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An economic approach to the study of polygamy: A case study of Mormon polygyny

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**AN ECONOMIC APPROACH TO THE STUDY OF POLYGAMY:
A CASE STUDY OF MORMON POLYGYNY**

by

Joseph D. Diaz

**A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of**

**Master of Arts
in
Economics**

**Department of Economics
University of Nevada, Las Vegas
May 1997**

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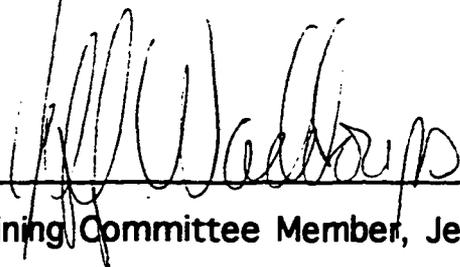
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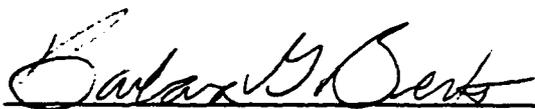
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ABSTRACT

This is a study of polygamy using economic theory and economic models. The focus of this research is an analysis of the occurrence of polygyny in the early Mormon church, and its effects on the members of the state of Utah, both Mormon and non-Mormon. This study is unique in that its subject, Mormon polygyny, was socially acceptable in Utah, but illegal, and often prosecuted, under Federal law. This combination had multiple negative effects on all aspects of the lives of Utah Mormons, however, the practice continued for approximately 60 years. The ways in which it occurred as well as the reasons for its eventual decline will be analyzed and discussed.

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And of course to my dear wife and children, who granted me great strength and patience when I needed it most, I dedicate this study to you.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In the past twenty years there have been numerous studies of the economics involved in marriage and the marriage market. Less numerous have been studies of the economics involved in polygyny, the taking of multiple wives, and polygynous marriage markets. This work adds to the study of the economics of polygyny by offering an analysis of the determinants, occurrence and consequences of polygyny for members of the early Mormon church in Utah.

The occurrence of Mormon polygyny is a unique case of polygamy in that it was acceptable socially but illegal, and prosecuted under Federal law. The effect of this combination on the polygynists, as well as the non-polygynous Mormons in Utah, was impacts on their incomes, birthrates, demographic patterns and economic growth of the area that continued to exist even after the formal abandonment of Mormon polygyny in 1890. For comparison, the patterns of these variables after the abandonment of polygyny will be compared to the years in which polygyny was still common. This study is unique in that it is the first economic analysis of polygyny as it occurred in early

Mormonism, and its economic effects on Utah and its inhabitants.

The next section of this paper is a literature review. This section is included to give a brief account of the major theories of the economics of polygamy and polygyny, and will serve the purpose of introducing ideas that will be contrasted to Mormon polygyny. Included in the works discussed in this section will be several broad studies on the economics of marriage and polygyny, as well as a social and historical study of Mormon polygyny.

Following the literature review is a discussion of the history of polygyny in Mormonism. The purpose of this section is to develop a broad understanding of the historical reasons Mormons chose to either engage in or refrain from engaging in polygyny. This section will chronicle Mormon polygyny from its beginnings to its formal abandonment. Included in this section will be a discussion of which individuals engaged in polygyny and where it occurred in the Utah territory, as well as surrounding areas.

The next section is divided into two parts. The first is an analysis of the economics involved in the growth and occurrence of Mormon polygyny. Economic theories of efficiency, productivity and specialization and division of labor will be used as tools to analyze Mormon polygyny. Also included in this section is an analysis of the costs and benefits of polygyny to the individual and the society as a whole. For most polygynists, the costs of engaging in polygyny were tremendously high, however they continued the practice and

fought in Federal courts to assure its legality. The reasons these high costs were willingly borne, and the benefits they produced to the polygynists will be analyzed.

The second analytical section is used to discuss the reasons behind the decline in Mormon polygyny. Determinants such as tastes, incomes, Federal legislation, economic efficiency, changes in agricultural technology, birthrates and demographic patterns will be considered for their impact on the occurrence of polygyny. It is widely believed that the Mormons abandoned polygyny out of the fear of war with the Federal government, however this study will present new theories why the individual, as well as the collective Mormon people, eventually chose monogamy over polygamy.

The final section summarizes the findings of the paper and discusses their implications.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

One of the first economic studies of polygyny was by Gary S. Becker in his book Theory on Marriage. His work is dedicated to a broad study of marriage, but he includes a section that discusses polygamy. This work is significant not only because it is the first attempt to analyze polygamy with economic theory, but also because he introduces a theory that polygamy is caused by only three determinants. The three conditions, one of which must fail to be met for polygamy to occur in an economy (society), are: all men and women must be identical (relative to productivity and wealth); there must be an equal number of men and women; and there must exist diminishing marginal returns upon adding a second spouse, meaning all other things being equal, the first spouse provides more productivity than each additional spouse. The condition that most commonly fails to be met is identical men and identical women.

Becker describes the differences in men and differences in women as the

individuals having different levels of productivity¹. For example, he writes that, "Although 40% of the married men in a sample of the Xavante Indians of Brazil were polygynous, it was the chief and the heads of clans who enjoyed the highest degree of polygyny" (1976 p. 240). It is supposed that a chief, or other tribal leader, is regarded as braver, more intelligent or wealthier than the other male tribal members, and thus, more productive. Therefore, when the opportunity for marriage comes to women in the tribe, "Total output over all marriages could be greater if a second wife to an able man added more to output than she would add as a first wife to a less able one" (p. 239). Becker uses this theory to suggest that society as a whole would be more productive if polygyny were permitted and the "abler" had more children through a greater number of wives. These children, conceived by more productive fathers, would have more productive genes and could pass them on to their children, resulting in a more productive tribe than one which does not permit polygyny (Becker 1973 p. 239).

The economics behind Becker's theory is fairly simple. In this case the cost borne by the polygamous wife is the foregone opportunity of being a monogamous wife. The benefit is everything she gains from choosing to

¹ Becker uses the term productivity to mean having the ability to do that which is desired in the society. It can be used to mean ability to perform labor, fecundity, wealth, status or power and ability to contribute to total output or income for the household. In this paper, the term productivity will be used in the same manner that Becker uses it.

become a polygamous wife. For polygamy to occur, the wives must have perceived more benefit from entering a polygamous marriage over a monogamous one.

