

Article

Understanding Compliance in Patriarchal Religions: Mormon Women and the Latter Day Saints Church as a Case Study

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Abstract: Defining compliance as acquiescence in situations of inequality, this article explores patterns of compliance to gender traditionalism from the analysis of interviews with Mormon women. Analysis reveals that Mormon women face unique, context-specific mechanisms for stifling resistance to gender traditionalism. Additionally, many of the Mormon women interviewed who do not comply with traditional gender expectations regarding motherhood still accept and defend gender traditionalism. We explain this pattern with a concept that we call ideological compensation, which means that women in gender traditional religions defend gender traditionalism even if they do not live it as a way to compensate for their non-compliance. Finally, we find that some of the women frame their compliance to Mormon gender traditionalism as a statement of resistance against the broader society. We describe this phenomenon with a concept known as subcultural resistance. Overall, this study sheds light on how Mormon women interpret traditional gender expectations and the mechanisms that are put in place to stifle resistance.

Keywords: compliance; gender; subcultural resistance; Mormon

1. Introduction

Why do people in situations of subordination comply with expectations that seem to work against their autonomy and power? How do organizations and individuals who benefit from other's subordination stifle resistance? These meta-questions are central to sociological inquiry and underlie the research that is presented here. In this article, we explore these questions from the perspective of women in the Mormon Church—an organization that espouses traditional gender expectations. By traditional gender expectations, we are referring to expectations that: (a) emphasize homemaking and motherhood for women and breadwinning for men; (b) place men as the head of household; and, (c) exclude women from positions of organizational power (adapted from Ruiz et al. 2017). For the purposes of this research, we define compliance as conforming to traditional gender expectations that result in inequality. This article investigates: (a) the mechanisms that are used to stifle resistance—or ensure compliance—to gender traditionalism in the Mormon context; (b) whether Mormon women who do not conform to gender traditionalism accept gender traditional ideologies; and, (c) how Mormon women contextualize their compliance to gender traditionalism as acts of subcultural resistance against the broader society.

Compliance among women in gender traditional religions is understudied and consequently is not well understood (Chong 2008). Most studies of women in religious organizations that espouse gender traditionalism show how women find room for agentic action within the constraints of religious gender expectation (Leamaster and Einwohner 2017). This is important research because it dispels

myths of religious women as dupes rather than active agents. Our work does not focus on women's agency or resistance in this context. Rather, we focus on how and why women comply to gender traditionalism and look for evidence of mechanisms of stifling resistance from the interviews.

In this paper, we refer to religious organizations that prescribe traditional gender expectations as gender traditional religions. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints is an excellent case study for understanding compliance in gender traditional religion because of the church's conservative stances on gender issues and its exclusion of women from leadership and decision-making positions. The women interviewed for this study revealed mechanisms for stifling resistance specific to the Mormon context. Surprisingly, analysis of the interviews also revealed that Mormon women who find themselves outside of Mormon expectations for gender traditionalism—specifically single career-oriented women—actually revealed a desire to comply with gender traditionalism. We explain this discovery with a concept that we refer to as ideological compensation, which means that the women are attempting to compensate for their non-compliance to gender traditionalism by demonstrating strong agreement with gender traditionalism, even as they themselves do not meet these ideals. Finally, we identify patterns of subcultural resistance among the interviewees. Many of the women that were interviewed framed their compliance to Mormon gender expectations in opposition to the broader society. We posit that subcultural resistance is a way for participants to frame their attitudes and behaviors as agentic, even as they comply with ideologies that limit them to traditional gender expectations.

We first briefly review theoretical approaches to understanding compliance. We then review studies that consider compliance to traditional gender expectations in a religious context. Next, we address arguments that seek to re-conceptualize religious women's compliance as a performance of a religious identity. We then review the data and methods that were used in this research, highlighting the methods used to parse out patterns of compliance. Lastly, we present the results of the analysis focusing on theoretical interpretations of the participant's understandings of and motivations for compliance.

2. Theoretical Approaches to Compliance

The lack of research on compliance among religious women is surprising; especially given a number of theoretical frameworks that are available to understand how the powerful stifle resistance and strive to influence the less powerful into contributing to their own subordination (see [Etzioni 1964](#); [Gaventa 1982](#); [Gramsci 2010](#); [Jackman 1994](#); [Mayo 1945](#); [Simmel 1896](#), for examples). [Jackman \(1994\)](#) outlines a series of paternalistic strategies that are used by the powerful to stifle resistance that are particularly well suited to understanding compliance among women in gender traditional religions. For example, Jackman emphasizes the ability of the powerful (priesthood leaders in a Mormon context) to speak from a position of moral authority and to idealize the subordinate role (homemaking and motherhood in a Mormon context).

Some of the theoretical work on compliance specifically examines why women do not always resist gender inequality ([Epstein 2007](#); [Glick and Fiske 1996](#); [Ridgeway 2011](#)). Perhaps the most influential theory in this vein is benevolent sexism ([Glick and Fiske 1996](#)), a concept that can be summarized as a set of “interrelated attitudes toward women that are sexist in terms of viewing women stereotypically and in restricted roles, but that are subjectively positive in feeling tone (for the perceiver) and also tend to elicit behaviors that are typically categorized as prosocial (e.g., helping) or intimacy-seeking (e.g., self-disclosure)” ([Glick and Fiske 1996](#), p. 491). More recently, [Ridgeway \(2011\)](#) offered the concept of status beliefs to explain why gender inequality persists in the modern world. Status beliefs are commonly held assumptions concerning the differences between men and women, acting as a primary cultural tool that frames personal interactions and institutional-level cultural beliefs in gendered ways. At least one conceptual approach to compliance singles out guilt as a mechanism for stifling resistance specifically for religious women ([Walby 1989](#); [Walter and Davie 1998](#)). This argument states that religion first induces guilt in women for not meeting traditional gender expectations, and then offers a way to reduce the guilt through religious adherence.

