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Doctoral Education among LDS Mothers: A Phenomenological Study of Making the Decision While Considering Church Counsel

JONATHAN GLADE HALL

Members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS) have been compellingly counseled by Church leaders that motherhood should be women's greatest ambition, and that as such it should demand mothers to be full time in the home; at the same time they have been taught to get all of the education that they can. Mothers with young families must decide if they should continue their educational pursuits or spend their full time in the home. This study sought to research how LDS mothers with young children experience the decision to achieve doctoral education, given LDS Church counsel. A phenomenological approach was selected to study seven LDS women's experiences of deciding to achieve doctoral degrees as mothers of young children. As a theoretical perspective, Women's Ways of Knowing informed this study. It appears that doctorate-achieving LDS mothers likely viewed the world from an epistemological position that allowed them to take part in the process of making meaning from authoritative directives.

How women answer questions about what they perceive as truth, authority, and evidence, along with how women know these answers is, according to some scholars, relative to the way women view the world and their part in the world (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986). Answers to these questions reveal how women define themselves, interact with others, conceive morality, and identify a sense of control during life events. Women develop various ways of understanding the world in which they live. In *Women's Ways of Knowing*, Belenky and colleagues share five epistemological perspectives that they believe women utilize in coming to knowledge; they refer to these stage-like categories as *silence*, *received knowing*, *subjective knowing*, *procedural knowing*, and *constructed knowing*.

According to Belenky and colleagues (1986), women know themselves and their world according to the epistemological perspective they hold. These authors propose that a woman in the silence position will view herself as having no voice or control over her decisions, whereas a woman in the constructed knowing position can deal effectively with complex situations and interpret her world according to her terms. *The Women's Ways of Knowing* framework provided a theoretical base and informed emerging themes of this study.

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THE ISSUE: AN LDS MOTHER'S DILEMMA

LDS women have been counseled in *The Family: A Proclamation to the World* (2001) that mothers' primary responsibility is the nurture of their children. LDS women have been admonished, "The counsel of the Church has always been for mothers to spend their full time in the home in rearing and caring for their children" (Benson, 1987, p. 26). The LDS Church has taught that mothering is women's highest responsibility and ultimate ambition. Church President Gordon B. Hinckley (1997) suggested that root consequences for mothers being out of the home include delinquency, drugs, and gang involvement for children.

President Spencer W. Kimball (as cited in E. T. Benson, 1987) counseled:

Come home, wives, to your husbands. Make home a heaven for them. Come home, wives, to your children, born and unborn. Wrap the motherly cloak about you and, unembarrassed, help in a major role to create the bodies for the immortal souls who anxiously await. When you have fully complemented your husband in home life and borne the children, growing up full of faith, integrity, responsibility, and goodness, then you have achieved your accomplishment supreme, without peer, and you will be the envy [of all] through time and eternity. (¶ 35)

EDUCATION FOR LDS WOMEN

The LDS Church has repeatedly emphasized the importance of women seeking education (Faust, 1986; Hinckley, 1999, 2000, 2007; Oaks, 1975; Young, 1862). LDS Church President Gordon B. Hinckley (1999) has stressed that men and women should get all of the education that they can. He declared that the "Lord has said very plainly that His people are to gain knowledge of countries and kingdoms and of things of the world through the process of education, even by study and by faith" (p. 4). He further stated that education will unlock doors of opportunity for those who receive it, declaring that it is worth sacrificing to receive so that LDS members will be able to contribute to society. President Hinckley taught that as members receive their education and contribute to society, they will bring honor to their church. He specifically stated that education will be of great benefit to married women. Rather than expecting married women to drift along

without improving themselves, he encouraged women to make the effort to gain education to enrich their lives and broaden their outlook.

The LDS Church has suggested many purposes for women achieving all of the education that they can. LDS Church President Harold B. Lee (1965) repeated that educating women may be more important than educating men, and he advised that education improves women's minds, bodies, cultural awareness, spirituality, ability to serve others, and capability to teach their children and wisely counsel their husbands. Education increases women's self-esteem, helps them be more interesting, and prepares them to view the world through wise, more mature eyes (Christensen, 1985).

