



UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA PRESS
JOURNALS + DIGITAL PUBLISHING

Sex and Conflict in New Religious Movements: A Comparison of the Oneida Community under John Humphrey Noyes and the Early Mormons under Joseph Smith and his Would-Be Successors

Author(s): Lawrence Foster

Source: *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions*, Vol. 13, No. 3 (February 2010), pp. 34-58

Published by: [University of California Press](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/nr.2010.13.3.34>

Accessed: 09/03/2014 16:22

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



University of California Press is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

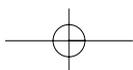
Sex and Conflict in New Religious Movements

A Comparison of the Oneida Community under John Humphrey Noyes and the Early Mormons under Joseph Smith and his Would-Be Successors

Lawrence Foster

ABSTRACT: Efforts to introduce unorthodox sexual and marital practices have often caused dissension in new religious movements. The nineteenth-century Oneida Perfectionist and Mormon communities highlight the profound impact such practices may have on group cohesion and development. Conflicts over the introduction of complex marriage almost led John Humphrey Noyes' Oneida Community to disband in 1852, yet the group survived and prospered for another quarter century until renewed internal and external tension precipitated the group's formal demise in 1881. Serious internal and external challenges associated with polygamy also developed within the larger, rapidly expanding Mormon community in Illinois under Joseph Smith Jr., during the early 1840s, and in Utah under Brigham Young until 1877. Not until the LDS Church began to give up plural marriage and make other significant accommodations to American society in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, however, was Mormonism eventually freed to begin its rapid expansion throughout the United States and worldwide after World War II. The article concludes that although alternative marriage and sexual practices may have initially served as powerful commitment mechanisms, such controversial practices appear to have had a net negative impact upon the long-term development of both groups.

Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions, Volume 13, Issue 3, pages 34–58, ISSN 1092-6690 (print), 1541-8480 (electronic). © 2010 by The Regents of the University of California. All rights reserved. Please direct all requests for permission to photocopy or reproduce article content through the University of California Press's Rights and Permissions website, at <http://www.ucpressjournals.com/reprintinfo.asp>. DOI: 10.1525/nr.2010.13.3.34

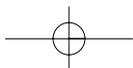


The attempt to introduce unorthodox sexual beliefs and practices in new religious movements has frequently generated intense controversy. Although all human societies have sought to find ways to control and channel the powerful biological and emotional drives associated with sexual expression in socially desirable directions,¹ such challenges become particularly great when new religious movements seek to introduce unconventional sexual practices within their communities. New religious movements already tend to be controversial because of their religious, social, economic, and political deviance from the norms of the larger society, but if they also engage in unorthodox marital and sexual practices, the resulting mix of internal and external tension may become explosive.²

One reason sexual deviance is so frequent, and so disruptive, in new religious movements is that much of the appeal of the charismatic leaders of such groups—like that of charismatic leaders in politics, business, and other spheres of life—tends to be associated with the leader's sexual as well as intellectual dynamism.³ Charismatic leaders typically have access to more power, opportunity, and temptation to express personal sexual drives in ways that challenge acceptable social norms, thereby provoking controversy, both inside and outside the group. Tensions typically escalate even further, however, if the charismatic leaders of new religious movements not only argue that their own idiosyncratic sexual behavior is divinely sanctioned but, in addition, that such behavior provides the divinely mandated model that their *followers* should adopt, as well.

This article will compare and contrast how the introduction of unorthodox sexual and marital systems provoked controversy in two contemporaneous “masculine products of the great revivals”⁴ active during the 1840s—the Oneida Perfectionists and the Mormons (officially, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints or LDS Church). First I shall focus on the tensions that developed when John Humphrey Noyes and his Perfectionist followers who founded the Oneida Community in central New York State in 1848 began to set up a system of “complex marriage.” Under that group marriage system, all adult members of the community were considered heterosexually married to each other, while any exclusive monogamous attachments to the opposite sex were broken up as antisocial behavior inimical to group order.⁵

Next I shall explore the disruption caused by the larger, more influential, and far more publicly controversial efforts by the Mormon prophet Joseph Smith Jr., to institute the *sub rosa* introduction of a form of polygamous practice between 1841 and 1844 among his leadership cadre in the primary Mormon settlement at Nauvoo, Illinois. Not only did the Mormon prophet lead the way into polygamy by taking at least thirty women as plural wives, but he also placed intense pressure upon several dozen of his key male followers to take at least one additional wife as a test of their total loyalty to him.⁶ This highly contested effort



was arguably the most important single factor that led to the Mormon prophet's arrest and subsequent murder by a lynch mob in 1844, as well as to continuing tensions within the various Latter-day Saint factions, most of which initially sanctioned or encouraged polygamous practices, even if only briefly or sporadically.⁷

Finally I shall compare the impact that introducing alternative sexual and marital systems had on these two groups, suggesting some of the larger issues that the groups' experiences may raise for understanding the internal and external challenges facing new religious movements. Since hostility toward new religious groups may be generated by a variety of interrelated religious, political, economic, and social factors, determining the relative impact of unconventional sexual behavior, as compared to other sources of tension, can be difficult. I shall nevertheless argue that the divergent marital and sexual practices of the Oneida and Mormon movements became one of the *primary* focal points for hostility inside and outside both groups while the practices were being introduced during the antebellum period. Once the new practices became established in both groups, however, they also served as a powerful source of communal identity and cohesion for several decades until public pressure forced both groups to give them up at the end of the nineteenth century.

SEXUAL CONFLICT IN THE ONEIDA COMMUNITY

For more than thirty years, beginning in the late 1840s in his hometown of Putney, Vermont, and continuing at Oneida in central New York State, John Humphrey Noyes presided over a system of "complex marriage" that the journalist Charles Nordhoff characterized as an apparently unprecedented "combination of polygamy and polyandry with certain religious and social restraints."⁸ Community members, who numbered more than two hundred adults at the group's peak, considered themselves heterosexually married to each other. Men and women exchanged sexual partners frequently within the community, while breaking up all exclusive romantic attachments as "special love," anti-social behavior threatening communal order.⁹

Making possible this unorthodox system was an intricate set of control mechanisms. All members lived together in one large communal Mansion House, ate together, worked together, had a system of communal child-rearing, and shared all but the most basic property in common. The group was governed through daily religious-and-business meetings that all adults attended, by using an informal method of group feedback and control called "mutual criticism," and by developing an informal status hierarchy known as "ascending and descending fellowship." A difficult voluntary system of birth control known as "male



continence”—technically “coitus reservatus,” or the male refraining from ejaculating either during or after sexual intercourse—was used exclusively until the group’s final decade, when a “stirpiculture” or eugenics experiment was introduced among selected community members.¹⁰

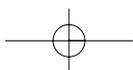
At Oneida, sex roles were perhaps more radically revised than in any comparable American groups, with men and women working alongside each other in many positions, and women serving in positions of authority over men in certain jobs.¹¹ The system of complex marriage associated with these practices existed at Oneida from 1848 until 1879, when it was given up due to a combination of internal dissatisfaction and external pressure. In 1881 the group also formally discontinued its communistic system of economic organization, reorganizing itself as a joint-stock corporation and going on to become a successful small business, best known for its silverware marketed throughout the United States.

Two closely interrelated factors generated intense conflict in John Humphrey Noyes’ communities during their initial development in the late 1840s and early 1850s. One was Noyes’ insistence on his absolute primacy as his followers’ unquestioned leader; the other was his introduction of highly unconventional sexual relationships within the group and his insistence on being the final arbiter over those sexual relationships within the extraordinary system of complex marriage he set up.

