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## Polygamy/Polyandry Concerns & Questions

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## POLYGAMY/POLYANDRY

### *Concerns & Questions*

*“So, the question of Polyandry. Polygamy is when a man has multiple wives. Polyandry is when a man marries another man’s wife. Joseph did both.”*

– ELDER MARLIN K. JENSEN, LDS CHURCH HISTORIAN SWEDISH RESCUE FIRESIDE | AUDIO

*Polyandry, the marriage of one woman to more than one man, typically involves shared financial, residential, and sexual resources, and children are often raised communally. There is no evidence that Joseph Smith’s sealings functioned in this way, and much evidence works against that view.*

– “PLURAL MARRIAGE IN KIRTLAND AND NAUVOO, [OFFICIAL CHURCH ESSAY](#)

One of the things that also truly disturbed me in my research was discovering the real origins of polygamy and how Joseph Smith really practiced it.

## **SHORT ANSWER:**

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**Most of Joseph's sealings to other women were sealings only, not marriages, and they did not have a sexual component. That's especially true of the false charges of polyandry and pedophilia you raise, which, as salacious as they are, fail to hold up to scrutiny.**

**There's no doubt that polygamy is a difficult reality in Church history, but it becomes far more difficult when its depiction is as distorted as it is in the CES Letter.**

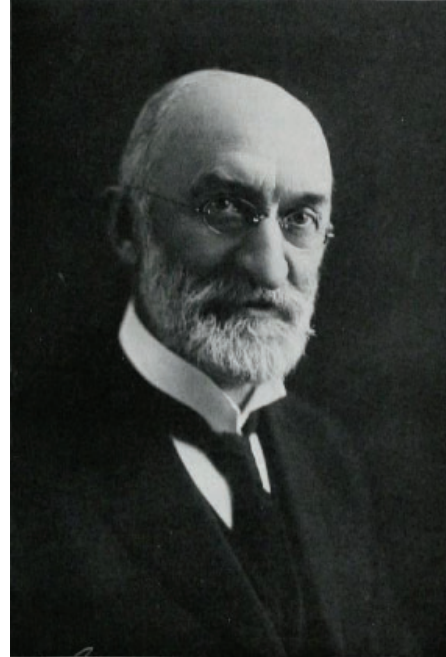
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## **LONG ANSWER:**

This is an interesting way to describe your objections to polygamy. It implies that you're not, in the abstract, upset that polygamy was practiced, but its "real origins" and Joseph Smith's personal polygamy was uniquely and egregiously wicked in and of itself.

Seems like we're going to be talking about plural marriage for quite awhile, so I thought I'd begin with my personal overview on the subject. My great-grandfather was Heber J. Grant, who had three wives. My grandmother was his youngest daughter, and she lived in hiding for twelve years, raised by her sister and unable to use her real name. It's undeniable that the whole history of polygamy in the LDS Church is fraught with difficulty, and everyone would just as soon forget that it ever happened. That's pretty hard to do, though, especially since it was the defining doctrine of the church for about half a century. So where there ought to be frank discussion, too often there's awkward silence.

That's mainly because modern Mormons find the practice abhorrent, including me. I had never met an actual polygamist until I moved to St. George and saw polygamous women crowding into the local Wal-Mart and Costco, their dowdy homespun dresses and strange, braided, non-bangs hair making them stick out like sore thumbs. I had been operating under the illusion that my ancestors weren't nearly this weird, but that's much harder to do when confronted with actual polygamists.



**Heber J. Grant**  
*Prophet, Polygamist,  
and my Great-Grandfather*

Where does that leave me?

Still in denial, at least to a degree. Because, first off, my grandmother wasn't weird. She was an accomplished woman who, to my knowledge, was never forced to wear an ugly burlap dress or yank her hair back in a strange, swooshy coiffure. And in the second place, I've seen no evidence that the systemic physical and sexual abuse that is rampant in these polygamous subcultures was part of polygamy back in the day.



**The FLDS Dress Code**  
*This wasn't always the case*

Yet the modern practice of polygamy invites everyone to imagine the worst.

Every young Mormon missionary is deluged with questions about polygamy, and few of them give substantive or satisfying answers. Some talk about the glut of single ladies on the frontier who needed the protection of a land-owning husband, so Mormon men dutifully obliged them in a historical anomaly that vanished when conditions changed.

I've never used that line, because, frankly, it's not true. Polygamy was always a religious principle, and to minimize its importance in the early history of the church is the height of disingenuity. But it's a principle that repulses me in practice, so how do I reconcile its previous sanction by my church with my present faith?

I do it the same way the Book of Mormon does.

Many anti-Mormons take delight in pointing out that the Book of Mormon rails on polygamy with more ferocity than anything in the Bible. The Lord condemns the unauthorized practice of polygamy as an "abomination" and refers to the taking of multiple wives as "whoredoms," and then says the following:

"Wherefore, my brethren, hear me, and hearken to the word of the Lord: For there shall not any man among you have save it be one wife; and concubines he shall have none." (Jacob 2:27)

That seems to be a pretty clear-cut standard, which makes you wonder how Joseph Smith could possibly lead the church to go contrary to the plain language of the scripture he himself translated.

Until you read on to verse 30:

"For if I will, saith the Lord of Hosts, raise up seed unto me, I will command my people; otherwise they shall hearken unto these things."

In other words, monogamy is the norm, unless commanded otherwise by the Lord to “raise up seed” unto Him. That’s exactly what happened when the Church practiced polygamy in the 19th century. The doctrine bound the church together through a torturous time and raised up a large second generation to carry the gospel forward. And now, when it is no longer necessary, the Lord has commanded us to revert back to the norm.

Still, while the doctrine seems clear, the practice remains disturbing, to me and to most other Mormons I know. I appreciate the essays on this subject, and I view them as solid first steps towards coming to terms with our past.

- [Joseph Smith was married to at least 34 women , as now verified in the Church’s 2014 polygamy essays.](#)

Yes, no, and sort of. The article you link says “up to 40” and includes several disputed names, but, more importantly, it makes no distinction between marriages and sealings. That distinction is essential, because Joseph was married – i.e. sealed – to dozens of other women, most of them after his death. Heber J. Grant’s father Jedidiah M. Grant stood proxy as his wife was sealed to Joseph Smith. Much of the confusion over polyandry is explained by the fact that Joseph was sealed to other men’s wives but not married to them. We’ll no doubt discuss that crucial distinction going forward, because it’s one you repeatedly ignore.

- [Polyandry : Of those 34 women, 11 of them were married women of other living men.](#)

Yep. There it is.

Joseph was sealed to lots of women, and some of them were, in fact, already married at the time. Yet in plural marriages where Joseph supposedly married other men’s wives, many of the supposed cuckolds knew about this arrangement, sanctioned it, and, what’s more, went on to live with their wives as they had before Joseph Smith came on the scene. Never mind Joseph Smith – what husband would allow such a thing? What on earth was going on?

The answer comes from an understanding of the difference between a marriage and a sealing. Because there is a crucial difference, especially in the early years of the Church. And, not to put too fine a point on it, that difference is sex. (More on that later.)

The word “seal” comes from D&C 132:45, where the Lord says to Joseph Smith:

“[W]hatsoever you [i.e. Joseph Smith] seal on earth shall be sealed in heaven; and whatsoever you bind on earth, in my name and by my word, saith the Lord, it shall be eternally bound in the heavens.”

This “sealing power” is thought by Mormons to be identical to the authority given to the apostle Peter in the New Testament as written in Matthew 18:18 – “Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” Binding/sealing a couple with this authority perpetuates family bonds beyond the grave.

Today, the word “sealing” is often synonymous with “marriage,” but not always. Children, for instance, are “sealed” in temple ceremonies to their parents. Joseph saw all of this as part of his role in the “restitution of all things” mentioned in Acts 3:21. That included restoring both the sealing, or binding, power mentioned earlier, along with the ancient practice of plural marriage.

Evidence suggests that what happened in the so-called “polyandry” was that Joseph drew a distinction between sealing and regular marriage. Some married women were sealed to Joseph, but, in this life, they stayed faithful to their husbands, who were aware of the sealing and consented to it. Many more women, including my own great-great grandmother, were sealed to Joseph after his death.

Back to the sexual question, the record indicates that Joseph had sex with women to whom he was both married and sealed. When Joseph was sealed to a woman but not married to her, sexual relations would have constituted adultery, and they were absent from the relationship. There is no solid evidence to suggest that Joseph slept with the women who remained married to other men, and not much in the way of flimsy evidence, either.

Those who claim that the doctrine of plural marriage was a convenient outlet for Joseph’s libido overlook the reality of how Joseph actually conducted himself in living this principle. There were no orgies or harems. A large number of his plural wives got a wedding ceremony and nothing else. Offshoots of the mainstream LDS Church, notably the Community of Christ, insist Joseph couldn’t possibly have been a polygamist. After all, how could a man be married to over two dozen women and father children with none of them? The answer is that Joseph did not view polygamy as a license for licentiousness, and how he lived this doctrine defies the modern caricatures that have sprung up around it.

