

Media Coverage of Dr. Shoshana Grossbard's Testimony as Expert Witness on Polygamy at the Supreme Court of British Columbia, Vancouver, Dec. 7 2010

RADIO SHOWS

- 1/ Interview with Vancouver's Radio-Canada in French, broadcasted on Morning Dec 8.
- 2/ Interviewed by Sean Leslie for The World Today Weekend, CKNW AM980, British Columbia, Dec 12.
- 3/ Interviewed by David Rutherford, CHQR AM770, Alberta, Dec 13.

NEWSPAPER ARTICLES

1/ **Polygamy's many wives don't capture 'market value'**

BY DAPHNE BRAMHAM, VANCOUVER SUN DECEMBER 9, 2010

<http://www.vancouversun.com/Polygamy+many+wives+capture+market+value/3949997/story.html#ixzz17dOj2my5>

Economist Shoshana Grossbard admits she was naive when she did her doctoral thesis on polygamy more than 30 years ago at the University of Chicago. Then, she believed that a simple supply-and-demand analysis would explain the economics of polygamous societies. Besides, she says, "I thought it was cool to say that polygamy might be advantageous to women and repeat what Gary Becker [her thesis adviser and Nobel laureate] has said."

Now, having written several books on the economics of marriage, Grossbard says, "I know better."

If the most basic economic rule is applied, she says women in polygamous societies would have power and value because virtually all polygamous societies are polygynous -- meaning that it's men who have multiple spouses. Women of marriage age are a rare and highly desirable commodity and should have "increased market value" in economics speak. In practice, they should have their pick of marriage partners.

But they don't.

Over her years of study, Grossbard has found that far from women having increased value, invariably the male leaders in polygamous societies have institutionalized women into subservience.

It takes a number of guises, says the San Diego State University professor, who testified as an expert witness this week at the constitutional reference case, to determine the validity of Canada's polygamy law. Polygamous societies have a higher frequency of arranged marriages. It's not surprising, says Grossbard. Young women aren't likely to choose old men for husbands, plus men find young wives easier to control. Of course, that increases the likelihood of early widowhood and financial hardship.

In societies where a bride price is paid, women don't "capture their increased market value." Instead, she says, potential husbands pay the fathers. No money goes to the bride. Divorce tends to be easier in polygamous societies. The threat of it keeps women in line and it allows men to shed wives who are too old or noncompliant. Child custody almost always is the right of the father.

Isolating women makes it more difficult for them to escape and makes them even more financially dependent on their husbands. As beautiful as the harem in Grenada's Alhambra is, Grossbard says, "The whole institution is typical of polygamous societies." There, eunuchs -- castrated men -- guard the wives. But isolation doesn't necessarily mean a harem or purdah, the economist says. It's as easily done by limiting job opportunities and participation in the labour force, denying women education, locating communities in remote locations such as Bountiful, B.C. or basing the economy on jobs that are best done by men, such as logging, construction or heavy labour.

Other common features of polygamous societies include the playing down of romantic love and inculcating women with the belief that sex is for procreation, not pleasure. In some African societies, she notes that female circumcision is prominent and used as a tool to curb women's sex drive and ease the pressure on the husband to satisfy all of his wives. Grossbard also found established cultural practices aimed at alleviating some of the harms of polygamy. Islam restricts the number of wives to four to limit competition among men for women and limit competition among wives for their husband's attention. Among the Kanuris of Nigeria, where Grossbard's research has focused, husbands rotate among the wives on a fixed schedule. In other societies, wives are given separate homes. And in many, men marry sisters, believing they may be better able to get along.

Far from polygamy being beneficial to women, Grossbard has come to realize that polygamy is anathema to women's economic, social and emotional well-being. And if Canada were to decriminalize polygamy and become the only developed nation to do so, polygamy will almost inevitably become more prevalent. Grossbard can't prove it. But the economist says it only makes sense that wealthy, well-educated polygamists might prefer living in Canada to Nigeria or even South Africa (where the president himself has five wives). And if there is an influx due to immigration or an increase due to inclination, Grossbard is certain there will be pressure to accept the kinds of cultural practices and institutions she has observed in other polygynous societies. If that happens, she warns, "Women and men will have less ability to create loving relationships."

dbramham@vancouver.sun.com

2/

THE GLOBE AND MAIL

Polygamy leaves women worse off, court told

Scarcity of females seen as encouraging men to exert control to ensure access

This story is also found on <http://www.cbc.ca/canada/british-columbia/story/2010/12/07/bc-polygamy-hearing.html#socialcomments>

JAMES KELLER VANCOUVER— The Canadian Press, Published Tue, Dec. 07, 2010

The same supply-and-demand forces that drive the economy ensure women are worse off in societies where polygamy is practised, a professor testified Tuesday at a landmark court case examining Canada's ban on multiple marriages.

Shoshana Grossbard, an expert in the economics of marriage from San Diego State University, said

allowing men to have multiple wives inevitably leads to a reduced supply of women, increasing demand.

But rather than making women more valuable in such communities, she said, that scarcity encourages men in polygamous societies to exert control over them to ensure they have access to the limited supply.

"In the cultures and societies worldwide that have embraced it, polygamy is associated with undesirable economic, societal, physical, psychological and emotional factors related especially to women's well-being," said Prof. Grossbard, whose research has primarily focused on polygamous cultures in Africa.

Prof. Grossbard was the latest academic to testify in B.C. Supreme Court in a reference case to determine whether Canada's polygamy law is consistent with the religious guarantees in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The court will also hear from current and former residents of polygamous communities.

