



## Living the Divine Divide: A Phenomenological Study of Mormon Mothers Who are Career-Professional Women

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### Abstract

*The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints – the Mormon Church – upholds a cultural expectation for women of their community to remain unemployed outside the home and to dedicate their early adulthood to bearing and raising children. This paper reports on a phenomenological exploration, using Smith and Osborn's (2008) model of interpretative phenomenological analysis, of the use, as a conflict-controlling strategy, of sanctification, or the sacred aspects of life, in the religious cultural navigation of 16 religious Mormon women who maintain full-time professional careers in the fields of law, medicine, education, science, administration or engineering, and who simultaneously mother one or more children under the age of 12. The findings of this study document significant demographic, values-based and experiential differences between the study participants and their Latter-day Saints (LDS) peers who live within the subculture's norm.*

In 1995, during a public address to female members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Gordon B. Hinkley, the President, read out aloud *The Family: A Proclamation to the World* (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1995). Designed to more clearly reveal the Church's stance on marriage, family, and traditional gender roles, this document states that "Mothers are primarily responsible for the nurture of their children" (p. 1). While these words and Hinkley's associated comments did not constitute a direct command to avoid employment, the declaration served to reinforce the Church's existing tradition of strongly encouraging women to stay home to act as full-time caregivers for their children (Hinkley, 1995).

Although a large number of modern LDS women do work outside of the home, they are counselled by Church leaders on local, national and even global levels to do so only out of financial necessity. The role of the mother in the home and the amount of time spent with the family are held to have consequences

in eternal life (Hinkley, 2003; Lee, 1972; Packer, 2004). Thus, many faithful LDS mothers do indeed revise financial plans, make considerable lifestyle changes, and/or physically move before considering entering, or returning to, the working world (Jurecki-Tiller, 2004).

Simultaneously, however, LDS women are encouraged to grow and develop their talents, to gain an education, and, as stipulated in the Church's *Doctrine and Covenants*, to be "anxiously engaged in a good cause" (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1981, p. 105). For many of these women, their talents and good causes lie outside of the field of motherhood and in professional fields such as law, medicine, academia, or science. While they remain faithful to the teaching and doctrines of the Church, professional women who choose to marry and have children are forced to navigate simultaneously between a religious cultural expectation of stay-at-home motherhood and a desire to participate in society's dominant culture (Chadwick & Garrett, 1998).

While engaging in multiple roles has been noted as having positive benefits for employed mothers (e.g., Barnett, 2004; Crosby, 1991), this has also been associated with interrole conflict. Understood as the conflict that results when different facets of one's life create opposing desires, interrole conflict is commonly linked to feelings of depression, stress, anxiety, and anger (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Phanco, 2004). To control these feelings, any of a myriad strategies may be used. However, in the case of career women with strong religious values, sanctification is extensively documented as the strategy most commonly used (Hall, Oates, Anderson, & Willingham, 2012; Oates, Hall, & Anderson, 2005; Walker, Jones, Wuensch, Aziz, & Cope, 2008).

Developed by Pargament and Mahoney (2005) as a model of psychological processing, sanctification is employed when individuals view particular facets of their life as having divine significance. In fact, among working women with Protestant and Catholic beliefs, high levels of sanctification of work have been documented as predictors of positive affect, work satisfaction, and the ability to deal with the subjective component of interrole conflict itself (Hall et al., 2012). While some research studies have explored the construction of family-friendly careers by limiting hours worked, the use of sanctification and attitudes toward full-time employment among professional women within the Mormon culture has not hitherto been explored (Jackson & Scharman, 2002).

In light of this, the aim of this paper is to explore the use of sanctification by, and to summarize the complex cultural negotiations of, LDS women who both mother children under the age of 12 and maintain a full-time professional career.

### Method: Participants and Procedures

The study (conducted by Curtis Greenfield) on which this paper reports was based on demographic and interview data collected from 16 participants selected in accordance with the prespecified criteria applied, the National Centre for Health Statistics (Mathews & Hamilton, 2009), and the Pew Research Centre (Cohn, 2009). To qualify for participation in the study, women had to meet multiple requirements that included being employed in a full-time position outside of the home, having an LDS temple recommend them (as evidence that the participant is highly engaged with her Church community and compliant with the Church's belief system), a single-partner marriage history of at least three years, and one or more children at home who at the time were 12 years of age or younger. All the women who participated in the study self-identified as heterosexual and were not planning to separate or divorce from their current husband. The participants selected were resident in eight states across the

contiguous United States and were collectively involved in a range of professional careers including medicine, law, education, science, public relations, finance, and engineering.

