2013

"It'll be Zion to Me": Ideal Mormon Masculinity in Legacy

David H. Newman

Follow this and additional works at: https://surface.syr.edu/rel_thesis

Part of the Religion Commons

Recommended Citation
Newman, David H., "It'll be Zion to Me": Ideal Mormon Masculinity in Legacy" (2013). Religion - Theses. 3. https://surface.syr.edu/rel_thesis/3

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the College of Arts and Sciences at SURFACE. It has been accepted for inclusion in Religion - Theses by an authorized administrator of SURFACE. For more information, please contact surface@syr.edu.
ABSTRACT

This thesis considers the presentation of ideal Mormon masculinity in the film Legacy (Kieth Merrill, 1993), produced by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The film responds to the image of Mormon men created in previous films by articulating an alternate masculinity which distinguishes Mormon men from both negative stereotypes and other American men. This thesis briefly presents the history of the cinematic image of Mormon men and earlier attempts by the LDS Church to frame a different conception of Mormon men through film. Then, the work explores Mormon masculinity theoretically via R.W. Connell's hegemonic masculinity, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's notion of becoming minor, and Judith Butler's performativity of gender. These three approaches together help shape a working definition of Mormon masculinity grounded on faithfulness, competence, and tenderness. The final chapter offers a reading of Legacy to show how the film presents this definition of masculinity.
“IT'LL BE ZION TO ME”: IDEAL MORMON MASCU LINITY IN LEGACY

by

David H. Newman

B.A., Brigham Young University, 2004
M.L.I.S., University of Alberta, 2007
B.A., University of Utah, 2011

THESIS
Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in Religion.

Syracuse University
June 2013
Table of Contents

Introduction: “Zion cannot be built without these principles” 1

“They hate us.”: Cinematic Stereotypes of Mormon Men 7

“You have to be a man now.”: A Theory of Mormon Masculinity 37

“I've little to offer.”: The Ideal Mormon Man in Legacy 66

Bibliography 91
Illustrative Material

Figure 1: Still from Legacy 2
Figure 2: Still from Legacy 2
Figure 3: Frank Leslie's Illustrative Newspaper, February 4, 1882 12
Figure 4: Cover of “The Mormon Coon” 13
Figure 5: Still from A Mormon Maid 15
Figure 6: Still from Wagon Master 22
Figure 7: Still from The God Makers 27
Figure 8: Still from Johnny Lingo 31
Figure 9: Still from Legacy 67
Figure 10: Still from Legacy 67
Figure 11: Still from Legacy 67
Figure 12: Still from Legacy 74
Figure 13: Still from Legacy 78
Figure 14: Still from Legacy 78
Figure 15: Still from Legacy 83
Figure 16: Still from Legacy 84
Figure 17: Still from Legacy 85
Figure 18: Still from Legacy 90
Introduction: “Zion cannot be built without these principles”

After six years of extensive remodeling, the Hotel Utah in downtown Salt Lake City reopened to the public in the summer of 1993. The space, now christened the Joseph Smith Memorial Building, no longer served as a hotel but housed two upscale restaurants, several rooms available for reception rental, office spaces for the burgeoning family history department of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and a 500-seat theater. The addition of a theater signaled a new approach to distributing films produced by the LDS Church. The theater boasted an oversized 31’x62’ screen and projection of 70mm film run on a continuous loop to allow the rapid repeat showings. The first film to make use of this special theater was the ambitious epic Legacy (Kieth Merrill, 1993). Shot on location throughout the United States with a cast of professional actors, the film charts the early years of Mormonism. In addition to crafting a historical narrative, it also presents role models for everyday late 20th century Latter-day Saints. This thesis will consider Legacy to address the question of ideal Mormon masculinity.

In the second to last scene of Legacy, the protagonist-narrator Eliza walks alongside her wagon across a rocky landscape. She appears worn out and dejected. Then, a group of boys come racing along shouting, “The Battalion is back!” She hands off the child she is carrying to her sister-in-law and starts walking more quickly to meet the returning men. She sees David, her husband, and rushes into his arms. They wordlessly embrace. This embrace presents a mirror image of their leave taking embrace, enhancing

---

the closure of the return. David had left the main company to join the Mormon Battalion and march to San Diego in order to provide much needed financial support to the emigrating Mormons. He returns just before they enter the Salt Lake valley, the saints' long-awaited and hard-won Zion.

Eliza has already achieved her Zion with this reunion. As he left, David told his wife, “It may be in Zion that we meet again.” She tearfully replies, “It'll be Zion to me if we ever meet again.” This mapping of the promised land onto the presence of her husband is one of the most pointed ways in which Legacy constructs a depiction of ideal Mormon masculinity. This ideal and its filmic representation grow out of both the theological and social constitution of masculinity inside Mormonism and as a response to a long history of media portrayals of Mormon men. In this work, I present a brief history of the filmic representation of Mormon masculinity, provide a definition of Mormon masculinity that has developed in response to that image, and show how Legacy exemplifies that definition.

Produced by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the early 1990s, Legacy recounts the early years of church history through the viewpoint of the
fictionalized Eliza Williams, a composite of several historical women. She and her family join the church in its first few years and gather with the saints, facing strident opposition in Missouri and Illinois. During this time, Eliza's father serves a mission in England where he baptizes David Walker. After emigrating to Nauvoo, David woos Eliza and edges out her fiancé. Soon after they marry, the body of the saints undertakes the trek to Salt Lake City. This sweeping history is compressed into 53 minutes creating a dense, rapidly paced narrative.

Although not the first feature-length film produced by the LDS Church, Legacy merits special attention for several reasons. Shot on location throughout the United States on 70mm film with a sprawling cast, this mini-epic is significantly more ambitious and professionally produced than earlier efforts. Unlike the two subsequent feature exhibited in the same theater, Legacy significantly downplays the roles and influence of major figures in the tradition's history. For instance, although the film ends with the arrival into the Salt Lake Valley, Brigham Young does not appear at all in the narrative. This focus on the rank and file members positions Legacy as an excellent source for Mormon role models for everyday members.

Prior to Legacy, most LDS Church-produced films had been distributed to local meetinghouses or member homes and shown to smaller groups. Legacy presents a very different method of distribution. The film premiered in a purpose-built theater that still retains the name Legacy Theatre. During its first month, 145,000 viewers saw the film.  

The Church did not charge admission but did use a ticketing system for crowd control.

---

The film played each hour nine times a day Monday through Saturday for its entire seven year run. Subsequently, it was released on both VHS and DVD and sold for minimal cost (in 2013 the DVD version is $4.50). Legacy continues to play on request at various visitor centers of the LDS Church. This method of distribution indicates the LDS Church's support for the film, and the massive audience of church members and visitors to Temple Square place Legacy as a crucial depiction of the Mormon story generally.

Because I am focusing on this one film, my discussion of Mormon masculinity will not dwell on changes in the conception of masculinity or Mormonness over time. Rather, I am attempting to capture Mormon masculinity at the key moment of the late 20th century. The moment and its cinematic output, however, are informed by the history of how media have portrayed Mormonism. Therefore, the history included below is only the history of the treatment of Mormonism in film that shapes the LDS Church response in the form of Legacy.

A brief note about use of the term Mormon. In this work, Mormon refers not only to the institution and the individual members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints but also to the broader cultural arena of the movement. In other words, Mormon refers to both an ecclesiastical membership and practices beyond a narrow religious definition. In some ways this follows the pattern of considering Mormon to be a quasi-ethnicity3. While I am not engaging the debate over peoplehood, I do employ the term Mormon to refer to a network of religious and cultural identities that are not clearly

demarcated from each other. Despite the growing international membership of the LDS Church, I also employ this term to refer mostly to Mormons in North America.

This use of Mormon should not imply that the Salt Lake-based church and its attendant culture have ultimate control over the application of this term. As the largest denomination espousing the teachings of Joseph Smith, this is the group that outsiders most commonly associate with the term Mormon. The various other Latter Day Saint denominations, especially the second and third largest (Community of Christ and the Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints), also have unique approaches to and iterations of masculinity in a broader Mormon sense. Due to the divergent history, aims, and teachings of these organizations, however, my focus is much narrower and therefore not pan-Mormon.

This work focuses on masculinity and thus largely sidelines consideration of Mormon femininity. I realize that, on the surface, this duplicates a long and unfortunate tradition of ignoring and silencing Mormon women. Because masculinity only exists in relation to femininity, however, this work connects to the scholarly investigation to recover and recuperate the Mormon feminine voices both historical and current. While my work will not explicitly connect to that ongoing conservation, I hope that adding in some of the contours and facets of Mormon masculinity can provide insights into the relationship between genders inside the LDS tradition.

My approach falls into three chapters. In the first, I outline the stereotypical depiction of Mormon men in non-LDS cinema as well as some pre-Legacy attempts by the LDS Church to reshape that image. The second chapter provides a definition of
Mormon masculinity through the theoretical frames of hegemonic masculinity, majoritarian-minoritarian slippage, and the performativity of gender. The final chapter reads the film *Legacy*, showing how this definition of Mormon masculinity appears and functions. Establishing proper gender roles may not be the goal of a film that is primarily meant to convert or reaffirm faith in the message of Mormonism. Yet gender continues to be a primary concern for the LDS Church and film is an obvious and effective means of conveying proper conduct and identity. As Joseph Smith sermonizes as he heals Eliza, “Zion cannot be built without these principles” of faith and obedience. He does not mention the importance of the principles of Mormon masculinity. But Eliza's weepy farewell to her husband informs the viewer that Zion is not merely an ideal place, but the place where ideal masculinity is close at hand.
“They hate us.”: Cinematic Stereotypes of Mormon Men

Images of Mormon men proliferate throughout media. In some instances, they are fully realized individuals and central characters such as Joe Pitt, the closeted gay Mormon lawyer, in Tony Kushner's *Angels in America*. At other times, their Mormonness is so hidden that its markers are only evident to fellow members, such as the various men in *Napoleon Dynamite* (Jared Hess, 2004). Much more frequently, Mormon men appear only briefly, as a punchline or minor moment in the service of a larger narrative. For example, early in the musical *Chicago*, one of the imprisoned female characters defends the murder of her Mormon husband. Like the other men in the song, “he had it coming,” Ezekiel Young was not what he claimed: “Single, he told me? Single my ass. Not only was he married, he had six wives. One of those Mormons, y'know.” The audience “knows” that Mormons are polygamists and this knowledge fuels the humor of the scene. John Kander and Fred Ebb (*Chicago*’s writers) did not create the image of the Mormon man as an untrustworthy polygamist. That image has circulated in popular media since the 1850s. The shifty sexual deviant is not the only stereotype that defines Mormon men, however. This chapter outlines the contours of the Mormon man as portrayed in various mass media, especially cinema. The consideration of these representations covers the very early days of the silent era through the late 1980s, when production on *Legacy* began. The chapter closes with the institutional attempts of the LDS Church prior to *Legacy* to shape an alternative view of the Mormon man.

General perceptions of Mormonism helped craft a stereotypical image of the
“Mormon man” well before the advent of film. In his work on anti-Mormon polemical writings of the 19th century, for example, J. Spencer Fluhman asserts that Mormonism long played the prime example of what religion is not in the minds of Americans.4 Mormonism appeared variously as an imposture, a delusion, or a dangerous form of theocracy in treatises critical of the church. At the most extreme, opponents classed Mormonism as a homegrown variant of primitive religion. Mormonism taught doctrines and practices more closely aligned with the perceived superstition of African or Asian religions. Mormons were viewed as blindly following leaders, believing in magical superstitions, and being driven by lascivious impulses. This lengthy process of cultural critique created images of Mormon leaders as charlatans, its adherents as dupes or calculatingly sex-obsessed, and its practices threatening and vaguely foreign.

By the end of the century, the abandonment of polygamy shifted the rhetorical attacks on Mormonism towards being a heretical form of Christianity.5 The rescinding of polygamy in 1890, however, only partially explains this shift of perception. Fluhman argues that the more crucial moment for the LDS Church is the 1893 World Parliament of Religions and the shift in religious studies it indicated.6 Although the LDS Church's request for participation was rejected and the Parliament largely reiterated Christian (and Western) superiority, the large-scale meeting did signal the new direction in the discourse about religion. Religion, as a term, was no longer entirely synonymous with Christianity. Opening the definition to cross-cultural manifestations rather than measuring all by the

5 Ibid., 135-140.
6 Ibid., 128-130.
type of less-true Christianity in the eyes of Protestants rather than a totally false superstition. Additionally, the praise heaped upon the Utah exhibit at the related exposition instructed church leaders in modes of public relations to cast the best light on Mormonism.

The rejection of the LDS Church from the World Parliament of Religion shows that the rejection of polygamy in 1890 did not adequately solve the “Mormon Question” for Americans. As Kathleen Flake argues polygamy was more symptom of the troubling nature of Mormonism than root cause. The real issue was that Mormonism's theocratic structure and ambitions seemed to place its members above civil law. Mormons seemed to reject the foundational authority of the state in favor of religious authority thereby undermining the American system. Sarah Barringer Gordon finds a similar sense underlying the lengthy judicial fights over polygamy. Polygamy challenged not only the moral basis of America, but the political basis of ultimate obedience to the state. Writers, reformers and politicians regularly connected polygamy to slavery, figuring the women as the slaves and Mormon men as the equivalent of the lazy, greedy, and harsh slaveowners. Because polygamy and slavery were intimately linked rhetorically and politically, anti-polygamy campaigns replaced abolition as a prime site of moral outrage after the Civil War.

Writers of fiction were some of the most ardent attackers of Mormonism during the period of anti-polygamy action. Terryl Givens argues that 19th century anti-Mormon

---

9 Ibid., 51-58.
fiction perpetuated two images of Mormons to cast them as “ethnically distinct, transgressive, dangerous.”

Mormons were either Oriental (or at least, non-white) or trafficked in bondage, compulsion, or mesmerism. Givens claims these modes of description were attempts to defuse the dread of Mormonism overwhelming America. Mormonism was growing rapidly during the era and these authors of fiction hoped to both create rhetorical distance and explain this success. By casting Mormons as non-white or Oriental, authors could reify the Other-ness of Mormons. The tales of compulsion, either physical or psychological, assuaged the “anxiety of seduction.” The Mormon converts, these narratives assert, are not willingly joining the church and moving to Utah. Thus, the readers need not concern themselves with the possibility of their own conversion to this threatening sect.

Megan Sanborn Jones scrutinizes the anti-Mormon melodramas of the second half of the 19th century. In these plays, Mormon men were villains falling into one of three stereotypes very similar to the ones Givens articulates. Mormon men are rapists, murderers, or Turks. In these melodramas, Mormons committed rape, aided by their charismatic appeal, under the guise of polygamy. Jones argues that the portrayal of polygamy in the dramas was not only to attack Mormonism but also to titillate the audience. Mormons as murderers in these plays contrasts their nefarious use of violence with the heroes' use of violence to protect family or in support of Manifest

11 Ibid., 128.
12 Ibid., 138.
13 Ibid., 129.
15 Ibid., 69.
Destiny. To drive home the image of Mormons as Turks, stage directions often include costuming Mormons in turbans in order to cast them as more aligned with the dark, mysterious, violent, and sexual Orient. In each of these three images, Jones finds authors employing Mormons as a foil to define what it means to be and act like an American. While Givens focuses on the ways in which Mormon Other-ness defused American anxiety, Jones extends the argument. Mormon Other-ness not only assuaged concerns but became a key method of solidifying American identity.

