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Honors Thesis

**Familiarity with Homosexuality “Changes Hearts”: What Lay Members and
Former Members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Think about
LGBP Issues**

by
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Submitted to Brigham Young University in partial fulfillment of graduation requirements
for University Honors

Department of Sociology
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ABSTRACT

Familiarity with Homosexuality “Changes Hearts”: What Lay Members and Former Members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Think about LGBP Issues

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Bachelor of Science

Recently, the United States has become increasingly accepting of lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals and their relationships. However, some conservative religions are hesitant or even unwilling to condone or to accept non-traditional lifestyles in their congregations. One such religious institution is the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (from here on known as the LDS Church, the Mormon Church, or the Church). A recent body of research has attempted to gain a general understanding of these religious groups and their teachings regarding homosexuality. While these contributions are significant, a more detailed understanding regarding the views of lay members of the LDS Church is needed. Thus, in this qualitative, exploratory study, the central question is this: what are the views of current and former Church members about LGBP (Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and pansexual) issues? I conducted purposive sampling to identify a diverse group of respondents. I used a grounded theory and situational analysis approach. Findings relate to several key themes, including autonomy, health, ontology of the divine,

and faith reconciliation. Importantly, the range of views and attitudes expressed by research participants suggest that dialogue between Church members and people of non-traditional sexual orientations have led to more positive perceptions of LGBP people and more positive experiences for LGBP members. Implications, limitations, theoretical advancement, and future research are then discussed.

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INTRODUCTION

The number of LGBP (Lesbian, gay, bisexual, pansexual) individuals in the United States is on the rise (Brown 2017). This can be problematic for these individuals because queerness itself challenges the Western concepts of identity and sexuality (Hennessey 2000). However, despite this tension, a majority of Americans are currently in favor of same-sex marriage, with religious individuals increasingly having more favorable views of LGBP issues over the last ten years (Pew Research Center 2017). Thus, it has become necessary to understand beliefs about same-sex marriage and homosexuality within a religious context. It is especially necessary, however, to understand the variety of beliefs that exist within the LDS Church considering that there is a dearth of such literature. The LDS Church has conservative views on the family (Dehlin 2015; Philips 2005), yet we know little about the range of beliefs among the Church membership. Therefore, in this qualitative, exploratory study, I strive to understand more about these various beliefs. I recruited participants through personal invitation and notices on social media sites. Participants either considered themselves to be Mormon or Post-Mormon (i.e., they considered themselves to have been Mormon in their life previously).

The analysis of interview data was informed by the symbolic interaction perspective as well as methodological approaches related to the active interview, grounded theory, and situational analysis (Clarke 2005; Corbin & Strauss 2008; Holstein & Gubrium 1995; Turner 2011). Results show four important ideas. First, all respondents believed that homosexuality and Church teachings were antithetical. Second, individuals differed in their reconciliation of homosexuality based on how they perceived the LDS

Church. Third, all respondents felt the need to resolve tensions between their desires, integrity, and faith. Lastly, respondents proposed many solutions that aim to resolve the tension between sexuality and the Church. These findings are followed by a discussion on how to implement these solutions, the contribution of this paper to relevant research and theoretical perspectives, suggestions for future research, and limitations of this study. From this point on, because of the scope of this paper, I will refer to those attracted to the same sex as LGBP (lesbian, gay, bisexual, pansexual) individuals. As this would insinuate that I am not solely studying the lives of those attracted to the same sex, I will avoid using the term LGBTQ+.

BACKGROUND

Recent studies indicate important shifts in American attitudes about sexual orientation. Pew research (2015) indicates, for example, that the majority of Americans report that homosexuality should be accepted by society (63%) and that sexual orientation cannot be changed (60%). Another Pew study (Brown 2017) notes that while in 2006 about 51% of Americans reported that they were in favor of same-sex marriage, the percentage increased to 63% in 2016. Additionally, a larger proportion of respondents (54%) reported in 2015 that there was no conflict between their own religious beliefs and homosexuality compared to 48% in 2013. Masci (2014) also found an increase in the percentage of congregations that allowed gays and lesbians to become full-fledged members, a change from 37% to 48% in the span of six years. Similarly, research by Cox et al. (2017) indicates that 58% of America supported same-sex marriage in 2015, an increase of 5% since 2013.

While these figures indicate increasingly positive attitudes toward lesbian, gay, bisexual, and pansexual individuals, studies also show important group variations. Researchers indicate that differences are related to such respondent characteristics as generation, political affiliation, race/ethnicity, gender, regional location, and religious affiliation. Although most religious groups support same-sex marriage, opposition persists. Cox et al. (2017) identified three religious groups in which the majority oppose same-sex marriage: Jehovah's Witnesses (53%), Mormons (55%) and white evangelical Protestants (61%). In contrast, 63% of white mainline Protestants support same-sex marriage. Additionally, only half of Protestants and less than half of Mormons believe that businesses should be allowed to refuse service to homosexuals (Cox et al. 2017).

According to Pew research (2015), the greatest conflict between religious beliefs and homosexuality is found among white evangelical Protestants. The majority of both white (72%) and black (64%) evangelical Protestants report conflict, compared to 53% of Catholics and 36% of mainline Protestants. As expected, reactions to the prospect of having a gay child also vary among groups with different characteristics. For example, about 55% of members of the oldest generation (55%) reported they would be upset if they had a child that was gay or lesbian, a figure that is twice as high as that of Millennial respondents (29%). Other research also indicates variation in attitudes of conservative religious groups. For example, studies by Whitehead (2018) and Bradshaw et al. (2015) suggest that attitudes among conservative religious groups toward LGBP individuals range from hostility to discomfort. This is also true for other charged subjects within the LDS Church, such as feminism. One researcher assessed people's opinions of this concept within the LDS Church and noted that their ideas were not monolithic but

actually incredibly variable (Beaman 2001), which suggests the idea that opinions on homosexuality would be just as likely to vary.

As a result of experiences with more negative attitudes, LGBP individuals face difficulties with choices regarding being religious or openly gay (Maher 2006). Recent research on adolescents by Page et al. (2014) focused on two challenges facing LGBP youth: "religious stress, which entails the difficulty and conflict that a sexual minority youth may feel from their religion or spiritual beliefs" (e.g., they may feel rejected by their religion or may feel conflict and stop practicing their religion) and "gay related stress, which refers to the unique stressors that sexual minority youth may experience due to their sexual orientation, such as negative family reactions to sexual orientation and experiences of harassment and victimization" (1). In this study, results showed that religious stress and gay related stress were strongly related to negative non-traditional sexuality identity perception and, in turn, mental health. Although the authors describe several limitations, they also suggest that "the most important implication of these data is the importance of maintaining a positive sexual identity for LGB[P] youth" (15). Additionally, the authors assert that "not all religions and spiritual belief systems view homosexuality negatively. It is critical for future researchers to investigate diverse variables related to religiosity among LGB[P] youth" (Page et al. 2014: 15).

These findings on youth support earlier research indicating the tendency among homosexual or bisexual individuals to experience some cognitive dissonance (i.e., anxiety that comes from having two or more attitudes, beliefs or traits that are contradictory) in relation to religious views (Rodriguez et al. 2000). Interestingly, bisexual males are less likely to experience cognitive dissonance (Bradshaw et al. 2015).

Rodriguez and Ouellete (2000) assert that there are four solutions for reconciling opposing identities related to religion and homosexuality: 1) reject religious identity, 2) reject homosexual identity, 3) compartmentalize the identities, or 4) integrate the identities (334). This study involves a congregation in New York that includes LGBP members who achieved integration in this specific congregation (334). The authors assert that religion may play both a protective role and harmful role for gay individuals.

Although people of queer sexuality may find support in religion, many are unable to talk about their sexual orientation and may feel they do not belong to their religious community (Izhaky & Hassil 2015; Kralovec et al. 2014). As suggested earlier in the research on adolescents, researchers have found that among adults, abandoning religious identity can alleviate the burden (Kralovec et al. 2014; Rodriguez et al. 2000). For some, however, leaving their religion is difficult, and reconciling faith and sexuality can lead to turmoil (Bradshaw et al. 2015; Izhaky et al. 2015).

