

The Risks of Leaving Mormonism or Living on its Fringes

bob mccue

June 19, 2006

<http://mccue.cc/bob/spirituality.htm>

Mormon culture is set up to sabotage those who will not play by its rules. This makes sense, since it tends to cause those who leave Mormonism and hence do not conform to Mormon standards, to fail. This supports Mormon claims that God blesses obedience and curses disobedience.

For example, in his excellent talk at last year's exmo conference (see <http://exmormonfoundation.org/files/media/2005Conference/Saturday-Anderson.mp3> or <http://exmormonfoundation.org/files/media/2005Conference/Saturday-Anderson.m3u>), Duwayne Anderson reviewed a number of questionable uses of science statistics by Mormon apologists. I can't now find the talk on-line in any form. Anyone who can help in that regard will be greatly appreciated.

One concept Anderson trotted out caught my eye particularly. It had to do with life expectancy in Utah. An LDS researcher had claimed that Mormons in Utah had a much higher than average life expectancy. Anderson showed, however, that once certain adjustments were made that were necessary in order to make the Utah data comparable to the national averages, that Mormons in Utah were bang on the national average, and that non-Mormons or less than active Mormons in Utah were far below the average. As I recall, the same kind of analysis was performed re. suicide rates. The conclusion was that being anything other than a full-blooded Mormon in Utah was harmful to your health.

And we all know about Utah's nation-leading use of anti-depressants, bankruptcy, commercial fraud and other indications that things are not going well for a lot of people there, Mormon or otherwise. I have not seen any statistics that break these categories down on a Mormon v. non-Mormon (or less active Mormon) basis, and again would be indebted to anyone who could point me to that. My bet is that active Mormons, less active Mormons and non-Mormons in Utah are all shown to be less functional than the average American in these areas.

The question, of course, is why would being a non-Mormon or less active Mormon in Utah cause problems?

I thought about this recently when hearing about some wayward children of my Mormon relatives and thinking about my own teenage waywardness. Most Mormon kids are not equipped with a healthy context in which to interpret their own behaviour outside of the Mormon norm. That is, they tend to see behaviour as either good (as prescribed by the Mormon community) or bad. There is not much in the way of a gradient that goes from good behaviour to questionable behaviour to dangerous behaviour to "you must be nuts" behaviour when it comes to the Mormon rule book.

For example, I recall while serving as Bishop being taken to task by a ward member (one of our stake most respected members) for talking to the kids about what to do on dates in a context that presumed there would be some kissing and touching. She told me in no uncertain terms that she wanted her children taught that there would be no kissing or touching of any kind. I told her that I lived on Earth, understood what teenage kids were like and valued the credibility I had with them. I was not going to waste my time and theirs, not to mention destroying my credibility with them, by giving advice that was unrealistic. "Who", I asked her, "was listening to these kids (including hers) in worthiness interviews and was charged with the duty to give them the most useful advice possible there and elsewhere?" (just typing those words give me the heebie jeebies). She reminded me that I was charged with instructing the kids to keep God's commandments. I politely suggested that I was doing a difficult job as well as I could and would continue to do what I felt was best regardless of her opinions, and that I thought recognizing "normal" teenage behaviour and helping the kids to cope with in the most healthy manner possible was the best route to helping them in the long term to comply with as many of God's rules as possible. Again, the act of remembering what my former head space was like, and what I told those poor impressionable kids, makes my shiver involuntarily.

In any event, once a Mormon kid has started down the "bad" path, it is natural for them to perceive themselves as bad all over. This kills self esteem. Kids with poor self esteem seek similar companions. And it does not help that Mormon kids like this have to lie to survive at home, and the psychologists have clearly laid out data that shows how once a few lies have been told in one context, the probability of lying in general skyrockets. Deceptive behaviour further degrades the social opportunities available to disobedient Mormon kids. And dysfunctional, low self esteem, naïve kids become adults with similar problems even if they have two or three degrees from BYU and have one of Utah's relatively good jobs.

In a nutshell, Mormon culture is set up to sabotage those who will not play by its rules. This make sense, since it makes faithful Mormons look good to the extent that those who do not conform to Mormon standards fail.

As is so often the case, we can see a more extreme case of Mormon behaviour be looking at the FLDS. Around here, many FLDS kids have recently left that community and are woefully equipped to survive in the "real" world. They are poorly educated; have been taught from the cradle that the world is wicked and to be avoided and so are dysfunctionally fearful; have been conditioned to think in simplistic terms and obey instead of making decisions on their own; etc. Hence, many of them do not thrive outside of their community, or utterly fail. This means ending up with addiction problems; in trouble with the law; dealing with unwarranted pregnancies; etc. This of course provides evidence to those on the inside that their way is God's one and only, and that those who disobey will be punished.

I am thinking of several people I knew growing up who were very talented, and ended up living what seems to be to be well below their potential. One in particular was (is) high

end smart, charismatic, attractive - he has the whole package. He and I both became near pathological liars as teenagers in order to experiment in what I now see as harmless teenage stuff. He lied his way into Ricks, lied while there, lied his way through a mission and got ex'ed shortly after coming home. Until his mid-40s, he lived outside of Mormonism while believing that he was not good enough for it. During this period, he had a host of different troubles. He has now falsified Mormonism and moved on, but a lot of water under the bridge can't be changed.

I wonder what he would have been like had he been raised in an environment that rewarded creative thought and brass balls, which he had in abundance.

It is likely not possible to test this scientifically, but I bet that persons who are of the type that is likely to non-conform would thrive in many environments while being chewed apart by Mormonism.

In conclusion, I believe that Mormons sets up its members for similar familiar for the same reasons, those in not the same radical terms as its more pure FLDS version. I don't suggest that any of this is by conscious design, though some of it may be. This is how organizations, acting as organisms, defend themselves. Only the organizations with good defence mechanisms survive. Mormonism's perimeter is well set up in this regard. The analogy to the human body's immune system is apt.

