

QUEER BODIES, QUEER TECHNOLOGIES, AND QUEER POLICIES

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Though there is a well-established conversation on how reproductive technologies and policies influence cisgender, heterosexual women's bodies within Mormonism, there is a less established conversation on how reproductive technologies and policies are affecting LGBTQ+ Saints.¹ Granted, the majority of the Church's attention has focused on non-queer women's reproductivity and not on the LGBTQ+ community. However, within the last handful of decades the Church has expanded its attention to include specific policies directed at the LGBTQ+ Latter-day Saint community.²

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints explicitly states its position in the *General Handbook* concerning how and when reproductive technologies are to be used. The morality of a technology is less a matter of the technology itself, but rather of matter of who is using it. Policies outlined in the handbook are directing reproductive technologies toward the creation of a fertile, cisgender, heterosexual, sex binary

1. Melissa Proctor, "Bodies, Babies, and Birth Control," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 36, no. 3 (Fall 2003): 159–75.

2. Tad Walch, "Church Releases Updates to Handbook for Latter-day Saint Leaders Worldwide," *Deseret News*, July 31, 2020, <https://www.deseret.com/faith/2020/7/31/21349687/church-handbook-changes-released-latter-day-saints-mormon-lds>.

under the guise of God's laws.³ In this brief article, I discuss the Church's current policies on reproductive technologies as outlined in the handbook and how they affect specifically the LGBTQ+ community.

Reproductive technology is already changing the landscape of gender and reproduction. For instance, such technology allows two cisgender women and one cisgender man to be the biological parents of their child who has the DNA of three biological parents.⁴ Uterine transplants allow barren bodies the ability to gestate their offspring.⁵ This is not science fiction. This is already happening. If these trends continue, technology could eventually enable trans women the ability to birth and nurse their own children.⁶ In time, two cisgender women could produce their own offspring without the need of a sperm donor, and children could have shared DNA with both their gay, cisgender fathers.⁷ Advancements in reproductive and medical technologies are not just changing the aesthetics and sociology of gender but also the biological utility and function of sex.

Biological sex classification is predicated on assumed reproductive function. According to Aristotelian essentialism, which is the basis

3. "38.6.9, Fertility Treatments," and "2.1.3, Parents and Children," *General Handbook: Serving in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2020), <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/general-handbook?lang=eng>.

4. Ian Sample, "Three-Parent Babies Explained: What Are the Concerns and Are They Justified?," *Guardian*, Feb. 2, 2015, <http://theguardian.com/science/2015/feb/02/three-parent-babies-explained>.

5. Bill Chappell, "A First: Uterus Transplant Gives Parents a Healthy Baby," *NPR International*, Oct. 4, 2014, <http://npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2014/10/04/353691555/a-first-uterus-transplant-gives-parents-a-healthy-baby>

6. B. P. Jones et al., "Uterine Transplantation in Transgender Women," *BJOG: An International Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology*, 126, no. 2 (2019): 152–56, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1471-0528.15438>.

7. Guy Ringer, "Get Ready for Embryos from Two Men or Two Women," *Time*, Mar. 18, 2015, <http://time.com/3748019/same-sex-couples-biological-children>.

of most gender essentialist claims, function is key to essentialism. As Aristotle explains in his biopsychology, an eye is only an eye if it fulfills the measure of its creation, to provide vision. If an eye cannot see, it is an eye in name only. In Aristotle's words, "The eye itself is the matter for vision; and if [vision] departs, there is no eye any longer, except equivocally, as in the case of an eye in a statue or a painting."⁸ According to essentialism, an eye must have the ability to see to be considered an eye in actuality. If not, it is only an eye in potentiality. However, if a blind eye has its vision restored, it is again an eye in actuality. To be considered an "actual eye" is a matter of function and utility in Aristotle's essentialist philosophy.