The common theme in the rich theoretical tradition of compliance is this: the best way ensure compliance, and thereby stifle resistance, is to make the subordinated feel like they do not need to resist or even that their subordination is justified or right. How this is achieved varies depending both on social context and time, but it always involves creating institutions with organizational structures and ideologies that limit opportunities for the subordinate group, while at the same time, in some way placating them. The theories of compliance presented here guided and informed the analysis of the interviews with Mormon women.

2.1. Cognitive Coping and Bargaining with Patriarchy

The overall trend in studies of women in gender traditional religions has been to highlight women's agency within religious structures and to dispel myths of religious women as gulls. Given this focus, these studies highlight religious women's agency and gloss over compliance to gender traditional norms (see [Chong 2008](#); [Kaufman 1989](#)). Studies that buck this trend do exist. For example, Ozorak interviewed over 60 women in gender traditional religious organizations ([Ozorak 1996](#)). She found that many of the women recognized inequality within their religion and were uncomfortable with their subordinate position. The women dealt with the unease through cognitive coping, which is a strategy used when individuals find themselves in an uncomfortable situation and "feel unable or unwilling to act" ([Ozorak 1996](#), p. 23). The gender inequities in their religion caused cognitive dissonance in the women and to cope with this, they found ways to "reconcile their self-respect" ([Ozorak 1996](#), p. 18). For instance, many of the women in the study acknowledged that they were bothered by inequality in their religion, but choose to focus on other aspects of their faith they felt more positive about.

In her book on evangelical women in South Korea, [Chong \(2008\)](#) criticizes previous research on religious women. She argues that the acute focus on religious women's agency has led to a body of that research glosses over women's subordinate position within gender traditional religions. Chong addresses the more positive aspect of women's experience in patriarchal religious groups; however, she also candidly addresses the church's role in reinscribing unequal structures for women and the overlooked issue of compliance (she uses the term consent). Chong concludes that evangelical Protestantism works to re-domesticate Korean women in the context of rapid modernization. While Chong does recognize that religious women do attempt to find room for agentic action—referred to as bargaining with patriarchy ([Kandiyoti 1988](#))—ultimately, patriarchal structures are reinforced by these actions.

Recent, quantitative studies investigate women's compliance in gender traditional religion and reveal a correlation between gender traditional religions and a lack of women's agency and compliance with gender traditionalism ([Agadjanian and Yabiku 2015](#); [Ruiz et al. 2017](#); [Power 2017](#)). These quantitative analyses are informative, but they do not reveal the mechanisms that are used to stifle resistance to gender traditionalism, which is the focus of this study.

Given the findings of Ozorak and Chong highlighting how religious women feel compelled to cope with inequality and how religion reinforces gender traditional norms and limits women, the lack of research on religious women from the perspective of compliance is surprising. In this paper, we address compliance in gender traditional religions using the conceptual frameworks that are reviewed above. Additionally, we provide new conceptual lenses from which to consider compliance in gender traditional religions.

2.2. Compliance in the Mormon Context

Mormons present a particularly relevant and fascinating case to study the phenomenon of compliance in gender traditional religion. The LDS Church endorses religious schemas that are very traditional in terms of gender expectations for men and women. Religious schemas are cultural schemas—which provide an ideological base for individuals to make decisions and to interpret the world—that draw upon beliefs about the sacred to guide individuals in choosing appropriate action

and attitudes (see [Bartkowski et al. 2012](#)). The LDS Church prescribes very specific expectations for what men and women should do and to what they are entitled. The Church generally encourages women to focus on motherhood and family duties above all else—especially women with young children. Indeed, the LDS Church is consistently found to be one of the most conservative religious groups in the United States on gender issues ([Smith and Denton 2005](#)). A more recent Pew study also shows Mormons to be among the most socially conservative religious groups in the United States ([Pew Research Center 2014](#)). Mormons also believe in a Heavenly Mother who adheres to gender traditionalism, and that both men and women will become gods and goddesses, which works to reinforce gender traditionalism ([Hoyt 2007](#)). Indeed, gender is seen as both eternal and essential, which deeply embeds gender expectations within Mormonism (see [Morrill 2014](#) for an overview of the role gender plays in Mormon theology and culture). For Mormon women, being a good woman and being a good Mormon are almost synonymous ([Hickman 2016](#)). These clear gendered expectations make an excellent case for considering compliance to gender traditionalism.

The organizational structure of the LDS Church is also gendered—women hold leadership positions in “auxiliary” organizations and not in the priesthood, which is where decision making power is centrally located. The LDS Church maintains this gendered structure, even as ideologies concerning gender are becoming increasingly progressive in the broader culture in the United States. Thus, we also examine how Mormon women—who sit at the intersection of a gender traditional religion and a liberalizing secular culture—view their compliance to gender traditionalism.

2.3. Arguments for Studying Compliance

Before presenting the data and methods, it is important to point out scholarly debate over referring to religious women’s adherence to gender traditionalism as compliance in the way we have defined it in this paper. Specifically, Avishai questions the usefulness of the “paradox approach” to understanding why women would adhere to a religion that seems to work to their disadvantage, especially in cultural contexts, such as the United States, where agency and power are increasing for women. Instead, she argues researchers should “examine agency as religious conduct and religiosity as a constructed status” ([Avishai 2008](#), p. 409). Thus, “‘doing religion’ is a mode of conduct and being, a performance of identity—not only a purposeful or strategic action” ([Avishai 2008](#), p. 413). By taking the study of religion out of the paradox framework, Avishai shows that women use their agency in the actual “doing” of their religion. In other words, a woman who lives up to the gendered cultural expectations of her religion is using her agency because she is achieving a status that she desires (observant, religious woman), even if these actions seem to restrict her. Avishai and others go on to argue that this paradox approach leads: (a) to hostility towards religion from other academic disciplines; and, (b) a bifurcation of views on the intersection of religion and gender; due mostly to a lack of understanding of the nuances of religious identity ([Avishai 2016](#); [Avishai and Irby 2017](#)).

