Walking in Between: The Messaging in Jeffrey R. Holland's Speech "The Second Half of the Second Century of Brigham Young University"

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Abstract

This research paper seeks to discover insights into the messaging found in Jeffrey R. Holland's August 23, 2021, speech given at Brigham Young University during University Conference. Holland is a leader and apostle of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Although this speech was directed towards faculty and staff of the university, it was soon after disseminated to the public. Holland's remarks were perceived as shocking and inconsistent to many members, nonmembers, and ex-members in relation to the inclusive statement by Brigham Young University (Swenson, 2021, para. 2). The explosion on social media resulted in public protests and verbal confrontations in the town of Provo, Utah, and the University issuing a statement condemning hateful speeches and behaviors (Pugmire, 2021, para. 11). Symbolic Convergence Theory will be used to examine the messaging of this speech that might be perceived as inconsistent to the principle of inclusivity—specifically towards sexual minority students. This study does not evaluate the truth claims of the church.

Keywords: Fantasy themes, Symbolic Convergence Theory (SCT), Jeffrey R. Holland, inclusivity, LDS church, Mormon church, LGBTQIA+, sexual minority

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, commonly called the Mormon church, was founded on April 6, 1830, in the state of New York (Badertscher, 2020). Today, Latter-day Saints (as members often refer to themselves) have become part of a religious organization of over sixteen million (Noyce, 2020). Brigham Young University, sponsored by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, has not followed the early twentieth century path of secularization trodden by many other research universities (Daines, 2018). Secularization in this case is defined as when religious faith is not the center of research and education (Daines, 2018,

pg. 3). Founded in 1875, the university not only maintained its religious affiliation as a faith-centered institution throughout the mid-1930s and 40s, but also has continued to champion its foundational values (Wilkins & Whetten, 2012).

Jeffrey R. Holland, a leader and apostle of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, gave a speech at Brigham Young University on August 23, 2021, during University Conference. On the same day, the university announced the formation of a new "Office of Belonging" (Jenkins, 2021). Although the speech by Holland was directed towards faculty and staff of the

university, it was soon after disseminated to the public. Holland's remarks were perceived as shocking to many members, nonmembers, and ex-members (Swenson, 2021, para. 2). The explosion on social media resulted in public protests and verbal confrontation in the town of Provo, Utah, and the University issuing a statement condemning hateful speeches and behaviors (Pugmire, 2021, para. 11).

The Office of Belonging was created to address the needs of marginalized individuals on campus (Jenkins, 2021). The university president, Kevin J. Worthen, stated, "The office is created to root out racism and combat prejudice of any kind, including that based on race, ethnicity, nationality, tribe, gender, age, disability, socioeconomic status, religious belief and sexual orientation" (Jenkins, 2021). However, Holland seemed to have created messaging that is perceived as inconsistent to many believers of the church as well as students of Brigham Young University (Monson, 2021, para. 6). Some active members of the church, who have revered Holland all their lives, described their experience as "disappointed" (Riess, 2021, para. 4). This type of messaging results in cognitive dissonance in members—the theory that describes how people tend to act and believe to minimize the divergence between action and belief (Harmer-Dionne, 1998).

Research has continually shown the decline of religious belief and practices in Americans (Twenge et al. 2016). Scholars have also studied Symbolic Convergence Theory (SCT) in the context of religious messaging; however, few scholars have studied symbolic convergence within messaging used by prominent LDS church leaders such as Holland—fourth-ranking senior apostle of the church (Heath, 1987) and former president of BYU. Holland's talk The Second Half of the Second Century of Brigham Young University will be examined using SCT to understand the messaging embedded in the speech and how members of the church create symbolic consciousness that is constitutive of reality through fantasy and bond with each other. SCT will also be used to show how various aspects of the speech might be perceived as inconsistent to the topic of belonging and inclusion and even harmful (Kaplan, 2021). This paper could be used to understand the perceived non-inclusive messaging and how one might minimize similar types of messaging moving forward by using a different messaging approach.

Literature Review

This literature review consists of important areas of research explaining the Symbolic Convergence Theory (SCT), how the theory is applied in religious communication (Underation, 2012), potential challenges of fantasy themes, and contextual information about The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in relation to cognitive dissonance experienced by sexual minorities.

The Symbolic Convergence Theory

The Symbolic Convergence Theory (SCT) provides a universal explanation for human communication (Bormann, 1982). It describes creation, maintenance and possible interpretations of empathic communication. It uses the human tendency to interpret signs and symbols to form meaningful social bonds. Convergence refers to when two or more symbolic worlds encounter each other. People experience symbolic convergence through having their symbolic worlds overlap and by sharing their common experiences through communication. Symbolic Convergence also describes how people develop an emotional investment in and commitment to the symbols they live by. These emotions allow people to sympathize and identify with one another, thus creating a community (Bormann, 1982). Bormann (1982) describes the communicative process by which people experience symbolic convergence as the sharing of fantasies. Fantasy chains are when people are harmoniously participating in a common drama. Group or organization members describe their experience in terms of analogies, metaphors, and narrative accounts. Fantasy themes and fantasy types could be found in written messages of group fantasies.

