

Polygamy, Prop 8, and the Peculiar People
Sexuality in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

by

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation addresses the issue of sexuality in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS), also known as the Mormon Church, on both the institutional and individual levels. It traces the ways that the LDS Church's early persecution over polygamy, and the enduring effects of this history – both within and outside the Church – have helped to shape contemporary Mormon policies and public actions related to sexuality and marriage. Despite its relative success in achieving assimilation with the larger American society, the LDS Church continues to be associated with the practice of polygamy, creating a need for the Church to prove its adherence to traditional marriage and sexual norms. This work analyzes Mormon involvement in recent political campaigns against same-sex marriage, especially the campaign to pass Proposition 8 in California. This political participation has provided LDS leaders with significant opportunities to reshape their Church's public image, to improve relationships between Mormons and other conservative Christian communities, and to position the Church in a particular way in the American religious landscape. The dissertation also examines official LDS policies related to homosexuality and homosexual persons, and individual accounts of gay and lesbian Mormons and former Mormons (and those that do not identify as gay but experience same-sex attraction), found in personal blogs, Youtube videos, and published volumes. Elements of Mormon theology related to marriage, gender, premortality, and revelation, combined with aspects of LDS Church history, structure, and culture, make the experiences of these individuals unique among those of gays and lesbian in conservative Christian communities.

DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to my parents, Douglas and Ellen Wertman, and to my boyfriend, Joran Stegner. I could never have finished this work without all your love, support, and understanding. I am incredibly grateful to have you in my life.

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Project Overview

In describing his attempts in the late 1970s to build support for the Moral Majority, an organization that he envisioned as a political coalition for conservative individuals from across the religious spectrum, Baptist minister Jerry Falwell recalls that “many, many pastors across the country in the evangelical/fundamentalist camp shuddered to think of sitting at the same table with a Roman Catholic or a Jew, or God forbid, a Mormon.”¹ These words are a weighty demonstration of the particular disdain that some conservative Christians have reserved for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS), even going beyond the disregard shown to other religious communities with whom they are at theological odds. And indeed, until quite recently, this attitude among evangelical and fundamentalist Christians remained essentially unchanged. However, beginning in the mid-2000s, a remarkable transformation occurred, making way for a new thread of opinion about LDS people among conservative Christians – one that is notably positive. This new attitude is best encapsulated in a statement by John Mark Reynolds, the provost of Houston Baptist University, who declared November 5th, 2008 – the day after Proposition 8 (which legally defined marriage as being between one man and one woman) passed in California – to be “Thank-a-Mormon Day,” asserting: “In the battle for the family... traditional Christians have no better friends than the Mormon faithful.”² It seems that in current political campaigns regarding the definition of marriage, Christians like Reynolds are not just willing to “sit at the same table” with Mormons; they openly welcome them as compatriots. This substantial shift from

¹ William Martin, *With God on Our Side: The Rise of the Religious Right* (New York: Broadway Books, 1996), 204.

² John Mark Reynolds, “California and Thank-a-Mormon Day,” *The City*, November 5, 2008, accessed March 25, 2014, <http://www.civitate.org/2008/11/california-and-thank-a-mormon-day/>.

derision to (relative) embrace provides powerful evidence of the significance of the issue of same-sex marriage in contemporary America, and particularly within American Christianity.

From the LDS perspective, civic debates and political campaigns about same-sex marriage offer an unprecedented opportunity, not only to renew relationships with other conservative Christians, but to remake the Church's image in American society and to align the Mormon community with a particular segment of the national population. These campaigns – and more broadly, official Church statements and actions related to sexuality and marriage – have given LDS leaders an effective platform to publicly proclaim Mormon adherence to “traditional family values,”³ which serves the purpose of helping the Church to counter its lingering associations with polygamy and the accompanying sexual deviance it suggests, while also raising the profile of the LDS Church among Americans that share its core morals. In addition, this participation helped the LDS Church to re-invigorate its base, and to refuel Mormon identity as the “Peculiar People,” a religious community embattled by the larger society, who valiantly stand up for their faith in the face of opposition. However, another consequence of these intense efforts to solidify the Church's identity as a fervent proponent of the nuclear family is the further stigmatization and alienation of gay and lesbian Mormons, who already face substantial challenges within the LDS Church. Mormon theology related to marriage and family, as well as premortality and the eternal nature of sex/gender identity, profoundly impacts the lives of gay and lesbian Saints, both in terms of their own self-perceptions, and the ways they are perceived by others within their religious community. These

³ The phrase “traditional family values” and the related phrase “traditional marriage” have long been used among political and religious conservatives in the United States in attempts to normalize and lend authority to a particular vision of family and marriage relationships – namely, marriage between one man and one woman, and the “nuclear” family more broadly. Numerous scholars and activists, however, have called attention to the problematic nature of these terms, given that tradition is itself a cultural construct that can vary dramatically in distinct time periods and national/cultural contexts.

theological elements, combined with structural and cultural aspects of the LDS Church, make their experiences unique among those of gays and lesbians in conservative Christian communities.

Significance

This project is significant in that it establishes the important role played by issues of marriage and sexuality in the shifting relationship between the LDS Church and American society. In particular, it highlights policies and public actions related to sexuality and same-sex marriage as a notable site of Mormon efforts to reshape the Church's public image and its status vis-à-vis American Christianity and mainstream society. More broadly, this work breaks new ground in identifying statements and actions about same-sex marriage by Christian denominations as powerful tools in establishing and proclaiming denominational identity and purpose. In examining the accounts of gay and lesbian Mormons, this project also demonstrates the importance of specificity in addressing gay and lesbian religious experience. It reveals that the intricacies of history, theological teachings, organizational structure, and cultural practices within a religious community can have a significant impact on the experiences, self-perception, and strategies of gay and lesbian members.

The introductions to each individual chapter of this project will address the existing literature relevant to the specific topics being discussed, and the aims of each chapter in adding to that previous research. However, it's also worth addressing the significance of this project as a whole in relation to the fields of scholarship with which it will engage, beginning with the primary area of Mormon studies. My work will contribute to the growing body of research on contemporary Mormonism, particularly with regard to issues of sexuality and marriage as forces influencing the LDS Church's relationship with the larger American public. Several studies contain excellent examinations of the topic of polygamy and its consequences in early

Mormonism. In particular, B. Camron Hardy and Richard Van Wagoner provide detailed histories of this practice within the LDS Church, while Sarah Gordon's *The Mormon Question: Polygamy and Constitutional Conflict in Nineteenth-Century America* examines the use of anti-polygamy rhetoric in the nineteenth century as a means of bolstering Protestant norms of religiosity and domesticity in America.⁴ I will extend the work of these scholars by addressing the continuing impact of the practice of polygamy – and more profoundly, the anti-polygamy rhetoric discussed by Gordon and its influence on the developing Mormon community – as a motivating factor in the development of LDS Church policies and public actions related to sexuality and marriage.

In addition, recent works by scholars such as Armand Mauss, Terryl Givens, Ethan Yorgason, and Lee Trepanier have introduced new ways of thinking about LDS history and modern-day Mormon culture, and about the relationship between the LDS Church and American society; one particularly notable work in illuminating this relationship is Mauss' *The Angel and the Beehive: The Mormon Struggle with Assimilation*.⁵ Mauss employs Rodney Stark and William Bainbridge's theory of "tension" – namely, that a religious movement will be successful to the extent that it maintains a medium level of tension (as Mauss calls it, "optimum tension") with regard to the larger society – that is, not so much tension that the movement will be heavily persecuted or even destroyed, but also not so assimilated into the larger culture that the movement loses its distinctiveness, and thus its appeal to current

⁴ B. Carmon Hardy, *Solemn Covenant: The Mormon Polygamous Passage* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992); Richard Van Wagoner, *Mormon Polygamy: A History*, 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1989); Sarah Gordon, *The Mormon Question: Polygamy and Constitutional Conflict in Nineteenth-Century America* (Durham: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002).

⁵ Armand L. Mauss, *The Angel and the Beehive: The Mormon Struggle with Assimilation* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994) and *All Abraham's Children: Changing Mormon Conceptions of Race and Lineage* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003); Terryl Givens, *People of Paradox: A History of Mormon Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), and *Viper on the Hearth: Mormons, Myths, and the construction of heresy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); Ethan R. Yorgason, *Transformation of a Mormon Cultural Region* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003); Lee Trepanier, *LDS in the USA: Mormonism and the Making of American Culture* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2012).

and potential members. Mauss applies this theory to the recent history of the LDS Church, arguing that having achieved a high level of assimilation with the American public, the Mormons are now in a process of “retrenchment” – that is, trying to again assert their uniqueness through a number of different types of initiatives.⁶ While he is primarily focused on the latter effort, Mauss does admit the complexity of the situation: “Assimilationist and retrenchment elements have always existed side by side... Some openness to assimilation is obviously still present in the church, which continues to strive for at least a modicum of respectability, both within the nation and among the denominations of Christianity.”⁷ My work will highlight the role played by LDS policies and actions related to same-sex marriage in these dual processes of assimilation and retrenchment, as Mormon Church leaders continue to sculpt the Church’s image and its position in these spheres of American society.⁸

This project also contributes to scholarship within the field of gay and lesbian studies tackling religious belief and identity, by providing insight as to the ways that the distinctive aspects of a particular Christian denomination can influence the experiences of its gay and lesbian members. A number of volumes have been published about the life experiences and identity conflicts of gay and lesbian Christian individuals in the United States, either in one particular denomination or within larger populations (i.e. evangelicals). However, many existing works – including most of those that speak to the experiences of gay and lesbian Mormons, as will be discussed in Chapter 5 – are written by individuals or groups that are

⁶ Mauss, 4-9. The theory of tension was first introduced in Rodney Stark and William Bainbridge, *The Future of Religion: Secularization, Revival, and Cult Formation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985).

⁷ *Ibid.*, 79.

⁸ In 2011 Mauss published the article “Rethinking Retrenchment: Course Corrections in the Ongoing Campaign for Respectability” (*Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 44, no. 4 (Winter 2011): 1-42) as an update to *Angel and the Beehive*, discussing some of the more recent LDS efforts toward assimilation. He does briefly address the issue of LDS participation in campaigns against same-sex marriage, but primarily addresses its negative effects on public opinions of the Mormon Church (particularly among the more liberal segments of the American population).

attempting to bring about change within a particular Christian denomination or within the larger Christian community as a whole; others constitute attempts to create a new and inclusive queer spirituality.⁹ One notable work in this area from a religious studies perspective is Melissa Wilcox's *Coming Out in Christianity: Religion, Identity, and Community*. Wilcox looks at the experiences of gay and lesbian Christians, as well as the strategies they use to construct their religious lives, providing a helpful framework for examining these topics. In particular, she argues against the assumption that all religious LGBT people simply choose between their religious and sexual identities, declaring that some, instead, engage in the work of "reinterpreting their belief systems in such a way that LGBT identity and religious commitment are not just compatible but are also intertwined."¹⁰ I will discuss some of the specific means through which this is accomplished by gay Mormons. However, the majority of Wilcox's volume is based on research conducted in two congregations of the Metropolitan Community Church, an inclusive denomination that was created by and for gay people; thus, the results she found with those groups are likely to be very different from those found in other Christian denominations, especially conservative ones.

Gary David Comstock's *Unrepentant, Self-Affirming, Practicing: Lesbian/Bisexual/Gay People within Organized Religion* includes survey information and accounts from gay and bisexual members of a number of different Christian denominations (and other religious organizations), providing a broad look at LGB religious experiences. Like Wilcox, Comstock's work suggests many important issues

⁹ For example, see Nicholas Coulton, ed., *The Bible, The Church, and Homosexuality* (London: Darton, Longman, and Todd, 2005), and Peter Sweasey, *From Queer to Eternity: Spirituality in the Lives of Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual People* (London: Cassell, 1997), and Justin Lee, *Torn: Rescuing the Gospel from the Gays-vs.-Christians Debate* (New York: Jericho Books, 2012).

¹⁰ Melissa M. Wilcox, *Coming Out in Christianity: Religion, Identity, and Community* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), 11.

and questions involved in studying the lives of such individuals.¹¹ There also exist several smaller-scale studies that address the issue of identity negotiation among Christian gays and lesbians. Most notably, Kimberly Mahaffy and Scott Thumma document some of the strategies taken by lesbian Christians (in the case of Mahaffy) and gay evangelicals (in the case of Thumma) in resolving the cognitive dissonance created by their conflicting identities.¹² Such studies, while certainly valuable, do not provide detailed analysis of the specific history, culture, and theological emphases of distinct denominations, or the way that these factors impact the life experiences of gay and lesbian individuals. This project offers an in-depth exploration of the experiences of gays and lesbians in one particular Christian community, while also placing those experiences within the context of a larger examination of the issue of sexuality within the history of that community.

In the broader field of American Religions, I will shed light as to the role of policies and actions regarding sexuality – and specifically same-sex marriage – as a central identity marker for American Christian denominations, building upon several existing works of scholarship. Mark Chaves' *Ordaining Women: Culture and Conflict in Religious Organizations* puts forth the idea that U.S. Christian denominations have used their denominational policies on women's ordination to help shape both their public identities and their interdenominational alliances.¹³ In a smaller-scale study, scholar James Wellman uses the theory of subcultural identity to address the issue of homosexual ordination in the identity formation of American religious organizations, arguing that organizational policies on this issue (and on homosexuality more

¹¹ Gary David Comstock, *Unrepentant, Self-Affirming, Practicing: Lesbian/Bisexual/Gay People within Organized Religion* (New York: Continuum Publishing Company, 1996).

¹² Kimberly A. Mahaffy, "Cognitive Dissonance and Its Resolution: A Study of Lesbian Christians," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 35, no. 4 (December 1996): 392-402 and Scott Thumma, "Negotiating a Religious Identity: The Case of the Gay Evangelical," *Sociological Analysis* 52, no. 4 (Winter 1991): 333-347.

¹³ Mark Chaves, *Ordaining Women: Culture and Conflict in Religious Organizations* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997).

broadly) are formed in the service of constructing specific identities and mobilizing resources and members, though he does not pay significant attention to the formation of alliances between religious communities.¹⁴ As both of these studies were published in the late 1990s, my work will provide a much-needed update to their research, specifically focusing on the issue of same-sex marriage, which, in the past decade, has taken center stage in both political and denominational disputes in America. I propose that in the contemporary landscape of Christianity in the U.S., same-sex marriage is one of the key issues by which a denomination is defined and defines itself. And given the prominence of public debates over this topic – one that has gained much more national attention than subjects like the ordination of women or gay persons – statements and political campaigns on gay marriage offer a prime opportunity for Christian denominations to position themselves with regard to both the larger American public and other religious organizations. Aside from exploring the way that this process has worked in the case of the LDS Church, the concluding chapter will also briefly address the methods by which some other denominations have used recent policies and actions concerning sexuality and same-sex marriage to form a particular public image. While the Mormon situation is certainly unique in many ways, particularly owing to the complex history of Mormonism with regard to issues of marriage and sexuality, there are also similarities to be found in this process of identity shaping in the LDS Church and other Christian denominations. Paying close attention to the issue of sexuality and civic discussions about same-sex marriage can provide an important new lens for exploring the development of American Christian denominations and interdenominational relationships.

¹⁴ James K. Wellman, Jr., "Introduction: The Debate over Homosexual Ordination: Subcultural Identity Theory in American Religious Organizations," *Review of Religious Research* 41, no. 2 (December 1999): 184-206.

Self-Situating and Approach

This work is centrally concerned with the Latter-day Saints Church in the United States. While the Mormon Church has many members around the world – in fact, more than half of the Church’s current membership is now found outside the United States – the relationship between the LDS Church and the American public is at the heart of this work, and the events, actions, and experiences discussed are tied to this nation.¹⁵ And given the limitations of this project, it is simply not possible to do justice to many different cultural contexts. This is especially true when dealing with as complex – and culturally-constructed – a subject as sexuality. In addition, Chapter 5 of this work addresses the experiences of gay and lesbian Mormons (and former Mormons), but does not attempt to also adequately explore the stories of bisexual and transgender Saints. This is in part due to a relative lack of availability of accounts from such individuals, but is mostly done in order to avoid conflating the experiences of these distinct groups of people. While certainly all Mormons falling into the LGBT spectrum face difficult challenges in negotiating their sexual and spiritual identities, the exact types of challenges – and the strategies for facing them – may be profoundly different.

When I first envisioned this project, I assumed that I would myself conduct personal interviews with such individuals in order to learn their stories and ask them specific questions tailored to my study. However, in the course of preparing to conduct my research, it became clear that in addition to taking up significant time and resources, doing interviews would in many ways be less effective than using the remarkable outpouring of publicly-available accounts of gay and lesbian Saints in recent years. These accounts have become available in a variety of different forms,

¹⁵ The LDS Church currently declares a membership of 15 million people worldwide, with a little more than 6 million of those members in the United States; see <http://www.mormonnewsroom.org/facts-and-stats> for more details (accessed March 25, 2014).

including several edited volumes of first-hand testimonies of Mormons (and former Mormons) that identify as gay or lesbian, or that have experienced same-sex attraction, as well as friends and family members of such individuals.¹⁶

An even greater richness of material can be found in various sectors of the internet – in YouTube videos, in message boards and comment sections on Mormon-centric websites, on Facebook, and most of all in personal blogs created by gay and lesbian Mormons themselves. In fact, so many of these blogs have sprung up in the last few years that there now exists an umbrella organization to bring these writers together, making it easier for those in a similar situation to find information and support. Called the MOHO Directory (short for Mormon Homosexual), the creators of this site offer the following description on their “About” page:

The MOHO Directory is an ever growing collection and database of blogs from gay, lesbian or bisexual men or women, who are past or present Mormons in any variety. We are not affiliated with any gay Mormon groups or The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. We just serve as the Directory for all personal blogs related to being gay, lesbian or bisexual, of past or present Mormons in any variety.¹⁷

As of now, the MOHO Directory has 204 members, many of whom have started a blog to document their own individual journeys. Aside from the sheer quantity of available accounts, it is also apparent that the openness and candor of these blogs far outweighs any insight that could be gleaned through interviews with a stranger writing a dissertation. Therefore, analyzing these existing narratives was the clear approach for this particular study.

Regarding the subjects of my research, I should state that I am not a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. I acknowledge that this

¹⁶ Notable examples include Ron Schow, Wayne Schow and Marybeth Raynes, eds., *Peculiar People: Mormons and Same-Sex Orientation*, Salt Lake City (Signature Books, 1991), Brent Kerby, ed., *Gay Mormons? Latter-day Saint Experiences of Same-Gender Attraction*, Charleston (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2011), and Ty Mansfield, ed., *Voice(s) of hope: Latter-day Saint Perspectives on Same-Gender Attraction – An Anthology of Gospel Teachings and Personal Essays*, Salt Lake City (Deseret Book, 2011).

¹⁷ MOHO Directory, “About,” *MOHO Directory*, accessed February 10, 2014, <http://www.mohodirectory.com/p/about.html>.

means that I do not have the same level of understanding of the intricacies of Mormon culture as does an insider to this community (or someone who was raised within the LDS Church). I also acknowledge that my status as a non-member allows me the freedom to discuss these somewhat controversial topics without the apprehension that may be felt by active members of the Church concerned with maintaining that membership and/or their relationships with fellow Church members. However, I have worked to demonstrate my great respect for the Saints in my work. I should also clarify that I do not identify as gay, although I do consider myself to be a strong ally and gay rights advocate. I was drawn to this research by learning simultaneously about the histories of the LDS Church and the struggle for gay rights, as well as through personal conversations with gay Mormons, whose experiences struck me as both incredibly moving and wholly unique.

Chapter Summary

This work begins by addressing the essential role that issues of sexuality and marriage played in the historical development of the LDS Church, and its initial relationship to the larger American society. Chapter 2, "The Slander of the Saints," discusses the early history of the Church, specifically the persecution that the Mormons faced from outsiders to their community during this period. While anti-Mormon feeling and rhetoric concerned a number of different topics, including the economic and political threats posed by the LDS community, the most widely-discussed and vehemently condemned of these factors was the Mormon practice of plural marriage, more commonly known as polygamy. Very early in its development, the LDS Church was marked by non-Mormons as deviant, due to its non-traditional sexual and marriage practices. Anti-polygamy literature and graphic art from this period, including so-called "exposés" of LDS plural marriage, charged the Mormons with a wide variety of sexual offenses, and portrayed marriage and family life among

the Saints as the complete opposite of decent Protestant civilization. These extremely negative accounts strongly impacted the early Mormons, forcing them to defend not only their beliefs regarding marriage, but also their virtue and their decency as a people. LDS accounts from this period demonstrate the extent to which the Saints felt the need to prove their purity and the sanctity of their marriages.

In the year 1890, as the LDS Church was facing possible annihilation at the hands of the U.S. government, Mormon President Wilford Woodruff put forth the "Manifesto," a document that banned the practice of plural marriage in the LDS Church from that point forward. Chapter 3, "The Legacy of Polygamy," picks up the narrative at this point, during a time in which the Saints were scrambling to reconcile themselves to an eternal plan of salvation that did not involve polygamy, and at the same time beginning the work of integration into the larger American society.

Although the Mormons were able to survive this transition and essentially re-envision celestial marriage as a monogamous enterprise, the status of plural marriage in LDS doctrine was never fully resolved. The text in which this principle was first revealed, section 132 of the Doctrine and Covenants, is still a part of LDS scripture today. The failure of Mormon leaders to address this issue has led many individual Saints to speculate that the practice of plural marriage is in effect in the heavenly realm, and that it may one day be reinstated on earth as well. The Saints were also successful in achieving assimilation into American society, but not in shaking their history with plural marriage. The LDS Church is still strongly associated with polygamy today among the American public, largely due to ignorance on the part of many Americans about Mormon history and beliefs. However, this enduring connection has also resulted from the continual presence of polygamy in the American public sphere, in the form of either news stories or popular media related to so-called "fundamentalist Mormons" that share the same origins as the LDS Church. Individuals and groups

who are publicly critical of Mormonism have also exacerbated this situation through their attention to this issue in its many intricacies. As a result, while the Saints have improved their public image in many respects, they are still on the defense with regard to marriage and sexuality.

In the last few decades, LDS leaders have issued statements that include a clear condemnation not only of homosexuality, but of any deviation from conventional marriage and gender norms – most notably, in a document leaders entitled “The Family: a Proclamation to the World,” which has essentially reached the status of doctrine in the LDS Church.¹⁸ Such policies certainly identify Latter-day Saints as advocates of “traditional family values,” but those policies cannot change the attitudes of outsiders, or influence the status of the LDS Church in American society, unless they are made known to the larger public. Chapter 4, “Let’s Get Political,” addresses efforts that have dramatically increased the Mormon Church’s public profile regarding issues of marriage and sexuality – namely, participation in campaigns against same-sex marriage. Beginning in the 1990s and continuing to the present day, the LDS Church has allocated many resources, both human and economic, into state-wide and national “Defense of Marriage” campaigns. In aiding these campaigns, LDS leaders have not hesitated to use their influence to harness the forces of the Mormon membership to uphold heterosexual marriage, even, at times distributing statements to be read in local Mormon wards. Such statements encouraged individual Mormons not only to support the campaigns, but also to provide monetary donations, volunteer hours, or both.

The LDS Church’s public declaration of its support of “traditional marriage” and sexual values – through its efforts in the Defense of Marriage campaigns – allows the Church to continue shaping its public identity, and positioning itself in the

¹⁸ The First Presidency and Council of the Twelve Apostles of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” *Ensign* (November 1995): 102.

religious, social, and political landscape of the United States. As previously discussed, the impact of these actions is perhaps most readily observed in the changing relationships between the LDS Church and other conservative American Christian groups and denominations. These relationships have historically been antagonistic, especially on the part of Christian communities that view the Mormon message as a heretical one, and consequently treat the Saints with contempt or outright hostility. LDS leaders have been working for many decades to bridge the gap between their church and other prominent Christian groups in the United States, strongly emphasizing Mormons' belief in Jesus Christ.¹⁹ But it is only through their recent participation in campaigns against same-sex marriage that the Saints have been able to make headway in this area. Mormon participation in these campaigns has also affected their status in non-religious spheres of American society, in part because it has raised their public profile – by calling attention to their championing of family values – which has allowed the LDS Church to align itself with a conservative segment of American society, and to place itself firmly in opposition to secular society.

LDS efforts to reform the Church's image in the realms of sexuality and marriage also impact the lives of Mormons that cannot or do not fit the traditional norms so fervently embraced by their Church. Chapter 5 of this work, "A Spiritual Tug of War," addresses the experiences of individual gays and lesbian Mormons (and those who do not identify as gay, but do experience attraction to members of the same sex), paying close attention to the distinct aspects of LDS doctrine, organization, and culture that set these experiences apart from those of gay and lesbian individuals in other conservative Christian denominations. Primary among

¹⁹ For a discussion of LDS Church efforts to underscore its Christian identity, especially with regard to the labels used for the Church and its members, see Gustav Niebuhr, "Adapting 'Mormon' to Emphasize Christianity," *The New York Times*, February 19, 2001.

these is the central position of marriage and sexuality in LDS theology. Unlike other Christian communities, in which marriage is limited to the earthly realm, in Mormon belief marriage is an essential part of the eternal plan of salvation, and is believed to endure beyond death. In an LDS context, this requires not only marriage to a person of the opposite sex, but also an official sealing in a Mormon temple.²⁰ The aforementioned "Proclamation on the Family" asserts that one's gender – presumably including a heterosexual orientation – is not only a characteristic of one's mortal existence, but also an integral part of one's pre-mortal and eternal life. These beliefs influence not only Mormon policies about homosexuality, but also how gays and lesbians are perceived, labelled, and counseled, and how such individuals view themselves. Given the necessity of heterosexual marriage to one's exaltation in the afterlife, Mormon culture in many ways centers around the nuclear family, which can be extremely difficult for those who do not conform to this family structure.

In addition, the centralized power structure of the LDS Church, and especially the existence of a living prophet in the Mormon community, provides current confirmation of these principles, ensuring that they will be strongly embraced among the Church membership. The role of the LDS Church itself in the individual salvation of members – bolstered by the all-encompassing nature of Mormon culture for believers – creates a situation in which many gay and lesbian individuals feel unwilling or unable to leave the LDS Church, even if they are unhappy in their spiritual and personal lives. Chapter 6 concludes this work by suggesting some possible ways that other Christian denominations are using statements and actions on same-sex marriage as a tool in shaping their public identities, proposing some

²⁰ Sealing is an LDS practice in which individuals participate in a ceremony in a Mormon temple that is believed to bind them to their spouse – and to any children they produce – for eternity. For more information see the article "The Sealing Ordinance Links Families Eternally" from the September 2011 edition of the official LDS Church magazine, *Ensign*: <https://www.lds.org/ensign/2011/09/the-sealing-ordinance-links-families-eternally?lang=eng> (accessed March 10, 2014).

areas for future research related to this work, and addressing the question of what the future may bring for the LDS Church regarding its policies on sexuality.

CHAPTER 2

THE SLANDER OF THE SAINTS

Even before it was made public by Orson Pratt and Brigham Young in August of 1852, the Mormon practice of plural marriage – or polygamy, as it is more commonly known – had already begun to cause a great deal of trouble for the Latter-day Saints. Rumors and accusations had been circulating for many years in non-LDS circles about the practice of “spiritual wifery” among the Mormons. As it turned out, those rumors were, at least in part, founded; Joseph Smith and other LDS leaders had been practicing plural marriage in secret for some time. However, prior to 1852, the Mormons fervently denied engaging in the practice of polygamy. In fact, the heads of the Church took great efforts to suppress any suggestion of its encouragement in the general Mormon populace; several local community leaders were excommunicated during this period for preaching about plural marriage.

After the public announcement was made, the LDS central leadership, and with it the larger Mormon population, dramatically shifted gears. In a short time they moved from denying and denouncing the practice to embracing it wholeheartedly and proclaiming its magnificence. While the vast majority of Mormons never engaged in polygamy – commonly accepted estimates range between 10 and 20 percent of the population – all faithful members of the LDS Church were expected to acknowledge the sacredness of the “Principle” and defend it against outsiders.²¹ LDS Presidential addresses and other official statements from this period are rife with declarations of the central position of plural marriage in the plan of eternal salvation which Joseph Smith had revealed, and its ability to elevate the station of man. In an

²¹ Mormon historians Leonard Arrington and Davis Bitton state that “at the maximum less than one-fifth of the church population lived in polygamous families while the principle was in effect...” See Leonard J. Arrington and Davis Bitton, *The Mormon Experience: A History of the Latter-day Saints* (Alfred A. Knopf: New York, 1979), 185. Historian Thomas F. O’Dea calculates that the segment of the Church practicing polygamy was between 10 and 11 percent. See Thomas F. O’Dea, *The Mormons* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1957), 246.

Epistle addressed to the Mormon community from October of 1885, John Taylor and George Q. Cannon of the First Presidency asserted that, after it was revealed, the Principle of plural marriage became “indissolubly interwoven in the minds of its members with their hopes of eternal salvation and exaltation in the presence of God.”²²

Despite increasing criticism from outsiders, Mormons held fast to their assertions about the sacred and glorious nature of the Principle. If anything, this opposition only made the Saints more determined to continue what they saw as a divinely-ordained and constitutionally-protected religious practice. Eventually non-Mormon objections to polygamy were elevated from censure and ridicule to a number of escalating governmental and legal actions. The practice was one of the justifications offered for President James Buchanan’s deployment of armed troops to Utah in 1857, in order to quell the “Mormon rebellion.” A series of congressional acts stripped more and more rights away from polygamists, and then from the entire Mormon population. Plural marriage was cited as one of the main reasons that Utah was denied statehood time and time again. Criminal prosecution of individuals involved in plural marriages sent a number of the Saints to prison, and eventually forced the highest levels of the LDS leadership into hiding.

Toward the end of the nineteenth century, the conflict again reached a boiling point. A Supreme Court case in May of 1890 dis-incorporated the LDS Church, and opened the way for the federal government to seize all the Church’s property and assets. Faced with the dissolution of the Church, Mormon President Wilford Woodruff prayed for a means of resolving the conflict. After receiving a revelation, in September of 1890 he issued a statement that has become known as the Manifesto, which ended the practice of plural marriage in the LDS Church. Due to the LDS belief

²² James R. Clark, ed., *Messages of the First Presidency of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints 1833-1964* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, Inc., 1966), 3:33.

in continuing revelation, the Manifesto held the status of a divine mandate for the Mormons. Just as they had been expected to accept the Principle when it was revealed to them, faithful members of the Church were now expected to abandon the practice. And while this transition was characterized by much confusion and uncertainty – some of which will be addressed in Chapter 3 – the Saints again dramatically shifted gears.

The LDS leadership was again placed in the position of having to deny Mormon involvement in plural marriage, and of having to police any hint of its encouragement within the LDS population. President Woodruff and his successor Joseph Fielding Smith both issued frequent addresses to the Mormon membership decrying the practice, and to the wider American public confirming its cessation within the Church. President Smith even issued a “Second Manifesto” in 1904, which again declared the LDS Church’s opposition to plural marriage, warning that any Saints engaging in polygamy would be excommunicated. Despite such protestations, accusations of continued Mormon polygamy from non-LDS Americans continued for many years.

Regardless of the percentage of Mormons that actually engaged in the practice of polygamy, and of the length of time that plural marriages existed within the membership of the LDS Church, one thing is certainly clear: between their staunch denials that they were engaging in the practice prior to 1852, their fervent defenses and justifications of the sacred Principle between 1852 and 1890, and their constant assertions that they had truly abandoned the practice after 1890, the Mormons as a community expended a massive amount of time and energy on the issue of polygamy in the early history of their Church. This begins the work of explaining why so many non-Mormons continue to associate Mormonism with this practice, despite its official cessation over one hundred years ago. Considering that

all of this occurred in the developmental period of the LDS Church, this struggle over polygamy – and more profoundly, the persecution that the Saints faced because of this practice – had a lasting impact on the Church and its people. A consideration of this history provides essential insight into the contemporary efforts of LDS leaders to shape the Church's identity in American society, and the central role of marriage and sexuality in these efforts.

Approach

My purpose in this chapter is not to offer a complete analysis of the Mormon practice of plural marriage, or of the persecution that Mormons faced over the issue of polygamy. Indeed, a number of excellent scholars have already produced thorough examinations of this period of Mormon history.²³ Rather, I will focus on certain particular aspects of this history that are relevant to one of the overarching projects of this work: to examine contemporary Mormon policies and public actions related to sexuality and marriage. For the purposes of my work, I will be less concerned with the events themselves, but instead will concentrate on the perspectives and concerns of the outsider and insider individuals and groups involved.

In examining historical materials, I will highlight two opposing viewpoints. The first of these is the outsider perspective – the way that non-Mormons viewed members of the LDS Church, and the way that they portrayed them and challenged them. Outsider perceptions of the Mormons can be found in a great variety of

²³ For a comprehensive overview of the history of plural marriage in the LDS Church, see Van Wagoner, *Mormon Polygamy*. Also see Gordon, *The Mormon Question*; she conducts a well-researched study of the conflict between the Mormon Church and the larger American public, focusing on the implications of polygamy for developing understandings of law and constitutionality in the nineteenth century. Another helpful resource is Norman F. Furniss, *The Mormon Conflict 1850-1859* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1960). Furniss concentrates on conflicts between the LDS Church and the U.S. government relating to issues of political and economic power, as well as governance of Utah. In *The Viper on the Hearth*, Terry Givens examines the use of literature by non-Mormons as a means of battling perceived threats posed by the Mormons, and more specifically by LDS religious doctrines.

sources: pamphlets, news articles, fictional depictions in novels and stories, and visual portrayals in political cartoons and other drawings. The other viewpoint is that of the Mormons themselves, and specifically LDS leaders – the way that the Saints conceived of themselves as a people and a Church, and the way they sought to portray themselves to the wider American public. Mormon perspectives from this period are not as widely available, but can still be gleaned from letters, diaries, and church publications. Particularly, the standpoint of Mormon leaders can be found in frequent – and well-documented – Presidential addresses to the Mormon community and to the general public. These viewpoints provide a necessary backdrop for understanding current interactions between Mormons and non-Mormons, and the preoccupations of LDS leaders regarding their Church’s image in American society.

Outsider Portrayals of Polygamy

To suggest that non-Mormons – or Gentiles, as Mormons have traditionally called them – all held the same opinion of the Saints in the second half of the nineteenth century would be a ridiculous overstatement. Certainly they held a variety of opinions and attitudes about the LDS Church and its members. However, it is safe to say that there was a *prevailing* negative attitude among non-Mormons concerning the Church and its adherents. Non-LDS concerns about the Saints and their religion in this period addressed a wide variety of topics, from Mormons’ growing numbers and economic power, to their political aspirations, to their secret rituals and practices, to their religious doctrines, which were seen as both bizarre and heretical by many.

Scholars offer different suggestions as to the main threat that Mormonism posed to various sectors of the larger American public. For example, Terryl Givens places emphasis on the religious threat posed by the LDS Church as a heresy with Christian roots. As he notes, “although the political and cultural conflicts Mormonism

provoked were real enough, the peculiar challenges the new faith posed to religious orthodoxy – and the legitimate mechanisms available to meet them – were especially difficult to negotiate in the context of Jacksonian democracy.”²⁴ In his work *Mormon Conflict 1850-1859*, Norman F. Furniss focuses on the concerns of the U.S. Government over Mormon political power in Utah and the threat of treason. He refers to governmental documents which “formed an impressive indictment of the Saints for subversion, near rebellion, and similar crimes.”²⁵ In *The Mormon Question*, Sarah Gordon centers her analysis on the challenge that the practice of polygamy, and the LDS religion as whole, posed to the de-facto Protestant underpinnings of American law and constitutionality.

Although the Mormon Church clearly did present a wide range of threats and challenges to the American nation, its institutions, and its citizenry, one thing agreed upon by these scholars is that the practice of plural marriage often served as the basis – and justification – for non-Mormon attacks against the Saints and their Church. As Givens states: “With the public announcement of polygamy, those opposed to Utah statehood and Mormonism generally had new and unimpeachable support for their claim that Utah was outside the pale of American institutions.”²⁶ In fact, evidence suggests that some anti-Mormon crusaders who were threatened by the growing political power of the LDS Church knowingly used polygamy as a tool to target the Mormons. This is clear from the statements of nineteenth-century anti-Mormon strategist Frederick Dubois: “There was a universal detestation of polygamy, and inasmuch as the Mormons openly defended it we were given a very effective weapon with which to attack.”²⁷ In other words, the practice of plural marriage

²⁴ Givens, 6.