In a similar vein, [Singh \(2015\)](#) highlights the difficulties of reconciling research on religious women’s agency and intersectionality. The intersectionality framework is focused on understanding interlocking systems of oppression, of which religion is one possible system of oppression for women. Thus, as Singh deftly points out, the intersectional framework displays ambiguity between religious identity and religious oppression.

We agree with Avishai, Irby, and Singh that it is important to point out that adhering to a religion to fulfill a desired status is agentic behavior. Only one of the participants the first author interviewed did not seem to give agentic reasons for why they adhered to the gender ideologies of the LDS Church (i.e., only one participant said they complied simply because they were being obedient, the rest had other reasons). In fact, one major reason for adherence highlighted in past research is the religious and familial fulfillment women garner from meeting the gendered expectations of the group—this theme was also very prominent with the women interviewed for this study ([Ammerman 1987](#); [Brasher 1997](#); [Davidman 1991](#); [Griffith 2000](#)). Certainly, any type of social action that leads to fulfillment and meaning is agentic. Additionally, sociologists have noted from very early

on that all social relationships have some level of inequality and that all social relationships—even the most unequal—are reciprocal to some extent (Simmel 1896). There is evidence of this reciprocity in gender traditional religions (Bartkowski 2001).

We argue that while religious observance is certainly an important aspect of identity for religious women and helps them to achieve a desired status, compliance is still important to understand. We argue this because gender traditional religions subordinate women within the organizational structure and through religious schemas that seek to limit women to traditional gender expectations.

The focus on agency and resistance among individuals in subordinated positions has also been criticized more broadly, with some scholars arguing that the researchers find resistance only because they go into research projects looking for it (Abu-Lughod 1990; Brown 1996). To be sure, researchers are often motivated to give voice to subordinated populations and to acknowledge their agency and resistance—highlighting agency and resistance even in instances of seeming radical oppression (Bell 2001). We argue that, while this research is important—certainly giving voice to the voiceless and demonstrating their agentic action is a worthwhile academic endeavor—the other end of the spectrum is also important. Understanding how the powerful maintain power and ensure compliance is critical to unpacking systems of subordination.

3. Data and Methods

The data for this research derive from 30 interviews with Mormon women. The participants in the study were selected using a snowball sampling method. The sample was collected with the purposes of the research questions in mind. In particular, the first author recruited Mormon women from three different life status backgrounds: at-home mothers with young children (10), working mothers with young children (10), and single career women (9). Another participant was married, career-oriented, and did not have children. This sampling technique was chosen to gain insights concerning the compliance to Mormon religious schemas from women with differing life situations. The sample includes Mormon women from a mix of class backgrounds and urban and rural settings. Because this research seeks to understand compliance to religious schemas, we recruited religiously committed Mormons. Research shows that there are differences between Mormons inside and outside of the intermountain west in levels of commitment, activity, SES/class¹, and rates of women who are at-home mothers (Phillips 1998; Phillips and Cragun 2011). For example, Mormons in the intermountain west show high levels of activity in the Church, but lower levels of commitment (Phillips 1998); additionally, Mormon families in Utah are more likely to have an at-home mother. Please see Table 1 for an overview of the demographic characteristics of the participants.

The first author found the participants using gatekeepers—people with access to potential participants—in various urban and rural locations in Utah and the Midwest. The first author personally contacted potential participants to explain the research project (Seidman 2006). The interviews usually took place in the participant's home, but also took place in public places, like libraries and cafés. Interviews were conducted in 2012 and lasted between 40 min and three hours.

The interview schedule was designed to obtain data on compliance using a variety of interview techniques. The strategy employed in the interviews was to gain insights into compliance by having the participants share narratives as well as their attitudes and opinions related to issues of gender inequality. The interviews began with a narrative. Participants were invited to tell the story of how they came to be in their current life situation—focusing particularly on circumstances and decisions

¹ Participants were divided into three class categories: working class/student/lower middle class, middle class, and upper middle class. Working class/student participants were participants where the income earner(s) were in blue collar occupations or the participant was a student. Participants in more white collar positions but made less than \$39,000 were also in this category, regardless of education. The middle class participants included those making between \$40,000 to \$79,000 and had earned a 4 year degree. Those making above \$80,000 a year with at least a 4 year degree were considered upper middle class.

that led to them being a stay-at-home mother, working mother, or single career woman. A variety of follow up and probing questions were used to determine: motivations and interpretations of decisions, life circumstances, their future plans, and feelings of satisfaction in their life situation. In telling their narratives and responding to the probes, participants explained their reasoning for complying with the gendered religious schemas of the LDS Church and the surrounding culture. Understanding how individuals interpret their everyday experiences has been identified as an appropriate way to analyze how cultural schemas affect individuals (Packer 2010; Rubin and Rubin 2011). The topic of women and work was chosen because it is known to be a topic of contestation among conservative religious circles (Ammerman and Roof 1995; Stacey 1998).

In the second part of the interview, the first author asked a series of questions concerning religion and gender inequality more generally. The questions and statements in the conceptual portion of the interview were chosen to elicit responses that revealed the compliance or resistance to religious beliefs and gender expectations that can be linked to gender inequality. For example, the first author asked participants to respond to the statements/questions: God created men and women differently so that they can fulfill different roles/functions within families; men should be the “Head of Household”; what do you think about only men being able to hold the priesthood?; and, a woman needs children to be fulfilled. The participant’s responses were open ended and the first author followed up on each response, as needed to determine motivations for, or interpretations of, and clarifications of the attitudes and opinions expressed. Finally, the first author presented the participants with vignettes about individuals in situations who made different choices than they did concerning work/family situations. This allowed for the first author to gain a broader perspective on the participants’ attitudes and opinions, particularly, it provided interesting insights into the extent that participant’s views were projected onto others.

