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## Predictors of opposition to and support for the ordination of women: insights from the LDS Church

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Female ordination is an important component of gender equality in Christian religious communities. While prior research has examined societal, institutional, and organisational factors that predict changes in ordination policies in Christian denominations, there is very little research examining individuals' attitudes regarding the ordination of women. In this research, we use data from two surveys of members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS) to examine the factors that predict attitudes towards the ordination of women using two polity-specific measures of support or opposition. Results indicate greater support for the ordination of women when framed in a way that takes into account LDS church governance. While several demographic variables predict attitudes towards ordination, the strongest correlate is perceptions of inequality.

**Keywords:** Mormonism; gender; ordination; priesthood

### Introduction

Researchers have become increasingly interested in the changing roles of women in religion. Scholars have examined the gender gap in religiosity (Collett & Lizardo, 2009; Cornwall, 2009; Miller & Stark, 2002), female ordination among Christian denominations (Chaves, 1997), opposition women face in gaining access to leadership positions (Adams, 2007), and the link between religion and gender traditionalism, particularly among evangelical Christians (Bartkowski, 2001; Bartkowski & Hempel, 2009; Wilcox, 2004). Gender roles and discrimination in religious groups have important implications for health and well-being. For example, numerous studies have demonstrated the negative effect of perceived discrimination on mental health (Pascoe & Richman, 2009; Pavalko, Mossakowski, & Hamilton 2003). Moreover, despite the generally positive effects of religious participation (Ellison & Levin, 1998; Schieman, Bierman, & Ellison 2012), evidence suggests that these effects may be greater for men than

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for women, possibly because of the lower status afforded women in religious settings (Douk, Zineb, Nacef, & Halbreich, 2007; Krause, Ellison, & Marcum, 2002; Maselko & Kubzansky, 2006). This study focuses on the gender dynamics in one particular religious denomination, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS or Mormon Church). Drawing on data from two surveys we conducted of Mormon Church members, we examine predictors of attitudes towards female ordination, a practice currently forbidden in the denomination.

### Literature review

Research on gender in Mormonism has highlighted important gender differences (Basquiat, 2001; Toscano, 2007), with LDS Church leaders stressing the importance of maintaining male priesthood authority as distinct and different from motherhood (Miles, 2008; Sumerau & Cragun, 2014; Vance, 2002). Very little research, however, has examined the issue of women's ordination. Women are ordained in about half of Christian denominations (Chaves, 1997), but not in the LDS Church. Currently, all male members 12 years and older are eligible to be ordained to the denomination's lay priesthood. Agitation for the ordination of women in the LDS Church has increased in recent years (Finnigan & Ross, 2013). Yet, to date, only two surveys provide data on Mormons' views of the issue. A Pew survey of Mormons in the USA found that 13% of men and 8% of women selected "Yes" on the question, "Should women who are dedicated members of the LDS Church be ordained to the priesthood?" (Pew Forum, 2012). Another study reported that 90% of Mormon women but just 52% of Mormon men opposed female clergy in the LDS Church (Putnam & Campbell, 2012). Together, these findings suggest rather low support for women's ordination among LDS Church members. In this article we revisit these survey findings, but do so in light of the ecclesiastical polity of the LDS Church.

Ecclesiastical polity refers to the power and authority structure of a religion. Some religious organisations, such as the Catholic Church, centralise power; in such organisations, policy changes come from the top-down. In groups with a more congregational polity, such as Quakers, power and authority are spread throughout the membership, allowing individual members or their representatives to propose and vote on policy changes. Church polity is particularly important in understanding major shifts in doctrine or policy. Denominations with a more democratic and bottom-up decision-making process may be quicker to respond to changing social mores (Chaves, 1997).

The LDS Church utilises a hierarchical, top-down polity. Policy decisions are made at the highest levels of leadership (Hammarberg, 2013). Votes of approval from church members are largely symbolic gestures of support for church leadership, since opposing votes do not alter decision-making (Hammarberg, 2013; Stevens, 2013). Local leaders are allowed some latitude in how policies are implemented, but major policy changes must be put into place by the highest leaders (Mauss, 2003; White & White, 1980). Many Mormons assume that significant changes in policy or doctrine are the result of divine revelation received by these leaders. In this context, asking Church members if women "should" be ordained is tantamount to asking them if they disagree with God's will as expressed by the organisation's leadership.

