

“ACCORDING TO THEIR WILLS AND PLEASURES”: THE SEXUAL STEREOTYPING  
OF MORMON MEN IN AMERICAN FILM AND TELEVISION

Travis Sutton, B.A.

Thesis Prepared for the Degree of  
MASTER OF ARTS

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH TEXAS

May 2009

APPROVED:

Harry M. Benshoff, Major Professor  
Sandra Larke-Walsh, Committee Member  
Claire Sahlin, Committee Member  
Sam Sauls, Program Coordinator  
Melinda Levin, Chair of the Department of Radio,  
Television and Film  
Michael Monticino, Interim Dean of the Robert B.  
Toulouse School of Graduate Studies

Sutton, Travis, "*According to Their Wills and Pleasures*": *The Sexual Stereotyping of Mormon Men in American Film and Television*. Master of Arts (Radio, Television and Film), May 2009, 187 pp., references, 107 titles.

This thesis examines the representation of Mormon men in American film and television, with particular regard for sexual identity and the cultural association of Mormonism with sexuality. The history of Mormonism's unique marital practices and doctrinal approaches to gender and sexuality have developed three common stereotypes for Mormon male characters: the purposeful heterosexual, the monstrous polygamist, and the self-destructive homosexual. Depending upon the sexual stereotype in the narrative, the Mormon Church can function as a proponent for nineteenth-century views of sexuality, a symbol for society's repressed sexuality, or a metaphor for the oppressive effects of performing gender and sexuality according to ideological constraints. These ideas are presented in Mormon films such as *Saturday's Warrior* (1989) as well as mainstream films such as *A Mormon Maid* (1917) and *Advise and Consent* (1962).

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Mormons and their views on sexuality received national attention during the theatrical release of *Brokeback Mountain* (2005), a critically-acclaimed film about two cowboys who maintain a closeted homosexual relationship throughout their lives. The Jordan Commons, a popular megaplex south of Salt Lake City, Utah, scheduled showings for the gay-themed film; however, hours before the first showing of *Brokeback Mountain*, Larry H. Miller, a prominent Latter-day Saint and owner of the megaplex, publicly refused his support for the film by canceling the scheduled screenings. His decision played out as controversial since *Hostel* (2005) and *The Producers* (2005) remained open the same day for exhibition at Miller's megaplex. Miller's decision appeared, to some, to communicate that the representation of a monstrous homosexual man performing gruesome human torture in *Hostel* was to be excused over the serious examination of male sexuality found in *Brokeback Mountain*, an examination that reached beyond the stereotypical effeminate gay men on display for audience laughter in *The Producers*. Miller, one Mormon man with heavy corporate power and influence in the Utah community, acted upon a value judgment that appeared to communicate that he preferred to mock or fear homosexual relationships rather than to seriously consider the reality of such relationships and the cultural climate that pressures such relationships to remain in the closet.

As can be interpreted from his decision, Miller is not comfortable with the way *Brokeback Mountain* presents male sexuality and American masculinity as having a potential for malleability, unpredictability, and nonconformity. Although *Brokeback Mountain* is commonly labeled as a “gay cowboy” movie, some critics resist and challenge the labeling of the main characters as “gay” because the two male characters do not self-identify as “gay” and their sexual activity within the narrative is predominantly heterosexual. In his reception study of the film, Harry Benshoff describes *Brokeback Mountain* as “an exemplary queer film, exploring diverse sexualities that cannot be easily labeled or described” (“Brokering *Brokeback Mountain*”). Benshoff’s use of the word “queer” to describe this particular film is significant because the main characters in the film challenge other popular labels such as “gay” and “straight.” The term “queer” recognizes a peculiarity that transcends known identity categories. Benshoff’s study acknowledges that “the film’s reception affirms, denies, and/or otherwise complicates the social constructions and popular understandings of male (homo)sexual desire” (“Brokering *Brokeback Mountain*”). Therefore, Benshoff’s study reveals that an inability for audiences to neatly categorize the two main characters in *Brokeback Mountain* within such binary social models as gay/straight or masculine/feminine potentially generates anxiety for both conservative and liberal communities who may respond to the film. Benshoff also identifies several theater owners in Texas who, like Miller, chose not to exhibit *Brokeback Mountain* at their particular venue, including one theater in Childress, Texas, where a portion of the story of *Brokeback Mountain* takes place. For social conservative Larry H. Miller, his decision to cancel the scheduled screenings of the film

reached a level of publicity to the extent that Heath Ledger, a star of the film, commented in an Australian newspaper about the “Mormons in Utah” and “their problem” with regarding the film as controversial (“Ledger Blasts”).

Ultimately, Miller’s choice and its subsequent news coverage reveal the complexities behind such issues as representation and advocacy, values and tolerance, and Mormons and sexuality. This project will examine such complexities and their relationships to social systems of power; therefore, this project will examine Mormon representation in film and television and interpret what such representations communicate about Mormons, sexuality, values, tolerance, and their interplay with cultural power systems. As these chapters will examine, there is a curious negotiation in the way cultural texts, specifically movies and television shows, present Mormons and their sexuality; that is, texts produced for Mormon audiences generally present a specific, idealized, and purposeful (hetero)sexuality, and this representation opposes texts that are produced for non-Mormon audiences that present Mormons and their sexuality as queer, monstrous, and/or self-destructive. Some cultural theorists explain “that since queer is a positionality [... it] can be taken up by anyone who feels marginalized as a result of their sexual practices” (Sullivan 44). In the nineteenth century, Mormons were marginalized for their queer sexual practice of marrying multiple partners. Since that time, the development of film and television has allowed for the display of Mormon characters, and the uniqueness of these characters is in many ways attached to their approach to sexuality. Accordingly, sexuality in the Mormon experience remains in a position of queerness as perceived by Western culture.



The sexual identities of Mormon characters in film and television are crucial in determining representation. This research project identifies three different sexual stereotypes that can be found in the presentation of Mormon identities: the purposeful heterosexual, the monstrous polygamist, and the self-destructive homosexual. These stereotypes are most prominently manifest in the representation of Mormon men. For that reason, this project will examine the significance of gender in the construction of these stereotypes and how that construction interacts with the representation of Mormon women. There are also instances of masculine and feminine forms of these stereotypes, which this project will address. Nevertheless, when these stereotypes are identified, unless otherwise noted, it is the masculine identity that is being referenced.

I am also using the term “stereotype” in a broad sense that can include both negative and/or pragmatic connotations. Stereotyping usually is perceived as a negative process because it can function to diminish a group of people to a simplified set of identifiable characteristics. A cultural practice of over-simplifying other groups or cultures and reducing them to a set of characteristics can be derogatory. In his collection of essays on cultural representation, Richard Dyer argues that the process of stereotyping is not always intended to be abusive. Dyer draws upon the work of Walter Lippman who introduced the term “stereotype” (11). According to Dyer, Lippman describes stereotyping as “a necessary, indeed inescapable, part of the way societies make sense of themselves” (12). With the prevalence of difference in a society, stereotypes function similarly to the human mind as it attempts to group and make connections in order to understand everything it encounters. For Dyer, the process of stereotyping is not the

main concern, “but who controls and defines [the stereotypes], what interests they serve” (12). Dyer introduces the exercise of power with the development of stereotypes, and a similar process is being applied to this project. These Mormon stereotypes might be part of a process of society trying to understand a religious group, or these stereotypes might be part of an abusive process of limiting the definition of a religious group. Therefore, the systems of power that control and define these stereotypes and for what purposes are significant questions that motivate this project.

The three Mormon stereotypes appear to reinforce or resist different types of cultural discourse. Media texts with purposeful heterosexuals or monstrous polygamists tend to reinforce heteronormative and patriarchal discourses in culture. However, media texts with self-destructive homosexuals tend to resist such discourses. At the same time, media texts with monstrous polygamists and self-destructive homosexuals tend to be critical of Mormon history, theology, and experience while media texts with purposeful heterosexuals are not. Though different in some ways, these three stereotypes overlap with the messages they present about gender, sexuality, and Mormonism. Furthermore, all three of these stereotypes present the Mormon institution and its culture as compliant with heteronormative and patriarchal forms of discourse.

### Power Systems, Ideology, and Cultural Discourse

Miller’s decision regarding *Brokeback Mountain* can be seen as a small (and literal) example of how cultural perceptions of different groups of people, such as gay men, can be influenced by what those in power choose to present (or not to present) about

each group of people. Miller had a particular preference for how he wished to present male sexuality in his privately owned megaplex. As a practicing Mormon in the Salt Lake City community, it would probably be safe to assume that Miller's decision was influenced, at least in part, by his religion's standards of sexual morality, which condemn homosexual behavior. However, it is necessary to place the example of Miller's action within an appropriate context. Miller is an individual, who happens to own a megaplex, and as an individual he is a product of larger mechanisms of power in his culture that enforce and resist different ideas about sexuality. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, the religious institution to which he belongs, is also a product of a much larger network of power systems that enforce and resist different cultural ideas. This paper will draw from specific examples, such as texts, individuals, or institutions, with the purpose of examining this much larger network of power systems. The object of concern in this project is systemic and not merely an isolation and interpretation of prejudices that can be found in specific movies, people, or theology. The interpretations in this project are made in order to examine the much larger cultural systems of power in matters of human sexuality.

In Louis Althusser's studies on Marxist theory and social systems of power, he includes religious institutions as an example of what he calls ideological state apparatuses (ISAs)(142). Ideological state apparatuses shape popular modes of thought by instilling an ideology into a cultural population. An ideology is a specific system of thought or set of ideas that is accepted by a cultural population, and this population does not question the ideology because it becomes part of their existence by how that population perceives

and assumes reality. Althusser writes, “Ideology represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence” (162). Individuals can be conditioned to perceive reality in a certain way that benefits other individuals. Those who benefit from an ideology at the expense of others are called “oppressors.” The unequal relationship between the oppressors and the oppressed is maintained because of the nature of ideology. Ideological state apparatuses, such as churches as well as institutions in medicine, politics, and education, are effective in disseminating ideology into the population because that process is difficult for the receptive population to recognize. The ideological process is more gradual and passive than the violent enforcement of ideology performed by what Althusser calls repressive state apparatuses (RSAs), such as law enforcement, military, war, and other systems that control ideas and behavior through coercion and violence (137). RSAs and ISAs are not completely independent from another. They blur together and often reinforce one another’s operation. For example, those subjects who choose to participate in enforcing an ideology through RSAs must be convinced of that ideology, typically through a history of being subjected to that ideology through ISAs (Althusser 148-150).

What Althusser references as the “ruling ideology” or dominant ideology is the ideology that is operative in the population, the set of ideologies that have been internalized and assumed by the population. This dominant ideology benefits the ruling class in the population; however, the dominant ideology encounters resistance on multiple levels and is always in negotiation with other ideologies (132-133). Althusser introduces these ideas with an interest in economic systems and class levels. In his essay

“Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation),” Althusser focuses on how the ruling classes in capitalist social systems are able to reproduce labor production from exploited classes on a continual basis (130). This is done through the exercise of ideology. Although ideas from Karl Marx and Louis Althusser focus on class systems, many cultural theorists have appropriated their ideas into other areas of social construction. In this way, the dominant ideology includes assumptions regarding race, gender, sexuality, and class. These different aspects of individual identity operate together within a dominant ideology that generates social levels. In American culture the dominant ideology is described by some cultural theorists as “white patriarchal capitalism” (Benshoff and Griffin *America on Film* 9). “Heteronormative” can be included in this description because of the ideological domination and privileging of heterosexual monogamy in American culture. The dominant ideology of white patriarchal heteronormative capitalism privileges some groups while marginalizing and exploiting others, and these privileged and exploited groups may or may not recognize on a conscious level their position in such an ideological operation.

Because ideologies shape how populations understand their reality, it is difficult for such populations to recognize such ideologies for critical evaluation. Michel Foucault writes, “Power is tolerable only on condition that it mask a substantial part of itself. Its success is proportional to its ability to hide its own mechanisms [...] For it, secrecy is not in the nature of an abuse; it is indispensable to its operation” (Foucault *History of Sexuality* 86). A dominant ideology operates most effectively when those under its subordination do not recognize their subordination. This can occur when women do not

see that relegation to a private sphere enables men to manipulate the public sphere for male interests; it can occur when gay men pay for therapies to alter their sexuality to be in accordance with what they perceive to be the only viable human condition; it can occur when girls of color prefer white dolls as objects of female beauty. On a systemic level, there are people who benefit from a certain ideology and resist its negotiation by those who may be exploited or marginalized by that same ideology, and this ideological conflict can occur in both conscious and unconscious levels.

In addition to recognizing power's invisibility, Foucault perceives the operations of power systems in a more expansive way, and he applies this perception in his multi-volume work *The History of Sexuality*. Foucault broadens his conception of power systems to the point where he advises that "one needs to be nominalistic" when approaching the idea (*History of Sexuality* 93). He writes about

The omnipresence of power: not because it has the privilege of consolidating everything under its invincible unity, but because it is produced from one moment to the next, at every point, or rather in every relation from one point to another. Power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere [...] power is not an institution, and not a structure [...] it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society. (Foucault *History of Sexuality* 93)

With Foucault's model, neither the Mormon Church, nor Larry H. Miller, nor I can operate or contemplate outside of the ever-present condition of power systems, yet the

Mormon Church, Larry H. Miller, and I continue to reinforce and produce the exercise of power systems. In Foucault's first volume of *The History of Sexuality*, he describes power as "mobile" and coming from an "interplay" of "innumerable points" (94); because of the multiple points of power production, there is no duality of "ruler and ruled" but "manifold relationships of force" (95); power is "intentional and nonsubjective" meaning that power operates for a specific goal but a goal not determined by a specific group or person (94-95); power also encounters a "plurality of resistances" that behave in various ways or degrees (95-96).

For Foucault, it is far too simplistic (excusing my opening example) to point to an individual such as Larry H. Miller, the Pope, or the President of the United States and argue that he is responsible for a specific cultural system of power from which he consciously benefits. Systems of power that form social attitudes are bigger than these individuals. Systems of power are also bigger than such institutions as the Mormon Church, the Roman Catholic Church, and the United States Government. Each of these institutions is penetrated by the power system network in one way or another, and each institution maintains a dynamic relationship of compliance and resistance to such systems. Recognizing the inescapable presence of power systems in culture can reveal how power systems are exercised and resisted through individual choices, expressions, and performances in a cultural population. In the ongoing process of individuals interpreting their reality, it is necessary to acknowledge the context of the exercise of power that penetrates any individual's interpretation.

With Foucault's nominalistic approach to power in mind, he goes on to examine the way Western culture incorrectly obsesses over its perceived repression of sexuality, and he does this through a strategy of looking at cultural discourse. He writes

And these discourses on sex did not multiply apart from or against power, but in the very space and as the means of its exercise [...] We are dealing less with *a* discourse on sex than with a multiplicity of discourses produced by a whole series of mechanisms operating in different institutions. (*History of Sexuality* 32-33)

Discourse, since it is developed in the service of power systems and part of their strategies, can be examined to interpret power systems and their directions. Returning to the theories of Althusser, analyzing discourse can reveal the dissemination of a dominant ideology and the participation of ideological state apparatuses in the construction of cultural attitudes and assumptions. This means that there are many cultural systems of power that shape (and are shaped by) religious institutions, and these systems of power benefit when they shape a cultural body to perceive sexuality in a specific way. This research project will examine how cultural presentations of Mormons in film and television are chosen to present specific messages about sexuality and this religious group by what are chosen to be (or not to be) presented by cultural systems of power.

### Sexuality Identity and Queer Theory

Because this project will approach specific cultural discourses on sexuality and their connection with a religious system, it is necessary to establish the framework of



sexuality that I will be assuming in each of the chapters. It is not my intention to place value judgments upon specific sexual activities or identities presented in media texts, and I will consciously minimize an “us”- versus-“them” attitude in my language. Though the religious community that is the focus of this project has many explicit boundaries and instructions on sexual matters, this project will examine the representation of sexual activity and identity through a postmodern lens. That is to say, I recognize an expectation of heterosexual monogamy in Western culture, and I join with cultural theorists who question the placement of heterosexual monogamy as the expectation. This requires a critical approach to the language and definitional boundaries the culture uses for sexual identity, desire, and activity.

Queer theory is a field of cultural criticism that aims to challenge culturally established ideas of sexual identities, relationships, and activities. Drawing upon the practice of postmodern thought, queer theory provides a forum where identity labels and expectations can be critically evaluated. Initially, some resisted (and still do) the adoption of a once pejorative term to identify a body of critical thought, but the term “queer” is appropriate in many ways. The ideas that can result from criticizing long-held notions of sexuality will usually be in the realm of the peculiar for the cultural mainstream. The reason for this peculiarity is important. Thus, an exploration of the mysteries that challenge assumed sexual normality requires a term that identifies that area outside of normality.

Although queer theory frequently examines issues that are significant to lesbian and gay communities, this system of thought is not isolated to the service of such communities. “Queer” is useful

As an umbrella term for dissimilar subjects, whose collectivity is underwritten by a mutual engagement in non-normative sexual practices or identities. In its broadest usages, queer describes not only lesbian and gay, but also—and not exhaustively—transsexual, transgender and bisexual individuals. As what Louise Sloan calls ‘the oxymoronic community of difference’ ... queer posits a commonality between people which does not disallow their fundamental difference. (Duggan 19 qtd. in Jagose 111-112)

“Queer” allows one to conceptualize a community outside of the dominant ideology, yet the differences within that community are not erased. Moreover, this term for a community of difference must be used with the reminder that “queer is less an identity than a *critique* of identity” (Jagose 131). The queer community challenges the ruling ideology of sexual identity, and a significant part of that challenge is to problematize identity as a whole.

Because queer theory enables a process of complicating sexual normality, this theoretical tool requires a constant redefinition outside of that normality. Thus, queer theory resists definition. In her introduction to this body of critical thought, Annamarie Jagose affirms that “part of queer’s semantic clout, part of its political efficacy, depends on its resistance to definition”; moreover, she clarifies that one must assume “that queer

is a 'zone of possibilities' [...] that it cannot yet quite articulate" (1-2). Though queer theory resists normalization through a clear-cut articulation and definition, it is clear that much of the purpose and effectiveness of queer theory lies in "the debunking of stable sexes, genders and sexualities" (Jagose 3). Resisting a definition does not mean queer theory can be anything and everything. Queer theory has a strategy that requires a complication of the "normal" and the "strange" in matters of sexuality, and this strategy opens a forum for ideas, anxieties, and interest in issues that include sexuality, identity, and activity.

There are a couple of important concerns that have surfaced in the development of queer theory since the 1990s, concerns which stretch back to the early Homophile and Gay Liberation movements of previous decades. These concerns are also relevant to matters of religion and sexuality, so they will be referenced throughout this project. The first is related to the nature-versus-nurture argument of sexual identity and desire; that is, is sexual identity and desire determined through biological factors or social conditioning? Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has described this popular concern as a "compulsory set piece for the Introduction to any gay-oriented book written in the late 1980s," and Sedgwick has concluded that "a conceptual deadlock between the two opposing views has by now been built into the very structure of every theoretical tool we have for undertaking it" (40). While I follow Sedgwick's example to forgo an attempt to argue either side of this issue because of the now existing "conceptual deadlock," it is important to recognize that both views still exist. Thus, queer theory attempts to complicate both.

Theorists frequently distinguish between each perspective of the nature-versus-nurture argument as “essentialist” or “constructionist” positions. “Whereas essentialists regard identity as natural, fixed and innate, constructionists assume identity is fluid, the effect of social conditioning and available cultural models for understanding oneself” (Jagose 8). Sedgwick expresses some anxiety about using these terms as a binary model because she feels that they miss significant questions. Essentialist or constructionist perspectives often point to a concern for the cause of the queer identity, which frequently leads to the “Western project or fantasy of eradicating that identity” (Sedgwick 40, 41). Sedgwick prefers the terms “minoritizing” and “universalizing.” Not only do these terms address the question about biology and culture but they also distinguish between those perspectives where “homo/heterosexual definition [is] an issue of continuing centrality and difficulty” (Sedgwick 40). It is important for some to find an inherent difference between “heterosexual” and “homosexual” while for others it is not. The minoritizing/essentialist perspective seeks this definable boundary so as to plainly mark a homosexual identity and, thus, a sexual minority. In this view identity is fixed, which is usually through biology. In contrast, the universalizing/constructionist perspective recognizes the fluidity of sexuality in any individual, especially in different social conditions. Sexuality is open, dynamic, and does not necessitate definable boundaries; however, it is important in the universalizing perspective to recognize how cultures limit and define the fluid nature of sexuality.

As a theoretical framework that complicates such ideas as the naturalness of gender, the purpose of sexual pleasure, and the language surrounding sexuality, writers in

queer theory frequently assume a more universalizing view of sexuality. However, the boundary between universalizing and minoritizing perspectives can be complex. Much of the early work in gay and lesbian civil rights was founded upon a strategy of distinguishing queer identities as biologically determined. Thus, a queer identity was not the result of a person's choice. This minoritizing perspective was effective with resisting sexual conformity, and this resistance encouraged the dominant culture to change. A universalizing approach might have been less persuasive to the dominant culture. Through a universalizing approach, the ruling ideology of heteronormativity would have been seen as a mere choice in the possibilities of sexuality. Ruling ideologies oppose alternative ideologies and do not favor choices when it means that their dominating position is to be threatened. Consequently, a minoritizing perspective has been effective with resisting the ruling ideology of sexuality despite the acknowledged complexity between minoritizing and universalizing perspectives.

### Sexual Perspectives and Religious Discourse

In many ways, leaders in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints adopt a universalizing view of sexuality. Mormon theology recognizes a diversity of sexual passions and appetites. However, the recognition that such desires exist is not important because devout Latter-day Saints make a sacred covenant of obedience to keep sexual activity and passions "within the bounds the Lord has set" (Toscano and Toscano 261). These bounds are currently (but not always) in accordance with the dominant ideology of heterosexual monogamy. For many Mormons, the fact that there are people who desire

sexual relations, identities, and activities outside of such boundaries is irrelevant because sex acts are a matter of obedience to God's law. A core tenet of Mormonism states that it is through Jesus Christ's atonement "that all mankind may be saved by obedience to the laws and ordinances of the gospel" (Article of Faith 3). As one former Mormon recalls,

Latter-day Saints are reminded constantly over the pulpit – and through manuals, official publications, and stated policies – that nothing is more important than unswerving observance of church standards. Love may be the first principle, but obedience is surely the first law of heaven. (Pace 252)

This objective of perfect obedience to divine texts and Church authority in Mormon culture, despite a reality that may exist beyond such boundaries of obedience, is important to understand the general mindset of a devout Mormon believer and his or her participation with power systems in culture.

There are some Mormons who internalize specific sexual identities, such as lesbians and gays, yet they seek inclusion in a church with divinely appointed boundaries for sexual activity. These people's main argument for a goal of religious inclusion is minoritizing. Similar with the early gay rights movement, these Mormons affirm that their human condition is innate yet cannot function within the established boundaries of obedience. The national support group Affirmation: Gay and Lesbian Mormons, founded in the 1970s, claims in its Mission that "sexual orientation is an inherent part of each individual," and the association's General Charter argues that "homosexuality and

homosexual relationships can be consistent with and supported by the Gospel of Jesus Christ” (“General Charter”). This minoritizing perspective is Affirmation’s main strategy to challenge the heteronormative position of Church leaders. The leadership of the Church affirms a universalizing perspective of sexuality that requires a divine boundary of monogamous heterosexuality.

The difference between the minoritizing and the universalizing perspective of sexuality can be complex, especially in matters of religious devotion. Though the Church adopts a universalizing approach in many ways, sexual behavior is still a serious matter and must be defined within a moral boundary to maintain inerrancy among believers. Church members who do err are frequently subjected to confession to a church authority and some form of Church discipline, such as excommunication. These ramifications show the importance of critically evaluating minoritizing and universalizing approaches to sexuality. Sedgwick writes

While there are certainly rhetorical and political grounds on which it may make sense to choose at a given moment between articulating, for instance, essentialist and constructivist (or minoritizing and universalizing) accounts of gay [or queer] identity, there are, with equal certainty, rhetorical and political grounds for underwriting continuously the legitimacy of both accounts ... Repeatedly to ask how certain categorizations work, what enactments they are performing and what relations they are creating, rather than what they essentially *mean*, has been my principal strategy. (Sedgwick 27)

This project will follow Sedgwick's strategy of recognizing how either perspective functions in the sexual stereotyping of Mormon men in film and television. Each perspective appears to serve a specific purpose in various contexts; accordingly, minoritizing and universalizing views produce and resist the exercise of cultural power systems.

### "A Religion that Became a People"

In the nineteenth century the Mormons were persecuted and marginalized by the culture around them, and this marginalization united them as a people. Mormons challenged dominant ideologies through their experiments with communal living, practice of polygamy, and opposition to slavery. Ultimately, they grew tired of resisting the cultural systems of power that fueled their ongoing persecution. This led to their withdrawal from the country and settlement in the Utah territory. One writer observes,

The Mormons are perhaps the only American ethnic group whose principal migration began as an effort to move out of the United States ...

It differentiates the Mormons from members of other sects and lends support to the judgment of the sociologist Thomas F. O'Dea that the Mormons 'represent the clearest example to be found in our national history of the evolution of a native and indigenously developed ethnic minority.' (May 47)

Literary critic Harold Bloom also categorizes the Mormons as an ethnic minority. In his view, "There are now about as many Mormons in our nation and the world as there are



Jews, and [...] the Mormons, like the Jews before them, are a religion that became a people” (Bloom 83). Describing the Mormons as an ethnic minority as O’Dea and Bloom do complicates the Mormon label, but an ethnic identity also distinguishes this religious movement from others in an important way. Mormonism is a religion that demands more of its members beyond attending Sunday worship services and making periodic contributions.

The Mormons have a history and theology that devout members internalize on a deep level. Such an internalization and devotion binds families, communities, and creates a people. Bloom uses the word “organized” when describing the Mormon people because he acknowledges the Mormon doctrine that God did not create the universe but organized it.

Organization, replacing creation, becomes a sacred idea, and every good Mormon indeed remains an organization man or woman. The visitor to Salt Lake City, after just four days, has learned to tell the difference between certain Mormons and most Gentiles at first sight. There is something *organized* about the expressions on many Mormon faces as they go by in the street. (Bloom 116)

Bloom recognizes “something” that separates the Mormon people from non-Mormon people, and it is something he does not attempt to fully articulate. Mormons might identify that “something” to be the spirit of God who dwells with His people. Opponents of Mormonism might call that “something” the product of brainwashing. Either way, the Mormon idea of organization that Bloom applies to the Mormon culture reveals

something about the process of developing identities within cultures. This further motivates a critical evaluation of power systems that can propel this process of organization. Nevertheless, the Mormon people remain as a community and ethnicity that is set apart in many ways from much of Western culture. And the Mormon community continues to grow in population and experience since its beginnings in the nineteenth century.

Mormonism is rooted in the spring of 1820. Joseph Smith, a fourteen-year-old farm boy in New York, did not know which church to join. Joseph knelt in prayer in the woods near his home. He later recorded a few versions of the event that followed this particular prayer. His 1838 account, now canonized in Mormon scripture, testifies, “I saw a pillar of light exactly over my head [...] When the light rested upon me I saw two Personages [...] standing above me in the air. One of them spake unto me, calling me by name and said, pointing to the other – This is My Beloved Son, Hear Him!” (“Joseph Smith” 1:16-17). Joseph testified that he saw both God and Jesus Christ in bodily form that spring day. In regards to his question about church membership, Joseph was answered “that [he] must join none of them, for they were all wrong” (Joseph Smith 1:19)

A few years later, Joseph was visited by the angel Moroni. Moroni instructed Joseph of a hill where an ancient record written on golden plates was hidden. Deposited with the golden plates were other ancient articles including the Urim and Thummim, “stones” which “God had prepared ... for the purpose of translating the book” (“Joseph Smith” 1:35). Joseph Smith translated the golden plates through revelation and use of the Urim and Thummim. The translation was published as *The Book of Mormon*. It contains

the record of an ancient civilization, prophetic instruction, and Jesus Christ's visitation on the American continent during biblical times. During the translation of this book, other heavenly messengers appeared to Joseph Smith to bestow priesthood authority upon him to be a leader for God's church, and the Church was established in 1830 as "the only true and living church upon the face of the whole earth" (Doctrine and Covenants 1:30). Believers accepted this church to be a restored version of the original church that Jesus Christ had organized with his apostles after his resurrection in the New Testament. According to Mormons, the church that Jesus Christ established faded into obscurity after the death of his apostles, but Christ anticipated a time to restore his church in the latter days.

Joseph Smith organized additional leaders and congregations as the Church grew in membership. The Saints, which the members of the Church were called, settled in Ohio and built a temple; however, persecution drove them out of Ohio to Missouri then Illinois. In 1844, Joseph Smith and his brother, Hyrum, were murdered by an angry mob. After a brief period of confusion and disorganization after Joseph's death, Brigham Young was accepted by many of the Church members to become the next prophet and leader of the Church. He took the Saints west "to the place where the Lord shall locate a stake of Zion" (Doctrine and Covenants 136:10). The Saints settled in the valley of the Great Salt Lake and expanded to many other parts of the area. The Church's headquarters, managed by a prophet and quorum of apostles, still functions today in Salt Lake City, Utah.

