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Sexism in Silicon Slopes:  
Religion and Gendered Organizational  
Structures in the New Economy

By

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## Abstract

This study investigates the role of religion in perpetuating gender inequality within contemporary workplaces, focusing on Silicon Slopes. Applying gendered organizational theory, I show how religious beliefs sustain sexist organizational norms and practices because religion is built into the gendered logic employed by company founders and their employees. Through 94 in-depth interviews and 147 hours of ethnographic fieldwork, I use an innovative social network strategy to examine the impact of Mormon religious beliefs on gender and labor dynamics in Utah's emerging tech space. Findings reveal three key insights:

1. Religion shapes educational and professional norms, leading to the structural disenfranchisement of women within organizations, irrespective of women's religious affiliation.
2. Religious teachings continue to influence corporate norms and language, even when divorced from their original source, thereby perpetuating gender biases in the workplace.
3. Despite shifts in religious dedication among company founders, religiously influenced gendered logics persist, impacting organizational dynamics of a growing company with employees from around the world.

These findings underscore the profound and direct impact of religion on women's economic precarity, particularly when they are closely associated with men professional gatekeepers from the same religious background that adheres to gender complementary beliefs. Furthermore, religious leaders wield significant influence over the global economy through the creation of structuring documents on gender, labor, and family dynamics. Thus, religion has the power to structure gendered organizations around the globe in ways that are likely extremely hard to trace without a unique language and shared religion that allows for the use of that unique language in the workplace.

KEYWORDS: Religion, Gender, Workplace, Tech, Gendered Organizational Theory, Mormon, Silicon Slopes, Sexism

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## Sexism in Silicon Slopes: Religion and Gendered Organizational Structures in the New Economy

Christian religiosity in the United States has dropped significantly in the last 30 years; according to the PEW Research Center, the number of American Christians is projected to fall below 50% of the population within the next 50 years (2022). What might these trends mean for the influence of religion on American lives, education, and careers? How do religion and gendered organizations interact, and what are the outcomes for women entering the workforce? To explore these questions, I trace legacies of religious beliefs on gender and labor over the life course of Mormon women, from Sunday school lessons to business school ethics debates and from sacrament tables to corporate boardroom tables.

I extend Acker's 1990 gendered organization theory and Williams et al.'s 2012 application in the "new economy" by showing how religion functions as a gender inequality reproduction mechanism in the 21st-century economy. I show how religion sustains the tenacious hold gender inequality has in the workforce because religion is built into the gendered logic that 1) influences childhood aspirations and career choices, 2) the educational institutions that develop labor talent pipelines, and 3) structures work organizations and the decision making of the gatekeepers they employ. I demonstrate how religion sustains these gender inequality mechanisms across the same four characteristics defined by William et al. in the 21st-century

economy (job security, teamwork, career maps, and networking), in this case, within a religious MBA program and a Utah-based tech company started by Mormon men.

I also extend knowledge about traditional gender-based roles/relationships among the members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints<sup>1</sup> (commonly referred to as "Mormons"), including what is unique to the decision-making of Mormon women entering higher education and professional spaces, the logic and biases of Mormon men who perpetuate specific patterns of gender inequality within professional business settings, and the high level of influence the Church's current leaders inadvertently have on the gender policies instituted by global Mormon-led companies and the subsequent experiences of women employees therein, regardless of those women's faith and geographic proximity to the leaders of the Church or company.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### 1. Gendered Organizational Theory

Acker developed the theory of gendered organizations to explain persistent gender disparities in the workplace (Acker 1990). Acker shows how jobs, work rules, evaluation systems, and organizational logic are built on a foundation that systematically disenfranchises those who are not men through the division of labor, cultural symbols, workplace interactions, individual identities, and organizational logic. Using this theory to critique organizational systems, researchers in the decades since its publication have shown how many industries function to favor men: corporate law firms (Pierce 1996), librarians, elementary school teachers, and nurses (Williams 1992), restaurants, prisons, Anglican parishes, NGOs, health organizations,

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<sup>1</sup> I use the term "Mormon" to identify members of this church because it is how they refer to themselves. This nickname persists despite recent church leadership's strong discouragement of the moniker and recent publication standards. To comply with the church organization's name preferences, I call the church the "LDS church" unless directly quoting someone else. This IS confusing and reflective of larger identity politics in the church culture; it also helps differentiate between the structural organization of the religion and what its people do, say, and interpret church teachings.

and prisons (Britton 1995). Since publication in 1990, this one article from Acker has been cited 618 times as of April 2024. The most recent citations use gendered organization theory to explore topics of labor (Holmberg & Alvinus, 2023; Tanquerel & Santistevan, 2022), identity formation (Chakraborty, 2023; Rumpf, 2023), education and inequality reproduction (Brewer et al., 2020; Quadlin, 2023; Rahilly, 2020).

In 2012, Williams et al. published an interaction of Acker's work (Acker 1990) but applied it to what they called "the new economy" (Williams et al. 2012). Focusing specifically on Acker's emphasis on organizing logic, Williams et al. showed how the basic gendered organizational logic has been transformed over the previous decades to further rationalize and legitimize organizational hierarchies. Williams et al.'s application identifies gendered mechanisms actively disenfranchising non-men in the twenty-first-century workforce, a workforce that has now accepted the following as the norm: job precarity with frequent downsizing, mergers, and lay-offs, employment on "teams" evaluated by results and outcomes by peers rather than hands-on managers, individualized and vague career development maps, and networking as an essential element for career advancement within and outside one's organization.

No research has yet explored how secular gendered organizations in the 21st century are influenced and sustained by religiosity using William et al.'s 2012 iteration of Acker's 1990 theory. To extend both Acker's (1990) and William et al.'s (2012) work, I thought with religious, organizational, gender, geography, and childhood socialization scholars. Many have explored the intersections of some of these topics in recent decades; I draw from each to situate my argument and my research locations.

## 2. Religion and Organizations

Current literature on the intersection of religion and organizations in the 21st-century for-profit sector is weak. Most focus on the organization of the religions themselves (Demerath 1998; Hall, 1997) or closely related organizations like historically religiously funded non-profits (Seigler & Cadge, 2023). Studies that examine religion in the for-profit section focus on the issues of religious individuals or small networks working in secular organizations (Ernst et al. 2024; Lockwood et al. 2023; Cadge et al. 2023; Cornforth 2023; Tien and Cadge 2023; Seigler and Cadge 2023; Lotfi Dehkharghani et al. 2023; Apelt et al. 2023). Some of the most recent studies examine how companies purposefully incorporate religion to increase worker profitability (de Wildt and Aupers, 2023).

### 3. Religious Organizations and Gender

Only a handful of scholars have examined organizational structures with both religion and gendered organizational theory lenses but do not address economic factors. For example, Whitehead (2013) linked the rates of women in religious leadership with religious policies on admitting queer members. Another explores the different institutional religious consequences for nuns' and priests' civil rights activity in the 1960s, showing that within religions, gender structures members lives (Stalp & Winders, 2000).

### 4. Religion, Organizations, Gender, and Geography

A community's conservative religious demographics are related to white individuals' gender attitudes in organizations within that state (Chan-Serafin et al., 2013; Moore and Vanneman, 2003). Across the U.S. and U.K., businessmen in "traditional" marriages have higher rates of discriminating against women coworkers and preventing qualified women from advancement (Desai et al., 2014). Religious homogeneity is related to well-being, likely in

proportion to the number of coworkers with similar levels of religiosity. (Diener et al. 2011, Chan-Serafin et al 2012).

As Americans are the most religious in the industrialized world (Diener et al. 2011), and the protestant work ethic is one of the most potent forces in shaping our economy, it makes sense to start a closer look at religious organizational interactions and gendered organizational structures in a densely populated region with strong protestant work ethics and religious homogeneity, where members of that dominant religion hold positions of organizational power in the local economy.

