"It's Like Being Pulled in Two Directions": Experiences of Transgender Latter-day Saints

Morgan Monet
Brigham Young University

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/etd

Part of the Family, Life Course, and Society Commons

BYU ScholarsArchive Citation
Monet, Morgan, "'It's Like Being Pulled in Two Directions': Experiences of Transgender Latter-day Saints" (2021). Theses and Dissertations. 9148.
https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/etd/9148

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by BYU ScholarsArchive. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of BYU ScholarsArchive. For more information, please contact ellen_amatangelo@byu.edu.
“It’s Like Being Pulled in Two Directions”:

Experiences of Transgender Latter-day Saints

Morgan Monet

A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Science

Quintin Hunt, Chair
Alyssa Banford Witting
Ashley Larsen Gibby
Kayla Mennenga

School of Family Life
Brigham Young University

Copyright © 2021 Morgan Monet
All Rights Reserved
ABSTRACT

“It’s Like Being Pulled in Two Directions”:
Experiences of Transgender
Latter-day Saints

Morgan Monet
School of Family Life, Brigham Young University
Master of Science

This study qualitatively examined the experiences of transgender individuals who also identify as active members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (N=10). Researchers took an interpretive phenomenological approach to elicit factors which allow trans Latter-day Saints to hold their apparently conflicting religious and gender identities simultaneously (and the consequences of doing so). Overall, we aimed to answer the broad question, “what is it like to be transgender and a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints?” Following a process of semi-structured interviews, transcription, and coding, the broad categories which seemed to connect many elements of the trans/Latter-day Saint experience were 1) a sense of being pulled in two directions, 2) experiences of sacrifice, and 3) experiences of loss and rejection. Findings suggest that sacrifices of authenticity, gender expression, and well-being were made because of a desire to: a) be accepted within the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, b) promote change within the Church, c) maintain family relationships, d) live congruently with one’s personal interpretation of doctrine, and/or e) follow personal guidance from God. Results also suggest that most experiences of loss and rejection for trans Latter-day Saints centered around their church communities and local leadership, the Church as an institution, and family members.

Keywords: transgender, non-binary, LGBTQIA+, religiosity, Latter-day Saints, Christianity, identity, family, community, minority stress, mental health
# Table of Contents

Title Page ......................................................................................................................................... i

ABSTRACT ....................................................................................................................................... ii

Table of Contents ........................................................................................................................... iii

“It’s Like Being Pulled in Two Directions”: Experiences of Transgender Latter-day Saints ....... 1

Literature Review ............................................................................................................................. 6

  Minority Stress ............................................................................................................................ 6

  Mental Health ............................................................................................................................ 8

    Suicidality ........................................................................................................................... 8

  Religion ..................................................................................................................................... 9

  Identity Conflict ......................................................................................................................... 11

  Family Relationships ............................................................................................................... 12

  The Current Study .................................................................................................................... 13

Methods ......................................................................................................................................... 14

  Participants .............................................................................................................................. 14

  Semi-Structured Interviews ................................................................................................... 14

  Data Analysis .......................................................................................................................... 15

  Trustworthiness ....................................................................................................................... 15

  Researcher Reflexivity ............................................................................................................ 16

Results ........................................................................................................................................... 16

  A Sense of Being Pulled in Two Directions ........................................................................... 17

  Sacrifices Made ....................................................................................................................... 18
“It’s Like Being Pulled in Two Directions”:

Experiences of Transgender

Latter-day Saints

Depression, discrimination, family cut-off, harassment, rejection, self-harm, and suicide: transgender folks are exceedingly likely to face these painful and destructive experiences when compared to the rest of the population. Trans people are at an increased risk of suicide (Marshall et al., 2016), are more likely to experience stressors related to discrimination and family rejection (Testa et al., 2015), and are at a high risk of experiencing mental health concerns such as depression and self-harm (Marshall et al., 2016). On the other hand, trans folks become remarkably resilient in the face of these challenges, and they develop resilience strategies like drawing on positive beliefs about themselves, connecting with their support systems, and cultivating hope for the future (Singh et al., 2011).

One of the most destructive and impactful of trans folks’ vulnerabilities is their high likelihood of suicidal ideation and behaviors. In one sample of trans adolescents, the rate of past-year suicide ideation was 83.7% (Kuper et al., 2018). In another sample, 45.8% of trans participants reported a history of suicide attempts and 79.2% reported a history of seriously considering killing themselves (Testa et al., 2017). Based on these and other statistics demonstrating the grave risk of suicide trans people face, further research is necessary and would allow us to better understand what is causing harm, what trans people need, and what might be helpful in decreasing these risks. We know that trans folks are facing serious, detrimental outcomes, and we need to do what we can to better understand and prevent those outcomes.

Transgender individuals include those whose current gender identity differs from the sex they were assigned at birth (CDC, 2019), and trans folks and other gender minorities (see
Appendix A for other definitions) are also susceptible to experiencing minority stress, a term which, for trans folks, refers to adverse experiences and life events related to gender identity and expression which may lead to psychological problems (Hendricks & Testa, 2012). Minority stress describes the impact of being subjected to gender-related discrimination, rejection, violence, victimization, and internalized transphobia at extremely high rates (Testa et al., 2015). When looking at minority stress in the context of gendered restrooms, researchers found that 70% of trans participants had been denied access, verbally harassed, or physically assaulted in public restrooms; these experiences, understandably, had adverse effects on participants’ education, careers, and health (Herman, 2013).

Trans people are often at higher risk for outcomes which are some of the most detrimental (e.g. suicide, depression, harassment, and discrimination), and this, in and of itself, points to a need for increased acknowledgment and discussion of trans experiences. Further, the addition of certain factors – like religion – may exacerbate the difficulties that trans individuals already face. The likelihood of minority stress is heightened in religious contexts, and some research suggests that individuals affiliated with traditional, conservative religious organizations are at greater risk for stigma-related stress and internalized stigma (Herek et al., 2009). Sexual and gender minorities affiliated with Christian religions also frequently report feelings of inadequacy, religious-related guilt, social strain, and depressive symptoms related to their religiosity (Dahl & Galliher, 2012). Overall, feelings of shame, guilt, and not being good enough seem to be themes for trans people, especially when they are involved in religion.

Religion and Christianity have already been shown to add difficulties for trans folks generally (Herek et al., 2009; Dahl & Galliher, 2012), but certain religious beliefs and practices may be particularly difficult to reconcile. For the purposes of our study, we will be focusing on
the experiences of trans folks within the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Within the Church, there are distinctive complex challenges that trans individuals may experience. For example, trans folks are likely to be impacted by the Church’s unique conceptualization of gender; in “the Proclamation to the World on the Family” it states that “gender is an essential characteristic of eternal identity and purpose” and teaches that family creation through marriage between a man and a woman is essential to God’s plan (Hinckley, 1995). The Church’s emphasis on gender and its role in eternal happiness and salvation begs the question, how and where do trans folks fit in?