When cultural texts speak of “the Mormons” they typically refer to the members of the now Utah-based Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. This institution affirms itself to be God’s true church on the Earth with divine Priesthood authority, a living prophet, twelve apostles, and continuing divine revelation. However, like many other religious movements, Joseph’s “religion-making imagination” inspired other groups to break away and form independent sects that are separate from the Latter-day Saints (Bloom 96). The most significant period for the development of offshoot organizations was immediately after Joseph Smith’s death. The acceptance of Brigham Young as the leader of Smith’s movement was not unanimous among Church members. A portion of the Saints went to Wisconsin. They were led by a recent convert to the Church, James Strang, who argued that a letter from Joseph Smith revealed that he should be the next prophet (Allen and Leonard 240). Others followed Sydney Rigdon, who was Smith’s counselor in the Church Presidency. Sydney Rigdon also claimed the position to lead the church. He took his followers to Pennsylvania (Allen and Leonard 240).

Other Mormons who did not accept Brigham Young, James Strang, or Sydney Rigdon as the succeeding prophet and leader of the Church later grouped together to establish the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. This group included Emma Smith who was Joseph Smith’s first wife. They believed the next prophet was to be Joseph Smith’s son who was eleven-years-old at the time of his father’s death; thus, they ordained apostles to lead the Church until 1860 when the young Joseph was ordained prophet-president for the Reorganized Church. This church has since that time changed its name to the Community of Christ; it differs greatly in doctrine

and structure from the Utah-based church. Members of the Community of Christ reject Joseph's account of seeing God the Father and Jesus Christ as "two Personages." They accept, with other mainstream Protestant sects, the doctrine that "The one eternal, living God is triune: one God in three persons" (Faith and Beliefs).

Other sects would break away during the latter part of the nineteenth century when the prophet of the Utah-based Church Wilford Woodruff proclaimed, "The Lord showed me by vision and revelation exactly what would take place if we did not stop this practice [of plural marriage]" (*Doctrine and Covenants* – Declaration 1). Prior to this announcement, the United States Government had been passing legislation to disable the Church and the territory for its practice of polygamy. When the Church agreed to abandon the marriage practice, the Government in turn allowed the territory to become the State of Utah. However, some believers rejected Woodruff's revelation to discontinue plural marriage, and they continue the practice today as breakaway sects. These sects include the Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and the Latter-day Church of Christ. Non-polygamist sects have also continued to develop in recent decades, such as the Restoration Church of Jesus Christ with a predominantly gay and lesbian membership. None of these offshoot organizations compare closely to the magnitude of membership and resources of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

## Defining a Mormon

Comprehending a Mormon identity can be complex since there are various religious sects that differ in theology and practice yet claim their origins to be with Joseph Smith and the publication of *The Book of Mormon*. However, in much of Western culture “Mormons” are typically assumed to be members of the Utah-based Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Most of the movies and television shows in this study assume such a connection. This cultural assumption perhaps arises from the size of the Church and its rigorous proselytizing effort that places the institution and its people in the public consciousness.

There has been an effort in recent decades by the Utah-based church to distance its members from the label “Mormon” for other terms such as “Latter-day Saint.” This transition may be due to the negative connotation “Mormon” has in much of the Christian population. Many Christian denominations spurn the Mormon Church’s additional scriptures, Biblical modifications, and unique doctrines. Nevertheless, the terms “Mormon” and “Mormonism” are so ingrained in the discourse of popular culture and academia that I will continue to use these terms as well as other terms such as “Latter-day Saint,” “LDS,” or simply “the Church.” My incorporation of all these terms is not intended to reflect any sort of contempt or disrespect for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints or its members. When appropriate, I will discuss the other religious sects that also originate from Joseph Smith. However, I will not be referring to these breakaway groups when I speak of “Mormons” or “Latter-day Saints.” I will specify distinct religious denominations when necessary.

Even if I define “Mormons” in this project as members of the Utah-based church, there are other areas of complexity surrounding religious identity. I was raised south of Salt Lake City just steps away from an LDS Temple, the Missionary Training Center, and Brigham Young University. The Mormon Church has a membership level that spans across the globe, and I am aware that my perception of Mormon culture and doctrine may be colored by the attitudes and behaviors of the communities specific to the Rocky Mountains. These communities have been distinguished by some writers as “Deseret Mormons” (May 53). “Deseret” is a term found in *The Book of Mormon* (Ether 2:3) that means “honeybee.” In the nineteenth century the Saints petitioned for their State to be named “Deseret” for the word’s connotation to industry, but the State was named “Utah” in allusion to the Ute Indians. Since I grew up in Utah, much of my interpretation of Mormon culture and doctrine will come from my experience and instruction among Deseret Mormons. Moreover, many of the movies in this project present Mormon characters as Deseret Mormons. So while I recognize the existence of faithful Latter-day Saints in countries and cultures around the globe, the Mormons that this project will comprehend and interpret are specifically limited to Deseret Mormons.

Furthermore, there are multiple levels of identification that are possible with a Mormon identity. Sedgwick writes, “After all, to identify *as* must always include multiple processes of identification *with*. It also involves identification *as against*” (*Epistemology* 61). For a religious identity, there are levels in which inner conviction and outside practice work together. In her essay “Beyond the Stereotypes: Mormon and Non-Mormon Communities in Twentieth-Century Mormondom,” Jan Shipps, a prominent

non-Mormon scholar of Mormon Studies, constructs what she calls a “belief/behavior continuum” (152). She places different groups of people who could all be identified as Mormons onto this continuum. Shipps includes breakaway sects while assuming that “Mormon” means the Utah-based church. This continuum begins with the extreme fundamentalist Mormon, who rejects the Church’s 1890 manifesto to discontinue the practice of plural marriage. Conversely, this continuum stretches to the opposite extreme of former Mormons who are fueled by antagonism and threatened by the Church hierarchy and “anything Mormon” (152 - 154). This continuum complicates religious identity while acknowledging the various individuals defined, in part, as a member of the Mormon ethnic minority. Currently, I would situate myself near the center of Shipps’ continuum as an “ethnic” Mormon because I “do not take much of a role in church activities” because of my sexual orientation, but I believe many of my “thought patterns [to still be] formed by their immersion in Mormon doctrine” (153). This study will predominantly define “Mormons” as “superorthodox” and “orthodox Mormons.” These are active members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Orthodox Mormons are not as extreme in their religion as the “fundamentalist Mormons” who practice plural marriage, but orthodox Mormons are obedient to Church policies, accept *The Book of Mormon* as a divine record, and are regularly involved in Church activities and responsibilities (152-153).

Despite the difficulty of examining a religious community and its culture, the Mormon institutional system is constructed in such a way that my experience and analysis regarding Mormon culture may be less problematic than a similar analysis



performed on other religious denominations. Church leadership follows a setup similar to many corporate systems in that a network of leadership is established to assess and report church activity and practice. Leaders within a local congregation, such as those responsible for the youth, Relief Society (female), or Priesthood (male) classes of people report to the Bishop or Branch President of the local congregation. The Bishop reports to a Stake President or other area authority, and reports continue up a chain of command. This international system stretches up to the prophet and president of the Church and his associates in Salt Lake City. Local leaders are provided with specific instructions from upper-level leaders who determine Church policies. In addition to the similarities with a corporate setup, tithes from the Church members are centralized with the upper levels of Church leadership. Church assessment on financial revenue and resources are a matter of strict confidentiality, unlike other large religious organizations but similar to many large corporations (Ostling and Ostling 115).

A description of this top-down Church setup emphasizes the whole and single body that is the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Specific church attendance, which includes location, congregation, and time of worship, depends entirely upon the geographic location of the Latter-day Saint resident. This means when a devout Mormon moves to a new apartment, he or she will quickly learn of the time and location of church services within jurisdiction for that particular apartment, even if friends or family attend a congregation at another time and place. This brings order to a worldwide membership mass, and it also means whether a Mormon attends the eleven o'clock or one o'clock worship service in Abilene, Texas or Wellington, New Zealand, the practice, instruction,

organization, and often the appearance of the Church building will be almost exactly the same. Moreover, the Church does not tolerate criticism of its leaders, as they are men and women who are “called of God,” and leaders are often quick to silence and correct misinformed instruction, vocal dissent, and doctrinal criticism among its members. This not only prevents believers from questioning their faith but it also maintains an international consistency that is crucial for a church that prides itself as being the only true church on the earth.

The Church’s organizational system is important to consider in a critical setting. Because consistency is crucial for the institution, the Church and its orthodox members can be described in this limited way. The Church also has a specific level of expectation for obedience from its members. Leaders hold Latter-day Saints accountable for their daily actions in order to fully participate in Church callings (jobs), responsibilities, and regular temple attendance, which is separate from Sunday worship services. This regulated system of membership behavioral accountability provides a somewhat definable orthodox identity among the various identifications within the ethnicity of Mormonism.

### Mormons and Movies

Filmmakers have been trying to define Mormons through representation since the early days of motion picture technology. The American Mutoscope Company captured a group of Mormon soldiers in the Spanish American War, and the film company titled and released the two-and-a-half minute movie as *Salt Lake City Company of Rocky Mountain*

*Riders* (1898) (Astle and Burton 20-21). A short time later, the nickelodeon film *A Trip to Salt Lake City* (1905) by the Edison Company staged a comedy on a train with a Mormon man who becomes weary of his abundance of children and multiple nagging wives. This film was presented for laughs, and the appeal of the Mormon image had begun. Mainstream movies from that time forward would use the Mormon image in various ways and develop the sexual stereotypes specific to this project: the purposeful heterosexual, the monstrous polygamist, and the self-destructive homosexual. These stereotypes were an attempt to categorize, understand, and define the Mormon identity, and Mormon sexual practice was crucial for that definition.

Members and leaders of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints were initially suspicious of movie technology and its potential impact on young minds (Astle and Burton 21). However, as movie houses and palaces began to be built throughout the state of Utah, the Church took advantage of film technology for both institutional and commercial purposes. The Church produced *One Hundred Years of Mormonism* (1913), a movie released commercially that chronicled the history of Joseph Smith and the establishment of the Church. This feature film was adapted from a book that had been published in 1905 for the centennial celebration of Joseph Smith's birth (Astle and Burton 36-37). The Church produced one more feature film, *All Faces West* (1929), to chronicle the Mormon migration to Utah; however, this movie suffered commercially the way many other films suffered during the end of the decade when synchronized sound was introduced to moving pictures. Audiences favored the films that were able to

accommodate the change in audio technology, and silent films such as *All Faces West* were typically dismissed (Astle and Burton 41-42).

Though the religious institution did not produce any more films for the commercial market after *All Faces West*, it took advantage of the technology for institutional and educational purposes. To celebrate the centennial of the Saints entering the Salt Lake Valley, the Church produced *Where the Saints have Trod* (1947) (Astle and Burton 69). Thereafter, the institution collaborated with the Disney studios in California to develop a couple of films about the Church's welfare program, *Church Welfare in Action* (1948) and *The Lord's Way* (1948) (Astle and Burton 70-72). This effort prompted the Church to develop the idea of its own motion picture studios that would be connected with Brigham Young University's Motion Picture Department. In 1963, the President of the University "boasted that not only were BYU and USC the only American universities with motion picture production studios, but BYU's was 'much the larger of the two programs'" (Astle and Burton 81). With access to its own motion picture studios, the Church could continue to use moving picture technology for proselytizing and other institutional/religious purposes.

In 1952, several years before the completion of the Church's studio, the Church began developing a film to assist in the presentation of sacred ceremonies inside the Church's temples throughout the world (Astle and Burton 72). Specifically, this film would be presented as part of what is called "the endowment ceremony" where Church members make sacred covenants of obedience with God (Ostling and Ostling 193). Participating in an endowment ceremony is a routine event for many active members who

are encouraged to attend the temple regularly. Part of this temple endowment ceremony is the presentation of a creation drama with characters and story elements from the Bible. Originally, this ceremony required live actors to participate in the presentation of the drama; therefore, the development of the temple endowment film eliminated this necessity for live actors and ceremonies could occur more easily and benefit more members.

The creation and implementation of this particular film, along with its updated versions in the following decades, reveals how respected the medium of motion pictures can be in Mormon culture. With the production of the temple endowment film, cinematic technology has been joined with the most holy of places for an orthodox Mormon, the temple. The film medium is clearly recognized in Mormon culture as having a capacity to enrich the spirit during prayerful worship; however, this cultural respect for the cinematic form also poses a spiritual danger for many orthodox Mormons. A medium that can draw an individual closer to God can also draw an individual away from God, so Mormons are counseled by Church leaders to be vigilant about what movies they might choose to see. As one leader warns, “It is a concern that some of our young Latter-day Saints, as well as their parents, regularly watch R-rated and other inappropriate movies and videos. One more reason why the ‘devil laugheth, and his angels rejoice’” (3 Nephi 9:2 qtd. in Christensen). Though Church leaders and publications regularly caution about movie choices, the Church does not officially endorse adherence to the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) ratings system; however, such warnings from Church leaders circulate in the culture, and many Mormons, at least in Salt Lake City and Provo,

believe the viewing of R-rated movies to be a sin or at least damaging to the soul. I still smile about a time in high school when my parents chose to see an action movie at the theater with an R-rating. Although they are very devout Latter-day Saints, my parents were not raised in Utah, and as their Utah-grown son I felt a personal obligation to express my disapproval for their choice. It went against what I had been taught about R-rated movies in my seminary and Sunday school classes. Thus, I refused to speak to them for a week.

Orthodox Mormons may be sensitive to the content of movies and television shows, but they are also concerned about how they are presented to a mainstream culture in film and television. This concern, in some ways, motivates this study. Accordingly, there are several options available when approaching films that pertain to a group of people, such as the Mormon community. There are movies that present Mormon characters; there are movies with content that relates to Mormonism; there are movies directed to Mormon audiences; there are movies where Mormons participate in the filmmaking process as actors, directors, producers, and other roles. Mormons have been involved in the filmmaking process since the early days of cinema. This project is concerned with references to Mormon content, culture, and characters in matters of sexuality and what those references reveal about patriarchy and heteronormativity in Western culture. While there are a variety of notable and award-winning Mormon filmmakers in mainstream cinema such as Don Bluth, Neil LaBute, Jared Hess, and Gerald R. Molen, this project will focus on movies and television shows with Mormon characters and how those characters are distinguished by their sexuality.

## Chapter Summaries

The chapters in this project are categorized according to the present culture's differentiation of human sexual relationships. How sexuality is currently understood in Western culture is certainly not the only (or most accurate) approach to sexual identities and activities. Regarding the gay/straight dichotomy, Sedgwick observes,

It is a rather amazing fact that, of the very many dimensions along which the genital activity of one person can be differentiated from that of another (dimensions that include preference for certain acts, certain zones or sensations, certain physical types, a certain frequency, certain symbolic investments, certain relations of age or power, a certain species, a certain number of participants, etc. etc. etc.), precisely one, the gender of object choice, emerged from the turn of the century, and has remained, as *the* dimension denoted by the now ubiquitous category of 'sexual orientation.' (Sedgwick 8)

Despite the many dimensions Sedgwick recognizes, this project will speak of sexual orientation in terms of gender but only because the culture comprehends orientation in such terms. In addition to hetero/homosexual differentiations, this project will also explore the practice of polygamy in opposition to monogamy. This project is concerned with the way cultural power systems present messages about Mormons and sexuality; therefore, this project will categorize sexuality in the same manner as cultural power

systems. This approach will reveal the meanings the culture attaches to such sexual categorizations when applied to Mormon identities.

Chapter Two will examine the dominant form of sexuality in Western culture, monogamous heterosexuality; furthermore, this chapter will analyze how the Mormon community represents itself in Mormon cinema through the stereotype of the purposeful heterosexual. This chapter will rely upon the research of Jonathan Ned Katz and his exploration of *The Invention of Heterosexuality*, especially in response to the clinical development of homosexuality in the nineteenth century (ix). Katz describes the different ways cultures perceive male and female couplings. Additionally, he outlines the different reasons that motivate such couplings in various historical periods and class levels. Mormon theology developed in the nineteenth century and influenced the cultural view of heterosexuality for the religious community. This view is motivated by the idea that men and women come together for reproduction, but they also come together as “true” forms of each gender to enable a “true” form of love. Much of this view remains today in Mormon culture and is the basis for the purposeful heterosexual in Mormon cinema. The movies *Together Forever* (1989), *Saturday’s Warrior* (1989), and *The Singles 2<sup>nd</sup> Ward* (2007) will be analyzed in this chapter. These movies will illustrate the way Latter-day Saints choose to present sexual relationships in their culture, and they will also reveal what Mormon audiences find acceptable about sexual identities and activities.

Chapter Three will introduce the exploration of Mormon representation in mainstream cinema. Much of the mainstream consciousness surrounding the Mormon experience is its history of plural marriage; accordingly, much of the mainstream



representation of Mormons grapples with a polygamous aspect. This chapter will examine the way mainstream movies present the Mormon stereotype of the monstrous polygamist. In these films Mormon sexuality is a monstrous sexuality that fuels a need for power and oppresses women. Robin Wood's theory of the horror film will explain many of the reasons for this monstrous stereotype. Wood says that monsters are usually created through a repressed society's construction of an Other and its disassociation of repressed elements onto that Other. Furthermore, since the monstrous polygamist is vilified against monogamous heterosexuality due to its use of women, Adrienne Rich's theory of "compulsory heterosexuality" will reveal the patriarchal strategies of this Mormon stereotype. The films that will be analyzed in this chapter come from two different periods of moviemaking: *A Mormon Maid* (1917) and *September Dawn* (2006). The monstrous polygamist stereotype in these two films will be contrasted with the depiction of polygamists in the currently running television series *Big Love* (2006-). The reworking of the polygamist image in this series in contrast with the other films reveals the compulsory heterosexuality and the culturally repressed sexuality that motivates the monstrous polygamist stereotype.

Chapter Four will explore the construction of the homosexual Mormon character in gay and lesbian cinema. Because of the Church's history of homophobia and political resistance to the gay and lesbian community, the self-destructive homosexual has become the stereotype for Mormon characters with same-sex desires. Furthermore, the Mormon Church is a representation in these films for the oppressive effects of the closet. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's theory on these oppressive effects and the performative nature of

the closet will help to explain the function of this Mormon stereotype. Judith Butler's work on the performative nature of gender will also be used to recognize the importance of masculinity for these Mormon characters in order to sustain their performance of the closet. This chapter will include an analysis of *Advise and Consent* (1962), *Latter Days* (2003), and *Angels in America* (2003). These movies and television miniseries include a depiction of the self-destructive homosexual stereotype and how that stereotype relates to the closet, gender, and cultural power structures.

Chapter Five will conclude this project. With the reinforcement of the preceding chapters, this chapter will reveal that the distinguishing factor for Mormon male stereotypes is in many ways sexual. The purposeful heterosexual, the monstrous polygamist, and the self-destructive homosexual are the recurring stereotypes for the depiction of Mormon men. These stereotypes reveal the significance of the sexual aspect in religious identities. This knowledge can contribute to the dialogue about issues such as representation and advocacy, values and tolerance, and Mormons and sexuality.

## CHAPTER 2

### FRUITFUL AND TRUE: THE PURPOSEFUL HETEROSEXUAL IN MORMON CINEMA

In his essay “*God’s Army: Wiggle Room for the Mormon Soul*,” David G. Pace explores Richard Dutcher’s film *God’s Army* (2000), a film that inaugurated the most recent wave of independent features in Mormon cinema. Pace struggles with the way Dutcher appears to aim for an authentic depiction of the Mormon experience while squelching elements of that experience that would seem odd for non-Mormon audiences. Pace writes, “Though by the end of *God’s Army*, it is clear that Mormon missionaries are, in fact, real folks with blood in their veins, the moral and cultural space in which they are allowed to exist is very small” (186). Pace’s criticism of this small space is in the black-and-white transitions the characters experience during the movie. However, Pace’s recognition of the boundaries that must be placed upon Mormon characters in order to satisfy both Mormon and non-Mormon audiences also applies to the presentation of Mormon sexual identities.

In much of Mormon cinema, there is nowhere for a sympathetic Mormon character’s sexual identity and activity to go outside of the current perception of heterosexuality in the Mormon system. This cultural perception of sexuality is a purpose-driven heterosexuality that includes a means for reproduction and eternal salvation. I will argue in this chapter that this purpose-driven heterosexuality in Mormon theology and

culture has led to the development of a specific sexual identity in Mormon cinema, the purposeful heterosexual. This stereotype is informed by a nineteenth-century view of heterosexuality that remains in much of Mormon doctrine and culture. Furthermore, even though the stereotype of the purposeful heterosexual is used in films that are generally consumed by Mormon audiences, the purposeful heterosexual is a stereotype that depicts the Mormon system as being compliant with patriarchal and heteronormative systems of power.

#### Inventing and Enforcing Heterosexuality

Many cultural theorists now recognize the manufactured qualities of what Western culture identifies as “heterosexuality.” People tend to assume that the way their culture organizes sexual identities, activities, and relations is the same way all other past and present cultures categorize such things. This assumption can lead to an acceptance that the current categories for human sexuality are natural and unchangeable, which would include each category’s placement in the cultural power system. Jonathan Ned Katz, a scholar who aims to challenge cultural assumptions of sexuality, recalls an epiphany he received regarding the heterosexual institution. He writes,

I had heard a young feminist historian and friend, Lisa Duggan, read a draft of a paper on women, American society in the 1920s, and ‘the social enforcement of heterosexuality.’ A few days later Duggan’s phrase set off in my head a flash of illumination. It suddenly came to me, and I even

muttered out loud to myself: ‘Heterosexuality wasn’t only ‘enforced,’ it was ‘invented.’ (11)

When Katz speaks of the invention of heterosexuality, he clarifies “Though the word *heterosexual* may be recently invented, surely the feelings and acts are not” (13). In order to recognize this invention, one needs to separate the phenomenon that motivates heterosexual acts from the language, value, interpretation, and categorization of such acts. These latter elements are developed within and internalized from culture, and systems of power influence culture to construct and maintain specific ways of knowing and perceiving the feelings, acts, and pleasures that are associated with (hetero)sexuality (12).

The term “heterosexuality” developed at the end of the nineteenth century to counter the recently termed phenomenon of “homosexuality.” The term “heterosexuality” needed its opposite “homosexuality” in order to comprehend itself. These two terms established themselves as “rival opposites” where one is good and the other is bad or one is normal and the other is abnormal (Toscano and Toscano 242-243). Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick writes,

Categories presented in a culture as symmetrical binary oppositions – heterosexual/homosexual, in this case – actually subsist in a more unsettled and dynamic tacit relation according to which, first, term B is not symmetrical with but subordinated to term A; but, second, the ontologically valorized term A actually depends for its meaning on the simultaneous subsumption and exclusion of term B; hence, third, the

question of priority between the supposed central and the supposed marginal category of each dyad is irresolvably unstable, an instability caused by the fact that term B is constituted as at once internal and external to term A. (Sedgwick 9-10)

When comprehending categories as binary opposites, such categories rarely remain symmetrical because eventually one category is privileged over the other. The terms “heterosexual” and “homosexual” depend upon one another for both their definition and cultural status. Since these terms rely upon one another yet compete as rival opposites, the construction of each is unstable. These two words are not universal terms or universal ways of comprehending sexuality, which foregrounds the invention of each.

Katz is not trying to diminish the feelings that motivate heterosexual coupling and activity. He writes, “The cultural and personal worth of any eros is independent of biology, and of its socially and individually constructed origins” (17). Katz’s intention is to challenge the “usual assumption of an eternal heterosexuality” and “suggest the unstable, relative, and historical status of an idea and a sexuality we usually assume were carved long ago in stone” (13). For Katz, heterosexuality does not specifically mean reproductive intercourse, the coupling of men and women, or the difference between men and women (14). What qualifies heterosexuality to be an invention are the cultural assumptions of heterosexuality as the normal sexuality in Western culture, the expectation of specific ideals within this normalized heterosexuality, and the language that is shaped by this heterosexuality (14). Moreover, this invention changes over time and in different places as it serves the ruling systems of power in culture.

To reinforce his point, Katz defines the heterosexual construction of various societies. Drawing from the work of Foucault, Katz recognizes the ancient Greeks as being what many would identify as bisexual if “bisexual” were interpreted to mean, “simultaneously ... enamored by a boy or a girl” (Foucault *Use of Pleasure* 188 qtd. in Katz 35). The Greeks did not have a heterosexual society because they did not categorize sexual activity and desire according to gender in the way many cultures do today; furthermore, the sexual desire for boys and girls in Greek society did not necessitate a distinction between one another as “different or competing ‘drives,’ each claiming a share of men’s hearts or appetites” (Foucault *Use of Pleasure* 188 qtd. in Katz 35). Thus, in ancient Greece there were no “heterosexuals” in the way the term is understood in Western culture today.

In a separate example from the Greeks, Katz identifies the white societies that settled in the early New England colonies. The culture that these societies developed did not categorize sexuality according to a modern heterosexual framework. Katz writes,

The operative contrast in this society was between fruitfulness and barrenness, not between different-sex and same-sex eroticism ... Specifically, the procreative man was constructed as seminal, a seed source. The procreative woman was constituted as seed holder and ripener, a relatively ‘weaker vessel.’ For a man to ‘waste his seed’ in nonprocreative, pleasurable acts was to squander a precious, limited procreative resource, as crucial to community survival as the crops the

colonists planted in the earth ... Men and women were, however, regarded as equal in lust. (38)

This cultural categorization of individuals according to his or her reproductive capacity was motivated by these settlers' aim to populate the new colonies; additionally, the emphasis on reproduction was also tied to the religious devotion of these cultures where believers adopt God's command in sacred texts to "multiply, and replenish the earth" (Genesis 1:28). In these early American cultures, sexuality did not operate in a hetero/homosexual division. Sexuality was mainly categorized by "acts thought to interfere with procreation (such as sodomy, bestiality, and masturbation) or the dominant reproductive order (such as adultery)" (Katz 37).

The categories, values, and words surrounding sexual acts, identities, and pleasures are constantly changing because of subjection and resistance to ruling ideologies. As far as the modern perception of heterosexuality is concerned, Katz writes,

Gradually, heterosexuality came to refer to a normal other-sex sensuality free of any essential tie to procreation. But only in the mid-1960s would heteroeroticism be distinguished completely from reproduction, and male-female pleasure sex justified for itself [...] The erotic attraction of men and women was now supposed to lead to love which led to marriage which led to sexual relations – which might, or might not, lead to reproduction. (86-87)

The bisexual existence of the Greeks and the reproductive imperative of white New England settlers have now developed into a different tradition that is identified as



“heterosexuality.” The use of sexual activity for reproduction has diminished, yet other factors have since taken the place of reproduction in order for individuals to culturally understand different categories of sexuality. Katz writes, “Today, the meaning of sexuality no longer seems to reside, self-evidently, within our bodies or in nature, but depends on how we use it” (184). This usage of sexuality by those in Western culture separates members into two different groups according to the gender of object choice. One group is privileged with being identified as normal, righteous, and healthy. The other group is marginalized through being identified as abnormal, wicked, and sick (Katz 99). The dominant ideology privileges one group while subordinating the other group. Today, power systems continue to reinforce the current tradition and invention of heterosexuality.

### Theological Heterosexuality

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and most of its scripture developed in the United States in the early nineteenth century; consequently, the Church’s sacred texts and teachings continue to maintain aspects of nineteenth-century interpretations of heterosexuality. Katz describes the cultural perception of heterosexual acts and desires during the nineteenth century, especially among members of the middle class. Members of the urban middle class in Western culture felt the need to distinguish themselves “from the supposedly decadent upper orders and supposedly sensual lower orders” (41). The sexuality that developed within this group of urban middle class people directly influenced the modern invention of heterosexuality that is recognized today;

likewise, this nineteenth-century view of heterosexuality made a profound impact upon the development of Mormon teachings and culture that still remains in much of Mormon discourse (41).

The nineteenth-century urban middle classes interpreted the human motivation to sexuality as a “true love” system. This system of true love was comprised of spiritual feelings that would “justify marriage, reproduction, and an otherwise unhallowed sensuality” (Katz 44). Sexuality was not distinguished according to gender but according to “true love and false love” (Katz 44). Furthermore, those who could participate in this true love needed to have a specific gender identity that was also “true.” Katz writes, “In this era, the human body was thought of as directly constituting the true man and true woman, and their feelings. No distinction was made between biologically given sex and socially constructed masculinity and femininity” (45). In order to be justified by true love, lovers needed to be constituted by a true gender identity that was inseparable from biological sex parts. However, the penis and vagina were still interpreted as organs for reproduction that could only “mesh as love parts” after marriage (Katz 45). “Human energy, thought of as a closed and severely limited system subject to exhaustion, was to be used in work, in producing children, and in sustaining love and family, not wasted on unproductive, libidinous pleasures” (Katz 45). This focus on reproduction and human energy as a valuable commodity hearkens to the perception of sexuality that existed in early New England settlements. Furthermore, the introduction of a “true love” that justified sensuality between “true” men and women, in addition to the reproductive

justification for heteroeroticism, circulated in nineteenth-century culture and influenced the current cultural invention of heterosexuality.