When function is at the center of gender, reproduction takes on a special role. Under gender essentialist philosophy, biological sex is a matter of reproductive utility, at least in potentiality. A woman must have the potential ability to reproduce to be considered a woman. A strict gender essentialist might even claim that she would have to actually reproduce to be a "actual woman." Her biological assignment is predicated on her reproductive ability, and an infertile woman is not an "actual woman" but only a woman in potential. If she cannot reproduce, an infertile woman is a woman in name only, like a statue or painting. She may look, talk, and sound like a woman, but if she doesn't serve the biological utility of a woman, she is not an "actual woman." Likewise, an infertile man or even childless man is not a man in function. To be a biologically "functioning" man or woman would require fertility and the fulfillment of that utility. In the stricter interpretation, a man would have to reproduce in actuality to be considered an "actual man." If not, he only has the potential to be a man, essentially speaking.

Reproductive gender essentialism claims exclude trans persons for their gender identity. However, these same arguments, when taken seriously, also exclude infertile and intersex women too. Such a strict

8. Hippocrates George Apostle, *Aristotle's On the Soul (De Anima)* (Grinnell, Iowa: Peripatetic Press, 1981), 20.

definition of “man” or “woman” does not simply exclude trans folks but also any body not fulfilling its biological utility. After all, biological potential and utility is the basis of a biological sex assignment.

There are many parallels with Aristotle’s essentialism, gender essentialism, and Mormon theology. In Mormon theology, doctrine, and policy, reproduction is of supreme importance.⁹ Brigham Young warned the Saints about “attempts to destroy and dry up the fountains of life.”¹⁰ He also stated, “There are multitudes of pure and holy spirits waiting to take tabernacles, now what is our duty?—to prepare tabernacles for them.” He continues, “It is the duty of every righteous man and woman to prepare tabernacles for all the spirits they can.”¹¹ Brigham Young’s encouragement for Latter-day Saints to reproduce is echoed in temple ritual, covenants, culture, scripture, and yes, the *General Handbook*. We are commanded to multiply and replenish the earth.¹² Providing bodies for spirits is a critical part of Mormon theology and doctrine.

Infertile bodies then pose quite a problem in Mormon theology. They must be “fixed” or at least have the potential to be “fixed,” in the next life or with current reproductive technology, as a matter of both utility and redemption. If God commanded us to multiply and replenish, God must provide a way for all bodies to achieve the measure of their creation. According to scripture, God gives us no commandment unless there is a way prepared for us to accomplish said

9. Genesis 1:28; Genesis 9:1; Genesis 35:11; and The First Presidency and Council of the Twelve Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, “The Family: A Proclamation to the World [Sept. 1995],” *Ensign*, Nov. 1985, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/1995/11/the-family-a-proclamation-to-the-world?lang=eng>: “We declare that God’s commandment for His children to multiply and replenish the earth remains in force.”

10. Brigham Young, *Journal of Discourses*, 12:120–21.

11. Brigham Young, *Journal of Discourses*, 4:56.

12. Genesis 1:28 KJV.

commandment.¹³ In Mormonism, everyone must have the potential to reproduce—even infertile bodies. If one of our earthly purposes is to birth and rear children, technology can and has assisted many faithful Latter-day Saints in that endeavor. As explained in the handbook, “When needed, reproductive technology can assist a married woman and man in their righteous desire to have children.”¹⁴ Technology is among the means Latter-day Saints use to fulfill the measure of their creation.

In a certain regard, infertile bodies have a shared “queerness” with the LGBTQ+ community.¹⁵ Both infertile and queer bodies are not performing according to their sex assignment and biological function, which in the Mormon imagination includes reproduction. Infertile bodies are queer bodies, both biologically and theologically. Many queer persons and bodies are not reproductive whether because they are single or in a nonreproductive relationship. If the purpose of a biological sex assignment is to reproduce via copulation, anything outside that narrow definition and gender essentialist view is somewhat “queer.”

