

# Patriarchy and Domestic Violence: Challenging Common Misconceptions<sup>1</sup>

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## I. INTRODUCTION: THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE ISSUE

In spite of significant attention which has been given to the topic of domestic violence in the United States in recent years, evidenced particularly by the Violence Against Women's Act enacted in 1994,<sup>2</sup> domestic violence continues to be a massive problem with enormous individual and societal consequences. The scope and consequences of domestic violence are often misunderstood and rarely addressed in the evangelical church, resulting in abuse victims and perpetrators not receiving essential ministry. For instance, in Maricopa County where I live, our community leaders conducted a survey of six hundred women to improve services to battered women. Roughly 85 % of the women surveyed indicated that they were Christians, 57% attend church, 35% indicated they had experienced physical abuse in a past relationship, and yet only 7% felt they could confide in a church leader if they felt unsafe due to their partner's abuse.<sup>3</sup> In another study of 1,000 battered women, 67% indicated they attend church,

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<sup>2</sup> The Violence Against Women's Act, subsequent implementation and development can be viewed at the U.S. Department of Justice web site, available at: <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/vawo/laws/vawa/vawa.htm>.

<sup>3</sup> "Domestic Violence Survey," Wirthlin Worldwide, 2000.

one-third sought help from clergy, but of those who sought help, two-thirds said their church leaders were not helpful.<sup>4</sup> Thus, the evangelical church must begin to address this pressing problem.

While women are also often initiators of intimate partner violence and initiate violent acts almost as often as men,<sup>5</sup> gender parity is non-existent when it comes to violence. The fact is that male violence against women is far more damaging, generally occurs in a far different context (aggressive dominance versus self-defense),<sup>6</sup> and typically has a more pernicious meaning (establishment of control) than does female violence.<sup>7</sup> For instance, according to a Justice Department analysis of crime, more than

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<sup>4</sup> Lee H. Bowker, "Religious Victims and Their Religious Leaders: Services Delivered to One Thousand Battered Women by the Clergy," in *Abuse and Religion: When Praying Isn't Enough*, ed. Anne L. Horton and Judith A. Williamson (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1988), 229-234.

<sup>5</sup> Murray A. Strauss offers a thorough discussion of the problem of female violence against men, "Women's Violence toward Men Is a Serious Problem," in *Current Controversies on Family Violence*, ed. Donileen R. Loseke, Richard J. Gelles, and Mary M. Cavanaugh (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2005), 55-77. For a review of the specific research on female-initiated violence, see M. S. Kimmel, "'Gender Symmetry' in Domestic Violence: A Substantive and Methodological Research Review," *Violence Against Women* 8 (2002): 1332-1363.

<sup>6</sup> S. D. Dasgupta, "A Framework for Understanding Women's Use of Nonlethal Violence in Intimate Heterosexual Relationships," *Violence against Women* 9 (2002): 1364-1389; S. D. Dasgupta, "Just Like Men? A Critical View of Violence by Women," in *Coordinating Community Response to Domestic Violence: Lessons from Duluth and Beyond*, ed. M. E. Shepherd and E. L. Pence (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1999), 195-222.

<sup>7</sup> Donileen R. Loseke and Demie Kurz, "Men's Violence toward Women is the Serious Social Problem," in *Current Controversies on Family Violence*, 79-95.

40% of adult female hospital emergency room visits are caused by violence at the hand of a male intimate partner, whereas violence by intimates caused less than 5% of male emergency room visits.<sup>8</sup> According to the National Crime Victimization survey, in 1998 women experienced almost 900,000 violent offenses at the hands of an intimate partner - a rate five times higher than the violence men experience from female partners.<sup>9</sup> Other research reveals that for every one man hospitalized due to being assaulted by a female intimate partner, forty-six women are hospitalized due to being assaulted by a male partner.<sup>10</sup> Clearly, male violence against women creates more destructive consequences than female violence. First of all, male violence creates great fear, and as abuse researchers Neil Jacobson and John Gottman note: “fear is the force that provides battering with its power” and injuries in turn help sustain the fear.<sup>11</sup> Second, due to males’ physical (and often social) superiority, male violence against women creates

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<sup>8</sup> L. A. Greenfield, et al., “Violence by Intimates: Analysis of Data on Crimes by Current or Former Spouses, Boyfriends, and Girlfriends,” Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice, 1998.

<sup>9</sup> Callie Marie Rennison and Sarah Welchans, *Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report: Intimate Partner Violence*, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice, May 2000.

<sup>10</sup> J. Straton, “The Myth of the ‘Battered Husband Syndrome,’” *Masculinities* 2 (1994): 79-82. Similarly, the World Health Organization notes that studies from Australia, Canada, Israel, South Africa and the United States show that 40-70% of female murder victims are murdered by their husbands, ex-husbands, or boyfriends, whereas in the United States, from 1976 to 1996, only 4% of the men murdered were killed by their wives, girlfriends, or ex-wives, World Health Organization, *World Report on Violence and Health*, ed. Etienne G. Krug, et al. (Geneva, 2002), 93. This report is available at: [http://www.who.int/violence\\_injury\\_prevention/en](http://www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/en).

<sup>11</sup> Neil Jacobson and John Gottman, *When Men Batter Women: New Insights into Ending Abusive Relationships* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1998), 35.

enormous long term physical and psychological consequences, far more so than female violence.<sup>12</sup> In terms of financial impact, male violence against women is enormously costly. Researchers using national survey data, particularly information from the Center for Disease Control, estimate that in 2003 dollars, the annual cost of intimate partner violence against women was \$8.3 billion, with \$5.5 billion of this the cost of physical assaults from intimate male partners.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> For a survey of the research on health consequences of battered women, see Stacey B. Plichta, "Intimate Partner Violence and Physical Health Consequences: Policy and Practice Implications," *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 19 (2004): 1296-1323. In one study of the long term consequences of domestic battering on women, researchers found that an incredible 51.6% of battered women had full Post Traumatic Stress Disorder which was much higher than the control group of women who had experienced non interpersonal traumas, Ronit Sharhabani-Arzy, et al., "The Toll of Domestic Violence: PTSD among Battered Women in an Israeli Sample," *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 18 (2003): 1335-1346.

<sup>13</sup> Wendy Max, et al., "The Economic Toll of Intimate Partner Violence against Women in the United States," *Violence and Victims* 19 (2004): 259-272. See also National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, "Costs of Intimate Partner Violence against Women in the United States," Washington, D.C., Department of Health and Human Services, 2003. The report is available at: [http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc/pub-res/ipv\\_cost/IPVBook-Final-Feb18.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc/pub-res/ipv_cost/IPVBook-Final-Feb18.pdf). For an analysis of global costs of interpersonal violence, including domestic violence, see World Health Organization, *The Economic Dimensions of Interpersonal Violence* (Geneva, 2004). This report estimates the annual cost of violence in the United States is 3.3% of the gross domestic product (p. x). The report is available at: [http://www.who.int/violence\\_injury\\_prevention/publications/violence/economic\\_dimensions/en](http://www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/publications/violence/economic_dimensions/en).

In terms of prevalence, various studies show that 22%-33% of North American women will be assaulted by an intimate partner in their lifetime.<sup>14</sup> Partner violence rates among young women are equally disturbing. A recent study released in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* found that 20% of high school girls report being physically or sexually assaulted by a male partner.<sup>15</sup> A study commissioned by Liz

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<sup>14</sup> Helen M. Eigengerg, *Women Battering in the United States: Till Death Do Us Part* (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, 2001), 62-85. One of the largest and most cited surveys of domestic violence is the Violence against Women Survey, which was a joint effort by the National Institute for Justice and the Centers for Disease Control. It involved a random sample survey of 8,000 men and 8,000 women. This survey found a lifetime intimate assault rate for American women of 22% (25% if sexual assaults are included), P. Tjaden and N. Thoennes, *Prevalence, Incidence, and Consequences of Violence against Women: Findings from the National Violence against Women Survey* (Washington D.C., U.S. Department of Justice, 1998). This report is available at: <http://www.ncjrs.org/pdffiles1/nij/183781.pdf>. Using a screening tool recommended by the American Medical Association, researchers in another study found a 31% lifetime prevalence for domestic violence among adult American women, R. M. Siegel, et al., "Screening for Domestic Violence in a Community Pediatric Setting," *Pediatrics* 104 (1999): 874-877. Similarly, research in Canada indicates that that roughly 1/3 of Canadian women will experience an intimate partner assault in their lifetime, Statistics Canada, *The Violence against Women Survey*, 1994. A description and summary of this survey by the Canadian government can be found at: <http://www.statcan.ca/cgi-bin/imdb/p2SV.pl?Function=getSurvey&SDDS=3896&lang=en&db=IMDB&dbg=f&adm=8&dis=2>. Studies of forty-eight populations reveal that world-wide lifetime intimate partner violence rates against women vary from 10%-69%, *World Report on Violence and Health*, 89-91.

