

Mormon polygamy effects on woman and children religion essay



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Now imagine a home with your father, seven of his wives, one being your mother and twenty nine other children, . Do you think you would have grown up the same? That you would have received the time, love, help or attention you needed to grow up to become a productive member of society. Right now all across the United States and Canada polygamous families are prospering, young girls are being married off and traded like cattle, young men are being cast aside all without prosecution or investigation by local, state or federal government. Accurate and current statistics on the commonality of polygamy around the world are unavailable due to their constant undermining of government officials and census bureaus.

Joseph Smith, founded the Church of Mormons in 1830. Mormons and fundamentalists' alike believe Smith to be the most important prophet of all time. A convicted imposter Smith led his people with the legend of an angel named Moroni, the supposed angel visited his bed side yearly. " He had come to tell Joseph of a sacred text inscribed on solid gold plates that had been buried fourteen hundred years earlier under a rock on a nearby hillside (Krakauer, 2003)." These plates would later be translated into the Book of Mormon. One of Joseph Smiths' main teachings was the practice of pleural marriage, many in the Mormon Church have tried to hide this practice away as if its only participants' are its wayward sons, however it was common knowledge that Smith had numerous wives. " Polygamy was, in fact one of the most sacred credos of Joseph's church- a tenet important enough to be canonized for the ages as Section 132 of The Doctrine and Covenants, one of the Mormon's primary scriptural texts. The reverend prophet described plural marriage as part of the most holy and important doctrine ever

revealed to man on earth, and taught that man needed at least three wives to attain the fullness of exaltation in the afterlife (Krakauer, 2003). “

Now 180 years after the Mormon Church was founded the practice of polygamy still goes unpunished by local, state or federal government. Places like Colorado City and Bountiful seem exempt from the laws of the rest of the world. Often young girls are married off to men twice or three times their age, they are dragged across state and country lines, put into a new house and told to perform sexual duties on set days. Young men are used as slave labor on farms and local businesses. Yet law enforcement does nothing. “ Children boys, mainly, but also girls - are frequently used as unpaid laborers’ in dangerous construction and forestry jobs (Bramham, 2009)”. This is all done in the name of the Lord, the elders insure this cycle to continue by urging the boys and girls to quit school at very young ages. The girls are told that they will be mothers and that school offers them nothing, the boys are told that they will be loggers or fence makers and that school is of no benefit to them. Thus they are left ignorant and unskilled to function in an any other society.

Like all other species on earth, men and woman are born at the same rate, there is no way to predict a man or a woman, therefore with men seeking more then three wives there is often a higher percentage of men then woman. Consequently, these unlikely boys are left to find a new way of life, they are cast aside and excommunicated. “ They enter an alien new world alone and often bewildered. Collectively, the boys who are either kicked out or encouraged to leave have come to be known as the lost boys (Bramham, 2009)”. Normally if a young child of eleven goes missing, alarms are
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sounded, alerts are sent, distraught pleading parents fill the air waves and the country collectively hopes for the child's safe return. In Bountiful, Canada and Colorado City, United States these young children are never mentioned again, all traces of them are removed from their home and their names never pass their mothers lips again.

Some of these boys find their way, they settle down and become respectable members of their new communities. Others with no resources of education or family turn to low paying jobs, prostitution or live for the thought or salvation. Any number of reasons can cause their exile, simple math or work ethic are some, but the fastest way to get exiled is to question, question anything and you make the elders radar.

Although the boys are left to fend for themselves, they are at least given the chance at a normal life, even if they don't view it that way. In my opinion the woman and girls of polygamous unions have a much more dreary future. Imagine being thirteen and surrounded by your family, living in the only house you've ever known. Then being told that your going to marry a forty six year old man who has six other wives, thirty two children and lives thousands of miles away. This happens all the time with in the United States and Canada. These young girls are ripped from their homes, married and then expected to perform sexual acts according to a house schedule. Often these houses are filled with contentious feelings and lacking in any familial support for the new wife.

Although polygamy is illegal in both the United States and Canada the offenders are never prosecuted. One clever way around the legal system is

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to only legally marry once and take on your pleural wives as spiritual wives. This allows polygamists to not be prosecuted for bigamy. Another advantage of this arrangement is government funding. “ These enormous families qualify for welfare and other forms of government assistance. Despite the fact that they view the government as Satanic forces out to destroy their polygamous community, they receive more than \$6 million a year in public funds (Krakauer, 2003)”.