Both Givens and Jones argue that the focus of all this invective on Mormonism attempts to distinguish the visually indistinct Mormon male as Other. Although thought of as radically different, Mormons lacked the markers of a distinct ethnicity. In physiognomy, speech, and dress, Mormons appeared no different from their fellow Americans. Additionally, unlike many other minorities of the era, the bulk of Mormons were geographically isolated from the rest of the country. When Americans who did not travel to Utah did come into contact with Mormons it was either briefly with converts (American and foreign) traveling to the Great Basin or missionaries. Anti-Mormon novels and plays attempt to create categories and axes by which to distinguish individuals who are not prima facie distinct. The result is the stridently anti-Mormon tropes employed, especially the casting of Mormons as non-white despite appearances.

What authors were attempting rhetorically during this period, illustrators undertook visually. Gary L. Bunker and Davis Bitton present a rather stable graphic image of Mormonism during its first century. The era of Mormonism's establishment

---

16 Ibid., 116.
17 Ibid., 150.
18 Gary L. Bunker and Davis Bitton, The Mormon Graphic Image, 1834-1914: Cartoons, Cariactures, and Illustrations (Salt Lake: University of Utah, 1983).
was also the beginning of the golden age of the illustrated periodical. Sensationalized accounts of events in 1850s Utah fueled American fascination with Mormonism. Lurid tales of polygamy and violent depictions of the 1857 Utah War appeared frequently. Following a lull in coverage during the Civil War, Mormonism once again captured American imagination during the anti-polygamy legal drama. Bunker and Bitton categorize these illustrations as lampooning and attacking Mormonism on various grounds, most frequently with jabs about polygamy. These vary from the humorous to the more serious, as in one 1882 image from *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* that shows female European converts entering a skull labeled “Utah” on their way to polygamy.¹⁹

Bunker and Bitton present two directions that illustrations took in portraying Mormonism. The first was to present Mormonism as a political snarl and moral evil, something akin to slavery, which must be solved through excision. This view often appears with a caricature of Brigham Young or later Joseph F. Smith standing in for the whole of Mormonism. An alternate route was to portray Mormons as allied closely with ethnic minorities. Mormons appear as unruly and liminal Americans alongside Chinese, Irish Catholics, African Americans, and Native Americans. At times, these images even blended, as in the

---

¹⁹ Ibid., 82.
cover illustration for the popular humor song “The Mormon Coon.” An African American man sits on a stately chair with the long beard and clothing of Joseph F. Smith, the well-known and recognizable President of the LDS Church. Surrounding this man are the faces of his diverse polygamist wives, including a Gibson girl, an African American woman with a head kerchief, and an Asian with chopsticks in her hair. Both routes present Mormonism as a problem and Mormon men as domineering, rapacious, and lascivious.

The constellation of polemical rhetoric, novels, plays, and illustrations create the image of the Mormon man as distinctly Other, despite outward appearance. The focus is on his seemingly inexhaustible sexual appetite and willingness to engage in violence. This stereotypical image is taken up by the early producers of cinema. While these films remove the Oriental trappings, they reinforce and display many of the perceptions of illustration and fiction. Silent cinema's Mormons are conniving religious frauds driven by lust. By mid-20th century, the Hays Production Code rejected both the representation of polygamy and the disparaging of religion. These strictures along with other factors shifted the image of the Mormon men away from over-sexualized and into reluctant frontiersmen that need rescuing by “real” Americans. The lifting of the production code allowed more critical portrayals of Mormon men, who appear as duped or fanatical followers of a corrupt religion. Thus, prior to the production of Legacy, three main images define the Mormon man in cinema: the insatiable and conspiratorial sexual predator, the victimized settler, and the derided heretic.

The silent era produced a stridently negative view of the Mormon man grounded

20 Ibid., 89.
in deviant sexuality. The success of the Danish silent film, *A Victim of the Mormons* (August Blom, 1911), incited a rash of five more anti-Mormon films over the next three years.²¹ *Victim* tells the story of a young woman tricked into conversion to Mormonism and whisked to Utah. Florence, the woman, regrets her decision but is held captive by the Mormons in a basement cell until rescued by her fiancé from the old country. This film and the other five it sparked are all lost, but surviving materials suggest that the depiction of Mormons (who are almost exclusively male) center on the use of deception, coercion, and violence to satisfy their polygamist lust.²²

In the one surviving American anti-Mormon silent film, *A Mormon Maid* (Robert Z. Leonard, 1917), the Mormon men are calculating villains and religious frauds who exert dominance in Utah through violence, forced marriage, and intimidation. Brigham Young is little more than a pawn for Darius Burr whose lust for non-Mormon Dora Hogue drives the plot. Dora's father, John, has been allowed to prosper in Salt Lake and Young summons him to a midnight meeting of “the Council.” The conspiracy is to force John into polygamy and threaten his life unless he offers up Dora to Burr. John's resistance leads to his and Dora's escape and the murder of Burr with the aid of young, uncorrupted Mormon Tom Rigdon.

The Mormons here appear as an undifferentiated unity. The dialogue on the intertitles uses “we” for all lines spoken by Mormons who always appear in groups on screen. The lack of individuality increases through the frequent clothing of Mormon men in white whites and hoods. These men are a band of “fanatics” who serve as the Mormon

---

22 Ibid., 31.
secret police, though no other groups of Mormons appear. With this limited presentation, the film indicates that all Mormons are fanatics. Their white robes served as a model for Ku Klux Klan's attire, the film explains with no historical basis. Unlike the solid white, though, the Mormon robes include an all-seeing eye, symbol of the power of Mormon leaders to exert ultimate control over followers and non-Mormon residents of Utah alike. Tom does appear differentiated, but the film informs us that he is “ignorant” of the evils of his church. His singular personality thus heightens the sense of his failure to conform and offers hope for viewers that the younger generations of Mormonism might cast off the shackles.

Conspiracy and machinations expand greatly in *Trapped by the Mormons* (H.B. Parkinson, 1922), a British film based on a novel by Winifred Graham. Unlike *A Mormon Maid*, which placed its events as historical, *Trapped* shows a 1920s Mormonism still actively recruiting unsuspecting girls for a polygamist doom in Utah. Isoldi Keene, the villain, is presented as Mormonism's “top recruiter” in England, where he employs his mesmerist talents to muddle Nora's mind, fake a miraculous raising from the dead, and even gain the consent of Nora's parents to take her away. She is rescued at the last minute by her fiancé, a hired detective and half a dozen police.
To suggest Isoldi's power, the film offers several close-ups of his face that iris in on his eyes. These shots place the viewer in place of the various victims of his mesmerism. The power and threat of Mormon eyes heightens with another missionary being shown indoors wearing sunglasses. He is less successful than Isoldi, though his appearance does lead Nora's paralytic father to a miraculous healing. This real miracle contrasts with the staged miracle of Isoldi to underline the falseness of Mormon faith. When Isoldi takes Nora to a nightclub, the viewers more fully see that he is a religious pretender whose doctrine rejects standard morality in favor of barely restrained sexuality. The scene of several other unsuspecting girls' baptisms presents Mormons in dark cassocks, conflating Mormonism and Catholicism as interchangeably false and dangerous religions.

These early portrayals that cast Mormon men as sexual predators align with Foucault's theories of the two purposes of racism. Racism, according to Foucault, attempts to create a rupture in the biological continuity of a population.\textsuperscript{23} Racism, then, serves the end of biopower by allowing control over life without demanding the absolute violence of war. This use of racism clearly applies to 19\textsuperscript{th} century Mormonism as Mormons were part of the population of the United States but the rhetoric, policies and practices of the dominant culture sought to create a caesura between American culture and Mormonism. These films undertook to define Mormon men as the Other in order to assert the dominance and power of the non-Mormon majority. Because Mormon men do not appear phenotypically different, other methods were employed. The robes of the

Danites in *A Mormon Maid* suggest different practices and dress distinguish them. The focus on Isoldi’s menacing wide stare while other men do not appear in close-up or viewing the camera straight on heightens his unique threat. By creating these differences visually and by narratively presenting Mormon men as sexually dangerous, these films racialize Mormonism in order to shore up American (and British) power regimes aiming to control citizens. While the focus is on Mormon men in these films, the racial function of the films extends to legitimize state control of all citizens.

Although during the next few decades the constraints of the Production Code largely removes the image of the sexually rapacious Mormon man, the stigma of polygamy remains. In *Brigham Young* (Henry Hathaway, 1940), an anti-Mormon Illinoisan quips the difference between a Mormon and “a white man” is “about fifty wives.” This joke, although presented as the thoughts of the bad guys, reiterates the long history of racializing Mormons as non-white. The brief appearance of Jacob Woodling in *Paint Your Wagon* (Joshua Logan, 1969) draws on the image of the shifty polygamist. Well-fed and flanked by his two wives, he enters No Name City and heartlessly auctions off his second wife. His greed induces him to move the bidding outside to allow a larger crowd. He literally talks out the side of his mouth and arrives on horseback, the scene presenting him as high above the miners. His brief interactions situate him as self-satisfied and untrustworthy, driven by greed and lust rather than sentiment.

Following the silent era, Mormon men move away from conniving polygamists in film toward being victimized frontiersmen. This image continues well into the late 1970s, as the rape and revenge potboiler *Jessi’s Girls* (Al Adamson, 1976) presents Seth and
Jessica as a newlywed Mormon couple ambushed by outlaws. Their Mormonism plays little into the plot that quickly dispatches Seth after tying him up and forcing him to watch the rape of his bride. Though this is an extreme example, *Jessi's Girls* shows Mormon men as victims on the edges of western American society. As I will detail below, this image of Mormon men arises from a confluence of the shift in film aesthetic, the impact of the Hays Production Code, the growing influence of the LDS Church, and an attempt to make sense of Mormonism alongside theories about the Western experience generally.

The silent anti-Mormon films are sensationalized but not excessively compared to other films of the era. The on-screen suicide of John Hogue's wife, the real threat of sexual danger, and other portrayals of violence all connect to the typical cinema of the time. While Mormonism was viewed as a particular kind of threat, the portrayal of Mormon men coheres to the presentation of other villains of the time. Anti-Mormon silent films drew on the tradition of novels and plays that attacked Mormon men openly as sexually motivated conspirators but the modes of representation allowed during the silent film era strengthened the cliché. With the shift to the studio system and the Production Code, filmmakers could no longer rely on openly lurid tales. Also, the realities of life during the Great Depression urged the studios to produce more optimistic, wholesome films where good triumphed obviously over evil. The western genre in particular became associated with American ingenuity and hard work. Westerns of leading up to and through the Second World War focus on the lives of simple people on the outskirts of civilization who manage to tame the frontier through communal action
Despite human fallibility. With this shift, Mormons move from being a prime example of
sexual deviance to a key member of the margins of society. Together, these marginal
groups can work together to carve out a livable life in a harsh environment.

Three westerns, *Brigham Young, Wagon Master* (John Ford, 1950), and *They Call
Me Trinity* (E.B. Clucher, 1969), signal the different direction in portraying the Mormon
man. Unlike the silent era, these Mormons are not an overt threat. They are industrious in
a system of mutual cooperation and peaceful even when under direct assault.

Additionally, Mormon men in these three films present a diversity of motivations and
behaviors. While this shifts Mormon men more toward a realistic portrayal, an
undercurrent of menace in the real world remains. By turning Mormon men into victims,
it weakens their power and influence. The first two of these three premiered during the
era of the Production Code whose strictures inform their presentation of religion.

Several reasons beyond the Code also help explain the shift in the presentation of
Mormons. In 1921, Utah Senator Reed Smoot brokered a deal with Fox to significantly
reduce the tariff on motion pictures in exchange for Fox destroying all prints of its
adaptation of the virulently anti-Mormon novel *Riders of the Purple Sage*. Additionally,
after World War I, a substantial number of Latter-day Saints left the intermountain west
for educational and occupational opportunities. Filmmakers also travelled to Utah to
produce films in the quintessentially western landscape of southern Utah. Therefore,
more Americans came in contact with Mormons and discovered the perceived differences
were more imagined than real. Among this wave of displaced Utah natives, a cadre of
successful novelists published Mormon-themed novels in the late 1930s and early 1940s
that were well received nationally. Darryl Zanuck, producer at Fox, purchased the rights to one of these novels, *Children of God* by Mormon-raised Vardis Fisher. This sweeping epic casts Mormons as heroic settlers of the West, genuinely believing in their faith. With heavy input from LDS Church leadership to avoid a repeat of the outcry against *Riders*, Zanuck oversaw the very loose adaptation of *Children of God* into *Brigham Young*.

*Brigham Young* largely sympathizes with Mormons, presenting them as genuinely religious individuals who are denied the freedom to practice their faith. Mormonism no longer consists merely in polygamy, and various preachy moments by Joseph Smith and Brigham Young indicate the greater interest in Mormon communal economic models. Although some characters try to racialize the Mormons as in the joke above or by advertising their riot as a “wolf hunt,” the mob's killing of friendly non-Mormon Webb undercuts the divisions. When this raid begins, Jonathan Kent, the Mormon hero of the film, has to explain to Webb's daughter what is going on. He explains succinctly, “They hate us. We're Mormons.” Even their neighbor who spends time with them cannot distinguish their religious affiliation.

The film does not, however, present all Mormons as innocent or worthy of praise. Because it includes so many different Mormons (both historical and fictional figures), the film presents Mormon men more as individuals than as stereotypes. Brigham Young covers up his uncertainty about his calling with bluster and public insistence that he has received revelations. Porter Rockwell agitates for a more violent response to anti-Mormon mob actions. Jonathan Kent, the young lover, is stoic even in the face of his mother's death during the migration. He confronts Brigham violently when he discovers
his family's deprivation, but his anger is defused when a cricket infestation suddenly descends and threatens all the crops. Angus Duncan serves as a foil for Brigham, claiming leadership at the death of Joseph and then later, during the trek west, planning an insurrection to steer the group towards the gold fields of California. The sum of all these images is that Mormons are not a narrow stereotype. Despite these differences, the film groups all Mormons together as victims. From the early “wolf hunt” that kills several Mormons to the final scenes of the locust infestation, Mormon men frequently find themselves beyond their own capacities and at the whims of violence or natural forces.

This victimized existence of Mormon men increases in John Ford's *Wagon Master*. Elder Wiggs, the leader of a band of Mormons heading to the San Juan in Southern Utah, hires two young cattle drivers as guides. Along the way, a pair of dancing girls, a patent medicine peddler, and a family of outlaws joins their group. They also encounter a group of Navajo, who express solidarity with the Mormon travelers. In the final scene, the outlaws, wanted for a series of bank robberies, are killed by one of the young guides. Mormons continue to exist on the margins of society in a victimized position, but are fundamentally acceptable.

