boys praying in a mosque before switching back to the couch-scene where they resume their gaming. As Campbell explains, "a clear message is being sent," that "engagement with media is acceptable, so long as it does not take precedence over one's religious obligations."[275]

3.1.3 Negotiation Process

The third area of investigation is called "negotiation process" which encompasses an interest in the processes of determining rules around how to approach new forms of media, and for example whether they reflect past technologies and existing rules can still apply.[276] However, if the technology is fundamentally different in its form or the social circumstances it creates, posing challenges for the community, then a negotiation process must occur. This process would determine which aspects or uses of the technology are acceptable and which may need to be rejected. If the religious community sees value in the technology but identifies significant issues, it may require modifying the technology to better align with the community's beliefs and accepted practices. Here, the researcher considers "how the previous phases," meaning history and tradition and core beliefs and practices, "inform a community's choices and responses to the new technology."[277] A crucial aspect at this stage is the community's stance on authority roles and structures, which can reveal who has the authority to oversee media decision-making and participate in innovation. Campbell explains that the engagement with computer technology for example results in one of three

272 Campbell, *When Religion Meets New Media*, p. 104.
273 Campbell, *When Religion Meets New Media*, p. 106.
274 Campbell, *When Religion Meets New Media*, p. 107.
275 Campbell, *When Religion Meets New Media*, p. 107.
276 Campbell, *When Religion Meets New Media*, p. 61.
277 Campbell, *When Religion Meets New Media*, p. 61.

choices, to "(a) accept the technology and appropriate it for certain uses, (b) reject certain aspects of the technology, thus requiring them to resist certain uses or create measures that put boundaries on its appropriation, or (c) see the technology as valuable but, in order for it to be more in line with the values of the community, as needing to be reconfigured in some way or to undergo technological innovation."[278] How a religious community goes about this process is dependent on how they view media. Based on Media and Religion scholar John P. Ferré, Campbell suggests that religious groups can view media as either a "conduit," where media are neither good nor bad, a "mode of knowing," where the message of media is "entwined with the medium itself" and viewed as "value-laden" encompassing certain "moral dispositions," or "media as a social institution" where media are viewed as systems of production where "both content and technology matter" and where "technology use is seen as influencing the social structures of its users."[279]

3.1.4 Communal Framing and Discourse

The final component of RSST concerns the "communal framing and discourse" that media negotiations result in. Discourse plays a crucial role for religious communities in "framing and justifying their approach to new technologies," Campbell explains.[280] Research should therefore examine whether negotiations of new technology use necessitate revising their previous language about it. The "adoption and adaptation" of a technology, she continues, may compel the religious group to develop a "public discourse" that aligns the technology with the community's values.[281] This communal discourse can also serve as a tool to reinforce "traditions and past standards," as well as to outline a future trajectory for the community's response to emerging technologies.[282] In other words, it is important for researchers to focus not only on how a religious community uses a new technology but also on the language surrounding its use.

In her own research, Campbell identifies three discursive strategies. "Prescriptive discourse" where religious individuals and groups praise the adoption of technology for its capacity to support a particular "valued goal or practice" can for example be found in the language surrounding the making of evangelical converts.[283] The Internet Evangelism Coalition – which seeks to promote evangelism online – describes media such as printing press, telegraph, telephones, CD's and internet as innovations that stem from "the succession that

278 Campbell, *When Religion Meets New Media*, p. 113.
279 Campbell, *When Religion Meets New Media*, p. 44–48.
280 Campbell, *When Religion Meets New Media*, p. 62.
281 Campbell, *When Religion Meets New Media*, p. 62.
282 Campbell, *When Religion Meets New Media*, p. 62
283 Campbell, *When Religion Meets New Media*, p. 136.

began with the Roman roads," thus implying that internet was created for the purpose of expounding the Christian message.[284] "Officializing discourses" where religious communities and particularly religious leaders present technology as affirming "established communal structures, policies, or theological goals" is demonstrated with reference to various churches' official declarations and reports on internet.[285] In texts such as the Anglican *Cybernaughts Awake* or the Catholic Church's *The Church and the Internet,* reflections and guidelines are created to help members use internet "properly" for example for "useful work" rather than just "consumer gratification."[286] "Validation discourse" is a strategy used by religious groups to portray technology in a way that demonstrates or validates "group goals" and "may serve as a way to affirm their communal identity."[287]

3.2 Revised Religious Social Shaping of Technology

Now that we have detailed Heidi Campbell's RSST framework, we are in a better position to clarify what revisions are required. As outlined above, the original RSST approach suggested four theoretical touchpoints: (1) history and tradition; (2) core beliefs and patterns; (3) negotiation process; and (4) communal framing and discourse. The revised approach prioritizes the latter two "negotiation process," and "communal framing and discourse" as its central components and the former "history and tradition" and "core beliefs and patterns" as the final fourth area's integrated parts. History and tradition, for example are therefore not so much a "prologue" as a continuously incorporated aspect of analyzing religious podcasts. The content of "negotiation processes," and "communal framing and discourse" have also been altered to better suit inquiries of how religious individuals and groups frame and construct significance and meaning around media technology while simultaneously enacting and embodying it from within. To better suit the changes made to them I have also renamed them as "performed media" and "discursive framing." "Performed media" signals the physical and communicational Capacities of media, a technology that decides how we record, store and transmit communication and by doing so affects and possibly changes how we position or perform ourselves spatially and temporally. "Discursive framing" recognizes that such positions are partially constructed, meaning, we imagine that technology has a specific purpose or meaning, and frame these positions directly and indirectly through discourse.

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284 Campbell, *When Religion Meets New Media*, p. 141.
285 Campbell, *When Religion Meets New Media*, p. 136–137.
286 Campbell, *When Religion Meets New Media*, p. 147.
287 Campbell, *When Religion Meets New Media*, p. 136–137.

3.2.1 Performed Media

One of the most obvious points of differences between Campbell's work and mine is that she is conducting an ethnographic fieldwork investigating mostly an offline environment where the acts and reflections concerning media are derived from observations of offline practices and interviews. This difference becomes apparent in the third area of investigation called "negotiation process." There are primarily two interrelated causes of concern when trying to apply this perspective in a study investigating online media such as podcasting: (1) that data is elicited, and (2) that media technology is implicitly treated as external to human beings. First, the corpus of a classical RSST consists to a large degree of "elicited" text/data, meaning, the research material is produced by subjects on the request of the researcher. It consists of individuals and groups reflecting *about* media, for example by being explicitly asked about it. While this reflects the use of RSST as an ethnography, this is not reflective of the type of material I am working with here which is "extant" text/data, meaning, I as a researcher have not had a hand in the shaping or production thereof. This means that the type of technology being negotiated here is not negotiated because I have asked subjects to reflect upon it, nor because I have been in their offline environment to observe how they treat or orient themselves around media technology. Second, the RSST approach observes acts and performances that are mostly dis-embedded from media and where media technology is outside of them. They are orienting themselves around things rather than through them. This differs from an investigation of extant data online where acts and reflections on media happens *through* media. Thus, the media negotiations investigated in this dissertation consists of individuals and groups reflecting from *within* media. So, when Feminist Latter-day Saints express themselves about the podcast they are simultaneously doing or enacting its technology – they are embedded and entwined with its dispositions. To signal this difference, I have referred to my own framework as encompassing an interest in "performed media," rather than Campbell's "negotiation processes." The word marks an interest in a fluid and integrated relationship between humans and media technology – i.e. media as performed.

3.2.1.1 Spatiotemporal Stance on Technology

Before adding a new framework to the RSST approach that replaces the "negotiation process" to recognize the performativity of the medium, it is necessary to confront the way that technology is perceived in its present form. The SST framework that Campbell builds on, she explains, was a way to reverse previous approaches in the field perceived as more "technological deterministic" – a turn toward culture's effect on technology that parallels

the move she makes in the field of Digital Religion. According to Campbell, early studies of religious engagement with media technology "were informed by a technologically determinist outlook" where "mass media" were framed as "an all-powerful social force driven by their own set of values."[288] Referencing Stewart M. Hoover, these early studies, Campbell explains, were "medium oriented."[289] While raising important discussions on how "media technologies may shape religious messages," the consequence of such approaches, she believes, is that religious groups are viewed as "subservient to the forces of mass media," which hinders a closer inspection of "how religious communities negotiate their choices about media in light of their values."[290] Some objections could be made against these claims. First, they risk simplifying the perspectives Campbell opposes. It is important to highlight the different ways in which scholars can be "medium oriented." Peter G. Horsfield, cited as a proponent of a more "medium-oriented" approach, draws from the Columbia school of media and communication which is associated with the "limited effects paradigm," challenging the notion that mass media decisively shapes public opinion. Instead, it suggests that media reinforce existing social, economic, and cultural structures, supporting capitalism and consumerism. Therefore, linking Horsfield with "technologically determinist" theories can be misleading. Second, if "technological determinism" was to be clearly recognized for the breadth of ideas it includes, it could work as a complement to the RSST approach for scholars interested in how the meaning of a medium is negotiated from within it. So, while there are many schools in media and communication, this dissertation will rest on an understanding of media technology that stems from – yet is not limited to – a type of discussion that started within the Toronto School of thought, occupied by thinkers such as Marshall McLuhan, Harold Innis and Walter Ong.

The phrase "technological determinism" says little of the scholars who can be found within this school of thought, however, who, when thinking of technology and media, are often concerned with the temporal, material, and spatial characteristics of specific media environments and how the physical and communicative capacities of technologies affect and change how people relate to each other by deciding how we record, store and transmit.[291] Instead of "technological determinism," I therefore use Bollmer's term "spatiotemporal materialism" to describe such scholarly interests.[292] To position myself in this discussion on "spatiotemporal materialism," I am inspired by Andreas Kitzmann's suggestion that how we document ourselves is affected by the material and

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288 Campbell, *When Religion Meets New Media*, p. 43.
289 Campbell, *When Religion Meets New Media*, p. 42.
290 Campbell, *When Religion Meets New Media*, p. 43.
291 Grant Bollmer, *Materialist Media Theory. An Introduction*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2019), p. 79–115.
292 Bollmer, *Materialist Media Theory. An Introduction*, p. 79.

"topological" conditions of different media.[293] Media he says is "a place to be" and a "place to do" that has its own physical topography and structures of "inhabitation," where we live out certain experiences or ways of being.[294] Each place – for example the page and the camera – comes with a physical, formal, and esthetic condition particular to the medium, or a certain "posture" specific to that place.[295] Important here is his recognition of media as a place, which he compares to the notion of space. Place, he says, "is that in which extensions occur, especially bodily extension" whereas space, on the other hand "is more like a void" or a "zone of pure potential."[296] In other words, place is where a body takes up room and where certain "repertoires" are created by means of which the body adapts to that space. It is, he explains a "repertoire of habits, of bodily positions, of aids and implements, of styles, forms, and genres."[297] The place of the page for instance is related to a posture of writing, a position of sitting, of holding a pen and a certain genre of autobiography associated with physical isolation, solitude and introspection. At the center of such posture is the celebration of the "enlightened, and self-aware individual."[298] The place of the camera, furthermore varies in terms of what type of camera – the camera shot aspires to capture the perfect moment or the "magical accomplishment of a perfect social conventionality" whereas filming lasts longer and takes up more room, therefore intruding further into the personal space while also offering "a greater space within which the body can extend itself."[299] A web-camera, additionally, is less ceremonial, more used to capturing or documenting the natural or ordinary.

I adapt Kitzmann's theory to argue that podcasting, in a similar way as other technologies, consists of different "topologies" i.e., certain spatial and temporal dispositions, and to suggest that those inform or condition podcast users to occupy specific "postures." In the next chapter I will return to specify what those topologies are and how they have informed my analysis. This idea allows me to turn RSST from a focus on how humans orient themselves around media, into how individuals and groups of people extend themselves within the topology of a certain medium. Ultimately, then, the revised RSST takes a different angle on the relationship between object and human, a more

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293 Andreas Kitzmann, *Saved From Oblivion: Documenting the Daily from Diaries to Web Cams*, (New York: Peter Lang, 2004), p. 4.
294 Kitzmann, *Saved From Oblivion: Documenting the Daily from Diaries to Web Cams.*
295 Kitzmann, *Saved From Oblivion: Documenting the Daily from Diaries to Web Cams*, p. 23.
296 Kitzmann, *Saved From Oblivion: Documenting the Daily from Diaries to Web Cams*, p. 22.
297 Kitzmann, *Saved From Oblivion: Documenting the Daily from Diaries to Web Cams*, p. 23.
298 Kitzmann, *Saved From Oblivion: Documenting the Daily from Diaries to Web Cams*, p. 33.
299 Kitzmann, *Saved From Oblivion: Documenting the Daily from Diaries to Web Cams*, p. 49.

integrated relationship possible to combine with a more critical and deconstructed perspective on women's agency.

3.2.2 Discursive Framing

Campbell's area "Communal framing and discourse" serves the present study as a gateway for reflecting further on the meaning-making surrounding technology. It contributes to the present study by suggesting that media technology is not only used or practiced but constructed or made meaningful through discursive strategies that frame and validate it. However, because this study is online-oriented and looks at performed media reflections, it does not ask explicit questions to its participants. Because of this, what I call "discursive framing" is broadened to include subtextual and implicit language on the meaning/significance of media. Because "communal framing" is furthermore not something else than "discourse" – framing occurs discursively – I have rephrased the revised version of it as simply "discursive framing." Before venturing into the different aspects of this framing, some groundwork needs to be performed that clarifies what role discourses play in the construction of a podcast community.

3.2.2.1 Discursive Stance on Community

To avoid the essentialist pinning thereof, I approach "community" as discursively constructed. Building on Ernesto Laclau's and Chantal Mouffe's Discourse Theory, I understand discourse as "the structured totality resulting from the articulatory practice,"[300] where "articulation" denotes how people "give meaning to the world around them by combining and connecting certain words, objects, ideas and concepts in specific ways when they speak or act."[301] This articulatory practice "constitutes and organizes social relations,"[302] meaning, social structure is discursive in nature. In comparison with other discourse-analytical frameworks, it is often noted that Discourse Theory treats everything as discourse, while others make distinctions between discourse and other aspects of social reality. Norman Fairclough's version of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) for example "straddles the division between society and culture on the one hand, and discourse, language and text on the other."[303] Thus, its purpose is to trace the connec-

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300 Laclau & Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy. Toward a Radical Democratic Politics*, p. 105.

301 Thomas Jacobs, "The Dislocated Universe of Laclau and Mouffe: An Introduction to Post-Structuralist Discourse Theory," *Critical Review*, vol. 30, no. 3–4, 2018, pp. 294–315, p. 298.

302 Jacobs, "The Dislocated Universe of Laclau and Mouffe: An Introduction to Post-Structuralist Discourse Theory," p. 96.

303 Norman Fairclough, *Critical Discourse Analysis: the Critical Study of Language*, (London: Longman, 1995), p. 60.

tions between discourse and its social context. While CDA differentiates between discursive and non-discursive practices, Discourse Theory views all entities as discursively constituted. One could therefore ask why Discourse Theory is chosen when I have made an analytical distinction between text and technology, and when I have positioned myself as deconstructing the idea of agency as exclusive to intentional acts and the discourses thereof. The first question is perhaps easiest to address, simply because the distinction of them as analytical frameworks does not translate into ontologically isolated realities. The second one is trickier and must be given some due attention. The idea that Discourse Theory treats everything as discourse is a common misconception. As Thomas Jacobs argues, Discourse Theory "does not involve solipsist doubt about the material character of the world around us, nor is it an idealist claim positing that nothing escapes language and ideas."[304] However, there is still a lingering assumption that it is the driving force. He continues to explain that "what it implies, instead, is that nothing necessarily follows from the material character of the world, that there is no meaningfulness outside discourse as a subjective practice."[305] While I concur with the first statement, the latter obviously collides with my initial purpose statement, where I recognized agency as distributed over both human agents and technology. Hence, I view things and persons as engaged in a fluid relationship. To be clear, my use of Discourse Theory does not imply that there is no "meaningfulness" beyond discourses that are part of subjective practices.

A helpful concept to articulate this position is what Bollmer refers to as "performative materialism."[306] Performative materialism seeks a middle ground between emphasis on media as either material or discursive. Whereas some media-theoretical assumptions regarding representational critique render media materialistic to an extent that excludes ideas or ideology, the solipsism permeating some medium theories, on the other hand, is equally problematic. To avoid both extremes, Bollmer defines media representation as a material *and* discursive practice, a practice that performs reality. Similarly, I view discourse as having varying degrees of permanence and influence and that it can materialize over time. One can, like Bollmer does, borrow from scholars such as Judith Butler whose interpretation of performativity suggests a "return to the notion of matter not as a site or a surface, but as a process of materialization that stabilizes over time and produce the effects of boundary, fixity, and surface we call matter,"[307] as well

304 Jacobs, "The Dislocated Universe of Laclau and Mouffe: An Introduction to Post-Structuralist Discourse Theory," p. 298.

305 Jacobs, "The Dislocated Universe of Laclau and Mouffe: An Introduction to Post-Structuralist Discourse Theory," p. 298.

306 Bollmer, *Materialist Media Theory. An Introduction*, p. 6, 25.

307 Referenced in Bollmer, *Materialist Media Theory. An Introduction*, p. 47.

as the ideas of Michel Foucault, for whom the capacity to speak about something today – in turn affecting materialization – is dependent upon history, an archive that "groups and orders the past in a way that materializes in the present."[308] Media, then, "*act* by serving as the means for writing down and closing off 'history' as it becomes stored."[309] Thus, discourses also become matter, and in reverse, matter becomes translated into discourse.

Such discourses, however, are not essential or stable, but conditional and transformable. Discourse Theory rests on a dual foundation and criticism of Marxism and Structuralism. Laclau and Mouffe "fuse these traditions into a single poststructuralist theory in which the whole social field is understood as a web of processes in which meaning is created."[310] While a Marxian view of society rests on the notion that economic processes "structure" the behaviors and ideas of individuals, Laclau and Mouffe are part of a "post-marxist" tradition initiated by thinkers such as Antonio Gramsci, that reject such determinism.[311] All social structure is on the contrary "dislocated" – "internally incomplete, conditional, accidental, and transformable."[312] Whereas the Saussurian structural linguistic, in turn, assumes that language and the relationships between different signs are fixated and stable, Laclau and Mouffe treats such structures as necessarily constructed and unstable.[313] Saussure's structural linguistic can be likened to a fishing-net, where "all linguistic signs can be thought of as knots in a net, deriving their meaning from their difference from each other, that is, from being situated in particular positions in the net."[314] Whereas this idea gives a helpful visual of Laclau's and Mouffe's Discourse Theory, the determinism of the structure is a false impression. The structure is only present due to our pursuit of meaning, that is, we strive toward meaning "*as if* a Saussurian structure existed."[315] In other words, there is no essence to the linguistic structure, rather it is a dream of fixation of meaning that is ultimately doomed to fail.

From this theoretical approach, religious organizations such as The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints contain discourses on communication that have become

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308 Bollmer, *Materialist Media Theory. An Introduction*, p. 65.

309 Bollmer, *Materialist Media Theory. An Introduction*, p. 65.

310 Marianne Jørgensen & Louise J. Phillips, *Discourse Analysis as Theory and Method*, (SAGE Publications, Limited, 2002. ProQuest Ebook Central, https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/gu/detail.action?docID=343958, accessed May 8, 2025), p. 30.

311 Jacobs, "The Dislocated Universe of Laclau and Mouffe: An Introduction to Post-Structuralist Discourse Theory," p. 296–297.

312 Jacobs, "The Dislocated Universe of Laclau and Mouffe: An Introduction to Post-Structuralist Discourse Theory," p. 297–298.

313 Laclau & Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy. Toward a Radical Democratic Politics*, p. 103–106.

314 Jørgensen & Phillips, *Discourse Analysis as Theory and Method*, p. 30.

315 Jørgensen & Phillips, *Discourse Analysis as Theory and Method*, p. 30.

hegemonic. Alternative religious identities or communities may engage in articulatory practices where they use those structures and combine their segments in novel ways while introducing new ideas, words or concepts that alter their meaning. Returning to the original RSST, then, historical accounts cannot merely be seen as what happened but must be considered as part of a discursive repertoire whose different parts are arranged and molded in a specific way to suit the author's purpose. The same goes for core values, which cannot merely be taken for granted as what a specific community believes, but as a construction based on a stock of signs available to them in their specific context. Discursive framing of technology such as a podcast therefore rests on articulatory practices that bind together and make sense of communicating in a particular way and in doing so, religious individuals and groups both construct themselves and their religious tradition. Consequently, neither the Church nor the podcast community exist sui generis but are approached as actively imagined and created by their participants through various discursive strategies. Thus, Latter-day Saint Feminists are studied here, not as representing a common underlying essence but as unified through discursive articulations that challenge the hegemony of the Church. Accordingly, the meaning and content of their community are not pre-given but crucially depend upon being articulated against or in relation to other discursive struggles and demands taking place in their religious context. In other words, I study community *in the making,* which separates the revised from the original RSST approach which presupposes existing communities.

4. Method, Methodology and Material

This chapter is tasked with detailing the study's general research design, the choices and delimitations made concerning material, ethical considerations and positionality, and lastly, outlining the operationalization of the theoretical framework presented in the previous chapter.

4.1 Research Design

This dissertation is based on a qualitative in-depth case study of three United States Feminist Latter-day Saint podcasts conducted between the years 2020 and 2024. The processual order in which this study was conducted can be described as abductive, which means that I have moved back and forth between data collection and analysis.[316]

4.1.1 Case Study

The purpose of doing a case study is to reach in-depth knowledge rather than generalizable results. John Gerring suggests that "a case study may be understood as the intensive study of a single case where the purpose of that study is – at least in part – to shed light on a larger class of cases (a population)."[317] In this case, three podcasts serve as cases of contemporary Mormon Feminism online. As in the present study, it may consist of more than one case, yet minimized enough so that an "intensive" or in-depth study is possible.[318] The "fewer cases there are, and the more intensively they are studied, the more a work merits the appellation 'case study'" Gerring explains.[319] The rationale behind doing a case study is dual: the possibility of reaching depth of knowledge and the "explorative" scope it offers.[320] Not only does it offer an opportunity to gain greater

316 Kathy Charmaz, Robert Thornberg, and Elaine Keane, "Evolving Grounded Theory and Social Justice Inquiry," in Norman K. Denzin & Yvonna S. Lincoln, *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research*, (New York: SAGE, 2018), pp. 411–43, p. 431.

317 John Gerring, *Case Study Research: Principles and Practices*, (Cambridge University Press, 2006, ProQuest Ebook Central, https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/gu/detail.action?docID=288451, accessed May 8, 2025), p. 20.

318 Gerring, *Case Study Research: Principles and Practices*, p. 20.

319 Gerring, *Case Study Research: Principles and Practices*, p. 20.

320 Thomas A. Schwandt & Emily F. Gates, "Case Study Methodology," in Norman K. Denzin & Yvonna S. Lincoln (eds), *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research*, (London: SAGE, 2018), p. 348.

knowledge on Mormon Feminism, it also allows me to better understand the process through which hosts and audiences enact and construct the significance of podcasting and to uncover the complexities and nuances of it. While one could draw general conclusions about whether digital media are significant through a cross-case study of a larger sample of podcasts, one could not – at least not with the time limit in place for this dissertation – arrive at conclusions as to *why* they are significant. That requires a closer look at the podcasts in question. By delimiting myself to three cases I have been able to make more extensive within-case observations (of episodes and related material such as images and texts), while also analyzing each in depth. In other words, this dissertation aims to generate a "holistic" and "thick" description.[321] Previous research has already demonstrated that digital media are important and that they grant women agency, but it has rarely "peered into the box" of that significance to learn the details of how it operates.[322]

4.1.2 Inclusion Criteria

The material researched in this dissertation consists of three cases (podcasts) and multiple within-case observations (episodes and related material from websites and social media).[323] In the following text I will describe the motives and rationales behind the choices that were made.

The podcasts explored here were initially found by searching for "Mormon Feminist podcast" and "Latter-day Saint Feminist podcast" using search engines such as Google as well as podcast streaming sites' and popular Mormon Feminist platforms' own search functions such as *Feminist Mormon Housewives* and *The Exponent II*. This search gave 10 results of podcasts produced between the years 2011 and when this project began in 2020.[324] First, among the ten search results, there were several podcasts driven by Latter-day Saints encompassing subjects such as female empowerment in a broad sense of the word, [325] but

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321 Gerring, *Case Study Research: Principles and Practices*, p. 49.

322 Gerring, *Case Study Research: Principles and Practices*, p. 45.

323 Gerring, *Case Study Research: Principles and Practices*, p. 19.

324 *Daughters of Mormonism,* daughtersofmormonism.blogspot.com/p/about.html, accessed January 4, 2024; *The Round Table*, www.patheos.com/blogs/theroundtable/about/, accessed May 13, 2024; Lindsay Hansen Park, *Year of Polygamy,* www.yearofpolygamy.com/about/, accessed, January 4, 2024; Neylan McBaine, *The LDS Women Project,* ldswomenproject.com/about-us/, accessed, January 4, 2024; April Young Bennett, *Religious Feminism Podcast*, aprilyoungb.com/portfolio-item/religious-feminism-podcast/, accessed May 13, 2024; Allyson Reynolds and Tiffany Sowby, *The Sisterhood Podcast*, accessed January 4, 2024; Susan M. Hinckley & Cynthia Winward, *At Last She Said It*, atlastshesaidit.org, accessed April 2, 2020; Channing Parker & Elise Poll, *The Faithful Feminists*, accessed January 4, 2024.

325 See for example "The LDS Women Project", ldswomenproject.com/podcasts/, accessed May 12, 2024.

not everyone of them was explicitly "feminist,"[326] nor autonomous from the Church.[327] Among these I chose podcasts that were (1) driven by independent Latter-day Saints who either self-identified as feminist or framed their content as such. Because this study focuses on podcasting as it is used and practiced today, and much has happened since 2011, I narrowed them down further to podcasts that were (2) still active in 2020 when I started writing this dissertation. It should be mentioned however, that this still includes one podcast that has been active since 2014. In a final step (3) I delimited the material through the criteria of popularity. There are several ways to find out a podcast's popularity. One is the number of followers, ratings or downloads that can be found on popular streaming sites such as Spotify, Podbean and Apple Podcaster. Another is to look at the number of followers the podcast has on social media. There are several reasons why both aspects have been considered. First there are differences in whether both downloads and number of followers are made public through streaming sites, which makes it difficult to compare them. Since one of the podcast hosts explored here does not use social media as frequently or in the same way as the other two yet has the most followers on streaming sites, it is also impossible to only refer to social media popularity. Also, while downloads may have been a valuable tool during the early twenty-first century to decide how large an audience a podcast had, because many listeners today stream podcasts online, they do not necessarily leave any trace. The same can be said about followers since listeners do not use the RSS function to the same degree as before. While the criteria of following on the streaming sites mentioned above may not show the exact number of listeners who listen regularly, then, they do give us an indication of what podcasters are most popular together with followers on social media. By combining these three criteria, I reduced the scope of material into three podcasts, *The Faithful Feminists*, *At Last She Said It*, and *Year of Polygamy*. These constitute the study's cases and will be presented in detail shortly.

4.1.3 Within-case Observations

As explained in the introduction to this dissertation, podcasts are transmedial, meaning they are integrated with other media.[328] Because the content of these podcasts flows over multiple platforms, I have recognized everything from Spotify to social media, websites, blogs, newsletters, live chats, and conferences under the umbrella of pod-

326 Through for example titles, self-definitions and hashtags.

327 See for example church-owned "Latter-day Saint Women" and "Saints," www.churchofjesuschrist.org/media/collection/podcasts?lang=eng, accessed May 12, 2024, and Brigham Young University "Maxwell Institute Podcast," https://mi.byu.edu/podcast, accessed May 12, 2024.

328 Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*.

casting. While recognizing all these practices as what podcasting means, I have for ethical reasons delimited my material to content publicly available.[329] Thus, when such practices are spoken of in my results, they concern material found on Spotify, websites, and social media, that is, material they have chosen to be public rather than restricted to a private audience. I have, in other words, not participated in conferences or live chats, as that would demand an entirely different approach as well as other ethical considerations. When I say that I have analyzed content related to conferences or other face-to-face gatherings it means that I have collected material related to such meetings from their online platforms.

I have further reduced this content to their Website and Instagram and their related comment section for several reasons. First, because two of the three podcasts who have Facebook primarily share secondary sources on their Facebook, meaning, links to their website and Instagram accounts, and secondly because the conversations among their audience happening on Facebook are not substantially different from their Instagram or Website. Thus, within the case of each podcast I have made four types of within-case observations: episode, website, Instagram and comments. Both text and audiovisual content have first been observed and then selectively collected to a Word document. The basis of this selection is their relation to the themes that emerged through analyzing the audio, which means that I have not collected or saved everything – as I have done with the audio – but delimited myself to relevant content.

The focus of this dissertation and largest observation of data concerns the audio of the podcast. The audio has been analyzed both through listening and reading. From the *Year of Polygamy* podcast, I have listened to each episode available between the years 2014-2024, and for *The Faithful Feminists* and *At Last She Said It*, between the year they both started in 2020 up until May 2024. Together this encompasses around 574 episodes, 198 episodes of *Year of Polygamy*, 192 episodes of *At Last She Said It*, and 184 episodes by *The Faithful Feminists*, each episode ranging between thirty minutes to one hour, sometimes one hour and thirty minutes. While my approach has been qualitative, to analyze the audio in depth, I have transcribed all episodes. To do so I have used the Office transcript-tool in cases where the audio is possible to download and the Office dictation-tool in cases where it is not. To ensure accuracy I have proofread the transcripts afterward. These transcripts are roughly 2000 pages long Word document per podcast. During each episode I have also written physical notes on paper. Besides highlighting important themes or events, these notes have both helped me pinpoint verbal cues that

[329] Charles Ess, Steven Jones, "Ethical Decision-making and Internet Research. Recommendations from the AoIR Ethics Working Committee," in *Readings in Virtual Research Ethics: Issues and Controversies*, Elizabeth A. Buchanan (ed.), (Hershey: Information Science Publishing, 2004), 27–44, p. 33.

are not noticeable in the transcripts as well as create a more accessible overview of the content. The quotes selected to illustrate my analysis in the empirical chapters have been transcribed using a simplified adaptation of the Jefferson Transcription System, originally developed by Gail Jefferson.[330] For those interested in the specifics of this transcription method, a detailed description is available in the appendix of this dissertation.

From each website I have made observations of several different types of content mostly encompassing texts but also images,[331] such as introductory texts and images to episodes that frame and paint a picture about what listeners will hear in the audio; about sections that present the hosts of the podcast and their podcast mission; blogposts that continue narratives and topics covered in the audio; and stand-alone content of things like resources and guides.

From Instagram I have observed both texts, images and videos. Texts include Instagram bios or short biographies of maximum 150 characters that describe the account in question, such as what the podcast's general mission/purpose is and a presentation of its host, as well as captions under uploaded images i.e. descriptions of or related to the image. Images, furthermore, which were Instagram's original feature, imply the function of uploading single or multiple photos in one post. These images often contain both visual and textual data. Videos on Instagram include Stories and Reels. Stories are videos meant to be quick 15-second snapshots uploaded to one's profile and available for up to 24 hours but are commonly used for longer videos as well (divided into 15 seconds each). Reels can be up to 90 seconds long and are saved under a reels category on one's profile. Both text and audiovisual content have first been observed and then selectively collected to a Word document.

From both Website and Instagram, I have observed comment sections where listeners can comment on their podcast or related content. For ethical conundrums concerning content where individuals' private information can be backtracked – which I will shortly return to – these have been used restrictively. Hence, I have observed them in their entirety but included a very limited part of them, more specifically shorter references rather than quotations.

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330 See for example Gail Jefferson, "An Exercise in the Transcription and Analysis of Laughter," in Teun A. van Dijk (ed.), *Handbook of Discourse Analysis*, (London: Academic, 1985), pp. 25–34; Gail Jefferson, "Glossary of Transcript Symbols With an Introduction," in Gene H. Lerner (ed.), *Conversation Analysis: Studies from the First Generation,* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2004), pp. 13–31.

331 Because many of the images analyzed here are original art with various levels of adaptations, the judicial process for using them in my dissertation proved to be more complicated than I originally prepared for. I have provided direct links to the images so that readers can look for themselves.

4.1.4 Presentation of Podcasts

Year of Polygamy created by Lindsay Hansen Park, originated as a segment of the *Feminist Mormon Housewives* podcast series. While sporadically active through Facebook, and Instagram, *Year of Polygamy* primarily produces audio- and website content. It chronicles Hansen Park's examination of Mormon polygamy through a feminist lens, commencing in 1831 with the inception of polygamy, specifically the plural marriages of Joseph Smith, and progressively broadening its scope to encompass contemporary manifestations of the practice among Fundamentalist Mormons. The podcast delves into sources that have allegedly been marginalized or overlooked by church authorities, excluded from official narratives, meticulously documented in academic abstracts and journals, and synthesizes these into a cohesive narrative. Initially conceived as a year-long endeavor – hence its title – with an anticipated output of 75 episodes, the project was subsequently expanded to include 100 episodes. Following the release of what was intended to be the conclusive 100th episode in 2015, the podcast has continued to evolve, releasing (at the time of writing) an additional 96 episodes. Besides making public material "hidden in archives" the podcast also investigates contemporary experiences of Mormon fundamentalists through interviews both with individuals who are still members of specific Mormon groups and with those who have left.[332] The main platform is its website, even though it also shows advertisements from time to time on its Facebook-page. Besides the 434 constant followers documented by Podbean,[333] *Year of Polygamy* is undoubtedly one of the most popular podcasts. It is widely acknowledged in media as well as by other Feminist Latter-day Saints as an authoritative voice on the subject of polygamy.[334] An example of Hansen Park's status as expert is her role as consultant in the Hulu series *Under the Banner of Heaven* (2022) about the murders committed by the Fundamentalist Mormon brothers Ron and Dan Lafferty. The project continues through the podcast website under the headline "Living under the Banner" where Hansen Park shares stories resembling the experiences of one of the brothers' victims, Brenda.[335]

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[332] This interest can be likened to other podcasts investigating post-Mormons and controversial subjects. One example is the famous podcast *Mormon Stories* led by John Dehlin who interviews former Latter-day Saints.

[333] Although the number of followers might appear low, it is important to consider, as noted in the inclusion criteria, that follower counts on streaming sites alone do not fully represent a podcast's popularity. This is due to changes in how listeners use streaming platforms, particularly a decreased reliance on the RSS function.

[334] *The Faithful Feminists* often references Hansen Park's work. For example in the episode "Emma's Election," March 8, 2021, as well as their series on "Polygamy in Pieces," November 8–15, 2021.

[335] Lindsay Hansen Park, "Living Under the Banner," *Year of Polygamy*, www.yearofpolygamy.com/living-under-the-banner/, accessed January 4, 2024.

At Last She Said It is a podcast that according to its hosts serves as a forum where "women of faith" convene to acknowledge the complexities of their experiences and support one another in navigating these challenges.[336] Established in April 2020 by Cynthia Winward and Susan M. Hinckley, the podcast has broadcasted 192 episodes to date and boasts approximately 11,200 followers on Instagram.[337] The platform disseminates content across three different social media channels: a dedicated website, Facebook, and Instagram. Hinckley and Winward also conduct real meetups with their followers and continuously expand their project through things like newsletters (where listeners can share essays), book-clubs and zoom-meetings with their listeners. The genesis of this podcast stemmed from ongoing dialogues among the hosts and their like-minded peers, creating a platform where women could express thoughts they had previously self-censored. The podcast is described by themselves as a place "where women of faith come together to acknowledge that it's complicated and support each other while we figure it out."[338] The podcast's title reflects its core mission: providing a space for Latter-day Saint women to voice sentiments they have historically been reluctant to share publicly.[339] This concept is conducted both through life writing by hosts and listeners, dialogues between podcast hosts, and interviews. It encompasses a broad spectrum of topics, including church doctrines, historical figures, and prevailing trends and ideals within the Mormon community, all explored through the lens of personal experiences and viewpoints.[340]

The Faithful Feminists is another notable podcast launched in January 2020 by Channing Parker and Elise Poll. It utilizes the *Come Follow Me* manual,[341] developed by the Church to enhance personal scripture study, as a framework for feminist interpretation of texts such as the Book of Mormon and Doctrine and Covenants. The podcast aims to explore the intersection of faith and feminism, described as an educational and empowering resource that presents gospel principles within a feminist context through

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336 Susan M. Hinckley & Cynthia Winward, "Episode 001: It's Complicated," *At Last She Said It*, April 2, 2020.

337 @atlastshesaidit, Instagram, www.instagram.com/atlastshesaidit/, accessed May 13, 2024.

338 Susan M. Hinckley & Cynthia Winward, "Episode 001: It's Complicated," *At Last She Said It,* April 2, 2020.

339 M. Hinckley & Winward, "Episode 001: It's Complicated."

340 This type of dialogue can be found in many other Latter-day Saints-driven podcasts as well. One example is *The Sisterhood Podcast* which was founded in 2018 and is hosted by Allyson Reynolds and Tiffany Sowby. *The Sisterhood Podcast*, thesisterhoodpodcast.com*,* accessed January 4, 2024.

341 The influence of the *Come Follow Me* manual can also be found among other Latter-day Saints podcasts, from *Beyond the Block* which provides Black and queer interpretations, to the more conservative *Follow Him*, featuring expert insights primarily from Brigham Young University scholars.

accessible and compassionate dialogues.[342] *The Faithful Feminists* also diversifies its content through various formats on its website and Instagram, including sermons, poems, diary-style episodes, and interviews, all fostering robust online engagement. Besides variations in podcast format, they also produce much content on both their website and their Instagram account,[343] where they actively engage and interact with their listeners. The website publishes their podcast episodes, written essays,[344] and instructions/guides.[345] Each episode is transcribed and published on their website, and advertised on an Instagram page where their followers can also join the conversation. A successful podcast, *The Faithful Feminists* quickly grew in followers, reaching 10,000 followers on Instagram by the time it aired its 184th and last episode in 2023.[346] Like *At Last She Said It*, the podcast complements its digital presence with offline activities like the "Soft Chair Workshop," where discussions on feminism and scriptures were conducted.[347]

4.2 Ethical Considerations

The subject of this dissertation presents a range of ethical challenges, some rooted in formal considerations like the guidelines set forth by the Swedish Ethical Review Authority.[348] The first issue raised was whether or not to submit the entire study for an ethical review. After consulting with legal experts at Gothenburg University, it was concluded that the material produced by the podcasters themselves fell under the principle of "fair use." This principle allows for limited quotations of copyrighted material without needing permission, provided the source is properly cited. This decision also aligns with practices in academic research on the internet,[349] ensuring compliance with both legal guidelines and the recommendations of internet research communities.

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342 Channing Parker & Elise Poll, "About," *The Faithful Feminists*, www.thefaithfulfeminists.com/p/about-us.html, accessed January 4, 2024.

343 Channing Parker & Elise Poll, @thefaithfulfeminists, www.instagram.com/thefaithfulfeminists/, accessed May 20, 2024.

344 For example, Kate M., Ruth M., Channing P. & Elise P., "The Hidden Harms of Heavenly Mother: Part 1," April 18, 2022, www.thefaithfulfeminists.com/2022/04/hidden-harms-of-heavenly-mother-part-1.html, accessed May 20, 2024; "The Hidden Harms of Heavenly Mother: Part 2," *The Faithful Feminists,* April 19, 2022, www.thefaithfulfeminists.com/2022/04/hidden-harms-of-heavenly-mother-part-2.html, accessed May 20, 2024.

345 Channing Parker & Elise Poll, "Conference Care Kit," *The Faithful Feminists,* October 1, 2020, www.thefaithfulfeminists.com/2020/09/carekit.html, accessed: January 4, 2024.

346 @thefaithfulfeminists, www.instagram.com/thefaithfulfeminists/, accessed July 31, 2023.

347 Channing Parker & Elise Poll, "Soft-Chairs Workshop," *The Faithful Feminists,* August 7, 2021, www.thefaithfulfeminists.com/2021/08/a-soft-chairs-workshop.html, accessed January 4, 2024.

348 Swedish Ethical Review Authority, etikprovningsmyndigheten.se/en/, accessed March 28, 2025.

349 Ethical considerations hinge on the venue's privacy policies and user control as well as whether or not the content is considered public by its participants. The Podcasts researched here are public, lacking

The ethical complexity of my research increased, however, when examining the podcast audience. Audience members often use private accounts or real names to comment on podcast websites and social media, which does not necessarily imply consent for these comments to face public scrutiny, especially since they sometimes include sensitive information.[350] Consequently, I sought a separate ethical review from the Swedish Ethical Review Authority specifically for using comments from these platforms. In the process of doing so however, I was forced to make some difficult decisions that ultimately slimmed down my initial plans considerably. The Swedish Ethical Review Authority mandated that comments be presented in a way that protects individual integrity, requiring even aliases to be modified. This measure was taken to ensure that real names and personal information would not be searchable and identifiable and therefore remained confidential, thus safeguarding the privacy of individuals involved. The effect as I interpreted it, was that there was no way of guaranteeing this without paraphrasing all comments, because copy-pasting the comments from my dissertation into a search engine would have allowed for them to be tracked back to their origin. This origin, in turn, displays an alias that may or may not be that person's real name and a connected profile possibly containing personal information.

Whether or not it is intended to have that effect, I would describe the Swedish Ethical Review Authority's conditions to be similar to what is sometimes referred to as "high cloaking." Because of the ability to backtrack information from a study to an online content, researchers use varying degrees of cloaking procedures, which refer to methods of concealing or changing either the identity of or content produced by online participants. Robert Kozinets recognizes three levels of cloaking: *No cloaking* is generally required if the "risk of harm is very low, data is not sensitive, the population is not vulnerable and where the person is already a recognized public figure."[351] As explained above, this is how I have approached the podcast's own content. *Cloaking* should be used "when benefits are high and the potential for harm is low" but "where the actual name of the social media site can be provided, such as the name of a Facebook or LinkedIn group."[352] Where the ability to recognize an individual or a group of people

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restricted access, and their hosts are "authors" whose texts/artifacts are intended as public, thus posing lesser ethical obligations regarding privacy and consent. See Ess &Jones, "Ethical Decision-making and Internet Research. Recommendations from the AoIR Ethics Working Committee," p. 33.

350 "political opinions," and "religious or philosophical persuasions," are identified by both The Swedish Research Council and the Swedish Ethical Review Authority as "sensitive information." See "God Forskningssed 2024," *The Swedish Research Council,* 2024, p. 68 and "Vad menas med känsliga personuppgifter?," *Etikprövningsmyndigheten,* etikprovningsmyndigheten.se/faq/vad-menas-med-kansliga-personuppgifter/#fl-main-content, accessed December 13, 2024.

351 Kozinets, Netnography: *The Essential Guide to Qualitative Social Media Research*, p. 400.

352 Kozinets, Netnography: *The Essential Guide to Qualitative Social Media Research*, p. 400.

who are not public is heightened, one should therefore "subtly alter or rephrase verbatim quotes without changing their meaning so that they cannot be linked to the original post."[353] *High cloaking* is used when the "potential for harm is high, when topics are sensitive and/or the population is vulnerable" and means that the researcher alters the name of the site, the online pseudonyms, names and other details that may be used to identify the user.[354] It also means that quotes are altered to the extent that their source cannot be found by entering them into a search engine. Since I am interested in how things are said or written, direct quotes are elemental.

Due to the stipulations set by the Swedish Ethical Review Authority, the use of social media comments in my research was limited. Originally intended to play a significant role, most comments are now referenced indirectly rather than being quoted in full. To capture the essence of social media discourse without compromising individual privacy, I quote only generic words that appear across multiple comments, ensuring they cannot be traced back to specific users or accounts. Quotes are linked to the Instagram posts they respond to, rather than user aliases, further protecting personal identities. I have also anonymized all individuals by using the term "commenter" instead of actual names or aliases. In contrast, comments from website platforms, where personal information is not visible, are quoted more liberally, though names are still anonymized.

4.3 Positioning

Positioning is crucial in research on traditionally religious women, where self-declaring one's stance as either an insider or outsider is common.[355] Scholars are either concerned about being part of the group studied or about being an outsider looking in. While mine is a position of a non-member – I am neither member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, nor part of a community of feminists struggling to bring change to a religious tradition – I have come to view my analytical process as partially attempting to pick up the spectacles of Feminist Latter-day Saints. Of course, I recognize simultaneously that I can never reach an understanding that mirrors their "own." But I also alternate and layer this position by reading against the grain, by attempting instead to interpret the further significance or dilemmas of their perspectives – in this case to explore the convergence of Mormon Feminism and digital media. This is also to say that I find discussions on analytical positioning far more interesting and pressing than

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353 Kozinets, Netnography: *The Essential Guide to Qualitative Social Media Research*, p. 400.

354 Kozinets, Netnography: *The Essential Guide to Qualitative Social Media Research*, p. 401.

355 See for example Hoyt, *Agency, Subjectivity and Essentialism within Traditional Religious Cultures: An Ethnographic Study of an American Latter-day Saint Community.*

whether one is an insider or outsider.[356] Rather than position myself on either side of the insider/outsider dichotomy then, I think of my position as a movement between immersion and abstraction, closeness and distance as necessary parts of analysis.[357]

A closely related issue concerns the relationship between researcher and researched. While closeness is alternated with distance, the latter does not equal indifference to the cause of Latter-day Saint Feminists. My interest in their cause does not necessarily mirror their own, however, but must be considered an attempt to also add to and abstract from it. Although, as I will demonstrate in the coming chapters, there is a substantial discourse on communication and the significance of media among Feminist Latter-day Saints, I recognize that my theoretical interests in the podcast as a medium that both enables and conditions is not necessarily an interest that the women I have studied share. While it is not as easy to distinguish Mormon Feminism from academia – several researchers on Mormon Feminism are for example themselves part of the community they study – it is for the academic audience within the specific fields of Mormon Studies and Digital Religion that this dissertation is intended.

This position is intimately tied to discussions on the relationship between feminist/critical theoretical perspectives and conservative/traditionally religious women.[358] It is not uncommon for scholars to retract their feminist positions, in the sense that they cannot be done away with but should not influence their research.[359] For instance, Amy Hoyt's 2007 dissertation critiques how feminist theory can inadvertently obscure the core values and beliefs of religious women by politicizing their motives. Hoyt discusses gender essentialism, a concept often criticized by feminist theorists but integral to Latter-day Saints' beliefs in a pre-mortal gender essence crucial for their religious identity and practices. Hoyt argues that applying anti-essentialist views to these beliefs risks causing "epistemic violence," as it could significantly undermine the fundamental self-

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356 A result also of the type of extant material I am working with, meaning, I as a researcher have not had a hand in the shaping or production thereof.

357 For that reason, I appreciate the proposition of viewing insider-outsider as "levels of observers" where secondary observers can utilize both "emic" and "etic" perspectives in Till Mostowlansky & Andrea Rota, "A Matter of Perspective? Disentangling the Emic-Etic Debate in the Scientific Study of Religion\s," *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion*, vol. 28, no. 4/5, 2016, pp. 317–336.

358 Which bears resemblance to the academic debate between Russel T. McCutcheon and Robert Orsi. See Russell T. McCutcheon, "'It's a Lie. There's No Truth in It! It's a Sin!': On the Limits of the Humanistic Study of Religion and the Costs of Saving Others from Themselves," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, vol. 73, no. 3, 2006, pp. 720–750; Robert Orsi, "Fair Game," *Council of Societies for the Study of Religion Bulletin*, vol. 33, no. 3, 2005, pp. 87–89.

359 See for example Hoyt, Agency, *Subjectivity and Essentialism within Traditional Religious Cultures: An Ethnographic Study of an American Latter-day Saint Community*.

understanding of Latter-day Saint women regarding gender and motherhood.[360] Such positions often underscore the importance of cultural sensitivity, inspired by post-colonial theory, which acknowledges the impact of imposing external norms on diverse cultural practices. It draws from scholars like Saba Mahmood, who critiqued feminist tendencies to fetishize resistance,[361] leading to a cautious approach toward feminist critiques that might transform traditionally religious women into unwilling political symbols. While endorsing this critique, I am also mindful of its limitations. The worst-case scenario to some scholars seems to be to attribute to women descriptions not "germane" to their own worldview.[362] There are several problems with succumbing entirely to this fear. First, it risks producing descriptions rather than analysis. My position, while trying to be sensitive to how Latter-day Saint Feminists see things with their own eyes, has, again, been to not only reproduce what they say – readers of this dissertation are recommended to listen to their podcasts for that information – but to think of the theoretical significance of it. Second, it seems to assume that one cannot address someone's belief in essentialism without theoretically sustaining essentialism. It is as if a theoretical framework must be homegrown or indigenous to that group. I find this position difficult to combine with the type of critical and nuanced perspectives that many scholars are now calling for when it comes to women's agency, i.e. the ability to contextualize what religious subjects narrate about themselves or their community. Returning to my initial discussion, I find it more helpful to think in terms of abstraction and immersion – both of which I find analytically necessary. It is to this subject, and more specifically to the analytical research process that has guided me in this endeavor, that I will now turn.

4.4 Abduction: Moving Between Different Media Approaches

The processual order in which this study was conducted can be described as abductive, which means that I have moved back and forth between data collection and analysis. Brianna L. Kennedy describes abduction as requiring "an iterative interplay between (a) data collection and analysis, in which the ongoing analysis of data suggests plausible hypotheses to investigate further; and (b) data and theory, in which researchers have to

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360 Hoyt, Agency, *Subjectivity and Essentialism within Traditional Religious Cultures: An Ethnographic Study of an American Latter-day Saint Community*, p. 4.

361 Mahmood, *Politics of Piety. The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*.

362 Hoyt, Agency, *Subjectivity and Essentialism within Traditional Religious Cultures: An Ethnographic Study of an American Latter-day Saint Community*, p. 4.

draw implicitly or explicitly on previous theoretical knowledge but also re-think, revise, or challenge established theoretical assumptions to resolve surprising or puzzling data."[363] In this case, it has meant that I have worked with the same corpus – the sampling of which I detailed earlier – yet collected different aspects of it at different stages of the research process. As a result of processing this material I have continuously revised my understanding and interpretation thereof – exploring the benefits of a variety of theories and analytical perspectives before settling with the framework described earlier. The highlight of this iterative process meant that I travelled through different outlooks of media – meaning, my understanding thereof developed over time. For clarity, this abductive process has consisted of three steps:

(a) Reading rather than listening was the first act in my analytical endeavors. After having transcribed all podcast episodes available I applied an inductive coding inspired by Kathy Charmaz's Grounded Theory. The rationale behind this choice is that it allows for an understanding of the material on its own terms, where more theoretically laden interpretations may grow from the process only in a later stage. Coding, Charmaz explains, implies "naming segments of data with a label that simultaneously categorizes, summarizes, and accounts for each piece of data."[364] On a first level, this involved the naming of each word, line and segment. These were generated through an openness and closeness to the data: codes worked as descriptive of "action," meaning, they explained what happened in each word/line/segment of the text rather than their conceptual or theoretical significance. Of course, it is impossible to code a text without being affected by your own assumptions, but Grounded Theory implies an endeavor to code as close as possible to the data itself, i.e., striving for closeness rather than abstraction. This allowed me to unpack the language used by its authors – sometimes resulting in "in vivo codes" i.e., coding based on emic terms, whose meanings are often assumed but not explained by its authors. Explaining and naming in small sections forced me to consider both the implied and indirect meaning of each. The implicit meaning of a word or sentence, however, often emerges through comparison between data – which takes us to the second level of coding which implies comparison and synthetization. I first performed a focused coding where "the most significant and or frequent earlier codes" are used to "sift through large amounts of data."[365] I then did a comparison between the codes which resulted in synthetizations or "categories." The third phase can be

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363 Brianna L. Kennedy, "Deduction, Induction, and Abduction," in Uwe Flick (ed.), *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Data Collection*, (London: SAGE, 2018), pp. 49–64, p. 6.

364 Kathy Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory. A Practical Guide Through Qualitative Analysis*, (London: SAGE, 2006), p. 43.

365 Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory. A Practical Guide Through Qualitative Analysis*, p. 57.

described as a more "theoretical coding" which meant that I tried to "specify possible relationships between categories" that were developed in my second stage of synthetization.[366] This resulted in a very broad set of themes describing mostly *what* and *why* of the performance of Mormon feminism. Among these were for example recurring topics of faith crisis, authenticity, resilience, and care; theological discussions on agency, grace, revelation, and ministering; perceptions of both their podcast, their listeners, and their Church.

(b) By casting a broad net, I also began taking notice of *how* the podcasters communicated, such as certain genres, recurring terms and catchphrases – but also (without having terms and concepts for it) the form of speech – whether they for example lectured or talked in dialogue, and how they communicated with their followers. Realization grew that I needed analytical tools for focusing on what podcasting consisted of technologically. I read up on media-theoretical perspectives – for example contemporary thinkers such as Andreas Kitzmann and classical thinkers such as Marshall McLuhan – and found those emphasizing spatiality and temporality to provide what I was lacking. I also did a literature review of podcast research more specifically, to construct a sheet of possibly relevant concepts. From there I read/listened for clues as to what podcast technology was enacted in the specific case of Latter-day Saint Feminists, that is, how they recorded and transmitted their podcasts. I spent some time going back and forth between the material at hand and previous research on podcasting. Through this repetitive process I came to the conclusion that three technological qualities – parasocial relationships,[367] liveness,[368] and seriality[369] – are enacted in different degrees and variations among Feminist Latter-day Saints. These are in other words the more specified adaptions of "performed media" that – as mentioned earlier – will be detailed later. This step then informed both my method for presentation and the continued analysis in step three. This latter part explains why I have presented the analysis the way I have – where each chapter presupposes one of these technological qualities.

(c) Now that I found myself somewhere in-between media as content and technology I saw more clearly what Campbell has referred to as "framing" – Latter-day Saint Feminists talked about communication and about podcasting specifically, and several aspects which I had coded as recurring topics of content – authenticity and their perceptions of Church – also had to do with format, or rather the framings and validations

366 Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory. A Practical Guide Through Qualitative Analysis*, p. 63.

367 Dibble, Hartmann & Rosaen, "Parasocial Interaction and Parasocial Relationship: Conceptual Clarification and a Critical Assessment of Measures"; Zuraikat, "The Parasocial Nature of Podcast."

368 Alyn Euritt, *Podcasting as an Intimate Medium*.

369 Frank Kelleter, "Five Ways of Looking a Popular Seriality."

thereof. Hence, as already emphasized, the significance of podcasting was dual in nature. I returned to my initial readings, my old interpretation and worked on them next to the findings I had made in the previous phase. In a final phase I therefore read and listened in a more focused way for what discourses surrounded and were attributed to these technological qualities. In this last part of the process, I applied an adaption of Discourse Theory, the foundation of which I will detail later in this chapter.

These three processes have largely been conducted in this order, yet as explained, I have also worked parallel with them, placing my initial readings next to the categories that emerged in the final stages. This back-and-forth movement enabled me to move beyond my own bias toward content – yet retain the values learnt by a close reading thereof.

4.5 Analytical Method

As readers will recall, the theoretical framework of this dissertation rests on a revised version of RSST which contains two aspects, "performed media" and "discursive framing." Contrary to prior research, I have opted to merge diverse theoretical perspectives – one from media theory and another from discourse analysis. This methodological approach to interpretation has increasingly been advocated to foster researcher creativity and challenge conventional, limited portrayals of phenomena that demand greater flexibility.[370] Thus, it is a combination that allows me to analytically explore technological affordance as a multifaceted issue that extends beyond mere content. This bipartite theoretical framework is representative of phase two and three described in the research design. Here they will culminate in two analytical methods: (1) Performed media will be analyzed by specifying the spatiotemporal characteristics of podcasting and (2) Discursive framing will be analyzed through Laclau and Mouffe's Discourse Theory.

4.5.1 Performed Media: Topologies of Podcasting

A central concern in my analysis of Mormon Feminists in this phase was how the physical and communicative capacities of technologies – by deciding how they record, store and transmit – affect and change how they perform themselves and relate to their followers.[371] But podcasting – despite the fuzzy borders of it recognized in the introduction to this dissertation – had to be further defined and conceptualized to do so. Through a process of looking back and forth between my own material and previous research on

[370] Mats Alvesson & Kaj Sköldberg, *Reflexive Methodology. New Vistas for Qualitative Research,* 3rd edition, (London: SAGE, 2018.)

[371] Bollmer, *Materialist Media Theory: An Introduction.*

podcasting I identified three technological characteristics important to recognize when analyzing a podcast: *parasocial relationships*,[372] *liveness*,[373] and *seriality*,[374] as well as their overall *transmediality*.[375] Each of these, then, was recognized as making up a certain "topology" of "temporal, material, and spatial qualities,"[376] that fostered "postures" of both subjective positions and interpersonal relationships.[377] These three topologies were then applied to further sort and synthesize my initial coding. Although I treat them as distinct entities, their interactions influence and modify each other. For example, the parasocial relationships of a podcast may be amplified by its live or serial elements.

4.5.1.1 Parasocial Relationships

First, the podcast encompasses a place and a time that fosters certain relationships. To describe the podcast's relational topology, I borrow Media and Communication terms "parasocial interaction" and "parasocial relationships." The former signifies the "seeming face-to-face relationship between spectator and performer." [378] The "para" signals that it corresponds to or likens a social interaction but without in-person communication. The dialogical character of interaction is instead achieved "by insinuating the absent viewer" into their talk "thereby stimulating conversation between host and audience." [379] This for example applies to cases of semi-bilateral communication such as when podcast hosts receive and respond to voice-messages, where they insinuate direct interaction by talking to the person as if they were present. However, several shifts from older to new media necessitate changes to the original term "parasocial interaction." For example, while old media may lack "effective reciprocity,"[380] podcasting enables a more frequent conversation between listener and host. This type of bi-directional communication, I suggest, is enabled by the podcast's "transmedia," character, which as I will

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372 Dibble, Hartmann, Rosaen, "Parasocial Interaction and Parasocial Relationship: Conceptual Clarification and a Critical Assessment of Measures;" Zuraikat, "The Parasocial Nature of Podcast."

373 Euritt, *Podcasting as an Intimate Medium*.

374 Kelleter, "Five Ways of Looking a Popular Seriality."

375 Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*.

376 Kitzmann, *Saved From Oblivion: Documenting the Daily from Diaries to Web Cams*, p. 5.

377 Kitzmann, *Saved From Oblivion: Documenting the Daily from Diaries to Web Cams*, p. 23.

378 Donald Horton & Richard Wohl, "Mass Communication and Para-Social Interaction: Observations on Intimacy at a Distance," *Psychiatry*, vol. 19, no. 3, 1956, pp. 215–229, p. 215.

379 Don Handelman, "Toward the Virtual Encounter: Horton's and Wohl's 'Mass Communication and Para-Social Interaction,"' in Elihu Katz, John Durham Peters, Tamar Liebes & Avril Orloff (eds.), *Canonic Texts in Media Research. Are There Any? Should There Be? How About These?* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003), pp. 137–151, p. 138–139.

380 Horton & Wohl, "Mass Communication and Para-Social Interaction: Observations on Intimacy at a Distance," p. 215.

detail later, refers to the interconnectedness of various media.[381] This aspect allows for interactions via for instance social media. As mentioned earlier, a recurring tool to promote podcasts among Mormon Feminists is Instagram. Instagram, however, is used not only for social interaction, but for self-presentations that help shape and form the conversations taking place. Douglas A. Ferguson and Clark F. Greer explain that when radio stations use Instagram to promote themselves it enables them "to characterize themselves as personable, emotionally connected to their listeners and social."[382] One aspect of this Instagram promotion was for example the "visuals of station personalities" where close-up photos of radio hosts added an intimacy between them and their audiences.[383] Strategies such as that foster a stronger "parasocial relationship" and allow the users to further pitch a friendly/intimate atmosphere.[384] As we will encounter in cases of Mormon Feminist podcasters, interaction in comment sections, by email or voice-messages is also coupled with visual content describing or framing the relationships between host and audience in a particular way. Such back and forth interactions between the podcast and its recipients also allows for live interactions to be performed, for example by inviting listeners on-air. Beyond its entanglement with interactive spaces, the podcast is also episodic and produces content – and thus relationships – over time. These aspects together necessitate the addition of the concept "parasocial *relationship*" which differs from "parasocial interaction" in that it emphasizes not only interaction at a single exposure but "repeated encounters" that allow relationship-building that grows over time.[385] This long-term interaction becomes a "regular and dependable event" that creates the "impression among the audience that they 'know' the actor."[386] The podcast host may thus become something of a "friend," a "counselor," or "comforter" to the listener.[387] Yet, the difference from a "real" relationship is that listeners can back away without repercussions.[388] Thus, responsibility or obligation is absent from the spectators' point of view.

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381 Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*, p. 95.

382 Douglas A. Ferguson & Clark F. Greer, "Visualizing a Non-Visual Medium through Social Media: The Semiotics of Radio Station Posts on Instagram," *Journal of Radio & Audio Media*, vol. 25, no. 1, 2018, pp. 126–141, p. 128.

383 A. Ferguson & F. Greer, "Visualizing a Non-Visual Medium through Social Media: The Semiotics of Radio Station Posts on Instagram," p. 135.

384 Ferguson & Greer, "Visualizing a Non-Visual Medium through Social Media: The Semiotics of Radio Station Posts on Instagram," p. 137.

385 Dibble, Hartmann, & Rosaen, "Parasocial Interaction and Parasocial Relationship: Conceptual Clarification and a Critical Assessment of Measures," p. 24

386 Zuraikat, "The Parasocial Nature of Podcast," p. 44.

387 Zuraikat, "The Parasocial Nature of Podcast," p. 44.

388 Zuraikat, "The Parasocial Nature of Podcast," p. 43–44.

While parasocial phenomena are often measured through users' experiences,[389] I use the concept to describe how podcast hosts enact various technologies to promote intimate/friendly relationships. When using the term "parasocial relationships" in the following empirical chapter, I am also indicating its preceding formulation "parasocial interaction." Sometimes I only use the latter, if it primarily concerns the type of semi-bilateral communication mentioned earlier.

4.5.1.2 Liveness

Second, podcasting's spatiotemporal conditions uniquely shape the interactions it enables. As an audio-based medium, podcasting emphasizes the liveness of speech, often unfolding as a conversation between hosts. This concept of "liveness" spans contexts – from traditional live performances, like theater or concerts, to interactive media such as online chats. Notably, some researchers argue that even recorded audio can evoke a sense of liveness. Paddy Scannell, for example, asserts that "recorded live" is "not an oxymoron."[390] He suggests that audio-visual recordings preserve and "redeem the living moment from death," such that pressing the replay button revives the recorded moment as if it were happening anew.[391]

Alyn Euritt describes liveness as "being with someone: in the same room, at the same time, or within the same interaction."[392] Accordingly, I suggest three key aspects of liveness. (1) The first one is spatial co-presence, often tied to the intimacy of recording in personal spaces like one's home. Many podcasters embrace "bad" audio as a marker of "intimate domesticity," emphasizing their recording environments rather than concealing them.[393] For instance, some hosts describe their podcasts as "kitchen table projects," recorded casually over glasses of wine using simple tools like GarageBand.[394] The kitchen, as a domestic space, fosters a sense of authenticity and comfort, shaping both the content and tone of the dialogue. Background noises and informal settings become part of the experience, reinforcing the personal and homely qualities of the podcast. This mobility and flexibility – the ability of podcasts to occupy and integrate

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389 See Dibble, Hartmann, & Rosaen, "Parasocial Interaction and Parasocial Relationship: Conceptual Clarification and a Critical Assessment of Measures."

390 Paddy Scannell, *Television and the Meaning of Live: An Enquiry into the Human Situation*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2014), p. 95–96

391 Scannell, *Television and the Meaning of Live: An Enquiry into the Human Situation,* p. 95–96.

392 Euritt, *Podcasting as an Intimate Medium*, p. 14.

393 Euritt, *Podcasting as an Intimate Medium*, p. 63.

394 Euritt, *Podcasting as an Intimate Medium*, p. 64.

into personal spaces – enhances their perceived intimacy. Listeners often feel a sense of "being there," as though they are privy to a genuine, unfiltered conversation.[395]

(2) The second one is temporal co-presence – the shared time between hosts or between hosts and their guests during recording. Podcasting's temporality enables spontaneity and immediacy, thus inviting unexpected events, and impromptu conversations and dynamics. As we will find in the coming pages the *Year of Polygamy* podcast is especially grounded in this type of exposure and uses recording techniques that allow listeners to experience not just the atmosphere of people's homes, but unintended appearances and exchanges between individuals in the recorded setting. Taken together with the first aspect of liveness, this could be framed through what Kitzmann calls the "dirty aura," a form of mediation experienced or anticipated as "getting close to a moment of authentic experience."[396] We are, as he puts it "transported into the brute thrill of (un)adultered reality, pure and simple and as direct as possible."[397]

(3) The third one is interactive "co-presence,"[398] or what some scholars describe as "conversational intimacy."[399] I take this co-presence to encourage unscripted, emotive dialogue, allowing interactants to connect in ways they perceive as authentic. An important feature of this is the exploration of complex emotional states that it invites. By engaging listeners in an intimate, reflective manner, podcasts provide space for extended, "messy," and ambiguous conversations about for example loss or grief – contrasting with other media, which may offer faster but less personal interactions.[400] This reflective quality grants podcasts therapeutic potential, positioning them as tools for self-care and mental health support. Beyond their therapeutic aspect, co-presence also facilitates interactional negotiations. Scannell notes that audio recording preserves the essence of what Socrates described as Dialogue: the pursuit of truth through questioning and interactive conversation. Only through this form of interaction "can distortions and misunderstandings be untangled in the back and forth of question and answer" thus enabling a "progressive clarification of meaning and understanding."[401] Podcasts, by enabling such interactional processes, serve as a contemporary platform for dialogic exchange.

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395 Euritt, *Podcasting as an Intimate Medium*, p. 132.
396 Kitzmann, *Saved From Oblivion: Documenting the Daily from Diaries to Web Cams*, p. 116.
397 Kitzmann, *Saved From Oblivion: Documenting the Daily from Diaries to Web Cams*, p. 115.
398 Euritt, *Podcasting as an Intimate Medium*, p. 72–73.
399 Euritt, *Podcasting as an Intimate Medium*, p. 67.
400 Kristin M. Peterson, "'The Bad Things are Just Too Close Right Now': Podcasts Cultivate Spaces to Sit With the Messiness of Grief," *Mortality*, vol. 28, no. 4, 2023, pp. 578–592.
401 Scannell, *Television and the Meaning of Live: An Enquiry into the Human Situation*, p. 95–96.

4.5.1.3 Seriality

Third, podcasts are inherently episodic, producing content serially over time. This temporal progression shapes both content and hosts in unique ways. Building on and adapting Frank Kelleter's perspectives on popular seriality,[402] I suggest five features to keep in mind when analyzing serial podcast performances. (1) First, serial audio acts as an agent of capitalism where renewal by duplication is key.[403] In other words, it requires continuous return from its participants and the perpetual renewal of content. Adding to this, the podcast unlike other popular seriality demands schematic frequency often at a fast pace.[404] Podcasts reflect this logic with terms like "stay tuned," promising listeners consistent, periodic new content, whether weekly or monthly. Thus, "continuity" as Kelleter puts it, is "the name of the game."[405] (2) Second, the serial podcasts invites retrospection. As podcasting is a type of content produced over a longer period of time, often moving toward a goal in a step-by-step manner, it produces a longitudinal archive portraying content and host-development.[406] This archive serves as a valuable resource for hosts and listeners alike to reflect on personal growth or transformations in the subject matter. (3) Third, seriality invites narrative coherency, meaning, it demands each episode or season to align with the purpose or plot of the podcast. In similarity to popular seriality, podcast content is continually adjusted by its hosts to new developments, reinterpreting past content while aligning it with ongoing changes. In long-running popular series, this process involves continually revising and even altering their past while moving the narrative forward.[407] For example, disruptions such as an actor leaving before the story concludes must be integrated into the existing storyline. Similarly, intrusions or disturbances to the narrative or the process of producing content as a podcaster must be managed so that it realigns, or suits previously told events. To address inconsistencies, podcast hosts therefore engage in coordination and coherence-building within the narrative itself, for example resulting in new introductions or special episodes to address shifts in content, goals, or positions. (4) Because publication and reception overlap in podcast seriality, it fosters a sense of reciprocity, allowing the audience to influence and engage with the content actively. Podcasts often adapt to audience feedback – gleaned from comments or emails – creating "affective bonds" and encouraging audience engagement through creative responses and narrative continuations.[408] This

402 Kelleter, "Five Ways of Looking a Popular Seriality."
403 Kelleter, "Five Ways of Looking a Popular Seriality," p. 30.
404 Kelleter, "Five Ways of Looking a Popular Seriality," p. 13.
405 Kelleter, "Five Ways of Looking a Popular Seriality," p. 30.
406 Kelleter, "Five Ways of Looking a Popular Seriality," p. 18.
407 Kelleter, "Five Ways of Looking a Popular Seriality," p. 17.
408 Kelleter, "Five Ways of Looking a Popular Seriality," p. 13.

also enables a parallel movement where listeners participate in the performances of podcast hosts. (5) Fifth, I suggest, podcast seriality invites processual transformation, meaning a drawn-out or prolonged change or development in content and host position. Change, in other words, does not happen swiftly but over a longer period of time. This process may also involve pedagogical and legitimizing aspects, where hosts evolve in their perceived abilities on the subject matter.

4.5.1.4 Transmediality

Fourth, these topologies are connected to various media forms involved in the podcast projects, embodying what Henry Jenkins describes as "transmediality."[409] As outlined in the introduction, transmediality refers to the interconnectedness of media platforms, where content flows across multiple mediums, forming a cohesive network of meaning. In analyzing transmediality, I consider how the various topologies are reinforced or altered by visual and textual media associated with the podcast projects, such as social media images and introductory texts on websites.

4.5.2 Discursive Framing: Discourse Theory

As specified in the previous chapter, discourse denotes "the structured totality resulting from the articulatory practice,"[410] where "articulation" denotes how people "give meaning to the world around them by combining and connecting certain words, objects, ideas and concepts in specific ways when they speak or act."[411] What Laclau and Mouffe provide through their seminal work *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* is a rigorous account of the processes in which such meaning is articulated. While some suggest that it was not originally meant to convey a specific methodology,[412] it has since its introduction in 1985 been employed and developed as such in various scholarly contexts.[413] This study employs a discourse-analytical approach but applies it eclectically, selectively using key concepts from Laclau and Mouffe as well as the interpretation thereof found in Marianne Winther Jørgensen's and Louise Phillips' *Discourse Analysis as Theory and Method*,[414] and Thomas Jacobs' "The Dislocated Universe of Laclau and Mouffe: An Introduction to

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409 Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*, p. 95.

410 Laclau & Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy. Toward a Radical Democratic Politics*, p. 105.

411 Thomas Jacobs, "The Dislocated Universe of Laclau and Mouffe: An Introduction to Post-Structuralist Discourse Theory," p. 298.

412 Klas Gustafsson, "Inledning," in Ernesto Laclau & Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemonin och den socialistiska strategin*, (Göteborg/Stockholm: Glänta/Vertigo, 2008), pp. 7–19.

413 Jenny Gunnarsson Payne, "Diskursetnologiska utmaningar. Från politisk teori till empirinära kulturforskning – och vidare," *Kulturella perspektiv*, vol. 21, no. 3–4, 2012, pp. 7–14.

414 Jørgensen & Phillips, *Discourse Analysis as Theory and Method*.

Post-Structuralist Discourse Theory."[415] Instead of conducting a full-fledged discourse analysis according to their model, this study concentrates on specific analytical tools, which will be subsequently detailed. These will also be adapted to fit my research aims. This type of methodological eclecticism has increasingly been recognized as a valuable approach within qualitative research, particularly in discourse analysis,[416] where strict adherence to a single theoretical or methodological model can sometimes limit analytical depth and empirical responsiveness. Rather than viewing methodological rigor as synonymous with rigid theoretical application, scholars have argued for a more adaptive and context-sensitive use of analytical tools.[417] A further argument in favor of methodological eclecticism is its potential to bridge different traditions within discourse analysis. This perspective is grounded in the recognition that discourse is multifaceted and that different analytical concepts may be more or less useful depending on the empirical material under investigation. Jørgensen and Phillips emphasize that discourse analysis is not a monolithic field but a collection of diverse theoretical traditions, each with its own strengths and limitations.[418] By selectively drawing on concepts from for example Laclau and Mouffe's tradition, researchers can construct an analytical framework that is better suited to capturing the nuances of specific discursive contexts.

Illustrative of this methodology is my treatment of narratives as forms of articulatory practices, thus encompassed within discourse. This integration of narrative and discourse theories is well-established. For instance, Susan E. Chase defines narrative as a "distinct form of discourse."[419] Similarly, Colette Daiute and Cynthia Lightfoot describe narrating as a "discourse process."[420] Discourse theorists have in turn long incorporated narratives in their analyses; for example, Steven Stanley and Michael Billig view narration from the perspective of Discourse Psychology as a "discursive resource."[421] Jørgensen and Phillips note that while discourse-analytical perspectives often present a com-

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415 Jacobs, "The Dislocated Universe of Laclau and Mouffe: An Introduction to Post-Structuralist Discourse Theory."

416 Jørgensen & Phillips, *Discourse Analysis as Theory and Method*.

417 Kristof van Assche, Raoul Beunen, Martijn Duineveld & Monica Gruezmacher, "Adapative Methodology. Topic, Theory, Method and Data in Ongoing Conversation," *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, vol. 26, no. 1, 2023, pp. 35–49.

418 Jørgensen & Phillips, *Discourse Analysis as Theory and Method*.

419 Susan E. Chase, "Narrative Inquiry: Multiple Lenses, Approaches, Voices," in Norman K. Denzin & Yvonna S. Lincoln (eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research*, 3rd edition, (Thousand Oaks CA: SAGE, 2005), pp. 651–679, p. 656.

420 Colette Daiute & Cynthia Lightfoot (eds.), *Narrative Analysis: Studying the Development of Individuals in Society*, (Thousand Oaks CA: SAGE, 2004), p. xii.

421 Steven Stanley & Michael Billig, "Dilemmas of Storytelling and Identity," in Colette Dauite & Cynthia Lightfoot (eds.) *Narrative Analysis: Studying the Development of Individuals in Society*, (Thousand Oaks CA: SAGE, 2004), pp. 159–176, p. 159.

plete methodological and theoretical "package," it is feasible to construct a tailored approach by blending elements from various discourse-analytical frameworks and where appropriate from "non-discourse analytical perspectives."[422] Following this "multiperspectival" approach,[423] I employ Discourse Theory as the primary framework, with narrative analysis serving as a critical component of my application, the details of which I will elaborate on later. I have thus engaged with Discourse Theory not as a prescriptive set of procedures but as a foundational toolset, adaptable to the specific requirements and objectives of my research. This approach entails a critical and flexible application of theoretical and analytical methods, tailored to address the unique aspects of the subject matter under investigation.

4.5.2.1 Moments and Nodal Points

When describing Discourse Theory, Jørgensen and Phillips return to the metaphor of a fishing net, which we "try to stretch out… so that the meaning of each sign is locked into a specific relationship to the others."[424] The purpose here is to map out these processes and how some attempts at fixation "become so conventionalized that we think of them as natural."[425] Discourse, or the fishing net, is therefore "the structured totality" resulting from practices that attempt to fixate meaning.[426] All signs in language can be likened to the knots of this fishing net, where meaning is fixed through "their differences from one another."[427] These knots can be likened with what Laclau and Mouffe refer to as *moments*,[428] and gain their meaning through their relation to other signs, together making out the web called discourse. Some signs have privileged positions, known as *nodal points,* which other signs gain their meaning from and are ordered around.[429] Because some signs are given priority, the discourse looks more like Thomas Jacobs suggests, a "spider's web" than a fishing net.[430] Several "peripheral signifiers," he explains, are connected by being chained to "the heart of the network."[431] Nodal points have therefore been used to denote central words, images, metaphors, symbols,

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422 Jørgensen & Phillips, *Discourse Analysis as Theory and Method,* p. 4.
423 Jørgensen & Phillips, *Discourse Analysis as Theory and Method,* p. 4.
424 Jørgensen & Phillips, *Discourse Analysis as Theory and Method*, p. 31.
425 Jørgensen & Phillips, *Discourse Analysis as Theory and Method*, p. 31.
426 Laclau & Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy. Toward a Radical Democratic Politics*, p. 105.
427 Jørgensen & Phillips, *Discourse Analysis as Theory and Method*, p. 31.
428 Laclau & Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy. Toward a Radical Democratic Politics*, p. 106.
429 Laclau & Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy. Toward a Radical Democratic Politics*, p. 112.
430 Jacobs, "The Dislocated Universe of Laclau and Mouffe: An Introduction to Post-Structuralist Discourse Theory," p. 303.
431 Jacobs, "The Dislocated Universe of Laclau and Mouffe: An Introduction to Post-Structuralist Discourse Theory," p. 303.

or concepts, whereas moments announce which other signs surround or accompany them. Let us pretend that Mormon Feminists for example, frequently use the phrase "safe spaces" to describe online platforms. They then attach words such as for instance "authenticity" and "solidarity" to it, figuring in the same sentences, e.g.: "this is a safe space where you can be your authentic self and share in solidarity with other women." In this instance then, safe space would be identified as a nodal point and the other terms, "authenticity" and "solidarity" its moments. Sometimes moments and nodal points such as "journey" signify popular narrative tropes and therefore implicate certain relationships between signs. The journey is for example often used to speak of character growth and transformation.[432] Consequently, other moments or nodal points connected to this trope typically revolve around and contribute to this narrative arc, emphasizing the progression and evolution central to the storyline.

4.5.2.2 Chain of Equivalence

To analyze relationships between moments and nodal points also means to observe what Chantal and Mouffe refer to as either a "logic of difference" or a "logic of equivalence."[433] The first term introduces separation between different signs, i.e. framing them as acting through "nuances, shades, variations and differences," whereas the logic of equivalence on the other hand "makes the social sphere simpler, by boiling down the structure of the world around us to a limited number of key distinctions."[434] The latter therefore forms a *chain of equivalence* where moments and nodal points are reduced to and framed as part of the same logic. Their particularities are erased and they are attached to each other, either by sharing a "positive" ground, or being brought together through their shared reference and opposition to something external and thus "negative."[435] Such orderings allow for coherency and particularity in the otherwise undecidability of the social field. I view this chain as put together in at least two ways. One variation is as nodal points and moments woven together over several podcast episodes, website and social media content. If, to exemplify, "authenticity" and "solidarity" are attributed to the nodal point "safe space" which then figures in episodes where it is coupled with words like "Zion," then those signs are interlinked to each other – a chain is created between "authenticity," "solidarity" and "Zion," reducing their otherwise separate meanings to fit under the same logic. Another variation of how such chains are produced, I

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[432] Jasmine M. Goodnow & Edward Ruddell, "An Illustration of the Quest Genre as Spiritual Metaphor in Adventure Travel Narratives," *Leisure/Loisir,* vol. 33, no. 1 2009, pp. 241–267.

[433] Laclau & Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy. Toward a Radical Democratic Politics*, p. 127–129.

[434] Jacobs, "The Dislocated Universe of Laclau and Mouffe: An Introduction to Post-Structuralist Discourse Theory," p. 304.

[435] Laclau & Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy. Toward a Radical Democratic Politics*, p. 127–128.

suggest, is through narratives, by which I imply that moments and nodal points are interlinked either (a) through narrative plots with certain structural dispositions or (b) through broader narrative tropes as part of the discursive repertoire of a religious group or community such as the "journey" mentioned above. By narrative plot I mean the identification of story and/or story arcs and how they temporally arrange past, present, and future in a meaningful whole. Many podcast episodes are for example autobiographically crafted, where some moments or nodal points are placed in the beginning and meant to signify that they are connected to a protagonist's past, and others placed in or categorized as the now to denote that they are connected to her present. When referring to this practice I will use the term "life writing," which denotes the act of narrating that "takes a life, one's own or another's, as its subject."[436] The chain of equivalence, then, sometimes works through a chronology of events, which makes narrative structures important to consider.

4.5.2.3 Floating Signifier and Field of Discursivity

When analyzing these interlinked signs, Laclau and Mouffe invite us to consider how they relate to larger discursive contexts. Some nodal points are widely used and are therefore especially open to attributions, with the consequence of always having multiple meanings attached to them. Such elements, that are particularly open to attributions are referred to as *floating signifiers* and encompass the ongoing struggles between or within discourses to fixate their meaning.[437] The word "care" is one example of a floating signifier that it is contested or filled with different meaning depending on context. As we will later see, care is sometimes connected to the practice of "ministering" where church members are assigned to care for another member in their ward. While most Latter-day Saints might agree that "bearing one another's burdens" is part of their covenant, how to do so is debated. There exists, in other words, an excess of possibilities for signs such as "care" to relate to each other, which Laclau and Mouffe refer to as a *field of discursivity*.[438] I will thus employ field of discursivity – used interchanged with *discursive field* – to point out the type of discussions and contexts in which the floating signifiers occur.

As will be demonstrated, Latter-day Saint Feminists mostly struggle over meaning within Mormonism and the various discursive fields it encompasses, such as for example ministering, personal revelation, and polygamy. In other words, they struggle to fixate meaning around words and practices constantly in flux among others claiming to define

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436 Sidonie Smith & Julia Watson, *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* (2nd edition), (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), p. 4.

437 Ernesto Laclau, *On Populist Reason*, (London: Verso, 2005), p. 129–131.

438 Laclau & Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy. Toward a Radical Democratic Politics*, p. 111.

or understand "Mormonism." Hence, Mormon Feminist podcasters are actors among others in the same discursive field – for instance progressive, ex-, or conservative Mormons – whose discursive practices temporarily bring the fluctuation of meaning to a halt. "Any discourse," as Laclau and Mouffe put it, "is constituted as an attempt to dominate the field of discursivity, to arrest the flow of differences, to construct a center."[439]

4.5.2.4 Antagonistic Others

An important analytical move is to observe how discourses reduce meaning by constructing discursive others. Discourses "aim to remove ambiguities" but since fixation is never absolute and the surplus of other possible meanings threatens its coherency "moments are always potentially elements."[440] What this means is that the signification of for example "care" cannot acquire meaning in and of itself but must be constructed against other possible combinations. Contrary to structuralists who would argue that the closure of discourse is permanent, Laclau and Mouffe argue that the insecurities inherent to structures allow people to struggle over meaning. In other words, antagonism is always inevitable; the meaning or significance of a discursive moment relies on its alternatives. This perspective is later developed in Laclau's work on populism. The motive for including this here, in a study, not of populism, but of a feminist movement, is that it provides us with the means of observing and naming border-making, both as present in how podcasting is framed and validated, but also in how feminist spaces are constructed and imagined (the missing piece suggested by scholars like Clark-Parsons and Heather and Noterman[441]). When Laclau later elaborates on the different discursive logics mentioned earlier, he suggests that we can distinguish between two forms of social logics. A "logic of difference" here refers to a social reality in which heterogenous groups of people can make demands that are particular for them and where such demands can be met institutionally through non-antagonistic ways. When demands are not met, the logic of difference changes into a "logic of equivalence" where groups, despite differences, meet in their shared rejection – which is how populism is formed.[442] Returning to the framework posited in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy,* this notion is intimately connected to the chain of equivalence mentioned earlier. In their words, "formation manages *to signify itself* (that is, to constitute itself as such) only by transforming the limits into frontiers, by constituting a chain of equivalences which construct what is beyond

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439 Laclau & Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy. Toward a Radical Democratic Politics*, p. 112.

440 Jørgensen & Phillips, *Discourse Analysis as Theory and Method*, p. 35.

441 Clark-Parsons, "Building a Digital Girl Army: The Cultivation of Feminist Safe Spaces Online" Heather & Noterman, "Safe Space: Toward a Reconceptualization."

442 Laclau, *On Populist Reason*, p. 73.

the limits as that which it *is not*."[443] Returning to the example of care, the meaning of "ministering" is for example compared with "administering" to highlight that their own perspective and practices of care are something other than the Church's "corporative" and "efficiently" executed "care." The practical use of antagonism has therefore been to explain how not only Mormon feminism but also the podcast becomes constructed against excluded or opposed others.

4.5.2.5 Subject Positions

Although there are no essential subjects or stable identities, Laclau and Mouffe proclaim that discourses assign "subject positions" for people to occupy.[444] They become interpellated by discourse, where certain roles are ordained and where boundaries and expectations for such roles are constantly in a process of fixation.[445] An individual can be likened to the notion of master signifiers, which in turn, can be described as nodal points of identity.[446] These points come into existence by the linking together of signifiers, that is, a chain of equivalence. A Latter-day Saint woman can for example be defined through the signifiers that her religious discourse provides, such as "happy," "pious," "mother" and so on. Similarly, a podcasting Latter-day Saint Feminist, can by inverting such values, occupy positions such as "grieving," "doubtful," and "childfree."

Because subject positions operate through the same logic as other articulatory practices, they are "prevent[ed]" from "stable articulation,"[447] and therefore open to dynamic and change.

4.5.2.6 Hegemony

The terminology outlined above enables me to thoroughly dissect the articulatory practices of Mormon Feminists. The concept of *hegemony*, however, will serve to integrate these insights, facilitating broader conclusions about how such articulations renegotiate the norms and values they perceive as dominant within their religious tradition. Thus, hegemony is understood as power that is dispersed through articulatory practices, with a focus on the struggle over meaning that occurs within these practices.[448] This analysis

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443 Laclau & Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy. Toward a Radical Democratic Politics*, p. 143–144.

444 Laclau & Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy. Toward a Radical Democratic Politics*, p. 115.

445 After Hegemony and Socialist Strategy Laclau has further developed this idea by borrowing from Jacques Lacan's theories, which in similarity to how Laclau and Mouffe describes society, proclaim that individuals are inherently incomplete and constantly driven to create coherent selves. See Ernesto Laclau, Lilian Zac, "Minding the Gap: The Subject of Politics," in Ernesto Laclau, *The Making of Political Identities*, (London: Verso, 1994), pp. 11–39.

446 Laclau & Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy. Toward a Radical Democratic Politics*, p. 117.

447 Laclau & Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy. Toward a Radical Democratic Politics*, p. 121.

448 Laclau & Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy. Toward a Radical Democratic Politics*, p. 139.

involves examining how articulations either align with or diverge from dominant discourses and identifying which aspects constitute sites for resistance and transformation. Through this approach, I aim to elucidate how elements of podcasting contribute to the evolution or maintenance of religious beliefs and practices.