Yet, despite infertile and LGBTQ+ Saints having a shared “queerness,” LGBTQ+ Saints carry the brunt of the queer prejudice. Many LGBTQ+ Saints that are not in cisgender, heterosexual relationships are excluded from reproductive technologies that would enable us to have families, while infertile, cisgender, heterosexual Latter-day Saints are not. Is the technology being used to reinforce cisgender, heterosexual,

13. 1 Nephi 3:7.

14. 38.6.9 “Fertility Treatments,” *General Handbook*.

15. For the purposes of this article, I will expand the definition of “queer” or “queerness” to include infertile bodies. Though “queer” has been used to reference the LGBTQIA+ community, I will use “queer” and “queerness” to denote all deviations from a binary, cisgender, heterosexual, fertile body. In the context of Mormon theology, infertility is its own sort of queerness when it deviates from the general pre-proscribed function of biological sex, which is to reproduce. If a man or woman cannot reproduce, their biological functioned is “queer.”

patriarchal gender assignments or reject or subvert said gender assignments? Prejudice against LGBTQ+ Saints creating celestial families of our own is codified in the handbook by prohibiting not just some kinds of relationships but also who can use specific reproductive technologies.

Though the handbook has made space for technological modifications for cis-male and cis-female bodies and couples, the Church has simultaneously demonstrated repeated resistance to technological modifications of many LGBTQ+ bodies and couples that don't include cis-male and cis-female couples. As stated in the handbook, "The pattern of a husband and wife providing bodies for God's spirit children is divinely appointed."¹⁶ In other words, vaginal-penile penetration is God's way to bring children into the world, and methods outside this "divine appointment" require patriarchal policing and approval. The collision of biology and technology is pushing against a fragile system which requires constant, meticulous, vigilant, and legalistic policymaking at the highest levels of authority in the Church, even from the First Presidency.¹⁷

Various reproductive technologies that would benefit queer reproduction are discussed in the handbook. Under the heading "Policies on Moral Issues," there is a list of "discouragements" that include surrogacy, sperm/egg donation, artificial insemination, and in vitro fertilization.¹⁸ Though these practices are discouraged, they are not entirely forbidden. These specific reproductive technologies are available to some but not all. For example, a cisgender, heterosexual man might require artificial insemination to impregnate his cisgender, heterosexual wife. Under the current handbook, this is permissible. As stated, "When needed, reproductive technology can assist a married woman and man in their righteous desire to have children. This technology includes artificial

16. "38.6.22, Surrogate Motherhood," *General Handbook*.

17. "38.6.22, Surrogate Motherhood," *General Handbook*.

18. "38.6.7, Donating or Selling Sperm or Eggs," and "38.6.9, Fertility Treatments," *General Handbook*.

insemination and in vitro fertilization.”¹⁹ Furthermore, their children are “born in the covenant” if the parents are already sealed.²⁰

However, the handbook does not simply open the door for artificial insemination, sperm/egg donation, surrogacy, and in vitro fertilization as sanctioned technologies for everyone. Sperm/egg donation and surrogacy are means frequently used by the LGBTQ+ community and therefore require more policing than artificial insemination and in vitro fertilization between a monogamous, cisgender, heterosexual couple. For example, a child born via surrogacy is not born in the covenant.²¹ This child requires a separate sealing with First Presidency approval.²² This ensures the First Presidency can exclude children parented by same-sex couples.²³

The handbook explicitly states, multiple times, that these technologies are for a cisgender “husband and wife”: “The Church discourages artificial insemination or in vitro fertilization using sperm from anyone but the husband or an egg from anyone but the wife.” This clarification reinforces a cis-male and cis-female application, which is especially potent when combined with other policies and prohibitions on LGBTQ+ participation in the Church and temple.²⁴ Thus, these reproductive technologies can be used as a corrective measure for infertile cis-male and cis-female married Saints but not used to assist LGBTQ+

19. “38.6.9, Fertility Treatments,” *General Handbook*.