Another study in which economic theory is applied to different types of marriage markets is Grossbard-Shechtman's 1993 book, On the Economics of Marriage. This book was inspired by Becker's work and includes one chapter devoted to the economics of polygamy.

In her book, Grossbard-Shechtman writes that men who are more wealthy or productive relative to other men in the same society perceive themselves as having more to offer as a husband and, consequently, demand more "spousal labor" (p. 215). The husband's demand is usually more than one wife can produce and he takes additional wives to increase his household productivity. To support her theory, Grossbard-Shechtman points out that men most likely to be polygamous are at their peak productivity level with respect to age and income (p. 216). This theory is also supported by data on the age of men at their first polygamous marriage in the early Mormon church (Logue, 1988 p. 55).

While higher productivity (ability to work, or other desirable traits) is positively related to polygamy for men, it is inversely related to polygamy for women (p. 216). Grossbard-Shechtman found that in polygamous societies, not only the most productive women, but also the most fertile and well

educated, were less likely to be polygamous. This also gives support to her theory that husbands demanding more than one "average" wife can produce, causes polygamy. Here, a husband's demand could be met by one extremely productive women, or several less productive women.

Another interesting difference in the determinants of polygyny for men and women that Grossbard-Shechtman found is education. Her study on several African villages found that, as with productivity, the more education a man possesses the more likely he is to be polygamous, while an educated woman is less likely to become a polygamous wife (p. 216). Given the discussion in the previous paragraph, this might at first seem fairly intuitive. However, education is defined as being literate, which would not affect productivity as it is defined here. Her theory is that education, which is usually attained away from the village, exposes women to "the outside world" and increases her self-perceived contribution to a marriage. This puts the woman in a position to demand an unshared husband.

In her study, Grossbard-Shechtman further developed several theories proposed by Becker. One of these theories is the cause of diminishing marginal returns to spousal labor. She proposed that conflicts among the wives would lead to hostility and a lack of productivity due to a decline in morale in the household. The solution for the problem of hostility among the wives that is attempted by some polygamists is sororal polygamy, or polygamy where the

wives are sisters. It is believed by the participants that this reduces friction among the wives and facilitates greater productivity from the household. As this was common in Mormon polygyny, it will be discussed in greater detail in the first analytical section.

Grossbard-Shechtman writes that another possible cause for diminishing marginal returns to spousal labor could be that male spousal labor is fixed for the household while the amount of productivity offered by the wives is variable (p. 236). This theory holds that the cause of decreasing returns is the husband, not the wives. She bases this theory on the observance that if household output is based solely on the combination of two inputs, male and female labor, and if one input is held constant, in this case male productivity, adding additional input in the form of more wives will give less marginal output to each wife because total output is based on the combination of male and female labor.

Grossbard-Shechtman's theories all lead to her statement that an open market (one which permits polygamy legally and socially) would benefit all parties involved, especially the wives (p. 219). She argues, "Societies that impose monogamy therefore cause the equilibrium market determined compensation for spousal labor to go down due to reduced competition for spousal labor by potential husbands" (p. 219). Further, she states that, "a legal imposition of monogamy can be viewed as an interference in the marriage

market curtailing men's aggregate demand for spousal labor" (p. 219). Her statements show that she believes the greater demand for women in a polygamous market will allow for additional, "consumer surplus and producer surplus in the market for women's spousal labor" (p. 219). These theories will be tested later in this study against historical data on polygyny as it was practiced by Mormons.

Another economic study of polygyny that further develops and tests Becker's theories is Jacoby (1995). In this study, he attempts to isolate the causes of polygyny in one region (Cote d'Ivoire in Sub-Saharan Africa) and examine its occurrence with theories developed by Becker's work, discussed previously.

The findings in this study support several of Becker's theories. For example, Becker's theory that inequality or differences in the male population (non-homogeneity) would increase the incidence of polygyny was observed in Cote d'Ivoire. Jacoby considered several differences in the male population to define inequality. They were, the man's wealth, the level of productivity and output of his farm, and if the man exhibited desirable physical characteristics (height and physical stature).

A man's wealth increased the probability of polygyny in the study, much as Becker theorized it would. Jacoby found that men with more wealth bid wives away from men with less wealth. Bidding came in the form of benefits

that could be offered to the prospective wife, like food or more desirable housing. All other things being equal, women chose to marry a man with greater wealth than a poorer man. The second determinant, the level of productivity at a man's farm, also increased the chance of a man having multiple wives. His theory is that, "wives are attracted to husbands on whose farms their labor is more productive" (p. 965). The last determinant based on male inequality was the male's physical stature. The taller a man was, the more likely he was to be engaged in polygyny. Jacoby's explanation for this was that the ability to offer physical protection to his wives might be more likely if the male was larger, and this would attract prospective wives.

In addition to differences in the male population, Jacoby (1995) also found the desire for children in the society and the household had an impact on polygyny in the area. Similar to Grossbard-Shechtman's findings, the more children are desired in a society, the more likely polygyny is to occur. Jacoby writes, "The demand for wives thus derives in large measure from the demand for children, the perceived advantages of which include prestige, old-age security, and heirs" (p. 942). The product of a high demand for children, accompanied with polygyny, causes higher levels of fertility in the area (p. 939). Jacoby did not thoroughly address this finding in his study, but it plays a major role in the economic conditions of Mormon society.

An important finding in Jacoby's paper is support of the theory that as

agricultural labor becomes more important in a society, the demand for wives increases. Support for this theory comes from his observation that areas in Sub-Saharan Africa which produce less labor intensive agriculture have lower levels of polygyny than areas that produce labor intensive agricultural goods. This observation is offered as an explanation for the reason for the decline in polygyny in Cote d'Ivoire. Increases in global demand for coffee and chocolate, goods which are less labor intensive, have reduced demand for wives being used as agricultural labor in the area. This finding suggests that changes in agricultural production changed the demand for wives as a supply of labor. This theory will be tested in the second analytical section of this paper, which attempts to identify the reasons for the decline in Mormon polygyny.

An informative social study of Mormon polygyny is *Sermon in the Desert*, by L. Logue. This work is a chronicle of Mormons who had migrated to southern Utah to escape a "war with the larger society" (p. 1). His study is unique, and important to this thesis, because it attempts to explain the reasons Mormons continued polygyny when the costs (disease, hunger, poverty and death) were often high. His work concentrates on the social aspects of polygyny and offers theories and ways in which families continued polygyny when, economically, monogamy might have been optimal.