Similar to the interview schedule, the analytical technique employed in this research focused on teasing out patterns of compliance. The first author took notes and memos during and after each interview (Rubin and Rubin 2011). Notes and memos included; (a) musings on whether the participant displayed a large degree of compliance—this simply means that the first author wrote down initial thoughts on whether the participant seemed to be mostly complying with or opposing gender expectations; (b) any parts of the interview that stood out as particularly important; (c) on non-verbal cues given by the participants; and, (d) any emotion participants seemed to be feeling during the interview.

The coding strategy employed sought to uncover patterns of compliance in the interviews using a holistic coding strategy that considered the context of the entire interview and drew upon conceptual and theoretical understandings of compliance (see Packer 2010). Before applying conceptual codes to blocks of text in the transcripts, the first author completed one round of “open coding” where segments of text were coded devoid of conceptual framing (Coffey and Atkinson 1996; Strauss 1987). The transcripts were then coded with conceptual codes three times where the first author specifically sought to code and categorize different types of compliance. In these rounds of coding, the segments of text were coded as compliance and later subcategorized by different types of compliance based on the attitudes and motivations for compliance described in the interviews (Saldana 2009). This coding strategy resulted in several clear patterns of compliance (see Results section below).

A final round of coding was completed where “weights” were applied to theoretical codes. If a segment of text was deemed to be a particularly explicit instance of one of the patterns of compliance derived from the data, a higher weight was applied. Weighting was done on a scale of 1–10, with 10 being a quintessential illustration of a particular pattern. The weighting process helped the first author to keep track of quotes and segments of text that best displayed patterns found in the earlier coding rounds. The first author also looked for intersections of different types of codes—e.g., a coding of compliance and an “open” code applied to the same block of text. In this way, the first author was able to ascertain which open codes intersected with the theoretical codes most often—this technique helped tease out broad themes as well as theoretical interpretations of patterns found in the data. The data

were also analyzed for differing patterns of compliance based on demographic information including: participant's life status (SAHM, working mom, single career), state of residency, size of area (urban, rural, small city), and socioeconomic status.

By way of disclosure, at the time of the interviews, the first author was a religiously committed, priesthood-holding Mormon man. Given the gendered nature of the LDS Church detailed in this paper, my position as an interviewer presented some challenges. Consequently, the first author was cognizant of the power dynamics in the interviews and tried to create an inviting environment for the participants to share their stories. Despite these efforts, the first author's status in the Church may have impacted how study participants answered the interview questions. In particular, it is possible that the participants may have paid special attention to portray themselves as "good", obedient Mormon women. However, many of the participants were actually quite resistant toward Mormon gender schemas. The first author's insider status aided in the analysis of the interviews because his knowledge of Mormon culture allowed for interpreting and incorporating many of the idiosyncrasies of the Mormon culture.

Table 1. Participant Characteristics.

	<i>N (30)</i>
Class ^a	
Lower middle/ working/ student	12
Middle	15
Upper middle	3
Age	
20–29	9
30–39	18
40+	3
Women Life Status	
Stay at home mom	10
Working Mom	10
Single / no children	10
Importance of religion	
Very important	28
Important	1
Somewhat important	1
Prayer frequency	
Daily or more	28
A few times a week	2
Weekly	1
Attendance frequency	
Weekly or more	28
A few times a month	2
State	
Utah	17
Indiana	13
Urban	
Urban	12
Rural	11
Small city	7

^a Class takes into account education, income, and occupation.

4. Results: Patterns of Compliance

The purpose of this research is to provide insights into why religious women comply with traditional gender expectations and unequal organizational arrangements in patriarchal religions. In the following sections, we provide insights into why Mormon women comply with gender

traditionalism and strategies that are used to stifle resistance. Status beliefs and paternalism, two concepts reviewed above, are clear mechanisms for stifling resistance in the interviews. However, this study focuses on Mormon-specific mechanisms for stifling resistance, so we focus the results on mechanisms of stifling resistance that have yet to be mentioned in other scholarly work. We then consider the question of why the single career women displayed high levels of compliance in the interviews. We offer the concept of ideological compensation as an explanation for why the single women that were interviewed for the study strongly affirm gender traditionalism. Finally, we present results of the analysis that argues for considering acts of compliance that are framed as resistant to the broader culture as qualitatively different from other instances of compliance found in the interviews.

4.1. Mormon Strategies for Stifling Resistance

Many of the resistance-stifling themes evident in the interviews sought to downplay or to refute the idea that gender inequality existed in the LDS Church. These tools for ensuring compliance are important contributions to theoretical understandings of compliance because they may be applicable in other social contexts, especially other religious contexts. The first strategy involves understanding power strictly at the micro (individual) level, rather than the macro (organizational/cultural) level. The first author posed several questions in the interviews having to do with gender inequality specifically in the LDS Church and more generally. The women most commonly approached these questions in terms of their interpersonal experiences. As long as men were “treating them well”, and not “abusing their power” (actual terms used by participants), most of the women did not recognize, or did not see gender inequality as a problem. This was evident in the fact that most of the women felt that a man should be the head of household, so long as he was not domineering. Take Betty as an example. Betty is in her mid-thirties, has an advanced degree, and she also has two young children. When Betty was asked about her thoughts on the idea that men should be head of household, this is how she responded,

I agree with it, but when I think of head of household, I don't think of like ruling with an iron fist. I don't feel like the church teaches that either. I think that the LDS Church teaches very clearly that men and women are partners, and equal partners, in marriage and family. I think as head of household—I mean my husband doesn't make decisions without—we don't make decisions without consulting each other. Ultimately, I respect his decisions that he makes, but I can't think of any decision where he didn't consult with me first. But as a priesthood holder, and the patriarch of our home, I do respect that, but it's never been an issue or anything.

Betty struggles to articulate how Mormon gender expectations can be seen as both egalitarian and still support the idea that the man is head of household. She sees her husband as an equal partner, but also concedes to his authority, so long as he does not rule with an iron fist.

