

**Agentic Sexuality: How a Latter-day Saint Perspective can Rescue Humanity from the  
Tyranny of the Abstract<sup>1</sup>**

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Human sexuality, as a universal and widely studied phenomenon, seems to hold a special status among human phenomena, in that it is both widely held to be basically biologically determined (LeVay, Baldwin, & Baldwin, 2019). However, at the same time, it is also widely held to be one of the most important and meaningful of all activities in which human beings seem purposefully to engage (Albanesi, 2010). In short, paradoxically, a great many people defend the legitimacy of radical individual freedom of action in sexual matters while also considering sexuality to be fundamentally biologically based, or otherwise driven by abstract, natural causal forces. Indeed, Wilkerson (2009) notes that the “standard view” in contemporary society and social science is that sexual orientation is “an enduring, fairly stable desire oriented toward a particular gender” that is “thought to be a constant and underlying feature of a person’s make up,” while sexual identity is “a self-consciously direct project that a person develops around this orientation” (p. 97). However, Wilkerson (2009) also notes that this distinction often disappears in many of our discussions about sexuality because “such talk often runs orientation and identity together” (p. 98).

The obvious contradiction between determinism and free choice speaks to both the importance attached to sexuality in our culture and to a persistent and enduring, possibly even self-deceived, confusion about its nature and meaning. And, insofar as the social sciences

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<sup>1</sup> This presentation is based on the paper “Agentic Sexuality: On Rescuing Humanity from the Tyranny of the Invisible” (Richard N. Williams, Edwin E. Gantt, Madeline R. Christensen, and Jacob D. Tubbs), and will appear as a feature article in forthcoming volume of *Issues in Religion and Psychotherapy*.

contribute significantly to the larger culture's understanding of human sexuality, the contradiction also attests to a fundamental incoherence in contemporary social science accounts of sexuality (see, Eberstadt, 2019; Grant, 2015; Soh, 2020; Trueman, 2020). This paper will present an analysis of both abstract and agentic approaches to understanding sexuality in the hope of shedding some new light on the phenomena, as well as bringing some clarity (by way of contrast) to the often muddled accounts present in contemporary psychological theory and practice relevant to sexual matters. It should be noted at the outset that this task is complicated significantly because the language of sexuality – scholarly as well as common conversational language – is constantly shifting as people insist on certain definitions and usages to support their particular theories or political agendas, and, thereby, “capture the discourse” on sexuality for themselves (see Kuby, 2015). I will try to note such language problems along the way, so as to not let them derail the analysis.

### **Sexuality as Abstraction**

Simply stated, the analysis here aims to establish that human sexuality is really best understood as embodied agentic action. As such, human action is neither reducible to underlying biological or natural causes and abstract forces, nor to the effects of powerful invisible abstractions – either of which would turn sexuality into a type of *natural event* rather than a meaningful *human action*. However, it is important to also state that this claim does not entail the somewhat common but conceptually flawed notion that sexuality as human agentic action is simply a matter of sexual behaviors, desires, orientations, or identities being freely chosen from among alternatives by an independent, autonomous, or free will. That is to say, in order to support the claim that sexuality is agentic, human agency must be understood in a different (dare I say better) way than it traditionally has been, one that does not simply reflect a view of agency

as “radical choice” (Taylor, 1985), or what is often termed “libertarian free will” (Clarke, 2003). Thus, a major purpose of this presentation is to offer a new account of human agency, an account that can make sense of human sexuality without succumbing to the temptations of either reductionism or radical free choice.

A major conclusion of this analysis is that the term “sexuality” does not really designate any “real” category or object. That is, “sexuality” is an abstraction, a general idea about all sorts of thoughts, observations, and experiences related to sex. And, ideas, as thoughts, observations, and experiences, have their being only in the *acts* of thinking, observing, and experiencing. Such acts are real, but they produce ideas, and a generalized idea is an abstraction, not a category of real things. Thus, the term “sexuality” has, in fact, no real referent, no condition or entity, no “thing” to which it directly or adequately corresponds. Rather, “sexuality” is more fruitfully understood as a description of what people do, say, or think, and not as the name of something people possess, or something that is operating within people or upon people and causing them to do what they do, or to desire how and what they desire.

Such a view clearly stands in fairly stark contrast to the prevailing consensus in the professional and academic areas of contemporary social science, as well as in the larger social and moral context of modern Western self-understanding (see Eberstadt, 2019; Lehmler, 2018; Trueman, 2020). Indeed, the current intellectual fashion is to offer explanation and understanding of virtually all human actions, including “sexual” activity, in terms of the operations of powerful abstractions, invisible to the eye, and discernable by only those whose minds have been educated to “see” and understand the operations of such invisible forces, as well as to understand themselves and others in those terms (Toomela, 2008; Williams, 2018;

Williams, Gantt, & Fischer, in press). For example, as Lehmiller (2018) asserts in a popular introductory text on the psychology of human sexuality:

As a starting point, it is useful to acknowledge that every single sexual act is the result of several powerful forces acting upon one or more persons. . . . Whether sex occurs at any given moment depends on which forces are strongest at the time” (p. 3).

It is the appointed task of the educated and critically discerning psychologist to detect and identify these powerful (though subtle and abstract) causal forces – the operations of which the individual him- or herself is almost certainly unaware – in order to fully comprehend and explain the variety of human sexual desires, acts, and relationships that make up what we refer to as “sexuality.”<sup>2</sup>

To be clear, there is nothing wrong, in principle, with using an abstract term like “sexuality” in common conversation. Effective communication in general would be very difficult without the use of such abstractions. One could use that word in any number of casual conversations, and everyone would know what was being talked about. However, “sexuality” becomes more than merely a conversational descriptive term when it is applied as the name of a metaphysical category of “things,” or set of supposedly real things, or real types of persons, or forces that “push” and “pull” persons to do or feel certain things, whether from the inside, the outside, or some combination of the two. When used this way, “sexuality” begins to take on an existence of its own that is independent of conversational or descriptive narratives *about* agentic

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<sup>2</sup> Stanley Milgram famously described the nature of social psychological inquiry in a way that deftly characterizes most contemporary social scientific research and theory when he wrote: “The implicit model for experimental work is that of the person influenced by *social forces while often believing in his or her own independence of them*. It is thus a social psychology of the reactive individual, *the recipient of forces and pressures emanating from outside oneself*. . . . Indeed, the creative claim of social psychology lies in its capacity to reconstruct varied types of social experience in an experimental format, to clarify and make visible the operation of *obscure social forces* so that they may be explored in terms of the language of cause and effect” (1992, p. xix; emphasis added).