²⁵ Furniss, 65.

²⁶ Givens, 37.

offered such individuals a rallying cry that they used to harness the support and encouragement of the larger American public.

Indeed, the issue of polygamy did garner support for a variety of actions taken against the Saints. In discussing the "Mormon War" – President Buchanan's deployment of troops to Utah in 1857 – Furniss notes: "To many Americans of 1857 the real purpose of the Government's expedition to Utah was to root out polygamy as an affront to Christian morality."²⁸ Gordon argues that this War illustrates the emergence of "a national antipolygamy ethic by the late 1850s."²⁹ It seems that although the Saints were criticized, harassed, and outright assailed in their early history for a number of reasons and with a variety of motives, the substance of those condemnations was overwhelmingly connected to their doctrine and practice of plural marriage. As summed up by Kimball Young, "since polygamy became the symbol for all of Mormondom, it provided an important focus for the attacks upon the entire system."³⁰ This acknowledgement of the consistent spotlight placed on the practice of plural marriage makes clear two things. First, it confirms that when it came to Mormonism, this practice was foremost in the minds of the vast majority of ordinary Americans; it was their central concern and their primary objection to the Mormon religion, society, and people. Second, it clarifies that the large part of the criticism, negative portrayals, and attacks confronted by the Saints during this period with regard to their faith and their community addressed the issue of polygamy. Thus it follows that ideas about and portrayals of plural marriage provide significant insight to an understanding of both outsider and insider perspectives.

²⁷ Ibid., 50.

²⁸ Furniss, 82.

²⁹ Gordon, 60

³⁰ Kimball Young, *Isn't One Wife Enough?* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1954), 443.

From this situation the question naturally arises: why was polygamy such an effective tool for building public support of anti-Mormon campaigns and activities? Certainly this was due in part to the enduring American obsession with all things related to sex. No other subject is so uniquely capable of simultaneously arousing such high levels of attention, fascination, and moral indignation, which was particularly true during the period in question. Indeed, in the nineteenth century sexual sins were held in a more serious light than the majority of other transgressions in the minds of many. As Klaus Hansen notes in his work *Mormonism and the American Experience*: "For many nineteenth-century reformers... sin had virtually become synonymous with sex."³¹ It's especially important to point out that in nineteenth-century American society, even sexual activity within the marriage relationship was viewed with suspicion, and in some cases, with outright derision. Some reformers – and even medical professionals – argued that any sexual expression held the potential not only for moral degradation, but also for physical harm. In his article "Sexuality, Class and Role in 19th-Century America," Charles E. Rosenberg notes that starting in the 1830s:

...for some authors sexuality began to assume an absolutely negative tone. Thus, for example, the dangers of sexual intercourse within marriage became, for the first time, a subject of widespread censure. Such warnings applied, moreover, to both sexes: only the need for propagating the species, some authors contended, could justify so dangerous an indulgence.³²

Rosenberg suggests that this tendency toward both repressiveness and an intense public moralism may have arisen (at least in part) out of the pietistic fervor of the Second Great Awakening of the early nineteenth century.³³

³¹ Klaus Hansen, *Mormonism and the American Experience* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981), 150.

³² Charles E. Rosenberg, "Sexuality, Class and Role in 19th-Century America," *American Quarterly* 25, no. 2 (May 1973): 135.

³³ *Ibid.*

In this environment, control of one's sexual impulses ultimately became the central marker for virtue and piety, especially for middle-class men. As discussed by Rosenberg, the message put forth by reformers was that allowing one's passions "...to act themselves out, was to destroy any hope of creating a truly Christian personality"; such admonitions became increasingly intense in the latter part of the nineteenth century.³⁴ As will be obvious in many of the following portrayals of plural marriage, the majority of non-Mormon Americans automatically associated polygamy with sex, increased libido and eroticism, and even unbridled lust. Anti-polygamy literature described a wide variety of sexual offenses in great detail, and thus served the dual purpose of titillating and infuriating readers. In his article "The Awesome Power of Sex: The Polemical Campaign Against Mormon Polygamy," Charles A. Cannon argues that the anti-polygamy campaign "allowed Americans to express vicariously their repressed desires at the same time that they reinforced the rigid sexual values of the existing order."³⁵ Gordon asserts that polygamy also challenged the "beloved Home Religion" of Protestant reformers such as Frances Willard, in which (monogamous) marriage was envisioned as "the centerpiece of private governance, an arena of profound religious meaning and safety for women, and the source of political legitimacy for men."³⁶ As the portrayals demonstrate, many non-Mormons saw the polygamous household as anything but a safe haven for women, and as an environment that is conducive to men's total lack of control over their

³⁴ Ibid., 137. For additional discussion of nineteenth-century discourses related to sexuality, including the focus on male continence, see Estelle B. Freedman, "Sexuality in Nineteenth-Century America: Behavior, Ideology, and Politics," *Reviews in American History* 10/4 (December 1982): 196-215.

³⁵ Charles A. Cannon, "The Awesome Power of Sex: The Polemical Campaign Against Mormon Polygamy," *The Pacific Historical Review* 43, no. 1 (February 1974): 82.

³⁶ Gordon, 231. Also see Amy Kaplan, "Manifest Domesticity," *American Literature* 70, no. 3 (September 1998): 581-606 for a discussion of cultural understandings about domesticity in relation to nineteenth century American expansion. As she notes, domesticity "is related to the imperial project of civilizing, and the conditions of domesticity often become markers that distinguish civilization from savagery" (p. 582). Certainly these notions are at work in nineteenth century discourses about Mormon polygamy.

sexual impulses. Given the increased attention to and importance of both sex and marriage during this period of American history, polygamy became a natural target for reformers.

What's important here is not just the fact that non-Mormon attacks on the LDS Church centered on the issue of polygamy, but the nature and content of those attacks as well. For non-Mormons, the concept of Mormon plural marriage was not simply a matter of multiple spouses, but rather, it was associated with an entire complex of ideas related to sexuality, religion, marriage, family, and gender roles. An analysis of some of these different depictions will provide a more complete understanding of the extent to which, taken together, they constituted a condemnation of Mormon marriage and family life. This condemnation would have a lasting impact on both non-Mormon and LDS perspectives about the Church and its members.

Perhaps the most popular form of anti-polygamy literature in this period was the exposé of Mormonism and Mormon polygamy. One part novel and one part investigative report, these sensationalist texts purported to contain factual accounts of life in polygamous families by women involved in plural marriages or Mormon "apostates" who had left the Church. Written for audiences living in the eastern part of the United States in the nineteenth century, most of whom had probably never met a member of the LDS Church, these shocking descriptions of Mormon life out west were a powerful means of raising anti-Mormon and anti-polygamous outrage among the American public. Such works were largely built on the dual themes of male lust, violence, and domination, and female enslavement, abuse, and humiliation.³⁷ One example is an exposé by Jennie Anderson Froiseth entitled *The Women of Mormonism: Or the Story of Polygamy as Told by the Victims Themselves*,

³⁷ For a more in-depth analysis of anti-polygamy exposés, including some of the themes and quotes discussed here, see Young, 5-28.

which was first published in 1882. Mrs. Froiseth states plainly her beliefs about the station of women in plural marriages: "The corner-stone of polygamy is the degradation of women, and it can flourish only where she is regarded and treated as a slave."³⁸ As portrayed in such accounts, the practice of plural marriage turns the traditional version of marriage on its head. Rather than being a sacred covenant based on love and respect into which a woman enters willingly, marriage in the Mormon community is imagined as a despotic and cruel institution, into which a woman is forced and held against her will by a tyrannical husband.

Another anti-Mormon exposé from this period is Maria Ward's *Female Life Among the Mormons*, published in 1855. Ward describes a conversation with a woman named Mrs. Murray, whose husband has just informed her of his new "spiritual wife," proposing to bring her home to live with them. Mrs. Murray reports that when she threatened to leave her husband if he indeed brought the second wife home, he replied: "No, madam, you won't. Among the Mormons, husbands are lords. They have the privilege of punishing disobedient wives, and enforcing their homage."³⁹ Exposés like these presupposed that women would not enter into polygamous marriages voluntarily; thus, husbands in such accounts use a combination of trickery and intimidation to coerce their wives into the situation. Froiseth documents a similar exchange between a husband and wife, but in this case the husband goes as far as to threaten the safety of their children, if she does not allow him a second wife: "'It is well that you think of your children,' was his reply, 'for if you will not do your duty and consent for me to do mine, by living up to the privileges of a Latter-day Saint, they shall have neither food, clothing, nor shelter of

³⁸ Jennie Anderson Froiseth, *The Women of Mormonism: Or the Story of Polygamy as Told by the Victims Themselves* (Detroit: C.G.G. Paine, 1887), 20. For more on the theme of women's degradation in this literature, see Young pp. 11-14.

³⁹ Maria Ward, *Female Life Among the Mormons: A Narrative of Many Years' Personal Experience* (London: G. Routledge and Co., 1855), 52.

my providing during the coming winter."⁴⁰ As these authors imagine it, all of the responsibilities and affections of family life fall away in the face of the overpowering desire of men, who are twisted by their participation in and allegiance to the Mormon religion.

Indeed, writers like Froiseth and Ward describe polygamy – and by extension, all of Mormonism – as an unbridled evil that corrupts everyone and everything in its path. The following lengthy passage from the beginning of Froiseth’s work is a good demonstration of the extent of the negative effects attributed to this system of beliefs and practices:

By this testimony of the women themselves, we also purpose to expose the arts by which women are coerced into permitting their husbands to take other wives, to show the evil results of the system so far as decency will permit, to exemplify how it destroys all that is manly, honest, and chivalrous in man, degrading him to the level of a brute; how it completely ruins all that is loveable and lovely in woman, and renders her either a dull, senseless, sorrowful, heart-broken creature, who has no interest in life, no hope beyond the grave, or else makes of her a common virago; how it fosters all the worst passions of both sexes, and makes them but a libel on God’s image; how it corrupts childhood and youth; how there is no respect nor honor shown to a woman living or dead, but that she is simply regarded as the slave of a lustful and tyrannical master.⁴¹

According to this line of thought, living in polygamy destroys all the virtues and values of both men and women, stripping them of their proper roles and character. Men lose their manliness, women lose their femininity, and both are debased to the extent that they become “a libel on God’s image.” Accounts like this include condemnations not only of Mormon marriage and family life, but of Mormon humanity itself.

It is also important to understand that anti-Mormon authors did not simply charge Mormon men with marrying multiple spouses; rather, they accused the Mormons of a wide variety of transgressions in the realms of marriage, family, and

⁴⁰ Froiseth, 52.

⁴¹ Froiseth, 26.

sexuality. An excellent example is found in *Life in Utah; Or, the Mysteries and Crimes of Mormonism*, an exposé written by John H. Beadle, the editor of the *Salt Lake Reporter*. Beadle describes the atrocities of what he calls “the Mormon version of modern ‘free-loveism,’” in which wives are passed around from man to man like cheap possessions:

Divorce also became so common that these marriages scarcely amounted to more than promiscuous intercourse. I met one woman who had been divorced and re-married six times, and an old Mormon once pointed out to me a woman who had once been his wife, and had been divorced and re-married nine times. In numerous instances a young girl would be married to some prominent elder, with whom she would reside a few months, after which she would be divorced and married to another and again another, ‘going the rounds’ and the phrase was, of half a dozen priests.⁴²

The picture created here is not simply one of a religion with an alternative marriage system, but a portrait of a religious community with a blatant disregard for the sanctity of marriage, the importance of chastity and fidelity, and all the values of civilized (Protestant) society.

As hinted by the above passage, anti-polygamy tracts also made a point of emphasizing the age differences between husbands and wives in many plural marriages; the “young girl” forced to marry the “prominent elder” appears frequently in this literature. Older men are often portrayed leering over teenaged girls, arguing over the rights to marry them. Central LDS Church leaders such as Brigham Young are specifically accused of abusing their power to lay claim on especially beautiful young girls. Anti-Mormon authors also suggest that the mothers and fathers of the girls are complicit in this sex trade of sorts, encouraging their daughters to catch the attention of wealthy and powerful elders. Ward’s text is filled with such encounters and dealings. She narrates one particular father’s quest to profit from the marriages of his daughters:

⁴² John Hanson Beadle, *Life in Utah; Or, the Mysteries and Crimes of Mormonism* (Philadelphia: National Publishing Company, 1870), 341-350.

...the father, who thought of nothing but making money, determined to cause their beauty to subserve his selfish ends. Accordingly he bought them dresses, and laces, took them to meeting, and exposed their charms to the wanton eyes of the old polygamists. Of course they were soon noticed, and an old man, whose domestic establishment comprised a dozen wives and thirty children, came to the house while I was there to bargain for the eldest daughter.⁴³

Here the father is portrayed as a kind of pimp, who dresses up his daughters and parades them in front of prospective "clients." In the end, he ends up trading not one but *both* of his daughters to the old man for two horses and a cow, despite the cries of the girls, who beg to be freed from the fate of marrying this "horrible" old man who "looks like an ogre."⁴⁴

The two sisters in this account suggest another common theme in anti-polygamy literature: suggestions of incest and inappropriately-close family ties. Tales such as the one above, in which a polygamous man marries two or more sisters, were quite common in anti-Mormon literature. This makes sense, since the idea of a man engaging in sexual relations with multiple women from the same family is seen as a more serious transgression of marriage and family values than sex with unrelated women, and thus is more effective in eliciting an outcry against the Saints. Indeed, incestuous relationships of various kinds are portrayed as being rampant in the LDS Church. The following description from Beadle's work makes the situation documented by Ward seem tame by comparison:

... the marriage of uncle and niece has occurred often enough to establish it as a Mormon custom. Bishop Smith, of Brigham City, numbers *two of his own brother's daughters* among the inmates of his harem, 'sealed' to him by Brigham Young, with a full knowledge of the relationship; and in the southern settlements several such cases exist... the marriage of near relatives is so common that to remark on it would itself be considered remarkable.⁴⁵

⁴³ Ward, 180.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 182.

⁴⁵ Beadle, 367; author's emphasis. For more on the theme of incest in anti-polygamy literature, see Young, 16-18.

The overarching message communicated by texts like this one is that the Mormon community is characterized by widespread deviant sexual activity and a grand web of unnatural and distorted marriage and family relationships. The use of the word harem to describe the wives of a polygamous husband was common in such texts, because it evoked images of foreign lands and thus made the Mormons seem even more alien to non-LDS Americans. In addition, like many anti-Mormon authors, Beadle makes a point of stating that such activities occurred with the full knowledge and participation of Brigham Young and other LDS leaders. The Church, and not just its people, is charged with the crimes described here.

In fact, the authors of some of these exposés specifically accused LDS leaders of using Mormon religious institutions as a means of augmenting their polygamous “harems.” For example, in her work Froiseth claims that the Mormon women’s Relief Society was created with the primary purpose of recruiting and indoctrinating young girls to secure them for future plural marriages with Church elders⁴⁶:

...this female organization is constantly at work, carrying out the plans of a licentious and tyrannical priesthood. The young girls are brought to these meetings every week and the principles of polygamy thoroughly and systematically inculcated. With such a belief impressed upon the plastic hearts and minds of children, what is the natural result? When they are fourteen or sixteen years of age, and are told that they must be sealed to brother So-and-So, and that thus their eternal happiness and glory will be assured, they go to the Endowment House and become the plural wives of the brothers selected, without hesitation.⁴⁷

The Relief Society is envisioned here as a well-oiled bride machine; pure, innocent girls enter, and they emerge as brainwashed pawns in the merciless system of Mormon plural marriage. Froiseth also portrays Mormon missionaries as womanizers

⁴⁶ The Relief Society is the LDS Church’s official organization for women. According to the “Introduction to Relief Society” on the LDS website, the purpose of the Relief Society is to “is to prepare women for the blessings of eternal life by helping them increase faith and personal righteousness, strengthen families and homes, and help those in need.” The full statement can be found at <https://www.lds.org/callings/relief-society/getting-started/introduction-to-relief-society?lang=eng> (accessed February 10, 2014).

⁴⁷ Froiseth, 146-7.

who use their periods of missionary service as opportunities to trick more women into becoming their wives:

Almost every woman, either first or plural wife could tell the same story of some kind of deception having been practiced upon her. Many of them were married to missionaries in foreign lands, thinking they were first wives, only to find on their arrival in Zion, that two, three, or more women, as the case might be, had a previous right to call the same man husband.⁴⁸

By implicating institutions of the LDS Church in the horrors of polygamy, the authors of these anti-Mormon texts were able to craft a more complete condemnation of the religion as a whole.

While they were particularly popular, anti-Mormon exposés were certainly not the only media through which the Mormon Church – and its practice of plural marriage – was criticized during this time period. A number of newspapers, magazines, and almanacs also published anti-polygamy material, and some of these portrayals are quite similar in character to the exposés. For example, in 1858 the *New York Times* published an article entitled “Utah and the Mormons,” which contained the testimony of a “Mormon Ex-High Priest” named Frederick Loba. The article is intended to inform readers about life in Utah among the Mormons, and the picture painted of that life is quite frightening; the Mormons are largely seen as violent individuals that bring death to all who criticize their religion or lifestyle – including women who refuse to enter into plural marriage. The section on polygamy begins with the following: “Mr. Loba states that a very brief examination of life in the Valley presents indubitable evidence that Polygamy is destructive of social comfort and peace, as well as of female delicacy, refinement, and virtue.”⁴⁹ This statement contains the familiar theme of plural marriage as a system that destroys feminine morality. Portrayals like this seem to suggest that under the oppressive force of

⁴⁸ Ibid., 44. See Young pp. 19-20 for additional discussion of missionaries in the exposés.

⁴⁹ “Utah and the Mormons: Further Statements from Mr. Frederick Loba,” *New York Times*, May 7, 1858.

polygamy, women somehow lose the essence of what makes them women, and become either androgynous beings or animalistic ones.

After discussing the women of polygamy, the article turns to the topic of children produced in plural marriages: "The children of polygamists are many of them weakly, poor, and miserable. No provision whatever is made for their education, and not a few are seen upon the streets half naked and starved."⁵⁰ This passage hits upon another popular theme of anti-polygamy literature: neglected and abused children. The children depicted here are lacking all of the necessities that are supposed to be provided for them: food, clothing, shelter, education, and – most importantly – love and care. Instead, they are described as being half-wild (again, as animalistic creatures) and completely ignored by their parents. The care and upbringing of children is yet another issue relating to family on which the Mormons were attacked through anti-polygamy literature.

Aside from the written accounts found in newspapers and magazines, readers also received messages about the nature of the Mormon community from a different kind of portrayal: political cartoons and other illustrations. Such pictures appeared in a variety of print media, as well as being printed and sold by private companies. Given the maxim that a picture is worth a thousand words, these visual images served as a particularly effective vehicle for anti-Mormon propaganda. As with written accounts, plural marriage was one of the main topics addressed in such illustrations. Anti-polygamy images contained many of the same themes addressed in exposés and other literature, although they did introduce additional themes as well. Aside from their visual nature, what most sets these portrayals apart from the accounts already discussed is the illustrators' use of humor to make their point. For the most part, exposés took a serious tone, attempting to evoke sadness and

⁵⁰ Ibid.

outrage in their readers, not ridicule. However, using humor certainly did not decrease the effectiveness of the images; it was simply another means of setting the Mormons apart as a lesser class of people.⁵¹

Like written accounts, the illustrations of Mormon plural marriage exaggerated the “harems” of polygamous Mormon men, often portraying one man with dozens of women. In addition, the artists made a point of depicting Mormon households with bizarre and offensive sleeping arrangements; a common theme in anti-Mormon illustrations from this time period was the image of a polygamous bedroom featuring one enormous bed for the lone husband and his many wives. This is the case with the following illustration, entitled “The Family Bedstead”:⁵²



This drawing shows a bed and row of polygamous wives that seemingly stretch out into infinity, with the nervous husband appropriately at the center. Like the accounts addressed earlier, this image portrays Mormons as a people who thoughtlessly toss aside accepted social conventions regarding marriage and sexuality; it simply does so using humor and derogatory visual imagery.

⁵¹ For a more comprehensive interpretation of the following illustrations and other visual portrayals of Mormons during the early years of the LDS Church, see Gary L. Bunker and Davis Bitton, *The Mormon Graphic Image, 1834-1914* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1983).

⁵² Figure 1: “The Family Bedstead.” Illustration from Mark Twain’s *Roughing It* (Hartford: American Publishing Co., 1872). Reprinted in Bunker and Bitton, 40. Other images portraying sleeping arrangements like these can be found on Bunker and Bitton, pp. 44-45.

Aside from introducing scandalous notions about Mormon bedrooms, artists also used their illustrations to critique plural marriage as a form of slavery. Such images emphasized the idea of polygamous wives as servants, who are acquired to fulfill the many tasks involved in running a household. The following cartoon, drawn by Thomas Nast, appeared in the issue of *Harper's Weekly* from March 25, 1882:⁵³



This illustration, entitled "Pure White 'Mormon Immigration' On the Atlantic Coast. More *cheap* 'help-mates' for Mr. Polygamist," depicts the polygamous husband as a form of overseer, waiting at port to augment his labor force from an arriving batch of immigrant women. This portrayal debases the (sacred) institution of marriage, and with it the station and role of the wife. The use of the word *cheap* in the title emphasizes the idea that, to Mormon men, women are of little value and essentially interchangeable.

⁵³ Figure 2: "Pure White 'Mormon Immigration' On the Atlantic Coast." Reprinted in Bunker and Bitton, 124. As they discuss, many portrayals of Mormon women during this period depicted them as a form of chattel, even using animalistic imagery (see p. 124).

While the large majority of anti-polygamy depictions portrayed Mormon men as despotic brutes who ruled their wives with iron fists, certain illustrations from this period provide an alternate picture. In such images, the roles are instead reversed: forceful, mannish wives overwhelm and overpower a shriveled, emasculated husband. The following cartoon, entitled "There are Influences Greater than the Government in Utah," was published in *New York World* in 1904:⁵⁴



This image depicts the family of Joseph Fielding Smith, at the time the President of the LDS Church. Smith is portrayed as a miniscule individual, being dragged along by his much larger, imposing wives. As indicated by the title, this cartoon suggests that the principle of strength-in-numbers allows polygamous wives to overrun their husbands. While quite different from other accounts of plural marriage, this image nevertheless accomplishes the same goal of portraying Mormon marriages as dysfunctional, and polygamy as a system that warps individuals. The central

⁵⁴ Figure 3: "There are Influences Greater than the Government in Utah." Reprinted in Bunker and Bitton, 133. They classify this image among a number of others that envision the "domineering Mormon woman" (see pp. 132-134).

message is that polygamy causes a severe imbalance in the marital relationship, such that normal husband-wife relationships become twisted, and men and women are no longer able to embody the roles and characteristics appropriate to their stations.

Taken together, all of these negative portrayals create a vivid picture of the Mormon Church and the Mormon people that was disseminated widely among the American public in the second half of the nineteenth century. Non-Mormon depictions of plural marriage portrayed Mormon families as profoundly disordered. In these portrayals, women and children were not protected, and instead were either neglected or abused. While the depictions display a variety of gender roles and relationships, none of them fall under the scope of what was considered appropriate and normal in Victorian society. Mormon women were portrayed either as enslaved victims, living at the mercy of brutish and lascivious husbands, or as overbearing, mannish ogres that dominate weak and emasculated men. Far from simply being a denunciation of the practice of plural marriage, these depictions constitute an utter condemnation of the Mormon family, and Mormon values regarding marriage, gender, and sexuality.

Although the Mormon practice of plural marriage ended officially in 1890 with President Woodruff's Manifesto, anti-polygamy literature continued to be published for some time. These later accounts asserted that Mormons had, in truth, failed to give up the practice. They attempted to warn the public about the continued threat that Mormon polygamy posed to the American family. An excellent example can be found in a series of articles published by *McClure's Magazine* in 1910 and 1911. In the introduction to the series, the editorial staff accuses the Mormons not only of maintaining plural marriages contracted before the Manifesto was issued, but also of entering into a large number of new ones:

Extensive investigations recently made by McClure's Magazine... show that polygamy is still practiced in the Mormon states on a considerable scale... not only are the old polygamous relations that existed before 1890 still maintained, but that hundreds of young men and women – young people in their twenties and thirties – have contracted plural marriages. More importantly, these 'new polygamists,' as the people of Utah call them, receive special favors at the hands of the church – many of them hold the highest ecclesiastical offices, are teachers in the church educational institutions, and are prominent in business in social life.⁵⁵

As demonstrated by the concluding sentence in this passage, *McClure's* is eager to establish not just the continued practice of plural marriage by LDS individuals, but the acknowledgement and approval of these marriages by the central authorities of the LDS Church.

The first article in this series, "The Mormon Revival of Polygamy," makes clear the continued connection between Mormonism and polygamy in the minds of many non-Mormon Americans. Its author, Burton J. Hendrick, contends that "Mormonism without polygamy largely ceases to be Mormonism. Its whole theological system, from its perception of the Godhead down, is pervaded with sensualism. The Mormon god is not only a just and vengeful god, but he is a lustful god."⁵⁶ As stated here, Hendrick equates Mormonism not only with polygamy but also with unbridled lust and sensuality. He also proclaims his horror at Mormon teachings suggesting that not only is God the Father a polygamist, but Jesus Christ may have been as well. Even more significantly, Hendrick attacks not just the Mormon principle of *plural* marriage, but the entirety of Mormon doctrine concerning marriage. As he notes: "Marriage, in the Mormon Church, is different from anything known in any civilized country."⁵⁷ Tirades like these did not simply target the Principle, but Mormon celestial marriage as a whole. By attacking the entire LDS marriage system, Hendrick suggests that –

⁵⁵ Anon. "The Present Status of Polygamy in the United States," *McClure's Magazine* 36, no. 2 (December 1910): 242.

⁵⁶ Burton J. Hendrick, "The Mormon Revival of Polygamy," *McClure's Magazine* 36, no. 3 (January 1911): 245.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 248.

even should plural marriage ever be eradicated – the Mormons will continue to pose a threat to traditional marriage as long as they exist.

Mormon Perspectives

It is appropriate to have left a discussion of Mormon perspectives until after first addressing non-Mormon attitudes. While Mormon self-perceptions from this period were fundamentally shaped by their understanding of LDS doctrines and personal/group convictions, they were also influenced by Gentile perspectives and portrayals of the Saints. More significantly, outsiders viewpoints powerfully impacted the ways that Mormons chose to portray themselves to those outsiders. Even in its early stages, LDS leaders were highly attuned to changes in their position and reputation with regard to the larger American public, seeking to influence that position by adapting their own public words and actions.

While Mormon perspectives from the nineteenth century are certainly not as prevalent as outsider views, a number of sources can be found, especially with regard to Mormon leaders from this period. Perhaps the best sources for the viewpoints of the LDS leadership are official statements and epistles issued by the First Presidency,⁵⁸ addressed either to the Mormon community or the larger American public. Mormon perspectives from this period can also be found in several newspapers and periodicals that were published by the Saints with the sanction of the Church leadership, such as the *Millennial Star*, the *Woman's Exponent*, and the *Deseret News*. Aside from these sources, personal letters and diaries written by nineteenth-century Mormons also provide insight into Mormon self-perceptions of that time.

⁵⁸ The term "First Presidency" refers to the Mormon President or Prophet, along with his two most senior Apostles.

What is initially clear from examining LDS documents from this period is that Mormons first and foremost perceived of themselves as faithful servants of God, fulfilling what they truly believed to be divinely-mandated laws about marriage and family. Due to the barrage of charges from outsiders that Mormons were engaging in polygamy to satiate their own sexual desires, the Saints were continually forced to defend their motives. In August of 1882, a few months after the U.S. congress passed the Edmunds Law outlawing plural marriage, the First Presidency issued a statement making clear the LDS Church's position:

As a Church, we have repeatedly testified in the most solemn manner that the institution of marriage, which this law is aimed at, has been revealed to us by the Almighty, and that it is a part of our religion; that it is interwoven with our dearest and holiest hopes connected with eternity; and that – not from any lustful motives, but because we believe we should incur the eternal displeasure of our Heavenly Father if we did not comply with its requirements – we have espoused this doctrine.⁵⁹

This statement stresses that the Mormons' belief in and practice of plural marriage is due solely to a belief that it is a divine mandate, not out of "lustful motives" or for any type of personal gain. Given the emphasis in nineteenth-century American society on control of sexual impulses – even in marriage relationships – as a mark of virtue and Christian civilization, this was an especially important delineation to make.

In attempting to bolster plural marriage as a practice sanctioned by God, the Saints made frequent references to important biblical figures who were themselves polygamous. An example of this line of defense can be found in a sermon delivered on July 24th, 1859 by Elder Orson Pratt. Pratt was one of the original members of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, the highest level of LDS Church leadership after the First Presidency; he was also a spokesman for the Church on the issue of polygamy. At the outset of his sermon, Pratt states: "This law of plurality, as I am going to prove, did not only exist under the Law of Moses, but existed before that law, under

⁵⁹ James R. Clark, ed., *Messages of the First Presidency of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints 1833-1964* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft Inc., 1965), 2:345.

the Patriarchal dispensation.⁶⁰ Pratt discusses the plural marriages of several of the Old Testament patriarchs, including Abraham and Jacob, noting that God did not condemn these individuals for engaging in polygamy, but rather blessed them and exalted them. In addition, he argues that the Gospel given to Abraham was the same that was later preached to Jesus and his Apostles. A similar argument is made by a Mormon woman in a letter written to her sister in 1854, which was later published in the *Millennial Star*:

To sum up the whole, then, I find that polygamists were the friend of God; that the family and lineage of a polygamist were selected, in which all nations should be blessed; that a polygamist is named in the New Testament as the father of the faithful Christians of after ages, and cited as a pattern for all generations...⁶¹

The fact that Mormons made such efforts to offer biblical proofs for the sacred nature of polygamy demonstrates that, from very early on, they actively sought to portray themselves not as members of an entirely new religion, but as Christians practicing Christianity as it was meant to be practiced. Rather than simply declare their right to enter plural marriages, members of the LDS Church attempted to establish themselves in the eyes of other Christians as fellow followers of Jesus who were bringing about the true gospel. As they saw it, this gospel was one that included plural marriage at its very foundations.

In addition to perceiving themselves as authentic Christians, the Mormons also portrayed themselves as authentic Americans – loyal, patriotic citizens of the United States. Much of anti-Mormon literature called into question the loyalty of the Saints, with many authors of these texts suggesting that Mormons heeded only the laws of the LDS Church, having no regard for the laws of their nation. LDS leaders and other Mormons fought these accusations vehemently, proclaiming that they were

⁶⁰ Orson Pratt, "Polygamy," *Journal of Discourses Delivered by Brigham Young, His Two Counselors, the Twelve Apostles, and Others*, Vol. 6 (London: Latter-day Saints Book Depot, 1859), 352.

⁶¹ Anon., "Defense of Polygamy," *The Latter Day Saints' Millennial Star* 16, no. 30 (Liverpool: Franklin D. Richards, 1854), 470.

in fact fulfilling the principles of their country in a way that their harassers were not. In an epistle addressed to the Church membership in 1885, John Taylor and George Q. Cannon of the First Presidency quote an earlier revelation given to Joseph Smith, in which the believers are enjoined to follow the laws of the nation as they are expressed in the Constitution. Following that citation, they make the proceeding declaration:

We are expressly commanded, and it becomes our duty, to uphold and sustain every law of the land which is constitutional; we have always had a strong desire to obey such laws, and to place ourselves in harmony with all the institutions of the country. We repeat, that we desire that all men should be aware of the fact that we have been the upholders of the Constitution and laws enacted in pursuance of that sacred instrument. We still entertain the same patriotic disposition, and propose to continue acting in conformity with it to the last.⁶²

This statement very firmly positions the Latter-day Saint Church as a patriotic institution that seeks to be in the harmony with the United States government, rather than in conflict with it. However, the authors also make clear that they feel their constitutional rights are being violated, and that it is thus their duty as patriotic Americans to resist these attacks.

This sentiment is also expressed by Relief Society President Emmeline Wells⁶³ in an article published in the *Woman's Exponent* in 1883: "'Mormon' people have rights under the Constitution, and they will seek to maintain them, women as well as men. If anyone supposes these same women citizens to be ignorant of the rights the ballot gives them, then they know very little about the women of this Territory..."⁶⁴ Thus, from their early years the Mormons sought to portray themselves as the very epitome of true Christians and true Americans, holding fast to the rights and

⁶² James R. Clark, ed., *Messages of the First Presidency of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints 1833-1964* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft Inc., 1966), 3:30.

⁶³ Wells was not Relief Society President at the time that she wrote this article, but became so in 1910 and held the position until her death in 1921.

⁶⁴ Emmeline Wells, "Is It Ignorance?," *The Woman's Exponent*, July 1, 1883.

responsibilities of these roles, despite any adversity they may face from the uninformed or the wicked. And, as made clear by Wells, they also demonstrated their willingness to use the venues provided to them by the political system of their government in order to secure their interests as a people.

The persistent adversity faced by the Saints in their early history also helped to shape another aspect of their identity. From the beginning, the Mormons perceived themselves to be the “peculiar people,” a title that offers a different translation of the biblical title of “chosen people,” which was given to the Hebrews. As such, the members of the LDS Church see themselves as an oppressed people, identifying their community with the many biblical peoples and individuals that have been persecuted for following God’s commandments. An 1885 address from the First Presidency makes such a declaration: “For a wise purpose in His providence He permits the wicked, in the exercise of agency, from time to time to afflict his followers... Not only in times past, but in our own day, the wicked have persecuted, tormented, and murdered the Saints of God.”⁶⁵ The continual harassment heaped upon the Mormons is here envisioned as a divinely-designed trial for the faithful. In addition, this statement places the Latter-day Saints in a long lineage of Saints of God that have been wrongly victimized for practicing their religion as God has revealed it to them.

A later First Presidency Epistle specifically compares the attacks against the LDS Church by the U.S. government to the attacks against Jesus Christ and the Apostles in the early days of Christianity:

Where is the Prophet or Apostle who did not endure persecution, whose liberty and life were not in almost constant jeopardy? They did not have an Edmunds law, perhaps, enforced against them; but they had laws which emanated from the same source. With few exceptions they were all punished, deprived of liberty and of life, in the sacred name of the law. Even the holiest

⁶⁵ James R. Clark, ed., *Messages of the First Presidency of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints 1833-1964* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft Inc., 1966), 3:5.

Being that ever trod the earth, the great Redeemer of mankind Himself, was crucified between two thieves to satisfy Jewish law.⁶⁶

Statements such as this one, along with the Mormon self-appellation as a “peculiar people,” served to encourage the suffering Saints in their fight to remain faithful to the principles of their religion. More significantly, they also served to represent the Mormons as an embattled people who face opposition precisely because they stand on the correct side of the conflict: the side of the Prophets, the side of Jesus Christ, and ultimately, the side of God.

As shown by the previously discussed portrayals of the LDS Church and its members, much of anti-polygamy literature consisted of attacks on the morality of the Mormons – specifically their sexual morality. Mormon men were depicted as lustful charlatans, and Mormon women as pitiful creatures with little virtue. Thus, during this time period the Saints sought above all else to portray themselves as models of chastity and moral rectitude. They also adamantly insisted that, contrary to the slander heaped upon them by their enemies, plural marriages were held to the same standards of fidelity and chastity as monogamous marriages. In response to the charge that the Mormons had engineered polygamy in order to be able to fully express their lustful desires, the LDS leadership declared that the exact opposite was true, arguing instead that the Saints had only accepted the Principle out of faith, *in spite of* their moral objections:

The idea of marrying more wives than one was as naturally abhorrent to the leading men and women of the Church at that day as it could be to any people. They shrank with dread from the bare thought of entering into such relationships. But the command of God was before them in language which no faithful soul dare disobey.⁶⁷

Declarations such as this one sought to take lust out of the equation entirely. The Mormons made clear that their acceptance of the practice of plural marriage was not

⁶⁶ Ibid., 26.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 32.

made lightly or with zeal – rather, it was only “the command of God” and their concern for their immortal souls that persuaded them to take it up. By reframing Mormon engagement in polygamy as a matter of religious conviction and compliance with divine will, LDS leaders depicted their community as a bastion of piety and goodness.

