

**A Basic Qualitative Study of Female Seminary Instructors as a Minority Group**

by

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## Abstract

In the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, the religious education (seminary) program for high school-age students disproportionately consists of male seminary instructors and administrators. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore the lived experiences of female seminary instructors through the lens of feminist and empowerment theories. Fifteen female seminary instructors were selected to participate in one-on-one interviews to provide data as a minority group within the seminary instructor population. A focus group of five instructors from the one-on-one interviews were invited to discuss the collected data and offer further analysis. The research identified multiple examples of gender bias and gender inequality experienced by the seminary instructors. The focus group recommended several changes in administration efforts to better train, educate, and improve gender equality among stakeholders. The recommended modifications included more clear communication of gender policy changes, increased efforts to improve workplace satisfaction for female instructors, and greater support for female instructors to return to graduate school with minor children living at home. The study could assist female seminary instructors' colleagues, principals, and administrators with efforts to eliminate gender inequality and gender bias and improve the work environment for all employees.

## Dedication

This work is dedicated to my incredible wife, Bonnie Lynn Merrill, and my children John, Ben, Isaac, Tacy, Julia, and Joyce. We made it!

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

In 1912, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (the Church) started a religious education program called *released-time seminary* to provide formal religious education to high school-age students (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2015a). The program of released-time seminary allowed students to leave the high school building for one class period a day and participate in a religion class in a separate building adjacent to the school (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2015a). The Church provided and financed the buildings, curriculum, instructors, and any other items needed. Students did not pay tuition, and the seminary class was open to anyone of any faith.

Released-time seminary began at Granite High School in Salt Lake City, Utah, and initial enrollment reached 70 students (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2015a). In 2018, released-time and early-morning seminary programs had significantly matured to include 404,270 enrolled students in 152 countries (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2019b). Most seminary students attend early-morning seminary classes taught by volunteer instructors. The seminaries have approximately 1,400 full-time seminary instructors and administrators, with 44,000 volunteer early-morning instructors worldwide (K. Blaylock, personal communication, January 14, 2020; The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2019b).

The 1912 job description of a seminary instructor included the gender-specific qualification to be male (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2015a; Griffiths, 2008). Female seminary instructors later served as volunteer instructors to teach early-morning or after-school classes but not as full-time instructors until decades later (Walch, 2014). In 2020, female seminary instructors made up to 4% of full-time seminary instructors and 2% of seminary

principals (K. Blaylock, personal communication, January 14, 2020). Until 2014, the Seminaries and Institutes of Religion (2014) department had a policy in place which stated, “no mother with minor children living in the home . . . may be employed full-time to coordinate or teach seminary.” The policy may have contributed to fewer women becoming full-time seminary instructors (Stack, 2014, Walch, 2014). On November 14, 2014, Seminaries and Institutes of Religion (S&I) changed the policy, making it applicable to female employees with dependent children in the home (Stack, 2014, Walch, 2014).

Chapter 1 includes a description of the background of the problem of female seminary instructors’ unheard perspectives, as well as the purpose of the study, significance of the study, and research questions driving the research. Sections covering the conceptual framework, definitions of terms, assumptions, scope and delimitations, and limitations are included in Chapter 1. A summary of the basic qualitative research concludes the chapter.

### **Background of the Study**

Many women in the United States feel marginalized due to sexism, leaving many men and women feeling frustrated, dissatisfied, and discouraged with the overt gender biases (Fink, 2018). Historical research shows multiple examples of gender inequality and fundamental civil liberties being denied to women based on gender (Fink, 2018; Giardina, 2019; Wright, 2016). The basic qualitative study explored the lived experiences and perspectives of female instructors working in a religious, male-led hierarchical organization.

Extensive research has focused on the experiences and challenges of female public-school teachers who feel marginalized or overlooked for administrative positions and devalued because they are not male (Lewis, 2018; Peterson, 2011; Riegle-Crumb, Moore, & Buontempo, 2017). This basic qualitative study focused on a segment of Church employees working as

professional religious seminary instructors in Utah. Current concepts, tenets, and views of empowerment theory and feminist theory were used to emphasize reliability and validity within the study (Mihas, 2019).

The data collected for the basic qualitative study will add to the contemporary data focusing on feminist experiences and perspectives in the workplace. The research may serve as a forum for female seminary instructors to voice their unique lived experiences as professional religious educators. Given the research is groundbreaking, the results from the research may serve as a springboard for more dialogue, discussion, and further focused training regarding gender-based concerns within S&I.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The problem within the religious education system of the Church is the relatively low number of female seminary instructors in the high school programs compared to the number of male seminary instructors (K. Blaylock, personal communication, January 14, 2020). With the large gender hiring gap, female seminary instructors have not been involved in administrative or leadership positions (K. Blaylock, personal communication, January 14, 2020; Stack, 2014). Due to the female seminary instructors' disproportionate hiring gap, their unique perspectives may go unheard, unrelated, misunderstood, or neglected (A. G. Baker, 2016; M. Baker, 2016). The background of the problem centers on the Church's religious education department not having critically researched the lived experiences and perspectives of the female instructor population within the organization. Without critical qualitative research supplying an opportunity and a forum for female seminary instructors, gender inequality issues may continue within the Church's religious education department.

Most newly hired seminary instructors are male (Stack, 2014). Before 2014, female seminary instructor candidates were told about the policy of disallowing female instructors to maintain employment if they chose to have children or if they married into a relationship in which minor children were still living in the home (Stack, 2014). Chad Webb, the administrator of S&I, stated the ideology behind the policy was intended to provide support to the Church's previously established position of the irreplaceable, nurturing role of mothers in caring for their children in their homes (Walch, 2014). Repercussions of the policy may be found in the hiring gap between male employees making up 96% of instructors or administrators contrasted with 4% of female employees working in the S&I department of the Church (K. Blaylock, personal communication, January 14, 2020; L. Newbold, personal communication, November 20, 2019). The basic qualitative study explored the lived experiences and perspectives of the extreme minority of female seminary instructors within the full-time seminary instructor population.

A significant gap exists in the academic research in this field because no scholarly studies have analyzed specific gender-based challenges for female seminary instructors as a minority group in the workplace. Griffiths, Esplin, and Randall's (2016) extensive research covered the foundations of the Church's education system but did not address gender inequality or gender hiring gaps found in the seminary program. McBaine and Wayment (2016) discussed the need for seminary curriculum to introduce and emphasize more scriptural and historical accounts of strong women, but the research stops short of addressing gender-based issues experienced by female seminary instructors.

Midkiff (2015) referred to a plethora of studies traversing several waves of feminism beginning in 1848. The bulk of the research focused on feminist experiences in diverse education areas such as science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) programs, but none of the



research included female seminary instructors (Riegle-Crumb et al., 2017). As a minority group in S&I's hierarchical religious male-led organization, female instructors have valuable, unique experiences, perspectives, and ideas which have not contributed to the body of research about feminist and empowerment theories. This study is important because it is the first study of an unresearched subject, possibly serving as the impetus for more feminist studies within the Church's S&I programs and other Church departments.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore the lived experiences of female seminary instructors through the lens of feminist and empowerment theories (Vásquez-Rosati, 2017). Scholars have not researched female seminary instructors' experiences and perspectives about feminist or empowerment issues (Griffiths et al., 2016; McBaine & Wayment, 2016). Conducting basic qualitative research using one-on-one interviews and a focus group provided data to fill the gap in research of female instructors' perspectives and lived experiences (Hoyt, 2017; Mihas, 2019).

Due to the dearth of literature and research on feminist and empowerment views of female seminary instructors, the literature from this basic qualitative study may augment training on how seminary administrators address the needs of all seminary instructors. Through this basic qualitative research, seminary colleagues, principals, and administrators may show increased awareness of female instructors' lived experiences and perspectives. Researching gender inequality in the workplace with a rigorous, scholarly approach seeks to provide sound data for S&I administrators to utilize in facilitating changes promoting gender equity. Supplying an opportunity for female seminary instructors to express and elaborate on personal events through lived experiences demonstrates the importance of the subjects' perspectives regarding feminist

and empowerment issues. Valid and reliable data help to propagate changes and improvements in an organization (Mihas, 2019).

### **Significance of the Study**

Research addressing gender inequality in public education organizations has been critical in mitigating gender inequality within public education (Lewis, 2018; Master, Cheryan, & Meltzoff, 2016). Gender disparity issues in STEM departments have been well researched and documented (Riegle-Crumb et al., 2017). Through valid and reliable data, the gender hiring gap within STEM programs was identified and policies were created to decrease the gap (Lewis, 2018). Through this basic qualitative research of female seminary instructors' experiences, lessons gleaned from the STEM program's gender-gap improvements may serve as a viable template for S&I. Providing data-driven research addressing potential feminist and empowerment concerns from female seminary instructors avoids conjecture and advances feminist and empowerment goals.

### **Research Questions**

Research questions are used to provide key direction and focus for scholarly research and writing (Cronje, 2020). To more fully understand the personal experiences of female seminary instructors, two research questions were used to guide the study. The following questions guided this basic qualitative research:

Research Question 1: What can the experiences of female seminary instructors employed by the Church contribute to the existing body of feminist and empowerment theories?

Research Question 2: What perspectives, insights, and experiences from female seminary instructors may help male administrators and colleagues better understand feminist concerns, challenges, issues, and perspectives?

The research questions were written as open-ended questions, supplying the subjects an opportunity to share personal lived experiences without researcher influence or bias (Sohn, Thomas, Greenberg, & Pollio, 2017). The framework of basic qualitative research provides subjects with the freedom to express themselves in a one-on-one interview setting. Following the collection of data, a focus group of five female instructors was utilized to provide commentary, insight, and analysis of the one-on-one interview responses. The focus group's insights and perspectives further strengthened the research analysis and diminished potential researcher bias.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework of the research includes different aspects and principles of feminist and empowerment theory. The feminist theory focuses on the existing social construct of established societal norms identifying gender discrimination as demoralizing, unjust, harmful, and adversely affecting women (Swirsky & Angelone, 2016). The tenets of feminist theory seek to establish the equal treatment of women by peers and eliminate all aspects of culture which have placed women at a disadvantage economically, politically, socially, and morally (Swirsky & Angelone, 2016).

Empowerment theory served as a companion to feminist theory as it increases the ability of a relegated minority population to become empowered to progress toward equality (Freire, 2000; Turner & Maschi, 2015). Each phase of the dissertation process was viewed through the lens of these two theories. The theories based on feminist and empowerment issues were selected because the subjects are members of a female minority group in a male-led hierarchical organization. The two theories driving the study best served the topic of research by supplying the optimal framework for the female seminary instructors to express lived experiences (Lu, Morrison, & Skordis-Worrall, 2019).

The conceptual framework for the basic qualitative study drew from a diverse range of theories connected to education, religion, feminism, empowerment, gender inequality, gender equality, and ethics (del Carmen Salazar & Rios, 2016; Gorski, 2009; Leś, 2017; Nieto & Bode, 2018; Shannon-Baker, 2018). Creating a structured and sound conceptual framework adds reliability and validity to the entire body of work (Collins & Stockton, 2018). Siim's (2016) research emphasized the broad array of topics and nuanced areas of the human family affected by feminist theory and empowerment theory, as researched by scholars. Social, political, economic, and global refugee emergencies continue to shed light on systematic issues and egregious struggles with gender inequality (Siim, 2016).

Philosopher and seminal author Freire (2000) advocated social change through empowerment theory. Freire theorized if one could identify and understand the sources of oppression, one could become empowered to enact change. Freire further linked empowerment and the ability to change an individual's life to their means and ability to receive a formal education (Vlieghe, 2018).

Carr (2003) viewed feminist theory and empowerment theory as linked due to the theories' emphasis on correcting and remediating oppression. Other authors are frustrated because feminist theory and empowerment theory have suffered from overpoliticization (Phillips, 2015). Phillips (2015) noted feminist and empowerment theories might be better understood when viewed with a more organic, agenda-less lens to identify progress and gaps more effectively.

### **Definitions of Terms**

Definition of the terms used in the study provides a better grasp of the research. References to the unique nomenclature involving the Church's seminary program are included to

provide a clearer understanding of the context and job description of the research subject. Each of the term definitions were extracted from reliable resources. The terms and definitions are as follows.

***The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (the Church).*** The employer of the seminary instructors; a religious organization whose total global membership exceeds 16 million (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2018b; Van Dyk, 2019).

***Released-Time Seminary.*** Seminary classes held during school hours (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2018a; Griffiths et al., 2016).

***Seminaries and Institutes of Religion (S&I).*** A religious department within The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (2019b) focusing on the religious education of youth and young adults between the ages of 14 and 30.

***Seminary.*** A religious education program offered to the youth between the ages of 14 and 18 (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2018a; Griffiths et al., 2016).

***Seminary Instructor.*** A professional, nonclergy, classroom facilitator; contracted to work for the Church, teaching five to six classes of 25 to 35 high school-age seminary students. The instructor teaches the curriculum provided by the S&I department of the Church (Pierce & Noyce, 2019).

### **Assumptions**

The first assumption is all-female seminary instructors are aware of past policies within S&I affecting the employment of women with minor children (Walch, 2014). A second assumption is, with voluntary involvement in the research, each subject is interested in sharing her lived experiences as part of the data. The third assumption is participants are interested in accepting and occupying administrative and leadership positions which were previously reserved

for long-tenured colleagues and which now may be made available to experienced female employees. Another assumption is the one-on-one interviews provide each subject with an opportunity to share personal, diverse, and unique lived experiences which can contribute to the breadth of the data.

### **Scope and Delimitations**

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore the lived experiences of female seminary instructors through the lens of feminist and empowerment theories (Vásquez-Rosati, 2017). The scope of the research involved female seminary instructors employed by the Church. All subjects were full-time seminary instructors employed by the Church. Each of the subjects lived in the United States and worked in Utah.

The research subjects consisted of 15 instructors selected through purposive sampling from the released-time seminary programs organized in Utah. All 15 subjects were subdivided into three groups based on years of employment in S&I. The first group of five instructors had one to two years of teaching experience, the second group of five instructors had three to four years of experience, and the third group of instructors had five or more years of experience. A focus group of five of the interviewed instructors was conducted to gather feedback and analysis of the data collected from the 15 one-on-one interviews.

Upon completion of the one-on-one interviews with the 15 subjects, the data were transcribed, and member checked to ensure validity and reliability (Tangen, 2014). Data were also triangulated to promote optimal validity and reliability (Tetnowski, 2015). Field notes were recorded throughout the research process to provide a greater contextual understanding of the research (Phillippi & Lauderdale, 2018). Five of the subjects involved in the one-on-one interviews were invited to participate in a focus group to assist with the analysis of data. The

focus group's contributions, personal insights, recommendations, and unique female perspectives were intended to minimize potential gender bias from all parties involved in the research (Randle, Mackay, & Dudley, 2014).

The basic qualitative study consisted of original research. The research in the field of the Church's seminary program is groundbreaking because it focused explicitly on female seminary instructors' perspectives as a minority group within the seminary instructor population. The one-on-one interviews and focus group phase of research was completed in August 2020.

Delimitations of the basic qualitative study are acknowledged in the research process. The basic qualitative study was not focused on all female employees of S&I, such as female support specialists, female substitute instructors, female student-instructors, or part-time female instructors. Significant challenges exist in gathering data because it is a time-intensive process and data have to be member checked. Other issues were confronted when selecting the subjects for the study and receiving approval from region directors to solicit volunteers from the regions they oversee. With 15 female seminary instructors participating in the research, the research subjects represent 30% of the female seminary instructor population in Utah (K. Blaylock, personal communication, January 14, 2020).

### **Limitations**

Intrinsic limitations exist in qualitative research methods based on the subjectivity and nature of the methodology (Venkatesh, Brown, & Bala, 2013). Utilizing sound research tools alleviates qualitative research limitations (Md Ali & Yusof, 2011). Establishing trustworthiness and rigor through in-depth examination strengthens the validity and reliability of the data (Drost, 2011). Limitations in the basic qualitative research may be minimized through member checking and triangulation (Tetnowski, 2015).

The basic qualitative study is limited because the 15 subjects involved in the research represented only 30% of the target population. Other limitations exist in the one-on-one interview process because the interviews were conducted by one colleague, and researcher bias may occur (Anderson, 2010). Limitations exist due to the amount of time required to gather data from one-on-one interviews (Anderson, 2010). One-on-one interviews rely heavily on the interviewer's ability to elicit personal perspectives from the subjects and can be significantly affected by a researcher's bias and interpretation of the body language of the interviewee (Anderson, 2010; Munthe-Kaas, Glenton, Booth, Noyes, & Lewin, 2019).

Limitations were addressed in the analysis of data because the colleague conducting the research is not a member of the female seminary population. To control the limitation of potential gender bias, the focus group in the study discussed insights of the triangulated and member-checked data from the one-on-one interviews. The research analysis relied heavily on the insights shared during the focus group discussion (Md Ali & Yusof, 2011). A personal journal was kept to record potential biases throughout the research process.

### **Chapter Summary**

The basic qualitative research is divided into five chapters. Chapter 1 introduced the problem and purpose of the basic qualitative study. Researching this unique segment of the seminary instructor population will lead to more in-depth research about female seminary instructors. The significance of the study along with the research questions were presented in Chapter 1. The framework of feminist and empowerment theories were identified and shown to have a symbiotic theoretical relationship. Several assumptions, scope and delimitations, and limitations of the research were also discussed. Chapter 2 consists of a comprehensive literature



review, including the literature search strategy, conceptual framework, research literature review, and chapter summary.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore the lived experiences of female seminary instructors through the lens of feminist and empowerment theories (Vásquez-Rosati, 2017). In the Church, leaders encourage high school students to participate in a free religious education program called *release-time seminary* (Nelson, 2019). In 1912, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (2018a) created the seminary program at Granite High School in Salt Lake City, Utah. The seminary instructors are paid as professional instructors and are not considered a part of the Church's clergy (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2015c).

Parents of seminary students consent to have their children released from the school's responsibility to attend one period of the seminary during the school day (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2018b). Students are permitted to attend the seminary class as part of their regular high school schedules throughout the school year (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2018b). Seminary students may choose to attend seminary classes for up to four years as part of their high school education experience, but the students will not receive any high school credit from the seminary classes. The curriculum for each year rotates between The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints' (2018b) canon of scriptures, which includes the New Testament, the Old Testament, the Book of Mormon, and the Doctrine and Covenants.