<sup>15</sup> Jay G. Silverman et al., "Dating Violence against Adolescent Girls and Associated Substance Abuse, Unhealthy Weight Control, Sexual Risk Behavior, Pregnancy, and Suicidality," *Journal of the American Medical Association* 286 (2001):572-579.

Claiborne and released in 2005 similarly found that young girls are being assaulted by their male partners at shocking rates. This study specifically found that: 13% of teen girls in a relationship admit to being physically hit or injured; nearly one in five teenage girls who have been in a relationship said a boyfriend threatened violence or self harm if they broke up; one in three teens report knowing a friend or a peer who has been hit, punched, kicked, slapped, or physically injured by their partner.<sup>16</sup> Given the fact that self reports of intimate partner violence by female victims have been shown to be 8%-13% underreported,<sup>17</sup> it is clear that male violence against females is an enormous social problem.

In light of the magnitude and impact of domestic violence, it is not surprising that considerable attention has been given to the etiology of domestic violence. Much of the discussion revolves around the causal relationship between patriarchy<sup>18</sup> and domestic

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<sup>16</sup> “Liz Claiborne Inc. Omnibuzz Topline Findings: Teen Relationship Abuse Research,” available at: [www.teenresearch.com](http://www.teenresearch.com).

<sup>17</sup> Eve M. Waltermauer, Christina A. Ortega, and Louise-Anne McNutt, “Issues in Estimating the Prevalence of Intimate Partner Violence: Assessing the Impact of Abuse Status on Participation Bias,” *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 18 (2003): 959-974.

<sup>18</sup> I recognize that for many the term “patriarchy” is inherently pejorative. I also recognize that some conservative evangelicals such as those associated with The Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood distance themselves from this term by calling themselves “complementarians.” Since labels are so often misleading, I am simply choosing to use the term “patriarchy” descriptively based on its etymology. “Patriarchy” refers to “male rule” and hence “male authority” and describes a very broad continuum of gender role models in which males have some type of gender based authority over females.

violence. This leads us to explore more precisely the relationship between patriarchy and domestic violence, starting with the traditional feminist view.

## II. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PATRIARCHY AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

### 1. *Feminist Theory: Patriarchy is the Ultimate Cause of all Abuse against Women*

It has only been in the past few decades that domestic violence has been studied in detail. When feminism emerged in the 1960s and 70s, feminist scholars began assessing the history and impact of misogyny and gender inequality in various spheres of life. This led to the first modern works on abuse being published in the mid 1970s.<sup>19</sup> During this period of early modern feminism, the perspective developed that patriarchy, in any and all forms, is the ultimate cause of all abuse against women for patriarchy is seen as the overarching social construct which ultimately engenders abuse. Lenore Walker in her early classic on domestic violence asserts: “My feminist analysis of all violence is that

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<sup>19</sup> One of the first modern articles to be written on domestic violence against women was done by Richard J. Gelles, “Violence and Pregnancy: A Note on the Extent of the Problem and Needed Services,” *The Family Co-ordinator* 24 (1975): 81-86. The first epidemiological study of battered women was conducted by Murray Straus, Richard Gelles, and Susan Steinmetz in the mid to late 1970s, and reported in their book *Behind Closed Doors: Violence in the American Family* (Garden City, NJ: Anchor/Doubleday, 1980). Another feminist classic work on domestic violence from this period is Lenore E. Walker, *The Battered Woman* (New York: Harper and Row, 1979).

sexism is the real underbelly of human suffering.<sup>20</sup> Typically, violence against women is explained in terms of a power struggle, for feminists argue that in a patriarchal society those with all the power (males) must resort to violence when their position of dominance is threatened. This feminist perspective on domestic violence is still fairly common. For instance, in a recent journal article several feminists state: “domestic violence is a consequence of patriarchy, and part of a systematic attempt to maintain male dominance in the home and in society.”<sup>21</sup>

Much of the early feminist abuse literature is global in its censure of male power and domination, and strident in its condemnation of patriarchy and even of males. For instance, Susan Brownmiller in her classic early feminist work on rape states that early on in human history, “rape became man’s basic weapon of force against woman” and became the ultimate “triumph of manhood.”<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, she argues that from prehistoric times through to the present, “rape has played a critical function. It is nothing more or less than a conscious process by which *all men keep all women* in a state of fear” (emphasis hers).<sup>23</sup> While she does not actually use the term “patriarchy” to link all female abuse to male power and domination, this is precisely what she is describing. Since the

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<sup>20</sup> Lenore Walker, *The Battered Woman*, xi; see also R. Emerson Dobash and Russell Dobash, *Violence against Wives: A Case against the Patriarchy* (New York: Free Press, 1979), ix.

<sup>21</sup> Nicole Knickmeyer, Heidi M. Levitt, Sharon G. Horne, et al., “Responding to Mixed Messages and Double Binds: Religious Oriented Coping Strategies of Christian Battered Women,” *Journal of Religion and Abuse* 5 (2003): 30.

<sup>22</sup> Susan Brownmiller, *Against Our Will* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1975), 5.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.



1970s, many feminists continue to maintain that patriarchy is the ultimate cause of all abuse against women.<sup>24</sup>

Various religious feminists and egalitarians have also argued that patriarchy is the ultimate and necessary cause of all abuse against women. Like the secular feminists who hold this view, these writers also tend to indict patriarchy in any and all forms as the causal factor in all abuse against women. Carolyn Holderread Heggen states

The inherent logic of patriarchy says that if men have the right to power and control over women and children, they also have the right to enforce that control...Domination and glorification of violence are characteristics of patriarchal societies...In patriarchy, women and children are defined in relation to men who control the resources and the power. Women and children are the other, the object. Men are the norm, the subject. In a dominance-and-submission social order, there is no true mutual care. Subordinates are to care for the needs of the dominants.<sup>25</sup>

Similarly, Rosemary Radford Ruether declares “Domestic violence against women—wife battering or beating—is rooted in and is the logical conclusion of basic

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<sup>24</sup> See for instance Russ Funk, *Stopping Rape: A Challenge to Men* (Philadelphia: New Society, 1993), 37; Shere Hite, *The Hite Report on the Family: Growing up under Patriarchy* (New York: Grove Press, 1994).

<sup>25</sup> Carolyn Holderread Heggen, *Sexual Abuse in Christian Homes and Churches* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1993), 85.

patriarchal assumptions about women's subordinate status."<sup>26</sup> After carefully documenting historical and religious incidents and justifications for the abuse of women, Mary Engel Potter argues that "ideologies of inequity [patriarchy] and the practice of violence are inextricably linked" because the logic of patriarchy provides one just cause for battery, namely female subordination.<sup>27</sup>

Some evangelical egalitarians are a bit more circumspect in linking abuse and patriarchy, asserting a strong causal link, but not a necessary one. For instance, Cynthia Ezell maintains:

Patriarchy is not responsible for an individual husband's violent action toward his wife. It does, however, create an environment ripe for abuse. A weakened immune system does not create the virus that leads to deadly infection, but it provides the environment in which the virus can thrive and do its killing.

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<sup>26</sup> Rosemary Radford Ruether, "The Western Religious Tradition and Violence against Women in the Home," in *Christianity, Patriarchy, and Abuse*, ed. Joanne Carlson Brown and Carole R. Bohn (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 1989), 31.

<sup>27</sup> Mary Engel Potter, "Historical Theology and Violence against Women: Unearthing a Popular Tradition of Just Battery," in *Violence against Women: A Christian Sourcebook*, ed. Carol J. Adams and Marie M. Fortune (New York: Continuum, 1995), 249, 258. For a similar historical/religious explanation of the justification of female battering in terms of insubordination see Joy M. K. Bussert, *Battered Women: From a Theology of Suffering to an Ethic of Empowerment* (New York: Division for Mission in North America, Lutheran Church in America, 1986), 12-15; *Not In God's Image: Women in History from the Greeks to the Victorians*, ed. Julia O'Faolain and Lauro Martines (New York: Harper & Row, 1973) 175-178.