Elder Wiggs, the most developed Mormon character, hints at a sinful past, but seems gratified to have left it behind, and frequently battles his hot temper. Wiggs constantly claims events fall out according to divine providence, urging his fellow Mormons and other members of the party to not question God's intentions with bringing them together. Shiloh Clegg, head of the outlaw gang, also refers to providence in
gloating about the wagon train offering him food, a doctor and a golden bed to rest in. While the film in general presents Mormons as admirable, this connection between the worldviews of Wiggs and Clegg hints at the possibility of false religion on the part of Wiggs.

The overall message of *Wagon Master* is that outsiders can band together to create a new world on the frontier. But there are limits to how far outside one can be. Being a Mormon, whether the ultra-pious Adam Perkins, the short-fused Wiggs, or the jealous and feisty Jackson, falls within the limits of acceptability. The selfishness of the outlaws along with their disregard for letting others live as they see fit casts them as dangerously outside. But it is not that Mormons are merely a lesser evil. They are good, but need the protection and guidance of the young, virile American men.

*Wagon Master* heightens the perception of Mormon men as non-threatening. While Young chafes at a question over polygamy and non-Mormon cracks a joke about the practice in *Brigham Young*, Wiggs makes the snide comment about the marriage system here and about having to wear a hat to cover his horns. Rather than being offended or defensive, Mormons defuse the suspicions with humor. While the Mormons in *Brigham Young* are forced west and are constantly under threat of extinction, they manage to flourish through their own work. In *Wagon Master*, Mormons require support from other outcasts and most crucially the aid of “real” American men to reach their western destination. The increased contact between Americans and Mormons in the
middle of the 20th century undercut the previous image of Mormon men as a major threat. However, the racist othering continues in a less egregious script of weakness.

Victimized Mormon men populate another western, *They Call Me Trinity* (1970). The Mormons, committed pacifists, are thriving in a valley coveted by Major Harriman, a greedy local landowner. With the help of drifter Trinity and his brother Bambino posing fraudulently as the local sheriff, the Mormons protect their land and oust Harriman and his Mexican bandit allies. Although they find scriptural support in the Bible for fighting back, the Mormon men are useless in the final battle. The scene plays as slapstick, with Mormon ineptitude at the center of the humor.

*Trinity*, produced in Europe, is somewhat loose in its presentation of Mormons. Indeed, they seem almost like an amalgam of American religious oddities: the pacifist mode of the Quakers, the dress of the Mennonites, and the polygamy of the Mormons. This blending arises from an exoticized sense of American religious outliers. They are only identified twice in the dialogue as Mormons, and both times by outsiders (Trinity and Major Harriman). Polygamy appears as two young girls both offer to be Trinity's wife, but the Mormon men themselves are not shown with multiple wives. Their hospitality to strangers (even hostile strangers), their belief in providential protection, and their fruitful hard work highlight the Mormon's religious practice as having real impact on their daily lives in positive ways. This same set of principles, however, leaves them at the mercy of less scrupulous figures.

The relative paucity of Mormon men in the Western genre and these few that show them as victimized presents a perplexing problem. Although the genre is not
particularly known for historical accuracy, the role that Mormons played in the actual settling of the West is not insignificant. The gap between the historical reality and filmic presentation arises from at least two reasons. First, the gap in general historical consciousness that excludes Mormons from the story of the West. Second, Mormon men do not cohere to the image of masculinity perpetuated by the Western genre.

Jan Shipps refers to the gap in the historical consciousness as the hole in the doughnut of the western story.24 The two primary reasons for the exclusion that Shipps articulates are the discomfort most historians have with the supernatural elements of the Mormon tradition and the fact that Mormon settlers of the West failed to duplicate the Americanization promised by the frontier thesis. Shipps asserts that the religious elements of the Mormon story complicate historians' treatments and, as a result, historians have avoided rather than addressed the settling of the Great Basin.25 Shipps also points to the failure of Turner's frontier thesis in the case of Mormons.26 Turner's model claims that life on the western frontier took Europeans and reshaped them into individuals committed to liberty and other American norms. Mormonism, on the other hand, took Europeans and made them communalists who accepted ecclesiastical authority and often rejected the American government. Shipps suggests that Mormonism challenges the Frontier Thesis and thus historians have excluded their story to strengthen the general argument. In the realm of film, the western largely serves to acculturate American audiences to the demands of the current economic and political system, as Will

25 Ibid., 36-37.
26 Ibid., 35.
Wright argues. To focus honestly on Mormonism's alternate socio-economic ordering of western expansion would require the a reshaping or expansion of the myth.

The difference of Mormons extends beyond historiography. Mormon men present a problem for the western genre's view of masculinity. In outlining the generic conventions of the western, Jane Tompkins argues that the realms of language, women, religion and culture form one half of a binary. The other half is silence, men, freedom, and power. Mormon men, with their proud display of their religion and their insistence on the power of speech place them outside this binary. Pioneer-era Mormon men have spiritual roles in the lay-led organization, possess priesthood, and shape their lives according to religious precepts. Mormon men made speeches (Brigham Young is remembered largely as a sermonizer), oversaw the publication of numerous newspapers and periodicals, and claimed that God speaks directly to humanity. Additionally, Mormons traveled to Utah not as individuals but as family groups and were intent on establishing a permanent civilization. Their practices set them apart as a different kind of man. To alter a fictional Mormon man to fit the mold of the western's masculinity would undermine the created image of both Mormons and the western man. They cannot coexist in the same person and thus are present only as the Other for the western hero.

While the two previous images, the sexual predator and the victimized frontiersman dominate film stereotypes, a third key image of the cinematic Mormon man more openly derides his religious belief and practice. The first narrative treatment of Mormonism, *A Trip to Salt Lake City* (1905), presents a beleaguered polygamist

---


henpecked by his wives and overpowered by his children. This film sets a standard of both reducing Mormonism to polygamy and inserting Mormonism as a punchline. At the end of *Hands Up!* (Clarence G. Badger, 1926), the Confederate spy solves his equal love for two sisters upon seeing Brigham Young's large family. Inspired, he rides off into polygamous bliss toward Utah. The ridiculous physical humor of the film prepares audiences to smirk at this resolution. The Buster Keaton film *Parlor, Bedroom, and Bath* (Edward Sedgwick, 1930) has a bellboy remark, “Oh! He's a Mormon!” to explain the main character's rotating objects of romantic interest.

The aligning of Mormonism with a brief joke about polygamy accomplishes two tasks simultaneously. It first reinforces the view that polygamy is the defining feature of Mormonism. Although all these films post-date the 1890 rejection of polygamy, the association remains strong. Part of this perpetuation relies on these very jokes that shape viewers' perceptions of Mormonism. The alignment secondly dismissing Mormonism as a joke. Rather than seriously engaging the subtleties, these throwaway punchlines deride Mormon men.

These easy jokes are mostly benign but other portrayals in post-Code film more openly attack Mormon men as heretical. The most important anti-Mormon film since *A Mormon Maid* appeared in 1982. *The God Makers* is an hour-long staged documentary that asserts itself as an exposé of the true doctrine and practices of Mormonism. Written by evangelical former Mormon Ed Decker, the film recreates LDS temple rituals open only to worthy insiders and contains an animated depiction of unearthed 19th century speculative Mormon theology including perpetually pregnant Heavenly Mothers,
justifications of racist policies dating back to pre-earth life, and a physical impregnation of Mary by God. The film also contains a series of exaggerated claims about the economic and political power of the LDS Church. The film has circulated widely on VHS and DVD and been shown by various anti-Mormon ministries.\textsuperscript{29} Despite the underground popularity of this work, various non-Mormon observers, including the Anti-Defamation League, have publicly denounced the distortions of the film.\textsuperscript{30}

![Figure 7](image)

Alarmist in tone, the use of animation particularly lampoons Mormon belief. The medium suggests Mormon doctrine is so outlandish it can only be represented in a non-real world. Decker returns to some tropes of conspiracy and greedy ambition. However, unlike the films of the silent era, the danger is not polygamy. Rather, the threat is that Mormon practices draw unsuspecting converts away from the truth of Christianity as Decker sees it. Produced during an era of strong growth through convert baptisms, the film sees Mormonism as posing a clear and continuing peril. Unwary individuals might be duped by young male Mormon missionaries not into sexual slavery but into false

\textsuperscript{29} Astle and Burton, 123.
\textsuperscript{30} Ibid., 123-124.
belief.

As the above summary has shown, the cinematic image of the Mormon man has been somewhat elastic over time. Despite slight changes and some variation, the general picture is divided into three general figurations. The oldest and most persistent is the Mormon man whose sexual deviance meld with his drive for power to turn him into a villain who must be defeated. The second, less harsh image is the Mormon man who is deeply religious and industrious but in desperate need of outside help. Lastly, Mormon men are a site of derision, either in the form of gentle humor or more serious attack. Thus, the Mormon man is either a threat, but one that can be overcome, or victims, which “real” American men protect and save. Navigating between these images, *Legacy* crafts the ideal Mormon man as a faithful and competent frontiersman with a large tender streak.

*Legacy* is not the first attempt by the Church to shape its own version of the Mormon man in film.\(^{31}\) In the heat of the early 20th century spate of anti-Mormon films, the LDS Church produced a 90-minute epic for theatrical release. *One Hundred Years of Mormonism* (1913) presented a history of Mormonism from the birth of Joseph Smith until the early 20th century. The film premiered in Salt Lake City and then toured theaters throughout the western United States.\(^{32}\) Unfortunately this film and the Church's next theatrical effort, *All Faces West* (1929), are both lost today. This second film has left less

---

31 The focus here is on institutional films, that is those films produced by the LDS Church or associated organizations. Individual Mormons have released independent features since *Corianton* (1931). Although these films articulate equally compelling depictions of Mormon masculinity, they do not carry the same official importance for the institution and lacked effective distribution.

of a trace than *One Hundred Years* and suffered from premiering as a silent feature right as the talkies appeared. The final large-scale attempt prior to *Legacy*, the filming of the 1930 *The Message of the Ages* pageant floundered over technical problems. The interior locations provided insufficient light. The failure of these three major projects soured church leadership on huge film undertakings.

The church continued to produce smaller films for distribution. Filmstrips and short films for local congregation, missionary and home use were actively undertaken by the church. The efforts in this regard were far from minimal. By 1936, only the federal government was using more film stock than the LDS Church.33 Some of this stock was devoted to the massive projects of photographing genealogical records from around the world, but it also indicates the investment of the leadership in the power of film technology. Their belief in the power and utility of film can also be seen in the 1950 filming of the temple endowment. This ritual drama connected to the highest ordinances in Mormonism had previously been performed by live actors. The need to accommodate multiple languages in the new Swiss temple lead church leaders to alternate solutions. Filming the endowment and dubbing it into various languages allowed greater number of members to take part in the rituals viewed as essential to salvation.

These smaller efforts eventually coalesced into the establishment of the Motion Picture Studio at Brigham Young University in 1953 under the direction of Wetzel “Judge” Whitaker. Whitaker left his position as chief animator for Disney to set up the studio, which would serve as the primary producer of institutional LDS film until *Legacy*'s production in the late 1980s. This studio was only the second at an American

---

university (the first being University of Southern California) and by 1964 was “much larger” than the Californian program.34 Church leaders supported the studio intellectually but demanded that it be self-sustaining financially. As a result, many of the films produced shy away from explicit depictions of Mormonism in favor of generic feel-good moral tales or educational projects.35 These projects bearing the imprimatur of the LDS Church-owned university still provide a shape to how Mormonism presents masculinity. These films became widely distributed to local congregations and individual homes, especially after the advent of VCRs.

In response to the clichéd depictions mentioned above, the films of the LDS Church crafted clear alternates to what they viewed as negative portrayals. These films attempt to address the lingering stereotypes by reducing any hint of sexual threat, focusing on the Mormon man's role as father, and retelling the founding stories of Mormonism. The result is the creation of a different set of stereotypes but ones viewed as casting Mormon men more positively. Ideally, these films would lead to either conversion or reigniting of faithfulness for viewers. At the very least, they would help shape a different view of Mormon men.

LDS Church films defuse concern about Mormon sexual capacity primarily through shying away from direct depiction of romance. Carl Young in Pioneer in Petticoats (Judge Whitaker, 1969) appears only briefly in the film that focuses on Abigail Harper, the reluctant teenage president of a late-19th century Retrenchment Society in small town Utah. Abigail expresses some interest in Carl, but he is geographically distant.

35 A Reel Legacy
and after the first few scenes visually absent. His role is minor in the plot, but this young
man is eager to serve his mission, quotes Shakespeare and warns Abigail that her
attachment to the church runs deeper than she suspects. He is the exact opposite of a
religious pretender or sexual threat and has a high degree of refinement for a late 19th
century frontier boy. The film further removes the sexual threat of Mormon men by
portraying an attempted sexual assault against Abigail by a non-Mormon outsider. Saved
at the last minute by lapsed local Mormons suggests that Mormonism serves as a
protector against rather than an instigator of sexual violence.

In another film, *The Phone Call* (Douglas G. Johnson, 1977), a young teenage boy
is the central role and the female love interest never appears on screen. Scott, the
protagonist, is awkward and overwhelmed by the prospect of calling his crush for a date.
He gains confidence working alongside another girl, Becky, even fighting her borderline
abusive boyfriend over his jealousy about Becky and Scott's friendship. Flouting
romantic comedy convention, Scott does not realize he actually has erotic yearnings for
his female friend and the film ends with him successfully setting up a date with the other,
never depicted girl. Scott and Carl Young both exhibit a
casual camaraderie with the opposite sex devoid of
erotic tension.

Produced the same year as *Pioneers in Petticoats, Johnny Lingo* (Judge Whitaker, 1969)

Figure 8

presents an erotic relationship but removes the threat through marriage and tenderness.
Johnny is a successful trader in his native South Pacific who has returned home to
bargain for a wife. He pays the unheard of price of eight cows for Mahana, a girl considered worthless even by her father. Johnny later explains that he always loved her. Mahan's glamorous makeover shot in soft light, proves that she has learned to see herself how Johnny always saw her. While the message of defining a girl's self-worth based on the price of her body is troubling, the film remains well-known and loved among Mormons.

Other LDS Church-produced films remove sexual threat through a focus on fatherhood rather than romance. The most extreme example of the tying of fatherhood and ideal masculinity together without leaving room for eroticism is Uncle Ben (David K. Jacobs, 1978). The title character overcomes his alcoholism shortly after his sister's sudden death makes him the guardian of her young children. When asked how he managed to overcome his addiction, he asserts that he returned to the teachings of his younger days and relied on prayer and God's help. His rehabilitation shows the power of divine influence but also presents fatherhood as the ultimate proof of Mormon male success, even if the children are not the man's by birth.

Man's Search for Happiness (Judge Whitaker, 1963), the most publicly exhibited and widely viewed film prior to Legacy, also links masculine purpose with fatherhood. Produced for the World's Fair in New York City, the film was the central attraction of the LDS Church Pavilion and was viewed by an estimated six million visitors. The brief film, only 13 minutes long, tells the origin and destiny of all humans from their pre-mortal life to post-mortal perpetual family bonds. The ideal family here is a white, suburban couple with three children. The film places the man's greatest responsibility as

36 Astle and Burton, “A History of Mormon Cinema” 82.
residing in the home and searching for truth. By including scenes of a grandfather leading his extended family in prayer and scripture study, the film asserts both the role of man as spiritual guide and that fatherhood does not cease once children are grown.

