

WGS. 101 INTRO TO WOMEN'S AND GENDER STUDIES FALL 2014
SESSION #25- IN-CLASS WRITING

Name _____

Susan Moller Okin- "Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?"

1. What is the core of Okin's argument in one or two sentences? Do you agree?

2. Respond to the following issue:

Polygamy or multiple-partner marriage (typically multiple-wife marriage) is illegal in all fifty U.S. states; polygamist immigrants can also be deported. An individual convicted of bigamy/polygamy can serve up to four years in prison. Despite clear and unambiguous legal prohibitions, polygamy in the U.S. is most often prosecuted when the practice involves underage females (as practiced by some Mormons). In other cases, polygamy is practiced in the U.S., somewhat secretly, within some urban immigrant communities and openly in some Mormon communities.

In the borough of Queens in New York City, there are many West African male immigrants who live in multiple-wife families; the practice is legal in some African nations. Typically, in these cases, there is one legal, civil marriage and several religious marriages unrecorded in civil law. The "first wife", often officially listed as living with the husband, is the one who benefits from health insurance, Social Security and other spousal benefits. The other wives often present publicly as single mothers without partners, living alone with children, and often do not identify their children's fathers on birth certificates and school/health documents. One journalist described the estimated 50,000 to 100,000 people living in New York City in polygamous unions as an "open secret."

While some say that polygamy should have no place in a gender-equal society, others contend that multiple-wife marriage—as a cultural practice—should be honored in the U.S. if there is no apparent violation of age-of-consent laws. Most wives in plural marriages do not speak up. Those who do express their views (e.g., in journalistic interviews) sometimes describe themselves as "in bondage", while others seem to accept the practice as part of their culture.

Should polygamists in the U.S. be arrested and charged with a crime? If immigrants, should they be deported? What are the larger implications of either prosecuting or not prosecuting polygamists? What would Okin argue?

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