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### **Sex and New Religions** FREE

Megan Goodwin

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### **Abstract and Keywords**

New religions have historically been sites of sexual experimentation, and popular imaginings of emergent and unconventional religions usually include the assumption that members engage in transgressive sexual practices. It is surprising, then, that so few scholars of new religions have focused on sexuality. In this chapter, I consider the role of sexual practice, sexual allegations, and sexuality studies in the consideration of new religions. I propose that sex both shapes and haunts new religions. Because sexuality studies attends to embodied difference and the social construction of sexual pathology, the field can and should inform theoretically rigorous scholarship of new religious movements.

Keywords: Sex, sexuality, gender, heteronormativity, cults, sex abuse, moral panic

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WE all know what happens in a cult. The word itself carries connotations of sexual intrigue, impropriety, even abuse (Winston 2009). New Religious Movements (NRMs) have historically been sites of sexual experimentation, and popular imaginings of emergent and unconventional religions usually include the assumption that members engage in transgressive sexual practices. It is surprising, then, that so few NRM scholars have focused on sexuality.<sup>1</sup> In this chapter, I consider the role of sexual practice, sexual allegations, and sexuality studies in the consideration of NRMs. I propose the following.

Sex shapes new religions. NRMs create space for unconventional modes of sexual practices and gender presentations. Many emergent groups strictly regulate members' sexuality, encouraging or even requiring transgressive practices to distance themselves from and correct mainstream culture. Some NRMs also deploy antigay rhetoric and practices, either during attempts to "mainstream" or to distance themselves from "fallen," presumably secular sexualities (Warner 2008). NRMs' interactions with mainstream religions or professedly secular institutions may also provide opportunities to

interrogate broader cultural attitudes about the relationship between religion and sexuality.

Sex haunts new religions. Emergent groups face suspicions of sexual deviance and coercion, regardless of their communities' mores or practices. While a significant number of NRMs encourage adherents in nonnormative sexual behaviors, the public response to such doctrines is massively disproportionate to the number of practitioners persuaded by or engaged in them. Mainstream religions, lawmakers, and media outlets often assume that participation in groups with restrictive sexual practices must be involuntary or irrational. Sexual difference renders new religions hypervisible and vulnerable to suspicious, invasive, or even violent responses from the mainstream culture.

Sex should inform the study of new religions. Sexuality studies provides insight into the ways NRMs use sexuality to create space for difference or broader acceptance of unconventional theologies, while often being ignored, mocked, and policed on the grounds of sexual transgression. Scholarly engagement with concerns of sexuality (p. 304) provides insight into NRMs' use of homophobic rhetoric to gain access to privilege, anticult panics about the coercion of women and children NRM members, the complex agency of such members, and the ways NRMs provide space for embodied difference. In these ways, the use of sexuality studies facilitates a more theoretically rigorous scholarship of NRMs.

## Thinking Sex and NRMs

Because NRMs are shaped and haunted by sexuality, scholars of new, marginal, and minority religions need to think critically about sex. The field of sexuality studies challenges cultural assumptions about what is "normal" to do with—to, on, in—one's body and interrogates the (primarily western) origins of ideas about bodily normalcy itself. Thinking critically about sex requires scholars to address how heteronormativity (the primacy and normalization of heterosexuality) shapes NRMs but also to consider how sexual identity, sexual object choice, gender presentation, and regulation of sexual behaviors manifest in NRMs. Certain embodied practices, identities, and presentations garner cultural privilege; others mark NRM members as seemingly legitimate targets of exclusion, intolerance, and violence. There is no space unmarked by cultural assumptions about sexuality, making sex a category of universal import.

There are several key tenets in the theorization of sexuality. First, sexuality shapes but cannot be reduced to gender, and vice versa. Normative sexuality creates expectations and compels performances of binary, hierarchical gender roles, which is to say

heteronormativity. Queer theorist Judith Butler suggests that heteronormativity *creates* gender by requiring binary roles. Butler calls this the “heterosexual matrix,” which “assumes that for bodies to make sense there must be a stable sex expressed through a stable gender (masculine expresses male, feminine expresses female) that is oppositionally and hierarchically defined through the compulsory practice of heterosexuality” (Butler 1990, p. 151). That is, normative sexuality makes sense of bodies in hierarchical, binary, reproductive terms.