A second way, resistance seemed to be stifled was to draw on Mormon ideologies that frame leadership positions, decision making privileges, and other key aspects of power as merely added “responsibilities” that men in the Church must take on. These responsibilities are not appropriate for women to take on because their time and energies should be in the home and they do not hold priesthood authority. Many of the participants framed men's sole access to institutional power as a burden that they were glad they did not have to bear. Ellen—a 24-year-old at-home mother with some college education and a husband in a professional occupation who earns a high income—provides a telling example of how Mormon women in the interviews understood the priesthood as a burden and not a power advantage. When the first author asked her about women not having access to the priesthood, she responded,

I definitely feel that's how it should be. I don't feel like, if the Lord wanted it any other way, that's how he would have instituted it in the beginning. And, I feel it's not because we're [women] not worthy, or anything like that. But I feel like that's who I look up to, you know, priesthood holders are there for, for my guidance, and for my comfort, and I don't feel like I would ever want that responsibility (laughter)

put on myself. And I feel like that's where the man's role should be, is on leadership and on service, they have been given that opportunity to do that service. That's the mantle that was placed upon men and that's where it should reside.

Ellen views men-only access to the priesthood, not as an advantage or a basis for gender inequality, but instead, she views it as a responsibility that she would rather not have. Couched in these terms, power differences between men and women within Mormonism is downplayed.

A third pattern explaining how compliance to gender traditionalism in the interviews was the belief that men needed the priesthood more because men are naturally less spiritual than women, and the priesthood acts as a way to improve men's spirituality. The following excerpt from my interview with Nicole displays aspects of all three of these themes. When asked how she feels about only men holding the priesthood, Nicole responded,

Nicole: I feel great about it.

Interviewer: In what ways?

Nicole: I just feel so much peace that it's the right thing to do. It's such a big responsibility. There's so much to the priesthood. It's a huge responsibility, but it's such a huge blessing to help men to become more like the Savior because the priesthood cannot be for selfish reasons. It's only used for service. In my opinion, it doesn't necessarily give them any more power. It is the power of God, but it's a power to act in his name, to bless other peoples' lives. I think women tend to do that more easily anyway. So they maybe, they don't need the added burden and responsibility, and they can still have the spirituality.

When power and privileges that are awarded only to men are framed in this way, compliance is ensured, and clearly the need to resist is suppressed.

Finally, the women interviewed displayed the tendency to weave themes of equality and subordination in the interviews. One method used to accomplish this was the way most of the women described gendered expectations that downplayed power differentials. Many of the women tacitly acknowledged inequality, but thought of it as non-problematic because the "roles" men and women played were "complimentary" and not complete without the other. The gendered expectations were different, but equally important. Many of the women described situations where they acknowledged their husbands as leaders of the household, but also said that they worked together as equal partners. Consider this quote from Emma about men being head of household,

I'm not necessarily a feminist, so it doesn't bother me to think of him as being the head of our household or like the primary anything. I do feel like, I mean, he has the priesthood and he presides over our home and not that any decision is ever unilateral or like that he dictates any of the choices that I make. I definitely feel like we're—like we work together and consult and make decisions preferably together, but I do feel that, I guess, in some ways grateful to not have to shoulder the burdens that he does, and to have like my energy in roles in other ways or being used in other—and I do feel like that's more the way that we naturally are.

This quote shows how Emma weaves narratives of equality and subordination into her feelings on men being head of household (Betty's quote above also displays elements of this theme). This weaving of equality and inequality allows for women to downplay the amount of gender inequality they face and dampens the need for resistance. Paradoxically, the women in the study simultaneously acknowledge and deny gender traditionalism and the inequities that go along with it.

4.2. Ideological Compensation

An initially counterintuitive finding from analysis of the interviews was that women whose life status and occupations seemed to provide them with the resources and motivations to oppose gender traditionalism actually expressed strong support for gender traditionalism. The fact that most of the single women and working moms interviewed (five of the working moms and three of the single

women) focused on making it clear that they still adhered to the gender schemas of the Church and were still good, obedient members deserves further explanation. Most often, working moms made great effort to point out that they were only working because of financial necessity. Several of the working moms explained in great detail why they felt justified using childcare while at the same time expressing regret at “needing” to work and still actively recognizing and wishing they could adhere to the ideal of being a stay at home parent. Finally, all but a couple of the working moms in the sample expressed some amount of guilt because they used childcare and described actively finding ways to minimize the time their children spent in childcare, including taking a lower paying job, working obscure hours, and quitting work at different points to stay-at-home. Additionally, only two women felt comfortable expressing a desire to pursue their careers. Even Pamela, a young married dental student, who did not yet have children, spent a good part of the interview explaining that she chose to go into oral surgery because she would work less hours and be able to fulfill gendered expectations in the home.

All of this leads me to conclude that these women were engaging in what we call “ideological compensation”. What we mean by ideological compensation is that many of the women found not meeting Mormon gender ideals difficult, and rather than resist the ideal, tried to compensate for their situation by making it clear that even though they may not fit the gender traditional ideal, they still adhered to gendered religious schemas prescribed by the Church. In other words, they are compensating with their stories and stated attitudes for what appear to be violations of LDS norms. These women were required to “work harder” to demonstrate their adherence because their life situation was signaling that they were not adhering to Mormon gender expectations. Evidence of ideological compensation is powerfully evidenced by the single women who displayed mostly traditional gender ideologies and were uncompromisingly critical of working mothers when responding to vignettes. Ruby, a single woman in her early forties, responded this way to a vignette about a couple who were both professionals and could afford to have the wife stay-at-home with their newborn child, but she decided not to,

Those kinds of things make me really sad because I think that that mom is putting the fulfillment that she thinks she feels on a worldly level much higher above the fulfillment of being a mom. It's not as glamorous and it's not—this is coming from someone who wished that I could be her. I'd give my job up in a heartbeat.