The Church's Seminaries and Institutes of Religion (2012) department articulated its mission statement clarifying the purpose of the seminary classes is to help the youth develop a greater understanding of the life, teachings, and ministry of Jesus Christ. The seminary curriculum focuses on foundational beliefs, doctrines, historical events, and application of the Church's teachings (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2018b; Morgan, 2014). In

states or countries in which the released-time seminary is not an option for students, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (2018b) offers early-morning or after-school seminary classes. The Church has invested resources of buildings, instructors, supplies, curriculum writers, and other supportive materials to ensure all high school students who wish to participate in the seminary program have the opportunity to do so.

Establishing and strengthening personal spirituality and religiosity at an early age is central to the Church's dogma for the young members of the Church (Glassford, 2015). Seminary classrooms consist of male and female students between the ages of 14 and 18. A significant gap exists between the ratio of male to female seminary instructors (Hale, 2018). The basic qualitative study used the minority group of nonvoluntary female seminary instructors as the target population in the research.

One of the problems which exist within the Church's religious education system is the ratio of female to male seminary instructors. The number of hired female seminary instructors is significantly less than the number of male instructors and has greatly impacted the number of female administrators and principals in the S&I department (K. Blaylock, personal communication, January 14, 2020). Female seminary instructors belong to a minority group within a religion which has been marginalized and disenfranchised in the past in the United States (Brekus, 2011).

From the earliest beginnings of the Church, many historians have struggled to offer an unbiased rendition of research regarding the depiction of female members of the Church (Brekus, 2011; Palmer, 2018). Female seminary instructors' unique perspectives have not been shared or studied with a scholarly approach (Griffiths et al., 2016; McBaine & Wayment, 2016). In the

seminary program, no scholarly research project has utilized the specific basic qualitative methodology to fill the existing gap in research (Walch, 2014).

The findings from the basic qualitative study can be used to educate S&I department administrators and employees to help better understand the different perspectives of female seminary instructors. The research findings may be used to contribute to gender equality training, promote the social awareness of challenges and concerns, and provide more significant professional growth opportunities for female seminary instructors and administrators. The gap in research literature demonstrates a need to study the lived experiences of female seminary instructors and evaluate how female instructors' voices may contribute to the literature of feminist studies (Mihas, 2019). Due to the lack of literature and research about such a specific segment of society, the literature from this basic qualitative study can enhance the training of seminary administrators to meet the needs of all seminary instructors (Griffiths et al., 2016; McBaine & Wayment, 2016). Increased awareness of female instructors' lived experiences and perspectives may improve the experiences of all employees and help facilitate changes and improvements in the organization (Mihas, 2019).

Modiba's (2017) research focused on gender equality in the public education system and how gender equality or inequality affects the teachers living and working in South Africa. Modiba's data showed educating all faculty members led to enhanced ability to recognize the different types of sexism and gender inequality in the workplace and helped facilitate positive changes among the faculty. Modiba noted public-school teachers' betterment and contentment in the workplace had a notable impact on the positive experiences of the students in the classroom. Modiba's research demonstrated a teacher's emotional and mental state may be correlated to

students' experiences with the teacher, as well as impacting the students' overall learning experience.

Buenestado-Fernández, Álvarez-Castillo, González-González, and Espino-Díaz's (2019) research regarding gender-heterogeneous faculties supported Modiba's (2017) findings of the benefits of gender equality and diversity awareness to improve workplace wellness. Recognizing the positive ramifications of inclusivity of all groups of a diverse workforce affects the whole culture of an organization (Buenestado-Fernández et al., 2019). Inclusivity in the workforce has short- and long-term positive outcomes (Buenestado-Fernández et al., 2019). Applying Modiba's and Buenestado-Fernández et al.'s findings to the Church's seminary instructor training program may be beneficial to help employees and administrators efficaciously improve the workplace and positively impact the overall learning environment for seminary students.

All of the female seminary instructors in the basic qualitative study are paid religious educators and have earned at least a bachelor's degree from an accredited university (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2019c). Each subject has agreed to comply with each of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints' (2019c) standards of employment, as outlined on the Seminary Careers website. The basic qualitative study explored different aspects and principles of feminist and empowerment theories through the lived experiences of the female seminary instructor population.

This chapter focuses on scholarly literature about feminist and empowerment theories and how these two theories impact the professional lives and work experiences of female seminary instructors (Mihas, 2019). Literature search strategies utilized in the research process reflect the critical role the ACE library played in the effort of compiling the research. Additional themes in the chapter include the conceptual framework used to support the basic qualitative

study. The literature reviewed in the chapter helped to analyze past and current challenges and struggles resulting from gender inequality.

The basic qualitative study addressed an array of issues supported by feminist and empowerment theories (Freire, 2000; Wollstonecraft, 1792). The chapter concludes with a summary of the potential counterarguments and identifies the gap in literature and research. The gap exists due to the lack of research involving female seminary instructors' lived experiences. The chapter includes some discussion regarding specific ways in which the basic qualitative study may remediate the research gap. Hoyt (2017) identified significant gaps in scholarly work within specific groups of women in the Church. The existing feminist scholarly research of women in the Church often centers on themes of polygamy, the pioneer exodus, or life as a pioneer woman in the western United States (Hoyt, 2017).

### **Literature Search Strategy**

To follow the recommendations of McGowan et al. (2016) concerning the importance of peer-reviewed articles, the basic qualitative study utilized peer-reviewed research to ensure reliability and validity of the study. The ACE library played an essential role in amassing the literature used in the research. Further research utilized SAGE Journals, Google Scholar, and ERIC. Academic Search Complete rendered several helpful articles to improve the research and literature review process.

Several keywords were selected to optimize research efforts. Narrowing the topics of research to specific keywords focused the research and refined the breadth of inquiries to more specific, pertinent themes for the basic qualitative study (Rewhorn, 2018). The keywords utilized in the research included *religious education*, *role of female educators*, *gender equality in education*, *gender neutrality in education*, *feminist theory in education*, *empowerment theory in*

*education/learning, religious education female teachers, Mormon education feminist theory, male hierarchy in education, workplace equality, social justice, gender equity in religious education, and Mormon feminism.* Each keyword search brought a deeper understanding and insight through peer-reviewed and non-peer-reviewed resources (Leś, 2017). ACE provided a thematic grid worksheet in Microsoft Excel, which helped organize the articles under different themes, such as methodology used, number of participants, key themes, key contradictions, how the article contributes to the knowledge base, and outstanding quotes.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework for the basic qualitative study drew from a diverse range of theories connected to education, religion, feminism, empowerment, gender inequality, gender equality, and ethics (del Carmen Salazar & Rios, 2016; Gorski, 2009; Leś, 2017; Nieto & Bode, 2018; Shannon-Baker, 2018). Creating a structured and sound conceptual framework based on proven theories adds reliability and validity to the entire body of work in the literature review (Collins & Stockton, 2018). Siim (2016) emphasized the broad array of topics and nuanced areas of the human family affected by feminist theory and empowerment theory, as researched by scholars. Social, political, economic, and global refugee emergencies continue to shed light on systematic issues and egregious struggles with gender inequality (Siim, 2016).

Freire (2000) advocated social change and empowerment through identifying and understanding the sources of oppression so the victims could act effectively to counteract their oppressors. Freire's empowerment approach and writings further embraced the pedagogy of how individuals might experience empowerment to change their lives and circumstances through the means of education (Vlieghe, 2018). Carr (2003) viewed feminist theory and empowerment theory as linked due to their similar philosophies of correcting and remediating oppression.

Phillips (2015) argued feminist theory and empowerment theory have suffered from overpoliticization and noted the need for each theory to be viewed with a more organic, agenda-less lens to identify progress and gaps better.

The basic qualitative study explored the lived experiences of female seminary instructors and their perceptions of gender equality and empowerment equality in the work environment. The opportunity supplied through the basic qualitative study provided the female seminary instructors an opportunity to share personal perspectives through one-on-one interviews and in a focus group, and directly contributed to their empowerment. Due to the basic qualitative study representing a pioneering effort in research, the primary researcher did not arrive at any presuppositions or beliefs regarding the female seminary instructors' gender- or empowerment-related views. The two theories driving the research were selected because the subjects are a female minority in a male-led hierarchical organization. Both theories best served the topic of research by providing the optimal framework for the female seminary instructors to express lived experiences (Lu et al., 2019).

### **Feminist Theory**

Issues within feminist theory should be viewed as a human family problem and not a problem to be isolated to a specific gender (Ferguson, 2017). Zinkin (2018) determined feminist theory involves multiple levels of societal power, influencing directly or indirectly all pieces of individuals' social fabric. Gender discrimination can be observed in family relationships, politics, economics, businesses, education systems, and social infrastructures (Allen & Jaramillo-Sierra, 2015; Fink, 2018; Zinkin, 2018). Gender discrimination may be found in all races and cultures (Allen & Jaramillo-Sierra, 2015; Fink, 2018; Zinkin, 2018). Due to the long history of the Church's seminary program's leadership consisting almost entirely of male administrators,



the process and results of the basic qualitative study may serve to identify gaps in gender equality issues (Hale, 2018).

Understanding gender inequality requires a clear understanding of the basic tenets of feminist theory. Wollstonecraft (1792) brought to light foundational principles of feminist theory affecting European women dating back to the French Revolution. Wollstonecraft's progressive writings about feminist issues are relevant today, as she decried social, political, economic, and educational inequality. Addressing the societal ills of gender inequality can be aided by an exploration process toward discovering, recognizing, and disrupting the existing status quo power structure, based on gender differences (Mercer-Mapstone & Mercer, 2018). One of the purposes of feminist theory is to socially solidify the equal treatment of women by their peers and reverse the dominant masculine culture which has placed women at disadvantages economically, politically, socially, and morally (Buenestado-Fernández et al., 2019; Swirsky & Angelone, 2016).

The modern feminist movement has experienced gradual turning points which have contributed to positive shifts toward greater gender equality in the United States (Coleman, 2016). Exploring the lived experiences of female seminary instructors in the work environment can provide a previously unresearched demographic of women with a voice to contribute their unique perspectives as women to the existing research in feminist theory. Not researching the specific demographic of the female population in the Church's religious education program may be viewed as a disservice to the female instructors as well as to their male colleagues, administrators, and students.

## **Empowerment Theory**

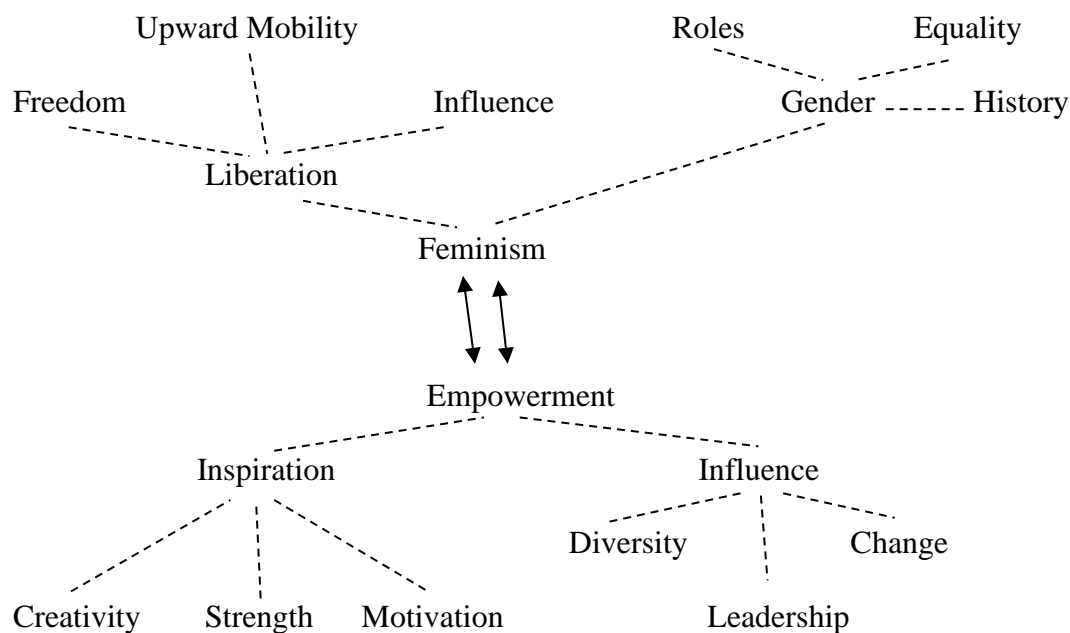
Empowerment theory serves as a companion of feminist theory. Scholars indicated empowerment theory focuses on the areas in which individuals or groups have become marginalized and lost power, relevance, or status by others in positions of power (Turner & Maschi, 2015). Buenestado-Fernández et al.'s (2019) research concluded with a recommendation for the 127 universities involved in the study to aggressively pursue equality-focused practices to benefit all teachers and administrators in their organizations. Focusing on issues with feminism and empowerment theory can shine a brighter light on female seminary instructors' experiences and how the instructors view their role as faculty members in the work environment. Research shows teachers view the work environment and relationships with colleagues and administrators as a significant factor in the overall well-being of an employee (Pedersen & West, 2017).

M. Baker (2016) indicated the diverse gender roles of men and women offer integral components in the workplace. However, women are still more often overlooked than men for promotions or administrative positions (M. Baker, 2016). Women today have an unprecedented degree of educational and career opportunities compared to the past. David's (2016) research focused on the critical, monumental milestones which have not been addressed in the male-dominant culture. Other researchers provide evidence of women being passed over for advancement opportunities because of the traditional sociocultural views of female roles and family responsibilities, contrasted with the roles in the workplace (A. G. Baker, 2016).

Modern research and literature establish the importance of feminist and empowerment theories and how each theory is integral to improve society for all people (Lu et al., 2019). The body of research about these two theories served as a sound foundation for the basic qualitative study involving female seminary instructors' experiences as employees within the Church's

religious education program. Literature relating to feminist and empowerment theories continues to identify many of the modern-day ill effects of sexism toward women (Wright, 2016).

Wright (2016) noted sexism, gender inequality, and gender discrimination saturate all layers of the sociological infrastructure. Fink (2018) recognized the legal and cultural support readily available to anyone experiencing gender inequality. Additionally, Fink indicated ways in which many women are still silenced due to blatant or passive sexism. While empowerment theory encompasses all feminist issues, the literature review was focused on feminist issues emphasizing the feelings and experiences of female seminary instructors in the Church's predominantly male-led hierarchical organization of S&I. Figure 1 illustrates the interconnected purposes shared with feminism and empowerment principles.



*Figure 1.* Mind map of the relationship between feminism and empowerment.

## **Research Literature Review**

Limited literature exists regarding female seminary instructors in the Church's religious education system. Holbrook (2016) delved into concepts of feminism and empowerment theories observed within the Church's ecclesiastical organizations. Holbrook's study did not address female Church employees or the experiences of female seminary instructors. Ample literature has established the importance of education organizations' awareness of gender differences and gender-related inequality.

Other related literature pertains to the complicated and challenging history of feminism and empowerment issues in the United States, providing critical historical context for current feminism and empowerment challenges for female seminary instructors. The research reviewed provided data addressing the symbiotic relationship between feminist theory and empowerment theory and the critical role each plays when discussing female seminary instructors and their lived experiences in the profession (McCusker, 2017; Turner & Maschi, 2015). Literature reviewing the gender and empowerment struggles of women in the Church's history provided a necessary contextual component to understand the perspectives of female seminary instructors participating in the basic qualitative study.

### **Historical Review of Feminism in the United States**

Long before giant redwood trees can tower hundreds of feet into the sky, seeds have to be planted and cultivated centuries before their majestic heights are attained (Smith, 2018). In a related way, the equal rights movement planted many seeds from past activists, which allowed society to enjoy real growth, freedoms, and improvements in modern society. Michals (2015) explained the earliest efforts for women's rights in the United States can be traced back to the first few decades of the country's birth.

One iconic figure, representing numerous other pioneers of modern-day feminism, emerged onto the landscape of the United States to cut across multiple cultural barriers and blaze a path toward religious, civil, and gender equality. The iconic figure was a freed female slave and civil rights activist known as Sojourner Truth (Bennett, 2017). Sojourner Truth spoke for women of every race and background when she boldly declared herself to be equal with men of any race, by publicly challenging her contemporary cultures of racism and sexism (Bennett, 2017). In 1851, Truth spoke at the Ohio Women's Rights Convention in Akron, Ohio (Bennett, 2017). Truth often invoked biblical texts to argue with her listeners (Bennett, 2017). Miss Truth taught how Eve partook of the forbidden fruit and turned the world upside down and stated it would be the strength of women to turn the world right-side-up again (Bennett, 2017).

Truth's messages of equality resonated with men and women in her time and promulgated significant progress in equal rights as well as civil rights in the United States (Bennett, 2017). Her peaceful action of verbal protest propelled the dialogue of the abolition of slavery as well as the equality of women with their male counterparts (Michals, 2015). Sojourner Truth continued to shatter human-made boundaries and remained a leader for civil and equal rights, ultimately meeting President Lincoln (Michals, 2015). Truth would become a symbolic figure and received numerous other honors and accolades as a result of her tireless efforts to further the causes of civil rights and equal rights (Michals, 2015).

With continued efforts and perseverance from other equal rights activists like Alice Paul, the torch for women's rights was passed along to other iconic figures and organizations (Congressional Digest Corporation, 2019). Through the National Women's Party's (NWP) efforts, with Alice Paul as their president, the Nineteenth Amendment was passed in 1920, thereby securing the right for women to vote in the United States (Congressional Digest

Corporation, 2019; DeWolf, 2017). Paul and the NWP would shift the focus of their next objective for women's rights to the Equal Rights Amendment (Congressional Digest Corporation, 2019). DeWolf's (2017) research offered insights into the challenges within the NWP from 1932 to 1946 as the organization grappled with the struggles facing women and women's issues impacted by the Great Depression and World War II.

The civil rights movement in the 1950s through the 1960s proved to be a significant catalyst to usher in the second wave of feminism, recognized as the equal rights movement (S. M. Evans, 2015). The equal rights movement would span the 1960s and early 1970s in the United States (S. M. Evans, 2015). Both the civil rights and equal rights movements focused on the equitable, fair, and moral treatment of specific disenfranchised segments of marginalized communities in the United States (S. M. Evans, 2015). Many of the challenges, issues, and struggles of the civil rights movement dovetailed with equal rights issues (S. M. Evans, 2015). The equal rights movement focused on society's treatment of women of all races, education levels, and backgrounds (S. M. Evans, 2015). Even with the Equal Rights Amendment becoming law in the U.S. Constitution, cultural changes to implement the new laws continue to require tremendous effort, patience, and persistence (E. Evans & Kenny, 2019; Miranda, 2015).