Noyes’ demand for his followers’ complete loyalty to his religious ideas and leadership—the belief in Noyes’ “divine commission”—was central to his religious and communal efforts throughout his life and led to severe disputes as he began establishing his communities.¹² As early as 1837, Noyes declared: “I would never connect myself with any individual or association in religion unless I was acknowledged leader.”¹³ As the community’s historian George Wallingford Noyes observed: “The dogma of Noyes’s divine commission became a touchstone in the Putney and Oneida Communities. Those who rejected it were turned away; those who accepted it were bound together in a brotherhood of self-sacrificing quest for the Kingdom of God.”¹⁴

Such an approach, so characteristic of charismatic leaders and the type of genius described in Len Oakes’ path-breaking study, *Prophetic Charisma*,¹⁵ proved disturbing to many of Noyes’ capable associates who eventually broke with him during the earliest years of the his communal experiments. One of those individuals, William Gould, stated bluntly:

After the strictest observation for three weeks at Putney, I am compelled to say that his government is an exhibition of the most absolute specimen of despotism I ever saw. The members are under his control in the most absolute sense in the matters of the least as well as most consequence. I do not think they feel the least right of control over their property, persons, time, their wives, choice, judgment, will or



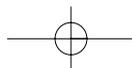
affections. I heard them express not a solitary opinion in his presence until they heard his first, and then all gave in the same opinion. He treats counsel with contempt, and criticism as mutiny and treason, and all such intruders are placed under the ban of the community. And although I say it with pain and regret, yet truth compels me to say that, notwithstanding the exalted opinion I have of the privileges and advantages of Association, if I can have access to them only through worse than southern slavery, then I will face isolation with all of its evil.¹⁶

Closely related to the controversies resulting from John Humphrey Noyes' demand for total leadership primacy, and greatly exacerbating those tensions, was his development and implementation of unorthodox sexual practices within his communities. As part of Noyes' effort to overcome human "selfishness" by demanding full submission to the will of God (and to Noyes as God's agent on earth), he argued that among fully faithful Christians, selfish, exclusive marital ties would be replaced by a complex marriage in which all adult believers could love each other fully and engage in heterosexual relations with all other adult members within the group. Each should be married to all—heart, mind, and body—in a complex marriage.¹⁷

The problem, of course, was how to regulate these "free" sexual relations within the group. Once again, Noyes viewed himself as the ultimate referee. His demand for complete control over the sexual lives of his followers was perhaps his most powerful test of their total loyalty to him, causing many individuals who otherwise might have accepted his religious leadership to leave his communities. As Noyes recalled: "During the first days of my residence at Oneida, our social [sexual] theory was the subject of open and violent discussion between myself, [Jonathan] Burt and others on one side and all the leading Perfectionists who deserted us on the other."¹⁸

Even those who remained loyal to Noyes—many of whom had initially been attracted to his religious beliefs without realizing their full sexual implications—did not move immediately toward complete "communism of love."¹⁹ As Noyes commented in August 1849: "If a man comes into this Association with a wife that he has to watch and reserve from others, he has brought a cask of powder into a blacksmith's shop."²⁰ Rather than allow the sparks to cause the cask to explode, Noyes worked patiently to reeducate his followers, gradually extending his own sexual prerogatives and allowing greater freedom to followers he thought ready to exercise such freedom. During this transition process, individuals and the group as a whole sometimes felt stretched to their emotional limits.

Establishing the unconventional system of sexual relations at Oneida was gradually achieved with the aid of several distinctive control mechanisms, including the demanding system of birth control through "male



continence;” small-group and community-wide “mutual criticism” sessions, during which even the most private aspects of an individual’s beliefs and sexual behavior could become the focus of group assessment and critique; and a status system called “ascending and descending fellowship,” under which individuals deemed to have higher status had access to a wider range of sexual contacts and power than those considered to be of lesser “spirituality.”²¹

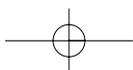
The many ways in which these and other Oneida Community practices mitigated or exacerbated conflict cannot be discussed here. Instead, this section will conclude by briefly highlighting three pivotal points during which Noyes’ unorthodox sexual preoccupations and practices provoked conflict between him, his followers, and the larger society.

The first significant conflict occurred in January 1837 when the 25-year-old Noyes wrote a remarkable letter to a friend, after learning the devastating news that Abigail Merwin, his first female convert whom he had assumed God had set aside for him, had instead married someone else. In that letter, published anonymously and without Noyes’ prior permission in another Perfectionist newspaper, Noyes made the startling declaration that:

When the will of God is done on earth, as it is in heaven, there will be no marriage. . . . In a holy community, there is no more reason why sexual intercourse should be restricted by law, than why eating and drinking should be. . . . I call a certain woman my wife—she is yours, she is Christ’s, and in him she is the bride of all saints.²²

Not surprisingly, as soon as Noyes publicly acknowledged his authorship of this letter his followers deserted him, his newspaper folded, and he retreated home in disgrace to Putney, Vermont, to try to put his life and reputation back together again. Just a year later, Noyes would marry a *different* woman, Harriet Holton, whom he hardly knew but who idolized him and who had the financial means to allow Noyes to begin publishing his Perfectionist newspaper once again.²³

During the subsequent decade in Putney, where Noyes’ wealthy and locally prominent family lived, he began to create the base for a small Bible school and then for the larger Putney Community, which would reach some thirty-five members at its peak.²⁴ Although the group gradually moved toward “communism of property,” following the model of the early Christians described in Acts 2:44-45, the Putney neighbors generally appear to have tolerated the little group’s eccentric beliefs at first. Then in 1846 John and his wife Harriet first entered into a mutually agreed-upon “enlargement” of their marital relations into a foursome with their followers George and Mary Cragin.²⁵ Noyes’ efforts the following year to expand such relationships further within the community outraged some members of the group and the citizens of Putney, leading

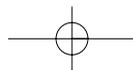


to a second period of conflict. Based upon the testimony of two defecting followers, Noyes was indicted on two specific counts of adultery in 1847 and his bond was set at \$2,000 (the equivalent of perhaps \$60,000 today). Rather than stand trial and face likely conviction or a possible lynching, Noyes instead fled the state.²⁶ Once again, his unorthodox sexual practices had apparently undercut his larger religious and communal efforts.

The third major conflict associated with Noyes' inauguration of unconventional sexual practices occurred when he and his followers started over again in 1848 at Oneida, New York. The community at Oneida grew rapidly, rising to more than two hundred by 1851.²⁷ The severe tensions that emerged as Noyes began introducing his alternative sexual ideas and practices among a much larger group of followers at Oneida are laid out for the first time in full and fascinating detail in the collection of primary Oneida documents, originally compiled by Noyes' nephew George Wallingford Noyes, that I edited for publication in 2001.²⁸ The climax of the crisis and its denouement took place between March and August 1852.

The immediate precipitant for the 1852 crisis was a young, recently married female member of the community, Tryphena Hubbard. She had become mentally ill, probably due at least in part to her ambivalence about complex marriage. Her young husband had beat and seriously injured her in a vain attempt to stop her disruptive behavior. When her father discovered his daughter's mistreatment, he initiated several lawsuits against the community. These incidents and other negative external publicity, exacerbated by internal opposition from disaffected community members, threatened the group's reputation and brought it to the verge of disbanding. In a skillful attempt to defuse the crisis, John Humphrey Noyes announced the temporary discontinuance of complex marriage in March 1852, and he began taking steps to placate his internal and external critics. Six months later, after the crisis had been largely overcome in August 1852, Noyes reintroduced complex marriage.²⁹ The community went on to operate successfully for more than an additional quarter century until serious internal and external tensions resurfaced during the late 1870s, as Noyes' physical and mental capacities were going into decline. These renewed tensions eventually led to the discontinuance of complex marriage in 1879 and the formal dissolution of the community itself in 1881.³⁰

In sum, John Humphrey Noyes' efforts to introduce a set of unconventional sexual beliefs and practices provoked severe tension during the initial years of his communal experimentation that almost caused the group to disband. Although the tensions were minimized for several decades between the mid-1850s and the mid-1870s, they resurfaced near the end of the community's existence and became the most



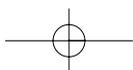
important factor in the internal divisions that contributed to the breakup of the community.