human actions, becoming instead a label for *types* of actions, or, as the lines of analysis proceed, a name for a real *cause* of those actions. This sort of reification can be seen in the context of “sexuality,” in references to such things and categories as “homo-sexuality,” “hetero-sexuality,” “bi-sexuality,” or “pan-sexuality.” In other words, such terms have ceased being mere descriptors of certain sexual acts a person engages in, and instead have become the explanation or reason why the person engages in those acts. Additionally, once this initial reification of sexuality has occurred, other abstractions are often and quickly drawn into the explanatory vocabulary to name more presumably real things and causes that are part of “sexuality,” for example, “sexual needs,” “sexual orientation,” “sexual identity,” and so on. In conversations informed by contemporary thought in the social sciences, “sexuality” is almost always, and usually without reservation, transformed from being simply a useful abstraction for describing a broad category of human *actions* into a name for real *things*, either types of persons, or some invisible abstract things with causal efficacy in sexually relevant human actions.<sup>3</sup>

The crucial question about this sort of rhetorical drift – where descriptions of actions morph into real things, rather than remaining mere descriptions of actions – is whether a category mistake has been made. In other words, by what new discovery or influx of knowledge do these reified descriptors (“sexuality,” “orientation,” etc.) show us that they are more than simply innocent descriptions of what persons *do*, but are in fact really the names of actual categories to which persons are to be *assigned*, or categories of real, powerful, invisible causes of what people do relative to sex, and how and why they do it. In short, the question is, have we mistaken the abstract for the human, and vice versa?

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<sup>3</sup> For a fuller analysis of how this tendency toward reification in psychology reflects a “metaphysic of things,” as well as a discussion of the philosophical issues and consequences involved, see Williams (1990).

### **Of Agency and Abstraction**

One of the salient effects of the reification of abstractions is the loss of genuine human agency from our understandings and explanations of our humanity and our actions. The absence of any compelling sense or understanding of agency in human affairs results in the loss of meaning, purpose, and the possibility of genuine proactive, self-initiated change (see Williams & Gantt, 2020, 2021). This, in turn, profoundly affects our understanding and explanation of sexual activity of all sorts (e.g., behavioral, cognitive, emotive, moral). With this in mind, then, I want to first focus on how reifying abstractions obviates genuine human agency and how our current understanding of human agency is inadequate as an explanation of human agency as it is actually lived and experienced. I will also explore some of the consequences of this inadequate thinking – both about agency and about sexuality – for our understanding of our humanity. I will then introduce an alternative understanding of human agency that overcomes the current problems and discuss the benefits of this alternative view of sexuality as agentic.

The technical language of the social sciences and clinical practice, the language of reified abstractions has captured the imagination of a most of us in the modern Western world, and, thus, the general discourse about human sexuality is a discourse suffused with reified abstractions. One result of this is that people actually do tend to think of themselves – especially when it comes to thinking about sex, sexual behavior, and gender – as being caused or determined (or at least heavily pressed upon) by any number of causes and forces that are outside their control, or which are not readily subject to their agency (see, Hess, Gantt, Lacasse, & Vierling-Claasen, 2014). These occult, abstract causes are typically given great deference in conversations, both professional and casual ones. It seems odd to have such confidence in, and afford such deference to, the supposed importance and power of abstract things when the only

evidence of their existence, indeed the only form in which they can confidently be said to exist, is that *they have been thought of*. If we were to assign a real metaphysical status to them, it must surely only be that they exist as thoughts produced and expressed by human beings. And, very importantly, the only way they can continue to exist is by continuing to be thought. Even if one were to object to this conclusion by suggesting that things like “identities” or “orientations” can also be felt – that is, they can be experienced as “feelings,” as subjective emotional states – feelings are always feelings *about* something, or toward something – otherwise they are merely bodily, diffuse, inarticulate, and of no effect above the level of general perturbation. Thus, the only way a feeling can have an effect on a person is for it to find expression, ultimately, as a thought, an idea.<sup>4</sup> As I will show, this very ontology simply confirms that these supposed abstract causes, as the thoughts and ideas of intentional beings, are in reality, themselves, meaningful agentic acts.

What this means is that in the modern world we have come to think of ourselves largely as “having” an identity, including a sexual identity, instead of just being the person that our embodiment, our history, our kinship, and our experience belong to. However, claiming to have an “identity” is redundant, and provides no new understanding or insight, it simply renames, as an abstract “thing,” what is already the totality of our experience and agentic living. Such an abstract, reified “identity” seems from this reifying perspective to be in some way responsible for things about us which we must either accept, or which we must try (sometimes with some desperation) to control. Doing so, however, results in a highly unnatural split of our personhood such that we become both an “identity” and a “person” apart from that identity, someone who

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<sup>4</sup> Though we will not develop the analysis here, this approach to understanding emphasizes the fact that human thoughts, feelings, and actions are radical holistic; every feeling is about something (accurately or not) and thus is intimately connected to a thought, and actions have thoughts and feelings already inherent in them (see Williams & Gantt, 2021).

must either fulfill or oppose that identity for reasons about which the two parts might strongly disagree. This situation is as odd as it is difficult, and one that for a Latter-day Saint Christian surely makes no sense. After all, for what purpose would a loving Father and God create us and place us in a situation as part of an opportunity for moral development, but do so in a condition in which we have a fundamental split in our being such that war within ourselves is basically inevitable, and being true to our eternal nature is, by design, ambiguous and fraught with contradiction?<sup>5</sup> The reasonable response to this question would be, of course, that a truly loving God would almost certainly do no such thing. Indeed, there is some scriptural assurance on the matter. For example, we read in the Epistle of James: “Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed” (James 1:13-14). If we take the liberty of defining “his own lust” as “his own agentic thoughts and ideas,” the essence of the agentic analysis here becomes clearer.

