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CHILDREN'S FOLKLORE REVIEW

EDITOR: ELIZABETH TUCKER

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Cover photo: A girl enjoying piano practice. Photograph by Brant Ellsworth.

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FROM THE EDITOR

ELIZABETH TUCKER

This thirty-fifth volume of *Children's Folklore Review* is a special issue devoted to the subject of Mormon children's folklore. I am delighted that we can publish a special issue on this important subject and hope that it will encourage further fieldwork and archival research.

This volume includes two essays that have won the William Wells Newell Prize. Jared S. Rife's "Playing with the Sacred: LDS Children's Games for Boredom and Entertainment" won the Newell Prize in 2012, and Brant W. Ellsworth's "Playing for Change: The Performative Functions of Children's Piano Play" is one of two winners of the Newell Prize in 2013. The other Newell Prize-winning essay, Semontee Mitra's "'Children Have Their Own World of Being': An Ethnography on Children's Activities on the Day of *Saraswati Puja*," will be published in the fall of 2014. Congratulations to all three winners!

I want to thank Tom Mould very much for writing a preface for this special issue. His preface puts the three articles in the context of previous scholarship and helps us understand the richness and depth of Mormon children's folklore.

All back issues of *Children's Folklore Review* except the most recent one are available on the Internet on Indiana University's Scholar Works Web site. It is great to know that the research published by our journal is accessible to anyone who has a computer.

I want to thank the Dean's Office at Harpur College of Binghamton University, which generously supports *Children's Folklore Review*. I am also very grateful to Kathy Buchta for her excellent work on layout/design and to Sheridan Press for its fine printing and mailing service.

Submissions and comments are always welcome. Please feel free to contact me any time: ltucker@binghamton.edu. Thank you very much for your support of *Children's Folklore Review*.

PREFACE FOR SPECIAL ISSUE OF *CHILDREN'S FOLKLORE REVIEW*: MORMON CHILDREN'S FOLKLORE

TOM MOULD

This special issue on the study of children's folklore among Latter-day Saints signifies an important contribution to the study of Mormon folklore. It is from this perspective—Mormon folklore rather than children's folklore—that I first approached these papers when I served as a discussant at the annual meeting of the American Folklore Society in New Orleans in 2012 when Brant Ellsworth, Spencer Green and Jared Rife first presented their work. It is with that same lens that I introduce their articles here.

The study of Mormon folklore has been fairly consistent over time but inconsistent in its attention to certain topics, genres and groups. The supernatural has received more attention than the mundane, oral genres more than customary or material, and white U.S. westerners more than non-white, international or east of the Mississippi Mormons. In terms of the most commonly studied folklore genres, legends have dominated, with The Three Nephites and J. Golden Kimball serving as the poster children of LDS folklore. I use that cliché intentionally if ironically. Neither the Three Nephites nor J. Golden Kimball are ever depicted as children. And a survey of the verbal, material and customary lore of Latter-day Saints reveals a similar vacuum when it comes to children.

To be fair, J. Golden Kimball could be accused of treating many of his fellow Saints as children in his frequent chastising, and occasionally, he unleashed his wrath on young as well as old, as when he was discussing the worth of an individual and turned his attention to his son: "Kimball said that he had a son—the finest son in the world—really a marvel—and that he wouldn't take a million dollars for him. And, he added, he wouldn't give ten cents for another like him" (Eliason 2007, 114). In fact, his critiques regularly treated youth and adult indistinguishably, as in the story Boyd K. Packer related in his book *Teach Ye Diligently*: "The story is told that someone stopped Elder J. Golden Kimball on the street on one occasion. There had been a little difficulty in Elder Kimball's family that had become publicly known, and whoever it was who stopped him, no doubt with a mind to injure, said, 'Brother Kimball, I understand you're having some problems with one of your children.' His answer was, 'Yes, and the Lord is having some problems with some of his, too'" (1975, 287).

In this story, J. Golden Kimball suggests that the category of children is dynamic and contextually defined, a reminder that defining children, and children's folklore is not as easy as it may first appear (Sutton-Smith 1999, 3). More obviously, but in some ways more interestingly, Kimball also references common imagery of mortals as God's children, an image understood as literal rather than metaphoric in Mormonism. It is this constellation of beliefs in a pre-mortal life, a god of flesh and blood, and spirit children waiting to become mortal in order to achieve the status of gods themselves that has, perhaps not surprisingly, received significant scholarly attention from folklorists, providing grist for some of the few

studies of Mormon folklore that address children explicitly. Consider, for example, the study of spirit children narratives, stories that describe revelatory dreams about unborn children (see Brady 1987, Mitchell 2004, and Mould 2011, 268-79). All of these studies have examined the impact of the experience and the subsequent narratives on the adults involved. Importantly, these studies also address how children are viewed by both narrator and audience. Accordingly, we are afforded a glimpse of children through folklore, if not of the folklore of children.

It is within this line of inquiry—children as a topic in folklore rather than children as producers, consumers and performers of folklore—that Spencer Green situates his study of the Wise Child in the LDS church discourse. Green's work goes one step further towards traditional folklore analysis, however, by considering children not only as a concept within LDS theology, personal belief and public performance, but also as a specific motif found in folk traditions around the globe. How, Green asks, might our understanding of the widespread motif of the Wise Child (J120) as it appears in official Mormon discourse inform our understanding of Mormon worldview? His answer sheds light on how children are viewed and used in religious discourse in ways that highlight paradoxes in church hierarchies.

Where Green follows LDS scholarship conventions but diverges from those of most children's folklore scholarship, Rife and Ellsworth do the reverse, bringing long overdue attention to younger members of the LDS faith by examining the folk traditions and performances of children. The lack of attention to the folklore of children is ironic since theologically, doctrinally and ideologically, children are such a central part of LDS religion and culture. Further, children are incorporated into church services and service at a very early age. Many young children bear their testimonies during Fast and Testimony meetings long before the still young age of eight, the "age of awareness" among Latter-day Saints when children are assumed to be mature and competent enough to make at least one choice of their own free will: the choice to be baptized. Not all children born into the covenant—that is, born of Mormon parents whose marriage has been sealed at the temple and raised in the church—make this choice at age eight, but many do. By age twelve, young men are typically ordained into the Aaronic priesthood and help serve the sacrament, and by eighteen, into the Melchizedek priesthood, having the full powers and duties of adult men in the church conferred upon them. Young women cannot hold the priesthood, but they move through the ranks of young women's organizations until at eighteen, they too join the ranks of full adult members of the church by becoming members of the Relief Society. In other words, young people in the LDS church are granted responsibility and authority from a fairly young age. Yet despite what may seem an accelerated trajectory into adulthood, as Rife and Ellsworth show, LDS children find ample time to play, both outside and inside church meetings.

Jared Rife takes us into Sacrament meeting—usually the first hour of a three hour block Sunday mornings that comprises the formal church service—to explore both how adults devise activities for children to keep them entertained, and how children devise their own play to stave off boredom. In his survey of these games, Rife examines the range of types, origins and functions of games played by toddlers to

teens. While his focus is on how these games function, his work opens up fruitful avenues for analysis in structural taxonomies of LDS games, theological cultural constructs of play within the LDS church, gender differences, and shifting social norms of sanctioned and unsanctioned behaviors within formal church spaces.

Brant Ellsworth, on the other hand, takes us *outside* these formal church spaces and into the homes of LDS children to consider how “playing the piano” differs from “piano play.” While Green and Rife provide glimpses into LDS culture through children’s folklore, Ellsworth provides glimpses of children’s culture through LDS folklore. Ellsworth notes that while his participants were all Mormon, the performances and patterns he observed are likely indicative of children in the U.S. more generally. That said, he does wonder whether the role of the piano in LDS church services both domestically and internationally impacts piano play among LDS children differently, if perhaps only in scope, than non-LDS children where the piano may not have as clear and widely shared symbolic meaning.

While these articles are not the first to examine the performances and folklore of children in the LDS Church—Elaine Lawless for example takes a brief look at how children’s testimonies compare to adult ones in order to highlight the well-worn patterns recognized and performed by even the youngest members of the church (1984)—they are some of the first to do as their focus. Further, many of the themes and topics engaged within these studies of folklore of and by LDS children can be read into larger bodies of LDS scholarship. Spencer Green’s work should be read within the deep and rich body of scholarship of LDS oral narrative and discourse by authors such as Margaret Brady (1987), Eric Eliason (1999), Carolyn Gilkey (1979, 1994), Tom Mould (2011) and George Schoemaker (1989). Jared Rife’s work on games and play can at least partially be understood in the context of LDS humor by authors such as Jan Harold Brunvand (1970), Ed Geary (1999), Steve Siporin (2009) and William Wilson (1982 and 1985), as well as in the context of the creative dating invitations of young men and women as studied by Kristi Young (2005). And Brant Ellsworth’s study of piano play, while most obviously relevant to children’s folklore scholarship rather than LDS scholarship, can nonetheless be understood as part of a deep musical tradition within LDS culture, righted noted by Ellsworth when he argues that “From their earliest existence, Mormons have been a musical people.” Folklorists of LDS musical traditions have focused primarily on song and ballad—Thomas Cheney (1968), Austin and Alta Fife (1947), Austin Fife (1953), Gustive Larson (1971), Jill Terry Rudy (2013), Barre Toelken (1959); one can only hope that the attention Ellsworth pays to the music, not just the lyrics, will encourage other folklorists and ethnomusicologists to do the same. With the publication of this special issue, the same can be hoped for the study of LDS children’s folklore more generally.

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AND A CHILD SHALL LEAD THEM: THE WISE CHILD FOLK MOTIF IN MORMON DISCOURSE

SPENCER LINCOLN GREEN

Prevalent in folktales throughout the world and in popular media in America, the “Wise Child” whose innocence sees through the deceptions, greed, envy, and ingratitude of his or her elders flourishes in Mormon official and lay discourse. Paradoxical in its inherent reversal of hierarchies in a religion often noted for its hierarchies, the wise child, rather than challenging adults and exposing adult foibles to mockery, is used to gently remind all members of their shortcomings and encourage greater adherence to church doctrines. Since the wise child in folk and popular culture is most often a trickster figure who points out foibles and follies in adults, how has it come to be used so often in Mormon discourse by those very adults and authority figures who are usually the butt of its jokes? This paper seeks to look at the significance of the wise child in Mormon official discourse, the transformation it has undergone there, and what that has to say about Mormon culture.

While the wise child is prevalent throughout Mormon discourse, this study is limited to the examples in the Spring and Fall sessions of General Conference. General Conference is a biannual meeting consisting of five two hour meetings over a Saturday and Sunday in April and October when Church Leaders present doctrinal and exhortive talks to church membership worldwide. This has been occurring since 1830 and each General Conference is identified by season or month and number ordinal number. My texts then come from the 182nd Spring and Fall or April and October General Conferences of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

General Conference is a time when the church General Authorities address the church as a whole. The General Authorities is a term for the highest authorities of the Church. At the head is the President or Prophet of the Church and the First-Presidency which includes the Prophet, Thomas S. Monson and his two Counselors. Beneath them, but still regarded as “prophets, seers, and revelators,” are the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, who are ranked in order of when they entered the Quorum. Next comes a Presidency of the Seventy, a group of 7 men who help direct the work of the First and Second Quorums of the Seventies, known as Seventies because of Christ appointing “other seventy” to preach the gospel in Luke 10:1. There is also a ruling Bishopric who take care of church humanitarian efforts, and the different auxiliary general presidencies of the Relief Society, the church’s women’s organization; the Young Women and Young Men, organizations for twelve to eighteen year old members; and Primary, organizations for the children of the church. All these presidencies, like local presidencies and the First Presidency, consist of 3 members: a President and First and Second Counselors.

General Conference is an important part of the year for active LDS church members and is often used in lessons and talks throughout the year by members

when they give talks in their local, weekly meetings. Further study on the wise child's use in local meetings will certainly reveal local variations. General Conference talks represent the Church's most public and widely recognized corpus of doctrine and knowledge beyond the "Standard Works." The standard works are the Old and New Testaments, the Book of Mormon, The Doctrine and Covenants, and the Pearl of Great Price. My citations for these scriptures follow the standard LDS conventions.

The Wise Child in Folklore

The Wise Child, folk motif J120 in the Stith Thompson Motif Index, includes tales from many cultures describing how a child's actions produce knowledge or wisdom in adults. Often it is the child's naiveté that produces the knowledge, and often in the form of a rebuke, in their elders. For example, motif J121 tells of a certain son being reproved by his own son's imitation of him. After a man gives his aged father half a carpet to keep warm, his own son keeps the other half, telling him that he is keeping it for him when he's older. Sometimes the situation is reversed as when a father tells a son to only drag him to the threshold, but no farther, because that is as far as he dragged his father. The themes of old age, decrepitude, and a simple, naïve sense of justice are all features of these stories. The wisdom produced in these tales comes from both the child's interpretations of his father's actions and the father's subsequent revelation of the justice of his own actions. The child then, knowingly or not, is active in creating the story's moral (Thompson).

Motifs J122 and J125 follow this pattern. Motif J122 features the naïve remarks of children rebuking or uncovering the sins of their parents. In one a forgetful father wonders what he's forgotten and his naïve son suggests that he forgot to strike mother, as he was an abusive man. In another a seducer is stopped short by a child lamenting that his mother is open to just the crime he aims to commit. In motif J125, children uncover their parent's misdeeds such as an innkeeper's wife who has watered down the wine, or the child who innocently reveals that the father's secretary has been having an affair with his wife. While the targets of the knowledge often changes—though is always composed of adults—the revelation in these stories is also a dialogic act between the child and the adult (*ibid.*).

Motifs J123 and J124 don't rely on the child's innocence and naiveté to uncover wisdom, nor do they rely on the child's innocence. Here the children can be either a passive object lesson or the agent who actively produces the wisdom in the tale. A King who judges a lawsuit wisely after observing a child's game and seeing the principles of justice present in the game earns his wisdom on his own without significant participation from the children. Here they seem to act more as object lessons rather than being involved in the meaning-making of the tale. But there are also the cases of a clever prince overruling the seemingly just decision of the King with greater wisdom, and the J124 motif which encourages the learning of virtues from children who can exhibit patience when their food is stolen. Adults can learn patience when they see the children search quietly for their food rather than crying or getting distressed. In these cases, the child is actually regarded

as wise either through having a rare wisdom beyond his years as the prince exhibited, or an innate quality that is seen as desirable in the adult world (ibid.).