The questions raised by this film, including how to be a good father, are partially answered in the various Homefront television spots. These brief advertisements, shown throughout the United States, first appeared in the 1970s. These spots generally show fathers preoccupied with work or pleasure at the expense of familial relations. The ads offer solutions to this problem. In one, the children trick their father away from work and into going camping with them by luring him to the camper and then driving off. A different father glowers at his kids fooling around while washing a car and storms off inside. Certain that he will come back angry, the kids look around nervously until the father comes back out with a camera to capture their exuberance. Another reminds parents to not “ignore accomplishments” by showing off-screen parents criticizing children after they proudly exclaim that they got a good report card (“Don't slam the door”) or finished the dishes (“Did you clean the sink, too?”). These commercials present good fatherhood, which centers on being present for and emotionally involved with your children, as the primary role of men. Although brief, they capture the importance of this role for Mormon masculinity.

This view of masculinity plays directly into Together Forever (1987), a half-hour film that uses mock interviews and everyday scenes to show non-Mormons how membership in the church can improve their lives. Claiming at the outset that the greatest happiness occurs in families, the film presents a man who reorients his life away from
overworking to quality time with his family, a young married couple who gain new purpose, an early twenties man who finds love and acceptance (his own words) in an adoptive Mormon family, and a family who learns to cope with the loss of their young daughter through the promise of families being forever. The emphasis again is on family and the roles required of men. The men spend a great deal of the time vocalizing emotional states before and after their conversion. The desire for “love and acceptance” and the father openly grieving his deceased child present a masculinity that not only includes articulated emotions but demands them. Though the scenarios are somewhat simplified and the answers of hope and maximizing potential vague, Together Forever shows that successful adherence to Mormonism produces a tender family man.

A third approach taken by LDS-produced film to challenge stereotypes was the cinematic enactment of early Mormon history. These countered assertions of duplicity or lust on the part of Joseph Smith and other early leaders by creating hagiographic narratives of their experiences. Therefore, they both challenge the view of sexual license and manipulation while also asserting that Mormonism is true in his claims of events. These films create visual proof of the possibility of the early leader's experiences through the use of live actors and simple stories. Most also employ some form of flashback or otherwise retrospective point of view. These narrative techniques further shore up the claims of Mormonism by arguing both the continued faithfulness of the characters and that their behaviors cannot be explained away as youthful exuberance.

The early Windows of Heaven (Judge Whitaker, 1963) presents Lorenzo Snow, the fifth president of the LDS Church, offering a revealed promise to the Mormons in
southern Utah that, if they faithfully pay tithing, they will receive much needed rain. The rest of the film shows Snow distraught when his promise seems to go unfulfilled. The final scene shows the rains falling, though, right after a desperate prayer by Snow. Based on a historical incident, this film does not question the calling or supernatural inspiration of Snow and shows him as an elderly man deeply concerned about his pastoral duties.

The subsequent *The Three Witnesses* (Judge Whitaker, 1968) shows how individuals disappear behind sacred history. The film opens with David Whitmer learning that a man in a neighboring town has impugned his testimony of fifty years before about seeing firsthand the golden plates, the source of the Book of Mormon. He rushes to his friend, Alexander, to get a signature for an affidavit on his trustworthiness. Exposition excessively weights the film as David recounts the later years of the other two witnesses. The three men are steadfast and resolute, but beyond this minor characterization, their personalities remain concealed.

Almost a decade later, *The First Vision* (David K. Jacobs, 1976) briefly presents the events leading up to Joseph Smith's theophany, hewing closely to his canonized account in voiceover. The film does not fully develop Joseph as a character, but presents him as hardworking and obviously concerned about spiritual matters through his constant look of puzzlement and reading of scripture late into the night. In one scene, he lies next to his younger siblings, pondering religious truth. As he gets up to return to the Bible, he pulls the covers gently up, showcasing his tenderness and concern.

Later films, beyond the timeframe of this paper, do attempt to more fully humanize Joseph while remaining exceptionally positive. But, in general, the historical
films of Church leaders by the BYU Motion Picture Studio offer more insight by what they fail to show than what they do. Despite many of these early leaders living polygamy, it never appears in any official film (nor has up through 2012). These leaders are presented variously as honest, hardworking, faithful, but rarely as fully developed three-dimensional humans. A man basing his perception of manliness on these portrayals would be left clinging to scraps during times when his life does not comport with the gentle frustrations of delayed miracles.

LDS Church-produced films thus attempted to tackle both stereotypes of sexual deviance and attacks on their theological claims. These alternate images diametrically oppose the villains of earlier mainstream films with men who are committed to their families, faith commitments and emotions. What is missing from these depictions is a direct countering to the image of the victimized frontiersman. Because the Code-era westerns have been viewed as more favorably portraying Mormon men, their stereotype did not require as much rehabilitation. Legacy arrives as the first major response to this stereotype while also going further in the realm of romance to present a heroic man actively pursuing a love interest. Before considering how the film presents this form of idealized Mormon masculinity, it is first necessary to tie Mormon masculinity into theoretical discussions of gender, which the next chapter tackles.
“You have to be a man now”: A theory of Mormon masculinity

Harold Bloom claims that it took him just four days in Salt Lake “to tell the
difference between certain Mormons and most Gentiles at first sight.”37 The marker of
difference for Bloom is the “organization” of the faces arising from the theological claims
of Mormonism that replace ex nihilo creation with divine organization of pre-existing
chaos. Bloom's claim might seem a bit extreme, though one psychological research
article argues that Mormon faces are visually distinct, even to non-Mormons.38 While
these claims about Mormon physiognomy may not be persuasive, Mormon theology does
give rise to specific ways of being in the world. One area where their difference is most
marked is gender. Mormon men might not appear different from their American brothers
on sight, but they certainly inhabit and strive for a different kind of masculinity. This
chapter offers a theoretical package for understanding this difference and provides a
definition of late 20th and early 21st century Mormon masculinity.

Scholars have yet to articulate the ways in which contemporary Mormon
masculinity differs from American masculinity. The long shadow of the radical early
years of Mormonism has long shaped perceptions of Mormon masculinity. Contemporary
Mormon masculinity is a much more subtle divergence from mainstream American
models. The fact that it is so subtle makes the issue a more, not less, compelling site for
investigation. My interrogation of Mormon masculinity and its deployment in film draws

doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0014241
Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s concept of becoming-minor, and Judith Butler’s performativity of gender. Before unpacking these three theoretical avenues and their application to Mormon men, I will first present a brief review of the scant literature on Mormon masculinity.

_Literature Review_

Very little scholarship has been devoted to Mormon masculinity. The work that has been done focuses largely on the issue of polygamy and its repeal in defining and shaping Mormon men's sense of their own gender in the late 19th century. Almost without exception, the considerations focus on the ways in which Mormon men lost distinct markers of their masculinity in favor of American norms. Amy Hoyt and Sara M. Patterson surveyed the official LDS publication for young men in the early 20th century to argue that Mormon men were urged to accept the white Protestant American masculine norm.\(^{39}\) The rapid and wide adoption of the Boy Scout program, the shift toward individualized business success and a great focus on monogamy and clear gendered division of labor highlight this movement. Hoyt and Patterson only point to moments of convergence between American and Mormon masculinity. Thus they ignore the points that continue to distinguish Mormon masculinity.

Elizabeth Ruchti also articulates Mormon attempts to align masculinity with the American norm, but argues for a lingering sense among Mormon men of being abject in the broader consciousness.\(^{40}\) According to Ruchti, the continued doctrinal belief in

---

polygamy, the intense focus on the dietary code, a willingness to exhibit emotion, and the wearing of sacred undergarments all position Mormon men as an abjected Other despite their efforts to blend in. Ruchti's sites for abjection, however, apply equally to men and women. The one exception, the willingness of Mormon men to display emotion, does play a significant role in Mormon masculinity but fails to address other major elements.

D. Michael Quinn explores the homosocial world of 19th century Mormonism and the hardening of the stance against homosexuality in the early 20th century to indicate a mainstreaming of Mormon masculinity.41 Quinn argues that the end of polygamy reduced the options for different figurations of masculinity among Mormons. For Quinn, this loss of openness and wholesale adoption of growing American homophobia were attempts by Mormon men to battle lingering questions about their masculinity. Terryl Givens points to the swing toward conservative values as no longer providing the mainstreaming function early to mid 20th century Mormons hoped for.42 By the late 20th century, their conservative stance positions Mormons as relics of a bygone era. Mormonism retains the masculinity adopted mid-20th century and resists shifts toward more contemporary versions of masculinity.

In his work on Mormon masculinity in film and television, Travis Sutton articulates three stereotypes that continue to define Mormon masculinity: the purposeful heterosexual, the monstrous polygamist, and the self-destructive homosexual.43 His work provides useful insights into the connections between genital expression and Mormon

42 Givens, Viper on the Hearth: 164.
masculinity. By narrowly focusing on matters of sexual activity and intentions, however, Sutton defines Mormon men by only one aspect of their lives and personalities. His approach fails to account for all the interactions between Mormon men and others that are not connected directly to genital expression. In conflating gender and identity with sexuality narrowly defined as set of sexual practices, his work duplicates and perpetuates the definition of Mormonism as its sexual expression employed by the early anti-polygamy crusaders.

As this short review demonstrates, scholars have not yet interrogated Mormon masculinity from the late 20th century onward and have reduced Mormon masculinity to the singular facet of sexuality. This thesis begins to illuminate this lacuna by offering a working definition of more contemporary ideal Mormon masculinity. Underlying this chapter is the Eve Kosofsky Sedwick's first axiom, “People are different from each other.”44 In developing a way of considering the difference between Mormon men and American hegemonic masculinity, I add an additional axis of categorization to this “self-evident fact” of human diversity.45 The axis of religion might seem relatively crude, but this chapter will show, I think, that religious is no more crudely deployed than any other marker of identity. I hope this chapter will provide a more robust method of understanding the difference of Mormon men from hegemonic American masculinity.

The definition I provide at the close of this chapter arises from considering Mormonism in the light of three theoretical approaches: hegemonic masculinity, becoming minor, and the performativity of gender. The first theoretical concept below,

R.W. Connell's hegemonic masculinity, helps explain *how* Mormon masculinity differs from the American masculine norm. Deleuze and Guattari's becoming minor offers a partial explanation of *why* Mormon masculinity differs. The final, Butler's performativity, provides a *method* for resolving the problem of the difference. The resolution of this problem is not a complete concession and adoption of American normative masculinity, but rather a compromise between distinction and similarity that allows Mormon men to claim masculinity on their own terms.

The application of these three approaches draws heavily on my lived experience as a Mormon man inside contemporary Mormonism. This tactic builds partially on the model of David Halperin's recent work on gay male subjectivity. He similarly begins with personal experiences to craft an alternate exploration that is not reducible to sexuality or identity.46 This personal approach addresses two problems in his explanation of gay male subjectivity that also bear importance in discussing Mormon masculinity. First, he emphasizes the need for initiation into gay male subjectivity. He asserts that “gay men circulate specific bits of mainstream culture” and reframe them in queer terms.47 This process often proceeds from individual to individual and therefore can be difficult to recover outside the circuit of its own transmission. Mormonism similarly circulates a culture and way of being in the world from person to person without explicitly stating what that culture is. Apostle Boyd K. Packer in a speech to Brigham Young University students referred to this culture as “the unwritten order of things.”48 In the speech, he

47 Ibid., 18.
refers to a handful of cultural practices but stresses that these things cannot be taught but rather members should “learn by watching experienced leaders in the wards and stakes in which you live.” Like the gay male initiation that usually does not occur through explicit teaching, Mormon acculturation also takes place through observation and personalized encounter. This observation will result in Mormon members adopting what Apostle Dallin H. Oaks has called “the gospel culture.” Like Packer, he leaves this concept vague with motions toward “strong families” and “modesty,” while also challenging “false traditions” that converts might bring from their pre-Mormon lives.

The second benefit of the insider approach taken by Halperin arises from the received discourse about gay identity. Halperin writes against the view that gay men are indistinguishable in every respect from heterosexual men except their erotic object choice. This view, Halperin argues, is an attempt by the lesbian and gay movement to downplay subjective differences less they feed into a narrative of abnormal psychology. These attempts to remove all differences other than sexual ones has been so successful to have “effectively closed off the entire topic of gay subjectivity to respectable inquiry.” Halperin thus turns to personal experience to rewrite this narrative and these conceptions in ways that seem counter-intuitive to the established trajectory. Although much less has been written about Mormon masculinity, the brief literature review above and the discussion of films from the prior chapter show that Mormon masculinity has similarly telescoped nearly completely down to one defining feature and historical moment:

---

49 Ibid.
51 Halperin, *How to be Gay*, 46.
52 Ibid., 71.
53 Ibid., 71.
polygamy and its aftermath. In a similar move to the gay rights movement, the LDS Church since the late 1980s has strenuously attempted to portray its members as indistinguishable in most respect from other Americans. As President Gordon B. Hinckley phrased it during an interview with Mike Wallace, “We are not a weird people.”54 This concerted public relations move alongside the stereotypical presentation of Mormon men has narrowed the conceptual avenues for consideration. By turning to personal experience that belies the lack of difference, I hope to offer an alternate method of considering Mormon masculinity.

_Hegemonic Masculinity_

R.W. Connell defines hegemonic masculinity as “the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women.”55 Masculinity exists only in relation to femininity and is a strategy of defining and approaching social relations in a way that ensures men retain their power. Masculinity is thus a defensive and conservative position that attempts to explain and maintain the current social order. Conservative does not, however, mean static. Challenges to the patriarchy often force reevaluation of the current view of masculinity and can result in new figurations that bolster men's power. Hegemonic masculinity is an ideal, the model of masculinity men strive for despite the fact that few if any men achieve it completely.

Hegemonic masculinity, for Connell, exists alongside alternative articulations of

---

54 Gordon B. Hinckley and Mike Wallace, “An Interview with Gordon Hinckley: A look back at Mike Wallace's 1996 Interview with the President of the Mormon Church,” “60 Minutes,” CBS News, 7 April 1996.
masculinity. These alternatives fall into two camps, the subordinated and the complicit. Subordinated masculinities, of which gay masculinity is the prime example, inhere those traits that are “symbolically expelled from hegemonic masculinity.” Often these traits are deemed too similar to the image of femininity to properly fit into a masculine identity. For example, the pressure on men to not show emotion in American culture arises from this perceived proximity to femininity. If women are figured as incapable of controlling their emotions, men who exhibit a similar lack of control must be subordinated.

The final type of alternative masculinity in Connell's theories is complicit masculinity. Complicit masculinities are those somewhere between hegemonic and subordinated. Complicit masculinity deviates from the hegemonic but still manages to benefit from the patriarchal subordination of women and subordinated masculinities. Men enacting a complicit masculinity are those who do not live up to the hegemonic ideal, but whose failures are not socially coded as significant enough liabilities to exclude them from the dominant position. An example of a contemporary complicit masculinity is the scrawny and awkward nerdy tech genius who accrués wealth from innovative services. While hegemonic American masculinity continues to value physical prowess, the geek's technological savvy places him close enough to the hegemonic masculine ideal.

