FAITH IN HIGHER EDUCATION: THE INFLUENCE OF RELIGIOSITY ON PROFESSIONAL EDUCATORS

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ABSTRACT

This companion dissertation integrated team-based research is designed to improve the professional environment of religious educators by influencing curriculum development, enhancing faculty and staff training, and adding insight and understanding into the literature concerning religiosity and higher education. This three article-based dissertation contains an individual research project, a group research project and a white paper.

Research conducted over the past thirty years repeatedly indicates that the educational achievement for members of the Mormon (LDS) religious tradition is positively correlated with religiosity. This dissertation explored the many possible factors involved in the relationship between educational attainment and religiosity for college-educated members of this particular faith. The research aimed to understand the following question: Why do college-educated Mormons manifest the highest levels of religiosity within their faith? Based on data gathered from interviews of those living the phenomenon (highly religious members with a college education), it was observed that church participation, influential religious mentors, and an expanded epistemology were important factors in the preservation and amplification of religious beliefs and practices of these highly religious professors.

These college-educated believers were not without challenges. Women participants particularly identified challenges within the faith regarding gender stereotypes that challenged their non-traditional interpretations of religious expression related to motherhood and family. Rationally describing and defending religious positions left other participants with a cerebral faith and a skeptical disposition that in their views weakened devotional aspects of religiosity.

The group research project was a collaborative co-authored effort that presented a more theoretical examination of the education-religiosity phenomenon. The purpose of the group study was to further explore the education-religiosity phenomenon in Mormonism (Albrecht & Heaton, 1984; Heaton et al., 2004; Hill, 2011; Merrill et al., 2003; Smith, 2011; Stott, 1983) using principles of qualitative meta-synthesis to evaluate data previously collected in our three qualitative studies. Although students and professors related experiences in the collegiate environment where their faith was challenged, the sense of community provided these participants with support, strength, and examples of religious living and thinking.

The white paper (chapter 4) provides implications for practice based on the individual and group research. It was written for religious educators and offers professional practice recommendations for curriculum development in an effort to improve teaching and learning the church educational system.

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I would like to express appreciation to our major professor from the University of Idaho, Dr. Bryan Maughan, who oversaw the professional practice doctoral program offered in southeast Idaho. Bryan has personally given me, and many others, hours of instruction, editing, counseling, and friendship that is much appreciated. I wish him the best and thank him for his dedicated service. Thanks also to members of the committee, Dr. Jean Henscheid, Dr. Tricia Browne-Ferrigno, and Dr. John Thomas who have been insightful and supportive of our research efforts and accomplishments. I am grateful to have shared this experience with two dedicated team members: James and Mitch. I hope you know how much I appreciated working and learning from you. I have been reminded once again of the strength that can come in numbers when people are committed to a common cause. There is power and wisdom in counseling in councils. Shane, my teaching assistant at BYU-Idaho, thanks for transcribing the lengthy interviews and being so positive in all of your responsibilities. You have been great to work with.

Laurie, my beautiful wife, is my great strength and love. She is the great example of what this study seeks to understand: goodness and knowledge. I am so grateful we could share this journey together. Everything I do has greater meaning and purpose because of you. Nothing I do matters in life if I don't have you, Tessa, Kirsten, Taylor, Brigham, and Annie. You have given me everything worth living for. Thank you. I look forward to an eternity of learning, growing, and serving with you and our family. Your love and support mean everything and truly makes my life possible. I hope in the upcoming days, months, years and eternities to reciprocate your goodness in our covenant relationship.

Dedicated to my wife

Laurie

and our children

Tessa, Kirsten, Taylor, Brigham, and *little* Annie

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This dissertation follows the Three Article Format Dissertation (TAD) recommended for Professional Practice Doctorates (PPD) (Willis, Inman & Valenti, 2010). Learning in situ underpins the nature of the dissertation. The professional circumstances of the researchers make these studies relevant and timely. The authors investigated specific areas of their immediate practices and produced three manuscripts. The three manuscripts consist of (a) an individual inquiry into each researcher's respective place of employment, (b) a collaborative, co-authored interdisciplinary content analysis of the individual research findings that addresses a shared theme, and (d) a white paper intended for stakeholders to consider plausible policy or procedural changes informed by the findings of the research.

The format of this dissertation was developed under the aegis of the Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate (CPED). CPED has formed an initiative to "strengthen and reclaim the educational research doctorate and develop a distinct form of doctoral education for professional practice" (Amrein-Beardsley, Zambo, Bass, Perry, Painter, Puckett, 2012, p. 99). It is the culminating product of a Professional Practices Doctorate (PPD) in Education (EdD) partially fulfilling the requirements for the degree through the College of Education at the University of Idaho.

Lee Shulman, first acting president of CPED, envisioned a new type of degree, which would prepare practitioners for their careers, the PPD (Shulman, Golde, Bueschel, and Garabedian, 2006). Shulman's vision for the PPD combined with the historic EdD prompts the authors to reference the program, not the degree, for this paper only as a Professional Practices Doctorate in Education (PP-EdD). This degree maintains high rigor as expected for doctoral research (Willis et al., 2010).

As envisioned by CPED, the PP-EdD is an advanced research-intensive degree designed for the development of school practitioners, education professionals, and academic leaders at all levels. Willis et al. (2010) explained, "...the modern PhD programs and the research dissertations are not well suited to preparing professional practitioners even though increasing percentages of PhD students go into professional practice rather than becoming academics" (p. 22). They pointed out the need for a degree that "...serves the needs of students who plan careers as professionals rather than academic researchers" (p. 59). This is why Shulman et al. (2006) observed that education degrees are often sought by practitioners who are well into their careers, whereas, students of other disciplines usually complete graduate degrees before entering the work force, or return to their educational pursuits after only a short time in their careers. As a clinical doctorate, the PP-EdD provides a way for full-time professionals to pursue their doctorate while performing meaningful job-embedded scholarly inquiry intended to improve or enhance immediate practice. Thus, the clinician becomes a scholarly practitioner.

Chapter 2 of this dissertation is my individual study that describes and explores the lived experiences of members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS) with graduate degrees. The purpose of the individual study sought to better understand factors involved in the religiosity-education phenomenon existing in Mormonism. This case study, reported here in journal-article format, utilized select research principles found in Rapid Assessment Process (RAP) and Action Research (AR). This case study also captured the lived experiences of five college professors belonging to the Mormon faith living throughout the United States. Although the primary investigator did the majority of the work, the research team assisted in data collection and data analysis. Team-members present provided

observations and insights into the research problem that would have been difficult to gain individually.

Interdisciplinary research, like that emphasized in the PP-EdD's companion dissertation approach, is gaining increasing acceptance among practitioners of all disciplines. The researchers who collaborated at times during these studies vary in educational backgrounds, but all three are practitioners in the common profession of religious education. Companion dissertation models (McNamara, Lara-Alecio, Irby, Hoyle, & Tong, 2007), often share six common elements: (a) a common research agenda, (b) a common inquiry statement, (c) integrated research tasks, (d) a common report format, (e) the same advisory chair, and (f) a similar statement in each dissertation about how each component fits with the others (Browne-Ferrigno & McEldowney, 2012).

The group study focused on the research topic of religiosity challenges and experiences among students and professors in higher education. Specifically, our collective research examined the unique relationship between the religious beliefs, behaviors, and experiences of both college students and professors. Religiosity is a "multifaceted" term used throughout the dissertation describing a person's "religious identification, religious attachment, religious behavior and religious beliefs" (Solt, Hable, & Grant, 2011, p. 447).

Chapter 3 is a collaborative co-authored group article that presents a more complex and nuanced look at the higher education religiosity relationship. Data from my independent study was combined with the data from research conducted by my fellow graduate researchers, James Williams and Mitch Simmons. The three studies were analyzed using the principles and guidelines of qualitative meta-synthesis (Erwin, Brotherson, & Summers, 2011; Jensen & Allen, 1996; O'Halloran, Grohn, & Worrall, 2012; Walsh & Downe, 2004;

Zimmer, 2006). “Bringing together qualitative studies in a related area enables the nuances, taken-for-granted assumptions, and textured milieu of varying accounts to be exposed, described and explained in ways that bring fresh insights” (Walsh et al., 2004, p. 205). The purpose of qualitative meta-synthesis is “theory development, higher level abstraction, and generalizability in order to make qualitative findings more accessible for application in practice” (Zimmer, 2004, p. 313). James’s study explored the experiences of college students whose religious beliefs and behaviors were challenged while attending a public university, while Mitch’s research project examined the role of religiosity for undergraduate students in dealing with the social, emotional, and psychological challenges of undergraduate.

This examination was intended to improve the immediate practice of the three religious educators as well as impact curriculum development both locally, and globally, enhance faculty and staff training, and add insights to the current understanding of the relationship between religiosity and the college student experience.

Chapter 4 provides a white paper intended to inform stakeholders of the findings from these studies and presents possible implications for the professional practice of religious educators. This individually authored white paper is based on my personal research and findings, as well as the research and findings of other team member’s studies. This white paper drew upon information I acquired by participating in the overall collaborative research endeavor. This chapter includes a review of the research on religiosity and education and provides professional practice recommendations for religious educators employed at Brigham Young University-Idaho (BYU-Idaho). In Chapter 5, I offer my reflections and experience on the companion dissertation process.

CHAPTER 2: FAITH AND HIGHER EDUCATION: THE INFLUENCE OF RELIGIOSITY ON PROFESSIONAL EDUCATORS

Introduction

A college education influences a person's religious beliefs. For some, the college experience diminishes religiosity, while for others their college experience magnifies religiosity. Religiosity, is a word used often by scholars to describe the "religious behavior and religious beliefs" of a person or people (Solt, Hable, & Grant, 2011, p. 447). The purpose of this study is to explore the relationship between religiosity and higher education as experienced by members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS), commonly known as Mormons. This studies seeks to discover and describe the lived experiences of Mormons who were educated and employed in the academy in an attempt to better understand the relationship between religiosity and higher education among college educated members within the LDS religion. Members of this religious denomination for the most part appear to have developed a symbiotic relationship between religiosity and higher education despite cultural, ideological and moral opposition.

Steven, a participant in this study, a Mormon and a professor of American history, was a talented future college student recruited by Harvard University in the 1950s. Shortly after arriving on campus, Steven remembers vividly how an academic mentor pulled him aside and shared some advice in order to more fully prepare him for his Harvard experience. The mentor caught Steven off guard when he said, "I hope you know that many people around here think Mormonism is garbage." Up to this point in his life, Steven had not yet experienced animosity toward his religion. In reflecting on his professor's words years later, he mused,

> It wasn't a malicious statement. I think he had a sort of grandfatherly interest and he thought that I was some naïve kid from the west bringing my sort of obsolete belief with me. He was preparing me for the next step, which would be to outgrow my childhood religion and to go on to something more mature.

Many scientists believe it is a contradiction to embrace both science and religion simultaneously. Years after graduate school, David another participant in this study and a current professor of physics, was challenged by a fellow scientist who thought a personal relationship with God and a commitment to a religion was beneath a true scientist. David's colleague inquired of him, "I know that you're an intelligent man and a good scientist, but I've got to tell you that I have never met a scientist who believed in God. How can you do that?"

Conversely, there are scientists who find that science and faith are complementary. For some, having faith in academic and religious knowledge is a fulfilling and harmonious way to live. Francis S. Collins (2007), director of the Human Genome Project, finds a "wonderful harmony" existing between the "truths of science and faith." For Collins, "the God of the Bible is also the God of the genome. God can be found in the cathedral or in the laboratory. By investigating God's majestic and awesome creation, science can actually be a means of worship" (para 11).

Higher Education and Religiosity

The relationship between religion and higher education in the United States has oscillated over the years. Early American colonizers established colleges and universities with the primary purpose of the training of clergy, civic and political leadership. Cohen and Kisker (2010) observed, "at the time of the founding of the colonial colleges, the pattern of

curriculum and faculty student relations stemming from church-related institutions was most prominent" (p. 20). Originally, higher education institutions such as Yale, Harvard, and William and Mary were founded and funded by various Christian religious denominations.

Toward the conclusion of the Colonial Era, the religious influence in higher education waned as the notion of a "civil community centered on principles of morality and public service, apart from an established church, grew" (Cohen & Kisker, 2010, p. 24). The early Protestant acceptance of new approaches to scientific inquiry, while well intentioned, eventually led to the marginalization of religious influence and orthodoxy (Eisenmann, 1999; Hartley, 2004; Hofstadter, 1996; Marsden, 1994; Sloan, 1994). The interest and development of the scientific way of learning and knowing "was the most impressive aspect of curricular change in the eighteenth century" (Hofstadter, 1996, p. 194). Up to this point colleges had focused on teaching what was known, rather than the advancement of learning (Cohen & Kisker, 2010). The emphasis on learning and discovering knowledge in the classroom and not just preserving knowledge was "a significant departure from the old prescribed curriculum of the classics" (Hofstadter, as cited in p. Hartley 2004, p. 196).

The secular transformation of the American university has been a steady and multifaceted process beginning early in the 19th century (Hartley, 2004). The intellectual culture of the Enlightenment emphasized thought and action without reference to religious and traditional authority. In particular, Shea and Huff (1995) pointed out how "the enlightenment values of individual autonomy, democracy, and secularizing reason appear to conflict with the religious traditions of community, authority, and traditional learning" (p. i).

AN influential group of social thinkers emerged during the Enlightenment: Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Augusta Comte, Herbert Spencer, Max Weber, Karl Marx, and

Sigmund Freud (Norris & Inglehart, 2011). The writings and teachings of these philosophers have provided social foundations for theories that lead toward secularization in the academy. It was observed by the French historian and philosopher, Alexis de Tocqueville (as cited in Stark and Fink, 2000), that the "The philosophers of the eighteenth century explained in a very simple manner the gradual decay of religious faith. Religious zeal, they said, must necessarily fail the more generally liberty [democracy] is established and knowledge diffused" (p. 319).

Ideas grounded in faith and traditional religious beliefs were replaced with the practice of knowledge generation that assumed religious traditions had no place in academia (Stevenson, 2013). This academic focus was the precursor to the secularization culture existing in higher education today. Berger (1967) defines secularization as the "process by which sectors of society and culture are removed from the domination of religious institutions and symbols" (p. 107). In the modern university, there are indications of continual resistance to religious beliefs and behaviors as indicated within the academic curriculum (Marsden, 1994; Perko, 1991; Sloan, 1994).

Due to the tensions of secular forces, the religious atmosphere of higher education became more marginalized and the original merger between colleges and their founding churches has changed through the gradual demise and separation of church in higher education. Course requirements in religion and moral philosophy decreased, and mandatory church attendance was abolished (Haynes, 2002; Marsden, 1994; Pattillo & Mackenzie, 1966). In many ways, "the university itself became a major religious phenomenon," becoming the "secular religion" of American culture by the 20th century" (Sloan, 1994, p. 21). In fact, Gross and Simmons (2009) sensed the secular culture of higher education could

likely be the result of university professors who report being less religious than the general U.S. population.

Religiosity is a complex term that is often used to describe the religious beliefs and behaviors of a person belonging to a particular religious denomination (Solt, F., Hable, P. & Grant, J., 2011, p. 447). The complexity of the term grows from the diversity of belief systems and the patterns of those who may be deemed as religious, whether or not they adhere to any particular tenets of a specific denomination, or subset of teachings and standards affiliated with any particular church. To be religious means to be a devout follower of, and advocate for, a powerful belief system that appears to be larger than one-self (Stevenson, 2013).

Educational attainment is associated with decreased levels of religiosity in college students (Hill, 2011; Scheitle, 2011). In other words, scholars indicate a correlation between increased levels of educational attainment and decreased levels of religiosity. Studies conducted on the relationship of religiosity and educational attainment indicate that higher education attainment is related to less religious commitment (Petersen, 1994), diminished belief in the existence of God (Johnson, 1997), lower levels of belief in the Bible as the literal word of God (Sherkat, 1998), and a decrease concerning the belief in divine involvement and control (Schieman, 2010). Schwadel (2003) noted how a college education was associated with a decrease in trust of religious authority.

It is interesting to note however, that while analyzing data from the General Social Survey (1972-2006), McFarland, Wright, and Weakliem. (2010) observed how increased levels of educational attainment brought increased attendance at religious services, but consistent to other research, frequency of prayer and belief in the Bible as the literal word of

God continued to decrease as students progressed towards graduation. McFarland et al. (2010) noticed how a student's religious tradition played a significant role in affecting the degree a secular education influenced a person's religious beliefs and practices. As shown in figure 2.1, not all religious denominations are influenced to the same degree by educational attainment.

Although research indicates a general negative correlation concerning higher education and religiosity, Erickson and Phillips (2012) show that religious tradition can be a positive force on college students. They noticed religious youth being more likely to complete high school and enroll in college. Mooney (2010) affirms that students with a strong religious commitment demonstrate more effective time management habits, participate more frequently in extracurricular activities and spend less time attending parties. Regnerus (2003) shows when students report higher commitment to religious beliefs and behaviors, they have "better emotional health, more satisfaction in the family, and more voluntarism" (p. 409). Religious institutions provided believers a unique environment that makes the secular educational experiences more or less influential (McFarland et al., 2010). Since people belonging to various religious traditions are affected differently by their college education experience, McFarland et al. (2010) have stated the need for future research on the relationship of higher education and religiosity that considers and focuses on specific religious traditions. Not all members of religious denominations are influenced to the same degree from their secular education experience. Biblical literalism provided one example showing how religiosity as related to educational attainment may be affected to different degrees depending upon the denomination a person belongs to (see Figure 1.1).

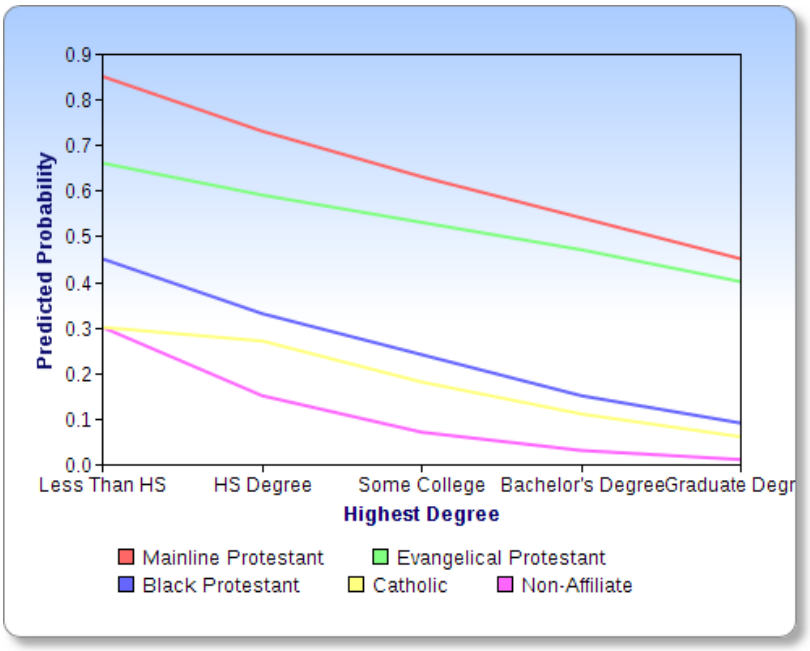

Figure 2.1: Relationship of Education and Religious Tradition on Biblical Literalism Adapted from McFarland, Wright and Weakliem (2010).

Mormonism is one particular religious denomination that has demonstrated in its membership an interesting phenomenon regarding the religiosity-education relationship. Not everyone believed followers of Mormonism or religious people in general would be able to withstand the secular reasoning often found in the academy. O'Dea (1957), an early sociologist studying Mormons in Utah, concluded from his studies: "Mormonism's greatest and most significant problem is its encounter with modern secular thought" (p. 222). O'Dea was not alone in his belief that secular thought would threaten the existence not only of this faith, but religion in general. Berger (as cited in Stark, p. 58, 2000) had boldly suggested that by "the 21st century, religious believers are likely to be found only in small sects, huddled together to resist a worldwide secular culture."

Research over the past thirty years has described a very different response and experience for educated Latter-day Saint (LDS) despite the beliefs and observations of

O'Dea and Berger concerning the decline of religious beliefs and behaviors in educated societies, (Albrecht & Heaton 1984; Merrill, Lyon, & Jensen, 2003; Heaton, Bahr & Jacobson, 2004; Hill, 2011; Smith, 2011; Stott, 1983). Albrecht and Heaton (1984) were some of the first to study and test the secularization thesis among LDS members. As a result of their research they concluded that "highly educated Latter-day Saints are more likely to pray frequently, to have strong religious beliefs and to attend meetings, suggesting that devotion is even more important for those with higher levels of education than those with lower educations" (p. 54). Similar results were found in the data analyzed by Heaton et al. (2004) and Merrill et al. (2003). In analyzing data from The General Social Survey (GSS) over the past thirty years, Heaton et al. (2004) found that education had a strong positive correlation with religiosity (prayer and church attendance) of Latter-day Saints in comparison to those with less education and in comparison with the general population of the United States (see Figure 1.2 and Figure 1.3).

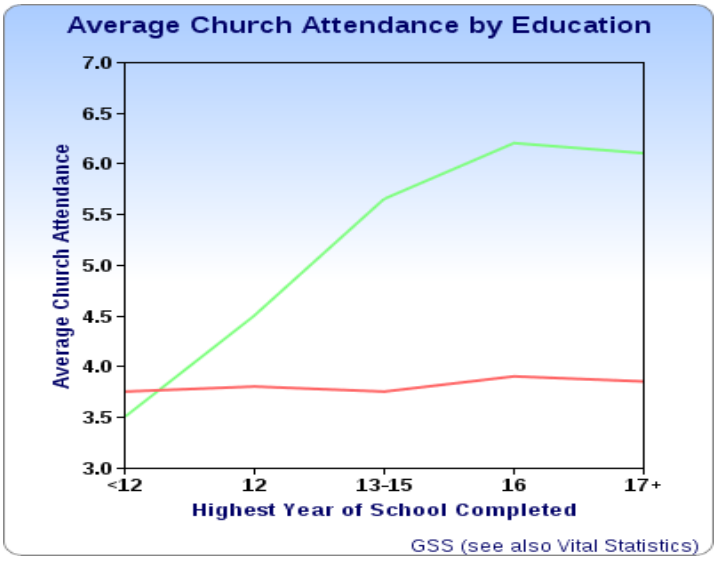

Figure 2.2: Relationship of Church Attendance and Educational Attainment. The green line represents LDS population and red line represents a combination of general U.S. religious denominations. Adapted from Heaton et al. (2004).

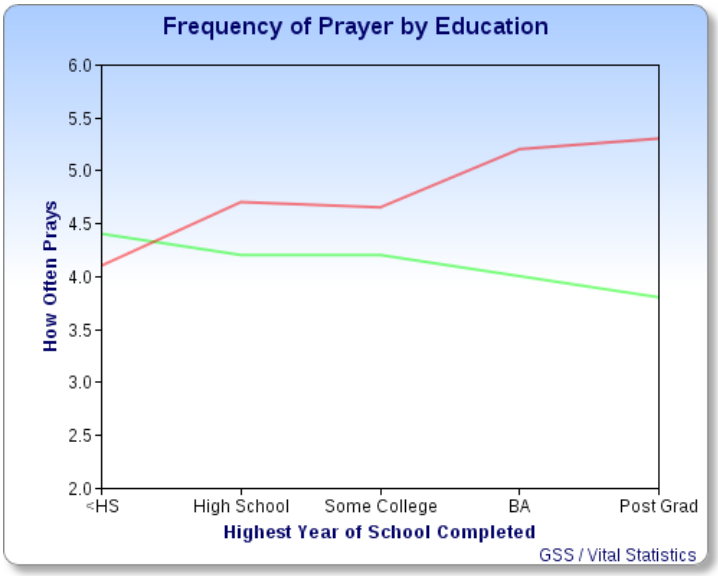

Figure 2.3: Relationship of Prayer and Educational Attainment. Red line represents LDS population. Green line represents a combination of general U.S. religious denominations. Adapted from Heaton et al. (2004).

