## <u>A VIEW FROM THE INSIDE: HOW</u> <u>CRITICAL ETHNOGRAPHY CHANGED</u> <u>MY MIND ABOUT POLYGAMY</u>

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My first entry into the world of so-called Mormon polygamy began on June 17, 2010 when I attended the second annual conference of Safety Net, an organization that seeks "to assist people associated with the practice of plural marriage, whether an active polygamist or exiting polygamist." Safety Net strives for neutrality toward the actual practice of plural marriage so they can "meet physical, emotional, and educational needs."1 The goal of their annual conferences is to increase awareness of the issues surrounding the practice of plural marriage, present individual stories of polygamy, and discuss resources available to those wanting to leave polygamous family structures. At the time, I simply assumed every woman wanted just that: to escape polygamy. I believed that women in polygamous relationships had been brainwashed, had little autonomy, and lived in insular communities. As I sat listening to the keynote speaker, Jim Cates, a noted clinical psychologist who works with Old Order Amish, I looked over and saw a young woman sitting near me who was drawing a butterfly. What a perfect metaphor, I thought! She

<sup>1. &</sup>quot;A Program of the Family Support Center," Safety Net, <u>http://www.safetynetu-tah.org/index.html</u>. In addition to the annual conference, Safety Net also conducts monthly meetings that alternate between northern and southern locations in Utah. These meetings are designed to promote the organization's four objectives: safety, collaboration, education, and outreach.

too wants to escape the rigidity of an overbearing and fundamentalist religion. I surmised that she was probably from a polygamous community and couldn't wait to plot her escape. I complimented her on her drawing, we had a lovely conversation, and she drew another butterfly for my six-year-old daughter. And then what I thought I knew about polygamy fractured into tiny, little cracks.

Up until this point, I had assumed that polygamous communities in southern Utah and northern Arizona were all like Colorado City, where Warren Jeffs ruled an iron-fisted patriarchy. Jeffs, the head of the Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints and notorious polygamist leader, was a fugitive on the FBI's most wanted list, and his arrest in 2006 set off a firestorm of negative publicity regarding the practice of polygamy.<sup>2</sup> This negative publicity was certainly well deserved for the FLDS Church, and Colorado City came to epitomize and reinforce the prevailing opinions about polygamy in the United States: of abuse, underage child brides, neglected and abandoned young boys, and hopelessly controlled women at the mercy of their authoritative, power-hungry husbands.<sup>3</sup> What became problematic, however, was that one person's story, even a collected group of stories taken from predominantly *one* 

<sup>2.</sup> Jeffs had been placed on the FBI's most wanted list for unlawful flight to avoid prosecution on Utah state charges regarding his alleged arrangement of illegal marriages involving underage girls. In May and July 2007, the state of Arizona also charged him with eight additional counts, including sexual conduct with minors and incest in two separate cases. See "Sect Leader Indicted on Sexual Conduct with Minor, Incest Charges," CNN, <u>http://www.cnn.com/2007/US/07/12/polygamy.charges/index.html</u>.

<sup>3.</sup> See Jon Krakauer, *Under the Banner of Heaven: A Story of Violent Faith* (Harpswell, Maine: Anchor Publishing, 2004); Andrea Moore-Emmett, *God's Brothel: The Extortion of Sex for Salvation in Contemporary Mormon and Christian Fundamentalist Polygamy and the Stories of 18 Women Who Escaped* (San Francisco: Pince-Nez Press, 2004); Carolyn Jessop and Laura Palmer, *Escape* (New York: Broadway, 2008); Elissa Wall, *Stolen Innocence: My Story of Growing Up in a Polygamous Sect, Becoming a Teenage Bride, and Breaking Free of Warren Jeffs* (New York: William Morrow, 2008); and David Ebershoff, *The 19th Wife* (New York: Random House, 2009).

community, could not represent the larger cultural practice of contemporary polygamy, particularly when such communities are so diverse and when the majority of those practicing polygamy reject the authority of Warren Jeffs. According to Anne Wilde, author, practicing polygamist, and political activist:

Polygamous families live by a variety of values and standards. Members of organized fundamentalist groups are often influenced by the traditions or expectations of the larger religious body with whom they identify. There are a number of different Fundamentalist Mormon communities centered in and around Utah, including two larger groups, several smaller groups, and the independent Fundamentalists who are not members of any organized group.<sup>4</sup>

Within this surprisingly diverse community of practicing polygamists (numbered to be around 40,000), only 25 percent recognize Warren Jeffs as their prophet.<sup>5</sup> The rest of this larger "community"<sup>6</sup> finds leadership in such varied options as a recognized council of elders, an internally recognized presiding patriarch, or, in the case of independent households (wherein the largest number of practicing polygamists are found), a male head of household.