In many interactions, Mormon masculinity is a complicit masculinity and Mormon men reap the rewards of patriarchy and ensure its continuance. In other moments and social settings, however, Mormon masculinity is subordinated by American hegemonic masculinity. This subordination, as the previous chapter suggested, has furthered American men's sense of their own gender identity by defining themselves

56 Ibid., 78.
against sexually unrestrained polygamists, victimized pioneers, or religious outsiders. By imagining Mormon men as sexually voracious and weak, American men can position themselves as protectors of women, true tamers of the wilderness, and bearers of truth. By expelling Mormon men rhetorically, American men reject the possible challenges to patriarchy Mormonism might pose.

Mormon men are complicit when they can “pass” for their non-Mormon counterparts. When they fail in these efforts by showcasing their divergence, they slip into a subordinated position. The position of Mormon men on the cusp appears in Gallup polls concerning willingness to vote for a presidential candidate. In June 2012, 18% of Americans claimed they would not vote for a “generally well-qualified” Mormon candidate. Only 6% of Americans would not vote for Jewish candidate, but 30% would not vote for a gay or lesbian candidate, 40% a Muslim, and 43% an atheist. While only one indicator of acceptance, this poll does show that Mormons are much more acceptable than some other articulations of masculinity, while still remaining outside total hegemonic acceptability.

In many ways, Mormon masculinity appears to conform to the hegemonic masculinity of their non-Mormon peers. Mormon men are avid capitalists and consumers, actively seeking education and middle class lifestyles. Mormon men engage regularly and fervently in church-organized sports programs, especially basketball. Mormon dress standards eschew facial hair, piercings, tattoos, and long hair on men in favor of a modest, clean-cut appearance. Additionally, Mormon gender constructions place men as

58 The dress and grooming standards of Brigham Young University demand this kind of appearance to remain in good standing at the school. See “Honor Code” Accessed 12 April 2013
more inclined toward physical challenges than women and encourage men to act as protectors. Because of Mormon emphasis on families, Mormon men are under great pressure to marry young and sire children. Frequent sermons remind men of this duty, such as the April 2011 General Conference address by President of the Church, Thomas S. Monson. He urged young men of marriageable age “to think seriously about marriage and to seek a companion with whom you want to spend eternity” and dismissed a number of concerns that might inhibit marriage. An infertile couple receives assurances that children will be granted them in the afterlife. As head of a nuclear family household, Mormon men cohere to the hegemonic masculine ideal. Despite these similarities, Mormon men do not fully accept the hegemonic ideal as their ideal.

The gap between American hegemonic masculinity and Mormon masculinity is perhaps most evident in late adolescent and early adulthood. While their non-Mormon counterparts are proving their manhood through sexual conquest, riotous alcohol-fueled living, and macho posturing, Mormon men cannot pursue these avenues and remain in good standing inside the church. Commandments on chastity, the dietary restrictions precluding alcohol, coffee, and tobacco, strong urgings against profanity and violence in both media and lived experience, and the emphasis on being actively religious all set young Mormon men apart from their peers. All of these strictures are outlined in a pamphlet given to all adolescent Mormon men entitled “For the Strength of Youth.”

Young Mormon men also shy away from braggadocio and swagger, not only because they cannot match the exploits of others but also because they frequently receive

instruction warning against pride. The social pressure on men to adhere to these standards finds significant leverage in the duty of Mormon men to serve two-year missions at age 19.61 In order to serve a mission, Mormon men must be morally worthy, a status overseen by their local leaders who generally have known the men all their lives. These missions further separate Mormon men from the experience of their peers. Mormon men spend two years in an intensely homosocial environment, where they can never be alone, engage in typical leisure pursuits, or even hug members of the opposite sex.

Differences between Mormon masculinity and American hegemonic masculinity are not only in the realm of abstention. Mormon men also regularly exhibit dispositions and behaviors outside accepted American masculinity. These include an interest in performing arts, a willingness to show emotion (particularly crying in religious settings), a politeness, and strong relationships with parents. Mormon men are taught early to sing and frequently to play musical instruments. Inside Mormon circles, these skills as well as abilities in drama and dance, do not contain the same stigma as a marker of possible homosexuality. Emotion, a burning in the bosom, frames the central proof of Mormonism's truthfulness for individual members.62 Mormon men will frequently appear overcome with emotion in sharing their personal spiritual experiences in public and private religious settings. Politeness is strongly encouraged by Mormon instruction. Mormon scripture warns against “unrighteous dominion,”63 understood to be the forceful

---

61 In October 2012, the age for male Mormon missionaries was reduced to 18, but this timing was stressed as being optional. The duty to serve a mission remains firm. See Thomas S. Monson, “Welcome to Conference,” Accessed 12 April 2013 http://www.lds.org/general-conference/2012/10/wELCOME-TO-CONFERENCE?lang=eng

62 Doctrine and Covenants 9:8, The Lord speaks and assures readers “I will cause that your bosom shall burn within you; therefore you shall feel that it is right.”

63 Doctrine and Covenants 121:39.
domination of others with less power and authority. Attempts to eschew even the appearance of this evil demand a rejection of the more assertive mode of demanding attention that American hegemonic masculinity prizes. Lastly, Mormonism's emphasis on familial relationships extending beyond the grave undercuts a masculinity grounded on generational conflict. Unlike non-Mormon men who chafe and attempt to get away from their parents, the ideal Mormon man has a close and communicative relationship with his father and mother.

By no means exhaustive, this sampling of the differences between American hegemonic masculinity and Mormon masculinity suggests that Mormon masculinity deviates significantly. I will attempt to synthesize these differences into a succinct definition below. Before tackling that, it is important to grapple with an idea suggested above. Mormon masculinity often appears and acts as a complicit masculinity, while at other times it becomes subordinated. A partial answer to this slippage can be found in the dual nature of Mormon masculinity as internally majoritarian and molar while being treated by outsiders as minoritarian.

_Becoming Minor, Becoming Mormon_

The terms majoritarian, molar and minoritarian come from the work of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. They define majority in _A Thousand Plateaus_ not as the numerically largest but as “the standard measure,” which “assumes a state of power and domination.”64 They cite the white European straight adult male as the majoritarian

---

subject in the West. All other individuals who do not meet these characteristics do not and cannot hold this subject position. This subject position is the molar identity, which unlike molecular identities, is not the state of flux demanded of all becomings. The molar subject resists becomings as they would undermine the presumed universal nature of the standard measure. The majority seeks for constants and uses language and other social structures to ensure its continued dominance.

Minority for Deleuze and Guattari similarly has nothing to do with relative size. Rather, they are “groups that are oppressed, prohibited, in revolt, or always on the fringe of recognized institutions.”65 These groups are not denumerable, as the ability to separate out individual members partially defines the majority. These groups are seen as a mass or horde by the majoritarian, molar subject. Despite this, the minority, as a subject of becoming, is “a deterritorialized variable of the majority.”66 The minority thus may not differ greatly from the majority in terms of appearance or actions, but some feature or set of features keeps it from the molar subject position.

Becoming begins with an axis of variation, whatever that may be. As Deleuze and Guattari point out, this could be anything but it is “a little detail that starts to swell and carries you off.”67 With the example of Mormon masculinity this “little detail” can be found in various places, but they are all sites where the theological demands of Mormonism place the Mormon believer as distinct from the non-Mormon. This differs from individual to individual, or what they would call a dividual, but the result is a becoming, an attempt to move in a direction and toward a mode of being that the

65 Ibid., 247.
66 Ibid., 292.
67 Ibid., 292.
majoritarian does not accept as the standard measure.

As minorities take part in becomings, they tend like all becomings toward the molecular. The molar majority attempts to recapture and dominate the minorities. In the terms of Deleuze and Guattari, a minority searches for a line of flight to deterritorialize, but the majoritarian subject recaptures and attempts to arrest the becoming. These recaptures attempt to solidify the power of the majority by ensuring that the power structure remains as stable as possible. Recapture, however, only leads to new lines of flight being opened. The result of this process is a constant flux forty and equally constant efforts to demand and force constancy from the majority.

Mormon men exist simultaneously in these two states depending on the frame of view. When considering Mormonism as a closed system bordered by its leadership, history, and doctrines, the interactions place Mormon men in the majoritarian position. As members of an open system that always navigates and negotiates with their non-Mormon surroundings, Mormon men slip toward a minoritarian position. Much like the scumbling of complicit and subordinated masculinity, this slippage leads to careful watchfulness on the part of Mormon men. The gap between their self-perceived dominance inside the culture of Mormonism and perceived persecution from the outside leads to masculine identity formed around a sense of embattled defense.

Mormon men view the challenge as both internal and external. Internal challenges are the becomings of fellow Mormons that question the majoritarian standard of Mormon men. These challenges might take the form of Mormons breaking rank to push for greater acceptance of non-heterosexual relationships or call for more discussion of Heavenly
Mother, the female consort to God. Apostle Boyd K. Packer in a speech to church leaders in 1993 cited the three main threats facing members as “the gay-lesbian movement, the feminist movement (both of which are relatively new), and the ever-present challenge from the so-called scholars or intellectuals.” Any of these three pose a danger by leading members away from the doctrine and culture of the LDS Church, according to Packer. The first two, in particular, are perceived to undermine the patriarchal power of Mormon men within the tradition. External challenges are those that question Mormon truth claims or attack Mormon senses of masculinity by mocking Mormon men. This mockery might take the form of teasing about sexual conservatism or other traits where Mormon men do not live up to the non-Mormon sense of the standard measure. Facing both these perceived attacks from both sides, Mormon men view themselves boldly engaged in maintaining their manhood.

Two key elements in Mormonism solidify the internal molar, majoritarian identity of the Mormon man: widely distributed priesthood and exaltation. Mormon priesthood authority is distributed to all males over the age of 12. Young men are ordained to the Aaronic Priesthood in successive offices (deacon, teacher, priest), each lasting two years. Each office oversees specific ecclesiastical duties. As a deacon, young men pass communion to congregants and as a priest they offer the prayer over the bread and water and possess the authority to baptize. At roughly age 18, Mormon men are ordained to the Melchizedek Priesthood and the office of elder. With this authority, they can confer the gift of the Holy Ghost and offer priesthood blessings for comfort and sickness. Unlike the

---

69 The duties of each office are laid out by revelation in Doctrine and Covenants 20.
regimented offices of the Aaronic Priesthood, the Melchizedek offices are not obtained on
a set schedule. Rather, specific assignments dictate when an elder is ordained a high
priest, a seventy, or an apostle. The qualification for leadership positions in the LDS
Church is a combination of holding the proper priesthood office and divine inspiration on
those above the position who assigns or calls them. Thus, Mormonism has no
professional clergy or even any training required before an individual congregant is
called to serve as a local leader. After his service, he returns to his former position of non-
leadership.

From their young teenage years as deacons, Mormon men are granted explicit
authoritative status. Although the strict hierarchy constrains this authority,\textsuperscript{70} granting
exclusively men this power strengthens their sense of themselves as subjects. All
decisions in Mormonism come through the priesthood and men are granted extensive
opportunities to participate in these decisions. Their voices matter and their word cannot
be challenged except by other men higher up the hierarchy. Even with this seemingly
extreme form of authority, the Mormon priesthood also partially undoes a simple
domination. In a revelation to Joseph Smith, the exercise of priesthood cannot coexist
with a man seeking to “gratify [his] pride, [his] vain ambition, or to exercise control or
dominion or compulsion upon the souls of the children of men.”\textsuperscript{71} Instead, the priesthood
functions “only by persuasion, by long-suffering, by gentleness and meekness, and by
love unfeigned; by kindness and pure knowledge.”\textsuperscript{72} Not only does this undercut

\textsuperscript{70} Terryl Givens argues the struggle between the radically democratic priesthood and the clear authority of
the hierarchy is the first and most fundamental paradox of Mormonism. \textit{People of Paradox: A History

\textsuperscript{71} Doctrine and Covenants 121.37

\textsuperscript{72} Doctrine and Covenants 121.41-42
domination, the traits so tightly connected with honoring the priesthood are rather unmasculine by hegemonic standards.

The second key element of the Mormon masculine molar identity is exaltation. The Mormon sense of the afterlife is divided into three kingdoms of glory. The highest level, the celestial kingdom, also contains three degrees. At the apex is exaltation. Reserved for faithful Mormons, exaltation literally turns individuals into gods. These gods will go on to create their own universes populated by an endless number of their spiritual offspring. Theologically, this is the same process that God undertook, being himself once a mortal man. Mormon men therefore are poised to become the molar subjects par excellence: deities. The teleology of godhood crystallizes human potential and provides a profound sense of historical continuity and individual entitlement. This anticipated power shapes Mormon men's sense of their own identity as dominant.

Despite these forces of domination internal to Mormonism, the status of Mormon men outside the tradition is much more precarious. Non-Mormons do not accept the priesthood authority or the divine trajectory of Mormon men. As shown in the previous chapter, the media contribute to the view of Mormon men as a generally lesser Other in comparison to the American man. If Mormon men in films are conniving polygamists, helpless settlers, or sources of comic derision, these are decidedly majoritarian figurations of the Mormon minor. Earlier in the history of Mormonism, Mormon men embraced their minority and struggled for an effective line of flight away from American dominance. In response, the American majority attempted to shut off this avenue of escape. Deleuze and Guattari assert that there are two options for recapturing a minority: extermination or
assimilation.73 Both were applied to the Mormon question.

In these early years, Mormon deterritorialization took a literal geographic approach. Members gathered together and set up communities isolated socially and economically from their environs successively in Ohio, Missouri, and Illinois. Their neighbors undertook violent means and political pressure to recapture these settlements. In each instance, the Mormon response was some resistance and then physical departure. The most violent attempted recapture took the form of Governor Lilburn Boggs’ Missouri Executive Order 44, which called for the extermination or expulsion of Mormons from the state. Though probably unaware of this legal carte blanche, a group of 240 men converged on a settlement of 75 Mormon families at Haun's Mill three days after the order was issued in late October 1838. A skirmish broke out that left 19 Mormons dead. One participant later recounted finding a ten year-old Mormon boy wounded but not dead. He shot him point blank because “nits will make lice and if he had lived he would have become a Mormon.”74

The final deterritorialization to the Great Basin led to the longest and most complicated reterritorialization of Mormon identity. Extermination (or expulsion) had proved unsuccessful, so the majority turned to legal methods of assimilating Mormons. The battleground was polygamy, though this one trait of family order and perceived sexual deviance stood in for all of Mormonism's deviant approaches, including merging of ecclesiastical and political power, communal economics, and closed society. The legal prosecution of plural marriage climaxed in the Edmunds-Tucker Act (1882). This seized

73 Deleuze and Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus, 473.
the property of the LDS Church, disenfranchised women in the territory of Utah, replaced the territorial judges with federal appointees, and denied polygamists spousal privilege. After losing several Supreme Court cases, the LDS Church conceded and officially renounced polygamy. As Leonard Arrington argues this “great capitulation” led to a significant period of Mormon mainstreaming to adhere to American norms in terms of economics and politics.75 The most extravagant lines of flight for Mormonism were closed off.

