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FROM WOMANHOOD TO SISTERHOOD:
THE EVOLUTION OF THE
BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY
WOMEN'S CONFERENCE

by
V. Gale Lewis

A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

Department of History
Brigham Young University

April 2006

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BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY

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As chair of the candidate's graduate committee, I have read the dissertation of V. Gale Lewis in its final form and have found that (1) its format, citations, and bibliographical style are consistent and acceptable and fulfill university and department style requirements; (2) its illustrative materials including figures, tables, and charts are in place; and (3) the final manuscript is satisfactory to the graduate committee and is ready for submission to the university library.

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Finally, I want to thank my children: Melissa, Jack, Michelle, James, Melinda, Jacob and Miranda. They have given me the love, support, encouragement and, at times, inspiration, that has allowed me to do a project of this scope. I dedicate this work to them.

ABSTRACT

FROM WOMANHOOD TO SISTERHOOD: THE EVOLUTION OF THE BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY WOMEN'S CONFERENCE

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Department of History

Master of Arts

For over twenty-five years the Brigham Young University Women's Conference has given women in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS or Mormon) the opportunity to go beyond womanhood and share sisterhood. Spurred by the women's movement of the 1970s, LDS women were pressed to define for themselves what it meant to be a woman in the Church. This discovery and defining process often brought confusion, criticism and conflict. As women sought to reconcile the discrepancies between their own lives and views, their internal definition and the external definition they received from others, a reconstruction began to take place that reflected not only society's stress on "family values" but also the Church's growing globalization and emphasis on LDS fundamentals of family and gospel principles. The conference is a

reflection of this transformation and the issues Latter-day Saint women faced in the late twentieth-century. In addition, it is the history of a grass roots conference that grew and was adopted by the Church through the Relief Society.

The BYU Women's Conference began in response to the needs of female students at BYU and quickly expanded beyond the BYU community. Early conferences concentrated on identifying the various roles of LDS women. The event expanded to include issues like depression, the Equal Rights Amendment, and the state and national meetings for the International Year of the Woman. Throughout the history of the conference the issue of professional women and working outside the home with its attendant issue of child care stirred controversy and contention. As the LDS Church has grown to be an international church, the conference expanded to address the needs of LDS women in a worldwide church. In expanding the focus, the conference topics evolved from a scholarly focus to a growing emphasis on LDS fundamentals of family and gospel principles. The sponsorship, program and structure of the conference have changed to meet the issues facing this expanded population. Through its annual gathering the conference endeavored to strengthen womanhood through knowledge and faith, assist women in understanding their identity, and recognize the beauty in the diversity of sisterhood.

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Introduction

Each year thousands of women converge on the campus of Brigham Young University (BYU) to attend the BYU Women's Conference. These women come from all over the United States and from various other countries. Many come with family members and friends in an annual pilgrimage to fill their spiritual, emotional and intellectual wells. For many women, this conference has become a tradition to be scheduled religiously into their calendar each year.

For over twenty-five years the BYU Women's Conference has given women in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS or Mormon) the opportunity to go beyond womanhood and share sisterhood. For the purposes of this thesis, womanhood is defined as the qualities of an individual woman. It is a cultural construct that goes beyond gender and includes the multiple roles including wife and mother. Womanhood is both individually and socially defined. As a result, each woman must decide for herself the qualities by which she will identify herself as a woman. However, since womanhood is also a social construct, each woman has to reconcile her definition with society's. Women often are required to consider multiple cultural definitions, which are frequently unrealistic stereotypes with nebulous characteristics. When asked to describe her, the list of qualities varies but the belief is the same. She is perfect.

Superwoman

She is a perfect mother
the model wife
the best housekeeper
the greatest cook
the most available daughter
the most effective worker
the most helpful friend.
She is wonderful at
juggling home and career
with a constant smile
and an even disposition.
She is everything
to everyone.
But who is she?

--Natasha Josefowitz¹

LDS women must consider not only society's changing expectations but also the LDS version of "Superwoman," "Molly Mormon." This term integrates the concept of Superwoman with a "good" Mormon woman who follows church teachings."² The LDS version would add a line about church and community service and would not expect a woman to have a career. However, if she does, employment must not adversely affect her family in any way. While what constitutes womanhood is an individual matter, women tend to apply their definition to all other women.

Womanhood focuses on the individual while sisterhood concentrates on the group. Sisterhood is the relationship that exists among a community of women whether the community is religious, political or social. Grethe Ballif Peterson, a speaker at the conference, defined sisterhood as the "application of a higher principle that connects women with women . . . It is the personal power that comes from the sure knowledge of

¹ Marjorie Hansen Shaevitz, *The Superwoman Syndrome* (New York: Warner Books, 1984), 1.

² Lori Beamon, "Molly Mormons, Mormon Feminists and Moderates: Religious Diversity and the LDS Church," *Sociology of Religion* 62, no. 1 (Spring 2001): 69.

who we are and why we are here. That identity is central to our lives. Sisterhood is a principle of unity and direction.”³ Being part of a sisterhood in itself does not change women although they may change as a result of their experiences. One may belong to a sisterhood without sharing in the connection in all aspects with the other women. Sisterhood exposes women to the diversity among women and, ideally, enables women to accept that their definition of woman may not be right for all women. This process is usually difficult and often contentious although the goal is unity of spirit. A key component of sisterhood is gathering together.

Women in the United States have been gathering together in societies since the late eighteenth century. Following the trend of women’s societies, a small group of Mormon women in Nauvoo, Illinois, met to form a club in 1842. The organization, named Relief Society, was immediately incorporated as an auxiliary of the LDS Church and today a “chapter” of the organization exists as a formal part of every local congregation.⁴ The Relief Society is one example of the types of women’s organizations that have been created over the years.

The women’s study club movement traces its origins back to New England in 1868 with the organization of the New England Women’s Club in Boston and the Sorosis Club in New York.⁵ Historian Annette K. Baxter points out “clubs strengthened

³ Grethe Ballif Peterson, “Priesthood and Sisterhood: An Equal Partnership,” in *Blueprints for Living: Perspectives for Latter-day Saint Women* Vol. 2, ed. Maren M. Mouritsen (Provo: Brigham Young University Publications, 1980), 57.

⁴ Jill Mulvay Derr, Janath Russell Cannon and Maureen Ursenbach Beecher, *Women of Covenant: The Story of Relief Society* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1992), 1. This includes a detailed history of the beginnings and significance of the Relief Society. For the purposes of this paper, it is important to know that LDS women place great significance in the creation of a separate organization for women early in the history of the Church.

⁵ Sandra Haarsager, *Organized Womanhood: Cultural Politics in the Pacific Northwest, 1840 - 1920* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997), 34.

collective confidence and afforded their members a more complete sense of individual identity . . . Sisterhood was the predictable outgrowth of such regular collaboration in sociability.”⁶ Jennie June Croly, founder of Sorosis and organizer of the General Federation of Women’s Clubs, wrote in 1898, “The club from the beginning accomplished two purposes. It provided a means for the acquisition of knowledge [and] the training of power; . . . [A woman’s] ideals were elevated, her trust in eternal goodness and its purpose strengthened and her own possibilities as a social and intellectual force, brought out and gradually molded into form.”⁷

In the introduction to a collection of talks from the 1990 BYU Women’s Conference, sociologist and director of the BYU Women’s Research Institute Marie Cornwall explained why women gather together in conferences but men don’t. “Simply, because women want to. Women want to meet together to talk about their lives and how to respond to the challenges and problems they face.”⁸ Meeting together is a method women use to identify, gather information and address the issues in their lives.⁹ The reason and study of why men do not meet together will be left for another scholar.

Female gatherings have not been confined to formal clubs or the distant past. German women who married American husbands and immigrated to the U.S. after World War II met together to share experiences, coffee and kuchen. As a result, in the 1950s homemakers meeting together came to be called coffee klatches. In researching her recent article, “The Opt-Out Revolution,” Lisa Belkin met with women in Atlanta, who

⁶ Karen J. Blair, *The Clubwoman as Feminist: True Womanhood Redefined 1868 – 1914*, with foreword by Annette K. Baxter (New York: Holmes & Meier Publishing, 1980), 36.

⁷ Mrs. J. C. Croly (Jennie June), *The History of the Women’s Club Movement in America* (New York: Henry J. Allen & Co., 1898), Preface.

⁸ Marie Cornwall, “Introduction,” in *Women of Wisdom & Knowledge: Talks Selected from the BYU Women’s Conferences*, ed. Marie Cornwall and Susan Howe (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1990), 3.

⁹ “Bay Area Task Force on Women,” *Exponent II* 17, no. 2 (1993): 19-20.

had formed a book club, and in San Francisco, who had come together in a playgroup for their children. Belkin's article discussed women who had left well-paying positions or "opted out" of the business world to stay at home with their children.¹⁰

These women are also examples of women reaching beyond their womanhood to share a sisterhood. Each group shared a relationship based on a religious, political or social interest. The women felt a need to gather together to discuss their lives and challenges. The BYU Women's Conference is an example of this searching for sisterhood.

Focus

Spurred by the women's movement of the 1970s, LDS women struggled to define for themselves what it meant to be a woman in the Church. This discovery and defining process often brought confusion, criticism and conflict. As women sought to reconcile the discrepancies between their own lives and views, internal and external definitions of womanhood, a reconstruction began to take place that reflected not only society's stress on "family values" but also the Church's growing globalization and emphasis on LDS fundamentals of family and gospel principles. The BYU Women's Conference reflects this transformation and illuminates the issues facing Latter-day Saint women in the late twentieth century. In addition, this history explores the creation of a grass roots conference that grew and was adopted by the Church through the Relief Society.

This thesis will examine the history of the conference for its first twenty-five years from 1976 to 2001 and describe how the issues affecting the conference reflect concerns in the lives of Latter-day Saint women. The BYU Women's Conference began in response to the needs of female students at BYU and quickly expanded beyond the

¹⁰ Lisa Belkin, "The Opt-Out Revolution," *New York Times Magazine*, 26 October 2003, 42, 47.

BYU community. Early conferences concentrated on identifying the various roles of LDS women. The event expanded to include issues such as the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) and the state and national meetings for the International Year of the Woman. Throughout the history of the conference the subject of professional women and working outside the home with its attendant issue of child care stirred controversy and contention. As the LDS Church grew into an international church, the conference expanded to address the needs of LDS women in a worldwide church. In expanding the focus, the conference topics evolved from a scholarly focus to a growing emphasis on LDS fundamentals of family and gospel principles. The sponsorship, program and structure of the conference changed to meet the issues facing this expanding population. Belonging to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has also placed stress upon the bonding process of sisterhood. Membership enhanced the expectation that the definition of womanhood was the same. This stress is reflected throughout the conference.

While historians, sociologists and anthropologists have written about the issues facing LDS women in the latter part of the twentieth century, there has been relatively little written about the Conference. In 1992, Carol Lee Hawkins, former chair of the conference, wrote a brief history. Wendy Watson, another former chair, joined with Jolene Merica of BYU's Conferences and Workshops in 2000 to update and formalize the history that has subsequently been included in presenters' information kits.¹¹ In 1999 Todd Hendricks wrote a senior paper examining the transformation of the Conference.¹²

¹¹ Carol Lee Hawkins, Wendy Watson and Jolene Merica, "Women's Conference -- A History" (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Conferences and Workshops, 1999), copy in author's possession.

¹² Todd J. Hendricks, "Brigham Young University and the Relief Society of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Annual Women's Conference: A Study in Transformation" (Unpublished Senior paper, Brigham Young University, 11 April 2000), copy in author's possession.

No one has examined the Conference's place in the history of the women of the LDS church.

Historiography

In *Mormon History*, a historiography of Mormonism emphasizing the twentieth century, the authors note that women's history has been "woefully underrepresented."¹³ While they were referring to biographies, the statement applies overall. Much of the limited research has focused on women church leaders, especially those of the nineteenth century.¹⁴ *Women of the Covenant*, a history of the Relief Society, however was published in 1992.¹⁵ BYU historians Bryan Waterman and Brian Kagel noted, "little—if anything—has been written about women at BYU."¹⁶

By contrast, many historians have examined the women's movement.¹⁷ Flora Davis analyzed the women's movement since 1960 in *Moving the Mountain*. Davis

¹³ Ronald Walker, David J. Whittaker, and James B. Allen, *Mormon History* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001), 121.

¹⁴ "An early attempt to survey the sources on women in LDS history was Carol Cornwall Madsen and David J. Whittaker, 'History's Sequel: A Source Essay on Women in Mormon History,' *Journal of Mormon History* 6 (1979): 123-45. More recent efforts include Patricia Lyn Scott and Maureen Ursebach Beecher, 'Mormon Women: A Bibliography in Process, 1977-1985,' *Journal of Mormon History* 12 (1985): 112-127; and Karen Purser Frazier, *Bibliography of Social Scientific, Historical, and Popular Writings about Mormon Women* (Provo, Utah: Women's Research Institute, Brigham Young University, 1990). Still another listing, Patricia Lyn Scott, 'Writing Women's Lives: A Bibliography on Writing Biographies on Women,' *Genealogical Journal* 27, no. 3 (1999): 3-23, focuses on national and regional women's biography, although some Mormon titles are included as well." Ronald J. Walker, David J. Whittaker, and James B. Allen, *Mormon History*, with a contribution by Armand L. Mauss, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001), 256.

¹⁵ Derr, Cannon, and Beecher, *Women of the Covenant*. Women in the Church become a member of the Relief Society at age 18 and meetings are held weekly in connection with Sunday worship services.

¹⁶ Bryan Waterman and Brian Kagel, *The Lord's University: Freedom and Authority at BYU* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1998), 23. Waterman and Kagel cite many of the same work listed in previous footnotes. There is nothing to date known by this author to be specifically on women at BYU.

¹⁷ I am indebted to Laurel Thatcher Ulrich for a partial list of books on the history of the women's movement in the late twentieth century, often referred to as second wave feminism. This list is by no means comprehensive but will provide a good basis for further study. Rosalyn Baxandall and Linda

declared that the movement “couldn’t begin without a change in consciousness as well. Enough women had to question the feminine mystique, realize that sex discrimination existed, feel that it was legitimate to fight it--and believe they could do something about it.”¹⁸

As the movement grew, many women who benefited from its accomplishments turned their backs on feminism.¹⁹ Historian Ruth Rosen points out that by 1982 many women refused to identify themselves as feminist even though they “believed in gender equality and aspired to combine a career with family life.”²⁰ The feminist was remade by popular culture and the media into a superwoman who became the “scapegoat for America’s irreversible decline into a nation of individual consumers.”²¹ Another

Gordon, *Dear Sisters: Dispatches from the Women’s Liberation Movement* (New York: Basic Books, 2000); Eileen Boris and Nupur Chaudhuri, ed., *Voices of Women Historians: The Personal, the Political, the Professional* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1999); Ann Braude, ed., *Transforming the Faiths of Our Fathers: Women Who Changed American Religion* (New York: Palgrave, 2004); Susan Brownmiller, *In Our Time: Memoir of a Revolution* (New York: Delta, 1999); Rachel Blau DuPlessis and Ann Snitow, *The Feminist Memoir Project: Voices from Women’s Liberation* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 1998); Estelle B. Freedman, *No Turning Back: The History of Feminism and the Future of Women* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2002); Daniel Horowitz, *Betty Friedan and the Making of The Feminine Mystique* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1998); Mary King, *Freedom Song: A Personal Story of the 1960s Civil Rights Movement* (New York: William Morrow, 1987); Gerda Lerner, *Fireweed: A Political Autobiography* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2002); Gerda Lerner, *Why History Matters: Life and Thought* (New York: Oxford, 1997); Ruth Rosen, *The World Split Open: How the Modern Women’s Movement Changed America* (New York: Viking, 2000); Benita Roth, *Separate Roads to Feminism: Black, Chicana, and White Feminist Movements in America’s Second Wave* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Leila J. Rupp and Verta Taylor, *Survival in the Doldrums: The American Women’s Rights Movement, 1945 to the 1960s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987); Ann Scott, “The Southern Lady Revisited,” afterward to *The Southern Lady: From Pedestal to Politics, 1830-1930* (Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 1995). I would add Flora Davis, *Moving the Mountain: The Women’s Movement in America Since 1960* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1991); Sara M. Evans, *Tidal Wave: How Women Changed America at Century’s End* (New York: The Free Press, 2003); and Cassandra L. Langer, *A Feminist Critique: How Feminism Has Changed American Society, Culture, and How We Live From the 1940s to the Present* (New York: IconEditions, 1996).

¹⁸ Davis, *Moving the Mountain*, 55; and Langer, *A Feminist Critique*, 34.

¹⁹ For a discussion on the definition of feminism, see Karen Offen, “Defining Feminism: A Comparative Historical Approach,” *Signs* 14, no. 1 (Autumn 1988): 119-157.

²⁰ Rosen, *The World Split Open*, 275.

²¹ Rosen, *The World Split Open*, 295, 330.

historian, Sara M. Evans, asserted that the younger generation of women was “raised with different expectations.” These women “presume that they will combine work outside the home with family responsibilities.” The realities of accomplishing this led “some of them to reassert the value of parenting and family.” She explained, “This explains some of the political popularity of ‘family values’ among people who do not, in fact, advocate returning to traditional, patriarchal family norms.”²² The media has reinforced this defection from the workforce by focusing on women who have left successful careers to concentrate on raising a family.²³ The women’s movement has changed society and its expectation of a woman’s role.

The women’s movement did not recognize the efforts of LDS women to reconcile the messages they received from society and the women’s movement with their own faith. Historians have only recently begun to address the issue of feminism and religion generally.²⁴ Historian Ann Braude remarked,

On both the right and the left, pundits portray religion and feminism as inherently incompatible, as opposing forces in American culture. On one hand, some feminists assume that religious women are brainwashed apologists for patriarchy suffering from false consciousness. They believe allegiance to religious communities or organizations renders women incapable of authentic advocacy on women’s behalf. On the other hand, religious hierarchies often discourage or prohibit women’s public leadership. Some leaders assume that those who work to enhance women’s status lack authentic faith. Many accounts of second-wave feminism reinforce these views by mentioning religion only when it is a source of opposition.²⁵

²² Evans, *Tidal Wave*, 235-236.

²³ Belkin, “The Opt-Out Revolution,” 42-86.

²⁴ For a look at Mormon women, the Equal Rights Amendment and the International Year of Women, see Martha Sonntag Bradley, *Pedestals and Podiums: Utah Women, Religious Authority, and Equal Rights* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2005).

²⁵ Braude, *Transforming the Faith of Our Fathers*, 2.

Braude declared that by examining religion in women's history, it "opens our eyes to the movement's impact on both private and public lives."²⁶ The BYU Women's Conference was one method LDS women used to examine their identities and roles in a faithful setting. This thesis examines an institution that has become part of the twentieth-century LDS women's culture and places it within the larger issues of the time.

Background

On the heels of the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s, the women's movement "came of age" in the 1970s.²⁷ Issues such as abortion, education, child rearing, equal pay for equal work, a woman's own credit history, the glass ceiling prevalent in many companies and a long list of other problems facing women were brought into the forefront of America's consciousness. This thesis will touch only briefly on the history of and the issues raised by the women's movement.

Two books about women's roles epitomize the differences in ideologies between a newly emerging feminism and traditional Mormon expectations for women. Betty Friedan is often viewed as the founder of the modern women's movement. Her book *The Feminine Mystique* published in 1963 explored the need of women for a complete life outside their roles as wives and mothers.²⁸ Women could meet their need for stimulation through means beyond the traditional domestic role. This concept freed women from the stay-at-home lifestyle that dominated expectations in the 1950s. In moving away from the home, men and patriarchy became the evils that were keeping women in their place. Rather than becoming equal with men, some feminists sought to do better than men. The

²⁶ Braude, *Transforming the Faith of Our Fathers*, 8.

²⁷ Davis, *Moving the Mountain*, 15, 11. This is often referred to as the "second wave." The first wave is designated as the fight for the vote for women in 1920.

²⁸ Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1963).

term “feminist” became associated with the liberationists who advocated the more radical stance that men were responsible for all the evils that had been perpetrated upon women and that marriage and motherhood were instruments designed to keep a woman subordinate.²⁹ Consequently, historian Cassandra Langer stated that “feminism got its bad reputation because many conservative women view it as a ‘narrowly ideological movement’ fighting for ‘unwinnable’ causes that make relations with men ‘very difficult to find or sustain.’”³⁰

In 1965, an LDS woman, Helen Andelin, countered *The Feminine Mystique* and the growing women’s movement with *Fascinating Womanhood*, which claimed that marriage was a woman’s ultimate role and that “[a] man wants a woman he can place on a pedestal and worship from below.”³¹ By 1973, *Fascinating Womanhood* was in its twenty-third printing. Ironically Andelin placed women in a subservient role that was portrayed as setting women above men. A woman’s power came not from the direct use of her intellect or her skills but from her ability to use manipulation to get what she wanted without the man realizing that the idea came from her. Her place was firmly in the home, a concept that was in direct opposition to the growing women’s movement.

Historian Jan Shipps notes, “Just as non-Mormon women of the recent past started to search for their feminine backgrounds as consciousness was raised by the women’s movement, so LDS women started seriously looking backward in the early 1970s.”³² Throughout the 1970s statements by Church leaders emphasized the role of

²⁹ Davis, *Moving the Mountain*, 70. 90.

³⁰ Langer, *A Feminist Critique*, 148.

³¹ Helen B. Andelin, *Fascinating Womanhood* (Santa Barbara, CA: Pacific Press, 1965), 131.

³² Maureen Ursenbach Beecher and Lavina Fielding Anderson, *Sisters in Spirit: Women in Historical and Cultural Perspectives*, with a foreword by Jan Shipps (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987), x.

women in the home and men holding the priesthood.³³ The “commitment to priesthood and motherhood seemed a dissonant counterpoint” and was criticized as “forcing women into menial, self-denying roles, and robbing them of decision-making power.”³⁴ Often, though, the same statements which promoted women in the home encouraged women to pursue an education.³⁵ As LDS women contemplated how the issues highlighted by the women’s movement fit into the gospel context, they were confronted with additional concepts such as praying to a Mother in Heaven, the denial of priesthood to women, and women’s prohibition from participating in priesthood ordinances such as the blessing of an infant and blessing the sick, some of which had been open to women or to non-LDS men in the past. LDS Church critic Marilyn Warenski observed that this “intense interest” developed as “Church leaders continue[d] to reassure the world that Mormon women are the most fortunate of all women.”³⁶

A response to the issues being raised by feminists appeared in 1971 in the first issue of the *Ensign*, the LDS Church magazine directed towards adults. In “Women’s Movement: Liberation or Deception,” Thomas S. Monson, a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, claimed, “What the modernists, even liberationists, fail to remember is that women, in addition to being persons, also belong to a sex, and that with the differences in sex are associated important differences in function and behavior. Equality of rights does not imply identity of functions.”³⁷ The Church doctrine that

³³ N. Eldon Tanner, “No Greater Honor: The Woman’s Role,” *Ensign*, January 1974, 7; and Spencer W. Kimball, “The Role of Righteous Women,” *Ensign*, November 1979, 102.

³⁴ Leonard Arrington and Davis Bitton, *The Mormon Experience*, 2d ed. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1979; Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 330.

³⁵ Tanner, “No Greater Honor,” 7; and Kimball, “The Role of Righteous Women,” 102.

³⁶ Marilyn Warenski, *Patriarchs and Politics: The Plight of Mormon Women* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1978), 52.

women are viewed as equal partners with their husbands causes its own challenges. The right to hold the priesthood, extended to all Mormon men, is seen by many as a privilege denied to women. While recognizing that some men use the priesthood to assert their position as the head of the family, the Church continues to emphasize that husbands and wives are equal partners, though with decidedly different roles.³⁸

Talks about women and their roles by Church leaders were compiled in a 1979 book entitled *Woman*.³⁹ The authors emphasized woman's role as "a wife, a mother, a homemaker, a sister, a sweetheart, [and] a good neighbor."⁴⁰ Barbara B. Smith, the general president of the Relief Society,⁴¹ noted in the foreword that she had received many letters indicating "that women of today [face] challenges and opportunities unheard of in [Smith's] grandmother's time, and the changing world brings with it a host of new and perplexing problems."⁴² Spencer W. Kimball, President of the Church, declared in the introduction, "It is fitting that a book on the subject of women be published at this time. There has never been a time in the world when the role of women has been more confused."⁴³ Yet President Kimball also emphasized the need for education for women. His wife, Camilla Eyring Kimball, was held up as a model of a righteous mother who had

³⁷ Thomas S. Monson, "Women's Movement: Liberation or Deception," *Ensign*, January 1971, 20.

³⁸ "Strengthening the Family: As Equal Partners," *Ensign*, October 2005, 8

³⁹ Spencer W. Kimball, ed., *Woman*, with a foreword by Barbara B. Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1979).

⁴⁰ Tanner, "No Greater Honor," 6.

⁴¹ Each ward (local congregation similar to a parish) has a Relief Society President that directs the program for her local area. Each stake (a group of wards similar to a diocese) has a Relief Society President. There is a general president who presides over all the women of the Church. Two counselors assist each president. This pattern is the same for the Young Women and Primary organizations.

⁴² Kimball, *Woman*, vii.

⁴³ Kimball, *Woman*, 1.

never ceased learning.⁴⁴ While obliquely addressing the concerns of the women's movement, the book reemphasized the position of the Church, relying on the addresses to guide women in understanding their identities and roles in society.

In 1974 former General Relief Society President Belle S. Spafford described some of the aims of the women's movement.

Many women of the 1970s are asking for a reorientation of social values that will accept them as human beings with rights and responsibilities. They are fighting for a changing recognition of the status of women, for family planning programs, for the elimination of all discrimination against women, for measures to promote women's rights in the modern world, and for the formulation of programs for the personal advancement of women.⁴⁵

Spafford agreed with many of these points but did not endorse the Equal Rights Amendment and disapproved of the militant tactics of radical feminists.⁴⁶ She favored the issues that promoted equality in areas such as education, training and employment, health and maternity protection and administrative and public life training, while protecting the family.⁴⁷ LDS historian Jill Mulvay Derr argued that these "contrasting messages--expansive from the larger society, constrictive from the church--caused considerable tension for many Mormon women."⁴⁸

In 1971, an issue of *Dialogue*, a scholarly journal, was devoted to women. The issue sported a hot pink cover and was nicknamed by its editors "Ladies Home Dialogue." Editor Claudia Lauper Bushman stated in the introduction, "The standard

⁴⁴ Lavina Fielding, "Camilla Kimball: Lady of Constant Learning," *Ensign*, October 1975, 61.

⁴⁵ Belle S. Spafford, *A Woman's Reach* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1974), 10.

⁴⁶ Beecher and Anderson, *Sisters in Spirit*, 194.

⁴⁷ Spafford, *A Woman's Reach*, 12.

⁴⁸ Jill Mulvay Derr, "'Strength in Our Union': The Making of Mormon Sisterhood," in *Sisters in Spirit*, ed. Beecher and Anderson, 195.

model for Mormon womanhood is the supportive wife, the loving mother of many, the excellent cook, the imaginative homemaker and the diligent Church worker, a woman whose life is circumscribed by these roles. This model has been so clearly presented to us in sermon and story that we feel strong responsibility to cleave to that ideal and guilt when we depart.”⁴⁹ Bushman disputed the veracity of the model. “We argue then for acceptance of the diversity that already exists in the life styles of Mormon women. We have too many native differences to fit comfortably into a single mold.” The issue contained “examples of widely varying life styles possible within an orthodox gospel framework.”⁵⁰

The problems facing LDS women continue to be discussed. Emulating the popular “Pink issue,” the theme of a 2003 issue of *Dialogue* was once again women. Author Vicki Stewart Eastman argued, “Most American women, including Mormon women, benefit from the feminist struggles for equality while neither recognizing nor acknowledging this.”⁵¹ Linda Hoffman Kimball illustrated the continuing need for recognizing and accepting the diversity of women by acknowledging that within the Church she “occasionally feel[s] like a stranger and a foreigner, an unwelcome visitor in the household of faith.”⁵² Recognizing and accepting diversity in sisterhood was a perennial issue confronting the conference.

⁴⁹ Claudia Lauper Bushman, “Women in Dialogue: An Introduction,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 6 no. 2 (Summer 1971): 6.

⁵⁰ Bushman, “Women in Dialogue: An Introduction,” 7.

