

Toward a Post-Heterosexual Mormon Theology

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Whatsoever you seal on earth shall be sealed in heaven; and whatsoever you bind on earth, in my name and by my word, saith the Lord, it shall be eternally bound in the heavens. (D&C 132:46)

The issue of homosexual relationships is among the most public struggles facing religious groups in America today.¹ The issue is not as simple as gay people versus religious groups, as rhetoric on either side often suggests; but it has become increasingly apparent that there is significant overlap of people who identify both as homosexual and religious. Mormon writing on homosexuality often has had a pastoral character, aimed either at easing the transition for those seeking to leave the Church or smoothing the way for those who desire to remain within it.² Those who have thought to advocate change with the LDS Church and culture have focused primarily on “attitudes” toward homosexuality encouraging “understanding and tolerance for homosexual people.”³ Too often this discussion of homosexuality has focused on either its etiology, or its relationship to the will, though neither the appeal to nature nor nurture resolves the question of ethics and meaning.⁴

Alan Michael Williams suggests that the question that Latter-day Saints must face is “how the Mormon ‘family’ can continue to make sense soteriologically when it does not represent the diversity of American families.”⁵ Williams’s question is ultimately a social one—about a soteriology “making sense” in the context of an America where Mormon notions of family look increasingly anachronistic. For Latter-day Saints, the question is not simply a

social one, but a theological problem of soteriological significance. The theological and theoretical work that may serve as a basis for reimagining the practices of the Church with respect to homosexual relationships has yet to begin with any seriousness.

What follows is a thought experiment on the question of how Mormons might imagine different kinds of sealing relationships other than heterosexual marriage. Such an experiment neither constitutes Church doctrine nor intends to advocate itself as Church doctrine. Rather, this essay provides an occasion to think critically about the intellectual and theological problems posed by the reality of alternative relationships outside of heterosexual norms. This essay treats the theological resources that can account for and make legible particular kinds of homosexual relationships within Mormonism. I use the term “homosexual relationships” to describe the particular dilemma for Mormon thought. Though contemporary Mormon discourse distinguishes between homosexual desires and sexual practices, permitting the former but rejecting the latter, both desires and practices obscure relationships as a dimension of homosexual experiences.

The opacity of the term “homosexuality” and its multiple and limiting meanings make it particularly unhelpful. The artificiality and historical contingency of our terms “homosexual” and “heterosexual” to describe “species” of persons is problematic for thinking socially and theologically.⁶ Given that Mormonism imagines ideal heterosexuality, not as desires or practices, but as eternal relationships, could this same framework help us to reimagine the permissibility of homosexual relationships within Mormonism?

The LDS theological focus on marriage is not reducible to “sexuality” since there are many circumstances in which marriages may be entirely celibate, such as the case of physical incapacitation. Nor should we reduce homosexual relationships to “sexuality,” since such an equation also distorts not only the actual practice of such relationships but is inconsistent with our own understanding of the salvific character of relationships per se—not the details of sexual practices performed within those relationships.

Any attempt to think creatively and theologically within Mormonism to reconcile the tension between the LDS Church and

those who identify as homosexual must investigate the ideologies and theologies that inform the current tension. Some may feel that no reconciliation is possible, that LDS teachings cannot and should not accept homosexual relationships as intelligible. This position is certainly viable, though it requires defense rather than simply repetition and assertion. We are forced to diagnose either way what is problematic with homosexual relationships according to current LDS theology.

As I understand it, much of the theological objection to homosexual relationships lies in current LDS understandings of the afterlife and the kinds of relationships that will exist there. First, these relationships are frequently understood to be reproductive relationships, at least among those who occupy the highest degree of the celestial kingdom.⁷ Second, the ordinance of sealing binds these reproductive families together, sealing only those who can presumably reproduce either in this life or the next. Finally, the heterosexual pairs of men and women should possess the proper “gender,” which is eternal. Homosexual relationships cannot be eternal because they are not able to reproduce by means of natural biological methods and confuse the natural gender they should possess. I will address these claims in order to suggest how it may be possible to imagine sealed homosexual relationships as compatible with key doctrines of Mormonism.

Celestial Reproduction

The belief in divine reproduction constitutes a central tenet for many Mormons, in spite of its rather thin canonical support. Even defining what exactly is meant by this belief in divine reproduction can be particularly unclear. At issue is determining exactly what is meant by the belief that human beings are a “spirit son or daughter of Heavenly Parents.”⁸ For instance, in a recent essay exploring “common ground” between womanist theology and LDS theology, professors of political science at Brigham Young University Valerie M. Hudson and Alma Don Sorenson asserted: “The primary work of God is to have children and nurture them into godhood.” In a clarifying footnote, the authors backed away from this bold statement with the significant caveat: “Actually, *have* is not the right word here. In LDS theology, God does not create intelligence; rather, God *organizes* intelligences to the

point that they can be called God's children, a process that is known as 'spirit birth.'"⁹ The ambivalence on this point is a persistent tension in Mormon thought. That is, the doctrine of spiritual birth stands at odds with the doctrine of eternal intelligences, and to this day Mormonism has not resolved this tension.¹⁰ On the one hand, "spirit birth" is a divine reproduction that mirrors human reproduction, requiring a male and female partner; and on the other hand, "spirit birth" is a more metaphorical "organization" that bears little resemblance to reproduction as a result of sexual intercourse. The former model of spirit birth depends on a heterosexual pair (at least if divine bodies are biologically constrained without access to the kinds of technologies human bodies may benefit from) and is often used as the prototype for the heterosexual family, as the authors quoted above argue. The latter model of spirit birth, however, requires nothing in particular about the sexual or reproductive acts of God, whose organization of spirits likely has little to do with the reproductive organs he or she (or his or her partner) might have.

This doctrine of spirit birth faces a few significant challenges. In Doctrine and Covenants 93—and repeated in many other of Joseph Smith's speeches, translations, and revelations—individual human identity is thought of as eternal, perhaps in explicit disagreement with the doctrine of spirit birth as it was developing among some of his disciples in 1843–44.¹¹ The doctrine of spirit birth seeks to reconcile itself with this doctrine of eternal intelligences by positing a four-fold progressive anthropology: from intelligence, to spirit, to mortal body, and finally to a glorified body. In this view, Heavenly Father and Heavenly Mother may not be the "parents" of intelligences, but are parents of spirits—in some sense having given "birth" to them. Advocates of "spirit birth" based on heterosexual reproduction generally insist that it is similar, if not identical, to the birth of mortal bodies. As it is frequently imagined, the process of male-female mutual divinization entails not only a sexual relationship, but also a reproductive one in order to populate future worlds. Such a notion may be tied to the promises of eternal increase, "a continuation of the seeds forever and ever" (D&C 132:19) in the revelation given on celestial marriage. In this view of the marital relationship, mixed-sex

couples are eternally engaged in the reproduction of spirit children.

While articulating the spirit birth process as providing the intelligence with a spirit in a way analogous to how mortal birth provides the spirit with a physical body, the analogy is strained to the point of breaking. If reproduction as we know it now offers a model for heavenly reproduction so as to exclude homosexual relationships by definition, then must we imagine that male gods deposit sperm in the bodies of female gods (who menstruate monthly when they are not pregnant), that the pregnant female god gestates spirit embryos for nine months and then gives birth to spirit bodies? While some LDS thinkers imagine an eternally pregnant Heavenly Mother, I see no reason why we must commit to this kind of literal pregnancy as the reason for divine female figures.¹² In mortal birth, parents with bodies provide lower-stage spirits with bodies in order to bring them to the same level. However, in this view of spirit birth, divinized parents provide intelligences with spirits, two levels below their own stage of progression. Mortal bodies give birth to equal mortal bodies, yet in this understanding of spirit birth, glorified bodies give birth to inferior spirit bodies. There is no equivalency between the two understandings of birth because they accomplish very different things in very different circumstances.

What would it mean for homosexual relationships if we were to substitute the tentative doctrine of literal divine reproduction for other models of “birth”? For instance, the process of “birth” is not used to describe each of the series of progression from intelligence to spirit to mortal body to resurrection. Resurrected bodies need not be born from resurrected beings but are organized from matter. We need not consider that spirit bodies must be literally born but may be “organized” in an analogous way to the resurrection. Even the model of baptism, which marks a spiritual rebirth, may be thought of as a model for how spirit children are born to divinized parents. In such models, biological reproduction is not needed to explain celestial parentage. Such ideas are certainly not the logical consequence of the notion of divine embodiment.

The issue of God’s embodiment is not as clear cut as it may initially appear. While we recognize continuity in appearance and even substance with the future exalted body, we also acknowledge

that it is quite different. As Blake Ostler explains, “The sense in which the Father’s body is like a human body must be qualified.”¹³ For instance, a divine body is not constrained by space and time in the ways that mortal bodies are. From scriptural accounts, divine bodies can appear, disappear, pass through walls, and resist entropy. While these scriptural accounts affirm that it is possible for divine bodies to perform functions such as eating and drinking, they also suggest that there is no necessary requirement that they do so in order to sustain life. Why then, do we imagine that sexual union as we know it in mortality is a necessary function for the production of life in divine bodies if these bodies are so dissimilar in every other way from mortal bodies? Could not sexual union be a possibility for divine bodies but not be a necessity for creation, just as alimentary functions may be possible but not necessary?

