ESPOUSING PATRIARCHY

Conciliatory Masculinity and Homosocial Femininity in Religiously Conservative Families

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Drawing on in-depth interviews with individuals in current and former plural Mormon fundamentalist families, I demonstrate how gender is structured relationally in plural marriage, dependent on noncoercive power relations. Men perform a "conciliatory masculinity" based on their position as head of the family that requires constant consensus-building skills and emotional labor to maintain family harmony. This masculinity is shaped in relation to women's performance of "homosocial femininity" that curbs men's power by building strong bonds among wives to deflect jealousies and negotiate household duties. I argue for the importance of studying masculinities and femininities together as a relational structure to better understand specific religious and family contexts.

Keywords: *conservative religions; masculinity; femininity; polygyny; fundamentalist Mormonism; gender relations*

> I don't view equality as "sameness." In patriarchal living, equality is found in equal value, not in the same job descriptions. I do not need to be a man, or to fill the role of a man, when being a woman is something equally prized in my family and faith.
>
> —Excerpt from essay by Samantha, plural wife

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Samantha's words reflect a dominant perspective of conservative Christians on marital and family relationships: Women who choose to live in a religious family structure that promotes men's headship can be equal to men by embracing their different "job descriptions." Samantha, however, is not your average wife in a conservatively religious household. She is one of several wives in a plural marriage in the Centennial Park community in northern Arizona, on the border of southern Utah, a fundamentalist Mormon group. Plural marriage within fundamentalist Mormonism supports a patriarchal family structure that is often viewed as exploiting women, providing a novel lens to consider the formation of conservative gender ideologies and practices outside the context of heterosexual, monogamous marriage.

Feminist sociologists have studied the many similarities among conservative Christians, Orthodox Jews, Mormons, and Muslims in their views that promote conservative gender norms based on men's headship and women's submission (e.g., Avishai 2008; Bartkowski and Read 2003; Beaman 2001; Chong 2006; Gallagher and Smith 1999; Griffith 1997). Much of this research has addressed the question of women's agency within religious traditionalism that is seen to circumscribe their options and autonomy. The more limited research on men's experiences in conservative religions has analyzed men's ideals of manhood, leadership, and authority (Irby 2014). Further research is needed to study the relational construction of masculinity and femininity together in religiously conservative families. As such, to comprehend Samantha's perspective on gender equality depends not only on studying her views on agency, but also on examining how gender is performed in complementary and/or divisive ways that impact the power relations within patriarchal family structures. Given the importance of attending to "a set of relationships" that make up a gender regime (Connell 2009[AQ: 1], 73), how do we understand the relational structure of gender in conservatively religious families?

This article contributes to the literature on gender ideologies in conservative religious contexts by examining the relationship between masculinity and femininity in a family structure outside the dominant family model of heterosexual, monogamous marriage. As a religious patriarchal family form built on the idea that the man is head of *all* his wives, Mormon fundamentalist polygyny (generally called plural marriage, consisting of one man and more than one wife) offers a novel case of a conservative family structure of gender inegalitarianism with which to consider how masculinity and femininity work interdependently to restrain men's power. In the following, I begin by presenting the literature on gender relations in conservative religions. After outlining the methods for

this research and providing some contextual background on Mormon fundamentalism, I present my findings that reveal how a gender relational framework is key to understanding the power relations within Mormon fundamentalist families. First, I show how men living in plural marriage practice what I call a conciliatory masculinity that paradoxically mixes together normative masculine standards of leadership with non-normative ideals of emotional labor and conciliation. Second, I uncover how conciliatory masculinity is practiced in relation to women's performance of a homosocial femininity that unites wives through strong emotional bonds to restrain men's power, deflect jealousies, and balance work and caregiving duties. Finally, I discuss the theoretical contribution of attending to the interplay of masculinity and femininity in structuring men's authority and women's empowerment in conservative religious families.

GENDER-TRADITIONAL RELIGIOUS FAMILY STRUCTURE

The practice of "doing gender" and "doing religion" within religious traditionalist marriages have become important topics in the sociology of gender and religion (Avishai 2008). Generally, scholarship has elucidated gender ideologies that support the idea of men and women holding contrasting but complimentary roles based on God-given, innate gender differences (Burke 2012; Irby 2014). A broad array of literature has focused on women's agency and how women negotiate their lives in the context of patriarchal religions (Avishai 2008; Bartkowski 2001; Beaman 2001; Brasher 1998; Chen 2005; Chong 2006; Griffith 1997; Stacey and Gerard 1990). Feminist sociologists have sought to uncover the conditions under which religious women negotiate conservative gender ideologies and to challenge the assumption that women in conservative religions are simply "doormats" or victims who must submit to men based on religious belief (Stacey and Gerard 1990, 104). Religiously conservative women support the idea of the husband as the head of the household and that men should take on leadership roles; however, many also express being empowered by their religious beliefs to resist, challenge, and adapt these gender ideologies to their own advantage. Critiques of this literature point to how it problematically juxtaposes "agency and complicity" and implicitly assumes that women are oppressed in conservative religions (Avishai 2008, 411).