Again, understand the narrowness of my point. I’m not saying polygamy is wonderful, and I concede it is strange and disturbing. What I am saying is that it wasn’t the sexual free-for-all that your suggesting with accusations of polyandry, and all this needs to be understood in its proper historical and theological context.

Also, I’m probably going to have to say the word “sex” a lot, mainly to deny its inclusion in Joseph’s non-marriage sealings. I know that, puritanically speaking, we got into trouble about this sort of thing when we had to acknowledge that God has genitalia, but the main objection to polyandry is the idea that Joseph was sleeping with other men’s wives, and Joseph wasn’t sleeping with other men’s wives. He was sealed to them in a religious ceremony, and then these women continued sleeping with their lawful husbands.

That’s an odd arrangement by modern standards, surely, but it’s not consistent with the caricature you’re trying to perpetuate.

**Among them being Apostle Orson Hyde, who was sent on his mission to dedicate Palestine when Joseph secretly married his wife, Marinda Hyde .**

Probably not true. The reports are conflicting, and Marinda signed an affidavit asserting the sealing happened in 1843, not 1842, the time Orson was on a mission. John D. Lee says that Orson both knew and approved - “Hyde’s wife, with his consent, was sealed to Joseph for an



eternal state.” Marinda Hyde continued to live with Orson Hyde long afterward, and she was sealed to him after his death, even though they had been divorced. It has never been church policy to seal a woman to two men, so the fact that Marinda was sealed to Orson is unusual. Regardless, there is zero evidence that Joseph and Marinda had a sexual relationship.

Church Historian Elder Marlin K. Jensen and unofficial apologists like FairMormon do not dispute the polyandry.

They do, in fact, at least in the way you’re describing it. Your link to Elder Jensen’s remark cuts him off after three short sentences, so we can’t follow up, but the Church’s essay, as I quoted at the outset of this section, points out that the typical definition of polyandry does not describe what happened in these instances, and that Joseph did not involve “shared financial, residential, and sexual resources.”



**Nancy Marinda Johnson Hyde**  
*Perhaps sealed to, but never married  
to Joseph Smith*

UPDATE: The Church admits the polyandry in its October 2014 [Plural Marriage in Kirtland and Nauvoo](#) essay.

As referenced twice above, your statement is misleading, if not wholly incorrect.

The Church and apologists now attempt to justify these polyandrous marriages by theorizing that they probably didn’t include sexual relations and thus were “eternal” or “dynastic” sealings only. How is not having sex with a living man’s wife on earth only to take her away from him in the eternities to be one of your [Joseph] forty wives any better or any less immoral?

For two obvious reasons:

First, if Joseph isn’t a prophet, then the “sealing” is meaningless, which is why disbelieving husbands had no problem with their wives participating in a ceremony they thought had no efficacy. You, Jeremy, also don’t believe this sealing means anything, so why would you call it immoral if it’s an empty exercise in superstition? If you’re concerned that this is actually going to accomplish something, then you are conceding the validity of Joseph’s prophetic authority and the divine origins of plural marriage.

Second, these are consenting adults. Jedidiah M. Grant, Heber J. Grant’s father and my great-great-grandfather, stood proxy for Joseph Smith when he married my great-great-grandmother, Rachel R. Ivins, who was sealed to the Prophet after his death. To say Joseph is going to “take her away” is to presume that neither Jedidiah nor Rachel agreed to this arrangement. While that certainly seems strange to us, everyone involved made that decision of their own volition, so nobody was being “taken away” from anybody else.

If you want to argue that girls like Helen Mar Kimball, who was 14 at the time of her dynastic, non-sexual sealing, were too young to consent to such a thing, you’re still

conceding that Joseph’s authority would result in her being married to Joseph Smith after she died, and, again, conceding that God sanctioned plural marriage in the first place and will honor it in the life to come.

During the summer of 1841, Joseph Smith tested Helen Mar Kimball’s father, Apostle Heber C. Kimball, by asking Heber to give his wife, Vilate – Helen’s mother – to Joseph:



**Vilate Kimball**  
Never sealed to and never married  
to Joseph Smith

*“...shortly after Heber's return from England, he was introduced to the doctrine of plural marriage directly through a startling test—a sacrifice that shook his very being and challenged his faith to the ultimate. He had already sacrificed homes, possessions, friends, relatives, all worldly rewards, peace, and tranquility for the Restoration. Nothing was left to place on the altar save his life, his children, and his wife.*

*Then came the Abrahamic test. Joseph demanded for himself what to Heber was the unthinkable, his*

*Vilate. Totally crushed spiritually and emotionally, Heber touched neither food nor water for three days and three nights and continually sought confirmation and comfort from God. On the evening of the third day, some kind of assurance came, and Heber took Vilate to the upper room of Joseph's store on Water Street. The Prophet wept at this act of faith, devotion, and obedience. Joseph had never intended to take Vilate. It was all a test.”*

*– Heber C. Kimball: Mormon Patriarch and Pioneer, p.93*

If Joseph’s polygamous/polyandrous marriages are innocuous “dynastic sealings” meant for the afterlife, as the Church and apologists are now theorizing, and Joseph wanted to “dynastically link” himself to the Kimball family, why was Apostle Heber C. Kimball so troubled by Joseph’s command for his wife that he “touched neither food nor water for three days and three nights”?

Because the test clearly involved a proposal that wasn’t for that kind of sealing. Heber C. Kimball calls this an “Abrahamic test.” That’s significant, as it is compelling evidence that Joseph recognized genuine polyandry as being transgressive of the plural marriage revelation.





**Abraham and Isaac by Titian**  
(Note: Painting may not be historically accurate.)

People talk about Abrahamic tests as if they're just really, really difficult things, but they're far more than that. Abraham was asked to do something *he knew was morally wrong*. Abraham knew that murder was contrary to the law of God, so asking him to kill anyone would have been excruciatingly difficult. But to ask him to kill Isaac? The birthright son and the heir to the Abrahamic covenant? He was born by miraculous means, yet suddenly the same God who allowed an old woman to bear a child is now asking Abraham to murder that child. The amount of inner torture this caused Abraham is unfathomable.

So if this truly was an Abrahamic test for Heber C. Kimball - and all evidence suggests that it was - the same kinds of rules apply. Heber had received a blessing saying that he and Vilate would never be separated, and then came this request. Heber knew, then, that what Joseph

was asking him to do was contrary to the laws of God, and he was being asked to do it to prove his loyalty. Personally, I have a problem with that. Indeed, I have a problem with all Abrahamic tests, especially the first one, because I'm pretty sure that if such a thing were asked of me, I would flatly refuse.

But that's not the issue you raise here. You're saying that this is proof that all of Joseph's sealings to married women were like this test. That's like saying that all prophets actually sacrificed their firstborn sons. Heber C. Kimball recognized this was uniquely different from the other sealings, strongly suggesting that the dynastic "polyandry" that actually happened wasn't like this at all.

- Out of the 34 women, 7 of them were teenage girls as young as 14-years-old.

Precisely one of the girls Joseph was sealed to – Helen Mar Kimball – was 14 years old. The rest were older than sixteen, which was marriageable age in the 19th Century. Many of them were middle-aged and older than Joseph. And the evidence strongly suggests that the sealing to Helen Mar Kimball was a sealing only, not a marriage. She continued to live with her parents, who approved the sealing, and Joseph was dead a year later. No sex.

Joseph was 37-years-old when he married 14-year-old Helen Mar Kimball, twenty-three years his junior. Even by 19th century standards, this is shocking.

It's also not true, at least in the way you're implying. Joseph was sealed in a dynastic union to Helen Mar Kimball, not married in the shocking – i.e. sexual – sense. He never lived with her, and he never slept with her. Helen later married Horace Whitney when she was 18 and bore him eleven children.

UPDATE: The Church now admits that Joseph Smith married Helen Mar Kimball "several months before her 15th birthday" in its October 2014 Plural Marriage in Kirtland and Nauvoo essay.

From that same essay:

Helen Mar Kimball spoke of her sealing to Joseph as being "for eternity alone," suggesting that the relationship did not involve sexual relations. After Joseph's death, Helen remarried and became an articulate defender of him and of plural marriage.



**Helen Mar Kimball**  
*Sealed to, but never married to  
Joseph Smith*

Joseph took 14-year-old Helen Mar Kimball's hand in marriage after his disturbing Abrahamic test on her father, Heber, while promising Helen and her family eternal salvation and exaltation if she accepted:

*“Just previous to my father’s starting upon his last mission but one, to the Eastern States, he taught me the principle of Celestial marriage, and having a great desire to be connected with the Prophet Joseph, he offered me to him; this I afterwards learned from the Prophet’s own mouth. My father had but one Ewe lamb, but willingly laid her upon the alter: how cruel this seemed to the mother whose heartstrings were already stretched until they were ready to snap asunder, for he had taken Sarah Noon to wife and she thought she had made sufficient sacrifice, but the Lord required more. I will pass over the temptations which I had during the twenty four hours after my father introduced to me the principle and asked me if I would be sealed to Joseph, who came next morning and with my parents I heard him teach and explain the principle of Celestial marriage - after which he said to me, ‘If you will take this step, it will ensure your eternal salvation and exaltation and that of your father’s household and all of your kindred.’”*

*This promise was so great that I willingly gave myself to purchase so glorious a reward. None but God and angels could see my mother’s bleeding heart – when Joseph asked her if she was willing, she replied, ‘If Helen is willing, I have nothing more to say.’ She had witnessed the sufferings of others, who were older and who better understood the step they were taking, and to see her child, who had scarcely seen her fifteenth summer, following in the same thorny path, in her mind she saw the misery which was as sure to come as the sun was to rise and set; but it was all hidden from me.”*

– Helen Mar Kimball Whitney 1881 Autobiography, A Woman’s View, BYU Religious Studies Center, 1997, p.482-487 12

Why all the agony and anguish if this was an innocuous “Dynastic Linking” and sealing for the afterlife?