Logue's work identifies the main determinant of polygyny in Mormonism as the desire to obey laws set forth by church leaders. In Mormonism, the

words of church leaders are considered commandments by God, and disobeying them brings condemnation. Therefore, when the formal announcement that all men should engage in polygyny was given, it was considered a direct commandment by God. Logue writes that Mormons then considered the negative ramifications of polygyny as a test of their faith, and continued to engage in polygyny to prove themselves devout members of the faith. In terms of economic theory, the costs of polygyny were high, but to the participants, they were not high enough to offset the spiritual benefit they expected to receive if they continued the practice.

CHAPTER 3

A BRIEF HISTORY OF POLYGyny IN MORMONISM

To gain an understanding of the common background of Utah polygynists, this section will offer an overview of Mormon polygyny. Polygyny first occurred in Mormonism around 1840. Joseph Smith, the founder of the Mormon church, "privately advocated plural marriages [polygyny] during the early 1840s and perhaps earlier... and insisted that without them no one could attain the "fullness of exaltation" in the hereafter" (Van Wagoner, 1989). However, no reasons were clearly given as to why or how polygyny should occur in Mormon families.

The first public acknowledgment of the practice of polygyny was announced in 1852 by church leaders, but by that time a large number of Mormon families were already engaged in polygyny (Van Wagoner, 1989).

In its beginning, the church was centered in New England, and members were dispersed throughout New England and the mid-west. However, Mormons had become unpopular and resented in most states. The resentment arose partly because Mormons frequently favored other Mormons over non-Mormons in business transactions and commerce. The practice of polygyny caused

further hostility towards the Mormons, and the leaders of the church decided to have all Mormon families in Europe and North America migrate to Utah, a scarcely populated region in the late 1840s, for religious freedom. The result is that from 1850 to 1880, the growth rate of Utah's population was astounding. (Poll, 1989).

TABLE 1
GROWTH RATE OF UTAH, 1850-1880

<u>DATE</u>	<u>POPULATION</u>	<u>% CHANGE PER DECADE</u>	<u>AVERAGE RATE OF CHANGE PER DECADE</u>
1850	11,380		
1860	40,273	253.9	13.5 %
1870	86,786	115.5	7.9 %
1880	143,963	65.9	5.2 %

Once in Utah, the church formally embraced polygyny and required it of all Church leaders and many families in non-leadership positions. An estimation of the percentage of Mormons actually engaged in polygyny after 1852 is 20-25%; excluding church leaders, the percentage drops to approximately 15-20% (Logue, 1988).

The violent treatment by state and local governments to the Mormons that still lived in the mid-west caused those in Utah to further isolate themselves from non-Mormons. The self-imposed isolation resulted in the refusal to engage in commerce with non-Mormons in neighboring western states, the unwillingness to leave Utah to pursue work in more profitable areas,

and an informal declaration of war against the Federal government (Poll, 1989).

The incidence of polygyny continued at the same level (about 20% - 25% of the population) until pressure and the threat of open war by the Federal government and the passing of the Edmunds-Tucker Act, which outlawed polygamy, influenced Mormon leaders to announce in 1890 that no additional polygynous marriages would occur. In return for this declaration, Utah was granted Statehood several years later, and some Federal protest ended (Poll, 1989). However, church approved polygynous marriages continued to occur at the same rates until 1904, when increasing pressure from the U.S. Congress caused the President of the Mormon Church to publicly authorize excommunication for any member that continued the practice (Van Wagoner, 1989).

CHAPTER 4

AN ANALYSIS OF THE ECONOMICS OF POLYGYNY IN MORMONISM

The occurrence of Mormon polygyny is unique among societies permitting polygyny for several reasons. First, it was illegal under Federal law, and so those that engaged in polygyny were frequently tried and convicted as criminals in Federal courts. However, it was socially acceptable in all areas with a high population of Mormons, which meant that criminal prosecution was one of several costs they chose to bear to engage in polygyny. The other unique aspect of Mormon polygyny is that households chose to engage in polygyny not for reasons of material efficiency or productivity, but because it was considered a commandment by God (Logue, 1988). This section will analyze these aspects as well as the costs and benefits to the household and the larger society (macroeconomy) of engaging in polygyny.

One benefit to polygynous households was division and specialization of labor among the wives. As in Jacoby's article on African polygyny, women in Mormon polygynous households provided a source of labor for the farm or family. In rural Utah, which was primarily a poor agricultural society, farm equipment was either unavailable or too expensive for most families to

purchase. The result was that some men chose wives specifically for their ability to efficiently produce agriculture (Hardy, 1992). In some cases, a polygamist chose several wives, each endowed with different abilities that, in combination with each other, led to greater household output. For example, it was common to have one wife care for small children, prepare meals, prepare and can food and make or repair clothing. This allowed a different wife to work in the field alongside the husband, while her children were cared for and her meals provided by one of the other wives (Arrington, 1966).

Division and specialization of labor also occurred in urban/non-agricultural areas in Utah, but for different reasons. Families that lived in rural areas were either too poor to afford urban land, or were asked by church leaders to live in uninhabited areas to help develop them as towns. Families that lived in urban areas were generally more wealthy and did not grow food for use beyond the home. For this reason, using wives as a source of labor in agriculture was inefficient because the production needed by the family was so low. However, wealthy men were often church leaders and were frequently expected to serve missionary positions away from home, often for several years at a time. While the husband was away from home, the family's source of income would frequently end. When this occurred, the wives would divide the necessary chores, such as child rearing and gardening, among themselves and one of the wives would seek employment as the main source of income for the

entire family (Hardy, 1992). In this way, labor was divided to free the time of the wage-earning wife to permit employment and an income for the family.

In addition to the way in which labor was divided, rural and urban polygynists differed in other ways, such as living arrangements. Raids by Federal troops to arrest polygynous males were common (Arrington, 1958). Federal officials would enter Mormon homes and arrest the males that had more than one woman living in the house. To combat this, polygynists could either move to scarcely inhabited areas, or purchase multiple homes, one for each wife. Poorer individuals obviously could not afford multiple homes, so the choice was to keep all wives together, and move to rural areas. Wealthy polygynous males usually lived in urban areas, and had not only multiple wives in different houses in close proximity, but owned houses in other cities and states and kept additional wives there (Van Wagoner, 1989).