⁵¹ Vicki Stewart Eastman, “On Being a Mormon Woman,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 36 no. 3 (Fall, 2003): 210.

⁵² Linda Hoffman Kimball, “Being a Mormon Woman or ‘Am I Not a Woman and a Sister? . . . Isn’t That Enough?’” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 36 no. 3 (Fall 2003): 215.

Inception of Women's Conference

By the early 1970s, LDS women began meeting together in informal settings outside Church meetings to discuss issues. Maxine Hanks noted that in these gatherings “they shared the tensions of emotional cultural cross currents.”⁵³ The tension was felt on the campus of Brigham Young University, the Church-sponsored university. Despite what the outside world was saying, marriage or the “MRS degree” was still the most highly sought accreditation for women.⁵⁴ Recognizing that worthy Latter-day Saints married in sacred temple ceremonies and there were seven temples located in Utah, the joke was “Seven temples, no waiting.”⁵⁵ While marriage was the predominant focus, it was not the only reason women did not finish school. A survey done in 1974 showed that only 40 percent of the women who entered the university graduated with a four-year degree. Of the 60 percent who dropped out, half of them cited marriage as the reason.⁵⁶ The prevailing attitude was that the value of an education for women was not for the individual but for her children.⁵⁷ But things were slowly changing.⁵⁸

⁵³ Maxine Hanks, ed., *Women and Authority: Re-emerging Mormon feminism* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1992), 196.

⁵⁴ Carla Gibson Smith, “First BYU Women’s Conference,” December 2003, Unpublished document in author’s possession; and Dianne Curtis Nissle, Letter to Gale Lewis, 21 January 2004, Unpublished document in author’s possession.

⁵⁵ Temples are different from local chapels where regular worship services are held. Temples are separate places where sacred ordinances and ceremonies are performed.

⁵⁶ Lavina Fielding Anderson, “Mormon Women and the struggle for definition: Contemporary Women,” *Sunstone* 30 (November-December 1981): 15.

⁵⁷ Nissle, Letter to Gale Lewis. Nissle was the Chairman of the first conference.

⁵⁸ For further insight on the status of students at BYU and the political climate during this time, especially regarding dress standards and the Honor Code, see Waterman and Kagel, *The Lord's University*.

Dallin H. Oaks, president of BYU from 1971 to 1980, made some significant changes. He appointed Marilyn Arnold, an associate professor of English, as the Assistant to the President, established the Women's Research Institute, and formed a Women's Advisory Committee.⁵⁹ In 1974, at a campus devotional, Oaks emphasized the importance of education and declared that BYU would make "no distinctions" between the sexes in providing an education. "Our young women should make effective educational plans for the whole span of their lives."⁶⁰ The following year he addressed the "concerns and aspirations" of not only women students but also employees and made proposals to begin addressing those issues. Oaks said,

A significant number of texts and courses give little or no attention to the relevant accomplishments, roles and concerns of women . . . Our instructional materials in relevant areas make hardly any positive mention of single women . . . Pictures in some of the brochures published by colleges and departments depict women only in subordinate roles, or as onlookers . . . Some of our counsel and advice has been offensive and ineffective . . . We find comparable concerns among our women employees, some of whom report that men in supervisory positions make them feel guilty about working, belittle their contributions, and offer them little hope of progress in their work.⁶¹

Elouise Bell, an assistant professor of English, delivered a BYU forum address on feminism on 30 September 1975. She defined a feminist to the BYU community as "a person whether man or woman who believes that historically there have been inequalities in the education and treatment of women in several or many spheres of society and who

⁵⁹ Dallin H. Oaks, Oral History Interview with V. Gale Lewis, 3 October 2003, notes in author's possession; and Waterman and Kagel, *The Lord's University*, 54-55.

⁶⁰ Dallin H. Oaks, "Statement on the Education of Women at Brigham Young University," Address delivered at Brigham Young University Devotional, 12 February 1974. Devotionals are a weekly assembly held during the school year for students, staff and faculty.

is interested in correcting those inequalities.”⁶² Bell made note of her belief that “East of the Utah-Colorado border and certainly west of the Nevada border, I would be considered a very moderate feminist if I were indeed granted that label at all. Within the boundaries of this state, I think I might be considered only too real a feminist for some people’s taste.”⁶³ She counseled the young women that they should not only pursue, but also achieve an education--the same counsel that President Kimball would give in a talk three years later.⁶⁴ There is no indication how this talk was received. However, the address was included in the *Brigham Young University Studies*, a scholarly publication. This was the environment in which the BYU Women’s Conference was established.

Sources

This thesis relies mainly on primary sources. When the conference was sponsored by the Associated Students of Brigham Young University (ASBYU) Women’s Office, papers for each year of the program were bound and deposited in the Harold B. Lee Library at BYU.⁶⁵ Programs from each year of the conference and the published books of selected talks provide insight into the issues the organizers addressed in the conferences. Summary reports from many years afford a view into the participants’ comments and problems women felt were significant, both with the conference and in

⁶¹ Dallin H. Oaks, “Concerns and Aspirations of Women at Brigham Young University,” Address delivered at annual BYU Fall Workshop, 26-27 August 1975.

⁶² Elouise Bell, “The Implications of Feminism for Brigham Young University,” *Brigham Young University Studies* 16 no. 4 (Summer, 1976): 530.

⁶³ Bell, 528.

⁶⁴ Bell, 532; and Kimball, “The Role of Righteous Women,” 103.

⁶⁵ While Todd J. Hendricks has previously viewed these volumes, their location is currently unknown. Fortunately, the vice-presidents and chairs of the Women’s Conference also kept personal copies that many have shared with the author.

their lives. Local newspapers such as the *Salt Lake Tribune*, *Deseret News*, and *Daily Herald*, as well as the BYU newspaper, *Daily Universe*, and Church magazines demonstrate the impact of the conference and also identify issues.

An important part of the research comes from personal interviews. I have interviewed many of the chairpersons and ASBYU Women's Office vice-presidents. Because BYU's president's office has sponsored the conference since 1985, I have interviewed past BYU Presidents Dallin H. Oaks, Jeffrey R. Holland and Merrill J. Bateman. Rex E. Lee died in 1997 though I have corresponded with Lee's provost, Bruce C. Hafen. I have interviewed various women who served on the committee throughout the years. The Relief Society began cosponsoring the conference in 1991. I have spoken with the organization's past general presidents, Elaine Jack and Mary Ellen Smoot.

I encountered several obstacles in the interviews. The first and most crucial was the amount of time that has lapsed between the interviewee's participation in the conference and when interviewed. Many I requested interviews from cited memory failure and declined to be interviewed. Others were reticent about talking about their experiences. This could largely be attributed to the timeframe they were associated with the conference and whether their feelings about the conference as it exists today were positive or not. Some were willing to share but indicated that if the interview were recorded, they would be less open and forthcoming about their experiences. Some who were initially guarded later opened their files and records to me.

In addition, I examined what was being said by the leaders of the Church and others regarding the role of women and the conflicts in those interpretations. I used secondary sources to provide background to the issues and events that affected women in and out of the Church during the last quarter of the twentieth century.

This thesis divides the conference into four eras: ASBYU, Mary Stovall's administration, Carol Lee Hawkins' administration, and the conference under the direction of rotating Chairs. Chapter one discusses the conference's origin in 1976, the ways organizers sought to make women aware of the issues affecting them and the choices available, and how the conference developed under the ASBYU Women's Office. The second chapter begins with the transition in 1984 to sponsorship by the BYU President's office and operation under Mary Stovall and the Women's Research Institute. It explores how the focus of the conference changed to a more scholarly conference. The third chapter begins in 1988 when Hawkins assumed leadership. The scholarly emphasis was continued and the globalization of the Church was reflected in the program. In 1991 the administration of the conference was brought under closer supervision of Church leaders through the addition of the Relief Society as a co-sponsor. Chapter Four covers the administration of the conference under the rotating Chairs from 1994 to 2001 and the growing emphasis on LDS fundamentals of family and gospel principles.

During the first twenty-five years BYU Women's Conference has acknowledged the conflicts and contrasting messages given to LDS women. Through its annual gathering the conference endeavored to strengthen womanhood through knowledge and faith, assist women in understanding their identity, and recognize the beauty in the diversity of sisterhood. It has grown from a grass roots gathering to an event formally sponsored by the Church. The transformation was not without conflicts. How did a simple "what if" become an enduring tradition in many LDS women's lives and how has it reflected the issues that they faced during the later part of the twentieth century?

CHAPTER ONE

A NEW TRADITION

In the spirit of consciousness raising, women students at Brigham Young University created a new tradition in 1976--Women's Conference. It was a place to explore the messages of the women's movement, to address the identity crisis facing women and to define what it meant to be a woman in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Over the next nine years the conference expanded to include mothers, grandmothers and others outside the BYU community until more non-BYU women were attending than students. The conference gave LDS women a place to explore the issues and strengthen their belief in their value as women.

In 1976 a female senior commented in the first Associated Students of BYU (ASBYU) Women's Office newsletter that when a friend told her she worked in the Women's Office, she thought "How sweet." Women's efforts in community service, while admirable, were not viewed as meaningful work. At that time the Women's Office was mostly known for its sponsorship of bake-offs, fashion shows, girls' choice dances, service projects such as Christmas cookies to military personnel, and the Bridal Faire [sic], each symbolic of the traditional roles expected of women and funneling women toward the ultimate goal of marriage.¹ By focusing on traditional aspects of a woman's life, the Women's Office reinforced the idea that women were limited in their activities and what was expected of them. *Daily Universe* editorial writer Nancy Hinsdale Wilcox

¹ Lisa Bolin, "Women's Office -- Irrelevant?" *ASBYU Women's Office Newsletter*, 1, no. 1, ASBYU Women's Office (September, 1976); Bryan Waterman and Brian Kagel, *The Lord's University: Freedom and Authority at BYU* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1998), 38; and Carla Gibson Smith, "First BYU Women's Conference," December 2003, unpublished document in author's possession.

noted, “Like the Women’s Section of a newspaper, it seemed the most banal and frivolous topics were relegated to women’s energies.”²

Making History

The student officers of the Women’s Office in 1975 had a greater vision of the potential of female students. Debbie Hutchings Forrest, Women’s Office Vice-President, “revolutionized the Women’s Office [by focusing] on all aspects of a woman’s life”³ incorporating the vision presented by BYU president, Dallin Oaks: “Our young women should make effective educational plans for the whole span of their lives, what I like to call life-span planning.”⁴ Hutchings’ successor, Dianne Curtis’s vision was to “chang[e] the focus of the Women’s Office to deal with issues concerning women.”⁵ One of the objectives was to help the women students value the opportunity they had to attend college. Curtis stated, “The foundation of the Women’s Office was to develop programs to support and help women utilize and achieve their full potential.”⁶

² Nancy Hinsdale Wilcox, “Women’s Week: No More Cookie Baking,” *Daily Universe*, 17 February 1978, 20.

³ Karen Bybee of Vienna, Virginia, Oral History Interview with V. Gale Lewis, 21 November 2003, Notes in author’s possession. The Women’s Office was one of nine branches of ASBYU and staffed by student volunteers. The vice president is a campus elected officer.

⁴ Dallin H. Oaks, “Statement on the education of women at Brigham Young University,” Address delivered at Brigham Young University Devotional, 12 February 1974, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University.

⁵ Dianne Curtis, “The LDS Woman: An Ever Widening Circle,” ASBYU Women’s Conference Program, 3 February 1977, in *ASBYU Women’s Office History, 1976-1977*, ed. Dianne Curtis, in the possession of Dianne Curtis Nissle, Mesa, Arizona.

⁶ Dianne Curtis Nissle, Letter to Gale Lewis, 21 January 2004, unpublished document in author’s possession. This letter describes the inception of the ASBYU Women’s Conference.

Two articles in the October 1975 issue of the *Ensign* greatly influenced the Women's Office staff. The first was about Camilla Kimball, the wife of Spencer W. Kimball, president of the Church. It was subtitled "Lady of Constant Learning."⁷ The student leaders were impressed that she had taken classes every year she had been married.⁸ The second article was in the "I Have a Question" column.⁹ A woman wrote in explaining that she had been offered an excellent scholarship at a prestigious school to study math but that friends warned her that if she became a scholar, "either I won't want to get married," which she stated wasn't true, or "no man will want to marry me." Reba Keele, associate director of the Honors Program at Brigham Young University, answered this woman's concerns. Keele assured the woman that further schooling, even in math, did not create "bitter, unhappy, unmarried persons" in women or men and that President Kimball encouraged women to get an education. Camilla Kimball was again cited as an example.¹⁰ The Women's Office leaders had seen this dilemma on campus and these articles encouraged them to continue their efforts to get women to take their educations seriously.¹¹

The student leaders at the Women's Office worked with the BYU Career Education Center. They met together regularly to discuss selecting speakers and topics

⁷ Lavina Fielding, "Camilla Kimball: Lady of Constant Learning," *Ensign*, October 1975, 61.

⁸ Smith, "First BYU Women's Conference."

⁹ This feature addressed issues and doctrines of the church that the magazine did not want to focus an entire article on.

¹⁰ Reba Keele, "I Have a Question," *Ensign*, October 1975, 48.

¹¹ Smith, "First BYU Women's Conference."

for the lecture series sponsored by the Women's Office. In the fall of 1975 an idea sparked while discussing ideas and concerns. Dianne Curtis posed the thought, "Wouldn't it be great if instead of having a speaker every week or so, we instead lumped them all together into a short time so we would have more impact . . . kind of like a women's conference."¹² Thus was Women's Conference born.

The conference "The LDS Woman: Potentialities and Promise" was scheduled for President's Day weekend in February 1976 for BYU students. The objective of the conference was

To help women on campus realize their responsibilities and capacities in life, recognizing that a woman bears joint responsibility with men in establishing the Kingdom of God. We will stress the importance of a woman living up to her potential and help clarify each woman's specific role in life. We will encourage women to plan to be a capable, aware, and contributing individual in each of the roles she will have throughout her life.¹³

The ASBYU Academics Office, as part of its "Last Lecture" series, cosponsored the keynote address. The object of the series was to hear the speech that presenters would give if it were the last speech they could make. Marilyn Arnold, Assistant to the President of BYU and member of the Women's Advisory Council, was selected to give the address. Arnold declared that she had "considered giving a purely academic-type speech" but that if it were truly her last speech she would want to "share some inner things that [are] important to me."¹⁴ In a talk entitled "Wherefore, lift up thy heart and rejoice," Arnold explained that the "sentence builds incrementally [and] joy comes in the

¹² Smith, "First BYU Women's Conference."

¹³ "ASBYU Women's Office Conference Proposal," in *ASBYU Women's Office History, 1975 – 1976*, ed. Debbie Hutchings, in the possession of Debbie Hutchings Forrest, Mesa, Arizona.

¹⁴ "English Professor to Share Thoughts," *Daily Universe*, 11 February 1976, 6.

most emphatic position.” She counseled the audience to appreciate the joys and beauties of life.¹⁵

In a talk to the general assembly of the conference, Grethe Ballif Peterson, homemaker, member of the editorial board for *Exponent II* (an unofficial publication for LDS women), and Program Chair for the Cambridge [Massachusetts] Family and Children Services, described different choices women make regarding their role in the family and the challenges they face. “There are a great many lifestyles that are successful for women, and we must encourage them to find their pattern in order to enrich their lives as mothers[,] wives, and persons.”¹⁶ Peterson noted that single women needed “a parallel preparation for marriage and career.” Women were not consigned to the June Cleaver world of their mother but even that choice had challenges such as the “empty nest” years when a woman had not “planned for any pursuits in her life except homemaking.”¹⁷ Nor were the choices of combining a career and family without challenges such as juggling all her responsibilities.

Any lifestyle choice has consequences and some speakers at the inaugural Conference related their experiences with their audiences. The most popular workshop was “Mothers and Daughters: Three Generations in Dialogue.” In the seminar six women from two families--grandmothers, mothers and daughters--shared personal experiences.¹⁸ The speakers were educators, a former state legislator, an artist, homemakers and a student.¹⁹ Psychologist Maxine Murdock, homemaker Norene Pollei and

¹⁵ “Women Continue Workshops, Talks” *Daily Universe*, 13 February 1976, 1.

¹⁶ Renee C. Nelson, “Utah Women: Grethe Peterson: Women and Changes in Lifestyle,” *Daily Herald*, 15 February 1976, 34.

¹⁷ “Prepare for Meaningful Lives,” *Church News*, 21 February 1976, 12.

¹⁸ “Women Continue Workshops, Talks,” 1.

businesswoman DeLoris Ritchie spoke in another popular seminar on planning meaningful lives in “Home, Career, Church and Community--Mutually Exclusive!” Murdock said, “A woman today can enter into any profession she chooses, or find fulfillment in community or Church work. Every woman needs a creative outlet--even those whose primary interest is in the home.”²⁰ This comment referred to the issue raised in Betty Freidan’s *The Feminine Mystique*, that women were not satisfied in the home and needed to have outside fulfillment. The seminars and talks provided examples of the different choices and possibilities available to LDS women.

The conference ended with a luncheon featuring former Relief Society General President Belle S. Spafford as speaker.²¹ Spafford told the attendees, “You are in a position to learn some of the most important lessons of life--how to organize your time, develop your talents and how to make the most of the resources at your command.”²² During her presentation, Spafford noted that the women leaders had “made history.”²³ The conference was the first time that LDS women had gathered together in a formal setting at BYU to discuss the issues and choices facing women in that tumultuous time.

¹⁹ “Women’s BYU Conference Program,” in Hutchings, *History, 1975-1976*. The women on the panel were Algie Eggertsen Ballif, Grethe Ballif Peterson, Erika Elizabeth Peterson, Arta Romney Ballif, Moana Ballif Bennett, and Heather Bennett.

²⁰ “Women at BYU Conference Told: Prepare for Meaningful Lives,” *Church News*, 21 February 1976, 12.

²¹ Belle S. Spafford was general president for the Relief Society organization from 1945 to 1974. No other general president has served for so long. The closest is Eliza Roxey Snow who served from 1866 to 1887. Derr, Cannon and Beecher cite the enrollment of every LDS woman into the Relief Society organization as one of the most significant highlights of her administration. Jill Mulvay Derr, Janath Russell Cannon, and Maureen Ursenbach Beecher, *Women of the Covenant: The Story of Relief Society* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1992), 346.

²² “Women at BYU Conference Told,” 12.

²³ Debbie Hutchings, Letter to volunteers, 14 February 1976, in Hutchings, *History, 1975-1976*; and Debbie Hutchings and Carla Gibson, Letter to Belle Spafford, 1 March 1976, in Hutchings, *History, 1975-1976*.

The Women's Office vice-president predicted, "Women's Conference will be run on a yearly basis."²⁴

Conference attendees completed evaluation forms at the end of the conference. Reactions to the conference were favorable overall. One participant observed that the organizers should add a divorced woman to the panel on being unmarried. Many suggested the conference be cut to two days and not to plan future conferences on a holiday weekend. The value of gathering and sisterhood at Women's Conference was noted. One woman wrote, "Some of the most valuable parts of such a conference are acquaintances made with others."²⁵

Responses to the conference poured into the Women's Office. Hutchings received letters of congratulations from participants and presenters. Many commented that this may have been the first conference but they were certain it would not be the last. The Women's Office even got letters from those who had not attended but who had heard of the conference from the media. A woman from Muskogee, Oklahoma, wrote after reading about the conference in the *Church News*. She asked for transcripts from the workshops for a class of 18-year-old girls she was teaching. She said they "feel like their next step should be marriage and I feel like they might rush right into the wrong thing."²⁶ The reach of the conference was already extending beyond the boundaries of the BYU campus. These reactions and comments proved there was a need for a place where women could discuss issues and explore possibilities.

²⁴ Debbie Hutchings, Letter to Carla Gibson, 14 February 1976," in Hutchings, *History, 1975-1976*.

²⁵ Debbie Hutchings, The LDS Woman: Potentialities and Promises, BYU Women's Conference, February 12-14, 1976: Response--Evaluation Questionnaire, in Hutchings, *History, 1975-1976*.

²⁶ Crystal Grover, Letter to Women's Office, undated, in Hutchings, *History, 1975-1976*.

Not all of the reactions to the conference were positive. During his academic classes at BYU, one religion professor expressed his displeasure to his students at bringing “women intellectuals on campus instead of people who ‘touched base with him [sic] who creates’” and that the stress given to the role of women was not of “getting married and doing the thing we were sent to earth to do.” The expression of this archaic but common view that a woman’s only function was to get married and have children reflected the need for an awareness of the full range of a woman’s potential and possibilities, among men as well as women. The teacher was popular and reports of the incident prompted a meeting between Hutchings and Jeffrey R. Holland, the Church Commissioner of Education. Hutchings noted in a follow-up memo to Holland that this professor had not attended the conference and made his observations based on what he read in the newspaper.²⁷

This professor was representative of others who were unhappy with the changes in the Women’s Office. Karen Bybee said that when she and the other members of the Women’s Office attended the Intercollegiate Association for Women Students conference, we “got clobbered because our viewpoint was so conservative.” She reflected on the incongruity since on campus they were “clobbered as too liberal.” This perception is similar to the observation that English professor Elouise Bell made in her BYU forum address on feminism in 1975. “East of the Utah-Colorado border and certainly west of the Nevada border,” Bell said, “I would be considered a very moderate feminist if I were indeed granted that label at all. Within the boundaries of this state, I think I might be considered only *too* real a feminist for some people’s taste.”²⁸ Bybee’s experience was

²⁷ Debbie Hutchings, Memo to Jeffrey R. Holland, 23 February 1976, in Hutchings, *History, 1975-1976*.

²⁸ Elouise Bell, “The Implications of feminism for Brigham Young University,” *Brigham Young University Studies* 16 no.4 (Summer 1976): 528.

similar to Barbara Omolade, a former Black Nationalist and feminist activist:

“Sometimes I have felt like an envoy and ambassador shuttling between two alien nations [black activism and feminism]. Sometimes as avenging warrior, I have defended each one’s causes to the other. At other times I have sought refuge in one side, after being disgruntled and fed up with the failures and weaknesses of the other.”²⁹ Movement away from a strictly social agenda towards expanding women’s horizons was seen by some as being too liberal for the traditionally conservative campus but was roundly criticized by others. Despite the opposition, there was no doubt by the student leaders that this was only the first of what they hoped would be an enduring tradition.

Following in Footsteps

Expanding women’s horizons was the basis for the 1977 conference theme, “The LDS Woman: An Ever Widening Circle.” Dianne Curtis observed wryly that when the theme and logo were approved, a male administrator remarked that it reminded him of a pregnant woman.³⁰ The logo carried the free flowing style of the 1970s with a woman’s head surrounded by expanding circles, clouds, and Jonathan Livingston Seagull style birds.

The conference committee widely promoted the event. Mothers of female students were invited to join their daughters at the conference in February. The Women’s Office planned to mail 13,000 letters set to arrive when the students returned home for Christmas break.³¹ However, by November, after three tries, Curtis had not received an

²⁹ Barbara Omolade, “Sisterhood in Black and White,” in *The Feminist Memoir Project: Voices from Women’s Liberation*, ed. Rachel Blau DuPlessis and Ann Snitow (New York: Three Rivers Press, 1998), 377.

³⁰ Dianne Curtis, “How to Plan a Women’s Conference at B.Y.U.,” in *ASBYU Women’s Office History, 1976-1977* ed. Dianne Curtis, in the possession of Dianne Curtis Nissle, Mesa, Arizona. See Appendix for example of logo.

³¹ Dianne Curtis, Letter to Mothers, 17 December 1976, in Curtis, *History, 1976-1977*.

answer from BYU President Dallin H. Oaks' office whether Camilla Kimball had agreed to be the keynote speaker. Curtis went to her friend, Steve Mack, Kimball's grandson, and asked him to call his grandmother to see if she would be willing to speak at the conference. Mack made the call while Curtis was in the office. Mack told his grandmother that he was calling in behalf of Curtis. She told Mack that the invitation was accepted weeks ago. Armed with her acceptance, Curtis sent the invitations.³²

Upon returning to BYU after Christmas, Curtis had a request in her Women's Office mailbox to meet with President Oaks immediately. She was questioned about Camilla Kimball's acceptance and other details regarding the conference. Curtis assured Oaks that "all was in order for the upcoming Women's Conference."³³ Neither Oaks nor his office offered an explanation about the lack of information on Kimball's acceptance.

The invitation included a quote from President Oaks to promote interest: "A woman's education should prepare her for more than the responsibilities of motherhood."³⁴ While designed to publicize the conference, this statement acknowledged the general trend that the college was more than a place to meet potential husbands.³⁵

The response was overwhelming. Women from across the United States and Canada streamed in to Provo. A local newspaper article noted, "One person commented it looked like a giant dishsoap commercial, there were so many mother-daughter look-alikes on campus."³⁶ One attendee commented, "It's a good excuse to leave home and

³² Dianne Curtis Nissle, "30th Women's Conference Reunion," 27 April 2005, unpublished document in author's possession.

³³ Nissle, "30th Women's Conference Reunion."

³⁴ Curtis, *History, 1976-1977*.

³⁵ Ruth Rosen, *The World Split Open: How the Modern Women's Movement Changed America* (New York: Viking, 2000), 40-43.

see what the kids are doing on campus. We're never too old to learn, you know."³⁷ The *Daily Universe* reported that fifteen buses had come from California and that the conference had attendees from "as far away as Lockport, New York, Kentucky, Florida, Germany and Hamilton, New Zealand." Ricks College in Rexburg, Idaho, the General Relief Society Board and the Young Women's Board each sent a representative.³⁸ Interest in the conference proved that it was meeting a need for women from all over the globe.

As part of the conference, Dianne Curtis presented the first "Exemplary Woman of the Year" award to Camilla Kimball. Kimball was chosen because she was a "lady of continuous learning" and exemplified the theme by demonstrating how LDS women can "expand their horizons."³⁹ Kimball was not just revered for her position as wife of the president of the Church but for her own personality and example. Until her death, Camilla Kimball continued to be an example and highly sought after speaker and guest. Whenever she came to the Women's Conference she was treated with reverence and respect.

Kimball gave the keynote address at the Conference.⁴⁰ She counseled personal development, spiritual growth and service. "Forget self pity and look for mountains to climb. Everyone has problems. The challenge is to cope with those problems and get our full measure of joy from life." She observed, "The chief limitations confronting us are

³⁶ "Women's Conference Focuses on Life of Camilla Kimball," in Curtis, *History, 1976-1977*.

³⁷ "Women's Conference Opens Thursday at BYU," *Daily Herald*, 2 February 1977, 4.

³⁸ "Y Conference Will Focus on LDS Women," *Daily Universe*, 1 February 1977, 1; Charlene B. Winters, "BYU Conference Women Encouraged to Excel," *Daily Herald*, 4 February 1977, 13; and "Monday Magazine's Special Women's Issue," *Daily Universe*, 7 February 1977, Insert.

³⁹ "Y Conference Will Focus on LDS Women," 1.

⁴⁰ Camilla E. Kimball, Untitled talk given 3 February 1977, BYU Women's Conference, unpublished transcript in author's possession, 8.

not age or sex or race or money. They are laziness, short-sightedness and lack of self-esteem. Those who avoid learning or abandon it find that life is dry, but when the mind is alert life is luxuriant.”⁴¹ Kimball did not deny discrimination but encouraged the women to look beyond it to improve their own lives, including the pursuit of education.

The 1977 conference explored different roles and qualities of women. In the seminar “Married in a Married Church,” the panel spoke about mutual trust, conflicts, guilt, and frustration in marriage. A report about the conference in the *Exponent II* did not include specifics about what was said but noted, “Some appreciated the openness and frankness about marriage and its problems but others felt uncomfortable with this kind of frankness.” The seminar “Beyond Fascination towards Assertion” had “the audience so involved that some refused to leave when the session was over.” The report stated that the seminar “dissolved many myths about the evils of assertive behavior.”⁴² Women were provided with examples of assertive behavior and more than 600 women divided into small groups to practice their new skills. An attendee noted that an echoing theme of the conference was “that everyone’s experiences are different, whether due to circumstances or by choice.”⁴³

Following the conference, letters of appreciation came to the Women’s Office, BYU President Dallin H. Oaks and Church President Spencer W. Kimball. Ramona Adams, the Associate Dean of Students at the University of Utah, wrote to Dianne Curtis and told Curtis that her remarks at the conference “expressed beautifully all the hopes, frustrations and concerns that are a part of a woman’s world in days like these.” She told Curtis that she had written to President Oaks expressing her hope that the conference

⁴¹ Yvonne Johnson, “Sister Kimball Counsels,” *Daily Universe*, 4 February 1977, 1.