That a loving Heavenly Father does create or arrange such conflicts for us is, I suggest, a misconception rooted in the secular discourse about ourselves and about sexuality, and is not rooted in the Gospel of Jesus Christ or the plan of salvation. The more reasonable answer, I believe, is that as human beings we do not “have” any such thing as an “identity,” certainly not one that stands apart from ourselves as we live, think, believe, relate, and become. Thus, our “identity,” so to speak, is largely a matter of our own making, not hovering somewhere waiting to be discovered, realized, embraced, accepted, or obeyed. It is, rather, a description of what we do, think, and feel, rather than an occult and independent abstract causal force or entity somehow

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<sup>5</sup> And lest one wants to simply claim that this odd situation merely arises because of naïve religiosity, we might also ask, of the non-believer, what interest Nature could have in creating such a conflict of identities, or why “evolutionary wisdom” would dictate such an inward struggle, or how and why “reproductive advantage” would maintain it or accrue from it.



working within us or outside us from somewhere or other. I can find no scriptural reference to any “designer conflicts” or “designer weaknesses” crafted by our Father in Heaven that He might somehow have implanted in us (perhaps within an identity). Again, there seems to be scriptural evidence to the contrary. In Ether 12:27, for example, we find:

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

It is important to note here that both uses of the term “weakness” in this passage are in the singular, which may indicate two things important to the point I am making here. First, it does not seem to be the case that the Lord handcrafts for each of us a set of weakness-*es* or temptations (plural), but rather that mortality – a state of weakness itself – provides an adequate opportunity for all moral agents to accomplish their purpose, and that it is this which has been and will be overcome by Jesus Christ unto redemption. Second, as noted above, God is the source of our redemption, not the source of our problems. Indeed, it is not clear exactly how God might actually become the source of a weakness in anyone’s character. In order to do so, it would seem that God would have to first create an identity, or an orientation, a drive, or a particular “weakness” or set of “weaknesses” since these things seem to be made of ideas, such as experiences, memories, interests, habits, decisions, and emotive responses, all of which are the products of our individual living and acting and reacting to the world we live in. How could God fashion something like an “identity,” or an “orientation,” and in what form could he “store” it, or where could he store it, while waiting for the right time to “give” it to someone or allow them to discover it? And because such things are very complex and context-rich, “giving” such an

abstraction would surely involve something more than whispering in an ear or triggering a thought in the mind. The whole process seems to be fraught with severe conceptual difficulties sufficient to suggest that it just cannot be the case. This position seems to make a loving Father and God simultaneously the designer of what might damn us, and the source of what might save us. Despite the fact that it might possess some mystical attraction that appeals to some with a taste for the absolutely numinous, the position fails as Latter-day Saint Christian doctrine.

Once again, scripture offers a clearer way of understanding how God “gives” us moral agency. As Alma the Younger taught:

Wherefore, he gave commandments unto men, they having . . . [become] as gods, knowing good from evil, placing themselves in a state to act, or being placed in a state to act according to their wills and pleasures, whether to do evil or to do good. (Alma 12:31)

Carefully reading this passage teaches us that God “gives” us agency by simply telling us what is true or good and putting us in a state to act according to our wills. This notion is further reinforced in Latter-day scripture where we learn of another sense in which God “gives” us agency:

Behold, I gave unto him that he should be an agent unto himself; and I gave unto him commandment, but . . . my commandments are spiritual; they are not natural nor temporal, neither carnal nor sensual. (Doctrine and Covenants 29:35)

In other words, one meaning of God’s “giving” us something spiritually relevant is his “allowing” us to act agentially. So, on the one hand, it seems that He does not “give” us agency in the sense that we are missing some “thing” and He gives it to us – which makes sense since our agency consists of our being the kind of beings who constantly *act* and *create*, morally, conceptually, physically, and spiritually. But, he does *allow* us to live agentially. By the same

token, then, identities, orientations, propensities, attractions, tendencies, and lusts are not the sorts of things God “gives” us, as particular weaknesses to be overcome by the exertion of individual will. Indeed, such things do not seem to be the kind of things even God *could* give us. Rather, they are the sorts of things that we as agents readily do (i.e., create for ourselves, as God *allows* us to live out our lives agentially). And, in terms of our wrestle with identities, orientations, attractions, and such, it is our fundamental human agency that is both the way in and the way out – with God’s help.

In summary, then, our larger (psychologically-informed) secular culture inclines us to think we are subject to powerful abstractions such as sexual drives, desires, attractions, identities, and orientations that have to be dealt with, controlled, accepted, or embraced and indulged, or even celebrated. This understanding is often so pervasive and unquestioned that it may not even occur to us that such things in fact do not exist – except as invented descriptions of what we, as individual human agents, actively think, feel, and do. The category mistake mentioned above is that we put all of these sexual things in a category of “real things” exercising some power over us, when they are in truth just terms that describe how we are actively engaging as human agents in the world of which sexually relevant thoughts, actions, and feelings are a part. In a word, all these things are really descriptions of stuff we do; they are not things that do stuff to us.

If one prefers a reifying explanation reliant upon the invocation of abstractions, then “sexuality” really is a “thing” with causal power and causal efficacy (although one’s preference does not make it so). Such a view keeps sexuality safely confined to the natural world (including both powerful invisible abstractions and physical matter) where moral quality or value cannot really be attached to it (except in a purely pragmatic sense) – since “natural” phenomena “just are,” and thus are morally inert. As Trueman (2020) observes:

Sexual activity [in this naturalistic sense] is not, in and of itself, moral or immoral. It is just an activity. To the modern post-Freud, post-Nietzsche mind, those who argue that sex acts have intrinsic moral content are merely expressing irrational aesthetic preferences rooted in cultural conditioning of simple prejudice. Sex becomes morally significant only as it is an expression of the self or of personal identity, and so any moral discussion of sex acts or their consequences must be set against that background. (pp. 348-349)<sup>6</sup>

In contrast, if sexuality is understood agentially – that is, as what we do, as embodied moral agents, together with others – then sexuality, including imagining, feeling, desiring, and many other ways of being in which people “take up” and “give themselves over to” various real possibilities, is inherently morally relevant and meaningful – chiefly because people are relevant and meaningful (Williams, Gantt, & Fischer, in press). Meaningfulness, as a key defining attribute of humanity, and our spiritual heritage, is both the content of and context for sexuality, as it is for all human acting. This understanding of sexuality locates it meaningfully within the realm of our humanity to which morality can be legitimately attached – as it can be to all agentic acts (Williams & Gantt, 2021).