Before discussing the intangible implications of polygamy for the Mormons, we begin a discussion of the social and financial implications. As stated earlier, fear of the Federal government and neighboring state governments caused the polygamists to remain isolated in Utah². Isolation in a geographical region accompanied with tremendous inward migration had several effects.

² Utah is used here to denote The Utah Territory, which is approximately the same political area as the present day state of Utah, although it did not formally become the State of Utah in name until after the discontinuance of polygamy.

First, the geographical isolation and a high growth rate (an average of about 185% annually³) would obviously lead to an eventual population overcrowding. In addition, because the size of the labor force is a positive function of the growth rate of the population, the size of the labor force also increased. At the time, there was very little economic growth in Utah (Arrington, 1958), and this, accompanied with the high growth rate of the population, pushed the unemployment rate up. For example, in the St. George region of southern Utah, only 8% of teenage males were engaged in wage earning labor, compared with an average of 25% in the rest of the United States (Guest and Tolnay, 1983). Although unemployment was high, most newly married polygamous families chose to stay in Utah to avoid arrest and imprisonment that they feared they would find in other states (Logue, 1988). The result was that poverty and food shortages became common.

Another effect of the isolation combined with polygyny was competition among men for wives. The competition to secure a polygamous wife was intense (Hardy, 1992), even though not every man was permitted to engage in polygamy. To be allowed to engage in polygyny, a male was subjected to an interview by an ecclesiastical leader. The interview centered around the prospective polygamist's financial status and devotion to the church. If it was determined that he was wealthy enough to afford more than one wife, and he

³See TABLE 1.

was an active member of the Mormon church, he was permitted to be a polygamist. The increase in competition for women, as men married second and third wives, affected both the age and income of the average male polygamist. The average age at which a man became a polygamist was 38.1 years while the average age for first marriages was 24.4, a difference of 13.7 years.

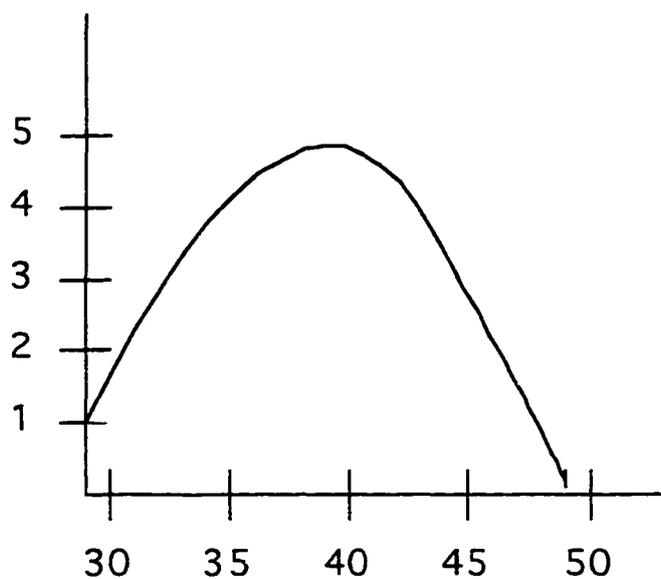
One can interpret this finding in two ways. First, it has been shown that a man's income is positively related to his chance of becoming a polygynist (Jacoby, 1995; Clignet, 1970). From the Utah data, the approximate age a man attained his peak income was around 35 (Logue, 1988). In the theory of selectivity among mates (Becker, 1976), a male with a higher income, while in the marriage market, is more appealing to a female, all other things being equal. Therefore, a Utah woman would select a husband that was more wealthy, which corresponds to a male approximately 35 years old, as is stated in Logue's findings. Further support of this theory comes from the finding that men who took a polygamous wife while only in their 20s were 33% wealthier than other men of the same age (Logue, 1988 p. 55).

A different explanation for the long period, 13.7 years, between a first and second marriage, is a simple one of time in the marriage market. Because a man has a relatively low probability of successfully finding a wife in a tight spousal market, it may take an extended period to find a compatible spouse.

A more realistic theory is that both variables, income and time in the marriage market, affected the age at polygynous marriage for men, which is why the average age of a man's first polygynous marriage occurs 3 years after the time of peak income.

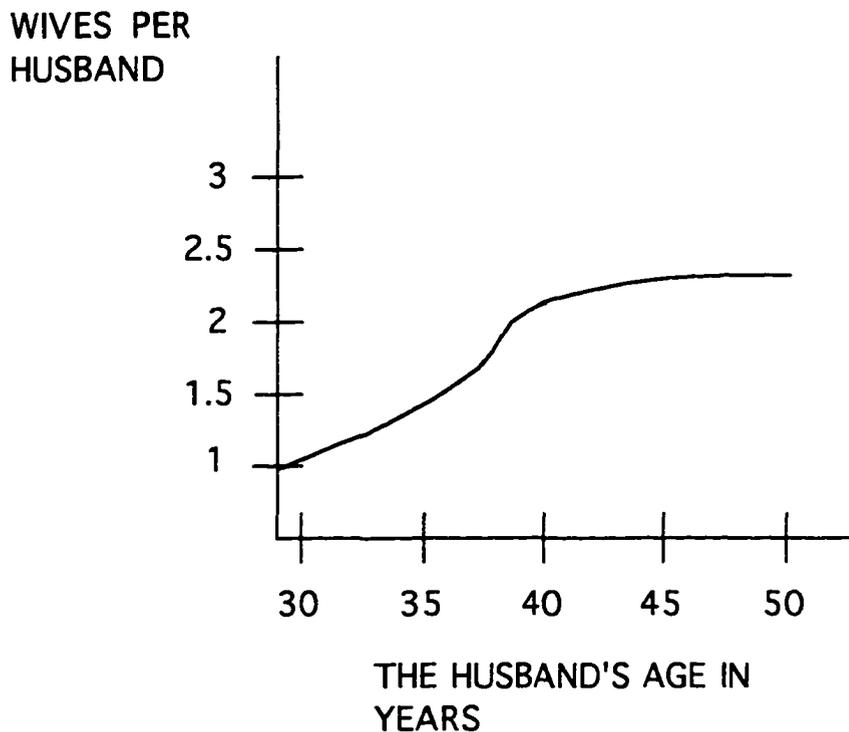
Although Clignet hypothesized a positive linear relationship between a husband's age and polygyny for central African polygynists, the data on males in Utah shows a different relationship. Logue found that 75% of men completed their polygamous marriages by the age of 43, and an insignificant number of males still took additional wives after the age of 46. These results do not support the following theory by Grossbard-Shechtman either, "This [the relationship between husband's age and polygyny] can be estimated by

WIVES PER
HUSBAND



THE HUSBAND'S AGE IN
YEARS

specifying a quadratic function of number of wives as a function of age" (p. 216). The type of relationship Grossbard-Shechtman identifies, would imply that at a certain age, a man begins being divorced by the wives he has already married, which could be represented by an inverse parabolic graph peaking at the age of peak productivity, such as the graph on the previous page. Logue's findings for Utah show a relationship similar to the following graph. In this graph, the average number of wives increases up to the age 38.1 for men, which is the point where most men married a second wife.