In addition to the resurrection, the creation provides a better model for thinking about how this “spirit birth” might occur than the process of mortal parturition. In both the canonical and ritual accounts of creation, women are entirely absent.¹⁴ Creation of the earth, organization of the elements, and even the creation of the living bodies of Adam and Eve all occur without the presence of female figures. The creation as we know it is capable of being performed with an all-male cast. This has the effect of not only making women superfluous to creation and salvation, but also of putting a male-male relationship as the source of creativity, productivity, and the giving of life itself.

The story of Adam and Eve in LDS scripture and ritual is often cited as the example of divinely authorized heterosexuality.¹⁵ Yet the creation of both Adam and Eve does not in any way affirm heterosexual reproduction as the method of divine creation either spiritually or materially. Indeed, creation according to God’s “word” is attested in all scriptural accounts available to Latter-day Saints (Gen 1–2; Moses 2–3; Abr. 4–5). Adam’s body is formed “from the dust of the ground . . . but spiritually they were created and made according to my word” (Moses 3:7). Both spiritual and material formation takes place without any sexual union. Furthermore, males alone perform the creation of Adam’s body. Even Eve is “reproduced” from a male body with the help of other males. The Lord penetrates the body of Adam and creates Eve.

The capacity for Adam's body to reproduce by means of another male provides scriptural precedent in the foundational story of humanity to the variety of possibilities available for Latter-day Saints to conceive of reproduction independent of heterosexual union.

Jesus's birth from Mary may also provide a way of thinking about the process of giving birth that does not involve heterosexual union. While the male-male creation and male-female creation may be found in Mormon thought already, perhaps the model of the virgin birth—of female pregnancy without male penetration—could serve as an example of how female-female relationships might reproduce with only minimal assistance of a male participant, like the sperm donor for the modern female-female reproductive relationship. Though some early speculation in LDS thought suggested that God the Father did have sex with Mary, Mary's virginity has been affirmed in official LDS doctrine.¹⁶ Rather than seeing the conception of Jesus as a wholly exceptional event, James E. Talmage has suggested that this method of procreation was, "not in violation of natural law, but in accordance with a higher manifestation thereof."¹⁷ While with Adam we have seen that male bodies may reproduce on their own, or with the help of another male, with Mary we see that female bodies may also reproduce without sexual intercourse. Or perhaps even the model of Adam reproducing Eve parthenogenically might also be a capacity of divine female bodies. Both scriptural accounts offer models of divine creation and reproduction not based on heterosexual union.

Though we have models of reproduction and creation that might suggest their possibility for same-sex partners, we Latter-day Saints face another theological question: Are creation and salvation male-only priesthood activities? The possibility of reproduction in the female-female relationship does not address the centrality of the male-only priesthood in LDS thought. 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. The fact that males can hold the priesthood allows the possibility for male-only creative relationships (like the male members of the Godhead) since priest-

hood may be held and exercised entirely independent of women in LDS practice. But if women do not have access to the priesthood—whatever we may mean by that term—, would they not be able to create without men? The autonomy afforded to males to create in Mormon tradition comes at the expense of females.

Historical precedents of women healing and blessing notwithstanding, most of the functions of the priesthood have not been exercised by women.¹⁸ Further, promises to women that they would be given the priesthood (or in some sense share it) were conditional on their relationship to their husband.¹⁹ Feminist concerns about the ability of men to act independently in the Church, while women are subject to male partnership as a prerequisite for their actions, are magnified in the consideration for female-female relationships. We may need to rethink women's dependent status with respect to the priesthood in tandem with rethinking the possibility of homosexual relationships. Thinking through what the priesthood means in an eternal context—which would presumably not include things like the authority to ordain officers, bless the sick, administer sacraments and other administrative or temporally bounded notions of priesthood authority—is an essential task for thinking about whether women might be excluded from the eternal priesthood activities of creating and saving.

If divine creation and reproduction cannot be used to exclude the possibility of nonheterosexual relationships in LDS theology, what about mortal reproduction? How can the command to “multiply and replenish” the earth be fulfilled (Gen 1:27)?²⁰ In the context of the Church's endorsement of ballot initiatives in several states to define marriage as between a man and a woman in the 2008 elections, the Church explained its interest in the issue in a document called “The Divine Institution of Marriage” that appeared in the online LDS Newsroom on August 13, 2008.²¹ The issue of producing children is presented as a central reason for defining marriage as a heterosexual institution. Its authors reason, “Only a man and a woman together have the natural biological capacity to conceive children.” This argument is repeated later, stating that marriage is “legally protected because only a male and female together can create new life, and because the rearing of children requires a life-long commitment, which mar-

riage is intended to provide.” Marriage should be restricted to mixed-sex couples because “marriage and family are vital instruments for rearing children and teaching them to become responsible adults.”²²

While from a public policy perspective the Church asserts the necessary link between marriage and procreation, in practice having children is neither a requirement for Latter-day Saint marriages after they have been sealed, nor is the ability to have children a prerequisite for sealing. Neither marriage nor sex is thought of in exclusively procreationist terms.²³ While LDS teaching may consider procreation a religious *desideratum*, it cannot and should not be a reason to exclude someone from receiving the blessings of sealing, especially if afterlife creation has nothing to do with mortal procreation. There is no requirement or expectation of natural fertility to qualify for marriages, even sealings, in Latter-day Saint practice.²⁴ There is no reason to exclude nonreproductive couples from the blessings of sealing on the basis of reproductive capacity alone. But this lack of capacity to reproduce in no way diminishes the responsibility to provide for and rear children. Indeed, the wording of this obligation to rear children is not connected to reproductive capacity at all, but rather to the obligations that able couples have to provide children, by means of adoption or other forms of reproduction technology available today, with the education and formation to become responsible adults. Further, it is certainly the case that it is, in fact, possible for nonheterosexual couples to take care of children, either their own from previous relationships, through medical assistance, or by means of adoption. The authoritative teaching that families should care for and rear children into responsible adults suffers no harm if we continue to teach that all families, heterosexual or not, take this as a religious responsibility.

Sealings as Kinship

The LDS rite of sealing is currently practiced as a means of authorizing relationships between heterosexual couples and their children.²⁵ Past and present practices of sealings also point to ways that we might reconceive of sealing as untethered from the heterosexual biological family. I suggest that the practice of sealing is about ritually producing kinship relations that are not re-

ducible to reproductive couples and bloodlines. Kinship may be defined as the practices of ritually marking relationships of care, trust, and bonding that are greater than friendship or community. That is to say, there are not predetermined relationships that count as kinship, but rather kinship emerges as a special kind of relationship within society. Sexual and reproductive relationships are one way that human societies practice kinship, but by no means the only way. Indeed, the biological basis for kinship is neither universal in human society, nor is it the only way that Latter-day Saints think about kinship. Rather, kinship is a way of making the biological results of sexual reproduction meaningful. Judith Butler suggests, "Kinship is itself a kind of doing, a practice that enacts that assemblage of significations as it takes place. . . . [T]hat norm acquires its durability by being reinstated time and again."²⁶ In this understanding, reproduction *acquires* the significance of kinship rather than being constitutive of it.

Studies of kinship over the last century have emphasized its central role in human society.²⁷ Psychoanalytic, functionalist, and structuralist analyses of kinship suggested that it was the key to the development of subjectivity and to the very existence of civilization itself. The LDS teaching that "the family is the fundamental unit of society" owes its debt to this modern cultural assumption.²⁸ The hypothesis that kinship structures require a father and a mother is a feature of some twentieth-century theorists' work on kinship.²⁹ This view, built on the Oedipal drama, assumes that the subject comes into being and culture by passing through this privileged social structure.³⁰ This argument is implicitly used to justify the insistence upon both a father and a mother in "The Divine Institution of Marriage."³¹ In this claim, the relations between the sexes gain significance only through reproduction, which marks reproduction as the foundational element in kinship.³² The problem is not simply the insistence that heterosexual kinship guarantees the continued transmission of culture, but that the argument is more often that culture must guarantee the continued transmission of heterosexuality.³³

Recent anthropological work has challenged the assumption that broader models of kinship are identical structurally (father-mother-child) to the modern Western nuclear family. The topic specifically at issue here is whether nonheterosexual kin-

ship may qualify as a recognizable form of kinship. Certainly, there are numerous forms of kinship that do not conform to the reproductive heterosexual family organized by legal marriage. This model for defining kinship does not coincide with the way that kinship relations are established in African American,³⁴ gay and lesbian,³⁵ and some rural Chinese cultures,³⁶ at the very least.³⁷ Such post-kinship studies denaturalize the biological family as the basis of kinship and complement alternative ways of ordering society.³⁸

