

The Backpack: Solidarity in Secrets and Sacrifice

[**Sarah Jeans Adam Clark** My mom had a huge personality. She wasn't someone you remembered, she was someone you could not forget. Like you just couldn't. She was a force to be reckoned with.]

That was Sarah Jean Adams Clark. She grew up as a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, but her family situation was different than the prominent LDS cultural ideals.

[**Clark** I don't know, church always felt uncomfortable. Like, you're the new kid at school everybody else had groups and friends and things in common. And you were the weird kid who just showed up in front, with the bologna sandwich when everybody else was eating a Lunchable. Nobody did anything. I personally felt like I didn't fit in, like my family didn't fit in.]¹

[intro music]

Welcome to “Roots to a Republic” where we discuss the intersection of religion, culture, and politics. I’m your host, Rachel Birch. Women are deliciously complicated filled with competing tensions between softness and grit, empathy and tenacity, and insecurity and ferocity. What is an ideal woman? The definition of the perfect woman is complicated, nebulous, and changing constantly. However, accurately analyzing womanhood cannot be done on an individual basis. Women inherently see themselves as “we” or define themselves by the relationships that underly their lives, and therefore, “must not be seen in isolation; [but] must be analyzed as one aspect of women’s overall relations with one another.”² Analyzing the behavior and characteristics of a subset of women, especially religious women, becomes especially problematic when there is an idealized notion of perfection and then there is well, reality or the way women actually live religious principles.

¹ *Sarah Jean Clark Interview*. Conducted by Rachel Birch. March 2024.

² Paul Thompson. *Voice of the Past: Oral History*. 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 2000.) 179. Carroll Smith-Rosenberg. *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America*. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985). 54.

Historians Amy Hoyt and Taylor Petrey stated, “Lived religion challenges high theology and seeks to understand how religion is actually practiced by people, not simply how it is idealized by leaders.”³ This principle of lived religion versus idealized religion is especially poignant for women in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (CJCLDS) or Mormon church.⁴ Starting in 1842, women in the CJCLDS organized into the Female Relief Society (FRS). The original purpose of the Relief Society was to function as a benevolence organization to raise money for fellow members of the church. Mormon women developed a “political conscience” as they helped build a city, raised money for charity initiatives, advocated for their community, and functioned in the public sphere “under the collective protection of a woman’s association.”⁵

The efficacy of the FRS has ebbed and flowed over the last one hundred and eighty years as the organization battled internal disputes, developed into an indomitable force, were hierarchically marginalized and eventually redefined its purposes based on a culture of spiritual development, fortitude, and strength. The legacy of the Female Relief Society is different for each woman in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. For some, the FRS is a source of strength, joy, and solidarity. Although, women who challenge Mormon cultural trends, have

³ Amy Hoyt., Petrey, Taylor G. “Introduction.” *The Routledge Handbook of Mormonism and Gender*. Editors Taylor G. Petrey and Amy Hoyt. (Milton: Taylor & Francis Group, 2020). Accessed February 2, 2024. ProQuest Ebook Central. 5.

⁴ There are several pseudonym’s for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. In this paper I will refer to the Church by its formal name, “Mormon,” “LDS,” “CJCLDS,” and “Latter-day Saint.” The full name is the preferred title by most members of the Church as some of the other names are historically derogative.

⁵ Laurel Thatcher Ulrich. “Mormon gender in the age of polygamy.” *The Routledge Handbook of Mormonism and Gender*. Editors Taylor G. Petrey and Amy Hoyt. (Milton: Taylor & Francis Group, 2020). Accessed February 2, 2024. ProQuest Ebook Central. 95.; Carol Cornwall Madsen. *A Mormon Woman in Victorian America*. Dissertation. (University of Utah, 1985), 172.

faced both religious disciplinary action and social criticism. The Female Relief Society is exclusive by design and only inclusive by the force of female nature.⁶

[Transition music]

Introduction

Since the mid-nineteenth century, American culture has divided society into two distinct parts, known as the private and public spheres. The public sphere was traditionally the man's domain to interact with government and business, while the private sphere was the women's place to care for home and family while being the pinnacle of virtue to raise righteous republican citizens.⁷ However, the hostile nature of the American Western frontier caused women settlers to alter their defining lines of private sphere activities. In an effort to be independent from government intervention and past persecution, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints developed a group identity that combined communal stewardship with community functions and religious practice. "For Mormons, community transcended the individualism characteristic of many western frontier ventures."⁸ The lines between public and private spheres became inherently blurred in Mormon society where religion, community, and family were one and the same. "This broader range of social experience redefined concepts of public and private space for women."⁹

⁶ Chiung Hwang Chen and Ethan Yorgason. "Intersectionality." *The Routledge Handbook of Mormonism and Gender*. Editors Taylor G. Petrey and Amy Hoyt. (Milton: Taylor & Francis Group, 2020). Accessed February 2, 2024. ProQuest Ebook Central. 42.

⁷ Susan Armitage. "Women and Men in Western History: A Stereotypical Vision." *The Gendered West*. Edited Gordon Morris Bakken and Brenda Farrington. (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc. 2000). 2.; Megan Stanton. "Structures of home and family north America." *The Routledge Handbook of Mormonism and Gender*. Editors Taylor G. Petrey and Amy Hoyt. (Milton: Taylor & Francis Group, 2020). Accessed February 2, 2024. ProQuest Ebook Central.344.

⁸ Carol Cornwall Madsen. "Creating Female Community: Relief Society in Cache Valley, Utah, 1868-1900." *Journal of Mormon History*. Vol. 21: No. 2. Fall 1995. 128.

⁹ Ibid. 128-129.

While Mormon women weren't the only religious American women organizing into social action, members of the Female Relief Society in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints did have more public sphere latitude than their non-Mormon sisters, because of the inherent nature of the Salt Lake City church culture.¹⁰ The Relief Society became the primary avenue for women to participate in non-traditional vocations like empire building, medical training, business ventures, and political initiatives under the protection of women organized Christian service. "Although ostensibly formed for benevolent purposes, the [Relief Society] became in time an educational, economic, and spiritual resource for its members as well as for the general Church membership."¹¹

As church membership increased, the CJCLDS leadership hierarchy pivoted to accommodate the growth and adjust to a changing social environment. Church leadership drew from ideas within Mormon culture and "on the norms and mores of American culture" to establish a "new gendered cultural synthesis."¹² For Mormon women, organizational changes meant a marginalization from the formal hierarchy to become "handmaidens of the priesthood" rather than officials in church government.¹³

¹⁰ It is important to not exaggerate Mormon woman's agency in the nineteenth century, while they had enhanced latitude, their gender limited the scope of influence while functioning in a strict religious patriarchal hierarchy. Catherine A. Brekus, "Mormon Women and the Problem of Historical Agency," *Journal of Mormon History*. Vol. 37, No. 2. (Spring 2011). 87.; David Hall. "A Crossroads for Mormon Women: Amy Brown Lyman, J. Reuben Clark, and the decline of Organized Women's Activism in the Relief Society." *Journal of Mormon History*, Vol 36 No 2. Spring 2010. 208.

¹¹ Carol Cornwall Madsen. "Creating Female Community." 129.; Carol Cornwall Madsen. *A Mormon*. 172.

¹² Matthew Bowman. "Mormon Gender in the Progressive Era." *The Routledge Handbook of Mormonism and Gender*. Editors Taylor G. Petrey and Amy Hoyt. (Milton: Taylor & Francis Group, 2020). Accessed February 2, 2024. ProQuest Ebook Central.