Bormann refuted criticisms on the theory that it is Freudian-based and applies only to small group communication (Bormann et al., 2003). The theory helps explain aspects in interpersonal, small group, organizational, public, mass, corporate, and intercultural communication (Bormann et al., 2001). SCT is useful because of its heuristic value. Through stories and practices, people share a common understanding of what it means to be a member of the same group. SCT is used to create, raise, and maintain group consciousness. Humans are able to create symbolic consciousness that is constitutive of reality through fantasy and bond with each other in creating a cohesive, strong community (Bormann et al., 1994).

Fantasy Theme and Symbolic Cues

According to Cragan and Shields (1992), SCT helps understand the meaning, emotion, and motive within the content of a message. Fantasy theme is the basic unit of analysis for the SCT (Cragan & Shields, 1992). It presents a common experience for a group of people and shapes that

experience into symbolic knowledge. Fantasy themes are imaginative ideas that a group of people develop to help understand reality since reality is constructed symbolically. Fantasy theme analysis is often used as the research method to capture different symbolic realities. A symbolic cue is a word, phrase, slogan, or nonverbal behavior. Symbolic cues act as triggers to remind members of the same group of their previously shared fantasies and emotions (Cragan & Shields 1992). Symbolic cues can act as a heuristic to connect people with whom they share similar constructed realities.

Group Fantasies

SCT also stems from the human tendency to try to understand events, life decisions, and actions that happen (Bormann, 1996). Interpreting events allows us to assign different responsibilities and emotions to the situation (e.g. praise, blame, hate, love, etc.). When a group of people share a fantasy together, they make sense of prior confusion. They come to symbolic convergence on one specific matter and end up envisioning their world in similar ways by creating shared interpretation, symbols, and common ground (Bormann, 1996). Bormann (1996) found that group fantasies often include dramatized messages. Dramatized messages may contain wordplay, puns, figures of speech, analogies, anecdotes, allegories, fables, or narratives. Fantasy chains spark interest and attention in the listener and help them respond to the narrative. A group of people can soon be talking and grow emotional when the imaginative enactment happens, whereas before then there might be little in which the audience can connect with each other.

Rhetorical Visions

Rhetorical visions are when composite dramas are being shared within large groups of people in a symbolic reality (Bormann, 1972). Rhetorical visions are constructed from fantasy themes and are then shared in groups, speaker-audience transactions, TV broadcasts, and many different large-group public settings. Any theme tied to the rhetorical vision can spark an emotional response. Rhetorical visions and fantasy themes demonstrate together that in order for messages to be persuasive, it is important to repeat what the audience already knows. Speakers often create messages that listeners already know and accept.

The Mormon rhetorical vision has been examined using SCT and Fisher's narrative theory. Challis (1992) discussed the recurring appeals of the rhetorical visions of the Mormon church and how those who embrace the narratives have increased in numbers dramatically in recent years. Some reasons the researcher included are how the rhetorical vision of the Mormon church appeals to the American value system. Church members all over the world—and in large in the United States—connect with the values taught in the church and then continue to share these rhetorical visions with others.

SCT in Religious Communication

Ever since its founding, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has focused on missionary work, attempting to persuade others around the world to accept its doctrines and practices (Challis, 1992). Scholars have also examined different narratives within different churches. A Missouri Baptist Church was found to have three prevalent fantasy themes: identifying with the church's successes and traditions, the members' link with the Southern Baptist denomination, and the organization's perceived success of their leader linked to the success of the church (Mathews, 2005). Mathews (2005) also found that younger members often interpret the fantasy themes differently than older members of the church.

Kwanzaa Community Church is the only African-American Presbyterian church in Minnesota (Madlock, 2009). It has been a place of refuge from oppression for African Americans, and some of its fantasy themes include consciousness creating, consciousness raising, and consciousness sustaining (Madlock, 2009). They place value on morals, ethical teaching, creating and appreciating natural and man-made aesthetics and caring for others. Jesus is part of their rhetorical vision of the church, but not the center of the cultural holiday message.

Mesaros-Winckles (2009) classified the Westboro Baptist Church (WBC) in Topeka, Kansas, more as a hate group disguised as a church. The church protests and promotes an anti-homosexual agenda on websites, podcasts, and press releases. Since WBC members believe that America as a nation is acting against the will of God, their religious rhetoric stirs up a cauldron of emotions that resists reason (Mesaros-Winckles, 2009). A prominent theme found in the WBC was religious manipulation. They often include rhetoric that exempts the religious groups' leader from criticism and that manipulates the will of others. WBC interprets tragedies, such as Hurricane Katrina and deaths of soldiers in Iraq, as signs of God's disapproval in America supporting homosexuality (Mesaros-Winckles, 2009, pg. 6). Fantasy themes portrayed by the church's propaganda videos include gay individuals wearing pig masks and comments that gays and Americans are going to hell (all except for the members of WBC). Simmons (2014) examined the messaging

found within fantasy themes of ex-Christians' deconversion narratives. Ex-believers would often search for others who have experienced similar feelings to share stories with each other concerning their former religious faith. Recurring words or symbolic cues are often found in their narratives and stories as well. Just like believers bond with each other with their own symbolic cues, ex-believers also have symbolic cues that create fantasy themes that help them relate to one another.

Historical Overview of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

The new American religion was founded on April 6, 1830, in the state of New York during a time of religious uprising. The prophet Joseph Smith claimed to have received divine authority to establish the church as a restoration of a church founded anciently by Jesus Christ. Mormons proved by their early achievements to be a group of industrious, frugal, and skilled mechanics and farmers, capable of trade and commerce (Roberts, 1912). After Smith's death in 1844, Brigham Young led thousands of pioneers to Utah in 1847, seeking a refuge from religious persecution. They settled by the Great Salt Lake (Badertscher, 2020). What began with six people in 1830 had endured and flourished. Today, Latter-day Saints (as members often refer to themselves) have become part of a religious organization of over sixteen million (Noyce,2020).