The traditionally presumed advantage of metaphysical reification in understanding and explaining sexuality is that it keeps human sexuality safely within the amoral universe of naturally caused activities, and, thereby, preserves not only the positivist intellectual project of establishing an objective, value-neutral account of behavior, but also any number of compatible structuralist intellectual projects (Howell, 2013). The agentic explanation, on the other hand, brings sexuality (as fundamentally agentic activity) into the realm of “intentionality” as

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<sup>6</sup> Trueman (2020) provides further clarification of this point in an accompanying footnote where he points out that “in this framework rape is wrong because it does not include the mutual consent of the parties involved and, therefore, represents the denial of the identity of the victim. The physical act itself, considered from a purely physical perspective, has no moral content, good or bad” (p. 349).

understood in the older, more formal phenomenological sense of that term articulated by such thinkers as Brentano (1995) and Husserl (1982). Intentionality, in this sense, refers to the fact that all meaningful human consciousness, and therefore all human action, is intrinsically endowed with a *telos*, that towards which it tends or aims. Indeed, “the word ‘intentionality’ derives from the Latin verb *intend*, meaning to aim or point at, or to extend or stretch.” (Carman, 2020, p. 33). Thus, intentionality allows for “moral” significance (in the broadest sense of that term). Genuinely human acts (including sexual acts), as intentional acts, are thus, a matter of what agents do with reason and purpose, in the context of, and for the sake of, a meaningful lifeworld of social relationships and moral possibilities.

### **Embodiment as a Rescue from Abstractions**

It is vital to appreciate that intentionality is not simply a cognitive or mental phenomenon, but rather is profoundly physical, as well as social and moral in nature. As embodied beings, we are always already situated beings, simultaneously enmeshed in social, physical, temporal, and spatial fields of various relationships and meanings. However, just as human action is recognized as always occurring in the context of an inescapable and ever-present biological reality, embodiment is also not in any meaningful way separable from the social, moral, cultural, and historical contexts in which all our acts are inherently embedded. The “lived-body” is a fundamental dimension of our existence as the sorts of (human) beings we are, the presuppositional horizon within which we live and act. Embodiment is, in this way, the grounding feature of the world of moral agents and, thus, the most salient context within which agents exercise their creative freedom to be and to do. This view stands in sharp contrast to the prevailing, but philosophically naïve perspectives currently on offer from any of a large number

of biological-reductive perspectives (see, e.g., Garson, 2015; Plaisance & Reydon, 2012; Plomin, 2019; Rowland, 2020).

A perspective grounded in embodiment as envisioned here suggests that the body is more than a mechanical object, governed by natural forces, defined by abstract conditions or casual tendencies, and driven by reflexive responses. In contrast to the traditional view of the body as mechanical, viewing human agency through the lens of embodiment allows us to see the “lived-body” (i.e., the whole, embodied being) as both site and source of our intentional engagement with, and engagement by, the world in all of our projects: a necessary ground for purposive, meaningful action and relationship.<sup>7</sup> While it is in and through the body that we are able to be intimately familiar with and engage the world and others – and are capable of desiring and acting at all – this does not mean that it is *because* of the body that we have a world in the first place, nor is it the case that the body is the sole origin or organ of our desires, our actions, or identities. As Matthews (2004) notes, “Except in certain contexts, we experience living human bodies, our own and those of other people, not as bits of machinery, but as *the expression of a human person and his or her mode of being in the world.*” (p. 194, emphasis added). Indeed, on this view, sexuality is not best thought of as some sort of abstract causal force or condition, a category of something that we possess or to which we belong, but rather an active, purposive, meaningfully unfolding mode of our being in the world with others. In other words, the body is best

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<sup>7</sup> This understanding of embodiment should not be taken as a suggestion that bodies are composed of some sort of magical “smart meat,” such that the physical body just *has* all the intelligence of a person. Such a position leads to all the conceptual problems encountered by invoking magical abstractions and attributing to them causal power – a position we have just refuted. Rather embodiment simply holds that even if there is an intelligent soul or mind that continues after the death of the body, to understand human beings we must adopt an holistic view that every intelligent agent we meet lives in and through a physical body. This point calls to mind an important point of LDS doctrine shared by most Christians: “And the spirit and the body are the soul of man” (D&C 88:15).

understood as a *mode* of being, not the material source of being. As such, it should be thought of as affordance – that is, an enabling context rather than as a cause.

Such a view provides a sophisticated alternative to the reductive and emergent explanatory strategies advanced over the last century or so, all of which attribute direct causal roles to the material body in the production and understanding of meaningful human phenomena, including sexuality (see, e.g., Heinämaa, 2012; Moya & Larrain, 2016; Tolman, Bowman, & Fahs, 2014). Understanding human beings as embodied agents, thus, provides a way of taking both the body and agency seriously – as certainly we must do if we hope to understand human sexuality – while avoiding the pitfalls of naïve and incoherent attempts to get meaning out of meat. It also serves as a deterrent to making all sorts of facile category mistakes of various sorts – such as the common notion that sexual attraction and feelings of love *are really just* the result of oxytocin and dopamine activity in the limbic system (Schneiderman, Zagoory-Sharon, Leckman, & Feldman, 2012).

Embodiment is particularly important in experiencing and understanding sexuality not only because sexuality generally involves the body and bodily affordances, but, more importantly, because sex is instantiated in the physical body. For males, in addition to primary and secondary sex characteristics, every cell in the body is also male. For females, in addition to primary and secondary sex characteristics, every cell in the body is female. This biological fact seems to be immutable. And, in discussions of sexuality, sexual orientation, or sexual fluidity, biological sex is not one of the factors that is mutable. A significant part of the muddle in both academic and lay discussions of human sexuality arises from making fine, mostly rhetorical, distinctions between “sex” and “gender,” and the introduction into discussions of various terms referring to various “things” with very different ontological provenances (see, Kuby, 2015,

especially pp. 108-120). Unfortunately, this serves to keep the conversations fluid and imprecise, allowing for any number of claims that might make conversational or grammatical sense, but which are logically and/or ontologically incoherent (see, Trueman, 2020). One might state, for example, that “gender” is fluid, and in so doing cite differences in gender roles and gender identities, and then also propose that sex is a part of gender, so that sex too comes to be seen as similarly fluid – in spite of what the biological facts “on the ground,” so to speak, happen to be. In these types of discussions, careful definitions, conceptual consistency, and ontological clarity are usually not points of principle emphasis.