This study focuses on the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. While the Church claims not to have a political stance (“Political Neutrality” 2018), many agree that the Church demonstrates a conservative culture (Bradshaw et al. 2015; Cook 2017; Philips 2005). Furthermore, many researchers have attempted to understand the Church’s steadily changing (and complicated) views on homosexuality (Cook 2017; Cragun et al. 2015), and even the Church’s significant influence on policies in the United States (Young 2016). Accordingly, researchers have discovered that the LDS Church’s conception of homosexuality has changed from viewing it as the cause for the dissolution of society, then responsible for the dissolution of the family, and then as a phenomenon that is not divine because it contradicts divinely inspired gendered roles. The latter

conception is the Church's contemporary view (Cragun et al. 2015). Also, in his historical analysis, Young (2016) highlighted the fact that the Church has pressured its members to vote against the Equal Rights Initiative and Proposition 8 in California, both of which would have given homosexuals more equal rights. The Church constantly reminds members that their political participation in these issues is "a moral matter" (Young 2016: 158). As is evident, more researchers have recently become increasingly interested in the Church's evolving views of homosexuality.

Because conservative attitudes toward sexuality have negatively impacted LGBP individuals, many researchers have tried to understand how LGBP individuals perceive and respond to the conservative rhetoric in the LDS Church. For example, Sumerau et al. (2014) note that this rhetoric has led to oppressive othering of homosexuals within the Church. To Sumerau et al. (2014), oppressive othering happens as the Church denies LGBP individuals the resources to understand themselves as credible, competent, and legitimate individuals. As a result, Bradshaw et al. (2015) report that homosexual males have difficulty achieving integration in the LDS Church, and homosexual members and disaffiliated members express dissatisfaction with the LDS Church's views, teachings, and policies regarding sexuality. A recent study by Crowell et al. (2015) found that the stresses resulting from being a non-heterosexual Mormon can cause depression. Researchers also found that conversion therapy was moderately to severely harmful for 37% of the Mormon respondents (Bradshaw et al. 2015).

In other studies, some researchers found that disaffiliation with the LDS Church led to a greater sense of satisfaction for some homosexuals (Dehlin et al. 2014). In her analysis of anecdotal data presented in Dehlin's podcast, "Mormon Stories," Harrison

(2017) noted that two of the three main reasons that people leave the Church are related to feminist issues and LGBP issues. Of particular concern to some are the reports of suicides among LDS youth. According to Knoll (2016), "youth suicides are more than twice as high in states with the highest levels of Mormon residents compared to states with the lowest levels of Mormon residents" (36).

The studies focusing on Mormons reviewed above have several important limitations. One is the focus on gay, transgender, and bisexual Mormon males and little, if any, attention to the views of other groups on queer sexual orientations and the family. Because these studies typically have not included a diverse group of participants, a full understanding of the range of perspectives has not been documented or analyzed. Another important limitation of past research is that it has been primarily quantitative, especially the research including Mormons by Dehlin and his colleagues. An exception is a qualitative study focused on young adults and adolescents, most of whom were Latter-Day Saints, which traced the reconciliation process and not attitudes toward those attracted to the same sex (Dahl 2012).

Furthermore, it is important to recognize that the studies that have been conducted to discover how Mormons view homosexuality have only been done on the institutional level through content analysis (Cook 2017; Cragun et al. 2015) and historical analysis (Young 2016). We have yet to understand what lay members believe about homosexuality. The research reviewed above clearly shows that there is variation in the attitudes about sexual orientation in most groups across American society, including traditional religious groups, political conservatives, older generations, and other conservative cohorts. Balkan et al. (2013) note that Christians today are divided on same-

sex marriage; some use the Bible to support it, while others use the text to refute it. Given the recent changes in opinions among the general American population, the variations across other religious groups, and the variation of opinions within the LDS Church on other subjects, it is necessary to understand more about the nature and types of differences in opinions and attitudes among Latter-Day Saints.

Therefore, the objective of this study is to address the gaps in recent literature by obtaining more detailed data about the perspectives on the family from a diverse set of participants including both LDS and former LDS members. As is evident from previously mentioned research, many queer Mormons and disaffiliated Mormons feel dissatisfied with the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Furthermore, attitudes are changing; more individuals, especially in the United States, are becoming more welcoming toward same-sex couples. In delineating disparate beliefs and examining empirical evidence that reveals dissatisfaction among non-heterosexual Mormons, it will become necessary to reconcile beliefs and ameliorate suffering had by non-heterosexual Mormons. To be clear, I will delineate these disparate beliefs in this paper and explain solutions that were proposed by respondents.

To understand what respondents thought about homosexuality, I will use the symbolic interactionist paradigm. This theoretical perspective states that individuals imbue meaning into objects, ideas, and values collectively, and are simultaneously inculcated with these meanings (Inglis and Thorpe 2012; Turner 2011). In relation to this study, symbolic interactionism can inform us on the Mormon community. Mormons and Post-Mormons have contributed to the dialogue of the ontology of homosexuality and also have been taught by this collective conception of the homosexual ontology. Thus, by

engaging in one-on-one interviews with these participants, I will be able to understand what the current beliefs are concerning homosexuality.

Lastly, this study is informed by the theoretical frameworks of Marx, Engels, Weber, and Durkheim. Marx and Engels (2002) provide explanations for why individuals are religious. They believe that many individuals become religious because of material destitution the subsequent despair; in other words, it provides solace with its promises of deliverance and salvation (Berger & Luckmann 1967; Marx & Engels 2002; Merton 2005; Waggoner 2011). This can help explain why there would be a tension between homosexuality and faith. Even if faith can prevent someone from fulfilling their sexual desires, it would not be easy to simply abandon said faith to pursue those desires. Furthermore, Weber (1963; 2002) explains the effects of Protestantism on society. In essence, he saw that Protestantism imbued individuals with a desire to live virtuous and ethical lives, which usually required asceticism to some extent (Weber 1963; 2002; Jonveaux 2001). This theoretical lens allows me to determine if there are any ascetic tendencies in members within the Church in relation to homosexuality. Lastly, Durkheim (1997) believed that religion functioned solely as a community and that it could function as a both a protective factor and harmful factor in consideration of suicide. He also began the discussion on the sacred/profane dichotomy (Paden 2011). His work can inform this study by allowing us to see the effects of religion on these individuals and also allow us to see dimensions of sacredness/profanity of homosexuality in a Mormon context.

PURPOSE AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The purpose of this study is to discover and understand the variety of beliefs regarding lesbian, gay, bisexual and pansexual individuals in an LDS context. Thus, this

research is exploratory. The research questions are: What are the various beliefs of Mormons concerning LGBP issues? What are the various beliefs of Post-Mormons concerning LGBP issues? How did these individuals understand the LDS Church's teachings on LGBP issues, and what effect did it have on them?

METHODOLOGY

The methodological approach for this study was qualitative because of its exploratory nature. Data collection involved individual, in-depth interviews and the analysis was based on a grounded theory approach and a situational analysis approach.

Participants

I identified individuals who were self-identified Mormons or had been Mormon in the past. While membership is formally recorded by leadership of the LDS Church, I respected the individual's identification regardless of what their membership record stated. Most participants were recruited through notices about the study posted on social media sites. On Facebook, I asked for volunteers interested in the study. Individuals responded and asked if they could be interviewed. I also invited volunteers to the study through the social media site, Reddit. I posted a notice on the subreddit r/Mormon, a page with Mormons and Ex-Mormons who discuss critical issues in the Church from a theistic or atheistic lens, and I asked for volunteers. I also personally invited six respondents to participate. Recruitment was designed to find a variety of individuals who were diverse in terms of their belief in the LDS Church. Ten respondents reported that they no longer

believed in the LDS Church as a divine institution; six of the ten were non-heterosexual. These respondents will be referred to as Post-Mormons. The remaining fourteen respondents are divided into two conceptual groups. Seven individuals are labelled as Non-orthodox Mormons. While these individuals still believe the Church has some divinity, they don't think that the institution itself is completely in line with God's will. Of these seven, four were non-heterosexual and one of these individuals identified as transgender (female to male). The remaining seven participants will be referred to as active Mormons or just Mormons. Members of this group believe that the Church is a divine institution and has sole access to all of God's power and revelation. While none of these individuals identified as non-heterosexual, five of the six non-heterosexual Post-Mormons were very active in the LDS Church at previous times in their lives.

Table 1: Sample Respondents by Religion and Gender

	Male	Female	Total
Mormon	3	4	7
Non-Orthodox Mormon	6	1	7
Post-Mormon	8	2	10
Total	17	7	24

Table 2: Respondents by Religious and Sexual Orientation

	LGBP	Non-LGBP	Total
Mormon	0	7	7
Non-Orthodox Mormon	3	4	7
Post-Mormon	4	6	10
Total	7	17	24

Although helpful for conceptualizations, these classifications of Mormons do not capture the exhaustive list of complicated and nuanced Mormon beliefs; nevertheless, these categories help us understand how Mormons in general perceive the intersection of

homosexuality and the Church. Unfortunately, many active Mormons who may also identify as gay did not want to participate. Nevertheless, the beliefs that queer Post-Mormons recalled when they were active Mormons can help overcome this limitation.

