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Humanistic Psychology, Same-Sex Attraction, and Safe Spaces: A Latter-day Saint Inquiry into the Meaning of Love

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, we explore the concept of a genuinely “safe space,” what it might mean, and how such a concept is usually understood in both the discipline of psychology and the larger culture. Further, we explore some of the potential pitfalls that must be avoided in seeking to establish a “safe space” for members of the LDS Church who experience same-sex attraction (SSA) that is in harmony with the restored gospel. We will argue that one of the most serious potential threats to any effort to create a genuinely safe space for Church members who experience SSA is to understand the nature of tolerance and safety in the conceptual terms offered in humanistic psychology and psychotherapy, particularly as articulated in the foundational work of Carl Rogers. We argue that because it is founded on a number of problematic assumptions antithetical to the central tenets of the restored gospel as we understand them, Rogerian psychology actually encourages us to adopt certain assumptions that lead away from revealed truth and the richer, deeper relationship with one another and Christ that such truth provides.

Modern secular society often marginalizes religious thought and practice, consigning them to the sidelines of public and intellectual discourse. As G. K. Chesterton (2006) noted over seventy years ago, “Religious liberty might be supposed to mean that everybody is free to discuss religion. In practice, it means that hardly anybody is allowed to mention it” (p. 230). This state of affairs has, in many ways, created an intellectual vacuum in modern Western culture that has for the most part come to be filled by the social sciences, psychology and psychotherapy in particular. As Richard N. Williams (1998a) has observed:

We indeed live in a secularized world. . . . We live in the “era of psychology.” In our present age, the social sciences are competing for that meaningful space in the lives of our brothers and sisters that used to be occupied by family, church, and other social institutions. In the past, we derived our values, goals, aspirations, and inspiration in large measure from family, and from a foundation of religious belief, but in the contemporary age, increasingly our culture turns to psychology, to therapy, to institutions dominated by natural and social scientists. (p. 7)

It should come as no surprise, then, that when our public discourse *does* turn to religion, we find ourselves looking at our religion through the lens of psychological thought and talking about it using the terminology and conceptual vocabulary of psychological theory. A full range of human questions, some as monumental and important to daily experience as how to be a

faithful Latter-day Saint, as well as some much more particular and personal, such as the origins and nature of the experience of same-sex attraction, are all often addressed within the available vernacular of secular psychology and natural science. The result is that our culture has developed a type of *lingua franca* for making sense of human experience. Given that the evolved language of science—natural and social—is much younger than human experience itself, this reduction of the whole range of human experience to a single conceptual vocabulary is problematic, if not dangerous. The risk of making category mistakes—in forcing deeply divergent human experiences into a single relatively modern set of meaning categories—is extremely high. Further, the set of available categories for understanding and expressing experience quickly levels off the experiences themselves as the universal explanatory language functions as a lens to bring everything into a single focus. All of this has led to psychological theory—though often in a fairly non-technical and loose conversational sense—becoming the *measuring stick* by which many Latter-day Saints evaluate Church doctrines, standards, and practices, as well as their own experience.

However, a number of Latter-day Saint psychologists have raised serious questions about the appropriateness of this “intrusion of social science into the moral fiber of our lives” (Williams, 1998a, p. 7). A variety of deep concerns have been voiced by such scholars. For example, Williams (1998a) has noted:

It seems that, in the minds of many, it is not the gospel of Jesus Christ that heals; the gospel of Jesus Christ merely supplies us with a support system while the principles and practices of therapy derived from the secular social sciences really make the change. The failure to believe that the gospel of Jesus Christ is the source of real healing of the human soul is a repudiation of the gospel itself. (p. 7)

Voicing a related concern, Gleave (2012) draws attention to the fact that often it is not so much the outright repudiation of the gospel in favor of secular psychological theories and practices that is most concerning but rather the careless or sloppy merging of “a few gospel principles sprinkled onto a basically intact psychological system with tenets and interventions that are consistent with [secular] therapy generally” (p. 2). Such an approach, Gantt (2012) has argued, ends up being “far too congenial to the basic assumptions and values of naturalistic or secular worldviews that are ultimately toxic to the truth-claims of the restored gospel” (p. 12). This applies to the truth-claims of Christianity generally and to the claims of the restored gospel particularly.

Whatever the case, it is clear that there are significant issues needing to be addressed regarding what sort of relationship there might be between contemporary secular psychological theories and practices and the revealed truths of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ. While some very helpful forays have been made in this area (see, e.g., Gantt, Wages, & Thayne, 2015; Gleave, 2012; Jackson, Fischer, & Dant, 2005; Richards, 2006; Swedin, 2003; Williams, 1998a, 1998b), it is clear that there remains a great deal more work to be done.¹

Thus, it is in this spirit that we will explore what the concept of a genuinely “safe space” might mean and how such a concept is usually understood in both the discipline of psychology and the larger culture. Further, we will address some of the potential pitfalls that must be avoided in any discussion aimed at establishing a “safe space” in the Church for those who may experience a range of issues. Because it has some currency in contemporary culture, and because it is not infrequently a clinically relevant phenomenon, we will discuss this larger issue in the context of same-sex attraction (SSA). We will concentrate particularly on how the concept of “safe space” has been derived from intellectual sources that are in important ways inimical to the revealed truth of the restored gospel. We will argue that in any sincere effort to think through the meaning of “safe space”—especially as we seek ways to love and comfort those in the Church who experience a range of challenges, including SSA—it is vital to understand how that concept is rooted in the theoretical categories and philosophical assumptions of Rogerian humanistic psychology, especially given that those categories and assumptions are, we will contend, so often antithetical to the central tenets of the restored gospel. We will also argue that the only truly “safe space” is the gospel of Jesus Christ; His atonement, which is its centerpiece; and His church. Entry into that safe space is to be found in giving ourselves over to Christ in full and genuine discipleship. Indeed, it is only in submitting ourselves and our desires entirely to Christ on the altar of faith and sacrifice that we can come to discover our true nature and eternal identity and obtain the safety and security that such knowledge provides. Ultimately, we believe the gospel of Jesus Christ provides the only genuinely safe space for any of us, whether we happen to struggle with the experience of SSA or not.

CARL ROGERS’S HUMANISTIC THERAPY

Carl Rogers, one of the most influential psychological thinkers of the twentieth century, argued that to facilitate genuine psychological and emotional healing therapists must establish a particular kind of empathic relationship with their clients, one based on the therapist’s unconditional acceptance of the client, regardless of what the client says or does or feels. This unconditional acceptance is vital to therapeutic success, Rogers

¹ It is important to note here, however, that our purpose in this paper is *not* to address the preeminent role that secular psychology has increasingly come to play in our conceptualization of spiritual well-being or the many possible ways in which this development might be problematic. Rather, it is only to address how a very specific strand of psychological thought has problematically informed the way in which many LDS Church members have come to (mis)understand what having a “safe space” in the Church might mean, especially for those experiencing SSA.

believed, because individuals spend most of their lives desperately trying to be someone they are not, acting in ways contrary to their own basic sense of themselves in order to please and satisfy others whose acceptance and esteem they wish to obtain, thus, losing a solid sense of personal identity and purpose. This relational strategy leads people to continually project an image of themselves that, while frequently at odds with their real self (i.e., their own deepest feelings and desires), is nonetheless an image that others are likely to find acceptable. In this process, people become fundamentally divided beings. From this view, people are seen to possess, on the one hand, a true self that is rooted firmly in the organismic reality of their emotional life and, on the other hand, a false image of who they are and how they feel, which they create for public consumption in the hope that this image will be endorsed and accepted by family and friends. The real self is kept hidden and safe behind a protective façade—kept safe from negative evaluation or painful rejection by others, particularly those whose approbation and acceptance is most deeply desired.