Patriarchal beliefs weaken the marital system so that the deadly virus of violence can gain a stronghold.<sup>28</sup>

Most of these religious feminists and egalitarians cite historical religious documents or other modern feminist writers to support their hypothesis that patriarchy in all forms is the ultimate cause of all abuse against women, but few actual research studies are cited which support this claim.<sup>29</sup>

## 2. *Problems with Viewing Patriarchy as the Ultimate Cause of all Abuse against Women*

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<sup>28</sup> Cynthia Ezell, "Power, Patriarchy, and Abusive Marriages," in *Healing the Hurting: Giving Hope and Help to Abused Women*, ed. Catherine Clark Kroger and James R. Beck (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 39; see also James and Phyllis Alsdurf who argue that adopting a "chain-of-command" perspective on marriage "can easily set the stage for a woman's victimization," *Battered into Submission: The Tragedy of Wife Abuse in the Christian Home* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1989) 92; Nancy Nason-Clark, *The Battered Wife: How Christians Confront Family Violence* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 1997), 4-5.

<sup>29</sup> The Alsdurfs in *Battered Women* do cite a study by Kersti Yllo ("The Status of Women, Marital Equality, and Violence against Wives," *Journal of Family Issues* 5 [1984]: 312) which found that the rate of wife beating in couples in which the husband dominated was three times higher than for egalitarian couples. This study begs the question, however, of whether the only alternative to marital egalitarianism is a male dominated marriage. In *The Battered Wife*, Nancy Nason-Clark cites an abundant amount of research, though she does not cite many specific studies documenting the relationship between gender roles and abuse.

While feminist research has greatly advanced our understanding of domestic violence by highlighting the broad social context in which abuse often occurs and the manner in which patriarchy has historically spawned violence against women, it does not explain the whole story. The feminist explanation for domestic violence gives many helpful insights, but is reductionistic as the complete and final explanation for abuse against women.<sup>30</sup> For example, many have noted the fallacy of attributing all contemporary abuse to patriarchy by raising an obvious question--If patriarchy is the ultimate basis for all violence against women, then why is it that on an annual basis 90% of all North American men do not abuse women?<sup>31</sup> In other words, why does the virus of patriarchy lead only 10% of men to batter women each year? Furthermore, the feminist hypothesis does not take into account the changing social climate. While the feminist model has been critical in explaining violence against women, particularly in cultures in which women truly have no power and experience global inequity, women in the western

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<sup>30</sup> Rebecca Merrill Groothuis, an egalitarian, notes the inadequacy of the feminist explanation of male domination: "patriarchy has become the monolithic paradigm that explains all the woes of sexism. It alone is presumed to have set the entire course of social history...Every social interaction involving both sexes is viewed through the lens of male oppression. This position is simplistic, one-dimensional, and reductionistic. It is true, but it is not the whole truth," *Women Caught in the Conflict: The Culture War between Traditionalism and Feminism* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1997), 71.

<sup>31</sup> D. G. Dutton, *The Domestic Assault of Women* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1995), 7-11; D. G. Dutton, *The Batterer: A Psychological Profile* (New York: Basic Books, 1995), 70-71. Numerous large surveys of women in the United States and Canada between 1975 and 1992 reveal that in any given year 89% of male partners are not physically violent.

world have far more power than they did a few decades ago, suggesting that there are other factors at play.<sup>32</sup>

More recent research on domestic violence also militates against the simplistic feminist assertion that patriarchy is the ultimate cause of all violence against women. There is a growing consensus that no single factor explains men's violence against women; it is multifactorial with many different and often overlapping causes.<sup>33</sup> While some of these factors are undoubtedly influenced and aggravated by various forms of patriarchy, several of these factors transcend them. For example, researchers note that there are biological (differences in brain structure, brain functioning, and hormones),<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Karel Kurst-Swanger and Jacqueline L. Petcosky, *Violence in the Home: Multidisciplinary Perspectives* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 47.

<sup>33</sup> Two of the most thorough discussions of the complex factors behind domestic violence are *What Causes Men's Violence against Women?* ed. Michele Harway and James M. O'Neil (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1999) and Kurst-Swanger and Petcosky, *Violence in the Home*, 30-53.

<sup>34</sup> There is empirical evidence that some abusers' brains are in fact not normal, though this does not excuse their behavior. A. Rosenbaum and S. Hoge reported that 61% of a group of men who were assessed for therapy for wife assault had a prior head injury, "Head Injury and Marital Aggression," *American Journal of Psychiatry* 146 (1989): 1048-1051. Recent brain neuroimaging studies of violent men give evidence of neurological dysfunction in the portions of the brain that control emotional regulation and impulse control, Jana L. Bufkin and Vickie R. Luttrell, "Neuroimaging Studies of Aggressive and Violent Behavior: Current Findings and Implications for Criminology and Criminal Justice," *Trauma, Violence, and Abuse* 6 (2005): 176-191; L. T. Elst, et al., "Affective Aggression in Patients with Temporal Lobe Epilepsy: A Quantitative MRI Study of the Amygdala," *Brain* 123 (2000): 234-243.

intrapsychic (personality disorders, attachment disorders),<sup>35</sup> and social construct (childhood experiences of violence)<sup>36</sup> factors in men's violence against women. Some feminist scholars are quick to dismiss other explanations for domestic violence in favor of their global indictment of men and patriarchy. Michele Bograd, for instance, argues: "the widespread prevalence of wife abuse suggests that it may be more a function of the normal psychological and behavioral patterns of most men than the aberrant actions of very few husbands."<sup>37</sup> But mounting data indicates otherwise. As we have already noted, the vast majority of men do not assault women. While wife abuse is an enormous problem, far greater than most want to admit, it is not the "normal behavioral pattern of most men" in our culture. Furthermore, research shows that a significant percentage of abusive men do not reflect "normal" psychological patterns. Neil Jacobson and John Gottman's study of over two hundred couples experiencing male violence disclosed some

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<sup>35</sup> Donald G. Dutton, et al., "Intimacy-Anger and Insecure Attachment as Precursors of Abuse in Intimate Relationships," *Journal of Applied Social Psychology* 24 (1994): 1367-1386; James R. Mahalik, et al., "The Role of Insecure Attachment and Gender Role Stress in Predicting Controlling Behaviors in Men Who Batter," *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 20 (2005): 617-631; Nigel Roberts and Patricia Noller, "The Associations between Adult Attachment and Couple Violence: The Role of Communication Patterns and Relationship Satisfaction," in *Attachment and Close Relationships*, ed. Jeffrey A Simpson and W. Steven Rholes (New York: Guilford, 1998), 317-350.

<sup>36</sup> Zoe Hilton and Grant T. Harris, "Predicting Wife Assault: A Critical Review and Implications for Policy and Practice," *Trauma, Violence, and Abuse* 6 (2005): 3-23; Ron Thorne-Finch, *Ending the Silence: The Origins and Treatment of Male Violence against Women* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), 49-108.

<sup>37</sup> Michele Bograd, "Feminist Perspectives on Wife Abuse: An Introduction," in *Feminist Perspectives on Wife Abuse*, ed. Kersti Yllo and Michele Bograd (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1990), 17.

startling findings. In particular, they found that one subset of batterers (20% in their study) were “hard wired” differently from normal psychologically healthy men. They did not get internally aroused (increased heart rate, perspiration, etc.) during arguments; rather, their heart rates decreased and they calmed down as they began to get more and more aggressive.<sup>38</sup> These men labeled “cobras” appear to be the most dangerous of all types of abusers and are largely identifiable with psychopaths, those troubling individuals whose are so psychologically disturbed that they do not have the ability to bond or sympathize with another human beings.<sup>39</sup> Other research indicates that a very high percentage of violent batterers have personality disorders,<sup>40</sup> and the greater the severity and chronicity of the violence, the greater the likelihood of a personality disorder.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Neil Jacobson and John Gottman, *When Men Batter Women*, 28-29; John Gottman, et al., “The Relationship between Heart Rate Reactivity, Emotionally Aggressive Behavior, and General Violence in Batterers,” *Journal of Family Psychology* 9 (1995): 227-248.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 104-107; R. D. Hare, *Without Conscience: The Disturbing World of the Psychopaths Among Us* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993); R. D. Hare, “Psychopathy: A clinical construct whose time has come,” *Criminal Justice and Behavior* 23 (1996): 25-54; J. R. Intrator, et al., “Brain Imaging (SPECT) Study of Semantic and Affective Processing in Psychopaths,” *Biological Psychiatry* 42 (1997): 96-103.