⁴² Vicky Clarke, “BYU Women’s Conference: The LDS Woman: An Ever Widening Circle,” *Exponent II* 3, no. 3 (March, 1977): 3.

⁴³ “Women’s Conference Opens Thursday at BYU,” 4.

would continue.⁴⁴ In a letter to President Kimball, writer and poet Emma Lou Thyne wrote that the conference “seems to me to have been a milestone in Church history.”⁴⁵ By extending the invitation to mothers, the organizers had opened the conference to women in the Church and laid the foundation for its longevity. In 2004, Curtis said, “we knew this work that was being laid out would last for years to come.”⁴⁶

Again, not all found the conference laudatory. One letter to President Oaks expressed a concern that would hound the conference—the mixed message of having female scholars presenting to women who had been encouraged by Church leaders to stay home and be mothers. Oaks responded that others had similar feelings and expressed his “desire to present a balanced and sound conference that will be helpful to all of our women and consistent with the standards of the University and the direction of our priesthood leaders.”⁴⁷

The conference also prompted a dispute as a result of an article in a Salt Lake newspaper. The article did not mention the conference by name but noted that it was a “BYU conference on women’s rights, opportunities, and roles.” The article focused on two workshops: “Women in Education” by Elouise Bell and a panel discussion “Growing Up Female in the Church.” Panelist Jan Tyler, a BYU Child Development and Family Relations professor, was quoted, “Mormon women will be sorely amiss if they become so afraid of the women’s movement that they don’t enter in. They have a voice that needs to

⁴⁴ Ramona S. Adams, Letter to Dianne Curtis, 8 February 1977, in Curtis, *History, 1976-1977*.

⁴⁵ Emma Lou W. Thyne, Letter to Spencer W. Kimball, 8 February 1977, in Curtis, *History, 1976-1977*.

⁴⁶ Nissle, Letter to Gale Lewis.

⁴⁷ Dallin H. Oaks, Oral History Interview with V. Gale Lewis, 3 October 2003, notes in author’s possession; and Dallin H. Oaks, Letter to Mrs. Vesta Gardner, 22 February 1977, copy in author’s possession.

be heard.”⁴⁸ In another article, Bell was quoted as having accused male counselors of directing female students into traditional majors despite their abilities and interests.⁴⁹ The *Deseret News*’ readership consisted largely of conservative LDS adults. The articles appeared in the first section of the paper and first page of the local news section with the headlines “Of Male Vocational Counselors: BYU Woman Professor Cites Bias” and “Shuttling of Women into Jobs Deplored.”

Bell and Tyler responded with letters to the editor. In the *Deseret News*, Bell disputed that the seminar had made “indictments of anyone and that our intent was essentially to raise questions . . . As for ‘male counselors’ neither participant ever used that phrase.” She noted that in the article the 175 attendees had “dwindled to 15.” Her chief concern was the “overall implication that the prevalent attitude of the workshops was mostly judgmental and accusatory.” She wrote, “It is most discouraging when a speaker attempts to treat a sensitive subject in a moderate, non-inflammatory way only to find the media’s report of the discourse filled with alleged accusations and misrepresentations.”⁵⁰

Tyler, in a letter to the editor of the *Daily Universe*, claimed, “When some women begin to ‘widen their circle’ other women and some men show their true colors by becoming very controlling, by exercising ‘unrighteous dominion’ and by blocking and inhibiting progress.” Stating that BYU should allow “honest inquiry and dialogue,” she observed that this was not always practiced. “Some are wrapped too tightly in their

⁴⁸ Joy Ross, “Shuttling of Women into Jobs Deplored,” *Deseret News*, 4 February 1977, B1.

⁴⁹ Joy Ross, “Of Male Vocational Counselors: BYU Woman Professor Cites Bias,” *Deseret News*, 4 February 1977, A19.

⁵⁰ Elouise Bell, “Article in Error,” *Deseret News*, 11 February 1977, A4.

‘Circle of Certainty.’”⁵¹ These articles exemplified the threat some felt over change and the resistance to those who expanded the knowledge of possibilities available to women.

Yvonne Johnson, an editorial writer for the *Daily Universe*, noted, “It seems fitting that last week’s Women’s Conference started on a day that began foggy. For just as the day gradually increased in brightness, so did the enlightenment of those who participated in the conference.” She closed by commenting, “How [sad] it would be if the effort of months and the time of many were quickly forgotten. Yet sadder still it would be if those who attended the conference and felt the excitement of realizing their potential and responsibility were to let that feeling die.”⁵²

The students in the Women’s Office believed they were pioneers. “We felt compelled and driven with a sense of mission,” Bybee said. “I was so motivated by Belle Spafford who told us to be an example in the community and be a force for good.”⁵³ The 1978 conference chair said, “We are approaching this conference with an academic attitude hoping to meet spiritual needs.”⁵⁴ The conference organizers also sought to provide information about social issues.

One of the perennial issues at the conference over the years was psychological depression. Early conferences provided tables with literature and information but by 1980 the conference had sessions directly dealing with depression. Speaking of Mormon women and depression in a documentary, psychiatrist and assistant clinical professor of psychology at the University of Utah, R. Jan Stout, said, “I think in Mormonism the

⁵¹ Jan L. Tyler, “Discounts Judgment,” *Daily Universe*, 2 February, 1977, 12.

⁵² Yvonne Johnson, “Conference’s Ideas Need to be Applied,” *Daily Universe*, 9 February 1977, 10.

⁵³ Karen Bybee, Oral History Interview with V. Gale Lewis, 29 March 2004, notes in author’s possession.

⁵⁴ Judy B. Rollins, “BYU Women’s Week to draw thousands,” *Salt Lake Tribune*, 7 February 1978, 11.

women themselves tend to apply a great deal of pressure on each other.” Stout asserted that this was not coming primarily from Church leaders, “but it is largely the women themselves who carry around with them excessive expectations of what they should or should not be as Mormons . . . in fact, this woman exists only in the minds of other women.”⁵⁵ A letter to *Sunstone*’s Reader’s Forum declared, “Mormon sisters often aggravate the problem through our inacceptance of diversity and the inability to discuss openly the pain and struggle in life which pave the path to perfection.”⁵⁶ The student leaders continued to address issues affecting LDS women while recognizing the pressure women faced. Two of the major matters were the International Women’s Year and the Equal Rights Amendment.

International Women’s Year and the Conference

In connection with the International Women’s Year (IWY) established by the United Nations, Congress designated a national IWY meeting to be held in Houston in 1977. Delegates to the national meeting were selected at state meetings. State meetings voted on the proposed national resolutions and submitted resolutions to be added to the national platform. The national resolutions covered issues such as the Equal Rights Amendment, abortion, teen pregnancy, credit, child care, rape, and affirmative action.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ “Mormon Women and Depression,” Transcript of documentary aired on KSL 17 February 1979, *Sunstone* 14 (March-April 1979): 19.

⁵⁶ Lori Winder, “Mormon Women and Depression,” Letter to Reader’s Forum, *Sunstone* (July - August 1979): 2.

⁵⁷ Jenny Lynn McGee Harris, “The Silent Majority: Conservative Perception, Mobilization, and Rhetoric at the Utah State International Women’s Year Conference” (Master’s Thesis, Brigham Young University, 2005); and Martha Sonntag Bradley, *Pedestals and Podiums: Utah Women, Religious Authority, and Equal Rights* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2005). These sources provide a rich background for the IWY and detail regarding the Utah state meeting. Participation in the state meeting was open to all women over 16.

For many women the Utah state meeting was their introduction to the women's movement. Attendee Dixie Snow Huefner observed that a majority of the participants were philosophically opposed to both the women's movement and feminism. "They had no wish to examine individual issues on their merit but rather were present to make a political statement in opposition to both the very legitimacy of the need for the conference, and to the role of the federal government in establishing the state coordinating committees and the upcoming convention in Houston."⁵⁸ In an interview in 1992, IWY Utah chair Jan Tyler reflected on the events that happened at the conference and the actions of the women. The committee attempted to provide "an open forum where women could come, meet together in sisterhood, discuss important problems women faced, and work together to create solution." Most of the women attending the conference did not come with the same intent but with the determination to protect and preserve their individual ideologies.⁵⁹ Historian Martha Sonntag Bradley noted, "For many Mormon women, 'sisterhood' had become a shrinking circle wherein admittance was controlled by politically proper shibboleths."⁶⁰

The controversy surrounding the Utah state meeting left a deep impression on the Women's Conference organizers.⁶¹ Karen Bybee, 1978 Women's Office Vice-President said, "I think the IWY state meeting did every person in Utah a favor." She pointed out that it caused people to think and want answers. "No matter how you feel personally

⁵⁸ Dixie Snow Huefner, "Church and Politics at IWY Conference," *Dialogue* 2:1 (Spring 1978): 63.

⁵⁹ Harris, "The Silent Majority," 76.

⁶⁰ Bradley, *Pedestals and Podiums*, 209.

⁶¹ The state IWY conference held June 24 and 25, 1977 provided a "battleground for supporters and opponents of the Equal Rights Amendment." One advantage that came out of the controversial meeting was that many women were "made aware of women's issues and of the need to learn more and be intelligently involved in community action." Derr, Cannon, and Beecher, *Women of Covenant*, 371-373.

about what happened, it was stimulating and provocative. We plan to meet some of the needs we saw from the IWY.”⁶² The conference committee adopted a “Sound Off” feature for the 1978 conference. During specific times at the conference, women were given two minutes to express their “feelings and vent their frustrations.” The conference chair stated that this feature had been implemented because they realized that what the attendees wanted to say was important and that there had been a problem the previous year with women wanting to speak in the seminars.⁶³

Bybee participated in a panel at the 1978 conference that reported on the IWY. She received a letter from a woman in Rapid City, South Dakota, complimenting her on her ability to express her thoughts and stating that she had been inspired to “do some serious study about the issues at hand.”⁶⁴ The *Daily Universe* noted that the “conference may have contained too much ‘fascinating womanhood’ for some, and a bit too feminist for others; at BYU it is difficult to explore issues about women’s concerns without arousing someone’s wrath.”⁶⁵ This observation remained significant and relevant throughout the life of the conference.

The 1978 conference’s keynote address replaced that week’s campus devotional and was given by Relief Society general president, Barbara B. Smith. Her talk was broadcast on KBYU-TV. This broadcast was the first of what would later become a major avenue to reach women beyond the BYU campus boundaries. After her address, Smith told the press, “Women in the church are playing a more important role.” Smith

⁶² Rollins, “BYU Women’s Week to Draw Thousands.”

⁶³ Yvonne Johnson, “Women’s Conference begins Thursday,” *Daily Universe*, 8 February 1978, 1; Harris, “The Silent Majority,” 80-81.

⁶⁴ Mrs. Donald Policky, Letter to Karen Bybee, 14 February 1978, in *ASBYU Women’s Office History: 1977 – 1978*, ed. Karen Bybee.

⁶⁵ Wilcox, “Women’s Week: No More Cookie Baking.”

covered topics such as the recent IWY meeting and the ERA. Referring to the Utah IWY meeting held the previous summer, Smith was asked if “women in the church were tolerant of other views.” The Relief Society general president responded that LDS women “are more critical of other Mormon women with differing views than they are with non-Mormons with differing views.” She declared that LDS women needed to “accept the diversity of opinion that exists in their own group.”⁶⁶ This call for recognition of diversity was sounded repeatedly throughout the history of the conference.

ERA and the Conference

By 1980 the issue of the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) and the role of women, along with Sonia Johnson, an activist for women’s rights and a Mormon, was again part of the Women’s Conference. ERA had been prevalent in national politics during the 1970s, and Congress passed the ERA in March 1972. By early 1973 only eight more states needed to ratify the amendment before it became law. One more state ratified in 1975 and another in 1977. By 1977 however, five states had voted to rescind. The deadline for ratification was March 22, 1979. In August 1978 Congress pushed the deadline back to June 30, 1982. The Utah legislature voted on the amendment in 1973 and again in 1975. Both times it was defeated, largely in part to Humanitarians Opposed to the Degradation of Our Girls (HOTDOG), an organization backed by the John Birch Society.⁶⁷

The First Presidency of the Church issued several statements opposing the Equal Rights Amendment between 1976 and 1980, identifying it “as a moral issue ‘with many

⁶⁶ Yvonne Johnson, “Barbara B. Smith Addresses Press,” *Daily Universe*, 10 February 1978, 1.

⁶⁷ Kathryn L. Mackay, “Equal Rights Amendment,” *Utah History Encyclopedia*, Utah State History, Utah History To Go, http://historytogo.utah.gov/equalrights_.html, (Accessed 17 August 2005); and Bradley, *Pedestals and Podiums*, 138.

disturbing ramifications for women and for the family.”⁶⁸ One statement acknowledged that “there had been injustices to women before the law and that many rights still needed to be achieved” but opposed the ERA as the avenue to address these issues.⁶⁹ Barbara B. Smith, Relief Society General President, stated

Its passage could portend a weakening of moral and social values, which have produced strong people, strong homes, and a strong nation. By reason of the nature of the act itself, it seems unlikely that it can accommodate for the fundamental differences and appropriate roles of men and women. Once it is passed, the enforcement will demand an undeviating approach that will create endless problems for an already troubled society.⁷⁰

This position angered advocates of the ERA who charged the Church with discrimination against women.

Sonia Johnson began speaking out in favor of the ERA in 1977. She founded an organization, Mormons for ERA, and testified before Congress in 1978. Johnson appeared on the Phil Donahue Show in December 1979.⁷¹ Barbara B. Smith was invited to appear with Johnson but she declined and later explained “it seemed as if Sonia Johnson was being made a media martyr, and I didn’t want to contend with her on the air.” Smith suggested that Beverly Campbell be invited in her place but Johnson refused to appear if Campbell were on the show. Beverly Campbell was Public Relations Director for the Church in the Washington, D. C. area and a member of the same stake

⁶⁸ “First Presidency Statements on the ERA,” 26 August 1978, in *The Church and the Proposed Equal Rights Amendment: A Moral Issue* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1980), 22. The 23- page pamphlet was included in the March 1980 *Ensign*.

⁶⁹ James B. Allen and Glen M. Leonard, *The Story of the Latter-day Saints* 2d ed., revised and enlarged (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1992), 659; and “First Presidency Issues Statement Opposing Equal Rights Amendment,” *Ensign*, December 1976, 79.

⁷⁰ “Relief Society General President Opposes ERA,” *Ensign*, February 1975, 84.

⁷¹ Leo Perry, “LDS Women Rally to Basic Beliefs,” *Deseret News*, 1 February 1980, A17; and Derr, Cannon and Beecher, *Women of Covenant*, 368, 499, n53.

(an organizational unit similar to a diocese) as Johnson. Smith and Campbell appeared on a later episode. Johnson's outspoken criticism of the Church's leaders and the Church's political activities regarding the ERA led to her excommunication in December 1979. Author Emma Lou Thyne noted that Mormons were "seen as in on a cat fight. Sonia says this. Beverly says that."⁷² Smith and Cannon, along with Primary General President Naomi M. Shumway, used the conference as a forum to address the ERA again in 1980.

Student leaders chose a phrase from two fireside addresses by Spencer W. Kimball for the 1980 conference theme, "Blueprints for Living."⁷³ Conference Chair Kimberly Ford wrote, "In this time of confusion in the minds of women as to their role--it is most critical that this institution [BYU], if no other, sound forth an unmistakable answer to the questions being asked."⁷⁴ The conference committee's desire was "to talk about principles . . . rather than singular issues such as the Equal Rights Amendment."⁷⁵ The conference organizers may have wanted to keep the issue of ERA separate from the conference but Church leaders brought the issue of ERA to BYU.

Following Barbara B. Smith's keynote address in 1980 to an audience of 4,000, Smith, Young Women General President Elaine A. Cannon, and Primary General President Naomi M. Shumway, gave a press conference in the KBYU-TV studio in

⁷² Emma Lou Thyne, "The Cat Fight and What Matters Most," in *Blueprints for Living: Perspectives for Latter-day Saint Women*, Vol. 2, ed. Maren M. Mouritsen (Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 1980), 58.

⁷³ Spencer W. Kimball, "The Role of Righteous Women," *Ensign*, November 1979, 102-104; and Spencer W. Kimball, "Privileges and Responsibilities of Sisters," *Ensign*, November 1978, 102-106.

⁷⁴ Kimberly Ford, Memo to Dean David Sorenson, in *ASBYU Women's Office History: 1979-1980*, ed. Kimberly Ford, in the possession of Kimberly Ford Gilboy, Heber, Utah.

⁷⁵ Kimberly Ford, "Gospel Perspectives and Women," in *Blueprints for Living: Perspectives for Latter-day Saint Women*, with foreword by President Spencer W. Kimball, ed. Maren M. Mouritsen (Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 1980), 105.

which they discussed Sonia Johnson and the ERA. Approximately 30 reporters, including the Associated Press and United Press International Wire Services, covered the press conference and also attended the women's conference. The majority of the questions were about Johnson and the ERA. Smith told the press, "The Sonia Johnson case has made Mormon women look closely to their testimonies and strengthen them."⁷⁶ Ford later observed that, in light of a recent snowstorm, the large attendance spoke to the "huge identity crisis at the time--struggling with ERA and Sonia Johnson--it was a statement how hungry women were for answers."⁷⁷

Expanding the Reach

The conference organizers recognized that there were a great many women who wanted to attend the conference but were unable due to time and distance. Often women who had attended requested transcripts of individual seminars. Talks from the 1980 conference were published as *Blueprints for Living*.⁷⁸ It is noteworthy that President Kimball wrote the foreword. Kimball's introduction emphasized the importance of the messages and placed a stamp of approval on the conference and its accomplishments. He declared, "The very number and nature of the challenges in today's world give rise to the need to ensure ourselves . . . we are doing all we can to prepare our wonderful women to meet those challenges."⁷⁹

Blueprints for Living was so well received that a second volume with additional talks was published. Speaker Grethe Ballif Peterson noted that since Sonia Johnson's

⁷⁶ Perry, "LDS Women Rally to Basic Beliefs."

⁷⁷ Kimberly Ford Gliboy, Oral History Interview with V. Gale Lewis, 30 Jan 2004, notes in author's possession.

⁷⁸ Mouritsen, *Blueprints for Living*; and Mouritsen, *Blueprints for Living*: Vol. Two.

⁷⁹ Spencer W. Kimball, "Foreword," in *Blueprints for Living*, v.

excommunication, she “sensed a need among sisters in the Church to share deep feelings about what it means to be a committed Latter-day Saint woman and to be understood.” She declared, “Sisterhood for women is just as important as the priesthood is for men.”⁸⁰ The books allowed the messages from women’s conference to extend to those who could not travel to Provo. Unfortunately, books containing talks from women’s conference were not published again until the 1985 conference.

New BYU Administration

A new era began at BYU with the installation of President Jeffrey R. Holland in 1980. In his first address to the conference in 1981, Holland directed his talk to a young girl and what she “might grow into.”⁸¹ He used his eleven-year-old daughter, Mary, whom he planted in the audience. His family was still new enough to the BYU community that not many recognized her as his daughter.⁸² He told the audience “[s]he already borders on womanhood, and soon she will share in the sisterhood that you all have--and that’s something I will never know.”⁸³ He asked her if her dad wanted her to be happy and loved and she replied, “Yes.” President Holland then asked, “Well, who is your dad? She said, ‘You are.’” President Holland remembered that he started to cry and “it was a little teaching moment.”⁸⁴ Through Mary, President Holland reiterated the position of the leaders of the Church that sisterhood is a natural development of womanhood.

⁸⁰ Grethe Ballif Peterson, “Priesthood and Sisterhood: An Equal Partnership,” *Blueprints*, Vol. 2, 49, 55.

⁸¹ Jeffrey R. Holland, Oral History Interview, 13 October 2004, notes in author’s possession.

⁸² Holland, Oral History Interview.

⁸³ “Proud father Praises Womanhood,” *Deseret News*, 6 February 1981, A17.

⁸⁴ Holland, Oral History Interview.

The 1981 conference committee made an unintentional slight in creating the program's theme. In focusing on "Ye Are Free to Choose," the conference organizers assumed that motherhood was a woman's first choice. In making that assumption, the committee neglected to focus any workshops about women in the home. Women reminded the organizers that the option to be a wife, mother and homemaker was not one they were not willing to give up nor did they want it to be slighted. The committee inadvertently belonged to a larger trend as historians Jill Mulvay Derr, Janath Cannon and Maureen Ursenbach Beecher noted in the history of the Relief Society: "Ironically the widening of women's options had radically devalued the choice to be a housewife; homemaking had somehow become a nonchoice."⁸⁵ Women's Office advisor Ardeth Green Kapp observed, "The most significant aspect of the conference was the concept that one needs to recognize choices or alternatives that are available."⁸⁶

The conference closed with an address from Camilla Kimball.⁸⁷ She noted that "power and freedom to choose carried with it four components: the existence of alternatives, knowledge of alternatives, choosing between the alternatives and responsibility once the choice is made." Kimball's popularity as a speaker and role model was evident in the size of her audience. It was estimated that 800 people heard her in the ballroom, balcony, stairs and hallways with another 2000 listening in rooms with direct feed throughout the Wilkinson Center.⁸⁸ If Mormons had patron saints, Camilla Eyring Kimball, through her example and support, would have been the patron saint of

⁸⁵ Derr, Cannon and Beecher, *Women of Covenant*, 375 -376.

⁸⁶ Gerry Avant, "Ye Are Free to Choose: Focus on Alternatives," *Church News*, 14 February 1981, 4.

⁸⁷ ASBYU Women's Office, Conference Program, 1981, Women's Conference collection, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University.

⁸⁸ "Camilla Kimball: Accept Responsibility for Choices," *Daily Herald*, 8 February 1981, 1.

the ASBYU Women's Conference. Her example and impact was comparable to the one that Marjorie P. Hinckley, wife of Church President Gordon B. Hinckley, would have a decade later. While similar to the position of First Lady, the wife of the president of the church does not hold a formal office, but she is a role model to the women of the church.

Continuing the Legacy

Information regarding the last three conferences (1982 – 1984) under the ASBYU Women's Office is scarce. Media coverage declined and the documents from the Women's Office are missing. Available information indicates that the conference continued to provide a forum for women and the issues facing them.

The 1982 conference theme, "For Such a Time As This," was based on the biblical story of Queen Esther. "As Queen Esther in her day was ready to seize the chance to do good, so women and men are asked to do the same today," stated the conference program. "We hope to strengthen in each student and in others present at the Conference an awareness that we live for a purpose, and that what we do now with our lives is of profound importance."⁸⁹ President Holland welcomed participants and said the "women's conference is the highlight of BYU's academic year."⁹⁰

Speaker Beverly Campbell declared, "You must step forward and take the leadership to assert your moral and social values in issues of great concern." Campbell challenged the premise put forth by feminists that a woman can have the "seamless web of successful career and family life."⁹¹ Ironically, the idea of being a superwoman was not a feminist concept but one created by the media and popular culture. A perfume

⁸⁹ ASBYU Women's Office, Conference Program, 1982, Women's Conference collection, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University.

⁹⁰ "Life's' Trials Topic Opens Three-day Women's Meeting," *Daily Herald*, 18 February 1982, 1.

⁹¹ "*Women Told: Once Can Make a Difference*," *Daily Herald*, 19 February 1982, 3.

commercial at the time told women they could “bring home the bacon, fry it up in the pan, and never, ever let you forget you’re a man.”⁹² The LDS version of superwoman, “Molly Mormon,” may not have brought home the bacon but there was the added expectation to not only fry it up but also serve it with fresh, homemade bread and canned fruit and also volunteer at church and in the community. The BYU Women’s Conference sought to provide LDS women with information to assist them in their many roles, whether it be homemaker or career, married or single, mother or childless, and the myriad other variations.

The 1983 theme, “Deep Roots Are Not Reached by the Frost,” was taken from J. R. R. Tolkien.

All that is gold does not glitter,
Not all those who wander are lost.
The old that is strong does not wither,
Deep roots are not reached by the frost.⁹³

Conference speakers were given an explanation of the theme: “Each of us needs to understand the significance of roots in our lives . . . The frost will undoubtedly come. The leaves and limbs may not survive, but a tree can endure the harsh season by turning to the earth and drawing from its roots.”⁹⁴ One of the conference organizers noted, “We had a hard time deciding to use the theme because it is not scripturally related” although she did not indicate why that theme had been chosen.⁹⁵ Analyzing the theme, one could surmise that the organizers were acknowledging the harsh season resulting from the ERA

⁹² Rosen, *The World Split*, 295.

⁹³ J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring: Being the First Part of The Lord of the Rings*, 2d ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1954), 182.

⁹⁴ “All that is gold does not glitter,” Women’s Conference collection, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University.

⁹⁵ Carol Jencks, “Good Feelings Evoked: Conference Set in Motion,” *Daily Universe*, 18 February 1983, 1.

and IWY that LDS women had just been through and sought to reinforce the need for each woman to develop a deep understanding of her role individually and the strength that could be drawn from the doctrines of the Church.

The conference committee received a surprise when, days before the conference was due to start, keynote speaker Angela “Bay” Buchanan, treasurer of the United States, canceled. There is no indication of why she canceled. Buchanan, sister of Pat Buchanan, had joined the church in 1982. As a high-level working mother in the Reagan administration, Buchanan demonstrated some of the choices the conference had explored in past years. Women’s Office vice-president Cynthia Sorenson and conference chair Leigh Stevens stepped in to deliver the address. The vice-presidents’ talk developed the conference theme while the chair explained the “conference developments, its purposes, who the conference is for and how it is received.”⁹⁶

A New Home

In 1984 the President’s office again considered the subject of the Women’s Conference. On 30 April 1984, President Holland emerged from a meeting and “indicated that the ‘ . . . Board had endorsed the University conducting a Women’s Conference.’”⁹⁷ The Board of Trustees for BYU consists of Church and BYU leaders. This reaffirmation indicates that Church leaders also considered the conference a worthwhile endeavor. On 12 June 1984 the Women’s Office announced that due to financial losses, it would no longer sponsor the Conference. The conference had grown beyond the student body and had become a community event. Adding that the annual

⁹⁶ “Woman’s Keynote Speaker: Buchanan Cancels Conference Talk,” *Daily Universe*, 15 February 1983, 3.

⁹⁷ William R. Siddoway, “Memo to Continuing Education Executive Council,” 30 April 1984, as quoted in Richard H. Henstrom and Keith R. Oaks, *The World is Our Campus: The History of the Division of Continuing Education at Brigham Young University Provo Utah 1875 - 1997* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1998), 646.

meeting was not serving the students, Women's Office Vice-President Stephanie Black said the annual event would "probably be picked up by another group or organization."⁹⁸ Because the student budget was not able to sustain the losses, the university looked for another sponsor.

The conference only had to wait the summer to be adopted. On 11 September 1984 President Holland, in his annual University Conference speech, announced that his office would sponsor the annual meeting. The conference would be placed under the Women's Research Institute with Mary Stovall as the chair. She announced that the date of the next conference would change from its traditional February time to March.⁹⁹

The student leaders of the ASBYU Women's Office established a valuable tradition for Latter-day Saint women. The women's conference has provided LDS women a forum to address the conflicting messages and explore the issues facing them such as the ERA and the state and national IWY meeting. The conference grew into an event that school officials and Church leaders acknowledged as meeting the needs of women. Like the women of the church, the conference would struggle to find its own identity, face crises, and reconstruct its direction and focus. Through it all, the conference and Latter-day Saint women explored the individual definitions of womanhood. While the women belonged to a sisterhood, they were struggling to share in the strengths available from that association. This struggle would escalate and cause many problems for the conference.

⁹⁸ "Financial Losses Lead to Drop Women's Conference," *Daily Universe*, 12 June 1984, 1.

⁹⁹ "Y Conference in New Hands," *Daily Universe*, 11 September 1984, 1.

