

Utah State University

DigitalCommons@USU

All Graduate Theses and Dissertations

Graduate Studies

5-2012

"It's Wraylynn – With A *W*": Distinctive Mormon Naming Practices

Jennifer R. Mansfield
Utah State University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/etd>

 Part of the [English Language and Literature Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Mansfield, Jennifer R., "'It's Wraylynn – With A *W*': Distinctive Mormon Naming Practices" (2012). *All Graduate Theses and Dissertations*. 1406.

<https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/etd/1406>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate Studies at DigitalCommons@USU. It has been accepted for inclusion in All Graduate Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@USU. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@usu.edu.



“IT’S WRAYLYNN – WITH A W”:
DISTINCTIVE MORMON NAMING PRACTICES

by

Jennifer R. Mansfield

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree

of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

in

American Studies
(Folklore)

Approved:

Dr. Steve Siporin
Major Professor

Dr. Lynne McNeill
Committee Member

Elaine Thatcher
Committee Member

Dr. Mark R. McLellan
Vice President for Research and
Dean of Graduate Studies

UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY
Logan, Utah

2012

Copyright © Jennifer R. Mansfield 2012

All Rights Reserved

ABSTRACT

“It’s Wraylynn – With A W”:

Distinctive Mormon Naming Practices

by

Jennifer R. Mansfield, Master of Science

Utah State University, 2012

Major Professor: Steve Siporin
Department: English

This thesis identifies six distinctive Mormon naming types and investigates the relationship between distinctive Mormon naming and other aspects of Mormon culture. It also examines Mormon group identity through the lens of distinctive naming. This thesis draws conclusions based on the author’s personal interviews with Mormon parents who used distinctive names for their offspring, the Social Security Administration’s website, and existing literature on naming and folklore.

Utah houses a distinct Mormon subculture in which distinctive Mormon naming types are often found. Informants were reluctant to identify as Mormon namers, though they often pointed to certain factors particular to Mormons that influenced their name choices such as the emphasis the LDS Church places on genealogy, family, missionary work, serving a mission, and intense religious devotion.

This thesis argues that distinctive Mormon naming types have emerged out of a need to distinguish oneself when belonging to and being surrounded by a culturally

homogenous group. Contrary to existing literature, Mormon personal names do not contribute to a shared group identity among Mormons. Because the LDS Church restricts many usual venues for expression, names are one of very few areas open to creativity. Therefore, names have become a popular avenue for personal self-expression. Members of the group take advantage of the lack of restrictions on naming without recognizing that other members do the same thing, thus contradicting the original purpose of expressing individuality through this avenue. By interviewing Mormons who practice distinctive Mormon naming patterns, we gain insights into how these naming patterns function for the group.

(120 pages)

PUBLIC ABSTRACT

“It’s Wraylynn – With A *W*”: Distinctive Mormon Naming Practices

Jennifer R. Mansfield

The primary objective of this study was to investigate ways in which names among members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints are distinctive and the reasons behind those distinctive names. While many before me have noted that Mormons often possess distinctive names, there are few studies that attempt to determine the reasons why. Existing research has neglected to include perspectives from members of the LDS Church who practice distinctive naming. Through interviews with LDS Church members, I analyzed what they hoped to accomplish through naming and the larger cultural themes visible in distinctive LDS names. I also researched jokes and legends about distinctive LDS names in order to discover more about Mormon name stereotypes.

As the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints grows throughout the world, it is beneficial for society to understand that there are many subcultures within it, including a Utah Mormon subculture. It is also beneficial for society to recognize the various cultural values demonstrated by members of the LDS Church through naming.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I will always be grateful to Lynne McNeill for introducing me to the field of folklore. I would not have reached this point without her, Steve Siporin, and Jeannie Thomas who put achieving a master's degree in my grasp. Steve Siporin's expertise, feedback, and endless patience made this thesis what it is. I am also indebted to Elaine Thatcher for the fieldwork skills she taught me that enabled me to successfully conduct the primary research necessary for this thesis. To the strangers and friends alike who let me into their homes to interview them about the names chosen for their children, thank you.

The flexibility and sacrifice on the part of my friend and employer, Nazih Al-Rashid, was an invaluable contribution. Carol Sainsbury frequently assumed additional work responsibilities in order to free up time for me that I needed to devote to research and writing. Thank you both.

I am grateful to my family for their continual support and for setting many examples of the importance of education. Neither this thesis nor a master's degree would have been possible without my husband, Christian.

Jennifer R. Mansfield

CONTENTS

| | Page |
|---|------|
| ABSTRACT..... | iii |
| PUBLIC ABSTRACT | v |
| ACKNOWLEDGMENTS | vi |
| CHAPTER | |
| I. INTRODUCTION/LITERATURE REVIEW | 1 |
| II. TYPES OF MORMON NAMING..... | 8 |
| Combination/Invented Names | 9 |
| Creatively Spelled Names..... | 11 |
| Book of Mormon Names | 13 |
| Other Religious Names | 14 |
| Inspired Names | 15 |
| Theme Names | 17 |
| A Surprising Parallel Tradition..... | 18 |
| III. NAMING IN THE LDS CHURCH..... | 21 |
| The Ordinance of Naming and Naming in Ordinances | 21 |
| Naming in Mormon Scripture and Literature | 24 |
| IV. REFLECTIONS OF MORMON CULTURE..... | 32 |
| Religious Naming | 38 |
| The Influence of Genealogy..... | 42 |
| Individuality | 48 |
| Serving LDS Missions | 55 |
| Gender Expectations | 56 |
| Jokes and Legends | 58 |
| V. CONCLUSION | 64 |
| In What Ways Are Mormon Personal Names Distinctive? Can Naming Systems Be Identified?..... | 64 |
| Are Those Distinct Names A Regional Characteristic?..... | 65 |
| What Do Personal Names Reflect About Mormon Culture?..... | 65 |

What Do Distinctive Mormon Names Reflect About Mormon
Group Identity?68
A Valuable Contribution.....68

WORKS CITED70

APPENDICES74

Appendix A Sample Questions Asked During Interviews75
Appendix B Data Collection Forms.....77
Appendix C Sample Interview Transcription79
Appendix D Sample Fieldnotes110

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION/LITERATURE REVIEW

“And he [Hearthrom] begat Heth...And Heth begat Aaron...and he begat Amnigaddah...and he begat Coriantum...and he begat Com” (Ether 10:31). Since the beginning of the begetting, names have conveyed any number of things, including family relationships, ethnicity, gender, profession, and religion. Everyone has a name and all cultures follow their own naming conventions. People have observed over the years that there is something different about Mormon names. There is obviously something that has caught people’s attention, which is demonstrated by blog posts, newspaper articles, and even a website devoted to Mormon names.

My thesis addresses the distinctiveness of Mormon naming practices. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints¹ is the subject of intense scrutiny on many levels, but personal names have yet to be illuminated by folkloristic methods to any meaningful extent. The ultimate objective of this thesis is to provide a fuller understanding of how naming practices by members of the LDS Church are a reflection of characteristics specific to Mormon culture.

A number of questions guided my research, and I attempt to answer them from a folkloristic perspective: In what ways are Mormon personal names distinctive? Are those distinct names regionally characteristic? Can naming systems be identified? What do personal names reflect about Mormon culture? What do they reflect about Mormon group

¹ Hereafter referred to as the LDS Church or the Mormon Church.

identity? In this thesis, I explore the relationship between distinctive naming practices and other aspects of Mormon culture, including group identity.

My thesis on personal names is limited to names among current members of the Mormon Church and those who were, at the time of their naming, members of the Mormon Church. Membership in the Mormon Church has been determined through self-identification. As part of my analysis, I demonstrate using data available through the Social Security Administration that the personal names found among my interviewees are not found among the general population of the United States.

Data for my thesis is derived from several sources, including both primary and secondary sources. Primary data was collected through my own fieldwork, including interviews with Mormons whose children have distinctive² names. I conducted sixteen formal interviews in the course of my research. While I did not ask exactly the same questions during each interview, the general list of questions I composed and then drew from is attached as Appendix A.

Secondary resources will be addressed below in the literature review. I frequently used the Social Security name database, which contains the top one thousand names given in any particular year, searchable by decade, state, nation, or for twins. The Baby Name Wizard, which is a database with a graph that allows one to search the popularity of any given name since the 1880s, was also consulted.

My thesis is organized into five chapters. The first is the introduction and literature review. The second chapter details the types of Mormon naming techniques I identified, including numerous examples of each type. The third chapter addresses

² Distinctive as defined in Chapter II.

naming perspectives in the Mormon Church and includes two sections: (1.) The Ordinance of Naming and Names in Ordinances and (2.) Naming in Mormon Scripture and Literature. The fourth chapter contains the bulk of my findings and attempts to answer the question, “What is it distinctive personal naming practices reflect about Mormon culture?” A section on names as jokes is included in this chapter. The fifth chapter concludes my thesis.

Rosenthal (2005) provides a general overview of onomastics, which is the study of names, in response to what he sees as historians’ reluctance to accept onomastics as a field of study. He addresses the various subjects within onomastics, listing baptismal names, animal names, house names, place names, surnames, nicknames, and surnames as examples. He explains that names can be studied as labels and also as something more significant: “...In some instances, the choice or use of a name unpeels a hidden or subterranean layer of the social and cultural onion” (59).

Many disciplines participate in onomastics because names can be studied from so many angles. Linguists represent the majority of those who study names, though geologists, geographers, sociologists, psychologists, philosophers, historians, and folklorists, too, conduct name research. Each field approaches name study differently, although scholars agree that names are hugely important. Khatib (1995) analyzes name changes among African-Americans and writes: “What is clear...is that names are central to a person’s identity and a person’s identity seems critical to other aspects of behavior” (351). I intend to demonstrate that a person’s identity directly influences, consciously and subconsciously, the naming choices that person makes with regards to his or her children.

Previous research on personal names and naming patterns has provided valuable

insights on naming ceremonies, names as a reflection of kinship relations, and African-American naming patterns. Very little has been written on Mormon personal names and what has been written has yet to be published. Many articles analyze African and African-American names (Bateman 2002; Laversuch 2006; Lieberman and Mikelson 1995; Pharr 1993; Senif 2006; Siran 1989), but for most other groups, analysis is severely lacking. Most research on names concerns itself with linguistic and historical implications rather than sociological or cultural perspectives. Folkloric aspects of naming, such as the cultural significance of naming patterns within a group, are almost completely ignored as well.

Two common threads appear in the literature: names as reflective of social values and names as jokes. My thesis focuses on the first thread within the frame of Mormon personal names to explore why Mormons practice distinctive personal naming patterns and what social, cultural, and/or religious values drive this practice. The second thread is addressed, but not to the same extent as the first due to the fact that I did not collect as many jokes about Mormon names as I did personal stories about why a certain name was chosen.

The theoretical assumption guiding my work is the idea best expressed by Abd-el-Jawad (1986), who writes about Jordanian naming practices: “If taken from the namer’s point of view, personal names may have a significant meaning implied in them by the namer, and they reflect the cultural, psychological, and social atmosphere of the namer” (80). In other words, names and naming patterns are not random among Jordanians. I intend to demonstrate that Mormon personal names are not random either but that they reflect unique qualities of Mormon culture.

Lieberson and Bell (1992) discovered that the more educated the mother, the more likely it was that a female child would be given a more standard name, a name with historical roots, and/or a less “frilly” name. Less educated women were much more likely to invent a name or choose a distinctly feminine name, regardless of race. Evans (forthcoming), a professor at Brigham Young University, modifies the impact of education on naming choices for Mormons when he suggests that unusual names among Mormons are spread more evenly across all education and income levels. He also suggests that this possibly explains why Mormons have earned a reputation for unusual names.

Norton (forthcoming) briefly addresses the education factor in naming, too. He looks at combination names, which are names created out of two existing names like LaDell and DeLoy, in Brigham Young University’s faculty and staff directory and notes that most of the combination names were found among staff, not faculty. The lack of combination names among faculty, but not staff, might indicate that education does play a role in naming because staff positions do not require the same education qualifications as faculty positions. While it is not the bearer’s education that matters, numerous studies have shown that parents’ education has an impact on the education their children receive, with higher educated parents generally producing children who follow suit.

Pyles (1947) provides a useful, though dated, example of how to examine names. He studied names in Oklahoma, categorizing them in a variety of ways and remarking on the many unique aspects he found. He is guilty of one extreme oversight, however, since he fails to analyze in any depth *why* Oklahoma names are so distinctive. Pyles presents something that was uncommon in the name literature I reviewed: names as jokes. But

Oklahoma is not alone in possessing names that act as jokes. In Utah, I have personally encountered numerous examples of names meant to act as jokes and jokes told about names, though the scholarly research on these jokes is lacking. For example, I was once told of a child whose Mormon parents wanted a French-sounding name and, rather than consult French naming sources, created the name Shithead, pronounced Shi-thay-ed. The existence of names that act as jokes and jokes told about names in Oklahoma and Utah suggests that name and naming jokes happen elsewhere in other specific groups, although scholarly sources are scant.

Abd-el-Jawad (1986) provides more useful information. He examines personal names as a study of the likes, dislikes, expectations, and values of the parents and community in which a child is born. Despite his case study being so geographically distant (Jordan), his findings demonstrate the ways in which society influences personal name choice. For instance, Abd-el-Jawad discovered cases similar to cases I found in which reference is made in the child's name to being finished having children. In Jordan, a baby girl might be named Xitam (finish), Nihaya (that is the end), Kafa (that is enough), or Kifaya (that is enough) (88). An example of the Mormon equivalent of this Jordanian practice can be seen in the name Aldon, which is pronounced "all done" and signifies that the family is "all done" having children. Unlike this case however, the practice occurs in Jordan when a family wants to be done having female children, not just children. In the previous example about Aldon, the practice works more as a joke because there is often a child who follows the "last" child and is then named with some reference to the new child as a surprise. A camp counselor from my teenage years had a brother named Aldon and a sister, just younger than Aldon, named Sue. Her middle name was

Prize.

The forthcoming book *Names in Mormon Practice and Belief* is the first and currently only collection that focuses on Mormon naming, and the variety of articles it contains demonstrate the diversity of onomastics. Several authors included in the volume note that the majority of Mormons follow the same personal naming patterns as others in their region, that Mormons play a certain name game upon meeting someone for the first time, and that some Mormon naming patterns are similar to African-American naming patterns. Only one article is written by a folklorist, but several articles in the forthcoming book address personal naming to a limited extent.

Many articles in onomastics rely on public records to analyze naming patterns and more often than not, historical names were studied. Rossi (1965), however, took a different approach with her study of names by conducting personal interviews in addition to using surveys and public records. She did not interview members of a specific cultural group and instead interviewed a random sample of individuals. Interviews enriched her research on contemporary naming and I followed her example.

The existing literature demonstrates that names matter to Mormons and all cultures and that naming is often an indicator of cultural values. A few hypotheses have been put forth about what Mormon names reflect about the culture, but no one has directly interviewed Mormons in an effort to discover why they choose the names that they do. While it has been demonstrated that some Mormons follow naming patterns unique to Mormons, it has yet to be shown why, and the theories submitted are etic perspectives only. What do Mormons themselves say about their name choices and what they mean?

CHAPTER II

TYPES OF MORMON NAMING

Mormons as a worldwide group do not name their children drastically different names than anyone else. Membership in the LDS Church consists of people from many different cultures and ethnicities. Names that appear exclusively among Mormons are not necessarily popular for all Mormons, either, and appear to be concentrated in Utah, the significance of which will be addressed in Chapter IV.

There is not any data available that isolates Mormon personal names. Evans (forthcoming) comes closest with his comparison of names in Utah and Colorado in hopes of identifying whether or not Mormons have more unusual names than their neighbors. He works under the assumption that because Utah is such a predominately Mormon state, naming trends could be credited to Mormons. He chose Colorado because it is the state bordering Utah with the lowest population of Mormons. After analyzing public health records in Utah and Colorado for three different years, Evans concluded that Mormon personal names are barely distinctive. The top ten names for each state are comparable, as well as the number of names in each state with a single occurrence.

The top ten names in 2011 for Utah compared with the top ten names for the United States does not show dramatically different names for Utah than for anywhere else. One possible exception is the popularity of Ryker in Utah (#19) compared to the United States (#267). Every other name that appears in Utah's top ten also appears in the nation's top 25, which hardly speaks to a striking distinction for Mormon names.

Despite a lack of statistical evidence that Mormons use drastically different names

than their neighbors, Mormons with unusual names and stories about Mormons with unusual names are frequently circulated and observed. In an effort to identify the characteristics of these unusual Mormon names, I developed the following categories compiled from my observations, readings, and fieldwork:

Combination/Invented Names

Combination names refer to names created from two existing names. For example, JaceLee, whose parents are Jason and Railee or Ermae from parents Earl and Mae (Norton, forthcoming, 96). Combination names are not always so obviously taken from parent names, but are generally a previously unheard combination of prefixes and suffixes that come together to create a name. I include invented names in this category because invented names are usually nothing more than a new combination of parts of existing names, e.g. Xaiden from Aidan and Xander, Quinlee from Quinn and Ashley, Tayden from Taylor and Kaden, Brandaige from Brandon and Paige, or Kimalie from Kim and Melanie.

In 1936, H. L. Mencken remarked on Mormon names in *The American Language*. He even provided examples of combination names using the prefix for which Mormons are perhaps most famous: LaRue and LaVar. The particular significance of La- names will be discussed in the final section of this chapter.

Norton (forthcoming) focuses solely on what he calls composite names and analyzes the trend using data from ward directories, telephone books, census records, and Brigham Young University's staff and faculty directory. He provides very detailed listings of male and female prefixes and a list of male suffixes that are commonly used by

Mormons to create names. He deliberately chooses not to include a list of female suffixes, stating instead, “the imagination should suffice,” which I interpret to mean that the list of female suffixes is so vast and varied that it contains every suffix imaginable.

