

# GETTING OUT/STAYING IN: ONE MORMON STRAIGHT/GAY MARRIAGE

## *Getting Out*

*Ben Christensen*

BEING A GAY MORMON is one thing; being a gay Mormon married to a woman is quite another. At this point, defining exactly what *gay* means to me is not only a question of how true I am to my religious beliefs, but also a question of how faithful I am to my wife. Knowing this, one can't help but wonder why I chose to marry in the first place. Was it unyielding faith? Earth-shattering love? Temporary insanity? Not-so-temporary stupidity? Probably all of the above, give or take an adjective or two.

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I made a point of not telling Jessie ahead of time that I wanted to talk to her because I didn't want her to go through the torture of wondering what horrible thing I wanted to talk about. I knew she'd immediately assume that I was going to dump her, which was far from my intentions. She might have thought that I was going to officially propose, but she's smart enough to distinguish between a good "I want to talk to you" and a bad "I want to talk to you."

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After going to the temple, we decided to stop at Taco Bell. I went through the drive-thru because I knew that inside wouldn't be a good place to talk—too many people. Then I looked for a church parking lot, which took surprisingly long considering we were in American Fork, Utah. As we pulled into the dark lot it occurred to me that I was behaving strangely—insisting on going through the drive-thru, then spending five minutes trying to find an empty lot to park in. It also occurred to me that bad things happen to girls who park in dark places with boys. Hoping Jessie wasn't thinking the same thing, I scarfed down my burrito as quickly as possible. When I finished she was still trying to figure out how to eat her Mexican pizza without a fork.

“Is it okay if we talk about something?” I asked.

“Oh. Okay.” I sensed the uneasiness in her voice, the insecurity. Although we'd been friends for over a year, we'd only been dating for a few weeks. Neither of us had been in a serious relationship before. Dating had progressed into kissing, and kissing had progressed into talking about marriage much faster than either of us had expected. Jessie had expressed concern early on about our romance possibly not working out and ruining our friendship. Now, in the car, I saw in her face that she believed her fears were about to come true. She looked as if she were on the verge of crying, and we hadn't even started.

“Before I say anything else, I should say that this has nothing to do with us or our relationship. At least I hope it doesn't. I'm happy being with you and I still want very much to marry you and I still love you.”

This seemed to help, but I could see the gears turning in her head as she wondered what horrible confession I had to make, now that some of the expected options were eliminated. I must have told her that I loved her at least four more times before I gathered the courage to go on.

“I . . . I'm . . .” I sighed. “Sorry, you'd think this would be easier after I've done it so many times. I can't even get the words out of my mouth.”

Jessie reached across the compartment between the seats and squeezed my hand. “It's okay,” she said, looking into my eyes.

I looked away. It's nearly impossible for me to speak about myself openly. Even with her. I took a deep breath. “I'm not like other guys.” I took another breath. “As long as I remember, I've been attracted to men.” There. I'd said it.

She nodded. Her eyes were turning pinkish and raw, but no tears

came. I couldn't tell if she was angry, surprised, sad, or what; she didn't say a word.

"I've talked to countless bishops and counselors at LDS Social Services. I've been trying to overcome this problem for years, since before my mission. I've come to accept that it might be something I have to deal with for the rest of my life." I told her how I'd first talked about it to a counselor in the stake presidency, who also happened to be my best friend's father, when I was seventeen. Since then I'd told only three of my sisters, two friends, and my mother (not counting the bishops and counselors and random group therapy people). I told her about how the counselors said it probably had something to do with my relationship with my father (or lack thereof) and my "defensive detachment" from men. This theory made *some* sense to me but didn't quite all add up. There had to be more to it. Maybe I'd blocked out some kind of early childhood abuse, or maybe it really was a genetic thing. I'd stopped caring about the whys anyway, I told her.

Her first question was one I had expected. "Have you ever . . .?"

"No. I've never done anything with another guy. Anything." I paused, allowing that to sink in. "I just wanted you to know before you made any kind of commitment to marry me. You know, so you know what you're getting into." As if I knew what either of us was getting into.

Silence.

"What are you thinking?" I asked.

"I'm scared."

"That we'll get married and five or ten years down the road I'll mess up?"

She nodded.

"To be honest, that scares me too. I know getting married won't make these feelings go away. But I can promise you that if we get married I'll be faithful to you. I won't leave you. I refuse to become my father."

I really wanted to be as confident as I sounded. Maybe I was.

"At any rate, I don't want you to decide tonight. I want you to take your time and think about it, then let me know if you still want to marry me. I won't blame you if you don't."

Another silence, then Jessie's voice, calm, slow. "I think I still do want to marry you. I'll think about it and pray about it, but I think I do."

Jessie told me the next day while we sat together on the steps in front of her apartment that she wanted to go ahead with the engagement. She

was hesitant to get into a marriage that might prove to be as tumultuous as her parents' was, always wondering if divorce was right around the next corner, but at the same time she knew that (1) we were nothing like her parents, nor would our problems be anything like theirs, and (2) even they had made it through more than twenty-five years of ups and downs and were now very happy together. If I had asked her a few years earlier, when things were still pretty rocky for her parents, she might've said no. Who knows?

A week or two later, I officially proposed with a white-gold diamond ring after homemade lasagna and before Breyers ice cream at Kiwanis Park.

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In an ideal world, I'd be able to sit down at lunch with a group of friends and we'd all talk openly about our challenges and struggles. One might say, "I was getting *Newsweek* this morning at Barnes and Noble, and I was really tempted to pick up a copy of *Penthouse* also." Or, "I thought I'd kicked this smoking thing years ago, but I'm really craving a cigarette today." Or, "Last night my kid wouldn't stop crying and I was so angry I almost hit her." "I can't stop thinking about this guy in religion class," I would say.

(Actually, in an ideal world I'd be turned on by boobs like the other 90 percent of the world's male population.)

It ticks me off that Mormon social taboos force me to lie about who I am. Every day of my life. I've been doing it for so long, it's become second nature. A year or so ago in an English class at BYU, we were playing a "get to know you" game. This one involved each person in the class saying what celebrity she or he would like to kiss. Besides the fact that I was bothered by the general immorality of the question, it really bugged me that if I said Ewan McGregor I'd probably be turned in to the Honor Code Office (and yet it's okay for a married man to say he'd like to make out with Gwyneth Paltrow). I ended up saying Lauryn Hill, not because I'm any more attracted to her than to any other woman, but because I like her music and I thought it would be interesting to throw a black rapper into all this fantasizing about whitebread movie stars. I don't think God really wants us to lie in order to make people think we're "normal," but Mormon culture sure expects us to. It's not like pretending I'm attracted to women will make it true.

I don't intend to justify homosexual behavior. If I thought homosexual behavior was okay, I would have left the Church long before I even met Jessie. I certainly wouldn't have gone on a mission. Sex outside of marriage (and for that matter, lust) is wrong, regardless of whether it's with women or men. But the initial attraction itself is not a sin, and people who happen to be attracted to their own gender shouldn't be made to feel any worse than people who happen to be attracted to the opposite gender. There shouldn't be any need to make homosexual attraction into some deep, dark secret, something to be ashamed of. It's not as though I choose who I'm attracted to any more than anyone else does—as if I wouldn't have enough problems without being attracted to the gender my religion forbids me to marry.