There seem to be two spectrums at work in creating the central action and conflict in these stories. One is a passive/active spectrum. Active children interact with adults in some way to create the moral of the story. Passive children's actions are only significant when the observing adult draws wisdom from the child in a way that might be available to any observer. The other main spectrum is between the naïve and knowing child. Again, the bulk of stories feature children who possess their wisdom naïvely. Their sense of justice is innate, or their fears real and guileless, and it is simply in voicing those pure, innocent, and honest values that creates wisdom in the adults around them. In this way they are valued as speakers of widely known but unacknowledged truths as in "The Emperor's New Clothes." The lone instance of the clever prince whose actions are indicative of wisdom in and of themselves without the interpretation or transfer of that wisdom to a corresponding adult is an exception that seems to prove that most of the wise children in folktales rely on being active but naïve.

The wise child is a liminal figure that both divides and bridges the worlds of children and adults. A child is often seen as passive and naïve, as an object rather than a subject (de Schweinitz 126). As they grow more active, and more knowing, they come to enter more and more the adult world. As such, the best bridge between the two worlds are children who partake of both the childlike and the adult. These wise children exist somewhere between the wholly naïve and passive child of popular imagination and the active knowledge associated with adults and are indeed the most popular in folklore. This would suggest that the knowing, passive child would be the next most common, but there are no examples of passive, knowing children. This could be due to narratives preferring the more dynamic "active" child. Tales with passive wise children are more rare than the active because knowledge seems to presuppose or be indicated by activity. In other words, a child can act naïvely, but a knowing child will show it through his or her actions. Finally, the next most uncommon category seems to be knowing and active children as they partake too much of the adult world and or no longer childlike. Thus they are no longer liminal, trickster figures who can instruct and delight.

It is important to note that these categories are etic constructions and don't always reflect the use of the wise child motif. The speaker and audience may not care whether child characters are active or passive, naïve or knowing, especially in the context of a didactic discourse such as General Conference. Within the General Conference talks I surveyed, the most common child was an active, naïve child, but there were also numerous examples of the knowing, passive child. The requirements of a good story or performance also influence how wise children are used in Mormon discourse. Active children are certainly more interesting than passive, while naïve and knowing children both have their narrative uses, and can both create interesting, artistically satisfying, story arcs and turnarounds.

Other scholars have noticed some of these contrasts at use in Mormon culture. Kristine Haglund Harris studied changes in the Children's Songbook and found "that early Primary songs presume that young people will play significant roles

in building the kingdom while later songs try to limit children's activity (think 'reverence') and suggest that children prepare themselves for future contributions" (qtd. in de Schweinitz 135). Harris found Mormon culture favoring passive children more recently, but the use of the wise child in General conference shows that LDS still prefers active children for use in official narratives.

Categorizing wise children in Mormon discourse with these traits was sometimes unclear. Active or passive traits, while seemingly obvious, were often unclear in context, and naïve and knowing were even less clear, and sometimes less relevant. Henry Eyring, First Counselor in the First Presidency, spoke on the seeming difficulty in knowing or perceiving God in the world. In his address he relates the story of his three year old granddaughter visiting an open house of a temple, sacred structures to Latter-day Saints said to be a house of God. In one of the beautiful rooms, she asks her mother, "Mommy, where is Jesus?" Her mother responds that she wouldn't literally see Jesus in the temple, but could feel his presence. After considering this, the child, Eliza, responds with "Oh, Jesus is gone helping someone." Is this child naïve in taking literally the "house of the Lord" title Latter-day Saints use in talking about the temple, or is she knowing in her realization that this is a physical building where the physical presence of Jesus is expected to be found? Obviously the child's mother interprets it as naïveté while President Eyring goes on to comment, "No pavilion obscured Eliza's understanding...of reality" (Eyring, *Pavilion*), so President Eyring obviously sees Eliza as a knowing child, and yet the meaning of the story rests on Eliza being both a naïve AND a knowing child. It is faith that reconciles these two opposing forces. She is innocent and knowing in that her faith, or belief, in what she has been told is literal whereas her parent's understanding seems more figurative, and yet, with faith, it is the literal that is favored. So the older, wiser-in-the world parent has come to interpret doctrine as figurative instead of literal and thus is not as knowledgeable as her daughter in certain spiritual truths. She has something to learn from her daughter. By including this in his talk, President Eyring implies that all Latter-day Saints have something to learn from this young girl.

This dichotomy between worldly and spiritual things in Mormon thought is relevant to the wise child and one of the reasons that the Mormon variants differ so much from the folk variants. In *The Book of Mormon*, the prophet Jacob speaks of this dichotomy: "O the vainness, and the frailties, and the foolishness of men! When they are learned they think they are wise, and they hearken not unto the counsel of God, for they set it aside, supposing they know of themselves, wherefore, their wisdom is foolishness and it profiteth them not" (2 Ne. 9: 28). Paul, in his epistle to the Corinthians, echoes the sentiment with "If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, He taketh the wise in their own craftiness" (1 Cor. 3: 18-19). Paul's words seem like they would support the traditional folk use of the wise child, as a figure who reveals the foolishness of its elders through mockery and 'taking them in their craftiness,' as it says. The differences become more fully explained if we look at its use in its performance context of General Conference. I will discuss this later,

but first another example where the division between the naïve and knowing child seems less relevant in the context of the story.

Russell Osguthorpe, Sunday School General President, recounts a story of his son calling, wondering why Russell hasn't told them one of his articles was appearing in the Church's magazine, *The Ensign*. Russell responds with "I just wanted to see if you were reading the church magazine." His son says it was actually his daughter who brought it to his attention. "She got the *Ensign* from the mailbox, came into the house, and read it. Then she came up to our room and showed us your article." Russell concludes with "My granddaughter read the *Ensign* because she wanted to learn. She acted on her own by exercising her agency. The First Presidency recently approved new learning resources for youth that will support the *innate* desire of young people to learn, live, and share the gospel" (Osguthorpe, emphasis mine). It is obvious by his wording that Russell sees his granddaughter as an active child, but his wording also suggests she is a passive child. This desire to learn certainly exhibited itself in an active way, reading an entire magazine meant for adult members (young children and teenagers have church magazines aimed more at them), is certainly an active thing, but this desire Russell sees as innate, and thus is the source of knowledge coming from what she did, or the innate desire to do it? Depending on how one sees children, this granddaughter can be knowing or naïve. Either she knows that she is doing a good thing, or she is simply doing what she likes, and that thing happens to be an action Russell wants his adult listeners to imitate. It is obvious that this action in an adult member would be seen as active and Elder Osguthorpe is seeking to instill the knowledge of the value of that action, but it seems clear that for children, the assumptions are different. That this is not as volitional, that it is more innate and thus an expression of personality rather than an indication of one's use of free will. The message seems clear, that a desire to learn is a good thing that adults should learn but which seems to come naturally to children. Adults, the message is, be like your wise child. The cultural beliefs inherent in this dichotomy involve religious beliefs in the innate goodness of children and the cultural and religious beliefs that children are blank slates in need of instruction. Both of these ideas lead to assumptions in stories that divide how Mormons view adults and these wise children.

The Wise Child in Mormon Scripture and Tradition

Probably the most important example of the wise child culturally is Joseph Smith who, as a fourteen year old boy, had the wisdom to "ask of God" when he was confused about which religion to join. This act by a fourteen year old boy is often referenced and framed in a way that emphasizes both his youth and his wisdom—particularly as opposed to the religious leaders in his area at the time.

Other scriptural precedents include many prophets in the Book of Mormon. Nephi, the first writer in the Book of Mormon, is still a child of his father, a prophet in Jerusalem and begins the Book of Mormon with "I, Nephi, having been born of goodly parents (1 Ne. 1:1)." Later, when recounting his conversion, Nephi mentions that he was "exceedingly young" when he came to "believe all

the words which had been spoken by my father.” It is significant that he is able to convince his *younger* brother to also believe, but his *older* brothers, Laman and Lemuel, harden their hearts to his, and his father’s, words (1 Ne 2: 16-18). Alma, a later prophet in the Book of Mormon, is described as a wicked priest to a corrupt King when he hears the testimony of the prophet Abinadi. Alma, at the time, is described as “a young man” who “believed the words which Abinadi had spoken, for he knew concerning the iniquity which Abinadi had testified against them [meaning the wicked King Noah and his priests] (Mosiah 17:2).” Alma believes and must flee the court of King Noah and the older, still wicked priests who seek to kill him and put Abinadi to death.

Later still, Captain Moroni, the Nephite leader in some of their most intense wars with the Lamanites is mentioned for being “only twenty and five years old when he was appointed chief captain over the armies of the Nephites (Alma 43: 17).” While 25 can hardly be said to be a child, his youth is certainly emphasized and in the succeeding chapters his wisdom is demonstrated as he prepares the Nephites for war against the Lamanites led by a rebel Nephite. He prepares his soldiers with various armor, and constructs ditches, walls and fortifications around their border cities ensuring those cities which had been weakest were now strongholds. The invading Lamanites are at first too scared to attack these heavily fortified cities. Finally using a combination of spies and prophecy, Moroni traps the main Lamanite army as they cross a river and completely defeats them (see Alma 43:17-44:24). When war returns a few years later, Moroni is again instrumental in securing peace from war and the stability of their main government.

While the war Moroni is engaged in is started by a Nephite dissenter, it is the sons of Lamanite converts that help turn the tide. These converts are called the people of Ammon and, after their conversion, make an oath to never “tak(e) up arms against their brethren (Alma 53: 11).” When the war against the Lamanites gets long, they consider breaking their vow for the greater good. They are “moved with compassion” at seeing “the danger, and the many afflictions and tribulations the Nephites bore for them... and were desirous to take up arms in the defence of their country (Alma 53: 13).” Their spiritual leaders urge them not to, and they send, instead, 2000 of their sons, “who had not entered into a covenant that they would not take their weapons of war to defend themselves against their enemies,” so they are mobilized instead, and join the war under the command of their spiritual leader, Helaman (Alma 53: 16-18). Are these good examples of the wise child? Their youth is certainly a vital part of their identity.

Rather than the wisdom, or cunning, exhibited by Captain Moroni, it is often their faith that is seen as praiseworthy and what continuously saves them. They are promised by their mothers, “that if they did not doubt, God would deliver them,” sure enough, in their first battle, “not one soul of them [had] fallen to the earth (Alma 56: 47, 56).” In a later battle, while casualties mount on both sides of the conflict, their faith in their mother’s words are confirmed again when “there was not one soul of them who did perish; yea, and neither was there one soul among them who had not received many wounds (Alma 57: 25).” While this may

not qualify as “wisdom,” according to the worldly/spiritual split mentioned earlier, the youth are indeed being set up as figures whose actions and faith adults can and should learn from.

The bible has its wise children too. Before Joseph becomes second only to Pharaoh in Egypt, he is the second youngest of 12 brothers, loved by his father, and envied and hated by his brothers. At 17, “the lad” tends sheep with his older brothers. He dreams dreams which indicate his parents and brothers will bow down to him. It may not be seen as wise to share those with said brothers, but in the end, the dreams come to pass, and Joseph is vindicated (see Gen. 37, 39–41).

Samuel is promised by his mother, Hannah, to serve the Lord, and so she gives him to the High Priest of the time, Eli. Eli, while a good man we are told, allows his sons to mismanage the sacrifices of Israel, and so, Eli’s house is condemned. Samuel, while still a child, is called of God in the night time. He finally responds “Speak; for thy servant heareth,” and is finally told the calamities that will befall Eli and his sons and is set to be the next prophet (1 Samuel 3). Young Samuel, is remarkable in receiving revelations from Lord at a time when “the word of the Lord was precious in those days; there was no open vision (1 Samuel 3: 1).” Samuel however is innocent and good and honest. He even reveals God’s word of destruction towards the current Prophet, Eli, when asked to do so (1 Samuel 3: 19).

Samuel is instrumental in anointing David as the King of Israel after Saul sins and loses his mandate to rule God’s people. When Samuel sees David’s oldest brother, Eliab, he thinks he must be the future King of Israel, but the Lord counsels him to “look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the Lord seeth not as a man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart (1 Samuel 16: 7). This is even a “scripture mastery” scripture that is one of 25 in the Old Testament emphasized in Seminary, a daily spiritual study class many Mormon youth of High School age take. Seminary students will focus on and often memorize scripture mastery scriptures.

As for David’s wisdom, his encounter with Goliath is telling. While all the armies of Israel fear the mighty Philistine Goliath, David asks “for who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?” (1 Samuel 17: 26) David, in opposition to his older brothers and King Saul who notes “thou art but a youth, and he a man of war from his youth,” but David insists on his ability to defeat their champion and, without the traditional armor and weapons favored by the more experienced, he approaches Goliath with his staff, “five smooth stones,” and his sling (1 Samuel 17: 40). Goliath is insulted, David, undaunted, tells Goliath he’s about to die and that David comes in the “name of the Lord of hosts,” and that “this day will the Lord deliver thee into mine hand; and I will smite thee, and take thine head from thee...that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel (1 Samuel 45-46).” David does so, and is set up as a model of exemplary faith.

Finally, Jesus is a prime example of the wise child when, at only 12 years old, he is left behind in Jerusalem after a Passover feast and is found, finally, “in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking

them questions. And all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers (Luke 2: 46-47)." Jesus is a wise child who is wise beyond his years and astonishes those around him at his understanding of the scriptures and the law. Further, he is the source of many teachings that emphasize what people can learn from children. In Matthew 18: 2-4 "Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them, and said, "verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven." In Matthew 19: 14, "Jesus said, Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven." The emphasis on wise children in General Conference may reflect this precedent and desire to emulate Jesus Christ's example, and align themselves with his teachings.

The wise child that Jesus speaks of, and that appears most frequently in scriptures, is strikingly different from the wise child of the folktales. These scriptural variants of the wise child share some similarities with the folk variants. The folk variants and the scriptural variants both emphasize rebuking elders, though those elders are less often parents. In the case of Nephi, it's his older brothers, David rebukes King Saul, Joseph Smith rebukes the religious leaders of his area, and Jesus rebukes his mother. These rebukes are different in that the youths in these examples are both active, and knowledgeable although they retain a naiveté as well. They are able to be both knowledgeable and naïve by being naïve to worldly things, and knowledgeable about spiritual things. As such, they come across as less caustic than the folk examples in their efforts to instruct and exhort people on spiritual things.