This category, together with creatively spelled names, encompasses the sound patterns generally preferred by Mormon parents, which Evans and Eliason discuss. Eliason (forthcoming) writes about the current predilection toward using suffixes to create a new name as something he sees among Mormons as the modern equivalent of using prefixes to create combination names. The most common suffixes he notes are -son, -ton, and -den for boys, which can be seen in the unmatched popularity of Kason, Daxton, and Caden in Utah. Eliason lists -lyn for girls with names like Ashlyn and KypLyn. I would add another suffix to the list for girls. It appears that many names are invented by adding an “l” followed by a long “e” sound to a common sound or existing name. For example, Taely, Aimsley, Kynlee, and McKayli. Eliason points out that many variations in spelling, affixation, and pronunciation are performed upon these suffixes, which is an important observation because creative spelling is a hallmark of Mormon naming and will be addressed in the next section.

Evans (forthcoming), who looked at names in Utah and compared them to names in Colorado, has also observed a preference for certain sounds among Utah parents. Like Eliason, Evans notes a preference for the -den sound for boys, as seen in the popularity of Caden, Jaden, and Braden in Utah, but not in Colorado. For girls, he notes the Mc- sound found in McKell, McCall, McKenna, and Mackenzie. I agree that the Mc- sound appears popular with Mormon parents; however, I disagree that its popularity is limited to females. For example, I interviewed the parents of McKlayne and the parents of Maclain,

both males.

Evans suggests that these types of sound preferences shown by LDS parents in Utah might demonstrate a conscious decision to choose a name that emphasizes their Mormon culture. The sounds themselves do not emphasize Mormon culture, though intentionally giving a child a recognizably Mormon name may contribute to feelings of belonging to a group and group identity. Norton (forthcoming) theorizes something similar about combination names and claims that Mormons use composite names as a way to distinguish their children without going completely against existing trends. As Mormons, these children belong to a subculture that sees itself as distinct from other surrounding cultures and Norton suggests that Mormon parents deliberately choose this type of naming to reflect that.

The problem with both theories is that they assume parents are identifying these sound patterns and combination names with Mormonism and deliberately choosing a name accordingly. My findings demonstrate that Mormon parents do not make a conscious decision to fit into a type of Mormon naming, particularly in cases of sound and spelling preferences. Instead, the parents I interviewed expressed the idea their particular combination of these sounds is fresh and unique to their baby and free from fitting into any types or being bound to any existing expectations.

Creatively Spelled Names

Creatively spelled names encompass a very large category of Mormon naming types and tend to overlap every other category of Mormon names. Creatively spelled

names include popular¹ names that are spelled noticeably different than they are traditionally spelled. For example, I spoke with Jaidyn's mom and Klara's mom, who both took a fairly popular name and spelled it creatively. Other examples include Brittn, Jonathyn, and Wrileigh. In the course of my fieldwork, I learned of a baby girl recently named Zyon, referencing Zion,² which demonstrates the overlap between creatively spelled names and other religious names. Another example of overlap would be Emmaleigha, which is a combination of Emma and Leah.

Creative spelling is significant because it exemplifies the overriding theme I found among my informants: uniqueness. The overlap between categories demonstrates that it is often not enough to have a distinct name; it also needs to be spelled distinctively. There was an attitude of possessiveness about names and fear about someone else using the name picked out for a child. When asked about sharing the intended name for a child before the child's birth, Paul Marshall commented: "And we heard a lot of times, you know, as soon as people started telling you—you hear other people naming their kids that so we just figured it was safer just to wait until we'd had the baby" (Marshall and Marshall 2012, 00:21:05). Perhaps creative spelling is used to provide an additional safeguard to the uniqueness of a child's name. For example, Erriana is still unique even if Ariana gains in popularity.

¹ Popularity is determined by whether or not the name appears in the top 1000 names for the United States for the year in which the child the child is born, according to the Social Security Administration. Names found in the top 1000 names reflect 70%-80% of all names given to children in any given year.

² A word used by Mormons to refer to various geological places, the Lord's people, and the Church.

Book of Mormon Names

This category of Mormon personal names is taken directly from the scriptures on which Mormon beliefs are based: the Book of Mormon. Book of Mormon names are a type that is exclusive to Mormons because while other cultures, most notably African-American culture, employ some similar naming patterns, no other group gives their children names from the Book of Mormon. The only exception to this is, perhaps, breakaway fundamentalist groups from the LDS Church. It is interesting that, as noted by Eliason, Mormon parents do not name their children after the man who compiled the books in the Book of Mormon and lent these scriptures his name (forthcoming). Instead, names like Alma, Ammon, Moroni, and Nephi are used relatively frequently. Names like Shule appear very rarely; I have met only one in my life.

The popularity of certain names in the Book of Mormon and the unpopularity of others might easily be explained by familiarity borne out of frequency. The first time I met Shule and his brother Zenock, I did not even recognize their names as Book of Mormon names immediately. I was raised in the LDS Church, am currently a member, and have read the Book of Mormon, yet it took me more than a few minutes to pinpoint where I had heard the names before. I certainly had not heard the names because anyone else I knew was named Shule or Zenock. In the Book of Mormon, there is only one Shule and one Zenock, and they do not appear often. There are four Nephis, however, and two Moronis, Almas, and Ammons. These men are also spoken of in church lesson manuals, talks, and articles with far more frequency than Shule or Zenock.

The only two women who appear by name in the Book of Mormon are discussed

in church magazine articles, lesson manuals, and talks; however, that exposure does not seem to have impacted LDS parents' naming preferences. Girls are rarely, if ever, named after the two Book of Mormon female characters: Sariah and Abish. The limited selection of female names in the Book of Mormon might be to blame for this male/female imbalance or perhaps there is a different reason. Evans found that significant Mormon women, in and out of the Book of Mormon, do not appear to have any influence on naming like significant Mormon men do. A lack of influence is interesting because in my fieldwork experience, the wife most often leads naming, though it is usually a cooperative endeavor between husband and wife.

My guess would be that parents, especially mothers, in the church would want to name their daughters after righteous women the same way they want to name their sons after righteous men, but that does not appear to be the case. Mormons seem to prefer more "girly" names for their girls, evidenced in the sound pattern preference observed by both Evans and Eliason for ending names with -lyn, my own observation of the popularity of "l" followed by a long "e," and the cutesy factor of short names. For example, Paizlee and Kambrie. The female names in the Book of Mormon simple do not fit this preference. Other possible explanations for the lack of female children named after Book of Mormon characters will be addressed in the following chapter, along with the lack of influence significant females in the church have on naming trends among Mormons.

Other Religious Names

Other religious names include names taken from religiously significant people

and places not found in the Book of Mormon, such as modern-day prophet names and other General Authorities.³ An example would be the family friend my father-in-law told me about named Kirtland, after the temple in Ohio, who grew up to name all of his children after temples. His youngest child, a girl, was named Nauvoo. Shule and Zenock, who are mentioned above, have a brother named Jashon after a city in the Book of Mormon.

Eliason and Evans both suggest that LDS parents see naming a child after a prophet as placing too much pressure on their sons (forthcoming). They contend that LDS parents do not want to give their sons an ideal that would be impossible to live up to by giving them the name of a prophet. This is inconsistent with my findings and with the popularity of the certain names among Mormons, such as Brigham after Brigham Young, an early prophet in the Mormon Church. The parents I interviewed whose children possessed religious names, including names of prophets and General Authorities, *want* pressure on their children to live up to their namesakes.

Inspired Names

It was only in the course of conducting interviews that I recognized inspired names as a type of Mormon personal name. Like creatively spelled names, inspired names also overlap with the other types of Mormon names. Many people that I spoke with shared stories about how their children's names were revealed to them, most often

³ Men called to serve in the LDS Church at the highest levels of leadership are known as General Authorities. They are general priesthood officers of the Church and include the First Presidency, Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, quorums of the Seventy, and Presiding Bishopric. (http://eom.byu.edu/index.php/General_Authorities)

through the Holy Ghost.⁴ I heard one instance of a friend who was approached in the temple by a temple worker⁵ and told she was carrying a girl and she was to name her Ruth. In this example, the temple worker, presumably acting on promptings from the Holy Ghost, revealed the child's name.

Another example I discovered was on a popular blog written by Courtney Kendrick, a member of the LDS Church. She was pregnant with her second child on February 19, 2010 when she wrote a post about naming and the revelation she received while vacuuming one day: "I heard something of a voice in my ears saying, 'Name the baby_____'" (cjanekendrick.com). Kendrick ended up giving birth to a daughter and naming her Ever, despite initial reservations about giving her child a name that is a word, a spiritual word according to Kendrick, that she had never heard used as a name prior to this experience. She explains it this way:

"And yet, I sorta feel (ok I *really* feel) like this is supposed to be this child's name. I've tried to talk myself out of it, to toss it, or trade it for a more socially acceptable choice. BUT I CAN'T. And I am sheepishly suggesting that it was whispered in my ear by an angel. The Naming Angel. The same one who told Isaiah to name his son Mahershalalhashbaz (which cheerfully means 'Destruction is Imminent') or Joseph Smith's naming of his neighbor's son the always fashionable, Mahonri Moriancumer. Like that (but with a two-syllable name instead)."

That Kendrick justifies an inspired unusual name to herself by remembering examples from scripture is noteworthy and will be discussed in Chapter III. This example also

⁴ The Holy Ghost is the third member of the Godhead, which is comprised of three separate persons. God and his son, Jesus Christ, are the other two members of the Godhead.

⁵ Temple ordinance worker is someone who works in LDS temples officiating ordinances and directing temple ceremonies.

illustrates overlap between inspired names and other religious names.

A few articles in the forthcoming book, *Names in Mormon Practice and Belief*, also give examples of inspired naming stories. Norton tells of a colleague who told him a story in which the unborn child visited its mother to let her know that it [the baby] was to be named Strelsa. This story demonstrates the overlap between inspired names and combination/invented names because Strelsa occurs so rarely and has no identifiable origin that I consider it an invented name.

Theme Names

Names that follow a theme are not exclusive to Mormons. The Duggars of The Learning Channel's "19 Kids and Counting" come to mind with all of their nineteen children's names beginning with a J, but the practice of theme naming exists among Mormons as well. Theme names are personal names within a family that all follow the same theme. Alphabet themes, especially, are popular for many people and groups but are less striking when seen among a family of three than a family of six. Therefore, traditionally large LDS families might be the perfect place for theme-naming to shine.

My accountant provided me with an example when he told me that he works with a family who give all their girls names that begin with a *t*: Tylee, Tenzi, Tayla, and Tawni, and all of their boys names that begin with a *j*: Jett, Jade, and Jaron. The explanation my accountant provided about the choice of *js* and *ts* was that the mother's name began with a *t* and the father's name began with a *j*. My grandma lived next to an LDS family in Spanish Fork, Utah, with kids named after cities: Sydney (Australia), Tallinn (Estonia), Boston (Massachusetts), and Vienna (Austria). I interviewed Kristen

and Brandon Smith, whose children all possess names that end with the letter *n* and contain a *y* somewhere in the name: Madisyn, Dylan, Ashlyn, Griffyn, and Jaidyn. Kristen explained that she always wished her name had a *y* in it because the traditional spelling of her name was so “boring.” When the time came to name her children, she used *ys*. Kristen admitted that the *n* ending was unintentional for the first two children, but she did not feel comfortable breaking that inadvertent tradition with the remaining children.

Overlap exists between theme names and other naming types. Kristen and Brandon’s children Madisyn, Griffyn, and Jaidyn were given both theme names and creatively spelled names. The example above about Kirtland, named after the Kirtland temple, who named all of his children after temples, demonstrates overlap between theme naming and religious naming. An informant told me about his friend who has named all of his children after modern-day apostles: Talmage, after Elder James E. Talmage; Conklin, a variation from Elder Bruce R. McConkie; and the newest, baby Monson, after current LDS Church President Thomas S. Monson. My coworker told me about a family she recently met with two boys, Joseph and Hyrum, and a little girl, Emma. Emma introduced herself and her little brothers before saying to my coworker, “Do you get it? We’re the Smith family!” Emma’s last name was not Smith; she was referring to Joseph Smith, his wife Emma, and his brother Hyrum.

A Surprising Parallel Tradition

In addition to scholarly articles acknowledging the similarities between African-American and Mormon names (Norton, forthcoming, and Evans, forthcoming),

newspaper articles have also observed it. In 2003, an article in the *Washington Times* quoted Pamela Redmond Satran, who wrote numerous baby name books, as saying: “In America, two cultures in particular – the black and the Mormon communities – are well-known for inventing names.” Christy Karras wrote an article for the *Salt Lake Tribune* in 2002 in which she quoted William Egginton, a linguistics professor at Brigham Young University, comparing African-American and Mormon naming practices.

Evans (forthcoming) wrote that Utah Mormons name children after basketball players, which is also something he says is popular with African-Americans. However, the popularity of the name Stockton in Utah is the only example Evans provides so perhaps it is not a preference for basketball players among Mormons in Utah so much as it is a preference for a certain basketball player, John Stockton.

Norton (forthcoming) also acknowledges similarities between African-American naming patterns and Mormon naming patterns and suggests that it was with the “pseudo-French” trend that these similarities emerged. For example, names starting with La- are found in both groups with names like Latoya and Lakreshia appearing in African-American groups and names like LaRecia and LaDawna appearing in Mormon groups. Norton points out that combination/invented names are also found in the Deep South, which is unsurprising given the high concentration of African-Americans living in the Deep South.

While several authors in *Names in Mormon Practice and Belief* recognize the similarity, no one has much to offer by way of an analysis. Eliason admits that it is puzzling why two such culturally distinct groups share naming characteristics. My original hypothesis was that naming similarities emerged because both Mormons and

African-Americans are minority cultures, and they want to give their children recognizably Mormon or African-American names. After interviewing Mormons, though, I found out that that does not hold true for Mormons. More research has been done on African-American naming than on Mormon names and those findings suggest that African-Americans intentionally embrace names that indicate their roots. However, there is a need for more research that looks at both groups before any conclusions can be drawn.

CHAPTER III

NAMING IN THE LDS CHURCH

The Ordinance of Naming & Naming in Ordinances

Unlike some of the other books included in the standard works¹ of the LDS Church, the Doctrine and Covenants is not considered a translation of an ancient document. Instead, members of the LDS Church believe that the Doctrine and Covenants is “a collection of divine revelations and inspired declarations given for the establishment and regulation of the kingdom of God on the earth in the last days” (lds.org). It is in this book that the instruction to bless children can be found. Section 20:70 reads: “Every member of the church of Christ having children is to bring them unto the elders before the church, who are to lay their hands upon them in the name of Jesus Christ, and bless them in his name.” Some parents choose to bless their child at home in a more intimate setting and arrange for the proper church authority to be present. A baby blessing is usually done at home when going to the church poses a risk to the baby or family. For example, babies with compromised immune systems, such as premature babies, are often blessed at home. Traditionally, however, a baby is blessed in front the congregation on the first Sunday of the month, two or three months after birth.

Giving a name and a blessing to a baby is an ordinance of the Gospel of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, which means that it is a sacred act performed by the authority

¹ Mormons refer to the canonical books of the LDS Church as the standard works. The standard works include the Old and New Testaments, the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, and the Pearl of Great Price.

of the priesthood. Some ordinances are necessary for exaltation² and those are referred to as saving ordinances. For example, Mormons believe that baptism, confirmation, receiving the priesthood³ (for men), the temple endowment,⁴ and being sealed⁵ to their spouse in the temple are all saving ordinances, but receiving a name and a blessing is not.

Naming ceremonies are not unique to Mormons. Many other religions and cultures practice traditional naming ceremonies. For example, Jewish children are named in one of two ceremonies: *berit milah* for male children or a *berit bat* for female children. Male circumcision takes place during the male child's naming ceremony, which is held eight days after birth. Female children are named during a synagogue ceremony and also given a blessing at that time (Syme and David 1997). Many Christians practice infant baptism, of which naming is a part. Those that do not practice infant baptism, for example, members of the Seaford Baptist Church, have a dedication ceremony in which the child is named and presented to God and the congregation. Each ceremony, of course,

² Exaltation refers to the highest state of happiness and glory in the celestial realm. Mormons believe that heaven has three levels and celestial is the highest level.

³ The priesthood is the eternal power and authority of God. God gives priesthood authority to worthy male members of the Church so they can act in His name for the salvation of His children. Priesthood holders can be authorized to preach the gospel, administer the ordinances of salvation, and govern the kingdom of God on the earth. (lds.org).

⁴ It is a series of covenants Mormons make with their Heavenly Father to live a life of chastity and virtue, to sacrifice selfish desires in his service to their fellowmen to build up His kingdom; and He, in turn, promises protection and blessings in this life and greater blessings and glory in eternity. It is also an individual ordinance that must be performed before members may receive the sealing ordinance of eternal marriage.

⁵ An ordinance performed in the temple eternally uniting a husband and wife, or children and their parents.

has its own details and exceptions that are not included in the brief explanation provided. The similarities between these examples and LDS baby blessings include receiving a blessing and presenting the child to God and other church members. Naming ceremonies among other faiths are not always compulsory and some churches consider the ceremony a preference rather than a commandment.

Susan Easton Black, a professor of church history and doctrine at Brigham Young University, answered a reader-submitted question in the April 1989 edition of the *Liahona*, a church magazine, about the importance of naming and blessing a child. She calls it a “commandment” and explains its importance by comparing it to scriptural occurrences of naming, like when Adam was commanded to name the animals in the Garden of Eden. She also points out that new names are often involved when new covenants are formed, submitting the example of Abram’s name change to Abraham after he entered a covenant with Jehovah. Modern examples include baptism when members take upon themselves the name of Christ and certain temple ordinances that involve giving and receiving new names.

Personal names are also important in the ordinances mentioned above because the performance of almost every ordinance, even the ones that involve taking on other names, begin with a personal name. Oaks (forthcoming) devotes a small section of his article to personal names within the LDS Church because he sees individual names as sacred in some way. He points out that personal names are key in all ordinances in the church, stating: “While ordinances are performed in the name of Jesus Christ, they often begin with the name of the individual for whom the ordinance is being performed” (62-63). I add to this that it is the *entire* name that matters. I have never witnessed or

received a blessing that began with “Sister” or “Brother”⁶ followed by a last name. In my experience, any blessing always began with the first, middle, and last name. The person giving the blessing consistently asked the recipient what his or her full name was if he has any doubts. In some ordinances, such as baptism, if the full name is said incorrectly upon performance, the entire ordinance must be redone, which further illustrates that personal names matter in the LDS Church.