Who on earth ever said these sealings were “innocuous?” You may believe that there is no afterlife, or that Joseph’s sealings will not endure there, but the Kimballs clearly believed otherwise. This was an act of extraordinary significance to them, even though it seems silly to you. The point is not that plural marriage was easy; the point is that it was not the opportunity for sexual predation that you insist that it was.

Why did it seem “cruel” to Vilate, “whose heartstrings were already stretched”?

Because, according to the source you quote, Heber had “already taken Sarah Noon to wife and she thought she had made sufficient sacrifice.” Again, all the early accounts of plural marriage suggest that they viewed it as a severe trial. It was not the blithe sexual free-for-all that you characterize it to be.

- Among the women and girls was a mother-daughter set and three sister sets. Several of these girls included Joseph’s own foster daughters who lived and worked in the Smith home (Lawrence sisters, Partridge sisters, Lucy Walker).

I take issue with the term “foster daughters,” as it is not one that Joseph or any of these women would have recognized. It is true that Joseph had legal responsibility for these



women, but it is a presentist error to assume that their situation correlates with a 21st Century understanding of what foster parenting is.

If some of these marriages were non-sexual “dynastic” “eternal” sealings only, as theorized by the Church and apologists, why would Joseph need to be sealed to a mother and daughter set? The mother would be sealed to the daughter and would become part of Joseph’s afterlife family through the sealing to her mother.

Thank you for clarifying your objection here. In your last version of your letter, you just raised this issue as if it were self-explanatory as to why this was problematic. I would speculate that this was necessary because both mother and daughter would want to claim a spouse in the eternities. The family relationship is essential, yes, but there is a unique relationship between husband and wife in the Celestial Kingdom that does not come solely from being part of a dynastic line. (See D&C 131: 2-4).

I would also speculate that this is strong evidence that the relationship in mortality was not sexual, as I think either mother or daughter - probably both - would complain if Joseph were having sex with either or both of them. No such complaints are recorded, even long after Joseph’s death.

Further, Joseph died without being sealed to his children or to his parents. If a primary motive of these “sealings” was to be connected in the afterlife, as claimed by the Church and apologists, what does it say about Joseph’s priorities and motives to be sealed to a non-related and already married woman ( Patty Sessions) and her 23-year-old already married daughter (Sylvia Sessions) than it was to be sealed to his own parents and to his own children?

I don’t know what’s funnier - that your source for this information is a Reddit “Ask Me Anything” from Brian Hales, the “unofficial apologist” you despise as much as or more than “Tapir Dan,” or that Hales answers your question in the thread itself and you didn’t bother to notice.



**Brian Hales**  
*Despised Apologist and/or  
respected CES Letter source*

“By adoption I think you mean child-to-parent sealings?” Hales says in his AMA. “None were performed during Joseph’s lifetime because they can only be performed in a temple.” There’s your answer.

As to what it says “about Joseph’s priorities and motives,” this may well have been why Joseph’s top priority in his final days was the completion of the Nauvoo Temple, but he was tragically murdered before these ordinances could be performed during his mortal life. They were, of course, performed by proxy on his behalf after his death, as Joseph was confident they would be.

• Joseph was married/sealed to at least 22 other women and girls before finally being sealed to his first legal wife, Emma, on May 28, 1843. Emma was not aware of most of these other girls/women and their marriages to her husband.

And you know this how? We have no idea how many of these marriages were known to Emma. Later in life, she refused to admit that Joseph had ever practiced plural marriage, so she's largely an unreliable witness, although we do have records of her knowledge and approval of several of these marriages. You are welcome to presume whatever you like, but that is all it is - presumption on your part, not demonstrable historical fact.

Why was “elect lady ” Emma the 23rd wife to be sealed to Joseph?

Because Emma refused to accept plural marriage, and, contrary to your accusations, Joseph didn't force women to be sealed to him, not even his own wife.

Some of the marriages to these women included promises by Joseph of eternal life to the girls and their families...

Yes.

Richard Bushman, in answering the question as to why a husband would consent to having their wives sealed to Joseph, said that the “only answer seems to be the explanation Joseph gave when he asked a woman for her consent: they and their families would benefit spiritually from a close tie to the Prophet.” (Rough Stone Rolling, p. 439) This kind of explanation demonstrates that these marriages functioned in a spiritual rather than a carnal context. If Joseph really were just trying to bed as many women as he possibly could, he constructed a very inefficient vehicle for that process.

... or threats that he (Joseph) was going to be slain by an angel with a drawn sword if the girls didn't marry him.

No.

You are conflating two stories into one in order to make Joseph look as seedy as possible. There was an angel with a drawn sword connected to plural marriage, but it's a story with quite a different context than the one you're suggesting.

All the accounts of the sword-bearing angel come after Joseph's lifetime in reminiscences of those close to him. In every one, the angel appeared due to Joseph's reluctance to engage in plural marriage as a general principle, not because he had to marry any specific woman. Not one of the accounts of the angel has Joseph telling anyone, “If you don't marry me, an angel will kill me.” If that happened, even once, it'd be very hard to imagine that a woman wouldn't have mentioned it. None of them do.



Angel with a Sword  
by Hans Melming  
15th Century

I have a problem with this. This is Warren Jeffs territory.

Actually, this is precisely the opposite of the way Warren Jeffs, a convicted pedophile, conducted the principle of plural marriage. Joseph saw plural marriage as a religious principle to bind families together, not a license for sexual adventurism. He was sealed to dozens of women with whom he had no sexual relations, and he did not have sexual relations with any underage women. There is no evidence of coercion, and there is solid evidence that he took no for an answer. Jeffs, on the other hand, forced underage girls to marry and have sex with himself and other men or be damned forever. You're trying to drag Joseph Smith into Warren Jeffs territory, but the facts don't support you in that effort.

This is not the Joseph Smith I grew up learning about in the Church and having a testimony of.

That's because this is not the Joseph Smith that is Joseph Smith. The Warren Jeffs-like Joseph Smith that you're describing here is a grotesque caricature of the real thing.

Keep in mind that of the 34 women you're talking about, 33 of them were married after 1841. By June of 1844, Joseph Smith was dead. All of these weddings, then, took place during a compressed three-and-a-half year time frame that was the busiest period of Joseph's life, when he was doing a great many of the things you were telling people about on your mission. This was when he was building the second-largest city in Illinois and the largest religious building in the country, as well as leading a rapidly expanding church and, oh yeah, running for President of the United States. For most of these sealings, the wives got a ceremony and nothing more.

It's noteworthy, too, that Joseph fathered nine children with Emma, yet, as far as has been verified, he had no children with any of his other wives. That alone is the basis for the specious RLDS claim that Joseph couldn't have been a polygamist after all. While that doesn't prove any such thing, it does suggest that sex was not the only or even the primary motivation for these marriages. It demonstrates that plural marriage does not negate everything else Joseph Smith was and did, and that you're condemning him based on a series of assumptions that don't match the record.

This is not the Joseph Smith that I sang "Praise to the Man" to or taught others about two years in the mission field.

Are you saying that when you served a mission, you didn't know Joseph Smith was a polygamist? When investigators brought up polygamy, did you assume they were lying? That's astonishing to me. I don't know how anyone could spend more than a week in the mission field and not know this information.