EDUCATIONAL DECISIONS OF LDS MOTHERS WITH CHILDREN

Mothers with young families must decide if they should continue their educational pursuits; there has been a lack of research on their decision to achieve doctoral education. Former General Young Women's President of the LDS Church Ardeh G. Kapp (1985) has said:

The question has been asked, if a woman is trained in such broad areas, will she be lured away from the home? In many ways, her education can strengthen her home. Down the road, higher education may give her more opportunity to be with her family, to set her own working hours, to have the know-how to go into business, to prepare her to meet the economic needs of her family if she must become the provider. Knowledge and intelligence are tools that can be used in righteousness or unrighteousness. Proper use can help us better protect and guard our homes (p. 9).

Church leader James E. Faust (1986) was careful to note that Church directives regarding mothers pursuing endeavors outside of the home apply in a general manner to all members, but that their application involves exceptions. Pinborough (1986) urged women to consider that since circumstances vary from home to home, "every family must work out the details for themselves" (p. 22).

EXTANT RESEARCH ON LDS WOMEN'S MOTHERHOOD AND EDUCATIONAL DECISIONS

A body of research has suggested strategies LDS mothers use to think through balancing family and

education, while considering counsel that mothers are to spend their full time in the home along with counsel that they should get as much education as they can. Vance (2002) performed a content analysis of the themes and directives given in LDS periodicals to women over a hundred-year time period throughout the 1900s. Vance found disparity in the ideals that the LDS Church promoted for its women members; she concluded that motherhood has been most idealized, but education has also been a strong emphasis for women.

Beaman (2001) studied how LDS women make sense of Church directives, noting that LDS women choose how to interpret and reconcile varying Church counsel. Beaman investigated how LDS women maintain their autonomy and agency within the LDS Church and how women understand LDS Church directives regarding male authority. Using a qualitative approach, she conducted life history interviews with 28 LDS women. Beaman found a pattern of heterogeneity from the women's explanations. She stated that this topic is "complicated for LDS women, who are taught to be self-sufficient, even though they are expected to marry, have children, and stay at home" (p. 71). The author described a further tension in the expectations for women by concluding that the message of the LDS Church to women is essentially "be responsible for yourself, yet be dependent on your husbands. Be able to care for yourself, but let your husband be the breadwinner" (p. 83).

Mihelich and Storrs (2003) questioned how LDS women resisted hegemony and wondered why they remained participants in the LDS Church. The researchers interviewed 20 LDS women enrolled in an institution of higher education in the northwestern United States, thinking that they would find that the participants were resisting hegemony by achieving higher education. Mihelich and Storrs initially utilized a resistance theoretical framework, while employing an interpretive and qualitative research design to interview the women. Interviews were transcribed and coded for the degree and form of gender role resistance and adherence. Additional categories of educational goals and aspirations emerged from the women's answers. The researchers' initial expectation that the women would articulate resistance during the interviews failed, as the women did not perceive their actions as students in higher education as resistance. The researchers concluded

that LDS women incorporate higher education into the ideology of womanhood, allowing them to "mediate the potential contradictions" (p. 417).

Ozorak (1996) observed coping strategies women use to reconcile difficulties within religions. A strategy Ozorak identified was characterized by women substituting or interpreting their own ideas for those offered by their particular religion. She believed that an interpreting strategy for church directives had the "greatest potential for liberation through actual change of circumstances" (p. 25).

GAPS IN OUR UNDERSTANDING OF THIS PROBLEM

While a body of research has suggested some strategies LDS mothers use to think through the seemingly inconsistent counsel that women should spend their full time in the home fulfilling their primary responsibility of mothering and that they should get all of the education that they can, there has been a lack of research on how LDS mothers experience the specific decision to achieve doctoral degrees. Research has failed to understand how women experience the decision to achieve doctoral education as LDS mothers of young children. This is an important question because LDS women may find themselves conflicted as they consider Church directives along with their personal desires; understanding how some women experienced their decision to achieve their degree may inform other women as they come to this decision in their lives.

