Fame and Latter-Day Saint Youth: Value Conflicts and the Interpretive Audience

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FAME AND LATTER-DAY SAINT YOUTH:
VALUE CONFLICTS AND THE INTERPRETIVE AUDIENCE

by

Shellie M. Frey

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

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ABSTRACT

FAME AND LDS YOUTH:
VALUE CONFLICTS AND THE INTERPRETIVE AUDIENCE

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Fame is a paradoxical issue: a phenomenon that is both embraced and shunned simultaneously in American culture and particularly within many religious institutions. Leaders of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS), for instance, discourage its members (particularly the youth) from seeking out fame as well as famous individuals as role models. Yet they also incorporate positive rhetoric about fame as well in terms of famous LDS people, landmarks or groups. Furthermore, various aspects of the LDS Church (worldwide televised conferences, widely distributed books written by Church leaders, etc.) are highly mediated, thus, integrated with a public venue that is heavily associated with establishing or perpetuating fame. Therefore, leaders themselves may also be considered famous.

In light of the complex view of fame both in and out of the Church, this study explores the relationship between fame and religiosity of LDS (Mormon) youth and how they define and resolve value conflicts therein. The study uncovers themes about how LDS youth define fame, how they talk about it, how they tie religiosity into those conversations, and whom they consider famous and why. The research also explores both the positive and negative uses of fame in the lives of LDS youth, including what they are learning and emulating from those who are famous, as well as how they see the role of fame playing out in the Church.
Through qualitative research incorporating a series of triads, in-depth one-on-one interviews and nonparticipant observation, results of this study revealed an active audience that not only reads against the media, but recognizes and acknowledges the media manipulation that can be found in fame. While these LDS youth both embrace and reject various aspects of fame as it relates to their individual lives, LDS religious fundamentals clearly lay a foundation upon which these youth establish their ideals about fame and whom they choose as role models. When these religious ideals collide with the realities of mediated fame, internal conflict arises. Religiosity then becomes the strategy these youth incorporate to resolve these conflicts. Conversely, the closer fame merges with the religious values of these individuals, the more justified fame becomes in their minds. Furthermore, the data demonstrate a strong tendency toward gendered views about fame and religiosity, particularly within the value conflicts and resolutions, although additional research is needed to determine its conclusiveness. Overall, the religiosity of these LDS youth was found to supercede the influence of fame as the guiding force in their lives.
I would like to sincerely thank my committee members, Steven R. Thomsen, and Kathryn S. Egan, and particularly my chair, Daniel A. Stout, for their wisdom, knowledge, guidance, and patience throughout the research and writing of this thesis. I would also like to thank my editors, Suzanne Kimball and Valerie Stewart, for their keen attention to detail. Finally, I would like to express my gratitude to my parents, LaRue and Dixie Frey, for their constant love and support.
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Introduction/The Problem

In the recent film, The Talented Mr. Ripley, Matt Damon's character, Tom Ripley, makes a life out of impersonating his way into elite social circles, wealth, and recognition. After realizing the destruction caused by his covetousness and deceit he confesses, "I'd rather be a fake somebody than a real nobody."

Though Ripley's desperate-yet-heartfelt aspirations ultimately lead to his demise, his sentiment is not uncommon among today's youth. "Some people don't care why they're famous, they just want to be famous," said a teenage guest on an episode of ABC's Politically Incorrect television talk show, "because they're going to get recognized."

This quest for fame often begins with fandom itself--idolizing those in the spotlight who have what seems to be "the good life"—love, money, success, self-worth, and therefore, happiness. But like the character, Tom Ripley, fame can be a powerful imposter in today's society, particularly among youth who are seeking social identity and approval amidst a media-saturated world that aggressively perpetuates this phenomenon. With today's mighty media machines and pervasive availability among audiences, superstars are literally created overnight; icons seem even more immortal than ever; and celebrities become society's idols.

"The media world is fantastically attractive compared to real lives in which relationships may not be satisfying or stable," says University of Maryland's Dr. John Caughey, explaining society's tendency to "worship" those who have been deemed famous. "Media relationships are with people who are, almost by definition, famous, successful, dynamic and good-looking. Celebrities have become the gods of our social system because our success-oriented culture has placed them at the top" (Caughey, 1984, p. 106).

Likewise, a recent university study found that more than 80 percent of the nation's youth looked to celebrities and professional athletes as their "personal role models" second only to their parents (Schlesinger, 2000) demonstrating the influence of fame on young people today.

While patterning one's behavior, performance, world views, and/or habits after someone who appears to be successful in a desired area has shown to help onlookers increase their own performance and in some ways help them live better lives (Marshall, 1997), others believe it also has its dangers. Those concerned say
that people who idolize the famous or fame itself are actually endangering their own self concept—the very thing they're trying to improve. “When we grant another person the status of hero, we deny our own full potential for empowerment,” writes Sue Erikson Bloland, in her recent article, *Fame: The Power and Cost of a Fantasy* (Atlantic Monthly, Nov. 1999, p. 52). “Adulation dulls our awareness of the human dimensions of those we idealize, limiting our knowledge of them and of ourselves as human beings.”

**LDS Church and Individual Identity**

One group is particularly concerned with this phenomenon. The leaders of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints have always emphasized the importance of authentic self identity among Church members, a group which currently numbers more than 11 million worldwide. “The greatest search of our time is the search for personal identity and dignity,” expressed former Church president Howard W. Hunter (1967, p. 115), speaking as a General Authority at the time. Some have equated this pursuit with the necessity of incorporating effective role models into one’s life. “This search for personal identity is essentially a search for role models that become instructive in the conduct of our lifestyles,” said Monte J. Brough (1995, p. 4) of the Presidency of the Seventy.

LDS Church leaders continually encourage the adoption of positive role models (Kimball, 1976, Black, 1997, Hales, 1991, Ballard, 1997). But they also caution against employing those in the limelight as exemplars simply because they are famous:

With only a few exceptions, a young person cannot find adequate role models among those in athletics, entertainment, or commercial music. Not only do these public figures fail to provide positive examples, but they are often the exact inverse of the type of role models that are acceptable to most of us. Access to these contemporary icons is expensive and unproductive. We are almost always disappointed when we come to witness the shallow and murky standards by which the public heaps its praise. No wonder the public areas of many cities and towns are crowded with young people who are possessed with these same shallow and murky standards of personal behavior. (Brough, 1995, p. 4)

President Hunter (1990) also commented on the negative values that may be exemplified by many
public figures:

The limelight of contemporary attention so often focuses on the ‘one’ rather than the many. Individuals are frequently elevated as heroes. But sometimes that recognition is not deserved or may even celebrate the wrong values. This presents us with the challenge to choose wisely our heroes and examples, while also giving thanks for those legions of friends and citizens who are not so famous but who are ‘no less serviceable’ . . . . (p. 5)

**Fame as Negative**

The extent to which LDS Church leaders also continually focus on the negative effects of the media in general (Porter, 2001, Ballard, 1989; Kimball, 1976; Benson, 1980; Peterson, 1980; Griffin and Cline, 1976; Bytheway, 1993) implies value conflicts among LDS members and mediated issues as well as the notion that many poor role models who are valued by society are often those who are mediated. Therefore, as these Church leaders seek to instill correct principles of morality, doctrine, and values along with self-worth among Church membership, they likewise seek to protect members—particularly the youth—against the deceptions of fame which is often associated with heroes and role models. For example: “Beware of those whom the world loves and showers with fame and fortune. They are often unreliable guides in your quest for virtue” (Porter, 1989, p. 7).

Church leaders remind youth that happiness is not always found in fame, but rather in self-confidence and the ability to make correct choices: “Remember, my young friends, fame and fortune do not necessarily mean happiness. It is far better to have confidence in yourself and to be comfortable in your own skin. This depends upon your ability to choose what is right. It is also important to be able to excel in some field” (Faust, 2001, p. 5).

LDS Church leaders emphasize conformity to gospel principles that stress wholesome character traits rather than competition: “A feeling of worth based on adherence to principles of the gospel—kindness, warmth, and faithfulness—is often undermined by a culture that celebrates winning rather than participating, wealth rather than thrift, fame rather than honor, and status rather than service” (Brown, 1986, p. 11).

They remind members that life’s true riches lie in peace rather than in fame or wealth: “[T]he
The greatest treasure in this world is not fame or wealth, but rather, a sense of well-being and the inner peace that living the teachings of the gospel can give to us” (Ballard, 1977, p. 5).

Leaders urge the making and keeping of sacred gospel covenants rather than focusing one’s heart on worldly things like fame: “No one can serve two masters (see Matt. 6:24). If Satan can get you to love anything—fun, flirtation, fame, or fortune—more than the Lord with whom you have made sacred covenants to endure, the adversary begins to triumph” (Nelson, 1998, p. 5).

And above all, Church leaders encourage the development of a Christlike character as life’s main priority: “Man’s chief concern in life should not be the acquiring of gold, or of fame, or of material possessions. It should not be the development of physical prowess, nor of intellectual strength, but his aim, the highest in life, should be the development of a Christlike character” (McKay, 1967, p. 32).

Finally, President Hunter reminds youth that most of the best people who have lived were never famous, and that serving others quietly without seeking “the praise of men” is true strength of character:

If you feel that much of what you do does not make you very famous, take heart. Most of the best people who ever lived weren’t very famous either. Serve and grow, faithfully and quietly. Be on guard regarding the praise of men. Jesus said on the Sermon on the Mount: “Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven. . . . but when thou doest alms, let not they left hand know what they right hand doeth: that thine alms may be in secret: and they Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly” (Matt. 6:1, 3-4) (Hunter, 1990, p. 4).

Church leaders have further characterized fame as a form of “idol worship” (Largey, 1998, Kimball, 1969), “a deterrent to faith” (Carmack, 1993), “a cross to bear” (Ashton, 1988), “a severe trial” (Matthews, 1982), “a worldly influence” (Porter, 1998), and something that can lead to “eternal torment” (Holland, 1989).

LDS Church curriculum and supporting literature has also strongly warned against fame. In a lesson to the young women of the Church titled, Obeying Commandments Helps Us Fulfill Our Divine Roles, the suggestion that “Making fame, worldly recognition, and unworthy role models your highest priority” was listed under a category of “Ways Commandments are Broken” (Young Women Manual 2, 1993, p. 17); and
"We may be tested and perhaps will not acquire the wealth and fame that the world advocates, but we will be rich in the more important areas of our lives" (Young Women Manual 1, 1993, p. 143). Churchwide Sunday School manuals (1998) as well as supplementary materials such as *A Parent’s Guide to Teaching Adolescents* (2001) also caution members about the persuasive influence of fame.

**Fame in the LDS Church**

These examples illustrate how fame can have negative influences on those who idealize it as a value worthy of aspiration in and of itself or on those who, when faced with fame, do not manage it well. However, the Church itself with its hierarchal structure and unique media atmosphere is not insulated from the dynamics or consequences of fame. Church leaders themselves often become mediated images via television and radio broadcasts which are transmitted throughout the world as they speak at Churchwide General Conferences, Church college devotionals, or special conferences such as Education Week, Women’s Conference, special temple dedications and other public occasions. They are often publicly acknowledged in large settings among its members, separated from less-known members of the Church as they are typically situated on a stage in front or above a congregation. Additionally, books, magazine articles, and newsworthy pieces are written about these leaders as well as other “prominent” members of the Church. Talk tapes, video cassettes, photographic images, music, and films are marketed and merchandised through public bookstores and traditional multimedia advertising venues to promote selected individuals and their teachings and philosophies. In short, the subculture of the Church itself may perpetuate intra-religious conflicts through its own mediated world and markets therein within which “the famous” rise and fall.

Though LDS Church leaders emphasize, for instance, the importance of all callings, some seem to receive more recognition and even respect among members than others—perhaps sending mixed messages to the youth of the Church. Various Church presidents have spoken out against placing value judgements on these assignments, thus acknowledging the social dilemma. Recently President Gordon B. Hinckley (1999) himself reminded young college students about the importance of all Church callings:

---

1 President Hinckley, along with all other LDS Church presidents, is considered by members of the LDS Church to be a prophet to the world as well as the president of the worldwide Church.
It really does not matter where you serve, what office you fill. There is no small or unimportant duty in this Church and in the kingdom of God. One does not have to be a general authority\(^3\), a stake president\(^4\), a member of the high council\(^5\), a bishop\(^6\), or a leader in the auxiliary organizations\(^7\) to serve in an acceptable way before the Lord. What matters is the spirit in which we serve and the manner in which we apply our talents and our resources. (p. 3)

Former President Hunter (1990) also previously addressed the issue of notoriety in the Church:

Not everyone is going to be the student body president or the Relief Society president\(^8\) or the teacher of the elders’ quorum\(^9\). Not all are going to be like Moroni\(^10\) catching the acclaim all day every day. No, most will be quiet, relatively unknown folks who come and go and do their work without fanfare. To those of you who may find that lonely or frightening or just unspectacular, I say you are ‘no less serviceable’ than the most spectacular of your associates. You, too, are part of God’s army. (p. 4)

**Fame as Positive**

With the general discouragement of fame by Church leaders also comes positive references of fame as well. Statements from former Church president, Joseph Smith (1836) used the phrase in a positive manner:

“And the fame of this house [referring to the Kirtland, Ohio temple] shall spread to foreign lands; and this is the beginning of the blessing which shall be poured out upon the heads of my people” (p. 229); Likewise, John Taylor (1857) also used the phrase positively saying, “God expects Zion to become the praise and glory of the whole earth, so that kings hearing of her fame will come and gaze upon her glory” (Sermon, September 20, 1857); and in regards to the martyr of the Church’s first prophet, Taylor (1844) said, “Joseph Smith . . . left a fame and a name that cannot be slain. He lived great, and he died great in the eyes of God and his people; . . .” (p. 281) indicating a positive interpretation of fame. Current Church General Authority Jeffrey Holland (1994) has spoken of “. . . the famed temple square . . .” (p. 16) and *Church News* editors write regularly about “the famed Mormon Tabernacle Choir” (p. 104).

Furthermore, the scriptures themselves address the phenomenon of fame in regard to both ancient and modern prophets as well as Jesus himself: “When the Queen of Sheba heard of the fame of Solomon, she
came to prove Solomon with hard questions at Jerusalem . . .” (2 Chr. 9:1);

And [Jesus’] fame went throughout all Syria: and they brought unto him all sick people that were taken with divers diseases and torments, and those which were possessed with devils, and those which were lunatic, and those that had the palsy; and he healed them. And there followed him great multitudes of people from Galilee and from Decapolis, and from Jerusalem, and from Judaea, and from beyond Jordan. (Matt.4:24-25)

Fame as Paradoxical

With both positive and negative aspects of fame referenced by Church leaders, the phenomenon of fame itself could be viewed as paradoxical—appropriate and revered in some instances, yet discouraged and devalued in others. Considering this paradox encompassing the various messages about fame both in and out of the Church, could LDS youth, therefore, experience some confusion about the value attached to fame? With the amount of discussion that occurs in the Church about fame, particularly regarding modern media among youth, it is surprising that a study about LDS youth and their attitudes about fame has not yet been conducted. While such a study is certainly warranted, the young LDS audience provides a unique terrain on which to study the phenomenon of fame from the standpoint of conflicting values. Furthermore, though fame is an area couched in the pervasiveness of ever-growing media studies, it still remains in its infancy as far as academic attention (Harris, 1998).

Fame and Religiosity Defined

Thus, this author will explore the various aspects of both religiosity and fame by focusing on their relationship to each other. For this author’s purposes, therefore, religiosity, which is generally defined as being “devoted to religious beliefs or observances” (Miriam-Webster’s, 2000) will also encompass more specifically in its definition “one’s knowledge (cognition) feelings (affect), and doing (behaviors)” (Cornwall, 1998) regarding religious activity, doctrines, and interpretations thereof. Likewise, fame, which is generally defined as “public estimation or popular acclaim; known widely and well” (Webster’s, 2000), will also more specifically encompass in its definition a three-fold interpretation: (1) one’s desire for personal notoriety, recognition, and/or status; (2) idolizing someone who is already famous; and (3) idealizing the concept of
fame as a valued ideal itself.

**Research Questions**

With these parameters, the key question that this author will explore is: (RQ1) What is the relationship between fame and the religiosity of LDS youth, and (RQ2) how do they define and resolve value-conflicts that arise therein? This primary question will be examined through the inquiry of these subsequent questions: (RQ3) How do LDS youth talk about fame, and (RQ4) how, do they tie religiosity into those conversations? (RQ5) How do they define fame, and (RQ6) whom do they consider to be famous? (RQ7) What are both the positive and negative uses of fame in their lives? In other words, (RQ8) what are LDS youth learning and perhaps emulating from those who are famous? Finally, (RQ9) how do they see the role of fame play out in the Church?

This audience-based study will seek to fill the void of what media and religion scholars such as Stout and Buddenbaum (1996) define as “missing from the public debate about media and religion” which is “any substantive information about what churchgoers themselves have to say about these issues [of media’s influence on religious values]” (p. 5). This study will also best be addressed by incorporating the theory of interpretive community, an ideal approach in studying religious audiences particularly those involved in resolving conflicts in social settings. This theory will be addressed in detail at the end of the Literature Review.
Literature Review

Because this is a study about LDS youth, the author will begin with an overview of the LDS culture and relevant studies on LDS youth. However, a number of more secular literatures have also addressed the issues of fame and adolescence, though few have taken into account the element of religiosity. Nonetheless, those relevant theories will be acknowledged as they contribute to the theoretical foundation, state of mind of this author, and further justification of this study including the need for the theory of interpretive community as a basis for this study. In an effort to maintain focus, however, the vast bodies of literature relating to these subsequent theories will not be reviewed here. The author will instead summarize the relevant literature that incorporates the more pertinent theory of interpretive community as it relates to the issues of fame and religiosity. Finally, the author will provide theoretical criticism of the interpretive community theory.

LDS Culture/Studies on LDS Youth

The young members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints comprise a group of more than 1.1 million individuals worldwide (LDS Church, 2001). The male segment ranges between the ages of 12-18, and the female segment ranges between the ages of 12-17. Though they comprise approximately 10 percent of the Church’s overall membership, they remain largely underrepresented in the areas of fame and religiosity research. While Church leaders spend an extensive amount of time and effort talking directly to the youth, organizing youth curriculum and programs specifically designed to enhance the spirituality and moral standards of LDS youth (including media guidelines), audience-based studies about LDS youth and mediated fame are virtually nonexistent.

Most studies about LDS youth range from delinquency (Chadwick and Top, 1986; 1999, Pickett, 1994) to social competence (Thomas and Carver, 1990) and a host of studies and books that highlight authoritative teaching to LDS youth (Welch, 1996, Wright, 1993). While local Church leader and author, Randall Wright, has occasionally touched upon the relationship between LDS youth and celebrity in his related studies (Wright, 1993), and Brigham Young University Professor, Daniel Stout, has focused primarily on adult LDS membership and media usage (Stout, 1993), virtually no LDS study has significantly addressed
the aspect of fame specifically—its influence (or lack thereof) on the development, encouragement, or discouragement of religious values. Nor do these studies discuss the depth of how youth discuss celebrity among each other, parents, church leaders, school teachers, etc., and most importantly, how they think about it themselves and subsequently act based on their beliefs. This void exists despite the fact that Church leaders themselves have not only continually addressed the subject of media effects (Ballard, 1989, Hinckley, 2000) but, as indicated earlier, have broached the specific subject of fame in relation to LDS youth themselves (Hunter, 1991, Hinckley, 1999, McKay, 1967, Monson, 1989, Packer, 1989, Woolsey, 1995, Faust, 2001, Nelson, 1998, Ballard, 1977, Brown, 1986).

Wright, however, has briefly touched on the subject in his books, *Why Good People See Bad Movies* (1993), and *A Case For Chastity* (1994). Though intended for a general LDS audience rather than purely scholarly research, Wright is one of the few authors who attempts to move somewhat beyond the mediated message to an audience perspective. While Wright does not base his research on any particular communications or sociological theory, it could be argued that he not only assumes a heavy media effects theory in his theses, but cultivation hypothesis, social learning theory and social comparison theory as well. Though he does not define these theories as a basis for his writings, these books and studies explore the spiritual benefits of not only avoiding television, but eschewing *all media* for the reward of increased spirituality and familial bliss. Wright (1993) specifically addresses the negative effects of fame on LDS youth as he discusses celebrity within the context of R-rated movies (media genre specifically discouraged by LDS Church authorities). He concludes that “the more [R-rated] movies youth watch, the more they are influenced by media celebrities” (Wright, 1993, p. 29). For example, following is the number of R-rated movies Wright’s sample of LDS youth have seen in the past year and the percentage who would change places with a media star if they could “change places with anyone:”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>R-rated Movies Seen</th>
<th>Change with Media Star</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-5</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-15</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-25</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25+</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

19
Wright, therefore, heavily advocates the abandonment of not just all R-rated movies but all media in general in exchange for more spirituality. While Wright has been quoted by various Church leaders in the past (Ballard, 1989), LDS prophets have likewise discouraged the patronage or viewing of R-rated movies, pornography, and other violent or degrading forms of media (Hinckley, 1999, Hinckley, 2000, Scott, 1998) deemed to be “produced by Satanic influences” (Petersen, 1993), it should be noted that the current trend of religious advice by President Gordon B. Hinckley echoes his earlier admonishments for a more moderate approach to media with a newfound call for media literacy:

Let there be good magazines about the house, those which are produced by the Church and by others, which will stimulate their thoughts to ennobling concepts. Let them read a good family newspaper that they may know what is going on in the world. . . . When there is a good show in town, go to the theater as a family. Your patronage will give encouragement to those who wish to produce this type of entertainment. And use the most remarkable of all tools of communication, television, to enrich [your] lives. (1975, pp 38-40)

Other communications scholars have likewise studied media and LDS youth with more of an audience-based approach. In Stout, Scott and Martin’s 1995 study titled, Mormons, Mass Media, and the Interpretive Audience, the authors sought to determine LDS attitudes and practices about viewing R-rated movies. While this research primarily studied LDS adults, some participants were BYU students, and thus, teenagers. Furthermore, this study incorporated the theory of interpretive community, the methodological approach to be adopted by this author.

From the findings of two LDS audience samplings (video rental habits of BYU students and Mormon women’s views on television viewing studied in Los Angeles, Houston, and Salt Lake City), Stout et. al., identified polarized interpretive audiences that varied greatly in their “talking” about television and movies. Though not completely mutually exclusive, the researchers defined the two groups as the “Traditionals” and the “Independents.” The Traditionals “placed a strong emphasis on what is considered ‘immoral’ content in selecting movies and television programs and whose style of talking about the media reflected strong institutional influence.” The Independents “described their media-related experiences in individual, goal-
oriented terms and assessed their value more from a personal, private point of view rather than an institutional perspective" (Stout, et. al., 1994, pp 248-254). The study details how each group differs in the way they view television and film media, how they talk about them in terms of moral values, media usage, and freedom to choose what they view, and how they incorporate such media into their lives in relation to their religious beliefs.

Stout's groundbreaking studies exemplify the value of audience-based research in media and religiosity that go beyond the media message to the audience perspective. Yet while they effectively shed light on the adult LDS audience and provide an effective model of interpretive community, they neglect the voice for the younger LDS audience specifically, which should also be heard.

Furthermore, while Wright's well-intended studies address the LDS youth audience within the media arena, his research is admittedly biased and also lacks scholarly salience to be considered academically legitimate—again, underscoring the need for further scholarly research in this area. Thus, a study about the religiosity of LDS youth and fame would prove to be pioneering.

Theoretical Foundation

As stated earlier, other more secular studies have indirectly addressed the issues of fame and adolescence. These oft-cited theories such as social comparison (Festinger, 1954), self-socialization (Arnett, 1995), social learning (Bandura, 1964), and parasocial relationships (Baudrillard, 1983) have provided much academic enlightenment in terms of identity, value, and social development among adolescents and other audiences as well as having contributed significantly to this author's motivation in approaching this study. Nevertheless, the literature regarding these theories will not be reviewed here. As mentioned, the author has instead chosen to review in-depth the more directly related literature linked to the more relevant theory of interpretive community which probes deeper into the area of media and audience-based research, particularly in the area of religiosity. Although this more current theory has been incorporated as the foundation of several studies previously mentioned, it has not yet been applied to the adolescent LDS audiences. Furthermore, by utilizing this particular theory, this author hopes to uncover a clearer, richer understanding of the value conflicts that young, Mormon audiences face, which will hope to broaden the understanding of media, youth,
and religiosity in general.

**Interpretive Community Theory**

When it comes to studies about fame and fandom, some would argue that the above theories and others have not adequately addressed these phenomena. "[T]he past much of the literature has tended to examine fan practices closely but has not successfully integrated existing or new theoretical models into explanations of why fans do what they do" (Harris, 1998).

A more appropriate theory, therefore, which will become the foundation of this study on LDS youth and fame, is that of interpretive community. In recent years, this theory has given more direction and scope to audience-based studies by analyzing the recipients of mass communications “not only as individuals from certain common backgrounds but also in ways in which individual members of an audience use discursive modes of interpreting media content” (Jensen, 1990, p. 130).


Recent work in the area of social semiotics, interpretive community, and critical mass communication research has examined the issue of how audiences discursively make sense of texts within environments of social practice. Some have termed this sublevel unit of analysis interpretive community (Fish, 1980; Lindloff, 1988; Radway, 1984). (p. 244)

Stout explains that interpretive community is used to address questions of how audiences define boundaries as well as their values when dealing with variant interpretations of popular culture—in this case value conflicts related to fame and LDS religiosity. “[Lindloff, Coyle, and Grodin] argue that recent research often fails to account for ‘divergently correct ways of categorizing the textual object.’” (p. 244)

Jensen more recently adds that “[T]he purpose of much previous research—both in the commercial and the academic sectors—has been to explain audience behavior in terms of demographic or social psychological variables rather than to elicit audience assessment of and participation in social communication processes” (Jensen, 1999, p. 129).