CHAPTER TWO

A SCHOLARLY SETTING OF FAITH

Women leaders in the Associated Students of Brigham Young University (ASBYU) Women's Office started the Women's Conference in 1976 as a conference for female students. The following year an invitation was extended to mothers and they came to BYU along with grandmothers and family friends. The conference continued to grow until it had outgrown student leadership and operation. In September 1984 the president's office at BYU took over sponsorship. President Jeffrey R. Holland placed the conference under the direction of the Women's Research Institute (WRI) and asked Mary Stovall to chair the conference.¹

As the young conference moved to its new home, it was given an expanded purpose to provide women an opportunity to discuss issues and share sisterhood in a scholarly setting of faith. Under the ASBYU, the conference objective had been to help women "realize their responsibilities and capacities in life."² President Holland directed the conference organizers "to address issues of vital concern . . . in a manner that unites the best scholarship and rigorous thinking with faith, spiritual insight, and, as appropriate, comfort and healing."³

¹ For a brief history of the inception of the WRI, see Bryan Waterman and Brian Kagel, *The Lord's University: Freedom and Authority at BYU* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1998).

² "ASBYU Women's Office Conference Proposal," in *ASBYU Women's Office History: 1975 – 1976*. ed. Debbie Hutchings, in the possession of Debbie Hutchings Forrest, Mesa, Arizona.

³ Mary E. Stovall and Carol Cornwall Madsen, eds. *As Women of Faith: Talks Selected from the BYU Women's Conferences* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1989), vii.

The conference continued to attract Latter-day Saint (LDS) women who hungered for communion with faithful women and reconciliation of the conflicting messages they were receiving. Confused and insecure due to the constant attacks on their lifestyle choices from within the Church and without, many LDS women were looking outside of themselves to validate their choices. Women faced messages which contrasted their beliefs of what it meant to be a faithful LDS woman. Latter-day Saint women struggled to define the “perfect Mormon woman” and understand how their life and the lives of other women fit that description.

Despite continued encouragement from leaders and speakers, many denied the diversity within the LDS sisterhood. By seeking to have a model of perfection, women denied themselves and others the ability to be perfect *and* be different. As the conference grew, many attendees were not comfortable with scholarly approaches and some objected to professional women presenting talks. Polarization resulted as women sought to define their role and often applied their definition to all women. The conference organizers aspired to provide a place where ideas could be explored in an academic and spiritual setting.

Conference Defined

A brief history of the conference states that in 1984 President Holland “realized that the students could no longer support what had become a community conference” but that the conference was “too important to drop.”⁴ He knew that discontinuing the conference would make it appear as if the University was “unmindful of the needs of women.” Holland believed that part of the University’s role was a “certain commission”

⁴ Carol Lee Hawkins, Wendy Watson and Jolene Merica, “Women’s Conference--A History,” Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Conferences and Workshops, 1999, copy in author’s possession.

to deal with issues and provide a forum for discussion and debate.⁵ Former BYU President Dallin Oaks had expressed the same idea a decade earlier, “Our students and faculty must be prepared to deal with these issues because the forces we confront will not allow us to ignore them or brush them off with simplistic answers.”⁶ The *Daily Herald* reported that the conference was the only university conference for women sponsored by the university’s president.⁷

Mary Stovall worked with a committee consisting of BYU faculty and community leaders and the academic vice-president, Jae Ballif, who acted as liaison to the President’s office. Holland explained that the conference should “provide a rich experience for women--young and old, married and single, mothers and daughters . . . [with] a conference content full of intellectual stimulation, cultural enrichment and spiritual affirmation.”⁸ This was to be an academic conference in an atmosphere of faith separate from Education Week and other campus conferences.⁹ Conference committee member Carol Cornwall Madsen recalled that Holland told the organizers that the

⁵ Jeffrey R. Holland, Oral History Interview with V. Gale Lewis, 13 October 2004, notes in author’s possession.

⁶ Dallin H. Oaks, “Concerns and Aspirations of Women at Brigham Young University,” Annual Brigham Young University Fall Workshop, 26-27 August 1975. The talk was paraphrased and reported in the official faculty newsletter, *Y News*, 2 September 1975. L. Tom Perry Special Collection, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University.

⁷ “Today’s Women Face Challenges and Opportunities,” *Daily Herald*, 30 March 1986, 4.

⁸ “Women’s Conference Takes Aim in Providing Enriching Experience,” *Daily Universe*, 28 March 1985, 5.

⁹ Mary Stovall Richards, Oral History Interview with V. Gale Lewis, 21 January 2004, notes in possession of author; and Carol Lee Hawkins, Oral History Interview with Todd J. Hendricks, 5 October 1999, copy in possession of Todd J. Hendricks, Provo, Utah. Education Week is a conference offered by BYU’s Office of Continuing Education. The event offers seminars in a wide range of subjects from religious to social topics.

conference was “to give women an academic experience.”¹⁰ Holland felt the conference should be widely publicized.¹¹

The purpose of the conference was reiterated in the program greeting which emphasized faith and study and expressed the hope that the conference would “aid us in the divine quest for greater religious conviction and broader understanding of the human experience.”¹² By emphasizing a scholarly approach, this desire for broader understanding reflected a growing problem among LDS women since most scholars were professional women.

Superwoman

With more women entering the workforce in the 1960s and 1970s, whether by choice or necessity, a rift grew between mothers who worked and those who stayed at home. Those who worked were accused of contributing to juvenile delinquency. Critics attacked homemakers for staying home. This existed within society at large and was prevalent among LDS women. It was reflected at the conference by the statement of one attendee. While it is only one woman’s comment, she voiced the feelings of many. “I resent the fact that I, as a mother and wife, get put down by the world for my choice of a career as a housewife.”¹³ Those who praised the at-home mother asked if she made her own bread and then wondered if she ground her own wheat. Mothers at home accused working mothers of neglecting their families. Women who had worked previously but

¹⁰ Carol Cornwall Madsen, Oral History Interview with Todd J. Hendricks, 14 October 1999, tape in possession of Todd J. Hendricks, Provo, Utah.

¹¹ Hawkins, Watson and Merica, “Women’s Conference--A History.”

¹² Brigham Young University Women’s Conference, Program, 1985, Brigham Young University, copy in author’s possession.

¹³ “Selected Comments from Participants’ Evaluation Sheets: 1987 BYU Women’s Conference,” L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, 53.

chosen to stay home with their children were suspect because of their education and work experience. Many women were insecure with their life choices and sought to validate their choice through the approval of others. Those who didn't fit into the predetermined mold were criticized and even ostracized.¹⁴

This trend reflected the growing emergence of the “superwoman” or in Mormon terminology, “Molly Mormon.”¹⁵ Psychotherapist Marjorie Shaevitz examined the Superwoman Syndrome in 1984. She noted, “In less than fifteen years our culture has integrated a new role for women—that of worker and career person. However, our culture has not altered the perception of woman as perfect wife, perfect mother, and perfect homemaker. Now she gets to be perfect employee or executive, too. Performing multiple and conflicting roles has become a fact of life for most American women.”¹⁶ Historian Ruth Rosen observed, “The Superwoman could ‘have it all,’ but only if she ‘did it all.’”¹⁷ While the ideal Mormon woman did not work, she was expected to perform her many roles perfectly. And if she did work, she had to ensure that her job did not adversely affect her family in any way.

¹⁴ These are a few of the conflicting and contrasting messages women received. As a woman raising a family during the 1980s and 1990s, I personally heard many of these messages directed towards myself or other women. These messages are also gleaned from the many talks given at Women's Conference over the years.

¹⁵ For further research on mothers and working: Marjorie Hansen Shaevitz, *The Superwoman Syndrome* (New York: Warner Books, 1984); Daphne Spain and Suzanne M. Bianchi, *Balancing Act - Motherhood, Marriage, and Employment Among American Women* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1996); Francine D. Blau and Ronald G. Ehrenberg, *Gender & Family Issues in the Workplace* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1997); Faye J. Crosby, *Juggling: The Unexpected Advantages of Balancing Career and Home for Women and Their Families* (New York: Free Press, 1991); Arlie Hochschild and Anne Machung, *The Second Shift: Working Parents and the Revolution at Home* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1989); Darcie Sanders and Martha M. Bullen, *Staying Home: From Full-time Professional to Full-time Parent* (Boston, Little Brown, 1992); and Richard B. Freeman, *Working Under Different Rules* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1994).

¹⁶ Shaevitz, *The Superwoman Syndrome*, 31.

¹⁷ Ruth Rosen, *The World Split Wide Open: How the Modern Women's Movement Changed America* (New York: Viking, 2000), 295.

This is not to say that these attitudes applied to all LDS women. There were many who were secure in their choices and lives. They had made their choices, had the support of family and believed they had the approval of God. Both kinds of women, secure, insecure and many in between, came to the Conference seeking enrichment. Mary Stovall noted that the conference was an opportunity for women to consider serious issues with like-minded women. Yet, sharing the same religious commitment did not mean that women (or men) were of a like mind on issues, especially those affecting women.¹⁸

A Scholarly Conference

The 1985 conference theme, “Women of Faith,” reflected the purpose set forth by President Holland and offered selections based on the needs expressed by women. Holland opened the conference and welcomed the participants. Camilla Kimball again gave the keynote address. The program was cited by the *Daily Herald* as a “tribute to President Kimball” based on a presentation by their son, Edward Kimball, entitled, “Illustrated Tribute to President and Sister Kimball on the Occasion of President Kimball’s Ninetieth Birthday.” Members of the Kimball family were present as the audience was treated to a film on President and Sister Kimball’s lives. “Family members and audience alike wept” as they viewed shots of the Kimballs over the years.¹⁹ In a later conference, Marjorie P. Hinckley, wife of Elder Gordon B. Hinckley, remembered this address. She spoke of the reasons why LDS women admired Camilla Kimball. “She was ninety years old at the time and still going strong, perhaps not physically, but certainly spiritually and mentally. She inspired us all with her continuing drive to learn and her

¹⁸ Richards, Interview.

¹⁹ “Sister Kimball Advises to Learn, Work,” *Daily Herald*, 29 March 1985, 12; and Brigham Young University Women’s Conference, Program, 1985.

ability to make us all reach beyond our inclinations,” said Hinckley.²⁰ Sister Kimball was a role model to the women of the church. Women could look to her for attributes to incorporate in their own lives. She had suffered adversity; her husband had been through major illnesses, yet she had many of the attributes that LDS women sought to embody.

An early morning talk by the dean of BYU’s law school Bruce R. Hafen, entitled “Women, Feminism, and the Blessings of the Priesthood,” elicited a tremendous reaction from the audience. After the talk, the audience was told that the talk would be published. One attendee reported that the audience “cheered and whistled.” She asserted, “The speech’s appeal came perhaps from Brother Hafen’s honesty in dealing with sticky issues for women in the Church.”²¹

Hafen’s talk discussed three questions: What is the women’s movement and what is good and bad about it? How do women, especially single women, enjoy the blessings of the priesthood? And why should women have a college education?²² Hafen identified three viewpoints regarding the nature and place of women. First, that women are inferior and should restrict their attention to matters of the home. The second view was that not only are women equal to men, “but that there are no innate distinctions between males and females significant enough to justify any differences in role.”²³ The final position was that “women are unquestionably the equal of men, having talents and interests that

²⁰ Marjorie Pay Hinckley, “Building the Kingdom From a Firm Foundation,” in Stovall and Madsen, *As Women of Faith*, ed. Stovall and Madsen, 10.

²¹ Kathryn Fowles, “Conference Explores ‘Women of Faith,’” *Sunstone* 10, no. 6, (June 1985): 39.

²² Bruce C. Hafen, “Women, Feminism, and the Blessings of the Priesthood,” Women’s Conference Collection, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, 7-19.

²³ Hafen, “Women, Feminism, and the Blessings of the Priesthood,” 10.

extend well beyond the home; yet, there are some God-given differences between the sexes that should be both appreciated and preserved.”²⁴

Hafen referred to a talk given by Bruce R. McConkie entitled, “The Ten Blessings of the Priesthood.”²⁵

Here is his list of the ten blessings of the priesthood: First, being members of the true Church and receiving the fullness of the everlasting gospel. Second, receiving the gift of the Holy Ghost and the other gifts of the Spirit. Third, becoming sanctified by the Spirit, thereby becoming fit to dwell with God. Fourth, representing Jesus Christ in administering salvation to mankind. Fifth, becoming children of God in the family of the Lord Jesus Christ. Sixth, having the opportunity of eternal marriage, without which there is no exaltation in the highest degree of the celestial kingdom. Seventh, having the power to govern all spiritual and temporal things. Eighth, having power to gain eternal life, the greatest of all the gifts of God. Ninth, having power to make one’s calling and election sure while yet in mortality. Tenth, having the power and privilege, if pure in heart, to see the face of God while yet in mortality.²⁶

Hafen stated that “almost all of them are available to women, and most are available to single women.”²⁷

Finally, Hafen cited research done for the Church that “revealed some sobering statistics about the circumstances of LDS women. According to these findings, 90% of all young women will work for some portion of their lives.”²⁸ He expressed two additional reasons for women to take education seriously; it would make them a “far better mother and person” and that they would have a “richer, fuller life.”²⁹ Hafen

²⁴ Hafen, “Women, Feminism, and the Blessings of the Priesthood,” 11.

²⁵ Bruce R. McConkie, “The Ten Blessings of the Priesthood,” *Ensign*, November 1977, 33-35.

²⁶ Hafen, “Women, Feminism, and the Blessings of the Priesthood,” 15.

²⁷ Hafen, “Women, Feminism, and the Blessings of the Priesthood,” 14.

²⁸ Hafen, “Women, Feminism, and the Blessings of the Priesthood,” 16.

²⁹ Hafen, “Women, Feminism, and the Blessings of the Priesthood,” 17.

concluded by telling the women, “We must deal with these issues constructively for social as well as personal reasons. It will not do for us to respond with superficial ideas or raw emotions.”³⁰ McConkie’s talk had been given to males twelve and older in a Priesthood session of the semi-annual general conference of the church. Hafen’s talk confirmed that these blessings were not just available to men.

In “LDS Women: At Home and Beyond,” Ida Smith, founding director of the WRI, observed, “Our lives are filled with paradoxes and hard questions.” She noted that some of the ideas she presented “may be frightening--or even seem threatening--to some.” Smith asked, “Do we define home narrowly as the four-walled structure in which we live?”³¹ She noted:

We have been criticized in the past that too few full-time homemakers have been highlighted at Women’s Conference, that all the women who have been asked to speak have done things outside the home with the implication being that the former are the obedient and the latter are not following the proper, prescribed plan. Perhaps, the latter simply see their role as “homemaker” extending to individuals and families that live beyond the four walls of their own houses.³²

Sisters were encouraged to embrace the diversity of the sisterhood within the church and broaden their concepts of the role of “homemaker.”

Carolyn J. Rasmus, in a seminar entitled “The Faithful Heritage of a Convert,” told the audience, “We represent a diversity in age, experiences, talents, family, and personal situations, languages spoken and understood, education, marital status and church callings. But more important than our diversity are the things that bind us

³⁰ Hafen, “Women, Feminism, and the Blessings of the Priesthood,” 18.

³¹ Ida Smith, “LDS Women: At Home and Beyond,” in *As Women of Faith*, ed. Stovall and Cornwall, 204 - 205.

³² Smith, “LDS Women: At Home and Beyond,” 216 - 217.

together and unite us.”³³ Strength in sisterhood comes from the ability to acknowledge the diversity that exists within the group and unify despite those differences.

The committee for the 1986 conference sought “to bring together those who from experience or academic training (or both), have gained particular insights into handling some of the complex issues facing us now or awaiting us in the future.” They reminded participants that the ideas presented were not offered as “prescriptions but as considered suggestions.”³⁴

President Holland introduced himself at the conference as the husband of Patricia T. Holland. His wife was well known among the women as a counselor in the general Young Women presidency. He related that with his wife’s travels he had come to “appreciate what many wives in the audience have experienced for years.” He added that his children were encouraging him to attend “as many of the domestic skills sessions as I can.”³⁵ The class on “Nutrition: Fads, Fancies and Facts” might have best met Holland’s needs.³⁶ His approach was not meant to demean the women or their academic and intellectual pursuits. Every speaker, in any setting, attempts to identify with the audience and their purpose for gathering. Holland was also acknowledging his lack of experience in an area of expertise for many of the attendees. Holland said that the Women’s Conference was one of those two or three audiences that “any speaker would give anything to be able to address.”³⁷

³³ Carolyn J. Rasmus, “The Faithful Heritage of a Convert,” in *A Heritage of Faith: Talks Selected from the BYU Women’s Conference*, ed. Mary E. Stovall and Carol Cornwall Madsen (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1988), 40.

³⁴ Brigham Young University Women’s Conference, Program, 1986, Brigham Young University, copy in author’s possession.

³⁵ “Women’s Conference at BYU,” *Daily Herald*, 27 March 1986, 1.

³⁶ Women’s Conference Program, 1986.

³⁷ Holland, Interview.

Marjorie P. Hinckley gave the keynote address. She began by noting, “We are in a time when the winds of adversity and sophisticated criticism and bitter attack have become the order of the day.” Hinckley told the audience, “It is a sociological fact that women need women. We need deep and satisfying and loyal friendships with each other. These friendships are a necessary source of sustenance.”³⁸ She encouraged the women to draw on the experience and diversity of the sisterhood that exists among women. This sisterhood is a power that women needed to learn to rely on but were instead destroying. Some doubted whether women could really learn this lesson.

Lisa Ray Turner wrote in the *Exponent II* that she “wondered whether diversity within Mormonism was possible.” She declared that wherever she had lived “diversity among women was met with suspicion.” Turner acknowledged that this was not unique to Mormonism, stating that contemporary magazines described how working women and stay at home mothers had “declared a war on each other.” She argued, “Sisterhood happens when we permit each other to be human.”³⁹ The fact that women belonged through Church membership to the sisterhood was often confused with sharing a bond with other women in that sisterhood. The war on other women, however, was not just a Mormon phenomenon.

Trashing

According to historian and critic Cassandra Langer, in the 1960s and early 1970s, women were encouraged to adopt the role of the transitional housewife-careerist, blending home and career to meet the needs of all. This evolved in the 1980s to a “dualistic superwoman whose career came first and whose family was of secondary importance.” Feminists were hit with a “backlash that attempted to champion a return to

³⁸ Hinckley, “Building the Kingdom from a Firm Foundation,” 3, 11.

³⁹ Lisa Ray Turner, “Requiem for a Typical Mormon Woman,” *Exponent II* 18, no. 1 (1993): 15.

home and hearth.”⁴⁰ For years women had been told that they could have it all. However, the price of a successful career often meant that family life was placed second. A major contributor to the backlash was the growing conservative political movement that advocated home and family. Women turned on other women and criticized their choices.

Trashing other women “was a form of character assassination, an attack on a woman’s personality, motives or commitment to the cause.”⁴¹ Historian Ruth Rosen notes, “It is not done to expose disagreement or to resolve differences. It is done to disparage and destroy.”⁴² Some LDS women criticized other LDS women who were perceived as not demonstrating commitment to the Church because they worked outside the home. Similarly, trashing among feminists occurred because women “had unrealistic expectations of the movement’s capacity to fulfill their deepest needs.”⁴³ Despite the differences, whether the cause was feminism or Mormonism, the outcome was the same. Women held each other to an often unattainable standard and criticized each other for the choices and lifestyles that did not match their own.⁴⁴

One session in the 1986 conference, “Fact or Fiction: The Image of LDS Women” prompted many comments in the evaluations. This seminar was given by Cynthia B. Lynch, whom the program lists as a writer, homemaker and ward and area public communications director, with a response by Susan Buckles, a budget analyst with the

⁴⁰ Cassandra Langer, *A Feminist Critique: How Feminism Has Changed American Society, Culture, and How We Live From the 1940s to the Present* (New York: IconEditions, 1996), 165.

⁴¹ Flora Davis, *Moving the Mountain: The Women’s Movement in America Since 1960* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1991), 98.

⁴² Rosen, *The World Split Open*, 228.

⁴³ Rosen, *The World Split Open*, 231.

⁴⁴ Rosen, *The World Split Open*, 227.

LDS church.⁴⁵ The records do not show what was said in the session but the evaluation report states that almost everyone who attended the session had a comment. One participant asserted that Sister Lynch “left no time for Sis. Buckles and several of the ladies left in a huff.” Another wrote that Sister Lynch was “extremely opinionated and left me feeling there was not much for us to be happy about being women in the church.” The comment was made that the presentation “border[ed] on anti-mormon thoughts.”⁴⁶ The evaluations lead one to think that “The Image of LDS Woman” was not a positive one. The reactions demonstrate the conflicts that existed among LDS women on how they viewed themselves and others. The criticism also shows that the women did not apply the program message of open scholarly consideration of those with differing viewpoints.

Not everyone participated in trashing. The conference gave women a forum to communicate the life lessons they had learned. In one session, Signe Hale Gillum shared personal experiences and lessons learned after her husband experienced a crippling illness. She said:

I learned not to envy others or their accomplishments. It was incredible to discover that my friends, the eloquent, highly educated ones, the famous ones, the accomplished ones, all had serious problems, problems I am very glad I don't have. I have learned there is not just one right way to do something, that my way may not be the way someone else may do it, but, if it works for me, it's okay.⁴⁷

Soon, the notion that differences were all right faced a challenge that caused many to stumble.

⁴⁵ Women's Conference Program, 1986.

⁴⁶ Mary E. Stovall, Report of Written Portions of Evaluation Sheets, 1986 Women's Conference, Women's Conference Collection, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University.

⁴⁷ Signe Hale Gillum, “Worse is Better,” in *As Women of Faith*, ed. Stovall and Cornwall, 199.

To the Mothers of Zion

President Spencer W. Kimball died on 5 November 1985 and Ezra Taft Benson was set apart as President of the Church. Church presidents are sustained by Latter-day Saints as prophets, seers, and revelators. Members accept the counsel given by the presiding Church president to be revelation enabling the Saints to manage the issues currently facing them. This process of continuing revelation is a cornerstone of their faith. Church doctrine states that continuing revelation is also available to individuals for themselves and their family. Thus, members are expected to prayerfully apply the counsel from the prophet in a manner that fits them and their family. How each person and family does that is not necessarily the same. President Benson tested, and thereby caused Latter-day Saints to reflect on, the principle of continuing revelation through his statements on women.

Two weeks prior to the 1987 Women's Conference, President Benson addressed the parents of the church. In a talk entitled "To the Mothers of Zion" he told women, "Contrary to conventional wisdom, a mother's calling is in the home, not in the marketplace . . . 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." The importance of the impact of this talk can be demonstrated by the fact that it was printed into a pamphlet and later included in the book *Come, Listen to a Prophet's Voice*.⁴⁸ The pamphlet was distributed to the women of the Church through their local wards. As a result of this talk, many women quit their jobs while others were left feeling guilty and/or angry.

Chair Mary Stovall recalled that the talk spiked enrollment at the conference. Women came to the conference looking for an expansion of President Benson's talk but they did not find it. The lack of further direction and the fact that many of the presenters

⁴⁸ Ezra Taft Benson, "To the Mothers in Zion," in *Come, Listen to a Prophet's Voice* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1990), 29.

were professional women spawned a palpable anger.⁴⁹ One journal called the conference one of the “most divisive Women’s Conferences ever held.”⁵⁰ Stovall said that the anger was in part due to the timing of the conference so close to Benson’s address and that there was a larger number of women who had never attended the conference before and were unfamiliar with an academic conference. Because the conference featured so many professional women, many participants viewed the conference as “going against the prophet’s counsel.” Stovall noted, “More than one evaluation sheet questioned the righteousness of both the presenters and the committee.” One participant asked, “How can you be a successful business woman and still be a good example of an [sic] LDS?”⁵¹ Another stated:

A few weeks ago, the prophet of God told the women about their roles. The Women’s Conference at BYU, a university financed greatly by members of the church, should not be “preaching” about the greatness of careers and life outside the home but [rather] how we can follow the word of God.⁵²

The committee had received “almost universal praise for previous conference sessions, thus, we were totally unprepared for the negative reaction.”⁵³

Not all reacted negatively. A woman from California wrote that the “conference was outstanding. Its strength was in uniting LDS women with divergent points of view in the spirit of love and support.” She noted, “You may have responses that it failed to

⁴⁹ Richards, Interview.

⁵⁰ “Prophet’s Talk Prompts Examination of Role of Women,” *Sunstone* 11, no 2 (March 1987): 42.

⁵¹ “Selected Comments, 1987,” 54.

⁵² “Selected Comments, 1987,” 55.

⁵³ Mary E. Stovall, Director’s Report to Provost Jae R. Ballif, 21 March 1987, Women’s Conference Collection, L. Tom Perry Special Collection, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University.

achieve that. If so, they will probably come from those who already had a spirit of division.”⁵⁴

Other women brought expectations for a “broader kind of enrichment” than had been part of the program in the past.⁵⁵ Carol Cornwall Madsen observed, however, that many of the women did not want their lives broadened in a scholarly manner.⁵⁶ These women were seeking validation and reinforcement. One conference participant noted that

There was considerable tension in the air as conflicts and frustrations were shared . . . there was some discord between two groups--working and non-working mothers. It would appear that President Benson’s fireside address has created a real dilemma for many and there is little tolerance for how others choose to apply his counsel.⁵⁷

It is ironic that the conference theme was “Women in Faith--Diversity in Works, Unity in Faith.” The program expressed the desire for sisters to “seek to celebrate both the unity and the diversity of our sisterhood” and quoted Elder Marvin J. Ashton’s injunction: “Only you and your Father in Heaven know your needs, strengths, and desires. Around this knowledge your personal course must be charted and your choices made.” Women were reminded that the conference sessions were designed “to be intellectually challenging and spiritually fulfilling.”⁵⁸ In his opening remarks, President

⁵⁴ Stovall, “Director’s Report.”

⁵⁵ Todd J. Hendricks, “Brigham Young University and the Relief Society of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Annual Women’s Conference: A Study in Transformation,” unpublished Senior paper, Brigham Young University, 11 April 2000, 16.

⁵⁶ Madsen, Hendricks Interview.

⁵⁷ “Selected Comments, 1987,” 51.

⁵⁸ Brigham Young University Women’s Conference, Program, 1987, Brigham Young University, copy in author’s possession.

Holland declared that the “BYU was a ‘place for and a symbol of growth and development and learning, including and *especially* for women.’”⁵⁹

Some women believed Patricia Holland’s keynote address “Many Things . . . One Thing” “started the conference out right.”⁶⁰ One participant said her talk “alone was worth the trip.”⁶¹ Holland decried the Superwoman model that was prevalent among women.

If I were Satan and wanted to destroy a society, I think I too would stage a full-blown blitz on its women. I would keep them so distraught and distracted that they would never find the calming strength and serenity for which their sex has always been known. He has effectively done that, catching us in the crunch of trying to be superhuman instead of realistically striving to reach our individual purpose and unique God-given potential within such diversity.⁶²

Holland expressed gratitude for the “added awareness” the women’s movement had given to the gospel principle of the right to choose. She observed

One of the most unfortunate side effects we have faced in this matter of agency is, because of the increasing diversity of life-styles for women of today, we seem even more uncertain and less secure with each other . . . There seems to be an increase in our competitiveness and a decrease in our generosity of one another . . . Surely there has not been another time in history when women have questioned their self-worth as harshly and critically as in the second half of the twentieth century.⁶³

⁵⁹ “Prophet’s Talk Prompts Examination of Role of Women,” 41.

⁶⁰ “Selected Comments, 1987,” 16.

⁶¹ “Selected Comments, 1987,” 3.

⁶² Patricia Terry Holland, “Many Things . . . One Thing,” in *A Heritage of Faith*, ed. Stovall and Madsen, 17.

⁶³ P. Holland, “Many Things . . . One Thing,” 15 - 17.

Jeffrey Holland recalled that Patricia Holland gave the talk “out of the depths of her heart.”⁶⁴ Her talk deeply affected many and was published in the *Ensign*, the Church magazine for adults.⁶⁵ After the session, a woman in her fifties who was a professional nurse “was found crying” outside the Marriott Center where the session was held. “For the first time in my life,” she explained, “I’ve come to a conference where I was told that whatever my choice is, it is acceptable.”⁶⁶ This reaction appears to have been rare at the conference that year where many women struggled to feel their choices were acceptable.