Miranda (2015) cited examples of gender inequality in social benefits, such as the gender wage gap, employment inequality, and political double standards for women in power, to emphasize areas in which progress still needs to be made (Fraser, Osborne, & Sibley, 2015). This basic qualitative study of female seminary instructors contributes to expanding the understanding of specific groups of women who offer perspectives, insights, and lived experiences. Feminist rights issues are intertwined with other social justice concerns and require sharp equitable

corrections (del Carmen Salazar & Rios, 2016; Gorski, 2009; Nieto & Bode, 2018; Shannon-Baker, 2018).

### **Feminism and Empowerment Theories Within the Church**

Chaparro-Sainz (2018) found the discourse of Mormon feminists focused on women's disparity of authority within their Church responsibilities and how to promote more influential gender roles which could help offset women's lack of authority in the Church. To provide clarifying, historical, and literary context of female seminary instructors' positions within the Church's social structure, it is beneficial to examine feminism and empowerment theories in the context of the Church's history. In the existing literature, no large body of scholarly work has specifically detailed the nuanced history of the Church's seminary program or provided evidence of gender studies within S&I.

The purpose of the brief overview is to utilize the existing historical literature to highlight the difficult and multilayered role women have played in the Church's culture and leadership as gender equality and empowerment issues developed (Madsen, 2016). The literature review includes some of the Church's doctrines and worship practices and how those doctrines and practices may reflect the feelings of gender-related perceptions and empowerment themes within The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (2015b, 2019a). Drawing from the existing historical literature may help provide a basic understanding of the theological, doctrinal, and social place of women within the Church's culture.

In April 1830, Joseph Smith, Jr. organized the Church (Madsen, 2016). Smith was 24 years old when the Church was organized, and until then, Smith had not received any formal education in the role of a minister. Smith considered himself to be a conventional farmer (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2015c). In the first 17 years, the fledgling Church

organized in upstate New York with six members would gradually relocate down through the Midwest and finally settle in modern-day Utah (Farmer & Woods, 2018; Shipps, 2007).

Much of the cause for the early migrations of Church members was the result of hostile persecution from local communities or neighboring settlements (Derr, Madsen, Holbrook, & Grow, 2016; Farmer & Woods, 2018). Regardless of where the members of the Church chose to settle, feelings of safety, protection, and peace were seldom experienced by Church members for extended periods (Farmer & Woods, 2018). Even with unfavorable public perceptions, the new Church would grow and expand through an aggressive and extensive missionary program, reaching into Canada, Europe, and the western United States territories (Farmer & Woods, 2018; Olsen, 2016; Ulvund, 2016).

The early literature of the personal histories of Church members details severe persecution, including tarring and feathering, verbal and physical abuse, as well as stealing and plundering of personal and community property (Derr et al., 2016; Farmer & Woods, 2018). Mob rule escalated to more aggressive acts, including the destruction of private property, public and private threats to families and Church leaders, and the murder of men, women, and children (Derr et al., 2016; Farmer & Woods, 2018). Acts of hostility ebbed and flowed but eventually led to the assassination of Joseph Smith and his brother Hyrum in June 1844 (Derr et al., 2016; Farmer & Woods, 2018).

The Church, compared with its contemporary Protestant religions, taught unique doctrines and ordinances which led the Church and its members to be ostracized and labeled a *cult* (Derr et al., 2016; Farmer & Woods, 2018). Smith's message proclaimed he had been ordained a new prophet, with authority from God (Farmer & Woods, 2018). Smith taught his authority was received directly under the hands of the resurrected New Testament apostles Peter,



James, and John as well as by John the Baptist (Farmer & Woods, 2018). Through the priesthood authority Smith received, Smith unapologetically declared his authority came directly from God (Givens, 2016; Shipps, 2007). By 1844, Smith had become well known as an influential religionist and effective colonizer (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2015c; Shipps, 2007).

Many accounts from Smith and other early converts included the visitation of angels, newly revealed scriptures, open visions, revelations, and hearing the voice of God speaking to humankind (Givens, 2016; Shipps, 2007). Historians and scholars have confirmed women in the Church participated in priesthood ordinances and received blessings from the priesthood authority, but the women were never ordained to priesthood offices or divisions within the Church (Chaparro-Sainz, 2018; Derr et al., 2016; Givens, 2016; McDannell, 2019; Van Dyk, 2019). Butler, Bradley-Evans, and Petrey (2017) researched ways female Church members grappled with their divinely revered and respected roles as daughters of God, mothers, wives, and spiritual leaders in their homes without ever having been ordained to any of the Church's (2019a) priesthood offices. Butler et al. noted different priesthood offices were often associated with power or authority by many of the researched groups of female members of the Church.

Academics have written of their intrigue regarding the uniqueness of the Church's theology, which embraces the doctrinal concept of God the Father as married to a deified woman, recognized as a Heavenly Mother (Butler et al., 2017; The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2008, 2019a). Church doctrine embraces the dogma which teaches all members of the human race are literally spirit children of deified parents whom church members refer to as *Heavenly Father* and *Heavenly Mother* (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2008, 2015b, 2019a). Among the cherished, unique doctrines taught by Smith and

subsequent Church leaders is the belief men and women, married through a sacred temple marriage ceremony, could continue to be married after death (Butler et al., 2017; The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2008, 2019a).

Butler et al. (2017) emphasized the doctrine of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (2008, 2015b, 2019a) which declares men and women who are faithful to their temple ceremony covenants could be married in the afterlife and become perfect, like Heavenly Father and Heavenly Mother. The Church's proclamation of the unpopular doctrines of the eventual deification of married couples further contributed to the persecution suffered by its members (Farmer & Woods, 2018). Much of the persecution came from leaders and congregation members of contemporary religionists, as well as nonreligious attackers (Farmer & Woods, 2018). Madsen (2015) clarified members of the Church only pray to Heavenly Father and not to Heavenly Mother, as demonstrated by Jesus Christ, in his example of prayer found in the New Testament (Matthew 6:9, King James Version [KJV]).

Butler et al. (2017), Givens (2016), and Shurtz (2019) noted early female Church members felt empowered and emboldened because they were taught of their potential to become like their perfect Heavenly Mother who stands by the side of God the Father as His equal partner. As Smith shared these doctrines in the last few years of his life, the men and women in the Church were taught the roles of men and women in marriage and family are equal (Shurtz, 2019). According to Givens, leaders in the Church preached of existing support for the doctrine of eternal marriage, as found in biblical sources such as, "Neither is the man without the woman, neither the woman without the man, in the Lord" (1 Corinthians 11:11, KJV).

McDannell (2019) and Givens (2016) explored the uniqueness of Smith's teachings of Church members not needing to rely on him alone for revelations, visions, or to know God's will

concerning their lives. Many men and women who were early converts to the new religion, commonly referred to in their day as *Mormons*, claimed to experience their own personal, heavenly manifestations before and after being baptized into the Church (McDannell, 2019). Historians make mention of women in the Church often being called upon to use their faith to heal, protect, and perform other miracles on behalf of men, women, and children (Givens, 2016; Ulrich, 2010). Givens (2016) clarified the women involved in the miraculous accounts did not claim to have priesthood authority or power. The female Church members rather claimed the miracles occurred because of deep faith in Jesus Christ (Givens, 2016). Among the thousands of converts baptized in the beginning decades of the Church, approximately half were women (McDannell, 2019).

Madsen's (2015) research showed a significant historical shift for women's empowerment within the Church's organization during the last few years of Smith's life contrasted with the previous decade. Smith taught of the need for women in the Church to have a robust, acting organization to serve and to strengthen their bond as women and create an entity of the Church to extend relief to the poor, afflicted, and suffering (Madsen, 2015). In 1842, Smith organized a female-led organization, referred to as the Relief Society (Derr et al., 2016; Madsen, 2015). Joseph Smith taught the Relief Society was organized according to the will of God, and subsequently called his wife, Emma, as the first divinely appointed president of the organization (Madsen, 2015).

Literature on the history and extensive roles of the Relief Society in the Church's past are found in historical narratives and church-published books (Derr et al., 2016). In their book, Derr et al. (2016) released previously unpublished Church documents, including the minutes of meetings, activities, and challenges faced within the Relief Society during its first five decades.

The exhaustive historical work by Derr et al. highlighted the Relief Society's active role of ministering to the poor and sick, as well as their founding of a hospital, building assembly halls, fighting for women's suffrage, and struggling to protect their religious freedoms relating to the early practice of polygamy. Hall, Morrill, and Brekus (2017) praised Derr et al.'s book as a landmark work offering readers a comprehensive view of the non-stereotypical perception of women in the Church as innovative, empowered, and progressive in gender-related causes and issues.

Turley and Chapman (2011) edited another seminal, female-focused biographical and historical novel about women in the Church born between 1778 and 1820. In Turley and Chapman's book, biographical sketches delve into the lives of well-known as well as lesser-known women in the Church whose experiences and lives were deemed inspirational or noteworthy. Turley and Chapman's book was the first of a seven-volume series exploring the lives and lived experiences of prominent women in the Church from the 1830s through the 1960s. Turley and Chapman's significant work provides depth and breadth to feminist and empowerment issues within the Church. Multiple firsthand accounts of hundreds of women in the Church's history, whose journals and writings were lost in filing cabinets, church archives, or private family collections, were discovered and published for the world to read (Easton-Flake, 2015). Easton-Flake's (2015) scholarly review likewise praised the vast array of biographies of women converts, representing diverse countries, backgrounds, and experiences. The strength of each volume of research in Turley and Chapman's series comes from breaking down false narratives and uninformed stereotypes of the women highlighted in the series (Easton-Flake, 2015).

The wave of literature published by and about women in the Church represents an awakening within the Church's leadership to recognize the cacophony of unheard inspirational messages by women in the Church. Hall (2015) wrote of female Church members' activism in a biography of Amy Brown Lyman, Relief Society president from 1940 to 1945. Hall's focus on Lyman's life provided a comprehensive narrative of women in the Church's active role in social service programs, post-polygamy family life, women's suffrage, postwar recovery, and through the Great Depression. Hall's scholarly approach narrates women in the Church's activism and crucial roles during national and local crises (Radke-Moss, 2017; Rugh, 2017). Hall's work similarly provides a glimpse into the steeled character of female Church leaders such as Lyman, as many women in the Church were forced to fight derision, ridicule, and condescension from other female-led organizations and groups outside the state of Utah.

Reeder and Holbrook (2017) contributed to the existing body of research and scholarship in their seminal book. Included in the historical narrative are 54 discourses, sermons, or lectures by women leaders in the Church. The historical context is invaluable to contextualize the messages of hope, inspiration, correction, comfort, and motivation (Palmer, 2018). The archived messages provide insightful images of women who were subjected to horrific abuse and suffering because of their choice to exercise religious freedoms (Reeder & Holbrook, 2017). Palmer's (2018) critical review of Reeder and Holbrook's book references some of the politically active roles of many female Church leaders, including securing their rights to vote in 1870. The right to vote would be taken from women by the federal government but reinstated soon after Utah became a state (Haddock, 2010). Palmer praised Reeder and Holbrook for filling the existing gap of female voices, not just as religious women but as pioneers of the western United States.

One of the most recognizable practices associated with the Church involved the practice of plural marriage, or *polygamy* (Madsen, 2015; McKellips, 2018; Ulrich, 2017). Polygamy was practiced from 1843 to 1890 and quickly became the defining characteristic of the Church and the Utah territory (Hanly, 2017; McKellips, 2018). Rumors and speculation surrounding polygamy and why it started became a topic of countless articles, novels, and political speeches (Hanly, 2017; Madsen, 2015; McKellips, 2018; Ulrich, 2017). In 1876, Ann Eliza Young, a former polygamous wife of Brigham Young, wrote a prominent piece of early literature regarding polygamy. Young described her life in a polygamous marriage as one filled with oppression, jealousy, and heartache. Young's book and subsequent speeches were used by government officials, newspaper publicists, and religious leaders to promulgate an anti-Mormon narrative (Hanly, 2017). Young's literary account of her experiences received great opposition from many men and women in the Church who were living in polygamous marriages (Hanly, 2017).

Efforts by multiple scholars led to a rich collection of literature about the Church's history of practicing polygamy (McKellips, 2018; Ulrich, 2017). Historians attempted to separate the sensational from the historical by relying on firsthand accounts of Church members involved in the practice of polygamy (Harris & Harris, 2019; McKellips, 2018; Ulrich, 2017). Pulitzer Prize-winning author Laurel Thatcher Ulrich (2017) published a detailed history of the role feminism played in the lives of polygamist wives' daily lives. Ulrich examined the multiple examples of freedoms, such as voting, schooling, and more straightforward divorces enjoyed by women in the Church compared to women living in the United States in the same era.

McKellips (2018) referred to Ulrich's writings in a book review and observed harshly inaccurate stereotypes of polygamist families were accepted as critical history, without

supportive, scholarly evidence involving the people living in polygamy. Harris and Harris (2019) maintain a website dedicated to publishing, documenting, and researching every literary account involving Smith and polygamy. The intent of Harris and Harris was to bring all available information about polygamy to light. Offering accurate information regarding the Church's past feminist issues and challenges can provide opportunities to learn from the past and empower Church members in the present and future.

**Awareness of institutional gender discrimination.** Increasing awareness of gender discrimination in an organization is paramount before gender equality practices and policies can be implemented (Scarborough, Lambouths, & Holbrook, 2019). Past feminist movements demonstrate both short- and long-term gender equality improvements can positively affect all groups in the organization. Giardina (2018) suggested the modern feminist movement followed many of the organization models utilized during the civil rights movement.

In 1964, an African American woman named Ruby Doris Smith Robinson organized her female coworkers to initiate dramatic changes from their superiors (Giardina, 2019). Robinson and her colleagues protested the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) due to the gender discrimination and sexual harassment Robinson and her colleagues were experiencing in the workplace. The initial protest was a silent, nonviolent act of defiance (Giardina, 2019). Each female worker refused to type, answer phones, or engage in any of the tasks associated with the workers' job requirements (Giardina, 2019). Robinson and her peers issued a memorandum outlining how the discriminatory behavior from the SNCC would cease forthwith (Giardina, 2019). The initial protest of the SNCC became highly publicized and served as a spark which would ignite a feminist movement and eventually help spread the movement across the United States (Giardina, 2019).

Despite the noteworthy advancements in gender equality since the 1960s, a significant gender inequality disparity still exists in the United States. Fink (2018) addressed one of the concerns of institutional discrimination which deliberately or inadvertently has created policies, guidelines, or procedures perpetuating or promoting sexual discrimination. Chuang (2015) identified several common areas ranking higher for women than men regarding personal wellness and life satisfaction outside of the workplace. The areas of priority for women include familial relationships and personal time for their well-being. Chuang's research showed most working women share similar areas of importance, regardless of differences in demographics, country of origin, phase in life, or level of education.

In the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints' (2015a) seminary program is a long history of male instructors, principals, administrators, and curriculum writers. Due to the traditional culture of male leadership in the seminary program, there exists a higher likelihood of several forms of gender inequality which may have made their way into the culture and infrastructure of the seminary program. Midkiff (2015) emphasized the importance of enlightening education administrators to be more cognizant of vague but real forms of gender inequality.

To address awareness of gender inequality, seminary administrators and directors may consider implementing gender equality training. Additional training of best practices could focus on how administrators and directors may ask questions, evaluate effectiveness in the workplace, or promote female employees to administrative positions to eradicate past practices (Correll, Kelly, O'Connor, & Williams, 2014). Biesecker and von Winterfeld (2018) identified the importance for organizations to make necessary changes to correct feminist issues of the past,



even if doing so would require the recognition of discriminatory gender issues and cast the organization's past practices in a negative light.

**Policy toward greater gender equality.** In the past, the Church's S&I department almost exclusively hired men as religious educators and administrators (Walch, 2014). With the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints' (2008) concentrated focus on the importance of the nuclear family, particularly with the emphasis on the invaluable role of mothers and their presence in their homes, several policies would directly affect female seminary instructors with dependent children. One of the policies in the S&I department required female seminary instructors to discontinue their employment as paid seminary instructors until the instructors no longer had minor children under their responsibilities living in their homes (Chen, 2014; The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2008; Dollahite, Marks, & Kelley, 2017).

The policy for female instructors to discontinue employment when minor children were in the home was made known to all employees applying to become seminary instructors (Stack, 2014). Volunteer seminary instructors were exempt from the policy. As a result, any female seminary instructors were unable to accrue the years of experience which were required to advance to leadership roles. Leadership opportunities such as seminary principal, institute director, or region director were not available to female seminary instructors due to some of the formal policies of the past (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2019c). Regardless of the well-intended outcomes from the policy, an unintended consequence cannot be quantified because of the decades of female instructors' invaluable perspectives, influences, and contributions never being expressed in S&I.

As societal and cultural shifts occurred in the traditional roles parents played in the nuclear family, the department of S&I reevaluated its longstanding policy in 2014 and allowed

women with minor children to work as full-time religious educators (Hastings, 2014). Stack (2014) observed the significant policy change would provide opportunities for female seminary instructors and their families to receive all the benefits provided to full-time religious educators. The new policy provides female instructors with opportunities to grow and progress in their careers (Stack, 2014). The 2014 policy change may provide lasting effects on the whole culture within the S&I department of the Church (Stack, 2014). Female and male seminary students can now be taught by a more significant number of full-time female seminary instructors. The new policy allowing female instructors to continue working, despite having minor children in the home, reconstructs social norms which once may have dissuaded women from considering seminary teaching as a career (Kerr, 2016).

In a conversation with the seminary preservice director of the University of Utah in Salt Lake City, Curtis Waite (January 13, 2019) said a steady increase of female aspiring seminary instructors was anticipated for the foreseeable future. The policy change may communicate a cultural shift of support, the opportunity for upward mobility, and a change of perception of the role of female instructors within the S&I department (Stack, 2014). Stack (2014) considered the 2014 policy change to be a positive, impactful example of an organization's ability to identify and rectify a policy specifically affecting employees based on gender. In a conversation with the director of training services, Lori Newbold (November 20, 2019) the effects of the 2014 policy change were discussed. Specifically, Newbold conveyed optimism regarding the potential long-term impact of retaining greater numbers of female instructors and administrators within S&I. The general sentiments of the training department and senior administrators were unanimously optimistic toward the potential progressive outcomes resulting from the 2014 policy changes.

Skardéus (2018) emphasized the undeniable impact on societies, organizations, and businesses when women are afforded the same opportunities as men. Supporting gender equality in any organization is morally just and equitable for individuals in the organization (Ackerley, 2017). Data from critical research conveys, even if female employees may not choose to enter certain occupations at the same rate as men, there is invaluable merit for the organization to provide equal opportunities to female employees (Browne, 2018).

