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Persevering Polygyny: An Initial Study of Relational Maintenance Among Polyginists

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Abstract

This thesis examined the relational maintenance behaviors used by polyginists living in Centennial Park, Arizona, where polygyny is practiced openly, to sustain their relationships. The framework used was Stafford and Canary's relationship maintenance behavior typology, including five categories: shared networks, assurance, positivity, openness, and shared tasks. The typology has been used to study other relationship types. Findings indicated more similarity in relationship maintenance behaviors to monogamous relationships than difference. Generally, the polyginists were found to utilize many of the same basic relationship maintenance behaviors found in prior research. Some important unique maintenance behaviors emerged, including an entire community social network and reliance on outside elements, such as faith and children, to support the relationships despite social stigma. In general, the findings question common assumptions about differences between monogamous and polygynous long-term relationships. Studying Centennial Park community members offers a new opportunity to explore relational maintenance in a previously unstudied relationship type.

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Introduction and Rationale

Relationships pervade our lives. It is clearly important to study and seek understanding of relationships to help us improve them. While insight into commencing and dissolving relationships is valuable, the in-between stage, involving maintenance , is typically the longest period in a relationship. This is the span in an enduring relationship to which we usually devote the most time and effort. Often the volatility inherent in the beginning and ending of relationships is an attractive dig site for researchers. It draws them like flies, meanwhile the more comparatively humdrum, yet certainly equally important in terms of prolonging and enriching a relationship, middle ground takes a backseat. Relational maintenance is a key component of this portion of our relationships and, as such, merits scholarly attention as well. The importance of increasing our mindfulness of strategies to maintain quality relationships is a developing focus, yet, to a large degree, mastery of relationship maintenance skills evades us. Adding to our frustration, the modern trend is to reevaluate and redefine our relationships and become more accepting of nontraditional relationships types. Although maintaining quality relationships may be difficult, we can learn effective methods by studying various relationship types. It is important to study a myriad relationship types, and how they are maintained, to come closer to understanding what we can do to develop and sustain quality relationships in our lives.

While some progress is being made toward acceptance of alternative lifestyles, like the 2013 declaration of the Defense of Marriage Act as unconstitutional, much opposition still remains, particularly to polygamous situations. In a recent ethnographic study by Ault (2012) on Centennial Park, the community where the participants in this study live, he describes the political climate in years past for those practicing polygyny (a type of polygamous union

involving one man and more than one wife as opposed to say polyandry, which involves many men being married to one woman) in the area:

> The first law created to oppose polygamy was passed in 1862…. The threat of prosecution and imprisonment was ever present among those who held to the principle of plural marriage (polygyny). The first of a series of government raids of Short Creek (later Colorado City) occurred in August of 1935, in which six of the community's leading citizens were arrested and three of them were convicted… (p. 8)

This scrutiny was one of the major reasons Mormon fundamentalists chose to be so secretive about their lifestyle.

The polyginists this study focuses on look to Mormonism for their roots. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latterday Saints (LDS) openly practiced polygyny in the 1800s as a tenant of their religion necessary to their ultimate salvation. The Church's founder Joseph Smith, Jr. included a revelation (section 132 in the *Doctrine and Covenants*, an LDS canon of scripture) that declared plural marriage essential to the religious salvation of the members. Near the turn of the century, the LDS Church leaders abandon the practice. Certain factions of LDS people did not follow the leaders of the church and, even today, there are groups like the Centennial Park community in Arizona, practicing polygyny as their early Mormon ancestors did, includig their belief in placement marriage, an arranged marriage system used for their religious polygynist marriages (Ault, 2012). This continued practice led to their persecution by authorities and ostracization from mainstream America.

In light of the rocky social climate, many polygamists kept there lifestyle covert, from the LDS church and legal authorities. On the tail of the HBO series, *Big Love*, some polyginists have

come out in the open, as evidenced by the reality show *Sisterwives* featuring an actual family practicing polygyny.

The people of Centennial Park have recently been seeking more attention and trying to change the public view of their community. In the past few years, they organized a few community members to act as a public relations committee to represent the community and give it a public face as Ault (2012) emphasizes:

> In the mid 2000's a surge of attention from local, national, and world-wide news outlets, talk-shows, and television programs made it necessary for this community to organize a committee to be the face…to the outside world. This was a huge and dangerous departure for this closed society. Many of these individuals lived through the (police) raids of the 1930's, '40's, and '50's, which had broken their families apart for up to ten years. Understandably, the Centennial Park Action Committee (CPAC) tentatively began shedding light on their lifestyle that was considered strange, unnatural, and dangerous by a majority of Americans and is against the law in both Utah and Arizona. CPAC worked with such national celebrities as Oprah and Dr. Phil in an attempt to communicate their message to the public (p. 8).

The group strives to dispel common assumptions about polygamist relationships and help individuals outside the community understand their lifestyle choice. Some families in the community also appeared on the new reality series *Polygamy USA* on the National Geographic channel. Steps like these could help the general public to realize that polygynists are more "normal' than previously thought. The Centennial Park community members also seek to differentiate themselves from other fundamentalist and/or polygamist groups, such as the extremists like the followers of Warren Jeffs in Colorado City and other communities around the

nation. The community is much more open in terms of communication and education than the closed FLDS community. This shift, with the open communicative environment it creates, is a good reason to study this community and its members. It is an excellent opportunity for researchers and helps extend the community members voice into academia. The specific purpose of this study is to extend previous relationship maintenance research through inquiry into a different and understudied population involved in long term polygynous relationships using five relational maintenance strategies: openness, positivity, assurance, social networks, and shared tasks.

The push to accept alternative relationship types in Westernized societies is furthered by special interest groups, like the people of Centennial Park, who have worked to inform the public about polygamy and other alternative lifestyles. For example, in the U.S. states like Massachusetts have legalized gay and lesbian marriages. With fluctuations in general relationships, family structures are also changing and those that have been considered alternative are becoming more and more prevalent. Polygamous relationships, specifically polygynous (one man with more than one "wife"), in the West are receiving more and more attention. Many people practicing alternative lifestyles are trying more than ever to overcome the social stigma and be accepted by larger society in ways that have only been possible thus far in their tight-knit social circles. *Polygamy USA* shows regular people facing the same issues anyone might face. It shows that polygamy isn't all about abuse of individuals and social programs. The families on the show are trying to figure out how to navigate the economy to make an honest living and raise their kids to be responsible citizens. Government and sociology and psychological professionals recognize this shift and are searching for ways to establish open communication with participants. In 2005, Polygamy in Canada, a collection of policy research reports, addressed

whether existing policies adequately addressed the rights of women living in polygamous domestic arrangements (funded jointly by the Status of Women Canada and the Department of Justice Canada) was published in Canada.

Taking a closer look at polygynous families is important in our efforts to redefine family relationships in our nation to keep up with current trends in society. Since polygynous relationships are heterosexual in nature and often based in religious values that frown upon relationship dissolution, it seems likely that individuals in polygynous relationships engage in similar basic maintenance behaviors reported in previous studies on monogamous heterosexuals. Yet, because they also face rejection of their lifestyle from their larger society, they must also work at overcoming this deficiency. It is likely they utilize some unique maintenance behaviors, as with gay and lesbian relationships, to accommodate for the lack of general social acceptance. There are some in the nation that have come to change their perception enough to accept polygynists' lifestyle choice and now look to help them maintain their families in positive and healthy ways. Their perception reflects a more widespread and longstanding societal value of preserving families.

Still, polyginists and gay couples are not allowed to legally marry in the most of the U.S. today. This can affect their relationships (Haas & Stafford, 1998). The Centennial Park group only hopes to decriminalize their lifestyle, as they can hardly imagine their political leaders would actually give it legal validation (Ault, 2012). While we don't know how the showdown will end, we do know the current climate for marriages in the U.S.

The dissolution rate of marriage relationships, specifically in the U.S., today is alarming to some. The divorce rate is around 40% (Hurley, 2005). Organizations within our nation are working to educate and inform citizens to address the concerns of those interested in reducing

this number. Researchers can fuel this educational effort and boost it by finding new opportunities for inquiry that may shed additional light in this area.

While there are not current reliable statistics regarding divorce rates among polygynists in Western societies, Gage-Brandon (1992) found, as a result of a case study in Nigeria, examining the effect of polygyny on the stability of first unions, that "two-wife unions are the most stable whereas unions with three or more wives are associated with the highest rates of marital disruption…independent of childlessness, marriage duration, and other factors" and "a simple dichotomy of polygynous and monogamous unions may be misleading" (285). Specifically, Gage-Brandon (1992) found "little difference in the likelihood of divorce between monogamous and polygynous unions" (285). Such a view is lopsided when considering all the polygynous women in the study. When the number of wives per union was isolated, however, considerable variation in divorce probability emerged: 6% for monogamous unions, 2% for two-wife unions, and 14% for unions with three or more wives (cumulative proportion divorcing within five years of marriage). Perhaps some polygynous unions are more stable than the traditional monogamous unions as they stand now and studying them could offer some useful information in the quest for maintaining families.