#### 5. Religion, Organizations, Gender, Geography, and Childhood Socialization

Religious density and proximity shape girls' childhood aspirations; the level of embeddedness in and exposure to a religious subculture through parents matters for educational outcomes. (Horwitz et al. 2022). In 2022, Horwitz et al. were the first to show that the combination of religious socialization on gender ideologies directly affects girls' degree of precision in long-term educational and career planning starting as young as 13, planning which ends up matching their later bachelor's and graduate degree attainment. Controlling for social and economic differences, the key factor that predicted whether a girl aspired to and achieved education/career or motherhood as her primary life goal was their social proximity to religion. The significance of social networks to educational and professional outcomes is linked to the presence of same-gender role models for Jewish girls and contrasted with the lack of same-gender role models for Christian girls (Horwitz et al., 2022; Henningsen et al., 2022).

#### METHODS

Williams et al. 2014 used a case study of geoscientists in the oil and gas industry to show four new organizing logics that reproduce gender inequality in the twenty-first-century

workplace (Williams et al. 2012; Williams et al. 2014). I extend this conversation by showing how religion in the 21st century also functions as a gender inequality reproduction mechanism in the modern economy. To investigate how religion upholds these new organizing logics, I draw upon my research on the life course of Mormon women with MBAs, global corporations influenced by the LDS church, and the people affected by those institutions.

While I initially began with a cohort of 37 Mormon women with MBAs from 10 different universities across the U.S. and U.K. Further interviews and connections brought me deeper into the rich social and professional networks these women interact with over their life course. Using feminist in-depth interviews and relational ethnography (Small and Cook, 2023; Desmond, 2014; DeVault and Gross, 2012; Olsen, 2009; Harding, 1987) methods, I performed an additional 57 interviews with participants' classmates, teachers, recruiters, and coworkers to contextualize the data I gathered and embed it within a rich tapestry of interrelated social networks and geographical locations. This allowed me to discover relationships between all 94 participants even amongst different recruitment networks. They often knew one another and, unwittingly, were able to add insight, complexity, and nuance to my data. These methods allowed me to map relationships among participants and vicariously experience the networks and divisions within their social circles (Saldaña 2013). Being able to observe and detect the tight social and professional networks that emerged from this technique informed and supported my choice to include a tight geographical boundary to the tech company I chose to explore. Without the context interviews and multiple insights and data confirmations, I would not have been able to thoroughly locate the religious beliefs and relationships that guide my analysis. All interviews were either performed in person or over video calls. The in-person interviews were conducted in



university campus cafeterias. I found participants through snowball sampling and social media recruitment flyers.

In addition to formal interviews, I performed 147 hours of ethnographic participant observation over the 2023-2024 school year. My participants invited me to classes, public lectures, networking events, conferences, meals, and private club and social events. I visited four campuses across four different trips for a total of 139 in-person hours and was invited to 7 hours of virtual calls and events.

When I started my research, I was interested in understanding Mormon women's networks and how they use them in the business world, including mentors and role models. I quickly found that to not only be an unproductive line of questioning (most did not have networks or mentors), but most immediately turned the topic of conversation to matters of religion, gender, and the barriers they faced in business because of their identity, upbringings, and beliefs. Following their lead, I changed my line of inquiry to investigate religious socialization and gender tension to better understand what these women face. I asked about their motives for getting into an MBA program, their plan to obtain an MBA, previous work experience, why they chose their university, how others responded to these choices, and how their Mormon religious affiliation (whether upbringing, current attendance, or relationship with the church) has affected their choices and experiences.

Interviews lasted 30 minutes to two hours, averaging 60 minutes. I did follow-up interviews with a handful of subjects and continued to accept new participants until I reached result saturation; even then, I continued to pursue more participants until I reached the limits of the various networks I had been connected to. There are likely more Mormon women with

MBA's out there, but, as I will show in my analysis, they are often disconnected from the networks that otherwise would connect them to my study.

Using grounded theory and inductive coding techniques (Charmaz 2006), I transcribed and coded each interview, memo notes, and observations using summative coding and thematic analysis. I read, reread, and relistened to each interview many times and created process and chronological maps to help me analyze the relationships between people, events, and ideas. I confirmed my analysis with systematic coding using MAXQDA. I used process, emotion, verses, and evaluative coding to confirm and refine the relationships I found between sites, beliefs, structures, and people.

By combing the previous research at the intersections of religion, organizations, gender, geography, and childhood socialization, with the strength of influence that religion has on the development of an individual's morality and opinions (Finke & Adamczyk, 2008; Mez 2020; Nie, 2023), and especially executive decisions made concerning company policy and culture (Ananthram, 2019), I propose that organizations with a high density of homogenous religious white men organizational leaders will enact policies and procedures informed by their religious context that disenfranchise women. Finke and Adamczyk's (2008) analysis was done at the national scale. However, I position my study on the logic that a similar finding can be found within smaller population segments when the homogenous religion holds enough power to enact corporate structures and policies.

Thus, in order to extend Acker's 1990 gendered organizational theory and Williams et al.'s 2012 application in the "new economy" to show how religion functions as a gender inequality reproduction mechanism in the 21st-century economy, I locate my study in and amongst the following people, organizations, and geography, ending with a deep analysis of the

relationships between the LDS church and one global tech firm based in Utah and started and run by Mormon founders.

## BACKGROUND

The LDS church is a global organization with 9.6 million members residing in the U.S. More than half of those members are women (Religious Landscape Study 2014), yet women are restricted from the highest church offices. This patriarchal structure, run by fifteen men aged 62-99, is headquartered in Utah. The densest Mormon population (72%) is found in Utah County. It is home to the church's flagship university (Brigham Young University) (Religious Landscape Study 2014) and Silicon Slopes (a nickname coined to promote Utah's growing technology community).

Utah's economy is ranked highest for job growth in the U.S. and is predicted to be the state with the most tech job growth over the next decade (*Utah - State Economic Profile*, n.d.). However, it is also consistently one of if not the worst states in the nation for women's equity (McCann, n.d.). Utah is consistently ranked as one of the lowest states in the nation for women's equality, home to the eighth largest gender pay gaps in tech (McCann, n.d.); women make 76% of what their men counterparts make. This gap is 10% higher than the national average for tech firms. All of these low rates for women are reflected in the leadership of Utah tech companies; many larger organizations like NASDAQ refuse to work with them because their leadership is made up entirely of white men (Zarroli, 2020). Unsurprisingly, anecdotal reports say that, in Utah, they have been the most affected by recent Silicon Slopes layoffs in 2023. This is supported by national data from 2023 showing that 45% of tech layoffs were women, though only 30% of tech workers are women; 65% of women are more likely to lose their tech jobs than men (WTC, n.d.).

As the nation's most sexist state (McCann, n.d.), benevolent sexism is particularly rampant in Utah (Stevenson 2014). Utah has the geographic and religious homogeneity needed for my approach, combined with the force of a growing tech company presence that positions Utah's tech company founders to have a profound influence on emerging global companies across the globe.

### The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

The LDS church is unique in its top-down approach to managing and teaching members; it has an official correlation department that manages all church messages, manuals, and programs to ensure they comply with official church policy and practices (*Correlation*, 2022). In addition to these libraries of texts and media, members spend many hours a week at structured church events. To illustrate the extent of this religious education and socialization, I will explain what most U.S. church members experience between the ages of 14 to 18 years old. They attend weekday seminary each day before high school (5 hours), participate in weekly church attendance (2 hours), evening youth events (1-2 hours), and may also attend mission preparation classes and hold church service callings (2-4+). Church youth can easily spend 10-15 hours most weeks in formal instructional and service settings before counting the time they are expected to study scriptures and sermons on their own time. These events are planned and structured according to current church handbook standards. (For those youths who serve missions after high school, this intense structure expands to account for every minute of their day for 18 to 24 months until the ages of 21-23.)