Married men often talk to each other about how they had to look the other way in order to avoid having bad thoughts about a beautiful woman passing by. An innocent attraction is confessed, perhaps joked about, then dismissed before it can fester in the mind and grow into lust or something worse. I believe this is healthy. In my wife's family, there's an ongoing joke in which my mother-in-law will see some guy on TV and comment on how hot he is, then add with a grin, "But not as hot as your dad." Will I ever be able to casually comment that Tom Cruise is hot, but not as hot as my wife?

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Difficulties arose fairly quickly in our engagement. It bothered Jessie that she was usually more interested in kissing than I was. This bothered me too, but I didn't know what to do about it. I definitely loved her, and out of that love an attraction was growing, but to be honest it was nothing compared to the strong desire I had for men. But then it's not accurate to even compare the two feelings. My attraction to Jessie, the drive that made me want to hold her in my arms and feel her body next to mine, came entirely from my heart. On the other hand, the drive that made me want to feel a man's body next to mine was purely a libido thing. I've never allowed a physical attraction to a man to become any more than just that. Apples and oranges.

That summer I worked as a park attendant in northwest Provo. I spent eight hours a day cleaning bathrooms and mowing grass and picking weeds by myself. Way too much time to think, particularly if you're an engaged man prone to second-guess every decision you make. Every day

I'd wonder if I was making a mistake, if I was forcing myself into something I just wasn't ready for yet, or if everything I believed in was a load of crap and I really should run off to San Francisco and embrace a rampant life of unrestrained queerness. More than anything, I was afraid that getting married would cut me off from that option. While I wasn't ready to completely accept homosexuality, I wasn't ready to completely abandon it either. As far as I was concerned, that was what marriage meant—permanently burning the bridge of homosexuality. Marriage is forever.

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Once, when I was a teenager, in a rare bout of courage I asked my father about a somewhat sensitive subject: The Divorce. At least it was a sensitive subject for me, since I saw it as the defining point of my hopeless and miserable teenage life. As far as I was concerned, my father had abandoned not only my mother but also me; and in my melodramatic view of the world, I couldn't understand how anyone could not see the cruel injustice of not having a father figure around during my oh-so-precious formative years.

As I recall, we were driving on some highway between Green Bay and Milwaukee. The land of cheese and beer was my home away from home for two summers and one Christmas between the ages of nine and sixteen. To a boy who had lived all his life on an island in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, the long stretches of road and farmland were very foreign. So was everything else about my father.

"You don't understand," he said in his defense. "Marriage is complicated. Sometimes divorce is unavoidable."

"It's avoidable if you put some effort into it," I muttered. I was shaking with the anger I felt toward this man whom I didn't know well enough to yell at or swear at or hit.

"Ben, I'm not going to argue with you about this. You're fifteen years old. You'll understand when you get married."

Who was he to talk about marriage, at that time going through divorce number five? How dare he assume that I would fail at marriage just because he had? I thought these things but I didn't dare say them.

Years later, after I'd taken some big steps toward forgiving my father and building some kind of relationship with him (more than anything, I stopped blaming him for everything and started taking responsibility for my life), I still couldn't accept what I perceived to be his "fail and bail" phi-

losophy of marriage. If I married Jessie and I couldn't handle being married and I bailed, then he'd be right. I couldn't allow that to happen. I wouldn't.

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One morning while I was cleaning up the playground at Rotary Park, I found a condom streaked with poop lying on the ground. It was the single most disturbing thing I had ever seen. This all-too-graphic image, this irreconcilable association between anal sex and poop, helped me ultimately opt for a heterosexual lifestyle. If I start thinking I might like to have sex with a man, the poop-streaked condom stands in my way, shaking its little rubbery head and saying, "This path is not for you, my friend."

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A couple of years ago, KBYU planned to air some talks given at a conference about overcoming homosexuality. Gay rights activists in Salt Lake complained, and KBYU backed down and canceled the scheduled programming. When I learned about this, I felt betrayed. Betrayed by a church that told me to give up homosexuality but didn't have the guts to stand by this doctrine in the face of adversity (realizing, of course, that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and KBYU aren't exactly one and the same), and betrayed by my gay and lesbian brothers and sisters who fought so hard for their right to be who they wanted to be but would deny me that same right.

I don't understand people who call themselves liberal and progressive but are threatened by homosexual reparative therapy enough to try to stop people like me from having that option. In my mind, this kind of thinking is anti-progressive. The whole point of the civil rights and women's liberation movements was to allow blacks, women, and other minorities to break free of what had been their traditional roles. We live in a world now where it's okay for blacks to do what was once considered "white" and for women to do what was once considered "male"—get an education, have a career, etc. Why then is it not politically correct for a gay man to venture into what is usually considered the exclusive territory of straight men—to marry a woman and have a family—if that's what he chooses to do?

I already know the answer to this question. Many gays and lesbians

believe that if homosexual reparative therapy is recognized as a legitimate and viable option, it won't be long before we're back to the days of labeling homosexuals as social deviants and forcing them to submit to electroshock therapy or some such barbarism. Others don't feel this way. When I voiced my frustration over the KBYU thing on a Mormon discussion board, one man contacted me and apologized for the overzealous activists who demanded that KBYU back down. He believed God had told him to leave his wife and pursue a homosexual relationship, but he felt in no way threatened by those of us who choose not to. He assured me that most gays and lesbians would not react as the vocal minority had.

It's easy for me to blame liberal gays for making me ashamed to be straight and conservative Mormons for making me ashamed to be gay, but truthfully a lot of it comes from my own fears. I'm afraid of what people will think of me. I'm afraid that I'll be labeled by one side as a religious wacko in denial about who I really am or by the other as a sex-crazed pervert unable to look at a man without mentally undressing him.

When I first heard Lauryn Hill's song "I Get Out," I felt that she was singing my life with her words. In "I Get Out," Ms. Hill talks about getting out of the boxes that society tries to force us into: "Psychological locks / Repressin' true expression / Cementin' this repression / Promotin' mass deception / So that no one can be healed / I don't respect your system / I won't protect your system / When you talk I don't listen / Oh, let my Father's will be done."

My everyday existence is a threat to the world's neat little boxes of "gay" and "straight." I get out of the boxes that liberals and conservatives would put me in. The freedom is exhilarating.

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A couple of times during our engagement, I talked to Jessie about my fears. I tried to explain that I loved her but I wasn't sure if that would be enough. These conversations tended to end with one or both of us crying and my concluding that I just couldn't bring myself to hurt her.

One night I talked to one of my sisters about my uncertainty. I didn't tell her exactly why I was afraid to get married, just that I was. She told me about an experience she'd had years before when a guy she was dating proposed. He seemed to feel good about marrying her, and he was a priesthood holder so she was hesitant to question his inspiration, even if she didn't have the same feeling. She also really liked him, so she didn't want



to hurt him by saying no. After a lot of prayer and thought, though, she came to a wise conclusion, which she now shared with me.

