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# A Preliminary Survey of Lesser-Known Polyandrous Societies

Katie Starkweather

*Abstract: To challenge the common misconception that there are only four societies in the world that allow polyandry, this paper uses types of polyandry, suggested by Levine and Sangree (1980), to identify polyandrous societies from India, Africa, South America, and North America. Basic issues of these societies are examined within the context of four commonly cited attempts to explain the existence of polyandry. The goal of the paper is a preliminary look at the existence of polyandry around the world and an initial exploration of issues that may or may not be associated with this form of marriage.*

George P. Murdock's (1967) *Ethnographic Atlas* states that polyandry is allowed in only four societies in the world: Tibet, the Sherpa and Toda of India, and the Marquesans in eastern Polynesia. That is not necessarily so. While these four societies may be the principle ones in which polyandry is preferred, many other societies across the world have practiced polyandry. Murdock and others have overlooked, and some have dismissed, the appearance of polyandrous unions in these other societies because they are perhaps not as prominent in the literature, or not as institutionalized in their practice as the four societies listed above.

According to Cassidy and Lee (1989), polyandry is the simultaneous marriage of one woman to two or more men. Marriage can take many forms, and depending on how it is defined, can determine whether a society is actually polyandrous or not. George P. Murdock (1965) defined marriage in economic and sexual terms, leaving out legitimization of children, and Kathleen Gough (1959) centered her definition on legitimization of children, based on her experience with the Nayar people. Prince Peter (1963:23) defines marriage as "the union between man and woman in the form recognized by their society entitling them individually to the specific kinship status of husband and wife, jointly to that of spouses with reciprocal rights and obligations, and to the procreation of legitimate children within the union." Levine and Sangree (1980) looked for universal concomitants of marriage and found them to be "legitimation of children born to the wife" (p. 387) and "affinity" (p. 388) between the kin of one married partner and his or her spouse, and occasionally

between the larger natal groups of husbands and wives as well. These definitions of marriage would rule out the categorization of *cicisbeism*, which is sexual union between one woman and more than one man who are not related to her by marriage (Peter 1963), or other forms of extra-marital sexual unions such as polyandry. To qualify as polyandry, the marriages also must be simultaneous. The *levirate* requires a widow to marry her deceased husband's brother (Steward 1936), therefore is not polyandry.

One issue that will be discussed later in this paper, in relation to the societies that practice it, is *partible paternity*. *Partible paternity* is the belief that it is possible to have more than one biological father (Beckerman et al. 1998). It is a particularly common belief in lowland South America that all the men who have intercourse with a woman during her pregnancy share the biological fatherhood of her child. The woman's husband, if he cohabited with her during pregnancy, is usually considered the primary biological father and the lovers a woman took during her pregnancy are secondary fathers (Beckerman et al. 2002).

It is important to understand the tie between *partible paternity* and polyandry. *Partible paternity* is one way to institutionalize a female having more than one legitimate mate. Polyandry is the other. *Partible paternity* can also serve to legitimize the children born to a woman, as it does for the Bari of Venezuela (Beckerman et al. 1998). Also, in a case where polyandry and *partible paternity* co-exist, as they do with the Yanomama Shirishana and the Ache, one could assume that both husbands would be "fathers" of the child, and for reasons that will be discussed later, this would help ensure investment by both husbands and survival of the children.

Levine and Sangree (1980) define four basic types of polyandry. The first is fraternal, or *adelphic*, polyandry and is defined by Levine and Sangree (1980) as the "classic" form of polyandry. In its strictest form, co-resident brothers jointly marry a single woman in only one wedding and later form a single household.

The next type of polyandry is *associated polyandry*. It is a system of marriage in which a woman marries two men who may or may not be brothers, though marrying brothers is not uncommon. This type of marriage begins monogamously and additional husbands are incorporated into the pre-existing union later on (Levine and Sangree 1980). For the purposes of this paper, the first husband will be referred to as the primary husband, and the husbands who entered the union later will be referred to as the secondary husbands. This type of marriage is very flexible (Levine and Sangree 1980) and secondary husbands will often leave the marriage once they acquire a wife of their own (Steward 1936; Peters and Hunt 1975).