Concurring with Jensen’s edict about the lack of audience-based research in media literature,
Fingerson (1999) points out the need to thoroughly examine media meanings from the viewers’ points of view:

[Many assume that content determines the viewers’ meaning rather than examining qualitatively what audiences are actually appropriating from media. Therefore, to understand the effects of television [or other mediated issues such as fame] we must first explore the meanings viewers produce from television “texts.” (p. 390)]

Furthermore, Caragee (1990) adds that the value of interpretive community theory is a viable means to uncover the diversity that lies within audiences. He posits that opposite to the deterministic models of mass communication, interpretive community theory has shed light on why an audience with very similar backgrounds have diverse attitudes and behaviors concerning media use and attitudes (p. 86).

**Interpretive Community Defined**

Thus, for the purposes of this study, interpretive community is defined as a group of people within a common subculture who share a common world view about mediated fame and its related issues. These strategies include methods for defining and resolving value conflicts as well as interpreting media content.

**Interpretive Community Studies—Fandom**

A significant tenant of the phenomenon of fame, fandom has recently become an emerging area of study among mass media and social science researchers. Though still in its dawn, the “surprisingly scanty literature on fandom” neglects “the authentic voices of fans themselves” (Harris, 1998, pp 4-5). Researchers have thus, opted for a view from a marketing, merchandising, public relations, press, or otherwise institutionalized perspective. Harris explains:

To media industries, fans have traditionally represented an important constituency to be measured, controlled, co-opted, institutionalized, and appropriated for their value as a ready market for products and as a public relations tool. The press, on the other hand, seems well-invested in the idea of fandom as highly stigmatized, marked by ‘danger, abnormality, and silliness’ (Jensen, 1992, p. 1), in which fans engage in ‘secret lives’ without much purpose. The functionalist pitfall of academics is of a different kind. Academic researchers fall prey to the tendency to focus on ‘objectifying,
exterior perspectives... which slight the insider’s dimensions of... audiencehood” (Ang, 1991, p. 11). In other words, much of the discussion around fandom has essentially pathologized it without leading us much closer to understanding this important phenomenon. (p. 5)

Contrary to this traditional research, Harris posits that “fans who exist within an organized web of interpretive communities define themselves and their roles very differently from any of these groups” (1998, p. 5). Thus, the more current trend in fandom study favors the theory of interpretive community, particularly for the opportunity it allows audience members their individual as well as collective voice in mass communication issues. Henry Jenkins’ (1998) study, for example, titled, Normal Interest in Men Bonking allows fans to speak for themselves as they examine slash literature (Jenkins, 1998, in Harris, 1998, p. 5). In Nancy Baym’s study, The Talk of Fandom: The Importance of Social Practices of Soap Opera Fans in a Computer Mediated Group, the author describes fan discourse as “highly interpretive and differentiated, going beyond previous typologies of viewing behavior” (Baym, 1998, in Harris, 1998 p. 6).

Andrea MacDonald’s study, Virtual Fans, analyzes interactions over computer networks via the global Internet system, highlighting how this new interface has changed the workings of fandom and fan expression. Harris points out that “because computer-mediated communication has profound implications for future and cultural development, ways in which individuals and social groups make use of this resource in developing identities” (Harris, 1998, p. 7), not only deserves serious attention, but underscores how individual, yet connected fan interpretation can be.

In should also be noted that many authors of fandom research generally propose issues of social class and power as dominant themes among audiences. Because by definition, all organizations possess some form of hegemony, it could be argued that these potentially hegemonic factors may indeed be consistent with some of the basic elements of this study. One common denominator of LDS youth is that they operate within a dominant hierarchal church structure which, in large part, prescribes what the values of its membership should be. But because of its structural and mediated nature, as well as the value conflicts between fame and religiosity (in terms of social class and power), hegemonic characteristics may exist among this young, LDS audience as well.
Interpretive Community Studies—Religiosity

“Religious socialization has a direct positive influence on personal community relationships,” says LDS researcher, Marie Cornwall (1987), explaining the vitality of interpretive community theory in audience-based studies particularly involving religiosity. “Personal community relationships influence religious belief and commitment, and both personal community relationships and religious belief and commitment influence conformity to the norms and expectations for the religious group” (pp 45-46).

Concurring with Cornwall, Stout has conducted several studies about media issues and religiosity among LDS audiences, incorporating the theory of interpretive community. His 1993 study with BYU Professor Joann Myer Valenti, explored the media behaviors of women in a conservative subculture whose religious institution articulates rules and guidelines for media use. LDS women from Los Angeles, Houston, and Salt Lake City were selected as the sample group. Stout and Valenti’s findings reported a significant diversity among the group regarding television viewing habits (specifically, the value of TV in general for the respondents as well as their children, the reasons they watch TV, how often they tune in, their guilt or lack thereof when watching certain television shows or television at all), newspaper- and magazine-reading, and radio-listening habits. These differences of habit and opinion existed despite a very similar demographic profile. The authors emphasized, “These findings suggest that conservative cultures may provide fertile ground for mass communication audience researchers. Members of organized conservative groups demonstrate a diversity of responses as they confront institutionalized definitions of the role of media from a conflict perspective” (Stout and Valenti, 1993, p. 193).

Stout’s related study on the television viewing habits and perspectives of LDS women incorporated the theory of interpretive community as well as a foundation in his 1993 research. His findings revealed three primary “communities” within the broader LDS community, again indicating diversity within a larger group:

1. “Traditionalists,” (young, affluent, and highly religious women who stress selectivity in their television viewing),
2. “Contextuals,” (women who are highly religious, but unlike Traditionalists, watch a wide variety of entertainment programs and experience guilty feelings in doing so), and
3. “Independents,” (women who are older, less affluent, less religious, and view a wider variety of
programs than the other women sampled) (Stout, 1994, p. ii).

These findings again underscore the idea that many audiences can be found within what appears to be a more “homogenous group,” such as LDS women who are taught similar doctrine and receive similar directives from Church leaders regarding the media (Packer, 1974; Ballard, 1989; Petersen, 1993, 1974, Maxwell, 1993). This study is insightful in that it reveals the various ways LDS women interpret these directives as well as the doctrines of the Church as they carry on their day-to-day lives, incorporating media therein. “The concept of interpretive community suggests that audiences do not uniformly conceptualize the role of television in their lives, but discursively make sense of their viewing within their everyday networks or social interaction” (Stout, 1994, p. 63).

This same author subsequently conducted a more recent study about Mormons living in Las Vegas. The 1999 study sought to reveal how Las Vegas Mormons living in a media-saturated city that openly displays mediated images and messages contrary to the teachings of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, defined and resolved conflicts of world views between religious and secular cultures. This study of media and religiosity incorporated both secularization theory as well as interpretive community theory as its foundation, examining “how Mormons themselves talk about Las Vegas entertainment in their own words,” (Stout, 1999, p. 5). Stout defines members of the LDS Church as part of an interpretive community “which shares a ‘code of understanding’ about certain types of media texts, in this case, Las Vegas entertainment (Stout, 1999, p. 6, Lindlof, 1988), just as others describe the norms and behaviors of an interpretive community of fans of the film, Field of Dreams (Aden, Rahoi, & Beck, 1995), and journalists as an interpretive community” (Zelizer, 1993).

“Interpretive community is a well-developed concept in media studies (Lindlof, 1988; Radway, 1984), but is only beginning to be applied to religious audiences,” adds Stout. “While interpretive communities usually revolved around reactions to particular media texts, they may also focus on efforts to resist or read against media considered threatening to religious values (See Lepter & Lindlof, 2000)” (Stout, 2000, p. 6).

Through focus groups and non-participant observations, Stout (2000) uncovered five dominant themes or secularization defense strategies: (1) mythical geographical separation, (2) mythical standards of
acceptable/nonacceptable behavior, (3) family entertainment umbrella, (4) faith-building environment, and (5) elitism. The author noted that these categories were "not mutually exclusive, and do not represent all of the ways Mormons negotiate the boundaries between religious community and secular culture in Las Vegas. They are, however, more specific ways of describing the specific nature of moral conflict, and identifying starting points for future research" (Stout, 2000, p. 9).

Similar to interpretive community theory, personal community theory was selected as the research foundation for Marie Cornwall's study, *The Determinants of Religious Behavior: A Theoretical Model and Empirical Test* (1989). The author found in her research that personal communities indirectly influence religious behavior by helping individuals maintain a religious world view and commitment to the norms and expectations of the religious group. Her study examined five categories of factors which have been found to influence religious behavior (group involvement, belief-orthodoxy, religious commitment, religious socialization, and sociodemographic characteristics), and she, thus, suggested alternative ways of measuring the various factors, and presented a theoretical model. Rather than using standard measures of group involvement, measures of in-group, marginal, and out-group personal community relationships were used. The model was tested using data collected from Latter-day Saints living in the United States. Each of the various factors was found to influence religious behavior. Religious commitment had the strongest direct effect, with belief, personal community relationships, and religious socialization variables having an indirect influencing effect.

Within this study, Cornwall emphasized the relevance of personal communities—in this case, moral communities—as a reinforcer of religious thought. As stated by Durkheim (1915):

The only source of life at which we can morally reanimate ourselves is that formed by the society of our fellow beings; the only moral forces with which we can sustain and increase our own are those which we get from others. (p. 473)

In terms of this effect of social interaction on one's religiosity, Cornwall adds:

There is growing evidence that religious belief and commitment are highly dependent upon the extent to which an individual is integrated into a religious community. Durkheim stressed the
importance of 'collective sentiments and the collective ideas' which could not be achieved 'except by the means of reunions, assemblies and meetings where the individuals being closely united to one another, reaffirm in common their common sentiments' (Durkheim, 1915, p. 475). Thus, these personal communities shape personal beliefs, level of commitment, and also have some effect on behavior. But while group sanctions influence behavioral conformity, the effective operation of sanctions may be dependent upon the extent to which the individual believes in and is committed to the group. (p. 574)

**Theoretical Criticism**

While this interpretive community research in both fandom and religiosity lays a solid theoretical foundation as well as sound justification for this study on LDS youth and fame, it should be noted that this theory has received some criticism. Interpretive community by nature accentuates a weakness that is inherent in typologies in general in terms of attempting to categorize groups of people who are ultimately unique individuals with varied differences.

However, according to the definition of interpretive community (Lindlof, 1988), individuals—distinct as they are—can and do share strategies of interpretation regarding the media that does not detract from their individuality. Thus, the interpretive community theory can be an effective tool for helping to understand and explain the views and related issues among media audiences particularly in a common subculture.

Additionally, like other forms of qualitative research theory, interpretive community theory has been occasionally challenged for its “interpretivism.” Some have argued that its distinctiveness from other earlier work in the anthropology field is sometimes vague.

The recent turn toward interpretive study is often thought to represent a fundamental challenge to “traditional” media “effects” research . . . [However], a comparison of interpretivism with gratificationism in terms of underlying philosophical premises and technique of discovery reveals continuity rather than rupture between the two approaches (Evans, 1990, p. 147).

This “continuity” of interpretivism will indeed aid this researcher in determining the significance
of her study by allowing dominant themes to emerge naturally among participants. Since influence of any media factor is difficult to recognize, let alone communicate by the audience being studied, the interpretive community theory will not only be the most appropriate theory for revealing truth among participants in this study but ideal in reaffirming core themes, attitudes, and beliefs throughout the research. It is highly valuable because it allows the researcher to study fame and religiosity in a values-conflict situation. Through non-participant observation, triads, and in-depth interviews (which will be further outlined in the Methodology section), the researcher will be able to uncover these themes that occur in conversations among participants as they discuss their notions of fame and religiosity with various others. It is projected that the researcher will be able to identify common attitudes, beliefs, values, and therefore the relationship between fame and religiosity of the young LDS participants. This information will not only be useful to the LDS population at large but to any academic researcher studying mass media and youth—particularly those groups who face institutional values that conflict with societal expectations.
Methodology/Data Collection

In order to gain insight into the ways LDS youth define and resolve value conflicts between mediated fame and religiosity, an ethnographic approach based on the previously described theory of interpretive community was incorporated to uncover rich, qualitative data employing a naturalistic approach. Qualitative methods are particularly vital to this study because as Lincoln and Guba (1985) explain:

[T]hey are more adaptable to dealing with multiple (and less aggregatable) realities; because such methods expose more directly the nature of the transaction between investigator and respondent (or object) and hence make easier an assessment of the extent to which the phenomenon is described in terms of (is biased by) the investigator's own posture; and because qualitative methods are more sensitive to and adaptable to the many mutually shaping influences and value patterns that may be encountered. (p. 40)

Thus, in this section, the author will summarize the various qualitative methods used by first explaining the selection of subjects for her research and how they were qualified for participation. She will then detail her approach to data collection which included one-on-one in-depth interviews, triads, and non-participant observation. Finally, she will address coding procedures, reliability and trustworthiness issues, as well as the limitations of this study.

Purposive Sampling

With the permission of university authorities, purposive sampling as well as snowball sampling procedures (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) were conducted. The criteria for this sample included college freshmen and sophomores (17-18- and 19-year-olds) who are LDS. These individuals have most recently completed up to six years in the Church's youth program and therefore, most likely embody some if not most of the general religious principles taught therein. The researcher made concerted efforts to obtain a diverse cross section of individuals from various geographic areas of the country as well as a variety of ethnic backgrounds and economic strata. Both males and females were selected for participation.

The sample consisted of 12 LDS youth who currently attend college at Brigham Young University or Utah Valley State College—both institutions located in Utah County in the state of Utah. This group
included six males and six females, ten of whom were freshmen and two of whom were sophomores. Two of these individuals were 17 years old, seven were 18 years old, and three were 19 years old. Of this sample, ten were Caucasian, one was Asian-American, and one was African-American. While all of the participants currently resided in Utah at the time of data collection, six were originally from California, three were from Utah, two were from Florida, and one was from Pennsylvania. All individuals were raised with LDS beliefs except for one individual who had converted to the LDS Church approximately 10 months prior to data collection. Based on frequency and variety of use, media usage among these participants would generally be classified as moderately heavy. (See Appendix A—“Participant Profiles” for more specific information on each participant.)

**Triads**

As Milke (1994) posits, “Television and media content are often talked about and interpreted within groups.” (p. 354) Therefore, four triads were conducted to observe how young LDS people talk to each other about the phenomenon of fame, how it influences religiosity, and how they define and resolve value conflicts therein. These triads were designed around student households in order to create a comfortable environment for the participants to share their feelings amongst their peers. The smaller numbered group (3) proved to be beneficial to the comfort level and openness of the individuals in expressing their personal experiences and candid perspectives as opposed to a larger numbered focus group which might have decreased the amount of time for individual expression. Each triad was held in the naturalistic setting of the given participants’ homes, again, in an ambience where they might feel the most comfortable. This environment also provided the researcher the opportunity to conduct non-participant observations in terms of existing “fan paraphanalia.” (Please see Non-participant Observation section for more detailed information.) Moderated by the researcher herself, these triads ran approximately 60-90 minutes long, and each included three individuals who fit the criteria of the purposive sample. All discussions were audio taped including the researcher’s personal notes regarding her observations of group dynamics, participation levels, opinion leaders, and nonverbal interactions that occurred. Additionally, the researcher kept field notes and a daily journal of these triads recording any interesting or surprising revelations as they occurred, points of discussion for future triads or
interviews, as well as her ongoing thoughts about the overall research itself.

These triads addressed the various issues of fame and religiosity in terms of their dialogue among each other about fame in general, famous people specifically, and their own aspirations of grandeur or lack thereof; who they deemed to be famous and who, in their estimation, should not be granted that label; how, if at all, religiosity played into the mix in terms of role model identification, value definition and/or conflicts or rationale for either embracing fame or avoiding it as an ideal; how knowing that someone is famous influences how each individual conducts their everyday life; and finally, any issues associated with fame when discussed within the context of the LDS Church. (Please see Appendix B—"Triad Discussion Topics and Questions" for sample questions and discussion topics.)

**In-depth Interviews**

Stemming from the triad discussions, 12 in-depth interviews were conducted one-on-one with each youth by the same researcher. The researcher sought to probe even deeper into how each individual participant felt about fame and how it affected their values, goals, beliefs, and behaviors. These semi-structured interviews were approximately 20-30 minutes long depending on the amount and quality of information that the participant was willing to reveal. Though the interviews were semi-structured and thus, somewhat focused (i.e., “a conversation with a purpose,” Dexter, 1970), they also proceeded in the spirit of Guba and Lincoln’s (1981) unstructured or “elite” interview “which is concerned with the unique, the idiosyncratic, and the wholly individual viewpoint” (Guba and Lincoln, 1981, pp 155-156). Thus, the interview questions included inquiry about the participants’ life aspirations (to see if there was any influence of fame on their goals) as well as information about their personal role models; questions related to the theories of social comparison theory, social learning theory, self socialization theory and parasocial relationships; questions to uncover respondents’ attitudes, definitions, and perspectives about fame in general, both in and out of the Church; more personalized value-related questions involving fame and religiosity; detailed discussion about each individual’s fan paraphanalia; and general media and demographic information. (Please see Appendix C—“Interview Schedule” for sample interview questions.)

Field notes and daily journals accompanied these interviews which recorded significant revelations,
attitudes, and beliefs of the participants, as well as nonverbal communication and interpersonal interactions among the participants and the interviewer as well as the reactions of the researcher about these dynamics. These notes and journals were also valuable to the researcher in terms of logging “personal impressions and biases, emotional and attitudinal dispositions, individual motives, and speculation and extemporaneous theorizing, . . . ” (Welk, Sherry, Jr., Walendorf, 1988, p. 452). These one-on-one interviews were also audio taped for subsequent transcription and coding procedures.

**Non-participant Observations—Fan Paraphanalia**

Limited non-participant observations will also be conducted throughout this study. As Guba and Lincoln (1981) explain:

> [O]bservation . . . maximizes the inquirer’s ability to grasp motives, beliefs, concerns, interests, unconscious behaviors, customs, and the like; observation . . . allows the inquirer to see the world as his subjects see it, to live in their time frames, to capture the phenomenon in and on its own terms, and to grasp the culture in its own natural, ongoing environment; observation . . . provides the inquirer with access to the emotional reactions of the group introspectively—that is, in a real sense it permits the observer to use himself as a data source; and observation . . . allows the observer to build on tacit knowledge, both his own and that of members of the group.” (p. 193)

Though the non-participant observations were limited in scope to general living environment and roommate relationships, they were somewhat more detailed in terms of studying the existing “fan paraphanalia” in the participants’ homes. In terms of fandom, Harris (1998) explains that a vital method of any study involving forms of fandom must include observance of environment as well as acquisition of fan paraphanalia. In addition to “fan writings” (e.g., newsletters, fanzines, songs, etc.), being “central to the practices of fandom,” Harris explains:

> [F]an culture also has other means of appropriation: an active, acquisitive material culture in which the collection of objects central to the practice of fandom serves both as an admission to fandom and as a form of ritualized maintenance. Fan acquisition of paraphanalia, therefore, must be carefully considered in developing overall theories of fandom. (p. 6)
Thus, with the permission of each participant, the researcher conducted close observations of participants' dorm rooms or apartments insofar as they were willing to reveal them, noting any evidence of fan paraphernalia such as posters, clothing, stickers, souvenirs, merchandise, and other reflections of fandom behavior in material forms. Media genres such as CDs, videos, books, magazines, and Internet sites were also noted when applicable. This evidence was not limited to their dorm rooms exclusively; however. It was at times uncovered outside of their homes such as hats they may have worn, notebooks they may have carried, or bumper stickers on cars they may have driven, for example. With the consent of the participants, still photos were taken of this evidence, with the identity of the participant being protected as much as possible. Field notes and daily journals were also maintained throughout this method of data collection.

**Transcription/Coding**

All in-depth interviews and triads were transcribed word-for-word and then coded into clusters of common themes, behaviors, values (including conflicts), perspectives, and definitions that emerged. This process incorporated what Glaser and Strauss (1967) term as "constant comparative method" which suggests that "while coding an incident for a category, compare it with the previous incidents in the same and different group coded in the same category" (p. 106). Concurring with Glaser and Strauss, Goetz and LeCompte (1981) assert:

Ethnographers who infer cultural and behavioral patterns as viewed from the perspective of the group under investigation must use strategies to elicit and analyze subjective data . . . . The goal is to reconstruct the categories used by subjects to conceptualize their own experiences and worldview. . . . This strategy combines inductive category coding with a simultaneous comparison of all social incidents observed. As social phenomena are recorded and classified, they also are compared across categories. (pp 54, 58)

Glaser and Strauss further assert that these categories "must emerge" naturally, and that researchers must be open to "what the data tells them." Once these categories, therefore, materialized, they were then subsequently grouped, and a coding scheme was developed from these clusters. This categorization process not only helped highlight the various "communities" of thought and behavior within the interpretive
community theory, but it also incorporated Glaser and Strauss’ explanation of grounded theory (1967) which allows a given theory to unfold naturally from the data. Glaser and Strauss summarize the four stages of this process as follows:

(1) comparing incidents applicable to each category, (2) integrating categories and their properties, (3) delimiting the theory, and (4) writing the theory. Although this method of generating theory is a continuously growing process—each stage after a time is transformed into the next—earlier stages do remain in operation simultaneously throughout the analysis and each provides continuous development to its successive stage until the analysis is terminated. (p. 105)

External Auditors/Member Checks

Once the researcher initially grouped this data, she employed external auditing by soliciting the review of several qualified academics who examined the clustered data as well as labels and content of each “community.” These individuals consisted of selected faculty members and graduate students from other schools and departments at BYU as well as at other universities. The researcher presented to them categories of data clustered into the various themes and requested the analysis of the external auditors. She subsequently made adjustments based on their feedback.

Furthermore, the researcher conducted member checks by selected informants who verified the consistency of the participants’ statements, behaviors, values, perspectives, and definitions with their respective categories. This procedure aided the researcher with reliability and trustworthiness issues as well as further clarifying her understanding and interpretation of participants’ conversations, behaviors, and interactions. Thereafter, coding adjustments were made by the researcher in response to these member checks.

Study Limitations

This study about LDS youth is not only limited in terms of age, but it may also be limited in terms of educational, economical, and moral diversity. Though a fortunate academic cross section did exist among this particular sample (e.g., one participant currently attended UVSC; three were recent transfer students from Utah State University, BYU Hawaii, and Ricks College; and two of the participants were early high school
graduates who began their BYU studies early), the fact that most currently attended BYU might have weighted the sample in some ways. For instance, since the average BYU freshman enters with a 3.7 grade point average and an ACT score of 27, this research may have tended to focus on those BYU students who most likely represent a more educated segment of the Church’s youth, thus, ignoring those young members with a lower academic performance record. This “more educated” portion may also represent a more affluent Church membership who can afford to attend a private university. Furthermore, since it is required of all BYU students to sign the university’s “Honor Code” (agreeing to abide by high moral and behavioral standards) as well as submit a signed endorsement by one’s clergy (in the case of LDS members, their bishop) verifying active Church membership (if LDS) as well as adherence to high moral and ethical standards, it is assumed that most students are at least moderately active LDS members. (Since this is a study about LDS youth, non-members were automatically excluded from the study.) And after much discussion with the participants in this study, the researcher would consider all individuals to be very active religiously (based on their statements about their beliefs both doctrinally, philosophically, and their talk of frequent church attendance as well as active involvement in Church callings and other ward activities). Thus, this selected sample may have barred an equally significant segment of young people who may be wavering religiously, and who, because of their struggles, may be even more affected by the value conflicts in question between fame and religiosity.

It would, therefore, be interesting to later expand this study in order to observe a broader segment of LDS youth who may not be attending a Church school, who may be somewhat less educated, who may come from a lower income family and/or environment, or who may be less active in the Church. (See “Recommendations for Further Research” in Conclusions chapter for more detailed suggestions.)
Results

Despite popular views that youth are being overcome by fame and media, this study revealed an active audience among these LDS youth that not only reads against the media, but recognizes and acknowledges the media manipulation that can be found in fame. The research also showed that these youth talk about fame in a way that reveals a significant variation of views as well as a deep complexity regarding the phenomenon. Thus, the data revealed a single interpretive community of LDS youth with a diversity of talk about fame within it. This variance emerged through revealed themes about the paradoxical nature of fame, religiously-founded ideals about fame, fan paraphanalia, definitions of fame, and specific styles of talk about fame. In fact, the data demonstrate a strong tendency toward gendered views about fame and religiosity, particularly within the value conflicts and resolutions. However, further research is needed to determine its conclusiveness. Nonetheless, all participants exhibited a constant flow of analysis during group and individual discussions further identifying an active-audience approach to this mediated issue. This group of LDS teenagers provided data that revealed a number of key findings about fame within varied modes of analysis, each of which will be discussed at length in this section.

In terms of the central research question (RQ1) about fame and the religiosity of LDS youth and (RQ2) how they define and resolve value conflicts that arise therein, the overall relationship between fame and the religiosity of the young LDS participants in this study was found to be paradoxical—both complimentary and conflicting depending on the context. This relationship was further explained in responses to the subsequent research questions (RQ3) about how LDS youth talk about fame and (RQ4) how they tie religiosity into those conversations, (RQ5) how they define fame and (RQ6) whom they consider to be famous, (RQ7) the positive and negative uses of fame in their lives, (RQ8) what LDS youth are learning and perhaps emulating from those who are famous as well as (RQ9) how they see the role of fame play out in the Church. (Please refer to Appendix B for specific triad questions and discussion topics and Appendix C for one-on-one interview schedule.)

Thus, in order to effectively explain these detailed findings, the author will first define fame as seen through the eyes of these LDS youth as it relates both secularly and religiously. These definitions will be
arranged into dominant themes of categorized data (though not entirely mutually exclusive) to describe the interpretive community. For instance, one theme that emerged was the paradoxical nature of fame and the media. While fame was seen as a negative force that “corrupts people,” it was also seen as “an opportunity to do good” in the world. Likewise, celebrities were viewed as both “happy” because of their abundant “riches,” “glamorous lifestyles,” and that “they always seem happy in the media;” and “unhappy” because of related consequences like “divorce” and failed relationships, “lack of privacy,” and people wanting to know them “only because they are famous, not for who they really are.” Additionally, varying definitions of fame emerged regarding the Church. For example, President Hinckley and other General Authorities were considered to be famous—but not “worldly famous” like other celebrities. Their fame, which was considered not to have been sought out, was seen as merely a consequence of their well-doing throughout the world. The media, which were also viewed both positively and negatively, were defined as “the outlet” for fame, and thus, an integral aspect of this phenomenon. Finally, the nature of fame was considered to be relative in terms of geographic impact (local fame versus global fame), duration of influence (fleeting fame versus enduring fame), and the tenuous social network of those deemed famous (those who are famous to some are unknown to others).