“Ben, you have to think about yourself first. I know you love her, so you don’t want to hurt her, but doing what’s best for you really *is* doing what’s best for her. Telling her no may hurt her now, but marrying her when that’s not right for *you* will hurt her more in the long run.”

The problem was that I didn’t know what *was* right for me. How could I be sure?

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For the record, “gay” is not the Mormon PC term. Mormon (and other conservative Christian) psychologists differentiate between living a homosexual lifestyle and experiencing homosexual desire by referring to the former as “gay” and to the latter as “SSA,” which stands for “same-sex attraction.” But you can’t *be* SSA, and saying “I struggle with SSA” or “I have SSA” makes it sound as if I suffer from some obscure venereal disease. SGA—same-gender attraction—is no better.

So, for lack of a better term, I choose to call myself gay. Does that mean I have sex with men? No. It means I’m naturally attracted to men and, like it or not, that’s part of my identity. An important part, yes, but not the most important part. “Gay” falls somewhere below “child of God,” “Latter-day Saint,” “husband,” and “father.” Maybe even below “writer,” “librarian,” and “unabashed reader of comic books.”

But it’s still part of who I am, and I’m okay with that. It makes me unique. It separates me from all the things I don’t like about heterosexual male culture—like football, hunting, and chauvinism—while connecting me to millions of people like me around the world.

Which, of course, is a lie. I’m no more gay than I am straight. No, I don’t fit into any of the heterosexual male stereotypes, but I don’t fit into the gay stereotypes either. I don’t have an effeminate voice or walk with an exaggerated gait, nor do I have a supernatural fashion sense. If I were to appear on *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*, it would be as the hopeless aesthetic reject, not as the voice of queer wisdom. I can’t call myself a big fan of Barbra Streisand. I tried drama in high school and was horrible at it. It’s not only the stereotypes, either. I’m practically clueless about the nuances of queer culture, save for a few terms and practices I’ve learned about from books and movies. I know, for example, that a ring on the right-hand ring finger has another cultural connotation besides “widowed.”

Yes, there is a sense of identification when I read E. M. Forster or listen to Elton John, but there's always this nagging feeling that they wouldn't consider me one of them. I don't think I'd fit in at a Village People concert any more than I do in elders' quorum or on a basketball court. The fact of the matter is that I'm as distanced from gay men as I am from straight men. I'd like to think that I'm both, but really I'm neither. In the politics of sexuality where gays and lesbians are only beginning to topple the social hierarchy dominated by straights, I fall into some hidden crevice, not even recognized enough to be repressed. I'm practically nonexistent.

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I'd always assumed that I'd go on a mission, come home, meet a girl, get married, and have a family just like normal Mormon guys. I really looked forward to this, even craved it, feeling I'd been robbed of a normal family as a child. Along with this scenario went the assumption that somewhere along the way I'd *become* a normal Mormon guy, my attraction to men somehow magically disappearing. This fantasy seemed like even more of a reality during my freshman year of college when I was actively working to overcome homosexuality with the help of bishops, counselors, and therapy groups. But then after I'd worked through all the issues, done everything the therapists told me to, and made miles of progress in learning to have normal healthy relationships with men, even with my father, nothing really changed.

Don't get me wrong—I was a happier, more confident person, much better equipped to deal with homosexual attraction than I had been in high school—but the attraction was still there, as strong as ever. Somewhere along the line, perhaps while I was on my mission, I came to accept that I would very likely be attracted to men for the rest of my life. As much as I believed in the healing power of the Atonement and the possibility of real, lasting change, I didn't feel, nor do I now feel, that the kind of change I'd wished for is part of the plan for me. My resolve now was to reach a point similar to John Nash's situation at the end of the movie *A Beautiful Mind*. Speaking of the hallucinations that have plagued him most of his life, he says, "No, they're not gone, and maybe they never will be. But I've gotten used to ignoring them, and I think as a result they've kind of given up on me."

So I came home from my mission less sure that marriage and family

were in my future. I'm not sure what kind of life I envisioned for myself—a lonely celibacy, I suppose—but for a month or two I'd resigned myself to it.

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Here's where Epiphany Number One comes in. This must've been in January, because I'm pretty sure it was before Jessie came home from her mission. I'd attended one of those BYU firesides where they tell you to get married. I pretty much tuned out the entire thing because it didn't apply to me, but then I got home, sat on my bed, and had a distinct impression that yes, it did apply to me. Yes, I was gay, but that didn't mean I was excluded from Heavenly Father's desire for his children to marry and have families.

I thought of a sister missionary who had been in my district for nearly eight months and was coming home soon. I really admired her intelligence and her love of reading, and her complete disregard of whether people thought she was cool or not. She seemed like the type of person I'd like to marry. So I planned it all out. I'd email her when she got home, and we'd build our friendship while she was in Maryland. Then she'd come out to BYU and we'd start dating and then we'd get engaged and then we'd get married.

I think more than anything I liked this plan because it seemed like a Normal Mormon Guy type of thing to do (or at least a Normal BYU Student type of thing—it's hard to distinguish after being in Utah Valley for so long).

To my surprise, the following months happened exactly as I'd planned. This is quite disturbing, now that I think about it. It must have disturbed me then, too, because on the morning of the day that we were to mail out the wedding invitations, I was still worried that I was marrying Jessie for the wrong reasons. I didn't want to marry her just to prove to myself and others that I was normal, or to avoid hurting her feelings, or because it was the right thing to do. I wanted to marry her because I loved her and I wanted to be with her. Which I was pretty sure I did.

What it came down to was making a decision between doing what my heart wanted or doing what my libido wanted. I wished I could have both, but I knew that was impossible. On this particular morning in October, the libido was winning. I was just about ready to call the whole thing off. I felt like I was standing on a cliff and all I could see in front of me was impenetrable darkness. It terrified me.

And now we get to Epiphany Number Two. Oddly enough, inspiration came in the place I was least likely to be thinking of spiritual things—the men’s locker room showers. I was washing my hair, staring at the wall, when it struck. I wouldn’t say it was a voice, but it was the closest thing to a still small voice I’d ever experienced. I can’t even say that it came to me in words, so I’m not sure how to quote it, but it was something like, “Jump. Jump into the big, scary, unknown darkness. Don’t look back.” (It might have been more along the lines of “Just do it,” but I refuse to believe that the Spirit works for Nike.)

So Jessie and I were married in the Salt Lake Temple two days before Thanksgiving. And then we lived happily ever after.

Mostly. Not all the time, of course. All the problems, all the concerns, all the doubts we had before we got married didn’t go away. She still is usually more interested in kissing than I am, and I still feel bad because of that. I feel even worse about the way I can’t help noticing the well-built men who jog bare-chested during the summer. Or how good some men look in a white shirt and tie. Occasionally I allow myself to wallow in self-pity over how hard my life is as a gay married Mormon.

Really, though, my challenge is not that unique—it’s irrelevant whether I’m attracted to men or women. The goal is to be attracted only to my wife and no one else, male or female. This makes things more complicated, yet in a way simpler, than when I was single.