¹³ *The Teachings of Harold B. Lee*. Edited by Clyde J. Williams. (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2015). 319.; Claudia Bushman. "Mormon Feminism After 1970." *The Routledge Handbook of Mormonism and Gender*. Editors Taylor G. Petrey and Amy Hoyt. (Milton: Taylor & Francis Group, 2020). Accessed February 2, 2024. ProQuest Ebook Central. 157.

Mormon women, and thereby the Relief Society, became cultural retention gatekeepers by immersing themselves in family, home, and individual congregational-centric activities to encourage solidarity within the ideology of Mormon identity.¹⁴ Historian Jennifer Ritterhouse argues, “By molding the past, groups give shape to their expectations for the present and the future, which is crucial to their efforts to create a certain social reality using political, economic, and cultural tools. At the same time, their visions of history validate their efforts.”¹⁵ By capitalizing on the history of their ancestors, women connected Mormon theology with cultural practices which reinforced middle class values, community service, and social conservatism to concentrate and focus Mormon ideological social activity. Individuals who deviated from these philosophies faced social obstacles within the “axis of hierarchical centrality.”¹⁶

Women largely cultivated and enforced this labor of cultural retention and reinforcement. Though formal hierarchy directed policy changes and evolutions, women’s informal sources of power conveyed and conducted the programs to fruition.¹⁷ Hierarchical relationships are understood as the ultimate source of power, and traditionally, historians look for women who have driven “collected resistance against the male hegemony” or tried to mold “female agency into an emancipatory paradigm.”¹⁸ While interesting, this type of scholarship may exaggerate women’s historical agency and the importance of hierarchical power.

¹⁴ Coleen McDannell. “Mormon Gender in the Mid-Twentieth Century.” *The Routledge Handbook of Mormonism and Gender*. Editors Taylor G. Petrey and Amy Hoyt. (Milton: Taylor & Francis Group, 2020). Accessed February 2, 2024. ProQuest Ebook Central. 151.; Melissa Wei-Tsing Inouye. “Women and Religious Organization a “Microbiological” Approach to Influence.” *The Routledge Handbook of Mormonism and Gender*. Editors Taylor G. Petrey and Amy Hoyt. (Milton: Taylor & Francis Group, 2020). Accessed February 2, 2024.

¹⁵ Ritterhouse, Jennifer. “Reading, Intimacy, and the Role of Uncle Remus in White Southern Social Memory.” *The Journey of Southern History*. Volume XLIX No 3. August 2003. 587.

¹⁶ David Hall. “A Crossroads for Mormon Women.” 206.; Chiung Hwang Chen and Ethan Yorgason. “Intersectionality.” 42.; Colleen McDannell. “Introduction.” *Religions of the United States: In Practice*. Edited by Colleen McDannell. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001). 3.

¹⁷ Melissa Wei-Tsing Inouye. “Women and religious organization.” 312.

¹⁸ Catherine A. Brekus, “Mormon Women and the Problem.” 71-72.

Agency is defined as the ability to act and have the power to make something happen.¹⁹ Creating change or having the power to change happens within a hierarchical structure, however, “vertical structural power is not the only systematic power at work within a religious community.”²⁰ Authority from formal power flows from rules and doctrine that defines duties and responsibilities, however, to focus only on this type of power is like arguing that the skeleton is the only important element of a human physical structure.²¹ Outside the formal pyramid structure of power, in any organization, there is relational and ontological power that influences trajectory. Relational power is informal coalitions, or family and friends related to those in the formal authoritative hierarchy.²² Whereas ontological influence are “constant acts of collective affirmation” or “influencers” of those in relational power.²³ Historian Maureen Beecher argues that soft or informal powers function in “facilitating, or interrupting the formal system when [policy actions prove] inadequate to the need or counter to the best interests of the people it serves.”²⁴ In 1918, Susa Young Gates, early Mormon leader and Brigham Young’s daughter, aptly summarized the Relief Society’s role in early twentieth century church hierarchy by stating, “Let us provoke the brethren to good works, yet not provoke the brethren while we work.”²⁵

¹⁹ Catherine A. Brekus, “Mormon Women and the Problem.” 70.

²⁰ Melissa Wei-Tsing Inouye. “Women and religious organization.” 305.

²¹ Jill Carol Mulvay Derr.; Derr, C. Brooklyn. “Outside the Mormon Hierarchy: Alternative Aspects of Institutional Power.” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*. Vol. 15. Winter 1982. 22.; Melissa Wei-Tsing Inouye. “Women and religious organization.” 306.

²² Melissa Wei-Tsing Inouye. “Women and religious organization.” 307.; Jill Carol Mulvay Derr.; Derr, C. Brooklyn. “Outside the Mormon Hierarchy.” 22.

²³ Melissa Wei-Tsing Inouye. “Women and religious organization.” 307.; Jill Carol Mulvay Derr.; Derr, C. Brooklyn. “Outside the Mormon Hierarchy.” 22.

²⁴Maureen Ursenbach Beecher. “The ‘Leading Sisters’: A Female Hierarchy in Nineteenth Century Mormon Society.” *Journal of Mormon History*. Vol. 9. 1982. 25-39. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23285914>. Accessed 8/16/2023. 26.

²⁵ As quoted in James B. Allen; Jessie L. Embry. "'Provoking the Brethren to Good Works': Susa Young Gates, the Relief Society, and Genealogy." *Brigham Young University Studies*. Vol 31, No 2. Spring 1991. 115.; Voice Actor: Jeanette Patrick.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints marginalized Mormon women from vertical hierarchical power during the first quarter of the twentieth century. The Relief Society, and its women members, were charged with the primary authority in relational and ontological influence to form, inculcate, and preserve Mormon culture. While the Priesthood supported and Relief Society managed LDS society, women embraced the role of family and home guardian, the division of labor created a veritable power vacuum in Mormon cultural development. For some individuals, the women's organization created an acculturation of perfection causing feelings of inadequacy, deprecation, and insecurity while for most women the Female Relief Society encouraged sisterhood and solidarity to support, uplift, and educate while continuing the legacy of sacrificing for the greater good. The consequences from Relief Society initiatives, some positive while others unintendedly adverse, were neatly packaged in a backpack for each sister to secretly shoulder throughout her life.

[Transition music]

Lived Religion

[**Clark** I feel like everybody has a backpack. And certain things that happen to us in life are these pebbles or rocks or boulders, or sand and we put them in our backpacks. I've always somehow been able to just chip off a little bit of the boulder to remember the lesson and stick it in my backpack, and carry it, so my backpack, for the most part, feels pretty. But, it's almost like that little pebble has some sharp edges that it's poking through that backpack and hittin' ya right in the right spot. So, you just got to keep moving around or choose to take it out of that backpack and file off that hard edge.]

[**Clark** I can choose to take a little bit of the rock, stuff that I can learn from it, stuff that I can grow from, and choosing to refine those rocks over time. And carrying those with me instead of the boulders. And learning to rejoice in those. So there is joy that came out of my mom being sick, was my parents being together; there was joy that came out of losing my brother is not happiness, but it's joy. But it's taken a lifetime to learn how to have difficult things happen, or hard moments happen and find the joy in it, because my favorite scripture is in the Book Mormon Nephi 2:25. "And Adam fell, that men are and men are that they might have joy." I really feel like we're here in this life, not necessarily to be tested as we talk about but to find joy.]

And there's joy in the atonement, and there's joy in Christ, and there's joy and service. And so that's, I guess that's what I would have to say is that taking the rock, taking a piece of it, figuring out how to refine that rock and then find joy in that rock. To have it be a treasure, not necessarily a boulder that holds you down.]²⁶

Internally and externally, women within the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints are often viewed as a monochromatic monolith of personality and belief. However, while each Mormon woman has a connecting thread that they are a daughter of God and committed to family (in the broadest sense of the term), individual life experiences form a unique world perspective for each person and personalized version of lived religion.²⁷ Though “women diligently follow counsel from primarily male Mormon leaders to be politically active, they do so after much personal study and consideration of the issues.”²⁸ One topic that is especially divisive, within the church, is female priesthood ordination. Traditional gender studies bring attention to the perceived secondary role Latter-day Saint women perform in Mormon church hierarchy because LDS women are not formally ordained to the priesthood.