<sup>4.</sup> Presented at the 3rd Annual Safety Net Conference held in St. George, Utah, on March 11, 2011. Safety Net is an organization funded by the Utah Attorney General's office to promote access to social services within polygamous communities. Anne Wilde has also coauthored *Voices in Harmony*, a text aimed at refuting the negative view of polygamy held by most Americans. See Mary Batchelor, Marianne Watson, and Anne Wilde, *Voices in Harmony: Contemporary Women Celebrate Plural Marriage* (Springville, Utah: Cedar Fort, 2000).

<sup>5.</sup> The rough breakdown of this community is as follows: 15,000 self-identify as independents, 10,000 as FLDS, 7,500 as the Allred Group, 2,000 as residents of Centennial Park, 2,000 as part of the Davis Co. Co-op, and 1,500 who classify as "other." See Jennifer Huss Basquiat, "Fundamentalist Mormons by Affiliation," field document, St. George, Utah, March 11, 2011. All field documents in author's possession.

<sup>6.</sup> I use this term loosely because most of the separate groups have limited, if any, communication with one another. This lack of communication stems from both theological and geographical differences.

These groups are all united in their belief in celestial marriage<sup>7</sup> and the practice of a plural lifestyle, but they do not practice it in the same way. Some groups assign women to husbands, some allow underage marriage, some prefer to construct their communities in isolation, and some live squarely in suburban neighborhoods. Much like any human group, there are distinct differences and individual nuances in the ways people choose to live their faith. In reality, some plural communities seek to integrate themselves into contemporary society, to live alongside the "gentiles."<sup>8</sup> Such communities are actively choosing to live their belief in plural marriage differently—to live their version of Mormonism differently.

During the Safety Net conference, my perceptions about polygamous families began to change. On the conference schedule was a panel comprised of young adults from the Centennial Park community. The youth who spoke on this panel were enlightening. Dressed in modern (albeit modest) attire, they looked nothing like the anachronistic images of pioneer dress generally associated with the FLDS plural lifestyle. They spoke articulately about their community, eagerly engaged with the audience, and shone with confidence. This was hardly the expected demeanor of someone suffering from systematic abuse at the hands of old men. One young woman, in particular, left a strong impression. Her name was Stephanie, and there was a light in her that connected so well with the audience as she talked about her service to the community and her plans for the future. As a member of Voice Box, a youth organization and volunteer group, she believed living by example was the best form of missionary work. She shared a quote generally attributed to St. Francis of Assisi to make her point, "Go preach, and if you must, use words."9

<sup>7.</sup> Many practitioners of plural marriage find the catchall term *polygamy* to be offensive because it implies a secular desire for multiple wives and ignores the celestial and eternal commitment such a practice requires.

<sup>8.</sup> Historical LDS usage and contemporary fundamentalist usage often refers to non-Mormons as "gentiles." See "Gentile," LDS Bible Dictionary, <u>https://www.lds.org/scriptures/bd/gentile?lang=eng</u>.

<sup>9.</sup> See Jennifer Huss Basquiat, "Voice Box," field notes, St. George, Utah, Jun. 17, 2010.

It was this interaction with a group of civically minded and engaged youth that opened my mind to the many realities of polygamy. Polygamy, even fundamentalist Mormon polygamy, cannot be categorized by one sweeping (and extremely negative) generalization. As a woman who was born and raised among the FLDS said, "Everyone who's living in the culture is an individual and they are living an individual experience."<sup>10</sup> Rather than focus on just one collection of shared and common experiences drawn primarily from Colorado City, why not examine the story less told? From this point on, I made it the focus of my fieldwork to learn about Centennial Park, Arizona, located just three miles from Colorado City.

In comparison to Colorado City, Centennial Park is a relatively new community dedicated to plural living. It was formed in 1984 when Marion Hammon and Alma Timpson were dismissed from the FLDS Priesthood Council in Colorado City by acting prophet Leroy S. Johnson.<sup>11</sup> After a disagreement surrounding the future leadership of the FLDS group, Johnson assumed these men would just fade away from influence; however, they held meetings (initially in their homes), built up a new community, and ended up taking quite a few followers with them. Centennial Park, as it exists today, sits in stark contrast to its fundamentalist neighbors down the road.<sup>12</sup> The most telling difference is the community's open embrace of the outside world. Susie Timpson, former Centennial Park Action Committee President states, "We want to

<sup>10.</sup> See Jennifer Huss Basquiat, "Conversation with Shirlee Draper," field notes, St. George, Utah, Mar. 11, 2011.