<sup>40</sup> It appears that 80-90% of male batterers evidence diagnosable psychopathology, L. K. Hamberger and J. E. Hastings, “Characteristics of Male Spouse Abusers Consistent with Personality Disorders,” *Hospital and Community Psychiatry* 39 (1989): 763-770. For a survey of psychopathy and male batterers, see: A. Holtzworth-Munroe, U. Rehman, and K. Herron, “General and Spouse Specific Anger and Hostility in Subtypes of Maritally Violent Men and Nonviolent Men,” *Behavior Therapy* 31 (2000): 603-630; A. Holtzworth-Munroe and G. L. Stuart, “Typologies of Batterers: Three Subtypes and the Differences among Them,” *Psychological Bulletin* 116 (1994): 476-497; Thomas A. Widiger and Stephanie N. Mullins-Sweatt, “Typology of Men Who Are Maritally Violent,” *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 19 (2004): 1396-1400.

Perhaps the most powerful refutation of the feminist thesis that patriarchy is the underlying cause of all abuse of women is the consensus of several studies in the past decade which assess religion, gender views, and domestic violence. While relatively few studies have been conducted which specifically assess the relationship between religion, patriarchal beliefs, and abuse, most of the studies that have been conducted do not support the global feminist hypothesis. For instance, a comprehensive meta-analysis of various studies showed that adult male batterers could not be differentiated from non abusive men on the sole basis of traditional (patriarchal) gender attitudes.<sup>42</sup> Early population studies did find that the least egalitarian states had the highest rates of violence,<sup>43</sup> and a few studies that gave very extreme definitions of patriarchy found higher abuse rates among patriarchal men.<sup>44</sup> But several recent studies are more nuanced

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<sup>41</sup> D. G. Dutton, "Patriarchy and Wife Assault: An Ecological Fallacy," *Violence and Victims* 9 (1994): 167-182.

<sup>42</sup> D. B. Sugarman and S. L. Frankel, "Patriarchal Ideology and Wife-Assault: A Meta-Analytic Review," *Journal of Family Violence* 11 (1996): 13-40; see also Lisa Jeanne Battaglia, "Conservative Protestant Ideology and Wife Abuse: Reflections on the Discrepancy between Theory and Data," *Journal of Religion and Abuse* 2 (2001): 31-45.

<sup>43</sup> K. Yllo, "Sexual Equality and Violence against Wives in American States," *Journal of Comparative Family Studies* 14 (1983): 67-86; K. Yllo and M. A. Strauss, "Patriarchy and Violence against Wives: The Impact of Structural and Normative Factors," *Journal of International and Comparative Social Welfare* 1 (1984): 1-13.

<sup>44</sup> For instance, Michael D. Smith found that the more patriarchal a man was, the more likely he was to beat his wife, but he defines patriarchy as "the system of inequality in society whereby males dominate females," "Patriarchal Ideology and Wife Beating: A Test of a Feminist Hypothesis," *Violence and Victims* 5 (1990): 257. The eight questions he then uses to determine patriarchal beliefs are very extreme, and



in their assessment of religion, patriarchy, and abuse. These studies do find a link between conservative religion and domestic violence, but it is not the simple causal relationship the feminist model would predict. Rather, there is an inverse relationship between church attendance and domestic violence. Conservative Protestant men who attend church regularly are found to be the least likely group to engage in domestic violence, though conservative Protestant men who are irregular church attendees are the most likely to batter their wives.<sup>45</sup> Thus, current research disproves the feminist hypothesis that patriarchy is the single underlying cause of all abuse against women, though it strongly suggests that patriarchy plays some role in domestic violence.

A final problem with the feminist hypothesis that “the root of all violence against women is patriarchy” is that “patriarchy” is rarely defined and covers a hopelessly broad

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include the right to slap one’s wife and to force sex upon her when she does not want it, 264. By this definition of patriarchy, it is all but certain that the study would find a link between patriarchy and abuse.

<sup>45</sup> Christopher G. Ellison and Kristin L. Anderson, “Religious Involvement and Domestic Violence among U.S. Couples,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 40 (2001): 269-286; Merlin B. Brinkerhoff, Elaine Grandin, and Eugen Lupri, “Religious Involvement and Spousal Violence: The Canadian Case,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 31 (1991): 15-31; Christopher G. Ellison, John P. Bartkowski, and Kristin L. Anderson, “Are There Religious Variations in Domestic Violence?” *Journal of Family Issues* 20 (1999): 87-113; W. Bradford Wilcox, *Soft Patriarchs, New Men: How Christianity Shapes Fathers and Husbands* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 181-183. Similar trends were noted in an earlier non American study which found that the husband’s church attendance was an identifiable risk factor for wife assault: 11.2% of husbands who never attended church assaulted their wives. But only 2.2% of husbands who attended church at least monthly assaulted their wives, while 6.2% of husbands who attended church sporadically assaulted their wives, David M. Fergusson, et al., “Factors Associated with Reports of Wife Assault in New Zealand,” *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 48 (1986): 410.

range of ideologies and behaviors. This is a particularly glaring problem when domestic violence is related to the theological debate regarding gender roles. For instance, everyone agrees that fundamentalistic Muslim societies in which women have exceedingly few rights, and husbands and fathers have essentially unfettered control over women's bodies, children, and finances are patriarchal. And most would agree that this kind of patriarchy is responsible for the wide spread abuse of women. For instance, the treatment of women in Afghanistan under the Taliban was extremely patriarchal, and resulted in wide-spread abuse.<sup>46</sup> For example, women were not allowed to go out into public unless every inch of their skin was covered, they could not be educated, female doctors had to discontinue practicing medicine, male doctors could not treat women, and women, even widows could not work outside the home. If women violated even minor rules, they were typically beaten by Taliban authorities on the spot. Virtually all would also agree that Christian fundamentalists espouse patriarchy when they declare: wives have no rights whatsoever until they submit to their husbands; true femininity is reflected when a woman says to a man "I'm dumb compared to you," "whatever you say, you know best"; every human problem is ultimately caused when the inferior one (the wife) refuses to submit to the stronger, superior one (the husband).<sup>47</sup> And many would agree that this type of Christian fundamentalism contributes to the abuse of women. But these two types of patriarchy are still qualitatively different and surely have different effects on

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<sup>46</sup> For a general first hand perspective on the treatment of women under the Taliban, see Latifa, *My Forbidden Face: Growing Up Under the Taliban - A Young Woman's Story* (New York: Miramax Books, 2003).

<sup>47</sup> Jack Hyles, *Woman the Completer* (Hammond, IN: Hyles-Anderson Publishers, 1981), 22, 36-38, 60.

the abuse of women. And they in turn are radically different from the increasingly common “soft patriarchy” found in modern American evangelical society. According to several recent sociological studies of conservative Protestant family life, most American evangelicals affirm distinctive gender roles in marriage and affirm male headship, but do not practice traditional patriarchy but “soft patriarchy.”<sup>48</sup> This form of patriarchy deemphasizes male authority and control, defines male “headship” in terms of loving sacrificial service to one’s family, and lives this out in terms of joint decision making, shared parenting, and shared domestic duties. It is by no means logically or empirically clear that this brand of “patriarchy” promotes the abuse of women.<sup>49</sup> Nor is it clear in view of fundamentalistic Islamic and fundamentalistic Christian patriarchy that “soft patriarchy” should even be labeled patriarchy.

### 3. *Patriarchy as a Significant Contributing Factor in Much Domestic Violence*

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<sup>48</sup> John P. Bartkowski, “Distant Patriarchs or Expressive Dads? The Discourse and Practice of Fathering in Conservative Protestant Families,” *The Sociological Quarterly* 41 (2000): 465-485; John P. Bartkowski *Remaking the Godly Marriage*; Sally K. Gallagher, *Evangelical Identity and Gendered Family Life* (Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2003); W. Bradford Wilcox, *Soft Patriarchs, New Men: How Christianity Shapes Fathers and Husbands* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

<sup>49</sup> I have argued elsewhere that a soft patriarchy which employs a Trinitarian model protects women by construing male headship in term of protecting, sharing authority, and honoring women, Steve Tracy, “Headship with a Heart: How Biblical Patriarchy actually Prevents Abuse,” *Christianity Today* (February 2003): 50-54.

Having noted the weakness of the feminist assertion that patriarchy is the root cause of all violence against women, it is essential that we recognize legitimate feminist findings. While patriarchy may not be the overarching cause of all abuse, it is an enormously significant factor because in traditional patriarchy, males have a disproportionate share of power.<sup>50</sup> At its core, domestic violence is the abuse of male physical and often social/religious power. Abusive males are characteristically insecure and have a low sense of self esteem.<sup>51</sup> Research shows that wife abusers are generally less educated and have a lower income than non abusing men, and often do not have a sense of personal empowerment.<sup>52</sup> But men need not be uneducated, low wage earners to be insecure and feel powerless. Donald Dutton cogently argues that most male abusiveness stems from “deep-seated feelings of powerlessness that have their origins in the man’s early [childhood] development.”<sup>53</sup> So for many abusive men, in order to maintain their fragile sense of masculinity, they use physical force to keep their wives in their “proper place” and to squelch all threats to their limited male potency. This dynamic of insecure, powerless men using force to control their wives helps to explain why assault

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<sup>50</sup> Hence, I believe Kersti A. Yllo is correct in asserting “Domestic violence cannot be adequately understood unless gender and power are taken into account,” “Gender, Diversity, and Violence: Extending the Feminist Framework,” in *Current Controversies on Family Violence*, 19.