JOSEPH SMITH'S CONTROVERSIAL EFFORT TO INTRODUCE POLYGAMY

Joseph Smith's *sub rosa* campaign to introduce a form of polygamy belief and practice among his closest followers in the large Mormon settlement he was creating in Nauvoo, Illinois during the early 1840s was a far more ambitious and disruptive undertaking than John Humphrey Noyes' relatively self-contained efforts to introduce complex marriage within his smaller communities at Putney and Oneida. Although the Mormon movement during its initial decade of existence in the 1830s had become subject to hostility for a variety of religious, political, economic, and social reasons, sexual matters do not initially appear to have provoked much controversy. However, by the early 1840s in Nauvoo—a frontier boomtown that would grow to some 11,000 inhabitants by 1845, rivaling Chicago for the title of largest city in Illinois—Joseph Smith began his most ambitious effort to introduce a prototype for the Kingdom of God on earth, and sexual issues emerged as a key source of tension within the group.³¹

As part of his larger effort to help inaugurate the Kingdom of God on earth, Smith devoted enormous time and energy to a skillfully orchestrated private campaign to introduce a form of polygamous belief and practice among his most trusted followers. This campaign became one of the Mormon prophet's primary preoccupations during the final three years of his life from 1841 through 1844. Closely associated with what many criticized as the prophet's highhandedness and increasingly dictatorial leadership style, this effort to introduce polygamy may well have been the most significant factor in the growing internal dissension within the Mormon movement in the early 1840s.³² During the ensuing "apostolic interregnum" between Joseph Smith's death in 1844 and Brigham Young's formal accession to supreme leadership of the most numerous group of Mormons in 1847, conflicts over polygamy continued to be highly divisive throughout the Mormon movement as a whole.³³

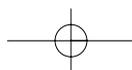
Several pre-Nauvoo controversies with sexual overtones foreshadowed the later contentiousness in Nauvoo. In the Mormon settlement at Kirtland, Ohio, on 24 March 1832, for example, Joseph Smith was mobbed, smeared with hot tar, and almost castrated, allegedly because Levi Johnson was upset that Smith had been too intimate with his sister Nancy Marinda Johnson, who later became one of Smith's plural wives.³⁴ By 1835 enough rumors were circulating that a resolution explicitly denying that the Mormons practiced polygamy was introduced under the auspices of W. W. Phelps and Oliver Cowdery, two of Smith's most able lieutenants, into the 1835 edition of the church's Doctrine and



Covenants. It stated: "Inasmuch as this church of Christ has been reproached with the crime of fornication, and polygamy, we declare that we believe that one man should have one wife, and one woman but one husband."³⁵ A few years later, the major charge against Oliver Cowdery during his excommunication trial in Far West, Missouri, on 12 April 1838, was that he had defamed Joseph Smith's character by falsely insisting that Smith had committed adultery, and Cowdery's letter from the period shows that "the girl" in question was Fanny Alger, a young woman who had been a ward in Smith's house during the mid-1830s.³⁶

Not until the Mormons began creating their most ambitious settlement in Nauvoo during the early 1840s, however, did allegations and controversy about unorthodox Mormon sexual behavior increase dramatically. Between 1841 and 1844 Joseph Smith began a systematic effort to introduce new temple sealing ceremonies designed to link indissolubly the living and the dead. Closely associated with those new beliefs and ceremonies, Smith began to introduce the practice of polygamy, as well. The Mormon prophet's first formally recorded plural marriage for which a definite ceremony can be identified was to 26-year-old Louisa Beaman on 5 April 1841.³⁷ About a year later, in the spring of 1842, the first and possibly the most devastating of a series of conflicts and apostasies associated with polygamy began when the colorful adventurer John C. Bennett—then mayor of Nauvoo and Smith's right hand man as his "assistant president"—broke with the Latter-day Saints and began publishing a series of lurid exposes, reprinted in a widely-circulated book in the early fall of 1842 that purported to "tell all" about the polygamy practices secretly being introduced in Nauvoo.³⁸

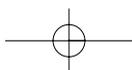
Although Bennett's equivocal character, transparent ambition, profligate behavior, and flamboyant exaggeration undercut the credibility of his allegations for both non-Mormons and Mormons alike, many of his specific factual allegations about polygamy practice in Nauvoo were accurate. Bennett had been privy to the behind-the-scenes action in Nauvoo, and he may even have helped develop and articulate some of Smith's initial polygamy policies, although Bennett apparently viewed them simply as a clever way to seduce women.³⁹ Among Bennett's most devastating allegations were that Joseph Smith had attempted to marry/seduce Sarah Pratt, the wife of Orson Pratt, one of his twelve apostles, and that Smith had also attempted to convince Nancy Rigdon, the daughter of his first counselor Sidney Rigdon, to become his plural wife. Bennett also published a detailed affidavit by Martha Brotherton, a young English convert whose straightforward account of the blow-by-blow details of how she had been asked to become a plural wife of Brigham Young while under duress in a locked room has the ring of truth and remains deeply disturbing even today. Despite the previously unblemished reputations of these and other women whom Bennett's expose highlighted, defenders of Joseph Smith's reputation countered



with lurid counter-charges defaming these women's characters in ways that defy credibility.⁴⁰ The prophet's character apparently had to be defended as spotless, no matter the cost.

Almost as devastating as Bennett's external diatribes against Joseph Smith was the distress that polygamy caused some of Smith's closest male followers such as the aforementioned Orson Pratt, who remained within the church. Gary Bergera's insightful analysis in *Conflict in the Quorum* shows that Pratt felt so deeply torn between confidence that his wife Sarah was telling the truth and his equally strong conviction that Joseph Smith was an authentic prophet of God that he teetered for a time on the verge of madness or suicide, unable to overcome his profound cognitive distress.⁴¹ In a display of intense personal ambivalence in 1842, for example, Pratt flatly refused to affirm his confidence in Joseph Smith's character when specifically asked to do so before a public audience. Only after being pointedly asked whether he *personally* had any *direct* evidence impugning Smith's character, did Pratt reluctantly admit that he did not.⁴² Although Orson Pratt was briefly disfellowshipped in Nauvoo, he somehow managed to find a way to recover his loyalty to the Mormon prophet and also continue to trust his wife, and he would become Mormonism's most articulate public spokesman for plural marriage. Yet polygamy remained deeply disruptive throughout Pratt's life. Eventually the issue would contribute to the breakup of his marriage with Sarah and also would prevent him from becoming President of the Latter-day Saint Church, due to the seniority he lost when he was disfellowshipped in Nauvoo.⁴³

If Bennett's exposé and Pratt's ambivalence about polygamy in Nauvoo led to tensions, the hostility that powerful Mormon women such as Joseph Smith's first and only publicly acknowledged wife, Emma Hale Smith, displayed toward polygamy was even more involved, conflicted, and disruptive. Emma, as portrayed in her definitive biography by Linda King Newell and Valeen Tippetts Avery, was not only a capable, articulate, and influential individual in her own right but also a wife who deeply loved her husband and was profoundly ambivalent about his practice of polygamy.⁴⁴ Like many other women caught in similar circumstances, Emma was determined to avoid airing the family's dirty laundry in public. Nevertheless, she used her powerful role as head of the Nauvoo Women's Relief Society—an organization that rapidly grew to more than one thousand strong after its founding in 1842—to work quietly but forcefully behind the scenes to encourage other Mormon women not to allow their husbands to enter into polygamy. As she led Relief Society meetings in Nauvoo, Emma used code words about the necessity of ferreting out "iniquity" and putting a stop to "vice," while her husband Joseph countered by cautioning the sisters that their zeal should not exceed their knowledge and that they should hold their tongues and "hold all characters sacred."⁴⁵

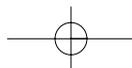


Following Joseph Smith's murder in 1844, the Relief Society was discontinued and was not reestablished until 1867, more than two decades later, perhaps in part because of Brigham Young's concern to establish polygamy securely in Utah before allowing a powerful women's organization to be set up once again. Emma, meanwhile, remained behind in Nauvoo when the main body of Mormons went west with Brigham Young in 1846, quietly instilling in her children a visceral hatred of polygamy. After 1860 her son Joseph III became the head of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (RLDS), eventually headquartered in Independence, Missouri, a group whose most striking difference from Utah Mormonism throughout the nineteenth century was its unrelenting opposition to polygamy.⁴⁶

After Joseph Smith dictated his revelation on plural and celestial marriage on 12 July 1843, and his brother Hyrum presented it before the Nauvoo High Council a month later, the lines of division over the issue began to harden. Church leaders were now pressed to take a stand for or against plural marriage, and three respected members of the Nauvoo High Council—its president William Marks, Austin Cowles, and Leonard Soby—bitterly opposed the practice. In addition, dissident Mormons began providing information to anti-Mormon newspapers, thereby helping to generate additional external hostility toward the Mormons.⁴⁷