For this reason, public discourse both lends sexual acts “an excess of significance” and identifies some sexual practices and identities as more moral, or normal, or healthy than other kinds (Rubin 1993, p. 11). In her seminal “Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality,” Gayle Rubin maps this cultural divide as a caste system or “charmed circle” of “Good, Normal, Natural, Blessed Sexualit[ies]” and “Bad, Abnormal, Unnatural, Damned Sexualit[ies]” (1993, p. 13). Those engaging in “normal” sexual acts are considered sane, respectable, law-abiding, and worthy of social mobility, institutional support, and marital benefits (Rubin 1993, p. 12). Unrepentant sexual transgressors may be accused of mental illness, disrespectability, and criminality, as well as restricted social and physical mobility, loss of institutional support, and economic sanctions (Rubin 1993, p. 12). This is to say that engaging in good or normative sexual practice confers privilege within contemporary Western cultures, while (p. 305) engaging in “bad” or transgressive sex garners social stigma and often negative material consequences.

Further, individuals or groups who engage in a single transgressive practice are often presumed likely to engage in others; Rubin refers to this as the “domino theory of sexual peril” (1993, p. 14). Normative sexuality posits a thin line between moral order and licentious pandemonium, “fear[ing] that if anything is permitted to cross this erotic DMZ, the barrier against scary sex will crumble and something unspeakable will skitter across” (Rubin 1993, p. 14). Transgressive sex thus fosters public anxiety in a recursive loop, as any “bad” sex stands as evidence for more to come.

The consistent association of NRMs with transgressive sexual practices makes the consideration of sexuality especially pertinent to NRM studies. Mainstream cultures often interpret unconventional religious beliefs or practices as evidence of sexual transgression, and engagement in sexual transgression often invites mainstream suspicion toward emergent theologies and praxes. NRMs have historically facilitated transgressive and experimental sex, including nonmonogamy, intergenerational relationships, and celibacy. Even sexually mainstream new religions are often accused of sexual impropriety (Dawson 2006, p. 126). As historian Michael Warner has noted, many “still fear and despise those whom they identify with sex,” despite public cultures saturated with sexual imagery (1999, pp. 21, 33). While the mass media facilitate unprecedented public discussions about sex, Warner argues, anyone associated with

“actual sex” can be “spectacularly demonized” (1999, p. 23). When identified publicly with sex, religious minorities can be and have been demonized in spectacular fashion, becoming targets for state and federal intervention and cast as folk devils in national moral panics (Goode and Ben-Yehuda 2009, p. 19). The association of NRMs with what Warner calls “sex in public” suggests that sexuality must be of particular concern to NRM scholars.

## Specters of Sexuality

The sexual mores and practices of new and marginal religions have historically been targets of popular suspicion and anxiety (Mosse 1985). Public intolerance for sexual difference often authorizes interference into religious minority practice, even absent evidence that transgressive sexuality has taken place (Jacobson and Burton 2011, p. xvii). Mainstream discussion of these marginal communities often pairs anxieties about sexual difference with titillating descriptions of sexual abuse, poring over the details of these harrowing tales. Though public officials often bemoan the alleged abuses, these same officials frequently linger over shocking particulars while excoriating religious minorities for their supposed prurience (Pagliarini 1999, p. 99).

It is true that a significant number of NRMs condone or even encourage nonnormative sexual behaviors for their adherents. Yet the public response to such doctrines or practices is massively disproportionate to the number of citizens persuaded by or engaged in them (Bennion 2011, p. 180; Givens 1997, pp. 42, 87). Minority religions are (p. 306) frequently suspected and accused of sexual deviance and even coercion regardless of their communities’ mores or practices (Davis 1960, pp. 213–214).

Why are NRMs so frequently accused of sexual transgression? Why do we assume we know what’s “really going on” in minority religious communities (Wessinger 2008)? Why is the burden of proof so often laid on defendants, rather than on prosecutors, in cases of suspected religiously motivated sexual abuse (Ross 2009, p. 410; Wright and Richardson 2011, p. 15)? Why, when sexual abuse of women and children is so prevalent, do we so commonly locate it within religious minority communities (Palmer 2011, p. 51)? In short, why do we so often suspect religious outsiders of sexual predation or coercion, and why does sex work so well as a tool for marginalizing suspect religiosities?