LDS sealings for nonheterosexual relationships could offer a set of regularizing terms under which such existing social relationships are ritually legitimized.³⁹ For the Church to acknowledge nonheterosexual unions would be to acknowledge what already happens in practice—namely, that homosexual relationships of care and commitment, including the raising of children, exist. As it stands, the Church legitimizes heterosexual marriage as the only acknowledged way of marking kinship. To expand this definition is not to authorize any and all practices. Rather, same-sex marriage is really modeled on heterosexual practices of establishing legitimacy by means of long-term relationships of filiation. Homosexual activists have not universally accepted this project of privileging state-authorized marriage as the only way of establishing kinship.⁴⁰ Indeed, many see gay marriage as a profoundly conservative means of filiation.⁴¹ For the Church to accept gay marriage would be to continue to privilege certain kinds of kinship over others, excluding certain sexual and relational possibilities. The relevant questions for sealing nonheterosexual couples are not the legal issues that link health care, hospital visitation, and tax benefits to marital status. For Latter-day Saints, the sense of purpose and divine partnership, as well as spiritual safeguards and consolation in life and death that sealings endow, are blessings that might apply to kinship relationships beyond the heterosexual, reproductive family.

These broader understandings of kinship practices not only serve as a better anthropological model for the multiplicity of culture, including modern Western culture, but also better explain historical precedents of the LDS sealing ritual, which similarly created kinship in nonreproductive relationships.⁴² Though discontinued by President Wilford Woodruff in 1894, many men and

women (most often married couples) were sealed to prominent nineteenth-century Church leaders through the “law of adoption” regardless of blood or reproductive relationships.⁴³ Prior to the Woodruff reform, the adoption sealing was intentionally a means of establishing new kinds of kinships other than familial-reproductive, though utilizing the vocabulary of the family. As Samuel Brown explains, “The Mormon heaven was emphatically not the Victorian hearth of the increasingly popular domestic heaven. . . . Smith’s heaven consisted of one boundless family of eternal intelligences.”⁴⁴ The practice of “adoption,” in which men and their families were sealed to other men and their families points to alternative ways of establishing kinship.⁴⁵ Instead of sealing genealogical chains, this system of kinship connected new social units of nonbiological families with the ultimate goal of uniting all of humanity into one sacred network.⁴⁶ In Orson Hyde’s “Diagram of the Kingdom of God,” he envisions the universal family tree made up of different branches with prophets at the head of each branch. To each prophet is sealed large kingdoms. From each of these branches extend still smaller branches, with even smaller branchings from them. Hyde describes how, in this patriarchal order, “every man will be given a kingdom and dominion, according to his merit, powers, and abilities. . . . There are kingdoms of all sizes, an infinite variety to suit all grades of merit and ability.”⁴⁷ This sense of rulership is not meant to suggest that the prophets are the literal fathers of the greatest number of people, but rather that, because of righteousness (not fecundity), their kingdoms are the greatest. In Parley P. Pratt’s terms, the “royal family” is one singular family that consists of “friends and kindred.”⁴⁸ This bond is not forged by a genealogical link, but by the sealing itself. As Joseph Smith proclaimed in the King Follett Discourse, “Use a little Craftiness & seal all you can & when you get to heaven tell your father that what you seal on earth should be sealed in heaven.”⁴⁹

It wasn’t until after Woodruff’s temple reforms that proxy temple sealings were administered for deceased ancestors, including those who had rejected the faith in mortality. In 1894, the Utah Genealogical Society was formed as a response to this new interest in proxy temple work made possible by the new revelation and policy shift.⁵⁰ Woodruff explained the new practice which re-

versed the previous ban on sealing children to deceased parents: “The Lord has told me that it is right for children to be sealed to their parents, and they to their parents just as far back as we can possibly obtain the records, and then have the last obtainable member sealed to the Prophet Joseph Smith.”⁵¹ This new practice centered on biological families, but also relied on the earlier notion of kingdoms, with Joseph Smith as the adoptive father of this dispensation. In time, the notion of dispensational kingdoms would recede ever more behind kingdoms based on individual lineage, thus paving the way for the contemporary emphasis on the nuclear family.⁵² The new proxy sealings of married couples reduced the need for proxy adoption and also introduced greater flexibility in who could be sealed to whom, allowing for those who hadn’t been members of the Church in mortality to be sealed posthumously to living spouses or for ancestors to be sealed to one another. Less emphasis was placed on getting the earthly sealings absolutely correct, shifting the ultimate decisions about validity of a sealing from earthly ordinances to justice in the afterlife, noting that there “all will be made right.”⁵³ More important than making sure that one was sealed to a righteous person was performing the sealing itself.

One need not return to this earlier notion of the sealing as kinship for examples of nonreproductive or biological relationships but may rather explore the misrecognition of how the ritual is practiced today to link nonreproductive or biological kin. The clearest example is the current understanding of the theology of LDS adoption after the reformation of the adoption practices in the late nineteenth century. The case of nineteenth-century adoptions as a practice of establishing kinship in ways that are not biologically based poses a challenge to the assumption that biology is the basis of kinship.

Anthropologists have traditionally distinguished between “true” and “fictive” kinship, though this distinction rests on an assumption that privileges the biological relationship regardless of how families themselves treat such children. But the assumption that parents have a different relationship to biological than to “fictive” kin fails to account for how kinship may be extended at all.⁵⁴ It is, of course, often the case that families make no distinction between biological and adoptive children and, indeed, often reject

the premises of the distinction. In LDS practice, nonbiological children are ritually incorporated into a new kinship structure by means of the sealing following legal adoption.

Perhaps one might suggest in anthropological terms that the LDS sealings of legally adopted children do mark adoptive kin as separate from those “born in the covenant.” The ritual itself certainly marks the crossing of a boundary, but the point is that, after the ritual, there is no meaningful distinction between biological and adoptive kin. In fact, though incredibly rare, it is possible that even those who were “born in the covenant” may be sealed anew to adoptive parents.⁵⁵ Rather than consider the biological child who has been born within a LDS kinship structure as already covered by the blessings of sealing *a priori*, it is possible for this child’s sealing to take place in the adoptive family. Here, the sealing ritually marks how the kinship structure takes precedence over and replaces the biological family.⁵⁶

The case of divorce and the cancellation of sealings further reinforces the principle that biology is less important than the sealing itself. President Ezra Taft Benson explained that the children of parents whose sealing was cancelled “are entitled to birthright blessings, and if they remain worthy, are assured the right and privilege of eternal parentage regardless of what happens to their natural parents or the parents to whom they were sealed.”⁵⁷ Benson’s view here represents a continuation of the reforms under Woodruff that emphasized the sealing itself as important, not necessarily to whom one is sealed. Further, it distinguishes biological kin from the blessings of kinship through sealing, promising kin on the basis of the sealing even if biological kin cannot fulfill that role.

When kinship replaces reproduction in the logic of the sealing, we may consider how alternative relationships of care, modeled on, but not identical to parent-child and husband-wife, as well as those not yet regularized or named, offer a better model for understanding both the purpose and possibilities of the sealed relationship, whether those sealings entail a sexual relationship between partners or not. Mormon models of kinship, both past and present, displace and replace the biological and the sexual relationship as markers of kinship, suggesting alternative modes and models for establishing such relationships. The heteronormative

notion of family neither corresponds to a universal ideal nor reflects the actual practice of kinship among Latter-day Saints. Understanding sealings as ritually marking and normalizing relationships as kinship offers a more accurate understanding of how sealings have been practiced and are practiced today, as well as how they may be practiced at some future time.

Eternal Gender

The concept of “gender” remains an important term in LDS discourse about homosexuality and is a necessary site of critical inquiry.⁵⁸ The question of homosexual relationships is intimately bound up in conceptualizations of gender differences. The semi-canonical 1995 document “The Family: A Proclamation to the World” (hereafter “Proclamation”) announces: “Gender is an essential characteristic of individual premortal, mortal, and eternal identity and purpose.”⁵⁹ The notion of an eternally persistent gender functions to regulate normative behavior that is believed to correspond to the attributes of an eternally “gendered” subject. “The Divine Institution of Marriage” suggests that same-sex marriage causes “gender confusion,” with the result that “the rising generation of children and youth will find it increasingly difficult to develop their natural identity as a man or a woman.”⁶⁰ It further asserts that there are “inherent differences between the genders.”⁶¹ The appeal to a “natural” and “inherent” sexual identity that is at risk of being “confused” presumes a certain kind of sexual difference rooted in heterosexuality. LDS concepts of gender difference are as much about rejecting homosexuality as they are about ordering the relationship between men and women. It is necessary to address the ideas of incommensurable “genders” as the basis of heterosexual priority in the Church.