Gender equality does not ensure all occupations evenly distribute the work among each gender but how the opportunities may be evenly offered to each candidate, regardless of gender (Buenestado-Fernández et al., 2019). Beddoes and Schimpf (2018) researched the possible reasons why teachers' gender disparities are so extreme in U.S. higher education programs. Female employees reported family and work balance were among the most prominent challenges for female instructors and were impactful on the gender hiring gap (Beddoes & Schimpf, 2018). Beddoes and Schimpf discovered the value of administrators recognizing the ability for female employees to choose different priorities compared with their male colleagues.

### **Gender Equality and Workplace Satisfaction**

Research demonstrates a correlation between gender equality and workplace satisfaction. In the department of S&I, all religious educators are paid by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (2019c), according to the same salary scale based on education level and years of work experience. Wage-gap discrepancies are one of the most blatant forms of gender inequality in many organizations (Midkiff, 2015). Huang (2016), chief executive officer of Fairygodboss, a gender equality-focused company, stated female employees ranked employment satisfaction significantly higher when treated as equals with male colleagues. Female seminary

instructors' lived experiences concerning job satisfaction may assist S&I administrators in implementing changes to improve the work environment for all employees.

Literature indicates all forms of sexism may be addressed to establish long-term workplace equality for women, although the ill effects of sexism are rampant in most cultures and require greater vigilance by both men and women to address the concerns of specific gender-related challenges (Wright, 2016). Wright (2016) noted feminist rights must be viewed not as a female problem or issue but as a human rights issue. Scarborough et al. (2019) acknowledged the causal effect between discrimination and inequality within a workplace environment. Other scholars call for a redefining and overhauling of the definitions of *successful work*, to better reflect the diverse workforces found in organizations (Correll et al., 2014). Additional studies demonstrate effective and adequately implemented efforts toward diversity are proven to positively affect workplace satisfaction for all employees (Correll et al., 2014). Providing more significant opportunities for female seminary instructors to impact policies, curriculum, management, human resource responsibilities, and other functions in S&I may profoundly impact the future of the S&I.

### **Benevolent Sexism**

Numerous insidious forms of sexism are entrenched in an organization's culture (Fink, 2018). *Benevolent sexism* is a subtle but detrimental form of sexism. The underpinnings of benevolent sexism are based on the false perception or misguided belief of women being weaker, less competent, or less capable than men (Fink, 2018). Benevolent sexism is different from pure benevolence, which may be manifest through sincere outward expressions of cordiality, kindness, respect, or service (Fink, 2018). Pure benevolence is motivated by positive,

empowering, altruistic, supportive intentions without ulterior motives or discriminatory intentions (Goh & Hall, 2015).

Fink (2018) revealed some men silence female employees through benevolent sexism as well as through blatant sexism. Oswald, Baalbaki, and Kirkman (2019) observed some men might have no ill intent to express benevolent sexism to female colleagues and may be acting out of cultural ignorance or subtle gender bias. When benevolent sexism is directed toward a female colleague, even with the best intentions, the outcome reinforces gender stereotypes, further encourages inequality, and could be more damaging toward gender equality than overt sexism (Oswald et al., 2019).

Goh and Hall (2015) examined the role benevolent sexism plays in the workplace and how often it is misunderstood or misguided. Research supports the effectiveness of gender equality training in an organization and notes all stakeholders may benefit from the training (Leamaster & Bautista, 2018). Radke, Hornsey, Sibley, and Barlow (2018) researched ways in which some women supported benevolent sexism behavior because they were the recipients of an elevated status from the socially dominant group. Radke et al. found the women refused to oppose forms of benevolent sexism out of fear of retribution by the socially dominant group. Benevolent sexism may be perpetrated by female employees against their female colleagues (Radke et al., 2018). Employers should effectively educate all employees on the adverse effects of benevolent sexism, regardless of gender (Radke et al., 2018).

### **Gender Inequality in Education Departments**

Due to the similarities in organizational structure with high school-age students, studies of public education programs were used as comparable models for the S&I department. Multiple studies in public education highlight inequalities between female and male instructors (Lewis,

2018; Master et al., 2016). Rieggle-Crumb et al. (2017) studied feminist and empowerment issues in STEM departments of higher education institutions and noted significant gender inequality issues. Peterson (2011) stated gender inequality was remedied in much of higher education in Sweden through policies created due to increased political pressure and lobbying.

Lewis's (2018) research focused on closing the gender gap of K–12 STEM students by having more female teachers present at STEM conferences. Female leaders, teachers, and administrators in STEM conferences proved effective in breaking down gender stereotypes of STEM teachers being primarily male (Lewis, 2018). In Master et al.'s (2016) research, two controlled experiments were conducted to identify if female students were averse to enrolling in STEM-related courses because the classroom environment projected gender stereotypes and were less inviting to female students. Master et al. found small, calculated adjustments in a classroom environment could significantly influence female students to alter their decision to pursue STEM-related courses.

### **Potential Counterarguments to the Research**

Counterarguments to the basic qualitative study may attempt to marginalize the small sample size of the research. Other critics may be religiously biased in favor of the Church and do not wish to critically analyze the subject of gender inequality because the topic is considered unflattering or less than favorable toward the organization. Critics may have a personal bias against the Church and wish to cast it in a negative light and allow their personal biases to influence the data. One of the desired outcomes of the basic qualitative study was to add to the existing body of feminist theory and empowerment theory, as shared through the lens of female seminary instructors employed in the Church's religious education program.

The basic qualitative study provided a unique opportunity for female seminary instructors to openly discuss issues related to gender inequality and empowerment (McCusker, 2017). Such safe forums should eliminate anxiety or concern for any negative recourse due to expressing one's feelings, thoughts, or concerns (McCusker, 2017). Before this basic qualitative study was conducted, a research gap pertained to female seminary instructors and their lived experiences as a minority group in a predominantly male-led organization (Cragun et al., 2016). Numerous studies have analyzed gender issues within the Church, but none of the studies focused on the specific group of female seminary instructors and their unique lived experiences (Hoyt, 2017).

### **Chapter Summary**

Despite the existing body of literature identifying gender inequality, gender bias, and feminist empowerment concerns, no research has involved female seminary instructors and their unique lived experiences within the predominantly male-led work environment. The literature review focused on the critical need for organizations to become more aware of the existence and ill effects of institutional gender discrimination. The literature emphasizing the potential positive impact and benefits of recent policy changes within the S&I department were addressed in this chapter. Adverse outcomes of benevolent sexism have been explored, and information about significant negative outcomes was provided (Fink, 2018; Goh & Hall, 2015; Oswald et al., 2019; Radke et al., 2018). Gender inequality in public education STEM departments was compared with the seminary program because of a similar gender hiring gap between male and female STEM teachers (Pedersen & West, 2017; Riegle-Crumb et al., 2017).

Due to the dearth of research on the experiences of female seminary instructors, the present study filled the gap and prepared the way for future researchers (Hoyt, 2017).

Researching the lived experiences of female seminary instructors, while giving the instructors a

voice in a forum to share what female seminary instructors have learned, understood, and discovered, may lead to increased empowerment and an improved future for all seminary instructors and administrators. Chapter 3 is focused on qualitative research methods used in the research. The basic qualitative study utilized the two basic qualitative research methods of in-depth one-on-one interviews and a focus group.



### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

In 1912, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (2015a) initiated a religious education program providing formal religious education to high school-age students. The new released-time seminary program allowed students to leave high school for one class period and participate in a religious education class. The Church provided the building, curriculum, instructor, and any other items needed for the class to be a success (Griffiths, 2008). Students paid no tuition, and the seminary classes were open to anyone of any faith. The first released-time seminary class began at Granite High School in Salt Lake City, Utah. Seventy students enrolled in the first year of the program.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints' (2019c) seminary program has significantly matured and as of 2017 had over 400,000 enrolled students in 152 countries. Most seminary students attend one-hour early-morning seminary classes taught by volunteer instructors. At the time of the study, approximately 2,000 full-time seminary instructors and various employees were working for the S&I department of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (2019b), with 44,000 volunteer instructors teaching early-morning seminary worldwide.

The 1912 job description and desired profile of a seminary instructor included the gender-specific qualification of being male (Griffiths, 2008). The first female seminary instructors served as volunteers to teach the early-morning classes but were not hired as full-time instructors until decades later. Several policies were put into place which potentially shortened the careers of full-time female seminary instructors. The most influential of the policies included a contractual agreement obligating any female released-time seminary instructor with children under the age of 18 to quit teaching to serve as the primary caregiver to her children at home.

Female instructors without children in the home could remain employed as released-time seminary instructors until retirement. The policy, which had contributed to the hiring of substantially fewer full-time female seminary instructors, was changed in 2014 when the Church's S&I department eliminated all stipulations involving female instructors' employment status based on their guardianship of minor children (L. Newbold, personal communication, November 20, 2019).

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore the lived experiences of female seminary instructors through the lens of feminist and empowerment theories (Vásquez-Rosati, 2017). As a minority group in the hierarchical male-led organization, perspectives of female seminary instructors have not been researched. The following research questions were utilized to gather data to cultivate a greater depth and breadth of understanding as it pertains to the experiences of female released-time seminary instructors and how they view their experiences through the lens of feminist theory and empowerment theory:

Research Question 1: What can the experiences of female seminary instructors employed by the Church, contribute to the existing body of feminist and empowerment theories?

Research Question 2: What perspectives, insights, and experiences from female seminary instructors, may help male administrators and colleagues better understand feminist concerns, challenges, issues, and perspectives?

The subsequent sections of Chapter 3 include the research design and rationale, role of the researcher, research procedures, data analysis, reliability and validity, and ethical procedures. A discussion about any conflicts of interest or potential ethical issues which may have affected the reliability and validity of the research are included in Chapter 3. Valid evidence explaining

why the qualitative analysis was best suited to provide optimal research results to address the research questions and topics is addressed in the chapter (Tetnowski, 2015).

### **Research Design and Rationale**

Qualitative research is essential in generating theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Qualitative research can provide detailed information about a phenomenon through discussions, conversations, interviews, and focus groups, along with a variety of other instruments (Arghode, 2012). Qualitative research provides opportunities for subjects to share personal perspectives of how the phenomenon affected them (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Kornbluh, 2015). A basic qualitative research approach was selected for the study as it provided an optimal methodology tool to better understand the lived experiences of female seminary instructors and analyze data through the lens of feminist and empowerment theories (Vásquez-Rosati, 2017). Turner and Maschi (2015) found empowerment theory shares complementary elements with feminist theory and noted utilizing both theories leads to more substantial validity and reliability within the body of research.

The basic qualitative research included in-depth one-on-one interviews and a focus group to collect data. Both instruments were used due to the lack of research and scholarly data involving the specific population of female seminary instructors. One-on-one interviews provided opportunities for the subjects to articulate their experiences (Milena, Dainora, & Alin, 2008). After data were collected and triangulated, a five-member focus group consisting of previously interviewed female instructors received copies of the data. Randle et al. (2014) surmised one of the benefits of a focus group is the ability to harness the collective energy and ideas of a group to provide a fuller, more profound understanding of the research topic. The

focus group provided a personal analysis of the interview data and how the research could affect feminist and empowerment issues within the Church's S&I department.

### **Role of the Researcher**

In all research, the role of the researcher is to maintain the highest ethical standards throughout every facet of the research process (Ngozwana, 2018). Once ethical standards were established and understood, the subject of the study was determined and then research questions were developed to fill the gap in the existing body of knowledge of the subject. As the experiences of female seminary instructors had never been researched through a scholarly process, the basic qualitative study consisted of original research obtained through basic qualitative methods. The researcher served as a participant-observer throughout the one-on-one interviews and focus group, as questions were asked of the subjects. To avoid observer bias, all data were member checked and triangulated. Data were discussed and analyzed by a five-member focus group of female seminary instructors who had participated in the one-on-one interview process. A personal journal of field notes was kept to provide contextual information, potential conflicts of interest, and conversations directly or indirectly affecting researcher bias (Phillippi & Lauderdale, 2018).

The primary researcher is also a released-time seminary instructor for the Church and could have interviewed several colleagues who may have been on the same seminary faculty. The subjects were selected from multiple areas in Utah. Each of the selected instructors was contacted using e-mail, phone, or direct messaging. The contact information was available through the employee directory database.

Before the interview process began, each interviewee was reassured of the privacy and security of the interview data. Interviewees were free to respond or not respond to any question

and were permitted to terminate the interview at any time. All research findings from the study were disclosed to the subjects. Participants were contacted and interviewed with as little disruption to their regular workday routine as possible. Each subject's personal identity was protected, and a numerical pseudonym was assigned in place of the actual name. Subjects were not compensated for their time or participation in the research. All subjects were shown the highest degree of deference throughout the research process.

### **Research Procedures**

The research procedures utilized qualitative research methods to explore, analyze, describe, and interpret the research topic. The in-depth one-on-one interviews produced critical data and provided a much greater understanding of lived experiences shared by the participating subjects. The reliability and validity of the research were further achieved by carefully adhering to the selected research procedures (Daniel, 2019).

### **Population and Sample Selection**

The Church employs approximately 2,000 seminary instructors. Some instructors are transferred out of a classroom setting and reassigned to work in different departments within the division of S&I. At the time of the study, approximately 1,400 released-time instructors were actively teaching in classrooms or engaged in seminary administrative positions. Of the 1,400 active instructors and administrators, only 59, or 4%, were women (K. Blaylock, personal communication, January 14, 2020). Until 2014, S&I upheld a policy precluding female seminary instructors' employment as full-time seminary instructors if they had minor children living in the household. The policy played a part in the dramatically skewed ratios of male to female employees (L. Newbold, personal communication, November 20, 2019).

Purposive sampling was selected as a sampling methodology in the research. A homogeneous sampling instrument was used as the instrumentation for the research due to the size of the selected population, which represents approximately 4% of the full-time seminary instructor workforce (K. Blaylock, personal communication, January 14, 2020). Palinkas et al. (2015) emphasized new understanding and greater comprehension may be obtained by using purposive sampling in homogeneous groups.

The subjects of the research consisted of 15 female instructors, or 30% of the target population of 50 female seminary instructors working in Utah (K. Blaylock, personal communication, January 14, 2020). The target population of 50 instructors was divided into three strata, based on years of teaching experience. The first stratum consisted of instructors with one to two years of teaching experience, the second stratum consisted of instructors with three to four years of teaching experience, and the third stratum consisted of instructors with five or more years of teaching experience. Five teachers were randomly selected from each of the three strata to recruit the 15 candidates for the basic qualitative study.

Before requesting participation from subjects, written permission was obtained through the region directors to contact and recruit female instructors from each region. The protocol for requesting permission from region directors is outlined in the approval letter (see Appendix D) issued from the S&I Education Research Committee. Recruitment communication to the potential subjects occurred through e-mail, phone calls, and Zoom video conferencing. The contact information for each subject was available through the employee directory database. Once IRB approval was obtained and recruitment completed, informed consent forms were sent to the participants through e-mail. Each phase of the research was conducted following established ethical standards for all subjects involved in the study (National Commission for the

Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research [National Commission], 1979).

### **Instrumentation**

Through qualitative research, multiple instruments were used to collect data. Qualitative data were used to answer questions addressing potential reasons why the phenomenon occurred. Due to the subjectivity of qualitative research, precautionary efforts to avoid researcher bias were observed. The two primary instruments used in the basic qualitative study were one-on-one interviews, using semi-structured interview questions to provide sufficient direction to gather data pertinent to the basic qualitative study (Tetnowski, 2015), and a focus group of five female seminary instructors who had participated in the in-depth one-on-one interview process. Candidates for the basic qualitative study were selected from the target population of 50 female seminary instructors in Utah. Through a guided random selection process, five female instructors were selected from each stratum.

After data were collected and triangulated from the one-on-one interviews, the most common themes, perceptions, shared phenomena, and experiences were transcribed and organized for the focus group. The focus group provided interpretations, explanations, and insights from the data. Seeking expert input from the five-member focus group provided an opportunity for the female instructors to imbue the research with personal, unique perspectives and analysis of the body of data. Utilizing a focus group made up of female colleagues also provided another safeguard protecting the interpretation of the data from researcher bias (Yin, 2011). No research had focused on the lived experiences of female seminary instructors or how the instructors viewed the experiences through the lens of feminist theory or empowerment theory.

Throughout the one-on-one interviews, the subjects were invited to share insights, lived experiences, challenges, concerns, satisfactions, and disappointments. The focus group data provided another level of insight and understanding to help the S&I department of the Church better understand how to provide more opportunities to empower female seminary instructors and improve workplace experiences. The two selected instruments of one-on-one interviews and a focus group provided reliable, valid data which may be used for many purposes, including administrative training to improve the work environment of all seminary instructors and administrators (Milena et al., 2008). As directed by Phillippi and Lauderdale (2018), detailed field notes were used during the one-on-one interviews and focus group to record the setting, potential conflicts, and critical reflections which may be of use in subsequent similar studies.

To strengthen the reliability and validity of the research, five subject matter experts (SMEs) were sent an e-mail containing the potential interview questions to be used in the one-on-one interviews and in the focus group (Zamanzadeh et al., 2015; see Appendices E and F). Responses from each SME were received several weeks after the interview questions were initially sent out for review (see Appendix F). Each SME proposed several changes to the preliminary questions. The SME responses were analyzed and used to improve the interview questions (see Appendix E). The modified questions and follow-up questions more specifically addressed the designated purposes of the basic qualitative study. The final questions for the one-on-one interviews and focus group were adapted and modified as each interviewee's responses led the interviews in different, unanticipated directions. Jamshed (2014) emphasized the effectiveness of semi-structured interviews when researchers conduct one-on-one interviews or interview subjects in a multigroup setting, to allow the subjects to speak more freely and comfortably.



## **Data Collection**

Collecting data for the basic qualitative research began with a structured model to ensure the participants' identities were safeguarded and remained confidential throughout each phase of the research (Surmiak, 2018). Through the Church employee directory, each candidate's e-mail address and cell phone number were accessible. The years of work experience for each female employee living in Utah were obtained through a personal communication with the manager of human resources in S&I.

To select the candidates through purposive sampling, the target population of 50 female seminary instructors working in Utah was divided into three strata based on years of teaching experience. The three strata were organized by instructors with one to two years of teaching experience, three to four years of teaching experience, and five or more years of teaching experience. After the target population was categorized in each stratum, five instructors were randomly selected from each stratum as candidates for the study.

Once the 15 subjects were identified, each candidate's region director was contacted through a personal e-mail and follow-up phone call seeking permission to interview the candidate (see Appendix C). Along with the e-mail seeking written permission to contact employees under the region directors' responsibility, the region directors received a digital copy of the letter providing research approval from Adam Smith, associate administrator of the education research department of S&I (see Appendix D).