On the Rogerian account, one's true self is constantly threatened by evaluations from others. Rogers (1961) notes:

In almost every phase of our lives—at home, at school, at work—we find ourselves under the rewards and punishments of external judgments. “That’s good”; “that’s naughty.” “That’s worth an A”; “that’s a failure.” “That’s good counseling”; “that’s poor counseling.” Such judgments are a part of our lives from infancy to old age. (p. 54)

It is not, however, just *negative* evaluations that threaten the individual. As Rogers goes on to argue, “Curiously enough a positive evaluation is as threatening in the long run as a negative one, since to inform someone that he is good implies that you also have the right to tell him he is bad” (p. 55). Thus, fearing scrutiny, evaluation, or criticism, the client hides his or her true self from the world. By so doing, the projected (false) image can be criticized, evaluated, and scrutinized, and with much less psychological consequence because deep down the individual knows that it is not his or her *real* self that is being judged by others. In this way, the individual's façade acts as a shield from the threat of evaluation by deflecting the brunt of the pressure of others' “conditions of worth” (p. 283) on behalf of the real self.

In order to unearth the real self the therapist must help the client to feel completely safe from evaluation, judgment, or critical scrutiny. The therapeutic question that is of central concerns to the therapist is, “Can I free [the client] from the threat of external evaluation?” (Rogers, 1961, p. 54). Only by providing a safe and accepting environment within which the client can freely explore and learn to accept his or her *real* self, an environment free of any threat of external evaluation or judgment, Rogers argues, can the therapist facilitate genuine and lasting therapeutic change and real healing. He elaborates:

When a person comes to me, troubled by his unique combination of difficulties, I have found it most worthwhile to try to create a relationship in which he is safe and free. It is my purpose to understand the way he feels in his own inner world, to accept him as he is, to create an atmosphere of freedom in which he can move in his thinking and feeling and being, in any direction he desires. (p. 106)

In this safe environment, the client's *real* self is more likely to emerge from behind the façade and stand revealed. Successful therapy, in Rogers's view, is therapy in which the client's public self and real self are rendered more congruent. “A helping relationship,” he explains, “might be defined as one in which one of the participants intends that there should come about, in one or both parties, more appreciation of, more expression of, more functional use of the latent inner resources of the individual” (1961, p. 40). This process can begin best in the microcosm of the therapy room as the therapist offers the client a completely safe environment. Thus, Rogers asserts that:

[crucial to] creating a climate for change is acceptance, or caring, or prizing [is] what I have called “unconditional positive regard.” When the therapist is experiencing a positive, acceptant attitude toward whatever the client is at that moment, therapeutic movement or change is more likely to occur. . . . [The therapist] prizes the client in a total rather than a conditional way. (p. 62)

However, Rogers also argued that although the process of healing is best undertaken in the therapy room, helping relationships need not be confined to the therapeutic context. He included in his scope the relationship between doctors and patients, parents and children, teachers and students, and, presumably, the

relationship between ecclesiastical leaders and their parishioners (see, e.g., Barrett-Lennard, 2005; Field, 1997; Holifield, 1983; Rogers, Lyon, & Tausch, 2014). While the safe environment of the therapy room could initiate monumental changes in the client's life, Rogers felt that such change could also be facilitated and nourished if similar safe environments were cultivated elsewhere in life (see, e.g., Barrett-Lennard, 2005).

Rogers maintained that as a therapist builds healthy therapeutic relationships with his or her clients, those clients are then more likely to experience an array of important psychological and emotional transformations. These transformations commence as the client comes to accept his or her *real self* with the same unconditional regard that the therapist manifests. Genuine psychological healing begins, for Rogers, as the client gives him- or herself permission to experience and embrace the full range of his or her own deepest, most authentic desires and emotional responses. He based this claim on observations drawn from his own extensive work as a therapist, stating, "As I have worked for many years with troubled and maladjusted individuals I believe that I can discern a pattern, a trend, a commonality, an orderliness, in the tentative answers to these questions which they have found for themselves" (1961, p. 164). Rogers maintained that it was through self-acceptance that the client would begin to be "open to the wide range of his own needs" and become a full "participant in the rationality of his organism" (pp. 194–195). The end result is that the previously anxiety-ridden and unhappy client would become a creative, sensitive, and thoughtful being whose feelings and reactions could "be trusted to be positive, forward-moving, and constructive" (p. 194).

MOVING AWAY FROM FAÇADES, OUGHTS, EXPECTATIONS, AND PLEASING OTHERS

Describing the process of person-centered therapy, Rogers (1961) writes, "I observe first that characteristically the client shows a tendency to move away, hesitantly and fearfully, from a self that he is *not*" (p. 167). In other words, as therapy begins to make real progress, the first bit of key evidence for such progress is found in clients' beginning to move away from the façades, or "false fronts," they have built up to protect their innermost self from exposure or criticism. The

individual "learns how much of his behavior, even how much of the feeling he experiences, is not real, is not something which flows from the genuine reactions of his organism, but is a façade, a front behind which he has been hiding" (p. 110). As clients come to understand that the therapist will not judge them for how they feel and think—but rather is willing to engage them with openness and unconditional acceptance—a vital psychological and emotional transition begins to take place, one in which individuals start (perhaps tentatively at first) to reveal and explore their deepest desires and feelings without fear of rejection or shame. Elaborating on the significance of this transition, Rogers states, "It is my experience that the [client] uses [the safe environment] to become more and more himself. He begins to drop the false fronts, or the masks, or the roles, with which he has faced life" (p. 109).

During successful therapy, Rogers argues, clients will inevitably begin "moving away from the compelling image of what he 'ought to be'" (1961, p. 168), away from the "oughts" that have accumulated over the years and that have given rise to the self-destructive desire to project false images to the world in the first place. This happens as the client comes to discover just "how much of his life is guided by what he thinks he *should* be, not by what he is" (p. 110). By moving away from these "oughts," the client is able to unburden him- or herself of the oppressive demands of both other people and his or her own false consciousness. As clients achieve fuller congruence between their actions and the desires of their real or true self, they no longer experience the "wish to be what they 'ought' to be, whether that imperative is set by parents, or by the culture" (p. 170). Rather, perhaps for the first time, they find themselves at the helm of their own lives, beholden only to themselves and their own, innermost, and most authentic desires and feelings.

As an example of this process, Rogers (1961) describes the reaction of one of his clients who reported that she was constantly trying to meet the expectations of her father and discovered that in doing so she had become compliant and submissive, all the while "really not wanting to be that kind of person" (p. 168). She said, "I find it's not a good way to be, but yet I think I've had a sort of belief that that's the way you have to be if you intend to be thought a lot of and loved" (p. 168). The process, however,

is not an easy one for many clients to undergo. According to Rogers, "Some individuals have absorbed so deeply from their parents the concept 'I ought to be good' or 'I have to be good' that it is only with the greatest of inward struggle that they find themselves moving away from this goal" (p. 168). He asserts that in a healthy therapeutic context, clients will almost inevitably (though, perhaps at times, reluctantly and cautiously) take a journey away from the moral impositions they have experienced thus far in their lives and move toward a more open, self-affirming, and self-accepting mode of being. As evidence of such psychological and emotional evolutions, Rogers cites an example of a client who, toward the end of therapy, reported, "I finally felt that I simply *had* to begin doing what *I wanted* to do, not what I thought I *should* do, and regardless of what other people feel I *should* do" (p. 170).

Similarly, says Rogers (1961), "Many individuals have formed themselves by trying to please others, but again, when they are free, they move away from being this person" (p. 170) because they realize that the social and moral expectations of others have only served to keep them from being true to themselves and their own innermost desires. Societal organizations such as school, church, and family, according to Rogers, structure expectations of how individuals are to believe and feel and behave in necessarily oppressive ways. "Over against these pressures for conformity," he writes, "I find that when clients are free to be any way they wish, they tend to resent and to question the tendency of the organization, the college or the culture to mold them to any given form" (p. 169).

