

The Poly-Gamē | Unpacking the Acceptance of Polygyny among Women In and Out of Biblical Contexts

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Abstract

This article attempts to examine the assumptions surrounding the (in)appropriateness of jealousy among women, in response to the modernization of the ancient practice of polygyny, in a contemporary context. In the United States (U.S.), changes in marriage patterns and family structures are met with resistance, criticism, cynicism and fear; especially if deemed too ethnic or too dissimilar from the established norm. Polygyny, as a viable marriage strategy, threatens to disrupt contemporary collective agreement on what is natural, nuclear and acceptable pair bonding in the U.S. Overall, legal marriage and sustained committed partnership, has declined markedly in melanated communities; and children raised in homes, with both natural parents, have reached a critical low compared to previous generations. Authors, such as Dr. Patricia Dixon in *We Want For Our Sisters What We Want For Ourselves* (2009), Shahrazad Ali in *The Blackman's Guide to Understanding the Blackwoman [sic]* (1989) and many others from the academic and private spheres, have written thought-provoking texts on the inclusion of multiple women to one man, in a household and the potential benefits. Likewise, there is a corpus of data that documents disharmony and distress written by medical professionals, anthropologists and other academics. Methodology: Noting these developments, this work investigates the claims that women who are not willing to participate in this paradigm are problematic and reacting from an unreasonable, often “emotional,” position rooted in socio-historical, cultural and even biblical distance from this family plan. Using population statistics, linguistics analysis, relevant texts and existing research including interviews with women participating in this marriage strategy cross-culturally, this paper will establish the function of jealousy in response to covenant sharing.

Keywords: biblical, context, cultural, jealousy, mental health, patriarchy, polygyny

Note: The above abstract reflects the objective of the entire article. You are now reading part 1 “*Just the Stats Ma’am.*” As the subtitle suggests the following information will present data on jealousy and its possible causes. Subsequent parts (2.*My Partner in Jealousy* and 3.*Patriarchal Approaches to Female Jealousy*) will provide cross-cultural testimony, biblical examples and contemporary outlooks.



INTRODUCTION – The Poly-Gamē

“Uh-huh, that sounds good and all, but not for me and mine, no way, no how.” Rejection of any proposed solution, which involves compromising exclusivity in a sister’s conjugal relationship, is sometimes very honest and conclusive and may sound a bit like this. For others, there is a hesitance to disregard the paradigm outright, but the conclusion is similar, “it’s not for me.”

When I first began to seriously interrogate the proposition of polygyny, as a biblically sanctioned marriage strategy, I gathered together all of the assertions, that appeared to support this position that, I could find. Originally, I shared the thoughts of many polygyny positive women, when first introduced to biblical polygyny, “there is no law commanding it, but there is no law against it, so as long as it was done ‘righteously’ it was OK, right?” In my defense I was introduced to this assertion as a teenager and was still at an age where I expected adults to be reliable sources of information.

Unfortunately, this was not always the case. As I got older, repetition reinforced and even normalized this thinking. However, as time marched on the parameters for what qualified as “righteous” grew strange and sometimes cancerous strands that developed a resistance to biblical temperance and destroyed healthy attempts at sustainable holy unions. Study did not support supposition and the research unseated even the most convincing rhetoric. Nevertheless, efforts to intelligently and objectively revisit these etched-in-stone-tablet ideas, were met with scathing reproach and my two shekels on the matter were invariable reimaged as “being in my feelings.”

It has been argued that resistance against polygyny is a product of modernity. It is supposed that rejection of this paradigm is seated in jealousy, insecurity and western feminism, all of which is incompatible with Hebraic living and would ultimately jeopardize one’s salvation. When nested in biblical



precedence it is easy to mystify the process. Polygyny assumes new accoutrements and is packaged as the golden apple accessible only to the truly enlightened. Polygyny is slathered in comely language such as “celestial marriage,” “divine marriage” or “mantic marriage” to give the impression that there is some ascension involved in the participation and embracing of this practice.

It's important for the reader to know that polygamy (in any of its forms, including polygyny) is not a practice that you must achieve nirvana to understand, or unlock your pineal gland to achieve. There is no moral or spiritual ascension afforded to those who engage this conjugal arrangement and there is no spiritual or maturity deficit in those that do not. Whereas, as an academic, I can understand polygyny as a marriage strategy, the propagandizing of the paradigm corrupts any opportunity for honest exploration.