After approval was obtained from the region directors to contact the candidates, the candidates were contacted through an e-mail describing the research study and what the candidates might contribute to the research (see Appendix A). Within the e-mail was an attachment of informed consent to participate in the research (see Appendix B). Each candidate

also received a personal phone call to answer any questions and attempt to establish a trusting relationship.

All 15 randomly selected candidates agreed to participate in the research study. After the 15 candidates returned the informed consent document, a time for each one-on-one interview was established. The 15 participants were interviewed using Zoom. Each interview took place somewhere the subject felt comfortable to be conversant (Zahle, 2018). Before the interview, candidates were e-mailed the research questions (see Appendix G) and follow-up questions to prepare the subject for the interview and assuage any concerns regarding each subject's role in the research. The semi-structured format of the in-depth one-on-one interviews allowed for additional questions not included in Appendix G, to provide opportunities for the subject to clarify or expound on initial answers. The one-on-one interviews lasted no more than 75 minutes. None of the subjects were asked to give additional time for follow-up questions because the initial time was sufficient.

Data were collected using the Zoom recording option along with the password-protected digital recording app on an Apple iPhone X (Surmiak, 2018). Data were transcribed from the audio file using a digital transcription program in Microsoft Word and saved in a Word document. Upon completion of the study, all data files were stored on a password-protected storage device and kept in a personal password-protected safe (Surmiak, 2018). All participants received an electronic copy of the completed dissertation with a personal expression of gratitude. Field notes were kept providing data enhancement and to supply contextual information of the study (Phillippi & Lauderdale, 2018).

After the one-on-one interview data were collected, member checked, codified, and triangulated, a five-member focus group was selected from the 15 one-on-one interview subjects.

One focus group member was selected from the first stratum of instructors with one to two years of teaching experience, and two were selected from each of the other two strata, for a total of five focus group members. The one-on-one interviewees were notified of the potential to be selected to participate in the focus group (see Appendix B).

The codified data collected from the one-on-one interviews were sent to each member of the focus group no less than eight days before the focus group. The focus group members were invited to read the data from the 15 interviews and to be prepared to share their analysis of the data. The focus group members also received seven questions which were used to lead a discussion aiding in the analysis of the one-on-one interview data (see Appendix H).

The focus group was conducted and recorded through Zoom and on a personal, password-protected iPhone X audio recording app. Data from the focus group's analysis of the one-on-one interview data were used to further protect the research from researcher bias. All data from the focus group were subject to the same rigorous protective protocols which guarded the anonymity of the subjects. The focus group members' names were replaced by numerical pseudonyms, and transcribed data were stored on a password-protected computer and backed up on a password-protected thumb drive, which was stored in a password-protected personal safe. All names and potentially identity-revealing references within the data were removed from the research.

### **Data Preparation**

Following the conclusion of the data collection phase of the research, data were transcribed, and each participant's name was replaced with pseudonyms to protect the anonymity of the subjects (Surmiak, 2018). All data were saved and backed up on password-protected devices for the security and protection of the participants, as per IRB standards (Surmiak, 2018).

Data were downloaded from Zoom recordings and transcribed using the audio transcription tools in Microsoft Word. The Word document of the transcribed interview was sent to each respective interviewee for member checking to strengthen the validity and reliability of the data. All references to the subjects' identities were deleted and replaced with numeric pseudonyms to protect the anonymity of the subjects, as per *Belmont Report* standards (National Commission, 1979; Surmiak, 2018; U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Office for Human Research Protections, 2018). Pseudonyms were also changed in all field notes to provide greater protection and anonymity of the subjects involved in the research (Phillippi & Lauderdale, 2018).

The coding process utilized the practices recommended by Onwuegbuzie, Leech, and Collins (2012) through keyword analysis, word count, and categorization, to identify emerging phenomena. Once the groups were identified through the analysis process, themes started to emerge from the collected data (Sohn et al., 2017). Each interview was listened to and the transcript read to identify keywords, themes, and emerging phenomena. Using Microsoft Word tools, each of the 15 subjects' answers to the seven semiformal questions were compared. Different highlight colors were used to distinguish common themes, keywords, phrases, and phenomena to assist in visual clarity and organization of the data.

After the one-on-one interview data were collected, member checked, and codified, the focus group members chose a time for the focus group. The peer focus group took place using Zoom. The interviews were also recorded with an audio recording app on a password-protected iPhone X. The focus group received the data from the one-on-one interviews to assist in offering personal, expert analysis of the data.

### **Data Analysis**

Goble, Austin, Larsen, Kreitzer, and Brintnell (2012) expressed concern regarding the role technology could play in data analysis and cautioned researchers to optimize the use of technology without allowing it to impede the creative process. Kaefer, Roper, and Sinha (2015) emphasized the implementation of “software tools [which] can facilitate . . . transparency and trustworthiness” (p. 1) in qualitative research and strengthen reliability and validity.

Data were transcribed using the Microsoft Word dictation tool. Microsoft Word tools were also used to organize the data for coding, keyword searching, emerging themes, and significant statements (Creswell, 2007). Each interviewee’s responses to the seven one-on-one interview questions (see Appendix G) were compared and analyzed against the other interviewees’ responses.

As keywords, themes, significant statements, and shared phenomena were identified, a color-code system was implemented to further distinguish the different data chunks from each other (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2012). Comments which did not specifically answer or correspond to the formal questions were recorded in a distinct color to further distinguish secondary data from more specific answers to the formal questions (see Appendix G). Each one-on-one interview transcript was reviewed with an open-minded approach. After carefully reading through the data and determining how the data answered and expounded on the research questions, notes were recorded with initial perceptions of recurring topics, trends, or subjects’ shared experiences. After data were analyzed and repeated chunks of data emerged, the five-member focus group received a copy of the coded interview data to assist in data analysis. Additional insights and anecdotes were supplemented from the field notes (Phillippi & Lauderdale, 2018).

### **Reliability and Validity**

Establishing reliability and validity in research is at the heart of a thorough inquiry. Reliability is correlated with sound research (Md Ali & Yusof, 2011). When research is found to be reliable, scholars are assured the research methodology may be duplicated similarly and yield the same results (Daniel, 2019; Md Ali & Yusof, 2011). Validity requires the research to establish “credibility, auditability, fittingness, and confirmability” (Md Ali & Yusof, 2011, p. 30) in research outcomes.

To further establish reliability and validity in qualitative research, it is important to ensure the transferability of the research findings (Daniel, 2019; Houghton, Casey, Shaw, & Murphy, 2013). Transferability examines the results of research and whether results may be adapted or applied to other similar groups or individuals. The outcomes of this basic qualitative research may be transferred to other religious organizations with similar male-led hierarchical leadership groups managing female subordinates in positions held mostly by men (Sandstrom, 2016). Additional research findings may be transferred to STEM programs which have leadership and teacher positions predominantly filled by men (Lewis, 2018; Master et al., 2016; Pedersen & West, 2017; Riegle-Crumb et al., 2017).

Several instruments were implemented throughout the basic qualitative study to ensure the trustworthiness of the data (Md Ali & Yusof, 2011). The instruments were used to strengthen objectivity and credibility, including triangulation, member checking, field notes, and analysis by a peer focus group (Phillippi & Lauderdale, 2018). Applying rigor-strengthening practices in the basic qualitative study further reduced researcher bias (Md Ali & Yusof, 2011; Randle et al., 2014).

Barnham (2015) emphasized the critical need for qualitative data to establish objectivity in the findings from the research. Triangulation is used to establish credibility, validity, and legitimacy in research findings (Tetnowski, 2015). In this basic qualitative research, data were gathered using one-on-one interviews, after which a peer focus group analyzed the codified chunks of data and provided analytical interpretations. Data were member checked to strengthen reliability and validity.

### **Ethical Procedures**

Each participant was notified orally and in writing of voluntary participation in the research and the right to withdraw from the research process at any time. All data were stored on password-protected devices, and all participants' names were replaced with pseudonyms to preserve anonymity and safety. All one-on-one interview data were member checked before being applied to the research.

All audio recordings and field notes will be destroyed after five years. All original documentation, video recordings, transcripts, and other related data will be stored in a secure location under lock and key on a password-protected storage device. As per *The Belmont Report*, no positions of authority were held over any of the participants in the study (National Commission, 1979). All IRB standards for ethical procedures were implemented in all phases of the research process.

The Church's research department were made aware of all ethical principles of beneficence, justice, and respect of persons, as per *The Belmont Report*, would be observed in each phase of the research (National Commission, 1979). In compliance with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office for Human Research Protections (2018),

informed consent was obtained before the research was conducted. Ethics laws were also followed as outlined in *The Belmont Report* (National Commission, 1979).

### **Chapter Summary**

A basic qualitative research design was utilized in the one-on-one interviews and focus group to better understand the lived experiences of female seminary instructors through the lens of feminist and empowerment theories. Chapter 3 outlined the details of the qualitative research by focusing on the methodology, research design and rationale, role of the researcher, and research procedures. Subsequent sections in the chapter outlined the study population and sample selection, instrumentation, data collection, data preparation, and data analysis. The conclusion of the chapter clarified the importance of transferability, reliability, validity, triangulation, member checking, and ethical procedures used to ensure the trustworthiness of the research.

Each component of Chapter 3 established a solid foundation for Chapter 4, which presents the basic qualitative research findings. Chapter 4 includes the data collected from the one-on-one interviews and focus group of female seminary instructors. The data provide perspectives, insights, and lived experiences of the subjects as well as a new perspective for S&I administrators regarding gender equality and female seminary instructors' lived experiences as full-time employees working within the Church's seminary program.



#### **Chapter 4: Research Findings and Data Analysis Results**

The background of the problem centers on the Church's religious education department of S&I not having critically researched the lived experiences and perspectives of the female instructors within the organization. Chapter 4 presents critical qualitative research regarding the personal experiences of female instructors in their own words. The lived experiences of female seminary instructors were evaluated and analyzed through the lens of feminist and empowerment theories (Mihas, 2019).

The problem within the religious education system of the Church is the number of female seminary instructors in the high school programs is significantly less than the number of male counterparts (K. Blaylock, personal communication, January 14, 2020). With the large discrepancy in gender hiring, female seminary instructors are almost completely absent from administrative or leadership positions (K. Blaylock, personal communication, January 14, 2020; Stack, 2014). As a disproportionate hiring gap exists between male and female seminary instructors, the female instructors' unique perspectives may go unheard, unrelated, misunderstood, or neglected (A. G. Baker, 2016; M. Baker, 2016).

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore the lived experiences of female seminary instructors through the lens of feminist and empowerment theories (Vásquez-Rosati, 2017). Scholars have not researched the population of female seminary instructors or their experiences and perspectives about feminist or empowerment issues (Griffiths et al., 2016; McBaine & Wayment, 2016). Conducting basic qualitative research using one-on-one interviews and a focus group provided data on female instructors' perspectives and lived experiences, which contributed to the existing body of feminist and empowerment research (Hoyt, 2017; Mihas, 2019). In Chapter 4, data are interpreted and analyzed through coding and with assistance from

five participants from the one-on-one interviews. Data analysis and results are presented along with evidence reliability and validity were sustained in the research. A summary concludes the chapter.

### **Data Collection**

Collecting data for the basic qualitative research began with a structured model to ensure the participants' identities were safeguarded and remained confidential throughout each research phase (Surmiak, 2018). Through the Church employee directory, each candidate's e-mail address and cell phone number were accessible. Each employee's years of work experience were obtained through personal communication with the manager of human resources in S&I.

The basic qualitative study included 15 female seminary instructors employed by the Church, representing 30% of the target population (K. Blaylock, personal communication, January 14, 2020). After receiving IRB approval, the 15 participants were chosen through purposive sampling methods from the target population of 50 female seminary instructors from multiple areas in Utah. The 15 participants were subdivided into three strata. The first stratum of five instructors had one to two years of teaching experience, the second stratum of five instructors had three to four years of experience, and the third stratum of instructors had five or more years of experience.

Once the 15 subjects were identified, each candidate's region director was contacted through a personal e-mail and phone call between July 15 and July 17, 2020. The e-mail provided the required permission to interview the candidates (see Appendix C). Along with the e-mail seeking written permission to contact employees under the region director's responsibility, the region director received a digital copy of the letter providing research approval

by Adam Smith, associate administrator of the education research department of S&I (see Appendix D).

After approval was obtained from the region directors, an e-mail was sent to each candidate describing the research study and how the candidate might contribute to the research (see Appendix A). Within the e-mail was an attachment of the informed consent form, which the candidate was required to sign before participating in the research (see Appendix B). After receiving the e-mail, each candidate was contacted through a personal phone call to answer any questions and attempt to establish a trusting relationship between the candidate and researcher. The informed consent form was read to the candidate, in the presence of a witness, and signed by all three parties. The digital copies of the informed consent records were stored with all of the other data. All 15 instructors agreed to participate in the research.

Each of the one-on-one interviews occurred at the most convenient time for the subject and did not last more than 75 minutes. The interviews took place over two weeks and were conducted at each subject's place of employment or other convenient location of the subject's choosing. Data were collected using the Zoom recording option, along with the password-protected digital recording device app on an Apple iPhone (Surmiak, 2018). Data were transcribed from the audio file using the digital transcription program from Microsoft Word and were saved in a Word document. None of the interview participants was interviewed more than once during the one-on-one interview phase of the data collection process.

All data files were stored on a password-protected storage device. Files and data were kept in a personal password-protected safe. The recorded data and field notes were transcribed, and member checked to ensure validity and reliability. The triangulated data was presented to a five-member focus group selected from the fifteen female instructors who participated in the

one-on-one interviews. The five instructors participated in a semi-structured focus group session to provide personal observations, evaluations, and commentary regarding the collected interview data. Data collection and analysis were executed as outlined in Chapter 3.

Due to the dearth of literature and research on feminist and empowerment issues from female seminary instructors, the literature from the basic qualitative study may augment existing training on how seminary administrators address the needs of all seminary instructors. Providing an opportunity for female seminary instructors to express and elaborate on personal events through lived experiences demonstrates the importance of the subjects' perspectives regarding feminist and empowerment issues. Valid and reliable data help propagate needful changes and improvements within an organization (Mihas, 2019). The following analysis and results presents data collected from the 15 interviews.

### **Data Analysis and Results**

After each interview transcript was member checked by the respective participant, all names and direct references to the subjects were removed from the transcripts. The names of schools, colleagues, and administrators mentioned in the interviews were replaced with pseudonyms to protect the anonymity of the subjects. Subjects were referred to as Interview Participant 1, Interview Participant 2, and so forth, through Interview Participant 15.

Using the research questions and feminist and empowerment theories as guides to code and categorize data, the audio recordings were listened to while reading each interview transcript. After interviews were accurately transcribed, the data were member checked by the respective participants. The member-checked transcripts totaled 138 pages of single-spaced raw data, with 701 minutes of one-on-one interview audio recordings. After member-checked

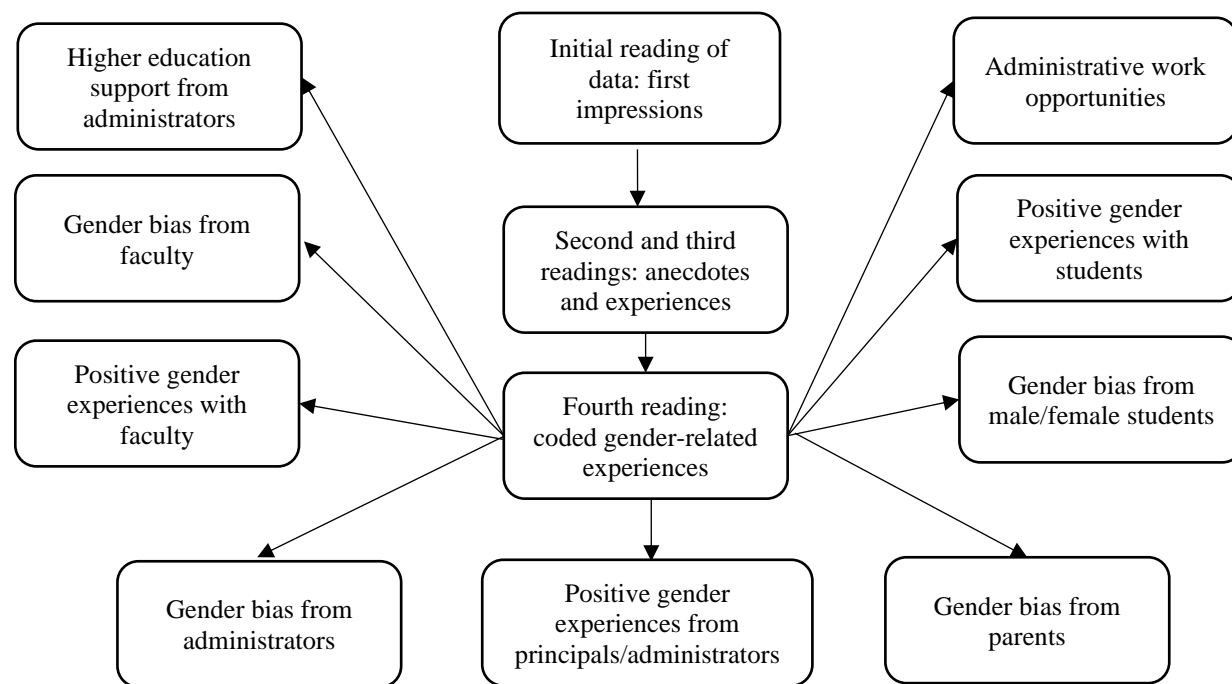
transcripts were returned from the participants, each previous transcript was deleted, and the member-checked transcripts became the primary data resource for the research.

Initial readings of each member-checked interview transcript were completed while making field notes of general impressions and thoughts of how each participant answered the research questions (Phillippi & Lauderdale, 2018). Following Linneberg and Korsgaard's (2019) recommendation, careful coding practices were utilized to prepare the data for analysis. After several readings, the interview transcripts were organized by highlighting specific themes, identifying shared experiences, highlighting keywords, and assigning code words or phrases to the information (Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019). The coding process significantly reduced sizable amounts of data to better prepare the information for data analysis with the five-member focus group.

Coded data were organized into chunks with multiple color codes based on the emerging themes. The highlighting and coding process was conducted utilizing Microsoft Word (Creswell, 2007; Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019; Mihas, 2019). Themes and keywords were identified, and data were organized into chunks based on the female seminary instructors' experiences with policies, culture, and gender-centered interactions with stakeholders. Once themes were identified and data were organized into manageable chunks, data were organized into tables and figures (Creswell, 2007; Sohn et al., 2017). Figure 2 shows a mind map of the coding process.