Prof. Grossbard said there are fewer women available to men in societies that permit polygamy – even for monogamous men, because they are drawing from the same pool of women.

Since that scarcity could increase what she describes as the women's "bargaining power," men in such societies have an incentive to ensure they retain control over who the women marry.

To that end, Prof. Grossbard said, polygamy is associated with teenage brides, arranged and forced marriages, payments to brides' fathers, little emphasis on "romantic" love and poor access to education or the work force – all designed to restrict the ability of women to choose who they marry.

"The men in polygamous societies want these institutions to help them control women," Prof. Grossbard said.

Other unintended consequences of polygamy include jealousy among plural wives and psychological or health problems, she told the court.

While Prof. Grossbard acknowledged it's difficult to attribute any single issue to polygamy, the fact that so many of these problems consistently appear in polygamous societies – and at much higher rates than in monogamous ones – suggests they are caused by polygamy.

"I conclude that polygamy actually causes some of these institutions to be created," she said.

"The fact that so many of them are present in cultures that also have polygamy, my conclusion is that men in polygamous societies will manipulate the social institutions in ways that will facilitate their control of women."

The court case was prompted by the failed prosecution last year of two leaders in the community of Bountiful, in southeastern B.C., which is home to members of the U.S.-based Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. The FLDS is a breakaway sect of the mainstream Mormon church, which renounced polygamy more than a century ago.

Prof. Grossbard said she hadn't researched Bountiful or other fundamentalist Mormon communities before she was asked to testify. However, she said it appears some of the problems associated with polygamy – including limiting women's ability to choose who they marry and social isolation – are also present in the B.C. community.

Earlier, Supreme Court Chief Justice Robert Bauman ruled that video affidavits filed with the court can be broadcast on TV and the Internet.

B.C. government lawyers videotaped interviews with 14 women and children who have lived in polygamous communities in Canada and the United States.

The Crown had asked the court to prevent news outlets from broadcasting the videos after one of the witnesses complained that part of her affidavit appeared on a news website.

But Judge Bauman noted that witness Ruth Lane, who was once married to Bountiful leader Winston Blackmore, has already told her story in other media interviews, including on the internationally broadcast program *Dr. Phil*.

"The media respondents are accurate when they submit that the complaining [witness's] concerns are apparently based on a whim – a wholly inadequate basis for the impeding the interests of the press and the public here," he said.

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Read more at <http://m.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/british-columbia/polygamy-leaves-women-worse-off-court-told/article1829154/?service=mobile>

My response: I am Shoshana Grossbard, and glad I could be of some help on this matter. This entry—written by James Keller from the G&M—is well-written but some statements are inaccurate:

a/ Keller: "Allowing men to have multiple wives inevitably leads to a reduced supply of women, increasing demand, said Shoshana Grossbard," I did not say that. What I said is that for any given supply of women, if men can take more than one wife, there will be increased demand for women.

b/ Keller wrote: "She said there are fewer women available to men in societies that permit polygamy — even for monogamous men, because they are drawing from the same pool of women." Again, I did not say that. In marriage markets in polygynous societies there is higher aggregate demand for women by men, leading to a higher market value for women if the markets are free to clear.

c/ Keller wrote: "To that end, Grossbard said, polygamy is associated with teenage brides, arranged and forced marriages, payments to brides' fathers, little emphasis on "romantic" love and poor access to education or the workforce — all designed to restrict women's ability to choose whom they marry." What I said is that SOME of these institutions (or others that help men control women) are likely to be associated with polygamy. Later statements by Keller on this issue are correct.

3/



Economic freedom reduced for women in polygamous marriages, says expert

(<http://www.thestar.com/news/canada/article/903130--economic-freedom-reduced-for-women-in-polygamous-marriages-says-expert>)

December 07, 2010

Petti Fong

VANCOUVER—Women are treated like commodities in polygamous societies and their economic freedoms are reduced.

That's the opinion of economist Shoshana Grossbard who testified at B.C. Supreme Court Tuesday in a case to determine whether the country's polygamy laws are constitutional.

Grossbard, who has studied the economic effects of polygamy in other countries, testified that there will be increased disparity between husbands and wives if Canada were to legalize polygamy.

"In the cultures and societies worldwide that have embraced it, polygamy is associated with undesirable economic, societal, physical and emotional factors related to women's well-being," Grossbard said Tuesday. The natural economic consequence of polygamy should be increased market value for women, since multiple wives are highly desirable. But in these societies, husbands can simply divorce the wives they don't want, so women don't actually have control over their value.

Grossbard was a witness for the Christian Legal Fellowship, an organization that has legal standing in the reference case that has involved nearly a dozen intervenors and organizations. The attorneys general for B.C. and Canada are in court arguing that the 50-year-old polygamy law in the country is constitutionally valid, a finding it is seeking from the court in order to pursue possible litigation against the polygamous community in Bountiful, B.C.

There are nearly 800 believers of the Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (FLDS) living in the interior of B.C. in two separate factions under two feuding leaders, Winston Blackmore and James Oler. Among them, the two men have dozens of wives and dozens of children.

Grossbard testified that there is an increase in the number of polygamous marriages in western countries because of immigrants who are Muslim or from African countries and is practiced in many cultures and on most continents. She traced polygamy to other women and children issues including female circumcision, which makes it easier for men to control wives when they're less able to experience sexual pleasure.

In polygamous relationships, women are more likely to be widowed because their husbands are considerably older, and children are more likely to have health problems and have less access to education, she said, Polygamist men tend to spend their money on having more children rather than investing in their existing children's education, Grossbard testified.