I would appreciate hearing from anyone with evidence pro, or con, this theory.

best,
bob

The following messages were posted in response to the above at The View from the Foyer, at <http://www.aimoo.com/forum/categories.cfm?id=418550&CategoryID=121363>

Reply to : philo
From: Natural Man

I believe that Mormons sets up its members for similar familiar for the same reasons, those in not the same radical terms as its more pure FLDS version. I would appreciate hearing from anyone with evidence pro, or con, this theory.

There is plenty of anecdotal evidence. We could present our 6 children as; Exhibit #1.... or 1 thru 6.

We resigned to completely separate ourselves from Mormonism mostly for our kids sake. We have spent much of our "building blocks" time (our replacement for FHE) discussing

with our children the spectrums of behavior that they might engage in as they confront life.

Some of our kids seem to grasp more quickly the concept of a "middle ground" that's between what the mormon world teaches and complete chaos. Interestingly enough our child who seems to have the most difficulty with the concept is the one who is still flirting with Mo-ism because of her boyfriend who now has a mission call.

Our oldest daughter followed much of the pattern you described above in that she made some mistakes, then lied, then lied about everything. Our experience with her was one of the biggest wake up calls for me as to the potential effects of mo - culture with a teenager passing through some rather ordinary problems. Our experience was that "the culture" on made the issues worse, not better.

Natural Man

Reply to : philo

From: Merry Prankster (a lawyer)

Mormon culture is set up to sabotage those who will not play by its rules...Most Mormon kids are not equipped with a healthy context in which to interpret they own behaviour outside of the Mormon norm. That is, they tend to see behaviour as either good (as prescribed by the Mormon community) or bad... many FLDS [and LDS] kids ... are woefully equipped to survive in the "real" world...[they] have been conditioned to think in simplistic terms and obey instead of making decisions on their own; etc. .. And dysfunctional, low self esteem, naïve kids become adults with similar problems even if they have two or three degrees from BYU

philo:

Once again, I appreciate your insights. You hit a personal and painful nerve. I have shared this before online, but here is how growing up in Mormonism shaped my self esteem and undermined my self confidence despite two degrees from YBU including a law degree:*

Despite this ideal description [of growing up in a Mormon family], my family also had its dysfunctional side. My parents, and my mother in particular, placed a great deal of importance on image and appearances. They also placed great importance on conforming to others' expectations, standards and values, particularly those of the Church and white-middle class America. These expectations governed how we dressed, behaved, the choices we made, etc. In my family, we also learned to ignore our feelings and we avoided talking openly about problems. We kept our personal and family problems tightly locked away and hidden from others and even each other. For example, several years ago I learned that my grandmother had spent two or three years in an insane asylum during my mother's childhood. My parents guarded this family secret for over 45 years

from my siblings and I. I suspect that they did not tell us because they feared that we might let the secret out and tarnish our image of being the perfect Mormon family.

Mormonism lurked just below the surface of my family's dysfunction. In fact, in many ways my family's dysfunction made us good Mormons. (Or maybe we were dysfunctional because we were good Mormons.) The Church places a great deal of emphasis on appearances and image. Its leaders too often elevate form over substance by insisting on strict adherence to the Church's standards at the price of a person's individuality. Also, the Church teaches unquestioning obedience and frowns on dissent of any kind or any questions that might raise controversy or challenge its official positions. The Church expects its members to conform their lives to its teachings and expectations no matter what the cost or sacrifice.

These expectations came with a very heavy and personal price tag for me. Slowly, but surely, I felt myself becoming "comfortably numb" as I sacrificed my individuality and uniqueness on Mormonism's altar of obedience and conformity. By placing the Church's expectations above my own needs and desires I grew to doubt my own importance and strength as an individual. I developed feelings of guilt, unworthiness, low self-confidence and self-esteem. I came to feel that I was only loved conditionally and that I had to look outside of myself for validation and acceptance. I also came to believe that I should keep my feelings, beliefs, fears, problems, doubts, opinions, and dreams to myself, particularly when such feelings or beliefs might not meet with others' approval.

Over the years, I developed an underlying attitude of "What's the point of paying attention to myself? Based on what I have been taught and how I had been programmed, there's nothing of value in here anyway." In Mormonism, the inner person is neglected and forgotten, while the outer person seems to be all that is worth paying attention to. In the eyes of the significant Mormon adults in my life, my outer expression and experience were much more important and consequential than what was going on internally, which in their eyes seemed insignificant and unimportant. As a result, I became outer, rather than inner, directed, synchronizing with and responding to what the church needed or required, rather than responding to my own inner promptings. The needs of others, particularly the church, drowned out my own needs, which by comparison felt less important and of a much lower priority. In time, my self-importance became based on responding to and serving others rather than myself. Despite all of the talks I had heard about losing myself in the service of others, in this process I lost the spiritual ground and core that gave my outer expression and functioning meaning and significance.

One writer has explained how conforming with the church's expectations took a personal toll on him:

“This unwillingness to re-evaluate my faith came with a price. The more I ignored my own thoughts in order to align my thinking to prescribed ideas, the more I lost touch with my own sense of right and wrong, and the more I lost confidence in my own judgment. I became more dependent on the source of authority as to the correct course of action. At times, I asked not: "What is right?" or "What is wrong?" but "What do the 'authorities' say on the matter?" Something precious is lost in such a process, even if one is following a prophet who will never lead us astray.” Brad Morin and Chris Morin, *Suddenly Strangers, Surrendering Gods and Heroes*, pg. (2004).

As a result of these beliefs, I learned to invalidate my feelings, beliefs and sense of self-worth. I also grew to doubt my own strength as a person. Instead of learning to use my own personal power and to make my own choices, I learned to conform to the expectations of others. Unfortunately, these beliefs have deeply embedded themselves in my psyche and I still struggle with strong feelings of self-doubt that undermine my sense of self-esteem and sabotage my sense of self-confidence. And I still focus on others' feelings and needs and struggle with making choices based on the expectations of others rather than on my own feelings and beliefs.

M.P.

* Ironically, I grew up with DuWayne Anderson. His family was very similar to mine.