20. “38.4.2.7, Children Conceived by Artificial Insemination or In Vitro Fertilization,” *General Handbook*.

21. Surrogacy is a complicated issue when it comes to women’s bodies, especially impoverished women of color. Though surrogacy is a technology to help people, including gay parents, bring children into the world, it is also ethically complicated due to economic stratification that exploits women of color. There are significant ethical dilemmas to address beyond the scope of this paper.

22. “38.6.22, Surrogate Motherhood,” *General Handbook*.

23. “38.6.15, Same-Sex Attraction and Same-Sex Behavior” and “38.6.16, Same-Sex Marriage,” *General Handbook*.

24. “38.6.9, Fertility Treatments,” *General Handbook*.

Saints in creating celestial families. Quite explicitly, the handbook's current policies demonstrate that celestial families can be created via technology but only if you are cisgender, in a mixed-sex relationship and/or intersex.

There are many examples of the Church allowing technological transformations for cisgender persons, while disallowing the procedures for trans persons. A cisgender woman is allowed breast augmentation or even labiaplasty, but trans women are threatened and/or excommunicated for similar or even less invasive technological body modifications.²⁵ Likewise, some trans folks are threatened with ecclesiastical discipline for a mastectomy, while cancer patients are not taught to counsel with their bishop before undergoing a mastectomy.²⁶ The handbook makes no mention of a cisgender woman who requires hormone therapy for menopause but has an entire section dedicated to policing how trans bodies can use hormone therapy.²⁷ This fragile system of correcting, policing, and erasing queerness is shaken by the collision of technology, biology, and theology.

Intersex bodies specifically pose a threat to an imagined biological sex binary because intersex bodies are literally born non-binary.²⁸ According to the cisgender, heterosexual, fertile, patriarchal mandate, intersex bodies and infertile bodies must be "corrected" to fit the

25. Peggy Fletcher Stack, "After Leading LDS Congregations and Designing Mormon Temples, This Utah Dad is Building a New Life—as a Woman," *Salt Lake Tribune*, July 21, 2017, <https://www.sltrib.com/news/mormon/2017/07/21/after-leading-lds-congregations-and-designing-mormon-temples-this-utah-dad-is-building-a-new-life-as-a-woman/>.

26. Courtney Tanner, "A Transgender BYU Student Could Be Expelled and Face Discipline in the Mormon Church for Having Breast-Removal Surgery," *Salt Lake Tribune*, Aug. 16, 2018, <https://www.sltrib.com/news/education/2018/08/16/transgender-byu-student/>.

27. "38.6.22, Surrogate Motherhood," *General Handbook*.

28. Elizabeth Reis, *Bodies in Doubt* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009).

imagined biological sex binary of how a man or woman is supposed to function. The gender binary is not just socially constructed, it must be technologically and surgically constructed, medicated, corrected, performed, and strictly enforced. Intersex persons are often erased or ignored in Mormon discourse, or when we are addressed, intersex conditions are treated like a disability.²⁹ Queerness, in this case, is considered a “challenge of the flesh” that requires technological treatment.³⁰ From intersex bodies to conversion therapy to in vitro fertilization, the Church has a well-established history of using technology to eradicate queerness as if it is a disability.

Keep in mind that a disability is considered a “disability” precisely because a presumed function is not being fulfilled. If the Church assumes that the purpose of a cisgender woman is to bear children and she cannot, she is, according to essentialism, broken and in need of repair. Folk doctrines suggest that if she cannot be fixed now with technological means, her “condition” can be “fixed” in the afterlife. Infertile cisgender women should certainly be encouraged to use technological transformations to bear children according to their desires, but we should not assume that the purpose of all cisgender women is to bear and nurse children.³¹ The problem is not the desire to be

29. “Interview with Elder Dallin H. Oaks and Elder Lance B. Wickman: ‘Same-Gender Attraction,’” *Mormon Newsroom*, 2006, available at <https://newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/article/interview-oaks-wickman-same-gender-attraction>.