This is where the poly-gamē (polygamy) goes from the hard 'e,' to a *silent* 'e' and many women find themselves caught up in the game, the poly-game. Sisters find themselves being intimidated, insulted and jeered into silence or castigated and subjected to vituperative backlash. Unwilling to roll the dice or fold their cards, these women are often threatened with loneliness, accused of selfishness, labeled as "westernized" and dismissed as “emotional”. Unsure of how to avoid the opprobrium that would follow, women sometimes simply retreat. The reclassification of their concerns is due, in part, to how women on occasion voice their objections; using phrases that begin with “I think,” “I feel,” “I want,” and “I don't like,” ensure that polygyny apologists will label their opposition as “worldly” or “carnal”.

That isn't to say that the poly-positive community does not rely on somatic needs and sensual realities. Indeed, it is not uncommon to hear it argued that men have an accelerated sex drive or that they are visual creatures. These assertions are meant to appeal to the *natural* inclination of men to acquire



more than one mating partner. From there, those that wish to appeal to cross-cultural occurrences of this type of pair bonding, will provide evidence of men practicing formal polygyny in socio-cultural and legally sanctioned communities worldwide; and the existence of informal polygyny were it is disallowed, in the form of “serial monogamy” and infidelity. Finally, an appeal to biblical authority and the history of Hebrew patriarchs, are sometimes resurrected to siphon legitimacy for their cause, and fabricate a crisis of faith or charges of irreverence.

So then, if polygyny is natural, socially sanctioned, and biblically permitted, the question that arises (and the one this article attempts to answer) becomes: Is there something *un-natural*, socially *inappropriate* and biblically *contrary* in not accepting this paradigm? **This work is not concerned with condemning polygyny as a marriage strategy or disparaging the poly-positive community.** Instead, this article will investigate the obloquy women face once labeled as “jealous”. As well as suppositions that women, who have not been influenced by western modernity or western feminism, respond more amicably to polygyny; and that not accepting this family structure is uncommon in spaces where the practice is legally sanctioned and socially normalized.

1. JEALOUSY

The obloquy, or harsh criticism, which women encounter, when they reject polygyny often includes accusations of jealousy. This commonly leaves women scrambling to defend their judiciousness and retreat, if only momentarily, from their objections to the paradigm. One may have anticipated a denouncing of emotion and jealousy as a factor; however, I see no reason to. That does not mean that I intend to encourage jealousy *has vehalila*¹! Instead, I propose that emotion is part of our humanity (in both men and women) and there is value in understanding what jealousy is; as

¹ Similar to G-d forbid, for examples from Scripture c.f. Genesis 44:7, 2 Samuel 20:20 – [c]halilah



opposed to what it has come to imply. Jealousy is sometimes confused with envy, the difference, in simplest terms, is that jealousy can be understood as feelings of protectiveness for what one has or can have when it is threatened by another party; rather than desire for what someone *else* has that one does not, which is envy. Kristjánsson, K. (1996), citing Benze'ev's (1992), work in *Envy and Inequality* provides this explanation:

Envy is the "emotional attitude of wishing to have what someone else has and which is important for the subject's self-definition"; jealousy, on the other hand, is the "emotional attitude of wishing not to lose something (typically, a favorable human relationship), which is important for the subject's self definition, to someone else." Jealousy is thus "more personal than envy." (p.168)

A good example of the two can be found among the Hebrew Ancestresses Sarah and Rachel. Sarah's feelings over Isaac could be understood as jealousy "Wherefore she said unto Abraham, 'Cast out this bondwoman and her son: for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, even with Isaac.'" ([Gen.21:10, KJV](#)). Sarah was protecting what she already had, heir-ship for Isaac, from being taken in the future. Rachel's feelings regarding the fertility of Leah is correctly noted as envy, "And when Rachel saw that she bare Jacob no children, Rachel envied her sister; and said unto Jacob, 'Give me children, or else I die.'" ([Gen. 30:1, KJV](#)). Rachel is exhibiting envy, because she has been kept from bearing (by the Creator) this was not something that anyone was *taking* from her. Leah's fertility was due to the favor she received from the Creator ([Gen. 29:31](#)). Leah had something Rachel wanted, but did not have.