Personal interviews were conducted with eight of the 16 participants (based on both the researcher's and the participant's availability), utilizing the following predeveloped set of questions:

1. What messages, if any, did you hear about motherhood while growing up?  
Where did those messages come from (Church related, family culture, other)?
2. Did you hear any messages about education?  
Did those messages ever evolve into career choices?  
What did you hear?
3. What do you now do professionally?  
Tell me a little bit about your job.
4. When did you decide to become a(n) XXXXX?  
How did you make that decision?
5. Do you now or have you ever wondered or feared that your career goals would limit you religiously (e.g., getting married, callings in the Relief Society, Celestial Kingdom)?  
What did that look like?
6. What about in other aspects of your life (e.g., motherhood, current relationship, and personal hobbies)?  
Do you feel like your career choice limits you at all?
7. Tell me about the amount of support or lack of support your husband gives in relation to your job.  
Do your children support you?  
How?
8. What about your parents?  
Do they support your career choice?  
How do they demonstrate it?
9. Did your husband or parents support your career differently before you had children?  
How?
10. Do you feel any support for your career from your Church community?  
Why or why not?
11. Many members of the Church believe that a woman's primary role is that of a homemaker. What do you think of that?

Do you ever wish you could stay home full-time?  
Why or why not?

12. When you tell your LDS peers that you are a(n) XXXXX, how do they react?  
Does that reaction change when you are talking to an LDS stay-at-home mom?  
Do the men of the Church ever ask about your career?  
Do those outside of the Church react differently?  
How do you cope with those reactions?  
How do you explain them?
13. Would you feel differently about yourself if you stayed home rather than working?  
How?
14. How does being a member of the Church inform your decisions in the workplace?
15. Do the people at work know that you are a mother?  
How do they support you in that?
16. Do they know you are a Mormon?  
Why/why not?  
How do they (or could they) support you in that?
17. In many ways you have been asked to live in two worlds. In the one you have your career obligations, in the other your responsibilities as a mother.  
How does your relationship with the Gospel affect those worlds?  
Do you feel like the Church ever pulls you closer to one and away from the other?  
How do you manage that?
18. How do you integrate these roles between motherhood, career, and Church?
19. Given your experience as an LDS woman who is also a career-professional and a mother, would you recommend your own path to the Church's young women?  
Why or why not?
20. If you were looking for a therapist or mental health professional, what qualities are important to you?
21. What could a psychologist do to help you navigate your stressors or to feel more personally fulfilled?

All the interviews were recorded, transcribed, and then individually coded and thematically analysed by the researcher and two research assistants. Procedurally, the

coding and creation of themes was based on Smith and Osborn's (2008) model of interpretative phenomenological analysis, as follows:

1. An unfocused overview of each of the individual transcripts: Readers separately read the text to gain familiarity with the whole, drawing on their own feelings of personal empathy and meaning.
2. Personal interpretations: Readers reviewed each transcript individually and drew out similarities in language and meaning within the individual transcript to create themes.
3. Broad interpretations: Readers reviewed all the transcriptions, drawing parallels between them in respect of language, experiences, and feelings in order to explore consistency of themes.

The research team then met as a group to compare and contrast findings among transcripts. They found that the central themes discovered by each individual researcher closely mirrored one another such that no further breaking down of themes was necessary. To strengthen validity, these themes and the supporting statements excerpted verbatim from the interview transcripts were then presented to the participants who were not interviewed and who collectively acted as an internal peer-review.

Unlike their peers involved in the one-time personal interview, these eight participants, who had access to the database of themes, were allowed up to six weeks to share their thoughts. These participants were also encouraged to respond to one another's posted online comments, with these dialogues being supervised by the researcher. As it turned out, the eight women who participated in this phase of the research shared a rich anonymous dialogue with one another that added both substance and depth to the research findings.

## Results

The findings consisted of interpretative analyses of both the demographic data collected and the thematic content that emerged from the transcribed interviews. Summaries of the findings follow.

## Demographic Findings

When compared with both the national and the state of Utah averages, notable differences became evident between the study participants and their LDS peers. On average, the study participants first met their husband at 20.6 years of age and were married by the age of 23.8, over two years earlier than the national average age of 26, but almost three years older than the Utah average of 21 years (Cohn, 2009).

All the participants had completed a college degree, and over half of them had also successfully completed

a graduate degree. The average age at which the participants first gave birth was 28.8 years old, two years after the average age at which they completed their education/job training, and five years later than the average age that a woman first gives birth in the state of Utah (Mathews & Hamilton, 2009). Distinguishing them from the national average, 13 of the participants reported personally earning a salary at or above the national average.

Notwithstanding, the study participants appeared to be very aware of LDS cultural expectations. Fifteen of the participants reported having grown up in the Church, seven of whom reported having grown up in the “Mormon Corridor” of Utah, Idaho, or the more northern parts of Arizona where Latter-day Saints have a demographic prominence. Half of the participants had attended the LDS-administered Brigham Young University for one or more semesters. Six of the participants had served a full-time proselytizing mission for the Church, and 15 of the 16 participants were married to a man who had also completed a full-time proselytizing mission.

### Thematic Findings

Five major themes were identified in the participants’ responses that provide a deeper look into the personal experiences of LDS working mothers: (a) archetype, (b) deficits, (c) conflicting messages, (d) isolation, and (e) coping. Reflecting the experiences of these women, the direct quotations that follow are offered to both illustrate and substantiate each of the themes/subthemes. These quotations come from either the study participant’s personal interview or from the written conversation conducted by the reviewing participants. All the names used to identify the source are fictitious in order both to respect confidentiality and to protect the privacy of the participants. It also needs to be noted that various terms used by these women are specific to the LDS lexicon.

