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Bountiful's plural marriages

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Abstract

Bountiful, British Columbia is Canada's only openly polygamous community. Public discussions about Bountiful suggest that the only form of marriage practised there is polygamous, and that this is usually harmful to women and children. This article suggests that this monolithic representation of marriage in Bountiful misses the conjugal pluralism that exists in this community. Part I sets out the typical portrayal of marriage in Bountiful offered by Canadian public and political discussions. Part II contrasts this portrayal with five stories about marriage in Bountiful that the author observed or was told about while conducting field research. These stories indicate that conjugal heterogeneity is both existent and accepted in Bountiful. They also suggest that, in becoming and being a wife in Bountiful, women can experience varying degrees of choice and agency. All of this is relevant to exploring how a fuller recognition of the conjugal diversity and choices that may exist in a place like Bountiful might affect formal juridical approaches to polygamy.

Introduction

While it cannot be situated on any map, many people in Canada have a general sense of where 'Bountiful' is and what it is known for. Home to about 1,000 members of the Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (FLDS), this community sitting at the brink of the British Columbia–Idaho border has come under intense social and political scrutiny because of its open adherence to plural marriage. It is a place cast as Canada's only open 'polygamist cult'[1] and has drawn extensive attention because, while polygamy is criminally prohibited in Canada,[2] Bountiful's residents have adopted this practice for decades without state

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1 British Columbia, Legislative Assembly 2008, *Official Report of Debates of the Legislative Assembly (Hansard)*, No. 9 at 12183 (B. Bennett).

2 'Polygamy' is prohibited under the Criminal Code of Canada, R.S.C. 1985, c. C-46, s. 293(1) which states:

> '*293*. (1) Every one who
>
> *(a)* practises or enters into or in any manner agrees or consents to practise or enter into
> (i) any form of polygamy, or
> (ii) any kind of conjugal union with more than one person at the same time,
> whether or not it is by law recognized as a binding form of marriage, or
>
> *(b)* celebrates, assists or is a party to a rite, ceremony, contract or consent that purports to sanction a relationship mentioned in subparagraph (*a*)(i) or (ii),
> is guilty of an indictable offence and liable to imprisonment for a term not exceeding five years.

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interference.[3] This situation changed, however, when two male community leaders were arrested on polygamy charges in January 2009.[4] These charges were recently quashed, but on the basis of a judicial finding that the province's Attorney General acted without jurisdiction in pursuing them.[5] The substantive question as to whether Canada's criminalisation of polygamy is appropriate, given constitutional guarantees of religious freedom, liberty and equality,[6] remains unanswered and plural spouses continue to be vulnerable to state prosecution for their marital choices.

Contemporary discussions about Bountiful, both before and after the 2009 arrests, have been primarily normative, concentrating on whether the state should tolerate the community's adherence to plural marriage in the name of religious freedom, particularly given gender equality concerns associated with this practice. The debate has received considerable attention but has unfolded without rigorous examination of polygamy's actual implications for plural wives, and without awareness of the lived experiences of Bountiful's constituents. Rather, the public focus on this community has cast it simply as an essentially polygamous space, hostile to the interests and safety of women and children.

A closer, 'on the ground', look at Bountiful suggests other possible insights about conjugal partnering in this place. It indicates that polygamy continues to be an important practice for some in family ordering, with its relevance stemming both from religious dictates and from the social and economic benefits it can engender for families, and for many women.[7] However, observations within Bountiful might also offer a glimpse into the diversity in marital practices that exists and is accepted within this space. One will find, within Bountiful, not just polygamy but also monogamous marriage, unmarried cohabitation, same-sex marriage and divorce. These relational forms, though, have not been the subject of public attention about Bountiful; rather, the news about this community continues to be the polygamy that goes on there in the face of law's explicit rejection of the practice.

In this article, I explore how the rather flat, one-dimensional picture of polygamy in Bountiful offered by public representations of this community does not capture the conjugal pluralism that exists there. I do this by first presenting, in Part I, an overview of the way that marriage in Bountiful is typically presented in Canadian public and political realms. An analysis of recent media publications and legislative debates portray Bountiful as a space dominated by polygamy and as a site where girls and women are subject to coercion, abuse, child marriage and international trafficking. This image of Bountiful helps rationalise state interactions with this community, primarily through criminal law. Then, in Part II, I draw on data from qualitative research interviews conducted within Bountiful to map out five stories, which suggest that marriage in this community may involve more than polygamous unions involving unwilling brides. These stories provide a sense of the conjugal pluralism that seems to exist within Bountiful, which texture the monolithic depictions of this community typically offered in the public media. While none of the stories presented here is meant to be cast as generalisable or representative of a 'typical' marriage in this community, taken together these narratives do offer a helpful counterpoint to the way in which Bountiful has been represented to the Canadian public.

In setting out different narratives about marriage in Bountiful, I invite readers to contemplate the relevance of thinking that, insofar as marriage is concerned, there might be more going on in this community than polygamy and coercion. The stories below suggest that at least some women in this

3 Since polygamy was first prohibited in Canada, just one successful prosecution for this offence has occurred and this more than a century ago. The case involved a member of the Kainai first nation. *The Queen v. Bear's Shin Bone* (1899), 3 C.C.C. 329 (S.C. N.W.T. (S. Alta. Jud. Dist.)). See also Carter (2008, pp. 13–14, 222–23).

4 See Austen (2009); Coyne (2009).

5 *Blackmore v. British Columbia (Attorney General)*, 2009 BCSC 1299.

6 See *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, Part I of the Constitution Act, 1982, being Schedule B to the Canada Act 1982 (U.K.), 1982, c. 11, ss. 2(a), 7 and 15(1) respectively.

7 Campbell (2009).

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community make choices about conjugality, and are not necessarily bound to be polygamous wives. These women also hold divergent values and perceptions in regard to marriage and spousal life. And the role that state law plays in each of their narratives differs; in some, formal rules seem altogether irrelevant, while in others, they appear to be a primary factor in the protagonists' conjugal choices. Further, as suggested, these stories indicate a degree of tolerance and diversity that one might not expect in a community like Bountiful, where the theological teachings on marriage are conservative and patriarchal.

It should be stated plainly that this is not an article that stakes out a normative argument about whether or not polygamy is 'bad' or 'harmful' for women; this article, in fact, deliberately resists drawing a conclusion on this question. As noted in the discussion about methodology that follows, the data on which this article draws is not quantitatively sufficient to offer a definite sense of the 'typical' experience of a polygamous wife. Instead, the analysis here reflects on the way that marriage is celebrated and practised in one religious community that has come under heightened legal, political and social scrutiny based on two key assumptions: (1) that marriage in this community is always heterosexual and polygamous; and (2) that women in this place have little choice about whether, how and whom to marry. This article thus examines how these assumptions are conveyed publicly, and proceeds to present five narratives that call these assumptions into question. Specifically, these narratives indicate that conjugal heterogeneity is both existent and accepted in Bountiful. They further suggest that, in becoming and being a wife in Bountiful, women can experience varying degrees of choice and agency. For law, these indications are relevant to exploring how a fuller recognition of the conjugal diversity and choices that may exist in a place like Bountiful might affect formal juridical approaches to polygamy.

