Beyond Biography: Using Technical and Professional Documentation to Historically Contextualize Women's Agency

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Introduction

In 1908, Harriet Barraclough—Relief Society president of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS; a.k.a. "Mormon") Halifax Ward, Leeds, England—taught the women in her religious community to be "lifters and not leaners" (Halifax Ward, Folder 1, p. 58). This communication, documented in a handwritten minute book, falls within various definitions of technical and professional communication (TPC), as the practice of TPC "creates both knowledge and value [which]...comprehends the good of the community in which the practice has a history" (Miller, 1989, p. 69). TPC occurs within communities, and "forges connections between new and existing knowledge" (Durack, 1998, p. 181). TPC is not always associated with the public workplace and can be found within the workplace of the home (Durack, 1997), extra-institutional hobby communities (Kimball, 2006), and religious institutions (Petersen, 2014b). In fact, scholars have argued against defining workplaces and professionalism so narrowly as to avoid examination of documentation and discourse that occurs in varied contexts (Durack, 1997; Petersen, 2014a). In that mode, this article examines the three existing minute books from the Halifax Ward Relief Society of the Leeds England Stake that cover the society's activities from 1907 to 1921. The minute books document the work and therefore create recognition for women's unseen labor, highlight the creation of identity within an organization, and illuminate the mediating discourse of society leaders. I argue that TPC is an ideal site for examining the kind of "agency [that] takes place within structures" (Brekus, 2016, p. 33).

There are over 9,000 minute books of various branches of the local Relief Societies (the church's women's organization) in the LDS Church History Library in Salt Lake City, Utah. These records document the structure and context for women's lives in various locations and eras. TPC documentation gives insight into the enabling and constraining contexts of organizations and users, and we can better understand the lived experiences of women by examining the historical documentation of their organizations. Much research has been done on LDS women in Utah from a historical and biographical perspective; however, my study further recognizes the global

community of Relief Society women that has existed since the late 1800s from a TPC perspective.

Mormon women's history has been overwhelming conducted and characterized by women's individual biographies (Compton, 2004), yet so much of the Mormon woman's experience is community-oriented and has been from the church's organization in 1830. Past research questions have asked how attention to women's individual lives gives insight into the Mormon woman experience. However, an equally interesting question is how can the documentation of Mormon women's experiences as a group give context and highlight the agency in women's lives?

Interestingly, Clive Field (2014) suggested of Great Britain that "no denomination routinely collected countrywide data about its attendants at ordinary Sunday services until well after the Second World War" (p. 247). Based the attendance records in the Halifax Relief Society meetings, held on a weekday, I suspect that other LDS meetings kept similar records, even on Sundays, meaning these books and other LDS minute books are a rich source of churchgoing data during World War I for scholars of history and religion.

Women in technical communication

Scholars have asked why women are absent from "the history of technical communication" (Durack, 1997, p. 249). While possibilities are explained variously—women rarely contributed, women were hampered by biological functions and responsibilities, or cultural definitions have deemed women's work unworthy of study—this research uncovers a rich repository of women's TPC from the late 1800s to the early 1900s within a religious organization. Such work is crucial to TPC as a field, as Mark Zachry (2000) argued, "the field lacks a historical perspective on how specific social practices…have affected communicative practices during the twentieth century" (p. 58). Because the field often focuses on public and corporate sites of TPC, I suspect that TPC lacks even more of a perspective on extra-institutional historical communicative practices, meaning that women's contributions are often overlooked. Elizabeth Tebeaux (1999) argued, "[E]ven though women did not often publish their works, the failure to publish does not mean that women were not active intellectually" (p. 110).

Feminist theory is relatively new to TPC. Elizabeth Flynn (1997) noted that feminist theory came to TPC in the 1980s, "nearly two decades after it influenced other fields" (p. 313). Mary Lay's (1989) landmark article on collaboration and gender studies argued that women are important to the field and should be included. Six common characteristics of feminist theory include celebration of difference, social change, acknowledgement of backgrounds and values, inclusion of women's experiences, study of gaps and silences, and new sources of knowledge (Lay, 1991, p. 429; outlined in detail pp. 430-432).

Simply recognizing and inserting women into what is recognized as "rhetoric" or "technical communication" is an important part of historical work, according to Jacqueline Royster and Gesa Kirsch (2012). Their methodological idea of social circulation "focuses on where women's writing and speaking take place, where the work goes and what it does" (p. xi). Women's contributions are not often public, but "there is indeed value to be recognized and appreciated in

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the lives, words, participation, leadership, and legacies of women" (p. 18). They suggested that we may not always agree with the values or beliefs of the historical group we are studying, but it continues to be an inimitable part of research to make "more visible the social circles within which they [women] have functioned and continue to function as rhetorical agents" (p. 24). Women's rhetorical spaces are worthy sites of study and enrich our understandings of TPC practices, artifacts, and exigencies.

Many scholars have contributed to the recognition of women's in TPC. Laura Gurak and Nancy Bayer (1994) called to include women's contributions to technology and to understand reasons why women have not been recognized for their achievements. Susan Rauch (2012) argued for the inclusion of Hildegard von Bingen as an early female writer of medical texts in the 1100s. Rauch rejected assumptions of female agency to establish von Bingen's work as worthy of recognition. Teresa Kynell (1999) highlighted female technical writing pioneer Sada A. Harbarger's work as "an adherence to the principles of the discipline she came to understand and indeed even define. Tracing her contributions permits a better understanding of a 'woman's place' in higher education and how one woman reconceived that place not only for herself but for the development of the discipline as well" (p. 92). We can extend this analysis to all women's contributions in the field, that their work has been a developing of TPC as a discipline, whether institutional or extra-institutional. Patricia Okker's (1995) study of a nineteenth-century female editor identified women's periodicals as a form of "female institution building" (p. 21). These "provided an opportunity for like-minded women to come together in a public forum" (p. 21). Similar to women's public voices, women's recordkeeping in minute books gives us glimpse into private activities and documentation. Women have shaped the field, and we can more fully understand its parameters by examining all sources of that development. TPC scholars have recognized women's contributions in many forms, and such history must continue to be uncovered, investigated, and understood.