Historically, specific guidance from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints about transgender issues has been minimal, and the statements that have come from the leadership about gender were flexible enough to be interpreted in multiple and personal ways. For example, some Latter-day Saints believe that people’s felt/identified genders match the genders of their spirits even if their identified genders do not align with their biological sex (Fletcher Stack, 2015). This belief has allowed trans members of the Church of Jesus Christ to acknowledge the eternal nature of gender while feeling affirmed in their gender identity.

However, the Church’s stance on transness was clarified when a new handbook outlining official policies and guidelines was released; in a section titled “policies on moral issues,” leadership introduced a more solidified narrative of how they view transgender individuals (General Handbook, 2020). The policy states, “gender is an essential characteristic of Heavenly Father’s plan of happiness. The intended meaning of gender in the family proclamation is biological sex at birth” (General Handbook, 2020). Essentially, this clarification takes away some of the previous doctrinal ambiguity and may conflict with some people’s belief that the gender of a person’s spirit can be different from their biological sex.
The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints also discourages trans folks from transitioning, and warns that church membership privileges are restricted for trans members who choose to transition socially or surgically:

Church leaders counsel against elective medical or surgical intervention for the purpose of attempting to transition to the opposite gender of a person’s biological sex at birth… taking these actions will be cause for Church membership restrictions. Leaders also counsel against social transitioning… this includes changing dress or grooming, or changing a name or pronouns, to present oneself as other than his or her biological sex at birth… Those who socially transition will experience some Church membership restrictions for the duration of this transition. (General Handbook, 2020)

Membership restrictions for trans Latter-day Saints who transition include, first, the inability to receive the priesthood. Within the Church of Jesus Christ, *priesthood* refers to the authority to act in God's name and the right and responsibility to preside within the Church organization; it is also a term that refers to the men of the Church in general (BYU, 2011). Trans folks who have transitioned from female to male are unable to hold the priesthood under the Church’s policy because they were not assigned male at birth (General Handbook, 2020).

Another membership restriction for those considering or undergoing social or medical transition is the inability to enter the Church’s temples (General Handbook, 2020), which are considered sacred buildings where Latter-day Saints perform ceremonies and ordinances (BYU, 2011). Additionally, membership restrictions may include limitations on which church callings can be held (General Handbook, 2020). This means that certain offices, roles, or assignments within the Church (BYU, 2011) may be withheld from trans folks.
These specific doctrines and policies likely make it difficult for trans folks to feel a sense of belonging and worthiness within the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. In combination with the vulnerabilities that being trans and/or religious can create generally, these factors serve as evidence that more research which involves gender minorities who are influenced by the Church’s culture and doctrine is imperative.

Within the existing literature involving LGBTQIA+ Latter-day Saint issues, most focus on sexual minorities rather than gender minorities, and studies tend to focus more broadly on religion or Christianity, with little looking specifically at the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. This is problematic because the Church has unique and specific policies about trans folks (General Handbook, 2020) and emphasizes the significance of gender more heavily than many other Christian religions. This gap in the literature means that family members of trans Latter-day Saints, Church leaders, and other members of the Latter-day Saint community may lack understanding and not know how to help or be supportive towards trans folks. Instead, family responses are often rejecting and disapproving and trans Latter-day Saints may feel like they do not belong or like they must change to be accepted (Bradshaw et al., 2015b). Building on the existing literature with data about what it is like to be trans in a conservative religion that explicitly condemns gender transitioning will shed light on factors that keep folks religiously involved and factors that may help or hurt them in that experience.

It is important to note that many queer folks report experiencing increases in well-being when they leave or distance themselves from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Dehlin et al., 2015). When examining the navigation of sexual and religious identity conflict for Latter-day Saints, Dehlin et al. found that those who rejected their religious identity reported significantly higher psychosocial functioning and quality of life scores than those who rejected
their sexual identity or tried to compartmentalize their identities (2015). For these reasons, leaving or distancing from the Church may seem like the clear or easy option. However, many LGBTQIA+ individuals choose to remain members of the Church, and we want to understand what it is like for trans folks who do try to maintain both identities.

For the current paper, we are examining the experiences of transgender folks who consider themselves active in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, meaning they attend church meetings regularly and/or observe the principles set forth by the Church (BYU, 2011). We hope to elicit factors which have allowed trans Latter-day Saints to hold both their religious and gender identities simultaneously, and the potential consequences of doing so. There is a general lack of information about these experiences, and our study will aim to address this gap by asking the question, “what is it like to be transgender and a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints?” We hope, through our research, to give voice to trans Latter-day Saint experiences, to give ecclesiastical leaders, Church members, family members, and clinicians the opportunity to increase in their knowledge and understanding, and to promote the support, health, and well-being of transgender Latter-day Saints.

**Literature Review**

**Minority Stress**

Transgender and other gender minority individuals are at an increased risk of experiencing minority stress, which encompasses the external events that occur in an individual’s environment because of someone(s) else’s knowledge or perception of their gender minority status (Hendricks & Testa, 2012). Specific minority stressors that are commonly experienced by trans folks include internalized transphobia, negative expectations or fear of future experiences
involving victimization and rejection, and identity concealment or non-disclosure (Testa et al., 2015).

Trans people often report *expecting* social rejection (Rood et al., 2016). In a qualitative study about minority stress in transgender individuals, researchers found that participants expected to be rejected any time they left the house and went in public, when they had to interact in situations that would highlight their gender identity, and when they were around people who knew them before their gender transition; these concerns were found to be associated with participants’ feelings of anxiety, stress, and fear for their personal safety (Rood et al., 2016). The participants reported that this internal stress is physically and mentally taxing and that it is associated with feelings of self-loathing and anger (Rood et al., 2016).

Transgender people also experience high rates of discrimination and physical threat or harm. An overwhelming majority (92%) of trans males and 79% of trans females report having been discriminated against because of their gender identity, and 37% of trans males and 33% of trans females report having been physically threatened or harmed because of their gender identity (Price-Feeney et al., 2020). Not passing or blending as one’s identified gender puts people at an increased risk for fear about their personal safety, and trans and gender non-conforming individuals feel the need to conceal their assigned birth sex as much as possible so that they can feel safer in social contexts (Rood et al., 2017). These elements of minority stress and their consequences on trans individuals are important to note because they highlight the difficulty of constantly fearing being rejected or hurt because of others’ perceptions of their gender.
Mental Health

In part due to this minority stress, mental health struggles are particularly prevalent for transgender individuals. The rates of depressive symptoms and anxiety far surpass the rates of those for the general population; 51.4% of trans women and 48.3% of trans men report depressive symptoms, and 40.4% of trans women and 47.5% of trans men report anxiety (Budge et al., 2013). In a sample of 25,396 youth, 83% of transgender and nonbinary participants reported significantly higher rates of depressive mood than their cisgender counterparts (Price-Feeney et al., 2020). When researchers adjusted for demographic variables such as age, family income, and race/ethnicity, trans and nonbinary youth were found to be twice as likely to report depressive mood and seriously considering suicide (Price-Feeney et al., 2020).