Next, the author will highlight the respondents’ ideals about fame—what they believe fame should (or shouldn’t) be—arranged into dominant themes of categorized data that revealed topics of religiosity as their foundations and rationales. Compelling themes include standards such as: The famous should be recognized for both achievement as well as possessing a noble character—not merely for being exposed. In other words, people shouldn’t be “dubbed famous” for doing things (like reality TV) that are not “a big deal;” The famous have an added responsibility to do good in the world in terms of “speaking out on their beliefs” or doing “sincere charity work;” The famous should possess vast amounts of humility and avoid being overly self-serving in terms of too much “self-promotion;” The title of “role model” should be earned through both achievement and a good character, someone who “kids can strive to be like;” And finally, true Christlike individuals would not want to aspire to fame because they would instead prefer a life of “humility” and “helping others grow.”
The author will then detail the value conflicts experienced by these individuals which provide foundational concepts for determining potential sub-interpretive communities regarding fame and religiosity. These conflicts displayed striking gender exclusivity both in definition and in resolution, but as stated, require further research in order to determine whether or not gender is the primary defining factor in these sub-level interpretive communities. For instance, some value conflicts that were predominantly shared by the female participants include: body image issues and eating disorders—media pressure to look perfect and be thin as well as a social connection of this conflict with the LDS belief and practice of marriage; fame and Hollywood not being conducive to LDS lifestyle; and idol worship and celebrity emulation—a “guilty pleasures” female view. The value conflicts that were predominantly shared by the males include: visual media temptations and wasting time on unimportant things; as well as an alternate view of idol worship and celebrity emulation—a “pure entertainment” male perspective. While both males and females exhibited a tendency toward idol worship and celebrity emulation, they interpreted it differently in that the females connected various levels of guilt with their mediated interaction with celebrities, and the males saw their interaction merely as entertainment with no evidence of guilt association.

Finally, the author will conclude this section by analyzing the contradictions that arose among participants throughout the study such as: avoiding admittance of fandom or any direct personal media effect (most effects were initially stated in third-person effect and were later expressed through more personal experiences); and demonstrating value/behavior inconsistencies such as criticizing celebrities for things like “immodest dress” for instance, and then dressing similarly themselves. The author will then take a final look at fame and fandom personalized in the lives of the participants which includes a comparison of fan paraphanalia versus religious artifacts displayed in their homes and how religious symbols significantly overshadowed fan symbols; and thoughts about their own potential fame which were varied in nature, but significantly tempered from their initial absolutist perspectives. (Please refer to Table I on the following page.)
Table 1
Overview of Interpretive Community

LDS Youth: Distant-Yet-Active Audience

Characteristics:
- Distant—hesitant to admit fandom or personal media influence
- Active media audience
- Reads primarily against the media
- Tendency toward third-person effect

Shared Dominant Themes:
- Fame Defined
- Fame Ideals
- Contradictions About Fame
- Fan Paraphernalia vs. Religious Symbols

Gendered Views About Fame and Media

Females

Characteristics:
- Personalize fame / mediated images
- Social connection to value conflicts
- Feelings of media-related guilt
- Preoccupied with appearance
- Incorporate individualized religiosity strategies to resolve value conflict
- *Friends* is preferred TV sitcom

Value Conflicts:
- Fame / Hollywood Inhabits Dreams—Seen as not Conductive to LDS Living
- Body Image Issues and Eating Disorders—Media Pressure to Look Perfect and Be Thin
- Pressure to be Perfect—Perpetuated by the Media
- Idol worship and Celebrity Emulation (Appearance)—GUILTY Pleasures

Males

Characteristics:
- Emotionally detached from internal dissonance; able to "shelve" media issues and conflicts
- Absence of media-related guilt
- Preoccupied with action/adventure
- Incorporate institutional religiosity strategies to resolve value conflicts
- *The Simpsons* is preferred TV sitcom

Value Conflicts:
- Visual Media Temptations—Wasting Time on Unimportant Things
- Idol Worship and Celebrity Emulation (Action)—Pure Entertainment
Interpretive Community: 
LDS Youth—A Distant-Yet-Active Audience

As a fundamentally united interpretive community regarding the initial forthcoming issues, these LDS participants were generally very assertive and thorough in expressing their opinions, experiences, and perspectives about mediated fame and its related issues. Thus, they displayed characteristics of an active audience that is not afraid to read against the media. They are termed “distant” because as explained previously, there was a hesitance among them to admit any fandom behavior or direct personal influence from the media, opting for explanations in third-person effect and later evolving into more personal examples and connections. This initial distant behavior causes one to ask whether there is an underlying negative perception of fandom in general.

FAME: WHAT IT IS

Speaking to the research questions about (RQ5) how LDS youth define fame and (RQ3) how they talk about fame, this section will detail the paradoxical nature of fame as described by the participants—a vital foundation from which to uncover subsequent audience meanings, ideals, and value conflicts. This section begins to reveal how fame is both shunned and embraced simultaneously. For instance, while participants have clearly detailed definitions of fame that are both positive and negative, they are slow to admit being enticed by it—or by the media—again, indicating a significant third-person effect; while they detail the “corrupting influence of fame,” they are also somewhat intrigued by it, admiring the lavish lifestyle, elitism, perks, and power that seem to come with celebrity territory; and while there was a wide range of people whom they consider famous, they were both critical and in awe of those celebrities—some whom they have actually met and others whom they only know through the media. Again, this pattern underscores the theme that fame is paradoxical in nature.

The participants initially viewed this mediated phenomenon as primarily negative describing it as “overrated,” “disturbing,” and “a big hype,” for instance. They also pointed out that fame “corrupts people” in various ways, analyzing it within a religious context which includes references to The Book of Mormon, an ancient record which is accepted as scripture within the LDS Church. In the following triad, M4 compares...
the corruption of today's fame with the corruption that took place among ancient civilizations documented in *The Book of Mormon*. The reference below refers to a common theme of pride throughout the book that is often linked to "riches" and "prospering in the land." This exemplifies how these LDS youth commonly used religious framework to analyze fame:

M11: It's like you don't want like, really good people to be famous because it kind of corrupts them, too.

M12: It's just like anything else. It is like when you have a lot of money, it's going to go to your head eventually. You know, it's like their pride cycle in *The Book of Mormon*. It's like you see the Nephites in *The Book of Mormon*, like in [the book of] Alma, they'll be all humble, right? And then because of that they will prosper in the land, and then the Lord will bless them and they will get more possessions and then um, as soon as they start getting rich again they get prideful, and they, as soon as they get prideful, then they start getting famine or something, and then they get humbled again. And then it is like a cycle. It just happens again and again. And it's like that and uh, in modern day life too, you know, I mean you get more money, you get more power, you get more anything. It is just like you get caught up in it, like you let it consume you instead of controlling you, you know like if people could control it, then there is not a problem with it you know?

However, with further discussion, positive views of fame—as well as the media—eventually surfaced, being described generally as "an opportunity for those in the public eye to use their influence for good in the world," for example:

F1: [I]f you used fame properly, it can be good. My mom is a regional representative of the Church for public relations, and the media has a lot of positive things about it . . . . [And] like Audrey Hepburn for example, she served children and made her cause known, . . . If you have the opportunity to be famous—since we know in the world like, Stephen R. Covey does wonderful things—use it the right way.

Fame, therefore, was ultimately viewed as both positive and negative, the hinging factors lying in
how famous individuals chose to use their fame as well as the quality of their true characters. In the spirit of the uses and gratifications theory (Katz, 1959; Katz et. al., 1974), these respondents saw fame as a “tool” or “an opportunity” with potential for a variety of functions to accomplish either good or bad in the world. Again, this exemplifies how these youth simultaneously accept and reject fame:

F8: Fame is positive and negative. OK, well, I think it’s how you use your fame . . . . Leaders and people like the Dalai Lama or stuff like that [use their fame positively]. And then there’s people who display their fame negatively, like actors or actresses that do drugs or sleep around, and stuff like that.

Respondents viewed fame as somewhat tenuous, describing it as “fleeting,” “relative,” and a “trial” for those who are famous. They likewise equated it with wealth, “popularity,” and high levels of mediated exposure such as “well-known people” who are “always on TV” or “on magazine covers.” They associated fame with “glamour,” “fanfare,” “excitement,” and “hoopla,” along with a privileged lifestyle that included “power” and “influence.” This lifestyle translated into things like expensive cars, limousines, luxurious estates in exclusive areas; extravagant parties and elite formal events; and various types of assistants on hand to attend to hair, makeup and clothing needs. It was interesting to note that these individuals were again, both enamored and critical of these elements of fame. While they generally viewed these specific elements as desirable, they were likewise critical of them, labeling them as “worldly” and “selfish” desires, as seen in the following triad exchange:

F9: You know, you’ve got the Britney Spears people or whatever. They’re always going in their limos, and they’re always going to huge formal things, and whenever you look at magazines, you always look through them and see everyone dressed up in their huge ball gowns and people doing their hair and makeup. And I love that. That’s one of my favorite things. I’d love for somebody to do my hair all the time, you know? . . . And not have to worry about, ‘Oh, I can’t afford this,’ or ‘I can’t afford that.’

F8: Well, I think the reality of it all is you have to look at what makes money, and what people want. And people—what’s famous is what people know, what’s popular . . . .
In regard to the research question that explores (RQ6) who LDS youth consider to be famous, a variety of people were considered. Actors (particularly “movie stars”), musicians, and professional athletes were at the top of the list. Names such as Marilyn Monroe, Audrey Hepburn, Princess Diana, and Elvis epitomized classic fame in their minds. Other actors such as Julia Roberts, Gwyneth Paltrow, Jennifer Anniston, Robert Deniro, Tom Cruise, and Jackie Chan were also mentioned in this context. Pop music stars such as Britney Spears, Christina Aguilera, and Madonna were discussed as being famous as were highly paid athletes such as Roger Clemens and Sammy Sousa. Philanthropers and religious leaders such as Mother Teresa, the Dalai Lama, and LDS Church president Gordon B. Hinckley were also considered famous by these respondents along with various other LDS celebrities.

While there was great discussion about who they felt “deserved” to be famous (further detailed in the FAME IDEALS section), it was equally interesting to observe who did not make the list. The data showed that those who were the most mediated individuals in popular culture were most often considered as the most famous in their minds, while novelists, artists, politicians, and other highly accomplished—and even recognized individuals—were rarely mentioned, if at all, in some discussions. This indicates that while they criticize the media in many cases, they simultaneously accept them as a validator of fame, which defines celebrities. While some participants described their actual encounters with famous individuals, others shared how they felt when they wanted to meet someone famous, such as the participant below:

F8: I think it’s wanting to shake someone’s hand, to be like, ‘Oh, I shook his hand!’ Having to be excited about shaking someone’s hand—that means that they were, like, famous to me. I don’t know. Could you see that? You’re like, ‘I shook the prophet’s hand!’ He’s famous. I’d be really excited about shaking the prophet’s hand.

Another fascinating revelation that was constantly reiterated during discussions was the belief that famous people want to be famous and that they seek it out. The participants described these individuals as “wanting attention” or “recognition” on a mass level, or “self-promotion.” The only individuals who they considered as having fallen into fame as merely a coincidental or undesired by-product of their work or position were people such as Mother Teresa, Gordon Hinckley, and the LDS Church General Authorities.
This revelation is perhaps an indication that the term fame in general may be defined in more selfish terms in their minds in contrast to how people viewed it years ago.

The participants further pointed out that fame can be a strong human motivator. Their underlying belief that the famous want to be famous led to a correlating universal assumption that not only do celebrities want to be famous, everyone wants to be famous in some way, even if it's for a short period of time. Each triad featured talk about Andy Warhol’s “15 minutes of fame” philosophy in various applications. As illustrated in the contrasting views below, some described this quest for fame as wanting to be “rich and famous,” desiring “others to look up to them,” and that “some people will do anything—bad or good—to be famous:"

M10: Everybody wishes and has the dream that they can become the famous person that everybody looks up to . . .

However, participants such as the musically-inclined student below, pointed out that what they really wanted was to be recognized for their work, not just to be “popular” or to gain vain attention:

M4: Well, I would like to be famous in the sense I would like to be remembered, which is sort of bad, because that means that you are dead. (Laughing) . . . I just want name recognition, not so much fame recognition, but just name recognition. Like you are listening to someone[’s music] saying, ‘Wow, M4 wrote that,’ in that sort of way . . . [W]hat I really like about what it is, is the joy of writing music is truly a joy for me, and it’s not a task, and it is not really work. But I would also like to have that name recognition as well. You know, not just the classical [music] circles, just throughout everything . . .

[I]t’s something like I think everybody sort of wants to have is part of them live on into the future, when they are physically gone.

Consistent with the previously described paradoxical view of fame, the participants likewise saw celebrities as both happy and unhappy. As illustrated in the following isolated statements, this contrasting perspective further highlights their acknowledgment of the duality of fame, indicating both an active and analytical approach to fame:
F9: Yeah, who doesn’t want to be famous? Who doesn’t want to be popular, because they always seem so happy?

F3: [I]ike you see the [celebrities] that are like doing really well. And of course they are like, happy and like, you know, positive. But when their career goes bad, or they are not as famous so they are not as whatever, they start getting like all depressed, and they’re not as nice and they don’t take care of themselves . . . .

F8: Yeah, I see like divorce and like—’cause, I don’t know. I was reading a People magazine in the doctor’s office yesterday. It was, like, all about, like, the stars and, like, this guy divorced three times, and then she divorced—had four divorces. And then they got married, and they thought they were going to stay together, like, this was the one. It had to be, you know, like, but it’s like, yeah, people break up. You know, a lot of times, I think they seem to be really happy, like, just in, like, movies and stuff, but I really don’t think they’re that happy. They can’t be . . . because, like, they’re always away from their family. They work those long hours. And people just like you because you’re famous, and they don’t want to just be like real friends with these people.

F1: I don’t think that many people in Hollywood are really happy. I do empathize with them. It’s really hard not to get caught up in it. Even you know, people in the Church have a hard time not getting caught up in it.

Media—The Outlet for Fame

Most participants generally viewed the media as the “outlet for fame,” as described by one respondent. Thus, various correlating media issues emerged which related to fame. Typically considered to be negative overall with some redeeming positive traits, the media (particularly TV and magazines) were repeatedly described as “manipulative” and “powerful,” indicating both a universal distrust among these
respondents as well as a sense of the audience being somewhat dominated by the media. They went on to further describe the media with negative terms such as “immoral,” “low quality,” and “a waste of time.”

**Media as Negative**

Assuming a “big media effects” tradition (Lazarsfeld, 1949; Comstock and Strasburger, 1990), many participant concerns were voiced in a third-person effect, while other concerns expressed a direct influence or effect on the individual. F8, for example, admits heavy media usage (in part because her parents “were too open with the media”), and as a result, she intends to strictly regulate media use among her future children; F9 shared first-hand experience she has had producing media, detailing how she has witnessed manipulation within the print media; And F1 believes that the media are so powerful that she hopes for mercy from the Almighty for herself and others—including celebrities—concerning attitudes and actions which she perceives as having been heavily influenced by the media. She said that when it comes to many of these issues, “we are also human” and equally vulnerable to the persuasive effects of the media—[influence persuasive enough to be compared to Hitler’s Nazi regime 60 years ago. As stated earlier, the following examples illustrate how these participants not only acknowledge the media manipulation that can be manifested in fame, but are lamenting the hollowness and negative persuasion that they perceive exist in both. Consider the following perspective during a triad exchange regarding harmful media effects:

**F8:** It’s horrible. When I have kids, what they watch on TV is going to be very highly regulated. Oh, I’m going to hide the clicker and hide the thing, and they have to ask me permission—

F8 continues to explain that “even cartoons” like “Xena” are “provocative” and “violent.” Likewise, “Cartoon Network” shows too much “cleavage,” “shooting and blood,” “sexual and violent content” that is “geared for children.” Thus, she concludes, “my kids aren’t going to watch cartoons.”

F9 adds that “people wonder why our society is so bad,” insinuating that it is because of media influence. Sharing a report she wrote about “the violent effects of television,” F7 concurs with F8 and F9, explaining that her conclusions showed that “it totally affects them:”

**F7:** What you see is what goes into your thoughts, and what you think becomes your actions.
If you see on—like F8 said, the cartoon where some little person like blows somebody’s head off, then laughs about it. It like goes in their head, and it’s just like there’s no repercussions for their actions so they start thinking that’s OK.

Likewise, F8 shares a report she did about how advertising uses sexuality to sell products with similar “big effects” conclusions:

F8: [L]ike I did comparisons of different ads—non-sexual/sexual, non-violent/violent, like that. And people always will go for the worst case scenario—the sexier woman or something.

... I held like two pictures of a woman next to each other; One in like a business suit and one in like lingerie for Victoria’s Secret. And you ask like a six-year-old boy, like, ‘Which girl’s prettier?’ And he’ll be like, he’ll always pick the girl with less clothes on. Even if this girl’s face is a lot better, and she’s skinnier or whatever, even anything. They’ll always pick the girl with less clothes just ‘cause they think that’s, that’s like the norm today, like that’s what’s good and that’s what’s pretty and attractive. 6-year-old boys! I mean, how do they know?

M4 shows concern for others’ understanding of the media rather than his own, indicating a third-person effect which was prevalent throughout all triads, particularly early on in the discussions:

M4: Well, some of the times reading Time or some other things I can see sort of a liberal slant some of the times, and I am kinda like, ‘There are 30 million people reading this right now.’ And you know, I am wondering how many are actually recognizing that there’s this slant to it.

F9 expresses her distrust for the media because of her personal witnesses of print media manipulation:

F9: Well, one of the reasons [I don’t trust the media] is I was in yearbook in high school. And so, I mean, we easily, if there was something we didn’t like about a picture, we could easily send it to the manufacturing plant and say, ‘Well, crop this,’ or whatever. And same with like video productions. You know, you can have one scene, and then completely change
everything around through the computer and make somebody wear something completely different—make them look entirely different, but yet it’s still them. I always just sit there and think, ‘Oh, you know, they cut off three-fourths of her thigh,’ or, you know, ‘they airbrushed all of her whatever, you know, like her—the moles off of her back or something like that, and made her look like she has this perfect skin.’ . . .

While many participants point out their cynicism regarding the manipulation they believe exists in the media, F1 acknowledges the “humanness” of vulnerable media audiences—as well as those who are famous—and expresses hope for mercy for “media victims” due to the media’s powerful potential to “manipulate.” Again, this example demonstrates how these LDS participants often analyze fame and media issues within a religious context:

F1: [T]he media, like the Nazis, Hitler was so influential, and I think a lot of Germans will be held accountable. But at the same time, some of them had just been so deceived and so manipulated, and Heavenly Father knows we are being deceived and manipulated. He knows that, he understands that. And so, even I like beat myself up, I’m like, ‘I know better,’ but at the same time this is hard. He knows that and [we shouldn’t] beat ourselves up too much, because we are being manipulated and deceived, and these people are smart, and Satan is smart; he is intelligent, and so . . . [we shouldn’t] be too harsh on anyone, you know?

**Reality TV**

The topic of reality TV fostered further discussion regarding the perceived power that the media have to manipulate reality. While some participants enjoyed certain genres of reality TV such as *Cops, National Geographic,* and *Survivor,* all participants acknowledged the pervasive facade that they viewed as inherent in Hollywood and highlighted in the most recent trends in reality TV—again, showing that they are not led or fooled by the power of the media.

MTV’s *The Real World* was of particular interest to these participants as a major point of discussion regarding fame and media manipulation, because a former BYU student named Julie Stoffer was selected to
participate on the show beginning in 2000. Julie’s involvement on the show led to her compromising her agreement with BYU’s moral code of honor (e.g., single students living with members of the opposite sex) and subsequently led to her expulsion from BYU.

While the general sentiment of these participants was one of disrespect for Julie, she was, nonetheless, considered famous in their eyes. Her notoriety, therefore, was further used as a negative example of fame as well as an example of media manipulation and how audiences often accept what the media gives them at face value because they rarely know “the whole story:”

F8: [The media] can make anyone appear what they want to be. They can take—like if they want someone to be portrayed negatively, they have their way of doing it. If they want someone to be portrayed positively, they have a way of doing it. Like Julie from The Real World—like, I’m sure there’s more to her. I’m sure she’s a nice girl. Well, I’m not really sure. But she could very well be a nice girl, and a good kid, but like the way she’s being portrayed, you know, it’s all like, the media’s totally portraying her how they want to portray her, not how maybe she really can be. And that’s how with everyone it is. So sometimes it makes me think twice about people, but most of the time I don’t think twice. I’m just like, ‘Oh, that’s the way it is.’ ‘Cause that’s how we’ve been like trained to think, you know? . . . You don’t get like background on this stuff. You just get, like, what’s there. And you take everything like it’s true. And there’s so many things that like after you find out more about it, you learn more about it, you’re like, ‘Oh, so that’s why,’ you know? He’s acting like an idiot because this and that. Media doesn’t give you that background. Like F9 said, they have so much power to show you—anybody in any way. And most people naturally just take whatever they hear and believe it. So media is scary like that.

**Media as Positive**

While there was much discussion about the negative side of media, many participants acknowledged its positive side as well. This included an effective “way to communicate,” “instruction and education,” a way to “tell a story,” a means to express “lots of emotion” (particularly in music), motivation “to dance,” and an
entertaining way to “escape” the realities of everyday life into a mediated release. Thus, they viewed the media as a functional tool in their lives to help them improve in various physical, emotional, and even spiritual pursuits as explained in these two isolated statements about media usage:

M4: I try to see a lot of the media as the way we communicate. And I think that since we have had a lot of electronic media, we’ve become a lot more um, focused on communicating, which can be very good but can also be very bad, because of the fact that um, there are so many faiths—beliefs and so many moral beliefs between cultures that when you communicate some of the times you might come across something that you might find offensive or may not like to see. So about General Conference when they do say, you know, ‘Beware of some of the media, because not all media is bad.’ The Church, I mean Philo D. Farnsworth himself, you know, [invented the television and was LDS], but um, I think that it’s good to heed what the General Authorities say, and I think that it is also good to have media. Because without that, you would not be able to communicate just like we are now or even spreading our message. We wouldn’t have those tools. So I think that um, the media is great.

F7: Yeah. Uh-huh, I think that’s the way that like media is helpful also. You know, like surf videos, magazines. Like, my brothers, when they were really into skateboarding, they used to always watch Skate [videos], and like ‘Oh, rewind it,’ you know, ‘how do you do that?’ Yeah, I think media is totally like stuff like that is totally cool, and I know like [another roommate not present] will watch basketball, and she’s like, ‘Oh, that was awesome!’ and like, stuff like that. Yeah, I totally agree. It, you know, helps and motivates and teaches. You know, like, not all [media] is bad. I mean, I grew up on Sesame Street and learned the ABC’s so I know there’s like redeeming values. And it’s the same with anything you know, like, the Internet. Like, I just read a conference talk that was like, you know, it’s been put on there for good. You know, it unfortunately falls into the hands of evil, which I think all
media has. So like, everything has its good, too.

FAME IN THE LDS CHURCH

With that snapshot of fame taken from these LDS teenage perspectives, it was interesting to observe how these philosophies and viewpoints were applied to—or modified—to issues regarding fame in the Church. Overall, these issues addressed the research question regarding (RQ9) how they see the role of fame play out in the Church. President Gordon B. Hinckley, for example, was considered famous by the respondents, as were the other Church General Authorities, yet they were clearly exempt from prior general perspectives offered about the famous elsewhere. For instance, one respondent described him as being “not worldly famous” because he does not “seek out” the glamorous, opulent lifestyle that they assumed other secular celebrities pursue. LDS celebrities were discussed at length with varying viewpoints about most individuals. While they were generally considered to be either a strength or a hindrance to the Church with little middle ground, some participants took the stance that “any fame is good fame for the Church.”

Like the previous media issues heretofore mentioned, fame in the Church was viewed both positively and negatively, depending on the type of fame and how it was used. For instance, during this discussion, a participant who happened to be a convert emphasized that famous LDS examples helped young members of the Church—particularly converts—solidify their LDS identity, consistent with self-socialization theory (Arnett, 1995). However, derogatory or “false” mediated information about the Church was seen as a negative form of fame with the participants defending the Church on a very personal level. In fact, it seemed that famous LDS people were considered “representatives” of sorts for them, and thus, there was an underlying feeling of personal investment with or against them. Finally, priorities were determined among the participants regarding who they would most prefer to listen to in a public speaking situation given the option. The prophet and General Authorities were most preferred. LDS celebrities were second choice, and “regular people” were third.

In short, as discussions about fame in the Church increased and values and beliefs were brought into play, it was interesting to observe how their previously defined definitions of fame seemed to bend somewhat for those who shared common belief systems and behind whom they could stand. In other words, the closer
fame got to “the Church”—a common value and belief system—the more accepted it became (if mediated accurately and by the right people). In fact, some acknowledged “the lack of fame the Church has,” implying that fame—in this case—should be a sought-after ideal. Likewise, there seemed to be a protectiveness of the Church and its leaders regarding their fame and publicity—unlike secular celebrities who were commonly criticized by these participants without equal defense.

**Prophet and General Authorities**

As stated, the prophet and Church General Authorities were seen as positive examples of fame in the eyes of most participants, though some considered them more as men of “respect” than men who were “famous” in the “Hollywood” sense. The respondents explained that this difference was primarily because they assumed that these Church leaders did not “seek fame out.” This element, therefore, differentiated them from other famous people in the eyes of these LDS youth, as indicated in the following isolated statements about fame in the Church:

**M4:** I think the fame that has come to President Hinckley over the past two years regarding his traveling at the age of 90 . . . the fame that he has is really positive for our church, I think. . . . The fame he has acquired . . . is not so much [because] of his talents, but his beliefs that make him—and his affiliation makes him famous.