To address Research Question 1, the first and second questions in the one-on-one interview focused on the experiences and opportunities for personal and professional growth experienced by each participant. Feminist and empowerment research identified the generational gender bias between men and women in pay scale, professional development, upward mobility,

leadership opportunities, and administrative positions (del Carmen Salazar & Rios, 2016; Gorski, 2009; Leś, 2017; Nieto & Bode, 2018; Shannon-Baker, 2018).



*Figure 2.* Mind map of the steps used for coding the raw data from the one-on-one interviews.

Participants were asked to relate personal experiences of support, encouragement, and opportunities conveyed by their principal or region director to advance in educational opportunities. According to participants, administrators have expressed a substantial degree of support and encouragement for higher education and administrative opportunities. Twelve of the 15 participants discussed principals or region directors strongly encouraging the participants to attend graduate school in order to increase salary or improve the potential for future administrative opportunities.

Half of the interview participants expressed a desire to hold administrative positions in the future. Graduate work played an even more crucial role in the long-term professional goals of the instructors interested in administrative opportunities. Strong support and encouragement were offered from administrators to most of the subjects. Each interview participant was asked if she felt supported in her educational goals and progress the same as her male peers. All of the interview participants received equal or similar treatment to their male colleagues. Swirsky and Angelone (2016) emphasized female employees generally experience a high degree of unjust, demoralizing, and unethical treatment in the workplace, which was not expressed or conveyed by the interview participants in the present research. Interview Participant 2 stated,

You cannot really progress in an S&I career or expand on your opportunities and experiences unless you have a master's degree. But I actually love that! I have been wanting to go to grad school anyway. I've wanted to do that for a very long time, but it also will help me in S&I because I can't be a principal, you can't do these things without a master's degree. And so being able to be given more responsibilities requires that. So I would love to be given those opportunities! I have an awesome region director. He is so supportive and encouraging to me to attend graduate school, which is fantastic!

In a follow-up question, Interview Participant 7 was asked about specific experiences or examples of direct encouragement from the region director. Interview Participant 7 responded,

My region director has said, "You're on a shortlist of people that I'm looking at that are viable candidates for principals, and so I'm really glad you're getting your master's degree. I want you to know that I see your gifts and talents and think that they could be a blessing." And so, he says those things, and I think that's really good that he presents to

me my career opportunities and says, “These are things . . . I think you would be good at.”

Of the 15 participants, 11 responded with positive examples of encouragement and support from the principal or region director. The interview participants were invited to discuss some of their administrative opportunities not requiring a master’s degree. Examples of the responsibilities included assignments such as online seminary instructor, seminary council advisor/assistant advisor, assistant principal, mentor, or special needs faculty representative.

To help answer the research questions, participants were asked to share experiences of personal growth associated with their employment with S&I. Almost all of the teachers related personal growth in facets focusing on spirituality and improved relationships with God. When asked about other areas of personal growth, self-improvement, or personal wellness, the participants expressed ways in which growth occurred in multiple aspects. Huang (2016) noted personal growth and improvement generally rank higher among female employees compared to male employees when discussing the determinants of personal workplace satisfaction. Table 1 displays several examples of how participants recognized areas of personal growth or personal improvement.

Each participant expressed particularly high job satisfaction in working with teenagers, colleagues, and administrators on a day-to-day basis. To address Research Question 2, participants were asked if they had experienced gender bias from students. Nine of the 15 instructors identified at least one example of gender bias from their seminary students. When invited to share specific anecdotal experiences, four of the nine instructors shared occurrences when students transferred out of their seminary classes, specifically stating the reason for the transfer was because the student did not want to have a female teacher. Eight of the interview



participants shared personal anecdotes of blatant or overt experiences of gender bias from the parents of students.

Table 1

*Areas of Personal Growth and Improvement*

Interview participant	Areas of personal growth and improvement
1	"I gained a greater sense of self-confidence, maturity, and composure when dealing with challenging and belligerent students."
4	"I made a concerted effort to be more vulnerable and transparent with students during each lesson."
5	"Every aspect of this job has affected my personal life for the better. I think every single aspect of this job change who we are and affects us in a positive way."
7	"Teaching at the junior high school provided multiple opportunities to create relationships with the junior high school administration. I also taught our special needs class."
8	"It's impossible to adequately express how seminary teaching has changed my life. . . . So to answer, 'How has seminary helped me personally?' seminary has saved me. This career is saving me."
10	"It's really cool to see some carryover between what I actually do for my job and how it blesses my life personally."
11	"I think about experiences with specific students that have made me feel so valued to the Lord. These experiences have been the reasons why I love teaching, personal one-on-one interactions or even classroom interactions, where I feel like I'm helping my students."
13	"I've grown in my desire to connect with Christ daily. I daily need that touch with my Savior. Also, my prayers have deepened, and I think my scripture reading and pondering has deepened."
14	"I think receiving feedback has been really helpful. So, receiving feedback and having opportunities to try different things."
15	"The biggest changes from the beginning part of my teaching to where I am now is that I've found a voice to be comfortable expressing my opinion. I'm comfortable voicing concerns, or questions, or being unashamed of who I am and what I can offer to the seminary program I'm working in."

When participants were asked to share the unique challenges, they faced because they were unmarried female employees in S&I, nine of the 15 shared one or more challenging

experiences. As discussed in the literature review, a doctrinal and cultural emphasis is placed on marriage for eternity within the Church's dogma. In the Church's theology, marriage is regarded as a critical component in an individual's eternal progression and necessary to attain the highest degree of joy in the afterlife. Because of the doctrinal and cultural emphasis on marriage, the topic of marriage is discussed in individual training, faculty meetings, and lesson plans, and is a component in the hiring process for full-time seminary instructors. With the strong cultural and doctrinal emphasis on the eternal nature of marriage, a majority of participants articulated different harrowing anecdotes involving mandatory, overnight couple-training meetings, conferences, and seminars.

When interview participants were asked to elaborate on the lived experiences regarding the different mandatory meetings required by S&I, eight of the 15 readily recognized the benefits of the different meetings and did not oppose the meetings. Four of the participants' negative feelings regarding the mandatory meetings were centered on the topics discussed at the couple retreats, which were overwhelmingly focused on improving one's marriage or strengthening communication within a marriage. Interview Participant 14 stated, "As a single person, I dreaded them [mandatory couple meetings]. . . . It's like being on a giant group date where you don't have a date. . . . It was so awkward!"

Interview Participant 9 shared specific experiences when she did not have a partner to be a teammate during a married-couple game. Her singleness created an awkward and uncomfortable experience. Interview Participant 9 became visibly frustrated as the following experience was shared:

We would have these husband-and-wife retreats, and it was mandatory to go. I was expected to go to these overnight retreats with all my coworkers and their spouses. We

would do couple-games and listen to speakers give marriage advice . . . but I wasn't married. And while everyone was really nice, it was so uncomfortable hanging out with everybody else's spouses and feeling like a 17th wheel on a big group date. And then I'd go back to my lonely hotel room.

Interview Participant 7 addressed the blurred lines between gender discrimination and marriage discrimination, stating,

I think that gender bias is interesting in S&I because gender bias is also paired with discrimination based on marriage. To me, those go hand-in-hand. Often, the discrimination I've seen and felt are things that are because you're married, or you're not married. But the only people not married are women, and therefore, it becomes a gender bias.

Interview Participant 10 experienced challenges of feeling left out and like she did not have a place in S&I or on her faculty because she was a woman and single. Interview Participant 10 noted the culture and policy had changed in the past few years regarding how single female teachers were treated, so she "would get a special e-mail or a special phone call to say, 'Hey, we know that you're not married, so you can bring a friend if you'd like.'" Interview Participant 10 discussed a weeklong summer workshop focused primarily on accommodating married couples. Interview Participant 10 was assigned a female tentmate, which created multiple challenges and awkward situations, and distracted from the purpose of the workshop. The participant discussed the specific experience with administrators, and the tentmate policy, along with other policies, has been changed to be more inclusive of all participants regardless of marital status.

An often-repeated refrain emerged from the interviews focusing on the subtle differences between gender bias in the culture of S&I versus gender bias in the policies of S&I. Feminist

theory emphasizes the keys to reversing gender inequality through the equal treatment of women by peers (Mihas, 2019). Empowerment theory seeks to remediate oppression through policy, culture, and practice within an organization (Carr, 2003). Research Question 2 was crafted with the purpose to provide a forum for female seminary instructors to identify personal perspectives, insights, and experiences which may be used to enlighten, educate, and instigate change from male colleagues and administrators. In the one-on-one interviews, participants were asked, What examples of gender bias, if any, have you observed or experienced as a teacher in Seminaries and Institutes of Religion? Table 2 identifies examples of the participants' lived experiences of gender bias.

Table 2

*Experiences of Gender Bias From Faculty or Administrators*

Interview participant	Personal experiences of cultural gender bias
2	"My first-year teaching was very difficult because I felt very isolated as a female. I often found my male coworkers working together and collaborating on lessons and talking about ideas, and often I was not included in those discussions."
4	"Anytime there's food that needs to be arranged, or something needs to be beautified, they always call me."
6	"I've had a lot of male colleagues come to observe me and then try to give feedback, but it's like they're not comfortable being upfront with me or they aren't completely honest. I feel like they're afraid it's going to hurt my feelings."
8	"For a long time, the policy was that one woman and one man could not work alone in the same building. The same thing with driving a car, a man and woman couldn't ride together to a meeting in the same car."
9	"I noticed that my male coworkers observed each other's classes a lot more often than they would come and observe mine. I felt like I was not worth observing and learning from. Most of the times that I did get observed, I felt like it was to be corrected, not to be learned from."
15	"There's been several times where, throughout my whole career, when different faculty members and principals will be going to an activity as a group, and I'll be asked to drive myself to avoid the appearance of evil—to not get in the car with a bunch of men."

The participants were asked to share experiences of gender bias from seminary students. Many of the participants discussed blatant examples of gender bias by male and female students. Only the blatant examples of gender bias from students are identified in Table 3.

Table 3

*Experiences of Gender Bias From Students in the Classroom*

Interview participant	Experiences of gender bias from students
1	"I was a brand-new teacher, and he [student] walks in, sees that I'm the teacher, and he immediately walks out and tells the secretary, 'I refuse to have her as my teacher!' It was the first day of class!"
3	"Last year was the first year that I didn't have any students say, 'I don't want to be in the girl teacher's class.' So, it took five years for them to just get used to the idea that I'm here."
6	"We were talking in a meeting last week, and I was saying how I can't get students to sit in their assigned seats, and one of the other brothers who were there said, 'Don't you just tell him, 'I'm the teacher, now sit down.'?" And I'm like, 'Yeah, I told him that, but they don't sit down.'"
9	"The students are so ingrained about having male seminary teachers that they won't give you a chance. I remember I had one student came in, she just sat there and rolled her eyes or glared at me for the whole first week, and finally, a couple of weeks into class, she wrote me a note. The note said, 'I came in the first day and decided I didn't like you because I wanted a guy teacher.'"
10	"I feel like, as a sister, I have less authority in a classroom. I think the students question that at the very beginning of the school year."
13	"I have had students go to my principal and ask to be transferred out of my class. When asked why, they have said, 'I don't want a girl teacher.'"
14	"I think some young men think that I am just not an authority figure to the students."
15	"[The students think] I am not an authority figure. And a woman seminary teacher is 'supposed to be' sweet and kind. If I am too strict, then they say I'm asking too much of them."

Participants were invited to share impressions about which policies or practices should be altered, changed, or removed to help mitigate gender bias in S&I. In response, almost all of the interview participants addressed the 2014 policy change regarding mothers with minor children in the home while still retaining employment as full-time S&I employees. Forty percent of the

participants noted the change in the dress-code policy allowing female seminary instructors to wear pants helped to mitigate a feeling of gender bias in S&I.

Each participant was asked to identify positive changes in the culture of S&I which directly affected gender bias or gender-centric issues. The subjects noted several policy changes, cultural shifts, or other noteworthy positive changes which helped to eliminate any gender-bias culture and behavior. Table 4 identifies examples shared by the participants addressing a host of encouraging cultural changes while acknowledging areas still deemed inconsistent.

### **Focus Group Analysis**

After emerging themes were discovered and data were organized into manageable chunks, the data were then arranged into tables (Sohn et al., 2017). Using stratified random sampling, one or two focus group participants were selected from each of the strata of the one-on-one interview groups to become a part of the five-member focus group. The five-member focus group was contacted and invited to participate through a personal e-mail.

All five randomly selected focus group invitees accepted the invitation to participate in a Zoom call. Eight days before the focus group discussion, the five participants received a digital copy of Tables 1–4 along with the semi-structured focus group questions. A reminder e-mail was sent one day before the focus group discussion, along with an invitation to ask any additional questions before the meeting. One focus group invitee had an emergency and was unable to participate in the focus group discussion, so a replacement interview participant was called and agreed to participate in the focus group. The replacement participant belonged to the same strata as the original participant. The replacement participant received all of the data to be analyzed and discussed three hours before the focus group discussion.

Table 4

*Positive Cultural Changes Toward Gender Equality*

Interview participant	Example of positive cultural change
4	“At the apprentice summit, administrators discussed the positive outcomes of female instructors gaining much more experience and time in S&I to better qualify and fill administrative positions.”
5	“I also can see myself ending up in more administrative roles down the road because throughout my life I’ve been in leadership positions, and it’s not something that’s intimidating to me.”
5	“S&I training requirements are addressing gender equality and gender bias in a much more clear and open way.”
9	“Last summer, the region held a female teacher forum and discussed gender-centered issues with the region director.”
9	“We need to recognize that they are navigating 100 years of culture, and that doesn’t just change overnight.”
11	“The Church culture is changing, and S&I is changing along with it.”
12	“Even though I’m an infant in this career, I was not treated like that. I also recently have been given the opportunity to be a mentor myself.”
12	“My faculty and principal are always saying, ‘How do you feel about this? What do you think? Let’s get a sister’s view on this.’ I was actually blown away seeing how much I was called upon.”
13	“I think in S&I the leadership is making a very intentional, concerted effort to improve gender equality.”
14	“Change is going to take a long time. I’m grateful that the Church and S&I are trying to look at these things and trying to improve, because I think there is always room for improvement.”
15	“I’m just really grateful that they assigned you this topic. I think any woman you talk to in S&I chose this career because they absolutely love teaching, and they love the youth, and I guarantee they’ve had a pretty positive experience!”

The focus group’s contributions, personal insights, recommendations, and unique female perspectives provided invaluable analysis and support to limit potential gender bias (Randle et al., 2014). The Zoom focus group discussion was video- and audio-recorded. An additional

backup audio recording of the focus group discussion was recorded on a password-protected Apple iPhone X. The audio recording was transcribed to a Microsoft Word document using the audio transcription software provided by Microsoft Office.

The focus group questions were written in collaboration with SME consultation, with the purpose to explore the data to answer the two research questions. Focus Group Question 1 asked, What thoughts, feelings, and recollections struck you as you read through the different responses? Table 5 shows the focus group's analysis.

Table 5

*Thoughts, Feelings, and Recollections of the Data*

Focus group participant	Initial perceptions from the data
1	"Because I am brand-new to this, I haven't experienced so many of the things I read about from the one-on-one interviews. I was surprised at how often sister teachers had felt excluded in different activities."
2	"As I was reading through each comment, I was happy to feel like I wasn't alone, and I could relate to other female teachers. But I was sad because I realized other teachers had experienced the same challenges I was experiencing."
3	"What struck me most was that I wasn't alone in what I've experienced. But I need to make sure I pay attention to the good things that are happening because there are so many great things about this job, and I love what I do."
4	"I had the same thought as [Interview Participant 3]. I need to be more positive in how I look at this job. And it is good to see that I have a really good job and that I really do enjoy my work!"
5	"I recognized how often the different biases that occurred were often really marriage bias, instead of gender bias. Many negative experiences were not because I was a woman but because I was single. . . . I also saw that many of the gender-related issues were experienced because male colleagues were so worried or concerned that they would be 'inappropriate' in our relationship or, to 'avoid the appearance of evil,' they went to the extreme."

As a follow-up to the first question, the focus group was asked about the responses from the data which most resonated with their personal lived experiences. Responses were diverse and



covered multiple themes and topics from the one-on-one interviews. Table 6 displays the focus group participants' answers.

Table 6

*Responses Which Resonated With Focus Group Participants' Lived Experiences*

Focus group participant	Interview responses which resonated most with focus group participants
2	"Why do they spread us out as sisters so much? It is so nice to have another sister teacher on my faculty! So now we're isolated. We should have a few sisters together so we can get support and help—and a secretary/support specialist is not the same as a teacher."
4	"Collaboration is different when female teachers are preparing lessons together. There is a different process and feeling when I work with sisters in lesson preparation."
5	"Get rid of the required couples retreat for single sisters. Offer a sisters' retreat/workshop. . . . Allow for sisters to not feel more alone or isolated. If it's a husband-and-wife thing, then make it that. Please, don't make me come. I seriously sat up all night worried because I was alone all night. Find something to make us feel more comfortable."

Focus Group Question 3 sought analysis from the focus group about how data might be used to help administrators diminish gender inequality in the workplace. Focus group participants expressed sincere gratitude for the opportunity to discuss such sensitive topics without any reservation or concern for actual or perceived negative recourse. Most of the answers to Question 3 centered on the theme of a need for better training for administrators, faculty members, and preservice directors in charge of hiring new teachers.

The focus group participants noted most of the gender bias experiences discussed by the one-on-one interviewees could be remediated through better gender-focused training. Focus Group Participant 4 stated,

Create clear and direct training to help principals and colleagues understand HR [human resource] issues and FMLA [Family and Medical Leave Act] issues. There should better

training and understanding of policy. When training and understanding aren't there, it makes me feel like I don't matter or I'm not that important to S&I. So many of our gender-related issues could be taken care of by clear, blunt training, which would directly effect a change in the culture as well.

Focus Group Question 5 focused on different ways in which the one-on-one interview data could assist administrators and colleagues to become more aware of the circumstances, actions, and situations directly affecting gender inequality in the workplace. Focus Group Participant 3 discussed the importance of job satisfaction and earning a higher education degree. In her response, the participant further noted female employees use different tools than male employees use to gauge job satisfaction and workplace wellness. Focus Group Participant 3 stated,

Even though our salaries are not tied to our administrative assignments like principal or vice principal, there is an element of job satisfaction that is important to us. Earning a master's degree may be much more difficult for a sister teacher who is a single mom or a married mom with children. So, if we are going to see more female teachers in the system, maybe more can be done to accommodate female teachers because our dynamics may be very different from our male colleagues. There is not always a spouse to support us through the higher education process.

