

Why Pop Culture (and ‘Say Yes to the Dress’) are Going Wild for Polyamory

Hey everyone, a relic of barbarism is making a comeback!

If the reference is lost on you, I am referring to an expression from the mid-1800s, when the Republican Party was established to replace the Whigs on the platform of eradicating what party leaders like Abraham Lincoln [coined](#) “the twin relics of barbarism.” The first of those relics was polygamy, seen as a system that was fundamentally oppressive to one of the two sexes: women. Bigamy was formally abolished under the Lincoln’s presidency.

And yet, 155 years later, the concept is creeping back into the mainstream, with popular culture blowing wind in its sails.

Just this week, *People* magazine informed readers that the popular bridal show, *Say Yes to the Dress*, would be featuring its [first-ever polyamorous fitting](#). “*Say Yes to the Dress* Sneak Peek: Inside Kleinfeld’s First Polygamous Bridal Fitting,” read the headline. The article casually discusses the first “throuple” to be featured on the show and what it means to dress two women for a “polygamous wedding.”

The whole thing is framed as edgy and fresh, but in fact it’s just the latest bit of pop culture news I’ve read treating polyamory like it isn’t something backwards, straight out of the eighteenth century. We should have seen this all coming with the smash-hit “Big Love,” but at least that show tried to show the moral complexities of the issue. Today we have cultural polyamory in abundance. Showtime has a series called [Polyamory](#), a show called [You Me Her](#) is billed as the first-ever “polyromantic comedy,” and TLC is still running episodes

of [Sister Wives](#).

Apart from television, I read almost weekly some sort of article about the rise of polyamory in the modern era. *The Atlantic* [informs me](#) that dating website “OkCupid Adds a Feature for the Polyamorous.” [Refinery29.com nonchalantly runs a story](#) entitled, “My Boyfriend & I Got a Girlfriend – & This is What Happened.” The opening paragraph says, “In the polyamorous world, there is a special term for the third person in a relationship. She (and it is usually a she) is called a ‘unicorn.’ She is rare, beautiful, and hard to track down. And if you can catch her, she will bring magic into your relationship.” The [BBC tells me](#), “Polyamorous relationships may be the future of love.” “Love doesn’t just come in pairs. Is it time that marriage laws come to recognise the fact?” the article asks.

You might be reading this and asking yourself, “What the what?”

But this has been coming down the pike for years. Plenty of us were mocked for asking questions about where it all stops if we start redefining marriage. And yet here we are in 2017, and polygamy is making a comeback. In the midst of a quick Facebook check while writing this piece, [an article](#) on the Institute for Family studies blog analyzing a recent study on rising acceptance for non-monogamous marriages scrolled through my feed. I clicked over to the study itself, [the abstract](#) of which claims, “These data call out for greater attention to both the social mediation of Giddens’s detraditionalization thesis and a more nuanced concept of marital fidelity than a simple binary axis of ‘monogamous/nonmonogamous’ permits.”

But what happens to women in a world where we scrap the “binary axis” of monogamy? Women suffer, that’s what. Nobody is asking for a show called “Brother Husbands.” Nine of ten pictures for polyamory involve one man with multiple women.

The other one in ten is usually just a crowd of people. Men may sleep around, but they don't tolerate the degradation of being a part of a modern male harem, nor have they ever, really. Polygamy uniquely subjugates one sex; it's like an institutionalized form of the hookup culture—with women on call for male pleasure, just with some boundaries and a relationship status. But that hasn't stopped Hollywood's big wigs from putting bigamy on the big screen like it's NBD, no big deal.

Hey 2017, 1850 called and wants its barbarism back.

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