As a final preliminary point, a brief word about methodology and context is in order. This article is part of a larger project premised on accessing the stories of women living in Bountiful, as a community known for being openly polygamous. My goal in this project was to gather an understanding as to how polygamy is lived by women in Bountiful, particularly to assess whether presumptions that seem to drive law's approach to polygamy are reflected in the experiences of this community's women. I have made two separate trips to Bountiful, one of five days in 2008, and one of seven days in 2009.[8] During these visits, I conducted twenty-two individual interviews, three focus group discussions and two interviews with two participants together. I have interviewed twenty-two women in total, and spoken to numerous others off the record, who opted not to participate in this research in a formal setting. In this article, I draw on data deriving from these interviews, and from my observations while in Bountiful, to present the five separate narratives set out in Part II, which reflect the plurality of marital relationships I encountered in this place.

Part I: the public presentation of Bountiful

Public preoccupations about Bountiful have focused on the apparent harm that polygamy inflicts upon girls and women. Concerns are substantiated by basic numbers. That is, with few exceptions, polygamous societies involve men with plural wives, and not the reverse.[9] Thus, because men and women do not have equal entitlements in marriage, polygamy has been cast as a 'fundamentally unequal relationship',[10] which allows women to be 'treated as chattels and allocated as concubines

8 A fuller discussion on the methodology followed in this project is presented in an earlier article (Campbell, 2009) that also draws on research developed as part of this project. See also Campbell (2008), which sets out the methodological challenges of a project that purports to gather empirical information about women living in closed religious communities.

9 Campbell (2005).

10 Professor Nicholas Bala, cited in Javed (2008a).

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into harems'.[11] Some empirical studies of polygamy in different international contexts *have* identified abuse and unhappiness on the part of plural wives.[12] Yet media reports and political commentary alleging such repression for Bountiful's women rarely make reference to this literature. As the examples below suggest, public statements seem simply to assume that the plural marriage practised in Bountiful results, irrefutably, in harm to women:

> 'Invariably, where there's polygamy there's abuse of women.'[13]
>
> 'The British Columbia children and women on our television screens from Texas recently illustrate that we must take action to support women and children trapped in this polygamist cult.'[14]
>
> 'People across the province are concerned for the women and children in Bountiful. The people of BC are tired of talk. They want to see some action to protect those women and children from potential abuse and human rights violations.'[15]

The presumed synonymy between polygamy and misogyny in Bountiful is suggested also in a special prosecutor's report commissioned in 2007 by the then Attorney General of British Columbia, Wally Oppal, to investigate the propriety of laying criminal charges in this community. While he ultimately advised against prosecution in favour of a court reference to test the validity of s.293(1) of the *Criminal Code*, Richard Peck, QC, the author of this report, stated:

> 'I have come to the conclusion that polygamy itself is at the root of the problem. Polygamy is the underlying phenomenon from which all the other alleged harms flow, and the public interest would best be served by addressing it directly.'[16]

Although Peck went on to refer to a 'substantial body of scholarship' suggesting polygamy's social harms, his report did not include any specific references. The report also neglected to acknowledge that scholarship on polygamy's implications for women is actually equivocal; some sources suggest harmful results for women, while others indicate that women may develop considerable agency and authority within plural marriage societies. Furthermore, most empirical work on plural marriage has been developed primarily in foreign polygamous societies where the social, economic and political circumstances of women typically do not match those experienced by women in Canada, and thus cannot be extrapolated without qualification to Bountiful.[17]

Two additional key ideas emerge in popular stories about marriage in Bountiful. A first relates to under-age marriage. Several texts on FLDS communities suggest that arranged or compelled marriages are common in these places, often involving teenage girls and men decades their senior.[18] This imagery of premature brides marrying male elders has supported efforts to bring this community under close legal and social scrutiny. Indeed, the media attention that befell Winston Blackmore, one of the two men from Bountiful charged with plural marriage in January 2009, focused primarily on his

11 O'Malley (2007).

12 See, e.g., Al-Krenawi (2001); Al-Krenawi & Graham (1999); Peters (1994); Starr & Brilmayer (2003).

13 Former Attorney General, Wally Oppal, quoted in CanWest MediaWorks Publications (2007).

14 British Columbia, Legislative Assembly 2008, *Official Report of Debates of the Legislative Assembly (Hansard)*, No. 9 at 12183 (B. Bennett).

15 *Ibid.* at p. 11212 (L. Krog).

16 Peck (2007).

17 For a full discussion of the global scholarship on the implications of polygamy, and its overall equivocal nature, see Campbell (2005).

18 BC Ministry of Women's Equality Committee on Polygamous Issues (1993); Ward (2004); Palmer & Perrin (2004); Peters (1994). See contra Forbes (2002–2003) and D'Amour (2004).

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alleged relationships with '9 child brides'.[19] Second, Bountiful's marriages are often cast as dependent on an ongoing exchange of young women between this community and affiliated FLDS sects in the United States. These migration practices have been consistently referred to as 'trafficking',[20] suggesting that such cross-border movement happens in a surreptitious fashion, without consultation or consent from the women concerned, and for illicit purposes.

Apart from these concerns pertaining to gender equality, one other important current driving public conversations about Bountiful deserves mention. It is rooted in an argument that the community's nuptial practices undermine core Canadian values pertaining to family and marriage. Some commentary suggests that, if tolerated by law, polygamy in Bountiful would threaten the entire institution of marriage, and possibly even Canadian social cohesion. The current federal government stated that the polygamy charges brought against two men in Bountiful would not be dropped, despite the potential constitutional problems associated with the offence, given that the practice undermines gender quality, dignity and the rule of law. According to the Office of the Prime Minister, 'It is these values that unite us as Canadians. [. . .] The practice of polygamy represents a clear challenge to those unifying values."[21]

This idea is echoed in other writing on polygamy, which makes explicit suggestions about the practice's non-Western associations. Comments have thus referred to the 'Christian' rejection of polygamy,[22] and the fear that permitting polygamy, or even allowing it to go unprosecuted in Bountiful, would pave the way to 'unfettered religious practice' and tolerance for 'other repugnant practices, such as female genital mutilation' in Canada.[23] For some, then, cracking down on polygamy, and on Bountiful more specifically, is justified in the interest of preventing religious normativity from overpowering state law, perhaps requiring a recognition of '*la normativité chrétienne sécularisée comme nouvelle norme commune applicable à tous*'.[24]