<sup>51</sup> Richard J. Gelles, *Intimate Violence in Families*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1997), 79-80; P. Neidig, D. Freidman, and B. Collins, “Attitudinal Characteristics of Males Who Have Engaged in Spousal Abuse,” *Journal of Family Violence* 1 (1986): 223-233.

<sup>52</sup> L. W. Kennedy and D. G. Dutton, “The Incidence of Wife Assault in Alberta,” *Canadian Journal of Behavioral Science* 21 (1989): 40-54; Michael Smith, “Patriarchal Ideology and Wife Beating,” 266.

<sup>53</sup> Donald G. Dutton, *The Batterer*, 212.

and homicide rates are highest when a woman separates or threatens to separate from an abusive husband or boyfriend.<sup>54</sup> In other words, abusive men must be in control, and threats to their control of the relationship must be dealt with by force if necessary.

Physical abusers also tend to employ many other forms of control (verbal threats, control of the finances, control of her relationships, etc.) to dominate and subjugate their wives.<sup>55</sup>

So while patriarchy is not the sole explanation for violence against women, we would expect that male headship would be distorted by insecure, unhealthy men to justify their domination and abuse of women. Furthermore, we would expect that patriarchal views which define the male role primarily in terms of power and control would be most likely to contribute to domestic violence.

At this juncture we may be able to make sense of the research studies cited earlier that reveal an inverse relationship between conservative Protestant church attendance and wife abuse. We might surmise from the fact that conservative Protestant men who are regular church attendees have the lowest spouse abuse rates that: (1) regular exposure to

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<sup>54</sup> Mari L. Aldridge and Kevin D. Browne, "Perpetrators of Spousal Homicide: A Review," *Trauma, Violence, and Abuse* 4 (2003): 270-271; E. K. Englander, *Understanding Violence* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1997); M. Wilson, M. Daly, and C. Wright, "Uxoricide in Canada: Demographic Risk Patterns," *Canadian Journal of Criminology* 35 (1993): 263-291.

<sup>55</sup> Kersti A. Yllo notes the often cited "Power and Control Wheel" developed by the Domestic Abuse Intervention Project in Duluth, Minnesota. This model postulates eight main categories through which abusive men abuse their power and control: intimidation, emotional control, isolation, minimizing and blaming, using children, using male privilege, economic abuse, and coercion and threats, "Gender, Diversity, and Violence: Extending the Feminist Framework," in *Current Controversies on Family Violence*, 23.

balanced biblical teaching and preaching on family life detoxifies abusive misbeliefs about male headship; (2) Christian community offers salutary models of loving, non dominating masculinity; (3) the experience of Christian community increases men's sense of confidence and masculinity which in turn decreases their need to control women and children. But we must be careful to note the identified risk factor for men of nominal attendance at conservative Protestant churches. What is it about periodic attendance at conservative churches that makes men more likely to abuse their wives, even more likely than non church goers? Based on what we know about the dynamics of abuse and abusers, I would suggest the following: When men come into conservative Protestant churches, for the most part they are going to hear some form of patriarchal gender views, i.e. male headship. For men who are significantly insecure, immature, and/or misogynistic, patriarchal teaching of any form may merely serve to confirm their views of male superiority and their right to dominate women. This dynamic is particularly true for men who are not well integrated into the church and regularly exposed to Biblical teaching. In this manner, patriarchal teaching that stimulates many men to be more loving and sensitive to their wives and children is distorted by other unhealthy men to justify male superiority and the domination and abuse of females.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> It is imperative that conservatives begin to acknowledge that there is a real causal connection between male headship and domestic violence. It is troubling when conservatives who affirm male headship dismiss this connection and imply that abuse is largely or solely the result of feminism. For instance, see John Piper and Wayne Grudem, "An Overview of Central Concerns: Questions and Answers," in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, ed. John Piper and Wayne Grudem (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1991), 62.

Very little research has been conducted to evaluate whether different forms of patriarchy have different effects on domestic violence, but it is anticipated that this would be the case. Furthermore, it is both logical and Biblical to assume that in a sinful world males would often use their power to dominate and abuse. The curse in Gen 3:16 predicts that men would seek to harshly dominate women (“he shall rule over you”).<sup>57</sup> Scripture frequently condemns powerful men abusing the weak and vulnerable, especially women and children (Isa 1:15-17; Jer 22:3, 17; Ezek 22:7, 27-29). Furthermore, due to the noetic effects of sin, abusers will seek to shift the blame and justify their evil behavior (Gen 38:11-24; 1 Kgs 18:17; Ezra 9:9-10). Patriarchy can offer a handy means for abusive men to justify their domination (“I am the head”) and to justify physical abuse (“she wouldn’t submit so I had to put her in her place”).<sup>58</sup>

Thus, we would anticipate that very traditional patriarchal teaching that views male headship primarily in terms of power and control, places few parameters on submission, and urges women not to correct their husbands, could most easily prompt

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<sup>57</sup> The majority of commentators recognize that “He shall rule over you” is no divine proscription but a tragic predication of sin’s effects on the human race. The Hebrew verb for “rule” found in Gen 3:16 (mashal) is the same term found in Gen 4:7 of Cain’s need to harshly dominate or master that which would harm him, namely sin. This lexical observation, along with the context of Gen 3:16 that gives several unfortunate, negative consequences of the fall, lead me to conclude that “he shall rule over you” reflects not God’s desire, but a realistic prediction of the results of sinful depravity on males who will routinely seek to abuse their power. Thus, Victor Hamilton argues that this phrase means: “the sinful husband will try to be a tyrant over his wife,” *The Book of Genesis Chapters 1-17* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 202.

<sup>58</sup> For a helpful case study of this dynamic, see Nada L. Stotland, “Tug-of-War: Domestic Abuse and the Misuse of Religion,” *American Journal of Psychiatry* 157 (2000): 696-702.

insecure and misogynistic men to justify abuse and domination. This approach to gender roles also undercuts a woman's ability to challenge her husband's abusive behavior.

There are numerous examples of this approach to gender roles in the very conservative patriarchal literature. Marlene Evans, for instance, argues that a wife should never correct her husband even in private and should never fail to obey her husband.<sup>59</sup> Martha Peace instructs wives that they can only challenge their husband's authority one time, and after that they should accept his decision as the will of God, even if that means suffering for righteousness sake.<sup>60</sup> Jack Hyles argues that one of the best things parents can do for a daughter is teach her strict obedience that means "she must obey immediately, without question and without argument."<sup>61</sup> The reason this is so important is that she will be transferring her obedience to her future husband. Hence, parents who require their daughter to obey immediately, without question and without argument "have done a big favor for their future son-in-law."<sup>62</sup> It takes no stretch of the imagination to visualize how

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<sup>59</sup> Marlene Evans, *Marriage without Divorce* (Crown Point, IN: Christian Womanhood Publications, 2000), 52-53. Though not quite as extreme, Jack Schaap similarly argues that it is better to allow a husband to drive miles out of the way than for her to tell him that he missed the freeway exit; apparently wives do not have the right to correct husbands even when they are patently wrong, in spite of the fact that the husband's mistake would greatly inconvenience the entire family, *Marriage: God's Original Intent* (Hammond, IN: Hiles Publications, 1995), 114-115.

<sup>60</sup> Martha Peace, *The Excellent Wife: A Biblical Perspective*, rev. ed. (Bemidji, MN: Focus Publishing, 1999), 160-161.