Interview Schedule

Twenty-four individuals were interviewed regarding their opinion of LGBP individuals and issues in a Mormon context. I conducted face-to-face interviews with eight individuals and phone interviews with the remaining sixteen individuals. Interviews began with questions about demographic characteristics. The next questions were about Mormon socialization, followed by how they were introduced to the concept of homosexuality. At this point, the interview diverged for the four groups, non-queer Mormons, queer Mormons, non-queer Post-Mormons, and queer Post-Mormons. For Mormons, I asked what they understood about LDS theology, how it considered LGBP individuals, and how they considered LGBP individuals. When asking about LGBP individuals, I specified that I was talking about anyone who is attracted to the same sex (homosexuals, bisexuals, lesbians, and pansexuals). Queer Mormons were asked the same questions, but also how they understood their sexuality in the context of the Church. I also asked Post-Mormons about their understanding of LGBP issues and the Church's views. However, I also asked this group if the Church's conception of the issue was a problem for them. Similarly, Post-Mormon queers were asked if the Church's beliefs about homosexuals contributed to their leaving the Church. With permission of the participants, I audio-recorded all interviews, including phone interviews, and transcribed them verbatim.

Interview Strategy

A sociological perspective relevant to the purposes of this study, symbolic interactionism looks at ideas, structures, or individuals that are sometimes taken for granted and how we perceive them (Turner 2011). With this in mind, I investigated how groups of people, specifically Mormons and Post-Mormons, perceived a certain idea: homosexuality. Because of the dearth of existing literature on perceptions of homosexuality, especially in religious settings, I believed that qualitative research through one-on-one interviews would be most effective at answering this question. In conducting the interviews, I followed the approach used by Holstein et al. (1995). An active interview, according to Holstein et al. (1995), acknowledges that both the interviewer and the respondent will be discovering principles, ideas, and patterns throughout the process of the interview. In other words, the process will involve conversation with respondents to discover their experiences and beliefs as well as the meanings they ascribe to them. Although I had some understanding of the respondents' beliefs (e.g., beliefs about the Church, sexual orientation, etc.), especially due to some personal connections, I limited my assumptions by asking all respondents questions even if I had an idea of what they would say.

Analysis Strategy

For analyzing these data, I used the grounded theory approach developed by Corbin and Strauss (2008). I built an explanation of the idea of homosexuality by listening to how people described what it was to them. By setting my presuppositions aside, I was able to allow the participants to create their own conceptions of homosexuality. Furthermore, I conceived these data using situational analysis proposed by Adele Clarke (2015). Once I gathered the data, I conducted open coding to look for

general themes, and then I conducted line-by-line coding to explain these themes (Berg 2007). I then created conceptual and situational maps to understand what these respondents were really saying and insinuating (Clarke 2005). Using grounded theory by creating concepts based on what was said and organizing these concepts using situational analysis, I developed meaningful explanations of the differences in opinions and struggles that reflected participants' perspectives, experiences, circumstances and backgrounds. The grounded theory approach allowed me to account for variations and differences in attitudes and beliefs (Corbin et al. 2008), which is the focus of this research, while situational analysis allowed me to conceptualize these differences (Clarke 2005).

FINDINGS

Of critical importance are the tensions and conflict that exist in the LDS world between homosexuality and the Church's teachings. Thus, I will first discuss how having any attraction to the same sex (from now on referred to as homosexuals for simplification purposes) and the teachings of LDS Church are in conflict. Next, I highlight a general conflict that exists in religion: autonomy and the biblical injunction to "lean not unto thine own understanding" (Proverbs 3:5). Within this same section, I will talk about the more nuanced version of this tension present in the LDS Church regarding homosexuality. Then, I will highlight a second tension for all LDS members among three concepts: personal integrity, divine commandments, and subjective desires. Lastly, I will discuss solutions proposed by participants and solutions that I observed to be both

effective and ineffective in reducing the suffering that comes as a result of trying to resolve the issue of homosexuality.

Social Purgatory

Writing at the turn of the 20th century, W.E.B. Du Bois lived between two great milestones achieved in social equality: emancipation and civil rights. However, Du Bois describes the, at best, awkward social purgatory in which African Americans were forced to live. While technically “free,” they were denied many civil amenities along with several moral dignities (Du Bois 1993: 1). We can say the same for LGBP Mormons living in the 21st century. Unable to pursue their “same-gender attractions,” Mormons who have any attraction to the same sex must remain celibate, marry someone of the opposite sex (known as a mixed orientation marriage), or pursue a same-sex relationship and be branded as an apostate. They, too, must live in social purgatory where they have some opportunities but not all that straight members get to enjoy. All twenty-four respondents, regardless of activity and belief, noted this same conflict. Daisy, a queer Post-Mormon, when asked whether or not being both gay and Mormon was possible, answered:

No, I don't think so. I think you'd have to be lying or denying part of yourself to do so pretty strongly to stay part of the Church.

Another gay Post-Mormon expressed similar feelings. When he tried to live according to the standards of the Mormon Church by dating females, William explained what he experienced:

I was conflicted about what my future would hold in the Church; I was utterly depressed, and felt like I was constantly lying in any interpersonal relationship.

And as mentioned previously, this was not just a Post-Mormon phenomenon. A sexually-fluid active male Mormon mentioned his struggles:

Sage: ...but sometimes like being at [this LDS Church school] like the honor code makes me feel like I don't belong [here].

When at Church schools or involved in Church educational programs, all members under the program's jurisdiction are required to be chaste, which means abstaining from any homosexual behavior. While one may acknowledge that they are "same-gender attracted," said individual cannot have any physical intimacy with somebody of the same sex ("Homosexual Behavior" 2018). Even though Sage is an active member and not actively engaging in "homosexual behavior," he still expresses his grief when he expresses that he does not belong because of his sexuality. Finally, Marilyn, an active female member, notices a critical conflict in allowing homosexuality in the Church because that type of union cannot procreate:

I don't believe that he would create people – the way that he created them that would prevent them from having exaltation. That's in conflict with everything that I believe.

All members and former members experience or see a tension between being attracted to the same sex and the LDS faith. While it's not a problem to proclaim their sexuality, there are bars placed around homosexuals that prevent them from living a life with full benefits that a heterosexual member would enjoy. How, then, have members responded to this tension?

“You Know Best” Versus “Trust in the Lord with All Thine Heart; and Lean not Unto Thine Own Understanding” (Proverbs 3:5)

We can clearly see the secularization and postmodernism of contemporary society (Berger 1967). In other words, specific religions are losing ontological authority as their

different meta-narratives compete against each other, including that of science (Berger 1967; Smith 2003). Furthermore, many researchers have noted that religion has become increasingly compartmentalized and thus negligible (Wenzel 2011). This presents a tension between those who are religious and those who have more humanist beliefs. While this is not the main focus of the paper, I will talk about the necessity of studying this in my conclusion.

Scholarship has noted the tension between autonomy and proselytizing. In a postmodern world, individual choice becomes a virtue while, simultaneously, religion becomes privatized (Wenzel 2011). In this private world, some individuals will feel inclined to share their religion. However, proselytizing can become imposing because it requires the receiver to put aside their strong, moral evaluations to consider the missionary's perspective (Elshtain 2008). This can also be seen at a societal level, which is known as twin tolerations. This is the tension between allowing democratic freedom in a society but also giving political power to religious individuals and groups political power (Stepan 2000). Thus, present in society today is the tension between individual autonomy versus religion having salvific, practical, and epistemological sovereignty that trumps individual feelings and beliefs.

Salvific sovereignty is the idea discussed in Proverbs 3:5: Trust God and "lean not unto thine own understanding." Foucault (1980) discusses how power is not exercised through repression but through the production of truth. As previously mentioned, the LDS Church is an all-encompassing religion that has an influential meta-narrative (Philips 2005). This truth-producing meta-narrative then provides the LDS Church ontological authority and a sovereignty of truth over those within its purview (Philips

2005; Ter Bor 2011). Evident in these participants responses, then, was a significant tension: do I know myself best? Or does the Lord's true Church (the Church with the most truth on earth) know what's better for me? How they answered these questions differed for each respondent according to their understandings of the ontology of the Church.