Religious groups' different polities should inform the methods by which scholars study attitudes towards female ordination. In denominations with a congregational polity, asking members whether they think a deserving woman should have the right to be ordained makes sense. In a hierarchically organised tradition such as the LDS Church, however, asking members whether worthy women should be ordained may not reflect the process by which policy or doctrinal change occurs. In the LDS Church, belief in the core tenets of the religion requires members to accept that significant changes should be initiated at the highest level of leadership. Efforts

to enact change in any other ways can be considered heretical and can serve as grounds for excommunication (Moulton, 2014). Therefore, we propose the following:

Hypothesis 1: Members of the LDS Church will voice greater support for female ordination when it is framed as an inspired decision from church leadership.

Polity may also shed light on other factors that influence members' views of female ordination. Beginning at eight years old, church members are regularly interviewed by their local (male) leaders (Hammarberg, 2013). The LDS Church may excommunicate members who promote beliefs that deviate too greatly from church teachings (Johnson, 1981). A strong emphasis on behaving, believing, and belonging contributes to a culture of conformity and obedience, particularly in Utah (Stevens, 2013). These cultural norms, when combined with normal psychological efforts to maintain attitude-behaviour consistency (Cooper, Kelly, & Weaver, 2004), lead to our second hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2a: The higher the level of activity or involvement of individuals in the LDS Church, the greater the opposition to bottom-up advocacy for the ordination of women.

The relationship between activity level and support for female ordination could vary depending on how the issue is framed. If the ordination of women is framed as a bottom-up change, highly active members may be more opposed. However, if ordination of women is framed as a divinely-inspired policy change emanating from the highest levels of leadership in the religion (i.e., First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles), more active or involved Mormons may be more supportive, given the culture of obedience in the denomination. This leads to another hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2b: The higher the level of activity or involvement of individuals in the LDS Church, the greater their support for a top-down change allowing women to be ordained.

Gender is another potential determinant of ordination attitudes. Given the nature and extent of gender inequality in conservative Christianity (Chalfant et al., 1994; Sumerau & Cragun, 2014), one might expect women to be more likely than men to support a policy change allowing women to be ordained. However, results of the Pew (2012) and Putnam and Campbell (2012) studies demonstrated lower support among LDS women than among LDS men. One possibility is that women may be compensating for their subordination by internalising the doctrines that subordinate them (Hoffmann & Bartkowski, 2008). Such actions stem from motivation to enhance the overall fairness of the social system (Jost & Hunyady, 2002). Thus, we propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 3: Active LDS women will express less support for women's ordination in the LDS Church than will active LDS men.

Another factor that could contribute to views of women's ordination is political orientation. Politically conservative individuals tend to oppose certain kinds of social change, while those who are more progressive tend to support change, particularly change that increases equality and empowers minorities (Amodio et al. 2007; Jost 2006). Given the largely conservative makeup of LDS Church members (Phillips et al., 2011), more politically liberal members are likely to be more supportive of women's ordination. We therefore propose the following:

Hypothesis 4: More politically conservative members of the LDS Church will exhibit greater opposition to the ordination of women than will more liberal members of the LDS Church.

Finally, perceptions of inequality may shape attitudes towards female ordination. Perceptions of inequality exert considerable influence on the ways people interpret events and processes (Collins, 1990). Personal experience with discrimination or sexism in religious settings could make some LDS women more sympathetic towards efforts for greater gender equality (McQueeney, 2009; Sumerau et al., 2014; Wilcox, 2009). On the other hand, “internalized oppression” (Collins, 1990) or “internalization of inequality” (Jost & Hunyady, 2002), wherein religious women learn to accept their subordination and thus perceive inequalities as nonexistent, necessary, or natural (Schwalbe et al., 2000), could lead devout LDS women to deny the existence of inequalities within the Church. Because behaviour is driven by meaning attributions (Blumer, 1969), individuals’ perceptions of inequality strongly influence their responses to existing social conditions (Acker, 2006; McCabe, 2005; Messner, 1997). Thus, our fifth and final hypothesis:

Hypothesis 5: Perceptions of inequality will be strongly predictive of attitudes towards the ordination of women.