The most serious challenge to Smith's authority, however, began in April 1844 when a group of highly respected Mormon leaders led by William Law, who had been one of Joseph Smith's two counselors in the First Presidency until just three months earlier, announced the formation of a rival Reformed LDS Church. This movement to set up an alternative Mormon church in competition with Joseph Smith's own was led by prominent Latter Day Saints who remained staunchly committed to the Book of Mormon and core Mormon beliefs but who became convinced that Joseph Smith had become a "fallen prophet," unfit to lead the church he had founded. Despite the pressures against becoming involved with this dissident group, it was able to attract as many as three hundred individuals to one of its public meetings in Nauvoo.⁴⁸

Events began to move rapidly toward their tragic denouement on 7 June 1844, when leaders of this dissident movement to reform the Mormon Church published the first, and only, issue of its opposition newspaper, *The Nauvoo Expositor*. The newspaper attacked Smith's high-handed leadership, his theological innovations, and especially his polygamy, printing three straightforward affidavits on polygamy in Nauvoo that were difficult to dismiss as mere slander. Knowing that publication and circulation of such information would undercut the faith of many rank-and-file Mormons, who were still unaware that the church secretly advocated such practices, Smith acted quickly and decisively to destroy the press of the *Expositor* and any surviving copies of the



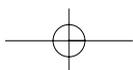
paper. Almost inevitably, that action brought outside hostility against the Mormons to a fever pitch. Smith was indicted for illegally destroying the press, as well as for adultery.⁴⁹ Rather than see outright civil war erupt, he eventually surrendered himself to the authorities in Carthage, Illinois, to stand trial. There, on 27 June 1844, a mob in collusion with local militiamen entered the jail, shooting and killing Joseph and his brother Hyrum.⁵⁰

POLYGAMY CONTROVERSIES AFTER JOSEPH SMITH'S MURDER

Although polygamy had been controversial under Joseph Smith during the early 1840s, it continued to be a divisive factor during the succession crisis that followed his murder. In fact, all but a handful of the individuals who aspired to succeed Joseph Smith initially introduced some form of polygamy in their groups, even if only briefly, and the few who did not found the issue very disruptive, both internally and externally. Among the most noteworthy early Mormon claimants to the prophet's mantle other than Brigham Young, whose crucial role will be discussed later in this article, were Sidney Rigdon, William Smith, James J. Strang, and Joseph Smith III.⁵¹

Sidney Rigdon, the only surviving member of Joseph Smith's first presidency and the first figure who sought to lead the church after the prophet's death, initially inveighed vehemently against Brigham Young and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles over which he presided, for advocating and practicing what Rigdon called the "spiritual wife system," as well as for the "desperate lengths" to which the Twelve had gone to keep their "corruptions" from the public.⁵² Rigdon's efforts soon began to falter, however, and by the end of 1846, the group he founded after he retreated to his Pittsburgh base no longer posed a significant challenge to Brigham Young and the Quorum of the Twelve.⁵³

Another of Joseph Smith's would-be successors was his brother William, the only surviving brother of the prophet and the black sheep of the Smith family. William put forward his claims to succession based upon family-dynastic grounds, but he proved extraordinarily ambivalent about polygamy, engaging in inconsistent and flagrantly irresponsible sexual behavior that caused Brigham Young and the Twelve in Nauvoo endless headaches and embarrassment. During the early fall of 1844, for example, William disrupted the small Mormon branch in Boston when he attempted to introduce the doctrine and practice of polygamy there.⁵⁴ A year later, on 17 August 1845, William publicly announced in Nauvoo that polygamy doctrine and practice were "taught secretly in Nauvoo—he taught and practiced it, and he not was not in favor of making a secret of the matter."⁵⁵ This and William's subsequent inflammatory statements, published on the front pages of the bitterly anti-Mormon



Warsaw Signal during the late summer and early fall of 1845, may well have contributed significantly to the rise of the virulently anti-Mormon sentiment outside Nauvoo that forced the Mormons to evacuate the city prematurely and led them to begin their great trek westward in early February 1846, in the depths of a bitterly cold winter.⁵⁶

James J. Strang, arguably the greatest of the earliest Mormon aspirants to the mantle of the prophet and the only claimant who might have mounted an effective challenge to Young and the Twelve, initially asserted his “unchanged” and “unchangeable” opposition to polygamy, thereby attracting many of the most able Mormons who had opposed Joseph Smith’s polygamy. In 1849, however, Strang completely reversed that position by taking as his first plural wife the 19-year-old Elvira Field and bringing her along on his major missionary journey to the eastern states, dressed in male garb and posing none-too-convincingly as Strang’s private male secretary, “Charles J. Douglas.” After Strang reversed his original anti-polygamy stance, he rapidly lost the support of many of his most capable and committed early followers, including William Marks, Zenos Gurley, and Jason Briggs. They would become instrumental in founding the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, discussed below, and Strang was never thereafter able to mount a serious challenge to the Utah Mormons from his headquarters on Beaver Island in Lake Michigan.⁵⁷

The last and most influential of Joseph Smith Jr.’s early successors, aside from Brigham Young himself, was the prophet’s eldest son, Joseph Smith III. In 1860 he reluctantly took up his father’s mantle in an attempt to reorganize the Mormon movement that he felt had gone astray under Brigham Young’s leadership. Eventually Joseph III was able to attract many of the most articulate and committed Mormons who had rejected Brigham Young and the practice of polygamy that had become the defining public characteristic of nineteenth-century Mormonism in Utah under Young’s leadership. Under Joseph III’s pragmatic leadership for more than fifty years, the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (RLDS), which eventually set up its headquarters in Independence, Missouri, became the only numerically significant challenger to the larger Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Utah.⁵⁸

That the Mormon prophet’s son built and led the Reorganized Latter Day Saints—inspired in large part by a visceral hostility toward the practice that had been so central to his father’s efforts during the final years of his life—is a matter of profound irony and pathos. The reorganization developed its sense of identity by carrying high the torch of true Mormonism and opposing what it viewed as the corruptions and abominations perpetrated by the Utah church.⁵⁹ Ultimately, disagreements over polygamy would prove the only irreducible basis for hostility between these two primary branches of the Mormon movement, the



underlying reason they could never be reconciled in spite of Brigham Young's repeated attempts to bring Joseph III back into the fold.

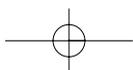
In sum, nineteenth-century Mormonism under its prophet Joseph Smith and his would-be successors, even more than Noyes' Perfectionists at Putney and Oneida, was racked by dissension over unorthodox marital and sexual practices. The divergent trajectories of the dominant Utah branch of Mormonism and its smaller Reorganized challenger during the nineteenth century were chiefly shaped by their irreconcilable disagreement regarding polygamy belief and practice.

ALTERNATIVE SEXUAL PRACTICES AND GROUP COHESION

What larger impact did the Oneida and Mormon efforts to introduce alternative sexual and marriage practices have on the development of their communities in nineteenth-century America? How did the controversial sexual systems in these new religious movements influence the lives of their members, strengthening or undercutting loyalty to the group? What were the relative costs and benefits of unorthodox sexual experimentation in these groups, both when the new practices were being introduced and once they had become established?

At Oneida, the first five years when complex marriage was being introduced were the most contentious in the community's history. Yet after individuals who could not or would not accept Noyes' absolute primacy in all spheres of religious and community life had left, the approximately three hundred people who eventually comprised the Oneida Community for the next quarter century were able to sustain a stable, prosperous, and generally happy life.⁶⁰ Achieving such stability, however, required that Noyes give up his earlier universalistic goal of spreading his ideas and communities throughout the world. Only within a relatively small group of carefully tested members under strong leadership could such a demanding system be made to work. By the mid-1870s, as Noyes aged and lost much of his earlier dynamism, a power vacuum developed within the group and an internal struggle for succession ensued, weakening the community and opening it to renewed external attacks that ultimately led to the discontinuance of complex marriage and the breakup of the community.⁶¹

In retrospect, despite the inevitable stresses inherent in inaugurating the extraordinary system of relationships at Oneida, the net impact of complex marriage on the community once the practice had become established appears to have been generally benign. Those who could accept complex marriage found it a powerful bonding mechanism, and both men and women at Oneida benefitted from having far more opportunities for self-expression and stimulating communal life than they might have found in the outside world.⁶² After the community



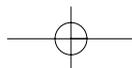
formally broke up, a diverse and generally congenial core of the former members continued to work closely together for more than an additional half century to develop the successful Oneida flatware and silverware business that continues today.⁶³ Aside from complex marriage itself, Noyes' Perfectionist religious faith was the most significant casualty of the community's breakup in 1881 and Noyes' death in 1886. Little or nothing of that faith remains today, except as a topic of discussion among community descendants and scholars of the community.