Potential Challenges of Fantasy Themes Relating to Marginalized Groups

A dangerous phenomenon of the fantasy themes found in the SCT occurs when people become too dogmatic. Persuaders may also employ fantasy themes to turn listeners from traditional messaging to a defensive strategy as a political-rhetorical weapon to harm others, namely marginalized groups of people (Mueller, 2004). These could include women, racial minorities, and sexual minorites.

The Role of Women in the Mormon Church

Religious institutions are extremely influential in how gender identities are constructed in families, private spaces, workplaces, and the community (Halford et al., 2021). Halford et al. (2021) also described how in traditional Christian communities, women are often subject to greater gender inequality due to patriarchal organizational structures and religious dogma. Members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints find it difficult to express diverse forms of gender expression and roles because of the messaging taught at general conferences—a semiannual global conference of

the church (Bradley-Evans, 2005). Women are often asked to focus on practical tasks without ever gaining a thorough understanding of feminism (Bradley-Evans, 2005).

According to Chen (2014), the multi-million-dollar "I'm a Mormon" campaign was a tremendous effort from The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints on influencing public perceptions about members of the church. These ads sent a clear message about Mormon family values and especially the ideal of womanhood and motherhood. Mormon women reaffirm the traditional gender roles for women as they emphasize stay-at-home motherhood as the most important identity above all others. Women are considered the most divine and holy as they bear and rear children. The idealization of motherhood also leads to the disapproval of wage-earning mothers within the church.

Mormonism promotes distinctive and complementary gender roles as found in The Family: A Proclamation to the World (Hinkley, 1995):

> By divine design, fathers are to preside over their families in love and righteousness and are responsible to provide the necessities of life and protection for their families. Mothers are primarily responsible for the nurture of their children (Hinckley, 1995, para. 7).

The church is categorized by some as a highly structured, but rigidly patriarchal religious organization (Hinderaker, 2017). The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints allows all worthy male members to hold priesthood authority (Hinderaker, 2017). Mormon priesthood is believed by members of the church to be God's authority on earth. Many Mormons believe that the restoration of the priesthood gives members of the church the authority to baptize, give blessings, and participate in other holy ordinances; however, women in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints do not receive the same priesthood and are to support the priesthood holders and defer to husbands, brothers, and sons (Hinderaker, 2017).

Although women are not explicitly stated in the Bible to be an inferior sex, most scholarly research characterizes the underlying society of the Bible as patriarchal (Crawford, 2015, pg. 3). Women's freedom is especially limited in public spaces and female authority continues to be suppressed when the Bible is being treated as normative reading in modern times (Crawford, 2015). Mormonism does recognize a Heavenly Mother; however, this theology is not frequently taught within church discourse. Members are cautioned to not pray to Heavenly Mother and

how speculations on the subject can lead to deception (Renlund, 2022, para. 7).

Women can experience reduced freedom within conservative religious organizations (Feller, 2016). Egyptian Muslim women follow social limitations that authorities deem to be moral conduct (Feller, 2016, p. 157). In Mormonism, leaders often encourage women to stay home with their children; and stigmatize the pursuit of a career. Mormon women often turn to personal revelation when negotiating challenges found within the institution, thus using their individual agency and personal experience to self-interpret the limits. Many would describe how they prayed about the situation and felt good about their decisions (Feller, 2016, p. 158).

A Church for All of God's Children?

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints heavily focuses on missionary work, sharing its doctrines and practices with people around the world (Challis, 1992). Today, the church averages around 700 converts a day and has temples in over 66 countries (Coppins,

2021). However, the church has been accused by many of being a predominantly white religion, and both members and non-members have criticized it for being prejudiced against Black people (Trank, 1971).

> For much of its [the church's] history—from the mid-1800s until 1978—the Church did not ordain men of black African descent to its priesthood or allow black men or women to participate in temple endowment or sealing ordinances ("Race and the priesthood," n.d., para. 3).

Since the church's president reveals God's word and is the only instrument who can decide a theological change, this created intellectual dissonance and internal conflict for members of the church (Trank, 1971). The ban was later lifted at the 148th general conference of the church in 1978 through a document that is currently listed as the church's Official Declaration 2 (Kimball et al., 1978).

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has been trying to globalize its faith base; however, there are challenges that come with merging cultures and worldviews (Chen, 2020). The church sent missionaries to the Mauritian landscape in the early 1980s (Chintaram, 2021), and Mauritius celebrates multiculturalism. It has been challenging for Mauritian church members to navigate cultural heritage and find their place within an American-born religion and its fantasy theme narratives.

The Church has been building its relationship with the Chinese government for over four decades (Chen, 2020). However, due to the church's precarious political position in China, it has not released any information regarding its development in the country, and the branding effects of the church remain uncertain. The church also faces negative information online, stereotypes of being a cult-like faith, and warnings from Christian pastors that impede its message from being accepted in the country (Chen, 2020). Chen (2020) described that the church's "Americanness" can attract curiosity; however, the American characteristics can also generate distrust towards the church due to the recent trade war between China and the US, as well as accusations regarding the COVID-19 pandemic. Last, political complications might ask for the church to adapt its teachings to "Mormonism with Chinese characteristics" instead of its original form (p. 76).