Jealousy is often represented in scripture as an emotion expressed in relationships, to mark dissatisfaction with the idea of a partner straying outside of the covenant. This can be found metaphorically between the Creator and his "bride" Israel ([Deut. 32:21, Ex. 34:14, KJV](#)) and



literally of husbands over theirs (Num. 5:12-31). Jealousy in these covenant contexts are not seen as disagreeable, according to Attridge (2013):

Jealousy may have evolved to deter a partner's infidelity. Thus, in this view, jealousy is central to relationship enhancing goals of mate guarding and mate retention, and is therefore not a personal failing or pathology, despite its sometimes negative consequences. (p.3)

Female jealousy does not inherently signal irrational thought, rather Kristjánsson (1996) "jealousy can in many cases be justified as a rational and a morally appropriate emotional response" (p.163). Establishing the contextual appropriateness of jealousy is valuable to the objective of acknowledging the normalcy and even the expectation of it. Therefore policing the tone, and negatively qualifying potential causes, cannot be accepted as reason to nullify female objection to any marriage strategy she is expected to participate in.

2. NATURAL vs. NORMAL

After more than two decades of listening to apologists sing the same song, the little DJ in my head samples Michael Jackson's 1983 hit *Human Nature*, to keep me entertained. The reason for the track selection is clear, polygyny positive advocates invariably point to human nature, specifically the nature of the man, to seek out multiple partners, as one of the chief means of legitimizing the paradigm. It is important not to get frustrated by the often dissonant insistence of polygyny as a conjugal no brainer. Instead of tuning out the stale refrain, an examination of the arguments helps to determine if there is truly any merit to the proposition. So, rather than run for the hills, I heeded the DJ and moonwalk right into the conversation.

"If they say: why, why? Tell them that it's human nature. Why, why, does he do me that way?" –Michael Jackson, *Human Nature* (1983)



One of the urgings for female acceptance of polygyny is the presumed nature and scarcity of the male. According to Dixon (2009) more than other causes; the need for polygyny “has to do with sex ratio imbalance and **natural** tendencies of men to engage in sexual multiplicity.”(p.xxxi) *Emphasis added.*

Let's begin by defining terms. English Oxford Living Dictionaries defines nature as “the phenomena of the physical world collectively, including plants, animals, the landscape, and other features and **products of the earth, as opposed to humans or human creations.**” *Emphasis added.* Note that nature is not concerned with anything manufactured by humans. This includes social systems, cultural concepts, rites, rituals, traditions and theories. The etymology of nature is rooted in the Latin word for birth (natura), from “nat-born” and related to the verb “nasci”. (Nature, 2017)

So what if “what we want for our sisters” (and for ourselves) is monogamy? If we were to consider only what *nature* has provided, then the argument that women are failing to accept the *natural* realities falls flat. Nature provides for 1 + a fraction males to be **born** for every 1 female. Quick math reveals that **creation** supplies us with a **surplus** of men, not a deficit. The disruption of nature and creation is almost always the consequence of men imposing their will on its carefully calculated balance, which considers the high risk activity of males. According to the World Health Organization:

The natural “sex ratio at birth” is often considered to be around 105. This means that at birth on average, there are 105 males for every 100 females. Nature provides that the number of newborn males slightly outnumber newborn females because as they grow up, men are at a higher risk of dying than women not only due to sex differentials in natural death rates, but also due to higher risk from **external causes** (accidents, injuries, violence, war casualties). (Sex Ratio, 2017) *Emphasis added.*

The melanated, or ‘black,’ community is no exception. More males are born to melanated families than girls and they remain in the majority until around the age of 24. The most recent population poll conducted by the U.S Census Bureau (2016) demonstrates that after the age of 24 these numbers decline, reaching its most critical point **after the age of 65** where the percentage falls

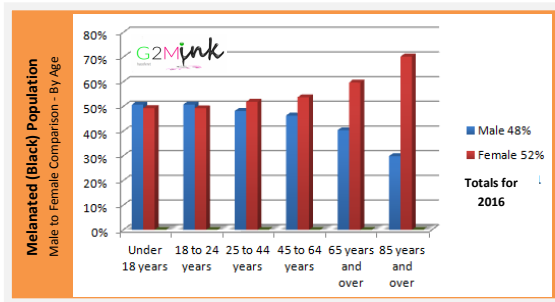


PART 1: JUST THE STATS MA'AM

to around 40 % to 60% in favor of women. If a lady is still looking to shake the sheets with a brother after the age of 85, then she is looking at only a 30% population of possible studs. Polygyny after 80 is completely unavoidable for the entire melanated female population, unless you decide to “cougar” it – they do say “black don’t crack.”