**M6:** I guess my observation would be the lack of fame that our church has. I don’t think we emphasize the importance of fame, necessarily um, the—more of reverence, I think, and respect. The only reason I distinguish this is because a lot of times we associate [fame] with a lot of publicity, a lot of glamour, a lot of hoopla, that I think our church focuses more on the respect and reverence for you know, really good people. And that’s how I would view the apostles and the prophet and even the local leaders. A lot of the local leaders, I just have the strong sense of respect for these people as men of integrity, men of honor, and in the eyes of the world they might not have that kind of fame, but I think my respect and my—I guess adoration for them would be greater than my sense of fame or my sense of how
I would hold famous people to. So I think in respect to this question that these people are famous in their own sense, and though they might not have as wide of an audience, I think if you ask anybody that has the same respect that they would consider these people more famous than superstars or pop stars.

M10: I remember the interview that President Hinckley had with Mike Wallace on 60-Minutes. I think that was great publicity for the Church, because I think that could have been possibly one of the greatest things that we could have done publicity-wise, you know, because I mean, like the leader of our church agreed to go on a well-known show and be asked whatever they wanted to ask them. And every question they asked him he had an answer for and backed it up. He knew exactly [what to say] and you know, he had the spirit with him. And like you could just see that he was admired for that, you know? I mean, Mike Wallace is... coming from a non-member standpoint, and [he is] asking him the things that [were confusing]. And he is just like totally answering [his] questions, and he is totally humble and whatnot about it. I think it's a good image as a whole, and it gives the prophet a good image as just an individual you know? It shows that he knows what he is doing, and he doesn't go out there and make us all sound like a bunch of losers or anything.

LDS Celebrities and Newsworthy Individuals

LDS celebrities were viewed as either a strength or an embarrassment to the Church. Individuals who were commonly brought up included former professional football player, Steve Young, entertainers, Donny and Marie Osmond, author and motivator, Stephen Covey, former BYU student Julie Stoffer, from MTV's reality TV show, The Real World, as well as various other professional athletes, musicians, and celebrities. Most LDS celebrities including Steve Young, Donny Osmond, and Stephen Covey were viewed favorably and considered to be positive examples of the Church. Talk about NBA player, Mark Madsen, exemplified how these young members of the Church create bonds with celebrities based solely on religious
commonalities. The Real World’s Julie Stoffer was considered to be a very negative example of the Church as well as of a typical BYU student for her “unreal” representation of an LDS college student. Tom Green, a Utah polygamist who claims to be a “fundamentalist Mormon” but has actually been excommunicated from the LDS Church, was also viewed negatively. Opinions about Marie Osmond were mixed. The underlying concern seemed to be that the Church maintain a positive and accurate image in the eyes of the world. Again, because of the common LDS values, the data strongly indicated a shared feeling of personal investment with these celebrities, as if they were a voice—or face—to the world of the Church. Therefore, they were either highly critical of these individuals, or they applauded them wholeheartedly. Following are some of their perspectives on these individuals illustrated in various triad exchanges.

**Marie Osmond—Entertainer***

While the sentiment about Marie Osmond was varied, it is interesting to observe how in the following triad discussion F1 vacillates in her views about the LDS celebrity. While she doesn’t particularly respect Marie Osmond as a personal role model, she demonstrates compassion at the hardships LDS celebrities must encounter as public individuals. Thus, F1 struggles with expressing a one-sided perspective:

**F1:** I don’t really look up to Marie Osmond that much. I don’t really admire her that much. She’s my brother’s wife’s neighbor, and she was at his wedding and everything. And I think she has done well and everything, but I think she has had a lot of struggles and had to pay for being in Hollywood . . . . I don’t really like how she has come out [publically] on the postpartum depression thing and really didn’t—I don’t agree with how she’s milking it for all it’s worth [writing books and appearing on talk shows]. . . . I think I admire her in some ways. I think she is a good person, and I think she tries, but I think she’s had a hard time, and in fact, I think she’s probably done the best you can do being in Hollywood. It’s really hard not to become prideful and, you know, care so much about what you look like, and she does care, and how could she not? I mean, you almost sympathize with her. So she’s done well, but still, I don’t look at her as some outstanding, you know, religious woman. She’s really had difficulties, and I wonder if it is her fault or just, you know,
what’s been thrown on her. And I’m judging her, but I just don’t look at her like Sherry Dew [an LDS general Church women’s leader] or these other people that you really look up to . . . .

F3: . . . I probably look up to Marie Osmond like a little more, just ‘cause, there aren’t that many [famous LDS] women out there . . . .

F1: . . . I think like, when you get big, and like, people know you and know everything about you, like, it’s hard, and there is tons of stress, and [Marie] is still, somewhat grounded even though [she’s] not. So I just think it’s hard, like, things that [celebrities] deal with are hard, and so like, people can’t understand what they are going through unless they’ve [been through it, too].

Julie Stoffer—The Real World

Clearly, Julie is not well respected among any of these young participants, nor is she seen as a typical or positive representative of BYU co-eds. As the following comments indicate, there is evidence of some resentment toward Julie among the respondents because she is seen as “representing” to the world what young LDS members are. This sentiment again, illustrates how these individuals take the public image of the Church very seriously and personally.

F8: OK, yesterday, I was watching The Real World, it was just something that was on at work, and [Julie] was on it. And she was like bagging on BYU, how she thought it was so stupid because [of] all the articles [about her] and everything. And then while she was saying that, while she was sleeping in bed with a guy next to her, and making fun of putting a ‘chastity pillow’ between her, she called her bishop to see what the results had come back, whether she had got in [to BYU] or not. She’s like saying, ‘I’ll sleep with this . . . .’ [S]he’s like saying how much she was upset because the school kicked her out and everything, but then like—I don’t know. I just think she doesn’t give the school, like especially our religion, a good, like, impression. So I’m not too fond of her, and she’s Mormon, and she’s famous, and I don’t like her one bit . . . . She disappointed me a lot . . . just because they could have
picked someone like—if they wanted a Mormon girl like they say she’s representing BYU like as the college, you know, they could have picked someone a lot better than her, I think. When people think, ‘Oh, Mormon girl,’ I wouldn’t want them to think, ‘Oh, her.’ I would rather have them think of someone like F7 or something like that rather than this girl.

Tom Green—Utah Polygamist

Comments about Tom Green further demonstrate the investment and concern by these respondents for a positive public perception and accurate understanding of what the Church is and what its members are like. Though Tom Green is not a member of the LDS Church, respondents were concerned that nonmembers are too often confusing him (and other mediated individuals like him) as a typical member, thus distorting the view of who Mormons in 2001 really are.

F7: Oh, we’re in my class yesterday talking about the whole Tom Green polygamy thing, and how it’s just like massive media and how even though he’s not directly affiliated with the Church, just because he’s from Utah, he gives Mormons a bad name, you know? Because automatically, stereotypically, people think the Mormons and polygamy.

F8: He went on the Sally Jesse Raphael show, and he went on Leeza and all these shows about having five wives and being a polygamist and claiming that he’s a member of the Church.

F7: And like I guess on some Newsweek or something, some article, it said like the Mormon church has denounced polygamy for 100 years, which is like the one good thing—

F8: And still, even the word that he says, even whatever he claims he is, even that it has affiliated with Mormons, makes people like my mom, and my family members that aren’t LDS, like totally, totally not like our religion. Like my mom, she’s really, really more open about it now, but at first, she was just convinced that Mormons were just a bunch of polygamists. And it’s because of the media, because that’s all she knows. Like shows, magazines and stuff like that show people like him doing the negative—portraying the negative image, that makes my mom be like, ‘Oh yeah, you can’t get baptized,’ stuff like that. Like, that was the only thing she had to do that she like ever knew about our church.
that had her saying, like, ‘Oh, I don’t want you going to church with [a member family] like that.’ Polygamy, and all she knows of polygamy is from TV and magazines. So I think negative media like that really has a bad influence.

**Mark Madsen—Los Angeles Lakers**

The following triad discussion about Mark Madsen is an example of how LDS youth look to positive role models in the Church who are famous as a means to connect themselves socially within the LDS community and to establish or enhance their religious and cultural identity both individually and collectively in the world.

F8: I think I look up to people that like are LDS, that like, . . . Mark Madsen. Like I’m obsessed with the Lakers right now. And then like when I found out that Mark Madsen was Mormon we just like really supported him, like when a couple of months ago, like a couple hundred BYU students, we went to a Lakers-Jazz game. And we were like all about Mark Madsen. Like the guy doesn’t even get to play. Well, he’s playing now, but he wasn’t even like, playing, you know? And we’re just like all about Mark Madsen because he’s Mormon. He kind of like represents us ‘cause like, Mormon youth, and he’s a basketball player.

F7: Yeah, the other night we were watching the game here and [another roommate] was like, ‘Oh, he’s so cute. He’s Mormon. He’s so good.’ And like, the guy’s not cute. He’s not at all. You know, he might be good at basketball, but he doesn’t play very much. And as soon as we found out he was Mormon, we’re like his number one fan. So I think, like it has to do with standards and stuff because you know, if he’s Mormon, he’s, you hope at least [he’s living LDS standards].

F8: I’m kind of biased. Yeah, my favorite snow boarders—like they’ve all become my favorite snow boarders now that I found out their Mormon. ‘Oh, yeah, he’s my favorite. Yeah, he’s Mormon!’ You know, ‘cause it’s kind of like a thing like all that ‘cause I don’t have, like up here [in Utah] I have all LDS friends but at home, you know, [I don’t]. So it’s like,] ‘Oh yeah he’s Mormon.’ You know, yeah, like ‘He’s cool,’ and stuff like that.
F7: Oh, yeah, it was just funny like, as soon as we found out he was Mormon we were all like, ‘Oh, oh!’ I’m like, ‘He’s our favorite!’ And so it was just funny.

F9: I think it influences it big time because you’re like, ‘Oh, I can relate to them.’ Like you feel like you have this huge bond. But I don’t know.

F8: It’s kind of like that everywhere though, like if you go to a new city or a new class or something, or somewhere like a new job somewhere, outside of Provo anyway, you kind of bond with the people that are Mormon. Like, if you find out they’re Mormon . . . Before I would seek people out with the biggest names, you know, like before I was a member, but now, ‘Oh, you’re Mormon?’ I’m like automatically stay close to them. I think it’s just a security blanket.

Local LDS Fame

Reiterating the relative nature of fame, some participants considered local Church leaders to be famous. Other respondents had not considered them in that way. Still other LDS individuals such as university teachers, public speakers, and mission presidents were singled out as being vulnerable to the “temptations of fame,” also speaking to the research question regarding (RQ6) whom LDS youth consider to be famous and (RQ9) the role of fame in the Church.

F1: Even teachers at BYU probably have a hard time not becoming prideful, like religion teachers. Because we have these amazing religion teachers, and we look up to them, and they’re famous in their own way, in their own light. Stake presidents, they are famous in their own way. Bishops’ families, you know, these little esteemed things that they are somewhat in the spotlight; like our family was a bishop’s family, and we have a big family in Florida that’s righteous. So I know some people are jealous. And it’s not, it’s because, you know, maybe they are new members, and they’re struggling along, and they see these six kids, and they are righteous, and my dad is well off, and he was a bishop. Like that matters. Callings are not about money or fame or anything like that, and I—you have to realize in the Church when you are stake president or bishop’s daughter or whatever, that
some people you treat really, really careful, 'cause you don't think that you are better than them. I would never ever think that or that [I was] famous, but you don't realize how they are seeing you. So if you are having a bad day, and you're sulky, they might think you are snobby. Do you know what I mean? You have to be very careful.

**Preferred Speakers**

Again, the relativism of fame is reflected in how these LDS youth prioritized those individuals to whom they would most like to listen in a public speaking situation. Most participants say that if they had a choice, they would choose to listen to the prophet or a General Authority rather than an LDS celebrity. But if given the choice between an LDS celebrity or a non-famous speaker, they would choose to listen to the LDS celebrity. This "spiritual hierarchy" adds to the evidence that these LDS youth are seeking spiritual growth above fame, yet if given an opportunity to meet and/or observe a famous person—particularly one who is LDS—they would also be curious and interested. Consider the following perspective which exemplifies this sentiment followed by various triad exchanges regarding those who have most merited their attention.

**General Authorities Most Preferred**

That these LDS youth prefer listening to General Authorities above other speakers—including celebrities—is an indication of their priorities in life. Religiosity takes a clear front seat as they define the General Authorities as men who "are called of God" which is consistent with LDS doctrine and belief. The following comments exemplify how these youth are making strong efforts to center their lives around LDS faith and how their religiosity takes precedence over the influence or pursuit of fame and celebrity.

M12: Well, if it's a General Authority, I would much sooner go to a General Authority than just a normal somebody that I maybe never heard of. And if it is somebody I have never heard of, I would probably go to someone who is famous otherwise also, other than a normal person, but I mean like if it was between somebody that's famous in the public eye and Mormon giving a talk or a General Authority, I would go to the General Authority because it's from a different perspective that they are famous I guess you would say. And it's in a different aspect.
M5: [The] prophet and apostles when they talk and they give talks and what they're saying is definitely much more than if I would listen to M4 here. (Laughing)

M4: Just because spiritual understanding being very low; would be like, no.

SF: Is it because they are General Authorities or because they are famous?

M5: It is because they are General Authorities and they are called of God.

M4: Now for me, I really listen to anybody, really, and I try be my own judgment system base to either interpret what they are saying or to actually listen to what they are saying. So, if a prophet is speaking about a spiritual thing and being that is what he is supposed to do, I will listen to that probably with more weight and since I am also a member of the Church more than if my bishop was saying something to me in the same light. But if it was the prophet saying something spiritually, and it was a Jehovah’s Witness missionary trying to tell me the exact same thing, but in his own way, I would listen to the prophet because that’s because my personal values [are related to his].

Famous People Next Preferred

While the respondents first preferred to listen to General Authorities if given the option, their interest in celebrities was still evident, as illustrated in the following triad. Some youth said they were simply curious to observe a mediated icon to see what they were like in real life. Others used their encounters with celebrities as social clout with which to impress their friends.

SF: Why would you choose [to listen to a famous person] over the regular person?

M5: Just because he is famous. That is probably the only reason. I can say that I have met this person, I have seen him talk in person, or know I kinda had that little link with him as being a famous person with that, than the other joe schmoe.

SF: That’s interesting because I recall that in the group [discussion], you were the first person to say that you are not wanting to have like posters on your walls and whatever, and that famous people don’t really faze your life, and yet if it came down to making a choice
between meeting a famous person or non-famous person, you would want to meet the famous person.

M5: Yeah, yeah! But I don’t really glorify these people in my own, when my door is shut. But you know, if I get a chance to go and see them and I guess most if it could be that I could go to my friends and say, ‘Guess who I just saw?’ and stuff like that where you can actually talk about it with your friends and stuff like that. I don’t usually come out of those meetings saying, ‘Gee I never knew this,’ or stuff like that.

SF: So is it more curiosity like you feel like it carried with it some social clout among your friends, (M5: Yeah.) like they might think more highly of you?

M5: Possibly.

Anyone Can be an Effective Speaker

Finally, several respondents emphasized the perspective that in the Church, anyone can be an effective speaker, that everyone has something to offer, and when individuals are under the influence of spiritual inspiration, even “regular people” can be very effective public speakers.

M10: I mean I give talks in Sacrament Meeting. I mean, we are not spiritual; there’s far better people than we are and everything like that. They—everybody has something to offer, and I mean it would just be like you or I going out and giving a talk at a fireside. I mean, anybody can do it. It just so happens that they were chosen, not so much for their being athletes, but maybe like in the outside world, I’ll say, that might be more necessary and stuff like that, because they have the voice that we don’t have.

M12: Like in the scriptures, . . . Like, for instance, it says that weak things will be made strong, you know, you may not all have as strong of a voice, and we’re not all good speakers, and we may not always be so in tune with the spirit, but if we just trust the Lord, you know, like if he wants us to give a talk in Sacrament Meeting, then he’s going to provide a way for maybe some of those who need to hear those words to be touched or whatever, or something like that. And then another one is like the story of the talents, you know. Like everybody
is given talents, and if you don’t use them as for good then you are going to lose them. And if you do [use them], then you could get more. You should just use what you have to the best of your ability and whatever that may be.

SF: Are you just saying just regular people or like these famous [people]? . . . everybody?

M11: I would say with the athletes figuratively speaking, I definitely wouldn’t say it’s good that you like oh, it might have been more, but that doesn’t matter. The fact, is you know, we would listen to them more, so it is more affective they could say the exact same thing that any of us would say, only everyone that hears them is going to remember it for a longer time and listen better, and they are going to be a thousand times more affective. Even if they are a less effective speaker, just because of who they are, their message, ‘cause they are automatically role models just because they are famous. Again, that’s not to say they’re right, but that’s the way it is. So, once in that position, they say something good, you know, they will have an influence.

**FAME IDEALS: WHAT IT SHOULD (OR SHOULDN’T) BE**

While the LDS youth displayed evidence of being enamored by fame during previous discussions, they were much more analytical about fame when it came to discussing their ideals about this phenomenon. For instance, they recognized the difference between earned and unearned fame which contradicts the stereotype that youth are simply under the power of celebrities. LDS religious ideals emerged significantly as participants explained their concepts of how fame should or shouldn’t be. Addressing the research questions about (RQ3 and RQ5) how LDS youth talk about and define fame and (RQ4) how they tie religiosity into those conversations as well as (RQ6) those whom they consider to be famous, participants felt strongly that: (1) People should be famous for doing good, not for just being exposed; (2) Fame requires an added responsibility to do good; (3) Fame requires humility; (4) Role models should embody both achievement and good characters; and (5) Christlike individuals should not aspire to fame. Based on the Judeo-Christian ethic, these themes clearly revealed both the religious foundation and various forms of application of these individuals as well as their religious rationale as justification for these ideals. In short, religiosity took
priority above fame alone in guiding the ethical principles of this phenomenon which eventually set the
standard against which value conflicts were determined.

**People Should be Famous for Doing Good, Not for Just Being Exposed**

All participants agreed that fame should be a bi-product of doing something good or contributing
to society in some positive way. The idea that many celebrities today have become famous or have perpetuated
their celebrity merely through mass exposure or capitalized on their fame for opportunities they did not
necessarily earn was disturbing to these participants. However, a few individuals defended the perceived
perks and opportunities that the famous received explaining that they were “blessed,” and that they had to
make other sacrifices in their lives such as lack of privacy, gossip, and less time with their families, etc., to
pay the price of fame. Either way, most saw these elements of fame as a reflection of society, and they had
definite ideals about what fame should be.

**Something for Nothing**

M12: I think mostly [fame] is overrated because nowadays most people are dubbed famous or
respected for things that I don’t think should be a big deal. Like things that maybe they
just got a lucky chance in life or if they know somebody and have connections and then all
of a sudden they are famous or if they make music that doesn’t take too much talent, but
people like it you know? And it is not really a respected thing, whereas something that you
have to work toward or acquire or a gift, you know?

**Reflection of Society**

M6: I think [reality TV] really shows off what kind of society we live in, awarding nothing for
nothing. I guess (All: laughing). But um, I don’t know. It’s kind of sad that you know we
come to this point where you know we glorify people who do nothing. And a lot of like the
local heroes, like the true heroes get you know five minutes on the news when they die.
Um, so, I don’t know exactly, there is like no remedy to this, I don’t see this getting better
any time soon . . . .

M4: Well, I think like Andy Warhol said, you know, the ‘15 minutes of fame,’ you know, ‘Every
person in the future will have 15 minutes of fame.’ I think that really what is happening is it’s no longer 15 minutes, but it is becoming 15 years, or whatever. Because I think that people that advertise or promote these shows and things and TV stations that have these shows on and they promote it, really make these people huge in the eyes of the viewers. And what happens is really, people are not famous without fans, really. You can’t really say, ‘I’m famous,’ but you know I’m not, ‘cause they don’t have anybody who thinks that I’m famous (laughing) So, you have to, you really have to look at these people as um, uh, what would be the word? They are celebrities in the fact that they were on a TV show, but the fact that they are getting more work for just being who they are as you know, as opposed to acting their actual part, that kind of bugs me. Being someone who is in an artistic field and that’s kind of hard to see people who are not really artists become famous.

**Undeserving Athletic Icons**

F7: [T]here’s guys that are just total losers that are, like, idiots . . . that are, like, you just look at them and you’re like, “What are they doing and how come they’re in so much limelight and put on, you know, a pedestal?” . . . [L]ike we were in Kauai, and there were these two brothers, the Irons brothers, and they rip at surfing. They’re so good. And um, we were surfing, basically like in their backyard [every night]. And they came out when we were surfing, and they were there with their friends sitting there smoking pot and like hanging out. We’re like, ‘You guys are like losers.’ How come—like neither of them graduated from high school, and like they’re awesome at surfing. Like you’d see them on the water and just go, ‘Oh, my gosh.’ But then you get on land and you’re like, ‘Why do people put you on a pedestal,’ you know?

**Fame Requires Added Responsibility**

All participants likewise agreed that fame requires an added responsibility: “Where much is given, much is required,” mentality. This responsibility translated into “speaking out on important issues” (particularly religious issues); participating in “sincere charity work,” not just for more publicity or tax write-
offs; and to set a positive example in terms of fostering positive character traits and healthy relationships (e.g., avoiding divorce).

**Speaking out on Beliefs**

M5: [Fame] can also, give you—you have an opportunity to um, not so much say things, well, I guess say things, yeah, that um, since you have an outlet like the media, that other people don’t have, you can say like your beliefs. But the problem is a lot of the times, famous people go too far in pushing their ideals on other people. So, I think if they have an outlet, they should use it. But with that fame comes responsibility. They should also give other people the opportunity to rebut or give their own ideals alongside their other ideals.

**Using Fame to Benefit Others**

M11: Yeah, I think that the only people that should be famous are those that can handle it and use it to benefit everyone else once they are in that position. Like there are very few that do that, like a lot of people have charity and stuff, but the big reason for that is just tax reasons or publicity. I think people like, one definitely sincere person that seems like Sammy Sousa, how he came from the Dominican Republic. He is always going back there giving them tons of money, doing stuff and you can totally tell just by, ‘cause he is not even a native American [from the U.S.]. He’s from there, and so he is always going back, and you can tell that it’s a sincere thing that’s definitely not for publicity.

**Sincere and Humble Motivations**

M12: Once again, in the scriptures it says that like in [the book of] 3rd Nephi [in The Book of Mormon], it says um, like when Christ comes, and he is instructing the apostles and people what to do, he tells them to pray in secret, you know, and to uh, like if they are going to be charitable or give to the poor do it in secret, and God will see it and now and reward them for it. But they do it in public, then they already got their reward, you know? That’s it. I think that goes a lot with what M11 was saying that a lot of people will do stuff in the public eye, you know, because it will make them look good, but they’re not really doing it
for maybe the reason the public thinks, that it is to really help, you know?

Fame Requires Humility

Again, all participants unanimously agreed that humility should definitely accompany fame, and that it would be a “trial” to remain humble and avoid the pitfalls of pride if constantly in the public eye. Those who were seen as maintaining this virtue were elevated above other celebrities in the eyes of these participants, as indicated in these isolated statements about fame and humility:

M6:  It just amazes me that you know, some people can just be so humble, knowing that they achieved something fantastic, and uh, those people are highly regarded in my eyes. I try to . . . sometimes it gets to me, but I am sure everybody likes their time in the spotlight, but, yeah, I think humility is a great attribute for famous people, I think.

M4:  Fame should not be a method for you know, ‘I’d like to thank the little people’ (laughing), you know? It shouldn’t be condescending, that’s what I am saying. What it should be is it should be uh, adoration and adulation for the things that you accomplish and for the talents that you have and you use.

F9:  I mean a perfect example, like [my boyfriend] out there—an incredible athlete, like was sponsored like by Santa Cruz Snow boarders, 13th in the nation for his trampoline team, and everything like that, and absolutely hates to talk to people about it, like never talks about it, never brags, nothing. And that to me is famous. That—because I have so much respect, because he’s humble about it, and he’s not glorifying in the fact that he’s good, if that makes sense. So he, in my eyes, is one of my big role models.

Role Models Should Embody Both Achievement and Good Characters

According to these participants, global fame seemed to be less in their control than selecting their own personal role models. Thus, they seemed empowered as they spoke out on the necessary prerequisites for today’s role models. Unanimously selecting family members such as parents or siblings as their primary
personal role models, other role models—including celebrities—eventually emerged in the discussions. Overwhelmingly, however, the participants determined that those who were placed in an exemplary position should possess achievement as well as a noble character—one that can help others become better people, as indicated in these following statements and triad exchange:

M6: Yeah, I think you can be a great athlete and everything, but to not have a good character, that wouldn’t be someone I’d want to look up to. Not just sportsmanship or a real good person. They have to have both attributes for me to consider them a great person.

F9: I totally agree with what F7 was saying. There are people out there that are incredibly good at sports and incredibly good athletes that have good morals and good standards. And those are the people that we should be praising and looking up to. But instead, because of the media today and because of the way the world is, you don’t look at that. You look at the fact that, ‘Oh, they can still, you know, be cool and go out and get drunk and it won’t affect them at all.’

F8: [Who’s] that one basketball player [that] is like a total punk, you know?

F7: Dennis Rodman is—

F8: Like is that the kind of kid, the kind of guy where your kids want to be role models to? I’m so sure. No way. . . . [R]ole models used to be someone, you know, you strived to be like, and you know, like had attributes that you liked that you would want for yourself and stuff like that. And like, these are, like, what kids’ role models today are like, you know, like guys like that. It’s like, what are the kids going to turn out to be like? Who would you rather have? A role model that’s like, more wholesome and . . .

F9: Well, I just think role models should be people you want to be like, and who wants to be like Dennis Rodman?

SF: OK. [But] would you look at him and say, ‘Well, maybe I don’t agree with his character
traits, or whatever, but he’s a really good basketball player? Can you separate those things?