Carlford Broderick, sociologist and head of the marriage and family therapy program at the University of Southern California, presented an evening fireside entitled “The Uses of Adversity.”⁶⁷ He told the women that while serving as a stake president he learned “not to judge people who were having problems.” He related that through two different women who had asked him for blessings, he realized “that some of the most valiant spirits in heaven volunteered for duty in the trenches during Earth life rather than choose the safety and comfort of the back lines.”⁶⁸ As with Job of the Old Testament and the blind man in the New Testament, some believe that those with challenges have failed to be fully righteous. Broderick’s statement turns this belief around and draws upon the LDS doctrine of a premortal life. Trials and adversity were not punishments, but opportunities for growth that some women volunteered for instead of having an easier

⁶⁴ Holland, Interview.

⁶⁵ Patricia T. Holland, “‘One Thing Needful’: Becoming Women of Greater Faith in Christ,” *Ensign*, October 1987, 26-33.

⁶⁶ Laurie Williams Sowby, “BYU Women’s Conference 1987,” *Exponent II*, 12, no. 3, (Spring 1987): 19.

⁶⁷ Carlford Broderick, “The Uses of Adversity,” in *As Women Of Fatih*, ed. Stovall and Cornwall, 171-190.

⁶⁸ Sowby, “BYU Women’s Conference, 1987,” 19.

life. Through his talk, Broderick was addressing the trend of women criticizing each other's choices.

According to one report, "the most confrontational session" seems to have been "The Price of Excellence." The panel included mothers who were "pursuing academic and cultural interests." There were accusations from the audience that the women were "not following the prophet's counsel to stay at home."⁶⁹ One participant commented, "I believe this group of women was not in tune to the Holy Spirit and the teachings of the Prophet!!"⁷⁰ Another noted that while the panel was "right on target for me," that "all those panelists [were] married [and] had supportive husbands."⁷¹ A report on the conference observed, "President Benson's talk ["To Mothers in Zion"] was often used not just to guide one's own life but also to judge others."⁷²

BYU English Professor Karen Lynn Davidson told the audience in the seminar "Peer Pressure and the Truly Adult Woman," "We do not all need to be the same. Sameness is one of the false premises of peer pressure. One of the most important things we come to learn as adult women is that two profoundly different people may both be fine, devoted members of the Church."⁷³ Davidson's counsel demonstrates the fact that while women may be a part of a sisterhood through birth, they may not share a cultural connection with the other women.

⁶⁹ "Prophet's Talk Prompts Examination of Role of Women," 42.

⁷⁰ "Selected Comments, 1987," 52.

⁷¹ "Selected Comments, 1987," 58.

⁷² "Prophet's Talk Prompts Examination of Role of Women," 42.

⁷³ Karen Lynn Davidson, "Peer Pressure and the Truly Adult Woman," in *A Heritage of Faith*, ed. Stovall and Madsen, 183.

To some, life choices of the women presenting the messages to the conference were apparently more important than their messages. Many attendees expressed opinions similar to this woman:

To hear one thing from prophet (don't put off having children to get an education, be home for your children) yet these women presenters are held up to us as our teachers, as those who have arrived--are successful. yet, [sic] to be where they are, they didn't stay home. They didn't postpone their educations. This is totally frustrating to see and experience one thing, but be told to do another. These women didn't do what the prophet suggests. Why are they put up as our examples?⁷⁴

Judgments were sweeping. There is no indication that the attendees considered whether the presenters were single or married, when they got their education or their life circumstances. If any initials followed a presenter's name, she was criticized. One attendee wrote, "We want to hear from 'real women' not from all these M.A.s and Ph.D.s -- women with letters after their names."⁷⁵ Another commented that she appreciated one "non-accomplished" speaker. "No big Masters or Ph.D. after her name. A faithful sister is easier for me to relate to than all 'intellectual' speakers."⁷⁶ Many women only wanted to share sisterhood with those who were like themselves. This left no room for diversity or empathy. This attitude would continue for many years.

Jeffrey R. Holland believed that there was "always the potential for misunderstanding" about having professional women speak. But that was also the reason that the University wanted to have those women speak. By including professional women, the University could have them speak "in a good way, not draw women out of

⁷⁴ "Selected Comments, 1987," 55.

⁷⁵ Donna Lee Bowen, "Real Women," in *Women Steadfast in Christ: Talks Selected from the 1991 Women's Conference Co-sponsored by Brigham Young University and the Relief Society*, ed. Dawn Hall Anderson and Marie Cornwall (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company), 268.

⁷⁶ "Selected Comments, 1987," 55.

the home” or to say that this “professional model is your model.”⁷⁷ The objective of the conference was not to espouse careers over family but to explore issues facing women in a scholarly manner that included utilizing the professional faculty of BYU. Many women, however, saw the issue of working outside the home in black and white terms and were unwilling to consider alternative views. This attitude fueled the divisiveness and contention that previously existed and threatened the bonds of sisterhood.

The theme for the 1988 conference “Women of Faith: Nourishing One Another in the Faith” reflected the desire to bring women together to support one another. The program reminded women of the scriptural injunction to be “willing to bear one another’s burdens.”⁷⁸ Norma Berntson Ashton, the wife of apostle Marvin J. Ashton, gave the keynote address. She told the audience:

To love ourselves, we must realize who we are and examine our feelings about ourselves. It is our obligation and opportunity to eliminate the negative and nourish our real selves with humble pride and conduct worthy of one a little lower than the angels. Self worth can’t be verified by others. You are worthy because you say it is so.⁷⁹

While the conference organizers tried to involve more non-professional women as speakers, the majority of presenters still held degrees.⁸⁰ Speakers with degrees included wives of former mission presidents, the matron of the Provo Temple, and former members of the Relief Society and Young Women general boards. Conference organizers selected presenters based on their expertise in the subject and by drawing on

⁷⁷ Holland, Interview.

⁷⁸ Brigham Young University Women’s Conference, Program, 1988, Brigham Young University, copy in author’s possession.

⁷⁹ Norma B. Ashton, “For Such a Time As This: The Time Is Now,” in *The Best of Women’s Conference: Selected Talks from 25 Years of BYU Women’s Conferences* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 2000), 16.

⁸⁰ Richards, Interview.

their pool of acquaintances or friends of friends. Since the majority, if not all, of the conference committee held degrees, their pool had a similar makeup.⁸¹

The conference was not without controversy. The Thursday morning plenary session included the talk “Women and Nature: An Awakening” by Terry Tempest Williams, an author and “naturalist in residence, Utah Museum of Natural History.” There is no record of the text to her talk and reactions were mixed. One woman stated that she had come specifically to hear Williams and said she was a “beautiful thought-provoking speaker.” Another declared that Williams’ talk was “worth flying from California.”⁸²

Others disagreed. “I couldn’t believe someone advocating leaving your family on the spur of the moment, walking around nude, would be invited to speak at BYU. I had a bad, almost evil feeling while she was talking” wrote one attendee. Another expressed her disappointment and commented that the talk “went against all I have been taught on how to cope in a gospel way with life. I was left cold and disturbed and so was my friend.” Noting that many did not like Williams’ presentation, one woman commented that she “felt it successfully addressed my need to explore myths about what an LDS woman can or cannot be, can or cannot think. That is why I come to Women’s Conference.”⁸³

Mary Stovall recognized that not everyone interested in the conference could come to Provo, so she and Carol Cornwall Madsen selected talks from the 1985-1987 conferences to be published in two books.⁸⁴ The editors wrote that the conference

⁸¹ Hawkins, Hendricks, Interview; and Kathy D. Pullins, Oral History Interview with V. Gale Lewis, 9 January 2004, notes in author’s possession.

⁸² “Report on Brigham Young University Women’s Conference - 1988” Women’s Conference Collection, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University.

⁸³ “Report on Brigham Young University Women’s Conference – 1988.”

committee had “constantly struggled to address issues of vital concern to all of us-- women and men--in a manner that unites the best scholarship and rigorous thinking with faith.”⁸⁵ Readers, however, should not “expect to find dictatorial prescriptions for what some one believes constitutes ‘the perfect Mormon woman.’”⁸⁶ Talks covered areas such as spirituality, social issues, history, community and the international church. Stovall started an enduring legacy. Books with conference talks were published annually thereafter.

Moving Forward

In 1988, leadership of the conference changed hands. Mary Stovall left the directorship of the WRI in December to move to the history department full-time.

Stovall’s final report reflected the difficulties of pleasing all attendees:

It is hard to bill the conference as a BYU conference when many of the attenders do not want to listen to intellectual presentations or to hear from BYU women faculty (whom many view as somehow suspect), and suggest as possible presenters people we rejected long ago because of their simplistic, “canned” presentations.⁸⁷

Stovall also observed that if the conference was to be primarily faith promoting, then the Relief Society should sponsor the program. She suggested that if the conference’s purpose was to remain academic, the next chair should have at least a masters degree and that a tenured faculty member be considered.

In 1988 BYU sociology professor Marie Cornwall became the director of the Women’s Research Institute. Recognizing the dimension and time commitment required

⁸⁴ Stovall and Madsen, ed. *A Heritage of Faith*; and Stovall and Madsen, ed. *As Women of Faith*.

⁸⁵ Stovall and Madsen, ed. *As Women of Faith: Talks*, vii.

⁸⁶ Stovall and Madsen, ed. *As Women of Faith: Talks*, viii.

⁸⁷ Mary E. Stovall “The 1988 BYU Women’s Conference -- Evaluation and Recommendations,” document found in *Conferences and Workshops: Women’s Conference Division*, as quoted in Hendricks, “A Study in Transformation.”

of the chair of Women's Conference in addition to the other duties associated with her new assignment, she agreed to continue to edit the books of talks but requested that someone else shoulder the rest of the responsibilities of the conference.⁸⁸

During this time President Holland met with the board of trustees to determine the future of the conference. The board gave Holland a "strong message" that the conference should go on because "it was addressing needs for the women of the Church that the Church itself could not address directly through a similar conference."⁸⁹ Without direct involvement of the Church leaders in the conference, there was more latitude for exploring issues without the strict scrutiny that would exist later when the Relief Society was brought in as a co-sponsor. Holland and Ballif told the board that the purpose defined in 1984 should continue to direct the conference, "To provide a rich experience for women--young and old, married and single, mothers and daughters . . . [in] a conference content full of intellectual stimulation, cultural enrichment and spiritual affirmation."⁹⁰

Carol Lee Hawkins was appointed to chair the conference. Hawkins had been Mary Stovall's administrative assistant and a conference committee member. Her job was to "oversee the Women's Conference so that it would continue to fulfill its original goals and maintain the high level of quality that had been established."⁹¹ The position was designated as a part-time contract employee. The conference headquarters and the chair moved from the Women's Research Institute to Conferences and Workshops, which provided logistical and secretarial support to the conference.

⁸⁸ Carol Lee Hawkins and Kathy Pullins, "Women's Conference -- A History," Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Conferences and Workshops, 1997, copy in author's possession.

⁸⁹ Hawkins and Pullins, "Women's Conference: A History."

⁹⁰ Hawkins, Watson and Merica, "Women's Conference-- A History," 1-2.

⁹¹ Hawkins, Watson and Merica, "Women's Conference-- A History," 2.

Change and growth are rarely easy. The conference moved from the ASBYU and assumed on a more scholarly objective. Mary Stovall directed the conference through an era when there was a growing divisiveness within the women of the Church. As the Women's Conference grew, it attracted a wider diversity of women, a diversity that many of the women were not prepared to accommodate or draw strength from. Women were learning to define their role yet many based the definitions on outside sources. They were not at the point where they could be comfortable with their own life choices and allow others to seek a different path. Before women in the Church, and the Conference, could truly begin to share in the diversity of the sisterhood that was available to them, there would need to be more change. However, that transition would be painful and result in greater scrutiny by Church leadership.

CHAPTER THREE

ANGUISHING MOMENTS

Former BYU President Jeffrey R. Holland declared that “[g]reat good sometimes has anguishing moments.”¹ Between 1989 and 1993 the BYU Women’s Conference went through some “anguishing moments” that resulted in a backlash that permanently changed the conference and its administration. In her study of the women’s movement, historian Flora Davis declared, “Periods of great social change . . . are almost always followed by periods of backlash or stagnation.”² LDS women were struggling to be “Supermom” and the conference encouraged women to examine their lives, establish a role and identity for themselves, and avoid judging others who made different choices. Because of their education and professional status, those chosen to be presenters often appeared to be incongruent with the counsel of the leaders of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints for mothers to remain at home. Many praised the conference organizers for their selection of topics and presenters but those who disagreed made their views known to University and Church leaders. Through a series of events the administration of the conference was brought under closer supervision of Church leaders. In 1991 the Relief Society was brought in as a cosponsor. The conference committee expanded to include BYU faculty, Relief Society General Board members and

¹ Jeffrey R. Holland, Oral History Interview with V. Gale Lewis, 13 October 2004, notes in author’s possession.

² Flora Davis, *Moving the Mountain: The Women’s Movement in America Since 1960* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1991), 450.

community members. After the 1993 conference, the position of chair changed from a paid employee position to an unpaid appointment under the supervision of the BYU president and the General Relief Society president. These changes resulted in greater scrutiny by Church leaders regarding the tone and content of the conference.

Different Voices

In 1989, Mary Stovall's former administrative assistant Carol Lee Hawkins took over as chair of the Women's Conference. Jolene Merica, the Conferences and Workshops program administrator for the BYU Women's Conference, declared that "Carol Lee's strength as a chair was her sensitivity to having different voices represented."³ Hawkins balanced the scholarly nature of the conference with the demand of some attendees to hear from women without academic credentials. She expanded the program to reflect the growing international nature of the LDS church by inviting speakers from around the world.

President Holland and Provost Jae R. Ballif, President Holland's liaison to the Women's Conference, "desired a more academically rigorous conference."⁴ Hawkins summed up this point of view, "Women must realize the rigors associated with scholarly work."⁵ This was a concept that over time fell by the wayside as the conference changed to meet the demands of the participants. BYU's position changed from being an academic sponsor to a host providing women with a taste of the BYU atmosphere: going to classes, meeting at the Wilkinson Center, and attending devotionals at the Marriott Center.

³ Jolene Merica, Oral History Interview with V. Gale Lewis, 31 January 2004, tape in author's possession.

⁴ Carol Lee Hawkins, "BYU Women's Conference: A Brief History," *1990 BYU Women's Conference Report*, copy in author's possession, 24.

⁵ Hawkins, "BYU Women's Conference: A Brief History," 24.

Reflecting about the conference, Hawkins noted:

The original intent of the conference design [according to President Holland] was to offer a diverse selection of research-based papers by BYU faculty members, religious sessions and a heavy emphasis on university experiences with the arts. From numerous reports most participants felt we provided “something for everybody.” Our attempt to balance the concurrent sessions--some being more academic while others were more spiritual and practical--appears to have been successful.⁶

The scholarly objective disturbed many women. There were still those who were confused with the difference between the university format offered by Women’s Conference and that of a “Relief Society and Education Week format” with comments about “‘written talks’ and ‘academic degrees.’”⁷ Many women were unfamiliar with the academic style of professional conferences where reading a paper is considered acceptable.

Hawkins explained the importance of a panel format, “The panel is perfect for presenting diverse opinions . . . blending intellectual and spiritual experiences.”⁸ Scholars would be joined by “someone who had been intimately involved, perhaps in a personal way with that issue in a way to validate and unify women’s experiences.”⁹ This format enabled the conference to address the concerns of women who felt that the sessions overemphasized women with degrees and ignored homemakers. With a

⁶ Carol Lee Hawkins, “Preliminary Evaluation Report: Women’s Conference 1989,” Women’s Conference Collection, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University.

⁷ Hawkins, “Preliminary Evaluation Report.” Education Week is an annual conference offered by BYU to the public. The classes are presented in a lecture style and directed toward a nonacademic audience.

⁸ Judy B. Rollins, “BYU Women’s Conference has something for all,” *Salt Lake Tribune*, 25 Mar 1990, 2W.

⁹ Carol Lee Hawkins, Oral History Interview with Todd J. Hendricks. 5 October 1999, tape in possession of Todd J. Hendricks, Provo, Utah.

diversity of women speaking on each topic, attendees heard different viewpoints. For example, in 1990 the panel “Learning: A Key to Influencing One’s World” featured Barbara Bailey Hales, Specialist in Vocational Equity and Single Parent Displaced Homemakers at BYU; JoAnn E. Hickman, Homemaker, Community and Church Leader; Alice Colton Smith, Chair, Community/Utah State University Committee for Foreign Students and Former Assistant Professor of Sociology; and Helen Candland Stark, Author, Community and Church Leader. Though panel formats had been used when the conference was under the ASBYU, panel presentations increased to balance the formal academic conference style.

Carol Cornwall Madsen, a conference committee member from 1988 to 1991, recalled that, starting at the end of June of each year, the organizers would concentrate on identifying the issues pertinent to LDS women.¹⁰ Until 1990 the committee consisted of approximately ten women (excluding the provost who was an *ex officio* member). The women were all faculty members at BYU. The 27 September 1988 minutes record that the committee discussed the “fears and risks involved in stepping beyond our current ‘comfortable’ mindset towards an understanding of others with different views and beliefs.”¹¹

Partly as a result of LDS Church President Ezra Taft Benson’s talk “To the Mothers of Zion,” and partly due to media influence, a schism had developed between stay-at-home mothers who viewed themselves as following the prophet’s counsel and

¹⁰ Carol Cornwall Madsen, Oral History Interview with Todd J. Hendricks, 14 October 1999, tape in possession of Todd J. Hendricks, Provo, Utah.

¹¹ “Minutes of Women’s Conference Planning Meeting, September 27, 1988,” Women’s Conference Collection, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B Lee Library, Brigham Young University.

Mormon working women.¹² The committee believed that “women’s issues are in reality human issues, issues of relationships, which can be solved only with all of us--women and men--working side by side.”¹³ The committee planned each conference to address issues that LDS women faced in their everyday lives. Women came to the conferences searching for answers to the challenges they encountered as women, wives, and mothers.

President Jeffrey R. Holland expressed his continued commitment to the BYU Women’s Conference and welcomed the attendees at the opening session of what would be his last conference as university president. He declared, “In a very personal way the emergence and development of the Women’s Conference as a strong, significant statement for and about and by women will be one of my most treasured memories.”¹⁴ President Holland believed that the conference filled “a very real need. . . to address what were questions increasingly about women and women’s issues.”¹⁵

A World Flavor

The 1989 conference emphasized the international growth of the church. The conference program reminded women, “If we want others to learn what we have to teach them, we must be open to what they have to teach us” while acknowledging that “open[ing] ourselves to other ideas, to vast fields of knowledge, to other ways of believing, can be very frightening. It means that we must develop humility, acknowledge

¹² Ezra Taft Benson, “To the Mothers in Zion,” in *Come, Listen to a Prophet’s Voice* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1990), 29; and Ruth Rosen, *World Split Wide Open: How the Modern Women’s Movement Changed America* (New York: Viking, 2000), 330.

¹³ Mary Stovall and Carol Cornwall Madsen, ed., *As Women of Faith: Talks Selected from the BYU Women’s Conferences* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1989), vii. This was not unique to LDS women; the media was writing articles on similar issues and “featured stories about women who had seen the light and were staying home to raise the children.” Davis, *Moving the Mountain*, 473.

¹⁴ Carol Lee Hawkins, Wendy Watson and Jolene Merica, “Women’s Conference -- A History,” Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Conferences and Workshops, 1999, copy in author’s possession.

¹⁵ Holland, Interview.

the limits of our understanding, and be willing to change.”¹⁶ The program encouraged sisters to build bridges of understanding to the diversity of the sisterhood in the church.

Hawkins invited “women who changed the world around them by living the gospel in simple ways with no resources including Julia Mavimbela from Soweto, South Africa.”¹⁷ Hawkins discovered Mavimbela in a one-line reference in an ASBYU file.¹⁸ She probed further and discovered a woman with strength and determination who “would not let poverty, civil war, or apartheid stand in her way.”¹⁹ This “unassuming woman” built interracial playgrounds for children and “taught the children to plant seeds, to begin to build again in a country where difficulty and strife had already destroyed too many lives.”²⁰ Mavimbela spoke about teaching children to “grow gardens in small infertile areas.” Her message to the youth of South Africa was “where there was a bloodstain, a beautiful flower must grow.”²¹

In 1990 and 1991 the international speakers, Jutta Baum Busche, Olga Kovarova, and Edith Krause, were from Eastern Europe. Busche’s husband, F. Enzo Busche, was a member of the Church’s First Quorum of Seventy. She had served with him when he was the mission president for the Germany Munich Mission and she served as the first

¹⁶ Brigham Young University Women’s Conference Program, 1989, Brigham Young University, copy in author’s possession.

¹⁷ Carol Lee Hawkins, Oral History Interview with V. Gale Lewis, 4 February 2004, notes in author’s possession.

¹⁸ Hawkins, Interview by Lewis.

¹⁹ Carol Lee Hawkins, “Pilgrimage Retreat, 3 June 1995,” copy in author’s possession.

²⁰ Marie Cornwall and Susan Howe, ed. *Women of Wisdom & Knowledge: Talks Selected from the BYU Women’s Conference* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1990), 6-7.

²¹ “S. African Schoolteacher Will Speak At BYU Women’s Conference April 6,” *Deseret News*, 21 March 1989, B13; and Sheridan H. Hansen, “South African Tells Y. Audience of Fight For Equality and Better Life,” *Deseret News*, 7 April 1989, B7.

matron for the Freiberg Temple located in East Germany.²² Busche related her experience when she and her husband moved to Utah when he became a member of the Seventy.

Intimidated by examples of perfection all around me, I increased my efforts to be like my sisters, and I felt disappointed in myself and even guilty when I didn't run every morning, bake all my own bread, sew my own clothes, or go to the university. I felt that I needed to be like the women among whom I was living, and I felt that I was a failure because I was not able to adapt myself easily to their life-styles.

I could have benefited at this time from the story of a six-year-old who, when asked by a relative, "What do you want to be?" replied, "I think I'll just be myself. I have tried to be like someone else. I have failed each time!" Like this child after repeated failure to be someone else, I finally learned that I should be myself. That is often not easy, however, because our desires to fit in, to compete and impress, or even simply to be approved of, lead us to imitate others and devalue our own backgrounds, our own talents, and our own burdens and challenges. I had to learn not to worry about the behavior of others and their *code* of rules. I had to learn to overcome my anxious feeling that if I didn't conform, I simply did not measure up.²³

Busche's account demonstrates the Mormon superwoman syndrome that she first encountered in Utah. The expectation to be superwoman was not part of the worldwide Mormon women's culture although it existed in the United States and Canada.

Kovarova was from Brno, Czechoslovakia. "When I found Olga, Hawkins recalled, "she could speak about twenty-five words in English. And yet I knew [she] had something to say that we needed to hear . . . [She was] living in very difficult situations but [was] also able to magnify the gospel in a way that had a powerful impact in [her] communit[y] and in the world around [her]." Another international speaker, Edith Krause, was a lifelong Church member whose family lived in Germany during World

²² "Faith Key to Success in 'Journey,'" *Church News*, 14 April 1990, 12.

²³ Jutta Baum Busche, "The Unknown Treasure," in *The Best of Women's Conference: Selected Talks from 25 Years of Women's Conference* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 2000), 70-71.

Wars I and II. She spoke of her “many experiences growing up in one of the early member families of the Church in Germany.”²⁴

The conference exposed attendees to the worldwide diversity of sisters in the Church and the expansion of the religion from an “American church” to a worldwide organization. “This growing commitment to diversity was not entirely welcome. To some extent it was tainted by association with the women’s movement; but more significantly, grass roots interest in diversity came at a time when LDS officials were stressing unity and uniformity,” wrote Jill Mulvay Derr.²⁵ Recognizing that the unknown is often feared and resented, the leaders of the conference sought to show the women that they were part of a larger, diverse sisterhood that was inclusive and accepting. After years of assimilation, the LDS Church was reclaiming its uniqueness while dealing with the realities of an international church.²⁶

Rex Lee

After the 1990 conference, Rex Lee was installed as the new president of BYU, and Bruce C. Hafen became the provost and liaison to the conference chair and committee. Hafen’s wife, Marie, had previously served on the conference committee under Mary Stovall, and Bruce Hafen was a past speaker. In a meeting with the organizers, the provost “expressed deep personal interest in the conference.”²⁷ Later,

²⁴ “Language of Heart, Love and Spirit Touches All,” *Church News*, April 20, 1991, 13; and “LDS Women Behind the Iron Curtain Relate Trials,” *Daily Herald*, April 14, 1991, B 1.

²⁵ Jill Mulvay Derr, “‘Strength in Our Union’: The Making of Mormon Sisterhood,” in *Sisters in Spirit: Women in Historical and Cultural Perspectives*, ed. Maureen Ursenbach Beecher and Lavina Fielding Anderson, with foreward by Jan Shippis, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 194.

²⁶ Armand L. Mauss, *The Angel and the Beehive: the Mormon Struggle with Assimilation* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 98-99.

²⁷ “Minutes of Women’s Conference, 26 September 1989,” Women’s Conference Collection, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University.

Hafen recalled that the success of the conference was due to the fact that it “had increasingly tapped into a need, even a kind of hunger, among LDS women, who wanted the intellectual and spiritual stimulation and the fresh perspectives the conference gave them.”²⁸

Hawkins noticed the differences between the two administrations. The Women’s Conference “was definitely Jeffrey Holland’s conference,” and, while Lee was supportive, the new president did not have ownership to the same degree. The way the two provosts interacted with the committee was also different. Jae Ballif was a supportive but “hands off” leader, whereas Hafen micro-managed.²⁹

In his welcome address for the 1991 conference, President Lee declared that “he would be surprised, even a bit disappointed, if his audience agreed with everything said during the conference.”³⁰ Lee recognized the diversity of the sisters and the reality of bringing such a diverse group together. By letting the women know that he did not expect them to agree with him, Lee let the women know that they could disagree with each other as well. As with other speakers who encouraged acceptance, Lee’s counsel was noted and forgotten.

Co-Sponsor

After the 1990 conference came a momentous change. The First Presidency and the Council of the Twelve, unbeknownst to Hawkins and the conference committee or the General Relief Society presidency, discussed a change in the sponsorship of the conference. It is not known when these discussions began, although Rex Lee and Bruce

²⁸ Bruce C. Hafen, E-mail to Gale Lewis, 27 December 2003, copy in possession of author.

²⁹ Hawkins, Interview by Hendricks.

³⁰ Carol Lee Hawkins, “A Steadfastness in Christ,” in *Women Steadfast in Christ: Talks Selected from the 1991 Women’s Conference Co-sponsored by Brigham Young University and the Relief Society*, ed. Dawn Hall Anderson and Marie Cornwall (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1992), 4.

Hafen are mentioned in a memorandum dated 8 May 1990 regarding the conference. The memo recommended that future conferences be sponsored by the Relief Society and co-sponsored by BYU with the Relief Society having “the lead role.” “However, topics, tone, and participants should be determined by the General Relief Society Presidency and Brigham Young University Administration.”³¹ A memorandum from the General Relief Society President Elaine Jack to Carol Lee Hawkins noted that the final recommendation was that the conference was to be co-sponsored by the Relief Society and BYU.³² By bringing the Relief Society in as a co-sponsor, the conference received tighter scrutiny by Church leaders regarding “topics, tone, and participants.” As a result, the scholarly tone of the conference gradually softened. This change was consistent with the trend in the Church towards correlation and tighter control over the messages being given to members.

The Women’s Conference committee was informed of the change in June when Rex Lee walked into a committee meeting and announced that the Relief Society would cosponsor the conference.³³ Hawkins remembered that the women of the committee, knowing what this would mean to the academic autonomy of the conference, “felt so strongly” about making a commitment to support the Relief Society presidency. “I think there is a real tribute that needs to be paid to that group of BYU women who knowing the reality of what it means to come under church coordination felt so strongly about the

³¹ Priesthood Executive Council, Memorandum to Council of the First Presidency and the Twelve, 8 May 1990, copy in author’s possession. The Relief Society is the women’s organization in the Church. Each ward and stake has a Relief Society president who is assisted by two counselors. There is a General Relief Society president and two counselors who oversee the direction of the worldwide program. They are assisted by a group of women known as the General Board.

³² Elaine Jack, Memorandum to Carol Lee Hawkins, 7 June 1990, copy in author’s possession.

³³ Hawkins, Interview by Lewis.