<sup>11.</sup> See E. Keith Howick, *Polygamy: The Mormon Enigma* (Silverton, Idaho: WindRiver Publishing, 2007).

<sup>12.</sup> The disagreement that created Centennial Park arose between those who supported the "one man" doctrine (which argued that only one man should preside over the church) and those who supported the idea of a presiding priesthood council composed of several worthy men. Centennial Park was created by these dissenters and founded a mere three miles from Colorado City. In 1986 the Centennial Park group built a meetinghouse and later, in 2003, created a charter school for elementary education. See Jennifer Huss Basquiat, "Centennial Park History," field notes, Centennial Park, Arizona, Mar. 12, 2011.

be as transparent as we can be. We want people to come to activities, visit the clinic, and attend church if they want to. We have nothing to hide."<sup>13</sup>

During my ongoing fieldwork, I came to learn that the practice of contemporary plural marriage varies not only from community to community but also from family to family. The purpose of my research has been (and continues to be) twofold: first, to examine how this marginalized group of practicing polygamists struggles with and attempts to overcome the various hegemonic power structures of dominant American culture, and second, to listen critically to how this group chooses to define itself, absent from the Western gaze that classifies polygamy as primitive and inherently abusive to women. Through engaged and critical observation, my preconceived and media-influenced ideas of polygamy as interchangeable with abuse have been challenged and, subsequently, changed. In an era where legal access to marriage has been (and continues to be) hotly contested, the challenge to engage and understand is more important than ever.

One particular area of focus in my research unpacks the rather complicated ideas of hegemonic authority and engaged observation. While my research is ongoing and by no means complete, there are two clear themes that have thus far emerged: First, plural marriage, as practiced by families in Centennial Park, illustrates a direct contradiction to media reports about American polygamy. Second, in some communities polygamy has historically provided benefits to women, unacknowledged by mainstream society, and continues to do so. While most people in America view polygamy as a black-and-white issue, I have been teasing out the gray areas that disrupt the predominant social narrative. This is not without risks. I have been accused of "drinking the Kool-Aid"<sup>14</sup> simply because I have listened to polygamists of Centennial Park describe and

<sup>13.</sup> The Centennial Park Action Committee (CPAC) is committed to achieving the decriminalization of polygamy. See Jennifer Huss Basquiat, "Conversation with Susie Timpson," field notes, Centennial Park, Arizona, Mar. 10, 2011.

<sup>14.</sup> See Jennifer Huss Basquiat, "Conversation with Anne Wilde," field notes, St. George, Utah, Mar. 11, 2011.

define themselves. The most provocative backlash to date occurred shortly after my presentation at Safety Net's fourth annual conference in 2012, where I was invited to be a featured speaker. My presentation, "Moving Beyond Cultural Sensitivity: Embracing Equality in Plural Communities," was designed to get attendees to think outside of the very small box into which the understanding of polygamy is crammed. Several of the women from CPAC drove up from Centennial Park to hear me speak, and my presentation was very well received by the plural community. Outside of the community and in the blogosphere was another matter. I was accused of encouraging felonious behavior with minor children, sweeping abuse under the rug, and (a personal favorite) conflating my chosen field of cultural anthropology with polygamy apologia.<sup>15</sup>

Nevertheless, I discovered that the people of Centennial Park challenge popular media images and perceptions of what it means to be a polygamist. Rejecting labels that have been imposed upon them by others, members of this community simply say they are engaged in "the Work." At other times they may also call themselves "Joseph Smith Mormons."<sup>16</sup> Driving through this community is like driving through most other small communities in the American West. While driving through Colorado City can bring scornful looks and unwanted followers tailgating until you leave town, Centennial Park is a friendly and welcoming community.<sup>17</sup> Sanjiv Bhattacharya notes this reality from his time spent in the community:

The first thing I learn about Centennial Park is that they're big on waving here. They wave from the streets, from their cars, at intersections. And

<sup>15.</sup> See Jennifer Huss Basquiat, "FLDS Texas Blog," field document, Jun. 22, 2012. See also FLDS Texas Blog at <u>http://texasflds.wordpress.com/2012/06/10/</u> general-discussion-77-the-wait-for-the-rulings/.