The third form of marriage defined by Levine and Sangree (1980) is *Nayar polyandry*. This type of polyandry is unique to the

Nayar of southwest India. The nature of the system is that just as a woman is involved in a number of marital relationships with a number of men, a man is married to a number of women. Nayar women and their husbands did not traditionally live together in the same household. The purpose of each union was to legitimize children born to the wife. Nayar marriage will be discussed in more detail later in the paper.

The last form of polyandry Levine and Sangree (1980) define is secondary marriage. They reported that secondary marriage had been found only in Northern Nigeria and the Northern Cameroons at the time their paper was written. It seems to be a combination of polyandry and polygyny, as women are married to several men simultaneously and the same men are married to several women simultaneously. Secondary marriage will also be elaborated on and more distinctly defined in a later section of this paper, and the differences between it and Nayar polyandry will become clear after further explanation.

Levine and Sangree (1980) also discuss the idea of *cicisbeism* to distinguish it from a form of marriage. One woman may take on several lovers while she is simultaneously married to another man, however, the extra-marital unions do not serve to legitimize children, do not allow partners rights over each other's property, and do not build relationships of affinity between the *cicisbeo* and his lover's brothers; therefore, it is not polyandry. It is important to distinguish between *cicisbeism* and polyandry because some societies, like the Northern Nigerians (Muller 1980) practice both.

Although polyandry exists outside of the four societies identified by Murdock (1967), it is still a relatively rare form of marriage. It is also important to note that wherever polyandry is found, so too is polygyny (Levine and Sangree 1980). The inverse is not true, however. Several anthropologists have attempted to provide theories as to why polyandry exists in some societies and not in others. A few of the more prominent and recurring theories have been presented rather succinctly by Levine and Sangree (1980) and Cassidy and Lee (1989) and will be discussed here and again in the conclusion.

Economic issues seem to dominate ideas about the existence of polyandry in specific societies. The first theory is that polyandry tends to occur in societies with marginal economies, where the environment is not conducive to productivity and the land can support only a low-density population (Cassidy and Lee 1989). Polyandry is a very effective way of holding population growth in check, as a woman's fecundability remains the same, whether she is married to one or several men. In conditions where resources are scarce, it would be more adaptive for a society to place few demands on those resources.

Another theory presented by Cassidy and Lee (1989) is that polyandry coincides frequently with a relatively limited role for women

in the productive economy. They suggest polyandry should be found among groups in which males dominate the major subsistence or food-producing activities. While women contribute to subsistence through food preparation and cooking, among other things, many women are simply not needed in a polyandrous society.

A third possible explanation for polyandry is that it conserves hereditary rights in property (Levine and Sangree 1980). If a society is patrilocal (couples reside postmaritally in the home of the husband's father) and inheritance is patrilineal (passed down through the male line), one way to keep all of the family land and property together is for the brothers of the family to marry one wife. The land or goods will not be split among all of the brothers, as it would if they each took a wife, and is a way for the family to conserve their wealth. In this instance, polyandry is often seen as an option, depending on the current economic situation.

The final theory presented by Levine and Sangree (1980) involves the political significance of polyandry. They suggest that an important function of polyandry, and possibly an explanation for it, are the patterns of marital alliance that it fosters. Marital alliance is found to be important in South Asian and Northern Nigerian societies, although it is achieved through different methods. The importance of marital alliance will be discussed in more detail later in the paper.

### *Polyandrous Societies*

The purpose of this paper is to do a survey of the literature on some of the lesser-known societies that have practiced polyandry. Due to space limitations, this paper will focus on societies in India, Africa, South America, and the Native North Americans, although the author is aware that polyandry occurs among certain Eskimo groups as well (Burch 1975; Damas 1975; Hoebel 1947; Kjellstrom 1973). Some factors that may be influencing or involved with the polyandrous unions will be considered, such as the status of the union within its respective society, the status of both women and men in the unions, the type of polyandry practiced, and some economic or social factors that may be involved in the society's use of polyandry. This paper will begin looking for patterns across these different societies. It will later attempt to point out those patterns and investigate whether or not they support the theories listed above.

### *India - The Pahari*

While the Toda and the Sherpa of India are well known for practicing polyandry, there are other societies in India where polyandry can be found as well. It is consistently found in certain sub-Himalayan

hill areas in Himachal Pradesh, the northern Punjab, and northwestern Uttar Pradesh (Berreman 1962). The larger group of people that inhabit parts of these areas are the Pahari people. The Pahari are known to practice mostly fraternal polyandry, although monogamy and polygyny are also not uncommon. In this society a polyandrous union occurs when a woman goes through a marriage ceremony with the eldest of a group of brothers, who, upon the ceremony, all become the woman's husbands. Subsequent wives may be taken, and it is not unusual for a group of brothers to have more than one wife. Each wife considers all of the brothers to be her husbands, and her children recognize the group as their fathers.