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This evening, after a roast-beef-and-potatoes meal, Jessie and I took our nine-month-old daughter across the street to the library where I work. As I pushed Sophie’s stroller through rows of picture books, Jessie and I talked about favorite authors, infant sleeping patterns, my job, and our budget. My co-workers smiled at Sophie and commented on her cuteness. My life is surprisingly typical of a straight Mormon male. Hardly even a hint of queerness to it.

Is all this normalcy only an act, a facade covering up repressed desires? Maybe. I don’t know. What I do know, though, is that I’m happy. Whatever my reasons, this is the life I chose and I plan on keeping it.

## *Homosexual Attraction and LDS Marriage Decisions*

Ron Schow

**B**EN HAS WRESTLED HONORABLY and honestly with this matter, trying to make all of the conflicting personal, societal, and religious/church elements fit into something acceptably coherent. It is a formidable challenge, one faced by a number of Latter-day Saints.

It is clear that our culture, in which everyone is expected to marry, puts enormous and excessive pressure on homosexuals to marry. I am aware of the pressure on homosexuals because in the last fifteen years I've been studying this issue of same-sex attraction (SSA) and meeting with homosexuals in our culture. Universally, they report feeling the pressure to marry. Many homosexuals also report on their marriages which have ended in failure. For example, in 1994 I surveyed an LDS homosexual group of 136 where 71 percent were returned missionaries (indicating their commitment to the Church) and 36 had tried marriage. They had been married an average of nine years and had an average of 2.5 children. Only two of the 36 were still married.<sup>1</sup>

Recent conversations with Latter-day Saint homosexuals confirm that far too many are choosing to marry despite the fact that both Presi-

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1. Ron Schow, "1994 Survey of 136 LDS Same Sex Oriented Individuals," in *The Persistence of Same Sex Attraction in Latter-day Saints Who Undergo Counsel-*

dent Hinckley and Elder Oaks have cautioned about such marriages. Elder Oaks reinforced President Hinckley by quoting him: “Marriage should not be viewed as a therapeutic step to solve problems such as homosexual inclinations or practices.”<sup>2</sup>

Evergreen, a resource group committed to promoting change therapy for homosexual Latter-day Saints, helps create this problem by promoting the idea that persons can “transition out of homosexuality.” This idea is also promoted by many ecclesiastical leaders, most of whom are not well informed about the nature of homosexuality. The extent of the problem is seen in the fact that Evergreen receives over 150 requests for help each month from those with homosexual attractions; 40 percent of these requests come from men who are married. Only 10 percent of the calls come from women. The remaining 50 percent are from single men.<sup>3</sup> This pattern indicates a great deal of social pressure on LDS men with homosexual attractions to marry heterosexually, with unfortunate outcomes for many of them and their spouses and children.

It is possible that Ben can achieve a successful marriage, but, unfortunately, the odds are against him and Jessie. An increasing body of data, some mentioned above and some that I will summarize below, reinforces this pessimistic forecast. Much pain—directly and indirectly—results when these marriages fail.

Why do so many marital relationships of this kind fail? Primarily because the homosexual attraction of one spouse creates a major difficulty, despite hopes that such attraction will diminish over time. In reality, the great majority of those who are homosexually oriented cannot fundamentally alter their feelings by desire, therapy, or religious practice. Unfortunately, our culture continues to exert pressure to marry based on two essential misunderstandings about homosexuality—that it is a condition that is chosen and the expectation that, after marriage, these feelings will

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*ing or Change Therapy*, edited by Ron Schow, Robert A. Rees, William Bradshaw, and Marybeth Raynes (Salt Lake City: Resources for Understanding Homosexuality, 2004), 31–41.

2. Gordon B. Hinckley, quoted in Dallin H. Oaks, “Same Gender Attraction,” *Ensign*, October 1995, 13.

3. David Pruden, Evergreen executive director, personal communication to Ron Schow, October 2002.

go away. The reality is that homosexuality is not a choice and, except in rare cases, is not subject to change.

An LDS Family Services therapist who spoke to us about his clinical experience likely has had the most extensive experience in working with single and married homosexual Latter-day Saint men—approximately eight hundred men in more than thirty years.<sup>4</sup> Approximately half of these clients left counseling after one or two sessions; the other half, who were in therapy for one to three years, include roughly two hundred single men and two hundred married men. Among the two hundred single men, only 10 percent were able to marry. Almost all of them (nineteen of twenty) identified themselves as bisexual. Of the two hundred married males (a large portion of whom, it is probably safe to speculate, were likely bisexual), only half were able to stay in their marriages, although there is no information as to what kinds of accommodations they had to make to do so, nor how many of these marriages will ultimately endure.

Thus, marriage seems risky for homosexuals and even bisexuals since we presume that some will end their marriages without trying therapy and that those receiving skilled professional assistance still achieve only this level of success. Based on many personal interviews, I know that many of these mixed heterosexual/homosexual marriages, even when they do not end in divorce, result in marriages in which there is no true intimacy nor a mutually nourishing relationship.

One of the reasons so many homosexuals enter into such high-risk marriages is that they are encouraged to do so by many LDS counselors, therapists, and ecclesiastical leaders who are ill informed about the nature of homosexuality and the dangers of homosexual-heterosexual bonding. Far too often, these marriages end in broken homes and with broken hearts. It is imperative that those who are in positions to counsel with homosexuals and the heterosexual partners with whom they are considering marriage know the facts about choice and the persistence of homosexual feelings along with the risks of homosexuals marrying heterosexuals.

Ben's situation is a case in point. He affirms that he did not, and would not, choose willingly to be attracted to men because such feelings create so much difficulty in his life. Ben's story also affirms that even with

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4. His findings are summarized in "Summary of Data," in *The Persistence of Same Sex Attraction*, Table 1, 10-11.

noble efforts, homosexuality is not a condition where the feelings will go away.

Ben and Jessie have made a decision and deserve our understanding because of the pressure in our culture for them to make a successful marriage; but this decision has set them on a very difficult path. The outcome of this decision may significantly affect their own lives as well as that of their daughter Sophie. Based on my extensive work with homosexuals for more than a decade, I submit that, if Ben is actually gay and not bisexual, their marriage faces formidable obstacles.

### Understanding Homosexual Attraction

It is important to understand some fundamental background information about sexual orientation. Humans experience a spectrum of sexual attraction. The HH (Homosexual-Heterosexual) Scale, defined originally in 1948 by Alfred Kinsey and his associates, uses seven points to define this range. Those on the heterosexual end of the continuum (0) are attracted only to the opposite sex. A minority on the other end (6) are attracted only to the same sex. Between (1–5) are those attracted to both sexes, with 3 representing an equally dual orientation. As applied historically, position on the scale is determined half by behavioral history and half by phenomena such as fantasies and dreams.

Most professionals agree that the HH Scale is an overly simplified approach to what is in reality a much more complex matter. Nevertheless, it has some utility as long as we understand that it cannot completely capture the inherent complexity of human sexuality. Since libido also varies in strength, one could likewise speak of a scale for this dimension of sexuality that goes from low to high. In a slightly different approach, we can put two bar graphs side by side with one bar representing homosexual attraction and the other representing heterosexual attraction. One can have high levels in both (bisexual and fully sexual), low levels in both (asexuality), or some combination of the two.