According to Rogers, then, clients who form a healthy therapeutic relationship (defined as a relationship based on unconditional positive regard) will find themselves abandoning façades, liberated from external expectations and oppressive "oughts," and, thereby, steadily becoming more willing to live in ways that are true to their inner—and more authentic—wishes and desires. The direction in which clients move once such a welcoming, open, tolerant, and accepting environment is facilitated almost inevitably leads them away from the pressures and demands that have presumably been imposed upon them by society, family, church, and (false) conscience.

MOVING TOWARD AUTONOMY, ACCEPTANCE, OPENNESS, AND TRUST

According to Rogers (1961), in addition to moving away from societal expectations, clients in a warm and nonjudgmental therapeutic context will find themselves moving toward greater autonomy and moral self-determination. By this Rogers meant that the client would gradually choose the goals toward which *he or she* wants to move based on his or her own desires and feelings, rather than relying on those based in some set of external expectations or standards. In this way, the client "becomes responsible for himself" (p. 171). "He decides," Rogers writes, "what activities and ways of behaving have meaning for him, and what do not" (p. 171). In essence, then, in moving toward greater self-realization and self-direction, clients begin to decide for themselves what they will do, based on what they feel is right for themselves rather than allowing others, institutions, or externally located philosophies or moral systems interpret for them the correct course of action in given situations, or dictate how they ought to feel or what they ought to desire. In the end, Rogers explains, "Less and less [do they] look to others for approval or disapproval; for standards to live by; for decisions and choices" (p. 119).

Ultimately, this movement toward greater autonomy entails clients coming to live out an essentially Protagorean ethos (i.e., "man is the measure of all things"), that is, a worldview in which clients' own sense of things become the sole standard against which matters of right and wrong, proper and improper, just and unjust are to be judged. In this perspective, genuine autonomy is achieved as clients fully embrace the notion that they are the source of their own values, desires, and goals and that there is no divinely appointed or transcendent system of values available to provide any absolute moral compass or rational certitude to which they must conform. Indeed, in Rogers's view, clients must come to create for themselves their *own* values, desires, and goals by attending carefully to their own organismic valuing process and thereby learn to eschew the attempts of others to define such goals and values for them. In order to become a "fully-functioning person[s]," (pg. 191) according to Rogers, individuals must learn for themselves that they are the measure of all things in their own life-space, the

source of all real truth, value, and understanding. This state of understanding and self-acceptance is cultivated primarily by the *unconditional positive regard* that the humanistic therapist offers to his or her clients.

Speaking of the role unconditional positive regard plays in facilitating a genuinely healthy therapeutic relationship, Rogers (1961) notes:

I have come to feel that the more I can keep a relationship free of judgment and evaluation, the more this will permit the other person to reach the point where he recognizes that the locus of evaluation, the center of responsibility, lies within himself. The meaning and value of his experience is in the last analysis something which is up to him, and no amount of external judgment can alter this. So I should like to work toward a relationship in which I am not, even in my own feelings, evaluating him. This I believe can set him free to be a self-responsible person. (p. 55)

Furthermore, according to Rogers, because fully functioning persons no longer measure their conduct, their attitudes, or their beliefs against some arbitrary set of external standards imposed on them by others, such persons are freed to “move forward more openly, being a process, a fluidity, a changing. They are not disturbed to find that they are not the same from day to day, that they do not always hold the same feelings toward a given experience or person, that they are not always consistent” (p. 171). The fully functioning person, then, is one who is willing to embrace changes in perspective, opinion, and attitude as he or she feels to do so and as he or she prefers. Such individuals come to discover that their personal identity is a moving target, but nonetheless something with which they are able to come to terms.

In addition, clients begin to feel as if they can openly embrace *all* of their experiences—even those experiences that are frowned upon by the social, religious, or cultural context in which they happen to find themselves. For Rogers (1961), only as the client “experiences such a hitherto denied aspect of himself in an acceptant climate can he tentatively accept it as a part of himself” (p. 173). Through this process, clients learn, for example, that urges and desires that they’ve been trained to ignore, control, or hide are in fact deeply important parts of their personal identity. The client finds him- or herself, Rogers claims, “increasingly listening to the deepest recesses of his

physiological and emotional being, and finds himself increasingly willing to be, with greater accuracy and depth, that self which he most truly is” (pp. 175–176).

Finally, the client learns to openly accept those around him or her—that is, he or she begins to engage in the same kind of empathic relationships with others that the therapist has engaged in with him or her. “As a client moves toward being able to accept his own experience,” Rogers (1961) writes, “he also moves toward the acceptance of the experience of others. He values and appreciates both his own experience and that of others for what it is” (p. 174). The fully functioning person, then, is one who ceases to *evaluate* the choices, actions, attitudes, and experiences of others and instead begins to embrace others in the same kind of warm, empathic, and accepting manner demonstrated by the Rogerian therapist in the first place. In the end, then, the fully functioning person is, Rogers asserts, someone who is “able to experience all of his feelings, and is less afraid of any of his feelings; he is his own sifter of evidence, and is more open to evidence from all sources; he is completely engaged in the process of being and becoming himself, and thus discovers that he is soundly and realistically social; he lives more completely in this moment, but learns that this is the soundest living for all time” (p. 192).

SAFE ENVIRONMENTS AND THE FREEDOM TO BE ONE’S TRUE SELF

Ultimately, then, Rogers (1961) argues that providing a safe and accepting atmosphere of unconditional acceptance and unreserved tolerance is vital to freeing individuals from the debilitating fear of scrutiny and evaluation that motivates them to create false fronts, thereby allowing their *true* self to emerge. This is what Rogers referred to as a *safe environment* and what has more recently come to be known as a “safe space.” In such an environment, “individuals and groups know that they will not face criticisms that would challenge their expressions of identity. In a ‘safe space,’ people are encouraged to speak their minds freely and to share their experiences openly, and they are guaranteed that their expressions of self will be as well regarded as anyone else’s” (Rom, 1998, p. 407). Individuals are empowered in this way to transform themselves in ways that are often quite contrary to whatever public image

they may have adopted and portrayed to others thus far in their lives. Rogers (1961) writes:

Let me see if I can state more concisely what is involved in this pattern of movement which I see in clients, the elements of which I have been trying to describe. It seems to mean that the individual moves toward being, knowingly and acceptingly, the process which he inwardly and actually is. He moves away from being what he is not, from being a façade. (p. 175)

In addition, Rogers argues that such welcoming, safe environments need not be available only in the therapy room but could and should be cultivated in schools, the workplace, in church and family settings, and among friends—indeed, in whatever life-space the individual occupies. One of the consequences of experiencing such a safe environment, Rogers holds, is that individuals will be more likely to extend to others the same kind of unconditional acceptance they have experienced and, thus, cultivate the same kind of healthy therapeutic relationships with others. For example, Rogers (1961) suggests, “As I am more willing to be myself, I find I am more ready to permit you to be yourself, with all that that implies.” (p. 327). Indeed, Rogers (1989) indicates that the (proper person-centered) “therapeutic relationship [is] simply one instance of interpersonal relationship” (p. 251) and that genuine friendships and healthy, accepting relationships with others naturally occur as “the dropping of some defensiveness by one party leads to further dropping of defensiveness by the other party” (Rogers, 1961, p. 336). Ultimately, Rogers believed that “the insincerities, the defensive exaggerations, the lies, the ‘false fronts’”—what he characterized as “defensive distortions”—that typify all inauthentic relationships “drop away with astonishing speed as people find that their only intent is to understand, not judge” (p. 336).