Religious Cognitive Dissonance for Sexual Minorities

Adolescents who identify with the LGBTQ+ community in religious contexts may have higher risks for mental health issues (Gibbs & Goldbach, 2021). Research has shown that sexual minority youths are at risk to experience negative mental health outcomes. They're more likely to experience depression. Religious messages that contain anti-homosexual rhetoric often create dissonance among sexual minority adolescents (Gibbs & Goldbach, 2021).

When religious beliefs are tightly connected to someone's moral domain, uncertainty creates cognitive dissonance in the minds of believers (Forstmann & Sagioglou, 2020, p. 76). This especially occurs when a person holds contradictory beliefs and values or encounters experiences inconsistent with his or her beliefs. Cognitive dissonance causes cognitive and emotional distress (Forstmann & Sagioglou, 2020, p. 77). This is contrary to the role of religion.

Often, by thinking about religion people feel increased certainty and control, but this is not always the case for LGBTQ+ members in religious narratives.

According to Mental Health America, the adult ranking for mental illness in the year of 2020 has Utah listed as number fifty out of fifty-one states—the lower the ranking, the higher the number of mental illnesses in a particular area and the lower the rates of access to care ("Ranking the States," 2022). The measurements include several metrics: adults with any mental illness (AMI), adults with substance use disorder, adults who had serious thoughts of suicide, AMI who are uninsured, AMI

who did not receive treatment and have unmet needs, and those with disability who don't have access to doctors due to high costs ("Ranking the States," 2022). Although youth ranking is not as low as the adult rankings in 2020, it is still ranked number forty-one ("Ranking the States," 2022). Similarly with adult rankings, states ranked between 39–51 show that the youth have lower rates of access to care and higher rates of mental illnesses in the area. The metrics for youth rankings include several considerations as well: youth with one or more major depressive episodes in the past year, substance use of disorder, severe major depressive episode (MDE), youth with MDE who did not receive mental health services, youth with MDE who received some mental health services, children with insurance that did not cover mental health issues, and students with emotional disturbance (Ranking the States, 2022).

Miet (2014) described that the LDS policies for members of the LGBTQ+ community may contribute to this statistic. Deanna Rosen, a 61-year-old social worker and therapist describes how one third of her patients in Salt Lake City are sexual minority youths who grew up in the LDS church. Unfortunately, many of them live in cognitively challenging environments that could contribute to their poor mental health, and some were kicked out of their homes because of religious narratives (Miet,2014).

Limitations & Justification

The purpose of this research is to investigate the strategic messaging found in the major fantasy themes of Holland's speech in relation to marginalized individuals found on BYU campus—specifically sexual minorities. A study surveying students at Brigham Young University found that 13% of the students surveyed did not identify with being exclusively heterosexual (Klundt et al., 2021). Sexual minority students on campus experience a lower quality of life than their heterosexual peers and encounter higher levels of psychological distress (Klundt et al., 2021). This study will provide insights into the rhetorical visions' implications, as well as build on aspects of the SCT and other previous studies of the theory.

SCT should be the most effective in answering the research questions because messaging can be categorized into character, setting, and action. This study aims to review sources from an academic viewpoint and will provide insight regarding the speech messaging that might be useful to both the leadership of the church as well as scholars in other fields. This study will not be evaluating the truth claims of the church but is more interested in how those claims are perceived by audiences.

The purpose of this research is to investigate the SCT within Holland's talk. This paper will examine major fantasy themes found in the speech "The Second Half of the Second Century of Brigham Young University." There will be insights on topics that might be difficult for some members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. However, this study aims to review sources from an academic viewpoint.

Research Question

RQ: What are the major fantasy themes found within Holland's messaging in relation to sexual minorities?

Method

Ernest Bormann's (1972) Symbolic Convergence Theory (SCT) along with the fantasy theme analysis found within the theory were employed as the method for this research. Bormann (1982) described fantasy theme analysis as a tool that provides universal explanation for rhetorical messages. Dramatizing communication uses imaginative language such as puns, figures of speech, wordplay, analogies, anecdotes, allegories, parables, jokes, stories, talks, legends, narratives, etc. Fantasy chains emerge from such communication (Bormann, 1972).

The Symbolic Convergence Theory (SCT) is used as a lens through which the speech by Holland is examined. The speech transcript was obtained from the BYU Speeches website (speeches.byu. edu). Jeffrey R. Holland's speech, "The Second Half of the Second Century of Brigham Young University," is the main text for this research. The supplemental text includes the university's Statement on Belonging (Jenkins, 2021). They will be analyzed and examined using SCT through a qualitative approach.

SCT is useful in providing a broad view of the speech; however, it is not detailed and specific enough for my examination of the text. Therefore, both deductive and inductive research approaches will be used working within the SCT framework. I will code the characters, settings, and action messaging based on if it focuses on belonging and inclusivity. Ernest G. Bormann created SCT to understand small groups and mass communication. Dramatized messages, such as fantasy themes, create social reality for groups of people. Those messages are a way to examine the group's cohesion, culture, and motivation (Bormann, 1972). Group fantasies are when group members respond to the fantasy themes and show commitment to the narrative (Bormann, 1972, p. 397).