One important aspect of embodiment, then, is that the body witnesses, even at the cellular level, to the immutability of biological sex (and, therefore, biological gender).<sup>8</sup> Embodiment and sexual dimorphism also brings us face to face with sexual complementarity and gives tangible form to the natural connection of sexuality to fecundity and to the concrete otherness of others, including others not yet present (Levinas, 1985). Even granting that biological processes of development and maturation do occasionally not work out perfectly, a person’s sexual or, one could say, “gendered” embodiment, at the level of the body itself and not merely its outward appearance, is what it is, and is so in its concrete givenness. To the extent that embodiment undergirds identity, then, one’s sexual identity is likewise given. In other words, this is to say that, at the material level, our identity is immutable as well. For LDS Christians, and most other Christians, this truth can be stated even more directly, as it has been in *The Family: A*

*Proclamation to the World:*

All human beings – male and female – are created in the image of God. Each is a beloved spirit son or daughter of heavenly parents, and, as such, each has a divine nature and

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<sup>8</sup> This will hold as true of human beings, regardless of what future exercises in gene splicing or other technological tinkering might produce.



destiny. Gender is an essential characteristic of individual premortal, mortal, and eternal identity and purpose.

Furthermore, as this statement declares, there is more to the concept of “identity” than just what the body provides (i.e., sex/gender).

Western culture is quite taken with the notion that we can make of ourselves whatever we desire, and has been at least since the rise of Renaissance Humanism in the 14<sup>th</sup>, 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries. The brute facts of the material world and its resistance to us, however, impose strong pragmatic limitations on this self-creativity. Nonetheless, we do have significant power and significant leeway to create our non-biological selves. At the heart of this self-creation – the construction of an identity – is the human will and its capacity to imagine and to create and re-create. Though we can certainly construe the circumstances of our embodiment in a variety of ways, and apply to it a variety of meanings, our embodiment is not itself fully complicit in such creativity, it does not inexorably bend to the dictates of our will, but rather constrains and resists the inventiveness of our imagination. Thus, it makes more sense to talk about something like sexual *identity*, along with *preferences* and *orientations*, as being mutable (i.e., subject to creative construction through agentic action). Indeed, we have argued that such things likely are mutable – able to be constituted and re-constituted, done, undone, and redone – precisely because they have their being, their essence, only in agentic acts – even in the context, or perhaps especially in the context, of embodiment with all the possibilities and affordances that embodiment presents to us along with its inherent givenness. Thus, we can hope that mutability might bring about harmony with the given, rather than conflict with the immutable. It is in this context – i.e., while biological sex (or gender) is fixed and immutable, sexual identities, and such

things, are constructions which only agentic human beings can create – that we turn attention to the case for genuinely agentic sexuality.

### **Agentic Sexuality**

There is no aspect of our essential humanity that is more dynamic (i.e., mutable) than our agency. This dynamism does not attach to whether or not we *are* agents, but rather to how agency is deployed, and what it might produce. Agentic action is, in its essence, fluid and open-ended. To be human is to be an agent, and to be an agent is to be creative, to be intimately enmeshed in a world of possibility, purpose, and meaning. Agency is the essence of our mutability, our being able to change and do otherwise at any time. The lived world for us exists primarily as possibility and constraint, permeated by meaning and moral significance. Agentic beings are fluid and mutable, though most assuredly not infinitely so, particularly in light of the constraints of embodiment and the material world that resists us. Furthermore, we simply cannot bring material things into existence by thinking them or speaking them into existence. We cannot conjure. However, the fact that we are, ontologically, agentic beings is not itself mutable or subject to change. However, fluidity of action and mutability in the face of possibility, and in the flow of human events, is endemic to all human agents and definitive of agency itself.

This is not to say, however, that human agency, properly understood, ends up in a chaos of random reasons and impulses that would obviate any predictability or understanding of us and our behavior. On the contrary, the lifeworld in which human agency unfolds is not chaotic.<sup>9</sup> Chaos (i.e., random, unconstrained change) precludes meaningful reasons and thereby destroys meaningful agency. Sense can be made of people's agentic actions and their lifeworld. However,

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<sup>9</sup> Any chaos in the unfolding of agency would be of the sort that afflicts humankind generally whenever there is illness, developmental difficulties, impairments, or other things that would produce their chaos even in a completely determined world.

if sense is to be made of a person's agentic world, it must be made from the perspective of the particular agent him- or herself, rather than from some "extraspective theoretical (or abstracted) perspective" (Rychlak, 1988), which in the contemporary social science disciplines is generally based on assumptions developed and applied generically, and emphasizing hypothetical constructs, causal abstractions, natural forces, or the mechanical activities of meat and chemical. In the agentic view life is a constant and purposeful doing, undoing and redoing – in the sense of always being open-ended. In short, one might say that for human beings, "it's agency, all the time, and all the way down."<sup>10</sup> The reality of agentic action unfolds within the very hermeneutic circularity – or spiral trajectory – of life (Slife & Christensen, 2013). In other words, human agency innately entails that what is done is done, but can always be undone (or redone differently) for any or all of a potentially very large number of reasons. And, those reasons can also always be taken up anew (or put down again), taken on, or modified as we give ourselves over to (or hold ourselves back from) them, either fully or by degrees.

Human agency is, perhaps, best understood as a constant and endless procession of persons' "taking on" and "giving themselves over to" meaningful possibilities as we construe and construct our lives and ourselves within the possibility-rich (or sometimes, perhaps, possibility-poor) world in which we find ourselves – constantly living and acting with others and among things. It is for this reason that our agentic action in the realm of sexual matters is, *as in all other realms of human action*, contextual and fully participatory, involving others (both real and imagined). Further, it is in this light that agentic action in the realm of sexual matters is inescapably moral, always tethered to the givenness of life while simultaneously being telic and

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<sup>10</sup> This expression refers to the famous story about the defense of the thesis that the world does not just stand in space, but rather rests on the back of a giant tortoise. The answer to the question as to what the tortoise rests on is "Nothing, its tortoises, all the way down." In other words, agency is a fundamental way of being and not caused by or dependent on other things. It is originaive and irreducible (see Gantt, Williams, & Reynolds, 2014).

oriented to the rich possibilities that givenness always affords a rational moral agent. Sexuality as agentic meaning-making is inherently dynamic, as dynamic as any other kind of meaningful human action, consisting of “taking up” ideas, meanings, and possibilities, and “giving oneself over to” those meanings and possibilities – or, at other times, leaving certain meanings and possibilities behind – in a constant flow of living, deciding, acting, re-acting, doing, undoing, and doing over.