## Methods

### *Participants*

Two samples were obtained for this study. Sample 1 was contracted by the authors from Qualtrics, a panel survey company whose database of potential participants includes participants’ religious affiliation. Qualtrics chose a random sample of individuals from its database who had identified their religious affiliation as LDS or Mormon. While drawn randomly from the Qualtrics database, it is not necessarily a probability sample reflecting the demographics of the LDS Church. The survey was launched in November of 2014 and remained open for just under a week. During that time, 624 individuals clicked on the survey link. The final sample of 525 excludes individuals who did not agree to take the survey, indicated that they had never been members of the LDS Church, or were later dropped from the final sample based on completion speed or failure to respond accurately to an attention question. This sample was predominantly female (69.1%) and white (89.7%). A majority (53.8%) had a college degree, including 13.2% who had earned a graduate degree. Most considered themselves somewhat active (18.3%) or very active (62.6%) in the Church and not concerned about gender roles (88.8%). Respondents were given categories to indicate their age and income, which are shown in Table 1.

Sample 2 was a purposive sample, allowing us to include a greater number of survey items than in Sample 1, which was limited in length by cost. Links to the survey were posted in a variety of locations on the Internet, including Facebook Groups, blogs, and forums covering a wide spectrum of Mormonism-related websites, on 16 November 2014. The response was much larger than anticipated, leading us to close the survey early (December 4) rather than keep it up for an entire month as initially planned, with 71,309 completed responses. After data cleaning, elimination of incomplete responses or responses from outside the USA, a total of 57,432 respondents are represented in the current study. For more information on this study, see Cragun and Nielsen (2015). Sample 2 was predominantly female (72.3%) and White (93.2%). A majority (69.9%) had a college degree, including 22.5% who had earned a graduate degree. Most considered themselves somewhat active (14.5%) or very active (79.0%) in their church activities, and were not concerned about gender roles (88.8%). Age and income responses also appear in Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics from Samples 1 and 2.

	Sample 1 %	Sample 2 %
Membership status <sup>a</sup>		
On roll and identifies	92.4	86.2
On roll but does not identify	5.6	11.2
Was on roles but no more	1.9	2.6
Gender		
Male	30.9	27.7
Female	69.1	72.3
Age		
18–25	15.1	20.2
26–30	15.5	22.6
31–40	24.6	33.5
41–50	14.1	11.5
51–60	13.2	7.8
61–70	12.4	3.5
71+	5.0	9
Education		
Did not finish high school	.8	.2
High school	9.9	3.3
Some college	35.4	26.6
College graduate	40.6	47.4
Master's degree	10.7	16.3
Ph.D.	.8	2.5
JD/MD	1.7	3.7
Race/ethnicity		
White, non-Hispanic	89.7	93.2
Black, non-Hispanic	1.1	.4
Hispanic	3.6	2.6
Asian	2.1	.8
Native American	.8	.6
Other	2.1	2
Pacific Islander	.6	.5
Income		
Less than \$10,000	6.1	5.5
\$10,0001–25,000	11.4	9.5
\$25,001–50,000	29.8	19.9
\$50,000–75,000	28.0	21.6
\$75,001–100,000	13.7	18.5
\$100,001–250,000	10.0	21.2
\$250,000+	.9	3.8
Political views		
Very conservative	19.2	7.9
Conservative	31.4	27.6
Moderate, but lean conservative	21.5	29.2
Moderate	16.5	12.5
Moderate, but lean liberal	5.7	11.4
Liberal	3.4	5.9
Very liberal	1.8	1.5
Other	.5	3.8
Activity Level		
Not at all active	8.6	2.2
Not too active	10.5	4.2
Somewhat active	18.3	14.5

(Continued)

Table 1. Continued.