Women and children who have runaway from polygamous families have been deeply impacted in every aspect of their lives. Due to the clandestine nature that conceals polygamous relationships, information is not readily available, nor easily obtained, especially to outsiders. States like Utah, Arizona and Colorado are where polygamy has its roots in the United States. “ Salt Lake City, Utah is home of the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-Day Saints, as Mormons prefer to be known, with nearly 10 million followers worldwide (Beaman, 2009)”.

In the course of my readings for this paper, I have come to realize that the psychological impact sustained by children growing up in polygamous families almost mirrors the impact children growing up in abusive households face. Between survivors of polygamy and survivors of domestic violence and religious cults, these people struggle the rest of their lives to find out the why.

If an outsider were to talk to a mother in a polygamist family who did not want to abandoned her polygamous lifestyle, her description of her experience would be extremely different from what escapees report. The

reports or accounts of women who stay in polygamous relationships only portray positive characteristics to them, and are less revealing of their more negative experiences. “ A woman who escapes had reached the limits of her capacity to continue enduring intolerable conditions for her and her children (Narutowicz, 2008)”. The obstacles in their path are inconceivable. One of the most difficult obstacles may be the mental and emotional damages sustained by both the woman and children. These include the feelings of guilt for leaving, their unsure unsteady new lifestyle and their total lack of family and friends. Then there is the obstacle of being believed. To the powers that be when a woman reports her experiences, her stories may sound off the wall or suspicious in our modern society. The report may also be inconsistent with reports of flourishing polygamous family’s.

In polygamous communities there is a chain of command which is focused around one central leader. “ This leader is generally referred to as “ the prophet” and is the leading patriarch of the community (Narutowicz, 2009)”. One of the problems with this chain of command structure, is that it leads to a dictatorship with one power hungry person in charge. Total power tends to corrupt, it stirs up images of Hitler and Napoleon, and it is not unusual for the prophet with in the community to become corrupt with power. This corruption increases the power and control of polygamous husbands and fathers, who are usually guilty of abusing their families and could rightly be described as domestic violence and child abuse offenders. “ This corruption is also manifested by child brides girls fourteen or fifteen and sometimes younger who are given in marriage (Ray, 2009)”.

There are prominent characteristics or calling cards of polygamous cults. The control generally belongs to one central figure. As I previously mentioned, this central figure is referred to as “ the prophet”. In the polygamous family and marriage, the central figure is the husband. A child is responsible to his/her father and he in turn is responsible to the prophet. The prophet, through the father, controls when and to whom their children will marry, the places their child will work and for how long, how much education the children will receive and in what area they will be allowed to study. In a polygamous cult, the prophet can take a child’s father or mother away and reassign him or her to new parents if he chooses. He can also make a unilateral decision that will effect the whole society in which his followers live, without explanation.

“ Revelation from God dictates the words and acts of the central figure. This is the basis of the prophet’s power and authority and in a corollary way, the polygamist father’s power and authority over his wives and children (Ray, 2009)”. Mormons are required to worship the prophet as a god. If the prophet imposes a ruling it becomes law to them. Many of the prophets rulings are unreasonable but they are expected to be followed, because they came from God. “ The story of the patriarch Abraham and his son Isaac in the Old Testament often is cited to reinforce this control. Abraham was willing to sacrifice his son Isaac because God commanded it (Ray, 2009)”. With this thought process as their basis of reasoning , a patriarch can then dictate to a fourteen year old girl that she is to be his wife because God said so. For the girl to not follow such a decree would be considered, a revolt, resulting in excommunication.

Free thinking and outside information are forbidden. The fathers in the polygamous group are figures to be respected but the mothers are only to be obeyed if they are in agreement with the father. Children are never to ask information other than what is told to them by their leader, and this is to be accepted completely. Relationships with others outside the cult are strictly banned. No relationships outside the cult are allowed. There are no exceptions to this.

Education is strictly left up to the prophet to decide who, where and what the children study. In fact, some types of education can be considered a crime. Most literature is forbidden. "A bookstore once carried a book that was deemed un-godly and the prophet commanded everyone to boycott until it was removed from the book store shelves (Bramham, 2009)". All other races, cultures and belief systems have no value, therefore, there is no need to learn about them. Math is only taught as far as basic addition and subtraction. Science of the body is not taught because the body is an off limits topic and the men and woman alike are to always be covered up. The only education a child needs and is most likely to receive is the education that results from watching the prophet in order to become just like him.