PURPOSE STATEMENT

This study attempted to enlighten understanding of how LDS mothers with young children experience the process of deciding to achieve doctoral education. This study informs LDS mothers who desire or are considering pursuing doctoral education by providing insight concerning the experience of making this decision and demonstrating how some LDS women have understood relevant Church directives.

DELIMITATIONS

Participants were tenure-track and tenured women professors at schools mainly in the Rocky Mountain region. Participants self-reported to be active participating members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

METHODS

PARTICIPANTS

A qualitative research design was chosen because of its ability to examine multiple dimensions and display the complexity of this situation (Creswell, 1998). Qualitative research involves the researcher as an instrument of data collection, focuses on the meaning of data, and provides expressive description. As this study sought to shed light on women's experiences of deciding to achieve doctoral degrees as LDS mothers, phenomenology was an appropriate methodology. A phenomenological approach involves beginning with a philosophical idea and being open to learning about a phenomenon that may seem inconsistent with objective reality. Phenomenology seems to have offered a useful method of learning about the specific phenomenon of achieving doctoral education as LDS mothers.

Women's Ways of Knowing provided the philosophical idea that doctorate-achieving LDS mothers likely viewed the world from an epistemological position that allowed them to adopt a particular process of making meaning from authoritative directives (Belenky et al., 1986).

PARTICIPANTS

Purposeful sampling allowed the researcher to select participants who had experienced the phenomenon and who could contribute to the study by thoroughly articulating their experience (Creswell, 1998; Polkinghorne, 1989). Selected participants were women who reported to be active members of the LDS Church who had made the decision to achieve their doctoral degrees as LDS mothers. Information-rich cases--women who could provide the richest descriptions--were graduates, as the decision to achieve a doctoral degree is a decision that must be made continually until the degree has been achieved. As women who have previously decided to achieve their degree might eventually decide not to continue, the most information-rich cases are of those who have made and remade the decision to achieve their degree during all stages of the decision-making process, culminating in graduation.

Participants were selected from two forums of LDS women who were tenure-track and tenured professors at various universities. The forums met at least annually at national conferences or in local settings in the Rocky Mountain region. These groups of women met as a

support network of LDS mothers who had chosen to achieve doctoral degrees. Having learned about these forums of LDS women, I was able to solicit participants for this study from a large group of LDS women with doctoral degrees. As professors' religious affiliation can be a sensitive topic and is protected information, these forums of women allowed convenient access to potential participants.

Seven participants who were able to provide information-rich cases of LDS mothers who had achieved their doctoral degrees were selected and assigned pseudo-names. No two participants had achieved their doctoral degree within the same state. Angie, Beth, Carol, Donna, Faye, and Ginny were married, and Emily was a divorced, single mother. Ages of the participants as they had initiated their doctoral studies ranged from Donna at age 24 to Angie at age 37. Angie had eight children, while Donna had one child and was expecting a second. Faye had her fourth child four days before she achieved her doctoral degree, and Carol had her fourth two months after achieving her degree. Each participant identified herself as a lifelong member of the LDS Church; a description of each follows.

Angie. Angie reported to have been a 36-year-old, married, lifelong member of the LDS Church when she began her doctoral program in the 1990s. She graduated at age 43 from a school in the Rocky Mountain West. Angie made the decision to apply for a doctoral program as the mother of six children, and she was pregnant with twins during the application process. She began the program 5 months after the twins were born, as a mother of eight, with five children who were 5 years old or younger. Her husband was a stay-at-home father while she had been the breadwinner for the previous 10 years. Her experiences provided rich insight as she was the mother of a large family who was the sole financial support of that family while in a doctoral program over a period of 7 years.