<sup>61</sup> Jack Hyles, *How to Rear Children* (Hammond, IN: Hyles-Anderson Publishers, 1972; reprint Clayburg, PA: Revival Fires Publishers, 1998), 134.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*



this kind of rigid patriarchal teaching that gives men virtually unbridled power and little or no accountability to their wives could stimulate unhealthy men to become abusive and domineering. Furthermore, this type of patriarchal teaching clearly programs women to accept abuse. Some patriarchal literature is even more extreme and actually instructs wives who are being physically abused to passively submit to their abusive husbands and to accept the resultant physical and emotional suffering as an act of godliness.<sup>63</sup>

In addition to the evidence we have noted this far demonstrating a link between patriarchy and domestic violence, we will briefly note two additional lines of evidence that patriarchy is a significant contributing factor in much domestic violence.

a. *Historical studies of the treatment of women*

Feminist scholarship has repeatedly demonstrated that throughout human history patriarchy (male authority and power over females) has provided the foundation for male domination and often abuse. This is clearly evident in ancient cultures, and in spite of the

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<sup>63</sup> Dorothy McGuire, Carol Lewis, and Alvena Blatchley, *Submission: Are There Limits?* (Denver: TRI-R Ministries, 1984), 91, 93–94; John MacArthur, *The Family* (Chicago: Moody, 1982), 31; Elizabeth Rice Handford, *Me? Obey Him?*, rev. ed. (Murfreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord, 1994), 31, 35; Ed Wheat, *How to Save Your Marriage Alone* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), 24–25, 29, 31. For a detailed discussion of the manner in which evangelical and fundamentalist Christian writers take the submission command in 1 Pet 2:18-24, which was directed to first century abused slaves, and illegitimately apply it to modern abused wives (who they say should passively submit to abuse), see Steve Tracy, “Domestic Violence in the Church and Redemptive Suffering in 1 Peter,” *Calvin Theological Journal* 41 (2006): 279-96.

feminist revolution of the late twentieth century, patriarchy inspired abuse against women continues on to the present.<sup>64</sup>

One of the earliest extant legal texts that links patriarchy and physical abuse of wives is the Code of Hammurabi (early second millennium, B.C.). Based on male superiority, one law lays out the consequences for a wife who does not carry out her submissive role, thus bringing shame upon her husband: “if she was not careful, but was a gadabout, thus neglecting her house (and) humiliating her husband, they shall throw that woman into the water.”<sup>65</sup> While the husband may or may not have been the one to carry out the punishment, the point is clear—wives who violate their subordinate position so dishonor their husbands that they deserve to be assaulted, even fatally. Similar legitimization of wife abuse based on patriarchy is seen in the ancient west, where in Republican Rome husbands who found their wives committing adultery could kill them, though husbands who cheated on their wives faced no such legal threat. Aulus Gellius quoted a speech of Cato in which Cato declares “If you catch your wife in adultery, you can kill her with impunity; she, however, cannot dare to lay a finger on you if you commit adultery. It is the law.”<sup>66</sup> While we do not know how often this law was actually

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<sup>64</sup> For an excellent overview of broad global violence against women, see Charlotte Watts and Cathy Zimmerman, “Violence against Women: Global Scope and Magnitude,” *Lancet* 359 (2002): 1232-1237.

<sup>65</sup> The Code of Hammurabi 143, recorded in *The Ancient Near East*, vol. 1, ed. James B. Pritchard (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1958) 154.

<sup>66</sup> Aulus Gellius, *Attic Nights*, 10:23, cited by Bruce W. Winter, *Roman Wives, Roman Widows: The Appearance of New Women and the Pauline Communities* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 41. See also Jane F. Gardner, *Women in Roman Law and Society* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1986), 127-131.

implemented, the point remains the same, namely, male power and superiority provides the conceptual basis for the abuse of women.

Augustine was one of the most influential church fathers, and arguably the great post apostolic theologian in the first thousand years of the Christian church. In the process of praising his own mother, Monica for her piety, his explanation of domestic violence highlights the manner in which patriarchy contributes to domestic violence. He argues that wives should view their husbands as their lords, and if they would submit utterly to their husbands' authority they would not be beaten. If they were abused, it was their own fault for going against their earthly lord. Augustine positively notes that when his mother married, "she was given to a husband whom she served as her lord."<sup>67</sup> Furthermore, Augustine states that his father was an unbeliever with a violent temper, but his mother learned "that an angry husband should not be resisted, neither in deed nor even in word" and she was never beaten. Monica was said to have applied this approach to other Christian women whose faces were disfigured by beatings from their husbands:

In short, while many matrons, whose husbands were more gentle, carried the marks of blows on their dishonored faces...she [Monica] would blame their [the wives'] tongues, monishing them gravely , as if in jest: 'that from the hour they hear what are called the matrimonial tablets [betrothal contracts] read to them, they should think of them as instruments whereby they were made servants; so, being always mindful of their condition, they ought not to set themselves in

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<sup>67</sup> Augustine *The Confessions* 9.19.

opposition to their furious lords'...They who observed it [Monica's principle of utter submissiveness to abusive husbands] experienced the wisdom of it, and rejoiced; those who observed it not were kept in subjection and suffered [abuse].<sup>68</sup>

While Augustine himself does not necessarily approve of domestic violence, he uncritically accepted a patriarchal system that justified it, and made battered women ultimately responsible for being beaten by not being submissive enough to their husbands (their earthly lords).

One of the clearest modern examples of a causal relationship between patriarchy and abuse is fundamentalistic Islam. Islamic patriarchy is primarily responsible for 140 million women around the world having undergone female genital mutilation (circumcision), causes one out of four homicides in Jordan to be the murder of a woman killed by family members in an "honor killings," causes women to be publicly executed because they were raped, and gives men the right to physically "discipline" their wives even if it causes injury.<sup>69</sup> Examples abound of women beaten, mutilated, and murdered

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Geraldine Brooks, *Nine Parts of Desire: The Hidden World of Islamic Women* (New York: Anchor Books, 1995), 33-37, 42-54; Jan Goodwin, *Price of Honor: Muslim Women Lift the Veil of Silence in the Islamic World*, rev. ed. (New York: Penguin, 2003), 5-6, 266, 321. A recent example of this is seen in the case of Dr. Shazia Khalid, a Pakistani woman who reports that after she was raped she was drugged and confined to a psychiatric hospital by local authorities. The family patriarch reportedly declared that because of her rape she had stained the family honor and must be killed or at least divorced. The Pakistani government reportedly forced Dr. Khalid and her husband to leave the country without their son, Nicholas D. Kristof, "A Pakistani Rape and a Pakistani Love Story," *New York Times*, 2 August, 2005.

because they brought dishonor on their male relatives.<sup>70</sup> In fact, the Koran articulates patriarchy in such a manner as to justify, even command husbands to beat their wives.

Sura 4:34 reads:

The men are placed in charge of the women, since God has endowed them with the necessary qualities and made them bread earners. The righteous women will accept this arrangement obediently, and will honor their husbands in their absence, in accordance with God's commands. As for the women who show rebellion, you shall first enlighten them, then desert them in bed, and you may beat them as a last resort.<sup>71</sup>

Formal research among conservative Muslim men confirms the link between patriarchy and wife battering. In one study of Arab husbands from Israel, 62% of the men strongly agreed or agreed that an unfaithful wife deserves to be beaten and 37% strongly agreed or agreed that a husband has a right to beat his wife if she insults him in front of

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<sup>70</sup> For instance, see Souad, *Burned Alive: A Victim of the Law of Men* (New York: Warner Books, 2004). Souad grew up in a small Jordanian town and reports regular beatings by her father who was humiliated that he had many daughters and only one son. When Souad became pregnant as a single seventeen-year old, she recounts how her family plotted her death (to save their honor) culminating in her brother-in-law pouring gasoline over her and lighting her on fire, burning ninety percent of her body.

<sup>71</sup> Rashad Khalifa translation.

his friends.<sup>72</sup> Hence, most Palestinian men blame wives for being beaten, for 57% agree with the statement “if a battered wife knew her boundaries and knew how to avoid her husband, he certainly would not beat her.”<sup>73</sup>

Lest we ethnocentrically assume that such abusive patriarchy is reserved for non western, non Christian cultures, we should note that the European and ultimately American legal system also countenanced wife battering based on patriarchy. For centuries, Anglo-American common law granted the husband the right as head of the household to beat his wife as long as he did not cause permanent damage.<sup>74</sup> In a detailed analysis of the legal history of wife beating in the west, Professor Reva Siegal, Yale Law Professor notes, “As master of the household, a husband could command his wife’s obedience, and subject her to corporeal punishment or ‘chastisement’ if she defied his authority.”<sup>75</sup> Thus, our English phrase “the rule of thumb” came from English common law which declared that a man could beat his wife as long as the rod he used was no larger than his thumb. By the late nineteenth century the American legal system had rescinded a husband’s right of corporeal punishment of his wife. But until the rise of feminism in the latter part of the twentieth century, domestic violence was not

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<sup>72</sup> Muhammad Haj-Yahia “A Patriarchal Perspective of Beliefs about Wife Beating among Palestinian Men from the West Bank and the Gaza Strip,” *Journal of Family Issues* 19 (1998): 595-621; Muhammad Haj-Yahia, “Predicting Beliefs about Wife Beating among Engaged Arab Men in Israel,” *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 12 (1997): 530-545.