Groups on the opposing side of provincial and federal governments include the FLDS, free speech organizations and a court-appointed amicus who is being funded by the provincial government to take the opposing view that the current law is a violation of religious freedom.

Under cross-examination by Tim Dixon, acting as an amicus, or friend of the court, Grossbard admitted that there is no proof that legalizing polygamy will increase the number of polygamists in Canada. She also testified that there is a potential for women to be harmed financially if the breadwinner in polygamous marriages, the husband, is jailed if Canada's polygamy laws are enacted.

Beside Bountiful, there are known pockets of polygamists living in Quebec and Ontario but how many there are remains unclear because the communities are isolated.

Also in court Tuesday, the B.C. Supreme Court judge hearing the case ruled that the media is allowed to broadcast video affidavits taken from witnesses who have left polygamous communities.

One of those witnesses, Ruth Lane, the tenth wife of Blackmore, had sought to have the evidence barred from the Internet. In her testimony Lane, dressed in a pink tank top, her hair pulled back in a ponytail, is interviewed in her home in Hurricane, Utah. She had married Blackmore after he came to talk to the FLDS community in Colorado City, Arizona in 1994, one of three women the self-proclaimed bishop married in the span of two weeks.

One week before her marriage to Blackmore he had married two sisters from her community.

"He had a thing for sisters," Lane said, smiling nostalgically. A year after marrying her, Blackmore married Lane's sister.

The man Lane called "Wink" was "very charismatic" and younger than many of the church leaders. He was 40 when they married, 17 years older than her. She already had one child from an earlier relationship before eventually having six more kids. She left Bountiful to move back to the U.S. when Blackmore refused to "work on their relationship," Lane said.

The case continues until January.

4/ The Montreal Gazette and the Province

It hurts women, hinders society: expert

BY KEITH FRASER, POSTMEDIA NEWS DECEMBER 7, 2010

VANCOUVER — Legalizing polygamy would undermine gains Canadian women have made in education and will have a negative impact on society, an expert on the economic impacts of polygamy on women told a court hearing Wednesday.

Dr. Shoshana Grossbard, a professor of economics at San Diego State University, testified during a constitutional reference case that could rewrite the country's polygamy laws that there would be a number of unintended consequences if Canada allowed polygamy.

"Were Canada to legalize polygamy one can expect that this would negatively affect education achievement (for women) wherever polygamy is found in the urban centres," she told B.C. Supreme Court Chief Justice Robert Bauman, the judge tasked with deciding whether Canada's polygamy law is constitutional.

"It would also cause all women to be under the constant threat their husbands are going to take another wife."

Polygamy has been illegal in Canada since 1890.

In 2008, two religious leaders — Winston Blackmore and James Oler of the southeastern B.C. polygamous community of Bountiful — were charged. While the charges were stayed, the case was the genesis of the current constitutional reference case.

Grossbard, the third witness to testify in the case, said more competition for scarce women by men leaves many men unmarried, resulting in social problems, such as crime.

"In the cultures and societies worldwide that have embraced it, polygamy is associated with undesirable economic, societal, physical, psychological and emotional factors related to women's well-being," she said. Polygamy is practised in most African countries, the majority of Asian countries and some parts of North America, said Grossbard.

She said "market value" for women will rise if polygamy is permitted, but women don't necessarily capture their increased market value, with men having an incentive to create institutions that lower women's bargaining power, she added.

Those institutions include early marriage — some African polygamous communities seeing child brides as young as 13 — arranged marriages, divorce and female circumcision, she said.

Grossbard was called as a witness by the Christian Legal Fellowship, a group opposing the legalization of polygamy.

Earlier, the judge dismissed an application by a lawyer for the B.C. government to ban the use of video affidavits filed in the case on the Internet. One of the affidavits, an ex-wife of Bountiful leader Winston Blackmore, had complained about the use of her video testimony on the Internet.

The trial is expected to run until the end of January.

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Read

more: <http://www.theprovince.com/life/Polygamy+hurts+women+hinders+society+Expert/3941898/story.html#ixzz17dVYqWDI>

5/ The Canadian Press; The Star

Polygamy means arranged marriage, teen brides, B.C. court hears

December 07, 2010

<http://www.thestar.com/news/canada/article/902958--polygamy-means-arranged-marriage-teen-brides-b-c-court-hears>

VANCOUVER—An expert witness says increased demand for wives in polygamous societies leads to cultural institutions that control women and harm their financial, social and physical well-being.

Shoshana Grossbard, an expert in the economics of marriage from San Diego State University, has told a B.C. court examining Canada's law against polygamy that the practice leads to a reduced supply of wives, increasing demand.

But rather than making women more valuable in such communities, Grossbard says that scarcity requires men in polygamous societies to exert control over women to ensure they have wives.

Grossbard, whose research has focused on polygamous cultures in Africa, says that leads to arranged marriages, teenage brides, forced isolation and dowries.

She says it also fosters jealousy among plural wives and causes psychological and health problems, as well as limiting their access to education.

Grossbard says if Canada were to legalize polygamy, those problems could become more common in this country.

BLOG

Marginal revolution blog by Tyler Cowen

<http://www.marginalrevolution.com/marginalrevolution/2010/12/arguments-against-polygamy.html>

New arguments against polygamy

Prof. Grossbard said there are fewer women available to men in societies that permit polygamy – even for monogamous men, because they are drawing from the same pool of women.

Since that scarcity could increase what she describes as the women’s “bargaining power,” men in such societies have an incentive to ensure they retain control over who the women marry.