Berreman (1962) looked at many factors associated with polyandry and considered them in the context of the Pahari society. For the highly agricultural upper caste Pahari people, keeping land and property together is a self-proclaimed important advantage to their marital practices (Majumdar 1944). Polyandry may be used by the lower caste people as an attempt to make the most of limited resources, not an attempt to keep the wealth in the family.

According to Berreman (1962), two factors that may give the best explanations for why the Pahari practice polyandry are tradition, which is very important in Indian culture, and demographics. It has been long thought that a shortage of females in a society would presuppose polyandry. Jaunsar Bawar, the name of the area where the Pahari people are located, has shown a remarkable shortage of females. The sex ratio has been as striking as 789 females for every 1000 males at times, and the trend extends back as far as census data has been available (Berreman 1962). Possibly an even more interesting fact is that the neighboring non-polyandrous Garhwal have consistently shown a surplus of females, with ratios of 1110 females to every 1000 males, and 1149 females per 1000 males. This appears to be one of the only differences between the two groups. Although Berreman does not offer enough support for this idea, the sex ratios seem to contrast along with the marital practices of two Indian groups living in fairly close proximity to one another.

While Berreman (1962) focused on some of the factors involved in preexisting theories about the existence of polyandry, he did not give information about the status of the husband or wife in the union, though it can be assumed that the wife is of relatively low status, since that was the norm for women overall in the society. Based on the fact that polyandrous unions were more common than monogamous or polygynous and that Berreman (1962) mentioned that it was not unusual for upper caste families to practice polyandry, one could assume that polyandrous unions were at least not poorly regarded in Pahari society.

G. S. Bhatt (1983) studied the Jaunsari, who are a group of Pahari people, living in the district of Dehradun in the state of Uttar Pradesh. They are a part of the regional caste system, consisting of three different castes and their economy is based on agriculture (as are the economies of most Pahari societies). Women's economic roles are confined mainly to the household and agriculture (Bhatt 1983), and married women are of lower status than their husbands. Women's status in this society is indicated by a few practices: males seek dissolution of marriages more commonly than do females, and mainly cite their wives as the cause for the dissolution; social taboos are placed on a woman when she is in menses; female education is mostly unimportant; and women do not have any right to inheritance (Bhatt 1983). There is a degree of sexual permissiveness for females, especially in the lower caste. However, women are viewed negatively for this.

Among the Jaunsari, polyandry takes the usual form of one wife and two husbands, or three husbands and two or three wives, and is almost always fraternal (Bhatt 1983). Fraternal polyandry exists at a higher frequency than do monogamy or polygyny in the highest caste, and is also fairly frequent at the lowest level of caste hierarchy. In the higher-level castes, polyandry serves to keep land from being divided, and in the lower-level castes, polyandry and polygyny are functional in offering the extra help needed to provide subsistence for a family. Bhatt's insights into the Jaunsari, coupled with the general information about the Pahari that Berreman discussed, provide some useful information about polyandry in this area of India.

### *The Nayar*

Another important, as well as highly contested (see Panikkar 1918; Aiyappan 1932; Ananthakrishna Iyer 1932; and Leach 1955), polyandrous people are the Nayar of southwestern India. Nayar marriage is a very unique variation, and was listed above as one of the four marriage types defined by Levine and Sangree (1980). Kathleen Gough (1959) goes into great detail about Nayar marriage, and describes it as a form of group marriage, although it may also be a case of polyandry and polygyny occurring simultaneously, as cohabitation is atypical. The unions are almost always non-fraternal. The status of women in these unions can be high, if all customs are appropriately followed however, if a particular girl or woman does not abide by the customs, her status is very low and she can be excommunicated or killed. Gough (1959) does not comment on the status of the men or the union, although it seems to be practiced in the upper and lower castes, so it is likely not of low status, and Levine and Sangree (1980) mention that men are not ranked in this system.