The Child in Mormon and American Culture

Scholars of American culture have identified two contrasting views of childhood: as a "tabula rasa" in need of "acculturation," protection, or shelter, and the child as "specula naturae," the mirrors of nature, or a type of noble savage. Gary Cross notes the connection between the Romantic era and the idea of the pure, innocent child. He quotes Wordsworth as saying children come "fresh from the hand of God." Mormon speakers in General Conference are fond of Wordsworth and have quoted his *Ode: Intimations on Immortality* which includes "Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting:/ The soul that rises with us, our life's Star, / Hath had elsewhere its setting, / And cometh from afar: / Not in entire forgetfulness, / And not in utter nakedness, / But trailing clouds of glory do we come / From God, who is our home: / Heaven lives about us in our infancy!" This quote has been used in General Conference two or three times a decade over the past three decades, twice by President Monson in 2012 and 2007. It portrays the child not as a blank slate, but a noble, pure, innocent being close to heaven and divinity. The rise of Mormonism during the Romantic Movement supports this connection, as do numerous Mormon scriptures. Rebecca de Schweinitz also sees evidence of an Aristotelian view of children where "the child is important, not for herself or himself, but for his or her potential" (136-7).

Support for this idea in Mormon doctrine is surprisingly hard to find. If asked for scriptures that indicate children's innate goodness, many members might quote the prophet Mormon condemnation of infant baptism. However, his reasons don't necessarily indicate it is because children are good, but because they are innocent and unaccountable for their actions. Mormon writes that "their little children need no repentance, neither baptism...But little children are alive in Christ...For the power of redemption cometh on all them that have no law" (Moroni 8: 11, 22). Other reasons include the injustice of a God that would condemn innocent children to hell for failure to do something they have no knowledge of or power to do. His reasons focus not on children's goodness, but their innocence or, the term I've been using, *naïveté*.

There is, however, some scriptural support for the idea that children are innately good. Christ encourages his disciples to "become as little children," and "humble himself as this little child" (Matt. 18: 3-4). Invoking the difference between the natural (or worldly) sphere and the spiritual, King Benjamin says that all men are enemies to God and in a fallen state "unless he yields to the enticings of the Holy Spirit, and putteth off the natural man and becometh a saint through the atonement of Christ the Lord, and becometh as a child, submissive, meek, humble, patient, full of love, willing to submit to all things which the Lord seeth fit to inflict upon him, even as a child doth submit to his father" (Mosiah 3: 19).

Looked at as a syllogism, if saints should be good, and saints should be like children, children must be good. The difficulty of differentiating between good and innocent children is still present however because the examples here, and elsewhere in Latter-day Saint scripture, could still be read as seeing children not as acting righteously, but as being innately righteous. While much maligned by other Christian sects as 'trying to save ourselves through works,' Mormon theology does require knowledge to act righteously and places prime importance on agency or free will. While Mormon theology asserts that "salvation was and is and is to come...through the atoning blood of Christ (Mosiah 3: 18), Joseph Smith reveals that "It is impossible for a man to be saved in ignorance" (D&C 131: 6). The goal seems to be a fusion of the inherently good qualities of a child—especially those of submission to a heavenly father—fused with the understanding, knowledge, and decision-making ability of an adult.

The problem, finally, with the syllogism is a difference in expectations. Children are seen as inherently innocent, and so good or bad applies less to them—forget the conspicuous absence in any scriptures of the crying, willful children filling the pews each Sunday—while adults, with full agency, are expected to act good, knowing that those actions are good. The wise child in Mormon folklore helps clarify these expectations by presenting the naïve goodness of the child as an example to the knowing, but not always good, consideration of the adults.

The child as a blank slate is prevalent in American culture and, if not explicitly stated in Mormon theology, implicit in Mormon culture. The child of the blank slate needs acculturation, needs guidance, needs protection. Gary Cross would say the child needs "shaping." Mormon doctrine speaks of a "veil" that has caused people on earth to forget their premortal life where they knew and lived with God and Jesus Christ. The veil is there so that people can exercise faith, and so that

faith and obedience can be tested. The veil of the tabernacle Moses erected in the wilderness to “divide unto you between the holy place and the most holy,” is a symbolic representation of this separation between our world and God’s (see Ex 26: 33). Scriptures speak of a Book of Mormon prophet, the Brother of Jared, who was so righteous he “could not be kept from beholding within the veil (Ether 3: 19; 12: 19). Joseph Smith speaks of the veil being “taken from our minds” so that they can behold the Lord (D&C 110: 1), and later, explaining perhaps the physical workings of this veil, Joseph Smith records that “All spirit is matter, but it is more fine or pure, and can only be discerned by purer eyes; We cannot see it; but when our bodies are purified we shall see that it is all matter” (D&C 131: 7-8). While generally the veil is a kind of tabula rasa, a blank slate that erases the memories of people’s premortal existence, it is also used, folklorically, to indicate that children are inherently good—not just innocent—but that they have an “innate connection to spiritual realms” (de Schweinitz 134). You can often hear speakers speak of good children and end with something like ‘the veil is very thin for children, who have recently come from God.’

Looking at General Conference talks, Mormons would seem to agree. While the wise child folk motif is the subject of this paper, the protected child who needs shaping and the watchful care of parents is just as, if not more, prevalent in official discourse. “Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it” (Proverbs 22: 6), is more than just a proverb in Mormon families. After giving Moses the law, God commands that these things be taught to their children on multiple occasions (see Deut. 4: 10; 6: 7; and 11: 19-21). Ephesians, in the New Testament encourages us to “bring up [children] in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (Eph. 6: 4), The Book of Mormon includes numerous examples of children being taught (like the aforementioned Stripling Warriors), Nephi and Enos both reflect on words they were taught by their fathers (see 1Ne 1: 1 and Enos 1: 1), and Lehi preaches to and corrects his children many times (see 1 Ne 2: 8-9, 1 Ne 8: 37), King Benjamin exhorts his people to “teach [their children] to walk in the ways of truth and soberness” (Mosiah 4: 15), and the Doctrine and Covenants include the injunction to “bring up your children in light” (D&C 93: 40), and a warning for parents who do not teach their children (D&C 68: 25).¹ In any general conference or sacrament meeting, members hear counsel about the importance of and how to raise their children. Beyond that, there are two magazines especially for youth, *The Friend* for pre-teen youth, and *The New-Era* for teens. Beyond that, the first presidency—the highest authority in the church comprising the President and his two councilors—has a message at the beginning of each issue of *The Ensign*, a magazine for adult members of the church. The message is meant to be shared in month family visits by pairs of male members known as Home Teachers. These messages now include special teaching ideas and examples for “Youth” and “Children.” Obviously the training and teaching of youth and children is a high priority for the church, and the members that comprise it. All of which indicate a strong belief in and support of the child as a blank slate, the child in need of acculturation and guidance to become proper adults.

Methodology

While the current LDS Prophet, President Thomas Monson, is well known for his use of stories and anecdotes that would include the wise child, I have instead chosen to focus on the use of the Wise Child folk motif in the last two general conferences of the church when church leaders speak to members all over the world. Although the topics and discussions are often familiar, the messages in these biennial meetings represent the most current word of the Lord available to church members. I have looked at each talk in these conferences and noted each use of the Wise Child.

The wise child in the folk motif stories were classified based on someone learning something based on the actions of a child, and the person who learned was usually an adult. Based on these broad similarities, the criteria for which stories I included as an example of the wise child included two main components. First, the story had to be about a child and secondly the child, knowingly or not, had to be the source of the knowledge the adult gained. Thus a story about a child who dies and the family who learns to cope with and overcome trials would not necessarily count as a wise child because the learning comes more from the child's death, an event, rather than the child herself. There were other border cases.

For example, David F. Evans spoke of a young man who was not a member of the church but had many friends who were and came to many ward activities as a youth. After high school, he became roommates with an LDS friend who had not gone on a mission due to certain issues he was working through. They spoke about it and soon the boy was meeting with the LDS friend's bishop and was baptized. The purpose of the story was to show how conversion can often be a slow process, but many will eventually enter the church through the efforts of friends and church members. The teaching that occurs is from boy to boy rather than child to adult, but later, when the speaker talks of what he learned from this example, and makes the point to share that with church members listening to General Conference, it becomes a more obvious example of the wise child, as the actions of a young man are presented as exemplary, and thus something all can and should learn from. Even within the narrative when Evans remarks "What an invitation!" after the LDS boy invites his friend to come meet with his bishop, we see that he is being set as an example, and someone to learn from, a wise child (Evans).

Some cases were not clear-cut. While parts of Joseph Smith's story includes moments of the wise child, only references dealing specifically with him as a wise child were included. Jesus is an even more complicated example because his "Son-ness" is emphasized much more often than the wisdom and learning he had to offer when he was a child. I have not included any references of Jesus as a child of God, but have included any references made to his mortal childhood. This dual quality of Jesus as Father and Son, parent and child, will be discussed later in my interpretation of the wise child motif. Finally, I have included wise children used in talks aimed at youth or children as well as children as old as missionaries if the youth or "child-ness" of the missionaries was given as a defining feature. If it

was important enough to stress, then it seemed fair to include it as an example of the wise child.

In looking at the last two general conferences of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, there were a total of sixty-seven talks, thirty-two of which used the wise child motif with forty-nine unique instances. So if a story of a wise child started at the beginning of a talk and was references towards the end, it still only counted once. However, if one speaker gave numerous stories about different children who taught or whom the audience could learn from, each instance was counted. So this year, the wise child figured in nearly half of all talks given by general authorities at General Conference. The unique instances shows that it can be used numerous times—five was the most—in a given talk and that depending on topic and speaker, it can feature quite prominently in a talk. When a primary president or a Young Men president speaks, or when the topic is what parents can learn from their children, the speaker often uses numerous examples.

General Conference: The Authoritative/Exhortative Frame

At General Conference, leaders of the LDS church present talks of varying length to church members around the world and, implicitly or explicitly, to non-members. The purpose of general conference talks is to present doctrine and exhortations to live by gospel principles. Conference talks, like many talks in weekly church meetings, include exhortations, scripture quoting, personal experience, the experiences of others, and usually end with a declaration of testimony, or conviction of truth. Current events, references to magazine articles, or pop-culture references happen, but are less common. Like sacrament meeting talks, General Conference addresses are monologic, and are the most public speech act in LDS culture.

As Richard Bauman says, in most communicative acts, an interpretive frame sets up how things are to be interpreted (292). While I have defended various aspects of the wise child in Mormon discourse on narrative grounds, General Conference frames the speech acts as authoritative and exhortative. General Conference is set apart as a very special verbal event in Mormon life. It happens only twice a year and overrides the usual schedule of weekly meetings. Rather than meeting in their regular church buildings on Sunday during the regularly scheduled three hour block of meetings, Latter-day Saints across the world watch online or via satellite the Conference Center in Salt Lake City. In supplanting regular worship services, General Conference is marked as more important and of more authority than regular worship services. Further, it places Salt Lake and the leadership who reside there as the loci of the LDS world. Not only is it authoritative, but possesses the most authority. Similar to any classroom or auditorium, the leaders of the church sit around and behind the raised lectern from which speakers address their live audience of 21,000 and their televised audience of millions. The General Authorities are raised, literally, above the crowd to address the entire church membership.

This most authoritative and exhortative frame may be one reason why General Authorities employ children to communicate their messages. Tom Mould notes that

the cultural norm for humility in Mormon culture. By making the child the source of wisdom, even church leaders, those highest in the hierarchy, are able to achieve a level of humility by learning things from the humblest among us, children. We see this in fact, in the many examples of experiences that involve children in the third world in abject poverty. In terms of humility there is the added implication that even the “greatest” in the Kingdom have something to learn from the lowest. A message echoed in the New Testament. In one instance, Christ tells his apostles “Whosoever shall receive this child in my name receiveth me:...for he that is least among you all, the same shall be great” (Luke 9: 48).

Boyd K. Packer’s talk in the April session of General Conference is a good example of this humility before children and even impoverished children. The title of Packer’s talk “And a Little Child Shall Lead Them,” references the wise child. Accordingly, he cites many examples of children he learned something from. He begins his talk with the story of seeing an orphan beggar in Japan freezing, dressed in rags, covered in scabies, and holding a rusty tin can and a spoon. He’d knocked on the door of his train. Elder Packer tried to open the door to give him some money but the train pulled out. Elder Packer ends the story by commenting “I will never forget that starving little boy left standing in the cold, holding up an empty tin can. Nor can I forget how helpless I felt as the train slowly pulled away and left him standing on the platform.” Elder Packer is not explicit in what he has learned or what he intends his audience to learn at this point, but the idea that children can help us understand and know the purpose of life becomes more clear as he continues. In Cusco, Peru, another “starving street orphan” enters the meeting house and tries to make for the Sacrament bread. A stern look from a woman causes him to leave, but he returns and, when Elder Packer opens his arms for him, comes to sit on his lap. Again, he offers little explanation beyond sharing it with then Prophet President Kimball, who notes “That experience has far greater meaning than you have yet come to know.” Next Elder Packer tells of a boy in Salt Lake running around in the winter with no coat. He concludes that story with the moral “At night, when I pull the covers over me, I offer a prayer for those who have no warm bed to go to.” He has learned, or hopes to teach something about compassion (Packer).

The wise children Elder Packer tells about in these stories are largely passive. What the children do is less important than who they are, poor, destitute, and children. Elder Packer’s next example includes a girl in Japan at the close of WWII. She goes about “busily gathering yellow sycamore leaves in a bouquet,” seemingly “unaware of the devastation that surrounded her.” Elder Packer is impressed by her ability to find “the one beauty left in her world,” and adds that thinking of her increases his faith, concluding “embodied in the child was hope.” The child is naïve in the wisdom she produces, which is produced in both active and passive ways. Her actions of gathering the leaves are the catalyst for Elder Packer’s revelation, but his interpreted focuses on an innate quality in the child (ibid).

Later in his talk, Elder Packer notes, “one of the great discoveries of parenthood is that we learn far more about what really matters from our children than we ever did from our parents. The role reversal here is obvious, but done very differently than it would be in American culture or even many folk tales. In American culture,

there is more conflict and thus more victory for the child and more humiliation for the parent when roles are reversed. The wise child in folktales is also often a trickster figure who will turn the tables on their foolish, stingy, or conniving parents. Here the second most senior member in the church, and a father and grandfather himself, cites this role reversal. There is no trace of the trickster, or humiliation for anyone involved, but is presented more as a simple fact of life. Parents are not necessarily diminished by it, and yet, children do rise to the role of teacher in the reversal (*ibid*).

This role reversal is well known in scriptures. Jesus rebukes his disciples for keeping a child from him and uses the opportunity to teach them that “of such is the kingdom of God,” and “whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein” (Mark 10: 14-15). The Book of Mormon also has much to say on the matter. Mosiah 3: 19 reads that “The natural man is an enemy of God, and has been from the fall of Adam, and will be, forever and ever, unless he yields to the enticings of the Holy Spirit, and putteth off the natural man and becometh a saint through the atonement of Christ the Lord, and becometh as a little child, submissive, meek, humble, patient, full of love, willing to submit to all things which the Lord seeth fit to inflict upon him, even as a child doth submit to his father.” Here sainthood, is equated with becoming like a child. And the child indicated is not the *tabula rasa* but, but the noble savage in direct contrast with the “natural man” who is the carnal aspect of people who prioritize their physical desires. The naturally innocent and pure child must be worked towards once someone has become an adult and their natural desires grow stronger. There seems to be a pre-puberty purity and post-purity tendency towards physical appetite and “the natural man.” As far as the wise child goes, this corresponds to the passive child in the folktypes whose wisdom is outside its own knowledge. The child may have things to teach, but those things are merely attributes of who the child is, and thus the child can teach simply by being a child, good, pure, obedient, etc.