4.5.3 Summary and Notes on Analytical Presentation

I have thus far explained that to study podcast affordance one must pay attention to two things: "Performed media" and "Discursive Framing." First one must recognize how the physical and communicative capacities of technologies – by deciding how they record, store and transmit – affect and change how hosts perform themselves and relate to their followers.[449] To do so I first proposed a general sensitivity toward spatiality and temporality of media – what Bollmer refers to as "spatiotemporal materialism" – and then I extended this perspective to suit the specific medium studied here by proposing three analytical categories inherent to podcasting, *parasocial relationships*, *liveness* and *seriality*, each of which has its own but interrelated "topology" with specific "temporal, material, and spatial qualities,"[450] that fosters "postures" of both subjective positions and interpersonal relationships. I also suggested that each topology is affected by overall *transmediality,* meaning the additional media – textual and visual – encompassed by each podcast. Second, I suggested a study of the meaning discursively attributed to the podcast and here I provided eight analytical categorizes based on Laclau and Mouffe's Discourse Theory: *moments, nodal points*, *chain of equivalence, floating signifier, field of discursivity, antagonism*, *subject positions* and *hegemony*.

In chapter five and six I treat "performed media" and "discursive framing" separately. I also apply them in different ways. "Performed media" is applied in simultaneous treatment and presentation of the material, meaning, I use analytical terms throughout. "Discursive framing" on the other hand is applied after the material has been presented under a separate headline called "analytical summary of discursive framing," where I extrapolate examples and apply technical terms from the discourse-theoretical model outlined above. In chapter seven I treat "performed media" and "discursive framing" simultaneously and end with a combined analytical summary under a separate headline called "analytical summary of performance and framing," where I use technical terms from both frameworks. After each chapter I will conclude with a reflection on hegemony.

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449 Bollmer, *Materialist Media Theory: An Introduction*.

450 Kitzmann, *Saved From Oblivion: Documenting the Daily from Diaries to Web Cams*, p. 5.

5. Parasocial Relationships

In the introduction to this study, I posed the question: *What forms of community and host-listener relationship does the podcast foster among Feminist Latter-day Saints?* In this chapter, I argue that the podcast enables Latter-day Saint Feminists to cultivate communities of care and advocacy. This phenomenon is rooted in both the parasocial nature of the podcast's technological and communicational dispositions and the broader discourses of care and justice that shape its content. To support this argument, the chapter is divided into three subsections, each focusing on a different podcast and employing two key analytical concepts: "performed media" and "discursive framing." In the first part "performing parasocial relationships" I place particular emphasis on the podcast's spatial and temporal dimensions. Through examples such as voice messages, live interactions, comment sections, practical resources and episodes responding to listeners' expressed needs, this analysis highlights how parasocial relationships interact with features like transmediality, liveness and seriality to reinforce particular host-listener relationships. In, "framing parasocial relationships" I shift focus to how such performances are framed, using discourse-theoretical tools to explore how the podcast discursively constructs its relationships. In this context, I analyze examples where the hosts position themselves as caretakers of their audience and frame their performances of care as an extension of their religious covenants.

5.1 Performing Parasocial Relationships: *The Faithful Feminists*

Our first focus is how parasocial relationships are performed within *The Faithful Feminists* podcast. To explore this, I will examine three illustrative examples: the "conference care kit," which showcases how transmediality facilitates practical forms of care; "succor and support," which demonstrates how platforms like Instagram enhance host-listener exchanges; and "processing polygamy," which underscores the role of seriality in fostering long-term reciprocity and connection.

5.1.1 "The Conference Care Kit" – Transmedial Resources

One example of parasocial relationships is the Conference Care Kit, where *The Faithful Feminists* approach the General Conference, a worldwide gathering of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints held twice a year in April and October.[451] During the conference Church leaders from the General Authority share messages and sermons with the members who watch the live streamed event from all around the world. It is considered an important opening for members to find direction and inspiration for their lives. Since the General Authority consists exclusively of men, a recurring discussion among Mormon Feminists has been the lack of female perspectives. On their website, Parker and Poll for example ask their listeners:

> General Conference. What do those words bring up for you? Excitement, fear, dread, joy? Whatever it is, we know exactly how you feel … For womxn[452] and other marginalized peoples, conference weekend can be a time of sorrow, hurt, loss, and pain. It can be especially challenging to find yourself the dissenting minority in your family and/or community. And if you have experienced or are in the midst of a faith transition, the difficulty is compounded![453]

As the quote illustrates, the conference can evoke a complex array of emotions, and especially difficult for members who – as themselves – are a part of a "dissenting minority" or struggling with a "faith transition." They continue this quote by saying that "after going through a few conference weekends on our own with little support, we wanted to create a safe space and resources for others."[454] That is, they have endured the conference and through that personal experience, they are knowledgeable about the support needed. To help their listeners manage this experience, Parker and Poll present a "Conference Care Kit" on their website, where they have put together a list of helpful resources for women to survive the conference.[455] As they explain on their Instagram, the kit was "created with other faithful feminists in mind who find this weekend challenging, lonely and upsetting."[456] They hope the kit will "help listeners find comfort, peace,

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451 The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, "Conference," www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference?lang=eng, accessed May 20, 20224.

452 "Womxn" is an alternative spelling used among some feminist and queer circles to be inclusive of trans women and nonbinary people.

453 Channing Parker & Elise Poll, "Conference Care Kit," *The Faithful Feminists,* October 1, 2020, www.thefaithfulfeminists.com/2020/09/carekit.html, accessed: January 4, 2024.

454 Parker & Poll, "Conference Care Kit."

455 Parker & Poll, "Conference Care Kit."

456 Channing Parker & Elise Poll, "The Faithful Feminists Conference Care Kit," *@thefaithfulfeminists,* October 1, 2020, www.instagram.com/p/CF0Itm4hNFf/?img_index=1, accessed: January 4, 2024.

and divine connection."[457] Ending with "remember, we've #savedyouaseat on the soft chairs right next to us."[458]

The care kit comprises various resources designed to enrich the listeners' experiences. Among these are the "Pre-conference journal sheets," which provide listeners with an opportunity to delve into their spiritual connection, explore their emotional responses to the conference, set personal "boundaries," and develop a tailored "self-care plan."[459] These sheets are accessible as a Google document, which listeners can either print and write on, fill out online, or use as a reference for personal reflection. The process begins with a "Pre-Conference Check-in" segment, where participants are prompted to reflect on their current spiritual connection with God. They are presented with a range of descriptive options for their feelings, from feeling "alone" to feeling "confident," allowing them to gauge and articulate their spiritual state as they prepare for the conference. [460] Readers are then asked to dot down things like "an affirmation of divine love that I can carry with me this weekend" and "things that remind me of God."[461] The second section on "Emotional Awareness" asks readers to assess their feelings about the General Conference, offering a wide range of emotions from excitement and joy to discomfort and depression. It encourages reflection on the reasons behind these feelings, what might be causing "dread" or anticipation.[462] The third section called "Conference Boundaries" guides readers in establishing boundaries to ensure a safe and positive conference experience. It prompts reflection on how one can engage with the conference in a way that respects their worth, safety, and values, and asks them to consider the characteristics of their ideal conference weekend and the boundaries necessary to achieve it. The materials suggest that having a prepared statement can be useful for communicating these boundaries to partners, family, or friends.[463] Finally, the "Conference Self-Care" section emphasizes the importance of self-care practices during the conference. It suggests activities like journaling, crafting, outdoor activities, yoga, and meditation, and stresses the importance of choosing safe people for sharing personal thoughts and emotions, as well as managing social media interactions healthily.[464]

After filling in the pre-conference journal, listeners are directed toward other practical resources, such as previous podcast episodes, soothing podcast playlists, inspira-

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457 Parker & Poll, "The Faithful Feminists Conference Care Kit."
458 Parker & Poll, "The Faithful Feminists Conference Care Kit."
459 Parker & Poll, "Conference Care Kit."
460 Parker & Poll, "Conference Care Kit."
461 Parker & Poll, "Conference Care Kit."
462 Parker & Poll, "Conference Care Kit."
463 Parker & Poll, "Conference Care Kit."
464 Parker & Poll, "Conference Care Kit."

tional YouTube videos from women who *have* spoken during the General Conference over the years, their "favorite recipe for cinnamon rolls" ensured to "fill and warm you all weekend long" or, to further calm one's nerves, follow Parker's fourteen-minute "Guided Relaxation Meditation" that "can help you wind down and calm your mind, body, and spirit."[465] Finally, to help "wrap up and process the weekend" they also have a post-conference journal to fill out.[466] Here readers can "explore and break down [their] thoughts and experience for easy sorting and assimilation" with the hope "that they will help [them] decide what to keep, what to throw away, and what to give to God" so they "can move forward from conference weekend with confidence and a stronger connection with the Divine."[467] Although we cannot know how many listeners actually used the kit, we get some hints of its significance when looking at comments on an Instagram post where it was advertised. The response to the kit tells of it being used as a "resource" to manage the conference experience.[468] For example, one follower reports on the benefits of expressing her feelings in writing and giving herself time to process them.[469]

In the above examples, and particularly the pre- and post-conference journals, listeners are meant to be guided toward self-awareness by asking questions about how they feel in the moment and what boundaries they can set up to better their circumstances of self-care. As such, the Conference Care Kit is a good example of a recurring practice in *The Faithful Feminists* podcast to express care for the wellbeing of their listeners and to provide them with resources to ascertain their safety. The kit also showcases the transmedial qualities of the podcast where sprawling over many media platforms such as Google Documents, YouTube, Spotify, podcast episodes, recorded meditation guides, and so on, they allow their care, borrowing their own words, to wrap their listeners like a "warm blanket."[470] Parker and Poll therefore work beyond the borders of interactive media to tend to the wellbeing of their listeners. The care kit has its own dimension of transmediality such as texts and Google sheets that encourages self-care through emotional awareness. It draws boundaries and engages in mindfulness practice. Followers report on how it helped them orient themselves around their offline practices. It allows for podcast-hosts' influence on listeners' wellbeing to be strengthened and in extension multiplies the channels through which parasocial relationships grow.

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465 Parker & Poll, "Conference Care Kit."
466 Parker & Poll, "Conference Care Kit."
467 Parker & Poll, "Conference Care Kit."
468 Commenter, "we are humbled," *@thefaithfulfeminists*, October 5, 2020, www.instagram.com/p/CFTDaVhBDa/, accessed January 4, 2024; Parker & Poll, "The Faithful Feminists Conference Care Kit," October 1, 2020.
469 Commenter, "we are humbled."
470 Parker & Poll, "Conference Care Kit."

5.1.2 "Succor & Support" – Supportive Exchanges Through Social Media

Another example of how they enact this type of care, but where the interaction between themselves and their listeners is heightened, can be found in what Parker and Poll call "Succor & Support," an Instagram post regularly published where listeners are invited to confess things about their Sunday Church experience and where the hosts respond with support. In their first podcast episode they introduce this practice with the following words:

> Parker: Every Sunday on our Instagram page, you can find us on Instagram @thefaithfulfeminists, um we do a Sunday check-in, so: that is the perfect time to share how your lessons went, what thoughts you ha:d if you made a comment, or if there was a comment that you wish you had ma:de. We want to create a space for conversation and safety, just so that we can all start connecting with each other, because you guys are all amazing.[471]

Here they present the Succor & Support practice as a "Sunday check-in" where listeners can share "how their lessons went." The duo opens a "space for conversation and safety" where listeners purportedly say the things that they did not feel at liberty to share within the Church. The first Succor & Support post explained that "in an ideal world church would be a safe place" but "unfortunately that is not always the reality."[472]

> Every Sunday we want to hold space for the conversation and support YOU need. In an ideal world, church would be a safe place to share and discuss a variety of thoughts and ideas…unfortunately, that is not always the reality, especially for those whose gospel experience and belief draw from… feminist and liberation theology. We want to create culture of acceptance and love, so we are starting right here, right now. So, let's talk! We want to hear how your Sunday went. How are you feeling? were there lessons or insights that really spoke to you? were there comments shared that hurt? What was a comment you made, or one you wish you had but didn't? Was church hard for you today, so you left early or didn't go? Wherever you are and however you feel, know that you are not alone. There are women in wards and branches across the globe who had a similar experience today. [473]

To remedy this lack of support, the duo introduces what they describe as their own "culture of acceptance and love" – starting "right here" on their Instagram page.[474]

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471 Channing Parker & Elise Poll, "Bikini-Body Eve, Problematic Curses and Hugs From God," *The Faithful Feminists,* February 3, 2020.

472 Channing Parker & Elise Poll, "Succor & Support," *@thefaithfulfeminists,* January 19, 2020, www.instagram.com/p/B7g0LZ1F65-/, accessed December 23, 2024.

473 Parker & Poll, "Succor & Support."

474 Parker & Poll, "Succor & Support."

While there might be women in "wards and branches across the globe who had similar experiences" the function of the post implies that they are unaware of or disconnected from each other.[475] Tying these separated women together under an Instagram post where their shared experiences can be connected, enables a sense of closeness – "wherever you are and however you feel, know that you are not alone."[476] Parker and Poll thus enact friendship and intimacy through the interactive technology of social media, where listeners can take up the invitation given – "how are you feeling?" – to share their thoughts and feelings. To these posts, their listeners respond with both positive and negative experiences of the Church. They write about difficult days,[477] followed by a lament on things like male-centric lessons,[478] narration of hurtful conversations with friends or colleagues,[479] feelings of being unwelcomed or uncomfortable as single members,[480] being questioned for not doing enough service work, or positive experiences of leaders trying to implement more loving approaches to LGBTQ+ community, women speaking from the pulpit,[481] or Heavenly Mother being mentioned.[482]

The podcast therefore gains a heightened interactivity through Instagram. As the "Succor & Support" example demonstrates, followers are invited to participate in the "safe space" of their comment section. Under each post, followers who feel marginalized or vulnerable in the church setting can feel free to express themselves openly without concerns for hostility or judgment and can rely on the podcast hosts to give the support they need. The topology of podcasting is thus casting a highly relational and intimate form of communication, where hosts and listeners – despite being unacquainted and strangers to each other – attempt to foster friendly bonds.

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475 Parker & Poll, "Succor & Support."

476 Parker & Poll, "Succor & Support."

477 Commenter, "Succor & Support," *@thefaithfulfeminists,* January 19, 2020; Parker & Poll, "Succor & Support," *@thefaithfulfeminists,* March 8, 2020, www.instagram.com/p/B9e-6j8hxe9/, accessed January 4, 2024.

478 Commenter, "Succor & Support," January 19, 2020; Commenter, "Succor & Support," *@thefaithfulfeminists,* February 23, 2020, www.instagram.com/p/B869JM5BcK3/, accessed January 4, 2024.

479 Commenter "Succor & Support," *@thefaithfulfeminists,* February 2, 2020, www.instagram.com/p/B8FMKSdB7Cq/, accessed January 4, 2024.

480 Commenter, "Succor & Support," *@thefaithfulfeminists,* February 9, 2020, www.instagram.com/p/B8WyH3lhsEd/, accessed January 4, 2024.

481 Commenter, "Succor & Support," *@thefaithfulfeminists,* February 23, 2020.

482 Commenter, "Succor & Support," *@thefaithfulfeminists,* March 1, 2020, www.instagram.com/p/B9M_yH8hfuD/, accessed January 4, 2024.

5.1.3 "Processing Polygamy" – Serial Reciprocity

When this interactive space coexists with the podcast's seriality, it opens for the podcast to be constructed reciprocally. In the case of *The Faithful Feminists*, for example, their followers' need of care comes back to affect the content of the podcast. An example of this can be found in a five-part series called "Polygamy in Pieces." In the series, Parker and Poll talk about Doctrine and Covenant 132 which references revelations on the practice of plural marriage. During these episodes they cover the early historical timeline of polygamy, perform a textual analysis on official letters of mobilization to the practice of plural marriage, women's motivation and thoughts on their participation, questions of consent (or the lack thereof), resistance, and finally the hosts' own feelings surrounding the Church's current standing on polygamy.[483] Dividing the subject into smaller sections, Poll explains, was an attempt to "be mindful and respectful of our listeners."[484] By breaking it down "into bite sized pieces so that [their] listeners [could] take things in strides" they allowed their listeners to let their "emotions rush over them without having to be totally destroyed."[485] As the series progressed, however, the hosts realized the hurt it caused.

> Poll: In our last episode, we said that it was the final one, but we actually have so many more thoughts and honestly, as the series has progressed, we've seen and heard so much pain that's really come up for many of our listeners and we felt like we needed one more episode in order to try to salve the wound that the series has broken open…We were also shocked, honestly, at the amount of information and emotion that this series stirred up, not just for us, for Channing and I, but for so many of our listeners. As we've moved through this week and the series has progressed, we've received many, many messages that are filled with deep pain and questions, questions and statements like, "how do I make sense of all this plural marriage?" "I didn't know about all these elements of polygamy before," "How do I process polygamy with my ever-changing relationship with the church?" Be that in, out, or somewhere in between, and basically, "What do I do now after you just dropped this mini-series into my lap?"[486]

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483 Channing Parker & Elise Poll, "Polygamy in Pieces – Part One: Timeline (Doctrine & Covenants 132)," *The Faithful Feminists,* November 8, 2021, to "Polygamy in Pieces – Part Six: Current Standings & Feelings (Doctrine & Covenants 132)," *The Faithful Feminists,* November 13, 2021.

484 Susan M. Hinckley & Cynthia Winward, "Episode 073: Acknowledging the Elephant: A Conversation About Polygamy with The Faithful Feminists," *At Last She Said It,* December 14, 2021.

485 M. Hinckley & Cynthia Winward, "Episode 073: Acknowledging the Elephant: A Conversation About Polygamy with The Faithful Feminists."

486 Channing Parker & Elise Poll, "Processing Polygamy with Brook Andreoli (Doctrine & Covenants 132)," *The Faithful Feminists,* November 15, 2021.

By going through the history of polygamy, then, Parker and Poll have put their listeners in a position of grief. After having the series "dropped" into their laps, listeners message them, requesting solutions. Since they "[saw] and heard so much pain" from their listeners, they therefore "felt like [they] needed one more episode in order to try to salve the wound that the series has broken open."[487] So, what they do is that they release an additional episode dedicated to the subject of processing polygamy. Thus, reciprocity and seriality reinforce each other; the interactivity of social media enables the audience to reach out and have their reactions known to podcast hosts; and seriality allows hosts to respond to their audiences by allowing their feelings to affect the development of upcoming episodes. To "process polygamy" they have therefore invited Brook Andreoli: "a writer and 'faith expansion' coach, who shares accessible tools and frameworks to process heavy and difficult topics like polygamy."[488] One of these tools includes the practice of creating "containers" to carry "big emotions."

> Brook: So first, I just want to acknowledge the heartbreaki:ng um moment of this and that we're here to honor your hearts. I know how hard it is to come across polygamy:. I: have several ancesto:rs who practiced polygamy: as well as how it affected my own life… so I would love to share something that I learned from my coach, Sarah. This idea of when these big emotions come up, anger, grief, sadness, there's a tendency for these emotions to spill out everywhere… So, something that has been really helpful for me…is the process of integration. So, we move what we know from our he:ad through our ha:nds to our heart. So, we: can look at some tangible ways to make containers thinking of the grief that may be coming up or the anger and making something with intention. For me:, for whatever reason, my container is often making tablescapes at my kitchen table. I will think about these big emotions:. I'll set an intention:. I'll light a candle that smells like my great grandma:'s tea-rose perfu:me, put on a playlist, it really speaks to my creative heart, and think of the grief, for example. And I play with the textu::res, the colo::rs, there may be images I add to the table or objects that speak to my heart. And I give myself that half hour, that hour to really let these things flow. And then I sit back a:nd look at it, perhaps take pictures of it and having that container: to come back to: and knowing that it's holding that space for me…[489]

The quote is telling of a type of mindfulness and self-care recurring in the podcast, visualized also in the care kit referenced earlier. In discussing methods to value her inner experience, Brook for example suggests an exercise of writing three-page-long drafts

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487 Parker & Poll, "Processing Polygamy with Brook Andreoli (Doctrine & Covenants 132)."

488 Channing Parker & Elise Poll, Episode description from "Processing Polygamy with Brook Andreoli (Doctrine & Covenants 132," *The Faithful Feminists,* November 15, 2021, www.thefaithfulfeminists.com/2021/11/processing-polygamy-doctrine-and.html, accessed November 28, 2024.

489 Parker & Poll, "Processing Polygamy with Brook Andreoli (Doctrine & Covenants 132)."

about one's "uncensored self" to tap into one's inner knowing. The hosts further discuss that dealing with polygamy involves a grieving process, likening hurtful realizations to a symbolic form of "death" because once certain things are known, they cannot be unseen, marking the end of previous beliefs and innocence. To manage this, they recommend embracing this transition as a "midwifing of death and rebirth."[490] Brook's transitioning away from the Church is used as an example of how to process the death of one's previous innocence. In her experience of this transition, Brook continues by likening it to composting and the need to "slow down," which brings her to her Mormon heritage of "homesteading."[491] Parker adds that the concept of composting is about "taking the good and the beautiful things that have maybe been let go of or maybe have been through that death process" and "allowing them to kind of just break down and decompose."[492]

In other words, when the interactive spaces of social media co-exist with the podcasts' seriality, furthermore, they invite reciprocity. As Kelleter suggest – albeit in relation to popular seriality – continuous duplication has consequences for the content, one being that the content responds to its audience. "Repeated temporal overlap between ongoing publication and ongoing reception" he explains, "allows serial audiences to become involved in a narrative's progress."[493] The podcast episode "Processing polygamy" is an example of this, where concerns and needs expressed by listeners lead to adaptions in terms of podcast content.

What we find in the different examples explored above is that the podcast hosts of *The Faithful Feminists* leverage the transmediality and seriality of the podcast to foster caring relationships with their listeners. To put it in more technical terms, Parker and Poll create a continuous and accumulating parasocial relationship with listeners through the visual and interactive affordances of their website and social media. Through each observation made above, parasocial relationships gain, one could say, a certain "thickness" where care is layered through different mediums, creating and sustaining an already well-fed topology in the social media landscape that expects intimacy and friendship. In sum, *The Faithful Feminists* podcast layers care across multiple mediums, weaving a rich, relational topology that thrives on intimacy and friendship. Through their performance Parker and Poll become as much caretakers of scripture as they are caretakers of the scripture's recipients.

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490 Parker & Poll, "Processing Polygamy with Brook Andreoli (Doctrine & Covenants 132)."
491 Parker & Poll, "Processing Polygamy with Brook Andreoli (Doctrine & Covenants 132)."
492 Parker & Poll, "Processing Polygamy with Brook Andreoli (Doctrine & Covenants 132)."
493 Kelleter, "Five Ways of Looking a Popular Seriality," p. 13.

5.2 Framing Parasocial Relationships: *The Faithful Feminists*

But, reiterating the second aspect of my analytical aims, care is not only *performed* through various technological and communicative dispositions, but simultaneously constructed through the meaning-making of its participants, or what I have termed *discursive framing*. To illustrate this framing, I will discuss two specific examples: "soft chair sisters," which portrays the hosts as caregivers to their audience, and "look to the poor and needy," where their caregiving acts are depicted as fulfilling their religious commitments.

5.2.1 "Soft Chair Sisters" – Constructing Intimacy and Friendship

The hosts of *The Faithful Feminists* are exceptionally skilled at framing their podcast in terms, symbols and imagery that create a more intimate and friendly atmosphere. This framing begins with the story of Lisa, their mutual friend. Both she and Parker were part of the same congregation, one which Parker perceived as hostile and judgmental. In this harsh and cold environment, however, Lisa was a comforting presence, always saving a seat next to her and holding Parker's hand when she spoke or commented, knowing how difficult it was to find the courage to use her voice. The story about Lisa can for example be found in an episode called "Searching for God, Finding Friends."

> Parker: I've shared this on the podcast before, but Elise and I have a mutual friend. Her name is Lisa. And I always will remember when she knew that I was having such a hard time being at church…Anytime someone made a comment that she knew maybe would, like, hurt my feelings or frustrate me, she would reach over and hold my hand. And it was so comforting to know that she was always there for me. And that was it! Like, I mean, she did so many more things as my friend, but that was the thing for me that felt like a warm heart and a friendly hand because she was right there.[494]

Being open about her feminism in Relief Society, Parker adds in another episode, was a "painful" experience, where she was almost always met with "hostility" and "rejection."[495] In such situations, friendship to other women was paramount. In the quote above Lisa stands out as a safe and caring person in a crowd of other women, a person who offered her support in difficult situations, who was "right there" to offer her hand.

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494 Channing Parker & Elise Poll, "Searching for God, Finding Friends (Doctrine & Covenants 121–123)," *The Faithful Feminists,* October 18, 2021.

495 Channing Parker & Elise Poll, "Humble Home Inspections (Mormon 7–9)," *The Faithful Feminists,* November 2, 2020.

Lisa, Parker adds in another episode, would always "save [her] a seat," and "hold [her] hand" after she made comments in class.[496] Friendship is therefore depicted as a rare commodity within church environments, which are often portrayed, in the worst cases, as hostile and exclusionary. The recollection of Lisa, the friend who offered her hand, can be seen as the genesis of how parasocial relationships are discursively framed.

This sense of having someone to back you up and catch you when things get tough is a relationship that the podcast hosts try to emulate and bring to life for their listeners. Lisa is for example introduced in one of their "Succor & Support" posts presented earlier, as making "hostile" environments "safe."

> [Lisa] played an important role in making church a safe place for me, and I will always be grateful for her friendship and support. I can't be in every ward everywhere to be this kind of friend for you, but we share this space together and it's important to me that you know: We are here for you. So if your heart is heavy today, if your spirit aches with questions unanswered, if your body feels anger or shame, we are your sisters in solidarity. If you are celebrating, joyful, and filled today, we are your sisters in support. Whatever you need today, We are here for you. Share with us in the comments or anonymously in our stories and Elise and I will do our absolute best to witness, succor, and support you. All my love, ♡ Channing.[497]

In this quote, Parker draws on her ambition to follow in the steps of Lisa, whose acts of kindness inspire her to "be there" for her listeners. If listeners "share" their experiences in the comments, the duo will do their "absolute best to witness, succor, and support" them. Although Parker cannot "be in every ward everywhere to be this kind of friend" for her listeners – they "share this space together" and they are "their sisters in support." In other words, the podcast is attributed with qualities of support and friendship allegedly lacking in the offline environment listeners belong to.

As hosts of *The Faithful Feminists* portray it, speaking up in church is therefore dependent upon having at least one good friend to back you up. To replicate this atmosphere of friendship and security that Lisa exuded, they employ various strategies. The most foundational one is the "soft chair," where the very experience of having a "seat" saved by a friend such as Lisa becomes extracted and used as a catchphrase repeated in different ways. The phrase "soft chair" is something that their listeners will instantly recognize and associate with as it refers to a familiar piece of furniture often used in

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496 Parker & Poll, "Humble Home Inspections (Mormon 7–9)."

497 Channing Parker & Elise Poll, "Succor & Support," *@thefaithfulfeminists,* January 26, 2020, www.instagram.com/p/B7y0RFmlpLO/, accessed January 4, 2024.

church classes.[498] In each episode, for example, the hosts welcome their listeners by saying "we saved you a seat on the soft chairs, so join us today for a conversation about…" The sentence is accompanied with "we're so::: glad you're here" – a dragging of syllables to accentuate their enthusiasm.[499] In the beginning of this subchapter we saw that the podcast afforded a type of parasocial relationship where hosts and listeners develop friendly and intimate relationships with each other. Here we also find that they enact the type of "parasocial interaction" suggested by Horton and Wohl when welcoming their listeners in each episode, where they through specific wordings and intonations assume or imitate the face-to-face interaction that could (but rarely does) happen in a church setting and where a good friend "saves a seat." Besides being expressed verbally to introduce each episode, the soft chair is also used on their website to describe who they are. There we find the following description:

> Our hope is that every episode is both an exhale of relief and comfort *and* an invitation to new questions, ideas, and further study. Most of all, we want you to find friendship with us. We are the girls who save a seat for you on the soft chairs and back up your comments in class, because that is what faith and feminism both do: love one another and make room for everyone.[500]

Here, Parker and Poll become the "girls who save a seat for you on the soft chairs and back up your comments in class," thus making available those bonds of intimacy otherwise disabled in, what we are led to believe, is the harsh climate of the Church. In other words, they enter the position of Lisa, the friend who saves a seat. In contrast to the experience Parker described earlier, where speaking up meant being treated with hostility, the podcast offers a space of "comfort" where there is "room for everyone." In other words, the soft chair is infused with the symbolical meaning of inclusion. By reading about them on their website, the ambition of their verbal introduction in each episode, "we saved you a seat on the soft chair," becomes strengthened. It guides listeners into recognizing that the podcast or "every episode" *should* feel similar to how Parker felt when she received Lisa's support. The technology of sound, of recording that they are "so::: glad [we're] here," is fortified by a framing that tells us that this is what the podcast is meant to do. It is meant to be an intimate and friendly experience.

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498 Examples of this chair can be seen in the images published on Instagram as a part of their last episode: Channing Parker & Elise Poll, "LOOK AT THESE BABIES," *@thefaithfulfeminists,* August 2, 2023, www.instagram.com/p/CvcomSFLwm-/?img_index=1, accessed December 23, 2024.

499 Channing Parker & Elise Poll, "Words of Women & Wisdom (Doctrine & Covenants 89–92)," *The Faithful Feminist,* August 30, 2021.

500 Channing Parker & Elise Poll, "About," *The Faithful Feminists,* www.thefaithfulfeminists.com/p/about-us.html, accessed January 4, 2024.

Beyond text, images and audio, however, the soft chair concept also travels into real life practices such as meetings with their audience. The chair for example inspired the name of a workshop called "a soft chairs workshop."[501] In the promotion of this workshop on their website, they referred to their listeners as "soft chair sisters,"[502] which on other occasions is synonymously termed "soft chair siblings."[503] As is visible in the change from singular to plural – from soft chair to soft chair*s* – as well as the change of wording – to soft chair *sisters,* listeners are invited to become part of a community and presumably to co-produce the "softness" of the chair. This co-production is visible in the following quote where the duo talks about their experiences of the soft chairs workshop. While both were "nervous" and carried a "bit of imposter syndrome," the feeling of "shared friendship" with their audience gave them "comfort."

> Poll: being able to be in a room with all of these other people who maybe I didn't know by name just yet, but there was this kind of shared friendship [mhm] or like agreement of friendship that we are all here supporting one another, that we have space to listen and hold one another. And I found it so comforting and so loving that as we were working through the workshop, you know, presenting material and stuff, I was able to look out into the audience and like make eye contact with so many people who would like nod their heads, like, in encouragement and who I just felt were kind of radiating this like praise and yeah, just meeting me with, like, "yes, you can do it. I see you here. Like, you're doing an amazing job." And so, in that way, I know it's not as intimate as our friendship with Lisa or our friendship with one another, but good friends start from general spaces, [mhm] like everyone starts with strangers before they're friends. And so, I think at the workshop there was this kind of bridging from, like, stranger to friends that I really appreciated.[504]

The workshop – as an offline extension of what the podcast does online – is reflected upon as an instance where mutual support and friendship are created. It allowed them to go from "stranger to friends." The duo experienced an "agreement of friendship" that they were all there to "listen and hold one another." Here, they are imagining an intimate community: it might not be "as intimate as our friendship with Lisa or our friendship with one another" but "good friends start from general spaces." Put differently, there is an assumption that although strangers they have a shared goal of friendship – they could see it "blossoming" among participants.[505] The duo also recognizes

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501 Channing Parker & Elise Poll, "A Soft-Chairs Workshop," *The Faithful Feminists,* August 7, 2021, www.thefaithfulfeminists.com/2021/08/a-soft-chairs-workshop.html, accessed December 23, 2024.

502 Parker & Poll, "A Soft-Chairs Workshop."

503 Parker & Poll, "Processing Polygamy with Brook Andreoli (Doctrine & Covenants 132)."

504 Parker & Poll, "Searching for God, Finding Friends (Doctrine & Covenants 121–123)."

505 Parker & Poll, "Searching for God, Finding Friends (Doctrine & Covenants 121–123)."

the meaning of friendship for the task they were gathered around or workshopping about: reading and interpreting scripture. When "presenting material and stuff" Parker looked to the audience and found friendship, women nodding their heads in "encouragement." The implication of this quote and the fact that they frame scripture studies through such a strong emphasis on friendship and intimacy, is that the seemingly formal or rational task of interpreting scripture must be couched in a framework of friendship and support. That the soft chair concept is meaningful is reverberated among their listeners, who find hope and comfort in it – a haven as some describes it.[506] For some followers it has also become a habit to use the phrase among friends, or to quote it in the podcast's comment section.[507] The soft chair as framing the podcast is therefore also fortified through the audience reception.

But the soft chair is not the only physical property of the Church used to symbolize podcast intimacy. Another soft piece of church furniture important for the podcast is the foyer couch. The Old English Flowered pattern of the couch can be seen in the background of their podcast logotype,[508] where the couch pattern frames a pink square with their podcast name on it. The couch is yet another piece of furniture familiar to members in an American context. In one of their Instagram stories, they explain that the background of their logo is a close-up image of a real foyer couch from Church.[509] The podcast, as the image explains, draws from "iconic features of women's experience in church" which seems to imply both domestic labor – "feeding babies," "chasing toddlers" – as well as "seeking refuge" from "hurtful talks and lessons."[510] The foyer couch, then, symbolizes a shared experience of both domestic tasks and sanctuary. It is a place or a position where women can rest and be rejuvenated among friends, but also a place of "sisterhood" where they are able to be vulnerable or "sit" with their "complex feelings."[511] As Parker reports in the second image of that story, "she felt that sisterhood" as she sat on the couch herself, and she thanks listeners for saving *her* a seat, which also demonstrates, again, that the soft chair or soft couch is a concept produced reciprocally.[512] Using the couch as a logotype and sharing images and experiences of it

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506 Commenter, "We Saved You a Seat on the Soft Chairs," *@thefaithfulfeminists,* January 8, 2023, www.instagram.com/p/CnKUA4quz4P/, accessed January 4, 2024.

507 Commenter, "We Saved You a Seat on the Soft Chairs."

508 Channing Parker & Elise Poll, www.thefaithfulfeminists.com, accessed January 4, 2024.

509 Channing Parker & Elise Poll, "this beautiful floral couch," *@thefaithfulfeminists,* Uploaded on Instagram Stories August 11, 2021.

510 Parker & Poll, "this beautiful floral couch."

511 Parker & Poll, "this beautiful floral couch."

512 Parker & Poll, "this beautiful floral couch."

through social media[513] further accentuate the values associated with the soft chair as characteristic of the podcast.

What happens here, I suggest, is that they are furnishing their podcast in a manner which will help listeners imagine that they are sitting in solidarity with other women. Using the soft chair image, then, enables both closeness in tangible terms (making the podcast similar to the church environment) and closeness as a value (symbolically representing friendship and inclusivity). Its meaningfulness comes from carrying both physicality/church likeness and the fact that it subverts the lack of intimacy in the actual chair. This, I believe, can be inferred from another Instagram post where Poll comments an image of the duo sitting in another type of church furniture, the red velvet armchair.[514]As Poll explains in this Instagram post, "the furniture, the texture, design, and fabric" of the church setting are deeply familiar to someone raised in the gospel. Due to its iconic nature, they felt a strong need to "reclaim" and "incorporate" themselves into this setting.[515] Their motivation was not just nostalgia for a beloved space, but also a desire to infuse it with "new life" and to address its need for significant renewal.[516] In other words, they are using church furniture as a resignification – they keep its familiarity but "reexamine" and "reenergize" it by attributing new meanings of intimacy and inclusion to it.[517] In other words, the soft chair imagery is, as Parker emphasizes in the quote below, not just a "nice sentiment," but part of reimagining communal relationships.

> Parker: It is being in the presence of other women that is a huge part of feminist interpretation. "We are saving you a seat on the soft chairs" is not a nice sentiment we begin the podcast with because it sounds pretty and welcoming. Saving you a seat is at the very heart of what we do. We save you a seat because we know what it is to have none. We sit beside you because we know what it is to feel alone. We reserve those seats, keep them, guard them, not because everyone knows the soft chairs are valuable real estate in any LDS chapel, but because the people that sit within them – you, me, us – we are sacred and holy and worthy of acceptance and belonging. We need each other because we are all we have. With so few canonized women's voices within the Church, and within the text, within our cosmology, oftentimes the only validation we receive as women of the Church comes from the sisters sitting next to us. So, speak up,

513 See for example Channing Parker & Elise Poll, "You asked, we're answering!" *@thefaithfulfeminists,* May 12, 2020, www.instagram.com/p/CAGMOGQBG0i/, accessed January 4, 2024; Channing Parker & Elise Poll, "LOOK AT THESE BABIES," *@thefaithfulfeminists,* www.instagram.com/thefaithfulfeminists/p/CvcomSFLwm-/?img_index=1, August 2, 2023, accessed December 23, 2024.

514 Channing Parker & Elise Poll, "I'm sure you can't tell," *@thefaithfulfeminists,* February 14, 2020, www.instagram.com/p/B8h8G4khNwD/, accessed December 23, 2024.

515 Parker & Poll, "I'm sure you can't tell."

516 Parker & Poll, "I'm sure you can't tell."

517 Parker & Poll, "I'm sure you can't tell."

> reach out, hold a hand, be brave, show yourself and show up. There are women in your ward, your family, your circles who feel as alone as you do. Let's commit to finding each other.[518]

Putting this quote next to Poll's Instagram post allows us to draw the conclusion that what is missing in the actual soft chairs/foyer couches is both intimacy and representation. As Parker expresses it, "we need each other because we are all we have." She articulates that due to the lack of "canonized women," oftentimes "the only validation" women receive "comes from the sisters sitting next to us." Hence, when "scripture," "Church" and "cosmology" fail to give validation it becomes even more important to "commit to finding each other." Emancipation is contingent upon those sisters who sit on the soft chairs beside you. The terminology of the soft chair sisters, then, emphasizes the occupation of physical place in church, and that being a "sister" is entangled with this need for physicality and presence – "being in the presence of other women" she says, is a "huge part of feminism." But these values are not inherent to the chair or the Church – as Poll argued earlier, they need to be re-worked. Obviously, the chair exists, but its "softness" – in terms of values of friendship and inclusivity mentioned earlier – does not. These values are necessarily constructed and practiced together with their listeners online.

5.2.2 "Look to the Poor and Needy" – Constructing Inclusive Community Care

We will now look at another example of framing where the soft chair concept explored above travels into discourses on care as a religious covenant. This means that parasocial relationships are also framed as carrying religious virtues. Besides addressing the lack of intimacy between members of the ward, the podcast duo also reflect on and respond to what they experience as a general lack of care within the Church as a religious institution, especially when it comes to members in doubt. This neglect, the duo suggest, has to do with a culture of certainty,[519] the context of which we will return to when exploring *At Last She Said It* in the following chapter. For now, it suffices to say that according to Parker and Poll there is a tendency of professing truths above questions, and that this setting interferes with the Church's ability to care for its members. To illuminate this argument, we can look at an episode called "A Journey of Grief to the Hope of Zion" where the podcast duo frames care for doubters as a way to establish Zion today. The

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518 Channing Parker & Elise Poll, "A Halfway Sermon," *The Faithful Feminists,* June 28, 2021.

519 Channing Parker & Ellise Poll, "Seeds & Circles: Understanding Faith (Alma 32–35)," *The Faithful Feminists,* July 12, 2020.

episode begins with reflections around what Zion in today's world could mean. Poll explains that one interpretation of the Doctrine and Covenants section 37–40 is that it narrates the history of how the Saints were moving toward Ohio with the hope that God had prepared a promised land there. Another interpretation, however, is that the verses tell us something about the "the way that we can create Zion" in the "here and now."[520] For example by "look[ing] to the poor and needy and administer[ing] to their relief that they shall not suffer."[521]

> Poll: "Look to" the poor and the needy, which to me sounds like, learn from, understand, defer to, include people on the margins, remember […] that our understanding of the world and systems comes with bias and privileges that are limited by our own social locations. And the other verb phrase that shows up here is "administer to their relief, that they shall not suffer." And "administer to," to me, sounds like help, aid, serve, attend to, wait upon. And I think it's important that this verb phrase comes after "look to," because we cannot truly administer if we have not looked to the people we think we are helping. We need to listen to their needs…instead of showing up, assuming that our way of administering is the best and the most well-informed. Also, we're not just administering to the poor and the needy, so that…we feel good about ourselves or…fulfill our ministering responsibilities, or…check off the box of service for our week […] And not just that we're trying to stop the suffering, but…making sure they find relief […] For me relief looks like healing the pain, healing trauma, organizing long-term sustainable resources for flourishing.[522]

The podcast duo seems to suggest, then, that this interpretation of "administering" is a deeper type of care than the one typically offered by the Church. Care should not only be a necessary evil to "fulfill [one's] ministering responsibilities" or to "check off the box of service for [the] week," Poll says. What she is referencing here is the Church's ministering program where Latter-day Saints are called to attend to others' needs and look after their welfare in a "Christlike" manner, and where each household in a ward has a "ministering brother" caring for the family in total, as well as "ministering sisters" caring for the adult woman in the family.[523] This gives us a hint about who is being addressed earlier in the same quote; it is the Church that fails to "administer to" the sufferers' "relief" and instead of "looking to" or "listening" to their "needs," they "show up, assuming" that their "way of administering is the best and most well-informed." It is a superficial form of care, then, that does not attempt to learn from the one who is

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520 Channing Parker & Elise Poll, "A Journey of Grief to the Hope of Zion (Doctrine & Covenants 37–40)," *The Faithful Feminists,* April 12, 2021.

521 Parker & Poll, "A Journey of Grief to the Hope of Zion (Doctrine & Covenants 37–40)."

522 Parker & Poll, "A Journey of Grief to the Hope of Zion (Doctrine & Covenants 37–40)."

523 Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, "What is Ministering?," www.churchofjesuschrist.org/ministering/what-is-ministering?lang=eng, accessed April 8, 2024.

afflicted by pain. What Poll calls for, furthermore, is not a care that simply puts a halt to suffering but takes it "one step further by making sure they find relief," one that requires "healing" and "organizing long-term sustainable resources for flourishing." In other words, care is not a one-time treatment but a commitment to a continual process where the sufferer is given the tools to "flourish" or grow and develop within a supportive environment.

But according to the hosts of *The Faithful Feminists*, doubters have rarely been offered that support. In the same episode they use section 39–40 of Doctrine and Covenants to exemplify the Church's history of ill-treating their doubters. The section narrates the story of James Covel, a missionary for the Church who was called to join the Saints in their move to Ohio but was depicted as tempted by "Satan" in his choice to stay behind. Covel, section 40 verse 2 explains, "received the word originally with gladness, but straight away, Satan tempted him and the fear of persecution, and the cares of the world caused him to reject the word wherefore he broke my covenant and it remaineth with me to do with him as seemeth me good."[524] "Unpacking" this section, Poll suggest, is a good entryway to discuss the Church's present treatment of members in doubt. James Covel's story is a "snapshot of the different stories that we tell around doubters, faith crisisers [sic], questioners, and post-Mormoners [sic]," she says, and it tells us something about "the way that [church] interacts with and treats members who are on their faith journey."[525]

> Poll: Why was there seemingly no care or attention paid to James Covel's journey of leaving a faith tradition, having to leave his family and leaving all that he ever knew behind and why when he chose to stay and in fact not join the Church, why was the narrative so quickly flipped to make it seem like Satan had tempted him and that he wasn't courageous enough to accept the gospel? Why does leaving the Church or doubting mean breaking our covenant?[526]

There is only an in or and out position offered members, Poll seems to suggest, and no interest in their wellbeing when that threshold has been crossed – when someone goes from certainty to doubt, they have broken their "covenant." It is "unfortunate" Parker adds that such a "short chapter can have such a huge influence on the way that we view people who are questioning," where members turn to the verdict that it is "Satan's temptations" rather than show compassion for those going through a faith transition.[527]

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524 *Doctrine and Covenants* 40:2, cited in Parker & Poll, "A Journey of Grief to the Hope of Zion (Doctrine & Covenants 37–40)."

525 Parker & Poll, "A Journey of Grief to the Hope of Zion (Doctrine & Covenants 37–40)."

526 Parker & Poll, "A Journey of Grief to the Hope of Zion (Doctrine & Covenants 37–40)."

527 Parker & Poll, "A Journey of Grief to the Hope of Zion (Doctrine & Covenants 37–40)."

There are many reasons for why members start to doubt, Parker explains, such as having a feminist awakening, struggling with the Church's stance on LGBTQ+ members, "religious trauma" or, as was the subject of their "processing polygamy" episode, "discovering unsavory church history."[528] When such "discoveries are made," she continues, many members experience a long process of "grief."[529] Sadly, Parker explains in the following quote, no one is willing "to mourn with them."

> Parker: We have this tremendous and complex grief and fear, and sense of responsibility that these people are carrying around on a daily basis. And unfortunately, they find that often there's no one willing to hold it with them. There's no one that's willing to listen, to look and to mourn with them […] suddenly these people are burdened, not just with the agonizing pain of a faith crisis, but also with the blame and shame of a black-and-white, in-or-out community that would sooner shove them aside and leave them for dead in this Samaritan desert, than take them in and care for their wounds […] I want to ask, do we hear the weeping of these wounded hearts as recently quoted "a rehearsal of doubt," because we fear it's too painful to look at or can we recognize it for what it is? A cry to belong, a cry to be seen, a cry to be healed and welcomed in and accepted rather than pushed away.[530]

The Church's lack of care for individuals facing doubt is starkly underscored in this quote. Despite the profound emotional, psychological, and relational struggles doubters face, the Church's response, it suggests, often lacks the compassion or support these individuals need. This neglect adds to their grief, compounding their internal crisis with a sense of abandonment by the very community they once trusted. Rather than creating a safe space for open questioning or providing resources for those in transition, the Church's typical approach leans toward reinforcing doctrine and urging conformity. That their rhetoric is in direct response to ongoing discussions among Church officials is evident in the quote "rehearsals of doubt" which references a talk given by Russel M. Nelson in 2021, where he said, "if you have doubts about God, Jesus, or Joseph Smith," you should "choose to believe and stay faithful." [531] One should "study with the desire to believe" he continued, "rather than with the hope that you can find a flaw in the fabric of a prophet's life or a discrepancy in the scriptures. Stop increasing your doubts by rehearsing them with other doubters."[532] This lack of institutional empathy can deepen the internalized "shame" and fear of doubters. When someone doubts, further-

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528 Parker & Poll, "A Journey of Grief to the Hope of Zion (Doctrine & Covenants 37–40)."
529 Parker & Poll, "A Journey of Grief to the Hope of Zion (Doctrine & Covenants 37–40)."
530 Parker & Poll, "A Journey of Grief to the Hope of Zion (Doctrine & Covenants 37–40)."
531 Russell M. Nelson, "Christ Is Risen; Faith in Him Will Move Mountains," *General Conference,* April 2021.
532 M. Nelson, "Christ Is Risen; Faith in Him Will Move Mountains."

more, they are out and therefore no longer eligible of the community's care. It's an "in-or-out community" Parker says, that "would sooner shove them aside and leave them for dead… than take them in and care for their wounds." Parker ends with a rhetorical question, suggesting that the Church community "hear the weeping of these wounded hearts" as "rehearsals of doubt" because they are too fearful of the pain or discomfort it means to truly "recognize" them as a "cry to be healed and welcomed… rather than pushed away."

Returning to the episode we initiated this section with, it is this in-or-out community that hinders members from realizing what "Zion" "here and now" could mean. The conversation that continues on this subject emphasizes the inability to care for others when search for "unity" trumps inclusion. Verse 27 in Doctrine and Covenants section 38, "I say unto you be one. And if you're not one ye are not mine," is "often weaponized against advocacy for the least of these" Parker explains.

> Parker: people just say, "if we all just strive to be unified and we're all together, and we just focus on, like, niceness and being good to each other and being unified that everything will be fine…" because everyone will be comfortable…but I think paired with our baptismal covenant and the later verses in this chapter about caring for the poor and oppressed, the word "be one" isn't about the marginalized tugging on their bootstraps, and it's not about the marginalized silencing themselves in order to make everyone comfortable and have a façade of unity […] If we're not listening to those who we are wanting to comfort… who we are wanting to be unified with, then "be one" sometimes can be weaponized to say, "be silent" and that's not unity. Unity is having everyone's voices heard, everyone's experiences validated, and accepted and making space for everyone to have a seat on the soft chairs, not necessarily just be quiet and sit down, but be here, be loved so that we can be one.[533]

There is no real "unity" among members who want to be "comfortable" and pretend that "everything will be fine," Parker suggests. Issues like sexism, racism or transphobia – sometimes exemplified as what causes doubt among members – cannot be smoothed over for the sake of comfort. If we "pair" this discussion with "our baptismal covenant" Parker says, the "marginalized" cannot be expected to solve their own suffering or "tug on their bootstraps." The baptismal covenant means that Latter-day Saints promise to "bear one another's burdens, that they may be light," and to "mourn with those that mourn" and "comfort those that stand in need of comfort"[534] – which cannot be performed if those who suffer are "silencing themselves in order to make everyone comfortable." That is not real unity, Parker claims, but a "façade." Returning to Poll's

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533 Parker & Poll, "A Journey of Grief to the Hope of Zion (Doctrine & Covenants 37–40)."

534 *Book of Mormon*, Mosiah 18:8–9.

comments on the intimate relationship between "looking to" and "administering to," "offering relief," Parker adds, must be done by "listening" to the one who suffers, and acknowledging their experiences.[535] But what does listen before administering mean? If readers recall the content of "Processing Polygamy" it becomes apparent why the recourses used in that episode to "salve the wounds" of their listeners, centered around contemplative practices: because listening or "looking to" doubters' experiences mean acknowledging a process of a changing faith. When the duo later reflects on what the Church could do in practice to change these circumstances, they for example mention "training auxiliary leaders with contemplative practices, including training on cycles of faith and faith transition from scholars and not just what your Bishop thinks he knows."[536] If we return again to the quote above, the last sentence also invites us to consider the podcast duo's online community as realizing a type of care that the Church cannot. Having "everyone's experiences validated and accepted" which is framed as a necessity to fulfill the covenant to care, is described as "having a seat on the soft chairs." And if we combine this argument with the initial reflections in that same episode, then the soft chair practice *is* how Zion should be lived in the "here and now."

5.2.3 Analytical Summary of Discursive Framing

Through these observations we can acknowledge the strategies of discursive framing that accompany the parasocial relationships described earlier and how they are formulated based on their religious tradition in mind. To begin with, this discussion centers around the *nodal point* "soft chair," which serves as a gravitational core for other *discursive moments* like "friendship," "care," and "comfort." Through these moments, we understand that Parker and Poll not only "back" their listeners "up" but also act as their "sisters" in support, offering "validation" for their experiences. They provide a "refuge" and a "salve" for listeners' "wounds" during challenging times.

The "soft chair" and its associated moments, furthermore, are ordered in a *chain of equivalences* that places the chair as a logical solution to past and present lack of intimacy. The genesis and backstory of this chain is Lisa. Through Parker's narration about her past ward, we learn that without Lisa there would be no soft chairs. By "saving [her] a seat" and by offering acts of kindness – "holding [her] hand," giving "gentle hugs" when church was especially hurtful – Lisa constituted an anomaly in an otherwise "hostile" environment, and by doing so played an "important role in making church a safe place." The ideal friendship that Lisa exudes is then connected or chained with the *nodal point*

535 Parker & Poll, "A Journey of Grief to the Hope of Zion (Doctrine & Covenants 37–40)."
536 Parker & Poll, "A Journey of Grief to the Hope of Zion (Doctrine & Covenants 37–40)."

of "soft chair" and other *discursive moments* revolving around the physical attributes of the Church. Through moments such as the "foyer couch" and the "red velvet chair" we learn that these are ambiguous places where "friendship" and "refuge" may occur – the pause from "hurtful talks" that the foyer couch enables and Lisa's act of making a safe space next to her are example of this – but that their full potential must be created by the podcast duo themselves. Because the church furniture is so "familiar" and "iconic" they "knew" they had to "reclaim" and "incorporate" themselves in it – it was a "necessity." As Poll writes in the Instagram post presenting the red velvet chairs earlier, there is a familiarity to the "texture, design, and fabric of it all" that gives a sense of nostalgia and shared history. While it is a place that they "love," however, it is "outdated" and "needs a lot of work." In other words, they need to do the work that Lisa initially did for the soft chair, by making of it a "safe space." Much like they "hauled" the chairs "up onto the stage in order to get a decent background" for their photo, they relocated the church's furniture into the podcast, "reexamined," "reenergized," and "[gave] new life" to it. Thus, the soft chair is part of a chain of events where the chair progressively metamorphoses from unsafe to safe. It started with Lisa and the acts of kindness that initiated a safe space for Parker within her previous ward and continues through the reminiscing of other familiar yet outdated physical attributes, such as the foyer couch and the red velvet chair, the statement that these either lack intimacy or that they are only created in close proximity to exceptions such as Lisa, and finally their transportation into the podcast, where they are re-signified through the multiple discursive moments mentionned earlier focusing on love and support. Though Parker and Poll cannot "be in every ward everywhere to be this kind of friend," they create a "safe space" online where, just like Lisa was "right there" in church, they are "there for" their listeners.

Apparent in this articulatory practice is that the safe space is constructed against an *antagonistic other*. The narrative that unfolds about the physical congregation above is one where intimacy and friendship are foreclosed or enacted only in close proximity to specific individuals encompassing unique traits. I argued earlier that the use of the soft chair image fosters both a tangible sense of closeness – by drawing parallels to the church environment – and a symbolic closeness, representing values like friendship and inclusivity (which are also enacted through the parasocial qualities of the podcast as a medium). But those values are not self-sustained, they are motivated against the Church as a not-so-caring other, a perceived communal reality where women cannot foster authentic and intimate relationships with each other. As Parker explains, they are saving a seat "because [they] know what it is to have none." In an "ideal world," they stated in one of their "succor & support" posts, "the church would be a safe place to share and discuss a variety of thoughts and ideas." But "unfortunately that is not always the reality."

That is why all of those spaces – the soft chair, foyer couch, red velvet chair – must be "reexamined" and given "new life." One can infer from this that there is a negative other at the opposite side of the chair's "softness." The unspoken premises here is that their podcast community contrasts what we may – borrowing their terminology – refer to as the "hard pews" of the Church.

It is in relation to this imagined other and the parasocial nature of the podcast as a medium that Parker and Poll emerge as caretakers of their audience. By the dual effect of media's performativity and their own discourse framing the podcast as a safe space, they are hailed into the *subject position* of Lisa, the caring friend. But as we observed through the following examples, this discourse does not only speak to their own positions as caring or their listeners as recipients of that care, but to a larger *field of discursivity* on caring or ministering among Latter-day Saints. In episodes like "A Journey of Grief to the Hope of Zion" the meaning of the *nodal point* "soft chair" develops through *discursive moments* drawing on various religious repertoires. It illustrates that the Church is ignorant of the experiences and hardships of its "doubting" members and that providing a soft chair means "looking to" or "administer[ing]" unto those experiencing "faith crisis." That is what the hope of "Zion" entails – that members uphold their "baptismal covenant," to offer vulnerable/doubting members not only "relief," but "flourishing." This discourse on doubt and care, fortifies the *antagonistic* frontier mentioned earlier where the Church community – an "in-or-out community" – contrasts the inclusive community of the podcast. This "other" is manifested through discursive moments that reveal the Church's superficial interest in "fulfill[ing] [its] ministering responsibilities," treating it as just a "box" to "check off." The duo explains that this emphasis on maintaining a "façade of unity," ostensibly "so that we feel good about ourselves," actively "shoves [aside]" doubting members and effectively "leaves them for dead in [a] Samaritan desert." As a result of this neglect, there is "no one that's willing to listen... to mourn with them," leading "marginalized" members to "silence themselves in order to make everyone comfortable." This brings clarity to the *chain of equivalence* that holds the podcast's imagined other together; it is an institution whose "care" is image-driven and structured on shallow priorities, that is, ministering is only performed to "fulfill" or "check off" certain "responsibilities." It is also a ministering where recipients of care are reduced to those who promise to remain uncomplicated, those who do not "rehearse" their "doubts," but keep "silent" about them, and thereby uphold a "façade" of "niceness" and "comfort." No one is really "willing" to "mourn" with those who doubt, they are "too painful to look at."

This is not a critique from outside the confines of the Latter-day Saint tradition, however. While the "how" of caring is debated, and shallow adoptions thereof is heavily

critiqued, the faith in the religious covenant to care, itself, is non-negotiable. Accordingly, care becomes visible as a *floating signifier*. As Latter-day Saints they covenant to "bear one another's burdens," to tend to the welfare of other members. But because the ideal to care is outmaneuvered by the Church's "fear" of doubters and their desire to remain "comfortable," however, that covenant cannot be realized. If we trace the *chain of equivalences* around this floating signifier "care," furthermore, we also discover its connectedness to another discursive moment, which is "Zion." When speaking about care and doubt, Parker and Poll draw on a well-known Pioneer narrative where Saints gather in a promised land. In their reflections on what this means however, they translate "Zion" into something that can be enacted today. In doing so, they not only imagine Zion as administering to those who suffer but place their "soft chairs" as a gathering principle and a substitute for the Church. There, they "look to" those they "administer" to, meaning, they take their listeners' experiences of doubt seriously and provide them, as we saw in the "Processing Polygamy" episode earlier, with "salve" for their "wounds."

5.3. Performing Parasocial Relationships: *At Last She Said It*

In the following subchapter we turn to the *At Last She Said It* podcast. We will begin by looking at how it performs its parasocial relationships. This includes three examples, "hotline," illustrating the use of voice messages, "I am not a mother, but I am enough," about how voice messages sometimes turn into interactions on-air, and "when the wheels come off," showcasing how episodes respond to needs expressed by listeners.

5.3.1 "Hotline" – Voicemail Technology

An example of how Hinckley and Winward perform parasocial relationships is by playing and responding to voice messages on-air. These voice messages are sometimes included in the discussions held on the podcast,[537] added at the end of an episode,[538] or part of episodes solely dedicated to sharing voice messages,[539] and are frequently advertised through social media. One Instagram post for example depicts a vintage image of a

[537] Susan M. Hinckley & Cynthia Winward, "Episode 098: The Invisible Woman," *At Last She Said It,* July 12, 2022; "Episode 108: What About Sealings?" *At Last She Said It,* September 6, 2022.

[538] Susan M. Hinckley & Cynthia Winward, "Episode 156: What About Consent?" *At Last She Said It,* October 17, 2023.

[539] Susan M. Hinckley & Cynthia Winward, "Episode 126: What About Tithing?," *At Last She Said It,* February 21, 2023; "Episode 144: Messages to Our Daughters |Part 2 – To Our Younger Selves," *At Last She Said It,* June 13, 2023; "Episode 165: BONUS | Still Talking About Patriarchal Blessings," *At Last She Said It,* December 8, 2023.

woman using a telephone, accompanied by the slogan "At Last YOU can say it!" and the text, "what's on your mind? We'd love to use your thoughts (and voice) on season 5 episodes."[540] Through this technology, listeners like "Tracy" are invited to confide in the podcast duo to receive support and validation.

> Hi, my name is Tracy. I was married back in 1982 and was divorced twenty-eight years later. My ex-husband has recently applied for a sealing cancellation. I'm not getting married again. He is. This would be his third. Anyway, he asked for this because he said he wanted a clean slate as he enters this third marriage. Anyway, I was told by both my Bishop and his Bishop and stake president that this was the result if this cancellation is approved. It was denied and at the same time no one bothered to tell me, you know, none of the priesthood involved. Church didn't notify me. Nothing. Anyway, I just haven't understood this. And I'm really kind of desperate for an answer. I would really like to talk to you. You seem to know (0.2) ~so much (0.3) ((crying)) Anyway, I would really appreciate some help. Thank you.[541]

That listeners turn to the podcast duo with confidence that they can provide help is obvious in Tracy's voicemail. Tracy ends her voicemail in tears, saying that she is "desperate" and that she "really would like to talk to" the podcast duo, since they seem to "know so much." A good way to explain the technology of the voicemail function is like a "hotline" women can call when they need someone to talk to. The term hotline was used on one occasion when the duo responded to a guest speaking about her feelings of depression and loneliness, where Hinckley exclaims "I wish you'd had my phone number," Winward adding "we need a hotline, and Mormonism for women who just need to say it," and their guest responding "It's so lonely…That's why what you're doing is just an unbelievable gift."[542] The difference from an actual hotline, however, is that listeners communicate something to have their messages responded to on a single and later occasion. In more technical terms, these voicemails can be described as a para-social interaction. Although Hinckley and Winward are not physically present with the voicemail sender, they engage with the message as though they were, for instance by weaving in their own experiences together with hers, creating a virtual dialogue that feels personal and supportive, or co-present.[543] After playing the voicemail, Winward for example recalls a friend who had a similar experience.

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[540] Susan M. Hinckley & Cynthia Winward, "At Last YOU can say it," *@atlastshesaidit,* May 9, 2022, www.instagram.com/p/CdV-uZbrEJX/, accessed January 26, 2024.

[541] Susan M. Hinckley & Cynthia Winward, "Episode 159: At Last YOU Said It | ALSSI Listener Voicemails," *At Last She Said It,* November 7, 2023.

[542] Susan M. Hinckley & Cynthia Winward, "Episode 157: Embracing Your Journey | A Conversation with Mer Monson," *At Last She Said It,* October 24, 2023.

[543] Euritt, *Podcasting as an Intimate Medium*, p. 72–73.

> Winward: Maybe my one bit of advice is that it sounds like her ex-husband is the one who applied for the sealing cancellation [right cause he's the one getting married]. Yeah, So maybe if she's the one that applies for it, it u::m would be granted in that way […] I just had a good friend of many, many years who went through a horrific divorce and the first thing she did once her divorce was final, was she applied for a sealing cancellation. Uhm, it was granted. I mean, it was horrific what she had to go through [mm]. They asked her questions like, "list all of your sins [ri:::ght I've heard of this] since the divorce," you know, and her priestly leaders were insistent, like, "are you a full tithe payer?" And it's like, wait, what if I'm not a full tithe payer? I have to stay sealed to him or, like, which is it? Like, they just kept insisting they needed to know whether she was paying her tithing. And so, it's not a fair system, even if she's the one that applies to it. But maybe she would at least have some more answers if she was the one that spearheaded her paperwork through her Bishop and state president. That's my only advice and it's crappy advice. That's all I can offer. I'm sorry.
> Hinckley: Mh, well, I just hope that she hears the message that our hearts are with her in this, [100 percent] and she deserves better. [544]

Based on her friend's experience, Winward responds with a few practical suggestions, saying that while "there's just not a whole lot women can do about this" she advises Tracy to seek for a sealing cancellation herself. In addition to practical guidance, the duo often responds with affirmations and words of support. Responding to Tracy's message, Hinckley for example says, "that message is just heartbreaking to me," adding, "my heart is breaking for you, Tracy."[545] Hinckley continues to say that "it's so meaningful to me, that she feels like this is a safe space to bring that and set it down for us."[546] And while Hinckley does not have an answer she will "sit with her in it."[547] The term "sitting with" – which we will have reasons to return to in the next chapter – can also be seen in the response to another voicemail, where Winward is heard saying "I don't know what to say except I just want to sit with Madeleine's feelings," Hinckley adding "I think that part of the point of putting out this episode is probably that now we can all just sit with her in that and with each other."[548] Through exchanges like this, listeners can receive "validation," and as a result feel "less alone," which is really, as the duo claimed in their first season, "the point of the whole thing."[549] By using the voicemail, listeners are not only turning to the podcast duo as authorities in fostering their own well-being but also

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544 M. Hinckley & Winward, "Episode 159: At Last YOU Said It |ALSSI Listener Voicemails."
545 M. Hinckley & Winward, "Episode 159: At Last YOU Said It |ALSSI Listener Voicemails."
546 M. Hinckley & Winward, "Episode 159: At Last YOU Said It |ALSSI Listener Voicemails."
547 M. Hinckley & Winward, "Episode 159: At Last YOU Said It |ALSSI Listener Voicemails."
548 Susan M. Hinckley & Cynthia Winward, "Episode 109: BONUS – A Few More Thoughts About Sealings," *At Last She Said It,* September 9, 2022.
549 Susan M. Hinckley & Cynthia Winward, "Episode 21: Bonus – At Last We Said It!," August 4, 2020.

agreeing to be featured on-air, thereby contributing further to the podcast's parasocial structure.

5.3.2 "I'm Not a Mother, But I'm Enough" – Live Consolations

While these examples are semi-bilateral communications, they occasionally turn into live interactions where host and listeners engage in interactive co-presence.[550] An example of this can be found in an episode called "I'm Not a Mother, But I'm Enough" where one of their voice messengers, Crystal, is invited as a guest. "She left us a voice message," Hinckley explains, and they immediately knew they "need[ed] to have a whole conversation with her."[551] Crystal, she says, had raised an issue they "hadn't really felt comfortable addressing" themselves.[552] They were "waiting for someone…who had the right experience, the right emotion, and what [they] needed to tackle this topic," a quote that tells both of the editorializing role the duo occupy, of choosing who gets representation on-air, and of their ambition to invite people who can talk about the subject at hand through their own experiences.[553] As motherhood is a huge part of women's roles in the Church, they explain, it can be difficult to experience desires that do not abide by those norms. In the conversation that continues they discuss how the ideal of motherhood makes other life choices "invalid."

> Crystal: It makes my existence feel invalid to go to church and hear over the pulpit on Mother's Day or any other day, that because I'm a woman, I'm a mother. I have spent the last twenty years of my life coming to terms with the fact that I am not a mother […] Instead of accepting my reality, instead of accepting me, we will announce over the pulpit and sacrament meeting and in General Conference [Winward: Right] that that all women are mothers. [Hinckley: mhm] I am just now… ((takes a deep breath)) ((crying)) I am just now understanding that most of my shame of I am not enough came from this messaging. I felt invisible. I felt like a half self. I felt that my identity was unspeakable.[554]

This quote is telling of how the podcast becomes a place where listeners can finally breathe, cry, and work through their struggles without fear of judgment or rejection. Struggling to verbalize her feelings, through deep breaths and tears, Crystal explains the shame that the Church's messaging has caused. When the Church preaches over the pulpit that "all women are mothers" she feels "invisible" or like a "half self" whose

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550 Live interactions later cut and edited before being published.

551 Susan M. Hinckley & Cynthia Winward, "Episode 077: I'm Not a Mother, But I'm Enough," *At Last She Said It,* January 11, 2022.

552 M. Hinckley & Winward, "Episode 077: I'm Not a Mother, But I'm Enough."

553 M. Hinckley & Winward, "Episode 077: I'm Not a Mother, But I'm Enough."

554 M. Hinckley & Winward, "Episode 077: I'm Not a Mother, But I'm Enough."

identity lacks language or is "unspeakable." While members try to be "kind," she adds, by "explicitly including" her on Mother's Day, she feels like her "identity is being overlaid" by something that is "more comfortable" for them. In support of Crystal, Hinckley responds:

> Hinckley: I wish I could say that's not true, [Crystal: right] ((Crystal sniffling)) You know, I wish I could say, "well, that's how Crystal's experienced it." But that's not really true. I can't say that, and I guess I never really realized until right this second the degree to which that is hu::gely problematic for me personally even, like, I'm not sure I can live with this truth that you have brought to my face right now. I don't know. I'm going to have to think on that. I've always kind of known that, you know, women's roles are so closely and carefully defined in the Church that that has always chaffed me and really felt uncomfortable to me, but I didn't really understand the full implications and the full implications are what you're telling us right now. [Crystal hhh yeah] I'm sorry, Crystal.[555]

Hinckley's response to Crystal is a good example of how the *At Last She Said It* podcast creates a space not just for sharing but for affirmation, support, and solidarity. Rather than dismissing or minimizing Crystal's experience, Hinckley actively listens and reflects on the depth of what Crystal has shared, validating her feelings and acknowledging the systemic issues it reveals. It also serves as a moment of consolidation, where the host and guest come together in mutual recognition of the often-silenced issues around gender roles and expectations. By admitting that she, too, feels the weight of this truth and needs to "think on that," Hinckley shows what could be described as humility and openness, making it clear that she is engaged in a process of continual questioning and learning. The apology at the end, "I'm sorry, Crystal," emphasizes empathy and reinforces the podcast's role as a supportive space.

This type of interactive co-presence characteristic of live conversations fortifies the relational intimacy otherwise built through social media interactions by audibly manifesting the podcast's support network. Crystal, breathing deeply and fighting back tears, vocalizes her story, while the hosts validate and console her. This format allows the podcast to evoke an emotionality, as participants voice their concerns, creating a palpable sense of host-listener intimacy. This live aspect thus adds to the parasocial nature of the podcast by presenting the recipients of the duo's care as not only passive or anonymous recipients, but as active participants in a relationship-building process.

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[555] M. Hinckley & Winward, "Episode 077: I'm Not a Mother, But I'm Enough."

5.3.3 "When the Wheels Come Off" – Serial Reciprocity

In similarity to *The Faithful Feminists*, parasocial relationships are also amplified by seriality, where communication with listeners over time enables the content of the podcast to be affected by the needs of Hinckley and Winward's listeners. One of several episodes comparable to "processing polygamy" mentioned earlier,[556] where Parker and Poll "salved the wounds" of their listeners, is an episode from the *At Last She Said It* podcast called "When the Wheels Come Off."

> Winward: So we're calling this episode "When the Wheels Come off," and so we're kind of going to be touching on the topic of faith crisis a little bit today, and the reason we wanted to talk about this now is, it seems like, Susan, probably within a few months of starting this podcast we started getting a lot of private messages from listeners who kind of were "hanging on by their fingernails"[mhm] or their "wheels had come off the bus," or, you know, any of number of metaphors that we could use, and they really seemed to be in faith crisis and were kind of reaching for a lifeline. So, in many ways, I mean, I think we already tackle many of the reasons why, you know, women can find themselves in a crisis of some sort. But we wanted to tackle this head on today.[557]

In other words, listeners who have reached out seem to be going through a faith crisis, or as they refer to it "hanging on by their fingernails" or having the "wheels come off the bus." In response to listeners "reaching for a lifeline," they release an episode to tackle the subject "head on." As they describe under an Instagram image of spelling blocks signing the word "HELP," the episode is a "faith crisis 101" about how you can "best take care of yourself (or a loved one) when you find yourself believing differently than you once did."[558] Although a faith crisis, Winward writes, can lead to greater "compassion," it is a "hard, hard journey," which is why listeners should "reach out" and "get help," to which she adds that they have "listed some resources on our website" and that they can "reach out to [them] as well."[559] In the episode that follows they have invited Jeralee Renshaw, who they describe as their own "mentor" in dealing with their own faith crisis. They "figured there was really no better person to have this conversation with than the one who kind of shepherd[ed] [them] into this space and has helped [them] move through it."[560] The duo introduces by saying that they "have five questions,"

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556 See also Susan M. Hinckley & Cynthia Winward, "Episode 121: What About Faith Crisis? A Conversation with Becky Edwards," *At Last She Said It,* January 24, 2023.

557 Susan M. Hinckley & Cynthia Winward, "Episode 42: When the Wheels Come Off," *At Last She Said It,* February 2, 2021.

558 Susan M. Hinckley & Cynthia Winward, "Faith Crisis 101," *@atlastshesaidit,* February 4, 2021, www.instagram.com/p/CK4D2BiBsvy/?img_index=1, accessed January 26, 2024.

559 M. Hinckley & Winward, "Faith Crisis 101."

560 M. Hinckley & Winward, "Episode 42: When the Wheels Come Off."

one being "what advice would you give someone who finds their faith is suddenly undergoing a dramatic shift of some kind?" to which Renshaw proceeds to advise listeners to "go slowly."

> Renshaw: I realize that for so many people, and I've heard this over and over, "I've got to know the answers" and "I've got to know whether it's true or whether it's not and if it's not true, I'm out, I'm gone" [Hinckley: right right] and I've seen that happen [Winward: hm] with people that I really care about…They're just out so quickly. And you know, um one of the most bittersweet aspects of Mormonism, I think, is that it really permeates our relationships, our family relationships, depending on where you live, I'm in Utah, my relationships with my neighbors, with our ward members, with our friends, it's such a big deal…And then when the Church isn't working so well, it can be really painful and isolating for people and they feel very, very much alone. And so, I would say […] holding space for the possibilities, not having to make any big decisions today, tomorrow, six months or a year from now [Winward: mhm]… For me, what I experience is getting comfortable with being uncomfortable […] There's a psychological term, "cognitive dissonance," and a lot of people experience that as a part of a faith crisis [Hinckley: mhm] and so even just accepting that this is something new and I'm going to be uncomfortable for a while in this space, is really an important step in allowing (.) allowing time to process.[561]

As Renshaw puts it, listeners should practice being "comfortable with being uncomfortable" or in a state of "cognitive dissonance," rather than, as she advises against, going too fast or leaving too "quickly." They round off by going through resources that can be used by their listeners, which they later publish on their website. This provides another example of how care is often directed at doubters or those experiencing "faith crisis" and is comparable to what we saw in the previous case where a "faith expansion coach" was invited to *The Faithful Feminists* podcast to talk about how to process polygamy. In similarity to what we observed there, the example also demonstrates how seriality and transmediality work together with the result of relationships between host and audience building over time. Transmediality allows the podcast to flow over interactive media which opens opportunities for listeners to express their feelings and needs, while seriality allows those needs to accumulate host-responses.

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561 M. Hinckley & Winward, "Episode 42: When the Wheels Come Off."

5.4 Framing Parasocial Relationships: *At Last She Said It*

While these examples of parasocial relationships focus on the enactment of care, there is in similarity to the case explored earlier, also a discursive framing of the type of host-listener relationships found therein, where the podcast hosts actively construct themselves as caretakers. It is to this subject we will now direct our focus. Two examples will be explored: "she was at her wits' end," depicts how the podcasters construct their listeners as in need of care, and "administering doesn't save souls," how the podcast enables hosts to fulfill their religious covenant to care.

5.4.1 "She Was at Her Wits' End" – Constructing the Need for Care

In the *At Last She Said It* podcast there is a noticeable construction of its listeners as in need of care. To the women referenced above for example, who were "hanging on by their fingernails," and having the "wheels come off the bus,"[562] Hinckley and Winward describe themselves as holding out a "lifeline."[563] Besides verbal expressions, this type of discourse is also illustrated through images. An example of the latter is an Instagram post depicting a vintage image of a woman resting her head in her palms in a dismayed manner, saying, "I was at my wits' end!" accompanied by the commercial-like sentence "Thank goodness her friend recommended ALSSI! She's not alone!" and within parentheses, "neither are you."[564] In other words, a situation is illustrated where a woman is guided to the *At Last She Said It* podcast after finding herself at her "wits' end." This illustration goes hand in hand with another self-acclaimed description of the podcast, as a form of "triage." According to the dictionary, this term means "the sorting of and allocation of treatment to patients and especially battle and disaster victims according to a system of priorities designed to maximize the number of survivors" or "the assigning of priority order to projects on the basis of where funds and other resources can be best used, are most needed, or are most likely to achieve success."[565] In the following quote they imply that assessing injuries among "struggling" members, is part of their desire to continue their podcast:

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562 M. Hinckley & Winward, "Episode 42: When the Wheels Come Off."

563 M. Hinckley & Winward, "Episode 42: When the Wheels Come Off."

564 Susan M. Hinckley & Cynthia Winward, "I was at my wits' end," *@atlastshesaidit*, January 13, 2023, www.instagram.com/p/CnWzJcpvw1K/, accessed, January 24, 2024.

565 "Triage," Merriam Webster, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/triage, accessed May 19, 2024.

> Hinckley: I feel like we're doing triage [Oh] I feel like that's what you and I are doing right? [that's a great way] People come to us, we like, assess the injury and offer the most rudimentary – and I mean sometimes an emoji or [laughing] a kind word or two, right – we're talking about rudimentary aid that we can offer. But then we try to point them towards something that could help [mhm] in our conversations or by bringing guests on that have something that may be able to help a little bit. That's it. But at some point, you know, you start to have opinions about the nature of the injuries that you're seeing. When you see the same injury again and again.. [oh my gosh yes] you know the similarities to the ways that people show up hurting, how and why they're injured, and you know, how that's happening and at whose hands […] We can do better [sure!] and so that's why I desire to continue to grow this project.[566]

This quote tells us about both the performance and framing of parasocial relationships. First, thanks to the interactive media they use, followers can reach out to them – "people come to us" Hinckley says – and through interactions, presumably on social media such as Instagram, they offer "rudimentary" aid or "an emoji or a kind word or two." These interactions then affect what type of content they have on their podcast, that is, they "bring guests on" that may "be able to help a little bit." Second, this is described as what they "do" through their podcast, "assess the injur[ies]" of their listeners. In other words, their listeners are described as coming to their podcast in a state of distress. Implicitly suggested here is that the Church is accountable for their pain – they know "how that's happening and at whose hands." The lack of triage offered by the Church, furthermore, can be assumed to be the reason why even the most "rudimentary" aid, becomes a source of "much relief," in effect portraying a comparably not-so-caring other, quite the opposite of their own podcast community.

As described earlier, much of their interaction with listeners is based on their personal experiences, something Hinckley and Winward often acknowledge by describing themselves as sitting in the "cheap seats." Despite these seats' disadvantages when it comes to formal power, the experience of sitting in them makes them able to send out lifelines to other women:

> Winward: Susan, when you talk about a lifeline, how we give a lifeline to so many women, what is it you and I text back and forth to each other? "The bar is low."
> Hinckley: The bar is so low, Cynthia.
> Winward: The bar is so low. You and I are not experts in anything. The only thing we're expert in is we've sat in the pews for – uh between the two of us? – Oh my gosh, hundred years ((laughing))
> Hinckley: Like a literal hundred, oh ouch ((LAUGHING))

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566 Susan M. Hickley & Cynthia Winward, "Episode 066: Wrap Party!," *At Last She Said It*, August 31, 2021.

> Winward: An actual yeah, [yeah an actual 100 years] [LAUGHING] between the two of us. So, we're not experts in anything except 100 years of our butts in the pews [right]and so maybe that does sort of make us experts or at least semi know about certain things. And, so, when women uh, cry to us? about the different things that they're going through, it doesn't take too much solidarity, right. We offer solidarity and then, like you say, sometimes we can point them in certain directions, but that's it. The bar is so low to help people.
> Hinckley: Oh yeah, and it's amazing how much relief they seem to feel from that. It requires nothing. It requires just being seen.
> Winward: And we're changing nothing.
> Hinckley: Now, we're changing nothing. We know that. We're in the cheap seats.
> Winward: The cheap seats, always in the cheap seats.[567]

Beyond repeating the lack of care from the Church – it doesn't "take much" to offer solidarity since the "bar is so low" – the duo also frames their resilience on behalf of their listeners as thanks to their informal knowledge or personal experiences. Sitting in the "cheap seats" seems to imply a lack of formal authority to cause change but nonetheless a position of knowledge that comes from a lifelong experience of sitting in them. Through this lived experience or "semi-knowledge" they are in the position of assessing the injuries of other women and offering solidarity or a "lifeline." Hinckley recognizes in a cross-over episode with *The Faithful Feminists* that because they "are in the cheap seats" they "can't do a single thing about this institution."[568] What they can do instead is to change "the experiences of women at church."[569] The affordance of podcasting, in other words, simultaneously gives them the authority to better the experiences of female members, while also doing nothing about their formal authority to do so – "we're changing nothing. We know that." They have, in effect, only the authority – in a secondary instance – to treat those afflicted by the authority of the Church. What can be inferred from this is that parasocial relationships are not only placed against a not-so-caring other, but also an opposite where women lack formal decision-making power. Adding to their own terminology of triage, they are not only left with "crumbs" as they sometimes put it, [570] but also the collateral. That is, someone is causing damage – members show up "injured" – and they are left to assess – "triage" – and alleviate them. The logical conclusion of this description, then, is as a movement from unsafe to safe, or

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567 M. Hickley & Winward, "Episode 066: Wrap Party!"

568 Susan M. Hinckley & Cynthia Winward, "Episode 073: Acknowledging the Elephant: A Conversation About Polygamy," *At Last She Said It,* December 14, 2021.

569 M. Hinckley & Winward, "Episode 073: Acknowledging the Elephant: A Conversation About Polygamy."

570 Susan M. Hinckley & Cynthia Winward, "Episode 154: What About Racism? | A Conversation with Tamu Smith," *At Last She Said It,* October 3, 2023.

that members are hurting at the hands of the Church, and that the podcast emerges as their refuge.

Another expectation of the podcast is to aid loneliness, both among themselves, their guests,[571] and their followers.[572] It "really gets at the heart of why I wanted to do this project to begin with," Hinckley says. Her whole life has been spent sitting in "relief society rooms" and "wondering" if she was the "only person" ruminating on certain things, until it occurred to her that "obviously she was not," and she was "tired of feeling like [she] was."

> Hinckley: And I don't really know another way to eliminate that feeling than to, you know, express the things that I'm thinking, and um give other people an opening to step into that space and say, "you know what? Me too." And so that's how the podcast was born and it's having exactly the effect that I hoped. I am feeling so much less alone. I hope that you're having the same experience
> Winward: I am, and I'm so touched by the feedback, and in a few minutes, we'll share a few more private messages or reviews that we've gotten that have told us that. What we set out to do, Susan, is exactly what is happening, which is that women feel less alone. And that makes it a::ll worth it to me. All of it.
> Hinckley: Absolutely. That's the point of the whole thing. [573]

Reducing loneliness both for themselves and the women listening, then, is "the point" of the podcast. Hinckley explains that after spending most of her life feeling alone – wondering if she was "the only person" having certain thoughts – she decided to "eliminate that feeling" by giving "other people an opening to step into that space and say, you know what? Me too." Hinckley says that the idea to invite others into a space where they dare to express themselves and in effect feel less alone explains "how the podcast was born," adding in the same sentence, that "it's having exactly the effect that I hoped."[574] The number of listeners turning to their podcast, which as Winward explains "could fill the largest stake center multiple times over," represent the "many women" who are "out there alone" and "struggling."[575] Their podcast, this suggests, is a response to an actual need – they "wish[ed] [they] never needed to do a podcast" Hinckley adds, which implies that the loneliness and struggle of Latter-day Saint women makes it a necessity. In a similar manner, they express in the episode quoted below that the reason they continue the podcast is not because they want to be "famous" but

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571 Susan M. Hinckley & Cynthia Winward, "Episode 021: We Don't Believe Our Own Stuff: Agency Edition," *At Last She Said It,* July 21, 2020.

572 Susan M. Hinckley & Cynthia Winward, "Episode 021: Bonus – At Last We Said It!" *At Last She Said It,* August 4, 2020.

573 M. Hinckley & Winward, "Episode 021: Bonus – At Last We Said It!"

574 M. Hinckley & Winward, "Episode 021: Bonus – At Last We Said It!"

575 M. Hinckley & Winward, "Episode 021: Bonus – At Last We Said It!"

because they "hear again and again, from women who are so relieved to realize that they're not the only ones."

> Hinckley: We don't really have a specific goal for next season, but it's not because we want to get famous for having a podcast, but it's because, you know, we hear again and again, from women who are so relieved to realize that they're not the only ones right? They're not the only ones with these thoughts or feelings or experiences. We hear this every single day. And most of these women, I think, have felt very alone, [yes] you know, at some point, and they get to the podcast, and they realize they're not alone at all. And that's a really wonderful feeling. We hear the word "lifeline" with some regularity, I'd say [mhm] so, we want to keep throwing as many lifelines as we can, to as many women as we can, we can reach who are in need of one, so we're going to continue to look for ways to get the word out on the podcast.[576]

Throwing a "lifeline" to women, then, partially refers to reducing loneliness by talking openly about their own experiences and opinions, in effect allowing listeners to "realize" that they are "not alone at all." This image is fortified by their returning guest Jeralee Renshaw who says that "When the Church isn't working for you, it can be painful, and it can feel isolating. But please know that you are not alone, and I hope that you all feel that through your connection with the *At Last She Said It* podcast lifeline."[577] In other words, when the Church "isn't working," listeners are "not alone" *because* they can reach out to the *At Last She Said It* "lifeline." As the examples demonstrate, women "realize" allegedly first when they come to the podcast that there are other women thinking the same things as themselves, in effect implying that they are unaware of each other before that. It paints a picture where women isolate their struggles from other members, thus disclosing a church context where – like in the previous case – women cannot seek each other's support without fear of judgment. This other will become more explicit when we return to the question of liveness in the next chapter.

5.4.2 "Administering Doesn't Save Souls" – Constructing the Religious Covenant to Care

When talking about church doctrines or practices that do not seem to live up to their own promises, the duo has a saying: "we don't believe our own stuff."[578] Hence, while

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576 M. Hickley & Winward, "Episode 066: Wrap Party!"

577 Susan M. Hinckley & Cynthia Winward, "Episode 118: BONUS – Living at the Edge of Inside, Featuring Jeralee Renshaw," *At Last She Said It,* November 22, 2022.

578 Susan M. Hinckley & Cynthia Winward, "Episode 110: We Don't Believe Our Own Stuff – Repentance Edition," *At Last She Said It,* September 13, 2022; "Episode 081: We Don't Believe Our Own Stuff – Revelation Edition," *At Last She Said It,* February 8, 2022.

identifying as "we" with the Church, they are in contestation with how the Church embodies its own principles. It is against this background we must understand the "lifeline" exemplified earlier. While their religious institution is part of the context that leaves women in need of this care, it is simultaneously a religious baggage drawn from to make claims about the need to show compassion, or more specifically to bear others' burdens. This can be exemplified with an episode on tithing:

> Winward: I hope our listeners know by now that you and I are not afraid of being uncomfortable [no, so used to it] and these emails and voicemails have left me feeling all kinds of swirly emotions [same same] and I'm better for it. I want to think that I'm a better person for being able to mourn with those who mourn.
> Hinckley: I think so too, and not even just a better person, but even a better church member [there you go! Let's say that] It makes me a better church member [mhm] to be able to sit with the other women in that room, in the real things that they're carrying, and it doesn't get more real than money.[579]

Here the parasocial performance, or collecting and listening to women's voicemails, which they earlier referred to as a "triage" and a "lifeline" is also portrayed as a religious virtue, or more specifically as fulfilling the covenant of care. By reading and listening to their followers' emails and voicemails, they are able to "mourn with those that mourn," a reference both to scripture (Mosiah 18:8-10) and their baptismal covenant, in effect becoming not only better persons but "better church member[s]." This idea can be placed in relation to the podcast duo's discussion on ministering, a practice where members of the Church care for and attend to others' needs, often by being assigned a specific person to minister to.[580] Whether or not the Church fulfills this task, however, is according to Hinckley and Winward debatable. In the quote referenced below, Hinckley asks whether pastoral care is really their focus as a church.