<sup>16.</sup> Again, terminology becomes important. Members of Centennial Park do not identify as FLDS (led by Jeffs) or as Latter-day Saints (mainstream Mormonism).

<sup>17.</sup> On my first drive through Colorado City, I was closely tailed by a black pickup truck with tinted windows. People on the streets turned their faces away with open scorn for this unwelcome visitor. See Jennifer Huss Basquiat, "Colorado City," field notes, Colorado City, Arizona, Mar. 10, 2011.

it's not just kids or people I've met—*everyone* waves. And smiles. It may well be doctrine at this point . . . . [But] there's a purity of purpose to Centennial Park, an air of discipline.<sup>18</sup>

Residents' attire, while modest, is modern and does not serve as a telltale marker of plural living as do the pioneer dresses found in Colorado City. But the differences go deeper than that. In Centennial Park, marriage before the age of eighteen is not permitted, and it is the woman who typically choose her spouse, *not* the men. In the event that a woman has not been "moved by the Spirit" through thoughtful prayer to identify her future spouse, she may consult the Council of Brethren for guidance.<sup>19</sup> Yet, even in this case she makes the decision to marry. She is never assigned or forced to participate in plural marriage. Contrary to mainstream American perception, "No one is forced to marry anyone they don't want to marry. *No one*. Now, I don't know what's happening over there (pointing toward Colorado City). That's what we hear in the media, but we don't always know whether to trust it."<sup>20</sup>

Stephanie, that bright, young woman volunteering with Voice Box, found herself contemplating marriage not too long ago. A student at Mojave Community College, she didn't plan on marrying young. She had plans; she was going places. She remarked that "some of my other friends were dying to get married. I just wasn't."<sup>21</sup> But Stephanie started to recognize an unfamiliar call or what she described as a "weird, antsy feeling."<sup>22</sup> Rather than turn herself in to the Council of Brethren for marriage placement, she decided to fast and pray and reach a decision herself, but also in conjunction with priesthood counseling. A valuable

<sup>18.</sup> See Sanjiv Bhattacharya, Secrets & Wives: The Hidden World of Mormon Polygamy (Berkeley, Calif.: Soft Skull Press, 2011), 72.

<sup>19.</sup> See Jennifer Huss Basquiat, "Choosing Wives," field notes, Centennial Park, Arizona, Mar. 12, 2011.

<sup>20.</sup> See "Ruth" in Bhattacharya, Secrets & Wives, 75.

<sup>21.</sup> See Jennifer Huss Basquiat, "Interview with Stephanie," field notes, Merry Wives Café, Hildale, Utah, Jun. 28, 2012.

<sup>22.</sup> Ibid.

resource for her during this time was *1960 Priesthood Discourses*, a published collection of talks delivered by the Council of Priesthood and Their Associates. The passages regarding marriage were particularly useful:

My brothers and sisters, the thing that the servants of God have been trying to get this people to do is live according to the teaching they have received, that they might know and understand that we are saved no faster than we gain knowledge. Knowledge of what? Knowledge of our Father in Heaven, who He is, why He created us, and why we are here. I have young men and women come to me and want to place themselves in the hands of the Priesthood, that they might be placed correctly during their lifetime. Why do they come? Because they have been taught that they made covenants before they came here, and they want to know who they covenanted with.<sup>23</sup>

It was important to Stephanie that she not make this decision alone; she very much wanted "input and counsel so that [she had] support."<sup>24</sup> While admitting this decision at such a young age was decidedly "weird," she firmly impressed upon me how right the whole decision-making process felt to her. In discussion with Brother John, she arrived at a name, discussed her choice with Brother John as well as her father, and allowed the Priesthood Council to approach the man she had selected. Stan called her in December while she was wearing pajamas and studying for her Spanish final at MCC. Stephanie admitted she was "freaking out. The whole thing just seemed so surreal."<sup>25</sup> She started seeing this man, who already had one wife to whom he had been married for four years. Stephanie met her as well and determined that this was the family with whom she was meant to be.

Despite common misunderstandings to the contrary, Stephanie made a fully informed, consensual decision to enter into celestial

<sup>23.</sup> See Claude T. Cawley, ed., *Priesthood Discourses*, *1960* (Centennial Park, Ariz.: The Work of Jesus Christ, 2004), 103.

<sup>24.</sup> See Jennifer Huss Basquiat, "Interview with Stephanie," field notes, Merry Wives Café, Hildale, Utah, Jun. 28, 2012.