**Archetype of the Mormon woman.** Throughout the interviews, multiple references were made to the participants’ experience of the demands imposed on them by themselves, their culture and their religion. Many of these demands were blatant comparisons with a “Molly Mormon” ideal, loosely understood as the perfect mother, wife, and Church member. Six sub-themes emerged that could readily be used to define a Molly Mormon: (a) early marriage and motherhood, (b) has home-centred hobbies such as canning food, (c) is active within the Church and has a calling (a role, duty or service one is asked to perform by the Church leadership), (d) is social within the Church, (e) does not complain, and (f) loves motherhood.

**Early marriage/motherhood.** The first subtheme can

be described as “gets married early and rushes into midlife/having children”. During her interview, Ann spoke about pressures felt from her ward (an assigned congregational unit) and her family:

*You want to somehow like hurdle to middle-age. You want to be there, you want to have the house, and I see the people in my family, in my ward, like I want to have kids when I’m 22. By the time I’m 30, I want to have kids and a house, and it’s just like this whole sense of impatience that I don’t really see in my other colleagues or other people or other interns that I interview at work. They’re not kind of as anxious about getting to this mythical kind of middle-aged place with the suburban house and the backyard.*

Grace mirrored the same feeling. When reflecting on the role of motherhood in relation to the position of her office colleagues, she shared,

*It’s not something that’s relatable for them at all. Of course we’re early 30s. None of them are married or even close, or even contemplating it in the near future. So it’s not something that’s relatable for them really at all.*

**Home-centred hobbies.** Ranging from genealogy to sewing, having a home-centred hobby seemed to be something each participant felt she should be doing. One of the participants also noted that many of these hobbies in fact become side businesses and questioned where the dividing line was between significant hobbies and work: “If you don’t make money at it, or enough money to support a family, does that make it okay? Working full-time for real money is not okay, but significant hobbies are okay and even praised.”

**Active within the Church/Has a calling.** Members of the LDS Church use the term active to refer to their level of participation in Church activities; having a visible calling or service that one is asked to perform by local Church leadership is considered by many as a hallmark of being religiously active. These concepts of being active and holding a calling evoked strong feelings from the participants. Kelly expressed her concern about the inequity between the role of men and women in terms of career and Church callings:

*I’ve served under bishops [local Church leaders] that will NOT call a president that works outside the home. The rationale? “Your children are sacrificing enough to be without you during the day. I can’t ask you to serve in a calling that will take you away from your family even more.” Funny, my husband has never had that conversation! On the flip side, some of my stay-at-home mom friends have*

*told me [that] they didn't feel like they were "grown up" until they got their first calling in a presidency.*

**Social within the Church.** Sociability was separated from activity because of the Church's unique blend of mandatory and optional events. It is obligatory for Church members to attend certain meetings and meet minimum requirements in order to attend LDS temple ceremonies. Other activities, such as weekday Relief Society (a Church group for adult women) meetings, are less formal and provide additional opportunities for socialization. The majority of the participants in this study felt that these more social activities did not meet their needs.

**Does not complain.** The fifth subtheme presented as "does not complain" was modified by two members of the reviewing participants as more accurately being "does not complain publicly". These two participants pointed out that complaints are indeed present, but are hidden behind a facade of overall happiness. This was substantiated as follows by Patty:

*There is a desire for Mormon women to put on the appearance that their internal life is perfect. We don't talk about our difficulties or struggles. We're really not very deep in our relationships. And I think blogs are absolutely evil for this – life is perfect, matching clothes, effortlessly planned activities every day. We do have this extreme desire to portray our lives as perfect.*

**Loves motherhood.** This subtheme represents a shared concern about having forced feelings of loving the act of motherhood. Regardless of physiological challenges such as post-partum depression or even simple preference, the feeling that one should innately love motherhood was common. In her interview, Frances shared, "I've heard people say things like, 'There's nothing like being a mother', that 'Once you make the decision and have a child ... you NEVER regret it'." Another participant referred to an LDS blog with the tagline "If you aren't finding the joy in motherhood, you're doing it wrong".

Other negative associations with the archetype were also shared by the participants. Outlined below, these stem from four main sources: (a) judgment, (b) guilt, (c) being seen as an enemy, and (d) setting up working mothers for failure.

**Judgment.** The idea of moving away, even slightly, from the created archetype was acknowledged by the participants as associated for them with fear that they would suffer negative consequences, typically from those who lived in conformity with the subculture's norm. Recalling a personal experience in this regard,

Eve shared:

*There are other people that – I know it's completely unintended, but they make comments in church meetings or along the lines of – I think it was about four or five months ago I was at a [women's] meeting and I was sitting there with a couple of my other friends, that ... we all are working moms, and there were some other people at the table that were all stay-at-home moms. One of the stay-at-home moms said something along the lines of "Well, I know my children are going to be much more righteous because I've been at home with them every day of their lives."*

When recalling even her own mother's reaction to her career, another participant said, "I think she would prefer that I were home because she feels I do not technically need to be working. We wouldn't be homeless ... she would prefer that I be home." Hence the judgment faced by these women can extend beyond their immediate wards into the sphere of their more personal relationships.