Trans and gender nonconforming youth also report other substantial mental health concerns: in one sample, 49% reported lifetime self-harm (with 17% having been diagnosed with a self-injury disorder), 61% had depressive symptom scores which were clinically significant (with 40% having been diagnosed with depression), 48% had an anxiety disorder diagnosis, and 24% reported having a suicide plan (Katz-Wise et al., 2018). These statistics are staggering and illustrate some of the mental health risks that trans folks are susceptible to.

Suicidality

High rates of suicidal ideation and behaviors in trans individuals further demonstrate the importance of studying trans Latter-day Saint experiences. Using a large online sample of trans and gender non-conforming youth and young adults, researchers explored suicide ideation and risk. Astoundingly, nearly all of the participants in the sample reported life-time suicidal ideation (95.5%), and 32.3% reported suicide attempts at some point during their lives (Kuper et al.,
When it comes to trans youth, other research suggests that 54% have seriously considered suicide and 29% have attempted suicide (Price-Feeney et al., 2020).

Trans folks may be more or less likely to experience suicidality depending on certain factors. For example, in a study which qualitatively examined the experiences of 90 transgender youth, researchers found that belongingness and thwarted belongingness were two of four main themes related to suicide (Hunt et al., 2020). Participants described caring relationships (belonginess) as sources of support against suicide, and conversely, described feelings of rejection, isolation, and disconnection (thwarted belongingness) as deeply distressing and related to suicidality (Hunt et al., 2020). Minority stress factors such as harassment, threats, violence, rejection, and lack of support from friends and family are variables that also exacerbate suicidality and increase the likelihood of suicide attempts (Kuper et al., 2018).

Religion

Religious values and beliefs seem to play an important role in the way sexual and gender minorities view themselves and the extent to which they experience different elements of stigma-related stress. For example, for gay people in the Latter-day Saint community, their sexuality is often referred to as “same-sex attraction” and viewed as a temptation or an experience to struggle with rather than an essential aspect of identity (Crowell et al., 2015).

While some studies have found religious affiliation in general among sexual and gender minorities to be a significant predictor of happiness (Barringer & Gay, 2017), the difficulties that LGBTQIA+ folks tend to experience in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints have also been considered. In one study, non-heterosexual people who reported being active in the Church scored higher on depression, need for acceptance, need for privacy, internalized homophobia, and identity confusion than those who reported inactive or unaffiliated status; active Latter-day
Saint participants also reported greater difficulty coming to terms with and disclosing their identity (Crowell et al., 2015).

The complexity of how religion may influence LGBTQIA+ individuals has been addressed by researchers looking at the relationship between religious affiliation and transgender/gender non-conforming individuals’ mental health (Lefevor et al., 2019). They hypothesized that religious affiliation may function as an avenue for social and family support, providing a buffer against distress, or that it may conflict with trans folks’ gender identity, “contributing to feelings of isolation and exposure to non-affirming behavior” (Lefevor et al., 2019, p. 40–41). Despite the finding that religiously affiliated cisgender individuals were less psychologically distressed than religiously unaffiliated individuals, for transgender/gender non-conforming individuals who continued to claim religious affiliation, religiosity did not buffer the effects of psychological distress (Lefevor et al., 2019). In other words, religion may serve as a mental health buffer for cisgender people but not for trans folks, perhaps because being cis allows a person to more easily fit the expectations of and feel worthy within some religions.

Interestingly, though, in another study, how some stigma-related stressors linked to depression varied depending on participants’ level of affiliation with the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints; for example, internalized homophobia was more likely to predict depression for individuals who reported being less affiliated with the Church (Crowell et al., 2015). This finding begs the question of whether remaining active in the Church may actually serve as a protective factor against depression. The seeming lack of clarity found within the research illustrates the need to understand trans folks’ individual experiences. In doing so, we can identify factors and variables which may lead to more hopeful or ideal outcomes for those trans folks who want to stay in their religious contexts.
Identity Conflict

Individuals who consider themselves both transgender and members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints share the unique challenge of having to reconcile conflicts between what are often prominent, self-defining aspects of identity: religion and gender. The policies of the Church paint gender transitioning as unacceptable in that people are not considered worthy of participating fully in church if they choose to transition (General Handbook, 2020). The belief that gender transitioning is wrong or intolerable puts many trans Latter-day Saints’ gender expression and identity at odds with access to the benefits of full membership in the Church of Jesus Christ.

This sense of competing identities may manifest as a level of cognitive dissonance which, for sexual minorities, is often handled by altering or rejecting one of the identities in order to preserve another; this may look like denying, concealing, avoiding, or trying to “pray away” their perceived non-normative identity (Moss, 2012). Research suggests, though, that for lesbian, gay, and bisexual Latter-day Saints, rejection of sexual identity is difficult to sustain and leads to negative psychosocial outcomes. Interestingly, only 4.4% of participants in one sample felt able to integrate their sexual and religious identities, but these individuals had better outcomes such as lower depression levels, higher levels of quality of life, and higher levels of social support than those who cut off one identity (Dehlin et al., 2015). These results make it seem as if identity integration is rare and even difficult to achieve, but if it leads to the best outcomes, we believe it is important to understand what identity integration actually looks like, how people are able to accomplish it, and what they need to do in order to hold seemingly competing identities.

Many sexual and gender minorities in the Church of Jesus Christ may feel the need to change or suppress who they inherently are. Research suggests that heterosexist norms and
values within the Church’s culture may lead to poorer self-appraisals and increased preoccupation with one’s “sin” (Dahl & Galliher, 2010). Researchers have also found that “reversing a nonheterosexual orientation is likely a major emphasis for those who experience same-sex attraction in the [Latter-day Saint] community” (Bradshaw et al., 2015a, p. 406). Among Latter-day Saint folks who had gone through change-oriented therapy, 42% reported that it was “not at all effective” and 37% described it as moderately or severely harmful; participants reported being more satisfied with counseling approaches that emphasized acceptance or accommodation (Bradshaw et al., 2015a).