What is apparent in any lived-world, however, is that abstract metaphysical realities (in contrast to human meaning and purpose) are not so fluid or mutable. For example, agency and possibility are inherent in a proposition (and in the lived reality it represents) such as “Smith is a golfer,” or “Smith is an English speaker.” Such statements can only be understood as something that a person (i.e., Smith) – understood as an agent – is *doing*. Smith is a golfer because she golfs or is golf-ing. She is not necessarily bound to be a golfer indefinitely, nor is she metaphysically or necessarily a golfer. If she gives up golfing, then she ceases to be a golf-er. The world of human sexual understanding and activity, as opposed to the world of the metaphysically given, is inherently an agentic world of meaning and possibility, in which we actively and creatively immerse ourselves. What this means is that things such as sexual orientation, preference, attraction, and identity are actually descriptions of what a person is *doing*, not statements of metaphysical “types” or abstractions, or categorical identification of what a person *just is*. In other words, all of these aspects of our sexuality, since they are things we are doing, are things that can be undone, taken up anew, or put down. As agentic acts, they are the sort of things (i.e., possibilities) to which we can give ourselves over, or reserve ourselves from, as we take up some other possibilities – including the possibilities of desire itself. This is not to say that such agentic becoming otherwise is easy, as habits of thinking and acting are notoriously stubborn. It is to say,

though, that there are no *metaphysical* or *lawful* constraints on change, and no *powerful causal abstractions* exercising invisible, compulsive force and constraint on us. That aspect of our sexual nature which genuinely is metaphysically given, and thus not agentic or mutable (i.e., our gendered embodiment), provides the givenness, and a range of affordances and opportunities consistent with that reality, within which agentic sexuality can be meaningfully and purposefully expressed.

### **Agency as More than “Free Choice”**

Most opposition to the idea that sexuality is agentic, as I am proposing here, will likely be rooted in a particular understanding of human agency that has prevailed for centuries. This is the construal of agency as traditional libertarian free will or “radical choice” (Taylor, 1985). In this construal, agency is manifested most clearly and fundamentally in the capacity for making autonomous or free choices – i.e., choices made based on the unfettered will of the agent and the agent’s capacity to resist external influence (see Williams, 1992, 2005, 2017). It is important to note here that the belief in invisible, magically powerful abstractions is one of the sources of “influence” that are traditionally held to impact individual “free” choices (or attempts at choosing freely). If, however, the powerful abstractions developed in the discourse of our culture really do not exist, or have any real causal power in themselves, then their influence can lie only in our giving them credence, and allowing them to become the grounds for our “free” choices. But a choice made by an agent who gives credence to something that is not true, or is not “the case” is in fact not really free in the way freedom is usually understood. For example, if Smith, as an adult, chose always to sleep on the couch in his home because he believed (sincerely) that there was a monster under the full-sized bed in his apartment, and the monster was too large to fit under the couch, therefore the couch was a safer place to sleep, would we then be inclined to

grant that Smith's choice is really a *free* choice – even though he made the choice of his own free will? Would we not, in such a case, be more inclined to consider that Smith is not really exercising his agency because he is living in a false world, bestowing power, in the form of influence, on a false narrative (i.e., on an entity that does not in fact exist except in Smith's own narrative), and therefore has no real causal power except insofar as Smith's narrative grants such power in the very act of his choosing?

Similarly, cultural narratives can obviate freedom and negate human agency on at least two levels. First by creating powerful narratives about ourselves and our world in which invisible, powerful abstractions exist and control many aspects of our lives, including the choices we make based on reasons that reflect our belief in the reality of those forces, and, thus, our own impotence in the face of such forces' working in our lives. The second level on which our freedom can be negated has to do with whether the various reasons for which we might make our free choices actually reflect truth; that is, the world as it really is, including the truth of our own being-in-the-world.

The common view of agency as described above – as exercising one's freedom to choose in a situation despite influences to the contrary – does not constitute human agency as we really live it out in almost all the situations in which we find ourselves in the course of daily life. The common view tends to emphasize particular specifiable “choice points” and the exercise of agency in a particular situation by weighing alternatives and deliberating on possible choices, while resisting some influences and opting in the direction of other possible influences. The problem is that in actually living our lives we almost never do anything like this. A moment's reflection should be enough to convince us that there really are very few instances in any given day where we really go through the sort of detached, deliberative process of making a free choice

that the common view assumes. For the most part, as we go about living, we are just too busy doing what we want to do and what needs to be done. Of course, we might assume that true agency is brought out only on special occasions, but this line of thinking misses the ubiquity and the essence of our genuine agency. Our real human agency is not something we employ just on special, sometimes momentous occasions of careful, calculative deliberation. Rather, human agency is the substance of our being-in-the-world. It is the very “stuff” of which human life is composed. And, as such, our agency cannot be disentangled from our very living and acting as the sort of beings we are.

This alternative view of agency being developed here can be most readily understood by attending to the experience of agency as actually lived. If we focus on the countless agentic actions we perform in a given day – everything from choosing whether to get up or push the snooze button on the alarm, picking up a glass to drink and putting it down again in the spot we put it rather than somewhere else, making a purchase or foregoing it, phoning or texting a friend or putting it off, doing any one of perhaps hundreds of things we could purposely do in a given day – it becomes clear that we almost never actually stop, lay out competing alternatives, deliberate over them systematically, and then free ourselves from all influence we don’t want to influence us, and then exert our own will in order to decide the matter. The common libertarian model of agency is artificial at best, and incoherent at worst. Further, the model of agency as just “free choice” cannot be saved by claiming that the real deliberation and deciding is all done unconsciously, as some models assert (see, e.g., Akram, 2013; Shepherd & Mylopoulos, 2021). From a conceptual point of view, taking this position and relying on the existence of unconscious minds and/or subconscious processes creates more conceptual and moral problems than it could ever solve, and much worse conceptual problems than the ones we have laid out in our argument

about agency in this paper (e.g., the *homunculus problem* that results in our having two minds to explain instead of just one, etc.).