**Guilt.** Many of the interviewees shared fluctuating feelings of guilt associated with working while raising their children in an LDS culture. Comments such as "Maybe I sometimes feel like I'm doing the wrong thing" or "Maybe I feel a little bad, maybe a little guilty" were not uncommon and were expressed in association with many topics.

This concept of guilt also received attention from the reviewing participants. Several of them commented on how they should not feel guilty for being who they are or for using their talents. Another participant noted that guilt about working was a product of her environment and referenced her experience in a major metropolitan city as different from that of women who live in more rural or suburban areas. Yet another referred to guilt as a general LDS cultural norm rather than as something exclusive to LDS working mothers. After responding to many of the other reviewing participants' thoughts, one woman said:

*I'm starting to believe that LDS feel guilty no matter what they do – I don't read my Scriptures enough, pray enough, can food, FHE [Family Home Evening – a tradition of reviewing gospel concepts each Monday evening as a family] without fighting, et cetera, et cetera – so I'm not sure that if I didn't work that my feelings of guilt would not just shift to some other activity.*

**Being seen as an enemy.** While never intending to be extreme, many of the participants felt so opposite to

Molly Mormon that they looked for release from her pervasive shadow even if it meant being seen as her rival. During her interview, Cathy shared her hopes about General Conference, a bi-annual meeting held in Utah that is broadcast to Church members world-wide:

*General Conference is something that I always want to hear a statement from somebody about women and careers and it being perhaps a choice. ... I wish someone at General Conference would affirmatively tell the membership [of the Church] – men and women – that it's okay for a woman to choose to work outside the home. However, I have never heard that and, realistically, I don't expect to hear it anytime soon – if ever.*

In response to the above statement, another participant referred to the General Conference address by Church leader Quinton Cook (2011):

We should all be careful not to be judgmental or assume that sisters are less valiant if the decision is made to work outside the home. We rarely understand or fully appreciate people's circumstances. Husbands and wives should prayerfully counsel together, understanding [that] they are accountable to God for their decisions.

While the message still carries a heavy caveat of eternal accountability if the wrong choice is made, it does move closer to Cathy's hope for public approval from the Church's pulpit.

**Failure.** The fourth negative association with the archetype was that it functioned to set up working mothers for failure. After she had become pregnant, Holly found that sharing the news became difficult precisely because she planned to continue working. She said of her LDS peers, "*They're not just wondering are you going to stay home or not. It's more of a 'You're going to stay home, aren't you?' I mean, that's what I experienced when I was pregnant.*" One of the other professionals candidly shared, "*If it weren't for the Church, I don't know if I would have kids yet. I probably wouldn't actually.*" Several of the reviewers agreed with this statement.

**Deficits.** Although recognizing that the Church offers much to its community both inside and outside of its actual membership, participants specifically used the term "deficits" to express: (a) the lack of prominent female role models in the Mormon subculture, and (b) the inability within the Church to discuss the role of female career-professionals.

**Lack of prominent female role models.** The first deficit was having no prominent female role models

within the hierarchy of the Church to emulate. When addressing this subject, Beth stated, "*I feel like I don't have any good role models for an LDS mom who has young children who is successful in her career and with being a mom*". Cathy also recognized the lack of role models for LDS women. She stated that she believed "*the world needs Mormon women working*", and that she would like to

*send the message to today's young women that working is an option; that you can feel like you're a good mother and a good member of the Church and also work. [She would] like to be that exception in some young woman's eyes.*

This statement was applauded by the reviewers, many of whom shared similar thoughts.

**Inability to discuss the role of female professionals within the Church.** The second deficit discussed was that the LDS culture currently lacked the vocabulary to discuss female career-professional working mothers within the Church. Grace shared, "*The vernacular is really not there in the Church, I don't think, to be able to have a conversation about what you do.*" With regard to speaking of her career while at Church, Beth also stated,

*I feel like it's a kind of taboo subject. When I went back [to work] like I don't talk about it at Church. I don't – very few people I think know that I went back to work and I'm in the Relief Society Presidency, like I'm visible. People know who I am, but it's not something – it's not something that I talk about and I feel like it's not – I feel like it's taboo.*

Another participant professional agreed and brought up the concept of identity splitting. As a reviewer, she shared her thoughts in writing:

*I rarely speak of my job at church. In fact, I avoid the subject completely. When I'm at church, I feel like I have to give up my working identity and focus my conversations on participants [those who partake of the sacrament and participate in worship, church meetings and other church activities] about home and family.*

**Conflicting messages.** Perhaps due to the church culture's current inability to accommodate, and hence discuss, the concept of religiously active working mothers, a series of conflicting messages existed for many of the participants. Three messages in particular acted as points of confusion and anger for these women: (a) the inequality of parental expectations, (b) clashes in educational standards, and (c) feelings

of mixed Church support. A brief discussion of each of these mixed messages follows:

**Inequality of parental expectations.** Participants identified a vast difference in expectations between good mothering and good fathering. Ann, during her interview, expressed herself passionately about the different expectations of men and women respectively with regard to parenting. She stated:

*It's just like somehow parenting done by women takes ten times the time of parenting done by men to be good, right? So, if you stack the good mother on one side and the good father on the other side – good father, okay, that's a couple hours a week commitment before you hit that good threshold of like, okay, it's showing some interest, doing some homework. You would say that's two to five hours per week and then you kind of hit a good threshold. The women are kind of like to hit the I'm a good mother threshold, is more like 20 hours a week, 30 hours a week.*

Frances experienced the same phenomenon among her community members in the Church. When asked how her LDS peers respond to her working, Frances exclaimed:

*Their reaction is, "I have no idea how you do that." It's not "I can't believe you're working" or "Do you wish you were home with your kids?" Sometimes they say, "Don't you wish you were home with your kids?", but most of the time it's "Oh my goodness, I cannot believe you can do all of that!" Which is funny, because men work full-time and no-one ever says to them "Oh my gosh, I have no idea how you're a dad and work full-time." But with the women it's funny because that is exactly the reaction: "How in the world are you a mom and work full-time?" And I don't know if that's because the idea is the woman is still taking care of the entire household and working full-time, but the man just works full-time. It is perceived that a woman who works full-time is doing twice as much work because [she's] doing the home work and the full-time work.*

Like the concept of guilt, the gender-based expectations surrounding parenting received a considerable amount of attention from the reviewers. Nearly every reviewer shared a personal experience or remark. Comments ranged from tasks that stay-at-home mothers engage in that frequently take them away from their children to "non-offensively squash[ing] such expectations as they arise in conversation". Although there was no consensus as to how best to deal with this issue,

reviewers noted that this problem was not necessarily exclusive to the LDS subculture and was probably felt by working women in many different communities.

**Clashes in educational standards.** Educational obtainment acted as a point of both frustration and confusion for many of the women. Some of the participants believed that the Church not only explicitly espoused education as a way of preparing for motherhood, but simultaneously emphasized that education was a means of self-fulfilment and a vital step toward achieving a career outside of the home. With regard to this dichotomy, Eve stated, "So I grew up always wanting [children] as a large part of my life, but also hearing that message of there should be a career, there should be self-fulfilment, there should be goals."

Given the state of global economies, a number of the women expressed frustration that the need to obtain an education, and particularly one that led toward a specific career track, did not receive more emphasis in the Church's programmes for young women. Reflecting on her own daughter's experience, Kelly stated:

*I have a 20 year old daughter, and she is STILL being taught that she should have education "just in case she has to work outside the home". There are no realistic conversations about the economic reality that most people her age WILL need to have a career. Even if she is able to stay home while her children are young, she's not going to be without a job her whole life. But the great majority of the lessons and activities for young women are focused on homemaking and family life. An example: last summer ... the young men toured the local university campus and learned about what they need to be doing to get accepted there. The same evening, our young women learned to make throw pillows out of an old T-shirt!*

Economic realities aside, many of the study's participants felt that the Church had outlined personal lifestyle choices that they were not all completely comfortable with. Opal spoke bluntly about this issue:

*The Church population also needs to recognize that for some women education/career is not a Plan B; it's an integral part of our identity and calling in life. ... I know that this is what God had in mind for me.*

While recognizing that she had chosen a lifestyle outside of the cultural norm of LDS ideology, Opal also stated that she felt judged for her decision: "I think a lot of people think I'm sinning though."

**Feelings of mixed Church support.** Perceptions that the Church supports “us” and the Church does not support “us” presented points of confusion for the participants. These ranged from messages of inclusion for working women received from the pulpit followed by sermons of shame to community compliments and community slights. When reflecting on her having been dismissed from her calling after sharing that she was pregnant and would continue working, one participant said, “*It irritated me that they would say, ‘We’ll have someone else. Someone else who is not working can do this now. Someone else who stays home, they can do this now. You don’t do this anymore.’ ...*”.

**Isolation.** Feelings of isolation, loneliness, and/or exclusion were experienced by all the participants at varying levels. For some, these feelings were acute when reflecting on their time away from their children, while others experienced these emotions in relation to their Church peers. Three sources were identified as creating these negative feelings: (a) the different worlds lived in by stay-at-home mothers and career-professionals, (b) fear of being authentic, and (c) schedule limitations associated with working. Regardless of their point of origin, this theme was among the strongest for both the interviewees and the reviewers.

**Different worlds lived in by stay-at-home mothers and career-professionals respectively.** While many of the participants acknowledged dissimilarities in their lifestyle when compared with that of stay-at-home mothers of the dominant culture, Beth highlighted that the differences seemed more disparate between LDS stay-at-home mothers and their working female peers in the Church. These differences often cause the career-professional to feel like an exotic specimen. In respect of her experience of attempting to speak about her career with LDS stay-at-home mothers, Beth stated:

*I feel that I can’t talk about the challenges of it ... I feel like they’re either kind of surprised and it’s kind of a conversation stopper, “Oh-how’s-that-going?” kind of thing, or I feel like they’re very intrigued and they’re almost jealous and it’s almost like “Really?” ... That it’s – this world that – you know when they’re home with three or four children, it’s totally different for them.*