I think that that child's going to be the one that's suffers. A nanny isn't going to talk to their child. Is not going to engage, isn't going to worry like a parent does because it's not their responsibility. I truly believe that when a couple Mormon or non-Mormon chooses to have a child, that becomes your number one priority. You don't get to be selfish and have a child.

If you both want to keep working, then don't have the kid. Don't think that you want the kid because that's the next viable step, but then you're not willing to change anything about your life to have that kid. I'm pretty serious about that one (laughter).

Among all of the participants, the single career women had the strongest negative responses to women in the vignettes who chose to work after having children. It seems counterintuitive that Mormon women who find themselves outside of ideal gender expectations would be most harsh in their views on working mothers, but ideological compensation helps to explain this outcome—their position outside of the ideal causes these women to want to display their strong acceptance of the ideal.

Many of these single women expressed regret at having never been married—many even stating that they would gladly give up all of their career success to be an at-home mother. Jenna described the difficulties in being a career-oriented Mormon woman in a religion that places so much emphasis on motherhood,

You know it is what it is because obviously that's my goal and what I want is to have children and be a mother. Especially I think as I was working during those first few years at the department of health where I think people thought, “Oh she's working. She doesn't want to have kids and a family.” I'm

like that's not... I never wanted... if I could choose right now to quit my job and be a stay-at-home mom I would. In a heartbeat.

That's definitely what I want, my goal, but that hasn't presented itself. How do you deal with that? You, you know you have no options (chuckles), so I mean you just you deal with it through I would say, I mean—I don't know how you would describe it. Spiritually dealing with it through prayer and knowing that those blessings will come some day. I have complete faith and confidence that those blessings will come to me at some point. Whether it's in this life or the next that that's going to come and I won't be denied anything, so I'm not worried about that. That doesn't mean I don't want it. I'm just not worried. Like I'm not worried that I'm going to be denied somehow.

Jenna tried hard in this quote and throughout the interview to portray herself as accepting of Mormon gender expectations. She even cites her faith as the main resource she uses to deal with the hardship of being single in a religion that places a great deal of emphasis on family and child rearing.

Analysis of the interviews revealed that working moms were the most resistant to traditional gender expectations. However, many of the working moms did not display strong resistance to Mormon gender ideologies, but rather sought to justify their situation as working moms in their narratives because they were cognizant of the fact that they were not playing the ideal role of the stay-at-home mother. The most common thread in this vein was for working moms to portray their decision as coming from financial need, while still recognizing and yearning for the “ideal” of being a stay-at-home mom. Katy is a middle-class working mom with two children in her early forties. She and her husband encountered an array of unexpected and very substantial expenses. When Katy was asked about her motivations for working, she explained,

I was pretty much forced to work... although I wanted to quit and Henry (her husband) and I discussed it a lot, but our financial hardships just drained us financially. We were lucky because we never had to go into debt to meet those obligations, but we, I just couldn't afford to quit... we didn't really have a chance to have the ideal dream scenario of mom stay home and cause it just, it wasn't feasible.

As a working mom, Katy views herself as outside of the ideal for a Mormon woman and confides that she desires to be a stay-at-home mom. Thus, although she appears to be resisting gender traditionalism, her intent is to comply with Mormon gendered religious schemas.

Another way that the participants in the study were able to achieve ideological compensation was through the Mormon belief of personal revelation. Mormons believe that while revelation for the Church as a whole must come through general authorities, and revelation for a family should come through the father, each individual member of the Church can personally receive inspiration in their own lives. This idea played a key role for many of the participants who found themselves outside of what they felt were the “ideal” Mormon situations. One of the working moms interviewed, Sarah, said that she only worked after she received a personal revelation that it was okay to do so. When presented with a vignette about a woman who had a career and decided to go back to work full time shortly after having her first child because she was worried about getting behind in her career, Sarah—who is also a working mother—responded with this:

I think at the end of the day when, I would say that's the wrong decision to make. The reasons for the decision are maybe wrong, and I think it's wrong to do that without knowing that is the best thing for your family and having a personal revelation that that is exactly what Heavenly Father wants you to be doing. I think it's really scary to have your child raised by somebody else as far as having a full-time nanny or a full-time daycare teaching your children values when they're very small and when they're older. Although there are probably some daycare providers out there who do a better job than some others in teaching good values and everything. I guess I would say it's not necessarily wrong for both parents to work full-time even if they don't need the income, but it is wrong unless you know that's exactly the right thing that Heavenly Father wants you to do. I don't know often that would happen. I don't know. I think a lot of times Heavenly Father would want the woman to stay home.

Sarah makes it clear that she accepts the stay-at-home mother ideal that is espoused by the LDS Church, to the point that she sees it as wrong for a mother with young children to work without permission from God, which she feels that she received through personal revelation. Sarah describes her personal revelation as coming from feelings and “promptings” that she understands as coming from God because of her supplications through prayer. Making the decision to work outside of the home with young, pre-Kindergarten children was difficult for Sarah, but it was clear from the interview that she felt justified in the eyes of God. God had made an exception for her, even though in most cases His will would be for a mother to stay at home with her children.

Ideological compensation is not as difficult to achieve as one might think and is not achieved solely by expressing acceptance of the hegemonic gender ideologies of the religion. Although clearly a gender traditional religious organization, the LDS Church is not monolithic and is moving away from the very strict gender schemas of the 1970s through the 1990s (Bowman 2012). For example, while the Church has maintained that the most important thing for a woman to do is to be a wife and mother, they have also emphasized the importance of women getting an education—although they have not advocated for women to pursue careers or strive for financial independence. Often the narratives can be seen as conflicting: get married early, get as much education as you can, do not put off having kids, be self-sufficient, women’s primary responsibility is her children. Thus, many of the women honed in on aspects of Mormon gendered cultural schemas that spoke to their situation. A very convenient source for ideological compensation for several of the women was patriarchal blessings. A patriarchal blessing is a blessing Mormons get from a priesthood leader that acts like a roadmap for their lives. Mormons will often view their patriarchal blessings before an important life decision to see if it provides any guidance on the decision. Many of the women disclosed that their patriarchal blessings state that they would financially “contribute” to their family’s income. Ironically, patriarchal blessings were employed as explanations by women who fit Mormon gender ideals and those who did not. Thus, while clearly hegemonic, Mormon gender ideologies are inconsistent and broad enough for women outside of the “ideal” to find ways to engage in “ideological compensation” for their noncompliance to gender traditionalism.

