

*Zen Sky* is this: as soon as I finished, I put my tablet down, went for a walk outside to view the last of the remaining cherry blossoms, and then washed the dishes. I picked up my rake.

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## Gendering Mormon Studies—At Last!

Amy Hoyt and Taylor G. Petrey, eds. *The Routledge Handbook of Mormonism and Gender*. London: Routledge, 2020. 646 pp. Illustrations, index. Hardcover: \$250.00. ISBN 9780815395218.

*Reviewed by Christine Talbot*

Women's and gender studies emerged out of the women's and sexual liberation movements of the 1960s and 1970s, movements the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints vigorously opposed. The so-called New Mormon History flourished around the same time, opening the field to new approaches. While the New Mormon History resulted in a better understanding of women in Mormon history, the study of gender in Mormonism has largely remained captured by the kind of compensatory history that argues women were there, too, and they mattered. As Amy Hoyt and Taylor G. Petrey acknowledge, Mormon gender studies has remained relatively untouched by the methodological and paradigm shifts in the broader study of gender over the last few decades. Mormon studies has been late in applying to Mormonism

the more expansive approaches emerging in women's and gender studies—incorporating the study of men and masculinity and thinking more carefully about the complex processes by which people become gendered in the first place. Moreover, perhaps because of the pervasive whiteness of Mormon studies until recently, only a few scholars are just now beginning to think through how intersectional approaches matter to Mormon studies. Intersectional approaches consider how gender is inflected with race, class, sexuality, nationality, and other categories of identity and social structure. Even fewer scholars have engaged with the theoretical turns in sexuality and queer studies that make visible the complicity of heteronormativity in gender structure and inequality. Hoyt and Petrey's new edited collection, *The Routledge Handbook of Mormonism and Gender*, tries to correct that lag, curating and assembling forty-one essays by as many scholars with diverse perspectives. Some of the chapters give readers an overview of Mormon gender studies, illustrating how far the field has come. Others “[chart] a future” to “address the many gaps” in Mormon gender studies, revealing just how far it hasn't (2). While Hoyt and Petrey's introduction is more optimistic than I am about how much Mormon gender studies has grown, the collection nonetheless moves the field significantly in valuable directions.

Following an introductory essay from the editors, the book is organized into four sections: methodological issues, historical approaches, social scientific approaches, and theological approaches. Essays in the methodological issues section explore the potentials of current standard methodologies in gender studies for thinking about gender in Mormon studies. These essays address the context in which Mormons become gendered and live gendered lives, using intersectionality as methodology and in practice at national and global levels.

The historical section, unsurprisingly the book's most robust, is comprised of essays giving an overview of gender over the course of LDS history, all but one focused primarily in the United States (the other examining LDS art in nineteenth-century Scandinavia). These chronological overviews are followed by topical essays: three on

elements of the Church's confrontation with emerging homosexual identities and social movements in the post-World War II era; one each on LDS artistic and literary production across its history; and two interrogating LDS (hetero)sexual culture, discussing modesty and sexual violence. Some of these essays break new ground, while others are state-of-the-field essays that expertly digest territory well-covered in LDS historiography.

Social scientific approaches flesh out these historical approaches in the collection's third section. Five of the essays in this section focus on the United States, giving readers an analysis of women's informal power, the home as ideology and as lived experience, and the gendered experiences of Mormons seeking mental health and pastoral counseling. Two additional essays provide large scale demographic analyses of non-traditional families and gendered belief structures. Six essays in this section discuss Mormon gender and family cultures in England, Ireland, Peru, Nicaragua, the Pacific Islands, and Nigeria, making it the most globally oriented of the four parts. Two of these essays examine how Mormons in modern, secular, more egalitarian cultures in the UK negotiate a theology and a culture rooted in traditional gender roles and family culture. The other essays look at how a religion and culture centered around white American gender roles and filial structures is negotiated in the Global South. Taken together, the pieces in this section look at how a faith and culture with distinctly American gender and family beliefs and norms gets negotiated by believers in very different cultural contexts with very different ways of organizing gender, family, and sexuality. These negotiations result in hybrid beliefs and practices that are a middle ground between American Mormon and local ideals, mosaics of more distinct features of each, or some of both. In this section especially, but elsewhere as well, Hoyt and Petrey have turned the weaknesses of Mormon studies into a strength of the collection. The editors include and amplify what little intersectional and international scholarship there is, simultaneously announcing the arrival of and calling for more of these important approaches.

As Hoyt and Petrey point out, “Theology is often a marginalized discourse in contemporary Mormonism” in part because Mormons are “suspicious of religious professionalism” and because of “the fear of suffering institutional consequences” (6). These essays explore some of the pitfalls and potentials of LDS theology in the twenty-first century. They explore issues as diverse as gendered theology in the Book of Mormon; theologies of the family, sexuality, queer and trans issues; the Heavenly Mother; gender and LDS priesthood; and women of color feminism. Many of these essays feel quite labored in their attempts to make Mormon theology “feminist.” Some authors throw caution to the wind, while in others’ essays the caution and sometimes self-censorship is palpable; taken together these essays rethink Mormonism’s theology in terms that attempt to make Mormon patriarchy more palatable for those voices most marginalized within the Church.

Intended primarily as a reference book, the *Handbook* is likely to be read cover to cover only by its most dedicated readers but is nonetheless worthy of such a read. Its essays are well-selected, well-written, engaging, and broadly accessible to readers in both gender studies and Mormon studies, providing both a strong overview and new approaches, ideas, and directions for further research. Topical essays occasionally lead to some repetition, most egregiously in the chapters covering LGBTQ+ topics, but overall, the book includes a wide variety of topics and perspectives.

The book is broadly illustrative of debates familiar in gender studies—the nature of gender, the relationship between prescriptive and lived gender roles and relations, and how gendered subjects negotiate formal and informal forms of cultural and institutional power. Distinctly Mormon flavors recur throughout as themes reappear in multiple essays: Mormonism’s material and embodied theology, changes over time and across cultures in the shape of LDS gender ideology and gendered life, and the difficulty of reconciling LDS belief and culture with twenty-first-century understandings of gender, feminism, LGBTQ+ issues, and intersectional thought. Notably, the book

as a whole and many of the essays within it illustrate tensions in the study of gender in Mormonism, an area of focus just beginning to grow beyond its initial impulse to search for a useable feminist past. The inclusion of many contributors facilitates recognition of new ways of celebrating the strength, agency, resilience, and creative influence of historical and contemporary LDS women and queer subjects. However, celebration sometimes comes at the expense of explicitly critiquing the heteropatriarchy that demands this of them. Despite the occasional prevarication of a few of its contributors, though, Hoyt and Petrey's collection does the study of gender in Mormonism a great service by bringing its frameworks, paradigms, and methodologies further into the twenty-first century.

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## Connecting the Dots

Caitlin Myer. *Wiving: A Memoir of Loving and Then Leaving the Patriarchy*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2020. 283pp. Hardcover: \$14.99. Kindle: \$18.83. ISBN: 9781950691470.

*Reviewed by Lisa Van Orman Hadley*

When I was a kid, I loved doing dot-to-dot pictures. Do you know the ones I'm talking about? You began with a sheet of paper scattered with dots and tiny numbers, like a starry but constellation-less sky; any star