To that end, Prof. Grossbard said, polygamy is associated with teenage brides, arranged and forced marriages, payments to brides’ fathers, little emphasis on “romantic” love and poor access to education or the work force – all designed to restrict the ability of women to choose who they marry.

There is further discussion [here](#). I am not a fan of polygamy, but I find this argument strange (though not strictly impossible; men can behave preemptively and incur a large fixed cost to prevent a subsequent erosion of their control). Surely Grossbard would not argue that all institutions which improve the bargaining power of women lead to...less bargaining power for women. So why is polygamy so special in this regard?

For the pointer I thank [John Chilton](#). On polygamy, I once wrote:

Polygamy ends when children cease to be a net economic asset. As society progresses and urbanizes, there are cheaper ways of having sex with multiple women, if that is one's goal.

Here are [previous MR posts on polygamy](#).

Posted by Tyler Cowen on December 8, 2010 at 02:32 PM in [Economics](#), [Law](#) | [Permalink](#)

Comments

Why can't authors say polygyny when they mean polygyny?

Posted by: Joshua Lyle at Dec 8, 2010 2:39:55 PM

Polygamy also reduces the bargaining power of the average man and means most men will be without a partner. As an example: 100 people in a polygamous community of marrying age, 50 men and 50 women. If a group of the top 5 elite men take on 5 wives each, that leaves a pool of 45 eligible men and only 25 women. There are obviously serious social consequences for the lowest status men as well.

Posted by: Chris F at Dec 8, 2010 2:46:05 PM

Your analysis is very male centric. When marriage offered economic stability to a woman, it arose as a response to a shrinking pool of available males who could provide economic stability - either through death by war or unequal distribution of wealth. (I.e. Moscow after the war, feudal societies)

Grossbard's argument has some merit: when something has increased value, the transaction costs of ownership change can be higher without wrecking the market.

Posted by: Just an Australian at Dec 8, 2010 2:53:46 PM

The idea that polygamy is incompatible or negates romantic love is not supported by history. The concept of romantic love or chivalry was invented in polygamous Muslim Spain centuries before it spread to medieval Europe. See the 11th century treatise on romantic love *The Ring of the Dove*, by ibn Hazm.

Posted by: Aretino at Dec 8, 2010 3:02:03 PM

Those aren't arguments against polygamy, just observations. If your policy goal was maximising population growth, how relevant would that be? Not much, is my guess.

The consequences noted in the paper (teenage brides, forced marriage, etc.) are not inevitable. They are merely one possible response by the low-value men of a society that could not win brides in the face of competition from Brad Pitt, Bill Clinton or Tom Brady (any of whom might be in the market for wife #3). Legal rights to brides is the end-run the politically powerful use to make up for their inadequacy in the dating scene.

Because, let's face it, Tom Brady and Bill Clinton don't need to pay a dowry to attract multiple women in a polygamous society like ours. They're drowning in marriage offers.

The other possible policy response by low-value men to competition from Tom Brady and Bill Clinton is legally enforced lifetime monogamy. By limiting the high-value men to one wife, there's more women to go around for the lower-value men.

You'll note that both situations have nothing to do with the bargaining power of women, and are merely the result of choices made by the plurality of men who want wives but wouldn't be able to acquire them in a "free market" for them.

Tyler,

In all your previous posts on polygamy, you always claim that polygamy improves the bargaining power of women. However, this claim rests on an implicit assumption. You should think about this assumption, and I'm confident that once realize the assumption you are making, you'll realize your claim does not follow.

Posted by: Salim at Dec 8, 2010 3:06:59 PM

It increases women's relative value, not so much their bargaining power. It just increases the incentive of men to prevent them from coming out of their control.

Something that increased women's agency power rather than only their value (such as liberal divorce laws) would in fact increase their bargaining power, although, by further increasing their value, might encourage other forms of repression.

Posted by: John at Dec 8, 2010 3:13:06 PM

the improved bargaining power is with whoever is in control of the woman (girl)'s decisions. Thus the preemption by bargaining with the parents before the girl is old enough to make her own decisions.

Posted by: nate at Dec 8, 2010 3:37:36 PM

Polygamy seems to me a lot like the whole Gay Marriage issue 10 years ago: People coming up with very convoluted arguments to justify what is essentially their own emotional biases against a lifestyle.

Shoshana Grossbard is just another small minded bigot trying to force her personal preferences on other people at gunpoint. In 10 or 20 years, we will see her and her kind as just as hateful, vile, and evil as the people trying to keep gay marriage illegal.

Posted by: Vehicle Driver at Dec 8, 2010 3:59:32 PM

"Polygamy ends when children cease to be a net economic asset. As society progresses and urbanizes, there are cheaper ways of having sex with multiple women, if that is one's goal."

I am not sure I quite agree with this. Men marry multiple times because there would be more kids to take care of him when is old. Makes sense so far. But this assumes that the man is poor. If so, why would the second woman marry him?

I guess that the pool of eligible bachelors must be even worse. That must be a poor county Perhaps, the first marriage signals relative wealth? Maybe, but this seems like I am stretching it.

Posted by: RM at Dec 8, 2010 4:10:47 PM

And if the first marriage signals wealth, all the more strange why he would need kids as economic security, no?

Posted by: RM at Dec 8, 2010 4:13:25 PM

Tyler, polygamy is special because in these societies power still comes from the barrel of a gun. It is brute force and coercion that determines how people act. Because men tend to be stronger than women, they have the power in general. If the men all collude to set up measures to counteract the increased bargaining

power of women, what are women supposed to do? The would be suitor, the father, and potentially brothers and uncles and friends of the suitor will force the women to marry anyway.