	Sample 1 %	Sample 2 %
Very active	62.6	79
Hold temple recommend		
Yes	65.9	84.3
No	34.1	15.7
View on obedience		
Obey counsel	34.2	34.2
Seek revelation first	65.8	65.8
Concern about gender roles		
Yes	11.2	24.2
No	88.8	75.8
Differences are		
Cultural	4.3	6.7
Doctrinal	42.8	24.7
A mix of culture and doctrine	52.9	68.6
Dependent variables		
Women should be ordained (neutral polity)		
No	80.7	71.3
Yes	9.9	8.3
Other	3.6	11.5
Don't know	5.9	8.9
Support decision to ordain (LDS polity)		
Strongly supportive	27.1	34.7
Supportive	40	42.4
Neither supportive nor opposed	17.9	14.2
Opposed	8.8	4.8
Strongly opposed	6.2	3.9

<sup>a</sup>The descriptives from this variable are included in this table only so readers know that that these individuals were able to take the survey. However, the rest of the descriptives reported in this table come from just the first group – those who were on the roles and self-identified as LDS.

### Measures and procedures

After being shown an informed consent, respondents were asked, “According to its records, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS Church) has approximately 15 million members. Do you think your name is on the Church records?” Response options included, “Yes, and I currently identify as LDS”, “Yes, but I do not identify as LDS”, “No, but I was LDS”, “No, I have never been LDS”, “Don't know”, and “Prefer not to respond”. Individuals who chose one of the last three options were sent to a screen where they were told that their interest in the survey was appreciated but that the target audience was current or former members of the LDS Church.

Participants were asked a question about the composition of their social networks, “Take a moment and think of the individuals with whom you have socialised during your leisure time during the past month. Indicate below the rough percentage of these individuals who are members of the Church.” Participants were presented with a slider that ranged from 0 (no LDS friends) to 100 (all LDS friends) in increments of 1.

Several questions measured religiosity. We asked, “How active are you in the LDS Church?” Response options included, “Very active”, “Somewhat active”, “Not too active”, and “Not at all active”. We also asked participants, “Do you hold a current temple recommend?” a question that

captures the highest level of participation in the LDS Church, temple worship, which is reserved for adult members in good standing. Response options were “yes” or “no”.

To gauge respondents’ views of obedience to church leaders, we asked, “Which statement comes closer to your own view, even if neither is exactly right?” Response options for this question were, “A good Latter-day Saint should obey the counsel of priesthood leaders without necessarily knowing why” and “A good Latter-day Saint should first seek his or her own personal revelation as the motivation to obey.”

Several items focused on gender issues in the LDS Church. The first question was, “Are you personally concerned about the different roles men and women are expected to play in the LDS Church?” Response options were “yes” or “no”. We included a question designed to capture members’ views of the origins of gender roles in the Church, “Differences between the roles of women and men in the LDS Church are ...” Response options included, “Cultural”, “A mix of culture and doctrine”, and “Doctrinal”.

Participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement with several statements regarding gender equality in the LDS Church (options included: “Strongly Disagree”, “Disagree”, “Neutral”, “Agree”, and “Strongly Agree”). The statements included: “God has established different roles for men and women.” “The way women are treated in the Church is a problem.” “If women were given more leadership responsibilities, it would strengthen the Church.” “God has revealed that only men should hold the priesthood.” “It’s not fair that 12-year-old boys can pass the sacrament, but 12-year-old girls cannot.” “Women who feel unequal to men at Church don’t understand the gospel.” “Feminism is incompatible with the restored Gospel of Jesus Christ.” Because of space limitations, only the first three statements were asked of Sample 1. After recoding such that all items run in the same direction, we formed a single scale by taking their average. We refer to this as the “Perceptions of Inequality in the LDS Church Scale.” Cronbach’s Alpha for the scale in Sample 1 was .783 and .887 in Sample 2. While on the low end of acceptable reliability in Sample 1, both scales meet standard reliability cut-offs (DeVellis, 2012).

Participants in both surveys were asked their age (in categories), level of educational attainment, race/ethnicity, gender, income (in ordered categories), and political views (see Table 1 for descriptive statistics for the two samples).