F8: Like, when I look at Dennis Rodman, I don’t think, ‘Oh, he’s an incredible basketball player.’ I think, ‘Oh, he has issues with hair.’ (All: laughing.)

Other participants shared examples of positive role models they appreciated because they possessed this fame ideal:

**John Olerud**

M6: Well, as a kid I always looked up to John Olerud, he is the I think first baseman for the Seattle Mariners. . . . He played with the Toronto Blue Jays during their World Series. He was in the golden years. He was always soft spoken and uh, pretty humble guy. And what really impressed me even as a kid was that he underwent I think brain surgery on a tumor, during his early major league baseball years. But one story that I heard from him is or from someone about him, was that um, anytime a child with a similar situation was, uh, would request him, he would always show up by their bedside and you know just visit these terminally ill kids or kids with similar situations and he impressed me that a major league player, and there was no publicity on this, would spend his personal time with these children, you know just because he knows what they were going through. I was always impressed by that. So, I’ve looked up to him for pretty much most of my life.

**Steven Hawkings**

M10: I look up to Steven Hawkings (laughing). He is, I don’t know, like I, he was even on The Simpsons one time, but they like totally, they told him, he didn’t even know what they were going to do. He said, ‘OK you can put me on there,’ and everything like that. But I mean, he’s just a cool guy. He has, I don’t remember exactly what his disease that he has is, and he is paralyzed, and he talks with a computer and stuff, but he didn’t give up. And now his mind is so clear and he could easily, you know because of his condition, just fade away, but he has lived far past his expectancy, and he’s done so much for you know our knowledge of the universe and stuff like that and I think people like him, other physicists and people
in—like the prophet, Gordon B. Hinckley and people like that they’re purpose is synonymous, but not in the same way. Like I think that people that try to explain like with biologists and any type of science or even any field of study that has to do with like the human mind or stuff like that, it’s, we’re trying to learn a knowledge, and we’re trying to explain things that are eternal principles and stuff like that. With the more we learn about physics or about ourselves, like our bodies or people’s minds and stuff like that, that gets us one step closer to God and being Godlike. And I think those kind of people . . . deserve more credit than any[one] else, that anyone could do.

**Christlike Individuals Should Not Aspire to Fame**

Finally, several participants agreed that Christlike individuals would not want to aspire to fame. Perhaps as a result of inculcating humility, true saints would find fame in the worldly sense undesirable. Other participants pointed out that if an individual happens to be famous, however, that does not preclude them from being Christlike. After all, said one participant, “Christ himself was famous.” This theme responds to the research questions about (RQ4) how LDS youth tie religiosity into their conversations about fame, (RQ7) the positive and negative uses of fame in their lives, and (RQ8) what LDS youth are learning and emulating from those who are famous.

**F1:** People really, everyone wants to be famous and, but then I think, I think what’s going to happen is all these people that are famous for doing dumb things, but then you look at your mothers who are not famous for anything and that truly heroic things that they do. (All: yeah, that’s true.) And that’s truly famous. But, I think that in the eternities, [it] will be very different, not—I don’t think that the people who were really righteous are going to be like, ‘Yeah, I’m famous’ and look at Hollywood, because that’s not the mentality, if you’re—you’re not going to want that. You’re not going to be too . . . it’s just going to completely change. I mean we’re in a world that’s just not at all what it’s going to be like [in the hereafter]. I used to think when I was younger, like, well, my friends would persecute me, I’d be like, ‘Oh, when I’m in Heaven and I’m in the Celestial Kingdom, and
I’m like you know, queen, I went there and I was going to be famous,’ you know, like that, but that’s not like how it’s going to be, because we are not going to want that. We are going to be humble and want to love them and help them grow, if we’re truly Christlike.

It’s significant to point out that these “ideals” are just that—ideals to which the participants’ own behaviors displayed evidence of incongruence. For instance, the next section (VALUE CONFLICTS AND RESOLUTIONS) will explain how the participants recognize that they admire celebrities and mediated characters who clearly do not uphold these ideals they defined. Subsequently, for many, when they find themselves “drawn in” by celebrities who fundamentally do not uphold the standards they deem necessary (most of which are based on LDS religious fundamentals), conflict arises. This is a key finding of this study which further addresses the primary research question concerning (RQ1) the relationship between fame and the religiosity of LDS youth and (RQ2) how they define and resolve the value conflicts that arise therein which will be detailed in the following section.

VALUE CONFLICTS AND RESOLUTIONS

The religiosity-rooted anti-fame sentiments previously described in the FAME IDEALS section holds the key to the emerged value conflicts these youth encountered when fame and LDS values collided. As previously explained, when the youth found themselves enamored by celebrities embodying different values than theirs and took pleasure in those values, internal dissonance arose as the conflict in values became more evident. These value conflicts and resolutions speak directly to the key research questions regarding (RQ1) the relationship between fame and the religiosity of LDS youth and (RQ2) how they define and resolve value conflicts that arise therein.

To this point, the data in this regard generally revealed one interpretive community of LDS youth with diversity of talk therein. However, while certain value conflicts crossed gender lines, a key finding of this study is that most value conflicts showed evidence of being gendered in nature as were the various religious strategies incorporated to help resolve those conflicts. While further research is needed to verify the essence and the extent of these gendered value conflicts in terms of being defined as actual sub-interpretive communities, a discussion regarding the gendered nature of these value conflicts will be included in the
description of each conflict and resolution.

VALUE CONFLICT: Fame/Hollywood Inhibits Dreams—Seen as Not Conducive to LDS Living:

Many female participants expressed frustration with wanting to pursue a particular career path or interest that interfaced with the entertainment media, but felt thwarted because the industry norms, expectations, and lifestyles of those within the industry were seen as “not conducive to LDS living.” F1, for instance, initially wanted to be an actress and a dancer. But because of the influence of “Hollywood” and “the media,” she has opted to pursue law instead as her primary occupation. She explains that the Hollywood lifestyle and expectations are not conducive to LDS living, and even people “like Marie Osmond” have “had a lot of struggles and had to pay for being in Hollywood:”

F1: (I)t would be really hard to be a good Mormon and make films. . . . [E]ven [Hollywood’s] sitcoms are pretty gross. Like Friends, one of my favorite shows—I do enjoy it . . . [but] they have sex randomly. Last night they just found out that Rachael’s pregnant with an anonymous man (All: laughing) . . . . Yeah, you can see that’s totally exciting and the clothes they wear, how most of them have anorexia or some sort of eating disorder, which disables them to have children, most of them don’t have children; family is not their priority, at least for women.

On the other hand, F1 also points out positive examples of selected individuals who have been able to reconcile Christianity with fame, again, exemplifying how she considers both the positive and negative sides of fame:

F1: There has been successful people like um, the guy from Growing Pains, what’s his name, the really cute one (F2, F3, SF: Kurt Cameron, Mike Sever) Mike Sever and his wife. (F3: They are way good) yeah, they’re really good strong Christian family, and they have done some movies . . . . so I think you can do it, I think you have to work really, really hard to do it properly, but you can do it. But . . . I don’t think you can really be a really famous Julia Roberts without, I mean how can you make movies that are only PG and expect to make it all the way to the top? So I think anything is possible, if the Lord wanted you to do that and
you felt impressed to become an actress, you would be blessed, and you would get—anything is possible. But I think it is very hard and very unlikely. But it is possible.

Further group discussion revealed how all three young women in this triad acknowledge both the talent and the shortcomings of Britney Spears, and indicate how she has “changed” in order to become famous and successful:

F2:  [I]ike Britney Spears (laughing). She’s like the stupidest person alive (All: laughing).
F1:  She’s talented though. She can dance!
F2:  She is very talented, and it’s awesome. I wish I could dance like that and sing like that, but there is no way I would ever want to be how she is. . . . Just because I love my life and being involved in the Church, and I wouldn’t give it up to be able to sing and dance.
F3:  She gave up her life to perform for other people. And like I was watching something on about her and it like had her boyfriend from back home, like before she got big, and she’s like, she has like forgot all these people who mean so much to her, and this poor guy is just, she was shy and like, they’re like well, now what’s your status in like sexual relationships? And he was like, ‘I’m not commenting on that.’ And this kid was so nice, and this kid’s mom was like, ‘She’s just, she was just a nice girl.’ Now she’s just like totally broke up with him when she, you know, it’s just sad. And I was never, you know, I would never want to trade that for like all the stuff she has.

**Resolving Conflict: Choosing Value-based Careers**

Stemming from a religious foundation, the participants seemed to make distinctions between worldly and spiritual desires and activities (e.g., worldly desires being excessive wealth, gratuitous violence, language, and sex—including revealing dress and nudity; spiritual desires of maintaining the spirit, being educated, raising happy and unified families, staying active in the Church by participating in Church meetings, callings, and activities as well as maintaining an individual gospel study and worship). Thus, participants seemed to deal with this conflict by first acknowledging the differences within various career choices and interests, for instance, and then making conscious decisions to avoid those industries or even hobbies that placed them in
compromising situations as well as monitoring their desires for those types of “worldly desires.” F8 walked away from a modeling career she was once involved in viewing it as “worldly” and not conducive to her happiness. She says she tries “not to want to do that kind of thing,” and has opted instead to pursue a career in nursing:

F8: \[T]\hat whole industry just makes me sick. What they’re doing to kids and especially teenage girls is just—shouldn’t be allowed. It’s just not a good industry. It’s not something that I would want to be in . . . Like, it’s not desirable to me. It doesn’t, it’s not something that appeals to me, I don’t think. I guess that’s it. I would rather just lead my lifestyle; have my family, my friends, and do my own thing and be happy with myself than have—those are kind of worldly things to me, I think, and I try and not want to do that kind of thing. . . . I would never want to go in that industry. And I know girls that do it now that I grew up with . . . and they’re not happy.

Likewise, as indicated previously, F1 has opted to pursue law instead of acting and dancing because it would be difficult for her to merge her religious beliefs and her vocational requirements:

F1: I mean it would be so fun to be a spokesperson, to be an actress, and uh, it would just be a blast. But I think I would have a hard time if I became famous. Plus doing a lot of acting, I think it would be a trial for me not to want to do big roles. It would truly be a trial, like I would have to work very hard. \[A]\nd I would not do [roles that were contrary to gospel standards], but that’s why I said I would just give up and say I wouldn’t be able to be an actress at all. Like it’s sad, but it would be hard not to have this great role, and then realize you are going to have to take the Lord’s name in vain. ‘Cause we’re not talking about—there are PG-13 movies that women don’t have sex or anything, but they are going to want her to wear something [really revealing] . . . [M]aybe he, the Lord would be like, ‘Hey this is acting, and you can portray someone that maybe wears a sleeveless top or whatever.’ I don’t know if he would or not, but I’d have to just stay really close to the spirit and make every decision perfectly . . .
It was interesting to note that the male participants did not see a conflict with these values like the female participants did. They seemed to feel more at ease with the career possibilities available in the media that would not conflict with their values. As one participant said, “Hollywood can inhibit dreams, but it can also help launch them, simply because they have so many media outlets” (member check quote). “Broadway” was mentioned by another male participant as a safer option with a “better atmosphere” for aspiring LDS actors and dancers in the sense that it produces plays such as Les Miserables, which are more in line with gospel teachings; “Music” and “writing” were other options suggested by the males of how LDS artists could remain “in control” of their situations as well as their craft. However, it was recognized by at least one male participant that “acting in Hollywood or in films could be more difficult because they have to do what other people write.” Again, this gender difference underscores the diversity of ways members of a common subculture such as the LDS Church can view specific issues relating to mediated fame.

VALUE CONFLICT: Body Image Issues and Eating Disorders—Media Pressure to Look Perfect and Be Thin

Clearly the most overarching value conflict among all the female participants was the battle between feeling mediated pressure—particularly by those who are famous—to look perfect and to maintain a healthy self-esteem and acceptance of themselves physically. Social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954) taken to the extreme, this value conflict among these young LDS women has taken a toll on their individual body images and self-concepts—not only causing them internal discord regarding the impossibility of achieving unrealistic mediated expectations, but causing them to literally “hate the media” and the images therein at times, viewing them as “depressing” and “sad.”

Although these participants did say that viewing unrealistic mediated images can be somewhat positive temporarily because it motivates them to “go work out” and to “eat well,” they expressed that they experienced more despair when they found themselves unable to maintain the strict ritual they felt would reward them with desired picture-perfect looks. Thus, the data clearly indicates that body image plays a key role in the self-identity, social identity, and self-esteem of these young women.

Ironically, as an observation from this researcher, every single female participant in this study was
truly stunning physically—possessing much better-than-average looks, yet they still felt intense pressure—particularly from the media to look even better—“to be like Hollywood,” as one participant explained. The participants themselves made comments about the evident beauty possessed by the other participants and how it was ironic that they would still stress over how they look, and that sometimes “it’s the prettiest girls who feel the most pressure about their looks.”

Furthermore, probably the most significant factor in this conflict was the belief among most of these young women that if they didn’t achieve this model beauty then the top-notch Mormon men would not find them attractive enough to marry—a religious and cultural tradition tantamount in the Mormon religion. While the male participants viewed this issue quite differently (see “Male Response to Female Body Image Conflict” within this value conflict), these young women were convinced that that’s how all men view this issue—even the “unattractive” or “real religious” guys. In fact, several participants seemed subsequently conflicted regarding the value of education in their lives, because they saw examples of “girls that are smart and have educations” who didn’t “marry as well” as those who weren’t as smart or educated but were more attractive. One participant even questioned whether or not she should exchange her time in college for more “productive” time in the gym “working out” in order to attract “the best guys.” The following triad exchange illustrates these perspectives, beginning with the overall negative sentiment about mediated images:

F7: I think media is kind of depressing. (All: laughing.)
F8: What’s sad is all these skinny girls.
F7: Skinny girls that are nothing like me. And so—and that’s kind of another reason why I don’t have anything to do with the media because, like, I’m not that kind of a person . . . like, I haven’t put on makeup for a year. Let’s just say that . . . I don’t care what everybody else is doing, you know? Like, my boyfriend cuts my hair, you know, so, I don’t know. I think that’s kind of another reason why I’m not into the media is just because it doesn’t affect me.
SF: Well, what about—you mentioned you like to look at Shape magazine, for instance.
F7: Yeah.

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SF: If that’s how you feel, like, how do you feel when you look at like these models that are super skinny?

F7: I hate them. (Laughing) I seriously do. OK, I had a roommate—this is a good example. My first roommate was kind of—she kind of had like issues with weight and stuff. Like, she isn’t totally skinny, but like, we’d be dishing ice cream or something and she’d just stop looking at it. She’s like, ‘This just makes me—’ like it literally made her depressed. Like me, I’m like, ‘This is stupid. I hate these people.’ But like her, it like literally, it would make her be depressed, and she’d like diet, and she’d go and work out for, like, three hours, you know? So, like, I can see how media has a bad effect on people, too, just in like things it portrays, you know? I think because the media, because there’s what, like probably three actors that are overweight, you know? Or that are, like, not the perfect body. And so I think—and because other people put them on a pedestal, and because guys are like, ‘Oh, she’s so hot!’, you know, you’re like, ‘Well, I want to be hot. I want to, you know, like what do I do?’ And so it comes down to, like, ‘Oh, she’s got a good body,’ you know? And so I think on all teenage girls it has a huge effect on how they—self-esteem and how they portray—themselves and stuff.

These participants explained that although “the media” and famous models contribute to a lowered self-esteem, these images can be motivating temporarily, inspiring them to work out and eat well. But they went on to explain that they wished magazines would portray more “realistic looking people:”

F7: Yeah, like the best People magazine I ever saw was their portraying like fat actresses. And I was like, ‘Yeah!’ I think the reason the reason all of them were fat was because they just had a baby and I was like—(All: laughing.)

F9: I totally agree with it. Like, when I look at a Shape magazine, I don’t think, ‘Oh, I want to be like that’ or anything because in my mind set I think, ‘Oh, you know, they just crop some off here and some off here and maybe she really doesn’t look like that in reality.’ And so it never really applies to me, but I mean, yeah, as a 19-year-old person, who wouldn’t
want to look like that? Who wouldn’t want, you know, to be all, into all that kind of stuff, but I just don’t have the time. I’m lazy. (All: laughing.) I don’t have the time to go workout or whatever unless I’m frustrated. You know, but at the same time, it’s like yeah, you know, it’s ‘eat this’ [holding up a cookie] or whatever, and then, I don’t know. . . . We’re like making huge meatballs and stuff. I mean, I think everyone wants to eat healthy, but there are certain extremes that people take. And it’s because of the magazines and the media, I think.

F8: *Shape* magazine is interesting. It’s cool, it has some cool stuff in it. Sometimes it has some cool, good and healthy recipes and like, good ab workouts, and stuff like that, but they should also—I think, I think it’s cool when magazines take the more realistic approach, like put kind of normal size girls in there and not, like, show the fat girls as really fat or the anorexic and skinny girls, but just like normal people, like normal girls like us, you know. Using them as the models, and stuff like that. But then again, people buy—people don’t buy that stuff. So, that’s why they don’t do it. They do it because that’s—the skinny is what sells.

The following triad discussion reveals how most of the females admit to comparing themselves to mediated images, and how they appreciate seeing “normal, beautiful” women in the media—those with whom they can more realistically identify. They also discuss their struggles with admiring immodestly dressed celebrities:

F1: We compare ourselves. And you can’t help but compare ourselves. And it is horrible, you know, all the women are so disgustingly thin. I loved [the movie] *Chocolate*, and . . . the actress, she was so beautiful, and she had a normal beautiful figure, she was not big at all, but she just had a normal beautiful figure. And what’s wrong for girls is a lot of guys just like normal girls that have beautiful healthy figures. And they don’t necessarily like this *Ally McBeal* where she looks like she is going to pass out. You know what I mean? They don’t. (SF: Laughing) And we, but the girls, we totally have a distorted view on what we
think is beautiful, and it is because of Hollywood. Because that’s what I see is beautiful, ... like Jennifer Love Hewitt. Have you seen the new movie—

F2:  *Heartbreakers?*

F1:  *Heartbreakers*, first of all it should have been [rated] R. It is pretty—it was so gross, ... but I can’t help but say that it was totally fun. They had the cutest clothes, and they were running around seducing men. But it was horrible! (All: laughing) But your other side is going, ‘This is disgusting! I’m walking out.’ But ‘That was the cutest dress. I wonder where she got it. Why can’t I look like that in a dress?’ ... When you realize how human you really are, you have to like protect yourself and be like ... like I don’t like people who are like, ‘That is not a cute outfit. She just isn’t modest, so it’s not pretty!’ Because she is cute, and it is really darling looking (All: laughing). It’s not modest, but don’t deny the fact that it is cute! (F2 and F3: Right, yeah, uh huh).

Adding to the discussion about being influenced by celebrity comparison, F3 explained how watching her favorite TV shows makes her feel pressured to not only look better by eating less or working out at the gym, but to also purchase more products like make up, for instance:

F3:  For me, right after I watch [shows like *Ally McBeal* or *Friends*] I don’t want to eat, like at all. But seriously after I watch *Friends*, like you look—and it’s weird ‘cause like their skin is skinny and clear and everything about them, you are just like, ‘Holy cow,’ like I get so overwhelmed ‘cause I’ll be like, ‘Oh my gosh, I have to go get make-up, and I have to look like ... just like, not just me, like I am so bad that way like I just look up to these people, and I’m just like idolizing them, like Britney Spears, like going back to that, I like, cannot stand her, but yet I like, idolize her so much because ... a lot of guys I know are like, that’s who they think is cute, like the Britney Spears, the Christina Aguilaras, ... they all have implants, like, wow, they’re not real. Yeah, [guys] don’t understand that. And they have extensions, their hair’s not—their hair is not even their hair, you know? But really, like after an episode of *Friends* I’m like, ‘Oh, I am not even [going to eat],’ but of course I like
don't stay that way, and an hour later [I'm eating again. But right after the show] you just
don't want to, like for me right after I'm just, 'Alright I'm cuttin' back [on food]; I need
to go get new make-up,' and it just inspires me to be like Hollywood.

**Social Connection to Body Image Conflict**

As stated earlier, all female participants connected this value conflict to social rewards or
consequences. They detailed how they have been praised or punished by men as well as other members of
their communities simply on basis of their physical appearance. And while they adamantly connect this issue
with mediated images in all media—but particularly magazines, they simultaneously emphasize the
importance of "being aware" of their outward appearance or physical "presentation" in order to avoid being
punished for not looking good. For example, F1 explains that while she was in high school, the world seemed
to open up to her after she lost 15 pounds. A modeling agent encouraged her future career; her ballet teacher
expressed approval of her appearance; and an ex-boyfriend wanted her back.

F1: I mean, it was horrible the different things that reinforced how nice it was to be thin. I got
so many more guys, and everyone was so responsive. . . . But still your mind starts to get
distorted that that's where your beauty lies, and that's where your importance lies in what
you look like. . . .

But realizing that she was on the verge of an eating disorder, F1 worked to get her life back into
balance and subsequently gained 15 pounds. Although she says she was living a healthier life, she explains
how she was "treated differently" by others:

F1: [M]y ballet teachers were like, 'What happened to you?' and boys just weren't as nice. I
mean, I got horrible comments, I would get mean things like, my ballet teacher was just so
angry and told me that I just needed to go and diet and you know, I 'couldn't dance like
this.' And so you get all these negative reinforcements telling me, OK, maybe my value is
placed in that, you know?

But after some soul-searching and input from trusted family members, F1 decided that her social
success was ultimately determined by her level of self-confidence, regardless of her weight. But she concludes
by explaining that body image issues are still “a daily struggle” for her to refrain from trying to measure up physically to those who are famous and who are frequently mediated, making a clear link between this value conflict and Hollywood fame. She says she survives by striving to maintain a spiritual perspective which for her includes looking to her future role as a mother.

F1: [It’s still horrible for me. Like I am fighting it every day to not want to go revert back to being really thin. But you realize that’s going to hurt your children, it’s going to hurt your future. And I was thinking about it the other day, it’s one of Satan’s major tools, because I think every single girl is so obsessed with what she looks like, it’s not where our thoughts should be; it totally puts our priorities in wack, and if he can make us so distressed to the point of destroying our bodies, then our divine motherhood will be taken away from us. We won’t be able to have children, which is what, that would be his probably one of his greatest accomplishments. And I never thought of it that way before. And that is why he works so hard on women to make them hate their body image. ‘Cause I have met girls here at BYU now who cannot have kids I don’t think anymore, ‘cause of, you know, and eating disorders everywhere, especially in college, are horrible. And it’s definitely Hollywood, ‘cause you turn on the TV every single day and those girls are beautiful and thin and popular and people do, even in everyday world treat you different. They treat you different.

As stated, all media were blamed for this conflict by all female respondents, but magazines were the primary culprit in contributing to their value conflict concerning body image:

F3: Magazines, definitely.

F1: It’s just they have pictures in there and they’re just so . . .

F2: And their legs, are like so tone, totally ripped arms that are so skinny . . .

F1: Might as well say it’s not even their real bodies . . .

F3: Well, the worst part is like, like me and my mom, we get so mad because we’ll read like these things on like models or actresses and they’re just like, ‘My favorite thing to eat is french fries, I just love that,’” (All: laughing) You do not eat french fries, you do not eat ice
cream. And like, it's so like, doing everyone a disservice that they're like, '... and my favorite is to go eat french fries and go to McDonalds and get an ice cream,' you know, and it's like, 'Why do you say that?' you know, because they so make you think that, 'Oh, I can eat ice cream like that.'

SF: And then look like they do.

F3: Yeah, so, I don't know, it's frustrating. ...Well, I'll read it and for a minute I will be like, 'Oh, well, then I can do that, I can do what they do, and still look like that,' and then you realize that you can't, it's physically impossible to have that be your favorite food and to, unless you are doing something else to [counteract the effects of that food], you know, so I don't know, it's yeah, it's way frustrating I think.

F1: That makes me so mad. 'Cause it's just that, or else I'll be like, 'That's really cool that she's just like that and can eat like that.'

**Social Connection of Body Image Conflict to the LDS Belief in Marriage**

Again, the following statements illustrate the feelings and beliefs that these females experience in terms of the direct correlation they believe exists between an attractive appearance and garnering social success with LDS men. These perspectives underscore the complexity of this body image conflict which (from their perspectives) is rooted in the media:

F1: But, you know, to end it like this: [Physical appearance] is not important, but I think that it does influence what kind of guy you are going to get, which is the most important decision of your life. It's like, I went to a wedding last Saturday. And two girls who were not very educated, they were not bright girls, nice kind girls, righteous girls, were not bright, they went to college, one of their husbands is going to go to law school in like a month and the other one is going to MIT to get his MBA in business. They are like very attractive and they dress very well, but not educated. And I think, you know what? I better make sure I work out, look nice, because that sometimes, I think, will influence even a righteous good man, 'cause even righteous good men will look at what you look like, and
that is the first thing they see. So if you’re, it’s wrong, but to be a logical, bright person and realize that for a woman, half of what you are going to get is going to be on what you look like.

**Social Consequences with Body Image Lead to Conflicts about Education Priorities**

F1 thus explains how she has considered spending her time more “productively” by working out more as opposed to investing it in her education, again, emphasizing how body image, which is believed to be influenced by the media, is central to these young women’s identities and social value:

F1: I’ve been thinking I should put more value in working out than I should instead of studying which I won’t do, but I was saying to my sister, [name], we would probably get better husbands ‘cause the girls that are smart from our ward and have educations, I don’t think they married as well, all of them. Some of them did, but the two girls that were beautiful and came out here, got amazing husbands. And that, I think stinks. I just think that stinks, ‘cause guys will always, my husband, I want to care about the fact that I want a huge education . . . .