Methodology

Historical research in TPC is established but incomplete; many scholars have compiled bibliographies of the work that has been done (Connor, 1991; Malone, 2007; Moran & Tebeaux, 2011; Moran & Tebeaux, 2012; Thompson & Smith, 2006). Edward Malone's (2007) review of the past fifteen years found distinct types of historical studies (on practitioners, artifacts, genres, movements, techniques, events, and the profession) and noted that many historical studies have produced "greater coordination among scholars and a better awareness of the areas that have already been studied" (p. 344). My article fits into this awareness by focusing on women's history as a subset of historical research in TPC. Because historical research has seen "a shift from studies of well-known to lesser-known figures and an increased interest in women as technical communicators," I see feminist lenses, theories, and scholars as a major part of this shift (p. 334). This shift is addressed in Nancy Blyler's (1995) call for research as ideology, that aims to give "voice to groups that are underrepresented or silenced," to "recognize and bring to the fore [researchers'] immersion…in ideology" (p. 301). The project of including silenced and missing voices addresses the problem of historical research in TPC, as Michael Moran and Elizabeth Tebeaux (2012) articulated: "the history of technical writing still has not been written" (p. 58). The history of TPC and what it can teach us is incomplete. Documenting our history is a project that continues to require attention.

Paying attention to the records women have kept of their work, however mundane, allows us to investigate the active and agentive roles women took within organizations and communities. As Laurel Thatcher Ulrich (1990) suggested, "It is not as easy as it once was to dismiss domestic concerns as 'trivia,'" (p. 27) as the invisible and unseen work of women is what weaves communities together (p. 96). Haller (1997) established that the documentation of work plays "an important role in the politics of recognition" and "reports of work must set forth the value of the work in terms meaningful to intended readers" (p. 283).

Furthermore, Haller (1997) argued that the documentation of work functions "as a way of constructing professional identity within an organizational setting" (p. 283). Zachry (2000) seconded this notion in a historical study of company records: "The extensive network of communicative practices that linked organizational activities also created more-or-less stable identities for organizational participants. People derived their organizational identities through their participation in communicative exchanges with others" (p. 67). Because of communicative exchanges and records, we have access to the ways in which women enacted their identities in relation to an organization. This is especially pertinent in LDS women's history, as the religious organization may play an all-encompassing role in these women's lives. Zachry (2000) noted, "Through their active participation in repetitive communicative exchanges, employees (re)constructed their organizational identities" (p. 67). We see similar organizational identities emerge within the Halifax Ward Relief Society minutes.

Moreover, documentation highlights the mediating work performed by female organizational leaders. In Halifax, the Relief Society presidency connected women to the larger structure and hierarchy of the LDS church, located in Salt Lake City, Utah. As Kathryn Neeley (1992) argued, "successful mediation need not originate within the community of scientific and technical professionals" (p. 214). Similarly, the mediation in a religious organization need not originate from headquarters. Local female leaders were "performing important mediating functions both within the community of" religious believers and between "that community and the rest of the culture, activities that were essential to the process of knowledge production" (p. 215). The women practiced headquarters' genres through their weekly meetings and developed for participants "a type of organizational identity that linked them to other" members across locations (p. 77).

To analyze mundane and overlooked documentation, we must rearticulate an understanding of agency, especially historically. Catherine Brekus (2016) suggested redefinition in a way that recognizes the agency possible and present within organizations, including patriarchal hierarchies. She suggests various ways of doing so, and I present five of them. First, "a definition of agency should recognize that agency includes the reproduction of social structures as well as the transformation of them" (p. 28). This recognizes that all social actors are agents, not just the revolutionary or contrary ones. Such an understanding lines up with TPC understandings, as Brenton Faber (2002) argued,

> Our cultural discourses, meaning the jargon, dialects, intonations, vocabularies, and other linguistic features that we use to create and maintain our communities, are important

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> because they make up and reflect the structures that dominate our routinized, habitual world…Within these structures lie the foundations from which we gain our identities as individuals and as part of a larger group of people. To change these structures is to change who we are, what we believe, and how we view each other. (p. 62)

His explanation of discourses recognizes the localization of norms and suggests that norms create the structures in which we live. He further connects structures to identity-building, and any form of agency enacted occurs amid the forces of structures and identities.

Related to this understanding is Brekus' (2016) second idea, that "we should rethink the close association between agency and intentionality" (p. 30). Not all changes within or without structures are intentional or agitated for. Third, "agency should always be seen as relational and social rather than simply individual" (p. 31). The changes that occur within communities that follow social norms can be seen as part of agency within a social activity system. As Greg Wilson (2001) delineated, "[T]hinking of relationships in terms of webs, not hierarchies, allows a re-vision of relationships that decentralizes and distributes power" (p. 88). The relational and social connections made within a network highlight the power available to be claimed by those not in leadership positions and recognizes the agency of the lesser members of an organization. Similarly, Zachry (1999) argued, "[I]t may be advantageous to conceive of documentation as a complex genre that exists in lively ecological systems" (p. 24). These lively systems see agency occurring at all levels and moving in many directions.

Fourth, "agency must be understood as existing on a continuum" (Brekus, 2016, p. 31). Etienne Wenger (1998) discussed a similar notion in his work on communities of practice. All practices are located in broader contexts, and "[i]t is therefore incumbent on a learning community to deal with its position in various communities and economies and with respect to various enterprises, styles, and discourses" (p. 220). Agency is similarly positioned and must be examined from various perspectives. It is not a static term, and it is not only possessed authoritatively.