In addition, The Pew Forum (Smith, 2011) has provided the latest evidence of this phenomenon:

> Mormons who have graduated from college display the highest levels of religious commitment (84%) followed by those with some college education (75%). Mormons with a high school education or less exhibit substantially lower levels of religious commitment (50% score high on the scale) than their more highly educated counterparts. These large differences in religious commitment among respondents with different educational backgrounds are not seen among many other religious groups in the population. (p. 37-38)

In an attempt to make sense of these findings, Stott (1983) suggested the correlation between education and religiosity was the result of "Latter-day Saint theology," which "appears to negate the secularizing impact of education by sacralizing it and incorporating it into the total religious milieu" (p. 8). Although the quantitative studies (Albrecht & Heaton 1984; Merrill et al., 2003; Heaton et al., 2004; Hill, 2011; Smith, 2011; Stott, 1983) on religiosity and educational achievement within Mormonism have consistently observed and reported a religiosity/education phenomenon, they do not reflect the details and nuances that a qualitative study can provided in offering detailed explanatory evidence of the phenomenon based on the personal experiences of those who have and are living the phenomenon.

Source: PEW Forum - Mormons In America (2012)			
	HS Grad or Less	Some College	College +
Satisfied with life	*80%*	*89%*	*92%*
Religion is Very Important Part of Life	***70%***	***88%***	***90%***
High Level of Religious Commitment	*50%*	*75%*	*84%*
Temple Recommend	***46%***	***67%***	***85%***
Served Full Time Mission	*10%*	*26%*	*48%*
Believe Wholeheartedly in Teachings of the Church	***66%***	***81%***	***85%***
Mormon Converts	*40%*	*37%*	*24%*
Importance of Being a Good Parent	***71%***	***87%***	***87%***
Importance of Having a Successful Marriage	*62%*	*76%*	*83%*
Importance of Being Very Religious	***44%***	***65%***	***59%***
Importance of Career	*11%*	*5%*	*3%*
Importance of Having Free Time	***10%***	***6%***	***5%***

Figure 2.4: Religiosity and Education Attainment. Adapted from Smith (2011).

Statement of the Problem

Scholars have called for more studies on religiosity as related to a college education are needed to continue to inform interested parties concerning the "much-debated relationship between secularization and higher education" (Mooney, 2010, p. 212). A college education exposes students to ideas, cultures, and experiences, which seriously challenge religious beliefs and behaviors and provides students with a "college peer group [that] is typically a breeding ground for new ideas, new styles of thought and behavior" (Caplovitz & Sherrow, 1977, p. 108). McFarland et al. (2010) has found and stated that, "the relationship between education and religiosity can be positive or negative depending upon the religious tradition and dimension of religiosity under question" (p. 19).

Over fifty years ago, sociologist Thomas O'Dea (1957), believed a secular education storm was brewing in Mormonism. He had observed how members of the church were frequently encouraged by leaders to seek knowledge and value it and was convinced that when Mormon youth leave their sheltered upbringing to attend a university it would be their

"first real encounter with secular culture" (p. 227). This exposure to secular learning and secular culture would not only lead to "doubt and confusion" but was "bound to bring religious crisis…and profound danger to his religious beliefs" (p. 227).

Although there has been some accuracy in O'Dea's argument that social and ideological influences found in philosophies, ideologies, and cultures within higher education have challenged traditional LDS religious paradigms, more recent scholars have consistently reported a positive correlation between educational attainment and religiosity among Mormons (Albrecht & Heaton, 1984; Heaton et al., 2004; Hill, 2011; Merrill et al., 2003; Smith, 2011; Stott, 1983). This discrepancy has become the source of this study. However, these scholars do not provide clarification concerning what human factors—individual experiences, attitudes, and behaviors—contribute to, and are responsible for, the positive correlation as reported from the perspective of those who have lived the phenomena, such as academic professionals.

Little is known how academic professionals who have navigated secular universities learned to keep the two strands of religiosity and secularization separate, or how they attempted to bring them together and thereby be influenced in their work lives (Gross & Simmons, 2007). We don't know how Mormon academic professionals who have maintained their faith avoided the alleged higher education dangers that presumably threaten religious beliefs as O'Dea (1957) assumed.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to discover and describe the lived experiences of Mormon academic professionals in an attempt to better understand the relationship between religiosity and higher education among college educated members

within the LDS religion. Furthermore, the findings from this study will be used in considering curriculum development and teaching practices for professional religious educators employed by the church.

Research Questions

The overarching question guiding this study was: *Why do college-educated Mormons, manifest the highest levels of religiosity within their faith?* The central question to this study was informed and expanded by the following sub-questions:

- What do Mormon academic professionals have to say about their college experience as a student and later as a professional educator?
- What are the perceptions, attitudes and experiences of Mormon academic professionals concerning their religious beliefs and practices?
- What challenges, if any, do Mormon academic professionals experience with their religiosity and experiences in the academy?
- How do Mormon academic professionals resolve these challenges, if any, and manage the tensions between their religiosity and their college experiences?
- What implications do the academic and religious experiences of Mormon academic professionals have for religious educators interested in preserving faith in LDS college students?

Significance of the Study

A case study exploring the relationship between higher education and religiosity among professional educators belonging to the Mormon faith is significant for three reasons: First, this study contributes to the general body of literature where scholars research and debate the relationship of higher education and religiosity. McFarland et al. (2010) note that

the "relationship between education and religiosity can be positive or negative depending upon the religious tradition" (p. 19). Research focusing on the experiences of Mormon professors educated at non-religious affiliated colleges and universities will add an important chapter to the literature from a qualitative perspective in understanding the diverse connections existing between higher education and religiosity. Although religiously devoted professors are a unique portion of the LDS population, their experiences have the potential to reveal a unique perspective of the religiosity/education relationship within Mormonism as well as offer insight into the professional practices of religious educators who are interested in preserving faith among those enrolled in the academy. This group (religiously committed college professors) was purposefully selected because of their unique experiences that could reveal a way of being at home and living in two worlds: the religious and the academic.

Second, this study on religiosity in higher education will expand scholarly understanding beyond the quantitative studies previously conducted on Mormons and higher education (Albrecht & Heaton, 1984; Merrill et al., 2003; Heaton, et al., 2004; Hill, 20011; Smith, 2011; Stott, 1983). This particular case study supplements previous studies by providing a description and analysis of the personalized narratives of individuals within this religious community who have lived and are living the phenomenon. It provides possible explanations based on personal experiences for the positive correlation between education and religiosity within the LDS community. It has the potential for improving the practice of religious educators employed by the Church in higher education. This study also observes aspects of the religiosity educational phenomenon that may be strained and/or create tension in members and could go unreported in the numeric descriptions reported in previous studies.

Finally, this study will offer another chapter to the ongoing research focused on religiosity and education. In some way, I would hope this research would contribute what Mooney (2012) describes as a need for more studies on religiosity and higher education that "would continue to help sociologists of religion refine the much-debated relationship between secularization and higher education" (p. 212).

Delimitations

Delimitations and limitations are important characteristics of a study identified by a researcher that help establish and reveal the "boundaries, exceptions, reservations, and qualifications inherent in every study" (Creswell, 2003, p. 147). In order to make this study meaningful and manageable, specific decisions were made to narrow and focus the study. Purposeful sampling strategies were implemented in the identification and selection process of participants. This study was confined to active members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints employed in higher education as professors and who have earned terminal degree from a non-religious college or university. This population reveals a disposition to be committed religiously and engaged intellectually. For this researcher, these dual attributes are an important part of the religiosity/education phenomenon as well as membership in the LDS faith. Higher education at a non-LDS college provides a unique experience in being exposed to secular thought and culture outside the reinforcing religious culture of a church sponsored university.

Participants were delimited to the following criteria in order to reflect unique aspects of the religiosity-education phenomenon:

- Be "active" members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Active means participants will consistently perform religious behaviors related to Mormon

religiosity (e.g., religious service attendance, prayer, payment of tithes, and observance of health guidelines).

- Be a PhD graduate from a non-LDS sponsored college or university.
- Be employed as a professional educator or administrator in higher education
- Represent a variety of professional experience from recent doctoral graduate to tenured professor.
- Represent a diversity of demographics (e.g., gender, race, ethnicity, geographic region).
- Represent a variety of academic disciplines (social sciences, business, law, engineering, biologist, etc.).

The reasons for using the above criteria in participant selection were two-fold: First, it was important in this study to have interviewees who were living the phenomenon (highly educated and highly religious). Second, according to Creswell (2013) diverse interview samples provides increased variation in order to "fully describe multiple perspectives about the cases" (p. 156).

Limitations

As a qualitative approach to research, this study is based on the philosophical position that emphasizes the making of meaning and describing of an individual's lived experiences (Creswell, 2003; Lincoln & Guba, 1995). One limitation to this study is the purposefully selected number of participants who were all Caucasian and educated and living within the United States. Two of the five participants were female and the other three male. This study only looked at highly educated Mormons working in the academy and did not include highly educated Mormons working outside the academy (doctors, lawyers, accountants, etc.)

In case study method and action research, interpretation of findings are context-specific, wherein the ultimate goal is to understand the particular and not necessarily reveal universal solutions (Creswell, 2013; Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Stringer, 2007). Generalizability of data is a limitation of qualitative studies. The reader should recognize these boundaries when interpreting the findings and attempting to apply them to other religious groups or denominations. Despite these limitations, it is our hope as a research team, that the meanings of each person's experience may illuminate a broader context within the field of religiosity and higher education. It should also be noted that the positionality of the research posed a limitation in this study.

Role of the Researcher

The transparency of the researcher in qualitative inquiry is critical because the researcher is the primary instrument of the research design, data collection, analysis, and interpretation. According to Creswell (1998), qualitative researchers should be clear about their biases "from the outset of the study…so that the reader understands the researcher's position and any biases or assumptions that impact the inquiry" (p. 202). By disclosing "assumptions, worldview, and theoretical orientation" (Merriam, 1998, p. 205), others are informed concerning the impact the researcher may have had on the research design and analysis. Bogdan and Biklen (1998) explained the need for researchers to recognize and take into account their own biases as a means of reflection and enrichment.

> Acknowledge that no matter how much you try you cannot divorce your research and writing from your past experiences, who you are, what you believe and what you value. Being a clean slate is neither possible nor desirable. The goal is to become

> more reflective and conscious of how who you are may shape and enrich what you do, not to eliminate it (p.34).

Creswell (2013) affirmed the need for self-reflection of the researcher, by stating, "the writer is conscious of the biases, values, and experiences that he or she brings to the qualitative research study" (Creswell, 2013, p. 216). As the primary researcher in this study, I was responsible for designing the study, selecting the participants, carrying out the interviews, having the data transcribed, coding the data, and reporting the findings. In being so intimately involved in every aspect of the research process, I recognize the possibility and likelihood that my values and experiences could influence the study. In being so intimately involved in every aspect of the research process, I recognize the likelihood that my biases in the form of values, perspectives, history and professional experiences could influence the interpretation and design of study.

I have been a faculty member in the Department of Religious Education at Brigham Young University – Idaho (BYU-I) for fifteen years. BYU–I is part of CES and is therefore owned and operated by the LDS church. Prior to this position, I was a seminary teacher in CES for seven years and attended seminary for four years as a part of my high school education. My teaching and learning philosophy is deeply informed by the history, traditions, doctrines, and beliefs of the LDS religion. I embrace the primary mission statement of BYU-Idaho, which encourages teachers and students in the educational experience to deepen their understanding of the gospel of Jesus Christ and encourage others in the living of its teachings. This mission statement guides my professional and personal life. It influences the way I interact with students and colleagues in a variety of settings.

This study explored the phenomenon existing in Mormonism. A number of studies of the past thirty years have reported a positive correlation between educational attainment and increased religiosity in members of the LDS faith (Albrecht and Heaton, 1984; Heaton, et al., 2004; Merrill et al., 2003; Smith, 2011; Stott, 1983). I began wondering about this topic informally as an undergraduate student studying pre-med zoology at a church university. On one occasion, I remember responding to one of my zoology professor's questions with a religious concept concerning man's relationship to God. He dismissed the thought considering it irrelevant and inappropriate for that particular academic setting. As I left class that day, I wondered if majoring in pre-med zoology would require me to eventually choose between my faith and secular knowledge or if I would just need to go through life compartmentalizing ideas and beliefs as secular or religious. I value the secular education I have received in courses at Ricks College, BYU, Idaho State University, and most recently the University of Idaho. For the most part, I have not had to choose between my faith and the secular knowledge I have obtained in my university education. At times I have chosen to postpone final understanding and answers until I receive further information. There have been times when I have valued one idea above another and there have also been times when I have had to wait patiently for further understanding until more information surfaces from the religious and/or scientific community. Even though my profession now focuses on the religious instruction of college students, I still value the scientific training I received in college. I still find it meaningful to read scientific books and literature and continue to challenge myself and ask myself deeper questions about the relationships between science and religion. I recognize the tremendous contribution that scientific reasoning and research has provided the world.

Qualitative research has guided me in the process of bracketing my life experiences and personal biases. Team members aware of these biases were helpful in identifying moments when I was influencing participant ideas and experiences in the analysis process. Peer review and team member triangulation of data increased the likelihood that the findings were reported through the lens of the participants. Furthermore, member checking assured that the transcription and analysis of the data properly represented the views and experiences of the participants.

Theoretical Framework: Social Cognitive Theory

Religious belief and behavior has been described as a social phenomenon "determined to a large extent…by what others around them take to be true. Their beliefs are determined by socialization and the cultural environment in which they find themselves" (Hamilton as cited in Clarke, 2009, p. 124). Social cognitive theory describes human behavior as a result of multiple influences and provided a theoretical framework for this study focused on understanding the religious and educational experiences and perceptions of others. Social cognitive theory suggests that human activity is the "product of the interplay of intrapersonal influences, the behavior individuals engage in, and the environmental forces that impinge upon them" (Bandura, 2012, p. 11).

Social cognitive theory suggests multiple influences in human epistemological development. Epistemology is the science explaining how people "know what we know" (Crotty, 1998, p. 8). Knowing in social cognitive theory involves external and internal influences. Knowledge in social cognitive theory is obtained through the dynamic interplay of personal, environmental and behavioral or social influences. Personal factors influencing human behavior include beliefs, thought patterns, and biological forces. Environmental

influence on knowledge acquisition and behavior comes from either physical and/or social stimuli. Behavior factors influencing knowledge acquisition may also result from conditions experienced in previous settings (Bandura 1996, 1997, 2012). Although this study does not directly observe the behavior of participants, the experiences and perceptions of participants have the potential to reveal environmental factors that have influenced the behavior of those being interviewed. Knowles, Holton, and Swanson (2013) capture aspects of social cognitive theory in perceiving, "Each individual as existing in a life-space in which many forces are operating. The life-space includes features of the environment to which the individual reacts; such as material objects encountered and manipulated; people met; and private thoughts, tensions, goals, and fantasies. Behavior is the product of the interplay of these forces" (p. 29).

This study seeks to understand the positive correlation between religiosity and educational achievement within the Mormon community using the theoretical framework of social cognitive theory. Debate continues concerning the factors responsible for this relationship. Previous theories focus on the theogical, social, and organizational forces of Mormonism. Social cognitive theory provides a meaningful lenses as well as a broad theoretical frame for studying the religiosity-education phenomenon in Mormonism. Bandura (2003) was a proponent of using SCT in understanding religious behavior in people. Social cognitive theory provides an ideological base for exploring and analyzing a number of personal or environmental factors in the higher education and religious experiences of participants.

Social cognitive theory is based on an agentic perspective. An agentic perspective recognizes the autonomy within a person to act and choose in relation to the multiple sources of influence and information they experience. Agentic behavior occurs when people "exert

intentional influence over one's functioning and the course of events by one's actions" (Bandura, 2012, p. 11). In social cognitive theory, people are not just products of their environment or genetic inheritance they are capable or acting within and influencing their environmental conditions (Bandura, 2012). According to Bandura (2003), personal motivation is often rooted in the self-efficacy belief that "one has the power to produce desired effects by one's actions" (p. 270). Rational choice is the theory Stark and Finke (2008) use to describe the agentic reasoning underlying beliefs and behaviors of religious individuals. Bandura (2003) suggests individuals don't just react to their environment but act consciously within and upon the environment. An "agent" in social cognitive theory describes an individual who chooses "to influence intentionally one's functioning and life circumstances" (Bandura, 2003, p. 270). Agentic power develops in adults as they psychologically develop and "arrive at a self-concept of being responsible for our lives, of being self-directing (Knowles et al., 2013, p. 62).

Learning in social cognitive theory is often done through modeling. Observational learning occurs when a person watches the actions of another person and the reinforcements that the person receives (Bandura, 1997). "Through the power of modeling, people acquire lifestyles, values, self-regulatory standards, aspirations, and a sense of personal and collective efficacy" (Bandura, 1997, p. 2). Religious and educational organizations are interested and committed to teaching and modeling approaches that can effectively transmit patterns of beliefs and behavior that tend to carry on for generations. "Our lives depend on having access to the knowledge our ancestors have accumulated and passed down from one generation to the next" (Nakamura, Shernoff, & Hooker, 2009, p. xi). Modeling is one way the preservation of knowledge occurs for religious communities.

Religion is one type of community that models specific beliefs and values to one another (Bandura, 2003; Oman & Thoresen, 2003). Socialization of members is a factor in the success of religious movements. Stark (1998) argues that religious movements may "succeed to the extent that they sustain strong internal attachments, while remaining an open social network, able to maintain and form ties to outsiders" (p. 47). As noted previously, some religious movements are more effective than others at preserving aspects of their faith among members who choose to obtain a higher education (McFarland et al., 2010).

Religion is both a personal spiritual encounter with Deity and a social expression of faith and service. For Bandura (2003), "religiosity is socially grounded rather than just an intrapsychic self-engagement with a Supreme Being. Congregations provide multiple models of behavior and reinforce lifestyles patterned on them in close associational networks" (p. 171). The nature of the religious community is a significant factor in the preservation of religiosity for college educated individuals (McFarland et al., 2010). College students belonging to "closed-network" (McFarland et al., 2010, p. 3) religious communities have shown to have increased levels of religiosity following their graduation from college.

Research Design

A case study research design (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 1998; Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014) was used for this inquiry. According to Merriam (1998), case study research is "employed to gain an in-depth understanding of the situation and meaning for those involved" (p. 19). Case study research strives for "intensive descriptions and analyses of a single unit of bounded system" from a limited number of cases (Merriam, 1998, p. 19). Using the case study method tradition of semi-structured interviews, this study obtained a description of the experiences, attitudes, and ideas of the various participants.

In addition to the case study method, principles of Action Research (AR) and Rapid Assessment Process (RAP) were also used in the research design. Stringer (2007) describes AR as a "systematic approach" that "enables people to find effective solutions to problems they confront in their everyday lives" (p. 1). AR is often

> Based on localized studies that focus on the need to understand how things are happening, rather than merely on what is happening, and to understand the ways that stakeholders – the different people concerned with the issue – perceive, interpret, and respond to events related to the issue investigated. (Stringer, 2007, p. 19)

The involvement of multiple researchers in the analysis of data is part of the triangulation process of RAP and is designed to increase the overall credibility of the research being conducted (Beebe, 2001). Research team members in this study assisted in the coding and analysis of the data collected from the interviews. For Beebe (2011), the use of multiple researchers in the coding and analysis of data is a form of "investigator triangulation" which has

> The potential for increasing the efficiency of data collection by allowing better decisions on what information is really needed. The observation of a team member that a certain line of inquiry may not be relevant has the potential of saving both data collection time and data analysis time. The assumption is that two heads are better than one. (p. 20)

Participants

Interview data were collected from five participants who met the criteria outlined for this study as noted above. Those interviewed live in diverse geographical locations throughout the United States and represent a variety of academic disciplines (English,

physics, political science, economics, and history). Two of the participants were women, and three were men. All participants were Caucasian. Interviewing somewhat diverse Mormon scholars (gender, academic discipline, geography) was purposefully sought in order to "report multiple perspectives that range over the entire spectrum of perspectives" (Creswell 2013, p. 151). I believed comments from a diverse group of PhD-holding Mormon scholars working in the academy living in different geographical regions representing various scholastic backgrounds and genders would generate information-rich data concerning the relationship of higher education and religiosity.

Data Collection Procedures

Following approval from the university's human assurance committee, interviews were conducted with five individuals who met the participant sampling criteria. Semi-structured interviews were selected as a primary means of data collection. Pseudonyms were selected by each participant to protect their identity. Because this study was concerned with understanding the relationship of religiosity and higher education from the lived experiences and perceptions of the participants, interviews were the primary means of data collection (Miles et al., 2014). Silverman (2010) suggested, "perhaps we all live in what might be called an interview society in which interviews seem central to making sense of our lives" (p. 123). One of the reasons we "interview people [is] to find out from them those things we cannot directly observe…We cannot observe feelings, thoughts, and intentions…The purpose of interviewing, then, is to allow us to enter into the other person's perspective" (Patton as cited in Merriam, 1998, p. 72). Using interviews as a primary means of data collection allowed the research team to understand the participants' perceptions under the assumption that their

viewpoints were “meaningful, knowable, and able to be made explicit” (Patton, 2002, p. 341).

Interviews were scheduled and conducted based upon principles and guidelines of qualitative research. Semi-structured interviews allow respondents to respond to open-ended questions and articulate their worldviews and experiences without researcher bias (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 1998). Following the recommendations of Beebe (2011) and Stringer (2007), multiple researchers were present for data collection and data analysis. The lead researcher contacted each of the participants by phone or email in order to explain the study and determine the feasibility and interest of the study for the participant. Interviews were scheduled and conducted at a time chosen by the participant. An interview protocol provided a dialogue framework for the primary researcher, research team and participants (Bodgan & Bilken, 2007; Spradley, 1979; Stringer, 2007). Open-ended questions found on the interview protocol guided the conversation and allowed the participant to elaborate in their own words their experiences and ideas. Occasionally, to search for deeper understanding, the interviewer prompted the interviewee to clarify an answer given to an open-ended question (Beebe, 2001; Stringer, 2007). With permission of the participants, the semi-structured interviews were recorded and notes taken. Each interview lasted approximately one hour. After data was transcribed, participants were part of the member checking process that allowed them to revisit the data, review their comments, make corrections and to “verify that the research adequately represents their perspectives and experiences” (Stringer, 2007, p. 58). Although the majority of data were analyzed and coded by the primary investigator, the other researchers provided perspective and critical feedback throughout the coding process. They too read, analyzed, and coded data in efforts to ensure triangulation of data.

Analysis Procedures

Data analysis in qualitative research involves, (a) "preparing and organizing the data," (b) "reducing the data into themes through a process of coding and condensing the codes," and (c) "representing the data in figures, tables, or a discussion" (Creswell, 2013, p. 180). Data from the interviews were transcribed, shared, and read by members of the research team in order to obtain a sense of what the data set contained as a whole. According to Stringer (2007), when team members analyze data, it is helpful to have each person develop the coding format independently, then compare and contrast similarities and differences. During the analysis, categories were identified and interpreted individually by each team member; notations were made in the margins and potential themes were highlighted throughout the transcripts. In an attempt to "increase the probability of a trustworthy study" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), and further triangulate the data, after the principle investigator reviewed the data, the data were revisited as a group to ensure the consistent interpretations.

Social cognitive theory not only informed the research design but also the analysis of the data. As team members viewed the data they looked in the data for personal, social, or other environmental factors in higher education or religion that may be influencing the religiosity of the participant. Social cognitive theory provided the initial codes in looking at the experiences of these participants. General codes included social, behavioral, and environmental factors. Individual narratives were initially organized according to these broad codes before being specifically identified and labeled. Social cognitive theory provided an important theoretical lens for the initial analysis of this phenomenon.