<sup>25.</sup> Ibid.

marriage. She was not brainwashed. She did not live in an isolated community cut off from dominant American culture. She didn't even grow up in a plural household; her father, although married multiple times, never took plural wives. She also married at nineteen, which is not unusual in mainstream Mormonism. Of her experience, Stephanie says, "I thought it would be so hard. I thought joining another family would be difficult, but it's just been the easiest thing. I really didn't think I would be here. But now I can't imagine *not* being here."<sup>26</sup>

Another way in which Centennial Park is challenging preconceived notions of plural marriage revolves around the importance of education within the community. Here, women (as well as men) are encouraged to further their education beyond high school. Many members of Centennial Park enroll in classes at Mohave Community College, located just minutes from the community. Mary Timpson, a formidable matriarch within the community, referenced Brigham Young's teachings on education, stating, "Education is the power to think clearly. That is what we want for our children."<sup>27</sup> Comparing the Centennial Park community to the FLDS community, Susie Timpson emphasized:

We're not them, you know. We're not the FLDS. Our people have a choice. We don't force here, no. Our children watch television, they read books, they go to college. We can get you figures on how many go to college, but it's higher than out in the world. It's so sad what's happening over there [Colorado City] with the young girls being forced. And I know that's the sensational story, but we don't do that.<sup>28</sup>

Indeed, Centennial Park's commitment to education is reflected in its creation of both Masada Charter School and the Academy.

Masada Charter School opened its doors in the fall of 2001 to 150 students from the community. It currently serves over 500 K–9 students.

<sup>26.</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27.</sup> Jennifer Huss Basquiat, "Education Lecture with Mary Timpson," field notes, Centennial Park, Arizona, Mar. 10, 2011.

<sup>28.</sup> See Jennifer Huss Basquiat, "Conversation with Susie Timpson," field notes, Centennial Park, Arizona, Mar. 10, 2011.

(Students in grades 10–12 generally continue their education at a private high school within the community known as the Academy.) The Masada school building was constructed by members of the community and financed through a Department of Agriculture loan. In 2008, Masada Charter School was a Blue Ribbon Award recipient recognized by the US Secretary of Education.<sup>29</sup> Currently, Masada is ranked in the top 10 percent of all Arizona schools and more than 90 percent of its students meet or exceed state standards in reading and mathematics. It is also worth noting that Masada is not a religious school. Yes, it is located in the heart of Centennial Park, but as principal Polly Dockstader notes, "Masada was created to be a community school. It is a culturally supported school, yes, but it is not a religious school. Our students can just focus on learning; they don't need to hide their backgrounds and/ or their families."<sup>30</sup>

Part of the reason Centennial Park is so openly committed to the education of their children connects to the larger argument made in mainstream media that polygamy inherently equals abuse. According to Mary Timpson, polygamy is not the reason that abuse occurs within these communities. The reason for abuse is the "lack of education, isolation, and the lack of commitment to personal growth. A balanced education comprised of liberal arts, practical arts, and twenty-first century living creates self-fulfilled individuals."<sup>31</sup> Sometimes these self-fulfilled individuals decide that the plural lifestyle is not for them. However, unlike the inevitable shunning that occurs in more rigid and isolated religious communities, in Centennial Park such a decision barely merits a shrug.

<sup>29.</sup> See Jennifer Huss Basquiat, "Blue Ribbon Award Letter," field document, Centennial Park, Arizona, Oct. 6, 2011. See also Blue Letter Award, Masada Charter School, <u>http://www.masadaschool.org/filestore/BlueRibbonAwardLetter.pdf</u>.

<sup>30.</sup> See Jennifer Huss Basquiat, "Interview with Polly Dockstader," field notes, Centennial Park, Arizona, Oct. 6, 2011.

<sup>31.</sup> Jennifer Huss Basquiat, "Education Lecture with Mary Timpson," field notes, Centennial Park, Arizona, Mar. 10, 2011.