**Family Relationships**

For the current study, we are also interested in family relationships and how they influence the trans/Latter-day Saint experience. Current research shows the significance of family acceptance and connection in achieving optimal outcomes for trans individuals; when looking at trans and gender diverse youth, “feeling more connected to parents was related to significantly lower emotional distress and substance use” (Gower et al., 2018, p. 789). Katz-Wise and colleagues found that when trans and gender non-conforming youth felt that family communication was better, it was associated with less self-harm, fewer depressive and anxious symptoms, and greater self-esteem and resiliency (Katz-Wise et al., 2018).

Additionally, sibling acceptance, independent of caregiver acceptance or rejection, is associated with positive mental health outcomes in transgender youth, and caregiver indifference, not just hostility or rejection, increases transgender youth’s depressive and anxiety symptoms (Pariseau et al., 2019). This is meaningful because it is important to note how trans folks may be helped by feeling accepted by siblings and family members. We wonder if it may
be especially difficult for trans Latter-day Saints to feel like they can or will be accepted by their families because of the nature of their religious beliefs.

The Current Study

The present study was designed with qualitative research methods to explore the lived experience of trans folks in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints while acknowledging and considering the factors we’ve discussed as salient to the trans/Latter-day Saint experience (e.g. minority stress, mental health, religion, identity conflict, and family relationships). When it comes to these and other variables within the trans/Latter-day Saint experience, there are many things we wanted to know more about specifically, but we largely wanted to give participants the space to share the things they felt were most important and relevant; being that the nature of the current study was qualitative and exploratory, there was no formal hypothesis. Our research was designed to provide descriptions of the unique experiences of trans Latter-day Saints by addressing the broad question: What is it like to be transgender and a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints?

Along with descriptions of what it feels like generally, we also hope to gain more information about 1) trans Latter-day Saints’ perceptions of acceptance and rejection from others within the Church (including family members, leaders, and other Latter-day Saints) and the influence that has on their ability to be trans and active in the Church. We also want to better understand 2) how people manage to hold identities that are in apparent conflict with each other and 3) how it influences folks to maintain their religious identity in the Church while identifying as transgender.
Methods

Participants

The Institutional Review Board at Brigham Young University approved this study and semi-structured interview procedures prior to data collection. The sample for this study was taken from a larger study about transgender people involved in the Church of Jesus Christ, which also included trans folks who have left the Church and family members of trans participants (N=67). The sample used for this paper included 10 transgender Latter-day Saints between the ages of 20 and 64 ($M=39.4$, $SD=14.01$).

Participants were recruited for the study through posts on social media platforms (Twitter, Facebook, and Reddit), through flyers posted at Encircle (an LGBTQIA+ family and youth resource center located in the same community as the researchers’ university), and snowball sampling. Criteria for inclusion in the present analysis were 1) self-identification as transgender and 2) self-identification as an active member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (this usually meant that the participants attended Church meetings regularly and/or observed the principles set forth by the Church (BYU, 2011)). Within our subsample, four participants were transwomen, three were transmen, and one identified as non-binary. Two of the participants identified as transgender but had chosen not to transition (they were assigned male at birth and continued to socially identify as male). See Table 2 (Appendix B) for participant demographics.

Semi-Structured Interviews

Data was collected through semi-structured interviews (see Appendix C) and demographic questionnaires (see Appendix D). Dr. Quintin Hunt was the primary interviewer and was assisted by five students (three graduate students [including the author on this paper]
and two undergraduate students). Some interviews took place in-person and others via video (Zoom). Interviews lasted for an average of 86 minutes, with interview times ranging from 45 to 147 minutes. Participants were compensated with 25-dollar Amazon.com gift cards. All interviews were audio recorded with a digital recording device and digital audio files were stored on a confidential Box folder.

Semi-structured interview questions for trans participants are listed in Appendix C. These questions include: What is it like to be transgender and a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints? Which aspects of being trans and a member of the Church are most difficult? Are there any specific moments which have been helpful in your process? Have there been times when you have felt the need to choose between your gender identity and your faith? How does the Church’s doctrine about the eternal nature of gender fit with or impact you?

Data Analysis

In order to elicit a new understanding of the phenomenon of being trans and a member of the Church of Jesus Christ, we adopted an interpretive phenomenological approach (van Manen, 1990). Audio recordings of interviews were transcribed by several members of the research team using Express Scribe software, then researchers analyzed the interviews’ contents and coded them for recurring ideas and themes. Coding was done using pen and paper and NVivo software.

Trustworthiness

Several members of the research team (the author on this paper and two other graduate research assistants) individually open coded the first five interviews, then came together to consolidate themes. The researchers met with each other and were advised by Dr. Quintin Hunt consistently throughout the coding process to ensure that the codes were accurately describing participant experiences and that all relevant data was represented in the codes. In cases where
research team members did not agree, we consulted as a larger group until the team came to an overall agreement.

According to Fusch and Ness (2015), data saturation is reached when there is enough information to replicate the study, when new data can still be attained, and when further coding with the current data is no longer feasible. Based on this definition, data saturation in the current study has been reached because there is sufficient information to continue or replicate this study, we have access to more participants and data (we continue to have interest from new potential participants), and further coding is not currently feasible.

**Researcher Reflexivity**

Recognizing the researcher’s biases and views is an important aspect of trustworthiness in qualitative research, and due to the qualitative nature of this study, the author’s lens should be acknowledged. I am a bisexual white cisgender woman and was raised in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The Church and its culture remain significant aspects of my life, but the focus of this study is personal to me because I know firsthand that it can be difficult to try to hold conflicting identities within the Church. In my case, I have felt unable to integrate my identities as a Latter-day Saint and LGBTQIA+ ally/community member, and have felt compelled to let go of my religious identity. This personal experience introduces a level of bias into the study. However, the research team consisted of individuals of varying levels of belief in and affiliation with the Church, and our variety of perspectives and backgrounds, we believe, enabled us to agree on codes and meaning more objectively.

**Results**

Open coding was done by three research team members using the first five interviews; this process resulted in over 200 unique codes. The research team reduced this to 25 codes, then
re-coded the first five interviews. After this, the researchers developed a coding frame which included three main themes and 11 subthemes. Two members of the research team then analyzed and coded all ten interviews in the current sample using this coding frame. The broad categories which seemed to connect many elements of the trans/Latter-day Saint experience were 1) a sense of being pulled in two directions, 2) experiences of sacrifice, and 3) experiences of loss and rejection. Within experiences of sacrifice, we will describe what sacrifices are being made (authenticity, gender expression, and well-being), and reasons for the sacrifices (desire for acceptance within the Church, desire to promote change within the Church, maintaining family relationships, living congruently with one’s personal interpretation of doctrine, and personal revelation). Within experiences of loss and rejection, we will discuss trans Latter-day Saints’ experiences with their church communities and local leadership, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints as an institution, and family members.