“You Know Best,” “God Knows Best,” or “God is at the Helm of the Church; Remain Faithful to the Teachings of the Church”

When asking individuals influenced by Mormon culture about what they think of homosexuals, their beliefs directly related to what they thought about the LDS Church. Their beliefs were related to where they saw the good: outside the Church, sometimes in the Church but always with God, and completely within the divinely inspired Church. Nearly all Post-Mormons, when asked how a gay individual should navigate the Church, suggested that the individual should make that decision alone and insinuated that God did not exist, or that God did not see sexuality as a divine issue. They also suggested that the Church is a man-made institution. Most non-orthodox Mormons, similar to Post-Mormons, suggested that an individual knows best. However, non-orthodox Mormons differ in suggesting that the individual should continue following God even if that means leaving the Church (or staying). In other words, these Mormons saw that the Church falls short of the Lord's standards, and that the individual must follow the Lord, and sometimes that may mean leaving (or staying in) the Church. To them, the people (and almost always including the leaders) are fallible.

Orthodox Mormons, on the other hand, believe that the Church is directly led by the Lord and, thus, meets the Lords standards. Even though they also believe that its members are imperfect, they differ from non-orthodox Mormons by believing that,

although technically imperfect, the Lord will never allow a Prophet (or any General Officer) to lead the Church astray. Thus, orthodox Mormons would say that a gay individual should align their beliefs and actions with the Church and, therefore, God because following divine mandates will always improve life. For homosexuals, this could mean changing sexual orientation, getting married and sealed to someone of the opposite sex, or staying celibate for the remainder of their life.

“You Know Best”

Nearly all Post-Mormons saw the Church as not only a mundane institution with its teachings on homosexuality but also as a fundamentally damaging one. In fact, two respondents actually used the concept “Stockholm Syndrome” to describe the Church’s relationship with homosexuals. Geoff says:

This is the concept, okay: the Mormon Church is like the kidnapper, and the [gay] kid who stays in the Church is now the person who experiences Stockholm syndrome. Yes, the kidnapper sometimes treats you kindly and may sometimes bring you meals and all kinds of things and say they love you, but in the end, they are harming you. Don’t stay. That’s the snarky response.

Similarly, Boyd says:

[The Church is] an abusive uncle who we would visit during the week and would say really really harmful things to me and like fuck me up.

While some may argue that the Church has a positive impact on individuals, Geoff and Boyd argue that the Church has a negative impact on gay individuals. However, as you can evidently see, the first is Geoff’s “snarky response” to a homosexual Mormon asking him if they should stay in the Church. His “thoughtful response” is this:

Every person has their own journey in life. Some of them are going to be like mine, which is not coming out until they’re 45 years old, which means there are a lot of years of loneliness and sadness and depression that now that I have hindsight, I wish that I could have avoided it. I wish I could have come to [church school] when I was a fresh-faced 17-year-old, when I was a freshman and find a

counselor who said, ‘You know what? Instead of beating yourself up for this you’re actually gay and that’s okay and that’s normal and let’s see where we can get you into school where you can be accepted.’ So, if I accepted me when I was 17 or 18 years old, I could have avoided many many years of heartache. I would have avoided the hardships and heartache that I experienced because of the divorce and marriage children who now hate me and won’t speak to me. All of that could have been avoided, and that does not mean that I didn’t want children. I love them, but I could have had children a different way had I come out much younger. I could have found a partner and adopted or whatever and it would have been a different way to have a happy life as opposed to living constantly constantly [repeated for emphasis] under - um - the disapproval and the condescension that I have been treated with.

While he acknowledges that every person has their own path, Geoff also said that he wished he could have been presented with choices that would have made his life easier. Here, preserving individual choice is of utmost importance, not upholding faith in the Church.

Even though other Post-Mormons didn’t describe the Church as “an abusive uncle,” they still saw it as negative in how it inhibits individual choice that they see as healthier than leaning on faith. In one respondent’s words, we can very clearly see the tension between God/Church knowing what is best and individuals knowing what is best very clearly. When one of his acquaintances had a same-sex partner, Mike decided to “help her:”

I went back to her and was like, “I think you’re about to make a decision that’s so wrong for your life,” and she was about to move in with her girlfriend, and she was like, “I’m going to live my own life,” and I came away from that feeling so bad.

Mike described this conversation as a turning point. In this moment, he began to realize that individuals might know themselves best, and now he believes that the Church is man-made and harmful to LGBP people because it inhibits autonomous behavior.

Overall, when Post-Mormons are presented with the tension of autonomy versus salvific sovereignty, they will almost always choose autonomy because, to them, the LDS Church has a more negative effect than a positive effect and that having faith in such an institution is not worth the pain. An individual will experience more pleasure and less pain if they do what they feel is best. As one respondent put it, “What is good about [the Church] is not unique, and what is unique about it is not good.” If someone asks them what a gay Mormon should do, they would say, “You know best,” but would highly suggest leaving because the Church has no good to offer. To them, the individual is the source of the good, not an unknowable God or one of God’s institutions.

“God Knows Best”

While preserving the cherished value of autonomy along with Post-Mormons, most non-orthodox Mormons will also say that it is almost always integral to listen to what God has to say about the matter. Again, to them, the Church is still a divine institution, but it has some flaws. With this in mind, a non-orthodox Mormon would exhort a gay person to seek counsel from God because Deity is the source of the good. Now, this is not to say that these individuals don’t believe in the power of human beings; however, they see God as integral to this process of faith and sexuality reconciliation.

This is apparent in one participant’s response:

Interviewer: Have you ever gotten into disagreements [about homosexuality and the Church] with fellow members?

Bill: Yeah... when I talk to people, I try to be very subtle about the kinds of things that I drop, and I’ve found that there’s a lot more allies than you think. But I remember on one occasion we were in High Priests quorum, um, were talking about “The Family: A Proclamation,” which has not been definitively declared as scripture. Boyd K. Packer [a Mormon apostle] actually described it as revelation when he was speaking, but they removed the word “revelation” and changed it to, um, I think it was guide or something like that. So, I can tell that the Church is

being very careful on whether or not it will claim the proclamation as revelation. So, in the proclamation it says that gender is eternal, which is probably a misuse of the word gender as you probably know, but I think they were inferring sex as eternal you know. Male/female.

“The Family: A Proclamation to the World” was a statement given by the Prophet Gordon B. Hinckley in 1995 at a Church conference that defined gender roles and talked about the importance of family (“The Family” 1995). Evidently, this respondent sees the Church as correct in some areas concerning homosexuality but incorrect in other areas, especially when dealing with gender essentialism and the Church’s statement on the family. However, he reveals that he believes the Church still has some potential for good when he says that the Church is reconsidering this document as revelation. This same respondent actually suggests that gay individuals who leave the Church should hold on to their cherished beliefs that the LDS Church instilled in them, insinuating that there is good within the Church, but that it sometimes is behind where God wants it to be.

Another respondent, when his son came out, responded in a similar way to how Bill said he would. Carson said:

“You are a good young man, [Son]. You know how to choose right and wrong, and I believe that you can feel the spirit in your life, and we’ve taught you well, and I trust you, and whatever path you take, I will love and support you regardless of what that path is because I know that you will do the best you can. I trust in God and I trust the atonement. It will make up for any errors that any of us might make... You don’t necessarily have to cut ties with God.” I encourage them to keep that line open with Heavenly Father and with belief and faith and something divine and also good principles that they’ve learned for good, righteous living. You know lots of those principles – they can – no matter if you’re gay or straight – they can help you as a guide in life.

In this moment, Carson saw that, maybe, the Church was not always right, especially regarding homosexuality. So, he asked his son to stay with the source of truth, God, causing him to realize the Church may be fallible to a certain extent. It is integral, though,

that gay people take the good from the Church that they've learned according to these non-orthodox Mormons. Contrary to most Post-Mormons who would say that the Church has a net-negative effect on individuals, Carson and Bill both assert that the Church can offer some positive influences. In other words, the Church is on the path to goodness but has yet to reach it.

A queer non-orthodox Mormon even has similar thoughts. When asked about what decisions he thinks he will make regarding his sexuality and faith, Sage referred to a significant spiritual experience and described his feelings afterwards:

I just felt to be open minded. [God said,] "Just follow me. Don't leave me specifically." Although I may leave the Church one day, I never want to leave God. I want to continue to be connected with him in whatever way I can be.

Sage, when compared to Post-Mormons, sees that the Church can offer him spiritual benefits. He sees that the Church may not live up to God's standards; thus, he is accountable to God before being accountable to the Church's expectations. To him, the Church is not perfect, and he believes that his connection to God is more important than his connection to the Church that he believes may have a slightly tenuous relationship with God. Like Carson and Bill, some believe the Church has some good, but preserving a connection with God is most important, even if that comes at the expense of the Church.