Fantasy themes provide insights into the shared worldview of groups (Bormann, 1972). SCT is largely based on two assumptions: 1) communication creates reality and 2) symbols not only create reality for individuals, but they also provide meanings that can converge to create a community of people sharing the same reality (Foss, 2008, p. 97). Convergence refers to the state between several people when their individual symbolic worlds overlap. They then share a common consciousness or fantasy. Fantasy theme is the basic unit of analysis. "Fantasy" in the SCT framework is not defined as something fictitious; instead, it is referring to the artistic interpretation of events (Foss, 2008, p. 98). It is designed to describe the constructed reality a group of people experience. Actions that do not make sense to an outsider make perfect sense when seen within the context of the group and its rhetorical vision (Foss, 2008, p. 101).

The faculty and staff of Brigham Young University share fantasy themes and a rhetorical vision, largely taught and influenced by the teachings and values of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Foss (2008) describes the fantasy theme particularly well— "a story that accounts for the group's experience and that is the reality of the participants." I will be analyzing the speech by Holland using the fantasy theme analysis. The fantasy theme analysis is composed of two steps (Foss, 2008, p.101): 1) coding the setting, character, and action themes of the speech and 2) constructing and framing the rhetorical visions from the fantasy themes.

The core principle of the SCT is that humans interpret signs and symbols that explain reality and create fantasies that transform individuals into cohesive groups (Bormann, 1996). BYU's inclusive statement provides the meaning, emotion, and motive for action that is perceived by some as inconsistent with the rhetorical themes of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The speech was examined sentence by sentence and read multiple times for a more accurate examination.

Foss created three main elements to categorize fantasy themes: setting, character, and action (Foss, 2008, p. 99). I will provide a brief explanation of each of these three elements and demonstrate how coding is to be done within this framework. The setting theme is the place where the action or event is happening. Character themes portray the actors and characters in the messaging. Character themes also include me, we, people, I, etc. Nonhuman entities with human action should be coded as characters (Foss, 2008, p. 102). These include earth, music, institutions, and more. Action themes are plotlines in which the characters

engage in the messaging (Foss, 2008). They are linked to characters and thus should be coded with them. There can be more themes in one category and fewer in another. Anything in the text that was not a setting, character, or action theme was not coded (Foss, 2008). If a word or phrase belonged in more than one category, I coded it in both categories and waited until the end of coding to see which of the rhetorical visions were formed. Then I decided which category the word or phrase best belongs. To illustrate this coding, the following passage from the university's Statement of Belonging was found and examined:

We are united by our common primary identity as children of God (Acts 17:29; Psalm 82:6) and our commitment to the truths of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ (BYU Mission Statement). We strive to create a community of belonging composed of students, faculty, and staff whose hearts are knit together in love (Mosiah 18:21) where:

> All relationships reflect devout love of God and a loving, genuine concern for the welfare of our neighbor (BYU Mission Statement); We value and embrace the variety of individual characteristics, life experiences and circumstances, perspectives, talents, and gifts of each member of the community and the richness and strength they bring to our community (1 Corinthians 12:12–27); Our interactions create and support an environment of belonging (Ephesians 2:19); and the full realization of each student's divine potential is our central focus (BYU Mission Statement, Jenkins, 2021).

In this passage, the settings include "community of belonging," "restored gospel of Jesus Christ," and "environment of belonging." The characters are "we," "our," "children," "God," "Jesus Christ," "they," "students," "faculty," "staff," "relationships," "hearts," "each member of the community," and "neighbor." The action themes utilized are "united" (we/members of the university), "commitment" (we), "strive to create" (we), "knit together in love" (hearts), "reflect devout love of God" (all relationships), "value and embrace" (we), "bring" (each member of the community), "full realization of each student's divine potential" (our central focus), and "create and support" (our interactions).

Using the fantasy theme analysis, I coded and categorized the inclusive and exclusive characters, settings, and action languages found within Holland's speech pertaining to sexual minorities. The major and minor themes

were identified. Themes that appear the most frequently are coded as major themes. I then identified the settings, characters, and actions that construct a fantasy theme.

According to Cragan and Shields (1992), SCT includes understanding that meaning, emotion, and motive are often manifested in the content of a message. Members of a group interpret meanings of fantasy themes the same way, and they also have similar emotional responses and attitudes towards the same fantasy. Foss describes that fantasy themes involve a creative interpretation of personal experiences and events (Foss, 2008). SCT turns what seems to be confusing into something organized (Foss, 2008, p.99).

Analysis

The speech by Holland was intended to instruct faculty and staff of Brigham Young University to unite in their beliefs and follow the leaders of the church (board of trustees of the university). It also included mentions and perceptions of sexual minorities. Through my analysis of Holland's speech, I found three major fantasy themes regarding sexual minorities. These include defending the faith, loyalty to church leadership and church teachings, and the perception that public awareness of sexual minorities creates divisiveness. The word and phrase "believers" and "members of the church" are often used interchangeably, referring to members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Defending the Faith

The most prevalent fantasy theme was reflected in one of the subtitles of Holland's speech: "A trowel in one hand and a musket in the other." This major theme includes the recurring use of symbolic cues such as defend (5 uses), and the action is accompanied by "the kingdom," "the faith," and "marriage as the union of a man and a woman." It was also used as a noun— "defender," and "defender of the faith." Since this fantasy theme uses the action word "defend," messaging that accompanies the action word incorporates a war-like parallel. Holland described how members should defend the faith by using an analogical musket. The word "musket" was mentioned seven times throughout the speech. Holland quoted Neal A. Maxwell, who created the metaphor between teachers at BYU and pioneer temple builders in Nauvoo:

> In a way [Church of Jesus Christ] scholars at BYU and elsewhere are a little bit like the builders of the temple in Nauvoo, who worked with a trowel in one hand and a musket in the other. Today scholars building the temple of learning must

also pause on occasion to defend the kingdom. I personally think this is one of the reasons the Lord established and maintains this university. The dual role of builder and defender is unique and ongoing. I am grateful we have scholars today who can handle, as it were, both trowels and muskets (Holland, 2021, para. 24).