What exactly is meant by the term “gender” in LDS discourse? Since second-wave feminism divided biological “sex,” meaning male and female bodies, from socially constructed “gender,” meaning culturally assigned social roles, the sex/gender distinction has had a great impact on how the term “gender” is understood in American society. Yet in my reading of LDS statements on the subject, this distinction is not operative, and significant attention to defining the term is absent. The term “gender” seems

to be deployed without a single definition of what is meant, leaving the broadest possible semantic range.

Gender as a category is variously applied to cover three separate aspects of human identity, though they are often conflated under this single term. As one example, an official LDS booklet *A Parent's Guide* published in 1985 explains: "Gender identity involves an understanding and accepting of one's own gender, with little reference to others; one's gender roles usually focus upon the social interaction associated with being male or female."⁶² Parsing this definition reveals that first, gender refers to the morphological bodies of males and females—what is taken to be self-evidently "one's own gender." Second, gender refers to an "identity" that males and females are supposed to possess that corresponds with their bodies, including heterosexual desires. Third, gender refers to the differing "roles," purposes, and responsibilities that some Church leaders understand to be assigned to males and females. These three definitions refer to quite different things, which makes it difficult to know how exactly the term is used in different contexts.⁶³ When one adds the idea of gender as an eternal characteristic, these three definitions become even more complicated. I will examine each of these three notions of "gender" as they might serve as an objection to homosexual relationships.

First, "gender" is understood to refer exclusively to the morphological differences between bodies labeled "male" and "female." In this sense, "gender" is a synonym for "sex," the identifiable bodily characteristics of maleness and femaleness. If we restrict the understanding of "gender" to mean simply bodily difference, it is not clear that homosexual relationships would be impacted at all. Homosexual relationships do not interfere with this minimal definition of "gender," since male and female bodies persist as such in these relationships. Nonheterosexual relationships, it would seem, do not require a changed belief in an eternal "gender" at all, as long as "gender" is understood to refer exclusively to bodily morphology. In the same way that the sex/ gender distinction was deployed by second-wave feminists to argue for a fixed notion of different sexes, while suggesting that the way those differences were given meaning in culture were changeable, one could argue that homosexual relationships also affirm a

fixed, eternal notion of sex, while seeing the particular configurations of relationships as variable.

Yet we might be wary of conceding this point too quickly. The notion of a morphological binary system of “sex” rooted in “nature” serves as an attempt to naturalize a particular division. Monique Wittig has argued, “The categories of ‘man’ and ‘woman’ . . . are political categories and not natural givens.”⁶⁴ The notion that sexual difference is political, rather than natural, suggests that the emphasis on the mark of sexual difference as reproductive capacity is rooted in the social and political world, even while appealing to “nature” as an outside authority.

In this way, a theory of sexual difference that claims to be rooted in “nature” is always already heterosexual, thus concealing its political import.⁶⁵ One must be aware that the binary division between male and female, taken to be on the order of not only nature, but also God’s will, has as its goal the sanctification of heterosexual sex.⁶⁶ There must be strict gendered correspondence between a spirit and a body, it is believed, because of God’s providence over creation. This view of the premortal gendered spirit is often put to use against transsexuality and intersexuality.

The problem with this view arises in explaining not only the real experiences of transsexual persons, but also the existence of intersexed persons whose bodies resist categorization in the gender binary. Anne Fausto-Sterling has suggested that as many as five “sexes” occur in nature.⁶⁷ The idea of a natural or inherent binary sexual difference in LDS discourse makes a legible “sex” the prerequisite to personhood, rendering the differently sexed “accidents of nature” illegible as children of God and divine potentials.⁶⁸

The notion of an eternal gender, referring to physical differences alone, also faces significant theological problems. If gender is “an essential individual characteristic of premortal, mortal, and eternal identity and purpose,” then presumably the premortal spirit of each individual necessarily corresponds in appearance to the body it inhabits as a kind of facsimile. The challenge with such a view is in saying what kinds of bodily characteristics correspond to one’s preexistent spirit. What is the relationship between one’s eternal identity and one’s contingent genetic makeup, including “sex”? What are the characteristics that make up a morphological

sex? Is it just the genitals, or are premortal bodies also capable of reproduction? Do things like performed gender differences, relative height and weight, chemistry, hormones, and muscle build also factor into what makes the “genders” eternally different? Do premortal spirits have chromosomes? What defines physical “gender” that it can persist eternally?

The whole question of the relationship of the premortal spirit to the mortal body is at stake in the claim that “gender” belongs to both equally. If any of the particularities of one’s genetic and environmental circumstances may be said to not preexist with a particular spirit in a deterministic way, why then is sexual difference the exception? To assert that “gender” is more fundamental to one’s identity than these other contingent features begs the question: Of the many different features of human identity, why does sexual difference—whatever that may refer to—occupy a privileged place in the account of the eternal nature of the human being?⁶⁹

In the second understanding of “gender,” the term refers not only to particular bodies, but also to an “identity” that is supposed to match to those bodies. What is meant by “identity,” and on what grounds is it done correctly or incorrectly? Gender identity is the relationship between sex, gender, and desire; and it is done correctly when all three align according to heterosexual norms. Early twentieth-century discourse about homosexuality thought of it in terms of pathological gendered “inversion,” suggesting that men and women who engaged in homosexual activity mistook their proper sexual identity as a result of confused social roles.⁷⁰

Current LDS discourse uses the term “gender confusion” to speak about homosexuality.⁷¹ Here, the stereotypical notion of male homosexuals as effeminate and female homosexuals as masculine functions to explain homosexuality. A correct gender identity can only be thought of in terms of heterosexuality. In this discourse, the transsexual and homosexual are indistinct since both have identified with a “sex” or “desire” that does not correspond correctly to their body. Such “identities” are rendered failures—or even impossible—in a framework that recognizes only some identities and is the impetus behind the pathologization of nonconforming gender identities.

Church teachings assert two ideas about gender identity that

are in significant tension: first, that gender is an eternal, immutable aspect of one's existence; and second, that notions of gender identity and roles are so contingent that they must be constantly enforced and taught, especially to young children.⁷² To say that one "is" a particular gender by virtue of that individual's body and also that one's disposition or identity is of that gender suggests that, in the latter case, gender is not a question of ontology but of achievement. "The Divine Institution of Marriage" manifests this tension by appealing to an "inherent . . . natural identity" with respect to gender, but also positing that nature is so unstable as to require heterosexual marriage to make sure that it can "develop."⁷³ In this understanding, male and female "identity" is not secured by the possession of a male or female body alone but must be enforced and made legible as "male" or "female" through practices like heterosexuality.⁷⁴ As Douglas A. Abbot and A. Dean Byrd put it, heterosexuality must be "encouraged" in children in order for it to take.⁷⁵

But gender "identity" cannot be both inherent and taught. The contingency of "gender identity" here reveals that it is not, in fact, "natural" at all but rather must be maintained and enforced juridically. Gender is constantly at risk of failing to correspond to the sexed body. As Judith Butler explains, "There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results."⁷⁶ The idea that gender is performed, not possessed, reveals just how unstable it is as a category for defining people.⁷⁷ Such a view—that gender is something that develops, or is achieved—suggests that there is no true or false gender, nor one that coheres with a precultural "nature."

The use of the category of "gender" to describe one's desires and sexual practices has been heavily discredited over the last several decades.⁷⁸ Rather, given the vast variability of gender "identities" of culturally recognized "masculine" or "feminine" traits among those who identify as either heterosexual or homosexual, the assumption that any given gender performance corresponds to a particular object of desire is entirely contingent. The old binary categories of hetero and homosexuals—with the caveat of bisexuals—does little to capture the wide variety of gender performance and sexual preference. The experiences of transexuals, transgender, drag, intersexuality, and the variety of gender per-

formances in gay, lesbian, and straight cultures are not adequately understood through the category of gender as a system that matches “masculine” and “feminine” sexual desires to “male” and “female” bodies. The history of this categorization of sexual preferences in connection with gender relies on the same heterosexual matrix that it attempts to explain. Gender simply fails as a category for thinking about sexuality, and LDS discourse should move beyond such an infelicitous conflation.