Finally, Brekus (2016) reasoned, "agency is always shaped by cultural norms and structural constraints…the way that humans use their agency is always shaped by the multiple structures that exist at a particular historical moment" (p. 32). Relatedly, Brekus asserted, "agency takes place within structures as well as against them" (p. 33). People within organizations, whether or not they seem to be actively opposing the structures, are influenced and guided by the norms of that system or community. Clay Spinuzzi (2003) has recognized such constraints in his genre tracing methodology, which examines "how people interact with complex institutions, disciplines, and communities" (p. 23), and recognizes that artifacts and genres are "usually studied in a mediatory role" (p. 40), as they "are culturally and historically grounded ways of 'seeing and conceptualizing reality'" (p. 41). Spinuzzi further suggested that mediatory genres are often "developed by the workers themselves" (p. 48).

My artifacts, developed by the women of the Halifax Relief Society, are drawn from a site of seeming conformity: religion. I am analyzing the work and documentation of ordinary and everyday historical actors. I argue that TPC is an essential way of looking at Brekus's redefinition of historical agency. In order to recognize actors within structures and organizations

who are likely maintaining and transforming those structures, we need to consider the type of agency that does not fight the status quo. In addition, the actors are exercising agency through communication and especially through documentation of that communication. The agency and changes enacted within a structure may be less visible and slower moving but are still there.

Artifacts are transformative for those who create and interact with them. According to Spinuzzi (2003), "artifacts bear the material traces of an ongoing activity, represent problem solving in that activity, and thus tend to stabilize the activity in which they are used" (p. 39). In activity theory, they are crystallized "aspects of historically developed activity" (p. 39). The Halifax Relief Society meeting minutes document mediation and likely changed the way the women engaged in their activities. The minutes illuminate the problem solving and negotiation present in the activity system.

As Krista Cowman (2002) suggested in her examination of a British suffrage minute book from 1907 to 1909, "the branch enabled many provincial women to engage directly with the national campaign" (p. 300). Similarly, the leaders of the local Relief Society in Halifax provided the means for women to engage with, recognize, and participate in larger Mormon culture and faith. Neeley (1992) identified this as, "The history of the mediatrix [that] reminds us that people who appear marginal or whom history has rendered invisible may be performing activities of crucial importance for the group as a whole" (p. 210). As Ethan Yorgason (2002) explained, "Regions, …like nations, can only exist only through the widespread act of imagining a community or home: regional inhabitants cannot possibly know most of the inhabitants personally, but nevertheless can feel affinity for those unknown fellow citizens" (p. 452). Through the agency of local Relief Society women, all members would feel a part of the larger organization and form "enough of a critical, contiguous mass in parts of the world that social processes are constituted partly through existence of that critical mass" (p. 453).

Historical background

The LDS church was founded in 1830 in Fayette, New York, based on Joseph Smith's vision of God the Father and Jesus Christ. He followed their instructions not to join any particular denomination and eventually was led to an ancient record by an angel. He translated this record into *The Book of Mormon: Another Testament of Jesus Christ*. By 1844, Joseph Smith was killed. While Mormon adherents faced persecution and settled around the Midwest, they eventually followed their new prophet Brigham Young to the Salt Lake Valley, establishing settlements beginning in 1847.

Joseph Smith formally organized the Female Relief Society in 1842. It began in Nauvoo, Illinois, as a women's sewing circle, similar to the many benevolent societies formed by American women of that century. It was soon organized as the church's women's organization, with Emma Smith (1804-1879), Joseph's wife, as the first president. According to Jill Derr, Janath Cannon, and Maureen Beecher (1992), Joseph Smith explained, "The minutes of your meetings will be precedents for you to act upon—your Constitution and law" (p. 42). The minute-keeping of these organizations was not optional or inconsequential, as such records were meant to guide, organize, and sustain the Relief Society organization.

Part of LDS religious culture is proselytizing, which has been done in many countries since the 1800s. LDS missionaries began preaching in Great Britain in 1837, and many of the converts traveled to Salt Lake City: "[O]ver seven thousand British Mormons had left for America by 1850" (Fleming, 2008, p. 84). According to data gathered by Field (2014), there were 6,885 Mormons in Great Britain in 1914, and that number rose to 7,117 by 1918 (p. 261).

In the early twentieth century, Mormons became the subject of attacks and propaganda in Great Britain. "In the years 1910-14 Britain was drifting to the verge of domestic chaos, as labor unrest, feminist agitations, and parliamentary divisions…were rapidly fragmenting society into dangerous extremities. As a result there was a propensity for seeking violent solutions to problems that troubled the country" (Thorp, 1975, p. 70-71). In particular, LDS missionaries and members in the country were tarred and feathered and attacked with sticks and buckets of water; mission headquarters was attacked by a mob throwing rocks (Thorp, 1975; Thorp, 1979; Walker, 1988). Anti-Mormon propaganda was published in newspapers and in novels, especially due to the work of Winifred Graham, "a tireless, anti-Mormon crusader from 1908 to 1924" (Thorp, 1979, p. 107). Furthermore, "missionaries from Utah were prevented from obtaining visas for the United Kingdom" in early 1919 (Thorp, 1979, p. 112).