The vast majority of homosexual-heterosexual marriages fail. However, as Ben attests, some, with strong determination, choose to try and beat the odds. Such hopes of success are, in part, based on claims that some homosexuals have achieved successful marriages characterized by adequate sexual compatibility.

Such claims, however, must be examined in the light of (1) the complexity of homosexual feeling as it manifests itself in individuals (the HH



Scale); (2) the relative importance that individuals attach to sexual intimacy as an element in the marital relationship (strength of libido and capacity for sublimation of sexual desire); and (3) other important factors such as whether individuals have personal compatibility and maturity adequate to withstand challenges to the marriage which are far greater than average.

1. *Bisexuality*. In most mixed hetero/homosexual marriages that can claim some degree of success, the partner with same-sex attraction is really bisexual and is able to emphasize his or her heterosexual attraction sufficiently to create sexual intimacy. Thus, heterosexual-homosexual couples considering marriage should carefully explore the possibility that the homosexually attracted partner is bisexual.

The LDS family therapist previously cited, and Dr. Beverly Shaw (past president of AMCAP, the Association of Mormon Counselors and Psychotherapists), who have worked with hundreds of Latter-day Saints with SSA, report that bisexuality may make some marriages workable.<sup>5</sup> This is because such individuals have the ability to bond romantically (are capable of expressing genuine emotional and physical intimacy) with partners of the same *and* the opposite sex. Those at 5 or 6 on the HH scale, however, are at much higher risk of marriage failure than those at 4 or below.

These reports support my own study, mentioned above, from the thirty-six LDS homosexuals who had tried marriage. At the time of the survey, only two were still married. Seventy-eight percent were 5 and 6 on the HH Scale, indicating that essentially they were not attracted to the opposite sex and therefore probably should not have married.<sup>6</sup>

2. *Libido*. The importance attached to sexual satisfaction is another variable affecting the success of these marriages. When both parties have little interest in or need for sexual intimacy, marriage may become a more realistic possibility. The partners may also be able to deemphasize sexual intimacy through sublimation of sexual feelings. Other kinds of compatibility such as mutual interests, strong friendship, and non-erotic attachment may also be important factors for those who do not have strong libi-

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5. *Ibid.*, and Beverly Shaw, "Counseling with Homosexual Latter-day Saints: My Experience and Insights," in *The Persistence of Same Sex Attraction*, 15-16.

6. Schow, "1994 Survey of 136 LDS Same Sex Oriented Individuals."

dos. Prospective couples should be aware, however, that the homosexual desires may intensify over time and present a risk later in the marriage.

### Myths, Misunderstandings, and Stereotypes

The widespread failure of homosexual-heterosexual marriages, together with the psychological stress single homosexuals feel because of extraordinary pressures to marry, are largely attributable in LDS culture to ignorance about homosexuality and to unexamined beliefs about marriage and family life.

Many young couples consider marriage or enter marriage unaware of the liabilities and challenges they face. Here are a few of the myths and misunderstandings involving homosexuality and marriage.

1. *Sex in marriage will solve the problem, or, conversely, sex isn't that important.* Because of the Church's appropriate emphasis on premarital chastity, young people generally have not experienced sexual intimacy in a committed relationship. Thus, they have little understanding of what marriage without sexual intimacy or with unsatisfying sexual expression might mean. Few homosexual-heterosexual marriages survive without at least some degree of mutually satisfying sexual expression.

2. *Homosexuality is a personal challenge only.* A young man who just ended his eight-year temple marriage as part of coming to terms with his homosexuality told me that he deeply regretted his own lack of understanding that made him treat his gayness as a "personal issue." As a result, although he expected some difficulty and was prepared for it, he did not disclose his homosexuality to his wife before their marriage. He didn't realize, he says, "the impact that my own struggle would have on other people. Nevertheless, I wonder if any straight woman or man can really understand in advance the implications of entering into a mixed orientation marriage. I think a lot of gay men contemplating heterosexual marriage underestimate the impact that their actions have on their future spouse."

With considerable after-the-fact remorse, he explains finally coming to terms with his wife's anguish: "It was only after I came out to my wife that I realized how much she had suffered and endured over the years in asking questions like why didn't I find her desirable or why our sexual relationship never seemed satisfying. Was it a failure on her part? she wondered. She had sadness about feeling alone, confused and hurt in ways that were nearly impossible to articulate."

This young man emphasized the falsity of a prevalent myth: "I saw

my struggle with (and against) homosexuality as my own cross to bear. I felt I was the one who was suffering, struggling, and trying to make things right. What I failed to recognize was that my wife was also part of the same struggle even though she lacked basic information.”

3. *Anyone with the basic capacity to marry, should get married.* This same young man also articulated another view held widely within the Church and inculcated through years of socialization of youth: “There is such a strong bias toward marriage and married couples in the church, that it is almost unthinkable to consider alternatives to the idealized father-mother-children arrangement.” As a young man, he saw “no other alternative” than temple marriage and children. “The fact that I was gay was irrelevant. Getting married is what faithful LDS returned missionaries do.”

This belief is so strong that it becomes extremely difficult to get past the “faith” that “things will work out” and ask hard questions about, “How will they work out? What will this require of me? Of my wife? In our role as parents?” The young man quoted above lamented his naivete: “Looking at the pain that my little family has experienced leaves me convinced that we need better answers, more openness, and real honesty.”

4. *The gay lifestyle is one of wanton promiscuity.* Ben expresses this stereotype when he phrased his options as either temple marriage or “a rampant life of unrestrained queerness.” Some may feel, when recognizing their same-sex attraction, that their choices are equally limited. Obviously, there are many choices between these two extremes.

5. *“Homosexuality” is not the same as “homosexual behavior.”* The Church has made an important policy shift wherein there is censure of behavior but not of homosexuality per se. This shift is reflected in Church handbook terminology, and yet many members and some leaders are not clearly making the distinction. The 1976 *General Handbook of Instructions* listed “homosexuality” as “grounds for Church court action,” as did the 1983 edition.<sup>7</sup> Not unreasonably, some local leaders interpreted homosexuality itself, even on the part of celibate persons, to be an actionable offense. However, in 1989 the *General Handbook of Instructions* for Church leaders used the phrase “homosexual relations” in that same list of

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7. *General Handbook of Instructions* (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1976), 71; *General Handbook of Instructions* (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1983), 51.

grounds for disciplinary councils.<sup>8</sup> The 1998 handbook uses the terms “homosexual activity,” “homosexual acts,” “homosexual relations,” “homosexual activities,” and “homosexual behavior” as being problematic.<sup>9</sup> As the language of this current handbook makes clear, it is behavior, not homosexuality per se, that is proscribed.

President Hinckley also made this clear in 1998 when he said, referring to homosexual inclinations, “If they do not act upon these inclinations, then they can go forward as do all other members of the Church.”<sup>10</sup> Church members, therefore, do not have to “give up” or “overcome” homosexuality—only homosexual behavior that is incompatible with Church standards of sexual morality. Such “going forward” does include, of course, a life of sexual abstinence.