Comments from non-orthodox Mormons indicate that they see the Church as a partially or mostly good institution but also suggest that its ideas on homosexuality may not be completely aligned with God. Thus, some individuals who identify as Mormon may not agree with the Church's teachings on homosexuality. To them, it is something essential, similar to how the Church conceives gender, that the Church does not

understand. If someone were to ask this type of Mormon what a gay person should do, they would encourage them to ask God.

“Remain Faithful to the Teachings of the Church”

Different from both non-orthodox Mormons and especially Post-Mormons, orthodox Mormons believe that the Church is the source of all truth and goodness. As a result, when dealing with the issue of homosexuality, these individuals would advocate for complete fidelity to Church principles. When asked about how this problem will be resolved, one member of this group responded this way:

James: If there's no doctrine that gives understanding [to why there is homosexuality], then go forward in faith and wait [chuckles]. And you know we are required to live by faith in this life, and we do have so much and know so much, but there's just things that we don't know or understand, and we're gonna have to live by faith for a time.

While not identifying as queer himself, James nevertheless acknowledges homosexuality as a trial, but also that the Church is divine in its interpretations of homosexuality. Since he believes the Church is the source of all truth regarding homosexuality, it is logical that an individual should wait upon the Lord for help. In other words, they should not take the matters into their own hands; rather, they should seek answers within the divine ecclesiastical institution because it has salvific sovereignty. James continues:

I love the way they're handling it in that, um - and if I'm right on this, and maybe I'm a little off - I think that they've handled it with open arms. "Please come. We love you; we want to love you; we want to help you if that's what you want. Um, but we can't change the doctrine." And I think that that's the invitation to anyone. As a bishop, that was an invitation to youth that were living and walking in immoral paths and it's always the vision/approach - the Savior's approach. "Come, just come. Let me help you [chuckles]. And with my help you can be more and become [as in become like God]."

In supporting the doctrine of the Church, James sees homosexuality as an error that can be remedied. In other words, sexuality can be changed to be harmonious with the

teachings of the Church. Another respondent, a mother of a gay son, said something similar. When asked about various programs that try to advocate for LGBP Mormons, she revealed the attitude of many other orthodox Mormons:

Esther: I don't think the Church has to change its doctrine in order for my son to have a happy life. In fact, if we believe that God is unchangeable, then I think we're kind of asking [God to do something He cannot do]... something that doesn't make sense to me.

Here, Esther expresses that the Church is the center of truth and that God is in charge. Thus, rather than asking a wholly divine and therefore ineluctable institution to change, she insinuates that we ought to trust God instead. She suggests that all individuals should align their wills with God's. Another respondent, when asked about what a gay Mormon should do, said something similar:

Jon: I would encourage them to live the principles of the Gospel, and my opinion would be that they would be happier living the Gospel rather than living principles contrary to the Gospel.

Here, the tension between autonomy and salvific sovereignty is palpable. Essentially, Jon is saying that God knows best especially when it comes to homosexuality. "Don't live principles outside of the Church," he essentially suggests, "because they will make you unhappy."

In sum, most orthodox Mormons assert that the Church is the source of goodness and that it has all of the truth necessary to be happy. Contrary to non-orthodox Mormons, orthodox Mormons see that the Church already contains all the truth and that it doesn't have to change; they believe the members are the ones who have to change themselves to be more in line with God's will. This is even evident with Post-Mormons who were once orthodox Mormon. One such respondent reported that he viewed the LGBP community as disgusting because these individuals were deviating from God's commandments.

While sounding harsher than the orthodox Mormons interviewed in this study, the idea remains the same: The Church is true on the topic of homosexuality, and members deviate from it when they try to live according to sexual standards outside the Lord's standards. Thus, the correct path, according to orthodox Mormons, is to align themselves with what the Lord has taught them.

Summary

The interview data discussed in this section indicate important variations on how Mormons view non-heterosexual orientations. The data suggest that a Mormon's understanding of homosexuality comes as a direct result of how they conceive the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. Post-Mormons, in conceiving the Church as simply a temporal institution, however, see the Church, at best, as neutral and, at worst, as an abuser. Thus, Post-Mormons not only disregard the Church's stance on homosexuality but also speak out against it. Non-orthodox Mormons, on the other hand, see the Church as having some divine characteristics, but also assert that it is not completely aligned with God's standards. They, therefore, encourage homosexuals to uphold their autonomy but also simultaneously preserve their relationship with God. Lastly, orthodox Mormons view the Church as the literal Church of God and that, rather than its doctrines being flawed, imperfect members should live up to the Church's standards. Thus, believing that God knows best, orthodox Mormons would encourage them to live within the bounds of the Church's teachings rather than making a different decision regarding sexuality that breaks the Church's commandments.

A Fractured Faith

As previously mentioned, the Church can provide a sacred canopy for individuals (Berger 1967; Thomas 2001). Furthermore, the LDS religion is an all-encompassing, pervasive influence in an LDS individual's life (Philips 2005). Consequently, when growing up in the Church, most respondents did not initially see the Church's stance on homosexuality to be incorrect because the Church held strong moral authority. Bill, a non-orthodox, non-queer Mormon expresses this same sentiment when he states:

I mean, I didn't really know a whole lot about it [homosexuality]. I didn't have any friends that were or people that I knew that were gay or people that fell into one of those categories that you mentioned [homosexual, lesbian, bisexual, pansexual], so from my logical mind perspective, it kind of seemed at the time to make sense that, of course, God would be against this. It seems illogical that someone would be attracted to the same sex. It seemed to go against, you know, having children and family and all these things, right? So, in my younger, adolescent mind, it made sense where I actually couldn't understand why someone would even think about those kinds of things.

Bill initially agreed with the Church's stance on homosexuality. However, once members become aware of the antithetical relationship between homosexuality and the Church, a crisis arises. One gay, Post-Mormon respondent expressed his feelings when he came home from his mission:

Steve: It's [my sexuality is] just here, but I'll try and like date women and get married in the temple and that kind of thing. It didn't last very long until I started realizing, "Okay, what can I do?" So, after I came back from my mission and before school, I started dating guys. Just experimenting.... I totally felt guilty. But, so basically imagine it where the box of my homosexual self was getting larger and larger and larger and more and more annoying 'cause it's like, 'No, I'm trying to be good; I'm trying to live how I'm supposed to live according to what the church wants to teach.' And how I've been taught before, you know, like marry a woman, no homosexual activities that kind of thing. And it finally came to a head where it just – I can't do this anymore, so I might as well just try. So, that was when I started going on dates with guys and then I went to school and shoved that back away for a while, and then it came out and back in and back out a couple times.

Initially, Steve didn't actually understand that his sexuality was antithetical to the Church. In a way, it wasn't really his sexuality; it was a condition. However, he came to a moment where he saw that he couldn't continue to keep his sexuality on a shelf. This critical realization resulted in the challenging of his faith against his sexuality, two very cherished identities.

For Steve as well as for most of the respondents, the antinomy between sexuality and faith causes a fracture in the belief system held by these individuals. As a result of this fracture, three competing concepts create a tension in Mormon culture, which I will articulate in the follow questions: What does the Church say I should believe? What do I feel is right? What do I want to be right? There are various tools or strategies that people use to answer these questions. In Steve's case, he used compartmentalization. However, other members have also tried to rationalize beliefs, eschew faith or sexuality, and/or reconcile faith and sexuality. While the categories do obviously and inevitably overlap, I believe that these conceptual divisions are integral in trying to understand the tensions within this issue.

Compartmentalization

Most respondents reported that they tried to compartmentalize their integrity, desires, and religious beliefs. As Steve indicated, people have tried to put their sexuality or beliefs on a shelf. They isolate their integrity from their desires, their desires from their faith, and their integrity from their faith. One respondent even described his coping method to this antimony as greater than compartmentalization. He said:

David: I was gonna say it was more so than that. It wasn't that I [just] compartmentalized; it was that I bundled them up and tucked them away. It was something that we knew that we felt and that we talked about with our children as they came to the age where having those discussions with them was appropriate.

David and his wife felt that the Church offered existential protection. Upon discovering that supporting gay marriage would have prevented them from being together as a family forever, they decided to put their beliefs about gay marriage to the side and uphold LDS teachings instead. This behavior, however, did not offer them a permanent solution, as David and his wife decided to leave the Church a while after this.