By comparison, the challenges that the Mormon prophet Joseph Smith faced in trying to introduce polygamous belief and practice between 1841 and 1844 among his core leadership cadre in rapidly-expanding Mormon Nauvoo, a community numbering thousands of residents, were exponentially more difficult and contentious than those John Humphrey Noyes encountered in his relatively self-contained group of several hundred followers at Oneida during the late 1840s and early 1850s.

Even more daunting, however, was the second set of challenges that Joseph Smith's primary successor Brigham Young faced as he proceeded to introduce and institutionalize polygamous belief and practice, not just among the church's top leadership group but also among the more than ten thousand rank-and-file Mormons who followed him in a difficult trek west to begin to settle the intermountain West in 1846-47.⁶⁴ By the time Brigham Young died in 1877, thirty years after Mormons began arriving in Utah, there were more than one hundred thousand Latter-day Saints living in more than three hundred settlements in territorial Utah and adjacent areas of the American West, with approximately one-quarter of them in polygamous households. This constitutes the largest and most sustained effort ever undertaken to introduce an alternative to monogamous marriage in the United States.⁶⁵

The third and most-daunting polygamy-related challenge the LDS Church faced during the nineteenth century was precipitated by the national anti-polygamy crusade that peaked during the 1880s. That crusade—the most virulent government assault ever launched against a major religious group in the history of the United States—culminated in a federal law dissolving the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints as a legal entity in 1887. When the United States Supreme Court upheld the law in 1890, the LDS Church did what had to do if it were to survive in the United States; it began a difficult transition process that extended over several decades, during which the Mormon Church gave up the practice of polygamy and began to accommodate itself to American society in other ways, as well.⁶⁶

The issues that the post-Nauvoo phase of polygamy development in nineteenth-century Utah and the late nineteenth-century anti-polygamy crusade continue to raise are legion and beyond the scope of this article. The following reflections, therefore, will focus on just one question:

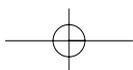


To what extent did Mormon plural marriage, and the intense commitment that it necessarily entailed, contribute to or undercut the larger religious and social objectives of the LDS Church during the nineteenth century?

From a Latter-day Saint perspective, plural marriage, and its justification based upon an ideology of “sealing” human family relationships throughout all eternity, played an essential role in generating the astonishing group cohesion, commitment, and elaborate web of family relationships that allowed tens of thousands of Latter-day Saints to follow Brigham Young west to settle the valley of the Great Salt Lake and adjacent areas of the intermountain West. Despite widespread initial suffering and death, Latter-day Saints would persevere in building their latter-day Zion in the arid and inhospitable wilderness that their efforts would eventually cause to “blossom as the rose.” The faint-of-heart and those not willing to comply with “counsel” were rapidly selected out by the demands of polygamy. By partially breaking down exclusive bonds between husbands and wives, while greatly extending kinship ties based upon primary loyalty to the LDS Church, plural marriage played a crucial role in the subordination of individual interests to those of the larger community that underlay Mormon success in settling the intermountain West. As Leonard Arrington astutely observed, initially “[o]nly a high degree of religious devotion and discipline, and superb organization and planning, made survival possible” during the settlement of nineteenth-century Utah.⁶⁷

The Mormons in Nauvoo and in Utah increasingly saw themselves as a literal “New Israel” linked together by a variety of extended kinship ties, both in this life and the next. As just one example, by the time the Mormon patriarch Benjamin F. Johnson died at age eighty-eight, he was related by blood or marriage to more than eight hundred people.⁶⁸ The complicated and dynamic ways in which plural marriage developed and facilitated the group cohesion and cooperation necessary to settle frontier Utah cannot be further discussed here, but such factors are ably analyzed as they changed over time in Kathryn Daynes’ *More Wives than One: Transformation of the Mormon Marriage System, 1840-1910*.⁶⁹

Although plural marriage may have contributed in significant ways to the development of internal Mormon cohesion and identity during the nineteenth century, the enormous human costs associated with introducing, practicing, and eventually dissolving Mormon polygamy also are striking and disturbing. Mormon experiences with polygamy starkly highlight the perennial tensions between individual and communal loyalties, as well as whether excessive demands for commitment may sometimes undercut fundamental human values and aspirations.⁷⁰ Personal anguish and extremes of behavior were frequent during the introduction of polygamy in Nauvoo, both among those who accepted

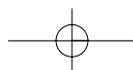


and rejected the practice,⁷¹ and similar extremes continued during the first difficult decade of Utah settlement that culminated in the turbulent Mormon “reformation” of 1856-57. After that time, however, plural marriage became an increasingly accepted part of life in Mormon Utah, and conditions stabilized considerably as a more normative spectrum of polygamous practices emerged. The tensions that polygamy practice continued to generate in frontier Utah are nevertheless suggested by the high divorce rate there: more than 1,600 cases during the Brigham Young period alone. Throughout the period, the LDS Church provided a necessary safety valve by making divorce and remarriage relatively easy for dissatisfied wives but difficult for husbands, who were expected to continue to support their original spouses while having the option of taking additional wives, as well.⁷²

THE IMPACT OF ALTERNATIVE SEXUAL PRACTICES

The introduction of unconventional marriage and sexual practices in the antebellum Oneida and Mormon communities proved a highly disruptive process, although once those alternative systems had become institutionalized, they served as powerful commitment mechanisms for several decades in both groups. Ultimately, however, the unorthodox marital systems provoked such intense hostility from the larger society that they became a net liability to both groups and had to be discontinued. At Oneida, neither the group’s alternative sexual practices nor its religious faith survived the death of the community’s founder. By contrast, although Mormonism’s controversial religious and sexual practices survived the death of the group’s founding prophet, polygamy practice also was discontinued by the same generation of church leaders who introduced it. The concern that underlay the introduction of Mormon polygamy to create strong, extended kinship ties was eventually transformed into an almost equally strong, and far more acceptable, Mormon commitment to monogamous marriage and family life, understood within a cosmic religious context. As the controversial memories of nineteenth-century polygamy increasingly faded, the LDS Church during the second half of the twentieth century was enabled to begin rapid expansion, both in the United States and throughout the world.

Overall, the net impact of unconventional sexual practices on communal cohesion in new religious movements remains a problematic question, as I have suggested elsewhere.⁷³ Since new religious movements can generate strong levels of group commitment using a variety of other, far less controversial, commitment mechanisms, the wisdom of making the acceptance of alternative sexual practices a test of group loyalty is questionable, especially if group members themselves and the larger society with which they must interact may find the practices

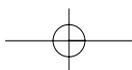


repugnant. Even if they can be sustained temporarily, controversial sexual practices are inherently self-limiting in the long run and are likely to interfere with the ability of new religious movements to achieve their larger religious and social goals.

ENDNOTES

¹ For overviews of the wide range of ways sexual behavior and morality have been approached in the major world religious traditions, see Geoffrey Parrinder, *Sexual Morality in the World's Religions* (Oxford, U.K.: Oneworld, 1995); Joseph Runzo and Nancy M. Martin, eds., *Love, Sex, and Gender in the World Religions* (Oxford, U.K.: Oneworld, 2000); and Christel Manning and Phil Zuckerman, *Sex and Religion* (San Francisco: Wadsworth, 2004).