Focus Group Participant 4 noted the data conveyed a feeling of frustration because a clear path to administrative positions was not outlined. Most often, principals were chosen without a formal application process. Focus Group Participant 4 observed,

If the administration in S&I could implement a clear process for assigning principals, vice principals, and other administrators, then female teachers would feel they had an

equal opportunity to fill those positions. Instead, we treat it like it's a calling, where region directors just call someone without any clear direction or requirements other than a master's degree.

A persistent theme emerged in the focus group: Why is there not a clear method to show female instructors how they are considered for leadership experiences and opportunities the same as male coworkers? Focus group participants reiterated the need for direct questions among faculty members addressing gender bias issues with female colleagues. A common theme emerged from the data emphasizing the critical need for open communication and more direct training so gender inequality and gender bias could be recognized and addressed within the faculty.

Focus Group Question 6 invited participants to analyze the data, looking for measures S&I could implement to create a more gender-equal environment within the organization. Table 7 displays the focus group participants' answers. The last question in the focus group focused on methods S&I could implement or improve to appeal to, hire, and promote more female employees within the organization. Focus group participants analyzed the one-on-one interview data and came up with multiple changes. Table 8 displays the observations made by the focus group participants.

Conducting a focus group discussion to analyze the data significantly changed the analysis of the data. The five focus group participants' data analysis of the one-on-one interviews provided unique perspectives incapable of being offered by the male researcher. The five-member focus group was introduced as a critical element of the research process to reduce researcher bias.

Table 7

*Methods Seminaries and Institutes of Religion Can Implement to Improve Gender Equality**Within the Organization*

Focus group participant	Methods to improve gender inequality
2	"I think it would be awesome if S&I would let us know all of the options available in this career. I only know about seminary, institute, and administrative stuff. What if S&I sat us down and gave us all the career path options like curriculum, training, etc.?"
3	"Please talk about the need to see me as a professional colleague, and not see me for my gender. We need to have blunt, awkward conversations and talk openly about the different examples of gender inequality or gender bias and sexism that exists."
4	"The faculty that was the most gender-supportive had more than one woman on it. The teachers and students are just used to having sisters, so it was not a big deal that I was different."
5	"It is so important for our emotional and mental health to have more sisters on each faculty. I can observe, prepare, and talk with a sister in a completely different way than I can with a male colleague."

**Reliability and Validity**

Sound qualitative research practices were implemented in the data analysis to establish trustworthiness, reliability, and validity (Md Ali & Yusof, 2011). Instruments of triangulation, member checking, field notes, and peer focus group analysis were used in the data analysis (Phillippi & Lauderdale, 2018). Applying rigor-strengthening practices to the basic qualitative study further reduced researcher bias (Md Ali & Yusof, 2011; Randle et al., 2014). The 15 interview participants represented 30% of the target population of female seminary instructors working in Utah. Researcher bias in the analysis of the data was virtually eliminated through the focus group of female seminary instructors.

Table 8

*Potential Approaches to Better Appeal to, Hire, and Promote Female Employees*

Focus group participant	Potential improvements
3	“If S&I wants to recruit and retain more women teachers, there needs to be the infrastructure already in place that will accommodate mothers, single women, or other unique situations for women. Things like better support for higher education, training, workshops, or administrative certifications. . . . Allow teachers to work a few days a week on higher education or certifications. If S&I is paying for the degree and paying us to be in the building in the summer, why not support us more effectively by allowing us time to work on certifications?”
3	“‘Come, have a career with S&I,’ not just, ‘Work for S&I.’ Also, keep recruiting me after I’m hired. Keep me growing, progressing in my career.”
4	“I love that S&I encourages a master’s degree. Maybe we can receive reduced class time [from six classes to four] for a master’s degree. This should be a natural part of the conversation, and it shouldn’t be required for an employee to beg and plead their cause to get professional developmental leave for a master’s degree. . . . Why is a master’s degree the only tangible requirement to be a principal? Does experience matter? Could an internal certification program exist where one to three certifications are required for a principal position, rather than only a master’s degree level of education?”
5	“What if we had a six-week/40-hour summer program of leadership training as a requirement for a principal or vice principal training?”

To further establish reliability and validity in qualitative research, ensuring the transferability of the research findings is critical (Daniel, 2019; Houghton et al., 2013). The outcomes of the basic qualitative research may be transferred to other religious organizations with predominantly male-led hierarchical leadership. Additional research findings from the basic qualitative research may be transferred to STEM programs with leadership and teacher positions predominantly filled by male teachers and administrators (Lewis, 2018; Master et al., 2016; Pedersen & West, 2017; Riegle-Crumb et al., 2017).

### **Chapter Summary**

The findings in Chapter 4 presented the lived experiences of female seminary instructors in the instructors' own words. Tables and summaries of the one-on-one interviews and focus group analysis were shared. The semi-structured interview questions were focused on eliciting information from a previously unresearched demographic of a minority group within the Church's S&I program. The female seminary instructor population has not heretofore contributed experiences, perspectives, and insights to the body of research discussing feminist and empowerment theories.

The basic qualitative study answered the first research question, which concentrated on what the female seminary instructor population could add to the existing body of feminist and empowerment studies. The experiences of female seminary instructors provide unique insights, perspectives, and analysis which may now be added to the body of research related to women working in traditionally male-led hierarchical organizations. Data collected and analyzed in Chapter 4 addressed the second research question, which sought an understanding of how the perspectives, insights, and experiences from female seminary instructors may help male administrators and colleagues to better understand feminist concerns, challenges, issues, and perspectives. A five-member focus group of female instructors was selected from the 15-member one-on-one interview participants to analyze the data. The focus group provided data analysis to help minimize researcher bias.

Data and data analysis provided insights into the unresearched world of female seminary instructors working for a large, established, male-led hierarchical religious organization. The shared lived experiences and perceptions from the data and data analysis can be used to educate

and train colleagues, principals, and other administrators in S&I. Research supported training could help mitigate gender inequality and gender bias in the culture and policies of S&I.

Chapter 5 presents the findings, interpretations, and conclusions of the study. The limitations in the research are addressed, along with the implications for leadership from the study. Meaningful applications are discussed in Chapter 5, along with any recommended future research options.

## **Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion**

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore the lived experiences of female seminary instructors through the lens of feminist and empowerment theories (Vásquez-Rosati, 2017). The study can help administrators better understand how to improve gender equality throughout the S&I department (Mihas, 2019). The background of the problem centered on the Church's religious education department of S&I not having critically researched the female seminary instructor population to understand the lived experiences and perspectives of the female instructors within the organization. The cutting-edge research provided an opportunity and forum for female seminary instructors to share personal lived experiences, perspectives, insights, and dissonance with current gender-related policies and cultural concerns within S&I. Each interview participant expressed gratitude for the opportunity to participate in the research because the participants were afforded a safe, anonymous forum to share personal perceptions without fear of recourse or a negative outcome.

The subjects experienced robust support from administrators to earn graduate degrees to assist efforts for future administrative opportunities. The interview participants were almost unanimous in expressing high levels of job satisfaction, gender equity, and unbiased opportunities with faculty and principals. The female instructors shared multiple lived experiences of gender bias with students, peers, principals, and administrators (see Tables 1–5).

The basic qualitative study contributed to the existing body of feminist and empowerment research. The research questions focused on issues of empowerment and feminist challenges facing female seminary instructors. Research Question 1 asked, What can the experiences of female seminary instructors employed by the Church contribute to the existing body of feminist and empowerment theories? Research Question 2 asked, What perspectives, insights, and



experiences from female seminary instructors may help male administrators and colleagues better understand feminist concerns, challenges, issues, and perspectives?

### **Findings, Interpretations, Conclusions**

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore the lived experiences of female seminary instructors through the lens of feminist and empowerment theories (Vásquez-Rosati, 2017). The research included 15 female seminary instructors. The lived experiences shared in the data expressed the feminist and empowerment issues of female seminary instructors working in a male-dominated hierarchical organization. The data were analyzed and interpreted by a five-member focus group. The focus group was created by inviting five instructors selected through stratified sampling from the original 15 one-on-one interview participants.

Key findings from the data indicate a high degree of job satisfaction and support from S&I administration. All 15 interview participants were satisfied with the administration's support for earning graduate degrees. The instructors expressed feelings of workplace contentment with fellow employees. Twelve of the 15 participants acknowledged multiple experiences of blatant and overt gender bias in the workplace. Much of the sexist and gender-bias experiences shared were linked to workplace culture. Female instructors with five or more years of employment shared more experiences of sexism from colleagues, administrators, and students than did the instructors with fewer years of employment. The female instructors with fewer years of employment discussed positive changes and cultural shifts among colleagues, principals, and region directors. Tables 1–4 presented the lived experiences of female seminary instructors working in S&I. The tables also conveyed the multiple feminist and empowerment issues of female seminary instructors working in a predominantly male-led organization. The tables additionally included several positive experiences shared by the interview subjects.

The five-member focus group analyzed the data and shared perceptions, feedback, and observations. Using five female instructors from the one-on-one interviews to assist in the analysis of the feedback helped eliminate researcher bias. The analyses found in Tables 5–8 are the data interpretations from the five-member focus group. Feedback and interpretations of the data conveyed overall job satisfaction. Other data analysis showed female seminary instructors' personal experiences of diverse forms of gender bias, sexism, and prejudices based on the female instructors' marital status.

The focus group noted data from the one-on-one interviews showed how isolated female instructors felt when they were the only female instructor on a faculty (see Table 6). Several focus group participants shared frustration with administrators' decisions to isolate female teachers under the guise of diversifying faculties, when such isolation further compounded the feelings of aloneness, isolation, and gender tokenism (Samuelson, Levine, Barth, Wessel, & Grand, 2019). The focus group discussed several significant positive outcomes of allowing multiple female instructors on the same faculty. Some of the outcomes included greater mental health, better synergy during lesson preparation and collaboration, and improved observation and feedback settings.

The focus group's analysis of the data supported the research showing the benefits of researching gender equality and gender diversity to improve workplace wellness and culture (Buenestado-Fernández et al., 2019; Modiba, 2017). Each of the interview participants shared ways in which involvement in the basic qualitative study provided them an opportunity to voice their personal feelings and experiences. The interview participants felt empowered from the basic qualitative study because they were able to speak openly and were given a forum to freely express personal experiences and perspectives (Freire, 2000).

The basic qualitative study represents cutting-edge efforts in critical research of the female seminary teacher population (Griffiths et al., 2016; McBaine & Wayment, 2016; Walch, 2014). Female seminary instructors belong to a minority group who have been marginalized and disenfranchised in the past (Brekus, 2011). Historians' depictions of feminist issues within the Church were poorly characterized in historical texts and research (Brekus, 2011; Palmer, 2018). The research in this basic qualitative study provided an in-depth look into the lived experiences of female seminary instructors and illustrated the feminist and empowerment issues the interview subjects face as a minority group.

The basic qualitative research filled a gap in the research literature and added the lived experiences of female seminary instructors to the existing literature of feminist and empowerment research (Hale, 2018; Mihas, 2019). Wollstonecraft (1792) observed one of the most pressing issues of gender bias in France's lower class centered on the blatant withholding of educational and economic opportunities from women. In the one-on-one interviews, each of the 15 interview participants expressed the opposite experience referenced by Wollstonecraft. Feminist and empowerment researchers can learn from the progressive work environment to promote and support female employees working in S&I.

In S&I, all seminary instructors and principals are paid the same salary based on algorithms using education level, years of experience, and additional certifications earned by the seminary instructor. No gender wage gap exists between female and male seminary instructors. Gender wage-gap frustrations or disparities were never brought up by participants in the interviews. The S&I policies regarding pay and educational support eliminate feminist and empowerment issues most women outside of S&I face daily regarding unequal pay and unequal educational opportunity (Fraser et al., 2015; Miranda, 2015).

Additional examples of the basic qualitative study's contributions to the existing knowledge of feminist and empowerment theories may be found in the focus group's analysis of the data. Focus group participants expressed a sense of optimistic momentum regarding feminist and empowerment issues within S&I and the Church culture at large. Multiple subjects attributed the positive cultural changes to the awareness by Church leaders of past wrongs in the Church, as well as in S&I as an entity of the Church (Scarborough et al., 2019). Each one-on-one interview participant commended the S&I administration for allowing and supporting this basic qualitative research. Participants deemed the research as further evidence of positive cultural changes within the administration of S&I (Midkiff, 2015).

The interpretation of the data relied almost exclusively on the focus group's perspectives, analysis, and commentary. Relying on the focus group's analysis diminished researcher bias. Using the one-on-one interview participants' own words and experiences captured some of the authentic struggles and challenges facing female seminary instructors. The interview participants and focus group participants shared lived experiences of equality efforts in the workplace (Mercer-Mapstone & Mercer, 2018; Turner & Maschi, 2015). Feminist and empowerment theories address and highlight areas in which individuals or groups become marginalized and lose power, relevancy, or status by others in positions of power (Turner & Maschi, 2015). The research provides a greater understanding of the complex, unique, and dynamically lived experiences of a female seminary instructor working in S&I. The research revealed areas of gender bias and gender inequality within S&I.

### **Limitations**

The basic qualitative study provided a unique forum for female seminary instructors to openly discuss issues related to gender inequality and empowerment (McCusker, 2017). A

research gap existed related to female seminary instructors' lived experiences as a minority group in a predominantly male-led organization. The Church's female seminary instructor population had not been researched before the present basic qualitative study (Cragun et al., 2016). Previous studies and extensive research analyzed a multiplicity of gender issues within the Church, though none of the studies focused on the specific group of female seminary instructors and the unique lived experiences of the female seminary instructor population (Hoyt, 2017).

Venkatesh et al. (2013) noted the intrinsic limitations which exist in qualitative research methods due to the subjectivity and nature of the methodology. Utilizing proper research tools alleviates qualitative research limitations (Md Ali & Yusof, 2011). Establishing trustworthiness and rigor through in-depth examination further strengthens the validity and reliability of the data (Drost, 2011). Limitations in the basic qualitative research were minimized through member checking and triangulation (Tetnowski, 2015).

The basic qualitative study was limited because the 15 subjects involved in the research represent 30% of the small target population. Additional limitations exist in the study because the one-on-one interview process was conducted by one researcher, and researcher bias may occur (Anderson, 2010). Limitations exist due to the amount of time required for one-on-one interviews to gather data (Anderson, 2010). One-on-one interviews rely heavily on the interviewer's ability to elicit personal perspectives from the subject and can be significantly affected by the interviewer's bias and interpretation of the subject's body language (Anderson, 2010; Munthe-Kaas et al., 2019).

To control the limitation of potential gender bias, the focus group in the study discussed insights of the triangulated and member-checked data from the one-on-one interviews. The

research analysis relied heavily on the insights shared during the focus group discussion (Md Ali & Yusof, 2011). A personal journal was kept to document potential biases throughout the research process.

To further establish reliability and validity in the basic qualitative research, the transferability of the research is imperative (Daniel, 2019; Houghton et al., 2013). Transferability examines the results of research and how the results may be adapted or applied to other similar groups or individuals (Daniel, 2019; Houghton et al., 2013). The outcomes of the basic qualitative research may be transferred to other religious organizations with similar male-led hierarchical leadership groups managing female subordinates (Sandstrom, 2016). Additional research findings may be transferred to STEM programs with leadership and teacher positions predominantly filled by male teachers and administrators (Lewis, 2018; Master et al., 2016; Pedersen & West, 2017; Riegle-Crumb et al., 2017).

Several instruments were used throughout the basic qualitative study to ensure the trustworthiness of the data (Md Ali & Yusof, 2011). The instruments used in strengthening objectivity and credibility included triangulation, member checking, field notes, and analysis by a peer focus group (Phillippi & Lauderdale, 2018). Applying rigor-strengthening practices in the basic qualitative study may further reduce researcher bias (Md Ali & Yusof, 2011; Randle et al., 2014).

### **Recommendations**

The following recommendations were based on the responses from the focus group discussion. The focus group participants strongly recommended conducting regular, gender-focused discussions in faculty, region, and area-wide training. The focus group discussed the critical need for more clear communication of gender policy changes, with follow-up training of

best practices of how to implement each of the gender-focused policies. Other suggestions were focused on female seminary instructors' job satisfaction and workplace wellness.

The focus group participants strongly advised administrators more creatively address challenges female employees experience as they return to school, particularly if the employee has minor children still at home. Several focus group participants recommended lighter teaching loads or more summertime autonomy to attend graduate school. Each member of the focus group recommended and strongly supported the idea of committees, panels, or other organized groups of female instructors to address female employee concerns and challenges. Two focus group participants strongly suggested a more concentrated campaign to recruit female instructors.

All the recommendations from the focus group were intent on mitigating cultural gender bias. According to the participants, an overall improvement in communication regarding gender-related policy changes should be the first issue addressed by the S&I administration. Both the interview and focus group participants expressed a strong desire for more gender-related research to be conducted within S&I.

### **Implications for Leadership**

For 100 years, S&I almost exclusively hired male employees to teach the youth of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (2018b) in the seminary program. In 2014, when the policy allowing mothers of minor children to work as full-time employees was changed, a significant increase occurred in the number of female employees working in S&I (personal communication, L. Newbold, November 20, 2019). Addressing gender bias issues by the S&I administration has already made a positive impact and presented a more optimistic outlook for many of the interview participants in the basic qualitative study. The department of S&I is

currently presented with an opportunity to demonstrate positive support and gender equality with the influx of female employees entering the workforce.

Half of the interview participants addressed the gap which exists between the number of female employees and the number of female seminary principals. Three focus group participants strongly encouraged more straightforward pathways to leadership assignments. Creating clear paths to leadership assignments would further eliminate the potential for favoritism or gender bias to play a role in making leadership assignments. As more female employees progress within the ranks of S&I leadership, their unique perspectives, insights, and practices can be implemented. Skardéus (2018) emphasized the positive changes and impact on organizations, businesses, and all stakeholders when women are afforded the same opportunities as men.

### **Conclusion**

The basic qualitative study provided a voice to a previously silent female cohort. Conducting one-on-one anonymous interviews with 15 female members of this population empowered the participants to speak up and speak out. Sharing personal lived experiences may provide validation and empowerment to a silent or voiceless portion of any community. Research from the unique segment of the female population contributes new perspectives, voices, and insights into the existing body of knowledge of feminist and empowerment issues. Other predominantly male-led or -managed organizations may learn from the example of S&I to offer equal pay and educational opportunities to all employees using a similar universal standard.

The administration of S&I may use the research to understand female employees and research ways to address the gender-bias issues within S&I. The research may be used to improve administration training regarding gender bias issues. As female employees fill a larger role in the future of S&I, students, faculties, and culture within the seminary classrooms could be



directly affected. Promoting additional female instructors in S&I to more positions of leadership and administration could improve the overall work experience of all stakeholders.

