Mormon Women's Sense of Empowerment

Stace Hucks Christianson
Brigham Young University - Provo
Mormon Women’s Sense of Empowerment

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Stace Hucks Christianson

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Carol Ward, Committee Chair

Lynn England, Committee Member

Renata Forste, Committee Member

Stephen Bahr, Department Chair
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Chapter 1
Overview of Research Problem

The purpose of this research is to examine empowerment experiences of women within the patriarchal structure of the LDS Church. This research will identify the factors that lead LDS women to feel empowered to varying degrees, as well as define the process of empowerment for LDS women. This project will also examine empowerment within the contexts of family, Relief Society, and LDS community on a stake and ward level. In studying the factors that empower LDS women, I hope to demonstrate how and why LDS women feel empowered within the structure of the LDS church. This research can add an important dimension to the study of gender issues in patriarchal systems. The results of this investigation can also be used by LDS church members to better understand the nature of institutionalized power and authority and their potentially oppressive consequences.

Since patriarchy is the dominance of a male influence, there is potential for conflict in a patriarchal system where women seek power or empowerment in order to realize their own potential or to serve others (Lerner 1986). Because the LDS church is a patriarchal system, and LDS women may feel constrained by their statuses and roles within this structure, I believe that there are women within this system who experience different degrees of empowerment. The value that the church places on traditionally female characteristics and female experiences as well as the sense of connection with other LDS women, ecclesiastical leaders and family members all contribute to this phenomenon.
One reason this effort is significant is that it can help us better understand how a religious community’s values can work to empower individuals within the group. But more specifically, it can help explain the structure and characteristics of LDS women’s experiences with their church. Much of the research on patriarchal systems that has been done in the last thirty years has shown how such systems have marginalized minority groups and women. However, there has been very little scholarship dealing with how a patriarchal system can empower its members. Additionally, there has been virtually no research on LDS women and the empowerment process. Educating those that serve LDS women on issues of empowerment is critical because of the widespread misunderstanding or lack of knowledge regarding what fulfills and empowers LDS women. Since LDS women do not hold central administrative positions in the church, the potential is greater for women’s spiritual and personal needs to go unmet. Finally, this research can also help LDS women to better understand their experiences in the church as well as help them to understand how to empower themselves.

**Relationship of Research Problem to Recent Literature**

Much of the current scholarship on LDS women focuses on the oppression they may feel within a patriarchal church. Martha Nibley Beck (1994) and Debbi Christensen (1988) have both explored the conflicts LDS women experience and how they resolve them. Beck (*Flight From the Iron Cage: LDS Women's Responses to the Paradox of Modernization*, 1994) describes LDS women’s experiences as representing a double bind between the traditional and modern worlds in which they live. According to Beck, “Traditional and modern values are often not only different in degree, but mutually
exclusive and contradictory” (Beck 1994, 18). She describes how LDS women seek to overcome the double binds that modern society imposes on traditional society by making essential paradigm shifts through “highly personal mystical experiences” (270). She concludes,

This mystical conflict resolution, when it occurred, had predictable and similar consequences for those who experienced it—consequences similar to those described in other studies of people with ‘divided consciousness.’

Psychologically, the women in my sample who had mystical experiences reportedly attained a sense of relief and freedom from the extreme stress of internalizing a valuative double bind. Behaviorally, they adopt patterns of action which appeared erratic or contradictory from the perspective of either their society’s traditional norms or of modern rationalist logic. Their substitution of social legitimation with mystical legitimation provided them with a sense of personal legitimacy even in the face of extreme social sanctions. (Beck 1994, 270).

Christensen’s findings indicate that the paradoxes LDS women confront in their religious belief system and culture are central to their personal development. She notes, “Development is a dialectical process. In other words, for us to develop there must be discrepancies in our teaching, our beliefs, and our experiences. We develop by attempting to reconcile these discrepancies. Some discrepancies cannot be reconciled, in which case, it is through acceptance of the paradox that we mature” (1988, 9).

While these scholars have examined conflict resolution of LDS women, they have
not discussed its effects on empowerment nor have they identified or defined a process of empowerment. By analyzing the individual experiences of LDS women, I hope to better define the relationship between the social paradoxes that these women face and the empowerment process. This research also builds on the writings of Debra Kaufman, Julie Ingersoll and Judith Stacey and their discussion of women’s experiences in other patriarchal religions. Each have studied how women of patriarchal religions give validation and status to the roles that they perform within their religious beliefs. Kaufman (1991) focuses her attention on Orthodox Jewish women and how they legitimize their place within Jewish patriarchy through the practice of gender segregated rituals. Ingersoll (1995) addresses Protestant Fundamentalist women and how they work to find a place within a patriarchal structure that only places men in leadership positions. Stacey’s (1991) research focuses on Christian Evangelical women and how they create a more equalized distribution of power within marriage.

**Overview of Findings**

Using ethnography, this research identifies three different levels of flexibility within two areas of patriarchy. One within the structure of church organization and the other within familial division of labor. Conventional notions of patriarchy have become overly-simplistic and usually inaccurately describe many modern day patriarchal systems. This research ascribes three main levels of flexibility to patriarchal structures. Level one, is the strictest level of patriarchy. This level can be defined as a system in which the views and opinions of men are favored, sought after, understood and included as part of ones own belief system. Men determine the structural aspect of this kind of patriarchy,
which typically includes observed rituals and community laws. A woman’s place within this society is usually in the home performing domestic tasks in her various roles as wife and mother. Level two elevates the role of Sunday school teacher or auxiliary leader to a position of authority. In the LDS church, this means that the positions of Primary President, Young Women’s President, and Relief Society President--positions typically held by women--are viewed and respected as positions of authority. Level three, includes a perception that priesthood authority is something to be shared among all members. Priesthood leaders view their position as a way to share their authority and empower the members whom they serve. This level allows for flexible definitions of church callings and the responsibilities they entail. For example, in the LDS church a Bishop may call a woman to be Relief Society President and she may accept but together they may redefine her responsibilities as the Relief Society President to suite the needs of the Relief Society of their ward. These three structural levels of patriarchy can be applied to any patriarchal system. The lack of prescribed structure within the LDS church, leaves church members to individually interpret which level the church is on. Depending upon interpretation, empowerment can be achieved or denied.

Like the three structural levels in patriarchy, there are three levels based on the flexibility of family roles. The first familial level is the most rigid; roles are prescribed for women by male church authorities. Essentially there is one acceptable career option for women, that of homemaker. Strict rituals and laws give guidance to how these roles are to be performed. Division of labor is assigned by gender and has little flexibility and is believed to be prescribed by God. In familial level two, the division of roles within the
family is more malleable. Although the husband may be the primary provider with the wife mainly performing domestic tasks, there is flexibility to roles and more adaptation to the demands of the current situation. Familial level three, is the most flexible, with division of labor being divided on need and capability rather than gender. Again because of the absence of intense boundaries and penalties, LDS families are left to interpret and set family habits according to personal interpretations and needs (See Figure 1).

**Hypothesis**

I hypothesize that there are women within patriarchal systems who feel empowered because of the value that their religious community— in this case the LDS church— places on traditionally female characteristics and the intense connection that these women experience in their church and familial relationships. That women can empower themselves within a patriarchal system, suggests that the consequences of patriarchy are more complex than conventional notions purport. It also draws attention to the idea that societies that value traditionally female characteristics tend to legitimize the many roles of women. Thus, women within patriarchal systems can empower themselves, not in spite of patriarchy, but because of it.
**Figure 1. Flexibility Levels of Patriarchy**

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<tr>
<th>Patriarchy</th>
<th>Structural</th>
<th>Familial</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Level 1</strong></td>
<td>Most rigid form of patriarchy within the structure of the church. Only Priesthood callings are viewed as positions of authority.</td>
<td>Most rigid form of patriarchy applied to division of labor within the family. Division of labor is based solely on gender.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Level 2</strong></td>
<td>All leadership positions are viewed as positions of authority. Positions of authority are grouped by ward, stake and region instead of priesthood holder and non-priesthood holder.</td>
<td>Traditional roles assigned to family members, but with some flexibility in adapting to the present needs of the family.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Level 3</strong></td>
<td>Priesthood authority is viewed as something to share with people, not as a power to use over people.</td>
<td>Most flexible familial roles with needs and capability being what determines role assignment instead of gender.</td>
</tr>
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Chapter 2
Literature Review

This chapter will define empowerment as well as discuss the most recent literature on empowerment. It will also include an evaluation of patriarchy and its influence on the organization of religions and Judeo-Christian families. This review will conclude with a discussion on the paradoxes of role conflict among traditional women living in a modern society.

Empowerment

Empowerment requires an awareness of a broad range of choices coupled with access to those choices (specifically when the decisions are personal). Empowerment affects the multiple roles that a person performs over a lifetime including ecclesiastical, professional and familial. Empowerment is magnified when a person is able to participate in an organization or group in two ways: on a voluntary basis and with some decision-making power. This definition incorporates ideas from several sources, reviewed in the following discussion.

Theodore Thomas defines empowerment as "owning the capacity to act, rather than be acted on" (1985, 19-20.) To Paolo Freire, being human is to be a "Subject" with the capacity to act and think for oneself. "Objects" are to be acted upon. When negotiating, people view each other as equals, or "subjects" instead of "objects"; power and control can be shared (Freire 1973). This ability to act as an independent agent is referred to as agency in LDS theology. Agency is a major theme of LDS scripture; according to the Book of Mormon, people have agency because "...they are redeemed
from the fall, they have become free forever, knowing good from evil; to act for themselves and not to be acted upon" (2 Nephi 2:26). LDS church members are taught that personal power, or empowerment, is gained through self-mastery, not by controlling other people.

Empowerment also depends on control over resources that affect the outcome of personal decisions. David Korten emphasizes the relationship between empowerment and "the ability to manage resources" when he states that "...control over an action should rest with the people who will bear its consequences" (Korten 1986, 6). While linking control to accountability, Korten also asserts that empowerment is not a zero sum game where one group suffers at the expense of another (1986).

Finally, this definition of empowerment can be related to A.H. Maslow’s process of self-actualization. To be self-actualized means “finding out who one is, what he is, what he likes, what he doesn’t like...”(Maslow 1971, 47). But this is only part of the empowerment equation; to be empowered means to not only understand one’s personal needs, but to also seek to understand other’s needs and include them in one’s personal decision making process.

**Patriarchy: Oppression or Empowerment?**

The LDS church is a patriarchal church. Because patriarchy is male dominance over women and children and over society in general (Lerner 1986), it is critical to understand the effects of how the traditional values of patriarchy have affected women in modern society, for our purposes, LDS women. Although, men hold positions of power in patriarchal churches while also controlling the resources that affect women, Gerda
Lerner (1986) asserts that under patriarchy women are not without “rights, influence and resources.”

However, we cannot limit the discussion of patriarchy strictly to church organization, for it has also had an enormous impact on the Judeo-Christian family. Central to the organization of the Christian family is the patriarchal concept of hierarchy which is a systematic pattern of rights and duties with ultimate authority given to the male in the most privileged position (Lerner 1986). Church leaders assert that the New Testament contains the basis for patriarchy within the Christian family. In the book of Ephesians, Paul outlines an ostensibly divine family organization when he tells wives to “submit yourselves to your own husbands, as unto the Lord.” Paul goes on to compare the husband’s relationship with the family to Christ’s role as head of the church. Just as all church members must obey Christ’s teachings to be saved, so to must wives obey their husbands. (Eph 5:25-25).

Traditional Christianity also assigns the task of bread-winning to the husband and homemaking and child care to the wife. The boundaries surrounding gender divisions of labor are strict and are believed to be God ordained. Yet, there are double standards that disadvantage women in traditional gender divisions of labor. Women’s history must account for the “various forms and modes in which patriarchy appears historically, the shifts and changes in its structure and function, and the adaptations it makes to female pressure and demands” (Lerner 1986, 239). Lerner suggests that women in traditional patriarchal structures seek to empower themselves in the system, by redefining the system in modern terms. For example, Ingersoll’s (1995) discussion of
recent efforts to reinterpret the Bible regarding gender equality, highlights the efforts of Biblical Feminist.

Biblical Feminists go to the original Greek and argue that the word kephale, which is translated as head, does not include the idea of “authority over” as it does in English. Kephale, it is argued, means head as in source. Biblical Feminists argue that Paul is referring to the creation account in which man was created first. They then cite Paul’s later statement that although woman originally came from man, through the birthing process, all men come from women. They conclude that taking these passages in light of Paul’s statement in Galatians that there “is no male or female in Christ” the Bible necessarily teaches equality between men and women (Ingersoll 1995, 4).

In contrast, Ingersoll’s research on Protestant Fundamentalist women demonstrates that although these women did not align themselves with Biblical Feminists they did work to empower themselves through their roles as teachers in the church to gain status among the members.

Modern Society and the Patriarchal Family

For many women, rigid traditional roles prescribed by patriarchy have come into direct conflict with their roles in a modern world. Because these women’s daily lives include the playing out of conflicting roles, they must resolve the tension that exists between the traditional roles they have adopted and the norms prescribed by the modern society in which they live. Key to the process of resolving these tensions is often a crisis in which women’s life assumptions are threatened (Christensen 1988). Such a crisis can
expose discrepancies between expectations and experiences, and cause women to take action in reconstructing a new framework and as a result, feel empowered. Similar or related experiences have been found among women in two very different religious groups. Kaufman’s (1991) and Stacey’s (1991) research demonstrate these processes for Jewish and Evangelical Christian women. In Rachel’s Daughters, Kaufman discusses the experiences of women who described themselves as “politically liberal” in their college years but eventually embraced Orthodox Judaism. She describes the women in her study as having found “in Jewish orthodoxy a sense of community and a moral discourse to be used for everyday living” (1991, 157). After concluding that the modern world had failed them, these women moved to the political right, and learned to construct their traditional roles within a modern framework. In Kaufman’s view, these women “raised important questions about the meaning of family, the politics of gender identity, and feminism.” The stories of Rachel’s daughters and other women with similar experiences “reveal more than the antipathy of an antifeminist religious Right. Their voices are the voices of women trying to cope with what they perceive to be the inequalities and imbalances of postindustrial living and liberal patriarchal culture” (157).

Judith Stacey’s (1991) research on Evangelical Christian women also sheds some light on empowerment possibilities within a patriarchal system. In Brave New Families, she introduces her readers to Eleanor, the founder of Global Ministries, an Evangelical Christian group in Northern California. After divorcing her abusive husband, Eleanor reevaluated her attitude toward patriarchy and started a new church, with herself at the head. Although Eleanor rejects feminism, her notions of gender have been deeply
informed by it. While explaining to Stacey that it is true that she believes in the patriarchal order that the Bible teaches, Eleanor uses Biblical Feminist rhetoric: “To be the head doesn’t mean that you rule over something, or that you usurp something. It means just the opposite actually, that you serve them with love and with respect.” Eleanor is comfortable when explaining that her new framework teaches that “submission is not subjection,” but teachability; and authority means responsibility. The two parts to this equation complement each other to create a successful marriage (Stacey 1991). Stacey describes Eleanor as having achieved much more “…sociospatial integration than most feminists or other progressives who decry the modern schisms between public and private worlds, between work and family life” (135). Eleanor represents an unanticipated blend of fundamentalism and feminism, of traditional patriarchal principles and modern egalitarian practices.

Stacey’s work identifies the different challenges feminism must face in the twenty-first century. In addressing the backlash that has occurred against feminism, she explains that most women who had families turned to feminism for answers to personal struggles in balancing family and work and found disappointment in the lack of answers feminism provided. The collapse of feminism caused a social and political rightward shift. When these women’s expectations of feminism failed them, they reconstructed a new framework that allowed for social and political changes (Mitchell 1986).

Martha Beck’s (1994) research on LDS women supports the findings of these studies of conservative women by showing how women whose daily lives are affected by patriarchy reconstruct their world to include both the traditional and the modern.
Although traditional patriarchy is partly to blame for the challenges associated with role conflict, it is also patriarchal religions that have given women the tools necessary to successfully empower themselves in modern society. Beck argues that, women who belong to a religious culture which validates a spiritual existence are much more likely to have “mystical experiences.” The women in Beck’s study substituted “social legitimation with mystical legitimation [which] provided them with a sense of personal legitimacy even in the face of extreme social sanctions.” Beck concludes that “the common feature in the behavior of these individuals was not so much a pattern of lifestyle choices as a qualitative similarity in the means by which they made and defended those choices” (Beck 1994, 270).

Ironically, it is the strict nature of the structure of patriarchy that can lead to the empowerment of LDS women. Christensen’s research indicates that it is the potentially oppressive side of patriarchy that forces LDS women to rethink their value as women, within the system. Although, in patriarchal systems women are told that they are valued, their experiences have taught them otherwise. It is this kind of paradox that Christensen believes eventually leads LDS women to restructure their belief system in a way that validates their sense of identity in spite of the patriarchal system.

The Paradoxes of Role Conflict

One way that the above paradox manifests itself in the lives of women is in role conflict. Women who value traditional characteristics and draw upon those characteristics in nurturing close relationships may find that the very characteristics that make them successful in the private sphere, undermine their position in the modern,
public sphere. Women's moral development is central to understanding the dynamics surrounding role conflict. The very traits that have defined the traditional woman as "good," flexible, nurturing, relationship oriented etc. are those that have defined them as deficient in moral development. According to Carol Gilligan, the derivation of developmental constructs from women's lives provides an "outline of a moral conception different from that described by Freud, Piaget, or Kohlberg [which then] informs a different description of development." Gilligan describes a new concept in which

\[
\ldots [a\]\ moral\ problem\ arises\ from\ conflicting\ responsibilities\ rather\ than\ from\ competing\ rights\ and\ requires\ for\ its\ resolution\ a\ mode\ of\ thinking\ that\ is\ contextual\ and\ narrative\ rather\ than\ formal\ and\ abstract.\ This\ conception\ of\ morality\ as\ concerned\ with\ the\ activity\ of\ care\ centers\ moral\ development\ around\ the\ understanding\ of\ responsibility\ and\ relationships,\ just\ as\ the\ conception\ of\ morality\ as\ fairness\ ties\ moral\ development\ to\ the\ understanding\ of\ rights\ and\ rules\ (Gilligan\ 1982,\ 19).\]

The ignorance behind the exclusion of normal female development from human development theories undermines the importance that modern society places on the individual and devalues more traditional communitarian notions. Ann Swindler argues for the need to value societal connections when she claims that "the most crucial shift in our culture is a change in the symbolic and moral grounding of the self in modern society." This shift leads to a self that is defined by its lack of attachment and its inability to change. As a result, Swindler sees "an ideal of the self cut off from meaningful connection to others, from any danger of commitment, attachment, sacrifice, or self-
“In the end, we have a model of human relationships in which people are unable or unwilling to engage in the activities that are fundamental to meaningful relationships (Swindler 1980, 120). Present theories of human development revolve around the more modern qualities of independence and rationality. Consequently, the equally essential need to connect with others is devalued and contemporary definitions are inadequate (Guntrip 1961). Debbi Christensen’s (1988) research centers on the complex developmental process of LDS women. Instead of placing autonomy as the pinnacle of maturity she describes the importance of balancing self-sufficiency with relationships. The ability to balance, for LDS women, was viewed as critical in times of crisis (Christensen 1988).

A woman’s ability to adapt to modern society’s demand for independence and traditional society’s required cultivation of relationships is fostered by her biology. In Feminist Theory (1993), Josephine Donovan asserts that women have developed a different epistemology because their life experiences have forced them to adjust to internal and external conditions that they have very little control over. This has led women to develop a greater degree of flexibility and adaptability—what many have judged as passivity. In an attempt to account for the development of an “environmentally aware, or holistic vision” in women, Donovan claims that

The primary condition of powerlessness has necessarily meant that women have had to be aware of their environment to survive, for that environment has continually impinged upon them. This sense of not being in control of one’s own world resulted in more flexibility, of relativity, of contingency. Similarly, both
the monthly experiences of menstruation and the lack of birth control until recently, pregnancy, birth and menopause would have contributed to a feeling of not being in control (Donovan 1993, 173).

The ability to be flexible has been one of women’s greatest survival skills in the desire to balance what appears to be two mutually exclusive worlds. Women have learned that there is a delicate balance between nurturing the self and nurturing others.

It is women’s ability to see both their modern and traditional roles as flexible, that has led to their empowerment. According to Sara Ruddick (1989), “Reality dictates that there are things that are beyond our control. Anyone who has loved and nurtured knows that excessive control may defeat the purpose of growth, the nurturer must adopt a relatively passive attitude” (Ruddick 1989, 178). Yet, passivity and flexibility should not be confused with apathy. The ability to care for a person should never be justification for the human compulsion to want to control. True freedom and empowerment comes from people who care very much but have the wisdom to know when to let go of personal attachments and cultivate another’s sense of self.

Unanswered Questions

Much has been said about traditional women in a modern society. The different roles they fulfill, the internal conflicts those roles can produce, and how women construct their world in response to their life experiences. While most of the studies discussed have not looked particularly at LDS women, their findings are relevant to the study of LDS women’s experiences. In addition to the influence of Mormon culture, there is intense pressure to adhere to the counsel given by church leaders. The following question
must be asked: “Can LDS women within a patriarchal system empower themselves?”, “If so, how do they empower themselves?” and finally “Can LDS women empower themselves and maintain church membership?”. Up to date there has been no research explaining how LDS women work to empower themselves within the dynamics of LDS culture and institutional leadership. This research will demonstrate how LDS women can maintain church membership and empower themselves by challenging previously held beliefs systems and changing personal paradigms.

Summary

Empowerment is the freedom to select from a full range of perceived choices when making a personal decision. It also means having access to resources that affect the outcome of that choice. Women who are part of a patriarchal religious group have learned to navigate through complex paradigms to create a delicate balance between traditional values and modern roles. According to recent scholarship, it is to a woman’s advantage that they maintain flexible definitions of their roles in both worlds, when making personal decisions. As tradition would suggest, it is common for women to include significant others in the process of making personal decisions that affect their role in a modern society. These decisions are often made with the desire to maintain harmonious relationships not only with significant others, but between the modern and traditional worlds. This often places their decision making process in complex and competing cultural contexts. In the effort to negotiate among these paradigms while adopting their own, women further enhance their own empowerment. The literature reviewed above gives insights into the empowerment process of women in general, but no
research has addressed the empowerment of LDS women. Both LDS theology and the patriarchal structure of the LDS church are particular to Mormon culture, and it is unclear how they affect LDS women’s empowerment.