MOVING BEYOND THE CONFINES OF THE THERAPY ROOM

Rogers’s person-centered therapy paradigm was quickly extended beyond the confines of the therapy room with the application of its insights and procedures to issues in parenting and education. In the person-centered approach, children are taught that certain acts of affection (e.g., soft touches, gentle voices,

embraces, etc.) are genuine expressions of love. According to Rogers, when acts of affection and expressions of acceptance are withdrawn as a consequence of misbehavior (e.g., when a parent scolds a child, or consigns a child to his room, or raises his or her voice, etc.), the child learns that the love the parent offers is in fact *conditional* love, provided only upon condition of acceptable behavior. This situation inevitably leads, according to Rogers, to feelings of insecurity within the child and ultimately stifles expressions of the child’s true self as he or she grows older. For Rogers, and like-minded humanistic thinkers (see, e.g., Gordon, 2000 and Luvmour, 2006), “the parent’s job is to accept the child as he or she is, trust in the child’s abilities to solve problems, and provide an environment of acceptance” (Powell & Cassidy, 2007, p. 228).

Humanistic psychologists have long taught that “if it weren’t for the acceptance/rejection threat bound up in the expectations parents make on behavior as a precondition for certain expressions of acceptance and love” children would not grow up with the problems that they do (McKee, 1986, p. 39). Indeed, Rogers argues that when the “*self-experiences* of the individual are discriminated by significant others as being more or less worthy of positive regard, then *self-regard* becomes similarly selective” (Rogers, 1961, p. 246; italics in the original). “Conditions of worth” was the term Rogers used to describe that process whereby the child engages in self-discrimination and self-rejection, as well as in the creation of a false self-image or façade in order to please his or her parents whose approval he or she desires. Ultimately, Rogers claimed that the development of conditions of worth (primarily in childhood) is the principle source of almost all of our persistent anxieties and depressions, pervasive feelings of inadequacy, propensities to violence, susceptibilities to delusion and self-doubt, and other such forms of psychopathology.

The humanistic solution to such debilitating and dispiriting problems is simply to cease imposing judgments regarding the child’s value or worthiness of acceptance (i.e., unconditional positive regard). “If an individual,” Rogers (1961) suggests, “should experience only *unconditional positive regard*, then no *conditions of worth* would develop . . . and the individual would continue to be *psychologically adjusted*, and would be fully functioning” (p. 246, italics in the

original). As McKee (1986) has noted, in the humanistic vision, for children to be truly creative and joyful they must be “freed from a nagging conscience, open to and having a sense of awareness of their own feelings, independent from institutions, free from binding rules and preconditions that stifle growth, etc.” (p. 42).

In education, A. S. Neill enthusiastically applied Rogers’s ideas in a school setting (see, DeCarvalho, 1991, for a more detailed account of the ways in which the humanistic thinking of Rogers and Maslow, in particular, impacted educational theory and practice). His private school held as one of its founding philosophies that:

parents are spoiling their children’s lives by forcing on them outdated beliefs, outdated manners, outdated morals. They are sacrificing the child to the past. This is particularly true of those parents who impose authoritative religion on their children just as it was once imposed on them. (Neill, 1960, p. 118)

Again, as was the case with parenting, the imposition of moral values and expectations from *outside* the individual is seen as inescapably *stifling* to children. Neill maintained that “the eternal imposition on children of adult conceptions and values is a great sin against childhood” (p. 113). Furthermore, he argued that “children do not need teaching as much as they need love and understanding. They need approval and freedom to be naturally good” (p. 118). Parents and educators, on this model, should always be vigilant to “not disapprove of their children’s misbehavior, because to children ‘disapproval means hate’” (McKee, 1986, p. 40).

This extension of Rogerian theory beyond the confines of psychotherapy and into education and parenting represents a significant social and historical development. According to Neill, “disapproval means hate”—at least, as he says, to children, though we strongly suspect that the notion has been carried into explanations of feelings and the need for unconditional positive regard in the adult world as well. The obvious, contrary implication of such a claim is that *approval* means *love*. Thus, it comes as no surprise that, true to this implication, “the cumbersome term positive regard was eventually replaced and popularized with the simpler and commonly understood term ‘love.’ The meanings of unconditional love and unconditional positive regard are essentially the same” (McKee, 1986, p. 41). Ultimately, as McKee has argued, “The bandwagon

response unconditional love received has even found its way to the pulpit and Sunday School classes. This acceptance has added to its popular appeal a kind of religious zeal and consequently an informal theological sanction” (p. 39).

AND SO WHAT?: CONSIDERING SOME IMPLICATIONS OF ROGERIAN HUMANISM

It must be admitted that not all of Rogers’s assertions are controversial. For example, helping an individual to feel safe in expressing his or her hidden thoughts and feelings is a valuable and important endeavor, especially in a therapeutic setting where genuine empathy and openness are vital. Nonetheless, for those who wish to orient their psychological and moral understanding within the context of the restored gospel there are a number of deeply problematic (and often unexamined) practical and conceptual implications of the Rogerian perspective.

One implication of Rogers’s humanistic theory, for example, is that societal, cultural, familial, and even religious expectations almost always act as a cage on the individual and his or her desires, keeping him or her from being the self he or she *truly* is. That is, the expectations of others not only inevitably stifle the growth and healthy expression of the individual’s true self but also cause the individual to deny or reject what is most real about him- or herself. This explanatory narrative pits the individual’s core identity against the moral guidelines and standards being taught to him or her by family, church, and community. One significant and unfortunate consequence of this situation is that moral standards (such as the law of chastity) may come to be conceptualized as inherently animus-driven, oppressive constraints on the individual’s freedom and need for self-expression—even when adherence to such standards is only gently encouraged through persuasion and admonition. This is because in the Rogerian view even gentle instruction such as “God has asked us to remain chaste” can be considered a form of *evaluation* and, as such, is the very sort of thing that Rogerian thought condemns.

In contrast, genuine liberation (i.e., self-liberation, or, to use Abraham Maslow’s term, “self-actualization”) is fundamentally understood as one’s being relieved from the inherently oppressive constraints of the

moral or social expectations and evaluations of others. True individual freedom and self-realization exists, it is presumed, only in an atmosphere of “safety,” that is, an atmosphere of unconditional acceptance and empathic understanding entirely devoid of any expectations, “oughts,” or moral judgments about the rightness or wrongness of one’s desires, feelings, thoughts, or actions. A number of scholars have noted how this sort of thinking both reflects and nurtures our modern culture of “expressive individualism” (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1985; see also, Browning & Cooper, 2004, Milton, 2002, Westen, 1985, and Wilkens & Sanford, 2009). “Expressive individualism,” as Wilkens and Sanford (2009) note, “worships the freedom to express our uniqueness against constraints and conventions,” and “because rules and social conventions encourage conformity, they are viewed as a threat to personal expression and individuality” (p. 28).