Furthermore, some gay members have sought refuge in Church service and faith-affirming LGBP communities. One respondent described this behavior as quasi-monastic and that these organizations were “pseudo-convents.” Another Post-Mormon described opportunities that he wished he could have had when trying to understand his sexuality:

William: I wish that I could have been a professional missionary because, like, I didn't want to leave my mission because I didn't want to deal with all of the things that I had been suppressing my whole life.

In other words, missionary work was an ostensible panacea for William. It allowed him to put his sexuality on the shelf for a time and to feel that he was free of this burden. However, he eventually had to take his homosexuality down from the shelf when he received a post-mission injunction to marry a woman. After this, the burden became too heavy to bear, and he subsequently abandoned his faith.

While these approaches to mending the relationship between faith and sexuality worked for some respondents some of the time, they did not always solve the issue. Some respondents decided to leave the Church. For them, keeping desires, integrity, and Church expectations isolated did not work; upholding desires and integrity eventually surpassed the Church in importance. The sacrifice of the former two required more energy than the sacrifice of the Church; therefore, these individuals acted accordingly and eventually abandoned their faith. While this may not be the general pattern of gay

Mormons, these individuals show some of the paths that Mormons have taken, indicating that compartmentalization seems relatively ineffective at easing the tension between faith and sexuality.

Rationalization

Another option for coping with issue of sexuality is rationalization, which is where orthodox Mormons and sometimes non-orthodox Mormons, usually heterosexual, defend their positions on traditional marriage by appealing to religious authority and sometimes social science research. In other words, despite seeing the Church's teachings as potentially problematic for homosexuals, they rationalize their thinking in such a way that simultaneously validates LDS theology while also explaining the "problem of evil" within this context, or why God would allow people to have these supposedly aberrant sexualities.

Members who rationalize typically describe homosexuality as a "cross to bear." For instance, when asked what advice he would give to his children if they came out as gay, Jon responded with this:

I would encourage them to live the principles of the Gospel, and my opinion would be that they would be happier living the Gospel rather than living principles contrary to the gospel. Um, but if they chose to live contrary of the principles of the Gospel... They would still be my [child]. They would still be loved by me. I would still want them as a part of my life. They're still part of my family. I have a couple of [close friends] who aren't making decisions consistent with the Gospel and if they asked me the same question, it's not because they're gay. It's the same answer.

In other words, the commandments given to gay individuals are no different than the ones given to straight members. To them, it is about living the law of chastity, a sexual commandment that entails chastity before marriage and fidelity within marriage that is required of all members of the Church ("What Is the Law of Chastity?"). As one

respondent puts it, “I don’t think he singles out any one person or lifestyle.” These Mormons reconcile the conflict between faith and homosexuality by saying that gay people are not the only ones who struggle with living the commandments, and even a Post-Mormon can corroborate this. Reflecting on his experience of coming out to his mother, Geoff commented:

[She said] we’d figure it out, but those were back in the days when she got involved with [faith-affirming gay organization]. And so, when she said she’d figure it out, she said, “Jon, this is your cross to bear in life just like [your siblings struggle with health and addictions]. You know that’s their cross to bear and this is your cross to bear, you know, your struggle to live with, so we’ll just get through it and you’ll just keep resisting temptation until you die.” Right? And that was how she viewed it.

Rationalization led some Mormons to believe that homosexuality is no different than alcoholism or diabetes. It was simply a trial. One respondent described it succinctly, although with hesitance: “My opinion is that same-gender attraction is an earthly [pause] issue. It’s an earthly challenge.”

Other respondents even explained why this is a trial. Marilyn said:

I think where my, like, lack of understanding or not sure how this pans out is the LDS Church teaches very strongly about the Plan of Salvation and part of the Plan of Salvation is reaching the highest level of exaltation and that – we believe – includes populating other worlds – procreation. And the problem with people in a same-gender relationship is there is no way to make that happen.

Rationalizing beliefs of marriage is essential because the theosis, or the process of becoming more divine, of LDS theology is to become a procreative God. Therefore, the necessary practice of religious legitimation (Berger & Luckmann 1967) can be conducted by justifying the sanctity of traditional marriage. To rationalize their beliefs, then, some Mormons argue that gay couples cannot and should not be sanctioned by God because

they cannot procreate. But when asked about couples who can't have children, some respond as Jon did:

I think the challenge is - I think that every kid deserves a chance at a Mom and a Dad. Not every kid gets that and there's a lot of single parents. And while I don't know any, I'm sure there are gay couples who are wonderful parents. It's not a feeling that being gay makes you a bad parent, but I think that every kid deserves a chance at a Mom and a Dad. One of the things I realized when I got married and had children was how different men and women were as parents. How I see other families - you could get into stereotypes, but there are pretty common things with how Dads parent and how Moms parent. And I just think that all kids deserve a chance at a Mom and a Dad.

In this specific interview, Jon realized that procreation isn't only an issue with which gay people struggle. For instance, he acknowledged that some couples cannot biologically have children. He then argued that men and women have essentially different characteristics that are necessary for raising healthy children. When this idea was then challenged, he remarked that there are limitations to human perspectives and that members have to have an "eternal perspective," or always keep in mind that God knows our situations best. Overall, it seems that rationalization works for some, but it is typically only sufficient for those who are heterosexual. These individuals are not always required to contemplate the issue of homosexuality because it does not directly affect them. For instance, none of these respondents' close relatives were queer, at least to their knowledge. Thus, unless homosexuality was a personal issue (as it was for many Post-Mormon respondents), some Mormons will only need rationalization to preserve their sacred canopy. In other words, if desires and integrity are aligned enough with the expectations of the Church, then rationalization is sufficient to maintain faithfulness to LDS theology.

Reconciliation

Upon realizing that homosexuality and faith were not immediately compatible and that the Church's stance could not be rationalized, many of the respondents indicated that they set out to relieve the tension that existed between what they felt was right, what they wanted to be right, and what the Church told them to be right. One gay respondent expressed his feelings when he tried to reconcile these two things:

Steve: Like, I still thought that, like, the Church was true and that it was the most correct church, that it was the Church that would bring you the most happiness, but I wanted to see if I could merge the two to make a happy medium of me being gay and the Church's teachings.

During this time, Steve thought he could pursue relationships with men and also live up to the Church's standards. In a way, he tried to have what he saw as desirable in same-sex relationships but also in the Church; he wanted to reconcile his divergent sexual desires and faith. Similarly, Bill, a non-orthodox respondent strived to understand why God would have such a stance on a sensitive issue. After his attempt at reconciliation, he concluded that the Church needed to change. Although still active, this respondent believed that the Church, due to its mostly divine nature, needed to align with what he felt to be true.

It is important to note that the interview data suggest that reconciliation does not look the same for everyone. For Steve, it was trying to feel comfortable with his membership in the Church while pursuing same-sex relationships. For Bill, his reconciliation process was understanding that the Church was not a completely perfect institution. Sage, a non-orthodox queer respondent, began to believe that the Church might not hold the ultimate truth and that God might lead him elsewhere. What is constant, however, is the attempt for some Mormons to align their desires, integrities (i.e., what they feel to be right), and the LDS faith.

Rejection of Religion

When some Mormons first saw the contradiction between homosexuality and the teachings of the Church, they either rejected religion immediately, or they pursued one of the first three strategies and then decided to leave. For some, it can be a harrowing process; for others, it was relatively painless. Thus, upon realizing the tension between integrity, desires, and the Church, the Church was rejected. Daisy, a queer Post-Mormon female, described her relatively painless exodus:

I remember having the girls [at Church] judging me for having [a gay couple on my phone background] because I was in support of [gay marriage] and like you – it was so weird – there was such strong negativity in my ward towards same-sex attraction. and I was like, “I don’t want to be a part of that. I don’t want to be around that anymore.”

Once Daisy saw that homosexuality and her faith were antithetical, she decided to leave. For her, if we revisit the tension of autonomy versus religion, Daisy held her autonomy above any ecclesiastical inputs. As a result, leaving was her preferred option upon the realization of the mutual exclusivity of these issues. Another respondent described what led him to his resignation process:

Mike: And it suddenly hit me that [the Church] had been doing [reparative therapy] for decades, and after knowing that it wouldn’t help anyone – and this was post Gini and Bush, and I knew what human torture was and that fit my definition of human torture – if you do an experiment on someone knowing that it won’t actually change or it won’t get the result, and that was very much part of my transition out of the Church. Uh, I resigned my membership a couple of months after that [realization].

Once these individuals saw the Church had the tendency to compromise not only health but also autonomy, staying in the Church was no longer tolerable. In both cases, we can see that when faced with the tension between integrity, desires, and the Church, these individuals saw no issue in abandoning the Church.