**Resolving Conflict: A Basic Solution for a Complex Issue—Religiosity Strategies**

While all the females viewed this issue as highly complex with no simple answers and admitted that they still struggle frequently with this issue, their defense was again founded in religious strategies. These individuals seemed to find strength and confidence in simple daily habits such as personal prayer and individual scripture reading. They explained that these habits helped them “maintain a perspective on what’s important in life,” and helped to diminish the monumental feelings of inadequacy they felt from upward and downward comparisons with the media. They added that “staying close to the gospel” helped them to “feel the spirit” more often, which helped them feel more confident and secure. Furthermore, they said that incorporating an “attitude of gratitude” by “counting their blessings” helped them be more positive and more appreciative of what they do have in this life, physically or otherwise. All of these strategies of religiosity, they say, helped provide them with an overall feeling of increased peace in their lives, as seen in the following triad exchange:

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F1: I never have [resolved this conflict]. And people will, you know, like tell you—I, I’ve thought about it and thought about it how do you resolve it and not let it affect you every day. Cause it can, like, really affect you. It can make you in a bad mood. It can make you just feel upset about it and people will be like, ‘Oh, well, pray more,’ or whatever. To me, it is getting closer to the gospel helps me the most, but I don’t know how to resolve it... . [Do]ing the simple things like reading your scriptures [can help]; like taking that time to sit and put yourself in the proper perspective again.

F2: Yeah, you have to take a step back.

F1: Take a step back and be like, ‘Hello,’ look at yourself and what is truly important; read your scriptures, stay close to the spirit and that will help you. Heavenly Father will help you and will help you get over that. I think it will be my lifelong struggle, I do.

F3: Like, the hymn, ‘Count Your Many Blessings,’ you know, like that is such, it’s such like a powerful thing ‘cause if you really do, if you take a step back and be like, OK, I have hair, like some of it, like you just go to the basics. Like so many people don’t have hair or you know what I mean? Like I don’t have like, like I was telling F2 I had this dream that I lost, that my little sister lost like her arms and her leg in a car accident. And it was so traumatic for me and like, but now I just sit back and it’s like, ‘OK, I have two arms, two legs, ten fingers, you know, it’s like I look at like that, just the very basic... I have both eyes that work,’ and then all of a sudden I’m like, ‘Wow, I am pretty,’ like, you know what I mean?

F3: Yeah, just [being grateful for] the little things, then I find that I, that ‘Oh, it’s not that bad, I’m not that ugly,’ it’s just, you know what I mean? (All: laughing)

F2: Yeah, that’s exactly what my mom always says if I’m like, ‘Mom,’ I’m just complaining about being fat or whatever, my mom will be like, ‘You have two working legs,’ you know, ‘Your body works, you know, you’re mind works.’ And so I totally think about that all the time. Like it’s so how ungrateful of me to be sitting here complaining about myself when I have a perfectly normal body that works. And that’s healthy.
F1: And how hard it must be like us complaining about ourselves. It's almost as bad as complaining about other people. I mean it's a bad thing to sit and complain about this wonderful thing that Heavenly Father sends us.

F3: It's almost like someone's given you a gift, and you're like, 'Wow,' and say, 'It's not very cute' and, 'Let's spend a little more time on it next time.' (All: laughing.) That's really how it is, you know, 'cause that's like how it is. He has given us this wonderful thing and then we're, you know, 'It's a little too short, why are my legs so chunky at the top?' We're pretty picky when we were just given this like gift, you know?

Additionally, F9 says that understanding how the print media, for instance, manipulate photographic images of models by air brushing and with computer technology has helped her maintain a healthier perspective regarding this conflict:

F9: [I]t's kind of like if I tell myself, 'Oh, [this model's] really not like that,' then it makes me feel better . . .

SF: Yeah, yeah, because if you didn’t know that, I mean, if you didn’t know that, how do you think you would feel?

F9: Then I would totally feel the same way the girls are out there. I'd totally feel like, 'Oh, nobody's going to like me because I don’t look like that,' or whatever. When in reality, it's just a stupid magazine. Like, it’s just ridiculous how magazines and TV shows control people’s lives; whereas, we should be controlling those.

**Male Perspectives on Females’ Conflict with Body Image**

Discussion about body image conflict arose unprobed in both female triads as well as in the female individual interviews. While the author hadn’t intended to focus so heavily on this issue, she allowed the discussion in all the settings since it seemed to be taking on a life of its own, and since one young woman mentioned that men sometimes suffer from the “Adonis complex.” Additionally, having read several studies about how objectification of both females and males has been increasing in the media (Reichert et. al, 1999), (though still three times more prevalent for women than for men according to some studies), the author chose
to explore this issue with the males—from their own perspectives of how the media portray men as well as how the women viewed this issue—to see if perhaps the body image conflict could exist in some form among them as well.

The findings were quite the contrary. The only conflict the men seemed to have regarding this issue was understanding how this type of conflict could even exist. They instead approached this issue from a much more confident and secure perspective than the women. For instance, they recognized that perhaps they didn’t have “the perfect body” either, but they added that they could have that body if they were willing to spend the time and make the sacrifices necessary to attain it—they simply chose not to use their time like that. Furthermore, they stated that the females could likewise attain the results they desired if they would stop “sitting around and talking about it” but rather spend their time “working at it,” assuming that the females were not making efforts. Unlike the females, there was not a tone of fear about the issue—fear that they might not be able to achieve perfect looks, and if they didn’t, they would not be accepted socially. The male participants seemed to have an easier time accepting themselves more realistically and feeling at peace with that, raising questions about how females are valued in society, how those values are communicated to them, and how they feel and act in response to those issues.

Additionally, while the female participants seemed to be preoccupied with conflicts regarding appearance and perfection as they relate to media and fame, the males seemed to more preoccupied with what mediated characters actually did or said within a plot. While some males appreciated “seeing how they act” or “hearing their words in relation to a story,” other male participants engaged in lighthearted fantasies about achieving extraordinary physical feats. Interestingly, both the male and female perspectives commonly acknowledged the artificial aspect of Hollywood and mediated images, yet they were expressed in different ways. And though both viewpoints seemed to be physical—and even emotional—in nature, the males’ action fantasies did not appear to be as much of a value conflict as a preoccupation or media interest that illustrated how they read and interpret certain media texts regarding fame. The following triad discussion about the females’ struggle with body image in relation to fame and the media illustrate how the males view this issue quite differently. This difference is also manifested through their expressions about their preoccupation with
action and adventure mediated characters as opposed to specific body images. Again, this difference emphasizes how members of a common subculture can view media issues in dramatically different ways:

M11: I think that [the body image issue] is totally girls! (Laughing) . . . I would love to, you know, sure if I had an option just to be like extremely ripped or something, maybe a body builder or something, but I don’t care enough to . . . I thought it was funny, I was talking to some of my friends last semester, and they (it’s a girl apartment), and they have like this magazine with almost naked women, and . . . I was like, ‘What do you guys have this for? Is this like some lesbian thing or whatever?’ I was making fun of them for it (laughing). And they were just like looking at these super skinny girls, and most of them were just, they were all like wearing either see through stuff or inappropriate and most of them were pretty ugly and weird hair styles and like intentionally darkened eyes and like . . . and a lot of them were really weird. Some of them were definitely pretty, but they just sat there, ‘Oh, yeah, ‘cause it’s just cool to look at it and like they think how cool it would be to look like that’ and stuff. It wasn’t just them, it’s like everyone in there like, and then I asked this girl . . . and she’s like, ‘Yeah, it looks so stupid.’ And she asked one of the girls, and she gives likes the exact same answer. And it’s like, they just like seeing these skinny girls and are like, ‘Oh, I’d be so cool if I had that stomach,’ or if I had legs like that.’ And I think, ‘You guys are dumb!’ . . . I don’t understand the complexity a lot of girls seem to have when it is caused by the media and stuff.

M12: It’s once again about devoting your whole life to something, whereas you can spend your time doing a lot of things that you would rather do. Plus, for me there are a lot of other things that are more important than to sit there and building up your body. You could be studying and furthering your mind, you know?

M11: I think girls are so stupid to look at it that way because then you know they want the really good guys, and do they want people to like them for their body or that’s like what they seem to be saying. It’s just all messed up and warped. And then they are all ‘Oh yeah, she is so
pretty,' but I don’t know why they talk about that because like, that is not going to do anything. Like you can’t make yourself prettier just by talking about it or anything. I don’t think guys have that problem, or at least like me, I can’t tell if an actor is handsome or something.

M10: I agree a lot with looks and everything, but like, Steven Segal. . . . I did martial arts for a long time, and like, I like Jackie Chan and stuff like that, but the movies are, you know, they’re movies and everything like that. But those people they actually do that stuff, and so people that are like actually, not more like with the looks and stuff but like the skills and stuff, like, I wish I could do stuff like that.

M12: Yeah, not just wanting to look like someone like girls, ‘Oh, I want to look like that!’

M11: I don’t know, I think more from my experience was just definitely limited (M12: laughing) but, I think the girls do what they say, ‘Oh, guys like it,’ but I swear, it’s mostly to impress other girls is what it seems like to me. Mostly to impress girls than to impress guys, but the guys know the fact that they are just trying to impress the other girls to like beat them out. That’s a lot of how it appears to me. I even have some girls who tell me that.

M12: I think that a lot of the girls that like aren’t the, you know, the hottest, cutest girls have the best personalities. ‘Cause a lot of them, I really don’t like to stereotype, but from my experience a lot of the ones that are really cute seems like they know it, and they act like it, and a lot of times they act like they are too good.

M11: It’s just like they have that power or something like that.

As stated, instead of seeking “power” through physical appearance, the males spoke in terms of seeking power—or at least fantasizing about it—through action/adventure film and TV characters and mediated celebrities, again, acknowledging both the real and artificial nature of these characters, yet still aspiring to emulate them in behavior rather than appearance:

M11: It would be cool to be able to do all that, like I realized how incredibly fake it is, . . . like The Mummy, I hated the sequel, but like the first one, you really just go in and see all that
stuff like that’d be cool, but it’s totally fake.

M12: Yeah, I think that a lot of the skills that they portray on movies, TV or whatnot are like a lot of times are things that you wish to apply to you, but then like a lot of times also on TV I think again I think it’s a hyperbole. I think they like they do exhibit talents and things, but I think they do it in some exaggerated mode, sometimes.

M11: Well, like everything that James Bond does is totally fake.

M12: Yeah, exactly. But then again, like if you look at something like Jackie Chan, I mean, you can’t computer animate like that. He’s doing what he’s doing, and it’s real.

M11: Yeah, I admire that he does like he does all his stunts, which is very rare.

M12: Yeah, that’s really cool. You got to think that’s hard to do all those stunts. He has been known to like hurt himself once in a while.

M11: He’s a horrible actor, I think, but I don’t know (All: laughing).

M12: I don’t care though just ‘cause it’s impressive to watch him.

M11: Yeah, you don’t go to movies just to watch the acting.

VALUE CONFLICT: Pressure to be Perfect—Perpetuated by the Media

Stemming from the body image conflict discussions, another gender-related issue that emerged among the females was the pressure on LDS women to be perfect—not just physically, but in every way—intellectually, emotionally, spiritually, and socially as well. Participants clearly articulated that not only do they compare themselves with other LDS women who seem “perfect,” but this pressure is aggravated by the media—“tempting” them with conflicting voices and perspectives regarding their priorities and pressuring them with superhuman life expectations. The consequence, as seen by these participants, included depression as well as apathy—a loss of hope—and thus, the desire to carry on or even attempt something in life, because they felt like they could not “do it all” perfectly, as expressed in the following triad discussion:

F1: OK, I heard that one of the highest depression rates is among LDS women—{p}robably the majority in Utah. I don’t know, I don’t know the statistics, but probably ‘cause Utah has more of a Mormon culture, and I can definitely see how the media has influenced that
because . . . LDS women they do have a lot a pressure. They need to have children, and then still they feel that they . . . and that this is what usually impacted by the media, if they see these housewives on television who look great, and their kids are so happy and always look cute, and their husband comes home, the house is clean, and that is hard when you have six kids, and you know, you are trying to be a wonderful mother. And so I think it's totally impacted LDS women in the Church . . . trying to be everybody and everything. . . . [W]omen try to do everything now days, and I think sometimes the other things that are more important suffer, and a lot of women work in the Church, and you can't judge that 'cause some people have circumstances, and I'm a woman that I love—I am going to probably want to be a lawyer or be a professor of history or whatever. And I'll, some circumstances are different. So, you can't judge it, but I think sometimes they shouldn't be working, and they are, and that's influenced by the media. It makes it so appealing and powerful like Ally McBeal, once again . . . [T]he Church is wonderful with how they treat their women. And I think that as a woman in the Church it's a wonderful experience. But sometimes [the media] distort[s] like, maybe make[s] us feel like we can't hold the priesthood, or things you hear on the media. And if you know the gospel you are fine. But I think they can distort woman, and there's people that probably go inactive because of it. You know, because the feminists and what they believe is powerful, and they can make us feel like, 'Well, they're not letting me do this, and don't you realize this and,' you know?

F3: Well, a lot of times you get like, I know I feel like the Church is hard because we're not expected to do so much, but like, sometimes you feel, I don't know, what's the word, just like that you are not, you are so far from where you should be. Like everyone just seems, like when you go to church, and you see everyone and their kids and they are happy, and they are just so righteous and you are just like, 'Oh my gosh, I' . . . and then it's like, looks so easy to just take the other way. Like how they, people in Hollywood [the path they] have taken, and like it's just so easy, so you just get so overwhelmed. And then that just adds
to it.

SF: So, overwhelmed like you will never be able to measure up?

F3: Yeah, and so why, yeah, it influences me. . . . *Friends*, they have a great time in life, and they don’t have this like. . . they are not involved in this religion so maybe it’s not . . . it like makes me think twice [about my values] which is so bad. That’s when I really have to be like, ‘OK, what am I?’

F2: Totally. I think that I do that a lot. Like, they’re fine. Like if I’m depressed or something you go to church and see everyone is happy and doing well and they’re bearing their testimony, and they are so grounded, and they know it without a doubt, and then I just doubt myself. And then I come home and watch *Friends*, or whatever, and then just feel even worse. And so, yeah.

**Resolving Conflict: Striving to Maintain Proper Priorities**

The triads and one-on-one interviews produced no evidence of how the females resolved this conflict. However, in subsequent member checks, one informant explained how “choosing your battles” and “being at peace with your priorities” can help resolve this conflict and help women feel better about themselves and less swayed by mediated opinions and examples. Like many of these young women, they sought resolutions to their individual value conflicts not only through religious strategies but also through the examples of their own mothers:

F1: You have to keep your priorities straight. Like, my mom is totally secure with her role as a wife and a mother. She has raised a family of great kids who are successful and who love her, and she is at peace with that. So someone else could come along and try to tell her that she’s missing out on something else in life, and it wouldn’t even faze her. . . . Also, it’s important to remember that the gospel has nothing to do with being perfect. We are saved by grace. And it’s like if we try to become perfect all on our own, then it’s like we’re not accepting the Savior. Because it’s only through him that we can become perfect. (Member check quote)
VALUE CONFLICT: Idol Worship and Celebrity Emulation—Guilty Pleasures for Women, Pure Entertainment for Men

Most participants felt that various celebrities, TV shows, and/or music were not in accordance with gospel ideals, but they enjoyed consuming them anyway because they were “fun,” “entertaining” or “trendy.” However, what was revealing was only the young women felt guilty about participating. While the young men felt that they could “separate characters and entertainment from reality,” females experienced internal conflicts—from these mediated experiences that featured famous people whom they admired. They indicated that the more they incorporated these mediated elements into their lives, the more acceptable some of their behaviors seemed. Thus, they consider these celebrities, shows, and/or music to sometimes be “trials” or “temptations,” because the more they watched them individually, the more they revered them and wanted to be like them. This gender difference suggests diversity in the way LDS males and females process media messages and attach value judgements as well as personal connections and behaviors to those messages, resulting in the presence or the absence of guilt.

Some examples were clear cases of parasocial relationships (Baudrillard, 1983, Rubin and McHugh, 1987) as several participants confessed to forgetting that actors were not really their characters, and that their characters were not actually real. Other behaviors and perspectives exemplified social learning theory (Bandura, 1964) primarily via appearance awareness for women and action trends for the men. Still, the “temptation” toward “idol worship” seemed to cause some level of internal dissonance, guilt, confusion, and ultimately a value conflict within the participants if the mediated behavior—or behavior of the actual celebrity—was not in line with gospel principles and standards. Overall, this value conflict—as illustrated in the following triad discussion about idol worship—addresses the research questions concerning (RQ7) the positive and negative uses of fame in their lives, (RQ8) what LDS youth are learning and emulating from those who are famous, and (RQ4) how do they tie religiosity into those conversations about fame.

F1: I think it’s difficult ‘cause you go to the movie theaters, and like there are certain actresses I look up to like Audrey Hepburn, I already mentioned her, she’s amazing; she’s done amazing things with her life. She used her talent to reach out and help others. And many
actors do that and actresses, but we tend to want to idolize them. And you have your two sides, your logical side or and when you think about things logically and then your side that is influenced dramatically by the media. Like I’ll go to the movie, and say Gwyneth Paltrow is in it, and I’ll just think she is the awesomest person and . . ., she is so amazing, and you wish you could meet her and if you met her, and you know, but they’re nothing like that, but you look at them like they have done like. . . The Grammy Awards are huge, and you think really, that’s really great that they’ve done all that stuff, and the acting is awesome, and I really look up to it ‘cause there is a bunch of bad actors out there, you know, you see Keanau Reeves, and you start appreciating good actors and acting is a wonderful talent, but it shouldn’t be idolized the way it is like they have done some amazing thing. But we do, and like Jennifer Anniston, I complained about her, but I love her, I think she is (laughing) so fun. And I look at her hair styles, and all I think, ‘OK, that’s what’s in.’ You know, and you look at her clothes, and you say, ‘That’s what’s in,’ and it makes you—it’s tempting, it’s very tempting, and it totally does tempt you.

F3: See I’m bad because I like—I’ll see that and like I sometimes my logical side doesn’t like come into play. I think it’s just—well, we just like her. Like really, I’m glad when I’m shopping I do think, ‘Would she wear that?’, but it does, yeah.

F1: Well, it does, yeah. ‘Cause she is, what’s in . . . ‘cause she’s Friends, the top show, what’s in style, she’s going to be wearing it.

Some participants viewed these celebrities as “bigger than life” that helped them escape from the mundaneness of their own lives, and that they often feel a part of the mediated scenarios:

F1: It is like you see them as superhuman. . . . and movies can effect you OK, books, movies, it’s also the fact that they did movies. You watch them, they take you out of your normal life.

F3: Well, I feel like I am part of Friends. Like I think it’s like Rachael, Phoebe and F3. Right? Like I watch every single, like 6:00 and 10:00 every day, and like the 7:00 one on
Thursday. And like I tape them, and it’s pathetic! But like really I feel like I am part of it. And then when you watch E.R. you feel like you are . . .

F3: Yeah, you are like Green . . .

F1: Yeah, I thought Green was going to die yesterday. I for some reason got this intuition and me and my friend are like holding each other’s hands like it’s real. And it’s because it’s a story. And stories are so fun. And they are not, like I am reading Harry Potter, like if I met him, like he’s real, but yeah, yeah, and it’s not a bad thing. It is not a bad thing that we love these characters, but you have to, it’s not reality. It’s not real! OK, Harry Potter is not real, no matter how much I want it to be, it feels real. Especially movies, ‘cause books, you are reading a book, you have to imagine. But movies, it is right there, and seems so real.

F3: Yeah, and you don’t have to read anything, you just sit there.

F1: It took me so long to realize that there were no Spocks and there were no Cling-ons. That Cling-ons were not real. (All: laughing) ‘Cause I was a Trekie for so long. (F2: I was too!) You’re so much like a Cling-on, and your Cling-ons are not real, there is no such thing!

This becomes part of your culture.

Often the participants explained how they would get “completely lost” in a story and forget that the actors aren’t actually the characters:

F3: ‘Cause you feel like when you, whenever I watch like a movie and say like Sandra Bullock’s in it, you know, I like always forget that she is playing a character, and she is not playing like herself, and so like I feel like, like it’s weird because you see them on whatever they’re doing and so you’re like, ‘Oh, that’s how they are.’ And like you kind of think they’re like that, but then you see them in other things that are like in real life, and they are not at all like that, and so you just kinda want to know what they are really like. But, that makes me curious, it’s like what are they really like.

These same participants explained how seeing celebrities wear certain “immodest” clothes tempt
them to act against their values, illustrating the internal struggle these young women often experience even in simple things:

F3: I do like Britney Spears, like, and I hate that, and I’m frustrated with myself because of that, you know, I don’t know. It’s wrong.

SF: Because you don’t agree with her values?

F3: Yeah, and she just does such a disservice to all these poor little girls like me, who are just already struggling and then she adds to it. . . . Just coming across as the outfits she wears are just so dang immodest, and then I just think, ‘Oh, the outfit’s cute. Well, I want a shirt like that.’ And so I’ll wear that, and what really it’s not and it’s hard because I think she is so cute and so talented and can dance and can sing and is funny and just, I don’t know, it’s hard.

**Resolving Conflict: Young Women Justify Behavior, Live with Conflict, or Avoid Artist Altolgether; Young Men Avoid Conflict by Embracing the Message but not the Messenger**

Some of the young women justified or overlooked the behavior of their artists of choice in exchange for more wholehearted musical enjoyment, pardoning the performers in the spirit of “no one’s perfect,” or that they’re “thinking about the music,” for instance, “not the person.” However, as in the earlier example of Dennis Rodman, most females were rather conflicted with the notion that they enjoyed something that they knew was “bad.” Thus, their resolution was to either continue in their “guilty pleasures” and just live with the conflict, or as the participant below explained, “avoid the artist completely” in exchange for more internal integrity:

F1: I can’t even watch Richard Gere anymore. I used to love him, but after I read and heard some [negative] things about him, I can’t even watch him, because I’m thinking about all those things that he did. Same with Tom Cruise. I find it really difficult to separate the actor from their character, so I just avoid them altogether. (Member check quote)

As previously indicated, the young men explained that they did not experience conflict with this value, because they felt that they had the ability to separate the art from the artist. M4 based his awareness
of the issue on religious or moral foundations. But in order to cope with the chasm between supporting "great music" for instance, created by a "not-so-great musician," he simply separated the dissonance into two categories—the art and the artist—allowing himself to embrace the message but not the messenger. This conflict resolution strategy is an example of how these the males are capable of welcoming certain aspects of fame into their lives and rejecting others, responding to the research questions about (RQ7) the positive and negative uses of fame in their lives as well as (RQ8) what LDS youth are learning and emulating from those who are famous.

M4: [T]he leader of the Beach Boys, his name is Brian Wilson. There's this music that not many people really know about, and it's really classical based type of music, but within a sort of a popular music context, and it, in some of the things that he did with harmonies and um, and uh, instrumentationalize or just, I mean, music today doesn't even touch it, even though the recordings are ten times more clean or whatever. [A]s a personal, personal man, [Brian Wilson] went through many years of drug use and had a hard time, [and] he is deaf in one ear, but yet he can, he has perfect pitch, and he can create waterfalls of sound . . . . [But] it's really hard to love somebody like that, because I think coming from my moral background, it's tough to look beyond it, but I think that I have, really by just thinking about the music quite a bit. But as a person, I mean he shows a lot of love to his family now, and he shows a lot of personal traits that I think are very admirable now, but I think that if you focus on his music, I think you will be alright . . . . I had to sort of separate the social from the musical, whatever, I wouldn't call it that, I would . . . familial from the musical, so I had to separate some things with that, but I think he is just a genius.

Friends vs The Simpsons: A Gendered Approach

While this value conflict again, heralds the idea that there is a wide diversity of talk about fame within the LDS youth subculture, it was thus interesting to observe the two different gendered approaches regarding the selected TV sitcoms the two communities most commonly chose to illustrate their feelings and examples. The program selection itself seemed to be gendered as the females most frequently chose
Friends—a sitcom that focuses primarily on human connections—to explain what they liked and disliked about fame and Hollywood, and to describe the value conflicts which often encompassed various character traits of the actors and/or characters of the show (see prior VALUE CONFLICTS for more detailed dialogue about Friends); and the male community most frequently chose The Simpsons—a satirical illustration of life—as their preferred television show, describing it more as “an escape” from everyday life or valuing it for its “random humor.”

The females seemed to personalize Friends more than the males personalized The Simpsons. For instance, as F3 explained, she felt like “one of them—Phoebe, Rachel, and F3” as she watched the show nearly a dozen times a week. F1 cited various examples of body image and moral issues as she watched Friends, explaining her personal conflict with enjoying the show for its humor, but recognizing that these characters and/or people were not who she should want to idealize. Most women indicated that it was fun to be able to identify with their single and “happy lives”—morals aside—and to observe and emulate the characters’ fashion trends, individual hairstyles, and physical appearances.

The males, however, seemed to be able to disconnect themselves more than the females as they watched The Simpsons. While they acknowledged being able “to relate” to certain instances or episodes in the show which contributed to its humor, they said they enjoyed it “purely for entertainment” despite the fact that many of the plot lines and character examples illustrate ideals that are contrary to the “family values” that were so often talked about and idealized by these male participants. They continually discussed the importance of “a stable family” particularly a solid “father figure” in today’s world, yet were particularly enamored with Homer Simpson—the very antithesis of what they said they wanted to be.

The intriguing part of this aspect of the discussion was that both the males and the females seemed to acknowledge the gap in morals, ethics, or ideals between their religious ideals and the ideals of their favorite TV shows, but the females seemed to personalize it more and felt conflicted over it, whereas the males seemed to distance themselves from any conflict or guilt about it whatsoever, taking the show at face value, and enjoying it for “pure entertainment” purposes. This difference exhibited by the two gendered approaches suggest that though part of a common LDS subculture, both genders read and even emotionalize media texts
quite differently—yet they are generally unified within their own genders.

**The Simpsons: A Male Bonding Escape**

As stated, *The Simpsons* seemed to provide a creative outlet or escape from the participants’ everyday reality, taking them to places they wouldn’t dare go in real life—with Homer Simpson leading the way. This big-hearted-yet dysfunctional dad seemed to amuse the male participants as he lead these young men to a land of stupidity, disrespect, irresponsibility, and self-indulgence—a humorous mediated retreat that ironically allowed them to experience what they would never actually choose to become. When asked what they liked best about *The Simpsons*, some responded with “stupid humor,” “randomness,” and “the jokes that my brother and I get that no one else in the room will get.” They described it as “a guy thing, ‘cause girls don’t like it,” and as “a hyperbole” that while it “portrays real life,” it exaggerates it, so it’s easy to tell the difference between reality and fantasy. They also said that watching *The Simpsons* makes them feel “successful” in their own lives, suggesting perhaps, a downward comparison trend.