Though gender authority is not a new controversy throughout the history of the Church, female priesthood ordination can be a sensitive topic within the CJCLDS community. Each woman’s life experience cultivates their opinion on women in the priesthood. As a thirty-seven-year-old Mormon woman, Sarah Jean Adams Clark believes,

[**Clark** I have never struggled with my role, as a woman in the church. I have never felt that I am less than or that I don't have as much responsibility, as the men in the church. I have always felt that there is a divine nature, divine right in women. I have seen women do amazing things in the church. I think about the kind of moments of being built up by other women. I feel important as a woman in the church.]²⁹

²⁶ Sarah Jean Adams Clark Interview. Conducted by Rachel Birch. March 2024.

²⁷ Amy Hoyt. “Femininities.” 58.

²⁸ Melanie Newport. “The Utah Eagle Forum: Legitimizing Political Activism as Women’s Work.” Edited by Jessie L. Embry. *Oral History, Community, and Work in the American West*. (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2013). 257.

²⁹ Sarah Jean Adams Clark Interview. Conducted by Rachel Birch. March 2024.

Forty-nine-year-old Christine Suok Chon Sunia has a differing perspective than Adams Clark by saying,

[**Christine Suok Chon Sunia** I think I hear a lot of women who are dissatisfied with how they feel like their roles are in the church.]

[**Sunia** I think sometimes because we don't hold the priesthood there's certain things that were considered a little, not lesser, but we all have our different roles. We all we can hold the priesthood in different ways. Like we don't give priesthood blessings, things like that. But I know there are a lot of sisters I met, in years past, have always thought that was really kind of a slight to them, that men get the priesthood power, and I would be like, 'Hey, I don't want the responsibility of having to be worthy every single day to be called upon to have to give a priesthood blessing.' That's a lot of pressure off for me not to feel that way. But am I only I can do it. My mom, when I was sick. I was miserable. My mom was with me. And my dad was not around, give me a priesthood blessing. And my mom, said a prayer. And I remember feeling a healing power come over me, and it was my mother. That is the priesthood.]³⁰

Confirming Sarah Clark's position on women's treatment in the church, seventy-four-year-old Nancy Winter Parry recounts,

[**Nancy Winter Parry** felt like I've been loved and respected the general leadership of the church, and then how they love and respect women. And I feel like the men are constantly being called upon by the brethren to love your wife, you want the best thing you can do for your child is to love their mother, they're constantly focused on how women's roles are beautiful and wonderful. I've never felt looked down upon by a man in the church, especially in leadership positions. I feel like they respected my opinion, even when my opinion was eh just kind of not really, very well thought out, they still respected and still asked. I don't think I've ever felt like that.]³¹

While ninety-four-year-old Doris Ann Jones Bodily believes,

[**Doris Ann Jones Bodily** I felt like I was always well treated. I sang a lot in things for the church. And I always had good jobs in the church. I was Relief Society president, I was Young Ladies president, and I was a counselor in the Relief Society. I love the church, and I felt like that anything that the church had to give me was worth taking. And that if I needed to give of myself or in some class or to speak at something. I did.]³²

³⁰ *Christine Suok Chon Sunia Interview*. Conducted by Rachel Birch. March 2024.

³¹ *Nancy Winter Parry Interview*. Conducted by Rachel Birch. March 2024.

³² *Doris Ann Jones Bodily Interview*. Conducted by Rachel Birch. March 2024.

For many women, receiving the priesthood is not necessarily about church membership equality or value to church organization. For example, nineteenth-century Mormon women regularly used scriptures to assert that, even without formal priesthood ordination, women were equals to men in the public sphere. *The Woman's Exponent*, a Relief Society publication, reinforced “Mormon women as capable, intelligent, independent agents with crucial roles to play in society and God’s kingdom.”³³ Part of this advocacy for Mormon women was rooted in American society’s view of the Mormon practice of polygamy or “The Principle.” While nineteenth century print culture depicted Mormon polygamy as barbaric and enslaving, for many Mormon women, polygamy was empowering because they achieved greater independence and non-traditional opportunities in the public sphere. For early CJCLDS women, polygamous marriages, were seen as a test of faith equivalent to the biblical Abrahamic sacrifice. Adherence and acceptance of the difficult principle would guarantee exaltation, divine favor, and social acceptance.³⁴ The Mormon Female Relief Society provided women in the church, and those practicing polygamy, a community vehicle for advocacy, support, defense, and civic action.³⁵

While the Church moved away from polygamy in the twentieth century and sought greater integration and acceptance into American society, “Mormon leaders, male and female, sought to implement [organizational] reforms in order to guide their flock” into American society while retaining religious values.³⁶ “Authority was central to the issue of reform” and because both men and women had been assuming leadership positions throughout CJCLDS history, infrastructure

³³ Laurel Thatcher Ulrich. “Mormon Gender in the Age of Polygamy.” 106-107.

³⁴ Matthew Bowman. “Mormon Gender in the Progressive Era.” *The Routledge Handbook of Mormonism and Gender*. Editors Taylor G. Petrey and Amy Hoyt. (Milton: Taylor & Francis Group, 2020). Accessed February 2, 2024. ProQuest Ebook Central. 130.

³⁵ Ibid. 130.

³⁶ Ibid. 129.

changes were made to delineate who had formal structural authority in relationship to the male priesthood.

While women didn't claim priesthood office or authority, they did view the Relief Society operating as independent and parallel to priesthood hierarchy and quorums.³⁷ As Mormon women became more distanced from the formal hierarchal power structure, the Relief Society eventually became "correlated" into, rather than independent from, the vertical power alignment.³⁸ This priesthood "pyramidal hierarchy of authority" came with a "clear-cut chain of command, specialized division of labor, and supremacy of line over staff" and moved away from an informal structures based on relational power.³⁹ This push to have women at the periphery of church governance had ramifications on the structure of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, women's role in the Church, and on Mormon women's lived religion.

While narratives of formal power structures and women who challenged these structures are salient, it is equally important to analyze congregants who adhere and innovate within a strict religious hierarchy. Mormon women used strategic patriarchal bargaining to possess and "[gain] positions of leadership and authority without explicitly upsetting the 'rules' of the established patriarchal hierarchy already in place."⁴⁰ Though women guarded their words and actions to never outright threaten hierarchal operations or convey women's goals "as inconsistent with the goals of the church. [T]he women tenaciously defended their right to participate in the political [and religious] process."⁴¹ Mormon men celebrated masculine leadership, and women transitioned from a

³⁷ David Hall. "A Crossroads for Mormon Women." 206 ft.1.

³⁸ Claudia Bushman. "Mormon feminism after 1970." 158.

³⁹ Jill Carol Mulvay Derr.; Derr, C. Brooklyn. "Outside the Mormon Hierarchy." 29.; David Hall. "A Crossroads for Mormon Women. 229.

⁴⁰ Casey Elizabeth Kaf Alghazal. "Patriarchal Bargaining: Female Religious Authority in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints and the Muftiyas of Al Azhar." *The Muslim World*. Vol 112, Issue 2. Spring 2022. 225-246. <https://doi.org/10.1111/muwo.12435>. Accessed 8/16/2023. 225, 229.