Only when the institutions of the state become strong enough to counteract this (the police will show up and arrest the men who threatened violence), are women able to actually used their increase bargaining power.

It's the weakness of the state. And polygamy is not special in this regard. There are any number of laws that exist on books, but aren't enforced, and this law of the jungle always happens. Slavery is illegal everywhere - but it still exists in places where the state is not powerful enough to enforce its own laws (or where it does not really want to in cases where it adopted those laws to pacify other states or international organizations but always intended not to comply).

This is so obvious I am surprised you even asked the question.

Posted by: Chris Durnell at Dec 8, 2010 4:27:59 PM

Discussions of polygamy need some empirical content. In temperate climate countries where polygamy is acceptable in theory, such as Iran, it is fairly rare because wives are expensive for their husbands to support and children require a lot of paternal investment. These cultures tend toward intense restrictions on women because the cost to a husband of a cuckoo's egg child is high.

In contrast, in tropical cultures where women do most of the farm work and men are not expected to invest heavily in each child, as often seen in New Guinea and sub-Saharan Africa, polygamy is common. That's where you'll see some well-to-do but not ultra-rich handsome, charming fellow acquire dozens of wives. Some of his many wives' children are likely cuckoo's eggs, but he's not paying much to support them, their moms are supposed to feed them, so he doesn't care as much.

Posted by: Steve Sailer at Dec 8, 2010 4:30:13 PM

Polygyny increases the value of women. It only increases the bargaining power of women if women control who gains women. In certain societies, men (fathers, brothers, husbands, etc.) may control that instead. As society progresses and urbanizes, it becomes harder for people who are not that woman to control who gains her, since one can run away and join the wider social institutions permitting progress and urbanization (the anonymous market, the developmental welfare state) and earn a higher real wage.

Posted by: david at Dec 8, 2010 4:31:21 PM

From the point of view of GDP per capita, pro-monogamy pro-paternal investment societies (e.g., Europe, Japan) typically outperform pro-polygamy pro-paternal investment societies (e.g., Middle East), which in turn typically outperform pro-polygamy societies that aren't strong on paternal investment (e.g., New Guinea or Africa).

Posted by: Steve Sailer at Dec 8, 2010 4:33:37 PM

Starting at page 150 of mary douglas's "purity and danger" is a good case that without a central authority clamping down on women, polygamy does result in increased choice for women:

http://books.google.com/books?id=QGRUTH8hnQ4C&pg=PA152&dq=Purity+and+Danger+wheedling+tone&hl=en&ei=bvr_TTrHLIP98AaFsqW2Bw&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=1&ved=0CCcQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q&f=false

The key seems to be the ability of women to exit a marriage and enter a new marriage. This results in the men working to keep and gain wives though flattery, gifts and begging.

Posted by: lemmmy caution at Dec 8, 2010 4:51:59 PM

I've been curious where the fierce taboo on polygamy in western society comes from. It is generally portrayed as some sort of moral depravity (for instance, being where the slippery slope of gay marriage leads). The best answer I can come up with is St. Augustine, who set the agenda for the Catholic church and therefore Europe. Did some obscure theological reasoning really determine a central feature of western culture? Anyone have a better answer?

Posted by: efp at Dec 8, 2010 5:24:03 PM

People get so bigoted when it comes to polygamy...if you don't want to do it then don't, but forced marriage is it's own crime it isn't a necessary cause of polygamy.

Posted by: phil m at Dec 8, 2010 5:40:42 PM

efp: "I've been curious where the fierce taboo on polygamy in western society comes from. "

Selection Bias. Think Darwinistic, not teleological. Monogamy survived because it increased fitness of the society, compared to polygamous societies. Not because someone planned it. You were born in a monogamous society because those tended to be more successful.

For several reasons, some of which are now obscure, initially polygamy became taboo in Europe in the early middle ages. It stuck, because enforced monogamy allowed (most) men to focus on work instead of on competing for scarce women, leading to economic success and eventually rapid growth.

We are now at the end of that development, read [Citizen Renegade](#) why & how men are spending more and more time at competing for women.

Posted by: adam at Dec 8, 2010 5:44:59 PM

Aretino,

"The concept of romantic love or chivalry was invented in polygamous Muslim Spain centuries before it spread to medieval Europe. See the 11th century treatise on romantic love 'The Ring of the Dove, by ibn Hazm."

Chivalry and the mores that underpin it, and romantic love are documented in Irish texts from the 6th century recording pre-Christian oral literary works. These texts clearly reflect the culture of Iron Age Western Europe, as well as earlier pan Indo-European cultural mores (dating back to 4,000 BCE).

So no, Europe hardly owes this to the Muslims.

"Men marry multiple times because there would be more kids to take care of him when is old. Makes sense so far. But this assumes that the man is poor."

No it doesn't. A rich man has exactly the same incentive as a poor man, since that incentive is not wealth, it is numbers strength of the family, which is the basis of wealth in those societies. In non-civil societies with few legal protections, wealth is not a source of power on its own, it is a lure for raids by greedy neighbors. You need a big strong family if you want to accumulate and retain wealth.

Posted by: Jim at Dec 8, 2010 5:52:25 PM

@ Chris: "Tyler, polygamy is special because in these societies power still comes from the barrel of a gun. It is brute force and coercion that determines how people act. Be Because men tend to be stronger than women, they have the power in general. If the men all collude to set up measures to counteract the increased bargaining power of women, what are women supposed to do?"