Several scholars have noted the efficacy of sexual suspicion as a method of discrediting minority beliefs and practices throughout the nation’s history. Mormon studies scholars Terryl Givens (1997) and Sarah Barringer Gordon (2002) provide insightful analysis of Mormon disenfranchisement on the grounds of sexual indecency during the nineteenth

century. Religious historians Lynn Neal and John Corrigan likewise insist that “the intertwining of religious differences with other forms of divergence—[specifically] the meaning of family, sexuality, and reproduction—continues to be central to the issue of intolerance generally” (2010, p. 81). Yet observing the frequency with which allegations of “bad” sex work to defame religious minorities provides a limited and ultimately unsatisfying explanation of NRMs’ bad reputation.

Public discourse tends to identify minority religious communities as especially prone to sexual transgression, duplicity, and violence, particularly of women members. Rubin notes that critics of nontraditional sexuality frequently assume that those who engage in transgressive sexual practices must be “uninformed, duped, or coerced” into doing so (2011, p. 29). This is, I have argued, particularly true in assumptions about participants in unconventional religio-sexual practices (Goodwin 2014, p. 5). Popular discussions of women members of NRMs frequently portray these women as irrational, trapped, and/or tragically misled.

It follows that religious people or groups who engage in nonnormative sexuality would meet with public suspicion, but this does not account for the prevalent assumption that NRMs are inherently sexually suspect. As I have argued elsewhere, religion and sex are co-constitutive terms (Goodwin 2014, p. 8). Certain beliefs, practices, people, groups, sentiments, or experiences are excluded from the category of “legitimate religion” even by purportedly secular logics. Anxieties regarding “bad” sex do not merely mark the boundaries of religious tolerance. Rather, such anxieties and the accusations of deviance that follow from them also work to promote normative religious and sexual practices.

However, mainstream religions and governments often assume that participation in groups with restrictive gender roles or sexual practices must be involuntary or irrational. Eileen Barker (1984), David Chidester (2003), and J. Z. Smith (1988) have all convincingly demonstrated that NRM members’ unconventional beliefs and practices are neither necessarily coerced nor illogical. Critics of NRMs nevertheless presume that charismatic leaders or cultural programming coerce or fool their devotees into (p. 307) transgressive sexual behaviors or seemingly oppressive gender roles. NRM critics and anticult activists—as well as mainstream media and politics—often portray adult male members as sexually predatory and oppressively patriarchal, and female, adolescent, and child NRM members as in need of rescue (Gibson 2010).

Professed concern for women and children has proved an extremely effective rhetorical strategy to marginalize NRMs. The 2008 raid on the Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (FLDS) Yearning for Zion Ranch in Eldorado, Texas, serves as a poignant example. In response to unsubstantiated allegations of institutionalized religious coercion and child sexual abuse, the polygynous FLDS community in Eldorado

suffered the “largest state custodial detention of children in U.S. history” (Schreinert and Richardson 2011, p. 259).

Popular accounts of plural marriage and “violent faith” (most notably Jon Krakauer’s *Under the Banner of Heaven*) often fail to account for the hundreds of Mormon fundamentalists—men, women, and children alike—who do not feel exploited by or coerced into their religious or sexual practices. The Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (DPFS)’ intervention, swayed in part by allegedly expert testimony before the state’s House of Representatives that polygyny is inherently abusive, alienated and terrified the women and children it sought to help without detaining a single male member of the community (Jacobson and Burton 2011, p. xviii).

While the Texas House of Representatives, DPFS, and other agencies involved in the unprecedented custody seizure insisted repeatedly that their actions were “not about religion,” these events demonstrate a compelling attempt to dissuade minority religious practice within—and by—the state of Texas (an exercise of authority, it is worth mentioning, that was backed by state and local law enforcement officials and armored personnel carriers). Authorities justified this effort in large part by insisting that plural marriage is necessarily exploitative of women and children. The case of *Texas v. Yearning for Zion* compellingly demonstrates the extent to which the free exercise of religion is frequently bounded by normative sexuality.

Significantly, neither Krakauer nor any of the legislative representatives, law enforcement officials, and social service providers involved in the events leading up to the raid on Yearning for Zion or in the raid itself condemn Mormon fundamentalists on religious grounds. Indeed, both the Texas Committee for Juvenile Justice and Family Issues and DPFS adamantly protested that their concerns and their intervention were “not about religion.” All parties insisted that their concern lay with the practice of plural marriage, which they unilaterally identified as exploitative and predatory.