This discourse, which pitches polygamy in Bountiful as a foreign practice, in a clash with 'Canadian' marriage ideals, is not new. Shortly after Confederation, the issue of plural marriage was debated, and there again a focus emerged on particular groups of *people*, rather than the *practice* itself. Specifically, attention was given in the 1890 parliamentary debates to the propriety of allowing Mormons from the US to immigrate to Canada. While recognising the general ability of many Mormon farmers to settle and cultivate land – clearly an attractive attribute during this period of western settlement – questions were raised about their desirability as an immigrant class because of their marital practices.[25] Polygamy was at the heart of the controversy, labelled a 'serious moral and national ulcer',[26] an 'abomination',[27] and a 'peculiar institution'.[28] That same year, the first Canadian

19 According to evidence deposited by the Crown, Blackmore was allegedly married 'celestially' to four 15-year-olds, two 16-year-olds and three 17-year-olds; Bramham (2009).

20 British Columbia, Legislative Assembly 2008, *Official Report of Debates of the Legislative Assembly (Hansard)*, No. 9 at 12183 (B. Bennett); CanWest MediaWorks Publications (2007).

21 Mayeda (2009). See also Ferretti (2009), who suggests that accepting polygamy and other practices rooted in religious norms threatens a shared history and culture.

22 Javed (2008b).

23 Bramham (2007).

24 Ferretti (2009). This view has, however, been ardently criticised by scholars who have explored the historical and current implications of formal rules on polygamy for cultural, racial, religious and sexual minorities; see Denike (forthcoming 2010); Ertman (forthcoming 2010); Carter (2008); Drummond (2009).

25 Canada, House of Commons 1890, *Debates*, vol. 30, at 3178 (Mr. Charlton).

26 *Ibid.* at 3177 (Mr. Mulock).

27 *Ibid.* at 3178 (Mr. McMullen).

28 *Ibid.* at 3180 (Sir John A. Macdonald).

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prime minister, Sir John A. Macdonald, insisted that the 'laws of Canada' would be followed regardless of any immigrant group's private conjugal practices:

> 'Her Majesty has a good many British subjects who are Mohammedans, and if they came here we would be obliged to receive them; but whether they are Mohammedans or Mormons, when they come here they must obey the laws of Canada.'[29]

As these comments indicate, conversations about polygamy have been bundled in broader discussions about the legal treatment, integration and accommodation of 'the other', that is, of minority groups whose family practices appear unconventional. Now, in 2010, Bountiful represents one such 'other' group in Canada. Discussions about this community reflect uncertainty, hesitation and, perhaps, intolerance, in relation to an unfamiliar, un-Christian, marital form. It is pertinent, however, to ask what spousal relationships in Bountiful actually look like, and whether they conform to the public representations of married life in this community put forward in the media.

The discussion that follows offers five different 'marriage stories' drawn from interviews with women in Bountiful in 2008 and 2009. They are presented as case-studies highlighting some of the community's diversity in spousal relationships, and contrasting common images of the Bountiful marriage as statically and homogeneously polygamous and unhappy for women. Contemplating these stories offers a fuller sense of the complexity of conjugal life in this place, and provides some insight into the different ways in which spousal relationships may be experienced and valued there.

Part II: plural marriage stories

Each of the five marriage stories presented in this part is quite distinct, although each alludes to changes and diversity within Bountiful and the FLDS Church in regard to ideas and conceptions about conjugal life. In this way, the stories overall suggest the dynamic nature of marriage in this community. As noted in the 'Introduction', the goal in presenting these stories is not to offer a final normative comment on polygamy and its implications for women. Instead, what follows is intended to suggest the possibility of *marital pluralism* within Bountiful, a community typically appreciated as a conservative religious space committed exclusively and unequivocally to polygamy.

Bountiful's big, 'untraditional' wedding: Rachel and Jack[30]

This presentation of marriage stories starts off with a discussion about a wedding that took place in Bountiful during my second visit there in June 2009. The features of this event that made it exceptional by Bountiful's standards would have rendered it quite ordinary in many other places. The wedding united a couple in their early twenties who had been engaged for about one year. On their big day, the bride wore a white gown, and the groom, a handsome, dark suit. The wedding attendants, fourteen in total, were dressed in the latest bridal fashions. The couple was married on a sunny June afternoon in a courtyard decorated with bales of hay, flowers and cowboy attire. Their ceremony was officiated by a hip, fifty-something justice of the peace from the nearby town of Creston who seemed almost oblivious to her location as she enunciated the BC wedding vows, with their emphasis on matrimony as a 'legal state' and a 'high and serious state' into which 'two persons' unite, and to which there can be no known 'legal impediment'.[31] The couple responded with the requisite 'I do' in exactly the right places, and ended the ceremony with their first nuptial kiss

29 *Ibid.*, also cited in Carter (2008, p. 44).

30 For all participants with the exception of Shalina and Lorraine, pseudonyms are used.

31 British Columbia Vital Statistics Agency, *The Marriage Ceremony, available at* www.vs.gov.bc.ca/marriage/pdf/ceremony.pdf.

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before 400 guests. A reception at the community school followed, where guests gathered for dinner and a tiered white wedding cake sliced by the couple with a serving set embossed with their names and wedding date.

Unlike the four other stories about marriage that follow, I never had occasion to speak to either spouse 'on the record'. The young bride and groom, 'Rachel' and 'Jack', were not even sure they wanted me and my two research assistants to attend their wedding. Yet while I exchanged only a few words with the couple, their story and the significance of their wedding was the focal point of community attention and chatter over an entire weekend. Traditional weddings in Bountiful are small and private. Customarily, spousal unions were arranged by a couple's family and community leaders, and the bride and groom often would not know each other until days – or even hours – before their wedding, although it is now the case that more couples 'court' before marriage.[32] Civil law is also usually absent from these celebrations; couples in Bountiful have traditionally been 'married' by Church leaders, and if the union was monogamous, it would be registered formally later on. Rachel and Jack's ceremony was thus seen, in the words of one participant, as 'a whole new era' (Participant 1). This was not only because the marriage was monogamous and so explicitly civil, nor because of the elaborate planning and detail associated with the ceremony. Rather, the event united two FLDS-affiliated communities. Before their wedding, Jack and Rachel had a long-distance courtship, with Jack residing in Bountiful and Rachel near Salt Lake City, Utah. Their wedding, ostensibly couched in tremendous romance, was also a practical union meant to expand marriage opportunities for two similar communities concerned about crossed bloodlines within their respective groups, and about the possibility of younger members being drawn to marry outside their faith community (Participant 1).