Beth. Beth recalled being 37 years old when she enrolled in her doctoral program in the late 1990s as a housewife who had been a lifelong member of the LDS Church. She graduated 3 years later at age 40 from a university in the Midwest. The youngest of her four children had been 3 years old when she decided to begin her doctoral program; when she graduated her children ranged from age 6 to 11. Beth informed this study as a mother in her 30s with four children at the time she

decided to achieve her doctorate.

Carol. Carol was a married, active member of the LDS Church when she decided to enroll in a doctoral program at age 29 during the early 1970s. She graduated 4 years later from a university in the southern states. She had three children when she began her doctorate, and had her fourth child 2 months after she defended her dissertation. Carol informed this study as a mother who was in her twenties and was still bearing children when she decided to achieve her doctoral degree.

Donna. Donna shared that she was 24 years old when she decided to enroll in a doctoral program in 2001. She was an active member of the LDS Church, and was not yet married. She got engaged a month into her program and got married during spring break of her first year. She graduated at age 30 with one child, expecting her second. Donna informed this study from the viewpoint of a younger woman, who wanted to be a mother, but was not one until after she began her program. Her decision to achieve her degree was made when marriage was imminent and continued through the process of having a first child.

Emily. Emily was an active member of the LDS Church when she decided to enroll in a doctoral program at age 25 in the 1980s. She was divorced and had one child. She graduated at age 30 from a university in the Midwest. Emily informed this study from the perspective of a divorced mother. Her experience of moving to a new part of the country with a young child to begin her doctoral program as a single mother provided another rich perspective of achieving a doctorate.

Faye. Faye was an active LDS Church member when she decided to enroll in a doctoral program at age 29 in the 1970s. She graduated 3 years later from a university in the Midwest. She had three young children when she began her doctoral program and graduated four days after her fourth child was born. Faye provided information from the viewpoint of someone who decided to achieve her degree when she already had children; a further challenge was added to the necessity of balancing motherhood and education as she had a fourth child during the final year of her program.

Ginny. Ginny was 35 when she decided to enroll at a university in the Midwest in the 1990s. She graduated at age 41. She reported to be an active lifelong LDS Church member who had four children. She informed this study as the mother of four children who decided she wanted

to go back to school after having been out of school for some time while she worked in her community.

DATA COLLECTION

Prior to the interviews questions were tested with three LDS mothers with doctoral degrees and were found to satisfactorily probe the women's experiences and perceptions. In an effort to build rapport, the researcher contacted each of the 7 women, discussed the study individually with her, and left a copy of initial interview questions. Providing the questions in advance so that the participants could preview what they would be asked was intended to help them feel comfortable with the interview questions, as well as allow more time for them to recall their most meaningful answers.

The researcher then met individually with each participant for an interview, which was tape recorded for transcription and transcribed by the researcher within a day of the interview to promote accuracy. Following the interview, each participant was contacted and asked if she had thought of anything that she would like to add to her answers. One participant added information at this time. Participants were sent a copy of the interview transcription so they could check for accuracy; 5 of them chose to clarify comments they had made or add insight. Depending on emerging themes and their personal answers, the participants provided continual clarification throughout the analysis stage.

DATA ANALYSIS

Procedures for analyzing the data were based on the writings of Creswell (1998), Moustakas (1994), and Colaizzi (1978). These major procedures for data analysis are generally accepted, and a similar sequence of steps is used by all psychological phenomenologists (1998).

After transcribing the interviews, the researcher read all of the descriptions in their entirety.

The participants' answers were divided into statements during a process called horizontalization. During this step, each statement was tagged with a code that identified the participant and provided unique information. The data were then coded for themes and categories that emerged. Themes were identified by using a color code system, and significant statements from each description were extracted.

These statements were combined to create clusters of meanings. Color-coded sheets identified clusters of data from all of the participants.

The clusters were tied back together to make a general description of the experience. This included a textural description of what the experience was and a structural description of how it was experienced.

Follow-up interviews were utilized to clarify the participants' experiences and offer additional insight until saturation was reached.