Specific messages and quotes are reiterated to drive home particular messages and instructions. The messages in these texts range from typical Christian teachings about Christ, service, and scripture to, more specifically LDS doctrines. For the purpose of this paper, I will

explain one document that structures the church's teachings on men's and women's gendered relationships, labor, and assignment as parents.

One of the most explicit church teachings on gender comes from a church document published in 1995- *The Family: A Proclamation to the World* (hereafter referred to as the Proclamation) that was signed by all of the men in church leadership at the time of publication (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints 1995). In the first 25 years of publication, this document was cited 150 times in the twice-annual global church conferences (*In 25 Years, 'The Family: A Proclamation to the World' Has Gone From UN to Vati*, 2020).

The document starts by declaring the centrality of the family to God's plan and that "Gender is an essential characteristic of individual premortal, mortal, and eternal identity and purpose." It defines the eternal responsibilities of men and women as husbands/fathers and wives/mothers. According to Mormon teachings, even those not blessed with a spouse or children in this life will have the opportunity to have them in the next. Thus, all women and girls are spoken to as if they are already or are destined to be mothers (interestingly, the same logic is not consistently applied to men). After declaring that parents are tasked with a solemn, divine responsibility to love and provide for their children's physical and spiritual needs, the document goes on to divide up who does what:

"By divine design, fathers are to preside over their families in love and righteousness and are responsible to provide the necessities of life and protection for their families. Mothers are primarily responsible for the nurture of their children. In these sacred responsibilities, fathers and mothers are obligated to help one another as equal partners. Disability, death, or other circumstances may necessitate individual adaptation. Extended families should lend support when needed."

The explicit gendered assignments in the Proclamation are one example of the gender complementarianism logic that many conservative Christian churches use to justify binary gender “roles,” abilities, and access to power (Ross & Finnigan, 2020). Further, the text warns that “the disintegration of the family will bring upon individuals, communities, and nations the calamities foretold by ancient and modern prophets.”

Members report that this text is used in weekly religious services to push women to be stay-at-home mothers to avoid the armageddon described in the document. When a woman does choose a career to “provide” for her family, she is viewed as going against the divine measure of her creation (Hard-to-Find Mormon Videos, 2016). Unsurprisingly, young girls are taught to primarily prepare themselves for motherhood, not financial stability. This directly leads them down paths that result in economic precarity and dependence that is compounded by the church’s high value of avoiding debt.

Orienting girls towards childcare is embedded within a larger, even more alarming expectation: to be economically dependent on an imagined future husband who will be solely capable and responsible for providing her economic stability. By devaluing economic independence, education, and long-term career planning at a tender age, girls are encouraged to dream about a future husband and children that she has very little ability to control, unlike creating an educational and career plan. Other studies show that American girls are already prone to this phenomenon, but religion and social proximity also increase that narrowed vision of what is possible (Horwitz et al., 2022).

By teaching that crossing these gendered lines of care work and paid work will destroy families and societies, the church begins gendered labor separations in childhood that result in

challenges working across genders later in life. These relationship challenges are compounded when Mormon men interact with non-conforming Mormon women in professional settings.

The tension between the church's high value for education and its high value for "traditional gender roles" in marriage comes to a head at BYU, specifically in its MBA school. Brigham Young University. Doctrinally, members of the LDS faith are taught that formal education is a gift from God that will only enhance their lives in the next world. Brigham Young University embodies this belief in its mission statement, which declares it "a university dedicated to education for eternity."

As a private religious school, Brigham Young University (BYU) extends the religious socialization of childhood into adulthood. It functions to make explicit the norms that are typically not made explicit in adulthood. 99% of the students are part members of the LDS church; for the last 80 years, the school has been governed by a Board of Trustees consisting of the First Presidency of the Church as well as other church leaders appointed by the First Presidency (Brigham Young University. Board of Trustees, n.d.). Two of the current fifteen top men in church leadership are former BYU presidents; presidents are often called to the role from within the church's leadership auxiliaries.

The schools' geographical proximity and tight oversight by church leadership, combined with their religious homogeneity (99% Mormon), local religious density, and proximity to the emerging tech space, "the Silicon Slopes," make it a fascinating place to watch religious values and ideals get codified at the institutional level and then go on to influence the now global tech companies with headquarters scattered across the Wasatch Front.

Professors at BYU are spiritually and religiously vetted extensions of the church clergy. To stay employed, professors must obtain annual approval from church authorities. Men

professors are often also called to be local congregational leaders over students who live in the area.

Mormon students who wish to attend BYU are required to be “active” (attend church at least every few weeks), in good standing with the church’s morality and health standards, and graduate from the seminary program (*Ecclesiastical Endorsements*, n.d.). These requirements are supervised by a local religious leader who interviews each applicant and decides if they will endorse the student; this certification process is renewed each quarter for the duration of the student's time attending BYU with only slight modifications made to those who belong to another faith.

## MBA

Master in Business Administration (MBA) programs are often used to change career fields and speed up one's professional role attainment; they serve as an interesting socializing space for those new to particular business industries (Haski-Leventhal et al., 2020). They are at the forefront of preparing graduates for the "new economy" and have to grapple with each of the four areas that Williams et al. explore (Williams et al. 2012).

Studies show that, in the U.S., post-MBA pay trajectories are directly related to gender differences in men and women (Patterson et al. 2017; Thamrin et al. 2023). Upon graduation and controlling for years of work experience, men are paid 8% more on average in their first role out of MBA school; after 9+ years of experience, that gap widens to 34%.

Women's graduate education attainment rates have increased rapidly in the last few decades, doubling previous generations and outpacing men (Eagly et al. 2020) - just not for Mormon women. While Mormon women graduate high school at about the same rates as Mormon men and have achieved more college education than Mormon men (67% versus 59%),



Mormon women only achieve graduate degrees at half the rate of Mormon men (7% versus 14%) (Religious Landscape Study 2014).

While many top-ranking MBA programs have developed a 50% acceptance rate for women students, BYU's Marriott School of Business has struggled to maintain 20% of its students as women. According to one inside source, the BYU MBA programs peaked women's attendance at 26% in 2023. The numbers have since dropped. However, this has more going on than just a passive, cultural, and religious lag. Professors and administrators at BYU have the power to socialize each new generation of graduates on gender roles. And they do.

In 2024, this number harms the credibility of Marriott's school programs. Anecdotally, the school has been known to produce privileged white men who do not know how to work with women in the workplace. The school is aware of this perception and is struggling to change it. Reflecting the issues of Silicon Slopes and their lack of diversity, this reputation has also hurt job placement metrics; recruiters from prominent employers have severed ties with the school in direct response to the sexist behavior of men students during recruitment events on campus. Low participation rates among women are even more dramatically reflected in the number of people hired as faculty at the university. In the last 15 years, the Marriott school has had at most two women professors on staff at one given time, including professors on leave. One previous recruiter for the BYU MBA program told me that for the six years they worked specifically to recruit more women at the direction of their boss, no women were actually on the admissions committee.

BYU, as both a top university and a direct extension of the LDS church, is a site of extreme tension on the topic of women's place in the business world. This complication likewise

bleeds into the Mormon-influenced community, both those within physical proximity and those that have a claimed proximity through religiously affiliated clubs at other MBA schools.