Our dependent variables are two items on the ordination of women. The first question replicated the Pew (2012) measure, “Do you, personally, believe that women who are dedicated members of the Church should have the opportunity to be ordained to the priesthood?” Response options included “Yes”, “No”, “Don’t Know”, and “other”. We refer to this as the “neutral polity ordination” question as it does not reflect any particular way that the policy would be enacted. The second question, designed to reflect the method of policy change in the LDS Church, asked, “If the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles were to receive a revelation allowing women to hold the priesthood, I would be ...”. Response options included, “strongly supportive”, “supportive”, “neither supportive nor opposed”, “opposed”, or “strongly opposed”. Higher values on this item indicate greater opposition to the decision. We refer to this as the “LDS polity ordination” question throughout.

Due to space limitations, we present only results from multivariate regression analyses. Results from bivariate analyses are available in an online supplement. The smaller sample size in Sample 1 necessitated that we collapse or reduce the number of response options for a number of variables shown in Table 1, including age, education, income, and political views. We also collapsed the number of response options for our dependent variables. In the neutral polity ordination question, we combined “other” and “don’t know” responses. In the Mormon polity ordination question, we combined “strongly supportive” with “supportive” and “strongly opposed” with “opposed”. Thus, with both dependent variables, we had three response categories.



Accordingly, we used multinomial logistic regression for the multivariate analyses. The same set of independent variables were used in all analyses. Analyses were limited to self-identified Mormons in the USA.

## Results

In line with our first hypothesis, support for ordination is much higher in both samples when framed from a Mormon polity perspective (Sample 1, 68.5% supported the decision and 17.1% were neutral; Sample 2, 77.1% supported the decision and 14.2% were neutral) than from a neutral polity perspective (Sample 1, 12.5% supported ordination and 9.8% chose “other or don’t know”; Sample 2, 8.4% supported ordination and 19.5% chose “other or don’t know”, with the balance opposing ordination).

Table 2 presents the results of the multinomial logistic regressions of the neutral polity ordination question in both samples. Presented are the odds ratios (OR; confidence intervals are in parentheses) or differences in probability of each of the variables in predicting whether respondents chose “Yes” over “No” in response to the question about female ordination. Results from the comparison of respondents who answered “other or don’t know” and respondents who answered “no” are available in an online supplement to this article.

In Sample 1, four variables were significant predictors of differences between those who said “Yes” and those who said “No”. Respondents with incomes in the \$25,001–75,000 range were less likely than those with incomes above \$75,000 to support ordination. Those who cite culture for the origin of gender differences were significantly more supportive than those who cited a mixture of culture and doctrine. Respondents with a higher percentage of Mormons in their social network were less supportive. Finally, perceiving inequality in the LDS Church was significantly and substantially associated with support for female ordination. While problematic when applied to multinomial logistic regression, the pseudo  $R^2$  measures indicate that somewhere between 40% and 56% of the variation in attitudes towards ordaining women is explained by the variables in the equation.

In Sample 2, nearly all variables were significant predictors. Men respondents who are less than “very active”, respondents who believe gender differences in the church are cultural *or* doctrinal in nature, and those who perceive more inequality in the church were more likely to support female ordination. In contrast, respondents between the ages of 18 and 30 (compared with those over 50), respondents with a high school diploma or less, less-affluent respondents, conservative and moderate respondents, and respondents emphasising obedience were less likely to support female ordination. Like in Sample 1, the pseudo  $R^2$  measures suggest the model accounts for somewhere between 40% and 60% of the variation in attitudes towards the ordination of women.

Table 3 presents results of two multinomial logistic regression analyses of the Mormon polity question, one for each sample. The table shows the relative influence of each variable in distinguishing between those who chose “supportive or strongly supportive” compared to those who would “oppose or strongly oppose” such a decision. Results from comparing those who chose “neither supportive nor opposed” to those who selected “oppose or strongly oppose” are available in an online supplement.