Much of this propaganda "was based on the belief that 'thousands' of females were being lured from Britain every year" to participate in abusive and polygamous marriages in Utah (Thorp, 1975, p. 78). While untrue, it served to increase intolerance toward Mormon missionaries and members in the region. As Ronald Walker (1988) explained, "The British public saw the Saints as strange if not licentious, an image stemming largely from the Mormon practice of plural marriage, which the Fleet Street tabloids played on with merciless delight" (p. 21). However, not all areas of the country engaged in hostilities. Mormons were present in 82 cities and towns, and "only nine of these were [the sites of] violent demonstrations" (Thorp, 1975, p. 84). Much of the anti-Mormon crusading was in the form of opinions and written propaganda.

Based on studies of this period of LDS history in Great Britain, I have not found evidence that the Halifax area, the subject of my study, experienced any upheavals because of anti-Mormon sentiments. However, the minute books do allude to some criticism. There appeared "an article in one of the newspapers criticising [sic] the kindness of some of our people shown to some interned German prisoners of war who were our brethren in the Gospel, by the Anti Mormon League of Liverpool" (Halifax Ward, Folder 3, p. 105-106). The anti-Mormon campaign is said to have originated in Liverpool and it "soon spread to other cities in the north and midlands, where a number of mass rallies were held in early 1911" (Thorp, 1979, p. 109). Halifax is approximately 63 miles northeast of Liverpool.

Mormon women
Mormon women of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century were actively involved in politics, medicine, publishing, speaking, traveling, administering, and leading. They were activists for suffrage, and many early LDS women led political and public lives. For example, Emmeline B. Wells (1828-1921), called by her biographer an "advocate" for women (Madsen, 2006), "worked with Susan B. Anthony…to bring back women's suffrage…[and] unsuccessfully ran to be a legislative representative" while also serving as editor of the *Woman's Exponent*

(Morrill, 2006, p. 175). The *Woman's Exponent* was a newspaper run by Mormon women as a means of sharing ideas and promoting achievements that ran from 1872 to 1914.

In seeking suffrage, Eliza R. Snow and Sarah Kimball were elected in a Relief Society meeting in Salt Lake City to represent Mormon women in Washington, D.C. (Derr et al., 1992, p. 110-111). Snow was recorded as saying, "it was 'high time' to 'rise up in the Dignity of our calling and speak for ourselves.... We are not inferior to the Ladies of the World, and we do not want to appear so'" (p. 110). Moreover, church culture promoted public work for women, and Laura Vance (2002), in an analysis of the *Improvement Era* and *Ensign* (official church magazines), found that "articles published prior to the 1940s include explicit instruction for women to participate in the public sphere—to participate in formal education, to engage in wage labor, and to participate in politics" (p. 100). However, Vance noticed that such admonitions began to be tempered by rhetoric of the domestic sphere by 1914.

Contemporary LDS scholars and Mormon feminists praise the work of these early women. Moreover, feminists use the history of activist work within LDS culture to create exigence for campaigns highlighting inequities within the religious structure, such as pushing for a woman to pray for the first time at General Conference (Stack, 2013); promoting changes to menstruation policies at temples (Elisothel & RAH, 2012); urging the visibility and respect of female leaders (Walch, 2014; Reuters, 2015); and advocating that women be given the priesthood (Dicou, 2014), currently an all-male privilege.

Overview of artifacts: The Halifax Ward Relief Society Minute Books

The minute books are three small, lined exercise books that contain the minutes of Relief Society meetings in Halifax, England. The first book covers from 1907 to 1911, the second book spans 1911 to 1915, and the third book goes from 1915 to 1921. These are only three of the thousands of Relief Society ward and branch minute books available in the LDS Church History Library. I chose the Halifax minutes because the society was decentralized during a time of change in the communications of the central Relief Society, as *The Relief Society Magazine* replaced the *Woman's Exponent*. The overseas location represents how messages were received and enacted in a place far from headquarters in Salt Lake City. Focusing on Halifax recognizes the contributions and activities of LDS women who lived on the geographical margins.

On the surface, the Halifax minutes reveal a predictable format of Relief Society meetings each week on Wednesday evenings, as "most sisters worked during the day" (Derr et al., 1992, p. 200).

1. The president called the meeting to order.
2. The women sang a hymn together.
3. Somebody said a prayer.
4. The women sang another hymn.
5. The roll was called.
6. The minutes from the previous week were read and accepted.
7. The president or a counselor discussed business matters.

8.   The women reported how many visits they made and gospel conversations they engaged in throughout the week. (On November 25, 1908, President Barraclough reported making 21 visits in three weeks (Folder 1, p. 73).)
9.   They engaged in an activity, either sewing, bearing testimonies, or reading from church-produced periodicals or novels to each other.
10.   They sang another hymn.
11.   They prayed and went home.

They set apart different weeks for different activities and followed that rotation faithfully: testimony meeting, sewing meeting, and lecture meetings.

Beneath this repetition we find agency occurring within an organization. The minutes provide evidence of work performed by women, and such work is representative of the ways in which women shaped, changed, and molded the organization and its participants. The records provide insight into women's religious organizational roles and activities, highlighting agency as occurring within a patriarchal organizational structure.

TPC documents record women as participants, users, and audiences for various contexts and important historical events in global religion. The society is engaged in the kind of agency that not only reinforces structural norms but that enacts change on an interactional, social, and individual level. Public leadership does not guarantee organizational success and it is not the only site of agency; those who participate, network, and communicate play significant roles in the identity and communicative practices of an organization (Neeley, 1992). Seemingly mundane archival sources can illuminate religious women's history and contextualize and situate historical events.

To facilitate familiarity with the artifacts, the following is a list of the women who served as president of the Halifax Relief Society over the course of the records.