In 2005, Rep. Harvey Hilderbran proposed a bill that directly targeted the FLDS community in Eldorado as a sexually suspect “fringe religious community” (House Bill 3006). During this hearing, the witnesses and members of the Texas House of Representatives were adamant about not targeting Mormon fundamentalism as a religion. As former Utah Attorney General Mark Shurtleff stated in his testimony about the FLDS: “we don’t want to persecute your religious beliefs. *It’s not about religion*. It’s about crimes and civil rights violations that you are committing in the name of your religion that we have a problem with, and we’re not going to stand for (p. 308) it” (Committee on Juvenile Justice and Family Issues 2005, 24:30). Such statements highlight the tension in these hearings between a professed commitment to religious

freedom and a pervasive suspicion about sexual predation among this minority religious community.

In April 2008, following these proceedings and a false report of sexual violence within the community, SWAT teams, helicopters, police vehicles, and an armored personnel carrier descended on the ranch to assist in the removal of 439 FLDS children—and 29 adult women mistakenly identified as children—from Yearning for Zion. DPFS's final report on the "Eldorado Incident," like the HB 3006 proceedings, defines the FLDS by the practice of polygyny; more significantly, the agency identified that practice as evidence of "neglectful supervision" of children (DPFS 2008, p. 19). DPFS found that the parents of 274 children (including 12 DPFS determined had been sexually assaulted) had subjected their children to neglect because they failed to "remove their child from a situation in which the child would be exposed to sexual abuse committed against another child within their families or households" (DPFS 2008, p. 3).<sup>2</sup> DPFS charged 124 people from 91 families with "neglectful supervision" because they allowed their children to live at the Ranch (DPFS 2008, pp. 3, 14–15; Duffy 2012, pp. 553–554). If upheld, persons thus charged have their names entered into Child Protective Services' abuse/neglect registry, are not allowed to work in some areas of child welfare, and may not be foster or adoptive parents in Texas (Wright and Richardson 2011, pp. 14–15).

In their disproportionate and militaristic actions, Texas law enforcement and DPFS emphasized that FLDS in its entirety—not the single alleged perpetrator originally investigated or the nine men eventually convicted of bigamy and sexual assault of children—was religiously and sexually suspect. In raiding Yearning for Zion, these agencies deployed normative understandings of proper sexual conduct to define and delimit legitimate religious practice.

The Yearning for Zion raid was not an isolated incident: Concern for women and children incited the disastrous 1993 raid on the Branch Davidian compound in Waco, Texas, and has incited the removal of more than 500 minors from Family International—a reformed instantiation of the Children of God—households between 1989 and 1993 (Shepherd and Shepherd 2011, p. 238). Popular depictions of the women and children of NRMs as victims and dupes of sexual coercion or gendered exploitation has incited widespread anxiety regarding and even violence toward marginal religions.

## Sexual Constructions of NRMs

Sexual practices, theologies, and expectations shape new religions. NRMs often deploy transgressive sexual practices and gender norms to distance themselves from and correct

mainstream culture. As I have shown, these transgressions render NRMs hypervisible and sometimes provoke suspicious, invasive, or even violent responses from the mainstream culture. But sex panics do not exhaust considerations of sexuality within (p. 309) NRMs. Such movements also use sexuality to create space for difference or secure access to privilege.

NRMs facilitate unconventional modes of sexual practice for a number of reasons. Often, sexual difference demonstrates a better, more theologically precise understanding between humans and the divine—as with the celibacy and arranged marriages required of members of the Unification Church. Sexual difference can be a strategy of deliberate distancing, separating NRMs from mainstream “fallen” cultures and purifying them in anticipation of more godly times to come. The Shakers, in anticipation of the world’s end, practiced gender segregation and celibacy. John Humphrey Noyes encouraged the Oneidan community to avoid romantic intimacy by mandating impermanent sexual relationships among members, known as complex marriage; Noyes also deployed male continence (onanism) and stirpiculture, a rudimentary eugenics program, to create more perfect children. Nonmonogamy can be an effective recruitment technique—as with the Children of God’s “flirty fishing,” a combination seduction-and-proselytization technique practiced during the mid-1970s until the late 1980s. Prolific procreation is often geared toward kingdom building, as with the Mormon fundamentalist practice of plural marriage or David Koresh’s “winning in the bedroom” scheme—Koresh intended to achieve religious domination by literally outbreeding his opposition. Finally, some NRMs view sex as a source of bodily pleasures to be celebrated: Wiccans declare that “all acts of love and pleasure” are the Goddess’s rituals. Sex is a multivalent and significant site of meaning making for a considerable number of NRMs.