In addition, as proof of the purity of their motives, the Saints offered the persecution they were facing over their involvement with plural marriage, and the deep anguish this persecution had caused:

Constant attempts have been, and still are being made to induce the world to believe that our motive in espousing patriarchal marriage has been the gratification of gross sensuality – that our belief in and practice of the doctrine had its origin in licentiousness, and that the sanction of religion is merely invoked to furnish greater license for the indulgence of base passions and devouring lust. This, as you know, is the exact antipodes of the truth... Is there any necessity for lustful men and women in this age and nation to suffer martyrdom to gratify their passions? ... Foul desire opens wide her arms and invites all to her lecherous embrace by easier paths than honorable marriage and the begetting of numerous children to be carefully trained and educated and made respectable and useful citizens.⁶⁸

With these statements, LDS leaders countered assertions of their moral depravity by making clear the great costs they incurred in preserving plural marriage, and the absurdity of the notion that they would endure all this simply for their sexual gratification; and in doing so, they also pointed to the many immoral sexual acts that others committed without facing the censure heaped upon the Saints. The final argument here asserts that, far from harming the American nation, Mormon marriages actually contribute to its advancement – by producing “respectable and useful citizens.”

Due to the fact that they were consistently portrayed as victims that had been forced into polygamy against their will, female advocates of plural marriage were seen as particularly effective ambassadors for the Mormons. A number of LDS

⁶⁸ Ibid., 34-5.

women wrote letters or articles defending plural marriage, and combating the charges made against their people. In her article, Wells declares that polygamous women “are like other good, pure, virtuous women, industrially, morally and intellectually. Religiously they are far above them in the graces which elevate and adorn human character.”⁶⁹ She makes a point of stating that Mormon women are the equals of other women intellectually as well as morally, clarifying that they enter willingly into plural marriages, with their full faculties intact. A similar article from the editors of the *Woman’s Exponent* addresses not only the character of polygamous women, but also the nature of children that result from plural marriages:

Mormon women are not only virtuous, but chaste. The principle of plural marriage itself tends to the strictest chastity, and children born in this order of marriage, will, from antenatal influences, be purer in character... nowhere on the earth exist purer women than right here in Utah, those who have embraced this sacred order of marriage the world is so ready to condemn.⁷⁰

Mormon women felt the need to defend their moral character, and to assert that plural marriage did not have harmful effects on their children. In particular, these statements demonstrate a fervent – almost desperate – need to prove that Mormon women and children are pure and virtuous, in complete opposition to outsiders’ negative perceptions about them.

While asserting their own righteousness was certainly an important task, the most significant testimony given by LDS women during this period was in regard to the character of the men of their Church. Given that Mormon men were so widely maligned as lustful brutes, and polygamy as a form of slavery for women, it was the duty of Mormon women to refute these accusations. An *Exponent* article entitled “The ‘Enslaved’ Women of Utah” offers excellent examples of such testimony. Speaking of the political conventions of the Utah Territory in February of 1870, the

⁶⁹ Wells.

⁷⁰ As quoted in Jeffrey Nichols, *Prostitution, Polygamy, and Power: Salt Lake City, 1847-1918* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 2002), 21.

authors proudly proclaim that “the voice of nearly twenty thousand women – wives, mothers, sisters and daughters of these ‘tyrants’ – was a unified protest against the calumnies of years heaped upon the men of Utah, whom they honored and in whom they had confidence.”⁷¹ Given their embattled status, it was essential that the Saints present a united front against outsiders; this image of Mormon women, twenty-thousand strong, defending their men-folk and their lifestyle, is a powerful one. The authors also refute the notion that Mormon women are forced into plural marriages or held in those marriages against their will: “With the knowledge thus obtained through many years of experience, we denounce the incorrect and vindictive statements still made concerning men, women, and matters in Utah... If the women of Utah are ‘slaves’ their bonds are loving ones and dearly prized.”⁷² In direct contrast to outsider portrayals of polygamy, these authors depict plural marriages as loving, affectionate ones. The frequent appearance of new anti-polygamous literature ensured that Mormon women and men would have to continue to defend their sexual morality and their marriage and family life.

Despite the importance of testimony like this, LDS leaders also realized that such written accounts alone would not be enough to convince outsiders of the purity of the Saints or the honorable nature of their marriage covenants. As a result, they also implored the members of the Church to serve as exemplars for their religion. The following is from an Epistle of the First Presidency issued to the Latter-day Saints in 1886:

At this point it may not be improper to again solemnly warn the officers and members of the Church against all conduct that tends to immorality and unchastity. We are being continually, though most falsely, accused of teaching and practicing sexual vice under the garb of religion. No charge could be more utterly false; for no system of philosophy, no code of ethics, no articles of religion since the world was first people, ever taught more strictly

⁷¹ “The ‘Enslaved’ Women of Utah,” *The Woman’s Exponent* 1, no. 3, July 1, 1872.

⁷² *Ibid.*

and emphatically than does the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints the paramount necessity of personal purity in the relations of the sexes. Of this the Saints are well aware. Let us see to it, then, that our actions correspond with our faith; for we rest assured that no prominence of opinion, no ties of family, no influence of wealth can save us from the penalty if we break the law of God in this regard.⁷³

This passage demonstrates the extent to which LDS leaders understood the necessity for their members to be models of virtue with regard to matters of marriage and sexuality. Words being insufficient, the Saints would have to prove their chastity through their continued exemplary behavior as well. And exhortations like this one served numerous purposes – to refute outsiders’ negative claims about the LDS Church, to firmly express confidence in the righteousness of the Saints, and to urge individual Mormons to fulfill the ideals put forth by their leaders.

Just as non-Mormon attacks regarding LDS marriage and family life continued in the decades after the Church’s abolition of the practice of polygamy, Mormon leaders also continued to vigorously defend their community’s purity and goodness during this period as well. In 1907, The First Presidency released an “Address of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints to the World,” an appeal that both lamented outsiders’ assumptions about the Mormons and asked those outsiders to reconsider their previous understandings of Mormon belief and culture. In the opening greeting, the members of the Presidency state that issuing this address “seems imperative. Never were our principles or our purposes more widely misrepresented, more seriously misunderstood. Our doctrines are distorted, the sacred ordinances of our religion ridiculed, and Christianity questioned, our history falsified, our character traduced, and our course of conduct as a people reprobated and condemned.”⁷⁴ The rest of the address consists of definitive statements about

⁷³ James R. Clark, ed., *Messages of the First Presidency of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints 1833-1964* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft Inc., 1966), 3:62.

⁷⁴ James R. Clark, ed., *Messages of the First Presidency of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints 1833-1964* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft Inc., 1970), 4:143.

the nature of the Mormon faith. After addressing several aspects of Mormon belief and practice, the Presidency then turns to the subject of LDS marriage and family relationships:

Neither is it true, as alleged, that 'Mormonism is destructive of the sanctity of the marriage relation; on the contrary, it regards the lawful union of man and woman as the means through which they may realize their highest and holiest aspirations... The typical 'Mormon' home is the temple of the family, in which members of the household gather morning and evening, for prayer and praise to God, offered in the name of Jesus Christ, and often accomplished by the reading of scripture and the singing of spiritual songs.⁷⁵

These passages demonstrate the strong burden felt by LDS leaders to defend their community's commitment to family, and to change non-Mormon views of LDS marriage.

Summary

The fervent protestations of LDS leaders and other Mormons with regard to their faith in Christ, their patriotism and loyalty, and their moral uprightness reveal both an unflinching determination and a deep insecurity about the Church's position in the larger American public, in all respects: religiously, politically, and socially. Given the sheer magnitude of the attacks against them during this period, it is natural that the LDS would continue to be insecure about their standing in these different spheres of American society long after the clamor died down. The persecution that the Mormons faced, the defensive position in which they were placed, and the measures they were forced to take as a result, put the Saints on a path that they would continue to follow for many years, and which would play a vital role in shaping their still-developing Church and their identity as a people. More than anything, these events instilled in the LDS a deep and abiding investment in the project of proving their virtue and moral character to outsiders, especially regarding matters of marriage and sexual behavior.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 147.

CHAPTER 3

THE LEGACY OF POLYGAMY

Although this doctrine was not publicly announced until 1852, was never practiced by more than a small minority, and was abandoned in 1890 or shortly thereafter, Mormonism from the mid-nineteenth century to the present has been synonymous in the minds of many with plural marriage.

-Terry Givens, *The Viper on the Hearth: Mormons, Myths, and the Construction of Heresy*⁷⁶

When Wilford Woodruff issued the Manifesto ending polygamy in 1890, it had a profound impact on the development, and indeed the very survival, of the LDS Church. The Manifesto did much to quell the Mormons' growing legal troubles, and it helped ensure that Utah would gain statehood. It set the Saints on a clear path away from the practice of plural marriage, toward greater acceptance by non-Mormon Americans. However, it would be a mistake to suggest that the Manifesto completely clarified the relationship between Mormons and polygamy, for either insiders or outsiders to the LDS community. In this chapter, I address the legacy of plural marriage in Mormon history and culture, beginning with a brief discussion of the immediate challenges facing the LDS community in the period after the Manifesto was issued. Then I move into an analysis of the modern period, addressing internal Mormon questions regarding the issue of polygamy, as well as non-Mormon perceptions regarding LDS marriage practices. In contemporary American society, there remains much uncertainty about the relationship between the LDS Church and plural marriage, both in the minds of Mormons themselves, and in the minds of outsiders to the Church. I discuss some of the causes for this continued confusion, as they appear in official Mormon discourse, as well as in internal and external discussions about Mormon polygamy.

⁷⁶ Givens, *Viper on the Hearth*, 5.

Struggles in the Wake of the Manifesto

In the period after the Manifesto was issued by Wilford Woodruff, the Saints faced a number of challenges in ensuring the survival of their community. Some of these were internal struggles, while others concerned their relationship to the larger American public. The primary challenge faced by the Mormons in the wake of the Manifesto was stopping the practice of polygamy, to ensure that no more plural marriages were contracted, either in Utah or other parts of the country. On an immediate and practical level, polygamous Mormon families presented a quandary for the Church: the Manifesto declared plainly that the Saints should not enter into any new plural marriages, but what about marriages that were contracted earlier? In the period after the Manifesto was released, there was much confusion among both LDS leaders and the general Mormon membership about the status of previously established polygamous marriages, as well as the status of the principle of plural marriage itself.⁷⁷

This confusion was due in part to the fact that different members of the community had dramatically different understandings of the Manifesto – not just its meanings and practical implications for the community, but also its status within the Church. Many of the Saints, including some LDS leaders, were clearly under the impression that the Manifesto was only meant to outlaw new plural marriages, and had no bearing on existing polygamous families. In fact, some understood the Manifesto as simply a capitulation to the national laws, and not as an abandonment of the principle of plural marriage altogether. Aside from differing ideas over the meaning of the document, it was at first unclear to many Mormons whether or not

⁷⁷ For an in-depth look at this period of Mormon history, specifically focusing on the issue of polygamy, see Hardy, *Solemn Covenant*. Hardy documents the continuation of the practice of plural marriage (including the contracting of new plural marriages) in the years after the publication of the Manifesto, as well as the shifting opinions of LDS Church leaders and members as to the status of polygamy and the Manifesto during this period. Additional insight can be found in the chapter “Interpreting Woodruff” from Van Wagoner’s *Mormon Polygamy*.

the Manifesto was considered to have revelatory status, and therefore to be a divinely inspired commandment from God. As noted by LDS historian B. Carmon Hardy: "It is clear that the Manifesto *evolved* to its present status as a revelation of God – a deference it did not originally claim."⁷⁸ Regardless, in the years following its publication, the First Presidency and other central LDS leaders began to assert more and more strongly the divinely-inspired origin of the document, and the fact that it now superseded the 1843 revelation of the principle of plural marriage. In 1904, then-President Joseph F. Smith issued another statement, known as the "Second Manifesto," which re-affirmed the declarations made in the first Manifesto about the end of the practice of polygamy in the LDS Church, making clear that Mormon individuals who did contract plural marriages could face excommunication from the Church. Eventually, faithful Mormons who recognized the spiritual authority of the current LDS leadership had to accept both the revelatory nature of the Manifesto, and its implications for the life of the community.⁷⁹

Once the status and meaning of the Manifesto had been clarified, these practical challenges gave way to a much more profound spiritual crisis that resulted from the abandonment of the principle of plural marriage. At that time, plural marriage was believed by Mormons to be foundational to the plan of salvation that had been revealed by God to their prophet, Joseph Smith. In the LDS community, polygamy was not simply a type of marriage or family arrangement; it was understood to be one of the central means by which men and women fulfilled their spiritual destinies and achieved exaltation in the afterlife. The idea of celestial – that is, eternal – marriage was deeply intertwined with the principle of plural marriage.

⁷⁸ Hardy, 150.

⁷⁹ Certainly there were members of the Mormon community that did NOT accept the Manifesto as a true revelation, nor did they ultimately recognize the spiritual authority of LDS leaders at that time; those individuals and groups will be addressed later on in this chapter.

The following passage is from an Epistle issued by the First Presidency in 1885 – just five years before the Manifesto was released:

The Lord has revealed to us by His special revelations, as clearly and positively as He ever did to any of the ancient Prophets, certain principles associated with the eternity of the marriage covenant, has given definite commands pertaining thereto, and made them obligatory upon us to carry out. He has made manifest to us those great and eternal principles which bind woman to man and man to woman, children to parents and parents to children, and has called upon us in the most emphatic and pointed manner to obey them. These glorious principles involve our dearest interests and associations in time and throughout the eternities that are to come. We are told that this is His everlasting covenant, and that it has existed from eternity; and, furthermore, that all covenants that relate only to time shall be dissolved at death and be no longer binding upon the human family. He has, moreover, told us that if we do not obey these principles we shall be damned. Believing these principles to be of God and from God, we have entered into eternal covenants with our wives under the most solemn promises and in the most sacred manner.⁸⁰

Given the emphatic nature of statements like this one, it's understandable that the LDS membership was thrown into a spiritual tailspin by the publication of the Manifesto. The renunciation of this principle raised several uncomfortable – but extremely important – questions for LDS leaders and Church members. If plural marriage was no longer valid, what did that mean for the eternal lives of the Saints? Did a non-polygamous marriage have the same status – and divine benefits – as a “celestial” marriage? What would the Mormon plan of salvation look like in the post-Manifesto world?

LDS leaders eventually resolved this crisis, not by downplaying the importance of marriage to eternal salvation, but simply by altering the vision of that marriage. As stated in a June 17, 1933 address of the First Presidency: “Celestial marriage – that is, marriage for time and eternity – and polygamous or plural marriage are not synonymous terms. Monogamous marriages for time and eternity, solemnized in our temples in accordance with the word of the Lord and the laws of

⁸⁰ James R. Clark, ed., *Messages of the First Presidency of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints 1833-1964* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft Inc., 1966), 3:9-10.

the Church, are Celestial marriages."⁸¹ Certainly the fact that such a statement was still necessary as late as the year 1933 – over forty years after the Manifesto was issued – signals the depth of the anxiety within the LDS community over the abandonment of plural marriage. LDS leaders were ultimately successful in quelling these fears, but only by promoting marriage to a single person of the opposite sex – more specifically, an official Mormon marriage ceremony conducted in a Mormon temple – as the form of marriage at the heart of the LDS plan of salvation and the key to eternal exaltation. And in the process, all of the hopes, expectations, and individual and collective energy that Mormons had exerted on behalf of the principle of plural marriage, were transferred to the tenet of celestial marriage to a single partner. As Mormon historian Jan Shipps has noted, after the dissolution of the practice of polygamy, "the importance of Mormon temples increased, and the significance to the faith of celestial marriage for time and eternity, albeit to one partner, was enhanced."⁸² The loss of plural marriage, not only as a salvific principle, but also as a central mark of Mormon difference – meant that the doctrine of celestial marriage became even more important to the formation of Mormon identity. Indeed, the significance of celestial marriage in the temple to the LDS project is confirmed in an address issued by the LDS First Presidency in October of 1942:

Amongst his earliest commands to Adam and Eve, the Lord said: 'Multiply and replenish the earth.' He has repeated that commandment in our day. He has again revealed in this, the last dispensation, the principle of the eternity of the marriage covenant. He has restored to the earth the authority for entering into that covenant, and has declared that it is the only due and proper way of joining husband and wife, and the only means by which the sacred family relationship may be carried beyond the grave and through

⁸¹ James R. Clark, Ed., *Messages of the First Presidency of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints 1833-1964*, Vol. 5 (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft Inc., 1971), 329.

⁸² Jan Shipps, "Difference and Otherness: Mormonism and the American Religious Mainstream," in *Minority Faiths and the American Protestant Mainstream*, ed. Jonathan D. Sarna (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 100. A similar sentiment is also expressed by Sarah Barringer Gordon in her interview for the PBS documentary series "The Mormons." In discussing this period of LDS history, Gordon states that "the nuclear family inherited both that superheated quality and that supportive quality that had gone into that investment in polygamy." The full text of the interview can be found at <http://www.pbs.org/mormons/interviews/gordon.html> (accessed February 10, 2014).

eternity. He has declared that this eternal relationship may be created only by the ordinances which are administered in the holy temples of the Lord, and therefore that His people should marry only in His temple in accordance with such ordinances.⁸³

This message expresses a clear vision of marriage and family that is vital to Mormon belief and culture – a vision that helped the LDS Church to maintain its distinctiveness after the loss of the principle.

Even as they struggled to resolve essential questions within their own community, the Saints also strived during this period to begin repairing their relationship with the American public. Although the Manifesto paved the way for the entrance of the Mormon community into American society, it did relatively little to reform the image of the LDS Church among non-Mormon Americans. After having been viewed as sexual criminals, and as criminals in general, for so long – indeed, some Americans viewed them in this way from their very beginnings – the Saints were then left with the gargantuan task of remaking themselves in the eyes of outsiders, as law-abiding and morally upstanding American citizens. Faced with a proliferation of negative portrayals of their Church and their community – such as those documented in the previous chapter – LDS leaders soon began to take the public image of the Church into their own hands. Mormon historians have demonstrated that during the decades following the passing of the Manifesto, LDS leaders thoroughly embraced the task of increasing their social profile and gaining a favorable public identity in America as one of their primary objectives, doing everything possible to get their fellow Saints to join the program. They increasingly celebrated good publicity that the Church received among outsiders, and more importantly, they actively worked to make their own voices heard in American society.

⁸³ James R. Clark, ed., *Messages of the First Presidency of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints 1833-1964* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft Inc., 1975), 6:177.

In *A Kingdom Transformed: Themes in the Development of Mormonism*, Gordon and Gary Shepherd undertake an analysis of the shifting attitudes and topical areas of concentration in the semi-annual Mormon meetings known as General Conference. Remarking on the post-Manifesto period, they note: "Beginning in the transition period of 1890-1919, and especially in the subsequent generation of 1920-1949, conference speakers show a much greater concern for Mormonism's social status and respectability vis-á-vis public opinion...."⁸⁴ Likewise, Thomas G. Alexander states in his work *Mormonism in Transition: A History of the Latter-day Saints 1890-1930*: "After Joseph F. Smith became president in 1901, the church became increasingly active in defending itself in the national media. In part this came about because, as John R. Winder put it, the leadership concluded that it was 'better to represent ourselves than be misrepresented by our opponents.'"⁸⁵ The Saints also took their public image into their own hands by making substantial changes in the operation of their community. In order to reduce tension with outsiders and ensure that Utah would be able to merge more easily with the rest of the nation, LDS leaders moved away from both communitarian economic endeavors and outspoken political participation.⁸⁶ Along with the abandonment of the practice of polygamy, these changes did allow the Mormon community to find a place in the larger nation, and eventually to achieve a considerable degree of integration with American society.

Although it is true that many aspects of the Mormon public image needed to be reformed in the wake of the extreme strife between the Saints and other Americans in the early history of the Church, perhaps the most damaged aspect of LDS Church identity was its perceived vision of marriage, family life, and sexuality.

⁸⁴ Gordon Shepherd and Gary Shepherd, *A Kingdom Transformed: Themes in the Development of Mormonism* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1984), 84.

⁸⁵ Thomas G. Alexander, *Mormonism in Transition: A History of the Latter-day Saints, 1890-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996), 246.

⁸⁶ For an in-depth discussion of this process of change, see Yorgason, *Transformation*.

While non-Mormon Americans began to hesitantly accept the Saints as fellow citizens in the early twentieth century, the remaining association of Mormonism with polygamy, one of the “twin relics of barbarism,” ensured that the Mormons continued to be marked as transgressors of sexual boundaries and threats to the traditional American family structure. In their efforts to counter outsiders’ negative perceptions of Mormon marriages, the LDS community not only repudiated the practice of polygamy, but also sought to reshape their families to look as much like those outside the fold as possible. Mormons strongly embraced the societal norms of Victorian America, including an emphasis on strictly-defined gender roles and women’s domestic roles. As historian Klaus Hansen notes, having “been branded sexual outcasts, the Saints may well have felt that they had to ‘out-Victorian’ the Victorians in order to become respectable members of American society.”⁸⁷ These Victorian ideals became thoroughly entrenched in the Mormon worldview, and have continued to influence LDS attitudes related to gender and family even in the present era. However, despite the Saints’ efforts to reform their identity with regard to these matters, outsiders persisted in branding them as sexual outsiders, and their association with plural marriage continues to this day.

The Status of Plural Marriage

In the period following the Manifesto, the Saints were successful both in re-envisioning celestial marriage as the centerpiece of their plan of salvation, and ultimately in integrating with the larger American society. However, the polygamous past of the LDS Church still haunts it in a number of profound ways. The fact is that there remains a certain amount of confusion – both among Mormons themselves and among outsiders – about the current status of plural marriage in the LDS Church.

⁸⁷ Klaus J. Hansen, “Mormon Sexuality and American Culture,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 10/2 (1976): 53.

Not the status of the practice – it is clearly forbidden in LDS communities, and is an offense punishable by excommunication from the Church – but the status of the *doctrine* itself. To this day, there has been sporadic but ever re-appearing discussion in Mormon circles as well as non-Mormon ones – especially among contemporary detractors of Mormonism – as to the question of whether the doctrine of plural marriage has really been permanently forsaken by the LDS Church, or if this practice could possibly be reinstated at some point. And indeed, there is reasoning behind these questions. As recently as 1966, Bruce R. McConkie, a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, included the following statement regarding plural marriage in his comprehensive work *Mormon Doctrine*: “Obviously the holy practice will commence again after the Second Coming of the Son of Man and the ushering in of the millennium.”⁸⁸ While not an official LDS Church publication, *Mormon Doctrine* has been widely quoted and used as a reference by members of the Mormon community for decades, and portions of it have been employed in official church works. During that same time period, John J. Stewart, Mormon historian and publications editor at Utah State University, declared: “The church has never, and certainly will never, renounce this doctrine. The revelation on plural marriage is still an integral part of LDS scripture, and always will be.”⁸⁹ Later on, McConkie further explains that “though forced by evil circumstances to suspend its practice here upon earth,” the Mormon Church can never truly repudiate this doctrine, because “plural marriage is the patriarchal order of marriage lived by God and others who reign in the Celestial Kingdom.”⁹⁰

⁸⁸ Bruce McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 2nd ed. (Bookcraft: Salt Lake City, 1966), 578.

⁸⁹ John J. Stewart, *Brigham Young and His Wives* (Salt Lake City: Mercury Publishing Co., 1961), 14.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 41.

As acknowledged by Stewart's statement that the Mormon Church cannot repudiate the doctrine of plural marriage, this doctrine is still technically in place in Mormon scripture. Section 132 of the Doctrine and Covenants, which was recorded in July of 1843, includes the revelation that made way for the practice of polygamy among the Saints. Verses 61-62 of this section state:

And again, as pertaining to the law of the priesthood—if any man espouse a virgin, and desire to espouse another, and the first give her consent, and if he espouse the second, and they are virgins, and have vowed to no other man, then is he justified; he cannot commit adultery for they are given unto him; for he cannot commit adultery with that that belongeth unto him and to no one else.

And if he have ten virgins given unto him by this law, he cannot commit adultery, for they belong to him, and they are given unto him; therefore is he justified.⁹¹

Despite the addition of the First – and Second – Manifesto, which seemingly supplant this earlier revelation, the fact remains that Section 132 has not been removed from the Doctrine and Covenants or edited to this day. The continued presence of this document in the LDS scriptural canon certainly sends mixed signals, and has been the subject of much discussion by individuals and groups both inside and outside of the Church. In particular, critics of Mormonism have cited the failure of LDS leaders to remove Section 132 as proof that the LDS Church still promotes polygamy, or that its leaders intend to reinstitute this practice at some point in the future; such criticism will be addressed in the final section of this chapter.

The uncertainty caused by these conflicting doctrinal messages is exacerbated by a lack of recent public commentary by LDS leaders on the subject of plural marriage, outside of statements confirming that the practice was abandoned by the Church in 1890 with the issuing of Woodruff's Manifesto, and that polygamy is no longer practiced by the Saints today. Writing in 1992, Hardy notes: "[Contemporary] references to polygamy are conspicuous by their absence. Discussion of the

⁹¹ This scriptural passage can be accessed on the official LDS Church website: <https://www.lds.org/scriptures/dc-testament/dc/132?lang=eng> (accessed February 10, 2014).

principle—except to say God directed a small number of church members to enter it in the past, a commandment since suspended—is carefully avoided”⁹² The last two decades have seen a similar avoidance of this topic in official Mormon public discourse. Since the statements by McConkie and Stewart, both published in the 1960s, discussion of the status of polygamy in LDS doctrine has essentially disappeared from speeches and documents published by LDS leaders and those officially connected to the Church. This seems to be a deliberate move on the part of the Church leadership, almost certainly as a means of steering the attention of both outsiders and the Saints themselves away from this topic in connection to Mormonism. As will be addressed in the second part of this chapter, LDS silence on this matter has not succeeded in quelling outside interest in Mormon polygamy. However, it has created a contemporary situation in which ordinary Mormons are left to themselves to make conclusions about the theological status and importance of plural marriage, especially as it pertains to their eternal lives.

Some Saints believe that it is a principle that persists in the Celestial Kingdom (but *only* in the Celestial Kingdom), and certain individuals within Mormon communities have even acted on this belief in concrete ways. “Mormon Matters” is a blog and podcast containing informal discussion on a number of topics related to contemporary Mormon culture. In a 2009 post, one LDS contributor shares several conversations he has had with fellow Mormons regarding the issue of plural marriage, and more specifically its practice in the heavenly realm. He relates the story of a divorced Mormon woman with children who was experiencing financial problems, and was subsequently approached by a married couple with whom she was close friends; they “had come to her with an offer of polygamous marriage in

⁹² Hardy, 338.

the next life, if she wanted it.”⁹³ The couple assured her that this proposal came with no expectation of physical intimacy in this life, although they did offer her some financial support. The post also discusses the contributor’s friend, whose girlfriend had died while he was serving a mission for the LDS Church.⁹⁴ This friend “felt that he wanted to marry this girl in the life to come so that he could offer her the highest blessings of the Celestial Kingdom,” and he “would expect any future wife to understand and accept this before they were married.”⁹⁵ These examples are striking in that they represent a seeming confidence on the part of those proposing heavenly plural marriage that this was an appropriate – and in fact, righteous – course of action to take.

Similar ideas are expressed in a post from *Ask Mormon Girl*, which is the popular blog of LDS author Joanna Brooks. In the post – titled “I’m pretty sure Mormons still believe in polygamy. Am I wrong?” – Brooks reprints a letter she received from an LDS woman, recounting the woman’s concerns surrounding a discussion in a weekly meeting of her local chapter of the Relief Society. The woman reports that during a discussion on exaltation in the afterlife, her Relief Society President stated that “those of us who have righteous husbands need to be prepared in the Celestial Kingdom for him to take on other wives.”⁹⁶ When the letter-writer brings this issue up with her husband, he tells her that he would prefer to be monogamous with her in the afterlife, but that he would be willing to take on more wives if it was commanded of him by God. The woman tells Brooks that these

⁹³ Aaron R., “Poly-What?, or, a Contemporary View of LDS Plural Marriage,” *Mormon Matters*, July 12, 2009. <http://mormonmatters.org/2009/07/12/polly-who-or-a-contemporary-view-of-modern-lds-plural-marriage/> (accessed January 18, 2013).

⁹⁴ In the LDS Church, it is common for young men (and some young women) to complete two years of missionary service; some do so between high school and college.

⁹⁵ Aaron R.

⁹⁶ Joanna Brooks, “I’m pretty sure Mormons still believe in polygamy. Am I wrong?,” *Ask Mormon Girl*, January 22, 2012, accessed January 18, 2013, <http://askmormongirl.wordpress.com/2012/01/22/im-pretty-sure-mormons-still-believe-in-polygamy-am-i-wrong/>.

encounters have resulted in a great deal of anxiety and have caused her to question both her faith and her marriage; it is clear that these concerns are not an isolated instance within the LDS community. Peggy Fletcher Stack reports on her interview with Brigham Young University political science professor Valerie Hudson in a 2011 *Salt Lake Tribune* article entitled "Are Mormons through with polygamy?": "Hudson knows Mormon men afflicted with what she calls 'celestial lust.' They spend time figuring out how many wives they will have in the next life and LDS women who say they don't want to go to heaven or be married in the temple because of the possibility of polygamy."⁹⁷ These accounts reveal just how deeply rooted these ideas are within the Mormon population, as well as some of the complicated feelings that they engender.

In her blog post, Brooks also includes another letter sent to her, in which the writer declares: "From my perspective, the LDS faith still practices polygamy, not overtly but by permitting men to be sealed to more than one woman."⁹⁸ Indeed, aside from the maintenance of section 132 in the Doctrine and Covenants, LDS policies regarding the practice of temple sealing do seem to be a major cause of remaining uncertainty among the faithful as to the place of plural marriage in the Church. The official policies of the Church regarding the regulations for temple sealings can be found in Volume 1 of the *Church Handbook of Instructions*, now known officially as *Handbook 1: Stake Presidents and Bishops*, which is a document published by the LDS Church in order to aid local leaders in their administrative roles in the Church. While Volume 2 of this guide, *Handbook 2: Church Administration*, was recently made available publicly through the lds.org website, the first volume is distributed only to those holding an official leadership position in the Church (as

⁹⁷ Peggy Fletcher Stack, "Are Mormons through with polygamy?," *Salt Lake Tribune* (August 23, 2011).

⁹⁸ Brooks.

indicated by its title), and is not officially available to the Church membership or to non-Mormons. Regardless, many Mormons – as well as some critics of the LDS Church – are aware of the policy referenced in the letter above; namely, that LDS men are permitted to be sealed to more than one woman. To be clear, a man can only be married to one woman at a time while on Earth. However, sealings are considered to also link two individuals for all eternity, and it is the eternal bonds which are at issue here.

If a woman is married and sealed to a man in an LDS temple, but her husband dies, and she wants to then be remarried and sealed to another man, she must first request a cancellation of her sealing to the first man. However, if a temple-married-and-sealed man's first wife dies, he does not have to cancel that first sealing before being sealed to another woman. In other words, it is understood that he will remain sealed to both women in the next life – they will both be his eternal wives in the Celestial Kingdom. This policy seems to be confirmed by Mormon Apostle Dallin Oaks in a speech made in 2002, later published as an article in the LDS Church magazine the *Ensign*. In discussing how his life plans have changed, Oaks notes: "When I was 66, my wife June died of cancer. Two years later I married Kristen McMains, the eternal companion who now stands at my side."⁹⁹ It is worth noting that a recent change to *Handbook 1* now allows a Mormon woman to be sealed to all of the men she was married to in life, but only "by proxy" after all parties are deceased.¹⁰⁰ Although no official announcement was made about this change, some have speculated that it was made not to allow polyandry (marriage between one woman in several men) in the next life, but to ensure that the deceased

⁹⁹ Dallin H. Oaks, "Timing," *Ensign*, October 2003, accessed February 8, 2013, <http://www.lds.org/ensign/2003/10/timing>.

¹⁰⁰ In LDS doctrine and practice, faithful members can perform temple ordinances such as baptism and sealing "by proxy" for the dead; according the LDS policy, the deceased are free to either accept or reject these ordinances.

woman would be able to choose which husband she would prefer to remain eternally married to in the afterlife.¹⁰¹ With such policies in place, but a lack of public acknowledgement and clarification regarding their meaning and intentions on the part of LDS leadership, it is hardly surprising that some Saints would be doubtful as to the status of polygamy in LDS doctrine.

Aside from this belief in the continued practice of polygamy in the afterlife, some Mormons also feel that they must be mentally and spiritually prepared for the potential – or even inevitable – return of plural marriage to the physical realm. Hardy discusses this latter perspective in the conclusion to his work on Mormon polygamy and the dissolution of its practice:

As with communitarian economics, which, although doctrinally respected, slumbers in incubation, plural marriage is coated with the chrysalis of a spiritual ideal and laid away for rebirth in a world beyond time. The modern Latter-day Saint, relieved of responsibility for living it, need only believe in his heart that he will be equal to the task when, once again, God requires it of the faithful.¹⁰²

Likewise, scholar Janet Bennion argues that "...many mainstream Mormons still believe plural marriage to be a law of the highest degree of heaven, simply in suspension until the millennium."¹⁰³ These passages seem to suggest that this issue has been straightened out, and that contemporary Mormons have contentedly put polygamy on a shelf for another time, far beyond their own lives. But the anxieties documented in the letters and conversations referenced above demonstrate that questions in the LDS community surrounding plural marriage are far from resolved. However individual Saints may feel about the principle of plural marriage, it is apparent that its status in LDS Church doctrine is still not clearly defined, at least in

¹⁰¹ See the wikipedia entry "Mormonism and Polygamy" for the Handbook citation and discussion of this subject:
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mormonism_and_polygamy#Modern_plural_marriage_theory_within_the_LDS_Church (accessed February 8, 2013).

¹⁰² Hardy, 349.

¹⁰³ Janet Bennion, *Women of Principle: Female Networking in Contemporary Mormon Polygyny* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1998), 20.

the minds of many members. This confusion within Mormon culture over the station of the principle contributes to persisting discomfort among the Saints over the topics of marriage and sexuality.¹⁰⁴ It also provides fodder for outsiders that are critical of the Church, especially those that take issue with the Church's beliefs about marriage.

Contemporary Reminders of Polygamy

Just as the members of the LDS Church continue to struggle with the place of the principle in their doctrine and their eternal plans, outsiders to this community continue to associate the Mormons with plural marriage, even though more than one hundred years have passed since its practice was officially abandoned. In large part, this enduring correlation is due to a simple lack of understanding about Mormonism on the part of many Americans. Especially outside of the southwest, a significant percentage of Americans know very little (if anything) about Mormonism or its history; some may even have *exclusively* heard about the Church in stories or jokes related to plural marriage. Only fourteen percent of the Americans surveyed in a 2011 poll correctly acknowledged that the Latter-day Saints Church banned the practice of plural marriage a long time ago and that current members of the LDS Church no longer participate in this practice. The rest of those surveyed – a massive eighty-six percent – either incorrectly believe that Mormons still practice polygamy, or are unsure as to the relationship between Mormonism and plural marriage.¹⁰⁵ No poll asking this specific question has been conducted since that time, so it is not clear whether Mitt Romney's presidential campaign – and the greater visibility of the

¹⁰⁴ Some suggest that polygamy contributes to this discomfort in other ways as well. For example, William Gardiner draws on his experiences counseling and conversing with other Saints to argue that individual and collective repression of the LDS polygamous past contributes to pervading feelings of shame surrounding sexuality, and even sexual dysfunction, in the LDS community ("Shadow Influences of Plural Marriage on Sexuality Within the Contemporary Mormon Experience," accessed March 10, 2014, <http://www.i4m.com/think/polygamy/mormon-polygamy.htm>). Notably, Gardiner does not address LDS attitudes surrounding the issue of homosexuality.

¹⁰⁵ Peggy Fletcher Stack, "Poll: Most Still Unsure About Mormons and Polygamy," *The Salt Lake Tribune* (September 12, 2011).