Once the researchers had recognized and agreed upon general categories found within the data, the principle investigator employed pattern-coding analysis (Miles et al., 2014) to sort the data further into patterns and themes. Pattern codes discovered in Second-Cycle coding were "explanatory or inferential codes, ones that identify an emergent theme, configuration, or explanation" (Miles et al., 2014, p, 86). The coding process provided an effective way for identifying themes as well as potential cause and effect explanations for the positive relationship between religiosity and educational achievement.

Next, the emergent themes were compared to the related literature (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). The primary researcher used theory triangulation (Beebe, 2001) in the data analysis. Comparing and contrasting codes with previous theories led to a more conclusive view of what was being observed in the data. The primary investigator wrote the narrative and revised the findings as patterns became more transparent. Finally, to strengthen validity, member checks (Stringer, 2007) were performed when data was transcribed and after analysis and reports were written. Minimal changes to the data were made and participants generally expressed appreciation for the opportunity to participate in the research.

Findings

As noted above, the purpose of this study was to describe, explore and explain the lived experiences of Mormon academic professionals in an effort to more fully understand the relationship existing between educational attainment and religiosity. In seeking to understand the lived experience of these college-educated participants with terminal degrees from non-LDS colleges and universities, four major categories emerged.

THEME 1	THEME 2	THEME 3	THEME 4
Participation Connections	Influential Role Models	An Expanded Epistemology	Remaining Challenges
Responsibility and service in the church provided a meaningful experience that complemented academic training and experience.	Influential mentoring experiences from educated individuals within their faith and in the academy.	Looking for meaning and answers beyond the reaches of learning and knowledge production of the university.	Unresolved challenges between faith and educational experience remain for many of the participants.

Figure 2.5 Findings Summary

Theme 1 is labeled Participation Connections. Participants referred to opportunities to serve in their church and actively participate with fellow members from diverse backgrounds and experiences. These instances of participation revealed connections between academic and religious thoughts and experiences of participants. Opportunities to participate also revealed how religious service can be expanded and deepened as a result of academic tools acquired in college.

Theme 2, Influential Role Models, referred to a culture of mentoring found in the church. Mentoring is a tacit characteristic woven into the fabric of many faiths. Mentoring provided positive religious development and experience for many of these participants. In every case, the participants acknowledged some level of mentoring by other individuals within their faith and in the university.

Theme 3 was titled An Expanded Epistemology. Educated believers embraced an epistemology that expands beyond the reaches of academic knowledge. It was noted that both religious and academic knowledge were valued and were not mutually exclusive. Theme 4,

"Remaining Challenges," highlights some of the issues that challenge the religiosity of the participants and look to strain the relationship between educational achievement and religious commitment.

In sum, the overall experience of the participants showed that (a) participation within the church through service, (b) mentoring relationships with other members with terminal graduate degrees (PhD, EdD, MD., JD, etc.), and (c) an expanded epistemology that melded academic knowledge with religious learning were factors that helped participants maintain and possibly increase religiosity. Rather than experiencing decreased levels of religiosity, their commitment to pursue, maintain, and nurture the dual paths of scholarship and religiosity were enhanced.

Participation Connections

Religiosity is a word used to describe the beliefs and behaviors of a person of a person professing religiousness. Religiosity is a term that captures a person's "religious identification, religious attachment, religious behavior and religious beliefs" (Solt, Hable, & Grant, 2011, p. 447). The term will be used throughout this paper to identify the religious beliefs and behaviors of the participants in this study.

Prior to interviewing participants, I spoke with a member of the PEW forum committee on religion in America, David Campbell—not a formal participant in this study—, a political scientist at the University of Notre Dame. Campbell used the phrase, "education effect" to describe the positive correlation between religious commitment and higher education found in members of the Mormon religious tradition. He believed the "education effect" was magnified among Mormons as a result of the volunteer service opportunities expected of members while attending local congregations. He thought these service

opportunities "require the sorts of cognitive and administrative skills that are associated with a college degree – reading a handbook, leading discussions, running meetings, giving speeches." Campbell thought that the high participatory demands of Mormonism positively influences their religiosity. He noted that within the culture the term "active" is used to describe devout members, which probably magnifies the "education effect." Campbell drew a correlation between the high social and leadership demands of the religion and the higher cognitive and administrative skills associated with a college degree. For church responsibilities, members are required to read handbooks, lead discussions, running meetings, giving speeches, etc. These same demands are made of members while in college. Campbell believes educated church members are "likely to be called to positions of leadership and authority, which creates a self-reinforcing pattern of ongoing church activity – both in terms of one's self-identity and friendship networks." In his experience with the religion, Campbell noted how the college-educated were often asked to participate more in their congregations than their counterparts. For his perspective, the college-educated were more likely to be "called upon to bear their testimonies, an act that often deepens one's beliefs in the church." The college educated are often asked to "counsel with people in need, pray for others' wellbeing, and, if they are men, to give priesthood blessings." Campbell believes that the education effect includes all of these activities "that deepen their commitment to the faith, including a profession of belief in the fundamental claims of Mormonism…" He went on to explain, "This self-reinforcing process largely applies to people once they have graduated from college, and not necessarily while students are in college" (personal communication, September 27, 2013).

Given the volunteer nature of the organizational structure existing within the Church, it was noticed in the findings the extensive involvement and pervasive influence of church service in the lives of the participants. Steven, a history professor on the east coast, has taught in the academy ever since he graduated with a doctoral degree. He has been a part of academia as a student and professor for over 50 years. During this period of time, he has served in a variety of callings (voluntary positions of responsibility and service) within the church. All of these years of experience, has led Steven to conclude, "Education makes you more comfortable in the Church. A lack of education makes you less comfortable in the Church…." Along with Campbell, David acknowledged the demands that the church put on people including requiring "people to speak in public, to organize, to run things, to give you responsibility." Education strengthens confidence to perform these duties, however, people who may not have developed those skills throughout college might be a little less at ease in the church.

For many, the academic experience had a way of overlapping with the religious. The academic community often asks tough questions that believers must either dismiss or wrestle with. For instance, as an undergraduate and later a graduate student at Harvard University, Steven was given multiple opportunities in academic settings to articulate his religious worldview as a result of the concerns and questions others expressed. After returning from an LDS mission, Steven noticed a change in the culture on the Harvard campus toward religion:

> People were sympathetic to the religious undertaking because religion is a way of talking about ultimate meaning and they liked that but what they can't stand is naïve religion, unquestioned religion, when you sort of go along with what everybody else

is talking about, they wanted people to be critical and thoughtful about their own religious belief.

As students and professors questioned and challenged Steven's beliefs, he would research answers, formulate answers often in the company of other members his own age, and express his resulting views on a variety of topics. This critical thinking culture of higher education helped Steven develop "considerable confidence in talking about religion among educated people…it gave me kind of an intellectual confidence in talking candidly about my faith that I might not have had otherwise."

Years after his undergraduate days at Harvard, and as a result of this intellectual confidence and ability concerning religious matters, Steven was given an opportunity to publicly articulate Mormonism to the media. On this occasion when Steven was asked to speak, he said, "people from CNN, and the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times*, and television people of all sorts" had come together "to ask questions" concerning Mormonism. Steven noted that "religion is in the air, everyone's curious about Mormonism, so I was there and I talked about Mormonism for about an hour and then for the next hour and a half they just asked questions." He expressed concern that this interview would be transcribed and broadly circulated. He described the group of interviewers as "sharks in the water," but he did not think their intentions were to hurt, but they were really curious asking questions they really cared about. He couldn't explain how it happened, but he was "amazed at how the questions would come and the answers would come and it all flowed together and all seemed very normal and rational and easy." Other found it refreshing that a Mormon could stand up for their faith and answer the tough questions. Steven explained the reason for his confidence:

> I really readied myself especially spiritually. I couldn't ready myself intellectually because I had no idea what the questions would be but I really prayed very hard that I could do this, but other than that it came natural to me and it's because I had been asking questions like that ever since Harvard.

This is how Steven explained he lived his life and this gave him confidence to answer the really tough questions. The questions from others were challenging, but not always as difficult as the ones Steven frequently posed to himself throughout his life, especially throughout undergraduate and graduate school. He noted, "every time I had a belief I had to find some way of stating it that it would make sense to that imaginary Harvard intellectual." His rigorous self-examination positioned Steven to become what he calls a "sort of the speaker for Mormonism."

Besides seeing connections between his education and religious experience, Steven has noticed how his religious involvement fills an altruistic void. Steven values his opportunities to serve in the church. These opportunities introduce him to new people and help him counter a personal propensity toward selfishness often found in his academic pursuits. He shared,

> Scholarship is a very self-absorbed work….This week I have been visiting a sister [a female member of the church] in the hospital whom I would never know if it weren't for home teaching [a calling to care for other members]. I appreciate the incentive to get out of my shell and get involved with people I might never know otherwise.

Similarly, Jill, a Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) graduate and a current Ivy League professor of economics, has been given privileges to use her academic training not just in the university classroom but in a church "calling." She reflected,

> Several years ago I was called to be the financial specialist in our ward. We had an elderly woman who had severe financial problems, and a long and interesting life story. I'm still working with her. She has terminal cancer and is probably going to pass away sometime in the next few weeks. I spent over two years trying to help her refinance her house and file for bankruptcy and start over and now that it's clear that she's not going to be with us for much longer I'm part of a committee trying to her help get a will in place, [and] get her assets set up in such a way that as much as possible can pass to her two kids who are 19 and 24 who both have disabilities and who both need a lot of help.

Local church (ward) leaders have drawn frequently upon Jill's knowledge in giving her opportunities to deliver talks or teach adult and youth groups. During these religious meetings Jill would educate fellow members on basic family financial principles: saving, setting a budget, managing credit cards, etcetera.

On the other hand, John, a religious educator with a PhD in political science, observed how the intellectual development he experienced in college enhanced his religious service. John has observed how his college courses have provided him "conceptual tools and frameworks." He indicated that these cognitive tools have helped him increase his ability to reason and express religious concepts more thoughtfully. In teaching LDS young adults about Jesus Christ, John still uses concepts and imagery he received from a professor while attending Notre Dame. He was able to mold his language to the people around him to clarify his beliefs. For example, he never spoke "about the Atonement of Christ and our relationship to him especially in regards to his command for us to follow Him, without using this kind of language that I get from the Catholics." He explained that Catholics talk about the fact that

He, Jesus Christ, is in the boat with us and that "He doesn't have some speedboat, you know, hovercraft, he's in a little skiff, he's in the boat with us, he's experienced mortality." John explained the differences in doctrines between his religion and their, but appreciated how his church's doctrine added to the language he learned at Notre Dame and expanded his mind and deepened his thinking.

Over time, John came to notice how education is a critical part of a church member's development and experience. John conveyed a concern that those individuals "who cannot express themselves very well, are limited, truly in their experiential life because they have no way to paint or you know setup what they've just gone through..." He went on, "The more intelligent we are, the more words we have at our disposal and the greater capacity we have to manipulate our realities."

John believed education provided a degree of literacy that allowed him to have greater control over the ideological and environmental influences in his life. Currently, John has numerous opportunities to use his cognitive scholarship tools in religious settings. He is employed as a religious educator and has approximately 700 college students in his courses at a church-sponsored educational institution. He also serves in a religious calling that allows him to guide, instruct and be of influence on a regular basis to around 1,000 young adults belonging to the LDS faith.

Karen did not express direct connections between her religious participation and her academic training but she still sensed a need to belong to and participate in the church community. Karen is an English professor in southern California and currently participates in the church as a teacher and leader of young women ranging in age from 12-18 years. After receiving her PhD from UCLA, she chose to limit her contact with church members and

involvement in the church. After marrying and having children, her religious interest and activity levels increased. Having a family seemed to temper the initial concerns that led to Karen's temporary religious inactivity. Life-changing circumstances had now inspired Karen to return to her faith not just for herself but because she also "wanted the girls to grow up Mormon. I had been teaching them at home, I mean really I had been teaching them at home. But I knew they needed a ward, and I was scared to join a ward again but I went back anyway." The religious community had been a significant source of influence and involvement in Karen's life and overtime she desired her children to have a similar religious community.

The personal experiences and perceptions of participants suggest the importance of increased levels of education for members of the LDS faith. The advanced education and the acquisition of academic skills and experiences appear to help a person feel more comfortable and confident participating in religious settings and belonging to the faith.

Influential Role Models

In his social learning theory, Bandura (1977) maintained that "most human behavior is learned observationally through modeling: from observing others one forms an idea of how new behaviors are performed, and on later occasions this coded information serves as a guide for action" (p. 22). Participants frequently expressed appreciation for leaders, parents, and peers who impacted them by their examples. Religious mentors appeared to have a substantial influence on participants as they personally experienced academy life as an undergraduate student, a graduate student, and later as a professor in their respected discipline.

While attending Brigham Young University (BYU), Karen struggled with the faith that had been an integral part of her family. Feeling out of place ("like a root beer among the Cokes") as an undergraduate in the conservative culture of BYU, Karen yearned for individuals who could help her through the various tensions she had with her faith. She found some relief in the relationships and examples of some "faculty at BYU" who she remembers being "rigorous thinkers." Specifically, she was introduced to and influenced by a handful of faculty members,

> Who seemed to be assured in their faith…and even assured in addressing historical controversy like it wasn't a big deal, and were also Mormons living the life of the mind. I just thought that was so great…I saw people who were really making it work but I also saw areas of inquiry around hot-button issues where it was really rocky and institutional LDS spaces to be pursuing those lines of inquiry.

For Karen, religious role models provided her a sustainable pattern for wrestling with challenging issues and maintain her religious beliefs and interests. Karen also indicated the need to have a variety of role models who think differently from one another and who avoid strict and inflexible approaches to important issues. While Karen found models in the church to help her through a difficult stage connecting her intellectual world with her religious world, she worries that in the church young people may not be as fortunate. With a measure of concern, she cautioned,

> A sense of fear has crept in and a dogmatism has crept in that provides young people who do seek very little refuge, only very polarized models for sorting it out. That's not healthy. There's lots of ways to sort out how to be a believing, thinking person, there are even lots of paths in Mormonism but right now we have a very polarized

environment. I think that is a challenge. Young people can find those role models in a lot of places, and you can find people who will support that kind of a thinking inquiry path at a secular school.

Karen sees a need today in the church for providing youth with places where "they can ask questions of faith and have adult role models who may be living a range of answers without disappointing their parents." Related to her own experience in finding meaningful role models in the faith, Karen argues the importance of having a diverse number role models believing the results of such exposure will make a person's faith more robust.

David found influential role models in a peer group of LDS students who met regularly to discuss religious ideals in light of current events. David was a graduate student in southern California during the 1960s. Being married, serving in the church, and studying physics limited David's first hand exposure to cultural disturbances occurring on campus. David just "wasn't hanging out with the other students" on campus as a result of the academic expectations and religious commitments. Focusing on family, academics and church responsibilities distanced David from ideas, behaviors, and influences on campus that conflicted with his religious beliefs. Although this separation from his peers may be viewed as close-minded, particularly during the social unrest of the day, David felt he was very much educated on the issues, but chose to focus on aspects of his life he felt more important.

After graduating with a PhD in economics from MIT, Jill found a variety of impressive role models of academic achievement blended with religious devotion within her ward family. She was inspired by the scholarly presence in the religious community.

My husband and I moved to Belmont and we were in the same ward with Mitt Romney, who was stake president and Clayton Christiansen [current Harvard

> business professor] and Kim Clark [current BYU-Idaho President] and a whole host of other people. These were amazing people and leaders in the business community, leaders in the church community and leaders in higher education. We had several faculty members at MIT and Harvard and Boston University, and several people who were successful in the business world. It was an amazing experience to go to church every week and to talk to these people and hear them. They have such strong testimonies.

For Jill, exposure to these accomplished individuals in a religious setting was "almost more faith promoting then growing up in Provo, [Utah]" despite the worries of colleagues who expressed concern about the religious influence an east coast graduate school experience would have on her.

Church and other religious settings were places where Steven could associate on a regular basis with and be influenced by "intelligent, well-informed, believing Latter-day Saints." While attending Harvard in the 1950s, he was challenged by what he called, an "atheistic philosophy" that prevailed on campus. Steven discovered while an undergraduate at Harvard that the regular gathering of fellow LDS students provided him a stimulating place to develop religious understanding and intellectual confidence on a range of issues. He remembers,

> When I went to Harvard, there were no institutes. That was an unknown thing. But we had a group of undergraduates, terrific kids, and we got together every Sunday and we asked every question under the sun. We tested ourselves. So I grew up with the idea you ask questions and you keep working at them and you find answers. So there has to be sort of a basic confidence that you can get through anything.

Despite these memorable occasions, Steven pensively recalled how after two years attending Harvard, he returned home for Christmas to his family with his faith "crumbling within." In this fragile spiritual state, he "went off into the mission field" assigned to serve in the eastern United States, ironically in the same region where he had attended college. Upon arrival, Steven met his mission president (i.e., ecclesiastical leader) who later became one of his primary role models. While reflecting upon an interview with his mission president, he said,

> [W]hen I arrived [on my mission] and he interviewed me…. He asked me if I knew the gospel was true. I said, 'No, I don't.' He didn't panic. He was an agriculture professor from Utah State and he had dealt with doubting among graduates before. That is the point where he made the statement and judgment and said, 'Here is a book. I would like you to read it and see if you can find an explanation for it.' He handed me the Book of Mormon and put me on the train from Boston to Halifax, Nova Scotia, and bid me farewell and that was it.

After three months of wrestling within his soul, Steven's prayers were answered and he had obtained spiritual conviction concerning his religion. In this religious experience, Steven was greatly influenced by the leadership and personal challenge of his Mission President who had worked prior to this call as a university professor.

Not all of the examples from participant accounts of influential religious and scholarly thinking and living came from members of the church. While at Notre Dame, John had Catholic professors who left a favorable impression on him with their examples of kindness and service as much as by their intellect. John relates,

> The head of the master's program was such a good dad; he was such a ridiculously good dad. You could tell from everything he said and talked and the way he visited,

> you know, the things he was teaching his kids…I love the guy, and the guy was a great husband and father and that inspired me…. [T]o see the Christian character in him, to see the light of Christ working in him to great ends even though we have some differences, but that was so inspiring, and several others that I met, I just thought, "you are gold, you're Mother Teresa people," to have nothing to do with doctrine but have everything to do with getting the love of God in their hearts. Living the first and second commandment you know?....These guys bended over backwards for me, they did the sweetest things that I frankly never got treated this way at BYU, you know? The point is I've seen in my education among non-LDS a great love of God's children and how much he's [God] teaching them and helping them and blessing them.

Education and religious institutions provided these individuals a number of settings where they were exposed to diverse ideas, examples, and influences found in a variety of role models. A number of college educated members and professors contributed to the religious and academic perspectives of these participants.

An Expanded Epistemology

The thoughts and experiences of these faithful scholars illuminated a religious worldview of knowledge and learning that extended beyond the traditional academic emphasis on learning by study and experiment. In addition to the epistemology of their various academic disciplines, these scholars believed in and confidently expressed an epistemological approach to learning informed by principles of revelation, obedience, and faith.

David, a physics professor in the northwest, has had a number of opportunities trying to explain his religious worldview to scientific colleagues. In explaining his views, he points out that he perceives knowledge can come from scientific and religious sources. To illustrate, David shared an occasion while working at a jet propulsion lab for NASA, when he and his colleague from the European Space Agency (ESA) were sitting in the foyer at a bed and breakfast in England conversing:

> We had a big dinner that night after our meetings, [we were] just sitting around the fire and [his ESA counterpart] asked me sort of out of the blue, "[David], I know that you're an intelligent man and a good scientist, but I've got to tell you that I have never met a scientist who believed in God. How can you do that?"

David stewed over how to answer this educated colleague's inquiry. He had devoted much of his life rationally reconciling a number of challenges to his faith and wondered about explaining these. Instead of engaging in a detailed discussion concerning these conclusions, he decided on a more fundamental approach. He found he could only come up with one answer in his mind. It was a "simple one," as he explained. David felt it would have been wrong to go over the intellectual explanations because, as he put is, "it would have been extraneous." His simple and to the point answer was, "I know that God exists because I've talked with him and he's answered me. So end of story."

Overtime, David has become a little more cautious in his approach to religious and scientific claims made by experts in both religious and scientific fields. David shared in the interview two specific anecdotes that he frequently uses when addressing the issue of faith and science to Mormon audiences.

> [L]et me give you two quotes. The first one is from Lord Kelvin who was speaking in 1900, and he said that there's nothing new to be learned in physics anymore. All that remains is more and more precise measurement. This [man] was a giant in the field of physics, and he was dead wrong. And my second quote is,…. Joseph Fielding Smith's famous statement that man will never be permitted to go to the moon. He had a religious basis for that; he read in the scriptures that the earth is where we belong, the moon is at a place that is above the earth, and we had no business being there. And the Lord will not let us go there, so he came to that conclusion. Well, he was wrong. So then I say okay here's a quiz question, if you ever find a conflict between science and religion can you think of at least two reasons that might occur? And the point is that [a] scientists are often wrong, and [b] people who read the scriptures and try to figure out what they're telling us are often wrong. And you know Joseph Fielding Smith was a giant [in the LDS religion] and if anyone knew the gospel, the scriptures, it was him, and if he can make that kind of obvious mistake, I'm going to be a little humble when I come up with some religious conclusion…. there are so many things that change so radically in science and so often when we come to a conclusion based on how we read scriptures and then realize gee you know this really isn't tenable… you go back and you read and suddenly you say, that's not tenable. Our problem was we never read the scriptures carefully. We thought we knew stuff, and if we'd been more careful we would have seen we didn't know.

When knowledge conflicts occur between the scientific and religious knowledge David does not panic but goes to work trusting the process that in the past has helped him

discover more complete answers. When questions and tensions arise for him between religious and scientific knowledge his approach is straightforward:

> I think the more you know, ultimately the better off you are… you know you probably need to take some of the things that people tell you at a university setting and not accept them as absolutely true just because a professor said it, any more than you take something absolutely true because your mom told you. And you don't need to idolize guys that have that great learning and especially if they don't share your faith and understanding, I mean they are coming from a different perspective, but the antidote for knowledge that confuses is more knowledge; it's certainly not running away from it… I only can believe things that I have really solid reason to think are true. And so that works well in science and for me it works well in my faith.

Although David realizes there have been imperfect judgments in the past proclaimed by authoritative figures in both fields, he still finds it difficult to realize why anyone interested in pursuing truth would limit themselves to only one of these fields of study. David explains, the limits to scientists such as physicists who "restrict themselves to evidence that can be reproduced by others in an objective way." Those scientists, he said, "will not accept as evidence anything that is subjective and personal." He noted that personal experiences are not considered as scientific to them, but rather they want proof. With some contempt, David exclaimed, "it is a preposterous restriction if you're searching for truth. Why in the world would you limit yourself to some really arbitrary set of rules?" A physicist do not accept religious experiences at face value, they restrict themselves to hard empirical evidence. This restricts them from accepting other "kinds of evidence." David sees this as obscuring a path for truth rather than facilitating it. He explained,

> I find that most scientists are aware of the limitations of what they're doing. We all know that what we're doing is only tentative. We know that we're trying to find an understanding or theory that agrees with what we've seen so far. We can only do things by agreement, we will only do things in the science world that we have evidence for…We realize that there are some limitations to that, and you know the guys who actually do the work recognize the places where they've had to make assumptions just to be able to go forward. They realize that if something goes wrong they can go back and question those assumptions.

Blending the fields of science and religiosity in the search for truth is something David has done and continues to feel quite confident in. He does not believe there are "two paths to truth." For him there is only "one path to truth and it is trying to understand the evidence of your personal experiences" whether they be religious or academic.

David's beliefs and confidence seem to mirror the thoughts of Karen: "Our faith is so capable of cosmic thinking it is not a fragile theology…The gospel is not fragile; it doesn't and never has needed to be protected from inquiry." I noticed in these participants an intellectual confidence concerning their personal learning culture that involved asking challenging questions and believing answers would surface as they diligently applied themselves to their familiar religious and scientific learning processes. Steven captures this sentiment when he stated,

> Whenever you run onto questions or problems, you don't want to run away, you don't want to go around or to conceal. You really want to go right into the middle of it, and think about what is the problem here? And once you've determined that then you can pursue an answer. And in my experience, even with the most difficult questions

sooner or later you begin to get some light on what's going on and then you're much better off.