Previous work on other women in patriarchal systems indicates that LDS women’s experiences with empowerment may follow the sections shown below in Figure 2. In this model life altering experiences are similar to what Beck refers to as “the double bind.” In the lives of LDS women, life altering experiences may cause significant turmoil which challenge personal belief systems, what Christensen calls “failing assumptions.” In reconstructing personal belief systems people often turn to God for answers to secure a more legitimate paradigm that corresponds with their experiences. Answers from God are termed personal revelation, and are comparable to what Beck labels “mystical experiences.” These experiences are capable of transcending any previous held belief, to give new meaning to the receiver while at the same time calling for a new framework. This ability to expand a perceived range of choices by transcending established beliefs or expectations through personal revelation is a significant source of empowerment for LDS women.

Figure 2: Overview of Empowerment Process, contains four sections. The first section is labeled Life Altering Experiences; the second section is labeled Challenging Personal Belief Systems; the third section is Personal Revelation; and the fourth section is Empowerment.

The first section was developed after reading dissertations by Deborah Christensen, and Martha Beck. Both describe LDS women as going through a profound
Figure 2. Overview of Empowerment Process

- Life Altering Experience
- Challenging Personal Belief System
- Searching and Personal Revelation
- Negotiation and Empowerment
lifelalteringexperience that led them to challengepersonalbeliefsystems. Christensen (1988) describes some of her respondents as having undergone a crisis that caused them to reevaluate their personal belief systems because it revealed an incongruity between expectation and experience. Christensen refers to this dilemma as “failed assumptions”. Kaufman (1991) and Stacey (1991) also discuss how conflicting beliefs and experiences can work to challenge personal belief systems. Beck discusses the crisis in the context of a double bind; a double bind occurs when a person has received two conflicting messages and is trying to deal with her conflicting roles. These messages can come from external sources or they can come from the self. Both Christensen and Beck describe such experiences as unconscious or at least unarticulated. Section three of my model is entitled Personal Revelation, and is the pivotal step in LDS women’s sense of empowerment. All empowered women in the sample reported receiving personal revelation. In my research I found that the women who claimed to have a personal revelation from God, felt Empowered to overcome any obstacle that stood in the way of what they felt was a divinely determined course. Although, Christensen focuses on relationships to further a maturing process, and Beck focuses on “mystical” experiences to explain how LDS women resolve the tension created in the double bind, the patterns they describe in their research coincide with my findings on LDS women.

Although, this original model proved to be useful in describing LDS women’s sense of empowerment, it was oversimplified and left out many essential steps in the process that LDS women go through to empower themselves. Figure 2, therefore, is to be viewed as a general model which is the starting point for this exploratory research.
Research questions related to this model include the following:

1. How do LDS women empower themselves?

2. What are LDS women’s experiences with empowerment and how do they vary from each other?

3. What conditions and characteristics affect the empowerment process?

4. How does the process for LDS women compare to other women in patriarchal religions?
Chapter 3
Research Methods and Analysis Plans

History of the Mormon Women’s Project

This project originally started with Dr. Debra Kaufman (1991), author of Rachel’s Daughters. Dr. Kaufman's book analyzes Jewish women who were politically active in college and defined themselves as liberal, but later distanced themselves from liberal beliefs and embraced Orthodox Judaism. Dr. Kaufman concludes that Orthodox Jewish women feel more valued living in a structured system of patriarchy because of the value placed on the role of wife and mother, as defined by religious practices. When Dr. Kaufman was a visiting professor at Brigham Young University, she initiated a similar study about Mormon women in conjunction with Carol Ward, Marie Cornwall, and Martha Beck. Several graduate students were trained in the in-depth style interviewing format. We received instructions to record interviews, to keep extensive field notes, to keep track of personal biases in a journal, and meet often to discuss interviewing experiences.

Under the direction of the Women’s Research Institute, 50 two-hour interviews of Mormon women were recorded. Each interview began with the signing of a consent form asking permission to use the interview for this research. Each respondent was required to fill out a questionnaire in which we asked 23 closed-ended questions describing each woman demographically. Interviews were loosely structured, consisting of open-ended questions designed to obtain a more descriptive account of women’s experiences within the LDS church. More probing follow-up questions were asked so that respondents
would have a chance to clarify the meaning of anything that seemed ambiguous. The first round of interviews was to be a starting place for future research of LDS women. General questions were asked about the sense of “sisterhood” in Relief Society, experiences with priesthood leaders, and their feelings about self and family. A conscious effort was made to obtain interviews from a diverse group so that a variety of Mormon women might be represented.

**Interview Questions**

These questions represent the basic elements of the interview guide. Additional background data (e.g., demographic characteristics) were also collected from each respondent. These data were be used in establishing patterns in the responses of women to the interview questions.

1. How would you describe yourself to someone else?

2. What do you spend most of your time thinking about? Was that the same five years ago?

3. How would you describe a typical Mormon woman?

4. What does being a woman mean to you in the context of the gospel?

5. What is your relationship to the Relief Society?

6. What is your relationship with other LDS sisters?

7. What is the relationship between women and the priesthood?

8. What is Mormonism for you?

9. What is Salvation for you?

10. To what extent do you incorporate the counsel of church leadership into your life?
How do you deal with that counsel?

11. How do you approach problems? (Clarify their perception of range of choices.)

12. How would you describe your mother? How would you describe your grandmother?

13. What do you consider to be the best things about your life at this point in time?

14. If you could give advice to the young women in the church, knowing that they would listen, what would you say?

From this original sample I have selected 25 interviews, 20 of the interviews I conducted myself, with the remaining 5 being done by 4 other graduate students that worked with me on this project. I selected these 25 interviews based on demographic diversity and various levels of empowerment to demonstrate the entire empowerment process.

Research Design

Because of the strong influence of patriarchy in the church and the possibility of LDS women being socialized in a culture dominated by male perspectives, this exploratory research was designed to obtain detailed information from LDS women about their personal experiences through in-depth interviews. According to Martyn Hammersley, ethnography “enables us to capture social reality more accurately than other approaches” (Hammersley 1992, 5). Because it allows respondents to give personal definitions and explanations of their own experiences. This is critical in exploratory research because it allows the researcher to immediately ask follow up questions to better understand respondents' experiences. Jesse Bernard refers to a woman's experience in the social world as "her world." Bernard suggests that the structure of the female world
is based in kinship relationships of women in which “centralizing” is pivotal. Bernard views women as “keepers of the family tradition, fulfilling ‘an important integrating role in channeling, switching, and storing information pertaining to the entire kinship network’” (Bernard 1982, 29). Bernard’s approach involves long, intense interviews and participant observation so that the researchers might familiarize themselves with the respondent’s daily routine. The focus of the approach is to understand how the respondent has constructed her social world.

Given my desire to understand the meaning of LDS women’s social world on a more profound level than mere description, and because of the religious nature of LDS women’s experiences, qualitative methods of research are the most appropriate. I have chosen to use in-depth interviews as my main data source because they will give me the most natural as well as detailed and comprehensive answers about the experiences of LDS women in empowerment. Extensive personal interviews also allow for more thoughtful responses from research subjects as well as affording me the opportunity to participate verbally and non-verbally with respondents which will help me to read other cues that might otherwise go unnoticed. Shulamit Reinhartz (1992) claims that “‘alternative’ or nonpositivist methods—particularly open-ended interviewing and ethnography—must have a prominent place in feminist social science. These ‘alternative’ methods focus on interpretation, rely on the researcher’s immersion in social settings, and aim for intersubjective understanding between researchers and the person(s) studied” (Reinhartz 1992, 46). Analysis of in-depth interview data will identify themes and patterns that are critical to the empowerment process.
Interview Sample

The interview sample consists only of LDS women. The twenty-five LDS women included in this study have three main characteristics; first they must identify themselves as active and involved in the LDS church. *Active* means that they regularly attend all three church meetings on Sunday. *Involved* means that they have church callings, regularly attend ward activities, or they are called to help serve other ward members. Second, the LDS women selected will represent a variety of demographic categories. Women have been selected because of their various ages, incomes, marital status, geography, if they have served missions, where they grew up, if they are converts, how many children they have, etc. Only LDS women who currently live within the United States have been selected. I feel it important to include women who live along the Wasatch Front as well as those who do not, to see if proximity to church headquarters will have any impact on empowerment. One of the limits of my research is the lack of racial diversity. However, since most American LDS women are white, the sample is fairly representative in this way. Another limitation of this sample is its small size. Although this sample will represent various circumstances of LDS women, it will not include enough cases to make substantial generalizations.

The areas of LDS women's life explored in this research include: expectations and experiences with LDS doctrine, the church, other women, church culture, the sense of community within the church on local levels, her relationships with family members and more. This research also explores paradoxes, role conflicts, rigid divisions of labor and rhetoric that gives special emphasis to women's roles in this patriarchal system.
Because of the exploratory and qualitative nature of this research and the small sample size, the findings of this study will be useful only in describing LDS women and in understanding the construction of their world. The qualitative nature of this study influenced the sample size. The cost associated with collecting data through the use of intensive interviews and the limits of funding made it impossible to make the sample size larger. The disadvantage of a small sample size is its limited use in generalizing the findings to an entire population. Nevertheless, the findings from this research will assist in developing future research efforts on LDS women, women within patriarchal settings, and minority groups seeking empowerment.

Gaining Access to LDS Women

All the interviews were collected between January of 1994 and December of 1996. Only LDS women that identified themselves as active were selected. Interviews were needed from women living along the Wasatch front as well as and women who lived outside of Utah. Since I had lived in Southern California, I knew I had relatively easy access to that group and it seemed practical to obtain my “outside Utah” sample there. Initially access to the sample of LDS women was gained by simply asking women that I knew if I could interview them. Everyone I asked was not only receptive but very accommodating. After the initial interviews it was a snowball effect, one interview led to another through referrals.

The interviews I collected in Utah, were from women that I knew through church, my job, or school, with which a relationship of trust had already been established. I think one of the reasons I had easy access to LDS women in Utah was because of my job as a
release-time seminary teacher. In order to be a release-time seminary teacher there are several interviews that one must “pass” based on personal worthiness. The last of these interviews is done by a general authority. Based on the intense competition and worthiness factor, there is a certain amount of status within the LDS community that comes with being a seminary teacher. In addition to being a seminary teacher, the fact that I was a female seminary teacher, one of only seven (at the time) in the entire Church Education System, entitled me to a considerable amount respect. Although, being a seminary teacher was a bonus when asking for interviews, it also has its limitations in interviewing. My position as someone who represented one of the most orthodox institutions within the church may have constrained some of the respondents in their answers.

When calling to schedule interviews in California, by chance and generosity, I was invited to stay with a well respected Relief Society President in the area. This proved to be a lucky break as many of the women that accepted to be interviewed called her before the interview asking her if I was trustworthy, and she was very supportive. Another break came when I asked one of my respondents if she knew of anyone else that might be willing to be interviewed. She was also well respected in the area and gave me a substantial list of women’s names that were not only interesting but helped diversify the sample.

Coding and Data Analysis

My first step in data analysis will be what Strauss and Corbin (1990) refer to as conceptualizing. By dissecting sentences and paragraphs each unit of analysis will be
broken down and given names that represent a phenomenon to later categorize. Once particular phenomena are identified and two or several phenomena are found to be common, then these groupings can be assembled together and labeled as influencing variables or categories. Each category is given a name by the researcher to help organize data. Categories are significant to data collection because they have the ability to pull together other groups or subgroups of concepts which can reveal patterns of empowerment.

Strauss and Corbin (1990) also explain that within each category there are properties and dimensions. Properties are characteristics of the category. Property labels include the frequency of a phenomenon, the intensity, the duration and so on. Dimensions consist of the location of the properties along a continuum. Dimensions are usually coded in the following format; low-----high, less--------more, never--------often etc. Recognizing and understanding properties and dimensions within categories gives essential depth to research.

The next step will be a process of taking categories and rearranging them in different ways to see if any new connections or patterns can be identified. This process is called Axial coding (Strauss 1990, 96). Next will be a search to see if any causal condition can be identified. Causal conditions are any “events, incidents, or happenings that can lead to the occurrence or development of a phenomenon” (96). Another part of analysis will be looking for actions or behavior that can lead to the result of a particular phenomena, as well as identifying the consequences of that action.

Selective Coding is the next step in which the researcher selects the core category,
in this case empowerment, and systematically relates it to other categories, while
“validating those relationships, and filling in categories that need further refinement and
development” (Strauss 1990, 116).

The final process will be to describe findings by using different visual models
(figures) to represent influencing variables, the relationship between variables, patterns
of variables and explain the descriptive behavior that leads LDS women to or away from
issues of empowerment.

Working Hypotheses

Many women have been oppressed in the name of patriarchy. Within any
patriarchal religion the presence of women seeking empowerment has potential for
intense conflict. Yet, I hypothesize that there are women within this order who feel
empowered because of the value that the church places on traditionally female
characteristics and because of the sense of connection that LDS women feel toward other
LDS women, their ecclesiastical leaders and family members. The fact that some women
have been able to empower themselves within the patriarchal system suggests several
things. First, it undermines popular notions of patriarchy as inherently destructive or as
only capable of oppression. It also presents a more complex picture of the society that
patriarchy creates. In the lives of these women whose marginal status should make them
casualties of the system, it may be the very characteristics of patriarchy that have
facilitated their empowerment.

Because empowerment depends on a woman’s ability to gain access to resources
that widen her spectrum of options when making choices, characteristics that improved
her access to those resources influenced empowerment. Figure 3: Characteristics That Influence Empowerment, expands on Figure 2 by outlining patterns surrounding those characteristics that improved a woman’s access to empowering resources. The characteristics in Figure 3 are divided into four main groups; Experiences that Influence Empowerment, Relationships that Influence Empowerment, Religious Beliefs that Influence Empowerment, and Personal Characteristics that Influence Empowerment. Each category of concepts will in some degree positively or negatively influence an LDS woman’s sense of empowerment.

(1) Experiences that Influence Empowerment

Life altering experiences occur when LDS women have experienced a major change in their life such as a death of a loved one, divorce, infertility etc., that is, something that has taken them outside the cultural norm. Being outside the mainstream can promote personal evaluation in which personal belief systems are confronted, and challenged; this can also lead to empowerment.

(2) Relationships that Influence Empowerment

Because of the close connection that LDS women have to their families, and the responsibility they feel to include them in personal decisions, family members have a huge impact on LDS women’s sense of empowerment. I also expected that ecclesiastical leaders, because of their positions of authority, will have an impact on empowerment.

(3) Religious Beliefs that Influence Empowerment

A belief in the importance of personal progression and faith in God would influence empowerment because it allows for questioning in the name of personal
Figure 3. Characteristics that Influence Empowerment

**Characteristics**
- Life Altering Experiences
- Relationships
- Religious Beliefs
- Personal Characteristics

**General Process of Empowerment**
- **Section 1**: Life Altering Experience
- **Section 2**: Challenging Personal Belief Systems
- **Section 3**: Searching and Personal Revelation
- **Section 4**: Negotiation and Empowerment
progression and asserts that since God is supreme, receiving His answer to prayer is final, and should be adhered to to achieve happiness.

(4) Personal Characteristics that Influence Empowerment

I hypothesized that the following personal characteristics influence LDS women's empowerment process. Knowledge of doctrine from personal study or because of callings held in the church enables individuals to better separate elements of culture and tradition from those of doctrine. I also predicted that geographical proximity to church headquarters would impact empowerment. This research will show that LDS women who live farther away from church headquarters are more capable of separating church doctrine from church culture because of their experience in another culture. The ability to discriminate between different kinds of beliefs would lessen the pressure to conform to LDS culture and thus empowerment could be achieved. Age is another concept that influences empowerment. I predicted that the younger the woman the more empowered she will feel because her culture has validated the experience of women. In other words, she would have grown up with the questions and answers from previous generations of women who challenged traditional gender issues. Being a returned missionary, having work experience, experience in church leadership positions and having an education all influenced empowerment because they encourage independent thought and the questioning of personal belief systems.

Exceptions

Although, I expected to find common patterns in the above variables that support my hypothesis about empowerment among the LDS women in the sample, I anticipated
anomalies that would not fit neatly into any pattern identified by the hypotheses. Therefore, I looked for common patterns among the anomalies or different configurations within the boundaries of the hypotheses to explain the exceptional experiences of those particular LDS women. In some cases I developed new concepts to account for exceptions.

Level of Empowerment

Final analysis showed that the following core phenomena were most critical in determining empowerment. Influences are placed in one of two broad categories: external, situations beyond a person’s control, and internal, those experiences that a person can control. The most pivotal external factors were the attitudes of church leaders and husbands. Primary internal factors included expectations of fellow church-members, family members, and self as well as an understanding of church theology.

The women in this study are divided into three levels of empowerment: empowered, in the process of empowerment, and unempowered. A woman’s response to the core phenomena determined her level of empowerment. Empowered women benefitted from personally affirming external relationships while possessing a realistic set of life expectations and a mature understanding of LDS theology. Women in the process of empowerment were often transitioning toward more constructive expectations of themselves and or others, specifically family members and church leaders. Many of the women in this category were also coming to what they termed as a better understanding of the doctrine. Unempowered women struggled with church leaders and or a spouse who were unsupportive of all but the most restrictive roles. They often had a
comparatively simplistic view of LDS theology which prevented them from assimilating their experiences in an empowering way.

Overall Demographic Description

The women in this study are best described using five sets of characteristics, shown in Table 1: Overall Demographic Description. The first group is called personal characteristics and gave information about age, health, depression, drug and alcohol habits, full-time missions and how many respondents were converts to the LDS church. The work characteristics included: full-time or part-time jobs, wages per hour, how many women owned personal business, Sunday work or moonlighting and family income. The next set includes family characteristics. This included information about marital status, years married, age of first marriage, kind of ceremony, if married before how many times, and number of children. The education characteristics indicated if they were currently a student, the number of years spent at formal schooling and the kind of degree achieved. The last set, personal background, described regional origins, the parental situation in the home, if their mother worked outside the home, if their father worked outside the home, how many children in the home they grew up in, their birth order and the size of town they grew up in.

Personal Characteristics

The average age of the women in the sample was 37 years old. Most of the women in the sample saw themselves as healthy, with 44% believing their health to be excellent, 48% claimed very good health, 4% marked good health, and 4% said fair. However, 24% of the sample said they had experienced depression. Of this group, all of
Table 1. Overall Description of Sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overall Demographic Description</th>
<th>Empowered</th>
<th>Processing Empowerment</th>
<th>Unempowered</th>
<th>Total Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>15.9</td>
<td>13.2</td>
<td>13.5</td>
<td>15.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>$54,000</td>
<td>$43,750</td>
<td>$40,000</td>
<td>$46,800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work Outside the Home</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital Status:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never Married</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Widowed</td>
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<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remarried</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separated</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Children</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
them sought professional help. Of the 12% that claimed experience with drugs or alcohol or both, 67% were not members of the LDS church at the time.

Sixteen percent of the sample were converts to the church, with an average age of 24 years old when converting to the church. A little over one-third of the total sample served full-time missions. However, of those that served full-time missions 87% were under 38 years of age.

**Work Variables**

Of the total number of my respondents 76% were working outside the home. Most of the women were working part-time, (48%) with only 4% working full-time and the remaining 32% working more than forty hours a week. Of those that were working, 16% were running their own businesses. The average amount of money made in an hour was, $15.51. Only 8% of the sample worked on Sunday and 12% were moonlighting, all of these women talked about overwhelming financial stress in their lives. The average annual income of the sample was $46,800. This can be deceiving because so many women fell on both ends of the financial spectrum. Twenty-four percent of the sample measured in the less than 10,000 range, all of these women were either in school or in-between degrees and, or supporting husbands in school. The second largest group, or 16%, fell in the $100,000 range.

**Personal Family Variables**

Most of the women in the sample were married (56%). The next largest group was the women who had never married (24%). Only 4% were divorced and single, 4% reported that they were separated, and 12% were divorced but had remarried. The
average age of first marriages was 23 years old, and of those married the average amount of years married was 16.8. Of the total sample 4% had a civil wedding, 12% had married civilly or in a church and later married in the LDS temple, and 64% had married the first time in the temple. Only 16% of the sample had been divorced, and only once. Of the 64% of the women in the sample who had children, the average number of children per family was 4.43.

**Education Variables**

Of my total sample, 16% were currently enrolled in school. The average number of years spent in school was 15.48. The break down in years was 13-16 undergraduate work, 17-19 graduate work, and more than 20 years. Seventy-six percent, had done undergraduate work, 16% had done graduate work and 4% had more than 20 years. Twenty-four percent, of the women had only a high school diploma, 8% had gone on to receive a degree from a Technical college, and 4% had completed an Associates degree. Many of the women had completed their Bachelors degree, 44%, with 12% achieving a M.S., J.D. or M.B.A. degree. Only 4% of the sample had more than 20 years of school and no one had a Ph.D..

**Personal Background Variables**

Of my total sample only 8% had grown up in Utah, although 36% had grown up in the intermountain west. An equal number, 36%, had grown up on the west coast, with the remaining 12% being raised in the south, 8% in the east and, 8% outside of the United States. Only 4% of the sample had grown up with their mother and step-father. The rest of the sample had all grown up with both their natural parents. Forty-four percent, of the
respondents grew up with mothers who worked outside the home. All but one of the respondent’s fathers worked away from the home, her father was a farmer. The average family size that respondents grew up in had 5.12 children. With 28% of the respondents reporting to be the oldest, 20% were second children, 24% were middle children and 28% were the baby of the family. Most of the sample grew up in the suburbs, 44%, with 28% growing up in a small town, 20% in a big city, and 8% in a metropolitan area.

Personal Experiences Related to Conducting This Research

For me, this project actually started in the summer of 1992, when I was 30, I had an experience which increased my desire to understand LDS women. Growing up, I had seen many different role models of empowerment, both women and men, some more positive than others. Prior to this study, I was enjoying a wonderful career teaching seminary full-time in Utah. I was single, traveling quite a bit, and was anticipating starting my Masters Degree at BYU in the fall. A couple of years later, I found myself overwhelmed with two demanding full-time jobs and school and decided to end my career at seminary and take a part time faculty position in the sociology department at BYU. I also married in December of 1992 and had a daughter in 1995. I describe these aspects of my life, because they greatly influenced how I viewed the empowerment of LDS women throughout the entire research project.

