

I first learned of the seven deadly sins when I was in an esoteric cult as a child. In the back of my mind, I thought the dangers of these supposed monstrous characteristics seemed very simple, dumb, and easy to avoid. Later, I believed that these sins were an unproductive way of viewing people's harmful actions. Years later, though, I can not help but call out like a mad-man: "*Biblical* levels of pride!" whenever I see a religious person show, well, *Biblical levels of pride*. And hubris. Turns out, pride is not always a flashy businessman who spits on the homeless. It's also the most devoted followers of the "compassion" religion.

I have heard Buddhist mothers scream at their small children "You will not have a mother in your next life!" growing up, not realizing that on the other side of the world, Christian mothers were abusing their children with the promise of hell in exactly the same way. I had no words to describe it as religious trauma, however, until I came to understand it through western literature on the phenomenon.

At the same time, I see the likes of Katy Perry and Beyoncé allude to orientalist and particularly Buddhist imagery and "philosophies" in their work or interviews as a feminist defiance against the western patriarchal structures and feel... appropriated. Buddhism is not feminist. It is not exactly anti-feminist, either, but it is a religion shaped by the societies which propagate it. Yet, unlike with Christianity, when the topic of Buddhism comes up, it has not been rare for me to face borderline shock at the idea that Buddhism *can* be oppressive, let alone frequently manifesting in society in oppressive ways. The image of Buddhism is that of the "peace and compassion" religion, wherein one can be passive and meek and exotically wise. This forgets the persecution of Muslims by Buddhist countries and cultures throughout history and in the modern day, including that of the Muslim population in Myanmar, for example. It also ignores the long history of denying women certain positions of power in many sects including Tibetan Buddhism, the same thing which the Catholic Church has certainly faced criticism for, and of course, victim blaming to the highest order through the justification of "Karma". What, then, makes the Buddhist religion so attractive to certain western women? It is perhaps the same quality which attracts people to the Virgin Mary, the maternal worship that appears to venerate and protect women, but often segregates them into whore and Madonna. Many women in the west, including influencers and celebrities, are seemingly eager to promote themselves to an exotic version of the Madonna, but let's take a closer look at what such a position truly offers.

The House of My Mother by Shari Franke is a memoir about her experiences growing up in a Mormon household with her abusive mother. Dr. Ana from YouTube, who has a PhD in

Psychology and is a practicing therapist, pointed out something very interesting in her video* analysing Shari Franke's book. She says:

"She really shows how motherhood can be for some people a way of gaining spiritual cultish levels of power over the family system... I think this is true for a lot of different religious faiths - perpetuating the family is seen almost like kind of doing God's work... Just like God created humans, presumably, humans then have the capability of creating more humans, which kind of like parallels the Divine creation and establishes that person almost as like a mini God in a sense. Sherry talks about how she has a recurrent dream in which God's voice is booming down at her saying 'You were wrong to defy your mother' which really speaks to this connection between the power of God and the almost Godlike power of an abusive mother."

My jaw was nearly on the floor when I heard this analysis. She has explained, in a short few sentences, what I have tried to articulate for years. I did not grow up in Utah, however, I grew up in another patriarchal system with a mother cult: Buddhist Mongolia.

What I realized then, in a stunningly revealing moment, was that the easiest way for a woman in a religious, stifling, and patriarchal society to feed her own sense of self (or even her narcissism) was to become a mother. This is not unique to Utah Mormons or Mongolian Buddhists, this is the result of religious ideology and suppression around the globe.

In Buddhist patriarchal societies, there exists a culture of mother-worship. This is quite literally explained with the language of debt. Indeed, the first person you are indebted to, they say, is the mother - the one who gave you life. This automatically creates a sense of entitlement for the mother, often only feeding into the most toxic characteristics of a woman. If a woman is already somewhat docile and emotional, this dynamic worsens such characteristics, making the mother codependent and reliant on the child for emotional support, essentially adultifying the child. On the other hand, if a woman has habits of acting cold and selfish, this dynamic ensures that she will feel entitled to place any and all dissatisfactions she has on the child in the form of expectations and/or blame.**

There lies a psychological process of habit formation: the parts of ourselves we exercise the most get stronger. Religion isn't just a matter of thinking something on the inside or doing a ritual every so often, it is a practice of habit and discipline, too. So then, what happens when we are constantly fed messages as women that tell us that the greatest thing we can do is be a mother, and that the only place in which we have absolute control is over our children? We then turn our passions inward, sometimes feeding only the worst parts of ourselves that tell us that we are *owed* something by the one group of people who most definitely don't owe us anything and have done nothing to harm us - children. This is an ideology which inherently harms the innocent and protects the powerful, which

is why I refuse to fall for the narrative that eastern patriarchal countries which practice mother worship are more “progressive” - it is just another face of oppression and corruption, creating in us the very cruelty we were warned to walk away from as kids.

**https://youtu.be/nn2n_R7I_sT?si=V5npAMbGgd0Lcrqf*

***It should be noted, these are simplistic depictions made to create intuitive connections, and that real life relationships are often much more complex and include many different dynamics which sometimes seem even contradictory. Many such dynamics are well explored in the book *Adult Children of Emotionally Immature Parents* by Lindsay Gibson.*