The third understanding of “gender” in LDS discourse sees it as more than bodies and identity, but also as comprising roles—or as the “Proclamation” puts it, “eternal identity and purpose.” Gendered “purposes” or roles are laid out in the document: “By divine design, fathers are to preside over their families in love and righteousness and are responsible to provide the necessities of life and protection for their families. Mothers are primarily responsible for the nurture of their children.”⁷⁹ Earlier teachings of Church leaders suggested an even more expansive notion of gender roles that included prescribed ways of dressing and acting so as to appear properly male or female.⁸⁰ Like gender identity, gender roles must also be taught to children in order for them to be carried on.⁸¹ This notion of “gender” as roles operates as a critique of homosexual relationships because at least one “confused” partner fails to conform to his or her “proper” gendered identity as masculine or feminine. Such a view of gendered roles may not include any assumed correspondence to capacity, but rather to responsibilities which each gender is meant to assume.⁸²

This view may be used to object to homosexual relationships because such relationships may include one or both same-sex parents as subverting the role assigned to their “gender.” In this sense, “gender confusion” is the result, not of the presence of both “masculine” and “feminine” parents, but the failure of these traits to be possessed by men and women respectively. The notion that women are more innately caring and nurturing reinforces the instruction for women to reproduce and be the primary caregivers of their children. In recent LDS discourse, the title “mother” does not refer to a period in a woman’s life, one particular aspect of how a woman’s identity may be performed, or a particular category of women who have children. This view was expressed in its most extreme form by Sheri Dew, speaking as second coun-

selor in the Relief Society general presidency, when she asserted that a “woman” is defined wholly as a “mother” since “motherhood is the essence of who we are as women.”⁸³

In spite of the emphasis that parents must act as both masculine and feminine (ideally by males and females, respectively), LDS discourse has increasingly emphasized “equality” in the marital relationship. The “Proclamation” teaches both that “fathers are to preside over their families” and that “fathers and mothers are obligated to help one another as equal partners.” The tension between these two positions—fathers presiding but both parents as “equal partners”—remains largely unresolved. Indeed, what it means to preside and what it means to be equal are left entirely unexplained. When differences are minimized between the sexes, Elder L. Tom Perry can say, “There is not a president and vice-president in a family. We have co-presidents working together eternally for the good of their family. . . . [T]hey lead, guide, and direct their family unit. They are on equal footing.”⁸⁴ Yet while the rhetoric of equal partnership could and would apply to parents of the same sex, when it comes to the issue of “gender confusion” in homosexual relationships, the question of who presides is much more important than the fact that there is an equal partnership. The retention of earlier language about “presiding” alongside more modern emphasis on “equal partnership” reveals the necessity of hierarchical views of males and females in marriage as a necessary aspect of marking same-sex relationships as illegitimate.

The problem with an interpretation in which “gender” refers to roles is that it cannot explain what these roles might be in premortal and postmortal life. The current Relief Society general president, Julie B. Beck, asserts: “Female roles did not begin on earth, and they do not end here. A woman who treasures motherhood on earth will treasure motherhood in the world to come.”⁸⁵ Here, a woman’s eternal role is defined as “treasuring motherhood.” Motherhood is connected explicitly to mortal and postmortal realms, perhaps referencing the belief that divinized women will perform the same reproductive functions of “motherhood” as defined by mortal bodies. However, she avoids exploring how motherhood is understood as a “role” for premortal spir-

its, or even beyond birthing, the roles a Heavenly Mother might expect to perform in postmortality.

These predefined roles apply to men as well. President Gordon B. Hinckley stated that women do not “resent the strong leadership of a man in the home” and that the man “becomes the provider, the defender, the counselor, the breadwinner and lends support and gives support when needed.”⁸⁶ Yet in LDS discourse, Heavenly Father takes on the role of a single parent nurturing His children, while Heavenly Mother does little that could be called mothering from the perspective of mortal persons. If we accept a definition of “gender” that suggests that men’s role is being a “breadwinner” and women’s role is caring for children, cooking, cleaning, and other hallmarks of the twentieth-century American family division of labor, this understanding of gender is meaningless in an eternal realm.⁸⁷

Further, the problem with dehistoricizing modern American divisions of labor is that such divisions fail to describe “gender” historically and cross-culturally. Anthropologists and theorists have shown the variability of “sex roles,” showing not only the cultural, but also the historical, contingency of what is considered to be masculine and feminine, which is what precipitated the theoretical division between sex and gender in the first place.⁸⁸ Even if one restricts gender roles to reproductive function, stripping away the divisions of household labor or access to public power as contingent features of mortal life, it is not clear that such roles could be construed as applying equally to the three phases of one’s eternal—premortals, mortal, and postmortals—life. The main problems for any theology that begins with a fixed notion of roles, gender binarism, or innate characteristics of what constitute masculine and feminine characteristics is that it is rooted in a fantastic idealization of such differences rather than any universal instantiation.

Finally, I would like to address the frequent charge that homosexual relationships constitute gender “separatism.”⁸⁹ Valerie Hudson has gone so far as to call same-sex relationships “gender apartheid.”⁹⁰ The assertion faces a number of problems. In this understanding of same-sex relationships, the only meaningful and politically valuable mixed-sex interactions happen in marriages and procreation. But this assumption that nonheterosexuals cannot or

will not engage in meaningful interactions with members of the opposite sex, including parents, siblings, children, co-workers, neighbors, and friends has no basis. The kinds of “separatist” feminist and gay and lesbian movements from earlier eras were more of a response to the injustice of patriarchal, heterosexual culture than a desire to cease all interaction with members of the opposite sex. If learning to interact with members of the opposite sex (or gender) really does hold a privileged position as a means to salvation over learning to master other kinds of relationships—such as those of different social, economic, racial, linguistic, national, or even religious backgrounds—there is no reason to suppose that same-sex companions cannot or would not develop those relationships. But the question of why mixed-sex relationships should be privileged above others must be seriously asked and explored.

Conclusion

At the turn of the twentieth century, as the Church began to embrace the new post-polygamy conception of families and formally ended the “law of adoption” as it had been practiced between adults, Wilford Woodruff prophetically suggested that there were more changes to come: “I have not felt satisfied, neither did President Taylor, neither has any man since the Prophet Joseph who has attended to the ordinance of adoption in the temples of our God. . . . [W]e still have more changes to make, in order to satisfy our Heavenly Father, satisfy our dead and ourselves. . . . [W]e have got to have more revelation concerning sealing under the law of adoption.”⁹¹ The possibility of creating theological space within Mormonism for homosexual relationships rests not on the abandonment of any central doctrine of the Church, but rather on the revival of past concepts, the recovery of embedded theological resources, and the rearticulation of existing ideas in more expansive terms in order to rethink the possibilities of celestial relationships. At the heart of this recovery is a displacement of biological reproduction as the sole way of imagining kinship as well as the model for celestial (pro)creation. In both cases, reproduction fails to offer a universal foundation for meaningful kinship relationships as well as being a doctrinally suspect account of divine relationships. Such a recovery project has the benefit not only of including homosexual relationships, but also of laying a

more solid ground for nonreproductive heterosexual relationships and other forms of kinship.

The numerous critiques of the category of gender in recent years cannot be ignored, even if Latter-day Saints opt for a continued emphasis on binary sexual difference. Whether from the critique of gender roles, gender essentialist notions of innate characteristics, or even the notion of biological difference itself, LDS theology faces serious credibility issues by continuing to hold to precritical assumptions about sexual difference. At the same time, however, there is nothing preventing Latter-day Saints from moving past these assumptions in order to more clearly focus on Mormonism's distinctive teachings about kinship and salvation, which does not require an appeal to the suspect category of gender at all. The unimportance of gender as a category for salvation is significantly affirmed in both ancient and modern scripture: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28) and "he denieth none that come unto him, black and white, bond and free, male and female; and he remembereth the heathen; and all are alike unto God" (2 Ne. 26:33).

Or perhaps by appealing to the social basis of gender, rather than a supposed eternal standard, we may better make sense of its place and significance in our theological thinking. To admit the social basis of gender does not entail the elimination of gender, nor does it require a leveling of difference toward some androgynous ideal. Quite the opposite. Instead, we may see more of a proliferation of "genders," released from the constraints of fantasies about a neat gender binary. Just as we do not imagine that only one (or two) races, body types, and hair colors are represented in the resurrection, we may also see a variety of "genders," understood as either different kinds of bodies, different kinds of identities, and even different roles. We need not abandon the idea of "eternal gender," but rather we can embrace the possibilities that it opens for us once freed from its artificial constraints. As one LDS manual puts it, backing away from its earlier claims about the fixed nature of gender: "There is nearly as much variation within each gender as there is between the genders. Each human being is unique. There is no one model except the Redeemer of all mankind. Development of a person's gifts or interests is one of life's

most enjoyable experiences. No one should be denied such growth.”⁹² Perhaps LDS ritual and rhetoric may embrace this variation, including homosexual relationships in the blessings of growth offered by sealing.

Notes

1. For an excellent set of scholarly essays addressing the claim that scripture and tradition prohibit same-sex unions in Christianity and Judaism, see Mark D. Jordan, Meghan T. Sweeney, and David M. Mellott, *Authorizing Marriage?: Canon, Tradition, and Critique in the Blessing of Same-Sex Unions* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2006).

2. Many of these works have appeared in the form of how-to guides for “overcoming” homosexual “problems.” In recent years, some works have appeared that seek to accept an LDS and homosexual identity side by side. See, for instance, Carol Lynn Pearson, *No More Goodbyes: Circling the Wagons around Our Gay Loved Ones* (Walnut Creek, Calif.: Pivot Point Books, 2007); and Fred Matis, Marilyn Matis, and Ty Mansfield, *In Quiet Desperation: Understanding the Challenge of Same-Gender Attraction* (Salt Lake City: Shadow Mountain, an imprint of Deseret Book, 2004).