VERIFICATION

Data were verified using techniques prescribed by Creswell (1998) and Polkinghorne (1989). A bracketing interview was carried out prior to data collection, allowing the researcher to suspend (bracket) pre-study suspicions.

Member checking strategies were employed to allow participants to verify that the written transcription accurately represented the oral interview and to request that they check the data analysis at progressive steps to verify that their experiences were reflected accurately. An audit trail and a research journal were also kept, and an audit was performed to verify the accuracy of the analysis.

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Data analysis is divided into two sections. The first section identifies what participants believed that the LDS Church counseled about education. The subsections are organized as (1) the perception that the LDS Church counseled women to achieve education, (2) the perception that the LDS Church counseled that even mothers should achieve education, and (3) the perception that the LDS Church counseled single women to seek education, but was wary of married women achieving education if they have young children. The second section identifies differences between others' experiences and personal actions. Subsections include (1) the perception that the Gospel stands independent of Church members' counsel, (2) the perception that women are all different and follow different paths, (3) the perception that LDS women may make their own choices, and (4) the perception that personal revelation may direct women in making their choices.

WHAT PARTICIPANTS BELIEVED THE LDS CHURCH COUNSELED ABOUT EDUCATION

Most of the mothers in this study seemed to indicate that they believed that the LDS Church counseled

that women should pursue education as a primary objective in this life. The women's perceptions differed on whether being married and having young children changed the Church's counsel as to the acceptability of achieving education. Beth related that she had had the blessing of her religious leaders to achieve her doctorate as a mother with young children, while Carol and Faye disclosed that they had felt opposition from their religious leaders. Emily illustrated how she and a fellow student felt that they were treated differently by Church members based on their marital status while in their doctoral program.

Perception that the LDS Church counseled women to achieve education. Several of the women alluded to the idea that they believed that the Church has supported women in their efforts to pursue education, teaching the importance of all women obtaining education. Angie remembered from her childhood when her father had taught her that the Church expected her to seek education. She recalled that her dad had emphasized that "Brigham Young said something like 'if I had to choose between educating my sons and my daughters, I'd educate my daughters because they would educate my grandchildren.'" Beth commented regarding her education, "I never doubted that choice. . . . I never felt guilty about the education." Referring to times she had heard LDS Church leaders teach about the importance of achieving all of the education you could, Carol said, "I always took that 'getting an education' seriously." Donna reflected on counsel that had influenced her as she grew up. She related a teaching which she believed was particularly meaningful and influential for her: "Whatever intelligence you attain in this life will carry with you unto the next." Ginny recalled that the Church's support for education "clearly was a factor" in her decision to pursue her doctoral degree.

Emily indicated her belief that teachings from the LDS Church about the importance of education for its members seemed particularly influential to her. She felt strongly "that we were expected to be as intelligent a people as possible." Emily continued, "The Lord doesn't want us to look like a bunch of ignorant hicks. He wants us to be the most successful, the most intelligent, the most creative, the most ambitious people on earth, and we should confidently pursue excellence in whatever we do."

Emily explained that she did not believe that the LDS Church counseled that achieving education necessarily

meant achieving specific degrees, but did believe that if formal school was available, it should “definitely be pursued.” She stated, “It should not be a secondary thing. It should definitely be a primary pursuit to be as educated as you possibly can and to take every opportunity in your life to increase your education.”

Perception that the LDS Church counseled that even mothers should achieve education. Beth articulated that she felt that the Church discouraged employment for mothers with young children, but felt like the importance of achieving education seemed like a constant teaching of the Church. She stated, “Going to school kind of gave me, in a strange kind of way, permission to achieve. When working full time didn’t seem like a choice for me. . . .going to school seemed like a choice.” Beth appeared emotional as she reflected on the influence of the Church’s counsel that mothers with young children should be in the home. She explained:

If I did not have that testimony, I would have done things different because being a mom and being in the home is the hardest thing in life. I love my children, but doing domestic stuff sucks. I find no fulfillment in those duties and responsibilities. Changing diapers and cooking dinner is not rewarding for me. I spent a lot of years feeling like I wasn’t right because I didn’t like that stuff I even had a hard time reading stories to my children and just doing kid stuff.