But if power comes from the barrel of a gun, men fighting men to get women should dominate over some notion that men use their guns to dominate women. In fact, the equilibrium here would be one man left with all the women in the country.

Posted by: RM at Dec 8, 2010 6:06:33 PM

First, I think any discussion of polygamy in Western society should focus on the historical context of marriage and relationships--basically what adam said above, that you need to trace the roots of the institution and not automatically assume that there's some rational economic reason for it since there aren't a lot of test cases in the short history of civilization.

Second, regarding some commenters' remarks on "bigotry," etc. of the arguments against polygamy, I'll take a more legal standpoint on it, in light of the recent Prop. 8 appeal, which will likely be decided on standing. That is, opponents of marriage between same-sex people in California have not been able to show how two people of the same sex getting married would hurt them. Allowing two men or two women to marry does not change the availability of mates since there are roughly the same number of gay men and women, and therefore the overall availability of potential mates is unchanged even if some of them are homosexual.

However, looking at societies that have been polygamous, I think there's a legit argument that can be made that allowing polygamy does actually skew the availability of women for mates and does significantly affect the competition for mates. Therefore, because the behavior of polygamous men and women would cause harm to a non-polygamous person trying to find a partner, the non-polygamous person has standing to move to prohibit the practice.

Posted by: Scott at Dec 8, 2010 6:32:14 PM

Everybody assumes that the optimal solution is for women to own themselves. That's fine in very rich societies. But in poor societies, fathers can (and do) choose to kill inconvenient daughters. If society can't protect newborn girls, then the second-best solution is to pay parents who raise their daughters. Banning polygyny might improve the average happiness of adult women. But it would come at the cost of a lot of dead girls.

Posted by: Rachel at Dec 8, 2010 6:41:50 PM

This all seems to be about marriage.

Thus overlooking the supply of women for intermittent use. After all there always were women who sold themselves to itinerants such as sailors etc.

With the increasing expense of marriage and high risk of adverse financial situation (divorce) to men it might well be that 'escorts' will replace wives.

These women really do 'own ' themselves.(Quite often)

Posted by: john malpas at Dec 8, 2010 7:08:12 PM

Presumably any introduction of polygamy into a Western society would be sex-neutral. I guess I don't see why it's so thoroughly unthinkable that multiple men might become husbands to one woman.

Posted by: Tom T. at Dec 8, 2010 9:32:56 PM

Presumably any introduction of polygamy into a Western society would be sex-neutral. I guess I don't see why it's so thoroughly unthinkable that multiple men might become husbands to one woman.

What man would agree to that, though? Women have traditionally gotten married so that they have someone to help out with child-rearing. If multiple men are married to the same woman, chances are one of them is going to be without a child. From a man's perspective, if you are in a situation where you are sharing a woman with other guys and where you don't expect to have a child, what is the added benefit of the marital relationship? One-night stands, casual dating or even prostitution don't seem inferior to this setup.

Posted by: Ricardo at Dec 8, 2010 10:59:50 PM

The tone of this thread is quite amusing. Yes, it is generally assumed by the religious right that polygamists are waiting swoop in behind the homosexuals. Despite some of what is said here, most find that less of a problem.

Would someone explain how polygamy raises a woman's value? What are bride prices like in monogamous countries verses low-polygamy verses high-polygamy societies?

As for the situation in high-polygamy societies, you should study the situation more carefully. This is NOT a home, it is a feudal estate, with the big man as lord, and his wives and children as serfs.

I read an study by a women who grew up Mormon, but left, trying to show that polygamy was good for women. The point that really stuck with me was her observation that polygamous societies are more violent. You can read about that in the Siege of Troy, or in a book about the Avenging Angels. I'm really not sure how increasing violence in a society can be good for women.

As for Western Society and polygamy, this seems to come through Judaism. While Sinaitic Judaism permitted it, there seem to be no happy stories come from it. Furthermore, the later prophets condemn even serial monogamy. This train of thought continues so that by the Roman era, you have a strong preference towards lifelong monogamy. There are some famous pericopes where Jesus opposes or condemns even serial monogamy, and Paul follows this tradition, thus given ideas to the Roman church.

Recently, someone made a post to the effect that strong society morals are a progressive tax on status. The medieval Roman church expended tremendous energy coming up with ways to level status in society, and forbidding divorce and polygamy were among those things.

The claim that monogamy has a societal advantage is an interesting one. I would like to see it supported in more detail, however.

Posted by: Right Wing-nut at Dec 8, 2010 11:05:10 PM

So far I think only Tyler and John have it right without dragging in other dehumanizing chaff like "women for intermittent use."

An adult woman might be able to marry who she chooses. The more autonomous she is and/or the more authentically committed to her (mono or poly) marriage the less likely she is to negotiate for separate wealth such as a dowery. Why should she? Even if marriageable women are scarce she'll be sharing some portion of her husband's wealth and/or estate.

To the extent parents can negotiate for the marriage of their daughter they can instead extract wealth from the husband and/or his family (never assume men have much more choice of spouse than women under real patriarchy.) Unlike the prospective bride herself, her family is unlikely to share directly in the husband's family's wealth. Consequently they have an incentive to attempt one of at least two major bride-price-capturing strategies. First they can arrange a marriage with another family before their daughter comes of legal age. Second they can agitate for cultural or legal means to control who she marries even after she comes of age. Either way they come out ahead, and therefore they have *incentive* to try to come out ahead, and therefore Grossbard's argument holds.