This violent history (much of which appears in Legacy) and its associated legal battles continue to resonate with Mormons. Mormons study their founding history over the course of an entire year of Sundays once every four years and are more frequently reminded of these events through hymns, sermons, and media. The regular repetition of these historical narratives nurtures a sense that outsiders do not accept Mormonism and desire its destruction. Although polygamy was officially renounced a full century before the production of Legacy, the sense of Mormons as an especially targeted group continues to shape Mormon identity, including Mormon masculinity.

This split majoritarian-minority status of the Mormon masculinity results in not only uncertainty and insecurity on the part of Mormon men, but also urges careful consideration and conscious shaping of masculinity inside Mormonism. Rather than fully capitulating to the hegemonic model, Mormon men intentionally maintain several elements that set themselves apart. This desire to set themselves apart duplicates the theological claims of being a chosen people. As Terryl Givens argues, the competing

claims of exclusive Mormon truth and a universalizing tendency in Mormonism forms one of the constitutive paradoxes of the faith.\textsuperscript{76} The history of fleeing the world for Zion and contemporary temple worship, which is closed to outsiders, reifies the distance between Mormons and others. Yet, the push to evangelize, the belief that all are literally spiritual brothers and sisters, and a belief that truth can be found in all traditions undercut exclusivity. Givens argues that Mormonism thrives by balancing its paradoxes. As this paradox of the charge to evangelize alongside a felt persecution frames Mormon masculinity, it engenders a masculinity that both desires to fit into the broader world and maintain its uniqueness.

The above discussion highlights the complicated dual sense of Mormon men as both majoritarian and minoritarian. As Mormon men find themselves enacting or experiencing a “little detail” that separates them from the majority position, they enter into a process of becoming. Unlike in previous eras, these becomings no longer take a literal geographic deterritorialization. Mormon men have instead crafted an alternate value system that largely goes unnoticed by the majoritarian American system. This lack of notice allows Mormon masculinity to flourish along a line of flight that remains as yet elusive to recapture. A key reason for the seeming acceptability of Mormon masculinity is that its most divergent features occur not in public spaces but in domestic ones. In these spaces, Mormon men enact their gender as a performative.

\textit{Performativity}

Judith Butler defines gender as a performance rather than a stable or inherent set

of characteristics. This performance is made up of actions that are “a repetition and a ritual” of gender identity. Butler cautions that these actions should not be imagined as a theatrical or singular act. Rather, performativity is a citational practice like that of citing law. The actions cite previous actions in order to establish the authority of the gender norm just as the law is cited in order to prove its power over new situations. Performance of the hegemonic heterosexuality, the norm, is “a constant and repeated effort to imitate its own idealizations.” Any specific act undertaken in an attempt to reach an ideal gender position both repeats the previous performances of that same act and helps to solidify the ideal itself. In order for these individual actions to make sense, they are both frequently repeated and drawn into a web of previous similar actions that they cite.

For gender to be performative means that the actions not only cite previous actions but also enact the creation of the norm. These actions are performative in the speech act sense of the term. Just like statements that create realities like “I now pronounce you man and wife,” habitual actions create gender through their enactment. Therefore one does not “have” a gender nor fundamentally “is” a gender. Rather, a gender is created and reinforced through regular citational actions. Changes to the actions and behaviors cited exposes the constructed nature of the gender norms. Drag, for instance, showcases the arbitrary nature of dress and mannerisms to subvert heteronormative norms.

While much less flagrantly outside the norm than drag, Mormon masculinity also challenges the standard performances of masculinity. Unlike drag, the disruptive potential of Mormon masculinity to heterosexist regimes is thwarted by its perceived resemblance.

79 Ibid., 85.
with the standard contemporary Euro-American masculine and feminine models on the surface. This perception is aided by the fact that the most non-standard forms of masculinity occur outside the public eye, in small family groups or worship services.

Mormon men perform their gender differently than other American men. In order to learn how to perform their masculinity, Mormon men rely on the examples of co-religionists. Because Mormon congregations are led by untrained local leaders and all adult males are ordained to the priesthood, Mormon men rely on a process of citation in carrying out their ecclesiastical duties. They mimic, consciously and unconsciously, the modes of dress, manner of speaking, and other traits of previous male leaders. These repetitions are bolstered by infrequent but insistent injunctions from higher leaders on the importance of minor details like wearing white dress shirts to Sunday services or which hand to take communion with. Butler's performativity does not refer solely to the realm of religious ritual. The importance of religious observance, however, to Mormon masculine identity formation can hardly be overstated. These weekly encounters with mostly unstated but necessary rules direct Mormon men toward a citational performance of masculinity. Mormon men also draw on historical and fictional examples from Church-approved sources for their conceptions of ideal Mormon masculinity. One such source is the films produced by the LDS Church like *Legacy*.

* A working definition of Mormon Masculinity

From the above discussion, it is clear that Mormon masculinity is a masculinity that hovers on the edges of hegemonic masculinity, at times cohering and other times
diverging. The uneasy status of Mormon men as internally majoritarian and externally minoritarian and the desire for Mormon men to distinguish themselves from the world (but not too much) forges a masculinity that responds to stereotype by both combining hegemonic elements and revaluing subordinated traits as masculine. The location for the revaluing occurs mostly in the home, thus allowing Mormon men to preserve a more traditionally masculine image in public. Therefore, Mormon masculinity can be imagined as the habitual enactment of faithfulness, tenderness, and competence primarily focused around the nuclear family and the local church community.

The opening of this definition builds on Butler's performativity of gender. These attributes form gender identity through actions. Mormon men do masculinity rather than being masculine or having masculinity. The three traits are lived through a series of small and large actions. What these actions enact is often not distinct. Getting up during a monthly meeting to share one's witness proves faithfulness while the tears that come to one's eyes during the bearing are a sign of tenderness and the fluid eloquence is a form of competence. More typical actions, like everyday interactions with immediate family members also enact these three foundational traits.

The end of the definition should not be taken to mean that these habitual actions are limited to the realm of home and church. However, these two realms become valued as more important than the other areas of a man's life. This revaluation helps Mormon men cope with both their masculinity being subordinated in other realms and to strengthen their sense of their own molarity. Subordination loses some of its sting when the public realm is placed as one of lesser importance. Additionally, the home and church
are the areas where Mormon men feel least the possibility of being the minoritarian. This striking emphasis on home offers one disruptive potential of Mormon masculinity: it removes any notion that the domestic space is fundamentally feminine.

In the domestic space, Mormon men lead family prayer, perform frequent priesthood functions, provide financial support, and undertake countless other daily tasks that create their gender identity. This does not suggest that Mormon men have two different modes of masculinity, one for the home and one for the world. Rather, the habitual behaviors that fall outside of the realm of hegemonic masculinity are often downplayed except in the setting of the home. This helps Mormon men minimize their subordination while still feeling apart from the world. Additionally, unlike hegemonic American masculinity, the domestic sphere is not an afterthought, but rather the primary site of energy. An often-repeated statement from mid-20th century LDS Church President David O. McKay showcases this valuation. He taught, “No other success can compensate for failure in the home.”

Both the heightened awareness of their own gender and the domestic realm as its plane can be seen in “The Family: A Proclamation to the World.” Gordon B. Hinckley first read this statement, signed by the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, at a Relief Society Conference session in 1995. The timing of this document aligns with LDS Church efforts to combat the legalization of same-sex marriage in Hawaii and provides a theological stance for their anti-gay marriage position. Although not officially canonized, it is has proliferated as a quasi-official declaration of gender roles for the Mormon faithful. The document conflates masculinity and fatherhood, but as

fatherhood is the ideal status for Mormon men, this conflation only strengthens its ability to shape gender identity.

The statement opens by asserting, “Gender is an essential characteristic of individual premortal, mortal, and eternal identity and purpose.” It then goes on to claim the importance of chastity and of opposite-sex parents rearing children. Parents have “a solemn responsibility to love and care for each other” and “will be held accountable before God for the discharge of these obligations.” Although it claims that fathers and mothers should be “equal partners’ in their households, it does outline specific roles for each parent “by divine design”. Mothers are meant to “nurture” children. Fathers are required to “preside over their families in love and righteousness and are responsible to provide the necessities of life and protection for their families.” This document thus states three primary roles of successful masculinity: presiding, providing, and protecting. What these terms mean, and indeed the document itself, has sparked a prolonged debate in Mormon circles. Regardless of the various actualizations of these directives, it is clear that the ordering is quite classically patriarchal. As Sherry Ortner famously argued, the basic structure of patriarchy aligns women with nature and men with culture. By assigning women the single role of nurturing, the Proclamation cements the association of women with the domestic and family rearing. Men, on the other hand, have a greater number of roles and fill all the roles that interface between the home and larger society. This patriarchal logic highlights how Mormon masculinity reaches at times for the American hegemonic masculinity. How these roles and terms are applied, however, also

shows that Mormon men may use the same language while meaning something different, an example of the more subtle lines of flight—or becoming minoritarian—of contemporary Mormonism. My definition for Mormon masculinity draws from the three-part responsibility proclaimed for Mormon men in slightly different terms.

Because gender is performative, the three following traits should not be thought of as static states. Rather, Mormon men undertake habitual actions that evidence each trait. Through the repetition of individual gender citations, the structure of Mormon masculinity grows stronger and more binding. The definition outlines an ideal. By this I stress both the ideal, that Mormon men live up to this definition in their everyday performances of gender to differing degrees of success, and the outlining, that these three are not a comprehensive explication of all aspects of Mormon masculinity. As articulated above, the performance of actions that point to these three traits largely occurs through church and family relations.

_Faithfulness_ refers both to intellectual adherence to the faith claims of Mormonism and a willingness to serve inside the church. For Mormon masculinity, this attribute is seen as a struggle against the natural tendencies of men. Mormon femininity, conversely, presents faithfulness as a natural outgrowth of their sex. In other words, women are more spiritual than men, the logic goes, and men need cajoling, constant vigilance, and the duties of the priesthood to defeat their more carnal natures. As faithfulness is the foundational difference for Mormon men, this is the realm of Deleuze and Guattari’s “little detail” that swells in the becoming minor of Mormon men. By accepting and enacting faithfulness, Mormon men begin a becoming minor that the other
aspect of this definition builds on.

This faithfulness counters the stereotype in media of Mormonism as either a false religion or primarily a site for derision. Devotion to Mormonism becomes a heroic cause in the name of ultimate truth. In terms of the Proclamation, this aligns with the injunction to preside. Mormon masculine faithfulness involves drawing on the priesthood to serve as a leader of the family, home, and church. Like all three characteristics this overturning of media-created stereotype attempts to undo the subordination of Mormon masculinity to American hegemonic masculinity.

The emotionality of Mormon masculinity appears primarily as *tenderness*. This suggests not merely an emotional vulnerability and the willingness to display it, but also sensitivity to the emotions of women and children. When one prophet in the Book of Mormon wants to highlight the depth of the sins of the people, he castigates the men for breaking the hearts of their wives and children and claiming “the sobbings of their hearts ascend up to God against you.”\(^{83}\) Mormon masculinity compels men to treat their families kindly and softly and to serve as a buffer between women and children and those who would inflict emotional or physical damage. Thus, Mormon masculine tenderness is tempered by the toughness needed to circle the wagons. Tenderness, however, is the primary setting and toughness the exception, as opposed to hegemonic masculinity that requires a constant hardness but might allow moments of emotion.

This element undoes the image of the Mormon man as a sexually greedy polygamist whose sole aim is to use women. Tenderness and the responsibility to shield the more delicate connects to the Proclamation’s requirement to protect. The dual

\(^{83}\) Jacob 2: 35
trajectories of tenderness, as softness, and toughness when needed, mirrors the dual molar and molecular identities of Mormon men. In the space where Mormon men are the molar, they can be tender without it being viewed as weakness. However, the grit necessary to protect others when outsiders attempt violence arises from the sense of the necessity of becoming minor and resisting recapture.

*Competence* includes the easy accomplishment of professional tasks as well as a self-assured bearing. Mormon men perform well in whatever they undertake, ranging from public speaking to home repairs to business endeavors. Failure is a temporary setback solved frequently through a combination of harder work and sometimes through innovative solutions. This competence centers in individual ability and highlights self-sufficiency as its aim. Unlike articulations in previous eras that focus on the communal nature of being Mormon, late 20th century Mormon masculinity stresses the individual's contribution.

Being effective and successful challenges the image from western films of the victimized Mormons who need rescuing by “real” Americans. By the standard of the Proclamation, competence meets the needs for men to provide. This attribute also most fully shows Mormon masculinity's push toward being a complicit masculinity. Competence is a cornerstone of American hegemonic masculinity. The inclusion of this trait as central to Mormon masculinity shows one way in which Mormons attempt to forge a compromise with broader conceptions of masculinity to avoid total subordination.

This definition is not intended to be an exhaustive presentation of Mormon masculinity. Rather, it draws out three key elements and the primary site of their
performance in order to highlight how Mormon masculinity has responded to the distilled social pressures presented in film portrayals. With this definition in place, it is possible now to turn to how Legacy undertakes to present an ideal Mormon masculine through the medium of film.
“I've little to offer”: the ideal Mormon man in *Legacy*

Running just under an hour, *Legacy* manages to cover the first 17 years of Mormonism (1830-1847). The rapid pace and gaps are smoothed over by the narration of Eliza Williams, who first appears as an elderly woman recounting the events of her early years to her grandson. She focuses her narration on her immediate family, with the early leaders of Mormonism relegated to the border and background. Eliza and her family join the LDS Church in upstate New York in 1830 and successively gather with the bulk of the saints in Ohio, Missouri and Illinois. Each move arises after violent opposition and each seems to be the Zion the Mormons are seeking until violence reappears. During this period of frequent resettlement, Eliza's father, John, serves a mission to England. While there, he converts an industrious stonemason, David Walker. David returns to Nauvoo, Illinois with John and immediately expresses romantic interest in Eliza. His persistence eventually leads Eliza to break off her engagement with Jacob. David and Eliza marry and soon have a son. Nauvoo, however, also proves to be a temporary home. The murder of Joseph Smith leads the church further west. As the group sets off toward Utah, a US government official marches into camp to ask for volunteers for a battalion of Mormons to aid in the Mexican-American War. David enlists and Eliza and the rest of her family continue on with the wagon train. The main plot ends with the reunion of Eliza and David. Elderly Eliza reappears on screen to close the frame story and inform her grandson, and by implication the viewers, to never let the legacy of faith she has recounted die.
Legacy strengthens the implication of this final line via its complicated knitting together of pasts and presents. Through the use of a frame story and a narration, the present of the action becomes a relative past. Narration and recollection collapse time to reveal that the past and present are not easily distinguishable. The film bolsters this association by having the voice of elderly Eliza give way during the first sentence of her narration to the voice of the actor playing the younger Eliza. The two voices overlap on the line “I was only 13 years old” before younger Eliza's voice takes over. This second voice provides all the remaining narration until the final voiceover similarly overlaps the two before cutting to the final scene of elderly Eliza. Additionally, three actors play the role of Eliza: the elderly woman, a young teenager, and a young adult. None of the other characters seem to age during the film and all other actors remain the same throughout. This sense of the main character changing while the surrounding characters remain the same heightens the layering of the past and the present together. Both the present of the action and the present of the narrative are chronologically prior for the viewer but realistically portrayed, further blurring clear lines between the past and present, and suggest the past in never something over and done with.