I believed that anyone who understood the church would not believe that LDS women could legitimately be stereotyped as the “doormats of patriarchy”. I had known many women in the church who were powerful, who had a voice, and who did not feel threatened by a patriarchal system to which they willingly belonged. After all, I was a
woman in the system and I did not feel unempowered. There had been times when I felt the judgements of women outside the church. I felt that they looked at me as young and naive, and that one day I would wake up and realize how oppressed I had been by a church that I had devoted my life to, then I would see the reality of my situation. I was aware that some LDS women felt unempowered, but unempowerment had not been part of my experience in the church. I had a sincere and strong desire to understand what effected an LDS woman’s sense of empowerment within the context of the Mormon church. Was I unique in feeling empowered as an LDS women? If LDS women do not feel empowered within the church why do they stay in the church? Why do some LDS women feel empowered and some not?

I must admit, I started this research with biases favoring younger single women, who had gone on missions. It was not hard to see how a younger women who is still looking forward in life, bound by few commitments, could be empowered. It was also easy to see how a single woman could feel empowered since she had so much freedom and so much time to think about the gospel, education, and various other areas of personal development. Although these things can be very noble they are also very self-involved, even with someone who has the best intentions. I also understood that because I did not have a family who needed my attention, I was able to do all kinds of positive, service-oriented activities; whether it was listening to a troubled student, helping the homeless or remembering those who are elderly or sick. I operated on the principle that I could not call myself a Christian unless I was willing to inconvenience my own life to make someone else’s life better. I mention these aspects of my life and outlook as a
young, single person because I think that they are relevant to how I exercised empowerment, and how I viewed the empowerment of other LDS women. Growing up in the LDS church, I had always been taught that the only way to gain a true sense of self was to devote your life to the needy. I started this project by defining empowerment has having the freedom to spend time, energy, and money as a person desires. An overly simplistic view, I admit.

I also believed that understanding how significant doctrinal beliefs can be appropriately applied to everyday life could be an important source of empowerment. It made sense to me that freedom can only come at the expense of responsibility. The more I knew, the more freedom I could enjoy, but I also had to be responsible for the consequences of exercising my agency. Although I believed that I could not control all of my circumstances in life, I could control most of them through the use of my agency. Of course, this influenced my definition of empowerment. It made sense to me that empowered women understood the doctrinal aspects of agency and how they applied to their lives.

As I collected data for this research, I found that interviewing women who fit the above description was a very therapeutic experience for me. It was not just enlightening to talk to these women; it was validating. I really enjoyed listening to their opinions and hearing their perspectives because they were so similar to my own. About this same time, I interviewed a few of the most unempowered women in my research, all of whom were married. I must confess that my initial feelings towards the unempowered was that of resentment. They so perfectly and unintentionally described themselves as the outside
stereotype of LDS women, something that I desperately wanted women inside the church to reject. Often, I would leave these interviews feeling frustrated and wondering why women stay in such unhappy circumstances. Up to this point, categorizing women as empowered or unempowered had been easy, probably because my definition was so oversimplified.

The first glitch in this oversimplified version of empowerment came when I interviewed my first empowered woman who was married with children. Statements from her interview did not fit anywhere, they were much more complicated than my other interviews had been. She was definitely empowered, but I did not understand it until after I had time to reflect upon her answers. It was during this reflecting time that I finished collecting the rest of my data. I had no idea the challenges that lay ahead of me in trying to understand how LDS women empower themselves. I spent the next two years transcribing and analyzing the interviews. I think adding a husband and a child to my reality helped me to see that I did not have to be young, single and a return missionary to be empowered. Lots of pondering and time taught me that empowerment can come in many forms, with many different kinds of women and people can do much to empower themselves and other people.

Now that this research is behind me, I find that my perspective on empowerment and my attitude toward LDS women in general has changed. Empowerment can bring a quality to life and a certain satisfaction in the playing out of different female roles that are critical to a woman’s overall stability, health and inner peace. Associating and talking with LDS women has taught me to love them and feel deep concern for their welfare. I
regret my previously unfair and harsh judgements of LDS women. The women I talked to
generously gave me their time and related to me some of the darkest and most joyous
times of their lives. The examples of the empowered LDS women in particular have had
a dramatic impact on me. I respect them, and in many ways hope that I can acquire their
respect for humanity and their wisdom in answering many of societies most troubling
problems. They are quick to answer to the needs of others and slow to prescribe answers
to the complicated questions of life. One day when I was admiring the many qualities of
LDS women, my husband, in jest, asked me, “Has this been a life altering experience for
you?”, “Yes” I answered, “it has been a life altering experience for me.” I hope that
through this research and subsequent efforts, LDS women will strive to create a
community that fosters the open and honest sharing of personal stories. It is also my hope
that people will be slower to judge LDS women and more earnest in seeking to
understand all the variables that account for the way people think and live.
Chapter 4
Processing Empowerment

The complex nature of the empowerment process requires a detailed description of its many dimensions. This chapter includes a brief overview of the empowerment process as well as detailed descriptions of each of the four sections of empowerment and the various passages which they encompass. It is impossible to understand how predicted characteristics relate to the empowerment process without understanding that process in detail. Thus, the focus of this chapter is to lay a foundation for a more comprehensive understanding of LDS women's sense of empowerment.

The Process of Empowerment

Upon final analysis, I was able to identify fourteen passages in the empowerment process of LDS women. The patterns that manifested themselves during analysis were cyclical, and progressive. I realized that empowerment did not come all at once; instead, it was a step by step process with each new passage of empowerment coming in one area of life at a time, which suggested that empowerment can be viewed as a positive spiral (See Figure 5).

There are fourteen passages in the process of empowerment shown in Figure 4:
The Process of Empowerment. The duration and intensity of each passage was contingent on the magnitude of the life altering experience and the personality of the woman having the experience. The first passage involves recognition of unhappiness and desiring happiness. This passage is followed by recognition of unhappiness due to confusion or a feeling of being unsettled. The third passage is recognition of mixed
Figure 4. 14 Passages of the Process of Empowerment

Section 1
Life Altering Experience

Section 2
Challenge Personal Beliefs and Questioning

Section 3
Searching and Personal Revelation

Section 4
Negotiation and Empowerment

1. Unhappy
2. Confusion
3. Mixed Messages
4. Confronting
5. Challenge Beliefs
6. Dysfunctional Beliefs
7. Question
8. Spectrum Options
9. Searching for Answers
10. Personal Revelation
11. Negotiate
12. Reconstructing
13. Empower
14. New Framework
Figure 5. Spiral
messages, conflicting roles or paradoxes within personal belief systems. Passage four involves confronting those beliefs described in passage three. The fifth passage involves challenging personal belief systems that include mixed messages, conflicting role behavior or paradoxes. Passage six is recognition of the double bind or dysfunction of the personal belief system which occurs when a woman realizes that previously held beliefs are not consistent with lived experiences. The seventh passage involves sorting through the personal belief system by questioning personal beliefs about church doctrine, church culture, personal expectations of members and self, as well as re-evaluating what has been an ideal and what has been a reality. Passage eight is recognizing the wide spectrum of options that are available in making personal decisions. It is an ability to perceive a bigger picture, one with options that go to the extreme on the choice spectrum. The ninth passage begins a serious search for answers in how to reconstruct the personal belief system into one that “works.” This passage includes drawing on spiritual resources such as deep pondering, prayer, studying the scriptures, fasting, attending the temple, drawing on feedback from others for direction, asking for priesthood blessings or looking to patriarchal blessings for guidance. Passage Ten is receiving personal revelation that is seen as an answer to this personal search. The eleventh passage is trying to negotiate any obstacles that can block access to desirable resources. Passage twelve is reconstructing the personal belief system. Passage thirteen is the achievement of empowerment. The final Passage, passage fourteen, is recognizing a new framework that allows for the blending of paradoxes. Unresolved tension was viewed as normal, and something that encourages personal growth. This process should be viewed as a positive
spiral which is part of an ongoing process.

I was able to identify, for each woman, one of three outcomes: those who were; **empowered**, in the process of empowerment and those who remained **unempowered**. The empowered group were those women who had learned to empower themselves in several aspects of their lives: family relationships, relationships with church members, role definition, expectations and understanding of LDS doctrine. The group labeled as in the process of empowerment were those that were empowered in some areas, or they were in the middle the sorting through the empowerment process. For example, these women may have been empowered in some aspects of their personal lives but they still struggled with some external aspects. The final group of unempowered women, lacked empowerment in both their personal and external lives.

Section 1: Life Altering Experiences

Figure 2 describes life altering experiences as a single crisis that preceded a major paradigm shift. I found this section of the figure to be too simplistic. Although a single life altering experience can come in the form of a tragedy which, in a single blow, can hurl someone into the process of empowerment, it can also result from a combination of less dramatic events. I conceptualized the single event as a life altering event, and the smaller events that in combination have the same effect as smaller life altering experiences. Life altering events had been experienced by 96% of the respondents. Death of a loved one had been experienced by 12% of my total sample; 4% had experienced terminal illness of self or family member; 24% divorce; 16% financial crisis; 12% had a husband or child that left the church; 28% came from a dysfunctional family;
24% had never married; and 8% had experienced a natural disaster in which all their possessions were lost.

In smaller life altering experiences, a combination of any of the following events could spawn a move toward empowerment: a regional move within the United States, a move from one country to another or living in another country for a significant amount of time (over 6 months), moving to or from Utah, depression, a substantial amount of traveling to other countries (specifically third world countries), a full-time mission, conversion to the LDS church, graduating from BYU and not being married, waiting several years after marriage to have children etc. Essentially any experience that departed from the standard paradigm or role expectations, associated with the culture of the church, were smaller life altering experiences. Personal beliefs that were once taken for granted were now seen as part of a distinct and unique culture, deeply influenced by the beliefs of the LDS church.

The processing of life altering experiences catapulted the women in this sample into the empowerment process. One of the differences between empowered women and unempowered women was the way in which they processed these experiences. Unempowered women showed the tendency to ignore life altering experiences. None of the women in the unempowered group had ever experienced a life altering event that would force them to recognize their circumstances. Their attitude is not to be confused with basic optimism. These women appeared to lack the motivation and skills necessary to recognize and confront the experience which left them unable to process it in a productive way. Empowered women in the sample were eager to find meaningful reasons
to explain why these dramatic experiences took place. Going through the process of a life altering experience helped women to give legitimacy to tragic circumstances. Thus, recognizing and confronting a life altering experience became essential to beginning the passages toward empowerment.

Three passages emerged during analysis that were all critical to the life altering experiences grouped together in Section One, shown in Figure 6: Life Altering Experiences. At any time in the process of Section One there could be overlapping of any combination of the passages. Again the intensity and the duration of the passages in Section One was dependent on the kind of event, the magnitude of the event and the personality of the woman. The first passage is experiencing unhappiness in combination with a desire to be happy. Many women in the sample discussed their unhappiness as part of their life altering experience. Krista was processing the recent death of her two year old son and expresses her feelings,

It’s hard if you don’t have someone to talk to all the time. That’s why I like being here with my mother. It’s really hard for me. I talk about my son that passed away a lot, and all these things about him. It’s really nice to have people that understand and believe the same way that we believe about children that have died.

Krista’s grief over the death of her son led her to evaluate her current situation. After evaluating her life she decided that she was not happy and wanted emotional stability and happiness, not only for herself but for her other children. This conscious decision to be happy may seem like an obvious step. However, it was not. I found that women who
Figure 6. Passages 1-3: Life Altering Experiences

Section 1

Life Altering Experiences

Feeling Powerful

Passage 1
Unhappy

Passage 2
Confusion

Passage 3
Mixed Messages

Right to Happiness

passages

life altering experiences

unhappy

passage 1

passage 2

passage 3

mixed messages
were unempowered had experienced severe unhappiness, yet they never consciously made a decision to be happy. It was not that they had made a conscious decision to stay unhappy either, but they did not recognize their unhappiness and depression. The paralyzing effects of feeling emotionally overwhelmed prohibited unempowered women from consciously thinking about their level of happiness; their circumstances remained unchanged as did their response to those circumstances. Unempowered women also saw themselves as powerless to change their circumstances which contributed to their unhappiness. One unempowered woman did not believe that she had the “right kind of personality” to leave her abusive husband. She explains that she stays with her husband because she loves him and “the church teaches that you should stay with your husband.”

I found the opposite pattern in passage 1 with the women in the empowered group. The women in the empowered group talked about recognizing their unhappiness, but they were not overwhelmed by their feelings. In fact, empowered women saw themselves as a powerful force in achieving personal happiness; their response to circumstances was something they felt they could control, and they were aware of this process. Although many of these women claimed that during their life altering experience their lives felt “out of control,” they still felt powerful in their lives. They also assumed that they had a “right” to be happy. This “personal power” in combination with a “right to happiness” was a significant pattern in helping these women get through many traumatic experiences. Another pattern that manifested itself in relation to these two concepts and empowerment was viewing challenging situations as temporary. Although these elements were most prominent in passage 1, feeling powerful and optimistic was
significant in enabling women to progress through all the passages of empowerment. Those women who felt entitled to happiness and had more personal power were more hopeful about making it through their life altering experience successfully, which increased the odds that they would.

In passage 2, unhappiness was linked to confusion. For many women in the sample, feelings of confusion preceded passage 3, or the awareness of mixed messages or role conflict. In trying to find the source of their unhappiness and give meaning to their confusion many women linked these emotions to mixed messages. Lisa expressed frustration with the members of her ward because of the mixed messages she received about being a “stay at home mother.”

The church has come out and said that motherhood is not a lesser role. It really, really is important, and yet in the way people are treated (it’s different) . . . I’m one of the very few women in my ward that stay home, now. You’d think that somehow that’s a Mormon ideal, but really I can only think of three or four women in my ward that stay home with their children. We’re having to do everything that everybody else can’t do because they’re at work. Well, I’m at home with my children and I think that’s an important place for me to be, not taking care of all the other tasks that everybody else can’t do because they’ve chosen to go to work. In that way, it’s a conflicting message.

Lisa felt like she was receiving mixed messages from church members, about where her time should be spent. On one hand, she was being told that as a mother her time should be spent with her children, which conflicted with the pressure she felt to pick up the slack.
from working mothers who needed help fulfilling their church responsibilities.

Unempowered women in the sample identified the source of mixed messages in a variety of ways. Some blamed other people; some blamed the church organization; some blamed themselves; but all of them viewed mixed messages as an external force and as rare. Mixed messages were seen by many as something to be changed, so that the system could be “righted”. Yet, the lack of personal control over external forces and the slowness of institutional change, left some women feeling frustrated and hopeless. Those LDS women caught in passages 1, 2 or 3 were understandably cynical towards the church and its members.

The women in the empowered group viewed mixed messages and role conflict as an everyday part of life. This is not to say that they supported them or believed that mixed messages should exist. Many empowered women viewed mixed messages as something to be understood and responded to appropriately. The women in the sample responded to mixed messages in a variety of ways. Those women who believed that mixed messages were something to fix used strategies of separation. This group of women responded to mixed messages by separating them from their source in such a way that the message was no longer mixed. For example, a mixed message became “unmixed” if one message came from the church and the other message came from the a non-LDS culture. An LDS woman could then simply ignore the non-LDS message to avoid a conflict. When women found themselves to be the source of mixed messages, the strategy was to resolve the conflict within themselves. Other women identified mixed messages as coming from church members, not “the Church.” The tone of Diane’s
response to a mixed message gives the impression that mixed messages are everywhere, only to be expected, including in the church, and it is up to the individual receiving the message to place it in a proper context.

Absolutely, I think women do get mixed messages. I think it’s more the old male chauvinistic stereotype thing showing forth rather than the gospel of Jesus Christ. There are times that I really wonder about things in the church. For example, and I’ve talked to my Bishop about this, and he’s talked to me. They were trying to get a President of the Sunday school. I said, “Does it have to be a man? Why does it have to be a man?” He said, “I don’t know. We were wondering about that too.” He said, “Nowhere does it say the President of the Sunday School has to be a man.” Does a ward clerk have to be a man? Why? What’s being a ward clerk and taking care of the finances got to do with the priesthood? What’s being in charge of Pioneer Day got to do with being in the priesthood? There’s lots of situations like that, where a woman could do the job just as well, maybe even better, than the man who was picked to do it. There’s no good logical reason. . . To reverse that, why does a woman have to be Primary President? My husband would make a good Primary President, better than a lot of women because he’s not having babies and having to take care of his own babies at the same time he’s conducting a Primary meeting.

Diane attributed these mixed messages to the members of the church, which was consistent with her belief that “the Church” itself would not send mixed messages. The idea that mixed messages came from church members was, for Diane, something to be
expected. To label Diane’s attitude toward mixed messages as passive would be a mistake. She did not believe that mixed messages from any source were acceptable, only natural. Seeing them as a natural part of human interaction, helped Diane to deal with them. Diane also talked about her hope that in the future, the church would eliminate mixed messages altogether. She pointed out that in the recent past, women were not asked to pray in the church’s main Sunday meeting, Sacrament meeting, but that has changed. She used this as an example of how things that are “illogical” in the church can change.

It is important to keep in mind that a woman experiencing the passages of Section One, could bounce back and forth among any of the first three passages several times before progressing to Section Two.

Section 2: Challenging Belief Systems

Section Two of the original model was Challenging Belief Systems, meaning that someone going through the empowering process would reevaluate their personal belief system, shown in Figure 7: Challenging Belief Systems. Again the original figure was oversimplified. Upon further analysis three passages in Section Two surfaced: passage 4, recognizing mixed messages in a personal belief system; passage 5, evaluation of a personal belief system; and passage 6, recognition of a dysfunctional belief system. Passage 4, confronting mixed messages, differs from passage 3, recognizing mixed messages, in that recognizing mixed messages did not necessarily mean that a woman confronted the mixed messages that helped create her belief system. Passage 4 was some kind of action that led to initial changes in a woman’s belief system.

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Figure 7. Passages 4-6: Challenging Personal Belief Systems

Section 2

Challenging Personal Belief Systems

Passage 4
Confronting

Passage 5
Challenge Beliefs

Passage 6
Dysfunctional Beliefs
After recognizing mixed messages or experiencing incongruity between one’s beliefs and one’s experiences, the empowered women in the sample confronted the dysfunction of their own personal belief system. These women found that previously held belief patterns were ineffectual. Again, this may seem like an obvious step, but it was not. The women in my unempowered group never questioned their belief system. Reactions of unempowered women varied from ignoring the life altering experiences, to trying to fit their experiences into their dysfunctional belief system and ignoring what did not fit. Many of the beliefs that LDS women were challenging were beliefs associated with teaching or counseling experiences in the church. In our interview, Phoebe talked about one of her children leaving the church.

I though that if we brought up our kids with love and understanding and in the church, that they would always listen to me and do what you role modeled. That if you kept the commandments, and listened to the prophet, and stayed with the church principles that you would be blessed and that some of the hard times would be softened and I knew that there would be difficult times but somehow I didn’t think it would be this difficult, as difficult as it is.

Here you can see passages 4, 5 and 6 overlapping. Phoebe struggled with her belief that if she did what she was told, her children would stay strong in the church. However, this belief was being challenged by the experience of her child’s departure from the church. She was confused about why this incorrect belief would be promoted by the people of the church and felt lost about how to rectify her situation. The discrepancy between what she expected and what she experienced led her to challenge her personal belief system about
parents and children and what she had heard at church. She was confronting what Christensen (1988) calls “failed assumptions”. She had been taught that parental behavior predicted the outcome of a child’s behavior, and she incorporated this idea into her personal beliefs. When what she had believed conflicted with what she had experienced, passage 5, this led her to an awareness that her belief system was dysfunctional, passage 6. Another important aspect of this model is its fluid nature; a person can move around from passage to passage at any point as she tries to determine through meticulous analysis the source of the beliefs, which beliefs should be discarded, and which beliefs should be maintained. Processing passages 4 through 6, found in Section Two, also varied in intensity and time depending on the event, and the personality of the women experiencing the event.

Passage 7, questioning of church doctrine and culture, also relates to Section Two, shown in Figure 8: Reevaluating Belief Systems. The ability to question became one of the most significant predictors of an LDS women’s empowerment. In fact, a woman could successfully go through passages 1 through 6, but if she did not have good questioning skills or the time to separate and methodically analyze her belief system, she could easily stay in passage 6. Being able to separate church doctrine from other church beliefs became a major predictor of empowerment. Those women who were able to place in separate categories church doctrine, church commandments, church policy, and church culture, were more likely to be empowered.

Originally, I had predicted that those women who felt that revelation from God could transcend any belief or counsel given, would feel more empowered. While all the
Figure 8. Passage 7: Reevaluating Personal Belief Systems

Section 1
Life Altering Experience

Section 2
Challenge Personal Beliefs and Questioning

Passage 1
Unhappy

Passage 2
Confusion

Passage 3
Mixed Messages

Passage 4
Confronting

Passage 5
Dysfunctional Beliefs

Passage 6
Challenge Beliefs

Passage 7
Questioning
women in the sample agreed that God was capable of superceding any counsel, there were distinct beliefs that predicted empowerment. All the women in the sample believed that God could both transcend church and personal beliefs and that he would. But from initial interviews it was clear that empowered women and unempowered women did not share the same perspective on church beliefs. It was only by asking specific follow up questions about their beliefs in God, that this Concept of Doctrine pattern emerged, shown in Figure 9: Doctrine Concept.

What separated empowered women and unempowered women when it came to this concept? At first, I imagined that all the women in the empowered group would be those women that believed that God could and would do anything, and I imagined that the unempowered women would qualify what God could and would do. By imposing limits on God’s influence, I predicted that women would struggle with empowerment. But this was not the case. As I analyzed respondents answers over and over again, I realized the belief that God could and would do anything was universal. However, what became monumentally significant was the way empowered women developed beliefs about the church based on their experiences in the church. Empowered women classified four different types of beliefs in the church: doctrine, which they identified as never changing; commandments, which only God could change; policy, which only the church leaders changed, and culture, which people changed. The women in my empowered group felt that God could and would change any belief except doctrine. However, the women in the unempowered group made no distinction between church doctrine and comments made in church on Sunday. This inability to discriminate between different kinds of church
Figure 9. Doctrine Concept

Characteristics that Influence Ability to Discriminate

- Never Changes
  - Doctrine
  - Commandments
- Church Leaders Change
  - Policy
  - Culture
- People Change

Women with Discriminating Ability
- Empowered
- Women with No Discriminating Ability
- Unempowered

Women Who Have Faith in God
- Powered
- Unempowered
beliefs left these women unempowered. Although they talked the same language as the empowered women, the meaning of what they were saying was dramatically different. They, like empowered women, believed that God could and would change anything, except the doctrine. But, because their view of doctrine included anything from the opinions of church members to what they read in the Bible, almost anything associated with the church was doctrine. Those women who were able to put mental parentheses around different church beliefs were significantly more empowered.