In Sample 1, just two variables significantly predicted support over opposition. Relative to very active members of the religion, respondents who were not at all active or not too active were significantly less likely to support a decision to ordain women. Respondents who perceived greater gender inequality were more likely to support such a decision. The pseudo  $R^2$  measures for this model indicate that the included variables explain a relatively small amount of the variation, between 10% and 20%.

In Sample 2, most of the variables significantly predicted support for (or opposition to) the decision. Men were more likely to support the decision. Respondents under 50, with less than

Table 2. Multinomial logistic regression of neutral polity ordination question in Samples 1 and 2.

Variables	Sample 1		Sample 2	
	Yes <sup>a</sup>		Yes <sup>a</sup>	
	OR (CI 95%)	<i>p</i>	OR (CI 95%)	<i>p</i>
Gender				
Males <sup>b</sup>	2.645 (.84–8.36)	.098	2.277 (1.98–2.62)	.000
Age				
18–30	1.260 (.25–6.49)	.782	.719 (.57–.91)	.006
31–50	.876 (.21–3.62)	.855	1.082 (.87–1.34)	.474
Education				
High school or less	3.892 (.36–41.81)	.262	1.825 (1.12–2.97)	.015
Some college	4.704 (.79–28.08)	.089	1.008 (.82–1.24)	.943
College graduate	6.178 (1.03–36.90)	.046	1.024 (.88–1.19)	.767
Income				
\$25,000 or less	.296 (.06–1.42)	.128	.683 (.54–.87)	.002
\$25,001–75,000	.284 (.09–.95)	.041	.815 (.70–.95)	.007
Political views				
Conservative	.991 (.12–8.52)	.993	.536 (.40–.72)	.000
Moderate	.936 (.13–6.88)	.948	.703 (.59–.84)	.000
Activity Level				
Not at all active	.245 (.03–2.21)	.210	3.430 (2.43–4.84)	.000
Not too active	.134 (.02–1.09)	.061	2.459 (1.92–3.16)	.000
Somewhat active	.610 (.14–2.73)	.519	1.818 (1.55–2.14)	.000
Origin of gender differences				
Cultural	9.605 (1.28–71.90)	.028	1.522 (1.26–1.84)	.000
Doctrinal	.859 (.20–3.64)	.836	1.762 (1.29–2.41)	.000
Obedience and Revelation				
Obey counsel	1.129 (.31–4.12)	.854	.609 (.48–.77)	.000
Mormon network density	.963 (.94–.99)	.004	.998 (.99–1.00)	.080
Perceptions of inequality	15.083 (6.32–36.01)	.000	75.248 (66.06–85.72)	.000
Chi-square	193.032	.000	21461.692	.000
Cox and Snell pseudo $R^2$	.390		.473	
Nagelkerke pseudo $R^2$	.561		.610	
McFadden pseudo $R^2$	.416		.428	

<sup>a</sup>The comparison category for the dependent variable is “No”. The results for the “Other or Don’t Know” categories are available as an online supplement.

<sup>b</sup>Among the independent and demographic nominal and ordinal variables, the categories that are reflected in the intercept include: females, those 51 years old and older, those who have graduate degrees, those with more than \$75,001 in income per year, politically liberal individuals, those who are very active members of the religion, those who think the origin of gender differences is a mixture of culture and doctrine, and those who believe you should consider messages from the leaders of the religion before accepting them.

a college degree, and those who are less than “very active” were less likely to be supportive. Respondents who emphasised obedience were more supportive, as were those who perceived greater gender inequality. Similar to Sample 1, the pseudo  $R^2$  measures for the convenience sample indicate that the variables in the model account for a relatively small amount of the variation in the dependent variable, between 7% and 13%.

## Discussion

We tested several hypotheses related to support for female ordination in the LDS Church. When asked whether they would support a decision by church leaders to allow female ordination,

Table 3. Multinomial logistic regression of Mormon polity ordination question in Samples 1 and 2.