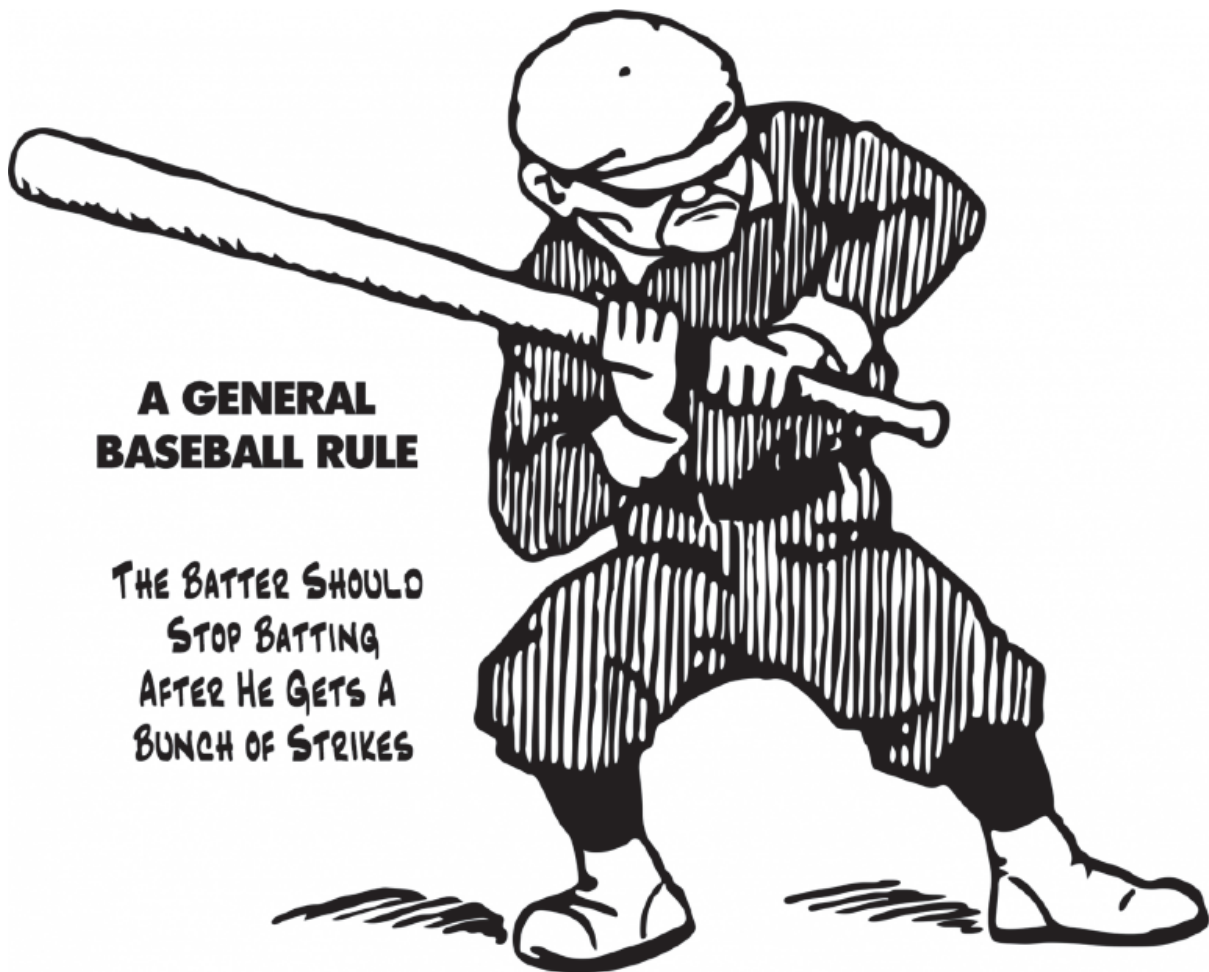
A lot of members don't realize that there is a set of very specific and bizarre rules outlined in [Doctrine & Covenants 132](#) (still in LDS canon despite President Hinckley publicly stating that polygamy is not doctrinal) on how polygamy is to be practiced.

You're getting very legalistic here. The context of President Hinckley's statement suggests that he was not disavowing previous polygamy but, instead, drawing a distinction between the past and present. He was absolutely correct in saying that it is not doctrinal to practice



plural marriage today. I can think of no faster route to excommunication from the Church than becoming a polygamist. His statement is consistent with the passage in Jacob 2: monogamy is the doctrinal norm, but there are periods in history where the Lord requires polygamous exceptions to the rule.

As for the “specific and bizarre rules,” I find that a puzzling construct. Aren’t rules, by their nature, supposed to be specific? There are specific rules as to how to play baseball, for instance. If there weren’t, the game would be unplayable. (“Rule 17: The batter should probably stop batting after he gets a bunch of strikes.”) As to the idea that “a lot of members don’t realize” what these rules are, one wonders why they can’t read the revelation itself, which the Church has been printing as scripture for 175 years or so.



As to whether the rules are “bizarre,” we’ll address those with the examples you provide below.

**It is the kind of revelation you’d expect from the likes of Warren Jeffs to his FLDS followers.**

No, it is the kind of revelation *you’d* expect from the likes of Warren Jeffs to his FLDS followers. Or, to be more precise, you provide a flawed analysis of the revelation because you deliberately misinterpret Section 132 to match your own expectations, which are rooted in inaccurate and distorted information. This tells me a great deal about your expectations and nothing about Section 132.

The only form of polygamy permitted by D&C 132 is a union with a virgin after first giving the opportunity to the first wife to consent to the marriage.

This is inaccurate, but before I point out why it's inaccurate, I want to take several steps back and point out just how far down the rabbit hole you're going here.

Your initial polygamy objections are premised on the idea that Joseph is Warren Jeffs, and polygamy was just an excuse to have sex with a lot of women, including underage girls. That was John C. Bennett's M.O. – his “spiritual wifery,” which had no accompanying revelation to justify it, involved him telling married women that they should sleep with him because they were “spiritually married,” so they could do as they pleased with their husbands none the wiser. That strikes me as a far more effective method to achieve easy sexual gratification – no rules, no boundaries, and no responsibility.

Joseph's plural marriage, however, didn't operate like this at all. Sex was not a part of most of these relationships. He married old widows who never saw him after the ceremony. He was sealed to married women who never had any significant relationship with him, sexual or otherwise, and who continued to live as wives to their existing husbands. And the revelation which authorized Joseph to do all this set very clear guidelines as to what was appropriate and what was not, including strict prohibition of the kind of polyandry of which you accuse him.

So now here you are, criticizing Joseph for practicing polygamy because of his supposed sexual licentiousness, and then you turn around and lay out reasons why Joseph wasn't actually following his own revelation. Do you see the exasperating futility of what you're doing? What if, for instance, it could be demonstrated – and I think it can be demonstrated – that Joseph's behavior was consistent with the boundaries set in Section 132? Would you be okay with polygamy then?

If not, then what's the point?

You've settled on the idea that this is all just Joseph the Fraud creating a flimsy pretext to justify adultery, yet you then nitpick here and adopt a tortured legalistic interpretation of Section 132 to indict him for not living up to the rules of his own fraud. The fact that he made any rules at all is a clear argument against fraud. L. Ron Hubbard, founder of Scientology, once wrote a note to himself in which he said “All men are your slaves.” Surely Joseph could have given himself similar license if Section 132 was solely a product of his imagination. Maybe something like “Verily, I say unto you, my servant Joseph, that all women are given to you to do with as you will.” See how easy that was? Why would a sexual predator make things as difficult as Section 132 did for Joseph?

If it's a fraud, then the rules don't matter, and you're just looking for more excuses to berate Joseph Smith.

Since the CES Letter became your livelihood, it's become undeniably clear that all the questions you ask aren't really questions at all – they're indictments. They couldn't get Al Capone on racketeering and murder charges, so they got him on tax evasion. Similarly, if you can't tear down Joseph Smith on the basis of him being a simple pervert, then you can get

him on the contradictory charge of not following his own revelation. You don't care if people believe that Joseph plagiarized *View of the Hebrews* or the *First Book of Napoleon* just as long as they don't believe the Book of Mormon is what it claims to be. This explodes the premise that you're "just asking questions." You're not inquiring; you're carpet bombing, and you don't care about the collateral damage you're inflicting in the lives of the faithful.

If the first wife doesn't consent, the husband is exempt and may still take an additional wife, but the first wife must at least have the opportunity to consent. In case the first wife doesn't consent, she will be "destroyed." Also, the new wife must be a virgin before the marriage and be completely monogamous after the marriage or she will be destroyed ( D&C 132: 41 & 63 ).



**Al Capone: Tax Evader**  
(But not a polygamist, as far as we know)

You're leaning pretty heavily on the word "virgin," as if God expects every sealing to be preceded by a medical exam a la Princess Diana before her wedding to Prince Charles. I don't think that interpretation of the word is at all consistent with the context or how the Lord views sexual purity.

Consider a victim of sexual assault, who, medically speaking, is no longer a virgin. D&C 132 still provides the doctrinal template for how monogamous sealings are performed today, and under your legalistic interpretation of this scripture, innocent victims would not be eligible to be sealed in the temple, despite the fact that they have done nothing wrong. The more appropriate contextual understanding of the word "virgin" here is a woman who is sexually pure in the eyes of God. So even a repentant adulterer would not be disqualified, because the Lord has said that when we repent of our sins, he will "remember them no more." (D&C 58:42)

As for wives being "destroyed," no doubt that's some pretty harsh language. Almost as harsh as "damned." In the context of what's being described, however, it has a unique spiritual application that you're deliberately missing. D&C 132 outlines the nature of exaltation, which is a continuation of posterity throughout the eternities. But when a river is damned, it does not continue. So it is when a person is damned – their posterity is capped. The destruction being talked about here is not being hit by a meteor or run over by a bus. It's the destruction of the opportunity to have eternal increase.

It is interesting that the only prerequisite that is mentioned for the man is that he must desire another wife: "if any man espouse a virgin, and desire to espouse another..." It does not say that the man must get a specific revelation from the living prophet, although **many members today assume that this is how polygamy was practiced.**

I've added emphasis to that last phrase of yours, because it is critically instructive. Are we wrong to assume that? Why? Generations of Latter-day Saints have read Section 132 and not

reached the conclusion that just wanting more wives was all that was necessary to justify marrying them. But they're all wrong, and you're the only one smart enough to get it right? There are so many other qualifiers in this very complex and far-reaching revelation with regard to when marriage is appropriate, but you cherry-pick a single sentence and presume it simply obliterates everything else.