A Sense of Being Pulled in Two Directions

When asked to describe the experience of being transgender and a member of the Church, many of our participants described a feeling of being conflicted or being pulled in different directions. Participants described the experience as difficult, incongruent, as putting them “at odds,” and as “a constant battle.” A common theme was that trans and Latter-day Saint identities felt at war or in conflict with each other, and participants felt like it was difficult to have both without giving something up. One transgender male participant, who was assigned female at birth, described the experience of being pulled in two directions when he said,

If I continue living the way that the church says is okay and, you know, stay a girl and do all these things the way that I'm supposed to, I would just continue being super depressed and I wouldn’t have this fulfilling life. But if I were to transition and lose all these
blessings, that’s also something that is really hard. It’s like a lose/lose situation.

(Participant 20, age 23)

Most participants, when alluding to a sense of being pulled in two directions, in their own ways also described a process of choosing between sacrifice and rejection or loss; the only options participants seemed to have when “being pulled” towards the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints were to sacrifice something (like their authenticity, gender expression, or well-being) or lose something/be rejected in some way (e.g. by being restricted in church membership, feeling unaffirmed by family members, or feeling unwelcome in local church settings).

Conversely, when being pulled in the direction away from the Church, trans folks often have to sacrifice family relationships or their religious involvement in order to “fit in” with the LGBTQIA+/trans community outside of the Church. For the purposes of this paper, though, we are focusing on individuals who remain pulled toward and consider themselves active in the Church; we will outline the types of sacrifices that are made and some of the reasons those sacrifices are made. We will also describe experiences of rejection and loss in the Latter-day Saint context.

**Sacrifices Made**

Trans Latter-day Saint participants described sacrifices they had made, either advertently or inadvertently, to maintain their religious identity.

**Authenticity**

When participants described feeling compelled to hide certain aspects of themselves, we coded this as a sacrifice of authenticity; repression of oneself usually seemed to be for the sake of other aspects of identity (namely religious aspects). While sacrifice of authenticity does go hand in hand with a sacrifice of gender expression (see below), we believe it goes beyond this
when folks feel unable to show others who they truly are, or when they fear that people will see them as inherently unacceptable or unworthy. This experience was illustrated by one participant who was assigned male at birth and feels female but continues to socially identify as male. He described a sense of knowing who he was and where he fit in a group, but felt that he could not express who he really was to other Latter-day Saints:

There have been times when [my wife] will have other women over and they’re talking about makeup or something like that. You know, the guys are over here talking about the sports game, and I’m thinking “I know where I want to be,” but I can’t go over there.

*laughs* So, I had to go and pretend to be interested in football. (Participant 11, age 64)

There is also a sense of trans folks having to “be careful” of what they say and who they talk to, and some worry about what will happen if they are open about their gender identity.

**Gender Expression**

The participants in this sample all expressed some level hiding or suppressing their gender at some point; this was coded as a sacrifice of gender expression. Some people felt like they were giving up the relief from gender dysphoria (i.e., ‘I would feel better if I could express that I am a man, but I can’t’) by aligning with Church policy. Because the Church has discouraged against social and surgical transitioning (General Handbook, 2020), some trans Latter-day Saints have further limited their gender expression. Some participants stopped using their preferred pronouns and others talked about being reluctant to have gender affirming surgeries because of the Church’s stance on it. One participant, who was assigned male at birth and identifies as non-binary, described the discomfort of wearing gender disaffirming clothes to church:
I go to church and I wear a white shirt and tie and I teach [the men’s class], and I’m talking with these old men about fatherhood and stuff. *laughs* Like, I’m not a father, but there’s just a lot of male role stuff in the Church that I don’t feel connected to but [have to conform to]. (Participant 21, age 34)

*Well-Being*

Many participants seemed aware of certain emotional and psychological sacrifices they were making in order to maintain their trans and Latter-day Saint identities. Some seemed to accept that part of being trans and a member of the Church was being hurt; one participant, who had transitioned from male to female, believed that there was something to learn from the hurt they were facing as a result of holding both of these identities:

God doesn’t make mistakes, and I’m not a mistake… I think I needed to go through all that [pain] so I could learn, and that’s what we’re all here to do. (Participant 14, age 43)

Another participant, who was assigned female at birth and identifies as male, described what it has been like not to use their preferred name and pronouns since the Handbook change in 2020:

I’ve already known that I’m not going to transition, but not having the ability to use my preferred name [and pronouns] that helped me when I felt extremely dysphoric, I feel more depressed. I know that when I went by my preferred name, I felt better… and I just felt more comfortable. (Participant 13, age 20)

When people in our sample sacrificed their well-being, this was often accompanied by reports of depressive symptoms, a “lack of relief,” shame, and guilt. While participants tended to acknowledge that comfort can come from social transitioning and living more congruently with their gender, many have chosen to minimize their gender expression in some way, and thus sacrifice their well-being. Participants reported feeling more depressed and ashamed the more
they suppressed their gender, but many continue to do so especially in contexts involving the Church, which is why it is important to understand these experiences and the impact of sacrificing well-being.

**Reasons for Sacrifice**

Participants described the reasons for the sacrifices they made. These included a desire for acceptance within the Church, a desire to promote change within the Church, maintaining relationships with family, living congruently with personal interpretations of doctrine, and personal revelation from God encouraging them to make those sacrifices.

**Desire for Acceptance Within the Church**

Naturally, people want to feel like they belong in the groups they are part of. When trans Latter-day Saints choose to stay in the Church, it makes sense that they would hope to feel accepted and welcomed into it, but that is not always the case. Participants talked about sacrificing in order to feel more accepted/like they belong, increase their alignment with the Church and its doctrine, maintain relationships with church community members, and avoid having membership restrictions placed on them/be able to participate in rituals and community. One participant, a transgender male who was assigned female at birth, described his desire to function in a male role within the Church while expressing the importance of feeling welcomed there:

I have been so happy that I can go to church and attend the meetings. Obviously I am not doing Priesthood stuff because I do not have the Priesthood. But I don’t care about that, you know, it’s a compromise. I can’t ask for everything that all the cis men can do in the church… I would love to, but it’s okay if I don’t because the most important thing is to be able to feel loved. (Participant 19, age 39)
While in some ways this participant’s experience highlights a lack of belonging, it also illustrates how some participants have found peace being in the Church despite the sacrifices they might make to stay in it.