Steven goes on to express worries about individuals who adopt simple answers for complex questions concerning their beliefs. He feels that faith lacking a degree of logic or rationale will not only be easily dismissed by critics but also eventually lost by individuals who profess it. He argues, "It's hard to recognize that if you have a pat answer to every question you are more vulnerable and less persuasive than if you admit there's a question and you're wrestling too."

John uses the metaphor of a map to describe his decision to embrace learning in the university with learning in religion. By adding the religious approaches to learning and the associated answers, John feels the size of his knowledge map has greatly expanded. He also recognizes like many others that there are some religious subjects that are difficult to argue or prove ("or put in a beaker") using only the scientific rules of discovery. Having this added knowledge is appealing to John and provides many satisfying answers to life's great questions.

John has received graduate degrees from Notre Dame and Idaho State University in theology and political science respectively. Based upon these dual paradigms of learning, John felt he was frequently informed concerning "many truths, [and] many falsehoods." For John, learning how to discern between truth and error is something that will ultimately require religious influence. With the language of his faith, he stated, "The spirit will teach you." He also believes that the religious ways of knowing will not only help [a person] know truth and error but "will lean on [a person] to go get more education." For him, Joseph Smith was an impressive model of someone who blended well learning by study and learning by

faith. John has developed a philosophy of learning where a person should not "be afraid to study anything." They should be inquisitive and not fear any knowledge. He said, "Look through every microscope every telescope, you just don't be afraid to study anything, but remember that not all truths are equal and not all facts are on the same level."

In his view and experience, a person should not worry in the initial stages of educations about categorizing everything they are learning as good or evil, true or false, and light or darkness. John came to a point in his learning where he was able to, "Break through the sifting process of education as a process of do I believe it or don't I believe it" and just enjoy learning for the sake of learning. He reflects his personal disposition and experience in his advice for others to not "be judgmental right off the bat of whether or not I have to accept this fully or whole-heartedly…." He chides people to "just learn what people think." And then, as he explains in the language of his faith that he let "the Spirit" help him sift through "which ideas should be adopted or…which should be rejected." He expressed a more relaxed attitude by expressing the need to "Just come into the learning moment…without prejudice, without judgment and just get educated with the idea that this is how some people think and be an educated person." Then, he said, "the Spirit will help you and direct you."

Each of these participants has been trained in a variety of academic disciplines (i.e., English, physics, history, economics, political science), each focusing on a unique branch of knowledge. Each of the participants embraces and described a religious approach to learning that they trust and for them complements the scientific approach to knowledge development found in the university. This spiritual epistemology embraced and articulated by these Mormon scholars, may well be summarized in Steven's words:

> I value the words of prophets who say they have seen and spoken with God. Without those words I might not think to pray. With them I take the chance. Mormons are taught from childhood up to trust their inner voices. That can be a source of courage as well as insight.

The answers that have come to these individuals as a result of this process appear to have added confidence in the religious approach to learning.

Remaining Challenges

The participants of this study face religiosity challenges as a result of their higher education learning and employment. Two main challenges to the religiosity-education relationship of Mormons were identified from the experiences and thoughts of the participants. The first was the gender role conflict expressed by female participants who struggled with various pressures to fulfill and balance the responsibilities of family and professional careers. The second challenge was the difficulty the participants encountered in keeping their faith alive emotionally and spiritually and not making it too much of an intellectual rational experience. These unresolved tensions between religiosity and higher education suggest all is not well or perfect in the college-educated believer.

Roles and Responsibilities of Mormon Women

The cultural and institutional expectations that Mormons should think and act a specific way was something individuals in this study wrestled with. The dual emphasis on education and family generated conflict for the female participants. Karen, an English professor, struggled to balance the opportunities and demands of her faith, family, education, and profession. She believes that “women with a higher level of education have more choices” and that educated Mormon women who have more choices stay in the faith because

"they want to stay, rather than being or feeling locked in. They get to affirm that their faith is something they choose or rather they choose it from a place of autonomy."

In the LDS church, choosing to have a professional career can be a personal and cultural struggle for college-educated women. One reason Jill, an economics professor, liked her job is because it gives her "flexibility" to frequently work at home. For her, historical context provided guidance in balancing professional and family demands. She observed,

> If you look back at the history of women, the notion of a woman who stays at home and plays with her children and [has] all of this free time… [is] a very modern idea of what it means to be a woman and a mother…. The history of the world is that women have mostly worked, it's just that the nature of the work that they're doing is very different today than it was in the past. So I actually don't sense any conflict in the idea of women working and balancing work and family because that in fact is mostly what women have been doing. It's only the last few decades where things have been different.

Furthermore, Jill believed that "God gave people different talents, different skills, and different abilities so that they could contribute differently and so that they would need to work together." For Jill, diversity of gifts in members is an opportunity that magnifies potential service to one another. Jill senses a cultural pressure for Mormon women to conform to a certain motherly "cookie cutter mold." Such pressures she feels,

> Creates a lot of frustration among women in the church. If you asked women about this you would actually find that a lot of the ones that look like they adhere to this traditional mold, some of them are very happy doing that, but I think that a lot of

them are frustrated because they feel like they have to and they feel like they're not as happy as they think they should be.

Female college students often sought Jill out, "trying to figure out this whole work family thing." She often advises these young women to set priorities and to have courage to make choices. She hopes these young girls would decide early what is most important for them. With concern in her voice, she explained, "I can't tell them what their priorities are because different things might be more important for them than what's important for me." For Jill, her priority is happiness. She cheerfully explains to those women, "there are lots of different ways to be happy, there's no one recipe to be happy and for some people happiness is having a really demanding intellectually stimulating job and for some people happiness is staying home with their kids." The choice is not about good or bad, it is a matter of preference and individual need and guidance from the Lord. Most importantly, however, Jill encouraged the girls to make "compromises" or they may "give up opportunities along the way."

The male participants of this study expressed no conflict between education, employment, and their role as husbands and fathers. This may be partially due to Church teachings that encourage and direct men in their roles as fathers to provide the necessities of life for their families. Despite the cultural conflict some educated women feel being a member of the church, Karen's is certain, "There's lots of ways to sort out how to be a believing, thinking person."

Cerebral Faith

Higher education expects and demands reasons for the beliefs and assumptions people espouse. After being told by an influential professor that others viewed his religion as a bunch of garbage, Steven went on the offensive in seeking to explain his faith

intellectually—in a rational manner—to his Harvard colleagues. As explained above, Steven questioned his beliefs, challenged himself, and tried to formulate thoughtful answers that would make sense for the Harvard elite. Steven mused, "What I worry about is that it's made my faith too cerebral, to put all my energy into explaining and understanding rather than just devotion…I know that my faith is very cerebral." Similarly, David's background in physics has had a comparable effect. He acknowledged feeling skeptical about new religious and scientific thought:

> [I'm] very skeptical about new things. I don't know if I'm skeptical because I'm a scientist or if I ended up being a scientist because I'm naturally skeptical…If anyone brings up to me anything in science or religion, my first thought is, "I'm not sure about that."

Steven said he doesn't recommend that attitude. He lamented that he may be missing a lot of good stuff to learn, but he continues to "insist on a fairly stringent level of evidence." It is interesting to note how Steven makes the connection between the secular and religious. He doesn't understand people who "say they choose to believe." He can "only believe things that I reasonably think are true." He doesn't feel comfortable merely believing something "just because I want to… I only can believe things that I have really solid reason to think are true." He concluded, "And so that works well in science and for me it works well in my faith."

Discussion

The purpose of exploring and describing the lived experiences of Mormons with graduate degrees was to better understand the religious-education phenomenon found within Mormonism as reported in a number of quantitative studies (Albrecht and Heaton, 1984;

Heaton, et al., 2004; Hill, 2009; Merrill et al., 2003; Smith, 2011; Stott, 1983). Albrecht and Heaton (1984) described the phenomenon clearly: "Highly educated Mormons are more likely to pray frequently, to have strong religious beliefs and to attend meetings" (p. 54) than educated counterparts belonging to other religious denominations and also in comparison to individuals less educated members belonging to LDS faith. A case study approach was used to expand on the findings of previous studies reporting the phenomenon.

In each of the above-mentioned studies describing the religiosity-education relationship in Mormonism, researchers offered possible theories for the phenomenon. Albrecht and Heaton (1984) theorized that the phenomenon was likely a result of the involvement of educated members in positions of leadership. Skills developed in university settings often overlap with abilities needed to fulfill voluntary church responsibilities (e.g., conducting meetings, speaking in public, interpersonal relations). It was difficult to determine the extent to which the educational experience influenced religiosity, but it was clear that the higher educational experience provided opportunities and skills that influenced religious growth in the participants of this study.

Similar observations have been made by McFarland et al. (2010) who found that highly educated individuals were "especially valuable to religious communities" in that they gave "the possessor the tools necessary to develop a high level of religious cognitive ability" necessary to "promote and explain these beliefs" (p. 4). For example, Cnann, Evans and Curtis (2012) not only noted how "members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints are the most pro social [volunteer] members of American society," but also that within the Mormon community "the more educated volunteered significantly more hours for religious purpose" (p. 17). Cnann et al. (2012) hypothesize that since "many church callings

involve teaching and public speaking, clergy may ask people with more education to carry out these roles" (p. 17). The experience of participation suggests that education not only made them comfortable in the church but also their knowledge, skills, and life experiences were valued and used in a meaningful volunteer setting.

In studying the religious-education phenomenon in Mormons, Merrill et al. (2003) and Stott, (1983) proposed that the behavioral relationship between religiosity and educational attainment was due to the LDS doctrinal, historical, and cultural emphasis on education. In the words of Stott (1983) "Latter-day Saint theology appears to negate the secularizing impact of education by sacralizing it [education] and incorporating it into the total religious milieu" (p. 8). Few participants referred to LDS doctrine or history as motivational sources for their religious and educational accomplishments. This may be due to the fact that such teachings are either not a driving force for members or is so woven into the intellectual and social culture of Mormonism that is was not easily identifiable by the participants.

Merrill et al. (2003) believed the social dimensions of the Mormon community were influential in contributing to the positive relationship between education and religiosity: "individuals who attend church frequently…are members of church-based networks that can reinforce religious commitment" (p. 121). Education encouragement and reinforcement may come as a result of the doctrinal emphasis on education or it may be more a function of the influential example of educated members who serve in positions of influence for younger generations. It has been observed that religious communities often provide a "unique socializing environment that emphasizes character, meaning, and purpose in life, and that facilitates the development of the norms, values, and expectations of success" (Erickson, et

al., 2012, p. 573). In this view, social norms in LDS communities concerning learning would promote educational achievement among members of the faith (Merrill et al., 2003). Religious social norms concerning education may offer one reason that high levels of religiosity in pre-college years would be strongly related to enrollment in college and that that college education and graduation is correlated with high levels of religiosity.

Conclusion and Implications

The academic professionals selected for this study provided a personal in-depth understanding of this phenomenon based on the perceptions and experiences of the participants. Based on the information they provided, it appeared that three main patterns emerged above others: (a) church participation, (b) influential religious mentors, and (c) an expanded epistemology. These three related to the preservation of religiosity in these Mormon scholars. These themes suggest that personal involvement, social connections, and religious knowledge and ways of knowing were all reasons identified in this study associated with the positive correlation previously reported between education and religiosity.

Implications for Practice

Professional practice doctorates are expected to carry out research that will inform and improve their career by producing knowledge related to the profession of the researcher (Willis, Inman, & Valenti, 2010). I designed this research project with a single question: *Why do college-educated Mormons, manifest the highest levels of religiosity within their faith?* In the process of investigating this question, I not only have obtained thoughtful answers for this research question but also been left with many more questions. The following are some of my questions:

- In what ways does the higher education experience influence the religiosity of married students as opposed to unmarried students?
- How is the religious experience of church members with low levels of education different or similar to those with a college education?
- How does the religious experience of first generation Mormons influence educational interests, opportunities and experiences?
- When members of the church live in socio-economically diverse wards, how effective is the mentoring process for the economically and educationally underprivileged?
- How does higher education influence the religiosity of members belonging to other religious communities?

What professional practice inferences can be drawn from the religious and academic experiences of these participants? The thoughts and experiences of these Mormon scholars have professional practice implications for religious educators who are interested in helping young people in the academy maintain religious belief and commitment. One professional practice implication drawn from their experience of these participants is the importance of asking and addressing questions. For some educators, there may be a propensity to shy away from difficult questions and sensitive issues and to just provide pat answers. The importance of this was further driven home in a personal communication I had with Clayton Christensen (February 3, 2014), primary author of *The Innovator's Dilemma*, *The Innovative University: Changing the DNA of Higher Education from the Inside Out*, and several other academic, religious, and business books. He expressed concern towards institutions that do not foster a questioning culture among adherents. Religiously, this disposition creates, as he expressed,

> a poison to the prospects of the church when we stop asking questions…the scary thing about the church today is that there is more and more a sense that if we are obedient, we don't need to ask questions because the answers have already been given.

He went on the explain his observations of a learning culture that from his perspective, "encourages and stimulates questions from students and guides them in the formulation of responsible answers is not a threat but an essential ingredient to the development of religious knowledge and faith."

Along with these thoughts of Christensen is the importance of student involvement in the religious communities. For a student, teaching and service to others strengthens their faith and ability to excel in school. A religion class that neglects the participatory aspect of learning creates a learning culture contradictory to that found within the church. The learning culture of the church encourages involvement and participation from all in members as they teach and learn from one another. The learning culture of the church emphasizes the importance of learning from others who might lack formal training but are willing to serve and share what they have learned from their experiences and study. For Christensen (2012), "if our mental model of learning is that we can only learn from people who have more education than we have, then the amount that we can learn is limited" (Para. 10).

Almost every semester there is a student who has just sat through a biology course on organic evolution or a geology course on the age of the earth who comes to my office with questions and concerns related to what they are learning and discovering in science in contrast to what they have been taught at home or in their Sunday classes. Participant comments in this study discussed the importance for them of embracing the dual

epistemologies found in their faith and in the university. According to Dixon (2008), people generally derive their knowledge of the world from five sources: sense, reason, testimony, memory, and revelation. Cognitive dissonance occurs when the knowledge produced from these sources conflicts. Dixon explains,

> Individual religious experiences, like modern scientific observations, are made possible by long processes of human collaboration in a shared quest for understanding. In the religious case, what intervenes between the light hitting your retina and your thoughts about the glory of God is the lengthy history of a particular sacred text, and its reading and interpretation within a succession of human communities. And, as in the scientific case, one of the lessons learned through that communal endeavor is that things are not as they seem. Religious teachers, as much as scientific ones, try to show their pupils that there is an unseen world behind the observed one – and one which might overturn their most settled intuitions and beliefs. (p. 8)

Bushman (cited in Black, 1996), a scholar and member of the LDS faith, makes some bold assertions when comparing science and religion. He argues that science has become "the unofficial truth of our culture," it has shied "away from goodness…[and] in fact, it explicitly denies responsibility for finding the good. Scholarship has no doctrine of repentance because it has not doctrine of good. I consider that a damning lack" (p. 76). These strong position is clearly open to debate, but may provide some insight into some cultural ideas predominant among Mormon members. Christensen (2012) takes a softer approach and describes a learning paradigm that reflects the views and experiences of all of the participants in this

study. He encourages all learners to make friends, not enemies, out of religious and scientific knowledge and ways of knowing. He goes on,

> Many assume that science and academics belong in one category of knowledge, while religion comprises another category, primarily of belief…[t]hese categories generate far more heat than light. A much more productive framing is that there is the pursuit of truth on the one hand, and the propagation of error on the other. If there are conflicting assertions in science and in religion, then one or the other is wrong, - or both are wrong, or both are incomplete. But truth cannot be inconsistent with truth. As long as we are seeking truth, we are on solid ground. The pursuit of truth has not intellectual or spiritual prejudice. (Para 12)

Recently, on BYU-I campus, Dallin H. Oaks (2014), an LDS church leader, sensed the importance of instructing students concerning these dual epistemologies that members of the church are encouraged to include in their quest for truth:

> There are two methods of gaining knowledge the scientific method, and [then] the spiritual method, which begins with faith in God and relies on scriptures, inspired teaching and personal revelation. There is no ultimate conflict from knowledge gained by these different methods because God, our Omnipotent, Eternal Father knows all truth and beckons us to learn by them both. (Para 11)

Implications for Future Research

This study may stimulate future research that addresses religiosity among members of various religious traditions. Specifically, this study could be expanded by future research focusing on learning from the lived experiences of college-educated women who seek to maintain religious devotion and work in the academy. Future research concerning the

influence of specific academic disciplines on the religious experiences and views of individuals would also contribute to the understanding of the dynamic relationship existing between religious belief and educational experience. Finally, research seeking to understand the experience of college-educated individuals belonging to religious denominations other then Mormonism would provide an insightful juxtaposition to this study.

It should always be remembered by the reader and future researchers that Mormonism, like other religious denominations, is complex and consists of "an array of doctrines, communal interaction, ritual, private worship, and spiritual history integrated into a life experience" (Bushman, 2008, p. 116). The thoughts and experiences of these participants reflect religious complexity and diversity and provide an important contribution for better understanding the religion-education phenomenon.

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CHAPTER 3: RELIGIOUS TRANSFORMATIONS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

W. Mitchell Simmons, James Williams, & Nathan Williams

Introduction

Historically, religion shaped higher education in America (Chery, DeBerg, & Porterfield, 2001). Early colonial colleges such as Harvard, Princeton, and Yale were primarily funded by religious denominations with the purpose of directing students toward religious studies that were "in line with the spirit of [the] religious tradition" of the day (Brickman, 1972, p. 31). These schools were also designed for educating the clergy, and worked to promote and preserve the views of their sponsoring religious denominations. Cohen and Kisker (2010) note that during the founding of these early colonial colleges "the pattern of curriculum and faculty student relations [stemmed] from church-related institutions [and] was most prominent" (p. 20).

Toward the conclusion of the Colonial Era, religious influence in higher education waned while a "civil community centered on principles of morality and public service, apart from an established church grew" (Cohen & Kisker, 2010, p. 24). Additionally, the early Protestant acceptance of an approach toward scientific inquiry led to a weakening of religious influence and orthodoxy in higher education (Hartley, 2004). Prior to this movement, colleges had focused on the preservation of specific knowledge rather than the epistemological discoveries (Cohen & Kisker, 2010). This new approach to the discovery of knowledge through scientific inquiry led to "a significant departure from the old prescribed curriculum of the classics" (Hartley, 2004, p. 113). The transition from primarily church-directed universities to a focus on scientific learning contributed to secularization in higher education (Smith, 1990).

Secularization in American higher education was a steady and multifaceted process beginning early in the 19th century (Hartley, 2004). Berger (1967) defines secularization as the "process by which sectors of society and culture are removed from the domination of religious institutions and symbols" (p. 107). The progression of secularization in higher education was influenced by the advancement of scientific inquiry, leading to modifications in academic curriculum (Marsden, 1994; Perko, 1991; Sloan, 1994). Additionally, the religious atmosphere on college campuses changed as the relationship between colleges, and the ministerial and civic objectives upon which churches founded them, began to deteriorate. Course requirements in religion and moral philosophy changed as a new morality was introduced, and mandatory church attendance was abolished (Haynes, 2002; Marsden, 1994; Pattillo & Mackenzie, 1966). In many ways, "the university itself became a major religious phenomenon," becoming the "secular religion" of American culture by the 20th century (Sloan, 1994, p. 21). It was the belief of the clergy and their lay supporters of the day, that the rise of the university marked the advancement of the practical and scientific over the spiritual (Smith, 1990) and parents of prospective college students were warned that their children "would become raw recruits for Satan if they enrolled at [these] secular institutions" (p. 100).

The Secularizing Effect of Higher Education on College Students

The question as to whether or not higher education has a secularizing effect upon the religiosity of college students today is complex and controversial (Stark & Finke, 2000). Several studies (Johnson, 1997; Petersen, 1994; Schieman, 2010; Sherkat, 1998) identify the modern university as a place where religious beliefs are challenged and faith is abandoned. Johnson (1997), Petersen (1994), and Shieman (2010) all suggest that higher education leads

to lower levels of belief in the existence of God and religious commitment. Sherkat (2007) came to a similar conclusion noting that at some point in their college careers students distance themselves from Biblical teachings. Albrecht and Heaton (1984) cite how this type of environment often pushes students toward diminished religiosity as they "encounter views that deemphasize spiritual growth and elevate scientific and intellectual achievement" (p. 46).

Other research paints a different picture about the effects higher education has on the religiosity of college students. Although Hill (2009) found evidence that church attendance among students declined during college, he noted that the change was not permanent. He stated, "no widespread, long-term decline in religious participation is likely for any particular religious group—particularly at public colleges and universities" (p. 530). Bowman and Small (2011) investigated whether students' religious transformations during college were associated with their religious affiliation, experiences, and characteristics of their college or university. Their report shows that many students, belonging to a variety of religious denominations were just as committed to their religious beliefs following their college experience as they were before they started college. Mayrl and Oeur (2009) also maintain that "college attendance does not inevitably create apostasy among most students" (p. 265), and Lee (2002) notes that academic and social encounters in college may cause students to rethink their religious beliefs, but not necessarily abandon their faith. Additionally, Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) point out that "evidence is mounting to suggest that students' commitments to religious values during the college years may not so much increase or decrease as become reexamined, refined, and incorporated in subtle ways with other beliefs and philosophical dispositions" (p. 284). Klassen and Zimmermann (2006) refer to this

reexamination of beliefs as "a form of Christian dualism" where students define themselves against tradition by "uncritically accepting certain modernist assumptions about thinking" (p. 90).

Inward Tension from Opposing Worldviews

Most college students reexamine their religious beliefs in light of unfamiliar worldviews and secular philosophies (Braskamp, 2007). Bryant (2011) notes, "The salience of religion and spirituality in academic encounters tend to provoke religious/spiritual struggles" (p. 441). We observed among the participants in these three studies the cognitive and emotional struggles of students when their beliefs were intentionally or otherwise challenged. Inward tensions were experienced when a student felt pressure to reconcile opposing worldviews, which created confusion, anxiety, and frustration. When their religious perceptions, or beliefs, did not match those of university peers and professors, they felt compelled to choose one or the other, or justify their incongruences, and thus minimize the internal conflict and associated emotional distress.

This inward tension is described in psychology literature as cognitive dissonance, "a state of tension that occurs whenever a person holds two cognitions (ideas, attitudes, beliefs, [or] opinions) that are psychologically inconsistent" (Tavris & Aronson, 2007, p. 13). One of the basic assumptions of cognitive dissonance is that people want harmony in their lives by having their perceptions match their reality (Ryan, 2010).

While working through these inner conflicts the students have the choice to do the following: (a) modify their existing beliefs; (b) add new beliefs to construct a consistent belief system; or (c) minimize the significance of any one of the dissonant components. Cognitive dissonance theory asserts that when these inward tensions occur individuals will

attempt to avoid circumstances or reject facts that may intensify feelings of discomfort or dissonance (Festinger, 1985). Often, the avoidance of new, conflicting views is unavoidable for college students who are required to master their course studies—to get the grade. In process, some come to the position of what Scheitle (2011) found, with a majority of undergraduate students who do not view the relationship between science and religion as one of conflict. Klassen and Zimmermann (2006) describe such Christians as "accepting a dualistic split between public and private realms" (p. 90). They argue that once undergraduate college students incorporate secular ideas into their religious traditions, their faith becomes more subjective.