Some speakers we expect to use the wise child. Primary, Young Women, and Young Men General Presidency members might all be expected to use children as examples of good action because their intended audience are children. Ann M. Dibb, 2nd Counselor in the General Young Women Presidency begins her talk with the example of a fifteen year old girl she saw standing in a line, wearing a shirt that said, “I’m a Mormon, are you?” Sister Dibb was impressed with her confidence in her identity. She was a passive but knowing child. Later she mentions a girl who joined the church because she finally found one that taught modesty and standards. Sister Dibb presents this young woman as having an innate knowledge of the importance of standards and modesty, she had a spiritual knowledge that general members, and other young women, can learn from. She even mentions Jesus as God’s son in the garden of Gethsemane being obedient and submissive to his father (Dibb).

Other speakers mention wise children similar in some ways to the wise children of the folktales who are naively wise. Quentin R. Cook, a member of the 12 apostles, mentions a young man who realizes that society recognizes many things Latter-day Saints see as wrong, but not when it comes to pornography. This

boy is set up as being wiser than much of American society, and Cook follows this up by citing himself the boy's exhortation that primary is not too early to start warning and protecting children from society (Cook). Here we have a wise child being used by a General Authority to evoke the sheltered or protected child in need of educating by parents and leaders. Truly a dizzying interplay of authority and subservience.

Rebecca de Schweinitz notes the sentimental use of children in Mormon culture and argues that LDS culture "(however unconsciously)...link(s) emotional responses to religious beliefs [] to reinforce adult agendas" (135). And certainly that is true. Children, especially the impoverished ones used by Boyd K. Packer, can produce powerful emotional responses, and in the hands of authority figures will not criticize the very people using the trope. Further explanation for this interplay comes from the earlier discussion of humility in Mormon culture, but it is important to note that the wise child is not just a way to borrow humility, but can also be seen as a democratic expression of heavenly virtues. Cook's talk is a good example. Beyond quoting this unnamed 15 year old boy, Cook also quotes C. S. Lewis—a highly respected and often quoted Christian author—past presidents of the Church, Joseph Smith, George Albert Smith, Ezra Taft Benson, and Gordon B. Hinkley; scriptures from *The Book of Mormon* and both Old and New Testaments; English poet William Wordsworth; New York Times columnist Ross Douthat; Wall Street Journal columnist Peggy Noonan; and even Dr. R. Albert Mohler Jr., president of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. The inclusion of children into the cannon of both spiritual and worldly greats presents an incredibly democratic cosmology. In the *Book of Mormon*, Alma speaks of this democratic ideal when he says "and we see that [God's] arm is extended to all people who will repent and believe on his name" (Alma 19:36). I will discuss further evidence and implications of this worldview in the conclusions.

Craig Christensen shares the story of going through a temple open house—before a temple is dedicated, anyone is allowed to go through and view much of the interior. His 6 year old son accompanies him and remarks "what is happening? What am I feeling?" Elder Christensen's talk credits his son for the wisdom he exhibited in noting not the fine and beautiful art and architecture which he and others were appreciating, but the spirit of the place, the spiritual importance of it, that was more important (Christensen).

Henry B. Eyring shares a similar story about his granddaughter who "illustrated the power of innocence and humility to connect us with God." She went to the temple open house and asked, "Mommy, where is Jesus?" As the "house of the Lord" she had expected to see Jesus. Her Mother explained that she wouldn't be able to "see" Jesus in the temple, but could feel his influence in her heart. Considering this, she decided, "Jesus is gone helping someone." While her naiveté seems evident, Elder Eyring praises her for not having things obscure or obstructing her view of reality, that God is close, and can be felt by anyone. He adds that she had a good understanding of Jesus's corporeal body, that he can only be in one place at a time, and that what Jesus was most often doing, was performing miracles. He adds that "the spirit could reveal to her childlike mind and heart the comfort all of us need and want" (Eyring). The point is that the

adults listening to Elder Eyring's talk should be as childlike in their faith of gospel truths.

D. Todd Christofferson tells the story about a 14 year old boy in India who works two jobs, goes to school, and studies into the night to help support his family and prepare for a brighter future. Elder Christofferson praises the boy's "diligence and courage," and continues, "he is doing the very best he can with his limited resources and opportunities, and he is a blessing to his family." The boy is wise and very active, an example of work and activity Elder Christofferson wants church members to emulate regardless of their circumstances. The boy's hard work is central to Elder Christofferson's talk which repeats numerous times "Brethren, we have work to do" (Christofferson). Clearly, this child is the example priesthood holders should follow.

Conclusions

Terryl Givens in *People of Paradox* reveals one reason why the wise child may be a popular motif in Mormon discourse. Givens identifies four fundamental paradoxes in Mormon thought, the first two relate to the wise child: authority and radical freedom and searching and certainty. The hierarchical structure of the church and the equating of priesthood power and authority with God's authority has been examined and criticized by many writers and scholars who see the unquestioning obedience that often results. On the other hand the lay clergy and the emphasis on personal revelation support a radical individuality and disruption of those hierarchies. If any worthy member can hold a leadership position in the church, then there is something of a meritocracy in the power structure of the church albeit a meritocracy based on spiritual rather than worldly values. This mixing of clergy and member, officials and officiated, does establish a hierarchy, but a fluid one, where members can find themselves on either side. A member may be a bishop for a while, and called to the Family History Center afterwards. The wise child reveals a similar flattening between youth and adults, the knowing and the naïve, as categories are mixed or fluid.

The second paradox relevant to the wise child relates to the wisdom of the child. Givens notes that Joseph Smith's experience in physically meeting God the Father and Jesus the Son, having actual angelic hands placed on his head to confer the power of the priesthood, and translating 50 lb. golden plates imbued him and Mormonism with a predilection for certain knowledge. Contemporary evidence of this can be seen in the monthly testimony meetings in any ward or branch in the church where members are encouraged to proclaim before their fellow congregants the things they know to be true. The emphasis is more on knowledge than simply belief. General Conference also emphasizes certainty as members hear testimonies from "special witnesses of Christ." On the other hand, Joseph Smith also taught that knowledge and progression were a ceaseless struggle that took not only entire lives but were something to work on "a great while after you have passed through the veil (qtd. in Givens 30)."

This paradox between certain knowledge in the form of testimonies and ceaseless striving for ever greater knowledge and righteousness extends the

spectrum between naiveté and knowledge out to eternity. When using such a measure, even the most elder apostles and prophets giving talks in General Conference can be viewed as little more than wise children themselves. Wilford Woodruff recorded some words of the Joseph Smith on this subject. At the conclusion of a conference Joseph Smith stated “Brethren, I have been very much edified and instructed in your testimonies here tonight, but I want to say to you before the Lord, that you know no more concerning the destinies of this Church and kingdom than a babe upon its mother’s lap. You don’t comprehend it” (Woodruff). This was the prophet speaking to the whole priesthood of the church at the time. While his comment was specific to knowing the destinies of the church, the comparison of even the highest in the church hierarchy to “a babe upon its mother’s lap,” is an aspect of the doctrine of eternal progression. Anyone in mortality can be seen as a child, but hopefully a wise one. Seen in this light, the wise child is not necessarily a trickster figure of role-reversals in Mormon culture and can be used with gentle humor since members share its naiveté and searching for truth.

Mormon teaching treats all people on earth as sons and daughters of God and thus spiritual siblings, but also focuses on the importance of the family consisting of a husband and wife, raising and teaching children. In a church where common addresses involve “brother” and “sister,” what is the role of the child in LDS religious discourse? For a religion that has been criticized for being patriarchal, and a Gerontocracy, what view of childhood emerges from looking at the official statements and faith-promoting stories given out by the church?

The democratic nature of Mormon cosmology is even more profound. Not only are all people brothers and sisters, and not only are all beings on an eternal path of progression, but all have the most grand potential. Church President Lorenzo Snow is often quoted as saying, “As man now is, God once was; as God is now man may be” (Snow). Joseph Smith also stated that “God himself was once as we are now, and is an exalted man, and sits enthroned in yonder heavens!” (“God”). Latter-day Saints believe that this potential is open to all men, women, and *children* on earth. The prevalent use of the wise child—and possibly even the short shrift given to rowdy children in official discourse—is a consequence of this democratic and egalitarian cosmology.

There is a flip side to this egalitarian view. Elder Packer’s talk, mentioned previously, notes that “the ultimate end of all activity in the Church is to see a husband and his wife and their children happy at home, protected by the principles and laws of the gospel, sealed safely in the covenants of the everlasting priesthood (Packer).” Although husbands and wives, mothers and fathers, are often reminded of the need to protect their children, here they are in need of protection as much as their children. This is not unique. If the sheltered or protected child is prevalent in American and Mormon discourse, the protected parent and adult, is just as, if not more prevalent in Mormon discourse. Scriptures are full of warnings for all people to continually beware temptation’s lure. Doctrine and Covenants 20: 33 reads “Therefore let the church take heed and pray always, lest they fall into temptation;” the same basic sentiment is repeated in D&C 31: 12. D&C 75: 11 and 88: 126 talk about praying always that people “faint not.” Matthew 26: 11 and Mark

14: 38 both exhort to “watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation.” The lord’s prayer includes the plea to “lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil,” again indicating the ever-present nature of temptation and risk of falling to it. The Book of Mormon Prophet, Nephi when he is older, laments “the temptations and the sins which do so easily beset me” (2 Nephi 4: 18). Alma 34: 39 states “Yea, and I also exhort you, my brethren, that ye be watchful unto prayer continually, that ye may not be led away by the temptations of the devil, that he may not overpower you, that ye may not become his subjects at the last day; for behold, he rewardeth you no good thing.” Clearly the danger of sin is prevalent, and the solution watchfulness, prayer, and, as Elder Packer States, the protection that righteous living offers. All people are like the protected child, in need of shelter and protection.

These connections between children and adults go further. Other conference addresses note that most things done in the church are begun when we are children. President Monson, in April 2012 conference, notes that “in one capacity or another, in one setting or another, I have been attending priesthood meetings for the past 72 years—since I was ordained a deacon at the age of 12” (Monson). Often, the comparison is made between the newest and most senior members of the Priesthood having access to the same or similar power, that it is all based on righteousness rather than age or experience. A great way to teach this basic belief is to use children as examples of power to prove that very point. It deemphasizes age, seniority, experience, other hierarchical structures for one that is more merit-based which, in this religious setting, means merits of morality, goodness, righteousness.

Julie B. Beck, then president of the LDS women’s organization, The Relief Society, shared a similar message. She notes that “every year hundreds of thousands of women and young women become part of this ever-expanding “circle of sisters” [meaning the Relief Society]” and “wherever a sister lives and wherever she serves, she retains her membership and association in Relief Society.” At eighteen women go from being in the “Young Women” organization of the church to the “Relief Society” (Beck). This change comes at the cusp of adulthood and lasts the rest of their lives.

Further essential rituals and practices of church membership are begun when children are young and continue into adulthood. Just as President Monson noted that he’d attended, and thus entered and continued in, Priesthood since he was 12. According to the “Articles of Faith” penned by Joseph Smith, the first principles of the gospel are “first, Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; second, Repentance; third, Baptism by immersion for the remission of sins; fourth, Laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost” (1:4). These principles are prerequisites for the ordinances of baptism and confirmation which commonly happen when children turn eight. Thereafter, as noted in 2 Nephi, Chapter 31, the main thing is to “endure to the end.” There are certainly other ordinances and rituals which only adults participate in, but the most basic and essential are done when members are children and simply continue on through adulthood and, as mentioned earlier, into eternity.

The wise child is not a real child but a narrative device. As a narrative device, the wise child is based on cultural concepts of childhood and how children

differ from adults. The wise child of folklore, the trickster figure who ridicules and confounds adults, has been transformed in LDS culture into a common trope on par with almost any other source of wisdom. This transformation indicates Mormonism's egalitarian ideals and cosmology as well as its unique views of children as agents and adults as young in an eternal perspective. In short, the wise child in Mormon discourse has been transformed from a trickster figure to a standard authority figure because Mormons already see themselves as liminal figures between a spiritual infancy and exalted adulthood. In such a worldview, the child as trickster loses its fangs and settles in as another member of the community.

NOTE

1. D&C is the abbreviation of Doctrine & Covenants, one of the standard scriptures of the LDS Church.

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PLAYING WITH THE SACRED: LDS CHILDREN'S GAMES FOR BOREDOM AND ENTERTAINMENT

JARED S. RIFE

On any Sunday throughout the United States Mormon (or Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, referred to hereafter as LDS) children in formal church meetings usually associated with somber devotion play games not out of a spirit of rebellion but with the social sanction, even encouragement, of the Church. Although game playing in church is not unique to LDS culture, Mormons associate the games with their distinctive worship settings. Often outside of their awareness, but possibly explaining the use of the play frame within the larger context of the church service, the containment of social paradoxes within the games sanctioned by the local group can serve to undermine the sacredness of faith and devotion in LDS youth. This paper will analyze the paradoxes of play enacted within the sacred setting of LDS Sacrament meetings, and use theories of "play framing" developed by Gregory Bateson and elaborated by Erving Goffman, Jay Mechling, and Simon Bronner to interpret the messages about Mormon cultural belief embedded within games performed in church.

A primary setting for game playing is during the Sacrament meeting, typically the first hour of a three hour block that constitutes the weekly congregational meeting of the LDS church. It is a time where members of the church partake of the emblematic blood and body Jesus Christ. Part of the meeting ritual is the Sacrament prayer where members will take upon themselves the name of Christ, and recommit themselves to keeping his commandments and the covenant they made at baptism.¹ During the service, members are introspective, evaluating their lives and over the previous week and preparing for the week to come. Because of its sacred nature of personal worship many participants understand that this is the most intimate and personal ritual performed during the Sunday meeting. The remainder of the meeting consists of the singing of hymns and listening to talks given by members of the congregation. It is a time when the outside world can be excluded, and the inner commitment and desire of each member can be laid bare and open as a form of worship. The Sacrament meeting where the games are played is considered the main service on Sunday. Church members (both young and old) have the understanding that while the service is occurring, children and youth are to remain quiet and in the immediate area of the pew. This is out of respect for others in the service that are concentrating on the talks and singing the hymns typical of a sacrament service.