As the age approaches 38, the slope of the function increases as does the husband's productivity and income. Because most men only married one

additional wife, the graph levels off at that point, and the slope becomes approximately zero after the age of 46, after which virtually no more additional wives were taken (Logue).

The difference between the two graphs shown is the result of the unique reason Mormon men engaged in polygyny, and the reason that men engage in polygyny in the rest of the world. As stated earlier, Mormon men married an additional wife because of religious obligations (Hardy, 1992 and Logue, 1988). Once the religious obligation was met, seldom was a third or fourth wife taken, and seldom was the second wife divorced (Hardy)⁴. In most other cases of polygyny, marriages occur to increase productivity or household output (Grossbard-Shechtman).

Becker's statement that "Mormons practiced polygamy on a wide scale with a slight excess of men" (1976, p. 239) brings up an interesting point. He further writes, "The inequality among men is crucial. If the productivity of men differs, a polygynous sorting could be optimal, even with constant returns to scale and an equal number of men and women" (1976, p. 239). In Utah, although the physical ratio of men to women was greater than one, the effective ratio was much smaller. Effective is used in this context to mean having the qualities that make one appealing as a polygynous male, such as

⁴ The occurrence of divorce of the second wife and all other polygynous wives was, however, common after the formal abandonment of Mormon polygyny in 1890.

holding the status of an "active member" of the Mormon church or a sufficient income for multiple wives. Active male members of the Mormon church were ones that attended church regularly, and were less common than active females (Hardy, 1992). This put the ratio of effective men to effective women considerably less than one. From this, it can be theorized that there were intangible variables that affected the perceived productivity or desirability of prospective mates. These in turn affected the determinants of polygamy, proposed by Becker.

Intangible variables are worth noting in an economic study because for the participants, the great costs of engaging in polygamy, which were frequent poverty, arrest and imprisonment, population overcrowding and low levels of household output, failed to outweigh the benefits, many of which were spiritual in nature and, hence, not measurable. However, the nature of this study renders an examination into the spiritual or "perceived" benefits of polygyny to the participants inappropriate. But because polygyny was common, it is safe to say that if the individuals were acting rationally⁵, the perceived benefits to them had to have outweighed the costs of being in a polygynous family.

There were several important social variables which had serious economic impacts on Utah residents' decision to engage in polygyny. The most

⁵ Rationality is defined in this context as, putting the greatest distance between one's costs and benefits.

common was trust in the community. As pointed out earlier, the people of Utah were mostly isolated from other states, and this meant that many goods and services were only available if they were produced locally (Arrington, 1958). Fear of the Federal government, accompanied by an influx of new families, 10% of which were non-Mormon, (Arrington, 1958. p. 97-108; Poll, 1989), made most new immigrants untrusted (Logue, 1988). The easiest way to prove oneself a devoted Mormon and become trusted, was to engage in polygyny. An individual who chose not to engage in polygyny would have his faith in God questioned, and hence, his commitment to the church (Logue, 1988). In an area where goods and services were available on an extremely limited basis, being untrusted could have dire consequences for a new resident of Utah in the form of unavailable necessities. Thus one of the benefits of engaging in polygyny in this sense was acceptance and crucial trust by the existing residents of the state, while the costs were all of those mentioned earlier.

Building on the previous theory, it can be expected that the demand for polygynous marriage by a male would change when there were more sources for necessities, such as work and housing. With more substitutes, it would seem that acceptance and trust became less crucial. This was exactly the case for areas such as Park City, Utah. Though less than 50 miles from Salt

Lake City, Park City had an almost non-existent polygynous population⁶. Park City grew as a result of silver and ore mining while, at the time, Salt Lake City and the rest of Utah was still primarily agricultural. The rich silver mines in Park City brought in a massive number of immigrants, as did the rest of Utah, but immigrants found employment and housing in the Park City mines and saw no financial pressure to engage in polygyny, as did new members of the rest of the state (Poll, 1989). Thus, as stated above, the Park City population had significantly fewer polygynists than neighboring Salt Lake City.

Polygyny also existed in Utah as a substitute for prostitution. In the late 1800s, medical science and Mormon doctrine believed sexual intercourse with a pregnant woman was unhealthy for the unborn child (Hardy, 1992). In most western states, prostitution was a common sexual outlet, but Mormon doctrine forbid sexual activity unless the couple were legally married. An early leader of the Mormon church wrote, "We close the door on whoredoms, seductions and adulteries... at the same time we open the door in the other direction and make plural marriage [polygyny] honorable" (Hardy, 1992). Regarding the lack of prostitution in Utah, President Theodore Roosevelt stated that he found, "among them [polygynous Mormons] less prostitution, less sexual degradation... than among their neighbors" (Hardy, 1992). It can be deduced that Mormon men married additional wives at least partly as a substitute for

⁶Utah's History, Richard D. Poll, 1989. p.11-35.

prostitution. This theory of men substituting multiple wives for prostitution is supported by a study by Mehrun Siraj, which found that the abolition of polygyny in Malaysia caused men to either adopt concubines or engage prostitutes.