A nineteenth-century view of heterosexuality still permeates much of Mormon culture because of the development of the culture's theology during the same period. Theological ideas regarding heterosexuality can be found in their scriptures and prophetic sermons. An example from *The Book of Mormon* reveals this nineteenth-century view of male and female coupling. Whether Joseph Smith fabricated this book or translated it from an ancient record, his comprehension of sexuality in the nineteenth century would have influenced his understanding of the text either way. One prophet in the scripture, Abinadi, condemns a king and his priests for "great evil" that includes sexual immorality (Mosiah 12:13,29). Abinadi asks, "Why do ye commit whoredoms and spend your strength with harlots?" (Mosiah 12:29) The prophet's inclusion of "spend your strength" in addition to "commit whoredoms" clarifies his perspective on sexuality. Abinadi condemns these priests for wasting human strength, which for Abinadi is a limited resource since it is something that could be spent. The perception of human energy as a limited commodity that is not to be wasted upon "unproductive, libidinous pleasures" hearkens to the nineteenth-century view of heterosexuality that Katz defines in his study (Katz 45).

In addition to sexuality as a limited resource of human energy, gender identity and roles are also important to devout Latter-day Saints. In 1995, Church leaders issued a proclamation to its members concerning matters of sexuality and gender, and this proclamation reinforces much of the nineteenth-century perspective of heterosexuality.

The prophet at the time, Gordon B. Hinckley, read this proclamation at a meeting for Latter-day Saint women. The Proclamation states, “Gender is an essential characteristic of individual premortal, mortal, and eternal identity and purpose” (Hinckley 98). This quote affirms the Mormon doctrine that human beings existed as spirits before being born into physical bodies on Earth. These spirits were gendered before coming to Earth to enter a gendered physical body. After death the gendered spiritual being separates from the body to await a glorified and gendered resurrected body to live forever. God the Father is in a male resurrected body, and he is married to Heavenly Mother who is in a female resurrected body. All human beings are spiritual offspring of Heavenly Father and Heavenly Mother. The doctrine of Heavenly Mother(s) is not clearly developed in Mormon theology, but the teachings are clear that God the Father is heterosexual, married, and that human beings are His spirit offspring.

All human beings – male and female – are created in the image of God. Each is a beloved spirit son or daughter of heavenly parents [...] In the premortal realm, spirit sons and daughters knew and worshiped God as their Eternal Father and accepted His plan by which His children could obtain a physical body and gain earthly experience to progress toward perfection and ultimately realize his or her divine destiny as an heir of eternal life. (Hinckley 98)

The Proclamation affirms that the gender of the spirit is the same gender (or sex) of the body that the spirit inhabits (Hinckley 98). In this way spirits can be distinguished as being a man or a woman, and the Proclamation’s preference of the word “gender” over

the more biological/chromosomal term “sex” assumes an expectation of gender performance and appearance for this spiritual identity. Fulfilling “a divine destiny” as “a beloved spirit son or daughter of heavenly parents” suggests an expectation of heterosexuality from the nineteenth-century that affirms “ideals of manhood or womanhood, founding a cult of the true man and true woman” who come together for a “true love” (Katz 44). As supreme beings or deity, Heavenly Father and Heavenly Mother must be models for this true manhood and womanhood that come together for a true love.

In addition to gender being an eternal aspect of spiritual identity, the ability to reproduce eternally is also an important element in the Mormon theological framework. Mormon teachings explain that a spirit personage leaves his or her physical body at death to await a resurrection with a glorified physical body; thereafter, those glorified persons who were righteous on Earth can eternally progress by having spirit children of their own. Heaven is also composed of many levels, and only the most righteous attain the highest level, which is identified as “exaltation” (Doctrine and Covenants 132:37). The individuals who enter exaltation are those individuals who enjoy God’s presence and continue to progress with children and worlds of their own. Mormon prophet Spencer W. Kimball states, “Man can transform himself and he must. Man has in himself the seeds of godhood, which can germinate and grow and develop. As the acorn becomes the oak, the mortal man becomes a god” (Kimball E 28). Inherent with the idea of progression toward godhood is the continuation of reproduction. “Those who are sealed continue the

family relationship eternally. Spiritual children are begotten by them” (*Teachings* 163 qtd. in Burton 188).

This eternal perspective of progression through reproduction connects with the importance (and often urgency) for heterosexual marriages during mortality in Mormon culture. Mormon doctrine requires baptism for entrance into exaltation; Mormon doctrine requires other ceremonies and rituals as well. One of the ceremonies necessary for exaltation is heterosexual marriage. Mormon scripture states, “If a man marry a wife by my word, which is my law [...] Ye shall come forth in the first resurrection [...] to their exaltation and glory in all things [...] except ye abide my law ye cannot attain to this glory” (Doctrine and Covenants 132:19-21). Without a heterosexual marriage or “sealing” in a Mormon temple, a man or woman’s eternal salvation is compromised. This compounds the mindset of men and women to participate in the current marriage system, a system that many feel privileges patriarchy and subordinates women. This theological pressure also brings insight into female complicity with polygamous relationships, which will be explored in the next chapter. Mormon theology not only accepts heterosexual unions but also requires members to participate in such unions in order to obtain the highest level of heaven. This theology privileges heterosexual unions as the highest form of obedience to divine command in order to reproduce and perform a true form of manhood and womanhood in pursuit of godhood; consequently, this perspective circulates in cultural discourse and reinforces heteronormative ideologies and systems of power.

Mormon proselytizing takes pride in its message that heterosexual unions continue after death and that “families are forever” (Haight 20). Active Latter-day Saints may comment upon the tragedy of the “until death do us part” clause found in many non-Mormon marriage ceremonies. These Latter-day Saints lament that other religions do not have the proper authority from God to bind such marriage relationships to transcend the barriers between life and death. According to orthodox Mormons, a marriage between a man and a woman outside of a Mormon temple without proper priesthood authority, whatever meaning is attached to such a marriage, is dissolved the moment a participant dies. Many Latter-day Saints find the idea tragic. Some cannot comprehend how non-Mormons accept a belief that their marriage and family relationships only last “until death do us part.”

These orthodox Mormons do not realize that a popular assumption in American culture, at least among those who believe in an afterlife, is that family members and relationships are included in the hope of an afterlife. This assumption is circulated in the culture and represented in film, television, theater, and literature. The repeated narrative of a character entering a state beyond death and meeting family members or lost loves suggests an audience response and acceptance. This plot element is included in films such as *Somewhere in Time* (1980), *Titanic* (1997), *What Dreams May Come* (1998), and *Just Like Heaven* (2005). Audiences respond favorably to these kinds of stories. For many non-Mormons who believe in an afterlife, the idea of family relationships continuing beyond death is a metaphysical truism that does not necessitate institutional authority or permission. For some Latter-day Saints, a non-member’s assumption of

ongoing relationships after death without specific rituals is simply a misguided idea in need of correction through missionary labor.

### Proselytizing Heterosexuality and *Together Forever* (1989)

In order to disseminate Mormon theology and its view of heterosexual relationships to the public, the Church took advantage of its movie studio to make films for proselytizing purposes. In the previous chapter, I specifically mention the Church's instructional videos about the welfare program as well as the temple endowment film. Other movies were made to benefit and instruct Mormon communities, such as a film about the importance of paying tithes with *Windows of Heaven* (1963)(Astle and Burton 81). Films were also made to teach mainstream culture about Mormonism with the hope of gathering converts. One of these first films was *Man's Search for Happiness* (1964), which premiered at the New York World's Fair in Queens. But it was when video technology developed that movies for introducing non-Mormons to the Church became more effective beyond television specials. "The Church's Missionary Department developed the concept of Direct Gospel Messages, or DGMS" (Astle and Burton 111). These short films could be broadcast over television as well as delivered as videotapes to the public by full-time missionaries, and these short films could teach basic principles of Mormon doctrine as part of the Church's missionary effort.

One of the Direct Gospel Message videotapes is *Together Forever* (1989), which is still available through the Church's proselytizing resources. It presents actors in documentary-style interviews to explain the importance of family relationships. Randy



Astle and Gideon O. Burton describe *Together Forever* as “arguably the Church’s most prominent production until *Legacy* [(1993), which is a pioneer epic that premiered in the newly remodeled Joseph Smith Memorial Building in Salt Lake City]” (99, 111).

Through several episodes, *Together Forever* shares messages of spousal fidelity, time with family, divorce, death, and the satisfaction of a congregational or church “family.” These messages attempt to instruct non-Mormons about the importance of heterosexual family unions, especially with the perspective that such unions extend beyond mortality and have a divine purpose.

Since the information in the film focuses on family relationships, the movie presents a specific Mormon view of heterosexuality that is purpose-driven, especially in matters of reproduction, salvation, and inner satisfaction. This is a film where the purposeful heterosexual has an opportunity to explain his or her identity to the viewer. This purposeful view on heterosexuality places an emphasis upon relationships that are composed of a man and a woman, and this emphasis is very clear in the opening montage of the film. The montage begins with an image of a bride over audio of a woman’s voice recollecting the happy occasion and how she wished “it could last forever,” which sets up the selling point of the film that relationships do last forever. This ceremonial joining of a man and woman is presented as satisfying, romantic, and crucial for the definition of “family” that will be referenced throughout the film. Subsequently, the image following the bride addresses the necessity of reproduction in heterosexual relations. This second image presents a young man near a crib holding a baby while a male voice describes holding his new baby daughter as his happiest memory. The clip that follows the baby

clip is unusual because it has a rupture between the audio cue and visual cue, yet this rupture reinforces heterosexual unions. In this portion of the montage, a male voice states, “There was nothing as quite as wonderful for me as just hanging out with my friends [...] And I really miss those guys.” The male voice’s use of the term “guys” suggests a reference to friendly relationship with other men; a parallel image might be a man enjoying time with other men. However, the image over this audio presents a man and a woman sitting together at a restaurant. Not only does the visual cue ignore the plurality of friends in the audio cue but it also modifies the gender to emphasize a coupling composed of one male and one female. In a movie prioritizing heterosexuality, an image of multiple men might be misinterpreted. Thus, the male/female dynamic of these first few clips emphasizes a heterosexuality that is defined by marriage and reproduction and prioritized over other human relationships.

After these three clips, the tone of the montage changes, and this change reveals an emphasis in the film’s message for women to desire marital relationships. The music slows, and the male narrator voice asks, “What is your happiest memory?” A female voice responds with sadness and laments, “Nothing can last forever.” The image presented over this lament is of a solitary woman sitting in a library. She rests her chin on her hands as if communicating a sense of hopelessness. The next female voice in this opening montage mourns that she is not as intimate with someone as she used to be. The voice does not specify that she is referencing her husband, but the image of a middle-aged heterosexual couple over this voice leads the viewer to such an assumption. Thus, two female voices in the entire montage describe their happiness in terms of their

heterosexual relationships. The one female voice without a relationship expresses the deepest level of despair of all the voices in the montage.

In contrast to the female voices that emphasize heterosexual relations, the male voices in this opening montage speak about relationships with children, friends, or grandfathers. The male interviewees do not directly address a desire for coupling with women while the women are presented as needing men. This collection of images and vocal tracks reinforces the dominant ideology that women in the culture can only find happiness in an institutional marriage with a male partner, while men can take pleasure in a variety of human relationships. In a patriarchal society, it is necessary to condition women to enter into an institution that is frequently used for their subordination. Depicting women as taking pleasure in relationships that might not involve men, such as with children, friends, or grandmothers, could be subversive to the patriarchal gender dynamic. Furthermore, that the solitary woman is in a library surrounded by books, a symbol for different ideas, yet she is not satisfied because she is not like the other women in the montage who embrace their heterosexual coupling is telling. It suggests a patriarchal strategy to discourage women from learning and finding enrichment through critical ideas. This movie is advocating a heterosexual definition of family that is described as the source of happiness here on Earth and beyond, and this definition is specific, purposeful, and of particular interest to women.

Following the opening montage are four interview segments. All of the interviewees are shown with their heterosexual counterpart during multiple points of each segment. In the third segment when a single young man describes a family who

befriends him and introduces him to the Church, any concern regarding this man's compliance with the expected heterosexual perspective is assuaged in at least a few instances. This character mourns in his interview that he did not grow up in a loving home. He recollects, "More than anything in the world I just wanted to be accepted. Course, to be accepted in this world all you've got to do is do what they're doing. To be accepted by the kids who do drugs, all you've got to do is do drugs." This young man's narrative continues until he finds acceptance with a rural Mormon family. Paradoxically, his condemning logic regarding acceptance is reinforced in this story because he adopts the family's lifestyle and perception of heterosexuality. The family accepts him because he is doing what they are doing. As he first sits down at the dinner table to eat with the family, the young sister who is sitting at the table nudges the older red-haired sister with a flirtatious glance toward the single man. This moment presents in this young man's first introduction to the kind Mormon family that he is already recognized as a potential match for a heterosexual coupling. By the end of the segment, after this young man has learned about the Gospel, read *The Book of Mormon*, and vocalized a prayer with the devout family, the segment closes with the young man sitting on a church pew next to the red-haired young woman from earlier in the segment. Despite his friendship with the young man in the family who is presented as socializing this interviewee into the Church, the interviewee's course to a purposeful and satisfying life in a specific heterosexual relationship is assured.

The structure of the film is designed to be obvious on the nature of the heterosexual family unit. There can be no room for misinterpretation in this institutional

video, so the cultural space in which these characters can exist is small. The cultural priority of the monogamous heterosexual institution is directly communicated in this film. In the first segment, the invisible male narrator asks the man at the drafting table, “Where do you think our happiest memories come from?” The interviewee in the first segment immediately answers,

There’s no doubt about that, it’s in the family. It’s either the family you grew up in, the family you’re raising now, and even if you’re single it’s the family you hope to have someday. And it’s interesting that all the evils in the world seem to be aimed at destroying the family, the one greatest source of happiness in the world.

This answer is simple in its response, but it can be complex in its interpretation. This interviewee is using a specific definition of family. The images that are presented over this line each present the pairing of a woman and a man, and most of these couples have a child. Even the modern view of heterosexuality that Katz identifies in much of Western culture with its devaluation of procreation can be recognized as an “evil” according to this interviewee’s assumption about the family within the context of the film. For this interviewee, the evil that aims to destroy his family is his desire for wealth and success, which in the past forced him to work much of the time and neglect his wife, children, and heterosexual purpose.

The purposeful dynamic of the heterosexual perspective in Mormon culture is illustrated in a couple of ways in the second interview segment. The interviewee is a young woman sitting alone and talking about how she overcame a difficult period in her

relationship with her husband. The invisible male interviewer asks, “Did you and your husband have separate goals?” She laughs, “No, more like no goals. We had no idea what we wanted.” This confession reveals the change that needed to be made for this interviewee: her heterosexual coupling needed a purpose, and she states that this purpose involves a theological awareness of eternity. She discovers that “God had a plan for married couples [...] to have truly meaningful relationships that could last not only for today but forever.” This plan that she describes involves God helping her and her husband to “re-learn how to love each other.” Receiving divine direction on a specific and sustainable form of love implies a correct or true form of love the couple does not yet share. This true love connects to the nineteenth-century view that embodies the Mormon stereotype of the purposeful heterosexual.

As with the other interviewees in the film, much of this purpose is also connected with reproduction. A comedic moment of this second segment occurs when the young woman surprises her husband with the news that she will be having a baby. She paints “nursery” on one of the doors in their house and waits for him to notice. Ultimately, this second segment presents a married couple who in the past did not have children, and the wife complained that their relationship did not have a purpose. She confesses to discovering a purpose or “goal” for the relationship with her husband, and this goal involves a true form of love and using their heterosexual relationship for reproduction.

The gender roles that are emphasized as eternal in the Church’s family proclamation are also recognizable in this short video. The proclamation states, “By divine design, fathers are to preside over their families in love and righteousness and are

responsible to provide the necessities of life and protection for their families. Mothers are primarily responsible for the nurture of their children” (Hinckley 100). One can interpret from this Proclamation that there is a right and true way to appropriate one’s gender identity as well as a wrong and false way. The purposeful heterosexual stereotypes in this film adopt a right way. They embody (or pursue) true manhood and true womanhood in order to be candidates for true love and a justified heterosexual coupling. The first interviewee is working at a drafting table while video clips from his life show his wife inside their house and carrying laundry or gathering all of the children together. The second interviewee sits in a crowded auditorium while cheering for her husband who receives an award. In the third segment, the Mormon mother apologizes to the young single man for a dinner that has “nothing fancy.” And the fourth interview includes images of the wife slicing tomatoes in the kitchen while the husband talks about being at work where a friend noticed he was having a hard time with their personal tragedy. Women stay domestic and serve the men who work “to provide the necessities of life and protection for their families” (Hinckley 100). All of these characters participate in expected gender roles that facilitate their depiction as purposeful heterosexuals.

*Together Forever* aims to introduce non-Mormons to the theology that families can have an assurance of lasting relationships beyond mortality when in accordance with Mormon principles. Even though the characters in the movie mention the “family” as being a source of great happiness, the definition and presentation of families is very specific to the Mormon perspective. It is a perspective that necessitates a male and

female participant, an institutional marriage, reproduction, and complicity in specific gender roles. These come together to present a heterosexual identity fueled by spiritual and cultural purposes.

#### Independent Films and *Saturday's Warrior* (1989)

The same year *Together Forever* was released as a proselytizing tool for Latter-day Saints, *Saturday's Warrior* entered the Mormon market as a movie made independently from Hollywood and the Church. Even though the Church stopped its activity of releasing films into the commercial market after *All Faces West*, interest for commercially released films about Mormons remained as a hope for many Latter-day Saints. Through the twentieth century, several Mormons attempted independent theatrical releases with films such as *Corianton: A Story of Unholy Love* (1931), which is an adaptation of a story from *The Book of Mormon* (Astle and Burton 54-56). Other films include *Brigham* (1977) and *Perilous Journey* (1984) (Astle and Burton 114-115). When video technology was introduced, it became easier to produce and distribute films in a cost-effective way to a niche Mormon market. Many of these videos were videotaped stage performances such as *It's a Miracle* (1984), *My Turn on Earth* (1986), and *Polly* (1992). *Saturday's Warrior* was not filmed before a live audience as these other adaptations; however, the mise-en-scene evokes the appearance of a theatrical stage with its fragmented sets and studio lighting. Apparently, the original writers of the stage musical were not directly involved with this film adaptation, and they were disheartened to discover that the filmed version was so stage-bound (Astle and Burton 118)



*Saturday's Warrior* begins with an explanation of the history of its development in a style similar to *Star Wars* (1977) where words for the spectator travel through space above a backdrop of stars. This floating introduction explains that this feature-length musical began as a drama project in 1973 before it evolved into a stage musical and finally a feature-length film. This film was a direct-to-video release in 1989, and it circulated mainly among Mormon audiences. Because of the original play, the music and story of this motion picture had been well known in much of Mormon culture. In time, other movies in Mormon cinema would reference elements of *Saturday's Warrior* in such a way that it has become part of the postmodern fabric of Mormon consciousness.

The opening credits of the film are presented over a montage of images of children, mostly little girls, who are playing in a park. The song that plays over this montage establishes the theme of the title, *Saturday's Warrior*. The song claims, "These are the few the warriors saved for Saturday." This statement as well as the title of the film alludes to the cultural understanding of Mormon theology that valiant spirits in the premortal life were saved to be born into the last days because of the increased wickedness before Christ's Second Coming. As the last day of the week, Saturday is a metaphor for the last days of the world. This doctrinal interpretation of reserving valiant souls for this period in history comes from talks similar to the Mormon prophet Ezra Taft Benson who states, "We have every confidence that you, 'the rising generation,' will not falter. I repeat: You were valiant spirits reserved for this exceptional time" (Benson 50). Thus, the narrative of *Saturday's Warrior* centers on issues surrounding "the rising generation" and staying faithful to the gospel. The language in the opening song uses

terms such as “warriors,” “battle,” and “win.” The language is violent and the allusions in the film to swords and shields suggest a violent assertion of heteronormative ideology. This metaphorically violent support for a ruling ideology is also disturbing in its attachment to the idealism of youth. The opening song prepares the viewer to interpret the narrative as a battle between good and evil. Each side is clearly marked by its relation to the Mormon characters who are depicted as purposeful heterosexuals.

The musical narrative of *Saturday's Warrior* connects a couple of different plots. The movie begins in the pre-existence, visualized as cloud-like floors with stars and sky overhead. All of the characters anticipate the moment when they will be born into a physical body. The main character, Jimmy, assures his younger siblings that they will make it through earth-life together. Jimmy's younger sister, Julie, has fallen in love with another spirit, Todd, and the two promise to find one another while on Earth to reunite their love. Two other male spirits, Wally and Harold, are eager for the missionary experience on Earth and anticipate changing the world through conversions. After the opening scenes in the premortal realm, the rest of the musical takes place on Earth. All of the characters have lost their memories of the pre-existence, and the characters appear to be far from their premortal expectations. Julie is romantically interested in Wally because she has never met Todd; Wally is anxious to serve as a missionary but finds little success in his service; and Jimmy surrounds himself with friends who challenge his family values through advocating open sexuality and zero population growth. Eventually, Jimmy leaves his family upon learning that his parents are going to have another baby in spite of their already large family. However, when Jimmy does not find

his rebellious life to be rewarding and upon learning that his twin sister has died from health complications, Jimmy returns home. Jimmy's faithfulness is restored when he helps his mother give birth to her new baby girl. However, Julie struggles with the emptiness of love in her heart, and she sends a Dear John letter to Wally as Wally is serving his mission. Wally meets Todd as a missionary, and Wally teaches and baptizes Todd. Upon Wally's return from his mission, he introduces Todd to Julie who immediately recognizes a familiarity about him, and the two characters reunite as lost lovers.

Heterosexual reproduction is a core theme for this musical narrative. The issue of zero population growth versus obeying God's commandments to create bodies for unborn spirits is the outward manifestation of Jimmy's inner doubts regarding the existence of God and a divine plan. However, the issues of reproduction that are connected with Jimmy's broader doubts are simplified and dichotomized. Each side of the issue is embodied by two opposing groups of characters, Jimmy's family and Jimmy's friends. Within the structure of this feature-length narrative, there is no exploration of the complexities of population growth that include limited resources, abortion, and birth control. The characters who disagree with the ideology of the purposeful heterosexual characters are vilified in their tone and appearance. "Jimmy, don't listen to them!" Jimmy's sisters plead, "They'll leave you alone in the end." The villainous friends aim to convince Jimmy of their worldview, and this worldview potentially victimizes Jimmy's youngest sister, Emily, who is still waiting in the premortal realm for an earthly body.

Jimmy and Emily are the possible casualties in a story about right and wrong interpretations of heterosexuality.

Jimmy's family comprises the good side within the narrative's morality. The narrative's introduction to the family on Earth is when they perform a song for a cable news channel, which suggests a reference to the Osmonds who were a Mormon family of singers and popular in mainstream culture. The family members in the film are dressed in the same outfits, and they sing about having "daddy's nose," which maintains the family's genetic similarities: they are joined by blood. It is important to recognize that the song foregrounds the father as bearing their unifying trait (their nose), and this places the father in a position of power as the builder and unifier of the family. The nose in this song also functions as a phallic reference with his position of authority. The mother is distinguished only once in this song and it is to say that she has "daddy's nose" too. This is a family that is defined by the father in the role of patriarch, which I will address in a moment regarding his embodiment of true manhood, but this definition of the patriarchal family unit is upheld as the true interpretation of the heterosexual institution. The unified song-and-dance number provides an impression that this family of seven children enjoys one another's presence and can unite and work together.

Jimmy's family is placed in contrast to Jimmy's friends who are presented as the evil side of the story's morality. Jimmy is caught between a pull of good and evil in these two groups, and the difference in appearance of each group is unmistakable. The family maintains a modest and clean-cut appearance, which includes the matching costumes in their musical performance for cable, while Jimmy's friends wear bikini tops,

torn jeans, and sleeveless shirts. This appearance depicts an open sexuality. These characters present their skin and their bodies, and they recognize an interest in pleasure separate from reproduction. Where films such as *Together Forever* address the product of reproduction (children) and ignores the process (intercourse), *Saturday's Warrior* in its limited way recognizes the use of sexual pleasure. One of Jimmy's female friends interprets his large family as evidence of "unbridled primal urges" and begs to know if those urges are hereditary. This idea of excessive sexual abilities due to the evidence of many children is also connected with the stereotype of the monstrous polygamist and sexually satisfying multiple wives. Culturally, the Mormon identity is attached to a sexual identity, which these stereotypes categorize.

Despite this idea that Jimmy's friend introduces that children are a walking manifestation of past copulations, the sexual act itself is attached to the villainous group of the story's morality. No character in the good side of the narrative's morality expresses an interest in sexual pleasure for itself. Sexual pleasure requires a purpose to be justified. Furthermore, the sexual interest in Jimmy among his group of friends includes both the men and women and allows for multiple levels of queer interpretations. As both the men and women gaze upon and reach for Jimmy as they sing about sexual pleasure, the boundary between heterosexual and homosexual is blurred, which further threatens the ideology of the purposeful heterosexual. Mack, the leader of Jimmy's friends, sings both of the musical numbers that foreground the evil perspective of the friends. At first, Mack aims to convince Jimmy that zero population growth and legalized abortion are fine ideas, which eliminate the purpose for the purposeful

heterosexual, and Mack's second musical number urges Jimmy to join him and his gang for the pleasures of summer. Jimmy's friends not only strip the purpose from sexual pleasure but they also encourage indulgence in such pleasures. These pleasures include "a place where we can get it together" and "building a world with no more fences." Mack and his gang present a desire for no boundaries, which might include cultural boundaries of sexuality, and though each member of the gang appears to take pleasure in members of the opposite sex, their heterosexuality is very different than the heterosexuality of Jimmy's parents as well as the romance between Julie and Todd.

Julie and Todd work to develop the cult of true manhood and womanhood that is described by Katz, which can form a true love. This nineteenth-century element of true love justifies the heterosexual coupling of Julie and Todd who do not reproduce within the narrative since they meet at the end of the movie. *Saturday's Warrior* is one of the first narratives to romanticize Mormon theology in such a way that it assumes premortal spirits can experience a heterosexual desire in the premortal realm insomuch to form couplings that can continue in the earthly realm. Though some orthodox Mormons are not comfortable with the questionable assumptions of doctrine that *Saturday's Warrior* presents, which also includes Pam's return to the premortal realm after her death, the movie certainly presents the perspective of heterosexuality that Mormon audiences are comfortable to see.

Todd and Julie are young and learning how to develop their true manhood or womanhood in order to finally find one another to fulfill their true love. In fact, Todd literally has a talent for sketching people in the way that they "could be," which suggests

that he is a character in transition. He sketches a portrait of Jimmy that captures a true manhood that Jimmy has neglected in his pursuit of a pleasure-driven lifestyle with Mack's gang. Regarding Jimmy's portrait, Todd states, "That guy knows where he's going, and that jaw: firm, strong, determined." Todd flips through his sketches of other people and describes them as "great and noble warriors." These terms can be attached to cultural assumptions about a correct form of masculinity, a masculinity that is valued within the narrative as something for Todd and Jimmy to achieve. Since this masculinity is something that Todd does not yet have suggests that this masculinity is manufactured; nevertheless, within the framework of the narrative Todd is discovering his true manhood that is connected with his discovery of the gospel and that will justify his eventual heterosexual coupling with Julie. Julie is also in the process of discovering her true womanhood. In one scene in her bedroom she outlines her desire to be a good wife, and her traits of good wifeness include being "a perfect housekeeper and a wonderful cook." This scene concludes with Julie and Todd singing a duet, albeit in their separate locations, about their desire to embody a specific identity of manhood and womanhood. Her superficial commitment to Wally when he left from the airport for his mission reveals her lack of maturity into womanhood, despite her younger sister incorrectly pronouncing that Julie is "so mature."

There is one heterosexual couple that already embodies the true womanhood and manhood during the course of the play, Julie and Jimmy's parents. Though Julie's mother says very little, her assistance with Julie's sewing suggests that Julie is being directed by her mother toward a culturally appropriate perspective of

womanhood/wifehood. And Julie's mother appears to be an appropriate guide for Julie into womanhood because the behavior of the mother and father manifests very traditional elements of manhood/masculinity and womanhood/femininity.

After the musical number that situates the father as the patriarch, the character of the father is quick to assert his domination in discipline and decision-making in the family. The father commands the children into silence or obedience, such as when he tells Benji, "Go apologize to your sister." When the kids are interested in a hypothetical situation of having to give up one of the children in the family, the mother confirms a love for all of her children while all of the kids look to father for an ultimate and authoritative response. They cheer when he concludes that they will keep Pam while considering the hypothetical dilemma. The privilege of patriarchal decision-making is also introduced when the father leads the mother into Julie's room to discuss Julie's doubts about her approaching marriage. Even though the mother expresses concern that the wedding is three days away, the father grants Julie the assurance that she can make her own decisions. Moreover, the father's non-passive manhood climaxes when he hits Jimmy for being angry at his mother for becoming pregnant with another baby. Within the story, this physical assault is justified since Jimmy is presented as the weaker and rebellious character who must later repent and return to his father's good graces.

The mother embodies the passive, feminine, and nurturing aspects of true womanhood. Her quiet voice asks Julie if she's all right while Julie is crying over a letter to Wally. The mother also takes an interest in Jimmy as he sulks over the idea that his parents will have more children. Interestingly, in one scene Jimmy asks his mother if she



plans to have another baby and his father answers the question. The mother is subsequently addressed as a third person between Jimmy and his father in the discussion, and the father becomes a voice for the value of family and the film's morally correct perspective of heterosexuality. The father later dismisses Jimmy's concern of population issues as "teenage brain damage"; nevertheless, the scene reveals a passivity of womanhood that silences and ultimately erases the character of the mother. Furthermore, the mother is equated with the other children at the scene of Jimmy's birthday party. Her head hangs low with the children as the father acts as the voice of reason for Jimmy to stay for his party.