The Phenomenon of Education and Faith

When Bowman and Small (2011) conducted research analyzing religious transformation during college, they chose to exclude data from LDS participants "because the religious change [during college] of Latter-Day Saints often differs substantially from that of other young adults" (p. 159). Among the many religious traditions observed in his study, Hill (2011) gives an example of the uniqueness of college students within the LDS faith. He observes,

> The religious tradition of the respondent as an adolescent is an important predictor of belief change. Those raised in most nonevangelical religious traditions, with the exception of Mormons, are more likely to decline in their super-empirical Christian beliefs compared to evangelical Protestants. (p. 543)

The research by Bowman and Small (2011), as well as Hill (2011), is supported by a national survey conducted by the Pew Forum:

> Mormons [LDS church members] who have graduated from college display the highest levels of religious commitment (84%) followed by those with some college education (75%). Mormons with a high school education or less exhibit substantially lower levels of religious commitment (50% score high on the scale) than their more highly educated counterparts. These large differences in religious commitment among respondents with different educational backgrounds are not seen among many other religious groups in the population. (Smith, 2011, p. 37-38)

RELIGIOUS COMMITMENT			
	High %	Medium %	Low %
U.S. Mormons	69	28	2
Men	65	32	3
Women	73	25	-
College Grad	84	15	1
Some College	75	24	1
HS or Less	50	44	4

Figure 3.1 Religious commitment. Adapted from Smith (2011)

The Pew Forum also discovered that highly educated LDS members regularly practice their religion and are stronger in their beliefs than their less educated counterparts (Smith, 2011). Additionally, Albrecht and Heaton (1984), as well as Merrill and colleagues (2003) noted how LDS members are an exception to the correlations between increased educational levels and declines or no difference reported in religious commitment. Albrecht and Heaton concluded that education had a positive effect on religious commitment among Latter-day Saints. They found that LDS members with university degrees are more likely to attend church, pay tithing, pray, study scripture, and have stronger religious beliefs than those without university degrees. It appears that higher education may have a "reverse secularization effect" on Latter-day Saints (Heaton, Bahr, & Jacobson, 2004, p. 61); a phenomena worthy of further inquiry.

Scholars theorize about the possible reasons behind this reverse secularization effect among LDS members. In an attempt to explain this phenomenon, Albrecht et al. (1984) hypothesize that the involvement of educated LDS members in positions of leadership fosters this anomaly. Skills developed in university settings often overlap with abilities needed to fulfill voluntary church responsibilities (e.g., conducting meetings, public speaking, interpersonal relations, and managing organizations). Stott (1983) and Merrill et al. (2003) theorized that the behavioral relationship between religiosity and educational attainment is due to the LDS doctrinal, historical, and cultural emphasis on education. These researchers posit "individuals who attend church frequently…are members of church-based networks that can reinforce religious commitment to aspirations of higher education" (p. 121). In this view, LDS social norms promote educational achievement while simultaneously diminishing secularizing influences. Stott (1983) hypothesized, "Latter-day Saint theology appears to negate the secularizing impact of education by sacralizing it and incorporating it into the total religious milieu" (p. 8). These studies suggest that something unique is occurring among LDS members as a result of their higher education experience: College-educated LDS members seem to challenge the secularization effects of higher education (Albrecht et al., 1984; Heaton et al., 2004; Hill, 2009; Smith, 2011; Stott, 1983).

Problem Statement

Not everyone agrees on the impact higher education has on a person's religious beliefs and commitments. The discrepancies between the effects of higher education and secularization are a hotly debated subject (Maryl & Ouer, 2009; Merrill et al., 2003; Mooney, 2010; Wuthnow, 2012). Among Latter-day Saints, the debate is no less intense. Despite a plethora of evidence discussing the positive correlation between higher education and

religiosity among LDS college students, there is other research suggesting trends of defection among LDS membership (Ash, 2013; Henderson & Cooke, 2012)—particularly among those attending college (Stack, 2012). The evidence that some LDS students are abandoning their beliefs during their young adult years are of great interest and concern for religious educators and church leaders. As religious educators in high school and college, we have observed these downward trends among our students. In our search to inquire about this problem, we found a dearth of literature describing the lived experiences of those who represent this phenomenon. We also found that the social, cultural, and personal forces that have contribute to the transformation and weakening the faith among college-educated Latter-day Saints had not been addressed.

Purpose Statement

Our broader objective was to capture and describe the contextual nuances and lived experiences of LDS college students currently attending college as well as doctoral graduates currently employed as professional educators (professors or administrators) to understand how college life influenced their religious choices. A corollary purpose is to provide stakeholders with information to make data-based decisions regarding policy and curriculum development.

Research Questions

The grand tour question guiding our research was: What are the attitudes, perceptions and experiences of LDS participants concerning religiosity in their higher education experience? The following sub-questions further guided the study: (a) How do participants reconcile or attempt to reconcile possible tensions between their religiosity and their university experiences? (b) How is religiosity transformed by the higher education

experience? (c) What do the thoughts and experiences of the participants offer those interested in religious commitment and academic achievement?

Research Method

We used a qualitative meta-synthesis (QMS) design to deepen understanding of the Mormon experience in higher education. We selected this method to complement the results, conclusions, and theories discovered through quantitative inquiry (Mayrl & Oeur, 2009; Regnerus & Elder, 2003a). The dearth of qualitative data on this topic prompted Merrill, Lyon, and Jenson (2003) to recommend a more focused approach: "The relation between secularizing and religiosity needs to be qualified by specific references to particular denominations and faith traditions" (p. 114). In considering a research approach to addressing this problem we noted that, "The influence of particular institutional religious traditions may vary considerably in their relationship to educational aspirations and post-secondary educational attainment" (Regnerus & Elder 2003a, p. 653).

Qualitative meta-synthesis (QMS) is a research method involving the reuse of existing data, collected from prior studies related in focus (Jensen & Allen, 1996; Zimmer, 2006). As explained by Walsh and Downe (2005), QMS is intended to deepen understandings of specific accounts by "bringing together qualitative studies in a related area" which "enables the nuances, taken-for-granted assumptions, and textured milieu of varying accounts to be exposed, described and explained in ways that bring fresh insights" (p. 205). Qualitative Meta-Synthesis creates a more complete understanding of the phenomenon being studied (Erwin, Brotherson, & Summers, 2011; Walsh & Downe, 2005).

Jensen and Allen (1996) contend that QMS is "rooted in the original data" (p. 556), whereas Erwin et al., 2011 suggests QMS is not "a secondary analysis of primary data from a

group of identified research studies; rather, it is an interpretation of the findings of the selected studies" (p. 188). In conducting QMS, the research team chose to focus initially on the findings of three related studies during the synthesis process; however, we also returned to the original data to increase credibility and confirmability (O'Halloran, Grohn, & Worrall, 2012). Credibility in QMS is achieved by handling data so that it remains true to the original source. The original researchers should be able to verify the integrity of the data used. This is naturally achieved by analyzing research conducted by the research team (Walsh & Downe, 2005). In QMS, findings are validated internally through agreement between the quotes of the participants and their common experiences. Externally, the findings are validated through comparison with related literature (Jensen & Allen, 1996). The recurrence of themes between compared studies increases the validity of the QMS as well as the validity of the original studies (Estabrooks, Field, & Morse, 1994). Furthermore, QMS allowed us to conduct the research in a timely manner as analyzed data had already been collected and related literature reviewed.

The purpose of QMS is "translating, explaining, and discovering meaning from the written narrative" and seeks to "integrate and interpret patterns and insights systematically across qualitative investigations while also maintaining the integrity of the individual studies" (Erwin et al., 2011, p. 189). In QMS, analysis and synthesis of data involves "comparison, translation, and analysis of original findings from which new interpretations are generated, encompassing and distilling the meanings in the constituent studies" (Zimmer, 2006, p. 312). This type of synthesis is an inductive process leading to the development of themes through the in-depth coding of qualitative data (Barnett-Page & Thomas, 2009).

Analysis

The research team was responsive to the specific guiding principles governing a QMS as described by scholars (Erwin et al., 2011; Jensen & Allen, 1996; O'Halloran et al., 2012; Walsh & Downe, 2005; Zimmer, 2006). We were guided by research principles in the synthesis of findings and data collected from their three related studies on religiosity and higher education. In Phase 1 of the QMS, we compared, contrasted, and coded primary data collected from three related studies in order to identify themes common in all studies. To increase the credibility and authenticity of the research, research team members reviewed and coded the studies individually before collectively analyzing the data. Personal coding of data provided a means of triangulating data and increased the credibility of the findings (O'Halloran et al., 2012; Walsh & Downe, 2005). As each individual researcher analyzed, coded and checked the process at each phase of synthesis, trustworthiness was increased by inter-rater reliability checks (Walsh & Downe, 2005).

During Phase 2, we determined the interrelated nature of the data collected in the individual studies. During this phase reviewing the emerging themes as a research team triangulated the data. Throughout Phase 2 reciprocal translations occurred in which each study was translated into terms consistent with the other studies and vice versa (Jensen & Allen, 1996; Walsh & Downe, 2005). The research team created categories and higher order categories through discussion and reflection. After we established common codes, we reviewed primary data and findings from each study again in order to assure all themes were accounted for in the analysis (O'Halloran et al., 2012). The recurrence of common themes increased the validity of the group study as well as the individual studies (Walsh & Downe, 2005).

Confirmation of the coding process occurred in phase 3. We analyzed and synthesized common codes by comparing the created categories of each study through reading and discussing the research again as a team. To accomplish the research purposes, we increasingly refined the codes until a clear consensus was reached elucidating "more refined meanings, exploratory theories and new concepts" (Walsh & Downe, 2005, p. 209).

Theoretical Framework

Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) provided a guide for collecting, interpreting and analyzing data regarding the lived experiences of the participants of this study. In SCT religiosity can be seen as a social phenomenon determined by the beliefs of others within specific social and cultural environments and community in which people belong (Clarke, 2009). "Social cognitive theory offers a promising framework within which to understand the mechanisms by which religion exerts its influence" (Fearer, 2004, p. 14).

Social Cognitive Theory views people ontologically as agentic beings influenced by the interplay of three factors: (a) intrapersonal influences, (b) behavior, and (c) environment forces (Bandura, 2012). According to Knowles, Holton, and Swanson (2013), SCT, describes each individual as existing in a life-space. They emphasized that life-space takes into account the unique features the environment brings and how people react to it. In the environment people encounter and manipulate their situations, the people they meet, and also experience "private thoughts, tensions, goals and fantasies that influence their behaviors. As agentic beings, humans are capable of choice and can influence their personal circumstances (Bandura, 2006). Agentic behavior occurs when people intentionally act to influence the events of their lives (Bandura, 2012). People are not just products of their environment who react automatically to environmental stimuli; rather people can alter their behaviors based off

of the ability to recognize the effects of actions and predict the results of those actions (Bandura, 1996, 1999).

Modeling is also significant factor of SCT that relates to our study. Modeling influences agentic behavior and occurs when people learn from the actions of and results obtained by others. Through modeling people can develop personal objectives, values, and lifestyles (Bandura, 1997). Albert Bandura, the father of SCT, connected modeling and other aspects of his theory to religiosity. Religious congregations provide "multiple models of behavior and reinforce lifestyles patterned on them in close associational networks" (Bandura, 2003, p. 171). This theoretical lens was used as the research team analyzed and discussed the lived experiences of the participants. In fact, two of the major themes that evolved from the findings were directly connected to SCT.

Limitations

Creswell (2013) describes how delimitations and limitations are important characteristics of qualitative research in that they "establish boundaries, exceptions, reservations and qualifications inherent in every study" (p. 147). In QMS, biases of the researchers and the participants in the primary studies may be amplified. Using predefined data meant that we could not ask additional questions; neither could we invite additional participants to provide further perspectives. We also could not ask additional questions of the participants to solicit clarifications or derive deeper meanings.

Delimitations

As part of a professional practice doctorate, this QMS was confined to the research of three studies previously conducted by research team members. Limiting the number of studies involved in the meta-synthesis runs the risk of reducing the diversity of

interpretations of the phenomenon (Hoon, 2013). Each of the individual studies we analyzed had unique delimitations related to purposeful sampling strategies. Two of the studies were limited to university students at public and private universities in the Intermountain West. One of the studies investigated educational professions who graduated with doctoral degrees from non-religiously affiliated universities and are now employed within the ranks of academia across the United States. Collectively, the participants of these studies were from three populations within the Mormon faith: (a) undergraduate students currently enrolled at a private, large university sponsored by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS); (b) undergraduate students enrolled at public university in the western United States; (c) educational professionals who completed graduate degrees and are currently employed as education administrators or professors at public universities across the United States.

Findings

Implementing principles of QMS helped us identify emergent themes. We only reported themes common to all three studies and provided accompanying and exemplifying descriptions from the participants. The following themes emerged from the analysis process: (a) tension, (b) community, (c) modeling, and (d) inquiry. Figure 3.2 presents an overview of the themes.

THEME 1	THEME 2	THEME 3	THEME 4
Tension	Community	Modeling	Inquiry
Diverse types of tension existed between religiosity and academia.	A variety of communities within the Mormon religion proved influential during the college years.	Effective role models were found within the LDS and higher education communities.	Serious inquiry stemming from the college experience created opportunities for both religious growth and discord.

Figure 3.2 Findings summary.

Tensions

We identified moments of tension for participants between religiosity and the university experience from the data and findings contained in all three studies. These moments of opposition ranged from naïve partiality to direct disagreement. Tensions were in part related to the social collegiate environment, and curriculum. Through these tensions, which will be described, participants remained committed to their educational and professional pursuits. These straining moments, at times, led to a reexamination of religious beliefs that, in turn, helped redefine, and deepen commitment to religiosity for the participants.

One undergraduate student, Melissa, struggled to connect her religious beliefs and behaviors with the ideological aspects of higher education. Her belief in God was challenged by the perceptions of an atheist science teacher. She explained,

> He didn't actually…bash about people believing in God, but you knew where he stood, and you didn't talk about religion at all, with that man, ever…He was like, "you can believe that if you want to, but it's ridiculous." Basically, that's what it came down to.

While some resistance was directed broadly toward belief in God, other participants experienced deliberate and focused opposition related specifically to Mormonism. Barbara was a standout volleyball player who on scholarship at a public university. She recalled how her coach would specifically target her and her teammates who shared her religious affiliation. She described the incessant pressure he put on the students to challenge their beliefs. Her coach had read Mormon literature and often questioned, "Why do you believe this?" and "Why do you do that?" Although he interviewed others, it seemed that he targeted the LDS students in one-on-one interviews. Barbara related that he reiterated carefully, "Well, why do you do this?" Barbara said she felt he was disingenuous and that he really did not care. She felt his motive was to test their beliefs. She explained, "It was really weird. He ruined my whole experience…" He encouraged the team to "try everything before you can believe it," she said. When he challenged the LDS students about the church's health code he chided them with questions about why, "why don't you drink?" Barbara said that the best she could do was answer, "We don't drink." He would say, "You can't believe it without trying it, without trying other stuff." Barbara said she tried to argue, but the best come-back she had was, "Nope, this is just what we do; this is just what we do." And, she said, "I didn't have a good reason." This caused Barbara to question her beliefs and in her second year of college she said, "I did have a lot harder time just because it was just too much." She did not only question her beliefs, but, she questioned, "everything in my life," and said, "you start to have those doubts."

For Daniel, an undergraduate student from a public university, his faith was challenged from a professor of English. Because the community where the university is located has a large LDS population, Daniel felt the professor was purposefully challenging

the LDS faith by deliberately conducting classroom discussions that conflicted with Daniel's religious beliefs and standards. He explained that his professor was "kind of rough," and the tone of the class was edgy. He went on to explain, "He [the professor] didn't ever say anything specifically about the church other than that one of his ex-wives had been a member of the church." The professor, according to Daniel, was bent on "attack[ing] everything that we believed in and would often bring up sexual references that came out of the poetry or stories." He saw the professor "lure kids into debate with him and then embarrass them." He said that he would go home "feeling pretty low—feeling like you're nothing." Daniel noticed the affect this was having on a fellow classmate who was also LDS. This student ended up dropping the class. The classmate later told Daniel, "about two weeks after mid-terms… [I] just couldn't handle that kind of environment."

Similar to Daniel, Steven, a respected scholar, experienced opposition to his faith from a professor during undergraduate schooling. He remembered a Harvard professor telling him in a private conversation, "I hope you know that many people around here think Mormonism is garbage." This comment prompted Steven to explore further and analyze his beliefs deeper. After confirming his faith within himself, he was determined to find a way to thoughtfully articulate his religious worldview in a scholarly manner that the Harvard elite would respect and understand. He studied controversial topics and posed questions to himself about his beliefs. He tried to anticipate questions from peers and professors, and then sought answers that would perhaps appease their curiosity and criticism.

Later during his professional career at another university, Steven reflected on a conversation with a colleague, partially responsible for hiring him, who expressed concerns

about his religiosity. His experience revealed a negative predisposition toward his research regarding the LDS faith, as opposed to a direct challenge:

> As we were driving along to the lunch place, I was just making conversation and I said casually that I was working on a biography of Joseph [Smith]…He stopped the car and pulled over to the curb and looked at me. He was driving and touched my arm and said "We took all that into account, and decided it didn't matter." So that was one sign and then when I got to Columbia, he was taking me from office to office and introducing me to the faculty. There was this guy, a distinguished historian from India and he says, "Oh yes, you are the Mormon."

During our analysis we also noted the tensions created by college curriculum and pedagogy, which was perceived by participants as being in opposition to their religious beliefs. Frank, another undergraduate student from a public university, who was seeking a degree in nursing, described an experience when a specific course curriculum caused him to question his beliefs. He struggled to reconcile Biblical teachings concerning creation and the origin of the human species as posited in Darwin's theory of evolution:

> About a year ago I was in a Biology 101 class, and we were going over evolution…and the teacher talked quite a bit about evolution and how we came from single cell organisms.…[He] went really in depth about evolution and how we came from apes, and so on and so forth. And that totally brought back everything I had been taught about Adam and Eve and the creation. So, I would say that my faith was a little bit shaken….Really, I knew where I had come from with Adam and Eve, but science is telling me it's like this, and this is how it happened. So for me, at least for a

> while, it was kind of hard to actually take both of them….To actually understand them both at the same time. So I would say that my faith was a little shaken up.

While some participants struggled with curriculum challenges, others recognized social tension between religiosity and the prevailing moral environment. For Debbie, there was a time at the public university when she distanced herself for a brief period from core standards expected of her faith. In order to fit in with peers, she began drinking alcohol and stopped attending religious services. Another public university student, Paul, quit attending religious services because, "I am a college student now, they act like this."

Students at a church-sponsored university were not shielded from tensions between academic learning and religious beliefs. However, in contrast with the participants who did not attend an LDS university, the opposition came from less religiously committed peers as opposed to academic professors and curriculum. Kelsey, who was completing a degree in English at a church-sponsored university reported, "I kind of just expected to be protected from everything, and I still found a lot of opposition." She went on to describe a difficult dating relationship with a religiously apathetic young man who frequently challenged her religiosity. In addition, Keith found being a student at an LDS university had unique challenges: "It's easy to be a Mormon here and it's hard too just because everyone is LDS but not necessarily with standards like they should. So, sometimes…that can be difficult." The challenge to maintain religious standards of conduct at a church-sponsored university were captured by McKenzie, a mathematics major, who explained how attending an LDS university may also make it easier to abandon religious behaviors for a time: "I think it's just easier to justify yourself…when it's predominantly LDS."

The lived experiences of these participants demonstrate multiple tensions that may occur as religiously committed individuals become immersed in the university environment. Other themes emerged as participants described their efforts to maintain their religiosity and reconcile the tensions between religiosity and university life.

Community

Another emergent theme we observed was the use and influence of the religious community by participants. This community occupied a significant role as the interviewees worked through the tensions between their academic experience and their religiosity. College attending Mormons are embedded in a religious system with various sub-communities that influenced religiosity in students during the formative years of young adulthood and appeared to assist the participants in maintaining their religious beliefs. Edward, an undergraduate student attending a public university captured the supportive nature these numerous communities provided him:

> I have an army of people to talk to. I go to church, I go to meetings, I go to the temple, and I just associate with those kinds of people. I can talk to almost anyone at any time about something that's bothering me and that group of people will help me see the better side of things.

We recognized several religious communities within the LDS faith that provided resources to help students as they struggled with a variety of college challenges, including tensions between religiosity and college life. Three prominent communities within Mormonism emerged from participant interviews: the family, the ward (i.e., a congregation organized by geographical boundaries), and the institute.

According to some of the participants, the LDS institute provided an environment of safety, friendship, and doctrinal instruction that often mediated the unique challenges participants encountered during their college years. LDS institutes are religious education programs for 18-30 year-old college students located in buildings adjacent to many public universities across the United States (Seminaries and Institutes of Religion, 2013). For multiple participants, institute was a place to increase understanding and resolve conflicts when they experienced tensions between religiosity and academia.

One way Angie, a student attending a public university in the Intermountain West, resolved ideological tensions created by her college coursework was by seeking help from religious educators. She expressed, "If I have questions, I go to them for answers." For Barbara, another college student interested in friends with similar values, institute provided an environment that helped young people identify "who was LDS on campus." Such thoughts reflect the interests of Paul, who also desired to "be around a lot of people with the same values." Participants felt being around people with similar religious beliefs and behaviors provided positive reinforcement for maintaining religiosity. Additionally, Barbara found institute provided a proxy family for her. This was particularly meaningful to her since she was currently living far away from her own family. This sense of family provided an escape from the pressures felt from her college volleyball coach who questioned and challenged her beliefs. She recalled how the "institute director would bring his wife and kids with him. I really liked that. It made you feel like you had family. It kind of joined us together. Institute gave you a chance to get away."

The ward community was a source of strength and support for handling the diverse challenges of university life for many participants. Melissa, a mother returning for her

baccalaureate degree, was experiencing a difficult time as her spouse began to suffer from major health problems. She was distant from her and her husband's families and any familiar support networks. She indicated a closeness she felt to others in the church who became her "new" family of support—she relied on them and they relied on her. Melissa explained how they built each other during their challenges. During her husband's sickness other church members said to her, "Okay we're going to take care of your kids on this day. We're going to bring you a meal on this day. What else can we do?" It was a boost for Melissa and her husband. It was particularly humbling for her when she realized those helping had bigger problems than she was experiencing. One ward member who helped her had a baby in the hospital struggling with an illness. She expressed that those times were "really tough," but given the support, they grew closer.

Leaders in the ward community helped Debbie maintain her religiosity during a difficult moment in college. As described earlier. She found her religiosity being challenged and weakened due to pressures from other college students to conform to behaviors, which contradicted her religious standards. She began going to bars with her roommates and acting in ways that were against the standards of her religiosity. When confronted with the consequences of her choices and a desire to maintain her faith and standards she found it helpful to frequently meet with ecclesiastical leaders. These leaders helped her to "make sure I was on track or if I slipped up they would be like alright, well let's meet weekly."

In addition to institute and the ward, participants across the three studies indicated that family relationships were beneficial when dealing with challenges at college. In reference to maintaining her religiosity during difficult moments of her undergraduate experience, Debbie related, "I learned that my mom is my best friend and I set this new thing

that if I can't tell my mom about it then I shouldn't be doing it. So, I would call her every day."

The theme of the family is also evident in the choice for many Mormons to marry during their college experience. Being married during the college experience appeared to remove participants from many of the social pressures that challenged the religiosity of other participants. David, as a post-graduate student, found that "the fact that I was married, of course took me out of a lot of the social environments, I didn't hang out with college kids. The only ones that we hung out with as couples would be mostly church members." Jason, another married participant attending the church-sponsored university, noticed how being married helped him "focus on my school work a lot better." Keith, also attending the church-sponsored university, enjoyed the fact he was married because he no longer felt the pressure to socialize and find dates. He considered doing homework together as a both bonding and a time saver.

The family, ward, and institute communities provided participants with supportive and educational environments that appeared to assist with the tensions of college life. Each of these communities was described as environments where participants could find relief from stress, reorient themselves, and be reinforced in their religiosity.