Naming in Mormon Scripture and Literature

The items above indicate that the act of naming is an important part of the LDS religion, but what about the names themselves? The church issues no official statement on the kinds of names it expects its members to use, though naming traditions and stories are found throughout the scriptures and church publications. Church magazines and conference⁷ talks address the importance of a name. There are also scriptural accounts of names in the Book of Mormon and the Bible. The examples below come from the Book of Mormon because those are the scriptures that are exclusive to members of the LDS Church.

⁶ “Brother” and “Sister” are terms used by members of the LDS Church to address one another. Mormons believe that everyone is a child of God, which makes people on Earth brother and sister to one another. Mormons also consider each ward to be a family. (<http://ldsblogs.com/2065/mormon-speak-brother-and-sister>).

⁷ General conference refers to a worldwide gathering of members of the LDS Church. It is held twice yearly in each April and October and consists of five two-hour meetings held over two days, Saturday and Sunday. Conference is held in Salt Lake City in the Conference Center and broadcast to members worldwide through the Church’s website and some television stations. Speakers include the President of the Church and other Church leaders. (<http://www.mormonnewsroom.org/additional-resource/what-is-general-conference>)

In chapter five of Helaman in the Book of Mormon, Nephi and Lehi have made the decision to preach for the remainder of their lives and recall the words their father Helaman spoke to them:

6. Behold, my sons, I desire that ye should remember to keep the commandments of God; and I would that ye should declare unto the people these words. Behold, I have given unto the names of our first parents who came out of the land of Jerusalem; and this I have done that when you remember your names ye may remember them; and when ye remember them ye may remember their words; and when ye remember their works ye may know how that it is said, and also written, that they were good.

7. Therefore, my sons, I would that ye should do that which is good, that it may be said of you, and also written, even as it has been said and written of them.

These verses do not address the act of naming, but rather the importance of the names themselves. Helaman named his sons after righteous people from his family tree and though the LDS Church has never instructed its members to follow suit, Mormons are encouraged to daily read and study the Book of Mormon where this account is found.

The idea of honoring one's name also appears frequently. One informant brought a particular story to my attention because she has encountered variations of it, included an illustrated version, in four separate places. The story, told most recently in the October 2010 session of general conference by Elder Mervyn B. Arnold of the Seventy,⁸ tells of LDS Church President George Albert Smith who was named after his grandfather. His grandfather appeared to him in a dream and asked him what he had done with his name. President Smith responded: "I have never done anything with your name of which you need be ashamed." That is the most succinct version of the narrative and it conveys the

⁸ Quorum of the Seventy. Men called to proclaim the gospel and build the Church, often referred to as "Seventies". They work under the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve. There are currently eight Quorums of the Seventy.

same message the others do about names, which is the idea that the bearer of a name has a responsibility and obligation to whomever he or she is named after. This story is valuable not only for its content, but also because of its frequent circulation among Mormons. Other stories about sons named for their fathers can be found in the Book of Mormon.

Scriptural examples of sons named for their fathers can be found in Mosiah, Alma, and Nephi, to mention a few. In the Book of Mormon, the king of the Lamanites is named Laman after his father. The introductory paragraph to the book of Alma says: “The account of Alma, who was the son of Alma, the first chief and judge over the people of Nephi, and also the high priest over the Church.” And 3 Nephi 1:2 writes about Nephi and his son, also named Nephi after his father.

Also contained in the Book of Mormon are accounts of inspired names given to babies. 2 Nephi 18:3 reads: “And I went unto the prophetess; and she conceived and bare a son. Then said the Lord to me: Call his name, Maher-shalal-hash-baz.” If the Lord’s ancient people received revelation concerning names, then perhaps it is not such a leap for those that see themselves as the Lord’s modern people to have similar stories of naming inspiration in their culture.

An account commonly joked about involves President Joseph Smith giving a child a name and a blessing:

“While residing in Kirtland Elder Reynolds Cahoon had a son born to him. One day when President Joseph Smith was passing his door he called the Prophet in and asked him to bless and name the baby. Joseph did so and gave the boy the name of Mahonri Moriancumer. When he had finished the blessing he laid the child on the bed, and turning to Elder Cahoon he said, the name I have given your son is the name of the brother of Jared; the Lord has just shown (or revealed) it to me” (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints 2000, 188).

Prior to Joseph Smith's revelation, the name of the Brother of Jared was unknown, even though he plays a major role in the Book of Mormon. The story of how Mahonri Moriancumer's name was revealed has made a much greater impression on Mormons than the name itself. The above account of Joseph Smith's revelation is found in a study guide provided to members and it is taught in church lessons so members are aware that the Brother of Jared is Mahonri Moriancumer. Despite this awareness, however, Mahonri Morancumer is still referred to most frequently as the Brother of Jared and not by his name.

The story of Joseph Smith's revelation about the Brother of Jared is very similar to one I collected about an informant's great-grandmother who was blessed by a General Authority. The parents of the baby were asked by a General Authority to allow him to bless the infant. The parents consented and the General Authority blessed the infant without asking the parents what to name her, relying instead on the Holy Ghost to reveal the appropriate name for the child at the time of the blessing.

Eliason (forthcoming) writes that Mormons often expect to receive personal revelation from the Lord about their children's names. Eliason provides a couple of naming legends in which the parents are inspired regarding what to name their child. I hesitate to support Eliason's claim that Mormons *expect* revelation about names because legends rarely circulate about things that are expected and go precisely as planned. For example, if every new parent conversed with an angel, then would we hear about it? Would Courtney Kendrick, referenced in Chapter II, "sheepishly" claim to have heard an angel's voice if all Mormons expected exactly that? I imagine no. Legends circulate and

are generally retold because they reflect something unusual about an otherwise mundane event. Stories might exist if angels visited every parent, but they would no longer be legends and instead be rites of passage. According to my research, stories about baby names being spiritually revealed to parents appear as legends, not as rites of passage. Legends circulate about naming revelation because it is unusual and because it is something atypical happening in what would normally be a common event.

While many parents are not given direct revelation about what to name their children, they still feel the weight of choosing a name because of the prevalence in church literature of articles addressing the subject. A quick search on the church's website, www.lds.org, led me to numerous articles about names in the *Friend* and the *New Era*, which are church magazines. The *New Era* is geared towards the young men and women in the church and contains articles on various religious topics.

One article, found in the *New Era* in May 1994, tells the story of Jared Moroni Trent who is very proud of his first name and his last name, but has always been embarrassed by his middle name. That attitude changes after a lesson about Captain Moroni, a righteous and powerful army general in the Book of Mormon. At the article's end, Trent closes with: "I no longer think of it [middle name] as one letter away from meaning idiot, but as one step away from achieving celestial glory, as the two Moronis of old did. I only hope that I might live up to its greatness." Young Mormons are given articles about taking pride in Book of Mormon names, which might have a lasting influence on them as they grow up and search out a name for their child.

The February 1995 edition of the *Friend* contains a story entitled, "A Good Name" by Ruth Liljenquist. She writes about a little girl named Ashley who learns about

Helaman and why he named his sons Lehi and Nephi. The other kids in Ashley's class are named after people in the scriptures or pioneer ancestors, and Ashley decides that she needs a meaningful name because Ashley is only a pretty name. Her parents console her by telling her that she can make the name Ashley meaningful for the Ashleys who come after her by living a good life. The *Friend* is written for kids under the age of 12, which means that this story is evidence that the importance of a name is pressed upon kids from a very young age.

These are only three examples of LDS Church publications that stress names and naming, but it is evident that names are important in the church. These examples provide a possible explanation behind the Mormon tradition of naming children after notable religious leaders, including scriptural names, and righteous ancestors, including parents and relatives. The tradition of distinguishing oneself through naming is also found frequently in the Book of Mormon, conference talks, and church magazines, though my interpretation of distinguishing through naming clashes with the possible interpretation of my informants.

People in the Book of Mormon find a name for themselves in order to distinguish themselves from their unrighteous Lamanite neighbors. In Alma 23, a group of Lamanites converts to the gospel:

16. And now it came to pass that the king and those who were converted were desirous that they might have a name, that thereby they might be distinguished from their brethren; therefore the king consulted with Aaron and many of their priests, concerning the name that they should take upon them, that they might be distinguished.

17. And it came to pass that they called their names Anti-Nephi-Lehies; and they were called by this name and were no more called Lamanites.

It was important to these former Lamanites that they call themselves something new in

order to be different from the others. Perhaps some members of the LDS Church interpret Book of Mormon passages like this as a demonstration of the importance of being different and the importance of a name acknowledging that difference.

The book of Alma in the Book of Mormon is not the only place to find examples of people distinguishing themselves through naming. Mosiah 25:12 reads: “And it came to pass that those who were the children of Amulon and his brethren, who had taken to wife the daughters of the Lamanites, were displeased with the conduct of their fathers, and they would no longer be called by the names of their fathers, therefore they took upon themselves the name of Nephi, that they might be called the children of Nephi and be numbered among those who were called Nephites.” Again, people in the Book of Mormon no longer want to be associated with the conduct of others who shared the name Lamanite. It was important that this group who was displeased with the conduct of their fathers found a new name to be called by. They found a righteous name in order to distinguish themselves from those that formerly shared their name and no longer shared their values.

Church magazines and conference talks address the idea of being apart from the world and having the courage to stand out. In context, these magazine articles and talks are addressing being different in much the same way as the Lamanites who wanted to be called by a new name: it is not necessary to be different unless being the same means you are forsaking your beliefs. For example, President Gordon B. Hinckley said in his *Ensign* article “Living with Our Convictions” that it is important to have the courage to follow the commandments when those around you scoff at obedience, which would make you different than those around you. The *Friend* contains an article written by Sandra

Skouson, “Glad to Be Different,” about a little boy who is different for many reasons, including going to Primary. This little boy does not always like to be different until he gets baptized and makes an important realization, “Jesus was different, too.” Again, it was important that this little boy is different because being different meant that he was getting baptized when his friends were not; being different was not the point, getting baptized was the point.

The Mormons I interviewed seemed to have taken the idea that different is good to heart. With very few exceptions, I heard that the most important thing when considering a name for their child was uniqueness. More than anything else, finding a name that set their child apart was important. Unlike the examples in LDS magazines and scripture, however, the LDS members I talked to stressed that it was important for their kids to be different from *everyone*, including their fellow Mormons. Also unlike the previous examples from church literature, the Mormons I talked to did not consciously give their children names that were recognizable as Mormon naming types. Religious names are the obvious exception, but even parents who named a son after a Book of Mormon character pointed out that part of the appeal was that there probably would not be any other Jaroms or Teancums running around the playground.

CHAPTER IV
REFLECTIONS OF MORMON CULTURE

The only source that provides more than a passing observation on the distinctiveness of Mormon naming patterns is *Names In Mormon Practice and Belief* that was mentioned in Chapter I. Some of the contributing authors provide theories about why Mormons practice distinctive naming patterns and what distinctive naming reflects about Mormon culture. The authors draw conclusions based on public records, telephone books, employee directories, and other similar data sources. A story from an archive makes the occasional appearance, but none of the authors spoke with Mormons who gave their children distinctive names about their naming practices. Therefore, these theories may be valid, but they are only valid as etic perspectives.

One author in the forthcoming book, Evans, submits his theories about Mormon names. He applies Pyles's (1959) theory about white Southerners to Mormons. In "Bible Belt Onomastics or Some Curiosities of Anti-Pedobaptist Nomenclature," Pyles explains that a decrease in religions that practice infant baptism has led to a decrease in "the good Christian name" in the Bible Belt. Evans compares this to Mormons, who also do not practice infant baptism, thus robbing educated clergymen of the chance to influence naming choices, which in turn increases the occurrence of unusual names that are not "good Christian" names. There are two problems with this theory. One is that the Mormon equivalent of clergymen, bishops and counselors, is not required to have any sort of education and may or may not be more educated than the parents. The second problem is that while Mormons reject infant baptism, infants are formally brought before

the congregation to be given a name and a blessing, which would give bishops and counselors the opportunity to influence naming choices.

The other theory Evans puts forth is that something happened to Mormon naming that was similar to what happened with African-American naming when African-Americans took over a stereotype about unusual African-American names. Up until the 1960s, only a small minority of African-Americans possessed unique names while the majority had the same names as white people. African-Americans began to embrace names that evidenced their roots after becoming increasingly interested in Africa (Zax 2008). In 2008, almost 30% of African-American girls were given a name that no other baby, black nor white, had been given (Levitt and Dubner 2006).

Citing the increase of distinctive names in Utah from 1990 to 1998, Evans suggests that Utah Mormons are latching onto the idea that Utah Mormons have different names and are proudly naming their offspring something that will reflect their religion and culture. He gives the Clarks some credit and claims that their website, The Utah Baby Namer, may have influenced Mormon naming by turning what was once a joke into a reality. My original hypothesis was that Mormons intentionally gave their children names in order to demonstrate their Mormon roots, but every interview I conducted contradicted it.

In order for Evans's theory to apply, my informants would need to be aware of Mormon naming types and intentionally choose names that fit those types; I found the opposite to be true. I asked informants what came to mind when I said Mormon names and while I got a variety of responses, I did not receive a single response that identified a shared characteristic between what they called Mormon names and what their children

were named.

Eliason (forthcoming) suggests that Mormon naming patterns evidence some distinctively Mormon things like plural marriage, the Book of Mormon, western colonization, and an emphasis on families. My findings were partially consistent with Eliason's theory. Mormon personal naming does not reflect all of the things listed above, but it certainly reflects an emphasis on families and the Book of Mormon. When I asked interviewees why Mormons might name their kids differently than other groups, a few suggested that Mormon parents give more consideration to names than the rest of the population because the LDS Church places such an emphasis on families.

Kassey Nell gave the example of a neighbor, non-Mormon, and the name she chose for her child: "...Some of our friends have named their kids after famous people, like Tyrell, wasn't that Kayla's baby's name? His middle name is after a famous boxer or something. So—so maybe the LDS culture uses more meaningful names" (Nell and Nell 2012, 00:16:19). Kassey viewed the names of famous boxers as less meaningful than the names she and her husband chose, which she credited to the LDS culture.

Gee (forthcoming) claims that Mormons have adopted the naming practice found in the Book of Mormon in which children are named after worthy individuals in hopes that the new bearers of the name will live up to previous bearers of the name. My research tends to validate Gee's theory because many of my informants said something along the same lines. For example, LaNae Ricks named her son Kimbal, after President Spencer W. Kimball, and said: "When he [Kimbal] was younger he'd say, I want to be a prophet when I get older. You know, so it creates dignif—it creates um, uh, something he needs to live up to, I guess" (2012, 00:26:10).

Norton (forthcoming) compares composite naming to a dialect and writes that when communities feel threatened, they make efforts to protect and preserve tradition. Therefore, as long as LDS communities perceive a threat to their identities, they will discover a way to differentiate themselves. Norton's theory assumes Mormons feel that their identities are threatened, which is very interesting considering Utah and surrounding states, where Mormons are the majority, are the ones where the composite name phenomenon occurs most noticeably. I would not expect to find Mormons in heavily Mormon areas feeling that their community is threatened because they are the majority; in fact, Mormons often wield community and government influence because they are the majority. Norton's theory might be more applicable concerning names from one hundred years ago when Mormons themselves *were* very threatened. However, one hundred years ago the church was in its infant stages creating, rather than preserving, tradition.

Norton also provides a more functional approach to looking at the distinctiveness of Mormon names. He proposes that in communities where many residents share the same last name, distinctive names are necessary to avoid confusion. Many Mormon settlements, particularly early Mormon settlements, would likely encounter the issue of an entire community sharing a limited number of last names. However, nicknames are often used by other cultures to address a problem like many sharing the same name. Also, the continuation of distinctive Mormon naming suggests that something else may be going on.

While all of the hypotheses above make some sense when looking at the data of Mormon naming and impressions of Mormon culture, the hypotheses cannot replace what members of the group say. The most striking thing about interviewing Mormons whose

children possess distinctive names is that not one identifies as someone who uses “Mormon” names. When asked about Mormon names, most interviewees could give me a list or name a type, e.g. Book of Mormon names, but none seemed to see the names they chose as distinctively Mormon names. Even the informant who acknowledged that her children had “weird” names did not consider the names she and her husband picked to fit any Mormon naming types. Perhaps the conflicting ideas of what constitutes a Mormon name demonstrate incongruous emic and etic perspectives.

For example, when I asked Circe Dopp if she thought being LDS had any influence on the names she chose, she responded: “I don’t know because I didn’t choose LDS names. I mean, there are LDS names, you know. And I don’t think I chose any of them” (2012, 00:15:54). Circe has seven kids: Golda, Ruby, Araceli, Freestone, Xanthe, Ptolemy, and Tziporah. I chose to interview Circe specifically because of Freestone, which sounded like a combination/invented name, though I suspected some sort of theme because Xanthe, Ptolemy, and Circe all possess names connected to Greek history/mythology.

Theme naming was not mentioned when I asked Circe what she thought of when I asked about “Mormon” names: “Well, I think, first of all, of Book of Mormon names like Nephi or Moroni or things like that, but then there’s also the cultural ones. It seems like, um, when Golda was born, Madison was such a regional name right here and we were in Idaho at the time. So every baby was named Madison. Like, literally. Everyone had to have one. And then, kind of everyone had to have a Kayla or a McKayla. The ‘Mc’ names were big” (Dopp 2012, 00:16:58). For Circe, Mormon naming meant using names that began with Mc-, Book of Mormon names, or ultra trendy names. (Madison was in

the top ten most popular names for the United States for the year Golda was born.)