Research on men's experiences in religiously conservative families uncovers how religious understandings of masculinity join together ideas about instrumental male leadership with expectations for household labor and child care, what Gallagher and Smith (1999, 229) call "symbolic traditionalism"

and "pragmatic egalitarianism" (Bartkowski 2001; Edgell 2006; Gallagher and Wood 2005; Wilcox 2005). Evangelical Christians symbolically support men's material and spiritual role as the head of the family and, at the same time, pragmatically practice joint decision making and women's workforce participation outside the home. The rise of conservative religious movements, such as the Promise Keepers, have also been important to understanding how conservative Christian men negotiate changing expectations of masculinity and male headship in nuanced and complex ways (Heath 2003). More recent research uncovers how Christian men—especially young white evangelicals—perform a hybrid masculinity that is both aggressive and loving (McDowell 2017), and both transgressive and reinforcing of hegemonic understandings of gender (Diefendorf 2015).

Research on gender negotiation in conservative, religious, patriarchal family structures has offered insight into opportunities for women's agency, and how men soften their authority to adapt to gender-egalitarian values. This research, however, tends not to study masculinity and femininity in the same frame as a way to move beyond the agency/complicity conundrum. This article takes up the call of feminist scholars to provide more nuanced analyses of women's agency in the context of conservatively religious family structures by addressing the question of how men perform masculinity in relation to how women do femininity. To theorize this relationship, I now turn to the literature on gender relations.

RELATING MASCULINITIES TO FEMININITIES

In her foundational theory of gender relations, Connell (1987) argued that masculinities are structured hierarchically with the hegemonic ideal at the top, legitimating patriarchy—a social system based on family and societal structures that position men as primary authority figures. Masculinity and femininity are "ways of living certain relationships" (1987, 179). Recent theoretical innovations in understanding gender as relational have conceptualized hybrid masculinities as a performance by privileged men (white, straight, young) of nonhegemonic masculinities that work to reinforce hegemonic ideals (Bridges 2014; Bridges and Pascoe 2014). This literature, however, tends to theorize the construction of masculinities and femininities without studying them together as relational processes (Schippers 2007).

Recent research on gender and religion has begun to consider the complex ways that men and women participate in and negotiate understandings

of masculinity and femininity in conservative religious contexts. For example, Diefendorf (2015) examined hybrid masculinities among couples who pledge sexual abstinence until marriage. Using longitudinal qualitative data, her innovative findings demonstrate that the commitment to abstinence requires men to seek help from their women partners to control what they view as dangerous sexual impulses, but that postmarriage transition allows them to embrace a more hegemonically masculine status based on understandings of "proper forms of masculinity and femininity" that reinforce the gender hierarchy (2015, 662). Her findings begin to theorize how masculinity and femininity can be relational in the context of conservative religious practices (see also Burke 2016, Prickett 2015, and Rao 2015 for research examining gender relationally in conservative religions).

Further research is needed to address how femininity and masculinity reciprocally shape one another in producing power relations within conservative religions. Mimi Schippers (2007) offered a theoretical model that focuses on the interactional relationship of femininity and masculinity in producing gender hegemony. The current study contributes to this theoretical focus by considering how masculinity and femininity interact together in the context of fundamentalist Mormon plural marriage to produce a specific articulation of gender power relations. I ask: How do men negotiate masculinity and leadership in polygynous households? How does this masculinity relate to women's performance of femininity in this family structure? Finally, what can this relational theory of masculinity and femininity tell us about gender negotiation in specific cultural contexts that would appear to severely circumscribe women's agency?

METHODS

The data for this article are from a larger comparative study of government regulation of polygyny, which includes in-depth interviews and participant observation of activities with individuals living in polygamy and actors who regulate and work with these populations in France, Canada, and the United States. For the purposes of this article, I focus on semistructured in-depth interviews and participant observation conducted in 2014 in Utah, where the majority of plural fundamentalist Mormon families live.

The history of Mormon polygyny began in the 1800s, when Joseph Smith founded the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS or Mormon Church) and included plural marriage as a religious commandment

(Gordon 2002). After much contestation, the LDS Church abandoned the practice in the early twentieth century, and a Mormon fundamentalist movement grew that continues to practice plural marriage (Jacobson and Burton 2011). An estimated 38,000 to 60,000 people live in plural Mormon fundamentalist families in North America, representing diverse communities and varying practices (Bennion 2012). Independents who are religious but do not follow a leader or specific group and groups like the Apostolic United Brethren (AUB or the Allred Group) behave and dress in a manner similar to mainstream American society, are opposed to underage marriage, and support the education of girls. The Fundamentalist Latter Day Saints (FLDS) practice underage and arranged marriages. Women wear prairie dresses and style their hair in long braids with the front swept into a wave (Jacobson and Burton 2011). The group known as Centennial Park (or The Work of Jesus Christ) practices a form of arranged marriage but opposes underage marriage and supports education for women and girls (Bennion 2012). The Kingston Clan (also known as Davis County Co-op) practices underage and intra-family marriage, but women wear modern clothing and blend into mainstream society.