So much of your rejection of the church is rooted in the idea that every word in the revelations has a singular and self-evident meaning, so when anyone else interprets those words differently than you do, they're obviously wrong. But if that were the case, then there would be no division in the Christian world, as everyone could read the Bible and never disagree about what it means. This is the reason living prophets are essential. Revelation is necessary not just to tell us new doctrine, but to give us greater understanding of the doctrine we already have.

D&C 132 is unequivocal on the point that polygamy is permitted only “to multiply and replenish the earth” and “bear the souls of men.” This would be consistent with the Book of Mormon prohibition on polygamy except in the case where God commands it to “raise up seed .”

There are a lot more words between “multiply and replenish the earth” and “bear the souls of me” that you fail to cite.

Here is the text in its entirety, from verse 62:

“for they are given unto him to multiply and replenish the earth, according to my commandment, **and** to fulfil the promise which was given by my Father before the foundation of the world, **and for their exaltation in the eternal worlds, that they may bear the souls of men.**” [Emphasis added.]

You want to get legalistic? Let's get legalistic. Just for fun, let's parse the living snot out of this.

This clause begins with multiplying and replenishing as a primary justification. Then we get the word “and” thrown in there. You're reading this as if it says “they are given unto him to multiply and replenish the earth, according to my commandment, **in order** to fulfil the promise...”

But that's not what it says.

“And” suggests we're about to get a second reason, not a clarification of the first. In fact, a tight, strict-constructionist reading of this verse reveals three different and distinct reasons for plural marriage, not “only” the replenishment of the earth, as you contend. (You also mistakenly assume that “bear the souls of men” is a reiteration of “multiply and replenish the earth.” That's a pretty big mistake, as I will shortly demonstrate.)

So let's review the three reasons:

1. **Multiply and replenish the earth.**

You're right; D&C 132 is unequivocal on this point, just as it is unequivocal on the two points that follow.

2. **Fulfil [sic] "the promise which was given by my Father before the foundation of the world."**

What promise? This seems to have reference to the "restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began." (Acts 3:21) Joseph cited the need to restore ancient practices to prepare for the Second Coming as a justification for polygamy, and this verse provides a credible scriptural context for him to do so. So just relying on this phrase – plural marriage is acceptable because it fulfills God's promises – would be justification enough for the practice, at least according to D&C 132.

3. **For "their exaltation in the eternal worlds, *that* they may bear the souls of men."**

Oh, this one's my favorite. Notice the emphasis I added on the "that." The word appears there to create a conditional clause. You claim the bearing of souls is the same thing as multiplying and replenishing the earth, but the actual text insists that the bearing of the souls of men will only be made possible by "exaltation in the eternal worlds." This is a promise of eternal increase, of bearing souls after the earth is no longer around to be replenished. Big, big difference.

And right here, with Reason #3, we have a clear rationale and justification for Joseph being sealed to women with whom he made no attempts to multiply and replenish the earth – i.e. no sex.

**AGAIN, CONTRARY TO D&C 132, THE FOLLOWING SUMMARIZES HOW POLYGAMY WAS ACTUALLY PRACTICED BY JOSEPH SMITH**

- Joseph married 11 women who were already married. Multiple husbands = Polyandry .

Sealings, not marriages. No sex. Not polyandry.

- Unions without the knowledge or consent of the husband, in cases of polyandry.

The evidence says precisely the opposite - we have records of husbands in these cases both knew and consented, as in the case of Ruth Sayers. From an 1887 account:

While there the strongest affection sprang up between the Prophet Joseph and Mr. Sayers. The latter not attaching much importance to the/ theory of a future life

insisted that his wife Ruth/ should be sealed to the Prophet for eternity, as he himself should only claim her in this life. She was/ accordingly the sealed to the Prophet in Emma Smith's presence and thus were became numbered among the Prophets plural wives. She however though she/ continued to live with Mr. Sayers / remained with her husband until his death.

Whereas we have no records proving Joseph Smith was sealed to legally married women without the knowledge and consent of their legal husbands, or that Joseph had sexual relations with any such husbands. No polyandry.

- These married women continued to live as husband and wife with their first husband after marrying Joseph.

Which is compelling evidence that Joseph wasn't sleeping with them. Not polyandry, and no sex.

- A union with Apostle Orson Hyde's wife while he was on a mission ([Marinda Hyde](#)).

A disputed date, and evidence suggests Orson both knew and consented. Sealing only, not polyandry. Also no sex.

- A union with a newlywed and pregnant woman ([Zina Huntington](#)).

Your link provides no evidence she was pregnant at the time of the sealing. (That's not to say that she wasn't, but only that I can't find any record of it.) Regardless, it was an eternity-only sealing, not a marriage, and one to which her husband consented, as your source admits.

From an [interview](#) with Zina Huntington in 1898:

Q. "Then it is a fact, Mrs. [Zina] Young, is it not, that you married Mr. Smith at the same time you were married to Mr. [Henry] Jacobs?"

A. "What right have you to ask such questions? I was sealed to Joseph Smith for eternity."

Q. "Mrs. Young, you claim, I believe, that you were not married to him for time?"

A. "For eternity. I was married to Mr. Jacobs, but the marriage was unhappy and we parted."

Married for time and not eternity means sealing, not marriage. Notice Zina corrects the questioner who claims she was married by saying she was sealed to Joseph and married to Mr. Jacobs. Not polyandry, and no sex.

- Threats that Joseph would be slain by an angel with a drawn sword if they did not enter into the union ([Zina Huntington](#), [Almera Woodard Johnson](#), [Mary Lightner](#)).

No. As noted above, none of those women say Joseph told them he would be slain if they didn't marry him. They say Joseph told him an angel with a drawn sword would kill him if he didn't enter into plural marriage as a general principle. Zina initially turned Joseph down, which she would not likely have done had Joseph told her his life was at stake.



- Unions without the knowledge or consent of first wife Emma including to teenagers who worked with Emma in the Smith home such as the Partridge sisters and the Lawrence girls.

Very strange that you would cite these as examples of marriages performed without Emma's knowledge or consent, as records show that Emma was aware of and approved the marriages to both the Partridges and the Lawrences.



Emily Partridge  
Married to Joseph with Emma's consent

From Emily Partridge:

Emma had consented to give Joseph two wives if he would let her choose them for him, and... she choose Eliza and myself... She afterwards gave Sarah and Maria Lawrence to him, and they lived in the house as his wives.

- Promises of salvation and exaltation for the girls and/or their entire families.

We've already covered this, but how is this contrary to D&C 132? Isn't that what you're supposedly "summarizing" by simply repeating, word for word, an assertion you made just a few pages earlier?

#### JOSEPH'S POLYGAMY ALSO INCLUDED:

- Dishonesty in public sermons, 1835 D&C 101:4 , denials by Joseph Smith that he was practicing polygamy...

Richard Bushman in *Rough Stone Rolling* refers to these as "carefully worded" denials, which is the accurate way to describe them. Joseph's most vigorous denials were directed at the idea that he was an adulterer, which he insisted – and which he believed – he was not. He also leaned heavily on the idea that his only legal wife was Emma, which was true. I think it likely that a fraud wouldn't have carefully worded anything and lied with impunity – the John C. Bennett and/or Donald Trump model – and taken no pains to craft evasive answers that were technically true but still misleading.

Understand, however, that I agree with you here to an extent. I don't think there's any question that Joseph was not fully honest in these statements. He justified it to himself by the belief that he was protecting himself, his family, and others engaged in plural marriage from physical harm. I like to think he took the "Abraham-said-his-wife-was-his-sister" approach. Even since the beginning, when Adam had to choose between not eating the fruit and having children, human prophets have been forced, like all of us, to make difficult choices between two bad options.

Joseph's destruction of the *Nauvoo Expositor* that exposed his polygamy and which destruction of the printing press initiated the chain of events that led to Joseph's death.

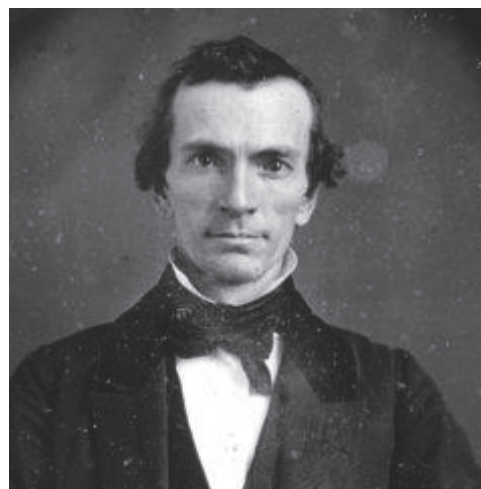
Yes. I remember listening to Truman Madsen's hagiographic Joseph Smith tapes on my mission, where he describes this event in almost your exact words. There's been no attempt, that I know of, by the Church to justify the Nauvoo Expositor destruction. Elder Ben B. Banks, former member of the presidency of the Seventy, [told an audience at BYU Idaho](#) that "both friends and enemies of the Prophet now agree that the act, legal or not, was unwise and inflammatory and was the major immediate factor that culminated in the Prophet's death." Elder Banks was my first mission president and a beloved mentor. He performed my wedding in the Salt Lake Temple. A more kind, faithful – and orthodox – Latter-day Saint has never lived. If Ben Banks agrees with you here, I don't think there's anyone who would dispute this.