⁴¹ Lola Van Wagenen. "In their Own Behalf: The Politicization of Mormon Women and the 1870 Franchise." *The Dialogue*. Vol 24 No 4. Winter 1991. 41.

polygamist lifestyle of endurance and sacrifice to one of monogamy and excelling in the notion of gendered spheres of influence.⁴² Though excluded from formal “line-authority management,” Mormon women claimed their culturally inherited tools of advocacy and sacrifice, placed them in their backpack, and pushed forward by embracing their new role as cultural cultivators and caretakers. In so doing, women increased their relational power influence and shaped Mormon religious culture and lived religion.⁴³

Historians David Hall, Robert Orsi, and Colleen McDannell argue that lived religion includes the “actions and beliefs of the laity” combined with congregant’s “relationships with [religious] leaders or institutions,” and the application of cultural power which stretch and modify religious practices.⁴⁴ Each woman has a unique lived experience which has shaped religious belief practices. For Sarah Adams Clark, the death of loved ones has been a constant thread throughout her life and formed her testimony or belief in doctrines of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. After the death of her brother,

[Clark My Bishop could tell something was wrong. And I didn't even know he knew who I was. Just a bunch of single kids in the ward. He called me into his office and he said, “Sister Adams, something's going on.” And I was like, ‘no, I’m fine.’ And, he was like, “No, you're not.” And, so I told him what happened to my brother and he gave me the scriptures, and he said, I want you to read this verse, just the first five words. “And it came to pass.” Okay, now that's it. Now read this one. “And it came to pass,” and “it came to pass,” and “it came to pass,” and “it came to pass.” And he said “Right now it hurts. Right now the pain is unmatched, and the what ifs and all the things you're feeling and those are okay. But it came to pass and it came to pass, because Christ has done this for you. The atonement has done this for you. So, it's okay that you want to see anybody, it's okay that you don't want to tell anybody but remember, and it came to pass. It didn't come to stay.” And that has stuck with me for a very long time. I remember thinking when I kissed my Dad, and it came to pass because it didn't come to stay.]

Sarah also adds,

⁴² Matthew Bowman. “Mormon Gender in the Progressive Era.” 130-136.

⁴³ Megan Stanton. “Structures of Home and Family North America.” 336.

⁴⁴ As quoted in Megan Stanton. “Structures of Home and Family North America.” 336.; Colleen McDannell. “Introduction.” 3.

[**Clark** I can't attend church every Sunday, I'm not every Sunday kinda lady. I also believe that Sister McDonald's needs to be visit taught on Sunday sometimes too, like I grew up where fast and testimony meeting meant, like we don't go. State Conference meant, hey, vacay time like we don't go. And, I have never shied away from my feelings towards those kinds of things that sometimes I just need a break. Sometimes I just need to have a Sunday at home. And I don't feel judged by it at all. Our Relief Society, has probably the most diverse set of feelings and thoughts on topics. For the most part, I feel like those differings opinions are respected and understood even though they aren't agreed with. I have genuine friendships, in the Relief Society, people that I really care about and I enjoy seeing. This ward's church experience, for me, is vastly different than ones I have been in before where I don't go to church and put on a pretense. I don't put my best foot forward.]⁴⁵

Sarah's life experiences have formed her lived religion. For Christine Chon Sunia, lived religion generates from the dedication of her parents who became members of the LDS church in Korea and immigrated to the United States. She believes that,

[**Sunia** Our religion is our life. It is so integral. It's what made them come to the U.S. My parents came to Utah from Korea, they could have gone somewhere else, but they went to Utah of all places, because they wanted to try to get closer to the church. They came to this country seeking more opportunities also to be able to live the gospel better, with more support and things like that. So, where they went from Korea, they left Korea with two children, my two older sisters, a suitcase, and a hundred bucks, moved to Utah. Our family has grown from all that, you know, and generations will be blessed. It-doesn't seem obvious right now, but I'm sure, as time goes on, things may change and shift and they leave their legacy so, my parents are their own pioneers of the church in Korea, they're part of that pioneer legacy.]⁴⁶

The legacy of early Utah Church members is an important point of strength and solidarity for all members of the church-especially women who draw from the heritage of independent women enacting change. Eliza R. Snow, early Mormon leader, became a propelling force for community action and women's advocacy. In an 1869 Relief Society "Great Indignation Meeting," Snow stated, "Were we the stupid, heartbroken beings that we have been represented, silence might better become us; but, as women of God,...we not only speak because we have the

⁴⁵ Sarah Jean Adams Clark. Conducted by Rachel Birch. March 2024.

⁴⁶ Christine Suok Chon Sunia Interview. Conducted by Rachel Birch. March 2024.

rights, but justice and humanity demand that we should.”⁴⁷ The heritage of Snow’s charismatic leadership was consistent for Relief Society leaders throughout the twentieth century. As women exchanged women’s suffrage for spunky initiative in Mormon cultural creation and retention, the Church society continued to draw spiritual, cultural, and social authority from “pioneer foremothers.”⁴⁸

The spiritual authority gained from Church history was utilized to cultivate spiritual experiences. Latter-day Saint women managed children’s “Primary” classes, where from a very early age, Mormon children have learned cultural heritage and the ideals of daily adherence to doctrinal ordinances and principles through songs, games, and lessons. For Doris Ann Jones Bodily, the children and youth program socialization are what led her to convert from the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

[Bodily My mother was an active member of the Reorganized Church and she always went, and I believe that's where I was blessed in the reorganized church. My mother always had a deep testimony of Jesus Christ. And no matter where we went, if there was a church nearby, we went to church. So I went to the Lutheran and Baptists and some little churches back East.]

Once her family settled in Idaho Falls, Idaho

[Bodily After school, I'd go with my friend's, they'd take me to primary and I didn't know what it was or anything. During Sunday, I went up the street to church and during the summer I took their Bibles classes. But like I said, Mother was a firm believer in God and when Sunday came, we were to be in church. My friends were Mormon. The people around me started taking me to church with them and I'd go to Sacrament meeting, Sunday school and I had lots of questions and I would get really angry and talk to the teacher. My friends would think I was awful and correct me, but there was something that I didn't understand. I finally, I told my mother that I

⁴⁷ “Minutes of Great Indignation Meeting, January 13, 1870.” The First Fifty Years of Relief Society. www.churchofjesuschrist.org. Accessed Apr 12, 2024.; Katherine Kitterman. “No Ordinary Feelings: Mormon Women's Political Activism, 1870-1920.” *PhD Dissertation*. Washington: American University, 2021.73.; Claudia L. Bushman. “Mormon Women.” *Encyclopedia of Women and Religion in North America*. Edited by Rosemary Skinner Keller and Rosemary Radford Ruether. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006). 722.; Voice actor: Donna Baker.

⁴⁸ Maureen Ursenbach Beecher. “Women's Work on the Mormon Frontier.” 278.; Coleen McDannell. “Mormon gender in the Mid-twentieth century.” 147.; Jill Carol Mulvay Derr.; Derr, C. Brooklyn. “Outside the Mormon Hierarchy.” 32.

wanted to join the church and then I was-16, 1947, I think it is. She said that she would go with me. The day that we were supposed to go dad disappeared with the car. And that was our transportation out there. I started to cry and I dropped to the floor in the dining room. And my mother says, Get up off that floor. I'll get you there, and she called a taxi, and so taxi took me to the stake building. I went in there, and I was baptized. And when we got through, I asked the fellow to confirm me. And he said that he would so the man that was there at the baptizing confirmed me a member of the church. And I was so excited. But it took me a while to get my courage to move further. It's something different, and you've got to make a different move. I wasn't a member of the church, and all of a sudden, I was a member of the church, and then I had to live up to its ideals and its teachings.]⁴⁹

In addition to the ideals and teachings taught in weekly primary classes, Mormon women developed a culture of remembrance through reviving a legacy of evangelical religious experiences. Women structured and planned events where members of the Church connected to a religious heritage through experiencing a recreation of early Mormon historical events. While memory is socially constructed, LDS women actively “claimed the present by reclaiming the past.”⁵⁰ Using relational power, women created and formed a specific Mormon culture connected to Church doctrinal precepts and established a common ontological power through historical remembrance and unanimity. Nancy Winter Parry’s testimony or commitment to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was instilled as a teenager while singing in a play surrounding Joseph Smith Jr.’s 1820 vision. Winter Parry remembers observing the audience and watching them

[Parry just be stunned. And it just made a beautiful addition to what was going on the stage because this choir of youth voices was just powerful, and the lyrics and the music was just beautiful, and because I spent so many months, I must have been fourteen or fifteen. That's where I first began to feel spirit. That's the first time I recognized the beginnings of my testimony. This is real, this is true. I just felt the Spirit testify to me at that age, that was true.]⁵¹

⁴⁹ *Doris Ann Jones Bodily*. Conducted by Rachel Birch. March 2024.