The thesis begins with a review of the literature on relational maintenance, including various typologies developed for the research area; some specific types of relationships; and polygyny. Next, the method for the study is detailed including information regarding the participants as well as data collection and analysis. Finally, the findings of the study are given with a discussion of the details.

Literature Review

The literature review covers relational maintenance behavior research that has evolved to the point that measurement tools have been created and refined to study it and shows researchers have branched their research out across various relationship types, from heterosexual married couples and dating couples to friends. Then, research on polygyny across cultures is presented.

Relational Maintenance

Our relationships, and their maintenance (however defined or measured), are an important support to us, and, yet, many researchers have focused largely on initiation and dissolution, rather than how they remain intact over time (Oswald, Clark & Kelly, 2004). A deeper understanding of maintaining quality relationships is important for modern times and made more difficult in our ever-changing (more quickly every day, infact) world. People can easily get lost in the complexity. Relational maintenance behaviors can stabilize, escalate, deescalate, a relationship, as well as act as a mechanism for changing a relationships (Dailey et al, 2010). Researchers need to put more effort into inquiry in this area and the challenges facing modern relationships. As Oswald and colleagues (2004) stated, "understanding how maintenance behaviors effectively sustain relationships can be of assistance to those who have trouble maintaining quality relationships (p. 414). Inquiry is beginning to focus more on this significant research area and relevant data is becoming available. The new research can point toward more satisfactory relationships.

Relational maintenance is grounded in Relational Dialectics Theory (RDT). RDT asserts that we create polarities in our relationships as we strive to have it all in our lives. Theorists Baxter and Montgomery (1996) were most influential in bringing forth RDT and observe that dialectical thinking is not about compromise and balance, but focuses on the less logical and

more consistent unfolding practices of the moment.

These dialectics are not the only dialectics affecting relational life; contextual dialectics (public and private, real and ideal) are also important factors (Rawlins, 1992). For example, cohabiting relationships (such as polygyny) may be trivialized because the participants aren't legally bound, which can cause relational tension because, sometimes, public functions constrain the private ones (Rawlins, 1992). Other practices can similarly be stress factors. For instance, comparing our relationships to idealized relationships can also cause relational tension (Rawlins, 1992); imagine the frustration that would ensue if everyone compared their family to the family standard dramatized in *Father Knows Best.* One must look at this ideal realistically, recognizing it for what it is – a situation crafted by scriptwriters. It may be used as a benchmark, but one should be cautious in allowing it to dominate the concept of acceptable family life. This approach, however, differs from other maintenance views, and Montgomery (1993) argues that it involves more of a relational *sustainment* - not exactly a view with an eye toward satisfaction and quality.

Relationship success is defined in many ways. Scholars approach relational maintenance in various ways from strategies for staying together to sustaining quality relationships (Dindia & Canary, 1993, Montgomery 1993).

Longevity is a clear indicator of success to some. Relationship maintenance refers to utilizing communicative strategies and behaviors to prevent relationships falling apart (Haas & Stafford, 2005). Certainly gold and silver wedding anniversaries are valued and admired by a large swath of the population. Despite significant problems in their relationship, some people will remain in the situation because of a major concern with longevity.

Stability is also comforting to people. Maintenance behaviors are used to maintain the

current status of relationship (Dailey, Hampel & Roberts, 2010). Some people may not be as concerned about the quality of their relationship as others and are content to just keep the status quo.

Another limitation on reaching consensus in defining terms is that researchers have been prone to choosing a certain theoretical perspective and applying it narrowly to one context, say friendship. The result is an unbalanced research agenda with most research concentrated on romantic couples and less on friendships and families. Scholars continue to debate the exact definition of the term.

Despite all this, the trend of more and more people seeking a *quality* relationship and concerning themselves with relational satisfaction in addition to longevity is moving some researchers to a more cohesive approach.

There are researchers that look at maintenance through a different lens and focus on quality relationships. Canary and Stafford (1991) are at the forefront of relational maintenance research that is coherent (promoting convergence) and considers quality (satisfaction, trust, etc.). They seek to understand strategies for keeping relationships intact in a *satisfactory* condition. For example, Canary, Stafford, Hause, and Wallace (1993) performed a study differing in two major ways from previous inquiries in that they took an inductive analysis approach and included relationships of lovers, relatives, friends, and others (in an effort to produce a more complete study). This cohesive approach takes the research area in the direction needed. Canary, Stafford, and Semic (2002) studied five relational maintenance strategies, openness; positivity; assurance; social networks; and shared tasks, and three fundamental relationship characteristics, liking; commitment; and control mutuality, concurrently and found indications that perceptions of the maintenance behaviors added significantly to the variance of the relational features. (These five

relational maintenance strategies will be used in this study. See the Methods chapter for additional explanation.) With quality in mind, Canary and Stafford (1991) closely examine these communication behaviors in their research and that of other scholars.

Maintenance behavior typologies. Researchers have sought to create sound measurement tools for inquiry regarding maintenance behaviors. One thing communication researchers converge on is their focus on maintenance strategies (Canary & Stafford, 1992). Haas and Stafford (1998) state that relationship maintenance research is dominated by a social exchange perspective, which focuses on communication behavior reciprocation. Researchers developed various typologies as a result of their inquiry into relationship maintenance in an effort to categorize the range of relational maintenance behaviors (Haas and Stafford, 1998). The typologies have been useful in studying relational maintenance.

Most relational maintenance behavior research has been qualitative and researchers coded comments into typologies (Oswald et al, 2004). The typologies include different ranges in number of maintenance behaviors and categories. Some typologies are centered on romantic relationships, while others are developed around other relational types, like friendships. For example, Dindia and Baxter (1987) qualitatively derived 49 romantic relationship maintenance behaviors and coded them into 12 strategy types; these strategies included changing the external environment, communication, metacommunication, avoidance of metacommunication, antisocial strategies, prosocial strategies, ceremonies, spontaneity, togetherness, seeking/allowing autonomy, and seeking outside help. In a second study (Baxter & Dindia, 1990), they did not replicate the initial strategies but rather found three underlying maintenance dimensions of constructive vs. destructive strategies, ambivalence vs. satiation based conditional use, and proactive vs. passivity based strategies.

Canary and Stafford noticed the divergence in the area amongst communication scholars and sought to "derive a comprehensive taxonomy of relational maintenance strategies" (Canary & Stafford, 1992, p. 243). To this end, Stafford and Canary (1991) developed a commonly used typology with five dimensions of intentional relational maintenance behaviors: positivity, openness, assurances, sharing tasks, and networks. (See Methods chapter for additional explanation of behaviors.) This action follows their leanings toward convergence in the research area.

Canary, Stafford, Hause, and Wallace (1993) developed a similar typology, as they sought to extend the previous Canary and Stafford (1991) research to create a more exhaustive typology and identified behaviors of positivity, openness, assurance, social network, sharing tasks, joint activities, mediated communication, avoidance, anti-social strategies, and humor. Dainton and Stafford (1993) also extended the previous work by examining routine behaviors that couples report enacting in addition to strategic behaviors. Routine maintenance behaviors are regular or habitual behaviors (intentional and unintentional) that serve to maintain the relationship (Haas & Stafford, 2005). Dainton and Stafford (1993) developed a typology of 12 behaviors. The categories included positivity, openness, assurances, social networks, shared tasks, joint activities, talk, mediated communication, avoidance, antisocial behaviors, affection, and focus on self.

Many scholars have worked toward creating solid typologies for studying relational maintenance. The Canary and Stafford typology seems to best lend itself to the sensitivity required for this study. Fewer categories work best considering the one-on-one interviews and the initial approach of a stigmatized population involved here.

Relationship Types

People engage in many differing types of interpersonal relationships. Some major types associated with polygyny are friendship, romantic, and family. Researchers have studied different types of relationships to see how they are maintained, but again the inquiry is mostly focused on heterosexual romantic relationships (Haas & Stafford, 1998).

Friendship. Friendship means different things to many people. The literature is replete with differing definitions for this dyadic relationship. One thing agreed upon, however, is that friendship is a unique relationship type because it is voluntary, that is friends must like each other in order to be considered friends (Adams, Blieszner, & De Vries, 2000; Devito, 2011). As such, friendships can be quite tenuous; therefore, how conflict resolution and relationship maintenance is handled is of utmost importance (Oswald & Clark, 2006). While research on friendship maintenance is somewhat limited, research on friendship maintenance is emerging (Oswald, Clark, & Kelly, 2004). According to Roberts and Dunbar (2011), the costs of maintaining friendships are higher than the costs of maintaining familial relationships.

Some friendships are closer than others so interdependency will vary, but friends' actions have much more bearing than those of casual acquaintances. While friends are more independent of the attitudes and behaviors of others and less subject to societal rules than other more casual relationships; At the same time, some theorists argue certain rules are the basis for maintenance of the friendship (Argyle & Henderson, 1984). Friends largely create their own rules for interacting with one another, such as taboo topics and when to discuss certain subjects. Friendships are also characterized by significantly reduced uncertainty (Devito, 2011). In this state, high levels of positivity, supportiveness, and openness are possible (Oswald et al., 2004). Friendships vary greatly and scholars have studied the differences.