Though the "true love" that is manifested between the parents is dwarfed in comparison to the romantic plotline between Todd and Julie, the mutual love between the parents is presented in occasional moments such as their recollection of Jimmy's childhood. But the parents do not need to manifest true love to justify their coupling because they have their seven (and later eight) children. They are heterosexuals who fulfill their purpose of providing bodies for unborn spirits. These purposeful heterosexuals directly contrast with the evil side of sexuality. Mack's gang could qualify for the scriptural warning of spending their strength, since one scene in a park shows them exhausted after a night of partying with "girls from San Diego." Again, in the framework of this narrative, sexuality is a limited resource that must be justified for reproduction, true love, and salvation, which all of Mack's gang neglect. In the story of *Saturday's Warrior*, the battle over the invention of heterosexuality is at the center of

conflict, and presenting the Mormon characters as purposeful heterosexuals ensures their final victory.

### *God's Army* (2000) and the Rise of Mormon Cinema

Few independent films were made for the Mormon market after *Saturday's Warrior*. However, Spencer W. Kimball, a past prophet for the Church during the late 1970s and early 1980s, encouraged independent filmmaking and prophesied of a future time “when our films, charged with the faith, heartbeats, and a courage of our people would play in every movie center and cover every part of the globe.... A day when Mormon filmmakers, with the inspiration of heaven, would produce masterpieces which will live forever” (Astle and Burton 13). This statement was a mantra for the instigator of the most recent wave of independent Mormon movies, Richard Dutcher. Dutcher posted the quote on his film company's website. A decade after the release of *Saturday's Warrior*, Dutcher's *God's Army* was theatrically released to enthusiastic Mormon audiences.

*God's Army* is a conversion story that is set within the homosocial environment of the Mormon missionary experience where young men and women are required to fulfill Jesus' command of preaching the gospel “two by two” (Luke 10:1). Men and women are partnered with companions of the same sex and remain in one another's presence for purposes of safety and monitoring one another's obedience to the mission rules, which include strict guidelines on how missionaries are to interact with people of the opposite sex. The importance of heterosexuality in Mormon culture can be recognized from this

film because of the story's treatment of heterosexuality in the predominantly homosocial setting of the Mormon missionary experience. The main plot includes a heterosexual tension between the characters Elder Allen and Sister Fronk, and the conclusion of the film reveals that these two characters later marry and have a child. Pace writes, "When we learn that Elder Allen and Sister Fronk end up together back at Brigham Young University, it's understood that there is nowhere for these two former missionaries to go except further into the correlated landscape of Mormondom" (Pace 187). The heterosexual interest between these two characters may be a source of conflict within the missionary environment, but this interest also serves to eliminate any misinterpretation about these characters' sexuality and its compatibility with orthodox Mormon life. The Mormon viewer of *God's Army* can rest assured that the sexual tension that exists between the two missionaries can later be a means for cultural conformity within "Mormondom." They are purposeful heterosexuals who are temporarily serving missions.

The Mormon cinema movement continued for a few years. Following the critical and financial success of *God's Army*, Dutcher directed his Mormon-themed mystery, *Brigham City* (2001), Kurt Hale released *The Singles Ward* (2002), and Mormon audiences were subsequently overwhelmed with independent features such as *Charly* (2002), *Pride and Prejudice* (2003), *The R.M.* (2003), *The Book of Mormon Movie* (2003), and *Baptists at our Barbecue* (2004). However, the level of market interest that had fueled this wave of independent films did not last. For his next movie, Dutcher returned to the Los Angeles setting of *God's Army* and directed *States of Grace* (2005),

which was released for Mormon audiences as *God's Army 2*. Despite receiving critical praise, *States of Grace* did poorly at the box office. Astle and Burton write, "Audiences had soured. LDS filmmakers had reacted against Hollywood's stereotypes but only succeeded in creating their own, and some detractors pejoratively dismissed the entire Mormon film movement as 'Mollywood'" (142). Dutcher then gave a public farewell to Mormon filmmakers and the Mormon community in a letter to a Utah newspaper. His letter reads,

Why is Mormon cinema dying? This is no great mystery. Diminishing quality has brought diminishing returns. As you know, it's a lot harder now than it was in 2002 to book a Mormon film into a movie theater or to get the DVD on the shelf at the local media store. Have there been too many movies in the marketplace? Of course not. Is the market gutted? Far from it. There have been too many badly-made films in the marketplace, too few good ones. A sharp increase in quality will bring an increase in box office. (Dutcher)

Dutcher has since focused on directing independent films for mainstream audiences, such as his most recent film *Falling* (2008). The filmmakers of *The Singles Ward* and other Mormon-themed comedies, such as *The Home Teachers* (2004) and *Church Ball* (2006), also created a sister company to produce movies for the mainstream market. However, despite the difficulty that Dutcher recognized for Mormon cinema to find distribution, some Mormon-themed independent films continue to reach theaters and video release, so the wave has not entirely diminished.

*The Singles 2<sup>nd</sup> Ward* (2007)

*The Singles 2<sup>nd</sup> Ward* is the sequel to the 2002 success of Mormon cinema *The Singles Ward*. Both of these movies use comedy to comment upon the Church's system of creating wards (congregations) specifically for non-married Mormons to encourage them to get married. The plot of the first film centers upon a less active stand-up comedian who falls in love with a devout Mormon. Much of the story of the first film involves his return to a life of religious devotion. The second film centers upon an already converted young woman, Christine, who falls in love with a devout professor of Mormon folklore, Dalen. The narrative chronicles the preparation of this pairing for their marriage in the temple, and the obstacles they confront mainly involve the non-Mormon characters who are attached to Christine's side of the family and bewildered by Mormon culture. Though *The Singles Ward* had a limited theatrical distribution and *The Singles 2<sup>nd</sup> Ward* was a direct-to-video release, *The Singles 2<sup>nd</sup> Ward* compares Mormon heterosexuality to non-Mormon heterosexuality more prominently than *The Singles Ward*. This comparison in addition to the film's tone of cynicism for the Mormon cinema movement is relevant for this chapter.

The narrative presents several perspectives of heterosexuality, and Christine, who as a main character is also the narrator for the story, comments upon the unique aspect of Mormon heterosexuality. After Christine phones her parents to tell them of her engagement to Dalen, Christine narrates, "Members of the Church have this unique perspective of marriage: the sooner the better. People who aren't members, like my

parents, have a hard time understanding that.” This anxious attitude for heterosexual coupling into a marriage is fueled by the doctrine surrounding eternal salvation and reproduction. For these purposeful heterosexuals, there is a reason and oftentimes urgency to bring men and women together in marriage. Christine narration acknowledges this perspective to be unique from contemporary views of heterosexuality.

Christine’s mother and father also present different forms of heterosexuality, and these forms are depicted as inferior to the purposeful coupling of Christine and Dalen. Christine’s mother, Dorothy, is married to a wealthy man who is old and in poor health; however, Dorothy’s heterosexual relationship is devoid of true love. Dorothy confesses that she married her husband for his money; thus, her perspective for the relationship is a matter of property. Christine’s father, Jack, is a wealthy middle-aged man who is not married but in a relationship with a young woman, Tiffany, whom he met at a popular clothing store. Jack’s perspective for his relationship is sexual pleasure. Jack and Tiffany reveal their plans to swing down to Las Vegas and marry after Christine and Dalen’s wedding. Jack and Tiffany’s spontaneity contrasts with the seriousness of Christine and Dalen’s love; hence, the moral framework of the narrative judges Jack and Tiffany for not having depth or true love to justify their romance and sexual activity. The narrative does not reveal much about the actual sexual activity that happens between Dorothy and her husband or Jack and Tiffany, but it is clear that neither Dorothy nor Jack are in a heterosexual relationship with reproduction as a purpose. In fact, the lack of purpose motivating each of their couplings cannot sustain their relationships within the moral framework of the movie. Unlike the purpose-driven coupling of Christine and

Dalen, Jack and Dorothy are each single again by the end of the film; however, they do express an interest in getting back together with one another, yet their comment about a prenuptial agreement assures that they do not adopt the purposeful perspective of their daughter.

In addition to the privileging of purposeful heterosexuality, the narrative also assumes non-Mormon conformity to Mormon standards. Even though Dorothy and Jack anticipate staying in a hotel, Dalen's parents invite everyone to stay in their home. Because of this arrangement, Jack and Tiffany are forced to sleep in separate beds because they are not married. Though invited into a Mormon home, Jack and Tiffany are forced to defer to Mormon expectations. Jack ultimately agrees with this logic, but he has a harder time complying with Mormon standards when he and Dorothy learn that they are to be excluded from the temple wedding. This is a common and often difficult scenario for real life orthodox Mormons, at least in the United States, where family and friends might be excluded from a temple wedding service because they are not devout members of the Church. The performances during this portion of the film aim for genuine heartbreak, and the tone of the story shifts to be more dramatic. However, it is difficult for the viewer to follow the story's jump into realistic drama when the rest of the film is a presentation of goofy caricatures in a plot line that follows any detour for a gag. Nevertheless, it is an honest, albeit uncomfortable and unsatisfying, treatment of this issue in Mormon culture. The issue is resolved by, yet again, Jack conceding to the Mormon standard. He is in the territory of purposeful heterosexuals, and they cannot compromise their perspective. Furthermore, Dorothy's resolution on the issue is not

presented. The structure of the plot assumes that the presentation of the two male characters making the decision to continue with the wedding to be satisfactory. Once Jack's concerns are resolved regarding the temple wedding, the narrative continues with Dalen's resolution with Christine.

The cult of true manhood and womanhood are privileged in this film. Much like the young lovers examined in *Saturday's Warrior*, Christine and Dalen are learning to discover their manhood and womanhood during the course of the story in order to embody the true love that can result between the gender ideals. Even though Christine is the narrator of the story, she remains as a passive feminine character. The plot is motivated by the active masculine character, Dalen. There are moments Christine, the narrator, completely disappears for several scenes at a time. This is not like the first film where Johnathan, like Christine, is the narrator of the story, but as the active and masculine character of the first film, Jonathan motivates much of the story in addition to narrating it. In the second film, Christine disappears in the story after the opening scene, and the story focuses on Dalen who reunites outside of the temple with his now-married friends from the first film. They offer encouragement that he will find a wife, and they even sing a brief clause from *Saturday's Warrior*. After the morning scenes at the temple, the story stays with Dalen until he sees Christine at the singles ward, where she again continues narration.

The most prominent disappearance of Christine in the story is near the climax when the parents are angered by the Church policy that they cannot attend the wedding as non-Mormons. Though Erin Chambers as Christine gives the most honest performance



in the film during this revelation, the narrative focuses on Dalen and his heartache. It is Dalen as the active/masculine character who calls off the wedding, wanders the streets in sorrow, and approaches Jack about the dilemma. And it is not until Dalen has resolved the issue with Jack, run to Christine's apartment, and called to her window that Christine reappears in the story to accept Dalen's desire to marry in a role of true womanhood.

In some ways, it is Christine who encourages Dalen into his true manhood. Though she is the narrator, which is an active role in communication, the plot defers from her story to favor Dalen's story. Christine also adopts an active role, albeit temporarily, in moments Dalen struggles. When he first asks Christine on a date, Christine finishes Dalen's sentence and decides the dating activity for him. She is also active in some of the matters regarding her non-Mormon parents, as far as monitoring the phone calls about the engagement and convincing Dalen to let them assist in the financial responsibility of the wedding celebration. Ultimately, though he struggles at times, Dalen comes to his true manhood after resolving the wedding trouble and calling to Christine's window, which he accidentally breaks in his moment of hyper-masculinity. It is at this point that the waiting true woman and the chasing true man rekindle their identities as purposeful heterosexuals and can commence with the wedding celebration.

In addition to discovering true womanhood and manhood, Christine and Dalen's relationship reveals a spiritual component that defines their true love. Where the story in *Saturday's Warrior* romanticizes the theology of the premortal realm, *The Singles 2<sup>nd</sup> Ward* romanticizes communion with the divine. Through prayer, Christine and Dalen use permission from God to justify their true love, which is common in Utah Mormon

culture. Christine and Dalen's assurance of divine approval for their heterosexual coupling is a source for comedy during their marriage proposal. However, later in the film when they express doubts about their relationship, their belief in approval from God regarding their relationship serves to sustain the true nature of their love. So even though Dalen is pressured with a prenuptial agreement or calls off the wedding, the film concludes with the triumph of their true love, and the story reveals that the true love for purposeful heterosexuals is divinely mandated.

In addition to the divine approval of their pairing that justifies Christine and Dalen's true love, the assumption of their reproduction as a couple is also assured. In a montage that depicts Christine's wedding shower, Christine receives sexy lingerie as a gift, which communicates the anticipation of pleasure and play in the sex act. However, this gift of sexy underwear is immediately followed by Christine receiving a baby stroller as a gift. This second gift maintains Christine's depiction as a purposeful heterosexual. Even though the sex act can involve a presentation that stirs desire, the act must always be justified through reproduction and true love.

Though Christine's parents depict two different approaches to heterosexuality, the two characters who directly contrast the true manhood and womanhood of Christine and Dalen are the wedding planner, Tabitha, and her assistant, Jeffrey. These are perhaps the only characters who have no interest in heterosexual weddings of their own, even though they have been hired to organize Dalen and Christine's wedding. The active and passive roles are reversed in this man and woman partnership. Jeffrey is probably the first effeminate gay male stereotype to appear in a film for Mormon audiences. He lisps in

high tones, wears pink and purple, and paints his fingernails. He is repeatedly silenced by Tabitha and passively remains in his subordination. Tabitha is the most active woman character in the film, with a possible exception to Dorothy. Tabitha is quick to criticize Mormon wedding practice, and she is the first to make wedding decisions on matters of location and presentation. She even insists upon challenging the matter of non-Mormon exclusion from the temple by desiring to speak with the manager. Dalen affirms, "I don't think you know him," which can be unpacked in a couple of ways. Dalen could be meaning the Temple President who manages and operates the particular temple, or Dalen could mean the prophet or other church leader. Dalen most likely means God as the manager of the temple since he later describes the temple as a place where God resides. Dalen's statement to Tabitha and Jeffrey can be interpreted as a kind of religious arrogance that only Mormons can commune with God, and people like Tabitha and Jeffrey, who are unaware of Mormon practice and do not perform in traditional gender roles, are incapable of a relationship with deity. Thus, these two characters who do not embody true manhood and womanhood are marginalized in the moral framework of the movie.

*The Singles 2<sup>nd</sup> Ward* presents multiple perspectives for heterosexuality; however, the perspective of the purposeful heterosexuals is the most superior in the moral framework of the film. Christine and Dalen are purposeful heterosexuals through discovering their true womanhood and manhood that is necessary for their true love, but their true love also reveals a spiritual component of divine approval. Unlike Dorothy and Jack who view heterosexual pairing as a means to get property or sexual pleasure,

Christine and Dalen's nineteenth-century view of heterosexuality sustains their relationship through the course of the narrative. This is important for these protagonists since the moral framework of the narrative is uncompromising with enforcing Mormon standards.

### Conclusion

Jonathan Ned Katz affirms that heterosexuality is invented and currently serves the current power structure in Western culture. Individuals in the culture have a specific way of perceiving and distinguishing different sexual identities and activities, and heterosexuality has been adopted as an unchanging and normative form of sexuality. Mormon theology adopts this normative construction of heterosexuality and infuses it with eternal necessity and purpose, and this incorporation of heterosexuality into Mormon theology manifests a nineteenth-century perspective of heterosexuality that can be recognized in films that present Mormon characters and content for Mormon audiences. Many institutional films, such as *Together Forever*, and commercial films, such as *Saturday's Warrior* and *The Singles 2<sup>nd</sup> Ward*, present a specific perspective of heterosexuality that is informed by the nineteenth-century view of heterosexuality that is found in Mormon teachings. Even though the characters in these films perform a heterosexual identity within a wider culture dominated by an ideology of heteronormativity, the purpose-driven heterosexuality that these characters perform can appear as unusual for much of the mainstream culture who adopt a different perspective of heterosexuality. Nevertheless, the purposeful heterosexual continues as a stereotype in

much of Mormon Cinema with its aim for reproduction, true love, and true forms of gender identity. It is this purpose-driven sexuality that makes even the young male missionary characters in the homosocial environment of *God's Army* to correct a young female character that they are not “like nuns” but can get married after their two years of service.

## CHAPTER 3

### AN AMERICAN OTHER: THE MONSTROUS POLYGAMIST IN FILM AND TELEVISION

Regarding contemporary leaders of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, a faculty member from Brigham Young University observes, “I wish they would deal more honestly and openly with the polygamy which is part of our heritage. They always react with embarrassment, almost denial. I am the descendant of a second wife. Except for polygamy, I wouldn’t be here – or my line is illegitimate” (Ostling and Ostling 75). This attitude of embarrassment and denial circulates in much of modern Mormon culture. A couple of Latter-day Saint writers admit,

As for church members, we rarely discuss polygamy in church meetings, and when we do, many of us are left feeling troubled and disoriented [...] We find ourselves still having to explain to outsiders that the LDS Church abandoned the practice long ago. We despise the fact that others think we are living outside mainstream, conservative American marriage patterns.  
(Toscano and Toscano 253)

These negative attitudes in Mormon culture about the doctrine and history of polygamy reveal a change in the Mormon community’s relationship with mainstream culture since the nineteenth century. Similar to the faculty member, I am also the descendant of a second wife. My grandmother grew up in a devout Latter-day Saint family comprised of one father and three mothers, and her generation was one of the last to experience

polygamy while the Church officially sanctioned the practice. My grandmother told me stories from her childhood of living in a Mexican colony that was designed to be a refuge for Mormons from United States marriage laws. In the decades since my grandmother's return to the United States, the passing generations of her Latter-day Saint culture have in many ways dismissed the practice of polygamy as a negligible part of their pioneer past. However, my grandmother's stories personally remind me that the Church's history of polygamy is very real, complex, and human.

The embarrassment about polygamy by Church leaders and members is motivated in part by the mainstream demonization of plural marriage. The dominant ideology in mainstream Western culture privileges monogamous heterosexual relationships, which is heteronormativity. The sexuality that is practiced in polygamous relationships can be perceived as a threat to heteronormativity. Thus, a strategy by ruling systems of power to combat opposing ideologies is to cultivate a discourse of fear and revulsion regarding such alternative ideologies. In much of modern culture, heteronormative power systems sustain discourses of fear and revulsion about polygamy, which influences the current embarrassment in much of Mormon culture. This paper will analyze the construction of Mormon characters as polygamous monsters in two films from two different periods of film history and how these films compare with the depiction of polygamy in the currently running television show *Big Love* (2006- ). I will argue that both *A Mormon Maid* (1917) and *September Dawn* (2007) draw upon elements of the horror genre as outlined by Robin Wood to represent their Mormon characters as monstrous, and the television series *Big Love* negotiates and problematizes this kind of representation. Furthermore, the

stereotype of the monstrous polygamist functions in many ways to displace the oppression of patriarchy and heteronormativity.

As recognized in the previous chapter regarding (monogamous) heterosexuality, cultural perceptions of human relationships change over time and among different cultures. There is not one way to be a polygamist, just as there is not one way to be heterosexual, lesbian, gay, or Mormon. My interest in this chapter is to examine a strategy in heteronormative discourse that perpetuates the idea of polygamy as frightening through the development of a monstrous polygamist stereotype. I am saddened to hear contemporary accounts and news stories, which are also influenced by the dominant ideology, of members of polygamous families who are victims of molestation, rape, male violence, and other forms of abuse and control. This actual phenomenon is frightening; however, for this particular study, it is important to remember that these acts of harm can (and do) exist in all types of sexual relationships and should not be assumed to be only inherent with polygamy.

This project is designed to reveal cultural power systems and their reinforcement of specific heteronormative ideologies through using Mormons in cultural discourse. The stereotype of the monstrous polygamist is presented as an Other and made frightening through its embodiment of society's repressed sexuality; furthermore, this stereotype functions as a red herring for the oppressive effects of patriarchy and heteronormativity. This project will first examine the elements in Mormon history that contribute to the construction of the monstrous polygamist. Subsequently, this chapter will introduce Robin Wood's theory of the horror film and Adrienne Rich's theory of compulsory



heterosexuality. Then these theories will be used with an analysis of *A Mormon Maid* and *September Dawn* to reveal stereotype of the monstrous polygamist as an Other as well as a patriarchal strategy. Finally, an analysis of *Big Love* will reveal a negotiation and reformulation of the monstrous polygamist stereotype.

#### “Fearsome” Elements of Mormonism: Danites, Blood Atonement, and Polygamy

Many of the movies that present monstrous Mormon polygamists draw upon several elements of Mormon history that could effectively be misconstrued and presented to generate fear and maximize a sinister image of this religious group. These elements include polygamy, blood atonement, and the secret society of the Danites. Historians and critics within Mormon studies have wrestled with these pieces of Mormon history, and many would find a reductive summary of these elements problematic. However, for the purpose of this essay I feel it is necessary to briefly define and contextualize them since they manifest themselves in many of the films identified.

A popular historical reference in these movies with monstrous polygamists is the secret society of the Danites. The Danites, also referred to as the “Avenging Angels,” were a

Highly secret society bound by penalty oaths; originally formed for retribution against internal dissenters, it later shifted its mission to include retaliation against anti-Mormon mobs ... It is not clear to what extent the church leadership bestowed its backing or was aware of Danite activities. (Ostling and Ostling 34)

Because this group was so secretive, there is little known about it, except that its founder was a man named Sampson Avard, and it began while church members were building settlements in the 1830s in Missouri under the direction of Joseph Smith. The period that the Saints lived in Missouri was a particularly violent period that consisted of anti-Mormon mob violence, a notable massacre of Mormon settlers, and eventually an order by the Missouri Governor for the Mormons to leave the State or be exterminated. The Danite group operated independently from the Church, but its participants were devoted to the cause and mission of the Church as to serve as its protector from mobs and dissenters. However, some Danites did operate with a vigilante mindset in order to seek revenge against those who had wronged Mormon communities, and Joseph Smith condemned the group after Avard testified against Smith in a Missouri court (Allen and Leonard 121-122). Many historians believe that the society had dissolved by the time the Saints settled in Utah in the late 1840s, and former Danites worked in other capacities within the Church. Fictional narratives that present the Danites as murdering women who resist polygamy or openly guarding Mormon councils in Utah are historically unfounded. However, the image of a secret society that is motivated to murder in the name of religion is an effective narrative device employed by writers who create stories about monstrous polygamists.

Another device related to the belief that Mormons will murder in the name of religion is the doctrine of “blood atonement.” Joseph Smith and Brigham Young taught the doctrine of blood atonement (Quinn 112-113). Many have misunderstood this doctrine and critics since the early days of the Church have misconstrued it to condemn

the Saints and their practices. The Church does not openly teach the doctrine today, which may be understood because of its frequent misreading. Apostle Bruce R. McConkie in his semi-official *Mormon Doctrine* related the concept of blood atonement to capital punishment. He affirms that “under certain circumstances there are some serious sins for which the cleansing of Christ does not operate, and the law of God is that men must have their own blood shed to atone for their sins” (92). As an example, McConkie poses the situation of a murderer who wishes to repent of his sin. The murderer must shed his own blood in order to show remorse. McConkie claims that such logic has been supported by the teachings of Moses in the Old Testament (93). In the Utah Territory where civic and religious matters had the potential to merge under Brigham Young’s leadership, developing doctrinal support for controversial matters such as capital punishment seems plausible. However, the depiction in fictional narratives that blood atonement is justifiable for any sin or for not being a member of the Church is historically unfounded.

Perhaps the most prominent practice associated with Mormons is polygamy, which was openly practiced in the Utah territory in the nineteenth century. Polygamy was also referred to as plural marriage, celestial marriage, or ‘the principle’ (Bushman and Bushman 63). Accounts of Joseph Smith’s revelation to restore the practice of polygamy as in the Old Testament date back to 1831 when the Saints were living in Ohio and Missouri. It was not until the 1840s that Joseph Smith and several other Church leaders began to comply with the divine command to practice plural marriage similar to Abraham, Jacob, and David in the Old Testament. This was after the Saints had been

persecuted and driven out of their settlements in Missouri, so they began a settlement in Illinois on the shores of the Mississippi river. Some interpret this doctrine as a strategy to increase the Mormon population during these early days of settling. *The Book of Mormon* supports this idea because it teaches that the reason God will command the practice of plural marriage is to “raise up seed [(children)] unto” him. At the same time, polygamy cannot be reduced to this single purpose because of polygamy’s complexity in theology and history.

Because of the controversial nature of the plural marriage doctrine, Church leaders began the practice of polygamy in secret while publicly denying their involvement in such behavior. Even Joseph Smith’s first wife, Emma, was unaware of polygamy’s early stages and that her husband was being spiritually married to other women (Newell and Avery 95). After she learned of the practice, she was reluctant, but eventually she was willing to obey (Newell and Avery 140). The secret underground of plural marriages in Illinois would lead to Joseph Smith’s downfall since his closest associates felt betrayed when they learned of what they perceived as adultery. Some of them vocally criticized him as a fallen prophet. William Law, a close associate of Joseph’s and a leader in the Church, was a direct opponent of plural marriage. He pushed to print an independent newspaper for the Church community in Illinois that would expose the secret polygamous practices. It was Joseph’s destruction of William Law’s press that led to Joseph’s arrest and imprisonment where an angry mob would murder him (Ostling and Ostling 14-17).

After Joseph's murder and the escalating mob tension in Illinois, Brigham Young took a group of the Saints to the Utah Territory in 1847. The practice of polygamy was openly revealed to the Church community in 1852, and Smith's revelation pertaining to the practice was added to the canon of Mormon scripture. Latter-day Saint historians Claudia and Richard Bushman affirm that it was "men in positions of leadership with sufficient incomes [who] were encouraged, and even commanded, to marry more than one wife," even though "the Utah population included slightly more men than women" (63, 65). The practice continued until 1890 when the Church issued a manifesto to end the practice after pressure and disenfranchisement from the Federal Government. The Church's official discontinuation of the practice enabled Utah to be granted statehood in 1896; however, the process of changing to an institution and culture devoid of new polygamous marriages was slow and difficult for many faithful Latter-day Saints. It was a period that included more than one manifesto by Church leaders regarding the practice, two apostles withdrawing from the Church hierarchy, and families relocating to colonies in Canada and Mexico where the United States' regulation on marriage could not be enforced (Allen and Leonard 386-388, 474). Though the Church does not sanction polygamy today, polygamy continues to be associated with the Mormon name. Church leaders and members are often vocal about distinguishing between The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and other offshoot fundamentalist sects that still practice plural marriage.

Many dismiss the practice of plural marriage or polygamy as an extreme form of patriarchal control. Polygamy certainly can be used as a form of male control and

exploitation of femaleness. But the word used in this project and in much of Mormon historical discourse is the word “polygamy,” which is defined as “many marriages” and can technically apply to both men and women (Toscano and Toscano 263). The popular image that people attach to polygamy is one man with multiple wives; however, “polygyny” is the term that identifies one man marrying more than one wife, and “polyandry” is the term that identifies one woman marrying more than one husband. “Polygamy” can function as an overarching term to include both polygynous and polyandrous relationships in addition to other marriages that involve multiple partners regardless of gender. The descriptor “polygamy” is important for Mormon history because there is historical record of both polygynous and polyandrous relationships, though polygynous relationships were much more pervasive (Van Wagoner 74). With this in mind, polygamous relationships have a broad potential for queerness. This queer capacity for polygamous relationships makes the stereotypical image of one man ordering a harem of women into subordination to be much more complex.

This complexity in the concept of polygamy can threaten heteronormativity. Even the popular polygynous image introduces other arguments in favor of women’s experience. For example, multiple wives allows for multiple life choices since domestic responsibilities can be shared with others in the family. There are historical accounts of Mormon women who attended colleges and universities outside of Utah since other wives in their families could care for their children (Bushman and Bushman 61). However, despite this example of sharing domestic responsibility, there are aspects of polygynous relationships that reinforce patriarchy, especially when the family is defined and lead by

the husband. So instead of focusing on one aspect of polygamy, the polygynous relationship, I will approach the topic of this chapter through polygamous relationships as a whole and their capacity for queerness and complexity. This complexity can challenge heteronormativity, and this power system's placement of monogamous heterosexuality as the ideal reinforces dominant social repression, enables the perception of Others, and enacts a collusion with patriarchy to subordinate women.

### Sexuality, Horror, and the Other

Though I do not affirm that *A Mormon Maid* and *September Dawn* should be regarded as part of the horror genre, these two movies are designed to incite fear in the viewer of the Mormon characters, and these two films draw upon elements of the horror genre in order to fulfill that effect. In his collection of essays found in *Hollywood from Vietnam to Reagan*, Robin Wood describes a foundation of the horror film as a separation between difference and normality. Wood summarizes "the basic formula of the horror film: normality is threatened by the monster" (78). Because of potential misinterpretation of what is regarded as normal, especially in the misinterpretation of equating normality with health, Wood clarifies his use of the word 'normality' in "a strictly nonevaluative sense to mean simply 'conformity to the dominant social norms'" (78). Social norms of a culture are typically consistent with the dominant ideology in that culture, which for much of Western culture has been identified as white patriarchal heteronormative capitalism. Various studies have been done that identify the way many monsters in the horror genre are designed to resist each ruling ideology in matters of race, class,

sexuality, and/or gender; thus, the monster is destroyed, and the dominant ideology remains undefeated.