Speaking of an influential religious community in his life, Steven, a university professor, believed, that everybody should have access to a community of support to help others preserve faith in secular settings. Steven believed that staying in touch with believers was the most important thing a college study can do. Recognizing the social nature of faith development and preservation was also seen in the comments of Frank, an undergrad nursing student, found it hard to keep his faith in classes. But, he explained that it was a help to him

to talk with others who shared his beliefs and ask the "tough questions." He expressed concern about falling away from the church, but also enjoyed the benefit of having someone he could trust and rely on.

Despite the many benefits of living within a supportive religious community, some participants felt constrained by various cultural aspects of the community. Failing to live up to cultural behavioral norms and patterns, whether real or perceived, was difficult for some participants. In one Mormon gathering, Angie, an undergraduate student who transferred from the LDS private university to a public university, didn't feel she "fit the mold" of the LDS university. She viewed herself as "a little off colored from the rest of the cookie cutter [members]." Another female participant in the study, Jill, explained that despite cultural pressures for Mormon women, such as not working outside the home and maintaining a picture-perfect family appearance, there are many different ways to be faithful and happy in the church. She sees the diversity of talents among believers and the abilities they brought as they worked together. The church expresses a need to be united as members in many ways, but Jill finds that sometimes members get confused about what it means to be united. She is concerned that many members are cut out of a "cookie-cutter mold" and loose their identity. She argued,

> I actually think that that creates of lot of frustration among women in the church. If you asked women about this, you would actually find that a lot of the ones that look like they adhere to this traditional mold, some of them are very happy doing that, but I think that a lot of them are frustrated because they feel like they have to and they feel like they're not getting, you know they're not as happy as they think they should be either.

While some found aspects of these communities suffocating because of expectations to express their faith in a particular or limited manner, the overall observation was that family, ward, and institute provided participants with communities of safety and reinforcement during their college years. Religious communities are made up of individuals who believe in common ideals and can assist members who are struggling to maintain beliefs and behaviors valued by others. The individuals in these communities not only provided support for participants but also were viewed by participants as influential models.

Modeling

The concept of modeling was frequently illustrated in the experiences of participants as they looked to and learned from specific members of their community. Modeling occurred in multiple settings. The LDS ward was a rich source of models for many of the interviewees. Jill, an Ivy League economics professor, reflecting on her experience as an undergraduate student, enjoyed observing members of her faith who were influential in the academe, community, and politics. She specifically named Mitt Romney, a candidate for the United States presidency, who was, at the time, a stake president; Clayton Christiansen, author of "The Innovator's Solution," and a host of other business books and also considered as one of the best business minds in the nation; and Kim Clark, the Dean of Harvard Business school who later because the president of Brigham Young University-Idaho. She was also among a host of other political, academic, economic and academic leaders.

She went on to emphasize, "It was an amazing experience to go to church every week and to talk to these people and hear them. They have such strong testimonies." These individuals provided Jill a model of academic achievement and religious devotion. She found in these individuals examples of academic and religious excellence. Today Jill has a number

of educational and religious responsibilities that give her opportunities to mirror the influential examples she looked to years ago.

Paul, a chemistry major at a public university in the Intermountain West, expressed how he looked up to his church leaders even saying that he "adored them." He along with Debbie, Daniel and Frank described the value of counseling with church leaders about the challenges of college life and looked to them as sources of inspiration and guidance. Steven, an American history professor, valued the suggestions and guidance of church leaders. He described the modeling experience of growing up in an LDS ward and being influenced by members of the faith when they would "stand up [in church] and bear their souls about what they were going through." He continued, "It meant a lot to me because I was a teenager going through my anguishes, and to see other people have anguishes and were struggling, was very helpful for me." Currently, Steven's transparent nature of writing and speaking provides members of the church with a potential model for thoughtfully considering religious beliefs.

We noticed that modeling for participants was not just limited to the influence of those living. Historical figures also provided models of faith. When Jill was asked how she balances the tensions of being a highly educated academic professional with being a mother of two children in their teens, she drew upon the example of a church member she had recently learned about. She summarized the experience of Ellis Reynolds Shipp, a Latter-day Saint woman in the 1870s. Shipp explained the Brigham Young, a leader of the LDS church at the time, expressed concern that there were not enough women doctors. Ellis Shipp traveled to Philadelphia to attend medical school, which at that time was three years long. She was married, she had two kids at home, and her third child was delivered the day after

the last final exam of her second year. The rest of her story was very inspirational for Jill who explained,

> [Ellis Shipp] went back to Salt Lake and started practicing as a midwife's physician. Over the course of the next 50 years she delivered around 50,000 babies. She also started a school to train others and trained more than 500 other physicians, [male and female].

An undergraduate student, David, related another type of historical modeling. He felt that scripture (i.e., sacred text considered authoritative by religious traditions) provided patterns, which could be followed during any time of life, not just in college. Specifically, David felt that a habit of regular scripture study not only prepped him for college, but also for life because the scriptures provided a model for dealing with challenges associated with university life. David explained, "With the struggles that come with college…if you have a foundation in the scriptures then you likely have a relationship with God and then you're self-sufficient."

Others found helpful examples in the LDS institute community. Barbara, who dealt with a volleyball coach who attacked her faith daily, found a religious educator that helped her through a difficult time. Barbara praised the faith of her Institute director. She noted, "It was his faith that got me through a lot of my challenges." He answered her tough questions and "wasn't afraid to say what needed to be said."

Others influenced Frank, an undergraduate student, in the institute setting. There he found peers and professional educators who could help him when his faith was contradicted by what he was learning in a biology class. He explained that institute provided a classroom setting with other LDS students who could help him as he asked difficult questions. Not only

did he receive answers in this setting but also he learned how the other students resolved similar issues. Karen, an English professor, found during her undergraduate experience a number of teachers that she could identify with that became models of thinking and believing that helped her feel there was a place for her in the religion during a time when her faith was being challenged. Drawing upon her experiences, Karen asserts the importance that "Mormon kids need a place where they can ask the great questions of faith and have adult role models…."

Debbie, a college undergraduate student, and other participants, suggested providing models in religious education courses to help younger students with the challenges of being in college. She thought it would be a good idea to have successful religiously committed college students come to high school religious education courses. The concept of modeling was captured in her explanation for why she thought this type of modeling would be beneficial. She explained:

> I really looked up to people in college, they were almighty, they were in college…if you know those people still have trials but they rely on the Lord to help them through, then it's like wow [*sic*], it can help me. Or, "They pray, I want to pray, I want to know what they are getting from that." You look up to people so if you just copy what they do in those situations than you get the same result as them.

Modeling did not come solely from the religious community. Prior to attending UCLA, Karen was inspired by the "excellent role models" in her honors program she experience at BYU in Provo, Utah. They were "rigorous thinkers." Seeing people who could ask tough questions and who also "seemed to be assured in their faith" was a positive modeling experience for her. She added, "I had these role models all around me of people I

knew who had thought these things through…There are lots of ways to sort out how to be a believing, thinking person." This comment by Karen leads into another theme, which emerged, from the lived experiences of the students and professors.

Inquiry

Rigorous thinking, a trait valued in higher education, at times was a concern for participants. In particular, the young adults who were in college during the interviews experienced tension when their religiosity was exposed to the rigorous thinking and religious opposition of certain professors. As mentioned earlier, Daniel, a 23-year-old Bio-Med Science student recalled an undergraduate English class where the professor's purpose was to "tear down everything we believed in so that we could build ourselves back up and see things more objectively." He went on to describe the instructor as, "a very good debater who would often would lure kids into debates with him and then embarrass them. He would constantly want people to ask questions, and then he would just belittle them." Although Daniel struggled at times with his faith as a result of these questions and discussions, he concluded, "I felt like the class, in the end, was good. I feel like my faith is stronger because I've heard his points."

Angie, a 25-year-old nursing major, also recognized the value of considering opposing views in class even though those views caused tension. She acknowledged, "Questions [from professors] are a good thing . . . Being able to think about things has strengthened my own testimony." Participants in these studies frequently shared experiences with opposition to their faith in the college experience that led them to deeply examine and strengthen their faith.

Although Daniel and Angie felt inquiry strengthened their faith in the end, other interviewees felt inhibited when questioning their beliefs in certain religious communities. Frank, a 26-year-old nursing student described how growing up in the church he felt there was a negative attitude toward anyone who expressed doubts about their testimony: "You're either 100% or you're nothing. And if you ever had doubts, it wasn't acceptable to say it." Karen also felt these stifling effects of a Mormon community. She described how some communities are "really hospitable to being a thinking-progressive Mormon...and some places are less." During college Karen "saw areas of inquiry around hot-button issues where it was really rocky in institutional LDS spaces to be pursuing those lines of inquiry." For her, "what's far more difficult is push back in a place that's supposed to be home." Kelsey remembers "thinking it was really bad to ask questions when I was little." She used to wonder, "Am I supposed to question that? Is that not okay to ask that question?"

The importance of asking questions and being willing to think deeply about one's religion were noted particularly by the academic professionals who seemed more comfortable and confident asking difficult questions concerning their beliefs. A common quality each of these professors shared was a willingness to examine their religion in a thoughtful way without fearing the "tough questions."

Steven recalled a conversation early on in his college experience where a mentor and professor warned him of perceptions from others who viewed his religion as "foolish garbage." Steven notes that this professor "was preparing me for my next step, which would be to outgrow my childhood religion and to go on to something more mature." Steven learned later on that it wasn't religion in general, but rather "naïve religion, unquestioned

religion" that bothered many at the university. He recalls, "They wanted people to be critical and thoughtful about their own religious belief."

Steven went on to describe how he developed the ability to inquire deeply into his religion in order to better articulate his beliefs to others:

> I've always asked questions, but it was not like questions of doubt, it was questions of inquiry. I'm always having to formulate an answer explaining why I believe what I do in terms that my Harvard classmates would understand. It's really Harvard that I am speaking to in my internal dialogues…This is how I lived my life to answer these questions. Not just ones that were posed by someone, but ones that I posed myself every time I had a belief I had to find some way of stating it that it would make sense to that imaginary Harvard intellectual.

David, a physics professor described how he has become comfortable and confident inquiring into areas where religiosity and scientific knowledge intersect. He found that the antidote for knowledge is confusing and challenging is to gain more knowledge. He chided, "it's certainly not running away from it…." David explained a number of times his faith was troubled, but his solution was to "learn more and try to figure them out." The more he studied and found, the stronger his faith grew.

David was not the only professor who offered advice to aspiring college students who are religiously committed. Like David, Steven strongly expressed the need to ask "all" questions on "every" issue. Not talking was a problem in Steven's eyes. He urges believers to talk it out when they run into a question or problem that is threatening or challenging and not "run away," or "go around or to conceal." Steven encouraged courageously running "right into the middle of it, and think about what is the problem here?" It's from that space the

answer can be pursued with vigor and a solution is found. Sometimes it takes patience, as Steven noted, “even with the most difficult questions, sooner or later, you begin to get some light on what’s going on and then you’re much better off.”

John, a professor, offers some insight into why college educated Mormons can wrestle with their beliefs, but in the end be strengthened by the struggle, “I think that the [Mormon religion] appeals to the intellect. It answers more questions. It just literally does. The gospel is remarkably open.” Freedom to explore and embrace knowledge in various dimensions including a strong emphasis by church leaders regarding the importance of receiving secular education was an appealing aspect of Mormonism for these scholars.

Karen like the other LDS scholars in this study has become very confident that her religious beliefs can withstand rigorous inquiry. She asserted, “Our faith is so capable of cosmic thinking it is not a fragile theology.”

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore the higher education and religiosity experience of religiously committed academic professionals and college students in order to better understand the link between religiosity and higher education and assist those desiring to maintain their religiosity during the college experience. We observed how the university environment created moments of tension for religiously committed students and academic professionals. This tension often became a catalyst for a reappraisal of religiosity for the participants. As suggested by multiple scholars (Bowman & Small, 2011; Hill, 2011; Regnerus & Elder, 2003a) the college years are often a time and place for religious reexamination. For many in these studies, these tensions led to a reevaluation of religious beliefs and commitment, and in the end increased religious belief and commitment. For some

participants, these tensions led to diminished religiosity for a time while beliefs were reconsidered. However, in accord with Hill's (2009) findings, the relinquishing of religiosity was not long-term for these individuals.

The analytical nature of the college experience was a source of tension and growth. These findings are of particular interest in light of several recent studies (Baumard & Boyer, 2013; Gervais, 2013; Ritter, Preston, & Hernandez, 2013; Zuckerman, Silberman, & Hall, 2013) that suggest religiosity is negatively influenced by critical and analytical thinking. It may be true that many believers experience what Gervais and Norenzayan (2012) described: "Analytic thinking strategies might be one potent source of religious disbelief" (p. 493). The argument that analytical thinking skills reduced peoples' inclination to say they believed in God is certainly strong and there is much evidence to support this claim. In contrast to these assertions, we observed, in these select cases, serious inquiry became an intellectual tool to develop higher order thinking skills that often led to religious reexamination and increased levels of religious commitment.

It is commonly understood that challenging and threatening ideas—ideas that oppose current assumptions, beliefs, cultures, and systems—may create strife and discord. Among believers, asking difficult questions about religious beliefs and behaviors has a way of generating stress among the participants. However, Stark (1998) asserts that for a religious movement to succeed, it must maintain a medium level of tension with its surrounding environment. Stark (1998) further claimed that high or low levels of tension would likely minimize the growth of religious movements. Tension produced by the intersection of academia and religiosity may be one reason educational achievement is positively correlated with high levels of religiosity in the LDS community (Smith, 2011). Due to social and

ideological cultures found in higher education, the participants experienced tension. A number of factors appeared to help participants balance tension levels so that participants could reexamine their beliefs without abandoning them. One of the key factors in maintaining an optimal level of tension between religiosity and environment was the religious community.

It appeared to us that challenges to participant religiosity were often moderated through involvement in one of the multiple Mormon sub-communities. The participants' descriptions of the role of religious community support the theory posited by Merrill et al. (2003) that belonging to the LDS church strengthened religious belief in the importance of obtaining as much education as possible. Albrecht and Heaton (1984) also hypothesized that commitment to religious community and educational community developed skills mutually benefiting individuals in both environments. According to Harvard historian Thatcher-Ulrich (2009), Latter-day Saints have proven successful in their "ability to create communities out of people who have nothing in common" where people "learn to be brothers and sisters and take care of each other and live together" (p. 104). The role of religious community was highlighted in the experience of multiple participants and appeared to influence the lives of participants as they managed the challenges of university life.

Religious communities provided an environment where participants could associate with individuals from a variety of backgrounds who have come to share common values and beliefs concerning religiosity and education. Sociologists refer to these types of religious communities as "sheltered enclaves" (Smith, Emerson, Gallagher, Kennedy & Sikkink, 1998, p. 67), which serve as a protection for members "from the undermining effects of modernity" (p. 68). McFarland et al. (2011) used the phrase "closed network communities" to describe

religious organizations that, “shelter individuals from exposure to challenging beliefs, lifestyles, and worldviews” (p. 3). Like McFarland (2010), we observed how the closed network nature of a religious community is integral for preserving religiosity among members. Although these closed-network communities provided a level of protection and support for some participants, others found the community stifling to religious growth as a result of its limited exposure to the surrounding environment. Balancing the protective nature of the religious community with openness to university thoughts and experiences seemed essential in providing the participants with optimal opportunities for intellectual growth while maintaining religiosity. Our observations concur with the theory articulated by Stark (1998), who argued that religious movements “succeed to the extent that they sustain strong internal attachments, while remaining an open social network, able to maintain and form ties to outsiders” (p. 47).

For many participants, religious community was not only a means of support but also a source from which members could observe role models for balancing the tensions between religiosity and the college environment. Modeling is a concept closely related to the religious community. Bandura (2003) saw religious congregations as sources of examples for living or modeling. The congregations provide “multiple models of behavior and reinforce lifestyles patterned on them in close associational networks” (Bandura, 2003, p. 171). Kang and Romo (2011) found that more time spent in church activities, such as attending religious services and church sponsored youth activities, was associated with stronger mentoring or modeling relationships. As people see models face adversity or challenges, such as those faced by college students, it encourages them to persevere in accomplishing difficult tasks or adopting behaviors they have not already adopted (Bandura, 2003).

The findings of this QMS suggest that modeling was benefited the participants in multiple ways and on multiple levels. Besides modeling from individuals with whom the participants interacted in their religious and educational communities, historic models influenced the interviewees. Bandura (1999) acknowledged the connection between historical texts and modeling. People generally experience symbols through external social sources such as media, books, and hearing stories. "Through the medium of symbols, people give structure, meaning and continuity to their experiences" (Bandura, 1999, p. 27). In this way people obtain modeling. Historical texts provide stories and models of behavior by which people can pattern their lives (Bandura, 2003). The religious community provided forms of modeling that assisted participants as they maintained religiosity while seeking degrees in higher education.

Implications for Future Research

Understanding the phenomenon of Mormon religiosity and higher education is far from being complete. We recommend that future research on higher education and religiosity within the Mormon community address the following:

- The college students and graduates who did leave the religion. What was their relationship with the LDS community during college?
- Examining the influence of an LDS mission on the educational experience. How was the college experience different pre- and post-mission for both men and women?
- Capturing the female perspective within Mormonism. How do they wrestle with the tension of family life, education and a professional career?

- What role does the church play in fostering educational achievement in less educated members of the faith?

Conclusion and Implications for Practice

What factors influence the preservation of religiosity in college students and academic professionals? We recognized some key answers in the lived experiences of participants as we combined, analyzed and synthesized the data of three studies through QMS. A common thread among the studies was the participant's attitudes and perceptions about the importance of belonging to a supportive religious community when encountering tension between the university environment and religiosity. The religious community was most beneficial for these participants when it provided modeling and encouraged thoughtful inquiry.

Implications from this study would suggest that religiosity may be diminished in college students when the religious tension provided by the university experience is not accompanied by (a) a supportive religious community, (b) a variety of role models within the religious community, (c) a religious community open to inquiry and reevaluation.

As noted earlier, members of this research team are religious educators for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Each of us has an interest in providing a religious education for future and current college students. From our experience with this research, religious education is intended to complement the secular education students receive in secondary and post-secondary schools. Analysis of three related studies has caused us to consider the following questions concerning our professional practices:

- How do religious educators help students thoughtfully examine, understand, and articulate their religious beliefs and behaviors to secular communities?

- How do religious educators help students develop an inquiring disposition that would assist them in educational and religious settings?
- To what extent should religious educators introduce sensitive information to students?
- Should religious education be settings where students resolve tensions they have experienced outside of religious education or should they be settings where the instructor helps students experience religious tensions?

Religious communities (family, institute, ward) within Mormonism provided college students and professors with means for managing the intersection of academia and religiosity. These communities provided assistance to students in times of social and intellectual distress. In these religious communities, interviewees observed patterns of living and thinking that impacted their college experience and religious devotion. For the individuals in this study, the religious community provided college students safe places to gather during their educational experience and appeared most successful when populated with diverse models for students to learn from and be influenced by. These participants valued religious communities that were willing to acknowledge and address sincere inquiry concerning religious beliefs and practices.

As students began to engage in the analytical emphasis of higher education, they recognized an aspect of the buffering nature of the religious community that adversely impacted their experience. These participants felt the closed-network culture of the religious communities in some instances stifled religious observance and kept participants from seriously questioning aspects of their faith. In contrast, when encouraged and supported by the religious community the questioning culture of higher education often led to a deepening of religious beliefs as challenges from peers and colleagues demanded thoughtful

examination and articulation of beliefs. The favorable relationship between higher education and religiosity for these LDS college students existed when individuals connected with influential models and had access to other community resources that allowed them to reevaluate their religiosity within a safe, supportive, and open environment.

Community, modeling, and inquiry offer understanding into what resources LDS college students have available to them as they attempt to maintain their faith while attending college. The need for further research into the relationship concerning religiosity and higher education remains evident. Mayrl and Oeur (2009) stated, "while there has been increased scholarly interest in religion on campus in recent years, the amount of high-quality research remains low relative to the scope and urgency of the debates" (p. 272). The question of how one's religiosity influences and is influenced by the higher education experience is as important as it is far reaching. Although this study provides a number of thoughts and experiences focused on understanding the religiosity-education relationship, there remains a number of questions to be asked and answers to be discovered.

Outside of our the professional practice settings, parents and ecclesiastical leaders concerned with maintaining religiosity in higher education may recognize value of the findings and questions communicated in this study. University administrators may also have an interest in these findings. According to Braskamp (2007), "Colleges will only succeed in effectively fostering truly holistic development when faculty address the issues of meaning, purpose, religious, spiritual and moral growth along with academic learning in the classroom and in their relationships with students" (p. 7). The face and function of higher education in America has experienced a fundamental transformation from the clergy producing, religion-sponsoring institutions of the Colonial Era to the, arguably, secularizing universities of today.

While some argue that secularization in university settings has taken a toll on the religiosity of young adults (Sloan, 1994; Smith 1990), others argue that the intersection of religiosity with higher education catalyzes a reexamination of religious beliefs and behaviors but does not lead to an abandonment of beliefs (Lee 2002; Pascaraella & Terenzini, 2005). Leaders and members of the LDS religious tradition should not feel threatened by secular education but rather continue to find ways to utilize the educational experience of its members to nurture younger generations and serve the needs of a larger community. As religious and educational communities combine efforts, their capacity to produce influential and informed individuals concerned with meeting the local and global needs of humanity may be enhanced.

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CHAPTER 4: TEACHING CONSIDERATIONS FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATORS

Introduction

There is no doubt that college influences a student's worldview—their *Weltanschauung* (Hill, 2011; Scheitle, 2011). The intellectual and social cultures of college campuses have the potential to profoundly re-orient a student's worldviews. It is interesting to note the diverse influences college cultures have on a student's religious worldviews (Smith, 2011). While some worldviews are framed by the philosophies and theories derived by seminal scholars, others shaped by the teachings of a religious tradition. Worldviews are malleable and evolve. Some college students might resist new ideas that challenge their worldview while others embrace them or may even assume an eclectic posture and attempt to merge them. Because of my profession as a religious educator, and by following the call for more focused research on specific denominations (Maryl & Ouer, 2009; McFarland, 2010), I inquired into the preservation of religiosity—beliefs and practices—of members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day saints (LDS) who have studied, researched, and were currently employed as professors in the university setting.

To better understand the dynamic relationship between higher education and religiosity among the LDS members, I combined my inquiry with a two other religious educators employed by the Church Education System (CES). These two other studies added other perspectives into my inquiry by investigating the challenges LDS students have in preserving religiosity while attending college as undergraduate students. These two studies investigated the lived experiences and attitudes of university students from the northwestern United States, and while my study focused on professors of various disciplines throughout the country at both private and public universities, the other two focused on students

currently attending college at both a private and public university. Altogether, a pilot study, two focus groups, and 19 semi-structured interviews were conducted. Fourteen of the interviews involved undergraduate students attending either a public university or religious privately owned university. The other five interviewees were LDS professors teaching at public and Ivy League universities throughout the United States. These interviews captured the perspectives of religiously committed (self-identified) undergraduate students and professional educators representing a diversity of backgrounds, experiences, and disciplines.

Following a review of the research on the relationship of higher education and religiosity in this white paper, specific considerations and implications for practice among religious educators will be offered. Each consideration is based upon previous research conducted on religiosity and higher education as well as the findings from the individual and group research of team members.

With the three studies a qualitative secondary analysis (QSA) was performed. The combined research provided insight about (a) preserving religious beliefs and practices amidst challenge and tensions experienced during college, (b) the influence higher education had on participant religiosity, and (c) possible implications of practice for religious educators.

The purpose of this white paper is to provide important information to stakeholders that may influence the decisions and directions of their organization (Doerr, 1971; Kantor, 2009; Stelzner, 2007). This paper is designed to provide *The Religious Educator* and its audience with a t review of the current and past research conducted on religiosity and educational attainment and to offer recommendations for religious educators in higher education. The *Religious Educator* is a scholarly journal dedicated to serving the needs and

interests of those who study and teach in the Church Education System (CES) of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS).