Perception that the LDS Church counseled single women to seek education, but was wary of married women achieving education if they had young children at home. Donna reflected that she was single when she initially made her decision to achieve a doctoral degree, but that she continued to carry out her decision after she got married during her first year in the program. She indicated that as a single woman, she felt especially encouraged by the Church to seek advanced education. She laughed, “They’re supportive, especially if you’re single. It’s like they say ‘well, you better think of something to do with your life since you’re not married.’” Concerning mothers with young children, Donna shared her feelings about how her perception of the Church’s teachings influenced her choice:

I don’t think that it would be such a dilemma in my mind if I weren’t a member of the Church and had the perspective of the eternal ramifications of how you raise

a person. So because of that, throughout my PhD and working, I would hope that anything that takes me away from full-time motherhood, causes some kind of internal turmoil. I would say that is directly related my belief in the Gospel and understanding of an eternal perspective of why we’re here and the capacity for human potential and divine nature of kids. That affected me throughout in terms of how I balanced my time and even how I balance my time now.

Though Carol seemed to believe that the LDS Church had always taught that “women need an education,” she expressed that she felt that the Church emphasized family even more. She noted that she believed that the Church taught, “Family’s always more significant, and I agree it is . . . I’m not denying the importance of being a mother. . . . Nobody ever taught about the idea of balance.” Recalling her own experience, Carol shared, “It would have been okay if I would have been single or childless, or if my children had left the nest. All of those are acceptable. I was in the unacceptable range, or the range where one is viewed with suspicion.” Faye seemed vigorously challenged by her local Church leaders as to her decision to achieve her doctoral degree.

Having been a recently divorced mother as she began her doctoral program, Emily recalled

I had a good friend when I was getting my doctorate at [a Midwestern university]; she was getting her doctorate in English, and she had three kids, and was a member of [my church]. She was a good friend. She was probably my closest friend there. I remember one day she turned to me and she said, “You’re so lucky.” And I go, “What, so lucky?” And I go “why?” She goes, “Well, because you can pursue your doctorate degree with [your child] being watched over by other people, and no one in the Church criticizes you for doing that. In my case, I even have my husband watching my kids, but I get criticized for doing that.” I felt really bad for her, and I thought, “Well, who would have the audacity to judge her like that?”

PERCEPTION OF DIFFERENCES BETWEEN OTHERS’ EXPECTATIONS AND PERSONAL ACTIONS

Many participants in this study seemed to recognize differences between what they perceived as LDS Church counsel or norms and their own personal decisions as

LDS mothers. Several of the women recalled learning to separate their understanding of the Gospel from what Church members sometimes counseled. They seemed to do this on occasions when they did not understand or agree with the counsel. Participants also shared their belief that there is not one single path through life that is right for everyone, but that after hearing counsel, women may choose what is best for them. Participants seemed to indicate that they were especially confident when they felt that their choices were based on personal revelation.

Perception that the Gospel stands independent of Church members' counsel. Three participants seemed to indicate that they had heard discouraging counsel regarding their decision to achieve higher education as mothers of young children, but they separated that from their personal understanding of the Gospel. Carol remembered that during her experience of deciding to achieve her doctoral degree, she felt like she was acting contrary to what "was being taught at the pulpit." She clarified her decision as she explained, "Now, did I feel that was the Gospel? Not necessarily. Did I feel that was how the brethren were interpreting things? Yes. But I felt the Gospel was true."

Angie explained, "I separate the Gospel from people, and so I didn't feel any tension as far as the Gospel is concerned. I didn't feel any tension like that." Angie candidly added, "But then I don't know if I was setting up barriers psychologically. I mean, I think I probably should have because a lot of people do, but I didn't." It is interesting that Angie apparently noted that other people may sense a tension in what has been said regarding the roles of LDS mothers of young children, yet she did not feel that way.