To understand how we really experience and exercise our agency, we have to focus not on deliberations and choice-making, but on the hundreds or even thousands of things (e.g., ideas, feelings, desires, beliefs, aspirations, worries, traditions, relationships, purposes, and the context of embodiment) that form the meaningful world of which we are always a part and in which we are always engaged. We are constantly accepting, rejecting, “taking up” the world, or a thought or feeling, accepting or “giving ourselves over” to an idea, a project, an interpretation, a priority, a mistake, a bit of slothfulness, giving ourselves over to our good judgments, or picking up and taking on an excuse for accepting what we really should not, and doing something else instead (Williams & Gantt, 2021). It really is quite unreasonable to believe that there are countless invisible, powerful, abstract causal influences, variables, or biological processes within us and around us, all operating beneath every physical, mental, emotional, and moral experience we have every day, and that these things are somehow connected to each of us as we move through time and the richness of our physical, mental, emotional, and moral lives. The truth is that there are no such unfathomable invisible, magical, abstract determining forces at work. Rather, quite simply, it is *we* (i.e., holistic, embodied, moral agents) who are at work. This manner of living constitutes the unique manner of being-in-the-world as only agentic beings can be. This is how the rationality that defines and characterizes human beings, and not other living creatures, unfolds in the life – the daily mode of living – of an agent. The crucial part of all this, however, is that agents, no matter how they happen to be in the world now, no matter how they are construing things, how they are “taking up” the world, or what they “giving themselves over” to,



can at any instant, for any of perhaps thousands of reasons and invitations, do otherwise . . . or not.

Within this understanding of agency, we can see that agency arises not from the fact that we can supposedly make deliberated decisions free from determining influence, subject only to our “will,” but rather that no matter what we as agents are doing, what decisions we are making in any given situation, it really is possible to do or be otherwise. And, even if it is not convenient or easy, it is always nonetheless possible to do *something* otherwise. Further, we should also note, the power to “do otherwise” comes not from standing apart from one’s life and world in order to deliberate about it, but rather it comes as we engage more fully and more seriously in the life we are living, considering things more broadly (or narrowly), adopting new perspectives, questioning ourselves, resurrecting or reconstructing memories, yielding to the Spirit, listening to our conscience, forgiving loved ones, losing ourselves in work . . . and the list goes on. Whatever meaning is “taken up” can be kept or put down, at any time, for a large and fluid number of reasons, any of which might be sufficient to be seized upon and thus to comprise a reason for action – or not. For genuine agents, therefore, whatever is started can be stopped, whatever has been done can be undone, or redone or modified in a potentially very large number of ways and for a potentially very large number of reasons. Agency then, we must be clear, is not some special capacity we have (like choosing from amongst hypothetical alternatives free from any influences we do not want). Agency as described here is the defining character of our very being, our being-in-the-world. It is not one trait or capacity among many. Rather, it is the very essence of our being as the kinds of beings we are. Agency is what we are – but it manifests itself always as what we do, and re-do, and un-do, and so on.

Most of the time in the course of a day, most of our agentic “taking up” and “giving over” are not elevated to any level of importance or awareness. However, they can be elevated, focused on, elaborated, and made meaningful – when, for a potentially large number of reasons (perhaps hundreds of reasons not fully articulated) they *become* important. A passage of scripture from the *Book of Mormon* offers an example of how agency can be understood as non-deliberative micro-choice that ultimately takes on importance as it comes to the forefront in a choice of great magnitude.

Wherefore, men are free according to the flesh; and all things are given them which are expedient unto man. And they are free to choose liberty and eternal life, through the great Mediator of all men, or to choose captivity and death, according to the captivity and power of the devil . . . . (2 Nephi 2:27)

Certainly, the decision between “liberty and eternal life” or “captivity and death” is unlikely to be one that can be or will be made at one magnificent, deliberative choice point. Surely, how one has lived one’s life will have agentially set the stage powerfully for any such decision as this. A more likely understanding of the choosing described here is based on the fact that a person’s “choosing” eternal life is really constituted by hundreds, if not thousands of “choosings” throughout one’s life, the “taking up or putting down,” and “giving oneself over or taking oneself back” that constitutes the rich, meaningful, moral life of agentic sons or daughters of God.

**And Ye Shall Know the Truth, and the Truth Shall Make You Free**

It needs to be understood, however, that if what we have just described here – i.e., agency as the innate capacity for taking-up or giving ourselves over to meanings for reasons that are always a part of our fluid, mutable being-in-the-world – were all there were to our human agency and to sexuality, neither would be much of a blessing. Indeed, if agency were just that, and only

that (i.e., just taking up the world and giving ourselves over to it without regard for just what it is we are taking up and what we are giving ourselves over to), it could hardly serve as the foundation for a moral life or the grounds for moral development. *Just* always being fluid and mutable, always able to do otherwise, would be at least as likely to lead to moral and epistemological relativism, immorality, and even chaos, as it would to lead to something good – to perfection of the soul. It would be just as likely to lead to sexual confusion and promiscuity as to sexual morality and sacred communion. *Just* doing otherwise may not lead to true freedom, but may lead us down any number of conceptual, relational, and moral dead ends.

What is required for genuine agency, an agency worth having, is access to and a genuine capacity for Truth. There must be a source of truth – that is, knowledge of things as they really are (e.g., D&C 93:24). When truth is available, always being able to “take up” and “give ourselves over to” things that are true, that “really are” is a great blessing and means of safety, progress, opportunity, and openness – the essence of freedom. Absent truth, and the capacity to grasp it and receive it, agency serves no useful purpose, and provides no meaningful freedom. When truth is available, agency can lead to what is usually referred to as “the good and flourishing life” (Thompson, Gill, & Goodson, 2020). Without truth, agency is meaningless. Without agency, truth is meaningless. After all, what good is truth if we cannot actually live it on purpose? Once again, modern scripture casts some light on the issue:

Wherefore, because that *Satan* rebelled against me, and *sought to destroy the agency of man*, which I, the Lord God, had given him, and also, that I should give unto him mine own power; by the power of mine Only Begotten, I caused that he should be cast down; And he became *Satan*, yea, even the devil, *the father of all lies*, to deceive and to blind

men, and to lead them captive at his will, even as many as would not hearken unto my voice. (Moses 4:3-4; emphasis added)

Agency is destroyed, or nullified, when truth is not available. The Christian truth of sexuality includes its being bound to covenant relationships. Further, it is intimately and inextricably connected to fecundity and the creating and rearing of families (or, at least, to being open and willing to give oneself to the possibility of doing so). In most Christian traditions, marriage is an ordinance or sacrament that believers enter into willingly, and as moral agents. Sexuality is thus located within the sacred and the agentic in Judeo-Christian traditions (see, Campbell, 2003; Lawler, 1996).