Different factors have been shown to play into friendship maintenance behaviors. For instance, Oswald and colleagues (2004) developed a four-factor scale structure (openness, positivity, interaction, and supportiveness) based on their friendship maintenance research and found gender differences in maintenance behaviors amongst friends, as well as that friendships perceive equity of such unique qualities of friendships make them interesting and fruitful for research. Oswald and Clark (2006), for example, used friendships as ground for a study to help clarify the association between maintenance behaviors and problem-solving styles. Such research brings us closer to understanding how to maintain quality relationships, much like the research into romantic relationships has.

Romantic. There is much research conducted and many theories developed around love and romantic relationships. In fact, most relational maintenance research has been conducted in the context of romantic relationships (Haas and Stafford, 1998). One widely researched romantic relationship is heterosexual marriage. Heterosexual dating couples are often part of research samples, whereas inquiry into non-traditional relational types, such as same-sex relationships, is more limited. Haas and Stafford (1998) studied relationship maintenance in gay and lesbian monogamous long-term relationships and compared them with heterosexual marriages (2005). Kurdeck (1993) looked at how gay, lesbian and heterosexual married couples allocated household tasks.

As in other interpersonal relationships, relationship rules are a major factor in romantic relations. As Baxter (1986) attempted to understand relationship expectations, she identified eight rules governing opposite-sex romantic relationships, such as expectation for shared time; equity; and similarity and the obligation for granting autonomy beyond the relationship. These rules bind the relationship and similarly break the bond when broken. Romantic relationships

have been integral to our society and commonly formed the nucleus of our families. Maintenance strategies can be used by romantic partners to change and preserve their relationships (Guerrero, Eloy, and Wabnik, 1993). Infrequent use of maintenance behaviors has been shown to erode relationships, whereas frequent use is associated with stability and escalation over time (Guerrero et al., 1993). On-off partners, however, use less maintenance behaviors than their counter parts (Dailey, Hempel, & Roberts, 2010). We value romantic relationships because they afford us opportunities for love, affection, sexual activity, emotional intimacy, and support (Haas & Stafford, 2005). While married couples are still most common, cohabiting couples, like dating couples, have become more common and have been part of research studies on relational maintenance (Devito, 2011).

Cohabitation is on the rise in America (Devito, 2011). Cohabitants are not married but have similar circumstances in their relationship as married couples: sexual exclusivity, children, shared financial responsibility, shared space, and shared time. Heterosexual couples do choose more frequently not to marry, whereas same-sex couples in America are cohabitants because most states have laws enacted to ban these couples from legal marriage. While research concerning homosexual relationships is limited in comparison to research into heterosexual relationships, the existing research has illuminated relational dimensions of same-sex couples, and some similarities between heterosexual relationships and gay and lesbian relationships have been found; However, researchers have done little to explore their communication behaviors (Haas &Stafford, 2005). Research shows that gay and lesbian couples, like heterosexual couples, do seek long-term, committed relationships, but do not follow traditional gender roles (Haas & Stafford, 2005). Researching various populations better positions scholars to approach unchartered territory, such as polygynous relationships. The information provides a basis to work

from; a diverse base offers a solid springboard. Studying such nontraditional relationships offers additional insight into relational maintenance and addresses a wider population than research that only includes heterosexual relationships.

Family. In contrast to friendships and even most romantic relationships, familial relationships (i.e. sibling) are ascribed. Generally, family relationships are considered significant to most people. However, researchers particular attention to maintenance behavior in these relationships is fairly recent. Relational maintenance is key in familial relationship satisfaction. For example, maintenance behaviors mediate the relationship between family privacy orientation and family satisfaction (Serewicz, Dickson, Morison, & Poole, 2007). However, much of the existing relational maintenance research has been focused on sibling-sibling and parent-child relationships.

Sibling relationships have received attention in the last decade. Myers' (2001) examination of sibling relational maintenance and its association with liking found a positive correlation between the two. Subsequent research substantiated their findings of adult siblings' use of shared tasks, positivity, assurances, networks, and openness (Mikkelson, Myers, and Hannawa, 2011). Myers and Weber (2004) conducted two studies to examine relational maintenance in the sibling relationship and preliminarily develop a measure for them; They found six factors (confirmation, humor, social support, family visits, escape and verbal aggression) and explored the link between the factors and relations outcomes including liking, commitment, and trust. The existing research was extended by findings indicating that generally genetically related sibling use relational maintenance behaviors more frequently than those less genetically related, stepsiblings or adopted (Mikkelson, Myers, and Hannawa, 2011).

Before 1999, relational maintenance in the parent-child relationship type had not been studied (Vogl-Bauer, Kalbfleisch, & Beatty, 1999). In their study, Vogl-Bauer and colleagues (year) posited that relational maintenance strategies could be used in parent-adolescent relationships as a communication pathway to sustain the relationships; they also found adolescents' reports of maintenance strategies were affected by parent gender. From the parent perspective, parents similarly describe their relationships with their young children (4-7 years old) in terms of authority, companionship, and intimacy (Harach & Kuczynski, 2005) found. Later, Myers and Glover (2007) found in their preliminary investigation that emerging adults (18-25 years old) use maintenance behaviors with their parents and their use of relational maintenance behaviors is directly related to perceived commitment, trust, and control mutuality.

Polygyny

Polygyny involves the above relationship types and provides a unique opportunity for inquiry into each. Heterosexual romantic relationships exist between husband and wives, as well as kinds of friendships between co-wives; together, they form a family. Polygyny is common in the world at large, yet more unusual in Westernized countries. It is receiving increased media attention in the U.S. Polygyny is a cultural norm in Africa and the Middle East (Elbedour, Bart & Hektner, 2000), yet it is viewed as an anomaly when instances occur in countries like Albania (Nicholson, 2006). Polygyny is defined as a husband "married" to two or more wives, and it is the most prevalent type of polygamy practiced in the world, wherein the most common arrangement is between a man and two wives (Al-Krenawi, 2001; Al-Krenawi, Slonim-Nevo, & Graham, 2006; Profanter & Cate, 2009). Polygyny is not mainstream in American culture.

Under such circumstances most research into polygyny has been done in Eastern countries and is mostly anthropological, though some have studied the relationships. Scholars

studying polygamy (including polygyny) have warned against the pitfalls of cultural differences and the like as the intricacies can make it difficult to get a clear picture (Elbedour, Onwuegbuzie, Caridine, and Abu-Saad, 2002). For example, children are one of the main focuses in research on polygamy. In their comprehensive literature review, Elbedour and colleagues (2002) found both perceived benefits of the lifestyle for polygamist children and perceived negative effects of the lifestyle on children, and they assert that the situation is exacerbated by contradictory findings from the few extant empirical investigations conducted. Women are also commonly a focus of polygamy studies, as well. While some studies show significantly higher levels of such things as psychological distress and the like when compared to their monogamous counterparts (Al-Krenawi, 2001; Al-Krenawi & Graham, 2006), other research shows that women prefer polygamy because of social advantages (Anderson, 2000). Although a growing body of research addresses polygyny in relation to women and children, few researchers have considered the perceptions and experiences of men in polygynyous situations (Al-Krenawi, Slonim-Nevo, & Graham, 2006; Profanter & Cate, 2009). In their study of the psychosocial well-being of polygynous husbands, Al-Krenawi and colleagues (2006) found high levels of psychological distress consistent with their findings of troubling consequences of polygynous family formation in their previous research with women and children.

In the United States, polygynous unions are prohibited, therefore, much like same-sex couples, polygynists are cohabitants if they live together. In fact, in Western culture at large polygyny is viewed as a social phenomenon. In our society, such subcultures are often stigmatized. Some people criticize the relationships and seek to exclude them from our culture. There are even laws put in place used to bar the practice of polygamy, forcing many to live their lives in secret. Within these subcultures, however, the participants consider themselves "joined"

as married couples but must live outside the law as it currently exists, such as the polyginists appearing in *Sisterwives*. Unlike gay and lesbian couples, polygynists shown in *Polygamy USA* said they chose their lifestyle as a result of their religious beliefs, which also discourage divorce. Some of them said they feel rejected by our larger society and specifically targeted by lawmakers because of these beliefs. In the past, those practicing polygyny have come under much persecution. Today, much like the gay community, polygynists are more open about their life style and are working to gain public acceptance. They are among the faction pushing for redefining family in our nation. Their efforts are resisted and polygyny is certainly still seen as an "alternative" lifestyle choice far from the mainstream.

In some cases, a legal marriage may exist between the husband and one of his wives; otherwise, all members of the polygynous unit residing under the same roof are cohabitating as shown in *Polygamy USA*. Often, the parents and any children live communally; other families may choose multiple dwellings with various living arrangements, as in the TV show *Sisterwives*. Because of the current legal limitations, polygynous families and families with same-sex parents often function with only a cultural bond for their "marriages" rather than a legal binding contract. Unlike those married under that law, these unions rely on their subcultures to tie them together; it is the glue that keeps their family and lives united and is of utmost importance to them. Many women, for example, rely on the additional support they and their children receive from the network of "sisterwives" in a family. This network is a vital part of the subculture and is a major cause of its survival.