<sup>73</sup> Haj-Yahia “A Patriarchal Perspective of Beliefs about Wife Beating,” 615.

<sup>74</sup> Riva B. Siegel, “‘The Rule of Love’: Wife Beating as Prerogative and Privacy,” *Yale Law Review* 105 (1996): 2117-2130.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 2123.

consistently prosecuted because of patriarchal presuppositions. Being battered by one's own husband was considered a family matter and not on a par with other assaults.<sup>76</sup> Thus it took a coalition of New York lawyers in 1976 who filed a class action suit against the New York City Police Department on behalf of twelve battered wives to begin to change this. The suit alleged that the police department had failed to protect them by discriminating against wives, treating wives of abusive husbands differently than victims of assault by strangers.<sup>77</sup> The plaintiffs won, and the New York Supreme Court in their decision acknowledged the long standing legal inequity that allowed such abuse to continue unchallenged. The New York Supreme Court justices declared:

For too long, Anglo-American law treated a man's physical abuse of his wife as different from any other assault, and indeed, as an acceptable practice. If the allegations of the instant complaint—buttressed by hundreds of pages of affidavits-- are true, only the written laws have changed; in reality, wife beating is

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<sup>76</sup> For a discussion of the development of the American legal tradition regarding domestic violence, see Elizebeth Pleck, *Domestic Tyranny: The Making of American Social Policy Against Family Violence from Colonial Times to the Present* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2004). For a discussion of the historical response of the American church to domestic violence, see Ann Taves, "The Power to See and the Power to Name: American Church History and the Problem of Domestic Violence," in *Violence against Women and Children: A Christian Theological Sourcebook*, ed. Carol J. Adams and Marie M. Fortune (New York: Continuum, 1995), 262-278. For a historical and contemporary overview of European and American responses to domestic battery, see Beverly Mayne Kienzle and Nancy Nienhuis, "Historical and Contemporary Responses to Battering," *Journal of Religion and Abuse* 7 (2005): 81-98.

<sup>77</sup> R. Emerson Dobash and Russell Dobash, *Violence against Wives* (New York: Free Press, 1979), 237.

still condoned, if not approved, by some of those charged with protecting its victims.<sup>78</sup>

Thus, only a few decades ago it took the New York Supreme Court to begin to challenge this longstanding western patriarchal tradition that marriage gives husbands rights that strangers do not have, viz., the right to control, even violently, their wives' bodies.

b. *Characteristics of male batterers*

A final line of evidence that patriarchy contributes to much physical abuse of women is found in the characteristics of male batterers. The literature on abusive men repeatedly notes that a primary characteristic of abusive men is a sense of entitlement and superiority over their wives and children, quite possibly because of their own insecurities and need for power and control.<sup>79</sup> A husband's sense of superiority over his wife will often lend itself to the development of rigid patriarchal views. Mary Nomme Russell states:

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<sup>78</sup> Bruno V. Codd, cited in Dobash and Dobash, *Violence against Wives*, 237.

<sup>79</sup> Lundy Bancroft, *Why Does He Do that? Inside the Minds of Angry and Controlling Men* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 2002), 120; Lundy Bancroft and Jay G. Silverman, *The Batterer as Parent: Addressing the Impact of Domestic Violence on Family Dynamics* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2002), 5-13; Eva Lundgren "'I Am Empowered with All the Power in Heaven and on Earth': When Men Become Men through 'Christian' Abuse," *Studia Theologica* 48 (1994): 33-47.



The belief in the superior self, with the man being dominant in an inherently hierarchical relationship, was one of the fundamental aspects of abusive men's belief systems. Competitiveness, an intrinsic part of male socialization, is reflected in abusive relationships in the assumption that positions in the relationship are defined by who is greater and lesser. For abusive men, retaining dominance and superiority were essential in their relationships with their intimate partners. Challenges to dominance by partners were viewed as insurrections requiring coercive action.<sup>80</sup>

Thus, abusive men often explicitly or implicitly cite male headship/female submissiveness to justify their abuse, arguing that their wives were responsible for the abuse because they were not submissive, they disrespected them, they did not fulfill their marital obligations, etc.<sup>81</sup> For instance, in the Alsdurf's interviews with abused women, 55% of the women reported that their husbands had said the beatings would stop if they would be more submissive.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Manry Nomme Russell, *Confronting Abusive Beliefs: Group Treatment for Abusive Men* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1995), 41; see also Nicky Ali Jackson and Gisele Casanova Oates, *Violence in Intimate Relationships: Examining Sociological and Psychological Issues* (Boston: Butterworth-Heinemann, 1998), 126-127; David J. Livingston, *Healing Violent Men: A Model for Christian Community* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002), 15-23.

<sup>81</sup> James Ptacek, "How Men Who Batter Rationalize Their Behavior," in *Abuse and Religion*, 247-257.

<sup>82</sup> James Alsdurf and Phyllis Alsdurf, *Battered into Submission*, 84.

### III. APPLICATION OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE RESEARCH TO THE EVANGELICAL GENDER ROLES DEBATE

#### 1. *Three challenges to complementarians*

##### a. *Start addressing the issue*

The stark reality is that complementarians rarely address abuse, in spite of the fact that it is an endemic evil and in spite of the fact that some will use teaching on male headship to legitimize abusive male domination.<sup>83</sup> One searches far and wide in the evangelical complementarian literature to find sustained treatments on physical or sexual abuse.<sup>84</sup> The first book length treatment of abuse by a non egalitarian biblical scholar was

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<sup>83</sup> For those who have not experienced abuse, the possibility of complementarian teaching being used to justify abuse may seem remote, but those who have experienced abuse realize this tragic possibility. In one study of over 250 southern women (57 battered women and 199 non abused parishioners with the vast majority of both groups of women being regular church attenders) 51% of the battered women believed church teachings contribute to domestic violence, whereas only 24% of the non battered women believed the church's teachings contribute to domestic violence, Ameda A. Nanett, Dianne F. Bryant, Teresa Cavanaugh, et al., "The Church—Does It Provide Support for Abused Women? Differences in Perceptions of Battered Women and Parishioners," *Journal of Religion and Abuse* 5 (2003): 14.

<sup>84</sup> I gratefully acknowledge that complementarian authors such as Robert Lewis, Stu Weber, Steve Farrar, and many others emphatically teach loving servant leadership and several specifically instruct husbands to not be abusive to their wives. I also acknowledge that topic searches on the CBMW web site ([www.cbmw.org](http://www.cbmw.org)) generate dozens of hits on "abuse" and "domestic violence." But the fact remains that sustained systematic treatments of abuse are virtually non existent in the complementarian literature.

published just this year, and it was not written by a traditional complementarian.<sup>85</sup> Even short treatments of wife abuse have just begun being given by complementarians, and they are still few in number and in some instances reflect a seriously flawed understanding of domestic violence.<sup>86</sup> Thus, it is worth noting David Scholer's criticism of *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, the book most consider the definitive articulation of traditional complementarian theology. Scholer notes that in the entire 566-page magnum opus, while there are numerous entries in the index for "submission," "headship," and "authority," there are none for "abuse" "battering" or "sexual violence," and only three entries on "wife abuse" (all three of which are very brief).<sup>87</sup> In fairness, it

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<sup>85</sup> Steven R. Tracy, *Mending the Soul: Understanding and Healing Abuse* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005). I should note that I am not a traditional complementarian, as I do not understand male headship primarily in terms of power and authority.

<sup>86</sup> For instance, of the CBMW (Council for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood) generated or promoted literature, in a brief web search I was only able to locate three specific published articles or book chapters on domestic violence: Wayne Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth: An Analysis of More Than 100 Disputed Questions* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 2004), 490-496; David Powlison, Paul David Tripp, and Edward T. Welch, "Pastoral Responses to Domestic Violence," in *Pastoral Leadership for Manhood and Womanhood*, ed. Wayne Grudem and Dennis Rainey. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2002), 265-276.; Steven R. Tracy, "1 Corinthians 11.3: A Corrective to Distortions and Abuses of Male Headship," *The Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* 8 (2003): 17-22. While I vigorously contest Powlison, Tripp, and Welch's understanding of the dynamics of domestic violence and of abusers when they advise a battered wife to disarm her abuser and to confess her sins to him (268-269), I appreciate the fact that domestic violence is at least starting to be addressed by some traditional complementarians.