As mentioned before, a Nayar girl customarily had several husbands. The first was a ritual husband, given to her just before puberty in a ceremony referred to by Gough (1959) as the *tali*-rite. After the ceremony, the ritual husband and his bride were secluded together for three days, during which sexual relations may take place. After this period was over, the ritual husband left the girl and had no further obligations to her. She, on the other hand, was obligated to observe death-pollution, a traditional death ritual, for him, along with all of her biological children, but this was her only obligation to her ritual husband. The *tali*-rite was an extremely important event in a girl's life, as its intent was to mark her social and physical maturity. It was vital that a girl not have reached puberty at the time of the *tali*-rite, and could be expelled from her lineage or even killed if it was known that she had. After the *tali*-rite, and after the girl achieved puberty, she began accepting a number of visiting husbands (sometimes as many as twelve). These husbands did not cohabit with her, arriving in the evening after dinner and leaving before breakfast in the morning.

While neither the ritual husband nor the visiting husbands held any rights in the women or their children, they allotted certain rights to the women and their children, and served important purposes. Gough (1959) emphasized the rights of the women in the unions as a way of solidifying them. The purpose of the ritual husband was to bring the ritual bride to maturity in honor instead of in shame. Her later right to observe pollution at the death of her ritual husband was interpreted by Gough (1959) as a mark of proof that she had once been married in the correct manner and that this ritual relationship had retained significance for her throughout her ritual husband's life. The visiting husbands, on the other hand, allowed their wife the right to have it openly acknowledged that her child had as biological father a man of required ritual rank. She had the right to gifts of high prestige value at festivals, establishing her as a woman well-favored by men. Finally, their wife's children had the right to the expenses paid by the biological visiting father at the children's births, allowing the children to enter the world as a member of the father's lineage and caste. Thus, Gough (1959:32) redefines marriage as "a relationship established between a woman and one or more other persons, which provides that a child born to the woman under circumstances not prohibited by the rules of the relationship, is accorded full birth-status rights common to normal members of his society or social stratum." Under these rules, the Nayar practices can be classified as marriage.

As previously mentioned, in their 1980 paper, Levine and Sangree nicely contrast the Indian (or South Asian, as referred to by the authors) polyandrous systems with those in Africa, namely the northern Nigerian societies. They emphasize the importance of alliance building as one of the main benefits of polyandry for both types of societies,



although the methods are quite different. While the Indians typically used fraternal polyandry, with the exception of the Nayar, to strengthen preexisting alliances, the Northern Nigerians used *cicisbeism* and non-fraternal polyandry, in the form of secondary marriages, to greatly increase "the extent and variety of affinal ties" (Levine and Sangree 1980:395).

### *Africa - The Irigwe*

The Northern Nigerians of the Jos Plateau are a tribal people, and alliances through marital ties are extremely important to maintaining tribal solidarity. Non-fraternal polyandry provides marital ties between more families than does monogamy, as both a woman and a man in a non-fraternal polyandrous marriage will have several sets of in-laws. A wife in a Northern Nigerian society will have at least three husbands and as many sets of in-laws. A husband will have sets of in-laws from his wife, their co-resident sons, and out-marrying daughters. These alliances are so important that they may be maintained after a husband's death, through the levirate (Levine and Sangree 1980).

As mentioned above, polyandry among the people of the Jos Plateau takes the form of secondary marriages. Secondary marriage was defined by Smith (1953) as the marriage of a woman, during the lifetime of her first or primary husband, to one or more secondary husbands, which neither necessitates nor implies divorce or annulment of previous or temporarily co-existing marriages. A woman does not live with all her husbands at the same time, but is concurrently wed to all of them, and maintains her right to have children with any of them (Levine and Sangree 1980). Muller (1980) adds to this by distinguishing "primary marriage," the first marriage of a girl, from "secondary marriage," any of the girl's subsequent marriages. His discussion of secondary marriage among the people of the Jos Plateau supports the idea of the importance of alliances for the Northern Nigeria tribal people. He says, "The basic principle of these Nigerian systems is to allow or even to obligate a woman to be simultaneously the wife of two or more husbands belonging to differing groups. Then the circulation of women does not link two groups only; rather it links at least three groups through a single woman" (Muller 1980:361).

The Irigwe of Nigeria are one specific instance of a society that practices polyandry in the form of primary and secondary marriages. The parents of the couple typically arrange the primary marriage while the bride- and groom-to-be are young children. The parents are usually either distant kinsmen, or the fathers are friends (Sangree 1980). Once consummated, the primary marriages typically do not last longer than a few weeks, nor produce any offspring.