LDS Church in America that resulted from it – has made a significant difference in American understandings of the Mormon Church’s connection with polygamy. However, it is worth noting the recent finding of the Pew Research Center’s Forum on Religion & Public Life that the Romney campaign made little headway in educating Americans about the LDS faith: “Eight-in-ten Americans (82%) say they learned little or nothing about the Mormon religion during the presidential campaign, according to a new Pew Research Center poll.”¹⁰⁶ This being the case, it seems unlikely that outsiders’ perceptions of the status of polygamy in the LDS Church have changed significantly in the last few years.

The persistence of the Mormon Church’s association with this practice is also a result of the contemporary American fascination with polygamy, and a number of recent reminders of its history that have proved irritating and embarrassing to the leaders of the LDS Church and many of its members. Chief among these is the frequent appearance in the news of individuals and groups that practice plural marriage for religious reasons, and claim Joseph Smith and the first Mormons among their spiritual ancestors. Commonly identified as “fundamentalist Mormons” (much to the consternation of LDS leaders, who would prefer that these groups not be in any way associated with Mormonism), many of these polygamists belong to groups that split from the Latter-day Saints Church in the wake of the Manifesto’s publication. Believing that the Manifesto was not a true revelation, and was simply a politically-expedient act of capitulation to the United States government, these early Mormons declared that Joseph Smith’s 1843 revelation instituting polygamy as a part of God’s plan of salvation for humanity was still firmly in place. As a result, some chose to leave the LDS Church and begin their own sects, continuing the practice of

¹⁰⁶ Pew Research Religion & Public Life Project, “Americans Learned Little About the Mormon Faith, But Some Attitudes Have Softened,” December 14, 2012, *Pew Research Center*, accessed February 10, 2014, <http://www.pewforum.org/2012/12/14/attitudes-toward-mormon-faith/>.

polygamy. Many of these groups are still in existence today, some living in closed-off societies in remote parts of Arizona, Utah, and Texas. Despite their relatively small numbers and their secrecy, such groups and individuals are frequently featured in national news outlets, as well as in documentaries and popular literature.¹⁰⁷

Particularly in the last few years, a number of events have brought these fundamentalists to the forefront of national attention. One such event was the kidnapping of Elizabeth Smart, an LDS girl from Utah, by Bryan David Mitchell, a former Mormon man who forced her to become his plural “wife.” Mitchell justified his actions through his religious beliefs, saying that he had received revelations from God. During his competency hearing to stand trial for the kidnapping, Brigham Young University professor Daniel Petersen testified that Mitchell’s writings made reference to both mainstream and fundamentalist Mormon beliefs, and that his beliefs fall within the scope of those espoused by groups that have broken away from the LDS Church.¹⁰⁸ Another such event was the arrest of Warren Jeffs, the prophet/leader of one of the most prominent fundamentalist Mormon groups, the Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints or FLDS; he was subsequently charged with aiding in the rape of a minor, for allegedly arranging unlawful marriages between older men and underage girls. A few months later an FLDS compound in Texas was raided, and many of the children living there were taken under custody by Child Protective Services, resulting in a huge media circus.¹⁰⁹ In the weeks that followed, national and international news outlets devoted extensive coverage to the

¹⁰⁷ For more in-depth information on Fundamentalist Mormon communities, beliefs, and culture, see Cardell Jacobsen and Lara Burton, eds., *Modern Polygamy in the United States: Historical, Cultural, and Legal Issues* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, Inc., 2011).

¹⁰⁸ Pamela Manson, “BYU prof says ‘there’s a logic’ to Mitchell’s writings: Stepdaughter says accused was interested in hypnosis, mind control and survivalism,” *Salt Lake Tribune*, December 1, 2009.

¹⁰⁹ Ben Winslow, “167 kids taken in Texas raid: Police seeking man in child-bride marriage,” *Deseret News*, April 5, 2008.

raid and to the FLDS themselves, broadcasting image after image of FLDS women in the nineteenth-century-style garb that is commonly worn by women in this sect.

What became clear in the wake of all of these events is the contemporary American fascination with plural marriage and polygamous individuals – many Americans cannot seem to hear enough about them. Their stories are recounted not only on the nightly news, but also in magazines of many varieties, in tell-all books by women who have grown up in these sects and subsequently escaped them, in documentary features and television series, and in made-for-TV movies that feature fictionalized portraits of polygamous women and families. Each new scandal and news story is a fresh reminder of the LDS polygamous past, and this association is compounded by the reality that many Americans do not even know enough about Mormonism to distinguish between fundamentalists and the mainstream LDS Church. Despite frequent protestations on the part of the LDS leadership that these individuals and groups today have no connection with the LDS Church, there remains widespread confusion about this issue in the American public. In fact, in the wake of the Texas raid, the LDS Church itself conducted a nationwide survey to determine whether Americans distinguish between the two groups. The survey revealed that thirty-six percent of Americans erroneously believe the fundamentalist group is a part of the LDS Church, while another twenty-nine percent are not sure if there is a connection between the two.¹¹⁰ If these numbers are accurate, it means that as much as two thirds of the American public is associating the beliefs and actions of the fundamentalist communities with those of the Latter-day Saints Church.

The continuing correlation between Mormons and polygamy in the minds of Americans has been further strengthened by certain elements of recent popular culture that have brought Mormon polygamy to national attention. In the realm of

¹¹⁰ KSL, "LDS Church distinguishing itself from FLDS group," *KSL*, June 26th, 2008, accessed February 10, 2014, <http://www.ksl.com/?nid=148&sid=3624799>.

print media, journalist Jon Krakauer's bestselling book *Under the Banner of Heaven: The Story of a Violent Faith* blurs the lines between mainstream and fundamentalist Mormons by grounding the sexual habits – and violent tendencies – of contemporary polygamists in early Mormon traditions and history. The front cover of the 2004 edition of this work references the crime committed by members of a polygamous sect that is at the center of Krakauer's narrative, proclaiming: "On July 24, 1984, a woman and her infant daughter were murdered by two brothers who believed they were ordered to kill by God. The roots of their crime lie deep in the history of an American religion practiced by millions...."¹¹¹

In the first chapter of his book, Krakauer discusses the apparent uneasiness and irritation that modern-day polygamous Mormon sects engender in members of the Latter-day Saints Church:

There are more than thirty thousand FLDS polygamists living in Canada, Mexico, and throughout the American West. Some experts estimate there may be as many as one hundred thousand. Even this larger number amounts to less than 1 percent of the membership in the LDS Church worldwide, but all the same, leaders of the mainstream church are extremely discomfited by these legions of polygamous brethren. Mormon authorities treat the fundamentalists as they would a crazy uncle – they try to keep the 'polygs' hidden in the attic, safely out of sight, but the fundamentalists always seem to be sneaking out to appear in public at inopportune moments to create unsavory scenes, embarrassing the entire LDS clan.¹¹²

The image Krakauer uses to describe the relationship between the mainstream LDS Church and the polygamous sects – that of a family and its "crazy uncle" – highlights the fact that the latter branches from the former, and emphasizes the close ties between the two, suggesting that at some level the contemporary LDS Church leadership continues to feel responsible for the actions of fundamentalist Mormons (or at least feel that they must respond to those actions). Krakauer's project is to bring to light not only the nature of these polygamous sects, but also their roots in

¹¹¹ Jon Krakauer, *Under the Banner of Heaven: The Story of a Violent Faith* (New York: Anchor, 2004).

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 5.

the history and theology of Mormonism. Although the fundamentalists are the central topic of his work, he devotes a large part of his narrative to a discussion of both polygamy and violence in the early years Latter-day Saints Church. By alternating between a discussion of the sexual lives and violent acts of contemporary fundamentalists and those of early Saints, he cements the connection between the two.

In the realm of American television, several recent programs have focused on the contemporary practice of polygamy by fundamentalist Mormons. The popular fictional HBO network television show *Big Love* centers on the story of a polygamous family living in Salt Lake City. While several members of the family have ties to a fundamentalist Mormon group, they live in normal society and portray themselves to outsiders as members of the mainstream LDS Church (at least until staging a very public “coming out” as a polygamous family). One of the plotlines in the show’s third season centers on the attempts of Bill, the patriarch of this polygamous family, to acquire a century-old LDS Church document which he felt would prove that LDS leaders during the era of the Manifesto never lost faith in the legitimacy of the original revelation instituting the practice of plural marriage. His ultimate goal in obtaining these documents was to restore the practice of polygamy to the mainstream LDS Church, where - *he believed* - it had always belonged.¹¹³

In 2010, the TLC network introduced a reality television show entitled “Sister Wives,” which documents the real-life story of a polygamous family in Utah that, again, live in normal society; the show has done well for the network, and is now in its fourth season. The patriarch of this family, Kody Brown, briefly clarifies in the first episode that his church is an off-shoot of early Mormonism, and that he and his

¹¹³ A detailed synopsis of the *Big Love* episode referenced here, entitled “Fight or Flight,” can be found at the Internet Movie Database website: <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1075442/synopsis> (accessed January 18, 2013).

family don't belong to the mainstream LDS Church. Outside of this mention, he and the other family members rarely discuss their church or religious beliefs, except for those beliefs relating to plural marriage. However, the family's connections to Mormon history are occasionally highlighted in the show, most notably in an episode aired in December of 2012, entitled "Polygamist Pilgrimage into the Past." The episode features the family's visit to Mormon historical sites in Nauvoo, Illinois and surrounding areas, and features discussion of Joseph Smith's jailing and death at the hands of an angry mob. Toward the end of the episode, Brown reflects that the visit has made him realize the great sacrifices of others, which now allow him to live the principle of plural marriage.¹¹⁴ More recently, the Brown family has made headlines in national news through its challenge to anti-polygamy laws in the state of Utah. The lawsuit filed by the Browns prompted a U.S. District Court judge to remove at least one part of the laws that were put in place to prevent and prosecute the practice of plural marriage in Utah. Although the judge maintained the law against bigamy – legal marriage to more than one spouse – he "threw out the law's section prohibiting 'cohabitation,' saying it violates constitutional guarantees of due process and religious freedom."¹¹⁵ These actions have drawn even more attention to the Browns, and to the practice of plural marriage among many others who also share roots with the Mormon Church. Although the families in these television shows may not be officially connected to the LDS Church, the fact remains that media images like these further solidify the connection between Mormonism and polygamy in the minds of many Americans. They reaffirm the historical connection between the two, and more importantly, they guarantee the continued exposure of the American public

¹¹⁴ A listing for this episode can be found at the TV Guide website: <http://www.tvguide.com/tvshows/sister-wives-2012/episode-7-season-4/polygamist-pilgrimage-into-the-past/306751> (accessed January 18, 2013).

¹¹⁵ Bill Mears, "Judge strikes down part of Utah polygamy law in 'Sister Wives' case," *CNN Justice*, December 16, 2013, accessed February 10, 2014, <http://www.cnn.com/2013/12/14/justice/utah-polygamy-law/>.

to polygamy – and specifically, polygamy that originated with Joseph Smith. As a result, they frustrate the attempts of LDS leaders to distance their community from this practice.

These same effects are also achieved by the work of certain individuals and organizations that seek to undermine the LDS Church. Beginning in the 1960s, a number of groups have arisen – mostly under the leadership of evangelical Christians, some of whom are former members of the LDS Church – that were founded with the express purpose of convincing others of the errors of Mormonism, and often also with the intent of guiding Mormons and potential Mormon converts away from the LDS Church and instead toward “true” Christianity.¹¹⁶ Among the most well-known of these groups are the Utah Lighthouse Ministry, the Christian Research Institute, Saints Alive, and the Mormonism Research Ministry. Although it is hard to say exactly how much impact these groups have had among the larger public, they certainly do hold some influence, especially within Evangelical Christian circles. As noted by scholar Massimo Introvigne: “Although the modern Evangelical counter-Mormon movement is not as large as it claims to be, it is also not totally insignificant, and its literature enjoys a large circulation.”¹¹⁷ While some of these groups, often labelled “anti-Mormons” by those within the LDS community, seem to deliberately spread misinformation about the Mormon Church, others are content simply to “expose” or point out aspects of Mormonism that they feel make the Church heretical or otherwise worthy of scorn – especially any theological doctrines that set the LDS Church apart from other Christians.

¹¹⁶ For a discussion of the history of these groups, including the differences between older and newer strains of criticism against the LDS Church, see Massimo Introvigne, “The Devil Makers: Contemporary Evangelical Fundamentalist Anti-Mormonism,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 27, no. 1 (Spring 1994): 153-170. Introvigne especially focuses on a particularly hostile strain of Mormon critics that he and others refer to as “New Age Anti-Mormons” – individuals and groups that make a point of connecting the LDS Church to the Devil and Satanic influence.

¹¹⁷ Introvigne, 168.

Polygamy is certainly among the issues highlighted by these groups – in fact, some discuss it at great length in the literature they have made available – precisely because plural marriage is not only a mark of LDS theological difference and deviance from traditional family norms, but also a topic that is clearly embarrassing to Mormon leaders and to many of the Saints. Thus it is seen as an easy point of attack, and one that can be particularly damaging to the reputation of the Mormon Church. Aside from numerous tracts cataloguing the many wives of Joseph Smith and other early LDS leaders,¹¹⁸ Mormon critics have particularly focused in on the doctrinal confusion regarding polygamy discussed previously in this chapter, such as the failure to remove Section 132 from the Doctrine & Covenants. For example, the website of the Mormonism Research Ministries contains an article entitled “The Polygamy Dilemma – Is Plural Marriage a Dead Issue in Mormonism?” that highlights the contradiction between the LDS Church’s current policy against the practice of plural marriage and the continued existence of that document among its sacred texts. A section called “Polygamy Will Commence Again?” asserts that if polygamy again becomes legal in the United States, the LDS Church “will certainly have a difficult time denouncing it since Doctrine and Covenants section 132 still encourages polygamous relationships.”¹¹⁹ Treatises like this not only draw attention to the Mormon Church’s history with plural marriage, but also suggest the possibility – perhaps even the inevitability – that the Church will again embrace this practice in the future.

Critics of Mormonism have also commented on the LDS Church policy that allows Mormon men to be sealed to more than one woman, and the heavenly

¹¹⁸ For one example, see Issue 97 of the Utah Lighthouse Ministry’s *Salt Lake City Messenger* newsletter, which contains several entries discussing Joseph Smith’s plural marriages, including “Joseph Smith and Polygamy,” “Number of Wives,” and “Teen Brides and Married Women.” The newsletter can be accessed at <http://www.utlm.org/newsletters/no97.htm> (accessed February 10, 2014).

¹¹⁹ Bill McKeever, “The Polygamy Dilemma - Is Plural Marriage a Dead Issue in Mormonism?,” *Mormonism Research Ministries*, <http://www.mrm.org/polygamy> (accessed February 10, 2014).

polygamy it implies. One such example comes from Hank Hanegraaff's "Hank Speaks Out" column on the Christian Research Institute website:

"The Mormon church is well known for its equivocations. The new and everlasting covenant of plural marriage is perhaps the best example of Mormon equivocation... By relegating polygamy to the eternal realm Mormon leaders managed to comply externally with societal norms while still maintaining an eschatological basis for the subjugation of women. Such spiritual sanctioning of polygamy was not only an affront to the value and dignity of women, but stands in direct opposition to Jesus' teaching that at the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage."¹²⁰

This passage accuses the LDS Church on several fronts, including distortion of the truth, misogyny, and going against the teachings of Jesus Christ, while also declaring that the LDS policy of allowing multiple sealings makes contemporary Mormons just as much polygamists as their spiritual ancestors, albeit in a different way.

In particular, the Utah Lighthouse Ministry has devoted a number of issues of its newsletter to the topic of polygamy, and has analyzed every detail of this practice in Mormon history and doctrine. One point emphasized by this and other such organizations is the suggestion in Section 132 that polygamy cannot be separated from the doctrine of celestial marriage, and is actually a mandatory part of the Mormon plan of salvation:

When Joseph Smith introduced his doctrine of eternal marriage it was directly tied to plural marriage. In the first verse of Doctrine and Covenants Section 132 we read that the revelation was given to Smith in answer to his prayer regarding David and Solomon's plural wives. Verse six goes on to state that 'as pertaining to the new and everlasting covenant, it was instituted for the fulness of my glory; and he that receiveth a fulness thereof **must** and shall abide the law, or he shall be **damned**, saith the Lord God.'... In fact, the very reason there are so many polygamist splinter groups today is due to followers of Joseph Smith taking his revelation seriously—live polygamy or be damned.¹²¹

¹²⁰ Hank Hanegraaff, "Mormonism and Polygamy," *Christian Research Institute*, accessed February 10, 2014, http://www.equip.org/hank_speaks_out/mormonism-and-polygamy/.

¹²¹ Utah Lighthouse Ministry, "Saintly Scissors: The Cutting Away of Unwanted Revelation," *Salt Lake City Messenger* No. 110 (May 2008), accessed February 10, 2014, <http://www.utlm.org/newsletters/no110.htm>; emphasis author's.

Arguments like this one place a spotlight on the very subjects that the LDS leadership has tried to downplay or avoid discussing, and echo some of the same concerns raised by the Mormon past and present regarding plural marriage and its status in LDS Church doctrine. More than anything, they continue to fuel discussions about Mormon polygamy among the non-Mormon American public. Although the reach of these Mormon critics is certainly limited, it is likely that their antagonistic discourses about the LDS Church – including those about Mormon history and doctrine related to plural marriage – have had some influence on Americans' perceptions about LDS beliefs and practices, especially in evangelical and other conservative Christian circles.

Summary

While the Saints have gained a positive public image in many respects in American life, they have not succeeded in disentangling their Church from the legacy of plural marriage – a fact made clear by the previously-mentioned surveys of the American public. The persistent association of Mormonism and polygamy, whether in popular media or in “anti-Mormon” discourse, ensures that the LDS Church remains in a defensive position when it comes to the topics of marriage and family values. This continuing need to prove LDS adherence to the ideals of the nuclear family and non-deviant sexual relationships has exerted a profound influence both on recent efforts of the LDS leadership to reshape the Church’s public image in American society, and on LDS responses to sexual difference within their own membership.

CHAPTER 4

LET'S GET POLITICAL

As discussed in previous chapters, the practice of polygamy was a primary source of conflict between the Saints and non-Mormons in the early history of the LDS Church. However, problems were also caused by the degree to which the Church impacted the political decisions and economic affairs of its members in its initial years. By all accounts, the LDS Church was inextricably entangled with the economic and political lives of its members, even forming its own political party known as the "People's Party." This strong influence was viewed as both unnatural and threatening by outsiders, fueling hostility against the Saints. As noted by scholar Ethan Yorgason, one of the frequent criticisms against the LDS Church made by non-Mormons during this period was "that the LDS Church overstepped its authority – that it acted as a religion ought not to. They insisted that the church should not influence members politically or economically, other than through inculcating general Christian values. Churches were to have no direct role in politics or economics."¹²² The Mormon community was seen by outsiders as a dangerous voting bloc with the potential to powerfully impact both local and national elections. The issue of political participation thus became one of the sticking points in the LDS Church's fight for survival and integration into the larger American population.¹²³

Certainly the Saints abandoning plural marriage was a major factor in allowing Utah to gain statehood, but the Mormons also made other changes to ensure they would be able to merge more easily with the nation. In particular, they retreated in a marked way from the political sphere, disbanding the People's Party and prevailing upon Church members to involve themselves with other political

¹²² Yorgason, *Transformation*, 131-2.

¹²³ For a summary of Mormon political participation during this period and the conflicts this caused with non-Mormons, see pp. 50-53 of Arrington and Bitton, *The Mormon Experience*.

parties. The Democratic Party had long taken a more favorable stance toward the Mormons than the Republicans, so the majority of the Saints flocked to that party. However, LDS leaders were so concerned about continued perceptions of a Mormon voting bloc, that some members were even encouraged to join the Republican Party instead.¹²⁴ These actions show the extent to which Mormon officials wanted to stay off the political radar in the wake of the troubles their Church had experienced, and the level of anxiety among the LDS leadership about the potential for more accusations.

Mormon avoidance of direct political engagement remained the norm for most of the twentieth century. However, this changed dramatically in the late nineteen seventies, when LDS Church leaders carried out a systematic campaign to mobilize members of Mormon communities across the United States against the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), a proposed national amendment that sought to give women equal rights in America. As D. Michael Quinn notes in his book *The Mormon Hierarchy: Extensions of Power*: "Existing evidence verifies a centrally directed, locally implemented, and successful effort by the LDS church to prevent ratification" of the amendment in a numbers of states, which ultimately helped to ensure the failure of the amendment on the national level.¹²⁵ As it turned out, rather than being an anomaly, the anti-ERA campaign was just the first of several major political efforts in which Mormons have engaged in recent decades. However, these intensive efforts have not encompassed a wide range of issues and causes; instead, they have been centered on one particular issue: marriage. Beginning in the nineties and continuing into the twenty-first century, the LDS Church has placed a huge amount

¹²⁴ See Arrington and Bitton, 247.

¹²⁵ D. Michael Quinn, *The Mormon Hierarchy: Extensions of Power* (Signature Books: Salt Lake City, 1997), 384. Also see O. Kendall White, Jr., "Mormonism and the Equal Rights Amendment," *Journal of Church and State* 31, no. 2 (Spring 1989): 249-267 for a discussion of various aspects of LDS participation in the anti-ERA campaign, including the internal conflict with pro-ERA Mormons that resulted from these political efforts.

of resources, both human and economic, into state-wide and national so-called “Defense of Marriage” campaigns – namely, campaigns that seek to preserve the legal definition of marriage as being between one man and one woman, and therefore, to make certain that same-sex marriage remains illegal.

Beginning with campaigns to pass laws barring same-sex marriage in states such as Hawaii, Alaska, and Nevada, and leading up to the highly publicized 2008 Proposition 8 campaign in California and more recent referendums, Mormons have not only offered ample financial assistance and volunteer hours, but have in many instances been among the central organizers of these efforts. Prior to Proposition 8, little scholarly attention was given to Mormon participation in Defense of Marriage campaigns. One notable exception is a 2000 article published by Quinn in *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* entitled “Prelude to the National ‘Defense of Marriage’ Campaign: Civil Discrimination Against Feared or Despised Minorities.” In this article, Quinn calls attention to Mormon participation in these efforts, documenting some LDS leaders’ tactics used to persuade Church members to get involved. For example, he describes their approach of presenting the issue at hand as a matter of loyalty to the Church: “In the state-by-state campaigns for Defense of Marriage laws from the 1990s to the present, LDS officials have repeatedly instructed Mormons to regard their vote as an act of obedience to leadership, rather than an act of individual conscience.”¹²⁶ Mormon participation in the Proposition 8 campaign has been covered widely in formal news articles and informal blogs, and has received some scholarly

¹²⁶ D. Michael Quinn, “Prelude to the National ‘Defense of Marriage’ Campaign: Civil Discrimination Against Feared or Despised Minorities,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 33, no. 3 (2000): 10. Also see the response piece to Quinn’s work, Armand L. Mauss, “On ‘Defense of Marriage’: A Reply to Quinn,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 33, no. 3 (Fall 2000): 53-65. Mauss discusses the theological and normative (i.e. wanting to influence the trajectory of American society) reasons for Church leaders to get involved in the Defense of Marriage campaigns, but doesn’t suggest additional motives. Mormon engagement in these campaigns is also discussed briefly in O. Kendall White Jr. and Daryl White, “Ecclesiastical Polity and the Challenge of Homosexuality: Two Cases of Divergence within the Mormon Tradition,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 37, no. 3 (2004) in the context of discussing the hierarchical nature of the LDS Church and its influence on decision-making within the Church.

attention as well. Most notably, in 2012 LDS scholar Kaimipono David Wenger published an article in *St. John's Journal of Civil Rights and Economic Development* entitled "'The Divine Institution of Marriage': An Overview of LDS Involvement in the Proposition 8 Campaign," in which he discusses many facets of Mormon participation in this campaign, with a specific focus on the legal, political, and sociological claims made in Mormon statements about Proposition 8.¹²⁷

Articles like Quinn's and Wenger's, as well as the stories in print and digital newspapers, have thoroughly addressed the nature of LDS engagement with and contributions to Defense of Marriage campaigns. In documenting this involvement, some of these scholars and journalists have acknowledged the great irony of a group of Americans who in its early history was harshly persecuted through legal means for its non-traditional sexual behavior and marriage ideals, and yet is now actively pursuing legal means of denying another group of Americans the very rights to non-traditional marriage that the LDS Church sought in its early history. Many individuals – both within and outside the church – cannot understand this seeming hypocrisy. And yet, few have offered concrete reasons to try to explain this irony, or have provided a significant analysis of this issue.

In fact, previous scholarship on recent Mormon political activity has largely failed to address the fundamental questions raised by the LDS Church's abrupt shift toward a much higher level of political engagement: Why would a Church that for almost a century has kept as far a remove as possible from the political arena – refusing not only to participate in partisan politics but even to take a stance on most political issues – all of a sudden throw its hat so decisively into the ring in these specific campaigns? What is it about the issues of defining marriage and of sexuality

¹²⁷ Kaimipono David Wenger, "'The Divine Institution of Marriage': An Overview of LDS Involvement in the Proposition 8 Campaign," *St. John's Journal of Civil Rights and Economic Development* 26, no. 3 (2012): 705-751.

that has persuaded Mormon leaders to abandon their previous policy of staying firmly out of the political arena? And indeed, why would the LDS Church – the very institution that above all others has intimate experience of discrimination on the grounds of non-traditional marriage and family relationships – seek to inflict this same experience on another set of Americans? In this chapter, I will offer some answers these questions.

Certainly without having access to the private meetings and discussions (and thoughts) of the individuals at the highest levels of LDS leadership – something that is not even available to the vast majority of faithful Mormon believers – it is simply impossible to know the entirety of the motives for this recent political activism. However, it is possible to explore the potential reasons LDS leaders may have felt this was the right direction for their Church. And perhaps even more importantly, it is possible to document the *consequences* of this activism for the LDS Church – that is, to address the question of what participation in these campaigns has accomplished for the LDS Church (both positive and negative). After all, regardless of the Church’s initial motives for involvement in early Defense of Marriage campaigns, it is likely that certain positive results (even if they were previously unanticipated) encouraged LDS leaders to continue – and perhaps even increase – their involvement in subsequent campaigns. I argue that participating in recent Defense of Marriage campaigns has allowed Mormon leaders to play an active role in reshaping the public image of the LDS Church, and to position the Church in the political, social, and religious landscape of the United States: in line with the conservative segment of American Christianity, while firmly in opposition to secular American society.

The Religious Right

Prior to discussing Mormon engagement with these campaigns and its consequences, it will be helpful to first provide some historical context for the reappearance of the LDS Church in the political realm – namely, the rise in the late nineteen seventies of a significant political coalition of conservative Christians (mostly evangelicals and fundamentalists, but involving some Catholics and others as well) that has been called either the Religious Right or the New Christian Right. Key to the beginnings and ultimate success of this coalition were the efforts of Baptist minister Jerry Falwell and a few other Christian leaders in creating the Moral Majority, an organization that was specifically designed to mobilize Christians toward the goal of exerting greater influence in the American political sphere.¹²⁸ In the past few decades, the Religious Right has indeed gained a significant amount of sway in American politics, especially within the Republican Party. And one of the first efforts undertaken by this new coalition was a campaign to stop the ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment in numerous states, through various grassroots efforts to influence both congressmen and voters.¹²⁹

The development of the Religious Right certainly helps to explain the timing of the reemergence of the Mormon Church in American politics. It seems likely that LDS leaders were emboldened by the feats of their fellow Christians to embrace greater political efforts themselves. However, it does not explain the reason the Mormon Church became involved specifically with the anti-ERA campaign, to the exclusion of other conflicts and causes from this time period. It also does not explain the relatively low amount of Mormon national political action in the roughly fifteen years

¹²⁸ For a detailed discussion of the early history of the Religious Right, see Martin, *With God on Our Side*. This volume is the companion piece to a PBS documentary series of the same name. Chapter 8, "Moral Majority" (pp. 191-220), specifically addresses the important role of Jerry Falwell and his compatriots in bringing about this political coalition.

¹²⁹ See Martin pp. 162-67 and 204-5 for a description of some of these efforts.

between the anti-ERA campaign and the Defense of Marriage campaigns. After all, since its inception, the activists of the Religious Right have tackled a wide variety of issues, including abortion, religious influence and prayer in schools, abstinence-only sex education, America's relationship with Israel, and religious freedom and expression in the public sphere. While the LDS Church may have at least made minimal endeavors toward addressing some of these issues, they are nothing close to the scope of Mormon engagement with the anti-ERA campaign or with the more recent Defense of Marriage campaigns. It follows, then, that there must be some specific reasoning behind LDS participation in these particular political efforts.

LDS involvement in Defense of Marriage Campaigns

As previously stated, the extent of LDS involvement in Defense of Marriage campaigns – particularly in the campaign to pass Proposition 8 – has been extensively documented in news articles, blogs, and in some scholarly works. Nevertheless, before moving on to a discussion of the possible reasons and the results of these actions, it will be helpful to first provide a brief synopsis of the different aspects of LDS participation in these campaigns. The Mormons have been involved in Defense of Marriage campaigns in a number of states, but have played the largest role in the campaign to pass Amendment 2 in Hawaii, and both the Proposition 22 and Proposition 8 campaigns in California. The LDS Church has aided the campaigns in a number of ways, but primarily by providing money, volunteers, and additional resources to aid in advertising and other efforts to sway voters toward the passage of these referendums. Some of this support has come from the Mormon Church itself; in fact, in June 2010 the California Fair Political Practices Commission fined the LDS Church for failing to report the extent of its donations to the

Proposition 8 campaign in a timely manner.¹³⁰ However, the majority of these resources have come from alternate sources, such as political action committees established with funds coming from the LDS Church. For example, the organization Hawaii's Future Today was crucial to the success of the campaign to pass Amendment 2 in that state.¹³¹ Mormons also form an integral part of the Protect Marriage coalition, an organization made up of members from a number of conservative religious institutions; Protect Marriage formed the backbone of the Yes on Proposition 8 campaign, and has also participated in campaigns against same sex marriage in other states as well.¹³²

In aiding these campaigns, LDS leaders have not hesitated to use their power as heads of the Mormon Church and the centralized organizational structure of their Church in order to harness the forces of the Mormon membership to uphold traditional marriage. Most notably, during multiple Defense of Marriage campaigns, the First Presidency of the Church has distributed statements concerning the campaigns to be read in Mormon wards in the states where the campaigns were being waged.¹³³ These statements did not simply notify LDS members that a vote on the issue of the definition of marriage would be taking place, or even just make them aware of the Church's position supporting these propositions. Rather, the letters

¹³⁰ Brian Montopoli, "Mormon Church Fined In Connection With Anti-Gay Marriage Campaign," *CBS News*, June 9, 2010, accessed May 10, 2013, <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/mormon-church-fined-in-connection-with-anti-gay-marriage-campaign/>.

¹³¹ For a detailed timeline of the LDS Church's involvement in the campaign to pass Amendment 2 in Hawaii, see <http://www.mormonsocialscience.org/2008/01/04/richley-crapo-chronology-of-mormon-lds-involvement-in-same-sex-marriage-politics/> (accessed May 10, 2013).

¹³² The LDS Church's official announcement of its involvement with the Protect Marriage coalition (and with the Yes on 8 campaign as a whole) can be found at the Mormon Newsroom: <http://www.mormonnewsroom.org/article/the-divine-institution-of-marriage> (accessed May 10, 2013). For more information on the coalition itself, see the "Who We Are" page of their website: <http://protectmarriage.com/who-we-are> (accessed May 10, 2013).

¹³³ With regard to the 2000 Proposition 22 campaign in California, the letter from the First Presidency can be found at http://www.lds-mormon.com/doma_copy.shtml (accessed May 10, 2013). One of the letters relating to the 2008 Proposition 8 campaign can be found at <http://messengerandadvocate.files.wordpress.com/2008/06/fp-letter.pdf> (accessed May 10, 2013).

actively encouraged individual Mormons to get involved in the campaigns, whether it be through monetary donations, volunteer hours, or both. The language used in the letters is quite strong, leaving no room for ambiguity or disagreement. For example, in the letter read in LDS wards prior to the vote on Proposition 22, the First Presidency wrote:

This traditional marriage initiative provides a clear and significant moral choice. The Church's position on this issue is unequivocal... Therefore, we ask you to do all you can by donating your means and time to assure a successful vote. Marriage between a man and a woman is ordained of God, and is essential to His eternal plan. It is imperative for us to give our best effort to preserve what our Father in Heaven has put in place.¹³⁴

This encouragement has clearly been effective. Donation records from the Proposition 8 campaign in California suggest that Mormon contributions made up more than a third of the total collected, despite their relatively small population.¹³⁵ Likewise, the LDS community comprised a substantial portion of the people working “on the ground” to help pass Proposition 8 – that is, individuals who devoted their time to running the day-to-day business of the campaign, and most importantly, to interacting with the voting public: “Jeff Flint, another strategist with Protect Marriage, estimated the Mormons made up 80 to 90 percent of the early volunteers who walked door-to-door in election precincts.”¹³⁶

It is important to note that although the LDS leadership so strongly urged Mormon believers to aid these campaigns, they also made efforts to ensure that there would be a certain level of separation between the labors of LDS individuals and the institution of the Church itself. One of the documents distributed to wards regarding the Proposition 8 campaign specifically stated: “No work will take place at

¹³⁴ A scanned image of the original letter is found at Mormonism and the LDS Church, “What are **you** skeptical of?,” accessed May 10, 2013, [lds-mormon.com, http://www.lds-mormon.com/doma_copy.shtml](http://www.lds-mormon.com/doma_copy.shtml).

¹³⁵ Mark Schoofs, “Mormons Boost Antigay Marriage Effort,” *Wall Street Journal*, September 20, 2008.

¹³⁶ Jesse McKinley and Kirk Johnson, “Mormons Tipped the Scale in Ban on Gay Marriage,” *New York Times*, November 15, 2008.

the church, including no meeting there to hand out precinct walking assignments so as to not even give the appearance of politicking at the church."¹³⁷ This statement indicates a lingering apprehension among LDS leaders as to potential attacks on the Church due to their involvement in the political sphere, and a desire to avoid any charges of this nature. Indeed, it's likely that this concern was the impetus behind the creation of or involvement in organizations like Hawaii's Future Today and the Protect Marriage coalition – to move the center of Mormon political activity out of the Church itself, and into associations that could legitimately be claimed to represent the interests of various groups and individuals.¹³⁸ Such organizations also brought the added benefit of fostering positive working relationships between Mormons and other conservative Christians – a topic that will be discussed at length later in this chapter.

Certainly individual members of the LDS Church were free to ignore the letters issued by their leaders, and to avoid participation in the Defense of Marriage campaigns. Indeed, not all Mormons agreed with the propositions against same sex marriage. Some were very upset by the LDS Church's extensive involvement in these campaigns. However, pressure from their fellow believers, combined with a belief that the President of their Church speaks with divine authority, certainly must have encouraged many to get involved with these campaigns, even if they were not already fervent supporters of the referendums involved. An *Ensign* article entitled "Continuing Revelation" explains: "We have been promised that the President of the Church, as the revelator for the Church, will receive guidance for all of us. Our safety

¹³⁷ Ibid. Similar statements were also made regarding LDS participation in the Proposition 22 campaign; see Quinn, "Prelude," p. 12.

¹³⁸ For additional discussion of the "covert" nature of Mormon political engagement in both the anti-ERA campaign and early campaigns against same-sex marriage, see White Jr. and White, pp. 77-78.

lies in paying heed to that which he says and following his counsel."¹³⁹ LDS members' confidence in LDS leaders enables statements released by the First Presidency to hold such sway among Mormon believers, including the letters put forth regarding the Defense of Marriage campaigns.