In analyzing those women who possessed a more discriminating belief system, patterns emerged involving similar background characteristics. These women were more likely to have served a full-time mission, they were more likely to have had a formal educational background in which they completed their sought after degree; many had lived in foreign countries; they were also more likely to have moved regionally within the United States, specifically to Utah or from Utah. Some had never married and or never had children; some had a calling in which they were responsible for teaching church doctrine, and they were more likely to have studied LDS women in the church’s history.

These experiences had taken them, in some form, outside the established culture of the church, helping them recognize the church’s cultural influence. These experiences also helped them to see that some of their taken for granted assumptions, or personal beliefs, had been influenced by LDS culture. Empowered women were able to view cultural beliefs as having an appropriate place in LDS lifestyle practices, but spoke strongly against confusing church culture with church doctrine. Alice describes the culture shock in her initial experiences when coming to Brigham Young University.
...For four years we lived in M- and we were the only members of the church. Our only meetings were the ones we held at home. Mom and Dad used to give sacrament meeting talks. I remember really believing that Mormon theology was the glory of God is intelligence and we could become gods. So for me being a Mormon in that context was terribly exciting. I saw myself as a goddess for eternity, with infinite potential. That really was what it meant to be a Mormon. There was absolutely no limit to what I could be and who I could become. I had a very rude awakening when I came to BYU and was introduced to what I think is a much narrower version that is often presented as Mormon theology. It was a very, very difficult transition for me. I wasn’t really even aware of it. But as I experienced what I saw as a real narrowing of my potential and possibility, defining my role as a wife and my success being defined in terms of, “Could I attract a man?,” it was a very, very cataclysmic for me. I really feel like my four years at BYU and my four or five years after were spent trying to figure that out, and finally realizing that I was right as a child.

By believing that her personal worth as an individual was unlimited, Alice had created an empowering belief system that encouraged her to explore many different roles. When Alice came to BYU she confronted a belief system that attached her personal worth to her potential to attract a man. By choosing not to accept this definition of self-worth, Alice rejected an established cultural belief. By basing her individual worth in church theology, Alice continued to empower herself. Alice’s jarring encounter with Utah Mormon culture demonstrates how personal experiences that remove an LDS woman from the standard
culture of the LDS church can help them see the culture that exists in the church. Alice’s experience, her struggle with culturally dictated views of marriage and family, clearly illustrates the significance of being able to separate church doctrine from church culture.

In the process of distinguishing church beliefs, women easily went back and forth between Sections One and Two and the passages included in both. During the questioning process, LDS women adopted a more fluid belief system, all the while recognizing its temporality. Later, the boundaries of functional beliefs could be constructed and placed into a more permanent part of their personal belief system.

Another dimension to the doctrine concept that also signified empowerment occurred when a woman was able to distinguish other aspects of her belief. Some of the empowered women in the sample separated “the priesthood” from “the man.” For example, a bishop could give a woman counsel, and if a woman felt “the spirit bear testimony” of what he was saying she would heed the counsel. However, if a Bishop was giving counsel and the woman felt that he was wrong, she separated him from his priesthood and he became “a man.” In our interview, Diane displays the process of separating “the priesthood” from “the man” and explains why it is important for her;

You can have a Bishop who has somewhat of a patronizing attitude towards women. He may listen to you, but you get the feeling that it’s going right over his head and he’s not even listening to you. I don’t think that has anything to do with the Church. I think it has to do with that particular person’s upbringing and history and baggage of where they’re coming from and what their attitude is towards women. They may not even realize that they’re chauvinistic. They just
are. I’ve run into men like that in the Church. That’s just the way they are. They say things that are chauvinistic and they don’t even realize it. But that’s not the church; that’s them, that’s the individual. . . . There have been times when I have run into men who happen to be priesthood leaders, but who are very, very chauvinistic, where I have felt that they would pat me on the head and send me on my way. I don’t think that’s a Mormon thing. I don’t think it’s the priesthood. I think it’s that particular man’s way of dealing with the priesthood, and he’s wrong.

Diane’s ability to separate men from the priesthood institution corresponded with other women’s ability to separate personal expectations from the behavior of church members, as well as an individual from the position or calling currently being held by the individual. Empowered women frequently talked about this kind of separating as a means to empower themselves. Among the women in the sample, the ability to discriminate was varied and depended on the types of distinctions involved. In other words, some women may have been able to separate individuals from the calling they held, but could not separate doctrine from culture.

Another important pattern among empowered women was the obvious influence of the women’s movement. Although not all empowered women identified themselves as feminists, they typically privileged individual characteristics over those of gender. When interviewing Kerry, I asked her what it meant to her to be a woman in the context of the gospel.

I don’t think of myself as a woman in the context of the gospel. I think of myself
as a person. I don’t think of myself as a woman getting ready and going to church on Sundays. I think of myself as a person getting ready and going to church on Sunday.

Kerry was able to see past gender stereotypes and view herself and others as individuals first, and subsequently see herself as part of a group.

Expectations of Church Members, Family and Self

There was a third dimension to this pattern that also was significant, the ability to separate personal expectations of members from their behavior. Some of the women in the sample struggled with empowerment because they could not separate personal expectations from personal experiences with members. These women often were judgmental of the members of the church, particularly the women in the church. The concept of how balanced a woman was in her expectations of the members of the church, family members and herself also was a reliable pattern in showing empowerment.

Church Members

Expectations of members, family and self were measured on a scale that ranged from low—balanced—high. Expectations of the members of the church were rated low when a woman expected little from them. Expectations in this category were very minimal. The women who were rated low expected members to be friendly to them when they saw them; they asked for respect for themselves as well as their families; they expected some kind of request that they be involved in a church calling; and they expected that the only kind of “sisterhood” that they would feel with all the women in the church was on a general level in which they believed that they may only share common
beliefs about Christ. They also expected to find offensive people; they expected that church sometimes was boring; they expected people to make mistakes and that they would have to be forgiven. They did not expect to have close friends in their ward; some didn’t even expect to have close friends in the church at all. They did not expect Relief Society lessons to be interesting or something that they could relate to because every teacher’s style and opinions are different, and some styles and opinions were easier to relate to than others. They did not expect to have home teachers or visiting teachers that came every month or that were available when they needed help. Women who were empowered rated from low to balanced on the rating scale. Those whose expectations were on the high end of the scale focused on things that they could not control which left them frustrated and unempowered. For example, women who focused their attention on trying to change personality traits of ward members because they found them annoying, rated high on the expectation scale.

*Expectations of Family*

What a woman expected from her family relationships were also measured on a scale from low—balanced—high. Those women located in the balanced region were those women who were most empowered. They had realistic expectations of their husbands and children, or parents. Women who were aware of their expectations were able to discuss them comfortably with family and come to an agreement. Another important pattern dealing with balance among empowered women involved flexible expectations. They had their own ideas but they were also willing to adjust to circumstances and people’s needs.
The women in the group who fell into the low range of expectations concerning their relationships with family members were those that were least empowered. They had such low expectations for their husbands, children, or parents that they appeared to have no standards. There was too much flexibility, which produced relationships without legitimate boundaries. Often their feelings and opinions were not considered important to the rest of the family, and the lack of standards raised questions of self-worth and self-respect. One woman had been married to her husband for four months when, unannounced, he came home with a baby for them to adopt after signing the adoption papers by himself. Although, at the time she was extremely upset, she never said anything to him, reasoning that he was the patriarch of the home.

The frustration felt by the women in the “high expectations” group undermined their ability to feel empowered. I was surprised to find unempowered women surrounded by empowering family members. These women blocked their own access to empowerment by harboring resentment towards family members. Because family relationships are a daily reality, any resentment can have severe consequences. Even small expectations, if continually unmet, can have disastrous effects. These women had unrealistically high expectations of their husbands, children, and parents; which created a conflict for family members. One expectation could only be fulfilled at the expense of another. For example, some women expected their husbands to be fully involved in domestic life while also providing a comfortable living. Family members were set up to fail, and these unempowered women felt personal disappointment.

*Expectations of Self*
Having a balanced expectation of the self was also a predictor of empowerment. Empowered women were introspective about their personal expectations and allowed themselves to occasionally fail at life’s tasks. There was not one woman in the sample who fell into the “low” range. The unempowered women imposed such high expectations on themselves that they trapped themselves into trying to be “Superwoman”. Expectations often operated in conflict; the effort to fulfill them inevitably ended in failure and guilt. These women were very hard on themselves and many of them struggled with feelings of guilt and depression. Another interesting pattern for this group was their belief in the “typical mormon woman” or “Molly Mormon.” These women believed that some women in the church were really “doing it all”. They talked about the woman in their ward whose children never argued and whose husbands were always happy, whose houses were always clean. Their interpretation of another woman’s life became proof that “Molly Mormon” was achievable, which reinforced the unempowering effort to accomplish the impossible.

The ability to differentiate components of one’s personal belief system was significant on many levels. First, was the importance of being able to distinguish church doctrine from other beliefs in the church. It was also critical for a women to be able to trace the source of her beliefs in evaluating personal belief systems to help her classify different kinds of beliefs. This led empowered women to understand that what a church leader said was not always doctrine, which led to the separation of a church “priesthood leader” from just “a man” and his beliefs. Empowered women also had balanced expectations of priesthood leaders, other leaders, and church members. Empowered
women were also successful in balancing personal expectations of church members, family members, and the self. Women who were able to locate church beliefs along a spectrum and to balance their personal expectations were more likely to find success in passage 7.

Section 3: Personal Revelation

Once empowered women were able to delineate different church beliefs, passage 7, they were able to perceive a much wider range of choices, passage 8, shown in Figure 10: Process of Selection. The ability to perceive a relatively broad view of options was another sign of empowerment for LDS women. When women were able to see a wide range of accessible choices, they felt more empowered. This is not to say that they were equally open to all choices. It does mean, however, that they felt they had equal access to all choices. When a woman found herself in the process of selecting from a wide range of options, she carefully considered which options were most desirable, weighing heavily the consequences of her decision. Repeatedly, in my interviews, I saw the practice of being “other oriented” in considering which option was most suitable. In my research, LDS women carefully weighed the needs and the wants of “the self” and the needs and wants of “others” equally. Finding the delicate balance between “the self” and “others” was an extremely challenging process, which usually required a great deal of patience. Empowered LDS women expressed the importance of personal commitment to “the self” and “others” in making decisions because of the long term impact the consequences had on everyone involved. The women in the sample clearly valued their connection to others by approaching personal decisions with an interdependent emphasis. This dimension
Section 3
Searching and Personal Revelation

Process of Narrowing Selections

Limited Options

Wide Spectrum of Options

Narrowing of Desirable Selections

Self + Others

Self Needs + Self Wants + Others Needs + Others Wants

Concepts that Expand Choices

Concepts that Expand Choices
called “other oriented” was also an important pattern in empowerment.

An example helps to illustrate this part of passage 8. A woman trying to make a decision about working outside the home when there are still children living at home would carefully consider both her own needs and wants and the needs and wants of her children. She might consider her motives for working as well as her motives for staying at home. She then would consider how working outside the home would meet the needs and wants of her children as well as how staying at home would do the same. The final step would be a decision which represented her effort to pursue a choice with satisfactory consequences for everyone in the equation.

Empowered LDS women spent a lot of time talking about their personal responsibility for their own happiness as only part of the equation. The rest of the equation involved personal responsibility for others, mainly family members. For example, the primary consideration for mothers was their children. In trying to select the best option in the range of choices, LDS women worked through extremely complex processes in which various multiple roles were considered. The ultimate question was, “Which choice satisfies most of the parts considered?” This process was often laborious and stressful and, when possible, took a considerable amount of time.

However, less empowered LDS women displayed patterns of placing too much emphasis on “the self” or “others.” Women who were lopsided in their inclusion of the “self” later admitted that they had not realized the destructive consequences of their decision for “others,” and were unempowered because of the constraining circumstances in which they found themselves. In similar situations, were those women who only
included “others” in their personal decision making process. Unempowered women were those who were trapped by overwhelming guilt at not being able to please everyone and exhausted from continually trying. Many of the unempowered women in the sample struggled with stress and depression because they saw themselves as working hard at an impossible job.

It was common for women to move from passage 8 to passage 9, drawing on spiritual resources and then back to 8, trying to narrow preferable alternatives, shown in Figure 11: Preparation to Personal Revelation. Passage 9 involved enlisting the use of spiritual resources to narrow the range of options and eventually spiritually test the final decision, shown in Figure 12: Searching. Spiritual resources included prayer, fasting, reading scriptures, reading to educate themselves on the topic at hand, getting feedback from others, meditating, pondering, making a list of pros and cons, etc. What I found to be important was the amount of perceived spiritual resources put to use. Empowered women collectively mentioned 12 different ways to spiritually search for answers as opposed to a total of 3 resources mentioned by unempowered women. The women in the empowered group mention at least an average of 3 or more spiritual resources, per person, they would draw on in passage 8, compared to the unempowered group, who mentioned an average of 1 spiritual resource. Women who used three or more spiritual resources also showed patterns of having more confidence in their chances of receiving spiritual direction as well as more conviction when they did have a spiritually moving experience. Some of them talked about their belief in doing “their part” so that God would do his.

Other patterns that emerged that influenced passage 8 were factors that led women
Figure 11. Overview of Passages 8-10: Preparation to Personal Revelation

Section 3
Searching and Personal Revelation

Passage 9
Searching for Answers

Passage 8
Spectrum Options

Passage 9
Searching for Answers

Passage 10
Personal Revelation
Figure 12. Passage 9: Searching for Answers

Section 3
Searching and Personal Revelation

Passage 9
Searching for Answers

Feedback
Reading (self help)
Therapy
Journal Keeping

Prayer
Fasting
Temple
Reading Scriptures
to have a more expanded range of perceived choices. LDS women who had obtained
degrees from formal educational institutions, enjoyed reading, had worked outside the
home in a career type occupation, had a higher income, sought feedback from others,
were older and had been affected by different phases of life or had grown up with the
influence of the women's movement, were more likely to uncover a greater range of
choices. What these factors have in common is an ability to expand, through the use of
various resources, a woman's range of perceived choices. All of the above experiences
set the stage for a woman to add to her ability to resolve problems through the use of
expanded choices. After several movements between passages 8 and 9, the women in the
sample narrowed their range of choices to either a few options or just one. It was this
effort to make a final decision that moved these women into passage 10 or section 3,
Personal Revelation.

Passage 10 was a phenomenological experience that helped women to make a
final decision, shown in Figure 13: Personal Revelation. Having received personal
revelation from God was another major predictor of empowerment. The personal
investment of time and energy into being open and receiving a revelatory experience can
not be emphasized enough. Most LDS women took this passage extremely seriously and
prepared themselves by making themselves vulnerable or open to receive an answer from
God.

It would be easy to assume that whatever options a woman was carefully
considering before her revelatory experience would most likely be the answer she felt that
God was giving her as well. As it turned out, this was not always the case. In fact, many
Figure 13. Passage 10: Personal Revelation

Section 3
Negotiation and Empowerment

Personal Revelation

Changing According to Revelation

Culture
Policy
Commandment
Doctrine

Changing According to Revelation
of the women in the sample had ruled out decisions that went against a personal belief. Many of these beliefs were rooted in LDS culture or family tradition. It was not uncommon for the empowered women in the sample to feel directed towards a choice they had previously decided against. If a woman felt that she had received revelation from God, she followed this divine direction, feeling confident that she was doing “the right thing.” Another pattern among empowered women was their confidence in establishing a new direction within what was often a fresh paradigm. In my interview with Shirley, she talked about how hard it was for her to go to work outside the home when her oldest children were young. It was so hard, in fact, that she quit and decided it was better to live on less money and be at home with her children. Years later, when her family was financially strapped, from supporting two full-time missionaries, she was trying to think of ways that they could supplement her husband’s income, but was not considering working outside the home when her current job “just fell into her lap.”

It was then that I fell into this wonderful job. It was more hours than I was looking for but it’s a great job. . . Everyday I would walk by the administration building at BYU to mail my sons boxes while on their missions. . .I had such a strong feeling [to go inside] I went over and submitted my application. Then [one day] they called from the ----department and asked me to come over for an interview that same day. I had the flu, but I dragged myself out of bed and hauled myself over there. . .They called back and wanted me to come and work for them. Every inch of the way I felt like Heavenly Father almost was taking me by the shoulders and walking me down the path, and I was like “alright, alright!”.
Shirley had strong personal experiences that led her to exclude working outside the home as an option. And yet, after receiving a personal revelatory experience in which she felt that God was directing her, she decided that, under the circumstances, she should work outside the home. Shirley also mentioned that her perception of her personal situation at home had changed and opened her up to receive this new direction. Working outside the home could now be considered because her youngest children were all in school, and being able to support two full-time missionaries was important and justified a change in her world view. Many women in the sample had experienced similar kinds of situations in which they were not considering a certain option, but after a revelatory experience, viewed their situation differently and made a choice that they felt was best for them.

Section 4: Empowerment

The experience with personal revelation was followed by passage 11, which involves the negotiating of relationship boundaries between family members and church leaders as well as the obstacles that block women from reaching their desired goal. In passage 11, empowered women were those who had successfully employed negotiating skills, shown in Figure 14: Negotiations. It is important to note that negotiating a relationship did not always mean staying in a relationship. The women in the sample empowered themselves, not only by negotiating relationships, but also by getting out of those that were non-negotiable. At the time of our interview, one woman was trying to rework the boundaries in her relationship with her spouse, but after finding out that he was unwilling to renegotiate, she divorced him. Empowered LDS women in the sample were able to negotiate new boundaries within their relationships to achieve desirable
Figure 14. Passage 11: Negotiations

Section 4
Negotiation and Empowerment

Concepts that Influence Negotiating Process

Negotiating Relationship Boundaries

Obstacles Blocking Access

Negotiating Obstacles

Relationship Terminated
Stay in Relationship

Desired Objective

Concepts that Influence Negotiating Process
Empowered women also knew how to negotiate relationship boundaries within the church structure. This pattern became significant in explaining how LDS women are able to empower themselves within a rigid patriarchal hierarchy which excludes them from holding administrative positions. It is critical to understand that these women describe themselves as good Latter-Day Saints. They all answered in the affirmative when asked if they support their church leaders. And yet, they were willing to engage in a negotiation process in which men holding administrative positions shared their authority with women whom they were serving. These kinds of relationships led to a cooperative agreement to empower LDS women. Analyzing the data to uncover how LDS women renegotiated these particular boundaries was one of the most intriguing aspects of this research. In talking about how renegotiation takes place within church structure on a local level, Diane says,

For example, you’re given a calling and you pray about it and you decide, “Hey, this isn’t right,” then you should go back to the priesthood leader or whoever called you and in some cases, it’s women too, like I call different people in the Relief Society. They should go back to the person who was calling them and say, “Hey, I don’t feel right about this.” Then together, you should seek God’s counsel to find out.

As a leader, Diane is open to negotiating her relationship with the women she serves in Relief Society. She also demonstrates how ward members are able to renegotiate relationship boundaries with Bishops. Instead of assuming that those roles are rigid and
inflexible, empowered women see them as bending when need demands it and changing according to circumstances. Empowered women had similar experiences in their relationships with close friends and family. They approached relationships as two equal people working together to create something good. The women who were able to continually negotiate the boundaries of their relationships when in need were those women who were most empowered.

Another interesting dimension of passage 11 was seeing how women negotiated obstacles that blocked access to their preferred choice. In our interview, Kathy was explaining how her daughter had a strong spiritual experience telling her to go on a full-time mission. Yet when her daughter went to talk to her Bishop about going, he told her that she needed to stay home and focus on getting married. Kathy says,

I told my own daughter, “Just because he’s the Bishop and says something, does not mean that he was inspired to say that.” It’s simple. I feel like I have a right to know whether that was inspiration or not.

When Kathy saw that the Bishop had blocked her daughter’s access to a mission, she encouraged her daughter to go to someone else who had more authority and they successfully removed the obstacle, in this case the Bishop. Kathy’s way of negotiating around the Bishop was to tell her daughter to talk to their Stake President about going a mission, which she did, and he encouraged her to serve. The women in the sample who talked about having personal revelation were very strong in their convictions about carrying out what they felt was “right.”

Other patterns that revealed themselves as critical to the negotiating process were
some personal background characteristics. Women who had experience in leadership positions in the church, particularly that of Relief Society President, were more likely to have negotiating skills. In part, this may have been the result of more frequent dealing with priesthood leaders. Also, those women whose husbands had served for several years as Bishop, stake President, patriarch, area director, mission president or the like, had more confidence going into the negotiating process. Again, an established rapport with church leadership may have influenced this process as well as the status attached to their husband’s position. It was the observations of the women in the sample who lacked this claim on status, that suggested the advantages that these other women had in negotiating with priesthood leaders. That is not to say that the wives of these leaders would take advantage of their situation. But women whose husbands had never held these particular priesthood callings felt at a disadvantage when going to their church leaders to negotiate.

Another more obvious characteristic in negotiating was a woman’s income. Those women who had higher income levels were able to draw upon a broadened spectrum of resources when approaching negotiation.

Passage 12 involves achieving consistency between beliefs and experiences, shown in Figure 15: Reconstruction of New Framework. This restructuring process usually took time and serious thought while reflecting on personal experiences and the experiences of others before testing new beliefs and putting them in a new framework. Once a new belief system was constructed, empowered women emphasized the importance of not judging other people and being a useful resource for those going through similar experiences. By successfully processing each of the previous passages,
Figure 15. Passage 12: Reconstruction of New Framework

Section 4
Negotiation and Empowerment

Selection of New Framework

Keep and Add to Beliefs

Testing New Framework

Parts of New Framework that are Functional

Parts of New Framework that Do Not Work

Out
LDS women reached empowerment. Empowered LDS women successfully confronted faulty belief systems and thoughtfully separated church doctrine from other church beliefs. Empowered women were consciously aware of a vast spectrum of options in trying to make a choice complicated by the many roles that they perform. In receiving personal revelation, these women successfully negotiated to achieve desirable consequences. Empowered women had exchanged their old framework for a new one in hopes that it would be more accurate, stable and useful.