Elements of psychoanalysis are significant in Wood's construction of both normality and the Monster in the horror film. Wood draws upon the work of Freud and Marcuse as found in Gad Horowitz's book *Repression* to understand what is commonly repressed both socially and individually and how such repression justifies the depiction of certain monsters in the movies (Wood 70). In order to recognize repressed elements in movie monsters, Wood distinguishes between basic repression, which is inescapable for an individual, and surplus repression, which "is specific to a particular culture and is the process whereby people are conditioned from earliest infancy to take on predetermined roles within that culture" (71). Basic repression and surplus repression can be recognized as two other terms: repression and oppression (71). Repression is associated with psychoanalysis in that it involves an individual's repression of elements into his or her subconscious during infancy. What is repressed cannot be accessed on a conscious level; it can only be accessed through analysis or recognition in dreams. Oppression involves something outside of an individual that could involve a cultural or political force. Cultural systems of power aim to oppress any threat to their ideological domination. Wood writes, "One might perhaps define repression as fully internalized oppression (while reminding ourselves that all the groundwork of repression is laid in infancy), thereby suggesting both the difference and the connection" (71). Though repression and oppression can be understood as two different phenomena, they must also be recognized



as interacting with each other in complex ways. What the dominant ideology oppresses will most assuredly affect infantile development and basic repression.

What constitutes repression is motivated by the dominant ideology. The repression of sexual energy, gender traits, and intellectual capacity are all interconnected in order to reinforce white patriarchal heteronormative capitalism. To reveal this interconnectedness, Wood chooses to identify the mutual reinforcement between heteronormativity and capitalism. Wood asks,

What, then is repressed in our culture? First, sexual energy itself, together with its possible successful sublimation into non-sexual creativity ... The 'ideal' inhabitant of our culture is the individual whose sexuality is sufficiently fulfilled by the monogamous heterosexual union necessary for the reproduction of future ideal inhabitants, and whose sublimated sexuality (creativity) is sufficiently fulfilled in the totally non-creative and non-fulfilling labor (whether in factory or office) to which our society dooms the overwhelming majority of its members. The ideal, in other words, is as close as possible to an automaton in whom both sexual and intellectual energy has been reduced to a minimum. (72)

Heteronormative systems of power work to repress sexual energy in culture, and this repression of energy is connected with a two-fold process that perpetuates the dominating ideology. This process involves channeling such repressed energy into necessary labor while the process also ensures that more individuals are being produced who can continue fulfilling the needs of the dominating cycle.

Wood's choice of the word "ideal" in describing those people who are complicit with the oppression of ruling ideologies is important because "ideal" recognizes that there will be those who do not function at such an expected level of complicity. Those who cannot be described as "ideal" are then identified as "the Other" (Wood 73). The Other functions as the outsider in an us-versus-them operation enacted by power systems whose subjects are threatened by the existence of non-conformity. Wood writes,

Otherness represents that which bourgeois ideology cannot recognize or accept but must deal with (as Barthes suggests in *Mythologies*) in one of two ways: either by rejecting and if possible annihilating it, or by rendering it safe and assimilating it, converting it as far as possible into a replica of itself ... Its psychoanalytic significance resides in the fact that it functions not simply as something external to the culture or to the self, but also as what is repressed (though never destroyed) in the self and projected outward in order to be hated and disowned. (73)

In a culture dominated by white patriarchal heteronormative capitalism, there will be those who cannot fully function within such ideological demands. Those who fully accept the dominant ideology are compelled to separate themselves from those who do not, and this becomes a separation between Self and Other. This separation is maintained through the Self's projection on to the Other of "what is repressed within the Self in order that it can be discredited, disowned, and if possible annihilated" (73). When the Other is not removed or destroyed, cultural systems of power aim to make the Other conform.

When applied to horror movies, the monster is connected with what the culture perceives as the Other. This is because in many ways the monster is constituted by the culture's repressed elements. Wood writes,

One might say that the true subject of the horror genre is the struggle for recognition of all that our civilization represses or oppresses, its reemergence dramatized, as in our nightmares, as an object of horror, a matter for terror, and the happy ending (when it exists) typically signifying the restoration of repression. (75)

Monstrous Others in horror films rarely conform in order to assimilate; the monstrous Other is generally annihilated in order to maintain the repressed condition of the ruling ideology. Depicting Mormon polygamists in cultural texts as monstrous Others means that in many cases such characters will be constituted by sexually repressed elements in the culture in order to be disowned, feared, and/or destroyed.

#### The Displacement of Patriarchal Oppression onto an Other

Patriarchy is a power system that privileges the perspective, knowledge, and experience of men over (and often at the expense of) women. "Technically, patriarchy is 'the rule of the fathers.' As it translates into experience, it is the view that male is primary and central and female is secondary and auxiliary" (Pearson "Could Feminism" 33). Mormon poet Carol Lynn Pearson describes patriarchy with a verse from *The Book of Mormon*, "Men are that they might have joy," with her own addition, "And women are that they might provide it" ("Could Feminism" 36).

Women are not only marginalized under patriarchy but they are also constituted as the Other when they are not complicit with patriarchal subordination. In accordance with the theory of the Self that projects its repression onto the Other, Wood asserts, “The dominant images of women in our culture are entirely male created and male controlled ... on to women men project their own innate, repressed femininity in order to disown it as inferior” (74). Disowning femininity as inferior is part of a long process under patriarchy that situates men and women as opposites and culturally attaching opposing attributes to each gender. This results in a dichotomous view of gender identity where men and women are different in such ways as masculine/feminine, active/passive, and strong/weak. These opposites ideologically justify separate roles in human activity because of gender difference instead of individual strengths and interests. Favoring gender roles over individual identities reinforces a patriarchal system that perpetuates an unequal operation between men and women through acculturation.

When cultures operate with dichotomous categories of gender and sexuality, individuals in the culture are often pressured to enter one of the two categories. Regarding the hetero/homo division of sexuality, feminist writer Adrienne Rich examines how women are particularly pressured to participate in heterosexual relationships. Rich identifies this cultural coercion as “compulsory heterosexuality.” In her classical essay “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence” (1980), Rich introduces her concept of “compulsory heterosexuality” as well as “lesbian existence” and the “lesbian continuum” (51). She criticizes feminists with “a perspective of unexamined heterocentricity” who are willing to accept motherhood as an institution in the service of

patriarchy without recognizing heterosexuality's institutional reinforcement of patriarchy (23-24). As a classical essay in feminist theory, Rich's ideas influenced the ongoing development and change in feminism over the next few decades, yet these concepts that she introduces are still important for identifying the patriarchal system of coercing women into heteronormative relationships.

Rich emphasizes the term "lesbian existence" over "lesbianism" because the latter term has been historically limiting. Discussing "lesbianism" does not convey the many facets of a lesbian woman's life beyond her sexuality and relationships. Rich affirms, "*Lesbian existence* suggests both the fact of the historical presence of lesbians and our continuing creation of the meaning of that existence" (51). Connected with Rich's "lesbian existence" is her theorization of a lesbian continuum. Rich's lesbian continuum addresses the multiple phases and levels of same-sex identification and desire in a woman's life whether she identifies as heterosexual or homosexual. Rich recognizes female same-sex relations as a continuum because she describes it as "a range – through each woman's life and throughout history – of women-identified experience, not simply the fact that a woman has had or consciously desired genital sexual experience with another woman" (51). There are many kinds of relationships that are possible between women. They can span the completely platonic to the passionately erotic as well as any level in between. The lesbian continuum emphasizes the fluidity of female desire as well as the varieties of desire available to women regarding their same-sex relationships.

Despite the fluidity of female desire in relationships without men, women are culturally coerced to choose monogamous relationships with men. Heterosexuality has

so perfectly become a part of cultural experience that even feminists have difficulty recognizing its fabrication for patriarchal benefits. Heterosexuality as an institution has been constructed from a male-dominated system to serve patriarchal interests (35). Furthermore, women are inundated with “the covert socializations and the overt forces which have channeled women into marriage and heterosexual romance” (34). Because of this cultural coercion into heterosexuality, a woman’s preference for a man is perceived as superior to all other options.

Moreover, it is understood that this ‘preference’ does not need to be explained ... It is lesbian sexuality which ... is seen as requiring explanation ... The assumption of female heterosexuality seems to me in itself remarkable: it is an enormous assumption to have glided so silently into the foundations of our thought. (34)

Compulsory heterosexuality exists because of its cultural construction as the preferred and often only option for women. Rich writes, “Women have been convinced that marriage and sexual orientation toward men are inevitable – even if unsatisfying or oppressive – components of their lives” (39). Women challenge patriarchy when they resist compulsory heterosexuality through recognizing multiple options for their lives.

Critics of Rich’s essay at the time expressed concern that Rich equates female friendship with lesbianism and heterosexuality with rape (Rich 69). Rich does address the misunderstanding that all heterosexuality is bad and should be completely avoided. She clarifies,

Within the institution exist, of course, qualitative differences of experience; but the absence of choice remains the great unacknowledged reality, and in the absence of choice, women will remain dependent upon the chance or luck of particular relationships and will have no collective power to determine the meaning and place of sexuality in their lives. (67)

It is the “absence of choice” that is Rich’s main concern for addressing this cultural phenomenon. Not only are women from an early age flooded with images and expectations of heterosexual romance, but also fear, misery, and abnormality are associated with the women who choose not to participate with heterosexual expectations. Rich is writing to generate a cultural awareness that women do not *need* men, and men do not have a right of access to women, which compulsory heterosexuality has so valiantly and successfully tried to teach.

Rich’s theory of compulsory heterosexuality reveals how the depiction of the Mormon character as a monstrous Other is in many ways a red herring. Stories with a monstrous polygamist typically involve forcing an innocent woman into a polygamous relationship against her will. The narrative is designed to generate sympathy for the innocent woman who is coerced into a subordinate position with other oppressed wives. At the same time in these stories, the innocent woman desires (and achieves) a monogamous heterosexual relationship, the specific type of relationship that is complicit with dominant heteronormativity and compulsory heterosexuality. The oppressive forces of a male-dominated heterosexuality are displaced in these movies onto polygamist relationships. This displacement not only cultivates fear of polygamy and eliminates that

particular option for women but it also maintains the invisibility of patriarchal oppression in monogamous heterosexuality.

#### The Development of the Monstrous Polygamist and *A Mormon Maid* (1917)

Representing Mormons as monsters, isolated, and mysterious was popular in the literature of the Victorian Era, which was mere decades after Mormonism's establishment by Joseph Smith in 1830. Arthur Conan Doyle's first Sherlock Holmes mystery required his up-and-coming detective to explore the dark mysteries of this religious cult in *A Study in Scarlet*, which was first published in 1887. Zane Grey popularly used Mormons unfavorably in his fictional narratives of the West with novels such as *Riders of the Purple Sage* and its sequel *The Rainbow Trail*. Both of these books became the source novels for several film adaptations.

Fear of Mormon influence and the construction of strange Mormon characters were not isolated to the United States, even though the Mormon Church has its origins in New York. Since the middle of the nineteenth century, Mormon missionary work had a strong presence in England and was expanding through much of Europe. As filmmaking became popular, a Danish film company released *The Flower of the Mormon City* (1911), and the following year Pathe released *The Mountain Meadows Massacre* (1912) (Astle & Burton 32). In both Europe and the United States, the stories in these films revealed a public distrust or anxiety regarding Mormons that could predictably generate profit. Accordingly, studios continued to produce movies that perpetuated an image of the Mormons as monstrous.



There could be many reasons for a cultural consciousness in this period of Mormonism as mysterious and frightening. In Europe, converts of the Church's missionary effort immigrated to the United States to gather with other Latter-day Saints to strengthen and build a community and kingdom of God. This fueled suspicion and vilification from local citizens, especially those affiliated with other Christian denominations. Some of these critics became vocal in their opposition as they saw their family, friends, and neighbors leave Europe in pursuit of a strange belief system and community. One critic was Winifred Graham who wrote the source novels for the British silent films *Trapped by the Mormons* (1922) and its sequel *Married to a Mormon* (1922). Graham wrote several other anti-Mormon fictional stories, and one included a preface with its aims specifically articulated. "It is a novel with a purpose; but as being such it is all the more valuable, for it copes with a definite evil ... the Mormon propaganda in England" (D'Arc 169-170). Several years earlier in the United States, the Famous-Players Lasky Studio produced *A Mormon Maid* (1917). In their historical summary of Mormons and movies, Randy Astle and Gideon O. Burton identify the attention *Trapped by the Mormons* has received by historians and critics as "the most important and damaging of the anti-Mormon films [of the era], though both descriptions better fit *A Mormon Maid*" (34-35). *A Mormon Maid* was critically well received and popular among audiences.

*A Mormon Maid* begins with a motif of a book about the Mormon pioneers or members of "The Church of Latter-day Saints" as stated on the book's cover. I do not know if the filmmakers removed "Jesus Christ" in the title of the Church for legal

purposes or for other reasons, such as disassociating Mormon practice with Christianity. Nevertheless, the image of the book is a recurring motif in the film with pages designed as title cards to explain elements of the story. The opening images of the story show the Saints traveling in the wilderness in their covered wagons, and the fictional leaders, Richard Cummings and Darius Burr, are introduced. Cummings is clearly modeled after Brigham Young and the title card identifies him as “The Lion of the Lord,” a phrase traditionally associated with Young. The rest of the story focuses on Dora and her parents, who are not Mormons. Dora meets and falls in love with Tom, who is a young Mormon man. After the Indians attack Dora’s home, Tom helps Dora and her family find refuge in the Mormon city. While in the city, Burr, a polygamist, expresses a sensual interest in Dora. After some time, the Mormons force Dora’s father, John, to pledge allegiance to their Church by taking another wife. John resists, so the leadership council says they will force Dora to marry a Mormon polygamist. To save Dora, John takes another wife, and Nancy, Dora’s mother, kills herself upon learning of John’s second marriage. Despite the agreement made by John, Dora is kidnapped by Burr to become one of his plural wives. Dora tries to escape from Burr’s home, but she is recaptured and dressed in ceremonial clothing to become one of Burr’s wives. During the ceremony, Dora tricks the leadership council by telling them that she is not a virgin, which would disqualify her from becoming a plural wife. The Mormon council stops the marriage, and John and Tom help Dora escape. After a final standoff with Burr, the three ride away to a “land of golden promise,” which the closing title card suggests.

With its release in 1917, *A Mormon Maid* is clearly modeled after *The Birth of a Nation* (1915), perhaps in an early attempt to attract audiences through the capitalization on similar imagery. These two movies were produced by different studios; however, the narratives in both of these films are set in the same time period, so many of the visuals are similar. Perhaps the most overt parallel between the two films is the Danite costumes in *A Mormon Maid*. They are near replicas of the Ku Klux Klan robes in *The Birth of a Nation*. With the motifs of the West, the Danites ride on horseback in pursuit of the film's protagonists, which harkens to the Klan on horseback in *The Birth of a Nation*. The Danites are also given a prominent amount of screen time in *A Mormon Maid*. Within the diegesis of the movie, this secret society is involved in many aspects of the Church from wedding ceremonies to policing the streets of Utah, even though historically the group had dissolved by the time the Saints reached Utah, and many Church members and leaders were unaware the group had ever existed. Whereas the Klan in *The Birth of a Nation* assists the heroes, the Danites in *A Mormon Maid* serve to contain and destroy the protagonists, but the imagery between the two films remains the same and is effectively frightening. The Danite figures appear like ghosts in their white robes and hoods while they lurk the shadowy streets of the Mormon city.

Despite the violence and intimidation enacted by the ghost-like Danites, it is Burr and Cummings who are constructed as the monstrous polygamists of the story. The robed figures may be monstrous, but they act at Burr's command and in many ways symbolize Burr's control and presence throughout the city. Burr even wears the Danite robe at several points in the film in a way that maintains the dramatic question that any

robed figure could be him. As mentioned earlier, Burr is granted lengthy screen moments in order to convey his sexual longing for young Dora, both on her family's farm and in the Mormon city. The disturbing glint in his eye echoes an otherworldly or demonic power, which also hearkens to Gus' look in *The Birth of a Nation* as a wicked lust for an innocent woman. The demonic and lascivious look that Burr maintains for Dora also connects with the motif of the "all-seeing eye" pictured above the council and on the robes of the Danites. It is a symbol that reinforces Burr's power and presence as a religious leader driven by violent and self-serving lust.

Similar to the robed Danites as appendages of Burr's monstrosity, Burr's wives are also depicted as part of Burr's command and further reinforces his power. At one point in the story Burr commands a Danite to take Dora to his wives, and Burr states, "They will care for her." This line communicates an assumption in Burr's mind that his wives will obey him, which places him in the power position. The next scene fades into one of the wives of Burr sitting in a chair with a sharp look toward Dora. It is not a pleasant look, and it can be read as jealousy toward Dora or as a state of silent bitterness that results from her polygamous existence. The camera then pans to another wife with a similar gaze, then a framed portrait on the wall of another wife, which is followed by a pan to two wives standing beneath the portrait. The inclusion of the single portrait in the camera pan of the wives is interesting because it suggests a comparison between the one-dimensional woman in the frame and the actual plural wives in the room. There is a flatness and absence of humanness in these women as they stare at Dora, and this absence suggests something monstrous about these women. They are not like other women. It is

also during this point of the film that John's second wife is introduced to Nancy, and this second wife also appears lifeless in her appearance. Her face appears blank in her black dress and black veil. This attire appears as if she is ready for a funeral, and this associates the second wife with death, a comparison that connects the second wife with Nancy's suicide.

The creepiness of the zombie-like plural wives is effective because these female characters are embodiments of what a patriarchal ideology does not desire to recognize in itself. Constructing the plural Mormon wife as the Other allows the Self in a patriarchal system not to recognize the secondary status of women or the way women are acculturated into male domination. These images of emotionally lifeless women who conform to religious command and at one point in the film cower from their one husband presents issues of male control and male violence; however, since such issues are attached to a Mormon Other, they can be disowned by the Self under patriarchy. The Self may have anxieties concerning patriarchy and how it diminishes female identity and interest, but in Western culture the Mormon polygamous wife appears to be an effective symbol onto which one can displace such anxieties.

Burr is depicted as a monstrous Other through his unbridled sexuality and domination of women. Since much of the plot is Burr's pursuit of Dora to be his wife, Burr's character construction as a polygamist is significant. This is especially true when one realizes that Dora's options in the framework of the narrative are to be a plural wife of Burr's or a monogamous wife of Tom's. Dora is pitted between polygamy and monogamy, and her goal as the protagonist is to embrace one and escape the other. Thus,

the recognition of polygamy with Burr's monstrosity is crucial. And much like the displacement of female subordination from patriarchy onto the Mormon wife Other, a corresponding activity is happening with Burr's monstrosity as a Mormon polygamist Other. First, the age difference between Burr and Dora reveals cultural anxieties about older men who desire young women. Repressing such desires and attaching them to a Mormon Other is connected with this process of cultural disavowal. Second, the desire for multiple sex partners must be repressed in a society dominated by an ideology of monogamous heterosexuality, so the exercise of collecting multiple partners is also attached to the polygamist Other and made fearsome.

Dora's development into a woman and escape from a monstrous form of sexuality provides an effective story that complies with compulsory heterosexuality. In the earlier scenes of *A Mormon Maid*, Dora is represented as boyish and clumsy with her femininity. Her parents complain that she has climbed a tall tree near the house, which is not in accordance with feminine behavior. Soon after Dora's display of boyish activity in the tree, Tom, the young Mormon man, enters the story. Dora is immediately stricken with romantic desire for Tom. Any doubt by the spectator of Dora's heterosexual desire generated by Dora's boyish activity in the tree is eliminated, and the film continues to channel the heroine into the routine of cultural femininity and heterosexuality. After her family prospers in the Mormon city, her dress and manner seemingly parallel the fictional heroines of the antebellum South with their large gowns and elaborate mansions. Dora's family and culture successfully conform her to a role of true womanhood and the goal in the narrative for her to escape a monstrous form of sexuality is set.

Even though Dora matures in the Mormon city and remains an active protagonist for much of the film, her desire to escape polygamy is not motivated by an interest to keep her self-identity but to embrace a monogamous relationship with Tom. Tom remains at the core of Dora's desire for escape, and this manifests the compulsory heterosexuality within the film. Dora fires the gun that kills Burr. This is a crucial moment for the displacement of patriarchal oppression because for an instant Dora takes phallic power through the gun to annihilate her patriarchal oppressor. Fear and anxiety of patriarchal oppression is channeled into the representation of the monstrous polygamist, and Dora's annihilation of the polygamist offers the impression that she is free from patriarchy and need not fear oppression. However, Dora rides away from the Mormon city with Tom and her father. The spectator is left to assume that she and Tom remain together, but Tom is a Mormon. The film reveals little about his personal affinity or lack thereof to the religious group, aside from colluding against it to save Dora. His character is associated with the system of patriarchal oppression in the film. Furthermore, Dora is never given the option to leave without Tom. In the conclusion with Tom and her father, Dora is surrounded by the patriarchal influence that took her out of the tree and cultivated her maturity into femininity. Within the diegesis of the film, Dora resists one subordinate position in the polygamist city for another subordinate position within male patriarchy.

After the release of *A Mormon Maid*, the monstrous images of the Mormon community would disappear altogether, at least in the United States, with the implementation of the Hollywood Production Code. This Code banned "sex perversion," which included polygamy, and it also banned the misrepresentation of religions and their

ministers (Keyser and Keyser 93). In the 1940 epic *Brigham Young* the Mormon characters are presented as noble and heroic in their search for religious freedom. However, polygamy is only spoken about briefly as a way to build a community in their new settlement, but no character is shown to participate in the practice, particularly the main character, Brigham Young, who historically had married over twenty wives (Bushman and Bushman 63). Additionally, John Ford's *Wagonmaster* (1950) presents a sympathetic group of Mormons traveling across the plains, but none of the Mormons are presented as polygamists. The restrictions of the Hollywood Production Code allowed the Mormon characters to be stripped of their unusual marital and sexual practices, so the elements for monstrosity were set aside for another time.

#### The Post-Code Polygamist and *September Dawn* (2007)

As the Code was replaced by a ratings system in the 1960s and options became available to studios for presenting polygamy to viewing audiences, polygamist characters returned to movie screens as well as television shows, and these characters were usually monstrous men with multiple wives, who were presented as victims. In *Paint Your Wagon* (1969), which is based on a stage musical, a Mormon man enters a mining town and auctions off one of his wives, Elizabeth. Though the moment with the Mormon is brief in the movie, he is presented as operating a monstrous form of polygamy through treating women as property in his act of buying and selling. The rest of the movie involves Elizabeth who, as a Mormon polygamist, chooses to have two husbands. The genre of *Paint Your Wagon* as a musical comedy is significant when compared with



historical dramas such as *A Mormon Maid*. Where the polygynous relationship in *A Mormon Maid* is monstrous, the polyandrous relationship in *Paint Your Wagon* is comedic. In many ways this is another aspect of a patriarchal culture that views the phenomenon of men sharing one wife to be absurd. These men are sacrificing their cultural power position to exist at the discretion of a woman, which fuels the comedy. Nevertheless, the polyandrous relationship does not last at the end of the film. As can be expected with compulsory heterosexuality, *Paint Your Wagon* concludes with Elizabeth choosing to stay with only one of her husbands. Furthermore, Elizabeth does not appear to adopt a Mormon identity other than using it as a means to justify having two husbands. The story presents her new polyandrous relationship in the mining town as rescuing her from her background in the oppressive religious institution of Mormonism.

The depiction of Mormon polygamists in the following years would be sporadic. The murderous antagonist in Chevy Chase's hit comedy *Fletch* (1985) is a bigamist from Utah, though specific references to the Mormon Church are minimal. The made-for-television movies *The Avenging Angel* (1995) and *Riders of the Purple Sage* (1996) present female polygamists as victims of the religious patriarchy in their western towns. In 2007 as the former Governor of Massachusetts and Latter-day Saint Mitt Romney campaigned for his party's nomination for President of the United States, *September Dawn* emerged in theaters as an overt condemnation of Mormon theology and history. In many ways *September Dawn* hearkened to the silent films in the era of *A Mormon Maid* where Danites roamed the land in a murderous rampage, sermons of blood atonement

pervaded the air, and women were forced to submit to lustful leaders in a sinister and erotic religious environment.

*September Dawn* is a problematic film in its polarizing and sentimental approach to the events of the Mountain Meadows massacre in the Utah territory. The historical assumptions and character constructions in this movie's narrative present an unpleasant story that results in a product that demonizes one religious group in favor of another. The massacre that is depicted in this film was an actual event that still involves many unanswered questions and painful feelings on all sides, and the film's approach of blending selections of actual history with fictional elements results in an overt exercise to condemn Mormon theology and practice. The actual events of the massacre are horrific, and nothing like it happened before or since in Mormon history. It is an event that could make for a fascinating film with themes of revenge, prejudice, religiosity, integrity, and the dilemmas between faith, duty, and inner wisdom. The narrative in *September Dawn* oversimplifies such themes, and this results in an entire community of people being generalized and demonized in the story. My analysis of this film is not meant to outline all of the historical flaws and assumptions that this movie presents. Hollywood has a long history of creating films about history that blend fictional elements with actual events, but I am concerned with the way such blending serves specific ideologies, particularly religious and heteronormative ideologies.

*September Dawn* is a love story situated in the historical events of the massacre at Mountain Meadows in 1857 when a group of Mormons and Native Americans slaughtered 120 men, women, and children traveling to California. The movie begins and

ends with the recollections of a character who survived the massacre as an infant. While overlooking the meadow years later as an adult she states, “Two worlds met on this spot: one of love, the other of hate.” Then the story dissolves back to the year 1857 and these two dichotomous groups are introduced as the mysterious Mormon riders observe the Fancher wagon party approaching the area. Jacob, the Mormon Bishop and Mayor of the area, speaks with Captain Fancher and allows his travelers to camp in a nearby meadow for a couple of weeks. Jacob then departs for the Utah capital and leaves his son, Jonathan, to monitor the Fancher party. Jonathan befriends many of the travelers and falls in love with Emily. He eventually asks her to marry him with an agreement to travel with the Fancher party to California. Meanwhile, Jacob meets with Brigham Young who shares Jacob’s disdain for the non-Mormon travelers; thus, the Mormon leaders make plans to steal the Fancher party’s supplies. Jacob returns to the area and asks the local Indians for their help in an attack. The groups attack the Fancher camp, but the travelers fight back, which causes the Indians to withdraw. Orders are then given by the Mormon leaders to destroy the entire party. Despite Jonathan’s forced participation in secret Mormon rituals, he resists the command to massacre the travelers; accordingly, Jacob chains Jonathan inside his home. After a few days, Jonathan frees himself from the chains only to find the entire Fancher party dead, except for Emily who is subsequently shot by Jacob.

The Mormon characters are singled out as violently monstrous in this story because of their obsessive devotion to Brigham Young and his instructions regarding “blood atonement.” At one point Micah, Jonathan’s brother, refers to Brigham Young as

“the Mormon God.” Such deification of Young within the film enables the Mormons to blindly follow his command, which includes acts of horrific violence. Jacob also appropriates a similar role as Brigham Young since he is the Bishop of the area and claims to receive visions from God that he can use to mobilize the local Mormon community. This control of one or two inspired leaders is similar to Burr and Cummings as monstrous polygamists in *A Mormon Maid* whose presence is associated with the Danites throughout the Mormon city.

The Mormon men’s queer sexuality is their distinguishing factor for an identity of monstrosity that is capable of violence. Jacob admonishes Jonathan that every man is to have three wives; thus, the viewer is left to assume that all of the other obedient men in the community have at least three wives. Jonathan’s resistance to marry multiple wives separates his character from identifying with the Mormon community and their violent acts. His romantic interest in Emily is presented in contrast to the polygamous relationships of Jonathan’s brother, Micah. Micah boasts about the pleasures of having two bodies in his bed, yet he admits that he does not feel love for his wives. He believes only women can feel love. Thus, Micah’s confession reveals a practice of multiple sex partners and a devaluation of his wives as sex objects. Within the narrative’s dichotomous morality, plural marriage is associated with the evil religious community and is incapable of producing human feelings beyond sexual gratification. As Micah’s violent monstrosity continues to develop in preparation for the massacre, Micah begs Jonathan to escape Mormonism. Micah feels it is too late for himself, but the only difference between the brothers is Micah is a polygamist and Jonathan is not married.

This moment suggests that polygamy and its sexual component is the point of no return for the Mormon character in becoming a monstrous polygamist.

Not only are the plural marriages queer but also the depiction of secret Mormon rituals blends into the erotic. Jonathan is forced by Jacob to receive his “endowments.” There is little explanation in the narrative as to what an endowment is except for a montage of images in a shadowy room decorated with sheer curtains. The montage of the ceremony depicts a cloudy image of a naked woman disrobing while Jonathan, who is also naked, kneels inside a round wooden structure. This image is followed by a close-up of an older man’s hand pouring a yellow fluid from a hollow horn onto Jonathan. Considering that the horn is handled by a masculine hand, the horn functions as a phallic symbol that appears to be symbolically transferring Mormon maleness, which might include their zealous obedience in matters of brutality and sexuality. Furthermore, this queer moment in the film that includes naked bodies, phallic symbols, and strange fluids is presented over a description of the ceremony by Brigham Young who attaches an obligation in the ceremony to “avenge the blood of the prophet” among other statements of violence. The group’s chant at the end of the montage also includes a graphic description of tearing out one’s own heart for the birds to eat. This combination of the violent and the erotic during this ceremonial scene reveals a sadistic aspect of the monstrous polygamist. Not only does he take pleasure in sexual activity with multiple wives but he also attaches an erotic gratification to the brute violence he enacts upon himself and others for religious purposes. According to Wood’s description of disavowing repression onto an Other, this moment of the Mormon Other manifests an

aspect of religion or churchly pleasures that blends into the erotic and must be disowned to maintain a purity in those pleasures found through religious worship. The monstrous polygamist who has multiple sex partners and sadistic rituals becomes an effective Other for such repression. Though Jonathan physically participates in the ceremony, he is presented through close-up as mentally and emotionally separated from the activity. This ensures that he is not to be identified as a monstrous polygamist. Additionally, this sadistic and queer montage is followed by a modest eroticism on the good side of the narrative's morality as Jonathan happens upon Emily who is beginning to bathe in the river. Their silhouettes in the moonlight and promises of fidelity stand opposite to the Mormon Other in the previous scenes.