30. David A. Bednar, “There Are No Homosexual Members of the Church [Feb. 23, 2016],” uploaded on Feb. 29, 2016, YouTube video, 11:37, https://youtu.be/BQ4_wTGv8Ao; Gregory Prince, *Gay Rights and the Mormon Church* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2019), 89–101, 112, 115; Taylor Petrey, *Tabernacles of Clay: Sexuality and Gender in Modern Mormonism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2020), 97, 155–61, 184–85.

31. Blaire Ostler, “Heavenly Mother: The Mother of All Women,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 51 no. 4 (2018): 171–81, https://www.dialoguejournal.com/wp-content/uploads/sbi/articles/V51N04_10.pdf.

fertile, regardless of whether the woman is transgender or cisgender, the problem is proscribing how her gender should function and perform. One woman may see her infertility as a “disability,” while another woman may welcome infertility as a convenient form of birth control. The “disability” should only be considered as disability if it hinders the fulfilment of her desires not because her disability is a product of an imposed proscription telling her how to perform her gender.

To make matters more intense for the Church, technology is not going anywhere. Technological developments are not slowing down. From uterine transplants to artificial embryo selection, reproductive technologies are only the beginning. CRISPR is being used to edit genes and will change our species irreversibly in ways we are not even imagining.³² Cisgender, vaginal-penile penetration could eventually be considered a reckless form of reproduction when technology allows us to alter a child’s genes even before gestation. Yesterday’s science fiction is tomorrow’s reality. Technology is radically and rapidly changing our world. The First Presidency, through the handbook that they approve of, have been trying to channel a small portion of that technology into the creation of an artificial cisgender, heterosexual, sex binary under the guise of God’s law, but their method of excluding queerness from Mormonism is slowly breaking down with the rise of queer Latter-day Saint visibility, activism, theology, and sympathy.³³

To be clear, the legitimization of queer bodies, relationships, and families is not simply a matter of embracing technological advancements. Theology, doctrine, and policy are in a symbiotic relationship

32. Heidi Ledford, “CRISPR: Gene Editing Is Just the Beginning,” *Nature: International Weekly Journal of Science*, Mar. 7, 2016, <https://www.nature.com/news/crispr-gene-editing-is-just-the-beginning-1.19510>.

33. I should clarify it is not exclusively the First Presidency that are creating an artificial cisgender, heterosexual sex binary with technology. There are many other queer antagonists that are doing similar if not identical things. Though I am putting my own community under the microscope, I understand this is not exclusively a Latter-day Saint issue.

with one another. Doctrine feeds our theology, and theology feeds policy. The exclusion of LGBTQ+ Saints is more than simply denying us equal access to reproductive technology within our Mormon community. Excluding LGBTQ+ Saints on the grounds that we cannot reproduce is weakened when technology has clearly allowed both straight and queer couples the ability to reproduce and raise families. Prejudice toward LGBTQ+ Saints did not start with policies in the handbook. Exclusionary policies are reflections of our existing prejudices. The legitimization of queer bodies, relationships, and families within the Church will not happen until we can imagine a more inclusive theology by interpreting our doctrine more compassionately. Technology can hinder or aid us in that endeavor, but the decision ultimately lies within our willingness to include queer Latter-day Saints as worthy members of celestial glory, including glorified bodies.³⁴

I suspect that when technology becomes powerful enough to give “men” the reproductive function of “women” and “women” the reproductive function of “men,” not just in social performance or aesthetics but in reproductive function and biological utility, we will see an unprecedented cracking of our taxonomies that the Church is woefully underprepared for. Keeping queerness out of churches, temples, and celestial eternities with the handbook is not a sustainable model. When Church policies, rituals, privileges, theologies, orthopraxis, and even classrooms are segregated according to the false premise of a biological sex binary, the rumbling of queer bodies could shake the very foundation of the Church.

34. Doctrine and Covenants 76:69–70.

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