**Desire to Promote Change Within the Church**

Some participants shared a desire to improve the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints’ culture and level acceptance towards trans folks by staying in it. They reported feeling like they could do more good from the inside than outside, and there was a common sentiment of wanting to stay active to be a helpful, positive, or affirming influence. One transgender female participant, who was assigned male at birth, said:

> I can’t hide [my transness] and I don’t wanna hide it so I might as well just embrace it and educate people and be open, be one of the ones who’s there to help other people… that’s my role now, so here I am. I’m going to show up for church on Sunday… and I’m going to continue to try to be a better disciple and follow Christ’s example to love those who don’t understand or who reject me. (Participant 14, age 43)

**Maintaining Family Relationships**

Among the reasons for sacrifice that our participants shared, not wanting to be a burden on family members and wanting to maintain the status quo with spouses, kids, parents, and extended family were some of the most common sentiments. For some, when their family members’ beliefs aligned more with the teachings of the Church, they were more wary of how open they could be about their gender identity (and they sometimes felt like they had to sacrifice more in order to maintain these relationships). One transgender female participant, who was assigned male at birth, talked about sacrificing her trans identity to avoid losing her relationship with her spouse:
I didn’t feel comfortable calling myself trans because I didn’t really feel like my wife would be comfortable with that. I worry about that relationship breaking down. Obviously coming out, it’s been a real struggle on our relationship. It’s been very, very hard. I worry about, well, what’s gonna happen? Are we gonna be able to stick it through? (Participant 22, age 34)

**Living Congruently With One’s Personal Interpretation of Doctrine**

Some trans Latter-day Saints share the belief that gender dysphoria is just an earthly experience to be overcome and that their eternal gender actually aligns with the biological sex they were assigned at birth even when it doesn’t feel that way, and this seems to motivate some people not to transition. One participant, who was assigned female at birth and identifies as male, described a common Latter-day Saint belief about the nature of gender:

I know that everything will be sorted out, that it’s the times, that the gender dysphoria is just an earthly type of thing. My spirit could be female, it could not be, I don’t really know… but that will get sorted out, and I know that gender is in fact eternal, but I don’t believe my dysphoria will be. (Participant 13, age 20)

When participants expressed anything relating to the desire not to go to hell or about doing what would bring them the most blessings eternally, this was also coded as living congruently with one’s personal interpretation of doctrine. It seemed to be a common experience for trans Latter-day Saints to sacrifice some level of gender expression or to avoid transitioning in order to follow the Church’s guidelines about what will bring eternal happiness:

I think the hardest thing to balance is acknowledging the fact that as long as I live here on earth, I’ll never feel one hundred percent comfortable in my body, but also
acknowledging the fact that in the end I will be happier for not transitioning. I think keeping that mindset is probably the hardest thing. (Participant 13, age 20)

**Personal Revelation**

People’s connections to their faith, religious beliefs, and God have the potential to powerfully influence the way they choose to live. Some of our trans Latter-day Saint participants experienced feeling an impression from God that they should present themselves/their gender in a specific way. One participant was assigned male at birth, experiences gender dysphoria and self-identifies as transgender, but continues to socially identify as male; revelation which discouraged him from transitioning felt very positive because it aligned with his personal beliefs and interpretations of transness:

> I felt like God was talking to me through President Oaks. I felt this joy, I felt like, “here’s what I was seeking!” He reaffirmed things in a way that gave me a clear course.

( Participant 8, age 51)

For others, the decision to align with the Church’s teachings felt more like a sacrifice. In the case of one participant who was assigned male at birth but identified as female, their experience with sacrificing gender expression was difficult, but motivated by personal revelation from God:

> God basically asked me to put away any and all forms of expression, which were pretty minor. It was hard, it was a sacrifice, it was something God was putting me through. In one moment, he’s telling me live guilt free and shame free and the next moment, he’s telling me, “Okay, it’s time to put everything on the altar and walk away from it.” Sacrifice was something that God was asking… I have no idea why, but he wants me to stay in the Church. It would be so much easier to just walk away… but for whatever reason, his answer is to stay. (Participant 14, age 43)
Loss and Rejection

Participants described times they had lost something or faced rejection because of their choice to stay in the Church. Most often, these losses and experiences of rejection were related to their immediate church community and local leadership, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints as an institution, and Latter-day Saint family members.

Church Community and Local Leadership

While some participants shared experiences of being accepted and welcomed by their church community and local leadership, others felt rejected in their wards, which are the geographic units in the Church consisting of several hundred members (BYU, 2011). Some felt rejected by their bishops (the presiding authority over their ward) and stake presidents (the presiding authority over a group of wards), whether by threat of excommunication (a disciplinary action in which membership in the Church is withdrawn (BYU, 2011)) or by being limited in their participation in church. Several stated that although they believed logically that they were accepted in church, it didn’t always feel that way and for some, even when they felt welcomed on some level, their gender identity and expression was not. One trans male participant said:

I felt like I had to be honest with the leaders of the Church about what I felt. I knew that I could be excommunicated, and for a long time, I couldn’t partake of the Sacrament. That was very hard on me because I kept the laws and commandments, so it’s really hard when they tell you, “I don’t know about this situation, so don’t take the Sacrament for now…” the general feedback was, “let’s try and stop this and, um, yeah, don’t engage in these thoughts or activities again.” (Participant 19, age 39)
The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints as an Institution

In the Church’s official policy, it makes not transitioning synonymous with worthiness; this is inherently rejecting towards gender transitioning, and those who choose to transition socially and surgically are likely to feel less than or not good enough. This sentiment came up often in our interviews and was exemplified by one transgender male participant who was assigned female at birth. He reported feeling like he may never be fully accepted in the Church as a male without hiding his trans identity:

I don’t know if I will ever be a “proper” male in the church, so I don’t know if the Church will ever accept me after my surgeries and after I change my documents. I might go to a different ward and pretend completely that I’m a man, and if they ask for a certificate, they will see that I am a man, so I can get the Priesthood, you know? But I don’t think that would be the right way of doing things. (Participant 19, age 39)

When the new policy about trans individuals in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was released, the leadership clarified that in their perspective, gender refers to biological sex (General Handbook, 2020). This conflicted with some Latter-day Saints’ belief that gender, while eternal, is connected to a person’s spirit and not necessarily their body. One participant, who was assigned male at birth and felt female but had chosen not to transition, said:

The statement that gender is an eternal part of our being has been something that the trans community thinks is a great statement. It’s the part that says it’s immutable and strictly binary that’s the problem! I think that we just haven’t done our homework very well. I

---

1 “If these members are not attempting to transition to the opposite gender and are worthy, they may receive Church callings, temple recommends, and temple ordinances.” (General Handbook, 2020)
mean, the lived experience of trans people doesn’t match what that says. And it diminishes them if you insist that it has to be that way. (Participant 11, age 64)