⁵⁰ Laurie Mercier. “Probing Memory and Experience: The Untapped Potential of Oral History (Re)Collections.” Edited by Jessie L. Embry. *Oral History, Community, and Work in the American West*. (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2013). 44.; Jill Derr. Preserving the Record and Memory of the Female Relief Society of Nauvoo, 1842-1892. *Journal of Mormon History*. Vol. 35: No. 3 (Summer 2009). 90.

⁵¹ *Nancy Winter Parry Interview*. Conducted by Rachel Birch. March 2024.

Winter Parry's teenage experience indelibly connected her to the Mormon culture, and she became actively engaged in the Latter-day Saint youth programs. While the youth programs nurtured ontological power of cultural unity and remembrance, activities and lessons focused on life skills and the growth of spirituality through the practice of Mormon doctrinal ideals. One of those focused ideals is getting married in an LDS temple. Adams Clark explains the significance of the temple:

[**Clark** We believe that what is sealed on Earth is sealed in heaven, so getting married in the temple, makes it an eternal marriage, it also seals you to your posterity. In order to attend the temple, there are certain standards that you have to live your life towards to be to go, sacrifice, is the best word I can think to think about it, like choosing to live life a certain way to be able to go to the temple.]⁵²

Nancy emphasizes,

[**Parry** Young women leaders always told us marriage and temple-that was the goal, and so I knew that was something that I wanted. Now, I think that what my assumption was that if you got married in the temple, then your life was going to be okay, that everything was going to work out and your life would be smooth sailing from there.]⁵³

[transition music]

Secret Insecurity

As LDS women have taken a primary role in forming and shaping Mormon culture, women also play a pivotal role in managing and directing their religious community environment.⁵⁴ In any culture that is built around ideals, there can be an element of shame, secrecy, and judgement when a person does not meet the religious society's standard of acceptability or status quo. Historian Laurie Mercier experienced this scenario when conducting oral histories among Latter-day Saint women. "There were lots of silences in these narratives,

⁵² Sarah Jean Adams Clark Interview. Conducted by Rachel Birch. March 2024.

⁵³ Nancy Winter Parry Interview. Conducted by Rachel Birch. March 2024.

⁵⁴ Melissa Wei-Tsing Inouye. "Women and religious organization." 311.

either from pain or embarrassment—women avoided discussion of what they feared would generate societal disapproval and making public what they had held secret.”⁵⁵

Nancy Parry has a very poignant example of failed expectations, sorrow, and embarrassment after her temple marriage to Thomas D. Parry in 1973.

[Parry The beauty of the blessings I heard, and I understood the importance of the covenants that I was making. Edit out voice In fact, what made me very serious about taking my marriage seriously because I knew I had made sacred covenants and I wanted to keep those covenants I wanted to be faithful. I think I knew the marriage was in trouble about a week later. He would tell people he wasn't married. He would take off his ring and act like he wasn't married. I felt like it was more of a, "I can't believe I married you. And this was a big mistake." And I just remember feeling very isolated. And I felt like I couldn't tell anybody, and I felt like I didn't know what to do about it. And I tried to contact somebody at BYU to get some counseling, and he would not even think about that. I had this commitment that I had made in a very sacred place was important to me. And I had a husband who didn't want me. It was embarrassing. My parents wanted me to do what I felt was the right thing to do. They didn't know the extent of the things he had done. And that was just the tip the iceberg. Shortly after we got married, the one time I did share with them that I was unhappy and things were not going well, I cried on the phone to them, and they were very upset, and they called his parents and told his parents what their son was doing to me . And then his parents called him. It was worse than ever. Because he was just like, I can't believe you told your parents. It made my life way worse. It was very, very stressful marriage and my husband was an alcoholic, and also ~~was~~ abused prescription drugs. So, the combination of alcohol and prescription drugs over many years changed him. I never shared the things that were happening to me in my life with anyone. That was reality for other people. I was embarrassed, and I was traumatized, and I was going through things that I didn't think anybody else would understand. And because I didn't feel like there was a safe place for me to share. Because I didn't think anybody was going through what I was going through, no one else was experiencing the stuff that I was, I was telling somebody the things that I was going to, they would look at me like, I was crazy. When I did go to Relief Society. I had a very difficult time relating to many of the women just because we had homemaking lessons, and we had education lessons, and the curriculum was very different than it is today. I didn't bake bread, I didn't do all the things that the women were doing. You know, I didn't can. I did sew, occasionally for my kids, but not I wasn't up to that standard I felt like, so I fell a little bit on the outside. And then I could never tell anybody what life was really like for me at home. Because I felt like I was the only one who was experiencing that.]

After twenty-seven years of marriage,

⁵⁵ Laurie Mercier. "Probing Memory and Experience." 54.

[Parry I went to go pick up my son from the park. Dad was home, kind of raging through the house? F this, F that. And I said, I gotta go pick up Tommy from the park, who wants to go with me? I do. I do. I do. Everybody wanted to go with me. So we all got in the car to the park. And as we were leaving, I said, and I shouldn't have said it but I did, "I wish I didn't have to come back." And my kids said, "Mom, we don't have to." That day I left. The next day went to an a divorce attorney and filed for divorce. And then I called the Relief Society president and asked her if she knew where I could stay, because I didn't have any money. She said, come to my house. Her husband came home from work and they cleaned out a bedroom and my whole family stayed at her house for two weeks. I rented a house and my kids and I stayed there until my husband killed himself. Six months later.]⁵⁶

Nancy had a boulder in her backpack but because of the emotional and mental abuse in her marriage, she didn't feel comfortable sharing with anyone. The fear of social embarrassment and judgment immobilized Winter Parry, until her children helped her to solidify the courage and determination to change. After the death of her husband, Nancy realized her situation was not necessarily unique and there was untapped strength within herself and her religious community. Her experience gave her the opportunity to help other sisters undergoing similar circumstances. As Nancy has taken boulders out of her backpack, the weight slowly receded.

[Parry I think when my children said to me, "you don't have to go back" was the really the first time that I believed that I could get out. And I didn't have to go back and I felt the weight of 100 tons off my shoulders. I just felt like I might be able to have a life again, I might be able to have a thought that wasn't demeaned, or are go for a day without telling me I was stupid. Or that the things that I was doing were ridiculous. I just thought I might be able to do this.]

During this challenging time, Winter Parry was Young Women's President in her congregation and charged with mentoring teenage girls.