In many ways, Rachel and Jack's wedding reflects strict legal compliance: a public, civil ceremony; the union of a young, but 'of age', couple who had spent time before their wedding day developing the early stages of their relationship; and their unhesitant assertion of consent to matrimony before the many friends and family members in attendance. Perhaps the most explicit 'law-abiding' moment of the ceremony occurred in the moments leading up to it, watching the groom's father drive away from the event. As one of the two men on bail pending trial for polygamy, this man had been counselled not to attend the ceremony, probably to avoid misplaced allegations in connection with his bail conditions, which required him not to perform marriages or get married himself.

Different takes on this marriage story are clearly possible. To me, Rachel and Jack looked like a happy and loving, albeit reserved, couple who made a decision to celebrate their marriage in a way that deviated from the standard ceremonies of their faith community. A different observer, though, might see their wedding as an example of ongoing 'trafficking' in young brides; although an adult, Rachel travelled from a counterpart FLDS community in the United States to settle with her new husband in Bountiful. That many of the thirty-five flower girls who attended the wedding shared the same father, a man with several wives, might give some a degree of pause. Moreover, this marriage might be understood as sacrifice over celebration. That is, one might wonder whether pressure was exerted on the spouses to take up their union, given the pragmatic benefits this promised for their respective communities by widening marriage possibilities. If one were to accept this hypothesis, it would be impossible not to see the wedding as coerced, at least to some degree. And, while this marriage was celebrated as a monogamous union, with no indication of the spouses' intentions to take up polygamy, the couple remains a part of Bountiful and the FLDS. Thus, there was no explicit rejection of polygamy communicated by this marriage, despite its mainstream conventionalism.

As may perhaps be true of all spousal unions, Jack and Rachel's marriage can be interpreted differently depending on what aspects are focused on, and how these are construed. This wedding

32 Campbell (2009).

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might be seen as a progressive and joyous event for the couple and community, or merely the perpetuation of an approach to marriage premised on coercion. This article thus refrains from suggesting that this particular wedding says anything of wider application about marriage in Bountiful. However, its significance lies in its reflection of the nuances inherent to most spousal relationships encountered in Bountiful. In particular, this story underscores the importance of resisting categorical interpretations of practices and relationships observed from 'the outside', where deep understandings are difficult to develop. At the same time, this story is critical for its apparent distinction from the way Bountiful's marriages are typically presented and for its indication, at least at a prima facie level, about options that young people in this community may have in relation to how they will form and celebrate a marriage.[33]

Faithful polygamy: Vicky and Isaac

Vicky and Isaac's story is somewhat anomalous within this project in that it started and continues outside Bountiful, in a community just outside Salt Lake City, Utah. Yet, as a polygamous marital union affiliated with Bountiful, this narrative is included here to offer some insight into the experiences of a woman who has lived within a plural marriage that has endured decades. Vicky and Isaac, who were married more than thirty years ago, express deep commitment to their polygamous relationship. Yet, as Vicky emphasised, their marriage has weathered some important challenges, many of which were overcome through her interaction and collective efforts pursued with her husband and sister wives.

I met Vicky and Isaac during the weekend of Rachel and Jack's 'big wedding'. Acquaintances of the bride-to-be, they had travelled to Bountiful from Salt Lake City to attend this event. Although treated as honoured guests, Vicky expressed her qualms about Rachel and Jack's wedding, suggesting its stark contrast to traditional nuptial ceremonies within her Church. Driving me in her van across Bountiful's terrain on the rainy morning that followed the ceremony, Vicky intimated some disappointment and concern with regard to the wedding. Stating that this was 'not the way we do things', she explained that Church weddings were solemn and sacred, and meant to involve little elaboration or fanfare. In our short conversation, she communicated critical acceptance of this 'new' and 'different' type of ceremony, while at the same time questioning whether it represented a shift in the community's understanding of wedding vows.

Vicky and Isaac were keen to learn about my research project on plural marriage, and Vicky agreed to share the story of her marriage to Isaac in an individual interview. She offered a detailed account of her distinct experience as a polygamist within an urban setting, and the particular challenges of raising children who grew up, and pursued school and other activities, primarily with children from conventional monogamous homes. She spoke further of some initial challenges

33 Traditional Mormon custom requires weddings to take place in a temple, where a private 'sealing ceremony' is performed by a member of the priesthood who offers the couple a special blessing. This ceremony is viewed as a crucial part of formalising a celestial marriage within Mormon faith. See Grimes (2000) and Heaton, Goodmand and Holman (2001, p. 88). Given this, I have been told by some commentators who have lived Mormonism that Rachel and Jack's wedding could not have been the 'real' wedding insofar as the community is concerned, and the couple likely had their sacred rites given to them in a secret ceremony before or after this big, public event. While it is possible that Rachel and Jack had both a civil and religious marriage, it is important to note that LDS marriage rites might not mirror wedding practices in Bountiful, which has historically been part of the *Fundamentalist* Mormon faith. Empirical work on American fundamentalist Mormon communities indicates the variety in wedding celebrations witnessed within these groups; see Altman and Ginat (1996, pp. 126ff.). Thus, it is not entirely possible to discern whether this secular celebration in Bountiful was the only formal event uniting Rachel and Jack, or whether they had another, religious celebration as well. Irrespective of how this might be answered, the newness of this type of celebration, and the importance that it symbolised for many community members, resonated in the comments of guests and participants in this project. It was also, as discussed in the subsequent marriage story (Vicky and Isaac), accompanied by some controversy.

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associated with marrying Isaac as his third wife, joining two existent spouses who were sisters. Taking occupancy in the home they had already made with their joint husband required some important adjustments. For example, contentious household decisions initially were taken by majority vote, and the sisters' solidarity resulted in her being outnumbered on many issues. She found this process 'too restrictive', as was her family's practice of pooling belongings and finances, the latter of which were managed by Isaac. As she described, 'when I got married, if I needed anything, whether it was sanitary napkins, or a zipper to make a dress, I had to go and ask [Isaac] for the money for it'. Vicky thus consulted with her sister wives and husband about the challenges this posed, and the group revisited the way money was distributed within their household. Ultimately, Isaac suggested that each wife should have a 'personal allowance' and that financial decisions should be based on a compiled list of pros and cons rather than by vote. Vicky described this as one example of the collaborative efforts that the wives and Isaac made 'in finding solutions that worked for everyone'. She notes that these efforts were fuelled by a shared love and commitment to making their joint relationship and household happy and productive.