Official Explanations of Political Engagement

The previous section highlights the substantial nature of Mormon contributions to campaigns against same-sex marriage, as well as the ways in which LDS leaders were able to harness the collective power of their organization in order to provide significant aid to these campaigns. The extent of this involvement is staggering, especially given the previous Mormon Church policy of avoiding political entanglements. So the question remains: Why has the LDS Church gotten so deeply involved in these campaigns? In trying to answer this question, the first place to turn is to statements made by LDS officials themselves that offer explanations of their motives for this political participation. Although various Mormon General Authorities have offered different reasons in letters, speeches, and articles over time, the central overriding message delivered by these addresses is that defining marriage is a moral issue on which the Saints must speak out as faithful believers in God's plan of salvation for humanity.¹⁴⁰

Many statements issued by LDS leaders regarding Mormon participation in Defense of Marriage campaigns make reference to a document introduced in September of 1995, entitled "The Family: A Proclamation to the World," but known more informally to Mormons as the "Proclamation on the Family." or simply as the "Proclamation." This document, which was written by those at the highest levels of

¹³⁹ James E. Faust, "Continuing Revelation," *Ensign* (August 1996): 2.

¹⁴⁰ The distinction that LDS Church leaders have made between "political" and "moral" issues is discussed by White specifically with regard to LDS participation in the ERA campaign; he argues that Church leaders make this distinction in order to be able to comment on certain political issues, while explicitly avoiding others (p. 266).

LDS leadership, has become so important in the Mormon community that it has – for all intents and purposes – attained the status of doctrine. The Proclamation makes clear the LDS position on the definition of marriage, and its importance:

We, the First Presidency and the Council of the Twelve Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, solemnly proclaim that marriage between a man and a woman is ordained of God and that the family is central to the Creator’s plan for the eternal destiny of His children... Children are entitled to birth within the bonds of matrimony, and to be reared by a father and a mother who honor marital vows with complete fidelity... We call upon responsible citizens and officers of government everywhere to promote those measures designed to maintain and strengthen the family as the fundamental unit of society.¹⁴¹

The Proclamation therefore contains within it not only a declaration of the divine significance of marriage between men and women, family, and procreation, but it also ends with a call to public action to defend the traditional family.

The notion that Mormons have a moral imperative to work against legitimizing same sex marriage because of their beliefs is also confirmed in a speech made by then-LDS President Gordon B. Hinckley in October of 1999, entitled “Why We Do Some of the Things We Do.” Specifically discussing Mormon involvement in Defense of Marriage campaigns, Hinckley makes the following statement:

Some portray legalization of so-called same-sex marriage as a civil right. This is not a matter of civil rights; it is a matter of morality. Others question our constitutional right as a church to raise our voice on an issue that is of critical importance to the future of the family. We believe that defending this sacred institution by working to preserve traditional marriage lies clearly within our religious and constitutional prerogatives. Indeed, we are compelled by our doctrine to speak out.¹⁴²

Even the Church’s efforts toward barring the passage of the Equal Rights Amendment, which might otherwise seem unrelated to its subsequent involvement in campaigns against same sex marriage, were also justified as a necessary means of

¹⁴¹ First Presidency, “The Family.”

¹⁴² Gordon B. Hinckley, “Why We Do Some of the Things We Do,” October 1999, accessed May 10, 2013, <http://www.lds.org/general-conference/1999/10/why-we-do-some-of-the-things-we-do?lang=eng>.

defending the traditional family and marriage between men and women. The following is from a statement by the First Presidency on the ERA:

We believe the ERA is a moral issue with many disturbing ramifications for women and for the family as individual members and as a whole . . . the possible train of unnatural consequences which could result because of its vagueness – encouragement of those who seek a unisex society, an increase in the practices of homosexual and lesbian activities, and other concepts which could alter the natural God-governed relationship of men and women.¹⁴³

As demonstrated in these and other statements, Mormon leaders clearly feel duty-bound to work toward preserving the definition of marriage in American society as being between one man and one woman, which they see as being a divinely-ordained institution. The LDS Church's participation in recent Defense of Marriage campaigns can therefore be at least partially explained by this sense of obligation. However, even these fervent declarations on the importance of heterosexual marriage provide an incomplete explanation as to the LDS Church's sudden shift toward political engagement, and particularly its laser-tight focus on preventing the legalization of same sex marriage. After all, the LDS Church holds many positions related to social and moral issues that are not embraced by the general American public. And as previously discussed, conservative Christians in the Religious Right sharing some of these same moral positions have entered the political fray to make their voices heard on a wide variety of issues. Even if the sole focus of the LDS Church were on preserving the traditional family unit, it would follow that Mormons should also be placing equal effort (or at least significant levels of effort) into fighting divorce, single parenthood, sex of any kind before marriage, and abortion. I therefore contend in order to achieve a true understanding of LDS involvement in

¹⁴³ The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, "The Church and the Proposed Equal Rights Amendment: A Moral Issue," *Ensign*, February 1980, accessed May 10, 2013, <http://www.lds.org/ensign/1980/03/the-church-and-the-proposed-equal-rights-amendment-a-moral-issue?lang=eng>. For additional discussion of the connection between the ERA and the issue of homosexuality, see Connell O'Donovan, "The Abominable and Detestable Crime Against Nature: A Brief History of Homosexuality and Mormonism, 1840-1980," 2004, accessed March 20, 2014, <http://www.connellodonovan.com/lgbtmormons.html>.

these campaigns, other reasons should be considered as well, specifically concerning the Church's image, and its relationships with other Christians and American society.

Identity Shaping and Interdenominational Alliances

It has long been acknowledged that the leaders of the LDS Church are incredibly concerned with the public image of their Church, and that they have sought to shape that image in as many ways as possible for the large part of their history. As discussed in the previous chapter, this preoccupation with the Church's image first came about during the decades following the abandonment of polygamy, when the Church's reputation was in tatters, tensions between Mormons and outsiders were still high, and the Saints were attempting to repair their relationship with the rest of the American population. Although the LDS people did overcome this conflict and successfully integrate themselves as Americans, this concern with the Church's image has remained a hallmark of Mormon interaction with outsiders until the present day. As described by Mauss in *Angel and the Beehive*, "The church public relations enterprise has grown enormously in size, scope, and importance. The approval of the world has been courted not only through a growing corps of clean-cut young missionaries but also with the Mormon Tabernacle Choir, mass-market magazine ads, films, and television ads and specials."¹⁴⁴ The continuation of this project can be seen in the recent "I'm a Mormon" television and internet commercials, in which an intentionally diverse group of Mormon believers talk about why they love their religion, and share what their Church means to them.¹⁴⁵ Since LDS leaders remain very concerned with the image of the Church, it is highly likely that they would consider the potential ramifications of any movement into the public

¹⁴⁴ Mauss, *Angel and the Beehive*, 23.

¹⁴⁵ These ads can be found at <http://mormon.org/people> (accessed March 20, 2014).

sphere, especially when it comes to politics. They would also likely play close attention to the results of their actions in terms of their reputation with outsiders.

The Saints have been spectacularly successful in reforming their image over the last century. Once condemned as anti-American fanatics, Mormons today are in some ways seen as being American as apple pie. However, they have not succeeded in shaking their continued association with the practice of plural marriage. Therefore, it makes sense that LDS leaders would look favorably upon any endeavor that might allow their Church to publicly reaffirm its commitment to the “traditional” or nuclear family unit, and particularly to the definition of marriage as being between one man and one woman. As mentioned earlier, many have pointed out the great irony of a group of Americans who, having experienced a great deal of discrimination in their past on the basis of their unorthodox ideas about marriage, would today seek to target another group of Americans on the basis of *their* unorthodox ideas about marriage. However, this seeming contradiction actually makes perfect sense in the context of Mormon history, since the LDS Church still struggles to no longer be associated with sexual deviance. Political campaigns that seek to defend traditional marriage in fact present an ideal platform for the LDS Church to continue shaping its image. What better way for Mormons to present themselves on the public stage as not only practitioners of traditional marriage, but its staunchest supporters?¹⁴⁶

Policies on sexuality – and specifically on same-sex marriage – currently play an important role in identity formation and assertion, not only for the LDS Church, but for all U.S. Christian denominations. In *Ordaining Women*, Mark Chaves makes the argument that formal policies on women’s ordination in Christian denominations

¹⁴⁶ Though it has not been given significant scholarly attention, this connection has been noted by some Mormons. For example, as Kim McCall stated in an interview about Mormon participation in the Proposition 8 campaign: “Okay, we weren’t very monogamous. Now we’re more monogamous than everybody else.” (Kim McCall, interview with Lucky Severson, *Religion & Ethics Newsweekly*, May 22, 2009, accessed May 10, 2013, <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/episodes/may-22-2009/mormons-and-proposition-8/3019/>).

have only a loose connection with internal practices and opinions of church members, and instead are largely a result of external pressures, both from other denominations and the wider society.¹⁴⁷ He presents research suggesting that these policies do not reflect either the leadership roles of women in congregations on the ground, or church members' desires' (or lack thereof) for women's ordination; rather, he argues that such policies are shaped by the motivations of church leaders to identify their denomination in a particular way. As he notes, "... policies concerning female clergy often became laden with symbolic meaning. As such, a denomination's policy on women clergy has become an important part of its public identity, signaling to the world the denomination's location vis-à-vis certain cultural boundaries."¹⁴⁸ Additional research by James Wellman on the issue of homosexual ordination demonstrates that this thesis holds true for policies related to sexuality as well; as he argues, in the case of homosexuality and specifically the ordination of gay persons, "ideological positions are constructed and negotiated precisely in an attempt to build subcultural and religious identity."¹⁴⁹ Within the last couple of decades, the issue of same sex marriage has become increasingly more visible and contentious. It is now front and center on the stage of American public debate. More than any other current social issue, it is same-sex marriage around which the battle lines of liberal versus conservative modes of thought are now being drawn, and this is perhaps especially true in the American religious landscape. Thus, I assert that in contemporary America views – and perhaps more importantly, *actions* – related to same-sex marriage have become a crucial identity marker for Christian

¹⁴⁷ Chaves, *Ordaining Women*, 5.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹⁴⁹ Wellman, Jr., "Introduction," 186. Wellman discusses same-sex unions performed within a few denominations, but doesn't address the issue of civil same-sex marriage or denominational activism regarding this issue (probably because at that time it wasn't yet among the major issues being debated in the public sphere). Although he addresses a number of prominent American Christian and Jewish religious organizations, he does not include the LDS Church in his research, nor does he give significant attention to interdenominational alliances.

denominations. As a result, the LDS Church's participation in the Defense of Marriage campaigns has allowed LDS leaders not only to publicly proclaim their adherence to traditional marriage ideals, but also to position their Church in relation to other denominations and secular society.

In *Ordaining Women*, Chaves pays particular attention to interdenominational networks, and the ways that they have impacted the development of denominational policies on ordaining women clergy. He argues that denominations have not simply been influenced to modify their policies by the other denominations with which they are affiliated, but rather have actively used those policies as a means of constructing strategic partnerships: "Whether or not to ordain women is not just a policy decision on which denominations look to their networks for guidance. It is also one of the policy decisions that denominations use to construct their networks and alliances."¹⁵⁰ This aspect of Chaves' research also provides important insight into religious participation in the Defense of Marriage campaigns, since interdenominational alliances have been a hallmark of these campaigns. In particular, the aforementioned Protect Marriage Coalition and the National Organization for Marriage have been at the center of different kinds of efforts all across the country to preserve the definition of marriage as being between one man and one woman.¹⁵¹ Mormons have been involved in leading and funding both these organizations, along with Catholics, evangelical Protestants, and members of other conservative religious institutions.

As a result of their close work with members of these other faiths on the Defense of Marriage campaigns, and particularly the Proposition 8 campaign, the Saints have indeed been able to form alliances that not long ago would have been unthinkable. In particular, certain members of evangelical churches in America have

¹⁵⁰ Chaves, 62.

¹⁵¹ For information about the National Organization for Marriage, see their "About Us" website page: <https://nationformarriage.org/about> (accessed May 10, 2013).

long been at odds with the LDS Church, and have engaged in such activities as widely distributing inflammatory literature about Mormons and protesting outside the LDS General Conference meetings.¹⁵² These efforts have long been a thorn in the side of LDS leaders, who have worked fervently to dispel misinformation about their community in the wider American public, and have tried – largely unsuccessfully – to bridge the gap between their church and other prominent Christian groups in the United States. And yet, within a relatively short period of time working with evangelicals on the common cause of fighting to preserve traditional marriage, the LDS Church has made more difference achieving respect and even admiration from former adversaries than would have previously been thought possible.

This turn-around was accomplished first and foremost by simply placing Mormons and evangelicals in a room together. For example, the following appeared in a September 2008 *Wall Street Journal* article about Mormons and other conservative religious leaders working together on the Proposition 8 campaign: “Jim Garlow, pastor of the evangelical Protestant Skyline Church near San Diego and a leading supporter of Proposition 8, said, “I would not, in all candor, have been meeting them or talking with them had it not been for the marriage campaign.”¹⁵³ Once working relationships like these were initially formed, LDS members of the campaign impressed their fellow volunteers with their enthusiastic efforts and their dedication to the cause of protecting the traditional definition of marriage. In fact, some were so grateful for the Mormons’ hard work on the campaign trail that they sought to pay tribute to the Saints in various ways. After Proposition 8 passed, Brian S. Brown, the Executive Director of the National Organization for Marriage, circulated

¹⁵² The term “General Conference” refers to semi-annual meetings held in Salt Lake City in which LDS “Church members and others gather worldwide in a series of two-hour sessions to receive inspiration and instruction from Church leaders.” The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, “About General Conference,” *The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, accessed March 20, 2014, <http://www.lds.org/general-conference/about-general-conference?lang=eng>.

¹⁵³ Schoofs.

a letter to fellow “friends of marriage” in which he encouraged them to demonstrate their admiration for their Mormon colleagues:

What can you do today? To NOM’s LDS friends and supporters we just say: Thank you. You’ve done enough already.

The rest of us friends of marriage? Whether you are a Protestant or a Catholic, or a Jew, (or a Hindu or a Muslim, or a determined secularist): Thank a Mormon today.

Or take the next step: Invite an LDS friend, colleague to lunch. Host a barbecue—to tell them ‘Thank you for your efforts to protect marriage. Thank you for your unfailing decency, civility, and respect for others in the community as you exercise your basic civil rights as Americans to participate in political debate.’¹⁵⁴

Even more significantly, these positive feelings and expressions of support did not end as soon as the glow from the successful campaign had faded. In the wake of the California campaign, the LDS Church was the subject of a number of protests from certain members of the gay community and others that opposed its large-scale participation in the Yes on 8 campaign. Rather than leaving them to deal with the fallout on their own, the Saints’ allies in the campaign stepped up to defend them in significant ways. In one such effort, an organization called the Beckett Fund for Religious Liberty took out a full-page ad in the *New York Times* entitled “No Mob Veto.” This letter, signed by religious leaders such as Rich Cizik of the National Association of Evangelicals and William Donahue of the Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights, decried the protests: “The violence and intimidation being directed against the LDS or ‘Mormon’ church and other religious organizations – and even against individual religious believers – simply because they supported Proposition 8 is an outrage that must stop.”¹⁵⁵

Nor were these the only religious leaders who spoke out on behalf of the LDS in the wake of the protests. As reported in the *Salt Lake Tribune*, Reverend Garlow “was so outraged by the protests against Mormons that he e-mailed 7,200 California

¹⁵⁴ Brian S. Brown. The full text of this letter can be found at <http://www.article6blog.com/2008/11/08/we-are-not-alone/> (accessed May 10, 2013).

¹⁵⁵ Kevin J. Hasson et al, “No Mob Veto,” *New York Times*, December 5, 2008.

pastors urging them to 'speak boldly' in defense of the LDS role in passing Proposition 8. 'We were not going to stand by and be silent while there was anti-Mormonism in the streets.'"¹⁵⁶ These statements demonstrate an unprecedented show of support for the LDS Church from other Christian leaders, and make evident the impact of recent Mormon political participation on the status of the LDS Church in (conservative) Christian America. It is worth mentioning that this kind of support can also be seen in certain evangelical discussions about Mitt Romney's candidacy for the U.S. Presidency in 2012. While many conservative Christians were reticent to give their support to Romney, especially in the early stages of his campaign, some did step up to defend him and to work toward convincing others that he was the correct choice for President. Notably, among the most common arguments made by his evangelical supporters is that he upholds conservative moral values. As remarked by evangelical leader Mark DeMoss, "I'm more interested in a candidate who shares my values than if he or she shares my theology."¹⁵⁷ Indeed, this idea is highlighted by the authors of the website *Evangelicals for Mitt*; the section entitled "Why We Support Mitt" points out that Romney "believes in the traditional family, and he has fought for it," and includes a link to a letter in which conservative leaders from Massachusetts detail Romney's efforts to uphold "traditional" marriage during his tenure as governor of that state.¹⁵⁸ It is clear that the LDS Church's strong position against same-sex marriage has made it easier for evangelicals and other conservative Christians to embrace both the Church as a whole and individual Saints as partners in common political and social causes. As discussed earlier, it is

¹⁵⁶ Peggy Fletcher Stack, "Prop 8 involvement a P.R. fiasco for LDS Church," *Salt Lake Tribune*, November 22, 2008.

¹⁵⁷ Mitchell Landsberg, "Evangelical support grows for Romney," *Los Angeles Times*, October 25, 2012.

¹⁵⁸ Evangelicals for Mitt, "Why We Support Mitt," *Evangelicals for Mitt*, accessed March 20, 2014, <http://evangelicalsformitt.org/why-we-support-mitt/>.

impossible to know with any certainty the entirety of the motives between LDS leaders' involvement of their Church in the Defense of Marriage campaigns, and whether those motives included a desire to repair their conflicted relationships with members of conservative churches. Regardless, the formation of close working partnerships and friendships between Mormons and other Christians certainly was a significant result of LDS participation in the Defense of Marriage campaigns, and a result of which LDS leaders must have taken note.

As should be apparent from the previously-mentioned protests, it is also true that the LDS Church's involvement with the Defense of Marriage campaigns has not endeared them to all Americans; they have in fact experienced a significant backlash for their participation. Certain supporters of same sex marriage – both gay and straight – were outraged by the extent of Mormon donations and efforts to ensure the passage of Proposition 8, and some held the LDS Church singlehandedly responsible for the success of the Yes on 8 campaign. However, while many Mormons were certainly shaken by the vehemence of the responses to their Church's foray into politics, this opposition was not necessarily viewed as a setback in the quest of LDS officials to improve the reputation of their Church. While the statements and actions of those leaders demonstrate a concern with the Mormon Church's image among the American public in a general sense, it is likely that they are especially preoccupied with the Church's reputation in the eyes of a *particular sector* of the American public – specifically, those Americans who share the Saints' conservative social outlook, especially a desire to maintain conventional gender roles and marriage ideals. It is reasonable to assume that through its involvement in the Yes on 8 campaign, the Mormon Church only created enemies of individuals that, due to a variety of factors, were already unlikely to be attracted to its message or to view it in a positive light. On the other hand, the Church's participation in these campaigns

has attracted positive attention from those individuals and groups that agree with its championing of traditional family values, and that might be more likely to embrace its other beliefs.

Indeed, this very attitude toward the responses to Mormon political participation has been expressed by some of the Saints themselves. Shortly after the completion of the Proposition 8 campaign, LDS spokesman Scott Trotter noted: "All in all, 2008 has been a particularly good year for the church... While some of the protest activity we have seen has been deplorable, there are others who have taken the time to fully understand the church's position on marriage and come to respect this principled stand."¹⁵⁹ This sentiment was also echoed by former Mormon bishop Ron Packard in an interview for a segment on the PBS program *Religion & Ethics Newsweekly*: "A majority of the people of the United States don't want same-sex marriages. So for the majority we may have, instead of getting a hit we get a halo. Whenever any organization gets involved in the political process, there's going to be some who consider it a hit and others who feel that they're a hero."¹⁶⁰ Although Americans who don't support same sex marriage may no longer be in the majority in this country, it is likely the favor of those particular Americans that the LDS Church is most eager to court.

Internal Consequences

In examining the results of recent LDS participation, it is also important to explore the *internal* consequences of this engagement for the LDS Church. Just as the Church faced antagonism from certain outsiders in the wake of its involvement with Proposition 8, it also confronted a certain amount of resistance from within its

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Ron Packard, interview with Lucky Severson, *Religion & Ethics Newsweekly*, May 22, 2009, accessed May 10, 2013, <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/episodes/may-22-2009/mormons-and-proposition-8/3019/>.

own ranks. Some Saints disagreed with the political actions of their Church, and in fact, certain Mormons were even motivated to resign their membership in the LDS Church over this issue.¹⁶¹ Like the series of protests held against the Church by proponents of same sex marriage, this exodus of a particular segment of the Mormon membership can certainly be seen as a negative result for the LDS Church of its participation in the Defense of Marriage campaigns. However, it can also be seen in another light as well. Insight can be provided here by sociologist of religion Laurence Iannaccone's influential 1994 article, "Why Strict Churches are Strong." In this article, Iannaccone argues that strict demands made by a church or denomination of its adherents "'strengthen' a church in three ways: they raise overall levels of commitment, they increase average rates of participation, and they enhance the net benefits of membership."¹⁶²

Iannaccone asserts that such strict demands result in specific social costs for believers, and while those costs actually inspire a great level of dedication in believers who are already highly committed to their church, the "costs screen out people whose participation would otherwise be low..."; such individuals are labeled "free-riders" by Iannaccone, and are portrayed as a hindrance to the strength and success of a religious institution.¹⁶³ On the basis on this theory, it can be argued that the LDS Church's involvement in Defense of Marriage campaigns – and particularly in the Proposition 8 campaign, in which its efforts were thrust so forcefully into the public eye – allowed it to raise the social costs of its membership, in a way that encouraged further levels of participation and commitment from its devoted

¹⁶¹ The website www.signingforsomething.org has archived letters written by a number of (former) Latter-day Saints in different parts of the country in which they resign their membership in the LDS Church (at least in part) over the Church's participation in campaigns against same sex marriage. For more information see http://signingforsomething.org/blog/?page_id=2 (accessed May 10, 2013).

¹⁶² Laurence Iannaccone, "Why Strict Churches are Strong," *The American Journal of Sociology* 99, no. 5 (March 1994): 1183.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

members, and ultimately served to eliminate members from its ranks who were less committed to its central theological principles and its social outlook.

Indeed, this very sentiment has been expressed by some members of the Church that strongly support LDS political engagement in campaigns against same sex marriage. For example, the following comment was attached to a blog post discussing the potential consequences of Mormon involvement in the Proposition 8 campaign, such as the divisiveness it created in some Mormon communities over this issue:

"I think this split is great. I wish for more of it. In the end, I know who will win (within the LDS Church) and it's not those who don't support Prop 8. This, more than anything else since E.R.A. has separated the wheat from the chaff. There is good and evil in this world and it is high time a few members decided whose side they are on."¹⁶⁴

Certainly those LDS Church members who take issue with their Church's participation in these campaigns do not see themselves as the "chaff" within their religious institution. They are saddened and even angry by the sense of alienation that they have experienced within their communities over this issue. Regardless, Mormon involvement in the Defense of Marriage campaigns forced LDS members to confront the Church's unyielding theological and social positions related to marriage and sexuality. They have had to ask themselves if they could in good conscience remain actively participating in an institution that holds those positions. It also served to reinvigorate the members of the Church who fervently agree with the Church's teachings on the essential, divinely ordained nature of the institution of traditional marriage, celebrating the LDS Church's firm stand on this and other moral and social issues.

¹⁶⁴ Jettboy, comment, October 24, 2008 (4:00 p.m.), on Dave, "The Price Tag for Prop 8," October 24, 2008, accessed May 10, 2013, http://mormoninquiry.typepad.com/mormon_inquiry/2008/10/the-price-tag-f.html.

Perhaps more significantly, these political efforts are serving to reinvigorate the Mormon community in another way as well – by placing it in opposition to mainstream society. Several scholars have written about the empowerment that a certain level of opposition can provide for a religious community. In their important work *American Evangelicalism: Embattled and Thriving*, Christian Smith and his co-authors argue that it is precisely this struggle that gives evangelicalism its power: “American evangelicalism, we contend, is strong not because it is shielded against, but because it is – or at least perceives itself to be – embattled with forces that seem to oppose or threaten it. Indeed, evangelicalism, we suggest, thrives on distinction, engagement, tension, conflict, and threat.”¹⁶⁵ As Smith et al demonstrate, through struggle with outsiders, evangelical identity is confirmed, and evangelicals are emboldened in their mission of faith. The authors note that many evangelicals they interviewed expressed the belief that mainstream society treats Christians as second-class citizens, mocking and discriminating against them, and even attacking them.¹⁶⁶

A similar theme runs through the history of the LDS Church. As discussed in Chapter 2, the Latter-day Saints have always envisioned themselves as a “peculiar people” – a community that was not only at odds with the larger society, but misunderstood and victimized by that society. While Mormons were deeply wounded by their treatment from outsiders, they also took satisfaction in bravely facing this hostility, placing themselves in a long line of saintly groups that had withstood

¹⁶⁵ Christian Smith et al, *American Evangelicalism: Embattled and Thriving* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), 89. Also relevant here is Stark and Bainbridge’s theory of “tension” and Mauss’ application of this work to the LDS Church in *Angel and the Beehive*, both discussed in Chapter 1 of this work. In documenting the “retrenchment” efforts of Mormon leaders, Mauss mentions the anti-ERA campaign (but not LDS activities related to same-sex marriage, which had yet to begin at that point), though he admits to being puzzled as to the reasoning behind this intense effort (see p. 118). While participation in the Defense of Marriage campaigns has not necessarily highlighted the distinctive aspects of the LDS Church, it has allowed the Church to create tension with mainstream American culture, and to align itself with a particular segment of American society.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid*, 140-143.

terrible trials in the name of their religion. This self-understanding as a persecuted people helped to shape Mormon identity, giving the young LDS community a great sense of purpose. Many Mormons today are deeply proud of their Church's history, including the fortitude of their religious forebears in facing adversity in the early years of the LDS faith. Like those early Saints, some Mormons today view antagonism from outsiders – especially from mainstream society – as a sign that they are righteous and that God is on their side.

This feeling is captured very well in a *Deseret News* column written by well-known Mormon author Orson Scott Card in the wake of the campaign to pass Proposition 8. In this column, titled "LDS singles the heroes of Prop. 8," Card brings up a letter from an LDS man named Kevin Hamilton, which he had presumably received through an email forward; according to Card, Hamilton's letter was passed widely among the Church membership: "Brother Hamilton, a seminary teacher, asked his students a couple of days after the election if any of them had been treated with hostility because they were Mormon. Every hand went up."¹⁶⁷ Card also discusses other "heroes in this struggle," including Mormon young adults living in California during the Proposition 8 campaign, who he suggests had faced anger from and ultimately been rejected by non-Mormon friends over the Church's participation in the Proposition 8 campaign. As he notes, in the aftermath of the vote passing the Proposition, one of these young people said: "Now we know what it was like for believers in the Book of Mormon."¹⁶⁸ Although Card – and the young man quoted here – on the surface portray this opposition from outsiders in a negative way, they also seem to wear it as a badge of honor.

¹⁶⁷ Orson Scott Card, "LDS singles the heroes of Prop. 8," *Deseret News*, November 13, 2008, accessed March 10, 2014, <http://www.deseretnews.com/article/705262586/LDS-singles-the-heroes-of-Prop-8.html?pg=all>.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

Later on in the column, Card issues a solemn warning to his fellow Saints regarding the days ahead: "We must be prepared to be the victims of lies. We may also see acts of violence and persecution by individuals and governments against Mormons, individually and as a Church."¹⁶⁹ Declarations like these affirm LDS people's self-identification as a mistreated (and singled-out) group, while at the same time encouraging the Saints to stay strong in their faith against the intolerance of others. And yet, while the sentiments expressed above highlight the opposition faced specifically by members of the LDS Church (both past and present), the Saints also recognize that when it comes to the issue of marriage, they do stand in solidarity with certain others. In his column, Card acknowledges that in their support of Prop 8, the Mormons "were part of a coalition of people to whom marriage is not just a brand that can be put on any relationship. We did not and do not stand alone."¹⁷⁰ Just as strong LDS engagement in the Yes on 8 campaign (and similar political endeavors) helped other conservative Christians see Mormons as partners in the fight against liberalizing forces in the U.S., it also served as confirmation for the Saints of the bonds they share with like-minded Christians. Thus their participation in Defense of Marriage campaigns has allowed the LDS Church to actively construct a very particular identity: one that places it in harmony with a particular sector of American Christianity, but in opposition to – and embattled by – mainstream society. And just as crucially, it has helped them to recapture some of the inspiration and sense of purpose that fueled their spiritual ancestors.

Summary

Despite being a considerable force in a number of Defense of Marriage campaigns since the mid-nineties, recent evidence suggests that the LDS Church is

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

now backing away from the fight to prevent the legalization of same sex marriage. As reported in a *Washington Post* article, "... Mormon leaders in Maryland have been silent on the ballot measure to affirm or toss the state's new same-sex marriage law. Activists in other states voting next month on the issue (Maine, Minnesota and Washington) say they see the same thing."¹⁷¹ Just as it is impossible to be certain about LDS' leaders full motives for getting so heavily involved in earlier campaigns, it is also not possible to know exactly what is causing their current retreat from political involvement. Perhaps they are hoping to avoid further negative attention of the kind received by their Church in the wake of the Proposition 8 campaign, and particularly to prevent any further charges that the LDS Church is overstepping its bounds in the political arena. Perhaps they are demonstrating sensitivity to members of their Church – both gay and straight – that were saddened or angered by the Church's aggressive efforts in previous campaigns, and are seeking to keep additional Church members from leaving the LDS faith over this issue. Whatever the reasons, the fact remains that the LDS Church's participation in political campaigns to preserve the traditional definition of marriage has had a profound impact on its public identity, and on its position in the political, social, and religious landscape of the United States.

¹⁷¹ Michelle Boorstein, "Mormon church is conspicuously absent in Md. same-sex marriage referendum," *Washington Post*, October 28, 2012.

CHAPTER 5

A SPIRITUAL TUG OF WAR

ox•y•mor•mon, *noun*, \äk-sē-□mo□r-□män\): a believer of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints who is living a seemingly incongruous, self-contradictory life by being both Mormon and Gay; one who sees his or her life as being oxymoronic: *The oxymormon wrote a blog about his vastly different-from-normal life.*

- From the "about" section of the blog OxyMor(m)on¹⁷²

Until this point, this dissertation has largely addressed the topic of sexuality within the entire institution of the Latter-day Saints Church, especially with regard to the Church's changing relationship with the larger American society. However, any comprehensive look at this topic must also include a discussion of the experiences of individual Mormons regarding matters of sexuality. While the term "sexuality" certainly encompasses a broad range of subjects, challenges, and questions, there is one particular issue that in recent years has become particularly pressing within the LDS Church, receiving a significant amount of attention from LDS leaders and from ordinary Mormons: the issue of believing members of the LDS Church who experience attraction to those of the same sex, some of whom have engaged in homosexual activity and/or self-identify as gay or lesbian. Mormon leaders have struggled with the question of how to publicly address, counsel, and treat such individuals; family members have struggled with the question of how to behave towards their loved ones; and the affected Church members themselves have, of course, faced myriad struggles in their attempts to negotiate their religious and sexual identities, and to navigate their major life choices.

The problems caused by a conflict between one's sexual orientation and religious beliefs/affiliations are certainly not limited to gay and lesbian Mormons. Due to theological teachings and cultural attitudes regarding sexuality and same-sex

¹⁷² Nate, "About," *OxyMor(m)on*, accessed March 10, 2014, <http://livingoxymormon.com/about/>; emphasis author's.

relationships in more conservative Christian churches in the United States (as well as other conservative religious organizations and communities), gays and lesbians in these churches often face great hardships as they attempt to negotiate their identities. On the surface, these denominations appear to espouse the same views on homosexuality, deriving their beliefs from similar sources – most often a few specific verses from biblical books such as Leviticus and Romans.¹⁷³ Indeed, this is demonstrated by the relative ease with which these groups have banded together in the fight against same-sex marriage, despite their many differences. Although there are certain common arguments and positions that unite these groups against homosexuality, to lump all conservative Christians together oversimplifies discussions and policy formation about sexuality and marriage in distinct modern American Christian groups. While each denomination and group deserves an individual examination, this is especially true about the LDS Church. The unique theology of the Mormon Church, reinforced by historical, structural, and cultural factors, distinguishes the situation that gay and lesbian Mormons face from that of gays and lesbians in other conservative churches.

A significant amount of material related to the experiences of gays and lesbians in the LDS Church already exists, although the majority was not intended for an academic audience. Much of this work was created by Mormons for Mormons, specifically with the purpose of increasing understanding within the Mormon community about the issue of homosexuality and the personal experiences of those who struggle with questions over their sexual orientation and what it means for their faith. In addition to a multitude of blogs, YouTube videos, and articles created by individual gay and lesbian Mormons (and those who do not identify as gay/lesbian, but have felt attractions to those of the same sex), as well as their allies, several

¹⁷³ Most commonly cited are Leviticus 18:22, Leviticus 20:13, and Romans 1:18-32; other frequently cited passages come from Genesis, 1 Corinthians, and 1 Timothy, among others.

compilations have also been published that include the testimonials of many different individuals facing this issue from a variety of perspectives (those experiencing same-sex attraction themselves, as well as their relatives, friends, and counselors). These works include, for example, *Peculiar People: Mormons and Same-Sex Orientation*, edited by Ron Schow, Wayne Schow and Marybeth Raynes, *No More Goodbyes: Circling the Wagons Around Our Gay Loved Ones* by Carol Lynn Pearson, *Gay Mormons?: Latter-day Saint Experiences of Same-Gender Attraction*, edited by Brent Kerby, and *Voice(s) of hope: Latter-day Saint Perspectives on Same-Gender Attraction – An Anthology of Gospel Teachings and Personal Essays*, edited by Ty Mansfield.¹⁷⁴

The latter text is one of two recent works published with the goal not only of increasing understanding among their fellow Mormons about this subject, but also particularly to aid and encourage those who are struggling with same-sex attraction, yet who want to remain faithful members of the Church. The other is a text entitled *Understanding Same Sex Attraction (LDS Edition): Where to Turn and How to Help* (edited by Dennis V. Dahle et al); it also includes some personal experiences, but mostly consists of essays discussing LDS perspectives on homosexuality and the faithful response to feelings of same-sex attraction, as well as some resources for those facing this issue and their families.¹⁷⁵ One notable scholarly work addressing this topic is Rick Phillips' *Conservative Christian identity & same-sex orientation: the*

¹⁷⁴ Schow, Schow and Raynes, *Peculiar People*; Carol Lynn Pearson, *No More Goodbyes: Circling the Wagons Around Our Gay Loved Ones* (Walnut Creek: Pivot Point Books, 2007); Kerby, *Gay Mormons?*; Ty Mansfield, *Voice(s) of hope*. Brad Carmack also includes some personal accounts in his work *Homosexuality: A Straight BYU Student's Perspective* (Charleston: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2011). Though the results of the study not yet been published in full, it should also be noted that psychologists John Dehlin, Renee Galliher, and Bill Bradshaw of the Utah State University have conducted a survey of over 1600 Mormons or former Mormons that experience same-sex attraction, in order to learn more about the distinct strategies taken by these individuals, and the psychological outcomes of those different choices. Some preliminary results of the study can be found at <http://ldshomosexuality.com/wp-content/uploads/USU-LDS-SSA-Newsletter-v1.pdf> (accessed March 10, 2014).

¹⁷⁵ Dennis V. Dahle et al, eds., *Understanding Same Sex Attraction (LDS Edition)*, Salt Lake City (Foundation for Attraction Research, 2009).

case of gay Mormons, which is a sociological study of a group of gay male Saints in Salt Lake City.¹⁷⁶ Phillips addresses some unique aspects of Mormonism, as well as the development of LDS policies about homosexuality over time, but his study primarily focuses on the experiences of individual gay Mormons in various stages of their life journey – upon first discovering feelings of same-sex attraction, going on a mission, and making decisions about whether or not to stay in the Church, get married, etc. All of these works touch on some of the characteristics of the Mormon faith that are relevant to the lives of gays and lesbians, but none contain a systematic look at these attributes, which will be the project of this chapter. More importantly, I will document some of the ways in which these Mormon distinctives help to shape the experiences and self-perceptions of gay and lesbian Mormons, and the strategies they employ in wrestling with their identities.