The secondary marriages are initiated by the couples themselves, are relatively inexpensive, and nearly always function to produce offspring (Sangree 1980). The woman plays a large role in her own secondary marriage arrangements as she is expected to accept several engagements from different suitors, but her father ultimately must approve before she is able to accept. A woman's control over her secondary marriages exists not only before she is married, but also after she bears her first child. She is able to decide which engagements she would like to honor and which she would not. While there is no specific mention of women's status among the Irigwe, the amount of control one has over her own future may indicate that women have relatively high status in the marital union. Muller (1969, as cited in Levine and Sangree 1980:401) supports this idea by saying, "... while men are not ranked in these unions, first wives hold a special status in some societies." Although the Irigwe were of rather low socioeconomic status (Opler 1943), the unions within the society seem to be highly regarded.

### *The Lele*

While polyandry in Africa is best known among the tribes of the Jos Plateau, the Lele of the Kasai in western Congo practices a different form of polyandry. The Lele's type of polyandry is uncommon, and perhaps unique only to their group. They are a slash-and-burn agricultural group, living in small, relatively impermanent villages (Opler 1943). Unity within the village is very important, and the sort of polyandry they practice supports that.

Polygyny is a widely accepted and high status form of marriage for the Lele. Polyandry occurs when the village acquires a *hohombe*, or a village wife. She will have come from another village, either by force, seduced, taken as a refugee, or betrothed from infancy, and is treated with "much honor" (Tew 1951:3) by the people in her new village. A village wife is married to several men in the village who may or may not have other wives already. The position is very prestigious for a woman, as is evidenced in her honeymoon period. The honeymoon period can last six months or more, and is a time in which she does no heavy work. She should also sleep with a different man in her hut every two nights, and may have relations with any village member during the day (Tew 1951).

Tew (1951) states that when the honeymoon period ends, the village wife is allotted a certain number of husbands, sometimes as many as five. She must cook for these men and have relations with them. She may eliminate husbands from her household, and usually does so until she has just two or three. By the time she reaches middle age, she will have only one husband who lives with her and whom she

cooks for, but she will forever be available to the rest of the village when she is outside of her home. Any children she has will be children of the village, and will be considered to belong to all of the men in the village.

As noted before, the non-fraternal polyandry practiced by the Lele is of high status, as is the village wife (although other women in the society, outside of the union, are of fairly low status). The status of men within the union seem to be equal during the honeymoon period, when they all have equal access to the village wife. Also, after the village wife has chosen the final two or three husbands to live in a polyandrous state with for some time, there is no mention of any sort of hierarchical system among those men. Probably the most important thing to note about this system of polyandry is the function it serves. Although the form is very different from other African forms, as well as Indian forms, they all serve a similar purpose: forming alliances.

### *South America - The Bari*

One issue mentioned earlier in this paper was that of partible paternity, the belief that a child can have more than one biological father (Beckerman, et al. 1998). As previously stated, it is a belief most commonly found in South America, although cases have been reported in parts of India and New Guinea, as well (Milius 1999). All three of the South American groups that will be discussed in this paper, the Bari, the Yanomamö (used interchangeably in this paper with the term Yanomama), and the Ache, believe in partible paternity. The Bari are the only society of the three that does not marry polyandrously.

The Bari of Venezuela are a horticultural group located in the lowland tropical rainforests of South America. Traditionally, a small portion of males might be married to more than one woman at a time, and women were never married to more than one man at once. The most common form of marriage for the Bari was monogamy, however, most women in traditional Bari societies took one or more lovers during at least one of their pregnancies. The married woman usually said that she did not take any lovers until after she was pregnant, and her husband was usually aware of the situation. When the woman gave birth, she typically named all the men who had been her lovers during her pregnancy. These men were notified and the secondary husbands were expected to carry out certain obligations for the child. The most important obligation was providing gifts of fish and game, which could be critical to the survival of the child (Beckerman, et al. 1998; Beckerman et al. 2002).

Beckerman, et al. (2002:33) hypothesized that “multiple paternity was in effect an insurance policy on a woman’s husband, providing an additional male with spousal and parental obligations in

case the husband died.” In their research, they did not find evidence to fully support this hypothesis, and were able to conclude that in the Bari society, the presence of secondary fathers (and thus perhaps the function of partible paternity) was to help ensure the survivorship of their presumed offspring only, and not the mother or her other children.