In the film, the Fancher party adopts a heteronormative view of human relationships where men are the primary figures in the relationship and women are secondary figures. This is most noticeable when Emily reveals to her parents her desire to marry Jonathan. Emily's mother does not vocalize a coherent response, and eventually Emily turns away from her mother to continue the conversation with her father, which leaves her mother out of the frame and forgotten. As the religious leader and patriarch of the family, it is the father's anger about the marriage that Emily fears and not her mother's perspective. Outside of this scene, the female characters in the Fancher Party predominantly remain nameless. There is one female character, Nancy, in the Fancher party who adopts something of a masculine identity in her clothes; however, she is still presented as a feminine object for the male gaze and a powerless voice among the male leaders of the party. The other female characters, who are nameless, can be seen cooking

food, churning butter, and tending to babies in the background as the men in the Party teach the group, lead the group, pray for the group, and fight for the group. It is in this environment that Emily is being prepared for (compelled into) marriage and motherhood. Emily may be briefly suspicious of Jonathan's background in a community of plural wives, but he assures Emily in the moonlight that were he to marry her there would be no reason "to marry anyone else." In that conversation in the moonlight the compulsion to heterosexuality is in full operation. Emily's fear of facing a potentially queer situation subsides as a romantic one-liner leads her back into the comfort of the good side of the movie's morality and its complicity with dominant ideology.

If the women characters are noticeably secondary within the Fancher party (the good group) then women characters are absolutely invisible in the Mormon community (the evil group). This is a displacement of a radical form of patriarchy onto an Other in order to disown the anxieties of the secondary status of femaleness. Moreover, this displacement allows for the dominant ideology in the Fancher Party to function without evaluation and perhaps appear as desirable. The framework of the narrative assumes polygamous relationships can only take one form, which is one dominating husband with many wives. Though the Mormon women are spoken of, there are no identifiable Mormon women in the film. They do not speak and they are not named, and this places the power entirely with the Mormon patriarchs and defines the monstrous polygamist as entirely male.

Religious ideologies are also associated with the polarized communities in the film where one religious ideology and its form of worship is depicted as good and the

other, as an Other religion, is evil. There are overt comparisons through the course of the film that privilege the Fancher Party's form of Protestant Christianity while demonizing the Mormon form of worshipping Jesus Christ. In fact, Jesus Christ is erased from Mormon worship within the filmic diegesis. Much like the erasure of "Jesus Christ" in the title of the church in *A Mormon Maid*, in *September Dawn* Jacob does not conclude his prayer in Jesus' name as prescribed in nineteenth-century Mormonism. Jacob's character only quotes rigid rhetoric from the Old Testament while Emily draws upon the warm rhetoric of the New Testament. Surprisingly, Jonathan is bewildered when Emily brings up such biblical verses and the topic of Jesus and his teachings. Other comparisons between the communities of love and hate occur during a cross-cut montage between the preacher in the Fancher Party, who prays in gratitude for peace, and Jacob with his wives and children, who pray in anger for condemnation. Other scenes in the film include the Fancher Party singing hymns and reading the Bible around the campfire while the Mormons continue their sinister activities to prepare for the eventual massacre.

The contrast in religious ideology in this film matters because it is associated with the heterosexual union between Jonathan and Emily and is a vehicle for Jonathan's escape from the bad religious ideology. When Jonathan proposes to Emily, he gives her his locket with his mother's picture to assure Emily of his sincerity. Emily, in turn, gives Jonathan the gold cross that she wears around her neck. In addition to her love, Emily is giving Jonathan a good form of religious ideology. After this exchange, there is an image of Emily with her parents who each have a gold cross around their necks. Emily's neck holds the locket with the picture of Jonathan's mother, which symbolizes the only other



woman Jonathan has shown to hold affection. When Jonathan is shown looking at the sight of the massacre years later as an older man, the cross hanging around his neck maintains the memory of Emily, who died in the massacre. Moreover, the cross also suggests in this moment his rejection of Mormonism for a good religious ideology, which the film confirms to be a Protestant form of Christianity.

The contrast in religious ideology is also relevant to contemporary concerns of categorizing some religious groups as good and others as evil, namely Christianity and Islam. *September Dawn* is designed to draw connections between the violent religious radicals in the story and the Islamic terrorists who hijacked planes and used them as weapons in 2001. Both this tragedy and the Mountain Meadows tragedy happened on September 11 of their respective centuries, and the movie makes sure this connection of religious radicalism is made. First, the narrative presents the date before the scenes of the massacre. Second, the narrative includes an obscure quote by Joseph Smith who compares himself to Muhammad who, according to the quote, enforced belief in the Qur'an by putting non-believers to death. This is problematic because all of the Mormon characters in this film, except Jonathan who becomes a Christian after the event, are depicted as an evil counterpart to the positive Christians in the Fancher party. There is little nuance in the Mormon identity, particularly the identity of the monstrous polygamist. The film's encouragement for the viewer to make contemporary comparisons to the events of the film with modern radical Islamic terrorism, since September 11 is a date engrained with meaning in modern culture, encourages a

polarizing view of religious ideologies. This view can be damaging to both Mormon and Islamic communities and identities in society.

#### Negotiating the Monstrous Polygamist in *Big Love* (2006 - )

Even though the stereotype of the monstrous polygamist was revitalized in *September Dawn*, some interesting developments regarding the representation of polygamous relationships had been occurring on television. In 2006, the television series *Big Love* debuted on HBO. Perhaps because of its episodic structure, this series has an ability to introduce a variety of characters with multiple approaches to Mormon polygamy, at least more so than films such as *A Mormon Maid* and *September Dawn*. The stereotype of the monstrous polygamist certainly is included within the ensemble of characters, but the filmmakers negotiate this stereotype through creating a space between religious and sexual identities, recognizing the complexity of cultural power systems, and acknowledging the differences that exist within communities that identify as “Mormon.”

The structure of the series is designed to include narratives that blend and stretch over multiple episodes. Each episode is not independent of the others and typically requires information from previous episodes for plot elements to be understood. For this reason, this section of the chapter will analyze the first two episodes of the television series. These first two episodes, “01 Pilot” and “02 Viagra Blue,” set the tone for much of the series and introduce many of the characters who compose the regular ensemble. These episodes reveal how the introduction to the television series recognizes the

prominent stereotype of polygamists in order to negotiate and challenge such a construction.

The first two episodes of *Big Love* introduce Bill and his three wives: Barb, Nicki, and Margene. They live in a suburb of Salt Lake City, Utah, and each character struggles with his or her own concerns. Bill is stressed with opening his second home improvement superstore; he also cannot perform sexually with his three wives. Nicki wants money to make improvements to her house, Margene wants a car like the other two wives, and Barb is back in school and working as a substitute teacher. Bill has little contact with his parents, who live in a polygamist community in rural Utah. However, things heat up between Bill and Roman, the prophet/leader of the polygamist community, who demands a portion of the profits from Bill's second superstore. Roman has also taken a new young bride, Rhonda. Other characters in the series include Don, Bill's friend and co-owner of the superstore who is also a polygamist.

Bill is the main protagonist for the series, and his introduction in these first two episodes involves his sexual dysfunction, which immediately distinguishes him from being a typical monstrous polygamist. As recognized in *A Mormon Maid* and *September Dawn*, stories that involve monstrous polygamists usually situate them in an antagonistic position within the narrative. As embodiments of cultural repressions, monstrous polygamists become obstacles to the pursuits of heroic characters, who typically embody dominant ideology. The monstrous polygamist does not concern himself with the needs of his plural wives, but he acts upon his own massive sexual appetite and capability. Sexual weakness would threaten his power over women, the Mormon community, and

the dominant ideology. Applying these parameters to Bill's introduction makes him incapable of such a monstrous identity. The opening montage for the first episode reviews a disappointing night Bill experiences with his second wife, Nicki. The other two wives are also concerned with his inability to perform sexually, and some begin to take it personally, such as Margene who concerns herself with losing excess body fat from recently giving birth. Through the course of the two episodes, Bill obtains a prescription for Viagra, a drug designed to sustain penile erections, and these pills quickly solve his problem. At the end of the first episode, Bill tries to encourage Barb into sexual activity after he has taken a pill and reclaimed his sexual stamina. Barb rejects his encouragement, so Bill turns away from Barb but admires the shape of his engorged penis beneath the bed sheets. This moment of masculine pride not only reassures the viewer of Bill's masculinity but it also reassures the viewer of a popular expectation for Bill's identity as a polygamist: that he must be able to sexually satisfy multiple women. However, he is not depicted as monstrous in this moment of masculine pride because his sexuality is still fragile since he relies upon medication. Furthermore, the depiction of wives who refuse his requests for sexual activity also acknowledges the limits of his control within the family unit.

Barb, Nicki, and Margene are presented as having sexual appetites and pleasures of their own that enforce a level of control upon Bill, but despite such power, Bill remains as the patriarch and dominating figure in the family. In some ways the interactions between Barb, Nicki, Margene, and Bill hearken to the 1905 film *A Trip to Salt Lake City* where the polygamist husband is weary from the constant demands of his

multiple nagging wives. Margene pleads with Bill multiple times for a new car and Nicki commands Bill to come to bed and follow a specific schedule. Moreover, Barb reprimands Bill when he behaves with a superior attitude, such as when he needs her paycheck as a substitute teacher to help with household bills. “I resent it when you tell me what to do, and you don’t ask,” she complains. However, even in moments of resentment or reluctance, Barb will usually comply with Bill’s will, such as when she gives him her paycheck or travels to the polygamist compound that she never wanted to see again. So even though all of the wives have a voice pertaining to family matters as well as control over Bill’s access to their bodies, much of the power remains with Bill who makes the conclusive decisions about their requests and the direction of the family.

Ultimately, these two episodes depict the family unit of one man and three women as a patriarchal construct. The series’ musical opening includes an image of Bill, Barb, Nicki, and Margene sitting at a table and bowing their heads in prayer. There is a lone white candle on the table. This candle is phallic and its visual association with their prayers to a male deity, which occur throughout the episodes, suggests that a patriarchal system that is informed by religion permeates their relationship. Furthermore, this patriarchal dynamic of the one-man-three-women relationship is not excused within the series. After the opening segment of sexual activity between Nicki and Bill, Bill leaves Nicki in the bed and silently places money on her nightstand in a manner that alludes to scenarios of prostitution. This action suggests an overlap between prostitution and (plural) marriage in the way that women might be used at the discretion of the solitary husband. Movies with monstrous polygamists might use this allusion to prostitution as a

strategy to displace the exploitation of women in a patriarchal society onto the polygamist image. However, Bill, Barb, Nicki, and Margene do not function as symbols for the displacement of patriarchy. Moments such as the allusion to prostitution reveal a complexity about the polygamous situation because these characters are sympathetic and find pleasure in their relationship. This moment with the money on the nightstand reveals that they live in a culture where they reinforce and resist cultural power systems. The family is composed of multiple marriage partners, which resists heteronormativity, yet they live in separate houses and follow strict rules of limiting Bill's sexual activity to one wife at a time. This dilutes the queerness of their situation and appears to reinforce heteronormativity.

To further the queerness of plural marriage, there are moments in these episodes when Rich's lesbian continuum applies to the polygamous family unit, which subverts the compulsory heterosexuality that is typically prominent in other texts with monstrous polygamists. There is a level of intimacy that is shared between Barb, Nicki, and Margene that reinforces a female-identified experience. The narrative reveals moments where they share hugs, kiss on the cheek, and hold hands in prayer. Barb even ensures in the second episode, "We're never too far apart when we're holding hands." Despite potential upsets with jealousy and offense, these three women are presented as striving to maintain a bond through emotional and physical contact separate from Bill. On an even more intimate level on the continuum, Don, who works with Bill at the superstore, has three wives and two of them are suggested as sharing romantic intimacy. As a group of characters play cards in the second episode, these two wives share a flirtatious look then

physically touch one another with their feet under the table. This romantic act of physical touch under the table between two wives of one husband suggests a secrecy or heightened intimacy about their level of interaction as wives. This moment not only suggests a potential for queerness through group sex in Don's family but it also suggests a pleasure for female participants in polygamous families that is separate from the culture of compulsory heterosexuality and dominant heteronormativity.

Despite the complexity of sexuality and ideology in the series, the monstrous polygamist continues as a stereotype for some of the characters in the series. As the prophet and leader of the Fundamentalist Mormon sect, Roman and many of his followers embody this stereotype. These men and women are situated as antagonists in many ways to Bill and his family's activities. Barb even admits in the first episode that they are "creeps." This is because Roman and his followers are identified as the Other, whereas Bill, Barb, Nicki, and Margene are not constructed as the Other and as a result cannot fit the monstrous role. In the first episode, the Other is spoken of before visually presented. Barb complains about visiting the polygamist compound, Juniper Creek, with words such as "seediness" and "corruption" and by calling the prophets "con-artists" who prey upon the "young helpless girls" within the colony. These descriptions can conjure the images of the Mormon city in *A Mormon Maid*. As Barb, Nicki, and Bill drive to the community, a cheerful adaptation of "Top of the World" plays over the traveling sequence. But as their car turns into the community of polygamists the music shifts to ominous chords, and Barb turns her head away from the polygamist onlookers. Though this introduction includes the sound and image of children playing, the silence of the

polygamist onlookers creates a mood of suspicion. As darkness settles in the community, Roman is introduced and his sexual dominance as a monstrous character is immediately depicted with his fourteen-year-old bride, Rhonda.

Roman embodies an excessive sexual appetite. Since Roman is the sexual Other in the series, Bill is represented as the sexual Self. It is certainly subversive to present the Self as a polygamist, but this can explain why Bill's sex acts appear as heteronormative since they occur in separate houses with one wife at a time. Roman's sexuality contrasts Bill's and is made monstrous through Roman's age difference with Rhonda, not only that Rhonda is a minor but also that Roman is an older man. In contemporary culture, people tend to be uncomfortable with acknowledging that older people have sexual appetites and engage in sex acts. His age suggests an impression that his sexuality is predatory, and this predatoriness hearkens to Burr's interest in Dora in *A Mormon Maid*. Roman's predatoriness reinforces the cultural assumption that sexual activity should stop at a certain age, and when it does not it is perceived as excessive.

It is in the interaction between Self and Other that the difference in religion is important in *Big Love*. Roman's interest in polygamy is motivated in many ways by his institutional form of worship. He is also in charge of the institution. Much like the leaders in *A Mormon Maid* and *September Dawn*, polygamous relationships are depicted as monstrous when attached to an institutionalized religious purpose where patriarchal leaders benefit. Bill, Barb, Nicki, and Margene are different from Roman's family because they are not attached to an institutionalized form of religion, and this absence of institutionalized religion allows each member of the family to approach the structure of a



polygamous relationship for each of their own intentions and satisfactions. As Roman's daughter, Nicki is strongly influenced by a religious ideology to participate in a polygamous family, but the intentions of Barb and Margene are not clear. Barb's intentions are suggested as more practical since the first episode reveals that Bill took Nicki as a second wife as Barb was struggling with cancer, which left her incapable of having any more children. Margene appears to have little interest in religious ideas and takes great pleasure and satisfaction in her relationship with Bill to the point of making Barb and Nicki uncomfortable. When Don invites Bill to bring his family to a congregation that Don and his family attends, Bill turns down the offer.

In conclusion, *Big Love* is potentially subversive to ruling ideologies with its multi-faceted approach to plural marriage. Unlike movies such as *A Mormon Maid* or *September Dawn*, this television series presents a variety of reasons that people enter into such relationships. These relationships are presented as both rewarding and challenging. However, the familiar conventions of the monstrous polygamist appear in the depiction of Roman, and in order to make Roman an Other the narrative depicts Bill as the Self. Presenting Bill as sympathetic requires the queer aspects of his lifestyle to be diluted, so despite having multiple wives, much of the imagery with Bill appears heteronormative. At the same time, Roman embodies an excessive sexuality that is discomfoting because of his age and predatory because of his new wife Rhonda. His position as a leader of the religious group also separates him from Bill who is not affiliated with a religion. In addition to appearing as heteronormative, Bill's character also makes plural marriage less threatening by removing it from an organized religion. Bill, Barb, Nicki, and Margene

find pleasure and satisfaction in their relationship, which is fairly subversive to the compulsory heterosexuality in narratives with monstrous polygamists. Perhaps what is most subversive and unique is the way *Big Love* has been able to engage a culture within a patriarchal and heteronormative system to identify with polygamists.

### Conclusion

During the early era of filmmaking, the predominant images of Mormons on the screen were as monstrous polygamists, and though the image disappeared during the era of the Production Code, the monstrous polygamist has occasionally resurfaced and perhaps been negotiated in recent years. Presenting Mormon characters as monstrous polygamists reveals a complex operation of ideology in culture. Through Robin Wood's theory of the horror film, monstrous polygamists in film and television manifest the culturally repressed sexuality of Western culture by creating characters with multiple sexual relations and associating such characters with violence. This allows the Mormon characters to be constructed as Others. This creation of an Other reinforces the dominant ideology of heterocentricity by disowning violence and female subordination, which creates a space for cultural repressions to survive. This is particularly significant for women who experience compulsory heterosexuality within the dominant ideology. Female polygamists on screen transitioned from being complicit monsters in a religious system to becoming victims. Narratives with monstrous polygamists typically involve a female character resisting polygamous relationships and embracing a monogamous relationship. In both *A Mormon Maid* and *September Dawn* the non-Mormon female

character enters a monogamous relationship with a Mormon who resists the religious institution. These Mormon characters are Others who conform and can in turn clarify the Other of the monstrous polygamist. The television series *Big Love* has adopted monstrous polygamists, but the series has also challenged this image through its use of characters with different approaches to plural marriage and religious identities. This is perhaps because of its ongoing episodic structure, but complicating the image of the monstrous polygamist challenges the operations of dominant ideologies that are prominent in previous cultural texts.

## CHAPTER 4

### WHEN THE CLOSET BECOMES DEADLY: THE SELF-DESTRUCTIVE MORMON IN GAY AND LESBIAN CINEMA

In the landmark film *The Boys in the Band* (1970), a gay man, Michael, reminisces with his friends about growing up gay. He remembers denying his same-sex interest as a young man by calling it “the Christ-was-I-drunk-last-night Syndrome.” This label allowed Michael to dismiss his enjoyment of sexual activity with other men as a consequence of intoxication. Accordingly, Michael’s friends conclude that Michael’s sexual denial as a young man was due to his Catholic guilt. “That’s not true.” Michael affirms, “The Christ-was-I-drunk-last-night Syndrome knows no religion. It has to do with maturity; although, I will admit there’s a high percentage of it among Mormons.” As a believing Catholic and the only religious character in the story, Michael removes his joke of masculine homosexual denial from his own Catholic experience and attaches it to the Mormon experience. There are no Mormon characters in the narrative, and the Mormon Church is never referenced again in the rapid dialogue of the film. However, Michael’s comedic jab suggests a distinction about the Mormon community from other religious communities. Aside from the Mormon doctrine that forbids alcoholic consumption, the Christ-was-I-drunk-last-night Syndrome and its connection with “maturity” reveals an interplay between recognition/knowledge and denial/ignorance in the religious experience. This interplay has much to do with the closet and the pressure to perform conformity in matters of sex and gender.

This chapter will examine three media texts that foreground both homosexuality and Mormonism. The Hollywood production of *Advise and Consent* (1962), the independent film *Latter Days* (2003), and the HBO (Home Box Office) adaptation of *Angels in America* (2003) each present gay Mormon characters as self-destructive. Most of the gay Mormon characters in these films are men, so this project will predominantly focus on them, the male religious experience, and the construction of masculinity. The lesbian or gay female experience in the Mormon community has not been presented in gay and lesbian cinema as prominently as the gay male experience. The reason for this would require a different study. Furthermore, I use the term “gay and lesbian cinema” broadly in this chapter to identify movies with gay and lesbian content, filmmakers, or target audiences.

Representing Mormon men as being self-destructive when they consider their homosexual desires can encourage questions about the relationship between the Mormon institution and its members. Unlike the previous chapter with movies of monstrous Mormon polygamists who threaten non-Mormon heteronormativity, the self-destructive Mormon homosexual is a victim of his devotion to the heteronormative theology in Mormonism. In the films that will be examined in this chapter, the Mormon Church is a metaphor for the closet and its oppressive effects. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick writes, “The closet is the defining structure for gay oppression in this century” (*Epistemology* 71). Through the metaphor of the Mormon Church in these films, the oppression of the closet is enacted through obeying religious strictures, internalizing gender ideals, and staying ignorant of sexuality. Since Mormon theology insists upon members pursuing perfect

identities in preparation for godhood, Mormon characters can be effective for narratives that question “perfect” gender performance or “perfect” sexual relationships. Perfection in matters of Mormon orthodoxy perhaps encourages the cinematic depiction of Mormon characters as ideal subjects in ruling power systems. When these ideal subjects confront their own non-ideal aspects they enact a drama of desperation, self-loathing, and self-destruction.

### Mormonism and Homosexuality

Associating self-destruction with the gay Mormon experience in media texts is in some ways an accurate representation. In a 1975 article in *The Advocate*, Robert I. McQueen, a soon-to-be editor for the gay-themed news magazine, describes his experience with “homosexual witch hunts” while he was a student at Brigham Young University (14). Five of his friends who were also gay at the religious institution killed themselves during this period. For them it was a final act of self-destruction. McQueen writes, “They wanted to be better people, but they believed in their church more than they believed in themselves. When their church rejected them because they were gay, it destroyed them” (14). Similarly, Mormon poet Carol Lynn Pearson’s autobiography relates the story of a young Mormon man who was gay and shot himself in a Utah canyon. This was after a church leader had “told him he’d be better off at the bottom of the Great Salt Lake with a millstone tied around his neck than to stay a homosexual” (*Good-bye 90*). Recently, Pearson published her play *Facing East* that she claims was inspired by a young gay man she knew who went to the gardens of a Mormon temple and

attempted a suicide through a drug over-dose (Interview). In 2000, *Newsweek* reported the suicides of Mormon men who had been pained by the Mormon Church's political involvement in California's proposition to ban same-sex marriage. One of these young men left a note before shooting himself on the steps of a Latter-day Saint chapel. The article states, "The people who dressed him for burial were struck by the sight of his knees, deeply callused from praying for an answer that never came" (Miller 39). The independent support group Affirmation: Gay and Lesbian Mormons maintains an online memorial of gay Mormons who commit suicide, and it is a list that continues to grow and is associated with this notion that homosexuality and Mormonism can mean self-destruction.

Though acts of suicide are a complex phenomenon that typically cannot be attributed to one cause, the Mormon rhetoric that condemns homosexuality encourages guilt and despair for Mormons who are grappling with their homosexual desire. Much like other fundamentalist and evangelical Christian groups, Mormon leaders draw upon verses in the Old and New Testaments to condemn homosexual acts, such as Romans 1:27, which states, "And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another." None of the scriptures that Joseph Smith introduced condemn homosexual acts in this way, which does not necessarily mean that homosexual acts are condoned in Mormon scripture. The language that is used in *The Book of Mormon* and *The Doctrine and Covenants* is predominantly vague when referencing sexual matters. The heterosexual coupling is praised and celebrated while "fornication and lasciviousness" are condemned (Jacob 3:12). Though not specifically

identified, homosexuality is commonly assumed in Mormon culture to be equal to the condemnation of lust, adultery, and “whoredoms” in Mormon scripture (Jacob 2:28).

One of the first works by a church leader to specifically address homosexual activity was Spencer W. Kimball’s *The Miracle of Forgiveness* in 1969, which is still available through the Church’s official distribution outlets. Kimball, who was an apostle at the time of publication but later became the prophet and president for the Church, attributes the cause of homosexuality to masturbation. “For, done in private” Kimball warns, “it evolves often into mutual masturbation – practiced with another person of the same sex – and thence into total homosexuality” (78). Kimball also hypothesizes a link between homosexuality and bestiality. “Perhaps as an extension of homosexual practices, men and women have sunk even to seeking sexual satisfactions with animals” (78). These queer practices are linked because Kimball believes homosexuality to have a snowballing effect that requires “ever-deepening degeneracy” in order to achieve sexual excitement (78). Finally, “Homosexuality is an ugly sin,” he concludes, “repugnant to those who find no temptation in it” (78). As one of the first publications by a Church leader to address the topic of homosexuality, Kimball’s instruction is direct and condemnatory.

Kimball’s instruction on the repugnance of homosexuality circulated in Mormon culture for decades and informed its perception of gays and lesbians. This instruction might have influenced one high-ranking Church leader in 1983 who taught, “That’s right, brothers and sisters, I am referring to the mother of all evil, putrid, and vile sins – *homosexuality*. You know, Satan himself is a homosexual. That is why he so desperately



desires the souls of these young men that have fallen into his grasp” (E. Pearson 42). Nowhere in scripture does Mormon theology describe Satan as a homosexual, but this statement reveals a cultural vilification of gays and lesbians through equating them with the archetype of evil, Satan. Such a level of vilification motivated one Mormon apostle to teach that a Mormon could be justified in instances of gay bashing. At a general priesthood meeting, apostle Boyd K. Packer “encouraged young men to physically assault any male who tried to ‘entice young men to join them in these immoral acts’” (*Conference* 101 qtd. in Quinn *Same-Sex* 382). Perhaps such authoritative rhetoric made an impression upon Russell Henderson who was raised Mormon and who assisted in the 1998 murder of Matthew Shephard in Laramie, Wyoming. I am not suggesting a direct correlation between these moments of discourse or violence, but this sampling of authoritative statements reveals how condemnatory the cultural climate has been in Mormon culture on the subject of homosexuality.

In recent years it appears that Church leaders have softened their language that condemns homosexuality. A recently produced pamphlet from Church leaders expresses sympathy to people with “same-gender attraction” and recognizes its “deep emotional, social, and physical feelings” (*God Loveth* 4). This pamphlet encourages professional counseling, but it also recognizes that some people cannot change their sexuality and need not worry about marriage during this life (*God Loveth* 3-4, 12). This is different from previous decades in Mormon culture where marriage and its function for salvation were assumed by some in authority to be a cure for homosexual feelings (Quinn *Same-Sex* 373-374). Nevertheless, the recently produced pamphlet is consistent with the

Church's previous isolation of same-sex sexuality as a descriptor for desire or actions and not identity. Drawing from Sedgwick's terms in the first chapter of this project, Church leaders maintain a universalizing view of sexuality instead of a minoritizing view (*Epistemology* 40). However, Church leaders promote boundaries for this universalizing view of sexuality even as their language for those boundaries has become less harsh.

Softer language regarding homosexuality does not mean that the current Mormon hierarchy accepts gays, lesbians, or same-sex sexuality. Church leaders remain staunch opponents of homosexual acts and the social interests of gay and lesbian communities. "The Mormon Church contributed \$500,000 to the successful 1998 referendum drive to ban same-sex marriages [in Alaska] ... It was the largest contribution to a ballot measure campaign in state history" (Ostling and Ostling 172). In 2000 I remember sitting in a Latter-day Saint church in Texas as a Mormon missionary when a leader in the congregation passed out blank paper to the members and provided instructions to write letters to elected officials to favor a ban on same-sex marriage. Such actions for community mobilizing and financial support have succeeded in many instances to pass legislation that marginalizes gay and lesbian communities and privileges heteronormative relationships.

This vigilance in much of Mormon culture to reinforce heteronormative systems of power also leads to another aspect of the self-destructing gay Mormon male: the desperate attempts some men take to "cure" their homosexuality. Pearson relates an account of a young man who participated in Brigham Young University's research in aversion therapies.

They strapped me in a chair and attached wires to me. Then they showed me porno movies of men in sexual activity. When I got turned on, they gave me a shock ... And then they would show the same kinds of pictures of women without the shock, so that *that's* what you'd start to want. Only it didn't work. All I wanted was not to touch anybody, not to be with anybody. (*Good-bye* 88-89)

Though some students were threatened to participate in such studies or be expelled from the University for homosexual activity, some students volunteered with a genuine hope that the therapy would eliminate their same-sex desire. Many believed that with enough of their effort they could change. Kimball asserts, "To those who say that this practice or any other evil is incurable, I respond: 'How can you say the door cannot be opened until your knuckles are bloody, til your head is bruised, till your muscles are sore? It can be done'" (82). Even Kimball's metaphor implies a requirement of self-destruction, albeit violent, before the homosexual person can change. This language of bloody knuckles and bruised heads in order to achieve a "cure" places the failure to be cured directly upon the individual (Pearson *No More* 217). Aversion therapies for homosexuality are no longer being performed at Brigham Young University, but the encouragement for gay and lesbian Mormons to change their sexual identity is still prevalent. Currently, many gay and lesbian Mormons who wish to change undergo counseling or participate in independent ex-gay programs such as the Utah-based Evergreen International, a program similar to other Christian programs such as Exodus International but with Mormon doctrine motivating a faith-based change.