While higher birthrates usually occur in polygynous societies (Jacoby, 1995), the birthrates for Mormon polygynists were actually lower than birthrates in the rest of the United States (Logue, 1988). For example, "the most influential of the fertility comparisons examined more than 6,000 marriages and found that monogamous wives averaged eight births per wife, compared to just under six for plural wives. Another study, focusing on Mormon [leaders], reported that monogamous wives bore about nine children on average, whereas polygamous wives had fewer than eight births each" (Logue, 1988: p. 76). One reason for the different fertility patterns with Mormon polygynists is that men did not become polygynists until later in life, after 35. Fertility in men declines after the early 30s⁷, corresponding to the age when men usually became polygynists, thereby making the average polygynous man less fertile. Another reason for the lower birthrate is that once a woman was married, she usually did not marry again if her husband died (Hardy, 1992). Because demand for wives was high in Utah in the late 1800s, it pushed the average age that a woman was married down to 18.9,

7 From Sexuality, Insights and Issues, by J.S. Greenberg, 1992, Brown and Benchmark.

much lower than the national average of 25.0 (Logue, 1988). The last reason that the birthrate was lower for Utah polygynists, was that children that had left the home did not provide financial support to their parents. In Jacoby's article, he listed that one reason it was common to have multiple wives in Cote d'Ivoire was to have children that would eventually be old enough to provide labor to the family. Thus a child was considered an investment that would provide a return to the family in the form of inexpensive labor. In Utah, men and women were encouraged to marry while still in their teens, and thus a family could only expect a return of several years of work from an investment of 10-15 years in the raising of a child.

Serious food shortages and starvation were common among the Utah polygynists. For example, the years with the highest number of polygamous marriages, 1848 and 1855, were followed by winters of famine and starvation (Arrington, 1958. p. 152). This is due in part to large numbers of polygamous families that were forced to consume food supplies which were meant to be saved for winter. The increased demand for food in households (which was caused by the taking of additional wives) frequently occurred in the summer or fall, after the crops had been planted. Because the amount of food harvested from crops did not increase when household size grew, the result was an effective lowering of the amount of food per person that was harvested. Starvation in the winter led to families consuming work animals as food and

thus, producing less the following year because of the reduction in productive ability. If the growth rate continued as the previous year, the reduction in productive ability would make the following winter at least as bad as the previous in terms of available food. The reduction of the food supply, which arose because of the consumption of work animals, pushed food prices in Utah polygamous communities up to 5-6 times their previous level (Arrington, p.152), making food supplies too expensive for most consumers. This further reduced the production possibility curve by reducing the quality of the labor force because of the lack of nourishment and disease associated with starvation, and the cycle would be repeated the following year.

In the late 1840s, church leaders feared that commerce with other states would jeopardize the Mormon's attempt to gain religious freedom and practice polygyny. The desire to refrain from interstate commerce came from a fear of dependence on non-Mormons in neighboring states. This arose because church leaders felt that once dependent on other states, their governments could threaten to cut off trade with the Mormons if they did not cease polygyny. The effect was that church leader Brigham Young, "expressed his determination 'to cut every thread' of trade and commerce tying his people to the outside world" (Poll, 1989; p. 212). Thus, Utah had no real economic growth until the late 1890s, when the rate of new polygynous marriages began to decline.

CHAPTER 5

THE DECLINE OF POLYGyny IN MORMONISM

There are two competing hypotheses for the causes of the decline of polygyny in Mormonism. The first, which is most frequently cited in works on the subject, is that the leaders of the Mormon church abandon polygyny under direct pressure from the Federal government. In this hypothesis, the Mormons ceased practicing polygyny to avoid further oppression and legal battles with the Federal government. The second hypothesis is that Mormon polygyny failed to exist because it was economically inefficient. In this hypothesis the alternative to polygyny, monogamy, was less costly to the church, the state and the individuals, and thus abandoning polygyny for monogamy was a decision based on issues of economic efficiency. This chapter will first discuss the ideas supporting the hypothesis that outside influence directly caused the abandonment of polygyny. Following that will be a discussion of the hypothesis that economic inefficiency caused the decline in Mormon polygyny.

The single strongest reason church leaders issued the 1890 statement that "ended" polygyny was to achieve statehood for Utah and remove the Federal government from absolute power in the Utah territory. The political existence of Utah began when the Mormons arrived in the 1840s and set up a

territorial government, with the president of the church as governor, and began official requests for statehood in the 1850s. Because of polygyny, Utah was repeatedly denied statehood by the Federal government. When denying Utah statehood failed to dissuade the practice of polygyny, more extreme measures were taken by the Federal government. The passing of the Edmunds-Tucker Act in 1862 was the first aggressive attempt by the Federal government to pressure Utah and the Mormons into abandoning polygamy. The Act essentially dissolved the Mormon church and any power it held in Utah, and allowed the Federal government to assume control of Utah and its inhabitants.

The extremity of the Edmunds-Tucker Act illustrates the attitude of the Federal government towards Mormons at the time. Articles in the Act, "entitled the 'Anti-Polygamy Act'"⁸ and its 1887 amendment, provide for the dissolving of any legal power or existence of the Mormon church, the seizing of any property held by the church, the refusal to allow immigrants to enter the United States for the purpose of settling in Utah to practice Mormonism, the refusal to allow the publication of church books or literature for members of the church and forbids polygynists from voting, holding public office or serving on juries. The Act also dissolved any territorial militia and turned military control in Utah over to Federal troops. Also included in the Act was the power for the Federal government to remove any territorial government that was in

⁸ From Great Basin Kingdom, Arrington. p. 361.

place and institute one free from "Mormon influence" (Poll, 1989). The effect of this action became known as the Utah War, and culminated with Federal troops pointing cannons at the Mormon Temple, where polygynous marriages occurred, threatening to destroy it and everyone inside if polygyny did not cease. This struggle dissuaded any business or commerce from entering the area for the purpose of trading with the Mormons. The effect was that virtually no outside investing occurred in the politically volatile Utah until the time of Statehood, and Utah was plunged into an economic depression that lasted for over 20 years⁹ (Arrington, 1958).

Outside influence by the Federal government also came in the form of raids on rural farms and small cities (Logue, 1988). In a "raid", government troops would quickly ride into towns and enter and search any home where polygynists were suspected of living. If a man was caught with more than one woman living in the house, he was arrested and his land and property were seized. The man was usually held in a Federal prison from 1 - 5 years, not receiving his farm or property upon release (Van Wagoner, 1989). The wives were forced to find new homes, which was often difficult because personal money was seized with the rest of their property. The raids, which heightened in the 1880s, were the single biggest concern of rural dwelling Mormons

⁹ Precise fiscal and economic reports for Utah are unavailable for this time period. However, the economic depression of Utah in the last years of polygyny is widely agreed upon based on journal and diary entries cited in Hardy (1992) and Tanner (1991).

because approximately 10-15% of all polygynous men were imprisoned, and most of those were community leaders or wealthy individuals (Poll, 1989).

Those that were not imprisoned feared that engaging in business and commerce or cultivating large farms would draw attention to them by Federal troops, and the result was that, "principle farmlands went uncultivated at the height of the persecution", which lasted about 9 years (Logue, 1988 p. 11).