6. *Understand the healing power of the atonement.* Some commentators suggest that the “cure” for homosexuality lies in the healing power of the Savior to remove same-sex feelings, arguing that the atonement is sufficient for such requests.<sup>11</sup> Such arguments show a fundamental misunderstanding of the atonement. Its purpose is not to change conditions of mortality like sexual orientation, but rather to help us live with life’s challenges, repent of our sins, and surrender our hearts to the Lord so that ultimately we can be sanctified through his sacrifice.

7. *Consider divorce realistically.* There is a strong and appropriate discouragement of divorce in Mormon culture, but couples who marry without a clear understanding of the implications when one partner has bisexual or homosexual feelings need to understand that sometimes divorce is the best solution for both partners. Fear of divorce’s stigma should not

8. *General Handbook of Instructions* (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, March 1989), Section 10, p. 4.

9. *Church Handbook of Instructions* (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1998), Vol. 1:81, 96, 129, 159.

10. Gordon B. Hinckley, “What Are People Asking about Us?” *Ensign*, November 1998, 71. He was responding to Question 2: “What is your Church’s attitude toward homosexuality?”

11. The Evergreen mission statement, which appears on all of its conference programs, begins: “Evergreen is founded on the belief that the atonement of Jesus Christ enables every soul the opportunity to turn away from *all* sins or *conditions* that obstruct their temporal and eternal happiness and potential.” Programs in my possession; emphasis mine.

compel husbands and wives to stay in marriages that are not mutually loving and fulfilling.

### Promising Developments

Even though there is currently much pain and uncertainty over the issue of homosexuality in Mormon culture, there are several developments which, given time and encouragement, may lead to a more enlightened situation. As noted earlier, it would be helpful for members of the Church to understand that individuals do not choose same-sex attraction and that, generally, SSA feelings do not go away. Ben's essay confirms both concepts. I see no doctrinal reason why this information should not be shared widely with members of the Church.

An encouraging sign is Deseret Book's publication in late 2004 of *In Quiet Desperation* by Fred and Marilyn Matis and Ty Mansfield. The Matises are the parents of Stuart Matis, an LDS man who committed suicide outside the Los Altos Stake Center in San Jose, California, in 2000, after years of struggling against his homosexual orientation. The book strongly confirms that SSA is not a choice and generally will not diminish or vanish in adulthood. According to Marilyn Matis, "When Stuart was thirty-two years old, he finally accepted his feelings of attraction to other men. He said he cried all night long when he realized his feelings of attraction had not gone away—nor had they diminished in any way since he had first recognized them."<sup>12</sup>

The book's preface describes Ty Mansfield: "You will read the reflections and impressions of [another] young man who presently wrestles with same-gender attraction. It will become obvious that he has spent hundreds of hours on his knees, in counsel with priesthood leaders, and in deep and pondering study of the holy scriptures in an effort to cope with feelings of attraction that he did not choose."<sup>13</sup>

Because Deseret Book is owned by the Church, its publication of this book with its strong message that SSA is not chosen and does not diminish over time is, in my opinion, a good sign.

The following First Presidency statement issued in October 2004 suggests that, at least to some extent, Church leaders understand that ho-

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12. Fred Matis, Marilyn Matis, and Ty Mansfield, *In Quiet Desperation* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2004), 11.

13. *Ibid.*, xiii.

homosexuality is not a choice and that it often results in loneliness: "We of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints reach out with understanding and respect for individuals who are attracted to those of the same gender. We realize there may be great loneliness in their lives."<sup>14</sup> The word "respect" suggests that they feel homosexuality is unchosen. Realistically speaking, both married and single people can experience "loneliness," but this statement at least seems to suggest that homosexuals will not be able to marry.

In December 2004, during an interview on CNN Television, Larry King asked President Hinckley if gays are "born that way." The president answered. "I don't know. I'm not an expert on these things. I don't pretend to be an expert on these things."<sup>15</sup> It is helpful when the prophet makes clear that understanding the causes of homosexuality requires "expertise" (in other words, it is not a matter that has been settled by revelation), and that the Church's position on homosexuality may include the possibility that individuals *are* "born that way."

Another promising development is that some bishops have begun to offer sound wisdom based on extensive experience. Robert Rees, who was bishop of the Los Angeles Singles Ward for five years, recently reported: "My experience with the 50 or so homosexuals with whom I have had a close relationship over the past 20 years can be summarized as follows: I have not met a single homosexual Latter-day Saint who chose or was able to change or alter his or her sexual orientation. I also have not met a single homosexual Latter-day Saint who had not tried valiantly, generally over a long period of time, to change his or her orientation."<sup>16</sup> It is likely that Bishop Rees has more experience with this issue than any bishop in the church.

Recently, in my area (southern Idaho), a bishop in a university stake bishops' council urged his fellow bishops to avoid encouraging gay persons to marry. Although some of the bishops objected, the stake president

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14. First Presidency Statement, October 19, 2004, retrieved October 20, 2004, from [www.lds.org/newsroom/showrelease/0,15503,4028-1-20336,00.html](http://www.lds.org/newsroom/showrelease/0,15503,4028-1-20336,00.html).

15. Gordon B. Hinckley, interviewed by Larry King, December 26, 2004, retrieved January 15, 2005, from <http://transcripts.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/0412/26/lkl.01.html>.

16. Robert A. Rees, "My Experience in Working with Homosexual Latter-day Saints," in *The Persistence of Same Sex Attraction in Latter-day Saints*, 16.

reinforced the bishop's comments. These are good developments which, in my view, move us in the right direction.

Unfortunately, an anonymous article in the September 2004 *Ensign* does not reveal the same level of understanding, suggesting both that, although difficult, SSA can be "overcome" and that marriage may be an option with "the Lord's help." The article does, fortunately, point out that these feelings are "seldom chosen," but does not say anything about the role bisexuality may have in making possible straight/gay marriages.<sup>17</sup>

Equally unfortunate is the fact that Evergreen has a role in training Church leaders, and its literature stresses that therapy can result in a "transition" out of homosexuality. Evergreen also fails to clarify the difference between homosexuality and bisexuality.

If Latter-day Saint couples considering marriage were getting better information from their bishops and if they understood clearly whether the partner in question were gay or bisexual, they would be in a better position to evaluate whether marriage is a possibility. I hope that good guidance can be given to the fine young men and women of the Church, gay and straight, who face the prospect of marriage when one partner is bisexual or homosexual. I also hope that, when such couples decide to marry, they can find the best path through this dilemma and that, if divorce ever becomes necessary, they can also find compassionate support during that difficult process.

## *Thoughts of a Therapist*

*Marybeth Raynes*

I FREQUENTLY SEE MORMONS who are gay or gays who are Mormon. Which comes first matters immensely to many. I consult with individuals,

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17. Name withheld, "Compassion for Those Who Struggle," *Ensign*, September 2004, 58–62.

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lesbian and gay couples, and couples in which one partner is gay, bisexual, or aware of attractions to the same gender but who doesn't identify with the "gay" tag. Moreover, I have seen many who are gay but who yearn to reclaim or rename the spiritual experiences they continue to receive or who want to find places of spiritual service that have as sweet a taste as those within the Church. Others urgently want to come to terms with God, grieve deeply the loss of access to the Church's callings and blessings, or want to find ways to mitigate the shunning they receive from their families.