Many NRMs also rhetorically position themselves against homosexuality as an identity and same-sex sexual object choice as practice. Late-nineteenth-century Latter-day Saints and Seventh-day Adventists had widely disparate views on sex, but by the middle of the twentieth century, Adventists and Mormons increasingly championed “dyadic gender roles” and actively condemned homosexuality (Vance 2008, p. 56). Both movements positioned homosexuality as contrary to American sexual norms, and thus contrary to their faith agendas. The Nation of Islam, by contrast, understands homosexuality as the result of white American culture’s emasculation of the black man: “when white society denies the black man the possibilities of being a real man, he runs the risk of degrading into a homosexual” (Gardell 1996, p. 336). The Seventh-day Adventists, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and the Nation of Islam all demonstrate comparable antigay rhetoric, though of the three movements only the LDS attempted to “cure” gay people through the use of electroshock therapy. For such groups, antigay rhetoric might be indicative of attempts to “mainstream” or to distance themselves from “fallen” or inferior sexualities (Warner 2004).<sup>3</sup>

Sexually transgressive NRMs—such as the Children of God, the Unification Church, and the Rajneesh Movement—have also historically distanced themselves from homosexuality. Mo Berg’s letters to his Children of God are illustrative of such discourse. David Brandt Berg (also known as Father David, or Mo—short for Moses) encouraged his followers to *show* potential converts Jesus’s love through “flirty fishing,” or evangelizing through sexual intercourse. The movement’s combination of a form of fundamentalist (p. 310) Christianity and free love (requiring members to remain nonmonogamous) was also contentious and ultimately led to allegations of incest, child molestation, and sexual coercion. The Children of God reorganized as The Family International in 1987 and officially discontinued all theologically sanctioned sexual difference; the group now solely emphasizes moderately procreative binary marital heterosexual practices.

The group’s sexually transgressive practices notwithstanding, Berg was adamantly opposed to sexual relationships between men and conflicted on sexual relationships between women. Three “Mo Letters,” Berg’s missives to his followers, are worth consideration in this matter: #292, “Women in Love,” published December 20, 1973; #719, “HOMOS! A Question of Sodomy?” published June 9, 1978; and #1110, “A Warning to All Sodomites!” published October 22, 1981. (A disciple named Peter wrote the third letter, but Berg and his wife echoed his sentiments at the end of the letter.) “Women in Love” addresses at length—thirteen single-spaced pages—female same-sex sexual object choice. Berg did not condone lesbianism: “It is certainly not normal or natural as God intended, therefore such Lesbianism is a perversion.” However, Berg suggested,

LESBIANISM SO-CALLED COULD POSSIBLY NECESSARILY BE A STOPGAP, A TEMPORARY INTERIM SOLUTION to a sexual need. But two girls can be very dear close friends without having to necessarily express it that way, although why not? I mean if they feel like it and they need it, why couldn’t they sleep with each other? If they get horny, why can’t they masturbate each other, love each other, comfort and caress each other, kiss each other and make each other feel good?

The sexually explicit nature of this letter is consistent with Berg’s other writings, and Berg explained at length that scripture did not forbid female–female sexual behaviors. He insisted, however, that sex between women should be temporary, as the ultimate goal was (nonmonogamous) marriage and producing more children. “Women in Love” also condemns male–male sexual object choice in no uncertain terms.

SODOMY DOESN’T APPEAL TO ME in any way, shape or form and never has! It just disgusts me and sickens me to even think about it! I’m not blaming the poor boys who have some kind of satanic perversion or demonic impulse that tries to drive them into that kind of a relationship. It’s really sad! I feel sorry for them and

they've got to pray and ask God to get them out of it and deliver them from that kind of a spirit—it's anti-Christ, anti-God, anti-Bible, anti-Nature!

Five years later, however, Berg reconsidered the issue of male homosexuality in "HOMOS! A Question of Sodomy?" Berg decried anal sex as "very harmful, dangerous destructive, perverted and damaging to the body, whether with men or women"—but "MERELY MASTURBATING EACH OTHER and sucking each other off, this doesn't really seem any different than having women do it for you." Berg admitted that he was uneasy with the idea of permitting male-male sexual practice but that "there's a possibility that it could be within the limits of the love of God, that two men could love each other that much as long as they did not do anything to each other which was damaging or harmful, either physically, morally, mentally or spiritually." Homosexual identity, whether male or female, should be understood as "anti-God, anti-nature," but (at this moment in the movement's history) homosexual behaviors short of anal intercourse were permissible.