> Hinckley: It's an honest question Cynthia [laughing] Is pastoral care really our focus? As a church, [hhh] is pastoral care our focus? [hmm] You know, I mean, in Jesus' Church, how could it not be about the people? But you know, I feel like when you get right down to the nuts and bolts of attending church and having our callings and all the things that we talk about and do and emphasize before pastoral care comes – a focus on pretty much everything else, right? All kinds of checklists, programs, rules, you know, protecting the organization of the Church. I just feel like [oh yeah] there are all kinds of things that we lead with in our interactions and in our church participation. We lead with all these

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579 Susan M. Hinckley & Cynthia Winward, "Episode 126: What About Tithing?" *At Last She Said It*, February 21, 2023.

580 Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, "What is Ministering?," www.churchofjesuschrist.org/ministering/what-is-ministering?lang=eng, accessed April 8, 2024.

> other things and in my observation, that's a really good way to invite vulnerable members to leave [mhm] Because they don't feel seen.[581]

As Hinckley seems to suggest, the Church is more focused on running a well-oiled organization than on showing compassion. Things like "checklists, programs, rules" and "protecting the organization" are things that they "lead with" in their interactions with each other, in effect causing members who do not fit the mold or hold the standard to leave. They are, as the title of this episode suggest, "Good at Showing People the Door." As an example, Winward comments that when excommunicating a person, the Church often talk about cutting people off to "protect the Church." Hence, instead of "protecting people," she says, they protect "organizations" – "we should be protecting people" she suggests, but "sometimes we get it wrong." The consequence as Hinckley adds, is that "church comes in above a lot of other things, including people." In the conversation that follows, Hinckley adds to her point that the Church as a "business" trumps the covenant to care.

> Hinckley: if you were going to ask me, like, what are the words that come to your mind, you know, as a result of a lifetime as a Latter-day Saint woman, it would be things like culture, conformity, judgment, rules, rigidity [mm], corporation. I mean, you put all the leaders in suits and ties. It's a very, this is a very business looking group [mm] of people that we're looking at and I just, I don't think I'm necessarily skewed in my perception of it feeling that way sometimes. But those are all things that I feel very often speak more loudly than our love does. We lead with those things.[582]

Here Hinckley ties the conversation to a well-known image of the Church – a "business looking group of people" with "leaders in suits and ties" – suggesting again that when "lead[ing] with those things" or prioritizing "conformity, judgment, rules, rigidity, corporation," "love" comes in second. Winward corroborates this in the following quote.

> Winward: We're very well organized. We know how to administer […] I mean, we know how to get things done. We know how to implement. We know how to be efficient. But administering doesn't save souls [mhm] ministering does. And several years ago, one of my children wanted a temple recommend to do baptisms. She didn't have a recommend at the time… But for various reasons, she couldn't sit for an interview […] I went to one of my leaders and I asked him if he could make an exception to let a little girl have a temple recommend for baptisms and I gave him all these different options […] he just looked at me and he said "no" […] I don't know that I've ever gotten over that. Instead of ministering to a little girl, we put the rules first [mh] […] You know, the "we

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581 M. Hinckley & Cynthia Winward, "Episode 053: We're Good at Showing People the Door," *At Last She Said It*, June 1, 2021.

582 M. Hinckley & Winward, "Episode 053: We're Good at Showing People the Door."

> have to have order." That's something we hear a lot in the Church, right? [right right] "God's House is a House of order." But I need someone to explain to me how a little girl in the Temple would create disorder [mh wow] …that was just one that I wanted to share from my own life where I saw administering came first and ministering came second, and it broke my heart.[583]

In this quote we find a dichotomy between administering and ministering where the former has to do with running a business and the latter with tending to the wellbeing of members. The Church is very good at the former, Winward says, on being "organized," "get[ting] things done," "implement" and be "efficient." But it doesn't do what the Church is meant to do – "administering doesn't save souls, ministering does." The effect of putting "rules first" in a quest of keeping the Church or the "house" "in order," is that the Church goes missing on opportunities to minister. The little girl being denied a temple recommend, because the church leader would not allow her worthiness interview to be conducted differently, is used as an example to demonstrate how administering "came first" and ministering "second." This type of "rigidity" with "policies and rules," they argue, is what "show[s] people the door."[584] But the Church partiality to check-lists and rules is not necessarily the fault of church leaders. In the same conversation, Hinckley suggest that leaders "are well aware of these issues" and that changes from what was called "Visiting Teaching" and "Home Teaching" into "Ministering" is an effect of that.[585] It was a "kind of shift designed to fight against our tendency to descend into programs over people," she hypothesizes, but since "these things get so ingrained," she says, "it's pretty hard to move the members in that kind of way."[586] While leaders in their "suit and ties" are used to illustrate the corporate-like Church that lacks true ministering qualities, then, the not-so-caring other appears here as a culture "ingrained" in members generally. One can infer from this that ministering, or true ministering from their perspective, is incapacitated. If we relate this discussion on ministering to their own perception of enacting the covenant of care through their interactions with followers, one could draw the conclusion that the podcast is painted as filling a ministering gap. Another reason for this interpretation is how Hinckley, in starting off the episode where ministering is discussed, describes feeling "called" to create fewer boundaries in Church, and the podcast as part of her enactment of it. She remembers hearing the quote, "when those on the edges leave, the boundary shrinks toward the middle" and realizing that

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583 M. Hinckley & Winward, "Episode 053: We're Good at Showing People the Door."
584 M. Hinckley & Winward, "Episode 053: We're Good at Showing People the Door."
585 M. Hinckley & Winward, "Episode 053: We're Good at Showing People the Door."
586 M. Hinckley & Winward, "Episode 053: We're Good at Showing People the Door."

this was the future of the Church, where people like herself, who did not feel that they "fit" would leave, resulting in lesser and lesser room.[587]

> Hinckley: I was receiving a calling. That's what it felt like to me […] It wasn't a calling that anyone gave me, but maybe the spirit was giving me a calling [hm] […] the best way I can describe it would be to ride the fences and round up strays [°laughing°] in the Church. And maybe it's because I'd always kind of been a stray [sure] but I just um wanted to patrol that boundary hard, really hard, with the intention of keeping it from closing in any further. And since then […] I'm always trying to signal that I'm a safe person, [yeah you are] you know, I'm always trying to lead with vulnerability. And it's kind of changed for me now to become as much about pastoral care for the people around me and offering kind of a safe space for people, as about trying to affect change in the organization or the makeup of the organization. But that sense of having received a calling has remained stable for me over those 20 years. I really think it's what I'm supposed to be doing. It's a good part of why I have a podcast.[588]

Hinckley imagines herself as a shepherd "patrolling" the church "fences" with the "intention of keeping it from closing any further." It was a "calling" from the "spirit" that has since affected her way of engaging in church, where she is "always trying to lead with vulnerability," an idea followed by "it's what I'm supposed to be doing" and "it's a good part of why I have a podcast." In other words, the podcast is part of her attempt to counter a future of exclusivity, to create a "safe space" for people who feel like they do not belong. This "pastoral care," furthermore is on equal footing or the same as "affecting change" – today it is "as much about pastoral care" she says, as "trying to affect change in the organization." The podcast, then, is a call to minister, both motivated by the Church's ideals to care for the vulnerable, while also posited against its culture of "conformity, judgment, rules, rigidity, corporation" which hinders members from caring for one another. Borrowing a frequently recurring terminology in the *At Last She Said It* podcast; one could say that the Church "doesn't believe [it's] own stuff."

5.4.3 Analytical Summary of Discursive Framing

If we continue to elaborate on the point made earlier about how the podcast affords a parasocial performance by adding the examples explored above, we find that the caring community cultivated around the *At Last She Said It* podcast is not only enacted but also discursively framed, around various *discursive moments* describing them as "assessing," the "injuries," "loneliness," and "struggles," of their listeners. The words "lifeline," "safe space," and "triage," hold particular significance but are not *nodal points* by way of frequency

587 M. Hinckley & Winward, "Episode 053: We're Good at Showing People the Door."
588 M. Hinckley & Winward, "Episode 053: We're Good at Showing People the Door."

– as the "soft chair" is – but rather because they seem to have explanatory value for the others in how they are used. One example is by being described as the primary thing or goal of what they "do," or what others say that they do. This is to assess women's emotional and spiritual needs and injuries and to provide them with a space where they feel safe to express them and lastly to give them resources to move forward.

The *chain of equivalences* that binds them together with the discursive moments, positions them as a logical response to women's past and present experiences in the Church. If the genesis of the "soft chair" lies in the construction of the ideal friend Lisa, then the "lifeline" begins with the construction of *At Last She Said It's* recipients or listeners. The origin of this chain is the woman "at her wits' end," sitting in her kitchen with her face in her palms. She represents women like Tracy, tearfully seeking help with her sealing cancellation, Crystal feeling invisible because of her choice to remain childfree, and the general population of listeners who are depicted as "hanging on by their fingernails" or having their "wheels come off." The relief of her troubles begins when she finds Hinckley and Winward's podcast – "thank goodness her friend recommended ALSSI!" as the podcast humorously explains in their vintage commercial, ending with, "she's not alone! (and neither are you)." These listeners, "hanging on by their fingernails," reach out to the podcast, latching onto the "lifeline" through their "hotline" or by appearing as guests. The hosts conduct a "triage" of their concerns, offering "aid" by listening, validating, and witnessing their experiences.

This discourse not only relies on discursive moments and nodal points addressing the podcast as "safe," however, but also by addressing an unsafe *antagonistic other.* As the duo explains when describing their work as "triage," they know "at whose hands" women "show up hurting," and "how and why they're injured." Reading between the lines – and more specifically comparing this phrasing to the context their recipients speak of – it is at the hands of the Church as a culture and hierarchy that women turn up wounded. This articulatory practice effectively hails Hinckley and Winward into the *subject position* of "safe persons." But this is not a formal authority. "We're changing nothing" they confess, "we're in the cheap seats," and because of that they "can't do a single thing about this institution." Nevertheless, such cheap seats offer them an informal authority. By sitting in the pews for – between the two of them – "one hundred years," they know what women are "going through" and can offer them "solidarity." They recognize that they are not changing the institution directly, but that they can change "the experiences of women at church."

In similarity to the case we explored earlier, however, the caring community performed through the podcast is also deeply attached to religious convictions on care. The nodal points "lifeline," "safe space," and "triage," found as central for framing such

relationships earlier are also coupled with *discursive moments* such as "ministering," in relation to which we find a more explicit *antagonistic other*. Here the Church is illustrated as a corporate, rigid institution, described in *discursive moments* such as "house of order," "corporation" and "business" where leaders wear "suits and ties" and where there is a dominating culture of "conformity, judgment, rules, rigidity," "checklists," and "programs." It is "well organized," knows how to "administer," "get things done," "implement" and be "efficient," yet leaves "vulnerable members" ostracized and consequently closes the "door" on them. Church leaders are therefore depicted as efficient "administrators" but lacking in the kind of love and "ministering" that can "save souls." Hinckley and Winward, however, provide what the Church cannot. By listening to women's voicemails, inviting followers to share their grief on-air, and offering solidarity, they fulfill the Church's covenants of "mourning with those that mourn" and "comforting those that stand in the need of comfort," in effect making them "better person[s]" and "better church member[s]." Thus, the parasocial qualities of the podcast are framed as enabling them to realize their covenant as Latter-day Saints. As such, they do not only position themselves against the Church as a not-so-caring other but contest its practice of ministering (or lack thereof). Thus, ministering works as a *floating signifier,* an emic concept and practice Latter-day Saints struggle amongst themselves to define in a larger *field of discursivity* where how to live up to one's baptismal covenant is discussed. If we follow this *chain of equivalence* to its logical conclusion, by trumping care with emphasis on efficiency and order, the Church becomes distant to its "mourning" subjects. Against this distance the podcast emerges as close and intimate with the Church's "vulnerable members." So, while as a corporate culture the Church puts up a wall between members, and especially against those on the "edge," Hinckley and Winward invite them in.

5.5 Performing Parasocial Relationships: *Year of Polygamy*

We now shift our focus to the final case examined in this chapter: the *Year of Polygamy* podcast. This exploration builds on four examples: "women began to show up at my house," illustrates the offline relationships the podcast fosters; "journey into fundamentalism," how the host lends her microphone to victims of abuse; "living under the banner," deals with the transmedial storytelling occurring through the podcast's website; and "holding out help," shows how serial and repeated encounters with victims spur reciprocal episodes where benefactors and listeners are connected to each other.

5.5.1 "Women Began to Show up at my House" – Relationships That Are Not so "Para"

A first observation of importance when it comes to parasocial relationships is that they are comparably less "para" than the ones we have witnessed so far. This is exemplified by the following quote where Hansen Park describes developing "borderline paranoia" from the people showing up at her house as a result of the podcast.

> Hansen Park: As I started doing this series, women began to show up at my house and call my house in the middle of the night. I had all these strange men contacting me – it was really, really scary. I began to rehearse worst case scenarios um in my head that, like, was borderline paranoia, you know, I worried about cars parked outside my house and things like that and I was actually diagnosed with secondary trauma, a diagnosis which I found both embarrassing and confusing.[589]

Hansen Park's host-listener relationships are, due to her podcast extension into offline activism, physically and emotionally close. Thus, her podcast fosters relationships between host and listeners that differ from the other podcasts. There is more face-to-face interaction with followers, and it is this increased interaction that contributes to what she describes as "secondary trauma." This physical and intimate interaction with listeners was not always the case. The *Year of Polygamy* podcast can be divided into two periods. The first one, as we will return to in the seventh chapter, chronicled the history of polygamy as it was practiced by early Saints. From around episode 60, however, it morphed into its present focus on contemporary Mormon fundamentalism, which includes interviews with its practitioners, including notorious groups such as The Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. It was this "new work," which bled into forms of activism and benefactions, that introduced the type of relationship described in the quote above. She was getting "law enforcement involved in some cases," eventually founded service projects such as the Fern Foundation conducting advocacy work in the Short Creek area (home of members and ex-members of FLDS), and worked for the organization Holding out Help, which helps people who have left fundamentalist groups. Through this change, Hansen Park's object of study turned from historical figures to living people – people who occasionally, as the quote above explains, showed up at her doorstep in the middle of the night. In a recurring type of episode where she invites her friend Sara Burlingame to interview her, Hansen Park reflects on her inability to distance herself from the subject and people she comes across through the podcast. "Maybe that's really co-dependent or unhealthy" she says, "but it's really hard for me to

589 Lindsay Hansen Park, "Episode 100: The Final Episode," *Year of Polygamy,* July 1, 2015.

separate this issue."[590] While the other podcasts go out venturing online for friendship, then, Hansen Park finds it – unanticipated – on her doorstep. People "show up" a bit more unexpectedly, sometimes as the quote below demonstrate, becoming dear friends staying for late night dinners. When Hansen Park addresses one of the podcast's recurring guests, former FLDS member Roy Jeffs' suicide in 2019, she exemplifies the close and often personal encounters the podcast harbors.

> Hansen Park: Roy became such a close friend of mine. Our family sort of took him in and he ended up spending several nights a week with us and coming over for dinner. And when I moved to my new place, Roy helped me move in. He actually helped hang all the pictures on my wall and we have this like temporary wallpaper that he helped me put up one night, and it was really fun. And um he came over one night, and we were up late and I cooked him dinner and then he, you know, was telling me about his whole, he was out in the dating world and experiencing that and we were just laughing and joking, and he was hanging up this wallpaper and he stepped on my couch and he broke my couch in half and he felt so bad about that. And it's just funny now because (0.2) my (0.4) ((crying)) my weeks are so empty hhh (0.3) He became such a part of my life and that's something I never anticipated with this podcast.[591]

After suffering a life of abuse from his father, the now convicted prophet of FLDS, Warren Jeffs, Roy Jeffs finally got the courage to leave, which is how he met Hansen Park, who was working on the Holding out Help organization that took him in. While her new work initially caused her "borderline paranoia" and "trauma," she eventually realized that "all these people coming to [her]," "weren't dangerous," they "weren't going to hurt [her]," they "just needed help," they "just needed their stories to be told and they wanted someone to tell them." She decided that she was going to be that person.

One could therefore say that the host of *Year of Polygamy* develops offline relationships less "para" than the term parasocial relationships implies. Although scholars point to the podcast's development from what Horton and Wohl originally termed parasocial interaction – just simulating a relationship – into actual interaction,[592] there is still a reservation inherent to the term. No matter how blurred this border becomes, the framework of parasocial relationships still makes a distinction between an actual relationship and a simulated one. As stated previously, the difference from a "real" relationship is for

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590 Lindsay Hansen Park, "Episode 103: Year of Polygamy, a Year Later, Part 3," *Year of Polygamy,* June 15, 2016.

591 Lindsay Hansen Park, "Episode 174: Revenge Killings on the Frontier," *Year of Polygamy,* November 5, 2019

592 Horton & Wohl, "Mass Communication and Para-Social Interaction: Observations on Intimacy at a Distance."

example that listeners can back away without repercussions.[593] There are no expectations that relationships are actual friendships. Thus, responsibility or obligation are absent from the spectators' point of view. This is not entirely the case in the *Year of Polygamy* podcast where listeners show up at the host's doorstep and come over for dinner. The *Year of Polygamy* thus fosters relationships that transgress *para*sociality by continuing off-air and becoming, in the host's own words, "co-dependent."

5.5.2 "Journey Into Fundamentalism" – Handing the Mic to Victims of Abuse

As a result of deciding to tell others' stories, Hansen Park conducts life writing interviews with present and former Mormons. These interviews exemplify an advocative type of relationship between host and listeners where the host lends her podcast as a platform where listeners can share their stories. One example of this is her interview with Mary Ellen Crase about "her journey into fundamentalism" as an aspiring polygamist, a narrative that tells of a series of abuse in the context of both her former Latter-day Saint environment and the fundamentalist church she eventually joins. A typical way to start off these open-ended interviews is for Hansen Park to ask the guest to begin with their growing-up years. The narrative thus begins in Crase's tumultuous childhood, where she was "in and out of foster homes" because of "abuses in the family."[594] While she grew up as a member of the Church, it seems to have been moderately practiced in their own family, or as she expresses it, she did not have a "good priesthood holder" to lead her early life. The turmoil continued in her high school years, where she describes herself as being a "wild child," which resulted in her getting pregnant at 18 years old.

> Crase: I did have a daughter outside of wedlock…and my Bishop told me if I didn't give her up for adoption that I would be excommunicated ((laughing)) and I would have worse punishment if I didn't give her up for adoption. So that didn't help my feelings towards the Church whatsoever […] [I was] massively pregnant in my church house, sitting next to my mother and on Sunday and… they literally brought the LDS Family Services social worker there to tell the entire congregation "if you know someone that's pregnant outside of wedlock" and literally I remember feeling everyone looking at me.[595]

Crase's relationship to the Church, which was already wearing thin, worsened when her bishop threatened her with excommunication because she did not want to give her child

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593 Zuraikat, "The Parasocial Nature of the Podcast," p. 43–44.

594 Lindsay Hansen Park, "Episode 150: Polygamist Therapist and Aspiring Sister Wife," *Year of Polygamy,* April 11, 2018.

595 Hansen Park, "Episode 150: Polygamist Therapist and Aspiring Sister Wife."

up for adoption. When she responds to her guests, Hansen Park often adds factual tidbits such as historical context to what the guest narrates. For example, this was a period, Hansen Park explains, where the Church's adoption policies were more "intense" and where "they invested a lot of energy in this campaign to get women to give up their children."[596] The "narrative was: if you don't do it, you're being selfish" which today has shifted to the opposite, that is, if you "give up your baby you're being selfish."[597]

Fast-forward two years, Crase's mother and herself decided to move from California to Cedar City, where Crase's "polygamist story" started. She encountered FLDS women in their "prairie dresses" and "bouffant hair" and starts imagining herself as one of them. She "could tell the spirit was with them more than any Mormon [she] would know."[598] Around that time, Crase took up her churchgoing again and started becoming more and more invested in her religion. She "was in this soak up a sponge phase of [her] life," she explains, and "wanted to know more about the things that the Church wasn't teaching that they used to teach about" and as she "researched really, really hard," she "ended up kind of bumping into" the "fundamentalist world."[599] This increasing interest in the "fundamentalist world" and more specifically in polygamy, occurred parallel to several difficult and abusive experiences related to her Latter-day Saint environment. When she was 29 years old, she had another child outside of wedlock, which resulted in being let go from her "LDS-based" job, "they told [her] that [she] didn't have their values because [she] made a mistake."[600] Shortly after having her second child, she meets her husband, where the abuse continues.

> Crase: when we were engaged, he was a very sweet, loving, gentle, kind man and then as soon as we got married, literally the next morning he woke up and he was laughing. I said, "why are you laughing?" …and he says, "you stupid bitch, you fell for every line I ever gave you" and then he proceeded to lay out who I really married and he's like "you're over 300 pounds, you're fat and you're ugly and no one's going to want you" … and "you're stuck with me. I quit my job and you're the one that can make $200 an hour so you get your fat ass out there and you go work," so I did.
> Hansen Park: I'm sorry that happened to you.[601]

In direct continuation of this quote Crase continues to recount events of domestic violence directed at herself and her family. After suffering such incidents of abuse, she

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596 Hansen Park, "Episode 150: Polygamist Therapist and Aspiring Sister Wife."
597 Hansen Park, "Episode 150: Polygamist Therapist and Aspiring Sister Wife."
598 Hansen Park, "Episode 150: Polygamist Therapist and Aspiring Sister Wife."
599 Hansen Park, "Episode 150: Polygamist Therapist and Aspiring Sister Wife."
600 Hansen Park, "Episode 150: Polygamist Therapist and Aspiring Sister Wife."
601 Hansen Park, "Episode 150: Polygamist Therapist and Aspiring Sister Wife."

"pretty much immediately went back to fundamentalism," she says, and her search for truth intensified.[602] When she eventually joins a fundamentalist church where she meets her second husband however, she experiences abuse once again. After being married she finds out that her husband is gay and that he married her in the belief that it would help him be cured from his homosexuality. "He wanted nothing more than to love me" she says, but "he just couldn't, and he was literally going crazy because of it."[603] Although the relationship became filled with verbal abuse and body-shaming, the few times they "were intimate" led to pregnancy. When she goes through a late-term miscarriage, she attributes it to the neglect and abuse by her husband.[604]

These interviews are conducted through a guest-dominant format and typically unfold with minimal host intervention and without any extensive introduction. Thus, the guest is given narrative authority and beyond a few interventions such as asking the guest to clarify aspects for listeners new to the subject, or shorter affirmations, they control its direction. This differs from the other cases explored in this chapter – such as the *At Last She Said It* conversation with Crystal – where there is more back and forth interaction and more explicit affirmations and validation of the story that unfolds. The manner in which Hinckley and Winward editorialize and form these conversations displays a friendly intimacy between host and guest that is not present within the *Year of Polygamy* podcast. This strengthens the interpretation that the type of relationship Hansen Park has with her guests on-air is as an advocation. She lends her microphone and takes a step back. When and if these interactions develop into actual friendships – such as in the case of Roy Jeffs – they are performed off-air.

5.5.3 "Living Under the Banner" – Transmedial Storytelling

If the storytelling exemplified with Crase occurs on-air, others – which we will look at now – occur through the *Year of Polygamy* website. In similarity to her other interviews, Crase's story is not given any introduction and Hansen Park plays a very small role in its unfolding. By the time it airs, however, her long-time listeners are already aware of why it matters, because they have listened to her recurring proclamation that "fundamentalist patriarchy" is not limited to fundamentalist groups. This claim culminates in the nest of content circling around the true crime series *Under the Banner of Heaven*,[605] where Hansen Park, due to her "extensive knowledge" on Mormon fundamentalism

602 Hansen Park, "Episode 150: Polygamist Therapist and Aspiring Sister Wife."
603 Hansen Park, "Episode 150: Polygamist Therapist and Aspiring Sister Wife."
604 Hansen Park, "Episode 150: Polygamist Therapist and Aspiring Sister Wife."
605 Dustin Lace Black, *Under the Banner of Heaven* [TV-series], Hungry Jackal Productions, 2022.

worked as a "cultural and historical consultant."[606] The series is a fictionalized version of Jon Krakauer's nonfiction book *Under the Banner of Heaven: A Story of Violent Faith.*[607] The story tells of the murder of Brenda Wright Lafferty and her infant child Erica Lafferty committed in 1984 by her brothers-in-law Ron and Dan Lafferty. The series captures the Lafferty brothers searching the historical archive and finding evidence of practices that have been buried by the Church. A central part of this archive for men such as the Lafferty brothers, is the revelation on "the one mighty and strong" documented in Doctrine and Covenants section 85. This revelation holds much value for many Fundamentalist Mormon groups where men base their authority on claiming to be "the one mighty and strong," sent to "set in order the house of God."[608] The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is therefore perceived as being "out of order" for discontinuing practices such as polygamy. The Lafferty brothers, who both consider themselves "the one," set out to live according to these lost standards. Brenda, who was married to Dan and Ron's brother Allen, openly challenged the Lafferty brothers' ideas, which made her an enemy. Brenda ends up on a list of people who according to the brothers had to be blood-atoned.[609]

The tv-series, Hansen Park explains, "is not the end sentence but a thesis with an unresolved finish."[610] As a part of a continued "conversation" Hansen Park starts a blog series on her website called "Living Under the Banner."[611] The blog "is inspired by the countless stories of women and others who identify with the characters portrayed in the Hulu show, which informed [her] research on [her] many projects."[612] The purpose, she explains is to "further the conversation and add texture to the portrayals seen in the show."[613] In other words, Brenda Lafferty's story resonates with other women who have suffered under similar circumstances. Her character, Hansen Park says, reflects "one of two stories" she often hears: "LDS women who marry into fundamentalist patriarchal

606 Lindsay Hansen Park, "Living Under the Banner," *Year of Polygamy,* 2023, www.yearofpolygamy.com/living-under-the-banner/, accessed January 4, 2024.

607 Jon Krakauer, *Under the Banner of Heaven: A Story of Violent Faith,* New York: Doubleday, 2003.

608 *Doctrine and Covenants* 85:7.

609 The idea that some sins are so severe that Jesus's atonement is not enough, is a controversial and disputed doctrine in the history of Mormonism. To atone for eternal sins, the sinner's own blood must be shed. As listeners find out through Hansen Park's podcast, the threat of blood atonement was occasionally used in the 1850s by church leaders, to threaten and discipline plural wives. See for example Lindsay Hansen Park, "Episode 38: Polygamy and Blood Atonement," *Year of Polygamy,* July 8, 2014.

610 Lindsay Hansen Park, "Living Under the Banner."

611 Hansen Park, "Living Under the Banner."

612 Hansen Park, "Living Under the Banner."

613 Hansen Park, "Living Under the Banner."

families or LDS women that grow up in them."[614] The project on her website therefore consists of women who send stories resonating with the tv series. Tabitha – anonymized by the host by using only her first name – who grew up in the "mainstream Church" for example, talks about the abuse that followed when she "married into a fundamentalist LDS family."

> My conflict came when I got married, into a fundamentalist LDS family. Like Brenda Wright Lafferty, who is depicted in the show, my own parents were initially hesitant when I told them that I had prayed and decided to marry a returned missionary who I had known for only several months […] In spite of my mom's advice, I was convinced I was old enough and making the right choice.[615]

The fictional character of Brenda Lafferty, then, is referred to as a representation of Tabitha's lived experiences in the Church. In other words, her narrative is used to demonstrate that violence continues today even in a Latter-day Saint context. Tabitha continues to explain that the family she married into was a "devout mainstream LDS family from a rural farming community," but that they were "fundamentalist in the patriarchal sense," by following strict gender roles and certain ideas about race.[616] She also reveals that the family harbored suppressed secrets of sexual abuse, a topic she remains hesitant to discuss openly due to years of being conditioned not to speak about it, despite having spoken with the victims themselves. Beyond the abuse towards humans, Tabitha recalls witnessing the family engaging in animal cruelty for sport, including drowning puppies in the lake and poisoning stray cats.[617] This parallels both the cruel treatment of the family dog by the Lafferty brothers' father who is depicted in the TV series as regularly turning to violence, and the abuse of family pets that occurs in the stories told by women interviewed on the podcast.[618] Tabitha's resistance to the ideas and practices of her extended family led to her opinions and behaviors being deemed unacceptable, resulting in ridicule and verbal abuse. Initially, she had a good job and was pursuing college education, but upon becoming pregnant, she faced intense pressure to quit both. The situation escalated over the years, reaching a peak when her husband experienced a faith crisis. The family blamed Tabitha for his wavering faith and tasked her with bringing him back to the Church. This marked the beginning of the end of her marriage, although it took years for her to finally leave. She considers herself "lucky,"

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614 Hansen Park, "Living Under the Banner."
615 Lindsay Hansen Park, "Tabitha's Story," *Year of Polygamy,* 2023, www.yearofpolygamy.com/tabithas-story/, accessed January 4, 2024.
616 Hansen Park, "Tabitha's Story."
617 Hansen Park, "Tabitha's Story."
618 Hansen Park, "Episode 150: Polygamist Therapist and Aspiring Sister Wife."

because her "story could've ended like Brenda Lafferty's and it didn't,"[619] again drawing parallels between herself and the character of the TV series. When she reached out to church leaders, however, her pleas fell on deaf ears:

> When I did petition church leaders and authority for help I was told every. single. time. that my humility was out of order and that I was to do better. Leaders were kind and sympathetic, but the undercurrent was always that I needed to humble myself in prayer and yes, it was my job to manage the faith of my husband.[620]

Women who confess and seek help from church authority are thus dismissed and referred to as the ones to blame. After years of abuse, Becky similarly writes that when she sought help from her Bishop, he told her she "was too emotional and that [she] needed medication to keep [her] family together."[621] When she finally divorced her husband, she and her husband received very different treatment:

> During this time I came to realize that our leaders were not trained to recognize abusive relationships […] because they are part of a system that controls and gaslights members on a macro level. The institution as a whole upholds and perpetuates unhealthy power and control dynamics over individual members' lives that causes harm in a myriad of ways. When my husband and I started this process [of divorce], I was serving as a counselor in our Relief Society presidency and he was on the High Council. When it became apparent that I was following through with the divorce, I was released from my calling and assigned to help in the nursery. My husband was made the High Priest group leader in our ward. I was effectively put in a corner for time out, while my husband was given a prestigious leadership position. Anyone familiar with our church dynamics can see the implications of that action. Our divorce became final in March of 2014. I moved to a new home, in a different ward and stake. Shortly thereafter, I was told that my former bishop had called my new bishop, before I had moved in, before I had met him, and told my new bishop that I had lied about the circumstances of my divorce and I had slandered my ex-husband.[622]

The situation depicted by women such as Tabitha and Becky tells of a church that not only fosters violent men but upholds power structures that punish the victims. Leaders "were not trained to recognize abusive relationships," Becky says, "because they are part of a system that controls and gaslights members on a macro level." While Becky was released from her calling, her husband was made into High Priest group leader. Before

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619 Hansen Park, "Tabitha's Story."

620 Hansen Park, "Tabitha's Story."

621 Lindsay Hansen Park, "Becky's story," *Year of Polygamy,* www.yearofpolygamy.com/beckys-story/, accessed January 4, 2024.

622 Hansen Park, "Mel's story," *Year of Polygamy*, www.yearofpolygamy.com/mels-story/, accessed January 4, 2024.

even arriving at her new ward, her bishop was already biased against her. She continues by saying that "by now" she is "used to having [her] experiences dismissed."[623] She is told that the problem is not structural but just "a few bad men."[624] She concludes by saying that while her ex-husband's family and her own are all "mainstream" Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints and while they "differentiate themselves from fundamentalist sects," they "fail to see how they are upholding fundamentalism in the mainstream Church," and "that there are many more similarities than differences."[625]

Narratives like these therefore perpetuate the point Hansen Park is trying to make, that the mainstream Church is accountable for abuse happening in fundamentalist groups. This notion is visible in how Tabitha concludes her story:

> If you would have told me I was lost in fundamentalist culture I would have explained to you the regular answer: We are mainstream LDS and we aren't like those crazy polygamists. But the patriarchal priesthood was the same and we both use the same name for our God. In the end it didn't matter what acronym I was part of, it was Mormon patriarchy. As I navigate this new world and try to unlearn all these lessons I absorbed and participated in, I'm so happy that *Under the Banner* is telling Brenda's story. Those who have shared her story with us, including her family, aren't just advocating for her, they are advocating for me and my kids too. Thank you.[626]

What these stories do then, is bridge the gap between women on both sides of the fence – the Church and the fundamentalists. Another writer references a statement given by the character of Allen Lafferty (Brenda's husband) saying "Mormonism breeds violent men."[627] This statement, she explains, has sparked significant controversy online, with many church members condemning it as false and harmful, insisting that most Latter-day Saints are not like the Laffertys and do not harbor a hidden inclination for violent acts. However, she argues for a broader definition of violence. Although she has never encountered anyone like Ron or Dan Lafferty in the pews, she has seen "violent rhetoric and a culture of abuse" among "your run-of-the-mill, average Latter-day Saints."[628]

Year of Polygamy, then, is a project that, as demonstrated above, migrates over multiple media platforms: podcasting, television, and blogging. The narratives of these women (and men), who suffer the consequences of "patriarchal fundamentalism," "sprawls" outward and expands the story – in Hansen Park's words they "add texture" to the

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623 Hansen Park, "Becky's story."
624 Hansen Park, "Mel's story."
625 Hansen Park, "Becky's story."
626 Hansen Park, "Tabitha's story."
627 Hansen Park, "Mel's story."
628 Hansen Park, "Mel's story."

portrayals in the tv series. In more technical terms, one could say that these are effects of the podcast's parasocial topology working together with its transmedial and serial character. Together, these narratives build a formula or an archetype of women's experiences where the distinction between Mormon fundamentalists and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints becomes blurred, and where they become part of a group all suffering from "fundamentalist patriarchy."

5.5.4 "Holding Out HELP" – Serial Reciprocity Through Benefactions

If the above examples demonstrate how advocative relationships are fostered through transmedial storytelling, then the following example showcases the significance of advocacy being performed through an episodic medium. As Hansen Park explains in an episode with sexual abuse attorney Tim Kosnoff – famous for representing clients from the Latter-day Saint context – the podcast's serial qualities allow her to repeatedly come into contact with victims of abuse.

> Hansen Park: as I've been doing this podcast since 2014 and blogging since around 2008–2009 it's put me in a position to have a platform. There's a lot of darkness and shadow sides in Mormonism and my podcast touches on a lot of that. Because of that, it, you know, attracts a lot of people who have been affected by things like abuse and, so, over the last 10 or 15 years I've talked to hundreds and hundreds of people who have been victimized in one way or another, usually sexual abuse by someone in their ward or in their family and didn't receive justice in the Church.[629]

As Hansen Park seems to suggest, victims of abuse have turned to her since she started the podcast. It has put her in contact with "hundreds and hundreds" of victims who never received "justice in the Church." Reading between the lines, one could infer that while her podcast meant to document the history and contemporary practice of polygamy in the Mormon context, those affected by its "dark sides" reach out to her. If we return to the quote that introduced this subchapter, we meet again those people turning up at her doorstep asking for their stories to be heard. In consequence she becomes a collector of those stories, making sure they are witnessed. Because of this, she often invites guests that have inside knowledge on the subject and/or can provide resources for those afflicted. In other words, it can be likened with the type of reciprocal episodes witnessed in earlier cases – such as "Processing Polygamy" and "When the Wheels

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[629] Lindsay Hansen Park, "Episode 197: Polygamy, Mormonism and Child Abuse," *Year of Polygamy,* March 31, 2024.

Come Off' – but differs by fostering relationships not between the host and the listeners but between (a) different benefactors and listeners wanting to contribute, and (b) between victims and benefactors.

One example telling of the former is an episode about Holding Out HELP, an organization providing service and care for people coming from polygamous backgrounds. They are "one of the only organizations" Hansen Park says, that "goes in and actually rescues and helps people who are leaving some of these fundamentalist groups."[630] To create "awareness" around this issue, Hansen Park invites its founder Tonia Tewell as a guest. She introduces the organization as a "nonprofit organization that fully serves people that are coming out of polygamy" that "provides all the necessary resources that basically refugees coming in from another country might need" which includes everything from "the basic necessities of life" such as "food, clothing and shelter," to "in-depth resources such as counseling, education, even the most basic of life skills."[631] Tewell explains how, after helping the initial family, she and her husband became deeply involved in supporting people leaving polygamy. As the family prepared to leave their home, they decided to explore available resources in Utah for others in similar situations. They initially planned to create a simple resource website but soon realized there were significant gaps in support, especially from organizations that did not understand the unique cultural challenges. This led them to start a small nonprofit organization to offer direct help, including housing and rehabilitation. As their organization has been active since 2008, Hansen Park herself has "sent a lot of people [their] way."[632] Tewell has also been important to her own podcast project:

> Hansen Park: Tonia's been really helpful to me, because since doing this podcast I have people contact me almost daily, you know, people going through faith crisis that come out of fundamentalism, and so you know that's something that I have in common with my LDS community, and but I don't think I was prepared for some of the challenges that people that leave these groups face and Tonia has been very kind and generous enough to help walk me through some of that.[633]

Reiterating what she said earlier about people showing up at her doorstep, Hansen Park describes coming into contact with people in the fundamentalist context who needed help. Being unprepared for "the challenges" they were faced with, she sought out the

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630 Lindsay Hansen Park, "Episode 105: Year of Polygamy, a Year Later, Part 5: Holding Out Help," *Year of Polygamy,* June 28, 2016.

631 Hansen Park, "Episode 105: Year of Polygamy, a Year Later, Part 5: Holding Out Help."

632 Hansen Park, "Episode 105: Year of Polygamy, a Year Later, Part 5: Holding Out Help."

633 Hansen Park, "Episode 105: Year of Polygamy, a Year Later, Part 5: Holding Out Help."

help of Tewell. Thus, *Year of Polygamy* networks with benefactors to help the victims it comes across.

Besides exploring cases from Tewell's work, the episode also draws attention to ways that listeners can "get involved," and what "kind of resources [they] provide that people could help with," to which Tewell lists everything from "food stamps," "hygiene items," "sponsor a child," "donations" to "volunteer tutors," and "handymen."[634] When Hansen Park asks if they would "take volunteers from… mental health professionals or legal counsel" the duo enters a discussion on the difficulties of finding professionals suitable for the task.[635] This conversation discloses the podcast's ambition to contribute to post-polygamist benefactions by countering a culture of "polygamy-shame."

> Tewell: we're always looking for legal counselors obviously because of all the legal issues that we deal with…volunteer counselors I'm a little more careful with because… they're told that counselors will brainwash you… getting them to trust one is very important […] they can do more damage than good so we're real [sic] careful […]
>
> Hansen Park: […] I do want to say something about the mental health angle. That's something else that I learned. Because we were sponsoring a woman, and you know who I'm talking about, she went through such trauma that we learned pretty quickly that a regular therapist was not equipped to deal with, torture is basically what some of these people have gone through. And, you know, this stumbling block of polygamy-shame in Utah, which is again my goal for integration and is to try to eradicate this idea that Mormons, LDS Mormons don't want to think about, look at or remember polygamy. We want to pretend it's something that happened in the past or it's something our great great grandfathers did. We don't want to look at it now and so we find that with mental health professionals too they just don't understand how people got here and that's my biggest frustration. I wish people understood the history, that people come by it honestly.[636]

Tewell remarks on the difficulty of finding counselors, hinting both that the people under their care have trust issues with them, and that some counselors can do "more damage than good," to which Hansen Park – by recalling her own experiences of sponsoring within Holding Out HELP – responds that "regular therapists" are not always equipped to deal with the experiences of "torture" that some ex-polygamists have gone through. A part of this seems to be the "polygamy-shame" prevalent in Utah where Latter-day Saints refuse to "look at or remember polygamy" and wants to dismiss it as part of their past – "something our great great grandfathers did." Even "mental health

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634 Hansen Park, "Episode 105: Year of Polygamy, a Year Later, Part 5: Holding Out Help."
635 Hansen Park, "Episode 105: Year of Polygamy, a Year Later, Part 5: Holding Out Help."
636 Hansen Park, "Episode 105: Year of Polygamy, a Year Later, Part 5: Holding Out Help."

professionals" are guilty of this, she implies, and are therefore not willing to "understand" or "come by [polygamy] honestly." It's a "stumbling block" for victims' mental health, which is why her podcast seeks to "eradicate" it. Again, the podcast stretches into benefactions and activism, here suggesting that the podcast aims to reduce the polygamy-shame that diminishes possibilities to care for ex-polygamists seeking help.

If this showcases an example where the podcast builds a connection between benefactors and listeners wanting to contribute, the episode mentioned earlier where sexual abuse attorney Kosnoff was invited, is a clear example of when episodes are used to give listeners resources to help themselves or someone they know. She introduces the episode by saying that she "wanted to get Tim out there to the Mormon community to give some resources."[637]

> Hansen Park: if you're a Mormon I guarantee you know someone who has had to deal with this because I do think it's so pervasive in our community and so hopefully this conversation today with Tim Kosnoff will help alleviate that. We're going to give some resources at the end. If you are a victim or survivor of abuse you have nothing to be ashamed of. It is so common in our community. You share the experience with hundreds and hundreds of thousands of people and you deserve to have a life full of happiness and love and acceptance and, you know, for people to believe your experience, so hopefully Tim's interview will do that for you today.[638]

The resources that Hansen Park offers her listeners include contact information to Kosnoff, links to national anti-sexual violence organizations such as RAINN (Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network) and Darkness to Light, who among other things have hotlines for victims, as well as nonprofit organizations committed to preventing child sexual abuse such as Stop It Now! The conversation itself is also meant to "alleviate" those victims' pain – "hopefully Tim's interview will do that for you today." In the same introduction, Hansen Park also advises listeners with experience of abuse to reach out for help from a licensed professional outside of the Church who does not "have a religious motivation" to help, since there are examples of "therapists who have abused their posts and their credentials and supplanted it with […] unhealthy Mormon doctrine."[639] As the episode goes on to suggest, the Church has often sided with the perpetrator, making it difficult for victims to receive help.

The seriality of the podcast puts Hansen Park in repeated contact with victims, whom she seeks to help partly by raising awareness of their experiences – sharing their

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637 Hansen Park, "Episode 197: Polygamy, Mormonism and Child Abuse."
638 Hansen Park, "Episode 197: Polygamy, Mormonism and Child Abuse."
639 Hansen Park, "Episode 197: Polygamy, Mormonism and Child Abuse."

stories – but also by meshing the podcast with various benefactors such as Holding Out HELP and Tim Kosnoff. In other words, a reciprocal relationship occurs where victims step forward and Hansen Park refers them to resources such as hotlines, shelters, and legal counseling.

5.6 Framing Parasocial Relationships: *Year of Polygamy*

Building on our earlier observations of how relationships are performed within the podcast, this section shifts the focus to examine the discursive strategies that frame these interactions. We will look at the example "architecture of abuse," displaying the justice-oriented framing of the podcast and how it is portrayed against the Church as an institution upholding abusive relationships.

5.6.1 "Architecture of Abuse" – Constructing Justice

While this practice of broadcasting and sharing listeners' stories of neglect sometimes resembles the other podcasts, it is not articulated as a "safe space" or as "care." Parasocial phenomena in the form of visible enactment and framing of friendship through online spaces – such as the "soft chair" and "lifeline" exemplified earlier – are absent in comparison. This is not because the podcast does not draw on and produce relationships, but because those relationships are less articulated by the host herself and often confined to less visible places – such as places for benefaction and activism. The type of discourse surrounding this practice is also more confrontational and invested in exposing injustice than the stereotypical feminine act of tending to the wounds of those it afflicts. This discourse recycles and relates to a framing of exposure which will be elaborated on in the next chapter, where compassion for listeners leans more toward justice and toward holding the Church accountable. When introducing the blog series depicted above, Hansen Park repeats the argument that while the Church rejects any accountability for or familiarity with the fundamentalist groups, they spring from the same well. In her words, while "mainstream Latter-day Saints are quick and persistent to distinguish their branch of Mormonism from more radical sects" those sects are often "and almost exclusively seeded within LDS wards and communities."[640] These "denials" she says, are "as ardent as they are predictable" – and the women suffer the consequences:

[640] Hansen Park, "Under the Banner."

> I've spoken to thousands of Mormon women through the *Year of Polygamy* about their experiences. They are not unfamiliar with such denials. These themes of fundamentalist patriarchy are persistent; lingering beyond 1984 and into today. A common heartache throbs in the veins of many Mormon women and girls who survive the weight of it. Too many depended on and trusted their community to honor promises that righteous adherence offered protection and when it failed them, or worse helped enable their suffering, it stings with betrayal. I'd like to believe the collective Mormon apathy and dismissals are rooted in shame, rather than cruelty. The show is picking at old wounds and some responses are creating new ones. Most hauntingly, many current LDS women feel that their experiences are again being dismissed and ignored within their own faith community as viewers react and try to distance themselves from the portrayals they see on screen. "I do not see myself in this narrative," is a common refrain triggered by the series. As a consultant, my defense against that statement is not about defending my work. My experience with this subject is clear and heavily documented. I don't need twitter hot takes to validate something I understand on a bone level. But this blog series is a response to the frustration that the defensiveness has sparked within the Mormon/LDS community. Most especially it is a rejected invitation from the people that need it most. This response ignores the stories of so many people who do see themselves reflected accurately in the portrayals.[641]

The experiences of women and girls who have "survived" despite their community's failure to "protect" them, Hansen Park suggests, are neglected, and dismissed as not representative or valid. Not only do the portrayals in the series reopen old wounds for those who have suffered similar abuse, the "defensive" and "dismissive" responses coming from the Latter-day Saint community also create new ones.[642] She continues to say that although "the show might not resonate with every single Latter-day Saint" it "reverberates with many."[643] The numerous individuals who have reached out to her to share their own story, deserve to "have their voices heard."[644] While it is a response to a conversation happening when the series aired in 2022, it is a description that makes explicit the values and purposes she has attributed to her podcast since it started in 2014, namely, to find and share women's often painful experiences of polygamy or the culture of polygamy allegedly still lingering. Part of the reason why these narratives are broadcasted through her project, then, is because they are not given validation through their own religious community. Because their "community," be it Latter-day Saint or fundamentalist, has "failed them," as the quote above implies, she uses her platform to offer retribution. This "blog series" she says, is an "invitation" to those who "need it most" but have been "rejected" and "ignored."

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641 Hansen Park, "Under the Banner."
642 Hansen Park, "Under the Banner."
643 Hansen Park, "Under the Banner."
644 Hansen Park, "Under the Banner."

Thus, there is a negative other to the podcast's function of collecting and amplifying men's and women's voices – a church that neglects or "betrays" hurting members. The relational aspect of the *Year of Polygamy* podcast is therefore, in similarity to the other cases explored in this chapter, committed to the wellbeing of members of the "Mormon community" by characterizing the Church as a not-so-caring other. The difference, however, is that the podcast is defined as a concerned ally through negation – not by defining *itself* as caring but by defining *someone else* as lacking those traits. More specifically, this means portraying itself as responding to a larger Mormon culture as an uncaring other. These claims peak in the episode on "Polygamy, Mormonism and Child Abuse" mentioned earlier. In the continuation of that episode Hansen Park describes abuse as a "plague in Mormonism" that begins with the doctrine of polygamy:

> Hansen Park: I see this as such a plague in Mormonism. I think we deal with higher levels of abuse. We certainly know that child abuse has higher rates in Utah than the rest of the country and that says something to me. I also think the culture of coming from polygamy is a way to sort of make people systemically dispensable, you know, if you're a plural wife you can be replaced with another wife who's more righteous. If you're a child there's, you know, plural family [meaning] there's probably lots of you and it's easy to be neglected and overlooked. But it's tricky when it becomes cultural when it becomes sort of endemic to a culture.[645]

The doctrine of polygamy, native or "endemic" to the "culture" of "Mormonism," she suggests, fosters abuse within the Church, that long after its discontinuation continues to treat members as "systematically dispensable." It is a system where you can be "replaced" and "neglected." Polygamy, she adds at a point later in their conversation, treats women as "keys to a man's exaltation in heaven" which means that they become "objectified," "dehumanized," "cattle" or "bargaining chips" for someone else's success, ultimately allowing men the entitlement to "treat" others "however [they] want."[646] Perpetrators also use polygamy to "justify" their crimes, Hansen Park explains, "groom[ing] their victims" by suggesting they will be theirs "in the next life."[647] And these are "mainstream Mormon people who supposedly… abandoned the doctrine altogether."[648] Another aspect of the Church's history that plays a part in contemporary abuse cases, Kosnoff adds, is the notion of "in the world but not of the world" or more specifically the idea of church as above earthly laws.[649] There is a "straight line" Kosnoff says, between the "defiance" of the federal anti-polygamy laws that were introduced during the 1860s, and

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645 Hansen Park, "Episode 197: Polygamy, Mormonism and Child Abuse."
646 Hansen Park, "Episode 197: Polygamy, Mormonism and Child Abuse."
647 Hansen Park, "Episode 197: Polygamy, Mormonism and Child Abuse."
648 Hansen Park, "Episode 197: Polygamy, Mormonism and Child Abuse."
649 Hansen Park, "Episode 197: Polygamy, Mormonism and Child Abuse."

present-day defiance of laws demanding child abuse to be reported. Just as they viewed themselves as having "free constitutional rights to practice polygamy," despite federal anti-polygamy laws then, they now proclaim their right to "repentance and forgiveness," in "defiance of mandatory reporting laws."[650]

> Kosnoff: their belief in the doctrine of repentance and forgiveness basically justifies them not reporting, instructing their lower clergy not to cooperate with the police, not to report known instances of child sexual abuse and to rally around and protect the abuser […] [it is] the same arguments that they made back in the 19th century… "we're above the law," you can't enforce the rule of law against us because we have this First Amendment protected belief […] so the cases that I'm involved in you know that that's the central allegation; they knew they were in a position to warn or protect the child. They not only failed to protect the child, when they learned about it they covered up for the abuser. They intimidated and silenced the victim oftentimes the child and they did everything in their power not to protect the child or other children or to provide them help and healing but instead aggravated the injury by pressuring the child, the parents, other church members… bishops, to conceal […] the Church consistently teaches that its members are you know "in the world but not of the world" and if you've got a problem of any kind… do not go to the police, do not report it. Instead, bring it to the Bishop because he's got, under the Mormon belief system, the powers of discernment, he's channeling God and he'll know exactly what to do.[651]

The constitutional right of religious freedom, Kosnoff suggests, that was used in the nineteenth century to defend polygamy, is used today to defend the right to manage cases of abuse internally through religious principles of repentance and forgiveness rather than turning to the police. The reason, Hansen Park adds is that "they would rather hold on to their authority than protect a child," later adding, that that is the "crux of the matter," that acknowledging allegations of child abuse "challenges their authority."[652]

There are in other words three tropes attributed to this culture of abuse, they seem to suggest: one is the expendability of women and children; another the view of church as superior to government laws; and the third is the protection of men in power. Together, these create what Hansen Park refers to as an "architecture of abuse."

> Hansen Park: The culture of polygamy has sort of built up this architecture of abuse. Tim will say that the Mormon church is sort of "a paradise for pedophiles," and I hate to say that, but that's, you know, that's kind of true. If you look at the very roots of our faith, it was bred out of secrecy, secret oaths that protected violence and secret marriages and underage marriages and men trading

650 Hansen Park, "Episode 197: Polygamy, Mormonism and Child Abuse."
651 Hansen Park, "Episode 197: Polygamy, Mormonism and Child Abuse."
652 Hansen Park, "Episode 197: Polygamy, Mormonism and Child Abuse."

> their daughters and their sisters and sometimes their mothers and their own wives for power and status in the priesthood. And regardless of, you can be a faithful Mormon listening to this and say well that's an uncharitable take, but that's what it was. I'm sorry if that's not how you know the wrappings that your faith has around those choices, but that's what it was. It was men making secret oaths and promises as they were exchanging women as favors. I mean they actually use the term "favors." I'm not, it's not, some ex-Mormon bias I'm you know putting on the term; that was Joseph Smith's term. And how do you have a healthy culture that comes out of that when it's never acknowledged and looked at in the face?[653]

Because of this "architecture," Kosnoff suggests, it is a "paradise for pedophiles," a label Hansen Park adds, that is not entirely false. She "hates to say it" but it is "kind of true" that the Church is a "paradise" for abusers. If you "look at the very roots of our faith" she explains "it was bred out of secrecy" and "oaths" where men traded their family for "power and status." They even used the term "favors," she continues, and how do you create a "healthy culture" out of that, she asks, "when it's never acknowledged and looked at in the face?"[654] On the same theme, a picture portraying a package of cigarettes with the Salt Lake temple on it was published on her website alongside Kosnoff's episode, saying "WARNING. Smoking is harmful to your health AND SO IS BAD POLICY."[655] As a result of "bad policy" or lack of structures in place to deal with abuse legally, the Latter-day Saint community, then, is allegedly suffering from bad health. If we return to what I said earlier on defining itself as an ally through negation, this is what the *Year of Polygamy* podcast offers its listeners and the relationships it fosters – it looks polygamy right "in the face" and exposes its "shadow sides" by making visible its victims' stories.

5.6.2 Analytical Summary of Discursive Framing

While resilience on behalf of others was explicitly constructed and defined through "care" or corresponding terms in the other examples, the affordance described above is discursively framed in negation. In other words, Hansen Park is mostly silent on how she defines her own acts toward listeners, but comparably more explicit in how she describes the situation that brings those listeners to her doorstep – both literally and figuratively speaking. There are two aspects of this, first, her editorial distribution of

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653 Hansen Park, "Episode 197: Polygamy, Mormonism and Child Abuse."

654 Hansen Park, "Episode 197: Polygamy, Mormonism and Child Abuse."

655 Lindsay Hansen Park, "Episode 197: Polygamy, Mormonism and Child Abuse," *Year of Polygamy,* March 31, 2024, www.yearofpolygamy.com/uncategorized/episode-197-polygamy-mormonism-and-child-abuse/, accessed February 12, 2025.

voices that speak of that situation, and her own description thereof. If we look at those voices distributed through the podcast's transmedial storytelling, *discursive moments* tell us that "Mormonism breeds violent men," that it fosters a "violent rhetoric" and a "culture of abuse," within which women are physically and verbally debased. We learn that perpetrators are ordinary "devout mainstream," "run-of-the mill" Latter-day Saint men, and that they are protected by church "leaders" who have not been "trained to recognize abusive relationships," and therefore "dismiss" women's "experiences" when they report them, while protecting the career opportunities of their husbands – Becky was "put in a corner for time out" while her husband was "given a prestigious leadership position." We also learn that these leaders are part of an "institution" that "upholds and perpetuates unhealthy power," that "causes harm in a myriad of ways," "controls," and "gaslights" members "on a macro level." If we observe the host's description, we find discursive moments describing women's "suffering" and "wounds" as "dismissed," and "rejected," due to the "Mormon community's" "apathy" and "shame," as well as the Church's "upholding and perpetuation" of a "patriarchal order" that cares more for "authority," "power and status," and therefore treats "people as systemically dispensable," as "cattle" and "bargaining chips," thereby creating an "architecture of abuse," a "paradise for pedophiles," and an "[un]healthy," culture that will not confront the problem of abuse or "look in its face." This *antagonistic other* frames the podcast, and explains its purpose: to confront it, to "look at" it straight in its "face" and to distribute the experiences of women (and men) who have been ignored, to "have their voices heard." The *chain of equivalence* here – which will become even more pronounced in the next chapter – gives us the rationale for the podcast's relationships: voices that have been hidden or "dismissed" and the abuse that lurks in the "shadows" of Mormonism will be brought to light and acknowledged. Through such exposure, victims will be given "justice."

This confrontation, furthermore, implies that the *Year of Polygamy* podcast does not – in this particular case – enter into conversation with the religious tradition it refers to. It does not draw on or seek to contribute to religious practices or concepts such as ministering or the baptismal covenant (seen in the other examples). It does not define its own resilience or care explicitly and nor does it frame that practice as part of the Latter-day Saint religion. What the podcast does do however – and this is something we will explore in depth in the subsequent chapter – is engage in a *field of discursivity* on Mormonism and media representation, especially concerning polygamy. It suffices to say that Hansen Park challenges the distinction between fundamentalist Mormons and

Latter-day Saints, opting instead to view it as a "spectrum,"[656] a blurring of borders that is highly controversial for reasons we will disclose in the pages to come. Because of this she also criticizes dismissals of the portrayals of Mormonism found within the Hulu series *Under the Banner of Heaven*. When *Year of Polygamy* engages in the struggle to define Mormonism and how it is portrayed in media, a *chain of equivalence* materializes where defensiveness around media representation upholds harmful structures. While some Latter-day Saints distance themselves and say, "I do not see myself in this narrative," Hansen Park explains, they fail to acknowledge that many women do, and that in rejecting the "narrative" they not only "pick at old wounds" but "create new ones." Failing to recognize the validity of how Mormonism is portrayed in the tv-series, then, has consequences for the women whose experiences it mirrors. This correlation is also visible in how she reasons around polygamy and shame. "Polygamy-shame" prevents therapists from "understanding" or coming to it "honestly" when approaching ex-polygamist victims, and "shame" rather than "cruelty" is what fuels the "dismissals" of the Hulu series. Coupled with the chain depicted earlier we can infer that the "shame" of polygamy is intimately connected to the "architecture of abuse" and that the podcast is a means to disturb the representation of "polygamy" and in essence the definition of "Mormonism" within the larger *field of discursivity* of Mormonism in order to create visibility and accountability for its own structures of harm. The image of Mormonism itself must be challenged to create true "understanding" and visibility and in the end, enable victims of it to receive care.

While *Year of Polygamy* undoubtedly creates resilience on behalf of others and is explicitly tied to benefactions aiding those who need care, its host does not occupy a position of caretaker. I attribute this tendency to two things. First that the nature of listeners' injuries demands a more bureaucratic type of care than the ones we witnessed in the other two cases. Thus, the host must refer them to professional or organized aid. Another aspect is that the host takes a *subject position* comparably more confrontational in style than the stereotypically feminine traits of "soft[ness]" and "sisterhood" found in the other podcasts. The host is someone who seeks to restore justice – she confronts church leaders and actors within the Mormon community who dismiss experiences of abuse, with evidence. Politics of visibility – amplifying women's experiences – can thus be both caring and confrontational in nature.

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656 Hansen Park, "Episode 73: The Birth of Mormon Fundamentalism"; "Episode 100: The Final Episode."

5.7 Conclusions: Countering Relational Hegemonies

In this chapter, I have explored the role of podcasts in fostering community and shaping host-listener relationships among Latter-day Saint Feminists. The analysis of three distinct podcasts – *The Faithful Feminists*, *At Last She Said It*, and *Year of Polygamy* – reveals how media performances and discursive framings create alternative spaces for care and advocacy, particularly for women within Latter-day Saint and fundamentalist contexts. By abstracting from the specifics of individual podcasts and their articulatory practices, we can discern how these feminist voices challenge and renegotiate the hegemony of the Church's communal relationships.

Symbols such as "soft chairs" are juxtaposed with the "hard pews" of the Church, vividly contrasting a welcoming, inclusive atmosphere against the rigidity and exclusion often perceived in institutional settings. This imagery critiques the Church as an efficient "administrator" yet lacking the empathetic "ministering" necessary to truly "save souls." Against this backdrop, the podcasts emerge as a responsive space where the notion of care is reimagined. They articulate an alternative vision of ministering that prioritizes engagement with doubters and the marginalized over maintaining comfort. Through parasocial interactions, these podcasters engage with their listeners' stories of doubt and pain, practicing a form of ministering grounded in empathy and solidarity. This redefines traditional religious obligations to "mourn with those that mourn" and "comfort those that stand in need comfort," positioning their platforms as modern venues to fulfill the Church's covenant to "bear one another's burdens." While not all podcasts directly engage with religious practices, they advocate greater visibility and accountability, urging a broader recognition and addressing the wounds inflicted by institutional and cultural practices within Mormonism. In sum, these Feminist Latter-day Saints construct new relational paradigms that challenge the hegemonic control of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints over spiritual care and community, illustrating a dynamic interplay between tradition and transformation in religious practice.

The caring and advocative communities envisioned by Latter-day Saint Feminists are therefore not static entities but social imaginaries that require active construction. As Heather and Noterman and Clark-Parsons articulate,[657] and as my analysis supports, the creation of such "safe spaces" involves a deliberate foregrounding of social differences and binaries – such as safe versus unsafe, and inclusive versus exclusive. This delineation

[657] Heather & Noterman, "Safe Space: Toward a Reconceptualization"; Clark-Parsons, "Building a Digital Girl Army: The Cultivation of Feminist Safe Spaces Online."

underscores that safety is not merely a given condition but a discourse that must be creatively envisioned. This process necessarily involves identifying the sources of threat or discomfort, thus positing the existence of a "not-so-caring other" as a comparative backdrop to the envisioned safe space. A second, more nuanced insight also arises from this analysis: the feminists under study – despite their critical stance – often reproduce the very traditions they aim to challenge. This paradox highlights that the dichotomy of safe versus unsafe is not clear-cut but is deeply intertwined with the central tenets of their faith. Latter-day Saint Feminists do not reject their religious tradition but rather contest a version of it they perceive as inauthentic or incorrect. Their advocacy for safe spaces, therefore, does not stand outside the Latter-day Saint tradition but actively engages with it, negotiating its meanings and practices. By invoking central religious covenants like being willing to "bear one another's burdens," these feminists underscore that the struggle to define what constitutes a safe or caring environment is also a struggle to define the essence of Mormonism itself. In this way, the creation of safe spaces becomes a counter-hegemonic act that does not exclude but rather renegotiates the contours of the Latter-day Saint tradition.

6. Liveness

The second question that this dissertation addresses is *what types of interactions are facilitated by the podcast's recording format.* As an audio-based medium, podcasting emphasizes the immediacy of spoken language, typically showcasing dynamic exchanges between hosts or between hosts and guests. This chapter argues that the live format fosters a counter-hegemonic style of communication, creating opportunities for interactions and discourses that challenge and reinterpret communicative patterns within The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. This is attributable both to the podcast's inherent qualities of liveness – its spontaneity, mobility, and immediacy – and to the discourses that frame it in terms of "messiness," "intuition," and "exposure." I will argue that together, these meeting points between performed media and discursive framing attribute two qualities to liveness: progress and therapy.

The structure of this chapter includes three subchapters, each dedicated to an individual podcast. Similarly to the previous chapter, two analyses are made in each case. The first part focuses on "performed media," where I explore how the podcast's spatio-temporal conditions affect the forms of interaction it enables, for example showcasing the significance of unscripted settings, spontaneous interactions and the emotionality and candidness that such dynamics invite. Following this, I examine how the concept of "discursive framing" is manifested in the podcast, for example illustrating how messy and informal conversations are discursively constructed in contrast to the dominant communication patterns within the physical congregation and the religious virtues they attribute to such interactions.

6.1 Performing Liveness: *At Last She Said It*

Our first focus is the performance of liveness within the *At Last She Said It* podcast. To explore this, we will look at three examples: "operating out of their bedrooms," which demonstrates the homely environment in which they record and the hosts' interaction through intimacy and unscriptedness; "punching Glenda in the face," showcasing the performance of candidness and emotions; and "we solved nothing," presenting the act of sitting with questions and uncertainty.

6.1.1 "Operating Out of Their Bedrooms" – Intimate and Unscripted Settings

The first characteristic of performing liveness is interacting in an intimate and unscripted setting. An example of this can be found in the opening to an episode called "When is Enough Enough?" where Winward introduces by saying "What's up Susan?" to which Hinckley responds "well, lawn mowers, for one thing, Cynthia," reminding themselves and their listeners that they are "women operating out of [their] bedrooms and sewing rooms."[658] Hinckley continues the conversation by saying:

> Hinckley: The landscaping crew at my building pulled up three minutes before we hit start on this podcast [Of course they did] so I'm really sorry. We're just going to have lawn mowers today and that's a reminder that we are women operating out of our bedrooms and sewing rooms. So [yeah] that's what this is about.
> Winward: Well, you have lawn mowers, and I have a neighbor babysitting a lot of dogs right now [LAUGHING] and then my other neighbor always mows on, we're recording this on a Friday morning. He mows Fridays. So. This is going to be fun. We may either have a really noisy podcast or a lot of bloopers at the end [maybe both]. We'll see, yeah.
> Hinckley: £it's an imperfect world, Cynthia£
> Winward: I know, I know, but that's a metaphor for life, right? [yes] Everything is imperfect. So, let's just go ahead and jump in…

These types of conversational openings are typical of the *At Last She Said It* podcast whose episodes often begin with lighthearted, everyday banter between its hosts. Informal discussions executed from their "bedrooms and sewing rooms" where "lawn mowers" can occasionally be heard in the background, also tell us that the mobility of the podcast allows them to record from the intimate location of their own homes. In a similar manner, Winward opens an episode on racism featuring her guest Tamu Smith, by saying, "Tamu is a friend of mine who lives in the neighborhood" and that listeners are "basically[…]just going to hear a conversation between two friends."[659] Smith is a prominent figure within the Latter-day Saint community, previously known for co-producing *Sistas in Zion* with Zandra Vranes – one of the oldest Latter-day Saint podcasts – and presently advocating for social issues, particularly concerning Black members of the Church.[660] Her expertise and firsthand experiences make her a valued guest for the

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658 Susan M. Hinckley & Cynthis Winward, "When is Enough Enough?" *At Last She Said It,* August 3, 2021.

659 Susan M. Hinckley & Cynthia Winward, "Episode 154: What About Racism? | A Conversation with Tamu Smith," *At Last She Said It,* October 3, 2023.

660 Tamu Smith & Zandra Vranes, *Sistas in Zion,* www.instagram.com/sistasinzion/, accessed March 21, 2025.

episode. She "came over to my house one day" Winward explains, and then they "had a chat for about an hour."[661] The introduction given to the episode on their website says:

> "What could a Relief Society lesson on racism look like?" "What do you wish other members of the Church knew about what it's like to be a Black Latter-day Saint in 2023?" Cynthia asked Tamu Smith these questions and more as they visited in Cynthia's kitchen with the recorder running. In Episode 154, Tamu shares her personal insights and answers in a wide-ranging, thoughtful conversation between two good friends.[662]

As the quote informs us, "two good friends" had a "wide-ranging" and "thoughtful" conversation on what "a Relief Society lesson on racism" could "look like." It explains to us that they addressed the issues of racism, which as later explained in the same conversation, is a subject excluded in church due to the tendency to avoid uncomfortable situations. It also suggests to us that they addressed this issue through a type of dialogue that is informal – or performed in a homely and intimate atmosphere, i.e. the "kitchen" where the recorder was "running" in the background. That the recorder was running while her friend visited her in her kitchen implies that it is a non-artificial or natural situation. Thus, podcast liveness is performed through a spatial co-presence,[663] tied to the intimacy of recording in personal and homely spaces.

As hinted at in the first quote and its opening banters, liveness also invites a temporal co-presence,[664] where hosts enter a spontaneous conversational dynamic. A clear example illustrating this can be found in an episode called "What About Worthiness?" As mentioned earlier, members go through what is called a worthiness interview with their bishop, after which they acquire a "Temple Recommend," a card that proves their suitability or worthiness to enter the temple. Worthiness is "very important to us in our church" Winward explains, "it's the water we swim in." In the opening to this episode, the duo laments over taking on such a heavy topic on a Monday.

> Winward: Why do we record podcasts on Monday?
> Hinckley: I don't know, [it should never] and why would we record a podcast on a big (.) meaty topic on a Monday? That's just [I don't know] silly [I don't know]. We'll see how it goes.

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661 Hinckley & Winward, "Episode 154: What About Racism? | A Conversation with Tamu Smith."

662 Susan M. Hinckley & Cynthia Winward, "Episode 154: What About Racism? | A Conversation with Tamu Smith," *At Last She Said It,* October 3, 2023, atlastshesaidit.org/episode-154-what-about-racism-a-conversation-with-tamu-smith/, accessed March 6 2024.

663 Euritt, *Podcasting as an Intimate Medium*, p. 14.

664 Euritt, *Podcasting as an Intimate Medium*, p. 14.

> Winward: Well hh, speaking of our topic hh, we're calling this episode, "What About Worthiness?" [mh] And I would have bet a million dollars, Susan, that we had already done this episode, or if I'm honest, like £10 episodes [right] [LAUGHTER], about worthiness£ because I have such strong feelings about it, and the only one who probably can match my strong feelings is you [mhm], you might even have stronger feelings about this topic, but we haven't done this yet, so I'm going to go ahead and talk about worthiness. A:nd because I'm: no::t so: su::re that we know how to be diplomatic about it [LAUGHING], you know, that's my caveat up front, is £this might£ expose our Achilles heel big time, Susan [hm], This just might be the topic that, I don't want to say takes us down, [LAUGHING], £but this might need some£ [yeah we'll see], yeah, we'll need some chocolate cake after this episode.[665]

As the introduction shows, the episode demonstrates a similar type of unpretentiousness that we found in the lawnmower opening. The jesting around recording an episode on a "meaty" topic on a Monday, give the impression of an easygoing and even spontaneous conversation – "why" they decided to do that they "don't know," "it's just silly." Nevertheless, Winward sighs, they are, and it's an issue they have "strong feelings about." She is not so "su:re" they will know how to be "diplomatic" on the subject Winward adds under prolongation. It might not "take them down" she jokes but it requires "some chocolate cake after." The quote showcases a relaxed style of communication that emphasizes the spontaneous and unscripted nature of their interaction, which contributes to a laid-back, informal atmosphere typical of exchanges between friends.

6.1.2 "Punching Glenda in the Face" – Candid Conversations and Unfiltered Emotions

Another important part of this unscriptedness is candid conversations and unfiltered emotions. While the episodes are edited to deliver a polished final product, the core conversations retain an unscripted quality, driven by the hosts' candid reactions and thoughts. To get a glimpse at what this sounds like, we are going to take a look at an episode called "What's the Church Up To?" As mentioned in the introduction to this dissertation, a recurring topic in the digital landscape of Mormon Feminism is the priesthood. In January 2021 the Church's magazine *Liahona* published an article by Relief Society General President Jean B. Bingham on women and "priesthood power" called "Women and Covenant Power."[666] As they are not acquainted with having access

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665 Susan M. Hinckley & Cynthia Winward, "Episode 70: What About Worthiness," *At Last She Said It,* November 23, 2021.

666 Jean B. Bingham, "Women and Covenant Power," January, 2021, www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/liahona/2021/01/women-and-covenant-power?lang=eng, accessed October 15, 2024

to the priesthood, the article resulted in confusion among Latter-day Saint women. Being among them, Hinckley and Winward decided to enact their own confusion on-air. As the duo explains, "the phrases 'priesthood power' and 'priesthood authority' are being used more often in reference to women."[667] The crux of the matter, they explain, is whether this represents some kind of change or merely a shift in how they discuss old ideas. Bingham frequently mentions "priesthood power," a phrase Winward notes she did not often hear in her youth but has become more common in the last decade.[668]

> Cynthia: Our leaders [are] telling us "women have priesthood power," "women have priesthood power." And I'm like, where? how is this different than what, you know, we used to talk about personal revelation or the gift of the Holy Ghost […] It's quite astonishing how much this phrase priesthood power is being ramped up. Really being ramped up. And my hunch is that as equality issues for women have escalated in the Church over the last, uh I don't know, like, 15 years, maybe 15 to 20 years, so have the talks trying to convince women that we have priesthood power just like men.
>
> Susan: £Yeah, you and I had exactly the same response to this£ We both said the same thing, which was, you know, "methinks the Church doth protest too much" [yes] [LAUGHING] £in this area£
>
> Cynthia: £What are you trying to convince me on? Why do you keep saying it? Over and over£ [are] it kind of reminds me of Dorothy in the Wizard of Oz, [LAUGHTER] cause at the very end of the movie when Glenda the Good Witch tells her, ↑"oh, you had the power all along" [LAUGHING] £And I just kind of feel like that's£ what's going on is that all of a sudden in the last decade or so, our church leaders, male and female, are telling us "you've had, you've had priesthood power all along." And it's like, well, no one ever told me that before.[669]

Through an easy-going conversation with overlapping speech and jesting, the duo discusses their reactions to an increased rhetoric on women's priesthood power, questioning the motives behind it. "Methinks the church doth protest too much" as Hinckley humorously remarks. Women have always had access to "personal revelation or the gift of the Holy Ghost" as Winward explains, but never explicitly the "priesthood keys." But in the last "ten years" the Church seem eager to impress upon female members that they have – as Winward insinuates while imitating the good witch Glenda, "it reminds me of Dorothy in the Wizard of Oz" when the good witch Glenda says "oh, you had the power all along." When Bingham references Church President Russell M. Nelson

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667 Susan M. Hinckley & Cynthia Winward, "Episode 039: What's the Church Up To?" *At Last She Said It,* January 12, 2021.

668 M. Hinckley & Winward, "Episode 039: What's the Church Up To?"

669 M. Hinckley & Winward, "Episode 039: What's the Church Up To?"

for saying that women should "study prayerfully about priesthood power" the duo therefore ask a bit puzzled – "where?"

> Winward: £Where do I go to study this? £ I mean, the only time I see power of the priesthood used in the scriptures, and I've gotten out my scriptures before and I've gone to the topical guide and I've looked up priesthood power, and the only time I see it used in the scriptures is when they are referring to the apostolic power, you know, the power of hierarchy, of how the Church is organized. So, it's used much more in the typical way we think about priesthood, which is, you know, the way the Church is organized. So, you know, we're kind of at a loss. If as women, if our goal was to fulfill what President Nelson is asking us to do and to study more, my question is where? Because we can't go to our scriptures to really learn about what that means that women have priesthood power.
>
> Hinckley: Mhm, exactly. When I started perusing some of the addresses and essays on the Church site in preparation for this conversation, it didn't clarify anything at all £for me, actually£ [LAUGHTER]. It did help me. No, it did put in stark relief my own confusion, though, and why some things do feel faintly gaslighty for me, [mmm] they do, Cynthia, just a little bit. And I imagine that that's exactly how Dorothy felt when Glinda, I mean, like, if I'd been Dorothy at that point, I'd have first wanted to punch Glinda in the face [£exactly£] [LAUGHTER] £and say, are you kidding me? I went through all that?£ [£you big jerk£] [LAUGHTER][670]

The irony of the encouragement is that when women – such as Hinckley and Winward – follow up on it by searching the Church website and scripture, they find no information on the matter, other than that confirming men's exclusive access to the priesthood. As the duo discusses throughout the episode, they have already studied this subject long and hard, often being reprimanded for asking questions or making statements about it in church settings. Hinckley explains that she has "had [her] hand slapped twice at church" for bringing it up.[671] Putting these aspects together, the increasing rhetoric of women having priesthood power, the lack of explanation for how, why and when this change happened (or if it even is a change), and the fact that church leaders urge women to "study prayerfully" on the subject, insinuates that there is no external problem with women's lack of authority, but that it is something women themselves are presumably missing or lacking comprehension on. It is a situation that makes women doubt their own concerns and experiences, or as Hinckley puts it, it feels a bit "gaslighty." The previous reference to Glenda the Good Witch is in other words saying that women's lack of power is attempting to be solved by references to a power that they have "had all along" such as personal revelation, which suggests that any worries or

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670 M. Hinckley & Winward, "Episode 039: What's the Church Up To?"
671 M. Hinckley & Winward, "Episode 039: What's the Church Up To?"

complains about not having equal opportunities to wield the priesthood power is unnecessary. Hinckley imagines that is how Dorothy felt too – in fact, as she candidly points it, she would have "wanted to punch Glinda in the face" for making her "[go] through all that."

As demonstrated in the quotes above, an important part of this unscriptedness is laughter and lightheartedness amid serious discussions. Despite the often serious or sensitive topics they cover – such as women's ordination, and worthiness – the hosts frequently intersperse humor and laughter into their dialogue. Another emotional expression that is part of the same tendency is the act of crying. This tendency was witnessed already in the previous chapter as many vulnerable moments appeared when guests joined the podcast to talk about their experiences. We can add to those previous examples, the vulnerability at play between the co-hosts themselves, where the co-present setting allows them to witness and support each other's feelings as they unravel. An example of this can be found in an episode called "We Don't Believe Our Own Stuff – Revelation Edition" where the duo reflects on the subject of continuous revelation and change. Winward addresses apostle Bruce R. McConkie's 1978 BYU speech "All Are Alike unto God" about Church changing their policy on priesthood to include black men, where he encourages his audience to "forget everything" that he and other Church Presidents have said "in days past."[672] They "spoke with a limited understanding" he explains and have now gained new knowledge – "We get our truth and our light line upon line and precept upon precept. We have now had added a new flood of intelligence and light on this particular subject."[673] When Winward reads McConkie's speech, however, she reaches a tipping point.

> Winward: [wow] I get a little teary (.) ((crying)) when I think about that. And I've made it to, I've made it this far in our podcast without crying. I made it almost two years, but when I read those words and I think about what he said, "light and knowledge," "line upon line, precept upon precept," a "flood of Intelligence" I just think how many things going on in our own church right now (.) do I need a flood of intelligence on? I think about my own gay daughter who's had to leave the Church (.) for safety. And I think (.) that flood of intelligence and that flood of light, it's too late for so many of our kids. It's too late for so many women our age, not just for our kids, Susan. But I just think we need so much right now and. God bless Brother McConkey for being willing to have egg on his face in public and say forget everything we said.
> Hinckley: °Mh° (.) that's so powerful.[674]

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672 Bruce R. McConkie, "All Are Alike unto God," *BYU Speeches,* August 18, 1978.
673 M. Hinckley & Winward, "Episode 081: We Don't Believe Our Own Stuff – Revelation Edition."
674 M. Hinckley & Winward, "Episode 081: We Don't Believe Our Own Stuff – Revelation Edition."

Many topics that the duo discuss on-air touch upon personally difficult experiences. One that has often recurred in the podcast is LGBTQ+ issues and the experiences of parenting LGBTQ+ children. As a parent of a gay daughter, reading a church leader specifically addressing the possibilities of prophets being wrong or of having spoken "with a limited understanding" leads Winward to a moment of vulnerability. While giving credit to McConkey for being willing to admit the shortcomings of church leaders, "to have egg on his face in public" Winward also reflects on the "need" for such a "flood of intelligence" when it comes to how the Church approaches LGBTQ+ members. Through pauses and tears she contemplates over the children for whom "it's too late" such as her own daughter having to "leave the Church" for her own "safety," to which Hinckley responds by affirming her experience with a lowered voice "°Mh° (.) that's so powerful." This demonstrates the mutual support hosts offer each other. In the conversation that continues on worthiness, Hinckley for example moves from humor and jesting around worthiness being "ludicrous" to more sincere personal reflections about her own experiences of other members questioning her children's worth. When doing so, Winward affirms by for example laughing or adding confirmations like "hmm," "wow" and "oh my gosh Susan."[675]

What these candid and emotive expressions do is that they infuse the conversation with unanticipated moments, signaling that it is occurring in real time and is not pre-planned, and also giving the conversations an informal tone that makes them feel genuine or authentic. Together, they add to the dynamic and lively atmosphere of the podcast, or more precisely, its liveness. The element of interactive co-presence plays a crucial role here,[676] providing the foundational space for these extended and often messy discussions about deeply emotional topics like grief.[677]

6.1.3 "We Solved Nothing" – Open and Explorative Conversations

A distinctive aspect of this unscripted style is the open-ended discussions that unfold without pressure for resolution. By employing an exploratory approach, these conversations naturally progress, not only enhancing their feel of authenticity but also adopting a format that eschews definitive conclusions. This method mirrors the complexities of real-life interactions, fostering ongoing engagement with the topics at hand. Without the

675 M. Hinckley & Winward, "Episode 70: What About Worthiness."
676 Euritt, *Podcasting as an Intimate Medium*, p. 14.
677 M. Peterson, "'The Bad Things are Just Too Close Right Now': Podcasts Cultivate Spaces to Sit With the Messiness of Grief."

obligation to reach a clear solution, the hosts often leave discussions unresolved, reflecting the intricate nature of the issues discussed. Thus, these conversations are not aimed at resolving problems but rather at unpacking thoughts and feelings about the subject matter. Telling of this is the duo's introduction which says, "Welcome to *At Last She Said It*, a podcast where women of faith come together to acknowledge that *it's complicated* and support each other while we figure it out."[678] While they at one point pondered on whether they should change their introduction, they realized that the phrase "it's complicated" had since become so ingrained among their followers, i.e. women reiterating their words – "we realized women over and over and over would say to us 'it's complicated, it's complicated'" that it instead became something of a "tagline." As can be found in the following quote it is also frequently repeated by themselves when discussing various issues like priesthood power.

> Hinckley: So, is that different? I don't know. I don't know what it is. Is it the gift of the Holy Ghost? Is it something else? It's a:ll confusing, Cynthia. It's a::ll [°°I don't know°°] It's complicated [LAUGHING] £It's apparently [complicated] complicated. It's complicated£
> Winward: But that's why we're talking about it.
> Hinckley: That's why we're talking about it. [We're not the only one's] Exactly. Well, we know we're not and that's why [we know we're not] we're talking about it, because we know we're not [mhm].[679]

In connection to the acknowledgment that they do not really "know" the answers to the question of what priesthood power means, they both repeat, in cognizance, the tagline "it's complicated." They don't really "know" the answers – its "a:ll confusing" – but "that's why they're talking about it." This sentiment is also mimicked in how they wrap up the episode:

> Hinckley: We're a living church of unchanging doctrine wait, that's hard, because living is changing as far as I have been able to experience it. So that's where the rub comes between living and changing and unchanging doctrine. We're caught right in the middle of it, right here, right now. We're waiting through it, but it's always worth beginning the conversation.
> Winward: It's always worth beginning the conversation. So, I'm not sure that we answered, what is the Church up to? But we sure talked a lot about it, and I feel better for having had this conversation.
> Hinckley: Me too. We asked the question, and someone needed to say it, Cynthia. I'm glad we did.[680]

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678 M. Hinckley & Winward, "Episode 001: It's Complicated," emphasis my own.
679 M. Hinckley & Winward, "Episode 039: What's the Church Up To?"
680 M. Hinckley & Winward, "Episode 039: What's the Church Up To?"

The amped-up rhetoric on women and priesthood power makes them feel as if they are part of a "living church" and an "unchanging doctrine" at the same time, Hinckley explains, sarcastically adding "wait that's hard, because living is changing" as far as she has "experienced it." The situation, and the questions and confusion it results in, she seems to suggest, are enacted and processed through the episode. They are "caught right in the middle of it" she says, "right here, right now." Winward adds that she is "not sure they answered" the question they set out to answer, "but they sure talked about it" and "feel better for having" done so. Often the un-packing of certain subjects is surrounded by the acknowledgement that they either "don't know" the answers to the questions that have posed – often by repeatedly claiming so during the conversation – or that they have, as suggested in the end of their episode on worthiness, "solved nothing."

> Winward: Thanks for showing up and discussing it with me, as always.
> Hinckley: Yeah, we solved nothing.
> Winward: £we never do£[LAUGHING]
> Hinckley: £I love going away with things to think about£, and I've got plenty of those.
> Winward: A::hh thank you so much
> Hinckley: Thanks friend.[681]

Related to this lack of pressure for solution, is the recurring presence of the phrase "sitting with" – a term that we will return to when observing how liveness is discursively framed. It can have many meanings and seems to hold both temporal and spatial significance. Sometimes it signals acts of pausing to let something sink in, pondering over a question or contemplating over someone else's comments, such as "I have to sit with that for a minute,"[682] and other times it denotes the act of being present with someone else – as we saw examples of in the previous chapter, for example when responding to voicemails or written emails on-air. This approach is a deliberate departure from more solution-oriented discussions, instead prioritizing the process of exploration and the sharing of thoughts and feelings. It creates a space where ambiguity and uncertainty are not only acceptable but embraced as part of the conversation. They are not out to provide solutions to their questions but to "sit with" them.

6.2 Framing Liveness: *At Last She Said It*

Podcast hosts do not merely engage in communication, however, but actively construct discourses about it. This process of discursive framing provides a deeper context for

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681 M. Hinckley & Winward, "Episode 70: What About Worthiness."
682 M. Hinckley & Winward, "Episode 053: We're Good at Showing People the Door."

understanding why communication – both their own and that of the Church – is expressed, interpreted, and sustained in particular ways. It is to this process that we now turn our attention. I begin with the example of "we're not afraid of messiness," illustrating how messy and informal conversations are discursively constructed in contrast to the dominant communication patterns within the physical congregation, and continue with "holy discomfort," showing the religious virtues they attribute to such messy interactions.

6.2.1 "We're Not Afraid of Messiness" – Constructing Mature and Unpolished Conversations

A good place to start our observations on how interaction is framed within the *At Last She Said It* podcast, is the common phrase "it's messy," used to frame everything from religion, people, families, to the conversations happening in the podcast. The podcast is "a process in public," "on-air," Hinckley says, of "us engaging with all of these messy things that we see and feel and understand."[683] Like the tagline "it's complicated,"[684] the term signals an enactment of sitting with and "processing" uncertainties and questions,[685] of "figuring it out as they go"[686] or as Hinckley puts it in their first episode, the "leaking" of "personal" stories.[687] "I'm sure that our stories are going to leak out all over this thing," she says, no matter how hard they "try to plug the holes," to which the duo concludes:

> Winward: I don't know. It sounds messy.
> Hinckley: Eh: well, it is messy, Cynthia. It's messy. That's why we're here.
> Winward: It's going to be messy.[688]

Taking into consideration the other terms that accompany this phrase "messy," we get the sense that when the co-hosts interact on-air, things that were previously "plugged" will be unplugged or "leak out." It is a metaphor for coming up front or being "honest" about the things that they "feel and understand."[689] Ergo the podcast is framed as a place of "messiness" – of processing and figuring things out in an authentic manner.

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683 Susan M. Hinckley & Cynthia Winward, "Episode 104: The Process of Staying," *At Last She Said It,* August 16, 2022.

684 Susan M. Hinckley & Cynthia Winward, "Episode 001: It's Complicated," *At Last She Said It,* April 2, 2020.

685 M. Hinckley & Winward, "Episode 104: The Process of Staying".

686 Susan M. Hinckley & Cynthia Winward, "Episode 004: What Do You Need?" *At Last She Said It,* April 8, 2020.

687 M. Hinckley & Winward, "Episode 001: It's Complicated."

688 M. Hinckley & Winward, "Episode 001: It's Complicated."

689 M. Hinckley & Winward, "Episode 104: The Process of Staying,"

This word is for example used in an image published on their Instagram, displaying a vintage portrait of three women gesturing with their hands while saying, "Touch no dirt!," "Breathe no dirt!" and "See no dirt!" originally an Electrolux commercial but cropped and instead coupled with the duo's own words, "We're not afraid of no messiness. Bring it."[690] But the significance of this term becomes explicit first when the duo describes the form of interactions that dominate in church settings. An example of this can be found in their pilot episode "It's Complicated" where the duo talks about the motivations behind the podcast. When Winward asks her co-host "why" it is "so hard to be honest" in church classes, Hinckley responds that "Mormons" don't really "let it all hang out very well at church."