An observer, however, might be surprised to find that it is common for children to occupy themselves with a variety of games during this reverent observance. These games range from simple tic-tac-toe and thumb wrestling, to a specific form of Bingo that uses either common uttered phrases or individuals as squares to be crossed of en route to winning. The simplest form of the question that this paper will try to address is: Why play games during such a sacred time? One answer to that question is a simple one. The games are meant to keep kids occupied and the

games themselves have grown since the church placed emphasis upon collective family worship in the post-WWII baby boom. In their seminal work, *Saints of Sage and Saddle* (1959), Austin and Alta Fife noted that children were not encouraged to attend sacrament meetings, because church leaders wanted a more reverent worship service. In the 1960s this attitude began to soften. The toleration of children was altered completely in the early 1980s when the church moved to its current once-a-week three hour block opposed to what the Fife's observed where the various meetings and organizations of the church meet during the week as well as Sunday.²

The physical setting and demographic makeup of a typical individual congregation are also relevant. The typical Sacrament room is about 50' wide and about 80' long. The usual attendance is around 150 individuals ranging in age from new born to late eighties. There are single adults, families with different aged children, and older couples in the congregation. Members of the LDS church vary in class, race, region and background. It is not uncommon for wards (local units) and stakes (comprised of eight to fourteen wards) across the United States to have these distinctions apparent through simple observation. In one pew you could find a member from Puerto Rico, Mexico, Canada or California. In another pew you could have a surgeon, a prison guard, or a stay at home mom. Typical lines of separation and distinction such as race, class, or ethnicity do not exclude games from being played by all the children within the ward, stake, or region. Because of this, the extrapolation of this analysis can be applied broadly to the church in the United States.³ Although as I will also discuss it does have some overlap into the rest of the non-LDS culture, but mostly its interpretations pertain to members of the LDS church.

The physical setting is also relevant. The room where the games are played is called the Chapel. The games are played in a padded wooden pew measuring 8' long, 20" wide, and a height of 22" at the seat of the pew, and 34" at the height of the back of the pew.⁴ All the pews face forward towards a raised platform and pulpit. The layout of the room is important because it reinforces the idea that there should exist community among the members, both old and young and that the focus of the congregation should be unified. The physical layout also suggests that the chapel and the Sacrament service that takes place there encourage a formal and encouraged location for silence, individual contemplation, and communication that at times can be at odds with the children's games. This emphasis further accentuates the questions raised about letting children play games.

The collecting of through fieldwork, I tried to step outside my role as a life-long member of the LDS church, and become an ethnographer that was capable of analyzing the symbolic communication within the frameworks of play. I emphasized this outside observer role to examine the common games that so often are taken for granted as just part of the LDS culture.

Methodologically I approached these games from the standpoint of seeing them as part of an ethnographic analysis. By personal observation, interviewing others, and by securing documents from folk archives, I was able to create a large pool of games from which to make comparisons and draw conclusions. After acquiring a large sample of games certain patterns emerged. Aside from inventorying

and trying to classify my findings, I wanted to situate the games within the broader LDS culture. These games were only played during Sacrament meeting and not at other times because of different activities that require more focused participation from the children and youth. The classifications assigned to the different categories are ones that I constructed, and make the classifications more universally understood by a non-LDS reader. A LDS member would not label or even categorize these games in this way aside from calling them “games,” “church games,” or “Sacrament games.”

The first was that the games themselves could be divided into three categories. The first was “quiet” games, so labeled because they make no noise when played and thus are not distracting to nearby worshipers. These games are intended to be silent in their nature, with the hope among other things is that they will not be a distraction to other members around the child. For the child these quiet games also have a purpose in that they teach and train the child how they should act but also how they can find success in their worship.



Figure 1. Mormon children playing quiet games. Photograph by Jared S. Rife.

The second was games for fun.⁵ In his work on Mormon recreation theory, Rex A. Skidmore claimed that fun and happiness is the attitude that most LDS members feel towards their church.⁶ Although broad in its definition this large group of games is intended for the player's amusement and to separate and insulate them

from the service around them. Unlike the quiet games, this category can distract others by participants with noise, but are still relatively quiet. These games are also the ones most likely to involve other children, who may also be in on the humor, jokes, and other forms of social capital shared among children. The amusement can come from the player's personal sense of humor, or at the expense of others.

The third and final category of games is that of games for learning. Within the LDS culture exists a strong emphasis placed on all types of learning.⁷ The emphasis on acquiring knowledge both temporal and spiritual. Also a drive to receive postsecondary education either in the form of technical training or college degree.⁸ With this strong emphasis, games that require learning, creativity, or other commonly held beliefs about intelligence and knowledge are tolerated as they serve a larger goal of learning as a lifetime pursuit.

Another level of analysis that can further shed understanding on the games played is a connection of play framing to age. There are three divisions: Children, Youth, and Teenage. The category of children encompasses the ages of 6 months to eight years. LDS theology teaches that children are incapable of sin⁹ until they reach the age of eight, or the age of accountability. Once a child turns eight they can be baptized and become full fledged members of the church. The type of games most played by this demographic is quiet games. The second category of age is that of youth and is from age eight to fourteen. After baptism at eight, a child will continue to be considered a child until they graduate from the Primary, the organization in the church is responsible for teaching children in the remaining two hours of the Sunday worship block. At the age of 12, children leave Primary. The boys enter the Young Men's program, and the girls enter the Young Women's program. This age group will still play quiet games, but there is more of an emphasis placed upon learning and instructional games. After the initial two years of participation in the Young Men and Young Women's programs at the age of fourteen they move into the third and final category of being teenagers. These moves also correspond with the graduation from a Junior High School to a Senior High School where the child can now consider themselves closer to adulthood. Here they have (or so leaders hope) circumnavigated the early years of teenage awkwardness and are progressing toward adulthood. This final stage may end around eighteen or nineteen when the teenager either leaves for college or for males in the LDS church leave to serve a mission two year full time mission. Although instances where these games continue on into college their frequency decreases. In this final age group is where most of the games that involve humor are located, although there are still games of learning, it is assumed that by this stage most participants have a grasp on basic beliefs. These three categories allow the division of games and their application to be better understood and dissected within the social expectations of LDS culture.

Identification and Annotation of Evidence

Although the games display variation, overall the same types of games are played in different parts of the country. Using the categories outlined above, the children's games come in the form of three different types. The first is Quiet Books. Quiet

books come in all shapes and sizes, but their purpose is the same: they keep children quiet through tactile interaction. Quiet books are usually handmade, often of felt-like cloth, and each page has an activity that spurs the young participant to action. On one page there could be the face of a young girl, with blond hair made from yarn. The directions on the page would tell the reader to braid the young girl's hair. Another page could have a coat with a zipper that can be zipped up and down. The pages also contain buttons, clasps, or other modules that require the use and energy of hands. Some pages have LDS content. Sometimes the page could ask the young reader to interact with Jesus, or another scriptural character. One example located had been used for over thirty years by one family that has been passed down from one generation to the next. This quiet book included an oxen drawn pioneer wagon, Lehi (a prophet from the Book of Mormon) holding an artifact and space for the child to place letters on the page, as well as a Mormon match game where children would put together two halves of easily recognizable people or items found in the Sacrament meeting itself. Other times it could be to give service or aid to a fictional charter in need of accomplishing a specific task.¹⁰

The second general activity was Felt Dolls. These can be homemade or commercially produced. The church I observed and others I have visited have high-wear thread count material on pews, and therefore the backs of the pews make excellent felt boards for these types of games. Generally these felt dolls are directed towards young girls, but boys often will play with them too. There are several different types of dolls. Some are from famous nursery rhymes and folk tales like the three little pigs, or Hansel and Gretel. Other examples are scenes of land animals in the jungle, forest, or underwater. Also more traditional dolls that require clothing to be placed upon them. One set contained girls from European countries and the traditional folk dress was provided for their attire. There exist LDS versions of felt dolls that will use dressing up of small children in a variety of outfits. Another variation found with felt dolls is homemade and commercially produced scriptural scenes, where children are encouraged to pretend play and act out scenes from the lives of prophets, wars, and other sacred moments found in the LDS canon.

Imagination games require the use of toys. Perhaps a small car, action figure, or even LDS figurines are used. Usually the use of the imagination does not allow for group or multiple participant games to occur but there are occasions when two children from different pews will play together using their imagination. They might recreate something from a television show or movie. Other times they might recreate a scriptural scene from the Bible or Book of Mormon, and sometimes it is merely as simple as two cars chasing each other on an imagined road. Usually the stipulation by the parent placed upon this collective play is that it needs to be done out of the line of sight of those around the children. That means it either has to happen in the space under the pews or it is not able to happen at all. This is perhaps the broadest and non-LDS centered game because it allows children to play outside LDS centered games. Their acceptance in Sacrament meeting lends credence to the theory about tolerance for the sacred when small children under the age of eight, that are seen as incapable of sinning, are involved.

The next category of games is that of youth games. These games are more learning centered, and unlike the children's games which intend to occupy and keep the participant quiet and isolated, these games involve others. The first one that is very popular and is not particular to LDS culture is the dot game. Two people play the game and it is played by first making dots, in neat lines and columns on a blank piece of paper. Then whichever of the two is going first has the chance to connect two of the dots with a straight line. It is then the other youth's turn to connect two dots with a straight line. The players will alternate turns, until all four sides form a box. The player who forms the box then claims the box by placing their initial or initials in the box and is awarded an extra turn. The back-and-forth nature of the game, with its demand for forethought and stratagem, illustrate a competitive spirit not observed by the youth's younger counterparts.

The next group of games played by youth is puzzles. Puzzles generally as a genre are not unique to LDS culture, but the types of puzzles that the youth are playing are different. These puzzles are usually of scriptural heroes or particular moments of devotion found in the canon of scripture. There are two types of puzzles. The first is one is more traditional. It requires that the youth print out and cut up a puzzle. The second is more unusual. It is not uncommon for members of a ward to bring iPhones, iPads, and nooks and use them during the three hour church block. This use of technology is aided by most ward buildings having Wi-Fi, and these buildings have similar passcodes. The LDS church has invested a lot of time and energy in making many of their services available via the internet. The Church has made accessible scriptures, talks, lesson manuals, directories, and most importantly for this discussion, puzzles that can be played by small children. These puzzles are much like the paper ones that can be printed and cut out, but do not require the effort to craft them. I will discuss more about the value of both of these formats later in the paper.

The final game that many youth play is that of Hymnal chase. The LDS church has a strong emphasis on singing, music, and performance. It most evident in the formation of the Mormon Tabernacle Choir, that formed and has been performing ever since 1847, a month after the first wave of pioneers entered the Salt Lake Valley. In fact songs are viewed as a form of prayer in the Doctrine & Covenants.¹¹ With a special connection between prayer and adoration, one might expect the hymnal to also be treated with care. Yet games played with the hymnal. The one game played by this age group is called Hymnal Hunt. This is where using the meter number associated with a hymn would, like a treasure map, would be circled and would lead to the page of another hymn. On this page the meter would be circled and that would lead to another page until the ultimate message was found. For example on page 181, the meter of 76 would be circled. The searcher would then turn to page 76 where the meter of 79 would be circled and so forth. One such message found was a question to the searcher if they wanted to watch TV later that afternoon at five.¹² Other such messages like "Hello," "How are you?", and "I'm hungry/starving" have also been recorded.

The last category of teenage games contains the most variation, and exhibits the most subversion of sacredness. The first game is that of Testimony Bingo.

The first Sunday of each month, Sacrament Meeting is reserved for the bearing of the congregation's testimony. A testimony is the public profession of one's beliefs about various subjects of LDS doctrine and lived experiences. Although these openly shared testimonies can often diverge from their intended purpose and become a travelogue or the bearer's gratitude for roommates or many other such declarations not related to the original purpose. Because of the consistent performance of the testimonies within the culture, there can also be phrases that are used again and again. With these variations in mind, teenagers will divide a traditional bingo playing board with either the phrases that are often muttered, individuals that consistently bear their testimonies each month or common themes like travelogues onto the spaces to try to get Bingo. This game can be played with other siblings or friends that are nearby.¹³ Often times these Bingo boards can be derisive especially if a certain individual continually bears their testimony each month in an almost rote-memory fashion.¹⁴

The use of parody for hymns and hymnals is also popular with the teenage group. The parodies often involve sexual and scatological humor. One good example is by taking hymn titles and adding the phrase "under the bed" or "in the toilet" or even "in the bathtub."¹⁵ Some hymns and phrases work better than others. But often it can be the hymns that are the some of the most often sung and have historical significance that are mocked. One example of *The Spirit of God Like A Fire is Burning, Upon the Cross*, or even the Christmas favorite *O Little Town of Bethlehem*. All of these songs have humor in adding the phrases like "under the bed" or "in the toilet" or even "in the bathtub."

Another game that can be played with hymns is using the mood markings to act out the singing of the song.¹⁶ Thus trying to sing a song and act out a hymn "resolutely," "tenderly," or "vigorously" becomes a performance for those around the singer. This open mocking of the hymn is especially evident to those immediately surrounding the singer, but also to the chorister who is leading the music at the front of the congregation. Due to the apparent irreverence and subversive qualities of these games, it could be assumed they would not be tolerated. Yet they are often played quietly by participants so as not to draw attention to themselves.

Another popular game involves two teenagers writing words on friend's backs, siblings, or a significant other.¹⁷ As Sacrament can feel boring to participants they will lean forward with their elbows on their knees as they sit in the pew. The friend, sibling, or significant other will write out messages or words one letter at a time as they try to convey a message to the recipient. Part of the fun lies in guessing what is written, and the other part can be especially if the two individuals are dating. The LDS church strongly encourages youth not to date until the age of sixteen and these games are played by those who are sixteen and older.¹⁸ Because of this delayed social interaction with the opposite sex, small physical interactions like touching someone's back and expressing messages of care and affection are significantly potent. Another way that messages can often be shared with a friend, sibling or significant other is by using words found in the Scriptures to send a message.¹⁹



Figure 2. More quiet games. Photograph by Jared S. Rife.