Statistics: Melanated Community (2016) Total Population 46,778,674²

Melanated Population Alone or in Combination [1]			
Both Sexes	46,778,674		
	Male	Female	
	48%	52%	.9:1
Under 18 years	51%	49%	1.02:1
18 to 24 years	51%	49%	1.03:1
25 to 44 years	48%	52%	.9:1
45 to 64 years	46%	54%	.9:1
65 years and over	40%	60%	.7:1
85 years and over	30%	70%	.4:1



Data	Male Female		
	Totals	Male	Female
20 to 24 years	3,898,176	51%	49%
25 to 29 years	3,760,274	50%	50%
30 to 34 years	3,215,756	48%	52%
35 to 39 years	3,040,188	47%	53%
40 to 44 years	2,786,682	47%	53%

Tables 1-3: Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Population Division. Table 2: Is a bar graph of Table 1 data. Table 3: Provides the detail estimates between males and females ages 25-44 implied by Table 1.

Although, the suggestion that women consider men younger than them was initially made in jest, it prompted me to recalculate the numbers to determine what impact this marriage strategy would have on the conjugal opportunities of monogamous minded women. The results were that women between the ages of 30 to 34 and 60 to 69 would be considering a pool of potential mates that have a surplus of males, simply by considering men between the ages of 25-29; a difference of just one year for the lowest end of the female age group (30) and the highest in the males (29) (see table 4).

² The total population considers the ‘black’ population including those who may have Hispanic origins. The adjusted value for the entire population is reduced by 3,560,136 to 43,218,538 without this consideration.



PART 1: JUST THE STATS MA'AM

Concerns that younger men may be unemployed or under employed are negligible. Blackdemographics.com (2014) noted that 40% of melanated men between the **ages of 16-64** earned no income in 2013 and the median income, of those in the same range, who were employed, was approximated at \$37,290 compared to “all men” \$48,099.

Race Alone or in Combination [1]						
Both Sexes	46,778,674					
Male	22,434,909	Female	24,343,765	M + F	M	F
Under 5 years	1,869,737	Under 5 years	1,813,427	CONJUGAL OPPORTUNITY ESTIMATES ADJUSTED FOR AGE DIFFERENTIAL		
5 to 9 years	1,885,810	5 to 9 years	1,835,412			
10 to 14 years	1,804,457	10 to 14 years	1,760,086			
15 to 19 years	1,858,694	15 to 19 years	1,804,630			
20 to 24 years	1,979,787	20 to 24 years	1,918,389			
25 to 29 years	1,863,716	25 to 29 years	1,896,558	3,876,345	51%	49%
30 to 34 years	1,550,741	30 to 34 years	1,665,015	3,528,731	53%	47%
35 to 39 years	1,440,574	35 to 39 years	1,599,614	3,150,355	49%	51%
40 to 44 years	1,307,829	40 to 44 years	1,478,853	2,919,427	49%	51%
45 to 49 years	1,336,109	45 to 49 years	1,511,826	2,819,655	46%	54%
50 to 54 years	1,358,459	50 to 54 years	1,544,901	2,881,010	46%	54%
55 to 59 years	1,281,766	55 to 59 years	1,489,718	2,848,177	48%	52%
60 to 64 years	1,020,210	60 to 64 years	1,247,574	2,529,340	51%	49%
65 to 69 years	765,320	65 to 69 years	988,547	2,008,757	51%	49%

Table 4: Statistics suggest that if melanated women adjusted their mating choices by -1 to -4 years they could significantly improve their conjugal opportunities.

Other considerations are for the disproportionate incarceration rate of melanated men of marriageable age (18-64). Blackdemographics.com (2014) found that:

“About **6% of working-age (18-64yrs old)** Black men are currently in state or federal prison, or in a municipal jail ...This is three times higher than the 2% of ‘all men’ in the same age group. What’s even more concerning is that approximately **34%** of all working-age Black men **who are not incarcerated are ex-offenders** compared to 12% of ‘all men’ which means they have at one point in their lives been convicted of a felony.”



Although only 6% are physically removed from the general population more than a third is excluded from contributing financially, through traditional means, to establishing and maintaining marriages and families.