From Hellmut (PhD in political science)

Thanks for your analysis, Bob, and for sharing your story, Merry.

My mother converted in Germany when I was six years old. My father never did. Maybe, I was just lucky but my wards in Germany were very different in that regard. In Mainz and Cologne we had young bishops that had been identifiably socialized during the sixties. Bishop Scheuer was a convert, later moved to Duisburg and became a Social Democrat city council member. Bishop Schmidt had been raised Mormon in Nuremberg but was an activist type, very energetic, always continuing to educate himself.

In mutual we got to live the axiom about learning correct principles and governing ourselves.

Of course, that made the mission experience all the more traumatic. In a sense, I never really recovered from that.

The LDS Church had been my cause. It damaged me not so much in terms of socializing dysfunctional behaviours but by idolizing the organization and its leaders. Therefore I never quite learned how to identify my interests and pursue them legitimately. I was too busy serving.

Realizing that this service was meaningless and counterproductive in terms of doing good, I find it rather difficult to live a healthy life.

Interestingly, two of my youth friends report that they suffered from guilt, an experience that I was spared. One of them does very well. He just follows his desires, however odd and is successful that way.

From: wry catcher

I wonder what he would have been like had he been raised in an environment that rewarded creative thought and brass balls, which he had in abundance.

This sentence brought tears to my eyes.

I only just saw the article about mormon women and depression for the first time a week or two ago (someone posted a link to it here). One of my personal takeaways from that was the nagging question of, 'what if...' But then, 'what if' has become a part-time hobby for me - it's very productive and builds great self-esteem. From that article, it appeared that creative thought, particularly, was linked with depression and self-numbing behaviours. Brass balls are way proscribed, esp. for women, but creative *thought* in itself was predictive of depression. That is fucking frightening. And yet I still wonder why I am who I am today...why don't I just get over it already.

It's clear to me that Utah (ie, concentrated mo culture) is extremely polarizing and creates classic us and them mentality. If you're not us (mormon), then you're them (gentiles). The markers of mormondumb are clear and well diffused, and in order to be part of 'them,' you adopt the 'them' behaviours (also clear and well defined), such as drinking, smoking and/or general carousing, for instance. So mos learn to keep their 'them' behaviours well-hidden and keep their 'countenance' clean, esp. around the adults. It can turn you into an uptight iron-rod type of mo who stays on a very straight and narrow, or it makes you good at dissembling and hiding your naughty side (JS anyone? Sexual 'deviance' is particularly easy to hide). I think nomos in Utah *as a group* suffer from lack of self-concept/-esteem, weaker social ties, and semi-invisibility. Classic signs of a marginalized group. Particularly in smaller towns or in Utah county. Simplistic and overgeneralizing, perhaps - but often the case in my experience.

Nice essay, MP. I hear you.

From: Iron Lung

Bob,

I don't have anything profound to add on this subject except that your analysis is spot on. I am a victim of the "little factory" preaching that Boyd Packer delivered in the 70's. 28 years later i'm still stuck with those same ill-conceived images of self.

MP:

I sacrificed my individuality and uniqueness on Mormonism's altar of obedience and conformity. By placing the Church's expectations above my own needs and desires I grew to doubt my own importance and strength as an individual. I developed feelings of guilt, unworthiness, low self-confidence and self-esteem. I came to feel that I was only loved conditionally and that I had to look outside of myself for validation and acceptance.

Do you mind if I just copy that and put it in a file somewhere with my name on it?

From: philo (bob mccue, that is)

Good comments all.

To put this in context, I agree that we are here talking about a human thing, not a Mormon thing. Jon Haidt (The Happiness Hypothesis - see www.thehappinessthypothesis.com) cites research (see <http://www.pupress.princeton.edu/chapters/s7806.html> for example) that describes communities in terms of "ethics of individuality" and "ethics of community". I get at the same kind of thing in a essay called "The Mormon Mask" at http://www.postmormon.org/exp_e/index.php/magazine. The bottom line is that social groups are oriented more or less toward community rights and obligations v. individual rights and obligations. Think of the Hindu, Muslim or fundamentalist Christian communities. Think of Hindu marriage in particular. This is more a duty to the group than a matter of individuals falling in love (see <http://mccue.cc/bob/documents/rs.a%20few%20thoughts%20about%20Mormon%20Marriage.pdf>). Contrast this with your typical Western secular humanist point of view as the ethics of individuality paradigm, as I try to do in The Mormon Mask.

The Mormon ethos is not as strongly oriented toward protecting the group at the expense of the individual as many groups are. However, the orientation is far stronger than is

healthy, and individuals are kept as comatose as possible in order to make better fuel for the communal fire, or to keep them from tossing water on it.

It helps me to keep the Mormon "problem" in context. There are far worse ways to have been raised, and while my Mormon experience has retarded me in some ways, it has also given many tools that I am pleased to have. For example, a strong work ethic; a strong team player orientation; a belief that relationships (and commitment to long term relationships) are/is important; a principled nature; a belief that learning and education are extremely important; a sensitivity to toward the emotional spectrum of life; etc. All of this would have been great had it been conditioned at an early age, and then tempered with reality at about the same time as I was taught that Santa Claus is not real and babies are not delivered by storks.

The advice psychologists like Haidt and Martin Seligman (www.authentic happiness.com) give is that we should focus most of our life's effort in those areas where we have strengths instead of endlessly (and mostly futilely) trying to shore up our weaknesses. And in particular, an old dog like me should be realistic about how many new tricks he can learn.

For better and for worse, my strengths and weaknesses were bred into me by my Mormon upbringing. That is what I have, and I am well advised to run with it and enjoy my strengths as much as possible while setting my life up so that my weaknesses will harm me (and those I love) as little as possible.