**Family Members**

All participants expressed some level of disapproval or rejection from spouses, parents, kids, or extended family members regarding their gender identity. People expressed feeling that they were not who their loved ones wanted them to be, that they could not be and were not accepted for who they really were, and like it would be easier on their family members and on their relationships if they just suppressed their gender identity. This was illustrated by one trans male participant who was assigned female at birth. He shared hurtful statements made by his mother about his decision to transition:

> I knew exactly what would happen if I came out… I didn’t feel like anybody would accept me as I am because they had this vision of who I should be. My mom is constantly telling me how much she misses the person I used to be and how much I'm hurting her because I'm changing myself… She refuses to use he/him pronouns and she can’t accept the fact that this is good for me. The phrase she said yesterday was, “your life would have been so much easier if you just stayed a girl.” (Participant 20, age 23)

Lack of acceptance from family members was often indicated by negative messages about gender nonconformity (“[My siblings] would get on my case when I started growing my hair out”), limits on gender expression (“[My wife] was always there to say, ‘you’re going too far, let’s pull it back a little’”), conditional acceptance (“My wife was okay with me presenting certain days, like half of the time”) and perceived burdensomeness (“My mom told me, ‘If you want this relationship, if you love me, you wouldn’t do this. You would be the way that you were in the past’”).
Discussion

This qualitative study focused on building understanding of the experience of being transgender and a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Key takeaways of this study center around the finding that when trans Latter-day Saints are pulled towards the Church and choose to remain involved in it, they feel explicitly and/or implicitly compelled to sacrifice something (their authenticity, their gender expression, or their well-being). This may be in order to avoid loss or rejection (from the Church as an institution, their local church community, and/or family members), to maintain their status and relationships within the Church, because they feel directly called by God to sacrifice something, or because their involvement in the Church has provided them with a framework to view transness in a different way (i.e. gender dysphoria is an earthly test, not an eternal struggle, etc.).

The findings from this study are in line with previous research about religious people in the LGBTQIA+ community. We have already discussed some of the vulnerabilities that trans folks face generally and how being religiously involved can exacerbate those vulnerabilities; based on these existing findings, we wondered if participating in a religion that has unique doctrine rejecting gender transitioning (General Handbook, 2020) might make being trans and a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints especially difficult.

Existing literature shows that trans folks are likely to experience internalized transphobia, negative expectations or fear of future experiences involving victimization and rejection, and identity concealment or non-disclosure (Testa et al., 2015). Each of these ideas came up frequently in our interviews, with many participants feeling like they had to hide their identity to avoid rejection or fit with the Latter-day Saint community. Additionally, research shows that trans men and women are highly likely to experience depression (Budge et al., 2013), and while
we cannot diagnose the participants of this study, many depressive symptoms (especially shame, guilt, sadness, and low self-esteem) were discussed throughout the interviews, and were seen to be related to the sacrifices that trans folks had made.

Researchers have hypothesized that, for trans folks, religious affiliation may function as an avenue for social and family support and provide a buffer against distress or it may conflict with their identity, contributing to feelings of “isolation and exposure to non-affirming behavior” (Lefevor et al., 2019, p. 40). In the experiences of many of the participants of the current study, being an active member of the Church has done both of these things (provided an avenue of support and contributed to feelings of loss or rejection). Maybe it is because people experience both sides of this coin that it becomes so complicated to reconcile identities or give up activity in the Church.

Throughout this paper, we have emphasized the difficulties and sacrifices that are often related to being trans and a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. However, some of the lived experiences we have gathered suggest that involvement in the Church might also be quite helpful; folks seem to draw on their religious beliefs and activity to navigate the experience of being trans and a Latter-day Saint. Participants often described the comfort and peace that they found within the rituals and doctrines of the Church and from the words of Church leaders. Their personal convictions, connections with God, and sense of purpose and community within the Church compel them to stay in it, and these and other factors related to staying in the Church seem to, in some cases, help trans Latter-day Saints to cope with and understand their own gender identities.
Future Directions

More research geared specifically towards transgender Latter-day Saints and their families is necessary (and is being conducted). The concept of identity integration in the context of trans Latter-day Saints warrants further exploration. The data we gathered from our sample suggests that people do try to integrate their identities (this is exemplified by the fact that we have a sample of individuals who identify both as trans and as active members of the Church), but we wonder if it is possible for people who do this to be authentic to both aspects of their identity and to be mentally/emotionally well.

Clinical Implications

Clinicians who work with conservative religious populations should be aware of the complexities of being LGBTQIA+ and a Latter-day Saint. The findings from this study are valuable for professionals because we now have data to describe folks’ process of feeling pulled in two directions and the inevitability of pain, as well as having to choose between sacrifice and loss/rejection. This knowledge should matter to all therapists, regardless of their personal views about transness or about the Church of Jesus Christ, because it gives them an understanding of the way systems are working in their clients’ lives and may help to increase a therapist’s cultural competence.

Knowing that their clients may be struggling with the difficult choice between sacrificing part(s) of themselves or losing their relationship with the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and the people in it, therapists are better equipped to empathize with their clients, engender affirmation from clients’ family members, and guide and support folks in making changes that will be most fulfilling and happiness-bringing. The findings of this study also illustrate the importance of clinicians making themselves known as safe people who do not
require sacrifices of authenticity or expression from their trans clients, and who will be affirming and non-rejecting.

**Ecclesiastical Implications**

Our ultimate hope is for all trans folks to have better life experiences and to feel accepted for being who they are. Sadly, it seems that trans Latter-day Saints are a group that are especially likely not to feel accepted and not to feel like who they are is enough (e.g. they often feel rejected by the Church as an institution because, if they transition, they are not living up to what it wants them to be, and if they don’t, the trans community does not understand why they would want to remain involved in the Church). We have hope that by listening and truly hearing their voices, those who interact with trans Latter-day Saints can become more accepting and affirming. Perhaps we can help trans Latter-day Saints be happier by supporting them in whatever direction they choose to be pulled in, whether that is towards or away from the Church.

The policies of the Church may make it difficult for trans people who stay in it to live authentically and happily. When we attempted to answer the question ‘what is it like to be trans and a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints?’ our main finding was that trans folks who stay in the Church often make a sacrifice of some significant aspect of themselves out of a fear of or a belief that they will be rejected or lose some other important aspect of their lives/identity. Church leaders should exhibit awareness of the pain and uneasiness that it may cause for trans folks to feel rejected by the religious organization that they love and try so hard to “fit with.”
Conclusion

Trans folks face giving up a lot so that they can make space for themselves in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints; they frequently sacrifice some or a lot of their authenticity, gender expression, and/or well-being in order to maintain their religious identity. Because social and surgical transitioning is now explicitly discouraged in the Church (General Handbook, 2020), it is often difficult for trans folks to feel recognized, valid, or safe being who they are, even when they are faithful Church members who want to align with the Church and its teachings.