These attempts to fix homosexuality are in many ways propelled by the absolutist discourse that the Church is the only true church on the Earth, which leaves no other option, with its theology that deifies heterosexual relationships. Thus, homosexual relationships are not just an abomination that is condemned in scripture; homosexual relationships do not fit the divine plan for heterosexual family units that are central to much of Mormon theology. As a publication by the Church states,

Heaven is organized by families, which require a man and a woman who together exercise their creative powers within the bounds the Lord has set. Same-gender relationships are inconsistent with this plan. Without both a husband and a wife there could be no eternal family and no opportunity to become like Heavenly Father. (*God Loveth 3*)

It appears that this statement is drawing upon an assumption of heaven and eternity where alternative methods for reproduction do not exist. Thus, not only might a believing gay or lesbian Mormon feel guilt about sex acts as an abomination, but he or she might feel pointless in God's dealings with men and women and their purpose to come together, raise children, and function in a family unit. This purpose prepares them for exaltation and to be divine parents for eternity. For Mormons, salvation and exaltation is heterosexuality and reproduction. Gay Mormons who remain faithful to the Church are most likely compelled to stay in the closet and attempt a performance of conformity to the religious system.

## The Closet and Heteronormative Power Systems

For gays and lesbians, the closet exists in many ways to reinforce heteronormative power systems. This is because the closet is a metaphoric space where those who cannot conform to ruling ideologies can at least appear to conform to ruling ideologies.

Dominating ideologies operate effectively when subjects do not recognize a choice to reject such ideologies. Rather than reject the ideology, the subject seeks to conform or at least to appear as a conformer. When a subject or Other enacts a performance by existing in the closet, maintaining an appearance as a non-Other reveals the performative aspect of the closet. Sedgwick writes, “‘Closetedness’ itself is a performance initiated as such by the speech act of a silence – not a particular silence, but a silence that accrues particularity by fits and starts, in relation to the discourse that surrounds and differentially constitutes it” (*Epistemology* 3). This chapter will rely upon Sedgwick’s theories regarding the closet because of her connection of the closet with culture. Through enforcing a silence upon potentially subversive subjects to a ruling ideology, such an ideology can remain in power while all subjects conform or at least engage in a performance of conformity.

The maintenance of a closet can contribute to the workings of multiple ruling ideologies. For non-heterosexual men to exist in a heteronormative culture, they often function in the closet by enacting a performance of heterosexuality, and this performance requires the use of women to maintain the confines of the closet. In her books *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* and *Epistemology of the Closet*, Sedgwick examines instances in literature when the same-sex desire between two male

characters manifests itself through the use of a female character in the text (*Epistemology* 15). Particularly in nineteenth-century literature, male characters who desire one another sexually or socially cannot directly express their same-sex interest. Therefore, the characters exist in the closet, and they must use their heterosexual performance to satisfy their desire for one another. The patriarchal system in this literature allows women to be used for the interests of men, even when that male interest is for another man. Similarly, Judith Butler examines the actual consideration of women in history as property to serve the homosocial or homosexual desire between men in heteronormative societies. Women could be used as the links to join property and families of “patrilineal clans” (52). These historical and literary examples of patriarchy exist in many ways because of heteronormativity. Such an ideology demands a heterosexual performance, and often men depend upon patriarchal strategies in order to achieve that performance.

The exercise of performing from the closet requires an act of negotiation regarding knowledge. The performer of the closet must choose between what remains in the closet and what is used for performance. “The relations of the closet” are “the relations of the known and the unknown, the explicit and the inexplicit,” particularly between the definitions of different sexualities (Sedgwick 3). The concept of the closet identifies a separation between what is known and what is not known through the enactment of a silence. Performing silence can be complex. Foucault reminds his readers that there is not a binary between what is said and not said. He writes

We must try to determine the different ways of not saying such things,  
how those who can and those who cannot speak of them are distributed,

which type of discourse is authorized, or which form of discretion is required in either case. There is not one but many silences, and they are an integral part of the strategies that underlie and permeate discourses.

(27)

These many silences allow the closet to function. Subjects of ruling power systems negotiate with the closet when they choose to reveal some things and not others. Sedgwick uses an example of the story of Esther in the Old Testament as a manifestation of the closet (75). Esther is silent with the King about her Jewish identity, and it is not until the Jews are threatened with genocide that she chooses to reveal her closeted identity. Revealing this knowledge changes her husband's mind, and it alters her identity performance. Esther's change in her silence affects her relationship with both the closet and the king.

The story of Esther also shows how the closet influences knowledge. The change in the King's understanding through the knowledge Esther provides allows for him to make different choices. Thus, the closet stands between knowledge and ignorance by what is relegated to the closet and what is revealed and performed. The closet's frequent relation to the knowledge of sexual matters is part of a cultural development that has been inherited from previous centuries. Sedgwick describes a process that accelerated after the eighteenth century in "which 'knowledge' and 'sex' become conceptually inseparable from one another – so that knowledge means in the first place sexual knowledge; ignorance, sexual ignorance; and epistemological pressure of any sort seems a force increasingly saturated with sexual impulsion" (73). Because of its history of dominating

forces, Western culture experienced a process of repressing sexuality to secrecy or at least believing sexuality had become a secret (Foucault *History of Sexuality* 10). The pursuit to know this secret in some ways fused knowledge with sexuality on multiple levels.

Consequently, knowledge, sex, and transgression overlap in Western culture. This combination of knowledge, sex, and transgression relates to the story of Adam and Eve. “Sexuality is fruit – apparently the only fruit – to be plucked from the tree of knowledge” (Sedgwick 73). Despite being a transgression, Eve obtained knowledge. Accordingly, this knowledge connected with sexuality, which allowed for maturation and reproduction. This knowledge is transgressive because of its sexual nature and relegation to the closet. Partaking of (sexual) knowledge that is withdrawn from the closet is potentially a subversive act to ruling systems of power. This reveals the closet as a space where ruling power systems can relegate and regulate knowledge insofar that it is transgressive.

### Performance, Gender, and Mormon Masculinity

The existence of the closet requires an act of performing because it is a space where knowledge can be relegated and made silent. This performance balances knowledge and ignorance in accordance with the dominating ideology. In a heteronormative ideology it is monogamous heterosexuality that must be performed and other sexualities and sexual identities that must be conveniently situated in the closet.



Moreover, in addition to performing sexuality to maintain the closet, a heteronormative society demands gender roles for such heteronormative sexualities to function.

Feminist theory has effectively challenged the way we think about gender. Gayle Rubin's construction of the "sex/gender system" separates chromosomal "sex" with the cultural meanings attached to that sex that create "gender" (Rubin 159 qtd. in Sedgwick *Epistemology* 28). Other theorists such as Judith Butler challenge the "sex/gender system" with the argument that even sex is understood and constructed through culture (11). Either way, Sedgwick concludes that Rubin's "sex/gender system" introduces a problematical space between what is cultural and what is biological rather than an absolute distinction between the two (*Epistemology* 28). This problematical space affirms that much of what a culture defines as gender is a culturally constructed arrangement of behavior and appearance. Butler defends her description of "the performativity of gender" when she clarifies that gender involves both an "anticipation of a gendered essence ... which it posits as outside itself" and "a repetition and a ritual, which achieves its effects through its naturalization in the context of a body" (xiv-xv). The culturally constructed phenomenon of gender endures because people are conditioned to anticipate gender before gender is performed, and this anticipation is fulfilled because gender is performed through consistent ritual. Gender becomes part of an identity without conscious awareness.

Recognizing the manufactured quality of gender allows for an examination of how gender's manufacturing benefits ruling power systems. The effectiveness of the "sex/gender system" is to develop a strategy "to gain analytic and critical leverage on the

female-disadvantaging social arrangements that prevail at a given time in a given society, by throwing into question their legitimated ideological grounding in biologically based narratives of the ‘natural’” (Sedgwick *Epistemology* 28). Recognizing this problematic space between sex and gender allows for discussion on how ruling power systems can use gender as a force to privilege and oppress.

Because this chapter examines films with gay Mormon men, these characters’ performance of “closetedness” is connected with their performance of masculinity, the anticipated gender in their cultural system. Expectations of masculinity change among different people, yet there is a basic and recognizable trend of masculinity in much of Western culture. Since Western culture functions under a patriarchal ideology, much of how the culture is understood is through a masculine discourse. Furthermore, because this discourse is masculine, masculinity in media texts in many ways reflects upon and idealizes itself. Movies consistently project basic traits of masculinity as “independence, strength, power, potency, aggression, competition, hard work, self sacrifice, being in control of difficult situations, athleticism, success, and emotional solidity and control” (Knowlton 23). Audiences respond to this definition of masculinity, which maintains its constant recirculation.

Many of these traits of an idealized masculinity in media texts are designed to be understood as opposites of femininity. Robin Wood is quoted in the previous chapter regarding his observation of women being recognized as the Other in patriarchal cultures. Men repress what is considered to be feminine in themselves and this results in displacing and disowning such repression onto female identities (74). In his essay *On Mormon*

*Masculinity*, Brigham Young University professor David Knowlton draws upon the work of anthropologist David Gilmore to discuss how “manhood rarely develops unproblematically from biology; rather, it is a creation formed in opposition to a male-based discourse about womanness” (Gilmore qtd in Knowlton 20). Much of what is understood about womanness in a patriarchal system is in many ways a male construction. Men act against such womanness to justify their masculinity and their privileged position in a patriarchal order.

Since masculinity is in many ways a reaction against femininity in a power system that privileges masculinity, masculine identities need consistent forums for such masculinity to be displayed and assured. Butler emphasizes the performative aspect of gender to be connected with ritual and repetition in order to be naturalized in an identity. Knowlton continues to draw upon Gilmore to argue that such gender performance for men must be seen and understood by others since maleness is central in a patriarchal system.

American men learn quickly the correct way they should hold themselves, cross their legs, walk, and even talk [...] lest [men] be accused of being effeminate [...] Masculinity requires constant display, performance, and acceptance [...] Hence, the status of being a man is never guaranteed; it requires constant external affirmation. One is only as much a man as one's last male act. (Gilmore qtd in Knowlton 21)

Because of this fragility of the masculine performance, patriarchal societies not only situate masculine identities in positions of power but also ensure that such positions have

regular opportunities to display and thus reaffirm masculine performance. Religious institutions can be an example of how masculine identities are placed in positions that offer opportunities for performance and affirmation.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is an institution that functions in this way of encouraging masculine performance, but the masculinity that is acceptable in Mormon culture differs in critical ways from mainstream culture. This difference can generate a conflict for the Mormon male and can threaten masculine affirmation outside of Mormon culture. In his essay that examines this conflict of Mormon masculinity, Knowlton acknowledges that the Church adopts much of how the national culture perceives masculinity (23). Mormon culture values emotional stolidity in the Mormon male except in matters of spiritual expression where tears can be valued as an affirmation of faith without threatening the masculinity of the individual (Knowlton 23). In much of mainstream culture, masculinity is also attached to assumptions of sexual conquest and high expectations for sexual performance. Faithful Mormon men are expected to maintain uncompromising standards of sexuality, which includes refraining from sexual acts until marriage (Knowlton 25). The virgin Mormon who waits for a marriage partner to begin sexual activity might be tormented by mainstream communities for being sexually weak. Mainstream and Mormon differences regarding masculinity threaten Mormon men as being perceived as feminine in mainstream culture.

Religion itself is also recognized in mainstream culture as attributable to the feminine side of humanity. Knowlton affirms that Mormon culture in some ways responds to this through assuming that women are more spiritual than men (24).

Accordingly, this supposed heightened spiritual level of women justifies the men to learn spirituality through extra effort such as receiving the priesthood and acting as leaders. In many ways leadership is a form of power in Mormon culture. “In fact,” Knowlton argues, “Church position [(leadership)], a measure of spirituality, also becomes a gauge of manhood” (23). Women do not receive the priesthood in the Latter-day Saint Church and cannot experience the rites of passage and leadership experience offered to men who become deacons, teachers, priests, bishops, elders, and so on. The institutional exercise of the priesthood separates Mormon men from women, and in many ways this separation responds to mainstream assumptions that religion is feminine. Nevertheless, Mormon men negotiate with these dilemmas of masculinity as they exist in both mainstream and Mormon cultures, and this negotiation of gender identity makes their performance potentially more fragile.

The conflict between a religious and mainstream form of masculinity is compounded for Mormon men who believe in an eternal, divine, and “perfect” notion of gender, gender roles, sexual relationships, and sex acts. The motive for masculine performance and assurance from public display of that performance is strengthened. For many gay Mormon men, believing in a supreme form of gender and sexuality further compounds the need for the closet. Much like the cultural anticipation and performance of gender, the closet is also a performance in the way that it is a space to separate the known and the unknown. Men and women distinguish daily between the public and the private as well as the spoken and the silent, and how they distinguish these things influences how they interact with the culture around them. The closet functions when

that act of distinguishing serves cultural systems of power. The depiction of the Mormon Church in gay and lesbian cinema as a metaphor for the closet reveals how oppressive the closet can be, and this representation of the Church has developed the stereotype of the self-destructive gay Mormon man.

### Mormons in Gay and Lesbian Cinema

Changing cultural perceptions of Mormons in the twentieth century allowed for the Mormon Church to become a metaphor for the oppressive effects of the closet in gay and lesbian cinema. As examined in the previous chapter, films that were made before the Production Code era depicted Mormons as monstrous, and this monstrosity was connected with the queerly sexual practices of polygamous relations in the Mormon community. At the dissolution of the Hollywood Production Code in the 1960s, Mormon characters could not only be homosexual but the Mormon image could also be used to depict the performative nature of the closet. In order to perform the closet, characters need to appear as compliant with ruling ideologies, especially in matters of sexuality. Even though Mormon characters in the past had been presented as fearful for their polygamous sexuality, Mormon characters after the Production Code era appeared to embody the ruling discourse on sexuality. The Mormon image had transitioned to personify the mainstream as an ideal subject for the dominant ideology. Such an ideal subject would become an effective character in films such as *Advise and Consent* and *Latter Days*.

*Advise and Consent* (1962)

*Advise and Consent* was produced and distributed during the final years of the Hollywood Production Code. The director, Otto Preminger, had already released a film without the Code's seal of approval in 1953 with *The Moon is Blue*, and this daring act revealed much of Preminger's attitude toward Hollywood's censorship and self-regulation. By 1960 the Code had weakened in such a way that homosexuality could be treated as a subject in films, albeit with limitations as not to challenge ruling ideologies of sexuality. *The Children's Hour* (1961) presents the story of a young woman with same-sex desires who hangs herself in shame. A similar sense of shame about homosexuality fuels the suspense in Preminger's *Advise and Consent*.

Much of the Mormon community was not happy with the release of the movie *Advise and Consent*. Preminger had adapted his film from Allen Drury's best-selling novel that directly connects the homosexual character, Brigham Anderson, with the Mormon Church. In the book, Brigham's father is an "Apostle of the Church", Brigham chooses not to serve a mission, and he resists the familial pressure "to make the Church his life's work" so as to enter public life as a senator (Drury 284). Church leaders were aware of Drury's novel and used what community resources they could to persuade Preminger not to make Brigham's character a Mormon.

Mormon millionaire J. Willard Marriott complained that such a 'movie would do inestimable damage to the image of our people.' Marriott joined with Utah senator Wallace F. Bennett in asking non-LDS friends to 'get to Preminger on a person-to-person basis' to 'at least make sure that there is

no identification of this character with the Mormon Church.’ Apostle Richard L. Evans, a director off Rotary International, used his contacts in the broadcast industry in a similar way. (Quinn *Same-Sex* 378)

The image of the Mormon community to the public is important for Church leaders, particularly in attracting converts. Despite such efforts by prominent Church members to contact Preminger, the depiction of Brigham Anderson in Premingers’s adaptation still connects Brigham connotatively with the Mormon community in Utah, and Brigham’s rigid moral stance with his existence in the closet enables the desperation that leads to the pattern of presenting the gay Mormon man as self-destructive.

As is typical with political dramas, *Advise and Consent* is a narrative about public figures who must grapple with the public and private elements of their characters. The drama in the plot surrounds the United States President’s nomination of a character, Robert Leffingwell, to be the Secretary of State. The Senate is divided on the nomination, and Brigham Anderson, the Senator of Utah, is chosen to chair the Senate Subcommittee hearing regarding the nomination. Accusations are made in the hearing regarding Leffingwell’s history with a communist cell in Chicago. Leffingwell denies and challenges the accusations, but he later asks the President to remove his nomination since the accusations were true. Brigham learns of Leffingwell’s deceit while under oath and decides to reopen the hearing before the committee is to vote. Before Brigham has an opportunity to do this, he and his wife are tormented by threats of blackmail regarding Brigham’s love affair with another man while serving in the military. The blackmailer’s intent is to convince Brigham to have the committee vote without reopening the hearing,



but Brigham's anxieties about the gay love affair and his uncompromising moral standards drive him to suicide.

This film uses a theme of the closet in the way that American politics is in many ways a performance and relies upon things said and not said. Presidents and senators whose careers are determined by the election process must perform an image that appeals to the majority of voters. The characters in the film judge one another on how each character is presented. The Senate Majority Leader, Robert, criticizes another senator, Lafe, for not being married since voters frown upon unmarried leaders. Lafe, a young and attractive Senator, assures Robert that it is the single women of his State who continue to vote him into office. This response challenges Robert's understanding that marriage is favorable to a politician's performance. Additionally, Robert's actions also challenge his own understanding of marriage since he is a widower and in a secret relationship with a woman, Dolly, with no intention of getting married. The narrative is direct in presenting Robert and Dolly's relationship as discrete and sexual. With a comical reference to Robert's age, Dolly says, "You're as virile as a billy goat and make noises like a wounded spaniel." They describe their sexual relationship as a "backstairs romance" because of its secrecy, and this secrecy allows Robert to effectively perform his knowledge of marriage, politics, and performance. Moreover, the single senator Lafe also has women visit his hotel room, and other characters assure Lafe that they will act as if they do not see the women. These are moments of transgressive heterosexuality in a heteronormative environment where knowledge and ignorance are selected and performed.

Though these instances of secrecy or “closetedness” are sexual, some instances in the film are political, and moral standards are compromised to maintain a performance of the closet. The dramatic question of Leffingwell’s association with a communist cell dominates the Senate subcommittee hearing. When Leffingwell confesses to the President that the accusation was true, he confesses, “I wish I could tell you I’m sorry I lied. I’m only sorry I had to lie.” Leffingwell “had to lie” because he believed were that part of his history/identity to come out of the closet he would lose his nomination, his job, and his future opportunities for employment. Leffingwell felt the need to bend his moral standards and lie under oath in order to ensure that his support for communism remain in the closet.

These are moments in the film where the closet is used to hide heterosexual activity that is not heteronormative and political ideology that is not capitalistic, but the closet is most dramatically used in the story to identify the repressed homosexuality of Brigham Anderson, a character who is performing a heteronormative identity. Brigham’s torment over the closet is distinguished from the other closeted characters in the narrative because of Brigham’s extreme response of committing suicide. His self-destruction is motivated in many ways because of his uncompromising standards. Even his wife, Ella, pleads with Brigham to concede to the demands of the blackmailer. This would mean overlooking Leffingwell’s lying under oath. Brigham cannot overlook this because he sees the issue as black and white and cannot morally compromise his duty to the Senate Subcommittee. This uncompromising view poses horrible consequences no matter what Brigham chooses, so he chooses to self-destruct. This self-destruction is a different

response to the closet than shown by the other characters, and this is because Brigham's character is unique in a significant way.

An interpretation of Brigham's self-destruction in many ways can be attached to Brigham's religious affiliation, which is suggested in the film. One character, Emmanuel, says upon meeting Brigham and learning of his home State, "Oh, Utah, way out west, the Mormons, and 'this is the place', and all that." Emmanuel's conversation reveals the cultural connection between Utah and the Mormons. His quotation of Brigham Young when the Saints entered the Salt Lake valley that 'this is the place' additionally connects Brigham with the Mormon community, since Brigham shares the name with the notable Mormon prophet. Emmanuel serves tea during the conversation, but Brigham does not drink the tea, which suggests that Brigham is obeying the Mormon health code. Brigham's wife, Ella, also incorporates their religious background when she quotes scripture to Brigham while she expresses concern about the blackmail. Moreover, what can be interpreted as sacred Mormon undergarments occurs when Brigham arrives to his home after speaking with the President. When Brigham takes off his coat in the bedroom, his white button-up shirt is somewhat sheer under the light and an undershirt can be seen underneath. The scoop of the collar on the undershirt is similar to the sacred undergarments that are worn by Latter-day Saints who attend the temple. A Latter-day Saint seminary teacher of mine jokingly nicknamed this undergarment scoop that can be seen beneath clothing as "the eternal smile" since temple covenants involve eternal blessings. At the same time, cultural identification through underwear lines can be a queer way of identifying one's community, yet it is an exercise that some Mormons,

including myself, might do to recognize religious affiliation and level of devotion. However, in the shot following the view of his undershirt, Brigham is unbuttoning his shirt with no undershirt underneath. Alluding to his undershirt in the mise-en-scene as he removes his coat then not including an undershirt as he undresses could be a problem with continuity, functionality for the action in the scene, or other problems with presenting sacred objects on film. The reason is not clear for not including his undergarment while undressing, but his “eternal smile” is clear as Brigham removes his coat. Brigham’s wearing of sacred undergarments in addition to the other clues in the film of his Mormonism suggest a rigid devotion to religious standards of morality that he is not willing to compromise.

Brigham’s religious affiliation distinguishes him from the other characters, and his religious affiliation influences his uncompromising attitude. Brigham has a black-and-white worldview of what is right and wrong, which is common in fundamentalist religious communities. Brigham is convinced that Leffingwell’s lying under oath is wrong, despite Leffingwell’s concern for his own welfare. Brigham’s surety of his own rightness, which he confirms to his wife, leaves him no option when tormented between the consequences of being outed from the closet or condoning Leffingwell’s behavior. This sense of rightness can be fueled by the fundamentalist language of his religious community that focuses on perfect obedience to religious standards. However, being perfectly obedient can be damaging when it comes to matters that threaten a performance of the closet because one might be put in situation where obeying one matter would mean disobeying another, which would make perfect obedience impossible.

Brigham's performance of his heteronormative relationship is initially presented as ideal, but the relationship with his wife is also presented as artificial. The first image of Brigham occurs when Lafe, who is sitting on a bed and disheveled after a sexual romp, calls Brigham on the phone. Lafe's appearance as a sexually unrestrained heterosexual in a hotel room contrasts with Brigham's clean-cut appearance in a city suburb. At first glance, Brigham is an ideal masculine character; however, Brigham's appearance is also critiqued in this moment. As Brigham speaks with Lafe on the phone, Brigham is framed as being inside his house while his wife and daughter are outside and surrounded by trees. The earthiness and naturalness surrounding the wife and daughter contrast the artificial tree, which is made of wire, behind Brigham on the wall. This artificial tree becomes a repeated motif for Brigham. It is presented again as his wife confronts him about the blackmailer. Their porch is surrounded with natural trees in this scene, but the artificial tree on the wall reinforces Brigham's attempt at performance and reinforcing the artifice of his identity. When Brigham enters the gay bar later in the film, a shadow of an artificial tree remains in the screen beside him. Brigham is metaphorically taking a glimpse into his repressed self in this scene, but the shadow of the tree reminds the viewer that he is keeping his artificial heterosexuality while attempting to comprehend his repressed homosexuality. This comprehension ends poorly as he violently shoves his former boyfriend into the street. This hysteria is unusual for Brigham since he had been calm and stoic in his masculinity until this point in the film. This violent moment can be understood as an attempt to reassert his masculine performance while its artifice is

exposed. However, this reassertion is simply a part of his desperation to resolve his black-and-white worldview that pushes him to self-destruction.

Brigham's performance of the closet not only reveals his devotion to heteronormative ideology but it also reveals his reinforcement of patriarchy in the narrative, which can occur in stories with the self-destructive Mormon male. Brigham performs a heterosexual identity while in politics where he must appeal to others in order to be elected to the Senate. The Senate, the governing body of the narrative, is overwhelmingly male, and the one moment in the film that presents a female senator who speaks is followed by a comment that dismisses her opinion because of her gender. Brigham's wife, Ella, is also silent for much of the picture. Initially, Brigham talks to her through his daughter. It is not until the instance of the blackmailer that she must force herself into the dialogue of the narrative. "Since when have I become the little woman who's supposed to sit at home and know nothing?" Her question is not only critical of Brigham but also of the narrative as a whole. The rest of the narrative allows her to act, learn of Brigham's deceit, and choose her own morality by lying about Brigham's history. Brigham's identity as a self-destructive gay Mormon enables the exercise of ruling ideologies that also oppress his wife.

After the release of *Advise and Consent*, the following decades of gay and lesbian cinema incorporate brief moments of Mormon characters or references to Mormonism. This repeated insertion of Mormon culture and identity into these movies suggests a curiosity, resentment, or overlap of the gay community with the Mormon community. As mentioned in the opening of this chapter, Michael in *The Boys in the Band* mocks the

immaturity and denial of gay Mormons. A character in Gregg Araki's *The Living End* (1992) describes having parents in Utah as "a fate worse than death." In *Six Degrees of Separation* (1993), the main character, who is gay, meets a young couple from Utah, has sex with the husband, and the husband subsequently kills himself. Similar to *Advise and Consent*, *Six Degrees of Separation* depends upon the connotative connection of Utah with Mormons, which can clarify the young man's desperation to self-destruct after the sex act. Later, the independent film *Trick* (1999) jokes about gay men in the Mormon Tabernacle Choir. In 2002, the film adaptation of *The Laramie Project* identifies one of the killers, Russell Henderson, as a Mormon. The following year, an independent film and an award-winning television miniseries were released that foregrounded the gay Mormon characters and the reasons why self-destruction informs the stereotype.

#### *Latter Days* (2003)

As an independent feature, much of the distribution for *Latter Days* was through film festivals and art houses. In fact, this film experienced something similar to *Brokeback Mountain* in the way that *Latter Days* was also withdrawn from its scheduled release in the Salt Lake valley. Initially chosen to be the location for the film's premiere, the Madstone Theater in Salt Lake City withdrew their agreement to exhibit the film at their location. Overseers for the theater claimed that the film did not meet their standards for quality, but the distributors claimed that the theater owners were capitulating to threats of boycotts and picketing (Baker). Many in the Utah community were bothered or angry about a story that allegedly presented Mormons as "bigots or idiots" (Baker).

Critics throughout the nation offered mixed reviews of the film due to the performances and the writing; however, *Latter Days* offers an interesting insight into the gay Mormon experience concerning the dilemma of losing church and family in order to find true love.

*Latter Days* follows the story of Aaron who is a devout Mormon and beginning his missionary service in Los Angeles. Aaron moves in next door to Christian, a party guy with few interests outside of sex. Christian's friends place a bet for him to seduce one of the missionaries, so eventually Christian and Aaron develop an interest for one another. After Aaron is caught kissing Christian by the other missionaries, Aaron is sent home in shame and is excommunicated. After an attempted suicide, Aaron is placed in a treatment center for his homosexuality. Subsequently, Christian is tormented with guilt over the bet as well as his love for Aaron. Christian tries to find Aaron and is repeatedly blocked by the resentment of Aaron's Mormon mother. Aaron ultimately leaves the treatment facility and returns to Los Angeles where he finds Christian and the two lovers unite.

*Latter Days* is a film in many ways about the closet because it grapples with the space between what is known and not known. This theme can be seen with the motif of the key that hangs around Christian's neck. The first scene that Christian is wearing the key is when he seduces a man who claims to be straight and is at Christian's apartment by mistake. Christian's act of seduction weakens the heteronormative label of the other man and reveals a willingness to participate in same-sex activity. The key also appears in the scene where Christian chooses to volunteer in an effort to find something inside of himself beyond an interest in sexual play, so this theme of unlocking unknown aspects of



different characters includes sexuality with other characteristics such as faith, hope, charity, and love. The key also appears in moments that Christian discovers elements in the plot such as when he finds Aaron's home phone number or realizes his roommate stole his journal entry for a song. The key around Christian's neck functions as an appropriate motif in all of these instances regarding his discovery, learning, and exploration into things unknown.

While the key is used as a symbol for unlocking the unknown, the Mormon Church functions as a symbol for the oppressive effects of the closet that include regulating knowledge and ignorance. As Sedgwick argues, knowledge is often linked with sexual knowledge, and this is a dominant theme for Aaron's character in *Latter Days*. As a newly arrived missionary, Aaron is called a "greenie" for being the most inexperienced of the missionary group, but this "greenie" idea applies to his sexual discovery as he comes to know Christian. There are repeated instances in the film when Aaron is seeking knowledge from *The Book of Mormon*, yet his thoughts and curiosity turn toward Christian as a new source for knowledge. When the two characters officially introduce themselves to one another, Aaron is sitting on the stairs trying to focus on his book of scripture but shifts his focus to Christian. The loose tie around Aaron's neck suggests some kind casualness about his missionary work or devotion to his religious standards. This flexibility on Aaron's part allows him to obtain (sexual) knowledge. Because this sexual knowledge is outside a religious power system, it is transgressive and challenging to Aaron's identity.