With the rising trend away from traditional families in America and similar cultures today, a segment of polygynous relations existing in such countries have limited structure and lack the cultural backing that the more mainstream polygynists have created. Cook (2007)

describes one such instance in her article concerning Black studies that she points out may be an adaptive cultural practice:

Many of these (African American) women may engage in what is referred to as "man sharing," having a relationship with a man who already has a wife and a job. Their White counterparts, on the other hand, are engaged in serial monogamy; getting married, divorced, and married again and living in a blended-family household (p. 232).

Both situations reflect changes in family structure throughout society and will most likely continue with that trend. The African American women may not have the same resources and, thus, settle because they don't perceive that they can get a man to legally commit to the relationship as their White counterparts. Rivett and Street (1993) describe an atypical family arrangement they occasionally happen upon in their family therapy practice and dubbed "informal polygamy" as they saw a stable pattern emerged after rules changed and men began maintaining two households:

We use this term (informal polygamy) to describe the one man-two women scenario where the man has regular emotional, and often practical and economic, commitment to two families, which include his children by the two different women. It is polygamous in the obvious sense and informal in that despite the adults' agreement to it, it is not culturally sanctioned and indeed contradicts social expectations (p. 72).

According to Rivett and Street (1993) family therapy may be improved by considering alternative perspectives when dealing with such cases and warn counselors against cultural ethnocentrism. It is evident that polygyny has a presence in Western societies, though not as prevalent as in Eastern societies, and a trend toward wider acceptance and pragmatic approaches is emerging.

The relationship maintenance research area is still quite monopolized by heterosexual monogamous relationships (Haas & Stafford, 2005). Although, researchers are beginning to examine relationship types such as friendships, even a bit of research on gay/lesbian unions and on/off relationships is coming forth (Dailey, Hampel, & Roberts, 2010; Haas & Stafford, 1998). It is important to conduct research into maintenance strategies in understudied populations to increase our understanding and go beyond using marital couples as a standard to studies directly comparing relational maintenance behaviors across union types (Haas & Stafford, 2005). The research needs to be diversified in many ways. Existing communication maintenance strategy research is limited in focus, almost exclusively "on the relationships of dating or married, White, middle class, heterosexual couples" and, therefore, in-depth knowledge of the maintenance behaviors enacted in other relationship types is lacking (Haas & Stafford, 2005, p. 44). There is a need for inquiry into not only other relationship types but different demographic areas (racial, socioeconomic), as well.

Polygynous unions offer the opportunity to study relationship maintenance in romantic heterosexual relationships outside of monogamy and the traditional concept of marital relationships, as well as the familial/friend relationship between co-wives. The research on polygyny comes largely from Eastern countries and is usually approached from an anthropological perspective; Examination through a sociological/communication lens is limited. Polygyny has not been addressed from a relationship maintenance communication strategy vantage point. Based on the literature, the following study investigates the role of maintenance behaviors in polygynous unions.

For the purposes of this initial investigation into polygynous maintenance behaviors, Canary and Stafford's (1992) typology of strategic behavior, including the five purposive

relationship maintenance behavior categories positivity, openness, assurances, shared tasks, and social networks, is the main area of focus. After further analysis, they eventually extended their typology to include six more routine maintenance behaviors in addition to the five strategic behaviors. As the first five are more purposeful, it seems best to begin with them and expand the research by utilizing the other areas in subsequent studies. The following research questions are addressed herein:

RQ1: How do those involved in polygynous unions maintain their relationships considering their need to accommodate for the lack of wide-spread social acceptance?

RQ2: How are the relational maintenance strategies developed in polygynous relationships similar to what we know about strategies in monogamous unions?

Method

The participants in this study resided in a community where polygyny was largely accepted and practiced in relative safety. They were interviewed one-on-one with an eye toward confidentiality. The data was analyzed primarily according to Stafford and Canary's (1991) five relational maintenance strategies.

Data Analysis

The resulting texts were cross-referenced with Stafford and Canary's (1991) five relational maintenance behaviors as a starting point with allowance for other behaviors to emerge. Stafford and Canary's (1991) five purposive categories have been used by Haas and Stafford (1998; 2005), as well as Daintain and Stafford (1993), and added upon in the course of research. The five purposive maintenance behaviors positivity, openness, assurances, social networks, and shared tasks are the focus of this inquiry and defined for its purposes as follows (Stafford & Canary, 1991):

Positivity is defined as an attempt to make couples' interactions cheerful, uncritical, optimistic, and pleasant. This category includes things like doing favors for one's partner or giving gifts, such as flowers; self reporting that one is cheerful and nice most of the time. An individual's willingness to change things that may bother one's partner; being proactive and prosocial, such as using humor in exchanges; and reacting prosocially, as in asking forgiveness, are all included in the positivity category.

Openness is defined as actions such as engaging in direct discussions about the nature of the relationship, disclosing one's desires for the relationship, and offering one's thoughts and feelings (as well as listening to a partner's thoughts and feelings). The openness category includes self-disclosure, meta-relational communication, seeking advice, and empathetic

behaviors, such as mutual respect. Openness refers to deeper to discussion than just "talk" (a separate category in other typologies).

Assurance is defined as explicitly or implicity ensuring each other of the future of the relationship, stressing commitment, and demonstrating faithfulness. Assuring actions focused on including encouraging one another in work; overt expressions, such as telling each other "I love you;" nonverbal assurances, such as not engaging in sexual relations outside of the relationship; and discussing future plans together. Depending on the nature of the relationship, some partners devote quite a bit of time to discussing the status of their relationship and focusing their efforts on changing to ensure their future together.

Social networks are defined as behaviors such as relying on the support and love of common friends and family or use of people outside the relationships for support. For example, meeting a partners' parents is often a significant milestone for a romantic couple. For gay couples, this may include "being out" as a couple in a given environment. Different possible social networks include family members who are open and accepting, tolerant and accepting friends, colleagues (and their spouses) that one might interact with on a social level during shared activities, and the general public that one would introduce their partner to as "my partner."

The shared tasks category is defined as performing tasks that jointly face the partners and sharing the responsibility for them. Some examples include making dinner, paying bills, childcare, cleaning, and household maintenance. Shared tasks are allocated in different ways. Some couples will divide them according to traditional gender roles, whereas other couples will engage in extensive role negotiation to divvy them up (Haas & Stafford, 1998).

Data Collection

Participants were interviewed one-on-one in face-to-face interviews. The interviews were guided by five questions (see appendix A) based on the relational maintenance categories. They voluntarily participated in the study without incentive.

Each interview was conducted by the same person and recorded on a password protected iPad (by consent of each interviewee). Only the interviewer knows the particpants' identities. The interview method was chosen over others because it seemed most likely to put people at ease and provide the richest text. The comfort of the interviewee was the main concern guiding the interviews.

Participants

Thirteen (four men, nine women) adults from the small community of Centennial Park, Arizona (where polygyny is openly practiced by an established religious sect) were interviewed. Each participant had been actively involved in a polygynous union for two years or longer. The participants came from five different families and every interviewee, whether legally married or not, said they considered themself "married" according to their religious belief system. Four of the families involve marriage between one man and two wives, and one family involves a union between one man and three wives. Collectively the families include about 50 children. Each family has one wife staying at home while the other adults go out to work.

Participants range in age from 21-44 years old. All have one or more biological children from their current marriage relationship. All but one were also born, raised, and settled in the community. Each had completed a high school education. Six participants held master's degrees, and the remainder had some college education to associate degrees.

Findings

Social Networks

Social networks, reliance on outside people and support, is a category that plays a major role in relational maintenance for polyginists in Centennial Park. Similar to the salience for gay and lesbian interviewees of Haas and Stafford (1998), whose relationships were strengthened by being "out as a couple" and socializing in environments where they were not discriminated against for such, the polyginist partners expressed appreciation for the supportive social opportunities they find in the community.

There was a general agreement from all interviewees that they felt more comfortable going out within the community than anywhere else. A specific example shared by interviewee #10, a man with three wives, occurred when he was on vacation in the last couple of years in Vail, Colorado and had two of his wives with him. He took one of his wives river rafting one day and the other four-wheeling the next, and it so happened that the same company ran the excursions. He said he got a strange glance from a man who had seen him on the rafting trip and then saw him on the four-wheeling trip with a different lady, since it was "obvious we were together" he said the man seemed to be a bit taken aback. Such experiences are shared by all the interviewees and create discomfort when out in public with their partners outside Centennial Park. They said they had to work to overlook the uncomfortable feelings to maintain the comfort in their relationships that they wish to have to keep them positive and intact. The chance to move in circles where polygyny is accepted, though not practiced, by everyone is greatly appreciated. Interviewee #10 contrasted his experience in Colorado with how he feels in his community:

> I think it would be very different to live in a place that wasn't a community that had
>
> common beliefs … it's very relaxing… my friends and family are located close by. We

look out for each other and understand why we're living this way. It's not a question of what's going on there? Why are they doing that? Who is the new person at their house? It's definitely helped me be comfortable in the lifestyle. (If I lived somewhere else) I think I would be very withdrawn into my family. (Here) Neighbor children are in and out… it's open door and open neighborhood.

