

Temple Marriage and Civil Divorce

September 12, 2008 by [Keller](#)

Recently FAIR (via [Ask the Apologist](#) feature) was queried about whether the Church's [website](#) was knowingly misusing the popular 6% divorce from temple marriage statistic. Its main promoter has been Daniel K. Judd. He gave a [BYU devotional](#) in 2006 and defended the 6% figure. A partial transcript of Judd's comments about his prior (2000) [LA Times](#) newspaper interview can be found [here](#). Judd explains that divorce statistics are very dependent on how one collects and calculates the data. My co-blogger, Steven Danderson, pointed out that the high divorce rates that people are most familiar with are calculated (for example by the government) on a yearly basis by dividing the number of recorded divorces by the number of recorded marriages. As will be shown, the research that Judd refers to uses a different counting scheme, which is nevertheless well within the norms of academic journals. I think Judd and the LDS Church can continue to use the figure in good faith.

It is kind of silly all the criticism it has gotten on ex-mormon forums and sites without anyone tracking the original research to see how the numbers were calculated. Even a neutral site like [this one](#) gets a lot of things wrong. The study used by Judd was reprinted in a [book](#) he edited for the Religious Studies Center. The original article used 1981 data and was published as "Religion and Family Formation" in *Review of Religious Research* June 1985, Vol. 26:4 by authors Tim Heaton and Kristen Goodman. Heaton's co-author was from the Church Correlation Department.

The Mormon data in the study was gathered by taking a random sample (n = 7446) of adults (18+) in the US and Canada based on Church records. They mailed or phoned surveys with a 81% response rate, but 15% (included in the 81%) came from the person's Bishop based on what he knew of the person aided by church membership records. Of the missing 19%, 4% refused to answer, 1% had died or had officially left the Church, and about 14% didn't respond (the authors likened that category of people who are Mormons, but who don't self identify as such. The self-identification problem is fairly typical in religious research, but scholars usually forge ahead after acknowledging the limitations. The divorce rates are calculated as number ever-divorced divided by the number ever-married. This percentage was compared to that found for Catholics and Protestants, using prior survey results over several years (this data not originally collected by Heaton and his co-author).

Let me quickly summarize the numbers for male and female divorce rates calculated this way:

Catholic: 19.8/23.1
 Liberal Protestant: 24.4/30.8
 Conservative Protestant: 27.7/30.9
 Mormon (total): 14.3/18.8

Compare those numbers to the 1999 Barna Survey (used [here](#)) which calculated its percentage by ever-divorced divided by total number of adults. In this calculation the denominator is relatively larger than ever-married population denominator used in the study above.

Non-denominational 34%
 Baptists: 29%
 Mainline Protestants: 25%
 Mormons: 24%
 Catholics: 21%
 Lutherans: 21%

As another baseline of comparison, Michael Quinn in *Mormon Hierarchy: Extensions of Power* page 828 has an entry for 26 JAN 1942 which reads:

" first counselor J. Reuben Clark tells reporter from Look magazine: "Our divorces are piling up." Church Historian's office in 1968 compiles divorce statistics since 1910 for temple marriages, "church civil" marriages, and "other civil" marriages. Although temple marriages have the lowest divorce rate, in 1910 there was one "temple divorce" (cancellation of sealing) for every 66 temple marriages performed that year, 1:41 in 1915, 1:34 in 1920, 1:27 in 1925, 1:30 in 1930, 1:23 in 1935, 1:27 in 1939, 1:17 in 1945, 1:31 in 1950. 1:30 in 1955, 1:19 in 1960 and 1965. Last rate for temple divorce is almost ten times higher than Utah's civil divorce rate [a] century earlier.

Finally readers will be interested in Tim Heaton's remarks at the [2002 FAIR conference](#) where he discussed studies that were then more up-to-date and estimated the active Mormon divorce rate using the governmental metric.