The consequences of the Federal raids on rural Mormons were famine, the loss of homes and starvation, which combined to cause a massive move into urban areas in Utah to seek anonymity among monogamists.

The church, as an organization, found itself competing financially against the Federal government because of polygyny. In defending polygyny, the church incurred massive court costs for litigation arising from questions of the legality of polygyny (Van Wagoner, 1989). The church's income was in the form of tithing, which is a function of the incomes of its members. Thus when the members of the church suffered financial difficulty, so did the church as an organization. By the mid 1890s, while polygyny was still common, the church found itself in financial ruin, "... the church's debt amounted to over \$1,250,000. Tithing receipts were about \$600,000. This was quite insufficient to carry on the enlarged construction, educational, and economic program of the church" (Arrington, 1958. p.401). The existence of polygyny became a hindrance to economic growth and self sufficiency for the church and Utah because of the

outside influence of the Federal government.

Pressure by the Federal government caused some polygynists to temporarily end polygyny until the political conflict ended. By 1900, Utah families had experienced years of poverty and fear of imprisonment for their religious beliefs and church leaders began privately announcing that polygyny should temporarily end until autonomy for Utah and financial self sufficiency for the church were gained (Hardy, 1992. p. 311). Around 1903, many polygynist men began divorcing¹⁰ their additional wives with the intention of remarrying them when the political turmoil ended. The by product of having monogamy temporarily thrust upon them was that many families found it preferable to polygyny. In this case, monogamy was chosen because of a change in tastes, which would be an economic reason, however this was directly related to outside influence by the United States government.

The second hypothesis of the causes for the decline of Mormon polygyny is general economic inefficiency associated with having multiple wives in exiled Utah. For this section it is important to note that several of the economic reasons for polygyny's demise are directly related to its illegality and thus, related to the outside influence of the Federal government, as in the previous section. However, the examples that support the economic inefficiency hypothesis are different than those discussed previously in that the following

¹⁰ Husbands and polygynous wives were divorced, but because they were never legally married, the divorce was a self-percieved one.

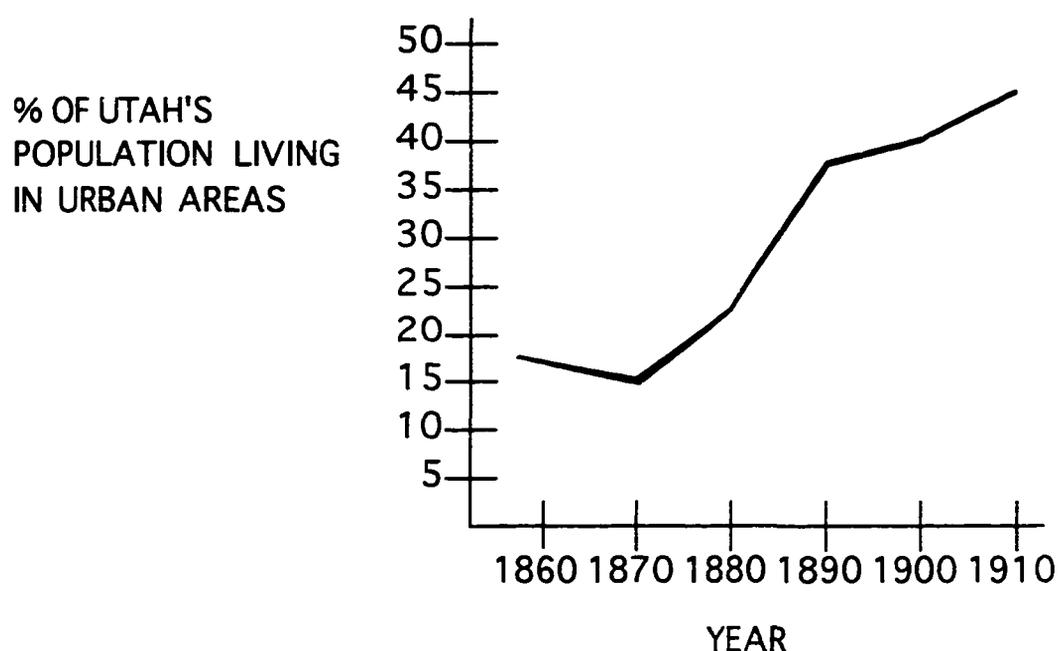
examples are indirectly related to actions by the Federal government, and are not direct responses to Federal legislation.

To the members of the church, and the church itself, polygyny held unnecessarily high costs compared to monogamy. Polygynous families risked losing their property while their monogamous neighbors did not share this concern. In this regard, we can say that the cost of polygyny to Utah families increased when Federal oppression increased. For example, in a general study of polygyny, Clignet found that as a woman's attainable wage away from home increases, a husband is forced to "pay" her more in the form of greater benefits. For Mormon women, the higher relative domestic wage¹¹ in monogamous settings, away from the increasing costs of polygyny, became increasingly desirable. The outcome was that at the micro level, families' (wives') preferences changed from polygyny to monogamy. Polygyny was still recognized as a commandment by God, but the costs became greater than the perceived benefits to many members of the church.

Another economic factor contributing to polygyny's demise was the reduction in demand for agricultural labor. As stated earlier, polygynous wives were often used as a source of labor in agricultural settings. In Utah, the raids by Federal troops caused a move of polygynous families towards urban areas

¹¹ Domestic wage is any benefit a woman receives from being in a specific marriage. This can be monetary, in the form of an outright transfer payment (Zelizer, 1994), or nonmonetary in the form of better housing and living conditions or less demand for spousal labor.

and away from rural settings for anonymity in the larger population. This is depicted in the following graph, where in 1860 less than 20% of families lived in urban areas until 1910 when approximately 50% of Utah families lived in urban areas. When demographic patterns change from a society of mostly rural dwellings to one with a significant urban population, in this case to seek anonymity, the percentage of families involved in agricultural production will decline. When the number of agricultural families decline, so does the demand for spousal labor (Clignet, 1970; Jacoby, 1995).



In Utah, this reduced the demand for wives, and polygynous marriage, because it reduced the production of agriculture. This theory is supported by most observations of polygyny which find that the more a society is centered

around agricultural production, the higher is the demand for wives as spousal labor. Further, Jacoby's study found that as a society changed from labor intensive agriculture to non-labor intensive agriculture, the demand for polygynous wives significantly decreases, which was similar to the effect in Utah, discussed above.