One reviewer responded with a similar statement, noting that, in order to deal with the discomfort, she often turned for conversation while at Church toward the men. “*I don’t have much in common with many stay-at-home moms, and our conversations are usually shallow. I often end up talking to men instead.*” It was noted that many of the Church activities geared toward women with children often created a chasm

between the working and the non-working women. In this vein, Dianne said that she felt excluded socially:

*I’m not a part of like the Mommy and Me groups or I’m very much outcast, not necessarily on purpose, but I am not available for 10 a.m. play dates or park days in the middle of Fridays and [name of child] just doesn’t know those kids as well as [she knows the] daycare kids.*

Iris struggled with the same feelings, commenting that she often felt as if her career acted as a source of judgment by her nonworking peers:

*It’s been very difficult to have social relationships with ward members. I often feel like I don’t fit in. I know part of it is because I can’t come to the play dates or do service activities during the week, so I miss out on the social time. Sometimes though I feel that there’s more judgment placed on me because I’m a working professional rather than just working. As if somehow if I worked at say McDonald’s or Walmart I would be more accepted because it would be seen as a “hobby” rather than a career.*

**Fear of being authentic.** The general feeling was that LDS working women cannot afford to be authentic with their peers. Because of the differences between their own and the stay-at-home mothers’ life choices and lifestyles, or perhaps in spite of them, many of the study’s participants felt that they could not risk sharing personal struggles or genuine feelings with members of their own Church community. Even when considering the general facade of happiness presented by the Molly Mormon image, differences in what the LDS subculture and dominant culture consider success make expressing their authentic feelings to members of the Church community risky for LDS professional women with children.

One of the participants actively struggled with this conflict. Recognizing her part in the conversation, she feared that,

*[If] I tell a Mormon I’m an attorney or I’m a working mom, I assume they have opinions about that, which may or may not be true. I assume that they disagree, but you know, they don’t say anything and I don’t – but when I tell someone who’s not LDS, I don’t have any questions about what they think. ... LDS people, I assume they have opinions.*

**Schedule limitations associated with working.** Managing the multiple unrelenting tasks associated with work and parenthood is difficult in any cultural

system. For LDS women who have careers as well as children, the additional duties associated with Church responsibilities and cultural expectations add further stressors that must also be considered. Several of the participants spoke about the difficulties associated with weekly Family Home Evenings, daily prayer and scripture study, and meal preparation. Participants also often spoke about the strict personal and familial boundaries they have set to prioritize what can and cannot be accomplished. However, given the expectation of perfection discussed previously, many of the study's participants felt as if they were the only ones who did not accomplish everything.

Patty, one of the study's reviewers, contributed an interesting perspective on this issue. While acknowledging her own limitations as a working mother, specifically with regard to balancing home time and work commitments, she reminded the rest of the reviewing panel that *"being a stay-at-home mother has limitations too, but we never talk about those"*.

Despite the participants having acknowledged their limitations, many of them still sought to do more and/or felt remorseful about not trying harder. Whether this drive to accomplish is in reaction to the Church's perfect female archetype or innate to the characters of the study participants, this constant struggle to achieve provoked a considerable amount of stress. For many of the participants, this stress was related to their work accomplishments and required a certain amount of recovery in the form of downtime. These periods of relaxation generally being spent alone, they tended to result in missing Church activities.

One of the participants captured the essence of the stress/isolation issue. Accepting that the members of her LDS community shared a different definition of success, this participant chose not to attend optional church activities. In reference to this act of purposeful isolation, she stated,

*Spending time with stay-at-home moms who have no concept of what I do all day is a chore, and is often not worth my time or energy, for example, the Relief Society Enrichment meetings. I have tried to go so many times over the years in an effort to be a good member of the Relief Society and the ward, but it is never worthwhile for me. When I talk with stay-at-home moms in my ward, the conversation is often about their child's accomplishment of the day. I can't add in the events of my day, "I had a paediatric case who went into laryngospasm and desaturated; I had to treat the laryngospasm and resuscitate the patient", et cetera, et cetera, even though that's what's on my mind. First, they don't understand the jargon,*

*and second, they aren't interested. As a result, many of my close friends aren't members of my faith.*

**Coping.** LDS working mothers use multiple methods to make sense of their world. These include having to make constant compromises, acknowledging personal and other limitations, and employing sanctification. Beyond this, the participant's relationship with her husband was pointed to as important in helping her emotionally navigate through her dual responsibilities as a career-professional and LDS mother.