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## Appendix A: Letter Requesting Participant Approval

May 21, 2019

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

My name is Matthew C. Merrill, and I am a doctoral candidate at American College of Education (ACE) writing to request permission to interview you in a one-on-one private interview. Your interview answers will be used for my dissertation research related to a basic qualitative study of female seminary teachers employed by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The purpose of the one-on-one interview will be to better understand female seminary teachers' experiences as employees of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

This research topic has been approved by the Research Department of Seminaries and Institutes. All participants are invited to participate on a voluntary basis and will not be compensated for their time involved in this basic qualitative study. Participants may drop out at any time in the research process and are under no obligation to continue. All participants names will be kept completely confidential and all real names will be replaced with pseudonyms before any information is shared with the S&I research department, the IRB, or the committee chair.

Please contact me if you are willing to participate in this research project. Thank you for your participation in this basic qualitative study.

Sincerely

Matthew C. Merrill

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix B: Informed Consent Form

## INFORMED CONSENT FORM

**Prospective Research Participant:** Read this consent form carefully and ask as many questions as you like before you decide whether you want to participate in this research study. You are free to ask questions at any time before, during, or after your participation in this research.

**Project Information**

**Project Title:** A Basic Qualitative Study of Female Seminary Instructors as a Minority Group

**Researcher:** Matthew C. Merrill.....

**Organization:** American College of Education.....

**Email:** [REDACTED] **Telephone:** [REDACTED]

**Researcher's Chair:** Susan Quiatkowski , PhD

**Organization:** American College of Education

**Email:** [REDACTED]

**Introduction**

I am Matthew C. Merrill, and I am a doctoral candidate student at American College of Education. I am doing research under the guidance and supervision of my Chair, Dr. Quiatkowski. I will give you some information about the project and invite you to be part of this research. Before you decide, you can talk to anyone you feel comfortable with about the research. This consent form may contain words you do not understand. Please ask me to stop as we go through the information, and I will explain. If you have questions later, you can ask them then.

### **Purpose of the Research**

You are being asked to participate in a research study which will assist with understanding the lived experiences of female seminary teachers working with predominantly male colleagues, administrators, and regional directors.

### **Research Design and Procedures**

The study will use a qualitative methodology and a basic qualitative research design. A letter of invitation to participate will be disseminated to specific participants within the designated areas in the state of Utah, in the United States. The study will comprise of 15 participants, randomly selected, who will participate in one-on-one interviews along with a focus group. The study will involve 15 female instructors for the one-on-one interviews after which, four female instructors will be invited to participate in a focus group. The interviews will be conducted at the site most convenient for participants. After data are gathered from the interviews, the focus group will analyze the information from the one-on-one interviews and offer additional insights and analysis pertaining to the topic of the research.

### **Participant selection**

You are being invited to take part in this research because of your experience as a female seminary teacher, who can contribute much to improve the understanding of your experiences, which meets the criteria for this study. Participant selection criteria: Full-time, female seminary instructors employed by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

### **Voluntary Participation**

Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary. It is your choice whether to participate. If you choose not to participate, there will be no punitive repercussions and you do not have to participate. If you select to participate in this study, you may change your mind later and stop participating even if you agreed earlier.

### **Procedures**

I am inviting you to participate in this research study. If you agree, you will be asked to participate in a one-on-one interview for no more than one hour. Additionally, you may be invited to participate in a focus group to discuss the responses and experiences recorded from the one-on-one interviews. The type of questions asked will focus on your personal lived experiences as a female seminary instructor working with a predominantly male-led organizational hierarchy. Questions may range from your experiences as a female instructor with colleagues, to your experiences as a female seminary instructor with your principal or regional director.

### **Duration**

The interview portion of the research study will require approximately 60 minutes to complete. If you are selected to participate in the focus group, the time expected for the focus group will be another 60 minutes. After your interview is transcribed, additional time may be required for you to read your interview transcript to make certain your comments are accurately recorded. You may make additional clarifications if you so desire.

### **Risks**

The researcher will ask you to share personal and confidential information, and you may feel uncomfortable talking about some of the topics. You do not have to answer any question

or take part in the discussion if you do not wish to do so. You do not have to give any reason for not responding to any question.

### **Benefits**

While there will be no direct financial benefit to you, your participation is likely to help teachers and administrators find out more about the lived experiences of female seminary teachers. The potential benefits of this study will aid the Church and S&I by offering sound-data to improve the working experiences of female seminary instructors. The information can help improve working conditions, leadership opportunities for growth, or upward mobility for female instructors. This study may help reduce sexism, stereotypes, and gender bias's that may have existed in the workplace.

### **Confidentiality**

I will not share information about you or anything you say to anyone outside of the researcher. During the defense of the doctoral dissertation, data collected will be presented to the dissertation committee. The data collected will be kept in a personal safe on a password-protected storage device. Any information about you will be coded and will not have a direct correlation, which directly identifies you as the participant. Only I will know what your number is, and I will secure your information.

### **Sharing the Results**

At the end of the research study, the results will be available for each participant. It is anticipated to publish the results so other interested people may learn from the research. The results will also be presented to the Seminaries and Institutes of Religion Education Research Committee (ERC).

### **Right to Refuse or Withdraw**

Participation is voluntary. At any time, you wish to end your participation in the research study, you may do so without repercussions.

### **Questions About the Study**

If you have any questions, you can ask them now or later. If you wish to ask questions later, you may contact me at [REDACTED]@gmail.com. This research plan has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board of American College of Education. This is a committee whose role is to make sure research participants are protected from harm. If you wish to ask questions of this group, email [IRB@ace.edu](mailto:IRB@ace.edu).

### **Certificate of Consent**

I have read the information about this study, or it has been read to me. I acknowledge why I have been asked to be a participant in the research study. I have been provided the opportunity to ask questions about the study, and any questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I certify I am at least 18 years of age. I consent voluntarily to be a participant in this study.

Print or Type Name of Participant: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Participant: \_\_\_\_\_



Date: \_\_\_\_\_

I confirm that the participant was given an opportunity to ask questions about the study, and all the questions asked by the participant have been answered to the best of my ability. I confirm that the individual has not been coerced into giving consent, and the consent has been given freely and voluntarily. A copy of this Consent Form has been provided to the participant.

Print or type name of lead researcher: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of lead researcher: \_\_\_\_\_

I have accurately read or witnessed the accurate reading of the assent form to the potential participant, and the individual has had the opportunity to ask questions. I confirm the individual has freely given assent.

Print or type name of lead researcher: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of lead researcher: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of faculty member: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**PLEASE KEEP THIS INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR YOUR RECORDS.**

## Appendix C: Permission From Region Directors to Contact Instructors for the Study

Date

[Person to Whom You are Writing]

[Title]:

Dear:

My name is Matthew C. Merrill, and I am a doctoral candidate at American College of Education (ACE) writing to request permission to interview [Enter Name of Candidate] in a one-on-one private interview. The answers from the interview will be used for my dissertation research related to a basic qualitative study of female seminary instructors employed by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The purpose of the one-on-one interview will be to better understand female seminary instructors' experiences as employees of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

After the one-on-one interviews are concluded, the [Enter Name of Candidate] may be invited to participate in a small focus group to

This research topic has been approved by the Research Department of Seminaries and Institutes. I have received their permission to reach out to you and seek approval to contact [Enter Name of Candidate] for this research project. All participants are invited to take part on a voluntary basis and will not be compensated for their time involved in this basic qualitative study. Participants may drop out at any time in the research process and are under no obligation to continue. All participants names will remain completely confidential, and all real names will be replaced with pseudonyms before any information is shared with the S&I research department, the IRB, S&I Administrators, or the committee chair.

Dissertation Chair: Dr. Sandra Quiatkowski, PhD

E-mail: [REDACTED]

Phone: [REDACTED]

Thank you for your time and please know that I appreciate your prompt response.

Sincerely,

Matthew C. Merrill

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

## Appendix D: Letter of Permission From the Institution

THE CHURCH OF  
JESUS CHRIST  
OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS

SEMINARIES AND INSTITUTES OF RELIGION

March 26, 2019

Matthew C. Merrill



Matthew,

The Seminaries & Institutes of Religion Education Research Committee (ERC) has approved your research project with the following provisions:

1. Data must be collected as outlined in your proposal. Any changes to procedures must be reviewed and approved by the ERC.
2. All program administrators (e.g., seminary principal, institute director, coordinator, area director) impacted by your study must be informed of your efforts.
3. Any presentation or publication of your research outside of your degree requirements must be approved by the ERC.
4. A digital copy of your final research report must be provided to the ERC.

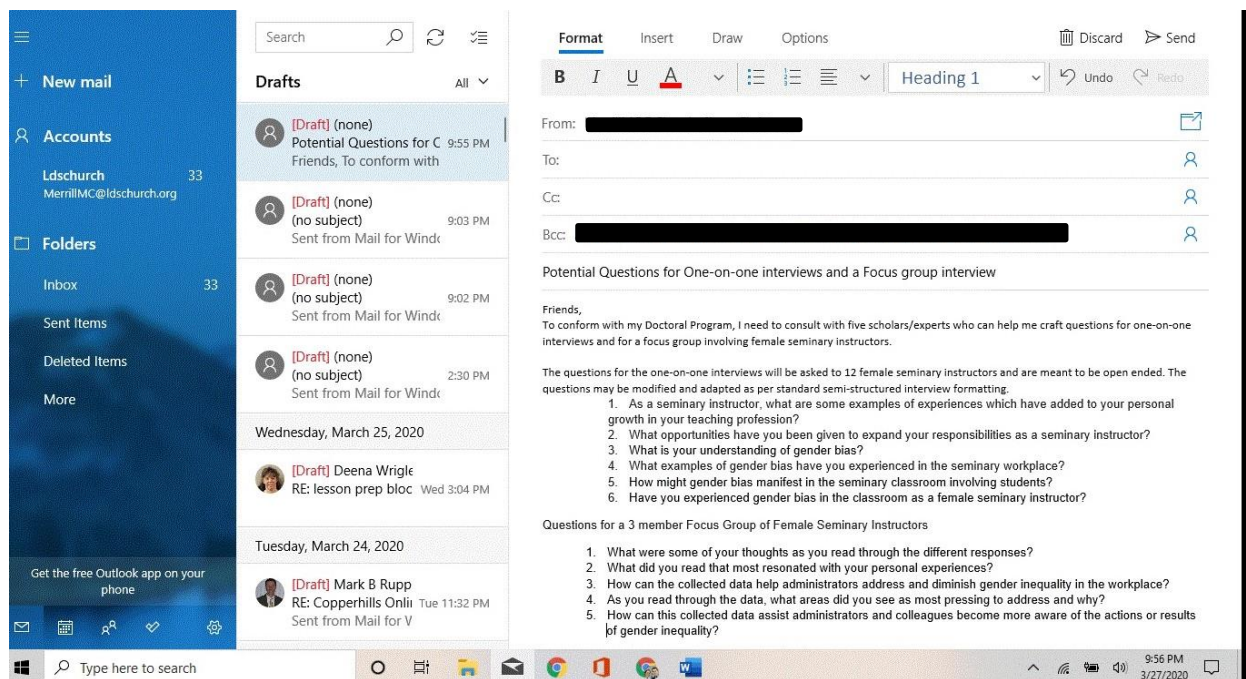
We wish you the best of success!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Adam N. Smith".

Adam N. Smith  
Associate Administrator

## Appendix E: Subject Matter Expert E-Mail Screenshot



## Appendix F: Subject Matter Expert Screenshot of E-Mail Responses

To: Matthew C Merrill

Hi Matt,

Sorry for the delay. Here are some slight additions you might want to make to your questions. You might also want to ask something about how gender inequality affects student perceptions of equality and gender roles within the church - and how that might differ between male and female students. Is gender bias being perpetuated in the classroom?

1. As a seminary instructor, what are some examples of experiences which have added to your personal growth in your teaching profession? **In what ways do you think these experiences are similar to male colleagues, and in what ways do they differ?**
2. What opportunities have you been given to expand your responsibilities as a seminary instructor? **Similarly, what types of limitations do you feel you have faced?**
3. **How would you define and describe gender bias?**
4. **In what ways have you encountered gender bias in the seminary workplace from administration, fellow teachers, student teachers, and staff?**
5. **How might gender bias be manifest in the seminary classroom involving students? (Either from the students, or towards the students).**
6. **Have you experienced gender bias in the classroom as a female seminary instructor? Please describe in detail.**

Questions for a 3 member Focus Group of Female Seminary Instructors

1. **What thoughts, feelings, and recollections struck you** as you read through the different responses?
2. **What elements of the responses** most resonated with your personal experiences?
3. **In what ways might** the collected data help administrators address and diminish gender inequality in the workplace?
4. **As you read through the data, what areas did you see as most pressing to address and why?**
5. **How can this collected data assist administrators and colleagues in becoming more aware of the circumstances, actions and impact of gender inequality?**

I hope this helps.

To: Matthew C Merrill

1. **what are some experiences which have added to your personal growth as a professional teacher?**
2. **What opportunities have you been given to expand your responsibilities as a seminary instructor?**
3. **What is your understanding of gender bias?**
4. **have you experienced gender bias in the seminary workplace? If so, will you share examples?**
5. **Does gender bias happen in the seminary classroom? if so, how?**
6. **As a female seminary instructor, have you experienced gender bias from students? if so, how?**

Questions for a 3 member Focus Group of Female Seminary Instructors

1. **What were your thoughts as you read through the different responses?**
2. **What did you read that most resonated with your personal experiences?**
3. **How can the collected data help administrators address and diminish gender inequality in the workplace?**
4. **As you read through the data, what areas did you see as most pressing to address and why?**
5. **How can this data assist administrators and colleagues become more aware of the actions or results of gender inequality?**

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1. As a seminary instructor, what are some examples of experiences which have added to your personal growth in your teaching profession? [This may be a soft opening, but I don't think this question will yield any tangible results. It's so broad.]
2. What opportunities have you been given to expand your responsibilities as a seminary instructor?
3. What is your understanding of gender bias? [feels condescending. Is this a definition test? People know what gender is, and they know what bias is. If not, I would just explain it and use the question below: Gender bias is when people are treated differently because of being male or female. What examples of gender bias...]
4. What examples of gender bias have you experienced in the seminary workplace? [Modify to: What examples of gender bias, if any, have you observed or experienced as a teacher in Seminaries and Institutes of Religion?]
5. How might gender bias manifest in the seminary classroom involving students? [How have you experienced or observed gender bias toward students in the seminary classroom?]
6. Have you experienced gender bias in the classroom as a female seminary instructor? [...experienced or observed] [also, seems similar to question 4].

Are these the only one on one questions you plan to ask? I would get more direct, personally. I think your questions above are vague (and I get that you don't want to ask leading questions in qualitative research, but they are so open ended they may yield little compelling data).

Seminaries and Institutes is a predominately male-led organization. As a female, what are your observations, frustrations, approvals, or suggestions regarding this fact? Do you think S&I being male-led is necessary? If not, how do you think women can or should be given more leadership opportunities in S&I?

Why do you think it is that not many women (if any at all) have been made seminary principals, institute directors, area directors, or associate administrators? What are your observations regarding this fact?

What cultural or doctrinal factors may limit women from becoming leaders in S&I?

What could male teachers, particularly those in leadership, better understand about what it is like being a woman in a predominately male organization?

How can S&I better help create feelings of gender equality in its organization?

What do you think S&I (or the Church) could potentially do to appeal to, hire, and promote more women in the seminary and institute classroom?

What established policies or practices in S&I do you feel should be altered, changed, or removed to help mitigate gender bias in S&I?

What gender bias have you observed regarding dress code or appearance expectations for women in S&I?

Have you been the lone female teacher on an otherwise male faculty? What was your experience like regarding feeling equal, having your voice heard, feeling supported and valued, etc.?

As a woman, what has been your experience working with other women in S&I? Have you been on a faculty with multiple female teachers? What was that experience like?

## Appendix G: Participant Interview Protocol and Questions

### Interview Protocol

This interview protocol is to be used to interview 15 female seminary instructors from the state of Utah. The interview will use a semi-structured format. Following a semi-structured format provides the interviewer to adapt the order of questions based upon the participants' responses. Additional questions will be needed to allow participants to expand on their lived experiences and interpretation of events.

All interviews will be conducted using the Zoom Video Communication program. The interviews will be recorded using two devices to ensure accurate data is gathered. One device will be through a password-protected computer using the Zoom Video Communication program. The second device will be with the interviewer's password-protected Apple iPhone. All data will be stored on a password-protected hard drive to serve as a backup. The hard drive will be stored under lock and key in a personal safe.

### One-on-One Interview Questions

1. As a seminary instructor, what are some examples of experiences which have added to your personal growth in your teaching profession? In what ways do you think these experiences are similar to male colleagues, and in what ways do they differ?
2. What opportunities have you been given to expand your responsibilities as a seminary instructor? Similarly, what types of limitations do you feel you have faced?
3. What examples of gender bias, if any, have you observed or experienced as a teacher in Seminaries and Institutes of Religion?
5. Have you experienced gender bias in the classroom as a female seminary instructor?
6. How might gender bias happen in the seminary classroom involving students?
7. What established policies or practices in S&I do you feel should be altered, changed, or removed to help mitigate gender bias in S&I?

## Appendix H: Focus Group Protocol and Questions

### Focus Group Interview Protocol

This interview protocol is to be used during a focus group interview with five female seminary instructors from the state of Utah. The focus group will receive the coded data from the one-on-one interviews and offer analysis and insight into the data. The focus group interview will be recorded on two separate password-protected devices. The first device will be the interviewer's personal computer utilizing the Zoom Video Communications program. The second device will be from the interviewer's personal Apple iPhone. All data will be stored on a password-protected hard drive to serve as a backup. The hard drive will be stored under lock and key in a personal safe.

The interviewer will ask open-ended questions to provide opportunities for the focus group to share their analysis and insights from the data collected from the one-on-one interviews. The focus group discussion will in a semi-structured format. Following a semi-structured format provides the interviewer to adapt the order of questions based upon the participants' responses. Additional questions may be needed to allow participants to expand on their answers.

1. What thoughts, feelings, and recollections struck you as you read through the different responses?
2. What elements of the responses most resonated with your personal experiences?
3. In what ways might the collected data help administrators address and diminish gender inequality in the workplace?
4. As you read through the data, what areas did you see as most pressing to address and why?
5. How can this collected data assist administrators and colleagues in becoming more aware of the circumstances, actions, and impact of gender inequality?
6. How can S&I better help create feelings of gender equality within its organization?
7. What do you think S&I could potentially do to appeal to, hire, and promote more women?