> Hinckley: I mean, I know that I'm broad brushing it here, but in my experience, um we've been a people who are quite attached to looking like we're all doing things the same way. We like to appear in our Sunday best, right? We don't like to show up um with our messy selves hanging out untucked. We don't like to come to church untucked, [m-m] and so we don't say the things that really would betray the mess and the difficulty and the sorrow in our hearts. Whatever is going on, those things haven't really, historically, for me, belonged at church. I haven't felt like there was a place for [mm] those things at church, and so I just don't say a lot of that. You know, you hear your lip service given to like the Sunday school answers, you know at church, and we all know what they are, and a lot of times in lessons there's room for those answers and there's not [sic] room for that much else, and it's not just in Relief Society, and it's not just with women. I think that members of the Church generally live under quite a code of silence […] generally, I don't think Mormons let it all hang out very well at church.[691]

A prevalent subject in the podcast, demonstrated in this quote, is the shallowness of how church members communicate with each other. This can be seen in the choice of wording. The term "Sunday best" alludes to the alleged window dressing of church participants, i.e., the act of making something look more attractive than it really is. Paying "lip service" in turn implies a shallowness or insincerity of words, seemingly based on the fear of standing out or not looking "the same." Showing up with oneself "tucked" in, then, is necessary to keep one's reputation but seems to imply the neglect of the true "messiness" and "sorrow" of one's "heart." Speaking of this messiness Winward responds, its "risky" – there is "a lot at stake."[692] This way of portraying church as a spectacle for external appearance, can be found in many other episodes as well. For example, in a cross-over episode with *The Faithful Feminists*, Parker depicts the Church

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690 Susan M. Hinckley & Cynthia Winward, "We're Not Afraid of Messiness," *@atlastshesaidit,* January 10, 2023, www.instagram.com/p/CnPEwjQBoOk/, accessed January 4, 2024.

691 M. Hinckley & Winward, "Episode 001: It's Complicated."

692 M. Hinckley & Winward, "Episode 001: It's Complicated."

as a masquerade where members do "this masked dance" with each other.[693] "Within the Church" she says, "we are not able to 1) authentically be ourselves, and 2) meet each other in that authenticity."[694]

If we follow up on Winward's conversation with Tamu Smith on racism that was referenced earlier we find another example of how the podcast enables a type of interaction perceived as missing in church. At one point, Winward describes, their Relief Society initiated a project where each member got to request subjects themselves. They gathered in a "little circle" and "brainstormed" about the various issues they would like to "hear covered" in Relief Society, such as neurodivergence, LGBTQ+ issues, and racism, and "by the time [they] left that day," Winward says, the "chalkboard" was full, and she "had such hope."[695]

> Winward: We're all going to sit in this circle like we're an Alcoholics Anonymous, where we're going to share. We're going to say, "Hi my name is Cynthia," "Hi, my name is Tamu," [°LAUGHING°] and none of it happened. Not one of those lessons happened. And so, I've always wondered, what would that Relief Society lesson on racism have looked like for that particular audience […]
> Smith: […] I remember the lesson. I remember sitting in the circle and as being vulnerable [yup] and talking about that […] I wonder what our ward would look like had we continued with [mmm] the circle because it was very, it was a vulnerable time [mhm] and […] the other day I was thinking, do we even have testimony meetings in Relief Society anymore? [no:::] I actually don't know [no::: so that went away too] so we don't do that anymore, and so, and for a lot of people, that was a safe space to share, you know.
> Winward: Yeah. Yeah. A lot of women are willing to share in a smaller space [yeah] with women. Maybe they don't want to walk up to a podium.[696]

Hopeful, Winward imagined that they were "all going to sit in this circle" like they were an "Alcoholics Anonymous" and where they would all get to "share" – presumably in a similar manner to the therapeutic session common to the AA meetings she references. In other words, there is an ambition to engage in more vulnerable and therapeutic dialogues in church. It would have propelled not only the Relief Society, but as Smith suggests, their entire ward. Winward later recalls asking her bishop what happened to the "circle thing" where they had all of those "lesson ideas written on the board," to

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693 Susan M. Hinckley & Cynthia Winward, "Episode 073: Acknowledging the Elephant: A Conversation About Polygamy," *At Last She Said It,* December 14, 2021.

694 M. Hinckley & Winward, "Episode 073: Acknowledging the Elephant: A Conversation About Polygamy."

695 M. Hinckley & Winward, "Episode 073: Acknowledging the Elephant: A Conversation About Polygamy."

696 M. Hinckley & Winward, "Episode 154: What About Racism? | A Conversation with Tamu Smith."

which he answered "Cynthia, a lot of people come to church to escape all of their problems."[697] Winward realizes that she is seeking for the opposite.

> Winward: I come to church wanting to, maybe have a little bit of cognitive dissonance where I'm stretching and growing and going into that growth zone and having to get rid of old ideas, and think of them in new ways, and I think what he was trying to say to me is people, a lot of people though, come to church as a refuge. They want to leave their problems at home. They want to come here and feel, I don't know, rainbows and unicorns and lollipops, like, this is their happy place where they shouldn't have to be stretched. And I'm like, huh, ok, well, we see the gospel very differently.[698]

Winward does not crave "rainbows and unicorns and lollipops" but a bit of "cognitive dissonance" where she can stretch and grow. In other words, sharing and being open about things that cause "dissonance" is what allows you to evolve. Here we also find a differentiation not dissimilar from the one we saw in the previous chapter, between how the Church communicates and the form of dialogue they are enacting through the podcast. Other members are depicted as wanting "rainbows and unicorns and lollipops" which could be interpreted as clinging to both comfort and immature expectations. Rather than engaging in real issues they are holding tight to their fantasies of rainbows and fairy-tale creatures. The podcast duo, on the contrary, requests "stretching" and "growing" and "getting rid of old ideas" something Winward does by inviting her friend Smith to talk about racism. In conclusion, the Church and its members look backward to seek comfort, and the podcast hosts look forward by daring to stretch themselves. Taken together, they reproduce a dichotomy that infuses the podcast affordance with progression and Church with stagnation. The liveness of their conversation then, becomes an important part of subverting this retrenchment.

Besides through audio, the other of the podcast's liveness is also constructed transmedially, through pictures on their Instagram. In relation to an episode called "Upset Instagram Follower," the Church is for example described on their Instagram as practicing "toxic positivity."[699] They have an "everything is awesome culture" in Church, Winward writes, a description coupled with a vintage image of a woman smiling next to a text saying "It's fine. We're fine. Everything is *fine*."[700] Because "denying someone's experiences" is a "form of gaslighting" happening in their church, Winward explains in

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697 M. Hinckley & Winward, "Episode 154: What About Racism? | A Conversation with Tamu Smith."
698 M. Hinckley & Winward, "Episode 154: What About Racism? | A Conversation with Tamu Smith."
699 Susan M. Hinckley & Cynthia Winward, "It's fine. We're fine. Everything is *fine*," *@atlastshesaidit,* May 7, 2021, www.instagram.com/p/COljID8BK0E/, accessed December 24, 2024.
700 M. Hinckley & Winward, "It's fine. We're fine. Everything is *fine*."

the post, they felt strongly about addressing it on the podcast.[701] It is "ok not to be fine," "ok to struggle," she says, "no need to sugar coat them," instead "show up as yourself."[702] Through the episode they are referencing they also enact their own vulnerability by processing or "work[ing] through" their own feelings in regard to a comment given by an "upset Instagram follower" who told them that they should "build everyone up" rather than create "doubt" and "finding fault."[703] In other words, they "call out" a culture of perfectionism and toxic positivity by "showing up" as their authentic selves on the podcast, something any "adult," as Winward suggests in the following quote, should be capable of doing.

> Winward: I don't know how to share pain and have it sound like a greeting card [mh]. I just don't. Things that are hard, they're just going to sound hard and they're going to sound uncomfortable. We are adults. Can we not act like adults? […] [Patrick Mason says] "first, I fear for what I call the juvenile-ization of Mormonism, or the EFYification of the Church [laughing]…When it's adults in the room, let's respect one another enough to talk like adults. Most people can handle complexity and nuance. We can stretch beyond what we learned in seminary though we are so rarely invited to." [mh] I feel like that's what we're trying to do on this very podcast is we are inviting women to stretch [to stretch yeah] and talk about the things past EFY […] and I love the EFY. I went like four years in a row [wow] saved all my own money. I know I loved it, but at some point, you grow up and you have to talk about the complexity. And that's what you and I are trying to do [right] and it doesn't have to be dripping in sugar.[704]

The quote from Mormon studies scholar and Latter-day Saint Patrick Mason about the Church being a prolonged summer camp (Especially for Youth) signals a sentiment similar to the "rainbows and unicorns and lollipops" described earlier by Winward. Being able to "handle complexity and nuance" is associated with adulthood or maturity, something seemingly not encouraged in the Church – "we can stretch beyond what we learned in seminary though we are so rarely invited to." While she "loves" summer camp, Winward adds, eventually you must "grow up," meaning "you have to talk about the complexity," and that is "not going to sound like a greeting card," or "drip in sugar," she says, its "going to sound uncomfortable." Another result of this quote is that the podcast purpose or "what [they are] trying to do on this very podcast" is chained to the things attached to a post-summer camp adulthood or "the things past EFY," which as

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701 M. Hinckley & Winward, "It's fine. We're fine. Everything is *fine*."
702 M. Hinckley & Winward, "It's fine. We're fine. Everything is *fine*."
703 Susan M. Hinckley & Cynthia Winward, "Episode 049: Upset Instagram Follower," *At Last She Said It*, May 4, 2021.
704 M. Hinckley & Winward, "Episode 049: Upset Instagram Follower."

we learnt in the same quote includes being "uncomfortable," handling "complexity and nuance" and "stretching."

6.2.2 "Holy Discomfort" – Constructing Liveness as a Religious Virtue

The examples explored above demonstrate what I would describe as a perceived hegemony of speaking in certainty, of maintaining status quo and perfectionism, against which the performance and framing of liveness is counter-posed. As readers might have noticed, such framings tend to look at podcasting or the conversations held within it as spiritually mature in comparison with the type of interaction found in church. In the following pages we will take a closer look at how this type of framing can be understood also as a form of religious virtue. To do so, we will use an episode called "Holy Discomfort" as a springboard and interrogate it alongside other episodes with similar content. In the introduction to the episode, Hinckley and Winward address the title as a "repurposing" of words, and as part of a habitual reclaiming and reframing labels that have negative connotations.[705] That "sums up" what they are going to talk about today Winward explains, about "repurposing discomfort."[706] But in the practice of contemplating over and repurposing the word discomfort they also add religious virtues to it. A cornerstone to this virtue is the word "liminality." It denotes "kind of an uncomfortable place," they explain, a "place of transition, a place of waiting, a place of not knowing."[707] It is like a "hallway," they add, "a time between what was and what's next," the "rests between notes and music" which creates the melody, and the "teenage years" that although "awkward" allow us to "come out changed."[708] This definition of liminality is a continuation of how it appears in earlier episodes. In the episode on faith crisis, referred to in the previous chapter, called "When the Wheels Come Off," Hinckley quotes best-selling author and Franciscan priest Richard Rohr's book *Everything Belongs* where he shares his thoughts on liminality.

> Hinckley: He says this "We have to allow ourselves to be drawn into sacred space, into liminality […] All transformation takes place there. We have to move out of business as usual and remain on the threshold. 'Limin' in Latin, where we are betwixt and between, there, the old world is left behind, but we're not sure of the new one yet. That's a good space. Get there often and stay as long as you

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705 Susan M. Hinckley & Cynthia Winward, "Episode 82: Holy Discomfort," *At Last She Said It,* February 15, 2022.

706 M. Hinckley & Winward, "Episode 82: Holy Discomfort."

707 M. Hinckley & Winward, "Episode 82: Holy Discomfort."

708 M. Hinckley & Winward, "Episode 82: Holy Discomfort."

> can by whatever means possible. It's the realm where God can best get at us because we are out of the way. In sacred space the old world is able to fall apart, and the new world is able to be revealed. If we don't find liminal space in our lives, we start idolizing normalcy. We end up believing it's the only reality, and our lives shrivel."[709]

To put it differently, liminality, or the position of in-between is a sacred space. It is also emphasized as a "good place" where one should stay as often and long as possible. It is a space purposefully sought out to be close to God, and to strive spiritually. Rohr is quoted as saying that it is the "realm where God can best get at us." Returning to the episode on Holy Discomfort, this space is particularly difficult for Latter-day Saints to uphold themselves in.

> Hinckley: So, what is so scary about discomfort, specifically for Latter-day Saints? [LAUGHING] Because I feel like something is. I feel like that is a scary thing. It goes in the same category as things like contention [ye::s] yes, the stuff we just want to avoid, like if we're doing it right, we won't be feeling this way, [yes] you know. I don't know. As a member of the Church, I grew up fearing the discomfort of liminal space. I think because certainty and direction are valued so highly in our culture, [mhm] so highly. But I have come to believe that I was sort of shortchanged by that aspect of my Mormonism. It kept me afraid of the growth zone [mhm].[710]

Discomfort, Hinckley explains, is usually something "scary" for Latter-day Saints or something that should be "avoided." The reason for "fearing the discomfort of liminal space" is that "certainty and direction are valued so highly" within the Church. Closely related to this tendency, the duo suggests, are the latter-day phrases a "stupor of thought" and a "burning in the bosom." These phrases reference Doctrine and Covenants Section 9 where God is speaking through Joseph Smith to his scribe Oliver Cowdery as he has expressed a will to be able to translate the words of God himself. The section begins by saying that Cowdery must ask God "if it be right" and that if it is right "your bosom shall burn within you" and continues with "if it be not right…you shall have a stupor of thought."[711] In a 2007 General Conference speech, Richard G. Scott said "that [stupor of thought], for me, is an unsettling discomforting feeling" and if you are "sensitive to the promptings of the Spirit, one of two things will certainly occur" either "the stupor of thought will come, indicating an improper choice" or "the burning in the

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709 Susan M. Hinckley & Cynthia Winward, "Episode 42: When the Wheels Come Off," *At Last She Said It,* February 2, 2021.

710 M. Hinckley & Winward, "Episode 82: Holy Discomfort."

711 *Doctrine and Covenants*, 9:8–9.

bosom" which confirms "that your choice was correct."[712] Or as Winward was "taught her entire life," when you "have that stupor of thought, that is how you know something is wrong" and when you get "warm and fuzzy feelings" that is when you know you are "doing it right."[713] In the following quote, however, "discomfort," "stupor of thought" and "liminality" are brought together and re-interpreted as signaling that "you're on the right path."

> Winward: Well, I saw it through new eyes this week, as I kept thinking about that stupor of thought, because I think that's the number one reason we're afraid of discomfort.
>
> Hinckley: I think you're right. And I'm thinking about a stupor of thought. That's an interesting turn of phrase, but I'm thinking what better description, really, of being in a liminal space, right? Your answers have gone out the window, [yes] you kind of got nothing for a minute. You got nothing, and you just gotta wait for it to come to you. You'll know when you see the right thing, right? Yes. It's not here right now. That's a stupor of thought. And yeah, I think it may mean you're on the right path.[714]

There are in effect two feelings a Latter-day Saint learns to acknowledge when growing up. One is the "warm and fuzzy" comfortable feeling indicating that something is right or of good report, and another is the "uncomfortable" "stupor of thought" indicating that something is wrong. Using Winward's words, such dichotomous thinking is "the number one reason we're afraid of discomfort." But by growing up in fear of it, Hinckley reflects, she was "shortchanged" and robbed of its "growth zone" potential. Eventually she "decided that avoiding liminal discomfort" was "actually counter to how we're meant to progress in life."[715] "Certainty," as they put it elsewhere had "run its course" and no longer provided sustenance.[716] Why? Because you cannot really evolve from a place of certainty as she expresses it in the following quote.

> Hinckley: It seems to me that it's pretty hard to be in any kind of real growth zone when you are completely certain of something [yeah] What else is needed when you have it all right? [Winward: mhm] What else are you looking for? How are you pursuing spiritual growth when you already feel like your spiritual life is pretty nailed down? So, although doubt and uncertainty might feel scary, when you're used to sitting in a place of certainty, I actually feel that when you're moving

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712 Richard G. Scott, "Using the Supernatural Gift of Prayer," *General Conference,* April 2007, www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/2007/04?lang=eng, accessed February 15, 2025.

713 M. Hinckley & Winward, "Episode 82: Holy Discomfort."

714 M. Hinckley & Winward, "Episode 82: Holy Discomfort."

715 M. Hinckley & Winward, "Episode 82: Holy Discomfort."

716 Susan M. Hinckley & Cynthia Winward, "Episode 011: Women on the Edge of Inside," *At Last She Said It,* May 19, 2020.

> into those things, you're taking a big step forward in some ways. You're willing to allow new things. Opening yourself to further light and knowledge – "further light and knowledge" [Winward: exactly::, good way to put it] is a phrase that we use in our church – and how can we be open to further light and knowledge when we already know everything? so I feel like it's important to validate [Renshaw: yes] the concepts of doubt…[717]

What happens in this quote is that the growth and stretching mentioned earlier become discursively linked to both doubt and spiritual development. The expression "further light and knowledge" is associated with the notion of both continuous revelation and spiritual progression suggesting that individuals can progressively gain more truth and understanding as they remain faithful or by "staying on the covenant path."[718] But you cannot arrive at a "real growth zone" Hinckley says, when you are "completely certain." Doubt, on the contrary is the necessity of enlightenment, wisdom or "further light and knowledge," a statement that counters a Church rhetoric, where doubt is what further light and knowledge are meant to eradicate. As Elder Robert D. Hales expressed in a 1994 General Conference address, "knowledge abiding in the heart leaves no room for doubt."[719] In effect, doubt also metamorphoses into the progressivity or "forward" movement mentioned both here and in earlier quotes. In an earlier passage Hinckley says that "accepting this condition is a necessary part of maturity."[720] Progression and ambiguity, then, go hand in hand. The height of re-purposing the word discomfort as a religious virtue or something "holy," however, comes when it is interpreted as a "fertile ground for the spirit."

> Hinckley: So, then for me, the question becomes how are we cheating ourselves? Kind of individually and collectively as a church? How are we cheating ourselves when we let our fear of discomfort keep us from experiencing it? […] Well, one of the ways that I think we're kind of shortchanging ourselves when we skip discomfort for whatever reason, fear, or something else, uh, I feel like we miss opportunities for the spirit to work. [mmm] Some discomfort is fertile ground for the spirit to work. I think it's like what you were saying about a stupor of thought. If you skip the stupor of thought, how is the inspiration or idea going to come to you? [mhm] How's the right thing going to come to you, right? In a liminal space we learn how to listen. And we learn how to read clues, [mm] because if we're moving through darkness, then we're moving by feel, and by faith Cynthia. And that's a very different kind of rocking, right? [I love that image] I think that that means that the spirit hangs out in liminality. [mhm]

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717 M. Hinckley & Winward, "Episode 011: Women on the Edge of Inside."

718 M. Hinckley & Winward, "Episode 82: Holy Discomfort."

719 Robert D. Hales, "How You Can Know," *General Conference,* October, 1994, www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/new-era/2002/08/how-you-can-know?lang=eng, accessed November 29, 2024.

720 M. Hinckley & Winward, "Episode 011: Women on the Edge of Inside."

> That's where the spirit lives. And this is, of course, opposite of how I grew up thinking about the spirit. I grew up thinking that the spirit needed worthiness and certainty to thrive. That, you know, it wasn't going to be with me. It needed me to be standing peacefully, or it wouldn't be able to find me and I just, I'm not sure that I was thinking about that right.[721]

While interpreted as evidence of something being "improper," "discomforting" and as the opposite of a "correct" choice, Hinckley and Winward approach the joint terms "discomfort," "liminality," and "stupor of thought" as necessary parts of the Spirit's workings. Repeating Winward's earlier description of "warm and fuzzy" feelings, Hinckley "grew up thinking" that the spirit "needed [her] to be standing peacefully, or it wouldn't be able to find [her]." In re-interpreting or repurposing the fear of discomfort, however, they turn it upside down – making its previous "negative" qualities into something positive or "holy." The stupor of thought is illustrated instead as a place of "darkness" and "liminality," a place where the spirit "hangs out." And "If you skip the stupor of thought" Hinckley says, "how is the inspiration or idea going to come to you?" The description that the Church is "cheating itself" of the spirit by fearing discomfort and by believing it requires "worthiness and certainty" to be found by it, fortifies the connection between doubt and progress – again emphasizing the Church as stagnating in its spiritual maturing process.

To round off this part of the subchapter I want to return to the phrase "sitting with" introduced briefly when observing how the podcast duo performed liveness, but here by observing instead how the phrase is used to frame the meaning of those same conversations. In their continued dialogue on how to recognize or enact holy discomfort the duo reflects on the various "uncomfortable spaces" that one "encounters" in life that may be transformative. The first aspect of holy discomfort is "sitting with things we don't understand," which as Hinckley explains, means moving into "liminal space" and to "surrender to the fact that you don't know something." [722] Reiterating what we observed earlier, this is "hard and scary" in a Latter-day Saint context, Hinckley suggests, because they are "not supposed to surrender" to the things they "don't know." They are a "church of knowers" as Winward responds.[723] The description of holy discomfort continues by emphasizing various other "sitting with" scenarios, such as "sitting with emotions," "sitting in opposition," "sitting with the unknown," or as the following quote demonstrates, "sitting with questions."

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721 M. Hinckley & Winward, "Episode 82: Holy Discomfort."
722 M. Hinckley & Winward, "Episode 82: Holy Discomfort."
723 M. Hinckley & Winward, "Episode 82: Holy Discomfort."

> Hinckley: Seeking answers to our questions in the Church context is kind of generally thought of as just receiving confirmation of a set of answers that's already predetermined, right? So that doesn't leave a lot of space for sitting with questions. […] And if you're demonized for having questions, if the questions then get weighed down with loaded words like doubt or laziness [ohhh], the discomfort of the questions themselves can be made almost unbearable because then you're carrying this added weight of fear and shame and guilt for having them [°yeah°]. It's easier to just ignore the questions, right? […] But in reality, I believe questions are one of God's favorite tools. We talked about it in revelation, [mhm:] It begins with big things come from questions. It's the way Jesus used to teach, [right] right? He asked questions. So, questions open space within us and within our experiences for God to move in and maybe teach us something [yes::][724]

While "sitting with questions" might be discouraged and even "demonized" among Latter-day Saints, the duo suggests, it is simultaneously akin to what is taught in Church about the importance of asking questions. The "revelations" given to Joseph Smith began, as Hinckley describes, with him asking "questions." It is also the manner through which Jesus taught – he was as they put it elsewhere "a master question maker,"[725] he "asked black and white questions but then answered them in very non-dualistic ways."[726] What we find, then, is that the earlier observed performance of "sitting with" intertwines with the discursive framing of "sitting with" presented here. In the quote below, this relationship becomes even more intricate.

> Hinckley: discomfort invites us to be open and present (.) kind of pulls us into the moment by making us aware in our bodies of what we're feeling or experiencing [mhm] in our hearts and minds. Sometimes we don't know what's going on with us until suddenly we find ourselves crying and then your body is telling you something, right? [right] […] If we're willing to pay attention to it, it's an invitation to listen to our own experiences for a minute, to look for clues about ourselves and our lives (.)[…] You step back and you pay attention to what's going on in this moment in my body. What am I feeling? Why am I feeling it? […] Because discomfort is a messenger, basically [yeah] it's a messenger from our lives and from our bodies to us. Pay attention. Pay attention here. I'm trying to teach you something. That's what discomfort is […]
> Winward: […] it requires leaning into the present moment. Instead of running away from it, frightened and screaming, we have to lean into the holy part.[727]

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724 M. Hinckley & Winward, "Episode 82: Holy Discomfort."

725 Susan M. Hinckley & Cynthia Winward, "Episode 031: Can I Ask a Question?" *At Last She Said It*, November 17, 2020.

726 Susan M. Hinckley & Cynthia Winward, "Episode 074: The Parable of the Laborers – Grace in Action," *At Last She Said It,* December 21, 2021.

727 M. Hinckley & Winward, "Episode 82: Holy Discomfort."

What we learn here is that part of what makes "sitting with" discomfort holy, is to be present in the moment. Hinckley's description of discomfort as something that "pulls us into the moment" and makes us "aware in our bodies" parallels the performance of liveness seen earlier where they were present with each other's emotions and uncertainties. It thus suggests a reverence for the present that is quintessential to the concept of liveness. In other words, there seems to be a convergence between the performance of "sitting with" observed earlier, where they pause to reflect or take a moment during interactions with each other and their listeners, and the framing of "sitting with" seen here, framed as a willingness to stay firm or pause in situations of discomfort. The unresolved questions "solving nothing" observed earlier, experience a full circle moment when such acts are also framed as "holy."

6.2.3 Analytical Summary of Discursive Framing

Through the examples above we can add to our previous answer that the podcast not only affords an unscripted and intimate type of dialogue but that those interactions are also framed as enabling a form of positive "messiness." *Nodal points* such as "it's messy" and "it's complicated" are often used to describe the type of conversations Hinckley and Winward have through the podcast. These nodal points are followed by a number of *discursive moments* explaining that messy and complicated means having interactions that are not "sugar coated." It is a type of conversation where they can "show up" as their "authentic self," "process," their thoughts openly, "figure [things] out as they go," "leak" their personal stories, and show "vulnerability."

Such moments are counter-posed against an *antagonistic other* carried by *discursive moments* depicting Church as avoidant and repressive. For many members, the Church is envisioned as a "refuge" and a "happy place" teeming with "rainbows and unicorns and lollipops," where personal troubles are "[left] at home." It is perceived as a sanctuary where members are not expected to be challenged or inconvenienced – a place "where they shouldn't have to be stretched." The prevailing sentiment is that Latter-day Saints are not adept at being open within the Church confines, striving to maintain an appearance of uniformity: they "don't let it all hang out very well at church," because they are "attached to looking like [they're] all doing things the same way." They go to church dressed in their "Sunday best," because they "don't like to show up with [their] messy selves hanging out untucked." As a result, they refrain from voicing the real tribulations that "betray the mess and the difficulty and the sorrow in [their] hearts." Instead, they offer "lip service" to superficial "Sunday school answers" and participate in a "masked dance." This charade inhibits members' capacity to "authentically be

[themselves]" and "meet each other in that authenticity." Ultimately, it fosters a "toxically positive" atmosphere, an "everything is awesome culture," where any sign of discontent or sadness must be packaged as neatly as a "greeting card."

This contrasting position establishes a *chain of equivalences*, positioning the podcast as a beacon of progressive and therapeutic interaction, countering the stagnating and suppressive atmosphere often found in church settings. In her dialogue with Tamu Smith, Winward recalls how the "vulnerable," "sitting in this circle," "Alcoholics Anonymous" style of conversations once typical at "testimony meetings" were discontinued in their ward in 2018. The bishop rationalized this change by suggesting that "people come to church to escape all of their problems," a sentiment echoed by Winward's description of members seeking "rainbows and unicorns and lollipops" at church. Instead Winward expresses a longing for a church experience that incites "a little bit of cognitive dissonance," where she can be "stretching and growing." This mirrors the aspirations she and Hinckley have for their podcast, aiming to create a space where women can discuss "complex" and "nuanced" topics beyond the simplistic "EFY-ification of the church." Their introductory episode, titled "It's Complicated," explicitly outlines the podcast's goals, to voice the unspoken, embracing the "mess" and "leaking" of genuine self-expression in stark contrast to the Church's norm where members "don't let it all hang out."

The podcast is thus portrayed as a therapeutic space, where "messiness" and "sorrow" are acknowledged and embraced, challenging listeners to step into the "uncomfortable" and confront "adult," painful realities. While the Church often enforces a façade of formality and superficiality, the podcast offers a venue for candid, informal interaction. It is a place where hosts and guests can finally articulate deep truths, allowing their authentic selves to "leak out" in discussions that address the complex, "messy" issues often skirted in church dialogues. From this, one could infer a contrast between superficiality and sincerity, where the podcast's open-ended discussions offer a corrective to the performative nature of church dialogue.

The religious significance of this type of interaction is accentuated by observing the *nodal point* "discomfort," which is amplified through its association with *discursive moments* that imbue it with virtuous and spiritual qualities, transforming it into something "holy." This transformation begins with the concept of "liminality" – a state often described as a "place of transition," "waiting," and "not knowing." It is akin to an "[awkward] hallway" that, despite its discomfort, facilitates profound personal changes. This idea is further enriched by their interpretation of Franciscan priest Richard Rohr, who refers to liminality as a "sacred space" where transformation occurs, a place to "move out of business as usual," to become "betwixt and between," and to "leave the old world

behind." Rohr celebrates it as a "good place," advising to "stay as long as you can." This perspective stands in sharp contrast to the view allegedly prevalent among Latter-day Saints, who often feel "scared" of discomfort due to a high value placed on "certainty and direction." Additional *discursive moments* highlight their identity as "a church of knowers," who are generally wary of uneasy feelings or "stupors of thought" – traditionally understood as indicators from the Holy Spirit that something is amiss. However, this concept is reinterpreted here to suggest that such uneasiness can be a "fertile ground for the spirit." The discussion of "discomfort" progresses through the phrase "sitting with," which emphasizes the importance of "sitting with things you don't understand," "sitting with emotions," "sitting in opposition," "sitting with the unknown," and "sitting with questions." These practices are often "feared" and "shamed" within the Latter-day Saint community, despite the irony that their faith itself purportedly started with a boy's questions. Lastly, the chain ends in a manner that invites an open convergence between performance and framing, by attributing holy discomfort with staying firm or sitting with uneasiness in "the moment," a practice the speakers also embodied in their live performances.

In other words, both their performance and their framing of sitting with discomfort and questions compete in a *discursive field* of Mormonism over *floating signifiers* such as spiritual progression and the Holy Ghost. Most Latter-day Saints would probably agree that spiritual progression is a fundamental part of their faith, but how to progress is as demonstrated here, up to debate. Much like the previous chapter where the duo suggested that "care" or "ministering" was trumped by the Church's focus on efficiency, they seem to imply here that the same type of proclivities trumps progression. To put it differently, focusing too much on "knowing" for the sake of worthiness risks curbing the goal of eternal progression, which instead demands the capacity to dwell in uncertainty. Hence the discursive framing of liveness emerges as a contestation of not only communicational patterns in a church setting but of whether or not the Church lives up to its own promises of spiritual evolution.

This, finally, allows Hinckley and Winward themselves to occupy the subject position of practitioners of the very "holy discomfort" that they envision. They emerge as virtuously messy subjects who sit with their discomfort, questions, uncertainties and emotions in a constructive and supportive manner. "It's complicated" and they are there to "support each other while they figure it out."

6.3 Performing Liveness: *The Faithful Feminists*

We now shift focus to another podcast, *The Faithful Feminists*. Here, our first focus centers on the interactive dynamics facilitated by the live setting, which will be illustrated through four examples. We begin with "just two friends talking about scripture," demonstrating the casual and playful exchange that occasionally permeates their scripture studies; "this might sound irreverent" showcasing expressions of spontaneous candidness; "this quote always gets me," illuminating live expressions of emotions; and "moving the text into action," depicting the cultivation of co-present reading experiences.

6.3.1 "Just Two Friends Talking About Scripture" – Casual and Playful Exchange

An iTunes review and the podcast duo's response to it serve as a good way to introduce the type of interaction conducted in *The Faithful Feminists*. "We had someone leave us a review on iTunes a couple of weeks ago" Parker explains, which said that "they didn't enjoy the podcast" because "it's just two friends talking to each other about the scriptures."[728]

> Parker: £They did get that right £ [laughing], like literally exactly what this is. Two friends talking to each other about the scriptures. And that's the whole reason we started this podcast because we wanted to:: show our listeners what it means to work through the scriptures in real time. And sometimes we're able to come to this episode, totally prepared um with notes written now know exactly what we want to talk about. We might be feeling especially passionate or especially touched by what happened in the text that week. But other times, like this week, we show up with, like, a half-baked outline [mhm] and a prayer that we could offer you something of value. […] that's the magic of coming together to talk about the scriptures. That's the magic of having someone to discuss these really nuanced, spiritual ideas with, and so if you think this podcast is just a bunch of girls talking about their scriptures, like, that's exactly what it is [LAUGHTER] And we encourage you to do the same.[729]

According to Parker, the reviewer is exactly right in that their podcast is two friends talking about scripture but fails to recognize the opportunities inherent in this live format. They are hashing out their thoughts on scripture "in real time," and "work[ing]" it "through" together, and while that might sometimes result in a "half-baked outline"

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728 Channing Parker & Elise Poll, "Barrenness and Broken Bread (3 Nephi 20–26)," *The Faithful Feminists,* October 12, 2020.

729 Parker & Poll, "Barrenness and Broken Bread (3 Nephi 20–26)."

and a "prayer" that their audience get something out of it, it can also be pure "magic." Being "totally prepared" and "know[ing] exactly what [they] want to talk about" could be used as a bridge to explain that their conversational style is more formal than what we have observed thus far, or more specifically has a slower turn-taking. This is an effect of the genre, i.e., of doing exegesis or reading and interpreting scripture, where an extensive material – such as scripture, research articles, books etc. – are presented and elaborated on. Conducting this live, however, allows for a temporal co-presence,[730] which invites unanticipated and seemingly unplanned performances to take place.

For example, while *The Faithful Feminists* podcast often engages in intellectual discussions, they balance these with moments of casual and playful exchange. Reading passages from scripture, in the case of Latter-day Saints, often means reading in a language with linguistic similarities to the King James Version (KJV). The KJV has for several reasons been used as the Church's official bible since the inception of the Latter-day Saint movement,[731] and King James English is therefore also used in Latter-day scriptures such as The Book of Mormon read from in the following quote. The use of the KJV can impart an archaic impression today due to its distinctive linguistic style, which mirrors the early 17th-century English in which it was composed. As hosts sometimes paraphrase and comment on scriptural verses with a vernacular language, the resulting performance can be quite humorous. For example, when the duo discusses a chapter from The Book of Mormon where Jesus confronts the Nephites for not recognizing the message from Samuel the Lamanite,[732] Poll reads in the voice of a frustrated Jesus.

> Poll: Jesus comes, and he says to Nephi basically, like, "what the heck Nephi!?" this is verse 9, "I command my servants Samuel the Lamanite that he should testify unto this people that at the day that the father should glorify his name in me that there would be many saints who should arise from the dead and should appear unto many and should minister unto them and he said unto them, was it not so?" [°laughing°] and his disciplines […]
> Parker: £ Jesus is, like, throwing it <u>down</u> £ [LAUGHING]
> Poll: Yeah, Jesus is like, "let me get this straight. I commanded Samuel to do this, right everyone?" And then the disciples answer him, "yea Lord Samuel did prophesy according to thy words, and they were all fulfilled." And Jesus says

730 Euritt, *Podcasting as an Intimate Medium*, p. 14.

731 Philip L. Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible: The Place of Latter-day Saints in American Religion,* New York: Oxford University Press, 2013.

732 The Book of Mormon chronicles the history of an ancient American people who descended from the prophet Lehi. Inspired by divine revelations, Lehi led his family from Jerusalem in 600 B.C. to the promised land in what is now known as Central America. Upon their arrival, Lehi's sons split into two factions: the Nephites, portrayed as righteous, and the Lamanites, depicted as wicked. The text explores their ensuing conflicts, highlighting the trials and final triumph of the Nephites.

> back, "Howbeit that you have not written this thing? [°laughing°] That many saints did arise and appear unto many and did administer unto them?" Right? Then Jesus is like, "then why didn't you write it down!?" [°laughing°]
> Parker: [laughing] Sorry, This is just too much keep going!
> Poll: […] "and it came to pass that Nephi remembered that this thing had not been written" [laughing] Like "oh shoot, I forg… Oh yeah, yeah, I forgot, I forgot that Samuel was around too." "And it came to pass that Jesus commanded that it should be written therefore it was written according as he commanded." […] it might suggest that maybe Nephi left Samuel the Lamanite out on purpose. [laughing] And Jesus is like "nope!"
> Parker: […] I'm sorry, you did that so well, can you just like read the scriptures for us from here on out? Like I would pay to have you read the scriptures on the LDS tools apps. Like if I could just select speaker, I would say Elise [laughing]
> Poll: Which means you'd get like sassy, sarcastic, and a little dry.[733]

In this quote we find a variation of paraphrasing where Poll mixes an everyday vernacular – "what the heck Nephi?!" – with King James-inspired language in one and the same sentence. The quote is also read in a joking fashion, with Poll reading or enacting a frustrated Jesus while portraying Nephi as clueless – "oh shoot, I forg… Oh yeah, yeah, I forgot." Parker is heard laughing in the background, and eventually excusing herself saying "sorry, this is just too much keep going" and later responding that she would "pay to have [Poll] read the scriptures on the LDS tools apps," to which Poll adds that "you'd get [a reader who is] like sassy, sarcastic, and a little dry."

The neglect of Samuel the Lamanite also has a more sinister meaning. The story, the duo argues, can be read as an example of how voices from the margins are ignored. The duo suggests in the same episode that one can distinguish between *a* prophet and *the* prophet, the latter being someone like Nephi "who has been given institutional authority and is kind of recognized at the institutional level of being the prophet" and the former someone who like Samuel the Lamanite "cries repentance to the people" and "emerges from the heart of the people, from the least of these, from those on the margins."[734] The story of Samuel the Lamanite, then, is made to represent a critique against a hierarchal system of power where the voices of "the people" and especially marginalized voices, are silenced. Jesus comes to remind *the* prophet – which is Nephi in the scriptural context and prophets of the Church in contemporary setting – that the stories of *a* prophet – Samuel the Lamanite – must not be forgotten. The prophets from the margins, as they refer to it, must be recorded – "howbeit that you have not written this thing" as Jesus chastises his disciples in the earlier quote. In the conversation that follows, the

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733 Channing Parker & Elise Poll, "Messages From the Margins (Helaman 13–16)," *The Faithful Feminists,* August 31, 2020.

734 Parker & Poll, "Messages From the Margins (Helaman 13–16)."

duo recognizes – through continued jesting – the significance this has for them as women. It is a "hopeful message," Poll explains, that their voices will matter – "hey didn't Elise and Channing have this experience?" as Jesus and God are imagined saying, "let's write that down," or perhaps it is "Rizzo Heavenly Mother" who keeps note of them, as Parker adds with "sass."[735] Everyone has the ability, they explain, for personal revelation and to use that to "call for repentance" even though the leadership does not recognize as authoritative other voices than *the* prophet. Conducting theological conversations in temporal co-presence with each other then,[736] allows for serious topics to be tackled through playfulness and colloquialism.

6.3.2 "This Might Sound Irreverent" – Spontaneous Candidness

Another affordance of hashing out their thoughts on-air is the show of candidness, sometimes hinted at through phrases like "this probably sounds a little irreverent but" followed by candid remarks like "wow God is really having a temper tantrum today. Do you need a popsicle or a lollipop? Let's see how your attitude changes after you've had some lunch."[737] For example, in the continuation of their conversation about prophets from the margin, the idea of Jesus modelling a kind of spiritual independence is expressed through sarcasm and curse words later bleeped out.

> Poll: I think Jesus is like, "uh hello I am a prophet from the margin" ((impersonating unbothered/laid back)) Is that what you think too? […] So, I think Jesus is all about that. I think Jesus is about the everyday-ness of prophets. I think Jesus is about encouraging people to listen to the words that come to their heart which is exactly what Samuel the Lamanite does and as you align yourself with God and goodness and godliness I think Jesus says like, yeah go for it. Speak out against these systems of oppression! Find the least of these and care for them and make your voice heard.
>
> Parker: I agree, and I think going along with that, like, I never once saw Jesus going on his knees to the Pharisees and being like, "please accept me. Please recognize my authority like don't you know I'm the son of God?" ((impersonating self-pitying voice)) No. He's like, "I'm the son of God what is wrong with you ****** [LAUGHTER] I will bleep myself but.

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735 Parker & Poll, "Messages From the Margins (Helaman 13–16)."

736 Euritt, *Podcasting as an Intimate Medium*, p. 14.

737 Channing Parker & Elise Poll, "Challenging Chastity With at Last She Said It (Doctrine & Covenants 63)," *The Faithful Feminists,* June 6, 2021.

> Poll: Yeah that's awesome. Yeah it's not a permission asking. And thinking about what you had shared last week about Heavenly Mother, it's not about asking for permission it's about recognizing that the power is already within us.[738]

The terms "sarcasm" and "satire" aptly describe the interaction, where a slightly mocking or humorous tone underscores the point that Jesus did not seek approval from the Pharisees. For example, Poll playfully remarks, "uh hello I am a prophet from the margin," adopting an unbothered demeanor. Additionally, Parker's language is direct and assertive, notably when describing Jesus's stance on his identity without seeking permission, saying, "I'm the son of God; what is wrong with you *****." This censored segment of the dialogue showcases an informal and candid style, departing from the formal or sanitized language typically expected in scriptural studies. Consequently, as the duo reinterprets prophecy and authority through the perspective of marginalized voices, they demonstrate a straightforward and unfiltered communication style.

Most often, however, the show of candidness is directed at the *Come Follow Me* manual. One of several episodes where a critique against the manual itself is articulated, is "Laying Down the Law of Chastity, Justice and Polygamy" where the duo engages with The Book of Mormon, Jacob chapter 1–4. The narrative tells of when the prophet Jacob calls out the men of the Nephite group for their infidelity. The significance of these chapters Parker and Poll believe, is the fact that a prophet of God stands up for women and holds men accountable for their wrongdoings against them. Jacob displays a "radical action" given in a Nephite culture that was "hierarchal and patriarchal."[739] He is "willing to shame the men in front of the women and children, an action that levels the power structure" the duo explains.[740] There is a "subtext" in this narrative that calls for "repentance," one "in which people with more social power are being held accountable to those with less."[741] Despite this promise, the *Come Follow Me* manual asks its readers to focus on the magnification of one's callings and chastity. In her reaction to this, Parker fluidly transitions between various facets of everyday informal language, such as candidness, emotion and paraphrasing.

> Parker: Are you kidding me!? This is one of the best social justice/feminist sermons we've gotten in our sacred texts ever, anywhere. And out of all of that, you got "magnifying our callings?" like, what? [LAUGHING] I just, I can't like even wrap my brain around it. And so, I just, I'm so:: I'm honestly annoyed, because (.) we lose so much, like, think about it. […] there are people […] who need

738 Parker & Poll, "Messages From the Margins (Helaman 13–16)."
739 Channing Parker & Elise Poll, "Laying Down the Law of Chastity, Justice and Polygamy (Jacob 1–4)," *The Faithful Feminists,* March 9, 2020.
740 Parker & Poll, "Laying Down the Law of Chastity, Justice and Polygamy (Jacob 1–4)."
741 Parker & Poll, "Laying Down the Law of Chastity, Justice and Polygamy (Jacob 1–4)."

> these chapters, because they speak to them. […] Growing up as a child in a home that was abusive on every level, this is why these are some of my favorite chapters ever. I needed someone. I needed to see that God would stick ~ up for me, that God would stick up for the abused and the forgotten ~ and the manipulated. I needed to know that someone was looking out for me. And part of me is so in love with these chapters, because here it is right here, God, and God's prophet says, "I'm going to show up for you. I'm going to level the power structure and give you a voice, because I know that me giving authority and power behind your voice is going to make the change." […] I don't want [these chapters] to be lost and forgotten underneath a palatable message of "Let's magnify our calling" [impersonating, high pitched] […]
> Poll: °This is so good. I'm feeling fired up°[742]

The expression "are you kidding me!?" could be described in relation to our previous discussion as a form of candid, informal communication. Much like the sarcastic or satirical remarks we discussed earlier, this phrase can serve to emphasize a speaker's reaction in a direct and emotionally expressive manner. The speech also shifts back and forth between the former and expressions of sadness as Parker recalls the emotional significance the chapters had for her as a child. Growing up in an abusive household she "needed someone," she says, adding with a slight tremble in her voice, that she "needed to see that God would stick ~ up for [her], that God would stick up for the abused and the forgotten ~" That is why she is "so in love" with these chapters, because the evidence of a God that "shows up" is "right here." Paraphrasing God's prophet, Parker says "I'm going to show up for you. I'm going to level the power structure and give you a voice." In her "fired up" response to this, Poll criticizes not only the manual but a broader culture of what they sometimes refer to as a "checklist" or "vending-machine" type of faith.[743]

> Poll: part of me wants to be like, "Okay, you do want to read it as magnify your callings? Well, why don't you go ahead and stand up and magnify our own calling, which is like, to care for those who are being trampled upon, to take upon their burdens, to um stand in solidarity, to speak up and to advocate for them." So yeah, if that's what you want to say is magnifying your calling, go for it. But if it just means that you… need to keep better attendance records and need to keep going to church on Sunday, like, I'm not here for that and neither is this scripture, and reading this scripture in that way is a disservice to the people who are implicated in the text.[744]

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742 Parker & Poll, "Laying Down the Law of Chastity, Justice and Polygamy (Jacob 1–4)."

743 Channing Parker & Elise Poll, "You, Me, and the Olive Tree (Jacob 5–7)," *The Faithful Feminists,* March 16, 2020.

744 Parker & Poll, "You, Me, and the Olive Tree (Jacob 5–7)."

Caring about "better attendance records" and "going to church on Sunday" is a reference comparable to the discourse mentioned earlier, one where appearance is valued over "authentic" or "real" conversations. This implies that the manual's focus on "magnifying callings" is really an implication of a shallow faith, one that cares more about checking things off the list than bearing others' burdens.

6.3.3 "This Quote Always Gets Me" – Show of Emotions

Another characteristic of *The Faithful Feminists* interactions, similar to the *At Last She Said It* podcast, is the show of emotions. An example of this can be found in an episode called "Is it the end of the world? Wait, it's just Isaiah."[745] In approaching the "themes of destruction" in The Book of Mormon, 2 Nephi chapters 11–25, the duo references feminist theologian Rosemary Radford Ruether's theories on apocalyptic thinking.[746] The quote that Parker reads in the following example – which has been radically shortened for conciseness – critiques the black-and-white worldview of apocalyptic thinking, which casts people and cosmic forces into rigid categories of "absolute good" versus "absolute evil."[747] Instead of understanding good and evil as intrinsic qualities of different beings or entities, Radford Ruether suggests they should be seen as relationships or ways people interact with each other and their world. This perspective challenges the view that individuals or groups can be inherently good or evil, urging a shift toward seeing morality as relational rather than essential. The apocalyptic mindset, Ruether argues, treats certain events as signs of a cosmic battle unfolding, where disasters and suffering are seen as validating signs of divine judgment or persecution, depending on who suffers. This view, she suggests, can lead adherents to celebrate, rather than resist, human suffering or environmental destruction, perceiving them as necessary steps toward a final reckoning or deliverance for the righteous. The end result is a form of thinking that may discourage social or environmental improvement, seeing such efforts as futile or even obstructive to divine will. In this framework, violence and suffering are reframed as part of a spiritual "proof" rather than a call for action or compassion, perpetuating a sense of separateness and opposition rather than shared responsibility and connection. When Parker attempts to read Ruether's words on this matter, however, she is caught by emotions.

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745 Channing Parker & Elise Poll, "Is it the End of the World? Wait, it's just Isaiah (2 Nephi 11–25)," *The Faithful Feminists,* February 17, 2020.

746 Parker & Elise Poll, "Is it the End of the World? Wait, it's just Isaiah (2 Nephi 11–25)."

747 Parker & Elise Poll, "Is it the End of the World? Wait, it's just Isaiah (2 Nephi 11–25)."

> Parker: Rosemary Radford Ruether says, "[…] The apocalypticist may even oppose efforts to eliminate poverty, prevent war, or clean up ecological damage, ((trembling voice/crying)) for this is to oppose God's will and retard the final deliverance." (0.3) I can't talk, that quote always gets me (0.4)
> Poll: Do you want to say why you're feeling the way that you're feeling?
> Parker: Uhm I think I just feel (.) so sad because (.) at least for me, I can see, like, I can see (.) where I have participated in some of this thinking […] as my faith has kind of matured and grown from there to ((trembling voice/crying)) recognize that sometimes these (.) ideas of absolute good and absolute evil have (.) hurt people in my relationships or ((trembling voice)) in like, my own speech; sometimes I've driven friends away and sometimes I've alienated people from myself […]at the time I felt like it was love to say, like, "well, you need to do this, so, like, you need to come back to church, or you need to do X, Y, Z so that you can be saved at the second coming," like, I seriously do have a lot ofhhh. anxiety about it, like, ((trembling voice/crying)) I was hurting them ((normal voice)) and now […] [that I have been through] some of those similar faith transitions, like, ((trembling voice)) sometimes the same language hurts me, too. And then the last idea, where "there are those who eliminate poverty ((normal voice)) who oppose efforts to eliminate poverty, prevent war, or cleanup ecological damage," like, I don'thhh. I don't want to get too controversial here, but […] this happens today, like, there are those that say, like ((normal voice)) "oh, well, all of the wars happening in the Middle East are supposed to happen. It's a sign of the end of the times. ((trembling voice)) And yet, what do we do about the suffering now? Nothing […]
> Poll: (0.3) °That was so good°
> Parker: °Thanks. I really was so sad° ((laughing)).[748]

Parker's speech is steeped in raw, layered emotion, as she navigates the weight of apocalyptic thought. She opens with a quote from Radford Ruether, that brings her to tears, unable to continue – "I can't talk" she says after a long pause, "that quote always gets me." This moment sets the tone of their dialogue which is tinged with vulnerability – visible in the continuous return of her trembling voice. Her co-host acknowledges her emotions by asking if she "want[s] to say why [she's] feeling the way that [she's] feeling?" to which Parker then shares her personal experiences of being both the recipient and messenger of the binarism Radford Ruether attributes to apocalyptic thinking. Through tears and shaking voice, Parker reveals how this mindset once felt protective and loving but has since shown itself to be divisive and hurtful. As Parker speaks, the tone occasionally shifts to anger, as she confronts the apathy she sees in others' justifications of current events, such as wars and environmental damage, as mere signs of the end times and the failure to take meaningful action against them. The quote ends with Poll acknowledging the depth of Parker's words – she pauses and says quietly "that

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748 Parker & Elise Poll, "Is it the End of the World? Wait, it's just Isaiah (2 Nephi 11–25)."

was so good," providing a subtle moment of affirmation. By the end, Parker's laughter carries a tinge of both sadness and relief, underscoring the complexity of her feelings. Through the interactive co-presence or "conversational intimacy" afforded by liveness,[749] the hosts of *The Faithful Feminists* thus engage in performances characterized by vulnerability and emotion.

6.3.4 "Moving the Text Into Action" – Co-present Reading Experiences

Another feature of performed liveness is the promotion of a co-present reading experience. Leading up to our first example of this we will of necessity foreshadow some of the discursive framing that we will turn to later. This has to do with a convergence between what is performed and framed. In an episode called "Gather Under the Wings of my Gospel," where Parker and Poll discusses what "wrestling" with scripture really means, Poll says that she assumed that it was "an act that we engaged in for deeper understanding" but that she is now concerned she is "doing [something] wrong."[750] Perhaps, she ruminates, she wrestles with them on a "surface level" focusing too much on "knowing all of the history and all of the etymology and all of the references."[751] This "over-intellectualizing," or even using scripture as a tool to prove a point – "wrestling them for show" is therefore seen as an engagement with scripture that misses the mark.[752] Poll finds that true "understanding" comes when scripture resonates with her on both an immediate and eternal level, impacting how she lives and views the world. The word understand Poll suggests, "really means to experience" scripture, to "feel [its] implications."[753] This approach calls for a receptive engagement with scripture, allowing it to shape the individual in a way that is sincere and action-oriented. Accordingly, she should "be more concerned about letting the scriptures move [her], letting God's word work in [her]."[754] In Parker's response she not only echoes this idea of an "intuitive" understanding of scripture but also performs it:

> Parker: I love this intuitive and loving interpretation of what it means to wrest or wrestle with the text. It means engaging with it with not just our mind, but all our mind, all our heart, all our might, so that we can truly, like, take the text out

[749] Euritt, *Podcasting as an Intimate Medium*, p. 14, 67.
[750] Channing Parker & Elise Poll, "Gather Under the Wings of my Gospel (Doctrine & Covenants 10–11)," *The Faithful Feminists*, February 1, 2021.
[751] Parker & Poll, "Gather Under the Wings of my Gospel (Doctrine & Covenants 10–11)."
[752] Parker & Poll, "Gather Under the Wings of my Gospel (Doctrine & Covenants 10–11)."
[753] Parker & Poll, "Gather Under the Wings of my Gospel (Doctrine & Covenants 10–11)."
[754] Parker & Poll, "Gather Under the Wings of my Gospel (Doctrine & Covenants 10–11)."

> of the black and white on the page and into the world rather than just like, saying, "Oh, yep. I've read first Nephi, I know it, I can recite it word for word and it's great and fantastic, and I can give you all the references." Like, that's an empty way of reading scripture. But being able to translate (0.3), maybe that's the gift of translation? To take the text from the black and white letters on a page and move it into action into the world [mhm] So maybe in a way we all have the potential for the gift of translation. Because .hhh that's ↑ frickin, now I'm understanding ↓ [laughing] I'm literally understanding in real time on the clock guys, okey, [what's happening] what's happening ((exaggerated affect)), oh my gosh.
>
> Poll: That is genius because I just looked up the etymology of translate. And one of the definitions is like to turn from one language to another [.HHH] And I think that's what it is like to turn it from the (.) uhm (.) the written, static language of the scriptures to a lived language, a lived experience of the word.[755]

In Parker's words, just being able to recite the text or knowing all the references – "Oh, yep. I've read first Nephi, I know it, I can recite it word for word and it's great and fantastic, and I can give you all the references" – does not equate with true understanding, because that is an "empty way of reading scripture." The gift of translation means to "move" the text "into action." In many ways, this quote is telling of what podcast liveness does for Parker and Poll – it takes the black and white letters of the scripture and moves them into action, into "lived language" and "lived experience." As such, it is not dissimilar from the framing found in the *At Last She Said It* podcast. "Empty way of reading scripture" is comparable to how Hinckley and Winward describes the Church as a context where "predetermined" answers rather than questions are encouraged. The performance of this is also demonstrated in Parker having a realization about this truer form of understanding on-air – ".hhh that's ↑ frickin, now I'm understanding ↓ …literally understanding in real time on the clock." Said differently, she is enacting intuition – having a realization on the spot – while addressing or talking about it, a position made possible due to the spontaneity of the technology she uses. As liveness enables a temporal co-presence,[756] of being in the here and how, it also allows the podcast duo to make realizations or have epiphanies as they go. In the same episode, Parker further exemplifies this intuitive reading when she invents a continuation of God's speech: "my church is open to everyone. You want it? Come get it. Knock on the stained-glass door. And I will open my feast and my table and my heart and my very wounded hands and feet to embrace you […] Here is my bread and my water, even my body. Partake freely. All I ask is love for you, for me, for all. Amen." Spoken in a passionate manner, Parker speaks *as* the text. More importantly however, is the reaction it elicits from her co-host:

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755 Parker & Poll, "Gather Under the Wings of my Gospel (Doctrine & Covenants 10–11)."

756 Euritt, *Podcasting as an Intimate Medium*, p. 14.

> Poll: Amen. That is church for me. Like I want you to always read that to me and say that to me, because that is what that type of relentless love is what I think the gospel is all about. And you put it into words that take it from something I read in the scriptures to something that I experience.[757]

Parker's paraphrasing of scripture enables Poll to experience rather than just read scripture – "you put it into words," Poll says, "that take it from something I read […] into something that I experience." The technology of the podcast, the live conversation between two friends, is used to speak intuitively about and through scripture, enabling them to be co-present not just with each other but with the text.

A similar example, but where co-presence is gifted their listeners, can be found in an episode called "Understanding Questions, The United Firm, and Service" where the duo approaches Doctrine and Covenants sections 77–80 by drawing on contemplative practices. In this episode, Parker uses her experiences of instructing a meditation class for her Relief Society lesson, to inspire her listeners in their reading practices. The same way she encouraged her Relief Society class to "notice how their body reacted to each question or statement" she tries to contemplate on how she feels in response to specific verses.[758] This approach, she claims, is different from the typical "Sunday school" approach.[759] "It isn't just, you know, sitting in a Sunday school class where somebody is like, 'alrighty, like what is the first article of faith?' and you get just like the same questions over and over and over again with primary answers" Parker says.[760] Rather it's a practice "sitting with ourselves and sitting with a deep question and allowing it to work within us and noticing what that process is in our body."[761]

> Parker: Questions open up a connection with the divine that provide a clear receptive channel for communication. So, as I go through and ask a couple of questions that were inspired by section 77, I'd love for you to listen in and look at the way the answers do or do not arrive to you. What images come to your mind? What smells or sounds arrive to you? What do you see just outside your window? What do you remember? What, and how do you feel? Use all of your senses and be open to all the ways you might receive an answer. This is a time to listen in […] the goal here is a present, embodied, active listening. And this

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757 Parker & Poll, Parker & Elise Poll, "Gather Under the Wings of my Gospel (Doctrine & Covenants 10–11)."

758 Channing Parker & Elise Poll, "Understanding Questions, The United Firm, and Service (Doctrine & Covenants 77–80)," *The Faithful Feminists,* July 12, 2021.

759 Parker & Poll, "Understanding Questions, The United Firm, and Service (Doctrine & Covenants 77–80)."

760 Parker & Poll, "Understanding Questions, The United Firm, and Service (Doctrine & Covenants 77–80)."

761 Parker & Poll, "Understanding Questions, The United Firm, and Service (Doctrine & Covenants 77–80)."

> can be really difficult at first, especially because women in the Church have been taught to look […] to outside authority, before or instead of trusting our own. But the more often you allow yourself to sink into your body and hear God speaking to you, through you, the easier this process becomes.[762]

Although the duo conducts their fair share of "research" for every episode,[763] the approach suggested here is one of embodied presence and of trusting one's own senses. They encourage their listeners to be present in the moment with them, to "use all of [their] senses" to think of "what images come to mind," how they "feel" or what they "remember," and from their own perspective, having opened senses to Godly communication. Through this "active listening" a "channel for communication" with the divine emerges – by "sink[ing] into" one's own body, God can speak both "to you" and "through you." We also find in this quote a certain framing, a resistance to the redundancy of scripture studies in church – where the same thing is said "over and over and over again." In "Sunday church," it seems, you don't really "process" questions or allow yourself to "listen in," you merely repeat what has already been articulated – "primary answers" – for the sake of shallow perfection.

Sometimes co-presence is extended to include not only themselves or their listeners but also the characters of scripture. This can be found in an episode called "Emma's Election" where the duo covers Doctrine and Covenants sections 23–26 which references Emma Smith's call to "expound scriptures and to exhort the church,"[764] and "make a selection of sacred hymns."[765] Before presenting their own interpretation, Parker explains the "downside" of reading Doctrine and Covenants as a historical document. The revelations within are frequently tied to specific organizational and administrative contexts, aimed at guiding church governance at a particular place and time. Reading the text with this historical lens can be problematic Parker notes, because our understanding is influenced by our knowledge of the eventual outcomes, making it difficult to appreciate the immediacy and uncertainty faced by the original recipients of these revelations. In other words, we already "[know] how it all turns out when we're reading from the future."[766] Continuing this discussion, one topic that is particularly challenging to approach from a historical perspective, which Parker implicitly refers to as "what

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762 Parker & Poll, "Understanding Questions, The United Firm, and Service (Doctrine & Covenants 77–80)."

763 Channing Parker & Elise Poll, "Our Final Episode (A Goodbye)," *The Faithful Feminists,* July 31, 2023.

764 *Doctrine and Covenants* 25:7.

765 *Doctrine and Covenants* 25:11.

766 Channing Parker & Elise Poll, "Emma's Election (Doctrine & Covenants 23–26)," *The Faithful Feminists,* March 8, 2021.

comes later in the Doctrine and Covenants,"[767] is polygamy. We now know, for instance, that Emma Smith faced significant pressure to accept plural marriage. There is even a specific revelation directed at her within the text, intended to persuade her to accept this practice.[768] This knowledge colors our interpretation of these passages, influencing how we understand the historical context and the personal dynamics involved. But the historically matter-of-fact type of reading is not the only possible way to approach the text – "what if we stepped out of a historical lens and into a more imaginative one?" Parker asks, "what if we stepped back in time, right into this moment of section 25 and looked out on the horizon of our shared future with Emma and saw not what is, but what could be?"[769] These were "exciting" times for the Church, she explains, it was "new and promising," and the potential of imagining this may be lost through both criticism and sentimentality.[770] She doesn't "want that potential to be lost," she says, not to the "cynicism of history," the "cynicism of feminism" or the Church's "brand of nostalgia."[771] She does not simply want to retrospectively visualize, then, but rather travel back in time and imagine the future as a hopeful "horizon."

> Parker: I think I'm hoping that in this moment, the one that you and I, and all of our listeners are in right here right now, that we can bend the rules of time and space using the power of our imagination and picture ourselves in a warm humid summer of July 1830. Maybe we're in a humble farmhouse sitting room. Maybe we're outdoors beneath the shade of a 200-year-old tree, hoping to catch a summer breeze. Maybe we hear the rustling of leaves or a horse whinnying in the distance. We definitely hear the loud laughter of children and maybe even smell a combination of sour milk, freshly turned dirt, baking bread and sweat. And here we are with our friends, Joseph and Oliver and Emma and John. We might be missing Lucy and hoping she'll come back soon. And we're dreaming about the future of our bodies and souls and refresh from this beautiful moment between Emma and Joseph. And in Emma's future, we can see our own and all of the paths we might walk with her. As we look past the windowsill, past the house, past the trees that line the farm, we see in the distance the horizon. That meeting place of birth and death of what has been and what could become. Emma, we say, can we take your hand and run toward the misty skyline to greet the sunrise set, take off your bonnet, wrap it around the sun and hold on tight to the strings and see what is just beyond, waiting for our reaching? Tell us what you see so we might know what to look for. Sing us a song to guide us. Sing our fears away.

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767 Parker & Poll, "Emma's Election (Doctrine & Covenants 23–26)."
768 E. Park, "Joseph Smith, Plural Marriage, and Kinship."
769 Parker & Poll, "Emma's Election (Doctrine & Covenants 23–26)."
770 Parker & Poll, "Emma's Election (Doctrine & Covenants 23–26)."
771 Parker & Poll, "Emma's Election (Doctrine & Covenants 23–26)."

> Poll: Oh, Channing, I'm so glad that you were able to kind of transport us back with this imaginative, poetic experience with Emma. Thank you for that.[772]

What Parker does here, I suggest, is solve the past through podcast liveness. In other words, she aims to create a better "now" of an allegedly worse "past" by taking the promises inherent to the temporality of the "moment," the instance, the here and now, and applying it to Emma's story. In other words, Parker uses the technology of the podcast to reclaim the "now" of the text, something that due to layers of historical facts and skepticism has gone missing. She "transports" her listeners to "a warm humid summer of July 1830" and asks them to imagine "a summer breeze," the smell of "sour milk, freshly turned dirt, baking bread and sweat" and their friends "Joseph, and Oliver and Emma and John." In this "now" that listeners are invited to experience, our friend Emma's future is still unknown, it is something "beyond" the horizon still "waiting for our reaching." The last sentences, referencing her call to create hymns, imagines Emma singing as guiding them toward the future and "sing[ing] their fears away." The performance of liveness, recording a sound meant to instill a feeling of co-presence – that is, she is in the "moment" with her listeners – coupled with a creative imagination, also allows listeners to live the text, to experience rather than perceive it "intellectually." The ability to make stories come alive, then, invites listeners to be present – to hope, grieve, or anguish together with – the scriptural persons and events of the text.

6.4 Framing Liveness: *The Faithful Feminists*

To this point we have – to borrow the hosts' own word – explored the "magic" of performing liveness. But why does it matter to be able to enact things like casual and playful exchanges, candidness, show of emotions and co-presence for feminist exegesis performed within the context of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints? Understanding this requires examining the discourses that frame and permeate these interactions. In the following text, we will analyze five illustrative examples. The first two, "spiritual bypassing" and "capital-t truth," demonstrate how the Church's approach to scripture is depicted. The remaining three – "storytelling truth," "we prefer the title prophetess," and "we don't always walk away with the answers" – highlight how their own dialogues foster a more creative, intuitive, and open-ended engagement with scripture.

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772 Parker & Poll, "Emma's Election (Doctrine & Covenants 23–26)."

6.4.1 "Spiritual Bypassing" – Facing Unresolved Issues

An important discursive "other" to the affordances of podcasting is the Church's own approach to scripture studies. When the duo illustrates this context it tends to depict the Church as avoiding or smoothing over difficult or controversial topics. Concerning polygamy for example the duo guesses that the "majority of teachers" would either "skip having the difficult conversations about polygamy altogether" or would "have a conversation about polygamy that doesn't do anything other than repeat what the church manual says" which is that "this was a hard trial, but if you have faith, you can get through."[773] An important term explaining this tendency, that resembles the "toxic positivity" used in the *At Last She Said It* podcast, is "spiritual bypassing." An introduction to this phrase can be found in an episode called "Two Vegan Feminists go Panning for Gold," where Parker and Poll address the *Come Follow Me* manual's overtly positive reaction to apocalyptic language in Doctrine and Covenants section 45.

> Parker: "war inequity and desolation will proceed the Savior's second coming but be not troubled. The Lord said for when all these things shall come to pass, you may know that the promises which have been made unto you shall be fulfilled." And that's from section 45, verse 35. The manual continues saying, "as you study, consider focusing, not just on the troubling events that are prophesied, but also on the blessings the Lord promises. What do you find that helps you be not troubled about the last days?" And after I read this, I really felt strongly that it just didn't sit right with me […] This practice of focusing on the good, over the bad has a name it's called "spiritual bypassing […] a tendency to use spiritual ideas and practices to sidestep or avoid facing unresolved emotional issues, psychological wounds, and unfinished developmental tasks." In other words, spiritual bypassing uses spiritual concepts to help you avoid uncomfortable responsibilities and feelings. And I think that this technique, this ignoring of the scary parts of the chapter is a form of spiritual bypassing. Because if we look at the promises in the text, the majority of them are not positive.[774]

In this quote, Parker critiques the guidance in the *Come Follow Me* manual, which encourages readers to focus on the positive aspects of the Lord's promises amid prophesied turmoil leading up to the Second Coming. While the manual urges readers to "be not troubled" and search for blessings, Parker feels that this approach ignores critical, challenging aspects of the text. After some reflection, Parker identifies this practice as "spiritual bypassing," a term they attribute to Sarah Hanks, a previous *Feminist Mormon Housewives* blogger, who defines it as the avoidance of unresolved emotional or psycho-

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[773] Channing Parker & Elise Poll, "Polygamy in Pieces – Part Five: Resistance (Doctrine & Covenants 132)," *The Faithful Feminists,* November 12, 2021.

[774] Channing Parker & Elise Poll, "Two Feminists Go Panning For Gold (Doctrine & Covenants 45)," *The Faithful Feminists,* April 26, 2021.

logical issues through spiritual ideas and practices. This spiritual bypassing, Parker explains, instructs readers of scripture to "avoid uncomfortable responsibilities and feelings," which results in a tendency to sidestep difficult topics or feelings, like the "war, inequity, and desolation," in turn preventing individuals from genuinely confronting and processing the challenging aspects of life and scripture.[775] In Parker's view, focusing solely on positive aspects while ignoring troubling prophecies can lead to a form of selective reading: it is like "panning for gold" she adds later, amid mostly negative promises. A more forthcoming interpretation, than looking for "blessings" and focusing on not being "troubled" as the manual instructs its readers, is to acknowledge the chapter's violent apocalyptic verses for what they are.

> Parker: I think that this approach is harmful for two reasons. The first one is that it bypasses the present and immediate pain and suffering of our fellow women by asking us to become numb to war and death and suffering. It bypasses our own human experience of fear, dread, worry, concern, anxiety by asking us to console ourselves with a kind of love that would sooner cut us off and see us quote, "hewn down and cast into the fire" than to tolerate any measure of doubt. And secondly, it bypasses our responsibility to read the text and internalize it because it makes us afraid. What if the verse quote, "the love of women wax cold and iniquity shall abound" is talking about our lax and lazy approach to reuniting families separated at the United States Mexican border? […] I argue that we should be troubled. We should be troubled by a God that promises to come with swift desolation, with scourges and earthquakes and sickness. We should be suspicious of a God that promises peace only after the destruction of all that opposes us.[776]

The detriments of spiritual bypassing, Parker elaborates are twofold. First, it denies our human experiences of "fear, dread, worry, concern, anxiety," by prompting readers not to focus on what is "troubling," ironically by asking them to make use of verses that speak of violence and destruction – or as Parker articulates it, "by asking us to console ourselves with a kind of love that would sooner cut us off and see us quote, 'hewn down and cast into the fire.'" Second, it disconnects believers from taking responsibility for contemporary issues such as "families separated at the United States Mexican border," or "bypasses our responsibility to read the text and internalize it" as she expresses it, because it feels disconcerting or makes them "afraid." Contrary to what the manual implies, then, readers "*should* be troubled," because this is a God that "promises peace only after the destruction of all that opposes us." Thus, she concludes:

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775 Parker & Poll, "Two Feminists Go Panning For Gold (Doctrine & Covenants 45)."
776 Parker & Poll, "Two Feminists Go Panning For Gold (Doctrine & Covenants 45)."

> Parker: I'm tired of being curious about it. I want to abandon it. I want to curse it. This version of God, I want this version to shatter and break open into something new and bigger and better […] This is one of those times that I feel so disappointed by the Doctrine and Covenants. I feel like every week for the last month and a half, we have these apocalyptic chapters in response to any critique, any opposition that early saints experience and I'm weary of offering a positive spin on the angry God. This chapter is a challenge to me […] and I think what I'm holding in this section and in its reading and in its interpretation is just a lot of sadness mixed in with annoyance and irritation and grief and frustration. And so, I just want to validate that too, for all of our listeners. Like if you're feeling that way about this section, you're not alone.[777]

In this quote the candidness explored earlier returns. Parker does not care for "curiosity," for a text that "disappoints," "annoys," "irritates," and "frustrates" her. She wants simply to "abandon" this part of scripture, "to curse it" even. She wants it "shattered" and "broken" open, into "something new." This type of candid language regarding the scripture is not uncommon, seen for example in an episode where Poll describes themselves as called to the scripture "to cry with it, to scream at it, to throw it in the river and then fish it back out only to dry the pages in the sun," hoping that "something will illuminate itself from within."[778] They are, you could say, borrowing from the following quote, not afraid to take off the "silky gloves."

> Poll: It also making me think of that line of reasoning that typically goes about speaking about Heavenly Mother, like, "Oh, well, she's just too sacred to talk about. So, we can't even talk about her or have a relationship with her" and if that line of thinking irks you but you also feel like the Doctrine and Covenants is holy in an untouchable, inaccessible, un-engageable way, I would encourage you to work through the way that you feel about Heavenly Mother in seeking out a relationship with her and apply that to the Doctrine and Covenants. The Doctrine and Covenants can be holy and spiritual and reverent… in a way that still invites us to wrestle and grapple because that's the way that the scriptures… [comes] alive, is when I can engage with them, not when I can put them on a high pedestal and simply like a bow down to them. That feels incredibly removed and incredibly fragile to me.
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> Parker: Yeah, and it's not off limits… Just because people revere it doesn't mean that we have to hold it in like, special silky gloved hands and never really crack it open. So, with that all said, we're about to get into it [laughing].[779]

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777 Parker & Poll, "Two Feminists Go Panning For Gold (Doctrine & Covenants 45)."

778 Channing Parker & Elise Poll, "Everyone Cries in This One (Moses 7)," *The Faithful Feminists,* January 24, 2022.

779 Channing Parker & Elise Poll, "Valuing Visions (Doctrine & Covenants 1 & JSH)," *The Faithful Feminists,* January 4, 2021.

In this discussion, Parker and Poll challenge the tendency to treat sacred texts, specifically the Doctrine and Covenants, as too holy for critical engagement, comparing them to the reasoning often used for not discussing Heavenly Mother: "she's just too sacred." Poll argues that if this idea frustrates those who want a relationship with Heavenly Mother, they should apply the same reasoning to scripture, viewing it as both sacred and open for examination. Poll explains that scripture feels "alive" when wrestled and engaged with rather than set on a "pedestal," "untouchable" and distant, as this approach can make scripture seem "incredibly removed and incredibly fragile." Parker agrees, emphasizing that revering scripture does not mean handling it with "special silky gloved hands" suggesting that reverence and critical engagement can coexist. Their approach invites listeners to open up and critically engage with scripture, allowing for a more intimate, dynamic relationship with sacred texts. The end signals a readiness to dive into scripture with gloves off – "we're about to get into it" Parker says in a playful tone. This approach forces them to face their own discomforts, for example when encountering verses that carry racist implications. While such verses are "icky," and Parker just want to "shake them off" she needs to "deal" with them. Parker acknowledges that, as a white woman, facing them is a necessary part of her anti-racism work. She emphasizes that being a reader of this sacred text, she has a responsibility not to ignore or excuse these passages but instead to engage with them critically. This, she suggests, is the only way to confront and dismantle harmful legacies within her religious heritage. Instead of "bypassing" it then, Parker encourages listeners who feel "uncomfortable" to lean into that "discomfort," to "sit with it."[780]

6.4.2 "Capital-T Truth" – Challenging Certainty in Scriptural Interpretations

Intimately related to this "spiritual bypassing" the duo suggest, is the tendency to occupy oneself with what is described as "positivist" readings of scripture. A recurring way to describe this tendency is the phrase "capital-t truth" which Parker defines as truths that are absolute, factual, and universally applicable, like scientific laws.[781] In a religious context, "capital-t truth" relates to doctrines that are presented as essential, unalterable truths. This concept emphasizes permanence and consensus, reflecting a reality that does not shift based on interpretation. As Poll explains, this is something that has to do with a larger culture of truth-claiming. Members "perform their faith," she says, in a way

[780] Channing Parker & Elise Poll, "Seeing Signs (3 Nephi 1–7)," *The Faithful Feminists,* September 7, 2020.
[781] Channing Parker & Elise Poll, "Moroni-All-in-One (Moroni 1–10)," *The Faithful Feminists,* November 30, 2020.

that gives the impression that "everyone" is on "the same page," and part of doing so means to stand up during testimony meetings in a "really stalwart" way and "say, I know, I know, I know."[782] That is just one example, she says, of how "the church culture and church institution value the proof behind the faith."[783] A context where this discourse can be found is within the episode, titled "Valuing Visions," which offers an analysis of Doctrine and Covenants section 1 and Joseph Smith's first vision, a key event in Latter-day Saint history that has varied in its retellings over time. The podcast hosts begin by discussing the fact that there are at least four firsthand accounts of Joseph Smith's first vision, each differing slightly in content and tone. For example, some versions emphasize Smith's feelings of guilt and need for redemption, while others focus on the appearance of God and Jesus or include additional figures like angels. Parker and Poll acknowledge that this complexity may be unsettling for believers who are used to a single, authoritative account, as it opens up questions about the authenticity, memory, and narrative integrity of religious figures. In the following quote they therefore offer a "buffer" before going into details on the different first vision accounts.

> Parker: What we want to say from the very get-go is that talking about church history is not anti-Mormon […] It's not a bad thing to be knowledgeable about the actual history that happened in church, even if it's not common knowledge. It's okay. And so, if this is the first time that you're hearing that there are different slash multiple accounts of the first vision, if you're feeling like, "Oh my gosh. Oh no. I feel uncomfortable. This is, like, bad to talk about. We're not supposed to be doing it," sit with those feelings, take a deep breath and just know: hey, we're all going to get through it together […]
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> Poll: […] these sacred texts are open for critique… we can both celebrate the tradition and critique the tradition and the history… It doesn't make us any less religious, any less faithful, any less of anything […] We can love Joseph Smith and love the tradition and also say WTF, Joseph Smith[…] So, with that buffer, we're going to talk about the four different firsthand accounts of the First Vision.[784]

By gently framing the conversation as one of "get[ting] through it together," Parker acknowledges listeners' potential fears in a way that is almost parental – carefully holding their hand as they step into unfamiliar territory. Parker reassures them with a calm tone, advising them to "take a deep breath," and normalizing that "it's okay" if this is the first time they are hearing about topics like multiple accounts of the first vision. This approach subtly frames church history as if it is something that might feel risky or even "taboo" for listeners to engage with on their own, implying that such truths might be a bit

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782 Parker & Poll, "Seeing Signs (3 Nephi 1–7)."
783 Parker & Poll, "Seeing Signs (3 Nephi 1–7)."
784 Parker & Poll, "Valuing Visions (Doctrine & Covenants 1 + JSH)."

"dangerous" without someone there to guide and comfort them. Poll then adds to this by emphasizing that it is "not only not anti-Mormon," but actually good and constructive to ask questions and express confusion. Her phrasing, "we can love Joseph Smith… and also say WTF, Joseph Smith," reads like a playful way of softening the fear around critique, as if making the big, intimidating figure of multiple first visions safe and approachable. In using this nurturing language, they signal that listeners are allowed to feel scared, confused, or even betrayed by history, and that it is safe to ask questions, no matter how "dangerous" this path may feel. Here we also find the recurrence of the phrasing to "sit with" – "sit with those feelings" – which again emphasizes the need to confront rather than bypass difficult emotions triggered by sacred scripture. By cushioning the discomfort and holding their listeners close, Parker and Poll signal something about the precariousness of church history. It must be, as a previous Church President Gordon B. Hinckley is quoted for saying below, either "valid" or "fraud."

> Poll: not all of the details line up and so they're questioning Joseph Smith's memory. They question, "Did this even happen? What really happened, like what actually factually happened?" And a lot of these debates about what actually happened in history occur in the arena of what's called "positivism […]" there's this really heavy focus on logical conditions of stories, trying to figure out what factually historically actually happened. […] we have passages like this one from Gordon B. Hinckley, where he says "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 it is the most important and wonderful work under the heavens"
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> Parker: That sets us up for failure, right?
>
> Poll: Exactly…when we have this kind of all-or-nothing, black-or-white thinking, then our whole faith rest on the factual historical truth or validity of this first vision. And I think that is way too much weight to place on this story.[785]

In this exchange, Parker and Poll warn against the approach of treating scripture, particularly the first vision, as an absolute, "factual" truth in the sense demanded by positivism. Poll explains that positivism is a framework aiming to deduce exact historical truths through logical, factual evidence, and she argues that this mindset can be distressing and incompatible with a spiritually meaningful approach to scripture. Poll critiques the Church's stance, highlighting how statements like previous Church President B. Hinckley's, sets up a binary, "all-or-nothing" mindset. This, they suggest, creates unnecessary pressure to validate the story as historical fact, leading some to feel forced to defend the details or reject them entirely. This approach to scripture, the duo argues "sets" members "up for failure." Members are instructed to search for absolute truth

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[785] Parker & Poll, "Valuing Visions (Doctrine & Covenants 1 & JSH)."

and when they find out that this truth is compromised in addition to their own church withholding those facts, the feeling of "betrayal," as Poll calls it, is exacerbated.[786] This conversation reflects, not only a call for honesty and openness in religious history to build trust and prevent disillusionment among members, however, but also a call for flexibility as readers of scripture:

> Poll: We don't get any practice in engaging in the in-between space. […] We haven't done a good job at building in that, that flexibility, or just living in that tension […] [John] Caputo encourages us to practice living in this space between […] letting both […] the kind of stalwart, Mormon in us and the open-ended free flowing, questioning faith that we have as well […] work with each other and deepen each other and question each other and allow us to have a mature, flexible faith […] that's the space of the storytelling truth, not truth as in like fact, but truth as in like truthfulness or, or meaningfulness. And that part of me loves this story because it is about a God who cares enough about someone's, not just someone's questions, but in the other accounts, it's a God that cares enough about the way that I'm feeling weighed down by my sins. It's a story about a God who loves me enough to forgive me and who thinks I'm, like, worthy and valuable of love and God would care or the Lord or these angels would care enough about me to show up in my little, in my little town in the forest.[787]

Poll discusses the lack of flexibility within the Church's approach to scriptural stories like Smith's first vision, critiquing how the Church's singular focus on one version stifles opportunities for nuanced engagement. She argues that this rigidity leaves members unprepared for the complexity and "in-between space" they encounter when they learn about multiple accounts. Without an established framework to process these variations, members can struggle with questions and doubts that the Church has not provided room to address. Poll explains that this structure discourages "wrestling" with the text, limiting members' practice in holding tension and cultivating a faith that only allows for certainty. They introduce the concept of living in an "in-between tension," influenced by philosopher John Caputo, where one can balance a strong sense of religious identity with a flexible, questioning faith. Poll expresses that this tension allows her to experience a "storytelling truth" that prioritizes "meaningfulness" over factual accuracy. Applying this to the first vision, she finds comfort in the story, interpreting it as about a God who cares for the personal burdens individuals carry, as someone who "shows up" in someone's "little town in the forest" where Joseph Smith knelt in prayer and received his first vision.

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786 Parker & Poll, "Valuing Visions (Doctrine & Covenants 1 & JSH)."
787 Parker & Poll, "Valuing Visions (Doctrine & Covenants 1 & JSH)."

6.4.3 "Storytelling Truth" – Focus on Creativity and Meaningfulness

In comparison with the Church's "capital-t truth" Parker and Poll embrace what they call "lowercase-t truth" or "storytelling truth" as Poll referred to it earlier. This type of truth is fluid, contextual, and personal, emphasizing that subjective experiences or interpretations are valuable in their own right, even if they do not meet the standard of objective "fact." This discourse must be held in relation also to the specific method of interpretation adopted. The hosts of *The Faithful Feminists* often engage with scripture through what they call "imaginings" and "retellings,"[788] a method that takes its inspiration from a range of feminist theologians both from Christian and Jewish contexts. One source of inspiration for this practice is Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's concept "hermeneutics of creative imagination."

> Poll: One of our favorite feminist theologians, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza writes, "Our hermeneutics of creative imagination [or an approach to the texts that values creative imagination] seeks to generate utopian visions that have not yet been realized, to dream a different world of justice and wellbeing. The space of the imagination is that of freedom: a space in which boundaries are crossed, possibilities are explored, and time becomes relativized, but we cannot imagine will not take place. Retelling biblical stories and re-imagining biblical characters in creative imagination and play is a catalytic process that liberates us from the false images that we have made."[789]

For the hosts of *The Faithful Feminists* this includes imagining and narrating events or parts of events that are not currently represented in scripture, such as narratives about women and transgender, as well as changing pronouns, adding women's names or queering entire narratives. In their reading of the Old Testament they also draw on the Jewish rabbinic tradition of Midrashim, and especially from queer and feminist ones.[790] They also rely on what they refer to as "Mormon Midrash" which includes more specifically Joseph Smith's renditions and expansions of biblical texts in *The Pearl of Great Price*. This form of comparison between Jewish midrash and the Latter-day Saint tradi-

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788 Channing Parker & Elise Poll, "Portraits of Women & The Pain of Excommunication (Doctrine & Covenants 81–84);" "Wild Oneness with Enoch (Genesis 5 & Moses 6)," *The Faithful Feminists,* January 17, 2022.

789 Parker & Poll, "Wild Oneness with Enoch (Genesis 5 & Moses 6)."

790 Parker & Poll, "Wild Oneness with Enoch (Genesis 5 & Moses 6)"; "Falling Forward & Keeping East of Eden (Genesis 3–4)," *The Faithful Feminists,* January 10, 2022; "Hagar, She Who Names God (Genesis 12–17)," *The Faithful Feminists,* February 7, 2022; "Whoops, We Ignored Women (Genesis 28–36)," *The Faithful Feminists,* February 28, 2022; "In Memory & Mystery (Judges)," *The Faithful Feminists,* May 31, 2022.

tion of expanding biblical stories is not uncommon among Latter-day Saints,[791] and can be found in an episode on Genesis 5 and Moses 6.[792] Poll explains that although there is a debate on the accuracy of Smith's translation – parts of *The Pearl of Great Price* are alleged translations of ancient Egyptian papyri – it reminds her of "that powerful element of feminist theology (which) is imaginative reinterpretations of text."[793] Parker adds that Smith's story of Enoch is a "good reminder" to "imagine an open invitation to scripture."

> Parker: Now, obviously I love Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, I love stories and I love utopias so it's clear why I would love this passage, but even if the story of Enoch doesn't do all of this at once, right, even if it doesn't sketch out a version of utopia or move us in a clear, straightforward pathway to justice or something specific like that, I think it's still a good reminder in practice to imagine an open invitation of scripture as one that welcomes us to the text and says, "remake me, mosaic, bring more of your stories and let them collide with mine. Imagine something new and grand. Write the story of what was not said. Remake me. Let's do it together." I really love this approach to the text and looking at it again as a story or a retelling of a story that maybe fills in the spaces or fills in the gaps, or maybe even takes a piece of something present in one version of the story and illuminates it even further. I think that this type of reading of the text can be one that offers us so much opportunity for play. And I think, at least when we're reading the scriptures, I think oftentimes it's like this very serious thing and we take the scriptures very seriously. And I say, we, as in like the collective everyone who reads it, but also Elise and I, but I enjoy midrash as an example of what it means to creatively play with the text.[794]

In this quote, Parker both explains and demonstrates the hermeneutics of creative imagination. It is a method, she describes, that allows an "open invitation to scripture," one that is not this "serious thing" but that provides "opportunity for play." In an interesting turn of events, Parker accepts this invitation by speaking as the text itself, imagining it saying, "remake me, mosaic… "let [your stories] collide with mine." In other words, she first speaks about creative imagination and then enacts it, through what appears as intuition and play. In similarity to the quote above, a hermeneutics of creative imagination recorded as a part of a live conversations between two friends often results in a seamless combination of genres and modes of speech. When creative retelling is performed live, it is difficult to see where one genre stops and the other begins, resulting in a medley of genres. Parker starting to read in the voice of the text above is one

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791 Avram R. Shannon, "Mormons and Midrash. On the Composition of Expansive Interpretation in *Genesis Rabbah* and the Book of Moses," *BYU Studies Quarterly,* vol. 54, no. 2, 2015, pp. 15–34, p. 15.

792 Parker & Poll, "Wild Oneness with Enoch (Genesis 5 & Moses 6)."

793 Parker & Poll, "Wild Oneness with Enoch (Genesis 5 & Moses 6)."

794 Parker & Poll, "Wild Oneness with Enoch (Genesis 5 & Moses 6)."

example of the sudden turns their performances often take, where conversations suddenly move into poetry, or sermon-like speech. It is a patchwork without seams.