President Harriet A. Barraclough (August 25, 1907 to January 31, 1912)
President Esther Reynolds (March 7, 1912 to December 3, 1913)
President Ada Hudson (December 3, 1913 to January 10, 1918)
President Lucy A. Walker (January 10, 1918; still serving at the end of minute books on February 2, 1921)

The work of these women was not performed within a vacuum, as the minutes record the women's reliance on the larger Relief Society organization. At the Halifax Branch's first meeting, on August 28, 1907, "The secretary read some papers…namely, 'Instructions to the Officers of the Relief Society,' by General Relief Society President Bathsheba W. Smith, and 'extracts from records of the first Relief Society'" (Folder 1, p. 3-4). On the anniversary of the Relief Society, March 17, 1908, President Barraclough held a large meeting in which she "gave a brief outline of the Organization of the RS, as organized by the Prophet Joseph Smith in the year 1842" (Folder 1, p. 26). The evening commenced with musical performances and speeches. Counselor to the president Lucy Walker shared an article from Utah's *Deseret News* called "Heroines of the Relief Society" (Folder 1, p. 27).

These entries confirm that the Halifax women based the formation and organization of their society, or their agency within an organization, on the guidelines set forth by the general Relief Society in Salt Lake City, Utah. They also went back to the original 1842 Relief Society minutes first kept in Nauvoo, Illinois, by Eliza R. Snow, the second general Relief Society president and famed Mormon poetess. The minutes from these Nauvoo meetings are still held in the LDS Church History Library and serve as a foundation for women's identities within the church, even today. In addition, the Halifax minutes list the names of each woman (there were eighteen) who was sustained a member of the society at the first meeting in 1907. The meeting minutes detail the local religious organizational planning, revealing the reliance on established social structures in order to create their own version. Agency in forming the local society depended on the broader context of women's roles within the LDS church.

Agency includes the reproduction of social structures

According to Brekus (2016), "a definition of agency should recognize that agency includes the reproduction of social structures as well as the transformation of them" (p. 28). Agentive actions are not always iconoclastic, and the meeting minutes of the Halifax branch are representative of this. For the Halifax women, their reproduction of social structures is specifically represented in the regular sewing they performed. Most meetings were sewing meetings, in which the women would work while listening to a reading or a lecture. The sewing was collected over the course of the year and eventually sold in an annual "Sale of Work." This sometimes included a refreshment stall (Folder 2, p. 108-110) but was primarily focused on selling their sewing work and making money. The money was used to maintain the society; therefore, it served to reproduce the structure of the religious organization.

Sewing is a recognizable form of women's work historically; therefore, while the women were working outside of the domestic sphere, the work looked much like the type of work expected in early twentieth century gendered roles. They used their time away from home to engage in work socially expected of them; yet this represents the agency they enacted by doing that work for the good of a larger community.

Furthermore, and still connected to domesticity, is the fact that the results of their labor were most often used to help the needy and the sick. The women used the domestic skills and a woman's organization to extend their domestic expertise outside of the structure of religion in order to reach those who may not be participants. The annual Sales of Work (in which the women would sew all year and then sell the items to the public) demonstrate the women's ability to use their work to gain a profit and therefore find further ways to make their efforts meaningful.

For example, on September 20, 1908, "The President then made a few remarks, concerning the Sale of Work and how it should be carried out. The rest of the evening was spent arranging and ticketing the articles for sale" (Folder 1, p. 54). The women sold items typical of women's work, engaging in commerce. After performing and selling the work, the women often rewarded themselves by having a tea or supper. From a sale held on October 25, 1919, the women reported making 11 pounds and 11 shillings. In other years, the sale is deemed successful. In

1920, their sale of work resulted in 21 pounds, 15 shillings, and one-half pence (Folder 3, p. 249). They were earning their own money to keep the society running. While the work they performed and the money they earned reproduced the structure of the organization, it was a women's organization that was independent of the church's general finances. It was a place especially for women, and the women reproduced it in order to claim agency within that space.

Agency is not always intentional

While the leadership of the society may have been acting to reproduce social structures when they asked women to participate in teaching and discussions during weekly meetings, they may have also encouraged an unintentional form of agency. Brekus (2016) wrote, "we should rethink the close association between agency and intentionality" (p. 30). A prime example of unintended agency is that Relief Society women often became educated and engaged in public speaking through their roles within the structure of the church. The ability of women to speak and teach in a public setting was an important goal of the Relief Society, as it would relieve the burden on running the meetings on the president and her counselors and it would also encourage attendance and commitment to the organization because of shared responsibility. It meant that women were trusted with the important work of lifting each other through the organization, which expected participation and insight from members. At first glance, requiring sisters to speak and teach seems like an effort to improve attendance and loyalty as part of the organizational structure. However, the unintentional (or perhaps intentional) results were the education and self-improvement of the sisters in teaching and speaking.

An organization for women within a patriarchal and hierarchical structure seems like an odd place for this to happen; however, because Mormon theology emphasizes eternal improvement, education is a central feature of this religious culture for women and men. A recurrent theme of the lectures and discussions during these meetings is the encouragement to read "good books to enoble [sic] the mind" (Folder 1, p. 179). In addition, the women were exhorted to develop "spiritual gifts, atributes [sic], and attainments" (Folder 1, p. 176). President Harriet Barraclough, on November 23, 1910, "tried to encourage us to give Lectures on any subject that will improve our own ideas and interest in the class" (Folder 1, p. 176). The female leaders appealed to the women, encouraging them to attend regularly and become committed to the organization. Membership was a central goal of the organization, as new members were proposed and accepted formally among the group, and those who visited the meetings without membership were marked down in the minutes as "non-members." Membership equaled income for the local society. Nevertheless, for women an unintended consequence was the agency they gained in learning to think, participate, and discuss.