I conducted 21 interviews with 36 participants who were in current or former plural marriages. Seven interviews included more than one wife and the husband, except in one case where the husband was not able to be present. Fifteen interviews were one-on-one. A number of families preferred to conduct a group interview, and I agreed as a way to observe how these families interact together. Conducting individual and family interviews allowed me to compare the responses between group dynamics and individual perceptions. I found consistency in the responses I received concerning the benefits and challenges that those living in plural families faced. I had a key informant who introduced me to several individuals and families, and then I used a snowball sample to recruit others. I also conducted participant observation of several groups in educational settings and at family events, such as a family-oriented dance, and I attended two fundamentalist Mormon church services. For background information, I drew on 21 interviews with non-polygynous participants who worked with individuals currently or formerly in plural families. While I conducted limited participant observation, the data for this article are predominantly participant-generated narrative representations of gender negotiations rather than ethnographic portrayals.

The sample includes 26 current or former polygynous women and 10 men. All self-identified as white, reflecting the racial makeup of fundamentalist Mormons. I conducted interviews during a period when polygamy was

decriminalized in Utah, after a 2013 U.S. district court decision found that the state violated polygamists' right to privacy and religious freedom. The ban on polygamy was restored in 2016. This brief window of decriminalization may have facilitated some interviews; however, many discussed being wary of recriminalization. Similar to Iturriaga and Saguy (2017), I found it easier to recruit women, who are less likely to be targeted by law enforcement. Still, I was able to interview four polygynous men one-on-one and six as part of a family interview. Most of the interviews were conducted with individuals who identified as independents (16), AUB (10), and Centennial Park (8). I was able to conduct interviews with two individuals from the Kingston group but not any current members of the FLDS, which is a closed group that does not speak to outsiders. However, I did spend time with several ex-FLDS members who described the complexities of life in the group. Twenty-eight of the participants were currently in plural relationships, and eight were no longer living in plural families. Most of those who had left plural marriages were very critical of polygyny and its negative consequences on women. By interviewing women and men currently in plural families and those who had left, my sample covers a range of perspectives on gender relations within plural families. Respondents either chose or were given pseudonyms.

The semistructured interview schedule included questions about the respondent's religious/family background and upbringing. A set of open-ended questions focused on experiences living in plural families, including how they dealt with conflicts and jealousies. Especially important for the purposes of this article are questions about views on the benefits and challenges of a plural family structure and on gender inegalitarianism. With these questions, I attempted to discern both ideals and practices with regard to gender and family.

Interviews lasted from one to three hours, with an average length of 1.5 hours. With the respondent's permission, I audio-recorded each interview, which was then transcribed. Three research assistants and I developed a codebook according to systematic textual analysis of the transcripts. The process of coding was based on a grounded theoretical method that began with identifying sensitizing concepts concerning the everyday experiences of plural families. Next, we coded guided by an inductive analysis to identify major themes and patterns that emerged from the data that led to an established codebook (Glaser and Strauss 1999), using NVivo 11 to code transcripts. Throughout the project, we met regularly to discuss consistency and similarities across respondents as a way to identify central themes and ideals that emerged repeatedly in the interviews. The coding

of the participant observation notes supported the broader themes identified in the interviews. For this article, I draw on codes that relate to gender relations and ideology, feminism, agency, and religious identities to distinguish the two main categories of gender relations: conciliatory masculinity and homosocial femininity.

FUNDAMENTALIST MORMON RELIGIOUS AND GENDERED LIVES

The gendered and religious lives of fundamentalist Mormons have much in common with mainstream Mormonism, which emphasizes honesty, hard work, and traditional gender norms (Bennion 2012). Only Mormon men are able to participate in the “priesthood,” which is necessary for fulfilling ecclesiastical leadership duties such as blessing the sacrament, performing baptisms, and holding church office (Beaman 2001). Mormon fundamentalism generally parallels Mormon theology in its emphasis on male authority, including placing men as heads of the family, assigning men’s priesthood responsibility, and upholding male leadership roles within the church hierarchy.

Respondents discussed the religious and cultural reasons behind the organization of the plural families in which a majority of respondents were born and raised. Several who were raised in Mormon fundamentalism described extremely pleasant memories of growing up in large families. Evelyn entered a plural marriage of three wives in her 20s after being raised in a plural family. She echoed the words of other respondents in describing the higher calling—supported by LDS scriptures—of entering a plural union: “Our intention to have this large family . . . and all that purpose of coming together is more than just like, ‘Okay, we’re married, now we have a relationship, now we have sex.’” Elizabeth was raised in a mainstream Mormon nonplural family and explained her reasons for becoming a plural wife as an adult: “There are temporal reasons, there are family reasons, and there are eternal reasons. It all goes back to our religious thing.” Like Elizabeth, many others recounted how their decision to enter a plural marriage is based on a heavenly requirement, underscoring how practicing plural marriage is a way to “do religion” based on a gender ideology of family and community (Avishai 2008).