While putting my experience in context as I try to do in the way indicated above does not change the damage Mormonism did in my life or what I need to do to continue the healing process, this understanding makes me immediately feel better for reasons I don't fully comprehend, and I am certain (having experimented with this now for a couple of years) that the "life on your strengths and protect against weaknesses" approach is one of the keys to living the good life. Watching the recent movie "Water" (see <http://www.aimoo.com/forum/categories.cfm?id=418550&CategoryID=121363>) is part of the context framing exercise I try to make a regular part of life. That helps to keep my umbrage in order.

best,
bob

From: Merry Prankster

There are far worse ways to have been raised, and while my Mormon experience has retarded me in some ways, it has also given many tools that I am pleased to have.

philo:

You raise some valid and worthwhile points. Obviously, the emotional baggage, as well as the positive benefits, that we each carry from our Mormon experience will vary from person to person. To be sure, I have some positive traits as a result of being raised in the LDS church. But despite this, the central struggle in my life has been to overcome this deep sense of not feeling very important. To this day, it permeates everything I do and every decision I make and in many ways it has crippled me as an individual. My focus goes to what others want and expect, rather than standing up for myself and my true beliefs and desires. As I have analyzed it, it is not surprising that much of this fits in all too well with the deference to authority demanded by the church.* It also fits in perfectly with the "obey with exactness" mantra that I had pounded into me as long as I can remember and in particular during my mission. Although I realize that some of this comes from my family, as I point in out my comments above it is difficult if not impossible to untangle my family's dysfunction from my family's involvement with Mormonism for four or five generations.

M.P.

* For example, how does a 19 year old kid who does not want to go on a mission counter his parents' and bishop's argument that the prophet of God, who speaks directly for the Lord, says that you should go on a mission? it is really a catch 22 for the young man. If you don't go, you feel tremendous guilt for disobeying God. If you do go, you feel a lack of self respect because your actions are not congruent with your true desires and wants.

Mormon culture is set up to sabotage those who will not play by its rules.

philo:

I have thought a lot about your post and how the church sabotages those who choose not to play by its rules. As I analyze it, much of this can be explained by cognitive psychology. Cognitive therapists talk about adaptive and maladaptive schemas or paradigms. Adaptive schemas reflect reality, while maladaptive schemas distort reality. Adaptive cognitive schemas or objective paradigms align us with our true selves and with the real world. Because maladaptive cognitive schemas or subjective paradigms distort the reality of whom we are and what we're surrounded by, maladaptive schemas create self-defeating, core themes or patterns that we keep repeating throughout our lives.

Aaron Beck, an early cognitive therapist, postulated that schemas bias our interpretation of reality in a consistent manner. When the distortions become pathological, they show

up as "typical misconceptions, distorted attitudes, invalid premises, and unrealistic goals and expectations."

Another cognitive therapist and a disciple of Beck's, Jeffrey Young, calls these maladaptive schemas "lifetraps." In his book *Cognitive Therapy for Personality Disorders: a Schema-Focused Approach*, Young lists 18 early maladaptive schemas or "lifetraps".

In my view, Mormonism uses various "lifetraps" to sabotage those who will not play by its rules. Below I have pasted Young's descriptions of some of the lifetraps that seem the most prevalent in Mormonism from Young's website. As I reviewed these, I was struck by how close Young's description of the lifetraps of subjugation fits my earlier posts on this thread. I was also struck by the prevalence in Mormonism of the lifetraps in Young's last cluster. BKP comes to mind with Young's descriptions of the lifetraps of unrelenting standards/hypercriticalness and punitiveness.

M.P.

OTHER-DIRECTEDNESS

(An excessive focus on the desires, feelings, and responses of others, at the expense of one's own needs -- in order to gain love and approval, to maintain one's sense of connection, or avoid retaliation. Usually involves suppression and lack of awareness regarding one's own anger and natural inclinations. Typical family origin is based on conditional acceptance: children must suppress important aspects of themselves in order to gain love, attention, and approval. In many such families, the parents' emotional needs and desires -- or social acceptance and status -- are valued more than the unique needs and feelings of each child.)

12. SUBJUGATION (SB)

Excessive surrendering of control to others because one feels coerced - - usually to avoid anger, retaliation, or abandonment. The two major forms of subjugation are:

A. Subjugation of Needs: Suppression of one's preferences, decisions, and desires.

B. Subjugation of Emotions: Suppression of emotional expression, especially anger.

Usually involves the perception that one's own desires, opinions, and feelings are not valid or important to others. Frequently presents as excessive compliance, combined with hypersensitivity to feeling trapped. Generally leads to a build up of anger, manifested in maladaptive symptoms (e.g., passive-aggressive behavior, uncontrolled outbursts of temper, psychosomatic symptoms, withdrawal of affection, "acting out", substance abuse).

13. SELF-SACRIFICE (SS)

Excessive focus on voluntarily meeting the needs of others in daily situations, at the expense of one's own gratification. The most common reasons are: to prevent causing pain to others; to avoid guilt from feeling selfish; or to maintain the connection with others perceived as needy. Often results from an acute sensitivity to the pain of others. Sometimes leads to a sense that one's own needs are not being adequately met and to resentment of those who are taken care of. (Overlaps with concept of co-dependency.)

14. APPROVAL-SEEKING / RECOGNITION-SEEKING (AS)

Excessive emphasis on gaining approval, recognition, or attention from other people, or fitting in, at the expense of developing a secure and true sense of self. One's sense of esteem is dependent primarily on the reactions of others rather than on one's own natural inclinations. Sometimes includes an overemphasis on status, appearance, social acceptance, money, or achievement -- as means of gaining approval, admiration, or attention (not primarily for power or control). Frequently results in major life decisions that are inauthentic or unsatisfying; or in hypersensitivity to rejection.

OVERVIGILANCE & INHIBITION

(Excessive emphasis on suppressing one's spontaneous feelings, impulses, and choices OR on meeting rigid, internalized rules and expectations about performance and ethical behavior -- often at the expense of happiness, self-expression, relaxation, close relationships, or health. Typical family origin is grim, demanding, and sometimes punitive: performance, duty, perfectionism, following rules, hiding emotions, and avoiding mistakes predominate over pleasure, joy, and relaxation. There is usually an undercurrent of pessimism and worry---that things could fall apart if one fails to be vigilant and careful at all times.)