Another form of unintended agency stemmed from the *Millennial Star*, an official publication of the church in Great Britain. The women read an article that said, "no street cars were running in Vienna; there were no lights at night, and no fires; and that provisions of every sort were so high in price as to be prohibitive except to the very rich" ("In Starving Vienna," p. 88). In addition, food was being rationed in Austria, and "in the first ten months of 1919 there were 52,000 more deaths in Vienna and 69,000 fewer births than in the year immediately preceding the war" (p. 89). The women of Halifax heard these facts and were informed; that information led to action. It was reported on March 14, 1920, that "[a] collection was taken up for the needy saints in

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Vienna" (Folder 3, p. 222). No official leader suggested that they help, but because of official church reporting and the mediating work of their leaders in presenting the information, the women used the skills they had learned within the society to act as agents to reach outside of their locality. The spirit of these actions was perhaps intended as part of the larger LDS faith and its precepts; but the specific action was a way for the women to assert agency.

Agency is social and relational

Another key feature of the women's actions is that agency is social and relational (Brekus, 2016). It occurs within communities and is networked and webbed. Within the meeting minutes, we learn that the way in which the women enact their organizational identities is based on the actions of others.

One site of this social and relational agency is the local leaders' meetings with visiting leaders from Utah to learn about how other Relief Societies acted. The local Relief Society leaders met with Sister Romania B. Penrose, the first LDS woman to earn a medical degree and the wife of the president of the European Mission at that time. They also later met with Ida B. Smith, the wife of the new European Mission president. Both Penrose and Smith linked the local women from Halifax to the larger organization headquartered in Salt Lake City. The local Relief Society president would return from the conference to share what she learned with the women of Halifax: "The President then told us as near as possible, the instructions Sister Romania B. Penrose had given on Saturday October 31st at the Relief Society Conferance [sic]" (Folder 1, p. 64).

However, the mediating and connective work of leaders did not necessarily translate into hierarchical prescriptions. It was a way of networking and remaining connected to the other women in the world who were engaged in the same work. When Ada Hudson served as a counselor to President Barraclough, she shared information about a friend of hers who was doing "great" work and "she wondered wether [sic] we was [sic] doing as great a work" (Folder 1, p. 85). In addition, President Barraclough "proposed taking a course of lectures sent to her from Zion [Utah] formerly taken by the Ensign stake of the Relief Society in Zion" (Folder 1, p. 87). Once Winifred Pickles, the first secretary of the Halifax Ward, moved to Utah, she wrote a letter to the Halifax women, "giving us an idea how the Relief Society work is carried on in Zion" (Folder 1, p. 88). The women were eager to perform their identities within the social network of their religion, and they took advice on how to do this by watching what others were doing and sharing that information with their members. They were concerned with engaging in the work correctly and doing so in a way that others within the larger organization had done. Identity and agency is therefore reinforced and facilitated through the mediating work of the leading women.

The social and relational aspect of agency illuminates the Halifax Ward's involvement in World War I. When President Ada Hudson "spoke to us & gave us some incedents [sic] in the lives of some of our wounded soldiers & their sufferings, [and] encouraged us in doing good and active work for all the suffering" (Folder 3, p. 86), she presented a problem to the sisters that included a network larger than their local organization. The documentation of their communication reveals that dialogue and interaction led to a proposed solution. Such work would not have been taken on without the meeting, the communication about the issue, or the agency available to be

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claimed by the women present. Their war work consisted of sending a sum of 5 shillings to each soldier from their branch (Folder 3, p. 121). The supper they held on June 19, 1918 resulted in the president sending five shillings "to all the remaining soldiers and sailors of our branch" (Folder 3, p. 132). They used the money meant for reproducing their women's organization in order to help the men within their religious organization who were fighting the war. They understood that their structure was an important place for women, but that they also had the power and expertise to aid those outside of the Relief Society. They chose to do so.

This further consisted of praying for those they knew on the front; knitting socks, scarves, and mittens from wool; and sending "a weekly supply of comforts to the Soldiers at the front" (Folder 2, p. 161). The women also received letters of gratitude from the soldiers. One letter, from a man interested in becoming LDS, asked the sisters "to visit his wife as her Husband especially wished to get his wife interested in the Gospel" (Folder 2, p. 184). Communications with soldiers and their dialogue about them within the meetings prompted action from a social perspective. Their work ultimately connected actors who were distanced from the meeting itself, and such relations prompted actions that would not have necessarily been undertaken without the connection to the war and its actors. Those affected by the Relief Society work made impact on the meeting even when not physically present because of the social and relational characteristics of agency.

The efforts also extended outside of immediate religious circles. President Ada Hudson encouraged the women to work for the Red Cross. On February 27, 1918, then-President Lucy Walker told the sisters "that the work which we did for the Red Cross would in future be recorded for the Halifax branch of the Relief Society. [She] [a]sked the sisters to save any old cotton for bandages for our wounded soldiers and any old garments which would cut down for poor children" (Folder 3, p. 112). In other meetings, the women were reminded by their president to do work for the Red Cross, which resulted in recognition, and not only in the minute books. President Lucy Walker announced on August 7, 1918, "she had received a badge and certificated [sic] from the Red Cross authorities acknowledging the work the Relief Society had done" (Folder 3, p. 139). After discussing the importance of the badge, the sisters decided that the president should wear the badge, but there is no record of her ever doing so.

Their actions and the recognition of those actions were relational and occurred in tandem with many other groups' efforts during the war. The LDS women, given their scarce numbers and the lack of support within the country (anti-Mormon sentiment discussed in the historical background section of this article), did not have to become involved with Red Cross efforts. They could have used their efforts only to reproduce the relations of their own religious community. However, they did not. They used the same agency demonstrated in religious work to enact change and support of their country, as their identities extended beyond religion and crossed national boundaries. Their purpose increased to larger national and social needs, demonstrating the relational and social aspects of the women's agency.