However, for other respondents who first tried one of the three strategies described above, the process was much more distressing. One such respondent described the troubling moment he decided to put his desires and integrity above the Church:

Dallin: But [a while ago], um I saw some people in the [LGBP faith affirming association] behave very cruelly toward someone who decided to leave [the Church]. Um, and that kind of shook me and it shook me in terms of [this organization] and it shook me in terms of the Church because during that time, like, panic attacks hadn't gone away all the way, and like I would still have the [church lessons] about how gays are destroying the fabric of the family, and it was really difficult at the time, but it was something that I was just trying to swallow but around [this time] I stopped being able to swallow that... I started to... I guess, wonder... if like... this kind of environment was right for me. Um, and I started to take things that they would say at Church really personally, and it was really dark time for me...

Before this moment, Dallin was trying to reconcile his beliefs with this sexuality, and his efforts were relatively successful. However, in the moment he realized that he couldn't withstand the Church compromising his integrity and desires, he decided to leave the Church to uphold his own beliefs. While painful, it was a necessary change he believed he had to make for his own health.

These interviews suggest that those who reject religious identity do so to uphold their autonomy, their integrity, and their desires. Interestingly, those who had tried to reconcile, compartmentalize, and/or rationalize their beliefs had a tougher time trying to leave the Church than those who had always seen their autonomy as more important. In other words, it is easier for Mormons who honored their integrity and desires above the Church to leave it when membership becomes painful.

Summary

Because all respondents reported viewing homosexuality as antithetical to the teachings of the Church, their beliefs fractured into three mutually exclusive needs to be

fulfilled: integrity, desire, and faith. Some respondents attempted to compartmentalize, or conceptually isolate their integrity, desires, and faith and fulfill one need without thinking of another. Others tried to rationalize their beliefs through ideological justification. In their words, the Church was right about homosexuality because of its divinity. In these situations, the individuals didn't necessarily sacrifice their integrity or desires. While the fracture still happened, the contradiction between homosexuality and the Church was not powerful enough to cause them to lose faith in the Church. Thus, it seems that rationalization is sufficient for those whose desires and integrity align closely with the teachings of the Church. Regarding individuals for whom rationalization was not sufficient, they tried to reconcile and harmonize these discordant beliefs. They sought to realign integrity, desires, and beliefs. Lastly, other individuals completely rejected faith once they concluded that the Church significantly and excessively compromised their integrity and desires. Additionally, in some cases these respondents adopted more than one coping mechanism. Furthermore, these findings do not represent an exhaustive discussion of coping strategies that Mormons have adopted to solve this issue. Nevertheless, these observations provide a window to see how Mormons understand and respond to this problem.

Solutions

In *The Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois (1994) very adroitly states, "it is easy for us to lose ourselves in details in endeavoring to grasp and comprehend the real condition of a mass of human beings" (88). In other words, it can be difficult to understand the opinions of a large group of people. Thus, in this section, I will discuss solutions to this difficult problem that were solely mentioned by respondents for not only resolving the

tensions identified in the analysis presented above but also for eliminating the cause of the tension. I will first analyze solutions identified by respondents that are generally seen as ineffective and then analyze others seen as effective.

Align Yourself with the Church

For respondents who saw homosexuality as a condition, fad, choice, or challenge, and who believed the Church to be the ultimate connection to God, they recommended that queer individuals align their beliefs and behaviors with the LDS Church. This entails one of three things: mixed orientation marriage, celibacy, or conversion therapy. When asked how he would help somebody who identified as same-gender attracted if he were in a Church leadership position, James said:

For example, as a Priesthood leader in the LDS Church, my feelings usually are one of, “K, let’s see if I can help you. And that may not be just change but if I can help you live a healthy life of how you feel towards yourself and others...” My initial reaction as a priesthood leader is to try to understand them emotionally, how they got there, um, what their outlook is, et cetera.

Prior to this question, James said that homosexuality is the result of pornography and masturbation, sexual abuse, or giving inordinate attention to lustful fantasies. In this quote, it is apparent that James would see same-gender attraction as an unhealthy condition. Therefore, he advocates a change of ostensibly temporal sexual orientation and an understanding that “deviant” sexual orientation is neither natural nor good.

Other respondents, while not necessarily espousing conversion therapy, advocated for living the commandments. Living the commandments means marrying a member of the opposite sex or it could sometimes mean remaining celibate for life and never pursuing same-sex physical or romantic intimacy. With the idea that same-gender attraction is a condition, Jon gives his thoughts on what a gay Mormon should do:

I have a couple of [loved ones] who aren't making decisions consistent with the Gospel and if they asked me the same question, it's not because they're gay. It's the same answer... But I can tell you that we have an eternal life to live, and this next 30 or 40 or 50 years that you have are going to be incredibly difficult to live eternal principles. But I believe that you would be happier to live those eternal principles and I would emphasize there's nothing wrong with how you feel... but I do have a strong conviction that living the principles will make everyone happier.

While acknowledging that same-gender attraction is a trial, Jon believes that God gives us all the same commandments, so gay people simply have a heavier cross to bear. He believes that they should still live within the boundaries that the Lord has set.

An important question about the recommended solutions is this: do these suggestions work? While technically not impossible, these solutions were viewed as poor recommendations by most. Additionally, they were not helpful in practice for all queer participants. One respondent described undergoing conversion therapy and electro-shock therapy:

Geoff: I did electroshock therapy when I was at [church school]. Yeah, I did them all. I came away with headaches when I left [school] and an upset stomach and IBS... I actually went on a date with a guy because I realized that I just wasn't going to do it anymore. And being able to date was extremely freeing. I slept like a baby; I didn't have headaches anymore; I didn't have IBS. Really did change my emotional health, being able to accept myself. And that's really what it amounted to was accepting myself. The prohibition of the Church, um, suppressing my feelings.

Another a queer respondent, who became disappointed in dating women and felt incredibly lonely as a celibate individual, expressed his feelings:

William: And so, after my mission, after I was struggling to date women, after I canceled a date with a woman... As I was struggling with that, I saw all of my mission companions move on and get married. Um, I felt that I was less than, sub-par and perpetually incomplete... For a big period of the last five years, I felt that my sexuality was something carnal and mortal. And that dropping out of the test early would be better than enduring in celibacy. Um, and so the idea of having a redemption from the problems of my flesh was appealing. But also, what they say in the temple – that procreation is the fulfillment of the measure of your creation

that you may have joy. I want to be a father, and as a gay Mormon, all I could think of was being gay and single in a family ward in my 40's, childless and not trusted around children. That those were my darkest dreams of the future.

As these quotes suggest, “living the commandments” is not always viewed by the respondents as the healthiest option. The depression, hopelessness, and physiological sickness that respondents described above show the negative effects of trying to live the commandments to resolve the tension between homosexuality and faith. What, then, could help build a bridge between these antithetical ideas?

Familiarity “Changes Hearts”

The following respondent comments reflect a range of ideas for addressing the aforementioned tension. For example, opportunities to know and understand LGBTQ individuals provided members the chance to gain new insights and understanding of the struggles to reconcile faith and sexuality.

Interviewer: How do we solve this issue?

Jane: I'm open and curious and I watch, but I don't know a lot. I'm not taught this in my community and we're not taught about this in the Mormon community...I wish we talked about it in play group at the park. Like, what are these issues? What do they mean? And how are they affecting those involved? I wish that these subjects would come up, but they don't.

David: [When I met my gay coworkers,] I think that's when I really started to – because now I knew people and identified people – friends and colleagues who were gay. It made me realize that some of those things that I may have thought were not legitimate.

Sage: And I asked [my Church leader] like, “Do you know of any other people in the Church that are gay and trying to be Mormon, too?” And he shared with me stories of people he's known – that's how I found out about the [mixed orientation marriage] family.

Jack: We gotta open our hearts more and see beyond our own personal experiences and stop reducing everything down. Exactly what I was saying: stop reducing experience down to what must be yours.

Carson: And I think the most valuable thing is when [members] get to know gay people - when they hear their stories, when they see them and see their lives, and that's what changes hearts.

When Mormons become familiar with homosexuals and their experiences, they become more welcoming toward homosexuals and homosexuals feel more comfortable in their Mormon communities. These five quotes encompass the diversity of the respondents, showing that familiarity can ease the tension between homosexuality and Mormonism. As Du Bois suggested, we need to become familiar with this large group of people that is gaining increasing visibility and importance in the United States and the LDS Church. In doing so, hearts can be changed as Carson posits.