Variables	Sample 1		Sample 2	
	OR (CI 95%)	<i>P</i>	OR (CI 95%)	<i>p</i>
Gender				
Males <sup>b</sup>	.949 (.468–1.925)	.886	1.793 (1.608–1.998)	.000
Age				
18–30	.468 (.191–1.147)	.097	.731 (.630–.848)	.000
31–50	.613 (.275–1.368)	.232	.826 (.717–.952)	.008
Education				
High school or less	.659 (.172–2.516)	.541	.633 (.497–.806)	.000
Some college	.811 (.297–2.212)	.683	.798 (.695–.915)	.001
College graduate	1.632 (.596–4.466)	.340	.943 (.831–1.071)	.368
Income				
\$25,000 or less	1.034 (.347–3.081)	.952	1.028 (.891–1.185)	.709
\$25,001–75,000	1.089 (.473–2.505)	.841	1.017 (.923–1.120)	.738
Political views				
Conservative	.877 (.166–4.631)	.877	.890 (.691–1.145)	.364
Moderate	1.129 (.216–5.909)	.866	.900 (.706–1.147)	.394
Activity Level				
Not at all active	.184 (.042–.813)	.026	.204 (.153–.273)	.000
Not too active	.261 (.083–.825)	.022	.304 (.244–.378)	.000
Somewhat active	.577 (.219–1.523)	.267	.432 (.382–.488)	.000
Origin of gender differences				
Cultural	1.473 (.167–13.023)	.727	.755 (.607–.938)	.011
Doctrinal	.892 (.454–1.752)	.739	1.035 (.939–1.141)	.487
Obedience and Revelation				
Obey without knowing why	.857 (.437–1.683)	.655	1.314 (1.200–1.439)	.000
Mormon network density	1.000 (.986–1.014)	.989	1.000 (.998–1.002)	.991
Perceptions of inequality	2.304 (1.387–3.829)	.001	3.692 (3.398–4.012)	.000
Chi-square	63.341	.003	3149.422	.000
Cox and Snell pseudo $R^2$	.162		.100	
Nagelkerke pseudo $R^2$	.198		.134	
McFadden pseudo $R^2$	.104		.077	

<sup>a</sup>The comparison category for the dependent variable is “Opposed or Strongly Opposed”.

<sup>b</sup>Among the independent and demographic nominal and ordinal variables, the categories that are reflected in the intercept include: females, those 51 years old and older, those who have graduate degrees, those with more than \$75,001 in income per year, politically liberal individuals, those who are very active members of the religion, those who think the origin of gender differences is a mixture of culture and doctrine, and those who believe you should consider messages from the leaders of the religion before accepting them.

roughly two-thirds of Mormons indicated that they would be supportive or strongly supportive. However, when asked in a way less reflective of how change takes place in the LDS Church, between 8% and 12% of Mormons supported female ordination – a result similar to those of other surveys. Together, these results strongly support our first hypothesis about the importance of considering polity when examining change in religious organisations. Among our respondents, very active Mormons and Mormons who perceive gender inequality in the Church both indicated that they would be more likely to support a decision allowing women to be ordained. This is notable given that more active Mormons are *less* likely to support the ordination of women when asked from a neutral polity standpoint. While this may seem contradictory, it is reasonable to expect very active church members to both strongly support a current policy as well as strongly

support a new policy put into place by church leaders. While highly active Mormons and those who perceive gender inequality likely approach the issue of ordaining women from different viewpoints, the implication is clear: if the leadership of the LDS Church announced that they had received a revelation allowing women to receive the priesthood, a majority of members would support the decision.

We found that LDS women were generally more opposed than men to female ordination, particularly in Sample 2. Furthermore, for both ordination questions, active LDS women were significantly more likely to oppose the ordination of women. This is consistent with research suggesting that women in conservative religions tend to oppose concrete equality in practice, but accept notions of equality when couched in a conservative framework (Manning, 1999). It is also consistent with research predicting higher levels of benevolent sexism among women in patriarchal organisations (Glick & Fiske, 2001; Jost & Hunyady, 2002).