There is a long history of annotation when it comes to quiet games. George Draper's book *School, Church, and Home Games* (1923) explores the philosophy that work is the highest form of play, and that children express their imaginations through play leads to their exploring and perfecting of their future professions. This book is a collection of games for beginners to intermediate children, of both sexes, and in the settings of school, church and the outdoors.²⁰

Jess Bancroft's work, *Games for the Playground, Home, School and Gymnasium* (1922) is an early folklore collection drawing from archival records as well as ethnographic field reports. The intention of the collection is to be used as an aid for parents, teachers, and recreational leaders to have a variety of games that can be played in diverse places of home, camp, and school. In particular a large listing of quiet games that are both educational and fun and provide an early framework for classifying and categorizing quiet games.²¹

Lastly, George Ripley's *Games for Boys* (1920) was another early collection of games that can be played in any setting. The purpose of the book was to give wholesome games that invigorated the mind and body, and were not just for the expression of violence pride. Because Mr. Ripley worked professionally for the Boy Scouts many of the games mirror the core values found within that organization. His categorization provided a framework to base games that I observed, especially the ones for small children whose goal was to have them be enlightening to the mind.²²

Analysis and Interpretation

Evaluating the body of these games there arise paradoxes that both affirm and subvert gospel principles of the LDS church. On a basic level the church has always had a strong emphasis on “Perfecting the Saints” or in other words in helping members to reach their potential both in this life and in the life to come. Part of that perfection comes through the gaining of knowledge or intelligence. With the expectation that members of the church are taking part in daily scripture study, attending Sunday School and other service oriented organizations, being active in politics at both the community, state, and national levels, members of the church view themselves as well reasoned and well informed. This emphasis begins at an early age when the expectation is that children take an active part in church, school, music, sports as well as family activities held each week in the home where gospel lessons are shared. This weekly meeting, called Family Home Evening, and its intention is to bring families closer together. But its structure is through the teaching of a lesson, singing of songs, service and an activity where each assignment is rotated among family members no matter the age. With this strong emphasis on children participating in a full and perfecting life, the added dimension of having a sense of humor provides an interesting contrast.

A factor in the use of play is the association of church leaders with humor. Joseph Smith was known for his willingness to play games, tell stories, and jokes with others. Prominent leader J. Golden Kimball was known for his colorful language while sharing sermons, but his crass language was excused because of its humorous nature.²³ The previous and current leaders of the church, Gordon B. Hinckley, and Thomas S. Monson respectively were admired for their playful use of jokes. It is also customary when members of the congregation give talks in Sacrament Meeting to start their discourse with a joke. With such a strong emphasis on humor, the games children play are seen as participating in honored and cherished form of LDS expression. In some ways this provides an excuse for some of the more subversive games; in others it allows for games to flourish because “its just something we do for fun.”

It should also be noted that all of these games, whether played by small children or teenagers are tolerated only if they are quiet and do not disturb the worshiping of others around them. If any of these games became loud or distracting, the child or teenager would be pressured to leave by parents, guardians, or other adults in close proximity. The usual punishment involves asking the offender to wait outside in a foyer, which every chapel has, and sit on couches until after Sacrament service is over. This may not sound like much of a punishment, but it can be a harsh sentence. To accommodate those who cannot be quiet or reverent during sacrament service, church buildings are equipped with in-house speakers that are placed in several rooms throughout the building. This allows for communications from the pulpit to be broadcast to other rooms, a mothers lounge, and the foyer. Once an irreverent child or teenager is removed to the foyer they still listen to what is being shared in the chapel but do not have friends or games to interact with.

The seeming paradox of the seriousness of cultivating perfection and at the same time indulging in the unruliness of humor feeds into another paradox of LDS culture: that of the scriptural stories of the Iron Rod and the Liahona from The Book of Mormon. The Iron Rod was viewed in a visionary dream by the prophet Lehi. The Iron Rod, which is interpreted as the scriptures or the word of God, leads to the Tree of Life, which is interpreted as the Love of God or the gospel. The Iron Rod is firm and immovable and those who grasp it know in what direction they are headed. On the other hand the Liahona another example provided by the Book of Mormon prophet Lehi, was a compass-like ball of fascinating design. After Lehi had left Jerusalem to journey to the Americas or as he and his family were told the "Promised Land" the Liahona was given to them to be a guide. The Liahona worked according to the faith and diligence Lehi and his family displayed towards the keeping to the commandments and statutes given them by God. It led them on a circuitous journey through the Sinai Peninsula, over the oceans and eventually to the Promised Land. Upon arriving in there, Lehi and his family were able to flourish and prosper. The story teaches current members of the church that if they lead a god fearing life they can be lead through trials and tribulations. This form of sojourn provides for personal guidance that might differ from one member to the next. This seeming paradox of knowing the answer to life's difficulties versus seeking and searching for it is also evident in the ways that children play their games. On one hand they are expected to know how to act or learn how to act through play, especially during a sacred service like Sacrament Meeting. On the other hand children are given the latitude to play games that often mock other members of the church or make light of sacred rituals.²⁴

Another interpretation of these games comes from the common phrase of "being in the world, but not of the world."²⁵ LDS members feel a certain hesitation about how their belief system often openly conflicts with their peers outside the church. Ideas about marriage, homosexuality, and drug use are some of the more recent ideas that in main LDS theology that have conflicted with broader societal views. Due to this conflict, members are encouraged to take part in as many "normal" non-LDS activities as possible to give non-LDS a more personal and human touch on a widely misunderstood religion. Thus a high percentage of LDS members actively serve, volunteer, and work openly in their respective communities. This is part of the reason that games enter into a sacred space of Sacrament but by the use of the church frame the message of "this is play (or profane)" is altered to "this is Mormon." By entering the "world" to take part in it, the reverse is also true. The "world" is able to enter into an individual's life, and this is manifest in the way that children play games during Sacrament. This is also manifest in the strong correlation of children that use their parents (or in some cases their own) electronic devices when playing puzzles and other games that the church provides on their website. By playing these games they literally bringing the world (or in this case the World Wide Web) into their lives and their sacred spaces.²⁶

The final point of this frame analysis is how church games treat the contexts of sacredness and reverence in an enactment of play. With the slow progression of children's games that instruct and teach to the eventual teenage games that

openly mock and criticize others the question must be asked how this influences the progression of membership in the church. In my opinion these games create a divide, an obstacle that teenagers must face. How do they respond to the paradox of playing games when those around them are trying to have meaningful communion with their deity? They must make a decision about whether to remain observant during the the sacred and reverent parts of the sacrament, and by extension they decide whether the sacred and reverent aspects of their religion are something to be taken seriously or are a game. It is no wonder that at the age of eighteen, internal church statistics show that the teenage years are the critical period when individuals decide to either fall away from the church or continue to be lifelong members.²⁷ The games that these children are playing are a huge part of that decision.

Conclusion

Games played by the children, youth, and teenagers of the LDS church celebrate the good and the bad of LDS culture. Individuals are expected to be smart, funny, and interactive with the LDS and non-LDS community. But this leeway leads, for some, to the eventual dismissal of LDS teachings and membership in the church. This paradox of frames reinforcing prized character traits as well as religious knowledge versus the criticism of religious expression during sacrament helps to address the anxiety and uncertainty of the LDS faith for concerned youth. At the same time these frames create a space where the paradox can be contested.²⁸ Further questioning should be done on other games that are played during three hour blocks, or during other activities that occur during the other days of the weeks. These activities played in Sacrament Meeting are part of (excuse the pun) the game changer if whether or not membership will be a lifelong activity or only one of their youth.

NOTES

1. See Doctrine in Doctrine in Covenants 20:77, 79, <http://www.lds.org/scriptures/dc-testament/dc/20.75-84?lang=eng> for a copy of the prayers that are read as well as the particular wording.

2. Fife, Austin and Alta. *Saints of Safe and Saddle*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1956, 3.

3. Many of these games have been personally observed, as well as recorded all over the United States including Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, Texas, Arizona, Arkansas, California, Oregon, Washington, and of course Utah.

4. Due to the regulations of the LDS church, pictures are not allowed in the chapel or during worship services. The pictures included in the report are either taken from the internet or from the personal collection of the collector that were taken in his home.

5. During the academic year, 1935-36, Elder John A Widtsoe delivered a series of lectures at the University of Southern California in a class on Mormonism.

An excerpt from the published copy reads as follows: “The aim of the Church, organized for the human good, is to make men happy. It could not be otherwise, its usefulness to a man is the function of religion. This doctrine has been delivered in sacred literature.”

6. Skidmore, Rex A. *Mormon Recreation in History and Practice: A Study of Social Change*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1941, 89.

7. See Doctrine and Covenants 88:79, <http://www.lds.org/scriptures/dc-testament/dc/88.79-80?lang=eng>, for the direct command to learn about things both spiritual and temporal.

8. Brigham Young University, a LDS owned and operated University, where nearly 96% of the student population is LDS recently noted that it was number one in grads from a high-research doctoral institution (a category that includes BYU) who earned PhDs in the last five years studied. BYU was 5th for all 264 doctoral institutions in a general category. Although we cannot draw conclusions about the entire LDS church through this statistic, the importance of education and the acquiring of knowledge is evident.

9. See Moroni 8:8, <http://www.lds.org/scriptures/bofm/moro/8.8?lang=eng>, which claims that children are incapable of sin until the age of 8.

10. See photos in Appendix 1.

11. See Doctrine and Covenants 25:12, <https://www.lds.org/scriptures/dc-testament/dc/25.12?lang=eng> for this correlation.

12. This item was submitted by an anonymous individual to the William Wilson Folk Archives at Brigham Young University, September 14, 1980.

13. There are numerous examples of this occurring. Four types are recorded by Jenna Allen Holt, David Joel Becksted, Christina M. Cuthbert, and Jennifer Holly Slemph all at the Wilson Folk Archives in section 5.1.2.1.

14. There are also several examples found online where the practice of families sharing with other families and the familiarity of the game is clearly understood. For example, “Testimony Bingo,” <http://emp.byui.edu/marrottr/testimonyBingo.html> and “Modern Mormon Men,” <http://www.modernmormonmen.com/2012/03/testimony-bingo.html>.

15. Examples collected by Lorraine Anderson, Paul Abbot, Eric Nelson, Dell Blair, Linda Hansen, Joanna Gardner, and David Becksted can be found at the Wilson Folk Archives in section 5.1.1.2.

16. This example was relayed by Spencer Lincoln Green, March 16, 2012.

17. This game is widely observed in many meetings by the author, as well as shared by Spencer Green on March 16, 2012, as well as Rachel Rife on March 20, 2012.

18. See the pamphlet “For the Strength of Youth,” <https://www.lds.org/youth/for-the-strength-of-youth/dating?lang=eng> for this explanation.

19. This example was relayed by Spencer Lincoln Green, March 16, 2012.

20. Draper, George O. 1923. *School, Church, and Home Games*. New York: Association Press, vi-vii and 44-54.

21. Bancroft, Jessie H. 1922. *Games for the Playground, Home, School and Gymnasium*. New York: MacMillan, 2-24 and 211-242.

22. Ripley, George S. 1920. *Games for Boys*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 39-43.
23. See Eric A. Eliason's book *The J. Golden Kimball Stories*, University of Illinois Press, 2007, 186.
24. Terryl L. Givens *People of Paradox : A History of Mormon Culture*. New York: Oxford University Press, 3-18.
25. See a recent address given by Elder L. Tom Perry of the Council of the twelve entitled "In the World," <http://www.lds.org/ensign/1988/05/in-the-world?lang=eng>
26. See "Games and Activities" on LDS website <http://www.lds.org/friend/online-activities/activities?lang=eng>.
27. See "Mormons in the United States 1990-2008: Socio-demographic Trends and Regional Differences" Rick Phillips and Ryan T. Cragun. Also available at <http://commons.trincoll.edu/aris/files/2011/12/Mormons2008.pdf>
28. Bronner, Simon J. Framing Folklore: An Introduction. *Western Folklore* (California Folklore Soc., Long Beach) (69:3/4) Summer/Fall 2010, 275-297.

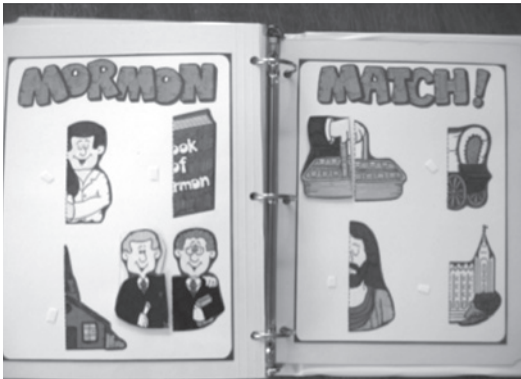
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Appendix A



A Pioneer Picture from a quiet book



Mormon Match Game from a quiet book



Lebi's Liabona Letters from a quiet book

PLAYING FOR CHANGE: THE PERFORMATIVE FUNCTIONS OF CHILDREN'S PIANO PLAY

BRANT W. ELLSWORTH

In an iconic scene from the 1988 film, *Big*, actors Tom Hanks and Robert Loggia leap from key to key on an enlarged foot-operated electronic keyboard as they perform in duet two piano pieces: "Chopsticks" and "Heart and Soul." For Hanks, playing the role of a 12-year-old boy magically transformed into a 30-year-old adult after wishing "to be big," the performance represents an outward manifestation of the inner-turmoil brought on by pre-pubescent size- and age-anxiety. As a child suddenly trapped within an adult's body, this form of play, I call "piano play," also represents a brief moment of liberation wherein for the first time in the film, Hanks appears comfortable negotiating the complexities of the incompatible worlds that he is trapped in, and yet, torn between: the world of childhood, characterized by carefree innocence and play; and the world of adulthood, characterized by work and responsibility.

This scene is effective at conveying Hanks' inner-turmoil because similar impromptu concerts are performed daily, flash-mob style, by children at pianos around the world and are recognized, around the world, as children songs. Search results on the popular video website, Youtube.com, include pages of shaky home videos of children teaching, performing, or improvising versions of "Chopsticks," "Heart and Soul," or "The Knuckle Song." Such results are consistent with my personal experience and observations made as a student of the piano, as an instructor in South Korea, as a father, and as a Boy Scout leader. For example, in 2003 I was teaching English at a South Korean HagWon (Academy) when two boys snuck out of class and into an adjacent, unoccupied piano classroom. When discovered, the boys gave me a mischievous smile and only came back to class after playing a variation of "Chopsticks." More recently, while monitoring the chaos of a recently concluded Cub Scout den meeting, I watched as young scouts ran around in unorganized play. A scout made his way over to a piano, sat down, and began hammering an "F" with his left hand and a "G" with his right hand. The repeating notes reverberating throughout the meeting room were the same notes I heard in the South Korea HagWon and that I watched Tom Hanks play on *Big*. As the boy finished his version of "Chopsticks," he barely had time to stand up before being pushed aside by another boy who sat down and played, in classic one-upmanship, the same song, although this time faster and much, *much* louder.