The following triad discussion details a group analysis of this TV sitcom that boils down to character association—or disassociation with the various members of *The Simpsons* clan. Again, the data suggests that these young men enjoy this show so much because it allows them to vicariously experience scenarios they would never actually pursue—or that society would not allow them to pursue—in real life:

**M5:** It’s all about Homer.

**M4:** Yeah, I like the comic book guys, ‘cause I had a friend in high school who was very sarcastic and his sense of wit was exactly like his.

**M6:** I think *The Simpsons* has like a character to portray like different personalities, every day one can identify with you, so maybe even subconsciously we find ourselves clicking with the show because we can relate to it in some way or another. They are so general that most people can relate, except for girls, which we don’t know why. (All: laughing)... I think Homer’s randomness sometimes, because I am a pretty random guy too, and you know... I remember when he goes to events and stuff and he usually has a little pennant and the thing is that pennants usually have the proper name of whatever the thing is, like if it is a
basketball game they're going to have the name of the team there on the pennant. Instead he has 'Team.' So, it's like—and one time he tried to break into the school, the principal stopped and says, 'Are you a student here?' And he says, 'I think it is most certain that I am! Go School!' And he has a little thing that has 'School' on it. So, it is just so, that's the randomness. It is just the, it catches you off guard, and it is beautiful.

M6: Homer gets away with like things that you know, you only wish you could do, and so I think of other times you know, he lives the other life that a lot of guys wish they had. You know, where Homer is sitting in a nuclear power plant and just eating donuts. (All: laughing)

M5: I love the way he is just so stupid. And how he just has this rage that comes into him every now and again, and he'll just be like, 'Why you little . . .' and then he is choking his son and all, and he is just so stupid, and it's just so funny (laughing). He has always got something that he is upset about that he is like, these guys are really . . . Flanders or whatever it is, he has always got something in the back of his mind that he is really ticked off at and he is going to voice it if he has to.

M6: It is just that The Simpsons is definitely a portrayal of real life, and I think that most people who watch it enjoy it and realize that, so I don't think you can have like a Homer in real life or any of those characters in real life explicitly, but I think it's like an ideal—I don't know fun, comical ideal for us.

M4: I think it is like a sort of Fantasia for comedy. Maybe because it is also a different comedic styles that go on, I mean it's just um—

M5: They got like the grounds keeper, Willy, who's got a real thick Irish or Scottish accent, and he is always getting to mop up work or what not, and he'll make comments in his accent which is really funny. And so, just like that or just anything. Bart's a real funny character, too, because he is always getting into trouble and uh—

M4: And he has always remained 10 years old for the past 10 years.
M5: And then they have grandpa who is old and senile, and can’t do anything by himself so he is a funny character, just like everybody.

M4: Yeah, but I think there is an empathy with the humanism of the show, but we realize that it’s fake and it is not real, so we can laugh at that.

M6: I mean, like some of the things that happen, if they would have been real life, you know, most people would probably find them pretty atrocious. (M5: Yeah! I agree with that) But I think that most people who watch the show can enjoy it and can identify that this is you know, a comedy and not something meant to be followed.

M5: And if Homer was a real dad, I don’t know, he just would be the horrible dad.

M6: [But] I don’t think the show would detract from our, our, our vision of our own families or anything.

M4: It’s pure entertainment is what it is, it’s not like the Full House living models (All: laughing).

**Resolving Conflict: “Pure Entertainment” Perspective**

As with other conflicts, the males seemed to believe that they could effectively distinguish between entertainment and reality in shows such as The Simpsons. They explained that they would never dream of actually becoming Homer, but it gave them great pleasure to watch him in action. As stated above, one participant described the show—as well as much of the media—as “a hyperbole” or an exaggerated depiction of life. Therefore, he explained, that he could watch it and enjoy it for “pure entertainment sake” without it actually affecting who he became. Another participant explained that in terms of celebrity, the characters on The Simpsons are just that—characters, not “real celebrities.” Thus, he didn’t see himself in a fan role, perse, but more just enjoying various characters in a show. Another male participant justified this behavior by leaning on institutional judgment saying, “It’s not like the General Authorities have come out and said that [Homer Simpson] is a bad role model.” As a group, they also again, revisited the foundation of a “solid family upbringing” and how that came into play in reconciling this media choice that is inconsistent with their ultimate goals of being a functional father and husband. They also incorporated family upbringing as
a source of strength in combating these potential media dangers by being able to recognize the difference between fantasy and reality. Ironically, however, one male participant explained that *The Simpsons* was actually forbidden in his home growing up. These perspectives are illustrated in the following triad exchange:

**M6:** I think a lot to do with that is just how you are brought up and your family around you. I see my sister as you know, led a successful life; she has made it all the way through on a mission and through medical school. Now she is married with children and now, I see that she has done it, and it makes me want to do it, too. So I think everybody can relate on some level to that just by their brother’s or sister’s or their parent’s [example], too. I think reality sets a way better precedent than what the media can give me to you know, [build] a good household, a good life, a good future that you envision, just because you know, you see it happen in real life, whereas [in the media] they’re all nice and pretty.

**M4:** I think that M6 really said it, ‘cause what your upbringing is, ‘cause um, that’s the basis for your whole life and if you have a very bad upbringing you know it’s—and my parents never really let me watch *The Simpsons*, cause when I was not allowed to watch *The Simpsons* until I was about 14 (All: laughing and agreeing). . . . I think my parents just didn’t want it. And I think they had to cut the cord sometime, but, no, I think that really good parenting is what accounts for how we are today, that we can look into the future today, well, not look into the future, but foresee the future as being a pretty good place.

**M5:** I just agree, and just parenting your family in general. Like I said, my uncle and his family and they’ve always lived real close to us, and we always have holidays, every holiday, and anything that we ever do, you could just do with them and like vacation and stuff like that, and they were good people, they are good people, my parents are good people, and it’s just I guess that if you are surrounded by people that love you and actually generally care about you, then you kind of gravitate and want to be like them.
VALUE CONFLICT: Visual Media Temptations/Wasting Time on Unimportant Things

The primary value conflict among the males was expressed concern over mediated images or entertainment that was not in line with gospel principles which was also associated with wasting time on unimportant things. They viewed this pervasive information as a "temptation" that they had to approach with cautionary discretion, wisdom, and constant self-monitoring. Various issues included such discussions as the ease of coming in contact with inappropriate Internet images; increased number of films that contain higher amounts of sexual content, bad language, or violence; and institutional religious strategies of not only how to avoid the pitfalls of these temptations but how to define and recognize them in the first place. These issues are evident in the following triad discussion:

M5: I'm actually in one of the religion classes I am taking this semester is *Teachings of the Living Prophets*. In which it tells that we read some 45 Conference talks by different General Authorities . . . I'm doing that right now, and there's lots and lots and lots and lots of talk about the media. And a lot of warning and a lot of just to stay away from the big one [pornography] is there really hitting on computer a lot. And I guess that it just the era came up on us so quickly that they really couldn't set any guidelines the way it should be, and they said it's free, so then they have these people come on and just pervert it and make it into some of the worse things that you can imagine on, and you can just get it whenever you want if you are hooked up to the Internet. And you have to be a monitor to yourself when you are on the Internet. You cannot, someone's not gonna be like, except for if you have parents and they're like, 'What are you looking at?' and stuff like that. But I think with us in college here, um, you go in our room and shut the door and we can, you know, whatever we want to see we can see. And so it's like, I think it is like for a lot of people it is so hard to be self-controlled to be in control of what you are actually looking at and what you are doing. And uh, just I, media is such a big thing for all aspects of life. I know Satan knows this and what a better way than to make the media into something that isn't good.
M6: Well, they always have the cautionary talks about being weary of what is going on in the media. I find that is very true, and what they are saying is pretty wise. Just because there is a lot of filth up there that you know, you really don’t benefit from seeing it not, if you don’t have the morals there, if you don’t have the morals there’s still no point in seeing like grotesque murders or rapes or things, because it detracts from humanism, because why would people want to aspire to do that? But aside from that, in the last General Conference there was I cannot remember exactly who it was, either [Elder] Ballard or [Elder] Oaks said something about wasting too much time with little aim to do anything right. I notice that sometimes I sit in front of the computer and waste hours and accomplish nothing. Yes, the media does, I found that really true, that I do waste a lot of time now that I think of it, just really accomplishing nothing. I think that was pretty safe advise to, and um, yeah, just they make you realize more important things in life I think, uh, you know, there’s bigger and better things out there than just wasting time sometimes.

**Resolving Conflict: Following the Prophet and Church Leaders**

Like the female participants, all male respondents incorporated religiosity strategies as defense mechanisms against these value conflicts. These tactics also included strategies for safeguarding themselves against specific visual media (Internet and films in particular) deemed potentially dangerous by the males. The importance of and willingness to follow the prophet and Church leaders was reiterated over and over, and it seemed to provide them with the strength and confidence that they could prevail against these pervasive mediated temptations. They explained that “things like pornography aren’t specifically discussed in the scriptures, but the prophet and General Authorities talk about it all the time” (member check quote). They added that developing habits of “self-discipline” as seen in the prophet’s example, media literacy as cautioned by other Church leaders, and the courage to “walk out” of an inappropriate movie or simply “turn off” a television show that was not congruent with the teachings of the gospel helped them cope with these conflicts. Additionally, like the females’ emphasis on the value of motherhood in relationship to incorporating positive role models, the males brought up the significance of a solid “family upbringing” as a strategy when dealing
with these types of trials. They also again emphasized the importance of a strong family in this day and age, particularly a strong father to lead the family in a positive direction and help family members succeed in life. M5, for instance, explained how he tries to stay directed while on the Internet so he won’t get “into trouble:”

M5: Usually, I don’t like to surf the Web per se, just because that leads into trouble. If I get on a computer, and I know what I want to look up, and I know what I want to find I can do that and then get off and then I’m done with it. And then with the TV something comes up that is not good I don’t really particularly like to sit and watch, and you just turn to a different station.

M4 gains strength from President Hinckley’s example of self-discipline when combating these types of temptations:

M4: Larry King was interviewing President Hinckley and asked him if, you know, ‘Temptation is hard for you?’ And he was like, ‘No.’ ‘And ‘How is it that you can overcome temptations like the media or stuff?’ And President Hinckley said, ‘Self-discipline.’ I think self-discipline is a key, you know? Basically it is up to you, and nobody is ever going to watch you or guide you all your life and the person that makes the choices and makes wise choices is yourself. If everybody in this world had self-discipline, you know, one way or the other, I think it would be a better, more controlled place.

The triad exchange below illustrates specific defense strategies incorporated by these males battling the visual image conflict:

M12: [I] walk out [of movies]. M11 and I were watching—

M11: We rented Medicine Man from the BYU Bookstore.

M12: It’s crap!

M11: Yeah, it’s PG-13, but like—

M12: It’s like an X-rated show, it’s PG-13—

M11: It’s because they have another movie we watched, The Mission with DeNiro, had a similar thing, but that one was just PG, but it was because for the same reason, there were all of
these native people that they could be totally topless, naked and everything, and it’s OK. Like they are not real people or something.

SF: Like the National Geographic sort of thing?

M11: Yeah, exactly, like I guess in a sense it is definitely more appropriate for them to be topless than you know one of us or something, because that’s their culture and so it is not wrong for them but it is wrong to us though. So like if it was in their culture the movie would be coming out like sure, rate it PG, because that is their every day thing and that’s part of their society and they don’t do it in like a sexual way, but I think we associate nudity with sex, like most of the time. And so for us, I don’t think it should be PG or PG-13, but there another movie also like Sean Connery, (M12: Oh, yeah, he’s really good), and he is like the producer and stuff and there were just tons of like that stuff and then I think there were two ‘F’-words in that, and we stopped for that, and it was really . . . I think actually think that the rating system has got to be stricter since the ‘80s because like—

M12: That movie was like in 1989 or something, and it was PG-13. We were appalled at what they were showing. I mean, unbelievable.

M11: The language is still bad, and sex was applied in most every PG-13 movie, but the nudity was so bad; I didn’t see Titanic, but as far as I know that was like the only PG-13 movie that I have seen that’s had explicit nudity in it. But they’re still definitely wrong, yeah, so I would rather walk out or just not see it. But I mean if I do see it, it’s not like, well, I say doesn’t change me, I guess I wouldn’t know, but you know, it’s not like I just go out and do whatever, but I don’t think it’s right. But you definitely have to be well grounded in what you know, first. Because Mormons, they usually know right from wrong, but some people just follow what’s out there.

M12: I think it’s just like, I think over the years they have gotten a little more lenient with what a PG-13 is, ‘cause I like, a lot of PG-13 like a few years ago I don’t remember them having like as many cuss words in them you know?
M11: It is like different things have changed.

M12: I mean it seemed like a while ago you could watch a PG-13 movie, and maybe every once in a while not see sex in it. Now, like every movie that’s PG-13 I mean, maybe even PG, you can almost guarantee there is going to be sex in it, you know? And then there is going to be violence for the most part, too, you know?

While these gendered approaches to favored prime-time sitcoms and value conflicts clearly polarized the LDS male and female participants in terms of their value conflicts with mediated fame, it was interesting to discover that both genders likewise incorporate unique religiosity strategies as they seek to resolve these conflicts. While both genders were united in relying on religious guidance to resolve these conflicts, the females most often spoke in terms of “staying close to the gospel” or “to the spirit” by “reading scriptures” or “praying” regularly or by “being grateful” for one’s blessings. In contrast, the males spoke more frequently of “following the prophet” or “General Authorities” citing references from General Conference talks these LDS Church leaders had delivered. Thus, this information has interesting ramifications regarding not only how male and female LDS youth perhaps view the media differently, but how they incorporate gendered approaches to religiosity—how they talk about it and how they incorporate specific practices into their individual lives.

CONTRADICTIONS ABOUT FAME AND MEDIA

Though a significant big effects tradition was assumed by these participants as previously mentioned, very few expressed up-front that they were personally effected by the media with any significance. Their comments were initially couched primarily in third-person effect. Further, these youth did not consider themselves to be “fans” or people who adopted mediated role models. Yet deeper discussion and observation revealed that those same individuals were in fact significantly influenced by the media in various ways, and they did, in fact, exhibit some fan behavior including the acquisition of fame paraphanalia. This suggests that the participants’ perceptions did not always match their habits. For instance, this participant confidently stated up-front:

M5: Well, I don’t think I have any media role models. Thinking when I was a kid, I can’t ever
remember having any of anybody's picture up on my wall that I really [admired], for any
sports or anything.

Yet later discussion and observation revealed that he did indeed have posters up on his
walls—posters of Curley from *The Three Stooges*, and the Philadelphia Eagles, specifically. He was also
wearing an Eagles’ hat during our discussion. Furthermore, it was revealed that he used his encounters with
famous celebrities in some ways as a mode of social clout among his friends. For instance, when asked why
he would choose to listen to a famous speaker over a non-famous speaker, he explained that he would prefer
a famous speaker “just because he is famous,” and so that he could have “a link” with someone who was
famous. He said he enjoyed returning to his friends after a celebrity encounter and saying, “Guess who I just
saw?” and that the experience might cause his friends to think more highly of him. This behavior is a
significant contradiction to his earlier claim of not being a fan.

Another participant indicated that he “didn’t have much time for the media” as follows:

M6: No, no, I don’t watch the TV for a while now, just once in a while for fun. But that is
mainly a source of entertainment. I don’t have too much time for entertainment these days
in the source of media.

Yet he later shared with the group his affinity for *The Simpsons*, and how he has *The Complete
Simpsons* on CD which he watches periodically on his computer along with viewing movies on his computer
as well. He seemed well-versed on the show in the discussion, providing several well-thought out analyses
of the show:

M6: I think *The Simpsons* has like a character to portray like different personalities, every day
one can identify with you, so maybe even subconsciously we find ourselves clicking with
the show because we can relate to it in some way or another. They are so general that most
people can relate, except for girls, which we don’t know why. (All: laughing)

... I think Homer’s randomness sometimes, because I am a pretty random guy too, and you
know, ... Homer gets away with like things that you know, you only wish you could do,
and so I think of other times you know, he lives the other life that a lot of guys wish they
had. You know, where Homer lies is sitting in a nuclear power plant and just eating donuts. (All: laughing)

... I mean, like some of the things that happen, if they would have been real life, you know, most people would probably find them pretty atrocious. (M5: Yeah! I agree with that.) But I think that most people who watch the show can enjoy it and can identify that this is you know, a comedy and not something meant to be followed.

(See “The Simpsons: A Male Bonding Escape” or for more complete discussion.)

Additionally, this participant has a varied CD collection which he says he listens to regularly, and added that his computer is his “gateway to the media” for entertainment, playing games, viewing movies, as well as Internet research for school. This reality contradicts his earlier claim of the media not being a significant part of his life.

Another participant saw herself as unaffected by the media, particularly TV, because her dad “turned it off” for good nine years ago. For the same reason, she did not view herself as a fan in particular because of her perceived detachment from the media. She does, however, currently watch TV quite regularly, read various magazines, use a computer, play video games, listen to CDs and attend music concerts. She was also very vocal about the value conflict regarding eating disorders, instigating the topic herself and then correlating it directly to the media saying, “I think media is kind of depressing” because of “all these skinny girls” which she says have a negative effect on her self-esteem because they’re “nothing like” her. Therefore, she tries to “have nothing to do with the media” because she doesn’t feel represented.

Still, however, she demonstrated signs of being affected by the media with which she claims not to affiliate. For instance, during a triad discussion about magazine models, she adamantly said, “I hate them” because their perfect physical standard perpetuated by the media “depresses people” and has “bad effects” on the self-esteem of “all teenage girls.” She said that her favorite issue of People magazine was one that featured “fat actresses” even though their reason for being fat (and thus being featured in the magazine) was that they all had recently given birth to babies. She further explained why she appreciates the Polynesian culture so much because “you don’t feel so bad [about your body]” because “there’s tons of fat Polynesians.”
F7: It’s like cool—like, ‘Oh, you’ve gained some weight!’ It’s like a good thing. Like [in Hawaii] it’s so funny, the Polynesians because, I mean, I’m a pig, so I like to eat. And they eat until they can’t walk, and it’s so fun!

(See “VALUE CONFLICT: Body Image” section for more complete discussion.)

Furthermore, when topics interested F7 such as surfing, LDS athletes, or preferred musicians, she suddenly became a more enthusiastic fan of sorts. She explained how she follows her favorite guitarist, Ben Harper, for example, from one concert to the next, and has purchased merchandise such as sweatshirts with his name on it, for instance. She explains other scenarios of actually meeting her “idols,” and admitting to being somewhat star-struck:

F7: [L]ike watching Surf View, it’s like, if I see him walking down the street I’d be like, ‘Yeah! You’re Dan Why! You know, like, you’re awesome!’ You know? . . . It’s kind of—it is, it’s a fame thing. You’re just like, ‘You’re so and so!’ And it goes—I don’t know. It’s all like intertwined in the same like, there’s like ulterior motives for like, ‘He’s famous, I want to get to know him.’ But then there’s also like because of who they are and it’s all—it’s weird, but yeah, totally, like, in Hawaii, I’d be walking and I’d see some pro surfer and I’d be like, ‘You’re, you’re Chris Malloy!’ You know? And he’s like, ‘Hey, how’s it going?’ And I was like, ‘Good.’ And it was cool because he’s like, he was one of my favorite surfers at the time. And I sat there and talked to him and he like started telling me like, ‘Oh, so you’re going to school? Stay in school!’ You know? . . . And like, it was cool. And then he was like, even more my favorite because not only is he an awesome surfer and I looked up to him and like, met him because he was him, but then just talking to him and getting that like, oh you know, he’s a real person, and he’s not just like, ‘Yeah, dude. Go surf. That’s cool. Yeah, I surfed Tahiti last week, I’m cool,’ You know? He was like, ‘Oh!’ and like, showed an interest and showed that he was like, a real person, so that made him that more, that much more of a real person and a person that I could be like, ‘Oh, he’s a good guy. He’s got his feet on the ground.’

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Thus, F7 exemplifies how many of these young participants were either slow to admit their fandom or they contradicted their initial claims of not being affected by the media during subsequent discussions and interviews.

Likewise, the following participant said that she’s not all that “into” or “influenced” by the media, yet she admits to enjoying TV shows like the long-running ‘teen drama, Beverly Hills 90210:

F9: Like, last semester, I mean, yeah, this is totally cheesy, but I would always come home and be like, ‘Oh, 90210 is on!’ or something like that, you know? I’d totally get caught up in that. But like I mean my roommates came home every day at 2:00 and they were watching ‘Days of Our Lives.’ And I’d sit there and I was just like, ‘This is ridiculous,’ like it was so annoying to watch because it was so dramatic and just pathetic. And my roommate is obsessed with like Buffy and whatever, you know? Because it’s not realistic to me, and she sits there and she goes, ‘It’s just as unrealistic as 90210,’ and I’m like, ‘You know, maybe you’re right,’ but at least it’s not like vampires jumping out or whatever (laughing). But, yeah, I totally—I totally get caught up in 90210 and stuff like that. But at the same time, I mean, my life isn’t going to be changed by it. I’m not going to be affected if I don’t watch it. It’s just something I do ‘cause I’m bored.

F9 further acknowledges the value differences exhibited on this TV show and others, but says she tries not to let them alter her own values. However, she does indicate some level of media effect (particularly third-person) because although she says she would not think that these TV values are OK for herself, she says that the way the plots are designed, they make these values seem OK for the characters. This, she says, contributes to the demise of society such as “teen pregnancies” because the media makes these values seem acceptable:

F9: I honestly, I always think about [the value differences]. I always sit there and go, ‘It’s OK for them because they don’t understand,’ or because they’re not members of the Church. It’s just weird. It’s easy to look at TV—you know people on TV, and one scene is they’re totally making out, and then the next scene is they’re waking up in bed together, and it’s
natural to watch it on TV. It’s natural to think, ‘Oh, you know, it’s acceptable.’ But in reality, I would never turn around and say, ‘Oh, well, they do it on TV so I can.’

SF: OK, so you separate that [from your own values and behavior]?

F9: Big time. I don’t really sit there and think, you know, ‘Oh, what they’re doing is wrong,’ though, which is really weird. It never affected me, because you’re constantly watching it. Every episode it’s happening. . . . Every episode of anything, it’s always happening. People are always sleeping together, you know, in every movie. You know, that’s the one thing we learned about in yearbook also is that’s what the media does. You’ve got to have language; you’ve got to have sex; and you’ve got to have entertainment. Those are the three main things to get people. If a movie doesn’t contain those, people aren’t going to go see it. And it’s so true, you know. That’s why people are like, ‘Ooh, a G-rated movie? No way,’ because it doesn’t have any of that; whereas, that’s—and that’s also why there’s so many R-rated movies out in society today. And it makes me sick because I’m like, ‘That’s not fair.’ And that’s a lot of the reason, too, why there’s so many teen pregnancies and all that kind of stuff because everyone’s role models and everyone’s idols are out in the movies doing it, whether they believe it or not for themselves. But you seem to think that because they go to the movies, ‘They’re doing it, so I can, too.’

That most participants were slow to see themselves as fans or directly affected by the media in any significant way suggests perhaps that they perceive being a fan as negative. As an active audience, perhaps the idea of relinquishing control of their lives to the media almost to the point of becoming victim-like to media domination is perhaps a passive role, and they are resistant to adapt or accept any association with it. Nonetheless, it was revealing to observe how most participants—once probed—eventually admitted to being fans in some way and simultaneously saw fame as perhaps not such a bad thing after all. (See “THE FINAL ANALYSIS: FAME AND FANDOM PERSONALIZED” section for further details.)

Another notable contradiction was observed in the behaviors of F2 and F3. These two young women went to great lengths to explain how they did not respect celebrities such as Britney Spears and the members
of the *Friends* cast as role models, because they did not project “high values and standards,” particularly in “the way they dressed.” Ironically, however, during our one-on-one interviews, the girls showed up wearing bikinis and explained that they typically do not “hang out” at the college dorm pool, because the rules dictate that girls must wear one-piece bathing suits. They explained how they opted, instead, to travel across town in order to attend a public pool so that they can wear their two-piece bathing suits despite the fact that they are considered to be “immodest” according to university standards.

This conflict, again, underscores the evidence of the value conflicts that exist—in this case, among the females. They desire to be “moral” and “modest,” and therefore they would not frequent any place where their attire would be considered “immodest.” Yet they still desire to wear what they (as well as BYU) consider to be “immodest dress,” so they simply choose to wear it in an environment where it would be more socially and morally acceptable.

**THE FINAL ANALYSIS: FAME AND FANDOM PERSONALIZED**

After much discussion about the many tenants of fame from a global to a local basis, religious and secular conditions, personal and impersonal applications, the participants were mixed regarding the possibility of being famous themselves. While most of these youth explained that they had experienced some level of fame themselves on a local level (e.g., high school football star, student body officer, prom queen, local TV show host, etc.), their opinions differed dramatically on the issue. For instance, some individuals who initially distanced themselves from any connection with fame and media influence concluded by saying that “it would be cool” to be famous—to have the opportunity to “portray truth and goodness” and to let “people know that you’re not trashy.” Others were “scared” by the prospects, fearful of the position in which it would place their family regarding privacy issues and public demands. Still others vacillated with the notion saying that “it would be hard to be famous,” but that they would “try to stay humble” and “do the same thing that the General Authorities do.” Still others were adamant that they definitely did “not want to be famous” because of how fame “corrupts and changes people” and how it seems to challenge family life. This variance of perspectives again, exemplifies the diversity of talk about fame that exists among LDS youth, yet it ironically contradicts their own universally accepted notion that “everyone wants to be famous.”