Review of Some Statistical Arguments against Resistance to Polygyny

1. **Divine Marriage:** The supposition here is that polygyny is a mantic marriage model, meaning that it is from the Creator and a corrective conjugal bonding model that will fix the current crisis of women without male companionship.

Conclusion: Women are selfish, immoral, and should really just get it together, and set another plate at the dinner table for a new sister.

Problem: Since this model is designed to ensure “righteous” children, who will not stray from biblical morals, the paradigm is inherently short-term. After just one (1) generation of righteous off-spring, not given to homosexuality, immorality, illegal activity and incarceration *nature* will eliminate the need for this practice. Indeed, nature will *preclude* this paradigm simply because the birth ratio will return to producing a surplus of males, leaving it impossible to have multiple conjugal partners without affecting a sever crisis of men who cannot find companions and procreate.

2. **Cultural Reproduction (African/Hebrew):** Polygyny is steeped in antiquity and couched in historical precedence. There are many instances of women who are born into these cultural traditions who effectively and co-operatively share their husbands and care for their children. Polygyny helps to ensure the production of children thereby securing future generations.

Conclusion: Women are jealous, westernized and disconnected from their culture and customary roles. Instead of resisting due to personal insecurities women should be considerate of the nation’s reproductive success.

Problem: There is no evidence that suggests that women in other cultures do not struggle with polygyny or that these unions are void of disharmony between women. Biblical accounts provide evidence of strife surrounding issues such as inheritance and fertility (both of which secure/define their positions in the family). Regarding repopulation, statistics clearly show that melanated people are absolutely not having reproductive issues. In fact the 2016 Census report states that as a group, melanated peoples have shown



PART 1: JUST THE STATS MA'AM

the largest increase compared to other ‘races’. Additionally, research shows that first wives of polygynous unions procreate at a similar rate as mono-wives and that additional wives do not translate to doubling or tripling reproductive success; in fact each subsequent wife (on average) produced fewer children than first wives with no fertility issues (see table 5).

SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS			
VARIABLE	Notes	Polygynous (N=156)	Monogamous (N=159)
Age of the man		46.69	43.6
Age of the wife (1st one)		42.5	39.4
Age of the wife (2nd one)		31.3	na
Age of the man when married (for the first time)		20.8	21.6
Man's years of Education		5.35	6.4
Number of wives		2.19	1
Total Number of sons		7.06	4.6
Number of sons (from 1st wife)		4.5	
Number of sons (from 2nd wife)		2.4	
Number of sons (from 3rd wife)		1	
Total number of daughters		7.33	4.15
Number of daughters (from 1st wife)		4.7	
Number of daughters (from 2nd wife)		2.6	
Number of daughters (from 3rd wife)		1.4	
Number of Years married until second wife		13.6	
Man's Employment	Unemployed	57	46
	Employed in his occupation	32	49
	Employed in other occupation	4	1
	Retired	7	4

Did his father have more than one wife?	Yes	63%	49%
	No	37%	51%

Table 5. Source: Polygyny and its Impact on the Psychosocial Well-being of Husbands p179-180

Biblical-cultural Reference: It is interesting to note that Jacob’s own marriages had similar results. Leah, the first wife bore 7 children (more than all three other women combined). Each of the three remaining women bore only 2 sons each (Gen 46:8-27). From Leah came all of the key features of Israelite government; the line of Kings³ (Judah), the line of Priests (Levi) and

³ The Messiah of the Messianic New Testament is also from this line.



the line of Prophets/Seers⁴ (Issachar) as well as the only daughter of Israel (Dinah).

3. Contemporary Context:

Polygyny provides for greater potential financial fitness and generational wealth. It is not uncommon to hear this marriage strategy referred to as the means to an “economic powerhouse.” By pooling the resources of each individual member there is better family business potential, extended resources for family maintenance, higher possibility of personal leisure time (since duties would be shared) and greater possibility of generating enough wealth so that succeeding generations can benefit.

Conclusion: Women are selfish, short-sighted and prefer to be broke, rather than deal with their socio-economic reality.