The universality of this type musical performance brought to my mind many questions. Is this folklore? Is this a musical performance, a form of play, or both? Why do children, especially children without formal piano training, learn and perform these songs on the piano? If these children are musically illiterate, a characterization that suggests the songs are not learned through music primers, how then are these songs transmitted from child to child, group to group? Who do these "pianists" intend to be the audience—in the case of the observed cub scouts, the other scouts or the adults in the room? Finally, what are the performative

functions of “piano play” and how do children use “piano play” to negotiate their social standing among friends, family, and society?

Before continuing, I should clarify what I mean by the term “piano play” and how this term is different from the more common phrase, “playing the piano.” By “piano play”, I do not mean the physical act of using fingers to depress notes on the piano. Instead, “piano play” is the act of engaging in play through the piano. While for some children “playing the piano” is a requirement set by authority figures, a chore, or a mandatory form of work, “piano play” is voluntary, improvised, and fun. I am not the first to wonder about the meaning children ascribe to their play. Over the course of many decades, folklorists have demonstrated how children use “play” as a mode of education, as a method of negotiating social groups, and as a form of entertainment. While children may use “piano play” for those same reasons, certain aspects of “piano play” appear to be unique and warrant additional query. For example, if there are rules that govern *who* (those who have learned or are learning) and *how* the piano is to be played (think about the mother chiding her son to stop pounding piano keys, “That is not a toy!”), than is “piano play” a form of musical protest wherein children skirt parental authority through engaging in prohibited activities? The piano is not a toy, but yet, in my observations, it is being used as one. Hanks’ character in *Big* is clearly using “piano play” as a means of coping with inner-turmoil and as an outlet for self-expression, but is there anything significant about his choice of songs? Does the use and performance of common piano duets like “Chopsticks” and “Heart and Soul” represent an additional layer in his complex ventilation of anxiety?

Identification and Annotation

In order to answer these questions, I observed and interviewed a group of children at play on April 7, 2012 at an informal church function at the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania.¹ While many of the adults sat in the gym eating and socializing, some of the children ran around the church in small groups playing games. Some of these children entered the Primary Room, a familiar room wherein they gather for Sunday school during church. In addition to being a room of spiritual learning and edification, the Primary Room is also a designated space for play as evident by the boxes of toys stacked neatly in the corner. Like many rooms in the church, the Primary room is equipped with a full-size, upright piano. Sitting down, I asked if any of the children could play the piano. One boy, Totten Christensen², age 9, said that he had taken piano lessons for two years but that he was not very good. The other children, Brady Nelson (age 9), triplets Adam, Tyler, and Nathan Bryner (age 8), Gracie Oaks (age 10), and Mattie Lewis (age 10) all said they could not. When I pressed them to clarify if they could play any song on the piano, each said they knew *some* songs but did not take formal lessons or know how to read piano music. I asked if they would play a song for me and they agreed.

Brady Nelson was the first to sit down at the piano. After opening the keyboard, adjusting the seat, and looking at his friends nervously, he began to play a song he called “Bubblegum.” I had never heard the song title before but as soon as he

began playing, I recognized a familiar tune that I had called, in my childhood, “The Knuckle Song.” Brady made his right hand into a fist and rolled his knuckles from left to right over the trio of black keys (F#, G#, and A#) in one sweeping motion. Keeping his hand in a fist, he hammered down twice on the next black key (C#). He repeated this series again, before reversing the direction and playing the trio of black keys from right to left and then hammering twice on the lower black key (B#). The direction was reversed yet again before Brady concluded the song with a quick series of staccato notes played with his index finger.

As soon as Brady finished, Nathan Bryner slid onto the piano bench and told Brady that he played the song “wrong.” Nathan demonstrated the “correct” method by likewise making a fist and rolling it along the black keys but then using his elbows instead of his fist to pound the C# and B#. Aside from the method of playing, the song was identical to the one Brady played. I asked Nathan what he called the song and neither he nor his brothers could recall a title. They said they learned the song from their cousin, Caleb, age 10, while visiting Caleb’s family in Utah. Other variations I found on YouTube include a boy playing the song while lying upside down on the bench with his head beneath the keys, a child piano prodigy who began his performance by rolling his fists across the keys, playing homage to the familiar and simple, only to diverge into a complex, improvised variation of the “Knuckle Song” as the audience cheered wildly, and a young boy playing the song as a duet with his grandfather.

I asked my informants if they had ever heard of the song “Heart and Soul” and looked down at a group of blank faces. When I hummed a few bars, eyes lit up. “Oh, I know *that* song,” said Gracie Oaks. “That song is easy!” Sliding onto the piano bench, Gracie sat towards the lower half of the piano and encouraged Mattie Lewis to join her. Bashfully, Mattie whined about not wanting to play the top hands. Reluctantly Gracie conceded and scooted over on the bench to make room for Mattie who sat to Gracie’s left. After flexing fingers and cracking knuckles, Mattie began playing the familiar call and answer of the song. With her left hand she played C – A – F – G while her right hand completing the cord, one note at a time (C – E – G, A – C – E, F – A – C, G – B – D). As Mattie started the sequence a third time, Gracie began playing a harmony in tempo with her right hand.

Like the popular children’s song, “This is the Song that Never Ends,” where the ending of one stanza is the beginning of another, “Heart and Soul” is written in an infinite-loop motif. The song continues indefinitely, stanza after stanza, until one of the children quits. The repetitive nature of the song aids in mastery and encourages variation as a means to ward off boredom. Mattie was the first to experiment in her playing. Instead of playing the C-, A-, F-, and G-chords one note at a time, she began playing the chords at once in a syncopated, rocking rhythm. Mattie then experimented with other notes, rhythms, and patterns.

Meanwhile, Gracie played a jazzy harmony in the upper-octaves. The melody was very lyrical and, unlike the rhythms Mattie was playing, Gracie’s harmony had a set beginning and ending. She played the same learned song over and over again. When Mattie varied her playing, Gracie stopped and watched, trying to pick up the new rhythm. When she felt she had it, she began playing again slightly altering her rhythm to match Mattie’s. The girls continued, gradually increasing

in tempo and volume, until the notes began to blur and the harmony became unrecognizable. Suddenly, the music stopped and the giggles began.

When the laughter quieted down, Gracie began mimicking a professional pianist by sitting upright and pretending to play a series of arpeggios with her left-hand while quickly playing nonsense notes with her right. The charade received high-praise from her young audience who laughed with glee at the spot-on impersonation. Having won the approval of her peers, Gracie scooted off the piano bench to make room for Totten, the one child who had taken piano lessons.

Not to be outdone, Totten began to play "Cherokee Dance," the song he had learned and memorized for a piano recital. The song was more complicated than those previously played; Totten maintained a steady drum-like beat with his left hand while the right hand played an unfamiliar, tribal-esque song. Although clearly an accomplished pianist, the more difficult yet unfamiliar tune did not elicit for Totten the same cheers or laughs as did Gracie's tomfoolery. With a determined smile, Totten opened up a nearby hymnal and began playing a fast-paced church hymn. While the song was certainly familiar to the children, again Totten's talents overshadowed the performance. He slid off the bench, clearly the best pianist of the bunch.

What Totten demonstrates is the difference between "piano play" and "playing the piano." While his friends appeared to be having fun on piano, Totten could not separate himself from his learning and as a result, his playing the piano exhibited a different function than the others. Instead of "piano play," Totten seemed to focus on aspects of performance and ability.

Adam and Tyler Bryner were the last two to take a place at the ivories. Both boys stuck out the index fingers of their hands and began playing the song "Chopsticks." The children erupted in muted exclamation as they recognized the song and confirmed to me, each slightly louder than the other, their own ability to play it. Adam and Tyler played the song by repeatedly hammering F and G notes six times in succession, followed by the E- and G- notes six times, the D- and B- notes six times, and concluded by striking C- notes in harmony. The song repeats this pattern once more before resolving into a melody composed of thirds.

Once the boys concluded their song, I asked questions about their method of learning and when these songs are performed. Gracie and Mattie both admitted they learned to play at a friend's home. Gracie's friend had a piano in the house and, while playing together a few years earlier, the friend taught her. The triplets, Adam, Tyler, and Nathan, all admitted learning "The Knuckle Song" from their cousin in Utah. They learned "Chopsticks" from their mother. I asked if one of the boys could teach me to play "Chopsticks" and I was quickly instructed to form imaginary chopsticks with my index fingers and told to play "these white notes like this." At this point, Nathan demonstrated the "correct" way of playing the song. Following his lead, I copied the song phrase by phrase until Nathan told me I had mastered it. I actually had learned to play this and other songs through my interactions with friends when I was a child. This is also the case with some other adults I interviewed. The transmission is often through a combination of oral explanation and physical demonstration.

I next asked the children why they played the piano. Mattie said, "Because it's fun!" "Well, what's so fun about it?" I responded. "It's just fun to play. I like to listen to music and make music with my friends. It's just fun to work together and see who messes up first." Mattie's answer suggests that the piano is a place for children to engage in "piano play." Totten disagreed about the piano being "fun." Each morning before school, Totten explained he must play the piano for thirty-minutes, practicing his scales and learning the assigned songs for the week—tasks that Totten considers boring. Playing the piano was a chore, a required task he was forced to complete. While other children saw the piano as something they got to play, for Totten, the piano was something he *had* to play. I asked Totten why he started taking piano lessons. He explained how everyone in his family "was forced" to play an instrument and he selected the piano. His choice in wording suggested this was something he did against his will. I asked if he was happy he knew how to play the piano. "Yeah, I guess so. I really like playing for my friends and with my family. Sometimes our whole family plays together as a big band. I think that's cool." For Totten, the piano is not a place for "play" as his encounters with it are not with friends but alone and forced.

Analysis and Interpretation/Explanation

Folklorists have been chided in the past for failing to offer meaningful explanations for the folklore that define the nature and character of child life. For decades, collections of children folklore sat unexamined and unexplained, providing few hints to what the collected items meant for the children who use them (see Sutton-Smith 1990, 17 and Dundes 1998, 119). However, scholarship in recent years, including works by Simon Bronner, Libby Tucker, and Brian Sutton-Smith, have demonstrated how fruitful the study of children's folklore, specifically children's folklore of play, may be by demonstrating how play helps children develop a sense of personal and communal identity and mediate their standing in a complicated vertical and horizontal social order. In the following paragraphs, I explore folkloric aspects of "piano play" and suggest a few possible functions unique to "piano play" that may provide a framework for understanding its meaning.

In a chapter examining the historiography of children's folklore, John H. McDowell defines children's folklore as encompassing many verbal and non-verbal activities that incorporate "playful or artistic motives with some standing in community tradition" (McDowell 1983, 314). For McDowell, the distinction between the two motives, playful and artistic, is important. He stresses these motives are not "coterminous" and children's folklore is one or the other. Such a binary definition is troublesome when examining "piano play" as it appears to blend the *playful* and *artistic* motives of children's folklore, creating perhaps a hyphenated third motive: playful-artistic. McDowell defines the *playful motive* as producing a sense of make-believe through the "allocation of a special play space, or by a reversal of real-life contingencies, or by some other factor." The *artistic motive* differs in that it is geared towards the "collective preoccupations" of the child and is intended for public consumption (McDowell 1983, 314).

Given these definitions, “piano play” uniquely provides children with both the environment (piano space) and tools (piano) to enter into a secondary reality (that of a talented pianist) while simultaneously encouraging expression intended for the consumption of horizontal and vertical social groups. In so doing, piano play opens up avenues of understanding of how children compete and collaborate with each other and use these functions as a way to mediate the anxiety associated with performance.

In his foundational observations on folklore, Bascom suggests folklore has four basic functions: to entertain, to educate, to stabilize society, and to serve as a release for anxieties (Bascom 1954, 343 – 346). In my experience and through my observations, I propose that, depending on the scenario, “piano play” fulfills each of these functions for the child participant. By situating “piano play” side-by-side with other forms of “musical play,” such as hand-clapping rhymes, jump-rope rhymes, and play-ground chants/songs documented in Simon Bronner’s *American Children’s Folklore*, we can see how “piano play” is an outlet for entertainment, self-expression, and cooperative play. For some of the children I interviewed, entertainment was the primary purpose for “piano play”—“It’s fun!” In her study of children at “musical play,” Patricia Shehan Campbell points out that on the playground and in the classroom, musical play unites children in purpose and solidifies social groups. By demonstrating knowledge of the music through chants, rhythms, songs, or other means, children form common playgroups and create bonds of solidarity (Campbell 2010, 25 – 30).

This solidarity was evident, for example, in the “Hear t and Soul” duet performed by Gracie and Mattie. As they began playing, the two adapted their performance to fit the tempo, style, and rhythm of the other. In this impromptu collaboration, each performer took turns experimenting and improvising on a musical instrument neither really knew how to play. As one would attempt to embellish their part, the other would diminish the volume of their part. It was as if there was one mind controlling four hands.

However, as the song continued, Gracie and Mattie began showing signs of disengagement—the song itself was no longer challenging and the girls had exhausted their repertoire of variation. With no clearly delineated ending, the girls seemed resigned to playing indefinitely or until someone quit. At this point in the song, the performance turned into a competition of endurance to determine who could outplay and outlast the other. When it became apparent that neither would quit, a nonverbal agreement was made and the performance suddenly became a competition of skill. Traditional rules that governed the performance of the piano piece, such as the suggested tempo, rhythm, and sound dynamics, were ignored. In fact, not only were these rules ignored, but also success in the competition hinged upon the participant doing the *opposite* of what the rules suggested. In this makeshift game, the faster, the louder, and the more non-traditional the piano play, the better. Having an extensive knowledge of proper piano playing technique or a repertoire of songs was not as important as being able to subvert rules, parody expectations, and ultimately have fun. As a result of these improvised rules, the tempo and volume of Gracie and Mattie’s version of “Heart and Soul” gradually increased until Gracie could not keep up and was forced to

quit. What had begun as a cooperative performance ended as a competitive game with a clearly defined winner and loser. After winning, Mattie turned to me and provided insight into her perspective, "I like to listen to music and make music with my friends. It's just fun to work together and see who messes up first." In other words, Mattie celebrated the opportunity to make music with her friend because it provided a shared experience for social bonding while allowing for social stratification and the development of hierarchies.

Another aspect of Gracie and Mattie's performance that was shared by other performers was their reliance on variation. On multiple occasions, the children attempted to surprise their audience through the unanticipated or unorthodox variation of a familiar form or method. For example, instead of playing a note with their finger, some children opted instead to use their fist or elbow. Other variations include using one's head, forearm, or bottom. This type of variation calls attention to the performance and to the performer. An analysis of children musical variations conducted by Bronner in *American Children's Folklore* provides insight into possible motives. Children often alter the lyrics of common songs to include obscene, macabre, or violent language and scenes. For example, the song "Jingle Bells," whose lyrics once celebrated the joy of a winter sleigh ride, is altered by children to describe the odors of superheroes and the egg-laying-abilities of their sidekicks. Likewise, children alter the lyrics to "Joy to the World" to celebrate school burning and teacher killing/disembodiment. As children become aware of social norms, these changes in lyrics allow them to dramatize and experiment with the limits of these taboos (Bronner 1988, 81). The changes in these lyrics are intended to elicit reaction from the audience—to make them cringe in disgust or cover their ears. These reactions place the performer in a position of power over the audience. As controller of the medium, the child determines whether to continue or to stop.