Joseph's marriage to Fanny Alger was described by Oliver Cowdery as a "[dirty, nasty, filthy affair](#)" – Rough Stone Rolling, p.323

It was. (Actually, he said "scrape" instead of "affair.") Although, as *Rough Stone Rolling* makes clear on the same page, Joseph made no effort to deny the relationship, but only to deny that the relationship was adultery.

Oliver's life has always fascinated me. He was the first person baptized in this dispensation; he was indispensable in the translation of the Book of Mormon; he was one of the Three Witnesses; he saw John the Baptist and Peter, James, and John; he was side-by-side with Joseph when the Savior Himself appeared at the Kirtland Temple dedication.

If all these miraculous experiences were nothing but frauds, Oliver could have profited tremendously by bringing down Joseph Smith's house of cards. Yet even when his anger at Joseph drove him out of the Church, he never denied any of this, and he came back to the Church late in his life, after Joseph was dead and despite having no position of prominence or authority.



**Oliver Cowdery**  
*Why didn't he expose the "fraud?"*

Apparently, whatever he thought of the Alger relationship, Oliver was ultimately able to accept that Joseph Smith's character was not so soiled by plural marriage as to invalidate his prophetic role.

William McLellin reported a conversation he had with Emma Smith in 1847, which [account](#) is accepted by both LDS and non-LDS historians, describing how Emma discovered her husband's affair with Fanny Alger:

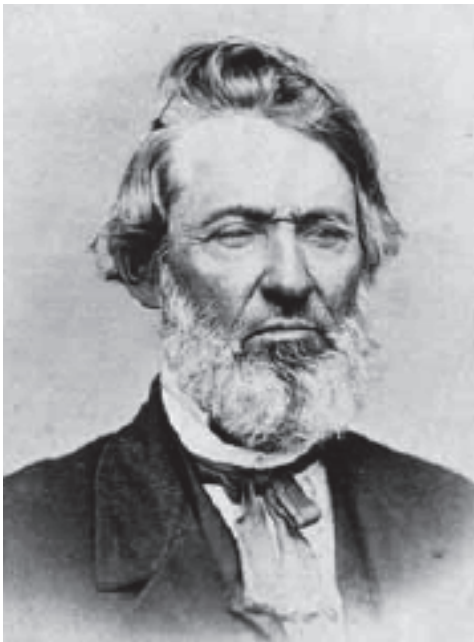
*"One night she [Emma] missed Joseph and Fanny Alger. She went to the barn and saw him and Fanny in the barn together alone. She looked through a crack and saw the transaction!!! She told me this story too was verily true."*

By saying this account is “accepted” by LDS historians, you are overstating your case considerably. You link to Brian Hales’s page as your source, where Hales points out that “[m]ost of the above details came from late and antagonistic sources. Therefore, readers may want to weigh what we ‘know’ in light of those factors.”

And, indeed, there are at least two reasons to be deeply skeptical of McLellin’s account.

First, McLellin was a bitter enemy of the Church in 1847, having been excommunicated nine years earlier. At one point, he ransacked Joseph’s home and later asked for permission to flog the prophet after he had been arrested.

From The 1864 Millennial Star:



**William McLellin**  
*Dubious Source; Wannabe Flogger*

“While Joseph was in prison at Richmond, Mo., Mr. McLellin, who was a large and active man, went to the sheriff and asked for the privilege of flogging the Prophet; permission was granted, on condition that Joseph would fight. The sheriff made McLellin's earnest request known to Joseph, who consented to fight, if his irons were taken off. McLellin then refused to fight, unless he could have a club, to which Joseph was perfectly willing; but the sheriff would not allow them to fight on such unequal terms.”

This does not strike me as the kind of man who would hesitate to tell tall tales about Joseph Smith.

Second, in 1847, Emma was refusing to admit that her husband had ever been a polygamist. The idea that she would tell a story like this about Joseph to anyone is unlikely, but that she would tell it to a man who had ransacked her home just a few years before

utterly defies credulity.

In addition, this isn’t a contemporaneous account - McLellin wrote this story way, way after the fact in an 1872 letter, one more reason that a healthy dose of skepticism would be wise.

[LDS polygamy apologists further discuss Emma’s disturbing discovery and the aftermath here .](#)

How can “they” - i.e. one person, Brian Hales - “further discuss” something in the identical article as your first link on the subject? I would think further discussion is not the same thing as linking to the same article twice. In addition, the “further” discussion centers around a dubious statement from Ann Eliza Webb Young, a deeply antagonistic, unreliable source who wasn’t even born when Joseph was married to Fanny.

The fact that what Brian Hales chooses to “further discuss” undermines your point suggests that, once again, you haven’t bothered to read your own source.

Joseph was practicing polygamy before the sealing authority was given. LDS historian, Richard Bushman, states: “There is evidence that Joseph was a polygamist by 1835” – Rough Stone Rolling, p.323. Plural marriages are rooted in the notion of “sealing” for both time and eternity. The “sealing” power was not restored until April 3, 1836 when Elijah appeared to Joseph in the Kirtland Temple and conferred the sealing keys upon him. So, Joseph’s marriage to Fanny Alger in 1833 was illegal under both the laws of the land and under any theory of divine authority; it was adultery.

The best evidence suggests that Joseph received the revelation now recorded in Section 132 sometime in 1831 when he was engaged in his translation of the Bible. Such a revelation would have given him the authority to perform a plural marriage for time only, but not for eternity until the sealing power was restored. So in the case of Fanny Alger, we have a case of a marriage – including sex – that was not a sealing. There were several other cases where this happened even after the sealing keys were restored. In addition, we don’t have a firm date on when the marriage took place, and some scholars place it after the Kirtland Temple dedication.

D&C 132:63 very clearly states that the only purpose of polygamy is to “multiply and replenish the earth” and “bear the souls of men.”

We’ve just been over this, and you got it wrong then, too. These are also two very different things. See previous.

Why did Joseph marry women who were already married?

He didn’t. He was sealed to women who were already married, but not married to them. See previous.

These women were obviously not virgins, which violated D&C 132:61.

No violation. They were pure in the eyes of God. See previous.

Zina Huntington had been married seven and a half months and was about six months pregnant with her first husband’s baby at the time she married Joseph; clearly she didn’t need any more help to “bear the souls of men.”

Say it with me now: sealing, not marriage, no sex. See above.

How about the consent of the first wife, which receives so much attention in D&C 132? Emma was unaware of most of Joseph’s plural marriages, at least until after the fact, which violated D&C 132.

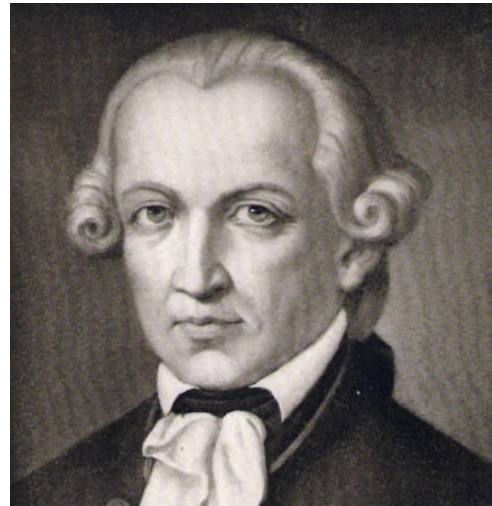
Can you provide me a number of marriages of which Emma was aware? No, because you don’t know, and neither do I, and neither does anyone else. We do know there are some marriages where she was aware and consenting. And D&C 132, actually makes a provision

that the man is not subject to the “law of Sarah,” i.e. the consent of the first wife, if the first wife rejects the principle altogether. This put Joseph in the position of having to choose Emma or the Lord, and I doubt either you or I would have fared better in walking that line if placed in a similar predicament.

The secrecy of the marriages and the private and public denials by Joseph Smith are not congruent with honest behavior.

That is a rather Kant-ian approach to the problem.

Immanuel Kant was the philosopher who insisted that honesty was a “categorical imperative,” and that it was never appropriate to tell a lie under any circumstances. The famous example to illustrate this comes from the story of “Kant’s Axe,” where Kant posits that if an axe-wielding murderer shows up on your doorstep and asks where your best friend is so he can go kill him, the “categorical imperative” of honesty required you to answer him truthfully, even if it were likely to result in your friend’s grisly death.



*Immanuel Kant*  
*Philosopher; Axe Aficionado*

From my perspective, an honest answer in that situation would be entirely immoral. Yes, honesty is important. But my friend is more important. In that situation, he represents a higher value – love trumping honesty.

There are plenty of other situations, most far less dramatic, where I feel another value can trump honesty. What did you think of my talk, Bishop? Well, Sister Jones, you had nothing interesting to say, and I had a hard time paying attention to you because I couldn’t take my eyes off of that honker you call a nose. Dad, did you enjoy my piano recital? Why, no, son, I thought it was deathly boring, and you may have been the worst one up there. Honey, does this dress make me look fat? Oh my, yes. You look like a whale in that thing!