He said as a teenager he spent time living in Salt Lake City (SLC), where this was not the case. Unlike his children, he felt "much less accepted" because of being singled out for the way he dressed when he lived there. He now enjoys living and working in a community where he feels acceptance.

In contrast, he also gave examples of times he has also felt uneasy in recent years including going places he usually doesn't go, such as when he recently attended an LDS missionary farewell gathering, and when he first got married to his second wife and looked at himself through a "lens of being a participant rather than a product" of the lifestyle. He said he was "keenly aware" of the difference when he went out to dinner with ladies to a restaurant outside the community.

Another example of feeling out-of-place and straining relations is a family with two wives whose husband works and lives primarily in SLC. The man (interviewee #1) said that, like his father when he was growing up, he is gone most of the week and usually home for three days on the weekend. He is a top manager in a company and follows his father's example in handling his unique lifestyle as he fills that role. He said he doesn't talk about his lifestyle with his co-workers and believes that if others have knowledge of his lifestyle it could negatively affect his business. He stated that, although it hurts his other wife's feeling, he has a "professional wife" and only she attends company functions with him. Even after about ten years of being a married

in a trio, his "professional wife" (interviewee #8) said she is uncomfortable going out in public places outside of the community with her husband and sisterwife together. She describes being at their SLC house with the entire family as "sensitive" and says she "avoids too much attention" when there. Her sisterwife (interviewee #9) and her sisterwife's little boy are presented to the neighbors as an aunt and cousin to her children, and the kids have to remember to refer to their brother as their cousin instead. Interviewee #9 works outside the community and finds it's "really hard at work" so she chooses not to discuss her lifestyle with her co-workers. She said it's "difficult to not be able to share my life … because there's so much joy and happiness in my life that comes from our lifestyle that I can't share with people I work with." She says living in Centennial is "much easier" than it would be to live in SLC:

> Like grocery shopping and going out with kids and not having people say 'so are these your kids?' (in Centennial) You don't have that awkward "oh, yes but no" and all the questions. It's convenient here having people that live like we live. I would never want to live in Salt Lake for that reason. It's too hard to maintain what we enjoy with our families and being very outward with our belief.

The openness in the community is considered an asset to the maintenance of the polyginist relationships in Centennial Park by the interviewees, especially when contrasted with experiences they have had outside of the community.

Interviewee #13's relationships with her husband and sisterwife is also affected because when she goes out in public outside of Centennial "it bothers" her still after nearly ten years of being together as a family, but she said though "it makes her uncomfortable" she will still do it. Her husband (interviewee #12) works at Mohave Community College in nearby Colorado City and describes himself as well accepted in the community and not discriminated against at work.

Yet he thinks "(people are) very judgmental in St. George" and "they'll look at you weird" when out. "I don't get those looks," he said. "I try to dress more mainstream." It is particularly difficult for women to not be singled out he explained and, although he has come to dismiss his unease when going out with his wife (interviewee #12), who he describes as dressing such that she's picked out as a polyginist, it has had an affect on their relationship:

> She (his wife) has a hard time going out on her own because she feels like she's being
>
> judged and having me there gives her some confidence that she probably wouldn't have
>
> on her own. So it has caused her to rely on me more heavily when she goes into public.

His autonomy is a bit hindered but he does choose to look past that to maintain their marriage, as she suppresses her discomfort to go out of the community to public places with her sisterwife and husband. Being able to overcome these sensitivities and also take solace in the community allows them to maintain their lifestyle.

Even Centennial Park does not completely put all interviewees at ease within their relationships. Some interviewees said they run into challenges inside the community, while not as great or as often, in Centennial Park. Interviewee #2 married his second wife five years ago and said that now tensions at home caused by jealousy and such make him not want to go out much at all with both his wives because he is uncomfortable in social settings in and out of the community. Although, he did say when he goes to work outside of the community he will share his lifestyle with people who ask him directly, despite that in the past he had one associate who he said started treating him a little different after he found out.

Along similar lines, interviewee #1 said he feels generally accepted in Centennial Park but thinks community members are more critical of the polyginists there than they are of the monogamous couples in the community. One woman (interviewee #4) expressed a similar

opinion. She explained that she, as the mother at home, is the one who usually takes out their 15 kids, and she feels people look at her judgmentally for having so many kids with her. She has also had experiences where people have questioned her when they see her provide certain care for her sisterwife's children because they don't understand their family and how it works. For example, once she was visiting her father's home (in Centennial Park) with some of the children. She had her sisterwife's baby with her, and he was sick and fevering. She was taking care of him, and was happy doing so, but said her family thought her sisterwife should be doing it rather than her. People will ask her if she sometimes wants it to be just her and her kids, but she says she really doesn't feel that way and has had other people's comments get back to her family, misconstrued as her own, that have caused difficulty in their relations. To sustain her relationships, she said she learned to ignore these things and just do what she is going to do. She explained that their family has worked hard for their family culture and she wants to maintain her relationships rather than jeopardizing them. These experiences make her seek the company of people within the community that she does not feel judge her in these ways. Thus, it seems even Centennial Park, as much freedom as it does offer, is not a completely safe zone for the polyginists living there.

Assurance

The subcategory of assurance (implicit or explcit expression of commitment or faithfulness) comforting and supportive messages was reported by heterosexual monogamous couples as the third most frequently used maintenance strategy/behavior when it came to demonstrating and instilling confidence in their commitment to their relationship, whereas for gay and lesbian couples meta-relational communication was more frequent, rated second (Haas and Stafford, 2005). Assurance in these polyginist relationships was not often demonstrated

verbally, like saying I love you (overt expression) or talking about the status (meta-relational communication) and future of relationships. Interviewee #12 did mention that both his wives will and "do say it" – but says he gives more credence to what they do than what they say. Interviewee #3 said she is concerned by the lack of communication in her family but is still confident in a future together. Nonverbals, certainly, are relied on more heavily.

Interviewee #4 (his wife) did say she tries to encourage both her husband and sisterwife in their work, as she cares for the home while they work outside of it. She also said they have "been through a lot" and don't want to throw it away. Overwhelmingly, however, the strategies and behaviors the interviewees describe as giving them confidence in their relationships, and assuring continuance, fall elsewhere. "It's (their union) not going to breakup," Interviewee #13 (also a wife of interviewee #12) flatly stated. "We all made a religious commitment (that) will hold us there. We can work out anything that comes along (conflicts, problems, issues)." Their husband expresses the same loyalty. "I'm very committed to the relationships," he stated. "Me leaving is not an option… not a thought that even enters my mind." A separate subcategory may be warranted in this category for this population for their religious (spiritual) commitment. The twelfth category of the expanded typology does address focus on self (i.e. individual spiritual growth) and the ritual joint activity of say attending church together (Dainton & Stafford, 1993), but these do not wholly capture what the polyginists expressed. The commitment to family, specifically children, is a major factor in their lifestyle, and hence their relationship maintenance, which seems to not quite fit in the typology as is. (Future plans is probably the closest.)

Nearly every interviewee responded, similarly to interviewee #13, to questioning about their confidence in the future of their "marriages" in the affirmative and cited the foundation as the commitment made because of their religious beliefs. Interviewee #2, for example, said that

marriage is not about loving a person but rather loving God. Although interviewee #12 said the nonverbal assurance that his wives "take care of him" makes him feel loved and secure in his relationships, he explained the main reason for his firm belief in their future together was the promise they had made from a spiritual vantage point to remain together. This spiritual bond is extremely powerful for them, and they believe it is eternal. The "openness" of interviewee #5's sisterwife gives her much confidence in her union, but she, too, relies primarily on the religious covenant to see them all through. She said her husband even asked her if he needs to move her out of their house into an apartment because of tension in their family. She explained that her faith in the sanctity of the marriage has her convinced she would not be "as happy somewhere else" away from the family, and she wants to stay put. Of her husband she says, "It would be wrong to him to end our relationships, and he isn't going to do anything wrong." She says she is not going to either.