[Parry All this happened when I was Young Woman president. They did not release me after I left my husband, because I wondered if they were going to because that was not the example that you wanted someone to set for the young woman, but they did not. And I felt like it was super important for me to show the youth that when bad things happen to you this is what you do. You don't give up on the church, you stay strong. You go to church, you bear your testimony, you let them know that life isn't easy. When bad things happen. You continue and you stay strong, you

⁵⁶ Nancy Winter Parry Interview. Conducted by Rachel Birch. March 2024.

don't change everything you don't give up everything that you learned in your life, you stay strong.]⁵⁷

Nancy's embarrassment and trauma started to be freed when she realized that other women identified and empathized with her experience. Historian Melissa Wei-Tsing Inouye states that, especially, millennial Latter-day Saint women cite "Feeling Judged" as the primary reason for leaving their faith. As women feel alienated, betrayed, or out of place, they detach from the desired ideal of sisterhood solidarity within the Relief Society and equate this socialization separation with a failing in religious doctrinal practice or lived religion and some disenfranchised choose to find different religious communities.

Sometimes a woman's disaffection can come from not meeting cultural expectations. As women were removed from formal church hierarchy, Mormon leadership emphasized that "Woman's most important duty is to her children."⁵⁸ The Relief society and Mormon women dedicated themselves to this ideal and it became a cultural expectation for Mormon women to not work outside the home.⁵⁹ Every woman took that charge personally and interpreted it differently. Christine Chon Sunia has felt forms of this social exclusion through her decision to work as a pediatrician.

As a child, Chon Sunia acquired osteomyelitis which could have impacted her bone growth. After spending a month in the hospital and being in incessant pain, she slowly began to heal.

[**Sunia** As horrible as experience it was, I wanted to be somebody who could help others to go through this experience. So I decided to be a pediatrician. And tada, I'm a pediatrician now.]⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ *The Teachings of George Albert Smith: Eighth President of the church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*. Edited by Robert and Susan McIntosh. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1996). 114.

⁵⁹ Lawrence Foster. "From Frontier Activism to Neo-Victorian Domesticity: Mormon Women in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries." *Journal of Mormon History*. Vol. 6. 1979. 3-21.

⁶⁰ *Christine Suok Chon Sunia Interview*. Conducted by Rachel Birch. March 2024.

As a medical student and doctor, Sunia didn't have many opportunities to socialize with the women in her religious community.

[Sunia I was probably one of the few working moms with younger children, and I couldn't go to the weekly activities and the play groups. And, at school, I never was to be a den mom or different things because I just did not have the time because I was working during the day, when everyone else is at home. And so I feel like, to a certain extent, I missed out on some of that. Fed into my guilt more that somehow I was lacking. I have plenty of regrets in the choices I made in my life. And I always feel guilty when I think about opportunities I've missed with my own children. But I always have to turn back to the thought that, no, this is something I'm supposed to be doing. I feel like that's what the Lord wants me to do. Because otherwise, I should be at home, raising my kids focusing on making sure that they're stalwart in the gospel doing what they are supposed to be doing. But I feel like I need to take care of other people's kids too. And I still can share the gospel with them. It's just in a different way of influencing them, because of helping His other children in other ways. I will tell you I've never felt judged by anyone. Who doesn't work like I do. I just felt myself like a little bit of an outsider because I wasn't able to get as close to them on a regular basis that those different activities. But I think there's just a level of respect that we have for each other. There's never been judgment there.]

The exclusive nature of Mormon culture is created by design to build up a society, or Zion, that is part of the world but not of the world.⁶¹ However, Wei-Tsing Inouye compares this judgmental hyper-exclusive type of culture to a human body's immune system going haywire and attacking native bodies as if they were a foreign contagion. Although, women in the CJCLDS church seek unity, sometimes cultural ideals and women's personalities, cause exclusion or social persecution of fellow church members. While the LDS culture intends to be inclusive, sometimes the ideals can cause frustration and estrangement. Winter Parry did say that the Mormon church culture is trying to improve in that women are more willing to share their personal difficulties and failings rather than trying to keep up the precept of perfection, and only through these efforts of increased transparency is sisterhood slowly improving.

[transition music]

⁶¹ Quentin L. Cook. "Being in the World but Not of the World." *The New Era*. January 2011.

Sacrificial Service

One way Mormon women have tried to be more inclusive and transparent is by focusing on service to both their religious and civic community.⁶² This legacy of community advocacy and service is formed around the idea of creating Zion wherever a person lives while defending and aiding those around her. However, each person interprets service differently. Sarah Adams Clark shared an experience of receiving service when her father passed away and was feeling immense guilt over not being able to resuscitate him.

[**Clark** I feel like it's pretty common practice in church, when something big is going on, to tell people like, "hey, just want to let you know so and so has this going on, or so and so is that going on, and they tell the bishop and the bishop tells the Relief Society presidency, the Relief Society presidency tries to help and then trickles down. I'm the exact opposite. I don't tell anybody, anything. I don't want anybody to know, I don't want meals I want to be left alone until I can process it myself I just kept everything really zipped up on the inside. I wasn't ready to talk about what had happened with my dad, I couldn't get the words out. Truth was is, after my Dad died, I pulled myself away from everybody. I couldn't look them in the face, cause I felt like I killed him. I was at home, laying on the couch, and I had the TV on I think I was just watching Law and Order over, there was like 500 seasons. So, you just start at one and you just push play. Netflix says, "are you still watching?" You're like, don't be rude, dude. Don't judge me. I just had it on repeat, and I was laying on the couch. And I just remember thinking it was really hard to breathe. Like just holding my breath constantly. I don't even know how long I've been watching it. I mean, it could have been a day. Like I just didn't want to talk to anybody. I didn't want to see anybody. It just kept trying to breathe and to not think of his sternum crack underneath my hands And there was a knock on our door after 10pm. And my husband answered it was this girl from hair school. And he's like I don't think she wants to see anybody. She just said "I know." She came in, she didn't make eye contact with me. She just laid behind me on the couch. She pulled a blanket over us, and she took one hand and propped it against my back. She didn't rub my back. She didn't tickle my back. She just put one hand in the middle of my back and just sat there with me for who knows how long, and I said "My dad died. He's gone." She said, "I know." That's it. That's all she said. And at some point, she took her hand off my back, got up, covered with a me with a blanket, kissed me on the forehead, and left. I remember thinking at that moment, that for that time that she was there with that hand on my back. That I could breathe. That the waves of grief weren't knocking me over. I wasn't the only one holding me up. There was somebody else holding me up. And it took me a while but that's where my testimony started. Because in our LDS church, when you get baptized, at eight, you make promises and one of the promises that

⁶² Claudia Bushman. "Mormon feminism after 1970." *The Routledge Handbook of Mormonism and Gender*. Editors Taylor G. Petrey and Amy Hoyt. (Milton: Taylor & Francis Group, 2020). Accessed February 2, 2024. ProQuest Ebook Central. 166; As quoted in Melissa Wei-Tsing Inouye. "Women and religious organization." 316-317.

you make is to take the Lord's name upon you, and to mourn with those that mourn, and rejoice with those that rejoice. And I remember thinking this is what mourning with those that mourn is. She didn't try to fix it. She didn't say comforting words. She didn't try to make it her story, she just put one hand on my back, and sat in the grief with me. And for that moment, I really think she took some of it upon herself, a little bit. She mourned with me to the point where I was able to breathe because I wasn't holding it all myself. This covenant that we make, this covenant that we keep, is mourning with those that mourn taking upon us the name of Jesus, and like he did in the Garden of Gethsemane where He took on the sins of the world, that's what we do. When you feel guilty, or you feel sad for somebody else, that somebody else, they feel empathy. You're taking a little bit of that on yourself and taking a little bit off of them. And so I had gone to church off and on growing up, and I had been married in the temple, and checked the boxes. But, it was Roseanne Larson Fick, and her hand on my back, that I came to testimony of the Atonement, and what that meant, and what that means in my life.]⁶³

Sarah's lived religious experience was enhanced when another woman served her. Adams Clark's backpack was crushing her until another sister lightened Sarah's backpack by helping her carry grief. Contemporary women in the church draw strength and examples from both their peers and historical Mormon women to defend a belief system, their community family, and each other. Ultimately, "the threads that connect all LDS female subjects, regardless of any distinguishing factors, are not about proper behavior, employment, or appearances" but the importance of their family and sacrificing for the greater good.⁶⁴ For members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, the term "family" doesn't necessarily denote biological connections, but family connections could be social, religious, and cultural ties.