### Global Tech

To extend my exploration of gendered job insecurity and the influence of religion in organizations, I explore the lived experiences of women working for a global Utah County technology company that, for anonymity, I call “Global Tech.” This is a real tech company geographically placed within Silicon Slopes with all-men Mormon founders with BYU degrees. Several of these founders are rumored to no longer be affiliated with the LDS church, but their ties to BYU remain strong. Global Tech is a late-stage startup with an annual revenue of over 1 billion and over 5K employees across North and Central America, Asia, Europe, and Oceania.

The social education literature highlights that education is a mechanism for mobility or any kind of advancement. However, in the case of Mormon women seeking MBAs, women say that their religion has more influence on their ability to be mobile and to have choices than the actual MBA school itself. Therefore, I am examining religion's ability and relationship to the MBA program because they are interconnected. BYU's MBA program is not just any MBA program. It is an MBA program within a religious institution. The interrelated institutions of religion and education work with and for each other to organize Mormon women's place in the 21st-century labor market.

### FINDINGS

I extend Acker's 1990 gendered organization theory and Williams et al.'s application in the "new economy" by showing how religion functions as a gender inequality reproduction mechanism in the 21st-century economy. Using gendered organizational theory, I show how religion sustains the tenacious hold gender inequality has in the workforce because religion is

built into the gendered logic that 1) influences childhood aspirations and career choices, 2) the educational institutions that develop labor talent pipelines, and 3) structures work organizations and the decision making of the gatekeepers they employ.

I extend existing knowledge about gender relationships and norms within Mormon culture by identifying the religious texts and beliefs that Mormons use to make choices about their education, careers, and other people's professional lives. By capturing explicit references to the Proclamation, I show snapshots of the logic and biases of Mormon men who perpetuate specific patterns of gender inequality within professional business settings. The weight that Mormons, specifically men managers, give this religious text shows the high level of influence the Church has in shaping the inequities that start at the tech companies headquartered in Utah and which now are expanding across the globe. The influence is shaping the work lives of women outside of Utah, far away from Mormons, and outlasting the religious dedication of the tech founders themselves.

Mormon women face gender barriers to entering the workforce. The gender stigma they face in the world is compounded by social-religious stigma for working outside of the home. They are taught to prioritize homemaking and childrearing to the extent that they neglect life planning beyond marriage and childrearing. They struggle to decide if they qualify for "individual adaptation" of the Proclamation and lose economic stability while they wrestle with the text. When in the workforce, they face gender discrimination from Mormon men that compounds the strain they feel in going against the instruction of the family Proclamation. They face outright gatekeeping by fellow Mormon men at BYU that leaches into global companies run by men BYU graduates and bleeds out to structure even casual interactions in their personal lives.

The general trends of Mormon women's disadvantage in the workplace and reasons for choosing particular educational routes are not unique; Protestant girls likewise learn they should prioritize family over career, resulting in younger marriage, younger childbearing, and staying out of educational institutions and the labor force (Glass and Jacobs 2005; Sherkat and Darnell 1999; Uecker and Pearce 2017). What is unique to Mormons is the reasons they cite for these choices (i.e., not the Bible), the degree of anxiety and risk they read into these choices, the young age at which future plans are created, the unique nature of the structuring documents they use to make choices, the space they give for individual differentiation (or lack of thereof), the resulting feelings of isolation and betrayal they experience when they perceive themselves as some kind of an anomaly for deviating from God's ideal family set up, and the constraints they face when making educational and professional choices in relation to their current or imagined futures.

Conservative Protestants cite the Bible as their source for complimentary gender assignments and divisions of labor (Horwitz et al., 2022). Mormons do not cite it when explaining gender complementarianism (they read the Bible with a much less rigid and prescriptive lens) (Hales, n.d.). However, Mormons achieve similar labor division outcomes by using documents and speeches given by current church leaders. I share study participant quotes in italics below to illustrate the ways that religious beliefs based on structuring documents and cultivated in childhood influence life planning and pivotal decision-making, including the level of education pursued, the selections of higher education institutions, and the choice of career paths and even specific job opportunities post-graduation and throughout the life course.

*I never planned or wanted to work; I was a rule-following Mormon girl. The Proclamation says I should be home with my kids and that it was my husband's job to provide for*

*us. That was always my plan. So, in college, I picked my major because it was a good 'mom career' just in case something really bad happened like my husband dying and I had to work.*

A vast majority of study participants like this one never planned to work. Likewise, they articulated the heightened degree of anxiety and risk they felt in going against the assigned labor roles prescribed in the Proclamation. The risk to their families goes beyond this life and extends to eternal consequences, based on the LDS doctrinal belief of eternal family structures.

Therefore, the degree of angst felt by these women is heightened to an almost existential level while also pitting them against the economic needs of providing for a family.

*I am actually really pissed that I've been forced to work. Growing up, I was taught that making money would be my husband's job. However, he has never made enough, so I've always had to work. And then, a few years ago, we realized we needed to bring in more money. We were both teachers then, but my husband wasn't willing to give up his job, so I had to. I didn't want to work in the first place, and then I had to give up my teaching job, and I didn't want to do that either. So now I am here getting an MBA, something I never expected to do and never planned on. This all has been super stressful; I'm worried about our marriage, my kids, and what this will mean for our family's future to have me out of the home even more.*

Another participant explained how hard it was for her to decide if she would continue to work after her kids were born, despite always planning since she was nine years old to grow up to have a career in addition to being a mother. Despite this strongly articulated dream and vision of her future life, scenes from her childhood echoed in her mind as she struggled to decide how to use her time and talents. She paints a picture of how the Proclamation was used as a structuring document in creating social expectations in childhood and what social pressures she felt when planning her life. Her resulting choices directly led to her current job insecurity and

inability to map her career, network with coworkers and other professionals, and interact with her management and team.

*I reread the Proclamation for the hundredth time and kept thinking about all those Sunday school lessons and stuff my mom would say about women having careers—my mom is very anti-career for women—how it was terrible for marriage and my kids and how all of that matters for all eternity in heaven; I worried about all that stuff—the eternal trajectory of my kids, marriage, family, and all that. So I decided to quit.*

*I was working at Global Tech then, so I felt like I could never return. I walked away from thousands of dollars worth of unvested stock. However, my time away as a full-time stay-at-home mom did not even last a year and a half.*

*At first, it was great. I enjoyed my pregnancy and baked and was just really content. But at about the six-month mark, I got really antsy and started signing up for all kinds of volunteer work that used all the business skills I'd worked so hard to develop. At a certain point, I decided I might as well return to my job and get paid to do what I was doing for free!*

*I returned to Global Tech and tried to pitch doing my previous people management role part-time, but they wouldn't go for it. Instead, a manager referred me to a different role without a team to manage. It's not the people management role I wanted - not the one I went to (top 5 business school) for, but that is the price I have to pay for a 30-hour week flex schedule.*

She went on to share how unique her position was, not realizing that I was aware of a few long-term flex positions similar to her own at Global Tech and that Global Tech actually *did* allow for people management with a flex schedule if you had the right boss. Like her arrangement, this was a “unique” setup negotiated privately between an individual woman and her manager according to the willingness of her manager.

*I do worry, though, that if my manager leaves or I get put into a different department, I'll just get fired. I'm really lucky my manager is willing to put up with this arrangement. The other org leaders I have to work with are always super weird about my schedule, and I can tell they think less of me as a worker until they get to know me. But that takes a long time!*

I asked her about her career plans, especially after her kids need her less.