In those examples, I believe kindness is far more important than honesty. Values are often competing priorities, and they can’t all be satisfied in every case.

The choices in mortality are seldom choices between good and evil. (Should I go to Church this Sunday or rob a bank instead? Maybe I’ll flip a coin.) They’re usually choices between less good and more good. Joseph firmly believed, and not without good reason, that the lives of many good people were in danger if he were to be fully forthright about polygamy. In hindsight, as you read his “carefully worded” denials, you can see the struggle and his attempt to be as honest as he felt was safe. You may have chosen differently in that case, but surely you wouldn’t tell an axe murderer where your best friend was.



Emma was not informed of most of these marriages until after the fact.

Again, you know this how? See above.

The Saints did not know what was going on behind the scenes as polygamy did not become common knowledge until 1852 when Brigham Young revealed it in Utah.

Given that roughly 25% of the Church was practicing plural marriage as they crossed the plains, this is a ridiculous statement. The 1852 declaration of plural marriage was an announcement to the world, not a statement to the Church, which was living with the doctrine firsthand.

Joseph Smith did everything he could to keep the practice secret from the Church and the public.

Actually, there are several incidences where Joseph tried to teach the principle and was disheartened by the Saints' unwillingness to accept it.

In fact, Joseph's desire to keep this part of his life a secret is what ultimately contributed to his death when he ordered the destruction of the Nauvoo Expositor, which dared publicly expose his private behavior in June 1844. This event initiated a chain of events that ultimately led to his death at the Carthage jail.

I know of no-one, in or out of the Church, who denies that destruction of the Nauvoo Expositor was the catalyst that precipitated the murder of Joseph Smith. I do, however, think it's incorrect to somehow characterize the Expositor as a sort of principled, just-the-facts exposé of polygamy. Rhetorically, it was way, way over the top. Joseph was characterized as one of the "blackest and basest scoundrels that has appeared upon the stage of human existence since the days of Nero, and Caligula" intent on "spreading death, devastation and ruin throughout you [sic] happy country like a tornado."

Yeah, Woodward and Bernstein this ain't.

Consider the following denial made by Joseph Smith to Latter-day Saints in Nauvoo in May 1844 – a mere few weeks before his death:

*"...What a thing it is for a man to be accused of committing adultery, and having seven wives, when I can only find one. I am the same man, and as innocent as I was fourteen years ago; and I can prove them all perjurers."*

– *History of the Church, Vol. 6, Chapter 19, p.411*

Again, look at the actual text. As Bushman pointed out above, it's "carefully worded." Joseph full statement here is vigorously denying adultery, of which Joseph believed he was not guilty, as he was married to the women with whom he was having sexual relations. The seven wives reference in the thing is the only direct reference to polygamy, and Joseph is leaning on the idea that Emma is his only legal wife, which, too, was true. Misleading? Yes. But not nearly as brazenly dishonest as you're suggesting.



It is a matter of historical fact that Joseph had secretly taken over 30 plural wives by May 1844 when he made the above denial that he was ever a polygamist.

He's denying he's an adulterer, not a polygamist, and many of the wives were sealings, not marriages, no sex.

If you go to [Familysearch.org](http://Familysearch.org) – an LDS-owned genealogy website – you can clearly see that Joseph Smith had many wives. The Church's new October 2014 [Plural Marriage in Kirtland and Nauvoo](#) essay acknowledges that Joseph Smith was a polygamist.

Those facts have been openly acknowledged by the Church for over 150 years.

The facts speak for themselves – from 100% LDS sources – that Joseph Smith was dishonest.

See previous. Joseph tried to walk the line between honesty and keeping himself and his family safe, and, like all human beings trying to satisfy conflicting values, he wasn't always able to do.

The following 1835 edition of Doctrine & Covenants revelations bans polygamy:  
[1835 Doctrine & Covenants 101:4](#): “Inasmuch as this Church of Christ has been reproached with the crime of fornication, and polygamy: we declare that we believe, that one man should have one wife; and one woman, but one husband, except in case of death, when either is at liberty to marry again.”

There's that careful wording again. Notice the use of the word “but” in reference to women, but not to men. Women are therefore explicitly prohibited from having more than one husband, while men “should have one wife,” without the explicit prohibition of having more than one. Also keep in mind that plural marriage, at least in the minds of the Saints, was not “polygamy” as understood by 19th Century folk – i.e. harems and concubines and seraglios. Even after plural marriage became public, the Utah saints went out of their way to distance themselves from those kinds of practices. This revelation is trying to put some distance between those two versions of polygyny, which, in practice, really were quite different from each other.

[1835 Doctrine & Covenants 13:7](#):

“Thou shalt love thy wife with all thy heart, and shall cleave unto her and none else.”

And? A polygamist would be in full agreement with this. A man cleaving unto a woman who is not his wife is adultery.

[1835 Doctrine & Covenants 65:3](#):

“Wherefore, it is lawful that he should have one wife, and they twain shall be one flesh, and all this that the earth might answer the end of its creation.”

Yes. Notably, this uses the language of Genesis, which somehow did not stop many of the ancient patriarchs from practicing polygamy. It states the lawfulness of having one wife but makes no statement on the lawfulness of having more than one.

Joseph Smith was already a polygamist when these revelations were introduced into the [1835 edition of the Doctrine & Covenants](#) and Joseph publicly taught that the doctrine of the Church was monogamy. Joseph continued secretly marrying multiple women as these revelations/scriptures remained in force.

The doctrine of the Church was monogamy. The Book of Mormon makes it clear that monogamy is the standard, and polygamy is the occasional exception. Joseph's teaching on this subject was therefore correct, as anyone entering into plural marriage without priesthood authorization to do so would be guilty of adultery.

In an attempt to influence and abate public rumors of his secret polygamy, Joseph got 31 witnesses to sign an affidavit published in the LDS [October 1, 1842 Times and Seasons](#) stating that Joseph did not practice polygamy. Pointing to the above-mentioned D&C 101:4 scripture, these witnesses claimed the following:

“...we know of no other rule or system of marriage than the one published in the Book of Doctrine and Covenants.”

Nope. Quote the rest of it, please.

*We the undersigned members of the church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints and residents of the city of Nauvoo, persons of families do hereby certify and declare that we know of no other rule or system of marriage than the one published from the Book of Doctrine and Covenants, and we give this certificate to show that Dr. J. C. Bennett's "secret wife system" is a creature of his own make as we know of no such society in this place nor never did.* [Emphasis added]



**John C. Bennett: Spiritual Wife-ist**  
*No relation. At all.*

This was not, in fact, an affidavit “stating that Joseph did not practice polygamy.” It is an affidavit disavowing “Dr. J.C. Bennett’s ‘secret wife system,’ i.e. the “spiritual wifeism” I described earlier, which was a flimsy pretext for adultery and antithetical to the principle of plural marriage as practiced by Joseph.

The problem with this affidavit is that it was signed by several people who were secret polygamists or who knew that Joseph was a polygamist at the time they signed the affidavit. In fact, Eliza R. Snow, one of the signers of this affidavit, was Joseph Smith’s plural wife.

She was also, if some sources to be believed, on the receiving end of John C. Bennett’s predatory “spiritual wife” advances. She would have every legitimate reason to come out in full force of Dr. Bennett’s gross distortion of the principle of plural marriage. In addition, the fact that 31 witnesses could make this statement with a clear conscience undermines your implication that they saw a conflict between the predatory seduction they were denouncing and the principle of plural marriage they were practicing.

Joseph and Eliza were married 3 months earlier on June 29, 1842. Two Apostles and future prophets, John Taylor and Wilford Woodruff, were very aware of Joseph’s polygamy behind the scenes when they signed. Another signer, Bishop Whitney, had personally married his daughter Sarah Ann Whitney to Joseph as a plural wife a few months earlier on July 27, 1842; Whitney’s wife and Sarah’s mother Elizabeth (also a signer) witnessed the ceremony.

So if this was such a blatant lie, why did no one object? Are we to assume that all of these people were as blithely dishonest as you suggest Joseph Smith was? The far more plausible explanation is the idea that this affidavit was denouncing a practice that they believed was wholly inconsistent with the doctrine they were then living.

What does it say about Joseph Smith and his character to include his plural wife and associates – who knew about his secret polygamy/polyandry – to lie and perjure in a sworn public affidavit that Joseph was not a polygamist?

It says that you have unwittingly misinterpreted this affidavit as perjury when it was not.

Now, does the fact that Joseph Smith practiced polygamy and polyandry while lying to Emma, the Saints, and the world about it over the course of 10+ years prove that he was a false prophet? That the Church is false? No, it doesn't.

Well, that's mighty big of you, but it's also a distortion of reality. Joseph practiced no polyandry – sealings, no marriage, no sex. You really have no idea what he told Emma. No question he was less than fully honest in discussing the practice with the world, but the fact that he still attempted to reconcile honesty with concern for the safety of the Saints speaks well of him.