The practice of plural marriage as a religious tenet is controversial. Generally, the debate over polygyny centers on whether it is inherently harmful and abusive to women and children (Bennion 2012). For many, the patriarchal structure of Mormon fundamentalism leads to the subordination

of women by promoting a gender hierarchy that allows men to marry multiple wives and not vice versa. In my interviews, individuals who left their plural marriages indicated the problems of gender inegalitarianism. Sally had entered a plural marriage voluntarily in her early 20s but left both the religion and her marriage. For her, "the very dynamics of polygamy and that triangle of the male being up here, and the females being down here, it doesn't matter how hard you try but there will never be equality." Kerry, now in her 50s, was not raised in Mormon fundamentalism and decided to leave her plural marriage after raising her children. She came to realize that the culture sustained the submission of women, saying, "The women should just be nice and submissive. . . . There's a very, very chauvinist attitude." These narratives point to women's constrained agency in a patriarchal religion and family structure that situates men at the top over multiple wives. In families in which the wives do not get along, there can be violence among the wives, and wives can abuse other wives' children (Bennion 2012).

Given this gender inegalitarianism, many assume that women in plural marriages are not able to make "a choice, but rather, are brainwashed victims" (Fry 2010, 977). However, the lived experiences of current and former plural wives and husbands are more complicated than this perspective would allow. Kerry decided to practice the "fullness of the gospel" (plural marriage) together with her husband. She had faith that God would reward her for making this huge sacrifice. After agreeing to marry the second wife, she recounted how standing at the altar she wanted someone to just "stick a knife in me right now." In the end, the sacrifice was too great, and she left the faith and her marriage.

Whereas Kerry's description of her choice to participate in a plural family might more readily fit the brainwashed stereotype, other participants recounted their desire for a plural marriage and involvement in choosing an additional spouse. Julie was not born into the fundamentalist Mormon culture but became the second wife to Oliver in her mid-20s. By 2017, they had a total of 17 children. She recounted how important it was to her that it was Ellie and not Oliver who approached her about joining the family:

> I think the way that Oliver and Ellie went about it, Oliver was very respectful. I could tell he wasn't trying to "woo" me or win me in any way. Ellie was the one who came to me and said that, "Oliver and I have been praying about you." She was the one who asked me. That meant a lot to me in our family setting and situation, to where I was the one who told Oliver we were engaged.

She recounted how entering the family in this way allowed the two women to nurture a friendship. Other participants described a norm in their communities that frowns upon husbands searching for multiple wives. In Centennial Park, women are encouraged to pray and find inspiration from God to choose their future mate. According to Harper, a young first wife who helped decide the entrance of the second wife, “Women get the choice. We all receive the inspiration, if we’re seeking and asking. But a man in our community is not going to be well received if he says I am inspired that she should marry me (laughs). Okay, it’s like ‘Oh, were you? That’s nice’ (laughs).” Families that work well together enter marriages by performing gender as relational: the man must prioritize the desires of the prospective and current wives to ensure future compatibility.

Participants described how belonging to a plural family can be complicated and create specific challenges for the husband, wives, and children. Some families live together in one large house where they divide space for each wife. When it is financially feasible, wives often have separate houses, generally close to one another, and the husband spends a designated number of nights with each. In either configuration, participants discussed the need to deal with jealousies, the challenges of bringing in a new wife who may have different norms of cleanliness and styles of parenting, and the financial and temporal difficulties of caring for large families. The availability of resources and how these are shared can either create cooperation or contention (Bennion 2012). In the following two sections, I provide insight into the way that gender is performed relationally in plural families to constrain men’s power and to enable women to balance work and home responsibilities.

Conciliatory Masculinity and Emotion Work

The ideological organization of plural families is similar to that of evangelical Christians where the husband is seen as the head of the family. Samantha, a second wife in her late 40s, discussed the importance of headship in Mormon fundamentalism:

> We do adhere to the Christian philosophy that Paul articulated that the man is the head of the family, but then he goes and says, “The man is not without the woman, nor is the woman without the man.” . . . I think you see yourself in that masculine mirror a piece that you can’t see in your own. And so, I think that what happens in these spaces is that we become a fuller version of our self.

This formulation of headship parallels the neotraditional embrace of gender ideology that reflects complimentary ideals of masculinity and femininity found among mainstream evangelicals (Gallagher and Smith 1999). In the case of plural marriage, the husband holds the mirror to more than one wife, but each wife has her own special relationship to the husband. Samantha explained that being head means being a worthy husband and father to each wife. She described a conciliatory masculinity that combines the qualities of leadership and sacrifice as a higher, spiritual standard than is true for monogamous men: "I see the patriarchal order as a set of responsibilities on a man to bring certain things into a family unit that women can use. I told a reporter once, 'You will not meet a group of women that have higher expectations for men.'" In families that are successful, the wives join together as a group to ensure that men live up to their responsibilities of prioritizing and nurturing family relationships. Being a breadwinner is not enough.