Questions Worth Asking

Karen, currently an English professor in southern California, as a new college student had received a full-ride academic scholarship to Brigham Young University (BYU) in Provo, Utah. She struggled in the transition from her life in southern California to the constraining spiritual and intellectual climate of a church-sponsored university. She was conscious of and involved in the tension surrounding controversial topics like evolution, feminism, and homosexuality. She remembered how "in southern California the *us versus them*" was an inter-religious conflict, but when she came to Utah that changed: "I was *the them" a*nd the people and institutions of the church were the them, "and that was very strange." Karen's views on challenging topics brought opposition and confrontation from church leaders. Over time she had learned from religious opposition to "adapt to the outside world" but found the push back "far more difficult…in a place that's supposed to be home."

Karen was not alone in these feelings. Frank, a current nursing student in southeast Idaho, described how, as a lifelong member of the LDS church, he sensed a negative attitude toward anyone who expressed doubts about their faith: "You're either 100% or you're nothing. And if you ever had doubts, it wasn't acceptable to say it."

Jill and Frank's experiences with religious education provided the research team an opportunity as religious educators in LDS church to ask and reflect upon important questions related to our profession. The primary mission statement (see Appendix D) guiding educators at Brigham Young University-Idaho is to strengthen religious belief and commitment in

students based upon the teachings of the LDS faith. The following questions are intended as a starting place in considering implications of practice for religious educators in CES:

- How can teachers in religious education effectively counsel and guide students with questions and concerns on sensitive and often difficult religious subjects?
- How is religious learning and secular learning similar and different? What should religiously committed students understand about each process of knowledge acquisition?
- How can students best manage the tension between the knowledge from religious and academic models that appears to be contradictory in nature?
- What can be learned from college educated individuals who have been able to balance their secular knowledge with their religious faith?

These professional practice questions were not a part of the original questions addressed in the three related studies on Mormons and higher education but were used in reflecting upon possible professional practice implications.

Education and Religiosity

Religiosity is a "multifaceted" word describing a person's "religious identification, religious attachment, religious behavior and religious beliefs" (Solt, Hable, & Grant, 2011, p. 447). In the development of the modern university, religion was viewed skeptically and became less apart of the standard academic culture (Hill, 2011; McFarland, Wright, & Weakliem, 2010; Scheitle, 2011). The French philosopher and historian Alexis de Tocqueville (1840) noted in *Democracy in America* how, "The philosophers of the eighteenth century explained in a very simple manner the gradual decay of religious faith. Religious zeal, said they, must necessarily fail the more generally liberty is established and

knowledge diffused" (p. 319). Many of the influential social thinkers of the 19th century observed the resistance and rejection to religious beliefs and institutions. Augusta Comte, Herbert Spencer, Max Weber, Karl Marx, and Sigmund Freud believed religion would eventually cease to exist as society became more economically and intellectually developed (Norris & Inglehart, 2011). Specifically, Freud (1918) viewed religion as a man-made attempt to "get control over the sensory world, in which we are placed by means of the wish-world" and that religion was a temporary possession of the evolving human race that "the civilized individual must pass through on his way from childhood to maturity" (p. 4). Similarly, Augusta Comte (1891) stated, "Religion is an illusion of childhood, outgrown under proper education" (as cited in Noyes, 1906, p. 360).

The theories of these philosophers were captured in a document called The Humanist Manifesto. The Humanist Manifesto was first published in 1933. The document was revised in 1973 and again in 2003 adding materials that affirmed and strengthened the first. Manifesto I (1933) proclaims, "religious forms and ideas of our fathers [are] no longer adequate" for governing society. Manifesto II (1973) further articulates the secular article of faith: "We believe, however, that traditional dogmatic or authoritarian religions that place revelation, God, ritual, or creed above human needs and experience do a disservice to the human species" (p. 3). Collectively, hundreds of educational leaders from science and government endorsed the documents with their signatures (Shultz, 2002). Signers include prominent philosophers such as John Dewey, B.F. Skinner, Isaac Asimov, and Julian Huxley. The manifesto has since guided public education policy and has spread its influence across the world.

Although these philosophies have penetrated education policy and influenced curriculum and instruction, it is interesting to note how these ideals have influenced undergraduate and graduate student populations. McFarland, et al. (2010), discovered that increased levels of educational attainment "decreased levels of prayer, increased inclination to view the Bible as a book of fables, and decreased inclination to view the Bible as the literal word of God" (p. 166). Other research has shown how the higher education experience decreases belief in the existence of God (Johnson, 1997), decreases belief in the Bible as the word of God (Sherkat, 1998), and also leads to a decrease in belief concerning divine involvement and control (Schieman, 2010) as well as diminishing the frequency of prayer and overall religious commitment (Petersen, 1994).

On the other hand, findings suggest that religious youth are more likely to complete high school and enroll in college (Erickson & Phillips, 2012). Religiously devoted college students spend more time studying and participating in extracurricular activities and less time attending parties (Mooney, 2010). Higher levels of religiosity have also been found to not only improve education outcomes for students but also be positively correlated with "emotional health, more satisfaction in the family, and more voluntarism" (Regnerus, 2003, p. 409). In sorting through these diverse reports on religiosity and academics, scholars have observed and agreed that religious tradition is a significant factor in determining whether higher education increases or decreases student religiosity (Albrecht & Heaton, 1984; Maryl & Oeur, 2009; McFarland, 2010).

Mormons and Higher Education

Sharing similar beliefs as Comte, was the 20th century sociologist O'Dea (1957) who after living and studying among the Mormons, was convinced that "Mormonism's greatest

and most significant problem is its encounter with modern secular thought" (p. 222) and that by "encouraging education and giving it a central place in both its own activities and its world view, Mormonism exposed itself more vulnerable to the danger" (p. 226).

Studies over the past 30 years suggest that individuals belonging to the Mormon religious tradition are unique in their ability to maintain and even deepen aspects of their religious belief and behaviors as a result of obtaining knowledge, training, and employment through higher education. Stott (1983) carried out one of the first studies concerning Mormons and higher education. His study defined and measured four areas of religiosity (i.e., practice, belief, knowledge, experience) among Mormons living in the Greater St. Louis, Missouri area. Results from his research indicated that religious practice, belief, knowledge, and experience increased with educational level and that college educated Latter-day Saints on the whole were more religious that those who never attended college. In hypothesizing about the possible meaning behind these findings, Stott theorized, "Latter-day Saint theology appears to negate the secularizing impact of education by sacralizing it and incorporating it into the total religious milieu" (p. 8).

One year later, Albrecht and Heaton (1984) tested the secularization thesis among college-educated Mormons. The secularization thesis argues that the decline of religion in a person is directly associated with the rise of scientific knowledge (Berger, 1968). Albrecht and Heaton challenged this thesis in revealing that college-educated Mormons were not less religious then less educated Mormons but were more likely to pray, have strong religious beliefs, and attend meetings than their religious counterparts. Ironically, Albrecht and Heaton (1984), used O'Dea's (1957) reasoning in theorizing why religious devotion in Mormonism becomes more important to those with higher levels of education. Albrecht and Heaton

(1994) thought the educated members of the Mormon faith would manifest higher levels of religiosity because they would be more frequently "selected into positions of leadership where they administer church programs." The educational system develops certain skills that are valued and important in the Mormon community. Those members who are those skills will be in high demand for the lay leadership of the LDS church. Educational level increases the skills a person possesses. Increased levels of skill development increases the demand and value a religious community places upon the service of certain individuals. Being needed and involved increases opportunities for participation and the preservation of religiosity.

Merrill, Lyon and Jensen (2003) revisited Albrecht and Heaton's (1984) study 20 years later and found conclusive evidence suggesting that increased levels of education did not have a secularizing influence on Mormon religiosity, but rather had a positive association with religiosity for both men and women. An interesting side note in their study found that within specific categories of age and education, the number of children born (a religiosity factor within Mormon culture) was considerably higher among religiously active Mormon women.

A fourth study conducted by Heaton, Bahr, and Jacobson (2004) compiled information on Mormons by analyzing data from six different national studies. The results of their findings showed Mormons were substantially more likely to have completed high school than was the case nationally. They also attributed the positive relationship between educational attainment and religiosity found in members of the Mormon faith to the "centrality of lay participation" (p. 46). The "reverse secularization effect" (Heaton et al., 2004, p. 61) of higher education among members of the LDS faith has been documented in a number of studies over the past thirty years.

Most recently, the recent Pew Forum study (Smith, 2011) highlighted additional aspects of the religiosity-higher education relationship among Mormons. The Pew Forum (Smith, 2011) reported, "Mormons who have graduated from college display the highest levels of religious commitment (84%) followed by those with some college education (75%). Mormons with a high school education or less exhibit substantially lower levels of religious commitment." This information was consistent with the previous studies conducted over the past four decades.

Such religious success emerging from a secular setting can be at times difficult to understand. Bushman (2008) has asked the questions many familiar with these studies may have wondered: "How can informed Mormons remain true to a religion based on miracles, behind the times in its adherence to conservative social principles, and subject to the authoritarian control of the church hierarchy?" (p. 113). Scholars have been calling for more qualitative research by specific religious tradition in order to better understand this question and the dynamic relationship between higher education and religiosity (Maryl & Oeur, 2009; Jeynes, 2003).

A Closer Look

In seeking to obtain further insight and meaning into the religiosity-education phenomenon reported in previous studies within the Latter-day Saint community, all three studies utilized the qualitative research method of case study informed by principles of Rapid Assessment Process (RAP) and Action Research (AR). The research team collected, coded, and analyzed data gathered from participants who represented a range of university experiences. The research team looked for recurring themes in the data that reflected potential characteristics or factors related to the religiosity-education phenomenon. In

looking at these themes, inferences and observations were made concerning professional practice implications as religious educators.

Social cognitive theory was used as a theoretical frame to understand this phenomenon. Bandura (2012) attributes human behavior to the "interplay of intrapersonal influences, the behavior individuals engage in, and the environmental forces" (p. 11). In analyzing and coding the data, we looked for all possible external and internal influences that would support or challenge previous research on religiosity and higher education in the Mormon community.

The purpose for conducting my particular study was to ascertain further why college educated Mormons display the highest levels of religiosity within their faith. In seeking to understand why college-educated members demonstrate the highest levels of religiosity, the following sub-questions directed the research team in collecting, analyzing, and presenting the data: (a) What are the thoughts and experiences of participants' concerning religiosity in the higher education environment? (b) How do the participants describe the role of religiosity in the university experience? (c) How do the participants describe the role of the university experience in regards to their religiosity? (d) How do participants reconcile or attempt to reconcile possible tensions between religiosity and the university experiences?

Three categories emerged as the research team evaluated data from the interviews of prominent LDS college professors. The first category observed from participant interviews was the value and role of meaningful participation in their religious community. The second category identified in this study was the influential nature of members of the faith on other members belonging to the Mormon community. Modeling religious thinking and living was something these participants identified as being significant in their religious experience and

development. The third category the research team discovered in the participants' stories was epistemology: Individuals in my study felt at home in two very different worlds of learning and teaching. Both institutions, the religious and academic, had different approaches to acquiring, valuing and transmitting knowledge that the participants understood and engaged in.

Our data analysis revealed another theme concerning the Mormon experience in higher education. The majority of the participants (i.e., students, professors) referenced specific moments where they felt their religious beliefs and behaviors were being challenged by the environment and ideology of higher education. Although their religiosity was challenged in higher education, they found support in religious community that helped them maintain and possibly deepen their religiosity. Within these supportive communities, participants mentioned the importance of being surrounded by members they looked up to who modeled religious and academic thinking and living. They appreciated religious settings where they could be open about their questions and concerns.

As a result of these interviews, the research team reflected on possible implications this research would have for religious educators in CES. The following recommendations for religious educators are based upon the information gathered and analyzed from these three studies:

- Foster participation
- Provide diverse mentors
- Create a climate of open inquiry
- Address sensitive issues
- Educate on epistemology

Foster Participation

The most effective college teachers find ways to engage students in the learning process. Successful college teachers help students "focus on important questions, stimulate them to grapple with key issues, help them acquire intellectual excitement, and give them the opportunity to construct their understanding" (Bain, 2004, p. 127). The learning model at BYU-Idaho is an ideological reminder for teachers to actively involve students in the teaching and learning process. Teachers committed to this model of learning often provide opportunities for students to teach one another.

Participation is a key characteristic of the education and religious learning culture of the LDS church. Members of the church are frequently invited and given opportunities to serve, solve problems, and teach one another. The importance of participation was a noticeable characteristic in the lived-experience of these interviewees. Religious educators who fail to provide students similar opportunities in the learning and teaching process at BYU-Idaho may create a learning environment contrary to the culture of learning found in the organizational structure of the church.

Religious educators throughout CES are reminded to trust students and give them important responsibilities to teach and learn from one another. Effective teachers in CES help students develop the self-reliant skills to identify and explain gospel truths found in the scriptures as well as to testify to them. Stark (2000) has noticed how "members of strict churches give more because they receive more" (p. 147). Our observations would suggest that religious participation and responsibility were important factors in preserving and deepening faith.

Participation through invitations to act on religious teachings was one way religiosity was developed and maintained. McKenzie, currently an undergraduate student attending BYU-Idaho, described an example of the importance of participation in a CES setting she experienced. She remembers how the seminary teacher invited her to "read the Joseph Smith story, to pray about it in order to have your own experience." She accepted his invitation to act on her own through reading and praying about the message and experience of Joseph Smith. The "spiritual experience" she had was reinforced by the opportunity given to her by the teacher to share this experience with her peers. Inviting students to act upon the knowledge they have received and providing opportunities for them to share from their personal experiences was one way religious belief and behavior was developed. The message from brain-science research is simple: "The one who does the work does the learning" (Doyle, 2008, p. 63).

Church callings provided a number of participants with meaningful opportunities to serve and feel connected to others. Jill, an Ivy League professor of economics, recalled specifically working in a church calling with an elderly woman who had severe financial problems. Drawing upon her academic expertise, church leaders assigned Jill to assist this woman with a variety of pressing financial issues. Using academic talents in religious settings doesn't bother these believing scholars. One participant noted, "Scholarship is a very self-absorbed work. I appreciate the incentive to get out of my shell and get involved with people I might never know otherwise."

McFarland et al. (2010) explain how highly educated individuals are "especially valuable to religious communities characterized by high network closure…Education may give the possessor the tools necessary to develop a high level of religious cognitive

ability…Educated individuals may be especially suited to promote and explain these beliefs" (p. 4). In exploring this topic further, I personally corresponded with David Campbell, a political scientist at the University of Notre Dame and member of the Pew Forum study (Smith, 2012) concerning Mormons in America. While analyzing the data from Mormon participants, and describing the reason for high levels of religiosity among college educated Mormons he coined the phrase "the education effect." He believed the effect of education on religiosity was magnified among Mormons because of volunteer service opportunities available to members belonging to local churches. He noticed how in these volunteer callings opportunities that would "require the sorts of cognitive and administrative skills that are associated with a college degree – reading a handbook, leading discussions, running meetings, giving speeches." The higher order and disciplined thinking found in higher education reinforced the social, cognitive, and spiritual expectations placed upon members serving in volunteer callings. David further explained that educational training helped develop leaders and keep people active in the church. He assumed higher education, "created a self-reinforcing pattern of ongoing church activity – both in terms of one's self-identity and friendship networks." He further noted in his observations that "This self-reinforcing process largely applies to people once they have graduated from college, and not necessarily while students are in college" (personal communication, September 27, 2013).

The religious culture of the LDS religion expects high levels of voluntary involvement from all of its members. This voluntary learning culture in turn leads to greater levels of religious commitment (Stark & Fink, 2000). We would conclude that when religious educators mirror this culture and involve students in a variety of activities related to

the learning and teaching process they model the learning culture of the LDS faith and increase the likelihood that a person will deepen religious commitment and understanding.

Provide Diverse Mentors

Mentors are an important component in educational attainment and religious involvement. According to Erickson et al. (2012), mentoring offers one "reason why religion and education are related, the relationships we have modeled indicated that the role of mentoring, and religious mentoring in particular, functions to increase the total effect of religious involvement on educational attainment" (p. 584). Active Mormons regularly have opportunities in the volunteer structure of the Church to mentor others. The LDS religious community provides members with a "unique socializing environment" (Erickson et al., 2012, p. 573). Cnaan et al. (2012) specifically observed how in the educated within the Mormon faith volunteered significantly more hours for religious purposes. The increased voluntarism of the educated would make them more likely candidates to provide mentoring in diverse settings to fellow members.

Modeling from academic and religious mentors proved influential in the development of faith of participants. Karen, an English professor, at one time in her undergraduate experience at a church sponsored university felt constrained in her non-traditional approach to living and expressing her faith. In this confined environment, Karen found encouragement in the examples she observed in a group of scholarly and believing Latter-day Saints:

> I saw around me all these people who seemed to be assured in their faith…and even assured in addressing historical controversy like it wasn't a big deal, and were also Mormons living the life of the mind and I just thought that was great.

For Karen, religiosity is strengthened when Mormon youth are exposed to a variety of educated adult role models that can demonstrate a range of thought and behavior. Karen believes that being exposed to diverse models will develop a stronger faith among followers.

A fundamental way people learn is by observing others (Bandura, 2012). Teaching and learning brings together impressionable students with persuasive teachers. Teachers provide a range of examples related to thinking, speaking, believing, and acting on various subjects that students may or may not choose to be inspired and influenced by. Karen, a college professor in this study, counseled, "The more role models of how to live…the more robust faith will be." The experience these participants had with influential mentors suggests the importance of individual students having multiple and diverse mentors who portray ranges of diversity concerning what it means to be an educated believing Mormon.

The LDS ward and the academic classroom has the potential of providing an influential source of modeling for members. Jill, an Ivy League economics professor, remembered early in her academic career being surrounded by a number of influential members in her religious community. These individuals she regularly associated with at church were also leaders politically, economically and educationally. Jill recognized in the examples of these people a model for her life in being highly educated and religiously committed. She went on and emphasized, "It was an amazing experience to go to church every week and to talk to these people and hear them. They have such strong testimonies." These individuals provided Jill a model of academic achievement and religious devotion. She found in these individuals examples of academic and religiously excellence. Higher education at a church-sponsored university is one environment providing members exposure

to diversity in thinking living, and believing, that is often found in students, professors and administrators.

Create a Climate of Open Inquiry

Creating the optimal conditions of learning in a classroom is the challenge of every teacher. Threatening learning environments are unlikely to produce change, promote student participation or invoke higher order thinking (Jenson, 2008). If students feel trust and safety in an instructional setting it is much more likely for the opposite to occur: change, participation, and higher order thinking. Frank, a current college student, didn't feel he could express his religious doubts and concerns with fellow Church members. He remembers,

> I often felt growing up that as a Church that if we ever expressed any doubts about our testimony it was like…Let's just say I felt there was a very bad attitude towards that type of thinking. You know, you're either 100%, or you're nothing and if you ever had doubts, it wasn't acceptable to say those things… College is a real tough time for people. It can be a time when your faith [is] either really strengthened, or [you] could end up falling away from the church. You start asking some of the tough questions of life. It's good to have church leaders who are there who we can ask those tough questions to. So when a doubt does come up we can ask those questions, and talk to them.

Church leaders today are aware of the cultural constraint felt by some members of the Church who feel out of place because of their questions and doubts. Dieter F. Uchtdorf (2013) recently taught members of the Church,

> It's natural to have questions--the acorn of honest inquiry has often sprouted and matured into a great oak of understanding. There are few members of the Church

> who, at one time or another, have not wrestled with serious or sensitive questions. One of the purposes of the Church is to nurture and cultivate the seed of faith--even in the sometimes sandy soil of doubt and uncertainty.

Nurturing and cultivating faith that grows out of honest inquiry is one of the great challenges and opportunities provided religious educators. The temptation in teaching for any educator is to focus more on dispensing knowledge and providing reinforcing answers to faith instead of responding to and creating an atmosphere that nurtures student driven inquiry. The experiences of these interviewees suggest the importance of teaching environments at church and in CES that create and encourage an inquiring culture where students can ask questions and wrestle with challenging issues. Karen, an English professor in southern California, recognizes this need: "Mormon kids need a place where they can ask questions of faith." For her, difficult questions are not a threat to the faith but a great opportunity for growth. She went on to say, "Our faith is capable of cosmic thinking. It is not a fragile theology."

Overtime Mormonism, which originated from the personal religious questions of Joseph Smith, has evolved into a religious institution that provides many satisfying and meaningful answers to members. Clayton Christensen, Mormon business professor at Harvard University, expresses concern toward religious organizations that are more interested in the answers they provide people as opposed to the questions they generate:

> People will only learn when they are ready to learn, not when we are ready to teach them…When people decide there aren't any more questions to ask, then God's answers to mankind stop…To me the scary thing about the church today is that there is more and more a sense that if we are obedient, we don't need to ask questions

> because the answers have already been given. In a lot of ways, we are doing the very same thing that killed Christianity the first time through…. Good questions, in many parts of the church are regard as really valuable…God can only give us answers when we ask questions…. I think it's a poison to the prospects of the Church, when we stop asking questions. There's a real difference between questions and questioning. A question is a question that is posed to strengthen our faith, and to strengthen the Church. Questioning is designed, not to create new insight, but rather to disagree without pursuing better truth. (Personal communication February 3, 2014)

Educators among CES may feel threatened or worried about a teaching pedagogy that is driven more by the student's questions then the teacher's answers. Such an approach brings a degree of vulnerability and may require all involved to develop more complex narratives doctrinally and historically. Trusting the process of asking, talking, and experimenting is something Steven, an east coast history professor, found helpful in his spiritual growth. When people do have questions and concerns regarding their faith, Steven believes,

> It's not a matter of panicking, that's the wrong thing to say stop thinking about that stuff it's just going to get you into trouble. You just have to let people work their way through it. If they work their way through it they'll be more stable than they were before, and if you haven't looked at these questions you're in a precarious position. Anytime you could be ambushed…[The] most important thing actually is to stay in the company of believing Latter-day Saints. Ask all the questions; bring up every issue. But, keep on talking… so I grew up with the idea of course you ask questions

and you keep working at them and you find answers, so there has to be sort of a basic confidence that you can get through anything.

Questioners play a valuable role in the Church. They often help members, teachers, and leaders articulate answers to one another and the world on difficult issues that have not been properly understood, addressed or explained. One thing Steven quickly found out about the culture of higher education is that it "can't stand naïve religion, unquestioned religion, when you sort of go along with what everybody else is talking about, they wanted people to be critical and thoughtful about their own religious belief." Steven is certain that wrestling with answers born of challenging questions will help members develop a rationality to accompany their belief that can and "will survive in both the world of unquestioning belief and a world of open scrutiny" (Steven, a professor participant). Participant experiences suggest that the preservation and expansion of religious beliefs and practices in students would be amplified as religious educators purposefully foster personal inquiry.

Address Sensitive Issues

There is a need to address sensitive religious issues even when it appears no one is interested or asking the questions. Inoculation theory offers one pedagogical approach to addressing sensitive issues. McGuire's (1961) inoculation theory refers to a learning process where sensitive information is provided to people prior to communication taking place in a different setting with the hopes that the information initially provided would make the exposed individual more resistant to future exposure. The success or failure of inoculation theory is dependent upon the method of information presentation. Inoculation theory is most effective when the following conditions exist: (a) the specific negative or harmful

information is known, (b) refutation or clarification of specific points is possible, and (c) the threat of damage to beliefs is high (Easley, Bearden, & Teel, 1995).

Mormonism, like many other religious denominations, has its own unique list of troubling issues where an inoculation approach may prove beneficial. Steven, a college professor, has lived long enough to see numerous issues over time surface that challenge the faith of Church members. He has written extensively on topics that have for some in the faith threatened the historical and doctrinal beliefs of Mormonism. From his observations of church members, the classic story of the shaken faith syndrome is not, "Oh, I found this fact and it's shocking," but rather it is,

> 'Oh, I found this shocking fact that they've [the Church leaders] kept hidden from me all these years.' It's the disillusion with the system as hiding the truth. Now days of course we are trying our darnedest to get more of this stuff out so that it doesn't come as a surprise…So I think that part of it may end up being a one-generation phenomenon that will gradually absorb all this material into our teaching manuals…I think the big reasons [for faith crisis] now are actually the anti-gay stance of the Church.