Faye related, "The biggest challenge, of course, was the Church. [The problem was] how I interpreted Church doctrine . . . A mother doesn't do this, and a mother doesn't do that, and so on." She continued, "But once I got beyond that, then the biggest challenges were from the Church authorities, and that was really quite severe." Faye explained that she did not feel that these challenges were wasted. She said:

One good thing that happened was my testimony of the Gospel grew. I could tell how I felt about it, and I could tell that what was important to me was the Church's definition of what God is. I wanted to stick with it for that reason.

Some of the women felt it was important to share their belief that all members of the LDS Church are different and may pursue different directions, and different directions may be right for each individual. Donna shared, "There are so many different routes and careers that might allow us to fulfill our mission in life. It may not matter what context we ultimately choose, but more how we act around people wherever we are."

Emily explained, "We are not cookie cutters in the Church. We are all unique and have unique paths and unique opportunities." Referring to statements made by LDS Church leaders regarding the role of women and her assumption that women would apply teachings individually, Ginny intimated, "You have to consider the whole range of women they are talking to."

Emily further discussed that achieving doctoral degrees may likely lead to women being out of the home as they pursue careers. Regarding the Church's concern for this, Emily reflected, "I think very few women selfishly pursue careers. I don't think it is selfish to develop a talent. I think that's what is expected of us." She further stated:

I really do think that it's important for people to have a life that extends beyond their family. I think men kind of naturally have that, but a lot of times women don't. I do think it's very important to be well rounded, and being well rounded also includes time developing your own talents and your own identity--your own self. To me it's just building on the talents that are given to us, and there are lots of ways that can happen.

Perception that LDS women may make their own choices. A majority of the women described their belief that they chose their own actions after receiving counsel. Angie referred to the decision she and her husband made that she achieve her doctoral degree to assist her in being the bread winner to their family of ten:

Over the years, almost every time we'd get a new bishop they'd call my husband in and talk to him about that. And then they'd call me in. I think that they thought that I was somehow kind of being mistreated. And I'd say this is a very conscious decision that we made.

Reflecting back on her decision to achieve her doctorate to assist her in providing financially for the family while

her husband stayed home with the children, Angie stated, "I know it's odd. I know all that kind of stuff. I understand the Church doctrine, and I believe 100% in that. For our situation, this is what works, and this is the right thing for us." It appears that Angie felt comfortable making her own choices after having received counsel from the Church.

Carol remembered Church leaders and members who expressed that they did not approve of her decision to achieve her degree. As she thought about things that were said to her, she recalled:

None of it was directed against me personally. Well, sometimes it was me personally but not usually. Usually it was just [that] I didn't have my priorities straight. I felt very comfortable with my priorities. My husband felt very comfortable with my priorities—our priorities—because they had to be the family's priorities.

Donna shared her belief:

Within the Church there's a fine balance: We really want educated women. We want our members being leaders in the world and all this, yet we also want strong families. Frankly, I think that even within the Church, people aren't sure where their alliances are and how you manage them practically. So I think they just stay out of your personal business.

Faye shared:

I mean the doctrine was troublesome, but I got over it. I had such profound spiritual experiences that for me personally it would have been unthinkable to have denied those experiences. You just couldn't do it. So, for that reason, I didn't know how the doctrine could reconcile with it, but I just decided not to worry about it.

Faye related how she was able to come to the point of not worrying about it, while she remained a faithful member of the Church. She explained:

I just did a lot of study of the Church's doctrines, and was just struck over and over again that the Church was developed on the premise that a person had to exercise his free agency and his freedom of thought in order to develop the Church, and that was an eternal principle.

So if it applied then, it applies now. Actually there was a scripture. . . .that really helped me get beyond the doctrine, or beyond the colloquial version of the doctrine. That scripture said if you study things out, then if you act on your own accord, you can't be held accountable if you're trying to do what is right, and if you're honestly trying to follow true pathways.