6.4.4 "We Prefer the Title Prophetess" – Challenging Prophetic Authority

A second aspect of the podcast's counteroffer concerns the act of prophesying, which was briefly foreshadowed earlier in the distinction between *a* prophet and *the* prophet. There we also saw examples of the hosts instructing their followers to "active listening" enabling a "channel for communication" with the divine to emerge.[795] By "sink[ing] into" one's own body, God can speak both "to you" and "through you."[796] This practice echoes the type of prophesying that their church claims to have restored through the priesthood. In fact, the hosts sometimes refer to their own role on the podcast as prophesying.[797] In an Instagram post about biblical female prophets the duo seemingly identifies with the Greek mythological prophetess Cassandra, who was "given the gift of prophecy by the god Apollo" but cursed so that she was disbelieved "after [she] spurned his love."[798] They claim that "some have said we are prophets, false or otherwise," and then self-confidently responding that, "first, we prefer the title prophetess."[799]

> Some have said we are prophets, false or otherwise. To this we say: First, we prefer the title prophetess. Second, prophesying is a tradition strong and beloved in sacred text. Miriam, Deborah, Mary, Abish, and Emma are our own prophetess foremothers. Prophetesses have always spoken to illuminate the divine nature inherent in all, but especially that of the downtrodden and oppressed…When messages of justice and liberation came from the margins, we can be assured they are prophetic. Third, interpreting scripture is not inherently prophetic. We interpret LDS canonized text through a feminist lens. This makes us readers, interpreters, and seekers, but not necessarily prophets. But hey, if our work feels prophetic to you, you can thank the original scriptural prophetesses we are taking lessons from….We do most of our prophesying on the podcast. Tune in every Monday. Consider Cassandra.[800]

This post uses the figure of Cassandra as a way to reflect on the role of prophetic voices in both myth and scripture. The authors embrace the title of "prophetess" while aligning

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795 Parker & Poll, "Understanding Questions, The United Firm, and Service (Doctrine & Covenants 77–80)."

796 Parker & Poll, "Understanding Questions, The United Firm, and Service (Doctrine & Covenants 77–80)."

797 Channing Parker & Elise Poll, "Prophesying since 76s BC," *@thefaithfulfeminists,* April 5, 2022, www.instagram.com/p/Cb8u1SPPI-R/, accessed December 24, 2024.

798 Parker & Poll, "Prophesying since 76s BC."

799 Parker & Poll, "Prophesying since 76s BC."

800 Parker & Poll, "Prophesying since 76s BC."

themselves with a tradition of biblical and scriptural women, such as Miriam, Deborah, and Mary, a tradition of prophetesses who "have always spoken" with compassion for marginalized groups. They argue that prophecy often emerges from the margins to advocate justice and liberation, especially on behalf of the vulnerable and oppressed. However, they also clarify that their work is grounded in interpretation rather than prophecy, as they read scripture through a feminist lens, aiming to find new insights and meanings rather than deliver divine pronouncements. In doing so, they highlight that interpreting sacred texts does not "necessarily" make them prophets, but if their messages resonate in ways that feel prophetic, listeners can attribute that power to the "original scriptural prophetesses" they admire and emulate. Despite this humble reservation, they end the quote by inviting followers to "tune in every Monday," because that is when they "do most of their prophesying." The duo concludes, a bit cryptically, by asking readers to "consider Cassandra," possibly as a reminder of the prophetic gifts that their God has bestowed on all members even though it is not "believed" or recognized officially as such. The quote is coupled with an image painted by Anthony Frederick Augustus Sandy, where Cassandra is painted so as to capture the moment of her vision, with her eyes wide open, mouth gaping and hair flowing in front of her as if she is physically struck by her own prophecy – arguably adding to the framing of intuition and co-presence explored earlier, and in extension giving religious significance to the spontaneity and presence of liveness.

This self-proclaimed role of prophetesses says something significant about what positions the podcast allows them to occupy. Explaining that they "do most of [their] prophesying on the podcast," seems to imply that podcasting enables them to acquire vision and revelation.[801] There are also some indications that they perceive themselves among what they earlier referred to as *a* prophet. There are many "among us" Poll thinks, who could be considered prophets, many who speak for people "at the margins."[802] Parker considers a prophet from the margins to be "a black woman," "parents of a bisexual child" or podcasters like "Sistas in Zion and… their friends at Beyond the Block" whose antiracist and queer message is shared "publicly, loudly, and in an effort to make a change."[803] This general appreciation of public critics – and podcasters in particular – as prophets whose "experiences" God feels compelled to "write down" is also compared to *the* prophet, who is, as they explain, a person with "a specific role and a specific message." This idea further dichotomizes the forms of communication adopted by themselves –an independent communication formulated through "lived

801 Parker & Poll, "Prophesying since 76s BC."
802 Parker & Poll, "Messages From the Margins (Helaman 13–16)."
803 Parker & Poll, "Messages From the Margins (Helaman 13–16)."

experiences" – and the one employed by the Church whose leaders rely on "specific messages." The implication of this is that theirs is a prophesying done spontaneously – like Cassandra they are struck by their visions – and the religious institution's is one of preplanned and comparatively disenchanted messages.

6.4.5 "We Don't Always Walk Away with the Answers" – Open-Ended Discussions

But sometimes no prophesying or imagination takes place. Sometimes the hosts of *The Faithful Feminists* walk away from the text with more questions than answers. But that is, as they argue in an episode called "Daughters of Liberation and God of Nevertheless," part of what it means to "wrestle with the text as a feminist." The episode is based on The Book of Mormon Mosiah chapter 18–24 which as Poll explains, tells "the tales of two groups of people…Alma and the people of Limhi, who is King Noah's son" both of which "experience bondage and oppression by the Lamanites," but also "the blessing of being set free by the hand of God."[804] When the *Come Follow Me* manual asks its readers to reflect upon what can be learnt "by comparing the captivity of Alma's people and Lamhi's people" they are uncertain how to proceed. Because Alma's people "are painted as the ones that are righteous," "who rely on God," are "repenting," and Limhi's people as "sinning" and having "forgotten God," the questions seem suggestive of similar binaries as was recognized in their episode on apocalyptic thinking,[805] namely, that God punishes those who live in sin and that keeping oneself on the righteous side is more important than trying to bear one another's burdens. This leaves Parker and Poll at a loss for answers.

> Parker: I feel like this is in kind of striking opposition to what we would typically find in a pretty typical Sunday School class. And it definitely brought up a lot of questions for us. And instead of coming to the episode today with answers that we're certain about and confident in, instead, today we bring you our vulnerability. And we kind of wanted to share and talk about how sometimes when we come to the scriptures with a feminist lens, we don't always walk away with the answers. Sometimes we will walk away with more questions, and it's okay to have those, and it's okay to wrestle with them, and to not have an answer all of the time […][806]

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804 Channing Parker & Elise Poll, "Daughters of Liberation and a God of Nevertheless (Mosiah 18–24)," *The Faithful Feminists,* May 11, 2020.

805 Parker & Elise Poll, "Daughters of Liberation and a God of Nevertheless (Mosiah 18–24)."

806 Parker & Poll, "Daughters of Liberation and a God of Nevertheless (Mosiah 18–24)."

In this segment Parker explores the idea of embracing uncertainty when interpreting scripture, specifically the parallels between the captivity stories of Alma's and Limhi's people in Mosiah. The *Come Follow Me* manual prompts readers to compare these two accounts, which are strikingly similar, leading Parker and Poll to discover more commonalities than differences. This finding – and their resistance to answering it – contrasts with the more clear-cut conclusions often emphasized in traditional "Sunday School classes." Rather than offering definitive answers, they choose to approach the discussion with "vulnerability," meaning, openly acknowledging the questions that arise instead of seeking concrete solutions. They highlight the value of this feminist approach, which does not demand tidy resolutions but instead permits "wrestling" with complex questions. Their message reassures listeners that it is normal and even valuable to leave scriptural study with questions rather than conclusions, honoring the process of working through spiritual challenges without needing immediate clarity. It is, as she continues in the following quote, also aired for the purpose of showing their listeners a "kind of behind-the-scenes look" at how it really is to "wrestle with the text as a feminist."

> Parker: Sometimes […] we can't offer you a resolution at the end of every episode, sometimes the end of an episode has to finish with a question, and that's just the nature of coming to scriptures, and it would be disingenuous of us to pretend to be anything else […] part of what we wanted to offer you today in the vulnerable talking through the questions that we had that came out of these chapters, was we wanted to involve you and kind of a behind the scenes look of what it looks like to actually wrestle with the text as a feminist. And so even though this episode does end on a question, don't let that turn you away. Instead, we hope to offer it as an invitation for you to do your work with the text and then come to the conversation, so that we can all benefit from each other. This is what it means to be a sisterhood.[807]

Parker reflects on the intentions behind podcast, emphasizing the importance of approaching scripture not as experts but as fellow seekers. From the beginning, Parker and Poll set out to make it clear that they are not presenting *the* way to interpret scripture but rather offering one of many possible readings. This openness means that episodes often end without neat conclusions, and sometimes even with unresolved questions. Parker explains that this ambiguity is an honest reflection of their process, especially when reading scripture through a feminist lens, which they describe as an ongoing "practice" rather than a search for definitive answers. By involving listeners in this vulnerable exploration, they invite them to join in the dialogue, suggesting that engaging with the text as a community enriches everyone's understanding. Parker frames this

[807] Parker & Poll, "Daughters of Liberation and a God of Nevertheless (Mosiah 18–24)."

shared journey as the essence of "sisterhood," a collective, open-ended process where each person's insights contribute to a deeper, more diverse interpretation. Rather than offering closure, they hope this episode's questions will encourage listeners to grapple with the text themselves and bring their perspectives to the community conversation.

6.4.6 Analytical Summary of Discursive Framing

The above observations allow us to understand why a seemingly banal format such as podcast liveness could be considered special in comparison to the religious setting it responds to. Because it is only when such practices are compared with the discourses that surround them, that we can witness the "magic" happening. Through these discourses we learn that the Church's approach to scripture is an important *antagonistic other,* characterized by the *nodal points* "spiritual bypassing" and "capital-t truth," framing its methodology as both avoidant and guarded. This stance is further illustrated by *discursive moments* explaining that the same questions are addressed "over and over again with primary answers," difficult conversations are skirted, and there is a focus on the positive while shirking "uncomfortable responsibilities and feelings." Certain scripture passages are considered "too sacred to talk about," and held as "holy in an untouchable, inaccessible, un-engageable way." Scriptures are so revered that they are "put...on a high pedestal," and are often viewed as "fragile," necessitating handling with "special silky gloved hands." This reverential fear discourages engagement with the "ickier" parts of scripture, which are instead dismissed with a "shake them off" attitude. Consequently, members are nurtured into a culture of "positivism," constantly affirming "I know, I know, I know," and obsessively seeking to "determine" the "proof behind the faith," focusing on what "actually," "factually," happened. This binary "all or nothing," "black-or-white thinking" ultimately sets members "up for failure."

This fortifies a *chain of equivalences* where the Church views scripture as "untouchable" and "pedestalized" and members' approach to scripture as afflicted by what we could call a "contact phobia" or a hesitation to engage deeply with the difficult, unsettling, or ambiguous elements within sacred texts. This tendency manifests in an emphasis on conformity, a search for "capital-t truth," and a cycle of redundancy where members are guided to ask and answer the same questions in predictable ways – through "primary answers." Through repetition, uniformity, and a focus on absolute truths, the Church fosters an environment that encourages members to seek certainty and continuity over exploration and nuance. This reluctance to confront challenging topics can be seen in the Church's structured study materials, like the *Come Follow Me* manual, which often nudges readers away from wrestling with troubling verses. Instead, it directs them to

focus on promises and blessings, frequently glossing over the messier aspects of scripture. For instance, passages prophesying apocalyptic events or divine punishment are sometimes presented with an optimistic framing, which can feel out of step with the gravity of the original text. This practice, which Parker and Poll describe as "spiritual bypassing," discourages members from grappling with feelings of discomfort, fear, or doubt, instead favoring a neatly framed "positivity" that bypasses the messiness of human suffering and existential questioning. In essence, the Church's approach to scripture reveals a subtle aversion to deeper contact with its own sacred texts. This protective strategy of structured study and limited engagement, while creating a sense of doctrinal stability, may also prevent members from fully encountering the depth, ambiguity, and profound challenges that scripture has to offer.

The Faithful Feminists podcast offers a counterapproach to this "contact phobia," rehabilitating the relationship with scripture by embracing a more open, interpretive, and vulnerable engagement. The podcast does so by promoting a radically open, questioning, and imaginative approach to scripture. Where the Church promotes truth claims as fixed and absolute, Parker and Poll encourage an interpretive process that respects complexity and invites questioning. Episodes sometimes conclude without definitive answers, allowing space for unresolved inquiries and ongoing dialogue. This approach normalizes ambiguity and nurtures a "living" relationship with scripture. Parker and Poll reassure listeners that it is valid – and even spiritually enriching – to leave scripture study with unanswered questions or to "sit with" all of their feelings. In doing so, they encourage listeners to view scripture not as a set of settled facts but as an invitation to continual exploration and growth. Following along the lines of the medical metaphor I just used, one could describe them as guiding their ambiguity-avoiding listeners through a form of exposure therapy: "It's okey," "take a deep breath" and repeat after them "talking about church history is not anti-Mormon." Their own performance and framing thereof also emerge as an exercise of exposure, of removing the "silky gloves" and talking to and about scripture with a bit of "irreverence." They "cry with it," "scream at it," "throw it in the river and then fish it back out only to dry the pages in the sun." Rather than bypassing difficult feelings, Parker and Poll lean into them, offering a model of engagement that validates frustration, sadness, and doubt. For example, when the podcast duo confronts violent or morally troubling passages, they voice their own discomfort and process their reactions with listeners. They describe this as "sitting with" the text, letting it "hurt" or "annoy" them, rather than masking these reactions with pre-determined, positive interpretations. This openness rehabilitates scripture as a space where the full range of human emotions can coexist with faith,

creating an environment where it is safe to experience – and even critique – difficult aspects of the text.

Managing scripture without the "silky gloves" on they also make themselves available for intuition and creativity. Because when "capital t-truth" is rehabilitated, and when there is no longer a need to confess "I know, I know, I know," it creates an opening for intuition. The exegesis practiced by the hosts of *The Faithful Feminists* is framed through terms such as "prophesying," "imagining," and "wrestling," words which harmonize well and can be summarized with the phrase or *nodal point* "intuition," each adding a unique dimension to its meaning. Intuition often involves envisioning or sensing possibilities beyond what is directly observable or rationally deductible. Imagining taps into that intuitive process by allowing someone to visualize or conceive ideas and outcomes that logic alone might not reveal – a lower-case-t truth. Both intuition and prophecy are about perceiving truths that are not immediately evident. Intuition can be seen as a softer, internal form of "prophesying," an inner sense of understanding or prediction without a clear, rational explanation – it opposes the "specific" type of "messaging" conducted in official prophesying. It is "*a* prophecy" to borrow their own words. Wrestling with a concept or experience reflects the internal struggle to understand or reconcile conflicting thoughts or feelings. Intuition often emerges in moments of tension or uncertainty when straightforward answers are elusive. This wrestling process can lead someone to new insights or realizations that are more deeply felt than rationally concluded. Together, these words capture the active, reflective, and sometimes mysterious – "or magic" – qualities of intuition.

These phrases are also orbited by *discursive moments* such as "we prefer the title prophetess," suggesting that they "do most of [their] prophesying on the podcast." The image of "Cassandra," who is struck by her prophecies strengthens the inference that true prophesying happens in the moment. This enables the podcast hosts to occupy – simultaneously accepting and resisting it – the *subject position* of "prophetess." While the Church centers prophecy within institutional hierarchy – accepting only *the* prophet – Parker and Poll view prophecy as a call to advocate justice, equality, and empathy for marginalized groups, and as rooted in "lived experience" rather than a "specific message." By embracing prophetic voices – particularly those of women and marginalized communities – the podcast reframes scriptural authority, suggesting that all believers can engage in prophetic acts by questioning oppressive interpretations and advocating for compassion. This act ultimately challenges not only who gets to occupy the role of prophet but also *how* such divine inspiration is given. As such, the podcast affords a type of interaction and a framing thereof that challenges concepts central to upholding the Church's religious hierarchy. More precisely, the hosts of *The Faithful Feminists* emerge as

contestants within a *discursive field* on prophetic revelation, struggling over the meaning of "prophet" – a term that through their performances and framing of their own live conversations is released from its fixed appearance, in effect making it a *floating signifier*. In other words, while "prophet" is hegemonically tied to men of the priesthood and more specifically the Church President – *the* prophet – the enactment and construction of podcast interaction allow for it to be dually troubled. This occurs first through media performance such as the type of live epiphanies and co-presence witnessed earlier, and second by discursive framing through the concept of "*a* prophet."

6.5 Performing Liveness: *Year of Polygamy*

We have now arrived at the final case for this chapter, the *Year of Polygamy* podcast, where we will start off by observing three examples of how liveness is performed. First, "an old man sitting in his pajamas" demonstrates the raw, unfiltered quality of live audio. Next, "defying the 'primary voice'" captures the potential of self-assertion inherent in the unscripted interview. Finally, "crazy compounds and isolated places" delves into how live discussions foster spaces for nuanced, dialogic opposition.

6.5.1 "An Old Man Sitting in His Pajamas" – The Exposure of Unfiltered Audio

A notable example of how the live settings are manifest in the *Year of Polygamy* podcast is through raw, unfiltered audio. This can be witnessed in some of the interviews Hansen Park regularly carries out with self-proclaimed prophets. Her "world is really full of prophets these days," she says in one of her introductions; in fact, she has "met more prophets in the last three years to fill a Bible" which is "unusual" given how as a Latter-day Saint she "grew up on a steady diet of prophets."[808] In one of the songs she sang as a child, she was taught to "follow the prophet, don't go astray, follow the prophet, he knows the way," adding that she "might have gotten those backwards."[809] Whether "backwards" is referring to possible misquotation of the lyrics or if it is a pun suggestive of her taking the opposite route is hard to tell, but she does in a sense "go astray" or depart from the usual flock of prophets, to find figures like Robert Rey Black. Hansen Park's interview with Black, a member of the fundamentalist group The Church of the Firstborn, is demonstrative of the spatial co-presence of the podcast,[810] and more

[808] Lindsay Hansen Park, "Episode 131: Robert Rey Black, Muslim Mormon Prophet," *Year of Polygamy,* August 21, 2017.

[809] Hansen Park, "Episode 131: Robert Rey Black, Muslim Mormon Prophet."

[810] Euritt, *Podcasting as an Intimate Medium*, p. 14.

precisely, its technological mobility, providing her with the ability to gain access and to blend in with her environment, and in extension to expose the lived reality of Mormon fundamentalism.[811] She explains in the introduction to this episode that she has a "recorded interview with someone who [she] wasn't really expecting to record at the time" it just "sort of happened,"[812] a description that marks the podcast with a sense of casualness. This strengthens the impression that her work is meant to uncover something authentic and real. By narrating the journey and landscape of the trailer park where the interview happens, Hansen Park explains that she wants her listeners to "picture" the events and "walk through this experience" with her.[813] With the help of one of her podcast acquaintances, Moroni Jessop, she explains that they "drove up to a sleepy suburb in Clearfield Utah" into "this quiet trailer park."[814]

> Hansen Park: We walked past the typical fair of pink flamingos and lawn gnomes until we find this trailer home of Robert Ray Black. And the door opens, and we were met by a woman who at first, I assumed was a daughter. And we walk inside. It's a very, very small trailer home and there is an old man sitting in his pajamas, his legs half covered by a blanket, his bare toes sticking out, hooked up to oxygen and apologizing for catheter bags and things like that. There's a nurse fidgeting in the backroom with medicine, and you'll hear all of this show up in the audio… there's a fan on that they had to turn off so we could have better audio, so we have no air conditioning at times. And I try to take out as much as I could, you know, people wrestling for medicine to give Robert Rey Black whose health is very poor as he laid almost flat on his back in an easy chair […] I interviewed Robert as Rebecca sat in a comfortable house dress, coloring books and as we're talking, halfway through my interview with Robert, it dawns on me that Rebecca is not his daughter. It's his wife.[815]

The above quote is a clear example of both a performance and framing of liveness. That is, Hansen Park prepares us for an audio in which we will hear raw reality exposed. The place is in disarray and the interviewee is an old man "hooked up to oxygen."[816] The girl Rebecca – who is not really his daughter but his wife – is entertaining herself with a coloring book. The audio, which Hansen Park explain as "rough" and "unedited" and where the interview intermingles with sounds of "a nurse fidgeting in the backroom with medicine," gives the feeling of "being there," an almost adventurous atmosphere, where the protagonist of the story ventures into unknown territory – she "really didn't

811 Hansen Park, "Episode 131: Robert Rey Black, Muslim Mormon Prophet."
812 Hansen Park, "Episode 131: Robert Rey Black, Muslim Mormon Prophet."
813 Hansen Park, "Episode 131: Robert Rey Black, Muslim Mormon Prophet."
814 Hansen Park, "Episode 131: Robert Rey Black, Muslim Mormon Prophet."
815 Hansen Park, "Episode 131: Robert Rey Black, Muslim Mormon Prophet."
816 Hansen Park, "Episode 131: Robert Rey Black, Muslim Mormon Prophet."

know what to expect."[817] A sequence at the mid end of the interview demonstrates parts of this unruliness. Rebecca – the identity of whom is unbeknownst to Hansen Park at the moment of the recording – and who appears to have been sleeping for parts of the interview, is awakened by her husband to fetch their guests hardcopies of one of his books.

> Black: Rebecca are you asleep yet?
> Rebecca: Yes, have just been fallen asleep ((sleepy voice))
> Hansen Park: So, wait, this is Rebecca that we talked about that you married?
> Black: Yes [Rebecca: yes]
> Hansen Park: Ok
> Rebecca: °I'm his wife°
> Hansen Park: Well, I knew that. I just didn't know. He talked about 25 wives, so I didn't know if you were.
> Rebecca: °I'll go get it°
> Black: Two of them please…
> Rebecca: °I'm sorry I haven't been sleeping very well the past two nights° (inaudible)
> Hansen Park: Oh, that's no problem
> [Inaudible] ((Several ongoing conversations at the same time)).[818]

Rebecca's entrance into the dialogue seems to take Hansen Park by surprise. This might explain her initial confusion – "wait, this is Rebecca?" she says – as she tries to verify her identity and relationship to Black, especially given the context of discussing multiple wives – "I just didn't know, he talked about 25 wives so…" This unplanned moment shifts the tone of the conversation, breaking any formal or prepared structure and introducing a sense of immediacy or realism to the interaction. Rebecca's sleepy and slightly disoriented replies together with her honest confessions mid interview, that she hasn't "been sleeping well" add to this unscripted moment and bring a sense of unfilteredness to the conversation, showing the group's adaptation to real-time dynamics. Hansen Park's reply is then followed by several ongoing conversations at the same time to the point where individual voices are indistinguishable. At the very end of the interview, where Hansen Park has just initiated a conversation with Rebecca about her beliefs and her marriage to Black, this disorientation peaks, ultimately forcing Hansen Park to stop the recorder.

> Rebecca: when I married Robert I was 17, I was in the 4th grade class because my dad really did not want his kids getting an education. That's why he he had a problem with that, uhm anyways, so there was one day that everybody was in the 4th grade. Everybody else was misbehaving except for myself and uh

[817] Hansen Park, "Episode 131: Robert Rey Black, Muslim Mormon Prophet."
[818] Hansen Park, "Episode 131: Robert Rey Black, Muslim Mormon Prophet."

> [PHONE RINGS] ((Robert takes a phone call on speaker)) [Inaudible] My, my family and my family treated me like I couldn't learn. Because of my disability.
> Hansen Park: I'm sorry.
> Rebecca: Treated me like worse than they would treat their dogs
> Hansen Park: So marrying Robert helped you, you were treated better.
> Rebecca: Yeah. When I heard Robert and people started treating me like an adult, and then I felt felt really liberated, like I have been, like, hurt.
> Hansen Park: I imagine that's a hard way to grow up. When you're treated that way …[Inaudible] ((Several ongoing conversations at the same time)) (0.5)
> Hansen Park: This is Lindsay again. So, you get the gist, the audio became too hard to handle at this point there were several points during the interview when the phone would ring and interrupt us, and Robert would take care of some business on speakerphone, and this is one of them. The call would go on for some time and so I ultimately decided to scrap the rest of the interview with Rebecca.[819]

In the continuation of this segment of the transcript Hansen Park fills in the inaudible parts, providing a further glimpse into Rebecca's personal history, her role in the relationship, and broader themes around gender expectations within a fundamentalist religious setting. The conversation that Hansen Park re-tells touches on Rebecca's upbringing, her lack of formal education, her disability and her relationship dynamics with Black. Her mentioning of being gifted to Black by the LeBaron family – a fundamentalist group – adds a layer of coercive control, framing her as an asset rather than a free individual. This dynamic indicates how women's lives in such settings can be determined by male authority figures or inter-family agreements. Most of these reflections become explicit first in Hansen Park's post-commentary recorded in addition to the interview, however. As is evident in both the transcripts and Hansen Park's description, the audio is filled with simultaneous speech, frequent interruptions such as phone ringing, followed by phone conversations on speaker and low audio quality, which ultimately affects how fully Rebecca's voice is heard. The editorial choice to retain some difficult-to-hear parts for their emotional impact underscores their significance. More important for our present concerns, however, is the media performance these transcripts convey. The transcript is punctuated by Rebecca's unexpected entrance, her sleepy, disoriented tone, and Robert's interruptions for phone calls. These unscripted occurrences highlight the immediacy and unpredictability of a live setting. Unlike a heavily edited interview, these spontaneous elements provide raw glimpses into their everyday lives, making the listener more acutely aware of the power dynamics, interruptions, and unspoken norms that govern their relationships. The imperfect audio quality, speakerphone interruptions, and fragmented dialogue give the audience a sense of being in the room. This real-time unfolding conveys a richer, more layered understanding of fundamentalism and poly-

[819] Hansen Park, "Episode 131: Robert Rey Black, Muslim Mormon Prophet."

gamy. A sense of closeness is also fortified through the images shared on her website, one of which demonstrates the scene described above.[820] Here we find Hansen Park sitting on her knees with her laptop, blending in with the environment of the messy trailer described in the introduction to the episode. The enactment and meaning of the recorded audio, then, becomes expressed through the transmediality of the podcast, that is, both through the audio of the podcast itself, and images published on her website. The liveness described here is live through the technology or recording device – a recording made on a portable laptop – which enables her to capture specific background sounds but also through the framing attached, where the audio is described as characterized by spontaneity and realness.

6.5.2 Defying the "Primary Voice" – Unscripted and Unleashed

In similarity to the unanticipated events of the trailer park interview seen earlier, liveness also invites unexpected conversational dynamics – sometimes allowing guests to command attention and control conversation in real time. This can be demonstrated with another controversial interview intruding on the Church's claim to prophecy, the one Hansen Park conducted with Julie Rowe, a self-proclaimed clairvoyant who was excommunicated from the Church in 2019. The interview with Rowe will nuance our understanding of gender and prophetic authority, in two ways. Not only does she occupy a religious position otherwise exclusive to men, she also performs a conversational pattern unorthodox for women. Rather than the quick turn-taking and back-and-forth dialogue that we have observed thus far, Rowe directs the conversation on her terms. Parts of this dynamic seems to be a result of bad internet connection. Hansen Park's introduction sets the audience expectations by addressing the audio quality directly. She begins by explaining that she wants to give a "caveat about the audio" – the recording was done that morning and "turned around quickly," which tells us that it was a performance done in a bit of haste. [821] The rushed feel of the interview, combined with the background car noises later heard during their conversation and Hansen Park's admission that Rowe was in her car during the recording, suggests that the interview may have been arranged with limited notice or at a moment of opportunity. Hansen Park's eagerness to get the interview out to listeners could indicate that this was a rare or urgent chance to speak with Rowe, perhaps due to Rowe's busy schedule – "I

[820] Lindsay Hansen Park, "Episode 131: Robert Rey Black, Muslim Mormon Prophet," *Year of Polygamy,* August 20, 2017, www.yearofpolygamy.com/year-of-polygamy/episode-131-robert-rey-black-muslim-mormon-prophet/, accessed January 20, 2025.

[821] Lindsay Hansen Park, "Episode 181 Part One: American Prophetess – An Interview with Julie Rowe," *Year of Polygamy,* May 30, 2020.

appreciate Julie giving me the time to interview her" Hansen Park adds, "I know she's got a lot going on right now."[822] Besides a few glitches due to bad connection, however, the lack of proper turn-taking seems largely to be a result of interactional dynamic. That the command is taken by her guest from the very beginning of their conversation is apparent in the following transcript. Hansen Park begins the interview by describing the excitement of finding a female prophet. She had mostly been dealing with "dudes" and "patriarchal stuff," but "all of a sudden" she started hearing rumors about "this prophetess."

> Hansen Park: I was super intrigued by that as a Mormon Feminist to be, like, "wait, what? There's a woman doing theology like this?" So that's how you first came on the radar […] You have conviction, and you have a faith that I think is pretty remarkable, especially going through all that you've gone through in the Church.
> Rowe: Thank you. That's nice of you. You know, I've wrestled with it from the time I was a young girl. I would love to talk about a point in time when I absolutely made a critical decision in my life about what direction I wanted to go based on my upbringing and experiences…and so I don't know how much to get into it right now, but basically, maybe we can talk about like how I was raised into the background or whatever, you know.
> Hansen Park: Yeah, that's what I was going to ask you. Why don't we start with… your Mormon background? …that's a long story but give us a concise version.
> Rowe: So, I was I was born in Salt Lake City, Utah, Salt Lake Hospital an LDS hospital. My mom's from Ogden, Utah my dad has pioneer ancestry with the LDS Church […][823]

In this initial exchange, Rowe quickly takes control of the interview, subtly steering the conversation to topics of her choice. After Hansen Park introduces the idea of Rowe's unusual role as a "prophetess" and expresses admiration for her conviction, Rowe uses this opening to suggest a focus on her personal journey and the "critical decision" she made in her youth. Rather than responding directly to Hansen Park's point about gender and theological innovation, Rowe pivots to talking about her own life choices and upbringing, effectively steering away from broader questions about her role as a female prophet. Rowe subtly proposes that they discuss her background and personal history, framing it as essential context. Her phrasing, "maybe we can talk about […] how I was raised into the background or whatever," is gentle but assertive, implying that her personal story is foundational to understanding her identity and choices. This approach shifts control from Hansen Park, as Rowe frames her life story as the necessary starting point. When Hansen Park responds affirmatively and asks for a "concise version" of Rowe's background, Rowe maintains her control by launching into an elaborate, uninter-

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822 Hansen Park, "Episode 181 Part One: American Prophetess – An Interview with Julie Rowe."
823 Hansen Park, "Episode 181 Part One: American Prophetess – An Interview with Julie Rowe."

rupted five-minute account of her family's roots and her own upbringing. Rowe's early redirection and willingness to start her story without specific prompting establishes her as the primary voice and sets the tone for the rest of the interview. By taking control from the outset, Rowe signals that her narrative will lead the conversation, with Hansen Park following her chosen trajectory. The quote below tells of the difficulties this dynamic poses for Hansen Park, to interrupt for clarifying questions or make comments. In this conversation they reference Chad Daybell, a fellow believer and previous friend of Rowe's, now known through labels like "doomsday cult leader" and sentenced to death for the murder of his ex-wife and his second wife's children.[824] By the time of the interview, Daybell together with his wife Lori Vallow were part of an ongoing investigation on the disappearance of Vallow's children and the murder of her previous husband and attempted murder of the then-husband of Vallow's niece. The excerpt speaks of Daybell's beliefs in zombies – or the possession of evil spirits – and the potential risks Rowe was faced with for challenging his beliefs.

> Rowe: Well, there's some truth to it, right? That's what Satan does, he tells some truth [How, how though] ((inaudible)) all the time the energy can come in and out of you […] [Chad's] been going around for a couple of years, telling people I turned dark. Oh just happened to coincide with when I was excommunicated. [Do you worry for your] well and it also coincided when he was starting to have an affair and go more off track, right? He can't be the dark one. I must be because I'm disagreeing with him [That's what I'm concerned] And about that, but it's like am I the next one on his hit list? […]
>
> Hansen Park: That's exactly what I was going to ask you if you were worried about that. Because once [no] the Melanie stuff came out –
>
> Rowe: No, I know who I work for, and I know I'm protected. I can tell you this. My light waves are way bigger than the demons that that give him information and guard him and […] they look way further into the future and we planned for this eons ago […] I'm not scared one bit about anybody in Spirit Realm […] worst case scenario, I die. Hallelujah. I'd be thrilled.
>
> Hansen Park: heh well I know, but I I would [I'd love it over there [laughing]] hope you won't be murdered by an old friend.
>
> Rowe: I won't be, but I've been murdered in other probations, and I have memory of it. You know what? So, what? …Honestly, I'm like, [well what would you say to] well take me out [Chad like]. I mean […] I'm Julie Rowe right. I'm not scared of Chad Daybell… I have Cain showing up to my house and Lucifer on a regular

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[824] Michael Drummond, "Alleged 'Doomsday' Cult Leader Chad Daybell Goes on Trial For Murder of Lori Vallow's Children," *Sky News,* April 10, news.sky.com/story/alleged-doomsday-cult-leader-chad-daybell-to-go-on-trial-for-murder-of-lori-vallows-children-13102168, accessed November 22, 2024; "Who is Chad Daybell? What to Know About the 'Doomsday Cult' Murder Case," *CBS News*, May 30, www.cbsnews.com/news/chad-daybell-trial-doomsday-cult-murder-case/, accessed November 22, 2024.

> basis. And I have to cast them out all the time… you think I really give a crap about Chad Daybell? He's he is a peon.[825]

Rowe fully dominates this conversation, cutting off Hansen Park's questions, redirecting the focus to her own narrative, and asserting her authority on spiritual matters. The performance of liveness here is what allows for varying conversational dynamics to take place, in this case a rapid and uninterrupted monologue. There is no way to edit away Rowe's intense stretches of monologue – radically shortened for conciseness in the quote above – and the way that they exclude Hansen Park from interjecting. Even when Hansen Park attempts to engage, Rowe often speaks over her or redirects back to her own interpretation of events. This dynamic keeps Hansen Park on the sidelines, turning what could be a dialogue into a monologue dominated by Rowe's narrative about energy, spirits, and her conflicts with Daybell. Rowe frequently interrupts Hansen Park mid-sentence, often finishing or dismissing her statements before they are complete. For example, when Hansen Park begins to ask if Rowe is worried about her safety, Rowe interjects with a forceful "No, I know who I work for," before launching into an elaborate explanation of her spiritual "light waves" and protections. By repeatedly interrupting Hansen Park, Rowe prevents her from steering the conversation back to the original questions or completing her thoughts. Rowe emphasizes her unique spiritual experiences and divine authority, claiming to have encountered Lucifer and Cain personally. This assertion of supernatural authority overshadows Hansen Park's attempts to question or moderate the discussion. Rowe's insistence that she is "not scared" one bit and that she has been "murdered in other probations" further reinforces her stance as an unassailable figure, essentially invalidating any alternative views Hansen Park might bring up. She tries to connect with Rowe by laughing and acknowledging Rowe's unusual perspectives, even jokingly expressing concern for her safety ("I'd hope you won't be murdered by an old friend"). This pattern of interruption persists throughout their conversation, notably when Rowe discusses spiritual confirmations. She asserts, "I had that confirmation from the spirit that I could not deny, and I will never deny, [Do you] when the spirit [Do you have any] when the spirit witnesses to you and you know that you're accountable…" during which Hansen Park attempts to interject multiple times. Despite these interruptions, Rowe overlooks these conversational cues and escalates her portrayals.

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[825] Lindsay Hansen Park, "Episode 181 Part Two: American Prophetess – An Interview with Julie Rowe," *Year of Polygamy,* May 30, 2020.

The dominance Rowe exerts over her communication is not necessarily interpreted as something negative by the host, however but could – as Hansen Park frames it in the following quote – be considered a challenge to how women in power usually speak.

> Hansen Park: we have this thing in Mormon Feminism where we call it the "primary voice." Like when women get power, they their voices get softer [right] and more. You know what I mean?
> Rowe: I call it fake
> Hansen Park: Yeah you're not like that [no] and you're talking as strongly as the men are. So, do you have any idea how big the reach is? How many people [well on what] respond to? [side of the veil right?]
> Rowe: we have a really big audience on the other side of the veil, and I don't I haven't given idea of some of the numbers there […] I do see this message going much broader in the next couple of years […] this message and other teachings that will be restored as prophecy […] it will transform this world as we go into New Jerusalem […] and I will play integral part in that in helping some of that information get out to people.[826]

Rowe's speaking style is revealed here as both assertive and subversive, challenging traditional expectations for women in power, particularly within a Latter-day Saint context. Rowe's refusal to adopt a "soft" voice, combined with her convictions of her own role, highlight her as an unconventional female figure. Hansen Park references the "primary voice," a concept in Mormon feminism describing the tendency for women to soften their voices and adopt a gentle tone when gaining authority, presumably as a way to balance their influence with traditional feminine expectations. Rowe, however, outright rejects this, calling it "fake." This strong, unfiltered response challenges the stereotype that women must be accommodating or subdued to maintain credibility or respect, especially in spiritual or leadership roles. Rowe's direct manner of speaking aligns her with the authoritative voices of male leaders, or as Hansen Park expresses it, she is "talking as strongly as the men are." Her choice to speak strongly rather than temper her language or manner reflects her unwillingness to conform to expectations of modesty or passivity often placed on women in her tradition. Rowe's self-description as playing an "integral part" in ushering in a transformative era, including the building of New Jerusalem and her confidence that she has a "big reach" "on the other side of the veil" suggests that she sees herself as a prophet with influence beyond traditional bounds. This unapologetic assertion of her reach and significance frames her as a force to be reckoned with, positioning her as an authority equal to or surpassing male counterparts.

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826 Lindsay Hansen Park, "Episode 181 Part One: American Prophetess – An Interview with Julie Rowe."

The live format of the interview is crucial in allowing this to come through in an unfiltered, impactful way. In a live or minimally edited setting like this one, the host has less control over the flow of conversation and cannot predict or steer every moment, creating an environment where assertive personalities like Rowe can dominate. The temporal co-presence,[827] or real-time nature of the conversation prevents the host from softening or reshaping her guest's responses. Rowe's intense, bold declarations about her mission and beliefs come across as spontaneous and genuine, unmediated by any post-production adjustments. This directness reinforces her authority and commitment to her role, allowing her to present herself more freely, without any filtering that might otherwise temper her presence. The live format thus amplifies her subversive challenge to authority, not only within the Latter-day Saint tradition but also within the framework of the interview itself. The live format's unpredictability becomes a vehicle for her to embody and perform her role as a self-proclaimed prophet, demonstrating that she can command attention and control conversation, much like the male prophets she challenges.

6.5.3 "Crazy Compounds and Isolated Places" – Dialogic Space for Opposition and Nuance

Another media performance enabled through liveness is interactive co-presence,[828] or more specifically a dialogic space for opposition and nuance. Audio and audio-visual recording, as Scannell puts it, preserve and "redeem" what Socrates referred to as the dialogue – the "pursuit of truth" that can only emerge "in questioning, interactive talk between people who are present to one another."[829] Only through this form of co-present interaction "can distortions and misunderstandings be untangled in the back and forth of question and answer" thus enabling a "progressive clarification of meaning and understanding."[830] A good example of this is Hansen Park's interview with a present-day member of FLDS, called Mother Irene. Due to the criminal activities of their prophet Warren Jeffs, the FLDS have frequently been in the floodlights of media. Recurring police raids as well as the incarceration of their prophet have fortified a long tradition of viewing themselves as a persecuted people. Hansen Park, however, can safely pass through such places, to collect personal accounts of its inhabitants, which again speaks of the technological mobility of the podcast. Or as she explains it, "I get to

827 Euritt, *Podcasting as an Intimate Medium*, p. 14.
828 Euritt, *Podcasting as an Intimate Medium*, p. 14.
829 Scannell, *Television and the Meaning of Live: An Enquiry into the Human Situation*, p. 95–96.
830 Scannell, *Television and the Meaning of Live: An Enquiry into the Human Situation*, p. 95–96.

go to crazy compounds and isolated places."[831] The alleged uniqueness of this interview is highlighted by Hansen Park who explains that the FLDS church is notoriously secretive and very isolated, typically staying away from outsiders. It is, therefore "very rare to talk to a faithful member of the FLDS."[832] The last time "they actually let somebody in like this" her guest and contemporary co-host Christine Katas adds, was in 2009 when Oprah Winfrey visited the Yearning for Zion ranch, ten months after a raid happened in 2008.[833] When Hansen Park conducts her interview, the group has not spoken to the media for years, which indicates to her listeners both that there must be something in Hansen Park's approach that allows the interview to happen and that the interview itself uncovers something previously invisible to the public. Descriptions like these further the framing of exposure, which we will turn to later, where her podcast project is portrayed as able to pass through and expose groups that have been hidden from media.[834]

Moving in closer to fundamentalist groups like FLDS enables Hansen Park to conduct more intimate dialogues with people, often in a manner of clarifying and bringing nuance to different perspectives. In the interview with Mother Irene for example, Hansen Park initiates a discussion on the "housing crisis." The term refers to a dispute about the properties of Short Creek. Up until 2005, the FLDS owned the land trust called "United Effort Plan" (UEP) which controlled all the homes of Short Creek residents. When Utah state seized UEP, due to fears that Warren Jeffs was "mismanaging" it and that some residents might lose their homes, the trust took over and became religiously neutral. Anyone who "placed assets into the trust or worked on its behalf" was its beneficiary.[835] When FLDS residents refused to sign occupancy agreements, some of them were evicted. While this happened, new residents moved in, often former members who were considered "apostates" by members such as Mother Irene.

> Hansen Park: The trust has taken over what the Church had with the United Order church trust. They took over a lot of the properties and lands and they're trying to give it back to people who have been sent away or lost their homes but from your perspective there's a different story to that, correct?
>
> Mother Irene: Yes altogether. There are some that are coming back in and taking some of the houses but it's not necessarily to those who are living in that house there or uh basically it's a land diagram and it's kind of painful to be evicted out of your home and then see it sit there for months on end, sometimes it's been a

831 Lindsay Hansen Park, "Episode 153: Turning the Mic on Lindsay," *Year of Polygamy,* June 6, 2018.
832 Lindsay Hansen Park, "Episode 120: FLDS and Faithful, Part One," *Year of Polygamy,* March 29, 2017.
833 Lindsay Hansen Park, "Episode 120: FLDS and Faithful, Part One."
834 Lindsay Hansen Park, "Episode 120: FLDS and Faithful, Part Two."
835 Nate Carlisle, "Exodus of the FLDS," *Salt Lake Tribune,* May 9, 2017, local.sltrib.com/online/sw/short-creek-exodus/, accessed December 24, 2024.

> year and then another family moves in […] I'm sure they want to make it look like that they're doing good but quite honestly anyone that comes in and takes any of our land, this is sacred land to us this is our land from our fathers and mothers from way back and we just don't want to compromise on signing anything with people that have turned against us. They're apostates and, so we won't sign their occupancy agreements.[836]

As the quote explains there is a conflict between earlier residents and contemporary FLDS members. While Hansen Park recognizes that people "have been sent away or lost their homes," Mother Irene expresses the pain of being evicted and seeing other families move into them. The UEP "want to make it look like they're doing good" but from her perspective, her community is being asked to "compromise" "sacred land" that has been theirs for generations. Hansen Park, who works with the trust, however, expresses another side of the story.

> Hansen Park: From my perspective, I deal with a lot of people who are shunned and who have been hurt and in their perspective, this faith that they gave everything to, they built these homes, they spent hours and hours on it, they consecrated their time and their effort and their energy and then to have one of their leaders say "you have this sin that we have discerned" and they say "no I didn't do that"[and then] be sent away. They feel a great injustice that sort of settles deep down and it's a pain that I don't think many people can understand because you don't just lose your home, you lose your family […] from their perspective they too have been robbed […] that's the predominant narrative and that's one I'm very sympathetic towards. But I will say that meeting mother Irene has made me see a different side of this and that's the tension […] from my perspective there's no real heroes here. I can understand why the trust is doing what they're doing but maybe Mother Irene can give a different perspective?[837]

Hansen Park's response, where she is both clear about their differences of perspective yet remains open toward Mother Irene's story, is demonstrative of the diplomatic conversation that continues. In both of these quotes, Hansen Park creates space for opposition – her prompt acknowledgement that there is "a different perspective" to be told from Mother Irene's side, sets up an invitation for a counter-narrative. The topic at hand – including property rights, community displacement, and religious loyalty – is inherently emotional and contentious. By inviting Mother Irene to speak candidly about her grievances, especially regarding apostates and the occupation of sacred land, she encourages a more nuanced, real-time exploration of these sensitive issues. When Hansen Park gives Mother Irene the platform to express her frustration openly, she allows the audience to hear an unfiltered view of the community's struggle. This invitation to

836 Hansen Park, "Episode 120: FLDS and Faithful, Part Two."
837 Hansen Park, "Episode 120: FLDS and Faithful, Part Two."

"hash out" differences live makes the conversation feel more genuine and highlights the personal stakes involved. This openness implies that there is more complexity to the issue than meets the eye. This framing suggests that Hansen Park wants to break from simplified or one-sided accounts, encouraging Mother Irene to provide insight into her community's lived experience of loss and resistance. By positioning herself as open to critique, Hansen Park adds credibility to the discussion, allowing listeners to witness the depth and diversity of perspectives within these religious conflicts. This approach enables a more multifaceted discussion that goes beyond surface-level reporting, allowing the audience to witness the emotional and ideological stakes firsthand.

In the conversation that unfolds, the dynamic between the three participants – Hansen Park, her co-host Katas, and their guest, Mother Irene – becomes crucial as they navigate both personal experiences and their broader historical and doctrinal contexts. In between their personal experiences, the trio makes attempts to fill the narrative with historical background or explain doctrinal reasons for why members cannot sign the occupancy agreement. Katas says, "they don't communicate with apostates or enemies […] that's been a longstanding part of their religion," so "when they get an eviction notice" and it has "the name of a well-known former member who they can't talk to or make a deal with" they are prevented from accepting the deal.[838] To elicit listeners' understanding and to further make comparison between the two women (Hansen Park and Mother Irene), Katas draws parallels to the Latter-day Saint tradition:

> Katas: It would be like for you Lindsey, let's suppose that in your home the only opportunity that you had to continue living in your home in your neighborhood with all your friends is if you signed a new occupancy agreement on a home that you thought was already yours, but you had to sign your temple name,[839] and let's suppose you're a good temple attending devout Mormon woman. Would you sign your temple name to stay in your home?
> Hansen Park: No obviously not no.
> Katas: Well, why not?
> Hansen Park: Oh, because that, I mean, that's a very deeply held religious belief of mine that that's something we don't reveal outside of the temple.
> Katas: Right, so that same commitment and power of religious devotion is what they have regarding the occupancy agreements […] so many times I've heard people that are outside of the church say they won't sign them because they're just stubborn. Well, that's not it, it's because they want to live their religion and if they do sign it there will be consequences. I mean, what would be the consequences if you signed that?
> Mother Irene: First of all, I think my own conscience would get the most of me because I had made a deal with an apostate or an enemy right, and so that's

838 Hansen Park, "Episode 120: FLDS and Faithful, Part Two."
839 Latter-day saints receive a temple name as part of the Endowment ceremony.

> number one pretty much. I would be citing that, state that I was not, I was no longer an FLDS I was an outsider.
> Hansen Park: Wait, so, what you're saying is if you signed it that would effectively remove you from your church?
> Mother Irene: Yeah, pretty much. You would be making a choice to say I do not want to be a part of the church.[840]

A similar way of finding common ground is the question of ex-members persecuting or criticizing their former group. While Hansen Park wonders if that is not "harsh" treatment against apostates, Katas asks if it is not the case that ex-members persecute The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, a question that leads Hansen Park to conclude that some spend "their entire life fighting against the Church and from my perspective very unfairly trampling on sacred things."[841] The spirit of this conversation, then, is very much focused on finding common ground. Thus, Katas plays a critical role in bridging the perspectives of Hansen Park and Mother Irene by drawing a parallel that makes their shared values and experiences visible, despite their different religious backgrounds within the broader Mormon tradition. This connection-building serves several functions. By posing a hypothetical scenario to Hansen Park about signing her temple name to retain her home, Katas creates a parallel that brings the two women's beliefs into alignment. She uses a sacred practice from Hansen Park's own Latter-day Saint experience to mirror the commitment Mother Irene feels toward her FLDS tradition. This comparison emphasizes the depth of religious conviction that both women share, showing that their resistance is not mere stubbornness but a profound expression of faith. For listeners, Katas' analogy helps demystify Mother Irene's stance, moving it from a position of "otherness" to something that resonates with broader Mormon values. By likening Mother Irene's refusal to sign to a similarly "unthinkable" action for a devout Latter-day Saint member, Katas encourages listeners to empathize with her position. By reframing this resistance as an act of faith, Katas challenges stereotypes, encouraging both Hansen Park and the listeners to see the FLDS community as motivated by religious integrity rather than defiance. This bridge-building promotes a more nuanced conversation, encouraging Hansen Park to listen with greater empathy, in effect fostering a sense of solidarity across religious boundaries. As is visible in the following quote, it also enables its participants to share a space of pain and vulnerability.

> Hansen Park: I don't know if the listeners can hear that, but there is such, like, this tense painful space that we're all holding right now […] one of the myths that you Irene broke down for me is that you were willing to dialogue and that you

840 Hansen Park, "Episode 120: FLDS and Faithful, Part Two."
841 Hansen Park, "Episode 120: FLDS and Faithful, Part Two."

> could take on these hard questions and let me give you hard answers and as people can clearly see you can speak for yourself and respond to that and still do that from a faithful place. I went home that night […] and I admit that I spent about 45 minutes sobbing. I started sobbing looking out the window and I was just thinking of all the pain that our people have experienced in our movement, and I mean the larger Mormon movement. From the beginning, from the misunderstandings, of the beginning from Utah, from the persecution from the government and how the government saw us and how we saw the government and then how I've experienced it in the LDS church […] what listening to you did, is it made it more complicated for me. Because I want the story to have heroes and villains right, we want someone to be a bad guy, we want to have the problem, we want it to be simple and we want to fix it. But that's not the story. The story, if people can hear it, there's pain here there's so much tension […] [in the Latter-day Saint community] we have such a culture of shame and othering and expulsion and making sure that you [FLDS] know you guys are kept away from us and even though you and I we could probably trace our history back and find common ancestors of people that came across the plains and that's the pain I'm holding, I'm holding the pain that you're feeling I'm holding the pain that from people who feel like they were pushed out. I don't have a good answer, but I just want to acknowledge that I recognize it, and I really appreciate that you're willing to, you know, be part of this side of the bridge.
>
> Katas: That's amazing, it's amazing. She's [Mother Irene] tearing up.[842]

The trio gathered under this episode are "breaking down myths" by collectively "holding pain" together on-air. "I don't know if the listeners can hear" Hansen Park says, but there is "this tense painful space that we're all holding right now." By recognizing that they are able to disturb or deconstruct stereotypes or myths by sitting in "tensions" and "pain," they come close to the discourse on discomfort seen in the *At Last She Said It* podcast. While dispelling myths through "hard questions" and "hard answers" the hardness is cushioned or held through vulnerability and humility – Hansen Park recalls "sobbing" after the visit to Short Creek, and Mother Irene is purportedly "tearing up." But the conversation is not meant to provide solutions or answers, there are no "good answers" Hansen Park admits, but at least they are providing a meeting place, that is, they are "willing" to be part of "the bridge." Part of performing liveness in the *Year of Polygamy* podcast then, means an interactive co-presence or "conversational intimacy,"[843] that allow its interactants to connect with each other in ways perceived as authentic.

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842 Lindsay Hansen Park, "Episode 120: FLDS and Faithful, Part Two."

843 Euritt, *Podcasting as an Intimate Medium*, p. 67.

6.6 Framing Liveness: *Year of Polygamy*

To grasp the significance of elements like poor and unfiltered audio, we must examine the discourses that envelop and infuse the podcast. This exploration will focus on five key examples: "warts and all," which underscores the importance of transparency for a subject like polygamy, often shrouded in secrecy and shame; "boardroom revelations," portraying how comparisons between fundamentalist Mormon prophets and the polished images of church prophets is used to question or relativize prophetic authority; "us versus them mentality," highlighting the stereotyping of fundamentalist Mormons; "it was just like being with people," which aligns live interactions with efforts to humanize fundamentalist Mormons; and finally, "faithful disagreement," showcasing the values and virtues of bridge-building amidst differences.

6.6.1 "Warts and All" – The Politics of Bad Audio

A particularly revealing illustration of why poor audio is significant in discussions about polygamy is the use of the word "secret." While liveness exposes unfiltered reality, the Church purportedly has a history of the opposite, to cover or conceal. But this label of "secrecy" is generated, not only through the fact that the Church for a long time avoided addressing polygamy and therefore caused it to become such a sensitive subject, but also because the discourse criticizing it – among Mormon Feminists and others – uses metaphors and terminology where polygamy is reproduced as being a shameful secret. We are led to understand that polygamy is a "wound" created from being given the silent treatment and from being hidden away in places where it does not get air or daylight. [844] Hansen Park not only echoes these statements but makes the exposure of polygamy her primary goal.

> Hansen Park: I cannot count how many times I deal with LDS people that say, "we're not polygamists," "don't equate us with polygamists," "we don't practice polygamy" and I just think like it's that institutional collective denial and shame that we have that's a huge problem […] it's a sickness, it's this denial of sickness. We need to pull the covers off, open the windows and let some light in about it.[845]

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[844] In the podcasts explored here for example, it is often spoken of as an infection or wound, that lacks treatment. See Channing Parker & Elise Poll, "Processing Polygamy With Brook Andreoli (Doctrine & Covenants 132);" M. Hinckley & Winward, "Episode 073: Acknowledging the Elephant: A Conversation About Polygamy with the Faithful Feminists."

[845] Lindsay Hansen Park, "Episode 143: Modern LDS Polygamy," *Year of Polygamy,* February 5, 2018.

In similarity to the festering wound, Hansen Park characterizes polygamy as a "sickness" brought on by the "collective denial" of the Church concerning its own practice of polygamy. She also frequently uses the saying, "sunshine is the best disinfectant" to describe the act of exposure to public scrutiny, and to push for transparency and openness.[846] The full implication of these words, sunlight and disinfectant, if we place them next to the "sickness" label, is that truth and health go hand in hand. Secrecy leads to sickness and germs, whereas sunlight exposes, and, in effect, defeats them. In a similar spirit, many commenters on *Year of Polygamy*'s website describe being "detached" from the Church's polygamist past,[847] and "shying away from the issue."[848] Others also recognize the lack of education on the matter by the Church. As one commenter expresses it, Hansen Park "reveal[ed] the truth that had never been told" or as another listener put it, "too bad we don't hear the real history in Sunday School!"[849] One listener says that she wishes "these historical issues involving Mormon women could be explored in Relief Society" but that "Correlation among other reasons will probably prevent that from ever happening."[850]

This discourse on exposure is interdiscursively linked to a larger discussion on church history and Mormon studies as an academic discipline. As described earlier Mormon history is a precarious subject for the Church. Only recently has the Church's ambition to gatekeep historical documents been loosened. One reason for the precarity surrounding their own historical records is, according to Hansen Park, that their own archive fuels the beliefs of Mormon fundamentalists, which causes the Church and its members deep shame. The documents in the historical archive demonstrate the involvement of church leaders in practices that are no longer part of the Church, including, but not limited to, plural marriage. In an episode where Hansen Park and scholar Cristina Rosetti discuss previous church historian Leonard Arrington's newly published diaries

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846 Lindsay Hansen Park, "Episode 11: Marina Nancy Johnson Hyde," *Year of Polygamy,* February 11, 2014.

847 Commenter, "Episode 04: Zina Huntington Jacobs Young Smith," *Year of Polygamy,* January 9, 2014, www.yearofpolygamy.com/year-of-polygamy/year-of-polygamy-zina-huntington-jacobs-young-smith-episode-04/, accessed January 4, 2024.

848 Commenter, "Episode 10: Polygamy in Nauvoo," *Year of Polygamy,* January 30, 2014, www.yearofpolygamy.com/year-of-polygamy/year-of-polygamy-polygamy-in-nauvoo-episode-10/, accessed January 24, 2024.

849 Commenter, "Episode 10: Polygamy in Nauvoo," *Year of Polygamy,* January 30, 2014, www.yearofpolygamy.com/year-of-polygamy/year-of-polygamy-polygamy-in-nauvoo-episode-10/, accessed January 4, 2024.

850 Commenter, "Episode 61: Polygamy and Abuse Intro," *Year of Polygamy,* November 10, 2014, www.yearofpolygamy.com/year-of-polygamy/year-of-polygamy-polygamy-and-abuse-intro-episode-61/, accessed May 20, 2024.

they talk about history as "a source of vindication" for fundamentalists.[851] In the quote below they mention Fred Collier who along with for example Robert Rey Black (encountered earlier), was a follower of the fundamentalist group Church of the Firstborn of the Fulness of Times. They were described by Arrington as the "Mormon Underground Press," which refers to their practice of stealing and circulating material from the Church archive. In the events depicted in the following quote, Collier was sharing tracts outside the General Conference in 1977.

> Rosetti: [Collier] thank[ed] the historical department for the quotes.
> Hansen Park: Do you think that was a way of him positioning that this did indeed come from the Church history department?
> Rosetti: Yeah…the fundamentalists can look in the archive and their whole worldview can be vindicated and their whole worldview is found in the archive. If you go in the documents, you see the continued practice of plural, celestial marriage […] outside of just Brigham Young […] and so to thank the historical archive, he's showing that yes, it exists in the archive, and yes, this is just something that's really Mormon, and the fact that it's in restricted documents is showing that it's something they're worried about if they're hiding it.[852]

In other words, fundamentalists are a painful reminder of what the Latter-day Saints used to practice and believe in. One document of importance for Mormon fundamentalists is for example the third Church President John Taylor's 1886 revelation that spoke of the necessity of continuing the practice of polygamy. This, the duo explains, is the history that Arrington wanted to portray – history with "warts and all."[853] In many ways, this is a project that Hansen Park endeavors to adopt and present for public consumption. In similarity to the other two podcasts, the Church – and its practices of secrecy – constitutes an important discursive other to the narrative that unfolds, thus explaining why the podcast matters. The interview with Robert Ray Black could be approached as an attempt to capture the reality that the Church allegedly wants to distinguish itself from. Thus, bad audio could be seen as enabling a contemporary history "with warts and all."

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[851] Lindsay Hansen Park, "Episode 154: Leonard Arrington and Fundamentalism," *Year of Polygamy,* June 12, 2018.

[852] Hansen Park, "Episode 154: Leonard Arrington and Fundamentalism."

[853] Hansen Park, "Episode 154: Leonard Arrington and Fundamentalism."

6.6.2 "Boardroom Revelations" – Relativizing Prophetic Authority

But it is not just the practices of plural marriage that the interview with Robert Rey Black exposes. Another potential source of embarrassment or "shame" for the Church, is the fact that he – like many of Hansen Park's other guests – disturbs the image of prophetic authority. The interview with Black is surrounded by discourses that can be interpreted as both questioning the authenticity of Church prophets and relativizing their authority. When Hansen Park introduces listeners to the interview with Black, for example, she recounts her own experiences and observations of prophetic figures growing up in the Church. The memories of these, contrary to what listeners encounter in the interview with Black, rely on carefully curated public images.

> Hansen Park: For me prophets were successful businessmen and tailored suits, usually from Woolen Mills, which is a local Mormon owned suit shop in downtown Salt Lake City. Prophets had kind soft eyes and white hair, clean shaven faces and voices that sounded wise and firm […] although they were corporate men I had pictures of them hung in my room as a teenage girl as if they were a teen idol […] they were more like beloved fathers, the patriarchs that watched down on us as we slept. But they still were corporate men, clean cut and crafted and we were never to get too close to them and if we did, the lucky few of us who had the chance to be in the same room as one of these men, we would usually cry and swoon as if we were 17 at a Mick Jagger concert […] I mean, prophets in the LDS church are often rock stars but without the rock.[854]

Hansen Park opens by contrasting traditional church prophets with her encounter with Black, describing how her upbringing presented prophets as polished, "corporate men" with strict adherence to image and authority – they were "successful businessmen," wore "tailored suits" usually crafted at the same "suit shop" from "downtown Salt Lake City," and had "clean-shaven faces." She describes the paradox of these prophets as "rock stars without the rock," a comparison that humorously highlights the reverence and mystique attributed to prophets, while also underlining the controlled, traditional nature of their public personas. Outside of Mormonism, she continues, the understanding of prophets is "anyone who claims to commune with the divine and receive instruction" or sometimes acts as an "intermediary" between God and people.[855] In Mormonism however, it is much "more complicated" because "it's tied to authority."[856] Latter-day Saints believe that every individual can communicate with God and receive

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854 Hansen Park, "Episode 131: Robert Rey Black, Muslim Mormon Prophet."
855 Hansen Park, "Episode 131: Robert Rey Black, Muslim Mormon Prophet."
856 Hansen Park, "Episode 131: Robert Rey Black, Muslim Mormon Prophet."

personal revelation, she explains, but in the Church prophets have to have "proper priesthood authority to be able to tell others what to do."[857] The crux of the matter is that sometimes personal revelations contradicts those of leaders with priesthood authority. Some who realize that the advice or guidance they received from their church authority, is just their "opinion" and not "something they have to listen to," go on their own "merry little way."[858] The problem with this for church authority is that it challenges their power – "what good is your authority if people don't listen to your instructions?" Hansen Park explains.[859] This, she suggests, is why the Church "continues to excommunicate people who question their authority."[860]

> Hansen Park: In the LDS hierarchy right now authority is represented by bureaucracy…It's tailored suits and clean-shaven faces and incisive policy and boardroom revelation signed off by lawyers and publicity firms. Your average LDS Mormon would not like to hear it that way because that's not how we experience it, that's not, certainly not how I experienced it. I experienced the sweet loving face of President Gordon B. Hinckley smiling down on me over my bedroom lamp as I read my scriptures at night. I didn't see him as a boardroom, you know, board of directors type company man, but he was both right. This is the paradox of Mormonism: if you decouple the idea of prophet from authority what are you left with? […] these ideas of prophets show up in almost every culture that I can think of […] in most traditions outside of Mormonism I would say that it would not be unlikely to have prophets who are strange and unusual. Maybe you get like more of an Old Testament prophet like Isaiah who walked barefoot for three years to warn people of upcoming captivity or someone like the ascetic monk Simeon Stylites who was famous for living in solitary confinement inside a cell. He abandoned all personal hygiene and basically lived the life of a beast inflicting pain and voluntary suffering to commune with the divine. For me, this interview that I that I am going to share with you today explores these questions of what a prophet is. Is a prophet someone with authority? Is a prophet someone with keys? Is a prophet someone who is strange? Is a prophet someone who is ascetic? Who is a prophet?[861]

While Hansen Park's memories of official church prophets are tinged with reverence – of "President Gordon B. Hinckley smiling down on [her]" as she "read [her] scriptures at night," they also seem to suggest a sense of ceremonial distance. Not only is she framing the Church as a bureaucracy, as "company men," but also the scriptedness of their prophecies. The Church authority is represented by "boardroom revelations signed off by lawyers and publicity firms" Hansen Park says, a choice of words that impresses

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857 Hansen Park, "Episode 131: Robert Rey Black, Muslim Mormon Prophet."
858 Hansen Park, "Episode 131: Robert Rey Black, Muslim Mormon Prophet."
859 Hansen Park, "Episode 131: Robert Rey Black, Muslim Mormon Prophet."
860 Hansen Park, "Episode 131: Robert Rey Black, Muslim Mormon Prophet."
861 Hansen Park, "Episode 131: Robert Rey Black, Muslim Mormon Prophet."

upon its listeners that they lack intuition and spontaneity. Such an interpretation is inevitable also in relation to how a prophet is imagined "in most traditions outside of Mormonism," namely as a "strange and unusual," "barefoot" and "solitary" figure who has "abandoned all personal hygiene." It is in this contrasting context that Black, and his chaotic interview setting is placed. His story is one of improvisation and informality, far from the carefully curated narratives of official prophets.

6.6.3 "Us Versus Them Mentality" – De-Constructing the Fundamentalist Other

In a previous quote the Church was constructed as suffering from a "collective denial," part of which implies the separation of itself from polygamists – "don't equate us with polygamists" – Hansen Park imitated. In the same quote she explains that an important function of this denial is the distancing toward and othering of those Mormons who have chosen to continue to live by the principle of polygamy.

> Hansen Park: I blame that shame and denial for the problems happening in fundamentals communities like the FLDS. I blame LDS people and their refusal to look at this and to marginalize polygamists as the reason why Warren Jeffs became so crazy and was allowed to have that much power. I absolutely blame the LDS church for that because we've allowed them to be secretive and marginalized and so we, it's a sickness it's this denial of sickness. We need to pull the covers off, open the windows and let some light in about it.[862]

By continuing to ignore and push away any accountability for and similarities to such groups, the Church, she suggests, is responsible for the crimes committed in some fundamentalist communities. Warren Jeffs was "allowed" power to do harm, she claims, because of the secrecy that the Church has created through their denial. Because of the deep "shame" of its past, Hansen Park argues that the Church has gone to great lengths to distinguish itself from Mormon fundamentalists. We are "inherently afraid" she says, of people "conflating fundamentalists with us."[863] This is part of the reason why "the Church was so adamant" on using their full name, she says, and "not the term Mormon" because "they wanted to distinguish themselves from Mormon fundamentalists."[864] It is also the reason why some church leaders have asked media not to use the word "Mormon" together with "polygamy" when talking about Latter-day Saints. In an episode dedicated to how "polygamy affects LDS doctrine, policy, theology and culture" Hansen

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862 Lindsay Hansen Park, "Episode 143: Modern LDS Polygamy," *Year of Polygamy,* February 5, 2018.
863 Lindsay Hansen Park, "Episode 167: The Council of Fifty," *Year of Polygamy,* October 12, 2018.
864 Lindsay Hansen Park, "Episode 98: How Polygamy Affects LDS Doctrine, Policy, Theology, and Culture," *Year of Polygamy,* June 13, 2015.

Park plays up a recorded interview from 2008 with Quentin L. Cook, an apostle for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. He recalls situations where newspapers have used pictures of their temple while talking about "polygamist sects" or have called them to ask, "for permission…to film in a temple of a polygamist sect" that the Church has "absolutely no connection with."[865] On "behalf of the Church" he makes an appeal to the news media "to not include Mormon with the word polygamous" and "to not identify the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints the Mormon church with polygamy" because they are "entirely separate."[866]

There have also been situations where the Church has directly condemned fundamentalist Mormons and supported government interventions, Hansen Park explains. This was for example the case with the Church's response to the 1953 raid on FLDS in Short Creek Arizona. The raid, that took 400 people, including 236 children into custody, was met with criticism from the public, who thought the treatment of FLDS inhumane. The photographers who were "on the scene ready to chronicle it" and expected to capture "these sort of wicked evil men... hoarding over these women" instead found "little children crying and clinging for their moms" and "men openly weeping."[867] The raid – with the images of weeping children – gets "plastered across the US media" and causes a heavy backlash.[868] The Church however, applauded it. Hansen Park explains that:

> Hansen Park: With all the negative media coverage, there was one group that applauded it and that would be the *Desert News* owned by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The news applauds this action and says that fundamentalists "had become a cancer of sort that is beyond hope of human repair."[869]

Such tendencies are a part of what Hansen Park perceives to be an othering of fundamentalist Mormons – or an "us versus them mentality,"[870] where fundamentalists are depicted as "the weird ones" and the Latter-day Saints as "the ones who got it straight."[871]

But the Church is not the only one othering fundamentalists according to this discursive construct. It has an alleged accomplice: mass media. Just like Rowe, many of Hansen Park's guests are prominent figures or representatives from Mormon fundamentalist groups that have often been the focus of tabloid journalism. In a conversation

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865 Hansen Park, "Episode 98: How Polygamy Affects LDS Doctrine, Policy, Theology, and Culture."
866 Hansen Park, "Episode 98: How Polygamy Affects LDS Doctrine, Policy, Theology, and Culture."
867 Lindsay Hansen Park, "Episode 75: The Short Creek Raid," *Year of Polygamy,* February 23, 2015.
868 Hansen Park, "Episode 75: The Short Creek Raid."
869 Hansen Park, "Episode 75: The Short Creek Raid."
870 Lindsay Hansen Park, "Episode 120: FLDS and Faithful, Part One."
871 Lindsay Hansen Park, "Episode 68: The 1886 Revelation," *Year of Polygamy,* December 9, 2014.

with conservative radio host Bryan Hyde, Hansen Park and her guest describe how the mass media focus on headlines that sell – a "gotcha journalism" – often results in over-simplified and false portrayals of Mormon fundamentalists.[872] Hyde asks people to consider that their knowledge may be "incomplete."[873] If you only go on what you learn through "the papers or on the news" and have no "first-hand knowledge" it is "easy to judge them and say, "wow what a bunch of nut jobs, what a bunch of crazy, waving guns doing whatever they please."[874] Hansen Park agrees, saying "I think you're right, our judgment always comes from incomplete stories right?"[875] Hyde responds that "labels are very overrated," they are a "lazy way" people make "group judgement" where one does not "have to do the hard work of actual observation."[876] As a person who works with such communities, Hansen Park is often disappointed by mass media portrayals that only seek to produce "sexy" headlines and "page clicks."[877]

> Hansen Park: People want a good headline. And I'm guilty of this, like, good headlines grab me, right? They incense me. But the stories are so much more complicated and messy […] I'll just use an example; I work with the FLDS community. One of the most frustrating things is, and I'm not exaggerating, once a week I will get an e-mail in my inbox where people will say "hey," you know, and "[we are] from this production company or this network and we want to tell the real story of the town and we want to tell it differently this time" and so, I'm like excited "oh differently? That's what they need." Because we're so tired of the same old Warren Jeffs as the evil guy and it's all about him…The town is so sick of it. It hurts the town every time that story is told that way. So, we I'll bring in, you know, this reporter, we'll spend weeks there getting to know that people and then it's the same old story because that's the story that sells right? That's a story that people want to read it's a story that when you know nothing about this community it's the one that makes sense to you.[878]

This quote reflects a critique of the media's tendency to oversimplify complex realities for the sake of marketable narratives. Hansen Park acknowledges the seductive power of headlines, admitting to being drawn in by them herself. Headlines act as entry points, designed to provoke curiosity or emotional reactions ("they incense me"), but they often oversimplify, distilling intricate stories into digestible but reductive narratives. This underscores a broader critique of how media prioritizes sensationalism over depth.

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872 Lindsay Hansen Park, "Episode 169: Conversations Across the Aisle With Bryan Hyde," *Year of Polygamy,* December 24, 2018.
873 Hansen Park, "Episode 169: Conversations Across the Aisle With Bryan Hyde."
874 Hansen Park, "Episode 169: Conversations Across the Aisle With Bryan Hyde."
875 Hansen Park, "Episode 169: Conversations Across the Aisle With Bryan Hyde."
876 Hansen Park, "Episode 169: Conversations Across the Aisle With Bryan Hyde."
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Hansen Park expresses deep frustration with the cyclical nature of storytelling about the FLDS. Media stories frequently reduce the community's experiences to a binary morality play centered around Warren Jeffs as the antagonist. Such stories perpetuate harm by reinforcing stereotypes and ignoring the community's lived complexities.

6.6.4 "It Was Just Like Being With People" – Humanizing the Fundamentalist

What Hansen Park seems to imply, then, is that the Church's othering and mass-media's black-and-white illustrations of Mormon fundamentalists together produce a stereotype, that is, a caricature idea held as a standard or format through which people are categorized. In reality, Hansen Park suggests, fundamentalist stories are as we learnt earlier, "much more complicated and messy."[879] If we place this argument alongside the discourse on secrecy and shame, the image of Mormon fundamentalism is largely created somewhere between the journalists' catchy headlines and the Church's rejection of them. Inspired by Gayatri Spivak, Hansen Park suggests in an interview with podcaster Amy Allebest that the fundamentalist other is unable to speak.[880] Borrowing this reference, one could interpret this as saying that the podcast is turned into a platform where the subaltern – in Spivakian terms – can use her own voice.[881] The perhaps most clear example of this can be found in Hansen Parks interview with Mother Irene. The type of exposure liveness affords Hansen Park's project is therefore understood as something other than the type of sensational representations of Mormon fundamentalists found in mass media. Rather than exposing by sensationalizing, Hansen Park explains to her audience that she is out to break down the myths propelled by mass media. Before moving into the interview with Mother Irene, Hansen Park for example described her visit to "the Creek" as breaking her "stereotypes."[882] She met "Mother Irene and some of her friends" and got "a tour of the town from Mother Irene's perspective."[883]

> Hansen Park: Mother Irene was very, you were very open and allowed me to ask questions even if they were hurtful to you and I appreciate, I, first of all I showed up with my hair just been dyed red so it's like fiery red I'm wearing my ripped

879 Hansen Park, "Episode 169: Conversations Across the Aisle With Bryan Hyde."
880 Amy Allebest, "Episode 13: Breaking Down Patriarchy and the Subaltern – with Lindsay Hansen Park," *Breaking Down Patriarchy,* April 5, 2022, www.breakingdownpatriarchy.com/episode-13-breaking-down-patriarchy-and-the-subaltern-with-lindsay-hansen-park/, accessed May 8, 2025.
881 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in Bill Ashcroft, Helen Tiffin & Gareth Griffiths (eds.), *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 24–28.
882 Lindsay Hansen Park, "Episode 120: FLDS and Faithful, Part Two."
883 Hansen Park, "Episode 120: FLDS and Faithful, Part Two."

> up jeans like a true gentile and I was treated with a lot of respect more respect than I had expected because of some of the stereotypes. It was just very loving and very natural from the beginning, and so, gosh, I mean, I hate to say this because it sounds so offensive, but it was just like being with people, I mean, who knew, who knew?[884]

This description adds to the image of Hansen Park's podcast as both uncovering hidden realities of lived polygamy and of normalizing or humanizing its practitioners – they were just "people" she says. The quote also discloses the perceived value of exposing oneself to environments otherwise only learnt about through provoking headlines or rumors. Even though Hansen Park arrived with her hair dyed red and wearing ripped-up jeans, looking like a "true gentile," she was treated with a lot of respect, more than she had expected given some of the prevailing stereotypes. In other words, Hansen Park plays into a stereotype where FLDS are supposedly hostile or disliking of "gentiles." After meeting Mother Irene and her friends Hansen Park realizes they were like everyone else – it was just "natural" and "it was just like being with people." The ideal presented here is that coming up close to people and environments – in this case the FLDS community – allows your prejudices to be challenged. The effect of this is that through exposure we can expect to find that fundamentalists are no different from us, they are not exotic others, but just like us. In an episode where her friend and sometimes co-host Sara Burlingame turns "the mic on Lindsay," Hansen Park similarly explains that being exposed to "people" actually living polygamy, has disarmed her judgments.

> Hansen Park: I've never once, never once advocated for plural marriage. Not once. But that is to say I can't condemn it anymore like I used to and I think that that comes with meeting people […] it's one thing to read about polygamy in a book, it's one thing to read about it in the histories, it's one thing to hear on a podcast, it is another thing entirely to build relationships with people who are living it, and then to have to sit there at their dinner table and explain to them why you know their life better than they do. I mean, I'm not capable of that.[885]

From this quote, we learn that Hansen Park's initial condemnation of plural marriage was significantly challenged and reshaped through her direct encounters with those who practice it. Previously, her understanding was primarily theoretical. However, engaging personally with practitioners – sitting at their dinner tables and forging relationships – offered her a more complex and nuanced view. This firsthand experience, she seems to suggest, allowed her to appreciate the human aspects of polygamy, moving beyond stereotypes and preconceived notions to a more empathetic and informed perspective.

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884 Hansen Park, "Episode 120: FLDS and Faithful, Part Two."

885 Hansen Park, "Episode 98: How Polygamy Affects LDS Doctrine, Policy, Theology, and Culture."

The framing of exposure, then, says that learning should come from an experiential and relationship building type of communication, rather than through the fixed and static content of "a book." What Hansen Park is addressing is a form of communication held in natural/everyday contexts or over "dinner tables," where people can be people. When conducting this type of dialogue, judgment or explaining "why you know their life better than they do" becomes incapacitated. Such prejudices, discussed in the conversation with Mother Irene, often revolve around the maltreatment of women and children.

> Mother Irene: One reason why it was surprising to me [to hear about the stereotypes of them] and you know like others to know this [is that] we do not follow the media as a rule. We do not watch the news, we do not go online, we just stay away from that which has been a benefit because we don't know the negative. It was a little bit surprising some of the stuff […] I'm glad you asked because and even though I'm very shocked each time, I don't know that I was hurt by it too much, I was shocked mainly. That […] the women aren't allowed to have money or credit cards and stuff like that. That shocked me, that we give all of our money to the people you know the ones over us our leaders and you know and the question was asked me "what do you do if you have money?" and I, we put it in our checking account and we take care of our bills what the, what most people do.[886]

What the audience is led to believe here, is that Mother Irene is invited to use her own voice, that is, instead of media or the Church speaking for her or about her, she is speaking in her own capacity. As listeners we are invited to infer from this, that the podcast brings voice to the voiceless. As Mother Irene explains, women *do* use their own money, they pay their bills like "most people do." Perhaps a bit ironically however, she seems to have been unaware of these stereotypes before Hansen Park explicitly asked about them. They do not "follow the media" and are therefore not familiar with what is written about their community.

6.6.5 "Faithful Disagreement" – Constructing the Virtues of Bridgebuilding

As readers might remember, the media performance permeating the interview with Mother Irene built on a dialogic format, opening space for opposition. The significance of this can – besides the discourse described above, be understood against a more general discourse on bridge-building between opposing parties. That this type of bridge-building is an ambition of the podcast, is made explicit in Hansen Park's conversation

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886 Lindsay Hansen Park, "Episode 120: FLDS and Faithful, Part Two."

with Hyde.[887] The duo, differing in political views – Hyde a "conservative" and Hansen Park a "marxist feminist" – aims to demonstrate through their own meeting how a conversation "across the aisle" can be managed. Part of the reason is that meeting in "disagreement" is an opportunity to "grow."

> Hansen Park: I have noticed that people listen to folks like us for several reasons. One is they want to hear their opinions sort of parroted back to them, which is totally fine, I do that too. I like listening to people, sometimes it's just refreshing to have a dialogue almost with my own opinions. People listen to us to learn new things and I think that there is a small amount of people that listen to be challenged and that's what I'm really interested in right now. Because challenge means growth, you know, and we can't really grow if we aren't challenged. And so, I'm kind of, you know, in the work that I'm doing now, I'm looking for these challenges and disagreements as opportunities to grow. And so, yeah, I think you and I got together, and we thought let's just have a dialogue and show people how we do it as we kind of fumble our way through this and maybe see if anyone else can learn something from this.[888]

In this quote, previous instances of non-partisan dialogues and attempts to bridge differences are reinterpreted as opportunities for growth. A narrative emerges where engaging in tough or uncomfortable conversations, like those between Hansen Park and Mother Irene, or between Hansen Park and Hyde, is directly linked to progress and improvement. For Hansen Park, challenges represent not just disagreements but the active engagement with differing viewpoints, underscoring her belief that "challenge means growth." As regards meeting people in disagreement, Hansen Park mentions a practice adopted within the Community of Christ called "faithful disagreement."

> Hansen Park: I come from a Mormon studies background so I deal with all the different 487 Mormon groups that exist out there and one of them is the Community of Christ [formerly] known as the RLDS…and they have an interesting theological concept called, and it's theology, it's called "faithful disagreement" and it's so interesting to me because it's like what you're saying it's not every, like, it's not everyone holding hands and like agreeing, that's just, you know, compliance or complicity. What if you're agreeing to a bad idea? But faithful disagreement is this idea of people coming to the table and being able to talk about it and to honor everyone's experience and that takes practice and that is not easy to do and it means…you have to be willing to be wrong…and you have to be willing to, like, acknowledge that and hold someone else's opposing story with your own and that's really hard to do.[889]

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887 Hansen Park, "Episode 169: Conversations Across the Aisle With Bryan Hyde."
888 Hansen Park, "Episode 169: Conversations Across the Aisle With Bryan Hyde."
889 Hansen Park, "Episode 169: Conversations Across the Aisle With Bryan Hyde."

"Faithful disagreement" refers to one of the Community of Christ's six statements of beliefs which according to its tenth principle means to "listen respectfully to another's viewpoints," to "see from each other's perspective" and to "celebrate our unity while learning from our diversity."[890] This is a perspective not dissimilar from the one propagated by Hansen Park herself. In the same quote, she arguably elaborates on what using the podcast as a "platform" for different voices means; people "coming to the table," ready to honor and acknowledge each other's experiences despite differences. It involves "holding someone else's opposing story" in consideration alongside one's own, fostering an environment of mutual respect and understanding. This type of articulatory practice gives meaning and significance to the type of dialogue witnessed earlier between herself and Mother Irene.

What Hansen Park can be described as doing through such faithful disagreement, according to Hyde, is taking a stand against mass media. The background to this commendation is his and Hansen Park's common involvement with fringe Mormon groups, and more specifically the Bundy family. The family is infamous for its long ongoing conflict with the United States Bureau of Land Management (BLM) where Cliven Bundy's refusal to pay grazing fees eventually resulted in an armed confrontation. Hyde, who has been a "spokesperson for the Bundy Family" argues that they have not been given a "fair shake in the mass media."[891] But "having been closer to them and having seen and heard where they're coming from" allowed him to "make more informed judgment of what their intent was."[892] He realized that they were actually "peaceful in their behavior" and "humble."[893] Because of that, he describes feeling called to be "a good witness of the kind of people that they are."[894] This is a quality he allegedly shares with Hansen Park.

> Hyde: I have great admiration for you because of the heat that you took when you came out and said "hey folks we've been sold a false bill of goods at least on this family because I've been there I've seen it with my own eyes," you know, you sat, you broke bread with them, you talked to them you asked hard questions and you came away with a very different impression from how the media had been portraying them. And you paid a price for that, but I was like "wow good for you Lindsey," because look, there's very few people who value truth more than they value approval […] truth matters more and for you to stick your neck

890 World Church Leadership Council, "Faithful Disagreement: Definition and Principles," *Community of Christ,* March 2013.

891 Hansen Park, "Episode 169: Conversations Across the Aisle With Bryan Hyde."

892 Hansen Park, "Episode 169: Conversations Across the Aisle With Bryan Hyde."

893 Hansen Park, "Episode 169: Conversations Across the Aisle With Bryan Hyde."

894 Hansen Park, "Episode 169: Conversations Across the Aisle With Bryan Hyde."

> out like that, that was a stand up move and it earned my admiration […] that's a move that's filled with integrity.[895]

In this dialogue, Hansen Park appears as someone who goes against the grain in her search for the "truth." Hyde's description of her is telling not only of his own "admiration" but also of the image Hansen Park seeks to uphold – she is someone who sits down with and "breaks bread with" the "other," she asks, "hard questions" and allow herself to walk away with a "different impression" from the one told by media. Why? Because she "values truth more than approval" and is ready to "pay a price" for the sake of it. Such was the case when she met with Ryan Bundy, a conversation Hansen Park describes as follows.

> Hansen Park: when you talk about incomplete information, that is so perfect because that is how I approach the situation [with Ryan Bundy]…when I went in there I was shocked by their faith, like, it was so familiar to me. I mean we started the meeting, like, with prayer…and he just brings out the Book of Mormon, we start talking all you know liberty and it was so interesting because that was a piece that I didn't realize you know um how Mormon he is […] so I had an opportunity to learn about that […] I also had the opportunity to, like, talk to the family…I said "you know people think that you're racist" and they were like "what?" you know, "where does that come from?" and so we had that opportunity to dialogue and I was like "well if you guys were black guys with a bunch of guns taken over something you wouldn't be alive"…and I said "and also you know a bunch of white supremacists like showed up" and so then we had this whole discussion about like where he positions himself and how he doesn't agree with that and that is just not something that I knew because I just thought I didn't know that there was a difference between like all these sovereignty movements […] I think you're right like our judgment always comes from incomplete stories right?[896]

Meeting Ryan Bundy, Hansen Park concludes, gave her the "opportunity to learn" and address issues concerning state conflicts and racism, which allowed her to walk away with knowledge on nuances surrounding his faith and the alleged differences between him and other right-wing actors. Hansen Park, in other words, is doing the "hard work" of firsthand, "actual observation," mentioned earlier, in effect problematizing stereotypes. Returning to Hyde's quote earlier, walking into conversations that may cause such an upheaval, Hyde suggests is "a move filled with integrity." What happens here is that the framing of exposure and humanizing the fundamentalist becomes linked with personal attributes. Other words for integrity are sincerity and honesty, terms arguably connected to the act of exposing and bringing to light. This is fortified in how Hyde

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895 Hansen Park, "Episode 169: Conversations Across the Aisle With Bryan Hyde."
896 Hansen Park, "Episode 169: Conversations Across the Aisle With Bryan Hyde."

continues his illustration of a good person. He says that "the strongest people" can "afford to be humble" and that humbleness "verifies" that "this is authentic." Hansen Park's position of integrity – the image or role she plays through her "challenging" dialogues – then, informs our expectations as listeners, that thanks to her integrity, we can find "authentic" portrayals on her podcast.

6.6.6 Analytical Summary of Discursive Framing

To unravel the articulatory practice illustrated above we can begin by recognizing the *nodal point* "exposure," synonymous with expressions such as "pull[ing] the covers off." The significance of this term appears when we observe how the discursive moments around it are ordered in a *chain of equivalences*. The genesis of this chain is polygamy as a "sickness" of "denial" and "shame" that has been brought on through "secrecy." It continues through the expressed need to heal this sickness by exposing it or "pull[ing] the covers off," "open[ing] the windows," "let[ting] some light in about it," because "sunshine is the best disinfectant." Within this genesis we find a dichotomy between health and sickness, light and dark, visible and secret, which creates a background logic for the performance of liveness. While polygamy has been hidden so long in the dark – covers on and windows shut – that it has begun to develop an infection or sickness within the Latter-day Saint tradition, the podcast and its live performances constitute the "sunshine" that "pulls the covers off," "opens the windows" and lets light into the dark room, in effect "disinfecting" the wound. In other words, exposure is healing.