In a similar vein, Vicky recounted how 'husband-sharing' unfolded within the early years of her marriage, articulating how she managed to avoid the formality and strictness of 'turn-taking' among sister wives:

> '[T]here were times when, especially as I got older and I, it became more difficult to conceive and there were more ladies in the family and that, then I would go to [Isaac] and the two of us would plan a way for us to get together [. . .] for when it would work. [. . .] I did not like the "turns". When I first got married it was we each got a turn, you know, and it didn't matter what was happening, we had our turn. And I'm the one that broke out of that and said: "I don't like this. I don't want it. I don't feel like sleeping with him tonight. I don't want to be in there. I want to be with my baby. You go ahead and have my turn."'

Vicky noted, however, that questions about intimacy with a husband – and competition among sister wives for it – are consistent preoccupations of 'outsider' accounts of polygamous communities. For her, however, polygamy 'is just not like that' and she says, regretfully, 'People cannot understand that'. Instead, she describes her relationship with her sister wives as 'beautiful and wonderful', and notes that her sorority and solidarity with Isaac's co-wives has given her comfort, particularly during a recent period that saw serious challenges to Isaac's health.

While Vicky stresses the benefits that she had as a polygamous wife, her narrative is not unduly romanticised; her story of a move that the Church asked her family to undertake fifteen years into her marriage suggests some of the challenges she endured and overcame as a plural wife. The same week her family moved to a different state pursuant to the Church's request, Isaac took three new sister wives. Vicky emphasised how no one was prepared for the inevitable changes that came with the sudden doubling of their family, and her metaphoric comparison of her life to the dice cast in a Yahtzee game is particularly illustrative:

> V: 'And then two of us [Vicky and Isaac] went down there and moved in, and took all the children including the other sister wife who was still working – she was working in Salt Lake. And then the other three ladies came into the family the same week we moved.'
> AC: 'Wow.'
> V: 'With the children!'
> AC: 'That's a huge change.'
> V: 'It felt like a bunch of dice. You know it reminded me of the Yahtzee cup when you put all the dice in and shake it up and throw it out.'

Yet while describing the disorientation and confusion that accompanied this period of transition, Vicky affirms that, all along, she and her sister wives maintained a sense of defined purpose. She thus

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stated, 'We knew what we were doing was right and directed by God', and indicated that adjusting to the changes was facilitated by her collaborative efforts with, and the shared support of, her sister wives.

Vicky's commitment to her sister wives, especially the two with whom she first shared a household, seems to have been consistently solid throughout her marriage. For example, after giving birth to her third child, she nursed her own baby and those of her two senior sister wives all at the same time.

Vicky is equally dedicated to her husband. She acknowledges that her marriage has encountered some important hurdles, related specifically to the difficulties of having to share domestic space and responsibilities, belongings, and her husband, with other women. Her story suggests how she has come to terms with these complexities of polygamous life, specifically by drawing certain parallels with what conjugal life would be like outside a plural marriage, and by choosing to remain focused on the positive aspects of her marital and family structure:

> V: 'Well there's [sic] definitely challenges; but it's not like b-, you don't experience those kinds of things in other types of [. . .] lifestyles, and relationships. It's not like polygamy is the only lifestyle that experiences jealousy.'
>
> [. . .]
>
> AC: 'But also, you know, there may be challenges that are unique to polygamy, but there are also distinct challenges to other ways of life too, so . . . '
>
> V: 'Absolutely. And there's so, there's as many benefits in my opinion, or more benefits [. . .] there's the many benefits that outweigh, to me, the negatives, and really, um, it's such an individual experience for each woman; [. . .] she chooses to have the experience that she wants. That's what I tell my children all the time. In every situation, no matter who you're living with, no matter what the situation is, you have to have two choices: you can choose to be happy and you can choose to be miserable, and it all depends on your attitude and how you plan to deal with it.'

Some parts of Vicky's story might sit uncomfortably with a feminist reader. First, looking at the couple, it is quite clear that Vicky is about fifteen years younger than her husband, raising some questions about the propriety of their union and whether it could, at least at its outset more than a generation ago, have reasonably been seen as a relationship of equals. Second, to a woman 'outside' polygamy, it may seem that Vicky lacked control over some life-changing decisions, such as whether and when her family moved, and her husband's acquisition of new wives who joined their household. Her apparent inability, at the outset of her marriage, to acquire personal property – basic 'things' (e.g. sanitary napkins or a zipper) – for herself, is also striking. Last, Vicky's narrative is rather stoic, emphasizing self-sacrifice (e.g. nursing her own and two other wives' babies during the same period of time) and an 'it's all in what you make it' attitude.

But Vicky's story also exposes some important insights into the potential agency that women living in ostensibly patriarchal communities and families may see themselves as experiencing. In particular, it suggests possibilities for crafting a sense of identity and meaningful solutions against a backdrop that might otherwise result in exhaustion and powerlessness. It also clarifies that a polygamous relationship that may appear difficult and taxing 'from the outside' might be viewed by the women within it as a veritable choice driven by sincere affection and love for a husband, and for his other wives. Specifically, Vicky is clear that the directions her family took were driven as much by her and her sister wives as by her husband. For example, before the move to a different state, the wives were invited to reflect on, and come to terms with, whether this was acceptable *to them*. Vicky also recounts that consultation with, and consent from, existent wives was necessary before a new woman was permitted to join her family. Given this, Vicky's interview was, for me, among the most instructive in regard to the possible experiences of a woman in polygamy. Further, although she is 'traditional' by virtue of her community's standards, she is also undoubtedly confident, resourceful, decisive and capable of articulating clear reasons for her decision to accept and live in a plural marriage.

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Monogamy in Bountiful: Melissa

Melissa stands out in Bountiful for several reasons. Apart from her striking looks, her energy and confidence are palpable. She does not braid her hair, and wears jeans, plaid shirts and sneakers. She is, unquestionably, a community leader, even though she is just in her early twenties.

My first interview with Melissa in 2008 took place by telephone, since she was then in Cedar City, Utah, pursing a college degree in education. She had been there for the preceding four years. This interview focused on her childhood in Bountiful and her decision, once she was married, to refrain from becoming a plural wife. As the child of a man with several wives, she describes herself as 'born into polygamy' and, from a young age, saw the phenomenon of a man taking several spouses as 'just the way it was'. But despite being surrounded by plural marriage, Melissa also stated that she understood herself as having a choice about whether, when and how she would get married. She was thus able to communicate her interest in not living in polygamy, which appears to have been respected:

AC: '[H]ow did you make your own decision about your marriage?'
M: 'Uh, it was a marriage through the Church so it . . . some called it an arranged marriage.' [. . .]
AC: 'Did you communicate anything to anyone about what you wanted in terms of marriage?'
M: 'Oh absolutely. Yes, I grew up when we had "priested" marriages but I always knew I had a choice. My father made it very clear throughout my life that I had the choice to say no, or yes, or I had the choice to say who I wanted to marry even though we didn't do traditional dating style but I did have a choice of who I wanted to marry.'
[. . .]
AC: 'But your marriage right now is monogamous right?'
M: 'Yeah, it is.'
AC: 'And is that a matter of choice?'
M: 'Well, yeah for me I, growing up, I never felt like I wanted to be a plural wife but, and I thought about this quite a bit because you could say it was because of how I was raised or whatever but I have friends my same age who, we basically grew up together in the same environment. And I have several friends who said that they wanted to be in a polygamous relationship and that was different for me, I didn't want to. [. . .] I guess you could say it's an individual thing because you know, we grew up the same and had the same influences and they chose to be polygamous and I chose to be a monogamous wife.'