Problem: In developing societies or culture areas where agriculture or subsistence farming men are the primary owners of production and take the lead role in provision. Cook, (2007) notes that women practice deliberate hyper-gamy (marrying above their economic status) while men marry younger, poorer women (hypo-gamy) (p.249). In industrialized societies like the U.S. melanated men, on average, are not supplying wealth, but rather siphoning or supplementing the existing income of women; and traditional hyper-gamy in the U.S., when practiced by melanated women, is usually re-visioned negatively as “gold-digging.” The result is that rather than men having the means to support polygyny, the family structure is expected to subsidize the polygynous intent of men. Furthermore, additional women potentially bring additional financial responsibilities (increase in children and need for material resources) that are not always offset. For example, if one wife is unable to work due to child-care or domestic responsibilities and little to no contribution from the husband is forthcoming as a result of high incarceration rates, un-employability and/or lack of marketable skills. Consequently, rather than women being concerned about sharing the husband’s resources, there are legitimate concerns that it is their own resources that are being shared – potentially, unequally and not necessarily for the benefit of the unit.

⁴ Issachar was uniquely gifted at understanding the signs and seasons [1 Chron. 12:32](#).



Fact: Certain societies that practice polygyny on The Continent (Africa) and in other places may be patriarchal, but they are not patrilineal. What this means is that although there is deference for the rule and authority of the father, the children of this union belong the lineages of their mothers (matrilineality) not their fathers (patrilineality). Consequently, women maintain strong ties with their brothers who are obligated to care for them financially. See Knight (2009) for more on matrilineality. Even with this type of financial and familial security, women find reasons to be jealous over their husbands' and suspicious of their husbands' other wives (Meekers, D., & Franklin, N., 1995) simply because inequities and imbalances are inevitable. To suggest that jealousy is unique to modern sensitivities, instead of the predictable consequence of scarcity in resources as observable in any other scenario, is intellectually dishonest.

Nevertheless, such assertions persist and melanated women are implored to abandon, what is presumed to be, unreasonably high expectations for fidelity in a covenant relationship. These pursuits that have nothing to do with natural imperatives are normalized and compliance is a must. Ali (1989) says of the 'black' woman, "She expects her man to obey all of the rules of the marriage vows or of the monogamous commitment. She refuses to accept the truth about what apparently is his nature." (p.155) In spite of overwhelming evidence to the contrary, the mythology of masculine sexual insatiability looms, interweaving with it flowery odes and accolades, to the suffering virtue of the wife of a polygynous man. Bryk (1964) pens this prose about such a woman among the Nandi people Africa:

The negress is tender in marriage in spite of her husband's harshness towards her. With what silence, self-sacrifice, and self denial she obeys every command of her husband. Even if demands what would break the heart of a European woman, she performs his fervent desire – not out of fear, be it emphasized, **but out of understanding his nature**, which, indeed, is the synonym of true love...She knows...the desire for variety...the expression 'a new vagina is sweet' is dictated by no consent value of love, but rather by the inborn **polygamous instinct** for new attractions and sensations, in order that feelings dulled at home by habitual usage, he sharpened and stimulated to new vigor. (p.201-202) *Emphasis added.*



Similar language is used in modernity to lull women into passive acceptance and assure them of the attractive and feminine quality of their compliance. In the end she may acquiesce, against her conscious, to a paradigm that she may not fully understand, or be fully prepared for, in fear that to do otherwise could result in the loss of a man or perhaps not getting a man at all. The issue isn't that nature calls out to her that she must heed his instinctual self; instead echoes of generations of women who left urges go unchecked saying "boys will be boys" have normalized behaviours that she is left to negotiate.

3. LOVE, JEALOUSY & MENTAL HEALTH

As stated elsewhere in this article, jealousy can be understood as protective, rational and a reasonable defense mechanism. When jealousy is suppressed in favor of the outward appearance of acceptance, tragic consequences can occur. Bryk (1964) admits that among the same Nandi women he romanticizes these wives are sometimes harboring real pain:

I know of a case in which the legitimate wife, after executing the command of her husband, hanged herself out of love and jealousy. For every time that her husband had thoughts of infidelity, it cut her to the quick, even though she did not manifest it, nor told her husband about it. (p. 202)

Other negative outcomes where the wife fails to "bear the anguish bravely" resulted in harm against others amongst other populations. Bryk (1964) observed, "among the Baganda. If a woman loves her husband she not only lets him take another into the hut, she supplies him. But if she is jealous she raises a racket and beats the other woman." Other than these different "black" groups there were "her white sisters" of the Mohammedan kamba "she [the first wife] attacked [her husband] in his sleep and smashed out his teeth with the massive bracelet on her right arm" in a "jealous rage" when she learned that he wanted to marry a second time. (p.203)