Holland also quoted another statement by Dallin H. Oaks—an apostle and leader of the church— given at a previous university leadership meeting at BYU: "I would like to hear a little more musket fire from this temple of learning " (Holland, 2021, para. 25). This sentence was addressed specifically to the audience in regards to the doctrine of the family and in defending the traditional marriage as the union of a man and a woman (Holland, 2021, para. 25).

Holland then continued to say that even though some faculties have fired their "muskets," after Oaks' address, they were aimed at the wrong audience: "Some others fired their muskets all right, but unfortunately they didn't always aim at those hostile to the Church. We thought a couple of stray rounds even went north of the Point of the Mountain!" (para. 25). "North of the Point of the Mountain" could be interpreted as Salt Lake City, which is home to the Mormon church headquarters. In paragraph 30, Holland again mentioned the phrase musket fire:

> Musket fire? Yes, we will always need defenders of the faith, but "friendly fire" is a tragedy—and from time to time the Church, its leaders, and some of our colleagues within the university community have taken such fire on this campus. And sometimes it isn't friendly, wounding students and the parents of students... (Holland, 2021, para. 30).

He then went on and endorsed, once again, the metaphor made by Neal A. Maxwell:

> My Brethren have made the case for the metaphor of musket fire, which I have endorsed yet again today. There will continue to be those who oppose our teachings—and with that will continue the need to define, document, and defend the faith (Holland, 2021, para. 31).

These examples illustrated how early members of the church had to protect and defend their land and faith by literally carrying both trowels and muskets while they worked. Holland urged members today to continue to do the same to defend the faith—specifically the topic of marriage between a man and a

woman—although "musket fire" in this case is represented metaphorically.

Loyalty to Church Leadership and Church Teachings

Another fantasy theme addressed within the messaging of Holland's speech is loyalty to church leadership and church teachings. The words "prophet" and "prophetic" were mentioned four times. Characters that were a part of church leadership also included "the Lord's anointed," "Neal A. Maxwell," "Dallin H. Oaks," "Russell M. Nelson," "David A. Bednar," and "President Kimball." Because BYU is a private university and an extension of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, the board of trustees consists of church leadership:

> I said then and I say now that if we are an extension of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, taking a significant amount of sacred tithes and other precious human resources, all of which might well be expended in other worthy causes, surely our integrity demands that our lives "be absolutely consistent with and characteristic of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ." At a university there will always be healthy debate regarding a whole syllabus full of issues. But until "we all come [to] the unity of the faith, and . . . [have grown to] the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ," our next best achievement will be to stay in harmony with the Lord's anointed, those whom He has designated to declare Church doctrine and to guide Brigham Young University as its trustees.

Holland described adhering to church leadership as "the next best achievement" for the faculty and staff of the university. This passage clearly demonstrates the relationship the university has with the church, and the values it holds—which are aligned with the characteristics of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ.

Holland used 16 paragraphs to recount concerns conveyed to him by other members and their perception of sexual minorities. He expressed his love towards sexual minority students and parents; however, he then always emphasized the importance of following the leadership and church doctrine after he shares his love: "There are better ways to move toward crucially important goals in these very difficult matters—ways that show empathy and understanding for everyone while maintaining loyalty to prophetic leadership and devotion to revealed doctrine" (Holland, 2021, para. 30). He described that he had wept and prayed about the questions members have asked him: "Like many of you, we

have spent hours with them, and we have wept and prayed and wept again in an effort to offer love and hope while keeping the gospel strong and the obedience to commandments evident in every individual life" (para. 28). Holland described that he and other leaders of the church are hearing the concerns members have brought up, but he pleaded with the university to stay true to the church that funds and supports it:

> I will go to my grave pleading that this institution not only stands but stands unquestionably committed to its unique academic mission and to the Church that sponsors it. We hope it isn't a surprise to you that your trustees are not deaf or blind to the feelings that swirl around marriage and the whole same-sex topic on campus—and a lot of other topics. I and many of my Brethren have spent more time and shed more tears on this subject than we could ever adequately convey to you this morning or any morning. We have spent hours discussing what the doctrine of the Church can and cannot provide the individuals and families struggling over this difficult issue (para. 26).

Holland continues to emphasize loyalty to church teachings and principles in relations to sexual minorities in the church and shared his interpretation of Christ and the commandments:

> For example, we have to be careful that love and empathy do not get interpreted as condoning and advocacy or that orthodoxy and loyalty to principle not be interpreted as unkindness or disloyalty to people. As near as I can tell, Christ never once withheld His love from anyone, but He also never once said to anyone, "Because I love you, you are exempt from keeping my commandments." We are tasked with trying to strike that same sensitive, demanding balance in our lives. (Holland, 2021, para. 29)

From this messaging, we can see that Holland encourages his audience to show love to sexual minorities while still being loyal to church principles. He described sexual minorities as "struggling" with a "difficult issue." Even though Holland expressed his love for sexual minorities, he is firm on his stance with the gospel principles and doctrines of the church. He emphasized the importance of gospel principles and keeping the commandments. Maintaining loyalty to church leadership and principles is a prevalent theme in these passages.