One year later, I met Melissa in person in Bountiful and had a chance to interview her a second time. She had just returned from her college convocation ceremony, where she had been the class valedictorian and graduated with top honours. Her return to Bountiful was permanent, as she'd just been offered a teaching job in one of Bountiful's two schools. However, she would live with her husband and children in a nearby town. This second interview with Melissa moved away from the story of her own marriage to a discussion about changing community norms affecting women. She spoke first about the way she wore her hair and dressed, indicating that she had made the decision, once she left her community for college, to dress like the other students there to avoid attracting attention and prejudice against 'plygs', not uncommon in Utah and other places where plural marriage is practised. She is aware that not everyone in Bountiful approves of her appearance, but nonetheless continues wearing modern dress, suggesting that, for her, it is more comfortable and reflective of who she is. Indeed, Melissa is not the only woman in the community in jeans and short sleeves; several (especially women born in the last generation) have opted for this look, even though it seems to cause some internal community friction.

Melissa is also one of the few people to speak about alcohol and drug use in Bountiful. A couple of participants indicated that substance use in the community does happen, even though the FLDS Church tolerates neither drug nor alcohol consumption. As a result, drug education and sensitivity programmes, developed in collaboration with public agencies in nearby towns, have been offered in

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Bountiful schools. While not supporting the use of illicit substances, Melissa acknowledges that alcohol is socially and moderately consumed by some community members and, to her mind, this is acceptable. She says drinking tea and coffee also happens without raising many eyebrows, even though the FLDS faith does not allow followers to drink 'hot beverages'.

Melissa thus does not seem to adopt many of her community's core ideas and practices in relation to things such as marriage, dress and diet. She does not even reside in Bountiful. What, then, makes her a 'member' of this community? Clearly she holds a place there; she is well respected and people seem to listen to her. Before meeting her, a number of women stressed how important it was that I 'speak with [Melissa]' as part of this project. And at a church gathering I attended, during which a number of congregants took up a celebrant's invitation to say a few words about the community, Melissa was the only woman to stand and articulate her ideas, vision and concerns about Bountiful.

For many in this community, it seems that Melissa represents the promise of what a woman in Bountiful can be: educated, vocal, critical and in charge of the major decisions affecting her life. But while she seems 'modern' in several ways, she consistently displays sensitivity and respect for the traditions and diversity of the place she still considers 'home'. In speaking about her community she is unmistakably tolerant and understanding of its conventional practices, even though she personally does not take up all of them.

Melissa's story, then, is not exclusively about marriage, be it polygamous or monogamous. Its relevance seems to rest primarily in what it conveys about the possibilities for young women in this FLDS society who have opted out of some key practices of this faith, including plural marriage. In this connection, Melissa's narrative provides an example of the plurality in marital forms in Bountiful. It also suggests possibilities for a woman to make decisions about marriage and family life – as well as work, education and lifestyle – according to her own preferences and values.

Same-sex unions: Shalina and Lorraine

In many respects, Shalina and Lorraine are among the most traditional women in Bountiful. Their dress and hairstyles adhere to strict community norms; they believe in modesty and admit to feeling uneasy about the choices some Bountiful women have made to shed the group's conventional style of dress for short-sleeved shirts and fitted jeans. With regard to marriage, they claim to be committed to the idea of chastity and to 'the Principle' (of polygamy), having adopted it themselves through their respective celestial marriages to the same man.

At the same time, Shalina and Lorraine can be interpreted as radicals within their community, having taken a step that Bountiful had never before witnessed of any two women, let alone two sister wives: they married each other. After sharing a home and family life for several years after their respective marriages to a shared husband, they opted, once British Columbia recognised same-sex marriage, to formalise what they claim was already a de facto genuine adult domestic partnership. This is reflected in the way they jointly recounted the story of their relationship:

L: '[W]e were [our husband's] youngest wives.'
S: 'He was very busy in the Church. So we became very close friends with each other.'
L: 'We didn't have a lot in common with the other ladies. [. . .] We only became friends because he stuck us together and said, "[O]kay you guys take care of each other!"'
S: 'And I would say that we grew together. And I go to work and support her and she tends my kids. And we really and truly and honestly are partners. [. . .] Honestly there's not any [sic] two ladies that live as a couple as we do.'
L: 'Our finances are intertwined.'
S: 'You could never divide our bills, for us to divide our bills and our income we would have to get a divorce, to divide our bills, because all of my credit cards, all of our bills are together so

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much that I wouldn't know where to start if we were separated. To the point where we are a couple. Our kids would be lost without each other.'

[. . .]

AC: 'Okay so let me just tell you then that the way the law defines a conjugal relationship, are intertwined social life, intertwined economic life, sexual life, cohabitation, and children together. Do you have all five?'

S: 'Pretty much. So I would just say that for people that, like a lot of people look down on it because it's been taught so strongly [that gay unions are unacceptable], but honestly, when the government made it legal, that pretty much said that it's okay to me. [. . .]'

Shalina and Lorraine are at once same-sex spouses and polygamous wives, wearing wedding bands given to them by their husband but describing one another as their 'life partners', with whom they share all aspects of domestic life. They are conventional in the way they appear and in many aspects of how they act, but they are also pioneers in some respects, staking out some space for same-sex marriage in a community that has traditionally accepted nothing but heterosexual unions. This is so, even though Shalina and Lorraine have never stated explicitly that they are lesbians; they have formalised a domestic partnership, but whether their relationship has an intimate, sexual dynamic, has never been made clear.

Over an afternoon with this couple in their cosy, but chaotic (between them they have a dozen children) home, Shalina and Lorraine shared a number of experiences suggesting the complex and paradoxical nature of their lives and relationship. For example, although they have sought civil recognition for their partnership and maintain a family with seemingly minimal involvement from a husband, they seemed uncomfortable with some ideas associated with women's reproductive autonomy. Specifically, they were perturbed by an article I had given them drawing on interviews with women in their community, which explained how some women claimed to be using contraception without their husband's knowledge.[34] Both Shalina and Lorraine found this hard to believe, and said they failed to understand first, why a woman would use 'artificial' methods of birth control and second, why she would not share this with her husband. Moreover, in discussing their normative perception of gender roles, they displayed a striking combination of feistiness and tradition. This is reflected in the following, apparently jointly written, passage that was sent to me via email following my interviews with the couple:

'Women are highly adaptable and versatile people. Throughout history we have been able to play whatever role life has handed us. Remember Joan of Arc, who led an army across France, the pioneer women who crossed the plains, and Amelia Earhart with her extraordinary desire to fly? We can do anything, and yet so often, especially in this modern, everyone is equal world, we forget to celebrate our womanhood.'