This film fuses knowledge, sex, and transgression, and Christian remains in the power position of offering this knowledge to the ignorant Aaron. Aaron's ignorance is revealed in the laundry room when he tells a joke about laundry and prophecy, but the comedy is awkward through Aaron's naïve delivery of the joke. Christian laughs politely after Aaron's joke, which places Christian in a power position since he knows his own performance is not genuine. In fact, the entire scene in the laundry room involves Christian's secret intention to seduce Aaron. Christian knows what is happening in the scene while Aaron does not. This scene is where Christian learns of Aaron's (sexual) ignorance, and Christian's instruction to Aaron about how to do the laundry situates Christian in a position as the giver of knowledge. As the film progresses, Aaron teaches Christian by example about the worth of faith and service, yet Christian's character is the one who actively instructs Aaron. Christian redefines Aaron's expectation of love ("You want revelations engraved in gold"), and Christian introduces to Aaron a shameless perspective of gayness ("I thought I'd rather die than be gay"). Even the characters' names reinforce this process of introducing knowledge. Aaron's name is typically associated with the Old Testament since Aaron is the brother of Moses; thus, Aaron's worldview is akin to the Mosaic law with its rigid behavioral do's and don'ts. Conversely, Christian's name associates his character with the New Testament as a follow of Jesus Christ who taught love and service and condemned the Pharisees for their rigid application of the Mosaic law. The knowledge that Christian provides can rescue Aaron from his self-destructive cycle, which is fueled by his own ignorance.

Aaron's association with Mormonism, thus the closet, requires a performance of heterosexuality and masculinity. Gender roles within and without Mormonism are contrasted in this film. Assumptions about male homosexuality and effeminacy are suggested in the scene when Christian meets the straight stranger. Christian's knowledge of automobiles, a culturally masculine body of knowledge, intrigues the straight man. Christian also exercises skill on the basketball court despite the accusation from a Mormon missionary that Christian is "a fairy". Christian's female roommate Julie also challenges the missionary's assumption about girls and basketball. Julie and Christian challenge expectations about gender and sexuality, and the Mormon characters wholly embody such expectations. Aaron's mother cooks and cleans, despite the absence of Aaron's father who spends much of his time at the church. Aaron's father is also emotionally stern while his mother is an emotional opposite who weeps in an airport and yells in a kitchen. Aaron's background is attached to these masculine and feminine notions of gender, and they inform his performance of the closet.

Connected with the Mormon masculinity that is presented in this film is the recognition of repressed sexuality in general that can occur with a heteronormative performance. The narrative acknowledges the homosocial environment of the Mormon missionary companions and encourages the viewer to question the queer elements of their interaction. The Elders (missionaries) in the house with Aaron make sarcastic remarks about their sexual interest for one another. One Elder asks the other to rub his back, so the other Elder confirms that he is straight but asks for one as well. These two missionaries are also seen wrestling at multiple instances in the film. These missionaries

clearly have an affinity to touch one another, but under their rubric of masculinity the only permissible way is in a violent fashion. One of these missionaries, Elder Harmon, speaks with Aaron about the sexual pressure while being on a mission where they are not “even allowed to beat off,” which Elder Harmon confesses is the reason there are teeth marks on his headboard. These moments in the film, along with Ryder’s distraction with Julie when she removes her shirt, address the repression of sexuality in general for these characters who conform to a heteronormative ideology.

The oppressive effects of being in the closet under Mormonism and being in the closet with other religions is differentiated in the film. This can be seen in a comparison between the two stories that Christian’s friend Andrew tells at the restaurant. Upon hearing that Christian’s new neighbors are Mormon missionaries, Andrew warns that he dated a guy who was Mormon. Then Andrew tells a story that the Mormon guy’s family had “put him through shock therapy”, and the Mormon guy would jump out of Andrew’s window after any sexual activity. The friends joke about Andrew’s window being on the first floor and the azalea bushes getting destroyed, yet Andrew’s recollection introduces a self-destructive element to the gay Mormon experience for the film. Andrew offers no reassuring conclusion to his story of his Mormon boyfriend, which is unlike his story later in the movie. Andrew’s second story at the restaurant, which he tells after learning that the “Mormons are mind-fucking” Christian, follows a similar pattern in the way that the story reveals something tragic about mixing homosexuality and religion while turning that tragedy into a joke. Andrew tells about a gay friend from a “religious family” who sent him to a “Christian change ministry.” Despite Andrew’s warning that the camp did

“fuck with” his friend, Andrew’s conclusion is reassuring and made in jest that the only thing the camp really changed was his friend’s preference in same-sex acts. These two stories reveal that the man from a “religious” family maintained his gay identity and could joke about the experience while the story of the Mormon man in a cycle of self-destruction offered no resolution. These stories set up for the unique torment Aaron will experience within the narrative.

Aaron’s attempted self-destruction is motivated by his connection to the Mormon Church. His family is devout in the faith. His father is a stake president or high-ranking leader in the Church. The buildup to Aaron’s suicide attempt includes his excommunication and the confrontation with his mother. The excommunication montage is greatly dramatized with heavy shadows and stern condemnation from the religious leaders. Aaron defends his sexual activity with equating his queerness to the early Saints who had multiple wives. Nevertheless, this defense does nothing as Aaron is stripped of his priesthood, membership, and garments. This moment fulfills Aaron’s fear of being “completely cut off.” The language in the excommunication and the conversation with his mother in the kitchen also hearkens to the negative rhetoric in Mormon discourse from previous decades, particularly Kimball’s book. Words such as “abomination,” “abnormal,” and “repulsive” magnify Aaron’s torment. The violence found in religious stories also enters the mix with the image of Aaron getting crucified. A sexual component is also introduced with this violent image since the coloring emphasizes Aaron’s muscles on his bleeding and near-nude body. A similar blend of eroticism and violence occurs in the montage of shock therapy as flashes of nude pictures of Aaron and

Christian generate torturous volts on the penis. This violent sexual imagery, the condemnatory language, and the erasure of Aaron's identity through the excommunication push him to the suicide act. Aaron opens a toy chest and finds a penknife that is from an old modeling kit and can cut his wrists. The toy chest suggests a connection to Aaron's past, and he is drawing upon his Mormon past to find the tools to destroy himself. The build-up and eventual suicide attempt in the narrative recognizes a multiplicity of forces that interact and develop the trend of assuming gay Mormon men to be self-destructive.

The conclusion of the film presents a moment where all of the characters are happy together at the restaurant, and this moment is made possible because of the way each of the characters reject their own secrets (or their own closet) in order to connect with one another. Each character has a moment in the film to reveal a performative aspect of their character that is meant to hide something, which relates to the function of the closet. A struggling actor at the restaurant reveals that she was miserable while living in New York City despite everyone assuming otherwise. Lila, the owner of the restaurant, reveals that a close friend was dying in the hospital. Julie reveals that she stole the words from Christian's journal for her song. Christian reveals that his initial pursuit of Aaron was motivated by a bet, and he later reveals his true love for Aaron. Aaron's dramatic journey out of the closet and the Mormon Church occurs in the process of revealing his homosexuality, his love for Christian, and his self-destructive act. Unlike *Advise and Consent*, the character who is identified as the self-destructive Mormon in

*Latter Days* is rescued through connecting with other people in a way that diminishes the constraints of the closet and, thus, the Mormon Church.

*Angels in America* (2003)

After the release of *Latter Days*, the film adaptation of Tony Kushner's award-winning play *Angels in America* premiered on HBO. Originally *Angels in America* was an over-arching title for two plays that present one continuous story: *Millenium Approaches* and *Perestroika*. Bringing these two plays to the movie screen had been a project under development for years with directors such as Robert Altman, P.J. Hogan, and Mormon filmmaker Neil LaBute (*Gener 32*). Ultimately, Mike Nichols agreed to direct the project, and development shifted to adapt the two-part drama for cable networks instead of theatrical distribution. Consequently, being designed for television, the film adaptation of Kushner's play is structured as a miniseries and divided into six episodes, which divides each original play by their three-act structure. Tony Kushner adapted his script, and major Hollywood stars were cast for many of the characters, including such stars as Meryl Streep, Al Pacino, Emma Thompson, and James Cromwell. The series presents, among other stories, the story of a gay Mormon man and his torment with the closet. This plot similarly follows a pattern with other movies of presenting the Mormon Church as a dangerous form of the closet in the way that it leads to the self-destruction of the individual.

The story of *Angels in America* uses Mormon characters in significant roles within the narrative. Kushner said that Mormon characters were part of his idea for the

story since its earliest stages. Regarding his application for a Federal Grant to write the play, Kushner states, “I said I was going to write a play about gay men and Mormons and Roy Cohn ...” (Jones 21). Among the ensemble of characters in the series, the Mormon characters are a young married couple, Joe and Harper, and Joe’s mother Hannah. Joe and Harper’s marriage is a source for conflict in the narrative. Joe is tormented by his homosexuality, and Harper’s depression has led her to an addiction to pills. Joe leaves Harper for one of the other male characters, Louis, and this encourages Hannah to relocate from Salt Lake City to New York City to help with her son’s situation. Ultimately, Joe spirals into desperation and emotional self-destruction as Louis rejects him over his affiliation with Roy Cohn and Harper refuses Joe’s pleas for forgiveness while she leaves for San Francisco. These characters are only a part of a complex interplay of stories that explore themes of AIDS, death, progress, stasis, racism, heterocentrism, patriarchy, power, and Reagan’s religious and conservative America. The Mormon characters provide a religious and conservative tone for these themes in the story.

In addition to Joe, Harper, and Hannah who are central to the plot, *Angels in America* also draws upon and parodies Mormon theology and folklore throughout the entire narrative. Prior, a character who suffers from AIDS and who experiences angelic visitations, becomes central in the narrative as an allusion to the story of Joseph Smith. The angel directs Prior to unearth “the sacred prophetic implements”, and these implements include a sacred book with “peep stones.” These moments in the story harken to the visit of the angel Moroni to Joseph Smith who directs Smith to an ancient



buried record that must be translated through the use of seer stones. However, the moments with Prior and the angel in the television series are parodic of Smith's story, which appears in Prior's resistance and plea for the angel to "go away!"

Whereas Joseph's vision was the start of a new religious tradition and a Moses-like trek to a new promised land, all fueled by the promise of ongoing revelation and communal progression into knowledge of the divine, Prior's vision commands all mortals to stop all movement, to cease the development of new ideas and new forms of social order [...] and centrally, where Joseph's vision began with the arrival of God the Father and led to a changed view of human potential, Kushner's God, the ultimate dysfunctional patriarch, has withdrawn from the world and from heaven. (Evendon 59)

This parody draws upon Mormon stories and reverses and challenges them. Religious faith and hope about God, angels, and divine benevolence are up-ended in this narrative that allows for God to lose interest in humankind, angels to have nonsensical ideas of stasis, and prophets to have no interest in divine command. Mormonism informs the design of heaven and Earth in this series only for that design to unravel and introduce questions about humanity.

Since *Angels in America* is set during the AIDS crisis of the mid 1980s and most of the characters are gay, the closet is a pervasive element in many of the stories. In the first episode, Louis admits to becoming "closety" at "family things" and apologizes to Prior, his partner, for not introducing him to anyone. Despite Louis' momentary lapse

into the closet for a funeral, Louis pretty much stays out of the closet for the remaining episodes through being open about his sexuality. Nevertheless, this first moment of Louis' performance because of the closet is not only treated jovially but is also connected with gender. Prior consoles Louis that he was not "closety" at the funeral; he was "butch", which included not saying the "s" sound in "Louis" to avoid sounding effeminate. This performance of masculinity enabled Louis to briefly reinforce his performance of the closet. Louis and Prior laugh about the necessity to maintain the closet when in Jewish families, particularly to avoid a Jewish curse. "I, personally, would dissolve if anyone were to look me in the eye and say, 'Feh,'" Prior affirms with a smile. This jovial justification for the closet in the opening episode of the series prepares for the damaging and dark side of the closet that the other characters experience in the following episodes.

Roy Cohn is a dark character in this series because of the way he uses the closet to achieve power and fulfill his greed. He is not sorry about having to perform because of the closet, and on several levels it is easy to judge Roy for his negotiation with the closet as hypocrisy. Louis even judges Roy as the "pole-star of human evil" in the fifth episode. "Cohn acts as the Satanic catalyst of the piece, forcing crisis of identity and identification in many of the men around him" (Cadden 84). Being described as a "Roy-toy," Joe's crisis is pivotal to the story as he has a history of emulating Roy's modus operandi in the legal system. Roy works the ruling ideologies of patriarchy and capitalism to fully satisfy his own interests. Roy Cohn identifies as a heterosexual, yet he has sex with men. "You know what a 'homosexual' is?" he asks his doctor after

receiving the diagnosis that he has AIDS. “‘Homosexuals’ are men ... who have zero clout.” Roy Cohn distinguishes his identity through power levels and not sex acts, and this leads him to be in the closet for his sex acts and his illness. “AIDS is what homosexuals have,” Roy affirms, “I have ‘liver cancer.’” It is because of his position in the closet that Roy Cohn can benefit from his position in the power hierarchy and further marginalize and demonize others for his own well-being.

Louis’ brief engagement within the closet is motivated by his religion, Judaism; Roy Cohn’s ongoing use of the closet is motivated by his political power. Joe’s motivation to perform within the closet is both religious and political. There is a part of Louis and Roy Cohn within Joe, and this combination of religious and political motives magnifies the damaging effect of the closet for this Mormon character. Joe’s dialogue with Harper reveals a lifelong devotion to Mormonism that forces him to stay in the closet and focus on his performance.

Does it make any difference that I might be one thing deep within? No matter how wrong or ugly that thing is so long as I fought with everything I have to kill it? [...] For God’s sake, there’s nothing left! I’m a shell. There’s nothing left to kill. As long as my behavior is what I know it has to be: decent, correct – that alone in the eyes of God ...

Harper tries to stop Joe’s “Utah talk/Mormon talk,” but her plea does not change his understanding that he must actively work to maintain a satisfying performance of identity according to his religious standards. His focus is on his external performance, and he forces his internal identity into the closet. Joe’s repression of his inner identity and

description of himself as a shell clarifies the reason why he “has no dreams at all.” Through engaging with the closet Joe is losing his soul, and this makes him a pliable candidate for Roy Cohn and the oppressive agenda of the legal system. Nevertheless, the moments of Joe’s anger and frustration with Harper reveals only one byproduct of the Mormon closet; the moment that Joe recollects the Bible picture of David wrestling with the angel reveals another sorrowful and hopeless consequence of engaging with the closet. Both of these instances in the series are the foundation for Joe’s maintenance of the closet. This foundation is religious, and it prepares Joe for his deepening degeneracy with Roy Cohn, his use of the closet for political power, and his emotional self-destruction through the course of the series.

Joe’s image and sexual capability is presented as desirable to the other gay characters in the narrative; this appeal has to do with his repression and his masculine performance. Prior describes Joe as “the Marlboro man” and “Mega-butth! He makes me feel beyond nelly.” Joe’s body is perfectly sculpted and put on display in the movie, and his beautiful body conveys a sense of masculine sex appeal, particularly as his undergarments barely hang on his skin. A similar idea occurs in *Latter Days* with Aaron’s muscular body combined with an ignorance of his own sexual capability; he asks Christian if “two and a half hours” of sexual activity is “good” whereupon Christian laughs and answers, “It’s amazing!” Perhaps the Mormon history of polygamy and multiple marriage partners suggests an idea of Mormon sexual stamina in these movies. Furthermore, in *Angels in America* the Mormon folklore that informs the narrative’s heavenly moments is coupled with eroticism. Prior gets an erection with all of his

heavenly visitors as well as an orgasm with the angel. This narrative overlaps religious ecstasy with sexual ecstasy. Since Joe's background is associated with the Mormon folklore that creates the erotic space for Prior and the angel, Joe's desirability as a sexual character magnifies. Nevertheless, though he explores his sexuality with Louis or learns how much Harper hates having sex with him, the association of his homosexuality to the Mormon system encourages his downfall. Paradoxically, the elements that make Joe desirable for the other gay characters, namely his masculinity and repressed sexual capacity, are the same elements that lead to his emotional self-destruction in the end.

Similar to the other gay Mormon characters in this chapter, Joe's interaction with Louis reveals a level of ignorance that necessitates Louis' offering of (sexual) knowledge. Following this idea, Louis teaches Joe about the male body during their first sexual encounter. "See, the nose tells the body, the heart, the mind, the fingers, the cock what it wants, and the tongue explores." Their relationship continues through the episodes as Louis is torn with guilt while Joe appears happy despite clinging desperately to Louis. As part of his desperation, Joe removes his temple garments for Louis in an attempt to metaphorically shed his past self; however, Joe still clings to his garments as Louis leaves and continues to wear them for the rest of the series. Joe's retrieval of his past through the garments leads to a return to his wife. Similar to Aaron in *Latter Days*, Joe's action symbolizes an attempt to move forward by shedding his garments only to go back to the garments and what they represent. Joe's attempt to step backward into his closeted self goes against the theme in the film of moving forward; Harper describes this forward motion as a "painful progress" as she flies away from New York and away from

Joe. Joe's attempt to move backward further motivates his own demise as Louis rejects him due to the political power Joe exploits when writing "an important legal bit of fag-bashing." Joe becomes violent with Louis and is surprised with the person he is becoming, which is an effect of his lifetime in the closet. Through the course of the series, Joe changes and becomes more desperate, angry, violent, and sad. This transition occurs during Joe's partaking of knowledge, sex, and transgression

Joe's self-destruction is not physical on the level of *Advise and Consent*, *Six Degrees of Separation*, or *Latter Days* where the gay Mormon character commits/attempts suicide. Joe reaches a level of despair from which he is not granted recovery. The final image the viewer has of Joe is disheveled and unshaven. As an Amish-looking choir sings on a street corner, Hannah stops Joe on the sidewalk. Metaphorically, these two Mormons stand on a busy street against a religious history, yet they have changed through the arc of the narrative. Joe's face hangs down for much of his conversation with Hannah, which is mostly one-way as Hannah queries with minimal response from Joe. He marches down the stairs below the city and is never seen again in the story. His absence is the most notable in the concluding epilogue at the Bethesda Fountain. Despite abandoning Prior while he was in the hospital, Louis is welcomed back into Prior's good graces. Hannah is also with them. The characters share a moment of inclusivity and hope in this final scene. Harper is not there, but she had already left New York City in anticipation for a new life. Roy has died of AIDS by the conclusion of the series but had been granted mercy by Ethel and Louis as they offered the Kaddish, or Jewish prayer for the dead. As Prior's friend tells Louis before the prayer, "Maybe a

queen can forgive her vanquished foe.” Joe does not receive such forgiveness and his despair on the street corner lingers as his final moment of emotional self-destruction.

### Conclusion

The writer of *Angels in America* “became interested in Mormons, he says, as a ‘people of the book’ – rigid and more reverent about texts than life” (Evendon 64). For many of the films in gay and lesbian cinema, this is true. Mormon characters cling to religious texts, rules, and expectations before thinking about their own lives. When religious tenets comply with a heteronormative or patriarchal ideology, then gay Mormon men spiral into an emotional desperation to maintain such tenets without regard for the destruction they are doing to themselves or the people around them, particularly Mormon women. This is when the closet can become deadly, and it is these oppressive forces that encourage an interpretation of the Mormon church in gay and lesbian cinema as a closet that provokes damaging ramifications.

The closet is a space that negotiates the known and the unknown, and it functions to manipulate knowledge and ignorance to serve ruling systems of power. The closet demands performance, particularly by an Other so as to appear as a non-Other. Much like one ritually performs the gender that anticipates his or her sex, one performs the closet in order to act as a subject to a ruling ideology. Maintaining the closet requires a complex interaction between ruling ideologies, such as patriarchy and heteronormativity. In the movies *Advise and Consent*, *Latter Days*, and the miniseries *Angels in America*, gay male Mormon characters are used to present this dilemma of maintaining the closet.

However, these characters' attachment to a religious ideology that conforms to the dominant ideology challenges their capability to maintain the closet. These characters cling to religious strictures, internalize gender ideals, and remain ignorant of sexuality. Sedgwick says, "The closet is the defining structure for gay oppression in this century" (*Epistemology* 71). These films reveal that the gay Mormon characters choose to self-destruct before rejecting the power system that has created their closet within Mormonism.



## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

The title of this project “According to their Wills and Pleasures” comes from a verse in *The Book of Mormon* about Adam and Eve. As Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick asserts, these two figures in early scripture are culturally associated with sexuality through their discovery of sexual knowledge (*Epistemology* 73). This project explores how Mormon characters are also culturally associated with sexuality in American film and television. The history of Mormonism’s unique marital practices and doctrinal approaches to sexuality have developed three common stereotypes for Mormon male characters: the purposeful heterosexual, the monstrous polygamist, and the self-destructive homosexual. Depending upon the sexual elements in the narrative, the Mormon Church can function as a proponent for nineteenth-century views of sexuality, a symbol for society’s repressed sexuality, or a metaphor for the oppressive effects of performing gender and sexuality according to ideological constraints. All of these narrative functions present the Church as a patriarchal and heteronormative institution, and the characters who are attached to the Mormon system are stereotyped “according to their wills and pleasures” (Alma 12:31).

After Adam and Eve partook of the fruit from the tree of knowledge in the Old Testament, a prophet in *The Book of Mormon* explains that they became “as Gods, knowing good from evil, placing themselves in a state to act, or being placed in a state to

act according to their wills and pleasures, whether to do evil or to do good” (Alma 12:31). This prophet attaches the condition of knowledge with godhood, and he also attaches knowledge with a capacity for action. For Mormons, not only is a human’s acquisition of knowledge a step toward godhood but knowledge also enables a possibility to examine, to choose, and to act. For this prophet in *The Book of Mormon*, it is this human condition of knowledge and action brought about by Adam and Eve that necessitates commandments from a higher power. These commandments initiate a framework where knowledge requires a categorization of actions as good and evil as designed by the higher power (Alma 12:32). Thus, this scriptural narrative affirms that knowledge, action, and power are interconnected.

Though different from the religious context of *The Book of Mormon*, this project also affirms a connection between knowledge, action, and power. Knowledge enables recognition and decision for action, and action has the potential to resist or reinforce systems of power. Because of this potential for resistance, power systems seek to provide and restrict knowledge in accordance with their ideologies. It is through ideological apparatuses that this manipulation of knowledge and ignorance occurs. Sedgwick writes, “Ignorance is as potent and as multiple a thing there is as knowledge. Knowledge, after all, is not itself power, although it is the magnetic field of power. Ignorance and opacity collude or compete with knowledge in mobilizing the flows of energy, desire, goods, meanings, persons” (Sedgwick 4). Though knowledge is typically associated with the acquisition of power, ignorance is also a form of power in the way it can distract and disrupt the acquisition of knowledge, which leads to action and power.

Through the framework of queer theory, knowledge involves a criticism and evaluation of sexuality, sexual identities, sex acts, and the cultural powers that seek to limit and define these things. As far as knowledge, action, and power, the use of queer theory in this project is not meant to encourage sexual irresponsibility in Mormon communities but to evaluate sexual meaning in Mormonism and the power systems attached to that meaning. As Sedgwick recognizes of Barthes regarding the homo/heterosexual paradigm,

It is at least premature when Roland Barthes prophesies that ‘once the paradigm is blurred, utopia begins: meaning and sex become the objects of free play [...] liberated from the binary prison, will achieve a state of infinite expansion.’ To the contrary, a deconstructive understanding of these binarisms makes it possible to identify them as sites that are *peculiarly* densely charged with lasting potentials for powerful manipulation [...] (qtd. in Sedgwick 10)

Sedgwick identifies that criticizing these cultural meanings and recognizing their instability does not always decenter oppressive sexual systems; however, deconstructing these meanings does reveal the power system and its methods for cultural manipulation.

Dominant ideology has penetrated the theology of Mormonism, and the sexual nature of the theology reveals a sexually oppressive system in much of Mormon culture. When Harold Bloom examines the revelation that Joseph Smith received to introduce the doctrine of plural marriage (*Doctrine and Covenants* 132:37), Bloom writes,

Joseph's implication is quite plain; the function of receiving concubines is to transcend the angelic state and become a god. If the entire quest of Joseph's life was to restore archaic religion, in which spirit and matter, God and man, were to differ only in degree, not in kind, then the culmination of that quest had to be plural marriage [...] Plural marriage was to be the secret key that unlocked the gate between the divine and the human [...] the function of sanctified human sexual intercourse essentially is theurgical. (Bloom 105)

Bloom's assessment is more speculative of Mormon theology than descriptive. He is drawing upon his expertise as a literary critic to analyze Joseph Smith's theology. Bloom's view is not supported by the contemporary application of this revelation in Mormon culture, a culture that Bloom argues has deviated from ("though not betrayed") Smith's original teachings (86). Unlike Bloom who interprets that plural marriage distinguishes "between the divine and the human" in Smith's doctrine, many Mormons today interpret that it is marriage, regardless of whether it is polygamous or monogamous, that approaches a reward of godhood.

A belief that heterosexual coupling, monogamous or otherwise, is required for a reward in heaven reveals the sexual component of the Mormon belief system. In Helen Whitney's documentary *The Mormons* (2006), classics professor Margaret Merrill Toscano argues that Smith "was struggling with trying to bring together spirituality and sexuality. And quite frankly," Toscano continues, "Christianity has been really bad at this, and most major religions have been really bad at sexuality and spirituality."

Toscano clarifies that this difficulty occurs because many religious people exercise their sexuality with a partner while at the same time denying their sexuality in other contexts, such as attending church or being spiritual on the Sabbath. Bloom also recognizes Smith's interest in merging sexuality with spirituality.

The sacredness of human sexuality, for Smith, was inseparable from the sacred mystery of embodiment, without which godhood would not be possible. God and Jesus are men of flesh and bone, and those who would progress to join them must be in the body also. Smith's theurgy [...] is essentially sexual, and demanded a full realization of the prophet's desires.

(Bloom 106)

The importance of the physical body in Mormon doctrine and the belief that God the Father and Jesus Christ are embodied is also connected with the importance of heterosexual relationships. Not only does the condition of knowledge bring an individual closer to godhood but also the condition and exercise of sexuality. This further combines the knowledge of Adam and Eve as sexual knowledge. The framework of Mormonism that Smith founded that includes the divinity of the physical body and godliness of heterosexual relationships magnifies the significance of sexuality in this belief system.

This sexual component of Mormonism has been utilized in culture to distinguish Mormon identities. The stereotyping of Mormon men in film and television relies upon sexual identity as the distinguishing factor: the purposeful heterosexual, the monstrous polygamist, and the self-destructive homosexual. These stereotypes overlap with the messages they present about gender, sexuality, and Mormonism. Consequently, these

recurring stereotypes reveal that the culture associates Mormons with sexuality, and Mormon characters are categorized and defined in order to reinforce or resist systems of power.

Within Mormon cinema, the representation of the purposeful heterosexual is a result of the sexual framework of Mormon theology. Much of the perception of sexuality that informs the purposeful heterosexual stereotype is still attached to nineteenth-century views of heterosexuality. This is because the theology that informs Mormon culture was developed during the nineteenth century. These views include an emphasis on reproduction as well as true forms of gender that can come together and form a true love, which justifies sex acts. This stereotype reinforces patriarchal and heteronormative systems of power.

In much of mainstream cinema, Mormons are depicted as monstrous polygamists. The depiction of the monstrous polygamist reveals the repression of sexuality in much of society. This sexual repression is attached to the polygamous characters because they function in narratives as Others, and their excessive sexuality fuels their capacity for monstrosity, violence, and power. Furthermore, the stereotype of the monstrous polygamist is often used as a symbol to displace the anxieties of patriarchal oppression. Such anxieties can be effectively disowned from society and placed upon the monstrous character; thus, the discourse of compulsory heterosexuality can effectively function within the narrative since patriarchal oppression is displaced onto the Mormon polygamist.

Movies with the self-destructive Mormon homosexual use the Mormon Church as a metaphor for the oppressive effects of the closet. The Church is depicted as an environment where heteronormative systems can generate emotional damage for gay and lesbian identities. The closet is also a space that allows for the control of knowledge through enacting silence. Moreover, the stereotype of the self-destructive homosexual is informed by the Church's cultural notions of attaining a perfect identity. This perfect identity involves an assumption of a perfect gender identity and a perfect sexual identity, and this can result in a fixation on identity performance. The closet is a performance and gender is a performance, and a system that enforces such performances can lead to emotional damage and eventual self-destruction.

I introduced this project with the story of Larry H. Miller canceling the screenings of *Brokeback Mountain* at his megaplex in Utah. Miller made a decision that limited the representation of gay men in his private venue. He preferred to fear homosexuals in *Hostel* or laugh at them in *The Producers* over seriously approaching the themes of *Brokeback Mountain* that examine perceptions of same-sex desire, American masculinity, and the damaging effects of the closet. Within his cultural space, Miller wanted to limit the representation and definition of homosexual/queer identities. Ruling ideologies function in a similar way in order to manipulate the culture to maintain their privileged status. Accordingly, this project has in many ways reversed Miller's situation by examining the limited representation and cultural definition of Mormon identities. As a Mormon, Miller only wanted to present movies that reinforce a heteronormative discourse on sexuality. However, the stereotypes that represent Mormon characters are

profoundly and distinctly sexual, and some are critical of heteronormative discourse. Additionally, the stereotypes of Mormons outside of Mormon cinema reveal that audiences prefer to fear or pity Mormon characters rather than seriously consider their theology and history. It appears that the network of cultural power systems seeks to marginalize and limit the definitions of homosexual and Mormon identities, and knowledge of this exercise of power can lead to recognition and action.



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