Interviewee #10 considers the marriage to be between he and each of his wives. He thinks that in every marriage the two people come to a point "where (they) seriously question why they are together" and the common foundation of "teachings, principles, family, and ideals" that forms his marriages keeps them together. "When trying times come, and they have come," he explains, "then that foundation prevents separation so it's not a foundation of finding someone." The belief that an outside influence brought them together, and it is "God's will" they be married, keeps the relationships intact. His idea of "God's will" was applied in his life in another way when he and one of his wives went through the experience of their infant daughter being killed in a car accident when she was driving. He said he was told by a religious leader to "get with his wife and grieve because 95% of couples that lose an infant child don't stay together" and took the advice. He looked at the accident and loss as experience he was meant to have and

an opportunity to learn something, while never allowing himself to lay blame. His belief and faith carried him through. Interviewee #9 commented along the same lines, "It's easy to say you believe in something, but ten years into it, it's obvious that's where you're headed." She is assured that her husband and sisterwife meant what they promised under the religious covenant because of actions observed over her ten-year marriage. "My sisterwife has always supported me and welcomed me completely, 100 percent, into our family," she explained. Yet, she (like interviewee #12) still cited the actual spiritual commitment as paramount:

> I have a strong testimony (that) this (marriage) is where I belong. I chose it; I chose it because I believe it's where God wants me, so I am very confident in our relationships…They (her husband and sisterwife) want what I want, and we all have common goals.

Referring to their religious practice of placement marriage, she continued:

> It's not easy to start out a relationship with two people you don't know, or for them someone you have no idea about. So you go completely off faith or what someone attests to believe. Over ten years, you can see they have put that into action.

Her passion illustrates that even in the face of what many people would consider potentially insurmountable opposition, the perceived sanctity of their vows carries them through the good and bad times.

Breaking trust, then, is taken even that much more seriously because of the religious and spiritual implications. "Through thick or thin" interviewee #11 believes her husband and one of her sisterwives will stick it out, but her other sisterwife, who moved out of their home for awhile once, has instilled "doubt" and broke "trust" she says. Her choice to move out of the family home had a major affect on confidence factor in their relationship. Commitment to family (again

part of their religious faith) can instill confidence in their unions, whereas a perceived violation of that commitment has grave consequences for trust and maintenance of a relationship. One aspect of this is that the large number of people in the families, and the resulting support, is seen as a major maintaining force. Interviewee #13 described this by saying serious things can sometimes break people up but where other people lend support it can help them overcome the obstacle . "In this type of relationship," she explained, "there are other people to lean on and help deal with the circumstances. Say you lose a child or something (sometimes that can tear a couple up, especially if they blame), you have other people to lean on and steady both. (They) bring an outside influence into that relationship and often, I think, they end up stronger and not as likely to fall apart." Weathering trials together, like time spent together, is seen as a strengthening factor.

Many interviewees attested to their relationships strengthening the longer the union persists. Interviewee #8 says she feels "less awkward over time" in the lifestyle. Interviewee #6 echoes her sentiments, "(The) longer she's (her sisterwife) married, the easier it is to watch him show affection to her and not have it bother me." She explained that the longer their relationships last, the more "level playing field emerges" and things are "more consistent" and "not such a drastic difference makes it easier to deal with" and settle into the relationship. Another factor that comes with time is family in terms of children being born and raised. She also said that over the course of living together, and having the chance to take care of each other's kids, trust is built. Interviewee #8 said she now knows her sisterwife is there "for the family" and has " a lot of confidence in her." "I can leave," she explained, "and she does a great job with the kids and everything." Her sisterwife (interviewee #9) said of her, "(She) made me feel like I am a mother to her kids and (has) given me that allowance." Interviewee #4 also said she wants to stay in her

family because of the kids. She thinks they all see her as their mother. She gave the example of her sisterwife's young daughter telling one of the other children, "I don't want Mama to get married because if she gets married she's gonna move away." Interviewee #5 did not mince words when she said, "I had a baby…that makes me stick." However, it manifests itself, the religious commitment in their lives is a rock of maintenance for their relationships.

Positivity

Positivity behaviors (trying to make interactions pleasant) were reported as more often used for maintenance amongst heterosexual couples than gay and lesbian couples (Haas and Stafford, 2005). They reported two positivity behaviors, proactive prosocial and favors/gifts, as the second and third most frequently used respectively (Haas and Stafford, 2005). Positivity, in some aspect or other, is found highly reported in previous research into relationship maintenance (Haas and Stafford, 1998). Reactive prosocial behaviors specifically were the fourth most frequently used in gay and lesbian relationships. The reactive prosocial aspect was mentioned the most often by the polyginist interviewees over the other aspects in the positivity category, as well. They said they are willing to adapt and change to maintain their relationships.

Interestingly, changing daily communication came up in two separate sisterwife relationships and the modifications were reversed. For interviewee #9 daily communication needed to increase to improve her relationship, but the opposite situation cropped up for interviewee #6. When asked what she did to make her relationships positive, interviewee #9 said she was currently working on daily contact with her sisterwife. She noticed a positive difference if she made the effort to say something, even about insignificant things, because of the resulting connection between them. She mentioned the same about her relationship with her husband, but said she could go a bit longer because their relationship was more advanced. On the other hand,

interviewee #6, a self-described "heavy communicator" who says she can be offended when communication isn't reciprocated, said she had to cut-back. She likes to chat and ask about someone's day to show interest and caring and likes people to do the same for her. "I want to know what's going on in your life, and I want to be a part of it," she said. She also said, in addition to sharing details of her life, she likes to share her perspectives and explain where she is coming from or why she reacted a certain way so her husband and sisterwife can understand her better. When she first got married, she had to learn to do this and felt that it improved relationships so she kept it up. Now that she has a sisterwife whom she perceives may not need that kind of talking to feel connected, she is learning to change again. Her sisterwife (interviewee #3) said she does chat with her husband this way but not her sisterwife because she does not feel the same emotional connection. She usually talks to her sisterwife about the children or household arrangements rather than her personal concerns.

The difference in interactions between sisterwives and wives and husbands, as mentioned in the above scenarios, came up often when the interviewees talked about how they maintain positivity. Interviewee #4 said the changes she makes for her husband are more subconscious than for her sisterwife because they are integrated into how she runs their home. She tries to structure and manage their home they way he likes and make food he likes to eat when cooking meals. Whereas, with her sisterwife, she does things more around talking. "Even if I am having a crummy day, I try to be pleasant to her," she said. She also does some of the nice and cheerful subcategory by trying to "brighten her day" and "encourage her." For example, when her sisterwife was working on her master's degree she said she thought "she felt strung out." So, she wanted to help her "feel welcome and accepted at home because I am there so much." She was very concerned for her sisterwife because she had taken on the role of a mother working outside

the home. "She works and doesn't know everything that's going on at home," she explained. "I don't want her to take on all that stress and then come home and take on all my stress." She did not express the same concern for her husband even though he also works outside the home. Speaking of her husband, interviewee #5 said, "He likes consistency…so, I try to be consistent." So with him she tries to alter behavior, but says she tries to "reach out to her sisterwife" and "ask her if she needs anything."

Despite the often different approaches, the changes emphasizing the group nature of the lifestyle are there. Children and parents alike are taken into consideration. Interviewee #13 stated it plainly when she said:

> In a relationship like this, you actually have to get to the point where you care about all the people. You're not in it all by yourself; you're not in it just with you husband, even. You're a group. So when you see that and you see what that other person is bringing to you, you try to create opportunities and expand them, help them have what they need in their life so that everybody is happy. Because if you end up with somebody who isn't getting what they need it creates stress, and it isn't just stress for you - it's stress for the whole family.

As seen with assurance, their religious devotion to family and children plays a unique role in positivity.

Interacting with one another's children was frequently mentioned by sisterwives as a way to promote positivity in their relationships. Interviewee #9 says she will "try to do for her (sisterwife's) children what she would do for them rather than what I think should be done for them." Her sisterwife (interviewee #8) mentioned taking time to be social with the kids as a way to make relationships more positive. Interviewee #13 explained that she tries to create her own

relationship with her sisterwife's children. "I interact with her children, not just my children," she said. Taking special care of her sisterwife's baby and helping with the kids was one example interviewee #5 gave for building a positive relationship with her sisterwife. While interviewee #3 was not comfortable chatting about her day with her sisterwife, as mentioned above, she did say she tries to take care of her kids to promote positivity. Her sisterwife (interviewee #6) similarly said she tries to support her by being available to cover childcare if she wants to participate in events with her other relatives, say a birthday party, for her sister. She also said she tries to encourage both her husband and her sisterwife whenever they instigate family activities by actively participating. One husband (interviewee #10) even said, "I know if I love this mother's children – she feels it." It seemed that most participants felt this to be a crucial allowance for positivity to persist in their relationships.

Consideration for their partners' relationships with one another is also considered by many of the interviewees to be part of promoting positivity. Understanding that her husband and sisterwife have a relationship and striving to "not cause stress for that relationship" is important to interviewee #13. Respecting the wishes of her husband and sisterwives is the basis of interviewee #7's effort to promote positivity. "If I know something bothers them, I try not to do it." Sometimes altering behavior to accommodate another is not so easily done, however. Interviewee #8 said she has been working to change a lack of communication in her family. She is the first wife and has seven children in the family. She has been appointed by her husband specifically to run the home. Her sisterwife (interviewee #9) has one child and works outside the home. Most of the time she said she and her husband will make plans for the family and not include her sisterwife. Her sisterwife has told them she needs to know what's going on. So, she has tried to make an effort to let her know their plans. Still, her sisterwife gave them the

feedback that it bothers her that they will plan things and then tell her what is happening, rather than including her in the planning. However, interviewee #8 was clear in her description of the situation that this wouldn't change, and it doesn't matter if she has an opinion if they've already made a decision for the family. "It doesn't matter what works for her – she's just one person out of many in a family," she explained. Evidently, sometimes the large family can limit the members' willingness to change to accommodate individual concerns.