A general change in tastes and preferences towards monogamy among the individual households further reduced the incidence of polygyny. As stated earlier, a significant percentage (23%) of polygynous households were considered to have had "considerable domestic conflict" (Poll, 1989, p. 290). Those in which conflict was less of an issue found overt competition among wives for the attention of the husband (Hardy, 1992; Poll, 1989). Certainly Federal prosecution made monogamy seem more pleasant to polygynists, but also "new ideas of romantic love and increasing stress on the family relationship may have caused younger Mormons to avoid the practice" (Poll, 1989, p. 292). Hardy added that the younger generation in the 1890s were, "overwhelmingly opposed to polygamy" (p. 255). In the rest of the U.S., the late 1800s saw a social change towards life consisting of a nuclear family, which affected the Mormon families' views of polygyny (Hardy, 1992, p. 285). Perhaps the influence of larger society combined with seeing the hardships associated with polygynous families, changed individual's preferences towards monogamy, a marriage sorting that would certainly be less difficult to maintain,

and more acceptable to larger society.

Economic inefficiency also occurred with the type of living arrangements of many polygynists. For example, it was common for a husband to provide each wife with her own house to reduce domestic conflict among wives. In rural areas, this created an intense demand for agricultural land on which to build farms. In the St. George area of Utah, the demand for land reduced the size of farms to approximately half the size considered necessary to sustain a family (Logue, 1988). The smaller sizes of the farms, combined with lower productivity¹² by the husband, reduced the efficiency of polygynous farms when compared to monogamous-run farms in other areas of Utah.

Polygyny was a hindrance not only to agricultural efficiency but also industrial efficiency. Potential industrial growth was halted because of lack of interstate commerce by the self-exiled Mormons. Hardy wrote, "the emergent middle class [Mormon] man wanted efficiency, economy and technology" (p. 284). Mormons began seeing polygyny and the ability to interact with the rest of America as mutually exclusive. One man on renouncing his polygyny wrote, "I do not renounce my religion or any part thereof. I simply give up the practice of polygamy, because the United States law forbids my indulging in it any longer. As long as I am a citizen of the United States I do not see how I can

¹² A polygynous husband would be less productive if his wives lived on different farms because work time would be wasted in traveling between the farms to help each wife with agricultural production.

do otherwise" (Van Wagoner, 1989. p. 122). In isolating themselves for religious freedom, the Mormons introduced a closed economy that suffered from the lack of growth associated with economic inefficiency on a statewide scale. It is clear that Utah could not become a financially independent state if the practice of polygyny continued.

CHAPTER 6

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The existence and decline in polygyny in the early Mormon church is similar to and yet vastly different from all other cases of a polygynous marriage market. It is different because of its source: religious obligation. Once instituted however, it showed similarities to other cases of polygyny, such as competition for wives, its predominant occurrence in areas with labor intensive agriculture and the positive relationship between a husband's income and number of wives.

It was shown in this study that polygyny is more common in areas with higher agricultural production. Studies by Jacoby, Clignet and Grossbard-Shechtman found that polygyny was more common in these areas because the wives were used as a source of cheap labor for domestic and agricultural production. This was also true in Utah where Hardy and Van Wagoner found higher instances of polygyny in rural and agricultural areas. The reason for this occurrence is probably that the additional financial costs borne by the husband in taking multiple wives, such as higher food costs and the need for larger or additional homes, could be offset with higher agricultural production by the family. For example, if a family's income is based on agricultural production,

increasing the number of workers (wives) would increase the family's income, assuming that the wife doesn't cost more than she could produce. While similar to other cases of rural polygyny, the occurrence of urban polygyny in Mormonism is unique.

In urban polygynous areas, other than Utah, wives are used as a show of wealth or power, as opposed to a source of production or income (Clignet, 1970). In urban Utah, multiple wives were frequently used as a source of income to the family. This occurred because engaging in polygyny was a form of signalling to others in the area that the family could be trusted as devout Mormons in a time when most Mormon families feared or resented non-Mormons. For example, in a rural setting a family can sustain itself through agriculture, but in an urban area trade and commerce are necessary to augment production and to attain necessities. Therefore, the way most families showed they could be trusted in business and commerce was to engage in polygyny. For Utah as a whole, polygyny was more common in rural areas, however urban areas also had a sizeable number of polygynists (Van Wagoner, 1989).

In almost every instance of polygyny, specialization and division of labor among wives is common. This was quite prevalent in Mormonism, and occurred in both urban and rural areas. In rural areas, labor division occurred when one wife worked alongside the husband in agricultural production, while the other

wife cared for children and prepared meals. In urban areas, it was common for one wife to provide financial support to the family if the husband was away, while the other wife performed domestic chores such as canning, making clothing and caring for children, freeing up time for the first wife to work outside of the home.

The causes of the decline in Mormon polygyny can be explained by two competing hypotheses. The first, outside influence and threats by the Federal government, holds that the Mormons abandoned polygyny to avoid legal prosecution and oppression by the United States government. For one to accept this as sole determinant of the decline in polygamy, it would have to be shown that polygamy in Mormonism was economically efficient, that families that engaged in polygyny were “better off” than those that engaged in monogamy and that there was a significant demand for polygynous marriages. In short, it must be shown that polygyny was beneficial not only to those that engaged in it, but to the society as a whole, as Becker's theories predict. This was not the case, and this clearly cannot be proven for several reasons.

First, it was shown earlier that an “overwhelming” number of young Mormons at the time were opposed to polygyny, and would have abandoned the church before engaging in the practice (Hardy, 1992). If that pattern of changes in tastes continued, the number of polygynous marriages would rapidly decline to an insignificant number. Second, families that engaged in polygyny

were not necessarily wealthier or more productive because of polygyny, as Becker's theories hold. For example, it was shown that polygynous families with wives in different homes (as was the custom in most areas in Utah), did not benefit from labor division and were actually less productive if the husband spent time travelling between the homes.

In conclusion, Becker's theory of the economic benefits to a society of permitting polygamy, are not supported by Mormon polygyny. For his theory to be true in all cases, the Mormons would have to have become more efficient, productive and wealthy in their isolation, when the exact opposite actually occurred. In the circumstances in which it existed, an illegal practice that was unpopular with larger America, Mormon polygyny was economically inefficient and failed to survive because of its inefficiency.

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