² This article draws heavily upon my three books, *Religion and Sexuality: Three American Communal Experiments of the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981; paperbound reprint, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984); *Women, Family, and Utopia: Communal Experiments of the Shakers, the Oneida Community, and the Mormons* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1991); and my edited volume, based upon George Wallingford Noyes' compilation, *Free Love in Utopia: John Humphrey Noyes and the Origin of the Oneida Community* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001). Susan J. Palmer, *Moon Sisters, Krishna Mothers, Rajneesh Lovers: Women's Roles in New Religions* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1994), provides a comparative exploration of seven of the more controversial new religious groups that have introduced alternative gender and sex roles in recent years. Among the many other high-profile groups in which unorthodox sexual practices have proved extremely divisive are David Koresh's Branch Davidians near Waco; present-day polygamous splinter sects of Mormonism such as the Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (FLDS); and the Children of God, now the Family International. For the Branch Davidians and the confrontation at Waco, see James D. Tabor and Eugene V. Gallagher, *Why Waco: Cults and the Battle for Religious Freedom in America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), esp. pp. 80–96; Dick J. Reavis, *The Ashes of Waco: An Investigation* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995; reprint Syracuse University Press, 2000); and Albert Bates, "What Really Happened at Waco? 'Cult' or Set-up?" in *Communities*, no. 88 (Fall 1995): 50–60. On contemporary Mormon fundamentalism, essential starting points are Brian C. Hales, *Modern Polygamy and Mormon Fundamentalism: The Generations after the Manifesto* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford, 2006); Benjamine Bistline, *Colorado City Polygamists: An Inside View for the Outsider* ([n.p.]: Agreka, 2004); and John R. Llewellyn, *Polygamy Under Attack: From Tom Green to Brian David Mitchell* ([n.p.]: Agreka, 2004). On the Children of God/the Family International, the most nuanced and thoughtful account of sexual excesses that occurred under David Berg's leadership is James D. Chancellor, *Life in the Family: An Oral History of the Children of God* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 2000), while one of the most tragic outcomes of the those excesses is carefully reconstructed in Don



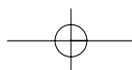
Lattin, *Jesus Freaks: A True Story of Murder and Madness on the Evangelical Edge* (New York: HarperOne, 2007).

³ Len Oakes, *Prophetic Charisma: The Psychology of Revolutionary Religious Personalities* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1997) provides a brilliant entrée into understanding the relationship between prophetic charisma and the sexual appeal of religious prophets. More broadly, Oakes' study also is suggestive for understanding charismatic religious leadership in much the same way that William James' *Varieties of Religious Experience* is suggestive for understanding the larger dynamics of religious experience as a whole. On this topic, also see Lawrence Foster, "Sex and Prophetic Power: A Comparison of John Humphrey Noyes, Founder of the Oneida Community, with Joseph Smith, Jr., the Mormon Prophet," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 31, no. 4 (Winter 1998): 65–83.

⁴ This was John Humphrey Noyes' characterization, quoted in William Hepworth Dixon, *Spiritual Wives* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1868), 351.

⁵ The most substantial documentary sources on the origin of the Oneida Community are in Foster, *Free Love in Utopia*, while the breakup is documented in Constance Noyes Robertson, *Oneida Community: The Breakup, 1876–1881* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1972). Lawrence Foster, "The Rise and Fall of Utopia: The Oneida Community crises of 1852 and 1879," *Communal Societies* 8 (1988): 1–17, compares and contrasts the two crisis periods. Other essential Oneida Community studies include Robert Allerton Parker, *A Yankee Saint: John Humphrey Noyes and the Oneida Community* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1935); Maren Lockwood Carden, *Oneida: Utopian Community to Modern Corporation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1969); and Spencer Klaw, *Without Sin: The Life and Death of the Oneida Community* (New York: Penguin Books, 1993). George Wallingford Noyes' two edited volumes, *The Religious Experience of John Humphrey Noyes* (New York: Macmillan, 1923), and *John Humphrey Noyes: The Putney Community* (Oneida, N.Y.: By the Author, 1931) document Noyes' activities before he founded the Oneida Community.

⁶ Todd Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness: The Plural Wives of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Signature, 1997), exhaustively documents and analyzes the lives of thirty-three of Joseph Smith's alleged plural wives, although his inclusion of Fanny Alger is highly debatable. George D. Smith, *Nauvoo Polygamy*: ". . . but we called it celestial marriage" (Salt Lake City: Signature, 2008), provides extraordinarily thorough documentation and analysis of thirty-seven plural wives of Joseph Smith; thirty-three of Smith's male followers who took at least one plural wife in Nauvoo under his authorization before his murder in 1844; and a total of 196 men who had taken at least one plural wife by the time the Mormons left Nauvoo in 1846. Linda King Newell and Valeen Tippetts Avery, *Mormon Enigma: Emma Hale Smith*, 2d ed. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), is the brilliant and definitive biography of Joseph Smith's first wife Emma and her reactions to polygamy. Two essential and often complementary biographies of Joseph Smith are Fawn M. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History: The Life of Joseph Smith, the Mormon Prophet*, 2d ed. rev. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977) and Richard L. Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (New York: Knopf, 2005). Foster, *Religion and Sexuality*, 123–225, provides the first detailed reconstruction and analysis of the origin and early development of Mormon polygamy under Joseph Smith and Brigham Young by a non-Mormon scholar who had full access



to the central LDS Church Archives in Salt Lake City. The best overall introduction to all aspects of Mormon life, history, and culture is Richard N. Ostling and Joan K. Ostling, *Mormon America: The Power and the Promise* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1999).

⁷ Some important Mormon splinter groups that adopted polygamy following Joseph Smith's death are analyzed in detail in Lawrence Foster, "The Apostolic Interregnum: Problems of Succession to Joseph Smith and the Institutionalization of Mormon Polygamy, 1844–1852," Chapter 5 of "Between Two Worlds: The Origins of Shaker Celibacy, Oneida Community Complex Marriage, and Mormon Polygamy" (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 1976), 289–360. For the full range of groups, see Newell G. Bringhurst and John C. Hamer, *Scattering of the Saints: Schism within Mormonism* (Independence, Mo.: John Whitmer Books, 2007).

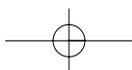
⁸ Charles Nordhoff, *The Communistic Societies of the United States: From Personal Visit and Observation* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1875), 271.

⁹ Noyes' religious justification for his unusual sexual practices is found in his "Bible Argument Defining the Relations Between the Sexes in the Kingdom of Heaven," originally printed in *First Annual Report of the Oneida Association: Exhibiting its History, Principles, and Transactions to Jan. 1, 1849* (Oneida Reserve, N.Y.: Leonard, 1849, 18–43; reprinted in Foster, *Free Love in Utopia*, 312–34). Note that a person could be a member of the Oneida Community and remain completely celibate, although Noyes considered this "Shaker" option distinctly second-rate compared to full participation in communal sexual activity. Foster, *Religion and Sexuality*, 88–90. And when Oneida gave up complex marriage in 1879, Noyes encouraged his followers to stand "on Paul's platform, which allows marriage but prefers celibacy." Quoted in Parker, *A Yankee Saint*, 284. Given the recent scholarly interest in gay and lesbian issues and the ongoing public debate over same-sex marriage, I should perhaps note that after carefully reading all Noyes' published monographs, as well as the first twenty-one years of his serial publications until 1855 in their entirety, I am not aware that Noyes ever discussed homosexuality, either pro or con, in any of his voluminous writings. The memoir of Noyes' son Pierrepont, *My Father's House: An Oneida Boyhood* (New York: Farrar & Reinhart, 1937), however, does mention that two of the men who worked in the Children's House remained celibate, and it is possible that they might have been either actively or passively gay. In view of Noyes' extraordinary willingness to experiment with various types of sexual activity at Oneida and his enthusiasm for the "amative" rather than the "propagative" value of sexual relations, I would not be surprised if he might also have been tolerant of gay or lesbian "amativeness" if it had been expressed discretely under the cover of the community's "celibate" option.

¹⁰ For assessments of these and other community control mechanisms, see Parker, *A Yankee Saint*, 177–89, 215–26, 253–64; Carden, *Oneida*, 37–88; and Foster, *Religion and Sexuality*, 93–100.

¹¹ On Noyes' paradoxical role as a both a liberator of women and a quintessential male chauvinist, see Lawrence Foster, "Free Love and Feminism: John Humphrey Noyes and the Oneida Community," *Journal of the Early Republic* 1, no. 2 (Summer 1981): 165–83.

¹² G. W. Noyes, *The Putney Community*, 25–33.