Their communities are run with an almost Gestapo mentality. Due to their extremely secretive lifestyle and ideals as a society it is necessary to "police" group members to ensure compliance. "Even as there is secrecy to prevent outsiders from discovering the ways of the cult there is policing internally to prevent followers from becoming disloyal (Beaman, 2006)".

Children are taught that it is not only their duty to report something that if they don't their going against the prophet and just as guilty. Children are to
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report on anyone and everyone including parents, brothers, sisters, or friends.

Violence is a serious problem in polygamous societies and seems to be the de-facto rule to getting things done, the personal stories I have read in my research all have severe abuse as a factor . “ An extension of the control and authoritarianism exercised by the polygamous father is violence (Narutowicz, 2008)”. It is common for mothers who have fled the polygamous relationship to report cases of the extreme violence they and their children endured at the hand of their husbands that were approved and permitted by the prophet. The patriarch uses violence to control his many children and many wives. “ There are so many children to take care of and such limited resources to get the job done, physical punishment is a direct way to enforce rules and ensure obedience (Narutowicz, 2008)”. Another aspect of violence within polygamous cults has to do with perception. A violent father is perceived as a strong father whose strength exhibits control and authority over his family. A major problems with this mentality is that violence breeds violence. As with abused children they tend to turn into the abuser it’s the monkey see monkey do concept. Open displays of violent outbursts are not uncommon and are often used as an example of what will happen to other family members who are disobedient.

Polygamous cults also seemed to be ruled by the old world caste system. “ The families belonging to a polygamous husband are part of a caste system established by the father. Only he can assign the child’s value or the value of the child’s mother. Likewise, the prophet can assign the value of the

patriarchs in the community giving relative community value to his families (Krakauer, 2003)". A families value is determined by those over you. To add further insult to injury in a house full of woman, every man has a favorite wife. The favorite wife is often rewarded with the better room, a higher clothing allowance and more access to her husband than the others. She is also granted one very important favor her husband protects her from the other wives. This horribly takes place with the children as well, a son may be allowed further education if his is the favorite son, a daughter may be allowed to stay unmarried longer if she is the favorite daughter.

Families with more value have nicer homes and are allowed better jobs. People revered to be higher up in the community do very little work and enjoy rewards for their position. People perceived to be lesser than do the hardest work and are often denied even basic necessities. It is equivalent to modern day slavery, only the slaves have volunteered.

As with their mothers, children born into polygamy are brought up in an environment that discourages any sense of individuality. " As a result this causes insecurity, paranoia and anxiety disorders. The child is left with a fragile sense of worth, uneducated and unaware of any other way of life (Krakauer, 2003)".

As indicated previously, secrecy is the lifeblood of the polygamous family. Living a life of secrecy is not conducive for anyone, let alone a child. " Secrets can harbor a compromise of integrity, an us against them orientation, a superiority attitude, an end justifies the means modus operandi, justification of wrongful behavior, and a failure to receive feedback

from others as to the appropriateness or correctness of what one is doing (Bramham, 2009)". Secrecy becomes the way of life for these children, one that is strongly reinforced by the violence at their fathers hands.

The effects of the polygamous cult on women and children who are victims of its abuses are widespread, reaching into every area of their lives, from mental to social to physical. " They lose of control of their lives, the cult secrecy produces feelings of insecurity and thought disorders; inflicted abuse can contribute to a whole array of problems, including Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (Bramham, 2009)".

Woman and children repressing their feelings seems to lead to anger; and the loss of self worth and personal understanding can cause identity loss and personality disorders. It is no exaggeration to state that polygamous cults lay the foundation for children to display major mental and emotional issues throughout their lives. For the women and children who are victims of polygamous cult abuse, their quality of life is destroyed, their personal freedoms are lost and hope for their future is limited at best. Polygamy is a real phenomenon causing real societal problems in the lives of its victims. I find it highly disturbing that our government has not stepped into to help these woman and children and that people with parking tickets pay higher fines then statutory rapists and child abusers. Personally I am disgusted that there is a new crop of TV shows glorifying this detrimental lifestyle. Reading these articles and books felt like I was reading about some far off underprivileged, uneducated lost land. I am proud to live in a country that allows religious freedom, but I am disgusted to live in a country that looks away while rapists and abusers hide behind their archaic religion. These <https://assignbuster.com/mormon-polygamy-effects-on-woman-and-children-religion-essay/>

woman and children are being abused even if they are unaware of it, the government needs to step in provide counseling and help. Education is power and power is strength and that is what in my opinion they need.