The Impact of History

The majority of this chapter will address theological factors influencing the situation of these individual Saints – that is, the unique aspects of Latter-day Saint theology and teaching that has a significant impact on the lives of gay and lesbian Mormons. In addition, a shorter section will examine structural and cultural factors – distinct aspects of LDS organization, leadership, and way of life – that also play a role in shaping gay and lesbian Mormon experiences. Whenever possible I will include the voices of Mormons (or former Mormons) who identify as gay or lesbian, or who have experienced attraction to members of the same sex, taken from some online and print sources previously identified; I will attempt to include accounts that

¹⁷⁶ Phillips, *Conservative Christian identity & same-sex orientation: the case of gay Mormons*, New York (Peter Lang, 2005). Although they are not primarily concerned with contemporary gay/lesbian Mormon experiences, two other important works that address gay/lesbian experience in LDS history are D. Michael Quinn, *Same-Sex Dynamics Among Nineteenth-Century Americans: A Mormon Example* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996) and Connell O'Donovan, "Abominable." Both explore homosocial/homosexual relationships between 19th-century Mormons, as well as some interactions between gay or lesbian Mormons and the LDS Church hierarchy in more recent history.

represent the wide spectrum of experiences within this community. Aside from theological, structural, and cultural issues, the history of the Latter-day Saints Church has helped to form contemporary LDS views about sexuality, and therefore, also impacts the current situation of homosexual Mormons. Aspects of Mormon history relating to sexuality have already been discussed in detail in previous chapters. However, it is worth reiterating one point that is especially relevant to the topic of this chapter – that is, the desire of the LDS leadership in particular, and the Mormons Church membership in general, to disassociate the Church with its early sexual transgressions. Just as the Saints’ polygamous past and its continuing effects have some bearing on the LDS Church’s political activity regarding same-sex marriage, this history has also influenced LDS policies and attitudes toward homosexuality and gay and lesbian individuals. Chapter 4 addressed the ways in which Mormon participation in national political campaigns against same sex marriage has allowed the Saints to publicly proclaim their firm support of and adherence to the traditional, nuclear, family. While they are not quite as public as political campaigns, internal LDS policies about homosexuality also play a role in the efforts of the LDS leadership to shape their Church’s denominational identity.

More than anything, these policies have allowed Mormons – and especially the LDS leadership – to displace outsiders’ allegations of their sexual impropriety onto gays and lesbians in their midst.¹⁷⁷ Certainly the Saints are not alone in this kind of deflection. In discussing the Jewish-Americans’ process of assimilating into American culture, Riv-Ellen Prell notes one way that Jews in this country tried to overcome the stereotypes hurled at them by the larger society: “As Americans looked upon Jews as marginal, obsessed with money, uncivil, and unworthy of citizenship, Jewish men and middle-class Jews projected those very same accusations onto Jewish women

¹⁷⁷ O’Donovan makes a similar point in “Abominable,” noting that the LDS Church “ironically deflects Christian criticism of its sexual past by over-emphasizing its rhetoric opposing other sexualities.”

and the working class."¹⁷⁸ Similarly, in their attempts to assimilate into American society – and more recently, to align their Church with conservative Christian America – Mormons have projected labels of sexual deviance and abnormal/sinful relationships onto gays and lesbians and onto same-sex sexuality and love.

LDS Theology Related to Sexuality and Marriage

In examining the different characteristics of the LDS Church that are relevant to a discussion of homosexuality and the experiences of individual gay and lesbian Mormons, it is important to start by addressing unique aspects of LDS theology, especially those related to marriage, family, sexuality, and gender. One element of LDS theology that is relevant to this discussion is the distinct Mormon concept of God, in which God is not only firmly defined as male, but is also said to have a physical body: "God is not a spirit, but a material being of male gender who, while he does not himself extend through all the immensity of space, has knowledge and power that extends through all space, which he governs in its entirety."¹⁷⁹ In addition, Mormon doctrine indicates that God is a male being different from humans only in degree, not in kind. As Joseph Smith once declared: "God Himself was once as we are now, and is an exalted man..."¹⁸⁰ In other words, in the Mormon worldview it is possible for humans to progress spiritually to the point that they themselves become like God – assuming, of course, that they follow the spiritual path laid out in the Mormon plan of salvation.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁸ Riv-Ellen Prell, *Fighting to Become Americans: Jews, Gender, and the Anxiety of Assimilation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1999), 13.

¹⁷⁹ Jan Shipps, *Mormonism: The Story of a New Religious Tradition* (Urbana: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 143.

¹⁸⁰ The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, *Teachings of the Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2007), 40.

¹⁸¹ It's important to note that this Mormon belief is quite complex, and has been interpreted in a number of different ways by believers (and outsiders). In attempting to address this confusion, LDS leaders just recently released a statement in the "Gospel Topics" section of the lds.org website addressing

Even more striking is the LDS belief that the male God has a wife; a female figure who is referred to by Mormons as the “Mother in Heaven.” Scholar Connell O’Donovan points out the significance of this belief to a discussion of homosexuality in the LDS Church: “During the early 1840’s Mormon founder Joseph Smith deified heterosexuality when he introduced the doctrine of a Father and Mother in Heaven – a divine, actively heterosexual couple paradigmatic of earthly sexual relationships. As Mormon bishop T. Eugene Shoemaker recently posited: ‘the celestial abode of God is heterosexually formed.’”¹⁸²

The doctrine of the Mother in Heaven is closely related to the Mormon “doctrine of pre-existence – the creation of human spirits prior to this mortal life”; in this line of thought, humans are quite literally the children of God.¹⁸³ Within the logic of LDS theology, a belief in the Mother in Heaven is a simple recognition that if men and women are children of a male God, then a female being must be involved as well. The popular Mormon hymn penned by Eliza R. Snow (plural wife to Joseph Smith and later to Brigham Young) makes this very point: “In the heavens are parents single? / No; the thought makes reason stare! / Truth is reason, truth eternal / tells me I’ve a Mother there.”¹⁸⁴ While Mormon doctrine contains little information about the Mother in Heaven, it is important to note that she is certainly not regarded as an equal to the male God. Rather, she is seen as God’s companion,

this topic: “Becoming Like God,” <https://www.lds.org/topics/becoming-like-god?lang=eng> (accessed March 10, 2014).

¹⁸² O’Donovan, “Abominable.” It should be noted that Mormons are not encouraged to pray to the Mother in Heaven, and she is rarely discussed in official LDS discourses, though she has been the subject of much discussion among certain circles, especially among Mormon feminists. For more information about Mormon conversations surrounding the Mother in Heaven, see Joanna Brooks, “Ask Mormon Girl: Why do we not talk about Heavenly Mother?,” *Ask Mormon Girl*, June 19, 2012, accessed March 10, 2014, <http://askmormongirl.wordpress.com/2012/06/19/ask-mormon-girl-why-do-we-not-talk-about-heavenly-mother/>.

¹⁸³ John Heeren, Donald B. Lindsey, and Marylee Mason, “The Mormon Concept of Mother in Heaven: A Sociological Account of Its Origins and Development,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 23, no. 4 (1984): 397.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

and her primary responsibility is to bear his offspring – spirit children who will become human beings.¹⁸⁵ As a result, this doctrine creates a paradigm not only for heterosexual marriage but also for gender roles.

The LDS belief about pre-existence itself is also quite significant to this discussion. The Mormon Church teaches that individuals are created in the spirit world prior to their earthly life, and also that they receive essential spiritual teachings during this “premortal” existence. Chapter 138, verse 56 of the Doctrine & Covenants states: “Even before they were born, they, with many others, received their first lessons in the world of spirits and were prepared to come forth in the due time of the Lord to labor in his vineyard for the salvation of the souls of men.”¹⁸⁶ Developing this doctrine further, the Proclamation on the Family states that humans made covenants with God before being born on Earth: “In the premortal realm, spirit sons and daughters knew and worshipped God as their Eternal Father and accepted His plan by which His children could obtain a physical body and gain earthly experience to progress toward perfection and ultimately realize their divine destiny as heirs of eternal life.”¹⁸⁷ This passage suggests that not only is there a specific divine plan in place for all humans, but additionally, that each human being *agreed to this plan* before coming to this world. It follows from this belief that, in the LDS perspective, any person choosing not to follow that plan during their time on Earth is breaking their covenant with God.

Even more significantly, the Proclamation on the Family asserts: “Gender is an essential characteristic of individual premortal, mortal, and eternal identity and

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 399.

¹⁸⁶ The full text of Section 138 of the Doctrine & Covenants can be found at <https://www.lds.org/scriptures/dc-testament/dc/138?lang=eng> (accessed March 10, 2014).

¹⁸⁷ First Presidency, “The Family.”

purpose.”¹⁸⁸ This pronouncement adds yet another layer to the doctrine of pre-existence; not only do humans come into existence before life in this world, not only do they make eternal covenants, but their gender is assigned to them before they even occupy a mortal body, staying with them after they die. To anyone familiar with the field of gender studies, the first question raised by this statement concerns the use of the term “gender.” In the scholarly distinction, the word “sex” refers to a person’s biological sex, while the term “gender” is much more complex. As explained in the *Encyclopedia of Sociology*, “gender pervades kinship and family life, work roles and organizations, the rules of most religions, and the symbolism and meanings of language and other cultural representations of human life.”¹⁸⁹ This sociological definition suggests that a person’s gender identity is inextricably connected to his or her cultural context, and is therefore not universal: “As an underlying principle of how people are categorized and valued, gender is differently constructed throughout the world and has been throughout history.”¹⁹⁰ Gender is not static even within a particular nation or society; rather, gender norms and ideals change over time along with larger cultural shifts in that particular society.

The question then becomes: Did the LDS leaders who created this document really mean to use the word “gender” or did they actually mean to say “sex”? This is an important question, as the terms refer to vastly different concepts. However, it is most likely that the LDS leaders simply did not make a distinction between the two terms or between their meanings. In fact, other statements in the document suggest that this is the case. One section declares: “By divine design, fathers are to preside over their families in love and righteousness and are responsible to provide the

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ Judith Lorber, “Gender,” in *Encyclopedia of Sociology*, vol. 2, 2nd. ed., edited by Edgar F. Borgatta and Rhonda J.V. Montgomery, 1057-1066 (New York: MacMillan Reference USA, 2000), *Gale Virtual Reference Library*, Thomson Gale.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

necessities of life and protection for their families. Mothers are primarily responsible for the nurture of their children. In these sacred responsibilities, fathers and mothers are obligated to help one another as equal partners.”¹⁹¹ The words “divine design” indicate that from LDS leaders’ perspective, the statement that one’s gender is pre-mortally determined is not confined strictly to biological sex; it also entails certain defined gender roles, not the least of which is that men should love women, and women should love men.¹⁹² These doctrines have profound implications for the lives of gay and lesbian members of the Mormon Church. If this belief system requires the acknowledgement that one’s gender – including a heterosexual orientation – is divinely preordained, then homosexuality is literally incompatible with LDS theology. The belief that one’s (hetero)sexual orientation is assigned by God precludes the possibility of accepting the idea that one can have a homosexual orientation. This leads to an assumption among some faithful Saints that all those claiming to be gay or lesbian must be, as scholar Jeffery Jensen puts it, “defiant, confused, or deceived” heterosexuals.¹⁹³

These beliefs connected to the doctrine of premortality – that individuals existed before their earthly life, that they made covenants with God, and that their sex/gender is eternal – have a major impact on how other LDS believers perceive and counsel gays and lesbians in their midst, as well as how those individuals view their own choices and actions. Indeed, these beliefs are used by some LDS leaders to explain same-sex attraction as a temporary condition of mortality that neither

¹⁹¹ First Presidency, “The Family.”

¹⁹² For a more in-depth discussion of the problematic nature of the term “gender” in LDS discourse, see Taylor G. Petrey, “Toward a Post-Heterosexual Mormon Theology,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 44, no. 4 (Winter 2011): 120-128.

¹⁹³ Jeffery R. Jensen, “We See What We Believe: The Heterosexualization of Gay Men and Lesbians in the LDS Church,” (paper presented at Sunstone conference, Salt Lake City, 1997), accessed March 10, 2014, <http://www.mormonism.net/kirjoitukset/jensen1.shtml>. Jensen discusses the ways that gays and lesbians are “heterosexualized” in LDS rhetoric, especially as it relates to their counseling through LDS Social Services (which is conducted in harmony with LDS beliefs and principles).

existed in premortal life nor will exist in one's postmortal eternal existence. Essentially it is described as one of many possible tests – albeit a particularly challenging test – that an individual can face during their mortal life. This perspective is put forward by Elder James O. Mason – who served as a Mormon General Authority – in his essay for the previously-referenced *Understanding Same-Sex Attraction* compilation:

Each of us in premortal life looked forward with expectation and joy to this momentous opportunity and essential stage in our progress toward exaltation and eternal life... Mortality is a time of learning and walking by faith and obedience.

A fundamental feature of mortality is opposition... congenital and acquired disabilities and handicaps are part and parcel of opposition.

In mortality, physical handicaps may persist, but through the Atonement, struggles with same-sex attraction can eventually be eased or removed... Fortunately, the eternal spirit is not blemished by our mortal afflictions of body or mind.¹⁹⁴

Thus, for at least some LDS leaders and believers, experiencing same-sex attraction is a handicap analogous to physical or mental disabilities – a trial that must be overcome through faith in this life (and unlike physical disabilities, can potentially be “eased or removed” in this life), and that will surely be removed in the next life.¹⁹⁵

For those members of the Church who are drawn to those of their same sex, but who wish to remain devoted Mormons, this belief can be a comforting way to make sense of their struggles and, as their leaders suggest, to put those struggles in eternal perspective. As described by one such Latter-day Saint:

...we left our home (the premortal life) because we were asked by God to. God presented us with the opportunity to have eternal increase, to go to the land of Bountiful where we would have everything we ever desired and more. But first we were to go into the wilderness to prove ourselves; to be tested... Being gay is hard. Especially as a faithful member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints... but I can do it. I accepted this trial and Heavenly

¹⁹⁴ James O. Mason, “Physical Bodies and Earthly Experiences: ‘I Did Not Choose This Challenge, So Why Me?’” in Dahle et al, 28-9.

¹⁹⁵ For additional discussion (and criticism) of LDS discourse about same-sex attraction as a disability or affliction to be overcome, see Alan Michael Williams, “Mormon and Queer at the Crossroads,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 44, no. 1 (Spring 2011): 69-71.

Father has provided the provisions that I need to get through the wilderness to the land of Bountiful.¹⁹⁶

Through the lens of this doctrine, some even choose to reframe their experience as a gift that endows them with special capacities. For example, one gay Mormon describes the personal revelation he received after a period of soul-searching and discussing his feelings with others: "...I felt like something clicked: my same-gender attraction wasn't something I had been punished with. This was a gift, like a package deal, and I had accepted it with joy in premortality, not only because it would be a challenge but because along with it came certain unique talents that I could not have in any other way... As I was unique, God's plan for me was also unique."¹⁹⁷ These passages express both a self-acceptance and a hope that spring directly from belief in the LDS Church's teachings about both premortal and postmortal existence, including covenants made with God in premortality.

However, these messages, and particularly the belief that same-sex inclinations will end along with this mortal life, have not been hopeful in this same way for all those who hear them. For example, the Understanding Same Gender Attraction (USGA) group at Brigham Young University (BYU) posted a suicide prevention awareness video on Youtube, in which a number of BYU students who either identify as gay or experience same-sex attraction share personal stories of having suffered with depression, and having considered or attempted suicide. In the video, one young man explains his experience with LDS teachings about homosexuality:

Whenever the topic of homosexuality would come up [it was said] that it was a mortal experience, and that this was something that... didn't exist in the spirit world and we would be immediately freed from its bonds when we died. And in a weird way that did the opposite of comfort me as I was growing up,

¹⁹⁶ Gay Mormon Stripling Warrior, "Liahona," *Gay Mormon Stripling Warrior*, September 23, 2012, accessed March 10, 2014, <http://gaymormonstriplingwarrior.blogspot.com/2012/09/liahona.html>.

¹⁹⁷ Carlos A. Arciniegas, "Carlos A. Arciniegas," in Kerby, *Gay Mormons*, Chapter 4, Location 1044-49.

because in my mind, the option was, well, if things really get that bad, if you just die, then suddenly it's not an issue anymore and you'll be right with God again.¹⁹⁸

These words are striking and heartbreaking, particularly given the many reports of suicide by LGBT Mormons. While specific statistics do not exist for LGBT Mormon suicides, Utah has the 5th highest suicide rate for young people in the country, and advocates have called for more attention to be given to this pressing issue.¹⁹⁹

It's also essential to acknowledge that not all gay and lesbian Mormons accept the notion that their eternal soul is heterosexual. For those who feel that their homosexuality is a part of their very being, the message that they were not gay in premortality, nor will they be in the next life, simply seems incongruous with their own deeply-rooted self-understanding. As reasoned by one gay Mormon: "It is my understanding that in LDS doctrine... our essential self was the same in the pre-existence, here in the mortal world, and it will be the same in the afterlife. If I was born gay (which I was) then I have to believe that if I have a soul, it too is gay. If this is how God intended me to be, then it logically follows that there is a plan for me, in all my gayness, in the afterlife."²⁰⁰ This statement represents an attempt to wrestle with LDS doctrine, confirming some of the Church's teachings, while refusing

¹⁹⁸ Understanding Same Gender Attraction, "'Just Be There': A Message of Suicide Prevention Awareness from Brigham Young University Students," Youtube, Flash video file, October 10, 2013, accessed March 10, 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uqkaWTM_vK8.

¹⁹⁹ See Candice Madsen, "Utah at center of 'suicide belt'; youth suicide rate troubling," *KSL.com*, April 25, 2013, accessed March 10, 2014, <http://www.ksl.com/?nid=148&sid=24937434#BroVg8jsKJIKfj0g.99> and Gina Barker, "Advocates see rise in gay suicide," *Deseret News*, August 6, 2010, accessed March 10, 2014, <http://www.deseretnews.com/article/700054446/Advocates-see-rise-in-gay-suicide.html?pg=all>. For further discussion of suicide among gay Mormons, see Phillips pp. 53 and 115-6, and Christopher J. Alexander, "Suicidal Behavior in Gay and Lesbian Mormons" in Schow, Schow and Raynes, 257-63.

²⁰⁰ rex_tremendae, "Seek and You Shall Find (More Than You Thought You Would), Part One," *Like Light Through a Prism*, October 24, 2013, accessed March 10, 2014, <http://likelightthroughaprism.blogspot.com/2013/10/seek-and-you-shall-find-more-than-you.html#more>. As John Gustav-Wrathall pointed out in a 2013 Sunstone conference presentation, there are a growing number of gay Mormons that are seeking and finding this kind of "middle ground," as he calls it – in other words, individuals that are both Mormon-affirming and gay-affirming. The text of his talk can be found at John Gustav-Wrathall, "No More Strangers Panel, Sunstone Conference 2013–John Gustav-Wrathall," *No More Strangers*, August 25, 2013, accessed March 10, 2014, <http://www.nomorestrangers.org/no-more-strangers-panel-sunstone-conference-2013-john-gustav-wrathall/>.

to accept others. Certainly some gay and lesbian Mormons (and especially former Mormons) feel comfortable challenging the beliefs of their faith. They have done so in both public and private forums. However, for many faithful Mormons, challenging or rejecting a teaching put forth by the Church's leaders is a very difficult thing to do; for some, it may even be impossible.

The LDS Church's doctrines about premortality and the eternal nature of one's sex/gender identity influence not only how Mormons leaders view homosexuality and how they counsel gay and lesbian Saints, but also the terminology that is used surrounding this issue. Another key document related to the LDS Church's stance on homosexuality is an article from the *Ensign* (the Church's official magazine), entitled, "Same-Gender Attraction," and written by Elder Dallin Oaks of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. Published in October 1995, just one month after the initial release of the Proclamation on the Family, this article appears to be specifically intended to expand upon and clarify some of the statements in the Proclamation. It is also written in a less stark, more compassionate tone than the Proclamation. While the Proclamation is comprised entirely of definitive statements that leave no room for discussion or questioning, Elder Oaks' article begins by admitting that many in the LDS Church are still searching for answers regarding the issue of homosexual feelings: "How should Church leaders, parents, and other members of the Church react when faced with the religious, emotional, and family challenges that accompany such behavior or feelings?"²⁰¹ Oaks acknowledges the pain and hardships faced by those who struggle with this issue.

However, despite its more sensitive nature, the underlying message in this Church leader's article is essentially the same as the one laid out in the Proclamation on the Family. Oaks recognizes that some people do experience homosexual feelings

²⁰¹ Dallin H. Oaks, "Same-Gender Attraction," *Ensign* (October 1995), accessed March 10, 2014, <https://www.lds.org/ensign/1995/10/same-gender-attraction?lang=eng>.

or attraction, even going as far as to admit that some feelings “seem to be inborn.”²⁰² However, he remains firm when it comes to the issue of sexual orientation:

We should note that the words *homosexual*, *lesbian*, and *gay* are adjectives to describe particular thoughts, feelings or behaviors. We should refrain from using these words as nouns to identify particular conditions or specific persons. Our religious doctrine dictates this usage. It is wrong to use these words to denote a *condition*, because this implies that a person is consigned by birth to a circumstance in which he or she has no choice in respect to the critically important matter of sexual *behavior*.²⁰³

This passage makes clear the Church’s position that while the terms “homosexual,” “gay,” and “lesbian” can be used to describe the feelings or actions of some individuals, they should never be employed as personal identifiers. As Oaks explains, Mormon doctrine “dictates this usage.” Thus, in the orthodox Mormon worldview, it is possible for someone to have homosexual feelings, or even to commit homosexual acts, but it is not possible to *be* homosexual.

The rhetoric of LDS leaders regarding the possible causes of same-sex attraction has shifted somewhat over time. In recent years, at least on the part of some Church leaders, it includes more acknowledgment of the possibility that there are biological factors at work. However, what has not changed is the official policy that the terms “gay” and “lesbian” should not be used as personal identifiers. In 2007, Jeffrey R. Holland, also a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, wrote an *Ensign* article entitled, “Helping Those Who Struggle with Same-Gender Attraction.” In response to a young LDS man who had called himself gay, Holland states: “You serve yourself poorly when you identify yourself primarily by your

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ Ibid.; author’s emphasis.

sexual feelings.”²⁰⁴ That same year, the First Presidency and the Council of the Twelve Apostles authored a pamphlet entitled *God Loveth His Children*, which was “intended for Latter-day Saints who are troubled with same-gender attraction”; this pamphlet does not even contain the words gay or lesbian.²⁰⁵ And notably, while the LDS Church’s official website on this issue has the url mormonsandgays.org, there are few instances within the copious text on the site’s central pages in which an individual is referred to as a gay (or lesbian) person. Instead, the text refers over and over again to those “who are attracted to people of the same sex” or who are “dealing with same-sex attraction.”²⁰⁶ This deliberate use (and avoidance) of certain terminology regarding sexual orientation is the direct result of Mormon theological teachings.

The specific language employed by LDS leaders – and, as a result, by many members as well – is certainly not lost on those Mormons who fall into this category, and can have a profound effect on the way gay and lesbian members construct their identities and interact with their fellow Mormons. Some see this language as a way for Latter-day Saints to dismiss homosexuality as an affliction that can be overcome with hard work. For example, in a post entitled “RANT: SSA & SGA Make Me Sick,” one gay Mormon blogger expressed his frustration at the use of these terms:

...the church didn't want people believing that 'gay' was something you could be. So, they invented the phrase 'same-sex-attraction,' which conveniently was reduced to 'SSA.' It is kind of like 'ADD' or 'IBS.' But then they realized people were getting offended by the word 'sex' [I know, sad right?] so they changed it to 'same-gender-attraction,' or 'SGA.'

²⁰⁴ Jeffrey R. Holland, “Helping Those Who Struggle with Same-Gender Attraction,” *Ensign* (October 2007), accessed March 10, 2014, <https://www.lds.org/ensign/2007/10/helping-those-who-struggle-with-same-gender-attraction?lang=eng>.

²⁰⁵ The First Presidency and Council of the Twelve Apostles of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, “God Loveth His Children,” 2007, accessed March 10, 2014, <http://www.lds.org/manual/god-loveth-his-children/god-loveth-his-children?lang=eng>.

²⁰⁶ The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, “Love One Another: A Discussion on Same-Sex Attraction,” *The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, accessed March 10, 2014, <http://www.mormonsandgays.org/>.

All of a sudden the church was able to make being gay sound like a disease or deficiency of some kind. 'So how are you dealing with your SGA?' 'Oh, he struggles with SGA.' 'She suffers from SGA.' Very smart. We really should give some time for applause.²⁰⁷

Another Mormon gay man explains that he rejects these terms for similar reasons: "I like men. So I say gay because it's easier and to me doesn't make it sound like I have some disease or disorder, or like I'm ashamed of that part of me. I'm not, though I used to be."²⁰⁸ It's clear that the use of the terms "same-sex attraction" or "same-gender attraction" convey a particular attitude about homosexuality on the part of the LDS leadership, which, in turn, can influence the attitudes of ordinary Saints, both gay and straight. As demonstrated in the passages above, some gay and lesbian Mormons feel that this language demeans them and denies their right to self-identification.

And yet, others have embraced these terms as a natural extension of their belief in the LDS faith. As noted by one Mormon: "For me, SSA IS a disease and I'm fine with that. That doesn't make me any less loved in the sight of God. And I could never call myself 'gay' when Mormonism stands as the antithesis of so many things the 'gay' community stands for, both in professed principles and in actual practice."²⁰⁹ In this line of thought, the word "gay" becomes associated with an entire realm of things beyond simply being attracted to members of the same sex, or even just an orientation – it also represents a choice about how to live one's life, and even an entire worldview (that is seen by some as the "antithesis" of the Mormon worldview). The language used by LDS leaders certainly helps to reinforce this view.

²⁰⁷ Jonathan Adamson, "RANT: SSA & SGA Make Me Sick," *In These Gay Mormon Shoes*, November 5, 2010, accessed March 10, 2014, <http://ingaymormonshoes.blogspot.com/2010/11/rant-ssa-sga-make-me-sick.html>.

²⁰⁸ Gay Mormon Stripling Warrior, "Coming Out: A Family Affair," *Gay Mormon Stripling Warrior*, October 30, 2013, accessed March 10, 2014, <http://gaymormonstriplingwarrior.blogspot.com/2013/10/coming-out-family-affair.html>.

²⁰⁹ Gay Mormon, "Labels 2," *Understanding Gay Mormons*, July 14, 2013, accessed March 10, 2014, http://anothergaymormonblogger.blogspot.com/2013/07/labels-2_14.html.

However, it's also worth noting that the predominance of the terms SSA and SGA in the Mormon community allows gay and lesbian Saints who are trying to remain faithful to the laws of the Church to use these terms as a kind of code to communicate their intentions to other Mormons. As discussed by one individual: "I like SGA because I think people (for better or worse) usually associate 'gay' with someone who wants to be in a homosexual relationship or act out on same gender attraction. SGA implies that I don't want to live a more 'typical' gay lifestyle."²¹⁰ Another specifically mentions switching between different terms, depending on the audience: "When I'm with those who understand my commitment to the gospel, I say gay. Otherwise it's 'I have SSA feelings.'"²¹¹ Regardless of how different individuals perceive and use these terms, it's clear that this language has great power, and that the terminology used in LDS policies and communities has helped to shape Mormon perceptions about homosexuality, as well as the identity formation (and at times identity confusion) of gay and lesbian Mormons.

Certainly the aspect of Mormon doctrine that is most significant to the experience of gay and lesbian latter-day Saints is the central position of marriage in Mormon theology. According to Mormons, gender is not the only aspect of earthly life that extends into the spirit realm; as discussed in previous chapters, the Saints also believe that the institution of marriage will continue into the next life. In this doctrine of "celestial marriage," a man and a woman married in a Mormon temple are "sealed" together, and this bond cannot be broken even by death.²¹² It is important to note that a marriage must meet these two requirements – that it is between a man and a woman, and that it takes place in a Mormon temple – in order for it to last eternally. Even more noteworthy is the Mormon belief that this type of marriage

²¹⁰ Ibid.

²¹¹ Ibid.

²¹² Arrington and Bitton, *Mormon Experience*, 186.

is a *requirement* for entry into the celestial kingdom, which, in the LDS faith, is the greatest degree of glory that a person can achieve in the afterlife. The following is from an article entitled "The LDS Concept of Marriage," written by Elder Hugh Brown of the Council of the Twelve Apostles and published in the *Ensign*:

The Latter-day Saints believe that in order to attain the best in life and the greatest happiness in this world and for the next, men and women must be married in the temple for time and eternity. Without the sealing ordinances of temple marriage, man cannot achieve a godlike stature or receive a fullness of joy because the unmarried person is not a whole person, is not complete.²¹³

In other words, in the Mormon worldview, marriage is a crucial element in the eternal progression of the individual. Each person must get married in order to fulfill their divine purpose and to become "a whole person" in the eyes of the LDS Church and God. As stated in the Proclamation on the Family: "The family is ordained of God. Marriage between a man and a woman is essential to His eternal plan."²¹⁴

In the Mormon belief system, God's plan for humanity includes not only heterosexual marriage but also procreation. Procreation is greatly emphasized by Mormon leaders as not only a blessing but also a duty of married couples. The entry in the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* entitled "Marriage" explains that Mormon temple marriage is not simply for the pleasure of the individuals involved, but also so that they can fulfill their responsibilities to their Heavenly Father: "Parents enter into a partnership with God by participating in the procreation of mortal bodies, which house the spirit children of God."²¹⁵ Likewise, the entry entitled "Family" explains that members of the LDS Church "are taught not to postpone or refuse to have

²¹³ Hugh B. Brown, "The LDS Concept of Marriage," *Ensign*: (January 1972): 60.

²¹⁴ First Presidency, "The Family."

²¹⁵ Thomas B. Holman and James T. Duke, "Marriage," in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, ed. Daniel H. Ludlow (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1992), 859. Phillips points out that this emphasis on procreation also helps to ensure that homosexual relationships will be looked upon in a negative light in the LDS Church (see p. 25).

children for selfish or materialistic reasons."²¹⁶ In the Proclamation on the Family, procreation is put forth not only as a responsibility, but as a divine decree: "The first commandment that God gave to Adam and Eve pertained to their potential for parenthood as husband and wife. We declare that God's commandment for His children to multiply and replenish the earth remains in force."²¹⁷ These statements demonstrate the importance of childbearing in the Mormon community, as well as the enormous amount of pressure placed on individuals in the LDS community to marry and have children.

Like the doctrines concerning premortality and gender, these LDS beliefs related to marriage and family also profoundly influence Mormon attitudes about homosexuality, and thus, have great bearing on the lives of gay and lesbian Mormons. Such individuals must contend not only with cultural pressure, but also with strong ecclesiastical (and, in their belief, even divine pressure), to marry someone of the opposite sex and raise a family. Those who are raised Mormon receive the message from a very young age that they cannot be complete or enter the highest level of the celestial kingdom unless they engage in heterosexual marriage and have children. For many Christians experiencing homosexual feelings that are not condoned by their church, remaining celibate – while unquestionably difficult for someone who would not otherwise have chosen it – is an option that allows them to remain in good standing with their community; in some Christian circles, celibacy is even admired. While celibacy is certainly an option for gay Mormons as well, this option is accompanied by great psychological strain from the knowledge that they will never fully be right with God in the same way as their married counterparts. This is demonstrated in the comments of an LDS gay man: "To

²¹⁶ Reed H. Bradford and Darwin L. Thomas, "Family," in Ludlow, 488.

²¹⁷ First Presidency, "The Family."

Mormons, family is everything. In order to get into the top level of heaven you have to have a family. You have to be married, and you have to take care of your family. Even if you're celibate, as long as you're gay you still don't reach the top level with God."²¹⁸ Or as another notes:

...the Doctrine and Covenants says that the only way to get into the highest kingdom of God is to be married to a woman in the temple. They strongly believe that the only way to even be happy is to be married with a wife and kids. They believe that God loves you more when you're doing what's right and what the church teaches. The only way for eternal progression is to be straight. I didn't fit into that plan, was I not entitled to any happiness?²¹⁹

These statements indicate that for many gay men and lesbians in the Church, Mormon teachings about the essential nature of marriage trump suggestions that celibacy is a worthy option for them. Indeed, some find it very difficult to accept counsel from their leaders that clearly goes against what they have been taught their entire lives in the Church: "... the official stance didn't fit with my understanding of loving Heavenly Parents and an inclusive Plan of Happiness. Why was I raised to want an eternal companion and family above all else, then told that my 'special mission' was to remain celibate for life?"²²⁰

It's also important to acknowledge that LDS doctrine about marriage is not just an idea on a page that is referenced occasionally by leaders and theologians, but is instead one of the central organizing principles of the Mormon community. Gay and lesbian Saints are confronted with their Church's teachings about the importance of marriage and family on a regular basis – in Sunday school and seminary lessons, in speeches and hymns during their church services, in General Conference talks,

²¹⁸ Young Gay America, "Gay in the Celestial Kingdom," 2002, accessed March 10, 2014, http://www.vetustus.affirmation.org/youth/young_gay_america_1.pdf.

²¹⁹ Jim Anderson, "Jim Anderson," *Gay Mormon Stories*, accessed March 10, 2014, http://www.gaymormonstories.com/Jim_Anderson.html.

²²⁰ Hermia Lyly, "The Gay Law of Chastity," *No More Strangers*, December 1, 2013, accessed March 10, 2014, <http://www.nomorestrangers.org/the-gay-law-of-chastity/>.

and in everyday conversation.²²¹ Being constantly barraged with messages about the crucial roles that (heterosexual) marriage and family play in one's eternal salvation and happiness can be deeply distressing for individuals who are in the process of coming to terms with their sexual feelings and/or orientation. For example, one gay Mormon describes his reactions to a Sunday school lesson on Eternal Marriage:

She asked me after the video why I was having some strange aversion to a relatively simple video of people showing that they love each other... How do you just drop on someone that as other people are watching this and thinking, 'I can't wait to have this kind of relationship!' you are just wondering, 'This is something that I may never have.' That whole lesson was on 'Eternal Marriage' and I was bombarded with statements like: 'This is the most important thing you could ever do to show your love to God and your spouse.' and 'True discipleship includes marriage in the temple.'²²²

He acknowledges that unmarried heterosexuals may also feel discomfort in such a family-oriented Church, but he points out that though "they may find it frustrating and [be] uncomfortable with the thought of being single, when they do find love it will not be shameful. It will not be condemned. They won't have to hide... as someone who is not attracted to the other sex, that seems as such an impossibility."²²³ For individuals like this, it is not simply the lack of a relationship that causes pain, but also the lack of hope for a future relationship that falls within the bounds accepted by the Church.

Another gay man reports on the content of a church service he had attended, in which the congregation sang the LDS hymn "Families Can Be Together Forever."

The lyrics to that hymn are as follows:

²²¹ It should be noted that Sunday school in the LDS Church is not just for children; teenagers and adults normally attend two hours of classes every Sunday after their regular church service. Seminary is an LDS educational program in which high school students study biblical and Mormon scriptures, guided by instructors. For more information see: <http://www.mormonnewsroom.org/topic/seminary> (accessed March 10, 2014).

²²² Gay Mormon, "Yearning to be Understood", *Understanding Gay Mormons*, August 20, 2013, accessed March 10, 2014, <http://anothergaymormonblogger.blogspot.com/2013/08/yearning-to-be-understood.html>.

²²³ Ibid.

1. I have a fam'ly here on earth.
They are so good to me.
I want to share my life with them through all eternity.
2. While I am in my early years,
I'll prepare most carefully,
So I can marry in God's temple for eternity.
(Chorus)
Fam'lies can be together forever
Through Heav'nly Father's plan.
I always want to be with my own family,
And the Lord has shown me how I can.²²⁴

In his blog post, entitled "Another Hard Sunday," the man reports that he had already been struggling emotionally before attending the service, so hearing the song affected him quite powerfully: "He most certainly has shown me the way, and though I've tried to 'prepare in my early years' to marry in the temple - it doesn't seem like it's an option. I've been taught this wonderful, beautiful plan - and then told - 'it's not for you.' With those thoughts in my mind and then this song - it took everything I had not to burst into tears and just walk out."²²⁵

These are excellent examples of the way that the topics of marriage and family pervade Mormon worship and culture. It should also be noted that both of these individuals were attending services at Singles wards, which are LDS Church congregations made up of single adults from within a geographical area.²²⁶ The mere existence of Singles wards in the LDS community highlights the vital place of marriage in this faith. While many churches may organize fellowship groups for young adults in their communities, the idea of creating entire congregations based

²²⁴ Ruth M. Gardner and Vanja Y. Watkins, "Families Can Be Together Forever," in *Hymns of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City, 1985), no. 300, <https://www.lds.org/music/library/hymns/families-can-be-together-forever?lang=eng> (accessed March 10, 2014).