3. Lowell L. Bennion, “Foreword,” in *Peculiar People: Mormons and Same-Sex Orientation*, edited by Ron Schow, Wayne Schow, and Marybeth Raynes (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1991), xi.

4. As an example, witness the discussion framing of the causality of sexuality as *either* a genetic question *or* a question of social conditioning in William S. Bradshaw, “Short Shrift to the Facts,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 44, no. 1 (Spring 2011): 171–91.

5. Alan Michael Williams, “Mormon and Queer at the Crossroads,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 44, no. 1 (Spring 2011): 75.

6. Jonathan Ned Katz, *The Invention of Heterosexuality* (New York: Dutton, 1995); David M. Halperin, *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality: And Other Essays on Greek Love* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 15–40.

7. On the degrees of the celestial kingdom, see D&C 131:1–4. Though “celestial marriage” was a synonym for polygamous marriage in the early LDS Church, today it refers exclusively to any marriage sealed in a temple.

8. 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,” <http://lds.org/family/proclamation?lang=eng> (accessed July 19, 2011).

9. Valerie M. Hudson and Alma Don Sorenson, “Response to Professor [Linda E.] Thomas [on Womanist Theology],” in *Mormonism in Dia-*

logue with Contemporary Christian Theologies, edited by Donald W. Musser and David L. Paulsen (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 2007), 327.

10. Blake T. Ostler, "The Idea of Preexistence in Mormon Thought," in *Line upon Line: Essays on Mormon Doctrine*, edited by Gary James Bergera (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1989), 141.

11. D&C 93:29–33: "Man was also in the beginning with God. Intelligence, or the light of truth, was not created or made, neither indeed can be. . . . For man is spirit. The elements are eternal, and spirit and element, inseparably connected, receive a fulness of joy." Hale notes, "While it seems certain that Smith taught that gods procreate, he did not specify that their offspring are necessarily spirits. And it is equally unclear if the alternative possibility, that the offspring of the gods are physical children, would be any more plausible in the prophet's thinking." Van Hale, "The Origin of the Human Spirit," in *Line upon Line: Essays on Mormon Doctrine*, edited by Gary James Bergera (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1989), 122.

12. Linda P. Wilcox, "The Mormon Concept of a Mother in Heaven," in *Women and Authority: Re-Emerging Mormon Feminism*, edited by Maxine Hanks (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1992), 3–21.

13. Blake T. Ostler, *The Attributes of God*, Vol. 1 in EXPLORING MORMON THOUGHT (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2001), 352.

14. The reference to the plural "Gods" in the creation account in the Book of Abraham 4–5 may include both male and female actors grammatically. However, in general Heavenly Mother's creative role is limited to the creation of spirits, emphasizing her role as bearer of children rather than in the governance or creation of the earth. Wilcox, "The Mormon Concept of a Mother in Heaven."

David L. Paulsen and Martin Pulido, "A Mother There': A Survey of Historical Teachings about Mother in Heaven" *BYU Studies* 50, no. 1 (2011): 85, extensively document statements by LDS Church leaders on the existence and roles of Heavenly Mother, offering a view that "marshals evidence against some claims that General Authorities and other Church leaders have limited Heavenly Mother's role to reproduction." The sources they cite, as I read them, nevertheless tend to remain within a framework in which reproduction is a central role for Heavenly Parents, even if not the only role for women. With perhaps one exception from Charles W. Penrose in 1904, the evidence that they cite from Church leaders that Heavenly Mother is a "co-creator" does not clearly claim that her creative act extends beyond spiritual reproduction.

15. Examples are abundant from both Church leaders and in conservative LDS theology. See, for instance, Jeffrey R. Holland, "Helping Those Who Struggle with Same-Gender Attraction," *Ensign*, October

2007, <http://lds.org/ensign/2007/10/helping-those-who-struggle-with-same-gender-attraction?lang=eng> (accessed July 19, 2011): “At the heart of this plan is the begetting of children, one of the crucial reasons Adam and Eve left the Garden of Eden (see 2 Ne. 2:19–25; Moses 5:10–12). They were commanded to ‘be fruitful, and multiply’ (Moses 2:28), and they chose to keep that commandment. We are to follow them in marrying and providing physical bodies for Heavenly Father’s spirit children. Obviously, a same-gender relationship is inconsistent with this plan.” Hudson and Sorenson, “Response to Professor Thomas,” 329, argue: “God created only two beings at the dawn of human history: a man named Adam and a woman named Eve. We infer that no male-male or female-female relationship can substitute for the critical importance of male-female relations.”

16. Camille Fronk, “Mary, Mother of Jesus,” *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 4 vols. (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 2:863–64.

17. James E. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ*, 6th ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1922), 81.

18. Jonathan A. Stapley and Kristine Wright, “Female Ritual Healing in Mormonism,” *Journal of Mormon History* 37 (Winter 2011): 1–85; Linda King Newell, “The Historical Relationship of Mormon Women and the Priesthood,” in Hanks, *Women and Authority*, 23–44.

19. Gregory A. Prince, *Power from On High: The Development of Mormon Priesthood* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1995), 204–8.

20. In the document, “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” the unnamed authors explain, “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.”

21. The introduction to the document identifies its author only as “the Church.” This document, “explains [the Church’s] reasons for defending marriage between a man and a woman as an issue of moral imperative.” The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, “The Divine Institution of Marriage,” LDS Newsroom, August 28, 2008, <http://newsroom.lds.org/article/the-divine-institution-of-marriage> (accessed July 19, 2011).

22. *Ibid.*

23. LDS discourse on sexual relations within marriage have come to see the purpose of sex as having to do with both procreation and relationships between spouses. Terrance D. Olson explains, “The purpose of appropriate sexual relations in marriage includes the expression and building of joy, unity, love, and oneness. To be ‘one flesh’ is to experience an emotional and spiritual unity. This oneness is as fundamental a

purpose of marital relations as is procreation." Terrance D. Olson, "Sexuality," *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 4 vols. (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 3:1306. Much of the shift in emphasis coincides with the acceptance of birth control. See Melissa Proctor, "Bodies, Babies, and Birth Control," *Dialogue* 36, no. 3 (Fall 2003): 159–75.

24. Joseph Smith was sealed in celestial marriages to women who were well past child-bearing years, like Patty Bartlett Sessions (age forty-seven), Elizabeth Davis Durfee (age fifty or fifty-one), Rhoda Richards (age fifty-eight), and Fanny Young (age fifty-six). Todd Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness: The Plural Wives of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1997), 4–6. This practice continues today. Of the numerous examples one could note, Elder Dallin H. Oaks was sealed in 2000 to Kristen Meredith McMains, who was in her early fifties at the time, presumably unable to naturally conceive.

25. Paul V. Hyer, "Temple Sealings," *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 4 vols. (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 3:1289, explains, "Among members of the Church sealing refers to the marriage of a husband and wife and to the joining together of children and parents that are to endure forever."

26. Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 126.

27. For a sustained argument against Levi-Straussian and Lacanian arguments for heterosexuality as a necessary structure for childhood development, see *ibid.*, 118–27; and her *Antigone's Claim: Kinship between Life & Death* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 68–73.

28. First Presidency and Council of the Twelve Apostles, "The Family: A Proclamation to the World."

29. Notably, Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*, rev. ed. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969).

30. In previous anthropological theories of kinship, David Murray Schneider, *A Critique of the Study of Kinship* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1984), 123, has observed: "It is simply assumed that for all human beings, for all cultures, genealogical relatedness (however defined) is of value and is of significance . . . that it is, in short, privileged."

31. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, "The Divine Institution of Marriage." Ironically, the studies it relies on do not indict two same-sex parented families, but single-mother families, which are fully permissible in the Church. David Popenoe, *Life without Father: Compelling New Evidence That Fatherhood and Marriage Are Indispensable for the Good of Children and Society* (New York: Martin Kessler Books, 1996) and David Blankenhorn, *Fatherless America: Confronting Our Most Urgent Social Problem* (New York: Basic Books, 1995). However, studies show that there is no persuasive evidence that children of same-sex parents or one

homosexual parent face any risks or disadvantages relative to children in heterosexual homes. Child Welfare League of America, "Position Statement on Parenting of Children by Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Adults," <http://www.cwla.org/programs/culture/glbtposition.htm> (accessed July 20, 2011).

32. For an example of a scholar who sees the only meaningful exchange between males and females in reproduction and heterosexual marriage, see Valerie Hudson Cassler, "Some Things That Should Not Have Been Forgotten Were Lost': The Pro-Feminist, Pro-Democracy, Pro-Peace Case for State Privileging of Companionate Heterosexual Monogamous Marriage," *SquareTwo* 2, no. 1 (2009), online journal, <http://squaretwo.org/Sq2ArticleCasslerMarriage.html> (accessed July 21, 2011).