Summary

The introduction to this study began by noting the antimony between homosexuality and the Church. Then, I highlighted the tension between homosexual Mormons trusting themselves, trusting God, and trusting the Church. This was followed by discussing the tension between desires, integrity, and the Church. The discussion of findings ended by examining solutions offered by respondents, both ineffective and effective. Overall, the findings suggest that all respondents uphold autonomy, but to different degrees. From the perspective of one group of interviewees, if the Church is a divine institution, then its teachings trump autonomy, even and especially sexuality. In contrast, another key respondent group asserted that if the Church is not divine or only partially divine, autonomy plays a greater role in the spirituality and sexuality of the individual.

DISCUSSION

Limitations

While this study successfully explores the various beliefs regarding the Church and homosexuality, there are some limitations. First, I was unable to interview orthodox Mormons who were also gay. This was due to time constraints and the fact that members of this group did not want to be interviewed. Furthermore, I was unable to interview gay Mormons who compartmentalize their faith and sexuality. Also, because Reddit has a largely male population, a majority of my respondents identified as male. Lastly, due to my small sample size and qualitative methodology, my results are not statistically generalizable. Nevertheless, these results successfully provide a glimpse into the perspectives and experiences of lay members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints in relation to LGBP issues. They also allow us to see religious behaviors and beliefs that could be theoretically transferable to other belief systems (religious or secular).

Theoretical Advancement

These results can make several contributions to existing theories related to the issues addressed in this study. For instance, while Rodriguez and Ouellete's (2000) contribution to understanding gay faith reconciliation is significant, I extend this explanation by addressing why people make these reconciliation choices in the LDS Church, noting that the decision is based on their understanding of and faith in the LDS Church. I also add to the understandings of twin tolerations. Not only is there tension between allowing both citizens and religious institutions democratic power (Stepan 2000; Thomas 2001), but this tension also exists on a micro level. In the LDS Church, I have

delineated a tension that exists between faith and autonomy that reflects a broader institutional concern. Interestingly, what makes this tension particularly strong is the members' understanding of the ontology of the Church. As discussed above, the LDS Church is an all-encompassing religion, which ranges from dictating what members eat to what God members worship (Philips 2005). This emphasis on faith and decreased focus on autonomy strengthens the Church's power to preserve collective beliefs. If the Church were to allow greater latitude in relation to sexual orientation, it could diminish their ontological authority (Hammond 1992; Ter Borg 2011). In other words, if a member were to see the Church as a less authoritative institution, it would not have as much influence over their lives. This probably explains why the Church is reluctant to address this issue. The Church provides ontological security and a sacred canopy for many of its members, and reducing this influence could be detrimental to the Church as an institution and to the individual (Berger 1967; Ter Borg 2011).

Additionally, this study not only corroborates the idea that developing religious identity is an ongoing process (Peek 2005), but also extends it. For instance, the study findings show that when some Mormons decided to uphold their integrity, they changed their religious identity. Thus, personal and moral integrities require theoretical consideration when understanding religious identity. Additionally, religious faith crises are a surprisingly understudied phenomenon. However, we do know that they usually result from doubt or denial about beliefs, moral criticisms of certain practices, feelings of sadness, and rejection of religious communities (Wright & Moody 2013). Experiences expressed by Mormons and post-Mormons corroborate these explanations and offer the idea that faith crises usually result from the doubts and moral criticisms of their faith and

result in sadness and rejection of faith. Future research, however, should explore faith crises and their social significance.

In regard to Marx, Engels, Weber, and Durkheim, this study can corroborate and extend their assertions. This study supports Marx and Engel's (2002) argument that religion offers solace through salvific promises (Berger & Luckmann 1967; Merton 2005; Waggoner 2011). I then add to this idea by showing that these beliefs in salvific promises can be compromised when there is something that challenges them, such as sexuality. Also, Weber's (1963; 2002) thesis is supported by the fact that religion often causes homosexual individuals to undergo ascetic behavior (Weber 1963; 2002; Jonveaux 2001). This paper furthers this thesis by giving an additional explanation for why people undergo asceticism. Often, homosexuals in this study have sacrificed their sexuality to have religious promises fulfilled. Lastly, this study extends Durkheimian thought by suggesting that religion is not just a community. Instead, religion, along with providing community, can offer existential validation and protection, as evident in various responses (Berger & Luckmann 1967; Durkheim 1997; Hjelm 2011; Paden 2011; Ter Borg 2011). In sum, this study corroborates and extends extant research on homosexuality and religion.

Implications

Those Within the Church

For members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, there are several important implications. As noted by respondents, individuals being open with their ostensibly "non-traditional" sexuality can place them at risk in their congregations. Thus,

it is first necessary for general officers of the Church to promulgate friendly discussion on the issue. One respondent named Ben suggested the following:

From a psychological perspective, a lot of gay members are going to need to leave, and there isn't a lot of cultural narrative or cultural resources to help people leave the Church safely. There's only a focus on retention, and I think the most immediate thing that needs to happen is we need to teach families to go to their gay kids' weddings and accept them over for Thanksgiving and not make comments and not make faces... and they do that [make comments and faces]. The very real possibility that their kids will leave the church is something they should be thinking about sooner rather than later, the serious contemplation rather than trying to just activate... because in the long run, it's damaging... That's not a healthy thing to happen and I think that empowering people to divorce themselves from their religion within their religion is the humane thing to do.

Once general officers sanction discussion on the issue by understanding the homosexual experience and giving it a voice, homosexuals will likely experience less tension within the Church. This will also make it easier for discussion about homosexuality to happen at the local level.

While official approval to discuss homosexual issues would make it easier to become familiar with and understand homosexuality at the local level, lay members can and should still promote discussion where appropriate and safe. This could include Sunday School instruction about the issue. may also include discussions of homosexuality at firesides and devotionals. Increasing awareness could mean discussing the issue in leadership councils. It could mean anything, as long as the issue is discussed in a way that informs members. After all, some respondents thought that many members "just don't understand" homosexuality. Therefore, members must be informed about the homosexual experience in order to gain understanding of the lives of LGBP Mormons.

Those Outside of the Church

For individuals who are not members of the LDS Church, this study can help them understand the tensions that Mormons face among autonomy and faith, and integrity, desire, and faith. Obviously, these tensions cannot always be resolved by choosing the Church. However, it is equally difficult and unrealistic to ask someone to leave the Church due to how pervasive the culture is. In fact, Philips (2005) found that gay Mormons became suicidal because people either told them to leave the Church or to stay in the faith. Such exacting imperatives leave gay Mormons spiritually and emotionally vexed. Leaving an all-encompassing and pervasive religion is neither a simple nor an easy decision. So, individuals who care for Mormons in these situations (including therapists, friends, and loved ones) should avoid giving answers or imperatives that don't allow for nuance. Instead, they ought to listen to the individual's experience and let them act according to their desires, as many respondents have suggested.

Future Research

There is still much to be learned about this topic. Along with projects that address the limitations of this study, future studies should focus on several issues. First of all, homosexuality within the LDS Church tends to be androcentric. When asked questions about homosexuals, most respondents talked about cisgender, white men in their responses. Future studies need to try to understand why this is the case. Studies with a larger female and gender minority representation are necessary, too. Furthermore, future studies need to understand what the experience of gender minorities are within the Church, including cisgender females, transgender individuals, and intersex individuals. Also, future researchers should study other sexual minorities within the Church that are not necessarily homosexual, such as those who are demi sexual and asexual. It also seems

necessary to understand why religions are so concerned with sexuality, especially considering the significant emphasis conservative Churches put on sexual purity (Sellers 2017). Future studies should strive to extend Foucault's analysis of why institutions like Churches often place sexuality under their moral and doctrinal jurisdiction (Foucault 1990).

Additionally, we need to understand the tension between autonomy and salvific sovereignty. This may not just be a phenomenon within the LDS Church, instead appearing in multiple faiths and belief systems; thus, future studies need to understand when and why people make decisions based on their health or integrity versus their faith in a certain belief system, within and outside the LDS Church. In addition, there are few studies that consider the experience of those transitioning faiths, let alone how loved ones who remain in the faith feel about the exodus of their loved ones. Apparent in this study was pain for those who leave the Church, but I did not gather sufficient data, nor is it within the scope of this study to answer this question. Therefore, future researchers should strive to understand faith transition processes and their collateral effects. Furthermore, although there are potentially negative influences that conservative Churches can have on LGBP communities as mentioned in the literature review, we know very little about how religious institutions affect social issues, such as Knoll's (2016) assertion that there is a relationship between the Church and LGBP suicides in Utah. Specifically, future research can attempt to understand the relationship between mental illness, suicide, and the Church.

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