Insofar as expressive individualism has come to be a defining feature of contemporary society, we increasingly see a culture in which the fullest and most satisfying life is thought to be available only in opening oneself up to the fullest range of “stimulating experiences, relationships, material goods, and bodily pleasures” (Smith, 2014, p. 17; see also, Wilkens & Sanford, 2009). In such a culture, Smith notes, it is taken for granted that “each individual should be free to do so in a way that satisfies her or his own self-determined desires and will,” and, consequently, “people should be free to engage in any relationship they should so choose” (p. 17). Furthermore:

Since different people find different kinds of experiences to be pleasurable, nobody has the right to define what pleasures or relationships other people should pursue and enjoy. A good life and society throws off the restrictive, repressive constraints placed on the gratification of individual pleasures and frees everyone to satisfy any pleasure that she or he so desires—provided, again, that doing so does not interfere with someone else being able to do the same. . . . And if any people go public with the particular forms of pleasure or relationships that most please them, everyone else ought to accept them and ideally morally affirm their personal preferences and choices. (Smith, 2014, p. 17)

Conversely, in such a perspective, an individual who feels expected by others to live a particular moral lifestyle, and who then holds him- or herself to those

expectations, is not only not genuinely free but is not even fully a person (in the sense that he or she does not enjoy a full, authentic actualization of his or her personhood). According to Rogers (1986), only in an unconditionally tolerant and accepting context can an individual abandon façades and become the “self which one truly is” (p. 167). Rebukes, chastenings, reprimands, commandments, instructions, parental advice, and attempts at persuasion are all fundamentally and inescapably at odds with the notion of a “safe space”—a notion that our culture of expressive individualism, abetted and nurtured by Rogerian thinking, assumes is considered crucial to personal development and freedom.

One inference we might draw from such an approach is that therapeutic success for clients who experience SSA—particularly when those clients are participants in a broader religious community that treats same-sex sexual activity as sinful—is identified with the progression outlined by Rogers above. That is, therapeutic success is seen to occur as clients move away from (and ultimately reject) the expectations of their faith community and move more toward an authentic embrace of their same-sex desires. This, in turn, creates an expected “template” for those who experience inner turmoil due to a conflict between their same-sex attraction and their religious upbringing and convictions. Ultimately, of the two, the religious upbringing and convictions are what must be rejected in order for the client to progress toward genuine “personhood” as defined by Rogers (i.e., a fully autonomous, authentic human being). Despite Rogers’s rejection of external evaluation of a client’s choices and values, therapists who embrace the Rogerian perspective might implicitly view a client’s decisions to embrace his or her religious upbringing and to not live out or act upon his or her same-sex attraction as a failure of the therapeutic process.

The problem many Latter-day Saints have with this perspective, however, is that it seems to be quite at odds with revealed truth and prophetic counsel. As Elder D. Todd Christofferson (2011) has stated, “Our Heavenly Father is a God of high expectations” (p. 1). God, as Latter-day Saints understand Him, is not a permissive parent of the Rogerian sort. He has firm expectations for His children and attaches consequences to their misbehavior. We are consistently

warned by God and His servants that we must repent and live better—to, for example, “stand a little taller” (Hinckley, 1995).

Addressing the impact of expressive individualism on contemporary religious thought, Elder Christofferson (2011) has said, “Sadly, much of modern Christianity does not acknowledge that God makes any real demands on those who believe in Him, seeing Him rather as a butler ‘who meets their needs when summoned’ or a therapist whose role is to help people ‘feel good about themselves’” (p. 1). Here Elder Christofferson is directly drawing on the analyses of the sociologist Christian Smith, who has shown that much of contemporary religious belief (at least in the United States) is reflective of what he has termed “Moralistic Therapeutic Deism” (Smith, 2005), something he claims is “the de facto dominant religion among contemporary U.S. teenagers” and many of their parents (p. 162). This new religion is, according to Smith, fundamentally

about providing therapeutic benefits to its adherents. This is not a religion of repentance from sin, of keeping the Sabbath, of living as a servant of a sovereign divine, of steadfastly saying one’s prayers, of faithfully observing high holy days, of building character through suffering, of basking in God’s love and grace, of spending oneself in gratitude and love for the cause of social justice, etcetera. Rather, [it is] centrally about feeling good, happy, secure, at peace. It is about attaining subjective well-being, being able to resolve problems, and getting along amiably with other people. (pp. 163–164)

The God of this religion is a kind of (Rogerian) “Cosmic Therapist,” a God who is “always on call, takes care of any problems that arise, professionally helps his people to feel better about themselves, and does not become too personally involved in the process” (Smith, 2005, p. 165). Such a God is by no means a demanding or commanding God. “He actually can’t be,” Smith says, “because his job is to solve our problems and make people feel good” (p. 165).

In contrast to the God of Moralistic Therapeutic Deism, Elder Christofferson (2011) notes (citing the work of Kendra Creasy Dean), “the God portrayed in both the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures asks, not just for commitment, but for our very lives. The God of the Bible traffics in life and death, not niceness, and calls for sacrificial love, not benign whatever-ism” (p. 1). In similar spirit, Givens (2012) has suggested that

the commandment to “love one another” can certainly be interpreted to mean “that we treat fellow humans as beings of infinite worth, and to whom unqualified acceptance would be cheap and easy, unlike Christ’s invested and loving devotion. Indeed, the scriptures are saturated with invitations to repent and live according to God’s will, as well as warnings of the consequences of our failure to do so.

The consequences of failing to live up to our covenants or strictly observe divine commandments are not imposed on us by God as manipulative, resentful, or uncaring “conditions of worth” in the way that Rogerian thought would construe such things. Rather, as the apostle Paul taught, “For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth” (Heb. 12:6), and as the Lord further stated in the Book of Revelation, “As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent” (Rev. 3:19). Similarly, President Brigham Young declared:

Every blessing the Lord proffers to his people is on conditions. These conditions are: Obey my law, keep my commandments, walk in my ordinances, observe my statutes, love mercy, preserve the law that I have given to you inviolate, keep yourselves pure in the law, and then you are entitled to these blessings, and not until then. (p. 162)

Indeed, in this same spirit, Elder Hugh B. Brown (1973) once famously expressed his deep and abiding gratitude to God for “loving me enough to hurt me” (p. 1) by not giving him what he happened to deeply desire at a particular moment in his life and instead guiding him through the painful process of accepting what he even more deeply needed to reach his fullest divine potential and calling.

In light of such doctrines and pronouncements, then, it is possible that one of the many purposes of mortal life is to experience the process of being humbled, chastened, and rebuked. Indeed, it could be argued that some commandments—particularly commandments that are all but impossible to obey with exactness—are in some ways meant to make us feel the weight of our own weakness and mortality, and in humility enable us to turn fully to Christ for our redemption. If such analysis is correct, then it may well be that one purpose of the strict moral standards we have been given is to teach us about the true nature of our own inadequacies. Indeed, as

the Lord teaches through the writings of his ancient prophet Moroni:

And if men come unto me I will show unto them their weakness. I give unto men weakness that they may be humble; and my grace is sufficient for all men that humble themselves before me; for if they humble themselves before me, and have faith in me, then will I make weak things become strong unto them.” (Ether 12:27)

If such teachings are true, it would clearly indicate that the doctrine of unconditional positive regard is in important ways deeply antithetical to the gospel of repentance and the reality of a God with high expectations for His children—if only because Rogerian thought would deny the humbling (and saving) power of God’s commandments and moral injunctions. In so doing, then, Rogerian thought, and all similar relativistic and radically permissive forms of thought, ultimately strives to keep us from acknowledging or even feeling the need to turn to the enabling power of Christ for personal transformation and redemption.

Now, of course, Latter-day Saints do not believe in a God who is constantly punishing humankind for its depravity, as do some Calvinist Protestant sects. To “chasten” does not always imply simple scolding—in fact, the word literally means *to make chaste or pure*. That is, because God loves us, He constantly seeks to purify us, to make our paths straight, and make us into chaste individuals. Indeed, in Proverbs we read that “whom the Lord loveth he correcteth; even as a father the son in whom he delighteth” (Prov. 3:12; see also Heb. 12:6). The correcting, straightening, guiding, and instructing implied in the many scriptural passages that speak of such things (see, e.g., 3 Ne. 19:28; D&C 50:28; Isa. 42:16; 2 Ne. 4:33; D&C 101:5) is clearly and significantly at odds with a Rogerian psychology that condemns evaluations and moral impositions or expectations of any kind. For Latter-day Saints, God is continually inviting His children into deeper, more meaningful loving relationships, not only by being infinitely patient and mercifully forgiving, but also by being invested in our eternal welfare enough to “call us out” and “ask more of us”—often in starkly direct ways—when we are choosing unwisely and opting not to live up to our covenants.