To soften rough edges as the husband seeks to meet the needs of all wives, conciliatory masculinity requires a high standard for acting as head that is shaped in relation to femininity. James, a Centennial Park member and husband of three wives, described the analogy that he tells those outside the community:

> I give a metaphorical description of rocks that are put into a tumbler, and all their sharp edges and corners get worn off. And when you take those rocks out, there's this beautiful smooth rock. . . . I've had a lot of rough edges knocked off, and I've had to give up some of the things that I probably would have pursued career wise, or at least interest wise, for the lifestyle and for the raising of a large family.

James suggests that the wives and husband get tumbled together to produce a "smooth" masculinity where the husband prioritizes his large family over more individualist pursuits, such as advancing his career. Whereas in families that hold gender-traditional beliefs in which the wife most often compromises her career, men in plural families must make career sacrifices that allow them to spend time with their families.

Masculinity is shaped in interaction with femininity as men do "emotion work" to be good husbands (Hochschild 1983). Terry, an independent who has two wives and eight children, discussed the emotional elements that have required him to grow and learn:

> You know, I hear a lot of men say, "I would never live polygamy. That's ridiculous! How can you handle more than one wife?" You don't handle

> wives anyway . . . but if you can look at it as relationships, and experiences, and growing, and learning, and learning to work together, and really learning to sacrifice of yourself. I'm not trying to get a four-door truck, or a snowmobile, or, you know, retire by this certain age . . . We're about a longer view.

Here masculinity is softened by femininity in plural relationships. Men eschew the idea that wives should be "handled" and reject a worldly perspective that focuses on getting material possessions—snowmobile, four-door truck—that many men covet as central to their masculine identity.

Husbands expressed the importance of prioritizing the family to spend time with their children. Terry explained his priorities, saying, "I don't come home and watch TV. I'm involved with the family. Someone asked me once, 'Well what about your children, doesn't that really rob them?' And I said, 'Well I don't watch TV. I spend more time with my kids than most monogamists I know.'" Having large families means that men must spend time and energy to have relationships with their wives and children. Men recounted that plural family life requires embracing a higher, spiritual goal of nurturing a family that will continue on into the afterlife.

In addition to committing to family time, having a successful plural marriage requires men to perform a masculinity that is considerate of the feelings of multiple wives. Samantha stressed the importance in her experience for the husband to be thoughtful and a good listener, qualities not usually associated with male headship that orient men toward leadership and action (Burke 2012):

> I will feel this way; my sister wife may feel this way. And you need to think very carefully about the choice you're going to make, because it's going to have a very real consequence. . . . He's been pretty good about just being thoughtful. Sometimes he does stupid stuff. I've done stupid stuff. Everybody does stupid stuff, but a little listening goes a long way.

Participants described the need for men to do emotion work that focuses on "interpersonal emotion-management," requiring them to effectively handle the emotional climate in which wives may disagree on fundamental issues (Erickson 2005, 338).

Interpersonal emotion-management often means acting as a mediator to smooth out the rough edges of multiple relationships, demonstrating the way that femininity shapes masculinity in plural families to produce conciliation. A heavy burden is placed on men as head to perform this role. Avery, an independent who was in a plural marriage that dissolved when

the first wife left, described what it takes for a husband to be exemplary. He said, “It is the ability to have a successful relationship, balance that relationship with multiple women, and actually have it work.” Amy, a young mother in Centennial Park and one of two wives, explained the necessity of men’s emotion work to ensure family harmony:

> My heart goes out to the men living this, because it really does take a big person and a man to honestly put his own feelings aside about a lot of things, and really just have to look for the benefit of the whole. . . . Instead of having it going in three crazy directions, to kind of bring it together and figure out what would be best for all. And a lot of times that means putting his own agenda aside.

Being head of a harmonious plural family means performing masculinity in relation to femininity: by setting the everyday rules and negotiating disagreements among wives, men’s performance of conciliatory masculinity provides an environment in which the wives can work together and get along. Amy explained:

> So, if a conflict does arise between her and I over something, and we can’t come to an agreement, or then usually we’ll take something like that to him, and say, “What do you think about this?” . . . So sometimes he can help us just sort it out, because he loves her, he loves me.

For Amy, her husband determines the middle ground as the arbiter of wives’ multiple and contested views.

Men openly discussed the importance and challenges of treating all wives fairly. Arch, the husband of Tammy and Joan, told me how he tries to model his own plural family on the one in which he was raised. His mom as the first and legal wife was never given special treatment: “My family always lived under very equal arrangements. So, it wasn’t, ‘I’m the legal wife, so I get this much, and you guys get what’s left over.’ It was very fairly distributed according to how many people had needs.” Arch explained that it takes extra consideration to buy gifts for his two wives to avoid hurt feelings and jealousies. This kind of consideration is integral to the strategies of men in plural families to create family accord.