Openness

The majority of the interviewees view their relationships as generally having open communication (direct discussion including offering and listening to thoughts and feelings). They seemed to mostly be comfortable talking about almost anything together. Self-disclosure was touched on, whereas advice and empathetic behaviors were not mentioned much. The category touched on most was meta-relational communication. They talked about working to discuss problems and resolve, or avoid, conflict. This emphasis is similar to gay and lesbian couples, who reported the category as the second most frequently used maintenance behavior.

The interviewees gave the impression that open communication was valued highly. Interviewee #12 describes himself as blunt and straightforward and says he is "open almost to a fault." He is "adamant that issues get out on the table" and feels he can say anything to his wives, while insisting they can say anything to each other. Like Interviewee #10, he holds regular family meetings to create the opportunity for an open forum. His wife (interviewee #4) said, "No matter what's going on, I feel like I can talk to him about it." His other wife (interviewee #13) described their family relationship as very open; she only holds back when she doesn't "want to cause hurt feelings." Her sisterwife (interviewee #4) says she has had to work harder on self-

disclosure with her because she is more reserved than her husband, but always goes to her when she admits needing help with the kids.

There was a slight trend expressed amongst younger second wives to view themselves as closed off (interviewee #9, interviewee #3, and interviewee #5), but they said they do not fault their partners. Interviewee #9 had to really work to adjust

I always kept things to myself…one of the hardest things about living plural marriage is you get married and all of a sudden you have to build and share with not just one person but two people who don't know you, you don't know them.

At first, she described communication as "business-like" but says her family has worked to make it more open. Interviewee #3 said she is "shut off," yet believes open communication would vastly improve the marriage. Interviewee #2 (her husband) was the only one who came close to the empathetic behavior category when he said he thinks it is fine for people not to talk and self-disclose if they don't want to.

Interviewee #4's slight propensity to be more open with her husband than her sisterwife was echoed by other ladies, and some husbands said they were more open with certain wives. Interviewee #7 said her communication with her husband (interviewee #10) is very open but mostly "topically" so with her sisterwives. Whereas interviewee #8 said she relies on her husband for the support and doesn't need to talk to her sisterwife about her personal affairs. Interviewee #11 also felt most comfortable and open with her husband (interviewee #10). He said he has found his relationships to become more open over time, so he says his relationship with her (his first wife) is the most open. Interviewee #1 also said he is more open with his first wife. In contrast, interviewee #2 likes self-disclosing to both his wives because he thinks it

builds the relationships by giving them a "sense of my humanity," and he also thinks it "gives them hope" and tell them "you're not alone."

When it comes to conflict, they work hard to manage it for individual and group advantage. Both interviewee #9 and interviewee #4 say they work to "nip it in the bud" and resolve it while the issue is "still small." Interviewee #4 said she does so particularly with her sisterwife (interviewee #13). Interviewee #1 was quite concerned with conflict. He described a system he established for his wives to resolve conflict. He has three rules: first, they "can't have a bitchfest," they must identify the principle being dealt with, and they must articulate a possible beneficial outcome. He says he will not listen to his wives "bash" one another and won't "get in the middle." He does insist that they do not have the right to "subject my kids" to their problems and negative emotions. He also said there have been times he wouldn't speak to his wives until he was ready to deal with their conflict. Interviewee #2 said he is also a firm believer in staying out of the middle of his wives' conflicts. Conflict management is of great concern and thought of much amongst the interviewees as evidenced by the detail of their responses.

taking care of responsibilities and duties facing both partners,

Shared tasks

Shared tasks (taking care of responsibilities and duties facing both partners) was found by Haas and Stafford (2005) to be the most frequently reported maintenance behavior of the monogamous couples in their study. These tasks often have to do with living together in the same household and caring for and maintaining it (Hass & Stafford, 2005). Traditional gender roles permeate the sharing of family responsibility in the interviewee's lives as directed by their religious beliefs. This structure, therefore, is important to them. It dictates how they share tasks.

These roles are evident in each family, even if not overtly mentioned. Interviewee #13 said her husband fills all the "male roles" in their family including "teaching the family (religion), working for the family, monitoring the family, and guiding and directing the family. Interviewee #11 described her husband as the "provider" and explained that he "carries the burden" more than the wives in the family who also work outside the home "because of how we believe" – the man should be the main provider for the family. She says he is the one that delegates others to work at home or go out and work. Both men and women consistently report this. Every man interviewed designated himself as the main breadwinner for the family, despite all having wives working in jobs outside their homes. As part of this role, the men are the main financial decision makers, even in the few instances where they report not managing all the family accounts or directly paying all the bills. On the other side, interviewee #13 and her sisterwife fill the "female role" and so "care for the family and house," and they do so "as a unit." Even though she works, she says she fills in when she returns home after her job. She describes the "unit" they form:

> (We) work as one woman would but we are expanded because we have the ability to go and do the things we need to outside of that (their home) without the stress of being overloaded by everything you're trying to do.

The wives, then, have to learn to share their role. The women talked of sharing all sorts of responsibilities, which they men for the most part stayed out of. The tasks they take care of include grocery shopping, childcare, shopping for children, all family laundry, yard work, job charts and schedules for children, cooking meals, and housework. Each family has a unique way of handling the responsibilities.

For example, some ladies will do all the shopping or all the laundry. Others choose to share the tasks. Interviewee #4 said her sisterwife (interviewee #13) recently finished a degree and took on the childrens' laundry "to feel more involved in their lives." Now that some of their kids are old enough, they do their own laundry. Interviewee #4, like interviewees #5 and #8, also does the grocery shopping for the family, whereas interviewee #6 says she and her sisterwife share that task. Making meals was a task consistently reported as shared, usually by mothers though in some families by fathers and children also.

Nearly all the interviewees spoke of being flexible to cover for someone else if needed, similar to interviewee #13's description of how she and her sisterwife function together in their "female role." Interviewee #8, for example, says she tries to be available to cover things for her husband and sisterwife if she knows they need to be away from home for classes or any obligation they have. Recently one of interviewee #10's wives went on a trip and he and the other mothers cared for her children in her absence. Having a group to work from versus a dyad makes this strategy more dynamic and could perhaps be considered all the more advantageous to maintenance because of it.

The negotiated roles and reactive prosocial behavior manifested themselves interestingly when interviewee #1, #8, and #9 described how their family shared responsibility and delegated tasks. They said Interviewee #1 (the husband) was the main delegator of tasks. He had appointed his first wife, interviewee #8, to basically run the household since he works and lives primarily outside the community. He said he modeled his family off his father's family. His father, like him, also worked and lived primarily away from the community and regularly had to be away from the majority of his family. Interviewee #8, who has seven biological children of the eight children in the family, said she runs the home mostly with the help of her teenage girls because

her sisterwife's (interviewee #9) schedule is so sporadic that she can't count on a consistent schedule to work around. She pulls her in to help when needed. She said she is "sometimes resentful" of the responsibility she has been given. Interviewee #9 says she checks in with her sisterwife when she is home from work to see what needs to be done. Speaking of their arrangement, she said:

> It's not something she always likes doing…There's a lot of struggles between the two of us over her being in-charge of the house and the position (he) has put her in. I have to remember it's not a pleasure for her all the time. So, the more I can help her with that, the easier it is for everyone. And (he) enjoys it more.

Since their husband is not always home, it is important to them to make his time at home with them pleasant she said. When asked if she felt like she shared the role of financial support for the family with her husband she said no because he could cover their expenses without her additional income. So the dynamic, which can be complicated and also largely advantageous, can also cause strife as roles and responsibilities are negotiated. Yet, in this case, the reactive prosocial behavior overrides the dissonance created by the lack of clear role boundaries.

Discussion

Previous research into monogamous relational maintenance has contributed to increased understanding of how these relationships are sustained over time. The purpose of this study was to extend previous relationship maintenance research through inquiry into a different and understudied population involved in long term polygynous relationships. A focused study of polygynist's communication relationship maintenance behaviors has not been conducted until now. The polyginist interviewees reported maintenance strategies that fit in with each of the five strategic behavior/strategy categories included in the Stafford and Canary (1991) typology, developed from research into heterosexual monogamous relationships. Generally, the findings regarding the similarities indicate that the typology applies to self-reported maintenance strategies of polyginists and offers additional support to its utility. The typology may, therefore, be applicable in studying other like populations, such as polyandrous (one wife with multiple husbands) and polyamorous (a unit of multiple women and men) relationships. The interviewees also frequently mentioned routine strategies/behaviors that fit with the expanded 12 category typology developed by Dainton and Stafford (1993). The results indicate that, although polyginist relationships are not mainstream in the monogamous sense, they more hold in common, in terms of relationship maintenance strategies, with mainstream relationships than not. The relational implications of the findings detailed in the previous chapter are discussed herein.