In "A Warning to All Sodomites!" the Children of God eschewed all such ambivalence. Same-sex sexual practices, Berg's disciple explained, led to incest and pedophilia. "THERE'S NOTHING MORE DISGUSTING TO GOD OR US," the letter insisted. The Children of God were no longer willing to tolerate male same-sex sexual object choice, though the authors do not mention lesbianism. Throughout all three letters, Berg displayed a consistent concern for scriptural precedent and doctrinal purity, as well as the primacy of heterosexual coupling and procreative sex.

In addition to maintaining distance from mainstream culture, fostering purity among members, and a strict (albeit targeted) adherence to sacred texts, NRMs' deliberate excoriation of homosexuality might also read as an attempt by these movements to access cultural privilege by invoking heteronormative status (Goodwin 2009, p. 91). In this way, NRMs volley for social approbation among abjected countercultures, rather than challenging the premises of cultural disapproval: rather than reject anticult criticisms based on sexual normalcy, these groups maintain superiority over other, less sexually normative marginalized groups (McCloud 2004, p. 22).

## Conclusion

NRMs create space for unconventional modes of sexual practices and gender presentations. Sex shapes the practices of NRMs, even when the movements in question do not engage in sexually transgressive behaviors. A significant number of NRMs encourage adherents in nonnormative sexual behavior, often to reinforce claims of

religious legitimacy, authority, or purity. Such claims can manifest as a desire to distance religious difference from sexual difference, as with NRMs that reinforce their claims to theological and practical superiority with homophobic discourse.

Popular understandings of emergent religions often associate them with sexual deviance and coercion. Such anxieties have led to dire material consequences, as with the raid on the FLDS Yearning for Zion Ranch in Eldorado, Texas. Public response to theologically sanctioned sexual difference is massively disproportionate to the number of practitioners persuaded by or engaged in them and often justified by professed concern for women and children NRM members. Engaging in nonnormative sexual practices often heightens NRMs' visibility and vulnerability, but sexually mainstream emergent religions are not immune to similar suspicions and sanctions.

For these reasons, sexuality studies must inform the study of NRMs. NRMs create space for sexual difference, face accusations of sexual impropriety, and participate in the reification of sexual norms. The field of sexuality studies, with its attention to embodied difference and the social construction of sexual pathology, may thus facilitate more theoretically rigorous scholarship of NRMs. (p. 312)

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## Notes:

(1.) Sexuality is the key term of analysis in very few monographs on NRMs. Elizabeth Puttick's *Women in New Religions* (1997) and Lawrence Foster's *Religion and Sexuality: The Shakers, the Mormons, and the Oneida Community* (1991) are notable exceptions. Bogdan and Lewis's *Sexuality and New Religious Movements* (2014) volume is perhaps

the only collection to specifically focus on sexual ideologies and practices within emergent religious communities.

(2.) This finding directly contradicts that of the Texas Third Court of Appeals, which stated that “[t]he existence of the FLDS belief system as described by the Department’s witnesses, by itself, does not put children of FLDS parents in physical danger.” “ACLU Submits Brief In Texas FLDS Case Saying State Can’t Separate Families Based Solely On Beliefs” (American Civil Liberties Union, May 29, 2008), <http://www.aclu.org/print/religion-belief/aclu-submits-brief-texas-flds-case-saying-state-cant-separate-families-based-solely->.

(3.) Antigay rhetoric is not the defining characteristic of any of the movements in question, nor is homophobic discourse unique to NRMs. Indeed, as Michael Cobb suggests: “this expression of God’s hate, this expression of rancor toward those participating in unlawful sexual practices, comes not only from the [religious] fringe ... This hatred is mainstream” (2006, p. 3).

**Megan Goodwin**

Megan Goodwin is a Mellon Postdoctoral Fellow in Creative and Innovative Pedagogy in the Humanities and a Lecturer in Religious Studies at Bates College. She completed her Ph.D. in Religion and American Culture at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in 2014. Her work focuses on gender and sexuality in contemporary American minority religions.