Husbands who successfully practice conciliatory masculinity must multitask and be available to each wife sexually. The latter is not something that men openly discussed, but Rachel, who began her own organization to help people living in or leaving plural families, described this

aspect based on the time she spent with the Brown family who star in the TLC reality TV show *Sister Wives*:

> The women ruled. They told Kody what to do and where to go. That poor guy though, oh bless his soul. He is like, "Okay, you want me over here because she's upset? Okay, I will go over here." . . . That's all he does the whole time is fix things. . . . And then, you have to think about him as a guy in the bedroom. He has to be on his game every time he goes from one wife to the next.

Conciliatory masculinity is not about "fixing things" in the stereotypical masculine sense of being good at repairing stuff but in being good at building and repairing relationships, a type of emotional labor that is mostly attributed to women (Hochschild 1983). It also means that men must meet their wives' needs and ensure that each feels loved and attractive. Gender relations in plural marriage shape a conciliatory masculinity that combines leadership with emotion work and conciliation that allows homosocial femininity to flourish.

Homosocial Femininity: Bonding and Rivalry

In successful plural marriages, wives perform a homosocial femininity that complements and shapes the conciliatory masculinity that their husbands do to maintain family harmony and balance power relations. Homosocial femininity entails building social bonds among the wives as friendships and/or practices of sharing household responsibilities, such as deciding on a child care schedule. On the surface, the fact that wives must share a husband would seem to severely circumscribe the choices they can make about their family and work lives, and in some cases this is true. When wives do not nurture emotional bonds, it becomes difficult to function as a family. Women formerly and currently in plural families discussed dealing with feelings of jealousy, rivalry, and anger that can arise between wives and towards the husbands. Clarissa, who was born and raised in a plural family of two wives and later entered a plural marriage before leaving the religion, explained that in her experience plural families fundamentally create competition: "It is the nature of polygamy that it breeds contention. . . . It is an underground emotional wreck where everybody is trying to be the best wife, the best husband, the best spouse, the best lover, the best provider, the best everything."

Wives discussed their strategies to deal with this competition and rivalry, a strategy that focuses on building strong relationships between

the wives and also requires the husband's performance of conciliatory masculinity to manage the jealousies that can arise. Elizabeth recounted how she seldom experiences jealousy, but when it occurs, she has advice on how to deal with it: "And what I usually say to people is, 'Get your feelings out of the bedroom and into the living room and kitchen, and not worry about the bedroom.' Well, that's easier said than done, I realize that. But this is a long-term, eternal thing." Her words highlight how wives focus on religious belief to enable them to overcome feelings of jealousy and competition. Tammy, married to Arch and Joan, told me that she views jealousy as a form of immaturity:

> And I discovered that it truly is possible to love your sister wife enough, and to maybe grow up enough that there aren't the jealousy issues that tends to always be the first question, you know. "How can you stand X, Y, Z?" And to truly just love that your husband loves your sister wife, because you love her too.

As is the case for many who practice polyamory or polyfidelity—terms used to describe a variety of nonmonogamous relationships that vary in the number of people, the gender, and the sexualities of those involved—women in plural families spend time and energy to overcome envious feelings that can threaten plural relationships (Sheff 2003[AQ: 2]). However, this work is not just for women. Elizabeth told me that men must also take responsibility to balance women's competing emotions and desires with "humanness" and "spirituality," recognizing that there is a godly purpose for living plural marriage. This balance is essential to the interaction of conciliatory masculinity and homosocial femininity that recognizes but curtails rivalry.

While jealousy can be a problem, being a sister wife can also have benefits, such as a break from your husband. Some women—especially in families with five or more wives—described feeling frustrated that they do not see their husbands more. Yet, many women also feel relief that they get some needed time to themselves. Tammy echoed the words of many other wives in discussing the advantages of having a sister wife that provides some needed solitude: "The convenience of having a soulmate for a husband, and yet having evenings when you can just connect with yourself, because you're not distracted every night by your soulmate." Tammy drew on what Ann Swidler (2001, 119) called the "love myth" that posits a perfect mate for each person, but in the case of plural marriage she recognizes that there can be multiple soulmates. This understanding might be a strategy to accept sharing a husband with sister wives, but it also takes some romantic and sexual pressure off the husband–wife relationship.

Accentuating feminine values of giving birth to many children and raising large families was a recurrent theme in the interviews. Several wives discussed their own version of feminism. Samantha identified as a feminist, stating: "When I get into this with other women, I am like, you want it to look a certain way. You don't want me to have ten children, because I wouldn't have ever done that on purpose. You're absolutely wrong." In her view, feminism allows women to focus on having many children and embrace their feminine values of nurturing the next generation. Participants described the benefits of homosocial femininity to raising large families. Sandra, in her 30s, married at 18 years of age, and the second of two wives, recounted:

> One of the main things that a sister wife will see, that she is never alone. If she needs somebody, she always has somebody to go to. If she needs somebody to talk to, if she needs somebody to lean on to take her children for a while, while she goes to work. I can't think of how many times I've come home late from work and find dinner sitting there waiting for me.