Variation is also a way of displaying creativity or feigning mastery. For example, when Brady sat at the piano to play "Bubblegum" or "The Knuckle Song," the audience expected him to play in a manner they had grown accustomed to over time and experience—they expected him to play the piano "normally." By using his fists instead of his fingers, Brady surprised the audience with his variation of form. Brady was performing a song in a unique way, drawing additional attention to the song, his playing style, and ultimately to himself. "Bubblegum" is not a difficult song to play, but by altering the form, Brady made the song appear more difficult. In so doing, he intended for his audience to perceive him as having more skill than he actually possessed. Skill is associated with time and practice. For someone to possess "skill," it is requisite that they must practice for an extended period of time. Skill, therefore, becomes equated with age. If someone possesses skill, they must also be old. By feigning to possess more talent than he actually has, Brady is suggesting he is older than he really is.

For children, "piano play" is a way to pretend to be something they are not, typically older, wiser, stronger, essentially, more adult-like. Gracie demonstrated this aptly after finishing her rendition of "Heart and Soul." In her demeanor, posture, and performance, Gracie the 10-year-old was transformed through the piano into "Gracie the Great," an accomplished pianist performing on stage at

Carnegie Hall. The purpose of “piano pretend play” falls in line with other forms of pretending games played by children. For example, in their collection of children’s folklore, *Children’s Games in Street and Playground*, Peter and Iona Opie document a long history of children “pretending games” going back to Ancient Rome that similarly show children attempting to take “shortcuts” to seem older or more adult-like than they really are. The Opies’ study includes games where children pretend to be mothers and fathers, schoolteachers, criminals, war heroes, and celebrities (Opie, 1969 330 – 344). Likewise, in her *Children’s Folklore: A Handbook*, Elizabeth Tucker writes that she observed children in New York during the 1990s pretending to be firefighters, police, teachers, doctors, Native Americans, and film and television stars (Tucker 2008, 32).

Piano variation is likewise an allowed means of experimentation within the boundaries set by societal norms. Often, the children will establish the right way to play first and then increased variation comes later to highlight specific skills. As Nathan told Brady after Brady finished playing “The Knuckle Song” with his fist, “That’s the *wrong* way to play it” and then demonstrated the elbow as a variant. In each child’s mind is the notion that foundationally there is a *right* and a *wrong* way to play a song. The complexity grows as we assume the child also knows that the audience knows there is a *right* and *wrong* way to play a song. The *wrong* way and the *proper* way to play are often the same and the *right* way is often in opposition to the *proper* way. By altering the piano performance in song, posture, clothing, and form the child is subverting expectations thereby experimenting with the boundaries of what is socially tolerated and socially unacceptable. The children found through the reactions of the audience that some variation, like playing with fists instead of fingers, to not only be tolerated but celebrated.

Returning to Bascom’s original four functions of folklore, how does “piano play” function to provide a release for anxieties? The answer is somewhat paradoxical for performing on the piano, whether for family, friends, or at a concert recital, usually does not *alleviate* or *release* anxiety, but, in fact, *causes* anxiety. Imagine the young child walking to the isolated piano on a lit stage, performing a challenging piece from memorization in front of an audience when the risk of error and public humiliation is high. Although the setting of this piano performance in a concert hall and the “piano play” that takes place in the living room may be different, performance anxiety is likely to exist in both settings as there exists elements of risk and vulnerability. However, in “piano play,” the fun, the opportunity for attention, and the opportunity for one-upmanship overpowers shyness and the risk of ridicule. Variation in piano play allows children to sidestep the need to appear competent in order to be successful. Instead, variation makes room for physical comedy, farce, and irony. It allows for and encourages imagination, freedom of expression, and collaboration. Working together to create or compete, children find these positives work to reduce anxiety.

Mormon Folklore

Although the children I interviewed are all members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormon), I do not feel that their piano play experiences

are unique only to children of this specific subgroup. Mormon children are first and foremost children and by tracing repetition and variation of piano play among other children, my analysis suggests a universal performative function. I distance my subjects from their religious affiliation in order to argue for broader implications, but I should note that in so doing I do not mean to devalue the importance of their religious identity. These children as Mormons *are* members of a recognized ethnic and religious subculture, and, as such, piano play does play an important role in the construction of their identity different from their peers. An examination of piano play within a Mormon religious folklore context allows us to pull back additional layers of functionality.

Mormon folklorist Bert Wilson wrote of the importance of reflexive studies in religious folklore. He recognized great value in looking, “not just at a body of abstracted beliefs but at actual behaviors, at the process of believing, at *how* religious people, Latter-day Saints and others, enact their convictions in daily life” (2006). In this paper, Wilson explored the practice of giving service among Mormons, suggesting that such experiences hold greater significance in Mormon religious living than do other more popular supernatural legends like the “Three Nephites.” I add to this list the central importance of music among Mormons. From their earliest existence, Mormons have been a musical people. Only days after the first official conference of the Church in June 1830, Joseph Smith, the Church’s founder, recorded a revelation that directed his wife, Emma, “to make a selection of sacred hymns, as it shall be given thee, which is pleasing unto me, to be had in my church” (Doctrine & Covenants 25:11). Years later, Brigham Young continued this musical traditional by directed the church to dance. Such fondness for music and dance led some to call the Mormons, “The Dancing Puritans.” Since their origins in 1852, the Mormon Tabernacle Choir has become an American institution. Mormon music historian Michael Hicks writes, MoTab has been “the object of presidential commendations, the focus of a *Reader’s Digest* record anthology—endorsed by Billy Graham—the topic of a widely distributed commemorative volume, and the even the subject of a U.S. postal stamp” (Hicks, 166). More recently, the popular success of Mormon singers like Donnie and Marie Osmond, David Archuleta, Gladys Knight, the Neon Trees, and Brandon Flowers, frontman for The Killers, has cemented this musical stereotype into American popular consciousness. Even in an episode of *South Park*, Mormons as a musical people is featured prominently. This stereotype is stressed in the television show *South Park*. In the episode, “All About the Mormons,” a Mormon family moves into town and introduces themselves to the neighbors. The father immediately encourages his five children to play a song. Each child, including an infant, picks up an instrument and begins singing and playing. The crawling infant selected the piano.

Without a paid lay ministry, Mormons from the congregation are asked to voluntarily give of their time and talents in order for the Church to function. Among these “callings” are many that focus on the musical abilities of the member. These calling include a choir director, chorister, organist, and the pianist for one of the many auxiliary groups. With a worldwide membership of over 12 million and nearly 29,000 congregations, the need for musical talent is high. For this reason, many Mormon parents require their children to study a musical instrument—piano

being the most common. As a child, my mother expected me and each of my three siblings to learn to play the piano, specifically hymns. She explained that by learning the piano, I could provide a great service to people around the world as a missionary. This is the case for many Mormon men and women who serve missions to remote countries around the world, countries where members do not have the same opportunity for learning musical instruments.

Mormons are also frequently taught the importance of discovering and developing talents. These lessons begin at a young age. For example, as a Primary teacher, the Church provided me a manual from which I could develop my lessons for the five-years-old. Chapter 26 of this lesson manual is called, "The Parable of the Talents," and uses teachings from the New Testament to encourage these five-year-olds to find and use their talents. The manual suggests that I, as the teacher, ask, "What do you think Jesus was trying to teach us by telling the parable of the talents?" I am then to, "Help the children understand that the Lord has given us talents, abilities, and opportunities (such as belonging to his church). He expects us to use all these things to make our lives better and to serve others" (Primary 7: New Testament, 1997). By developing their talents, Mormon children are taught that they can serve God.

Conclusion

Widely disseminated through oral tradition among children, this paper examines the performative functions of "piano play" and three specific children piano pieces, "Chopsticks," "Heart and Soul," and "The Knuckle Song" and argues that, during a liminal period, "piano play" provides children with a play-frame and space to negotiate age-anxiety. My analysis describes and expounds on the many ways I have documented that this negotiation occurs.

Childhood is a challenging period of life and many children do not have access to the tools that are needed to help them deal with these challenges. Left to their own devices, many unconsciously turn to the world of verbal and non-verbal folklore for help in coping with challenges and anxieties. As the boundaries of childhood become more constricted and contested, as evidenced by the popularity of socially constructed age-groups like "teenagers" and "tweeners," we will continue to see children seek shelter in the safety of shared folklore.

NOTES

1. Although the children I interviewed are all members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, I do not feel that the experiences I document within this paper are unique to children of this subgroup. To the contrary, I believe continued ethnographic study will show these performances are generally common for most children.

2. The names of the children have been changed to protect their privacy and identity.

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MINUTES OF THE CHILDREN'S FOLKLORE SECTION MEETING

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 25, 2012

In Attendance:

Kevin Cordi: cordik@ohiodominicon.edu
Priscilla Ord: pord@mcdaniel.edu
Irene Chagall: ichagall9@gmail.com
Jared Rife: jrife@psu.edu
Trevor Blank: blanktj@potsdam.edu
John McDowell: mcdowell@indiana.edu
Kathryn McCormick: kategro@yahoo.com
Spencer Green: slg310@psu.edu
Simon Bronner: sbronner@psu.edu
Brant Ellsworth: bwe5027@psu.edu

Business:

1. 2012 Aesop Award – Presented by Kevin Cordi from the Aesop Award committee
 - a. Aesop Award winner *Which Side are You On?* by George Ella Lyon
 - b. Accolades given to Rand Burkert's *Mouse & Lion*, Eric Walter's *The Matatu*, and Timothy McLaughlin's *Walking on Earth and Touching the Sky: Poetry and Prose*.
 - c. The committee asked for clarification on "What qualifies as folklore for the Aesop award?" and "Would collections of folklore, such as McLaughlin's book, qualify for the award?"
 - d. President Spencer Green and those in attendance agreed that the Aesop Award Committee should make those decisions and then present guidelines back to the section.
2. Suzy Grinford was elected to the Aesop Award Committee with an unanimous vote though she will need to pay dues to official join the Children's Folklore Section.
3. Opie Prize – Presented by John McDowell from the Opie Prize Committee
 - a. As the Opie Prize had not been awarded since 2006, the Opie Prize committee decided to award two prizes this year: one for books published between 2007 and 2010; the second for books published between 2010 and 2011.
 - b. Opie Prize pre-2010 was awarded to Kathryn Marsh's *The Musical Playground: Global Traditions and Change in Children's Songs and Games*
 - c. Opie Prize 2012 – 2011 was awarded to Anna Beresin's *Recess Battles: Play, Fighting, and Storytelling*

4. 2012 Financial Statement – Presented by Priscilla Ord
 - a. The section showed an increase in the total balance with funds totally \$11,990. However, this total does not reflect the recent payouts of the Newell Award to the last three recipients or the awarding of two Opie Prize winners.
 - b. Also of note, the price of award seals has doubled and Priscilla Ord agreed to price check other publishers
5. Editor for the Children's Folklore Review
 - a. As this is Libby Tucker's last year as editor, President Spencer Green asked for recommendations for the next editor. A few names were floated and President Green agreed to contact potential editors to check on interests and feasibility. The editor's school would need to be willing to cover \$2500 in newsletter printing costs.
6. Election of New Section Convener
 - a. Spencer Greed completed his two year term and Jared Rife, of Penn State Harrisburg, was unanimously elected as the new Convener
7. Children's Folklore Review Website
 - a. The Section approved a measure to purchase a domain name for the Children's Folklore Review. President Jared Rife agreed to spearhead this project.

NOTES AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

Newell Prize

The Children's Folklore Section of the American Folklore Society annually offers the William Wells Newell Prize (which includes a cash award) for the best student essay on a topic in children's folklore. Students must submit their own papers, and published papers are eligible. Instructors are asked to encourage students with eligible papers to enter the competition.

Papers must be double-spaced and submitted as a Word document. On the first page, include the author's name, academic address, home address, telephone numbers, and e-mail address. Deadline for this coming year's competition is September 1, 2014. Please submit papers to Jared S. Rife, jsr5238@psu.edu.

Book Reviews

Children's Folklore Review is seeking book review submissions for its next issue, to be published in October of 2014. This is an excellent opportunity for graduate students interested in building their writing credentials and demonstrating breadth in folklore, literature, and childhood studies. Books are selected for review in *Children's Folklore Review* according to their relevance to the field of children's folklore and their year of publication (within the past two years). If you would like to request a book for review, please contact the editor, Elizabeth Tucker (ltucker@binghamton.edu). Book reviews should not exceed 750 words.

CONTRIBUTORS

Brant Ellsworth is a Ph. D. candidate in American Studies at Penn State Harrisburg. He alternates academic masks during the week, working as an Instructor in the History and Political Science department at York College of Pennsylvania and in the Humanities department at Penn State Harrisburg. He is grateful to Simon Bronner, Jared Rife, Spencer Green, Tom Mould, and Eric Eliason for providing mentoring and insightful feedback on early drafts of this essay. Finally, Brant wishes to thank his wife and two daughters for inspiring this work.

Spencer Lincoln Green is completing a Ph.D. in American Studies at Penn State Harrisburg. His dissertation examines online trail journals of Appalachian Trail thru-hikers to better understand their community and identity today. He is a past president of the Children's Folklore Society and past winner of their W. W. Newell Prize for best student essay on children's folklore. Spencer researches what he knows and loves, so most of his publications include various combinations of children's folklore, narratives, hiking groups, technology, and Mormon culture.

Tom Mould is Associate Professor of Anthropology at Elon University, Director of the Honors Program, and Director of PERCS, Elon's Program for Ethnographic Research and Community Studies. He is the author of three books—*Choctaw Prophecy: A Legacy of the Future* (2003), *Choctaw Tales* (2004), and *Still, the Small Voice: Revelation, Personal Narrative and the Mormon Folk Tradition* (2011)—and co-editor of two more—*The Individual and Tradition* (2011) and *Latter-day Lore* (2013). His current project examines the impact narratives about the welfare system in the U.S. have on shaping public opinion and policy.

Jared S. Rife is a doctoral candidate and instructor of American Studies in the American Studies program at Penn State Harrisburg. His dissertation examines the experiences and state of mind of college-aged men's and women's culture during the years 1936-1941. He also serves as the Convener of the Children's Folklore Section.