### *The Yanomama Shirishana*

The Yanomama Shirishana of Brazil also believe in partible paternity (Peters and Hunt 1975; Peters 1998), although the belief may serve a different purpose in their society than it does for the Bari. Abortion and infanticide are common among the Shirishana (Peters 1998). A father may be more likely to invest in the child, or refrain from having it killed, if they believe it to be biologically theirs (see Hrdy 1988 and Hawkes 1991). Using the principles of partible paternity to convince a man that a child is mostly his may help ensure the survival of the child.

In the late 1950's and most of the 1960's a shortage of women, possibly contributed to by preferential female infanticide (Peters 1998), accounted for a relatively high number of polyandrous unions (Peters and Hunt 1975; Peters 1998). By the early 1970's the sex ratio had changed, and there was only one instance of polyandry remaining (Peters 1982). The unions were of particularly low status in the society, as polygyny is the most highly regarded form of marriage. Of the 9 polyandrous unions, seven were fraternal and two were non-fraternal (Peters and Hunt 1975). (It is important to note here that while Peters and Hunt use the terms “fraternal” and “non-fraternal”, the type of polyandry practiced among the Yanomama Shirishana is more closely related to associated polyandry, the definition for which was given above. The terms used by the authors will be used in this paper.) All marriages began monogamously, but an older brother may invite an unmarried younger brother to join later. Polyandry also occurred at times when an older or aging husband took on a younger man to either help provide meat for his family, or to appease his wife (Peters 1998).

The Yanomama are a simple horticulture society in which warfare and acts of brutality against women are common. The status of women in the Shirishana society was especially low (Peters and Hunt 1975). Preferential female infanticide is common (Peters 1998), and females are sometimes referred to as “bisiari”, meaning female dog (Peters and Hunt 1975). If a husband suspects infidelity on the part of his wife, he may punish her by beating her (Peters 1998). One can assume that the status of women in a low-status marriage would be extremely low.

### *The Ache*

The Ache are a small-scale horticultural group living in Paraguay. They were living strictly as hunter-gatherers until around 1980, but learned slash-and-burn agricultural techniques and began to raise some domestic animals during the early 1980's. They were previously living in small bands and were very mobile. They now live in stationary mission/reservation settlements, although they take every opportunity to travel to other settlements in attempt to maintain some mobility, and in 1993 they made a return to small-scale foraging in the areas around their settlements (Hill and Hurtado 1996).

The Ache practiced both polygyny and polyandry, although monogamy was the most stable and persistent form of marriage. Hill and Hurtado (1996) felt that polygamous marriages among the Ache might be better considered as transitional rather than permanent mating arrangements. Hill and Hurtado (1996) found that eleven out of eighteen men over 30 years of age had been involved in a polyandrous marriage at some point in their lives. Hill (2008, personal communication) speculated that polyandry occurred among the Ache due to shortages of women, either related to demographic issues or very high polygyny being practiced by other men. The marriages were short-lived, though, and usually ended with one of the co-husbands abandoning the relationship (Hill and Hurtado 1996).

The Ache practice non-fraternal polyandry, presumably of the associated type, although there is no indication as to why (Hill 2008, personal communication). There was no direct mention of the status of women in the union, though Hill and Hurtado (1996) reported that men did not admit jealousy at learning of, or even witnessing, their wives' sexual relations with other men, be they co-husbands or not, but commonly beat their wives later because of it. This likely indicates a lower status of women in the marriage. Also, Hill (2008, personal communication) mentioned that polyandry seemed to occur for the Ache as a last resort, suggesting the status of the union was probably fairly low.

Like the Bari and the Yanomama, the Ache believe in partible paternity. Females generally copulated with several males during their pregnancy and announced the multiple paternity of a child at its birth. Infant and child survivorship was a concern for all fathers, including the secondary fathers. There was an idea among the Ache that the secondary fathers were important to the well being of the child if the primary father died. Hill and Hurtado (1996) found this to be true. In 1992, they found that for children under ten years old, the probability of survivorship was lower when the father dies than when the father lives. Then, in 1996, their data showed that the highest survivorship of children might be attained for children with one primary and one secondary father (Hill and Hurtado 1996). Thus, the Ache's belief of partible paternity and that of the Bari people may serve a similar

purpose: attempting to ensure a child's survival in the instance of death of the primary father.