²²⁵ Chase Davenport, "Another Hard Sunday," *TR Unfiltered: True Reckonings*, December 30, 2012, accessed March 10, 2014, <http://trunfiltered.blogspot.com/2012/12/another-hard-sunday.html>.

²²⁶ A "ward" is the equivalent of a church congregation in the LDS faith; they are organized geographically. There are two kinds of Singles wards in LDS communities: Young Single Adult wards are for single adults ages 18-30, and Single Adult wards (which are less common) are for single adults ages 30 and above. For more information about Singles wards, see the online version of the "Handbook 2: Administering the Church": <https://www.lds.org/handbook/handbook-2-administering-the-church/single-members/16.6#166> (accessed March 10, 2014).

solely on the characteristic of being unmarried speaks to the high station of marriage in LDS culture, and also demonstrates the intense pressure that many Mormons feel to marry at a relatively young age. Singles wards can create awkward and uncomfortable situations for gay and lesbian Mormons, since they exist (at least in part) for the purpose of preparing and pairing up young faithful Mormons for marriage; this means that they are also more likely to offer lessons such as the one discussed above.²²⁷ All of these different manifestations of the Church's teachings about the importance of family have created a culture that can be isolating and alienating for those who are unmarried, and especially for those who intend to remain celibate. As noted by one gay Mormon: "Sometimes I still have difficulty feeling I have a place in the Church. It is troubling when people put so much emphasis on marriage and say that it's our purpose here on Earth. One member of the Church, in a Facebook comment, questioned whether there was any point in me keeping myself temple-worthy if I wasn't going to get married..."²²⁸ This suggestion that one's faithful participation in any other sacred rituals of their Church is meaningless without participation in the single ritual of marriage is quite striking, and certainly would seem bizarre outside the context of the LDS faith.

Given the amount of pressure they face to marry in the Temple, some gay Mormons do make the decision to enter a heterosexual marriage, even if they continue to experience same-sex attractions. While the LDS Church no longer counsels gays and lesbians in its midst to marry a member of the opposite sex, some still feel that this is their only viable option if they are to fulfill God's plan of salvation for their lives. One gay man explains that he married a woman in part because his LDS upbringing meant that he never thought about an alternative: "Mormonism's

²²⁷ For additional discussion of Singles wards as they relate to the experiences of gay men, see Phillips pp. 81-2. As he notes: "The entire structure of these wards is geared toward marriage, and exhortations to marry as soon as possible are delivered with great frequency from the pulpit" (p. 82).

²²⁸ Brent Kerby, "Brent Kerby," in Kerby, *Gay Mormons*, Chapter 1, Location 566-70.

core beliefs are centered on the family and their eternal nature. And so all growing up I knew that I would always hold to the same family-oriented values my parents lived by. I knew I would serve a full-time mission and upon returning I would find a woman to marry in the temple and soon thereafter have kids of our own. Never in my youth did I consider anything but this.²²⁹ This sentiment is mirrored in the comments of an LDS lesbian: "And in the church everything is so embodied by having a family, so it's 'Find someone of the opposite sex, go to the temple and get married and have kids,' and so for me homosexuality just did not enter my mind at all."²³⁰ Certainly some "mixed-orientation" marriages within the Mormon community are successful and happy, but many others ultimately end, causing pain and heartbreak. However, it is understandable that some gays and lesbians in the Church want to at least attempt marriage with a person of the opposite sex, due to the extreme emphasis on the family in LDS teaching.

In fact, this emphasis even takes on a menacing tone at the end of the Proclamation on the Family:

We warn that individuals who violate covenants of chastity, who abuse spouse or offspring, or who fail to fulfill family responsibilities will one day stand accountable before God. Further, we warn that the disintegration of the family will bring upon individuals, communities, and nations the calamities foretold by ancient and modern prophets.²³¹

This strongly-worded statement makes a comparison between domestic abuse and a failure to "fulfill family responsibilities," which in the context of the rest of the document seems to refer to those who (for whatever reason) do not enter into heterosexual marriage and obey God's commandment to have children. The second part of the statement goes as far as to suggest that those who do not fulfill these

²²⁹ Derek, "Why I Got Married," *A Shout from the Housetops*, August 21, 2012, accessed March 10, 2014, <http://www.shoutfromthehousetops.blogspot.com/2012/08/why-i-got-married.html>.

²³⁰ Understanding Same Gender Attraction, "It Gets Better BYU – Erikka," March 24, 2012, accessed March 10, 2014, Youtube, Flash video file, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1b18BZREF4g>.

²³¹ First Presidency, "The Family."

responsibilities will play a part in bringing “calamities” upon the world. In contrast to the Proclamation, other recent statements by LDS leaders do offer some hope by clarifying that because of God’s mercy, “persons who desire to do what is right but through no fault of their own are unable to have an eternal marriage in mortal life will have an opportunity to qualify for eternal life in a period following mortality, if they keep the commandments of God and are true to their baptismal and other covenants.”²³² However, in light of the Proclamation’s declaration that procreation is a commandment of God (and in fact, that it is the first commandment of God for humanity), statements like these are unlikely to relieve the burden that LDS gays and lesbians feel to be part of a nuclear family. In particular, the phrase “through no fault of their own,” which is found in several of these statements, is vague and leaves room for uncertainty as to what is expected of individuals in this regard.

It is this very uncertainty that is a huge source of anxiety among gay and lesbian Saints, especially given their beliefs about what is at stake in the decision about how to proceed with their lives. As acknowledged by one gay Mormon: “For many gay and lesbian Mormons, *not knowing* is a luxury they can't afford. If you are a believing Mormon, eternity means everything, and to be on the wrong side of eternity is to lose everything of value that this life -- even this temporal life -- has to offer.”²³³ Some may doubt whether even a life of faithful celibacy will qualify them for the eternal life for which they have been taught to aim and prove themselves. And even for those who truly believe that they will be able to achieve celestial marriage and its spiritual benefits in the next life, the reality of living their mortal

²³² Oaks. This sentiment is also echoed in very similar language in the pamphlet “God Loveth His Children.” The idea of single people achieving glory in the next life is seen as possible in part due to the belief that living Mormons can perform temple ordinances (including marriage) on behalf of those who are dead. However, as discussed, this knowledge does not necessarily relieve the anxiety of unmarried Mormons during this life. For more information on this practice, see Arrington and Bitton p. 303.

²³³ John-Gustav Wrathall, “The Spiritual Challenge in Mormon Political Support for Gay Marriage,” *Young Stranger*, October 4, 2013, accessed March 10, 2014, <http://youngstranger.blogspot.com/2013/10/the-spiritual-challenge-in-mormon.html>; emphasis author’s.

lives alone is of course a very painful pill to swallow. In the words of a Mormon lesbian:

It really hurts...the thought of no children...of no husband. I know that my righteousness will not keep from the blessings of exaltation...but getting from here to there and being happy while doing it...not so easy without a husband and children...I realize they bring their own set of challenges...but also their own set of blessings that I cannot have anywhere else. And though they can be mine in the next life...I am not in the next life right now...I am in this life.²³⁴

One answer to the question of what is expected of gays and lesbians in the Church can be found in Dallin Oaks' article, which places emphasis on God's great mercy, but also makes clear what is required in order to find acceptance within the LDS community:

Church leaders are sometimes asked whether there is any place in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints for persons with homosexual or lesbian susceptibilities or feelings. Of course there is. The degree of difficulty and the pattern necessary to forgo behavior and to control thoughts will be different with different individuals, but the message of hope and the hand of fellowship offered by the Church is the same for all who strive.²³⁵

According to this explanation, there is hope and help in the LDS Church for "all who strive" – meaning, all who work to overcome their same-sex desires and, ideally, embrace their true (heterosexual) identity. However, it is also very clear from his article that engaging in any type of homosexual behavior is not acceptable for Mormons: "Persons cannot continue to engage in serious sin and remain members of the Church."²³⁶ This sentiment has been strongly reinforced in more recent LDS Church statements about the issue of homosexuality. For example, almost the first piece of text on the website mormonsandgays.org – an official website of the LDS Church – is a highlighted section that includes the following: "The experience of same-sex attraction is a complex reality for many people. The attraction itself is not

²³⁴ (not)Sam, "Kids...what about kids?," *Enduring to the End*, April 23, 2008, accessed March 10, 2014, http://mynameisnotsam.blogspot.com/2008_04_01_archive.html.

²³⁵ Oaks.

²³⁶ *Ibid.*

a sin, but acting on it is. Even though individuals do not choose to have such attractions, they do choose how to respond to them."²³⁷ The inability of LDS leaders to accept homosexuality as a legitimate sexual orientation makes it impossible for them (and for many members as well) to accept continued homosexual behavior, and also makes them reticent to acknowledge self-identification as gay or lesbian.

This policy of imposed celibacy (with marriage to a member of the opposite sex offered as the only appropriate avenue for sexual expression) causes a great deal of pain and anguish for those gay and lesbian Saints who want to have a relationship with someone of the same sex, but who also want to preserve their membership in the LDS Church. Some ultimately decide that they are not willing to forego a loving and fulfilling relationship, even if it will put their status in the Church – and their eternal future – at risk. In the words of one gay man: "Through much thought and prayer, I've come to know that I cannot and should not be alone in life. I need to date men and find one to be my lifelong companion. This comes with the sad reality of there truly being no place for me in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints."²³⁸ However, even for those who are completely committed to maintaining the standards set by the Church, this policy still causes confusion and turmoil, due to uncertainty over the definition of "homosexual behavior." What exactly does it mean to act on one's same-sex attraction? Which actions are okay and which are not? Mormons of any sexual orientation are expected to follow the LDS Law of Chastity, which means remaining celibate outside of the bounds of marriage, and practicing modesty in dress and action.²³⁹ While the LDS Church does

²³⁷ The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, "Love One Another."

²³⁸ Nate, "Spirituality vs. Religion," *OxyMor(m)on*, January 29, 2014, <http://livingoxymormon.com/2014/01/spirituality-vs-religion/> (accessed March 10, 2014).

²³⁹ For more information about the Law of Chastity, see the "Gospel Principles" article on this subject at lds.org: <https://www.lds.org/manual/gospel-principles/chapter-39-the-law-of-chastity?lang=eng> (accessed March 10, 2014).

make fairly strict demands of its members in this regard, it is generally seen as acceptable for dating opposite-sex couples to hold hands and display their affection toward one another in public in appropriate ways. Yet some gay and lesbian Mormons argue that they are held to a much higher standard than their opposite-sex counterparts. In a blog post entitled "The Gay Law of Chastity," one Mormon lesbian explains that she was told by her bishop that she was unworthy to take the sacrament (the LDS version of communion), simply because she was pursuing a relationship with a woman, with whom she had only held hands. She argues that this dangerous double standard will only lead to further alienation of gays and lesbians in the Church: "It simply isn't fair that Mormons of one sexuality are allowed to follow a law that encourages them to love and guides them to fulfilling relationships, while Mormons of other sexualities must follow a law that tells them their love is wrong and leads them away from fulfilling relationships."²⁴⁰ The mother of a Mormon gay man makes a similar point: "The Church teaches that the same standard of morality applies to everyone, yet many of us expect our gay brothers and sisters not only to be chaste but to live a life completely devoid of affection. We accept that an unmarried heterosexual couple can hold hands and hug, yet some of us can hardly tolerate a gay couple even sitting next to each other. Can that really be what the Lord wants?"²⁴¹

Despite the efforts of some Church members to negotiate the relationship between homosexuality and Mormonism, the fact remains that with current LDS doctrine in place, the two are incompatible. Faced with this reality, many gay and lesbian members of the Church and those who love them are holding on to the

²⁴⁰ Lyly. A bishop is the closest equivalent within the LDS Church to a priest or pastor, though it is not an ordained clergy position; bishops are lay leaders.

²⁴¹ June Kerby, "Foreword," in Kerby, *Gay Mormons*, Foreword, Location 20-25. This issue of a double standard when it comes to homosexual behavior is also discussed by Phillips; he includes the text of an interview in which an LDS leader admits that there is a different standard for heterosexual couples than homosexual ones (see pp. 43-4).

possibility that a revelation will change this situation by accepting or legitimating homosexuality and same-sex couples.²⁴² Some compare the situation of gay and lesbian Mormons to that of Mormon men of African descent, who were denied the priesthood until 1978. In that year the LDS Prophet at that time, Spencer Kimball, stated that he had a revelation indicating that this policy should change, and subsequently the Church decreed that from that point forward all worthy male members would be granted the priesthood, regardless of race. In the words of one gay Mormon: "There was a time when African Americans couldn't be priests and no one ever thought that would change... People who are gay are hoping for another revelation."²⁴³ While there are certain points of comparison, the two situations are actually very different. Allowing black Mormons access to the priesthood was a revolutionary change, but it did not bring into question the basic worldview of the LDS Church. Due to the challenge it poses to major LDS doctrines concerning gender, marriage, and the family, the acceptance of homosexuality would bring into question some of the most basic Mormon beliefs about God and the Celestial Kingdom.

In actuality, a more appropriate comparison is to the 1890 Manifesto banning polygamy. As discussed in Chapter 3, the Manifesto resulted in a significant crisis for Mormon believers, because plural marriage was understood to be a central part of the LDS Divine plan of salvation. As Jan Shipps explains, at the time the Saints worried that if they "refused to enter into the 'Patriarchal Order' by marrying into plurality, they would be calling the entire Mormon theological program into question."²⁴⁴ A revelation accepting homosexuality as legitimate would amount to a crisis in Mormonism comparable to this one. The open canon of the Church does

²⁴² Phillips also found this view among gay men in his study; see p. 84.

²⁴³ Young Gay America.

²⁴⁴ Shipps, "Difference and Otherness," 97.

theoretically leave open the possibility that the Prophet could receive such a revelation at any time, and undoubtedly some gay and lesbian Saints (and their loved ones) will continue to hold out hope that the future within the LDS Church will be different. As stated by a Mormon gay man interviewed for an ABC News segment: "I think a lot of gay members of the church are praying all the time that God will speak to the leaders of the church and let them know."²⁴⁵ This hope for change within the Mormon Church is in a sense a double-edged sword; while it certainly helps preserve a sense of optimism among some faithful gay and lesbian Saints, it may also help dissuade those Saints from seeking a home in a more gay-affirming religious community.

In any case, what is certain is that the current policies of the Church, as well as recent statements by LDS leaders, provide no indication that there will be a significant change in the foreseeable future. The section of mormonsandgays.org discussing the purpose of the site contains a number of questions and answers, including the important question: "Is the Church softening its position regarding same sex attraction?" To this question, Elder D. Todd Christofferson of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles replies:

There shouldn't be a perception or an expectation that the Church's doctrines or position have changed or are changing. It's simply not true, and we want youth and all people to understand that. The doctrines that relate to human sexuality and gender are really central to our theology. And marriage between a man and a woman, and the families that come from those marriages – that's all central to God's plan and to the opportunities that He offers to us, here and hereafter. So homosexual behavior is contrary to those doctrines – has been, always will be – and can never be anything but transgression. It's something that deprives people of those highest expectations and possibilities that God has for us.²⁴⁶

²⁴⁵ ABC News, "Gay Mormons Face Excommunication," *abcNEWS*, June 7, 2006, <http://abcnews.go.com/Nightline/story?id=2051422&page=1&singlePage=true> (accessed March 20, 2014).

²⁴⁶ D. Todd Christofferson, "Purpose of this Website," *The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, accessed March 10, 2014, <http://mormonsandgays.org/>.

This statement could not be clearer, and is an excellent demonstration of the challenges that LDS theological principles present for gay and lesbian Mormons.

Structure and Culture

While the theology and worldview of the LDS Church provide the primary force in distinguishing the experiences of gay and lesbian Mormons from those of homosexual members of other conservative churches, it is also necessary to acknowledge the distinct structural and cultural factors of this religious community that have affected the lives of its gay and lesbian members. This section will explore some of these unique attributes that serve to reinforce LDS theological views related to the issue of sexuality. The first aspect of LDS Church structure that is particularly relevant to this discussion is the institution of the priesthood, which is the main organizing body of the Mormon Church. In *The Mormon Experience: A History of the Latter-day Saints*, Leonard Arrington and Davis Bitton note that in the LDS Church there “was to be no official clergy set apart from the larger class of lay members. Instead, all worthy male members were ordained to a lay priesthood...”²⁴⁷ The institution of the priesthood is exactly that; it is made up of all the worthy *male* members of the LDS Church, while women are not eligible to hold the priesthood. Due to the fact that all of the leadership positions in the LDS Church are drawn from the priesthood, this also means that women cannot hold leadership positions in the Church, with the exception of the all-female Relief Society. And unlike other churches with an all-male leadership, the priesthood is not a specific group of men but all men over the age of twelve who receive this ordinance. This means that among adults of good standing in the Church, the sole distinction between potential leaders and others is biological sex. The only way that women can participate in the priesthood is through marriage, as LDS women “are taught that women ‘share’ the priesthood with

²⁴⁷ Arrington and Bitton, 206.

their husbands."²⁴⁸ This policy effectively renders single women – both lesbian and straight – invisible in the governance of the Church, as they do not have a specific place in its organizational structure. However, it is particularly disorienting for lesbian Saints, as they may not feel willing or able to enter into marriage with a man, even if the opportunity were to arise.²⁴⁹ As one Mormon lesbian explains: "From the time I first recognized that my attraction to women was stronger than my interest in men, I knew instinctively that there was no place for me in the Mormon scheme of things."²⁵⁰

The policy also places additional pressure on women to marry, as they are otherwise unable to access the priesthood, and to receive the blessings of the Church that it bestows.²⁵¹ This idea is confirmed by the "Family" entry in the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*; it emphasizes "the role of the father in conducting family councils, which [are] seen as part of the councils designed to govern the Church extending all the way to the council of the First Presidency. The family is seen as the most basic unit of the Church, and all Church programs are designed to strengthen the family."²⁵² In this line of thinking, by holding the priesthood, the father of a family provides the link between that family and the larger hierarchy of the Church. The nature of the Mormon priesthood thus further encourages Saints to enter into traditional marriage and family relationships, ensuring that the institution of

²⁴⁸ Sonja Farnsworth, "Mormonism's Odd Couple: The Priesthood-Motherhood Connection," in *Women and Authority: Re-emerging Mormon Feminism*, ed. Maxine Hanks (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1992), 299.

²⁴⁹ The difficulty that the male-only priesthood poses for lesbian relationships is also discussed by Petrey. As he notes: "A male-only priesthood represents a significant limitation for female-female relationships, linking the exclusion of women from exercising priesthood power and authority to the exclusion of women's homosexual relationships" (p. 112).

²⁵⁰ Anna Hurston, "Suffering Into Truth," in Schow, Schow and Raynes, 15.

²⁵¹ Some scholars argue that women were originally given the keys to the priesthood by Joseph Smith, but that it was then taken away from them by later LDS leaders. See D. Michael Quinn, "Women Have Had the Priesthood Since 1843," in Hanks, 365-409.

²⁵² Bradford and Thomas, 489-90.

marriage is tied into the very structure of the LDS Church. This may help to explain why marriage is a prerequisite for some leadership roles in the Church; LDS leaders are meant to be models not only of virtue, but of a life lived in accordance with the Mormon plan of salvation. It is extremely rare (if not impossible) for an unmarried man to be called as a bishop in the Church, and some positions have marriage as a stated requirement, at least once a man reaches a certain age. For example, one gay Saint describes the circumstances that led to his engagement, despite his reservations about whether or not he should get married:

While in Hawaii, it was brought to my attention that if I was not married by the time I turned 28, then I would not be permitted to teach seminary. The Church has a policy that full-time male seminary teachers must be married. My coworkers were also constantly hounding me about why I was not married. My branch president constantly told me I needed to ask my girlfriend to marry me. He told me the Lord wanted me to marry and I just needed to trust Him and take the plunge.²⁵³

Thus for both lesbian and gay Mormons, failure to marry a person of the opposite sex can affect their standing and advancement in the Church in this life, as well as their progression in the next life.

A second aspect of LDS structure important to this discussion is the hierarchical and highly centralized nature of Church leadership. While members hold many leadership positions on the local level, the ultimate authority for all LDS Church matters rests in the hands of a small group of men, called the "General Authorities," and ultimately in one man – the President of the Church. Once LDS leaders occupy a certain office, they hold that office until their deaths, or until they achieve a higher position in the Mormon leadership structure (or in certain cases are given an honorable release), thus ensuring not only that a small number of men will have a great deal of power and influence over the entire community, but also that

²⁵³ Richard Draper, "Richard Draper," in Kerby, *Gay Mormons*, Chapter 3, Location 739-43.

the tradition will be very resistant to change.²⁵⁴ As discussed briefly in the previous chapter, Mormons believe in the doctrine of continuing revelation, which states that the lines of communication between God and man are still open. As the head of the Church, the President is understood to receive inspiration from God regarding the well-being of the entire Mormon community. And unlike Catholic beliefs about the figure of the Pope, Latter-day Saints believe that their President can even receive entirely new revelations from God that will help him guide them in the right direction.²⁵⁵ For this reason, the President is also referred to as the “Prophet” of the Church.

The very fact that the LDS Church has a *living* prophet is certainly significant to this discussion. Most conservative Christians base their beliefs and attitudes regarding sexuality on ancient biblical scriptures. While the Bible does hold prime authority among many Christians (as it does among Mormons), the fact remains that these are very old texts, translated from a completely different culture and (usually) from a different language. Mormons, on the other hand, have the added confirmation of statements made in the current era by their Prophet for this day. As noted by Elder Jeffrey Holland, “... there would be mass confusion and loss of gospel promises if no general ideal and no doctrinal standard were established and, in our case today, repeated. We take great strength in knowing the Lord has spoken on these matters,

²⁵⁴ For additional discussion of the hierarchical nature of the Mormon Church and how it influences LDS decision-making, see White Jr. and White, “Ecclesiastical Polity.” As they note: “Notwithstanding a rejection of the distinction between clergy and laity, the Church is governed by a highly centralized bureaucracy with decision-making prerogatives, control over institutional resources, and other forms of power located at the apex of a well-defined hierarchy.” (p. 75).

²⁵⁵ As explained in the entry on “Infallibility” from the Catholic Encyclopedia: “Infallibility must be carefully distinguished both from Inspiration and from Revelation... Revelation... means the making known by God, supernaturally of some truth hitherto unknown, or at least not vouched for by Divine authority; whereas infallibility is concerned with the interpretation and effective safeguarding of truths already revealed. Hence when we say, for example, that some doctrine defined by the pope or by an ecumenical council is infallible, we mean merely that its inerrancy is Divinely guaranteed according to the terms of Christ's promise to His Church, not that either the pope or the Fathers of the Council are inspired as were the writers of the Bible or that any new revelation is embodied in their teaching” (Patrick Toner, “Infallibility,” in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 7 (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1910), accessed March 10, 2014, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07790a.htm>).

and we accept His counsel even when it might not be popular."²⁵⁶ There is no doubt that the frequent modern-day clarification and repetition of LDS principles regarding the divine nature of the traditional family by their living Prophet helps to strengthen the hold of these principles among the Mormon community. The tremendous authority extended to the Prophet of the LDS Church is demonstrated by the following passage from Elder James Faust's 1996 Ensign article "Continuing Revelation":

He has been ordained and set apart as the prophet, seer, and revelator to the world. He has been sustained as the President of the Church. He is the presiding high priest over all the priesthood on the earth. He alone holds and exercises all the keys of the kingdom under the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the head of this Church and is the chief cornerstone. President Hinckley is leading this work forward and is assisted by two counselors and sustained by the Quorum of the Twelve.

I do not believe members of this Church can be in full harmony with the Savior without sustaining His living prophet on the earth, the President of the Church. If we do not sustain the living prophet, whoever he may be, we die spiritually.²⁵⁷

The great deal of power invested in the current Prophet of the Church means that many devout Saints believe that as long as they are following the will of the Prophet, they are following the will of God. And given the centralized authority structure of the LDS Church, the faith that most Saints place in their Prophet is also extended to other leaders in the Church, particularly to the General Authorities. As a result, the words of senior Mormon leaders, especially when published and distributed by the Church, can strongly influence the beliefs and attitudes of the LDS membership. The personal accounts of many gay and lesbian Saints reveal that their early encounters with damaging statements by principal LDS leaders about homosexuality profoundly influenced their sense of themselves and their value as

²⁵⁶ Jeffrey R. Holland, "General Patterns and Specific Lives" (lecture, Worldwide Leadership Training Meeting: Building Up a Righteous Posterity, February 9, 2008), accessed March 10, 2014, http://scottwoodward.org/Talks/html/Holland,%20Jeffrey%20R/HollandJR_GeneralPatternsSpecificLives.html.

²⁵⁷ Faust, "Continuing Revelation."

human beings. The most frequently mentioned treatises are the talk "To Young Men Only," given by Boyd Packer (now one of the most senior leaders in the Church), which was later published by the Church as a pamphlet, and the book *The Miracle of Forgiveness*, written by Spencer Kimball, who later became the LDS President.²⁵⁸ Both paint homosexuality (and homosexual people) in an extremely negative light. *The Miracle of Forgiveness*, in particular, is still widely read and referenced by Mormon Church members and leaders. One gay Mormon describes reading this book when he was young:

From an early age I knew that what I was feeling was wrong and unacceptable. I read in *The Miracles of Forgiveness*:

This perversion is defined as 'sexual desire for those of the same sex or sexual relations between individuals of the same sex,' whether men or women. It is a sin of the ages. Those who felt powerless to change their feelings were called 'weaklings.' I placed all my trust in my Church leaders. Hearing myself described in such language, I could not help but feel unworthy of God's love.²⁵⁹

In addition to their influence on the self-perceptions of gay and lesbian Saints, texts like this one have undoubtedly helped to shape opinions about homosexuality within the larger Mormon community as well.²⁶⁰

Aside from the great impact of its leadership structure, the hierarchical nature of the LDS Church is also important in a discussion of the situation of gay and lesbian Mormons because of its implications for the role of the Church in the lives of its individual members. As explained by scholars O. Kendall White Jr. and Daryl White:

"For hierarchically based organizations, the institution itself enjoys a metaphysical status as a corporate entity charged with the administration of sacred sacraments deemed essential for salvation. Since divine authority rests in the institution itself, especially in formal aspects of its hierarchically

²⁵⁸ Spencer W. Kimball, *The Miracle of Forgiveness* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, Inc., 1969). The entire text of "To Young Men Only" can be found at lds.org: <https://www.lds.org/manual/to-young-men-only/to-young-men-only> (accessed March 10, 2014).

²⁵⁹ Chris Taylor, "Chris Taylor," in Kerby, *Gay Mormons*, Chapter 5, Location 1076-84.

²⁶⁰ For an in-depth discussion of the treatment of homosexuality in *The Miracle of Forgiveness*, and its potential influences on views about this subject within the LDS community, see Phillips pp. 30-2.

structured social relationships, individuals can be saved only through participation in its sacramental structure."²⁶¹

The importance of the institution of the LDS Church in the faith and ultimate salvation of members helps to ensure that individual Saints will follow the doctrinal policies and behavioral guidelines of the LDS faith. The institution of the Church plays a similar role in other hierarchical churches such as the Catholic Church, but the comparatively smaller size and insularity of the Mormon community ensure that (at least in the United States) LDS General Authorities are able to more directly influence members of their community. This is especially true today due to an increased stress in recent decades within the LDS community on the importance of obedience to leaders.²⁶²

The role of the Church in the individual salvation of members also ensures that it will be much more challenging for gay and lesbian members of the LDS Church to consider switching to another church with different policies regarding homosexuality and same-sex relationships. This difficulty is compounded by the emphasis within the LDS Church that every Church member should pray for a strong "testimony" of the truth of the Latter-day Saints religion – "a spiritual witness given by the Holy Ghost... that The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is the Savior's true Church on the earth."²⁶³ Many Saints describe their experience of receiving a testimony about the truth of the Church as being among the most positive and powerful of their entire lives. Thus some gay and lesbian Mormons are reluctant to leave the Church, even if they feel alienated by its teachings about homosexuality. As explained by one gay man: "I still believed that Joseph Smith had

²⁶¹ White Jr. and White, 72.

²⁶² For a discussion of the process of "priesthood correlation" and its accompanying emphasis on obedience to the LDS leadership, see Mauss, *Angel and the Beehive*, 164-5.

²⁶³ The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, "Testimony," *The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, accessed March 10, 2014, <https://www.lds.org/topics/testimony?lang=eng>.

restored the gospel in this dispensation. But I felt like I just couldn't go back to the LDS Church. So I was trying to find a different church, but none of them could compare with what I knew, because I really had a testimony that the Church was true."²⁶⁴

The role of the Church in the salvation of individual believers also means that the possibility and especially the reality of being forced to leave the Church is that much more profound. The Mormon Church's strict policies related to sexual behavior – and especially homosexual behavior – have created a situation in which some gay and lesbian members are eventually excommunicated from the Church. As one gay man notes: "... the specter of excommunication hovers over all gay Mormons -- whether they have actually been excommunicated or not."²⁶⁵ Given the importance of the institutions of the Church in securing eternal life and happiness with one's family, this event can be devastating. As described by one man after his own experience of being excommunicated: "I never could have imagined I would lose my membership in the church, but it has happened. I have no Spirit, no priesthood, no forever family, NOTHING."²⁶⁶

The reticence of many Saints to switch churches – and the fear of being rejected from their own – comes not only from the essential salvific role of the Church for individual Mormons, but also from its important *social* role in their lives. One final point that is essential to an understanding of the situation of gay and lesbian Saints relates to Mormon culture, and more specifically to the powerful hold of the LDS Church and community on its members. Writer Cloy Jenkins recognizes

²⁶⁴ Matt Sutton, "Matt Sutton," in Kerby, *Gay Mormons*, Chapter 29, Location 4048-57. For additional discussion of testimony as a complicating factor for gay Mormons, see Phillips, 22.

²⁶⁵ John Gustav-Wrathall, "Gay, Mormon, Hopeful, Faithful, Excommunicated and Called," *Young Stranger*, November 26, 2012, accessed March 10, 2014, <http://youngstranger.blogspot.com/2012/11/gay-mormon-hopeful-faithful.html>.

²⁶⁶ The Dark Passenger, "Excommunication," *Silently Struggling*, October 24, 2013, accessed March 10, 2014, <http://silentlystruggling.blogspot.com/2013/10/excommunication.html>.

this aspect of Mormon life, and the problems it creates for gay people raised in the LDS Church:

Having been raised a Mormon, it is impossible ever to separate oneself emotionally from the Church. For many, it remains an irresolvable antagonism in their lives. My non-Mormon homosexual friends have often observed that breaking from their hostile church was one of the more positive things they had done, but the Mormon homosexuals they have known remain inextricably tangled with the Church. When they realize the extreme position the Church takes, they are incredulous that I would continue to be active. Their religious background does not give them an adequate perspective of the profound effect which being raised a Mormon has on the lives of its members.²⁶⁷

Jenkins' comments sets his experience apart from that of gay people in other churches; as he notes, those outside the Mormon community often have difficulty understanding the complex and intense connection that Mormon believers have to their Church. A similar sentiment is expressed by a gay man who left the Mormon Church in his youth, but after many years felt a strong pull to return: "Some of my non-LDS friends think that I have a weird case of Stockholm Syndrome, that after I escaped from church thirty years ago, I have a need to go back."²⁶⁸

The hold of the LDS Church on its members is partially a result of a Mormon culture that is both extremely insular and all-encompassing for those on the inside. One gay Mormon explains that "...participation in Mormondom goes far beyond doctrine, practice, or ideology. It's family, it's community, it's politics (especially in Utah). For most people, there is no way to fully get away from it... The church affects our lives, and even a conscious decision to resign from the church is evidence of the influence being Mormon had and has over our lives."²⁶⁹ It's clear that the LDS Church plays many important roles in the lives of its members; it represents not only a

²⁶⁷ Cloy Jenkins, "Prologue: An Examination of the Mormon Attitude Towards Homosexuality," (Affirmation/Gay and Lesbian Mormons, 1978), 47.

²⁶⁸ Happy, "Top 10 Reasons Why I Came Back to the Church," *Doodle Today*, December 13, 2011, accessed March 10, 2014, <http://doodletoday.blogspot.com/2011/12/top-10-reasons-why-i-came-back-to.html>.

²⁶⁹ Alex, "Gays and Mormons.com," *The Crazy Mormon*, last modified January 15, 2013, accessed March 10, 2014, <http://thecrazymormon.blogspot.com/2012/12/gays-and-mormonscom.html>.

community of worship, but an entire social and cultural universe. Accordingly, the Church's stated position on homosexuality and same-sex relationships has meant devastating losses for some gay and lesbian Mormons who make the decision to come out to their families, friends, and religious community. By being honest about their feelings and their relationships, they are risking rejection not only from their church, but also from their entire community and culture. This is evident in the comments of one gay man: "When you grow up Mormon the church is everything. It's your life, your friends, your activities, your family. When I came out I had to start a completely new life because the Mormons I'd grown up with didn't want to relate to me anymore."²⁷⁰ And certainly this experience of rejection is made even more devastating by the Mormon belief in the eternal nature of the family. As noted by Kate Kendell in her recent essay "A Priceless Gift: Loving Our Mormon LGBT Children":

The most difficult part about being rejected by your family as a Mormon youth is that you lose so much of your identity when your family turns away. As a very young child in the church, I knew that family was the most important part of God's plan: 'Families are forever.' And the LDS Church means that literally. According to the Mormon faith, a family will live on for eternity, long after our mortal death. Many of the LGBT Mormons I knew whose families had pushed them away believed that while their family would be together in the afterlife, they would be alone -- for eternity. That is a long time. If this is your belief and all you have ever known, the loss is intolerable.²⁷¹

These words from LDS believers demonstrate the powerful role of the Mormon Church in their lives, and the extent to which their religious beliefs are entwined with their social and family relationships.

However, it should be noted that for gays and lesbians, the experience of leaving the Church – especially when it is a decision made voluntarily – is certainly complicated, but is not necessarily a negative one. Due to the all-encompassing

²⁷⁰ Young Gay America.

²⁷¹ Kate Kendell, "A Priceless Gift: Loving Our Mormon LGBT Children," *The Huffington Post*, July 5, 2012, accessed March 10, 2014, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/kate-kendell-esq/mormon-lgbt-children_b_1644176.html.

nature of Mormon culture, the worldviews expressed by that culture can also be all-encompassing for those on the inside. Thus, taking steps outside of that culture (physically and especially psychologically) can open individuals up to entirely new ways of viewing the world and themselves. For those gay and lesbian Mormons that make the decision to leave the LDS Church, this process often involves not only coming to accept their gay identity, but also acknowledging that being gay is not a bad thing, and that it doesn't automatically mean struggle and pain. In fact, for those transitioning out of the Mormon Church, the realization that the negativity they associated with their same-sex attraction and homosexual identity came either partially or exclusively from the Church itself can be extremely profound and relieving. As described by one gay man: "Through much counseling and self-evaluation, I've come to realize that almost all of my anxiety, depression, shame, and guilt over the years has come from the Church. Yes, the Gospel tells us to love one another, but, in practice, men are fallible, and many members of the Church (in general) do not understand homosexuality nor its deep roots in the human psyche."²⁷² Another explains the great effort he put into embracing the Church's teachings on homosexuality, and the sense of reprieve he felt when he finally stopped doing so:

I had read everything the Church ever published on the subject, and desperately wanted to believe it.

Ultimately I think those materials harmed more than helped. They taught me to deny, suppress, and hate a major part of who I am, and it drove me into depression. They prevented me from coming to terms with my gayness in a healthy way... My misery didn't stem from being gay, but from the Church. I've spent my life relying on the Church for happiness, but it wasn't until I stopped looking there that I found it.²⁷³

²⁷² Nate, "Spirituality vs. Religion."

²⁷³ Praenomen Cognomen, "How I got to where I am," *According to the Dictates of my Gay Conscience*, February 1, 2014, accessed March 10, 2014, <http://mygayconscience.blogspot.com/2014/02/how-i-got-to-where-i-am.html>.