James Nell, parent to Kaizley, Kambree, and Kyron, described Mormon names as Book of Mormon names, like Nephi, or General Authority names: “You think Mormon names or what have you and then you think, oh man you gotta name ‘em to be like a General Authority name or something like that so if they are a General Authority then you can go, like, K. James Nell” (Nell and Nell 2012, 00:13:17). Theme naming, creative spelling, and combination/invented names were not on his radar of Mormon personal naming types, even though the names chosen for his children reflect all three. Circe and James were not the only informants to demonstrate an emic view that did not precisely match etic observations.

Josh and Heather Jones, who freely admitted that their two children possessed “weird” names, were adamant that they were not “Mormon” names:

Josh: “We don’t use unnecessary ys!”

Heather: [laughs] “That’s Josh’s big problem with the Mormon naming thing is—he’s like, ‘There’s a y in there! And an x! And—’”

Josh: “No, it’s always a y. There’s a y in everybody’s name. All the baby names. It drives me insane” (2012, 00:12:31).

For Josh, it was not the names themselves that demonstrated something distinctively Mormon, but the spelling. Soon after this exchange, Heather told me that the first time she saw the name Traegan, it was spelled Treygan. Nothing about the name suggested Mormon naming practices to them except the spelling. In order to avoid being associated with Mormon naming, Josh and Heather changed the spelling from Treygan to Traegan when they named their son. However, Josh and Heather were the only informants to mention anything related to spelling when I asked about Mormon names.

The majority of those I spoke with indicated that Mormon naming meant naming

after people in the Book of Mormon and after prophets and General Authorities. It is interesting that humor about Mormon names tends to focus on combination/invented, creatively spelled, and theme names, which will be addressed in more detail in the last section of this chapter. The difference between how Mormon naming is defined by those who follow distinctive Mormon naming practices and those who notice these practices reflects an interesting disparity between insider and outsider¹ perspectives. No interviewee wanted to be associated with what they considered to be distinctive Mormon naming practices, even though Josh and Heather and James and Kassey were the only informants to express any negative feelings about “Mormon” names.

While Mormons were quick to tell me that they did not use any Mormon names for their kids, they often expressed things particular to Mormon culture that influenced their naming choices. A church and cultural emphasis on genealogy, family, serving a mission, and missionary work influenced name choices directly and indirectly. In addition, perhaps the cultural homogeneity of Mormons in Utah drives a strong desire to be unique that is most often exhibited through naming, due to cultural and religious constraints around other expressions of uniqueness. Another factor in naming choices among my informants could simply be the fact that they belong to the LDS Church, which requires significant emotional, financial, and time investments.

Religious Naming

The LDS Church is as much a lifestyle as it is a religion. Celestial Brandley said,

¹ Insider and outsider do not refer to a Mormon and a non-Mormon. In this instance, an insider has a native perspective while the outsider has an academic perspective.

“It’s not just a religious-religion for Sundays...” (2012, 00:04:53), which echoes the teachings of President Joseph F. Smith. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph F. Smith* contains his words: “The religion which we have espoused is not a Sunday religion; it is not a mere profession...It is the most important thing in the world to us, and the results to us in this world and in the world to come will depend upon our integrity to the truth and our consistency in observing its precepts, in abiding by its principles, and its requirements” (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints 1998, 416). There are many requirements in the religion outside of Sunday church service attendance, and those requirements begin at age eight, which is also the age at which children are baptized into the LDS Church.

Separate programs for the young men and young women ask for attendance at a midweek activity every week. Young men and young women are also encouraged to attend seminary² or institute³ during the school year. Adult women attend midweek Relief Society activities each week, and adult men attend Elders’ Quorum activities. Women serve as visiting teachers, which requires a monthly visit to the women assigned to them by Relief Society leadership. Men serve as a home teacher, which requires a monthly visit to families assigned to them by the bishopric.⁴ All members are asked to attend the temple as often as possible, pay a ten percent tithe, and contribute the cost of

² A gospel instruction course for high school students offered through the LDS Church’s Continuing Education program. It is held throughout the school year in either the early morning before school or during a special release time in the standard school day.

³ A gospel instruction course for college students offered through the LDS Church’s Continuing Education program.

⁴ A collective term for the bishop and his two counselors.

three meals to the church.

Belonging to the LDS Church is a way of life that extends beyond Sunday worship. Giving children uniquely religious names may be an effort on the parents' part to instill in their children the idea that they belong to a daily religion. As mentioned previously, the parents I spoke with wanted their kids to feel pressure to live up to a name, especially a religious or Book of Mormon name. Celestial Brandley spoke about the names she and her husband chose for their children: "I believe and we believe that, my family believes that, um, the celestial kingdom is the highest degree of glory that you can reach in the next life and so for me, when I think of my name, it means a lot to me and I wanted to give my children names that they could, you know, have a similar attachment to that they would think to be better, to be the best that they could be" (2012, 00:01:18). Celestial's daughter is named Himaya, which is the Cebuano word for glory. Her son is named Teancum after the Nephite leader in the Book of Mormon.

Carrying a name with strong religious connotations serves as an indelible reminder of religion. Amy White, whose oldest son is named Brigham after President Brigham Young, explained: "...There's a responsibility with your name. Um, when—when my kids leave the house, my husband has worn out the phrase that says, 'Don't forget who you are and what you stand for.' I mean, it just comes out of his mouth. He can't not say it. So I think with that phrase in mind, um, who they are *is* their name and—and their—they have to be responsible for that name" (2012, 00:17:50). By giving her son the name of a former president of the LDS Church, and by her husband reminding Brigham of this every time he walks out the door, Amy White has transferred a sense of accountability to her son to live up to the expectations they associate with President

Brigham Young.

Religious names might also be a subconscious expression of a parent's hope that their child will not stray from the church. People born into a religion do not always remain in that religion for their entire lives. For LDS parents who believe that the LDS Church is the only path to salvation, the thought that their child may one day leave the church causes real anxiety. It is an expression of religion to give a child a religious name, and I wonder if the parent is not hoping, on some level, that a religious name is a safeguard against inactivity, breaking away from, or leaving the LDS Church. When your religion is in your name, it may be more difficult to escape that religion. I imagine that a Mormon identity would be more difficult to shed for a man named Hinckley than a man named Brandon.

Many Mormons identify as missionaries, even those not currently serving full-time missions. Beginning in 1923, the LDS Church began using the phrase "every member a missionary" (lds.org) to thrust the mantle of missionary work upon every member of the church and convey to each member a responsibility to share the gospel. Some members may have latched onto a surefire way for their children to live up to that phrase. Kristen Hale commented that one reason Jarom appealed to her and her husband was because it was unusual enough that people might ask him about his name and when asked, he can tell people about the Book of Mormon and the church (2012).

Obviously, not all Mormons interpret the phrase "every member a missionary" to mean that their children should be given names deliberately chosen to increase opportunities for missionary work. Some members, such as Kristen, intensify official doctrine about missionary work into other aspects of life like personal names. This

distinction and the group that most often intensifies official doctrine will be addressed in detail later in this chapter.

The Influence of Genealogy

The time and money spent by the LDS Church make it clear that family history and genealogy are important to the LDS Church. There is a class taught specifically about family history and genealogy included in the three-hour block worship sessions Mormons attend on Sundays and provided as an alternative to the standard Sunday school class. Conference talks and church magazines frequently urge members to work on their family history and genealogy and stress the important role genealogy plays in the mission of the church. The LDS Church has also established a Family History Library, the largest of its kind, complete with researchers and experienced genealogists available free of charge, and an extensive online database, FamilySearch.org. Elder Dennis B. Neuenschwander of the Seventy said in his April 1999 conference address: “Family history builds bridges between the generations of our families. Bridges between generations are not built by accident. Each member of this Church has the personal responsibility to be an eternal architect of this bridge for his or her own family.” While neither Elder Neuenschwander nor any other General Authority has instructed parents to name children after ancestors, some Mormons may view naming children with names from ancestors in their family tree as a way to enhance their relationship with their genealogy and build a bridge between generations.

Eliason credits the family tree as the most heavily used naming source among Mormons, which is not surprising given the resources invested in genealogy. My findings

are consistent with Eliason's observation about family history. For example, Freestone, who I assumed was given a combination/invented name, was actually given his paternal great-grandmother's maiden name. I also assumed Kaizley's middle name, Jun., was a creative spelling of the name June when it is actually an abbreviation for Junior. Her paternal grandfather was Junior who went by Jun. throughout his life; Kaizley is named after him.

Naming children after ancestors is not a uniquely Mormon trait, though Mormons do seem to have a unique approach to family naming. While the rest of the population appears to choose family names from very close ancestors, Mormons like to climb as far up the family tree as necessary to find a unique name. Mormons also have a special affinity for using last names of ancestors and adapting an ancestor's name to their personal preference. Circe Dopp is a good example of this because rather than give one of her many daughters her husband's grandmother's first name, she instead gave her son her husband's grandmother's maiden name, Freestone. Lindsey and Matt Rhodes also gave their son a family name, taking Matt's mother's maiden name and altering how it was spelled before bestowing it upon little Maclain.

Distinctive names may be perpetuated through ancestral naming. While Norton's argument that combination names came out of an actual need to distinguish numerous people with the same last name may be accurate, I wonder if such names continue out of a desire to connect modern descendants with their ancestors now that there is no longer the same need to distinguish. For example, I met a student named Jerman who is named after his great-grandfather. Perhaps his great-grandfather Jerman needed that distinct name and even though grandson Jerman does not, he carries that name as a connection to

his heritage. Ashley Ballard also has a son with the middle name Terel, after his grandfather, who was named after his grandfather. Terrell is the traditional spelling of the name, but because Ashley's son is named after a specific family member, she spelled it the same way that family member did.

The emphasis the LDS Church places on genealogy factors into naming in an additional way. Many of the parents I spoke with talked about how naming their child after a relative establishes a connection between that child and the previous bearer of the name. My husband, Christian, made me promise before we were even engaged that we would name our first son after his grandfather. I recently asked him why it was so important to him that we name a child after his grandfather. He told me that it would establish a connection between his grandfather and our son. Upon further questioning, Christian told me that he wanted all of our kids to know about his grandfather, but that especially the one who carried his name would know about him and about his life because they shared a name. Other parents shared similar sentiments. Kasey Nell, whose children possess family names for middle names, told me: "We want our kids to know their ancestors" (Nell and Nell 2012, 00:17:11). Amy White's children have all been given very meaningful family names, and she said: "They [her kids] do genealogy work and they know, uh, how things are connected and they know where their name is from. And I think maybe they know it better because they do have names that are tied to that..." (2012, 00:15:18).

Almost all of the parents who gave their children unusual names also gave their children traditional middle names. My initial assumption was that this was done in order to give children an option should they ever decide they want to go by a more common

name. Informants, however, were not worried that their offspring might not share their sentiments about unique names. Only one informant, LaVora Peery, addressed it: “The last [middle] names were just thrown in there. We have no purpose for those names other than in case the—the twins didn’t like their first name, they could go by their second name” (2012, 00:06:59). Choosing a traditional middle name is not unique to Mormons, though it is interesting in light of the distinctiveness of some Mormon first names that they tend to hold to conventional patterns for middle names.

If the first name was not a family name, then the middle name was almost guaranteed to be a family name, which suggests that establishing a connection to ancestors through naming is as equally important to parents as uniqueness. Krista Robinson, who actively sought out unique first names for her children explained their middle names: “...I feel like, for a—for a boy’s name, I don’t know, I felt like it would help tie them to their to their genealogy and that they’ll appreciate it when they get older. [Pause] ‘Cause that’s what we’re [Mormons] supposed to do. No, [laughs] no, I like it. I—I like that Krew has one of my family names and yeah, I just—I think it helps tie them to their ancestors” (2012, 00:17:20). Krista laughed after her statement about what “we’re supposed to do” with regard to middle names, but the fact that she mentioned it means she did feel some pressure to meet an expectation to give a child a family name. Perhaps that pressure is due to a cultural expectation that is born out of the church’s emphasis on genealogy.

When asked if she thought Mormons name their kids any differently and in what ways, Kristen Hale answered: “Yeah. I think so. More...I don’t know...family, I think, since family is so important to us [Mormons] that people tend to use names from their

grandmas or grandpas or ancestors. I don't know. I think a lot of people probably do it, but I think Mormons do it even more so because family is important" (2012, 00:09:30). Family is important to many people, although it particularly resonates with Mormons because family is an essential element in the LDS Church. Kristen Hale's answer was repeated numerous times by other informants who also suggested that belonging to the LDS Church influences naming choices because the church places so much importance on the family.

The LDS Church places extraordinary weight on family because it believes that the family is central to the Lord's plan. Elder Henry B. Eyring wrote an article for the February 1998 edition of the *Ensign* about family and stated: "The family unit is fundamental not only to society and to the Church but to our hope for eternal life." Eternal life is the ultimate goal for members of the LDS Church; therefore, by explaining that the family is essential to that, Elder Eyring conveys the importance of family. The belief that families can be together forever is a major tenet of the LDS Church and is addressed in the missionary discussions,⁵ coming in second only to a lesson on the Restoration⁶ of the gospel. The church promotes Family Home Evening, family councils,⁷ and General Authorities give many talks and write numerous articles about

⁵ Official lessons taught to people interested in the LDS Church, typically those interested in joining the Church.

⁶ Members of the LDS Church believe that Jesus Christ established the true church while he was on the earth. After his crucifixion, apostasy was so widespread that the fullness of the gospel was taken from the earth. Through the prophet Joseph Smith, the gospel was restored to the earth and all the ordinances necessary for salvation on available. (lds.org).

⁷ Meetings held within a family to discuss the needs, goals, and wants of the family unit. Sometimes a family council is held in conjunction with Family Home Evening, but not

strengthening family relationships between children and parents and between spouses.

The homepage of the LDS Church's website provides five categories from which to choose; listed immediately after "Our Heavenly Father's Plan" is "The Family." The Church Handbook, *Administering the Church*, reads: "The family is the most important unit in time and in eternity and is ordained of God" (1). Additional demonstrations of the importance of family are prevalent throughout the church.

The members I spoke with often mentioned the significance of family in the LDS Church when I asked what it was about Mormon culture and religion that lead to distinctive naming practices among Mormons. Informants suggested that being LDS led to a more thoughtful naming process and more meaningful names but did not always agree on what constitutes a meaningful name. For example, Kassey Elder used famous peoples' names as examples of something Mormons might not do that often, but Ashley Ballard confessed to me that two of her kids' names came from television shows that she and her husband enjoyed and one name came from a famous person's baby. LaNae Ricks laughingly told me that she and her husband sat through movie credits in search of a name for one of their daughters (2012, 00:18:21). All the children with names inspired by popular media were given family names for their middle names, which, perhaps, is what Kassey thought was lacking from the names of her non-LDS friends' children.

Mormons may be particularly fond of theme naming because it contributes to the idea that each family is a cohesive unit. Theme naming is not exclusive to Mormons,

always. The major difference between Family Home Evening and family council is that Family Home Evening is a time for socialization and teaching while family council is a time to discuss needs and goals and how the family will address them. (Family Councils: A Q&A with Elder and Sister Ballard).

though perhaps it is more striking when viewed among Mormons due to the higher than average family size; the average number of children per family is almost twice for Mormons what it is for the general population (The Pew Forum On Religion and Public Life 2012). While some Mormon parents strive to find or invent a name that will distinguish their child from everyone outside of the family, Mormon or otherwise, they are also intentionally seeking names that clearly demonstrate belonging to their family. Theme naming emphasizes the importance of being together as a family because everyone in the family has a name that matches one another and serves as an outward indicator that all members belong to their family unit.

For example, Paul and Kelly Marshall have six children whose names all begin with an *m*. They joked with me that they chose *m* so the children would be their “M&M’s.” Paul and Kelly Marshall brought home a puppy last year and let their children name her. The children insisted she also get an *m* name, which demonstrates their awareness of how theme naming indicates membership in the family. Only one informant, Krista Robinson, deliberately chose a name for her third child, Beckham, that did not fit with the names of her first two children, Trey and Krew. She did, however, choose a name that could be shortened to Beck and thus match the other two names better (2012, 00:12:48). Other informants gave their children names that all began with the same letter, ended with the same sound, or followed a religious theme.

Individuality

Unique was the word I heard most often in the course of my fieldwork. Without any prompting from me, informants would tell me that they wanted unique names. Not

interesting or creative, but unique and different. A couple of parents acknowledged that their attempts at uniqueness failed despite their best efforts and a few wanted unique, but drew the line at “*too* unique.” After addressing uniqueness and names, many parents followed up by stating that they did not want their kids to be one of a certain number in a class. Heather Jones said: “I just didn’t want him to be one—one of five in a classroom” (Jones and Jones 2012, 00:15:40).

I initially suspected that parents who grew up with common names and had been one of several with the same name in a class would be the ones most likely to give their children different names. However, it did not seem to make a difference whether parents themselves possessed unusual names or not. LaVora and Sam, who had uncommon names for their time, and Josh and Heather, who had very common names for their time, gave their children names that fit into distinctive Mormon naming types.

Unusual names are undoubtedly more common today than they were twenty or even ten years ago. According to the Social Security Administration’s website, 77.22% of all names were represented in the top 1000 names for 2001. In 2010, 72.87% of names were represented in the top 1000, which suggests that parents all over the United States are looking for unique names for their offspring more than they ever have before. I recognize that unique names are becoming a national trend, but Mormons were headed this direction long before it was a national trend. H.L. Mencken’s 1936 remarks, mentioned in Chapter II, demonstrate that Mormons earned a reputation for distinctive naming over 75 years ago. I also interviewed a few informants in their sixties who told me the same thing that informants in their thirties did, which was that finding a unique name was important. Even thirty years ago, it was important to these parents that they

find a unique name for their children.

The strong desire to be unique is interesting when looking at such a culturally homogenous group. Members of the LDS Church around the world are alike in many ways simply by virtue of following the standards of their religion. For example, the Word of Wisdom⁸ dictates what Mormons should and should not eat and drink. Mormons are counseled not to swear, not to engage in premarital sex, and to abstain from a number of other activities. All young men are counseled to serve missions⁹ and the majority of young men do. Every family is instructed to hold Family Home Evening¹⁰ on Mondays, build up their food storage, and research their family history through genealogy work. Even appearance is dictated to some degree through standards of dress, prohibition on multiple piercings and tattoos, and a caution against “extreme” hairstyles. However, Utah Mormons remain culturally distinct from their worldwide Mormon counterparts.