Most of Grossbard's assumptions depend on circumstances where marriageable women are in demand. I'm... pretty sure the agreeable-for-women conditions Tyler's thinking about depend on situations where women are either in neutral demand or negative demand, as in regions and cultures where dowrys rather than bride prices are required to secure marriage for a daughter.

Point being that both Tyler or Grossbard can be right. It just depends on who gets to make the marriage (individuals or their parents) and which way the money flows.

And Tyler can be even more right when he says the key is the net economic asset "value" of children. When it's profitable for a family to retain control over who a child marries they'll do so. When there is little or no such value you get crap like infanticide and children "apprenticed" off for "service" in sweatshops and domestic servitude.

Dumb question: if the "seed spreading," "naturally polygamous" ideologies forwarded by sociobiologists and evolutionary psychologists were true then where high bride prices are demanded you'd expect at least some men to respond by marrying multiple partners. And yet...

One explanation is that in most such cultures families control not only who their daughters marry but who their sons do as well. Another would be that our notions of sexual scarcity distort the deeper reality that polygamy is virtually always either an economic or political rather than a sexual arrangement. Brigham Young didn't marry 143 women because he wanted to have sex with them -- many or most had property that accrued to their husbands upon marriage.

figleaf

p.s. "the supply of women for intermittent use." I've noticed that guys who say things like that imagine they can't get girlfriends because "alpha males" scoop them up. They think this because it's easier on their egos than the real reason: nobody wants to go out with the kind of wall-to-wall creep who thinks about potential partners in terms of "intermittent use." Just saying.

Posted by: figleaf at Dec 9, 2010 1:02:57 AM

As [Robin Hanson](#) has said, most of the consequentialist arguments against polygamy should also apply to other practices which reduce the relative supply of women, e.g. being voluntarily single.

As I commented on that post, it's not necessarily hypocritical though because the other cases may be quite different. Forcing single women to marry is generally considered worse than not recognising a voluntary polygamous marriage as a means of increasing the supply of women, and I concur. So far as "redistribution of women" goes, anti-polygamy laws probably aren't all that bad.

However, we should still ask ourselves: is preventing polygamous marriage the most efficient means of achieving its ostensible benefits? Perhaps legalising or even subsidising prostitution might reduce the social costs of violence by low status men. Perhaps subsidies to encourage marriage might reduce the number of voluntarily single women in a less intrusive way than forcing them.

Posted by: [Henry](#) at Dec 9, 2010 1:33:53 AM

What happens to the equation in 2030, when the Japanese flood the market with sexbots?

Posted by: [8](#) at Dec 9, 2010 2:01:23 AM

"Polygamy ends when children cease to be a net economic asset. As society progresses and urbanizes, there are cheaper ways of having sex with multiple women, if that is one's goal. "

This only takes into account one party's goal. If the woman's goal is to gain a share of a very high-income man's income, or a high status man's status then polygamy is also an option.

Posted by: [Doc Merlin](#) at Dec 9, 2010 4:03:54 AM

I'm assuming that many of these discussions have to do with how legalized polygamy would affect life in the US. Well if polygamy were ever legalized in the US, it would not be the polygamy being discussed here; it would be polyamory. Can anyone conceive of a situation in the US in which men are allowed to have multiple wives, but women are not allowed to have multiple husbands? For all but a small minority of the country, having multiple wives is just as immoral as having multiple husbands, so there would be no moral basis for the majority to approve of one and not the other. And if permitting gay marriage precedes permitting multiple partners in a marriage, then why wouldn't a man be allowed multiple husbands and a woman multiple wives? Or why not multiple spouses of both genders?

Life used to be so simple.

Posted by: [stuhmann](#) at Dec 9, 2010 4:12:15 AM

ourmyle - why would the wives of Bill Clinton, Brad Pitt, etc, want their husbands to be able to marry other women? It's one thing to tolerate cheating, it's another thing to tolerate another wife. Some women can tolerate other wives, or even like them, and clearly some women can tolerate cheating, but other women don't, even from powerful, good-looking husbands.

Phil M - I think the problem with polygamy is that it does change the meaning of marriage, unlike same-sex marriage. Now, when a guy proposes marriage to you, you know that he's agreeing to send a social signal that he's committed to you, and you alone. Obviously many men (and women) cheat on that signal, and some men (and women) start off intending to cheat, but we do recognise that as cheating. With polygamy, the meaning of the single commitment is lost. It's a shame to me that we call polygamous marriages "marriages" at all, they strike me as a fundamentally different social institution.

Doc Merlin: *If the woman's goal is to gain a share of a very high-income man's income, or a high status man's status then polygamy is also an option.*

Um, no, not if you're the woman who already has that share. Polygamy would mean that I would lose out on my preferential access to my husband's IT skills. At the moment I have 100 percent of the first claim. (When I don't need his services, I graciously permit him to provide support services to his employer, his family, and to my family :). My family comes last because they have other IT geeks.). Why should I accept a reduction in that share, for only a chance at a share in another husband's time?

Polygamy is grand for those women who don't mind sharing their husbands, but it strikes me as a fundamentally different mindset to the one I have, where our first commitment is to each other (obviously kids change that first commitment in a marriage, and I understand that's often a source of stress to stepparents).

Posted by: Tracy W at Dec 9, 2010 7:12:52 AM

Surely Grossbard would not argue that all institutions which improve the bargaining power of women lead to...less bargaining power for women. So why is polygamy so special in this regard?