Filed Under: [General](#), [Temples](#)

Comments

Anne says
[September 13, 2008 at 1:14 am](#)

I've wondered about this from time to time. I'm civilly divorced, and have been for four years, but my sealing has not been broken because I haven't met anyone to remarry and therefore set the process in action. As far as my records in the ward are concerned, I am still married. In fact, my ward has more divorced single parents than it does married couples.

Keller says
[September 13, 2008 at 11:49 am](#)

That is a good point and one of the weaknesses in the 1985 Heaton results because of the fraction of Bishops that filled out the information for their ward members. There must have been cases where the Bishop was personally unaware of a divorce and the membership records weren't current either.

Debbie says
[February 18, 2009 at 8:57 pm](#)

What type of circumstances have to be proven to get a temple divorce, and do they usually keep the children sealed to the mother?

Keller says
[February 19, 2009 at 6:30 am](#)

Debbie, I have rather limited knowledge of what the steps can be taken in what circumstances and what the likely outcome will be, but I will try to address the most common situations and/or the most common principles that may be applied across a variety of situations.

I am not aware of the Church ever canceling out a child-parent seal. So, yes, the mother's seal with her children will remain in place after the divorce, as would the father's.

I think the Church prefers to leave the seal in place between divorced partners until the ex-wife is considering going through with a subsequent temple marriage.

There are three aspects of the marriage covenant that should be considered. 1) the promise between spouses to stay together and the blessing conditioned on mutual faithfulness to that promise (the ability to stay together throughout eternity). 2) The husband takes on an implied responsibility to economically provide for any children, something he remains accountable for even if aspect 1 collapses through civil divorce. 3) an individual's covenant with God has promised blessings of eternal life and exaltation (conditioned solely on individual faithfulness) which is intact regardless of the status of one's marital or former marital partner.

Note that Mormon vocabulary often treats temple marriage and temple sealing as interchangeable, when historically that has not been the case. A civil divorce puts closure on aspect 1, no marriage exists anymore, and going forward towards one's exaltation does not depend in any shape or form with ever getting back together as a marital couple. But I would suggest that the other aspects of the seal needs to remain intact, at least until new seal can renew and reformulate those covenants.

As per aspect 3, moving on towards exaltation after a divorce means repenting of any sins (including any that might have contributed to the divorce) and speculatively (since descriptions of exaltation usually depict a marital state) enter into a more successful marriage at some point (lack of adequate opportunity in this lifetime, presumably will not hold someone back in post-mortality if individual faithfulness is sufficient.)

When an ex-wife wants to enter into a new temple marriage and receive a new sealing, she can apply for a sealing cancellation. When an ex-husband wants to enter into a new temple marriage and receive a new sealing, he can apply for a sealing clearance. Either of these has to go through one's bishop and stake presidency and approved by the First Presidency before a new temple marriage is allowed.

I think aspect 2 may be the real reason why what happens to the original seal in case of remarriage, is slightly different for an ex-husband than it is for an ex-wife. While these things may have developed from our polygynous heritage, current posthumous sealing practices render such considerations (such as former speculation that there will be polygyny in heaven but no polyandry) irrelevant in my opinion.

Basically either process is like the steps taken in the temple worthiness interview except there is now added accountability and seriousness. The Church does not want to be a party who violate the spirit of the Law of Chastity through serial monogamy. They have historically always been concerned with not enabling "deadbeat dads." There may be some hesitancy with endorsing a new marriage if there are unresolved sins (like adultery, abuse, addictions) that caused the original divorce and would likely have the same effect on the new marriage. I think that the appeals process aids the level of discernment ecclesiastical leaders can exercise. By (sometimes) consulting the ex-spouse, sometimes these problems come to light, that wouldn't otherwise.

I hope some of that insight helps or people with more experience than I on this issue will chime in.

Theodore Brandley says
[February 19, 2009 at 10:03 am](#)

That covers it quite well. The Brethren encourage members not to cancel the sealing until they are going to be sealed to someone else because, as Keller has pointed out, it cancels the other promised blessings. I would just like to add that even if a divorced person passes into the next life with the sealing still intact it does not mean that one will have to remain sealed to someone they do not want. Personal choice and common consent are rock-bottom principle of the Gospel. Every worthy sister who so desires will be sealed eternally to a worthy man of her choice (and his). Also, the temple sealing between a man and his wife is only valid for those who are worthy of the Celestial Kingdom.