¹³ G. W. Noyes, *The Putney Community*, 25.

¹⁴ G. W. Noyes, *The Putney Community*, 33.

¹⁵ In Lawrence Foster, "The Psychology of Prophetic Charisma: New Approaches to Understanding Joseph Smith and the Development of Charismatic Leadership," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 36, no. 4 (Winter 2003): 1–14 (with Oakes' response, 15–16), I apply Oakes' framework to understanding the development of Joseph Smith's leadership and appeal.

¹⁶ Foster, *Free Love in Utopia*, 6–7.

¹⁷ See Noyes' "Bible Argument Defining the Relations of the Sexes in the Kingdom of Heaven" from the *First Annual Report of the Oneida Association (1849)*, reprinted in Foster, *Free Love in Utopia*, 312–34.

¹⁸ Foster, *Free Love in Utopia*, 171.

¹⁹ Foster, *Free Love in Utopia*, 215.

²⁰ This was most noticeable during the six-month crisis period from March to August 1852, when complex marriage was temporarily discontinued, Foster, *Free Love In Utopia*, xxx–xxii.

²¹ One of the most extensive discussions of how these control mechanisms worked in practice is found in Carden, *Oneida*, 49–88.

²² Quoted in Foster, *Religion and Sexuality*, 81.

²³ On the Noyes-Holton relationship, see Parker, *A Yankee Saint*, 45–68.

²⁴ Foster, *Religion and Sexuality*, 87.

²⁵ For the fullest account of these developments, see Parker, *A Yankee Saint*, 119–42, and G. W. Noyes, *The Putney Community*, 192–322.

²⁶ The bond was eventually cut in half after a skillful presentation by Noyes' brother-in-law John R. Miller. Foster, *Free Love in Utopia*, xxii–xxiv.

²⁷ Foster, *Religion and Sexuality*, 103.

²⁸ For further details on this rich documentary collection and how it was almost destroyed, see Foster, *Free Love in Utopia*, x–xii.

²⁹ Foster, *Free Love in Utopia*, xxviii–xxxi, 94–97, 136–48, 152–93.

³⁰ The role of sexual tensions in the breakup is clear from Robinson, *The Breakup*; Carden *Oneida*, 89–111; and Foster, "Sex and Prophetic Power."

³¹ On Nauvoo, begin with Robert Bruce Flanders' classic study, *Nauvoo: Kingdom on the Mississippi* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1965), and Roger D. Launius and John E. Halwas, eds., *Kingdom on the Mississippi Revisited: Nauvoo in Mormon History* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996).

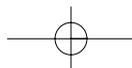
³² Foster, *Religion and Sexuality*, 139–80.

³³ Foster, "Between Two Worlds," 289–360.

³⁴ Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, 118–20, and Bushman, *Joseph Smith*, 178–80. Bushman asserts that the argument that the attempted castration was "to punish Joseph for an intimacy with his sister Nancy Marinda . . . fell for the lack of evidence."

³⁵ Foster, *Religion and Sexuality*, 137–38.

³⁶ Cowdery wrote regarding his 1838 trial: "A dirty, nasty, filthy affair of his and Fanny Alger's was talked over in which I strictly declared that I had never deviated from the truth." Quoted in Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness*, 28.



³⁷ Smith, *Nauvoo Polygamy*, 56–63, analyzes Beaman’s plural marriage to Joseph Smith and the eleven mutually corroborating accounts of it.

³⁸ John C. Bennett, *The History of the Saints; or, an Expose of Joe Smith and Mormonism* (Boston: Leland & Whiting, 1842). For the scholarly biography, see Andrew F. Smith, *The Sainly Scoundrel: The Life and Times of Dr. John Cook Bennett* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997). Gary Bergera, “John C. Bennett, Joseph Smith, and the Beginnings of Plural Marriage in Nauvoo,” *Journal of the John Whitmer Historical Association* 25 (2005): 52–92, also is indispensable.

³⁹ Foster, *Religion and Sexuality*, 169–74. For insights into the role that Joseph Smith’s cyclothymic or bipolar tendencies may have played in the complex motivation that led to the introduction of polygamy, see Lawrence Foster, “The Psychology of Religious Genius: Joseph Smith and the Origin of New Religious Movements,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 26, no. 4 (Winter 1993): 1–22.

⁴⁰ For the accounts regarding Sarah Pratt, Nancy Rigdon, and Martha Brotherton, see Bennett, *History of the Saints*, 226–45, as well as my discussion in *Women, Family, and Utopia*, 142–51. Sarah Pratt’s difficult balancing act and her integrity of character are analyzed and defended in Richard S. Van Wagoner and Mary C. Van Wagoner, “Sarah M. Pratt: The Shaping of An Apostate,” in *Mormon Mavericks: Essays on Dissenters*, ed. John Sillito and Susan Staker (Salt Lake City: Signature, 2002), 43–84. Countering the allegations of Smith partisans that Bennett rather than Smith had actually been Sarah Pratt’s paramour, the Van Waggoners point out that during the period when Bennett allegedly had been seeing Sarah Pratt daily, he had been living almost a hundred miles away at the state capitol in Springfield, Illinois.

⁴¹ Gary Bergera, *Conflict in the Quorum: Orson Pratt, Brigham Young, Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Signature, 2002). Bergera’s analysis inspired me to write this article.

⁴² Bergera, *Conflict in the Quorum*, 24–25.

⁴³ Bergera, *Conflict in the Quorum*, 1–6.

⁴⁴ Newell and Avery, *Mormon Enigma*, esp. 94–118, 130–56, 169–98, deals most directly with the problems that plural marriage cause for the relationship between Joseph and Emma.

⁴⁵ Newell and Avery, *Mormon Enigma*, 106–18, and Foster, “Between Two Worlds,” 322–30.

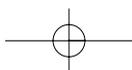
⁴⁶ See Roger D. Launius, *Joseph Smith III: Pragmatic Prophet* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), esp. 190–217.

⁴⁷ Foster, *Religion and Sexuality*, 177–80.

⁴⁸ Lyndon W. Cook, *William Law: Biographical Essay, Nauvoo Diary, Correspondence, Interview* (Orem, Utah: Grandin, 1994) contains a fine introductory essay and all known published documentary sources on Law. Smith, *Nauvoo Polygamy*, 421–42, and Bushman, *Joseph Smith*, 527–33, 537–43, analyze Law’s break with Smith and the role of the 1844 dissidents.

⁴⁹ On 23 May 1844, William Law preferred charges against Joseph Smith in the Hancock County Circuit court for living in adultery with Maria Lawrence, one of his plural wives. Cook, *William Law*, 30, and Bushman, *Joseph Smith*, 538.

⁵⁰ On Smith’s martyrdom and its aftermath, the most substantial scholarly study is Dalin H. Oakes and Marvin S. Hill, *Carthage Conspiracy: The Trial of the Accused*



Assassins of Joseph Smith (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1979). Bushman, *Joseph Smith*, 537–50, covers the final crisis from Joseph Smith's perspective, while Newell and Avery, *Mormon Enigma*, 180–98, discuss the events as experienced by his wife Emma.

⁵¹ Recent scholarship discussing polygamy in post-1844 Mormon factions includes Bringhurst and Hamer, *Scattering of the Saints*; Richard S. Van Wagoner, *Sidney Rigdon: A Portrait of Excess* (Salt Lake City: Signature, 1994), esp. 290–302, 352–53, 368–69; Biloine Whiting Young, *Obscure Believers: The Mormon Schism of Alpheus Cutler* (St. Paul, Minn.: Pogo, 2002), esp. 39–42, 55–57, 195–98; Melvin C. Johnson, *Polygamy on the Pedernales: Lyman Wight's Mormon Villages in Antebellum Texas, 1845 to 1858* (Logan: Utah State University Press, 2006), esp. 136–60; and Vickie Cleverley Speek, “God Has Made Us a Kingdom”: *James Strang and the Midwest Mormons* (Salt Lake City: Signature, 2006); John Quist, “Polygamy Among James Strang and His Followers,” *John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* 9 (1989): 31–48; and Lawrence Foster, “James J. Strang: The Prophet Who Failed,” *Church History* 50, no. 2 (June 1981): 182–92; as well as Milo M. Quaife's pioneering study, *The Kingdom of St. James: A Narrative of the Mormons* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1930).