While it should go without saying, it is important to realize that not all Mormons are the same. The LDS Church is constant throughout the world and members everywhere follow the same commandments and believe essentially the same things. However, the members represent diverse ethnicities and cultures, including a Utah Mormon subculture to which not all members belong. This subculture is exemplified in

⁸ Law of health found in section 89 of the Doctrine and Covenants. It is considered a revelation from the Lord and provides a list of substances to avoid and foods that are good to consume.

⁹ A mission is a voluntary, unpaid, two-year block of service in which the missionary is called to serve a specific geographic area. Missionaries uphold strict standards and are sent wherever the Church deems necessary and appropriate.

¹⁰ One night a week set aside to meet together as a family and learn the gospel. Family business is often a part of Family Home Evening.

the “Utah Mormon” stereotype, and it is among Utah Mormons where distinctive Mormon naming types are most commonly found. Despite the geographic inclusion in the title of “Utah Mormon,” it does not simply mean a Mormon living in Utah. Utah Mormons are born into the LDS Church, are raised in Utah, and stay in Utah, thus the term “Utah Mormon.” The term generally encompasses Mormons who appear to extend their religion and their sometimes distinct interpretation of their religion into their culture in a number of ways. For instance, many of my informants suggested that distinctive naming was a Utah Mormon characteristic, not a Mormon characteristic. I did not interview any Mormons outside of Utah, so it would be interesting to hear how Mormons outside of Utah view distinctive Mormon naming customs.

The Utah Mormon subculture seems to have been created out of the concentration of Mormons in Utah, which has led to a homogenous group. Mormons outside of Utah are generally part of a community that consists of many non-Mormons. In Utah, on the other hand, communities are made up almost entirely of Mormons; in fact, 73% of Mormons in Utah say that most or all of their close friends are also Mormon (The Pew Forum On Religion and Public Life 2012), which seems to contribute to the cultural homogeneity referred to earlier. Utah Mormons also see themselves as different from other Mormons.

When Utah Mormons talk about other places, they often refer to anywhere outside of Utah as “the mission field.” For example, I recently heard a woman speak about the church in Connecticut and how it would be to live in Connecticut and be out in “the mission field.” It also seems as though Mormons outside of Utah see Utah Mormons differently, almost as though to be a Mormon among so many Mormons is an experience

entirely apart from and less than the experience of being a Mormon elsewhere. Growing up, my Mormon cousins from out of state gave me and the other Utah cousins a hard time for being “Utah Mormons.” These cousins saw certain differences that made Utah Mormons separate from them. For example, my cousins seemed to think that attending seminary during school instead of before school meant it was not a “real” seminary experience. They were also under the mistaken impression that having an almost entirely Mormon peer group meant drugs, alcohol, and sex were not temptations Utah Mormons faced.

The LDS Church is spread all over the world and all over the United States. In many places, being a Mormon in and of itself makes a person different from his or her neighbors because Mormons are not the majority; in those places, distinctive Mormon naming types are not often observed. In March, an article about my research was published on the website for *LDS Living*.¹¹ Among the comments posted in response was one from sweetcarol126, posted April 5, 2012: “...I realize there are names like that and they hold their names proudly, but I wouldn’t do it in my mixed culture of being Mormon and being where most of my neighbors are not. *Our lifestyle makes us unusual enough* and we get opportunities to say that we are Mormon. They believe us without the strange name” [emphasis mine]. This comment underscores the idea that belonging to the LDS Church is usually enough to distinguish a person from his or her neighbor.

Distinctive Mormon naming types occur most frequently in Utah, where the population is largely Mormon. Perhaps because naming is one of few areas in which the

¹¹ LDS Living is not an official publication of the LDS Church. It is written with the LDS community in mind and strives to be family-oriented.

church has not formally instructed its members, Mormons in heavily Mormon areas try to use naming as a way to set themselves apart to some degree. Ironically, naming does not set them apart, but instead is another characteristic shared with their Mormon neighbors. Amy White said it best: "...I think everybody thinks that they're doing something really unique. And now that the Internet's out there with how un-unique they are, they still do it" (2012, 00:28:24).

The Mormons I talked to almost all considered their names to be unique, but not very "Mormon." I had expected to find Mormons proudly telling me which Mormon name they picked and how they wanted to give their children recognizably Mormon names. Instead, I found people who wanted more than anything else, to give their children unique names so their children could be unique. Kasey Nell expressed her feelings on unique names when she said: "I was all about uniqueness so that they could be themselves and didn't have to be James number five...because there's something about having a unique name" (Nell and Nell 2012, 00:22:27).

Emyla Conger also expressed her desire for unique names in a letter she wrote to me explaining her children's names: "I wanted my children to have names not like other children, but able to pronounce easily. Jaiymee came to my mind after many hours of flipping letters around, looking through countless baby books to make sure it didn't exist within them, and googling [sic] to see if any came up" (2012). Emyla was not willing to give her child a name anyone else had and went as far as searching the Internet to ensure that Jaiymee would not share a name with anyone else.

Emyla is not the only one to express the idea that there is a line that should not be crossed when it comes to unique names. For Emyla, that line was a name that could not

be pronounced. Josh and Heather Jones, parents of Traegan and Avonelle, told me that the names they chose for their kids were “weird, but not cruel.” There is obviously a shifting line even among Mormons about what constitutes mean and what constitutes unique.

Utah Mormon culture does not appear to prize individuality. It is a very tight-knit culture in which it is hard to be different. I did not ask my informants how they felt about my theory because it emerged as I studied the interviews together. I may be wrong, but it seems as though these people feel so similar to everyone else that they simply must be different somehow. Clothes that adhere to Mormon standards of dress are sometimes difficult to find, particularly for women, and thus many Mormon women find themselves shopping at the same stores, such as Downeast Outfitters, that specialize in modest clothing. Relatively common forms of self-expression such as piercings, tattoos, hairstyles, and conduct are all restricted by the church to some extent and are further reinforced by the culture.

There are few opportunities for Utah Mormons to be different so perhaps naming is the chosen venue of individual expression because they can be as different as they would like to be without rebelling outright. It may be that because names are important in the LDS Church, it does not feel like any sort of rebellion and instead feels like a meaningful place to invest creativity. I highly doubt that my informants consciously use names to rebel against the conformity of being a Mormon in Utah because none of them realize that their “unique” names are not unique at all, but instead are yet another characteristic they share with their Mormon neighbors.

Serving LDS Missions

While Mormons, particularly Mormons in Utah, may be perceived as a sheltered group, those who serve an LDS mission are often exposed to cultures radically different from their own. Many missionaries learn a new language and serve outside of the United States. In the course of my fieldwork, I noticed that many unusual names came from serving a mission. For example, Celestial Brandley named her daughter Himaya, which is the Cebuano word for glory. Sam and LaVora Peery named their oldest boy Sven after a little boy Sven they met on their missions. Circe Dopp named her daughter Golda after her grandmother Golda who was named after a girl Circe's great-uncle met on his mission. Ashley Ballard named her daughter Alitaya, after a girl her husband met on his mission. Celestial Brandley also told me of a friend she has who served in Alaska and named his little girls after his mission: Alaska and Mckinley. These names might not be unusual in the context the LDS missionaries heard them, but once transplanted to Utah they are often uncommon, if not entirely foreign, names.

It is more than simple exposure to a variety of names, though, that brings about the influence of missions on naming. Missions mean so much to those who serve that it could be their way of keeping their missions alive. Ashley Ballard informed me that her husband Justin talked about his mission frequently when they were engaged (2012, 00:07:30) and brought up naming a girl Alitaya before they were even married. Young men often get married soon after returning from a mission and generally proceed to have children soon after getting married. Perhaps it is because their most recent experiences are their mission experiences that names sometimes reflect their mission language and experience. It is important to once again acknowledge that not all Mormons who serve

missions give their children names from their missions; giving children names from missions is simply a recurring theme among my informants.

Gender Expectations

As mentioned in Chapter II, significant Mormon women do not appear in naming patterns at anywhere near the same rate as men. While men from the Book of Mormon appear regularly, the only two women named in the Book of Mormon do not appear at all. Male children are named after General Authorities while female children are rarely, if ever, named after female church leaders. Perhaps parents do not want or need their daughters to feel pressured to live up to the expectations of female religious figures. Sons appear to bear most of the pressure to live up to a name in a family.

Some of the Mormon parents I spoke with mentioned that part of the appeal of a certain name for their son was the perceived strength of that name and suitability to a career. Kelly Marshall, McKlayne's mom, explained: "I just think it [the name] sounds strong. I just remember thinking it would be, like, a great name on the door of an office [laughs] or something. It just sounded powerful" (Marshall and Marshall 2012, 00:05:45). Ashley Ballard mentioned that from the time he was a baby, Lincoln got a reaction from people about his "strong" name: "...I even had a nurse that said something to me, like, he was like two weeks old, but she was like, you need to go home and write this in your baby book because I'm telling you he is gonna be, I can't remember what she said, but I wrote it in here. Something about he's gonna do, he's gonna do something important. Because of his name" (2012, 00:18:52). She also said that the name appealed to her husband because of its strength.

I asked Krista Robinson what was the most important thing she considered when naming her children, and she answered that it was important the names were unique and added: “And then for boys, I wanted them to be a good solid—I feel like with girl names you can be a little bit more fun and cutesy, but with a boy I think—I feel like you have to be more like a good solid doctor, lawyer, or judge or you know what I mean? A good solid name” (2012, 00:11:04). This idea of strength and future career potential appeared multiple times when parents spoke of their sons’ names and not once when parents spoke of their daughters’ names.

The contrast between genders reflects certain cultural expectations. In Utah, especially, it appears that there is the cultural expectation among Mormons for women not to work outside the home. The church’s counsel to have a family is, as demonstrated above, crucial to the gospel of the LDS Church. While church leaders have addressed the value in a mother who is able to be home with her children when they are small, church leaders have also made it clear that each couple should do what works best for their family, even if that includes both parents working outside the home. The first half of that counsel, however, seems to be retained while the second is largely ignored. For example, I attended a married student ward¹² in Logan the first year after I married my husband. Out of a group of seventy women, I was one of no more than seven that worked. Not one woman who worked also had a child. I frequently heard women express the idea that mothers who worked outside the home simply were not willing to make the sacrifices it requires to stay at home with children. While my experience may be extreme because of the ward demographics, I am confident strains of this attitude appear in other wards,

¹² A type of local congregation. As the name implies, only married students attend.

especially wards in Utah.

As a result of the cultural expectation to be a stay-at-home mother, parents do not picture their daughters' professions outside of motherhood in the same way they picture their sons' professions outside of fatherhood. Parents give their girls pretty or cute names, not names designed to sound powerful when, for example, their daughters grow up to be lawyers. Perhaps it is because stay-at-home motherhood and homemaking is a priority for my informants that their naming choices reflect a desire for a similar lifestyle for their daughters.

Most of the women I talked to were currently or had at some point been mothers who did not work outside the home. Many worked from home in addition to their child-rearing responsibilities, doing everything from photography to massage therapy to violin repair. All but one informant self-identified as homemaker or mother in addition to whatever else they did. Motherhood and raising children is obviously an important part of life for these women and one with which they want to be identified. One informant who currently works outside the home as a nurse told me that she is only doing so until her husband graduates from school. Multiple factors influence a woman's decision to work outside the home, including socio-economic standing and desire to work. I do not know the circumstances behind employment for most female informants, but it is noteworthy that so many self-identified as homemakers and stay-at-home moms.

Jokes and Legends

Distinctive Mormon naming has been observed through humor about Mormon names in the form of legend-like jokes, joke-like legends, skits, and plays. Some of the

humor is designed for Mormons while other examples are for a more general population. Mormons are not the only minority that is good fodder for naming humor; in fact, some jokes about Mormons were originally jokes about other minorities. For example, the most popular legend-like joke I collected was about a boy named Shithead, pronounced Shi-thay-ed. Three people told me about Mormons who named their son Shithead, while another included it in a joke about Asians in California who had two children, Shithead and Toilet. My father-in-law asked me if I had heard about the Asian couple in California who had twins and did not know what to name the newborn babies. Inspiration struck the father while in the hospital bathroom where he saw “shithead” written on the wall and did not realize it was offensive graffiti. The father wanted the names to go together so he continued looking around the bathroom until finally, on his way out, he saw a little sign just outside the door that said “toilet” on it. Thus, the twins were named Shithead, pronounced Shi-thay-ed, and Toilet, pronounced Too-il-ette.

Wayne, who considers himself a cultural Mormon, but no longer practices any of the religious aspects, told me about Shithead in the form of a joke-like legend. He told me as though he knew it was funny and his final word, the explanation of how the name is spelled, reminded me of a punch line, but I could not tell if he thought it was true or if he expected me to think it was true. Wayne expressed his opinion on what his sister had just named her new baby, “I mean, she’s Mormon so I know it could’ve been worse. You’ve heard about the kid named Shithead [Shi-thay-ed]? Do you know how it’s spelled? Shithead.”

Twice, though, I heard Shithead in the context of Mormon parents trying to find a fancy/French-sounding name and ending up with Shithead. Giving a child a name that is

pronounced differently than it is spelled is a fairly accurate reflection of some characteristics of distinctive Mormon naming, though that is not the only point this joke makes. It also expresses the idea that Mormons are naïve and pretentious enough to fail to realize they named their child a curse word and an insult. Once I heard about a girl who was victim to the Mormon combination naming trend and ended up VaGina, pronounced Va-geena. Stories like this reflect a perceived naivety and pretentiousness about Mormons.

When I was a teenager, a coworker told me that her friend went to school with a Mormon boy named Lemonjello, pronounced La-mon-ja-low. This example picks up on both Mormon naming and the stereotypical Mormon affinity for jello. While I assumed it was a joke, my co-worker did not tell it like a joke; instead, she told it as though she believed it to be true. I had previously been under the impression that she did not like Mormons and she told me about Lemonjello so scathingly that it was obvious she thought Mormons were idiots. Unlike most examples of naming humor I collected, I heard this from a non-member.

I discovered my accountant belonged to the LDS Church when he told me about some of the “crazy Mormon names” in his ward after I confessed to him my fascination with Mormon names. He shared the following tidbit, “I filed taxes for a lady a few years back. She had a little kid named Absidy.” Then he paused and I asked, “Absidy?” He nodded, “And guess how it was spelled...A-B-C-D.” In a similar play on phonetics, my father-in-law once told me about L—a, pronounced La-dash-a. I do not recall whether or not L—a was Mormon, but she was from Utah.

Members, like my accountant and my father-in-law, who told me humorous

stories of Mormon naming, expressed a sense of disbelief that anyone could name their child so outrageously. The ability to laugh at oneself is an admirable characteristic, and perhaps jokes and legends such as the examples above demonstrate that ability. However, most of the jokes I collected are more about the tellers of these jokes and legends rejecting what others see as a part of Mormon culture. By poking fun at Mormon names, they are poking fun at an aspect of Mormon culture in an effort to distance themselves from other members of their group.

A satirical blog spoofing Mormon mommy blogs, *Seriously So Blessed*, contains yet another example. The blog has a fictional author whose profile contains the following, “In March ‘09’ we had the hottest twins ever, named very unique: Alivyiah TreCole and Tridger Kaegrin.” Creative spellings and combination/invented names are both noticed and mocked along with the desire to be unique. The woman behind *Seriously So Blessed* has been praised for her “wickedly dead-on” (Means 2008) observations about Mormon culture. Another news article commented that the blog’s fictional author is “all the stereotypes and cultural quirks of the quintessential modern Mormon mommy” rolled into one (Reichman 2009). *Seriously So Blessed* has been applauded for recognizing and poking fun at things that really hit home for its readers, including the distinctive Mormon naming observations portrayed in Alivyiah and Tridger.

Various skits have recognized distinctive Mormon naming patterns, such as the *Farley Family Reunion*, which is a one-man show in which James Arrington plays several members of a Mormon family, the Farleys. It is also satirical and observes a number of cultural eccentricities common to Mormons, including naming. Characters in the *Farley*

Family Reunion include Fayreen, Qweezel Dean, Vonelle, Delbert, Heber, Veta, and Theta. In an interview, Arrington said that some find his play offensive and assume it is meant as a mean commentary on Mormon society, but that it is really just a mirror (Stewart 2010). His play has been very well received for the most part, which perhaps proves the old adage that it is funny because it is true.

On March 3, 2012, Saturday Night Live aired a skit featuring Mitt Romney and his sons that demonstrates that outsiders observe distinctive Mormon naming along with insiders. While the skit was obviously meant to convey something about Mitt Romney, personally, it also pointed out what writers saw as a funny characteristic of Mormons. Actors portraying Mitt Romney's five adult sons introduced themselves: the first one introduced himself as Tagg, which is Mitt Romney's oldest son's name. The other four sons introduced themselves as Tanner, Tictac, Targalack, and Tiggitt. The names of Mitt Romney's other four sons are actually Craig, Ben, Matt, and Josh. Theme names and invented names are portrayed comically by Saturday Night Live.

Not only did Saturday Night Live change the names of Mitt Romney's sons, but they also presented each son dressed identically and with the same hairstyle. Along with supporting the idea that theme names form a unit, portraying the sons as replicas of one another with little variation also supports my theory that Mormons are fans of distinctive names because they are so indistinct in many ways simply by virtue of being Mormon, which has been discussed earlier in this chapter. Saturday Night Live's skit demonstrates that while Mormons see Utah Mormons as a different subgroup, the general population seems to view all Mormons as Utah Mormons.