Fig. 9: Eliza, Age 75  Fig. 10: Eliza, age 13  Fig. 11: Eliza, age 17-30

These layerings of present and past form what Gilles Deleuze refers to a crystal-image. Drawing on the philosophy of Henri Bergson, Deleuze explains the crystal-image
as an ordering of time. The crystal-image “constantly exchanges the two distinct images which constitute it.”84 The two images are the present and the past. Time “splits itself in two at each moment,”85 presenting the actual present and the virtual past. Thus, the present and past coexist. The past continues to exist virtually on a plane or sheet. When subjects return to the past, through a memory for instance, they select a portion of that sheet to focus on. The past, however, is constituted by multiple sheets, not a single one. As Eliza recollects and her experiences are dramatically portrayed, she engages with various sheets of the past. At several points in the film, Eliza disappears from the action and scenes appear that she could not possibly be recollecting (as she is not present). She might be recollecting these secondhand, but none of these moments include a voiceover narration and she recedes from focus. These moments show the past is full of multiple sheets that the film's recollection-image draws from. By juxtaposing points from various sheets, the film creates times that are “once a past and always to come.”86

Legacy subtly articulates this confusion of past and present. The scenes of the frame story are shot with a distinctly sepia-toned filter. This color scheme gives way to the bright, natural unfiltered light of the flashback narrative. By filmic convention, flashbacks (if set apart chromatically) appear in sepia or black-and-white to the natural color of the present.87 Legacy inverts this convention, showing the present of the film in sepia. Shot in the color scheme of old photographs, the frame story appears like a past.

---

86 Ibid., 123.
Elderly Eliza becomes in these scenes an image in photo that “came to life.”88 She inhabits a photograph full of photographs, as her home contains a section of wall crammed with framed sepia photos. Eliza lives in a present full of the past, literally coloring her surroundings. The sepia of the frame story confuses the present of the film with the past of the flashback and perpetuates the image of the past that is “still present and already past.”89 The collapse of virtual and actual images increases throughout the film as other shots are framed to mimic well-known paintings or sculptures. One image, of a couple burying their child, exactly duplicates a mid-20th century sculpture honoring pioneers at Winter Quarters, Nebraska. Mormon viewers will recognize these living tableaux that actualize virtual images. The sepia-tone of the frame story and these moments of recognizable images brought to life develop the circuit of the crystal-image. The past comes to life, but only to recount its own past. Although already past, the medium of film gives it an intensity and sense of being present. The circuit runs between the past and the present never resolving itself.

One of the effects of this crystal-image is to make the presentation of gender in the film more readily applicable to the lives of the viewers. The layering of sheets of past deny that the action of the film has no bearing on the present. Eliza's closing line about keeping the legacy alive demands that lessons are to be learned from the drama. The film further injects itself into Mormon subject formation by drawing implicitly on a scriptural injunction to “liken all scriptures unto” the lives of believers (1 Nephi 19.23). Mormon viewers attempt to draw application from stories and build their lives around such

88 Deleuze, *Cinema 2*: 68.
89 Ibid., 79.
teachings.90 Because the present of the viewers no longer contains actual forced migration from place to place, it becomes the responses to tribulation and the manner of relationships among participants that viewers draw upon to frame their own lives. In Deleuzian terms, the virtual persecutions of the film meet the actual lives of viewers and, through the crystal-image that denies the resolution of the past, urges viewers to experience and model their lives after the film. Both the film and the viewers exist on the same plane of immanence that values the same forms of gender. The film strengthens this connection by assuring the viewers with onscreen text that both the characters and the scenes are “based on actual events.”

The film opens by informing the viewers of the year (1892) and precise date (April 6) to those who recognize the historical event of placing the Angel Moroni statue on the Salt Lake Temple. The sheet of the past that the frame story arises out of already lays alongside the main plot, further developing the “confrontation between sheets of past.”91 The film draws out moments from these various sheets and stitches them together as if they were a whole. This seduces or hypnotizes viewers into seeing that the past cannot be resolved. One jarring cut to elderly Eliza, her only appearance outside the frame story, uses the clash of these sheets to smooth over a moment of crisis. Elderly Eliza appears just before the reported death of Joseph Smith. She explains to her grandson that killing Joseph would not end the progress of Mormonism. By cutting to her at this precise moment, the viewer is forcefully reminded of the fact that Mormonism

90 See for instance, the October 1985 General Conference address by President Ezra Taft Benson, President of the Church during the production of Legacy. He opens the address with “The Book of Mormon was meant for us. It was written for our day. Its scriptures are to be likened unto ourselves.” "Worthy Fathers, Worthy Sons" Ensign, November 1985: 35
91 Deleuze, Cinema 2: 116.
survives at least until Eliza is an old woman. Highlighting the multiple strata of sheets of past assures viewers that the events of the past continue to shape and influence the present. This cut to Eliza also underscores how the film views her feminine role as a link between generations of men. She tells the story of men to a grandson, her role as physical reproducer suddenly emphasized. The use of various actors has already destabilized the sense of Eliza's identity. The contrast between her young grandson and her frail appearance increases the sense of her dissipating influence. She can pass along the story to her progeny, but the story and authority rests in the men she connects discursively. Thus, the film points to a concern for passing on masculinity from generation to generation.

The Mormon viewers of the film are further implicated in the concerns of Eliza and her family by the way in which *Legacy* interacts with the sheets of past external to the film. Mormon viewers come to the film with an already strong sense of the founding story of Mormonism. *Legacy* mostly confounds these expectations. The first non-institutional decade, the era of Joseph's first visions and translation of the Book of Mormon, does not appear at all. The significant events in Kirtland, including the building of the first temple, disappear into half a sentence of narration. The main figures of early Mormon history never participate except the brief scenes of Joseph. The heroic journey to Utah takes as much screen time as the much shorter and less well-known transversing of Iowa a year before the main trek. Despite these omissions, some key historical moments do appear. Slightly disorienting, this approach forces viewers to constitute “a sheet of transformation.”92 This sheet cuts between the various sheets of past to create a new set of

---

92 Ibid., 123.
relations. Mormon viewers, confronted with a film that is already knitting together various sheets of past, traverse mentally from the points of the film to their own recollection of founding narratives. Because the characters in the film are not historical figures, the new relations formed cannot alter understanding of history. Thus, the peaks of present drawn out by the film become more useful in shaping everyday interactions in the contemporary world.

Many of these peaks help form the content of ideal Mormon masculinity. This ideal appears variously in the half dozen male characters. Although each highlights different elements, David Walker is the fullest embodiment of the ideal. Joseph Smith appears only briefly and mostly to sermonize. Hiding his exceptionality forces him to the margins of the film. Johnny, Eliza's brother, at first rejects his family's decision to join Mormonism and move to Ohio. He later reunites with the family but dies shortly thereafter during the Haun's Mill Massacre in Missouri less than a third of the way through the film. Jacob, Eliza's other suitor, suffers a tarring and feathering early in the film but otherwise also appears only on the edges, with few lines of dialogue. He and Eliza never have a conversation during the film. David is thus the most fully realized character, granted both the most screen time of any of the men and the most interactions with Eliza. Because the film seems to offer up the recollections of Eliza, the development of her love for David also positions him well to enact ideal masculinity. Eliza remembers David with nostalgia and fondness. The only point where she does “not wish to remember in a place [she] shall never forget” occurs during the brief period when she and David are geographically separated after their marriage. The variety of his actions and the
positive light Eliza's memory casts on him work together to present him as the ideal. By having Eliza as the narrator, the film draws positive attention to David and positions male viewers to emulate his masculinity. Thus, Eliza remains in focus both to pass this ideal on to her grandson and to better draw attention to David's actions.

The preponderance of male characters is only one way in which the film, despite having a female narrator, undercuts its presentation of femininity. *Legacy* does present an ideal feminine, but several elements combine to obscure it. Eliza does stand at the center of the film but she is the only female character with more than one line of dialogue. Unlike the men, who display various facets of masculinity, Eliza stands in for all femininity. This singular representative approach frustrates attempts to generalize her traits. The men prove and display their masculinity against each other, while Eliza has no such chance to interact with other women. Those scenes where she disappears as narrator all display the interactions of men, especially David. Early on these are scenes of anti-Mormon agitators. Later, every scene without Eliza contains and develops David. He talks about Eliza, but the scenes focus on his personality and actions. When she is present, she often serves as observer rather than agent. Her matter-of-fact tone of voice during the narration and the visual style of the film heighten the sense of her as neutral observer, even during moments of trauma. In many respects, she stands in the film to report and react to the actions of the men. The moments in her narration that opt for first person singular pronouns are few enough to be noticeable. Typically, she instead speaks for the community as a whole with “we” and “us.” Because she employs plural pronouns
Figure 12: *David Walker*

and men carry out most the action she narrates, her individuality partially disappears. All these complications do not deny that *Legacy* constructs a Mormon femininity. Rather, they point to how the film subsumes Eliza under the men, especially David. The teasing out of Eliza's femininity and the ideal it points toward extends beyond the scope of this thesis, but the film itself also buries her identity behind the men and their masculinity that it holds up.

David explicitly lays out his assets in terms of the tripartite definition of Mormon masculinity developed in the last chapter. When he asks Eliza to marry him, he informs her, “I've little to offer but these hands, my faith in the Lord, and a promise to cherish you with all my heart. And I will make you laugh.” In this list, he points to his faithfulness to Mormon doctrine, his competence as a stonemason, and the depth of his tenderness that appears as both protective cherishing and playfulness. In this chapter, I will offer a reading of three scenes from the film, one for each of these three characteristics. This is not to suggest that the scenes do not overlap in what they inform the viewer about David's masculinity. The traits all have a complex relation, but each scene focuses on one
more clearly than the others. Although each scene is relatively brief, none is shorter than the other scenes in the breathlessly paced film. Their brevity should not discount their impact but might further strengthen the view of all of them as the quotidian performance of masculinity.

The film heightens the everyday nature of these events and therefore of the enactment of Mormon masculinity through its cinematography. Merrill, the director, avoids extremes of camera angle, producing almost every shot at eye-level. This angle typically indicates a neutrality toward the depiction of events.\(^93\) The film includes some extreme long shots during the final migration and during other moments as establishing shots for a new setting or moment in the story. These long shots are brief, though, and give way quickly to the favoring of medium shots. Characters usually fill the screen and dialogue is always crisp and audible. This camera style gives an impression of unadorned reportage, as though the viewer were simply present for action. This approach does not create the most visually stunning cinema but rather lulls the viewer into a sense that these events are not exceptional. The matter-of-fact appearance underlies the entire film. Despite this general approach, Legacy does employ various methods to increase the effectiveness of its emotional appeal. In the scene analyses that follow, I draw out both narrative elements and aesthetic features to unpack how the scenes highlight David's traits.

Each of these scenes stresses the domestic realm for David's performance of masculinity. In his first scenes, he interacts with a number of characters. After his

---

conversion and immigration, he speaks once to Joseph Smith and twice to Jacob. All other interactions are with Eliza and all his other actions are only one step removed from Eliza, with people who know her well. There is no portrayed scene from his march as part of the Mormon Battalion, for instance. When engaged in his hard work on the Nauvoo temple away from Eliza, he cuts stone during conversations about her. Domestic life defines and surrounds David. The narrowing of David's relations around Eliza as the film progresses demands consideration. As suggested earlier, his actions become a model for the presumed male Mormon viewer of the film who will take David's traits and extrapolate them to his own domestic life. While the Mormon viewer may take up any number of ideal traits from the film, the three David outlines are clearly portrayed hallmarks of his masculinity.

David shows competence regularly throughout the film. He is an expert stonemason and gladly employs these talents in Nauvoo. He is competent in speech, as his smooth flirting and gentle persuasion with Eliza evidences. One scene that best shows his competence depicts a sawing contest. Jacob asks a crowd if anyone will challenge him. David replies that he will. When Jacob questions David's ability to compete with an injured hand, David suggests they wager something. Jacob balks at this and David suggests a prize instead, “the first turn with Eliza at the dance.” David pairs up with Eliza's father and Jacob with an otherwise unknown character, Hyrum. David and John win and the scene cuts immediately to David and Eliza dancing.

Narratively, this scene pits David's competence against Jacob's. David surpasses his rival despite two impediments: his hand and his crosscut partner. David's hand is
injured, a fact that appears only here with no explanation. The roughly bandaged hand serves to show how far superior David's abilities are to Jacob's. His competence brushes aside the physical pain. David partners on the crosscut with John, Eliza's father. While this might nod to John's desires for his daughter to marry David rather than Jacob, this pairing also creates another handicap that David must overcome to beat Jacob. John is significantly older than the other men involved (Jacob's partner is Hyrum who looks to be the same age as David and Jacob). David successfully compensates for John's age. By managing to saw through the log first, despite his hand and weaker partner, David highlights his total competence.

The montage of the scene mimics the film conventions of a conversation. After the spoken dialogue, the camera presents the two men side by side then cuts to a reaction shot of Eliza, her friend whispering what is happening. The rest of the scene consists of very rapid cutting between close-ups of David, Jacob, and Eliza. Although they exchange no words, the contest appears like a quick discussion between the three characters. It follows the convention of establishing two-shot, then a series of cuts framing each participant, who either add to the conversation or offer a visual reaction94 Nowhere else in the depiction of the love triangle is the rivalry laid so bare and nowhere else do all three converse. The two men wordlessly express their desire for Eliza. Eliza turns away slightly but then glances back to watch the watch the action. The first cut from her frames Jacob in a point-of-view shot, but each subsequent cut goes to David. As the number of shots including David increase, Jacob recedes from the conversation. A tally of the shots ends

with Jacob appearing in only half as many as David. The final back and forth from Eliza to David to Eliza resolves itself on the next shot, a cut to the dance where David and Eliza appear in the same frame. Throughout the film, David uses his facility with words to woo Eliza. By shooting this scene in a manner similar to conversation, Merrill ties together David's competences.

Figure 13

In their shots sawing, the focus is on David and Jacob. The log and their partners disappear off the bottom of the screen. By hiding the task of the contest, the film highlights that Eliza is the prize of this contest between the character of the two men. They fully engage their bodies, but their faces register their intensity. Jacob looks over at David, but David remains focused on the log. In every shot with both men, David appears closer to the top of the frame, the area generally associated with dominance. The shots of David have a larger crowd behind him, cheering on the action. Although the crowd does not appear openly partisan, by framing the shots so more bystanders appear in David's close-ups than Jacob's, the film creates the impression that his winning is more strongly supported. By sawing through the log first, David enacts his competence. He deploys his skills for a romantic and domestic aim. By structuring this proving as a

contest, however friendly, *Legacy* suggests that competence might be a zero-sum endeavor. For David to be competent, others must be incompetent. By standing above Jacob in skill, David is poised to pursue Eliza more forcefully. His competence becomes the basis for his distinction, as evidenced in his proposal that names his hands (and their skill) immediately after his faith. He and Jacob are matched in faith, but the contest shows David enacting more competence.