The meeting minutes include testimony meetings, which highlight the complexity and multivocality of social and institutional religious identity for women. The group required belief and public confession of that adherence. Each testimony meeting includes a detailed list of all of

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the women who spoke, documenting their presence, their existence, and their faithfulness to the larger organization. The record highlights the multivocality of a woman's organization and gives voice to the women who have often been overlooked or forgotten in history. More significantly, even the most unknown or obscure members are remembered through this social aspect of agency. The minutes record women's interactions within and beyond the institution.

Agency exists on a continuum

While the minutes highlight the agentive and ultimately positive actions of the women involved in the Halifax Relief Society, we must recognize that agency exists on a continuum and that not all actions are as impactful or freely taken as others. Pressure to conform is recorded, revealing enacted agency contrary to the aims of the organization; women may not have been told to conform if they were not already acting as expected. This is highlighted through some of the presidents' lectures on attendance and more poignantly through lectures on faithfulness. According to a visitor to the meeting, President Eber J. Robinson of the Leeds conference, "the faithfull [sic] would be blessed & the unfaithfull [sic] would be relieved of the work in the Relief Society & given unto others who would do the work faithfully & well" (Folder 3, p. 61). This characterization of faithfulness is threatening; it suggests taking away the agency that exists within the organization from women who are not fully involved. (I personally wonder if the threat was a relief for some of the women, especially if they were desperate to do less work!)

Similarly, Ada Shaw, on September 12, 1917, characterized faithfulness thus: "[She] asked us not to refuse to do anything asked of us also to keep faithfull [sic] to the Gospel" (Folder 3, p. 86). Such rhetoric is further complicated by the obedience the women and all members of the church were expected to perform. Agency is certainly intertwined with faith and the hierarchical prescriptions of faith. The agency that occurred within the organization is constrained and enabled by expectations.

Agency is shaped by cultural norms and exists within structural constraints

Leaders' articulations of faith are a prime example of the shaping of agency within a structure. Perhaps less overt is the mediation of local leaders in shaping the identities and therefore the agency of the female members. The topics covered in their meetings and through the articles and poems from widespread church publications give a clear sense of expectations for a Mormon woman's identity. The organization of the Relief Society is where these women would learn to be Mormon women; therefore, their agency is shaped by the norms of that culture and religion. The overarching narrative of these organizationally shaped messages includes feminine activities and identities as central. This rhetoric shifted toward recognizing the binary of those feminine prescriptions in later years, emphasizing male authority and the importance of obeying that authority. Feminine agency may therefore have been restricted and changed as the mediated messages from larger church norms were emphasized.

Ideas about marriage, motherhood, and children shaped their agency. The women were taught "that we should not marry those not of our faith" (Folder 1, p. 115). Such dangers reportedly began in girlhood, and one lecture focused on "Dangers Encountered by Girls at seaside resorts and the Remedy. They should avoid all familiarity with strangers" (Folder 2, p. 86). They heard lectures on the church's marriage covenant and were frequently reminded of their duty at home.

Motherhood was described as "Honourable" (Folder 2, p. 140), and courtship "leads to true motherhood" (Folder 2, p. 175). "Ideal Motherhood" was about "raising and training children" (Folder 1, p. 107), and the women were taught that children were God's best heritage. All of these messages inform the agency of the women. Because of these messages, we learn why the agency performed within domestic circles was significant, given the parameters of these women's lives and identities. However, we cannot view the ideals of the structure as completely limiting to women from a twenty-first-century perspective, or we mistakenly analyze their lives based on presentism (Novick, 1988). Recognizing the values that were promoted for them within the structure give us a sense of the agency they enacted based on the identities they were able to perform. It also gives us a sense of the identities they occupied and therefore allows us to measure agency accordingly.

Interestingly, the duty to home and motherhood was balanced by a reminder of "relief work & to render their support to the Presedent [sic] & her officers" (Folder 2, p. 108). Such work engages women socially, relationally, and outside of the home. Their presence at the meetings, sponsored by the church, signals that private and public work intersect, and that women should be involved in endeavors outside of their homes in order to support their communities. While the principles of the community as a whole demand an identity of married motherhood, that identity is complicated by the expectations of the Relief Society and the networking they were expected to do among each other and for those serving in other causes, such as the war.

Identity building was intertwined with the organization, which delineated what it meant to be a mother but also what it meant to be a Relief Society member. In a meeting on August 19, 1908, "the President made a few remarks upon; 'What constitutes a living member of the Relief Society,' exhorting each member to cultivate kind words and actions, and to bring them forth, especially towards the young people and the aged" (Folder 1, p. 47). We therefore understand the frame from which their agency stems, and we can see the actions they took to help soldiers, the poor, and the starving people of Vienna as a form of agency.

Agency and identity shift over time. In 1916, the minutes record emerging rhetorics focused on male authority within the church. President Ada Hudson "spoke to the sisters & exhorted them to support the Local Bretheren [sic] who were placed over us, to be humble & prayerfull [sic] at all times" (Folder 3, p. 18). Two of their local members were ordained to be elders in the church, and Hudson reminded the sisters that "they held the same Authority as the other Elders & call them in to heal the sick & pray for us. [She] as[ked] us to support them in all their callings" (Folder 3, p. 18). In other instances, elders were recorded as telling the women "to support those who were placed over them in Authority" (Folder 3, p. 20). These exhortations extended beyond local authorities. On October 2, 1918, President Lucy Walker

> spoke a few minutes on the caperbility [sic] of the authorities of the Church, strengthened the faith of the sisters in the same, said she believed the older members of the Church were to some extent responsible for the younger ones, that they should always try to strengthen this faith, and we should always sustane [sic] the authorities of the Church in all our actions, and if we did this all would go well. (Folder 3, p. 148)

The women were taught to reshape their agency and identities according to this new emphasis within the religion. While the minute books do not record enough years in the Halifax branch to be able to analyze how emerging rhetorics further shaped the agency of the women, any historical study of agency based on TPC would benefit from examining changes over time.