Thus, despite any hardships that may be involved in the decision to remove oneself from the LDS Church – or in the process of being forcibly removed from the Church – this exit may also help pave the way for positive self-understanding and for contentment in a life outside of the Church.

Summary

The many testimonials from gay and lesbian Saints in this chapter demonstrate the unique nature of this faith community. Whether they are trying to overcome or embrace their same-sex attractions, whether they identify as gay or as someone who experiences SSA, whether they are trying to maintain their membership in the Mormon Church or struggling to come to terms with leaving it, the words of these individuals are a powerful demonstration of the ways that LDS theology, structure, and culture make their experiences unique among those of gays and lesbians in conservative Christian churches. It is clear that in examining this topic, the LDS Church cannot be simply placed alongside other churches, nor can it be easily classified or categorized among those churches. Indeed, a focus on the issue of sexuality provides an effective means for exploring essential attributes of the LDS Church, and its place among other American Christian churches and denominations. Some possible applications for this research will be explored in the concluding chapter.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

Project Review

This dissertation explores the topics of sexuality, marriage, and family in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, on both the institutional and individual levels. It specifically focuses on the ways that Mormon history, theology, structure, and culture have impacted: a) recent Mormon Church policies and actions regarding homosexuality and the issue of same-sex marriage and b) the experiences of gay and lesbian Latter-day Saints. Early chapters provide necessary historical background not only on early Mormon attitudes and statements related to sexuality, marriage, and family, but the way that these attitudes were shaped by outsider perspectives and critiques. Non-Mormon attacks against the LDS practice of polygamy during this period were frequent and vehement, and they constituted nothing less than a complete assault on Mormon marriage and family life, as well as an indictment of Mormon sexual behavior and appetites. As a result, from very early in their history, the Mormons were forced to reply to attacks against their deeply-held beliefs and practices, and specifically to prove their virtue and the sanctity of their relationships; they took great pains to portray themselves as being good Christians and good Americans (and to confirm this through their behavior). These early attacks and the responses made by the Saints ultimately established within the LDS Church a pattern of self-protective measures and attention to public opinion that endured long after the LDS Church no longer endorsed the practice of plural marriage. However, neither Wilford Woodruff's Manifesto, nor any statements that followed from LDS leaders, completely clarified the status of polygamy in the Mormon doctrine, leaving room for persistent confusion among both the Saints themselves and among outsiders. Factors such as the frequent reappearance of the

issue of polygamy in the news media and in various aspects of popular culture, as well as a simple lack of knowledge about Mormon belief among the general public, mean that a significant number of non-Mormons today persist in believing that – or are entirely unsure if – members of the LDS Church practice plural marriage. This reality leaves the LDS Church in a defensive position with regard to this matter, having to continue attempting to prove that they currently embrace “traditional” values regarding marriage and family relationships.

Chapter 4 explores recent Mormon political engagement in American politics, specifically its intense involvement in “Defense of Marriage” campaigns that seek to confirm the definition of marriage as being between one man and one woman, thereby preventing the legalization of same-sex marriage. I propose that this political engagement has played an important role within the Church’s larger project to reshape its public image, and its position among American Christian groups and in U.S. society at large. Fervent support of and participation in Defense of Marriage campaigns allows LDS leaders to publicly assert the Mormon Church’s adherence to traditional family values, while also improving the standing of the Church among other conservative Christian groups; in fact, Mormons formed positive relationships with leaders and members of these churches through the campaigns. While this political involvement did gain the Mormons some enemies among the more liberal segments of the American population, it helped them to gain greater respect among conservative Americans that more closely share the values of the LDS Church.

Chapter 5 shifts from a focus on the Church’s public identity and interactions with outsiders, to instead address the internal impact of Mormon policies and actions regarding sexuality, marriage, and family; specifically, their influence on the lives of gay and lesbian Latter-day Saints. Distinctive elements of LDS theology, as well as the Church’s history, structure, and culture, ensure that the experiences of gay and

lesbian Mormons are unique among homosexual members of conservative churches. Mormon beliefs about premortality and the eternal nature of both gender and marriage preclude the belief in a homosexual orientation, and place marriage and family at the very center of LDS worship and culture, leaving many gays and lesbian Saints with feelings of unworthiness or exclusion, especially given that – unlike single heterosexual Mormons – they cannot simply hope that a potential partner will come along in the future. In addition, the belief in a living prophet who can receive revelations from God, and in whom Mormons are encouraged to place all their faith and trust, ensures frequent, up-to-date reiteration of current LDS beliefs related to marriage and family, while also providing hope that different policies may be embraced in the future. This hope, along with the essential role of the Church itself in both the individual salvation and the social lives of members, ensures that not only will gay and lesbian Mormons be more likely to remain in the LDS Church (rather than seeking out a more accepting religious or secular community); they will also be more likely to adapt their lives in order to adhere as closely as possible to LDS teachings and policies.

Significance

This project is significant for Mormon studies in that it contributes further to understandings about the topics of marriage, family, and sexuality in Mormon history, experience, and contemporary culture. By examining these themes in different time periods and across both the institutional and individual levels, it provides important insight about changing Mormon understandings of the nature of marriage and family, and of the origin and boundaries of sexuality, and how those understandings have in part been shaped by LDS interactions with the larger American public. A number of scholars of Mormonism have examined the practice of polygamy from various angles, tackling the shifting Mormon beliefs regarding

marriage and family in the period after the Manifesto was released. However, there has been less academic attention to Mormon policies and political activity related to marriage, family, and sexuality in recent decades, and even less that draws concrete connections between early Mormon persecution over polygamy and this political activity. I offer a thorough examination of Mormon involvement in Defense of Marriage campaigns, discussing not just the nature of that involvement but also its *results* – the opportunities that this political participation has provided in the continuing efforts of LDS leaders to shape their Church’s public identity and its position with regard to American society, as well as its relationships with other conservative churches.

This project is also significant in that it extends the academic body of work related to the experiences of gay and lesbian Mormons. As previously discussed, there are a number of existing compilations that include the voices of contemporary gay and lesbian Saints, but with a couple of notable exceptions, most of these texts are written by and for Mormons, with the specific objective of either increasing awareness within the larger community over this issue, or of helping Latter-day Saints that experience same-sex attraction to remain faithful to LDS teachings. I place the voices of those individuals within the framework of a systematic analysis of many different aspects of Mormon history, teaching, organization, and culture that help to shape their experiences, demonstrating some of the ways that these unique elements of the LDS Church impact their lives and their self-understanding.

This work also has implications for the study of religion in America, and specifically for the study of American Christianities, in that it provides a concrete example of the fact that the issue of same-sex marriage is now at the forefront of identity negotiation among American Christian groups. I document some of the ways that modern political campaigns like the Yes on 8 and other Defense of Marriage

campaigns are creating new interdenominational alliances among religious communities that previously were either indifferent or at odds with one another. Moreover, by demonstrating the effects of LDS participation in Defense of Marriage campaigns on their relationships with other like-minded Christian communities, and the way that this participation put the Mormon Church on the national radar as a staunch proponent of traditional family values, this work establishes the current potential of denominational policies and actions regarding the issue of same-sex marriage to play an essential role in the efforts of church leaders to shape the public identities of their denominations, to appeal to a particular segment of the American population, and to navigate interdenominational relationships in the American religious landscape.

To support this theory, it will be helpful to briefly explore possible ways that some other denominations (from different sides of the political spectrum) have used or are currently using policies and actions concerning same-sex marriage as a means of positioning. Among conservative Christians, the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) is one example of a denomination that has been highly active politically on this (and other) issues, and is notably the largest U.S. Christian organization after the Catholic Church. The Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission (ERLC), which is the political arm of the SBC, has issued numerous amicus briefs and written comments in favor of legislation preserving the definition of marriage as being between one man and one woman,²⁷⁴ and has also encouraged its membership to become

²⁷⁴ For examples, see the ERLC's press releases on a brief filed to the Supreme Court on the issue of Proposition 8 (Tom Strode, "ERLC urges court to review gay marriage case," *The Ethics & Religious Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention*, September 5, 2012, accessed March 20, 2014, <http://erlc.com/article/erlc-urges-court-to-review-gay-marriage-case>) and its then-President Richard's Land's written testimony to the Washington, D.C. Elections Board regarding the potential legalization of gay marriage in the District of Columbia (Staff, "Richard Land to D.C. Elections Board: SBC strongly opposes 'gay marriage'," *The Ethics & Religious Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention*, October 28, 2009, accessed March 20, 2014, <http://erlc.com/article/richard-land-to-d.c.-elections-board-sbc-strongly-opposes-gay-marriage>).

involved in political efforts opposing same-sex marriage as well.²⁷⁵ Internally, the SBC has also issued multiple statements declaring their formal position against same-sex marriage.²⁷⁶ For the most part, the language used in SBC declarations and political expressions regarding this issue have followed a pattern similar to other evangelical Christian groups, representing attempts to bring conservative Christian values more fully into American law and government, consistent with the goals of the Religious Right.

However, one statement that stands out is the SBC's most recent resolution on the issue of same-sex marriage, which was passed during its national convention in 2012. Aside from simply upholding the one-man-one-woman definition of marriage, this statement, entitled "On 'Same-Sex Marriage' And Civil Rights Rhetoric," declares the following: "It is regrettable that homosexual rights activists and those who are promoting the recognition of 'same-sex marriage' have misappropriated the rhetoric of the Civil Rights Movement... we deny that the effort to legalize 'same-sex marriage' qualifies as a civil rights issue since homosexuality does not qualify as a class meriting special protections, like race and gender...."²⁷⁷ This resolution was purposefully crafted to make a very specific point, and suggests a particular motivation on the part of the leadership of the Southern Baptist Convention. Indeed, it is almost certainly a reflection of the changing demographics of the SBC, and the direction in which its leaders are hoping to move the Convention

²⁷⁵ See the ERLC's action alert encouraging SBC members to call their Representatives in Congress regarding the Marriage Protection Amendment (H.J. Res. 88): Richard Land, "House to Debate and Vote on Marriage Protection Amendment July 18," *The Ethics & Religious Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention*, July 14, 2006, accessed March 20, 2014, <http://erlc.com/article/house-to-debate-and-vote-on-marriage-protection-amendment-july-18>. On the state level, the California Southern Baptist Convention passed a resolution endorsing Proposition 8 and encouraging local pastors and church members to get involved in the campaign (see "Proposition 8 Resources for Churches," *California Southern Baptist Convention*, accessed March 20, 2014, <http://www.csbc.com/protectmarriage>).

²⁷⁶ The 2003 Resolution can be found at <http://www.sbc.net/resolutions/1128> (accessed March 20, 2014).

²⁷⁷ Southern Baptist Convention, "On 'Same-Sex Marriage' And Civil Rights Rhetoric," *Southern Baptist Convention*, 2012, accessed March 20, 2014, <http://www.sbc.net/resolutions/1224>.

in coming decades. As news outlets have noted: "The nation's largest Protestant denomination is attempting to broaden its appeal beyond its traditional white Southern base."²⁷⁸ The ERLC's current President, Russell Moore, pointed out that "... the fastest growing segments of our denomination are among Latino-Americans and African-Americans. And so I think you're going to see a Southern Baptist Convention that over the next 25, 30 years looks increasingly more like global Christianity."²⁷⁹ Thus, it seems likely that the SBC is now employing its position on same-sex marriage – and more specifically, the language in which it is conveyed – to attract conservative African-American Christians, some of whom have expressed resentment or dismay at comparisons between African-American struggles in the Civil Rights Movement and contemporary gay rights struggles.²⁸⁰

The use of public decrees on this issue as a means of attracting new members may also come into play among liberal Protestant denominations as well. One particularly notable denomination in the fight *for* gay rights is the United Church of Christ (UCC), which has long portrayed itself as a champion for equality and a "Church of Extravagant Welcome"; the "About Us" page on the UCC website notes that this denomination was "the first to ordain an openly gay man, and the first Christian church to affirm the right of same-gender couples to marry."²⁸¹ The UCC has also been active in local and national political campaigns regarding same-sex marriage, and even maintains a page on its website dedicated to activism on this

²⁷⁸ Associated Press, "Southern Baptists declare that gay rights aren't civil rights," *New York Daily News*, June 21, 2012, accessed March 20, 2014, <http://www.nydailynews.com/news/politics/southern-baptists-declare-gay-rights-aren-civil-rights-article-1.1099710>. Also see Ingrid Norton, "The Changing Face of the Southern Baptist Convention," *Religion & Politics*, June 22, 2012, accessed March 20, 2014, <http://religionandpolitics.org/2012/06/22/the-changing-face-of-the-southern-baptist-convention/>.

²⁷⁹ WBUR, "New Southern Baptist Leader On Issues And The State Of The Church" *here & Now with Robin Young and Jeremy Hobson*, August 21, 2013, accessed March 20, 2014, <http://hereandnow.wbur.org/2013/08/21/bible-belt-christianity>.

²⁸⁰ See Steve Osunsami, "Are Gay Rights Civil Rights?," *ABC News*, March 13, 2013, accessed, March 20, 2014, <http://abcnews.go.com/WNT/story?id=131679>.

²⁸¹ United Church of Christ, "About Us," *United Church of Christ*, accessed March 20, 2014, <http://www.ucc.org/about-us/>.

issue.²⁸² While the affirmation of gay marriage is certainly in line with the ideals of this denomination's mission, it is still striking that UCC leaders made the decision to pass a resolution affirming same-sex marriage in 2005, given the outright opposition or ambivalence toward this position of some of its member congregations.²⁸³ Even more striking is the strong language used in this statement, which not only proclaims support for marriage equality, but also "urges the congregations and individuals of the United Church of Christ to prayerfully consider and support local, state and national legislation to grant equal marriage rights to couples regardless of gender, and to work against legislation, including constitutional amendments, which denies civil marriage rights to couples based on gender."²⁸⁴

The UCC employs congregational church polity, and firmly declares the autonomy of local churches within its denomination, so the resolution adopted by its General Synod is not binding on any of those individual churches. Therefore, it can be seen at least in part as a symbolic statement that expresses a particular vision of the United Church of Christ and its future. And indeed, the UCC has actively sought to make that vision known among the general American public. As a part of its ongoing "God is Still Speaking" campaign, the UCC has produced a number of advertisements to be aired on television and spread through Youtube, all of which make clear its embrace of same-sex relationships and gay and lesbian individuals; notably, the page on which these videos are compiled on the UCC's website is

²⁸² United Church of Christ, "Marriage Equality," *United Church of Christ*, accessed March 20, 2014, <http://www.ucc.org/lgbt/issues/marriage-equality/>.

²⁸³ For a discussion of the passing of the resolution, including some of the opposition to it within the UCC, see Shaila Dewan, "United Church of Christ Backs Same-Sex Marriage," *New York Times*, July 5, 2005, accessed March 20, 2014, http://www.nytimes.com/2005/07/05/national/05church.html?_r=3&.

²⁸⁴ United Church of Christ, "Equal Marriage Rights For All," *United Church of Christ*, July 4, 2005, accessed March 20, 2014, <http://www.ucc.org/assets/pdfs/2005-equal-marriage-rights-for-all-1.pdf>.

entitled "Identity Ads."²⁸⁵ These advertisements are no doubt designed not only to increase the denomination's public profile within American society, but also to try to appeal to potential members that may have either rejected or been rejected from churches that are not as welcoming in the same ways as the UCC.

The positions of the Southern Baptist Convention and the United Church of Christ regarding same-sex marriage are no doubt sincere reflections of the opinions of their leaders (and many members), and demonstrate deeply-held – though opposing – beliefs about the proper Christian standpoint regarding this topic. However, it is also apparent that the specific ways in which these messages are formulated and broadcast involve attempts to shape the public images of these denominations and the way they are perceived by outsiders – and particularly by outsiders that may be interested in joining them. These efforts represent an acknowledgment that the issue of same-sex marriage is at the center of civic debates in contemporary America, and therefore that any official actions on this issue provide a denomination with an opportunity to assert its identity on the public stage. Indeed, this is confirmed by the significant media attention (including some news stories published by prominent American news outlets) given to the declarations made by the SBC and UCC on this issue.

The Roman Catholic Church – and specifically in this country, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) – is another church body with deeply-held convictions about the issue of same-sex marriage – in this case, firm opposition to anything apart from the union of one man and one woman. Catholic institutions have been heavily involved in recent Defense of Marriage campaigns, in

²⁸⁵ United Church of Christ, "Identity Ads," *United Church of Christ*, accessed March 20, 2014, <http://www.ucc.org/god-is-still-speaking/ads/>. For general information about the "God is Still Speaking" campaign, see <http://www.ucc.org/god-is-still-speaking/about/> (accessed March 20, 2014).

particular by donating large sums of money.²⁸⁶ And in addition, the USCCB has launched its own effort, "Marriage: Unique for a Reason," to proclaim the importance of preserving heterosexual marriage within its own community and beyond.²⁸⁷ This is the Christian group who's positioning – and at least some of the potential motivations for it – seems to most closely resemble that of the LDS Church. Both share a history of discrimination in 19th-century America and of strained relationships with evangelical Catholics. Thus both groups have taken a similar tactic of using the issue of same-sex marriage as a means of building more constructive ties with other conservative Christians; like Mormons, Catholics have formed a significant part of the Protect Marriage coalition and other interdenominational alliances formed in campaigns against same-sex marriage.²⁸⁸ However, there are also several significant differences in their situations and in their approaches.

For one thing, Catholics have already been building bridges with evangelical Christians for several decades, in part through political collaborations related to the issue of abortion. Aside from minor participation in the political work of the Moral Majority in the 1980s, the document "Evangelicals and Catholics Together," written by American evangelical and Catholic scholars and published in 1994, represented an important attempt to bring these communities together on common ground.²⁸⁹ U.S. Catholics, and specifically U.S. Catholic leaders, have continued this political activism

²⁸⁶ Sara Gates, "Roman Catholic Church Leadership Poured \$2 Million Into Fight Against Marriage Equality: REPORT," *Huffington Post*, November 15, 2012, accessed March 20, 2014, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/11/15/catholic-church-2-million-defeat-marriage-equality_n_2140255.html.

²⁸⁷ The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, "Marriage: Unique for a Reason," *The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops*, accessed March 20, 2014, <http://www.marriageuniqueforareason.org/>.

²⁸⁸ See the site CatholicsforProtectMarriage.com for information about Catholic involvement in the Protect Marriage Coalition as a part of the larger Proposition 8 campaign (<http://ccgaction.org/family/protectmarriage/cathforprop8>, accessed March 20, 2014).

²⁸⁹ For a discussion of Catholic involvement in the Moral Majority, see Mary Hanna, "Catholics and the Moral Majority," *Crisis Magazine* (November 1982): 10-11. The document "Evangelicals and Catholics Together" (including a list of its writers and supporters) can be found at <http://www.leaderu.com/ftissues/ft9405/articles/mission.html> (accessed March 20, 2014).

in recent decades, expanding their attention not only to include same-sex marriage, but also the issue of religious freedom, specifically focusing on the mandate of the Affordable Care Act for employers to provide contraception for their employees; in all of these political efforts, Catholic leaders have continued to engage with leaders from other conservative Christian communities.²⁹⁰ It is also worth noting that the intense political engagement of the American Catholic hierarchy in efforts to fight same-sex marriage goes against both the opinion of the majority of U.S. Catholics, as well as the stated priorities of the Catholic Church's worldwide leader, Pope Francis.²⁹¹ These factors suggest that the investment of the U.S. Catholic leadership in the campaigns against same-sex marriage is part of a broader effort on their part to exert more political muscle and influence within American society. The issue of same-sex marriage in particular allows Catholic leaders the opportunity to exert a strong public voice in one of the major civic debates of contemporary America. This is confirmed by the USCCB website, which contains an entire section encouraging U.S. Catholics to engage in active and "faithful citizenship" in America; in one of the videos posted there, Cardinal Timothy Dolan states: "We bishops emphasize that the Catholic Church has a very important role to play in the political life of the nation."²⁹² On the other hand, given the historical reticence of LDS officials to bring the Church into the

²⁹⁰ For a discussion of Catholic opposition to the contraception mandate, see Irin Carmon, "Nuns take sides as contraception fight heads to the Supreme Court," *MSNBC*, March 18, 2014, accessed March 20, 2014, <http://www.msnbc.com/msnbc/nuns-center-contraception-fight>. For a discussion of recent political collaboration between Catholics and the Religious Right, see Frederick Clarkson, "Christian Right Seeks Renewal in Deepening Catholic-Protestant Alliance," *Political Research Associates*, July 23, 2013, accessed March 20, 2014, <http://www.politicalresearch.org/2013/07/23/christian-right-seeks-renewal-in-deepening-catholic-protestant-alliance/>.

²⁹¹ Recent polls suggest that 54 percent of U.S. Catholics currently support same-sex marriage (see Jonathan Capehart, "Catholics still lead way on gay marriage" *PostPartisan*, February 11, 2014, accessed March 20, 2014, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/post-partisan/wp/2014/02/11/catholics-still-lead-way-on-gay-marriage/>). For a discussion on Pope Francis' statements about Catholic focus on the issue of gay marriage see Laurie Goodstein, "Pope Says Church Is 'Obsessed' With Gays, Abortion and Birth Control," *The New York Times*, September 19, 2013, accessed March 20, 2014, http://www.nytimes.com/2013/09/20/world/europe/pope-bluntly-faults-churchs-focus-on-gays-and-abortion.html?_r=0.

²⁹² United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, "Cardinal Timothy Dolan on Participation in Faithful Citizenship," *United States Conference of Catholic Bishops*, Flash video file, accessed March 20, 2014, <http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/faithful-citizenship/videos-for-faithful-citizenship.cfm>.

political fray (in part due to charges of its undue political involvement in its early years), it makes sense that Mormon leaders would only engage in significant political efforts regarding an issue of particular importance to their community.

It is clear just from the few examples discussed here that while many denominations may use the issue of same-sex marriage as a way of positioning themselves in the American public sphere, the extent of the involvement, the intricacies of how this is done, and to what specific purpose(s) varies widely. A denomination's policies related to same-sex marriage may reflect the opinions of the majority of its membership, but as with the Catholic Church, this is not necessarily the case. The decisions about how – and how much – to get involved in public debates about same-sex marriage are instead largely determined by a combination of factors: the history of the denomination (especially history related to issues of marriage, sexuality, and previous political involvement), its current status in the American public, as well as the motivations of denominational leaders in shaping its identity and its connections with other religious communities. These factors also help to determine the meaning and value of this engagement for a particular denomination. I argue that there is more at stake in the LDS case – and that this project of positioning thus takes on more weight – specifically because of Church's history regarding marriage and sexuality, as well as its rocky relationships with other conservative Christians. The political debate about same-sex marriage provides the perfect opportunity for the Church to achieve maximum impact in (re-)shaping its public image and aligning itself socially and politically with a particular segment of the American population.

Aside from the academic contributions discussed above, it is my hope that this dissertation will prove useful for members of the communities discussed. In the wake of LDS participation in the Proposition 8 campaign and other campaigns against

same-sex marriage, many gay and lesbian Mormons (and their loved ones) felt unfairly targeted by their church, and were deeply affected by the extent of the LDS involvement in the campaign. As put by one man who was raised as a Mormon and in adulthood married another man:

And all of this craziness with the church is like a personal attack. MY church, the one I grew up in and loved, MY church is spending millions of dollars to dissolve my marriage. They are sending letters from the apostles to be read over the pulpit denouncing me and my friends. They are organizing community events and setting up call centers. It's like being disowned by my family all over again.²⁹³

Given the relative lack of direct Mormon political participation prior to Prop 8, the extent of the Church's involvement with this campaign came as a shock to many in the LDS community, but especially to those who identify as gay/lesbian or experience same-sex attraction and their close family and friends. While this project cannot alleviate the pain (or betrayal) felt by those Saints, it does provide a broader understanding of the possible motivations and issues involved in the decisions of LDS leadership regarding participation in Yes on 8 and similar campaigns. In other words, it demonstrates that Mormon involvement in the Defense of Marriage campaigns likely involves numerous factors, several of which have nothing to do with gay people themselves.

Chapter 5 may also prove useful in that it contains not just gay and lesbian LDS experiences, but also an in-depth look at many of the unique aspects of Mormon theology, culture, and structure that influence the lives of gay and lesbian Mormons. Aside from any confirmation and clarification that this may provide for Saints that experience same-sex attractions themselves, it will also help their loved ones, as well as other Mormons and interested outsiders, to better understand their experiences and the challenges that they face in making decisions about their future

²⁹³ Daniel McInerney, comment, October 9, 2008 (1:25 p.m.), on "Share Your Personal Stories," *Mormons for Marriage*, October 9, 2008, accessed March 20, 2014, http://mormonsformarriage.com/?page_id=20.

inside – or outside of – the Latter-day Saints Church. Any additional attention toward the lives of gay and lesbian Mormons can provide more awareness, and hopefully stimulate further discussion about these issues both within and outside Mormon circles.

Recommendations for Future Study

First of all, in the category of Mormon studies, this research suggests possibilities for further study regarding issues of sexuality, marriage, and family in Mormon communities outside of the United States. While official Mormon pronouncements and doctrine regarding these topics apply to Mormons in all parts of the world, it makes sense that different cultural norms related to gender and sexuality (and to the nature of marriage and family relationships) in distinct countries and regions would affect Mormon perceptions of these policies and how they should be lived out. There are now more Mormons living outside of this country than in it, so acknowledging and exploring the lives and beliefs of non-U.S. Mormons will be an essential part of the future of Mormon studies. And due to the culturally-based nature of understandings about gender and sexuality, these topics in particular deserve attention in research among Mormon communities in other countries.

This project also makes clear the need for additional study specifically in the realm of Mormon experiences that fall outside of the traditional heterosexual norm. Due to the nature of available sources, Chapter 5 of this project only addresses the experiences of Mormons that fall into the categories usually designated as “gay” and “lesbian” – namely, men who are attracted solely to men, and women who are attracted solely to women. It seems, then, that important missing pieces of the puzzle are the experiences of those Mormons who fall into the other categories that make up the acronym LGBT: bisexual and transgender. Future research centering on

the experiences of these individuals is not only important in and of itself, but could also shed additional light on the impact of LDS theology on the lives of those who do not identify as heterosexual, and could answer questions about how Mormonism affects the choices and strategies of such individuals. For example, it makes sense that the centrality of marriage and family to the Mormon plan of salvation, as well as cultural pressure within the LDS community to marry someone of the opposite sex, may have a significant impact on the choices of bisexual Mormons regarding how they self-identify, and who they will date and ultimately marry. Does this cultural atmosphere make some bisexual Mormons “invisible” to the larger Mormon community, and perhaps even to themselves?

The perspectives of transgender Mormons present even more complex issues and questions for exploration, especially given the pronouncement from the Proclamation on the Family that gender “is an essential characteristic of individual premortal, mortal, and eternal identity and purpose.”²⁹⁴ If one’s gender is considered to be inextricably tied to their biological sex at the time of birth, then this statement is an affirmation of LDS belief in the divine nature of male and female gender identities and heterosexual orientation. However, transgender people see their gender identity as being *in conflict with* the sex of the bodies into which they were born. From that perspective, this statement can be viewed as proof that God wants them to embrace their true gender, which represents their eternal nature and identity.

Indeed, this is confirmed by the statements of Leohnora Isaak, a Mormon woman who was born biologically male, and is now campaigning to have the central LDS Church acknowledge her current status as a woman (she is still listed as male in LDS records). Leohnora notes that she believes God made her transgender, and that

²⁹⁴ First Presidency, “The Family.”

according to her understanding of Mormon teachings, her biological sex isn't what really matters: "It's the gender not the sex. The gender is the eternal identity."²⁹⁵ Additional questions are brought up by the possible Mormon Church responses to requests like hers. If the Church were to officially approve this gender change, how would that action fit into Mormon teachings laid out in the Proclamation on the Family and other recent documents? Would it confirm Isaak's understanding that gender is an immutable characteristic of the soul, but not biological sex? What would this mean for Mormon understandings of premortal and postmortal existence?

In the realm of sexuality studies, this project makes clear that in looking at the experiences of LGBT Christians (and LGBT people in other religious organizations), it's not enough to simply sort groups into "liberal" and "conservative" categories, and to make generalizations based on their position in those categories. Rather, it's necessary to explore the unique history and theological intricacies of each individual denomination or group. The experiences of LGBT religious people – and the strategies they embrace to negotiate their sexual and religious identities – are in part shaped by the culture of the specific religious group to which they belong, and no two religious cultures are identical – each has its own distinctive character. Studies of specific Christian denominations and other religious organizations would thus provide a nuanced understanding not only of how each group approaches the issue of homosexuality and same-sex relationships, but how each organization's individual approach influences the lives of LGBT people in that community.

Additionally, this project suggests that the issue of sexuality (and specifically gay/lesbian experience) provides opportunities for interesting comparisons between different Christian communities, thus helping to place each of these groups on the

²⁹⁵ Billy Hallowell, "'God Didn't Make Garbage': Transgender Mormon Seeks Official Acceptance from LDS Church," *The Blaze*, Nov 7, 2013, accessed November 15, 2013, <http://www.theblaze.com/stories/2013/11/07/god-made-me-transgender-mormon-seeks-official-acceptance-from-lds-church-following-gender-transition/>.

“map” of American Christianity. For example, Mormonism and Catholicism share several characteristics influencing the experiences of gays and lesbians in these churches – the necessary role that the institution of the church plays in the salvation of individuals, an exclusively male clergy/religious leadership, and a living head of the church that can make (unassailable) pronouncements confirming the teachings of these institutions about homosexuality and same-sex relationships. And yet, the roles of these leaders are understood differently; specifically, the LDS President is believed to be a modern-day prophet, capable of receiving revelation which could (in theory) alter existing doctrines of the Mormon Church in a significant way. These differences in beliefs about the nature of leadership and the nature of doctrine certainly influence the lives of LGBT Mormons and Catholics in distinct ways, and they are important hallmarks of the identity of these two churches.

This examination of the approaches of each denomination regarding homosexuality and gays and lesbians also has implications for future research in the broader discipline of Religion in America. This project suggests the need for further investigation of denominational policies and actions regarding same-sex marriage (and homosexuality more broadly) as an important identity marker for modern American Christian denominations. The previous brief discussion of positioning on this issue within a few denominations suggests many possibilities to be explored, as well as a number of significant questions. How do the official teachings of each particular denomination on homosexual behavior and same-sex relationships reflect that denomination’s public identity and its connections with other denominations? Are there conflicts between denominational policies and the beliefs/actions of individual members and clergy on the local level? Are denominational conversations regarding issues of sexuality in any way influenced by the desire of leaders (or members) to portray or position their denomination in a specific way among

American Christian groups, to attract a certain segment of the American population to its churches, or to facilitate specific interdenominational relationships? Has that denomination engaged in any public activity related to issues of sexuality, such as campaigns for or against gay marriage, or other political activity related to gay rights, and what were the motivations behind this engagement? Campaigns related to voter propositions such as Prop 8 have in recent years elicited a great deal of participation by members of various American religious communities (on both sides of this issue); certainly there is a great deal left here for scholars to explore in the coming years. It is clear that issues surrounding sexuality will be in the foreground of both political and religious discussions in the United States for some time, so research in this area will only become more important as time goes on.

Where is the LDS Church Headed on the Issue of Sexuality?

As noted in Chapter 5, despite the seeming incompatibility of Mormon theology with homosexuality, it is clear that many gay and lesbian Saints will continue to hold out hope that at some point in the near or distant future, the LDS President will receive a new revelation confirming the divine and eternal nature of (committed, temple sanctified) same-sex relationships. Given the importance currently invested in heterosexual marriage and procreation by LDS leaders as an essential part of the Mormon plan of salvation, it seems unlikely that this will occur in the foreseeable future. However, other changes have been made and are continuing to be made within the Church regarding the treatment of gay and lesbian people and opinions about same-sex marriage. The existence of the mormonsandgays.org site is, at the very least, a testament to the growing desire for understanding about same-sex attraction within the LDS community, and a movement toward more sympathetic and loving treatment of lesbian and gay Saints by members of their Church.

In fact, there is some evidence that the Proposition 8 campaign – and LDS Church involvement in it – is in part responsible for bringing about this interest. In a recently published article, John Gustav-Wrathall, the senior vice president of Affirmation, an organization for LGBT Mormons, notes: “Before 2008, there was this huge silence around this issue... My impression was generally, in Mormon congregations, there wasn’t much discussion about it. Prop 8 began a discussion.”²⁹⁶ So in addition to its other results, the Church’s participation in the Yes on 8 campaign may have also helped to inspire LDS communities to begin the work of addressing the difficult questions surrounding same-sex attraction and gay and lesbian relationships.

And while the official position of the Church regarding same-sex marriage remains steadfast, there is certainly evidence that – along with the rest of the nation – the opinions of some LDS members on this issue are shifting. During an interview with a group of reporters over his support of the Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA), which seeks to prevent workplace discrimination based on sexual orientation, Mormon Senator Harry Reid commented on the changing attitudes regarding LGBT rights that he has observed among his local fellow church members: “But take for example, where I go to church here in Washington, D.C., I bet there are more people who agree with me here than disagree with me. So the church is changing.”²⁹⁷ While Reid’s particular congregation in Washington, D.C. may not precisely reflect the makeup of most Mormon communities, his comments do indicate a sea change among certain Mormon populations, especially among younger Mormons. Anecdotally, I personally have interacted with a number of Mormons who

²⁹⁶ Hunter Schwarz, “Why Prop 8 was good for LGBT Mormons,” *Buzzfeed*, November 8, 2013, accessed November 15, 2013, <http://www.buzzfeed.com/hunterschwarz/why-prop-8-was-good-for-lgbt-mormons>.

²⁹⁷ Amanda Terkel, “Harry Reid Opens Up About Being Mormon And Supporting LGBT Rights: ‘The Church Is Changing,’” *Huffington Post*, November 8, 2013, accessed November 15, 2013, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/11/08/harry-reid-mormon_n_4240125.html?utm_hp_ref=politics.

at least feel that same-sex marriage should be made a secular legal right in the U.S., and many of whom would also like to see an adjustment in the policy of their Church regarding this issue as well.

Regardless, the changing feelings of individual Mormon Church members do not necessarily mean that there will be shift on the institutional level of the Church. In fact, after Reid made his comments, LDS leaders quickly issued a statement that included the following:

On the question of same-sex marriage, the Church has been consistent in its support of traditional marriage while teaching that all people should be treated with kindness and understanding. If it is being suggested that the Church's doctrine on this matter is changing, that is incorrect.

Marriage between a man and a woman is central to God's plan for the eternal destiny of His children. As such, traditional marriage is a foundational doctrine and cannot change.²⁹⁸

The assertion that LDS doctrine on marriage is not only firm now but that it "cannot change" is fairly definitive. However, it does also seem possible that at some point a critical mass of opinion will be reached inside the LDS Church (and in the wider American public) that will convince LDS leaders that they must take some additional action regarding the acceptance of gay and lesbian relationships. Of course, in Mormon belief, this could only be achieved with a new revelation.

²⁹⁸ Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, "Church Responds to Inquiries on ENDA, Same-Sex Marriage," *Mormon Newsroom*, November 7, 2013, accessed November 15, 2013, <http://www.mormonnewsroom.org/article/church-responds-to-inquiries-on-enda--same-sex-marriage>.

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APPENDIX A
IRB DOCUMENT



EXEMPTION GRANTED

Tracy Fessenden
SHPRS - Religious Studies Faculty
480/965-7467
TRACY.FESSENDEN@asu.edu

Dear Tracy Fessenden:

On 2/21/2014 the ASU IRB reviewed the following protocol:

Type of Review:	Initial Study
Title:	Attitudes Regarding Marriage and Sexuality in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints
Investigator:	Tracy Fessenden
IRB ID:	STUDY00000680
Funding:	None
Grant Title:	None
Grant ID:	None
Documents Reviewed:	• LDS Attitudes Protocol.docx, Category: IRB Protocol;

The IRB determined that the protocol is considered exempt pursuant to Federal Regulations 45CFR46 (2) Tests, surveys, interviews, or observation on 2/21/2014.

In conducting this protocol you are required to follow the requirements listed in the INVESTIGATOR MANUAL (HRP-103).

Sincerely,

IRB Administrator

cc: Ann Wertman
Ann Wertman