*Well, I really don't know. I constantly perform at the top of my sector despite only working a third of the time as my peers' coworkers. My paycheck reflects the portion of my time in the office, not my team's deliverables or spheres of influence. So it's actually really hard to see how I would negotiate for more money even if I moved into a full-time position; I'm already negotiating with lower pay despite my deliverables.*

*I don't really want to advertise my unique setup, so I never talk about it with anyone. That makes it hard to even know if another manager might be willing to do something similar in a different role, but I don't want to ask and get branded as less committed or difficult to work with.*

*Now that I think about it, it's actually a big barrier for me in networking and inside and outside of Global Tech; my flex schedule is extremely important to me, but I can't risk losing it. I know they are underpaying me for what I do, but I can't risk asking for better compensation because they could just take it all away and I'd lose everything all over again.*

This story illustrates almost all of the points I show in this article. This participant's childhood religious socialization, reinforced by her mother's stories and worries, established a value system for stay-at-home parenting structured by the church's Proclamation document. Despite setting extremely early childhood ambitions (the few participants who did plan to work likewise claim they "always" planned to do so and cited specific memories of that orientation from ages 9-11), the strength of her childhood experiences and lack of working mother role

models led her down a complicated path of job insecurity, opaque career mapping, limited networking opportunities, and complex management and teamwork interactions. These were likewise shaped by the same religious belief in gender complementarianism formalized, shaped, and standardized in the same document she used to decide to quit.

Another participant shared a similar story about the Proclamation's influence on her childhood and educational choices as an adult.

*I remember coming home from college once, and my mom was talking about a coworker whose daughter was struggling and making poor choices. My mom said, "I just wonder if it's because the mom worked her whole life and didn't have time to have a relationship with her daughter."*

*Comments like that throughout my childhood just made it clear: If you're a working mom, your relationship with your children suffers, and your children don't turn out as well. That was the very, very clear message in church and in my home. Being a stay-at-home mom is the right thing to do. So, I chose a "mom job" that I could do until I got married and had kids.*

Just a few years later, this same participant had to grapple with the fact that her plan for marriage and motherhood was not going to happen anytime soon. Not only that, but her career had hit a plateau, so she decided to get an MBA and start a business career. Years later, when she was a married mother at the peak of her career, this religious socialization returned to haunt her. Rather than focusing on growing and mapping her career and family from where they were, she dealt with massive guilt for working when her husband finally made enough money to support their family on his income. She described spending months reading church publications about motherhood and working women from the 70s, 80s, and 90s. After reading and rereading the Proclamation, she said, "The message I got was very clear." So, after four months of



gut-wrenching study, she quit the job she loved, leaving behind tens of thousands of dollars in unvested stock options, considering it a "closed door."

*Everyone in my life was SO happy for me. I got so much approval for quitting, like moral approval. Especially my mom. It was like she was so relieved. Everyone was so relieved. I had no idea they were so stressed about the future of my marriage and kids and eternal salvation until I quit, and then I suddenly got the message from friends and family like, "Oh, finally you have repented and made the right choice! Now your family won't end up destroyed and lost to God."*

*But then I was home with my kids for six months, and I hated it. So, I poured over the document (the Proclamation) again to see if I could justify returning. I felt like I was born wrong. Motherhood is supposed to be my eternal calling, right? I felt like I was broken for not enjoying being a stay-at-home mom. I knew this wasn't a good fit.*

She spent another year trying to conform to the "rule" of being a stay-at-home mom. In tears, she described how, during that time, she read and reread the Proclamation again before finally allowing herself to be some kind of exception to the rule. Even after making that choice for herself and returning to her same place of work, she continued to listen to weekly sermons hosted at BYU's campus on the topic and podcasts by other Mormon women seeking social approval from the institutions she belongs to.

One recruiter summarized the challenges for recruiting Mormon women to MBA programs this way: While their undergraduate graduation rates are high, many Mormon women do not plan for graduate school because they expect to get married to Mormon men in their early twenties, have children within a year or two, and stop working once they have children (Horwitz et al. 2022).

*When this plan (or its timing) fails (which happens more frequently in this generation than in the past), many Mormon women find themselves in precarious financial situations. Some women find themselves single long after they expected to be married and hit a career plateau in a career they had only expected to stay in for a year or two; many are recently divorced and need to support themselves and their children for the first time; some are wrestling with resentment for a husband who is not making enough money to support the family on his income alone and mourning the reality of a shattered homemaker dream.*

Participants who turned to an MBA to increase their earning potential report working on a truncated timetable necessitated by a quick life change. However, without the forethought needed, many struggle to complete competitive applications. Recruiters emphasized that these women are almost universally highly educated, fantastic interviewers, and would make exceptional students and employees if they had only prepared even a few months earlier. However, many women only consider an MBA for a few weeks and accept whichever program still accepts applications for the fall cycle. One recruiter compared this to many of the men in the program who had been preparing and planning for an MBA for 5+ years.

*For some of these women, it was like, "I decided to do an MBA, I took the GMAT, I applied, and I was in," start to finish four weeks. And most of those men have been planning on it since they were juniors in college! They've been prepping for that for six years! So the preparation for someone who's been planning on that for six years versus someone who decided a month ago is going to be different, you know? I think it goes back to the fact that there are not a lot of models, and you know, it's not expected.*

BYU MBA recruiters report that women who would be competitive candidates do not complete their applications because they have yet to save up enough money to take the GMAT.

Even with funds available for the test and free test prep sessions, many women need more time to study and apply the following cycle. Many instead take lower-paying jobs that will get them money now and never return to school.

When single women leave the BYU MBA program, they report feeling extreme pressure to choose a job located in an area near other Mormon men. They make these career-altering choices at the crucial launching-pad moment of their future business careers, based on the rumors and stories they hear from other single and newly married Mormon couples on which geographic locations hold the most Mormon men.<sup>2</sup>

In one case, a graduate delayed graduation to buy time to choose her next role. In another, one participant chose economic uncertainty over a solid job offer. In this case, the woman, a medical doctor with a decade of experience, returned to school after realizing that the gendered field of medicine she had chosen as a “good mom job” did not offer her any way to advance in her career or generate more income. She had economic dreams of house ownership and early retirement that she could not do on her current, static income. Her story is a classic example of William et al.’s 2012 version of gendered organizational theory in the 21st-century economy, save for the fact that the gendered, feminized career path choice was again based squarely on beliefs cultivated in childhood deeply influenced by the Proclamation.

Despite her squarely economic reason for returning to school, this woman could not find a job that would give her the life she wanted at the time of our last interview. Her primary goal at that point is based on geography - she believed she had the best chance of finding a future spouse

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<sup>2</sup> While most married women considering entering MBA programs reported making school choices based on not disrupting their spouses education and career, there was one exception. One woman reported that while she has always been ambitious, it was her husband’s encouragement that really helped her think big about education. This support and cooperation enabled her to move across the world just a few weeks after giving birth and receive a fully-funded MBA education at one of the top programs in the world. Her husband, also a consultant like herself, was raised by a single mother. His wife attributes this “non-traditional” Mormon upbringing with his willingness to pause his own career for a year to move in with his wife and be a stay-at-home dad. After returning to the states and working as a two income family, they later made the joint decision for him to be a full-time stay-at-home parent and for her to continue to work full time. This family structure is an anomaly in my data set and indicates the potential for a husband’s low proximity to “traditional” marriage and Mormon upbringing to be associated with enabling Mormon women’s careers.

of her same religion if she stays in Utah. However, as she attempted to enter the job market, she was met with the reality of the economic environment of Utah; she could not find a role that would pay her enough to have the life she returned to school to obtain. The kicker is that she had a great job offer from her summer internship. One she turned down because it was out of state<sup>3</sup>.