33. Butler, *Undoing Gender*, 118–27.

34. Carol Stack, *All Our Kin: Strategies for Survival in a Black Community* (New York: Harper and Row, 1974).

35. Kath Weston, *Families We Choose: Lesbians, Gays, Kinship* (New York: Columbia, 1991).

36. Cai Hua, *A Society without Fathers or Husbands: The Na of China*, translated by Asti Hustvedt (New York: Zone Books, 2001).

37. Schneider, *A Critique of the Study of Kinship*, 43–94, focuses his study on the Yapese, who initially did not consider sexual coitus to be significant in establishing kinship.

38. Schneider asks the simple question: "Are all genealogies equal?" *Ibid.*, 124. His answer is "no" for two reasons: "One is that the defining features of the genealogy may be variously valued and have different meanings or significance in different cultures. The other is that when the nature and content of the genealogical relationship is taken into account—and these are known to differ from one culture to another—then the assumptions of the equivalence of the parent-child relationship is brought into serious question." The question is of keen importance for Latter-day Saints who are engaged in the practice of tracing genealogies across time and cultures. If, for instance, our particular configuration of genealogical kinship does not accurately reflect those (configurations) operative in the times and cultures of our ancestors (not to mention our otherwise cultured contemporaries), have we adequately sealed kinship units together, even if they force our own understanding of kinship in a foreign way? That is to say, the genetic relationship is not necessarily the same as the value established in any particular form of kinship. We may think of marriage laws and customs as ways of regulating and normalizing certain kinds of kinship structures, but this is not to say that such customs are universal in practice or even universally desirable. If the proxy sealing practice for those who have died serves to replicate the kinship

relationships of our ancestors in order to provide them with the blessings of eternal “families,” we would do well to better understand how their kinship relationships were structured.

39. Alan Michael Williams, “Mormon and Queer at the Crossroads,” 67, poses the question: “Is a queer family any less a family because it is queer? Official Mormon discourse has not yet addressed the familiness of these households, even while they are increasing.”

40. Michael Warner, *The Trouble with Normal: Sex, Politics, and the Ethics of Queer Life* (New York: Free Press, 1999).

41. Theodore B. Olson, “The Conservative Case for Gay Marriage: Why Same-Sex Marriage Is an American Value,” *Newsweek*, January 9, 2010, <http://www.newsweek.com/2010/01/08/the-conservative-case-for-gay-marriage.html> (accessed July 19, 2011).

42. While I have earlier defined kinship as a relationship that is ritually marked as other than friendship, it is useful to consider how the adoptive sealing may have functioned to make friendship a basis for kinship, as a disruption to family-reproductive relationships as the only basis for kinship. We may here consider what D. Michael Quinn in *Same-Sex Dynamics among Nineteenth-Century Americans: A Mormon Example* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001), 66–73, describes the “intense homosociality” of nineteenth-century Mormon culture as manifest in the way that kinship structures were being rethought. On July 23, 1843, in Nauvoo, Joseph Smith taught, “Friendship is one of the grand fundamental principles of ‘Mormonism’; [it is designed] to revolutionize and civilize the world, and cause wars and contentions to cease and men to become friends and brothers.” Joseph Smith et al., *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, edited by B. H. Roberts, 7 vols., 2d ed. rev. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1948 printing), 5:517. Here, friendship is posited as the basis of civilization, in contrast to the kinship structures described by later LDS teachers. Rather, Smith suggests that kinship (“brotherhood”) must be established through friendship, rather than the other way around. It is friendship that then serves as the basis for kinship. The significance of such a notion is that friendship, as in nonreproductive relationships, may be seen as equally desirable as kinship relationships, ritually marked through sealing, as a civilizing force.

43. Jonathan A. Stapley, “Adoptive Sealing Ritual in Mormonism,” *Journal of Mormon History* 37, no. 2 (Summer 2011): 53–117. Stapley notes (p. 66) that, in the Nauvoo period, women and men were adopted at roughly the same rate. Most often men and women were sealed as couples, though there are some unmarried men that were adopted by sealing, as well as at least one case where an unmarried girl was adopted by sealing. Willard and Jeanetta Richards adopted a young woman (age

eleven) whom they had cared for, for a period. Jonathan Stapley, email message to Taylor Petrey, July 22, 2011. See also Gordon Irving, "The Law of Adoption: One Phase of the Development of the Mormon Concept of Salvation, 1830–1900," *BYU Studies* 14, no. 3 (Spring 1974): 291–314. See *Journal of Mormon History* 37, no. 2 (Summer 2011) for Samuel M. Brown, "Early Mormon Adoption Theology and the Mechanics of Salvation," 3–52, and Jonathan A. Stapley, "Adoptive Sealing Ritual in Mormonism," 53–118.

44. Samuel M. Brown, "The Early Mormon Chain of Belonging," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 44, no. 1 (2011): 1–52.

45. D. Michael Quinn, *Same-Sex Dynamics*, 136–40, rightly rejects the idea that such relationships constitute "same-sex marriage." However, his claim that "this was an institutionalized form of mentor-protégé relationships between Mormon men" downplays the language of kinship—"father" and "son" of such relationships—even though he notes that, for instance, John D. Lee temporarily assumed the family name of Brigham Young, his spiritual father.

46. Stapley and Wright, "Female Ritual Healing in Mormonism," 55.

47. Orson Hyde, "Diagram of the Kingdom of God," *Millennial Star* 9 no. 2 (January 15, 1847): 23.

48. Parley P. Pratt, "Celestial Family Organization," *Millennial Star* 5, no. 12 (May 1845): 193.

49. Scott G. Kenney ed., *Wilford Woodruff's Journal, 1833–1898*, 9 vols. (Midvale, Utah: Signature Books, 1983–85), 2:364–65, quoted in Brown, "The Early Mormon Chain of Belonging," 1.

50. For the relevant events, see Stapley, "Adoptive Sealing Ritual in Mormonism," 106–12.

51. Abraham H. Cannon, *Journal*, April 5, 1895, quoted in *ibid.*, 108. Stapley notes that, over time, the quest to find one's dead proved an endless task and the idea of linking to Joseph Smith was eventually dismissed or forgotten: "In 1922, editors removed the instructions about sealing ultimate ancestors to Joseph Smith." *Ibid.*, 114.

52. *Ibid.*, 111.

53. Woodruff and Joseph F. Smith, Letter to John D. T. McAllister, April 26, 1894, quoted in *ibid.*, 116.

54. Schneider, *A Critique of the Study of Kinship*, 124, observes, "If there is a bond created in the process of reproduction, that bond must be culturally significant to count for anything."

55. I am personally aware of one occurrence in the past decade where an adopted child who was "born in the covenant" was sealed to the adoptive parents. The adoptive parents were informed by letter how rare their situation was.

56. Other examples of kinship that are not based on reproduction or biological relation are prevalent in LDS practice. Many members of the Church are “adopted” into the House of Israel, even while others are considered to be direct descendants. Discourse on Israelite identity has variously been asserted in terms of lineage and in terms of adoption. Armaund Mauss, *All Abraham’s Children: Changing Mormon Conceptions of Race and Lineage* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 17–40. While some versions of this doctrine imagine a change in the “blood” of the adoptee as part of this process, the very possibility of adoption across bloodlines already points to a kinship structure that precedes the reproductive family. Further, the notion of transformation itself, here in terms of transracial identity, as the result of the adoption may offer a model for transsexuals, who might also be ritually “adopted” into a new sex, perhaps as a part of a patriarchal blessing.

57. Ezra Taft Benson, quoted in Elaine Walton, “Children of Divorce,” *Ensign*, August 2002, 40–41, (<http://lds.org/ensign/2002/08/children-of-divorce?lang=eng> (accessed July 20, 2011)).

58. Williams, “Mormon and Queer at the Crossroads,” 67, adduces, “The issue of homosexuality for the Church is, at its core, about gender, as accepting same-sex parented families in full communion would upset the ecclesiastical relationship between men and women rather than necessarily disrupt theological ideas of marriage and parenthood.”

59. The First Presidency and Council of the Twelve Apostles, “The Family: A Proclamation to the World.”

60. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, “The Divine Institution of Marriage.”

61. *Ibid.* The text repeatedly emphasizes the centrality of a stable, heterosexual framing of gender: “gender differentiated parenting,” “gender differences are increasingly dismissed,” the need for a “clear gender identity,” and the erosion of “gender development.”

62. *A Parent’s Guide* (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1985), “Chapter 4: Teaching Children: From Four to Eleven Years,” <http://lds.org/manual/a-parents-guide/chapter-4-teaching-children-from-four-to-eleven-years?lang=eng> (accessed June 23, 2011).

63. The fact that the manual is anonymously authored, though presumably reviewed by General Authorities and the Correlation Review Committee, makes it impossible to deduce a more precise definition based on the authors’ backgrounds.