Sexual Minority Awareness is Divisive

The knowledge and awareness of sexual minorities is deemed to be divisive in one of the fantasy themes found within the speech. Holland commented that his audience should refrain from participating in actions that will divide members more than unite them. Members of the church experience confusion, as Holland had described, to sexual minority parades and representation on campus: "...students and the parents of students—so many who are confused about what so much recent flag-waving and parade-holding on this issue means. My beloved friends, this kind of confusion and conflict ought not to be. Not here" (para. 30). He described the sexual minority parades as "confusion and conflicts" and how it must not be represented on campus. This theme also discusses and mentions the idea that sexual minorities experience a "challenge" and the topic is a complex "issue."

A BYU valedictorian came out in a convocation speech in 2019 (Haller, 2019). Holland addressed the experience:

> *If a student commandeers a graduation podium intended to represent everyone getting diplomas that day in order to announce his personal sexual orientation, what might another speaker feel free to announce the next year, until eventually anything goes? What might commencement come to mean—or not mean—if we push individual license over institutional dignity for very long? Do we simply end up with more divisiveness in our culture than we already have? And we already have far too much everywhere.*

He used wordings such as "commandeers" and "more divisiveness" in his messaging describing that individual license should not override institutional dignity. He felt that the valedictorian brought more divisiveness to the culture and community.

Even though Holland addressed sexual minority students in his speech and declared his love to them, he used the wording same-sex challenge (Holland, 2021, para. 28), struggling over this difficult issue (para. 26), and same-sex topic (para. 26). He did not mention sexual minority, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, allies, LGBTQIA+ commmnuity, or other respective terms. Holland mentioned "same-sex" three times throughout the speech and was referring to the term generically and vaguely. He also addressed sexual minority students as "them," which could be interpreted or misinterpreted by some as an othering language: "...let me go no farther before

declaring unequivocally my love and that of my Brethren for those who live with this same-sex challenge and so much complexity that goes with it. Too often the world has been unkind—in many instances crushingly cruel—to these, our brothers and sisters. Like many of you, we have spent hours with them..." (para. 28). This passage also shows and reiterates how "the world" is complex, contemporary, unkind, and unrighteous (para. 31) while the church is trying to help. He then described to his audience that things need to be kept in proportion: "But it will assist all of us—it will assist everyone—trying to provide help in this matter if things can be kept in some proportion and balance in the process" (para. 29).

Last, Holland urged the audience to avoid language and symbols that represent the LGBTQ+ community:

> *So it is with a little scar tissue of our own that we are trying to avoid—and hope all will try to avoid—language, symbols, and situations that are more divisive than unifying at the very time we want to show love for all of God's children (para. 26)*

In this passage, he stated that these "language, symbols, and situations" representing sexual minorities divide instead of unify. He used the word "avoid" to indicate that his audience should refrain from showing such support or condoning actions that represent sexual minorities.

Discussion

The fantasy themes present in Holland's speech messaging demonstrate the lens in which members and leaders of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints view sexual minorities and members of the LGBTQ+ community. The fantasy themes also give insights into how members and leaders of the church view other topics that are inconsistent with church teachings. The findings shed light into how sexual minorities are perceived by the church culturally and especially at Brigham Young University.

The three dominant fantasy themes found in Holland's speech are to defend the faith, stay loyal to church leadership and its teachings, and to avoid LGBTQ+ language, acts, support, and symbols since they are perceived as divisive by church leadership. Holland urged his audience repeatedly to unite in their goals to help BYU students reach their divine potential (according to church doctrines) and to unite in following teachings revealed to church leaders.

In order for believers to defend themselves and their faith, they have to realize what they are defending themselves against. In this case, Holland presented LGBTQ+ protests (e.g. flag-waving and parading) as a factor that is confusing and inconsistent with gospel teachings (para. 30). He also described "some professors" and "some faculty" as characters in his speech who are shooting their muskets "north of the Point of the Mountain" (para. 25) when they support such protests.

Because BYU stands uniquely as a private institution operated by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, the majority of the students (98%) are members of the church (Klundt et al., 2021). The university community and parents of students feel "betrayed" and "abandoned" by BYU (para. 16) if faculty or other students support the LGBTQ+ community since the official revealed doctrine of the family only teaches the traditional heterosexual romantic relationship between a man and a woman (Holland, 2021, para. 25). The university is committed to becoming a more inclusive place by establishing its new Office of Belonging, and President Worthen shared that the office will not only combat racism, but also strive to root out "prejudice of any kind, including that based on race, ethnicity, nationality, tribe, gender, age, disability, socioeconomic status, religious belief and sexual orientation" (Jenkins, 2021). However, the statement is in some ways contrary to the university's own Honor Code—a document in which all students, faculty, and staff have committed to live their lives while a member of the university. The Honor Code asks that university students, faculty, and staff "live a chaste and virtuous life, including abstaining from any sexual relations outside a marriage between a man and a woman" ("Church educational system", n.d.). Furthermore, sexual minority students are not allowed to date on campus since "Same-sex romantic behavior cannot lead to eternal marriage and is therefore not compatible with the principles in the honor code" (Walch, 2020). Any same-sex romantic relationship is banned in or outside of marriage.