In both these cases and those like them, single Mormon women are making career choices that will affect the trajectory of their careers based on a future that has not yet come into reality. Despite the investment of money they spent on an MBA program and two years of lost income, at the most crucial moment for their economic security, they feel completely stuck and at the mercy of rumors of possibilities of meeting mates based on geographical density. This example shows the extreme depth of commitment these women have to the ideal of marriage and family and their value in finding a spouse with the same religious belief system. Thus, religion serves to inform the constraints they face when making educational and professional choices in relation to their current or imagined futures before they even have the chance to experience job insecurity, teamwork, career maps, and networking complications in the workplace.

The Proclamation and complimentary beliefs about gender relationships of the LDS church complicate women's experiences in BYU's MBA program, too. As a church-run organization, BYU serves as a bridge for Mormon women who cross their assigned gender roles and work for pay outside the home in the business world. It provides them with a logical

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<sup>3</sup> I want to emphasize that these women are neither foolish nor unintelligent. They are simply responding with logic to the values system that they have been given and have fully embraced. Their choices are logical extensions of the realities of being in their mid- to late-30s as single Mormon women committed to marrying someone with their same beliefs. Any reading that does not account for the weight and gravity of these values and choices does a great disservice to not only these women, but the study of gender, religion, and people in general. Because they are taught to focus on motherhood and homemaking and rely on a husband's income long-term, they lack the planning to develop the skills they need to survive on their own income; thus, not only are they dealing with a precarious job market, but they are also dealing with a precarious marriage market (Bursztyn et al. 2017).

This "being stuck" phase is an interesting complement to Benschop et al.'s finding of women "freezing" their ambitions while raising children; in this case the "freezing" is done before there is even an opportunity to create a child, let alone a bump or babe to contend with. At the risk of stretching the analogy too far, I want to point out the geographical element inherent in the "frozen" ambitions of single Mormon women; their ambitions and their geography are constrained by their unknown futures and desires to marry and start a family. In 2017, Bursztyn et al. similarly found that single women in MBA programs report passing up career promoting opportunities to appear less ambitious and more attractive to the men in their classes; future marriage market and network studies might look to see if this frozen/stuck pivot point post-MBA is a similar way to indicate marriageability across the larger single Mormon population.

framework for navigating gender role transversal, provides (or appears to provide) women role models for women to follow, and a religiously (theoretically) safe place to exercise new professional muscles. While mothers who enter the program report working for months after starting the program to feel okay with the fact that they are no longer full-time stay-at-home mothers, their Mormon men classmates are also confronted with a version of church-sanctioned “gender role” deviation that clashes with what they were taught as children. Historically, this has caused tension that required the business school to officially address each new student's MBA education at the start.

Participants recounted several versions of this scenario: It is the first week of the BYU MBA program, and all students attend the orientation in August. One of the program leaders, a man, gets up at the very start of the first session to set the record straight: the women are here because they deserve to be, not because of some quota or anything else. He then cites the Proclamation, pointedly calls out the language of the document, and explains how, just as a business manager is still ultimately responsible for the work of their team despite not physically doing every single step themselves, so too can mothers still oversee the care and nurture of their children through outsourcing child care to daycares and babysitters. Thus, he goes on, men should never question the women here, and he does not want to hear anything about it.

Many women cite this initial speech as a valuable mapping for legitimizing their place in school, but also express frustration that if it's really true, why is that message not shared with the rest of the church? Many report the disappointment their parents, friends, in-laws, and community express upon learning these women have enrolled in school with the intent to work full-time. They cite the director's explanation above as bringing themselves some consolation after personally struggling with their choice.

The school's repeated use of this logical workaround to justify enrolling women MBA students validates the extent to which women's presence elicits cognitive dissonance for men and women and points to the fact that the church, by running the school, is aware of the confusion that binary labor assignment causes in its most faithful members.

Work organization managers likewise use the Proclamation to justify gendered labor practices, both directly and indirectly. By focusing my analysis on a population, university, and company within a tight geographical location with immense religious and cultural homogeneity and a religion with explicitly reinforced gendered labor expectations and clear and structured childhood religious socialization processes, I was able to identify, parse out, and trace the logics of gendered organizations back to the religious sources being used to justify different policies and decisions. The homogenous population also allowed for using a particular kind of explicit insider knowledge that was used at the moment to explicitly cite religious teaching as justifications in manager-employee negotiations.

One woman explained her experience going up for a promotion at Global Tech just as she was becoming visibly pregnant. She had tried to keep the news private because she knew that the five women in her previous position had all quit once they got pregnant; she needed insurance for her delivery in just two months. But at seven months pregnant, rumors were spreading and she could not hide it any longer. A few weeks before her scheduled promotion, one her boss had been enthusiastic about in every one-on-one weekly meeting in the 12 months leading up to the promotional cycle, she "came clean."

*Everyday at lunch my boss talks "off the record" about his life and makes it really really clear that he is Mormon and believes women's proper place is to stay home once they have children. It's super awkward too because my team is pretty much all women. Some are even*

*mothers. But he blabs away about politics and religion and his stay-at-home-wife and everything, so we know exactly where he stands on everything, including the Family Proclamation, even down to the last camping trip he took with the boys in his church calling (it was during the time he took off for paternity leave, believe it or not!) He will gossip and complain about women leaving the company after maternity leave too. We (the women on my team) all just have to sit there and take it.*

*So I wanted to try and control the narrative around my rumored pregnancy - I am absolutely coming back to work after the baby was born. I didn't want there to be any questions about that. I announced all of this to my team and my boss' demeanor immediately shifted. He stopped answering my emails, he stopped giving me updates on my promotion applications, and avoided me at all costs. Finally I pinned him down to get an update on my promotion, but it went even worse than I expected.*

*I walked in and made my case for promotion. My metrics are great and I'd been in this one role for a long time. But my manager just sat back and straight up told me he didn't believe that I would return to my work after the baby was born and couldn't promote me. He asked me over and over again if I was going to come back and wouldn't take my answers seriously.*

*And I DO plan to come back to work. I love working. This is the one company that is located in a place where I can actually see myself as both a mom and employee. He really abused me in that meeting, but there's nothing I can do about it. He reports directly to the CFO who is even worse in the way he treats and thinks about women even though he's not even Mormon anymore. No one in HR is remotely empowered to do a single thing. I do not have the bandwidth or knowledge on how to begin to hold the company accountable. The whole thing makes me sick.*

*I don't know what I am going to do now. There really is no other way for me to progress in my career; I guess I'm just going to have to keep working for this guy and figure out what to do once the baby comes. I hope I can get promoted eventually somehow, but the plan is for me to stay here at least another five years before we move again and I have no line of sight to how I will move forward.*

This kind of explicit reference to women's "proper" place in the home between a manager and employee would not be possible were it not for the common knowledge of a shared religion, the assumed shared values of family, and the social processes in use by this population to enforce gender relationships norms from the religion's leadership.

Other participants reported similar experiences and gendered policies in specific work sectors of Global Tech.

