

19 Sins and Counting : Misogyny, hypocrisy, abuse, and power

In a [scathing article](#) that came out in the Daily Beast this spring, after the Duggars were dogged by scandals involving molestation and incest, the ever-expanding religious family was criticized for its misogynistic foundations. The Duggar family, whose fecundity and “wholesomeness” captivated audiences for seven years, believes in reproducing as often as “the lord will allow.” While the family denies that they specifically adhere to a religious sect known as “Quiverfull,” the family is outspokenly anti-contraception, and in practice, if not in theory, follows the tenets of this sect.

In the Quiverfull sect, women are expected to “submit” and be passive to the men in their families. Noting the disparity of power in such a social dynamic, author Brandy Zadrony wrote in her Daily Beast [article](#), “It’s not impossible to imagine how abuse might go unreported in a world in which women are told to submit to their fathers and brothers and husbands and taught to be ashamed of their own bodies.”

Women who are raised or marry into strict religious sects, including the Quiverfull movement, experience myriad forms of abuse – and perhaps none more damaging than reproductive abuse. In 2011, *Law And Order: Special Victims Unit* aired an episode entitled “[Bang](#)” that dealt with the topic of reproductive abuse. While the episode might have seemed far-fetched to some of its viewers, the topic has received increased attention recently, revealing the sad truth that the controversial episode had more basis in fact than in fiction.

Religious sects such as the Quiverfull movement encourage reproduction – whether or not the mother of the child truly wants to be pregnant, time and again. Not unlike *Law And Order’s* depiction of reproductive abusers, [one brave woman](#) who came forward with her story revealed that her husband had poked holes in the condom that he used to ensure that she would still become pregnant. The woman, who had been contemplating divorce, reluctantly reconciled with her husband, only finding out about the contraception deception after many more children had been born.

Just how prevalent is reproductive abuse – and why does it matter? Keeping women pregnant and financially vulnerable ensures that the balance of power is tipped in the husband’s favor. Quiverfull is a growing movement among fundamentalist conservative Christians, with thousands of Christians practicing these beliefs throughout the United States, United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. The movement derives its name from Psalm 127: 3-5, where children are referred to as arrows in a full quiver. Quiverfull eschews any forms of birth control to ensure a “quiver” that is full with children – “arrows of religion.” But what about the “bows” that are expected to keep sending out these arrows and the “quivers” who are expected to keep them?

With “19 Kids and Counting” providing a falsely wholesome view of sects like Quiverfull, the movement has only increased in popularity. But the Quiverfull movement objectifies women, viewing them as bows and quivers, and not as sentient beings with unique needs, desires, and ambitions. A Quiverfull mother should desire only to reproduce, as the movement encourages women to reproduce at production-assembly rates, bearing child after child, year after year. The

movement also discourages – and sometimes forbids – women from working outside of the home, widening the power differential between men and women. Women are expected to bear children, submit, and rely upon their husbands, financially, emotionally, and socially. Women in these relationships have no power, no resources, and no real options, should they realize that they no longer want to remain in these relationships. How would they support themselves financially without the “bread winner,” given their religious sect’s imposed restrictions on educational and vocational training? Unsurprisingly, women are very reluctant to try to leave their husbands, even if their husbands are adulterous or abusive. They’re even more reluctant to come forward publicly, [as this woman was](#) when she shared her story of reproductive abuse.

But now that the Duggar’s sins, including molestation, incest, and now, adultery, with the breaking Ashley Madison scandal; are reproducing with fecundity that rivals their familial growth, issues of reproductive abuse are beginning to come to the forefront. The Duggars – and Quiverfull adherents – hide behind a veil of “wholesomeness,” but there’s nothing Christ-like or admirable about the abuse within these religious sects. The essence of Quiverfull is men controlling women – these aren’t arrows of Christ; they’re arrows that arm the husband and disarm the mother. In an environment wherein women are told to submit, it’s really not hard to imagine that abuse goes widely unreported – or that it’s widespread, either. For girls and women who live under the rules of misogynist religious sects, reproductive abuse continues to be a very real problem. While the Duggar women struggle with the family’s mounting scandals, at least the Duggar’s 19 sins and counting have opened the conversation for victims of reproductive abuse – if not helping those who remain helpless to escape it.