Relief Society presidency that, in spite of that, giving up their academic autonomy, freedom and that kind of thing, were willing to do it.”³⁴

Hawkins recalled that President Lee indicated to her that Bruce Hafen was the man behind the move.³⁵ Hafen recalled that some of the BYU administration had been involved in “long range strategizing about ways to strengthen BYU’s support for the Church.” In considering women’s issues, one option was to develop a “more complete match between our planners/presenters and audience at Women’s Conference.” Through “informal sources” Hafen found that Latter-day Saint women missed the annual general Relief Society conferences. When the Church canceled the annual meeting in 1975, Church President Spencer W. Kimball promised that the Church would provide the same kind of support and opportunity for enrichment on a local level.³⁶ Hafen also remembered that about that same time there was a discussion among “some members” of the BYU Board of Trustees regarding the model of Women’s Conference being used at ward, stake and multi-stake levels. Hafen described the decision as “a ‘what if’ kind of concept that looked like it might serve multiple needs.” Hafen’s goal was to meet a perceived need of the women in the Church by co-opting an existing BYU program.³⁷

The change in sponsorship brought an additional responsibility to Carol Lee Hawkins. On 4 July 1990 she was called as a member of the Relief Society General Board. This unpaid ecclesiastical calling required additional work and travel beyond the time she was spending on Women’s Conference. While serving in this position she was

³⁴ Hawkins, Interview by Hendricks.

³⁵ Hawkins, Interview by Lewis.

³⁶ Hafen, E-mail. See Jill Mulvay Derr, Janath Russell Cannon and Maureen Ursenbach Beecher, *Women of Covenant: The Story of Relief Society* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1992), 378-379, regarding the cancellation of the annual general Relief Society conferences.

³⁷ Hafen, E-mail.

in charge of such major projects as the Relief Society's sesquicentennial celebration and literacy program.³⁸

After 1990, the conference committee was made up of three Relief Society board members and five BYU community members. Carol Cornwall Madsen stated that one of the most rewarding aspects of serving on the committee was working with the other women.³⁹ The committee met often with the General Relief Society presidency, in addition to Hawkins's interaction with the Relief Society general board. Frequent communication with President Jack gave Hawkins additional insight into the issues facing the women of the Church and the programs, such as the literacy project, already in place to meet those needs.

Feedback

Women did not wait for the conference to begin to express their opinions regarding the conference content. Each year a preliminary schedule of speakers was sent with the registration materials. In 1990, Hawkins and President Rex Lee received letters and calls prior to the conference regarding the seminar, "A Growing Concern: Child Care." The letters protested that "all the panel members are pro-daycare legislation" and supported the pending Act For Better Childcare which attempted to provide federal subsidies for child care programs. The authors requested a panel that reflected both sides of the issue.⁴⁰ The issue was highly political and reminiscent of the debate regarding childcare at the Utah state meeting for the International Year of Women. One of the

³⁸ Hawkins, "Pilgrimage Retreat," and Hawkins, Interview by Lewis.

³⁹ Madsen, Interview by Hendricks.

⁴⁰ Shirley Whitlock, Letter to Carolee [sic] Hawkins, 19 March 1990, copy in author's possession; Karen S. Johnson, Letter to Carol Lee Hawkins, 20 March 1990, copy in author's possession; Bruce J. Christensen, Letter to Carol Lee Hawkins, 20 March 1990, copy in author's possession; Lauri Updike, Letter to Rex Lee, 23 March 1990, copy in author's possession.

letters came from Shirley Whitlock, who was the president of the Arizona chapter of the Eagle Forum. Eagle Forum was founded in 1976 by Phyllis Schafley, a “powerful voice” for feminist opposition.⁴¹ Another letter came from Karen S. Johnson who was also a member of Arizona’s Eagle Forum and since 1997 has been an Arizona State senator.⁴²

Referring to President Benson’s counsel for mothers to stay in the home, one letter stated, “It seems to me that this class at the Lord’s University is in direct opposition to that advice to women. [sic] and MAY give many young women the idea that the church has changed its stand. This would be a real travesty for motherhood in our beloved church.”⁴³ Another declared, “Our prophets have repeatedly warned us against government usurpation of our own personal and family responsibilities and rights. And yet, here is our Church sponsored, tithing supported college supporting just the opposite!”⁴⁴ Many of the letters were copied to members of the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve.

Hawkins sent a memo to the members of the Child Care panel. She told them that she felt the protesters were “prejudging the panelists” and that she “felt sure that these panelists would examine the issues dealing with the full time homemaker in addition to other dimensions of the subject.” She requested that questions for the Question/Answer period be submitted in writing to avoid the prospect of the audience taking over the microphone. She commended the panel for their commitment to “addressing some hard

⁴¹ Bradley, *Pedestals and Podiums*, 65, 208.

⁴² Arizona State Legislature, “Karen Johnson,” *Arizona State Legislature*, <http://www.azleg.state.az.us/MembersPage.asp?MemberID=90#bio> (Accessed 7 February 2006).

⁴³ Mrs. Alyn Olson, Letter to Rex Lee, 31 March 1990, copy in author’s possession.

⁴⁴ Cheryl Young, Letter to Carol Lee Hawkins, 27 March 1990, copy in author’s possession.

questions facing our society” and asked their forbearance as “many in our audience are still attempting to struggle with the ‘awareness’ stage of the child care issue.”⁴⁵

In a letter to the protesters, Hawkins explained, “Each year the planning committee meets to determine some of the individual challenges Mormon women are facing as well as some of the broad societal issues facing our nation and the world in general.” She explained that she had spoken with several of the panelists and the panel moderator and that they were “shocked” that the protesters felt they were advocates of government financing and regulation of child care. Hawkins said, “We seek no closure or single solution. We advocate no political point of view or piece of legislation. Rather we seek greater understanding and compassion as we explore the extremely complex problems facing women and men in our larger society.”⁴⁶ The conference committee did not seek to set a single standard or position for the women of the Church. Rather, they sought to expose women to the issues and provide information for the women to make the choices that fit their individual circumstances.

Many committee members expressed disappointment that one letter to Church headquarters in Salt Lake about “this person’s talk or this comment shouldn’t have been made on BYU campus” would receive attention when there were hundreds of positive comments about the same talk. Madsen recalled that President Lee spoke on the issue to the participants in his welcoming address and “challenged the women to open their minds, hearts and spirits” and that the things which were presented did not have to be accepted. He told the women that the experience “might cause them to enlarge their own thinking and realize the diversity of experience in women.”⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Carol Lee Hawkins, Memo to Members, Child Care Panel, 21 March 1990, copy in author’s possession.

⁴⁶ Carol Lee Hawkins, draft response, no date, copy in author’s possession.

⁴⁷ Madsen, Interview by Hendricks.

In her summary report, Hawkins stated that the 1990 conference “stressed the blending of intellect, faith and the arts.” She noted that “from numerous reports, we learned that most participants felt we provided ‘something for everybody.’”⁴⁸ Hawkins observed, “Several of the programs and conferences directed specifically to women have been eliminated in this period of Church consolidation at the very time that the wider American society is focusing on the role and status of women.”⁴⁹ Many programs within the Church had been combined and the curriculum standardized to meet the needs of a the rapidly growing church.⁵⁰ During this time of consolidation, according to Hawkins, the conference “blossomed.” She noted that based on “the huge numbers the conference attracts, there exists a need for such a conference at this challenging and dynamic time.”⁵¹ Church members were expected to use the basic guidelines set by the Church and tailor them to their individual needs. The conference was a source of information for many sisters that helped them to meet this expectation.

In her 1991 seminar “Real Women,” BYU professor of political science and former associate director of the BYU Women’s Research Institute, Donna Lee Bowen responded to the comment from a participant in 1987 that asserted “we want to hear from ‘real women’ not from all these M.A.s and Ph.D.s--women with letters after their names.”⁵² She related that she had shared a personal part of her life in a presentation that

⁴⁸ Carol Lee Hawkins, “Summary Report, 1990,” BYU Women’s Conference. copy in author’s possession.

⁴⁹ Hawkins, “Summary Report, 1990.”

⁵⁰ For a history of correlation and its effects on the Relief Society, see Derr, Cannon and Beecher, *Women of Covenant*, 330-336, 340-346.

⁵¹ Hawkins, “Summary Report, 1990.”

⁵² Donna Lee Bowen, “Real Women,” in *Women Steadfast in Christ: Talks Selected from the 1991 Women’s Conference Co-sponsored by Brigham Young University and the Relief Society*, ed. Dawn Hall Anderson and Marie Cornwall (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company), 268.

year. “My heart was pierced, for I had exposed myself in my talk. I had taken a chance and trusted the audience with my sorrow and the faith that pulled me through. Did the letters after my name . . . mean that I was not a real woman?”⁵³ Hawkins was amazed at how “revealing many of these speakers were . . . We never ask[ed] people to speak particularly in such a personal voice. I think they felt safe within the forum and also desirous of building a sisterhood so that they were willing to risk an enormous amount.”⁵⁴ The conference allowed women, both speakers and participants, to share in a way that many did not experience in a Church setting. Perhaps this freedom came from the anonymity of being in a group of mostly unknown women, or it may have resulted from the atmosphere of the conference itself. Women were given the opportunity to reach beyond themselves and share in the sisterhood of a diverse group of women although clearly not all were comfortable with that opportunity.

Others remarked on the effect of adding the Relief Society as cosponsor. One attendee confessed, “I was nervously expecting a collection of sweet spirit relief society self-improvement lessons. I gratefully encountered stimulating presentations of statements, opinions, questions, suggestions, and discussions.”⁵⁵ “I feared that the Relief Society’s involvement in the conference would diminish the range of topics covered and the honesty with which they were addressed. I am delighted to be proved wrong,” expressed another attendee.⁵⁶ “I was particularly pleased to discover that so many LDS women share so many of my views,” wrote one woman. She said, “I have felt alone and

⁵³ Bowen, “Real Women,” 269.

⁵⁴ Hendricks, Hawkins, Interview.

⁵⁵ Carol Lee Hawkins, “Conference Summary Report, 1991,” Women’s Conference collection, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University.

⁵⁶ Hawkins, “Conference Summary Report, 1991.”

uncertain in my concerns, and it was comforting to find others with similar feelings, and to hear the women leaders of the church address these issues.”⁵⁷

The conference affected some women in ways that were not foreseeable. A participant from Yakima, Washington, wrote on her conference evaluation that she “had been thinking about leaving the Church, but after attending the opening session, I had a renewed commitment to remain in the Church and prepare myself for going to the temple.”⁵⁸ Another stated that she had been inactive and just begun to attend Church again. She said the “conference helped one to know that there is a place for me, within the Church. I do belong!”⁵⁹ Some who were struggling found a place for themselves in the Church through the conference.

Several women commented on the balance between professional and nonprofessional women as speakers and the topics covered. “There are so many issues that effect [sic] all of us LDS women in spite of all of our differences,” said one. She urged conference organizers to “please continue to have thought-provoking, challenging classes as well as faith building ones.”⁶⁰ “I like what I see as a careful balance between (1) a Church meeting and (2) a professional/academic conference,” wrote another attendee.⁶¹ This balance shifted as the Relief Society became more involved with the conference, however.

Reactions to the conferences were varied and often opposite. One woman stated that the conference “had an exceptionally good balance between presenters with

⁵⁷ Shannon Moore, Letter to Carol Lee Hawkins, 10 June 1991, copy in possession of author.

⁵⁸ Hawkins, “Conference Summary Report, 1991.”

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

credentials and those without.”⁶² Another expressed her desire to “hear from more ‘common’ women.”⁶³ The opposite sentiment was expressed when one woman said, “I can appreciate the wish for ‘average’ sisters to be represented on panels” but that the result was a “very average reiteration of their issues without wise and intelligent suggestions different from that one could easily reason out for herself.”⁶⁴ “As a homemaker, I felt validated and did not feel that my chosen role was diminished in any way. My sisters who work outside the home also felt accepted and valued.”⁶⁵ From another participant, “When Women’s Conference comes around, it seems my oil lamp is just about empty.” She said that coming to the conference refilled her lamp, and “I feel I can conquer all that life hands me when I get home.”⁶⁶ The conference, one woman wrote, “has made me so very proud to be a member of a church that has so many wonderful women of such diverse backgrounds. I left recognizing my own worth and the value of setting my own priorities.”⁶⁷

Subtle Changes

While the conference itself remained consistent with past years, the printed program described the presenters in a new style. Prior to 1993, the program listed a speaker’s degrees, occupation and perhaps any notable works published in the biography. The 1993 purse-size conference program, however, provided self-descriptions from the

⁶² “Voices from the 1993 BYU/Relief Society Women’s Conference,” *Exponent II* 18, no. 3, (1993): 5.

⁶³ “Voices from the 1993 BYU/Relief Society Women’s Conference,” 5.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Diane Cahoon, Letter to Women’s Conference, 5 May 1993, copy in author’s possession.

⁶⁶ “Voices from the 1993 BYU/Relief Society Women’s Conference,” 5.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

program presenters. These descriptions focused more on personal than professional achievements. The full-size program for the same year used the format used in previous years.

For example, a popular speaker, member of the Relief Society General Board, and a former director of training at the LDS Missionary Training Center, Mary Ellen Edmunds' self-description read, "In pursuit of happiness, simplicity, peace, good humor, getting organized, becoming a child, and helping to establish Zion." Her full-size program bio read "Director of Training, Missionary Training Center; B.S.N., Brigham Young University; Member, General Relief Society Board."⁶⁸ The following year her bio followed the full-sized format of the year before but in 1995 her bio read "Director of Training, MTC; member, Relief Society General Board; BS in nursing; homemaker; loves life, family, people and learning."⁶⁹ By 1996 the biographies became a blend of the two styles. Women wanted recognition that homemaker and mother were valuable careers. A presenter did not have to feel that she was "just a mother."

Donna Lee Bowen recalled the hours spent on the program blurbs that described the presenters. She noted, "it is a difficult problem to furnish the necessary information and yet not alienate those who read it."⁷⁰ Some women wanted presenters with academic credentials, others wanted those with life experience. Committee members wanted to give the participants the information that would allow them to make decisions on which seminars to attend. By including all the aspects of a woman's life, attendees were more ready to accept presenters with professional experience and degrees.

⁶⁸ Women's Conference: Sponsored by Brigham Young University and The Relief Society. Program. 1993, copy in author's possession.

⁶⁹ Women's Conference: Sponsored by Brigham Young University and The Relief Society. Program. 1995, copy in author's possession.

⁷⁰ Bowen, "Real Women," in *Women Steadfast in Christ*, 272.

Who Speaks?

Controversy stained the conference in 1993. As the conference committee met to decide on a theme and focus for the upcoming conference, they chose to explore ordinary women doing extraordinary things. LDS Church member Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, winner of the Pulitzer Prize and a past speaker at the conference, was proposed as a keynote speaker. Ulrich's book, *A Midwife's Tale*, examined the diary of a midwife that historians had ignored for centuries.⁷¹ In uncovering Martha Ballard's life story, Ulrich introduced readers to the richness of everyday life in early America.

For reasons never explained by BYU, Ulrich was not allowed to speak at the conference. In February the incident was leaked to the *Salt Lake Tribune* and quickly spread across the United States.⁷² The article pointed out that the BYU Board of Trustees had made the decision while its two female members, Elaine Jack and General Young Women President Jeanette Hales, were absent. BYU sociologist Marie Cornwall noted that due to the conference's popularity, the board had "exerted more and more control over its content and form . . . When they don't provide a reason, it shows a lack of respect to those of us who are trying to plan such events . . . It seems they don't value women scholars and that goes to the heart of what we are."⁷³ Former chair Mary Stovall Richards added, "The conference was an important contribution to the lives of Mormon women because we addressed women's issues in an atmosphere that combined

⁷¹ Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *A Midwife's Tale: The Life of Martha Ballard, Based on Her Diary, 1875 - 1812* (New York: Knopf, 1990).

⁷² Peggy Fletcher Stack, "LDS Pulitzer Prize Winner Puzzled by Rejection as Speaker at BYU," *Salt Lake Tribune*, 6 Feb 1993, A7.

⁷³ Stack, "LDS Pulitzer Prize Winner Puzzled by Rejection as Speaker at BYU."

scholarship and faith. . . . It would be a shame if one of those components was neglected.”⁷⁴

A BYU press statement explained the “process is private and is certainly not intended to publicly hurt any individual or scholar who is not chosen for one particular forum or event.”⁷⁵ BYU administration’s refusal to explain led many to contend that the university was stifling women scholars or conveyed the impression that Ulrich’s standing in the Church was, in some way, “questionable.”⁷⁶ BYU Director of Public Communications and Assistant Advancement Vice President Margaret Smoot responded to one letter of concern and corrected “a misperception.” She declared that Ulrich had “never [been] ‘uninvited’ to speak.” Ulrich’s name had been “put forward, as are all names, as a potential speaker.” She continued, “The administration, which retains a right of a speaker selection process, determined to chose [sic] another individual as keynote speaker for this conference. A formal invitation was never extended to Laurel.” Smoot noted, “It would be beneficial in the future if the selection process could be viewed by members of the Church and others as discretionary rather than disciplinary.”⁷⁷

Ulrich was gracious in her response to the media storm and told journalists that she was “not upset or outraged--just a little puzzled.”⁷⁸ In 1995 Ulrich became the first female on the tenured faculty in the American division of the history department at Harvard. Ulrich recalled that the first question an interviewer from the school

⁷⁴Stack, “LDS Pulitzer Prize Winner Puzzled by Rejection as Speaker at BYU.”

⁷⁵ Margaret Smoot, Press Release by Brigham Young University regarding Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, undated, copy in author’s possession.

⁷⁶ Denise Ann Tucker, Letter to Carol Lee Hawkins, 21 May 1993, copy in author’s possession.

⁷⁷ Margaret Smooth, Letter to Dr. Denise Ann Tucker, 7 June 1993, copy in author’s possession.

⁷⁸ Stack, “LDS Pulitzer Prize Winner Puzzled by Rejection as Speaker at BYU,” and “Mormon Pulitzer Prize Winner Turned Down as BYU Speaker,” *Daily Herald*, 7 February 1993, A5.

newspaper, *The Harvard Crimson*, asked was about the incident with the BYU Women's Conference. Ulrich stated that the perception was that "my church says I'm not worthy and people want to know why."⁷⁹ Mormon historian Jan Shipps offered her perspective, "Ulrich's personal life is almost certainly not the reason she was not invited to speak." She suggested, "A much more plausible explanation is that the Church's First Presidency and Council of the Twelve, who serve as university trustees, didn't want her to talk to her sisters about Mormon women and history from a platform that implied the blessing of LDS priesthood."⁸⁰ There is a common perception that what is said at BYU has the blessing and consent of the Church leadership in Salt Lake. Shipps noted, "The decision of the Brethren is also understandable—even sensible from their perspective. They were confronted with acceding to or disapproving the planning committee's proposal to invite not Sister Ulrich, faithful feminist Mormon, but Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, historian."⁸¹

The conference committee met with university officials and Henry B. Eyring, the Church Commissioner of Education and a member of the First Quorum of the Seventy, in a "meeting designed to smooth the controversy." The organizers sought "direction for submitting names in the future." Eyring described "the nature of authority. He told a

⁷⁹ Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, Oral History Interview with Gale Lewis, 10 March 2003, notes in author's possession.

⁸⁰ Jan Shipps, "Dangerous History: Laurel Ulrich and her Mormon Sisters," *The Christian Century* 110 no. 29 (20 October 1993): 1012. In addition to *A Midwife's Tale*, Ulrich written on Mormon women and history. "The Significance of Trivia," *Journal of Mormon History* 19 (Spring 1993): 52-66. Also published separately as 1992 Juanita Brooks Lecture, Dixie College, St. George, Utah; "Fictional Sisters," in *Mormon Sisters: Women in Early Utah*, ed. Claudia L. Bushman (Cambridge, Mass: Emmeline Press, 1976), 241-266; "And Woe Unto Them That Are With Child in Those Days," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 6, no. 2 (Summer 1971): 41-46; "Counseling the Brethren," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 9, no. 2 (Summer 1974): 68-70; "A Little Bit of Heaven," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 9, no. 3 (Autumn 1974): 63-65; "Poor Mother," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 10, no. 1 (Spring 1975-1976): 75-76; "The Pink Dialogue and Beyond," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 14, no. 4 (Winter 1981): 28-39; "Family Scriptures," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 20, no. 2 (Summer 1987): 119-127; and "Border Crossings," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 27, no. 2 (Summer 1994): 1-7.

⁸¹ Shipps, "Dangerous History: Laurel Ulrich and her Mormon Sisters," 1015.

story about taking a rock to a church leader and asking if that is the rock the leader wanted. Despite constant inspiration from God, the leader may not know why it's not the right rock." Eyring told them, "So you go back and find another one," saying that "he [had] learned over the years to anticipate the 'right rock' without being told."⁸² Bruce Hafen later told the conference committee members, "One of these days we might find a way to explore, just among ourselves, why this rock wasn't the right one this year."⁸³ This left committee members to continue to use their own judgment in selecting speakers, hoping that they had found the "right rock." Eyring's story frustrated several of those present but one aspect of his message was clear. The Church through the Board of Trustees has final approval regarding the speakers and topics of the BYU Women's Conference. In conjunction with bringing the Relief Society in as co-sponsor, this demonstrated the tighter control Church leaders exerted on the messages LDS women were hearing in Church-sponsored settings.

The value of the conference to women, as a method by which scholars could examine issues, became evident by the response to the Ulrich incident. One reaction was the organization of a counter conference. "Silences and Spaces: An Enhanced Women's Conference" was held on Wednesday prior to the start of the 1993 BYU event. Lavina Fielding Anderson, LDS historian, past editor of *Ensign* and an organizer of the conference, refuted that notion, "It's a complementary conference, not an alternative one." Organizers cited a list of concerns that prompted the event: the Ulrich situation; "unauthorized" modification of a general conference talk by Aileen Clyde, a member of the General Relief Society presidency; and a statement by President Gordon B. Hinckley

⁸² Peggy Fletcher Stack, "Changes to Greet BYU Women's Conference," *Salt Lake Tribune*, 4 December 1993, D2.

⁸³ Bruce Hafen, Memorandum to Women's Conference Committee Members, 20 March 1993, copy in author's possession.

that praying to “God the Mother . . . was the ‘small beginnings of apostasy.’”⁸⁴ Reacting to changes in the conference, LDS women turned outside Church-sponsored settings to address issues that were not being discussed at the BYU Women’s Conference.

This complimentary or competing conference was not without its own controversy. Women who had initially supported the “Silences and Spaces” conference withdrew when the conference was put under the auspices of the Mormon Women’s Forum which “politicized” the conference.⁸⁵ One history of BYU argues that the women, who were BYU faculty and students, had “been warned that their participation could bring repercussions from the university.”⁸⁶ Controversy at BYU regarding the Women’s Conference had not ended. BYU and the Church’s reaction to the contention was to remove the chair who was seen as “a bridge builder among factions.”⁸⁷

The Bridge Is Broken

The amount of work required to organize a conference of this size was a full-time job. Hawkins’ contract was for 20 hours a week during the academic school year. She noted that the actual time “required to conceptualize and administer the conference was almost double that.” Hawkins pointed out that her time commitment was consistent with the time spent by Stovall when she was chair. “It is doubtful,” Hawkins wrote in her conference summary report in 1990, that she would be able to “continue indefinitely to

⁸⁴ Peter Scarlet, “Does LDS Church Stifle Women? Conference Will Explore Issue, LDS Women Plan ‘Enhanced’ Conference, Organizers Say Women Need Stronger Voices in the Mormon Church,” *Salt Lake Tribune*, 24 April 1993, A8. The published version of Clyde’s address omitted her reference to the partnership of men and women.

⁸⁵ Scarlet, “Does LDS Church Stifle Women?”

⁸⁶ Bryan Waterman and Brian Kagel, *The Lord’s University: Freedom and Authority at BYU* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1998), 307.

⁸⁷ Peggy Fletcher Stack, “BYU’s Dismissal of ‘Moderate’ Troubles Women,” *Salt Lake Tribune* (17 July 1993), D1.

donate such additional time and energy.” Hawkins advised that additional funding be secured and suggested the conference “continue with the existing chair or move to faculty appointment.”⁸⁸ There is no record of a response to her concerns or suggestions.

Hawkins received a memorandum from Hafen congratulating her on the success of the 1992 conference. He related that, in a meeting with the Priesthood Executive Council (which consists of the First Presidency and Twelve Apostles) and Elaine Jack, there had been no complaints about the recent conference. He called it “downright incredible” and related it to the equivalent of “pitching a no-hitter in the championship game of the World Series!” He commended her work stating, “Your own effort and sensitivity had more to do with that outcome than any other single factor, save the blessings of heaven.” Hafen noted, “Elaine [Jack] shares my assessment” and expressed the “hope that you will see fit to continue next year as the conference chair.”⁸⁹

The following year, for family reasons, Carol Lee Hawkins sought a commitment from the university regarding her continued employment after the 1993 conference. Recognizing that her contract was based on a yearly renewal, she approached Bruce Hafen to ascertain whether her contract was going to be renewed. She received praise for her work and assurance that all was well.⁹⁰ Hafen told Hawkins, “1993 was ‘the best BYU women’s conference we’ve ever had.’”⁹¹

It came as a surprise to Hawkins, as well as those familiar with the conference, when “Mormon Church leaders and Brigham Young University administrators”

⁸⁸ Hawkins, “Summary Report, 1990.”

⁸⁹ Bruce C. Hafen, Memorandum to Carol Lee Hawkins, 15 June 1992, copy in author’s possession.

⁹⁰ Hawkins, Interview by Lewis.

⁹¹ Bruce C. Hafen, Memorandum to Carol Lee Hawkins, 1 July 1993, copy in author’s possession.

announced in July 1993 that the position of chair would become a rotating faculty appointment. Although the entire committee was released, the media focused on Hawkins' "termination." Rex Lee reportedly "bristle[d] at the term 'firing,'" stating that he was "astounded by this word." He went on to say, "This was a good time to rotate the position as we usually do with committee chair appointments." Referring to another change at the university, he asserted that Hawkins' removal "was 'no more an indication of anti-women or anti-feminist sentiments than rotating our athletic director has anything to do with Glen Tuckett's sex.'" While Lee praised Hawkins and stated that the university would "find her a position on campus," Hawkins related that nothing was offered to her, and she had to "pound the pavement" before securing another university position.⁹² The conference's primary bridge builder was gone, and there was concern that her dismissal would threaten "the diversity of future conferences."⁹³

According to the *Salt Lake Tribune*, this decision "stunned" LDS women "across the political spectrum." Gail Houston, a BYU English professor, said, "I was shocked by the action against Carol Lee and amazed that the BYU administrators cannot see 'the repercussions of this decision for women.'" In protest, Martha Nibley Beck, a sociology professor at BYU, submitted her resignation. Beck acknowledged that she had not experienced any gender discrimination but declared, "She can longer accomplish her goals . . . 'to understand and improve the quality of Mormon women's lives.'"⁹⁴ The major repercussion of Hawkins replacement has been a conference that is less focused on scholarly analysis of women's issues and one increasingly emphasizing gospel fundamentals.

⁹² Stack, "BYU's Dismissal of 'Moderate' Troubles Women;" and Hawkins, Interview by Lewis.

⁹³ Stack, "BYU's Dismissal of 'Moderate' Troubles Women."

⁹⁴ Stack, "BYU's Dismissal of 'Moderate' Troubles Women."

Hawkins dismissal added to the list of feminist concerns on the BYU campus. The week prior to the announcement, a “group of feminists” met with Bruce Hafen in a three-hour meeting “to explain their concerns about women’s issues.”⁹⁵ The group discussed items such as the termination of English professor Cecilia Farr and the treatment of Claudia Bushman, a Columbia University historian who spoke at a faculty seminar along with her husband, Richard Bushman, also of Columbia University. The Honors Program was not permitted to advertise Claudia as a speaker although Richard was advertised. Hawkins replacement reinforced perceived discriminations against women by BYU.