15. NEGATIVITY / PESSIMISM (NP)

A pervasive, lifelong focus on the negative aspects of life (pain, death, loss, disappointment, conflict, guilt, resentment, unsolved problems, potential mistakes, betrayal, things that could go wrong, etc.) while minimizing or neglecting the positive or optimistic aspects. Usually includes an exaggerated expectation-- in a wide range of work, financial, or interpersonal situations -- that things will eventually go seriously wrong, or that aspects of one's life that seem to be going well will ultimately fall apart. Usually involves an inordinate fear of making mistakes that might lead to: financial collapse, loss, humiliation, or being trapped in a bad situation. Because potential negative outcomes are exaggerated, these patients are frequently characterized by chronic worry, vigilance, complaining, or indecision.

16. EMOTIONAL INHIBITION (EI)

The excessive inhibition of spontaneous action, feeling, or communication -- usually to avoid disapproval by others, feelings of shame, or losing control of one's impulses. The most common areas of inhibition involve: (a) inhibition of anger & aggression; (b) inhibition of positive impulses (e.g., joy, affection, sexual excitement, play); (c) difficulty expressing vulnerability or communicating freely about one's feelings, needs, etc.; or (d) excessive emphasis on rationality while disregarding emotions.

17. UNRELENTING STANDARDS / HYPERCRITICALNESS (US)

The underlying belief that one must strive to meet very high internalized standards of behavior and performance, usually to avoid criticism. Typically results in feelings of pressure or difficulty slowing down; and in hypercriticalness toward oneself and others. Must involve significant impairment in: pleasure, relaxation, health, self-esteem, sense of accomplishment, or satisfying relationships.

Unrelenting standards typically present as: (a) perfectionism, inordinate attention to detail, or an underestimate of how good one's own performance is relative to the norm; (b) rigid rules and "shoulds" in many areas of life, including unrealistically high moral, ethical, cultural, or religious precepts; or (c) preoccupation with time and efficiency, so that more can be accomplished.

18. PUNITIVENESS (PU)

The belief that people should be harshly punished for making mistakes. Involves the tendency to be angry, intolerant, punitive, and impatient with those people (including oneself) who do not meet one's expectations or standards. Usually includes difficulty forgiving mistakes in oneself or others, because of a reluctance to consider extenuating circumstances, allow for human imperfection, or empathize with feelings.

From: junesu

...Frequently results in major life decisions that are inauthentic or unsatisfying....

story of my life

Typical family origin is based on conditional acceptance: children must suppress important aspects of themselves in order to gain love, attention, and approval. In many such families, the parents' emotional needs and desires -- or social acceptance and status - - are valued more than the unique needs and feelings of each child.

wow, that's how a real proclamation on the family should start!!

great info, thanks!

and speaking of personality disorders, is anyone else here an INTJ?

From: cumom (PhD in sociology)

Wow. I've never seen the emotional costs of mormonism on me broken down like that. It was both a bit stunning and really depressing--I can identify a handful of those behaviors in my loved ones who are still practicing.

The ones that resonated most with me were subjugation, overvigilance, negativity and emotional inhibition.

I've certainly spent the last 10 years or so working through a lot of that, but it's amazing how long-lasting and powerful the effects of one's upbringing can be, because they are literally habits of mind and feeling.

Thanks for this. It is really helpful to see it laid out like that in a sort of rational way.

From: philo

Reply to : Merry Prankster

That was brilliant. I have read a bit about Beck's work and had not heard of Young. Two more insightful people to read.

I have referenced here Jon Haidt's "The Happiness Hypothesis" several times. It and Martin Seligman's "Authentic Happiness" are the two best I have found in terms of mapping a constructive strategy after one has diagnosed his or her ills. Their approach is to take an inventory of strengths and weaknesses, take steps to protect against the weaknesses (avoiding situations where the tendency to be a "pleaser" will be front and center, for example) rather than try to change basic traits, and live as much of life as possible in situations that bring out our strengths.

I have found that this works for me better than anything else.

best,

bob

From: Circus Watcher

Reply to : mp

Your post hit home. I grew up in an alcoholic home. People like me are easy targets for tsc & others. With help these things can be overcome. But it takes a whole new world view.

At University I received help from a psychiatrist. His 1st advice was to move out & get away from my family. It was an enormously difficult thing to do - but I had to leave the family in order to survive & become healthy. This is also true of tsc. There is no middle ground - if one is serious about tsc.

I think of some of the tbs I knew, I do not think that they ever really talked about theology or the doctrines of the church. Oddly, these things were rarely deeply discussed in church. Everything was superficial, just showing up & tithing seemed enough. And if there was a problem - it would be a private discussion with the bishop or as GBH advised - think what you want just be quiet about it. My in-active SIL asks TBM MIL about doctrines & beliefs & the questions are never answered. MIL does not even try - she just says to have faith & what a wonderful time she has at church. Then the subject is changed.

Good post

cw

From: philo

Reply to : Circus Watcher

Your post hit home. I grew up in an alcoholic home. People like me are easy targets for tsc & others. With help these things can be overcome. But it takes a whole new world view. At University I received help from a psychiatrist. His 1st advice was to move out & get away from my family. It was an enormously difficult thing to do - but I had to leave the family in order to survive & become healthy. This is also true of tsc. There is no middle ground - if one is serious about tsc.

I did not realize you had this in your past.

The literature related to unhealthy dependencies seems to speak directly to many of the difficulties related to breaking away from Mormonism. I had not thought of alcoholism in that regard, but I can see how the dynamic within an alcoholic home (full of unhealthy dependencies, things-not-to-be-spoken-of etc.) would breed various of these.

And, once a person breaks away, the literature related to dealing with divorce (particularly after a bad marriage), death of a loved one (particularly an abusive loved one), etc. also seem to get at the issues we need to work on.