Overall, respondents felt this support system an advantage in their everyday lives.

Homosocial femininity means building ties with sister wives so that all mothers work together to raise their children. When asked about the benefits of being in a plural family, Esther responded, "Well, there's quite a few, especially if the wives like each other and get along well. Then you have a friend, and we do! So, I've really enjoyed having such a good friend. And then you can share responsibilities." Esther, in her early 20s, is the second wife in a family with teenage children. Her sister wife, Nancy, described how much she enjoys Esther's company and that Esther can relate to the teenagers as more of a contemporary. She explained, "So, we do fun things that I wouldn't think to do, but she knows what's like fun with the kids." Nancy found that Esther's inclusion in the family has brought her closer to her teenage children.

In families that are harmonious, sister wives divide tasks based on career trajectories and personal preferences. Megan, one of five wives in her mid-30s, discussed how women have to juggle so many roles and that living in plural families opens up possibilities for finding work–family balance:

> Not every woman wants to be a homemaker, but lots of women, still, they would like to be a mother, and it's really hard for a woman to have it all. She is trying to fulfill like four or five roles all at once when it's a monogamous

> situation. But in a polygamous situation, I kind of feel like it does open it up for a woman that wants to have it all to do that.

Wives negotiate their roles, which can change over time. Elizabeth described the importance that diplomacy plays in her own family and the families she knows: “One thing that is really important is *not* to say, ‘Oh you can stay home and take care of my kids.’ You work it out so that everybody feels important in the family. You don’t try to act better than one of the others.” Ensuring that everyone feels important helps to maintain good relations among sister wives.

The women I interviewed described the benefits of having multiple hands to help around the house, especially to care for children. Hannah, who is part of the Centennial Park group, discussed how plural families are better than monogamous ones. She stated, “Huge support. I can’t even imagine being a single mom. We call mothers in Centennial Park who just don’t have a sister wife single moms. . . . Even though they have a husband, they don’t have that support system at home.” For many women, having a sister wife means having someone at home who is invested in meeting family needs. Two women said that their husbands helped with chores like cooking, but most participants pointed to the wives’ responsibility to meet household needs and child care responsibilities. Emma, in a plural family with Matt, Charlotte, and Evelyn, described how important it is to have someone committed to the children at home:

> Evelyn works a lot from the home, so she’ll also stay the majority of the time with the younger children that are not in school. . . . And I am seeing that in a lot of families, where it’s been a real benefit. I’ve got a sister, and she and her sister wife, they already made the agreement when they got married that she would stay at home with the children, and the other one would go get her career, because that’s how they wanted it.

Men also remarked on the benefits of having more than one mom for the children. In his plural family of two wives, Arch explained that the children can draw on the different strengths of each mom:

> Oftentimes I’ve seen Joan’s children go to Tammy and ask her for advice, or she will just volunteer to help them out. Part of it has to do with our living arrangement, all of us living under the same roof. And I see that Tammy’s children will oftentimes go to Joan. Tammy and Joan each have their own strengths, and the children, I think, are better people that are more well-rounded because of that.

Homosocial femininity allows mothers to draw on each other's strengths to provide children with multiple supports.

Building social bonds between women is based on a reciprocal relationship with the husband. Tammy considered herself and her sister wife as part of her husband's team:

> Much is gained by having another wife in your husband's family. And to have the relationship of a sister wife, it's like a mother–daughter relationship—only not, and it's like a sister relationship—only not, and it's like a best friend relationship—only not. It's kind of . . . to be on the same team with your husband, and yet to have a woman who thinks like a woman, and to be able to share and be a support system to each other.

Tammy's perspective underscores the relationship between wives and husband: While the husband is head, the wives are a team, and they view things similarly and can support each other. She described making choices together that don't involve the husband, thereby attenuating his power.

In plural marriages that are successful, husbands perform conciliatory masculinity to nurture these homosocial bonds between wives, giving them the space to work out their feelings about the husband–wife relationship. Matt explained that when one of his wives is angry with him, she will often go to the other two wives to talk about it. He said, "Sometimes they will be in agreement, but a lot of times it's just a safe place to listen. It's more objective." This also means that, at times, all three would unite against him, underscoring the importance of social bonds between wives that can enable them to curb their husband's patriarchal power.

Homosocial femininity joins wives together to require men to be good husbands and to resist men's bad decisions or behavior. Jack, who is in his 50s and whose plural family broke down when the first wife couldn't get along with the second, described the advantages in his friend's family of three sister wives: "You have three monitors, so to speak, of bad behavior, if there is any." In recounting his own experiences, Jack described acting in ways that fit conciliatory masculinity, such as listening to the problems of both wives. Still, one of his wives left because of the lack of homosocial bonds between the women. His words speak to the importance of nurturing homosocial femininity to check men's behavior and maintain good relationships.