A group of eighteen professors, male and female, “who sympathize with women and women’s issues” submitted an editorial to the *Salt Lake Tribune* outlining the “institutional circumstances and actions” which “cause us to question the university’s commitment to the feminist goals,” which they defined using the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*’s definition of feminism. “Feminism is the philosophical belief that advocates the equality of women and men and seeks to remove inequities and to redress injustices against women.”⁹⁶ This action, combined with the Ulrich and Bushman incidents, “appears to us to be part of a pattern of silencing women, particularly women intellectuals.” The editorial presented a list of issues such as: the percentage of women faculty and administrators; that candidates for assistant professorship, both men and women, over the previous three years had been questioned “closely and at length about their views on feminism;” and that “[f]eminist professors seeking rank advancement have

⁹⁵ Stack, “BYU’s Dismissal of ‘Moderate’ Troubles Women.”

⁹⁶ Mary Stovall Richards, “Feminism,” in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, Volume 2, ed. Daniel H. Ludlow (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1992), 506-507.

been chastised for ‘politicizing the classroom.’⁹⁷ Hawkins’ termination, following in the wake of the Ulrich incident, caused many to voice their concerns about BYU’s position regarding women. The changes in the Women’s Conference displayed a backlash that, as historian Ruth Rosen noted, “in fact, reflected a society deeply divided and disturbed by rapid changes in men’s and women’s lives, at home and at work.”⁹⁸

New Leadership

In fall 1993, BYU appointed Jeanne Bryan Inouye, a homemaker, 1986 conference committee member, and former member of the Relief Society General Board, to chair the conference. Inouye was not a BYU faculty member although her husband was a professor. The position became a rotating appointment made by the General Relief Society president and the BYU president. No longer a paid position, the chair could be replaced without the controversy surrounding Hawkins’ dismissal. Bonnie Parkin, a current member of the Relief Society General Board, was the only former committee member asked to return.⁹⁹

From 1989 to 1993, the BYU Women’s Conference experienced many anguishing moments and a backlash that resulted in great change. Despite Carol Lee Hawkins’ emphasis on the growing international nature of the Church, throughout the period, women continued to struggle to share in the sisterhood. The sponsorship of the conference broadened to include the Relief Society. As a result, the scrutiny of Church

⁹⁷ Guest Editorial, signed by 18 Brigham Young University professors: Scott Abbott, John S. Bennion, Grant Boswell, Martha S. Bradley, William S. Davis, James B. Duke, Eugene England, Cecilia Konchar Farr, Gail Turley Houston, Susan Elizabeth Howe, Bruce Jorgensen, David C. Knowlton, Bonnie Mitchell, Tome-Ann Roberts, Samuel R. Rushforth, Brandie Siegfried, Darrell K. Spence and Lawrence A. Young, “Is BYU Anti-Feminist? Profs Say Yes,” *Salt Lake Tribune*, 23 July 1993, A11.

⁹⁸ Rosen, *The World Split Open*, 331.

⁹⁹ Stack, “Changes to Greet BYU Women’s Conference;” and “New Chairwoman is Appointed for the Women’s Conference at BYU,” *Church News*, 13 November 1993, 5.

leaders over the content of the conference increased. The position of chair went from part-time employee to rotating appointment. The conference was on the road to a new type of administration and a more conservative conference.

CHAPTER FOUR

CHANGING EMPHASIS

The BYU Women's Conference sought to "provide all women an opportunity to celebrate sisterhood."¹ The conference was created by women students at BYU, then taken over by the BYU President's office and placed under the Women's Research Institute, and ultimately cosponsored by BYU and the Relief Society. The changes in administration reflected the changing emphasis of the conference. With the addition of the Relief Society as a sponsor, the emphasis of the conference changed from a scholarly conference to a meeting emphasizing LDS fundamentals of family and gospel principles in a growing international church.

Women responded to the change. The popularity of the BYU Women's Conference grew each year and the number of attendees increased annually. The conference exploded in size and scope from 1994 to 2001. Attendance rose from 6,500 in 1993 to over 20,000 in 2001 for the two-day event.² In contrast, the 2003 Education Week drew 22,000 participants.³

¹ *The Balm of Gilead: Women's Stories of Finding Peace* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1997), back flyleaf.

² Women's Conference: Sponsored by Brigham Young University and The Relief Society, Program. 1999, Copy in author's possession.

³ "Visitors feed \$4 million into local economy," *The Daily Universe*, 20 August 2003, 1. Campus Education Week is an adult continuing education program in the United States that has operated since 1922. Classes are held on the BYU campus on subjects such as "education, religion, marriage, family relations, health, history, genealogy, science, youth interests, and many other areas. The program is designed primarily for adults, although anyone age 14 and over may attend. It is believed to be the largest continuing education program of its type." Department of Continuing Education, "Frequently Asked Questions," Campus Education Week, <http://ce.byu.edu/ed/edweek/intro.cfm> (Accessed January 31, 2005).

In 1999, the *Salt Lake Tribune* reported on the changes in the conference over the years. Calling the conference “a sort of combination General Conference and BYU Education Week for Mormon women,” the article charged that “sermons replaced debates, women church leaders supplanted faculty, and religious language and practical advice superseded academic style.” When asked about the lack of feminist discussion, Wendy Watson, the chair for 1999 and 2000 and BYU Marriage and Family Therapy professor, commented, “much of what is offered in the name of feminism has worked against women.” BYU sociologist Marie Cornwall noted that the women’s conference was “less about discussing social issues than about ‘creating a sense of community among LDS women.’” The author pointed out that the conference was not “strictly religious or naive about the stresses women face.” Cornwall said, “This is where women bring together different perspectives and experiences and analyze them. We may disagree but because we care about the issues, we want to confront them.”⁴

The conference is one avenue “to preserve a unique Mormon identity in the face of too much assimilation of mainstream American values.”⁵ Sociologist Arnaud Mauss asserted that over the latter half of the twentieth century “an emerging generation of Church leaders . . . became increasingly uncomfortable with the assimilation of Mormons and determined to resist that assimilation through a deliberate policy of retrenchment.”⁶ Mauss contends that church leaders used the Church Educational System to accomplish

Education Week and the BYU Women’s Conference have similar formats. Women’s Conference has consistently tried to avoid the appearance of a “Women’s Education Week.”

⁴ Peggy Fletcher Stack, “BYU Conference Is Huge Draw For LDS Women: Event has evolved from its academic beginnings, Conference Grows More Popular, Less Academic,” *Salt Lake Tribune*, 8 May 1999, C1.

⁵ Bryan Waterman and Brian Kagel, *The Lord’s University: Freedom and Authority at BYU* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1998), 12.

⁶ Arnaud Mauss, *The Angel and the Beehive: the Mormon Struggle with Assimilation* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 99.

this goal. The CES programs are “the Mormon identity-maintenance institutions . . . a means of asserting one’s Mormon identity to one’s peers, both Mormon and non-Mormon.”⁷ BYU is one of the anchors of the CES system. Bryan Waterman and Brian Kagel, BYU historians, argued that “in this retrenchment effort the church and BYU have, paradoxically joined a mainstream movement in a culturally conservative backlash, against the perceived excesses of modern democratic society.”⁸ With BYU and the Relief Society as sponsors, the Women’s Conference was an ideal medium to emphasize the uniqueness of Mormon identity.

Overview of Leadership

The position of chair changed in 1994 from a paid position to a rotating appointment. With one exception the chair rotated every two years. Conferences and Workshops program administrator for the conference Jolene Merica stated, “The largest strength that the conference has is that the chair changes.” Merica believes that the “changes allow for a vivacity and an energy because there is always a shift in focus or direction.”⁹ Each of the chairs brought different strengths and talents to the position.

A homemaker with a law degree, Jeanne Bryan Inouye, was appointed chair for the 1994 and 1995 conferences. Even though she had an advanced degree, the fact that she had been on the Board and a homemaker at the time allowed some of the furor that had happened in the past years to die down. Inouye saw the position as “an assignment like a new Bishop.”¹⁰

⁷ Mauss, *The angel and the beehive*, 95.

⁸ Waterman and Kagel, *The Lord’s University*, 12-13.

⁹ Jolene Merica, Oral History Interview with V. Gale Lewis, 31 January 2004, tape in author’s possession.

¹⁰ Jeanne Inouye, Oral History Interview with V. Gale Lewis, 18 December 2003, notes in author’s possession.

The practice of using BYU faculty as rotating chair began with Kathy Pullins, an assistant dean of BYU's J. Reuben Clark Law School. She served for three years to assist in the transition to a new BYU president, Merrill J. Bateman, in 1996 and a new General Relief Society presidency in 1998. Pullins said that about a year prior to Bruce Hafen's asking her to chair the conference, she felt that she needed to get her life in order. When she received a request from her Bishop to serve as the Relief Society president of her ward three months later, she thought she understood the prompting. During the priesthood blessing she received when she was formally given the calling, she was told that the calling as Relief Society president was a preparation for another work God had for her. When Hafen asked Pullins to be the chair, he told her that he needed a bridge builder and mediator to complete the transition to the rotating chair.¹¹ Merica observed that Pullins arrived at a "balance . . . between a little more intellectual content and a little more spiritual . . . Her interaction with her committee was very synergistic. She was able to meet the needs of the diversity of women who came."¹² Former chair Carol Lee Hawkins had been seen as a bridge builder between the professional presenters and the non-professional attendees. The conference needed another bridge builder as the conference focused more on gospel principles.

Pullins recalled that chairing the conference was "an amazing blessing, an incredible burden and a full time job." She said that law school had been great training because "it taught me to eliminate sleep."¹³ Pullins related one comical manifestation of the weight of her responsibility. After being "outvoted" by the conference committee, Pullins gave the 1998 Friday morning devotional. Those knowing Pullins knew her to be

¹¹ Kathy D. Pullins, Oral History interview with Gale Lewis, 9 January 2004, notes in author's possession.

¹² Merica, Interview.

¹³ Pullins, Interview.

very conscious about her professional appearance, yet her schedule was so packed that a friend bought her a new dress for the occasion. Then after the prayer meeting, just before the devotional started, two women (Pullins recalled one was Virginia Pearce) alerted her of an anomaly very apparent to those who knew her--she had forgotten to put on her mascara that morning.¹⁴ Her mind had been so preoccupied with the address to the women in the Marriott Center that morning that she forgot to finish her morning routine.

Wendy L. Watson, professor of Marriage and Family Therapy, chaired the 1999 and 2000 conferences. Merica recalled, “Wendy was a very innovative chair. She had a lot of ideas. She was a risk taker and it was new.”¹⁵ A newspaper article observed, “Watson sees an academic vs. religious approach as a false dichotomy. ‘I don’t draw a distinction between scholarship and spirituality . . . They go hand in hand.”¹⁶ This viewpoint reiterated the changing emphasis for the conference.

In 2001 when Janet Scharman, Vice President of Student Life, inherited the position of chair, the conference was massive and affected the BYU campus as a whole. Merica credited Scharman with helping others to increase their awareness of the impact and keeping the conference from becoming a burden to BYU. “Her position as a chair became rather pivotal for future success. Because if you can’t exist and have support at the administrative level because of how large it is, it will cease to be.”¹⁷

Scharman’s position as vice president enabled her to interact on a daily basis, if needed, with President Bateman. When things got discouraging and time was short, Scharman would begin to doubt how the event was going to come together. She related

¹⁴ Pullins, Interview.

¹⁵ Merica, Interview.

¹⁶ Peggy Fletcher Stack, “BYU Conference Is Huge Draw For LDS Women.”

¹⁷ Merica, Interview.

that at those times she would feel peace and know that the Lord was in charge and that He would not let those women down.¹⁸ Many of the chairs throughout the conference related similar feelings.

Maintaining, Building and Going Forward

Inouye maintained the foundation that had been established and began a subtle change in emphasis.¹⁹ “We want to continue the discussion of issues important to women in a gospel-centered context.”²⁰ The focus was shifting from scholarly to spiritual. She recalled how the theme was chosen at the first committee meeting. “I wanted a theme about rejoicing,” she stated. After the previous year’s outcry over Ulrich and Hawkins’ replacement, the organizers wanted to draw women’s attention to the counsel to “Lift up thy heart and rejoice, and cleave unto the covenants which thou hast made. (D&C 25:13).”²¹ Inouye relied heavily on the staff in Conferences and Workshops for logistical support. She noted, “Jolene [Merica] and Jean [Hwang] were good at predicting which sessions would draw larger crowds and finding the rooms on campus.”²² Looking back over the 1994 and 1995 conferences, Inouye recalled, “I remember what it felt like to see sisters come in on the first day. I felt like I could understand how a Bishop feels love for his congregation.”²³

¹⁸ Jan Scharman, Oral History Interview with V. Gale Lewis, 14 January 2004, notes in author’s possession.

¹⁹ Merica, Interview; and Inouye, Interview.

²⁰ “New Chairperson is Appointed for the Women’s Conference at BYU,” *Church News* 13 November 1993, 5.

²¹ Women’s Conference: Sponsored by Brigham Young University and The Relief Society, Program, 1994, copy in author’s possession.

²² Inouye, Interview.

²³ Inouye, Interview.

The conference continued the practice of emphasizing the international growth of the church and chose Veronika Ekelund, a Relief Society president from Sweden, for the closing session of the 1994 conference. In a moving talk, “From Nauvoo to Russia: The Reach of the Relief Society after 150 Years,” she told of the service project that her ward in Sweden had chosen as part of the celebration of the Relief Society Sesquicentennial. The ward adopted an orphanage in Syktyvkar, “a twenty-six-hour train ride north of Moscow.”²⁴ She closed by saying, “We women can perform miracles. And in this day and age, miracles are truly necessary.”²⁵

Women spoke of coming away with a renewed spirituality. Long time attendees and newcomers felt uplifted and refocused on gospel basics. “You go away with a renewed effort to better your life and be a better person” and “I need more spirituality and I found it. The more we get out in the world, the more we want the simple, plain things like scripture study, family life and prayer” were a few of the comments from attendees.²⁶ The critique form used by the staff in Conferences and Workshops to evaluate the conference reflected this shift in emphasis. The survey stopped asking participants if the conference was too “preachy” or if the experience was “disappointing.”²⁷ The balance of scholarship and spirituality had tipped in favor of spirituality.

²⁴ Veronika Ekelund, “From Nauvoo to Russia: The Reach of Relief Society,” in *To Rejoice As Women: Talks From the 1994 Women’s Conference*, ed. Susette Fletcher Green and Dawn Hall Anderson (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1995), 166.

²⁵ Ekelund, “From Nauvoo to Russia,” in *To Rejoice As Women*, ed. Green and Anderson, 175.

²⁶ Peter Scarlet, “BYU Women’s Conference Leaves Attendees Spiritually Recharged,” *Salt Lake Tribune*, 30 April 1994, D3.

²⁷ Women’s Conference Program, 1994.

The attitude of bringing women together in sisterhood is reflected in the 1995 theme “Hearts Knit Together in Unity and Love.”²⁸ Sandra Rogers, the Dean of the College of Nursing, later an Administrative Vice-President and Chair of the conference, gave the keynote address. She spoke of the need for humility. “Imagine how well we could serve, teach, encourage, uplift, and comfort one another, and how less frequently we would judge, feel judged, hurt or left out and strike back at others if we stopped ascribing sinister or unkind motives to others and remembered their hearts are probably in the right place.”²⁹ Rogers recognized that while the focus of the conference had changed, the underlying problem of women being critical of each other remained. Although Rogers was a college Dean, her field was a traditionally female dominated which presumably made her less suspect as a professional woman and her counsel more acceptable.

Advising attendees about criticism has been a recurring theme. Repeatedly, women were counseled not to judge each other. Patricia T. Holland and Marie K. Hafen spoke of the practice of criticizing others. In his 1996 conference presentation, Bruce Hafen noted that the tendency among LDS women to “judge other people’s choices can become emotional and ugly.” He told the women that no matter what type of articles on women were printed in one of the church publications, the editors would receive angry mail from women who “disapproved of the messages they think are hidden in the

²⁸ Women’s Conference: Sponsored by Brigham Young University and The Relief Society, Program. 1995, copy in author’s possession.

²⁹ Sandra Rogers, “Hearts Knit Together,” in *Hearts Knit Together: Talks from the 1995 Women’s Conference*, ed. Susette Fletcher Green, Dawn Hall Anderson, and Dloria Hall Dalton (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1996), 7.

stories.” He relayed the observation that the “people who are hardest on LDS women are other LDS women.”³⁰

This was not a tendency unique to LDS women. “Beneath the proclamation of sisterhood, women injured one another deeply. In movement circles, some called it ‘trashing.’³¹ Women “scrutinize[d] women’s private lives, bedmates and career choices. Some feminists felt threatened by women who did not act, look, or think like themselves.”³² The conference continued to encourage women to look beyond their differences while acknowledging the fractures that impeded the bonding process.

Organizational Challenges

Women responded to the changes in the conference and attendance grew. As a result, organizers faced challenges with campus facilities which caused them to revise procedures. Construction on the BYU campus in the 1990s added a new dimension to the conference, requiring humor and patience on the part of the attendees. The number of participants increased forty percent in 1996 alone, rising to 10,574, the largest conference to that date.³³ Attendees complained about the inability to get into sessions and their need to leave early so they could get into the next session. In 1999 President Bateman advised BYU Personnel to arrive before 9 am to ensure a parking space.³⁴ Pullins noted

³⁰ Bruce C. Hafen, “Principles and Preferences,” in *Clothed With Charity: Talks From the 1996 Women’s Conference*, ed. Susette Fletcher Green, Dawn Hall Anderson, and Dlora Hall Dalton (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1996), 15.

³¹ Ruth Rosen, *The World Split Open: How the Modern Women’s Movement Changed America* (New York: Viking, 2000), 227.

³² Rosen, *The World Split Open*, 229.

³³ Kathy D. Pullins, 1996 Conference Summary Report, copy in author’s possession.

³⁴ Ali Anderson, “Brigham Young U. Women’s Conference Grows From Local Event to International Gathering,” *BYU NewsNet*, 30 April 1999, <http://newsnet.byu.edu/story.cfm/4411> (Accessed 20 January 2003).

that the growth “has been--and will likely continue to be--the biggest challenge.”³⁵ The growth was a response to the addition of the Relief Society as a sponsor and the enthusiasm of previous attendees who spread the word about the conference.

As the conference grew, available campus housing filled up. This was a problem the staff at Conferences and Workshops had not previously faced with the Women’s Conference. At first, Merica remembered, “we felt somewhat responsible” and worked to find accommodations for the overflow.³⁶ Organizers recognized the number of campus housing slots would not increase and in fact was likely to decrease as more students attended Spring term.³⁷ Campus housing became available on a “first come, first served” basis. Some local hotels receive reservations a year in advance of the conference; others fill up as early as November for the May conference.³⁸

New Administrations

When Merrill J. Bateman became president of BYU in 1995, he elected not to have a liaison to the Women’s Conference. Previously the conference chair reported to the provost. Bateman had a “great personal interest” in the conference and met with the chairs on an individual basis. His wife, Marilyn, became a committee member. Bateman’s objective was to extend to as many women as possible the BYU experience of coming together in sisterhood. He encouraged expanded marketing of the event.

³⁵ Pullins, 1996 Conference Summary Report.

³⁶ Merica, Interview.

³⁷ Pullins, “1996 Conference Summary Report.”

³⁸ Anderson, “Brigham Young U. Women’s Conference Grows From Local Event to International Gathering.”

President and Sister Bateman gave the Friday morning devotional address at their first conference in 1996.³⁹

Recalling his experience with the conference, President Bateman said, “There is an electricity in the air when women gather in the Marriott Center for the opening session.”⁴⁰ Wendy Watson later echoed that observation. “You [the attendees] fill the Marriott Center, your stake centers, your homes and the airwaves with a palpable longing for learning and love of the gospel.”⁴¹

Change was in the wind following the 1997 conference in the form of a new general Relief Society presidency. Mary Ellen Smoot was named president with Sherri L. Dew and Virginia U. Jensen as her counselors. The new presidency was very involved in the Women’s Conference. While Jack’s presidency had worked closely with the conference organizers, the new presidency served personally on the committee. Pullins related that the leaders saw the conference as a “great vehicle to connect with the women of the church.”⁴² Jack’s administration had been brought into an existing conference. Over several years the Relief Society added its influence to the conference. When Smoot was installed, the Relief Society’s presence at the conference was already established. They were now in a better position to use the conference to build sisterhood.

Conference Highlights

In 1995 the generosity of the attendees caused quite a few headaches for the organizers. During her Friday morning devotional address, Nina Bazarskaya, the first

³⁹ Pullins, Interview; and Merrill J. Bateman, Oral History Interview with V. Gale Lewis, 25 November 2003, notes in author’s possession.

⁴⁰ Bateman, Interview.

⁴¹ Women’s Conference: Program. 1999.

⁴² Pullins, Interview; and Mary Ellen Smoot, Oral History Interview with V. Gale Lewis, 28 January 2004, notes in author’s possession.

Latter-day Saint convert in Voronezh, Russia, told of a woman in Russia who was unable to have children and needed an operation.⁴³ After the talk, a woman from the audience came to the microphone and said, “Sisters, if we all gave a dollar then this woman could have her operation.” Merica remembered that by the time she got to the podium from the information desk on the concourse, women had taken the liners out of the garbage cans and were filling them with money. Women handed money to the ushers and in later sessions passed around brown paper sacks. Their hearts had been touched.⁴⁴ One attendee remembered the incident and her disappointment that she never learned the outcome of the woman’s condition.⁴⁵

There were complications in carrying out the sisters’ desire to help. The money could not simply be given to Bazarskaya to take back to Russia. Conferences and Workshops was not equipped to handle the distribution of the funds so the money was transferred to LDS Charities. President Jack felt a responsibility to the women who had donated the funds to ensure that the funds were used appropriately. After a discussion with the Area President in Russia, verifying the nature and severity of the illness of the woman, arrangements were made for an LDS surgeon who was on Church assignment in the area to perform the surgery that eventually allowed her to have children. There was still money left and the mission president told President Jack of a sister missionary who needed to cut her mission short due to heart problems that were life threatening. The

⁴³ Nina Bazarskaya, “The Widow’s Mite From Russia,” in *Clothed With Charity: Talks From the 1996 Women’s Conference*, ed. Dawn Hall Anderson, Susette Fletcher Green and Dloria Hall Dalton (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1997), 32-36.

⁴⁴ Elaine Jack, Oral History Interview with V. Gale Lewis, 15 January 2004, notes in author’s possession; and Merica, Interview.

⁴⁵ Dixie Baker, Oral History Interview with V. Gale Lewis, 29 March 2004, notes in author’s possession.

balance of the money was used for the missionary's medical treatment, which prolonged her life.⁴⁶

Both Elaine Jack and Kathy Pullins recalled another impressive moment, a fireside in 1996 with Marjorie Hinckley and her daughters, Kathleen H. Barnes, Jane H. Dudley and Virginia H. Pearce. The fireside included a video clip on Sister Hinckley's life with President Hinckley narrating. President Hinckley and his counselors, James E. Faust and Thomas S. Monson, attended along with several other general authorities. President Jack remembered the laughter and enjoyment shared during the presentation. Hinckley's daughters took turns asking Sister Hinckley questions about her life. Sister Hinckley's sense of humor kept everyone laughing. She was not afraid to admit she could not remember the answer to a question even when she had written notes in front of her. Then she would laugh when one of her daughters told her to read the answer. She gently teased President Hinckley about insisting she use the phrase "bottom of the Depression" in describing when they were married.⁴⁷ Although the fireside was held in the arena-sized Marriott Center, one participant said the event "had the feeling of being an intimate gathering--of sharing a family home evening with our Prophet and his wife and daughters."⁴⁸

The highlight of the 1997 conference "Searching Diligently in the Light of Christ" was the Thursday evening fireside where President Gordon B. Hinckley spoke. Pullins remembered that President Hinckley asked how long he was to speak. She told him he was scheduled for twenty-five minutes but reassured him that "the sisters would be happy

⁴⁶ Jack, Interview.

⁴⁷ "An Evening with Sister Marjorie Hinckley and Her Daughters," 2 May 1996, in *Wives and Daughters of the First Presidency: Excerpts From the 1999 and 1996 Brigham Young University Conferences*, VHS, (Intellectual Reserve, 1999).

⁴⁸ Jack, Interview; Pullins, Interview; and Mary Ellen Edmunds, Memo to Gale Lewis, 29 March 2004, unpublished document in author's possession.

if you just waved and smiled.”⁴⁹ While President Hinckley had attended at the 1995 conference and had spoken in a film clip, this was the first time any president of the church had personally addressed the women at the conference. President Hinckley spoke for forty-five minutes. He told the women, “I wish every mother could be at home in this troubled world . . . Most of you and your associates who are married are now employed outside the home. You feel you must do this if you are to provide a home, music lessons and other costly and consuming things. I do not criticize you.” He cautioned though “against women working just to afford costly luxuries.”⁵⁰ Church leaders expressed compassion for the many women who were working out of necessity but still maintained that mothers should remain at home when possible.

The conference in 2000 was an all out extravaganza, “a once in a life-time” celebration. Celebrating the new millennium and 2000 years since the birth of Jesus Christ brought Jerusalem to BYU in a celebration of “the Savior’s life and lessons, mission and messages.” As part of the program a replica of the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem was erected in the Marriott Center. The wall cut off many seats from viewing the events held there. This limited attendance in the Center and the organizers provided overflow seating and remote broadcast in the George Albert Smith Fieldhouse for those who registered at the door. Merica remembered that it was not a popular thing with many angry women who wanted the firsthand experience in the Marriott Center.⁵¹ Forced to watch from a remote location, the women felt cut off from the sisterhood of the other women.

While the majority of the presenters were women, men also spoke at the conference. Steve Young, LDS quarterback for the San Francisco Forty-Niners and

⁴⁹ Pullins, Interview.

⁵⁰ Taylor Syphus, “Hinckley Praises Strength of Women,” *Salt Lake Tribune*, 2 May 1997, C9.

⁵¹ Merica, Interview.

descendant of Brigham Young, joined with friend and LDS scholar, Truman G. Madsen, in a talk, “Let Us Run with Patience the Race That Is Set Before Us,” for the Thursday afternoon general session. The *Salt Lake Tribune* noted that Young, who had been sidelined by concussions during the past football season, should seriously consider retiring since “clearly, the man’s timing is shot.” Young, a long time bachelor, had married six weeks prior to coming to speak in front of “thousands of admiring women.”⁵² Young’s presence reflected the shift away from scholars presenting towards a team presentation of one scholar and one “common” woman, or in this case, man. Young, while not “common,” offered a symbol of LDS identity through his notoriety and heritage.

At the 2001 conference, a group of women stopped Jan Scharman to tell her a story. The women explained that they lived in the same neighborhood and had been coming to Women’s Conference for years. As one neighbor moved away, she would reunite with the others at the conference and as new neighbors moved in, they would join the group. Each woman went to the seminars that interested her and on Friday night they would get together and share what they had learned.

A non-LDS woman moved into their neighborhood. The group welcomed her into their circle of friends and in the process, began introducing her to LDS doctrine and activities. She valued this friendship but did not want to be included in Church activities. When the women returned each year from the conference, they would talk about their experiences. The neighbor asked to join them at the upcoming conference.

At their annual Friday night gathering, the women came together to share their experiences. The non-LDS neighbor told the women that after participating in the conference, she had felt strongly that she wanted to receive lessons about church doctrine

⁵² “Michael C. Lewis, “*Too Young for NFL? Quarterback Mum on His Career Plans,*” *Salt Lake Tribune*, 28 April 2000, 1.

from the missionaries. The group explained to Scharman that they would not be going to the service project that evening. They were going to the Provo Temple to see their neighbor sealed to her husband and family.⁵³ This is one example of the way women reconnected and shared sisterhood through the conference. The incident also demonstrates the focus on fundamental gospel principles.

Audience Participation

The conference committee “recognized that many sisters have a strong desire to participate more fully in the conference.” Elaine Jack had implemented a gospel literacy program throughout the church through the Relief Society. The conference committee, building on the Relief Society program, issued a call for essays “through which women could share perspectives on their own life experiences.” The theme for the essay competition was “Balm of Gilead: Women’s Stories of Finding Peace.”⁵⁴

Chosen from more than 100 entries, nine essays were delivered at the conference. A collection of the essays was published by Deseret Book Company. Lynn Clark Callister, committee member and assistant dean of BYU’s College of Nursing, wrote in the introduction, “The response was overwhelming and heartfelt.” Women continued to submit essays after the deadline and even brought them to the conference and “thrust them into the hands of conference committee members.”⁵⁵ The authors included mothers, grandmothers, single women, married women, homemakers, students, clinical psychologists, musicians, nurses, accountants, and teachers. Susan Champion

⁵³ Scharman, Interview. Sealing is an LDS ordinance performed only in temples that joins husbands and wives and parents and children eternally. The ordinance is based on the New Testament scripture in Matthew 16:19 where Christ gives Peter the authority to bind or seal on earth and have it effective in heaven.