We found partial support for our fourth hypothesis that politically conservative members would be more opposed to female ordination. Political orientation mattered, but only on the neutral polity question (see Table 2). If conservative members of the LDS Church behave in a manner similar to that of very active members of the religion, they are more likely to oppose the ordination of women, unless that decision comes from the top-down, in which case they are likely to support it. We found strong support for our fifth hypothesis that perceptions of inequality would predict attitudes towards female ordination. It was by far the most consistent predictor of support for ordination, regardless of polity or sample. This is notable given the importance of perceptions in the reproduction or challenging of inequalities (Collins, 1990; Schrock et al., 2014; Schwalbe et al., 2000). Similar to the way that color-blindness reproduces racial inequalities (see Bonilla-Silva, 2013; Collins, 2005), people who remain unaware of gender inequality in religious settings will have difficulty supporting changes that seek to end such inequality (see Bush, 2010). Thus, for supporters of women's ordination, it may be important to teach Mormons to recognise gender inequalities within their Church in much the same way minority groups spend much of their time educating members of dominant groups (Collins, 1990).

Perceiving inequality in Mormonism could have consequences for mental health and well-being, given the connection between perceived discrimination and health (Pascoe & Richman, 2009; Pavalko, Mossakowski, & Hamilton, 2003). Ethnographic studies of conservative religious traditions point to ways in which women find satisfaction and empowerment in clearly defined gender roles (Brasher, 1998; Manning, 1999). Other research, however, highlights the experience of alienation and discontent experienced by women in conservative religious settings (Bednarowski, 1999) and the potential negative implications for mental health (Bridges & Spilka, 1992). The relationship between gender, religion, and mental health is complex. Scholars have suggested that gender differences in health benefits from religious participation could stem from gender inequities in religious settings (Krause, Ellison, & Marcum, 2002) or the possibility that discontented women, particularly in more distinctive religions, are less likely than men to switch out (Maselko & Kubzansky, 2006). Future research should examine the physical and mental health consequences for women, LDS or otherwise, who perceive gender inequities in their religious traditions.

### **Limitations**

Assessing the representativeness of these data is difficult, in part because the LDS Church does not publish data on its members that would facilitate comparisons. We intended Sample 1 to be a random sample of Mormons, and it aligned with Pew's sample in many ways (Pew Forum, 2012). Where our data do not align with Pew, we have reason to believe that our data are still quite useful

because they align nicely with other data sets (e.g., Phillips et al., 2011). Despite using two different sampling methods, we recognise that the data for this study are a limitation.

## Conclusion

Prior research (Chaves, 1997) has established the importance of institutional and social factors in changing ordination policies to allow greater gender equity (see also Bush, 2010). We extend that research by illustrating that a key factor predicting support for changing policies related to women's ordination is recognising inequality. So long as members of Christian traditions that forbid the ordination of women believe that male and female gender roles are equal but different, it is unlikely that religious leaders will change their policies. Leaders in many conservative Christian religions have adjusted their rhetoric on gender issues in light of shifting social mores (Bartkowski, 2001; but see also Messner, 1997, for limitations of such adjustments). This has resulted in the creation of terms such as "soft patriarchy" or "soft power" (Wilcox, 2004), both of which are misleading labels that mask the reality of gender inequality in much the same way terms such as "colorblind", "post feminist", or "religious freedom" mask ongoing social inequalities that continue to subordinate women, racial minorities, and sexual minorities throughout contemporary American society (see, e.g., Bonilla-Silva, 2013; Collins, 1990; Schrock et al., 2014).

Our findings also reveal the importance of considering polity among the factors that contribute to institutional change, as other research has noted (Chaves, 1997). While only a minority of Mormons support the ordination of women when asked from a neutral polity standpoint, a strong majority would be supportive of such a change if it were announced by church leaders. Future research could extend our findings by examining views of female ordination in other religious groups.

Finally, our findings suggest that increased perceptions of gender inequality may lead to greater support for female ordination in conservative Christian traditions (see Collins, 1990). Without such awareness, individuals are unlikely to agitate for such changes and may even be motivated to maintain the status quo (Jost & Hunyady, 2002). While most members of conservative religions appear to view gender inequality as natural or desirable (Chaves, 1997; Cragun & Nielsen, 2009), our findings suggest that there may be broad support for women's ordination if this change were to be promoted by religious leaders.

## Supplemental material

Supplemental material for this article can be accessed here: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13674676.2015.1126703>.

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