Here is some great irony for you. My oldest son was dating a girl a few years ago while we were still Mormon. She and her family were (still are as far as I know) faithful Mormons. One of her older sibs have been through serious drug rehab, and their family went to one of those in residence place where they help the entire family through the process, and to appreciate the unhealthy dependencies within the family that might have contributed to, and/or been exacerbated by, this child's problem. Our oldest daughter (just ahead of this son) had similar drug related problems, but nowhere near as serious as those in the other family.

The dear-mother-of-the-girl-friend (DMGF) took it upon herself to sit my wife and I down for two hours to explain to us, with graphs, charts etc., how our family was likely screwed up in the same way theirs had been, and how DS in particular was likely rendered co-dependant as a result of his sister's problems. DMGF told that this was her concern because there was some change that daughter would marry our son, and he needed to be fixed before that happened.

This was a surreal experience. DW and I, on the way home, were both shaking our heads and wondering where on earth this well-intended DMGF was coming from. We didn't think it was possible that we were as screwed up as she assured us we were. Later, the self same DMGF counselled DW to leave me since it was the only way to keep our family out of Satan's clutches as I left Mormonism. And, she told me that she was re-thinking her daughter's relationship to my DS, since who knows where he might end up with a father like me.

Now, I look back on DMGF and her family with different eyes. The counsellors (in NYC no less) who dealt with them likely recognized a severely dysfunctional family in part because of their son's addictions, but more likely as a result of their dependence on Mormonism and use of its unrealistic worldview. To my knowledge, this hypothesis was not floated at them, but the severity of the dependencies (if not their cause) would have been clear to anyone who counselled these folks.

And I look back on our lives with different eyes. We were much more screwed up than we thought, but for reasons that had little to what DMGF suspected. That is, our daughter's problems had not affected us much. In fact, they are what woke me up. My relationship with her was so dysfunctional that I started casting around for reasons why.

And we were mostly her problem instead of her being ours. We forced her to choose between lying and harsh punishment, etc. as noted in my post at the top of this thread. We were riddled with unhealthy dependencies which we attempted to pass on to her. She fought that, and while doing so fell into her own brand of unhealthy dependency. We hid from reality in Mormonism. She found more entertaining ways to do same.

best,

bob

From: Merry Prankster
Reply to : philo

Reply to : Merry Prankster That was brilliant. I have read a bit about Beck's work and had not heard of Young. Two more insightful people to read. I have referenced here Jon Haidt's "The Happiness Hypothesis" several times. It and Martin Seligman's "Authentic Happiness" are the two best I have found in terms of mapping a constructive strategy after one has diagnosed his or her ills. Their approach is to take an inventory of strengths and weaknesses, take steps to protect against the weaknesses (avoiding situations where the tendency to be a "pleaser" will be front and center, for example) rather than try to change basic traits, and live as much of life as possible in situations that bring out our strengths. I have found that this works for me better than anything else. best, bob

philo:

Thanks for suggesting these two books. I have heard of Seligman's book but never read it. I am going to get both books.

We were riddled with unhealthy dependencies which we attempted to pass on to her. She fought that, and while doing so fell into her own brand of unhealthy dependency. We hid from reality in Mormonism. She found more entertaining ways to do same.

This certainly describes the dynamic that I experienced growing up in my family. And unfortunately it describes the dynamic of my relationship with my children. As I said above, in many ways LDS culture fosters familial dysfunction with its emphasis on obedience, conformity and appearance -- all maladaptive schemas or paradigms. An adaptive schema would teach us to find out who we truly are and what we truly value and believe then act in a congruent manner with our discoveries.

Once again, great thread and great thoughts.

M.P.

From: Hellmut
Reply to : philo

To put this in context, I agree that we are here talking about a human thing, not a Mormon thing.

Yes, the LDS Church and its leaders are only human. They are no more evil than other humans.

What makes it worse, however, is that LDS leaders promote themselves as the mouth pieces of God. Hence, they and their believers argue that they should not be subject to anything. Whatever they say goes.

In other contexts, we realize that we are dealing with mortals and act accordingly. It begins with skepticism and looking out for ourselves and our loved ones. In Mormonism, that's not legitimate behavior. Unless you have a very good shtick, people need to conform and when they do, some get hurt.

As I tried to point out in my chimp thread, humans have developed sophisticated institutional responses to protect themselves from imperfect leaders. Mormonism undoes them all. Fortunately, the federal government saves the LDS Church from itself but clearly Mormon leaders resent that and aspire to sovereign power.

Mormonism isn't bad because Mormons are bad people. That's not the problem. The problem is that Mormon theology and the LDS organization do not properly apply the lessons of human nature to Mormon leaders.

From: MagicCicero
Reply to : Hellmut

Mormonism isn't bad because Mormons are bad people. That's not the problem. The problem is that Mormon theology and the LDS organization do not properly apply the lessons of human nature to Mormon leaders.

Brilliant analysis, Hellmut.

From: Hellmut
Reply to : Merry Prankster

When I had a phone conversation on the phone with my mother, she said that Mormonism operates on fear. Someone in her Lutheran congregation had related to her that the Bible contains the phrase "Fear Not" over 350 times. I am a little more skeptical about the Bible than my mother but I agree that LDS leaders exploit fear to control behavior.

If you raise children on fear then that will shape their personality.

To be fair, nurturing parents will inevitably induce inferiority feelings in children (according to transactional analysts). But I do think that Mormon theology and its overreliance on authority is unnecessarily unhealthy. As authority substitutes reason, there is a premium on appearances, which rewards hypocrisy and punishes honesty.

The hypocrites become predators, be it on a small or a big scale. Personalities that take the LDS gospel at face value will be ostracized. A third response is denial and compartmentalization. But I don't see how one can pull that off without hypocrisy.