While this competition for competence is the first chronologically in the film of the three scenes considered, David's faith stands as his bedrock feature. Indeed, he is one of the most faithful. As his emigration scene opens, a brief sermon of Joseph bleeds into it as voiceover. Joseph informs the listeners that, “the Lord has already begun to sweep the earth and gather his elect to help us.” David walks toward the camera as these words are spoken. The camera then pans to follow him as he calmly walks through a busy crowd at the docks. The shot sets David apart visually with his purposeful pace and his height placing him above the others rushing around. When he arrives in Nauvoo, he asks Joseph what he should do to help build the city. Joseph responds that he should help with the temple. Viewers later learn David has taken this request very seriously and dedicates twice the typical number of working days to the building. While these scenes all showcase David's faithfulness, the scene I consider below presents a moment of doubt. Rather than undercutting his faithfulness, this scene articulates David's masculine Mormon faithfulness. Masculine faithfulness is a struggle and goes against natural inclinations.

Immediately after the scene where they learn of the death of Joseph, the film cuts
to a shot of David sitting on a block of unfinished stone at the temple site. Eliza comes up behind him and calls his name. He turns only partially around and says, “I was not prepared for how it would end.” Eliza advances towards him, sits behind him and whispers comfort and promise that it “only ends if we lose faith.” David asks, “Why didn't God protect him?” Eliza rejoins, “Perhaps his work was done. But ours is only beginning.” David does not give in to his despair and the next shot opens with a blast of the Mormon Tabernacle Choir singing the hymn sung at every temple dedication, “The Spirit of God,” while David advances across an open field. Behind David, who stands at the center of the shot, a host of Mormon men follow, all heading toward the unfinished temple as the next shot from behind them reveals.

Rather than showing David's lack of faith, this scene points the depth of his commitment. He cannot take in the death of Joseph because he assumes it will be the end. Having shaped his whole life around his new faith, he feels unmoored and uncertain. He chose the temple site for his moment of crisis because his prior experience and anticipated future locate the temple as the site of enacting faith. He has labored one working day in five at building this temple. David has heard Joseph teach about and Eliza pine for the incalculable value of the temple. The struggle between what he has done for his faith and the Church's uncertain future drives him to the temple. David sits on an unfinished stone brought close to the temple, but not yet fully integrated. The stone is a visual metaphor for his current state. The temple (the church) is yet incomplete. The stone (David) has been brought to the site of the church and worked somewhat from its natural state just as David has been partially remade by his faith. But, David, like the
stone, has not yet fully integrated himself into the church and completed his work. He faces two choices: abandoning his work, which will lose all the effort he has put in or moving forward, building up the church even though he currently cannot see how that is possible. Because the Mormon viewer knows that the temple was completed and all viewers know that Eliza makes it to Salt Lake City with her family, his eventual choice of rec omitting himself to Mormonism is the clear option.

David's Mormon masculinity involves a faith that is a struggle. This struggle requires sustaining from others. Eliza sits behind David and speaks quietly, mimicking the still, small voice of the Holy Ghost. Eliza merges with the Holy Ghost as both an earthly support for David as well as a symbol of the interior support of the gift of the Holy Ghost. Because the film does not include internal monologues, the whisperings of the spirit are externalized in this scene onto the actions of Eliza. Speaking low directly to his ear, she sits behind him. David does not turn completely, suggesting she is somehow physically both there and not there. The disjunction between her hopeful message and her black mourning dress also points the viewer to thinking that her words come from some other source. As she enters the scene, there is no background music, an irregularity in the nearly wall-to-wall musical score. Silence intensifies the focus on her dialogue. As she sits down and begins to comfort David, a faint instrumental song begins. As this builds, David's faith slowly regains strength until it bursts forth in his action in the next scene just as the music bursts forth in one of three lyrical musical moments in the film. The sudden assault of song shifts viewers violently from doubt to certainty and David's faithfulness is restored as his defining feature. He immediately performs this faithfulness

96 Barsam and Monahan, Looking at Movies: 388.
through his work on the temple.

Although they finish the temple, the Mormons soon have to leave Nauvoo.

Shortly after this parting, Eliza and David must separate also. David answers the call to join the Mormon Battalion and Eliza cannot know when or if she will see him again. This leave-taking tests the dual nature of his promised tenderness. As he proposed, he promised to cherish her with all his heart and to make her laugh. Leaving her he cannot either protect her or minimize her pain. The scene of his farewell indicates how strongly his tenderness defines him. Rather than unemotionally and stoically riding off like a hero, David ruefully bids farewell to Eliza in a copse away from the wagon train. She appears to be crying when he comes on screen holding the hand of their young son. David claims “if there were any other way,” before Eliza cuts him off to say that she knows that this tribulation will bring blessings. David says, “I love you,” to her and then turns and kneels next to their son. His voice catching, he places his own hat on the son's head and tells him “you have to take care of mama and Sarah. You have to be a man now.” He then holds up the toy hammer and tells him “And take care of this too, hm? We've one more temple yet to build.” He closes this one-sided conversation with “whatever happens, you remember your father loved you.” David stands up, turns to Eliza and, still teary, warns her that it may be in Zion that they meet again. Eliza lunges forward to embrace him and nearly yells, “If we ever meet again, it'll be Zion to me.”

This scene places David in a moment of domestic crisis. He is leaving and he has to assure his small family with what might be his last words to them. He turns first to his son and instills in him the same three traits of his own masculinity. This boy should be
tender in his care of his mother and sister, competent with his hammer, and faithful in deploying his skills toward the building of a temple. David once again, like in his proposal, neatly encapsulates Mormon masculinity. David enacts his own tenderness in these instructions to his son. He cries as he tells these things to his son and wants to stress how much he loves him. The son's presence at the leave-taking stresses that this event impacts the whole family and that David's concern is not just for Eliza but also for his children. Although David returns safely, these words to his son and Eliza do become the last ones he speaks during the film. They thus gain additional importance as his final dialogue. With these last words, David shows that tenderness is spoken and acted out. The tears and the words combine to highlight David's tender approach to dealing with his own family.

This scene opens with a relatively long shot of Eliza to the left and David off to the right. Between them a large open space gapes. As David walks closer, the camera
slowly zooms in and continues to zoom as David kneels to speak to his son. As David stands, a match cut brings the camera much closer to the couple as they embrace. The scene closing distance both physically between the couple and visually through zoom. This closing in contrasts with the inevitable parting that will soon happen. As the camera

![Image](image.png)

**Figure 16**

tightens in on the small family and then the couple, attention is drawn to them as a unit. The scenery, a copse of trees, initially fills most the screen but landscape gives way to human relationships. The constricting matches David's desire to stay close. The camera matches his desire to heighten the cost of his leaving. The closeness also intensifies his emotion. Although we can hear him crying as he talks to his son, it is not until the final shot of him embracing Eliza that we see his tears. The closeness makes the emotion evident and the slow zoom creates an effect of escalation. 97

The scene abruptly cuts to his actual departure. The closeup of the embrace is replaced by an extreme long shot where figures are indistinguishable. The bright mid-day green of the forest gives way to orange dusk on a plain. The contrast in these two shots signal that David is gone and the world is a very different place for Eliza. It is a darker,

less clearly outlined world where she no longer feels safely protected by a Mormon man. The next jump is to a winter camp covered in snow. These three scenes quickly jump through seasons: the green of summer, the orange of autumn, and finally snow. Not only does this show time elapse, it matches the value Eliza places on David's tenderness. When he is around, the world is lush and warm and bright. When he leaves, Eliza's life goes dark and then cold.

These three scenes show how Legacy employs everyday interactions between Eliza and David to hold up the three-pronged conception of ideal Mormon masculinity. These scenes, and the entire film, also engage more fully in a large project. The first stage of this project is to undo the stereotypical image of the Mormon man. Previous films, as explored in the first chapter, craft three images of the Mormon man: the lustful sexual deviant, the victimized settler, and the derided religious outsider. Legacy responds by portraying a single man diametrically opposed to each of these. Presenting the ideal Mormon man inside an erotic relation that does not resort to coercion or rape counters the first stereotype of lustful and rapacious villain. By making David hyper-competent,
questions of the need of real Americans to save the Mormon man evaporate. Lastly, David's encounter with his own minister who urges him to join Mormonism and his ready engagement with worthy religious goals points to the depth and seriousness of his convictions. His beliefs are not mocked but admirable.

In combating these three stereotypes, *Legacy* depicts the Mormon man in a way that LDS Church and Mormon people had long since felt was missing from cinema. Prior films had not depicted Mormon men fully and had even more rarely portrayed significant interactions between Mormon men and Mormon women. As Deleuze claims about minority cinema “the people are missing.”98 Like all minority groups, Mormons exist prior to the creation of film, but film makes the people visible on their own terms. Minority cinema thus contributes to “the invention of a people.”99 Relying on conventions of Hollywood film, *Legacy* mimics other films in order to place the minority Mormons on par with other peoples that film has shown. Perhaps it would be better to say that *Legacy* works at the re-invention of a people. It addresses a people who already exists, but does so in order to solidify a sense of peoplehood that has faltered. When Eliza informs her grandson and viewers to not let the legacy of faith die, she stresses that the status of Mormonism is tenuous. Unless the viewers accept their status as part of this legacy, Mormonism will cease. The people are missing from other films and in danger of disappearing from reality, *Legacy* subtly argues.

If the invention of a Mormon people for the late 20th century is a goal of *Legacy*, it explains several features of the film. Leaders disappear to the background because most

---

98 Deleuze, *Cinema 2*: 216.
99 Ibid., 217.
Mormons will not be leaders or personally know them. Polygamy is absent not only because the period portrayed predates the public announcement but also because polygamy is no longer a part of the religion. Unique theological claims disappear in favor of suggestions about the importance of temples and eternal marriage. What is left are stalwart individuals that can serve as role models. In the case of masculinity, the faithful, competent, and tender David Walker shows Mormon men a century and a half after his life how they should live. The threat to this people is no longer physical violence from outsiders. The “new conditions of struggle” for Mormonism is the fight over appropriate gender roles. The forced expulsions no longer press Mormons into finding a geographical Zion. Rather, they are in search of a less physical Zion in the form of paired relationships of masculine and feminine, a mirrored version of David and Eliza.

Eliza's own understanding of Zion transitions over the course of the film toward this sense. The struggle to find Zion, a place of peace, drives the overall plot of the film. In their article claiming that Legacy develops a particularly Mormon cinematic aesthetic combining traditional Hollywood elements and the transcendental film style, Thomas Lefler and Gideon Burton point to the seeming failure to find Zion as one way Legacy undercuts Hollywood norms. They claim the “question is asked and answered” repeatedly in the episodic rise and fall of the film without ever resolving itself. Each place is only a temporary haven. Nothing in the film itself indicates that Utah proves more peaceful or ideal, they claim. Their argument rests on maintaining a literal understanding of Zion throughout the film. Eliza, however, transitions beyond this literal

100 Ibid., 217.
102 Ibid., 283.
approach. When she tells David that, “If we ever meet again, it'll be Zion to me,” she really does mean this. Her young girl certainty that Zion is a place to which she and her family can move is gone. Instead, Zion becomes the set of relationships wherever she is in proximity to the ideal Mormon masculine. Therefore, the resolution of the search does come, and conclusively in the second to last scene in which Eliza and David reunite.

The final scene informs viewers that even this Zion can end with death. Eliza has outlived David. Despite their temporary separation, though, they will be reunited in the afterlife, Mormon doctrine teaches. The film may then push off ultimate resolution for two reasons. One makes a subtle nod to Mormon belief and claims that Zion will be found, but not yet. As Eliza said in their leave-taking, tribulation may only end in the world to come. There, reunited with her David, the ideal Mormon man, she will experience Zion in perpetuity. The second reason to forestall resolution is to remind the audience that they are implicated in the film. The legacy of faith does not end and only if they fail to live up to the models in the film will it cease. The viewers are still engaged in a struggle to create Zion. They are called to create their own Zion by cultivating and uniting idealized relationships.

Mapping Zion, the defining struggle and political aim of the Mormon people, onto marriage and gender strengthens the understanding of David as the enactment of ideal Mormon masculinity. If being with him is Zion, then his actions must be what make Zion. The three scenes dissected above and others in the film all combine to show the viewers what they should aim for. Men should act like he does and women should seek a husband like him. In the first scene after their wedding, David sets the stakes fairly high. The
camera pans from the couple to white flowers that slowly fade to white flowers outside. Eliza appears on screen, heavily pregnant. David rushes out, blindfolds her playfully and brings her to the shed. There, he has repaired the rocking chair that the family has carted around since leaving upstate New York a decade and a half before. Eliza's father and brother both failed to fix the chair. Not only has David managed to repair it, he also carved a sunstone, an emblem from the Nauvoo temple, into its back. The symbol of their Mormon faith, his competence where others failed, and the tender way in which he presents the gift and then caresses Eliza's face coalesce into their first scene of married life. Eliza's pregnancy informs viewers he has even already begun to fulfill his duty to be a father.

David's faithfulness, competence, and tenderness haunt the very last shot of the film. Eliza's hand places a single small flower on a table in her comfortable home in Salt Lake. The table is filled with pictures of her and David during their younger years. She has pulled the flower from her Book of Mormon just before giving that book to her grandson. Half a century earlier, David gave that flower to Eliza and she pressed it in her book. This single shot captures the lingering influence of David on Eliza. The miniature portrait of Joseph on the table is a symbol of David's faithfulness, the comfortable home a fruit of his competence, and the flower itself an icon of his tenderness. As she places this flower, still intact, next to the framed photographs, she intensifies the circuit of past and present that runs throughout the film. The past is not dead and gone, but continues to animate the present. David's ideal Mormon masculinity lives on and the viewers are urged to honor, value and live it themselves.
Bibliography


*A Trip To Salt Lake City.* 1905.


“Atheists, Muslims See Most Presidential Bias” Accessed 20 March 2013.


http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/23529/Demand-great-for-Legacy-tickets-consideration-asked-for-visitors.html

*Doctrine and Covenants*. Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1981.


https://www.lds.org/topics/family-proclamation


“For the Strength of Youth.” Accessed 13 April 2013. https://www.lds.org/youth/for-the-
strength-of-youth?lang=eng


Legacy. Directed by Kieth Merrill. 1993 Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2000. DVD


Packer, Boyd K. “Talk to the All Church Coordinating Council,” Accessed 12 April 2013

http://www.zionsbest.com/face.html


http://emp.byui.edu/huffr/The%20Unwritten%20Order%20of%20Things%20---%20Boyd%20K.%20Packer.htm


*The Three Witnesses.* Directed by Judge Whitaker. 1968. Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2005. DVD.


*Trapped by the Mormons.* Directed by H.B. Parkinson. 1922. Phoenix: Grapevine Video. 2006. DVD


VITA

NAME OF AUTHOR: David H. Newman

PLACE OF BIRTH: Salt Lake City, Utah

DATE OF BIRTH: July 21, 1983

GRADUATE AND UNDERGRADUATE SCHOOLS ATTENDED
  Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah
  University of Alberta, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada
  University of Utah, Salt Lake City, Utah

DEGREES AWARDED:
  Bachelor of Arts in Linguistics, 2004, Brigham Young University
  Master of Library and Information Studies, 2007, University of Alberta
  Bachelor of Arts in Comparative Literary and Cultural Studies, 2011, University of Utah