⁵² See Foster, *Religion and Sexuality*, 187–88, and the more detailed analysis in Van Wagoner and Van Wagoner, *Sidney Rigdon*, 290–387.

⁵³ Van Wagoner and Van Wagoner, *Sidney Rigdon*, 388–460.

⁵⁴ John Hardy, *History of the Trial of Elder John Hardy, Before the Church of Latter Day Saints in Boston, for Slander, in Saying that G. J. Adams, S. Brannan and William Smith Were Licentious Characters* (Boston: Conway, 1844).

⁵⁵ Reported in the *Warsaw Signal*, 3 September 1845.

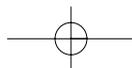
⁵⁶ Foster, *Religion and Sexuality*, 188–90.

⁵⁷ The discussion of Strang in this paragraph draws primarily upon Foster, “James J. Strang,” and Speek, *James Strang*; the outstanding scholarly biography of Strang and his wives.

⁵⁸ Starting points here are Launius, *Joseph Smith III*, and Newell and Avery, *Mormon Enigma*. The most candid and scholarly RLDS history of period is Richard P. Howard, *The Church Through the Years: Volume 1, RLDS Beginnings to 1860* (Independence, Mo.: Herald, 1992). On the changing RLDS/Community of Christ Church assessment of the historical development of polygamy in Mormonism, see David J. Howlett, “Remembering Polygamy: The RLDS Church and Historical Transformation in the Late Twentieth Century,” *John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* 24 (2004): 141–72. For larger perspectives on the RLDS/Community of Christ transition, see Lawrence Foster, “Beyond Black Muslims and Reorganized Mormons: The Transformation of Two New Religious Movements in America,” *John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* 28 (2008): 35–64.

⁵⁹ Launius, *Joseph Smith III*, 200–209, documents the variety of legalistic arguments that Joseph III used. Launius notes on page 208 that if all else failed, Joseph III was “willing to sanction untruths about the origins of plural marriage if necessary for his purposes.”

⁶⁰ For positive treatments of Oneida during its middle period, see Ellen Wayland-Smith, “The Status and Self-Perception of Women in the Oneida



Community," *Communal Societies* 8 (1988): 18–53; and Constance Noyes Robertson's compilation, *Oneida Community: An Autobiography, 1851–1876* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1970).

⁶¹ Sexual and other tensions are documented in Robertson, *Oneida Community: The Breakup*, and Foster, "Sex and Prophetic Power."

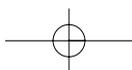
⁶² Wayland-Smith, "Women in the Oneida Community."

⁶³ Carden, *Oneida*, 113–212, discusses post-breakup developments, arguing that for at least half a century more under the leadership of the Oneida Community, Limited, corporation, with Noyes' son Pierrepont at the helm, a strong commitment to community continued.

⁶⁴ For the public relations challenges Oneida faced and overcame, see Foster, *Free Love in Utopia*, as well as Lawrence Foster, "Waco and Oneida: The Impact of Public Opinion on the Survival of Unconventional Religious-Communal Groups in America," *Communal Societies* 28, no. 2 (2008): 1–22. For similar challenges that the Utah Mormons faced, see Lawrence Foster, "Cults in Conflict: New Religious Movements and the Mainstream Religious Tradition in America," in *Uncivil Religion: Interreligious Hostility in America*, ed. Robert N. Bellah and Frederick E. Greenspahn (New York: Crossroad, 1987), 185–204.

⁶⁵ Lowell C. Bennion, "The Incidence of Mormon Polygamy in 1880: 'Dixie' versus Davis Stake," *Journal of Mormon History* 11 (1984): 27–42, and Foster, "Polygamy and the Frontier." On Brigham Young and his role in the settlement of Utah, two indispensable sources are Leonard J. Arrington's *Great Basin Kingdom: An Economic History of the Latter-day Saints, 1830–1900* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1958) and *Brigham Young: American Moses* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986). For the role polygamy played during the westward trek, see Richard E. Bennett, *Mormons at the Missouri, 1846–1852: "And Should We Die"* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987), and Foster, "Between Two Worlds," 289–360. Among the most broad-ranging treatments of Utah polygamy, see the unsurpassed study by Kathryn M. Daynes, *More Wives Than One: Transformation of the Mormon Marriage System, 1840–1910* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001); as well as Kimball Young, *Isn't One Wife Enough? The Story of Mormon Polygamy* (New York: Holt, 1954); Foster, *Religion and Sexuality*, 181–225; Jessie L. Embry, *Mormon Polygamous Families: Life in the Principle* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1987); and Richard S. Van Wagoner, *Mormon Polygamy: A History*, rev. ed. (Salt Lake City: Signature, 1992).

⁶⁶ From the massive literature on the 1880s crusade against Mormon polygamy and its aftermath, see especially Gustive O. Larsen, *The "Americanization" of Utah for Statehood* (San Marino, Calif.: Huntington Library, 1971); R. Carmon Hardy, *Solemn Covenant: The Mormon Polygamous Passage* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992); Sarah Barringer Gordon, *The Mormon Question: Polygamy and Constitutional Conflict in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 2001); Edwin Brown Firmage and Richard Collin Mangrum, *Zion in the Courts: A Legal History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1830–1900* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988); Thomas G. Alexander, *Mormonism in Transition: A History of the Latter-day Saints, 1890–1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986); Michael Quinn, "LDS Church Authority and New Plural Marriages, 1890–1904," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon*



Thought 18, no. 1 (Spring 1985): 9–105; and Kathleen Flake, *The Politics of American Religious Identity: The Seating of Reed Smoot, Mormon Apostle* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 2003). The most theoretically sophisticated analysis of this process is Armand L. Mauss, *The Angel and the Beehive: The Mormon Struggle with Assimilation* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994). For a brief overview of the two phases of the anti-polygamy crusade in the 1850s and the 1880s, see Foster, *Religion and Sexuality*, 220–25.

⁶⁷ Arrington, *Great Basin Kingdom*, 38.

⁶⁸ Benjamin F. Johnson, *My Life's Review* (Independence, Mo.: Zion's Printing and Publishing Company, 1947), 388.

⁶⁹ Daynes' study is now the indispensable starting point for understanding Mormon polygamy as practiced in nineteenth-century Utah. Dean May has characterized her book as "far and away the best study of Mormon polygamy ever to appear," providing "a feast of information and historical context, summarizing and analyzing intelligently and with admirable balance virtually every issue that has ever been raised in connection with Mormon polygamy," as quoted on the book's dust jacket. My own detailed assessment of Daynes' key arguments is provided in my Amazon.com review at: <http://www.amazon.com/More-Wives-Than-One-Transformation/dp/0252075609/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1250628608&sr=1-1>. For an overview assessment of the experiences of Mormon women under polygamy in nineteenth-century Utah, see Foster, "Polygamy and the Frontier."

⁷⁰ An influential analysis of the role of commitment is Rosabeth Kanter's suggestive but methodologically flawed study, *Commitment and Community: Communes and Utopias in Sociological Perspective* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1972). Charles Kimball, *When Religion Becomes Evil* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2002) presents a cautionary counter-argument, emphasizing the dangers of excessive commitment in new religious movements.

⁷¹ I analyze the tragic consequences that polygamy had for the prominent Mormon leader Heber C. Kimball, who deeply loved his first wife and was initially very reluctant to enter polygamy, but who eventually overcompensated by taking more than forty women as plural wives, in Lawrence Foster, "Reluctant Polygamists': The Struggles and Challenges of the Transition to Polygamy in a Prominent Mormon Family," in *Religion and Society in the American West: Historical Essays*, ed. Carl Guarneri and David Alvarez (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1987), 131–52. Not surprisingly, he ended up with one of the most conflicted and dysfunctional sets of family relationships of any early Mormon leader. Cook, *William Law*, 1–34, analyzes the case of William Law, one of Joseph Smith's strongest supporters, who could not bring himself to accept polygamy as divinely inspired. Eventually he became profoundly alienated and cynical, not only about Mormonism but about all religion.

⁷² Foster, "Polygamy and the Frontier."

⁷³ Foster, *Religion and Sexuality*, 226–47.