While these interviews contained many difficult experiences of rejection and loss, lots of participants also shared moving instances of kindness, warmth, and allyship from Latter-day Saints. In this paper, we hope not to condemn but to encourage those who do affirm, invite, and seek to understand trans Latter-day Saints to continue to uplift our trans siblings. Because the Church’s policies about trans individuals may make trans people uncertain about their safety in church settings, it is important that we all become “influences for good” by unmistakably respecting and affirming trans folks in whatever way they choose to present themselves and to whatever extent they choose to transition.
References


Appendix A

Terms About Gender and Sexual Identity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cisgender</td>
<td>Individuals whose current gender identity is the same as the sex they were assigned at birth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender expression</td>
<td>How an individual chooses to present their gender to others through physical appearance and behaviors, such as style of hair or dress, voice, or movement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender identity</td>
<td>An individual’s sense of their self as man, woman, transgender, or something else.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender minority</td>
<td>An individual whose gender identity (man, women, other) or expression (masculine, feminine, other) is different from their sex (male, female) assigned at birth.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender nonconforming</td>
<td>The state of one’s physical appearance or behaviors not aligning with societal expectations of their gender (a feminine boy, a masculine girl, etc.).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LGBTQIA+</td>
<td>Acronym that refers to the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, intersex, and asexual community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonbinary</td>
<td>Individuals who do not identify their gender as man or woman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Queer</td>
<td>An umbrella term sometimes used to refer to the entire LGBT community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual minority</td>
<td>Individuals who identify as gay, lesbian, or bisexual, or who are attracted to or have sexual contact with people of the same gender.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transgender</td>
<td>Individuals whose current gender identity differs from the sex they were assigned at birth.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transmale (F-M)</td>
<td>Assigned female sex at birth, current identity is masculine/male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transfemale (M-F)</td>
<td>Assigned male sex at birth, current identity is feminine/female</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(CDC, 2019)
Appendix B

Participant Demographics

Table 2. Participant Demographics (N=10)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant ID</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Sex Assigned at Birth</th>
<th>Gender Identity</th>
<th>Pronouns Preferred</th>
<th>Pronouns Used</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>He/him/his</td>
<td>He/him/his</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>She/her/hers</td>
<td>He/him/his</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>He/him/his</td>
<td>She/her/hers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>She/her/hers</td>
<td>She/her/hers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>He/him/his</td>
<td>He/him/his</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>He/him/his</td>
<td>He/him/his</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Non-binary</td>
<td>They/their</td>
<td>He/him/they</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>She/her/hers</td>
<td>She/her/hers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>She/her/hers</td>
<td>She/her/hers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>She/her/hers</td>
<td>He/him/his</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3. Assigned Sex and Gender Identity (N=10)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender identity</th>
<th>Assigned male</th>
<th>Assigned female</th>
<th>Total (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5 (50)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4 (40)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-binary</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1 (10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total (%)</td>
<td>7 (70)</td>
<td>3 (30)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. “Assigned male” and “assigned female” columns refer to the sex which participants were assigned at birth.
Appendix C

Semi-Structured Interview Questions

1. What is it like to be transgender and a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints?
   a. What are some of the things that are hardest?

2. Some people know they are trans from a very young age; for others, it’s more of a process. What has been your experience?
   a. Can you talk about how you knew (if there was such a time) that you were trans?

3. If you could speak to someone in your shoes, say an adolescent questioning their gender, what would you tell them?

4. Are you out?
   a. To whom are you out? (Friends? Family? Religious Leaders?)
      i. How did they respond?
   b. Are you out online?
   c. To whom are you not?

5. How did people respond (to coming out)?
   a. How did your family respond?

6. What has been most helpful for you in this process of being transgender and a Latter-day Saint?
   a. What has been most unhelpful?

7. I’d like to hear a little about your gender identity and expression. What are your preferred pronouns?

8. Some people are scared to ask about gender identity and expression; how would you like to be approached?

9. Did you ever seek help from a therapist? Individually, as a family/couple?
   a. What was helpful?
   b. What was not helpful?

10. Did you reach out to anyone in your faith community for help?
    a. What was helpful?
    b. What was not helpful?

11. Did you reach out to anyone from other communities for help?

12. What is your relationship like with your family?

13. Sometimes, trans folks are estranged or distant from their family members. Has this ever been the case for you?
    a. If yes, can you talk about how this happened?
    b. Are you still estranged?
       i. If yes, what keeps them estranged from you?
       ii. If no, how did you reconnect?

14. Can you tell me a time when you felt particularly distant from your family?

15. Can you tell me a time when you felt particularly close to your family?

16. Some research shows religion is a protective factor against suicide and other mental issues; some research shows religion is a risk factor. What has your experience been?
    a. How do the church’s religious beliefs impact your view?
    b. How do the cultural aspects of the church impact your view?
17. What is your relationship with the faith now?
   a. How do you describe yourself?
      i. Can you tell me about a specific time when you felt a conflict with your faith?
18. Within the Church, there is a specific belief that gender is an eternal aspect of identity. How does this fit with you or impact you?
19. Are you familiar with the November 2015 policy?
   a. If yes, what was it like for you when this was announced?
   b. What was it like for you when this November 2015 policy was reversed?
20. Are you familiar with the recent changes in the General Handbook?
   a. If yes, what was it like for you when these changes were announced?
21. Were there any specific moments when someone did something that helped you?
   a. Was there a friend or other adult (other than family) that helped you?
   b. What did they do to help?
22. Where there any specific moments when someone did something that really hurt your feelings?
23. Has there ever been a time when you felt like a burden or like a liability in your family relationships?
24. Can you tell me a time when you noticed a difference in the way family/friends interacted with you after coming out/transitioning?
25. How has this journey (of being transgender) impacted your relationships with people important to you?
   a. Friends?
   b. Family?
   c. Faith community?
   d. Work?
26. There has been a lot of press about the Church and suicide in sexual- and gender-minority youth, can you talk about your thoughts or experiences related to suicide?
27. Have you lost friends to suicide?
   a. If yes, how does that impact you?
28. Some trans folks have thoughts of suicide; has there been a time when you have had suicidal thoughts of your own?
29. What can people do to make trans folk feel safer and more accepted?
30. If you could speak to the leaders of the Church about Trans/Latter-day Saint issues, what would you say?
31. Is there anything else you’d like to share about your experience?