Well, a difference seems to be in the nature of the raise. Take labour supply - the men in my life have limited ability to compell good quality thinking or work from me. If they want to increase my productivity in a modern economy, they have to give me some share of the rewards. Increased wage rates raise my bargaining power. Votes in a system with roughly fair elections give an incentive to politicians to earn my vote, if they can't steal my vote, then they have to incentivise me into giving it away.

Polygamy though only raises the demand for women rawly. If men in that society at that time want baby-producers who do housework, this can be compelled by force (unlike, say, a high-flying career as a corporate lawyer), which men have a comparative advantage in due to upper body strength. If Prof. Grossbard's theory is right, I'd expect other changes that raised the value of women in ways that don't require her full-hearted cooperation could lead to similiar results in terms of changes in society to take away women's bargaining power.

Posted by: Tracy W at Dec 9, 2010 8:24:22 AM

Consider two of the arguments from among the above comments :

- (i) "Omega males" will not find women and hence turn violent.
- (ii) Men would object to being one among the multiple partners of a woman.

I see (ii) as being necessitated by, as well as a remedy for, (i). Don't forget that we already have men who marry women who have children from a previous relationship. That is, many men are willing to go against evolutionary tendencies and raise someone else's child, just for the sake of being in a marriage. Thus can one expect multiple omega-males happily marrying one Angelina Jolie, enabling the latter to adopt one kid from each country :-) Being in a polyandrous relationship would also be a great way for men to have sex every once in a while, without having to focus too much attention on one woman.

Posted by: Sandeep at Dec 9, 2010 10:08:16 AM

Please re-analyze in the situation where the numbers of men and women aren't equal.

For some societies, women have outnumbered men significantly. This can be due to social factors (religious belief, etc..) and/or practical effects (men in high-risk occupations like soldier/warrior).

Posted by: Thomas Sewell at Dec 9, 2010 11:32:03 AM

Polygamy and strip clubs have three things in common:

- 1 -- They are both horribly bad for men
- 2 -- Men yearn for them both anyway
- 3 -- They are relentlessly portrayed as exploitative of... women.

Posted by: Jim at Dec 9, 2010 11:49:12 AM

The "cheaper ways of having . . . sex" argument also applies to monogamy, especially after 32 years.

Aside from the economics, I believe if a man had two or more wives, the probability is far more favorable that one of them, at any given point in time, will not be mad as hell with him.

Posted by: T. Shaw at Dec 9, 2010 12:37:23 PM

In a polygamous society, the most powerful woman is the mother of the most powerful men. This was true in Saudi Arabia in the early 1980s, arguably the most sexist society on the planet, when the most powerful person in the country, not just among women, was Assa as-Sudeiri, the favorite wife (by then widow for 30 years) of the nation's founder, Abdul-aziz (aka "Ibn Sa'ud"), who was the mother of the "Sudeiri Seven," who included kings, defense minister, and a bunch of other heavyweights. She had them competing for her

favor, and she ran the country from a hospital bed for several years (in a hospital built just for her by one of her sons).

The biggest downside of serious polygamy is all the loose men who don't get a woman. They often end up causing a lot of trouble.

Posted by: [Barkley Rosser](#) at Dec 9, 2010 1:46:22 PM

"What happens to the equation in 2030, when the Japanese flood the market with sexbots?"

Hopefully Austin Powers will be able to protect us all. Anyway, I suppose my wife to be would be irritated; she nags enough about my video games habits. Of course, I don't become envious of her, uhm, electronically powered diversions.

Posted by: [Ryan Vann](#) at Dec 9, 2010 1:47:14 PM

Maybe the right way to think about this is that men invest in creating coercive institutions when their bargaining power is low. The mechanism is related to Acemoglu and Wolitzky, where labor scarcity encourages employers to invest in labor coercing technologies like slavery.

Posted by: [James Choy](#) at Dec 9, 2010 1:50:40 PM

Most if not all the commentators are assuming that if polygamists aren't thrown in jail, everyone will do it. More children are born out of wedlock now than in wedlock, and people do have multiple partners so I really can't understand why people are so easily fooled by a certificate.

Posted by: [phil m](#) at Dec 9, 2010 1:50:43 PM

"The biggest downside of serious polygamy is all the loose men who don't get a woman. They often end up causing a lot of trouble."

Are there not hordes of loose men in Westernized economies?

"Why can't authors say polygyny when they mean polygyny?"

I think this is an apt point. What people seem to be describing here is are the effects of a patriarchy, not necessarily polygamy.

Posted by: [Ryan Vann](#) at Dec 9, 2010 1:57:58 PM

This argument is certainly not new.

I think that the confusion over whether or not polygamy increases the bargaining power of a woman has to do with whether or not polygamy is being viewed in a vacuum. In the real world -- at least under some circumstances -- it is clear that the objectification of women can subsume substantial bargaining power, making bargaining power the less expressed part of the equation.

Posted by: [infopractical](#) at Dec 9, 2010 2:03:05 PM

Polygamy ends when children cease to be a net economic asset.

It's likely that societies themselves end when children cease to be a net economic asset. Birth rates in nearly all Western countries and Japan are far below replacement levels.

Pundits chatter about economically or ecologically unsustainable practices of modern societies, but demographically unsustainable practices are mostly a taboo subject.

Posted by: [anonymous](#) at Dec 9, 2010 2:53:49 PM

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Posted by: anonymous at Dec 9, 2010 2:53:49 PM

Yes, but what happens when you have marriage to opposite sex person and civil union with same sex person? Is this polygamy? What is the opportunity effect?

Posted by: jorod at Dec 9, 2010 9:46:21 PM

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