

abuse of pleasure, the embarrassment of a family, &c. In general, the most fecund women are of sanguine temperament . . . passions, and more especially the abuse of pleasure, and the physical insuitableness [sic] of individuals, are the most frequent causes of sterility."<sup>160</sup>

Similarly, in his 1841 book, *Elements of Obstetric Medicine*, Dr. David D. Davis wrote: "It is a general opinion, and one it would seem well founded, that excess in the use of the means of impregnation is upon the whole unfavourable to the interests of fecundity. Hence the almost uniform sterility of the more public prostitutes."<sup>161</sup> In addition, we recall George Reynolds's reasons for why Joseph Smith's plural wives did not conceive as "the reason generally assigned by the wives themselves is, that owing to the peculiar circumstances by which they were surrounded, they were so nervous and in such constant fear that they did not conceive."<sup>162</sup> The women themselves viewed their own nervousness and fear as the reasons they did not conceive, two emotions that would likely have accompanied any polyandrous sexual relations at that time and place.

We do not know what scientific beliefs Joseph Smith and Nauvoo polygamists embraced regarding impregnation, but it seems likely they would have espoused the common perceptions that viewed unconventional sexual relations (like polyandrous conjugality) as antagonistic to fertility and therefore as hampering the mandate to "multiply and replenish" the earth. In addition, more than a century later, modern medicine has verified that sexual polyandry would generally contribute little to enhance a woman's fertility rate.

### Summary

To date, authors chronicling Joseph Smith's plural marriages have documented the presence of ceremonial polyandry where a woman has experienced two marriage ceremonies, usually one legal and one religious. However, no one has provided credible evidence demonstrating the presence of sexual polyandry in any of those unions. The ten documents reviewed in this chapter along with the cases of Sylvia Sessions Lyon and Mary Heron Snider, constitute the most convincing documentation currently available. Nevertheless, whether grouped together or examined separately, they fail to provide even one convincing confirmation. These evidences might represent supplemen-

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160. T. Bell, M.D., *Kalognomia or the Laws of Female Beauty: Being the Elementary Principles of that Science*, 221.

161. David D. Davis, M.D., *Elements of Obstetric Medicine with the Description and Treatment of Some of the Principal Diseases of Children*, 369.

162. George Reynolds, Letter to H. Neidig, June 7, 1892, Wilford Woodruff Letterbooks, 1352, 10: 350.

tal corroboration that could be recruited to augment the credibility of other more reliable accounts. But the absence of even a single credible source that was close in proximity geographically and/or chronologically to the reported behavior, creates evidentiary challenges for all supporters.

While two accomplished polygamy researchers, Larry Foster and D. Michael Quinn, have presented the case of Mary Ann Darrow Richardson's marriages to Charles Edmund Richardson and Fredrick Cox as sexual polyandry, a close examination of documents supports, rather, a strange sequence of consecutive priesthood cancellations and marriages that did not include polyandrous conjugality.

In his well-researched essay, D. Michael Quinn has accumulated much circumstantial evidence, accompanied by his own interpretations, to assert the existence of sexual polyandry in several of Joseph Smith's plural marriages to legally wed women. However, this compilation once again lacks even one solid piece of documentation and manifests multiple analytic weaknesses.

Doubtless the reason commonly given (and developed in greater detail during the Utah period as polygamy became more widely practiced)—that plural marriage (polygyny) would fulfill the commandment “to multiply and replenish the earth” (D&C 132:63)—played a role in the development of polygamy theology, even as early as Nauvoo. However, Nauvoo pluralists would probably not have viewed such unconventional sexual relations as increasing fertility or assisting in replenishing the earth, a physiological reality verified a century later by medical science.