The haunting account of the forlorn wife who committed suicide is an example of the stress, distress and depression that can occur in wives forced



to share the affections of their covenant mates. Loue (2005), citing various studies, shows that a number mental health issues are possible:

Among women, research finds polygynous families to be "a definite stress" that produces low self-esteem, depression, and psychological distress. To illustrate this point, a high proportion of Kuwaiti psychiatric outpatients and inpatients were polygynous women, compared with their ratio in the general population. Competition between co-wives for the husband's social and economic support is common, as is jealousy. (p.174)

Citing Dr. Kutaiba Chaleby's (1985) work, *Women of polygamous marriages in an inpatient Psychiatric Services in Kuwait*, Loue writes that polygyny accounts for "slightly more" than 1 in 10 of marriages among the Kuwaiti general population, but almost **1 in 4** of all married women (in these psychiatric studies) were wives of polygamous men. Adding:

The ratio of senior to junior wives in the psychiatric population was 2 to 1; the ratio increased to 3 to 1 when cases of mental illness arising before the second marriage were excluded from the analysis. Depression was more frequently diagnosed among polygamous than monogamous wives and among senior as compared with junior wives. (p.41)

Other areas in the Middle East do not fare much better, Cook, (2007) asserts, "Studies indicate that Muslim first wives in the Middle East are unhappy with polygamous marriages and that their unhappiness is manifested in physical and mental illnesses." (p.239) According to Loue (2005), "Several studies have examined the frequency of polygamy among mentally ill patients in Nigeria, where polygamy has been found to be relatively common." Citing the work of Dr. R.O.A Mekanjuola *Clinical and sociocultural parameters in Nigerian psychiatric patients: A prospective study* (1985) and *The Nigerian psychiatric patient and his family* (1987) it was shown that out of the 318 patients observed, in a study, in the city of Ilesha, located in south west Nigeria, "that 81% had been born into polygamous homes" and that "an earlier study of psychiatric disorders among the Yoruba found that mental



disorder occurred more frequently among co-wives in the city, but not in the village.” (p.42)

Polygyny as a nuptial option has gained traction in a modernity where there is a virtual state of emergency understood in the melanated community; prompting women of various socio-economic-cultural and theological standings to give it serious consideration. Browning, S. L., & Miller, R. R. (2000). *Sharing a Man: Insights From Research* writes:

In a society which values marriage, black women who are faced with limited available men, must adapt to their circumstances, while at the same time attempting to establish marriages, or marital-like relationships. The result, we believe, has led alternative family form, one where sharing a man and settling for a "piece of a man" **provides the illusion of the traditional family and acceptance for women in a society questions your worthiness if you are not married.** (p.345) *Emphasis Added.*

CONCLUSION

Unpacking the acceptance of polygyny among women in and out of biblical contexts part 1, attempts to de-stigmatize jealousy as a factor that precludes legitimate objection to polygyny. There are reasonable grounds to reject this paradigm for oneself such as diminishment of material resources and potential mental and emotional strain. Arguments that suggest that women, specifically melanated women, have no choice but to accept this paradigm citing statistical realities of a declining male population is not necessarily true. When considering the balanced population ratio among both sexes between the ages of 18-29 and the potential affording to women who lower their pairing range by 1-4 years. It is not possible to say, and it is not the intention of this article to assert, that polygyny has no positive qualities or that informed adults, not seeking to shroud the proposition in idealized versions of the marriage strategy should not attempt it. Rather this was a look at the rational causes for jealousy and a caution against attempting a facsimile of marital satisfaction because of disingenuous representations of biblical, cross-cultural or contemporary suppositions.

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Note: This has been part 1 of 3 of *The Poly-Game | Unpacking the Acceptance of Polygyny among Women In and Out of Biblical Contexts*, subtitled “Just the Stats Ma’am.” Please click on the link to **read part 2, subtitled “My Partner in Jealousy”** for excerpts from interviews with women in this marriage paradigm on The Continent (Africa) and in The Land (Israel); as well as a look at how the expectation of jealousy among wives is found codified in language from Hebrew to Hausa (a Nigerian tongue).

 **End of Part One: Just the Stats Ma’am**

Part Two: My Partner in Jealousy 