'For me, wearing a dress is a display of femininity. God made men and women different for a reason, so why not enjoy being what you are? I feel beautiful and feminine in a dress, so as a rule, I wear a dress.'

'I also believe that seeing a woman in a dress brings out the protective, manly instincts in our male counterparts. Feminists may argue that skirts put women at a disadvantage, but I don't believe it's wrong for men to act like men and women to act like women.'

During part of one joint interview with them, the couple's attention focused on Citizenship and Immigration Canada's recent decision refusing to recognise them as spouses so as to allow Shalina, who is Canadian, to sponsor her American partner's application for permanent residency. The decision suggested that the refusal is grounded in a belief their marriage is a sham, entered into

34 Campbell (2009).

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only for immigration purposes. Specifically, it presumes an absence of intimacy between the women, and because of this, it concludes that they cannot be considered genuine spouses. In contrast, Shalina and Lorraine discussed what they characterised as a recent 'victory' with Revenue Canada, permitting them to list each another – rather than their husband – as a 'spouse' on their respective tax returns. While content with this outcome, they expressed confusion about these discordant decisions regarding their relationship. 'Don't they talk to each other?' they asked of the different public offices that have examined their family situation.

This conversation about tax and immigration officials' treatment of Shalina and Lorraine's relationship was peppered with a number of what might be called 'spirited' interruptions. Children traipsed in and out of the kitchen, looking for missing toys, asking for intervention in disputes with siblings or just wanting to listen in. The couple's babies needed to be fed or changed at different moments. Community members, as well as Lorraine's mother, dropped in, adding bits to the discussion. And Shalina kept busy throughout the conversation baking and decorating a cake she had made for Lorraine's birthday that same day. In the midst of this busyness and confusion, it was difficult to see anything orchestrated or contrived about Shalina and Lorraine's domestic space or partnership. Most conspicuous was the absence of the women's husband from this setting, who seemed, according to the stories we heard, to play a minimal role in this household.

Shalina and Lorraine's story presents a number of possible answers to questions about the role and meaning of marriage for them. In the eyes of the BC Civil Registrar, and for now, of Revenue Canada, they are married only to each other, whereas Immigration Canada appears to see them as formally married to no one. In their community's eyes, Shalina and Lorraine each have just one 'true' spouse: the husband to whom they are both 'celestially' married. Yet from their own perspective, it is clear that they see themselves as living a shared existence. At the same time, they express an unwavering commitment to their husband even though he does not seem to play much of a physical or even financial role in their family life. At the same time his presence was felt by the wedding bands they wore, which had been given to them by their husband on their respective wedding days.

This couple's experience thus reflects relational dynamics that might be both completely expected and unexpected, given common public representations of Bountiful. Shalina and Lorraine are wives dedicated to a husband, to their large families and to the ideal of polygamy. Their dress and attitude towards family life adhere to their community's most traditional expectations. At the same time, their formal union might suggest some evolution and openness toward diverse conjugalities in Bountiful; while they say that their marriage is not entirely accepted within Bountiful (as Shalina stated: 'There are people that think it's totally disgusting and wrong and immoral'), they have not been excommunicated from or shunned within their community. It is possible that this is because they have not ever stated that their relationship has a sexual component, and because they remain polygamous at the same time as they are married to one another. Their story ultimately offers promising insights into the different forms of conjugal life existent in Bountiful, while also suggesting the multiple and complex normative forces shaping – and reacting to – these choices.

Voice, rupture and exit: Gillian

There is a rich debate within some feminist writing about the meaning and relevance of 'exit' possibilities for women in unhappy domestic or community circumstances. This literature recognises an array of factors, such as emotional attachment, familial responsibilities and affections, economic dependence, limited education and skill, and religious commitment, which can frustrate efforts to leave harmful or abusive environments.[35] Thus, although the potential for 'exit' is often

35 Malik (2006, p. 216); Shachar (1999, p. 100).

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seen as significant in assessing women's freedom or autonomy in personal space, a body of scholarship also posits that women who stay within ostensibly patriarchal contexts might equally acquire influence and agency in these settings by mobilising to seek reform of the group's most troubling practices or expectations.[36] Developing 'voice' within a community – that is, an ability to express sentiments that may influence the group's actions and traditions – thus might serve as a substitute for, or perhaps as a companion to, exit opportunities as a means to forging autonomy from within a cultural group.[37]

During my visits to Bountiful, I encountered several women who seemed to be working quietly, but ardently, toward altering community practices with which they took issue. For example, some women acknowledged that marriages in the community had previously occurred with girls who had yet to reach adulthood. These women saw their acknowledgements as a type of admission, and articulated their belief that the practice was no longer, at least to them, acceptable, and that young people should not marry before at least eighteen years of age. Some women had also advanced formal arguments publicly, which argued for an elevation in the age of consent from fourteen to sixteen.[38] In addition, I met several women who felt that marriage should happen only after a couple has had a chance to get to know one another, and thus resisted the historical practices of arranged community matching occurring days, or sometimes even hours, before a wedding.[39] Finally, several women spoke emphatically about the relevance of appearance and dress. Some felt that the hallmark 'look' of an FLDS woman should be preserved as a symbolic commitment to historical community values (modesty, non-materialism, simplicity), whereas others saw their jeans, sneakers and short-sleeved shirts as communicating a desire to 'stand out less', while still considering Bountiful their space.

These are examples of the debates among Bountiful's women. Perhaps even more telling is the pragmatism these women exhibit; these are community members who have identified certain shortcomings in their way of life, and responded through specific, practical steps at improvement. This is clearly an important part of the story about women in Bountiful and how they might manage any dissatisfaction with family or community life.

Such dissatisfaction might also be met with a decision to leave a marriage or the community as a whole. Participants in this study suggested that separation and divorce are uncommon in their community. A few of them suggested that community leaders have historically become involved in marital discord, attempting to improve domestic tensions through measures like giving sister wives individual houses, to create more 'breathing room' within a large family. On some occasions, however, marriages have been dissolved, with the community often perceiving this as simply the result of a 'bad match'. Community leaders might then re-partner the separated spouses with other community members. Yet a woman unhappy with both her marriage and her life in Bountiful more generally might want to exit this space altogether.[40] Some research participants recounted stories of women they knew who had left the community after ending a marriage. Moreover, two participants had themselves terminated marriages with men in Bountiful. Both suggested that they maintain ongoing positive connections with some community members, but neither seemed entirely comfortable with the prospect of returning there to live as a 'divorcee'.