I also sit with both women and men who want to change their orientation or those who accept that they will always feel a split between their heart and their libido, but who want to be actively Mormon. They voice a clear wish to choose spirituality over sexuality as the only option in the forced-choice structure of today's Church.

The many facets of being homosexual and Mormon named above carry with them enormous suffering, endless questions, and, yes, many times of joy and fulfillment. I am delighted that Ben has brought to the fore the invisible choice that many live with—happily and unhappily. His voice—as well as the voices of other men and women who are married and bisexual or gay—needs to be heard, particularly with the sensitivity and hard-won insights he has gained through growing up being gay and Mormon, then marrying with his and Jessie's eyes as open as possible.

I am aware of more essays by men (but very few by women) about their journey in and out of marriages like this. I can count on both hands the couples I have worked with who have chosen to stay married with the goal of managing the difficulties and enriching their experience with each other and their children. From a wider list of contacts, I have talked in depth with at least a dozen more. I am sharing this information to simply indicate my frame of reference and my level of experience with these couples.

Some of these couples end up leaving the marriage, but I would guess that, for most married bisexual lesbian and gay people, choosing to leave may well be choosing life—literally and emotionally. As a side note, the high rates of suicidal ideation, attempts, and completed suicides do not end in young adulthood or upon being married. Suicide rates in general increase throughout adulthood, and I am guessing that the same trend applies for those with same-sex orientation. While I support leaving a marriage if one must, I am equally concerned about limiting the damage that spouses and children experience.



I am impressed with Ben's conscientiousness about entering his marriage. He employed a number of important strategies that every couple should use when embarking on marriage but particularly with the extra dangers and difficulties a gay/straight marriage entails.

First, he developed a close friendship over a fairly long period of time and then came to feel that he loved his friend before considering marriage. For gay persons, the choice between a deep love and erotic attraction plus love is an excruciating one. I recommend giving yourself plenty of time and contemplation to really feel the direction you most deeply want to go before choosing either path. Consult with trusted others who will support you whatever your choice. Rely on the spiritual practices that work for you. Research the practical implications. Study marriage as well as the nature of your prospective spouse's sexuality. (That is, if you are a man, become well acquainted with the nature of women's sexuality.) Fortunately, a decision-making model for these spiritual-sexual conflicts has been researched and developed by Lee Beckstead and others.<sup>1</sup> Even with last-minute doubts, you will be better prepared by cementing the relationship in caring first.

Second, I recommend disclosing your same-gender attraction before the marriage takes place, as Ben did. Telling someone, or worse, having the spouse find out years later, and after possible affairs and/or one-night stands have already taken place, produces the most damage. I give Ben extra credit for telling his wife early enough in their relationship that she could make a choice before becoming engaged or telling everyone else that a marriage was forthcoming, then later feeling the burden of social opinion regarding her decision to leave or stay in the relationship. Even though it is difficult, even impossible, to count the costs of being married to a gay person beforehand, the imagined choices must be laid before the other person.

It is important to recognize that not all persons are absolutely cer-

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1. A. Lee Beckstead and T. Israel, "Affirmative Counseling and Psychotherapy Focused on Issues Related to Conflicts with Sexual Orientation," in *Handbook of Counseling and Psychotherapy with Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Clients*, edited by K. Bieschke, R. Perez, and K. DeBord, 2d. ed. (Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association, in press). See also A. Lee Beckstead and S. L. Morrow, "Mormon Clients' Experiences of Conversion Therapy: The Need for a New Treatment Approach," *The Counseling Psychologist* 32 (2004): 651-90.

tain before marrying that they are, in fact, attracted to the same sex. They may not understand that their orientation is difficult to change, or, worse yet, be able to project the toll that years of inner and outer conflict may cost both partners. Some women who identify as heterosexual may, years or even decades later, become aware of their erotic or romantic attraction to women. For many men, hopes and promises of change seem so compelling because spiritual directives in other areas of their lives have worked. Others, who are not as compelled by their sexual natures, may have only limited awareness of its eventual power. The nature of our sexuality continues to unfold during the decades of adulthood, just as our other capacities do. How someone knows or comes to know about his or her sexual attractions and patterns is so varied that we should refrain from judging.

Ben also engaged his beloved in an ongoing conversation before the marriage about both his doubts and the possible effect his homosexuality might have on her. I have talked to many women—and several men—who felt left out of discussions of future ramifications, even if they knew about the same-sex attraction prior to the marriage. Amity Buxton, author of *The Other Side of the Closet*, discusses the trauma, silence, and loss of integrity that occur as one spouse comes out of the closet. Effectively, when the gay partner comes out of the closet, the straight one often goes in.<sup>2</sup> The feeling of invisibility and of not being loved or cherished increases for most spouses unless they pay consistent attention to working together on their relationship. (Of course, this is true of straight marriages also.)

Indeed, this concern about “not being loved” in a gay/straight marriage has led me to more pondering than any other in the area of homosexual married people. I am deeply concerned about what happens to both partners when there is very little or no sexual interest toward the other by at least one spouse. When this is the case, there often may not be a sustained emotional and mental wish to really discover who one’s partner is on many levels. Much like the quip, “Money doesn’t buy happiness, but it sure makes a good down payment,” sexual interest alone does not create a loving marriage, but it certainly is an important feature. In their book, *The Good Marriage*, a study of three types of healthy marriages, Judith Wallerstein and Sandra Blakeslee conclude that at least warm, if

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2. Amity Buxton, *The Other Side of the Closet: The Coming Out Crisis for Straight Spouses and Families*, rev. and expanded ed. (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1994), xiii–xx, 175–77.

not deeply passionate, sex is a necessary feature in all types of good marriages.<sup>3</sup>

Even when good intentions and deep commitments are present at the beginning of a union, marriages of all types need a steady motivational base to survive and thrive. After the initial high, people in most marriages experience a decline in interest toward the other as they enter into the predictable everyday phases of marriage before the deeper skills of really loving another take hold and grow. A gay person may lose that initial motivation to really love and deeply join with his or her spouse on many levels to a greater degree than straight spouses because it was difficult to do so in the first place. If this occurs, the frustration and alienation can be profound for both partners. Additionally, if either or both spouses are engaged in a core-level internal conflict, they often have few resources to reach beyond the self in a heart-felt, collaborative way. In my observation, gay/straight marriages do really well only when the partners are very good friends—indeed, best friends—and do not wish to be with anyone else despite the obstacles.

What I am pointing to is the need to be emotionally, mentally, and spiritually mature beyond the usual expectation of those entering marriage. Of course, we want people to be mature when beginning any marriage; but since a majority of Latter-day Saints marry at young ages, this is not always the case. Given that marriage is one of the chief institutions to help most people grow up—if you chose to let it—most people are quite immature at the point of embarkation. No matter the conditions, growing up takes a long time and a lot of work.