Saturday Night Live's skit about Mitt Romney's "T" sons is hardly the only

occurrence of theme naming serving as the butt of a joke. Famous philanthropist Ima Hogg is always joked to have a sister named Ura. Particularly applicable in the context of Mormon naming is the joke about the family that named their twins after well-known Book of Mormon siblings Jared and his brother. The punch line is always about how Jared is the lucky one. While a joke about Jared and his brother demonstrates theme naming, it is also an excellent example of jokes demonstrating insider knowledge. Members of the LDS Church know that Jared is lucky because his brother is named Mahroni Moriancumer, which is not something an outsider would be able to pick up simply by hearing the joke.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

This thesis has begun to answer a number of questions about distinctive Mormon naming patterns, including: In what ways are Mormon personal names distinctive? Can naming systems be identified? What do personal names reflect about Mormon culture? What do they reflect about Mormon group identity? These questions are addressed below. This thesis has also explored the relationship between other aspects of Mormon culture and distinctive Mormon naming, which is also summarized below.

In What Ways Are Mormon Personal Names Distinctive? Can Naming Systems Be Identified?

Mormon personal names are distinctive in a number of ways, and Mormon naming systems illustrate those ways. This thesis has identified the following Mormon naming types: (1) combination/invented names, (2) creatively spelled names, (3) Book of Mormon names, (4) other religious names, (5) theme names, and (6) inspired names. Many categories overlap, which creates, for example, creatively spelled religious names and inspired combination/invented names.

There is a certain stereotype about distinctive Mormon names at which both non-Mormons and Mormons poke fun. Many Mormons recognize distinctive naming among their fellow Mormons and seek to distance themselves from it by telling jokes and legends about what they see as ridiculous Mormon names. Alivyiah and Tridger of Seriously So Blessed and the character names from the Farley Family Reunion, as discussed in Chapter IV, serve as excellent examples of observations about distinctive

Mormon names by Mormons. People who are not members of the LDS Church have also noticed something different about Mormon names and address their observations humorously, as evidenced by Saturday Night Live's skit about Mitt Romney's sons, also discussed in Chapter IV.

Are Those Distinct Names A Regional Characteristic?

Distinctive Mormon names are somewhat a regional characteristic. Due to the heavily Mormon population, Utah is home to a distinct Mormon subculture, of which distinctive Mormon naming patterns are often a part. My informants generally suggested that distinctive names were more of a Utah Mormon characteristic than a Mormon characteristic. While these naming patterns can be found outside of Utah, they are most often observed in places where there is a dense population of Mormons; thus, Utah is the most likely place to find these names.

What Do Personal Names Reflect About Mormon Culture?

Distinctive Mormon personal names reflect a number of characteristics of Mormon culture and include: a church emphasis on genealogy, family, missionary work, serving a mission, and devoting oneself entirely to one's religion. Certain cultural expectations are also visible through these naming patterns, such as specific gender roles for boys and girls. I heard multiple parents explain that it was important to choose strong names suitable for future high-profile careers when naming sons. While none of my informants said outright that they did not expect their daughters to work outside the home, they did point out that names for daughters needed to be "fun" or "cute" or

“pretty,” and not a single informant considered how a daughter’s name would sound in any future profession.

The LDS Church places a tremendous emphasis on genealogy and family, which is perhaps why so many of my informants looked to their family history when seeking potential baby names. Unlike many cultures that use family names, however, Mormons seem to prefer a less traditional route up the family tree to find ancestral names. There are fewer Juniors and plenty of modified maiden names among Mormons. Mormon parents also tend to reach much higher into the branches of their family trees than other parents, bypassing grandparents until they find a great-great-great-great-great ancestor. An emphasis on family as the most important unit in the LDS Church can also be seen in theme naming. Names that share a theme link family members to one another and clearly identify each member as belonging to the same family.

General Authorities in the church often stress the importance of serving a mission. Missions have a significant and lasting impact on those who serve, which can be seen in some distinctive Mormon names. Many of my informants gave at least one child a name directly related to their mission, whether it was a city in which they served, a word from a language they spoke, or a favorite convert or family they met while on their missions. These mission-related names often fall into the invented naming category, because a word in a foreign language is not always a name from that language. Additionally, creatively spelled names spawn from missions because the name or word from a mission needs to be modified in order to be pronounceable in English or simply to suit the parents’ preferences.

The LDS Church is as much a lifestyle as it is a religion. Names are one of the first and most basic identifiers in life so by giving children religious names, parents may be hoping to bond their children's identities to their religion. It is difficult to escape a religion when your name is a constant reminder of that religion. Perhaps LDS parents, who see the LDS Church as the only way to achieve celestial glory,¹ hope that tying their child's name to their religion is enough to prevent their child from leaving the church.

However, it is important to remember that not all Mormons are the same. While certain characteristics of Mormons are clearly visible in naming patterns, not all Mormons choose to demonstrate these characteristics through naming. The LDS Church is a worldwide religion of which many cultures and ethnicities are a part, including a subculture of Mormons born and raised in heavily Mormon areas. The cultural homogeneity of Utah Mormons leads to these naming patterns that reflect their cultural characteristics.

Informants strongly expressed their desires for their children to have unique names. The cultural homogeneity of Mormons in Utah is perhaps what leads to the strong desire to be unique, which is most often demonstrated by naming because of the cultural and religious constraints on common expressions of uniqueness. Religious constraints prevent common forms of self-expression, such as piercings, tattoos, and "extreme" appearances. Names, however, are not restricted religiously or culturally and thus remain a way to set oneself apart. But instead of setting them apart, naming ironically becomes another shared characteristic with their Mormon neighbors. Outside of Utah, where

¹ Celestial glory refers to heaven and eternal life.

Mormons are often a minority, belonging to the LDS Church in and of itself makes a person different; perhaps this is why distinctive Mormon naming types are not prevalent.

What Do Distinctive Mormon Names Reflect About Mormon Group Identity?

Surprisingly, distinctive Mormon names do not reflect a conscious group identity. My informants denied their adherence to distinctive Mormon naming patterns, while simultaneously pointing out characteristics unique to Mormons that influenced their naming choices. In fact, it seems as though the primary objective of many parents was to give their children names to distinguish them from their neighbors, not to provide yet another similarity. And yet, creating another similarity is precisely the result.

A Valuable Contribution

The existing literature on distinctive Mormon personal naming patterns analyzes data in the form of numbers and statistics while failing to address data taken directly from those who practice Mormon naming patterns. The result is analyses of Mormon names that conclude that Mormons are deliberately choosing names to reflect their distinctive Mormon heritage, which is in direct contrast to what my informants expressed. I repeatedly heard Mormons happily identify themselves as members of the LDS Church, while simultaneously resisting the label of someone who chose distinctive Mormon names. Without speaking with Mormons themselves, it would have been impossible to recognize the flaws in the existing literature on Mormon naming.

Interviewing Mormons who practice distinctive Mormon naming also sheds light on how a Mormon name is defined by both insiders and outsiders. Existing literature defines Mormon names from outsider perspectives only. Without speaking to those who

adhere to Mormon naming types, the differences between those two definitions would not have been discovered.

Interviewing Mormons who practice Mormon naming was crucial to my research and led to various conclusions I would not have reached otherwise. Another important discovery made through the interview process is the impact certain cultural characteristics have on Mormon naming. While outsiders hypothesize that belonging to a minority culture is the major influence in Mormon naming, my findings demonstrate otherwise. Instead, serving missions, an emphasis on family, gender expectations, and a desire to be set apart from everyone else are what drive Mormon naming.

This thesis demonstrates the importance of keeping the folk in folklore. While numbers and statistics can be valuable, they are not always sufficient data for a cultural analysis. I am not the first to observe that there is something different about Mormon names, and I doubt that I will be the last. Others will undoubtedly survey, analyze, and try to unfold that which sometimes can only be told.

WORKS CITED

- Abd-el-Jawad, Hassan. 1986. A linguistic and sociocultural study of personal names in Jordan. *Anthropological Linguistics* 28, no. 1 (Spring): 80-94.
- Ballard, Ashley. 2012. Tape-recorded interview by author. Smithfield, UT. January 18.
- Bateman, Rebecca B. 2002. Naming patterns in Black Seminole ethnogenesis. *Ethnohistory* 49, no. 2 (Spring): 227-257.
- Brandley, Celestial. 2012. Tape-recorded interview by author. Logan, UT. January 24.
- The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. 2000. *Book of Mormon student study guide*. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.
- . 1998. *Teachings of presidents of the Church: Joseph F. Smith*. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.
- Conger, Emyla. 2012. Personal letter to author.
- Dopp, Circe. 2012. Tape-recorded interview by author. Kaysville, UT. January 17.
- Eliason, Eric A. Forthcoming. Nameways in Latter-Day Saint history, custom, and folklore. In *Names in Mormon practice and belief*, ed. Dallin Oaks, Paul Baltes, and William Eggington, 1-46. Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellin Press.
- Evans, Cleveland. Forthcoming. Contemporary Mormon naming. In *Names in Mormon practice and belief*, ed. Dallin Oaks, Paul Baltes, and William Eggington. Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellin Press.
- Gee, John. Forthcoming. Book of Mormon names: Beyond etymology. In *Names in Mormon practice and belief*, ed. Dallin Oaks, Paul Baltes, and William Eggington, 107-117. Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellin Press.
- Hale, Kristen. 2012. Tape-recorded interview by author. Hyde Park, UT. February 2.
- Jones, Josh, and Heather Jones. 2012. Tape-recorded interview by author. Brigham City, UT. January 14.
- Karras, Christy. 2002. Different Is Good for Utah Names. *Salt Lake Tribune*. October 29.
- Kendrick, Courtney Jane. Nomenclature. <http://www.cjanekendrick.com/2010/02/nomenclature.html> (accessed January 12, 2012).

- Khatib, Syed Malik. 1995. Personal names and name changes. *Journal of Black Studies* 25, no. 3 (January): 349-353.
- Laversuch, Iman Makeba. 2006. Runaway slave names recaptured: An investigation of the personal first names of fugitive slaves advertised in the *Virginia Gazette* between 1736 and 1776. *Names* 54, no. 4 (December): 331-362.
- Levitt, Steven D., and Stephen J. Dubner. 2006. *Freakonomics*. New York: HarperCollins.
- Lieberson, Stanley, and Eleanor O. Bell. 1992. Children's first names: An empirical study of social taste. *The American Journal of Sociology* 98, no. 3 (November) 511-554.
- Lieberson, Stanley, and Kelly S. Mikelson. 1995. Distinctive African American names: An experimental, historical, and linguistic analysis of innovation. *American Sociological Review* 60, no. 6 (December) 928-946.
- Marshall, Paul, and Kelly Marshall. 2012. Tape-recorded interview by author. Hyde Park, UT. January 20.
- Means, Sean P. 2008. Culture Vulture: Parody blog truly "Blessed." *Salt Lake Tribune*. July 15.
- Mencken, H. L. 1936. *The American Language*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc.
- Nell, James, and Kassey Nell. 2012. Tape-recorded interview by author. Hyde Park, UT. January 18.
- Neuenschwander, Dennis B. 1999. Bridges and eternal keepsakes. *Ensign*, May. <http://www.lds.org/general-conference/1999/04/bridges-and-eternal-keepsakes?lang=eng&query=bridges+eternal+keepsakes> (accessed October 10, 2011).
- Norton, Don. Forthcoming. Composite Mormon given names. In *Names in Mormon Practice and Belief*, ed. Dallin Oaks, Paul Baltes, and William Eggington, 95-106. Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellin Press.
- Oaks, Dallin D. Forthcoming. Onomastics and Mormon belief. In *Names in Mormon practice and belief*, ed. Dallin Oaks, Paul Baltes, and William Eggington, 47-87. Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellin Press.
- Peery, LaVora. 2012. Tape-recorded interview by author. Logan, UT. January 23.

- The Pew Forum On Religion and Public Life. Mormons in America.
<http://www.pewforum.org/Christian/Mormon/mormons-in-america-family-life.aspx> (accessed January 14, 2012).
- Pharr, Pauline C. 1993. Onomastic divergence: A study of given-name trends among African Americans. *American Speech* 68, no. 4 (Winter): 400-409.
- Pyles, Thomas. 1947. Onomastic individualism in Oklahoma. *American Speech* 22, no. 4 (December): 257-264.
- . 1959. Bible belt onomastics or some curiosities of anti-pedobaptist nomenclature. *Journal of the American Name Society* 8, no. 2 (June): 84-100.
- Reichman, Matt. 2009. Seriously So Blogged: Blogger pokes fun at Mormon mommy blogs. *Provo Daily Herald*. March 13.
- Ricks, LaNae. 2012. Tape-recorded interview by author. Logan, UT. February 8.
- Robinson, Krista. 2012. Tape-recorded interview by author. Hyde Park, UT. February 2.
- Rosenthal, Joel T. 2005. Onomastics and its uses. *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 36, no. 1 (Summer): 57-62.
- Rossi, Alice S. 1965. Naming children in middle-class families. *American Sociological Association* 30, no. 4 (August): 499-513.
- Satran, Pamela Redmond. 2003. What's in a Name? Baby names may reflect Grace; nothing ordinary Will do. *Washington Times*. May 11.
- Senif, Clara J. 2006. LaKesha and KuShawn: A cultural linguistic approach to Afro-American onomastics. Master's thesis, University of Nevada.
- Siran, Jean-Louis. 1989. Names and proverbs among the Vute (Cameroon): Signification, meaning and value. *Journal of Folklore Research* 26, no. 3 (Sep.-Dec.): 207-227.
- Stewart, Mahonri. 2010. James Arrington. *Mormon Artist*. June.
- Syme, Daniel B., and Jo David. 1997. *The book of the Jewish life*. New York: UAHC Press.
- Washington Times. 2003. Names Reflect Cultural Origins. *The Washington Times*. May 13.
- White, Amy. 2012. Tape-recorded interview by author. Hyde Park, UT. January 26.

Zax, David. What's up with black names, anyway?

http://www.salon.com/2008/08/25/creative_black_names/ (accessed February 16, 2012).

APPENDICES

Appendix A.

Sample Questions Asked During Interviews

1. Tell me about your kids' names.
2. Why did you choose that name?
3. What was it about that name that appealed to you?
4. What made you decide to spell it that particular way?
5. Where did you grow up?
6. Growing up, how did you feel about your own name?
7. How did those feelings change?
8. How did you and your spouse decide on names? What was the process?
9. When you were thinking of names for your children, what did you want the name to mean to your child?
10. What do you think about the idea that names can transfer certain qualities or characteristics to the bearer of that name?
11. What do you think about the idea that names have power?
12. Before your baby was born, did you have a name picked out? Did you tell people that name? Why or why not? How did you feel about people's reactions?
13. Do you think Mormons name their children differently than anyone else? In what ways?
14. What, if any, impact would you say your beliefs had on your naming decisions?
15. What is it about Mormon culture and religion that lead parents to use certain names?

Appendix B
Data Collection Forms

Appendix C

Sample Interview Transcription

**DISTINCTIVE LDS PERSONAL NAMING PRACTICES THESIS
TRANSCRIPTION COVER SHEET**

Interviewee: Circe Dopp
Location of Interview: 769 East Oxford Drive, Kaysville, Utah (Circe's home)
Date of Interview: January 17, 2012
Interviewer: Jenny Mansfield
Recorded by: Jenny Mansfield
Recording Equipment: Digital recorder
Transcription Equipment: Microsoft Word
Transcribed by: Jenny Mansfield
Transcript Proofed by: Jenny Mansfield
Brief Description of Contents: Circe explains her children's names.
Reference: JM – Jenny Mansfield (interviewer)
CD – Circe Dopp (interviewee)
SD – Scott Dopp (Circe's husband)
GD – Golda Dopp (Circe's daughter)

Note: Interjections during pauses or transitions in dialogue such as “uh” and starts and stops in conversation are included in this transcription. All additions to transcript are noted with brackets.

TAPE TRANSCRIPTION

[00:00:00]

JM: This is Jenny Mansfield on January 17th talking to Circe Dopp and it is a little after seven thirty. Okay, Circe, if you—and it's Circe, right?

CD: Mmm-hmm. Right.

JM: I knew that one from mythology.

CD: Okay.

JM: That one I know how to pronounce. Um, tell me about your kids' names.

CD: So there's Golda, she's the oldest and she was named after my grandmother. Um, so when I was pregnant with her, I guess it just came down to if—if we were going to have one name and narrow it down to one name, it should have some significance. So we named her after my grandmother who I love. And, um, she told me that when she was named, probably around the turn of the century, it was her uncle that came back from a mission in France and said he'd heard the name Golda. It's not a French name [laughs], um, but that's where she told me that it came from. So.

JM: And what's her middle name?

CD: Cristene.

JM: Cristene.

CD: Which is the same as my middle name and the same as my mom's middle name. So it's just something my grandparents came up with for my mom. They named her Christene with a c-h, and then my parents changed it to a K for my name. So that my initials wouldn't be C. C. [Laughs]. They were afraid somebody would call me CiCi or something so they changed it to a K and then I didn't ever like that so I changed it a c for Golda, which makes no sense. It's not even, you know, a real spelling. If it were Cristina without a c-h, with just a c, that would make sense. Anyway. It's Golda Cristene.

JM: How funny.

CD: So—and then Ruby is...By the time we got to the second child, we just kind of liked having a family name so we named her after my other grandmother.

JM: Oh.

- CD: So her name's Ruby and then, um, since Cristene was from my side, we named her Ma—her middle name Marlene. And that's my husband's mom's name.
- JM: Hmm.
- CD: So Ruby another family name. Araceli is our third daughter and I just think Araceli is the most beautiful name I've ever heard.
- JM: It's really pretty.
- CD: Yeah. It's not a family name. I don't—it was—
- JM: I've never heard it before, though.
- CD: You haven't?
- JM: Uh-uh. Where did you hear it?
- CD: It's not common in English at all, but in Spanish, it's really common. It's like an old-fashioned name in Spanish.
- JM: Okay.
- CD: It's like Isabelle or something that's kind of—In English, those names have come back.
- JM: Just really traditional, pretty names.
- CD: Yeah. Yeah. So I know—I know—I know of a few women maybe in their fifties who are named Araceli, um, from like the Philippines or, um, from Spanish-speaking countries. And a common nickname for it is Celi, but we ended up calling her Ari.
- JM: Ari.
- CD: So I love the Ari and I love that, um—it's funny how it turned out because Golda might be a Hebrew name, I don't know. I've never really checked into whether it is. You probably know.
- JM: I've heard of it in the Hebrew context more than any other.
- CD: Okay, right. Fiddler on the Roof.
- JM: [Laughs]. Right.