It has been common in the literature on human sexuality, both within scholarly discourse and within the lay culture, to contend that “sexuality” is not agentic. Often, this line of argument is based on the observation that sexuality is not agentic because it is phenomenologically (i.e., according to our lived-experience) not the case that people make the kind of special, deliberated decisions about most sexual matters employing the sort of detached, reflective process that libertarian models of free will require as the defining feature of libertarian forms of agency (see Bailey, Vasey, Diamond, Breedlove, Vilain, & Epprecht, 2016). In other words, many people resist the notion that sexuality is agentic because it just seems to be the case that no one actually deliberates, weighs options, resists unwanted influences, and then rationally, calculatingly, decides on their sexual identity, orientation, gender identity, sexual desires, and so on. Obviously, this is not how such things play themselves out. However, it is also true that this sort of deliberative choosing from amongst options is not how we make most any other important (non-sexual) decisions about ourselves either. This way of deciding and choosing is, indeed, not the natural or ordinary form human agency takes.

In the end, that conscious, deliberative choosing does not apply to sexual matters bears little relevance to our understanding of either sexuality or agency because that kind of choice-making really is artificial and yields understanding of very little even in other aspects of our lives. Therefore, affirming that one's sexuality is not the product of the calculative or deliberative making of free choices does *not* entail the conclusion that sexuality must therefore not be agentic in any important way. On the contrary, as our analysis of agency makes clear, when agency is properly understood in terms of our fundamental ontology as irrepressibly meaning-making moral agents, it becomes clear that matters of sexuality, just as all other aspects of our being-in-the-world, can and should be understood as what we are doing, not what we are caused to be or do by any material or abstract force. Consequently, and in principle, all such doings can be undone, redone, or done differently. This is, of course, not to say that all of the consequences of our agentic acts can be entirely undone, but only that the acts themselves surely did not have to happen as they did and the consequences of our agentic actions can, in many meaningful respects, be altered going forward. Thus, genuine human agency offers an understanding of ourselves in terms of what we *do* and not what we *are*, whether materially or as the convergence of hypothesized abstractions or physical causal forces. Rather, from the perspective we offer here, it is possible to understand ourselves, our identity, and our "sexuality" in terms of what we do, and, thus, at any time, what we do really is what and who we are. Understanding sexuality as agentic, as something we do, preserves meaning, moral purpose, and, most important of all, the genuine possibility of being and doing otherwise.

### **Conclusion**

Based on the foregoing analysis, we are brought to the conclusion that human sexuality is an agentic phenomenon in all of its manifestations. It comes from a "taking on" and a "giving

oneself over to” the meanings entailed in sexuality, sexual desires, and sexual possibility, as we encounter and engage them in the human relationships and purposive activities of our daily lives. In the light of this understanding, then, sexuality is neither something pushed upon us nor pulled out of us. It is no different from, and no more central to, our lives than any other meaningful phenomena we might take on and give ourselves over to. Although it may seem that we are pushed or pulled in matters of sexuality, it is because of any number of reasons based in our shared cultural meanings, and folklore of many types, that we take on and give ourselves over to sexual things and activities in ways consistent with any number of problematic theories, ideas, and folkloric tales.

In sexuality, as in all meaningful engagements in our lives, it takes effort to maintain who and what we think we are, or what we wish to be. This is the essence of our agency as embodied moral beings. As far as we know, it takes no effort for an oak tree, for example, to *be* an oak tree, or for a stone to *be* a stone. Such things simply are as they are.<sup>11</sup> And, for this very reason, there is no intrinsic *meaning* attached to being an oak tree or being a stone, nor does it seem to be the case that life means anything to them. This, however, is never the case with human agents because it takes effort to be and to do, and the constant *taking up* and *giving ourselves over to* is the essence of an agentic and meaningful life. The material world provides us with embodiment, and embodiment provides necessary context for and constraint on both the creative and stabilizing powers of agentic beings. Agentic living requires that we make peace with the givenness of embodiment, just as we must make peace with the passage of time, and the particular and individual characteristics, and even limitations, of embodiment and the facticity of the world. Embodiment provides as much in the form of affordances as it may in the form of

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<sup>11</sup> Some might argue that there are any number of chemical things going on in physical objects such as trees and stones. However, trees and stones are not the originative source of such natural processes.

constraints. Importantly, human agents can maximize those affordances. The view of sexuality we have developed here, as innately and fundamentally agentic, has implications for a wide variety of human activities, including diagnoses and therapies, relationships, and morality. It also has implications for our aspirations, our spirituality, and (perhaps most importantly) our understanding of what it means to be a human being as an eternal moral agent. Agency both reflects and consists in our very nature as the sort of beings we are. It must be remembered that agency as understood here is as eternal as the soul itself, and testifies to the eternal possibility of doing and being otherwise.

None of our analysis of agentic sexuality should be taken to mean that changes in sexual behavior, identity, orientation, or other manifestations, are easy. It is not easy. Indeed, it is often the work of a lifetime to create them, so it is not easy to undo them and create something else. To suggest that it is easy falls into the trap of assuming that agency is essentially libertarian free will, and that change of any sort is simply a matter of exercising one's will in a moment of radical choice. Thus, it is imperative to remember that agency as we have defined it and developed it here does *not* consist in the making of "free choices." Generally, we cannot simply change sexually relevant phenomena, especially those with long, deeply embedded and personally meaningful histories, by making a single decision to do so. In fact, such attempts might very likely produce frustration – as they would in most cases with other aspects of life. In the end, the most important aspect of this analysis, and the positive news it conveys, is that even if substantive changes in sexually relevant (or any other) actions and meanings in our lives do not come by single grand decisions, that does not rule out the possibility that changes can, in fact, come. How can such changes come? By doing differently in "taking up the world" or "putting it off," and "giving oneself over to" or "holding oneself back" in regard to any number

of alternative ideas, feelings, actions, and possibilities. There is almost never any grand single exercise of effort through which we are able transform for ourselves experientially significant things about ourselves. Rather, it is usually the case that there are dozens, or hundreds, or perhaps even thousands of small agentic acts through which doing becomes being. The account we offer here is, we believe, a fundamentally hopeful (and hope-filled) account of agency and sexuality. Ultimately, for LDS Christians, it is the offer of atonement extended by Jesus Christ Himself that provides the call, the possibility, the support, the power, and the welcome, in an agentic process of dealing with sexual issues – indeed, with all issues faced by moral agents in a meaningful world of possibilities and purposes. After all, only moral agents need a Savior.

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