In passage 13, women experienced restored happiness and satisfaction with a new functional framework; they were also open to having this new framework challenged one day. In the final passage (14), LDS women recognized a major shift in personal belief systems, shown in Figure 16: Gaining Empowerment. Messages or experiences once viewed as paradoxical in the church were now seen as overlapping, flexible, and dynamic. Once a women had successfully gone through all 14 passages of empowerment, she was more likely to be successful in repeating the process, which was often the case. After going through the entire process once, it is common to skip passages 1 through 3. The overall process of empowerment can be viewed as a large process in which several smaller processes are simultaneously occurring, slowly moving forward in a positive spiral (See Figure 17). Each time the process begins, another layer is added to the upward spiral.
Figure 16. Passages 11-14: Gaining Empowerment

Section 4
Negotiation and Empowerment

Stage 11
Negotiating

Stage 12
Reconstruction of Belief Systems

Stage 13
Empowerment

Stage 14
New Framework

New Framework
Figure 17. The Overlapping Process of Empowerment
Chapter Five
Assessment of Findings in Relation to Predicted Patterns

Building on the previous chapter’s discussion of the empowerment process this chapter explores the relationship between that process and predicted patterns. This chapter also discusses the characteristics of LDS women that influenced their level of empowerment. The qualities possessed by empowered women are identified as well as different patterns that were important in understanding empowerment. This chapter delineates four categories of predicted patterns and identifies a number of newly discovered patterns.

Empowerment and Predicted Patterns

Empowerment is defined as having the personal capacity to act on and respond to circumstances rather than to passively allow circumstances to inflict an undesirable result (Thomas 1985). Empowerment also indicates a perception of a broad range of choices and access to desirable options. Another critical dimension of empowerment is its connection to relationships. Empowered relationships were based on ideologies of equality. Ideal relationships were based on interdependence, sharing both power and control, with an understanding that relationships will grow and change and must remain flexible. I predicted that the following 4 categories of factors; Experiences, Religious Beliefs, Relationships, Personal Characteristics, would influence empowerment. These included the following:

(1) Experiences that Influence Empowerment

Life Altering Experiences were found to be critical in empowering LDS women.
Life Altering Experiences include: (a) life altering events, (b) life altering combinations and (c) processing life altering experiences.

(2) Relationships that Influence Empowerment

The flexibility or rigidity of the boundaries of relationships shared with (a) ecclesiastical leaders would impact empowerment and an LDS woman’s (b) expectations of her leaders and other LDS members would influence empowerment. The flexibility, expectation and support of (c) family relationships would influence an LDS woman’s empowerment.

(3) Religious Beliefs that Influence Empowerment

The presence or absence of the following Religious Beliefs would influence empowerment: importance of (a) personal progression and (b) faith in god.

(4) Personal Characteristics that Influence Empowerment

The presence or absence of the following personal characteristics would influence empowerment: (a) knowledge of doctrine, (b) geographical proximity to church headquarters, (c) age, (d) formal education beyond high school, having served a (e) full-time mission, having (f) work experience outside the home, and experience in (g) church leadership positions.

I predicted that the above characteristics would influence a woman’s perception of her range of choices, strengthen her relationships by equalizing them and increase her level of empowerment.

Assessment of Expected Patterns

(1) Life Altering Experiences
Originally, this concept encompassed devastating experiences such as death of a loved one, terminal illness, separation or divorce, never married for those who wanted marriage, infertility for those who wanted children, close family member or friend leaves the church, economic difficulty, abusive relationships or natural disasters. The aforementioned experiences are all single events that seriously challenge personal paradigms, and can have an unsettling domino effect impacting other aspects of life.

However, further analysis, revealed that there were combinations of other, less dramatic circumstances, that could also cause a woman to challenge her personal paradigms. By themselves, these events rarely challenged belief systems, yet when combined with each other over a relatively short period of time; many women described the impact to belief systems similarly to the way other women had described life altering events. These combinations included: moving either to or from Utah or moving regionally within a country or to a different country, extensive traveling, converting to the LDS church, education, and age of marriage. I re-labeled the single events as life altering events and called the combination events life altering combinations. A third dimension of the life altering experiences that influenced empowerment was the woman’s ability to process her experience(s). In the sample, women had varying degrees of skill in processing their life altering experiences. LDS women who processed their life altering experiences were more likely to be empowered than those who did not. Processing a life altering experience meant recognizing the effects of the experience and trying to deal with the consequences in healthy and productive ways. Women who ignored life altering experiences were not dealing with those experiences in healthy and productive ways, and
as a consequence were left unempowered.

All of the respondents in the sample had experienced some type of life altering experience. Forty-six such experiences were reported by the sample’s 25 women, meaning that many of the women in the sample had experienced more than one life altering experience. However, 8% had not processed their life altering experience, and 28% were in the middle of processing their life altering experience. Having a life altering experience and processing it became an excellent predictor of empowerment. Of those women who had experienced and processed a life altering experience, 60%, were in the empowered group.

**Processing Life Altering Experiences**

Many women at the time of having the *life altering event* questioned why the experience happened to them. They felt a sense of confusion and looked to their personal belief systems for support and validation. However, many found their belief system inadequate; this led to a process of trying to sift through personal beliefs to see what beliefs were consistent with their experiences and weed out those that were inconsistent. Searching for answers eventually led toward a profound experience in which there was a dramatic shift in personal paradigms. Diane mentioned experiencing several life altering events and how they led to a shift in her approach to life.

I think the most important experiences or the best part, however you want to put it, would be my brushes with death. The first thing that comes to mind is cancer. I had major surgery and cancer two years ago, and when you face something like that and you think you could die...and that’s not the first time in my life, I’ve had
other situations. I almost drowned twice. I had a very serious kind of surgery when I was a kid. Each time, especially the last one, maybe because it’s the most recent one, would bring me up short as to [say], “OK, what’s really important in life?” You get down to the basics of “Why am I here? What am I really supposed to do today?” I think it’s greatly influenced me on how I spend my time. Sometimes I’m almost impatient with wasting time, I get very frustrated because I think time’s so short, life is so short. You’re here one day, you’re gone the next. It can happen that quickly. . .I believe in immortality and all that, but I believe that this is such a critical time on this earth. I think that having cancer and going through all that was some of the most difficult times in my whole life, and also some of the most spiritual times. I had some really great spiritual experiences going through that whole thing.

Diane’s life altering experiences have caused her to seriously evaluate what she thinks about and how she spends her time. Changing paradigms not only affects a woman’s overall approach to life but her daily thoughts and activities. She feels a need to keep herself focused on what is most important, which includes those things that bring her satisfaction and peace in her life. Diane also mentions profound spiritual experiences in connection with life altering experiences. Women describe these kinds of spiritual experiences as giving them the strength to get through major challenges. Many of the women in the sample said that as traumatic as life altering events can be, their spiritual experiences had an equally profound impact.

The process of managing life altering combinations, whether they occurred in
sequence or concurrently, was more subtle and gradual than the processing of life altering events. Women sharing their experiences with life altering combinations talked about minor adjustments in lifestyle or beliefs. Usually these adjustments were inconvenient, and the women experiencing them were aware of faulty beliefs and a need to adapt. Women who experienced life altering combinations did not talk about spiritual experiences of the same magnitude as women who had gone through life altering events. Instead, spiritual experiences were viewed as more of a moment of insight without the impact of a religious epiphany. Life altering combinations caused women to alter their Christian beliefs to accommodate their new experiences. Barbara had a life altering experience when she and her family moved from Provo Utah to downtown Chicago.

...We came straight from BYU to an urban ward in Chicago; it was an amazing ward. We were on the south side of Chicago which was ninety-five percent black, and [there] were black converts joining the church in droves. So people who really were just brand new in the church, trying to get a grip on what it was that they’d actually done, and how they were changing their lives. Many of whom came from...poor circumstances. ...many of them on welfare, mixing with a group of very elite students at the University of Chicago who were the creme de la creme of the nation, in terms of intellectual ability, most of which had come from upper-middle class families. So you can imagine, any kind of meeting trying to combine these people who came from a really rudimentary knowledge of gospel to people who had been raised in the church for generations, and had all this intellectual capacity, and making that all work and in a ward was really an
I think living in Chicago defined for us what it was that we believed in terms of our orthodoxy, there were certainly many students, other fellow students there who were really questioning Mormonism, mormon culture, what is culture, what is gospel doctrine, and so fourth. It just helped us define in our minds the gospel. . . I think [it] gave us a lot more compassion, a lot more understanding . . . it wasn’t just a spiritual definition but a political definition.

In moving from a small LDS community to a big city, Barbara experienced a combination of smaller life altering experiences. She saw that her previous views of race, class, religion and politics did not correspond with her new experience and made the appropriate adjustments. As a result, she gained a better understanding of church doctrine and became more compassionate and tolerant, all of which helped to reaffirm her identity as a Mormon. Women who experienced life altering combinations described similar experiences. Like Barbara’s experience, life altering combinations came in a cluster and as the consequence of a larger decision, in this case a regional move.

The impact of life altering experiences on the process of empowerment cannot be overstated. It did not specifically connect with any one passage in the process of empowerment but had an overall effect on empowerment. Processing life altering experiences influenced a woman’s ability to successfully engage in the empowerment process. Processing life altering experiences and going through the empowerment process had some important overlapping steps. Women who processed life altering experiences also experienced confusion over personal beliefs, passages 1 through 3 in the
process of empowerment; they had to confront faulty personal belief systems, which encompassed passages 4 through 6 and do some sifting through their church beliefs, a process that involves passage 7, one of the most complicated passages in empowerment and one of the passages that best predicts empowerment. If a woman had successfully processed a life altering experience, she had already managed passages 1 through 7; she was half way through the empowerment process. Processing life altering experiences was the catalyst that started the whole process of empowerment. All empowered LDS women had entered into the empowerment process through a life altering experience. However, not all women who had life altering experiences were empowered. If a woman chose to ignore her life altering experience, or stopped in one of the early steps of processing, she was less likely to be empowered. Thus, only those women who were willing to go through both processing life altering experiences and the empowerment process could be empowered.

(2) Relationships that Influence Empowerment

I initially speculated that because (a) ecclesiastical leaders sat in positions of authority over LDS women, their relationship to them would influence empowerment. It also followed that an LDS woman’s (b) expectations of members of the church would influence empowerment. I also proposed that because of the close connection of many LDS women to their (c) families, family members would influence empowerment as well.

(a) Ecclesiastical Leaders: Bishops and Stake Presidents and Relief Society Presidents

Other significant relationships included those between LDS women and their
ecclesiastical leaders. One way that many empowered LDS women maintained their empowerment was by believing that they should only draw upon church leadership in extreme crises. Although church members are encouraged to use their leaders as a resource in resolving their problems, many of these women had never gone to church leaders for help. Empowered women claimed they did not go to church leaders because they considered their leaders too bogged down with other church responsibilities. They felt capable and more comfortable handling their situation on their own.

I also discovered that if an LDS women did not feel empowered in her relationship with her Bishop she would turn to her Stake President. All of the respondents in the sample felt empowered by either their Bishop or stake president. In their interviews, they defined an empowering priesthood leader as someone who listened to them, someone who took them seriously, respected them and included them when making decisions that affected them. Many women mentioned that, although ecclesiastical leaders held positions of authority over them, they felt that leaders would not abuse that authority. Some women even said leaders had used their authority to empower them. Of the total sample, 68% felt empowered by their Bishop, 24% felt unempowered by their Bishop and the remaining 8% did not answer the question. Seventy-six percent of the women in the sample felt empowered by their stake presidents, 12% felt unempowered by their stake president leaving 8% not responding to the question.

Another dimension of this concept was the personal control that LDS women had in their relationships with their ecclesiastical leaders. Although, LDS women’s
empowerment could be influenced by their priesthood leaders, there were internal factors that played an equally important role. Many women in the sample empowered themselves in their relationship with priesthood leaders by separating “the priesthood” from “the man.” One woman in the sample described the priesthood as “having no gender.” The priesthood is the “power to act in God’s name,” it is not a man telling you what to do.

The Relief Society aspect of the ecclesiastical leader factor became very complicated and increasingly difficult to identify as a single part of a complex set of factors. Separating this part of the ecclesiastical factor from the priesthood and creating subcategories made this concept manageable. Concept one measured how empowered women felt in their relationship with their Relief Society President. Concept two measured a respondent’s expectations of the women in Relief Society. Of the total sample, 74% felt empowered by their relationship with their Relief Society President. The 20% who did not feel empowered by their relationship with their Relief Society President often indicated that they saw their Relief Society President as too “Molly Mormonish” and could not relate to her. Many women in the sample who felt empowered by their Relief Society President claimed that they did not relate to their Relief Society President but that it did not effect them. These women did not expect to be able to fully relate to their Relief Society President, and they did not expect to always relate to the Relief Society as an organization. A woman’s expectations of the Relief Society was scored as low—balanced—high. Twenty-four percent of the women in the sample were found to be in the high range and did not feel empowered by the Relief Society.
Society organization. At some point in their Relief Society experience, they had been disappointed by the organization or its members. Many of these women expected more from the Relief Society lessons, more emotional support and more of a sense of connection. Most were disappointed when they did not receive what they were looking for. Some of these women talked of not fitting in with the other women in the Relief Society when they had expected to have a feeling of belonging.

Of the women in my empowered group, 87% felt empowered by their Relief Society President, and all of them fell into the balanced range of expectations. Many of the women in the empowered group also talked about feelings of not being able to relate to the lessons in Relief Society, or expressed feelings of not fitting in. These women were able to resolve these conflicts by separating individuals from church positions and giving weight to individual personalities. Many of these women empowered themselves by identifying the content of the lessons in Relief Society with a particular teacher's opinions and teaching style. They did not believe that the lessons were a direct reflection of the members of Relief Society or of the church as a whole.

LDS women also empowered themselves by not expecting to fit in with all the women in Relief Society. In fact, when asked about their connection to the Relief Society, many of the women in my empowered group asked me to clarify on what level was I asking about. With follow up questions, I discovered that many of these women saw their connections to the women in Relief Society on different levels. There was a general level or an international level, a ward level, and a personal level. These women did not expect to personally relate to the international Relief Society, they did expect to
share fundamental religious beliefs. Joleen expressed her expectations of the Relief Society in the following way:

I think that what connects the women in Relief Society is their belief and their faith in Christ and in God, and in their religion. Because in every other way they can be different. But that is the one thing that can connect them. I think that the church is becoming more universal instead of more American. I think the focus is being placed more on Christ than, your hair color, political party and dress size. I think that it should be focused more on Christ, that may be more ideal than real but I think we are getting there.

Joleen’s statement represents the level of expectation that empowered women in the sample had regarding their connection to the Relief Society as a whole through sharing basic beliefs. At the ward level, empowered women did not expect to relate to their ward Relief Society on a personal basis. They expected to share common religious beliefs with these women, and to occasionally receive acts of service as well as perform them for other Relief Society members. There was an overall sense from empowered women that they expected to perform more service than was rendered to them. Women who fell into the low end of the balanced range were also empowered. Women who had very few expectations from the Relief Society expressed great satisfaction when they were surprised by services rendered. Janice had lost her house to a fire immediately before being called away on a church assignment. After returning from several years in Europe, Janice did not expect that her new home would be partially furnished with a bed and some kitchen supplies. She expresses her surprise and expectation of herself, to give
back to her ward Relief Society by saying,

I moved into this home, and there was a lady from the church here and she had a queen size bed in the bedroom, she had gotten together some things so that we could start out a household, and I was so appreciative of that. And when I go to church one of the lady Presidents asks me if I would teach a lesson, there is a lot of give and a lot of take back and forth.

Janice’s surprise indicates her expectation level of the Relief Society. Her statement about give and take demonstrates another level of expectation, this time, of herself in reference to Relief Society. There is a general expectation in the church that women in the Relief Society are supposed to feel a more personal level of connection with the women in their ward Relief Society. Although 24% of my total sample reported feeling close to all the sisters in the church, 76% did not. Of those that did not feel close to all the sisters in Relief Society, 76% of them did not expect to feel a personal connection to the women in Relief Society and most of them were in the empowered group. Although all the women in the empowered group rated from low to balanced on the scale of expectations from Relief Society members, 93% of the total sample reported that their closest friends and confidants were LDS women.

Although the original concept of feeling empowered by the Relief Society President was not a good predictor of empowerment, an LDS woman’s expectations of the members of Relief Society became a significant factor in empowerment.

Expectations of Members of the Church

It is not uncommon for LDS church members to have high expectations of the
Most expected the church to fulfill several needs including spiritual, emotional, physical and, intellectual as well as a sense of belonging. Thus, what a woman expected from the members of the church, was an important factor in how empowered she felt as a Mormon. This concept’s influence is indicated by a rating of women’s positive, negative, or neutral comments about their perceptions of church members. Which were then assessed as low---balanced---high. Sixty-eight percent of the sample scored a “balanced” rating of their expectations of members of the church. A low rating meant that women expected little from church members, and a high rating meant that a woman’s expectations of church members were unrealistically high. In the sample, no one rated in the low category and 32% had expectations that were “very high.” Those respondents who had “very high” expectations of the members of the church, had a narrow perception of what was acceptable. I label these women as unempowered in this area because of their inability to make room for other people’s value systems in their personal perspectives. In other words, empowered women recognize and respect many differing value systems. This is especially true for members of a church that claims worldwide membership. Most of the women in the sample who believed that their personal opinions represented that of the church did not see that their frustration with others resulted from the imposition of unrealistic demands. The ability to distinguish between beliefs coupled with introspection, led women to empower themselves. Women who were unable to recognize the validity of value systems that differed from their own were paralyzed in the empowerment process because of their failure to accept that they could only change personal paradigms.
(c) Family Relationships

The family member variable includes four categories; parents, siblings, husband, and children; these family relationships had varying degrees of connection to empowerment.

Parents

Many of the women in this study talked about the positive impact that their parents played in their lives, specifically while growing up. Women shared stories that had been passed down from one generation to the next about being a pioneer and settling the wild frontier, women protecting their children and taking care of their aging parents, and the importance of being emotionally strong in life and not letting circumstances get the best of them. Other women shared stories about their dissatisfaction with their parents and the way they were raised. None of the women were passive in the language they used to describe their relationships with their parents, particularly their mothers. Women talked about being empowered through their mother’s selflessness and ability to give love and make their children feel important. Parents empowered the women in this sample by encouraging them to fulfill their dreams. Many women were surprised at the flexible gender roles their parents offered and encouraged for their daughters. One woman explained that her father encouraged her to do things (like play sports, go to college and have a career) that he would never encourage his wife to do. Although, the women who had good relationships with their parents also felt empowered by their parents, not all empowered women reported having a positive relationship with their parents. Thus, parental relationships are a moderate factor in predicting empowerment.
Another pattern that emerged was the impact of the spousal relationship on children. Some women mentioned the close relationship, mutual love, and respect their parents had for each other and how that influenced their dating habits, desire to marry and who to marry. One woman described her mother as the kind of selfless woman who would never say no to anything anyone asked of her; her mother was also an invalid whose parents were trying to take advantage of her good nature. One day when her mother’s parents showed up on their front porch, her father refused to let them in and made them stay somewhere else. For the woman, telling this story, showed how much her father loved and protected his wife. When she was dating, her father’s example of love and commitment was used as a way to evaluate prospective husbands. Since I did not anticipate this pattern in my research, I did not collect enough information to clarify its impact on empowerment. But for those women who discussed their parents relationship in relation to spousal selection and thus, sense of empowerment, it was significant. This would be an excellent area of future research.

_Siblings_

Many of the women mentioned the empowering relationships they had with their siblings, particularly sisters. Women described close relationships with their sisters while growing up, but even stronger and more influential relationships with sisters when their lives were more established. They often described the women in their families as their closest friends. In fact, the only women that reported that their closest friends were non-LDS were those whose mothers and sisters were non-LDS. Some of the women in the sample who survived dysfunctional families often stated that personal success had come
because of extremely close relationships with siblings and the support they had received from siblings. Alice felt that she and her sisters received conflicting messages from her mother. Now that they are older, she says,

[We have had] several years to process [double messages], and we have talked to each other. We now kind of cherish the ambiguity. Knowing, however, that we are not going to get approval from our mother. What we are going to get from our mother is a reminder of whatever it is that is the other side. . . The thing that I am most grateful to my parents for is my siblings. They are my closest friends.

Alice’s comments suggest how significant siblings are in empowerment. Having others who have had almost your same experience, who validate your perspective and experience, is empowering. Again, those women who described relationships with their siblings as positive talked about how essential their siblings were to empowerment, but not all empowered women had good relationships with their siblings. Thus, relationship with siblings is not a consistent pattern of empowerment.

Husband

Probably the most powerful influence on a married woman’s empowerment is her relationship with her husband. Of the married women in the empowered group, 82% felt that their husbands had an empowering effect on them because they saw each other as equals. In fact, the women in the empowered group at several points during the interview, positively mentioned their husbands and the close relationship they enjoyed. Many described their husbands as their best friends, the only person they could talk to about anything, and so on. When speaking of her husband, Barbara said,
. . . In talking with other married women in our ward, many of them marvel at my husband who is home with the children a lot and who wants to be home with the children. . . He’ll come home and basically devote hours to being with the children, to helping me get dishes cleaned up, to bathing all three children. I think that is a big contribution to the household. When shopping or other major things have to be done, we go out together, or as a family. . . To be a patriarch in the home, it means that you don’t just breeze in and conduct family home evening and scripture study, and lead the family in family prayers over dinner, but that you’re there! You’re part of your children’s lives. It means that your children spend time with you.

It was common for empowered women to describe their relationship with their husbands as being involved, with shared expectations, values, direction, friendship; they viewed it as a valuable partnership. Many of the empowered women stated that one of the best parts of their life was their relationship with their husband. Lorraine describes her relationship with her husband in this way:

I think the best thing about my life is that I really like being married to a good husband. He is a great guy; he is supportive, thoughtful, sensitive, patient, and I think because of him I am able to be a better self than I could be without him. So, because I feel a lot of security and support from him, I feel like then I am able to give to my children, because I am happy.

It was not uncommon for empowered women who were married to express their surprise at how satisfying a good marriage can be. Empowered women in the sample who were
married gave significant credit to having a supportive husband. A successful marriage was an important pattern of empowerment.

*Expectations For Future Families*

The importance of equality in marriage was a concern to single women as well. Those who were empowered had strong feelings about expectations for relationships with future spouses. It was interesting to discover that some single women empowered themselves by staying single. Most of the single women in the sample stated that they would rather stay single and happy, than married and unhappy. In particular, single women stated that they could never marry if they were not treated as an equal by their spouse. In talking about staying single or marrying in or out of the church Sandra says,

I would stay single. That’s really hard. I could never marry someone that I didn’t feel respected me, that had those things like respecting my opinion, respecting my goals, respecting the fact that I’m an individual, not part of him. I know so many men that just feel that a wife is an extension of him somehow, and not an individual. I could never live like that, never. So I might choose to marry outside the Church. If I had to choose between one or the other, I’d definitely pick a non-member who respected me.