RQ1 explored strategies used by polyginists to maintain their relationships despite stigmatization of and the lack of widespread social acceptance for their chosen lifestyle, while RQ2 explored similarities between monogamous couples' maintenance behaviors and polyginists' maintenance behaviors. The findings indicate that overall monogamous couples and polyginists use similar maintenance behaviors/strategies; however, there are some significant

differences. Where the similarities particularly come in is interesting to see. One might expect

the parallels most likely to be between polyginist and heterosexual couples since both are

heterosexual in terms of the romantic relationship; however, other factors seem to weigh-in more

heavily such that the similarities seem to be more with the homosexual couples. The sisterwife

relationship being a same-sex relationship may perhaps be a possible reason for this leaning,

though men were included in the sample and reported much the same behaviors as women. The

unique group dynamic including both heterosexual and same-sex relationships can create

surprising dynamics.

Social networks (reliance on outside people and support) is a category particularly salient

in the sample for Haas and Stafford's (1998) study of gay and lesbian maintenance behaviors and

ranked in the top five most frequently reported behaviors from the participants. Two themes that

emerged from their research were 'being out as a couple' (referring to living openly together and

being acknowledged as a unit or couple in society despite the lack of acceptance and inability to

obtain legal rights in most states) and 'gay/lesbian supportive environments' (referring to

socializing and living in gay/lesbian environments (Haas & Stafford, 1998). Similarly, the

interviewees expressed the importance of environments where the felt accepted and an

acceptance of their lifestyle. Haas and Stafford (1998) added a category, "gay/lesbian social

environments, based on this theme.

I assert the same could be done in the case of polyginists, who also face social stigma to

the extent that they have established an entire community in order to live openly together. Within

their community, at least, they can move in public arenas freely and feel accepted, as well as

socialize with friends, family, and co-workers largely without feeling judged and stereotyped. As

Haas and Stafford (1998) note, seeking comfortable environments to associate within and seek

validation is likely not a unique strategy to gays and lesbians, but they might have heightened awareness of it as a relationship maintenance behavior as couples. Additional research may show this trend for other such populations facing challenges in the larger society.

Other similarities to gay and lesbian couples came under the positivity (and openness (direct discussions/listening including thoughts and feelings) categories. Reactive prosocial behaviors (such as efforts to change to please one's partner), a subcategory of positivity, and meta-relational communication (discussing problems), a subcategory of openness, appeared from the findings to be the most important for the polyginists. Both subcategories also ranked in the top five most frequently reported behaviors from gays and lesbians, meta-relational communication ranked as second and reactive prosocial behaviors ranked fourth. (Haas & Stafford, 2005). Meta-relational communication was second on the top five list for same-sex maintenance behaviors, whereas positivity behaviors, namely proactive prosocial behaviors (such as using humor) and favors and gifts, were the second and third rankings for heterosexual couples. When compared, Haas and Stafford (2005) assert that their findings may point to an important indication of focus for the two couples types in their study.

The similarity between the polyginists and the gay and lesbian couples, therefore, is interesting and may also be important when postulating the relationship elements they reflect. Meta-relational communication involves discussion assessing relational status and may be emphasized more in relationships where a legal bond is unattainable, as is the case for some gay and lesbian couples and for wives whose husbands already legally married one of their sisterwives. In such a relationship, emotional commitment takes on a larger role, and, in contrast, couples that have made legal commitments, or even possess the knowledge that the option is available, may take the connection or opportunity for granted (Haas & Stafford, 2005). Future

research might focus exclusively on married gay and lesbian couples and polyginists to further investigate this possibility. I think, however, the polyginist value for children and religious faith, evident in the findings, should be considered as a factor, also. Future research might consider whether the participants have children or not and what affect, if any, their religious/spiritual values may have on their relationship maintenance behaviors, along with the question of legality. The limitation voiced by Haas and Stafford (2005) of the difficulty in recruiting participants from stigmatized groups, particularly subgroups, from the population may hinder such specific inquiry.

Based on Haas and Stafford's (2005) findings, it may appear that heterosexual married couples are able to focus on making their relationship more positive and pleasant versus having to spend that time assessing the state of their relationship. Contrasted with the way positivity is exhibited differently in relationships for gay and lesbian couples - that is primarily through reactive prosocial behaviors, "may lend insight into an important qualitative difference between the two couple types" (Haas & Stafford, 2005). The similar emphasis found in the polyginist population may lend support to the possible indication of an important difference, as well.

Gay and lesbian couples' relationships lack formalized role structure, and frequent meta-relational communication may also indicate a focus on role change that requires discussion and assessment (Haas & Stafford, 2005). Considering the role-sharing of sisterwives and the role played by the wives working outside the home, evidenced by the interviewees' reports of sharing tasks, these finding along side those of Haas and Stafford (2005) may offer additional support for meta-relational communication as a core element within relationships where role negotiation is valued. Future research is needed in this area.

The contrast between how the family situation mentioned in the shared tasks section illustrating the discord resulting from negotiating roles and task sharing and how Haas and Stafford's (1998) gay and lesbian participants described sharing tasks is interesting. The data contributed to a third theme, the importance of equity to maintaining a relationship, in their findings. "One gay male explained, 'since we don't have to live up to traditional gender roles, we are freer to behave naturally, like ourselves, like human beings, like equals" (Haas and Stafford, 1998). It would seem that the two groups are polarities of one another in this particular case. The polyginists' focus on traditional gender roles is in direct opposition to the perception the gay and lesbian couples have of their roles and how they are negotiated. Although some equity may be sought in the female role sharing, the pictures painted of the two are still dissimilar. So, although, their maintenance behaviors are similar here they are apparently carried out in vastly different contexts, pointing to an important difference in these relationship types. Future research focused on polygynists who live in different households might reveal other aspects of this category, as well, and possibly be more similar to how the gay and lesbian couples share tasks.

Another important finding is the support of outside elements to the polyginist relationships. The Dainton and Stafford typology (1993) has a thirteenth "miscellaneous' category allowing for unique results to expand it. Based on the results of this study, it seems that exploration for a possible additional category may be warranted for this population or others. While shared networks, people and environments outside the relationship, are addressed, the interviewees expressed some specific factors involved in their relationship maintenance that don't seem to fit into the existing categories. The first is their reliance on their common spiritual/religious beliefs - a kind of outside force - to bind them to one another. Yet, these values are not entirely their own, or even unique in the world at large. They are drawn from Christian

beliefs and paradigms of gender roles and family structure based on the New Testament. It seems plausible, then, that such factors may be present in other relationship types. There may be other types of beliefs that might have the same affect on relationship maintenance. Perhaps common economic values, social/cultural norms, or political circumstances might play a central role in holding individuals together. Research involving other polygynists, who are not practicing polygyny for religious reasons, might reveal some of these outside elements and the influence they bear. The second, along the same lines, is whether or not children are involved in the family. The family addressed in the social network category refers to parents and siblings, rather than the more immediate relationship children present. The reliance on children came up regarding both assurance and shared tasks. It seems likely this may also be the case in other relationship types. Future research exploring the possibility of such an additional category is needed. The presence in this study of such influence, coupled with additional support, could point toward maintenance being bolstered by outside commitments and commonalities working as grounding forces.

I think it would be of value to apply the Dainton and Stafford (1993) typology to the Centennial Park people for a deeper understanding of how they maintain their marriage relationships. The interviewees mentioned behaviors that would fit into the additional categories, including affection, talk, mediated communication, topic avoidance, joint activities, focus on self, alternative associations, and person avoidance.

Now that the subject has been broached, it might be easier to overcome the difficulty faced when recruiting participants from stigmatized populations. If the results from this same population, and even other polyginist groups, indicate, as this study does, similarities in

communication maintenance behaviors between relationship types, it might imply to the larger society that polygynists are more "normal" than previously perceived.

When there is a lack of credible information, or any information, ignorance will abound. People will tend to assume individuals who deviate from certain norms are extreme and perceive that they stray far from any kind of normalcy. Presenting opportunities for people to become accurately informed is the best way to dispel the misconceptions. In such light, would a counselor consider working with a polyginist family as futile as Rivett and Street originally did before they had more exposure to individuals choosing just such a family arrangement? This inquiry, and more like it, could help further the goal of the Centennial Park community to create awareness of their sub-culture's commonality with the larger American culture and contribute to the paradigm shift the community now seeks.

In the bigger picture, beyond Centennial Park, this study and future inquiry into diverse populations' maintenance behavior, as well as investigation of stigma and societal assumptions of such populations, and their possible affect on relational interaction will deepen general understanding of social and personal relationships.

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Appendix A

Interview Questions

1)   How accepted do you feel in your social environments?

2)   How confident are you in the future of your union and why?

3)   What do you do to promote positive interactions within your wives/husband/sister-wives?

4)   How open is your communication with your wives/husband/sister-wives?

5)   How do you and your partners share family responsibility?