There is, however, a much subtler and potentially more insidious consequence of the sort of Rogerian humanism we have been discussing here given the way

it has helped to frame the issue of SSA in our larger culture, especially insofar as it both reflects and nurtures the ethos of expressive individualism. In many ways in our modern world, authentic love has come to be seen as incompatible with expectations, evaluations, “oughts,” and personal moral accountability. Indeed, the Rogerian conception of unconditional positive regard—most commonly encountered and expressed in terms of “unconditional love” or “true acceptance”—has become a sort of standard paradigm through which many people (whether they experience SSA or not) have come to frame their experiences. For example, because experience is filtered by perception, it is possible that individuals who have adopted an essentially Rogerian perspective—even if it has only been tacitly and innocently absorbed from the larger culture in the course of everyday living—may come to experience themselves as being “unconditionally loved” only when they are in an environment (“safe space”) in which there is no hint of moral expectation or evaluation of their desires, actions, and attitudes. They may experience themselves as truly loved and accepted by others only when they are freely allowed to express and act on their desires without fear of scrutiny or moral judgment from others.

Conversely, such individuals (again, whether they experience SSA or not) may experience themselves as “hated” when they are told that God does not approve of them acting on their desires. They may experience themselves as hated and rejected when they see their deepest desires and inclinations—their true selves—being evaluated or questioned by priesthood leaders, family and friends, or fellow Church members. They may experience themselves as hated when they are expected to abide by moral standards external to themselves, *particularly* when those moral standards are at odds with what they have been taught to conceptualize as a crucial part of their self-identity. For example, the law of chastity explicitly forbids the expression of one’s sexual desires in sexual intimacy except under very specific circumstances and after very specific conditions have been met. However, from the standpoint of the expressive individualism entailed in Rogerian humanism, because sexual desires are held to be central to one’s identity, any external conditions or restrictions placed on the expression of one’s sexual desires (whether homosexual or heterosexual) constitutes an

assault on the Self. And, as an assault from an external source, it can only be understood as the product of intolerance, rejection, and animus.

Ultimately, adopting the vocabulary of Rogerian humanism, and the expressive individualism that grounds it, with its conceptual and practical redefinition of the nature of love and hate, renders meaningful discussion of SSA difficult for those wishing to take the language and concepts of the restored gospel seriously. This difficulty results from the way in which Rogerian humanism biases conversation against those who would seek to uphold the universality and truth of doctrines such as the law of chastity and who would claim that such doctrines are founded in love and genuine concern. After all, Rogerian humanism maintains that any moral imposition in the form of conditions, expectations, or commandments—particularly ones that forbid acting on sexual attractions that are experienced as central to our identity—are inimical to the meaning of genuine (i.e., unconditional) love and compassion.

In the end, the Church and its practices come to be evaluated against the measuring stick of expressive individualism. And, once the perspective of expressive individualism is embraced, individuals begin to seek out “safe spaces” where they can feel free to express, and perhaps even act on, desires and attractions that might otherwise be forbidden or discouraged. The promise of a “safe space” is that in it the individual will be insulated from having his or her desires or actions evaluated or scrutinized by others. Once securely located in a “safe space,” the individual can ignore the moral impositions or expectations taught to him or her by others and begin freely formulating his or her own personal morality and life goals, the adequacy and validity of which are to be judged only against the measuring stick of the individual’s desires. In addition, the tenets of expressive individualism encourage the individual, in order to be truly authentic and unconditionally loving, to cease holding others to the external standards or moral expectations imposed upon them by societal, familial, and religious organizations.

One important implication of all of this is that to the extent that individuals *do not* move in the direction prescribed by expressive individualism, they cannot and will not truly feel safe or free. This, in turn,

serves to foster a social and moral context in which the Church is perceived as failing to cultivate a genuine safe space for individuals so long as those individuals do not feel free to fully embrace their true self and sexual identity by acting on their desires without experiencing disapproval from ecclesiastical leaders, family members, and peers. Ultimately, since the Church is under divine obligation to teach the law of chastity, and to hold individuals accountable for obedience to it, the Church will always be seen—in light of the conceptual formulations of Rogerian humanism and expressive individualism—to fall short of truly helping individuals with SSA feel safe (particularly if they consider acting on their attractions).

Clearly, all of this presents a significant challenge for anyone wishing to extend the hand of fellowship to those who experience SSA and engage in serious dialogue with them about what it might mean to love in a Church that makes many demands and has many expectations of its members. Because our modern world has been inundated by the precepts and values of expressive individualism and Rogerian humanism, it is hard to define and conceptualize a “safe space” in any way *other* than that articulated by the defenders of such individualism. Ultimately, this can make it difficult to show why exactly it is that the Church is itself the only genuinely safe space available to the children of God—inasmuch as it is the “only true and living church upon the face of the whole earth” (D&C 1:30) and precisely because it maintains the importance of high moral standards and expectations of sacrificial discipleship. Because expressive individualism rejects putting any brakes on the expression of individual desire, all talk of adhering to absolute moral standards, invitations to restrain from acting on one’s desires, or encouragement to change one’s lifestyle are *a priori* clear-cut obstacles to the creation of any real safe space. The tension inherent in this situation can readily be seen in the deep frustration expressed by some Latter-day Saints with SSA who feel threatened, accused, and alienated by the doctrine of chastity and the expectation to remain abstinent (see, e.g., accounts in Kerby, 2011, Mansfield, 2011, and Pearson, 2007, as well as those accessible via websites such as www.affirmation.org, www.ldsvoicesofhope.org, and www.northstarlds.org).

AN ALTERNATIVE TO SELF-REGARD: DISCIPLESHIP IN CHRIST

In contrast to the vision of Rogerian humanism, and the ethic of expressive individualism it reflects and nurtures, we believe that central to the restored gospel of Jesus Christ is the call to *sacrificial discipleship*, a call that requires each of us to relinquish many of the desires of the self in the service of a higher, more meaningful cause. We believe that the gospel invites us to live for something beyond ourselves, to find ourselves and secure our identity in covenantal commitment to a mission and purpose greater than anything we could create or discover on our own. In the space remaining, we wish to briefly explore what we think such discipleship in Christ might mean; how it differs from the central, individualistic aims of Rogerian humanism; and how it might contribute to a richer, fuller, more compassionate and truthful understanding of "safe space."

This alternative we wish to propose is one in which eternal identity and genuine safety are found when we place our very selves on the altar of covenant and become true disciples of *Christ*. Put simply, whereas Rogerian humanism admonishes us to "*follow your heart*" and "*be true to yourself*," Christ calls us into discipleship, to follow Him, and to become one with the truth He is (John 14:6). The call to discipleship is the call to find peace, comfort, and hope in Christ through obedience to divine commands as we submit our will to that of our Father in Heaven. "*Follow thou me*," Christ says, and, in so doing, leave behind the self you desire so that you may become like me, become at one with me, desire as I desire, understand as I understand, and love as I love. Christ promises that in submitting to His will and following in His footsteps we can finally become who we were in fact always intended to be (i.e., joint heirs with Him in our Father's kingdom). Christ offers an eternal perspective that frees us from the narrow and limiting confines of individualistic self-actualization and self-concern by inviting us to accept *Him* as our Master, as the only real source of truth about ourselves and our identity and the ever-living fount out of which all righteous desires flow. We like to imagine Him saying, "Follow thou me, and I will give you a new heart and a new self, and, thereby, a safe and more reliable path to follow." In the battle to know who we really are and what we must be about in

this life, the victory the true disciple seeks is the victory of Christ over self.