If I could wave a magic wand, I would hope that premarital and marital therapy services would be easily available for gay, lesbian, or bisexual people considering heterosexual marriage. (An additional wand would grant these same services to couples who are already married.) However, these choices remain invisible for the most part because any disclosure is likely to attract unfriendly cross-fire from several sources. It seems that people take sides too easily, even when they want to be supportive. Ongoing support is crucial. Heterosexual marriages, much less other types of unions, generally don't survive without family and community support.

I praise Ben also for clearly taking a stand, spiritually, emotionally,

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3. Judith S. Wallerstein and Sandra Blakeslee, *The Good Marriage: How and Why Love Lasts* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1995), 183.

and behaviorally. He presents a cogent argument for his choice. He claims his right to do something hard. If his story is honest on all counts, he has internally worked through the obstacles he has faced so far through spiritual seeking and contemplation and externally by talking with Jessie and keeping the conversation open. He employs an important coping strategy by learning to pay less attention to his urges. Just taking a stand and claiming a right often helps to change one's sense of self (though not one's impulses or orientation) and can create increased motivation. Would that most people had this much foresight and planning!

However, I think it is possible that there are difficult struggles that Ben didn't name. Even if his list is complete, others would have more to add or may not be able to do what he is doing. Additionally, he is just starting out. The years can wear on us unless we renew ourselves with episodic or continual growth. Ben hasn't included much information about Jessie. I wish her well over the years and hope that her voice also finds a place in writing for a larger audience.

Those of you reading this article who are homosexual and married and who have not disclosed your orientation to a spouse, please review your situation and name the ways in which you were doing the best that you could at the time of your engagement and marriage. Then, find someone to talk to so you can, as wisely as possible, remedy the situation, or come to some deep peacefulness about your choices in the future.

To all who are challenged by this issue, and perhaps are engaged in a troubled or problematic relationship, please remember that, given your circumstances, you are undoubtedly doing the best you can and should treat each other with great patience and understanding.

## *Staying In*

*Ben Christensen*

I WROTE "GETTING OUT" as a somewhat naive twenty-four-year-old. Now I return, in theory a wise and mature twenty-five-year-old. Inevitably, I'll find whatever I write here equally naive a year from now. I don't know

whether this is a function of being young, human, or simply me. Whatever the case, I appreciate life's opportunities to be constantly learning, including the opportunity that well-written essays such as those by Ron Schow and Marybeth Raynes give me to reflect on myself and question my assumptions.

Perhaps the greatest shift in my perspective on homosexuality in the last year is echoed in comments made by Ron and Marybeth. Ron refers to my implication that my only options were marrying a woman or running off to San Francisco to embrace "rampant queerness." He points out: "There are many choices between these two extremes." I think I found myself in this "either/or" mentality because of a shallow understanding of love and sex. In "Getting Out," I say, "My attraction to Jessie . . . came entirely from my heart. On the other hand, [my attraction to men] was purely a libido thing."

Critiquing my essay, a friend asked, "Can you really separate love and sex so easily? I can't." I discarded his concern, believing I had a deeper understanding of love and sex. After all, he writes novels about missionaries who fornicate and teenaged boys who make out with cow udders. For me, the distinction between love and sex was clear. As I've become more honest with myself, though, I see that Marybeth states my dilemma more accurately when she says that people in my situation choose "between a deep love and erotic attraction plus love." This choice is a good deal more difficult than the over-simplified choice I thought I was making. By choosing heterosexual marriage, I've denied myself the experience of loving someone I am naturally attracted to and my wife the experience of loving someone who is naturally attracted to her.

Homosexuality is not just about sex. I desperately crave emotional intimacy with a man. Can I work on having that kind of intimacy with my wife? Yes. Can I attain some level of intimacy in platonic friendships with men? Possibly. Will this be satisfying? Will it fill the hole in my heart I've lived with for years? I don't know.

I'm uncomfortable, however, with Ron's conclusions regarding bisexuality and homosexuality. He admits that "the HH scale is an overly simplified approach to what is in reality a much more complex matter," yet he uses it as the basis for many of his arguments. If I were to guess where I fall on the HH scale (assuming that I believe anyone can reduce

his or her sexual orientation to a number), I would place myself at a 5: “Predominantly homosexual, but incidentally heterosexual.”<sup>1</sup> According to Ron, “Those at 5 or 6 on the HH scale, therefore, are at much higher risk of marriage failure than those at 3 or 4.” If my marriage fails, then, can I blame it on my fiveness? On the other hand, if it succeeds, am I therefore a 3 or a 4? Arguments like Ron’s require one to “speculate” that homosexuals who don’t support the desired conclusions “were likely bisexual.” My goodness, Ron, I’ve just barely come to terms with being gay, and now you’re asking me to deal with the possibility that I might be, “in reality,” bisexual? I’m not sure my self-image can withstand this much turbulence.

As a general statement, I am aroused by the male body and not the female. Nonetheless, there have been occasions, mostly with my wife, where I have felt such an emotional closeness to a woman that I’ve experienced some sense of sexual attraction. Similarly, I’ve often found myself attracted to men I wouldn’t have otherwise found attractive, due to shared emotional intimacy. Love and sex aren’t easily separated, and neither the HH scale nor terms like “heterosexual,” “homosexual,” and “bisexual” account for this complexity.

Overall, Ron and Marybeth make convincing arguments for the difficulty of “mixed orientation” marriages. I wholeheartedly agree. If “Getting Out” leads any gay Mormon to jump into marriage without considering the consequences, then I should have my writing license revoked. The problem is, no one offers any better solutions within the bounds of LDS doctrine. Apparently, the current alternative offered by the First Presidency is “great loneliness.” What kind of alternative is that? Am I to accept that a Church which proclaims “that marriage between a man and a woman is ordained of God and that the family is central to the Creator’s plan for the eternal destiny of His children”<sup>2</sup> would say that marriage and family simply aren’t options for me? Yes, many people don’t have the opportunity to marry in this life. That, in my opinion, is a tragedy. Why then

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1. Alfred Kinsey, quoted in Ron Schow, “Kinsey and Beyond,” in *Peculiar People: Mormons and Same-Sex Orientation*, edited by Ron Schow, Wayne Schow, and Marybeth Raynes (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1991), 160.

2. First Presidency and Council of the Twelve Apostles, “The Family: A Proclamation to the World” (Salt Lake: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1995).

should I *choose* loneliness? But if heterosexual marriage is “doomed to fail” and homosexual marriage is a sin, that’s exactly what I’m expected to do.

If it seems I have conflicting feelings on this subject, I do. Lately when I listen to Lauryn Hill sing “I Get Out,” I wonder whether my “psychological locks” are the boxes a gay-rights-driven society would put me in, or the boxes a narrow-minded view of God has me in. Maybe God *isn’t* so opposed to people of the same gender having a loving sexual relationship. I don’t know. To be honest, at this point it doesn’t matter. This much I do know: God told me to marry Jessie. I married her. I love my wife, and I love my daughter. Doing anything to hurt them couldn’t possibly make me happy. Yes, the issue is infinitely more complicated than I’ve painted it; and yes, at times the thought of never feeling a man’s body next to mine makes me literally tremble. At these times I find courage in the bold words of Ms. Hill: “And if I have to die, O Lord, / That’s how I choose to live.”