**Having to make constant compromises.** Many of the professional women recognized that they often had to choose between their responsibilities. When asked how they integrated the roles of motherhood, church and career, most women simply said that they did not. While others, like Holly, were more positive, they nevertheless recognized that

*[On] any given day I can integrate two out of three ... . Hence the fire. It's like, well, if I've got to teach a lesson in church, then forget answering work e-mails, and I'll do that and get that out of the way. Or whatever it is, it's just putting out a fire.*

Many of the participants spoke of constantly trying to find a balance between their Church, motherhood, and career responsibilities. When asked how she managed her complex schedule, Cathy stated:

*If everything goes as planned, it all works, but if one ball drops they all fall down. So, if I get sick, everything falls apart. If my nanny is sick, it falls apart. If I take on a big – I don't, but if I were to take on a big church commitment, then I'm sure work would suffer. I mean it's balance and it's a lot. I think I'm trying to put – if I tried to put everything on the scale to balance, it wouldn't fit. So, there are some things I just don't try to do, like every ward temple night, or every opportunity to give service for those sign-up sheets that come around in Relief Society. I just have to say – I say "no" to a lot of things.*

**Acknowledging limitations.** Like Cathy, many of the study's participants have had to learn how to say "no" to various personal, professional, and Church-centred requests. In acknowledging her limitations, another of the participants shared that *"it's gotten easier to say 'no' with practice, but I do still feel twinges of guilt that I don't have time to serve people or magnify my calling or go to the temple"*.

Accepting this guilt, however, appears to be part of each participant's recognition that she wants, but can-

not have, it all. Reflecting on how she maintains a balance, Grace said, *"I like working. I enjoy it. I enjoy what I do. I want all of it. But getting all of it, balancing all of it, is tricky for anyone"*. Similarly, another of the professional women shared, *"It's like I still somehow in my brain think I can have it all. Somehow, I think that I can do both [motherhood and career]"*.

**Employing sanctification.** While several participants consciously acknowledged their feelings of guilt or anxiety associated with their decision to live outside the norm of the Mormon subculture, nearly all of the women, when discussing their desire to maintain or grow their career, were able to share reasons that glorified LDS ideology. Walker et al. (2008) noted that individuals who are able to apply this level of sanctification feel more satisfied with their job and are more committed to their current work situation. Likewise, the majority of the participants in this study appeared to soothe themselves by aligning their decision to work with transcendent qualities – such as that maintaining a career was positive if it was a nurturing position, if it provided missionary or proselytizing opportunities, if it employed their God-given talents, or if it made them a better mother.

**Nurturing position.** Part of the Church's established doctrine of gender being that it is "an essential characteristic of individual premortal, mortal, and eternal identity and purpose", and that "Mothers are primarily responsible for the nurture of their children" (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1995), much can be said about sanctifying a career through a lens of nurturing. Keeping this in mind, Eve asked, *"If I can impact thousands of lives, where's the harm in that? Why wouldn't I, as an LDS woman, want to set an example of righteous nurturing to so many other people?"*

**Provided missionary opportunities.** Likewise, the Church's emphasis on proselytization, or perhaps the participant's history as a Church missionary, provided a means of sanctification. During her interview, Beth stated that she believed her career provided her with missionary opportunities. She stated:

*I feel like I have an opportunity to, in the workplace, share my testimony, in a way, of motherhood. That I can share the joys; that I can share snippets of that with people so they know, wow, [Beth] loves being a mom, she is good at her job and she loves being a mom.*

**Employed one's God-given talents.** The thought of capitalizing on God-given talents appeared to appeal to the women as they explored both their current career as well as their previous experiences. The response of one participant adamantly endorses this:

*When I was a girl and teenager, I remember thinking I wanted to be a career woman. Having kids wasn't part of what I naturally desired, but was definitely part of my surrounding Mormon culture. I think this is a big reason why I ultimately chose to become a physician, because to me it seemed like a worthy endeavour and something worthwhile of my time to take me away from my kids.*

Cathy agreed. During her interview, when asked to contemplate what it would be like not to have a career, she stated, *"I think I would feel like I wasn't using a lot of my skills. I am benefiting people around me that I wouldn't interact with if I was home."*

**Being a better mother because of working.** Recognizing that many individuals need stimulation outside of their home environments, some of the participants acknowledged that personal temperament was a factor in their maintaining a career. Speaking of womanhood within the LDS culture, Dianne stated succinctly, *"We're made to multitask. and if I was just primarily a homemaker, I think I would go insane."* Another participant agreed with her sentiment, adding that *"I assume this doesn't apply to most women who choose to stay home, but I know I'm a better mom because I work. My temperament requires it."*

**Supportive husband.** Most of the participants spoke of the amount of career support they received from their husbands. Many of the participants spoke of their husbands as being nontraditional or more liberal in their views on gender and employment than was usual within the Church. In many ways, this more liberal leaning appeared to be something that had been attractive, perhaps even unconsciously, to the participants even prior to marriage. Nancy nodded to this when reflecting on meeting her husband at Brigham Young University. She shared:

*Despite my husband growing up in a Utah household with a stay-at-home mom and traditional dad, he himself is completely non-traditional and very liberal in his views of gender and employment. That was very obvious to me when I met him, and it was one of the things that attracted me to him most. I found many guys at BYU absolutely distasteful because of their obvious quest for a Suzie Homemaker wife ...*

In reflecting on a previous relationship, Grace also referred to preferring men with non-traditional LDS ideals. She stated:

*Ten years ago I was dating a guy who definitely would not have approved of me staying and continuing to work [after the*

delivery of my child]. *He was very conservative and just in all aspects of his life expected things to be a certain way – I mean ... we dated for a very long time, but it's a very good thing that we didn't get married.*

In their current relationships, the study participants' husbands' support seemed to go beyond traditional Church culture expectations and gender norms. Holly stated of her husband:

*He never pushes back if I need to work late, if an emergency comes up, if – he's a professional, he's got a lot – he has just as much if not more – I mean, he's a [prominent calling in the Church]. He's got a lot on his plate too, but anytime I ever call him, he never tells me, "I'm too busy, I can't talk to you right now". He always drops what he's doing to attend to my crisis, or whatever I need, or to be home with [name of child] if I can't be, very supportive that way. We're in the same field. He's actually a few years farther along than I am. So, his advice has been absolutely invaluable on how to navigate [my career].*

Dianne echoed these statements, saying of her husband that *"he's really the only LDS male that I really confide in, and I think he's kind of a special case to where he's supportive of anything I want to do."*

### Implications for Clinical Work and Conclusions

Exploration of the lives and experiences of the 16 participants provided significant evidence that LDS women who maintain a career while also mothering a child/children under the age of 12 differ from their LDS peers both demographically and in terms of their values. The demographic differences include delayed first birth, more extensive and advanced educational attainment, and higher than national-average salaries.

The values-based differences weave throughout five different major themes. The first, *Archetype*, acknowledges the cultural expectations imposed upon all LDS women. The next two, *Deficits* and *Conflicting Messages*, recognize the challenges encountered by career-professional LDS women as they live under the shadow of the Archetype. The fourth, *Isolation*, reflects the social interaction problems experienced by these women and explores its likely sources. And the fifth, *Coping*, considers its resolution.

Strongest among these coping styles is sanctification. Like women of other religious traditions, participants in this study noted that their careers provided them with enviable transcendent qualities (Hall et al., 2012). By viewing themselves in their professional role as

nurturers, proselytizers, and users of God-given talents, the participants' decisions to delay marriage and the conception of children, to pursue additional education, or to remain employed after childbirth, became more acceptable.

This study highlighted the primary issues that could affect an LDS professional woman's mental health. Psychotherapists need to be aware of the women's experiences of marginalization within the LDS community, the invisible identity of the professional LDS woman in the dominant culture, and the religious double-bind of being bicultural. This implies that the psychotherapist needs to be sensitive to the issues related to cultural diversity that influence the lives of LDS professional women who are mothers.

There were sufficient similarities among the study participants' experiences to conclude that most LDS women who both maintain a professional career and mother children under the age of 12 will face some degree of marginalization within their own religious community. While the occasional act of discrimination may well be deliberate, the overall experiences of the participants in this study reflected the unintentional microaggressive acts common to those experienced by other minority groups. Sue (2010) defined microaggressions as "brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioural, and environmental indignities" (p. 5). The intra-Church microaggressions experienced by the participants were often a consequence of their own disinterest in and/or inability to adhere to the cultural norms outlined in the Archetype.

Workplaces free from the Archetype of the perfect LDS wife and mother can provide solace for the LDS career-professional with children. Yet, for many of these women, manoeuvring through the dominant culture also means carrying the burden of an invisible identity. Similar to the lack of authentic interaction characterizing their relationships with the female members of their religious congregations, the tacit differences in the definition of success and familial priorities often characterize the emotional depth of a workplace relationship. Even so, the LDS career woman may actually feel more at ease in her work community than she does in her own religious subculture.

The participants in this study reported experiencing negative reactions from their Church subculture and mixed reactions from the dominant culture. They both consciously and subconsciously chose to deviate from the LDS cultural norms. By acknowledging their limitations and constantly planning for compromise, the participants navigated between the dominant culture and the LDS subculture with some sense of assurance. As they weave between these conflicting mores, LDS career-professional women with children have become adept in accommodating their personal

presentation to the context. While appearing to be more comfortable with those who share their work ethos, they are able to diminish the importance to them personally of their involvement in the workforce in order to engage with the Church community.

In addition, these women demonstrated considerable reliance on their husbands for emotional and social support. While their increased age, social experience, neurological development, and relative maturity at the time of marriage, all factor into this relationship, their husbands' purported propensity to hold more liberal views of working women within the Church acted as both an initial point of attraction and a source of ongoing comfort for the LDS professional woman.

This study emphasized how female professionals who also mother children function within the Church's culture. However, by acknowledging the Latter-day Saints' early history of persecution, their expectation of Church members globally to share dietary and grooming standards, moral values, and age-related experiences, future research may explore how other

members of this subculture interact both with each other and with other societal groups. This may include an exploration of these same women's experiences at work and of how, or if, each deals with the stigma associated with her family and/or faith values in her place of employment. Future research on sanctification and cultural negotiation could focus on LDS stay-at-home fathers, LDS gays or lesbians, Church members who choose to remain single, or any other Latter-day Saint or population living outside of the Church's gender or cultural norms.

By acknowledging the unique cultural demands found in LDS populations, their supports and defences, as well as the very real stigma felt by these bicultural women, clinical psychologists are better positioned to provide effective psychotherapy for LDS women who both maintain a professional career and mother young children. However, to do so it is necessary first to embrace an understanding of spiritual belief systems as more than just a simple moral or philosophical compass, and instead to see them also as very real and viable cultures in and of themselves.

## Referencing Format

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