- CD: And then Ari is kind of a Jewish name, but it's more of a boy's name.
- JM: Yeah, that's true.
- CD: So if you were to hear our family names out of context, you'd wonder if we were Jewish because the baby's name is Tziporah.
- JM: Really?
- CD: Yeah. And it wasn't really intentional, but I just think it's such a pretty name that, um, that's what we're going with.
- JM: And there's not a Jewish...history connection?
- CD: No.
- JM: Just liked it?
- CD: There is a whisper in my dad's side of the family with, I think, his maternal side that, um, they might have Jewish ancestry, but they haven't been able to trace it. So if there is, it's pretty far back, but I kind of...I'm a Judeophile.
- JM: Mmm.
- CD: It's an interesting, um, tradition. So Araceli and then Freestone, he's our fourth, and his, um, name is my husband's grandmother's maiden name.
- JM: Oh, I wondered.
- CD: So, we kind of...Yeah, when we named Golda, our first baby, we thought maybe her name should be Freestone to kind of draw from both grandmothers, both sides of our family, but we didn't do that so we always thought if we had a boy, his name would be Freestone.
- JM: How—.
- CD: His middle name is my husband's name.
- JM: Do you call him Freestone?
- CD: We thought we would call him Stone, maybe, because that sounded rugged.
[Laughs].
- JM: Yeah.

CD: But we never did and we still kind of don't. Sometimes we'll call him Stone Boy—

JM: [Laughs].

CD: —but when he was little we called him Free-Free. So it's weird how nicknames just kind of take on a life of their own. So we call him Free for short.

JM: How funny. Free.

CD: Yeah, and a lot of people were critical of that name.

JM: Did you pick it out way ahead of time?

CD: Mmm-hmm. Years ahead. Yeah.

JM: Right. Oh, you said with Golda. So...

CD: Yeah, so if Golda would've been a boy, it would've been—I think we were thinking maybe Golden or maybe Freestone.

[00:05:01]

JM: Hmm.

CD: So we had it picked out, we knew that was his name. We weren't wishy-washy about it, but people—have you ever heard of the Freestone peach?

JM: Mmm-hmm.

CD: Yeah...[laughs].

JM: [Laughs].

CD: [Unintelligible] thought they'd make fun of him, but apparently nobody knows there's such a thing as a Freestone peach. They don't care. So I think it's a really cool name. I like it.

JM: [Unintelligible] Has he—does he like his name?

CD: Yeah. He's never complained.

JM: Never?

- CD: No. So Xanthe. This is the interesting one because she's adopted from China.
- JM: Right.
- CD: So when we got her picture and everything, her name was Ai Yu. So it was a name that—it was assigned to her by the orphanage. And it doesn't work in English. Ai, a-i, is a common name in Chinese and Japanese. It means love. So it's—a lot of times it's part of another name like Aiko or something else. And so they assigned her the name Ai and then all the babies her age, um, had Yu as a middle name that denoted which orphanage it was, so...
- JM: That's depressing.
- CD: Yeah, and they called her Yu-Yu, which was really cute and we kind of wanted to incorporate Ai Yu, but it's just so ugly in English. You can't call your baby Ai. [Laughs].
- JM: Yeah. [Laughs].
- CD: So we abandoned that whole name. Just because it was just an assignment that she had as opposed to being, like, a token from her birth parents or something. Um, we named her Xanthe, which is a Greek name meaning golden-haired and she has, obviously, has black hair. [Laughs].
- JM: I got to meet her.
- CD: So it's the meaning of it—doesn't fit with who she is, really, unless you, you know, stretch it and say, "Well, gold is a really significant color in Chinese culture" or something, you know. [Laughs].
- JM: [Laughs].
- CD: But—and then we gave her the middle name Mary, which is the—our mom's, Scott's mom and my mom are both named Mary as their first name so Marlene was the middle name, Scott's mom's middle name. And then Mary is both of their first names so we thought Xanthe Mary, but we wanted to have something Chinese so we put Mei. So it's Xanthe Mary Mei and Mei can mean beautiful or little sister so we thought that was perfect.
- JM: That's cute.
- CD: Yeah. Xanthe Mary Mei. And then Ptolemy. It's embarrassing. But we—I read it in a magazine that some minor celebrity had named her baby Ptolemy.
- JM: Really?

- CD: And it starts with a P so my husband thought it was really cool so—I knew Ptolemy was something ancient Greek, Egyptian. I kind of had to do some research. [Laughs].
- JM: [Laughs]. Right.
- CD: So it's embarrassing. I guess the Ptolemaic rulers of Egypt were Cleopatra's line.
- JM: Hmm.
- CD: And there was another Ptolemy who was a Greek, um, astronomer. So it's kind of hard to go into when people ask you about his name because it's so unusual. It's like, do I go the astronomer? Or the movie star? [Laughs].
- JM: [Laughs]. Which one?
- CD: Cleopatra? So I—I just thought it was a really unique name that, um, was a little recognizable if you were a little educated in, like, classical Greek and Roman.
- JM: Araceli was the only one I didn't know how to pronounce reading them.
- CD: Okay.
- JM: That's the only in my head—it was Araceli [pronouncing the c with a ch sound].
- CD: So that's what it would be in Italian.
- JM: Yeah, that's—that's—
- CD: Yeah, it's an Italian name, too.
- JM: That's how I had it—that's the only one. But Ptolemy is easy.
- CD: Yeah, see, you'd probably heard of that, right?
- JM: I haven't heard of any babies, but I knew about the...philosopher?
- CD: Ah, okay.
- JM: And you said that there, uh, was some negative reception with Freestone? What about the other names? Did you tell people ahead of time? Did people...?
- CD: No. Well, with the first ones we didn't. We didn't tell anyone Golda. My grandma was really old at the time. She was ninety. And—just a sec. [Addresses her

children who were hiding in the room]. Ari, you can't be whispering because we can hear you on our recording. Who are you talking to?.....Freestone? [Laughs].

JM: [Laughs].

CD: So, okay, be really quiet or go somewhere else. [Directs her attention back to the interviewer]. So, um, with Golda we kept it a secret because it was our first baby and we just thought we wanted to torture people. [Laughs].

JM: Yeah. [Laughs].

CD: So we wanted to tell my grandma first and she was there when the baby was born and she'd had a stroke so she couldn't talk very well. So we said, "Her name's Golda." And she said, "Nooooo!"

JM: [Laughs].

CD: And threw up her hands and was laughing and she was really excited. So we called her—then my grandma, my poor Grandma, had to be Big Golda. [Laughs].

JM: [Laughs].

CD: The baby, Golda had to be Little Golda. Then I had two brothers come home from LDS missions in Brazil and they called her Goldiña so I guess that's just a diminutive that they picked up from Portuguese. So we had Big Golda and Goldiña. Um, and people—I mean it's...an unusual name, for sure, but I don't think once we had named her, people didn't dare say, "That's the most hideous name I've ever heard" or anything. And Ruby is fairly common now. You hear it quite a bit. It's one of those old-fashioned names that came back. So—but when we named her Ruby, I think everyone was expecting us to name her Mary. People were guessing that that's what we'd do. And when we said Ruby Marlene I remember Scott's mom said, "Ruby Marlene?!" [Laughs].

[00:10:29]

JM: [Laughs].

CD: Are—like, are you kidding?! Ruby?! But that one's not a shocker. She has a girl her age named Ruby Jane and they've always been in the same class.

JM: How funny.

CD: So there's always been two. Yeah.

JM: That's really funny. I know a lot of baby Rubys, but I don't know...

- CD: Oh, okay, see? It's gaining popularity. It's because of us.
- JM: You guys started the trend.
- CD: Yup.
- JM: When you name, did you and Scott do it together? Or was it more, alright let's take turns here?
- CD: We did it together, definitely. Um, he's kind of the one that likes the unique names. He likes Xanthe because it starts with an X. So that was his deal. I kind of—I had a girl in my ballet class growing up named Xanthe and I just happened to mention it to him. There was this girl with this weird name. And he really liked it.
- JM: Perfect. Perfect.
- CD: So I figured since adopting was my idea...[laughs]
- JM: [Laughs].
- CD: We could go with a name that was his idea.
- SD: [Walking through the room] Everything is her idea. [Laughs]. I'm just along for the ride.
- CD: [Laughs]. Yeah. Um, so, we kind of went with that one because it was one—a name he really liked. Um, we're having a little bit of a debate on the baby's middle name, for the—for Tziporah because I originally wanted to name her Elizabeth. It's my favorite name.
- JM: It's a pretty name.
- CD: It's gorgeous, but it's so common.
- JM: Yeah.
- CD: It's like—what is it, like top one hundred names all the time? Every year?
- JM: Like, since forever. [Laughs].
- CD: Right. [Laughs]. So it just doesn't fit with the other kids. My friends were kind of like, "Oh, Elizabeth? Really?" So I don't know if I could go that—I don't know if I could name her Elizabeth just because of how common it is. So we—anyway,

we picked Tziporah, but I still wanted Elizabeth to be the middle name. But we have one more grandmother [Laughs].

JM: To honor? [Laughs].

CD: Yeah, and her name was Delilah.

JM: Oh. That's a nice name.

CD: So he wants Delilah to be the middle name. And we had thought about that for a first name for some of our kids, too, but there's not a good nickname.

JM: No, no one wants to be Deli.

CD: Exactly! [Laughs].

JM: [Laughs].

CD: That's what I thought.

JM: Delilah is pretty, but you have to say Delilah.

CD: Yeah, then you have to say the whole thing. And now I have a niece named Lilah.

JM: Oh.

CD: So they shortened it.

JM: And is this maybe the last...?

CD: This baby?

JM: Yes.

CD: This is the last one.

JM: So it's the last chance for names.

CD: Yes. So she might have, like, six middle names. [Laughs].

JM: [Laughs]. None of the others—So you—you want them to match? When you named them, you tried to get them to kind of...?

CD: Yeah, I think you have to. You automatically think of it like that, like how it flows with the other kids' names. In fact, my sister-in-law, right in the back of us,

just had a baby and her names are Esme and Abram and the baby's name is Rolene. The first thing I did was think, "Esme, Abram, and Rolene." The poor third child. You never think of her on her own. [Laughs].

JM: [Laughs].

CD: So it's Golda, Ruby, Araceli. So when we named her Araceli, I thought Araceli could make Golda and Ruby more unique or it could make them less unique. If it were Mary, it would be Golda, Ruby, and Mary.

JM: Yeah.

CD: And then it would cause the whole group to just kind of be a little bit more tame.

JM: Araceli. It's a pretty name. I really like Araceli.

CD: I like it.

JM: That's—and you haven't had any second thoughts?

CD: No...

JM: My aunt, it took her until her babies were about a year before she decided not to change their names.

CD: [Laughs].

JM: So.

CD: So she just would settle on one and then think, "Ugh...?"

JM: She went between Jeffery, Jefferson, Jackson, up until they were a year and half, I think, and then said, "All right, we're going to leave it at this." So.

CD: It's hard to narrow it down.

JM: Yeah.

CD: Because then the names you don't choose, you wonder about. Maybe that one would have worked.

JM: So where you've got such a strong history of family names...what is it that you hoped to convey to Golda by naming her Golda?

CD: Um, how much I love my grandmother Golda. Because she was one of my favorite people. And I thought she was worth emulating so I hoped to make that connection between Golda because she was five when Big Golda died so she doesn't remember a lot about her. Plus she didn't talk very well so they didn't have conversations.

JM: Right.

CD: But we saw her a lot. She lived right up the street. So we probably saw her every day. So they have a bond, but I think they had more of a bond because of the name. So.

[00:15:10]

JM: [unintelligible]

CD: I guess that's where I was going with it. I don't know.

JM: Yeah. Would you say that your cultural tradition had any sort of influence in it as far as growing up in Utah—I don't know if you—Where did you grow up?

CD: Yeah, I grew up in Utah.

JM: Growing up in Utah? Being LDS?

CD: Yeah.

JM: Did that have any—Do you feel like that had any influence on the names that you chose?

CD: Hmm. I wonder. I don't know because I didn't choose LDS names. I mean, there are LDS names, you know. [Laughs].

JM: Right. [Laughs].

CD: And I don't think I chose any of them. But I wonder if family names are— [addressing her children] hey, Free, why don't you go somewhere else? Ari, you, too. Go in a different room. Okay. You're ruining my interview. See you. No peeking. [Laughs]. [Addresses the interviewer] So I don't know. That's a tough question. I don't know the answer to it.

JM: What would you—When I say Mormon names, what do you think of?

CD: Well, I think first of all of Book of Mormon names like Nephi or Moroni or things like that. But then there's also the cultural ones. It seems like, um, when Golda

was born, Madison was such a regional name right here and we were in Idaho at the time.

JM: Oh.

CD: So every baby was named Madison. Like, literally.

JM: Yup.

CD: Everyone had to have one. And then kind of everyone had to have a Kayla or a McKayla. The m-c names were big. So it was almost like there was a pattern to...you have to have one of these and one of these and then...[Laughs].

JM: [Laughs]. And then have this one.

CD: Jarom. Names like that.

JM: Jarom. I hadn't thought of that one. That's a good one.

CD: [Addressing her daughter]. Golda, do you know of any, like, Mormon names?

GD: Madison.

CD: [Laughs]. Yeah.

JM: [Laughs]. Yeah. That's exactly what your mom said.

CD: Madi. And it's a really cute name.

JM: Right, but it is a very popular, particularly among...

GD: And Megan.

CD: Megan. Golda, can you tell Daddy to get Ari and Freestone out of there?

GD: Do you know where my other slipper is?

CD: What?

GD: Do you know where my other slipper is?

CD: No.

GD: Or my straightener?

- CD: No.
- JM: And all of your kids like their names? Have they ever expressed...?
- CD: Um, yeah, they all do, except for Ari.
- JM: Really?
- CD: She wants to be something else.
- JM: Really?
- CD: Yeah. And it's interesting. She's the one with the nickname. She always tells people her name's Ari, she never uses Araceli.
- JM: Really?
- CD: Yeah, but then she wants it to be something completely different.
- JM: Does that name change?
- CD: Mmm-hmm.
- JM: What she currently wants?
- CD: Yeah, but she's also the most dramatic. She's also the one that I specifically told that she had to go somewhere else for this interview and the one that's right there. [Laughs].
- JM: [Laughs]. All the time.
- CD: Yeah.
- JM: [unintelligible] Personality.
- CD: Yeah, she's intense. So I think Araceli fits her. Mary would've just been not enough of a name for her. [Laughs].
- JM: [Laughs]. Too common for her.
- CD: She needed at least two names for one thing. A nickname and a real name.
- JM: Do you think names can influence who your children grow up to be?
- CD: Yeah. I do. [Addressing her daughter] Don't you?

- GD: What?
- CD: Think your name has influenced who you are?
- GD: Yeah...
- JM: Grandma Golda?
- GD: Yeah...[Laughs].
- JM: Do you know much about her?
- GD: Yeah, a little bit. But I don't really—I only remember that we went to, like, the store to buy her food that she ate through a tube.
- JM: Oh.
- CD: [Addressing the interviewer] I know, it's sad how much time we spent with her and now they don't remember anything.
- JM: Yeah.
- CD: [Addressing her daughter] Close that door quietly—
- GD: She had red hair.
- CD: [Addressing the interviewer] And she had red hair. They both have the same color hair.
- JM: Oh, that's cool.
- CD: I know. And then Ruby and my grandma Ruby have the same color hair, too. It's a light blonde, like a strawberry blonde.
- JM: That's really cool.
- CD: So I feel like we picked the right names. I think, because I have weird name, too, an unusual name, so I don't know if it's because of my name or, but I always felt a little bit unusual.
- JM: Hmm.
- CD: And I don't know if my name would've been Jenny, [laughs] if I would've just not felt that way? Or...

JM: Right.

CD: Because there were a lot of Jennys my age.

JM: There—I've been lucky to never have them in the same class, but there have always been a lot in the grade above me and the grade below me.

CD: Really?

JM: I've been very lucky never to have to be, you know, Jenny K.

CD: Right.

JM: Or Jenny whatever. I've been really lucky, but there are a lot.

CD: Yeah. Well you're much younger than I am so that's another name that's always popular.

JM: It's always popular.

CD: It's a great name, though. I love it.

JM: It's fine. Like, I don't mind it. But it's funny because in my family we've got—my brothers are Michael and Benjamin and me, and then my little sister is Denali.

CD: Yeah, so she's unusual. [Laughs].

JM: [Laughs]. So it's funny to see where you guys all kind of have—you know, you've kind of maintained that tradition of it being a different name, kind of a unique name.

[00:20:04]

CD: Yeah.

JM: In my family, it was this total shift with the baby where—

CD: Right

JM: --average, average, average. Denali.

CD: So why did your mom do that?

JM: Um, because at the time—my stepdad is a big hiker.

CD: Hmm.

JM: And my mom wanted to name the baby Katherine, [laughs] which would fit with all of us.

CD: [Laughs]. Okay, yeah, that would fit.

JM: But my stepdad wanted Denali. Bridger or Denali.

CD: Was he the only dad? Was that his only child? Is he your—?

JM: Yeah, it was his only child.

CD: Oh, okay.

JM: Because our dad, we all had a different dad, and I guess he didn't express any sort of opinion when it came to naming. [Laughs]. So my mom just got to do it.

CD: [Laughs].

JM: You talk about Ptolemy. I'm named after a character on my mom's soap opera that she watched. Jennifer Rose was the character.

CD: See? That's just something—the cross you have to bear.

JM: Yeah. [Laughs].

CD: [Laughs].

JM: And it's just well, okay. She didn't tell me that until I was older.

CD: Oh.