But this rehabilitation is not bearing in and of itself but made effective against an *antagonistic other*. Several *discursive moments* fortifies this logic. Listeners for example acknowledge the Church's history of "shying away from the issue" of polygamy and Hansen Park recalls the many attempts of the Church to reject and deny any similarities or relations between themselves and practicing polygamists – "don't equate us with polygamists." The Church is living in "institutional collective denial," she says, and suffers from deep "shame" over its past. The interactive affordances of the podcast, then, rest on a *field of discursivity* where different actors with differing interests, such as the Church, are trying to pin down the meaning of polygamy and the relationship between the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and fundamentalist Mormons. These actors each seek to define and control the story: the Church allegedly aims to keep its history untarnished and create a clear separation from fundamentalist groups. Against this backdrop, the podcast provides exposure through intimate portrayals of lived polygamy.

Another discursive struggle taking place through *Year of Polygamy* concerns prophetic authority. A *chain of equivalence* parallel to the one described above acts as a relativization

of power and authority within the wider Mormon tradition by focusing on prophets who exist outside the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints' institutional framework. By exploring figures who do not fit the Church's image of propriety – described through *discursive moments* such as "clean-shaven," "suit-wearing," and officially ordained – Hansen Park is challenging the conventional markers of prophetic authority and legitimacy. In interviewing non-mainstream prophets, Hansen Park subtly questions the Church's monopoly on spiritual authority. She provides a platform for voices that diverge from the polished, carefully controlled public image of church leadership. These alternative prophets embody a different kind of charisma – one that is rougher, and less formal – visible in *discursive moments* describing Robert Rey Black sitting "in his pajamas," with his "bare toes sticking out," and "hooked up to oxygen." Such portrayals are carried and enhanced by the performance of liveness where their messiness can fully bloom. They are also contrasted with the institutional prophets, portrayed through various *discursive moments* as "corporate men" in "tailored suits from Woolen Mills," whose "revelations" seem to be curated in "boardrooms" and "signed off by lawyers and publicity firms." Figures like Black are described as "solitary," "strange and unusual" prophets who "walk barefoot" and have "abandoned all personal hygiene," and prophetesses such as Rowe framed as breaking the "primary voice" of women in leadership. This juxtaposition not only diversifies the narrative but also suggests that prophetic authority is not limited to formal structures or conventional appearances, instead hinting at a deeper authenticity in those who deviate from the norm. The *Year of Polygamy* podcast seems to encourage listeners to question and expand their understanding of prophetic authority, opening up space for a broader, more inclusive view of spiritual leadership within the Mormon context, but does not carry a positive affirmation thereof. Liveness carries a "dirty aura," to borrow Kitzmann's terms,[897] and is not used as leverage to prove the legitimacy of the prophetic wielder but to rehabilitate the listener from "correlated" stories.

Another important aspect of the podcast's articulatory practice, can be summarized by the word "humanizing." This *nodal point* is also surrounded by several *discursive moments* converging with the ones mentioned earlier: the Church is depicted as "afraid [of someone] conflating fundamentalists with us," of people using the "term Mormon," and are therefore adamant in "distinguish[ing] themselves from Mormon fundamentalists," going so far as to liken them with a "cancer… beyond hope of human repair." This attitude fosters an "us versus them mentality," Hansen Park suggests, where fundamentalists are "the weird ones," and Latter-day Saints "the ones who got it straight."

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[897] Kitzmann, *Saved From Oblivion: Documenting the Daily from Diaries to Web Cams*, p. 115.

If we observe the clusters of nodal points and discursive moments next to each other and the *chain of equivalences* they form, we can draw the conclusion that exposure ultimately has the goal not only of rehabilitating the listener from "correlated" stories, but of "humanizing" those it involves. Above we concluded that exposure was performed and framed against "shame" and secrecy. Here we can add to that *antagonistic other* the Church's othering of fundamentalists or "us versus them mentality," on the one hand, and mass media and its "gotcha journalism" on the other. As the subsequent *discursive moments* tell us, a "good headline," rests on reproducing "incomplete information," keeping "stereotypes," and "group judgement," around Mormon fundamentalists unbroken and of continuing to spread simple explanations that they are just a "bunch of nut jobs." Inspired by Hansen Park's mentioning of Spivak in an interview with Amy Allebest, where she draws from Gayatri Spivak, one could argue that she is probing the question of whether or not the fundamentalist "can speak." The answer to this rhetorical question is of course no – not while occupying the position of the other. However, if the other is given the option to speak as "just people," where their "so much more complicated and messy" stories are given space, borders can be torn down and replaced with "bridges." Thus, if we ask the same question again but with respect to what the *Year of Polygamy* podcast aims to accomplish, then yes, the fundamentalist can speak if you "move closer to them," "meet them" at their own "dinner table," "break bread" with them, and "hear where they're coming from."

We find then that the *field of discursivity* referenced by Hansen Park, where different actors with differing interests are trying to pin down the meaning of polygamy and the relationship between the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and fundamentalist Mormons, also includes mass media. Allegedly, these together seek to define and control the story: the Church aims to keep its history untarnished and create a clear separation from fundamentalist groups, while mass media often sensationalizes these communities to capture public attention. Against this backdrop, the podcast provides a nuanced perspective, doing the "hard work of actual observations," engaging directly with individuals involved in these communities and bringing forward "first-hand knowledge." Meeting someone live, being "closer to them," and "hearing where they're coming from," is an "opportunity to learn" things beyond catchy headlines. The closeness and intimacy of doing so, furthermore, incapacitates "condemnation," and judgment. This requires, however, a certain *subject position* or personal virtue to be held. A person needs a certain "integrity," and has to "value truth more than approval" to be able to "hold someone else's opposing story," and endure "faithful disagreement."

This approach allows the podcast to challenge the "us versus them" mentality perceived as fortified by both institutional and media narratives. Through candid, live inter-

views, *Year of Polygamy* exposes the human complexity behind the headlines and doctrines, seeking to move beyond binaries and focus on the relationships impacted by these divisions. By calling out the divisive rhetoric, the podcast wields the live format as a tool for direct engagement, often asking "hard questions," and fostering open dialogue that might otherwise be hidden or ignored. It might be "challenging," but "challenge means growth." Through these discussions, it aims to mend the "wound" caused by damaged relationships within the Mormon community and broader society, ultimately working toward reconciliation and understanding rather than judgment or exclusion.

6.7 Conclusions: Countering Communicational Hegemonies

This chapter set out to explore the interactions facilitated by the podcasts recording format. By analyzing three separate podcasts – *The Faithful Feminists*, *At Last She Said It*, and *Year of Polygamy* – I conclude that the live setting of these podcasts is strategically utilized to counter hegemonic communication norms prevalent in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The findings suggest that the podcast format encourages a communicative environment that is unscripted, informal, and spontaneous. Such interactions gain significance by contrasting with the more controlled communicative forms of the Church and mainstream media, which are often perceived as promoting perfectionism, redundancy, and secrecy. In this setting, Mormon Feminists use podcasts as platforms for fostering interactions characterized by "messiness," "intuition," and "exposure," which serve as mechanisms for progress and therapy. Instead of perpetuating "toxic positivity" or suppressing "truth" until they come out "sideways," these women embrace "discomfort," "doubt," and "disagreement" as tools for personal and collective growth.

This analysis reveals that the format of communication itself emerges as a focal point of contention and critique. I therefore contend that the critique by Mormon Feminists of the Church extends beyond merely renegotiating doctrines directly related to gender issues, such as women in leadership roles or the concept of the feminine divine. It also critically examines the communication format itself. Building on Finnigan and Ross and insights[898] on the role of media for the evolution of recurring Mormon Feminist issues, I argue that the immediacy of liveness does not merely develop issues such as leadership,

[898] Finnigan & Ross, "I'm a Mormon Feminist: How Social Media Revitalized and Enlarged a Movement."

representation in the Godhead or polygamy, but also fosters a shift in Mormon Feminism towards a more communication-centered approach.

This emphasis on communication does not distinguish Latter-day Saint Feminists from their tradition, however, but allows them to engage more deeply with it. What terms like "holy discomfort," imply, I suggest, is that given the opportunity to perform and reflect upon communicational patters in the podcast's live setting, they can articulate alternative religious virtues – virtues that simultaneously challenge and reproduce religious tenets. Thus, these virtues are portrayed as enhancements to their spiritual maturity and contributions to the broader religious community rather than a diversion from it. Importantly then, podcast liveness enables participants to actively reimagine and reshape Mormonism itself.

7. Seriality

The third and fourth questions of this dissertation ask *how the podcast conditions the construction and negotiation of feminism and faith* as well as the *personal faith among its hosts*. In this chapter I will demonstrate not only the intimate connection between these two questions but also how seriality both enables and troubles them. Accordingly, I will argue that podcasts serve as a platform for reimagining and challenging traditional temporal frameworks within the Church, providing alternative rhythms and timelines that contrast with established practices. But I will also address the challenges that come with the serial format, such as maintaining a certain pace and fulfilling the demand for continuity and coherence.

The structure of this chapter deviates from the previous ones. While it retains the subchapter organization seen earlier – each focusing on an individual podcast – the internal makeup of each case differs due to a more complex convergence between performed media and discursive framing. As a result, I have adopted a more organic treatment, dividing each subchapter instead according to the research questions outlined above. "Serial Dynamics in Ideational Negotiations" is an integrated analysis of performance and framing, examining how serial timeframes affect the construction and negotiation between feminism and faith. This includes several examples. First, how the podcasts' topology of continuous return and schematic frequency both enables and troubles feminist explorations of scripture, history and women's voice/self-expression. Second, how serialized content facilitates alternative communal movement that both fortifies and challenges the Church's timeframes. Subsequently, "Serial Dynamics in Faith" is an integrated analysis of performance and framing that explores the evolving faith positions of podcast hosts. It looks at how a continuous return initiates learning and legitimization, a retrospection fostering self-reflection and processual transformation of their faith.

7.1 Serial Dynamics in Ideational Negotiations: *The Faithful Feminists*

In this subchapter we embark on a detailed exploration of *The Faithful Feminists*. The first part will scrutinize four key examples: "chapter-by-chapter" observes how the podcasts'

topology of continuous return and schematic frequency enables a parallel movement among Feminist Latter-day Saints otherwise excluded by the *Come Follow Me* manual's sorting mechanism; "slowing down," looks at how the temporality of both the manual and the podcast is resisted through alternative temporal performances and framings; "'weavers' and 'caretakers,'" explores how these performances and framings are embedded within conceptualizations of feminist interpretations of scripture; and lastly "limitations of the podcast," scrutinizes the difficulties of upholding a feminist ethos of slowing down when the podcast demands a rapid pace.

7.1.1 "Chapter-by-Chapter" – Initiating Parallel Movements

Performing seriality involves continuously returning to the production of a specific content at a scheduled frequency.[899] In *The Faithful Feminists* podcast this timeframe is also fortified through the *Come Follow Me* manual that it is based on. The manual devotes each year to its own scripture and is organized according to a weekly reading schedule. Accordingly, the first year was devoted to the Book of Mormon, the second year to Doctrine and Covenants, the third year to the New Testament and the fourth year to the Old Testament. As such, members internationally read the same scriptures and the same chapters at the same time, moving forward alongside each other. Parallel to this, Parker and Poll show up to offer a "chapter-by-chapter interpretation" but from a feminist point of view.

> Poll: We actually started the podcast in the beginning of 2020, where we worked through the Book of Mormon and then 2021, we worked through the Doctrine and Covenants. And even though we spent a lot of our time and our research and our efforts standing on the shoulders of many other feminist theologians and researchers, this project, our podcast, at least from what we can see, was really the first of its kind to offer a chapter-by-chapter interpretation of Mormon-specific sacred texts through a feminist lens. [900]

In this excerpt Poll situates the podcast's work within a broader feminist theological context, emphasizing both its indebtedness to prior feminist theologians and highlighting the podcast's contribution to a growing body of work critically engaging with "Mormon-specific" texts through a feminist perspective. Poll also establishes the podcast as a pioneer or "first of its kind" in the Latter-day Saint context by providing a "chapter-by-chapter interpretation." One could compare the effect of this project to Benedict

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899 Kelleter, "Five Ways of Looking a Popular Seriality," p. 30, 13.

900 Channing Parker & Elise Poll, "2022 Introduction – Old Testament," *The Faithful Feminists,* January 2, 2022.

Anderson's argument about print media.[901] Print media enabled members of a nation to experience or imagine a connection to each other, without knowing each other. Anderson spoke of the newspaper's quality of coming out regularly at specific times and reporting on events that unraveled one week after another, thus allowing the members of a nation to imagine other members as experiencing these events at the same time as themselves. The printing press, however, also had a sorting mechanism, that allowed some nationalities to be represented, and others sorted out.[902] This sorting mechanism is also true for the *Come Follow Me* manual. Or as one of the podcasts listeners expresses it, the guide was written by white old men for other white old men.[903] Because of this, Parker and Poll are "actively" "pushing back…against the patriarchal ways that the scriptures and the manual are formatted."[904] By doing so, *The Faithful Feminists* enables a parallel movement among feminist or more liberal Latter-day Saints.[905] This collective movement is fostered not only by publishing an alternative content parallel to the manual, but also through the type of parasocial invitation seen below. The excerpt – a continuation of the quote seen in chapter five about their Succor & Support posts – instructs their listeners to share their engagement with the *Come Follow Me* manual.

> Parker: [Succor & Support] is the perfect time to share how your lessons went, what thoughts you ha:d if you made a comment, or if there was a comment that you wish you had ma:de […] And it's not, this podcast is not just me and Elise talking and spewing stuff at you, like, we want to hear from you. We want to know what you think. We want to have a conversation around this. And so, yeah, let us know on Sunday. We want to know.[906]

As the quote explains, the podcast is not just Parker and Poll "talking and spewing stuff" at their listeners – they want to know how listeners perceived the Sunday church lessons on the chapters covered in the *Come Follow Me* manual. They also expect or hope to hear about how the podcast may have affected the direction of their course. This quote clearly articulates the podcast's participatory ethos and its foundational role in fostering a communal discussion among its listeners. By inviting listener engagement – which is typical for the type of parasocial relationships we saw demonstrated in chapter five –

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901 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*, (London: Verso, 1983.)

902 Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism.*

903 Channing Parker & Elise Poll, "This podcast episode is extra special," *@thefaithfulfeminists*, March 9, 2020, www.instagram.com/p/B9hexvSBLnI/, accessed January 4, 2024.

904 Channing Parker & Elise Poll, "No Doubt, Mom (Alma 53–63)," *The Faithful Feminists,* August 10, 2020.

905 Kelleter, "Five Ways of Looking a Popular Seriality," p. 13.

906 Channing Parker & Elise Poll, "Bikini-Body Eve, Problematic Curses and Hugs From God," *The Faithful Feminists,* February 3, 2020.

Parker and Poll position the podcast as a dynamic space where discussions on scripture can evolve and expand, rather than merely presenting their own interpretations. The podcast, much like print media, therefore, becomes a tool for unifying a community of listeners. These listeners, while dispersed and diverse, are invited to partake in a shared experience of examining and interpreting scriptures through a feminist lens. Just as newspapers create a temporal rhythm that helps structure the collective experience of a nation, the podcast's regular episodes encourage a rhythmic engagement with feminist interpretations of scripture. In other words, a parallel movement of feminist readers emerges through the dual force of both seriality and parasocial relationships.

In response to Parker and Poll's encouragement above, listeners for example report in their comment section that they have used their episodes as resources when engaging with church lessons based on the manual. One mother explains that her sons, one of whom is homosexual, were taught in a seminary addressing Alma 39–42 that homosexuality is a sin, after which she chose to play them *The Faithful Feminists*' version of the same lesson to repair the damage.[907] Others also report of "canonizing" *The Faithful Feminists*' content, that is, printing and keeping parts of episode transcripts in their own scripture,[908] sharing what they have "learned" during their seminary lessons,[909] using printed copies of their work as resources in their own teaching,[910] and comparing their lessons with the ones given at church.[911] What this demonstrates is that the seriality of podcasting and the parasocial relationships enabled by its transmedial sprawling over social media, not only entices followers to accumulate knowledge gradually "chapter-by-chapter" but also to use it as a resource in both their private studies and in class. Thus, their own manual – *The Faithful Feminists*' come follow me manual – allows listeners to fend off or confront actors offline maintaining misogynistic and homophobic interpretations of scripture. The podcasts' movement forward therefore seem to enable a place-taking among some of their listeners who participate in church classes where the manual is taught.

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907 Commenter, "This week Elise is tackling her first solo episode!" *@thefaithfulfeminists*, July 27, 2020, www.instagram.com/p/CDJ5GJBh6Pg/, accessed May 20, 2024.

908 Commenter, "Trigger Warning," *@thefaithfulfeminists*, December 10, 2020, www.instagram.com/p/CIod9MoBuoJ/?img_index=1, accessed January 4, 2024.

909 Commenter, "In this episode," *@thefaithfulfeminists*, January 18, 2021, www.instagram.com/p/CKMlfZlht-m/, accessed January 4, 2024; Channing Parker & Elise Poll, "In this week's episode," *@thefaithfulfeminists,* February 7, 2022, www.instagram.com/p/CZrrTEAJWSh/?img_index=1, accessed January 4, 2024.

910 Commenter, "Generations," *@thefaithfulfeminists*, January 7, 2022, www.instagram.com/p/CYb-JOFFYj3/?img_index=1, accessed January 4, 2024.

911 Commenter, "In this week's episode."

7.1.2 "Slowing Down" – Navigating Patriarchal and Feminist Time

But whereas its episodic nature allow Feminist Latter-day Saints to move alongside each other, the pace of both the podcast and the manual is not always perceived as enabling a feminist reading. As the duo acknowledges in an episode called "Whoops, We Ignored Women," the manual not only produces a patriarchal content, it also prescribes a patriarchal timeframe.

> Poll: If you just happen to be listening to the podcast and you have your *Come Follow Me* manual open right next to you, you'll notice that we're covering more chapters in this episode than are outlined in the *Come Follow Me* manual. Which means that there are so, so many stories to cover this week, especially because there are tons of women that show up in the text […] but one of the things that makes it difficult is the speed at which we're supposed to move through the text if we're trying to stay on track with the *Come Follow Me* curriculum.
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> Parker: And I think I even mentioned at the beginning of the year, that the manual doesn't like, follow the text chronologically. There is a lot of skipping in the chapters and I think I mentioned, like, I'm going to be paying attention to that and, like, what stories are skipped and what, like, weight and priority the manual places on certain stories. And I think in this way we can say, like, patriarchy doesn't only show up in the text. It also shows up in the way that we read and study the text as well.[912]

This quote demonstrates a critique of the temporality and structure presented in the *Come Follow Me* manual, revealing how its pacing and selective focus impose a particular reading experience. The manual's approach introduces a temporality of rapid progression, which Parker and Poll challenge, arguing that this pacing obscures richer, alternative interpretations, particularly those centered on women in the text. Poll draws attention to the manual's imposed pace, noting the difficulty in giving due attention to "so many stories," especially with the presence of women in the scriptures. Poll therefore suggests that the manual's temporality implicitly prioritizes certain narratives over others, limiting space for feminist interpretations. Parker further deepens this argument by pointing out the manual's non-chronological structure, describing how it "skips" chapters and fragments stories. This approach not only disrupts the continuity of events but also selectively elevates certain passages while sidelining others, enforcing a patriarchal structure not just in content but in the very method of study – "patriarchy doesn't only show up in the text" she says, "It also shows up in the way that we read and study

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912 Parker & Poll, "Whoops, We Ignored Women (Genesis 28–36)."

the text." In the quote below, Parker and Poll therefore introduce a feminist temporality, one that challenges the manual's pace by advocating for a slower, more reflective reading.

> Parker: If we were going to study this text effectively, we have to slow down… especially feminist readers. The Hebrew Bible, like we mentioned before, is huge. It is the largest portion of text in the LDS canon […] Even when we were reading the Book of Mormon and the Doctrine and Covenants, we felt like the text moved wa::y too quickly. So, with the Hebrew Bible, studying it in this way is even more difficult. For us it feels less like feasting on the word and more like a timed, hot-dog eating competition…We really feel that it would make a world of difference if perhaps we were to study the Hebrew Bible over the course of two years, instead of trying to make it fit into just one year…the sheer amount of material justifies this extended approach. This is also a good opportunity to remind our readers and listeners that the manual doesn't have to be authoritative. If you can, read the unassigned chapters. If it feels right to you, you could ignore the manual entirely and let it lap you two or three or five times. Maybe you could be in Ruth in 2030, and that's a totally cool way to read the text. If you did that, you would probably discover treasures that everyone including us might miss because you walked and the rest of us drove the freeway to get to the end quicker.[913]

Parker's approach to studying the Hebrew Bible is a good example of a recurring suggestion to themselves and their readers to "slow down" their readings of scripture,[914] which is meant to challenge the rapid, surface-level reading pace they feel is prescribed by the manual. She introduces the metaphor of a "timed, hot-dog eating competition" to critique the hurried approach that the manual imposes. This metaphor contrasts sharply with how they frame the ideal reading experience, the idea of "feasting on the word," evoking a sense of intentional, thoughtful engagement that values savoring and digesting the text fully. By advocating an extended study period, suggesting two years instead of one, Parker underscores the value of slowing down, particularly for "feminist readers" seeking to uncover nuanced perspectives. The massive length of the Hebrew Bible (over 900 chapters) serves as a foundation for Parker's argument: the sheer volume of material justifies a slower approach, one that resists the manual's restrictive temporality. Parker's suggestion to "be in Ruth in 2030" offers a vision of scripture study as a lifelong, evolving journey rather than a rushed, yearlong curriculum. This alternative temporality invites

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913 Parker & Poll, "Whoops, We Ignored Women (Genesis 28–36)."

914 Channing Parker & Elise Poll, "Stories of Atonement, Body vs Spirit Showdown, and Milk & Honey (2 Nephi 6–10)," *The Faithful Feminists,* February 10, 2020; "Daughters of Liberation and God of Nevertheless (Mosiah 18–24)," *The Faithful Feminists,* May 11, 2020; "Call Her by Her Name (Helaman 7–12)," *The Faithful Feminists,* August 24, 2020; "Barrenness and Broken Bread (3 Nephi 20–26);" "Patriarchal Bargains (Ether 6–11)," *The Faithful Feminists,* November 16, 2020; "A Journey of Grief to the Hope of Zion (Doctrine & Covenants 37–40)."

readers to move at their own pace, allowing for discovery and reflection beyond the boundaries imposed by the manual. Her encouragement to read "unassigned chapters" or even "ignore the manual entirely" furthermore, is also an invitation for readers to construct a personal relationship with the text independent of institutionalized directives. This aligns with the feminist aim of reclaiming interpretive authority and resisting patriarchal constraints embedded in the reading structure. By highlighting that "the LDS church is not the authority on the Hebrew Bible," furthermore, Parker opens up scripture studies to other religious frameworks, later adding that the voices of "Jewish rabbis" and "feminist scholars" can contribute to "expansive" insights.[915] This broader approach to interpretation encourages readers to engage with the Hebrew Bible through multiple lenses, embracing diverse perspectives rather than adhering solely to a prescriptive, institutional view. It is a perspective on scripture that champions a feminist temporality embracing patience, pausing, and immersion, as well as curiosity and autonomy.

In the previous chapter, we came across several examples of relevance to understand how *The Faithful Feminists* enacts this alternative temporality, such as co-present reading experiences where they instruct mindful and present scripture studies. An observation that could be made from those examples is that liveness introduces a temporality that distinctively alters or moderates the strict pace dictated by seriality. Essentially, liveness seems to act as something of a counterbalance to the rigidities of serial production. Another method – perhaps a bit ironical given their critique of its pace – is to include more or lengthier pieces of scripture than the manual instructs. As we saw in the excerpt quoted earlier, they are sometimes "covering more chapters" in one episode "than are outlined in the *Come Follow Me* manual." The way that the manual assigns chapters, Poll explains in the same episode, "reflects disproportionate priorities based on gender," and shows how the manual "values men's experiences over women's."[916] She notes that while the manual covers the stories of Jacob in Genesis 28 through 33, it notably skips the chapters detailing Dina's story and the conclusion of Rachel's and Deborah's lives. This exclusion is seen as indicative of a "patriarchal bias" within the church leadership and the manual's authors, which perpetuates ignorance and indifference towards women's experiences. She advocates a more responsible and inclusive approach to scripture study, urging that hidden or intentionally "obscured" parts of the text, especially those relevant to women, be examined and acknowledged. After calling out the manual's gender "biases" Parker and Poll therefore counter by covering three extra chapters.

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915 Parker & Poll, "Whoops, We Ignored Women (Genesis 28–36)."
916 Parker & Poll, "Whoops, We Ignored Women (Genesis 28–36)."

> Poll: Genesis 29 and 30 have women who are active and speaking in the text, and they don't even receive a cursory mention in the manual […] Those who wish to study the text responsibly must be willing to unveil and witness the portions of the text which are hidden or obscured, especially when they are obscured by design […] With all that said, today we're going to do something a little bit different. We will move through Genesis chapters 28 through 36 chronologically. And instead of focusing on Jacob's experiences that are highlighted in the manual, we will instead favor the experiences of women and explore the potential avenues for further study that each of their stories introduces.[917]

Poll's analysis underscores the disconnect between the manual's assigned readings and a feminist approach that values the visibility and depth of women's stories in scripture. By highlighting the omission of key chapters involving significant female narratives – such as Dina's story and the burials of Rachel and Deborah – Poll calls attention to a selective temporality that prioritizes male-centered narratives while bypassing those of women. This selective exclusion, also referred to as "cherry picking,"[918] serves as an institutional choice that curates the reader's engagement with scripture. In response to these limitations, Parker and Poll shift their focus away from the male-centered narratives emphasized by the manual to prioritize the experiences of women in Genesis. By choosing to study Genesis 28–36 "chronologically" and highlighting the stories of women like Rachel, Leah, and Dina, the podcast duo seeks to reclaim a temporality that allows for a fuller, more inclusive examination of the text. This chronological approach defies the manual's fragmented structure, allowing listeners to explore each chapter's interconnectedness and appreciate the cumulative significance of women's stories within the larger narrative.

Of course, this practice is not exclusive to *The Faithful Feminists* but has been central to many feminists and womanist biblical and theological scholars. Barbara MacHaffie has famously termed the task of reading and searching for women's stories as *Herstory*. She writes that whereas books surveying the history of Christianity have been "his stories" she attempts to write "her story" by addressing "the forgotten history of over half of the Christian community."[919] This tendency is also visible in scholarship on Latter-day Saint women.[920] Today, the term is generally used in reference to a particular type of feminist project that seeks to capture women's voices and historical and contemporary experiences. Here though, it becomes part of a feminist ethos of slowing down

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917 Parker & Poll, "Whoops, We Ignored Women (Genesis 28–36)."
918 Parker & Poll, "Whoops, We Ignored Women (Genesis 28–36)."
919 Barbara J. MacHaffie, *Her Story. Women in Christian Tradition*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), p. xi.
920 Claudia L. Bushman & Caroline Kline, *Mormon Women Have Their Say. Essays from the Claremont Oral History Collection*, (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2013.)

patriarchal time – a temporality that glosses over or rushes past the depth of women's perspectives like a "hot-dog eating competition."

7.1.3 "Weavers" and "Caretakers" – Feminist Interpretation as a Processual and Holistic Practice

The discursive framing of their exegesis is also one that fortifies a continuous act of putting together an otherwise fragmented text. At times, this process is described as a "caretaking of language,"[921] or as "weaving" stories together.[922] On other occasions, it manifests as a form of self-identification, with the hosts describing themselves as "weavers."[923] This metaphor not only captures their role in assembling narrative threads but also emphasizes their active participation in shaping the discourse around it. One example of this can be found in an episode called "Creating Stories, Creating Bodies (Genesis 1–2)," where Parker shares a "Celtic story" about the "old woman at the end of the world" to exemplify this practice:

> Parker: She is a weaver, and she spends her days creating a beautiful tapestry made from the threads of the experiences, the loves, the wonder, the breath, the sorrows, the loss, the joys and delights of all the individuals and communities of the world. She weaves them all together in the company of her enemy, the crow, who waits for the opportune moment when she turns away to put on a cup of tea or rub her hands to undo the tapestry. For the crow knows that if the weaving were ever to be finished, the world would come to an end. And the Old Woman, returning to her tapestry in pieces, does not fret or sorrow. She turns to the crow as one would to a mischievous friend, gives him a knowing look, and begins a new tapestry, a new pattern, completely unlike the old one, yet with all the same threads. The first last, the last first, wefting love through the warp of wisdom and time. And so, it is for me, and my faith, and my God, a tapestry never completed. Sometimes God is the weaver. Sometimes God is the crow, but it is always together we picture and create the story of the world, my world, our world, inextricably connected in perpetual love.[924]

Parker's story of the old woman at the end of the world introduces a poetic and cyclical temporality that contrasts sharply with linear, goal-oriented approaches to faith and scripture study. In the Celtic tale, the old woman continually weaves and reweaves the

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921 Channing Parker & Elise Poll, "The Language of Grace & Joy (Doctrine & Covenants 93)," *The Faithful Feminists,* August 23, 2021.

922 Channing Parker & Elise Poll, "Barrenness and Broken Bread (3 Nephi 20–26);" "Searching For God, Finding Friends (Doctrine & Covenants 121–123);" "Creating Stories, Creating Bodies (Genesis 1–2)," January 5, 2022, "Bathsheba & David Part 1 feat. Amber Richardson (2 Samuel)," June 20, 2022, *The Faithful Feminists.*

923 Parker & Poll, "2022 Introduction – Old Testament."

924 Parker & Poll, "Creating Stories, Creating Bodies (Genesis 1–2)."

tapestry of existence, with each new creation reflecting and integrating past experiences. This process-oriented temporality, where creation is never truly complete and destruction is simply a precursor to renewal, serves as a metaphor for Parker's relationship with her faith – a "tapestry never completed." In this narrative, the old woman's tapestry embodies an ever-evolving faith journey, one woven from love, sorrow, joy, and wisdom. Her weaving and reweaving in response to the crow's interference reveals a temporality of resilience and transformation. Rather than seeing disruption – the crow's continuous "undoing" of her tapestry – as a loss, the old woman does not "fret or sorrow," but embraces it as an invitation to begin anew, bringing all past experiences forward into fresh patterns. This metaphor counters institutional or doctrinal frameworks that may impose closure, completion, or finality by implying a spirituality that is relational, processual, and cyclical. It is a temporal reimagining that invites Parker and her listeners into continual renewal. Returning to the "Whoops, We Ignored Women" episode referenced earlier, Parker similarly speaks about "fixing holes" in her son's pants, saying that "weaving the thread in and out of each other" is "exactly what feminist interpretation does. It sees a hole in the text, and it fills it."[925]

> Parker: Last night, as I was preparing for this episode and thinking about all of the things that I wanted to say about all of the incredible women in the text, I was fixing a hole in my son's pants and trying out some new, like mending skills cause I've never done it before. And as I was fixing the holes and weaving the thread in and out of each other and trying to basically reshape the fabric in the hole of my son's pants, I had this realization that I'm like getting emotional about it, but that's exactly what feminist interpretation does. It sees a hole in the text, and it fills it. Tiny thread by tiny thread. By spending time with these women and looking at the details of their lives and imagining their faces, their heart, their wants and wishes and desires, and their hurts, and their tears, and their pain, and weaving it into a story that retains its wholeness where there are no holes to be found. And the most beautiful part about finally finishing my son's pants, cause it really was a giant hole, was afterwards just running my hand over the threads and the handiwork. Being really proud of myself and feeling really grateful that my son was going to be able to wear these pants and literally be wrapped in the threads of his mother who really, really loves him. And I think that in that same way, we can look at these stories and allow ourselves by weaving our threads in with their stories and remembering them that we can be wrapped up in their love as well.[926]

Terms such as "weavers" and "caretakers" could be interpreted as a form of domestication of their exegetical practice, i.e., attributing terms that have traditionally been

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925 Parker & Poll, "Whoops, We Ignored Women (Genesis 28–36)."
926 Parker & Poll, "Whoops, We Ignored Women (Genesis 28–36)."

recognized as feminine, homely, and maternal to it. They also suggest an inherent promise to the task of interpreting scripture through a feminist lens – it fixes or patches up a text that is incomplete – and by doing so over time, bringing about fullness or completion. This reflection by Parker therefore speaks to the centrality of both temporality and care in feminist reinterpretation. By repairing her son's pants, she performs a small, intimate act of care that takes time, patience, and attentiveness – qualities that resist the hurried pace mentioned earlier. This slow, deliberate process mirrors how Parker describes feminist interpretation: an act of noticing gaps and taking the time to restore or bring depth to incomplete or overlooked narratives. This experience of "mending" aligns closely with the figure of the "old woman at the end of the world" just discussed, who stands as a symbol of wisdom, patience, and timelessness. Both gestures – mending and embodying this wise, slow, figure – resist linear temporality by valuing continuity, and resilience. This process of "filling holes" in a text is like stitching together fragmented histories and silenced voices, transforming a broken or incomplete story into one that is whole, continuous, and enriched. This imagery of weaving threads connects to the idea of slowing down to honor these women's lives and stories in a way that transcends surface-level readings, attending instead to their fullness and complexities. Her description of running her hand over the mended pants, feeling pride and connection, is reminiscent of the tactile, grounded experiences associated with caregiving. This tactile connection forms a "thread" between Parker and the women of the text as she suggests that by engaging deeply with their stories, she, and by extension her listeners, can be metaphorically "wrapped up" in the love and legacy of these women. This approach to feminist reinterpretation is therefore not only an intellectual exercise but an embodied, affective practice that aligns with the temporality of remembering, honoring, and "repairing" history. It appears as an act of care and resistance against a world – or a scripture manual – that often privileges speed over depth and wholeness.

7.1.4 "Limitations of the Podcast" – Serial Restraints

The question, however, is whether a *Come Follow Me* podcast really can sever its ties to this world of speed and acceleration. The crux of the matter is that they are bound by the timeframe the manual sets up. While the *Come Follow Me* manual does not have to "dictate" how their listeners read the text, they explain, "for the podcast it does" since they are "primarily a *Come Follow Me* podcast and are by design required to follow the schedule."[927]As the quote below suggests, the fact that they are bound by both the manual and the podcast makes their opposition a challenge.

[927] Parker & Poll, "Whoops, We Ignored Women (Genesis 28–36)."

> Parker: In preparation for this episode, we really discussed a lot of potential avenues for exploration of these two stories. And one thing that Elise and I have constantly been saying to each other is "ugh, we wish the manual took more time here! I wish that it slowed down a little bit." […] We really wish we had the opportunity to discuss everything, but due to the limitations and nature of the podcast, we can't. We understand that whatever we choose to focus on means the exclusion of something else that is equally worthy of exploration. So, in light of that, we encourage our listeners to continue their exploration of the text […] We're definitely going to miss things. We can't cover everything […] So, we hope you'll take this understanding and run with it. Check in with other sources […] We also have a reading list on our website that offers up more avenues of exploration and interpretation.[928]

Parker's expression of wishing "the manual took more time here" reiterates the recurring frustration with the manual's rapid pacing that we saw earlier, which compresses rich stories and reduces the opportunity for reflective, in-depth exploration. Beyond that, Parker also acknowledges the constraints imposed by the manual on their own project, which restricts the depth and breadth of exploration they can bring to each episode. Despite their desire to slow down and delve deeply into the text, the podcast's structure, aligned with the manual, limits their ability to comprehensively engage with every theme or narrative element they value. This creates a tension between their feminist commitment to and framing of a patient, expansive engagement with scripture and the practical reality of adhering to or performing the manual/podcast's timeline. This compromise underscores the tension their project is caught between, not only institutional frameworks that give "patriarchal" instructions, and a feminist approach that values lingering on stories and themes, but between framing the podcast through a feminist ethos of "slowing down" and the capitalist engine behind seriality, forcing the performance of a rapid succession of episodes.[929] In response to this constraint, Parker encourages listeners to supplement their exploration with alternative sources, invoking a more communal and decentralized approach to interpretation. This approach resists the manual's temporality, which implicitly prescribes what counts as essential or "enough" understanding within a limited timeframe, yet to some extent, recognizes that it is something that must be conducted outside the borders of their podcast. Thus, while bound by the manual's temporal limitations, Parker and Poll attempts to work within and around these constraints to create a flexible, interpretive space that invites continuous exploration of scripture. This allows them to partially fulfill their vision of a slowed, intentional engagement with sacred texts, even as they navigate the limitations imposed by the podcast's format.

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928 Parker & Poll, "Falling Forward & Keeping East of Eden (Genesis 3–4)."
929 Kelleter, "Five Ways of Looking a Popular Seriality," p. 13.

7.1.5 Analytical Summary of Performance and Framing

There are two serial formats operating in *The Faithful Feminists*: the podcast and the *Come Follow Me* manual. The first one can be described as conjured by the continuous return and schematic frequency key to serial performances. The second adds to these conditions by also instructing a certain scriptural content to be approached in a particular way and pace. The manual's criteria for inclusion are affected by the values of those who write it, which results in an exclusion of more progressive interpretations. It steers its members toward certain focuses or interpretations that may leave some feeling excluded. In accordance with the serial demands yet simultaneous challenge of the content of the *Come Follow Me* manual, *The Faithful Feminists* offers a "chapter-by-chapter" interpretation through a feminist lens. As a manual instructing a certain practice over time, it allows for a community experiencing – in this case a feminist alternative of – scripture together at the same time. By approaching and using the manual in a different way the podcast thus enables a parallel movement among Feminist Latter-day Saints, where some listeners use their podcast as a source to negotiate their own perceived tension with the manual or the way that text is approached in church classes.

However, the seriality of both the podcast and manual, they seem to suggest, imposes a patriarchal timeframe – one that proceeds at a rapid pace, skips and fragments, with the effect of troubling feminist practices of co-present readings, slowing down, and engaging in deeper reflections on passages related to women. Against this other, Parker and Poll discursively frame their own temporal ambitions. At the heart of this framing is the *nodal point* "slowing down." The term itself suggests that events are unfolding at a rapid pace, necessitating a reduction in speed. This is telling of the discursive frontier or *antagonistic other* that the podcast is formulated against – namely the *Come Follow Me* manual. This other is articulated through various *discursive moments*. For example, we learn that "patriarchy" not only "shows up in the text" but also "in the way that [they] read and study the text" by enforcing a certain "speed" or timeframe. When readers try to "stay on track," they end up "mov[ing] way too quickly," "driv[ing] the freeway to get to the end quicker." This temporality is a rushed or hurried approach – it is like a "timed, hot-dog eating competition," as Parker humorously put it. This causes parts of scripture – and especially ones that illustrate female figures – to be omitted. Patriarchal time is fragmentary as *discursive moments* such as "skipping" and "cherry picking" tells us.

To manage this deficiency, they encourage their listeners to "slow down" the pace of their reading. The meaning of this act is reduced by a *chain of equivalence* consisting of *discursive moments* such as "everyone needs to [slow down] but especially feminist readers" by which they imply "read[ing] the unassigned chapters;" the use of other sources – the

"LDS church is not the only authority on the Hebrew Bible;" – "ignore the manual entirely;" or setting much longer-term goals, such as being in "Ruth in 2030." They also describe themselves as adopting a more "expansive" approach that for example "covers more chapters" and "favor[s] the experiences of [scriptural] women." It is an approach that could be explained as combining what scholars like MacHaffie term "herstory" with a feminist ethos that marks patriarchal readings as an issue of temporality, in effect encouraging their listeners to both read against "his stories" *and* "his time."

This alternative temporal framing is also enhanced by the holistic and processual manner in which feminist interpretations are portrayed. Parker and Poll practice a "care-taking of language," where they "weave" faith and feminism like a "tapestry" despite its continuous "undoing" by the trickster crow. Although a comparison not made explicit by themselves, the trickster crow from the "The Old Woman at the End of the World" could easily be compared with the *Come Follow Me* manual – both allegedly acting to fragment and pick apart the tapestries or stories of women. Parker and Poll emerge as both the old woman in the story who endures the test of time – they do "not fret or sorrow," because "[faith is as a] tapestry never completed" – as well as the loving mother "fixing holes," in her son's pants, "weaving the thread in and out of each other," because that is "exactly what feminist interpretation does. It sees a hole in the text and fills it." In other words, this discourse reflects how Poll and Parker engage with scripture: they are undeterred by patriarchal erasures, instead working to mend the "holes" left by the manual's omissions. They embody a feminist practice that actively fills in the gaps in the text, making scripture whole in a way that speaks to women's experiences and voices. By reclaiming their pace, they offer a counter-temporality to "his time" – the patriarchal pace imposed by the manual. Their approach allows them to return to the text, not in fragments but in continuity, moving chapter-by-chapter and highlighting stories and experiences often left out.

As witnessed throughout this subchapter, however, the affordance of seriality is ambiguous, sometimes framed and performed as a positively enabling parallel movement among feminist readers, other times limiting the exploration of feminist perspectives. This became especially prevalent at the end of this subchapter where they described themselves as "primarily a *Come Follow Me* podcast," and "by design required to follow the schedule." Although they "wish the manual took more time" that it "slowed down a little bit," there are "limitations" inherent to the very "nature of the podcast," and because of that they are "definitely going to miss things." In this reflection, Parker and Poll acknowledge the limitations imposed by the nature of seriality, which emphasizes continuous production and adherence to a set schedule. As a *Come Follow Me* podcast, they are bound by the manual's weekly rhythm, producing new episodes in rapid

succession to keep pace with the prescribed study schedule. This "design" is driven by the serial demands of media production, where each installment must appear on time to maintain relevance and engagement. In this system, there is little room for the deep, reflective study they desire. The pressure to continually produce content quickly causes them to "miss things," inhibiting their ability to engage fully with the material or to dive into the feminist reinterpretation they envision. This accelerated production corresponds to what Kelleter describes as a capitalist model of seriality.[930] This concept helps contextualize the sentiment expressed by Parker and Poll, where quantity often takes precedence over depth, and time is optimized to encourage continuous engagement rather than contemplative exploration. Their admission that they are required to follow the schedule illustrates how seriality, underpinned by capitalist expectations of constant output, stifles their ambition to "slow down" and examine the text expansively. The need to keep up with the manual's pace essentially forces them into a streamlined process that prioritizes rapid consumption over careful examination. As such, their ideal of lingering with certain narratives and focusing deeply on women's stories is constrained by the format's inherent limitations, highlighting the tension between their feminist goals and the capitalist logic of serial media production that demands continuity and speed. In effect the podcast both affords and troubles "her time."

7.2 Serial Dynamics in Faith: *The Faithful Feminists*

If the examples observed thus far show how podcast seriality both enables and challenges the construction and negotiation of feminism and faith in terms of reading scripture, the following pages will be dedicated to an exploration of what the process of returning again and again or "showing up" as the hosts refer to it, means for the construction of their personal faith. To do so we will use their last episode, called "Our Final Episode (A Goodbye)" as a point of departure for exploring other episodes throughout the years and the changes they illustrate. We will explore four key examples: "[not] so simple as just pressing record," which illustrates how the podcast enabled Parker and Poll to become feminist exegetes; "the podcast has changed us," highlighting the hosts' evolving faith through retrospection; "I can no longer pretend," revealing how *The Faithful Feminists* hosts navigated a backstage crisis; and finally, "'Pisces water queen and 'post-Mormon,'" discussing their departure from a faith once bound to the institutional church.

[930] Kelleter, "Five Ways of Looking a Popular Seriality."

7.2.1 "[Not] so Simple as Just Pressing Record" – Processual Learning and Legitimization

Starting a podcast, Parker and Poll begin, was perceived as having specific expectations attached – expectations of skills and knowledge that the duo did not perceive themselves as having. While the podcast emanated from an ambition to make something of the dialogues they had as friends, since they wanted to "reach a wider audience" it was not "so simple as just pressing record on conversations [they] were already having."[931] The duo explains the many details that were considered when launching the podcast. They took professional photos for their website, executed their own photoshoot in church – including the logotype – and carefully planned and rehearsed the introduction. Poll explains that she "really wanted to make sure that this was a good podcast" that it had "quality" was "well researched" and that "every word was intentional."[932] They wanted the podcast to be "impactful." Having no training in either podcasting or feminist theology, the duo, you could say, went into training:

> Poll: It wasn't like we were trained theologians in any formal way, and I remember doing so much reading before we started the podcast in feminist theory and feminist theology because again I wanted to make sure that what we had to say was meaningful and impactful and was also, like, sound in some way, that we had kind of worked toward a research based, thoughtful interpretation.[933]

Parker adds that "for the first few years we definitely wanted to make sure that a lot of the things that we were sharing were grounded and rooted in something academic."[934] As this recollection of the podcast process seems to imply, the podcast brought them to feminist theology and not the other way around. They were not "trained theologians" Poll explains, which means that they had to learn about "feminist theory and feminist theology" in preparation. To produce the content that they did, furthermore, they conducted research for each episode, meaning they read and commented on scholarly work as well as popular scientific books on the subject at hand.

> Parker: as we first started this podcast I remember just, like, putting in a mass order on thrift books to get all of the feminist theology books and I was, like, reading them nonstop just so I could, like, test myself and see, like, "am I doing this right? am I doing this well?" […] I also had a lot of imposter syndrome and felt like I had a lot to prove […] we spent a lot of time laying the groundwork for feminist interpretation […] introducing and defining things like feminism,

931 Parker & Poll, "Our Final Episode (A Goodbye)."
932 Parker & Poll, "Our Final Episode (A Goodbye)."
933 Parker & Poll, "Our Final Episode (A Goodbye)."
934 Parker & Poll, "Our Final Episode (A Goodbye)."

> hermeneutics, lens, privilege, ecofeminism. […] We were still so like fresh and new to those terms and using these new skills that we remembered what it was like to not know how to do those things and not know what any of those things meant, especially in a Mormon context. And because of that, I feel like we were able to… lead our listeners through these concepts really well. And so, I think that first year, we definitely were able to introduce these concepts in a way that felt accessible for people.
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> Poll: we were still also trying to figure it out for ourselves like we really wanted to make sure that the message was clear and made sense on the podcast but there was a ton of behind the scenes work to, like, build that confidence and security before delivering.[935]

Parker explains that when they first started the podcast, they ordered a collection of feminist theology books and immersed themselves in reading. In the initial year, they established a foundation for feminist interpretation by introducing and defining key terms such as "feminism" and "hermeneutics." It can be inferred that their initial unfamiliarity with these concepts meant they were learning as they progressed, which in turn enabled them to introduce complex theological ideas in a manner that was accessible. In other words, their self-awareness of "remembering what it was like to not know" is described as positioning them as both students and teachers, uniquely capable of guiding listeners through complex ideas with empathy and clarity. One might therefore conclude that they became feminist exegetes by doing or performing themselves as such, and by returning to the podcast regularly for their promise to educate others.[936] Thus, the podcast served as a processual learning and legitimization – an educational endeavor not only for their audience but also for themselves, a process through which they learned, refined, and internalized new skills and concepts. The frequent return to the podcast created a rhythm that reinforced their identities as feminist interpreters, allowing them to grow more confident in their roles over time. Initially, they felt, as Parker puts it in the quote above, "imposter syndrome" but, as Poll adds, their immersion in the subject matter and ongoing research transformed these feelings into a grounded "confidence." Thus, the podcast became more than a medium of expression – it was transformed into a crucible for their own expertise development where Parker and Poll could test, refine, and confirm their theological insights.

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935 Parker & Poll, "Our Final Episode (A Goodbye)."

936 Kelleter, "Five Ways of Looking a Popular Seriality," p. 30.

7.2.2 "The Podcast has Changed Us" – Looking Back on a Changing Faith

As they grew in skills and confidence to conduct feminist exegesis, however, their initial expectations also shifted. When the hosts of *The Faithful Feminists* began podcasting, they were optimistic about the possibilities of being both feminist and faithful. As the early introduction between the years 2020 and 2021 stated, they were here to "show all the really good ways that faith and feminism work together."

> Poll: But this is not just any Come Follow Me podcast. We do things a little differently here. We offer approachable feminist interpretations of the Come Follow Me manual for those who want to study and understand the scriptures in a framework of equality, social justice, and sisterhood. We are here to show you all the really good ways that faith and feminism work together to illuminate and deepen the gospel experience.[937]

In the beginning, these ambitions were combined with a devotion to being a member of the Church. Looking back, Parker expresses that she was "committed to having [her] butt in that chair every Sunday," and that she "classified" herself as a "faithful and believing member who was also hopeful and working passionately toward change."[938] Poll, in similarity, "felt like the podcast was a really great way" for her "to explore these topics in a way that balanced [her] love of research, but also still allowed [her] to participate in the Church in some way." [939] In their last episode, however, Parker perceives those early ambitions as naive.

> Parker: I remember when we first began the podcast that I was, like, so sure that it was, like, possible to be both Mormon and feminist at the same time. And I was, like, setting out on this podcast to, like, show people how it's done, which is, like, I'm looking back on that part of myself, like, "aww that's so cute." Because I know differently now. But back then I just remembered myself feeling so passionately about, sure it's difficult to do that, but it's totally possible… and it is possible… for like a year [laughing], good job Channing![940]

Parker describes feeling passion and certainty about bringing her audience tools to engage in both Mormonism and feminism at the same time. However, as they continued the podcast and confronted the complexities of integrating feminism into a traditionally patriarchal religious institution, their optimism gave way to a more critical perspective.

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937 Channing Parker & Elise Poll, "Wisdom: The Antidote for Stories We Think We Know (Mosiah 7–10)," *The Faithful Feminists,* April 27, 2020.

938 Parker & Poll, "Our Final Episode (A Goodbye)."

939 Channing Parker & Elise Poll, "Is it the end of the World? Wait, it's just Isaiah."

940 Parker & Poll, "Our Final Episode (A Goodbye)."

Parker's reflection on her early ambitions captures this shift: looking back, she recalls her younger self as "so sure" of the compatibility of Mormonism and feminism, a memory she now views with irony and tenderness, referring to her past self as "so cute." Her sarcastic comment, "good job Channing!" and her observation that this commitment to merging feminism and faith lasted "for like a year" reveal her changed perspective. This evolution demonstrates how the process of regularly returning to the podcast, and engaging deeply with feminist theologies, reshaped their understanding of what it means to be both feminist and faithful. Through the challenges of advocating feminist principles in an environment resistant to change, they came to see their initial ambitions as somewhat naive, recognizing the difficulty of fully embodying both identities within a restrictive framework.

Consequently, the podcast evolved beyond just a platform for feminist theology. It was transformed into a process that challenged and ultimately reshaped the hosts' relationship with their faith. This experience pushed them to confront the limits of institutional change and embrace what they perceived as a more nuanced understanding of their evolving identities. They explicitly attribute this transformation to their experience of producing the podcast, as mentioned in the following quote.

> Parker: We have a lot of complicated feelings about this project being over. There's a little bit of relief, but there's also a lot of sadness and a lot of tenderness for the project. And for our past selves that have been so deeply involved in this. So, we're grateful to have the time to talk through that and move through that and look back on how much we've grown and changed throughout this podcast.
> Poll: […] we often hear that our episodes have changed something for them [listeners], like change the way that they understood a scripture passage or change the way they thought about Mormon doctrine or culture or change their relationships with faith and God. And honestly, we couldn't agree more. The podcast has changed us too. And I think that maybe there's a sense of outgrowing the podcast.[941]

This ability of "looking back," illustrates the retrospection that seriality affords podcast hosts to perform.[942] The ongoing nature of the podcast allowed Parker and Poll to reflect on their personal evolution over time, both in terms of their perspectives on scripture and their faith. Thus, each episode and each return to the podcast added layers to their understanding, making their change traceable over time. Parker expresses a complex blend of "relief" and "sadness" about ending the project, suggesting that the podcast had become an intimate part of their lives, not only as a public project but as a personal exploration. Poll's reflection on how the podcast impacted listeners – changing

941 Parker & Poll, "Our Final Episode (A Goodbye)."
942 Kelleter, "Five Ways of Looking a Popular Seriality," p. 18.

their views on scripture, doctrine, and relationships with faith – also speaks to the possible dual transformation occurring for both the hosts and their audience. Her observation that they may have "outgrown the podcast" also reveals how the project served as a growth process: a space that allowed them to wrestle with new ideas, develop feminist theological skills, and navigate their identities as feminists within the Latter-day Saint context. Their "tenderness" for their "past selves" highlights an appreciation for the stages they have gone through – the initial enthusiasm, the struggles with imposter syndrome, and the later critical reflections on the limits of merging feminism and faith within a restrictive religious framework. In combination with the podcast's liveness, the last episode also allowed them to "talk through" these evolving realizations, creating a cumulative effect that permitted them to process, reflect, and transform. This engagement in the last episode enabled them to revisit and revise their beliefs, making the podcast a living document of their personal and professional growth. In the following quote Parker remembers a specific moment in podcasting where this transformation became more tangible.

> Parker: I remember for that episode being completely unable to hold back my critique of that story. And I remember feeling almost afraid of how bold and how boldly I shared those feelings because I was like, how is this going to affect our audience? And how is our audience going to feel about me and feel about our podcast? If I share these really strong feelings […] [and] critique about the story. But it was also an experience of being able to share my feelings in a really real and honest way. And that felt really cathartic. And I noticed in myself, that was kind of a turning point in my ability to show up with my authentic feelings around the podcast.[943]

Describing this moment as a "turning point" implies that, up until then, Parker had been holding back her full voice, keeping her critiques moderated to align with what she perceived as palatable or acceptable for her audience. The quote speaks to an underlying sense of vulnerability and the pressure to maintain a balance between critique and acceptance within a faith community where bold feminist perspectives might not always be welcomed. Thus (perceived) audience reception – stemming from the parasocial quality of the podcast – therefore seems to cause a certain self-moderation. The turning point, however, occurred precisely because she chose to push past this fear, confronting the anxiety about audience reception head-on and allowing herself to express her critique unfiltered. This moment of "showing up" as she discursively frames it, was transformative because it was not merely about expressing a strong opinion; it was about claiming her right to voice uncomfortable truths even if they risked alienating some listeners. The

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943 Parker & Poll, "Our Final Episode (A Goodbye)."

phrasing "show up" therefore signifies the act of stepping into a changed position; at that moment she realized that she could bring her whole, "authentic" self into the podcast space, trusting that her audience could handle her critique and, in a sense, trusting herself to speak honestly. Thus, Parker's turning point reflects a deeper transformation in her relationship with the podcast and her audience.

This increasing confidence presented itself for example as an outlet to be honest about the personal experiences of reading scripture as a woman. In an episode called "A Halfway Sermon," Parker chooses to depart from their usual practice, to speak about her experiences reading Doctrine and Covenants.

> Parker: Friends, we know this podcast focuses largely on feminist interpretation of the scriptures, and we expected this week to be no different. I cannot be anything other than what I am, and I cannot show up to this space with anything more than what I have. Today, I do not have a feminist interpretation to offer you from my intellect. Today, I only have what my heart is holding. My heart holds grief. It holds the pain of erasure and the hurt of abandonment…So, from this space, I offer you not an interpretation of concepts, ideas, or definitions, but an interpretation through the lens of lived experience.[944]

In her quest to express "what [her] heart is holding," Channing speaks not from an "intellectual" point of view, which as she explains it, is what the podcast usually offers, but through the "lens of lived experience." Channing seems to say that when she speaks from the role of her personal self, the outcome is different than what listeners might have "expected." Her experiences speak of something other than the seamless weaving of feminism and faith that they usually construct themselves as being occupied with. She acknowledges that although the engagement with scripture has been "illuminating and empowering" it has also brought her into awareness of her own absence from the text:

> Parker: the Doctrine and Covenants is a text that, more so than any other portion of scripture, was not meant for women…it was not written by women, it does not give weight to women's experiences, it does not use language that is relevant to me as a woman, it does not answer questions from women, but instead dictates to and talks at and down to them, and at times, objectifies them. It is a unique kind of challenge and a unique kind of pain for a woman to enter into a study of a text that by and large excludes her, that is absent of her presence, let alone attempt a feminist interpretation of it.[945]

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944 Channing Parker & Elise Poll, "A Halfway Sermon," *The Faithful Feminists,* June 28, 2021.
945 Parker & Poll, "A Halfway Sermon."

Parker ceases to occupy her usual role here, in favor of a position where she performs what she perceives as her authentic self. In this practice, where she makes visible what she views as her truthful self (or what her "heart is holding"), feminism and faith no longer appear to work together. Here scripture "dictates," "talks down to," and "objectifies" her. As one can interpret it, the relationship between faith and feminism here is constructed as one of frustration and grief, because while a man can find himself reflected in the text, a woman reading for herself is, Parker says, like "looking through a glass darkly."

> Parker: It should not be so difficult to find myself in the text. I am exhausted from the requirement to work so hard to find myself there. A man could open this book and find a portion of himself reflected back to him by the language, pronouns, and characters both mortal and divine contained in the sections. But a woman's best chance at reading the text is, to borrow the words of Paul, by looking through a glass darkly […] It is like looking into a void. It is staring into the mists of time, hoping to see something to tie myself to, a thread of hope that I have a place in this church, and waiting and waiting and waiting for a hint of validation or approval or acceptance or recognition to arrive. And when it does, it passes through me as if I am a ghost, invisible. I find myself lost here in the Doctrine and Covenants […] I am looking where I was told to look. I am doing what I was told to do. And yet I find myself spinning, spinning, like a dervish without his delight, walking, walking, lost like a brand-new deacon passing the sacrament tray with no bread upon it.[946]

Parker describes her exegetical practice, then, as a form of rootlessness and "invisibility," where she keeps wandering in a "lost" state, unable to find anything to "tie" herself to. When she finally finds a "thread of hope that [she has] a place in this church" it "passes through [her] like [she is] a ghost." In other words, she appears to perceive her role as exegete and interpreter as failing. Or as she describes it, she becomes an exegete that has nothing to offer, like a "deacon passing the sacrament tray with no bread upon it."[947] The previous construction and negotiation of feminism and faith as an "endless tapestry" and persistent "weaving" is therefore troubled when Parker reflects on her personal

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946 Parker & Poll, "A Halfway Sermon."

947 Refers to the tray used in sacrament to carry bread and water symbolizing the body and blood of Christ and is often passed to the congregation by a deacon. Latter-day Saints use water instead of wine due to two reasons. First because Joseph Smith's revelation recorded in *Doctrine and Covenants* 27:2–3 is interpreted as saying that the substance used in the sacrament is not as important as the commemoration of Jesus Christ's atonement and the renewing of covenants made with God, and second, because the health codes based on Smith's revelations recorded in the Word of Wisdom advise against alcoholic drinks. See Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, "Why do we use water instead of wine for the sacrament?," www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/new-era/2008/11/to-the-point/why-do-we-use-water-instead-of-wine-for-the-sacrament?lang=eng, accessed January 30, 2025.

faith. Here reading scripture from a feminist lens is, as she adds in the same episode, "mental gymnastics" that leave her "exhausted."

7.2.3 "I Can no Longer Pretend" – Managing Backstage Crisis

What we find out in their last episode, however, is that this sermon was reflective not only of an increasing courage to be authentic, but also of an ongoing "backstage" crisis.[948] Their enthusiasm, the duo explains, was curbed when they started their second year in 2021. During this time, they were working with Doctrine and Covenants which according to Parker was the text that "broke" her.[949] The creative approach to scripture explored in chapter six was well suited for the Book of Mormon and the Old and New Testaments, they explain, but did not always "translate well" to Doctrine and Covenants. The inability to approach it with the same framework – due to its character of being a historical document more than a biblical narrative – made the continued engagement with it a frustrating job.

> Parker: I felt like every time we sat down to prep or record an episode I just was, like, "I hate this," "oh this is so frustrating," "uh I don't like how I feel." As I sit down and engage with this text, and I remember even recording an episode about halfway through the year it's titled "Halfway Sermon," and it was at this point that I was, like, I can no longer pretend that I'm having a good time reading the Doctrine and Covenants because I'm not.[950]

Parker's reflection reveals an evolution in her engagement with the podcast and her relationship to the religious text at its core. Her candid admission of frustration signals a departure from the initial optimism and determination she once had to balance faith and feminism. The repetitive nature of her feelings, expressed in phrases like "I hate this," "this is so frustrating," and "I don't like how I feel," indicates an emotional and intellectual dissonance that became increasingly difficult to ignore. Each time she prepared for an episode, she confronted a sense of discomfort, and over time, these feelings accumulated, undermining her ability to maintain a positive or neutral stance. The episode "A Halfway Sermon" quoted earlier thus marks both a midpoint in the study of the Doctrine and Covenants, but also a shift where she moves from concealing her

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948 Using language inspired by the theater, Erving Goffman suggests that our self-performances can be divided into a "frontstage" and "backstage," the former where we present our ideal and professional selves, such as a behavior or appearance that a specific vocation requires, and the latter a performance where we act in informal and relaxed way. See Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, (London: Penguin Books, 1959/2022.)

949 Parker & Poll, "Our Final Episode (A Goodbye)."

950 Parker & Poll, "Our Final Episode (A Goodbye)."

dissatisfaction to openly acknowledging it, both to herself and to her listeners. By declaring that she "can no longer pretend that [she's] having a good time," Parker chooses transparency over performative positivity. This admission is significant, as it signals a refusal to uphold a veneer of enjoyment or compliance for the sake of perceived expectations. In this way, Parker's experience underscores a larger theme of transformation catalyzed by feelings of incongruency: the podcast exposed her to the personal cost of exploring her faith through a feminist perspective. This interpretation is strengthened by how Parker continues the quote above by describing how this period became "the point of cognitive dissonance."[951] She "came to realize how little [she] truly resonated with the foundational teachings of the Church."[952] While told that her doubt stemmed from a lack of knowledge about the Church's truths, she explains, it was not really a lack of understanding that caused her doubts. She had devoted herself to understanding the scripture, even starting a podcast about it, but found that she "fundamentally disagreed with its core values and teachings."[953] She concludes that it was not "possible for [her] to continue a close relationship with the Church."[954] While they put on a brave face for their audience, there was, in other words, an ongoing crisis backstage.

> Poll: This is something that challenged our podcast relationship. Because halfway through the year you had all of these feelings that you wanted to share, that created a lot of anger and maybe, like, you didn't really want to continue working on the Doctrine and Covenants, and so how do we navigate this project that we said we were going to do but that doesn't feel lifegiving anymore? And, like, how do we continue throughout the rest of the year? And so I do remember that year we had some, like, podcast partner tension that we had to kind of sort out to see, like, ok look, at the end of the day we are committed to each other as friends before we're committed to the podcast, but like, is this something that we can work through and what do we need to change to make the way that you [Parker] show up on the podcast feel at least bearable in some way if we want to continue the project. And how do we navigate, like, who shows up and how we're sharing the workload and so yeah it was a really, really challenging year.[955]

As they returned episode after episode to the Doctrine and Covenants, Parker's feelings of disillusionment and anger intensified, and the project that once felt energizing became something that no longer felt "life-giving." The repetitive demand to engage with content that increasingly felt dissonant to Parker's values created an atmosphere of strain, testing both the purpose of the podcast and the strength of their working relationship.

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951 Parker & Poll, "Our Final Episode (A Goodbye)."
952 Parker & Poll, "Our Final Episode (A Goodbye)."
953 Parker & Poll, "Our Final Episode (A Goodbye)."
954 Parker & Poll, "Our Final Episode (A Goodbye)."
955 Parker & Poll, "Our Final Episode (A Goodbye)."

This reflection from Poll illustrates how the seriality of the podcast – a format that requires regular, sustained engagement over time – placed both hosts in a position of endurance, necessitating continual commitment even amid growing frustrations. Though questioning "if" they wanted to continue the project, it seems to have been more a question of a "how," since they asked themselves how to "navigate" the project even though it did not "feel life-giving anymore." Rather than abandoning the podcast, Parker and Poll had to work through these issues in a way that honored their friendship, ultimately reconfiguring their commitment to allow Parker to "show up" in a way that felt "at least bearable." This required a recalibration of both their roles and their expectations, demonstrating how seriality forced them to find ways to endure and adapt to challenges as they arose.

If we place the last episode together with "A Halfway Sermon" just quoted, the "bearable" way that Parker "shows up" then is through a sermon where she performs what could be described as a vulnerable self. There are of course many forms of vulnerability, one being the type we came across in the previous chapter where speech erupts into tears, another being a more strategic or formal vulnerability, which is what we find in "A Halfway Sermon." We can infer two things from this. First, that authenticity seem to be a motivating force, that is, Parker's authentic feelings must be expressed, and second, that authenticity is scripted to fit within the confines of podcast seriality – it does not cause cracks in the facade but maintains the promise of perpetual renewal.[956] Thus, they channel the backstage "anger" into a heartfelt sermon that does not disturb the seriality of the podcast or their perceived responsibilities toward their listeners. Part of what "showing up" on the podcast seems to mean beside self-discovery, then, is also to adapt to the demands of the format.

The increasing feelings of "dissonance" almost go unnoticed because of the controlled format. What becomes clear in their last episode, however, is that this was a process that set in motion their departure from the podcast. As Poll describes it in the former quote, they have "outgrown" it. So, while the podcast seems to change their footings, such changes are carefully edited and smoothed out. In the last episode referenced above, however, these silent events are made explicit. Placing this at the end though ultimately saves the face of the podcast. What seems to be the case here, is that two logics inherent to seriality are wrestling with each other. While the seriality that conditions Parker to follow through or "show up" allows her to step into a fuller self, it simultaneously conditions her to present those shifts smoothly i.e., in adherence to serial demands for coherency.[957] That is the function of "A Halfway Sermon," not only to make apparent

[956] Kelleter, "Five Ways of Looking a Popular Seriality," p. 30.
[957] Kelleter, "Five Ways of Looking a Popular Seriality," p. 17.

a feminist grief around scripture, but also to not disturb the continuity that the podcast requires. First when they have completed their promise, it seems, can they start recollecting the podcast process more explicitly and formulate the challenges it produced.

So, the duo struggles their way through Doctrine and Covenants and even manages to produce their most popular episodes – the five-part series on Polygamy mentioned in chapter five. The third year, where Parker and Poll read the Old Testament, therefore comes as a long-awaited break – it "was like night and day difference from the Doctrine and Covenants."[958] The biblical narratives, then, were more suitable for the interpretative methods they favor. Here, they had also evolved for three years, which allowed them to produce "some really fantastic episodes."

> Poll: And I felt like we were also really hitting our stride as podcasters. We had had two years of navigating and orienting ourselves and also coming into some conflict and tension. But we had emerged through that and worked through that in a really positive way. And I felt like we had become more confident and emboldened in our voice, in our politics, in our critiques on the podcast, and it made for some really fantastic episodes.[959]

By continuously returning and enduring the challenges of the past two years,[960] including moments of "conflict and tension," they were able to refine their approach and solidify their identities as podcasters. This process of navigating obstacles did not weaken their resolve but instead strengthened it, allowing them to "hit their stride" in a way that brought out the best of their abilities. Poll's comment that they became "more confident and emboldened" thus speaks to the transformative power of endurance. Their repeated return to the podcast, even in difficult moments, fostered a deepened sense of purpose and conviction, enabling them to embrace their "voice, politics, and critiques" more fully. Rather than simply persisting through hardship, then, they used endurance as a tool for what they seem to perceive as self-improvement; Poll's pride in the "really fantastic episodes" they produced after overcoming conflict underscores how it proposedly enriched the quality of their work.

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958 Parker & Poll, "Our Final Episode (A Goodbye)."
959 Parker & Poll, "Our Final Episode (A Goodbye)."
960 Kelleter, "Five Ways of Looking a Popular Seriality," p. 30.

7.2.4 "Pisces Water Queen" and "Post-Mormon" – A Process of Leaving

But while Parker and Poll may have been strengthened in their feminist exegesis, by the time they started with the Old Testament in 2022 they had stopped attending church and considered themselves inactive.

> Parker: At this point in my life, I was really starting to feel quite disconnected from the Church and was to the point where I even felt like the term 'post-Mormon' was the most, like, accurately reflective of where my relationship was with the Church, and I didn't even really consider myself like active or nuanced any longer like I just wanted to not engage with the Church at all. And I also think that this shift for both you and I really reflected into the podcast as well because we changed our intro that year. We changed our intro from, like, we're here to show how we're here to, like, talk about doing feminism faithfully and then our intro changed to, like, we're here to travel through the text in a journey with our God and with our experience with spirituality and that new intro just felt so refreshing and so necessary to kind of couch the change that both you and I had experienced.[961]

In this quote, Parker reveals a significant shift in her relationship with the Church, moving from "nuanced" engagement to a point of complete disconnection where the term "post-Mormon" feels most authentic to her experience. This shift marks a profound transformation, not only in her personal faith but also in her approach to the podcast, as both she and Poll felt compelled to change their introductory message to reflect their evolving perspectives. Initially, the podcast had been framed around "doing feminism faithfully," aligning with an earlier commitment constructed as wanting to merge feminist and Latter-day Saint identities. However, as Parker's disconnection from the Church grew, this framing became misaligned with her lived reality and what could be described as a sense of spiritual integrity. The new introduction, centering on a "journey with our God and with our experience with spirituality," represents a broader, more fluid approach that allows for exploration and self-discovery outside the boundaries of institutional faith. This shift in tone signifies their movement away from a focus on doctrinal allegiance toward a more personal and expansive spirituality, one that can accommodate their changing relationship with the Church. This redefined discursive framing of their purpose as being on a "journey" allows them to continue engaging with the text and their audience in a way that feels more authentic, without the pressure to reconcile their feminist values strictly within a Latter-day Saint framework. The change in the podcast's introduction thus serves as both a personal and a professional recalibra-

[961] Parker & Poll, "Our Final Episode (A Goodbye)."

tion, aligning the podcast's mission with their current, more flexible understanding of faith. When the duo began their reading of the Old Testament, then, it was the following introduction that was heard:

> Poll: We focus on feminist interpretations of scriptures and follow the LDS *Come Follow Me* manual as a guide for study. We understand scriptures can be a tricky endeavor for readers, but we also believe sacred texts contain compelling examples of loving and liberating relationships with the divine, others, and ourselves. We hope you'll join us in exploring the problems and promises of sacred texts with imagination, critique, and celebration to reveal what we feel is the loving and liberating heart of scripture.
> Parker: While Mormonism with its iconic floral foyer couches is our background, we follow our faith and our God on the winding path of spirituality over institution, and connection over condemnation. We are fellow wanderers, weavers, and doubters. If you've found yourself feeling a little too faithful for some and not enough for others: Welcome. We've saved you a seat on the soft chairs.[962]

This take on feminist interpretations of scripture is comparatively less optimistic than its previous promise to "show all the really good ways that faith and feminism work together." It offers a more nuanced depiction of what a "deepened gospel experience," could entail.[963] Now, reading scripture is about finding "relationships with the divine" and "ourselves." Perhaps most interesting is the explicit reference to their foyer couch background as a path of "spirituality *over* institution." From now on, they are not bound by their loyalty to the Church as an institution but rather by their personal spirituality. The shifting position of the hosts also "reflected into the podcast" in other ways. While they had "tiptoed" around certain topics in "previous years" to avoid the risk of excommunication, they add, now they "just went straight for it."[964] Seriality, then, accumulated a change in position that also affected what they said on the podcast. While earlier they were "always trying to say things in the right way or the acceptable way in order to avoid those consequences," now they were "bolder" and "didn't feel as hesitant to cover, like, really difficult topics," [965] which tells us that an overarching dedication to stay a member affects the content of the podcast. Their way of beginning the first episode on the Old Testament season is also telling of this new focus, where they start of by presenting themselves:

> Poll: My name is Elise, and I was born and raised in the Church. And I think over the years, my faith has really grown and changed. And right now, I'm under-

962 Parker & Poll, "2022 Introduction – Old Testament."
963 Parker & Poll, "Wisdom: The Antidote for Stories We Think We Know (Mosiah 7–10)."
964 Parker & Poll, "Our Final Episode (A Goodbye)."
965 Parker & Poll, "Our Final Episode (A Goodbye)."

> standing my faith as being ultimately concerned… [with] love, and hospitality and community and this is a type of faith that takes courage and questions, doubt, and action… my faith is not a pinky promise to the church institution that I'll never critique it and I'll never leave it and I'll never change. That's not really how I understand my faith right now. I am a Pisces water queen, just so you know.
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> Parker: My name is Channing […] Right now, for me, my faith is…wandery, weavey, like, path-like exploration… I understand my faith journey to just take me wherever it takes me, wherever my current interest is, or my next question. I'm always following a path that I hope brings me closer and closer to a fuller understanding of the divine and a fuller understanding of myself…and sometimes that path means walking out of a church institution… letting go of it altogether and exploring brand new frameworks and brand-new ideas and charting new territory […] I strongly identify with all of my fire signs […] my spiritual practice also includes scriptures… pagan spirituality and animistic worldviews and animistic spirituality…pre-Christian and ancient spiritual practices. I love working with the runes…plant spirits and animals.[966]

In presenting themselves they point to their religiosity as a "wandery," "path-like exploration" and "journey" – faith will "take me wherever it takes me" Parker says. This journey affects their relationship with the Church. Poll's faith is no longer "a pinky-promise to the church institution" and Parker's faith sometimes "means walking out of a church institution" and "letting go of it altogether" to explore "brand new frameworks." Part of this new "territory" seems to be heavily inspired by new age practices. Both identify themselves with their astrological signs. Poll describes herself as a "Pisces water queen" – alluding to the zodiac sign Pisces and its associated element of water, and Parker identifies with her "fire signs" which typically refer to zodiac signs such as Aries, Leo and Sagittarius. Parker also likes to integrate "pagan spirituality," "animistic worldviews," "pre-Christian and ancient spiritual practices," and loves "working with the runes." In their last episode, Parker even describes how these pagan practices worked as a relief while navigating a change of faith:

> Parker: Pagan practices and frameworks offered me respite as I navigated the waters of an ongoing and intensifying faith transition that was spurred on by the regular interaction with this really activating text and church history.[967]

Their shift in position toward the Church, then, which is here more explicitly framed as having to do with the continuous return to the subject of the podcast – it was "spurred on by the regular interaction" with the text – is seemingly co-occurring with an increased interest in other spiritual frameworks. The quote is also the beginning of an earlier

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966 Parker & Poll, "2022 Introduction – Old Testament."
967 Parker & Poll, "Our Final Episode (A Goodbye)."

excerpt where Parker addresses the increased discomfort that resulted in "A Halfway Sermon," which tells us that the performance of endurance forced them to seek an outlet in other religious practices. In the same first episode of the Old Testament season, Parker and Poll speak more explicitly about this change.

> Poll: I think as we were kind of stepping into our confidence and our ability to critique and celebrate, we also noticed that some people grew more weary and kind of suspicious, or maybe even intolerant of us as the years unfolded […] At least for me, I think that people can often take our title of *The Faithful Feminists* to be a podcast about how to be faithful, which I think is often misunderstood as abiding by the Church no matter what, never critiquing it, staying fully active member […]
>
> Parker: We've said on the podcast before […] that *The Faithful Feminists* podcast isn't faithful to an institution, it isn't faithful to the Church or any specific kind of dogma. I think at the end of the day, the faithful part of *The Faithful Feminists* podcast is a stubborn willingness, or curious willingness to follow the thread of the divine.[968]

In this quote, their increased "confidence" to "critique" was allegedly met with "weariness" and "suspicion." Their new position was apparently not tolerated by everyone, who had come to assume that the podcast name implied "fully active member" or "faithful to the Church or any specific kind of dogma." They address this as a false assumption and make it clear that theirs is not a faith and a critique that are "faithful to an institution." The podcast – and the practice of recording live scripture studies over time – may therefore be said to accumulate changes in one's belief and a change in attitude toward the religious institution of which one is a part.

This "winding path of spirituality over institution," was a process that finally led them out of the Church. While at least one of them recognizes that they will carry on some form of spiritual quest, they define themselves (without specifying what exactly it means) as "post-Mormon." As a result, the community enacted and framed online becomes increasingly dis-embedded from the place of the Church. This shift can be understood through the metaphor of decluttering. In direct continuation of the quote above Parker says that she has a room in her house that has always been a "particularly difficult room to decorate."[969] Over the years, she explains, "the decorations have changed," on one occasion it had a "vintage couch" and "then it had sitting chairs, a full-sized couch, a coffee table, some side tables, bookshelves, plant pots and stands, and so, so much more."[970] She "kept telling [herself] there needs to be something there

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968 Parker & Poll, "2022 Introduction – Old Testament."
969 Parker & Poll, "2022 Introduction – Old Testament."
970 Parker & Poll, "2022 Introduction – Old Testament."

to prove to the people who visit my house that people live here," but after a while she realizes that "the room needed and maybe even wanted to be empty."[971]

> Parker: As I cleared the couches and the tables away, the room breathed. I felt lighter there and there was a sense of freedom in the open space…In time, I have learned how to relish the sacredness of this empty room. It's a space that is expansive and infinite in possibility. There's room to spread out, to dance, play, explore, and imagine without it having to look picture perfect or pretty. And I think that this idea of an empty room is a compelling framework for faith. Sometimes we think that faith is having the expected beliefs that furnish our room. Maybe these beliefs are a hand-me-down couch that you got from your parents. Maybe it's a new trendy letter board, or a certain look or style that someone can categorize or understand. But what if faith is not the things in the room, but the room itself, but what if faith is having an open, expansive, empty space that is ready for anything. It's ready for surprise. It's ready for play and exploration, and it doesn't have to be, or do anything other than exactly what it does; empty and open. So, as I move into the Old Testament in the next year, this is the idea or the framework of faith that I'm holding within the text. And we invite you, maybe if it feels right for you to imagine or create a metaphorical empty room of your own.[972]

When Parker and Poll begin their third year in 2022, they described themselves as having emptied or cut ties to a faith that is "expected" or confined to pre-determined "categories." Metaphorically speaking, they have decluttered their over-decorated rooms and made them "empty and open." This metaphorical language is interesting to compare with their otherwise highly decorated podcast, with its soft chairs and foyer couches. Parker and Poll started from a position of wanting to re-signify the rooms of the Church, by using its furniture both verbally and illustratively to produce a "safe space." Through their "journey" however, they "outgrew" it and consequently made attempts to declutter. In the continuation of this quote, they also encourage their listeners to make the same effort. "Some of the ideas that we'll come across this year might be challenging" they explain, "they might bring up resistance in you," but "if there's an empty room for them to play in, then you can spend time with it there without threat. And decide if it's something that you want to welcome further into your home."[973] That empty "area" is an "opportunity for growth."[974]

But perhaps you can only take decluttering of a room so far. When all furniture and decorations have been removed, and you still feel confined by the walls of that room,

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971 Parker & Poll, "2022 Introduction – Old Testament."
972 Parker & Poll, "2022 Introduction – Old Testament."
973 Parker & Poll, "2022 Introduction – Old Testament."
974 Parker & Poll, "2022 Introduction – Old Testament."

you might have to take your favorite soft chair somewhere else. They end their final episode by saying:

> Parker: We'll still save you a seat on the soft chairs, but we've moved them to places that feel a bit more comfortable for us this season. We'll save you a soft seat on the bus or at the museum, in the library, on the park bench or even a seat at dinner. And in the end, we hope you'll save one for us too. Thank you so, so much for a beautiful journey. We love you friends.[975]

Whereas their "journey" began by saving seats within the church, they end it by saving seats outside it – "on the bus," "at the museum, "on a park bench" and so on, really any place that is not church. While meant to bring closure to their "friends" who have listened to their podcast for several years, this episode also speaks of their process of leaving, what in theoretical terms can be described as a process both initiated and made difficult by the seriality of podcasting and its inherent promise of "showing up."

If we put this in relation to what we observed earlier on as enduring through crisis, we find therefore that the podcast conditioned and allowed a performance of processual development, with the result of a slower and extended faith development. The podcast required them to stay longer than felt "lifegiving," so instead of a quick disruption – after losing their enthusiasm, becoming inactive or identifying as "post-Mormon – they stayed, revaluated and reformulated their personal faith.

7.2.5 Analytical Summary of Performance and Framing

The Faithful Feminists' last episode served as a convergent point between performance and framing: it allowed us both to pinpoint what happened to the hosts during the process of podcasting, as well as observe what significance or meaning was attributed to the changes that took place. The interplay between performed media and discursive framing, however, results in a complex web of *subject positions*. First, they occupy both the role of "podcaster" and the more personal role of a "Latter-day Saint." Second, due to the podcast as a medium that both archives/continually produces content, positions are layered with both the position performed *then* and the position occupied *now* which also adds retroactively to previous positions – such as when Parker sarcastically labels her past self "so cute." We have therefore observed both in-time positions and retroactively produced positions that explain, reframe, or change previous positions. For clarity, I will present them in chronological order.

If we start by observing their first positions, we find that being a "podcaster" was perceived as having specific expectations concerning skills, knowledge, and esthetics

975 Parker & Poll, "Our Final Episode (A Goodbye)."

attached to it. They took professional photos and since they were not "trained theologians in any formal way," they had to read up on "feminist theory and feminist theology," a preparation that seems to have been a very demanding endeavor. Parker remembers "putting in a mass order on thrift books," having a "lot of imposter syndrome," and feeling like she "had a lot to prove." There was also "a ton of behind-the-scenes work" to build "confidence and security before delivering." This expectation and the resulting commitment led them to "train" themselves in feminist theology, studying academic and theological texts in depth to make sure their contributions were thoughtful and well-informed. Having these expectations attached to podcasting, performing seriality therefore afforded them processual learning and legitimization. Another initial position was as "committed." Looking back, Parker expresses having been "committed to having [her] butt in that chair every Sunday," and that she was a "faithful and believing member who was also hopeful and working passionately toward change." The optimism attached to this position was visible in their old introduction, which stated that they were "here to show [us] all the really good ways that faith and feminism work together to illuminate and deepen the gospel experience."

While increasing their knowledge and skills, the schedule's demand for them to continuously "show up" also spurred the performance of a processual transformation, both in terms of self-discovery where they frame it as "showing up" to a new and "fuller self," and in terms of a change in their faith position. First, this is demonstrated through explicit descriptions of being "changed" and having "faith transitions… spurred on by the regular interaction" with the text and church history. Second, it is visible in things like a changing introduction, going from "we are here to show you all the really good ways that faith and feminism work together" to "we follow our faith and our God on the winding path of spirituality over institution," in episodes like "A Halfway Sermon," that suddenly diverge from the former promise by giving a speech on the adverse experiences of reading scripture as a woman, and of course the goodbye message to their listeners in their last episode.

But despite being in a process of leaving, these changes were more subtle before their last episode, which brings us to another important affordance or conditioning effect of continuous return, namely endurance. Submitting to a schedule that requires one to return week after week forced them to sit through their own discomfort. Looking back, the position of "podcaster" is therefore infused with a slightly different meaning. Just being skilled intellectually and esthetically was no longer enough; they had to keep showing up even when it was challenging. Parker recalls feeling "frustrated" and even "hating" it "every time" they "sat down to prep or record an episode." Nevertheless, it was not a question of abandoning the project, they had "said that [they] were going to

do it" and were "committed to the podcast," so it was more a process of "working through" and finding "bearable" ways to "continue." Ergo, they endured even when the project did not "feel life-giving anymore." The episode called "A Halfway Sermon" therefore showcases the ambiguity of what seriality affords – it appears as both enabling vulnerability and as enforcing it in a scripted form that appeases the confines of the schedule by not causing cracks in the façade and disabling its hosts from returning. Notably, this endurance thus caused a processual transformation of their faith rather than an immediate break. This presents a notable shift from the type of acceleration observed in the seriality discussed in the previous section, which explored the construction and negotiation of feminism and faith. Seriality thus emerges as paradoxical: it fosters performances that simultaneously accelerate and decelerate – accelerating the rapid pace of feminist interpretations of scripture, while also allowing for a slower, more gradual unfolding of evolving faith.

Another affordance of performing seriality was the ability of retrospection or to look back and reflect on one's own personal development. They are able to "move through" and "look back" on how they have "grown and changed throughout this podcast." When doing so, they also discursively frame both the podcast's seriality in a certain way and *re*frame their subject position. The phrase "showing up" appears as the discourse's *nodal point* and as an especially central knot where both performance and framing converge. Among other things, it carries the meaning of appearing anew or stepping/growing into the new position of "authenticity." This is demonstrated through its interaction with various *discursive moments* where they describe themselves as being "emboldened," and "honest." Some episodes are depicted as feeling "cathartic," and as constituting a "turning point," where they are able to present "what [their] heart is holding," in effect stepping into a "fuller understanding of [themselves]." Another *nodal point* that is latched onto this phrase of showing up is the word "journey," particularly when the podcast duo looks back on their years of podcasting. This sign is engaged with *discursive moments* like "faith journey," "path-like exploration," and "opportunity for growth," but also moments signifying a new *subject position* as "spiritual." This new position is described as being "wanderers, weavers and doubters," which in turn is related to moments such as "no pinky promises to the church institution" signaling their changed relationship with the Church. It is also framed by "charting new territory," using new age terminology such as "animistic worldviews," "pagan spirituality," as well as "pre-Christian and ancient ritual practices."

These nodal points and moments are connected in a *chain of equivalences* that assign a meaningful endurance to the podcast – that is, when the podcast duo looks back at and frames their difficulties where they had to endure returning repeatedly – they are refor-

mulated as a necessary journey for spiritual growth. This link is put into place when the above phrases figure in the same episode, are used synonymously with each other, and by figuring in the same sentences. For example, in some quotes "path" and "journey" are used interchangeably and path is a phrase used in their later introduction to denote a loosened relationship with the Church – they are on a "winding path of spirituality over institution" – as well as to signify the use of "brand-new ideas and charting new territory" which as Parker explains concerns "spiritual practices." In the same episode that they rebrand themselves as "spiritual" and on a journey they also speak of faith through the metaphor of "empty rooms," an "area" which opens an "opportunity for growth."

Finally, these interrelationships seem to be suggested as an aspect of seriality, when pagan beliefs are portrayed as "respite" in the face of "regular interaction" with the subjects on the podcast, scripture and church history. The effect of connections like these is that each term implies a different stage or aspect of a larger spiritual exploration, a "journey" through which they navigate new paths and redefine their sense of faith. The regular interaction with the text acts as a touchstone, one that continuously re-engages them with challenging questions and perspectives. This regularity itself evokes the repetitive steps taken on a journey, pushing them further along their path. This path eventually results in a faith transition, which marks the point of change, where familiar beliefs and structures no longer suffice, prompting a search for new spiritual ground. Here, "transition" and "journey" become synonymous with a movement away from fixed beliefs toward an open exploration. Within this journey, pagan practices become not just alternative beliefs but a form of spiritual rest and recovery along the journey, offering practices and perspectives that affirm their changing faith and provide grounding without requiring them to resolve every question definitively.