As we turn our lives and our hearts over to Christ and accept His invitation to discipleship, He offers to remake us into "new creatures" (Mosiah 27:26). We turn ourselves over to Christ by exercising faith on His name, repenting of our sins, and making covenants with Him by participating in the ordinances of baptism, confirmation, the sacrament, and the temple. King Benjamin taught, "Because of the covenant which ye have made ye shall be called the children of Christ, his sons, and his daughters; for behold, this day he hath spiritually begotten you; for ye say that your hearts are changed through faith on his name" (Mosiah 5:7). Christ offers us a *changed heart*, one in which our desires become His desires, our purposes become His purposes, and our will is swallowed up in that of the Father. Those who heard King Benjamin's sermon acknowledged the effects of this promise in their own lives. They declared that, because of their participation in the covenant, the Spirit of Christ "has wrought a mighty change in us, or in our hearts, that we have no more disposition to do evil, but to do good continually" (Mosiah 5:2).

In this process of conversion and submission, we literally give up our old identities and take upon ourselves the new one offered by Christ.² As we read in Paul's letter to the Corinthians, "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (2 Cor. 5:17). Thus, while accepting the call to full discipleship in Christ certainly involves giving up a false self, the reality of the thing is only very superficially similar to what is advocated in Rogerian humanism. By placing our will obediently and unreservedly on the altar as an offering to God we are indeed released from the bondage of a false and falsifying self, but not in order to embrace the rootlessness and communal alienation of the atomistic, autonomous self of expressive individualism. Rather, in turning ourselves, our deepest desires and

² The reality of this change, this being made new in discipleship, is reflected in our taking upon ourselves the name of Christ at baptism and renewing that sacred moment each week when we partake of the sacrament, as well as in the gift of receiving a new name in the temple endowment ceremony.

motivations, over to Christ and accepting His will without preconditions or reservations, we not only receive in return new desires and new motivations but also the recognition that the identity we are lovingly being given is really who we were and were meant to be all along.

In the end, whether we choose to accept the call to full discipleship by laying aside our own will (desires) to do the will of the Father and live as He desires, it is Christ who has *always* possessed the moral high ground to begin with. It is Christ who always owns us and who has the deepest and most profound claim on our lives. As Paul taught anciently, we are not our own; “For ye are bought with a price” (1 Cor. 6:20). Fortunately, when the desires of the self are in conflict with the teachings of Christ, we have been assured by Christ that those desires can be rooted out.³

Speaking of those who have made themselves disciples of Christ, C. S. Lewis (1986) famously wrote:

These people have got rid of the tiresome business of adjusting the rival claims of Self and God by the simple expedient of rejecting the claims of Self altogether. The

³ It must be noted here that in speaking of the possibility that our faith in Christ can allow certain desires of our hearts to be rooted out, we are not suggesting that individuals experiencing same-sex attraction do so simply because they lack sufficient faith in Christ, or that such attractions can simply be “prayed away” if one is diligent and faithful enough. Such a view of the nature of sexual desires (of whatever sort) is much too simplistic and conceptually tangled. We are, rather, seeking to address the desires to act on same-sex attraction in defiance of divine decree, the secret fantasies of the heart that long for a social and spiritual world in which acting on such attractions is acceptable before the Lord despite His commandments otherwise. It is those desires that must change, desires that seek to put our own desires, our own will before the Lord’s desires and will. Thus, while an individual may be sexually attracted to members of the same sex, by allowing Christ to change his or her heart that person can come to no longer experience the desire to act on those attractions in same-sex sexual relationships. The need to have Christ change such desires in us is, of course, not unique to those experiencing same-sex attractions. For example, a man can be sexually attracted to women other than his wife but through having his heart changed through Christ’s love experience no desire to commit adultery with them.

old egoistic will has been turned round, reconditioned, and made into a new thing. The will of Christ no longer limits theirs; it *is* theirs. All their time, in belonging to Him, belongs also to them, for they are His. (p. 21)

The problem, C. S. Lewis observes here, is not that we are weighed down by unnecessary guilt or by burdensome expectations and commandments but that we have not sufficiently given the self, and the desires of the self, over to Christ. In short, Rogers’s description of the unhappy individual hiding his “true” desires for the sake of appeasing societal or religious expectations is a person who is following convention but without wholly giving him- or herself to God. Such a person is still holding back what is required in order to experience the comfort and wholeness discipleship promises; he or she is still wishing and wanting to be his or her own master, rather than fully and unreservedly accepting Christ as Lord and Savior.

In contrast, “To become new men means losing what we now call ‘ourselves,’” Lewis (1996) explains. “Out of ourselves, into Christ, we must go. His will is to become ours and we are to think His thoughts, to ‘have the mind of Christ’” (p. 189). This is not, however, a betrayal of our true selves. Rather, “the more we get what we now call ‘ourselves’ out of the way and let Him take us over, the more truly ourselves we become” (p. 189). Lewis further states:

Our real selves are all waiting for us in Him. The more I resist Him and try to live on my own, the more I become dominated by my own heredity and upbringing and natural desires. . . . It is when I turn to Christ, when I give myself up to His Personality, that I first begin to have a real personality of my own. (p. 190)

This sort of thing is a dramatic departure from Rogers’s assumption that the true self is hidden under some façade created to appease the arbitrary moral expectations of others. In contrast, from Lewis’s perspective, the true self is found in giving up our own will and turning ourselves over to Christ. Lewis (1996) continues:

Give up your self, and you will find your real self. Lose your life and you will save it. Submit to death, death of your ambitions and favorite wishes every day and death of your whole body in the end: submit with every fiber of your being, and you will find eternal life.” (p. 191)

To give up the self, Lewis (1996) notes, is nothing less than to “hand over the whole natural self, all the desires which you think innocent as well as the ones you think wicked—the whole outfit” (p. 169). In so doing, Christ promises all: “I will give you a new self instead. In fact, I will give you Myself: my own will shall become yours” (Lewis, 1996, p. 169). In submitting to Christ in genuine discipleship, Lewis (1970) explains, Christ will give us a new self to replace the old. “Self-renunciation is thought to be, and indeed is near the core of Christian ethics” (p. 193). Indeed, the Savior taught, “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it” (Luke 9:23–24).

There are, of course, an array of consequences of becoming a disciple of Christ. First, when Christ’s commandments have been institutionalized into tradition, the disciple follows those rules and strives to adhere to those expectations. This is not done because one wishes to serve tradition or social convention but rather because one seeks to serve Christ. When that happens, tradition and convention cease to be *self-stifling* and instead becomes *self-transforming*. Tradition can assist us in our discipleship. However, this is by no means always a very quick or painless process. Rather, it is often a long and sometimes painful process of self-transformation. It is a journey, a pilgrimage of sorts, and one that sometimes takes a lifetime. In earlier parts of that journey—while we are still new in our sojourn with Christ—we might still be feeling the competing demands of self and tradition. However, the ordinances of the gospel of Jesus Christ that we often associate with “enduring to the end,” such as the sacrament and the temple ordinances, are designed to scaffold this self-transformative journey. In addition, when traditions are at odds with or different from Christ’s commandments, the true disciple experiences less hesitation in disregarding them and feels less shame or guilt when he or she does. Because the disciple’s identity and purposes lie in Christ, he or she is not as beholden to the arbitrary standards that human beings tend to construct for themselves.