In each congregation, the Relief Society President is a local female religious leader who is an "implementer of strong social networks" and who focuses leading women in efforts of compassion and service to every women in her congregation or ward.⁶⁵ While the Relief Society President is aware of the needs of each member of the congregation, she delegates to other women to

⁶³ Sarah Jean Adams Clark Interview. Conducted by Rachel Birch. March 2024.

⁶⁴ Catherine A. Brekus. "Mormon Women and the Problem of Historical Agency." 76.

⁶⁵ Rebekah Perkins Crawford. "Gender and Mental Health in Mormon Contexts." *The Routledge Handbook of Mormonism and Gender*. Editors Taylor G. Petrey and Amy Hoyt. (Milton: Taylor & Francis Group, 2020). Accessed February 2, 2024. ProQuest Ebook Central. 384.

help lighten backpacks and help the community family and Church members polish painful boulders.

This principle of sacrificial service was instilled upon Christine, at a very young age.

[**Sunia** Both my parents taught us that we always give to others that we have to serve others no matter what. We always did service it and sometimes we hated it. Now I look back and I fondly think of it, but our parents would make us dress up in our traditional Korean hanboks, they had purchased these, you know, they're not cheap. And we would dress up at our traditional Korean outfits and go Christmas caroling. So they pile us into this station wagon, and we drive with the snow or whatever, and we'd go visit widows of the church or friends of the family, even our neighbors, they would just drag us out. And we dreaded it, we hated it, but to know those families really appreciate especially those shut in widows. I have a fond memory. There's a woman in our neighborhood who her husband and her walked around the neighborhood faithfully every single day together. We found out that she was diagnosed with Alzheimer's, but she didn't recognize anything, and she just walked around oblivious to the world, and we went caroling to her that Christmas and even though she like never responded to anything, she actually started to cry it and I don't know why I remember that so strongly, but I knew in spite of us resenting that my parents did this all the time, it made a difference. And I've never forgotten that.]⁶⁶

Service is a keystone to the Relief Society, and while each Mormon woman has a unique lived childhood experience, they do have the Relief Society and the church in common. As a current Relief Society President, Christine Chon Sunia believes,

[**Sunia** I feel like I have certain talents that men don't have that I can do better, and I think that is my role is. I think that when there's a need the sisters are the first line of defense. And then we disseminate from there. I think we are always kind of in the background. We're not necessarily the one out in the forefront, unless we want to be, but we're always working in the in the wings, like making sure things happen. And I think a lot of times, we're perfectly content to be that way. I don't mind getting glory for things that I do. Because I don't think I need that. I get joy from serving, I get joy from the things that I do. I think that the Relief Society is another God ordained organization, in its own way. And that the Lord acknowledges that we have abilities that no one else can do what we do. And we just have to figure out which ones those are. I like that now, even like youth programs and all that that stuff, there's a general lesson book, but it's not like okay, you need to teach this, this, this this. You're supposed to go with a spirit, you're supposed to figure out what's best for those people that you're serving and working with and tailor to their needs. Because every congregation, every ward family is different.]⁶⁷

Each Relief Society is different in that varied personalities and leadership styles cultivate assorted responsiveness and atmosphere in relational and ontological structures. In every

⁶⁶ *Christine Suok Chon Sunia Interview*. Conducted by Rachel Birch. March 2024.

⁶⁷ *Christine Suok Chon Sunia Interview*. Conducted by Rachel Birch. March 2024.

congregation, a woman was assigned to be a “Visiting Teacher” to mentor, befriend, and serve other women in her ward family. As a teenager, Sarah Adams Clark had an early interaction with her own mother’s Visiting Teacher. Adams Clark grew up in a family that struggled with drug addictions and poverty and only sometimes went to church. Adams Clark remembers a time when their family home was in foreclosure, and the family faced eviction. A Visiting Teacher, from the LDS Relief Society, looked to lighten the load of a difficult situation.

[Clark There was one lady. She was my mom's visiting teacher. And she was incredibly diligent about keeping in contact with my mom. She visit taught my mom religiously. She came every month, sometimes a couple times a month. She never missed. She always came. So, our house went into foreclosure, and we were told we had three days to get out. And we had nowhere to go. My parents sat us down, “the bank is taking our house, we need to get everything out that we can, we're gonna have to leave. But I remember packing up thinking we are never going to get stuff out. I remember thinking we’re never getting out of here, this is never going to happen. But I remember the last morning getting up early, and going out to that long street, and looking to the right and looking to the left. And it was just rows of cars and trucks, and I just remember thinking, “wow, I wish they were here to help us.” And it was, my mom who was very proud person, hadn't said anything to anybody about losing our house except to that one visiting teacher, who came religiously. And she set it up and, I kid you not. I swear half the ward showed up and they packed our entire house in a matter of like half a day. They got everything, and we had nowhere to put it. So, they took it to their homes and stored it in their garages and they played music, and someone bought pizza. I remember it being really fun without realizing that we were leaving and never coming back.]⁶⁸

For Mormon women, religion is not just about hierarchy or Sunday services, it is a way of life or a lived religion. “Latter-day Saints devote much physical, emotional, spiritual, social, cultural, psychological, and sometimes even economic and political energy toward Mormonism.”⁶⁹ The Relief Society President utilizes her relational and ontological powers to guide other women to make regular contact with each woman in the congregation. Women leadership give male religious leaders a better idea of what happens in congregations, and, for the most part, the priesthood hierarchy supports and encourages women’s efforts and

⁶⁸ Sarah Jean Adams Clark Interview. Conducted by Rachel Birch. March 2024.

⁶⁹ Chiung Hwang Chen and Ethan Yorgason. “IntersectIonality.” 42.

innovations. Relational and ontological women socialization has aided in the reinforcement of doctrinal and social ideals throughout Mormon society.

[transition music]

Conclusion

Women have experienced and live religion differently than men. This gendered religious experience is not unique to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The CJCLDS Female Relief Society, has historically mirrored many North American women's benevolence organizational activities throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. During the Second Great Awakening, many women in Evangelical Protestant groups organized into sewing circles or benevolent societies which gave them access to the public sphere.⁷⁰ In parallel, through the Female Relief Society, Mormon women publicly engaged in political arenas to speak on the behalf others, but namely to protect their religion, community, and lifestyle.⁷¹ Though imperfect by nature, the Relief Society women members have increased efforts to "speak no evil of each other" and "cultivate a spirit of union humanity and love."⁷² Sometimes in efforts to encourage cultural ideals, women have overcorrected and created an environment of judgment and alienation which isolated women who viewed themselves different than the demands of the dominant religious culture. The battle for inclusion is constant in a perfection focused framework.⁷³

⁷⁰ Jill Mulvay Derr. "The Lion and the Lioness: Brigham Young and Eliza R. Snow." *Brigham Young University Studies*. Vol. 40 No 2. (2001). 80.

⁷¹ Katherine Kitterman. "'No Ordinary Feelings.'" 94-98.

⁷² Richard L. Jensen. "Forgotten Relief Societies, 1844-67." *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*. Vol 16: 1 1983. 113.

⁷³ In the last ten years, both the formal CJCLDS hierarchy and women leaders have pivoted from an unachievable perfection ideal to individuals pursuing an ideal of personalized completeness. See Jeffery L. Holland. "Be Ye Therefore Perfect—Eventually." *Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints October General Conference*. October 2017.