Sandra is a good representation of the single women in the sample. She is well educated, grounded in the church, and marriage and family are important to her, but not at the expense of losing self-respect and personal happiness. Sandra struggles with the challenge of maintaining her peace of mind while dealing with the issues of being single or getting married and to whom. Because so much of LDS beliefs are centered around
marriage and the family, single women had to overcome a great deal in order to achieve personal happiness and satisfaction. None of the single women in the sample were against marriage, but they rejected the notion that happiness is contingent on marriage. Instead they believed happiness is a by-product of good choices, integrity, and personal satisfaction. Most single women placed great importance on maintaining personal happiness, and they were not willing to lose it to an unhealthy marriage.

Children

Among the women in this study, 68% had children. Of those who had children, 65% felt that being a mother had empowered them. Several women mentioned pregnancy and delivery as the most empowering experience of their life. Marilee discussed how empowered she felt when she was able to give life to a growing child inside the womb, “something only women can do.” Many empowered women talked of their body’s ability to create life and give life and how empowering the experience of creation can be. When asked “what is the best part of your life?” Almost all mothers mentioned the benefits of having children and how equally challenging and rewarding parenthood can be. Phoebe felt empowered as a mother because of her experience in adopting all four of her children.

My children are adopted, and I feel like they all came to me through the spirit of Heavenly Father, and that they were brought to me in particular. For some reason, either me or my husband could give to them something that they needed in their lives. We had been married about five years and we went to our Bishop in M—and asked to have a blessing. We wanted to start a family and the Bishop gave me
a blessing, and in it he promised me that we would have a child by the end of the year. It got to be Christmas time and . . . I remember sitting in from of the Christmas tree and looking at the Christmas lights and thinking that the Lord had forgotten me and the promise that he had made me in this blessing. Three days before Christmas we got a telephone call saying that there was a baby boy that was supposed to be in our family, and would we please come pick him up. He was our Christmas present. The adoption people were LDS and their comment was “there’s a lot of other people that have been waiting a lot longer than you people, but this little boy is supposed to be in your family. And we felt very strongly about that.” When C--grew up and got older and received his patriarchal blessing, in his blessing it said that he had picked out his parents. I can go through each one of them; they are equally special stories. They are supposed to be in my family. They are supposed to be my children.

The complex and unique stories that accompanied each child’s adoption reaffirmed Phoebe’s belief that she was meant to be the mother of her children. The extraordinary way in which Phoebe became a mother gave her a tremendous amount of self-validation and empowerment. Although many mothers did not have such dramatic experiences in becoming a mother, they did feel that being a parent had an empowering effect on them. Many women who had devoted their lives to raising their children mentioned how empowering older children can be in thanking them for their sacrifice and devotion. Diane says,

Staying home and raising kids is the hardest job you’ll ever do. It is tough.
Sometimes it’s boring. But it’s so critical. Long afterwards when my kids were
grown, my daughter wrote me a letter. She said she was so grateful that I had
been home when she came home. Just that letter made it all worth it, because I
realized that it was the right decision.

Like Diane, the empowered women talked about motherhood realistically. They believed
it would be difficult, and it was. They also believed it would be worth the challenge. It is
important to note that empowered women had “balanced” expectations of what
parenthood would bring; 84% of the sample had “balanced” expectations of motherhood,
meaning that they did not expect motherhood to be totally fulfilling. Several empowered
women expressed fear and uncertainty about being a parent when they were new mothers,
something that influenced them to realize that parenting was an experience in which you
learn as you go. Although most empowered women believed that motherhood was
fulfilling, it was not totally fulfilling to the woman as a whole. This coincided with
Christensen’s research findings

Motherhood was defined as a critical life phase, but one that appeared to be easily
confused with life purpose. These women insisted that purpose in life really
depends on adequate self-definition--something that a child or a family will not
provide. A child will not give a woman a sense of who she is. A firm sense of
self-definition is necessary in order for a woman to support the development of a
child. The more firm a woman’s sense of her identity, the greater her impact as a
mother (Christensen 1988, 65).

Many women in the sample felt that the experiences of creating life, giving birth and
raising children were empowering experiences. LDS women who had balanced expectations of motherhood were more likely to be empowered in their motherhood experience.

(3) Religious Beliefs that Influence Empowerment

Initially, I expected that a belief in (a) personal progression and (b) faith in God would influence empowerment. A belief in personal progression was difficult to measure because even though several women had specifically mentioned such a belief, the absence of a discussion of a belief in personal progression did not mean that a woman did not believe in it. The lack of sufficient information on this concept resulted in eliminating it from the analysis.

(b) Faith in God

However, faith in God was an extremely significant concept. Initially, the faith in God concept indicated a respondent’s belief that God is supreme and that His answer through personal revelation is the final word when seeking guidance for personal decisions. All of the respondents answered in the affirmative to the belief that God is “the law”; however, 76% said that, if they received revelation about a personal decision, they would follow it, no matter what even if it went against the advice of a church leader, while 24% stated that if the revelation they received about a personal decision was in conflict with something a church leader had said, they would follow the church leader. I found this former pattern especially interesting, considering that all the women described themselves as sustaining and following their church leaders. When asked about what could appear to be an inconsistent belief, women explained that they did not see any
conflicting messages. Lisa expounded on her beliefs about sustaining church leaders and receiving personal revelation,

If there is counsel given to you within your stewardship, then that counsel has been given wrongly. . . For instance my husband and I have stewardship over our family. There shouldn’t be direct revelation given to our family from anyone in the church. It is [our] stewardship, and I think that the Lord’s house is an ordered enough house, that things are done in order. For instance B- was saying, “what about a Bishop who told this man to sell his house.” I just said “Well that Bishop shouldn’t be telling that man anything like that.” She wanted to know if I should be obedient to that Bishop. I said, “Of course you should be obedient to your Bishop, but your Bishop overstepped his stewardship. He doesn’t have stewardship over that”.

Lisa asserted that everything in the church has an order. And the order of revelation is connected to whomever has stewardship over that aspect of the church. Thus, an individual is the only one qualified to receive revelation that concerns their personal life, not church leaders. Women in the study who had rejected church leaders’ counsel claimed they could feel good about saying they sustained their church leaders because a church leader who gives counsel contrary to personal revelation, is misusing his authority.

This concept influenced women’s empowerment because of its effects on passages 7, questioning and 11, negotiating. Part of this concept is the ability to distinguish between church beliefs (such as those discussed in passage 7), and the patriarchal organization of those beliefs as well as their connection to church leadership.
There are church beliefs that only church leaders can change and personal beliefs that only an individual can change. Some of the women in the sample believed that only they could receive revelation for personal decisions. The empowered women in this sample understood the order of revelation that Lisa talked about and how it applied to them personally. Unempowered women in the sample were unclear about the distinctions concerning who could receive revelation and for what. This concept also influenced passage 11, or the ability of women to negotiate around obstacles that blocked access to desired ends. Again, those women who believed they had direct access to God were able to negotiate around church leaders who imposed personal views that conflicted with their personal decisions. Women were able to find other church leaders, usually with higher authority, who validated their personal revelatory experiences. All empowered women believed that when it came to a personal decision, they trusted their experiences with personal revelation more than a church leader’s counsel. Many also added that they had never received personal revelation that was contrary to the doctrine of the church or to counsel that was given by the prophet.

Martha Beck also discovered the freeing effects of personal revelation on Mormon women. In the final chapters of her dissertation on Mormon women, Beck discusses, at length, mystical experiences, or personal revelation. She explains how these mystical experiences helped women in a double bind to dramatically change their paradigm in a way that they viewed as legitimate, thus freeing them from what was once oppressive (Beck 1993).

A significant contributor to this concept is one of the church’s most fundamental
beliefs, the ability of all people to receive personal revelation. The President of
the church’s twelve apostles once said that, “Spiritual self-reliance is the sustaining power in
the Church.” He adds,

If we foolishly ask our Bishop or branch President or the Lord to make a decision
for us, there’s precious little self-reliance in that. . . if we lose the spirit and power
of individual revelation, we have lost much in this Church. You have great and
powerful resources. You, through prayer, can solve your problems without
endlessly going to those who are trying so hard to help others (Ensign 1975, 89).

Fundamental to LDS theology is the belief that every person has direct access to God.
This belief also stresses individual responsibility with regard to having one’s “own”
testimony. Women in the study took this doctrine seriously and found it a pivotal
resource for empowerment. This factor took on such monumental meaning that instead
of being viewed as only a single influence among many others, it is better understood as
the most pivotal passage in the process of empowerment. LDS women who believed that
God could intervene in their lives also believed that they could receive personal
revelation from him and that divine inspiration had played a significant role in helping
them out of many challenging situations. Many firmly believed that it was only because
of the revelation that God had sent them that they were able to deal with the stressful and
overwhelming task of life altering events. When searching for personal revelatory
experiences these women were open to doing whatever it was they felt that God had
directed them to do.

(4) Personal Characteristics that Influenced Empowerment

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I hypothesized that the following personal characteristics could be used to predict a woman’s level of empowerment: (a) knowledge of doctrine, (b) geographical proximity to church headquarters, (c) age, (d) education, (e) returned missionary, (f) work experience, and (g) experiences in church leadership positions. These traits had varying levels of influence on empowerment.

(a) Knowledge of Doctrine

Doctrine is defined as those foundational aspects of LDS theology that remained constant through time. An LDS woman’s understanding of doctrine and it’s distinction from other church related beliefs became a major pattern indicating empowerment. LDS women who had extensive knowledge of church doctrine were able to separate church doctrine from other church beliefs, such as those generated by church culture. This ability to discriminate became essential in the process of questioning and reconstructing personal belief systems discussed in passages 4 through 7 and passage 12 of the empowerment process. All the women in the sample believed that God could and would do anything except change church doctrine. In other words, all the women viewed church doctrine as unchanging. However, empowered women perceived church doctrine as different from church commandments, church policy, and church culture. Church beliefs are categorized by their likelihood of changing. If a belief is perceived as never changing, it is labeled as doctrine. If a belief can only be changed by God’s direction, it is called a commandment. Church policy can only be changed by church leaders, and beliefs that change based upon the influence of church members are thought of as church culture. The belief and the source of the belief affected the category in which empowered
women placed it. For example, there is a commonly held belief in the church that women should marry when they are young. Empowered LDS women might classify a belief by asking such questions as, “What is the source of this belief?” “Is it a sin if an LDS woman never marries?” “What do the scriptures say about women who do not marry?” “What does the First Presidency have to say about women who never marry?” By finding answers to a series of questions, empowered women appropriately categorize and generate understanding of a context for a given belief.

A critical difference between empowered women and those women struggling with empowerment is how they define doctrine. Empowered women described doctrine as church theology, a belief that remains the same on earth and in life after death, that not even God would change. LDS women who are unempowered do not discriminate between beliefs that change those that do not; they struggle with being able to identify the source of church beliefs. Their view of doctrine includes all of the church’s beliefs. It is not that they lack the ability to discriminate; they usually lack an understanding of church doctrine, and their lack of knowledge can lead them to mistake church culture for doctrine. The penalty for not discriminating between church beliefs is high. LDS women who give equal weight to Sunday school stories and doctrine are in a potentially oppressive situation because of the inability to distinguish between the opinions of people and what is seen by the church as truth.

There are four main influences on whether an LDS woman will be equipped with the skills to discriminate. One of the best predictors of discrimination, is having already processed a life altering experience which may have prompted a close examination of
persona beliefs. Because passage 7 of the process is the ability to discriminate between different church beliefs, a woman who has already had some practice in using this ability, is more likely to be able to repeat the process. Another major pattern connected to discriminating between church beliefs emerged with those LDS women who had certain church callings, such as Relief Society President, Gospel Doctrine teacher, full-time missionary, or seminary teacher. These callings have in common a responsibility to understand how the church functions on an administrative level as well as a responsibility for teaching other people about the doctrine of the church. An LDS woman who had a deeper understanding of church doctrine and church administrative practices was more likely to separate the two, which broadened her ability to delineate other church beliefs.

Another common pattern among women who were able to discriminate between church beliefs involved a self description as “the questioning type.” These women saw themselves as deep thinkers and felt that their tendency to not believe everything they heard was a positive trait. They strongly distinguished themselves from people they described as “doubting” church beliefs. They expressed very strong beliefs about self-reliance in connection with personal belief systems. Discriminating women talked about the need for personal revelation in constructing personal belief systems because it is something that you can trust and that comes with such certainty that it can solidify personal confidence as well. Alice talks about her experience with general conference as a self-characterized “questioner.”

General conference is always a really interesting experience for me. Because invariably there is something that rings true. But I guess that for me, my spirit has
got to testify of its significance and importance. . . Mormonism really is, to me, that assurance that each one of us has access to God. And our leaders are there as conduits, but blind obedience is not part of our theology. . . to me the Mormon approach to life is that ultimately we are agents unto ourselves and we must choose. Obedience is not acceptable if it is not the choice of our free spirit. . .

Now, of course, I am well aware of the fact that my own, natural man is there to distort that counsel, and I always have to examine myself for pride and on and on.

. . . But I have always got to have that witness before I am able to incorporate.

Like Alice, other empowered women emphasized the importance of spiritual self-reliance by making themselves responsible for the deliberate choice to include some beliefs while excluding other beliefs.

Finally, those women who were familiar with the LDS women in church history were more likely to discriminate between church beliefs. A small group of women, all of them 30 years old or younger, mentioned the impact that studying the women in church history had on their belief system. All of them had at some point wondered why some of the responsibilities that women had in the early days of the church had been taken away. This usually led to serious questions about church policy. In the process of sifting through church policies, these women had separated church policies from other church beliefs. Sandra had this to say about LDS women in church history,

When I learn about the early women of the church. . . when I learn about people like Eliza R. Snow, I really feel a bond to them because they had a lot of things [in common with women today]. I don't see them as people who just sat back and
said, “Ok, let the men do everything.”

It was not uncommon for the younger empowered women in the sample to express a similar connection with the women in church history. Many of them related to their predecessors because they saw them as politically active in fighting for the rights of women and children, as validating traditional family values, and affirming the significance of the role of women in the lives of their families. They were struck by the emotional and spiritual strength that early LDS women displayed, and many of the younger women saw themselves as valuing and behaving in these same ways. Younger, empowered LDS women felt that the histories of early LDS women validated their present day experiences.

**(b) Geographical Proximity to Church Headquarters**

Patterns of geography were more complex than the simple expectation that, the farther away an LDS woman lived from church headquarters, the less likely she was to feel pressure from the LDS culture and thus more empowered. There was a definite correlation between LDS women’s sense of empowerment and living in areas more densely populated with LDS people. LDS women who lived in areas that had higher percentages of LDS people did feel more pressure to conform to church culture, and when younger, were less likely to recognize the existence and influence of LDS culture. Those women who lived in an area with few LDS members were less influenced by church culture than those women who lived in densely populated LDS areas. LDS women whose native culture was less influenced by LDS beliefs had less difficulty separating church culture and other church beliefs. In fact, the process of maturing automatically
included a continuous process of identifying and separating native culture from LDS culture. Martha expresses frustration at the lack of distinction LDS women living in Utah make between church cultural and doctrinal beliefs. She frames her opinions in political discourse,

To me, the typical Mormon woman in Utah is different from the typical Mormon woman elsewhere. I think the typical Mormon woman in Utah equates political and social conservatism with the gospel of Jesus Christ. For that reason, I think that the typical Mormon woman in Utah does not have a rich, spiritual life because I think the typical woman doesn’t see the need for it . . . I think that the typical woman thinks that if she’s basically living the lifestyle of a conservative Republican, that’s what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ . . . I think that the typical woman sees the gospel as a set of rules, maybe a hundred rules, and if you follow them all, then you’re a good person. I don’t know if they even think in terms of being a disciple of Jesus Christ. I don’t know that Jesus enters into it all that much . . . I don’t think the typical Mormon woman outside of Utah sees her spiritual quest as being able to be explained by a set of rules or political dogma, that it’s something that isn’t a product of this world . . . I think that the typical Mormon woman outside of Utah is much more Christ-focused in her thinking and Christ-centered in the way that she attempts to conduct herself than the typical Mormon woman in Utah.

Although Martha expresses her views using political labels, her observations of LDS women in Utah and outside of Utah pertain to cultural patterns. What emerged in this
research project was less a Utah verses non-Utah experience than a comparison of LDS women who lived in areas with different numbers of LDS members. In other words, all the women in the study were deeply influenced by the culture of their native region. Since the native culture of Utah is deeply influenced by the LDS church, those women originating in Utah were more influenced by LDS culture. Since the culture of their native place is so steeped with church influence, it was especially difficult for Utah women to separate native culture from church culture and to further separate church culture from church doctrine. This is not to suggest that it could not be done, but there was an added step for women along the Wasatch Front in the process of classifying beliefs. Women coming from cultures less influenced by LDS culture had an easier time identifying and separating church culture from church doctrine. Of course, this separating technique is crucial in passage 7 in which the ability to discriminate between church beliefs influences personal empowerment. Again, women who could discriminate between church culture and other church beliefs were more likely to feel empowered.

(c) Age

Age also became a more complicated concept than first predicted. Two categories emerged: cohort effect, and location in the life cycle. Originally, I predicted that younger women would have a stronger sense of empowerment because of the influence of the feminist movement during their impressionable years. Instead of working out gender issues as they encountered them in life, this group of women had grown up with questions of gender being more dominant in the social landscape. Younger women were not only presented with possible future role conflicts, but they were also able to come to
comfortable solutions with little, if any, crisis. I found this prediction to be useful in understanding how younger LDS women were empowered.

However, there were two aspects of age that I had not predicted. The first was the experiences of respondents that were of the ages 29 to 37. This age group had particular internal struggles with empowerment because of their location in history, and the specific cohort in which they were born. These women were teenagers in the 1970s when the tension between the ERA and the LDS church was significant. Many of these women had memories of the supporters (mostly women) of the Equal Rights Amendment picketing their churches during Sunday services. They also remembered counsel from the pulpit about voting against the ERA as well as the infamous general conference when ERA supporters stood and shouted opposition to sustaining the church’s prophet. This particular group of women had experienced more turmoil in trying to resolve the conflict between feelings of entitlement toward staying at home, working, or both. They were cautious in their expressions about motherhood and career, trying to steer clear of being labeled either a “Molly Mormon” or a “radical feminist.” They were careful about aligning themselves with either because of the negative stereotypes associated with both. Their conflict mostly revolved around where to draw the boundaries between their roles as woman, wife, and mother. Many of these women were placed in the processing empowerment group. I eventually labeled this variable as location in history, meaning that the historical period in which they were born influenced their sense of empowerment; 76% of the sample were affected by this factor.

It also became clear that the age of the older women in my group, 45 years old and
up, was also significant. I label this concept as location in the life cycle. Originally, I thought that this group of women, because of the historical time in which they grew up, would be more attached to a stereotype of the traditional woman, and would be more subservient to men. However, older women not only had more life altering experiences but also had more time to do some serious processing that included a lot of hind-sight. Because the likelihood of experiencing life altering events increased with age and expanded family relationships, the members of this group, who were deeply engaged in raising children and even grandchildren, generally had several life altering experiences. The fullness of life had given them ample opportunity to practice their skills in the process of empowerment as well as improving their chances of success with the process. Because of their familiarity with the process of empowerment, these women had unique and powerful characteristics, even within the empowered group. I will give more attention to this particular group in my conclusions.

There were several significant patterns correlating age and empowerment. Those women in the sample who were younger (under 25) found empowerment through their experiences based on their location in history. LDS women who were older (45 and older) were empowered by their placement in the life cycle. They were empowered because of their experiences with issues surrounding mature families and careers. Those who struggled the most with empowerment were found in the middle group (ages 25 to 37). This group struggled with empowerment for several reasons. Many of them were, for the first time, in the midst of dealing with significant life altering experiences and were involved in sorting through the empowerment process. Since, at any passage, the
empowerment process can be halted, and I could not predict if this would occur, this
group was included in the Processing Empowerment category. Another reason many in
this group struggled was because of their experiences with the ERA that they had
internalized, which now caused them to struggle with role conflicts.

(d) Education

Final analysis revealed important patterns connecting education and
empowerment. LDS women who completed a technical, bachelor or higher degree were
more likely to be empowered than women who had not completed anything higher than a
high school diploma. An overall demographic description of education patterns among
the three empowered groups in this study is as follows: of the empowered group, 67%
had completed a bachelors degree, 13% had completed their Masters degree, 8% had
completed a technical degree, and 12% were currently in school, and of those currently in
school, all but one had less than one year to graduate. Of the processing empowerment
group, 25% had completed their bachelors, 12% had their law degree, another 12% had
their associate of arts degree and 50% had only their high school diploma. All the women
in the unempowered group had attended a four year university. This group of women
averaged 13.5 years of school, but all had dropped out leaving none with a completed
post-secondary degree.

Patterns that emerged among empowered LDS women were connected to a more
serious attitude about completing their degree by either postponing marriage or by
committing themselves to finishing a degree even after marrying and having children. If
women who were more serious about completing their degree(s) married before
graduation they tended to marry men who were also seriously committed to the completion of their wives’ degree(s). Joy, who married a year before she graduated with her bachelor’s degree explained,

I think my brain is as important as my husband’s, and I think my activities or my goals are as important as his. I want to retain my independence a little bit because that is one of the reasons why he married me, because I was me. I don’t want to get all absorbed in him. I don’t feel like I would like myself, and I like myself. I like my husband, but I don’t want to be him; I want to be me.”

Joy empowers herself by placing equal value on both her and her husband’s educational experiences. She also empowers herself by seeing the importance of maintaining her individual identity. Women who completed a college degree were more likely to be empowered. Those women in the sample who dropped out of college cited marriage and family as the number one reason for dropping out was marriage and family. Completing a college degree influenced a woman’s ability to assert her individuality and independence. These qualities enhanced a woman’s self confidence and, thus, positively influenced the overall process of empowerment.

(e) Returned Missionary

I originally hypothesized that those women who had served full-time missions would feel more empowered than those who did not. Of the 32% who had served missions, all but one had served during or after 1980. Years ago, there was a cultural stereotype that the only women who served full-time missions were those who were too unattractive to get married. Serving a full-time mission was seen as a default decision.
However, by the early 1980s, this stereotype was more of a generation marker than anything else and became unpopular. Of those women who served their missions during or after 1980 (87% of those that served), being a returned missionary was a relatively small factor in empowerment. Because some of the life altering experiences could coincidently be included in the mission experience (eg., traveling to different regions of the United States or other countries), returned missionaries were more likely to recognize the influence of culture in church beliefs. Returned missionaries were also more likely to understand the doctrine and its difference from church culture. Both these latter characteristics were significant to passage 7, distinguishing church beliefs. Returned missionaries were also more likely to have had questions about mission leadership positions since, only male missionaries can be called to leadership positions that oversee both men and women. Because women cannot be called to serve missions until they are 21 years of age and men are called at 19 years of age, many women expressed frustration at having to report to someone whom they described as immature. This situation can provoke questions concerning church policy and organization, which can lead to some restructuring of personal belief systems, again, preparing a woman for success in the process of empowerment. Serving a mission is only a small factor in an LDS woman’s empowerment because female returned missionaries can have some of these experiences, but they may not have experienced any of them. A woman’s empowerment depended on the combination of her experiences and how she processed them.