Participants described the close bonds between wives as providing a space for understanding emotions that men don't always understand. Julie explained:

> It's just like if you were in a relationship, and then all of a sudden, you add somebody else. So, it's not just you two trying to work things out. It's you three trying to understand and communicate with each other. And honestly though, I think Ellie and I have an easier time communicating than we do with Benjamin, because he's a man and we're both women. So, we understand that you're emotional and you cry.

When sister wives are not rivals, they can connect to share their emotional lives. These bonds can prevent relations of domination that might characterize a patriarchal family situation. Instead, women are able to work together to ensure the patriarch does not overreach his power.

CONCLUSION

This study examines how gender is constructed relationally in plural, patriarchal family structures, allowing plural wives to negotiate power relations with their husband. To date, there has been a lack of research exploring the relationship between masculinity and femininity, studied together, to analyze power relations in specific religious and cultural contexts. The case of fundamentalist Mormon plural families shines light on how religious and family structures construct conciliatory masculinity in relation to homosocial femininity to help curb men's power. They offer complementary ways of doing gender in the interactional context of plural relationships (West and Zimmerman 1987). In some cases, a plural family structure, and its patriarchal underpinnings, create contention and competition among wives and the husband, resulting in a hostile family environment. While monogamous families can become contentious, polygyny and patriarchy in combination can intensify toxic family dynamics. This may be particularly true for families in more closed fundamentalist Mormon groups.

The idea that all men are patriarchal and that all women are victims in polygynous families, however, is not supported by my data. The interactions of conciliatory masculinity and homosocial femininity are key to ensuring that women have power in a patriarchal family structure. Similar to findings on monogamous conservative Christian families, men in plural marriages act as soft patriarchs who seek to be considerate and communicative (Gallagher and Smith 1999; Wilcox 2005). Men in plural families differ from those in monogamous Christian marriages by practicing a conciliatory masculinity that requires even more emotion work to negotiate conflicts among wives and between wives and the husband. Husbands

recounted their efforts to treat wives fairly and ensure that each feels loved and cherished, and to organize their schedules to spend quality time with their children. While two wives said that their husbands participate in limited household chores, it is generally the wives who divide up domestic and caregiving tasks among themselves, allowing men to focus more on breadwinning. Conciliatory masculinity is thus a form of hybrid masculinity where men in plural marriages selectively integrate aspects of femininities like emotion work but maintain their position as breadwinner and head of the family (Bridges and Pascoe 2014).

I argue that conciliatory masculinity cannot be understood without studying its relationship to homosocial femininity. It is the interaction of these two that brings about family harmony. While conciliatory masculinity softens patriarchal power and ensures that men put their wives and children first, homosocial femininity builds strong networks among wives and allows them to balance work and domestic duties. In some cases, the patriarchal structure of these families can be disempowering to women. Many participants, in contrast, recounted ways that women achieve independence and raise large families while balancing work and family obligations. This is made possible when all members embrace plural marriage as a religious calling that is not just about acquiring material possessions or fulfilling one's own selfish desires, especially for husbands who recognize the need to shun temptations from broader society to acquire expensive items like jacked-up trucks. A religious commitment to plural marriage allows husbands and wives to work together to overcome negative emotions like being covetous or jealous.

The findings extend the research on gender relations in conservative religious families by moving beyond solely focusing on women's agency or men's headship (Avishai 2008; Irby 2014). By studying gender relations in the same frame, this research uncovers how men's power can be circumscribed by the need to act as a conciliator within an ideological context such as a religious identity. Wives build homosocial bonds as a united front to attenuate the power of the husband. Strong social bonds help them negotiate their family and work roles within the constraints of their religious belief system. Thus, my findings point to the importance of moving beyond "the (false) dichotomy that pits agency against complicity" (Avishai 2008, 429). To do so, it is necessary to understand how masculinity and femininity shape one another interactionally in the context of ambivalence and the challenges of complex family forms that are founded on patriarchal relations. Conciliatory masculinity provides the conditions under which wives can nurture homosocial femininity; homosocial femininity shapes

conciliatory masculinity to contain men's dominance. Women who choose to live in a plural marriage can foster relationships with other wives that allow them to raise the large families they desire, work outside the home, and compel the husband's good behavior.

While I have demonstrated the importance of attending to the relations between masculinity and femininity in Mormon fundamentalist families, there is reason to expect that applying this gender relational approach to other nontraditional family forms, such as committed polyamorous relationships, will illuminate specific ways of doing gender. Sheff (2005), for example, found that polyamorous women also experience feelings of strife and jealousy, vacillating between feelings of empowerment and disempowerment in the same relationship. Do polyamorous families that are structured similarly to patriarchal plural marriages include interactions between conciliatory masculinity and homosocial femininity that can curb men's power? Are there broader patterns of doing gender in other family structures that are relationally complicated by the fact that multiple men may be involved in the relationship? Questions like these point to the need to expand our conceptions of doing gender based on a relational approach that takes into consideration specific cultural contexts and family structures to understand how power is negotiated. Overall, there is need to more carefully assess the ways that gender relations are constructed and constrained in varying religious and cultural environments.

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