The Internet and media provide an abundance of material related to these sensitive and challenging issues. Whether ill informed or well-stated, thoughts contrary to Church teachings and practices can create a significant amount of cognitive dissonance in believers. Inoculation theory proposes that the presentation of sensitive information regarding challenging religious issues (i.e. race, gender, polygamy) to members come first from a safe, believing trusted source even when it appears the information would harmful on the surface. This presentation of sensitive information is intended to negate the spiritually shocking

effects of this information when presented later from a person seeking to discredit or destroy faith. Recent research by the church suggests that members who have previously been exposed to negative information about the church from church members are less affected in their faith by this information than members who were exposed to this type of information from a non-believing source. A proactive inoculation approach is something that would require careful planning and implementation. David, a physics professor in this study, does not believe knowledge is something a believing person should be afraid of. For him, "I think the more you know, ultimately the better off you are." The proper presentation of knowledge on difficult issues is something that educators in CES would need training and approval in carrying out.

Teaching members about controversial aspects of the faith is not something the Church has traditionally been in favor of or proactive about. In looking closely at participants' comments and experiences, our recommendation would be to create a religious education course that provides an opportunity for students to learn about and discuss sensitive issues related to their faith in an open trusted environment. As more and more information becomes available through electronic media, Church leaders and educators are often the individuals who are the primary interpreters of and explainers of information. Will church members be left to navigate individually this information found in books, blogs, or on various web sites or will the Church proactively provide teachers and members information and formal instruction on sensitive issues that can help frame these issues from a Latter-day Saint perspective? Our recommendation is that religious educators be trained and given responsibility to address sensitive issues for students in the formal classroom setting. Karen had noticed in her experience at a church university how,

> A sense of fear has crept in and a dogmatism has crept in that provides young people who do seek very little refuge, only very polarized models for sorting it out. That's not healthy. There's lots of ways to sort out how to be a believing, thinking person, there are even lots of paths in Mormonism, but right now we have a very polarized environment.

David, a physics professor in Montana, believes the answer to unquestioned assumptions is not to ignorantly run away:

> The antidote for knowledge that confuses in more knowledge; it's certainly not running away from it…. I've had lots of things that have troubled me and my solution is to try to learn more about them and try to figure them out.… I know if I keep at it then it will eventually work itself out because it's happened to me so many times.

The recommendation of our research team is for religious educators to create and offer a religious education course that addresses controversial or sensitive issues in the Church. The Church has recently shown some attempts to respond to these issues publicly by providing historical and doctrinal information on their website (see: http://www.lds.org/topics/) concerning a variety of sensitive gospel topics (including race, gender, polygamy, etc.). This may be an ideal opportunity to academically work in harmony with the Church's recent efforts in addressing sensitive issues. The risk or challenge of an inoculation approach to members who don't struggle with these issues or questions is that some may spiritually struggle as a result of being exposed to the information. The questions administrators and educators will have to wrestle with is, "Does the potential benefits of an inoculation approach on sensitive issues outweigh the costs?" For Steven, history professor participant, the best educational environment is one where students can,

> Ask all the questions, bring up every issue and keep on talking…I grew up with the idea you ask questions and you keep working at them until you find answers, so there has to be sort of a basic confidence that you can get through anything.

Educate on Epistemology

Mormons are instructed from childhood up to trust their inner voices as well as the inspired voices of parents and church leaders. When the information from these inner voices collides with the ideas promulgated in secular and academic cultures members are likely to experience a trial of their faith. Frank, a current college student, had his faith tested while sitting in a Biology 101 class at a public university. Frank remembered how,

> The teacher talked quite a bit about evolution and how we came from single cell organisms and went really in depth about evolution and how we came from apes, and so on and so forth. And that totally brought back everything I had been taught about Adam and Eve and the creation…And I actually ended up reading Bruce R. McConkie's book about evolution which didn't really help me out either. So I was kind of stumped at this point…I knew where I had come from with Adam and Eve, but science is telling me it's like this, and this is how it happened. So for me, at least for a while, it was kind of hard to actually understand them both at the same time. So I would say that my faith was a little shaken up.

Frank is not an uncommon Mormon student. Almost every semester there is a student who comes to a religious educator or trusted church leader and wants help understanding and connecting what they are learning in a science class with what they have been taught concerning their religion. The search for truth, knowledge, and meaning is something treasured in religion classes and other academic courses offered at BYU-Idaho. It has been

observed that people generally derive their knowledge about the world from five sources: sense, reason, testimony, memory, and revelation (Dixon, 2008, p. 20). There are assumptions and limitations to religious and scientific approaches to learning and knowing.

It was noted how undergraduate Mormon students often experience inner conflict as a result of the cultural and ideological influences of college life. It was observed how many of the professors interviewed were more comfortable and familiar with the epistemological assumptions, strengths, and limitations found in religion and in their academic training. Based on the differences observed between Mormon undergraduate students and Mormon professional educators in the academy it would appear that students would benefit significantly if they were formally educated on the epistemological approaches, strengths, assumptions, and limitations of various academic disciplines as well as their own found in their own faith in order to more accurately evaluate the knowledge they are being asked to remember and understand.

In an attempt to express his understanding of the boundaries and limitations of knowledge, British astrophysicist, Steven Hawking (1993), wrote, "Although science may solve the problem of how the universe began, it cannot answer the question: Why does the universe bother to exist" (p. 99). David, an LDS physicist, seemed aware of the epistemological nature of his profession,

> Most scientists are aware of the limitations of what they're doing. We all know that what we're doing is only tentative. We know that we're trying to find an understanding or theory that agrees with what we've seen so far. We can only do things by agreement, we will only do things in the science world that we have evidence for…the guys who actually do the work recognize the places where they've

> had to make assumptions just to be able to go forward and they realize that if something goes wrong they can go back and question those assumptions.

Christensen (2012) worries about a society that creates enemies between the methods and accomplishments of science and religion: "Many assume that science and academics belong in one category of knowledge, while religion comprises another category, primarily of belief" (Para 12). He recommends a "more productive framing" where both are viewed as important contributors in the "pursuit of truth…[which] has not intellectual or spiritual prejudice" (Para 13). In reflecting on the limitations of the scientific method, David mentions how scientists have a tendency to,

> Restrict themselves to evidence that can be reproduced by others regularly and in an objective way. They will not accept as evidence anything that is subjective and personal. So any personal experience cannot matter…If I'm telling you I have proof to this theory, it has to be something that you can understand and that you could do yourself so that makes it more communicable, but it is a preposterous restriction if you're searching for truth, why in the world would you limit yourself to some arbitrary set of rules.

Religious educators would benefit from understanding the epistemology of science as well as the epistemology of their religion. For many in the world, "scientific scholarship is the official truth of our culture" (Bushman, as cited in Black, 1996, p. 43), but for members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints there is an expanded epistemology that complements and at other times is challenged by the epistemology of scientific scholarship. Church leader, Elder Dallin H. Oaks (2014), recently instructed students at BYU-Idaho concerning these dual epistemologies:

> The glorifying of human reasoning has had good effects and bad. The work of science has made innumerable improvements in our lives, but the rejection of divine authority as the ultimate basis of right and wrong by those who have substituted science for God has many religious people asking this question, 'Why is the will of any of the brilliant philosophers of the liberal tradition or for that matter the will of the Supreme Court of the Unites States more relevant to moral decisions than the will of God?' Those who used human reasoning to supersede divine influence in their lives have diminished themselves and cheapened civilization in the process…there are two methods of gaining knowledge the scientific method and the spiritual method, which begins with faith in God and relies on scriptures, inspired teaching and personal revelation. There is no ultimate conflict from knowledge gained by these different methods because God, our Omnipotent, Eternal Father knows all truth and beckons us to learn by them both.

When there are questions and conflicts between knowledge gained from these different methods there may be a temptation to abandon or lose faith in religion or scientific methods for generating knowledge. Bushman (as cited in Black, 1996) has felt that,

> One of the perplexities of academic scholarship is how it shies away from goodness…the Enlightenment pursuit of truth does not provide answers to the question of how to live a life. In fact, it explicitly denies responsibility for finding the good. Scholarship has no doctrine of repentance because it has no doctrine of good. I consider that a damning lack. (p. 42)

Reflecting on the knowledge and scholarship in religion and higher education, Bushman (as cited in Black, 1996) writes,

> Every form of scholarship is rooted in a society, an imagined community of scholars in which the teachers or writers live and move and have their being. We cannot take a position on a scholarly issue without implicitly forming or breaking a social relationship. Everything we write and say links us to other people, with all the tangled consequences for our self-esteem, our personal identities, our hopes and aspirations. There is a social and personal dimension to every form of rational discourse, which means that all beliefs, not merely religious beliefs, are both rational and irrational. (p. 41)

Teachers in religion courses and other academic courses at BYU-Idaho need to help students navigate and understand the approaches, the strengths, and the limitations to knowledge produced in the academic community as well as in their religious community. Once students understand this, experienced professors interviewed in this study recommend patiently and persistently trusting the process of inquiry and research would produce answers over time. Professor participants exemplified a patient yet confident perspective when contradictions and challenges arise. David's approach to learning religiously and intellectually is described as follows:

> I've had lots of things that have troubled me and my solution is to try to learn more about them and try to figure them out. I've had so many things that have troubled me in the past. As I found out more I said, 'Oh yeah, I now rely on that.' I know if I keep at it then it will eventually work itself out because it's happened to me so many times.

The professional educators in this study appeared familiar with the epistemological approaches of their discipline and of their faith. They also recognized various strengths and limitations of the academic and religious way of knowing. Such maturity and insight could

certainly benefit the novice undergraduate wrestling with his faith as a result of his college instruction. Educating undergraduates on epistemology as related to their faith and science would hopefully create a greater understanding and respect for the scientific and the religious knowledge and approaches to knowledge valued by BYU-Idaho and their religious accompanying religious institution.

Neal A. Maxwell (as cited in Eyring, 1995, p. 6) emphasizes for religious believers the "need to distinguish between the truths which are useful and those which are crucial, and between truths which are important and those which are eternal." Maxwell uses the following conceptual model of truth in teaching students the various gradations of truths. This conceptual model of the gradations of truth offer educators in CES one approach in discussing knowledge and epistemology as it is related to the physical, social, scientific and spiritual dimensions of our existence

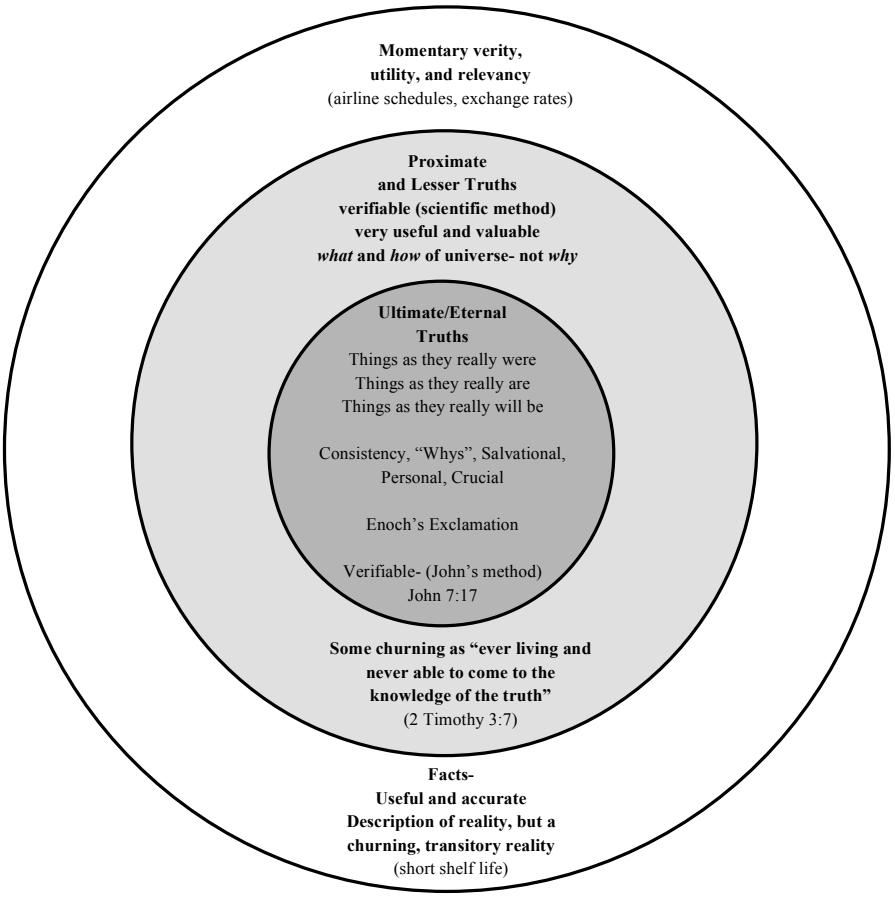

Figure 4.1 Gradations of Truth. Adapted from Eyring (1995).

Student would benefits from knowing not only the knowledge that has been produced in a specific field, but the process of producing knowledge, which, according Oaks (2014), happens in two ways—spiritual and temporal. It is our view that students at BYU-Idaho would benefit greatly from understanding not just the knowledge of various fields of study but how that knowledge is generated and becomes reliable and trustworthy. Such an approach would hopefully expand the ability of students in their capacity to make informed

choices as a result of having an increased awareness of how knowledge is created in the religious and scientific communities they choose to inhabit.

Conclusion

In 2000, when LDS Church President Gordon B. Hinckley announced that the two-year junior college (Ricks College) in Rexburg, Idaho would become four-year BYU-Idaho, he emphasized, "BYU-Idaho will continue to be teaching oriented. Effective teaching and advising will be the primary responsibilities of its faculty, who are committed to academic excellence." Shortly after this announcement, BYU-Idaho President David A. Bednar (2001) instructed faculty, "Our primary mission…is becoming a premier institution of learning and teaching" (p. 4). The recommendation and considerations in this paper for sustaining and improving effective teaching and learning in CES grow out of the three studies conducted on Mormons and higher education. These recommendations are designed to engage faculty in discussions and curriculum designs that will continue to make learning and teaching at BYU-Idaho a formative experience for teachers and students.

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CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

Being involved in a professional practice doctoral (PPD) program has been a remarkable learning experience. According to Willis, Inman and Valenti (2010), PPD program "accepts students in cohorts that complete the program together and thus form a cooperating and collaborating group that provides support and encouragement to members of the cohort" (p. 25). We have had approximately 20 individuals belonging to our PPD cohort. Individual members academic interests include mathematics, interior design, recreational management, business, religious education, culinary arts, computer programming, academic tutoring, secondary educational leadership, and online learning. Such a diversity of backgrounds and interests has provided me many meaningful conversations and classroom learning experiences. Being able to see issues from multiple perspectives has expanded my understanding on many subjects we have studied over the past few years. Over time a level of friendship and trust has grown and developed among cohort members that allows for candid disclosure, open feedback, and insightful dialogue.

The PPD program is designed to create theoretical knowledge but to "address a real world problem" (p. 25) and produce professional knowledge (Willis et al., 2010). I work in the world of religious education for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS). I feel fortunate to attend a state sponsored school that is comfortable enough in its academic tradition to grant me the privilege of studying such a topic that has the potential to benefit the University of Idaho as well as religious educators teaching in the Church Educational System (CES). Research on Mormons over the past thirty years suggests they have found a way of buffering the secular forces in higher education. Educational (secular or Church sponsored) achievement strengthens significantly the religious beliefs and practices in Mormons. Trying

to understanding and explain some of the possible factors influencing the symbiotic relationship of education and religiosity within the LDS community has been an educational experience and has provided insight into the phenomenon provided a foundation for future research on the subject.

This PPD dissertation was a collaborative team-based research project. Willis et al. (2010) emphasize the importance of this team-based approach "because most of the significant issues of professional practice call for collaboration" (p. 39). Our research team included three religious educators of the LDS faith: James Williams (no relation), Mitch Simmons and myself. James and Mitch both teach high-school students in southeast Idaho and I teach college students at BYU-Idaho. Initially I was worried about such an approach. I was concerned about sharing the workload, the quality of work from a team-based approach, the inconvenience of synchronizing schedules, and a host of other things that I thought would distract from the quality of the research. Overtime my thoughts and attitudes changes. We were able to create a functional relationship that in the end created, investigated, and produced something far more meaningful in such a short period of time then I believe anyone of us could have done on our own. Team members were involved in the research design, data collection, data analysis, data coding, and data presentation. Throughout these research stages, there were times when it was challenging being dependent upon other team members. Despite the difficulty of working in a team to coordinate schedules, analyze data, and write up our findings, I believe the overall product of our group article was much better then any one individual of the research team could have produced in such a limited amount of time. I learned in this process not only more about Mormons and higher education but I learned how to work together, get along, organize, communicate and care about others.

Though I enjoyed the experience of working closely with those on my team who shared similar backgrounds, I can't help but wonder how different this experience may have been if I had been assigned to work in a team that offered different interests and backgrounds. Beebe (2001) recommends that research teams be "composed of a mix of insiders from and outsiders to the situation being investigated" (p. 17). Such a mix would not just consider academic disciplines but also age, gender, and race. Organizing teams based on diverse characteristics is a consideration for future PPD programs interested in carrying out problem-based research projects involving principles Rapid Assessment Process (RAP). On the other hand, being familiar with language, culture, and history has facilitated our team's ability to move forward and accomplish things in a quick, focused manner.

The knowledge and experience visiting faculty members from the University of Idaho were valuable. They often provided expertise, support, and encouragement that was greatly needed for me during this graduate experience. I appreciate the time they took to communicate through emails, have online discussions and come personally up to cold Rexburg, Idaho to instruct us in person, answer our questions, and address our concerns. In many cases, I know they were learning like we were through this process. Their willingness to grow and learn with us was encouraging.

Yesterday I had a discussion with a faculty member about concerns he had regarding educating members of the Church on challenging issues. I don't think he realized I had just spent the last year of my life researching and writing on this subject. It was a very rewarding experience to discuss with him some of my findings and recommendations. I hope that this dissertation can lay a foundation for future research and be of help for others seeking to understand the challenges between and relationship of education and religiosity. The doctoral

program and dissertation process have certainly reminded me once again of the things in life that are most important and helped me value them even more.

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Appendix A: Informed Consent Form

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Dear _____,

I am a doctoral student in Professional Practices Doctorate (PPD) program at the University of Idaho. I am currently conducting a study on the influence higher education (e.g., graduate school, research, and the current environment of higher education) has had the religiosity of Mormons who are also professional educators. Particularly, I am interested in understanding and examining the experiences of Mormon's with terminal degrees. Your religious devotion, graduate schoolwork, and professional employment make your university and professional experiences uniquely relevant to this study. As an aside, I am also interested in knowing how your college career has shaped your personal religious development.

This is an invitation for you to voluntarily participate in my study. If you choose to participate, our visit will be audio recorded. We will meet for as long as you would like to meet, but our time should not exceed an hour and a half. We can meet at a location convenient to you. When my research and analysis is complete, I will transcribe our conversation and then check back with you to ensure I have represented your thoughts and ideas accurately**.** After transcription, the recordings will be deleted. The interview will be transcribed into a Microsoft Word document file on a computer that is password protected—no other knows the access code other than the primary investigators. It is anticipated that no hard copies will be generated, but in the event that they are, they will be shredded when they are no longer needed. Hard copies will be deleted within one year. Author(s) will retain interview data for a minimum of five years after publication of research (APA Manual, p. 12). Electronic copies will be kept at a minimum of five years after publications of materials (2017).

Your comments will be kept strictly confidential and will be stored on an electronic device that will not have access to Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, or any other social media. You will be encouraged to select a pseudonym, or have one assigned to you for anonymity. Every effort will be made to ensure the information provided will be strictly confidential within the limits of the law. Consent to participate will be indicated by your signature at the bottom of this informed consent form. You may declare your consent to participate null and void at any time, and the conditions of your participation are always open to negotiation.

Data gathered from this study will be used in the dissertation of Nathan H. Williams in an attempt at describing the effects of higher education on professional Mormon educators. Information gathered from these interviews will inform not only the dissertation but may also be used in future articles and studies.

If you have any questions concerning this study now or at any time during the research process, please contact me at (208) 496-3962 or williamsn@byui.edu. You may also contact my major professor, Dr. Bryan Maughan at bryanm@uidaho.edu, or University of Idaho office of Research Assurances, (208) 885-6162**.** The University of Idaho Institutional Review Board approved the for this study and the protocol number of this study is 13-241. I appreciate your willingness to participate and the time you are dedicating to this study. Thank you, in advance, for your generous involvement.

Sincerely,

Nathan H. Williams

_____ _____

Participant Signature Date

Appendix B: Interview Protocol

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL OR GUIDE

Time of Interview: _____

Date: _____

Place: _____

Interviewer: _____

Interviewee: _____

Position of Interviewee: _____

(Briefly describe the project)

Understanding Relationship of Higher Education & Religiosity

Questions:

1. Explain research. Invite participants if interested to share any preliminary thoughts concerning religiosity and higher education relationship: What thoughts or questions do you have in general about this study and research on Mormons and higher education?

2. Invite participants to tell their story: Would you mind sharing with me your academic autobiography (journey/story) in higher education as a college student up until now being a full time faculty member / professor? (Why certain college? Why certain major?)

3. What, if any, experiences did you have as a college student that caused you to think about certain aspects of your faith? Invite them to talk about intersections (if any) in educational setting with religiosity. Encourage (if referenced) participants to talk about intersections in religiosity with education.
    a. Example question: In what ways, did the higher education experience complement or challenge your religious faith and behavior?
    b. If participants talk about conflicts or challenges follow up question on whether this conflict ever was resolved and if so how?

4. What are some of the most important things you obtained/received (or took away) from your college education experience?

5. What is most meaningful to you about your membership in the Church?

6. As a professor, do you observe any unique challenges or opportunities Mormon college students are having in higher education today?

7. What advice would you give to a younger generation of college students who are interested in becoming highly educated and desire to maintain their religious beliefs and behaviors? (Hope in this question is to reveal aspects of their own experience with religiosity-education phenomenon by giving participants an opportunity to act the role of a mentor for younger generation.)

Thank you for taking the time to answer these questions. Your personal thoughts and experience will certainly help contribute to a better understanding of higher education's influence on religiosity within the Mormon community. Is there anything else you would like to talk about related to the topic of this interview? Thank you.

Appendix C: Institutional Review Board Approval

University of Idaho

October 23, 2013

Office of Research Assurances
Institutional Review Board
875 Perimeter Drive, MS 3010
Moscow ID 83844-3010

Phone: 208-885-6162
Fax: 208-885-5752
irb@uidaho.edu

To: Bryan Maughan
Cc: Nathan H. Williams

From: Traci Craig, PhD
Chair, University of Idaho Institutional Review Board
University Research Office
Moscow, ID 83844-3010

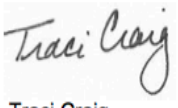
Title: 'The Influence of Religiosity on Professional Educators and Administrators Employed in Higher Education'

Project: 13-241

Approved: 10/23/13
Expires: 10/22/14

On behalf of the Institutional Review Board at the University of Idaho, I am pleased to inform you that the protocol for the above-named research project is approved as offering no significant risk to human subjects.

This approval is valid for one year from the date of this memo. Should there be significant changes in the protocol for this project, it will be necessary for you to resubmit the protocol for review by the Committee.



Traci Craig

Appendix D: BYU-IDAHO Mission Statement

MISSION STATEMENT

BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY–IDAHO

Brigham Young University–Idaho is affiliated with The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Its mission is to:

1. Build testimonies of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ and encourage living its principles.

2. Provide a quality education for students of diverse interests and abilities.

3. Prepare students for lifelong learning, for employment, and for their roles as citizens and parents.

4. Maintain a wholesome academic, cultural, social, and spiritual environment.