Because of other historical studies within LDS history, we know that in the larger organization, "The LDS church itself embarked on a project of bureaucratic centralization in the 1910s; LDS women's organizations, which had previously been relatively autonomous, became more formally tied to male priesthood authority" (Yorgason, 2002, p. 456). This project of consolidating power affected those branches overseas for women and men who were not geographically close to headquarters. It most certainly affected their agency in relation to the social structure, and we see from these meeting minutes that agency is shaped by structures.

A further example of the minute books' delineation of larger organizational norms and culture to the members is President Barraclough's words on lifters and leaners. On May 27, 1908, she read a poem titled "Which Are You?" from church publication *The Improvement Era*. She commented:

> the Lifters are the Leaders, the Leaners, the followers, and pointed out that we as Latter-day-saints ought indeed to be Lifters, because of our many advantages, as for instance, good Literature, good teachers, and so on, and if we have an interest in our work, no matter what it be, we shall be Lifters, for we have the germ of Divinity in us to cultivate intelligence that we may become such. (Folder 1, p. 37)

She repeated this message on October 14, 1908 (Folder 1, p. 58). In fact, most of the mediating information shared with the sisters was meant to acclimate them to LDS culture and identity and came from church-produced publications from Salt Lake City.

Church publications were critical in disseminating messages and giving the sisters who were far from headquarters information about what it meant to be a Mormon. The publications they read from included *Zion's Home Monthly*, the *Woman's Exponent*, the *Young Woman's Journal*, *The Improvement Era*, *The Relief Society Magazine*, books about prominent LDS women in Utah (such as Eliza R. Snow and Helen M. Whitney), and a book called *Patriarchs and Prophets*. In addition, they read frequently from *The Latter Day Saints' Millennial Star*, which was produced in Great Britain from the headquarters of the LDS British mission.

Perhaps even more importantly, the women often read from the scriptures of the church: *The Pearl of Great Price*, *The Holy Bible*, and *The Doctrine and Covenants*. Surprisingly, there is no mention of *The Book of Mormon*, a foundational text for the LDS Church, an absence I am unable to explain based on the information available. However, use of these publications and their appearance in the meeting minutes confirm the importance of structural constraints in shaping agency. Future study could include first, analyzing the texts specifically mentioned in the minutes to gain a richer understanding of the messages that shaped the society and, second, comparing how those messages affected the actions of the women. Such research would further clarify how cultural norms shape agency and how texts shape organizational identities.

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Conclusion

In 1918, the Halifax Relief Society had 19 members on the roll, held 45 meetings, completed 229 teacher visits and 154 member visits, engaged in 111 gospel conversations, and brought 39 "strangers" to their meetings (Folder 3, p. 161). The society networked by visiting and reporting on those visits, and it ultimately created the structure within which they enacted agency. In 1920, the last full year of reports for the Halifax Relief Society, they had only 11 names on the roll. Many of the British members had emigrated to Utah over the decade. Throughout 1920, they held 40 meetings, conducted some 441 visits, engaged in 131 gospel conversations, and made 94 articles for the sale of work. The work of these 11 women is significant, quantifiable, and recorded. It is representative of the agency that occurs within structures, that is shaped by cultural norms, that is relational and social, that happens on a continuum, and that can occur unintentionally.

TPC records are a prime source of investigating institutional, structural, and hierarchical agency. Many typical genres of TPC reside institutionally, and examining the contents of such records is a way of expanding our understanding of agency and recognizing the activities of organizational participants as agentive. In addition, we can contextualize the lives and actions of those found within such records, ultimately gaining a better understanding of their motivations, obtaining further insight into the way organizations shape actors, and studying the mediating texts that constrain and enable agency.

While our understanding of agency increases given various definitions and theories, applying that knowledge practically can be effectively done through TPC artifacts. The artifacts we have at our disposal are usually official, tied to corporate or organizational discourses, reveal hierarchical prescriptions for actors, and illuminate silent actors' agency within such discourses. Documentation rarely takes into account the user's experience or the way such instructions or records were used; however, by examining such texts from the perspective of agency, we can see into the possible cracks of the organization's power. Through their silence and the hierarchical prescriptions aimed at them, we can see how actors may have been responding to particular cultural norms and how such actions led to the documentation of official mediatory texts or ideas. We must read between the lines of official documentation to gain a greater understanding of the agency of people within an activity system.

In particular, the Halifax meeting minutes reveal the context of Mormon women's lives, which was shaped by the rhetoric used to teach and the ideals meant to inform. We do not know exactly how this advice was received, and we still know little about the individual women's biographies. Did they need the advice and information, and how did they employ it? How did they react? In what ways did other levels of agency occur through the individual lives of the women? From what we can read in the minutes, the society created a group of women who were dedicated to each other and their shared duties and expectations. After a year of meetings, President Barraclough told the women, "she was sure we were more knit together now than we were twelve months ago, and hoped we should continue on in the same way" (Folder 1, p. 96). Their agency as a group consisted of being united through common goals and using their experiences and skills to relate to other groups.

These are "well-behaved" women who make history (Ulrich, 2007) through these mundane but rich records. As Lucy Walker noted, "the Great Sacrifice often entailed upon the few faithfull [sic] workers" (Folder 2, p. 107). The meeting minutes clarify how such actions are representative of agency within a particular context. They attended church, obeyed their leaders, worked for the Red Cross, supported soldiers during WWI, read from church periodicals, and taught each other about prescribed roles and expectations. They were women who did not make trouble, yet their achievements and actions are recorded. We simply need to recognize them.

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