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Fan Paraphanalia vs Religious Symbols

Regarding the issue of physical manifestations of fandom in homes, the Distant-Yet-Active interpretive community was more united in this respect than with the value conflicts which showed evidence of gender separation. While there was evidence of "fame garb" in terms of posters, photos, apparel, and other various celebrity merchandise, the participants exhibited a more prominent display of family and religious symbols in their bedrooms and homes. For instance, pictures of Jesus Christ and various LDS temples hung in every home; Many photos of family and close friends were commonly displayed; Personal awards and certificates of achievement were also exhibited which seemed to catch one's initial focus, overshadowing any fame paraphanalia that existed. For example, one participant indicated that these physical displays helped remind her of her primary goals in life:

F1: [These photos are] pretty much all of my friends, and then I have a picture of the temple and then all my best friends are everywhere, and I like this picture because it reminds me of all my goals.

SF: The temple does?

F1: Yes. 'Cause this is my main goal to be able to be always worthy to go to the temple and always preparing to go to the temple and the rest is really just family and friends, all if it, I really don't have any that are really, if I think about it, there is not like a star I'm obsessed over, you know.

Other symbols—though scarce—were more temporal and more fan-like in nature, such as F3's statue of The Little Mermaid. She says that she keeps it up in her room because she "really loved that movie and really likes that particular character." Some adornments were more unspoken, like those found in F7's home, which was plastered with magazine photos and posters of professional surfers, wake boarders, and snow boarders. F8 says that she used to have similar photos up in her room, but she is trying to create a more "mature" ambiance in her home. Therefore she has opted to adorn her classic French decor with things like the Church's Proclamation of the Family statement, a picture of Christ and The First Presidency, as well as photos of family and friends.
Other fame paraphernalia that was within sight during nonparticipant observation included examples such as a *People* magazine lying on the floor next to the bed; posters of the actor, Jim Carey, the Philadelphia Eagles, or Curley from *The Three Stooges*; sweatshirts of singer/guitarist, Ben Harper; Disney CDs of popular theme park rides (such as “Sounds from the Haunted Mansion” or “The Pirates of the Caribbean”); other contemporary music; and name-brand support such as Nike hats and Quicksilver shirts that could be associated with various celebrities. When asked about his life-size image of Jim Carey hanging on his wall, one participant responded simply:

M11: Because I worked in the theater, and I had tons of posters, and I thought it was funny.

SF: So it’s not necessarily like Jim Carey is your idol or anything—

M11: Well, I think he is funny, and it was a funny expression.

**Religiosity—Central to the Lives of LDS Youth**

These physical manifestations of fame seemed to convey more of a shared interest in a hobby or sport rather than any type of zealous idol worship on the part of the participants. In each participating home, it was clear from visual observation, which was also reinforced by various in-depth discussions, that the main priority in the lives of these young individuals was their religiosity as it applied to the events in their lives, with a secondary focus on their interests, some which included elements of fame. This fan paraphernalia symbolically spoke to the research questions concerning (RQ1) the relationship between fame and the religiosity of LDS youth and (RQ2) how they resolve value conflicts that arise therein as well as (RQ9) how they see the role of fame play out in the Church. These LDS youth based their perspectives about fame and the media on their religious upbringing; they incorporated strategies of religiosity to resolve their value conflicts; and they implemented religious principles as a foundation for setting future goals. Though the primary interpretive community split into gendered groups at times during this study as well as exhibiting varying styles of talk about fame and media, it was firmly reunited in that each individual proved to be striving for LDS religiosity to take precedence over and to temper the effects of fame and media in their individual lives. (More on this in Conclusions chapter.)
Conclusions

The purpose of this thesis was to explore the relationship between fame and religiosity of LDS youth and how they define and resolve value conflicts therein. The study also intended to uncover themes about how LDS youth define fame, how they talk about it, how they tie religiosity into those conversations, and whom they consider famous and why. Additionally, the research sought to explore both the positive and negative uses of fame in the lives of LDS youth, including what they are learning and emulating from those who are famous, as well as how they see the role of fame playing out in the Church. Overall, the purpose of this study was to provide a foundation of useful concepts about fame and LDS youth upon which additional research could be conducted.

Discussion

Results of this study indicate that LDS youth both embrace and reject various aspects of fame as it relates to their lives. LDS religious fundamentals lay the foundation upon which these youth establish their ideals about fame and whom they choose as role models. When these ideals and religious values collide with the realities of mediated fame, internal conflict arises. Religiosity then becomes the strategy incorporated by these youth to resolve these conflicts. Conversely, the closer fame merges with the religious values of these individuals, the more justified fame becomes in their minds. However, religiosity supercedes fame and fandom as a guiding force in the lives of these LDS youth. Religiosity, therefore, becomes a multi-dimensional phenomenon which not only allows for “oppositional readings of mediated fame or ‘divergently correct’ interpretations” (see Lepter and Lindlof, 2000; Stout, 2000), but it also serves multiple roles such as helping youth establish ideals and goals in life, serving as the bar by which they judge their success as well as the success of others, and being the method by which they resolve value conflicts that result from discord between fame and religiosity.

LDS Youth: A Distant-Yet-Active Audience

The data revealed an active audience which read primarily against the media, thus, contradicting the stereotype that youth are simply under the power of celebrities. This audience initially manifested itself as a single interpretive community (“LDS Youth—Distant-Yet-Active Audience”) with a diversity of talk about
fame within it. This variance emerged through revealed themes about the paradoxical nature of fame, religiously founded ideals about fame, specific styles of talk about fame, fan paraphanalia, etc. As discussion about value conflicts deepened, this unified interpretive community demonstrated a tendency toward gendered views particularly in terms of value conflicts. Each gender’s value conflicts were as unique as their definitions and resolutions to these conflicts, though both genders commonly employed religiosity strategies as methods of resolution. Furthermore, these value conflicts themselves showed potential for even more definitive sub-level interpretive communities which could be proven as more conclusive with further research. Findings also showed that while fame and fandom played active roles in the lives of these LDS youth, religiosity—highlighted by its physical symbols—significantly overshadowed the presence of both fame and fandom behavior in their lives. This indicates that LDS beliefs, doctrines, culture, and values are central to the daily lives of these youth, serving as the focal point around which the rest of their lives revolve.

The data further revealed that LDS youth considered fame to be paradoxical—both positive and negative depending on the context. Its relationship to religiosity was likewise found to be paradoxical—complimentary in some cases and conflicting in others. While a variety of individuals were named as “famous,” LDS celebrities were considered to be “voices of the LDS culture” and “representatives” to the world of who Mormons are and how they live. Thus, both criticism and admiration were intensified as these LDS youth spoke of these individuals with particular praise and respect for the “positive examples of fame” that the LDS prophet and General Authorities provided. This research underscores the point that while LDS youth are diverse in their talk about specifics about fame, when it comes to media issues involving the Church, they are united in their concern for both a positive public image as well as an accurate representation of their individual-yet-collective values and beliefs.

Consistent with Harris’ indication that fans are primarily women (1999, p. 7), the value conflicts that emerged among the females in this study support that view. The detailed expressions and discussions of body image conflicts, pressure to be perfect, fame not being conducive to LDS lifestyle, and idol worship/celebrity emulation indicate that because the females struggle so personally with these issues more often and more intensely than the males, they must initially be influenced by the phenomenon of fame to some degree in order
to experience conflict. While it is possible that the males were simply less expressive about any additional conflicts they may have had but chose to keep them inside as to not appear weak or vulnerable in front of their peers, the more probable conclusion revealed through the data is that the more value conflicts individuals face regarding fame, the more fan-like characteristics they possess.

Such findings raise new questions about the diversity of talk about fame and media among males and females within a common subculture, such as the LDS Church. Evidence suggests that perhaps despite common religious values and upbringings, males and females read, interpret, emotionalize, and personalize texts—particularly mediated characters therein—very differently.

The data likewise revealed that most LDS youth resisted any connection to being considered fans or being significantly affected by the media themselves, opting to initially explain their issues and perspectives in third-person effect. This further suggests that there may be an inherent belief among these LDS youth that fandom is in some way perceived as negative or that it is embarrassing for them to be considered a fan. For an active media audience as well as an active religious audience, it is understandable to see why they would resist being considered “victim-like” or one who is “acted-upon” by another dominant force such as the media, which they ironically defined and interpreted as being “highly powerful.” There was an initial sense that despite this omnipotence, they expected themselves to be in control—or even more powerful than the media itself.

Implications

Contradictions about fame indicate the struggle that these LDS youth occasionally face in constantly adhering to their religious values in both thought and behavior. Though they all expressed a sincere desire to consistently be true to their values, their contradictions demonstrated their efforts to work through these conflicts in order to allow both fame and religiosity to assume their proper roles in their lives.

Such information might be useful to parents, educators, and religious leaders as they consider instilling values as well as media literacy from a religious perspective. As indicated by this study, religiosity is a strong determinant of how youth view ideals about fame. The values and beliefs they learn early on in their lives are the very ideals by which they choose their role models, make judgements about which mediated
messages they will accept or reject, and determine the role of fame in their lives—both from the perspective of being a fan and being in the spotlight themselves.

While religious leaders do consider fame from both a positive and negative standpoint, the data indicate that LDS youth communicate in a more complex diversity of talk as well as relativity in terms of the value of fame or lack thereof as it relates to both secular and religious aspects of their lives. It may be helpful, therefore, to (1) discuss fame within the context of specific scenarios as opposed to polemical generalities or a uniform approach. Within these complexities, it might be constructive to (2) consider the value conflicts these youth face when fame and religious ideals collide in their lives. As leaders seek to help them resolve these conflicts, it may be helpful to (3) express compassion, understanding, and sensitivity to the tensions that exist regarding these issues, particularly among the young women who seem to experience more internal conflict regarding these issues than the young men. According to the data, LDS youth are making concerted efforts to battle the various challenges and conflicts they face in today’s heavily mediated world, and perhaps recognizing and rewarding those positive efforts could encourage them to continue to adhere to gospel ideals. This study showed that LDS youth—especially the young men—look to and heed the counsel of respected Church leaders, parents, and authorities as they seek solutions to various challenges related to fame in the media. In fact, this research indicates that youth seriously consider the influential positions of Church leaders, educators, parents, and LDS celebrities in particular as they internalize the powerful messages that are sent from those both in authority and in the spotlight. It may be helpful, therefore, to also (4) take advantage of the positive aspects of fame insofar as these positive examples help youth progress in their lives. Such issues deserve the attention of those in authority over youth as well as further academic research.

**Interpretive Community Theory—A Useful Concept**

It should be noted that the interpretive community theory proved to be a useful tool in uncovering emergent data as well as common themes relating to fame, religiosity, and LDS youth. As this active media audience was highly analytical about fame, the interpretive community theory greatly helped to uncover their strategies of interpretation, which indicated that youth are not blindly led nor universally manipulated by the media—though they do express various vulnerabilities to the media. Interpretive community theory also
helped to organize and examine the many dominant themes that emerged in the data, highlighting the diversity of talk expressed among these LDS youth. It further helped to clarify and articulate the varied value conflicts which were revealed in this research as well as the audience’s strategic resolutions to these conflicts. The interpretive community theory, thus, provided a very useful method by which the rich, qualitative data in this study could be effectively analyzed as well as theorized in an orderly and productive manner.

**Recommendations for Further Research**

In addition to the above suggestions, there are various other research opportunities recommended for further study. As stated in the Results section, many fame and media issues in this study demonstrated a strong tendency toward gendered interpretive communities, particularly within the value conflicts. Further research could identify the extent to which this gender division exists as well as clearer boundaries and shared strategies among potential interpretive communities regarding the value conflicts LDS youth experience between fame and religiosity.

Among LDS youth audiences, the following issues could be further explored: Issues such as the media pressure young women face in terms of body image and attaining their idealized LDS marriage; comparison between young men and young women of the Church regarding how they experience and deal with guilt relating to media habits; a focus on Mormon converts and how they develop and reinforce their LDS identity through the connection and association with LDS celebrities and Church fame; an exploration of LDS celebrities exploring their experiences with fame as it relates to religiosity from their point of view; triangulation between youth of various religions to determine if and how their views about fame differ and how they define and resolve their respective value conflicts.

Various cultural and geographic issues relating to fame and media arose in this study that were not necessarily emphasized in this thesis. Some included: depression rates among Utah women relating to fame and the media; Utah’s youth seeming more vulnerable to media and fame trends; and Utah news “sugarcoating” information because of the “soft” LDS culture. These issues could be explored in studies that compare and contrast LDS media behaviors and beliefs in terms of geographic location.

Further research relating to this study could also be conducted among more secular audiences. For
instance, since the popular TV sitcoms such as *The Simpsons* and *Friends* tended to be gendered in various ways, it would be interesting to cross them with both male and female audiences to determine how each audience perceives each show in terms of gender identity and attraction; triangulation among youth who are active in the performing arts against those who are not heavily involved in the arts to determine if there is a significant difference in fame and media perception; or audience studies about reality TV to determine its actual level of reality, and whether or not it encourages or discourages the pursuit of fame among viewers or if it alters their perspectives about fame. Overall, further research in these areas will seek to broaden the understanding of issues relating to media, youth, and religion, and the diversity of talk that lies within common subcultures with both institutional and societal expectations.
Appendix A

Participant Profiles

Triad #1: (3 female roommates F1, F2, and F3)

(F1)
F1 is a 19-year-old sophomore from Tampa, Florida. She recently transferred from Ricks College where she was a national debate champion. Through this endeavor she has experienced minor brushes with fame as well as through her participation on award-winning dance teams. She has a history of eating disorders which she strongly attributes to the media. She is very outgoing and articulate, enjoys watching sitcoms such as Friends and enjoys reading magazines such as People.

(F2)
F2 is a 17-year-old freshman from Salt Lake City, Utah. She graduated early from high school and is new to BYU this term. She is shy—not as outgoing as the other girls, and therefore, sometimes deferred to their opinions during the triad. She seemed to avoid confrontation. Both F2 and F3 were reluctant to disagree with F1 while they were together in group discussion, but they later expressed their disagreement with F1 about selected issues during their one-on-one interviews. F2 has a love-hate relationship with Britney Spears (she really likes her and her music but feels like she shouldn’t) and also enjoys listening to Christina Aguilera. She also enjoys watching the TV show, Friends.

(F3)
F3 is a 17-year-old freshman from Salt Lake City, Utah. Like F2, she graduated high school early and is new to BYU this term. She comes from a wealthy, prominent family in Salt Lake City and has occasionally associated with various “famous” Mormons. She says she has witnessed people close to her make and lose large amounts of money and shared how these events have effected their relationships and individual lives. This background seems to have significantly influenced her opinions and perspectives about fame as well as wealth. Like F2, F3 also has a love-hate relationship with Britney Spears, and she also enjoys watching the TV show, Friends regularly.

Triad #2: (3 male roommates, M4, M5, and M6)

(M4)
M4 is an 18-year-old freshman from Anaheim Hills, California. Majoring in music, M4 is an experienced musician who especially admires Brian Wilson of The Beach Boys for his “musical genius.” He is media savvy, particularly on the computer and Internet. He is a very deep thinker who does well in school. He enjoys watching The Simpsons, particularly since he was forbidden to watch it growing up at home and is also a Disney fan.

(M5)
M5 is an 18-year-old freshman from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. He recently transferred from Utah State University but plans to return there next semester. He is street smart, honest, and open. He has a background in high school athletics and has particularly excelled in football. He is a dedicated Philadelphia Eagles fan and enjoys sports of all kinds. He reads Time and Maxim. He also likes watching the TV sitcom, The Simpsons, as well as televised sports.

(M6)
M6 is an 18-year-old freshman from Salt Lake City, Utah. He is an honor student who is attending BYU on an academic scholarship. M6 has a background in high school student government and leadership and is Asian-American. He enjoys watching The Simpsons (particularly on his computer via CD ROM), and he says that his computer is his “gateway” to the media.

Triad #3: (3 female friends/former roommates, F7, F8, and F9)

(F7)
F7 is an 18-year-old freshman from Rancho Santa Margarita, California. She recently transferred from BYU-Hawaii and is an Elementary Education major. She has a background of high school leadership, competitive track, surfing, snowboarding, and was a prom queen. Her dad prohibited TV viewing in their home (except for movies and surf videos) nine years ago, so she considers herself “out of touch” with the media. However, she says she now watches more television because of her roommates, enjoys reading Shape and Surfing magazines, and loves listening to Ben Harper music and attending his concerts. She also hosted a local cable show in southern California with F8.

(F8)
F8 is an 18-year-old freshman from Huntington Beach, California. She currently attends Utah Valley State College and is a Nursing major. She is a convert to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and is attending his concerts with her parents. She enjoys reading Shape, Health, and Ensign magazines and sometimes "indulges" in Cosmopolitan. F8 enjoys listening to Ben Harper music and attending his concerts with F7. She likes playing computer games such as Tetris, and she hosted a local cable TV show in southern California with F7. She was also a junior lifeguard, enjoys snow boarding, and was involved in high school leadership.

F9 is a 19-year-old freshman from Trabuco Canyon, California. She is currently an Elementary Education major at BYU. She has a background in print production as a member of her high school yearbook staff. This experience played into many of her perspectives about the media in that she did not seem very trusting of the media because she had witnessed "image manipulation" time and again. She says that this perspective has also helped her maintain a healthier perspective about not idolizing magazine models because she feels that they don't really appear in real life the way they appear in magazines. She says she prefers name brand clothing (e.g., Nordstrom, Roxy, etc.) because of her mother's example. She enjoys snowboarding and watching reruns of Beverly Hills 90210.

Triad #4: (3 male roommates, M10, M11, and M12)

M10 is an 18-year-old freshman from Kissimmee, Florida. He is a Physics major at BYU, and seems very bright and articulate. He says the computer is his main source of media, and he uses the Internet for email, school research, and for reading scientific journals. He also enjoys watching TV shows like The Simpsons and The Discovery Channel.

M11 is a 19-year-old sophomore from Vacaville, California. He is a CIT Electronics and Information Technology major at BYU. He says he also uses the Internet quite often for school research, email, looking up movie reviews, and "wasting time." He used to work in a movie theater in California, so he says he tries to stay current on movie trends and reviews. He also enjoys action/adventure shows like James Bond and Jackie Chan movies. He says he doesn't watch too much TV anymore, but when he does, he chooses The Simpsons and Seinfeld. He says he has also enjoyed watching Saturday Night Live reruns, Comedy Central, JAG, and Star Trak.

M12 is an 18-year-old freshman from Victorville, California. He is a Civil Engineering major at BYU. He is African-American, and says he enjoys listening to classical music, watching The Simpsons, and reading Church publications like the Ensign.
Appendix B

Triad Discussion Topics and Questions

Purpose: The purpose of the focus groups is to provide an arena within which LDS youth can address the issues of fame and religiosity in a group dynamic. Thus, many of the following questions are the same or similar to the in-depth interview questions, but the difference will be how they talk about these issues as a group. In a study incorporating interpretive communities, this element is equally as important as the answers themselves.

Tell me about some of your aspirations in life—careers, goals, etc.

Tell me about some people who you look up to and admire. What do you admire about them? Why are they examples to you? Have you ever met these people? If so, were they what you expected? Did your attitude change about them once you met them in person?

Sometimes people do things just to be “seen” or “to get recognized” in public. Tell me about some of the things you’ve seen others do “for attention.” Would you engage in anything similar “to get noticed”?

Sometimes people like to emulate celebrities, especially the way they look. I personally wanted my hair the same color as Jennifer Aniston’s. Have there ever been any instances in your life when you have tried to emulate someone famous?

Along those lines, many people enjoy watching celebrities such as professional athletes, because it helps them improve their own athletic performance. For instance, when I played tennis competitively, I used to imagine myself stroking the ball like Tracy Austin or Chris Evert and often that would help me to improve my game. Are there any activities that you do in your life (sports or otherwise) where you imagine yourself performing like other people?

Name some famous people who you admire. Why do you admire them? Are there any famous individuals in the limelight whom you wish you could meet? Tell me about some of your favorite TV shows or films. Who are some of your favorite characters and why?

Tell me about fame in other areas of life (e.g., school, local community, church, clubs, etc.). Have you seen it manifest itself there in any way?

Do you think there’s an element of fame in the (LDS) Church? How have you heard or seen fame discussed in the Church? (E.g. prominent leaders, well-known guest speakers, etc.)

How often would you say that you talk about or refer to someone who is famous? Tell me about some recent conversations. How does knowing that someone is famous influence your decisions in your everyday life?

Do you have any type of stuff in your room or apartment or elsewhere that represent people who you admire? (E.g. T-shirts, posters, notebooks, hats, etc.)

What do you think of reality TV?

Do you ever wish you were famous? Why or why not?

When is it important for you to be recognized and when is it not?

It has been said that most people will do just about anything for their “15 minutes of fame.” What would you do and what wouldn’t you do for fame?

What do you think of fame in general?

Tell me about some of your favorite TV shows or films. Who are some of your favorite characters and why?

Tell me about yourself: Family (number of siblings and birth order); Major in school; Hobbies, interests; Media involvement (TV, radio, Internet, movies, CDs, etc.)
Appendix C

Interview Schedule

Purpose: Stemming from the grouped trials, the one-on-one interviews sought to probe deeper into how each individual participant feels about fame and how it affects their values, goals, beliefs, and behaviors. In addition to the questions below, the interviewer tailored questions for each participant based on how they responded in the focus group situation. Thus, some or all of these questions were asked in no particular order. The interviewer incorporated a loosely designed approach to where the conversation could develop naturally and she could then address the following questions and issues as they evolved and were appropriate based on the responsiveness and openness of the participants.

Tell me about some of your aspirations in life—careers, goals, etc. What if that led to you becoming famous? What would you think about that?

Tell me about some people who you look up to and admire. What do you admire about them? Why are they examples to you? Have you ever met these people? If so, were they what you expected? Did your attitude change about them once you met them in person?

Sometimes people do things just to be “seen” or “to get recognized” in public. Have you ever done anything (crazy or not) so that others would notice you? What are some of the things you do to get noticed just among your friends?

Many people like to “follow” certain celebrities (actors, models, musicians, entertainers, etc.) For instance, (don’t laugh) when I was a teenager, I used to love Barry Manilow. I saw him in concert three times, bought every record, and watched or read every interview with him that I could. Are there any people like that in your life who you like to “follow?”

Sometimes people like to emulate celebrities, especially the way they look. I personally wanted my hair the same color as Jennifer Aniston’s. Have there ever been any instances in your life when you have tried to emulate someone famous?

Along those lines, many people enjoy watching celebrities such as professional athletes, because it helps them improve their own athletic performance. For instance, when I played tennis competitively, I used to imagine myself stroking the ball like Tracy Austin or Chris Evert, and often that would help me to improve my game. Are there any activities that you do in your life (sports or otherwise) where you imagine yourself performing like other people?

Name some famous people who you admire. Why do you admire them? Are there any famous individuals or characters on TV or in the limelight whom you wish you could meet?

How have you heard or seen fame discussed in the (LDS) Church? (E.g. prominent leaders, well-known guest speakers, etc.)

How often would you say that you talk about or refer to someone who is famous? Tell me about some recent conversations. How does knowing someone is famous influence your decisions in your own everyday life?

Do you have any type of stuff in your room or apartment or elsewhere that represent people who you admire? (E.g. T-shirts, posters, notebooks, hats, etc.)

What do you think of reality TV?

Do you ever wish you were famous? Why or why not?

When is it important for you to be recognized and when is it not?

It has been said that most people will do just about anything for their “15 minutes of fame.” What would you do and what wouldn’t you do for fame?

Any other thoughts about fame in general?
Notes

1. Considered a General Authority, a member of the First or Second Quorum of the Seventy is a general Church ecclesiastical leader who operates under the direction of the Twelve Apostles and to whom members worldwide look for spiritual leadership.

2. Callings refer to church service assignments.

3. A General Authority is a title given to the prophet, members of the First Presidency, the Twelve Apostles, members of the Quorums of the Seventy, the Presiding Bishopric, and area presidencies. These individuals are Church wide or regional leaders to whom the body of the membership looks for spiritual leadership.

4. A stake president is a local ecclesiastical leader who oversees a “stake” or a group of approximately 10 “wards” or congregations (see “bishop”). As with the bishop, local members often look to stake presidents for spiritual guidance and leadership.

5. Symbolic of the Twelve Apostles, a high council member (or “high counselor”) is part of a local stake ecclesiastical council that operates under the direction of the stake president. These members are responsible for providing spiritual guidance and doctrinal direction to the members of their stake. They also sit in council to the stake president regarding various matters of the stake.

6. A bishop is a local ecclesiastical leader who occupies an ordained office of the priesthood as President of the Aaronic Priesthood in his ward as well as the presiding member over the ward’s High Priests. He is also considered to be a “common judge in Israel.” He oversees a “ward” or congregation of approximately 400 Church members. These members often look to their bishops for individual guidance, spiritual direction, and personal counsel.

7. An auxiliary organization is a supplementary organization in the Church which provides service and educational opportunities for individual members. Examples of these organizations include the “Primary,” which seeks to serve children aged 3-11; “Young Men/Young Women,” which seeks to serve LDS teenagers aged 12-18; “Relief Society,” which seeks to serve the adult women of the Church 18 years old and older; and the “Sunday School,” which seeks to instruct doctrine to the members of the Church.

8. A Relief Society president oversees the women’s auxiliary organization at the ward, stake, or general Church level. Under the direction of the priesthood, the Relief Society offers the women of the Church an opportunity to provide charitable, volunteer, humanitarian service to men, women, and children. Local Relief Society presidents also preside over weekly Sunday meetings when members meet to receive instruction and to share spiritual experiences and insights. As with other Church leadership callings, Relief Society presidents are often sought out for spiritual guidance.

9. The elders’ quorum is the local men’s organization of elders who are 18 years old and older. This organization offers quorum members opportunities to provide charitable, volunteer service to members of the ward and to others in need. Members of the quorum also meet together each Sunday to receive instruction, spiritual guidance, and to share gospel insights.

10. Moroni was an ancient prophet and well-known leader in The Book of Mormon, canonized scripture of the LDS Church.
References


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