⁵⁴ Lynn Callister Clark, “Introduction,” in *The Balm of Gilead*, 1.

⁵⁵ Lynn Callister Clark, “Introduction,” in *The Balm of Gilead*, 2.

Sommerfeldt declared in her essay “Precious Balm,” “Sisterhood is a seemingly paradoxical blend of self-reliance and interdependency.”⁵⁶ Women belong as individuals to a sisterhood that is a collection of women of diverse backgrounds. The ability to share in sisterhood comes through recognizing the individual and drawing on the strength of the collective group. The essays were so successful that the organizers made the competition a permanent part of the conference.⁵⁷

Service Projects and Broadcasts

The number of women who could attend the conference was miniscule compared to the increasing number of women in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. BYU Women’s Conference lengthened its reach through two additional avenues, service projects and broadcasts. These additions broadened and enriched sisterhood and connected women together as Latter-day Saints.

At the 1999 conference a new feature was added to the event, service. It has since become a standard aspect of the conference with thousands of hours of service performed in a variety of ways. As the conference committee met in the summer of 1998 to plan the next Women’s Conference, Virginia H. Pearce made the suggestion of adding service to the program. They set a goal for 1999 hours of service in one evening. “Service Stations” were set up in the Wilkinson Student Center Garden Court. The printed program encouraged women to “drop in for a few minutes or for a few hours” to assemble school, hygiene, newborn, and temple dress kits, and make temple envelopes.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Susan Champion Sommerfeldt, “Precious Balm,” in *The Balm of Gilead*, 8.

⁵⁷ Pullins, 1996 Women’s Conference Summary Report,” 1.

⁵⁸ Women’s Conference Program, 1999. Temple envelopes are cloth packets that hold the ceremonial clothing for temple ceremonies.

The pre-conference session had an overwhelming turnout. Jolene Merica said, “We had so many women who wanted to participate. We timed them. They could only do so many kits and then we made them leave because there were so many others waiting and wanting.”⁵⁹ Attendee Jessica McGovern recalled, “I waited in line more than I actually got to do anything that night. They kept rotating us in and out.”⁶⁰ Women were willing to wait in line again and again to work on the different projects, but there were some who did not understand why they had to leave. “The women were angry that they couldn’t stay longer but they couldn’t see the 100 in line still waiting to get into the ballroom.”⁶¹ The conference organizers failed to anticipate the response of the women. Adding service to the conference met a need within the women to do something for others. It reinforced the leadership of the Relief Society whose motto is “Charity Never Faileth.” Service helped women share in sisterhood as they bonded while working.

Service opportunities continued throughout the conference. Women stopped in during lunch or between sessions to work. The LDS Humanitarian Center and Church Welfare department provided the supplies and distributed the finished projects.⁶² The inaugural event completed 31,000 hygiene and sewing kits, 2,500 newborn kits, 2,500 elementary school kits, and began work on 400 crib quilts and 2,000 crocheted leper bandages.⁶³ The finished items were used by the LDS Humanitarian Center throughout the world. The turnout and participation proved that women were hungry to serve.

⁵⁹ Merica, Interview.

⁶⁰ Jessica McGovern, Oral History Interview with V. Gale Lewis, 9 April 2004, tape in author’s possession.

⁶¹ Merica, Interview.

⁶² Women’s Conference Program, 1999.

⁶³ Peggy Fletcher Stark, “LDS Women Open Meeting With Service,” *Salt Lake Tribune*, 30 April 1999, B4.

For the 2000 Women's Conference, women were invited to "enlarge [their] vision of what it means to serve and be served" in an "Evening of Service and Good Works." The service project was held in Cougar Stadium. Mary Ellen Edmunds, chair of the service project, explained, "One of the things we [were] trying to do is help people see that service can be across the street, across the world and across the veil" which separates the physical world from the spirit world.⁶⁴ Planners expected more than 30,000 women to participate in giving blood, making quilts, stuffing bunnies and bears, assembling kits, extracting names for temple work, crocheting leper bandages, and many other projects.⁶⁵ In the end 10,000 women participated in the pre-conference event.⁶⁶ Anne Clegg, chief captain for the quilting project, recalled "there were things going on in the world, You kinda [felt] like what can I do to make a difference? I'm just a person here in Utah, or just a mom or I work but I'd like to do a few things. Women were eager to help and felt like they were making a contribution."⁶⁷

Dr. Bernadine Healy of the American Red Cross congratulated the women on participating in "one of the largest blood drives in the history" of the organization. She told them in a video shown at the closing session of the conference, "never doubt that a group of thoughtful committed women can change the world."⁶⁸ Between 135 and 150

⁶⁴ Mary Ellen Edmunds, Email to V. Gale Lewis, 20 March 2004, unpublished document in author's possession.

⁶⁵ Sarah Jane Weaver, "BYU Women's Conference expected to attract 30,000," *Church News*, 1 April 2000, Z10.

⁶⁶ Amy K. Stewart, "Around 10,000 women have fun in sun," *Daily Herald*, 27 April 2000, A8.

⁶⁷ Anne Clegg, Oral History Interview with V. Gale Lewis, 9 April 2004, tape in author's possession.

⁶⁸ *BYU Women's Conference, Sisterhood through Service: Across the Street, across the World, Across the Veil*, 26 April 2000, VHS (Brigham Young University Women's Conference, 2000), in possession of Jessica McGovern, Provo, Utah.

volunteers and staff from Utah, Idaho and Montana came to work the event. In total the women donated more than 1,400 units of blood.⁶⁹

The committee set a goal to tie 2000 quilts as part of the project. Edmunds described getting to use the stadium as a miracle but having the groundskeepers agree to let the women use the football field to tie quilts was a greater accomplishment. Merica joked, “If there is sacred space on campus, I think it is the BYU football field.”⁷⁰ Anne Clegg said, “They were afraid that we might drop some needles on the grass that the players would eventually find . . . We had to account for our needles.”⁷¹ Quilts were prepared ahead of the conference so that they could be tied on the day of the project.

Women volunteered to help with much of the preparation. Karen Edwards, chief captain of the bunnies and bears project, said she never made one call for help. Women heard about the project and called her. One woman called and said she had a pattern for the bears. Edwards received help from a woman in Washington who provided fleece scraps for the animals. Even when the project expanded from 100 to 800 and then 8000, and finally 15,000 stuffed toys, the material and help came.

One night prior to the conference Edwards was worried that they didn’t have enough stuffing. They were using left over fleece cut into small strips but she didn’t think she had enough for 15,000 animals. Two days later she received an email from the woman in Washington who had sent some of the fleece. She had just sent an additional 3 refrigerator boxes and 5 stove boxes full of fleece for stuffing. The woman told Edwards

⁶⁹ Sarah Jane Weaver, “Service: ‘Across World, Street, Veil,’” *Church News*, 6 May 2000, Z8

⁷⁰ Merica, Interview.

⁷¹ Clegg, Interview.

that she had felt that it should be cut into small strips for stuffing so she and other women had prepared the fleece.⁷²

Three hundred and fifty of the bears were distributed to orphaned children in Romania. Emily Nelson, in conjunction with an internship program through BYU, coordinated the distribution. She said the children “would look at the teddy bear, then at us through the bars of their crib, and slowly wrap their arms around the teddy bear . . . For a brief moment I saw happiness in their eyes.”⁷³

The project inspired women to continue to give service. One attendee said, “This makes me want to go home and do more than what we’ve been doing.” Another said, “It’s about making a difference and helping people across the world . . . It’s also an opportunity to come together with women who all have something in common.”⁷⁴ The impact of the conference spread to individual families, wards and stakes as women incorporated the service projects in their local women’s conferences and the items were distributed throughout the world.

Help came from many sources just as in previous years. An employee from Southwest Airlines called and asked if she could work on the crocheted leper bandages starts (the beginning pieces that other women could finish). She worked at the company’s call center and could work on the starts between calls. As the project leader explained how the bandages were used, the woman got excited and asked if she could have more than one. She wanted to pass them out at work for others to work on also. She called the next night and explained that the hundred she had taken were passed out

⁷² Karen Edwards, Oral history Interview with V. Gale Lewis, 8 April 2004, notes in author’s possession.

⁷³ Shaun D. Stahle, “Teddy Bears Bring Smiles to Orphans in Romania,” *Church News*, 21 April 2001, 6-7.

⁷⁴ Jeffrey P. Haney, “‘Service’ Launches Y. Gathering,” *Deseret News*, 27 April 2001, B2.

and asked for another hundred. She called again for more. “The women at Southwest loved doing the starts on the bandages; whole floors would be working on them. Probably the majority of the women at Southwest are not Latter-day Saints but it doesn’t matter. The spirit of service touched them also.”⁷⁵

The impact of the service projects at Women’s Conference had indeed reached “across the room, across the street, across the world and across the veil.” Former Assistant Secretary General of the United Nations, Dr. Wally N’Dow, visited the conference and saw the women working on the service projects. “I came here expecting to see a conference. I did not come here expecting to see human drama . . . This practice of coming together to participate physically to help those who are in need is fundamental to how the world should work.”⁷⁶ General Relief Society president Mary Ellen Smoot said the projects “inspired women to hold service projects around the world.” Women sponsored service projects in their local areas while listening to the broadcasts of women’s conference.⁷⁷ Dean Walker, formerly of the LDS Humanitarian Center, declared, “it would be difficult to meet our current needs without the efforts of these women at BYU’s Women’s Conference.”⁷⁸ Service project leader Cody Mazuran said, “Weeks after the event, I continue to meet women who participated and who have testified that the service projects brought them such great joy that in many cases their

⁷⁵ Barbara Cook and Deween Durrant, “BYU Women's Conference May 3 - 4, 2001: ‘Evening of Service and Good Works’” Summarized Service Accomplishments and Related Faith-Promoting Events,” copy in author’s possession.

⁷⁶ The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, “Former United Nations Executive Finds BYU Women’s Conference ‘Impressive,’” www.lds.org/ldsfoundation/accelwork/humanintereststory/0,7989.1334-1-220,00.html (Accessed 1 November 2002).

⁷⁷ Smoot, Interview.

⁷⁸ “Former United Nations Executive Finds BYU Women’s Conference ‘Impressive.’”

lives have been changed for good forever. Service does change lives, both for the giver and the receiver.”⁷⁹

Anne Clegg, co-chair for the 2001 Women’s Conference service project, said, “We found we didn’t need to ‘light the fire.’ The women’s hearts already had the fire within them.”⁸⁰ She stated, “One thing we really wanted to stress was you don’t have to have a big football stadium event.” Service was something women could do in their own communities. Jan Scharman, chair of the conference that year, expanded the idea of service. “Service involves being served--being an audience. It is a mistake to believe that service is based on we have it, you don’t, we’ll give it to you. Real service is a give and take. Part of service is connecting.”⁸¹

Reflecting on her participation in the service project, one woman concluded, “This service aspect has made [Women’s Conference] so full. I mean it is so wonderful to go and get knowledge and get inspired to do things. But then it’s also wonderful to go and as you get inspired, also be able to do things, physically able to do something . . . I think that’s what makes Women’s Conference so meaningful.”⁸²

The conference introduced another way of expanding its reach and sisterhood to as many women as possible by adding additional resources in 1997. The conference added satellite, television and Internet broadcasts. The 1998 conference program stated, “Technology has enabled us to extend our reach and share the great spirit of sisterhood present at the Women’s Conference with those unable to join us on campus.”⁸³ Women

⁷⁹ Cook and Durrant, “Summarized Service Accomplishments.”

⁸⁰ Cook and Durrant, “Summarized Service Accomplishments.”

⁸¹ Scharman, Interview.

⁸² Clegg, Interview.

⁸³ Women’s Conference: Sponsored by Brigham Young University and The Relief Society. Program. 1998, 29, copy in author’s possession.

in the United States and Canada who could not come to campus could now listen to the conference in their local meetinghouses through satellite broadcast. The process of broadcasting selected sessions also solidifies the unique Mormon identity.

The “pilot” broadcasts were sent over the Church satellite system and KBYU-TV. They were only in English but were close captioned for the hearing impaired.⁸⁴ The 1998 conference expanded the satellite broadcast from five to seven sessions. The following year there were ten sessions. The sessions with video conferencing available were also broadcast over Cougar Cable to those living in BYU’s Married Student Housing.

The broadcast was available on the Internet through BYU NewsNet and expanded to include a Spanish translation. One church member wrote to KBYU describing his family’s move to Taiwan. “When we left Provo . . . we felt we would leave the strength of the church and would have to carry what we had learned at BYU . . . Asia does not receive the Church satellite (at least Taiwan does not), so we cannot watch it on TV. But we can watch it on the internet . . . [My wife] can take part in Women’s Conference, that great program she loved while attending BYU.”⁸⁵

The Conference could be heard in homes and meeting houses worldwide. Each meetinghouse library had been “authorized to record and retain a set of the broadcast tapes for Church use only.” This enabled women throughout the church to check the tapes out and watch them at home. One woman from Alberta, Canada wrote,

I borrow [the recordings] from our branch library and listen to them many times. The messages have strengthened my testimony and understanding of certain aspects of the gospel. I have used them in family night and firesides. I have used things I have learned to enhance talks I have been

⁸⁴ Women’s Conference: Sponsored by Brigham Young University and The Relief Society. Program. 1997, 20, copy in author’s possession.

⁸⁵ Andrew and Candice Rail, in BYU Television, *BYU Television*, (Provo: Brigham Young University, n.d.), 8.

asked to give and I have studied the scripture to help me understand more of what I learned. I have copied out some of the quotes. I share the things I have learned with other members and encourage them to listen to the tapes themselves.⁸⁶

The 1998 program suggested that local Relief Society leaders “use the tapes for later viewing and incorporation into local women’s conferences.”⁸⁷ The concept of Women’s Conference had spread to ward and stakes throughout the Church. Relief Societies were holding a local version of the Women’s Conference.

The 1999 broadcast included a Thursday evening fireside featuring Gladys Knight, “Songs of Her Heart.” Knight, due to the example of her children who were also converts, was a recent convert to the Church. “An international recording artist” with many hit records, she shared “her testimony in words and music.”⁸⁸ According to BYU Television Director Michael Hunter, the broadcast received the second highest rating for the year. The First Presidency’s Christmas devotional was first.⁸⁹

The broadcast continued to expand. In 2000 it could also be seen on a new station, BYUTV, and included seventeen sessions.⁹⁰ The sessions in 2001 could be seen in the US, Canada, the Caribbean, Latin America, Europe and the British Isles. Past Women’s conference sessions appear on BYUTV as part of their regular programming.

The addition of service and broadcasts to the Women’s Conference broadened and enriched sisterhood among the women who attended the conference whether on the BYU campus or in their meetinghouse or homes. Feeling rejuvenated, the women carried

⁸⁶ Jeanine Passey, Edmonton, Alberta, In BYU Television, *BYU Television*, 47.

⁸⁷ Women’s Conference Program, 1998, 6.

⁸⁸ Women’s Conference: Program, 1999, 5, copy in author’s possession.

⁸⁹ Michael Hunter, Oral History Interview with V. Gale Lewis, 21 January 2005, notes in author’s possession.

⁹⁰ Women’s Conference: Sponsored by Brigham Young University and The Relief Society, Program. 2000, 4, copy in author’s possession.

the impact throughout their sphere of influence in the community, at work, and throughout the world. Through service and broadcasts, the BYU Women's Conference reached beyond the individual circles to an ever-widening sisterhood.

Beginning in 1994, the conference changed its emphasis, moving away from scholarly presentations toward discussion of fundamental gospel principles. The conference grew in numbers and popularity. The addition of the Relief Society as a sponsor of the BYU Women's Conference met the needs of a large number of LDS women. Each chair brought her unique experience and talents to guide the conference. Through the published talks, service projects, and broadcasts the reach of the conference expanded to include women across the world bringing sisterhood to those in attendance and those who felt its impact from afar.

CONCLUSION

Between 1976 and 2001, the BYU Women's Conference has reflected the issues and struggles in the lives of LDS women. Throughout the life of the conference women have sought to identify their role and identity as women and have struggled to share in the sisterhood to which they belonged. As the conference has grown, the content came under greater scrutiny by leaders of the LDS Church and eventually became a program cosponsored by the Relief Society. For over twenty-five years the BYU Women's Conference has given women in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day the opportunity to go beyond womanhood and share sisterhood.

The conference began as student leaders sought ways to broaden the views of women students at BYU. For the first nine years of the conference, the organizers provided a forum to women to explore such issues as depression, the Equal Rights Amendment, and the state and national International Women's Year meetings. The conference expanded to include women beyond the BYU community. As a result of its growth, the conference became a burden on the student leaders and sponsorship was transferred to the President's office where it was placed under the direction of the Women's Research Institute.

With its new sponsorship came a new emphasis. The conference was designed to be a scholarly venue where faith and scholarship could be brought together to examine

the issues facing women in the Church. As the conference grew in popularity, it attracted attendees who were unfamiliar with the nature of a scholarly conference. There was conflict over the professional women who presented. The conference reflected the struggle between career women and those who chose to stay at home. This conflict increased with the talk by LDS Church President Ezra Taft Benson, “To the Mothers in Zion.” Women felt increasing pressure to be the “perfect” Mormon woman from themselves, their families, and through the messages they received from both the Church and the world. Women responded by trying to become superwomen and thus increased the necessity to determine who they were and where they fit in.

When conference chair Mary Stovall became a full-time professor in the history department in 1987, her assistant Carol Lee Hawkins became chair. The conference moved into a period of great change. Throughout Hawkins’ administration, she built bridges between the professional presenters and the non-professional attendees. The conference reflected the growing international face of the Church as Hawkins brought in women from outside the United States to speak. In 1991, the Relief Society became a cosponsor and with that addition, Church scrutiny increased. This publicly surfaced when Laurel Thatcher Ulrich was rejected as a keynote speaker in 1993. Changes continued after Hawkins was replaced as chair after the 1993 conference.

The position of chair changed to that of a rotating chair appointed jointly by BYU and the Relief Society. With the shift in leadership came a move away from the scholarly nature of the conference and toward an emphasis on gospel fundamentals. The conference has expanded to reach women worldwide through published talks, service projects and broadcasts.

The subject of professional women as presenters has been prevalent throughout the conference. This peaked in the 1987 conference with the outcry to hear from “real women.” The shift to include presenters with practical experience in addition to academic training reflects the change from a scholarly conference to one emphasizing gospel fundamentals. As a result, the conference is meeting the needs of a broad base of women.

Additionally, the conference has repeatedly encouraged women to expand their viewpoints to take advantage of the diversity within the sisterhood. While the number of women attending the conference has increased, there are many who once attended the conference who no longer attend, feeling that the conference does not reflect their attitudes and viewpoints. As Women’s Conference has shifted away from the scholarly conference of the late 1980s, those who want that type of discussion of the issues have been left without a formal forum and struggle with feeling there is a place for them in the sisterhood.

This thesis has focused on the administration of the conference. While the author has endeavored to interview all who had leadership responsibility for the conference, it was not possible to speak to every chair. This has especially impacted the information available regarding the last three years of the conference under the ASBYU. The impact might have been lessened if the yearbooks containing papers from each year for the conference could have been located.

Due to the limited scope of this project, there are still many areas that should be explored. This thesis only examined the speakers and topics as they reflected on the issues facing women during the latter half of the twentieth century. It was the organizers’

goal to provide a forum for LDS women to examine these issues. Therefore it was necessary to provide some indication of the types of subjects being discussed. The examination was far from complete and a thorough understanding of the conference is incomplete without further scrutiny of the presenters and their talks. Many of the early presenters are still available to interview, although the passage of time has dulled the memory of many. What experiences did the presenters have? How did male presenters feel giving talks to large groups of women? Have the presenters attended the conference as attendees? These are a few of the areas to be explored.

An area that was barely touched on, except for how it affected the type of program the organizers offered, was interviewing women who attended the conference over the years. There is limited information available through the reports containing attendees' responses. Even this source, however, is limited to the comments included. What drew the mothers of the BYU women students to come to Provo to attend the conference? How did word of mouth expand the conference attendance? What caused the women to come back year after year? Did they feel it was a "privileged" conference open to those who had the resources to attend? What preparations were made in the family so the women could attend? What were the reactions of and effects on the family as a result of their attendance? What kinds of experiences did they have at the conference? Did the atmosphere of BYU affect their experience? This area, in particular, deserves greater research.

Since this project is of a historical nature, the spiritual aspects of the conference have been touched on only lightly. One cannot truly examine a conference that has such great ties to the Church without investigating the many spiritual experiences that have

accompanied this conference by organizers, speakers and attendees. The author has been privy to many accounts of spiritual experiences that did not fit into the academic nature of this paper.

The BYU Women's Conference has had a large impact on LDS women whether or not they have ever attended the conference. As women went home after attending the conference, they brought with them the conference model. As a result, wards and stakes throughout the Church have scaled-down versions of Women's Conference. With the addition of service projects, more local conferences include a service component.

Many women, due to time or circumstance, cannot attend the conference. It is not the mission of BYU to take the conference to the women either throughout the United States or the world. Deseret Book Company has responded to this unmet need by introducing one-day regional conferences for women. The conferences feature Deseret Book authors and are undoubtedly a marketing practice for the company. The popularity of the regional meetings demonstrates that women want more opportunity to share in the sisterhood.

Womanhood is a developmental journey of discovering and understanding. In the latter half of the twentieth century, the definition of womanhood for each woman was often a painful process. LDS women belonged to a sisterhood that was both a strength and a weakness. The BYU Women's Conference exposed those strengths and weaknesses and the process continues.

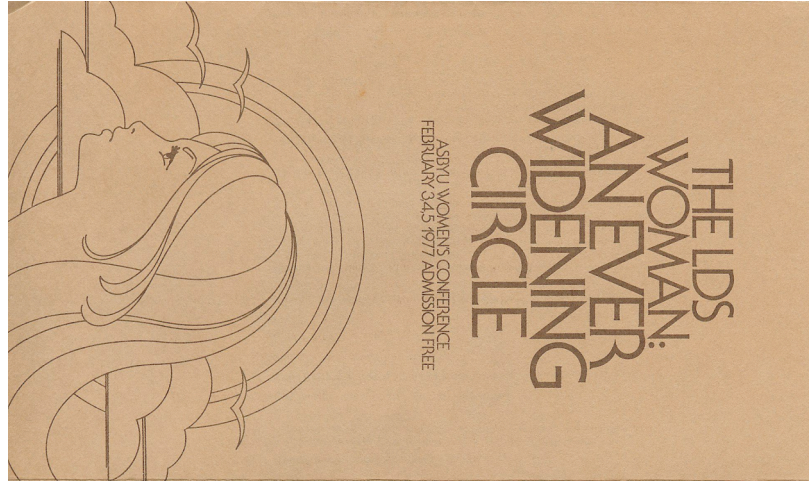
Appendix One BYU Women's Conference

Year	Date	Chairman	Theme	Sponsor
1976	February 12-14	Debbie Hutchings – Women's Office (WO) VP Carla Gibson – Chair	LDS Women: "Potentialities and Promises"	ASBYU Women's Office
1977	February 3-5	Dianne Curtis – WO VP Patti Binns - Chair	The LDS Woman: An Ever Widening Circle	ASBYU Women's Office
1978	February 9-11	Karen Bybee – WO VP Sharon Hoge - Chair	Roots and Wings	ASBYU Women's Office
1979	February 8-10	Susan Paxman – WO VP Denise Tucker - Chair	Challenges in Change	ASBYU Women's Office
1980	January 31- February 2	Jill Harris – WO VP Kim Ford - Chair	"Blueprints for Living"	ASBYU Women's Office
1981	February 5-7	Judy Mestas – WO VP Rose Oliver - Chair	Ye Are Free to Choose	ASBYU Women's Office
1982	February 18-20	Jeannie Erickson – WO VP Jennifer Harris - Chair	For Such A Time As This	ASBYU Women's Office
1983	February 17-19	Cynthia Sorenson – WO VP Leigh Stevens - Chair	"Deep Roots Are Not Reached by the Frost"	ASBYU Women's Office
1984	February 9-11	Anette Fenly – WO VP Renee Ing - Chair	The Future Within Me	ASBYU Women's Office
1985	March 28-30	Mary Stovall	Women of Faith	BYU President's Office
1986	March 27-28	Mary Stovall	Women of Faith: Building the Kingdom	BYU President's Office
1987	March 12-13	Mary Stovall	Women of Faith: Diversity in Works, Unity in Faith	BYU President's Office
1988	April 7-8	Mary Stovall	Women of Faith: Nourishing One Another in the Faith	BYU President's Office
1989	April 6-7	Carol Lee Hawkins	Women of Faith: "...wisdom and knowledge shall be the stability of thy times..."	BYU President's Office
1990	April 5-6	Carol Lee Hawkins	The Power Within:" To See Life Steadily And Set It Whole	BYU President's Office
1991	April 11-12	Carol Lee Hawkins	"...Press Forward with a Steadfastness in Christ, Having A Perfect Brightness of Hope"	BYU President's Office

Year	Date	Chairman	Theme	Sponsor
1992	May 7-8	Carol Lee Hawkins	"I Am Come That They Might Have Life, And That They Might Have It More Abundantly"	BYU President's Office and Relief Society
1993	April 29-30	Carol Lee Hawkins	"From Grace To Grace"	BYU President's Office and Relief Society
1994	April 28-29	Jeanne Inouye	"Lift Up Thy Heart And Rejoice, And Cleave Unto The Covenants Which Thou Hast Made"	BYU President's Office and Relief Society
1995	May 4-5	Jeanne Inouye	"Hearts Knit Together In Unity And Love"	BYU President's Office and Relief Society
1996	May 2-3	Kathy Pullins	"And Above All Things Clothe Yourselves With The Bond Of Charity"	BYU President's Office and Relief Society
1997	May 1-2	Kathy Pullins	"Search Diligently In The Light Of Christ"	BYU President's Office and Relief Society
1998	April 30-May 1	Kathy Pullins	"May Christ Lift Thee Up"	BYU President's Office and Relief Society
1999	April 29-30	Wendy Watson	"Be Faithful And Diligent In Keeping The Commandments Of God, And I Will Encircle Thee In The Arms Of My Love"	BYU President's Office and Relief Society
2000	April 27-28	Wendy Watson	"Arise and shine forth, that thy light may be a standard for the nations"	BYU President's Office and Relief Society
2001	May 3-4	Jan Scharman	"Ye shall bear record of me, even Jesus Christ"	BYU President's Office and Relief Society

Appendix Two

1977 Women's Conference Invitation



THE LDS
WOMAN:
AN EVER-
WIDENING
CIRCLE

ASBYU WOMEN'S CONFERENCE
FEBRUARY 3-4, 1977 ADMISSION FREE

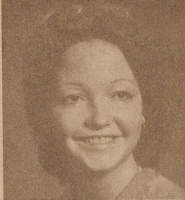
Dear Friends:

The ASBYU Women's Office is one of the nine branches of Student Government. The main goal of the office is to help women utilize and achieve their full potential. Gradually we are changing the focus of the Women's Office to deal with issues concerning women in addition to sponsoring activities. Women's programs are conducted in five major areas: spiritual, academic, cultural, service, and social. In cooperation with the ASBYU Executive Council, we are presenting a conference entitled "The LDS Woman: An Ever-Widening Circle." The conference objectives are to —


- help each woman understand her responsibilities and capabilities in life, recognizing that a woman bears joint responsibility with man in establishing the kingdom of God;
- stress the importance of a woman's living up to her potential;
- help clarify a woman's role in life — her most important role as a wife and mother — and also encourage her to plan to be a capable, aware, and contributing individual in each role she will have throughout her life.

We urge all men and women to attend this conference.

Sincerely,



Dianne Curtis
Dianne Curtis
Women's Vice-President



Patti Binns
Patti Binns
Conference Chairman

A special thanks to the steering committee in planning this conference: Chris Burdick, Karen Bybee, Susan Cyrocki, Carla Gibson, Karen Hill, Gerry Johnston, Joanie Swimme, and Margie McEntire, Adviser.

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