Also, 10+ years is really stretching it. He was first married to a plural wife in late 1835/early 1836, and he was dead by 1844, so nine years is the best you can do. Given that almost all of Joseph's practice of the doctrine took place in the two-and-a-half years of his life, that's an unsustainable accusation.

What it does prove, however, is that Joseph Smith's pattern of behavior or modus operandi for a period of at least 10 years of his adult life was to keep secrets, be deceptive, and be dishonest – both privately and publicly.

Is a bishop or stake president who refuses to discuss the private confession of an adulterer in public being secretive, deceptive, and dishonest? If you ask a bishop directly if Brother So-and-So had an affair, would he be wrong to try and find some way to deflect the question to protect the sanctity of the confidentiality to which he is bound? Should we applaud a bishop who blabs about such private matters because that bishop is being honest?

This is a line I have had to walk in my own family. Having been involved as a bishopric member in administering disciplinary councils, I learned things about my fellow ward members about which I cannot speak or even hint to own wife. When such things come up in passing, I try not to be dishonest, but I definitely do everything I can to skirt the subject. Does this make me a liar? By your definition, yes. From my perspective, I'm trying to balance the value of honesty with the value of protecting those who trust me to keep things confidential.

Just as I do not deny that polygamy is strange and even troubling, I think it is impossible for any remotely objective observer to deny that Joseph believed it to be the will of God, and that he practiced plural marriage as a religious principle, not as a vehicle for sexual predation. As such, he felt duty bound to keep such matters confidential in the same spirit that church leaders today do not publicize the confessional discussions they have with church members.

It's when you take this snapshot of Joseph's character and start looking into the Book of Abraham, the Kinderhook Plates, the Book of Mormon, the multiple First Vision accounts, Priesthood restoration, and so on that you start to see a very disturbing pattern and picture.

When you apply a single lens colored with a blanket assumption of dishonesty, then of course every pattern is disturbing. You're like the citizens of the Emerald City who wear green glasses so that everything looks green. (That doesn't happen in the movie, but it's in the book. And the musical *Wicked*.)



You've been unable to objectively demonstrate dishonesty in the coming forth of the Book of Mormon, the Book of Abraham, or the multiple – and consistent – First Vision accounts. All you've been able to do is show your own assumption of dishonesty in instances that are often based on your own misunderstandings and not the facts.

What's truly disturbing to me is that every time it's possible to give Joseph the benefit of the doubt, you choose not to grant it to him. In fact, you choose to interpret all of his actions in as harsh a light as possible. I think it would be wise to get a clear pair of glasses.

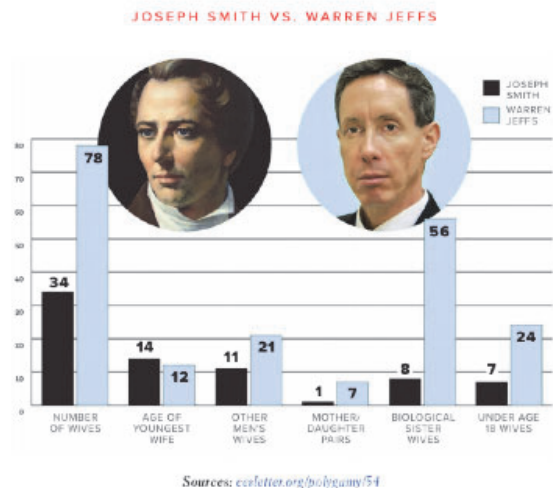
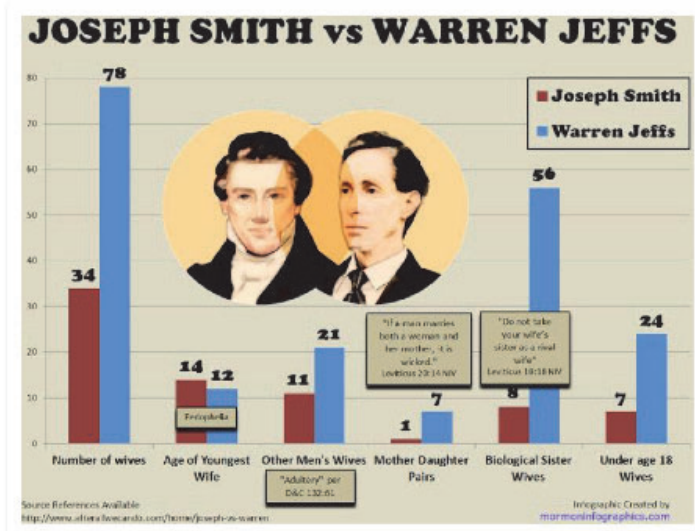
Today, Warren Jeffs is more closely aligned to Joseph Smith's Mormonism than the modern LDS Church is.

As noted above, the Jeffs comparison is unjustified. It's like saying rape and marital intimacy are essentially the same thing.

And now we come back to MormonInfographics.com and another plagiarized re-packaging:

Old Version with Tone Problems

New, Plagiarized Version

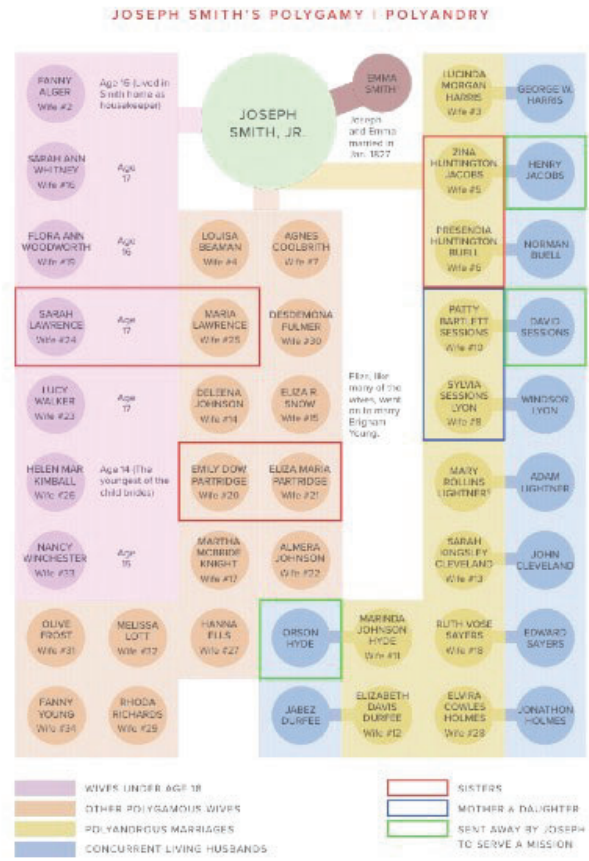
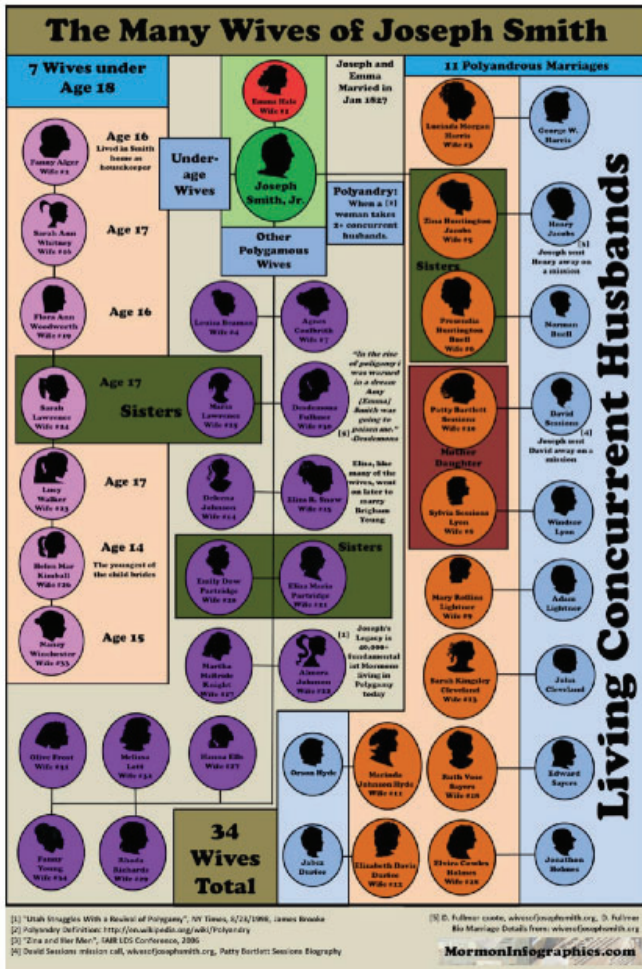




You could argue that this plagiarism is made a bit less egregious by the fact that the original MormonInfographics file can be found if you click on your link, except you claim the source is the CES Letter in the graphic. To anyone who doesn't click the link, they are left to think you did this research yourself instead of lifting it whole hog from MormonInfographics. Here's the second half:

Old Version with Tone Problems

New, Plagiarized Version



Sources: cesletter.org/polygamy/53

Again, we're just retreading all the same ground here – so many of these are not sexual relationships and not even marriages, and simply repeating the same accusations graphically is kind of tedious, albeit a bit more colorful. Saying the same thing over and over doesn't make it more true.