But combining a "spiritual" position with a podcast meant to merge feminism and a Latter-day Saint framework seems to last only so far. As their final episode explains, they are no longer active members and consider themselves "post-Mormon." From this viewpoint the initial optimistic position of being "committed," is framed as gullible, or as "so cute." Although it might seem obvious, it is worth mentioning that they depart from both the Church and podcasting at the same time. Hence, their last positions converge, they are both "post-podcaster" and "post-Mormon."

We can therefore conclude that podcasting, by enabling and enforcing returning repeatedly to the subject of feminist theology, changes the construction of personal faith among its participants. However, it is understood as a process less about arrival and more about transformative experiences and practices that sustain an expansive, personal

exploration. In a very Latter-day Saint way, then, they are prioritizing journey over destination, because through endurance they are refined.

7.3 Serial Dynamics in Ideational Negotiations: *At Last She Said It*

We will now turn our focus to another podcast – *At Last She Said It* – and how seriality influences its construction and negotiation of feminism and faith. We will look at three examples: "into silence and out again" illustrating how the podcast is framed as a receptacle for speech and solution to a censured past; "saying things out loud changes us" about how podcasting enables pedagogical verbalization; and "embracing your journey" where podcasting is enacted and framed as allowing women a more dynamic faith than the timeframe of the Church allows.

7.3.1 "Into Silence and Out Again" – Podcasting as a Receptacle for Speech

In their opening episode from 2020 called "It's complicated," Hinckley and Winward explain the many reasons why things are left "unsaid" in church.[976] The Church, they argue, suffers from a "code of silence," where critical discussions and the acknowledgement of controversial or difficult conversations are stifled.[977] In addition, there is always a risk of being reprimanded for voicing concerns in a church setting. One example is being reported to the bishop and called "power-hungry" for talking about women and leadership in a Relief Society lesson.[978] It is a "kind of silencing" Hinckley says, that "makes you finally decide to start a podcast."[979] In other words, they enter the podcast with the ambition to find a voice that has been stifled, an ambition that is central to their construction and negotiation of feminism and faith. The very title of their podcast also suggests a movement from silence to speech. "Speech" is a privileged sign of how podcast seriality is constructed – seen for example in their logo which depicts an open mouth saying it "at last." But if "she" is only now – "at last" or "finally" – saying "it," the podcast must presumably be backgrounded by the opposite, that is, silence. If the present place of the podcast is characterized by saying it at last, then, the Church is

976 M. Hinckley & Winward, "Episode 1: It's Complicated."
977 M. Hinckley & Winward, "Episode 1: It's Complicated."
978 Susan M. Hinckley & Cynthia Winward, "Episode 6: Uncrossed Bridges Part 1," *At Last She Said It,* April 21, 2020
979 M. Hinckley & Winward, "Episode 049: Upset Instagram Follower."

represented as its opposite, where things are kept unspoken. Phrases such as "at last" and "finally" that surround speech or "saying it" therefore illustrate that speaking has a timeline attributed to it. In the past "she" was silent, but in the present she speaks.

A prime illustration of this discursive framing is evident in an episode titled "Speaking Up," where Hinckley shares her journey of self-development. The form of life writing employed in this episode is a recurring practice in the podcast, used to navigate issues of female emancipation and empowerment within a church context that is perceived as restricting both voice and personal autonomy. This approach is not unique to this particular case but exemplifies a widespread practice among feminists to narrate their own experiences as a means of asserting their identities against existing patriarchal constraints. Scholars of Literary Studies Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson have highlighted "experience" as a central word and a pivotal point of reference in resisting patriarchal frameworks that claim to understand or explain women's lives.[980] As Lisbeth Larson has noted, narrating one's own life as a woman is therefore often seen as "the foremost political weapon."[981] Transformative qualities are furthermore often attributed to this form of life writing, enabling individuals to move beyond their past selves – previously confined and silenced within the strictures of patriarchal values – and embrace their authentic identities, a concept bell hooks described as the "me of me."[982] In the "Speaking Up" episode, Hinckley narrates a similar trajectory. She begins by explaining to her listeners that during her growing-up years she went from being an "outspoken young Latter-day Saint girl to a pretty repressed grown-up Latter-day Saint woman," but that she has now "figured out how to start saying things again."[983] Here "speech" also becomes entwined with the concept "journey" – the episode, she says, is devoted to a "piece she wrote" about her "journey into silence and out again."[984] The narrated "I's" in this story follows a plot with different temporalities and places. For example, she begins the narrative in a childhood memory; in kids' primary where she and other children gathered in the chapel "after a long day in school" to sing and listen to stories.[985] The memory is accompanied by background noises of children laughing and playing, a telling example of how the podcast's production variables are used to

[980] Sidonie Smith & Julia Watson, "Introduction" in Sidonie Smith & Julia Watson (eds.) *Women, Autobiography, Theory. A Reader,* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1998), pp. 3–52.
[981] Lisbeth Larsson, "'Experience(s)' – Autobiography, Testimony and Life-writing," *Tidskrift för genusvetenskap*, vol. 31, no. 4, 2010, pp. 4–21, p. 8, translation my own.
[982] bell hooks, "writing autobiography" in Sidonie Smith & Julia Watson (eds.), *Women, Autobiography, Theory. A Reader*, (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1998), p. 429–432, p. 429.
[983] M. Hinckley & Winward, "Episode 059: Speaking up."
[984] M. Hinckley & Winward, "Episode 059: Speaking up."
[985] M. Hinckley & Winward, "Episode 059: Speaking up."

amplify the feeling of getting a "real" glimpse of Hinckley's past. She recalls the feeling of the "big echo-y chapel" that "was just for us on those afternoons, our small songs, our childish voices."[986] With a piano playing in the background, Hinckley narrates:

> Hinckley: We loved the songs with actions best. We sang "the chapel doors seem to say to me…" taking special delight in adding too loudly the "shh, be still" […]In those days the song continued "for this is a reverent place to be, shh, be still." There are many things we can do outside, we laugh and play, we romp and slide, but when we come through the chapel doors "shh be still." I'm afraid I may have taken that last line a bit too much to heart.[987]

This quote demonstrates how the Church enters the scene, as both the "other" of the narrative and the site and format which forms Hinckley's younger self. The chapel is described as a "reverent place" that requires silence and stillness, values the young Hinckley allegedly internalizes. The "into silence" part thus begins already at a young age, taking the "shh be still" a "bit too much to heart." Latter-day Saints, Hinckley continues, seem to live "under a curious code of silence."[988] Whereas much of the world has "become more open to talking about things that were once taboo" censure and silence have "maintained [their] grip" over Latter-day Saints.[989] Perhaps, she confesses, the church building specifically should contain *some* limits. But those restrictions, she seems to imply, did not stop there – they infiltrated her personal life. Hinckley describes a childhood where her relationship to God was mediated through a code of silence and where words, songs and practices carried it from the chapel to her family dinner table, and ultimately into her own prayers:

> Hinckley: In a church that fails to meet my most basic spiritual longings, why have I chosen even in my adult life to leave them mostly unuttered? I've struggled to have a relationship with prayer because the words I was taught were appropriate for prayer didn't summon my heart to meaningful participation. Another primary song says, "I begin by saying dear heavenly father. I thank him for blessings he sends, then humbly I ask him for things that I need, in the name of Jesus Christ amen." That reflects exactly the format I was taught. But why didn't I ever feel at liberty to try bringing language of my own? My words, my song, to that most personal foundational practice […] why even today when I raise my hand to make a comment surrounded by the members of my ward, almost all of whom I know and love, does my heart still pound? Why despite vigilante prescreening of my own comment for acceptability does my voice still waver?[990]

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986 M. Hinckley & Winward, "Episode 059: Speaking up."
987 M. Hinckley & Winward, "Episode 059: Speaking up."
988 M. Hinckley & Winward, "Episode 059: Speaking up."
989 M. Hinckley & Winward, "Episode 059: Speaking up."
990 M. Hinckley & Winward, "Episode 059: Speaking up."

Hinckley narrates how her spirituality came in an "exact format," which seems to be something other than the spirituality that she recognizes as her "own." The words Hinckley was taught did not "summon" her "heart" but, as she expresses it, left her spiritual longings "unuttered." One can therefore interpret this as a perceived gap between the words or format that the Church wants her to use, and the words she feels are part of her authentic self.

The other of Hinckley's story – the chapel and its songs – therefore frames and depicts her past muted self. Hinckley explains, however, that she grew into her silence at a later stage – she was not always this silent. In fact, as a child she remembers "yelling at [her] Sunday school teachers as a ten-year-old that [she] refused to be a baby factory for eternity" and being described by another teacher as having a "caustic personality."[991] Her young years were "peppered with outbursts, designed for their shock value" that she believes "were really a reflection of a mighty conflict raging in [her] young heart."[992] These descriptions of the young Hinckley and her caustic personality seem to imply a raw version of her authentic self, bursting through a not fully disciplined, socialized persona, that eventually grows silent. Hinckley's upbringing in the Church is therefore depicted as entangled with an entrance into a language that silences her own voice. Without having ever really "resolved any of the issues that fueled it" she says, she eventually "grew out of that kind of speaking and acting out," which she felt was necessary to maintain relationships in her adult life:

> Hinckley: As an adult I've always known where the acceptable lines are. Observing and respecting them with a wide margin when addressing my concerns or airing my complaints. For one thing, important relationships have been on the line as an adult. I had responsibilities to our children, who were being raised in the Church. I'd made marriage promises to my husband. I knew what my parents and siblings expected from me. And I needed those relationships to be comfortable and loving. I also wanted to maintain some influence within my ward family. I'd noticed through the years when people I respected and admired had spoken outside the lines and become suddenly voiceless in the ward.[993]

In this quote, respecting norms "with a wide margin" whenever articulating or "airing" one's concerns becomes a prerequisite for maintaining relationships and influence. Speaking "outside the lines" is depicted as a somewhat dangerous undertaking where one is always at risk of disturbing important relationships. People who have done so, she adds, seems to have become "suddenly voiceless," meaning reprimanded in a way

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991 M. Hinckley & Winward, "Episode 059: Speaking up."
992 M. Hinckley & Winward, "Episode 059: Speaking up."
993 M. Hinckley & Winward, "Episode 059: Speaking up."

that has led the individuals in question to draw back from speaking out. Included in the other that she narrates herself in relation to, is therefore the ward and the social community where her friends and family are included. Perhaps a bit ironically then, to speak within the ward, and be able to express what is perceived as one's authentic self, one must adopt a certain vocabulary, or a "Mormon speak" as she once referred to it.[994] Hence "maintaining some influence" seems to require that she adopts the church-formatted voice. Although not sharing the same emphasis on reverence and silence as the chapel or church of her youth, then, the ward and community are described as having highly conditioned and censured speech. In conclusion, Hinckley "couches" or transmits challenging or subversive content by using the voice of the Church. Integrated with the silence theme then, is the formatted speech, one where speaking in ways that "challenge" "boundaries" or norms, in the worst case scenario leads to "voicelessness."

This tug-of-war that Hinckley describes between her formatted and authentic self eventually reaches its limits. For many Mormon Feminists, a feminist awakening is accompanied by a "faith crisis."[995] However, Hinckley opts for another term – "silence crisis." In other words, it is not a crisis centering around her "faith" but rather her voice:

> Hinckley: But about eight years ago, I did experience what I called a "silence crisis." And I realized that in order for my spiritual self to survive I was going to be required to break my silence […] the urge to talk and write, to finally speak up about my church experience in a more honest way than I had before became overwhelming. I just couldn't continue to wrestle in silence with the tension between my personal faith and its uneasy Mormon context.[996]

Through this quote we are led to believe that the repeated experience of being "shushed" eventually caused a crisis, even though, as she articulates it, it was not really a sudden crisis. It was a continuous and amazingly consistent "wrestle" until she felt an "urge" to talk. Who or what was participating in that wrestle? She describes it as a wrestle between her "personal faith" and her "uneasy Mormon context," again creating a distinction between her own religious person and the religion of her church. Despite portraying her

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994 Susan M. Hinckley & Cynthia Winward, "Episode 075: Ask Us Anything!" *At Last She Said It,* 2021 December 28.

995 See for example Desiree C. "How to be a Heartbreaker," *Young Mormon Feminists,* October 16, 2014, www.youngmormonfeminists.org/2014/10/16/how-to-be-a-heartbreaker/, accessed May 7, 2025; Jessica Steel, "Crisis of Faith and Marriage: The Bait and Switch," *Exponent II,* August 10, 2009, www.exponentii.org/blog/crisis-of-faith-and-marriage-the-bait-and-switch/, accessed May 7, 2025; Susan M. Hinckley & Cynthia Winward, "Episode 192: Embracing Your Journey | A Conversation with Annie Pimentel," *At Last She Said It,* July 28, 2024; "Episode 187: Embracing Your Journey | A Conversation with Amy Watkins Jensen," *At Last She Said It,* June 25, 2024; "Episode 180: Embracing Your Journey | A Conversation with Mary Cox," May 7, 2024.

996 M. Hinckley & Winward, "Episode 059: Speaking up."

crisis as a consistent one, she describes how it eventually comes to a halt, where she just could not continue "wrestling" this tension "in silence." That Hinckley chooses the term silence crisis instead of just crisis is notable. Silence crisis is not a synonym for the ordinary crisis but tells us that something is significantly different about the conditions of speaking about one's experiences as a woman; it is a crisis of speech. It also emphasizes that in the balancing act between female emancipation and faith, the crisis does not relate to her degree or position of faith per se but rather a crisis concerning her voice, shaped by a culture of reverence and imposed silence. This clearly differentiates her personal faith from the confining religious context.

The answer or solution to her silence crisis comes partly by observing what she does when she airs this episode; by putting her words out there, by telling a story about it, and by making that story her means of travel:

> Hinckley: A Danish writer said something to the effect that "all sorrows can be born if you put them into a story or tell a story about them." I know this is how I made my way through life. By the time I was in second grade I had already realized that if I could build the right receptacle with words to hold my difficult childhood, squashing it into what I constructed, could improve its shape into something I liked better or at least something less unyielding, something more acceptable, something I might manage to hold and carry.[997]

What Hinckley seems to imply is that to carry her through her silence crisis she must first articulate it as a story. The experience cannot "hold and carry" itself in other words. What is interesting here is that Hinckley describes the necessity of building a "receptacle" that is, a container, a structure or fitting of some sort. Writing, in other words, proposedly allows Hinckley to both hold and carry her "difficult childhood" but simultaneously to "squash it into" and "improve its shape." One could argue therefore that, when Hinckley tries to imagine her path toward her inner self, she also frames it as in need of a certain fitting/organizing principle that frames it, as she says, into something acceptable or less "unyielding."

The podcast emerges implicitly through stories like these, as one of those receptacles. Whereas what she believes to be her present authentic self is enacted and enabled through honesty and voice – a self that they mold partly through podcasting – her past is depicted as the other of that story, the dishonest and muted self that was enacted in church. Through discursive framings like this, podcasting and speech become linked together, whereas their past and the place of the Church is formulated through words and concepts signaling censure and silence.

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997 M. Hinckley & Winward, "Episode 059: Speaking up."

But as we saw in the introduction to this subchapter, it is not only through audio that such dichotomies are established, images also play an important part. Besides the image used as their logo – an open red mouth saying it at last – the podcast frequently makes use of vintage photos and art that further frame the podcast as an accumulative and progressive temporality. In an Instagram post the duo explains that "all [their] vintage ads come from Susan's 1930s–40s magazine collection."[998] The "irony that ads targeted to women 90 years ago are still applicable to our church" they say, "should give us all [reason to] pause."[999] The effect of such images is that the podcast counters or solves the backwardness that the vintage photo symbolizes. In one photo in particular, this connection becomes more explicit. The black and white image portrays a woman sitting with her head leaning on her knuckles, pondering over the representation of women and men on a TV screen behind her. In the speech bubble added by the podcast duo, she says "Is this what they think women want?! Won't somebody *PLEASE* hurry and invent podcasts so we can make our own shows? #atlastshesaidit."[1000] The woman in the photo, I propose, is constructed so as to seem like she is speaking from the past to the future. The sentence "is this what they think women want?!" presumably refers to both the Church and, based on the old television and its portrayal of a relationship between a man and a woman, its attachment to old patterns of misogyny. This interpretation is fortified by the request to her future sisters to "please hurry and invent podcasts," which as the hashtag implies, is what they have done – through their podcast she can "at last" "say it." Podcasting is therefore constructed as responding to a lack of women articulating what they "want" for themselves. Podcasting and making their "own shows" are likened to solving lack of representation. In other words, she has suffered through decades of others representing her, but now in the present place of the podcast, she is making her own show, i.e. representing herself. The *At Last She Said It* duo, then, remediates old photos/images with the purpose of attributing a progressive timeline to the podcast.

In conclusion, life writing, exemplified by the "Speaking Up" episode, serves as a vital tool for exploring and asserting both individual and collective identities. These narratives challenge the perceived censuring cultivated by the Church and provide a platform for amplifying women's experiences and voices. Hinckley's personal story, which traces her journey from being an "outspoken young Latter-day Saint girl to a pretty repressed

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998 Susan M. Hinckley & Cynthia Winward, "Calling Out Hollow Pedestals Since 2020," *@atlastshesaidit*, April 8, 2024, www.instagram.com/p/C5gXQussXtP/, accessed April 11, 2024.

999 M. Hinckley & Winward, "Calling Out Hollow Pedestals Since 2020."

1000 Susan M. Hinckley & Cynthia Winward, "Save the Date!", *@atlastshesaidit*, April 13, 2021, www.instagram.com/p/CNn0IyvB_Kn/, accessed May 14, 2024.

grown-up Latter-day Saint woman" and then back to rediscovering her voice, illustrates a perceived process of self-discovery within a restrictive religious framework. This narrative arc represents a dynamic interplay between her feminist ideals and her faith, framed as a struggle to overcome the silencing imposed by her religious community. By sharing her story, Hinckley not only reclaims authority over her own narrative but also aligns with broader feminist movements that advocate recognizing women's experiences as crucial to both personal and political empowerment.

7.3.2 "Saying Things Out Loud Changes Us" – Podcasting as a Pedagogy of Verbalization

Hinckley not only addresses speech discursively, however, she also performs the act she imagines as previously disabled. The podcast as a serial medium furthermore allows the repeated return of such performances,[1001] thus baring pedagogical efficiency. More specifically, seriality affords a pedagogy of verbalization, where the repeated use of one's voice enables greater confidence and larger vocabulary. As one of their Instagram posts says, "saying things out loud changes us."[1002] Winward explains the idea behind this quote in one of their episodes by saying that "there's something transformational in formulating the question and then verbalizing it."[1003] One reason for this, I suggest, is that using your voice to represent your opinions has a higher emotional and bodily stake. Speaking compared to writing is less detached from the thing said. Writing allows one to exercise more distance to what is being communicated as well as polish away any too chaotic emotions.[1004] Physically baring the voice of what had previously only been thoughts – the thing "unsaid" – means a higher risk of being overwhelmed by one's own emotions, something we have seen examples on in the previous two chapters.

One of its transformational effects is that the more they speak, the more they are comfortable saying.[1005] The duo for example has a habit of doing new takes on old episodes where they say things that have been on their minds since they first addressed the topic. These episodes are often released as bonus episodes at the end of each season and are usually accompanied by the recognition of the duo's increased courage. As a

[1001] Kelleter, "Five Ways of Looking a Popular Seriality," p. 30.

[1002] Susan M. Hinckley & Cynthia Winward, "Saying things out loud changes us," *@atlastshesaidit*, August 31, 2023, www.instagram.com/p/Cwndp3kOPXw/, accessed December 24, 2024.

[1003] Susan M. Hinckley & Cynthia Winward, "Episode 151: Embracing Your Journey |A Conversation With Aubrey Chaves," *At Last She Said It,* September 12, 2023.

[1004] Joshua Meyrowitz, "Understandings of Media: A Review of General Semantics," *et Cetera,* vol. 56, no. 1, 1999, pp. 44–52.

[1005] Susan M. Hinckley & Cynthia Winward, "Episode 45:BONUS – Looking Back and Thinking Ahead," *At Last She Said It,* Mars 9, 2021.

result of getting "braver" they "repackage" episodes based on "things they wished they would have said differently."[1006] For example, in a bonus episode on the topic of raising daughters in church, the duo makes the following reflections on comparing themselves against previous episodes.

> Hinckley: The other thing that I really liked about this episode was, as I listened to it, I realized that you and I have gotten a lot more comfortable saying some hard things.
> Winward: Thankfully.
> Hinckley: Yes, I was so happy to see my own progress. Because the point of this project, of course, is that we all become more comfortable saying what we need to say and what needs to be said. So, I'm happy to say that I'm experiencing, personally, some success, apparently, because we speak a bit more openly now than we did then. So, our listeners might enjoy listening for some clues that that's happening.
> Winward: They might enjoy hearing Susan hesitantly say the word "patriarchy."
> Hinckley: Exactly! [laughing] That's in this episode, where I couldn't quite say the P word Cynthia.[1007]

In the above quote, Hinckley acknowledges "seeing" her personal "progress" in expressing herself on the podcast – they have become "more comfortable" saying "hard things." At first, Hinckley could not even say the "P word" or "patriarchy," a word often central to feminist discourse, yet here perceived as too controversial or risky to articulate. They also recognize that this is a motivating factor behind their podcast. Becoming "more comfortable saying what we need to say" is the "point of this project." As such, the affordance of being able to say more is closely related to the act of retrospection.[1008] In other words, the technology of seriality where they can re-visit older episodes, in similarity to *The Faithful Feminists*, enables a self-awareness around one's own evolution. Another example of this can be found in a bonus episode on priesthood, where Hinckley describes their earlier episode as softer. Because the episode in question was early in their podcasting they "were a little softer then" – adding that "we're a little madder now."[1009] Thus, as Hinckley and Winward continuously carry their voices, they are in similarity to Parker and Poll "emboldened."[1010] Releasing an old episode and revisiting the same topic in a new one also gives their listeners the opportunity to find evidence

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[1006] Susan M. Hinckley & Cynthia Winward, "Episode 145: Season 6 |That's a Wrap!" *At Last She Said It,* June 20, 2023.
[1007] Susan M. Hinckley & Cynthia Winward, "Episode 067: BONUS – Uncrossed Bridges Redux," *At Last She Said It,* October 5, 2021.
[1008] Kelleter, "Five Ways of Looking a Popular Seriality," p. 18.
[1009] Susan M. Hinckley & Cynthia Winward, "Episode 148: BONUS | Still Asking – Where's the Priesthood in That?" *At Last She Said It,* August 1, 2023.
[1010] Parker & Poll, "Our Last Episode (A Goodbye)."

of this development. They encourage their listeners to "stay tuned," as they sometimes put it, for topics currently "put a lid on," hinting their potential unraveling in future episodes.[1011] That their listeners take this encouragement seriously is suggested by the reviews and receptions read aloud on-air. In the following quote, Winward reads a listener's message that demonstrates the significance of the podcast for her own ability to speak up. It showcases, Winward suggests, that "women really are finding their voice and speaking up more."

> I was out to dinner with a mixed group of LDS friends a couple of weeks ago. During our conversation, one of the men asked, "did you see that the Church is adding back a Saturday evening session for General Conference, but for all the adults now, just like we have had a Saturday evening session of state Conference." I mentioned that I was very disappointed about there not being a women's session anymore. One of the younger men in our group asked me why. I paused for a moment, then looked at him and said you get to see yourself represented every time a man walks up to the pulpit. As a woman in the Church, the only time I get to see myself represented sufficiently is during women's [session]. And now that's been taken away. Did you even realize that in the last General Conference, only two women spoke out of all of the four general sessions? I only had the opportunity to see myself reflected in church leadership twice. There was a moment of silence for a few seconds, and he truly looked dumbfounded by what I had said. Then he said "you're right. I never thought about that before." I could tell he sincerely meant that and appreciated what I had said, what I had to say. I hope that he will ponder on it and have cause to wonder what his wife and young daughter see and experience differently in the Church from him. I never would have brought up my point of view and shared my thoughts like that before. Being an avid listener of the podcast has given me courage to share my viewpoints boldly.[1012]

Recalling an event where she spoke up during a dinner with friends, about the importance of female representation, their listener concludes that "being an avid listener" of their podcast gave her the "courage" to share her opinions. She too recognized her increased "boldness." Through listeners' feedback, the duo explains, they can tell that it's a "journey" both for them and their audience. "You can tell the wheels are turning" Winward says, that is a noticeable "theme" in their comments on social media and on their website she explains.[1013] They say things like "I'm getting braver," "I'm speaking up more" or "I'm following your example."[1014] To which Hinckley jokingly responds, "we've opened Pandoras box."[1015] The podcast – and more specifically articulating

[1011] M. Hinckley & Winward, "Episode 066: Wrap Party!"
[1012] M. Hinckley & Winward, "Episode 066: Wrap Party!"
[1013] Susan M. Hinckley & Cynthia Winward, "Episode 045: BONUS – Looking Back and Thinking Ahead," *At Last She Said It,* March 9, 2021.
[1014] M. Hinckley & Winward, "Episode 045: BONUS – Looking Back and Thinking Ahead."
[1015] M. Hinckley & Winward, "Episode 045: BONUS – Looking Back and Thinking Ahead."

things verbally over a longer period – might therefore be generative even for their listeners' speech – at least from the perspective of its hosts. Hinckley's speaking up project, then, appears as a parallel movement among both them and their audience. Although difficult to draw conclusions on how generative the podcast is for their listeners' voice, it is clearly constructed as such and can theoretically be understood as part of how seriality converges with parasocial relationships.

When we juxtapose this performance with the initial discursive framing, it becomes evident that the serial movement toward increasing vocal capacity is strategically pre-invited through life writing projects. There is a conceptual groundwork laid by life writing efforts where the podcast is set up according to an anticipatory framework that encourages women to move from being silent or suppressed to being vocal and autonomous. Secondly there is the actual execution of such ideas carried out through podcast seriality, meaning the ongoing and repetitive use of women's voices in the podcast episodes themselves, where the act of speaking becomes both a demonstration and reinforcement of the empowerment envisioned.

7.3.3 "Embracing Your Journey" – Serial Exploration of Women's Evolving Faith

Another life writing practice that furthers the sort of temporal framing seen above, yet adds elements of dynamic expressions of faith, is a recurring type of episode called "Embracing Your Journey." In these episodes women are invited on-air to narrate their lives and personal developments or as they refer to it, their "journey." In other words, the emancipatory project of life writing is also produced through a collective of women. This relational nature of life writing is sometimes referred to by scholars within literary studies as "testimonio."[1016] John Beverley describes this form of writing as a new literary genre that developed during the 1960s in relation to movements seeking national liberation. As Beverley explains, testimonio represents "an affirmation of the individual subject, even of individual growth and transformation, but in connection with a group or class situation marked by marginalization, oppression, and struggle."[1017] There are many forms or genres of life writing and testimonios, however, and one that will become visible in the story arc below is the conversion narrative.[1018] Conversion itself – employ-

[1016] John Beverley, *Testimonio. On the Politics of Truth*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004.)
[1017] Beverley, *Testimonio. On the Politics of Truth*, p. 41.
[1018] That conversion is a form of "autobiographical" practice or life writing is substantiated by many religious studies scholars. See for example John D. Barbour, *Versions of Deconversion. Autobiography and the Loss of Faith*, (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1994); Ryan Szpiech, *Conversion and Narrative. Reading and Religious Authority in Medieval Polemic*, (University of Pennsylvania, 2012.)

ed to describe a radical change of perspective or transformation – carries central weight in Christianity.[1019] While broadly understood as an embracing of Christianity – and therefore a conversion *to* – inherent to this new commitment is also a rejection of one's past affiliation or beliefs. As John D. Barbour puts it, "every conversion is a deconversion, and every deconversion a conversion."[1020] Subsequently then, conversions are also offensives against competing religions and created in opposition to a negative other. "Embrace Your Journey" can therefore be understood as a series of conversion narratives where women move toward a new version of their previous faith. In effect, the negotiation of feminism and faith is articulated through the entanglement of two narrative formulas: women's life writing practices on the one hand, serving women individually and collectively in their aspiration to find their voice, and conversion narrative on the other, inviting a faith that survives within a religious context perceived as fostering rigidity in faith.

When putting the podcast episodes within the "Embracing Your Journey" series next to each other, a narrative structure or formula for what "journeying" means becomes visible. For example, the first part of the interview often sets the stage for the guests' growing up-years, a setting where, like Hinckley did in the "Speaking Up" episode, they remember life in church with both nostalgia and regret. In an interview with Aubrey Chaves, co-host of another popular podcast called *Faith Matters*, Winward asks "can we get a quick snapshot of memorable experiences that have shaped your Mormonism?" from which Chaves goes on to share both memories of a community of love and support, and an environment fostering the type of rigidity and perfectionism that was described in the previous chapter.

> Chaves: I think I just came primed for, I don't know, perfectionism. Like, I just really had this mindset that was, like, if you told me a rule, then you had to do it perfectly […] I don't know if I had a propensity for judging myself very harshly and I think the Church kind of gave me a lot of rules. And so, when I would hear a lesson that might maybe it was meant to be guidance, I was hearing really rigid, scary rules that were impossible to do perfectly. And so, I think I developed a lot of shame. And also, I got really good at just deferring to an authority. There was always an authority around that I could look to for maximum wisdom. And so, I think that did in some ways really stunt my development as a teenager to create a healthy sense of self and learn how to create my own boundaries and say yes when I want to say yes and no when I want to say no.[1021]

[1019] David W. Kling, *A History of Christian Conversion*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020.)

[1020] Barbour, *Versions of Deconversion: Autobiography and the Loss of Faith*, p. 3.

[1021] M. Hinckley & Winward, "Episode 151: Embracing Your Journey |A Conversation With Aubrey Chaves."

This answer aligns closely with the themes often explored in *At Last She Said It*, particularly regarding the ways religious structures impact personal development, identity, and self-worth, among women in the Church. The podcast often grapples with the effects of rigid expectations and how these factors intersect with the personal journeys of women seeking to find their voices and redefine their faith. The result, as Chaves describes, is a mindset where one's self-worth becomes tied to obedience and the ability to meet what she experiences as "impossible" expectations. Chaves' story similarly to Hinckley's illustrates her past identity and values as contingent upon meeting external standards, leaving little room for genuine self-expression or for making mistakes without "shame." Another similarity to Hinckley's story is that of the "crisis," a subject Winward directs the interview toward by suggesting that they "start talking about some of the hard stuff."

> Winward: All right, how about we start talking about some of the hard stuff? Like, when did you start experiencing kind of a shift? Whether you call that, you know, you put that one last thing on the shelf, and it broke. I mean, maybe you don't identify with, you know, the broken shelf analogy. You know, I don't know, maybe you have your own analogy. Susan and I have kind of had our own, so we'd love to know, like, was there any kind of a shift there or metaphor that resonates for you?"[1022]

This exchange highlights a narrative formula that *At Last She Said It* frequently employs, guiding interviews along a structured path that delves into faith crises, or "shifts" in faith,[1023] for example through the use of metaphors.[1024] By explicitly asking guests to share their own metaphors for moments of crisis, Winward subtly directs the narrative, shaping the conversation into a familiar structure. This structure enables a cohesive storytelling framework that not only allows guests to personalize their experiences but also draws listeners into a shared narrative arc that is repeated across episodes. The question "can we start talking about some of the hard stuff?" signals a turning point in the interview, where the conversation shifts from early experiences of faith to a moment of conflict or crisis. Being a recurring move in this series of episodes it creates a predictable rhythm where listeners can anticipate an exploration of transformative moments. By inviting guests to confront this part of their story, Winward directs the conversation

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[1022] M. Hinckley & Winward, "Episode 151: Embracing Your Journey |A Conversation With Aubrey Chaves."

[1023] Susan M. Hinckley & Cynthia Winward, "Episode 192: Embracing Your Journey | A Conversation with Annie Pimentel," *At Last She Said It,* July 28, 2024.

[1024] Susan M. Hinckley & Cynthia Winward, "Episode 187: Embracing Your Journey | A Conversation with Amy Watkins Jensen," *At Last She Said It,* June 25, 2024; "Episode 180: Embracing Your Journey | A Conversation with Mary Cox," May 7, 2024.

toward the crux of the guest's journey – the place where faith was most tested. In accordance with this structure, Chaves continues her story by introducing the issue that introduced the crisis – which as for many other Latter-day Saints was the question of polygamy. After going through a series of events that added to this crisis – such as her own husband "Tim" starting to read up on church history – she affirms Winward's initial suggestion, that she does have a "metaphor" for it – it is like a bursting dam.

> Chaves: And so, the metaphor that works for me actually, I think, is a dam. I think I had built this dam. To keep, you know, floodwaters back. And I think I've been working on that for years, like this building, this strong wall to keep back the questions and the fears. And so, when, and I think a lot of the support for that structure was from Tim. I think I trusted that he knows, like, you know, I'm disturbed, but he knows that the Church is true. So, I can trust it and I really trust him. And so, he was a huge support for that big wall. And it felt like immediately those support beams just got kicked right out. And I, and so what happened literally instantly was that I had this high-pressure leak called polygamy and that I had to face, and it was, it felt like, you know, a matter of days or weeks before the whole thing just burst.[1025]

Here, the metaphor of the "bursting dam" vividly encapsulates the pressure and subsequent release of confronting difficult truths, underscoring the intense psychological weight often carried by those undergoing faith crises. In line with the podcast's method of inviting metaphors, this image captures the gradual buildup of unresolved questions and doubts – the "floodwaters" – held back by a rigid belief system. Chaves describes how she "built this dam" over years, signaling that her faith crisis was not a sudden or impulsive shift but the culmination of prolonged internal tension. Chaves emphasizes how she relied on her husband, Tim, as a crucial "support beam" for her belief system. Tim's role as a stabilizing influence is used to illustrate how personal faith is intertwined with relationships, particularly in a religious community that emphasizes family and authority. According to this description, the "support beam" is effectively "kicked right out" when Tim begins questioning church history himself. The image of the "high-pressure leak" called polygamy breaking down her dam within "days or weeks" implies that once a certain threshold was crossed, the crisis could no longer be contained or delayed. The podcast use of such metaphors – "broken shelves" or "bursting dams" – to illustrate crises of faith, is often followed by a stage of contemplating on the significance of what at first seems like chaotic or destabilizing events. This narrative rhythm has a clear storytelling arc, moving from an initial foundation to a climactic challenge, setting the stage for reflection and growth. That this can be seen as

[1025] M. Hinckley & Winward, "Episode 151: Embracing Your Journey |A Conversation With Aubrey Chaves."

an invitation to listeners to view their own faith shifts as necessary for true change to occur, is supported by Hinckley's and Chaves' continued exchange.

> Hinckley: I wish that I could give people the gift without them having to go through that journey. And of course, like you say, that process is what got you to where you are, right? There is no arrival without the journey getting there, the process getting there. But what I do try to do with this podcast is give people the gift of understanding that this is going to continue to change for you. You're going to keep moving on this path. If you stay on this path, you're going to keep moving. So don't assume that this is over yet or that you know everything you're going to know, or even desire everything that you're going to desire. These things, ebb and flow, that's the nature of it […] I just really want people to be able to relax into the idea that they can continue to be open to whatever comes, and more is going to come […]
>
> Chaves: I love that you called this "Embracing the Journey," because that's the lesson. That's been the lesson for me. I wish that if I could go back and talk to myself, I would be like, just trust this. This is a gift that's about to unfold, and it's going to be terrifying and so exciting, and you're going to be okay, and you're going to be so grateful that it happened. And so just hang on to it. Lean into this season all the way. Don't even hold back. Be all the way a nihilist if you need to. Be all the way doubting. Be all the way curious. Whatever is coming and flowing into your life, just embrace it like you chose it, because it's so impossible to imagine the growth and the gratitude you'll feel looking back. And I feel like that's what I trust about life now, that the things that come can always be made good.[1026]

This exchange between Hinckley and Chaves positions faith not as a static destination but as a "journey" defined by its openness to transformation, encouraging listeners to embrace each stage of the process as necessary and ultimately rewarding. By framing faith crises as part of an evolving process – "these things ebb and flow" and "more is to come" – rather than an end point ("don't assume that this is over yet"), the podcast invites listeners to reimagine their struggles as steps toward "growth." The core message thus seems to be that openness to change – even if it means being a "nihilist" – rather than certainty or stability, is a key aspect of spiritual development. Against this quote, the podcast's reliance on metaphors like the "broken shelf" or Chaves's "bursting dam" appears as more than a storytelling device; it is a tool that helps listeners conceptualize their experiences as necessary transitions. These surrounding discussions allow for otherwise intimidating metaphors – things "breaking" and "bursting" – to be reframed as constructive, situating them within a larger narrative of personal growth that we have seen many examples of earlier. The metaphorical language also serves as a bridge between

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[1026] M. Hinckley & Winward, "Episode 151: Embracing Your Journey |A Conversation With Aubrey Chaves."

individual experiences. The use of consistent metaphors, like the bursting dam, reinforces this arc across episodes, establishing a collective narrative framework within which each unique story finds its place. By structuring these stories around specific issues, personal metaphors, and emotional release, the podcast creates a cohesive narrative that not only personalizes each guest's journey but also fosters a shared understanding of faith transitions as a natural, sometimes necessary process.

This focus on crisis is a recurring characteristic within conversion narratives,[1027] and is often depicted as a necessity for personal metamorphosis.[1028] In many Christian movements this story ends with the protagonist finding a stable home and sense of self. However, there are also variations among Christian conversion narratives – some of which depict conversion as an ongoing event.[1029] The effect of such processual accounts is sometimes that the crisis is lengthened, meaning trials and adversity become ingredients to a refinement in faith. Within the Latter-day Saint tradition such processual conversion narratives are common. The definition of conversion on the Church's website for example reads "conversion is a process, not an event."[1030]

While inviting listeners to see that each crisis is personal, the "Embrace Your Journey" series, then, also fits into a universal conversion narrative of transformation and evolution of self. This way of putting each listener into a similar story arc could be interpreted as a way to reduce the isolation accompanying faith crises, providing a sense of solidarity and shared purpose. If we turn again to a broader context of conversion narratives, such individual conversion stories have historically often served to construct tangible communities. In an early seventeenth- and eighteenth-century America for example, we find this practice among groups such as Quakers and Puritans. Among New England Puritans, conversion narratives were a requirement for joining the Church.[1031] In the eighteenth-century European Pietist movement, conversion stories similarly became essential to establish one's credibility as a true believer. Peter Vogt notes that "autobiographies" supported the Pietists' vision of the church – a close community of reborn individuals.[1032] This genre helped confirm believers' spiritual regeneration and fostered

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[1027] Szpiech, *Conversion and Narrative. Reading and Religious Authority in Medieval Polemic*, p. 16.

[1028] Barbour, *Versions of Deconversions. Autobiography and the Loss of Faith.*

[1029] Barbour, *Versions of Deconversions. Autobiography and the Loss of Faith.*

[1030] Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, "Conversion," *Library*, www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/gospel-topics/conversion?lang=eng, accessed November 13, 2024

[1031] Kling, *A History of Christian Conversion.*

[1032] Peter Vogt, "Spiritual Autobiography and Ecclesiology – The Social Dimension of Individual Life Stories in 18th Century Pietism in the Moravian Church," in Christer Ahlberger & Per von Wachenfeldt (eds.) *Moravian Memoirs. Pillars of an Invisible Church*, (Skellefteå: Artor & Norma, 2017), pp. 35–57.

a tangible sense of fellowship. Through sharing and revisiting personal salvation stories, Pietists could bypass the traditional church structures they critiqued, emphasizing institutional and confessional aspects, and instead cultivate a palpable sense of their "invisible church."[1033] We can perhaps view the "Embracing Your Journey" episodes in a similar way. The repetition of conversion narratives offers women's faith changes both tangibility and meaning in a context perceived as valuing consistency and conformity. This interpretation gains further confirmation when the podcast duo introduces their interview with Chaves.

> Every Latter-day Saint woman is on her own journey of faith. We describe it using all kinds of language, and some days the path ahead seems a lot clearer than other days. We each carry our own baggage, our own maps, our own stories of how we came to be where and who we are. Learning to relax into change in this part of our lives can be difficult in a religion where we hear phrases like "immovable faith," "knowing with every fiber of our being," and "unchanging doctrine." In Episode 151, Cynthia and Susan are joined by Aubrey Chaves for a conversation about movement. It's about reclaiming personal authority, following spiritual energy, and embracing our individual path.[1034]

This introductory text subtly emphasizes the centrality of temporality or "movement" to resist the timeframe enforced by the Church. Words like "baggage" and "maps" emphasize temporality by suggesting that each person carries forward pieces of their past while continuously navigating toward an unknown future. The quote indicates the challenges of changing within a static tradition by noting the difficulty of "learning to relax into change" within a religion that prizes "immovable faith" and "unchanging doctrine." This highlights a temporal tension between the expectation of constancy in faith and the reality of personal change over time. When "every Latter-day Saint woman is on her own journey of faith," and "reclaiming personal authority" is used in continuation of a statement that the episode is "about movement" they seem to imply that a more dynamic and changing temporality is central for women's self-emancipation. Thus, negotiating feminism and faith is constructed as having to do with abilities to move dynamically through faith and women's current inability to do so. In the Church they are bound to immobility and stagnation while here they are invited to believe through constant motion. This temporal approach positions faith not as a final or permanent state but as an evolving story, empowering listeners to embrace the fluidity and open-

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[1033] Vogt, "Spiritual Autobiography and Ecclesiology – The Social Dimension of Individual Life Stories in 18th Century Pietism in the Moravian Church," p. 39.

[1034] Susan M. Hinckley & Cynthia Winward, "Episode 151: Embracing Your Journey |A Conversation With Aubrey Chaves," *At Last She Said It*, September 12, 2023, atlastshesaidit.org/p/embracing-your-journey-a-conversation, accessed December 24, 2024.

ended nature of their spiritual paths. Like *The Faithful Feminists*' challenge to the *Come Follow Me* manual's patriarchal timetable, the serial conversion narrative thus aims to foster an alternative conceptualization of movement and temporality. We could therefore reutilize the term parallel movement from the previous subchapter, to describe this media performance; the serial exploration of faith "journeys" allows women otherwise held back by a stagnating and rigid framework to "move" together.

7.3.4 Analytical Summary of Performance and Framing

In the explorations above we have observed that the construction and negotiation of feminism and faith in the *At Last She Said It* podcast partially revolves around women finding their voice. Through specific life writing structures within episodes like "Speaking Up" and co-occurrences within the same sentences, such as the title of their podcast "*At Last She Said It*," nodal points and discursive moments create a *chain of equivalence* that positions the podcast in a particular timeline. At the very back of this timeline we find the Church as an *antagonistic other* where women like Hinckley live in a "code of silence," where she is "shushed," speaking in a specific "format," "prescreening" herself, and disabled from using "language of [her] own." When she finally reaches a "silence crisis" she is met with an irresistible urge to talk. So, she searches for a "receptacle" through which she can "hold and carry" her experiences or "difficult childhood." We are therefore led to understand that she has been silent but is now speaking – "I figured out how to start saying things again," as Hinckley expresses it. Placed together with the title of their podcast she is at *last* saying it, from which one can infer that the Church is portrayed as a muted past and the podcast a contemporary place or receptacle for speech. This interpretation is fortified when observing how they use vintage images to advertise themselves through social media. The sentence added to the woman sitting next to the Tv-screen, "Won't somebody *PLEASE* hurry and invent podcasts so we can make our own shows? #atlastshesaidit," is suggestive of a similar narrative plot. Accordingly, the past is silence/formatted speech – a situation where she cannot own her "own show" – whereas the future podcast she speaks to – "hurry and invent podcasts" – means voice/saying it at last.

The serial format of the podcast played a crucial role in amplifying these voices. Seriality fostered a cumulative process where repeated engagement with challenging topics gradually increased comfort and courage among both the hosts and their listeners in expressing their views. In other words, seriality allows for a pedagogy of verbalization where the practice of repeatedly speaking up results in increased "comfort" to speak

about "some hard things." This performance also encompasses a retrospection,[1035] where the hosts revisit and reframe their conversations, reflecting their growth in confidence and vocabulary over time. This is demonstrated in their bonus episodes where they return to or redo episodes that they have previously recorded. In one of those episodes, Hinckley for example acknowledges how, in the past, she struggled to say the word "patriarchy" but has since grown more comfortable with using the term. As Winward notes, "saying things out loud changes us," capturing the transformative effect of verbalizing difficult or controversial topics. The cumulative effect of podcasting extends to their audience, inspiring listeners to develop their own voices. Through feedback from listeners, they see evidence that their conversations foster courage among women who might otherwise feel silenced within their faith community, thus allowing a parallel movement among host and listeners in their project to "speak up."[1036] At the heart of the discourse that frames this performance we find the *nodal point* "speech," which summarizes phrases like "saying it" and "speaking up." Orbiting around this sign are *discursive moments* like "saying things out loud changes us," and "stay tuned," where they express themselves as becoming "more comfortable saying some hard things," tracking their "own progress," from "softer" to "madder." Listeners are also reported as "speaking up more," expressing that they are "getting braver."

But as the "Embracing Your Journey" episode demonstrates, the negotiation between feminism and faith is also portrayed as a struggle to foster more dynamic and evolving perspectives on faith within a church that is perceived as cultivating rigidity. In similarity to *The Faithful Feminists*, these episodes invited a particular temporality of collective forward movement, or more specifically, a parallel movement among women with shifting faiths.[1037] The podcast is enacted and constructed as enabling women to explore their own evolving spiritual paths while simultaneously connecting with others who are navigating similar questions, doubts, and shifts in belief. The use of similar questions and metaphors during the interviews that these episodes are based on, allows for a story arc to emerge, one which enables women to both progress uniquely in time, while remaining connected to a broader communal experience.

This performance was framed through the *nodal point* "journey." The *chain of equivalence* that orients various *discursive moments* in relation to it houses a form of conversion narrative. This type of narrative often unfolds with an initial foundation, where the protagonist is entrenched in a rigid belief system or way of life, shaped by black-and-white thinking. In Chaves' story this is found in moments like "perfectionism," "knowing

[1035] Kelleter, "Five Ways of Looking a Popular Seriality," p. 18.
[1036] Kelleter, "Five Ways of Looking a Popular Seriality," p. 13
[1037] Kelleter, "Five Ways of Looking a Popular Seriality," p. 13.

with every fiber of our being," and "rigid, scary rules." This period reflects a sense of belonging – seen for example in how both Hinckley and Chaves frame their past in a cozy nostalgia – but may also contain undercurrents of doubt or dissatisfaction, such as feeling silenced, hinting at an inner conflict, such as whether or not the Church is true. A climactic challenge or catalyst – a "crisis," "broken shelf," or "bursting dam," – then disrupts this foundation, shaking the protagonist's certainty and exposing the limitations or contradictions of her former beliefs. Following this climax, the protagonist enters a stage of reflection and introspection – sometimes even a period of disbelief or "nihilism." She grapples with the tension between her old beliefs and emerging convictions, confronting unresolved questions and the emotional weight of abandoning former ties. This period is often marked by both struggle and self-discovery as she gradually reframes her identity and understanding of the world. She "reclaims personal authority," "follows [her] spiritual energy," and "embraces [her] own individual path," which allows her to "relax into the idea that [she] can continue to be open to whatever comes," that she can "lean into [change]," because faith is a "process." The story culminates in a transformation, where the protagonist embraces a new belief system or spiritual path. This resolution represents not only a turning "to" the new faith or values but also a turning "from" the past self, culminating in a renewed sense of purpose and often a deeper, more resilient faith. Finally, when women step into the podcast to record this journey, they express the realization that this resilience and depth were actually shaped by the journey itself. All of these conflicts and struggles were necessary to establish a new and improved faith. The crisis was actually a "lesson" and a "gift."

The above discursive moments also follow each other in a *chain of equivalence* that fortifies both a dichotomous timeline and dichotomous conceptualization *of* time itself. Concerning the first dichotomy we find that the Church represents the past, the "shelf" or "dam" that "keeps back the questions and fears," and the podcast as the present, where they are free to "burst" and be conceptualized for the religious "lessons" and virtues they bring forth. Concerning the latter dichotomy, we can also observe how the Church is conceptualized through phrases like "immovable" and "unchanging" whereas the podcast's conversion series is framed through terms like "moving," and "relaxing/leaning into change." We can also compare the end result of this with the way messiness was promoted as religiously virtuous and mature in the previous chapter – because allowing oneself to follow this seemingly intuitive movement of "ebb and flow," "energy," and "whatever is coming and flowing," eventually results in "growth."

There are, in other words, many levels of seriality in these observations to keep in mind. The enactment of revisiting a specific narrative repeatedly, on the one hand, and the meaning of journeying attached to that serial production through both content and

structure, on the other. Consequently, women are not only performing movement but also engaging in "conversations about movement," further underscoring the importance of reimagining temporality in the interplay between feminism and faith.

7.4 Serial Dynamics in Faith: *At Last She Said It*

We now turn to another focal point of this chapter, namely how podcast seriality affects the construction of personal faith among its hosts. To analyze this question we will look at two examples: "women on the edge of inside," highlighting Hinckley and Winward as motivated to be "women of faith;" and "the process of staying," about the podcast as a means of staying in the Church.

7.4.1 "Women on the Edge of Inside" – Entering With an Ambition to Stay

To emphasize that the podcast is faithful to the Church, Hinckley and Winward have chosen to introduce each episode with the words "women of faith." It says in full, "welcome to *At Last She Said It*, a podcast where women of faith come together to acknowledge that it's complicated and support each other while we figure it out."[1038] In their first episode from 2020 they elaborate by saying that they are women who have "clearly seen and have experienced the challenges but are interested in what happens next" and who wish to "move forward to better directions."[1039] This move was made to highlight that the podcast would be portraying the voices of women *within* the Church and is still used three years later. This position is visible for example in an episode called "Women on the Edge of Inside," where their recurring co-host Jeralee Renshaw references Franciscan priest and popular author Richard Rohr's definition of different types of organization members:

> Renshaw: The first is the organization's insiders. They are the decision makers in the organization, so for us as members of the Church, these would be people in leadership position. The second are the outsiders, untouched by internal loyalties to the organization. They can be the bomb throwers who heavily criticize the organization. The third are the people at the edge of inside. They love the organization, but while being loyal they also see the organization as imperfect and possibly even flawed. Richard Rohr writes, "they work at the boundaries,

[1038] M. Hinckley & Winward, "Episode 001: It's Complicated;" "Episode 148: BONUS Still Asking – Where's the Priesthood in That?," *At Last She Said It,* August 1, 2023.
[1039] M. Hinckley & Winward, "Episode 001: It's Complicated."

> bridges and entranceways. A doorkeeper must love both the inside and the outside of his or her group and know how to move between those two loves."[1040]

Through the episode the hosts frame themselves as women on the edge of inside, which according to the quote above requires the ability to maintain a position of being both on the inside and the outside of their religious organization. Although constantly referring to themselves as sitting on the "cheap seats" i.e., having no authority to change their organization, they also view themselves as an important part of their organization. In one episode they for example reference Simone Campbell, the leader of a catholic organization called *Nuns on the Bus*, who described herself as being the "stomach acid" of the body of Christ – a "job" very "important for metabolizing food."[1041] Hinckley adopts the term and says that "We are the stomach acid. Criticizing what you love is like being stomach acid […] You can help it to become healthier."[1042] While "too much stomach acid is not a good thing," the "right amount actually is essential to maintaining a healthy organization."[1043] Addressing this metaphor Winward suggests another helpful source to describe their position in the Church. Referencing public theologian and author Brian McLaren's book *Do I Stay Christian?* Winward suggests that they are "staying defiantly."

> Winward: He said this "I don't have to choose between staying Christian compliantly or leaving Christianity defiantly. I can stay defiantly." So, staying defiantly is being the stomach acid, right? We're staying defiantly! He goes on to say "I can intentionally consciously, resolutely refuse to leave, and with equal intention and resolution, I can refuse to comply with the status quo. I can occupy Christianity with a different way of being Christian." Amen, Brian. Brian sees the value in being stomach acid, so I'm grateful for that. It's a great metaphor.[1044]

What is being disseminated then are two Latter-day Saint women's imaginings of a different church. They view themselves as necessary parts of the church body, with thoughts and opinions that would help the Church become "healthier." One can infer from this that the duo entered the podcast with an ambition to stay.

[1040] Susan M. Hinckley & Cynthia Winward, "Episode 11: Women on the Edge of Inside," *At Last She Said It,* May 19, 2020.

[1041] Susan M. Hinckley & Cynthia Winward, "Episode 104: The Process of Staying," *At Last She Said It,* August 16, 2022.

[1042] M. Hinckley & Winward, "Episode 104: The Process of Staying."

[1043] M. Hinckley & Winward, "Episode 104: The Process of Staying."

[1044] M. Hinckley & Winward, "Episode 104: The Process of Staying."

7.4.2 "The Process of Staying" – Podcasting as Continuous Conversion

This attitude also translates to how they frame the medium they use. As Hinckley articulates it, podcasting is an expression of her being "in the process of staying,"[1045] an expression that eventually grows into a tagline used by themselves and their listeners – "I'm in the process of staying too" one listener chimes in.[1046] The "process of staying" line eventually gets picked up in an episode of its own, where they address their feelings about getting asked why they stay in the Church.[1047] The question, they explain, awakens a "complicated patch of emotions" because it is based on a binary thinking that only leaves the options of staying *or* leaving.[1048] Although people asking may be women struggling themselves, and although they might wish for a simple answer, the podcast duo argue that "you're gonna have to listen to the whole conversation," meaning, that the conversation held on the podcast itself is how and why they stay.

> Winward: I'm not sure if people listen to our podcast is what I'm trying to say. And it's like, we're not really running a social media account. We're running a podcast. And our social media account hopefully points people towards the podcast. And so that's why sometimes it's difficult when people are, like, "wait a minute, you see everything, why do you stay?" And I want to reply, do you listen to our podcast? If not, I would really recommend it. We're really good.
> Hinckley: Because our whole podcast is pretty much in answer to this process, right?
> Winward: Yes it is.
> Hinckley: This is us working out the process in public right? On the air and it's us engaging with all of these messy things that we see and feel and understand. So yeah, we see it all. We see what you see, we see what you're struggling with. But if you want to know why or how we stay, then you have to listen to the whole conversation.[1049]

Later in the episode they talk about this process through the metaphor of a math calculation where it is not the "finished problem," but the "work" put into it that is interesting, and in itself, the answer to how they stay. In other words, the podcast *is* their process of staying. In a bonus episode, titled "The Process of Staying…A Few More Thoughts" Hinckley shares that she "first used the phrase, 'the process of staying' four

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[1045] Susan M. Hinckley & Cynthia Winward, *At Last She Said It,* "Episode 7: Uncrossed Bridges Part 2," April 21, 2020; "Episode 38: What's In It For Me?" January 5, 2021; "Episode 42: When the Wheels Come Off," "Episode 66: Wrap Party!"
[1046] M. Hinckley & Winward, "Episode 104: The Process of Staying."
[1047] M. Hinckley & Winward, "Episode 104: The Process of Staying."
[1048] M. Hinckley & Winward, "Episode 104: The Process of Staying."
[1049] M. Hinckley & Winward, "Episode 104: The Process of Staying."

years ago in an essay" called "Circles of Light," that she delivered at a symposium.[1050] This bonus episode serves as an extension of the previous discussion, offering additional insights into the nuanced reasons why one might choose to "stay" within a religious tradition that feels both essential and challenging. To give further context to the episode referenced above, she reads the essay on-air. The essay explores the deeply personal and ongoing decision to remain engaged in the Church despite a sense of not fully fitting. Hinckley recounts her journey toward "staying," describing her experience of living with questions, doubts, and a persistent sense of not being a "good Mormon" according to conventional standards. Yet rather than viewing these as reasons to leave, she interprets them as part of her unique path of faith – a process of remaining connected to a tradition that, while imperfect, has offered her moments of light, belonging, and "hope."

> Hinckley: For me, being a Mormon isn't a destination, it's a path, a way to something better, a process of hope. And hope is what carries me from one moment of darkness and uncertainty to my next. I'm not sure why Mormonism has always given me the kind of hope I need in order to draw my circle of light, because it gives me plenty of less desirable emotions too […] To be a Mormon is to be in a process of conversion, of doubt, of faith, of hope, of wending our infinite separate ways. We're always engaged in finding our path or staying on it. We're always in the process of becoming who we can be. So, I stand where I am and draw my circle. I am here.

What we find here is a framing almost identical to the one adopted in relation to the "Embrace Your Journey" episodes. Hinckley's reflection highlights a deeply temporal and journey-focused perspective on the "Mormon" identity, one that aligns with *At Last She Said It's* broader theme of valuing the process of faith rather than a fixed destination. "Being a Mormon" she says, "isn't a destination, it's a path." It suggests that Mormonism, for her, is less about achieving a final spiritual certainty and more about the day-to-day process of navigating faith, doubt, and hope. This perspective also implicitly defines "conversion" as an ongoing practice, which invites the interpretation that "being in a process" is actually more "Mormon" than standing on a fixed point. By framing her faith as a series of stages, Hinckley aligns with the podcast's ethos of embracing change and questioning as natural parts of one's spiritual path. The ongoing process of "finding our path or staying on it" implies that each phase, whether it is full of conviction or doubt, contributes to a larger, life-long journey that cannot be rushed or simplified into a single, unchanging belief. In effect, the "process of staying" does not mean standing still, or staying the same, but actually means a process of continuous movement and

[1050] Susan M. Hinckley & Cynthia Winward, "Episode 105: The Process of Staying…A Few More Thoughts – BONUS," *At Last She Said It*, August 19, 2022.

active struggle. The result of this is that the podcast allows for continuous conversion, ergo the podcast is their means of being "Mormon." In other words, it is a similar form of narrative as witnessed earlier, one which does not stay stuck on a climactic moment but values continuous struggle – a position made available also in their own religious tradition, where "conversion is a process, not an event."[1051]

7.4.3 Analytical Summary of Performance and Framing

When we moved on to the subject of how Hinckley and Winward construct their personal faith and how it was conditioned by seriality, the paradoxical performance of continuity became central. Despite the accumulation of voice and the parallel movement that the podcast's seriality afforded them,[1052] they have also been holding the same *subject position* throughout the years that they have podcasted. When they are compared to *The Faithful Feminists*, they appear to remain on a constant footing as members of the Church. Their introduction remains the same and there are no visible breaks in form and content. Part of the explanation for this can be found in how they frame that continuity. First we have the *nodal point* "women of faith," combined with *discursive moments* such as "women on the edge of the inside," "stomach acid," and "staying defiantly;" who while seeing the Church as "imperfect," also "love the organization," which explains that there is an explicit and continuous goal of remaining members of the Church. While this continuity seems paradoxical since they also enact and particularly frame themselves as shifting or moving forward, the *nodal points* "conversion" and "journey" explain why such a combination is understood as compatible. The *discursive moment* "I'm in the process of staying" provides a valuable context for these two terms. Here they describe the importance of their audience "listen[ing] to the whole conversation," and how it will illustrate why they stay. The podcast "is pretty much in answer to this process," they explain, where they are "working out the process in public." Signs like these create a *chain of equivalences* similar to the type of framing we saw around the "Embrace Your Journey" episodes, in that they present a distinctly temporal, "journey"-oriented view of the "Mormon" identity. This is made explicit in the sentence "Mormonism isn't a destination, it's a path." But they also lengthen this chain by adding the concept of "conversion." The way that "conversion" is defined – as a continuous practice – implies that seemingly incongruent terms like "process" and "staying" are actually compatible. This is because "staying" or being "converted" to "Mormonism" is not the same as stillness, but rather constant

[1051] Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, "Conversion," *Library,* www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/gospel-topics/conversion?lang=eng, accessed November 13, 2024

[1052] Kelleter, "Five Ways of Looking a Popular Seriality," p. 13.

movement and active engagement. Through this approach, the podcast embodies an experience of continuous conversion, making the act of podcasting itself a way of "being Mormon." So when the *At Last She Said It* duo instructs their audience to "listen to the whole conversation," half-complaining that they are not "running a social media account" but "a podcast," they are also implying that their podcast is a process of conversion.

7.5 Serial Dynamics in Ideational Negotiations: *Year of Polygamy*

The focus for our next observations is the *Year of Polygamy* podcast, starting with how seriality affects its construction and negotiation of feminism and faith. To illustrate this we will look at two examples: "this series is meant to go in order," about how seriality enables a step-by-step exploration of women's historical participation in polygamy; and "stay with us!" addressing the promises and ramification of such treatment.

7.5.1 "This Series is Meant to go in Order" – Filling in the Faceless Women of Polygamy

Constructing and negotiating feminism and faith within the *Year of Polygamy* podcast centers around honoring the voices and influences of historical women. While it is known today for covering the contemporary history of Mormon fundamentalism, it started out as a herstory project. As explained in the previous subchapter, a typical "herstory" project involves the effort to recover and highlight women's stories, a practice foundational to many feminists and womanist biblical and theological scholars.[1053] With women's stories in mind, then, Hansen Park sought to tell the forgotten history of polygamy. She explains that the few things known about the polygamous wives are centered around their husbands.[1054] One reason why the women of polygamy have been "erased" is because "they were part of such a controversial history."[1055] To remedy this lack, and to "honor" their "voice and influence" Hansen Park produces historical portraits of them.[1056] In the first episode she says that:

> Hansen Park: Although this information might be hard to take, remembering these women is very important because they had a voice and influence and a place in

[1053] MacHaffie, *Her Story. Women in Christian Tradition.*

[1054] Lindsay Hansen Park, "Episode 52: Obscure Polygamous Women and Paula Kelly Harline," *Year of Polygamy,* September 9, 2014.

[1055] Lindsay Hansen Park, "Episode 1: Fanny Alger," *Year of Polygamy*, January 1, 2014; "Episode 4: Zina Huntington Jacobs Young Smith," January 9, 2014.

[1056] Hansen Park, January "Episode 1: Fanny Alger."

> our Mormon history. And I've often resented that they've been erased out of it because they were part of such a controversial history. Let's honor them by remembering them and sharing the scraps of history we have to remember them by.[1057]

The information on women participating in polygamy might be painful to encounter or "might be hard to take" but sharing their stories is important to counter their "erasure." To let these women's "own voice[s] shine through" Hansen Park initially also hired women to read in the role of the person portrayed.[1058] This framing is also fortified transmedially. The art that surrounds the podcast, for example on its logotype and website header, speaks of the perceived promises hidden in telling the stories of women.[1059] The paintings, created by Leslie Olpin Peterson, who was "inspired while listening to the stories," depict the faceless women in the history of polygamy.[1060] On some variations of this art, all faces but Emma Smith – the prophet's first wife – are left blank, while on others a few faces have been filled in. One interpretation of this could be that throughout Hansen Park's portrayals of these wives, the blanks – the forgotten stories of women – are filled in. A result of this is that the herstory project converges with the conditions of seriality: The information shared on a podcast is cumulative and based on perpetual renewal – it builds over time.[1061] By doing so, it continuously works to put pieces – women's stories – together, effectively advancing equity in historical representation.[1062] In almost every episode Hansen Park also reminds her listeners to go "all the way back to episode one,"[1063] because "this series is meant to go in order."[1064] Occasionally she also says that "the podcast is meant to tell a story."[1065] We can expect from this seriality, then, a sense of completion – a narrative coming to fulfillment – a development seemingly crucial in the intricate balance between feminism and faith.

In the early 2014 episodes of *Year of Polygamy*, the promises of podcast seriality and herstory converged to create a discursive framing on meaningful endurance. Even though it may be "hard" to listen to, as the above quote suggest, walking her listeners "through the issues of Mormon polygamy" was repeatedly expressed as a promise of hope, which

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[1057] Hansen Park, January "Episode 1: Fanny Alger."
[1058] Lindsay Hansen Park, "Episode 20: Emily Partridge," *Year of Polygamy* March 26, 2014; "Episode 9: Mary Elizabeth Rollins Lightner," January 28, 2014.
[1059] See www.yearofpolygamy.com, accessed March 26, 2025.
[1060] Hansen Park "Episode 84: The FLDS, Part One," March 4, 2015.
[1061] Kelleter, "Five Ways of Looking a Popular Seriality," p. 30.
[1062] MacHaffie, *Her Story. Women in Christian Tradition.*
[1063] Hansen Park, "Episode 68: The 1886 Revelation."
[1064] Lindsay Hansen Park, "Episode 72: Generational Shifts," *Year of Polygamy,* December 28, 2014.
[1065] Lindsay Hansen Park, "Episode 124: Tom Bennett, the One Mighty and Wrong," *Year of Polygamy,* May 9, 2017.

would help "women find some sort of peace."[1066] While polygamy may not be actively practiced in the Church, it is a "ghost," as feminist Latter-day Saint and author Carol Lynn Pearson's puts it, that still "haunts" the "hearts and heaven" of Mormons.[1067] Though the Church discontinued the practice of polygamy, theological remnants persist. Joseph Smith's 1843 revelation on plural marriage was canonized in the Doctrine and Covenants in 1878, and current Church sealing practices allow a man to be sealed to more than one wife if he is widowed or divorced. As historian Benjamin E. Park notes, "while polygamy during life is still forbidden, a version of Smith's eternal polygamy remains fully in force."[1068] The ghost metaphor for this residue is frequently borrowed by Hansen Park who,[1069] for example, suggests that it "shows up" in different situations where "folks are tired and vulnerable" and threatens to punish them if they are not "good enough."[1070] It especially likes to haunt Latter-day Saint women who despite their husbands' protests and denials that "no no no, he never wants to practice polygamy," know they can be replaced.[1071] If they do not measure up, "someone else can fill that gap."[1072]

In an episode where Hansen Park looks back on her motives for starting the podcast she addresses her personal confrontation with the legacy of polygamy. Initially indifferent to the issue, her perspective shifted when she had to choose between two potential partners, a moment that underscored the emotional complexities of sharing a spouse. She describes the deep pain from her past relationship that lingered into her new marriage: "I had been so deeply in love with this other person" she says, "it was painful for years."[1073] This experience brought to light the severe disparities between men and women in polygamous unions, particularly the ease with which her husband could potentially marry another woman without enduring "the same sacrifice," of choosing, a notion she found "deeply unfair."[1074] In response to this, Sarah Burlingame – who appears on the podcast now and then to interview Hansen Park – interprets her intentions with the podcast as "detoxifying" her personal experience, and as "leech[ing]" the shame and anger she had felt by "confront[ing] it" head on.[1075] The podcast thus became a thera-

[1066] Lindsay Hansen Park, "Episode 19: Flora Ann Woodworth," *Year of Polygamy*, March 14, 2014.
[1067] Pearson, *The Ghost of Polygamy. Haunting the Hearts and Heavens of Mormon Women and Men.*
[1068] E. Park, "Joseph Smith, Plural Marriage, and Kinship," p. 83.
[1069] See for example: Hansen Park, "Episode 100: The Final Episode;" "Episode 106: Year of Polygamy, a Year Later, Part 6: Ghost of Eternal Polygamy 1 of 2," *Year of Polygamy,* October 11, 2016; "Episode 128: Denver Snuffer, The Remnant Movement, and Polygamy," *Year of Polygamy,* June 26, 2017; "Episode 149: D&C with William V. Smith," *Year of Polygamy,* March 19, 2018.
[1070] Lindsay Hansen Park, "Episode 100: The Final Episode," *Year of Polygamy,* July 1, 2015.
[1071] Hansen Park, "Episode 100: The Final Episode."
[1072] Hansen Park, "Episode 100: The Final Episode."
[1073] Hansen Park, "Episode 103: Year of Polygamy, a Year Later, Part 3."
[1074] Hansen Park, "Episode 103: Year of Polygamy, a Year Later, Part 3."
[1075] Hansen Park, "Episode 103: Year of Polygamy, a Year Later, Part 3."

peutic outlet, embodying the dual promise to continually address women's participation in polygamy, while also providing herself and other Latter-day Saint women with the possibilities to process the issue emotionally. Using the words of Burlingame we can think of Hansen Park's early project as an attempt to "exorcize" the "ghost" of polygamy.[1076] By narrating the stories of polygamy's faceless women, the haunted house that is the Church can be cleansed. The faceless women are seen and acknowledged before Hansen Park leads them into the light. And through that process the inhabitants of the house – the women haunted by the ghost of polygamy – can sleep at night.

In her role as a public historian who aims to counter this correlated history, however, Hansen Park's approach in facing the Church's polygamist past could be described as quite straightforward. There is rarely any cushioning of the – sometimes painful – past, it is merely there to be discovered. She seems to suggest that there is a faith-promoting history on the one hand, and a true history – what actually happened – on the other. "Truth" is a word used by both Hansen Park herself, and her followers to describe the purpose of the podcast. For instance, she says that the "aim of this series is to help people kind of work out these issues" and in doing so, "deal with some hard truths."[1077] Similarly, one listener writes on her website's comment section:

> I love that you aren't afraid to bring this discussion out in the open and reveal the truth that had never been told to me. I think all of us should know the truth and the whole truth. It is a deep unconscious fear in every Mormon and I think it would do us good to bring it out and finally deal with it. Ignoring it doesn't help.[1078]

While impossible to draw conclusions on general listener experiences based on this, this quote is telling of other commenters who, in similarity to what this listener expresses, appreciate Hansen Park for presenting information in a "nonbiased way,"[1079] or for "stand[ing] as a witness of what polygamy really is,"[1080] in other words, distinguishing between history as told by the Church and the "real" history depicted by Hansen Park. Of course, this "truth" is not really pioneered by Hansen Park herself but comes from already existing research. Nonetheless Hansen Park is viewed by her audience as instru-

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[1076] Hansen Park, "Episode 103: Year of Polygamy, a Year Later, Part 3."

[1077] Lindsay Hansen Park, "Episode 26: Helen Mar Kimball," *Year of Polygamy,* May 9, 2014.

[1078] Commenter, "Episode 98: How Polygamy Affects LDS Doctrine, Policy, Theology, and Culture," *Year of Polygamy,* June 13, 2015, www.yearofpolygamy.com/year-of-polygamy/episode-98-how-polygamy-affects-lds-doctrine-policy-theology-and-culture/, accessed May 20, 2024.

[1079] Commenter, "Episode 60: The 1890 Manifesto," *Year of Polygamy,* October 25, 2014, www.yearofpolygamy.com/year-of-polygamy/year-of-polygamy-the-1890-manifesto-episode-60/, accessed January 4, 2024.

[1080] Commenter, Episode 100: The Final Episode," *Year of Polygamy,* July 1, 2015, www.yearofpolygamy.com/year-of-polygamy/episode-100-the-final-episode/, accessed May 20, 2024.

mental in distributing it and making it more "accessible" to a broader audience.[1081] The host is therefore portrayed much like a witness of the sworn testimony, who swears to "tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth." Through the podcast she bares open the shame of polygamy and, in a tough love kind of way, encourages its listeners to face reality – "the only way through it is through it" as the host refers to it.[1082] The idea that women can gain peace by confronting history therefore integrates the feminist method of herstory seen here with the framing of exposure found in the previous chapter. Hansen Park is also active in producing an audience that seeks after this confrontation, for example by encouraging others to do their own historical research.

> Hansen Park: I would encourage you all to go study about these sources. Because they are controversial a lot of people might think that they are "anti-Mormon sources" but I think you'll be surprised that a lot of these are from our own church historians, our own church archives. You can see a lot of these at the history library downtown, you can talk to a lot of church historians who will back up this information and a lot of this stuff is being printed in the Joseph Smith papers. If there's a question about sources or an antagonistic source that I use, I make sure that I always try to bring that up and I always try to tell you if I'm speaking from my own bias or my own speculation so hopefully that helps clear it up but again, I can't convince you of anything of the veracity of these claims. You are going to have to look it up yourself and I would encourage everyone to do that. The more sunshine on this stuff the better, "sunshine is the best disinfectant" they say, so go study this, go read this…[1083]

The quote demonstrates not only a call to her listeners to do their own research but also highlights researching history as a sensitive subject. While her listeners "might think" that the sources Hansen Park uses to combat the historical erasure of women are "anti-Mormon" she assures them that they can be found in the Church's "own" archive, written by their "own church historians." Hansen Park cannot "convince" her listeners, they are "going to have to look it up [themselves]," which she also tries to motivate them to do. The more eyes on historical documents, then, the further one comes in defeating the organizational gatekeeping of history – or as she likes to put it "sunshine is the best disinfectant." A similar suggestion can be found in another episode where she "encourages" her listeners to "go down to the Church History Library, request some microfilm reviewing of some of these documents," adding "you can do that, just go right in the doors and go to the right and you can view some of those documents yourself."[1084] Hansen Park seeks to inspire her listeners to not only "take [her] word for

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[1081] Commenter, "Episode 100: The Final Episode," *Year of Polygamy,* July 1, 2015.
[1082] Hansen Park, "Episode 52: Obscure Polygamous Women and Paula Kelly Harline."
[1083] Lindsay Hansen Park, "Episode 11: Marina Nancy Johnson Hyde," *Year of Polygamy,* February 11, 2014.
[1084] Lindsay Hansen Park, "Episode 39: Early Utah Period Polygamy," *Year of Polygamy,* July 12, 2014.

it" but to look at the "primary sources" firsthand.[1085] The "you can do it" spirit is demonstrative of the fact that reading history is not as innocent a feat as one might think. The practical descriptions of where and how also speak of the sincerity of her encouragement. Inspired by Hansen Park's encouragement to find out the "truth" for oneself, listeners occasionally act as collaborators adding to the information on the podcast. Listeners who have ties to pioneer Mormons recognize their own family history and occasionally also share information on them in their comments. One commenter says the following:

> After hearing this one, I had to do a little family research of my own…So after listening to this, I went on family search and looked name-by-name at my lines of ancestors that go back to the Kirtland era of the church. I read and read for hours, and had to write it all down. I have at least 10 male ancestors who practiced polygamy with around 40 wives between them. A few of the women seem to have been sealed to some of the men after they died – it's hard to tell based on the limited info I could find. I also noted that at least one of my Lyman ancestors married 2 of the Partridge sisters who were married to Joseph Smith, plus another Partridge sister, and one female ancestor who was married to Joseph Smith and then later Heber C. Kimball. Once I started looking at this, I couldn't stop, and then had to look at each of these ancestor's children to see how many of them also practiced polygamy… It's staggering. My family was in it super deep. I can't help but feel heart sick about it. Thank you for doing your amazing research and sharing it in your podcasts. I have been inspired to try to learn all I can about these people in my family and somehow make sense of it all.[1086]

The parasocial qualities of podcasting – here seen in the interplay between website comment section and podcast content – in combination with seriality's request that listeners stay the course, transforms some listeners into truth seekers who research history parallel to the host. The quote above demonstrates how Hansen Park entices her listeners to investigate the history of polygamy by tapping into a long Church tradition of doing family research. After listening to an episode where one of her relatives was mentioned, the commenter above "went on family search," a Church-owned website for genealogical research, to seek further information. She researched "for hours" and found "staggering" evidence of her own family's polygamous history. Host and audience, to recycle our previous term, are therefore engaged in a parallel movement of truth-seeking and perseverance,[1087] where digging up the trails of forgotten women is consi-

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[1085] Hansen Park, "Episode 39: Early Utah Period Polygamy."

[1086] Commenter, "Episode 97: Messy Mormon Polygamy Pt 1," *Year of Polygamy,* May 31, 2015, www.yearofpolygamy.com/year-of-polygamy/episode-97-messy-mormon-polygamy-pt-1/, accessed November 23, 2024.

[1087] Kelleter, "Five Ways of Looking a Popular Seriality," p. 13.

dered a "difficult truth" that may leave some listeners "heart sick," but essentially must be "dealt with" to fill in the faceless women of polygamy, and, in effect, offer contemporary women relief. By positioning the podcast as a tool for uncovering suppressed stories, the host not only educates but also entices her audience to join in a collective effort to reclaim history. This participatory approach transforms historical revision into an inclusive act. Encouraged by Hansen Park to delve into their family histories or to explore church archives, they transition from mere consumers to collaborators in the feminist project of the podcast.

7.5.2 "Stay With Us!" – The Promise of Closure

As demonstrated above, constructing and negotiating feminism and faith center around honoring the voices and influence of historical women who participated in polygamy, a project spoken of as having therapeutic qualities for contemporary Latter-day Saint women. However, the possibilities of exorcizing these ghosts change as the *Year of Polygamy* project progresses. In the 100th episode Hansen Park says a heartfelt goodbye to her yearlong project of working with the history of Mormon polygamy. While doing so, she uses the serial qualities of retrospection – where her previous episodes work as an archive of her own and the subject-matter's development – looking back upon the podcast and summarizing the lessons learnt.[1088] One example is the naivety of believing that just re-telling the stories of early Mormon women would provide comfort for contemporary Latter-day Saint women. Hansen Park explains that she started the podcast with a promise to her listeners, that if they just listened to these women's stories everything would be "ok." When one commenter said that listening "sent [them] over the edge," the host responds "stay with us!! We have an entire year to go!! I promise you that working your way through it will help."[1089] Looking back at the first episode Hansen Park says:

> Hansen Park: I make this really ridiculous naive promise on it, I'm like "hey guys if you're just listening, I know it's hard and everything but just listen to the whole thing and we're going to get through this and you're going to feel a lot better about it." And then this horrible thing happened – people started messaging me and they were saying "oh Lindsay I'm on episode four and this is really hard and

[1088] Kelleter, "Five Ways of Looking a Popular Seriality," p. 18.

[1089] Commenter, "Episode 04: Zina Huntington Jacobs Young Smith," *Year of Polygamy,* January 9, 2014, www.yearofpolygamy.com/year-of-polygamy/year-of-polygamy-zina-huntington-jacobs-young-smith-episode-04/, accessed May 15, 2024.

> it's really awful, but you promised it would be ok, so everything's going to be ok right?"[1090]

The above quote tells us that there was a perceived promise inherent to the podcast's herstory approach – that "just listen[ing]" to women's own stories would somehow solve the shame and sadness contemporary Latter-day Saint women felt about their own history or make them "feel a lot better about it." Thus, it is a framing of perseverance, informing us that if listeners persist, they will reap certain benefits. As Burlingame puts it, Hansen Park "began the podcast with a very clear promise."[1091] Listeners, and women particularly, were invited to "follow along" on a "journey," that "promised" to "take away the shame and the betrayal and the confusion around polygamy." [1092] Hansen Park's head-on or "confrontative" approach to it, where she would expose or "look at" the stories of polygamy's forgotten women, would be the resolution or the thing that brought peace.[1093] Her "old Mr. Rogers" approach as Burlingame calls it, where "if it's mentionable, it's manageable" would however be troubled.[1094] Hansen Park continues to explain in her last episode that when starting the podcast, she had felt inspired by pioneer women who staunchly defended polygamy. The problem, however, was that while early Mormon women defended polygamy officially, their personal journals often told other stories. By returning repeatedly to the project of investigating the lives of plural wives, she comes over historical material that troubles her initial hopes. In the following quote, Hansen Park describes how her perspective changed when witnessing one of these journals:

> Hansen Park: It wasn't until I got to the research of Emmeline Wells who helped inspire this. I mean I love Emmeline Wells. She was a huge inspiration for this series. She was a big proponent of polygamy, and she writes these fierce scathing rebuttals to anti-polygamy legislation and, and critiques, I mean she was fierce about it. And I thought if Emmeline Wells who was a smart intelligent woman is happy in polygamy, then I need to respect that as a feminist woman. And so, I started the series. But it wasn't until I got to Emmeline's journals where she was tormented by the practice. Her heart was just ripped into pieces. She was so wildly jealous and sad and unhappy at times and yet she would go out publicly and she would, you know, say what she needed to say and fight for this. So, she had this real tension inside of her. But it wasn't until I read her journals that I

[1090] Hansen Park, "Episode 100: The Final Episode."
[1091] Hansen Park, "Episode 153: Turning the Mic on Lindsay."
[1092] Hansen Park, "Episode 153: Turning the Mic on Lindsay."
[1093] Hansen Park, "Episode 153: Turning the Mic on Lindsay."
[1094] Hansen Park, "Episode 153: Turning the Mic on Lindsay."

> thought "what have I done? what have I done?" I can't keep that promise I made in the first episode, that was absolutely naive and wrong of me to make…[1095]

Hansen Park thought that if these intelligent women were "happy in polygamy" she had to "respect that as a feminist woman." The stories of pioneer women, however, proved to be complex. Pioneer women's views on polygamy seemed to vary depending on what documentation was read (the official rebuttals of antipolygamy legislation or personal journals). As the host tells us, Wells "fiercely" defended plural marriage in the open – "she said what she needed to say" – but was "tormented by the practice" in private. Seeing Wells' "heart[…] ripped into pieces" causes Hansen Park to question her initial promises, labeling them instead as "naive" and "wrong." In other words, she realizes that she cannot promise that the stories of polygamist women will bring peace to the haunted house. Mormonism, she discovers, has a violent history connected to plural marriage. She says in another episode that she was "unprepared" for what she was "going to uncover" and was "shocked" by the information she found.[1096] One period that seems to have made "peace" difficult to conjure, was the Utah period. Around the time of the Mormon reformation between 1856–1857 – a phase where leaders called for a renewed spiritual dedication[1097] – she reports on gruesome details surrounding polygamy, such as threats of blood atoning women who complained,[1098] and castrations of rivaling men.[1099]

In effect, Hansen Park's discovery collides with the performances inherent to podcasting.[1100] The serial nature of podcasting, and particularly its demand for coherence, spurs critical self-awareness in its producers,[1101] as evidenced by Hansen Park's admission of failing to meet her initial promises. Borrowing from Kelleter, podcasts like popular serials inherently promote narrative consistency and coherence; each episode or season is expected to stay true to the podcast's overarching theme or story. Similar to popular serials, podcast hosts routinely modify their content to reflect new developments, reinterpreting previous episodes in the light of recent changes. Thus, Hansen Park must recognize the incongruity between her initial perspectives and the storyline it set the stage for, and the reconsiderations she had to make along the way. However, as

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[1095] Hansen Park, "Episode 100: The Final Episode."
[1096] Hansen Park, "Episode 153: Turning the Mic on Lindsay."
[1097] Richard E. Turley & Barbara Jones Brown, *Vengeance is Mine: The Mountain Meadows Massacre and Its Aftermath*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2023.)
[1098] Lindsay Hansen Park, "Episode 38: Polygamy and Blood Atonement," *Year of Polygamy,* July 8, 2014.
[1099] Lindsay Hansen Park, "Episode 48: Southern Utah Polygamy – Orderville, Santa Clara, Cedar City and Violence," *Year of Polygamy,* August 16, 2014.
[1100] Kelleter, "Five Ways of Looking a Popular Seriality," p. 30.
[1101] Kelleter, "Five Ways of Looking a Popular Seriality," p. 17–18.

we will discuss later, to meet the demands of seriality, the storyline itself must eventually be refined to resolve any inconsistencies.

Consequently, Hansen Park's realization that the stories of polygamist women do not uniformly bring peace, but instead expose profound internal conflicts and personal suffering, strikes a significant blow to the balancing act of feminism and faith. This impact is particularly notable given that the feminist perspective was initially crafted in a manner akin to a traditional herstory project, where unearthing and recounting women's lives is presumed to have emancipatory potential. However, the therapeutic promise of herstory is sharply contrasted by the harsh realities of these women's experiences, challenging the assumption that merely hearing their stories can alleviate contemporary feelings of shame and sadness among Latter-day Saint women. This realization not only calls into question the effectiveness of herstories but also complicates the podcast's role in fostering a sense of renewal and peace, ultimately highlighting the delicate intersection of acknowledging church history and achieving emotional reconciliation for women within the Church.

7.5.3 Analytical Summary of Performance and Framing

This subchapter began its exploration on the subject of how feminism and faith are constructed and negotiated in the *Year of Polygamy* podcast by observing how the herstory project converged with seriality. The podcast both performs herstory – each episode adding pieces to a larger puzzle about women's historical participation in polygamy and therefore abiding by seriality's need for perpetual renewal and continuation;[1102] and each episode frames it – by suggesting that continuously providing historical portraits of individual women is how we "honor" their "voice and influence." Hansen Park's frequent encouragement to her listeners to go "all the way back to episode one," is therefore suggestive of how narrative completeness is approached as a method of emancipation. A story that gradually unfolds toward a full, cohesive understanding is what will rectify the omission of women in history. This sentiment is fortified transmedially through the accompanied images painted by Olpin Peterson where some faces depicting polygamous wives are left blank, while a few others have been filled in – suggesting that they are omissions that the podcast is continuously solving. Thus, the interplay of feminism and faith, articulated through Hansen Park's herstory perspective, merges seamlessly with the podcast's serial drive for coherence and continuity.

[1102] Kelleter, "Five Ways of Looking a Popular Seriality," p. 30.

By urging its listeners to conduct their own research, the *Year of Polygamy* podcast also fosters a parallel movement,[1103] or collaborative quest for truth, where listeners work alongside its host to counteract the erasure of women in polygamy's history. Hansen Park encourages her audience with statements like, "I encourage you all to go study," "you are going to have to look it up yourself," and "go down to the Church History Library, request some microfilm reviewing of some of these documents." This approach resonates with listeners, as evidenced by a commenter who noted, "I had to do a little family research on my own."

The way that Hansen Park encourages her listeners to walk with her through the history of polygamy also demonstrates the framing of seriality as a meaningful endurance. "Perseverance" could be defined as one of the discourse's *nodal points* as it summarizes and explains sentences like "stay with us." It also shares first place with a by now familiar term, "journey." Around these signs we encounter various *discursive moments* telling us that "the podcast is meant to tell a story," and "although" the information displayed there "might be hard to take," "going through it" will "take away the shame and the betrayal and the confusion around polygamy," and might "[help] women find some sort of peace" and allow them to "feel a lot better about it." Consequently, the host urges "stay with us," because "if it's mentionable, it's manageable."

The *subject position* that emerges here is, to borrow Burlingame's phrase, the "old Mr. Rogers," one explained through various *discursive moments* as a straightforward person who "deals with hard truths," and "confronts" things "head-on." Hansen Park embodies someone who fearlessly "stands as a witness," for the sake of offering women in the past and present, "peace." This could be compared to the optimistic position of "committed" we saw in the early stages of *The Faithful Feminist* podcast, but while theirs was an optimism about combining feminism with Latter-day Saint theology, Hansen Park's was an optimism about combining feminism with church history.

The way that such moments are oriented toward each other creates a *chain of equivalences* where the continued act of listening to historical portraits of polygamist women is equated with a necessary journey of perseverance for the sake of women's wellbeing. It is not merely to "honor" women of the past but to "exorcise" or solve the issue or "ghost" of polygamy for the sake of contemporary women's "peace." History must be purged from its evil spirits and the only way to do that is by "dealing with some hard truths" – without cushioning, because "the only way through it is through it." This saying signifies the idea that facing a difficult situation head-on is the only way to overcome it. This is reminiscent of what we saw in several of chapter six's observations; Rather than

[1103] Kelleter, "Five Ways of Looking a Popular Seriality," p. 13.

avoiding, bypassing, or minimizing challenges, this phrase emphasizes enduring and engaging directly with hardship as a path to resolution. It reflects a belief that confronting discomfort, pain, or obstacles, however tough, leads to meaningful progress and transformation that would not be achieved by avoidance. In essence, it is about embracing the process of struggle as an inevitable, even necessary, part of personal or emotional growth – where one can arrive at feelings of relief.