(f) Working Outside the Home

**Working outside the home** was an insignificant factor in empowerment. Of the
total sample, 86% of women worked outside the home, leaving only 16% who did not. Each of the three empowerment groups had a large majority of women working and a small percentage not working outside the home. The high percentage of women working outside the home was less a predictor of empowerment and more of a reflection of economic issues.

(g) Church Leadership Positions

Primarily, I proposed that women who had fulfilled leadership positions or who were responsible for teaching doctrine to other church members would be more empowered. This concept also proved to have several significant dimensions. Serving in the Young Women’s Presidency and Primary Presidency was a poor predictor of empowerment. However, having served as a Relief Society President was significant to an LDS woman’s sense of empowerment. Sixty-three percent of those who had served as Relief Society President were in the empowered group with the remaining 37% in the processing group. The women that had served as Relief Society President had similar patterns in that they understood the administrative aspects of the church which helped to distinguish between doctrine and policy, increasing the chances of processing passage 7 successfully. Because of their familiarity with local priesthood leaders, this group of women felt less intimidated by men holding positions of authority than other women in the sample. This combination of circumstances led these women to feelings of entitlement in sharing opinions and a belief that the Relief Society and priesthood are companion organizations, equal in importance to the church. Feeling equal to the priesthood had a positive influence on a woman’s empowerment. Those women who had
experiences of teaching doctrine to other church members using the scriptures as text, also were more likely to be empowered. In the empowered group, 33% of the women had held such positions compared to none in the other groups combined. Again, women who showed deep knowledge of the doctrine of the church were better able to separate doctrine from other church beliefs, a significant characteristic in passage 7.

Newly Discovered Patterns

The Constancy of Care

In Debbi Christensen's research on LDS women, she identifies a concept that she calls The Constancy of Care. Some of the women in her sample believed that there would always be someone there for them to nurture them in their time of need, specifically their husbands. Melba, who has lived in Utah while her husband lives and works in California, has always relied on her husband for her emotional and financial needs. Since she moved to Utah she has experienced both emotional and financial stress. Melba resists independence, but is being forced to face the need to rely on herself.

He makes me feel good about myself when he is here. But he doesn’t take care of me in other ways. I get kind of ignored, as far as phone calls. He says, “I’ll call you in the morning,” and never does. Sometimes it gets hard. I feel like he doesn’t take good care of me. On the other hand, this had been really good for me because I have realized that I can take care of a lot of these things myself. . .

Women emphasize their experiences in relationships and see them as making life satisfying and worth living. However, “The loss of the assumption concerning the constancy of care is crucial for them and has the potential for leading to defeat as well as
to maturity” (Christensen 1988, 73). Women who placed personal responsibility at the core of their belief system, and relied on themselves for their own care and self-worth, were more empowered than those who had not made this discovery. This does not mean that empowered women did not share their lives with others. It does mean that they saw themselves as the primary person responsible for meeting their needs and wants, which enhanced the feeling of being in control of one’s life. Feeling powerful and in control of one’s life had an overall positive impact on a woman’s success in the process of empowerment. Empowered women were more likely to have healthy, close relationships in which interdependence was valued and practiced.

**Age of Marriage**

Another factor that became significant upon analysis was, how old the respondent was at the time of her first marriage, **age at marriage**. In the empowered group the average age at marriage was 24 compared to 21.6 in the two other groups combined. The 2.4 years difference between these groups suggests that the women in the empowered group may have had the opportunity and the initiative to pursue a broader range of experiences prior to marriage. Most of these women had completed their college degrees and had been involved in a career before and after marriage. Empowered women were also more likely to describe their husbands as empowering. Taking the comments from both empowered married women and empowered single women, this trend to marry older could indicate, first, that empowered women are focused on many things, and since marriage is only one of those things, they are more easily distracted from marriage; secondly, empowered women are more selective about who they marry and would rather
postpone marriage to marry an empowering husband instead of simply marrying. Women who married at an older age were more likely to have completed a college degree, fulfilled a full-time mission, traveled to foreign countries and be more independent, characteristics which increase the likelihood of empowerment.

**Companion Organization**

Another empowering perception was a woman’s view of the Relief Society organization in the hierarchy of the church. I label this concept as *companion organization*. The women who viewed the Relief Society organization as a companion organization to the priesthood felt more empowered in the church than those who viewed Relief Society as another auxiliary program of the church. Of the empowered group, 86% described this kind of relationship between the priesthood and Relief Society. Many described this as a separate but equal relationship. Alice explained her idea of the relationship between the Relief Society and the priesthood by saying,

> We really are God’s organization for women, it is a divine mandate. . . [We are] a companion organization to the priesthood. In the minutes of the Relief Society, the sisters were told to inspire the priesthood brethren to good works. Our position in the Lord’s kingdom is so clear. . . We are not an auxiliary. . . in the minutes we’re a companion organization, and the church was not fully organized until the women were organized. . . I think the Relief Society as an organization is absolutely essential to the growth and well-being of the church. Women comprise more than half of the church’s population. . . I think there are perspectives that women have, and I think they can offer solutions to problems. If growth is the
most serious problem the church faces, I don’t think those solutions can be found without women.

Alice’s placement of Relief Society alongside the Priesthood organization, instead of under the direction of the priesthood, empowers her as a member of Relief Society. Her view that the church was not fully organized until the Relief Society was established reflects her belief that the Relief Society organization is a critical component of the organization of the church. Women who described the Relief Society and priesthood organizations as companion organizations also made significant comments about ordinances in the LDS temples that connect women and the priesthood. In talking about her responsibility as a mother, Nancy quoted President Kimball’s advice to mothers about mothers blessing their children, typically carried out by the priesthood holder,

I feel that if it was necessary, and the time came, if I needed to bless a member of my family or call upon the power of God, call upon God to send faith and faithfulness, that my conviction would be enough. It doesn’t have to do with whether I’m a man or a woman, or whether I hold the priesthood or not. It’s simply faith and calling upon God to send his power here to earth. I may use a different manner than say anointing with oil and laying my hands on someone’s head to give them a blessing, but I think I’m just as much entitled to receiving or having God send his power here to earth to help me and anybody else.

Nancy empowered herself by believing that blessings are based on faith not gender.

Nancy’s beliefs about the responsibilities associated with the role of motherhood allowed her to bless her family which empowered her. Empowered LDS women felt entitled to
God’s power through their faith in God. They did not believe that holding the priesthood provided someone more access to God. The women in the study talked about how priesthood ordinances were an essential part of gaining salvation, but that blessings were predicated on faith in God. Those women who described the relationship between the Relief Society and the priesthood as companion organizations did so by describing them as distinct but equally important or parallel organizations. Those women who valued equality between relationships were more likely to see relationships as growth promoting. Thus, those women who described the relationship between the organizations of Relief Society and Priesthood as equal were more likely to be empowered.

**Balance by Blending**

Another pattern among empowered women was their ability to blend what appears to be mutually exclusive worlds in a delicate balance. Because LDS women place great emphasis on traditional feminine values while living in a modern society, they have learned to blend conflicting roles, and balance demands in order to maintain personal happiness. In many cases, the traditional is associated with the roles that LDS women perform in the family: teacher, daughter, sister and mother, etc. These traditional roles represent the “feminine” which typically values intuition, intimacy and relationships, characteristics LDS women find ennobling. However, the modern world places value on being rational, autonomous and competitive (Beck 1994). These modern qualities encourage women to devote attention to themselves as individuals by developing their mind, skills and talents. The constant tension between the traditional and the modern, cause the LDS woman to reevaluate how she has organized her world (Ekejiuba 1995).
She evaluates by questioning the effectiveness of her choices and the consequences that have resulted from those choices. This constant tension causes an ongoing reevaluation in the minds of LDS women, critically checking the blending and the delicate balance between their modern and traditional roles. Success is achieved when a woman is able to blend the strengths of both worlds, into her belief system. She may do this by interpreting modern society’s value of autonomy as a need for “alone time” in which a woman can devote time and attention to herself without feeling guilty for doing so. She may also blend traditional feminine characteristics of understanding and compassion with her responsibilities in the workforce. This blending affects how a woman perceives the spectrum of options available to her in passage 8 of the empowerment process. Instead of choosing mutually exclusive notions of both traditional and modern worlds she draws from and blends the strengths of both to broaden her options and empower herself (Collins 1991).
Chapter 6
Conclusions

External and Internal Forces on Empowerment

There are two categories that influence Mormon women’s sense of empowerment: first, is external forces; and second, internal forces. External forces are those forces that a woman either cannot control or over which she has only partial control. In this category falls the hierarchal structure of the church, her church leaders, and her husband. Internal forces are those forces that a woman can always control. This category includes her willingness to process a life altering experience, her ability to discriminate between church doctrine and church culture, and her skill at negotiating relationship boundaries and obstacles that block access to desirable choices.

External Forces

External forces that impact empowerment are the church structure, church leadership and husbands. Mormon women have little to no control over these factors in trying to empower themselves. However, these forces can work to empower women depending on each woman’s circumstance. Although, these outside forces can influence Mormon women to leave the church, the women in this research have been chosen because of their commitment to empower themselves within the system.

Probably the biggest obstacle to an LDS woman’s sense of empowerment is the patriarchal structure of the church, which prohibits women from holding any church position in which she has authority over both men and women. However, this does not mean that women do not have a voice in the church. It does mean that, in order to be
heard by the men in the church, men must listen and give validation to the female experience. It is the man in authority that dictates the amount of legitimization women receive in their experience with the priesthood. What we learn from this research is that some men are good at empowering women, and some women take the opportunity to make their needs known. On the other hand, if a woman’s priesthood leaders do not empower her, there is little she can do about it.

An LDS woman’s empowerment is also influenced by the personalities and beliefs of the people who are in positions of authority over her. I have found in my research, that leaders who distrust women are less empowering than those who trust women. Also, those leaders who view women as equals and respond to them as individuals instead of gender stereotyping, also had an empowering effect on the women in the study. Leaders who had flexible beliefs about gender roles have a more empowering effect on women. However, if a woman is in a ward where her Bishop and stake President are unempowering there is little she can do aside from moving, which has been known to happen. Again, in my study, all empowered women reported feeling empowered by either their Bishop or Stake President.

Another profound empowering experience comes from husbands who treat their wives as equals. Those husbands who had flexible ideas about gender roles in connection with marriage and parenting were found to have a significant impact on their wives' personal sense of empowerment. Some of the women in the sample mentioned that although they had survived experiences where they felt unempowered in their relationship with their church leaders while staying in the church, they would not stay in a marriage
with an unempowering spouse. Because of the daily routine of negotiating relationship boundaries in marriage, a husbands' ability to empower his wife was a major source of empowerment for married women. Some of the women in my sample felt that their own personal beliefs about marriage and empowerment had expanded because of the perspectives that their husbands had brought into the marriage.

**Internal Forces**

Internal forces were those forces that women could control, given some wisdom and personal insight. Internal concepts were not simply how the women responded to external forces, but also their efforts to empower themselves from within. Internal forces that influence empowerment include: the willingness to process a life altering experience and reevaluate one’s belief systems, the ability to discriminate between different kinds of church beliefs as well as church offices and those that hold them, experiences with personal revelation, and finally, the ability to negotiate relationship boundaries and obstacles that block access to desirable ends.

From the beginning of this project it was clear that a woman needed to be willing to process a life altering experience. The women in this study who resisted processing life altering experiences, very simply, could not be empowered. Women that resisted processing life altering experiences, typically, lacked the desire to accept a life altering experience and its consequences in their lives. However, those women who were willing to recognize and admit when they were in the midst of a life altering experience were more likely to successfully work through the process of empowerment. The characteristics that influenced recognition of life altering experiences and a willingness to
go through those experiences included a belief that they were meant to have happiness, a hope and faith in God, and that He would support them through their experience. This last characteristic is closely connected with beliefs surrounding personal revelation. One of the LDS precepts that influenced this concept and previously mentioned characteristics is that difficult experiences occur to help a person grow spiritually and emotionally to become like God. LDS theology states that God's people must be tested in all areas of their life to prepare them to receive glory in the afterlife (D&C 136:31). When suffering through life altering experiences, most LDS women search for the meaning behind the experience. One of the foremost questions in their minds is, "What does God want me to learn from this experience?" Giving meaning to a life altering experience helps LDS women to "work-through" the experience and learn whatever it is that they are "supposed" to learn to help them progress.

Another empowering pattern was found among LDS women who were willing to evaluate and challenge personal belief systems. Those women who accepted challenges to personal belief systems, worked out the beliefs that they found faulty and replaced faulty assumptions with working assumptions, were more likely to feel empowered. In processing a life altering experience, LDS women found that part of their belief system was in conflict with lived experiences, in other words, their assumptions about the church, family or how life was "supposed to be" failed them on some level. Those women who recognized, admitted and discarded dysfunctional beliefs found the need to search for new functional beliefs. In constructing a new framework, empowered women were able to view beliefs and the roles that stem from them as flexible and changing.
Another pattern among empowered LDS women was their ability to distinguish between various kinds of beliefs. Those women who were able to discriminate between beliefs generated from church doctrine and those that are culturally dictated, between leadership positions and the personality of the leader, were more likely to be empowered. Also, those women who placed more emphasis on an individual’s characteristics over gender stereotypes were more likely to have relationships based on equality and thus be empowered.

Those women who believed that doctrine was separate from church policy and church culture were able to empower themselves by giving emphasis to the doctrinal teaching regarding personal revelatory experiences. In making personal decisions, empowered LDS women believed that personal revelation could transcend personal counsel from church leadership and church culture, because these things were viewed as having less authority than personal revelation. LDS women were also able to empower themselves when they separated leadership callings from the personalities of the individuals holding those callings. Those women who described the priesthood as having two main functions, providing saving ordinances and administration, had no trouble separating the personality of the leader from the authority they held. Individual personality characteristics to ignore were chauvinism, immaturity, or lack of a female perspective. It is obvious that some qualities are more desirable than others for good leadership, but a leader who lacks desirable qualities in most cases was forgiven because of women’s ability to separate his personality from his “job description.” Women who were able to separate the personality of people from the church positions they held, were
more likely to be empowered than those who did not have the ability to discriminate between the two.

Those women who saw people as individuals rather than being constrained by rigid gender stereotypes were also more likely to be empowered. Women who saw themselves as an individual with individual needs were more likely to empower themselves and others in this same way. This belief could be associated with the influence of the feminist movement in general. Empowered LDS women described their connection to other LDS women around the world through their mutual beliefs about God and family, rather than narrowly defined western notions of femininity. The absence of gender stereotyping meant that their description of connecting beliefs in the church could be used to describe a connection to all LDS members, not just women. Seeing people as individuals first, allowed empowered LDS women to break confining stereotypes and enhance their ability to accept others' differences.

Another internal concept that influenced empowerment was that of personal revelation. In this sample those women who turned to God to find answers and direction in reference to life altering experiences, and claimed to have received guidance from Him, were more likely to feel empowered. These women felt that a revelatory experience not only opened up more possible choices, but also gave them more confidence in tackling the obstacles that may have blocked access to their desired goal. An LDS woman’s faith in God and her ability to discern doctrinal beliefs from other culturally dictated beliefs made her a likely candidate for empowerment. The internal factor of personal revelation and the belief surrounding it became the most pivotal and important
factor contributing to empowerment.

The final internal force that influenced women’s empowerment was the ability to negotiate relationship boundaries and obstacles blocking access to empowering resources that empowered them. Women who were able to negotiate relationship boundaries with their church leaders and their family members, specifically their husbands, were empowered. Those LDS women who were able to negotiate around or through obstacles that blocked access to resources needed for empowerment were also more likely to feel empowered. LDS women who assumed an equal relationship with church leaders were more empowered than women who did not. Women who were able to negotiate relationship boundaries with church leaders in times of personal crisis were more empowered than those who could not. LDS women who used the concept of personal revelation to give legitimation to navigating around obstacles that blocked desirable outcomes were also more empowered. LDS women who had had a personal revelatory experience expected obstacles to be removed so that they could achieve God’s will for them.

The kind of relationship an LDS woman had with her husband was also a factor in being able to negotiate access to important empowering resources. If a husband and wife both had flexible ideas about their roles as husband and father, wife and mother, the woman was able to access resources that she might not otherwise have access to within a patriarchal system. If a woman believed that she was supposed to work part-time and her husband was unwilling to pickup the domestic slack, then she was more likely to feel unempowered. However, if a woman in the same circumstances was married to a man
who supported her decision by sharing domestic responsibilities, she was more likely to be empowered. Another aspect of the spousal relationship among empowered women was the amount of status given to a husband’s past or current position in the church. There was a pattern of empowerment among those women whose husbands had held leadership position in the church for a number of years. These women had an empowering perspective when it came to being able to negotiate relationship boundaries or obstacles specifically associated with local priesthood leaders. These women felt less threatened when they had to confront their leaders and their ability to separate “the priesthood” from “the man” was supported by their belief systems. The cultural status attached to a husbands’ position within the church had obviously benefitted their wives’ ability to negotiate around members who blocked their access to a desired outcome.

Finally, those women who had positions in the church in which they were responsible for teaching doctrine to both males and females found that the status attached to those callings gave them more power in negotiating. Those women who were called to teach seminary, institute, or gospel doctrine received a certain amount of respect because of the status attached to those callings within the church culture. These women also had gained a greater understanding of church doctrine through callings. As a result they had more power in negotiating because church leaders were more willing to listen to them, respect them, and thus, sympathize with their circumstances. All of these conditions made them more successful in the negotiating process and influenced empowerment.

LDS women who acquired internal forces that promoted empowerment coupled with the support of external forces, were those women who felt the strongest sense of
empowerment within the LDS church. Most of the women who had gained internal forces and yet lacked the support of external forces were usually in the process of serious negotiations in an effort to gain more support from those external forces (Collins 1991, Ekejiuba 1995). Women who were empowered from external forces but lacked internal forces were dissatisfied and frustrated, but were still in the process of empowerment because the potential was there for them to empower themselves. Those women who were unempowered were usually struggling in both areas; they were blocked by external forces and they lacked the skills found in internal forces to begin the process of empowerment.

The Unwinding of the Spool

During the analysis process, the image of an old fashioned spool of thread kept coming to mind. As the women in this study were growing up they were taught many things about people, gender, religion, God etc. Much of what they learned fit neatly into a simple belief system. It fit neatly because, most of “life” had not unfolded and thus their beliefs were not yet tested. Complicated questions had not been given attention because more accurate answers are too complicated for people who have had few experiences. I pictured original beliefs being wound by a machine, efficiently but simply which resulted in untested assumptions. These beliefs were wound neatly and orderly which required a certain amount of tension for the order to remain. On the surface the neatly wound thread looks perfect. As these women experience more of life they may find that after a layer or two of thread has been used, there are knots in layers underneath or that their thread is out of order; maybe in places where the thread was weak it broke. All
of these problems would cause the rest of the thread to be out of order and the neatness of the layer would be disturbed. This part of the analogy represents the reevaluating and questioning elements of the empowerment process. Each of the women in this study came to a place in their life where they recognized that the only way to regain a smooth order was to completely unwind the spool and start all over. This overwhelming task could cause some women to ignore the disorganization while other women would learn to function as best they could under the circumstances, always feeling somewhat paralyzed by the magnitude of the task of unwinding and rewinding. After finding evidence of the disorder, some women would patch the weak places in their thread and make do until more time and attention could be given to the whole process. Still others, suspicious of other knots or weaknesses, started into the unwinding process immediately in order to rewind their spool as neatly as possible. The women in my sample represented all the different phases of unwinding the spool. When it came time to rewind the spool, I picture that most women chose to rewind their spool by hand. Careful and deliberate attention was given to making sure the thread was strong, smooth and orderly, so that when the thread was needed it could be used as expected. The unempowered women, the women in the process of empowerment and the empowered women in my sample were in different phases of unwinding their spool. Some were quicker, some were methodical, some were slower, and some were temporarily lost in the process, but all were somehow engaged. Being empowered was not a one time process, it was not something that could be discontinued, it was a complicated process that everyone was engaged in different aspects of their lives and in different places in the process.
Paradoxes

**Patriarchy in Modern Society**

Typically patriarchy is male dominance over women, children, and society overall. Yet, patriarchal religions in modern society have adjusted their own interpretation of patriarchy to fit their modern needs. Since its founding, little has changed within the patriarchal structure of the church. Most of the highest ranking offices of the church are dominated by men and even some church callings on ward levels are held by men, not due to a priesthood requirement but simply tradition. By the same token, some callings which do not specify a particular gender have been traditionally held by women and are still held by women. There are conflicting views about women ever holding highly ranked administrative positions in the church. Controversy surrounds the exclusion of women from the priesthood as well. This hotly debated topic was frequently discussed in my interviews, with varying opinions. Although many speculate about the future of this issue, today LDS women are denied the priesthood with its administrative positions. This strictly patriarchal hierarchy can leave church policy and counsel void of female insight. Although empowered women did not share a single opinion about women in the priesthood, they did share the belief that the church could do more to legitimize women’s views. Empowered women believed that their voices could be heard within the existing system. Priesthood holders in positions of authority validated women’s experiences and opinions by viewing women as equals and by helping them gain access to resources they may otherwise have been denied.

To limit a discussion of patriarchy strictly to church organizations would be over-
simplifying its complex nature. Another critical impact of patriarchy is within the family. Traditionally rigid gender roles have assigned the task of bread winning to husbands and homemaking and child care to wives. For many women, rigid roles prescribed by patriarchy have come into direct conflict with their roles in modern society. The daily playing out of conflicting roles causes such intense pressure for LDS women that some form of resolution must take place. Utilizing the resources made available to her within her patriarchal system and finding "creative solutions" for her conflicting roles is one of the LDS woman's greatest strengths (Stack 1981). Many modern Christian women have adopted views prescribed by Biblical Feminists. Such modern views include mutual submission by both partners in marriage. Sociologist James Hunter, who specializes in American religion, surveyed students attending evangelical colleges and seminaries and found that the majority of students in his survey held a view of the family that contained elements of the traditional and the modern. Not only did they feel that women should put husband and family ahead of career, they placed the same expectation on the men; 98% of Hunter's sample believed that both parents are responsible for caring for small children (Stacey 1991, 143-144). Relationships with husbands have a powerful influence on empowerment in the lives of married women in this study. Empowered women in this study who were married emphasized the importance of equality in their relationships with their husbands. In her study of LDS women, Christensen drew similar conclusions.