*We (women and non-Mormon coworkers) all know that leadership really doesn't think women should be working at all, let alone mothers. I know management looks at the employee engagement metrics, and I was the one to present it to them alongside a female manager. Employee intent to leave is at an all-time high among women of all ages at Global Tech and a whole bunch of women were recently laid off, and a bunch more quit. We lose women employees like crazy at the 1-2 year mark once the "honeymoon phase" of the job has worn off. Our attrition rates are atrocious for mothers after maternity leave.*

*During maternity leave, women's books of business metrics are not adjusted. We get ratings scores that are supposed to affect our promotions directly, but when they aren't weighted for an excused leave of absence, it throws off the number for up to two quarters! Those metrics determine promotions for the next several YEARS.*



*Managers are supposed to maintain a woman's book of business while she is on maternity leave, but in Sales they never do. Those who would stay there after maternity leave with a giant black mark on their employee stats that marks them as a mother willing to take leave. A similar thing happens for fathers taking paternity leave, too, but since the time allotment is shorter and they can space out their leave, they can still manage their customers and numbers and everything so there's no black mark on their company file. But, still, most of them (men) end up just working from home and then end up discouraging each other from taking leave. Because, again their books are "supposed" to be cared for by their teams, but it is inconsistent and really at the call of their manager.*

*A lot of this comes down to what the actual manager decides to do. There's so little oversight on enforcing this. If you have an awful manager or they and/or your team have a busy quarter, you are screwed. For a long time.*

While I cannot access the employee engagement results referenced by this participant, a simple Glassdoor.com search provided evidence that this opinion is not unique to the women I interviewed (Glassdoor, n.d.). As far back as 2017, anonymous employees at Global Tech say that women have no room to grow, that they have seen blatant sexism and borderline sexual harassment, and cite the consistent lack of women in leadership roles. Each is attributed to the "blurred line" between religion and work and a particular brand of "bro-y" culture unique to white Mormon men. Of the twenty reviews that cite women, the culture, and the structure of Global Tech and its leadership, only one from several years ago says it is a good place for parents to work, citing changes in schedule due to sick kids and their particular team of understanding coworkers. Overall, though, the message duplicates what my participants said, "Don't work here unless you are a man or a Mormon: This place is hell on earth." This general

interpretation of company policies and norms as being sexist and informed by the executives' religion is shared across Global Tech's employees even beyond Utah and those familiar with Mormonism.

Significantly, the culture and norms created in this tight crucible of religion and culture extend beyond the site of creation, beyond conscious religious maintenance, and have an afterlife that far outlives the religious dedication of the company's founders despite their continued involvement in running the company. Below is an example of what this looks like:

Another Global Tech employee, neither Mormon nor has ever lived in Utah or around Mormons, explained how this religiously informed and enforced culture affects her career. She has worked at many companies in the U.S. and taught at top MBA programs. She describes a unique brand of Mormon sexism she has only experienced while working at Global Tech.

*It's different from any other company I've ever worked for. I have multiple higher degrees in business, I've been a professor at (top business school), and I know lots of Christian businessmen who don't act this way. And the Global Tech execs I work with really closely here don't even seem to really believe in the Mormon church anymore and have not for like ten years. But the sexism and patriarchy in the LDS church still holds so much power in our organization. I have a high-profile role and am a top performer. But at the end of the day, that doesn't matter.*

*There's this natural, back-door, Mormon men network bro culture at Global Tech. They golf, go to the gym and the bar, drink eggnog, and have all these informal mentorships and networks that the women aren't a part of. And we know its sexism from the LDS church.*

*Even our bosses, the C-suite leaders themselves - are scared to go to lunch with us or be alone with us in a public setting. They are worried about being seen with us. It puts a ton of pressure on us women. It's like they have to have a reason to talk to us (women). And it's still not*

*enough to justify spending time together. Not once in 5.5 years has anyone reached out – my formal, c-suite exec level formally assigned mentor included – for a casual interaction outside of work. They are worried about the optics of eating a meal with me.*

At this point in the analysis, I want to point out the prevalence of not only the fear surrounding associating with women in social networks but also the specific mechanism of social oversight that is enabled through the eyes of others in the religiously and culturally homogenous community living in a geographically dense population of other Mormons. The social consequence of appearing to be crossing a line was repeatedly brought up in participant reports about their social interactions with Mormon men. As graduates of BYU's undergraduate and masters level business classes, this behavior of Global Tech's leadership can be traced back to BYU's ethics class discussion around lunch with a woman coworker.

Because professors at BYU are church employees whose employment depends on their belief and activity in the church, they hold unique power akin to religious authority in the classroom. Amongst religious universities, Mormon professors are much more likely to comply with teachings from the LDS church than other conservative Christian universities (Lyon et al. 2002, 339). BYU ethics professors, therefore, have an opportunity to guide discussions on sexism, misogyny, and discrimination in the workplace and set standards of conduct that are associated with the church-sanctioned "correct" way to do Mormon business.

Participants from BYU MBA cohorts spanning the last 15 years described nearly the same incident regarding a discussion in an ethics class about the prospect of a man going to lunch with a woman coworker. Sitting in stadium-style, U-shaped desks, the ethics professor posed the following question, per usual, framed from a man's perspective: "Would you go to lunch with a female coworker?"

*So many of my classmates (mostly all men) were like, 'Absolutely not. Avoid the appearance of evil. Nothing would happen, of course, but, oh my gosh, it would just look bad!' I just remember sitting there, and I was like, does anyone see me? Like, I'm right here. And you are telling me that you will network with everyone except me? Do you realize how left out women will be from so many meaningful conversations? Like, do you even? And it didn't even occur to them. Didn't even occur to them.*

She went on to explain that she directly attributed this behavior to proximity to the church:

*There's this level of like sin, right? "The appearance of evil," I remember just being red in the face and like. We're right here. Do you not see the five women sitting around you and what you were saying and what you were doing to us?*

Even when the conversation has gotten too sexist for even the professors, they refuse to step in and say anything to the contrary.

*The professor is maybe uncomfortable with what the guys said, but he's not standing up to the students, or standing up for us. He didn't come out with a stance of like, but what about women? And, like, what opportunities they're losing, and how is this fair? Probably because they don't care, they don't think women should be working anyway.*

Participants described their fear of speaking up in these settings; they were worried about being labeled as “dramatic” or “feminists” based on interactions they had seen in the program previously. The social forces that keep these women quiet serve as a prime example of how their interaction in this space was bounded by their gender, regulated by religiously informed and enforced social norms, and continued to impact their ability to network later in their careers.

The limitations of social networks are bounded by fear of sinning, the appearance of sinning, and the social consequences for each, which hold very real professional consequences for women at Global Tech. Thus, church teachings on gender relationships reproduce a social and spiritual precarity that results in women's disadvantage in professional and educational spaces. Women participants in top executive roles with formal mentor/mentee relationships to C-suite level executives report being left off emails, being avoided for in-person one-on-one meetings, and watching men from each level and branch of the company exclude women from networking, mentorship, and career advancement opportunities. One woman gave a particularly telling example of how her lack of access damaged her career and the careers of those she managed.

More than just lunch, she extends the company culture of restricted gender interactions to “any kind of social interaction. Informal social interaction does not happen for me with my male superiors.” She volunteered as an example of the impact of this “norm.”

Fresh from her MBA at a top university, her first role at Global Tech was to manage a large team of entry-level employees. One of the most significant parts of her job was helping these rising stars find their next position within the company.

*Part of your effectiveness as a manager depends on your ability to network throughout the company, but there are no tools in place to help you do this.*

She went on to explain that through regular surveying her team, she “always” got one piece of negative feedback that harmed her career progression; her team complained that her fellow peer manager (a man) always got the best subsequent roles for his teammates. His reputation was so compelling that her own teammates went to him for mentoring and support despite her being their assigned manager.

*I thought, wow! How's he doing that? So, I scheduled a meeting with him, and he told me his social schedule. It included nightly activities with the company's high-ranking male leaders: guys' poker night, basketball, and meals. And I just thought, "Wow. I'm not invited to any of these. That would feel so inappropriate for me to attend the guys' poker night."*

Here this participant mirrors the men's anxiety over mixed-gender social events. Her feeling of her presence being "inappropriate" indicates her familiarity with the norm of not mixing genders in social work interactions. Women at BYU explained this discomfort as a product of what they saw in childhood. They attribute their networks of almost completely Momorn women to a mutual "comfort" that is achieved between women because the "cultural bias" allows for it.