As Timpson so clearly articulates, "I lead my own life as my children will lead theirs."<sup>32</sup>

What becomes truly revolutionary within the community of Centennial Park is a strong commitment to challenging popular American representations of polygamy. As I noted earlier, polygamy is regularly equated with abuse and the subjugation of women in media reports and popular opinion. However, these beliefs are firmly rooted in an ontological privilege that upholds dominant cultural patterns. Even so, as Miriam Koktvedgaard Zeitzen notes:

[T]o many researchers . . . the question of women's subjugation in polygyny cannot be examined without focusing on the women themselves and their internal relationships. To a woman in a polygynous marriage, the bond to other adult females, including [. . .] her cowives, may constitute a more critical relationship than that with her husband for her productive, reproductive and personal achievements . . . . It is therefore not possible to generalize as to whether polygyny is by nature competitive or cooperative. It depends on the particular polygynous context.<sup>33</sup>

Indeed, the suggestion that women can benefit from plural unions is echoed in Centennial Park. Joanne Timpson Yarrish, the community's practicing midwife, bluntly states that "monogamy makes slaves of women."<sup>34</sup> Having spent several years getting to know women in Centennial Park, I admit I understand this point. As they look on my own personal Facebook page and see the many activities my children are engaged in, the volunteer hours I put into their schools, the holiday meals and decorations I prepare, and my position as a full-time tenured

<sup>32.</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33.</sup> Miriam Koktvedgaard Zeitzen, *Polygamy: A Cross-Cultural Analysis* (Oxford: Berg Publishing, 2008), 127.

<sup>34.</sup> See Jennifer Huss Basquiat, "Interview with Joanne Timpson Yarrish," field notes, Centennial Park, Arizona, Sept. 24, 2012.

professor, they say things like, "Wow, Jennifer. You could really use a sister wife." <sup>35</sup> I'd be lying if, on occasion, I didn't see the appeal.

When pressed to further explain her position, Joanne makes a strong case for polygamy as a collaboration wherein women do not shoulder the burden of a household alone; they can rely on a close-knit group of women who share the same familial goals to find both joy and fulfillment both within *and without* their family structures. To this end, Joanne has spearheaded a volunteer group called the Nightingales. Comprised of young, unmarried women over the age of eighteen as well as "empty nesters," the Nightingale program is designed to provide help with child-rearing and infant care. Volunteers must complete educational training, be certified in basic care, and pass a clinical exam under the watchful eyes of the midwife. For the young ladies of Centennial Park, these opportunities act rather like "missions" wherein they are able to assist in newborn and postpartum care.<sup>36</sup> In the plural community of Centennial Park, it truly does take a village to raise a child and it is a commitment that everyone takes seriously.

This is not to suggest, of course, that abuse is absent from polygamy. Abuse can occur anywhere, regardless of religious affiliation or marriage pattern. However, members of Centennial Park believe that forced isolation, the fear of "coming out" to mainstream society, and the stigma a plural lifestyle carries create an environment wherein abuse can thrive and go unreported (as was so widely seen in Colorado City). Activists within Centennial Park urge those in the outside world to "unlock the door so you can see for yourself that plural marriage can stand up to scrutiny in the light of day."<sup>37</sup> Polly Dockstader goes further, stating,

<sup>35.</sup> See Jennifer Huss Basquiat, "Lunch at Merry Wives," field notes, Hildale, Utah, Oct. 4, 2012.

<sup>36.</sup> See Jennifer Huss Basquiat, "Tour of the Birth Clinic," field notes, Centennial Park, Arizona, Mar. 12, 2012.

<sup>37.</sup> See the Centennial Park Action Committee's (CPAC's) website at <u>http://www.cpaction.org/CPAC/index.htm</u>.

"polygamy has become a synonym for abuse and tyranny. It is time for the outside world to stop controlling the terms of the debate."<sup>38</sup>

It is here that I believe my work has broader application. It is time for interdisciplinary research and critical ethnography to bring much-needed opposition to the cacophony of prejudice currently commanding the loudest voice in American discourse surrounding polygamy. It is my belief that as more people truly understand the workings of alternative religious communities, American culture in general will become more accepting of cultural, familial, and religious diversity. Indeed, all marginalized groups should benefit from the power of self-determination. When scholars remain open to the critical way "persons choose to present themselves, how they construct their identity, and ultimately, how they embody, reflect, and construct their culture,"<sup>39</sup> they uncover contextual truths often hidden by the privilege embedded in dominant narratives. Disrupting one's own privilege can be uncomfortable, but continuing to misrepresent modern polygamy as monolithic contributes to misunderstandings that, in turn, create "many social problems that could, otherwise, be minimized by giving the phenomenon the study and attention it requires."40

<sup>38.</sup> Jennifer Huss Basquiat, "Dockstader," field notes, Centennial Park, Arizona, Mar. 11, 2011.

<sup>39.</sup> Elizabeth C. Fine and Jean Haskell Speer, *Performance, Culture, and Identity* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1992), 10.

<sup>40.</sup> David G. Maillu, *Our Kind of Polygamy* (Nairobi: Heinemann Kenya, 1988), viii.