*North America - The Shoshoni*

Polyandry was also found in some Native North American groups. One society that practiced this marriage form were the Shoshoni of Nevada. At the time they were known to participate in polyandrous marriages, they were a hunting and gathering society. They appeared to be a fairly egalitarian people; both status egalitarian and sex egalitarian. Steward (1936) said that both men and women contributed equally to the household, had nearly identical roles in plural marriages, and had no property rights. Steward (1936:562) also described the people by saying they were "simple" and "uncomplicated by clans, societies, age classes, or other groupings" and the only real exception to the class-free society was the presence of a village headman, who was the only man with any advantage.

Steward (1936) reported that polyandry among the Shoshoni was usually fraternal, which is probably due, in large part, to the fact that the levirate was prevalent in the society. (Again, note that while the author uses the term "fraternal", this type of polyandry is likely associated polyandry, practiced among brothers.) For the Shoshoni, the levirate required, as it typically does, that when widowed, a woman marry her deceased husband's brother. It also required that if a woman takes a second husband while her first husband is still alive, the second husband must be a brother of the first (Steward 1936). The levirate requirements, then, allowed for an easy transition when the first husband passed away, and encouraged fraternal polyandry within the society.

In a study done on several groups of Shoshoni, Steward (1936) found, with one exception (the Shoshoni of the Little Smoky Valley), that polyandrous marriages were contracted with intentions of permanency. He says that brothers in the union were of equal status, both were called "father" by their children, and biological paternity was not of any relevance. Steward (1936) also reports of Shoshoni polyandry that it seemed "not to have been uncommon ... and carried no social stigma" (p. 564). He suggested that a possible function of fraternal polyandry among the Shoshoni was that while one husband was away from the home hunting, another was present at home with the wife. The Pawnee seemed to have used fraternal polyandry in a similar manner.

## *The Pawnee*

While paternity certainty was of little concern for the Shoshoni, it was a matter of great concern for the Skidi Pawnee of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. For Pawnee women, chastity before marriage and fidelity after marriage were very important (McGinnis 1983). Women were watched closely and as soon as a woman missed a menstrual period, she was expected to inform the likely father, because the people in the society, most importantly her husband, used this to determine paternity. A man would not invest in a child that was not his own, and children with unknown biological fathers were social outcasts (Weltfish 1965).

As stated before, the Pawnee practiced fraternal polyandry (again, most likely it was associated polyandry practiced among brothers). A younger brother was taught to think of his older brother's wife as his own wife, and usually was invited to live with the couple once he became a young man (Lesser 1930). The secondary husband was allowed sexual access to the wife at the discretion of the primary husband, possibly after the younger brother demonstrated his bravery and prowess on the warpath (Lesser 1930). The younger brother usually stayed with his older brother's family for a few years until he married a wife of his own, thus it was common for polyandrous marriages among the Pawnee to be impermanent. His primary role in his older brother's household may have been to provide protection for the wife when his brother was absent for any length of time. Not only was the younger brother to protect her from outsiders, he was also to guard her sexuality to ensure that she was not having extramarital affairs. Such an offense could result in the woman being killed (Grinnell 1891).

The status of polyandrous marriage among the Pawnee appears to be equal to other forms of marriage, based on the literature. There was definite stratification among the brothers within the union; the older brother possessed more power and control than the younger brother, however, the status of the wife in the union was lower than that of either brother. Fairly high instances of warfare as well as necessity for long hunting trips, both requiring the primary husband to be away from the house for long periods of time, could be factors that contribute to the occurrence of polyandry among the Pawnee.

## *Discussion*

The purpose of this paper was to begin to identify polyandrous societies other than the four identified by Murdock (1967) in his *Ethnographic Atlas*, and the hope was to begin a discussion about polyandry that included these other societies, and to look for patterns among them. There are several factors that may be related to the

marriage patterns practiced in a particular society. This paper looked at six factors for each of the societies mentioned here: status of the polyandrous union within the society, status of women and men within the marriage, type of polyandry practiced, and economic and social issues that may influence marital form.