The following replies were posted at the bulletin board at www.exmormon.org

Subject: Here's the link to the audio ...
Date: Jun 19 18:13
Author: High Rum
Mail Address:

I think this will allow you to download the audio:

<http://exmormonfoundation.org/files/media/2005Conference/Saturday-Anderson.mp3>

And I believe this will allow you to 'stream' it (listen without saving to your computer):

<http://exmormonfoundation.org/files/media/2005Conference/Saturday-Anderson.m3u>

That WAS a great presentation. I purchased his book at that conference and my wife even seemed to appreciate some of the issues Duwayne talked about. PS: I'm excited to hear whatever material you bring to the conference this year! Thanks for your continuous thoughts. You're helping a lot of people! I get comments weekly about how helpful your pod cast episodes are.

-High Rum

Subject: Re: The Risks of Leaving Mormonism, or Living on its Fringes
Date: Jun 19 18:30
Author: Pete Chance
Mail Address:

Bob, you are spot on. Until about two years ago I spent the previous ten years as an elders quorum instructor (always a closet doubter) who tried incessantly to convey to those young men that they needed to lighten up on themselves. I saw several examples of newly married men with small children who spoke of their shortcomings because they didn't feel they were meeting the highest standards set for them by both local leaders and general authorities. Other young unmarried elders and prospective elders were hounded by the bishop about going on missions to the point that they were running for cover every Sunday. One was my son. I eventually told the bishop in no uncertain terms to stop. Another issue this culture creates is the inherent need to keep score. It seems to me that mormon society at all levels is examining the "worthiness" of everyone else because it allows people to escape, even if only momentarily, the guilt laden thoughts they internalize because of their own shortcomings. In other words, "I may not be perfect, but I'm better than Bob McCue, because he's lost his testimony altogether." I've got to believe it's worse here in Utah but I could be wrong. Maybe that craziness is universal to the mormondom.

Subject: Bob, I agree...
Date: Jun 19 19:55
Author: Just Me
Mail Address:

but I don't have any hard data, only case studies from my practice. One of the first statements I make to kids is tell them they have a right to privacy, and if I ask them a question they don't want to answer, tell me, and I will respect that. I may come back to the question later, but I explain how critical honesty is at their age. They don't have to tell everything (and shouldn't) but what they say should be the truth. Mormon interviews either teach adolescents to lie or hate themselves.

I left the church when my son was turning 12. After my personal experiences with interviews, there was no way I would let this conservative, sensitive, honest kid anywhere near a priesthood interview. Interviews were the most destructive experiences of my teenage years, and others have expressed the same sentiment.

In my practice, I finally resorted to encouraging people to "postpone" their confession until they could make good use of the experience. For most that time never came, they either "sinned" again, recognized that confession would be a painful, non-productive exercise, and recognized that taking personal responsibility for their behavior (and deciding if it was right or wrong) was a better course of action.

Members that decide to follow their conscience eventually end up on a painful path (whether they protest, confess, or attempt to fly under the radar they end up in a one down position). Dissent is not tolerated in any organization devoted to obedience.

Others live on the fringes with their beliefs, but are committed to maintaining the cultural, economic and interpersonal benefits. They aren't confirmed a member of the church, but conformed one.

So, I guess you have three choices:

1. Believe, and when the hard times come, agree there is something wrong with you because your faith just isn't sustaining you.

2. Don't believe, admit you've been duped, and turn your own world upside down. Experience prejudice from members.

3. Don't believe, but pretend you do. Social structure stays intact, and you teach your children the value of conforming.

My guess is that group three would look more intact on a questionnaire, use fewer antidepressants, have fewer financial problems, and have a more intact social structure. For me, I just couldn't live like that.

Subject: Bob, I totally agree. Morgdrones totally F'ed up my head, and I wasn't even in it that long.

Date: Jun 19 20:22

Author: Webz

Mail Address:

but having to live with them, go to school with them... they still got to me, and I couldn't help feeling like crap and having mental issues... some of which I have to this day.

Subject: Re: The Risks of Leaving Mormonism, or Living on its Fringes

Date: Jun 19 20:41

Author: Son of Zelph

Mail Address:

Amen to that. I can remember being a teenager wrought with guilt and shame thinking I was such a failure for touching myself! I can remember crying to God for help. Of course it never came because I was, well... A NORMAL EFFING TEENAGER!!!! Despite what the Morg wanted me to believe! The more I learn, and the more I think, the more disturbing this freaking cult becomes!

Subject: oh, this is a theory? I thought this was an over-obvious recitation of fact!

Date: Jun 19 21:15

Author: 2cents

Mail Address: cogito@cfl.rr.com

Subject: Re: The Risks of Leaving Mormonism, or Living on its Fringes
Date: Jun 20 04:29
Author: No Moniker
Mail Address:

I think you are right about mormon kids. My observations are about non-mormon kids growing up in Utah.

In Utah, the ideal held up to all teenagers is mormon, seminary attending, chaste, doesn't smoke or drink, does well in school, obedient, etc. (it's just a stereotype, but kids don't know that.) The thought process for many non-mormon kids seems to be: "Well, if I'm not mormon I must not be any of those things either." So we seem to have a lot of non-mormon kids who deliberately set out to be the opposite and indulge in risky behavior. This, of course, fulfills the expectations of mormons that mormon kids are superior and the cycle continues.

Subject: It also affects career prospects
Date: Jun 20 08:27
Author: John Andersen
Mail Address: editor@unconventionalideas.com

If a guy isn't headed toward white collar employment, he is often made to feel less worthy. Mormon culture reinforces this majorly.

These feelings instilled in youth are often hard to overcome--especially in an environment where "keeping score" is so pervasive.

I have cousin who hasn't yet, and probably never will recover from this particular form of psychological damage.

Subject: So how does this work if you live in Chicago?
Date: Jun 20 09:09
Author: Yankee Doodle Dandy
Mail Address:

I can see where Utah culture impacts an exMormon, but how does it work if you live in say, Chicago? Are you immune from this because you can simply immerse yourself in

the non-Mormon culture, or does the Mormon culture still cause problems? My guess is that an exMormon in Chicago will be able to get along a whole lot better than an exMormon in Provo.

Subject: Thanks, Bob

Date: Jun 20 09:23

Author: T-bone

Mail Address: legalrepresentation@yahoo.com

Letting people know that I'm an exmo has affected how some things work in school. I was excluded from some activities by Mormon classmates, and I'm in the midwest.