36 Sunder (2003, pp. 1442, 1457); Malik (2006, p. 218).

37 Newman (2007, pp. 48–51).

38 These arguments were advanced before the 2008 amendments to the sexual offences provisions of the Criminal Code of Canada (ss. 150ff.), which raised the age of consent in most cases to sixteen; see CTV News (2005).

39 Campbell (2009).

40 See, e.g., *Blackmore v. Blackmore*, B.C.J. No. 2571 (2007) (QL).

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One of these women, 'Gillian', shared her story as the wife of a prominent polygamist in Bountiful. Now divorced, Gillian was this man's first (and legal) wife, and the mother of seven of his children. She married when she was eighteen, through arrangements made by her father and community elders. Her narrative suggests that her marriage resulted in significant losses for her. In particular, her academic interests, specifically in nursing and medicine, were postponed to have children while she was young. She therefore took up the pursuit of her nursing degree only after having six children, at age thirty. Gillian's description of her marriage as 'frustrating' or 'inexistent' is explained in the following excerpts from her interview in 2008:

> 'I talked to him at all the different points about, concerns I had, [. . .] for instance he always supported um, [pause] activities for the boys. But never anything for the girls. So, [pause] I, [sigh] they were going to dance lessons. And then I came home and I would teach, [inaudible] thirty-five young girls I was teaching dancing to and, [pause] uh, [pause] and then he told me, he wanted me to quit doing that. And I'd tell him well you stop doing hockey with the boys I'll stop dancing with the girls. [. . .] anyway, so different things like that, you know. Just, went on and on in our relationship and, um, it's really frustrating for me to, [pause] made no sense to me.'
>
> [. . .]
>
> 'You know, [the sister wives] would ask me like how do you get a relationship with [. . .]? And, you know it was just really hard just to watch them, struggling with that because I mean you get, a couple of hours a month you know to, [pause] [inaudible] when the women have kids, you know your focus changes. And yet, [pause] we learned to expect less and, and, now that you're um, children are your priority and, could take up all of your time, and, [pause] so it just, I don't know, I just couldn't.'

Gillian's unhappiness prompted her to leave the community with her youngest child a few years prior to my meeting her. She characterised this move as 'tough' largely because her own children did not fully understand her decision immediately. There is nothing simple or obvious about Gillian's story, the circumstances she left behind or the relationship she maintains with Bountiful today. Indeed, a year after my interview with her, I met Gillian at the 'big wedding' in June 2009 as the mother of the groom. She took her seat in the front row and, while sometimes on her own during the wedding weekend, it appeared that she was accepted into the community for this celebration.

Like other stories set out here, Gillian's may not be representative. In fact, there were no indications that Gillian's decision to leave her marriage and Bountiful was typical or easy. This should not be surprising; ending domestic partnerships is, in any context, generally complicated and difficult. But this story may suggest a possibility of exit for a Bountiful wife dissatisfied with her marriage and/or broader social setting. Furthermore, Gillian's ongoing connections with Bountiful supports participants' affirmations that while divorce and separation are uncommon in their community, they do occur, and a woman who leaves will not necessarily be ostracised by, or unwelcome in, the community she left behind.

Gillian's story would not be complete without mentioning two points that nuance her situation. First, Gillian never indicated whether she benefited from spousal support or property division at the end of her marriage. Yet even had this not been the case, Gillian is a professional with income-earning potential and this would have facilitated her decision to leave Bountiful; the same cannot be said of many women in this community. Second, while Gillian seemed welcome at her son's wedding and still close with family members who remain in Bountiful, she disclosed conflicting sentiments about her ongoing connections there. While 'loving those girls' she left behind (i.e. her sister wives), she also believed that she is viewed as an 'apostate' in the community. Thus, while divorce and departure are perhaps technically possible for women in Bountiful, Gillian's story suggests that such decisions might not necessarily be wholly tolerated or accepted within this community.

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Conclusion

While Bountiful has been consistently cast as a monolithic, religious community where polygamy is the only way of life acceptable to residents, an examination of conjugal life in this place suggests that multiple forms of conjugality are recognised and tolerated there. This article draws on data from qualitative research interviews and field observations to set out five narratives that suggest a more nuanced appreciation of marriage in Bountiful. Specifically, these narratives illuminate the diversity and complexity of spousal relationships that one might encounter in this community. They indicate polygamy's ongoing role and relevance in Bountiful, while revealing the simultaneous existence of other conjugal practices, such as monogamy, same-sex partnering and divorce. Considered together, the narratives can serve as a basis for revisiting tendencies to equate Bountiful with polygamy, and to assume that women in communities like Bountiful have no options with regard to marriage. Rather, these stories suggest that women may have diverse values and beliefs with regard to family and marriage that may guide their choices about conjugal life.

As indicated at the outset, this article does not reach a firm normative conclusion about polygamy and its implications for women. However, the analysis here *is* intended to convey two particular messages about marriage in a place like Bountiful. The first is that marital pluralism likely exists, and may well be tolerated, even in the most orthodox religious communities. The second is that in choosing among conjugal forms, at least some women in such communities will make thoughtful choices in line with their own values and interests. This is true even for women who live polygamously. While a Western, urban feminist might perceive a plural wife's marital experience as highly imperfect, the narratives presented here of women in a polygamous society suggest that they see themselves as having and making choices, including the choice to end an unhappy plural marriage. Thus, as a jurist thinking about law's approach to polygamy, these messages are germane to assessing whether the premises on which law is based accounts adequately for the marital diversity and options that might exist in a community like Bountiful.

As a final word, I would note that the most striking thing in developing this work and in speaking with women in Bountiful about their marital experiences are the ironies, complexities and paradoxes that emerge in their stories. They reveal how religious women can be at once conservative and traditional, while adopting ideas at the outer limits of their group's accepted doctrine. They can live in the most arduous and demanding circumstances, while crafting methods to improve their status and wellbeing. And, while they might physically exit a space that makes them unhappy, thereby suggesting tremendous resilience and strength, they might also retain deep ongoing emotional attachments to, and dependence on, the people they left behind. These tensions emerge from these stories about spousal relationships, but can be linked to ideas larger than just marriage or conjugality. Indeed, we might have seen the same intricate ideas had the focus of this article been on a topic such as women's education or work in Bountiful. The stories of Bountiful's 'plural' marriages thus ultimately lead to more global indications about the complex and sophisticated identities that women, especially those in ostensibly patriarchal religious spaces, might take on, and the decisions they make about matters fundamental to them.

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