There were no overarching patterns for most of the factors, including status of union, status of women, type of polyandry, and economic and social issues. The one factor that seemed to be true for all societies was the high, or at least not low, status of men. However, there were patterns among the societies, depending on the region where the society is located, for status of the union and type of polyandry. For example, the status of the polyandrous union was fairly high for all three of the Indian societies, in which polyandry functioned to maintain wealth within a family. It was also high among the African groups. The status of the union was equal with other types of marriage for the Native North American groups, and was low for the South American groups. Also, both North American Native North American groups, the Shoshoni and Pawnee, practice associated polyandry between brothers, and neither African group allows co-husbands to be brothers. Among the South American and Indian groups, though, there are no noticeable patterns of the type of polyandry they practice. The only pattern found for status of women was among the three Indian societies, the Jaunsari, Pahari, and Nayar, in that women were of low status in all of these societies. While not all societies or regions shared specific economic or social issues that may contribute to polyandry, some of the findings did support the theories presented at the beginning of this paper.

The first theory was that poor economic situations should be correlated with polyandry. This theory was supported by the Pahari, including the Jaunsari who are a group of Pahari people, the Bari, and the Ache, as all of these groups were struggling economically at the time polyandry was reported. Recall that Bhatt (1983) reported that in the lower level castes of the Jaunsari, polygyny and polyandry were functional in giving the extra help needed to provide for a family. However, societies all across the world are in dire economic situations, yet do not practice polyandry. Therefore, there is likely no direct correlation between poverty and polyandry.

The second theory was that polyandry should be related to limited roles for women in the productive economy. This theory was also supported by the Jaunsari when Bhatt (1983) pointed out that women were confined mainly to household and simple agricultural duties. The theory was refuted by the Ache and the Shoshoni, however. Both of these groups were hunting and gathering groups in which the women were integral in providing subsistence for their families.

The third theory was the idea that polyandry serves to conserve hereditary rights in property, and is supported by the Pahari,



again including the Jaunsari. While the lower caste people in these societies were using polyandry for a different purpose, both Berreman (1962) and Bhatt (1983) reported that the upper caste agricultural people were using it to keep land from being divided.

The final theory mentioned above was that polyandry functioned to form marriage alliances, specifically in the Northern Nigerians and the Indian people. The findings for both of these groups supported this theory, as did the Lele of the Congo. For the Lele, polyandry originally functioned to maintain unity within the group, but eventually served as a way to develop relationships with other groups as well. However, one might question why it is necessarily so that polyandry, rather than polygyny, was used to form alliances. In the way that Levine and Sangree (1980) are presenting this theory, it seems that sororal polygyny, in the case of the Indian societies, or non-sororal polygyny, in the African cases, would function in the same way.

Although there is definitely support for all of these theories, not one of them seems to stand on its own as a direct correlation to a polyandrous society. Perhaps they need to be more specific, as in the third theory, which suggests that polyandry is used to conserve hereditary rights in property. If the theory was narrowed down to agricultural societies, or the upper castes of agricultural societies, there may be a better relationship between the two. It is likely that there is no causal relationship (and none of the authors suggested there is) between any of these theories and polyandry. But, given that in many societies polyandry is practiced intermittently, if a society is already predisposed to the practice (for reason unknown), these theories may be good predictors of when a society will return to the practice or how long it will be maintained.

There are a few different issues that should be further explored in later studies of polyandry. One of those is the issue of demographics in a society. As noted earlier in the paper, the Pahari had a shortage of women, and had for a significant amount of time. This was also suggested to be the case for the Ache and the Yanomamö. A relationship between a low number of women in a society, either a natural shortage or an artificial shortage created by high polygynous practices or preferential female infanticide, and polyandry should be examined. This should also be a fairly easy to test through census information. Another idea that should be researched further is the correlation of fraternal polyandry, the long absences of husbands and the need for protection of the wife. This was described by the Shoshoni and the Pawnee, groups in which husbands would leave the home for long periods of hunting or warfare and would leave the secondary husband (always the primary husband's brother) to watch over and protect the wife. Wife protection was also briefly alluded to by

Berremen (1962) as a function of fraternal polyandry used by the Pahari.

There is not nearly enough literature on the practice of polyandry in societies, and of the literature that does exist, not enough information is given or issues explored. While this paper was a very brief attempt to shed some light on the lack of attention given to this important marriage form and hopefully prompt more research, further investigation of the literature needs to be done before more hypotheses can be tested, and there is a better understanding of the marriage form of polyandry.

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