Relationships of equality provided the necessary support for developmental growth, with or without the impetus provided by failing assumptions.

Relationships of inequality were found to obscure the self and demanded that
women eventually challenge the premise of those relationships in order to reclaim the self. . . the women who subordinated their identities and expected to gain their identity from their husband, experienced a sense of alienation from self (Christensen 1988, 82-83).

Rigid gender roles of traditional patriarchy are becoming more flexible to fit the needs of modern families. Modern LDS women have learned to balance the demands of conflicting roles by sharing family responsibilities with their husbands. Empowered women viewed family tasks and responsibilities as flexible and negotiable depending on the demands of circumstances.

**Religious Conservatives or Modern Feminists?**

It is hard to imagine how any orthodox religion can have anything in common with liberal feminism. Although, these two groups possess striking differences, they celebrate womanhood, especially in terms of women’s biological processes as well as their nurturing qualities (Kaufman 1991).

Liberal feminism views women’s oppression as comparable to all other oppressions suffered at the hands of dominant groups. Liberal feminists share five fundamental beliefs: 1) Reason and God are synonymous; 2) women and men are ontologically alike; 3) education is essential to success; 4) the individual is an isolated being seeking truth and acting as an agent, and her “dignity depends on such independence” (Donovan 1992, 8). Liberal feminists also assert that in order for women to defend their rights as women they must first define themselves by their sex. This process of separating men and women has allowed feminists to develop detailed
descriptions of female characteristics and thus isolate the strengths and power of women (Eisenstein, 1983). Mainly, they point to women’s unique abilities in nurturing, spirituality, intuition and moral superiority. Also valued is a woman’s keen ability to lead and persuade with patience which has been compared to a “light object thrown into the water; it is not the object that determines its direction, but the movement of the water” (Rabuzzi 1982). Because, these characteristics are closely related to women’s experience in the domestic sphere, great attention has been given to the home and family, and liberal feminism has sought progress not in opposition to, but united with the domestic sphere (Cott 1977). Today, liberal feminists go so far as to suggest that the power to change the world is in woman-centered consciousness (Kaufman 1992). Women who are able to merge the mind and the body, a metaphysical journey, are able to tap into the source of power and change present ideologies that negatively influence the world (Rich 1976).

The LDS women in this study also defined their experiences according to their sex. Separating the experiences and characteristics of men and women is a part of LDS theology and built into the structure of the church. Men and women are assigned different responsibilities in the church and in the home. The LDS church has created a specific organization for women in the Relief Society President and men are organized through the priesthood. Within the family, men are to be providers and women are mainly responsible for the domestic sphere. These differing responsibilities based on sex have given LDS women a unique and essential place within the church community. It has also legitimized qualities that are seen as innately feminine. LDS women derive a great deal of strength and identity from sex role differentiation. Women-centered groups such
as Relief Society validate LDS women’s identity and worth (Kaufman 1991). LDS women also argue that LDS theology “enhances women’s status, protects women as a group, and focuses both men and women on familial life” (Kaufman 1991). LDS theology places husband-wife relations at the center of religious beliefs (Brusco 1986). What are seen as feminine qualities, caring for others, selflessness, cooperation and kindnesses, are also seen as good Christian behavior and to be practiced within the family. In this way, LDS beliefs favor the feminine over the competitive and aggressive masculine construct, helping to legitimize the female experience.

Like liberal feminists, LDS women celebrate womanhood, specifically their biological abilities to create and give birth. Many of the LDS women in this study discussed the sacred nature of the female power to create life. According to LDS doctrine, the power of creation is a woman’s most celestial quality, endowing her with God-like potential. In LDS beliefs, there is no higher reward from God than posterity. Valued also are such qualities as patience, spirituality, introspection and the ability to teach, associated with motherhood. Sara Ruddick describes a certain maternal epistemology which she calls the attitude of “holding.” The attitude of holding is, “governed by the priority of keeping over acquiring, of conserving the fragile, of maintaining whatever is at hand and necessary to the child’s life” (Ruddick 1989, 350). Experiencing motherhood also legitimizes the immediate or daily reality in which one “accedes an independent validity, on which one does not attempt to impose total control” (Donovan 1991). The importance of creation and the value placed on the qualities associated with motherhood and Godhood all give women a critical place in LDS beliefs.
Traditional Values and Modern Society

During the Enlightenment age, western culture adopted the notion that people had certain inalienable rights which should be protected by law. Early feminists, such as Mary Wollstonecraft, challenged society to include both men and women when granting such natural rights. However, a patriarchal society rejected this petition and in so doing reaffirmed the privileged position of rational over non-rational modes of thought. The idea that truth could be found in linearity and rationality dominated western culture.

Neglected was the subjective, emotional and non-rational which had critical connections to questions of morality and religion. Ideologies stemming from the Enlightenment Era accentuated the sharp distinction of sex-segregated labor which accompanied the industrial revolution. By the early nineteen hundreds most women were assigned the responsibilities of the domestic or private sphere and most men were working away from home in the public sphere. The mechanized factories and rational nature of the public sphere were a sharp contrast to the more emotional and non-rational nature of the private sphere. Eventually, these sharp distinctions carried over into gender characteristics, which evolved hierarchically, privileging rationality and the men who had claim on it. For years, these separate spheres and the qualities assigned to each, have been viewed as mutually exclusive. In trying to explain the differences between the public and private spheres, many social theorists have emphasized the differences between the qualities inherent in both. Consequently, when people try to operate in both spheres, they experience the conflict that results from competing social values. Resolving this tension has been given much attention by modern theorists because of the adverse consequences
which result when such conflicts go unresolved. Because of the subconscious nature of these conflicting values, many individuals who experience them are unaware of the source of their stress (Beck 1994, 22). However, religion has found a valuable if not essential role in this modern paradox.

In spite of the modern world's privileging of the rational, religion has found a necessary place within modern society. Nonrational or mystical experiences which have throughout history inspired people to overcome great odds have been embraced by the LDS women in this study. In fact, according to Martha Beck, these mystical experiences or revelation from God experiences occur, "not in spite of modernization, but as a direct response to the paradoxical contradictions inevitably involved in the modernization process" (Beck 1994, 226). The LDS women in my sample who entered the process of empowerment discussed the pivotal point of receiving personal revelation in relationship to finding answers to conflicting beliefs and contradictory experiences. Personal revelatory experiences helped women to see new solutions, which included a blending of traditional values and modern life. This ability to "bridge values, attitudes, behaviors, and feelings" is critical to understanding how differing people whose sense of identity is grounded in their tradition, not only survive in modern society, but flourish (Huffman 1990, 8). Emphasizing balancing and blending of traditional values and the demands of modern society can help explain the benefits of a pluralistic approach to society, instead of purely an assimilating society (Blea 1988, Huffman 1991). Understanding how individuals in ethnic minorities overcome enormous cultural odds against them can also help modern society to explain variance within minority groups (Foley 1991). Finally,
the empowered women in this study blamed their frustration on conflicting beliefs and creatively used fundamental religious beliefs to legitimize personal revelation which helped them to blend their traditional values with their modern day experience (Berne 1991).

**LDS Theology that Influenced Empowerment**

There are two main LDS beliefs that have influenced how the women in this study empowered themselves: agency, and believing in a need for opposition. These two beliefs are directly related to LDS beliefs about salvation and what is necessary to achieve it.

Agency is a critical part of LDS theology surrounding what LDS scripture refers to as the *Plan of Salvation*. All other LDS beliefs can be traced back to the importance of an individual’s right to agency (2 Nephi 2:27). LDS doctrine teaches that agency is key because it was something God gave humanity so that they might choose to return to Him, instead of being forced to do so. LDS church members believe that in order for God to ensure our access to agency, He had to send Jesus Christ to earth to make the supreme sacrifice (Mosiah 5:8). Understanding individual agency is fundamental to the *Plan of Salvation* because it also reinforces personal responsibility in making choices. A belief in agency also gives control to the agent. LDS members are taught that although they may not have total control over their lives, they are not powerless; even if they cannot control the circumstances of life, they can control how they respond to them. This belief in agency was interpreted by the empowered women in this study as a need to make wise and responsible decisions as individual agents. It also supports the idea that they should be proactive in managing their lives toward achieving personal happiness. I believe the
empowered women in this study were able to validate their personal revelatory experiences and legitimize their negotiation experiences because of their belief in the doctrine of agency.

A second LDS belief that is closely connected to agency is the belief in the need for opposition (2 Nephi 2:11, 16). LDS theology states that there must be opposition to ensure agency. The more opposition one experiences the more agency is enhanced. To have opposition is to ensure a broad spectrum of choices. The belief in a need for opposition also influences a person’s expectations in life; believing in opposition means believing that life will bring challenges. In fact, according to LDS theology, challenges are not only to be expected, but seen as a sign of God’s love and humanity’s need to be refined (D&C 95:1-2; 136:31). Members of the LDS church believe that if you are living a good life and disaster strikes, it is probably God’s way of trying to strengthen your faith in him by reminding you of your dependence on him. Empowered women in this study gave meaning to their experiences by determining that God was trying to teach them something and bring them closer to Him through spiritual experiences. Believing that opposition is essential, validated empowered women’s life altering experiences and gave meaning to their suffering.

The Super-Empowered

Among the LDS women included in this study was a small group of four that I labeled the super-empowered. Although these women shared the characteristics held by other women in the empowered group, they were different in the degree and intensity of their empowered characteristics. These women radiated serenity and peace in connection
with their self-image and satisfaction with how they had conducted their lives. One would guess on first impressions that their lives had been fairly easy; this was not the case. In fact, what these women shared was an unusual amount of what I have termed life altering events. In discussing their experiences in the interviews, I found that they gave much of the credit for their peace of mind and unique and strong connection to a higher power, to the fact that they had had so many challenging situations. I found these women to be very aware of the dangers of judging other people’s circumstances. They were quick to show sympathy and compassion for the difficult circumstances of other people. I noticed that they were quick but unobtrusive in wanting to help and support people in tragic situations. Often in the interviews, they were careful to not over-simplify situations which they did not understand. They displayed greater maturity by recognizing the complexity of people and the lives they live. Another characteristic that each of these women displayed during their interviews was incredible clarity of thought and the ability to articulate their views. I believe this to be the result of their introspective natures and that they had given much thought and attention to humanity’s complexities in trying to understand how they can give service to others. Finally, another striking feature of the super-empowered women in my sample was their negotiating skills. Each of them, in their interview, made great efforts to understand the meaning of the questions and constantly negotiated differing terms so that they might accurately and honestly respond. These women displayed a rare amount of genuine respect and love for humanity, and I am indebted to them for their articulate and thoughtful answers that have had an enormous impact on me as an individual.
Future Research

My research strongly supports the use of ethnography in studying existing paradoxes within patriarchal systems and the effect they have on minority groups, specifically women. Because of the complex relationship between patriarchal cultures and the women within those systems, the use of qualitative research is critical in understanding them. It would be easy to overlook or over-simplify motivations and variance in the success of minority groups within patriarchal cultures with the use of other forms of data collection.

Although this research suggests three levels of flexibility in patriarchy, further attention should be given to understanding the details and effects of these complexities in patriarchy. This research has also laid a foundation for future areas of inquiry in understanding how women and minorities in other patriarchal cultures work to empower themselves using the means available to them. An area for future research suggested by many of the respondents and their spouses was understanding how LDS men work to empower LDS women. Another area of interest stemming from this research would be determining how the marriage relationship of parents affect women in spousal selection. And finally, the data from this research indicated unique patterns of LDS women who used being single as a way of self empowerment, a topic which deserves further research. Hopefully, this research will be a useful foundation from which others can pursue related questions of empowerment.
Appendix A

Personal History of Each Respondent

Key to understanding LDS women’s experiences is understanding their background. This section is meant to familiarize the reader with each of the respondents personal background so that a mental picture could be drawn and particulars could be better understood. To avoid potentially overly complicated details and to maintain respondents anonymity, I only included general information about each respondents.

Martha 37, was born in Utah but grew up living abroad with her parents who both originated from Utah. Martha also served a full-time mission. After graduating from BYU’s law school she married and moved to the east coast. She has two children and stays at home full-time.

Melba, 52, was raised in a small town in Idaho where she lived with her parents. After graduating from High School, she went on to attend BYU, where soon after her arrival she met and eloped with her husband, and moved to California. There, Melba has raised four children. Although her husband has remained uninvolved with the church, he has always been supportive of the family’s activity.

Joleen, 24, grew up along the Coast in Southern California. Joleen comes from a traditional family in which her mother was a full-time homemaker and her father the financial provider. After graduating from High School, Joleen went on to graduate from BYU in liberal arts. Joleen served an LDS mission at 21 and one year after her return was married in the Salt Lake Temple. Joleen is currently working full-time and returning back to school to receive her Master Degree.
Nineteen year old, Joy grew up in Utah and is currently a full-time student at BYU, focusing on a degree in education. Joy is preparing to serve a full-time mission for the LDS church. She is the oldest of four siblings and was raised in the church by both active parents.

Kathy, 45, was raised in Utah and raised in the church by traditional parents. Kathy’s parents shared the responsibility of provider. After graduating from High School, Kathy attended BYU and received her Bachelors degree. At twenty, she met and married her husband in the Salt Lake Temple, they have raised their five children in Utah. Financial strain has led Kathy in the workforce full-time. Her husband’s disloyalty to her, the family and the church has caused Karen to separate from her husband.

Janice, 60, has spent her life in Southern California, where both her parents worked. Janice attended a local university and obtained her Bachelors degree. At twenty-six Janice married a long time friend in the Los Angles Temple. Janice and her husband have five children. Janice is a full-time homemaker.

Lorraine, forty-seven, grew up in Utah. Both her parents worked while raising her in the church. Lorraine graduated from BYU with her Bachelors degree in education. At 24 Lorraine got married in the Salt Lake Temple. After marrying she and her husband moved to Southern California and raised their six children.

Diane, 60, was raised by traditional parents in New England. At thirty-seven, Diane joined the church with her husband and family. They eventually moved to Southern California where they raised their three children.

Barbara, 33, was raised in the South where she lived with both her parents.
Barbara comes from a traditional family background. Barbara met her husband while attending BYU and married when she was 22 years old. After receiving her Bachelors degree Barbara, her husband and three children moved to the Midwest. Barbara is a full-time homemaker.

Kiki, 35, was born and raised in France. She joined the church when she was a teenager. She has a Bachelors degree as well as a Masters of Business degree. At 24, she married an American and they moved to Southern California. There they run their own business and are raising five children.

Kerri, 35, was raised by traditional parents in Southern California. Kerri is the oldest of eleven children. While attending BYU she met her husband and at nineteen Kerri married in the Los Angeles Temple. Kerri worked full-time until a few years ago, when she dropped to part-time. Kerri and her husband have two children, that are 9 years apart.

Delores, 31, spent several years as a child in Mexico. She was raised by traditional parents, both active in the church. As a teenager her family of ten moved to a small town in Idaho. After graduating from High School, Delores went to a technical college, and after receiving her licence started her own business. She interrupted her career, by serving a full-time mission and returned home to resume her business.

Alice, 39, was raised in various countries around the world. Alice was raised in the church by traditional parents. After graduating from college with a Bachelors degree and a Masters of Fine Arts degree, Alice works full-time as an educator. Alice is second of ten children.
Marilee, 30, as a child lived with both parents but after a divorce lived with her mother and step-father. Marilee joined the church as a teenager. At twenty-five, she married in an Oakland Temple. After marrying her and her husband attended BYU where she received her Bachelors degree.

Tamara, 25, was raised by her parents in Utah. Both her parents worked in the music industry. Her mother worked inside the home and her father worked away from home. Tamara attended University of Utah and graduated with a degree in music. Tamara also served a full-time mission. At twenty-four, Tamara married her husband in the Salt Lake Temple. Both her and her husband are working full-time and expecting their first baby.

Sandra, 23, was raised in the East. Sandra’s traditional parents and their family joined the church when Sandra was a teenager. After graduating from High School, she left for BYU where she received her Bachelors degree, and returned to the East to obtain a Masters Degree in Social Work. Sandra also served a full-time mission.

Lily, 34, was raised in the church in Southern California. Both Lily’s parents worked while she was growing up. After graduating from High School, Lily attending school to receive her CDA licence. At twenty-five, Lily married her second husband and they have been married for nine years.

Phoebe, 51, has lived most her life on the west coast. She attended college in Utah and graduated with a Bachelor’s degree. She was sealed to her second husband twenty-seven years ago, and has four children. Phoebe has runs her own business for several years.
Shirley spent her youth on the west coast with her traditional parents. She moved to Utah to attend school but after meeting her husband decided to stay. She was married in the Salt Lake Temple 27 years ago and has five children. Shirley works part time at a local university.

Carol, 41, comes from a traditional family and grew up in Southern California. Her college education was interrupted by marriage and family. Carol was married in the Los Angeles Temple nineteen years ago, and has 8 children. Carol works one full-time job and one part-time job.

Lana, 37, has lived her whole life on the west coast with bother her parents. She received her Associates degree and married in the Los Angeles Temple when she was twenty. Lana has six children and runs her personal business out of her home.

Lisa, 29, grew up in the south with traditional parents. Lisa, interrupted her college education to help support her family. She was married to her second husband in the Provo Temple, they have three children. Lisa is a full-time homemaker.

Krista, 25, grew up on the west coast with traditional parents. She fell away from the church and at eighteen married and had two children. After seven years of marriage Krista, and her husband divorced and she received full custody of her children. Krista, works part-time and is currently living with her parents.

Nancy, grew up in Arizona with traditional parents. She received her Bachelors degree from BYU, after returning from her mission. She is currently working toward's her Masters degree at home.

Roberta, 55, grew up in Utah with traditional parents. Her college education was
interrupted by marriage and family. Roberta and her husband were sealed twenty-nine years ago, they have ten children, two of whom are adopted. Roberta is a full-time homemaker.
Appendix B

Interview Questionnaire

We would like some additional information about you. Please read each question carefully and answer this questionnaire as completely as possible.

1. What is your sex?
   1. Female
   2. Male

2. What is your age? __________

3. Are you currently employed outside the home?
   1. Yes--if yes, skip to question 3A.
   2. No--If no, are you... (then skip to question 4).
      1. a full-time homemaker
      2. not employed, not looking for work
      3. not employed, looking for work
      4. retired
      5. disabled

   A. How many hours a week do you work at your job(s)?
   B. How much money do you make per hour?
   C. What kind of work do you do?
   D. Does your job require that you work on Sunday?
   E. Does your job require that you moonlight?

4. What is your current marital status?
   1. never married
   2. divorced
   3. separated
   4. widowed
   5. married

   A. How long have you been married?
   B. What type of ceremony did you have?
      1. civil wedding
      2. church wedding
      3. civil followed by LDS temple ceremony
      4. LDS temple ceremony
C. If you have been married before, how many times?
D. Have you ever lived with someone of the opposite sex without being married?

5. Do you have any children? If yes write the ages and sex of each child on the lines below:

6. Circle the highest grade in school you have completed:
   1-20+, elementary, High School, College/Technical School, Graduate School

7. What degrees have you received? (Circle all that apply.)
   1   Associate Degree
   2   Bachelor’s Degree
   3   Master’s Degree (M.A., M.S., M.B.A., J.D., etc.)
   4   Doctorate (Ph.D., M.D., L.L.D., Ed.D., etc.)

8. Are you currently enrolled in an educational institution?
   If yes, what is your major course of study?

9. What was your total family income from all sources for 1994? (Be sure to include your spouse’s income. Circle one number.)
   Less than $10,000- above $100,000

10. What is your race/ethnicity
    1   white/anglo
    2   Native American
    3   Afro-American
    4   Hispanic
    5   Asian
    6   Other (please specify)

11. What is your nationality?

12. In what region of the United States or the world were you living when you were sixteen years old?
    1   West Coast, US
    2   Intermountain West, US
    3   Midwest, US
    4   South, US
    5   East, US
    6   Canada
    7   Other country outside the US (please specify).

13. Who did you live with for most of the time while you were growing up?
1 both mother and father
2 mother and step-father
3 father and step-mother
4 mother only
5 father only
6 other family member
7 Foster family
8 Other

14. What is your religious preference
   1 No preference
   2 Protestant
   3 Catholic
   4 Jewish
   5 LDS
   6 Other (please specify).

15. Did you convert to this religion from another religion?

16. If LDS, did you serve as a full-time LDS missionary?

17. A. What religion did your mother belong to most of the time you were growing up?
   B. What religion did your father belong to most of the time you were growing up?

18. When you were a teenager, what work did your parents do?
   Mother
   Father

19. How many siblings do you have?
   What is your birth order?

20. Which best describes your current physical health?
   1 Excellent
   2 Very good
   3 Good
   4 Fair
   5 Poor

21. Ever experienced:
   1 Major surgery
   2 Depression
3 Miscarriage

22. Have you ever use drugs or alcohol for leisure activity?

23. How would you describe the town you grew up in?
1 Small Town
2 Suburb
3 Big City
4 Metropolitan Area

Interview Questions

How would you describe yourself to someone else?

What do you spend most of your time thinking about? Was that the same five years ago?

How would you describe a typical Mormon woman?

What does being a woman mean to you in the context of the gospel?

What is your relationship to the Relief Society?

What is your relationship with other LDS sisters?

To what extent are you trusting of LDS woman to confide in them with your personal life or deep secrets? Is this different with non-members?

What is the relationship between women and the priesthood?

What is Mormonism for you?

What would you describe the curriculum for Salvation is?

What would you consider to be your divine purpose? Divine mission? Divine Role?

To what extent do yo incorporate the counsel of church leadership into you life?
   How do you deal with this counsel?

How do you approach problems?
   *clarify their perception of range of choices?

How would you describe you mother? Grandmother?
What do you consider the best things about your life at this point in time?
References


Mormon Women’s Sense of Empowerment

Stace Hucks Christianson

Department of Sociology

Abstract

This research focuses on the empowering experiences of LDS women within the patriarchal structure as organized by the LDS church. Women in the LDS church empower themselves by drawing both external and internal resources. The degree of flexibility that leaders and members of the LDS church adopt externally influences the degree of empowerment that LDS women. The more internal factors an LDS woman adopts the greater her internal sense of empowerment.

Carol Ward, Committee Chair

Lynn England, Committee Member

Renata Forste, Committee Member

Stephen Bahr, Department Chair