This "journey" that host and listeners were on together, however, became troubled as Hansen Park over time realized that she could not hold up her end of the bargain. The 100th episode, embodying seriality's characteristic of retrospection conditions Hansen Park to think back on her year of podcasting. When looking back on her project she also embodies the serial production's demand for coherence, meaning the requirement of each episode or season to align with the purpose or plot of the podcast. This conditions the host to adjust to new developments, here expressed through an admission of not fulfilling her initial aims. *Discursive moments* illustrating this, tell us that she could not "keep that promise" because there was no "peace" to be granted at the end of the "story" – it was a "naïve promise." Consequently, the podcast's feminist agenda faces significant challenges, partly due to its feminist methodologies and serial format. Both herstory and seriality continuously provoke confrontations with historical portraits, which in turn highlight nuanced histories of women who both defended and suffered under polygamy. These confrontations result in a crisis, as the complexities revealed do not bring "peace" to the podcast's female listeners but rather create tension. This tension highlights the broader struggle to seamlessly integrate feminist critiques with the Church's historical narrative.

7.6 Serial Dynamics in Faith: *Year of Polygamy*

Not only does the crisis described above affect the promises Hansen Park makes others but also influences her personal position toward pioneer narratives. This takes us to the second endeavor of this subchapter – to seek an understanding of how the above serial processes condition the host's construction of her personal faith. "Episode 100: The Final Episode," which was not really the last episode but more the end of a specific podcast era, will work as the backbone in our exploration thereof, structured around the following examples: "my entire identity became confused," which addresses the host's personal crisis of faith; and "their Zion is not my stopping place," about how she as a result chooses to reformulate the pioneer narrative. The 100th episode is also complemented with other another example, "turning the mic on Lindsay," illustrating a recurring form of behind-the-scenes addressing the host's personal development.

7.6.1 "My Entire Identity Became Confused" – Pioneer Narrative in Crisis

The fact that the 100th episode referenced above also accommodates the host's own life writing is indicative of how projects that construct and negotiate faith and feminism – envisioning resilience for other women – are deeply interwoven with personal transformation. In her "last" episode, then, the focus shifts from a life writing focused on historical women into one where the host herself becomes the narrated I in focus. Therefore, when the herstory project encounters setbacks, it significantly impacts Hansen Park's personal faith. This impact is particularly pronounced because, for Hansen Park, "faith" is extensively framed through the lens of heritage remembrance. When looking back on the project, as the serial characteristic of retrospection invites – she explains the personal and sentimental values that pioneer stories have had for her. She describes fond memories of her own mother acting the role of a public historian. She recalls her mother having "two outfits in her closet aside from her regular street clothes," one a "replica of Betsy Ross," the woman credited for creating the United States flag, and the other a "pioneer woman." She would visit school assemblies, youth conferences and Relief Society dinners, dressed up as different historical women. Her mother would also make Hansen Park and her siblings their own pioneer outfits, and they followed her around on different missions:

> Hansen Park: We would follow her around to these, you know, presentations and help teach kids how to churn butter and how to do the stick poll. And that was my upbringing and that was the sort of history, Mormon history, I got. Of course, these stories were all faith promoting. It was sort of the, you know, Legacy church movie pioneer version, where there was a formula to the story, where there was a great struggle, a great sacrifice, some cheers, you know – "the oxen and the wagon were stuck in the mud and the baby was dying and buried in the snow but through the faith of the pioneer ancestors all was well and they were able to make it to Salt Lake City" – those kind of stories, right. Anyone that has pioneer ancestors are familiar with these stories. Those were the stories I grew up on and they became really powerful and really important in the narrative of my identity. So, whenever I struggled with something, whenever I had challenges in my life, I would think back on these narratives, and they became sort of a metaphor to translate the things I was going through. I would say to myself "really Lindsay? like, you're worried about doing your test? Well, have you ever had to wrap your feet in cloth from your petticoat and walk across the plains? No! You can do this," you know, that's the kind of narratives I grew up on. So,

> pioneer stories have really shaped my identity which I think can explain a lot of why I'm so dedicated to this [podcast].[1104]

Hansen Park underscores how her early experiences with "faith-promoting" pioneer stories were pivotal in shaping her identity and values. She describes an upbringing filled with historical reenactments and simplified narratives of courage and sacrifice that were instrumental in reinforcing a "Legacy church movie pioneer version" of history. The "Legacy movie" she references, is an often-quoted example of this approach.[1105] *Legacy: A Mormon Journey* as it is called, was produced by the Church in 1993. The movie plot that she parodies above follows the tribulations of a fictive pioneer family, the endless persecution of the saints, the constant traveling to find their Zion, where the "oxen and the wagon" get "stuck in the mud," and the sacrifices made on the journey, when the "baby was dying and buried in the snow." These stories are often, she confirms, structured around a certain "formula:" through trials ("great struggle,") perseverance ("great sacrifice,") and "faith," pioneer ancestors ultimately prevailed, and were rewarded. In other words, they created an idealized template of endurance that was both emotionally resonant and prescriptive. These narratives became more than stories for Hansen Park, however, who used them as a metaphorical toolkit to interpret and navigate her own struggles. Whenever meeting a challenge, such as "worrying" about a "test" she compared herself to the pioneers who had struggled through worse challenges – who had "wrap[ped]" their "feet in cloth from [their] petticoat[s] and walk[ed] across the plains." This historical connection offered her both perspective and encouragement, reinforcing a sense of resilience and identity rooted in shared heritage. Hansen Park's "dedication" to the *Year of Polygamy* podcast can be seen as an extension of this identity-shaping process. By examining and often questioning the complex and marginalized narratives within Mormonism, she builds on the legacy of resilience she grew up with, now aiming to uncover and share a fuller, often challenging, account of Mormon history.

One could suggest, however, that in her quest to counter faith-promoting history, she relied on the very "formula" of pioneer stories she was critical of; if she and her followers just persevered, they would be rewarded – their "great struggle" would lead to a great reward. Through the podcast, however, she is exposed to the discrepancy between what she discovers about the Church's past and the legacy movie-type of history. Consequently, her original ambitions and hopes become strained by the "corruption" that follows the practice of polygamy:

[1104] Hansen Park, "Episode 100: The Final Episode."

[1105] Lindsay Hansen Park, "Episode 37: Polygamy and Winters Quarters," *Year of Polygamy,* July 2, 2014; Lindsay Hansen Park, "Episode 44: The Utah War," *Year of Polygamy,* August 4, 2014.

> Hansen Park: I began to fear and resent, deeply, deeply resent, the pioneer narratives that I had loved so much. The pioneer story was now gross and disgusting. It was full of women marching towards their own doom, to their own peril and to mine. And all of this under the auspices of agency. It was repulsive to me. I looked around at my beautiful state of Utah that I loved so dearly, and it felt sickening. The air was heavy with disease. My entire identity became confused…I couldn't sleep, I didn't know who I was anymore if I couldn't have those stories in my head. They had become rotten and corrupted and dirty. Who was I?[1106]

As she delved deeper into the darker aspects of Mormon history, she encountered a reality far more complex and troubling than she had anticipated. This collision between "actual" history and the idealized, "legacy movie-type" of history led to a crisis of identity and faith. As Hansen Park uncovered the stories of women whose lives were shaped by polygamy, her reverence for the pioneer narrative turned to resentment. The pioneer stories, once symbols of courage and purpose, were transformed into grim accounts of women "marching towards their own doom" under the guise of "agency" – a narrative that struck close to home, as she realized its lasting impact on her life. In other words, Hansen Park's journey is entangled with the pioneer women she portrays, and when they march to "their own doom" so does she – "to their own peril and to mine." The glorified pioneer legacy now seemed to represent not triumph over adversity but a systemic pattern that placed women in positions of subservience and sacrifice. This realization led to a profound internal struggle for Hansen Park. The stories that once provided strength and continuity in her life now felt "rotten and corrupted," leaving her questioning her place in a heritage she once cherished. The resulting disorientation – "Who was I?" – reveals how deeply entwined her sense of self was with these narratives. Stripped of the comforting framework she had grown up with, Hansen Park faced a destabilizing reexamination of her identity and faith. Her process of podcasting thus encapsulates not only the pursuit of truth but also the personal costs of confronting deeply ingrained beliefs. She continues by saying:

> Hansen Park: I have loved the stories of pioneers all my life, all my life. They have brought me so much peace and hope and purpose and identity. But they became really complicated by the darkness that follows this practice like a constant cloud of sorrow and corruption. Who were my ancestors then? People that sacrificed for this? for this?! How can I find anymore peace or power in their stories? Like I said, I felt like they were marching towards pain, towards heartache and towards sorrow. Every step closer to Zion brought them closer to complicity in the practice the haunts every single Mormon today. How am I supposed to celebrate that? …my ancestors could struggle for heroism in a practice that was

[1106] Hansen Park, "Episode 100: The Final Episode."

> wrong and would wound the hearts of so many. They could bring their wagons to those conclusions and call it right and call it from God. And they did, they did, they marched towards Zion that is no Zion to me.[1107]

In this reflection, Hansen Park grapples with the disillusionment that arises from reconciling her lifelong admiration for pioneer stories with the disturbing legacy of polygamy that was officially established in Salt Lake or "Zion." The pioneer narratives, which once filled her with "peace and hope and purpose and identity," are now shadowed by a "constant cloud of sorrow and corruption." She is forced to confront the possibility that the heroic narratives she internalized were intertwined with actions and beliefs that have inflicted lasting harm on the community she cherishes. She now sees each step her ancestors took toward Zion not as a journey of heroism, but as a journey toward "complicity" in a "practice" she believes continues to haunt the "Mormon" community. Hansen Park's statement that her ancestors "marched towards Zion that is no Zion to me" underscores her sense of alienation from the Mormon heritage she once held dear. The destination of Zion, symbolizing the ultimate hope and community for Latter-day Saints to gather in the latter-days, is now for her a mirage, a place founded on ideals that, in her eyes, enabled harmful practices. By questioning the morality of her ancestors' beliefs and actions, she destabilizes the foundation of her identity, casting herself adrift from the pioneer legacy that had been central to her faith. Her love for pioneer stories, you could say, experiences its own trial or its own "great struggle." In similarity to the hosts of *The Faithful Feminists*, then, it seems as if the serial topology of podcasting – repeatedly encountering the dark sides of her pioneer heritage – invites a processual transformation of how personal faith is constructed.

7.6.2 "Their Zion is Not my Stopping Place" – Meeting the Demands of Serial Completion

One could perhaps compare this situation with the "crisis" experienced by Parker and Poll during their second year of podcasting. While the hosts of *The Faithful Feminists* solved their crisis by finding a manageable way for one of them to show up, in effect meeting the demands for serial continuity and coherence,[1108] Hansen Park does so by imagining another ending to the pioneer narrative. As the last sentence in the quote above suggests, there are other places that could be Zion to her – in effect opening up for a continuation in both faith and seriality. The Zion met in the violent stories above is, as

[1107] Hansen Park, "Episode 100: The Final Episode."
[1108] Kelleter, "Five Ways of Looking a Popular Seriality," p. 30, 17.

she explains in the following quote, "not her stopping place." She ends her 100th episode with an impassioned speech. With a voice filled with fervor, she says:

> Hansen Park: I've come to realize that their Zion is not my stopping place. They walked and they bled, and they starved for this, and they stopped their wagons, and they made a home in this principle. I am fortunate that I can climb onto the tracks of their legacy, look at their old wagons, touch the cracked and rotting woods with my hands and look at the broken wheels – I can pick up those reins out of the dirt where they left them. Right here, right now, I pick them up, right now and I get on my wagon, and I take it out of this Zion. This is not the right place for me. This is no Zion for me […] If you've listened to anything in this series, I hope you've learned one thing, that no one on this earth or in heaven above should tell you where to take your wagons. No one but you can tell you where to take your wagons…Only you can stop and say, this is the right place. So, all of you, this is my challenge today, after listening to this, to pack up the things you've learned today, you pack up the things that you've heard in this series, you put them in your wagons and you go to the call that best moves you, and you be not afraid. May we all move towards the holiest history we can muster and may we live our lives with an equal yearning.[1109]

Hansen Park reclaims her ancestral legacy in this quote by redefining the purpose of the pioneer narrative. She acknowledges her ancestors' sacrifices, but while recognizing the physical and emotional toll they suffered, she rejects their destination as not her own, stating, "their Zion is not my stopping place." By describing her metaphorical journey as one in which she picks up her ancestors' abandoned wagon reins and sets out for "the hope of a better Zion," Hansen Park reclaims her spiritual and cultural lineage, shifting its trajectory in a new, self-directed path. Her words suggest that legacy is not about remaining static but about evolving to create a new vision that aligns with one's own values. She challenges her audience to take ownership of their spiritual journeys – "pack up the things you've learned today […] and go to the call that best moves you" – urging them to break away from harmful traditions that have historically led to exclusion, suffering, and misguided loyalty – what she in the same episode describes as a "flawed paradigm…that has given us inherited racism, inherited patriarchal misogyny."[1110] Consequently, Hansen Park imagines a new kind of temporality and movement that allows her to move freely, unbound by her ancestors' tracks. She departs from a fixed, linear narrative and creates in its stead a formula for a dynamic and open-ended faith. Hansen Park thus constructs her personal faith as something that adapts and flourishes through critical reflection and innovative rethinking of foundational narratives.

[1109] Hansen Park, "Episode 100: The Final Episode."
[1110] Hansen Park, "Episode 100: The Final Episode."

The function of the pioneer story in this episode, however, extends beyond repairing the fractures in her faith; it serves to reconcile discrepancies and maintain serial coherence in a narrative that is otherwise unraveling.[1111] When Hansen Park ends the episode in the quote below, it becomes evident that avoiding this unraveling is equally important for the Latter-day Saint concept of journeying.

> Hansen park: I want to thank you so, so much for listening to this series. I mean it. I if I'm going to get emotional, it's about this. I feel like you're my friends. You have been willing to walk this journey with me, which is what we do as Mormons, right, we're a collective body of Saints and regardless of where you stand in the Mormon spectrum or whether you've identified as Mormon or not or whether you've never identified as Mormon, we walked this journey together and we're going to keep on walking this journey. And I really appreciate you putting your faith and trust in me however misguided that was and I apologize that I couldn't fulfill my promise. But I do wish you the best as you take your wagons elsewhere.[1112]

What this quote makes explicit is not only that the podcast has been a "journey" that she and her "friends" or listeners have walked "with" her, but also that this is a "Mormon" practice. Seriality, then, is framed as something that they "do as Mormons," they "walk [the] journey" and they will "keep on walking" it. They may be composed of different beliefs and practices – they are on a "spectrum" – but they travel together. Besides drawing on the pioneer narrative, this rhetoric, I suggest, is reminiscent of the notion of being a "record keeper," a component inherited from the Book of Mormon, where different scriptural personas are depicted as "record keepers" who write their testimonies in respect of their fathers' commandments.[1113] While often highlighted for its brevity, Omni 1:9 illustrates what being a record keeper means: "now I, Chemish, write what few things I write, in the same book with my brother; for behold, I saw the last which he wrote, that he wrote it with his own hand; and he wrote it in the day that he delivered them unto me. And after this manner we keep the records, for it is according to the commandments of our fathers."[1114] In other words, being a record keeper means keeping your forefathers' and family's tradition of writing your personal testimony and thereby upholding an unbroken line of the record. This idea is therefore intimately linked with the practices of both genealogy and giving a testimony, i.e., giving an account of your personal story and your witness of faith. It was professed by the Church's first

[1111] Kelleter, "Five Ways of Looking a Popular Seriality," p. 17.
[1112] Hansen Park, "Episode 100: The Final Episode."
[1113] Steven E. Snow, "The Sacred Duty of Record Keeping," *Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints,* April 2019, www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/2019/04/the-sacred-duty-of-record-keeping?lang=eng, accessed January 31, 2025.
[1114] *Book of Mormon,* 1:9.

prophet – that a record shall be kept among the Saints "continually"[1115] – and has since been an important Latter-day Saint practice.[1116] In 1975 Church President Spencer W. Kimball for example urged teenage members, in a similar spirit, to "get a notebook, my young folks, a journal that will last through all time, and maybe the angels may quote from it for eternity."[1117] In fact, *not* journaling their life may cause them to be disciplined by their heavenly father: "Remember, the Savior chastised those who failed to record important events" he said.[1118] In addition, keeping a record is closely related to the idea of sealing or joining of people. Mormon studies scholar John Durham Peters articulates that "the keeping of records goes together with the joining of peoples," and that "gathering records into one is the same thing as linking people into familial relationships" which is why Smith employs the term "sealing" for both – "a canon of records is at the same time a community of souls."[1119]

Hansen Park and her fellow travelers are, then, to borrow from the Book of Mormon, record keepers; even when those records depart from each other, they are bound to keep them going. While in opposition against the "darkness" surrounding the early practices of plural marriage, the renegotiation of its legacy ironically reproduces a discourse on record keeping closely tied to that very praxis. While she "could not fulfil [her] promise" of making "peace" with history and by "honoring" the "faceless women" of polygamy, she did keep the record going.

7.6.3 "Turning the Mic on Lindsay" – Serial Retrospection on Faith

The intimate connection between her own evolution and the podcast demonstrated earlier is a recurring theme brought up by the host herself. In one episode Hansen Park for example explains that "this podcast isn't just about the story of Mormon polygamy it's about how this girl right here decided to innocently study the topic, and it radically changed her life."[1120] This change is for example addressed through returning episodes where Burlingame "turns the mic on Lindsay." In one of these episodes Hansen Park explains:

> Hansen Park: I get asked questions about myself quite a bit from the podcast and people are wanting to know when I'm going to do an update on where I'm at.

[1115] *Doctrine and Covenants* 21:1; 47:3.
[1116] Durham Peters, "Mormonism and Media."
[1117] Spencer W. Kimball, "The Angels May Quote from It," *Tambuli/Liahona,* June 1977, 17.
[1118] W. Kimball, "The Angels May Quote from It."
[1119] Durham Peters, "Mormonism and Media," p. 419.
[1120] Hansen Park, "Episode 174: Revenge Killings on the Frontier."

> And I think we did, Sara did our interview, an update, gosh, was it two years ago, Sara? I think it's been about two years since Sara interviewed me and wanted to see where I was at the time. And so now we're going to do another follow-up episode.[1121]

There seems to be an assumption, therefore, that Hansen Park is changing her position throughout the podcast – hinting at the processual transformation invited by serial production. And from time to time listeners request to know what position she is occupying. In other words, because Hansen Park gets questions from her listeners on "where" she "is at," she invites Burlingame to interview her. Thus "Turning the Mic on Lindsay" represents the dual affordance of a serial retrospection,[1122] meaning repeatedly addressing the host's personal evolution by constantly looking back at her own development. Because Hansen Park has, as Burlingame describes it, gone through some "really seismic shifts" in her approach, and now "stepped into" a role as a "public historian" they want to give her audience an ability to get a look at that process through Hansen Park's personal experiences.

> Burlingame: I think it's always a good thing to take steps to be more transparent and let you, you know, her listeners, some of you who've been following along on this journey the entire time, give you the opportunity to see what's been guiding some of those choices, what's worked, what hasn't worked. That's a great thing about podcasting, right? Like you have this opportunity to not just have this finished product but really take a journey with somebody.[1123]

This quote, again, makes explicit the discursive framing of seriality through the "journey" witnessed earlier. It explains to us that podcasting is a "journey" that listeners "follow along" with – "that's the great thing" about the medium, Burlingame suggests, it is not just a "finished product" but implies the act of taking "a journey with somebody." Here the podcast's tendency to produce content over time also entangles with its relational aspects. Thus, seriality co-effects with parasocial relationships in a way that makes the podcast host feel a sense of loyalty toward her listeners, which can be compared to the perceived audience reception in the case of *The Faithful Feminists*. Hansen Park herself describes Burlingame as a friend who "hold[s] [her] accountable" and that that is why she "thought it would be good to have Sara to come on."[1124] In other words, documenting or showing how change has happened over time through the seriality of the podcast becomes a part of showing commitment to one's audience. Because some of her followers

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[1121] Hansen Park, "Episode 153: Turning the Mic on Lindsay."
[1122] Kelleter, "Five Ways of Looking a Popular Seriality," p. 18.
[1123] Hansen Park, "Episode 153: Turning the Mic on Lindsay."
[1124] Hansen Park, "Episode 153: Turning the Mic on Lindsay."

have been with her "the entire time," it is a "good thing to take steps to be more transparent."[1125]

When opening up about her "journey," for example, Hansen Park tells of the personal experiences that initially motivated her to start a podcast, such as the anger and "shock" she felt when she found out that Joseph Smith was a polygamist.

> Hansen Park: I had always thought polygamy was that one thing that Brigham Young had done. Then when I found out when I was married when I was 25 that Joseph Smith was a polygamist, I was shocked and that's what led to this obsession, this craving of finding out more information. Yet, I could still, it was painful, and it was awful, and I was angry for a lot of years. Researching the history helped. I don't think that I felt anger about the issue for a long time until I realized how prevalent it is today. The anger wasn't necessarily because it was prevalent. I wasn't mad that it was still on the earth or existing. I think I was mad because I didn't know it. Once you know what that's like to be in the Church and to think that you got this down on lock, that you think that you understand the gospel and that having a testimony and faith is enough and then having your worldview shattered by the history, it's not a fun and comfortable place to experience that again and again. Of course, we do. Of course, that's how we grow.[1126]

When Hansen Park began her podcast, she initially felt that researching history had somewhat mitigated her anger. However, upon discovering the ongoing prevalence of certain practices, her anger resurfaced – not because these practices existed, but because she was previously unaware of them. As she reveals, she thought she had "this down on lock" that she "unders[stood] the gospel" and had a "testimony and a faith," but it was "shattered" by her historical discoveries. It is not necessarily always the history itself that "bothers a lot of Mormons who go through a faith crisis" she adds, but how people respond to it.[1127] When she attempted to discuss these issues within her Mormon family and ward, the responses were dismissive: "that didn't happen," "you're crazy," "you're wicked," or "stay away from it."[1128] Repeatedly confronting these issues was hardly comfortable, then, yet as she concludes in the quote above, "that's how we grow." Here, Hansen Park implies that, despite the discomfort she experienced facing this crisis of faith, it was essential for personal growth, thus mirroring the discourses we have seen so far where hardship and adversity are framed as necessary parts of maturing. While she later locates her first faith crisis already at the founding of the podcast, the first time

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[1125] Hansen Park, "Episode 153: Turning the Mic on Lindsay.".
[1126] Hansen Park, "Episode 103: Year of Polygamy, a Year Later, Part 3."
[1127] Hansen Park, "Episode 153: Turning the Mic on Lindsay."
[1128] Hansen Park, "Episode 153: Turning the Mic on Lindsay."

she refers to it is in episode 74 published in 2015. In a conversation with journalist Sanjiv Bhattacharya, famous for depicting polygamy among Mormon fundamentalists, she says:

> Hansen Park: I'm seeing my own my own upbringing with different eyes now and some things make more sense than then. I realized and I'm more connected, I think Utah Mormons especially, are more connected to fundamentalism than we realize.
>
> Bhattacharya: Do you mean you're more connected in terms that you're now realizing that people that you encountered as colleagues and friends were actually members of the group?
>
> Hansen Park: Yeah, that and just to find out that that there's this whole spectrum of practicing fundamentalists that go to Mormon church and… just the way that our doctrine intersects with their doctrine and, I mean, it's just been this sort of faith crisis of my own to realize that I grew up thinking that we were so different and better but it's just all a matter of degree […][1129]

Discovering through her podcast project that her church has deeper ties to Mormon fundamentalism than she initially realized appears to be a key factor in her "faith crisis." This crisis was already apparent at the start of her project but seemingly reappeared or intensified as she delved into the practice of polygamy among fundamentalist Mormons today. Coupled with the insights from the 100th episode, this suggests that the serial production of *Year of Polygamy* prompted a gradual transformation in her faith. It started with the launch of her project, deepened as she delved into the darker aspects of pioneer narratives, and was further reinforced as she explored the ongoing intersections of her faith with Mormon fundamentalism. Where this leaves Hansen Park on the "Mormon spectrum," however, is a question mostly left unaddressed. She reveals only that between "faithful people" and "ex-Mormons" she "occup[ies] this very unusual spot" where she "kind of ha[s] a foot in both worlds."[1130]

7.6.5 Analytical Summary of Performance and Framing

In the previous part of this subchapter I showed how Hansen Park sought to recover polygamous women's history piece by piece, but that she was unable to keep her initial promise to provide contemporary Latter-day Saint women with "peace" in the process. In the observations made here we can add two things, first that Hansen Park's personal faith was constructed as negatively affected by this, and second that her concluding episode brought a resolution to those unfulfilled aims. A fundamental part of solving

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[1129] Lindsay Hansen Park, "Episode 74: Secrets and Wives with Sanjiv Bhattacharya," *Year of Polygamy,* January 4, 2015.

[1130] Hansen Park Lindsay, "Episode 120: FLDS and Faithful, Part Two," *Year of Polygamy*, March 29, 2017.

this interrupted "journey" meant for the host to step into the pioneer story itself and reinvent it as an open-ended narrative, which also invited a more dynamic faith.

In the 100th episode that ties together polygamist women's biography with Hansen Park's own life writing, the content circulates around the *nodal point* "pioneer narrative." This term also represents an important *discursive field* where Latter-day Saints engage themselves with their pioneer legacy, one which, as Hansen Park demonstrates in this episode, carries significance for members' sense of identity and faith. In theoretical terms, the pioneer narrative made available certain *subject positions*. Before the crisis of this narrative, this position was put in place by various nostalgic memories. Hansen Park highlights *discursive moments* that underscore this influence, such as statements indicating that "pioneer stories... shaped my identity" and were crucial to her sense of "purpose." She recalls from her childhood the vivid imagery of her mother dressed as a "pioneer woman," teaching children to "churn butter." Hansen Park describes these narratives as "faith-promoting," akin to the "legacy movie" that extols the virtues of perseverance through "great struggles" and "great sacrifices." She injects a touch of parody into this revered story, recounting tales where "the oxen and the wagon were stuck in the mud and the baby was dying and buried in the snow," yet "all was well" through "the faith of the pioneer."

The crisis facing these nostalgic memories, and consequently her own faith, emerges clearly in *discursive moments* such as "I began to fear and resent…the pioneer narratives." These stories, once cherished, now appeared "gross and disgusting," depicting "women marching toward their own doom," a path leading to "their own peril and to [hers]." The final gathering place or Zion at the end of the pioneer journey is therefore positioned as an *antagonistic other* where a "flawed paradigm" of "racism" and "misogyny" was established. In essence, the very destination of the pioneer narrative is called into question. This stark shift in perception prompted a profound reevaluation of her identity, encapsulated in her questions: "Who was I?" and "how can I find anymore peace or power in their stories?"

But as the following *discursive moments* make clear, the crisis was resolved through a reinterpretation of the pioneer narrative, with herself cast as the central protagonist. She decisively states, "their Zion is not my stopping place," marking a clear departure from the damaging paradigms the pioneers settled with. Asserting her autonomy, she adds, "I can climb onto the tracks of their legacy," "I can pick up those reins out of the dirt where they left them," and "I get on my wagon," firmly articulating her intent to chart a new course: "take it out of this Zion," because "this is not the right place for me." In pursuit of a "better Zion," she invites her listeners to join this reimagined journey, urging them to "get in your new wagon, and you take it somewhere else." She empowers her

audience to assert their own narrative authority, stressing, "only you can stop and say, this is the right place." She motivates them to "pack up the things that you've heard in this series," "put them in your wagons," and "move towards the holiest history we can muster." She concludes by recognizing the collective effort and shared journey with her listeners: "you have been willing to walk this journey with me, which is what we do as Mormons," and encourages them to "keep on walking this journey."

If we place these sets of discursive moments after each other, we find a *chain of equivalences* itself modeled after the pioneer narrative, which is really an adaption of the conversion story. This follows a story arc or "formula" beginning with a protagonist stably grounded in a particular belief system or worldview, in this instance a recollection of childhood memories and the resilience the remembrance of pioneer saints gave her; followed by a climactic challenge – the "darkness" that she discovers in her close study of polygamist women – and accompanied by an internal conflict – "who am I?" – finally landing in transformation and resolution brought on by imagining the pioneer story as unfinished and continuously moving forward. As such, we find in similarity to the previous parts of this chapter, the importance of imagining and conceptualizing around temporality in a different way.

Through this final phase of resolution, Hansen Park manages – in similarity to Parker and Poll – to solve one of the most important demands a podcast makes, namely, the performance of perpetual renewal. The 100th episode therefore fills a similar role to *The Faithful Feminists*' "A Halfway Sermon" by smoothing out the potential creases caused when her initial promise could not be fulfilled. In doing so, she also retains her position as a "pioneer." Seriality and the Latter-day Saint faith thus seemingly demand of their participants similar things: to continue the "journey." Another narrative/practice reproduced in that episode is that of record keeping. Closely related to the pioneer narrative, but also inherited from the Book of Mormon, this concept holds up life writing as part of a duty among Latter-day Saints to uphold genealogical practices. This means keeping the narrative going or reproducing. The podcast has not only been a "journey" shared by Hansen Park and her "friends" or listeners; it also embodies a distinctly "Mormon" practice. As she puts it, walking the journey together is what "they do as Mormons," and they will "keep on walking." Given that this continued path is entangled with her own narrative continuation of the pioneer story, it arguably frames their shared perseverance and commitment to not only journeying, but ongoing narration.

Hansen Park thus envisions her Mormon identity as a continuum rather than a strict in-or-out dichotomy, enabling her to integrate both the painful and meaningful aspects of the church's history. This reimagined, continuous temporality is both personal and political: it resists pressures to amputate parts of oneself and instead supports an

evolving journey that honors complex identities. Through her podcast, Hansen Park not only models her own transformation but also creates a space for listeners and guests to redefine Mormon identity on their own terms. Both the pioneer journey and its gathering place (Zion), then, become *floating signifiers* open to reconstruction. By taking control over the pioneer legacy, Hansen Park therefore emerges as a forceful contestant within the *discursive field* of Mormonism, reclaiming it by broadening its narrative to include diverse experiences and affirming a path where people can authentically engage with their heritage in a dynamic, inclusive way.

Toward the end of this subchapter, I looked at a recurring type of episode where the host talks more explicitly about her personal developments through the podcast. This example adds to previous points in two ways, by also showing her position as a "podcaster," and by complementing our perspective on her first position as "old Mr. Rogers." Concerning her position as a podcaster, it emerges partly through the podcast's affordance of serial retrospection, where Hansen Park is able to look back at her own development, such as how her view on polygamy changed over the years. When she does that we find similar attachment to the "podcaster" position as we did in the first subchapter. To begin with, the performance of looking back seems in part conditioned by the need to show accountability toward listeners – brought on by parasocial requests that Hansen Park convey her status. In observing how she frames her past self in this performance we also find a retroactively placed position at the very beginning of her podcast, that contrasts a bit from what we previously learnt. If Hansen Park previously occupied the position of the "old Mr. Rogers," committed to deliver "peace," we find here that she initiated the project from a position of "crisis." More specifically, she describes a personal vendetta against the secrecy and shame surrounding polygamy, and that while podcasting/researching the subject mitigated her anger for a while it was also testing to be exposed to the subject "again and again," causing a processual development that eventually resulted in a "faith crisis."

Contrary to the other cases explored in this chapter, however, Hansen Park is comparably silent on her position as a member. We only learn that she is somewhere in-between "faithful" and "ex-Mormon." In analyzing the relationship between Hansen Park and the Church, it is evident that her engagement with faith is nuanced and complex. Unlike *The Faithful Feminists*, where faith eventually transcends the traditional boundaries of the Church and broader Mormonism, and *At Last She Said It*, where faith is reshaped within the institutional borders, Hansen Park navigates a unique course. Her approach to faith appears independent from the institutional church yet remains deeply intertwined with the cultural and historical facets of Mormonism. In this discussion, Hansen Park's "faith" appears to align more with cultural aspects of Mormonism than

with its doctrinal tenets. This alignment is actively constructed through her exploration of Mormon legacies, particularly polygamy, challenging and reinterpreting these narratives while still being part of the broader Mormon cultural fabric.

7.7 Conclusions: Countering Temporal Hegemonies

One of the questions that guided this chapter was *how the podcast conditions the construction and negotiation of feminism and faith*. What I found was that the performance of seriality both enables and troubles the construction and negotiation of feminism and faith. As a part of a capitalist engine to continuously renew and duplicate,[1131] the three podcasts explored here – *The Faithful Feminists*, *At Last She Said It*, and *Year of Polygamy* – assure audiences of regular and recurring new material, be it weekly or monthly. This might on the one hand be enacted and framed in positive terms as enabling a step-by-step exploration or filling of women's voices, and parallel movements among hosts and audiences in exploring history and scripture.[1132] Thus negotiating faith through a feminist perspective is entangled with temporal re-imaginations. On the other hand, however, the pace of seriality may limit deliberate explorations and detailed assessment that for example constitutes an important foundation for feminist exegesis.

Despite its limitations, seriality often serves as a stepping-stone to reimagine time in ways that may seem unwelcome or constrained within the Church. Each case highlights the Church operating within a specific pace or timeline, with podcasts providing a platform for exploring or proposing alternative rhythms and movements. Notably, when time is deliberately constructed, it challenges the temporal hegemonies of the Church. For example, the hosts of *The Faithful Feminists* encourage listeners to "slow down," advocating a deeper, more reflective engagement with scripture. This call to decelerate stands in stark contrast to the rapid and superficial interpretations often perceived as promoted by conventional religious practices. Instead Parker and Poll advocate continuous, cyclical engagement with scripture, akin to acts of "caretaking" and repair. Similarly, the hosts of *At Last She Said It*, Hinckley and Winward, position themselves against the constraints of a silenced past, advocating a present and future where dialogue and personal growth are possible. Moreover, they encapsulate an alternative temporality that values evolution and the fluidity of personal and communal narratives. Finally, Hansen Park highlights the "ghosts" of history while actively working to exorcise them, thereby

[1131] Kelleter, "Five Ways of Looking a Popular Seriality," p. 13.
[1132] Kelleter, "Five Ways of Looking a Popular Seriality," p. 13.

crafting a temporality focused on healing and resolution that extends from the past through the present and into the future.

The second question dealt with in this chapter was *how the podcast conditions the construction of personal faith among its hosts.* An important inference that can be made is that seriality transforms the personal faith of its hosts. The practice of podcasting, of continuous engagement facilitates internal reflection and growth. Enduring or staying in the podcast in all cases implies a change or transformation of one's convictions as a Latter-day Saint or position as a member of the Church. Sometimes such changes result in leaving, or becoming "post-Mormon," other times staying defiantly or being in a "process of staying," and in other instances remaining in an ambiguous in-between position of both "faithful" and "ex." Importantly, these transformations are processual developments, that hinder or dampen the potential of more immediate breaks. Because seriality requires content to keep coming, it demands changes in personal conviction or faith to be managed in a way that allows for smooth continuation.

But in so doing, seriality cultivates a reflection on what being a Latter-day Saint means. As the hosts reflect on past challenges, particularly those involving perseverance through repeated returns, these experiences are recast as essential steps in their spiritual development. Notably, this spiritual evolution is cast through certain narrative formulas, such as the journey, the conversion narrative and the pioneer narrative, all of which follow the same story arc centering on growth through adversity. Through such articulations, the podcast serves as a pivotal medium that challenges the prevailing temporal hegemony inherent in the construction of personal faith. The Church present a binary choice, compelling individuals to fully align with their doctrines – effectively an "in or out" scenario. In contrast, the podcast creates a space that nurtures the dynamic transformation of faith. It acts as a forum for critical reflection and reassessment of one's beliefs, encouraging a more fluid and evolving relationship with faith. This platform not only facilitates a deeper engagement with personal and communal religious narratives but also allows for a reconceptualization of faith as an ongoing process of personal growth and understanding. By doing so, it challenges the rigid temporal structures imposed by traditional religious paradigms and promotes a more inclusive and adaptive approach to spiritual life.

8. Conclusion

In this dissertation I have explored the significance of podcasting for feminists within The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints through a qualitative case study of three United States podcasts: *The Faithful Feminists*, *At Last She Said It*, and *Year of Polygamy*. In the opening pages, readers learnt of the risks that come with publicly questioning the Church.[1133] There is a long history of media precarity within this organization, where open critics risk being chastised or even excommunicated.[1134] Given this background, one could ask why Feminist Latter-day Saints seem to defy the risks of public speech by using the podcast, a medium comparably more precarious than others. This inquiry led me to formulate the dissertation's general research aim, which was to explore the technological affordances of podcasting for Feminist Latter-day Saints. This aim was pursued through four research questions:

(1) What forms of community and host-listener relationship does the podcast foster?
(2) What types of interaction does the recording format of the podcast facilitate?
(3) How does the podcast condition the construction and negotiation of feminism and faith?
(4) How does the podcast condition the construction of personal faith among its hosts?

In the clarification of this aim I defined "technological affordance" as a convergence between (1) the technological and communicational dispositions of the medium and (2) the discourses attributed to it. Through a revised version of Heidi Campbell's theory of Religious Social Shaping of Technology,[1135] I referred to these two aspects respectively as "performed media" and "discursive framing." By deciding how we record, store and transmit, "performed media" is concerned with the temporal and spatial qualities of certain media environments,[1136] and how the physical and communicative capacities of technologies affect and change how people perform themselves and relate to each other. Based on this I suggested that podcasting consists of different "topologies" i.e., certain

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[1133] Holpuch, "Mormon Church Excommunicates Kate Kelly over women's advocacy work."
[1134] Bushman, "Mormon Feminism After 1970."
[1135] Campbell, *When Religion Meets New Media.*
[1136] Bollmer, *Materialist Media Theory: An Introduction,* p. 79.

spatial and temporal dispositions.[1137] "Discursive framing" suggests that media technology is not only used or practiced but constructed or made meaningful through the discursive strategies that frame and validate it.[1138] The discursive framing of technology such as a podcast therefore rests on articulatory practices[1139] that bind together and make sense of communicating in a particular way. In doing so religious individuals and groups construct both themselves and their community.

This theoretical basis was operationalized through a bipartite analytical framework. Under the framework of "performed media," I examined three technological topologies. In the first topology, "parasocial relationships,"[1140] I investigated the type of interaction, and consequently the relationships, that hosts and audiences build with each other through the podcast's interactive channels and websites. Through the second topology, "liveness,"[1141] I studied the effect of the immediacy and spontaneity that characterizes the podcast as a recording method and communicative situation. Through the last topology, "seriality,"[1142] I explored the conditions imposed on the participants and production based on the podcast's episodic traits, i.e., the fact that a podcast records content over time and through a schematic frequency. These topologies also interact with each other and are influenced by the podcast's integration with other media platforms such as Instagram, which is highlighted through the term "transmediality."[1143] Under the second framework, "discursive framing," I studied the discourses that indirectly and directly attributed legitimacy and significance to the podcast, by applying discursive theoretical concepts: "nodal points," "discursive moments," "chains of equivalences," "floating signifiers," "field of discursivity," "antagonistic other," "subject positions," and "hegemony," all of which in various ways describe how meaning and significance are constructed through language.[1144]

In the concluding pages of this dissertation, I will first outline my key findings. I will then discuss their contributions to three specific areas of research within Digital Religion: (1) the intersections of Mormonism, media and gender, (2) women's agency, and (3) podcast studies. Finally, I will explore the theoretical implications of these findings for the field of Digital Religion and suggest avenues for future research.

[1137] Kitzmann, *Saved From Oblivion: Documenting the Daily from Diaries to Web Cams,* p. 4.
[1138] Campbell, *When Religion Meets New Media.*
[1139] Laclau & Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy. Toward a Radical Democratic Politics,* p. 105.
[1140] Dibble, Hartmann, Rosaen, "Parasocial Interaction and Parasocial Relationship: Conceptual Clarification and a Critical Assessment of Measures;" Zuraikat, "The Parasocial Nature of Podcast."
[1141] Euritt, *Podcasting as an Intimate Medium.*
[1142] Kelleter, "Five Ways of Looking a Popular Seriality."
[1143] Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide.*
[1144] Laclau & Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy. Toward a Radical Democratic Politics*, p. 106, 127–129, 129–131, 143–144, 115.

8.1 The Counter-Hegemonic Affordances of Podcasting

In analyzing the podcast from media and discursive perspectives, I discovered that it functions as a platform for articulating counter-hegemonic positions, enabling the production and dissemination of alternative viewpoints on the Latter-day Saint tradition. These viewpoints challenge dominant narratives within the Church, across communal relationships, communicative dynamics, doctrinal engagement, and faith. The unique spatial and temporal topology of the podcast, alongside the diverse discourses it intersects, encourages a nuanced reflection also on the temporal and spatial dimensions of faith and resistance. Through this medium, Mormon Feminists are not only expanding the boundaries of their faith, however, but ultimately redefining what it means to be a Latter-day Saint, effectively reshaping the identity and perceptions associated with their faith. In the following text, I will summarize what this means in relation to each research question.

RQ1: What forms of community and host-listener relationship does the podcast foster?

In chapter five I demonstrated how the podcast's affordance enables Feminist Latter-day Saints to create what they perceive as caring and advocative communities, where hosts build intimate and friendly relationships with their listeners. Leveraging both the podcast audio and digital and social media platforms, podcast hosts invite and receive outreach from their audience through voicemails, Instagram comments and blogposts, and frequently reciprocate by inviting listeners as guests or reading messages on-air, thus embodying roles akin to custodians of their community's welfare. Through these para-social relationships they establish themselves as emotional authorities, a legitimacy cultivated over time through consistent engagement and trust-building via the medium's seriality. These interactions invariably influence the podcast's content, often reflecting and responding to the personal adversities shared by listeners, for example by releasing specific episodes such as "Processing Polygamy" found in *The Faithful Feminists* podcast.

While using pre-existing structures of communication, these "safe spaces" are not only performed but discursively constructed. While resilience on behalf of their listeners varied in form and articulation, the use of social and religious imaginary such as "soft chairs," and "triage" allows Latter-day Saint Feminists to frame the podcast as a soft, intimate, and caring place where listener experiences that have been marginalized within the conventional ecclesiastical structures are validated and responded to. These narratives challenge the perceived "corporate" ethos of the Church, which is critiqued for prioritizing "efficiency" over emotional connection, thereby creating a dichotomy be-

tween the podcast as an intimate confidant and the Church as a distant, bureaucratic entity. This positions the podcasters as alternative providers of pastoral care, thus addressing a perceived ministering deficit within the Church. In conclusion, the establishment of safe spaces is a counter-hegemonic act that actively renegotiates the boundaries of the Latter-day Saint tradition and dominating discourses on care and ministering.

RQ2: What types of interactions are facilitated by the podcasts recording format?

In chapter six I concluded that liveness enables and enforces a setting that is messy and prone to spontaneity and informality, and that this provides interactions and discourses where the communicative patterns of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints can be revaluated and reframed. My central thesis posited that liveness operates as a counter-hegemonic communicative practice juxtaposed against the Church. In this oppositional framing, the podcast is characterized as fostering "messy," "intuitive," and "exposing" communication, with progressive and therapeutic qualities; while the Church is depicted as fostering "rainbows, unicorns and lollipops" and a "vending-machine" type of faith, in extension labeling it as enforcing stagnating and repressive forms of interaction. In line with this dichotomy, the discourse surrounding and permeating liveness is enriched by metaphors of advancement and evolution, using terms like "growth," "stretching" and "maturity" to contrast with the perceived regression and static nature of the Church. Through its therapeutic attributes, the podcast engages with challenging truths, and necessary, albeit uncomfortable, dialogues. Rather than succumbing to "toxic positivity" or suppressing "truth" until it comes out "sideways," Mormon Feminist podcasters are making a case of upholding themselves in "holy discomfort" and "faithful disagreement." By looking at the details of how these podcasts perform and construct the various aspects of liveness we learned not only how recycled issues such as priesthood and polygamy continue to evolve among contemporary Mormon Feminists but also how the communicational formats through which they are expressed matter.

RQ3: How does the podcast condition the construction and negotiation of feminism and faith?

In chapter seven I demonstrated that podcasting both enables and troubles the construction and negotiation of feminism and faith, with the serial format playing a pivotal role. This format not only promises step-by-step explorations but also demands continuation and endurance, thus deeply entwining the engagement with feminist perspectives and women's emancipation with the question of time. Beginning with its promises, seriality often serves as a tool for reimagining time in ways that are perceived as restrictive or problematic within the Church. This means that applying feminist perspectives or more broadly engaging with questions of women's emancipation meant thinking

about and reformulating temporal restrictions perceived as inherent to their Church. Each podcast highlights how both the Church and the podcasts operate within distinct rhythms or timelines, with the podcasts offering a space to explore or discuss alternative temporalities. For instance, in *The Faithful Feminists*, the *Come Follow Me* manual created by the Church to instruct members in their scripture studies, is critiqued for its bias in both content and structure. Parker notes that patriarchy not only "shows up in the text" but also shapes "the way [they] read and study the text," reinforcing a fragmented and hurried pace. In response, the hosts encourage listeners to "slow down" their reading and engage in more present and immersive experiences, thus suggesting that a feminist reclaiming of scripture must challenge Church-imposed schedules. In the *At Last She Said It* podcast, negotiating feminism and faith is partially constructed as having to do with abilities to move dynamically through faith – especially after the faith-crisis that feminists typically describe themselves as going through – and women's current inability to do so. In Church, they encounter constraints and inertia, whereas in the podcast they are encouraged to engage in an active, dynamic faith journey. This temporal perspective presents faith not as a fixed or immutable condition but as an ongoing narrative, enabling women to accept and appreciate the fluid and indefinite aspects of their spiritual journeys. Constructing and negotiating feminism and faith within the *Year of Polygamy* podcast centers around honoring the voices and influence of historical women, which the episodic nature of the podcast allegedly supports. By encountering the historical portraits of women who participated in polygamy in a step-by-step manner, host and listeners together counter their previous "erasure," in effect "exorcising" the "ghost" of polygamy and bringing contemporary Latter-day Saint women "peace."

Moving on to the potential ramifications of this format, while seriality at first glance seems well suited for the type of "herstories" approach found in all three podcasts, i.e., searching for and amplifying women's voices, it also comes with challenges. It enables Latter-day Saint Feminists to continually fill the blanks of women's stories, in both history, scripture and church culture, yet imposes a certain pace and a demand for closure that the herstories approach may not survive. "Slowing down" to immerse oneself in herstories is disabled by the podcast's weekly schedule, which demands a hurried pace. Also, promising "peace" to contemporary Latter-day Saint women by continually adding historical portrayals of the women who participated in polygamy, is impaired when those stories often entail subordination and pain – which the podcast through its promise of perpetual renewal must continue to explore. Hence while hegemonic timeframes are discursively re-articulated and resisted, technology occasionally poses a threat to the feminist ethos of expansive and dynamic approaches to faith.

RQ4: How does the podcast condition the construction of personal faith among its hosts?

In the second part of chapter seven, I showed how the podcast both conditions and enables the personal faith of Latter-day Saint Feminists to evolve and change. In extension of the above results, seriality not only produces content over time but also necessitates continuity and perseverance from its participants, which causes their positions as Latter-day Saints to change. This transformation has two important aspects. First, revisiting the topics of their podcasts – whether scripture or church history – to educate their audience, hosts naturally accumulate knowledge and legitimacy over time. Parker and Poll, for instance, began without formal theological training. However, through ordering a substantial collection of feminist theology books, studying the material, and consistently creating accessible content for their listeners, they became proficient in feminist theological practice. Examining their own podcast archives also allows podcast hosts to reflect on their personal and professional growth, leading to insights about their evolution. Parker and Poll, for example, describe moments of reaching a "fuller self" and feeling "emboldened." Likewise, Hinckley and Winward acknowledge the pedagogical value of articulating their thoughts and opinions, noting how they've grown increasingly "comfortable" addressing controversial or challenging topics.

Second, a repeated return to the subject of one's podcast can initiate both a process of leaving and a process of staying. It is a "process" because like *The Faithful Feminists* podcast showcases, seriality conditions its participants to endure or "show up" even when the project does not feel "lifegiving" anymore. Parker and Poll, for instance, face a crisis but choose to keep "showing up," with the "A Halfway Sermon" episode serving as a blend of embracing vulnerability and finding a "bearable" way to persist. Similarly, *Year of Polygamy*'s 100th episode appears to address the unresolved challenge of "exorcizing" the "ghost of polygamy" by reinterpreting the end of the pioneer narrative. In both of these cases the podcast becomes a means to either leave and identify as "post-Mormon" or remain in a grey zone between "ex" and "faithful." For others the podcast becomes a means of continuously working to stay – as the *At Last She Said It* duo phrases it, they are in a "process of staying." Despite the outcome however – staying or leaving – there is a general tendency to speak of this process as a "journey" and/or "conversion." While Parker and Poll use it to describe their "path of spirituality over institution," Hinckley and Winward use it to claim Mormonism as a "path" and in effect podcasting as a "process of conversion."

In conclusion, the podcast emerges as a crucial medium that disrupts the traditional temporal hegemony shaping personal faith within the Church, which often presents a binary, all-or-nothing choice to its followers. This rigid dichotomy can force individuals

into the painful position of having to cut off parts of their spiritual heritage to adhere to institutional expectations. In stark contrast, podcasts offers an environment that supports the dynamic evolution of faith.

8.2 Contribution to Previous Research

These results add to the findings of previous studies in several ways. In my exploration of podcasting among Feminist Latter-day Saints, I have been indebted to the research on Mormonism, digital media, and gender that came before me. Particularly valuable has been the incitement I found in Haglund and Feller's work to sensitize my research to the religious context to which these podcasts belong.[1145] In relation to this field of research, my findings add more specifically to the work of Finnigan and Ross,[1146] and in extension Quincy and Patterson.[1147] The results presented in chapter six on liveness support Finnigan and Ross's observation that while Mormon Feminists often revisit earlier issues, digital media may facilitate their evolution. I add to their thesis, that podcasting not only revisits and reframes traditional issues but also introduces new ones, with a particular focus on communication. Mormon Feminists continue to address key religious concepts such as leadership and polygamy, but with a pronounced emphasis on how they are embedded within communicative practices and norms. Experiences of Church as a culture of obedience and certainty seem to result in a feminism where *how* to communicate becomes prioritized on the same level as *what* is communicated about. A feminist critique of the Church, then, is not only a re-negotiation of doctrines explicitly dealing with issues of gender – such as women in leadership positions or the feminine divine – but also a critique of the format of communication. This partially explains the political significance of technologies such as podcast liveness and underscores why, echoing Finnigan and Ross, the medium is crucial for the evolution of how Mormon Feminism is communicated.

The same results presented in chapter six also contribute to research addressing the issue of certainty and doubt among Latter-day Saints, found for example in the works of Quincy and Patterson.[1148] The culture of knowing and certainty, of obedience and

[1145] Haglund, "Blogging the Boundaries. Mormon Mommy Blogs and the Construction of Mormon Identity"; Feller, "A Moderate Mormon Manifesto: Mormon Feminism, Agency and Internet Blogging."

[1146] Finnigan & Ross, "I'm a Mormon Feminist: How Social Media Revitalized and Enlarged a Movement."

[1147] Quincy & Patterson Sara M., "Mormonism's First Bad Girl: Lucy Harris and the Gendering of Faith and Doubt in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints."

[1148] Quincy & Patterson Sara M., "Mormonism's First Bad Girl: Lucy Harris and the Gendering of Faith and Doubt in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints."

censuring seen not only in the emic stories explored here but also in previous research depicting the past and contemporary history of the Church, tells us why communication becomes a first order of business for its feminist members and why liveness is politically significant. As Quincy and Patterson show, certainty in religious conviction has historically aligned with ideal femininity, while skepticism or demands for evidence are disparaged as traits of the "bad girl." Based on this, I suggest that contemporary Mormon Feminist podcasters are breaching prescribed gender roles by doubting and being "messy" on-air. Ambiguity and doubt, then, play important roles as strategies for subversion. The podcasts explored here shows that ambivalence – both actively upholding oneself in questions and doubts and framing doubt as virtuous – has a central value in challenging the language of certainty perceived as dominating church culture. Thus, ambiguity is extracted for its communicational benefits and becomes especially meaningful when practiced and imagined in a setting such as the one experienced by Latter-day Saint Feminists where communication is perceived as highly confined.

If we turn to research on digital media and women's agency, Lövheim's call for more critical and nuanced perspectives has been particularly inspiring.[1149] While many aspects of this dissertation actualize her critique, the focus on seriality created a more explicit opening to reflect further on whether women are merely "empowered" by media.[1150] That the technological affordance of seriality occasionally complicates the ambitions of religious feminists is demonstrative of that. The situation becomes even more intricate when considering the dynamic and layered nature of Latter-day Saint Feminists' construction of their personal faith. First, positions that are enabled evolve from for example "committed," to "spiritual," to "Post-Mormon." And second, initial positions that are enabled are framed and *re*framed through later episodes. On some occasions "committed" was for example layered with a more critical attitude of being naive or "cute," for thinking feminism and faith could be balanced in a church context. On other occasions, previous resolution was later layered with disillusionment and "faith crisis." The ability to frame positions retroactively, as humans generally do when thinking back to past selves, makes the question of being "enabled" problematic, simply because the position or identity being enabled is different depending on which temporal context is referenced.

Finally, my study diverges from existing podcast research in both results and theoretical approach. First, my research reaches different conclusions about the podcast's significance for alternative communities. While Laughlin found that it was the asynchronous recording aspect of podcasting that enabled black evangelicals more protected

[1149] Lövheim, "Gender and Agency in Digital Religion."
[1150] Lövheim, "Gender and Agency in Digital Religion," p. 247.

or "enclaved" spaces,[1151] I found that it was the opposite case for Feminist Latter-day Saints. In other words it was the "liveness" inherent in the recording process, a feature many podcasts use to promote a sense of "co-presence," that made podcasting meaningful and possible to interpret as counter hegemonic. A possible inference could therefore be that our research collectively illustrates how different components of podcast technology hold varying levels of significance for groups with diverse social and religious backgrounds. Second, while previous studies have had a methodological emphasis on content analysis, exemplified by Fekete's and Knippel's work on ex-evangelical podcasts,[1152] as well as Lundström and Lundström's podcast ethnography,[1153] I have accentuated what can be gained by an added focus on the podcast's technological and communicational format. Given this discussion's proximity to broader theoretical premises within Digital Religion, I will continue to explore the implications of this shift in focus in the subsequent section, which delves into theoretical explorations.

8.3 Theoretical Exploration

The purpose statement reiterated earlier included a clarification of what it means to study a podcast's "technological affordance." As previously defined, this term underscores a dual inquiry into the podcast's technological and communicational capacities alongside its discursive framing. Recognizing that existing frameworks were insufficient to fully support this exploration, I sought to develop a new theoretical approach to media – specifically podcasting – within the field of Digital Religion. I have addressed this task progressively along the way, beginning with a critique of prevailing theoretical premises in Digital Religion discussed in chapter two, and advancing in chapter three with the development of the revised Religious Social Shaping of Technology (RSST) model. In this section, I will assess the theoretical and methodological effectiveness of this model.

(1) One of the issues I encountered in my review of theoretical perspectives within Digital Religion was its omission of media's performativity. While it encompasses a variety of theoretical approaches and interests, the technological and communicational dispositions of media have not been a central focus for scholars in the field. Sometimes a focus on technology has even been advised against.[1154] The original RSST for example positioned itself against "technological determinism," arguing that it presents religious values

[1151] Laughlin, *Redeem All. How Digital Life is Changing Evangelical Culture*, p. 143.
[1152] Fekete & Knippel, "The Devil You Know: An Exploration of Virtual Religious Deconstruction Communities."
[1153] Lundström & Poletti Lundström, "Podcast Ethnography."
[1154] Tsuria, "Digital Divide in Light of Religion, Gender, and Women's Digital Participation."

as "subservient to the forces of mass media" which hinders a closer scrutiny of how religious communities adopt media "in the light of their values."[1155] The outcome of these dissuasions, I observed, is that they disentangle humans from their media environments, portraying individuals as oriented around rather than through technology. This perspective not only risks depicting religious expressions as detached from their media contexts, however, but also suggests that the only way to study media's significance is by examining elicited data. It implies that scholars must venture offline or backstage to uncover the meanings embedded in digital media. While this method provides rigorous accounts of people's thoughts and reflections post- or pre- media production, it may not comprehensively capture how meaning is dynamically produced through performance. Countering this trend, the revised RSST expands the possibilities for exploring how the significance of digital media evolves – not solely through media content, but from the interplay between content and format. For example, the observations made in chapter five show that interactive spaces such as comment sections and voicemails foster intimate and friendly host-listener relationships, so called parasocial relationships, but that such relationality is also invited by discourses drawing on religious covenants to care or minister. Thus, the podcast affords qualities both through its own technological dispositions and the religious values attached to it by its participants. In chapter six, furthermore we found that the spontaneity and mobility of liveness has the potential to invite unscripted, informal performances, even mistakes or unanticipated interruptions. These conducts put participants in vulnerable or sometimes delicate situations, fostering reflections on the challenges and potential rewards of such communicative situations. This reflection intertwines both the adoption and resistance to particular religious beliefs and practices. For instance, the podcast is framed as positively "messy,"[1156] and as cultivating virtues of "holy discomfort."[1157] This framing suggests that the Holy Ghost is more accessible in these spaces than within what is perceived as the stagnant and suppressive communication patterns of the Church. Similarly, chapter seven demonstrated how seriality affords both by conditioning its participants to repeatedly "show up,"[1158] and by inviting certain religious narratives. These narratives, the journey,[1159] con-

[1155] Campbell, *When Religion Meets New Media*, p. 43.
[1156] M. Hinckley & Winward, "We're Not Afraid of Messiness"; M. Hinckley & Winward, "Episode 001: It's Complicated."
[1157] M. Hinckley & Winward, "Episode 82: Holy Discomfort."
[1158] Parker & Poll, "Our Final Episode (A Goodbye)."
[1159] Parker & Poll, "2022 Introduction – Old Testament"; Parker & Poll, "Our Final Episode (A Goodbye)."

version[1160] and pioneer narrative[1161] all follow the same story arc centering on growth through adversity. The revised RSST approach invites us to make two reflections about this: To begin with, the serial format itself brings about a performance of endurance due to its demands of renewal and continuation and possibly invites its hosts to reflect on the meaning and challenges to that repetitive and forward movement – each episode for example corresponding to a step on a path. In other words, the format conditions individuals to make certain analogies. Additionally, the serial format gains its meaning by appearing in and appealing to a religious context where the conversion narrative or the journey is highly valued, making the endurance of it spiritually significant or meaningful. Remodeling the RSST approach thus allowed me to retain Campbell's suggestion that technology is framed and validated through discourse,[1162] while simultaneously taking into consideration the podcast's own performativity. This approach underscores the importance of the media itself as an active participant in the construction and dissemination of religious knowledge, challenging the notion that direct interaction with users is the only path to understanding the impact of digital media on religious practices.

(2) A related issue is that in approaching media's significance for religious groups, theoretical models sometimes assume a priori perspectives about community. Campbell's theory advises scholars studying how technology and media are used among religious groups and individuals to familiarize themselves with the core values and traditions of these groups.[1163] While this advice is fundamentally sound, it may inadvertently risk portraying these values and traditions as static and essentialist, whereas they are, in reality, continuously negotiated and dynamically constructed. The revised model enabled me to adopt a more dynamic view on community that contrasts with the risk of essentialism. Discourse Theory in particular helps illuminate communities in the making, which means they are constantly articulated and re-articulated through various discursive constellations. The communities materializing through the podcast are both conditioned by media to emerge for example in the caring and advocative performance they do but must also be actively imagined and constructed by their participants as such. Approaching podcast communities as discursively articulated helps counter the descriptive and, in effect essentializing, approaches to media's significance. Instead of describing caring and advocative communities as "safe spaces,"[1164] for example, and thereby assuming or taking

[1160] M. Hinckley & Winward, "Episode 104: The Process of Staying"; M. Hinckley & Winward, "Episode 105: The Process of Staying…A Few More Thoughts – BONUS."

[1161] Hansen Park, "Episode 100: The Final Episode."

[1162] Campbell, *When Religion Meets New Media*, p. 62.

[1163] Campbell, *When Religion Meets New Media*, p. 60–62.

[1164] Romero Walker, "Digital Discussions among Women Members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Vulnerability in Private Facebook Groups Grounded in Motherhood," p. 200;

for granted emic labels given to media by their users, I have posited that communities are counter-hegemonically constructed, and that the phrase "safe space" is a part of their articulatory practices.[1165] Moreover, Discourse Theory enables us to identify the importance of binaries in such constructions. As demonstrated throughout this study, podcast communities come into effect through dichotomies like caring vs. not-so-caring, progressive vs. stagnating, therapeutic vs. suppressive, speaking vs. muted, forward vs. backward, dynamic vs. immovable, and so on. The revised RSST model thus enabled me to heed the call made by scholars such as Clark-Parsons and Rosenfeld and Noterman on the "safe space" as a social imaginary that must be actively constructed rather than something pre-existing and static. As the latter suggested, and as my results demonstrate, such a focus reveals an underlying "paradox" which is that "cultivating them includes foregrounding social differences and binaries (safe–unsafe, inclusive–exclusive)."[1166]

(3) This discussion has effects also for the question of women's agency. Adding to my review of the theoretical landscape of Digital Religion, I identified previous research as attributing intentionality to women's agency, with the consequence of furthering approaches that overlook both the materiality and agency of technology, and the constructed nature of what media affords. In the introduction to this dissertation I suggested that Lövheim's call for a critical reevaluation of agency[1167] provides essential insights that can profoundly enrich the theoretical frameworks and methodological approaches in our research. However, while I acknowledged the importance of this perspective, my approach diverged from some of its assumptions. Adding to Lövheim, I critiqued previous research on agency, challenging its emphasis not just on "empowerment"[1168] but also its dependence on "intentionality."[1169] The problem with this approach is that it instills a delimitation to the conscious cultivation of self.[1170] Besides the omission of media performativity already addressed, another consequence of this is that researchers limit their analysis to descriptions of women's emic portrayals or "own voices" and therefore neglect an equally important subject which is how their speech is discur-

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Fekete & Knippel, "The Devil You Know: An Exploration of Virtual Religious Deconstruction Communities," p. 165

[1165] Parker & Poll, "Conference Care Kit"; M. Hinckley & Winward, "Episode 053: We're Good at Showing People the Door."

[1166] Heather & Noterman, "Safe Space: Toward a Reconceptualization," p. 1346.

[1167] Lövheim, "Gender and Agency in Digital Religion."

[1168] Lövheim, "Gender and Agency in Digital Religion," p. 247.

[1169] Lövheim says that "in order to bring out the variety and complexity of women's religious agency, we need a sensitivity to how 'the ways in which women understand their world – what they are capable of – may lead to *intentional* actions of conformity or resistance, both of which should be considered as agency,'" in Lövheim, "Gender and Agency in Digital Religion," p. 246

[1170] As seen in Mahmood, *Politics of Piety. The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject,* p. 136.

sively conditioned. This is true also for podcast research which similarly adopts insider terminology to describe media.

Problematizing agency, while culminating in my theoretical remodeling, began already in my definition of technological affordance as dual. Instead of identifying affordance as something that enables and empowers women, it locates the capacity – what technology is "good for"[1171] – within both the technology they use and the discursive repertoires available to them through their religious context. The latter aspect of this definition has enabled me to refine discussions on agency by viewing it as contextually based and, crucially, without presenting women's subjective descriptions as factual representations of media itself. I find myself drawing parallels to Karl Morrison's distinction between two different accounts of conversion, the "thing felt" (the conversion experience) and the "thing made" (the narrative explaining the experience).[1172] One could for pedagogical purposes borrow this terminology to describe media affordances. With a focus on discourse, I have emphasized the differences between affordance as "felt" and affordance as "made" or constructed. To see media as "empowering" or "safe" is to have constructed a narrative whereby moments of engaging with media emerge retrospectively as positively enabling. It is the discourse and narrative that justify and validate the importance of media for women who feel neglected or marginalized in their religious tradition. Consequently, it is important for scholars to approach this type of "empowering" paradigm with caution. While individuals recounting their media experiences may perceive them as independently existing realities, religious scholars should strive to critically assess and avoid adopting the assumptions inherent to such essentialism. Where positive media affordance is witnessed as an actual event for the user, then, it is not the event but the discourse and narrative about it, that creates affordance from the revised RSST model's point of view. This does not take away from signifying media as transformative, however. Both the technological dispositions of media and the continuous telling and re-telling of positive affordances may allow the individual to experience self-transformation. It is thus not the perceived event itself – that media is actually "safe" – but the performance and framing of it as such that causes potential change. For example, some podcasters stay despite lacking the will to do so, only to perceive/frame it later as an act that refined them. Hence, after finding themselves embedded in seriality – conditioned to take up the posture of enduring over time – they construct the durability of podcasting as a challenging yet meaningful act.

Despite the benefits of this revised RSST model, aspects of it merit deeper reflection and could be enhanced in future studies. Notably, the relationship between content and

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[1171] Kozinets, *Netnography: The Essential Guide to Qualitative Social Media Research,* p. 117.
[1172] Referenced in Szpiech, *Conversion and Narrative. Reading and Religious Authority in Medieval Polemic*, p. 3.

format deserves further attention in a more detailed examination. This is not to suggest that clear boundaries should be established between them, but rather that their points of intersection require careful consideration. A clear example of this is the role of narratives, which, although categorized under what I term "discursive framing," also significantly shape and structure the expressions of those who articulate them. There is, in other words, a fluidity between performed and framed media, that must be reflected upon. The theoretical exploration presented here is therefore not an exhaustive discussion on how we can theorize on media in Digital Religion, and more specifically religious podcasts, but a contribution meant to inspire further conversation.

8.4 Looking Ahead

Looking at the results of this study in the rearview mirror, I want to take a moment to imagine possible ways forward. To begin with, while this analysis has covered many aspects of podcasting among Feminist Latter-day Saints, several areas still warrant further investigation. Because my focus has been intentionally directed toward performed media – an area that required more targeted attention – the ways in which podcasting extends into the offline world have not been explored in this study. While I have criticized the romanization of elicited data and hope to have spurred other scholars to think further on the spatiotemporal materialism of media,[1173] I do not reject the importance of how such topologies are affected by and affect offline environments. A possible subject for future research could be to scrutinize the ways that hosts and listeners alike extend the podcast into both unofficial and church environments. In that scenario, the theoretical model discussed above would require additional reflection on how the spatial and temporal topologies of media compare to data gathered in offline environments.

Another intriguing topic that emerged during the writing process, but could not be developed further in this context, is the reception of popular Feminist Latter-day Saint podcasts. The *Year of Polygamy* podcast in particular is one of the most well-known and talked about podcasts in the Latter-day Saint context – yet has received no scholarly attention. Reviews of the podcast showcase its profound effect on its listeners: while some find it therapeutic, others report leaving the Church because of it. Additionally, I have personally encountered members who describe this podcast as contributing to significant membership loss within the Church and sparking discussions on how to effectively communicate church history to young people, who are particularly influenced by online content. We also know that the Church started publicly addressing polygamy

[1173] Bollmer, *Materialist Media Theory: An Introduction,* p. 79.

around the same time that this podcast entered the scene. This provokes the question of how podcasts – and in extension other popular media that may be perceived as controversial – are received by members but also managed/approached in everyday institutional church settings. A study of reception would be especially interesting given the precarity of media representation discussed in the opening of this dissertation – and could be valuable for the theoretical development toward understanding institutional approaches to media currently being developed by scholars such as Heidi Campbell.[1174]

An additional avenue for continued reflection that I had to abandon due to the scope of my project is the broader use of life writing among Feminist Latter-day Saints. The significance of such a study goes beyond podcasting. There is an entire archive of blogposts and a continuously evolving social media environment where life writing – and particularly the narration of feminist awakenings, the grief and struggle thereof – makes a repeated return. Within such life writing, ambiguity and doubt play an important role. While ambiguity has been addressed from theological points of view,[1175] it would have been feasible also to address it through the perspective of feminist literary critique. If we view the narration of their lives as life writing – a theoretical term infusing previous autobiographical studies with poststructural and postmodern insights – it is possible to attribute significance to this ambiguity without recognizing it as an essence or mode of being. Thus, such a project would allow for a de-essentializing of Latter-day Saint Feminists' "voices," and make them comparative to how women have written about their lives historically, and especially how feminists have constructed their resistance by adopting a self that is ambiguous and fragmentary.

I also noticed varied portrayals of care and advocacy by Feminist Latter-day Saints, sparking interest in how gender is performed and constructed among questioning and former Latter-day Saint women. Prior research on former Latter-day Saints suggests that motives for disaffiliation are distinctly gendered; that women often depart due to gender inequality and that their exit narratives have a notable focus on authenticity.[1176] No one has however studied gender in relation to how deconversion performances are mediated. Additionally, many female ex-Mormon content creators, such as Alyssa Grenfell[1177] and Hayley Rawle,[1178] who have recently risen to prominence, seem to vary in their performances. Grenfell, producing content on Youtube, Instagram and TikTok, primarily

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[1174] Heidi Campbell, *Digital Creatives and the Rethinking of Religious Authority*, (Oxon: Routledge, 2021.)

[1175] Kline, "Mormon Feminist Blogs and Heavenly Mother. Spaces for Ambivalence and Innovation in Practice and Theology."

[1176] Gull, Smith, & Cragun, "Outcast Women: Gender and Authenticity in Ex-Mormon Women's Disaffiliation Narratives."

[1177] Alyssa Grenfell, www.instagram.com/alyssadgrenfell/, accessed March 21, 2025.

[1178] Hayley Rawle, www.instagram.com/girlscamppodcast/, accessed March 21, 2025.

concentrates on exposing historical and contemporary facts about The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Her content is information-driven, aiming to shed light on the Church's doctrines and practices through a factual lens. In contrast, Rawle creates content with a more personal appeal. She often invites guests to engage in intimate conversations about their personal experiences within the Church. These variations among female ex-Mormons highlight significant differences between women's deconversion experiences rather than differences between men and women. Exploring these differences and the role media plays in shaping their narratives could provide new insights into gender dynamics and religious disaffiliation.

Additionally, while this study focuses on the podcast as an auditory medium accompanied by visual and textual media, the podcast is a continuously evolving medium. For example, the video podcast format has significantly grown in popularity among religious audiences, underscoring a compelling need for scholarly examination. This new format accentuates the concept of liveness as it is often performed in intimate, domestic settings. Hosts and guests engage in dialogue surrounded by the familiar comforts of the home, seated on living room couches despite the presence of sophisticated recording equipment. This juxtaposition of high-tech gear in casual, sometimes cluttered environments brings a relatable, unpolished quality to the forefront, inviting viewers into a more personal, genuine experience. This type of video podcast can for example be found among liberal and questing Latter-day Saints, who display doubt and vulnerability akin to that shown by my results. In other words, there is a pressing need for more comprehensive research to explore the intersection of media characteristics such as liveness with discourses on vulnerability and doubt.

Lastly, this dissertation highlights the crucial role of podcasts for religious groups and individuals, particularly within the Latter-day Saint tradition. While recent research has shown a growing interest in how religious communities utilize and value podcasts, scholarly exploration in this area is still in its nascent stages. The scarcity of research underscores an urgent need for further study into the influence and function of podcasts across various religious contexts. As religious individuals and communities increasingly navigate the currents of their faith, it becomes imperative to understand how they are shaped by – and shape – the waves of podcasting.

9. Sammanfattning

Avhandlingen *Making Waves: Podcasting Among Feminist Latter-Day Saints* undersöker podcastens betydelse för feminister inom Jesu Kristi Kyrka av Sista Dagars Heliga, genom en fallstudie av tre nordamerikanska poddar: *The Faithful Feminists* (2020–2023)*, At Last She Said It* (2020–) och *Year of Polygamy* (2014–). Den mormonska feminismen har från start varit nära sammankopplad med offentligt skrivande. Den så kallade Boston-gruppen, som bildade rörelsen på 1970-talet, organiserade sig kring tidskriften *The Exponent II*. I det första numret beskrev redaktören tidskriften som en reviderad version av, och en "andlig avkomma" till, pionjärtidskriften *The Womans Exponent* (1872–1914). Under 2000-talet var skriften fortsatt de mormonska feministernas dominerande medium, men internet blev den primära plattformen. Email-listor och bloggar fyllde en viktig funktion när feministerna i kyrkan behövde omgruppera sig efter en period av exkommuniceringar på 1990-talet. Denna studie skiftar fokus från tidigare använda, skriftliga och visuella medium som bloggen, till ett idag populärt ljudmedium, nämligen podcasten, ett medium som i jämförelse med skrift är ett betydligt mer dynamiskt och omedelbart kommunikationsformat.

Den mediala utvecklingen inom den Mormonska feminismen motiverar avhandlingens övergripande forskningsmål: att nå en djupare förståelse för podcastens roll inom samtida mormonsk feminism. Avhandlingen undersöker hur podcasten påverkar rörelsens möjligheter att bygga gemenskaper, mediets inverkan på konstruktionen av och förhandlingen mellan feminism och tro, rollen inspelningsformatet spelar för de frågor som diskuteras, samt podcastens påverkan på poddvärdarnas personliga trosutveckling. Medan tidigare studier har fokuserat på innehållsliga frågor, betonar denna studie vikten av att förhålla sig till hur medieformatet villkorar Mormonsk feminism. Med den ambitionen i förgrunden använder sig avhandlingen av ett teoretiskt ramverk som hjälper till att undersöka samspelet mellan mediets performativitet och diskursivitet. Den teoretiska diskussionen mynnar ut i en tvådelad analys: (1) "performed media," som analyserar podcasting som teknologi och kommunikationsformat, samt (2) "discursive framing," som utforskar hur medieteknologier konstrueras och legitimeras genom diskurser.

Den första analysen behandlar vad jag kallar för tre teknologiska topologier. Under den första topologin, "parasocial relationships", undersöker avhandlingen vilka typer av interaktioner som sker, och vilka relationer som byggs upp, mellan värdar och lyssnare.

Under den andra topologin, ”liveness”, studeras effekten av den direkthet och spontanitet som präglar podcasten som inspelningsmetod och kommunikationssituation. Den sista kategorin, ”seriality”, utforskar hur podcastens episodiska karaktär villkorar deltagare och framställning – det vill säga det faktum att en podcast spelar in ett innehåll över tid och genom en schematisk frekvens. Dessa tre topologier samspelar med varandra och påverkas därtill av att podcasten är integrerad med andra medieplattformar som exempelvis Instagram, vilket avhandlingen belyser med hjälp av termen ”transmedialitet”.

Den andra analysen tittar på de diskurser som direkt och indirekt tillskriver podcasten legitimitet och betydelse. Detta görs med hjälp av diskursteoretiska begrepp som ”nodal punkt”, ”diskursivt moment”, ”ekvivalenskedja”, ”flytande signifikans”, ”diskursivt fält”, ”antagonistisk andre”, ”subjektsposition”, och ”hegemoni”, som på olika sätt beskriver hur mening konstrueras via språk.

Studiens första resultat visar att podcasten möjliggör för feminister inom kyrkan att forma omsorgsfulla gemenskaper. Genom parasociala interaktioner, som främst möjliggörs av podcastens transmediala format, skapar värdarna intima relationer till sin publik. De använder sociala medier, webbsidor och bloggar för att bjuda in och interagera med lyssnare, till exempel genom röstmeddelanden eller Instagram-kommentarer. De svarar ofta genom att bjuda in lyssnare som gäster eller genom att läsa deras meddelanden i sändning, vilket ger värdarna en emotionell auktoritet och får dem att framstå som förvaltare av deras välbefinnande. Teknologierna konstrueras diskursivt på så vis att podden framställs som ett omhändertagande rum, som utmanar kyrkans upplevda ”korporativa” etos, vilket kritiseras för att prioritera effektivitet framför emotionell anknytning. Därigenom skapas en dikotomi mellan podcasten som en intim sfär och kyrkan som en avlägsen, byråkratisk enhet. Resultatet överensstämmer med den forskning som säger att ”safe spaces” – en vanlig term bland feministiska gemenskaper online – är sociala konstruktioner snarare än på förhand existerande platser. Det föreligger emellertid en inneboende paradox i skapandet av sådana platser, eftersom de samtidigt förutsätter sociala motsättningar (trygg–otrygg, inkluderande–exkluderande).

Det andra resultatet visar att inspelningsformatet spelar en betydande roll för podcastens funktion som ett spontant och informellt sammanhang, och i förlängningen för den omvärdering och omformulering av vad poddvärdarna upplever vara kyrkans mer formella och strukturerade kommunikationssätt. Utrymmet för personlig närvaro, improvisation och dialog förstärker intimiteten och engagemanget mellan deltagarna. Podcasten ramas in diskursivt som en ”rörig”, ”intuitiv” och ”exponerande” kommunikativ plats med progressiva och terapeutiska kvaliteter, medan kyrkan framställs som präglad av en stagnerande och repressiv interaktion, där medlemmar inte vågar vara kritiska, tvivlande och sårbara. Formatet tillskrivs också en teologisk betydelse, på så vis att podd-

värdarna argumenterar för vikten av ”rörighet” för att nås av den helige anden. Resultaten visar hur samtida Mormonska, feministiska diskurser inte enbart konstrueras kring sådana frågor som historiskt har kopplats till den feministiska strömningen inom Jesu Kristi Kyrka av Sista Dagars Heliga – som kvinnligt ledarskap och kvinnlig representation i gudsbilden – utan även kring kommunikationsformatet. Det är således inte bara *vad* som sägs som har betydelse, utan också *hur* det sägs. Denna insikt bidrar till befintlig forskning om nya mediers roll i utvecklingen av Mormonsk feminism, genom att peka på förskjutningen mot ett tydligare fokus på kommunikationsprocesser inom rörelsen. Den ger också stöd till forskning som visar på en lång historia av sanningsidkande bland sista dagars heliga – en tendens att förkunna “jag vet att kyrkan är sann”. Då tvivel i kyrkans historia ofta har förknippats med icke-normativ femininitet, används det bland samtida Mormonska feminister som en motståndsstrategi. Podcastens rörighet och spontanitet möjliggör därför ett ambivalent förhållningssätt till tro vilket utmanar kyrkans anspråk på sanning och lydnad.

I ett tredje led visar studien att podcasting både möjliggör och försvårar konstruktionen av och förhandlingen mellan feminism och tro. Det seriella formatet spelar en särskilt viktig roll, delvis som ett verktyg för omförhandlingar kring upplevelsen av kyrkans restriktiva relation till tid. Podcasten möjliggör ett successivt utforskande av kvinnors historiska berättelser, och en parallell rörelse mellan poddvärdarna och lyssnare vars tro befinner sig i ständig förändring. När sådana framställningar motiveras diskursivt, sker en sammankoppling av emancipation och temporalitet. Seriell framställning av feministiska skriftstudier beskrivs exempelvis som ett cykliskt ”vävande” och ”ombesörjande” av skriften, vilket står i kontrast till den upplevda brådskande och fragmentariska läsning som främjas genom kyrkans egna skriftläsningsmanualer. Samtidigt kräver podcastformatet ett visst tempo som kan vara svårt att upprätthålla. Podcastens veckovisa utgivning försvårar för feministerna att ”sakta ner” och djupdyka i berättelser om kvinnor i kyrkans skrifter, vilket begränsar utforskningen av dessa teman. Detta resultat bidrar till kritik inom tidigare forskning, mot att betrakta digitala medier enbart som en stärkande faktor vad gäller kvinnors handlingsutrymme. Podcastens teknologi understödjer således de religiösa feministernas ambitioner att utforma alternativa tidsramar, samtidigt som den hindrar desamma.

Sist men inte minst visar studien att podcasten formar, och möjliggör en utveckling av, Mormonska feministers personliga tro. Det seriella formatet kräver kontinuitet och uthållighet, vilket påverkar deltagarnas positioner som troende och medlemmar i kyrkan. För det första ger den återkommande diskussionen av podcastens ämnen – som skrifter eller kyrkohistoria – värdarna möjlighet att gradvis samla på sig kunskap och därmed förstärka sin auktoritet. För det andra kan det successiva arbetet med podcasten bidra

till att värdarna inleder processer mot att antingen lämna eller att stanna kvar i kyrkan. För vissa deltagare bidrar podcastens seriella format till att de fortsätter sitt engagemang även när projektet känns utmanande, vilket hindrar potentiellt abrupta avslut och skapar utrymme för längre perioder av reflektion och omvärdering. Ibland resulterar sådana processer i att deltagarna identifierar sig som "post-Mormoner", eller i att de stannar kvar i en gråzon mellan ex-troende och troende. För andra resulterar podcasten i ett aktivt arbete för att stanna kvar i kyrkan. Deltagarna formulerar dessa förändringsprocesser diskursivt som en "resa" ofta i nära anslutning till pionjärs- och omvändelseberättelser – berättelser av historisk betydelse för rörelsen. Resultatet stämmer överens med den forskning som har framhållit betydelsen av narrativa strukturer när sista dagars heliga omvärderar sin tro via digitala medier. Men det kompletterar också forskningen genom att belysa vikten av sådana narrativ när medlemmar, och före-detta medlemmar, formulerar sig diskursivt kring mediala processer som podcastens serialitet.

Sammantaget visar avhandlingens resultat hur podcasting möjliggör för Mormonska feminister att skapa gemenskaper, omformulera institutionella narrativ, navigera komplexiteten mellan tro och feminism samt konstruera sina personliga trosresor. Avhandlingen bidrar således till en djupare förståelse för den samtida Mormonska feminismen, samt till ett kritiskt och nyanserat perspektiv på kvinnors agens i digitala medier. Till sist bidrar studien till att driva samtalet om metodologiska och teoretiska angreppssätt på religiösa podcasts vidare.

Appendix: Transcription Method

Since I am interested not only in content but also in format, an important criterion for transcription method has been to convey how speech is performed. In my quotations I have used a simplified version of the Jefferson Transcription System introduced by Gail Jefferson[1179] and commonly employed in Conversation Analysis.[1180] I chose a simplified version of this method to balance analytical precision with accessibility for readers. While the full Jefferson system offers an unparalleled level of detail, its intricate notation can result in lengthy and cumbersome quotes that detract from a coherent reading experience. This is particularly challenging when presenting excerpts in written work, as the multitude of symbols and annotations may overwhelm readers and obscure the key insights being conveyed. Moreover, the simplified approach significantly reduced the time costs associated with transcription. While these nuances are valuable, they were not always essential for the analytical goals of my study. By streamlining the transcription process to focus on the most relevant conversational features, I was able to allocate more time to deeper analysis and interpretation of the data. This compromise allowed me to retain the core benefits of conversational analysis – such as examining turn-taking and interactional dynamics – while ensuring that the transcribed excerpts remained accessible and reader-friendly, supporting a clearer communication of my findings.

To indicate emotions, I have used the following markers. If not followed up by a closing marker such as ((normal voice)) or the same symbol twice, used before and after a word or sentence such as "£word£", it signifies an emotion that continues throughout the entire quote. I have furthermore adapted these to suit my own material. For example, contrary to the standard Jefferson model I have used "~" for slight tremble such as in cases where it is difficult to hear whether or not someone is crying but where the speaker is audibly emotional without explicit trembling or wobbling of their voice.[1181] Also,

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[1179] See for example Gail Jefferson, "An Exercise in the Transcription and Analysis of Laughter," in Teun A. van Dijk (ed.), *Handbook of Discourse Analysis,* (London: Academic, 1985), p. 25–34; Gail Jefferson, "Glossary of Transcript Symbols With an Introduction," in Gene H. Lerner (ed.), *Conversation Analysis: Studies from the First Generation*, (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2004), p. 13–31.

[1180] Anthony J. Liddicoat, *An Introduction to Conversation Analysis*, (London: Continuum, 2007.)

[1181] Alexa Hepburn, "Crying: Notes on Description, Transcription and Interaction," *Research on Language and Social Interaction*, vol. 37, no. 3, 2004, pp. 251–290.

instead of transcribing laughter by parentheses enclosing the letter "h" or multiple "h" characters, I have simply indicated it through description (see below).

~ = slight tremble
((trembling voice)) = voice is audibly trembling
((crying)) = crying/wobbly voice
((LAUGHING)) = one of them laughing loud/markedly
((LAUGHTER)) = everyone laughing loud/markedly
[LAUGHING] = overlapping laughter loud/markedly
((laughing)) = normal laughter
[laughing] = overlapping normal laughter
£word£ = indicates a smiley voice, i.e. where someone's tone conveys a smile without explicit laughter

To indicate sounds I have used the following markers.

.hhh = inbreath
hhh = outbreath
whhord: breathiness within a word
wo:::rd = lengthening of vowel or consonant, one or two denotes normal lengthening, three or more signals extreme lengthening
word = emphasis
°word° = something is said silently
(.) = pause
(0.2) = time of pause
↑ = rise in intonation
↓ = drop in intonation
((word)) = authors description, for example:
((impersonating)) = quoting someone by imitating their voice
((exaggerated affect)) = intentionally trying to sound excessive

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Material

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What happens when faith and feminism meet a microphone?

From its inception, Latter-day Saint Feminism has been deeply intertwined with public writing. In the 1970s, the so-called Boston group launched the movement around the journal *The Exponent II,* described by its editors as a modern revision and "spiritual descendant" of the female-driven and pioneer Latter-day Saint journal *Woman's Exponent* (1872–1914). Yet, as a series of Church excommunications in the 1990s made clear, publicly criticizing The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints came with significant risks. In response, feminist members increasingly turned to the internet as a vital platform for expression. Blogs like *Feminist Mormon Housewives* emerged in the early 2000s as spaces for regrouping and growth.

This dissertation shifts focus from these earlier text-based platforms to a contemporary and increasingly influential auditory medium among Feminist Latter-day Saints: the podcast. Through a qualitative case study of three prominent podcasts – *The Faithful Feminists, At Last She Said It,* and *Year of Polygamy* – the study explores the affordances of podcasting at the intersection of technology and discourse. Employing a dual analytical framework that combines media theory and discourse analysis, it examines how podcasting fosters caring, advocacy-oriented communities; enables informal and reflexive communication; and supports a dynamic, ongoing negotiation of feminism and faith.

By tracing how podcasting shapes both individual journeys and collective imaginaries, *Making Waves* offers new insight into the evolving landscape of Latter-day Saint Feminism.



Kristel Torgrimsson is a scholar of religious studies from the University of Gothenburg. This is her doctoral dissertation.

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