<sup>87</sup> Scholer remarks that the one explicit condemnation of wife abuse in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* appears in a footnote, making it "too little too late," "The Evangelical Debate Over Biblical

should be noted that in 1995 The Council for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood issued an official “Statement on Abuse,” unequivocally condemning wife abuse, and Wayne Grudem’s most recent response to evangelical feminism pointedly condemns the abuse of women and instructs abused women not to silently submit to abuse but to report abuse to authorities and flee from abusers.<sup>88</sup> But the fact remains that traditional complementarian scholars have, to date, given little or no sustained attention to domestic violence.<sup>89</sup>

b. *Acknowledge the legitimacy of feminist research regarding the universal, virtually unbroken abuse of male power in human history.*

Feminist scholars are correct in pointing out the wide spread historical abuse of male power, but conservatives are often so adamantly opposed to feminism that they refuse to acknowledge legitimate feminist findings regarding the virtually unbroken

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‘Headship,’ in *Women, Abuse and the Bible: How Scripture Can Be Used to Hurt or Heal*, ed. Catherine Clark Kroeger and James Beck (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996) 31.

<sup>88</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth*, 146-147, 491-495.

<sup>89</sup> After doing a literature review, I cannot find any book length treatment of abuse in general or domestic violence in particular by a traditional complementarian biblical/theological scholar, and only a handful written by complementarian writers who are not biblical scholars. The few works that have been written include: Aimee K. Cassiday-Shaw, *Family Abuse and the Bible: The Scriptural Perspective* (New York: Haworth Pastoral Press, 2002); Helen L. Conway, *Domestic Violence and the Church* (Carlisle, England: Paternoster, 1998); Kay Marshall Strom, *In the Name of Submission: A Painful Look at Wife Battering* (Portland, OR: Multnomah, 1986).

abuse of male power in human history.<sup>90</sup> Since evangelicals believe in human depravity and the authority of Scripture (which gives literally thousands of examples of physical abuse and blood shed), this should not be a contestable point.<sup>91</sup> But the conservative evangelical emphasis on the sanctity of marriage and on the validity of male headship makes it very difficult for conservatives to acknowledge the historical prevalence of domestic violence and its connection with male headship.<sup>92</sup> This accounts for the fact that many pastors resist the use of the phrase “wife abuse,” and preferred to use “family abuse.”<sup>93</sup> The failure to acknowledge the predominance of male abuse of power is also seen in instances in which complementarians address domestic violence, but put male physical abuse of women on a par with female physical abuse of men. This demonstrates the fact that many traditional complementarians still do not seem to accept the fact that

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<sup>90</sup> For instance, in the CBMW literature, “feminist” is a uniformly negative term and legitimate feminist findings on abuse or closely related topics such as gender discrimination are completely discounted or ignored. In fact, in a news article by Russell D. Moore posted on the CBMW website, Moore blames the feminists for wife beaters not being held accountable for their actions, and very erroneously argues that in the pre-feminist days wife abusers would face the sanctions of other men, “Do Wife Beaters Need Better Therapy Groups: Spouse Abuse and the End of Sin,” *Gender News*, 21 March 2004, available at: [www.gender-news.com/other.php?id=9](http://www.gender-news.com/other.php?id=9).

<sup>91</sup> For examples of the biblical data on abuse, see Steven Tracy, *Mending the Soul*, esp. 15-20, 41-48, 54-70, 217-223.

<sup>92</sup> This may account for Wayne Grudem’s acknowledgement that “male chauvinism has been the major problem through much of history” and yet his insistence that “statistics claiming to connect male headship with abuse of women are misleading,” *Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth*, 495, 524.

<sup>93</sup> Nancy Nason -Clark, *The Battered Wife*, 44-49; Nancy Nason-Clark, “Making the Sacred Safe,” *Sociology of Religion* 61 (2000): 361.

male abuse of power is virtually universal, and that due to human depravity, the concept of male headship is often misused to promote the abuse of women and children. It is not enough for complementarians to say they are against all abuse, unless they are willing to acknowledge the particular virulence of male abuse. Hence, I would go so far as to challenge complementarians that teaching male leadership/female submission without noting the reality and potential for male abuse of power is at best dangerous, at worst immoral.

*c. Clarify the role and limits of power in discussions of headship and submission*

In Matt 28:25-28 Jesus clarifies the nature of godly leadership by contrasting it with pagan leadership which is based on the ability to exercise power over others. He states “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. It is not so among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant.” While this text does not necessarily preclude Christian leaders having any authority over others, it seriously qualifies the nature of leadership by indicating that leadership is not primarily about having and exercising power but about serving others. Extensive work needs to be done by complementarians noting the limits of submission and authority in practical terms. Complementarian writers must begin to answer the hard real life questions. For instance, complementarian writers often note that a wife should not submit to a husband’s request which is immoral or illegal, like helping him rob the bank. But the use of this analogy reveals how detached these writers are from

the real life experiences of many, many Christian women.<sup>94</sup> It is much more likely that a wife will face the dilemma of how to respond to a husband's verbal abuse, harsh punishment of the children, or demeaning treatment. Does biblical submission require that such treatment simply be endured? At what point does biblical submission allow a wife to go against her husband's decisions? Does biblical submission require a wife to obey a mentally ill or drug abusing husband? Does biblical submission require that wives allow their husbands to dominate their children as long as they do not physically or sexually abuse them? These practical implications of submission theology must be clarified.

## *2. Three challenges to egalitarians*

### *a. Refuse to accept the radical feminist metanarrative that patriarchy is the basis for all abuse and is the ultimate source of most of the world's evil.*

The feminist hypothesis that patriarchy is the ultimate source of all abuse is not fair to the vast majority of complementarians who have never abused women or children and who are as appalled at abuse as egalitarians are. This radical feminist assertion also does not square with social science research—it illegitimately offers a simplistic explanation for a very complex phenomenon. To that extent, it impedes the process of accurately understanding and finding viable solutions to abuse.

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<sup>94</sup> A notable exception to this is an excellent chapter Robert Lewis and William Hendricks wrote for wives entitled “‘Helper’ Doesn’t Mean ‘Enabler,’” *Rocking the Roles: Building a Win-Win Marriage* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1991), 151-156.

*b. Avoid tarring all complementarians with the same abuse brush.*

There is a wide spectrum of complementarian models. In particular, I suggest that complementarians be distinguished in terms of the way they link power to male headship. The most fundamentalistic models place rigid emphasis on male power and unwavering female submission. This model surely creates a climate which increases the likelihood of abuse. But this is only one subset of complementarianism. Many, if not most evangelical complementarians' treatment of women and children is not qualitatively different than egalitarians'. There is a chasm wide gulf between fundamentalistic (rigid power based) models of headship and servant leadership models. In fact, one can argue that a servant leader view of headship, which is consistently lived out, reduces abuse by placing an emphasis on males using their authority to sacrificially serve and protect the vulnerable. This point is supported by the several recent sociological studies we have previously noted which reveal that conservative Protestant men who attend church regularly are the least likely to abuse their wives..

*c. Find ways to work with complementarians to address the issue of abuse.*

Ten years ago CBMW proposed a joint statement condemning abuse. Isn't it high time we work together? With millions of children, adolescents, and women being abused around the world, can egalitarians really afford to refuse to work with brothers and sisters with whom they have a gender role disagreement? Since all of us have found personal



salvation through the cross, the ultimate symbol of God's ability to transform evil abuse for good, surely we can find ways to work together to address this critical moral issue.<sup>95</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Domestic violence continues to be a hideous global social problem. Secular feminists and many egalitarians assert that patriarchy is the ultimate cause of all abuse against women. While there is considerable evidence that patriarchy contributes to much domestic violence, the etiology of domestic violence is far too complex to support any single cause hypothesis. Furthermore, patriarchy must be carefully defined when assessing its impact on abuse, for a wide spectrum of "patriarchy" exists today, from authority based traditional patriarchy to shared authority "soft patriarchy." While all forms of patriarchy can and do contribute to domestic violence, it appears that the models of patriarchy which give husbands the greatest levels of power and authority are most likely to stimulate domestic violence. Furthermore, recent social science research which reveals an inverse relationship between church attendance and domestic violence among conservative Protestant men challenges both patriarchalists and egalitarians to modify their understanding of gender roles and abuse and to work together to combat domestic violence.

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<sup>95</sup> This process may have already begun, for Catherine Clark Kroeger, one of the most well known and outspoken egalitarians in America, wrote the forward to *Family Abuse and the Bible*, in spite of the fact that the author, Aimee Cassiday-Shaw is a complementarian.