*There's a cultural bias in the LDS church, in particular, that teaches that men and women do not associate as friends in the church. There's a weird barrier. And women are the people I like talking with more because it's more comfortable, right? The church doesn't teach men and women to be friends. We are divided by gender at church so early. Certainly, by the time they are 11 and entering the youth program, but possibly even earlier if there are a lot of kids in a Sunday school class. And then, growing up, I never saw my parents hang out with members of the opposite sex. Ever.*

*But a lot of networking is based on working lunches, right? So I have to do it anyway to progress my career, but these guys don't have to because they have enough men to interact with. Their future career is not nearly as limited by the church's standards about not being alone with a member of the opposite sex. So I just miss out.*

*And I am in this MBA program, right? I'm a mommy-blogger-turned-entrepreneur; I've never had to network before. And they are telling me this is an essential skill for my career*

*progression and advancement and the school is allowing these men to think they can't go to lunch with me! In a freaking public place! How am I supposed to learn this skill if I only practice with other women who are, like me, unskilled at networking? BYU isn't solving this problem; instead, it is enabling it in those ethics class discussions.*

Women at Global Tech, the brainchild of BYU alumni, see their founders and men executive teams play out the same pattern of excluding the (very few) executive women from team meetings. One participant reflected on an important reorganizational call earlier that week; Global Tech announced massive layoffs for various company sectors. The one woman executive, the one actually in charge of people ops, seemed to have been entirely left out of all decision-making conversations.

*“It seemed like the agenda had already been laid out by the men in the C-suite, so she was just kind of listening as everything transpired. And I thought, ‘I wonder how much of the conversation occurred at these informal events where the decisions were actually being made as opposed to in that meeting room.’*

Global Tech has attempted some structural changes to support women and respond to feedback, but with limited results. HR created structured mentorship programs to give a formal stamp of approval on cross-gender networking. However, based on participants' reports, even a formalized mentor/mentee relationship is not enough to justify a C-suite executive taking the time to meet in-person with the women they were formally and officially assigned to mentor.

In response to a request for more women leadership on global weekly meetings, they hired a woman executive to help run meetings. But instead of asking her to lead the meetings, she was given “an emcee role,” which participants described as “a flop.”

*It just seemed like another way to appease our requests for more female representation. It was kind of embarrassing, actually, because she is an executive-level employee, but she wasn't empowered to actually run the meeting, just facilitate it. And besides, they chose the one woman on their level who doesn't manage a large team and has no influence on the overarching strategy of what people are doing. It just made her role seem not quite as important.*

I found out that within just a few weeks of this incident, this woman's c-suite executive quit her job, leaving Global Tech leadership even more heavily weighed with men.

Women at Global Tech shared with me that when their men co-workers needed something from them during the typical work day, the men often asked in an apologetic way, citing their guilt for taking the women away from their children. This same belief was used as a reason to keep women off essential emails and meetings.

*They said they didn't want to take me away from my "primary responsibility." They did not even let me decide; they decided for me! (Note the language lifted from the Proclamation).*

Yet, with seemingly so much awareness and support for families, Global Tech provides no formal on- or off-ramping structures for parents to roll in and out of paid work. Individual managers and teams have to shoulder the added workloads that come with parental leave. Part-time and flexible work, although something that does exist and is possible, is kept private, almost secret, and is not formally guided or structured by HR, leaving individuals to negotiate with their managers and teams on their own. Those who do arrange for flexible schedules (mostly women) report being initially viewed with suspicion by managers, being held back from promotion despite no decline in outcomes, facing increased job-mapping ambiguity, and are always one managerial change away from being out of a job. The work-from-home policies during and following the COVID-19 pandemic that created more flexibility for parents were



recently swiftly and rigidly retracted, and past rounds of lay-offs are rumored to have harmed proportionately more women who had established flexible schedules. Mormon women employees at Global Tech facing these circumstances once again report turning to the Proclamation to help them decide what to do with their careers.

Because the Proclamation has not been accepted as LDS church doctrine by its members, the church leadership could theoretically update or change its language at any time. Gender studies on active Mormon populations indicate that if church teaching of gender came through church channels as “revelation,” a majority of even the most conservative Mormons would accept the doctrine (Nielsen et al., 2015). Thus, LDS leadership has the unique potential power to directly shape Utah’s tech industry.

## CONCLUSION

Religion functions to uphold gendered organization in the new economy in ways that further structurally disenfranchise women. Mormon women face a double bind of precarity in the modern era's job market because they are socialized to depend on a future spouse to finance their future; they do not plan for a future career and must overcome professional, social, and religious barriers when confronted with unforeseen economic realities. Religion shapes education and professional norms that structurally disenfranchise women in the organization regardless of the woman’s religious affiliation. Religious teachings structure corporate norms and language even when divorced from their original source and despite organizational leaders' or members' current religious activity or beliefs.

One of my most significant findings, especially since my sample population for religiously informed gendered organization creation is so dense and geographically dependent, is that the culture and norms created in that tight crucible of religion and culture extend beyond the

site of creation, beyond conscious religious maintenance, and have an afterlife that far outlives the religious dedication of the founders despite their continued involvement in running the company.

These findings indicate that 1. the level of economic precarity for women increases in relation to the proximity and degree of childhood socialization, 2. Religion has the power to structure gendered organizations around the globe in ways that are likely extremely hard to trace without a unique language and shared religion that allows for the use of that unique language in the workplace; religious leaders influence the global economy when they create structuring documents on topics of gender, labor, and family.

Further analysis might use the 24-item scale developed by Miller et al. 2019 to assess an array of faith manifestations in the for-profit work sector at the individual level. This tool would be especially interesting to use on the decision makers of various companies and compare with their company cultural norms and instituted practices. Future studies might also use van Hoorn's (2019) scale to calculate the generational value shifts taking place across generations of Mormon professionals.

This study is limited in its application to a single religious group and those it influences. Other religions without a central leadership team and religious press may be less effective and influential in supporting gendered organizations. The Mormon population in this study is also almost entirely white women. Thus, the same study done on a BIPOC Mormon women population would likely bring forward even more systematic issues that harm BIPOC members but would be even harder to locate in the homogenous religion. Many critiques of Global Tech were alongside critiques of the lack of racial and ethnic diversity. Further research into the

religious elements of sustained gendered organizations should explore intersectional identities and the influence of religious proximity on organizational structures (Cho et al. 2013).<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Positionality: My location and background as a Mormon woman BYU grad, a graduate student at University Chicago, and a student enrolled in a Booth course gave me unique access to begin this project. I had access to many physical locations, familiarity with MBA classes and programs, a shared socio-religious background with my participants, knowledge of religion and gender role formations, education about the reproduction of gendered privilege as complicated by religion, and the social and educational background to analyze the role of religion in helping/hindering women entering the business world.

My positionality allowed me to go deep with each of my subjects and develop an intimacy and trust that is inscrutable and inaccessible to others outside the nuance of Mormon womanhood and gender role transversal as perceived within Mormon social norms and religious doctrines. As a feminist researcher, I work to find common ground with my participants, which was not hard in this study. However, while this helped to build rapport, it also allowed me to recognize and call out differences (Devault and Gross, p. 179). By recognizing what we shared and how we were different, my participants and I could flow in and out of common religious, academic, geographic, and professional vernacular with ease and only pause to clarify where those differences arose. Because my participants were not pausing to explain every nuance of their religious and educational identity, they were able to conserve their energy and dedicate more time and space to the deeper questions of my research. Despite this shared language, I decided to pause throughout our discussion to ask my participants to explain something to me as if I were an outsider to their worlds; this functioned as a confirmation of my interpretation or a vital correction. From there we were able to more deeply clarify what she meant or move on to our next story.

By combining relational ethnography and feminist methodologies, I was not only able to map the multiple sites of interactions and actors but also mapped myself into the system to radically confront my own complicity in the system (Olson 1998, 448; May et al. 2014).

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