I'm actually glad to be excluded from some events (like the J. Reuben Clark society), but it sucks to get left out of the networking opportunities.

T-Bone

Subject: Ultra obedient righteous kids

Date: Jun 20 09:40

Author: Lowtide

Mail Address:

Can make my skin crawl. The RMs who act like General Authorities at the age of 21 and then are so proper and careful with their dating, not realizing that normal girls want to make out and have some fun. There's this ultra serious attitude about respecting the sisters that in some cases causes these young guys to get weird about relationships and the natural course of starting a physical relationship with a kiss. How many 30 year old mormon virgins do you know? A lot. And then some of them move to the internet and find sex there instead of in real life because they can do it in secret and not have to involve a real person. Others seem to be able to abstain and be "perfect" never developing that warm personal relationship.

And then there are those who just end up bolting because they can't do it any more. They can't be perfect and they move into the bad boy world not realizing they aren't bad boys but normal boys, and like you say, in their rebellion feeling like they are sinners, move into some damaging behavior because it is what they think rebellious people do. No, the church's manipulative, unrealistic expectations of its children is sick and twisted in its own way and I personally don't love the outcome of the super-mature, adult acting kid who is only in his twenties. It's a bit yucky to me.

Here's my advice to RMs. Have some fun, date a lot, try different relationships, mature over time, not over two years and don't ever, ever act like a stupid general authority. Act like a fun energetic kid in his twenties. Get good grades and party on the weekends.

Subject: mormonism is the dominant tribe in Utah

Date: Jun 20 09:52

Author: trixie.beastie, who forgot password

Mail Address:

My guess is that research would show that exodus from any dominant tribe in an area is a health risk.

I wish I knew of research or stats to back that up, but I don't. I'm just using my common sense and what I know about evolution and the benefits of tribal association.

Subject: Sometimes, we have to "gird up your loins, fresh courage take" and change our mind and ditch the faulty thinking

Date: Jun 20 12:32

Author: SusieQ#1

Mail Address: sllestodd@aol.com

the fear and guilt and shame and take our power back from Mormonism and own it completely.

Then, take on the world with a new world view with integrity, self respect, self confidence and self esteem cooking on high, and never mind what the Mormons think or might do to us.

Mormonism helped shape who we are up to a point. I have no regrets about that. Damaged me? No, of course not. That was then, this is now. I changed my mind.

It was not beneficial in many ways as I have learned new information that is more productive. It taught me things that are not learned anywhere else.

Now we can make changes if we so desire. What is they say: "Change your thinking and you change your life."

I prefer to see Mormonism in a big picture: it is a tiny, insignificant religion, only important to a few people that live or ever lived.

In that context, I will continue, to my dying day, (I hope it is not sooner than later!) to be passionate about and strive for full disclosure for informed choice and decisions,

explaining and understanding how this American God Myth based on Christianity got a food hold and how it can be understood, how it functioned in our lives, and how we can delete the old automatic scripts and use our intelligence to change our thinking which opens up a whole world that has not been Mormonized!

As in all our life experiences, there is a basic principle that works every time: ask yourself what you learned from it and what you want to change next time.

Like the old song says: "Accent the positive and eliminate the negative and don't mess with mister in between." One can look at life as the glass half full or half empty. I prefer the first to the latter!

But, hey, that's just me and what works for me, having tried other methods. I know this is my preferred method.

Or in other words, if you are going to get out of a hole, you have to stop digging! :-)

Subject: Aaron Beck and Jeffrey Young ...

Date: Jun 22 00:32

Author: bob mccue

Mail Address: mccuer@telusplanet.net

are referenced by Merry Prankster in a helpful way relative to this topic at <http://www.aimoo.com/forum/postview.cfm?id=418550&CategoryID=121363&startcat=1&ThreadID=2558449>, about eight posts down.

best,
bob

Subject: Problem with Beck and Young link, and a discovery...

Date: Jun 22 12:01

Author: winter

Mail Address:

The punctuation got included in the link. It should be:
<http://www.aimoo.com/forum/postview.cfm?id=418550&CategoryID=121363&startcat=1&ThreadID=2558449>

As a general rule of thumb, always follow a hyperlink by a blank or carriage return. Punctuation immediately following a link frequently gets included as part of the link, which garbles the link address. Grammarians may not like a blank before a comma, but it makes the internet easier to navigate.

That said, when I followed the garbled link, I saw a post by Philo "trashing" World Cup Soccer. That would normally be a total no-read for me, but I had a vague recollection that Philo was Bob M, so I gave it a look. It was an absolutely delightful essay on basketball. Now I may start reading the Foyer. Damn you, Bob McCue.

The link to the (off topic) basketball post is:

<http://www.aimoo.com/forum/postview.cfm?id=418550&CategoryID=121363&startcat=1&ThreadID=2560932> .

[edit] I see Bob posted the essay of RfM. Woo Hoo - I don't have to add the Foyer to my reading list. I already spend way too much time online here. Whew.

I was only ever good at one sport - sailing. My curse is to be a mostly working-class Democrat with a taste for and skill in a rich Republican sport, and one its best writers is William F Buckley. Ah, life is filled with ironies.

winter, having a serendipitous day

Subject: Re: The Risks of Leaving Mormonism, or Living on its Fringes

Date: Jun 22 12:23

Author: Jessica Truax

Mail Address: jessica.truax@comcast.net

I wanted to comment on the non-conformist comment. I think that fits my personality pretty well. Here are the before and after mormonism effects on me. Before, I was lost trying to push the tide the wrong way and failing. I believed so many of the lies my parents and the church fed me growing up. I think for me leaving in my mid 20's was a life-saver. There are several factors I think that play into how well a person recovers (age, how long in the organization, personality). For me it wasn't too late to become who I was intended to become and because of that, I am so much happier and fulfilled in life. I believe in myself and my ideas and I have the confidence to make them a reality.

J~