Ginny discussed her perception of the teachings of the LDS Church as she said, "You know we have this 'be a stay-at-home mom, put your primary focus on your children,' but 'develop your talents.' It's kind of contradicting, and so I put things together that worked." Ginny further explained that she felt it was important for women to be able to figure things out for themselves. She shared, "It is so important for each individual woman, mother, to have their own testimony, their own sense of self" so that they can have a "sense of their own faith to be able to stand on their own." Ginny shared that the LDS Church's "support for education clearly was a factor" in her achieving her doctoral degree. Yet despite this support for education, she recalled, "I clearly felt like I was doing something counter-normative" within the Church.

Even though Ginny may have felt like her decision to achieve her doctoral degree was counter-normative, she did not feel that her decision was counter to what the Lord wanted her to do. She related, "I have to make some of these decisions myself. The Church can give general advice, and then I have to decide for myself. So I felt no guilt, in terms of going against the Church."

Perception that personal revelation may direct women in making their choices. Participants in this study identified contributing factors that seemed to lead them in deciding to achieve doctoral degrees. Participants identified that they felt a deep need, had a drive or strong desire, and felt spiritually led to achieve doctoral education. Six participants independently stated that their patriarchal blessings influenced them to achieve their doctorate. These contributing factors seem to indicate that participants' perception of personal revelation has been an important reason that these mothers decided to achieve their degrees.

When Faye was challenged by local Church leaders who did not feel that it was appropriate for her to pursue her doctoral degree as a mother of young children, she

responded, "Well, the last time I checked, the Church was built on personal revelation." Faye recalled another occasion, during a Church meeting, when she said:

I think this is probably a good time to say that I made my choice based on personal revelation, and I will not answer any more questions about it. I won't talk about it, and I don't want any of you to talk to me about it because I've made my choice. This is the way it is.

DISCUSSION

It appears that the women in this study perceived that the LDS Church asserts the importance of education for women, but the participants perceived the counsel regarding mothers seeking education differently. The women seemed comfortable separating their own situations from their perceptions of Church teachings. It appears that participants value their membership in the LDS Church and recognize the authority of Church leaders, while at the same time, they feel comfortable making their own personal decisions when considering general Church counsel. In this way, participants seemed to participate in finding personal meaning in LDS Church directives, claiming to rely on personal revelation in their decisions.

These participants confidently claimed to have taken part in finding meaning in Church directives regarding their lives. As Women's Ways of Knowing proposes, women's epistemological perspectives may enable them to find personal conclusions and direction in complex situations as they contribute personally to the meaning of the directives. The women expressed their ability to apply Church directives in their own lives in their own terms without a feeling of acting contrary to the actual directive.

CONCLUSIONS

The goal of a phenomenological study is that the reader understands the essence of the experience and comes away thinking, "I understand better what it is like for someone to experience that" (Polkinghorne, 1989, p. 46). Because of this study, readers better understand how LDS mothers consider Church counsel while deciding to achieve doctoral education. It appears that the participants shared an epistemological perspective

which allowed them to participate in finding the meaning of LDS directives in their lives. The LDS mothers expressed their dependence on personal revelation in applying Church directives. This study found that participants identified spiritual promptings and deep personal desires as important factors affecting their decision to achieve doctoral education.

As this was a qualitative study, the researcher was the primary instrument in data analysis. Readers may determine the transferability of this study based on how representative they consider this sample to be (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). The results and analysis sections detail the feelings and experiences that capture the essence of the participants' experiences.

This research may be useful to those who care for LDS Church members in understanding the experiences of a segment of its members. It may be useful to institutions of higher education in understanding this group on their campuses and in attracting additional students. This research may be particularly useful to LDS mothers who have decided to achieve doctoral degrees or are in the process of deciding to achieve doctoral education; insight may assist individuals in understanding themselves and relating to others.

It would be fascinating to interview women who made a conscious decision not to pursue doctoral education while their children were young to discover what factors lead to that decision. Do these women stay home because of authoritative directives, or do they feel empowered to make this decision for themselves? Would they cite spiritual promptings and deep personal desires as reasons for their decision?

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