4.3. Subcultural Resistance

In some cases, participants’ expressed compliance to gender traditionalism, actually seemed akin to resistant behavior. Acknowledging that this statement is initially very confusing, allow for us to explain. We found that some of the participants saw their adherence to LDS gender expectations as a political statement against the broader society, which the participants portrayed as morally deficient. Gallagher and Smith (1999) revealed somewhat similar findings in their study of evangelical women. They found that many evangelical women professed support of gender traditionalism, even though in reality they were participating in traditional gendered behaviors at about the same rate as the rest of the population. The authors explain this finding using the concept of subcultural identity theory; arguing that the women in their study wanted to maintain subcultural distinctiveness because of the identity value that was associated with being part of a religious subculture (see Edgell and Docka 2007).

We found that many of the participants in the study were engaging in behavior that seemed to be conceptually distinct from the subcultural identity and religious fulfillment conceptual approaches previously employed to understand why religious women comply. We felt this behavior was different because in addition to finding value and meaning being part of a distinctive religious subculture, these women also understood their acts as political in nature—opposing the broader society, similar to what has been termed subcultural resistance. An example of subcultural resistance comes from Leblanc (1999) who looks at subcultural resistance through a gendered lens and finds that women within the punk subculture are resisting mainstream, feminine gender norms through their involvement in the subculture; especially, norms of feminine beauty and behavior (see Haenfler 2004; Raby 2005 for other examples of subcultural resistance).

The Mormon women we interviewed engaged in behavior similar to subcultural resistance that is described above, although they are adhering to gender traditionalism. Put another way, their resistance is aiming “to curtail change” (Hollander and Einwohner 2004, p. 536). However, many of the women framed their motivations and attitudes in strong opposition to the broader culture, we felt compelled to categorize this type of compliance differently. We refer to these acts as subcultural resistance² and define it as compliance in subcultural groups that are framed in opposition to the broader society.

This quote from Emma—a stay-at-home mother who was admitted to medical school but decided to not to attend after getting engaged to her husband—shows that her compliance to gender traditionalism is understood as a statement against gender norms in the mainstream society,

I feel like, and this probably goes back to my faith, but I do believe like men and women are different. We're created different. We're created separately, individually as beings with different nature. I definitely feel like the one quote from general conference³ recently, that I've really liked, is how the family is the basic unit of the church and of eternity. I do feel like as we get more caught up in the world we kind of forget that really like the family is central to the whole purpose of being here, and that we (women) get so caught up in careers and worldly things that we kind of forget that. I feel like that understanding is very important.

Emma describes how religion reinforces her decision to quit medical school to focus on raising her family. She indicates that people who get “caught up in the world” (mainstream society) would probably choose differently, because the outside culture loses focus on the importance of families.

Terra—a mother of one in her late twenties—provides an excellent example of subcultural resistance. When asked about the state of the traditional family in modern society, she responded,

I think that, it's been said from the beginning, from Heavenly Father how the set up of the family is supposed to be. Just because society has progressed in their terms (the world's terms) doesn't mean that we're backwards. It just means that we stayed with what Heavenly Father has said, and they are the ones that have not truly progressed. But I don't think that those types of situations (non-traditional family forms) are appropriate.

She sees her values in support of traditional family arrangements as being in opposition with the broader society's values. Terra feels that the broader society is wrong to think that progression is equated to accepting non-traditional family types because this is in conflict with God's will. In this instance, her compliance is situated as being in opposition to “society's” ideal of progression.

Nicole, a participant mentioned above, said this when describing how society values being a stay-at-home mother,

I just think that it's going to be harder and harder to find the value in being a stay-at-home mom because society places such a negative connotation or negative view on it. We're kind of in a woman power age, and I'm all for it. I think women are great and I think women have talents and skills and can do amazing things, but I don't necessarily think that if you're not achieving these wonderful things that you're any less than those that are. I think a lot of the image that's placed on women right now is that you have to be successful, or you have to have this drive for power, and you need to put yourself out there. I think it's very unfortunate, especially for these younger generations. It's going to be harder and harder for them to feel their self-worth as a stay at home mom I think.

² A recent study provides an example of what we mean by subcultural resistance in a religious context. Shahar (2017) study examines Orthodox Jewish and Amish women whose religion adheres to gender norms well outside of the cultural mainstream in the United States. In this cultural context, the women in the study were greatly admired by their communities for maintaining gender traditionalism.

³ General conference is the twice a year meeting of the LDS Church where top-level leaders address the entire Church membership. General conferences are broadcast to Mormons across the world.

I think that's why it's so important that we as moms in the gospel and in the LDS faith help our daughters understand what a blessing it is to be a mom and to fulfill this role.

In Nicole's eyes, being a stay-at-home mother is not valued in the broader society. Hence, Nicole pits her decision to be an at-home mother as being in opposition to the broader culture; claiming that society's definition for success and fulfillment is misguided.

Ellen, a 24-year-old working mother who lives in rural Utah, expressed views that were similar to Terra quoted in the above paragraphs in favor of traditional family arrangements. When asked about the likelihood of future generations being more accepting of non-traditional family arrangements, this is what she said,

I hope not. (laughter) I hope that they won't be persuaded to have worldly views. I feel like it's a very worldly view when people agree with, or go with the flow of society and say, "Well, I have a friend that is like that, so I'm, I'm okay with that type of family (nontraditional), even though I don't practice it," you know? I hope that our kids can stand up and say this is what I believe in (traditional families), and this is how God created me, and that's how it should be.