64. Monique Wittig, *The Straight Mind* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992), 13–14.

65. *Ibid.*, 11–12.

66. See also Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 3–44.

67. Anne Fausto-Sterling, “The Five Sexes: Why Male and Female Are Not Enough,” *The Sciences*, March–April, 1993, 20–24. See also her book-length treatment on the sciences of sexual difference and gender, *Sexing the Body: Gender Politics and the Construction of Sexuality* (New York: Basic Books, 2000).

68. Presumably intersexed persons are dismissed when President Kimball suggested, “With relatively few accidents of nature, we are born male or female. The Lord knew best. Certainly, men and women who would change their sex status will answer to their Maker.” “God Will Not Be Mocked,” *Ensign*, November 1974, 8. With respect to transsexuality, Elder Boyd K. Packer has declared, “There is no mismatching of bodies and spirits. Boys are to become men—masculine, manly men—ultimately to become husbands and fathers.” *Conference Reports* (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, October 1976), 101. This talk was later published in pamphlet form, Boyd K. Packer, *To Young Men Only* (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1976).

69. For a brief overview of the history of the doctrine of eternal gender and some of the theological problems it raises for intersexual and transsexual persons, see Jeffrey E. Keller, “Gender and Spirit,” in *Multiply and Replenish: Mormon Essays on Sex and Family*, edited by Brent Corcoran (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1994), 171–82.

70. See, e.g., Sigmund Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, translated and edited by James Strachey, 4th ed. (1962; New York: Basic Books, 2000). The American Psychiatric Association (APA) got rid of its diagnosis of homosexuality as a disorder in 1973. Gender Identity Disorder (GID) remains in the *DSM-IV*'s diagnostic catalogue, which is used by groups such as the National Association of Research and Therapy of Homosexuality (NARTH) as a predictor of homosexuality. NARTH seeks to “correct” homosexuality through psychological treatment. LDS psychologist and activist against homosexuality A. Dean Byrd has served as president of NARTH. The connection between gender identity and sexual desires and practices remains murky at best. For a critique of the diagnostic assumptions about gender identity, see Butler, *Undoing Gender*, 75–100.

71. This view appears in many recent descriptions of homosexuality in LDS discourse. For instance, “If governments were to alter the moral climate by legitimizing same-sex marriages, gender confusion would increase, particularly among children.” No author, “Strengthening the Family: Within the Bonds of Matrimony,” *Ensign*, August 2005, 17, <http://lds.org/ensign/2005/08/strengthening-the-family-within-the>

bonds-of-matrimony?lang=eng (accessed July 19, 2011). See also Boyd K. Packer, "I Will Remember Your Sins No More," *Ensign*, May 2006, <http://lds.org/ensign/2006/05/i-will-remember-your-sins-no-more?lang=eng> (accessed July 19, 2011); The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, "The Divine Institution of Marriage."

72. *A Parent's Guide*, "Chapter 4: Teaching Children: From Four to Eleven Years," asserts: "But members of the Church must not be deceived about one immutable truth: there is eternal significance in being a man or a woman. The history of the gospel from Adam to this final dispensation documents equal respect for the roles of men and women and the need for all men and women to develop their gifts to the utmost through living the commandments of God. But within that same gospel framework are some realities about differences between the two genders. This means that there are some exclusive things men are to do and some that women are to do. A most appropriate time for this development is the interlude between early childhood and adolescence."

As recently as 2009, Elder Bruce Hafen of the Seventy defended the idea that homosexuality is the result of a prepubescent "block" on "normal emotional-sexual development." He continued, "Adult men who have had such childhood experiences can often resume their normal development by identifying and addressing the sources of their emotional blockage, which usually includes restoring healthy, appropriate male relationships." "Elder Bruce C. Hafen Speaks on Same-Sex Attraction" Evergreen International nineteenth Annual Conference September 19, 2009. The full address is posted at <http://newsroom.lds.org/article/elder-bruce-c-hafen-speaks-on-same-sex-attraction> (accessed July 19, 2011).

73. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, "The Divine Institution of Marriage."

74. The notion that youth is a particularly vulnerable time for the "confusion" of gender identity is a frequent theme in some LDS discourse. For example, Boyd K. Packer teaches, "Now, I must speak of another danger, almost unknown in our youth but now everywhere about you. Normal desires and attractions emerge in the teenage years; there is the temptation to experiment, to tamper with the sacred power of procreation. These desires can be intensified, even perverted, by pornography, improper music, or the encouragement from unworthy associations. What would have only been a more or less normal passing phase in establishing gender identity can become implanted and leave you confused, even disturbed. If you consent, the adversary can take control of your thoughts and lead you carefully toward a habit and to an addiction, convincing you that immoral, unnatural behavior is a fixed part of your nature. With some few, there is the temptation which seems nearly over-

powering for man to be attracted to man or woman to woman. The scriptures plainly condemn those who ‘dishonour their own bodies between themselves . . . ; men with men working that which is unseemly’ (Rom. 1:24, 27) or ‘women [who] change the natural use into that which is against nature’ (Rom. 1:26).” “Ye Are the Temple of God,” *Ensign*, November 2000, <http://lds.org/ensign/2000/11/ye-are-the-temple-of-god?lang=eng> (accessed July 19, 2011).

75. Douglas A. Abbot and A. Dean Byrd, *Encouraging Heterosexuality: Helping Children Develop a Traditional Sexual Orientation* (Orem, Utah: Millennial Press, 2009).

76. Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 33.

77. Butler explains: “Gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a stylized repetition of acts. The effect of gender is produced through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and styles of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self.” *Ibid.*, 179.

78. *Ibid.*, 9–44, 173–77.

79. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, “The Family: A Proclamation to the World.”

80. President Kimball, “God Will Not Be Mocked,” *Ensign*, November 1974, 8, stated: “Some people are ignorant or vicious and apparently attempting to destroy the concept of masculinity and femininity. More and more girls dress, groom, and act like men. More and more men dress, groom, and act like women. The high purposes of life are damaged and destroyed by the growing unisex theory. God made man in his own image, male and female made he them. With relatively few accidents of nature, we are born male or female. The Lord knew best. Certainly, men and women who would change their sex status will answer to their Maker.”

81. One official manual teaches that proper gender roles are communicated through positive feelings that parents have about gender roles: “We should also help children understand gender roles. This will help a child have a good feeling about being a girl or boy. Parents who feel good about their roles as men and women pass this feeling along to their children.” “Lesson 9: Chastity and Modesty,” *The Latter-day Saint Woman: Basic Manual for Women, Part A* (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2000), <http://lds.org/manual/the-latter-day-saint-woman-basic-manual-for-women-part-a/lesson-9-chastity-and-modesty?lang=eng> (accessed July 19, 2011).

82. Current official statements on eternal gender suggest a kind of role complementarity, “The nature of male and female spirits is such

that they complete each other.” Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, *Handbook 2: Administering the Church*, Section 1.3.1. (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2010), <https://lds.org/handbook/handbook-2-administering-the-church/families-and-the-church-in-gods-plan?lang=eng#1.3.1> (accessed July 20, 2011).

83. Sheri L. Dew, “Are We Not All Mothers?” *Ensign*, November 2001, <http://lds.org/ensign/2001/11/are-we-not-all-mothers?lang=eng> (accessed July 19, 2011).

84. L. Tom Perry, “Fathers’ Role Is Anchoring Families,” *LDS Church News*, April 10, 2004, 15.

85. Julie B. Beck, “A ‘Mother Heart,’” *Ensign*, May 2004, 76, <http://lds.org/ensign/2004/05/a-mother-heart?lang=eng> (accessed July 19, 2011).

86. Gordon B. Hinckley, quoted in Kristen Moulton, “Fathers Urged to Lead Their Families,” *Daily Herald* (Provo, Utah) April 25, 1998, A1, A2, quoted in Camille S. Williams, “Response to Professor Reuther,” in *Mormonism in Dialogue with Contemporary Christian Theologies*, edited by Donald W. Musser and David L. Paulsen (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 2007), 288.

87. “Girls ought to be taught the arts and sciences of housekeeping, domestic finances, sewing, and cooking. Boys need to learn home repair, career preparation, and the protection of women. Both girls and boys should know how to take care of themselves and how to help each other. By example and by discussion, both sexes need to learn about being male or female, which, in summary, means becoming husbands and fathers or wives and mothers, here or hereafter.” *A Parent’s Guide*, “Chapter 4: Teaching Children: From Four to Eleven Years.”

88. For an excellent history of this division, see Shira Tarrant, *When Sex Became Gender: Perspectives on Gender* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

89. Didi Herman, *The Antigay Agenda* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 107.

90. Hudson Cassler, “Some Things That Should Not Have Been Forgotten.”

91. Wilford Woodruff, quoted in Stapley, “Adoptive Sealing Ritual in Mormonism,” 109.

92. *A Parent’s Guide*, “Chapter 4: Teaching Children: From Four to Eleven Years.”