And, finally, as we give ourselves fully over to Christ, we begin to live less hypocritically in our lives. Interestingly, in this way, the goal of Rogerian psychology and

the process of spiritual conversion converge. Our *public* selves will, indeed, begin to reflect more completely our *private* selves.⁴ When we are publicly following the instructions of Christ (and, in so doing, perhaps adhering to traditions and customs that reflect those instructions) but inwardly wishing and wanting to do otherwise, we *are* engaging in a form of hypocrisy. It is true that we often put on a “pretense” of sorts when we are around others—particularly if we want to behave in ways they would disapprove of when they are not around. In many cases, we really are doing what Rogers claims we are doing: we are seeking the approbation of others at the expense of the self, and this is, indeed, a very unhealthy way of living. In the process of our conversion to Christ, however, we find the desires of our hearts changing, and we discover the gap between our public behavior and our inward desires shrinking—not because we are rebelling against the expectations of others but because we are becoming new creatures in Christ by adhering to His teachings and participating in His ordinances.

LOVE UNFEIGNED

As we turn ourselves over to Christ, we will not discover ourselves freed from “oughts,” “shoulds,” and “shouldn’ts.” In fact, we will find that quite the *opposite* is true. We learn from prophetic counsel and teachings that judgment, scrutiny, and evaluation are *not inherently* at odds with the kind of love God offers us, the purest form of love that we can know. In fact, the scriptures relentlessly teach us to anticipate a day in which we will be judged and evaluated by Him. As Elder Dallin H. Oaks (2000) explains, “The Final Judgment is not just an evaluation of a sum total of good and evil acts—what we have *done*. It is an acknowledgment of the final effect of our acts and thoughts—what we have *become*” (p. 1, italics added). This implies a level

4 We employ this distinction advisedly, being deeply suspicious of all subjective-objective dualisms and their ontological divisions of the world into inner realms and outer ones. Our intention here is not to lend weight to any form of Cartesianism or psychologism but rather simply to deploy a hopefully helpful descriptive metaphor without reading into it any dualistic metaphysics.

of scrutiny and evaluation unmatched by any mortal experience, and from a God who loves us more purely than it is possible for mortals to love—a notion that is utter heresy from within the humanistic worldview of Rogerian psychology and expressive individualism.

Because the term *unconditional love* has been hijacked by Rogerian concepts, we propose that as Latter-day Saints we make a more concerted effort to replace it with the term *unfeigned love*. In doing so, we will be employing a vocabulary whose origins are scriptural—something that Rogerian humanism cannot (and would not wish to) claim. Indeed, as Elder Russell M. Nelson (2003) has noted:

While divine love can be called perfect, infinite, enduring, and universal, it cannot correctly be characterized as *unconditional*. The word does not appear in the scriptures. On the other hand, many verses affirm that the higher levels of love the Father and the Son feel for each of us—and certain divine blessings stemming from that love—are *conditional*. (p. 20, emphases in the original)

McKee (1986) further elaborates, “While there are references and parables and stories of unfeigned love, there is not one single mention of the word or idea of unconditional love in holy writ” (p. 46). By more explicitly employing the term *unfeigned love*, we can perhaps avoid some of the more nefarious Rogerian connotations of the term *unconditional love*.

The key difference between the genuine, unfeigned love that God has for us (and that we should have for each other) and the “unconditional positive regard” that Rogerian humanism venerates as the cure for the struggle for sexual self-identity is that unfeigned love is *not* indifferent to the behavior and desires of those we love. When we genuinely love others, we are not indifferent to them or their sins—rather, we care about the sins of others *because* we love them. Someone who experiences unfeigned love toward others does not hold all life-paths as equal and does not react to all the choices of others in the same way. He or she might express joy when others make good choices and sorrow and perhaps disappointment when others make bad choices. These expressions of joy, happiness, sorrow, and disappointment in another person’s behavior are not variations in the degree of love but are themselves expressions of love—a love that is not indifferent to the eternal welfare of others.

Consider, for example, the experience of the sons of Mosiah, who after their conversion to Christ wished to preach the gospel of repentance to the Lamanites. Mormon describes their desires: “Now they were desirous that salvation should be declared to every creature, for they could not bear that any human soul should perish; yea, even the very thought that any soul should endure endless torment did cause them to quake and tremble” (Mosiah 28:3). As we draw closer to Christ, we grow in our desire to invite others to come unto Christ. We love the eloquent way Joseph Smith (1993) expressed the concept of love unfeigned:

Our heavenly Father is more liberal in His views, and boundless in His mercies and blessings, than we are ready to believe or receive. . . . God does not look on sin with [the least degree of] allowance, but . . . the nearer we get to our heavenly Father, the more we are disposed to look with compassion on perishing souls; we feel that we want to take them upon our shoulders, and cast their sins behind our backs. (p. 270)

In this teaching, we learn that compassion for those mired in sin or doubt or emotional and moral struggle does not require us to *overlook* their struggles or dismiss the reality of sin. Rather, it requires us to discern all the more accurately what the source of struggle and pain and sin is and how best to weed it out of our lives and the lives of those around us—all the while engaging others with meekness, gentleness, and hearts filled with a genuine, Christ-like love.

C. S. Lewis (1996) once wrote of God, “The great thing to remember is that, though our feelings come and go, His love for us does not. It is not wearied by our sins, or our indifference; and, therefore, it is quite relentless in its determination that we shall be cured of those sins, at whatever cost to us, at whatever cost to Him” (118). For this reason, unfeigned love is not incompatible with moral judgment. For example, in the Book of Mormon we read, “For behold, my brethren, it is given unto you to judge, that ye may know good from evil; and the way to judge is as plain . . . as the daylight is from the dark night. For behold, the Spirit of Christ is given to every man, that he may know good from evil” (Moroni 7:15–16). While we are instructed by Christ to forbear unrighteous judgment of others, we are *also* instructed to engage *righteous* judgment, which involves discerning what kinds of behaviors are right and wrong. Elder Dallin H. Oaks

(1999) explains, “The key is to understand that there are two kinds of judging: final judgments, which we are forbidden to make, and intermediate judgments, which we are directed to make, but upon righteous principles. . . . [A] righteous judgment will be guided by the Spirit of the Lord, not by anger, revenge, jealousy, or self-interest.” It is crucial, however, that we avoid pride, self-righteousness, and hypocrisy, because each of these is antithetical to unfeigned love and warps our ability to discern. As we humbly repent of our pride and relent in our self-interest, thereby allowing the Savior to more fully direct our steps and soften our hearts, we will find that the gospel of Christ is in fact the very loving “safe space” we have been seeking, one in which we are all the more able to “mourn with those that mourn; yea, and comfort those who stand in need of comfort” (Mosiah 18:9).

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this paper is a call to redouble our efforts as Latter-day Saints—both professional psychologists and lay members—to reframe an important dialogue about the nature and meaning of “safe spaces,” especially as we seek to extend the hand of fellowship and love to those individuals experiencing SSA. Nothing in this paper should be construed to suggest that there are not many things we can do better and differently as we pursue this goal. We hope only to extend a call for greater intellectual caution in our efforts at furthering this dialogue so that certain hidden and problematic cultural assumptions do not unnecessarily derail or misdirect the dialogue before it has a chance to bear important, and quite possibly soul-saving, fruit. We should ensure that our efforts to understand the meaning and possibility of a “safe space” do not neuter revealed truth of some of the potency that comes with a religion that makes demands of its adherents and lovingly invites them to make sacrifices as they strive to worship God and become one with Him and each other. We are convinced that LDS professionals and lay members should be wary of adopting the tenets of Rogerian humanism and expressive individualism as a measuring stick for determining whether the Church is or can provide a loving, compassionate space for all the children of God. We are likewise convinced that using Rogerian

terminology—particularly the way Rogerian thought conceptualizes love and hate—as the defining vocabulary of our discourse can only obscure and confuse it. Ultimately, the safe space the gospel offers each of us is discipleship. It is in genuine discipleship in Christ, in community with Christ and other disciples, that we find safety, comfort, real acceptance, and the abiding truth of our eternal identity.

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