Ellen hopes that future generations will resist encroachments on traditional family arrangements that were supported by "worldly views" or society (the world and worldly views were used as synonyms for society or the broader culture by the participants). Ellen sees herself as resisting the broader society and hopes future generations will too, although she is also complying with gender traditionalism.

Another participant named Alexandra—a nurse with a flexible work schedule that allowed for her to mostly avoid daycare for her two young children—responded in this way when asked if she felt the LDS Church would become more accepting of non-traditional family arrangements in the future,

No, I mean, I don't think our church will ever do that. I think the core of our church is family. Everything we're taught centers around family, even before our earthly birth, we're taught we were a family. That's not going to change for the LDS. We're not going to adapt to what the world is doing, we're just going to look stranger, (laughter) I feel like. I'm willing to look strange because I feel like this is the most beneficial way to raise a family. I'm not saying there aren't really good people, like I work with gay men at work—I'm not saying they're not good people that could raise a child, because I see children get abused by nuclear families at my job, I work with children. I'm not saying they wouldn't raise good kids, I just feel like this is the best-case scenario. I feel like the traditional family is really being attacked because they're pushing for all these other extreme lifestyles.

Similar to the other examples that are used in this section, Alexandra positions her views on traditional family arrangements in opposition to what she regards as the "worldly" view.

This type of language and explanation was common in almost all of the interviews and struck us as different from other types of compliance because it was framed in opposition to the broader culture and seems more political, going beyond compliance for the sake of religious fulfillment. Some would argue that what we describe here as subcultural resistance is actually the quintessential example of false consciousness, ideological hegemony, or the third degree of power—i.e., the quintessential example of deceiving people into reinforcing their subordinate status. While we have no way of proving empirically that subcultural resistance is not merely the representation of mechanisms that were used to stifle resistance, we argue that this more cynical perspective is inaccurate because the participants portrayed thought-out reasoning for adhering, combined with a sense of opposition to mainstream culture. Their cogent reasons for compliance combined with the political tinge of their narratives and attitudes lead us to believe that subcultural resistance is not merely the manifestation of insidious mechanisms of social control.

5. Discussion and Conclusions

Past studies emphasize the agency women in gender traditional religion exercise; however, one cannot ignore the overwhelming degree to which Mormon women comply with and appear to want to

comply with Mormon forms of gender traditionalism. The take away point from this article is that studying religious women's compliance to gender traditionalism allows scholars to investigate how religions maintain gender traditionalism in the modern world. The patterns of compliance found in the interviews allowed for us to analyze mechanisms for stifling resistance in a religious context.

While we wholeheartedly agree that religious women derive value and fulfillment from "doing" religion, at the same time, it is important to point out the strategies for stifling resistance within the religious context. We argue that understanding why religious individuals comply with gender ideologies that perpetuate inequality is important for unpacking systems of oppression in a religious context. This paper addressed three main questions: What are the mechanisms used to stifle resistance in the Mormon context apparent in the interviews? Why do some of the women who are in positions to resist religious patriarchy instead comply? Is compliance that is framed as resistance to the broader society qualitatively different from other types of compliance? We see three key contributions of this research in our attempts to answer these questions that improves the understanding of compliance in gender traditional religions.

First, there are other aspects of LDS gendered religious schemas that induced compliance among the participants that contribute new insights into understanding compliance in gender traditional religions. It is likely that the four distinctive mechanisms for stifling resistance revealed in this study—focusing on power only at the individual level, equating institutional control with added burdens or responsibilities, assuming that the powerful in an institution need that power because of some shortcoming, and weaving narratives of inequality and equality to obfuscate gender inequity—are also evident in other religions and non-religious gendered organizations. The mechanisms of weaving of equality and inequality and viewing the priesthood as a burden provide empirical examples of many themes that are discussed by [Hickman \(2016\)](#) in her treatise on the negotiation of agency Mormon women undergo in their lives. Future studies should consider these conceptual frames for understanding compliance in situations of gender inequity. Taken together, the organizational structure and the religious schemas of the LDS Church create what we term "LDS obedience culture". Because religious schemas in the Church are tightly controlled and hegemonic, opposing gender expectations are nearly akin to opposing God, which equates to a powerful mechanism of social control within the organization ([Hickman 2016](#)).

Second, just because people are not outwardly adhering to gender expectations in gender traditional religions, does not mean that they are resisting gender traditionalism. We introduced the concept of ideological compensation to explain why many of the participants who seemed to be in positions to resist Mormon gender traditionalism portrayed attitudes and motivations in compliance with traditional gender expectations. Many participants went out of their way to explain why they found themselves outside of the "ideal" even though they still desired it. Ideological compensation slows the process of breaking down gender inequality. When single Mormon women who from a distance seem to be resisting traditional gender expectations, in reality adhere to and support these expectations, the opportunity to pave the way for other women to feel free to make this choice is diminished.

Finally, this paper also utilizes the concept of subcultural resistance. In some cases, participants in the interviews framed their compliance to LDS gender expectations as political statements opposing the broader culture. There is an argument to be made that the distinction between subcultural resistance and false consciousness is delicate and is difficult to substantiate. However, we felt that when the participants framed their compliance in opposition to the broader society, this type of compliance was qualitatively different than other types of compliance where mechanisms for stifling resistance were clearly evident.

Mormon women find themselves in an institutional context where traditional gender expectations are considered "ideal", and men are granted more institutional power and control. We are not arguing that Mormon women adhering to traditional gender expectations of a religion is merely compliance. The religious fulfillment and meaning that the women describe is authentic and can have real, positive

impact in their lives. On the other hand, this paper provides evidence that mechanisms are in place to obfuscate gender inequity in the LDS Church and stifle resistance and that these mechanisms are effective.

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