As Mormon women were charged with caring for home and family and then marginalized from formal church government hierarchy, in the early twentieth century, a power vacuum was created in relational and ontological power sectors of church society. In reality, only a balanced approach of religious government hierarchy and cultural cultivation management will achieve more inclusive practices and positive environment in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Historian Claudia Bushman asserts that Mormon women “find in the church a place for satisfying service and an opportunity for female companionship. They do not harbor a secret wish for complete autonomy. Mormon women want partnership with their husbands” and priesthood leadership.⁷⁴ Christine Sunia echoes this sentiment of each individual doing their best.

[Sunia We are the little pebble thrown in the rain, with the ripples that come from the things that we do. And so we know that even simple and small things can lead to great things. So I'm just doing my part to be able to do that.]⁷⁵

Each pebble taken from a backpack and polished, helps each religious woman be a little happier, a little stronger, and slowly constructs sisterhood solidarity. While balanced completeness is the goal of progress in Church organization and cultural evolution, Mormon sisterhood should never be afraid to push forward in spunky ingenuity. As Eliza R. Snow aptly said, “We need not be afraid of doing too much nor getting ahead of our Brethren and iff we did why let them hurry up.”⁷⁶

Credits

I'd like to dedicate this episode to my husband, Nick, who keeps everything rolling when I am neck deep in the archives. I want to offer a special thanks to Doris Ann Jones Bodily, Nancy Winter Parry, Christine Suok Chon Sunia, and Sarah Jean Adams Clark for generously

⁷⁴ Claudia L. Bushman. “Mormon Women.” 725.

⁷⁵ *Christine Suok Chon Sunia Interview*. Conducted by Rachel Birch. March 2024.

⁷⁶ Jill Derr. “Preserving the. 99.; Voice actor: Donna Baker.

sharing their life experiences with me. Additionally, I would like to thank Jeanette Patrick and Donna Baker for their voice talent and R2Studios at the Roy Rosenzweig Center for History and New Media for allowing me dedicated time to in their recording studio and always helping me with audio editing dilemmas. The music in the show was produced by Yeti Music.⁷⁷ Thanks for listening and we will see you again soon.

[closing music]

⁷⁷ “Turn Away.” *Yeti Music*. <https://uppbeat.io/t/yeti-music/turn-away>. License Number: J7VNHEFELFIF4VCA.

Bibliography

Primary

Christine Suok Chon Sunia Interview, Conducted by Rachel Birch, March 2024.

Doris Ann Jones Bodily Interview, Conducted by Rachel Birch, March 2024.

Holland, Jeffery L., “Be Ye Therefore Perfect—Eventually,” *Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints October General Conference*, October 2017.

“Minutes of Great Indignation Meeting, January 13, 1870,” *The First Fifty Years of Relief Society*, www.churchofjesuschrist.org, Accessed Apr 12, 2024.

Nancy Winter Parry Interview, Conducted by Rachel Birch, March 2024.

Sarah Jean Clark Interview, Conducted by Rachel Birch, March 2024.

The Teachings of George Albert Smith: Eighth President of the church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Edited by Robert and Susan McIntosh (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1996).

The Teachings of Harold B. Lee, Edited by Clyde J. Williams (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2015).

“Turn Away.” *Yeti Music*. <https://uppbeat.io/t/yeti-music/turn-away>. License Number: J7VNHEFELFIF4VCA.

Secondary

Allen, James B.; Jessie L. Embry, "'Provoking the Brethren to Good Works': Susa Young Gates, the Relief Society, and Genealogy," *Brigham Young University Studies*, Vol 31, No 2, Spring 1991.

Armitage, Susan, “Women and Men in Western History: A Stereoptical Vision,” *The Gendered West*, Edited Gordon Morris Bakken and Brenda Farrington (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc. 2000).

Brekus, Catherine A., "Mormon Women and the Problem of Historical Agency," *Journal of Mormon History*, Vol. 37, No. 2 (Spring 2011).

Bushman, Claudia L., "Mormon Women," *Encyclopedia of Women and Religion in North America*, Edited by Rosemary Skinner Keller and Rosemary Radford Ruether (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006).

Cook, Quentin L., "Being in the World but Not of the World," *The New Era*, January 2011.

Cornwall Madsen, Carol., "Creating Female Community: Relief Society in Cache Valley, Utah, 1868-1900," *Journal of Mormon History*, Vol. 21 No. 2, Fall 1995.

Cornwall Madsen, Carol. *A Mormon Woman in Victorian America*. Dissertation. (University of Utah, 1985).

Derr, Jill. "Preserving the Record and Memory of the Female Relief Society of Nauvoo, 1842-1892." *Journal of Mormon History*. Vol. 35: No. 3 (Summer 2009).

Edited by Jessie L. Embry, *Oral History, Community, and Work in the American West* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2013).

Foster, Lawrence, "From Frontier Activism to Neo-Victorian Domesticity: Mormon Women in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries," *Journal of Mormon History*, Vol. 6. 1979.

Hall, David, "A Crossroads for Mormon Women: Amy Brown Lyman, J. Reuben Clark, and the decline of Organized Women's Activism in the Relief Society," *Journal of Mormon History*, Vol 36 No 2, Spring 2010.

Jensen, Richard L., "Forgotten Relief Societies, 1844-67," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, Vol 16: 1, 1983.

Kaf Alghazal, Casey Elizabeth., "Patriarchal Bargaining: Female Religious Authority in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints and the Muftiyas of Al Azhar," *The Muslim World*, Vol 112, Issue 2. Spring 2022, 225-246. <https://doi.org/10.1111/muwo.12435>. Accessed 8/16/2023.

Kitterman, Katherine, "'No Ordinary Feelings': Mormon Women's Political Activism, 1870-1920," *PhD Dissertation* (Washington: American University, 2021).

McDannell, Colleen, "Introduction," *Religions of the United States: In Practice*, Edited by Colleen McDannell (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

Mulvey Derr, Jill., "The Lion and the Lioness: Brigham Young and Eliza R. Snow," *Brigham Young University Studies*, Vol. 40 No 2 (2001).

Mulvey Derr, Jill Carol.; Derr, C. Brooklyn., "Outside the Mormon Hierarchy: Alternative Aspects of Institutional Power," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, Vol. 15, Winter 1982.

Melanie Newport. "The Utah Eagle Forum: Legitimizing Political Activism as Women's Work." Edited by Jessie L. Embry. *Oral History, Community, and Work in the American West*. (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2013). 257.

Ritterhouse, Jennifer., "Reading, Intimacy, and the Role of Uncle Remus in White Southern Social Memory," *The Journey of Southern History*, Volume XLIX No 3, August 2003.

Smith-Rosenberg, Carroll, *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985).

The Routledge Handbook of Mormonism and Gender, Editors Taylor G. Petrey and Amy Hoyt (Milton: Taylor & Francis Group, 2020). Accessed February 2, 2024. ProQuest Ebook Central.

Thompson, Paul, *Voice of the Past: Oral History*. 3rd ed (Oxford: Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 2000).

Ursenbach Beecher, Maureen, "The 'Leading Sisters': A Female Hierarchy in Nineteenth Century Mormon Society," *Journal of Mormon History*, Vol. 9. 1982, 25-39.

<https://www.jstor.org/stable/23285914>. Accessed 8/16/2023.

Ursenbach Beecher, Maureen., "Women's Work on the Mormon Frontier," *Utah Historically Quarterly*, Vol. 49, 3 (Summer 1981). 278.

Van Wagenen, Lola. "In their Own Behalf: The Politicization of Mormon Women and the 1870 Franchise," *The Dialogue*, Vol 24 No 4. Winter 1991.