The church that sponsors the university still holds firmly to its stance on the doctrine of the family and marriage between a man and a woman, thus creating a complex environment in which sexual minorities might feel confused, lonely, and often have self-blaming thoughts about their own sexual orientation (Klundt et al., 2021). One unexpected positive note in this context is that Klundt (2021) found that sexual minority students who associate with religiosity turn out to have fewer negative outcomes in relation to suicidality rates. More religious sexual minority students are less likely to endorse suicidal intent and participate in the attempts

thereof (Klundt et al., 2021, pg. 8). However, it should also be noted that this conflicted with a previous study that examined 250 Christian sexual minority youth who had significantly higher levels of self-harm behaviors than those who were not encountering Christian rituals and promptings from day to day (pg. 8).

This finding could also be interpreted to say that being more religious in this context (on BYU campus) could act as a protective layer through which the students could find both spiritual and social support (Klundt et al., 2021). The study also shows that religiosity is lower for sexual minorities, which might stem from the cognitive dissonance students experience and the difficulty to maintain high levels of religiosity in a context that does not permit LGBTQ+ romantic relationships (Klundt et al., 2021). Sexual minority students on BYU campus experience a high level of cognitive distress and dissonance, which may result in their lower levels of religiosity and quality of life.

Holland also described in his speech that conflicts arise due to the awareness of LGBTQ+ topics and he asks his audience to not subscribe to flag-waving and parade-holding activities. However, the act of increasing awareness of sexual minority students would not increase divisiveness but a sense of acceptance among the university community (Klundt et al., 2021). Researchers have found that the increased exposure of diverse thought and experiences relating to sexual minorities often lead to increased positive feelings toward sexual minority individuals (Klundt et al., 2021). People who know or have interacted with sexual minority students often have a more pleasant feeling associated with the LGBTQ+ community than those who have not been in contact with members of the community (pg. 9).

Holland seems to describe that conflicts and frictions arise from differing opinions—which is natural. However, instead of encouraging healthy discussions and creating space in which diverse opinions can thrive, Holland seemed to ask his audience to cease the conversation. He described flag-waving and parade-holding as confusion and conflicts when the flag-waving and parade-holding are ways students on campus try to show LGBTQ+ students that they are noticed and loved—since there are approximately 13% of BYU students who don't identify as strictly heterosexual (Klundt et al., 2021).

Conclusion

The three major fantasy themes—defend the faith, be loyal to church leaders and teachings, sexual minority awareness is divisive—seem to weave into one core ideal that the church

doctrine and current teachings don't seem to create much room for sexual minority acceptance and relationships. Also in the process of uniting members of the community and the university, the needs of the marginalized are often overlooked.

If all students on BYU campus have the same opinions, the university is going to lack many important conversations. If awareness is not allowed on campus, students will find other ways to protest and show love to the LGBTQ+ community. Instead of assimilating students, the Office of Belonging was meant to portray inclusivity for people who are not "the same" as everyone else. It is meant to combat "prejudice of any kind" (Jenkins, 2021). The university could be defining prejudice in a way that doesn't affect the way church doctrine is treating sexual minorities and does not apply to what the Honor Code is enforcing; however, the word "prejudice" includes a definition of unjust treatment of individuals ("Merriam-Webster," n.d.). Therefore, BYU's policies that treat sexual minority students differently would seem incompatible with the office's mission. The Office of Belonging was established to create space within the university for diversity to exist and hopefully thrive, but instead of "come as you are," the belonging statement seems to be accompanied with an invisible asterisk of "unless."

Sexual minority students at BYU all have different individual experiences on campus, some better than others. This complex topic requires sympathy and nuanced understanding from members of the BYU community, church members, and leadership of both the university and the church. Although people on the political spectrum have very different opinions on the topic, researchers have concluded that by raising awareness and affirming sexual minority students, it would not only likely have a direct impact on these students' quality of life, but it would also affect their suicidality, depression, anxiety, social life, and academic success (Klundt et al., 2021).

Increasing awareness, increasing exposure, and increasing interactions with sexual minorities will increase a sense of acceptance among sexual minority students (Klundt et al., 2021). The act of allowing differences to exist and thrive will not only create more understanding from the members of the campus community—it will create strength and power when students are able to learn in a diverse environment. Only then will BYU campus truly become a place where people feel loved and belonged.

Limitation and Future Research

This study did not seek to account for all aspects of the SCT nor does it have a comprehensive coverage of all the fantasy themes and rhetorical narratives of the Mormon church. It is focused on the major fantasy themes discovered in relation to Holland's speech given at the 2021 university conference and portrayal and mentions of sexual minorities.

Future research and recommendations include examining a larger sample size of church discourse concerning LGBTQ+ messaging throughout the history of the church, as well as surveying LGBTQ+ students regarding their experiences with harmful messaging on BYU campus or in religious settings. Other research disciplines could also use this study to examine other aspects and performances of sexual minority students, including mental health. This research shows that the experience of sexual minority students on BYU campus could be greatly improved by public awareness and support. As BYU continues to create a safe space for all students—including sexual minority students—-awareness will not only impact sexual minority students' academic success, but also their overall quality of life and lower their suicidality rate. Other students on campus will also come to learn more about the LGBTQ+ community and help to make BYU campus a safer and more welcoming place.

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