JM: But, yeah, it's interesting.

GD: I have a friend named Denaly [pronounced with a short a] and everyone says Denali [pronounced with an ah].

JM: Her name is Denaly?

GD: Mmm-hmm.

JM: And people—

CD: It's the same name.

JM: Yeah.

GD: Yeah.

JM: And they pronounce Denali's Denaly and she hates it.

CD: Oh really?

JM: "It's Denali!" Denaly. Same thing, I think.

CD: That's funny. Yeah. We have friends that have four kids and they're all named after mountain peaks.

JM: Really?

CD: Yeah, they've got McKinley and, um—[addressing her husband] See you.

SD: [Passing through the room] See you.

JM: [Addressing Circe's husband]. Nice to meet you.

SD: Yeah, good to meet you. [Addressing Circe] Hey, I can't remember. What time is Ruby done?

CD: [Addressing her husband] 9:00.

GD: Is one named Sierra?

CD: [Addressing her husband] Freestone's done at quarter to. [Addressing the interviewer] Oh, yeah, Sierra, McKinley, um...

JM: Rainier?

GD: Everest.

CD: Everest.

JM: Everest?

CD: That's obvious.

JM: Really?

- CD: Why couldn't I remember Everest? They call him Evy. And then there's one more. Can't remember... Anyway, but the hiking theme or whatever. [Laughs].
- JM: So how did Scott—I should've asked him while he was here—how did he feel about his name growing up? With—his name's Scott...
- CD: Yeah, I don't think he had any thoughts about it...
- JM: At all?
- CD: Whatsoever.
- JM: And then naming these kids he never thought, "Oh wait! They're going to be the only one."
- CD: Yeah, I think he really likes the unique, but he thinks a lot about, um, if he—if it reminds him of anything negative or if there's going to be a nickname attached to it and stuff.
- JM: How to make fun of it kind of thing?
- CD: Yeah, yeah. Definitely.
- JM: That's funny. And what are your siblings' names?
- CD: Well, there's Trajan, who was a Roman emperor.
- JM: Wow.
- CD: And then there's Joshua—[Laughs].
- GD: [Laughs].
- JM: [Laughs].
- CD: —who there were no Joshuas that—until 1975.
- JM: Wow.
- CD: So my parents were debating between Joshua and Jason because my dad's really into Greek mythology and Jason and the Argonauts appealed to him.
- JM: Oh.

- CD: But Jason was a really common name so they went with Joshua. And every boy in our neighborhood was named Joshua. [Laughs].
- JM: [Laughs].
- CD: So they've always regretted that. And my dad also wanted his initials to be JFK.
- JM: That's cool.
- CD: He's a huge Kennedy fan. So they were looking for a j name because my dad's name—hey, get this! So we come from a long line of weird names. [Laughs].
- JM: [Laughs].
- CD: But my dad's name is Felshaw.
- JM: Felshaw?
- CD: Felshaw.
- JM: How do you spell that?
- CD: F-e-l-s-h-a-w. And that is—My dad's real name—Well, okay, if we go back a few generations, it's my great-great-grandfather was Harvey William and then his son was William Harvey and then my dad's name was going to be William Harvey also, but, um, an aunt who never had any kids asked them to throw her name in there. Felshaw. It was her last name.
- JM: Hmm.
- CD: So she didn't want the name to die out so she said, "Why don't you just throw that in there?" So they named him William Harvey Felshaw, thinking they'd just hide it in the middle. And then when he was in second grade, he told everyone he was going by Felshaw. And he always has.
- JM: How funny.
- CD: So anyway.
- GD: We call him Bill.
- CD: Yeah, but you [addressing her daughter]...should be quiet. [Laughs].
- JM: [Laughs].

- GD: [Laughs].
- CD: You're too far away from the speaker. [Addressing the interviewer] Yeah, they call him Bill now because he thought the kids would have too hard of a problem calling him Felshaw.
- JM: Felshaw.
- CD: He didn't want to be Grandpa so he went back to Bill.
- JM: Really?
- CD: Which is what I called my grandfather because his actual name was William. [Laughs].
- JM: Why no Grandpa?
- CD: They just didn't ever want to be Grandma and Grandpa.
- JM: Huh.
- CD: They just thought it was too old.
- JM: Laugh. So Bill keeps them young?
- CD: Yeah. So his name is Bill now, but anyway. So Felshaw. My brother's name is Joshua Felshaw King, but they were always thinking of things they could change it to. [Laughs].
- JM: How funny.
- CD: They'd say, "Josh, do you want to be called... whatever? Should we change your name to this?" [Laughs].
- JM: [Laughs].
- CD: But he's always been really happy with his name.
- JM: Hmm.
- CD: Because he's not the kind of person that would appreciate a unique name, I don't think.
- JM: Not like you.

CD: Going back to your question about whether your name impacts you. Because my brother Trajan is really unique and he likes being a little off, a little weird, and just kind of, you know, kind of more unique. And then Joshua has tons of friends. He was always Mr... Popular, um, friend to everybody, just your basic every man. [Laughs].

[00:25:08]

JM: [Laughs]. So Joshua it is.

CD: And I think he would've really been freaked out about having a weird name so maybe it worked out.

JM: And you said you liked it. You liked growing up with a different name?

CD: Yeah. I did.

JM: Did people know how to spell it and pronounce it?

CD: No.

JM: Ever?

CD: It was always when they were calling role, if there was a pause, then I would know it was me. [Laughs].

JM: [Laughs]. You're up.

CD: Yeah, and it's still like that with all my kids at the doctor's office. If they come out with their chart and they're like, "Um....." And then I know they're going to try to say one of my kids' names. [Laughs].

JM: [Laughs]. Like I said, though, I was surprised. Yours were all very pronounceable.

CD: Yeah.

JM: Like, I mean, very phonetic and very—

CD: Well, you said Araceli was hard. Because that's a really phonetic—

JM: Yeah, Araceli, that's the only one I did wrong.

CD: Yeah.

JM: But Araceli.

CD: See, if you were speaking Spanish—

JM: Yeah.

CD: —It's so phonetic anyway, it would make sense.

JM: Araceli. And that one was just barely. The rest of them are very easy.

CD: Okay. See? I know!

JM: Even Ptolemy. And Tziporah. Because it's t-z, right?

CD: Mmm-hmm.

JM: Yeah, Tziporah.

CD: A lot of people will say Puh-tolemy or they'll just see the p-t and then they just won't know what do to. [Laughs].

JM: [Laughs].

CD: It's p as in pterodactyl. [Laughs].

JM: [Laughs]. That's funny...Do you call Ptolemy Ptolemy?

CD: Well, we call him Tolly.

JM: Tolly. That's cute.

CD: Mmm-hmm.

JM: That's really cute.

CD: Yeah.

JM: And there's no—you just like—like you said, you're a Judeophile? There's no Jewish connection other than your—

CD: Mmm-mmm.

JM: —fondness?

CD: No, I don't know why.

JM: Hmm.

CD: So maybe there is a Jewish connection, I just don't know what it is.

JM: You just like it.

CD: But there's a connection between Golda and Tziporah because Golda Meir, the prime minister of Israel, had a daughter named Tziporah.

JM: That's cool.

CD: Golda doesn't like the name Tziporah.

JM: [Addressing Circe's daughter] Really? What would you name the baby?

GD: Elizabeth.

JM: Elizabeth? Even though Elizabeth would have to be sister to Araceli and Golda and Ruby and Xanthe?

GD: Yeah. [Laugh].

JM: That'd be hard for little Elizabeth.

GD: We'd call her Zibby.

CD: Yeah, we—we picked a cute nickname for Elizabeth. It was going to be Zibby.

JM: That's cute.

CD: I know! It would've been cute.

JM: And that's a little different.

CD: Yeah.

JM: More in keeping with the rest of them.

CD: Right. I love the nickname Tibby, too. My best friend's grandmother's named Elizabeth and they called her Tibby so you can't—we can't use that. Nobody else can use it because it's Tibby. There's already one.

JM: Well, that's hard. Um. Where did Scott grow up?

CD: Here in Kaysville.

JM: Here in Kaysville?

CD: Mmm-hmm.

JM: And what is—does his family—are they all very common—

CD: Yeah.

JM: —names?

CD: They're—they have Michelle, Scott, Ryan, Jeremy, Jeffery and Nicky. Nicole.

JM: So just the—

CD: Just your, like—probably just take the most common name of that year [laughs] and—

JM: [Laughs]. Plug it in? It's right there.

CD: Yeah. In fact, with Jeremy, it was like this big to do: Is Jeremy too out there?

JM: Jeremy?

CD: I know! It's like a totally normal name.

JM: How funny.

CD: Yeah, but that was big for them. That was going out on a limb.

JM: Huh. Is there anything else that you would like to say about their names?

CD: About our kids' names?

JM: Yeah.

CD: Hmm. I feel like, when you're naming your child—this is totally biased, this is just me and my opinion—I feel like if you name them something common, this is why I had a problem with Elizabeth, if you name them something everyone else has already thought of, then it just, you don't fe—love them as much or something, you don't feel like they're as important. I know that's not true.

JM: But something about the connection...

CD: Yeah.

JM: Where if it's a name that you've come up with that means a lot—meaningful names are a more meaningful connection?

CD: Right. And I guess it's not just if it's a family name or something, but if it's a name that we feel an attachment to or that we've thought of—thought about a lot.

JM: That you've put a lot of effort into.

CD: Yeah.

JM: A lot of love into. Then that goes to your child?

CD: Mmm... Yeah. It just reflects your feelings about the child. I don't know if they—if they're getting any of that. They're not. But I am. I just want it to be—I guess I just want it to be totally who I am. So I guess their names are kind of a reflection of who we are.

JM: [Addressing Golda(to Golda) Do you like your name?

CD: Yeah. I really like it.

JM: And do you like that you're the only one?

CD: Mmm-hmm. Yeah, that's really nice because then everyone remembers it because it's different.

JM: True. That's true.

CD: That's true.

JM: People always remember your name. I didn't think about that.

CD: That is true. Because I teach ballet so I have, you know, sixty students at a time every year. And the ones I can never remember are like, Lauren, because there's always more than one. And Hannah.

[00:30:01]

JM: Mmm.

CD: And those are beautiful names, but there's always more than one Hannah and it—I can't remember their names sometimes because they're not the only one.

- JM: There are too many.
- CD: So I don't know, maybe that's why I feel like giving them unique names is because when I go down the roll and I see something like Paris or some name that none of the other kids are going to have, then I will automatically, immediately remember that student because that's just an easy one. Like, okay, I have that one down. Now what about all the other kids who have these names that are more traditional. Then I have to kind of place them. Like if it's a Katherine, hmm, do they call her Kate? Or...
- JM: Needs some physical characteristic.
- CD: Who is she? Needs something else attached to her that will make her unique.
- JM: Do you think naming—would you agree that naming is an important tradition in the LDS Church in general? In the doctrine, in the—Do you feel like naming is kind of a big deal?
- CD: I think it is a big deal. And the reason I say that is because of the baby blessing where they give her a name and a blessing. So, you always hear stories. My husband always says, “You can pick whatever name you want, but I give her the blessing.” [Laughs].
- JM: [Laughs].
- CD: As if, like that is...
- JM: The final...
- CD: Yes, but I think people really believe that it is. In fact, my friend's grandmother, Tibby, that's how she got her name. And that's what really happened. I think her parents had something else picked out for her or weren't sure or something. This was back a hundred years ago. I guess some church official/relative/bishop or something just took her and gave her her baby blessing and named her Elizabeth. And then it was almost like, “Well, there's nothing we can do. I guess that's just her name.” [Laughs].
- JM: [Laughs]. That's the final word.
- CD: So, yeah, I think there is kind of a religious significance, um, like it's almost part of that ordinance.
- JM: Hmm.
- CD: What do you think? Are you studying this?

- JM: It's kind of what I'm looking at. Because Mormon names are—I'm trying to identify what it is that makes Mormons get—generally give their kids more unique names and not just the Mormon names because that's a whole different thing.
- CD: Right.
- JM: But just, in general, they give their children meaningful, unique names.
- CD: Yeah.
- JM: A lot.
- CD: Huh.
- JM: And I don't know if statistically, that's entirely true.
- CD: Uh-huh.
- JM: Or if it's just a matter of you know, you hear the stories and the jokes about Mormon names and you hear about all these cases—
- CD: Right.
- JM: --And so it's kind of just trying to figure out what it is.
- CD: Oh, okay. Interesting.
- JM: And then what it is about Mormon culture and Mormon doctrine, even, that make it that way.
- CD: Yeah. That's an interesting thesis. Yeah, I wonder what it is. My dad's always saying, "Use a family name." He'll go back in the genealogy. He found a couple of Elizabeths, everyone has them I'm sure.
- JM: [Laughs]. To justify it.
- CD: Yeah. I don't know if it's maybe, um, our focus on genealogy or family ties.
- JM: That's a good think—I hadn't thought of that yet.
- CD: But then you've got the LaMonts [Laughs]. and the
- JM: [Laughs]. Mmm-hmm.

CD: Names like that and I don't know where those come from.

JM: I don't either, honestly. I've got a couple set up to interview

CD: Oh, okay.

JM: But I haven't talk to any yet. So I'm curious about that myself because I don't know. Those aren't as easily traceable.

CD: Huh. Interesting.

JM: And I honestly did kind of assume that you guys had like a Jewish Greek thing going.

CD: Oh really? [Laughs].

JM: [Laughs]. Yeah.

CD: It's just an odd combination. You don't get a lot of Jewish Greeks. [Laughs].

JM: No. [Laughs]. I wasn't quite sure because there's...

CD: The Greek thing was an accident, too, really because my name's Greek and then Xanthe.

JM: Yeah.

CD: We didn't pick that because it's a Greek name.

JM: You just did.

CD: And Ptolemy, too.

JM: How funny.

CD: Our guitar teacher, Ruby's guitar teacher, said the same thing, "Oh, you're going with another Greek name?" [Laughs].

JM: [Laughs]. Not on purpose.

CD: I guess so.

JM: Funny.

CD: No Greek heritage either.

JM: No?

CD: So I don't know. If we were to stick with our ethnic heritage I guess we'd have just, um, English names or Dutch names. Dutch names are hard to spell in English.

JM: Yeah.

CD: All the J's and the double A's. [Laughs].

JM: [Laughs]. No one could pronounce those either.

CD: Ugh, no. No. Although I did, um, my grandfather had a sister named Jakoba who died when she was a baby and I've always felt like I wanted to name somebody Jakoba, but, um, Jakob was too common.

JM: Mmm. Yeah.

CD: So I guess I felt the connection to that name, but...

JM: Haven't used it?

CD: It doesn't work.

JM: Hmm.

CD: So.

JM: Well, thank you for your time.

CD: You're welcome.

JM: And this concludes our interview with Circe.

[00:34:33]

Appendix D
Sample Fieldnotes

Fieldnotes: LaNae Ricks
February 8, 2012

When I arrived at LaNae's home, she invited me in and then sat as far away from me as possible while still remaining in the same room. We sat in the very front room. She was polite from the beginning, but rather hesitant. This was the first time we had met one another. Once I gave her a thorough explanation of what I wanted from her, she seemed friendlier. In fact, she was excited and launched right into names the minute I gave her the forms and before I could turn the recorder on. I asked her to repeat most of what she said again once the recorder was on, which she seemed happy to do. Before I started recording, she asked me what names I liked. She warmed up considerably when I told her some of my favorite non-traditional names. I imagine it helped that one of them is in a song.

A little while into the interview, LaNae left to go attend to the children and when she came back, she sat right next to me on the couch. The longer we talked, the friendlier she became. She also became very touchy the longer the interview went on. She patted my leg and touched my arm for emphasis, particularly towards the end.

LaNae was dressed in jeans, a blouse, and a cardigan and was wearing tennis shoes, even though we were inside at her home. Her house was obviously in the process of major renovations, which she explained were never meant to have taken so long to finish. She talked about what the plan was when she and her husband first bought the house and how nothing has gone according to plan. She said the house was never meant to house the family of seven it currently did.

Her daughter (age 3) and her daughter's friend (age 2) played around us most of the time, despite LaNae's best efforts to get them to entertain themselves. It did make me uncomfortable when her daughter locked her friend in the bathroom and LaNae did not see a problem with that, even when the friend started knocking on the door and trying to get out. LaNae did unlock the door and help her out after a couple of minutes.

LaNae repeatedly told me she dislikes "traditional." She did not use the word "unique" very often, but she told me multiple times that she likes to and wants to be different and she does not like to be traditional. She talked as though there is some tension with her in-laws because they are "very traditional." When I asked about Mormon names being different she said something along the lines of maybe, but that she would not know because she is not "traditional."

She talked about motherhood as a battle that starts with a name and never stops.

She said at first that she loves names that are in songs. On record, she sang a couple. She also spoke about how the most important thing about a name is the feeling you get about it. She emphasized this feeling frequently and said it is important to have the right feeling

about a name and feel as though it is the right name for your child. Towards the end of the interview, she had opened up to me so I revisited the idea of a certain feeling. I hesitated to put words in her mouth, but I asked her if the feeling she described was the Holy Ghost. She became visibly uncomfortable and looked at the tape recorder before asking if that was something we could talk about on tape. I assured her that it was fine and then she told me that yes, the feeling she meant was the witness of the Holy Ghost. She said that the Holy Ghost will guide you to the right name for your children and that feeling the confirmation from the Holy Ghost was the most important thing when choosing a name. It seemed as though once she knew it was okay to talk about religious things, she had stories to share. She told me about visiting the temple when she was only a couple months pregnant with Kimbal and felt the Holy Ghost tell her that it was a boy.

She was very open and emotional. She thoughtfully considered my questions. It was not difficult to get her to speak, but the interview definitely deviated from names more than once. She talked about her sisters who died, the difficulties of having so many children so close together, and the major health problems she faced after having one of her children.

LaNae spoke very reverently when she talked about President Kimball and how much she loved him as a child. She had always wanted to name a son Kimball and used the word “lucky” when she said her husband also liked it, even though he insisted on changing the spelling to Kimbal.