Keller says
[February 19, 2009 at 4:09 pm](#)

Since I brought up the plural marriage issue in regards to multiple sealings, I thought it would be of interest to quote (with her permission and my gratitude) H.K. Bialik's (of <http://theprogmo.blogspot.com/>) fame) thoughts on the matter:

" Many Church members past and present have had opinions on what will happen in the afterlife in regards to polygamy, but we simply do not know. Not even our leaders know (or if they do, they are keeping it a secret). It is true that a man can be sealed to more than one woman, and it is also true that a woman can be sealed to more than one man. The latter is less common, but it has been known to occur, both when doing temple work for deceased women, and for women whose husbands have passed away while they were still young. How it will be sorted out is not known.

The following is a quote taken from [an interview with Dallin H. Oaks](#)

*" HW: There still is some confusion in this world. Polygamy is definitively and unequivocally disallowed in this world. What will happen in the next? There is a perception that polygamy is part of the afterlife. Could you talk a little about that?
 DHO: If I talked about that I'd be making doctrinal statements where the prophet has not chosen to make doctrinal statements, so I think I shouldn't say anything except to affirm that a lot of people, myself included, are in multiple-marriage situations. Look at the significance of that. There are a lot of people that live on this earth that have been married to more than one person. Sometimes those marriages have ended with death; sometimes they've ended with divorce. What does the next life mean to them in relation to a covenant they once made and so on? I don't think those people have much of an answer for that question. It might not bother them because they don't believe that people will live as married couples in the next life. And if they don't make and live for the covenants to do that, [as for themselves] they're right! But for people who live in the belief, as I do, that marriage relations can be for eternity, then you must say, "What will life be in the next life, when you're married to more than one wife for eternity?" I have to say I don't know. But I know that I've made those covenants, and I believe if I am true to the covenants that the blessing that's anticipated here will be realized in the next life. How? Why, I don't know.*

My opinion is that no one will be forced into a marriage that they are uncomfortable with. Today we chose whom we marry, and I feel it is no different in the after life. I also don't feel that anyone can take on additional spouses without their current spouse's permission. But again, this is my opinion.

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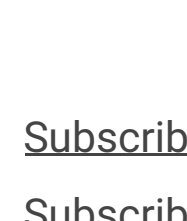
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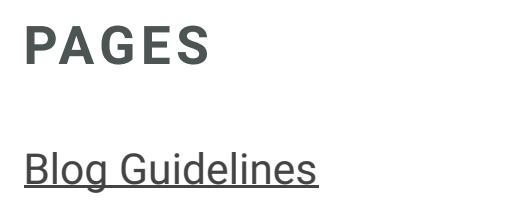
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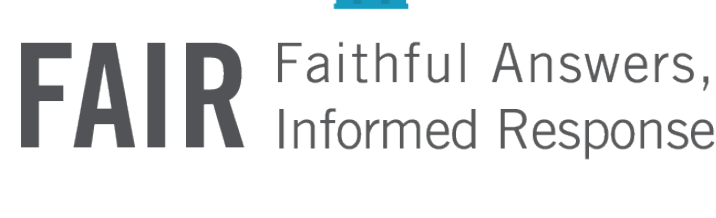
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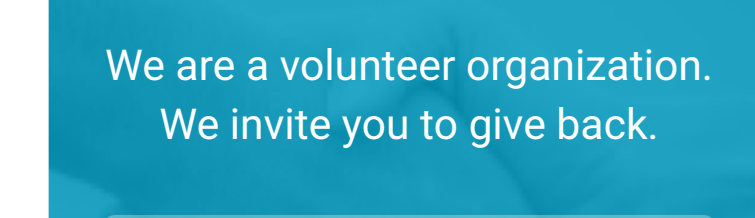
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